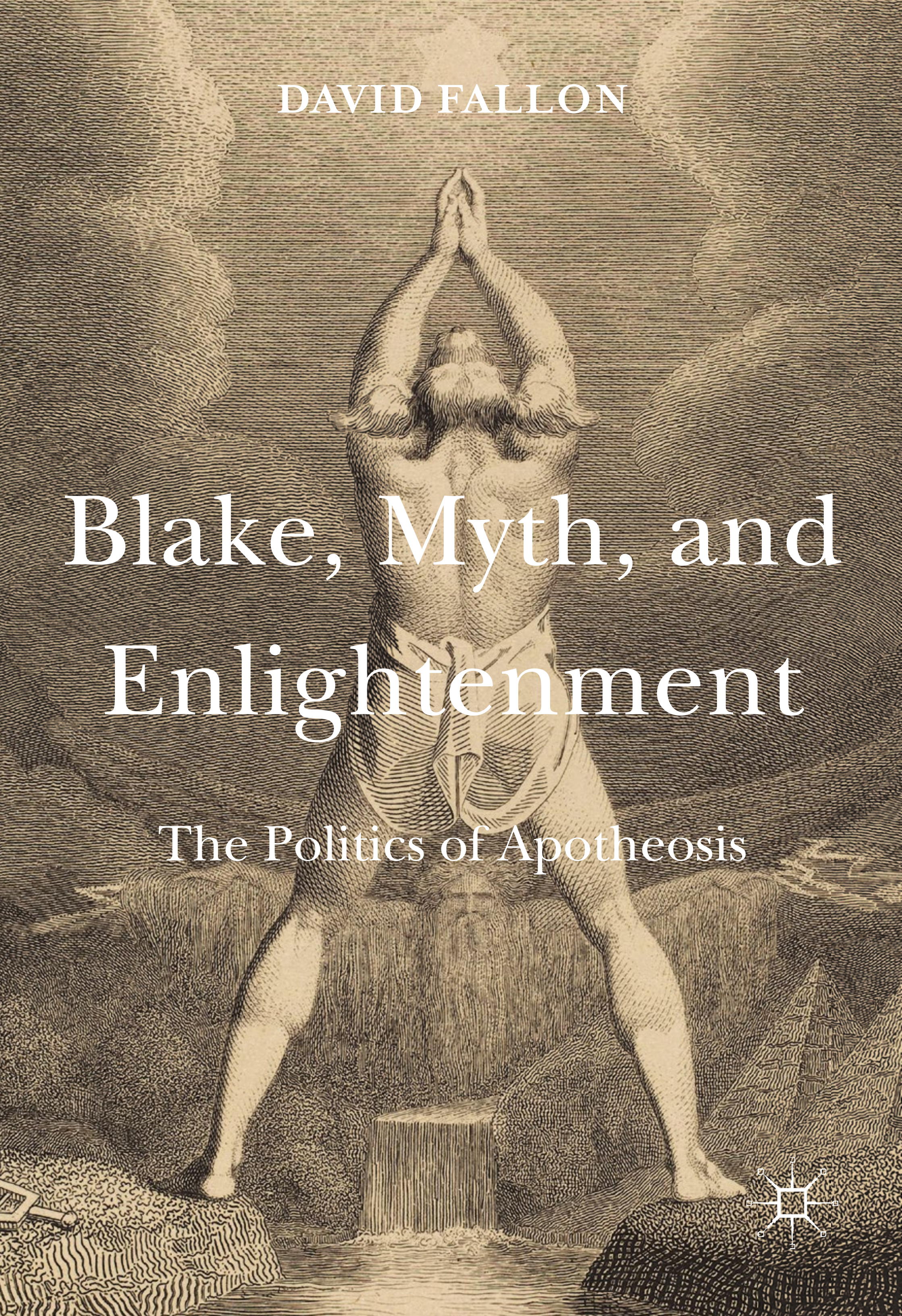
DAVID FALLON
Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment
The Politics of Apotheosis

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David Fallon

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## The Politics of Apotheosis

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# Abbreviations

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| *BB* | G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. |
| *BD* | S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973 [1965]. |
| *BIB* | Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. |
| *BMC* | *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*. Edited by Fredrick George Stephens and M. Dorothy George, 11 vols. London: 1870–1954. Caricatures are identified by the catalogue number. |
| *BPAE* | David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977 [1954]. |
| *BR* | G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. |
| *BT* | Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. |
| *CP* | *The Continental Prophecies*, William Blake's Illuminated Books, vol. 4. Edited by Detlef W. Dörrbecker. London: William Blake Trust and Tate Gallery, 1998. |
| *DE* | Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. |
| *E* | *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*. Edited by David V. Erdman with Commentary by Harold Bloom, rev. ed. New York: Anchor, 1988 [1965]. |

*EI* Morton Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

*FS* Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969 [1947].

*IB* David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-plate Commentary*, red. ed. New York: Dover, 1992 [1974].

*J* *Jerusalem*, William Blake's Illuminated Books, vol. 1. Edited by Morton D. Paley. London: William Blake Trust and Tate Gallery, 1996.

*M* *Milton*, William Blake's Illuminated Books, vol. 5. Edited by Joseph Viscomi and Robert Essick. London: William Blake Trust and Tate Gallery, 1998.

*N* *The Notebook of William Blake: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile*. Edited by David V. Erdman and Donald K. Moore. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

*PD* *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*. Edited by Martin Butlin, 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. Numbers for Volume I refer to images rather than catalogue entries, while those for Volume II refer to the commentary page numbers.

*RM* *The Riverside Milton*. Edited by Roy Flanagan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. All quotations from Milton are from this edition.

*UB* *The Urizen Books*, William Blake's Illuminated Books, vol. 6. Edited by David Worrall. London: William Blake Trust and Tate Gallery, 1998.

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: 'A Saint Amongst the Infidels & a Heretic with the Orthodox'

In 1855, John Linnell recollected Blake's paradoxical opinions on religion. Linnell believed Blake often made tactical responses depending on the immediate context:

> A saint amongst the infidels & a heretic with the orthodox[,] with all the admiration for Blake it must be confessed that he said many things tending to the corruption of Xtian morals—even when unprovoked by controversy[;] & when opposed by the superstitious the crafty or the proud he outraged all common sense & rationality by the opinions he advanced occasionally even indulging in the support of the most lax interpretation of the precepts of the scripture[.][1]

The first phrase captures the strange doubleness of Blake's works. Two aspects of his dubious attitudes are salient: firstly, his vehement opposition to 'the superstitious', a consistent stimulus to irascible criticism throughout his oeuvre; secondly, the connection of his contradictory piety and infidelity with his approach to interpretation. Blake's texts strategically respond to the political, intellectual, and spiritual history of his own time and, while conditioned by the context out of which they emerged, also seek to transform it.

This book explores Blake's tangled relationship to Enlightenment thought, especially in his engagement with myth. On the one hand, he employed Enlightenment critical practices which aimed to liberate humans from myths that sustained superstition and tyrannical authority;

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on the other, he remained positively invested in myth as an affirmation and expression of the creative and active energies of a free people. These two positions remain in tension throughout his oeuvre. The account of Blake's approach to myth that follows is informed by Paul Ricoeur's model of the 'conflict of interpretations', in which interpretation involves productive tension between a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' that strips away illusions and 'hermeneutics as the restoration of meaning' associated with faith. Ricoeur proposes that, ultimately, 'extreme iconoclasm' may be an integral part of a broader 'restoration of meaning'.[2] This book argues that not only is there a rich heritage of Enlightenment critical thought in Blake's texts that can be equated with a hermeneutic of suspicion, but also that it is in tension with (and even enables) his emphatic mythical and spiritual vision. The productive coexistence of these two impulses is what makes these works so distinctive and challenging.

## 'Plac'd in the Order of the Stars'

The subtitle of this book brings a specific focus to Blake's philosophy, art, and politics. Samuel Johnson defined apotheosis in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as 'Deification; the rite of adding any one to the number of the gods'.[3] This definition allows for two related pagan beliefs: firstly, the flight of the soul up to the heavens, usually after the body's death; secondly, the elevation of a human into a deity whilst living. The latter is more technically termed *entheosis*, but during the long eighteenth century apotheosis tended to denote both forms of transformation. The classic form of apotheosis involved the soul of a deceased hero, leader, or benefactor becoming a star or constellation. In *Polymetis* (1747), Joseph Spence described an ancient Roman form of this belief:

> There were great numbers of heroes that were supposed to have been received into some part or other of the heavens, either as stars themselves, or inhabiting or presiding over stars, and might very well all be considered as divinities.[4]

More broadly, the term apotheosis comprises a philosophical and religious idea, a genre in art, a trope in literature, and, especially, a mythological object for critique. Focusing upon it helps to elucidate Blake's engagement with Enlightenment thought and its relation to his mythical mode of expression.

It may seem surprising to focus on the term ‘apotheosis’, which Blake used just once. In advance of his 1809 exhibition, his advertisement foregrounded three works, including ‘Two pictures, representing grand Apotheoses of NELSON and PITT’ (E527). Nevertheless, apotheosis is a recurrent image and idea throughout Blake’s oeuvre. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 7 this apparently casual reference to his paintings actually encodes a dense network of mythological and political meaning, realised in his bizarre depictions of national heroes immortalised as constellations.

Ferber has observed that Blake ‘embodies many of his chief themes in terms of stars, moons, meteors, clouds, and nearly everything else that inhabits the sky “above” us’.[5] Critics have usually regarded Blake’s astronomical and astrological images as part of his demonisation of Newton’s mechanical model of the universe, although Worrall, Miner, and Squibbs have noted Blake’s attention to astronomical details, which he incorporates in his texts as components in their structures of meaning.[6] I will develop these insights further, by linking Blake’s celestial symbolism with the contexts of eighteenth-century mythography and enlightened discourse on primitive religions, as well as the politics of his time.

The narrator of *Milton* (*c.*1804–11) warns his reader ‘Seek not thy heavenly father […] beyond the skies’ (20[22]:32, E114). Nevertheless, Blake associated his own prophetic visions with the firmament. Writing to John Flaxman on 12 September 1800, he included a poetic intellectual autobiography:

> Now my lot in the Heavens is this; Milton lovd me in childhood & shewd me his face
> Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand
> Paracelsus &Behmen appeard to me. terrors appeard in the Heavens above
> And in Hell beneath & a mighty & awful change threatend the Earth
> The American War began   All its dark horrors passed before my face
> Across the Atlantic to France. Then the French Revolution commencd in thick clouds. (E707–8)

The perception of these political revolutions as ‘terrors’ in ‘the Heavens above’ reflects Blake’s recourse to astronomical and astrological language to describe momentous contemporary events. In his prophetic poetry of the 1790s in particular, he used the tropes and figures of apotheosis to represent the erosion of the elevated authority of kings, aristocrats, and state priests by revolutionary forces. Notably, Blake connects his visionary

reading to his perception of global political upheaval. Mystical language and metaphor, rather than ends in themselves, provided a repertoire of mythological figures through which he could interpret and represent the turmoil of his own time.

Blake's critical engagement with apotheosis is, however, complicated by a recurring sense of its transformative potential. This is exemplified when, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*c.*1790–93), a proverb pronounces that 'He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star' (5, E35). In the chapters that follow, I will trace Blake's attempts to incorporate this potential in his poems, alongside their many critical deflations of regal and aristocratic apotheosis.

## Blake, Blake Critics, and Enlightenment

Traditionally, Blake is an exemplary Romantic opponent of the Enlightenment. It is not difficult to find evidence for this. *Jerusalem* (1804–*c.*1820) is full of vigorous assaults on England's fathers of the Enlightenment, 'Bacon & Newton & Locke' (70:15, E224). If for Blake 'the Human Imagination […] is the Divine Vision & Fruition | In which Man liveth eternally' (32:19–20, E132), then it seems self-evident that he would reject the Enlightenment's sceptical philosophy and atheism.[7] His antagonism towards the Enlightenment has been a well-worn critical touchstone, with its origins in nineteenth-century commentary. It became especially prominent after Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), which crystallises its argument around Blake's attack on deism and his transcendence of 'The Orc Cycle', a recurrent narrative of revolution turning into tyranny. Frye embedded Blake in a Romantic tectonic rupture from 'the Augustan millennium', 'an age of reason and common sense': 'He hated its enlightened philosophers Locke and Voltaire' and 'its elegantly sceptical historians Hume and Gibbon'.[8] Some critics following in Frye's wake, especially Raine, have focused on tracing the mystical sources of Blake's myth. Despite fascinating insights, Raine's approach has tended to attenuate the social and political urgency of Blake's mythical mode, in favour of outlining 'a coherent symbolic system' derived from esoteric texts in the Neoplatonic tradition.[9] In reaction, Blake critics have often foregrounded the social and political contexts of the poems at the expense of the socio-political significance of their mythopoeic idiom.

Frye, however, was alert to the social significance of myth for Blake, especially the way his mythopoeic narratives conceive of culture as fundamentally collective. For Jameson, Frye's approach to myth in *An Anatomy*

*of Criticism* (1957), originally part of his book on Blake, is distinctive because of his 'willingness to raise the issue of community and to draw basic, essentially social, interpretative consequences from the nature of religion as collective representation'.[10] In their positive form, 'religious figures [...] become the symbolic space in which the collectivity thinks itself and celebrates its own unity', with literature a form of myth to be interpreted 'as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community'.[11] Blake's positive conception of mythopoesis relies upon its capacity to transform readers and to contribute to their imagining, generation, and participation in a communal social body.

In situating Blake's texts and designs within their social, political, and historical context and using this information to inform close readings, this book is in the tradition of historicist scholarship inspired by Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954) and is frequently indebted to his pioneering insights. As I will discuss further in the conclusion, however, Erdman's interpretations frequently approach the poems as naïve allegories to be decoded into historical events and leaders: for example, he argues that in *Europe* (1794) Rintrah stands for the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger.[12] While Blake's poems stage an enlightened demystification of political power, they are also resistant to the sort of allegories Erdman produces. Blake's own artistic practice was invested in a hermeneutic of plenitude; while his works invite allegorical interpretation they also exceed its capacity to account for them.

Critics have increasingly been willing to loosen Blake from the shackles of counter-Enlightenment. This began in earnest with *Visionary Physics* (1974), in which Ault argued that Blake's relationship to Newton's physics was characterised by dialogue rather than simple opposition. Since Ault's book, the force of Enlightenment philosophy in Blake's thinking and writing has been more widely recognised. Clark, for example, has traced Blake's dialogic rather than simply hostile relation to Locke's accounts of the human mind and Green locates Blake's epistemology at a point where religious enthusiasm and philosophical empiricism collide.[13]

Blake's approach to myth and history is also shaped by the Enlightenment. Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1992) draws political significance from Blake's syncretic mythography, distinguishing it from the more orthodox Christian approaches of William Warburton and Jacob Bryant and discerning affinities with the scepticism of radical writers.[14] The influence of Enlightenment ideas has implications for Blake's approach to narrative. Lincoln's essay 'Blake and the "Reasoning Historian"' (1994) notes surprising continuities between Blake's 'spiritual' history and the conjectural

history practised by Enlightenment writers such as Hume, Gibbon, and Voltaire, an argument eloquently elaborated in his *Spiritual History* (1995). In his provocative *Romantic Atheism* (1999), Priestman even finds connections between Blake and atheist elements of the Enlightenment; at his most radical, Blake engages with infidel philosophy and Lucretian atheism. Despite this body of research, even astute recent critics continue to portray Blake as a heroic opponent of the Enlightenment, an enduring account that this book will challenge.[15]

Lincoln observes that commentators who place Blake in a politically radical tradition often evade the 'narrative challenges' posed by a writer 'who thinks of the prophet as a teller of poetic tales'. They need to come 'to terms with Blake the myth maker, whose (sometimes allegorical) narratives are means by which he participated in the radical thought of his age'.[16] I aim to contribute to this process by reconnecting Blake's engagement with his political and cultural environment to his mythical narratives.

Blake's narratives mediate a religious vision. From the earliest theologians, orthodox Christians have sought to distinguish their religion from myth, insisting on the historicity of Jesus and following the classical understanding of myth as something false or fictional.[17] Nevertheless, there are affinities between the interpretative demands of myth and scripture; indeed, from a reductive point of view myth is merely 'dead religion', no longer animated by the force of belief.[18] Both myth and religion tend to require a peculiarly intense form of interpretation at odds with modern reading habits. Apocalypse is the most mythical mode and genre in the Bible, and Blake's fusion of apocalyptic figures and motifs, especially from Isaiah and Revelation, with mythological material, drawn from sources as varied as Hesiod, Ovid, *Northern Antiquities*, Ossian, and Milton, suggests he perceived continuities between myth and religion.

Historians of the Enlightenment often emphasise this overlap. Cassirer suggests that 'in the development of human culture we cannot fix a point where myth ends or religion begins'.[19] Gay identifies a 'family resemblance', a style of thought associated with both classical and Christian superstition, against which the *philosophes* revolted and thereby defined their own modernity. From this point of view, 'the Christian millennium [w]as a return to myth'.[20] For both Cassirer and Gay, and more recently Jonathan Israel, the Enlightenment programme of criticism sought to expunge primitive mythical thought from human culture.[21] The limit to Blake's affiliation with this aspect of the Enlightenment is evident in his conviction that myth remained a valid mode of thought and expression.

Myth demands complex responses from readers. For Damrosch, 'Blake's emphasis is on the fundamental problem of interpretation, of meaning itself'.[22] His understanding of the Bible and his own output are strongly invested in Christian hermeneutics. Tannenbaum and, more recently, Ryan, Fischer, Rowland, Roberts, and Sklar have provided illuminating accounts of the relationship between Blake's texts and Christian interpretative traditions, especially those which are visionary and heterodox.[23] While Christianity is central to Blake's thought, this book will argue that his works feature distinctively varying combinations of religious vision and an anti-authoritarian critical impulse.

During the 1780s in particular, Blake was sympathetically engaged with Enlightenment thought. While physiognomy may now seem like Romantic quackery, Johann Caspar Lavater's aspiration to produce a universal study of human nature that could become a science places him within the tradition of the European Christian Enlightenment.[24] Blake was probably introduced to Lavater's writings by their mutual friend Henry Fuseli, and his annotations to Fuseli's translation of *Aphorisms on Man* (1787, trans. 1788) reveal his allegiance to the term 'philosophy'. Lavater asserts that 'mankind agree in essence, as they do in their limbs and senses' and differ 'as much in essence as they do in form, limbs, and senses—and only so, and not more' (E583), to which Blake responds 'This is true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction' (E584). Blake endorses such essential universalism when, in *All Religions are One* (*c.*1788), he affirms that 'As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius' (E1). The term 'Poetic Genius' signals a different emphasis, but Blake shares with Enlightenment philosophers the tenet of a basic human nature beneath variations produced by historical, environmental, and social factors. There is an affinity with Hume's pronouncement that history reveals that 'in all nations and ages [...] human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations'.[25] Yet Blake also praises Lavater's resistance to 'abstraction', a quality of thought congenial to Hume's confidence in 'principles and operations'. For Blake the modifier 'Christian' reins in philosophy's tendency towards destructive abstraction:

> Deduct from a rose its redness. from a lilly its whiteness from a diamond its hardness [...] & [*chaos*] rectify every thing in Nature as the Philosophers do. & then we shall return to Chaos & God will be compelld to be Excentric if he Creates O happy Philosopher. (E595)

The 'happy Philosopher' alludes to Democritus of Abdera, known as 'the laughing philosopher', and a proponent of the atomistic philosophy later developed by Epicurus and Lucretius. Blake's obscure assertion that 'God will be compelld to be Excentric if he Creates', refers to the Lucretian *clinamen*, the swerve of atoms in the void which leads them to collide and combine, thus setting in chain the generation of matter.[26] Blake opposes those philosophers who merely 'rectify' nature into uniform and equivalent qualities and thus randomise and obscure rather than clarify divine creative work. He also turns Enlightenment practice upon itself, applying its suspicion of theories which rely upon speculative hypothesis to its own reliance upon the hypothesis of the indivisible atom. My conclusion will return to Blake's critique of a strain of Enlightenment thought embedded in this and other classical traditions. What is important here is that Blake is not simply against Enlightenment thinking per se so much as opposed to a particular direction in which it is taken, what he perceived as a blindness in its application, tendencies, and self-consciousness.

## Blake at the Limits of Enlightenment

Blake's engagement with Enlightenment thought can be helpfully situated in relation to a line of critique, stretching from Herder, through Hegel, to Adorno and Horkheimer, and later writers such as Kosselleck. Despite important differences, these thinkers have tended to see in the Enlightenment a predominantly negative use of critical thought. In *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), Hegel asked 'When all prejudice and superstition has been banished, the question arises: Now what? What is the truth which the Enlightenment has disseminated in place of these prejudices and superstitions?'[27] He believed that the Enlightenment had mistaken its mission and risked destroying the positive realities of spiritual experience.

Blake came to vigorously oppose the sceptical *philosophes*, but more for their unbelief, their premises, and their intolerance of Christianity, than for their methods of critique. Historians of the Enlightenment have repeatedly sought to defend it from charges of negativity, and writing it off as merely destructive philosophy ignores its powerful contributions to social and political liberty.[28] Nevertheless, while Blake's critique of the Enlightenment's *telos* indicates a limit to his investment in its critical project, its interpretative and critical strategies remain important presences in his texts and images. Cassirer and Gay claim that the Enlightenment comprised two stages, the first destructive and the second positive and

constructive. We might even wish to align Blake's myths of fall and resurrection with this two-stage process, however different his premises and idiom. As I will discuss, the Enlightenment was not a unitary or single phenomenon but had a range of ramifications within which we can productively explore Blake's affiliations.

Blake seems attuned to ways in which Enlightenment thinkers could believe that they had left behind mythical thinking, what Coupe calls their 'myth of mythlessness'.[29] For Blake, the critical thought of the Enlightenment loses its value when it becomes fetishised and detached from a utopian vision. This has affinities with Adorno and Horkheimer, who argued that, as it overlooks its own mythical tendencies and loses its critical self-awareness, 'enlightenment has relinquished its own realization'.[30] Contrary to Blake's reputation as an outright opponent of 'reason', it is more accurate to see him in this light, opposed to a passive or finalised form of reason which unwittingly conspires with domination. In part B of his early tractate *There is No Natural Religion* (*c.*1788), Blake affirmed that 'Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more' (E2). Reason is renewed from the constraints of a ratio of past knowledge through the future-oriented activity of the 'poetic or Prophetic character'. Blake critiques Enlightenment thought in order to liberate its positive form from what Adorno and Horkheimer later call its 'entanglement in blind domination'.[31] Blake's investment in mythopoesis challenges this tendency of critique to become complicit with authority. As Coupe argues, 'myths work according to the imperative of narrative dynamism and will always evade the stasis of doctrine'.[32]

To adopt an influential ancient Greek distinction, therefore, Blake is most interested in myth as *muthos* rather than *logos*, that is, in the poetic, creative, and narrative forms of myth he associates with the prophet Los, opposed to the doctrinal myths of hegemony associated with priest-king deity Urizen, with his 'iron laws' (23:26, E81) and 'brazen Book' (11:3, E64).[33] It is, however, typical of Blake's complexity that these characters are interdependent, with Urizen emerging from Los, being shaped by his activity, and in turn influencing Los's creative work. It is at the point where critical thought becomes complicit with oppression, restrains imagination and desire, and becomes a prescriptive *logos* that Blake resists it.

As I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, Blake came ultimately to give precedence to mythopoesis over critical thought. Nevertheless, this allegiance is qualified by his continuing investment in demystificatory critique, which aims at dissolving hegemonic myths, long reified from *mythos*

into *logos*, and revealing the imaginative and collective energy ossified beneath the traditions of domination. It is this recurrent critical tendency which enables Blake to be self-conscious in his mythical narratives, rendering them continually disruptive, resisting their abstraction into a stable *logos*.

In his concluding marginalia to Lavater, Blake conceived of himself and the author as members of a broad, enlightened philosophical enterprise: 'It does not signify what the laws of Kings & Priests have calld Vice we who are philosophers ought not to call the Staminal Virtues of Humanity by the same name that we call the omissions of intellect springing from poverty' (E601). Blake's perception of himself and Lavater as members of a group of progressive, humane philosophers exemplifies Edelstein's definition of the Enlightenment as self-conscious modernity: 'More than anything the Enlightenment seems to have been the period when people thought they were living in an age of Enlightenment.'[34] Opposing the restraints imposed by 'Kings & Priests', they were men of their enlightened age, consistently opposing the exercise of power through superstition.

That central term in Enlightenment thought recurs throughout this book, but needs careful unpicking in relation to Blake. In Lavater's *Aphorisms*, Blake amended number 342, replacing 'Superstition' with 'Hipocrisy': '[*Superstition*] <Hipocrisy> always inspires littleness, religion grandeur of mind: the [*superstitious*] <hypocrite> raises beings inferior to himself to deities'. His annotations develop this distinction:

> True superstition is ignorant honesty & this is beloved of god & man
>
> I do not allow that there is such a thing as Superstition taken in the strict sense of the word
>
> A man must first decieve himself before he is <thus> Superstitious & so he is a hypocrite
>
> Hipocrisy. is as distant from superstition. as the wolf from the lamb. (E591)

Blake distinguishes imaginative, innocent folk superstitions from a malignant false consciousness. What he redefines as 'Hipocrasy' here is closely allied to what Thomas Paine later termed 'political superstition', the people's unreflective submission to traditional hierarchy and authority against their own true interest and powers of resistance. I will discuss Paine's notion in relation to Blake's *Europe* in Chapter 5. Here, Blake gives 'Hipocrisy' a Protestant inflection. He alludes to the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus warns of 'false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves' (Matthew 7:15),

and St Paul's charge to the elders of Ephesus to carefully oversee the church because 'after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock' (Acts 20:29). Protestants, notably Milton in *Lycidas* (1638), applied these texts to the rise of ecclesiastical hierarchy, especially in Roman Catholicism.[35]

Blake often fiercely attacked superstition. In 1790 he objected to Swedenborg's view that 'all the grandest and purest Truths of Heaven must needs seem obscure and perplexing to the natural Man at first View' with 'Lies & Priestcraft Truth is Nature' (E609). As I will argue in Chapter 9, Blake later shifted his position, investing in St Paul's notion that the 'Natural Man' must be transformed into the 'Spiritual Man'. He still, however, demonised priestcraft as the superstition and cruel natural religion of Albion's druid sons. Blake was attracted to many modernising tendencies in liberal forms of eighteenth-century Protestantism. Central to what Rosenblatt describes as 'The Christian Enlightenment' was the reorientation of religious life away from dogma, tradition, and ritual and towards scripture, practical piety, and good works.[36] This was an attraction of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church when Blake and his wife Catherine attended its general conference in 1789.[37] In his copy of *The Wisdom of Angels, Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (1763, trans. 1788), Blake responded to Swedenborg's assertion that 'the whole of Charity and Faith is in Works, and that Charity and Faith without Works are like Rainbows about the Sun, which vanish and are dissipated by a Cloud' by adding in the margin 'The Whole of the New Church is in the Active Life & not in Ceremonies at all' (E605). Blake was less interested in the theosophical system than the demystified Christian praxis that Swedenborg's visions allegorise. While it may seem strange to regard Swedenborg as a figure of the Enlightenment, Garrett notes his enduring scientific interests and his fundamental emphasis on 'the possibility of humanity's improvement'.[38] The articles signed by delegates at the New Church conference include the belief that 'All can be saved, even the heathen, if they live charitable lives', the belief that the 'three-person Trinity is dangerous', and a striking assertion that 'Miracles do not occur'.[39] Indeed, one opponent singled out the New Church's anti-Trinitarianism and metaphorical readings of scripture as 'approaching nearer than any others to modern Infidelity'.[40] Swedenborgianism posed an enlightened challenge to Anglican orthodoxy.

Freedom of thought is Blake's fundamental basis for all other kinds of freedom. In his annotations to Henry Boyd's *A Translation of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri in English Verse with Historical Notes* (1785), he opposes

Boyd's backing for the suppression of Catholicism and criticism of Roman religious relativism: 'What is Liberty without Universal Toleration' (E635). Indeed, Blake's understanding of toleration extends beyond Christians to all races and creeds, allowing him to perceive 'The Divine Image' in 'heathen, turk or jew' (E13). While scholars have linked Blake with Protestant sects, whether the radical enthusiasts of the English Civil War, the Methodists, Dissent, or the Moravians, he was suspicious of religious factionalism.[41] Blake underlined the second part of Lavater's aphorism 'Who comes from the kitchen smells of its smoke; *who adheres to a sect has something of its cant*' (E590). When Lavater later asserts that none are 'ever little, who, to obtain one great object, will suffer much', Blake responds 'the man who does this is a Sectary therefore not great' (E593). Partial outlooks distort what is for Blake a universally accessible religious principle. In *All Religions are One* (1788), 'all sects of Philosophy are from the Poetic Genius adapted to the weaknesses of every individual' (E1). Blake's 'Poetic Genius' is as comprehensive as the Enlightenment's universal human nature.

In addition, Blake's enthusiasm for the passions and the stimulation of the senses has much in common with progressive eighteenth-century thought. Porter describes the 'Enlightenment's great historical watershed' as 'the validation of pleasure'.[42] While the idiom of the *Marriage*'s pronouncement that 'The soul of sweet delight. can never be defil'd' (9, E37) is visionary, its hedonism belongs with the liberal instincts of the eighteenth century. Some critics have detected an ascetic strain in Blake's later work, in which the natural body often appears in horrific vegetating forms.[43] But when Blake figures human renewal, he tends to emphasise bodily exuberance. Pleasure is not necessarily simple and Blake uncompromisingly explored tangled and often perverse forms of sensual gratification.[44] Nevertheless, his suspicion of asceticism echoes that of Enlightenment philosophers. Blake underlined Lavater's aphorism which began '*The purest religion is the most refined Epicurism*' and praised it as 'True Christian philosophy' (E591). His Jesus is 'a wine bibber' (E634) and even later in his career he was certain that 'The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion' (E564).

Perhaps Blake's most revealing alignment with progressive Enlightenment philosophy comes in the *Marriage*. In the fourth 'Memorable Fancy', the narrator rebukes a self-righteous Angel for imposing his 'metaphysics' on him in the form of a vision of eternal punishment for following his energies. In turn he imposes a vision of the Angel's opinions in the form of chained cannibal monkeys and baboons, before leading

them both out through a mill. He recalls that 'I in my hand brought the skeleton of a body, which in the mill was Aristotles Analytics' and answers the Angel's objections by asserting 'we impose on one another, & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics' (20, E42). Blake's jibe at Aristotle aligns him with the Enlightenment's mockery of Scholasticism and its traditional authorities and procedures. His attacks on reason are not *de facto* evidence of counter-Enlightenment, but are often aimed at reason as a form of traditional, superstitious thought, which ties the present to the precedents, norms, and institutionalised ideologies of the past.[45]

It is particularly important to re-evaluate Blake's relationship to Enlightenment thought because the traditional narrative of a Romantic revolt against the eighteenth-century Age of Reason is based on a now superseded historiography. The first volume of Gay's incisive *The Enlightenment* (1966) defines the movement as 'The Rise of Modern Paganism', presided over by predominantly French deist and atheist *philosophes*, who renewed ancient critical practices in order to free the moderns from medieval Christian metaphysics. More recent accounts find it a less unified phenomenon. Outram adopts many of the implications of Kant's seminal essay answering the question 'Was ist Aufklärung?' (1784), preferring to see the Enlightenment 'as a series of interlocking, and sometimes warring problems and debates', 'a process, not a completed project'.[46] For S. J. Barnett, Gay overemphasises deist thinkers and underestimates Christian reformers' roles in diffusing enlightened attitudes and practices.[47]

Indeed, Gay's polarisation of myth and enlightened reason is questionable. He draws this opposition from Cassirer's influential *The Philosophy of Enlightenment* (1951), but Cassirer elsewhere describes myth with more nuance. Myth and science are 'symbolic forms', modes of thought with valid claims to distinct areas of the human experience of reality.[48] Despite some qualifications, Gay's *Enlightenment* opposes all religious thought to rational criticism. The complexity and dynamism of Blake's writing and art derive from their resistance to such a distinction and willingness to endorse supposedly irreconcilable types of thought.[49]

## Enlightenment as Practice

For Gay, Enlightenment philosophers glorified criticism and largely repudiated metaphysics, meaning that 'the Enlightenment was not an Age of Reason but a Revolt against Rationalism', the notion that every-

thing could be systematically explained.[50] But whereas Gay focuses on French *philosophes*, Porter has argued for a distinctively pragmatic English Enlightenment. In Britain the movement was a more diffused phenomenon, with participants who shared goals of 'criticism, sensibility or faith in progress' which 'throve in England *within* piety'. Porter follows Pocock in rejecting the definite article in favour of plural 'enlightenments' or the verb 'enlightenment', which recognises the movement's variety.[51] More recently, Schmidt has identified 'Enlightenment' primarily as a verb rather than a noun in late eighteenth-century usage, denoting an unfolding process rather than a historical period of philosophy.[52]

This emphasis on plurality and process follows Foucault's essay 'What is Enlightenment?' (1984). He describes the movement as 'a set of events and complex historical processes', including 'forms of knowledge' and 'projects of rationalization of knowledge and practices'. Rather than a 'permanent body of knowledge', Enlightenment is ongoing, 'an attitude, an ethos' which interrogates and challenges the limits European societies imposed on their subjects.[53] For Foucault, the performance of new forms and methods of understanding in society drives the Enlightenment's liberation of human potential.

If we approach Enlightenment in terms of critical practice, its relation to myth can best be understood as a repertoire of techniques and procedures which enabled the critique of superstition, both ancient and modern. Enlightened acts of interpretation yielded naturalistic explanations of mysterious narratives. When Enlightenment is viewed in these terms, rather than as a monolithic 'Age of Reason', Blake's partial affiliation with the critical thought of his day becomes more apparent.

Eighteenth-century critical approaches to myth were generally forms of allegory. Moral allegorists followed Plato's approach of interpreting myths as personifications of abstract virtues and vices: Minerva stands for Wisdom. Historical allegorists interpreted the gods as deified historical individuals: Bacchus was the discoverer of wine or an ancient king of India. Physical allegorists accounted for myths as descriptions of nature: accounts of Apollo or Hercules described the progress of the sun. More modern approaches became influential in the later century, such as Hume's narrative of myth and religion originating out of impulses of fear in the unstable minds of primitive humans.[54] These methods can be broadly reconciled into varieties of 'naturalism'. Pagan myths and idolatry were frequently traced back to primitive origins, which had become distorted over time: ancestor and benefactor worship, ethical practices, natural and astronomical

phenomena. Apotheosis was widely understood as a major source of pagan deities, with founders of states, political and military leaders, inventors, and benefactors all regarded as divinities. The critical correlative to this practice was Euhemerism, which will be a key term in the chapters which follow and has received less attention from Blake critics than it merits.[55]

Chapter 2 of this book provides a fuller account of Euhemerist readings of myth, but it can be defined briefly as the tracing of pagan divinities back to historical individuals, accorded divinity by their descendants or communities. As Manuel suggests, if Euhemerism 'is broadened to include those who recognized in most pagan myths the elaboration of ancient political and other historical events of great moment', then the term would encompass most early eighteenth-century mythographers.[56] As I explain in Chapter 2, Euhemerism can be regarded as the most prominent modern approach to myth in the eighteenth century. Even those who regarded natural phenomena as the true source of religion believed that priests and kings promulgated superstitious beliefs as a means to displace the deity's numinous qualities on to their own authority.

Alongside the philosophical drift away from myth, mainstream eighteenth-century aesthetics charted a course of progressive realism and disenchantment. In 1712, Joseph Addison complained of his contemporaries' insistence on invoking 'trifling antiquated Fables':

> *Virgil* and *Homer* might compliment their Heroes, by interweaving the Actions of Deities with their Atchievements; but for a Christian Author to write in the Pagan Creed, to make Prince *Eugene* a Favourite of *Mars*, or to carry on a Correspondence between *Bellona* and the Marshal *De Villars*, would be downright Puerility, and unpardonable in a Poet that is past Sixteen.[57]

Only in deflationary mock-heroic poems was heathen mythology 'not only excusable but graceful'.[58] In Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1816), the traditional pantheon had become decaying trash. Squire Headlong shows off his grounds, in which 'Atlas had his head knocked off to fit him for propping a shed; and only the day before yesterday we fished Bacchus out of the horsepond'.[59]

At face value, Blake's phantasmagorical poems seem at odds with this tendency towards disenchantment. Nevertheless, like so much of his treatment of myth, his texts subtly involve a hermeneutic of suspicion. Although Blake is often accused of creating an obscure 'private' mythology, his sublime personifications tend to draw upon recognisable

mythological figures from the classical tradition, even while he deliberately thwarts their conventional associations. Thus Orc can be identified with the Greek Ares or the Roman Mars as a personification of war, but with myriad additional associations making him troublingly elusive: Satan, Prometheus, Jesus, sexual desire, revolution, a freed slave, fire, Oedipus, to name but a few. Blake therefore stands in a complex relationship to the disenchanting tendencies of polite eighteenth-century culture. He saw himself as a modern, complaining that Rubens's Luxembourg Gallery was 'the work of a Blockhead', being full of '<Bloated [*Awkward*] Gods> Mercury Juno Venus & the rattle traps of Mythology' (E580). His own aesthetic practice, however, suggests he retained a sense of the potential value of traditional mythology. Blake's conception of his own poetry as 'Sublime Allegory' (E730) is suggestive. Like allegory, it goes beyond a literal level but, unlike allegory, which Blake seems to have believed merely substituted literal denotation with another fixed level of significance, it aims at an illimitable profusion of meaning.

As I will discuss in the second chapter, in terms of style of thought and interpretative techniques, there were important continuities between the critical hermeneutics of liberal Protestant and radical mythographers when it came to pagan myth and corrupted religion. The distinctive differences lay in the extent of inquiry and the objects to which criticism was applied. It was only when the Protestant critique of pagan elements in Roman Catholicism began to be applied to the Anglican Church in the 1780s and political radicals adopted it to assail orthodoxy in the 1790s that this critical approach became heavily politicised and contentious. The close readings of Blake's writings and artworks that follow reveal the coexistence of his demystificatory and mythopoeic sensibilities and their tensions within the same aesthetic objects.

In his annotations to Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1796), a rejoinder to Thomas Paine's sceptical attack on state religion, *The Age of Reason* (1794–95), Blake praises Paine's assaults on priestcraft and superstition as in line with true Christianity: 'Paine has not Attacked Christianity. Watson has defended Antichrist' (E612). This is a strategic alliance: Blake notes that 'The Bishop never saw the Everlasting Gospel any more than Tom Paine' (E619). Blake leans towards Paine's egalitarianism, but remains independent, exemplified in his reflections on the two authors' views concerning miracles:

> The manner of a miracle being performd is in modern times considerd as an arbitrary command of the agent upon the patient but this is an impossibility

> not a miracle neither did Jesus ever do such a miracle. Is it a greater miracle to feed five thousand men with five loaves than to overthrow all the armies of Europe with a small pamphlet. (E616–17)

Blake rejects the supernatural claims Watson used to buttress state religion while pushing beyond Paine's critical agenda to affirm collective resistance as the proper arena of the extraordinary. Here, Blake echoes Voltaire, who in the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) asserts that 'A Miracle, in the energetic sense of the word, means something wonderful; and thus every thing is a Miracle.' As opposed to the supernatural interventions so important to Jesuits, 'Some persons of latter times make the suppression of the Jesuits in France a much greater Miracle than all those of Xavier and Ignatius put together.'[60] Voltaire's irony and Blake's sincere reverence for Paine's achievement are at odds, but both express confidence in the efficacy of the public sphere and human agency in the pursuit of collective freedom. While he may not have shared in all its premises or conclusions, Blake could endorse the critical procedures of the Enlightenment when serving that utopian aspiration.

## Blake, Myth, and Utopia

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim argues that 'mythical thought' is essential to religion, conceived of as 'something eminently social'. In any given society, 'Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities'.[61] While critics often refer to Blake's 'private' mythology, he adopts myth as an appropriate mode for representing communal dimensions of human thought and existence.[62] Indeed, while Blake critically erodes myths that sustain hegemony, with many of his personifications and characters he exploits traditional figures and events from classical and other myths in order to represent the collective psychological forces he saw at work in the momentous history of his own time.

Blake's dual approach to myth can be illuminated by strategies in biblical hermeneutics which bring criticism into dialogue with faith. Bultmann's essay 'New Testament and Mythology' (1941) proposes an influential version of this approach. For Bultmann it made no sense for modern Christians to accept the Bible's supernatural and mythical elements which reflected the worldview of ancient peoples. Instead, scripture should be interpreted anthropologically and existentially through 'demythologisation': not an elimination of myth, but rather the extraction of its deep

symbolic meaning. This process renews the *kerygma*, the proclamation of Christ as the living God, so that belief can exist in the modern world.[63]

Ricoeur, while endorsing aspects of Bultmann's project of demythologisation, also saw more potential in myth. Myth expresses 'the understanding that man has of himself in relation to the foundation and limit of his existence' and thus gives 'worldly form to what is beyond known and tangible reality'.[64] Its value, then, lies in its capacity to embody the divine as it is experienced by humans, hence the rich variety of myths across cultures and historical periods. Because this book explores the relationship between Blake's sceptical treatment of state religion and his attempts to articulate a vital, human form of the divine, Ricoeur's application of hermeneutics and phenomenology to questions of religious interpretation and belief has proved a helpful model. In 'Religion, Atheism, and Faith' (1974), Ricoeur argues that the atheism of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud is not 'limited in meaning to mere negation and destruction of religion' but instead 'opens up the horizon for something else', what he terms 'a postreligious faith or a faith for a postreligious age'. As the central term in a dialectic with religion and faith, atheism has a 'double signification as both destructive and liberating', opening up 'the way to a faith situated beyond accusation and protection', functions associated with God worshipped as the father, which Ricoeur conceives of as the 'corrupt parts of religion'.[65]

The future orientation of 'postreligious faith' is utopian in nature and Ricoeur sees a similar potentiality in the imaginative and indeterminate qualities in myth, which he describes as 'a bearer of possible worlds'.[66] The category of utopia is helpful when considering Blake's investment in myth. In *Jerusalem* (*c.*1804–20), hope is central to human existence, and when Albion loses it he falls into deathly sleep. In *Ideology and Utopia* (1998), Williams recognises a dialectical movement in Blake's work, arguing that the value of 'Blake's strategies for change' lies in 'the fundamental negation of the "here" of ideology for the "nowhere" of utopia'.[67] Williams fruitfully uses the ideas of Ricoeur, Mannheim, and Bloch to examine interactions between critique and hopeful imagining in Blake's poetry. Bloch's model of utopia in *The Principle of Hope* (1954–59) is illuminating in relation to tensions in Blake's poems. Bloch distinguishes between 'abstract utopia', largely individualistic daydreams which provide refuge from a reality corrupted by ideology, and 'concrete utopia', the dimension of present reality which anticipates and reaches towards real future possibilities just beyond the horizon of the present. While abstract utopia involves imagination of possibilities beyond given reality, the more vital form is concrete: utopia

freed from its ideological corruptions. This process of extraction produces what Bloch terms 'docta spes', or 'educated hope'.[68] Like Ricoeur's notion of 'postreligious faith', Bloch's 'concrete utopia' and 'docta spes' encapsulate imaginative and future-orientated hope refined and strengthened by but also exceeding the process of critique. There are affinities here with Blake's treatment of myth. Myths serving state power must be subjected to critique. This liberates myth's latent utopian content, which expresses and shapes collective energies and sustains hope for social change against the disillusionment and closed narratives of history.

This book examines Blake's attitudes towards myth and Enlightenment through close readings of his texts and artworks in their intellectual, political, and literary contexts, tracing his shifting affiliations within a field of beliefs. The second chapter sets out the intellectual and cultural context for the readings of the texts and artworks which follow. It describes Protestant and Enlightenment critiques of myth and their common investment in Euhemerism and naturalism as demystificatory strategies, outlining the significance of apotheosis in Enlightenment natural histories of religion and in art and literature. The chapter charts the politicisation of both mythography and apotheosis during the 1780s and 1790s.

The evolution of Blake's representational practice is the focus of the third and fourth chapters, which trace the shift from *The French Revolution*'s quasi-historical prophecy towards more fully elaborated mythopoesis in *America*, accompanied by his development of the illuminated prophetic book. These aesthetic revisions reflect Blake's response to the early stages of the French Revolution. In the face of this unprecedented event, Blake sought a medium to communicate what appeared to be the release of a newly liberated people's sublime energies. These poems are drawn both towards the enlightened urge to critically erode myths of monarchical and aristocratic power and the embrace of myth as an expression of utopian collective power. Blake's politicised representations of apotheosis make this tension visible, but also indicate a distrust of the representative forms of government favoured by radical contemporaries.

Chapter 5 sets the myth-making of *Europe* in the context of British loyalist, government, and clerical repression of radicalism from 1792 onwards, especially after Britain and France declared war in 1793. Blake's radicalism is more pronounced and he strategically adopts sceptical Enlightenment strategies to expose and undermine the myths sustaining the church and state establishment. Chapter 6 develops this analysis in relation to *The Book of Urizen*, *The Song of Los*, and *The Book of Ahania*. Blake's applica-

tion of critical mythography to religion in *The Song of Los* suggests that by 1795 his sceptical impulse was gaining the upper hand over his faith. An emphasis on political critique left him disenchanted with Christianity and struggling to articulate a utopian counter-myth.

Chapter 7 turns from the chronological sequence of previous chapters in order to foreground the important shift in Blake's thought that emerges in his later poems. It provides the first sustained and thoroughly contextualised readings of Blake's enigmatic portraits of William Pitt and Nelson and draws out the significance of their entries in his *Descriptive Catalogue* for his 1809 exhibition, where they are 'compositions of a mythological cast, similar to those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity' (E530). Tracing the meanings implied by the genre of oriental apotheosis, and scrutinising their mythological details, I reveal that while Blake's paintings continue his earlier critique of the myths of the British political establishment they also recognise the powerful appeal and potential of mythical thought.

The final chapters show how Blake's later poems and designs continue to draw on sceptical strategies of Enlightenment mythography, but now subordinate them to his renewed investment in Christianity. The rehabilitation of an affective, feminine Christian vision is central to this process. Blake perceived himself as emerging from a period of crisis. While he continues to use imagery of apotheosis to critique the state and state religion, he also adapts it to project Christian hopes for national and universal human renewal.

Chapter 8 charts Blake's transformation of apotheosis from a historical error associated with Urizen to a figure of redemptive possibility in *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*. The latter poem concludes with a vision of poetic inspiration conceived of as a kind of reconstituted apotheosis. Chapter 9 claims *Jerusalem* as a poem in the apotheosis genre. Blake's unusual emphasis on poetic form in the preface reflects a conception of the work as a bardic performance intended to galvanise its audience and to inspire the renewal and apotheosis of the nation, figured as Albion. The chapter links *Jerusalem* to liberal opposition to the war with France and argues that the poem is not an outright rejection of Enlightenment thought, but rather productively absorbs it into a larger utopian vision. This is figured in Los, who subdues his rationalist and masculine 'Spectre' in order to extract useful creative work from him.

Chapter 10 focuses on Blake's late works, particularly the *Laocoön* engraving, to assess the wider implications of his approaches to mythog-

raphy and mythopoesis. It refers Blake's famed antipathy towards classical culture back to the discussion of mythography in the preceding chapters, and the ontological and social assumptions in the classical sources of Enlightenment approaches to myth.

## Blake and Politics

The political dimensions of Blake's oeuvre are integrally related to the foregoing discussion of myth. Choosing figures of apotheosis to represent political tumult appears an abstruse strategy, but Blake's contemporaries were familiar with a politicised apotheosis. The ornamental stars worn by members of the Order of the Garter were frequently a focus for satire on corrupt courtiers and placemen.[69] The caricaturist James Gillray often made mock-heroic comedy out of the conceit that a seat in Parliament was a political apotheosis, as in *The Twin Stars: Castor and Pollux* (1799), where the Whig politicians George Barclay and Charles Sturt are corpulent and drunken versions of Gemini.[70]

Blake's tendency to associate apotheosis with regal tyranny is exemplified in Fig. 1.1, which illustrates lines from Gray's 'The Bard'. The last Welsh Bard remaining after their slaughter by Edward I's troops prophesies to the king the doom of his succession. He foresees Edward III: 'From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs | The scourge of Heav'n'.[71] Amazement, Flight, Sorrow, and Solitude are straightforwardly personified, but Blake transforms Edward III into a sky-god who wields a starry scourge.[72] The image is based on the constellation Hercules, whom star atlases usually depicted kneeling and raising his club over Cerberus. Blake transforms the Greek hero vanquishing hell's guard-dog into an image of the king's domination of his subjects. His mythological mode represents divine-right kingship as monstrous tyranny. Blake's association between kings and apotheosis is also suggested in his annotations to his 1798 edition of Francis Bacon's *Essays*. Bacon asserts that 'The motions of factions under Kings, ought to be like the motions […] of the inferior orbs' which are carried 'by the higher motion of the "primum mobile"'. Alert to the slippage between God and the monarch in this simile, Blake quips that 'King James was Bacons Primum Mobile' (E632).

The zodiac is a classic example of a signifying structure, the components of which are supposedly elevated and permanent. Representations of apotheosis accord the recipients immortality as an unambiguous sign within a culture, providing divine authority in life, or when deceased

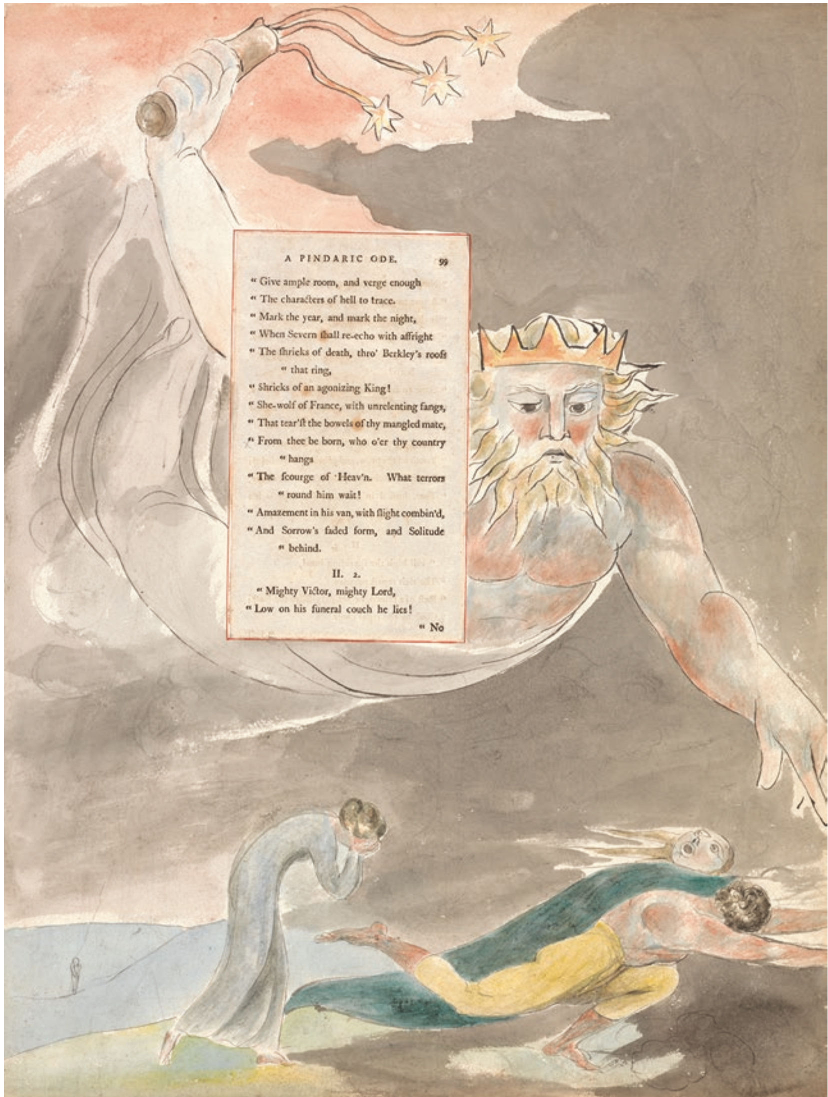


**Fig. 1.1** William Blake, *The Bard*. From *The Poems of Thomas Gray* (1797). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

merging their soul with the heavens in the form of one or more stars. The latter transformation is sometimes awkwardly termed 'stellification', but I will use 'apotheosis' or 'catasterism' (from the Greek *καταστερισμός*, a 'placing among the stars').[73] Blake and contemporaries sympathetic to the American and French revolutions subverted these mythologised representations of traditional authority. In V. I. Vološinov's words:

> The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual. […] [The] inner dialectic quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes.[74]

Blake's works repeatedly bring out this dynamic dimension of signs, especially stars. In *The Myth of the State* (1946), Cassirer argues that at critical moments of 'man's social life, the rational forces that resist the rise of the old mythical conceptions are no longer sure of themselves. In these moments the time for myth has come again.'[75] In this instance Cassirer is suspicious of the ideological dimensions of myth, especially in Nazism. In light of his earlier recognition of myth's primal role in human thought, however, the observation is suggestive. Blake seems to have believed myth and prophecy were apt modes in which to represent the momentous political changes of his day, which unleashed long pent-up collective human energies.

Against the established order's self-representation in symbols of hierarchical, univalent, and eternal authority, Blake attempted to articulate a conception of the people as a collective body, characterised by plurality, physical vigour, openness, and proliferating life. His positive investment in myth as a medium for representing his vision of contemporary events is closely bound up in this sense of collective human potential. The body of the people, envisaged as the totality of dynamic relationships among its members, represents a second, positive aspect of his approach to myth, contrasting his critical attrition of myths of power. Blake's earlier prophecies personify in Los the primacy of this creative form of myth, akin to what Cassirer calls 'the instinct of life that has created the myth-making function'.[76] In Blake's myth, however, this function merges into Urizen's dogmatism. While, for Cassirer, myth's 'vital principle' is 'a dynamic not a static one; it is describable only in terms of action', Blake recognises its disturbing ambiguity.[77]

The collective aspect of Blake's mythopoesis ties in to the ontological dimensions of Makdisi's account of Blake's politics in *William Blake and*

*the Impossible History of the 1790s* (2003). Makdisi distinguishes Blake's communal social vision from that of many contemporary radicals, whom he regards as invested in a 'sovereign self' identified with 'political and commercial rights' advocated by a 'hegemonic liberal movement'. This individual self is 'profoundly destabilized and rendered inoperative in Blake's work of the 1790s'.[78] Instead, Makdisi locates Blake in a communitarian tradition of religiously inflected radicalism. Makdisi's notion of 'hegemonic radicalism' is rather contradictory, overlooking many experimental and communal dimensions in 1790s republicanism and radicalism and, indeed, aspects of Blake's modernity.[79] Nevertheless, his account of Blakean ontology and epistemology is suggestive in relation to myth. In common with 1790s radical thinkers, Blake adopted enlightened Euhemerist and naturalist critical approaches to hegemonic myths, but Blake is much readier to countenance myth as a relevant and valuable mode of expression through which individual subjectivity could be transformed into communal forms of being.

An often neglected aspect of Blake's modernity is his investment in the idea of the public sphere. Habermas defines it as 'the sphere of private people come together as a public', the arena in which 'public opinion' could be recognised and generated through critical discussion and mediated through print.[80] Blake contributed to public debate and print opinion, and his active interest in public life made contemporary newspapers, caricatures, and parliamentary debates such fruitful resources for Erdman.[81] In *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (2011), Matthews opposes accounts of Blake as a writer for specific 'faith communities' and subcultures, instead emphasising that his 'work is addressed to "the Public", even where he does not succeed in communicating in any effective way with his intended audience'. The focus of Blake's work is 'the culture of the nation and even the world'.[82] That said, when Blake represents the public sphere within his poems, it tends to be imaginatively reconceived in mythical terms, amid the 'eternal tables' and halls of the 'Sons of Albion' in *Milton* (2:22–23, E96). Such arenas, however, have a function continuous with the public sphere of his own time: in response to the 'Bard's Song', 'All consider'd and a loud resounding murmur | Continu'd round the Halls; and much they question'd the immortal | Loud voicd Bard' (13[14]:45–47, E107). Blake's imagines his poetry stimulating debate.

In 1820, his friend George Cumberland recorded visiting William and Catherine Blake and reading 'the Courier to him about the Queens arrival'.[83] Cumberland, a gentleman connoisseur, amateur artist, poet,

novelist, and polymath, was one of Blake's most consistent friends, a long-term supporter and correspondent. He bought a number of Blake's illuminated books and their letters suggest congenial outlooks on a number of issues. Cumberland exemplifies the sort of public for whom we might imagine Blake envisaged his prophecies and poems. His political inclinations were towards the radical wing of the Whig party. His *Thoughts on Outline* (1796), for which Blake provided two engravings, is dedicated to Charles James Fox as the only man capable of rescuing 'the mismanaged vessel of the British state'.[84] As I discuss in Chapter 3, Blake's vote in the 1790 Westminster election for Fox, 'the man of the people', suggests the traditional Whig discourse of liberty held an enduring appeal for him. This is not to diminish the evident anti-authoritarianism of the illuminated books. Rather, while Makdisi is right to find Blake's politics incommensurate with the 1790s radical discourse of individual rights, I wish to resist Thompson's conviction that 'the closer we are to 1650, the closer we seem to be to Blake'.[85] Cooper more accurately links Blake's 'language of liberty' to the 'decidedly premodern' political discourse that predominated in the eighteenth century, prior to modern democratic politics.[86] This language focused on the politically fluid term 'the people', which in Blake's case takes on a radical inflection, but remains more recognisably connected with the public sphere than with sects and subcultures.

Blake remains a deeply political writer and artist throughout his career, but the adjective needs qualification. It is easy to interpret the following comment in 'A Public Address' (*c.*1810) as an outright rejection of politics for a spiritual or artistic vocation:

> I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics. If Men were Wise <the Most arbitrary> Princes could not hurt them If they are not Wise the Freest Government is compelld to be a Tyranny[.] Princes appear to me to be Fools Houses of Commons & Houses of Lords appear to me to be fools they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life. (E580)

Blake dismisses 'politics' construed as activities in the court and parliament. But while for many Blake's 'wisdom' here is the cultivation of spiritual or artistic gifts,[87] Blake can be understood to assert the people's primacy over forms of government. The 'Human Life' he prioritises over institutional politics is collective and social.

In his annotations to Watson's *Apology*, Blake wrote that 'to him who sees this mortal pilgrimage in the light that I see it. Duty to [my] <his>

country is the first consideration & safety the last' (E611). He considered his vocation as patriotic and political. Blake was often sceptical of claims by individuals to represent the people. In his annotations to the 1798 edition of Francis Bacon's *Essays Moral, Economical, and Political*, he complained:

> Every Body Knows that this is Epi[c]urus and Lucretius & Yet Every Body Says that it is Christian Philosophy how is this Possible Every Body must be a Liar & deciever but Every Body does not do this But The Hirelings of Kings & Courts who make themselves Every Body & Knowingly propagate Falshood. (E620)

Blake conceives of his work as salutary correction. This book will engage with Blake's politics in the broader sense of the constitution of 'Every Body' and the representation of 'the people'. Aristotle asserted in the *Politics* that man is *politikon zoon* ('a political animal'), political insofar as his true nature is realised in active association with his fellow citizens.[88] Blake would have been wary of Aristotle's valorisation of the citizen and state as 'natural', but this notion of politics is helpful when examining his fascination with modes of social organisation and the ways in which the nation and 'the people' were constituted and represented. Although Barrell has considered the importance of republican political theory to Blake's notion of the 'body of the public' in his writings on art, its influence upon his prophetic poetry has not received the recognition it deserves.[89] Blake's attempts to imagine a utopian collective form for 'the people' are at the centre of these visionary works and his complex engagement with myth. This book demonstrates that his social and political thought is repeatedly encoded in his mythopoeic representations of apotheosis, the body politic, and its renewal. To begin to understand this, we need to examine the meanings of apotheosis in Blake's time.

## Notes

1. *BR* 430.
2. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 27, 28–36. In *Interpretation Theory*, 43–44, 89–95, Ricoeur discusses this dialectic in terms of distanciation and appropriation. More recently, with LaCocque, he applies it to scripture and community in *Thinking Biblically*, esp. x–xv.
3. Johnson, *Dictionary*, I, *s.v.* Apotheosis.

4. Spence, *Polymetis*, 42.
5. Ferber, 'Blake's *America*', 77.
6. See, for example, Damon, *BD* 386 and Frye, *FS* 262. See also Worrall, 'The "Immortal Tent"', and Miner 'Visionary Astronomy', Squibbs, 'Preventing the Star-Led Wizards'.
7. See, for example, Hagstrum, 'William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment'.
8. Frye *FS* 161. For an important critique, see Hobson, 'The Myth of Blake's "Orc Cycle"'.
9. Raine, *Blake and Antiquity*, 17.
10. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 68–69.
11. Ibid., 70.
12. *BPAE* 212.
13. Clark, 'Blake's *Milton* as Empiricist Epic' and idem, '"Labouring at the Resolute Anvil"' and Green, *Visionary Materialism*, 13. See also my 'William Blake's Sensational Mind'.
14. Mee, *DE*, esp. 121–60.
15. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, xii, 28, 37, 52, 62–64, 98, 149, and Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation*, 11, 36, 78, 180.
16. Lincoln, 'Blake and the History of Radicalism', 232.
17. See Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 162–81.
18. For a recent version of this argument, see Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 123–25.
19. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 87.
20. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 35.
21. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 421–35.
22. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 6.
23. See Tannenbaum, *BT*; Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation*, 43–79; Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*; Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*; Roberts, 'St Paul's Gifts to Blake's Aesthetic'; and Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*.
24. For Lavater's project connected to Enlightenment and modernity, see respectively Erle, *Blake, Lavater*, 5–9, 22–25, 54–76, and Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 297–99.
25. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Nature* in *Hume's Enquiries*, VIII.i, 83.
26. See Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, I, 113–22 (ii.210–80).
27. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, 576, quoted by Outram, 109. For overlaps between Blake and Hegel's approach to Enlightenment and dialectical thought, see Punter, *Blake, Hegel and Dialectic*.

28. See Gay, *Enlightenment*, xi, 130–40, 388–92.
29. Coupe, *Myth*, 9–12, 111.
30. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 41.
31. Ibid., xvi.
32. Coupe, *Myth*, 103.
33. See ibid., 9–12 and *passim* for an elaboration of this distinction.
34. Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 73.
35. See Blake's similar comments on Aphorism 605 (E598).
36. Rosenblatt, 'Christian Enlightenment', esp. 284, 286, 289. See also Fitzpatrick, 'Latitudinarianism at the Parting of the Ways', 212, and Jacob, 'Enlightenment Critique of Christianity', 270.
37. See *BR* 50–53.
38. Garrett, 'Swedenborg and Mystical Enlightenment', 68–69.
39. *BR* 52.
40. Reid, *Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies*, 52–56, esp. 52–53. See Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 41, 86.
41. See, for example, Ferber, *Social Vision*, 31–39, 116–17; Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*; Mee, '"The Doom of Tyrants"'; Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 20–21, 95–97, 282–311 and 'Blake and the Communist Tradition'; Davies, 'The Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family' and 'Jonathan Spilsbury'; Davies and Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family'; Schuchard, 'Young William Blake and the Moravian Tradition of Visionary Art' and *Why Mrs Blake Cried*.
42. Porter, *Enlightenment*, 258.
43. See, for example, Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, esp. 165–243 and 287–92 and for a balanced judgement, Connolly, *Blake and the Body*, 197.
44. See especially the introductions to *Queer Blake* (2010) and *Sexy Blake* (2013), both edited by Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly.
45. See Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), VII.vii and XIV.i–iv. See also Gay, *Enlightenment*, 82–83, 225, 306.
46. Outram, *Enlightenment*, 2.
47. Barnett, *Enlightenment and Religion*. For English clerical (especially Latitudinarian) input into Enlightenment thought, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*.
48. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 24, 38, 68, 77, 208. See also Gay, *Enlightenment*, 37, 89, 212.

49. In this, Blake also cuts across Jonathan Israel's controversial division in *Radical Enlightenment* (2001) between moderate *lumières* (reformers accommodating elements of Christianity and existing political structures) and radicals (modern Spinozists, whose democratic and revolutionary creed opposed theism). Blake's contradictory combination of myth, mysticism, and Enlightenment has affinities with what Edelstein terms 'the Super-Enlightenment'. See Edelstein, *Enlightenment*, 71–72.
50. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 141–45.
51. Porter, *Enlightenment*, xviii and 'The Enlightenment in England', 6. He refers to Pocock's 'Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment'.
52. Schmidt, 'What Enlightenment Was' and 'Enlightenment as Concept and Context'. See also Gay, *Enlightenment*, 335.
53. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', 43.
54. See Chapter 2 for Hume on primitive religion.
55. An exception is Whittaker, *Myths of Britain*, 26–27, 32, 45–46.
56. Manuel, *Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 103–4.
57. Addison, *The Spectator*, 523, 30 October 1712, in *The Spectator*, IV, 363.
58. Ibid., IV, 362.
59. Peacock, *Headlong Hall and Gryll Grange*, 14.
60. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, II, 111, 120.
61. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 11, 14, 71–72, 175.
62. For Blake's 'private' mythology, see, for example, Butler, *Romantics, Rebels*, 50–51; Ackroyd, *Blake*, 67; and Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 98.
63. See Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology'. Karl Jaspers criticised Bultmann's demythologisation for attempting to abstract general truths from myth, which carries irreducible meanings peculiar to its own form: see his 'Myth and Religion', esp. 15–17. See also Ruthven, *Myth*, 60–61, and Segal, *Myth*, 47–50.
64. Ricoeur, 'Introduction to Bultmann', in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 386–87.
65. Ricoeur, 'Religion, Atheism, and Faith', in ibid., 436–37.
66. Ricoeur, 'Myth as a Bearer of Possible Worlds'.
67. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia*, 24.
68. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, esp. I, 142–47, 156–58. Bloch quotes Blake's proverb from the *Marriage*, 'The cistern contains: the fountain overflows' (E36) as an epigraph, I, 114. Kołakowski pro-

vides a sceptical account in *Main Currents of Marxism*, 1124–47. For 'docta spes', see Levitas, 'Educated Hope'. In relation to Blake, see Williams, *Ideology and Utopia*, 28–29.

69. See, for example, the caricature *The North Star* (1768, *BMC* 4229), in which Lord North sports his Star and Garter whilst riding on a cloud and dispensing tyranny on America.
70. Gillray, *The New Pantheon: The Twin Stars, Castor and Pollux* (7 May 1799), *BMC* 9379.
71. Gray, 'The Bard: A Pindaric Ode', in *Gray and Collins*, ll.59–62.
72. Butlin notes Blake originally sketched the personifications in the heavens with the king. See *PD* I, 335 and II, 265.
73. See Dwyer, 'Arthur's Stellification'.
74. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 23.
75. Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, 280.
76. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 102.
77. Ibid., 79.
78. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 41.
79. See the discussion between Makdisi and Mee, in 'Mutual Interchange', 13–29.
80. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27.
81. See his letter of July 1806, to *The Monthly Magazine*, responding to criticisms of Henry Fuseli in *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, and his letter to Richard Phillips in October 1807 (E768–69).
82. Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 9–10. See also Viscomi, *BIB* 338; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm*, 257–93; and Mertz, 'A Visionary Among the Radicals', 192. For Blake belonging to artisanal, radical, or millenarian public spheres, see Worrall, 'Blake and 1790s Plebeian Radical Culture', esp. 200 and 202, and Mee, '"The Doom of Tyrants"'.
83. BL Add. MSS 36,520H, ff. 384–85, quoted from *BR* 370.
84. Cumberland, *Thoughts on Outline*, iii. Cumberland identifies with Fox's politics in *A Letter to Henry Griffiths*, 15.
85. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 46, endorsed by Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation*, 7.
86. Cooper, 'Freedom from Blake's *Book of Urizen*', 200.
87. See, for example, Frye, *FS* 407.
88. *The Politics of Aristotle*, 4.
89. Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, 222–57.

CHAPTER 2

# 'The Deep Indelible Stain': Apotheosis in the Eighteenth Century

Blake studied at the Royal Academy from 1779 until at least 1781, and his involvement continued, indicated by his contribution of paintings to the summer exhibitions in 1784 and 1785. Among the Academy's major figures, Blake particularly admired the Irish painter James Barry, whom he apparently knew and about whom he later planned to write a poem.[1] From March 1782, Barry was Professor of Painting, before his ignominious expulsion in April 1799 due to his outspoken criticism of the Academy and concerns over his radical politics. His first lecture in 1784, 'On the History and Progress of the Art', included a narrative of how primitive man's originally pure religious impulse became corrupted. The primary form of idolatry, Sabaism, was the worship of the heavenly bodies, which became supplemented by apotheosis. After a deluge that destroyed the Atlantides, the inhabitants of Atlantis, and separated America from the rest of the world, 'Ouranus, Saturn, Jupiter, and the other mortals' were deified 'by the transfer and identifying of them with the heavens, the sun and planets'. Barry lamented:

> When we reflect upon this horrid state of things, resulting from the gradual and accumulating corruptions of sabaism or stellar worship, identified with these dead and living mortals, which had been thus superinduced on the primitive, traditional, pure theology, it affords a most dreadful exemplary spectacle of degraded (and perhaps in these matters impotent) human reason; and of the deep indelible stain it has imprinted on so many nations of the ancient world, who in other respects were so much celebrated for their genius and skill.[2]

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This narrative was the product of wide reading in Enlightenment mythography and history, recorded in Barry's commonplace book. His account draws on the Christian Euhemerism of the Abbé Antoine Banier, whose *La Mythologie et les fables expliquées par l'histoire* (published initially in 1711 and under this revised title in 1738–40) rejects allegorical readings of pagan gods in favour of interpreting myth as veiled history. Banier was extremely influential on Enlightenment writers, with entries on 'Mythologie' and 'Fable' in the *Encyclopédie* drawing substantially from *La Mythologie*.[3] Barry also derived his strange account of the flood and the Atlantean people from Jean-Sylvain Bailly's *Lettres sur L'Atlantide de Platon* (1779). Bailly drew on modern natural history and his own expertise in astronomy to challenge Voltaire's belief that the Indian Brahmins were the most ancient culture.[4] This passage reveals Barry's keen interest in the latest research in mythography. His attack on apotheosis, while perhaps defensively distancing his own Catholicism from pagan superstition, is directed against absolute regal authority and asserts that, without vigilance, public art could collude in political corruption. I will return to Barry's narrative at the end of this chapter to develop the contemporary political motivation behind its ostensibly ancient content. The rest of this chapter will elaborate representations of apotheosis in aesthetic, religious, and political domains, and situate Blake's account of paganism in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* within the context of Enlightenment mythography.

The predominant eighteenth-century approach to apotheosis was as a form of error, either a deformation of an originally pure theism or a stage in the evolution from primitive polytheism to monotheism. As a form of idolatry, Protestants claimed to discern its relics in Catholic ritual and the baroque Counter-Reformation art associated with absolute monarchs, especially Louis XIV. This chapter shows how during the 1780s and 1790s the standard Protestant critique was radically intensified, especially as it was extended to apply to the Church of England. At the same time, artistic representations of apotheosis became more common, as painters attempted to adapt this genre of painting to modern subjects and audiences.

The modestly titled *Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, in which the whole circle of Human Learning is explained* (1764) defined apotheosis as 'in antiquity, a heathen ceremony, whereby their emperors and great men were placed among the gods'. This idea originated in Chaldea and Pythagoras reputedly transmitted it to Europeans, along with the doctrines of the immortality and transmigration of the soul.[5] Croker based his definition on Herodian's account of the apotheosis of the Roman Emperor

Severus, following the rite officially introduced by Augustus Caesar. After burning Severus's body, senators and nobles mourned and sang over a wax effigy, which was then transported to a pavilion filled with kindling. The new emperor set the pile alight, and an eagle was released, 'which, mounting into the air with a firebrand, carried with it, as they believed, the soul of the dead emperor into heaven; and he was accordingly ranked among the gods'.[6] This symbolic public performance confirmed political continuity and legitimacy, linking the new emperor with his divine predecessor. The Jovian eagle, supposedly carrying the deceased emperor's soul, focused collective attention on the sky, a convention curiously echoed in Blake's time by the release of pigeons during executions at Tyburn.[7]

*Bell's New Pantheon* (1790) explains how the emperor cults were inculcated through priests, 'temples, altars, and images'. The 'Deities' entry critically detaches pagan practice from modern, rational monotheism:

> The Greeks and Latins did not mean by the name of *God* an all-perfect being, of whom eternity, infinity, omnipresence, &c. were the essential attributes […] Thus men themselves, according to their system, might become deities after death, inasmuch as their souls might attain a degree of excellence superior to what they were capable of in life.[8]

An overlap between the Christian God and humans is rejected. The *New Pantheon* noted the prevalent practice of deifying rulers in non-Christian cultures across history, including the Middle Eastern 'Belus or Baal' and the worship of Nebuchadnezzar's statue while he lived, as described in the Book of Daniel. Likewise, 'The Aethiopians deemed all their kings Deities. The Villeda of the Germans, the Janus of the Hungarians, and the Thaut, Woden, and Assa of the northern nations were indisputably men.'[9] The Euhemeristic approach and the past tense confidently separate primitive superstition from modern Christianity. As a discredited historical practice, apotheosis could be accommodated into the more secular sphere of the arts.

## Apotheosis in Art

Representations of apotheosis in the visual arts were readily accessible to Blake. The Royal Academy's collections included sculptures depicting the apotheosis of Antinous, a beautiful youth deified by Emperor Hadrian following his untimely death, who often appeared in the guise of Bacchus.[10] The most famous example in classical sculpture, *The Apotheosis of Homer*,

was a popular subject in ancient Greek art. In 1772, the antiquarian William Hamilton sold a vase depicting this scene to the British Museum and in 1778 Blake's friend John Flaxman adapted the design, producing a celebrated relief in white jasperware which Wedgwood reproduced on mantelpieces and vases.[11] Blake himself sketched what Butlin identifies as *The Apotheosis of Bacchus* from Pierre d'Hancarville's catalogue of Hamilton's collection, indicating his familiarity with the classical motif.[12]

Renaissance religious artists adapted images of apotheosis to portray the ascensions of Christ, Mary, and the saints. In 1806, Benjamin Heath Malkin described the young Blake visiting print dealers and auctioneers to purchase engravings after 'Raphael and Michael Angelo, Martin Hemskerck and Albert Durer, Julio Romano, and the rest of the historic class'. Images associated with apotheosis, such as Dürer's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1511) and *The Ascension* and *The Last Judgement* (1511), or Raphael's *The Triumph of Galatea* (1512) and *The Transfiguration* (*c*.1516–20), may well have featured among his collection. As an Academy student, he had access to an even more extensive collection of prints.[13]

Grand representations of apotheosis were particularly associated with the Baroque art of the Counter-Reformation. Annotating Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, Blake objected to a eulogy of Michael Moser, Keeper of the Royal Academy, who superintended his admission and study:

> I was once looking over the Prints from Rafael & Michael Angelo. in the Library of the Royal Academy Moser came to me & said You should not Study these old Hard Stiff & Dry Unfinishd Works of Art, Stay a little & I will shew you what you should Study. He then went & took down Le Bruns & Reubens's Galleries How I did secretly Rage. (E639)

Blake's anecdote focuses on different artistic techniques, but the 'galleries' of Le Brun and Rubens prints also contained regal apotheoses. Le Brun, Court Painter to Louis XIV, depicted *The Apotheosis of Hercules* (1663) and *The Apotheosis of Louis XIV* (1677), allegories of the king's divinely sanctioned rule. Rubens was renowned for *The Happy Life and Apotheosis of James I* (1632–34) in the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall Palace. James I was a famous exponent of the divine right of kings, proclaiming to Parliament that 'kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods'.[14] The central panel, *The Apotheosis of James I*, depicts him with a halo, borne into the sky by a Jovian eagle that clutches lightning. James looks towards

Justice, who guides him heavenwards. In the second panel, *The Peaceful Reign of James I*, allegorical images surrounding the beatific king testify to his virtues. The final panel depicts *The Union of the Crowns of England and Scotland*. James directs his rod towards the infant Charles I, while England, Scotland, and Britain crown the prince, flanked by panels featuring personifications of Strength (Hercules) and Wisdom (Minerva).[15] Charles I commissioned this propaganda piece, which gives divine sanction to the Union and the legitimacy of the Stuart succession.

Rubens's Whitehall ceiling exemplified the aesthetic effect commonly aimed at by Baroque painters in depicting apotheosis. Subordinate elements of the scene are grouped around their central subject. In combination with effects of light, shade, and colour, the tableau creates an illusion of centripetal movement around the main figure as they are propelled towards their installation in the heavens. For Whigs, the painting exemplified prostituted artistic talent. In his *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782), Blake's future patron William Hayley contrasted Rubens and Milton as the hireling flatterer of tyranny and the true 'patriot' artist respectively. '[N]oble RUBENS flatters Royal pride' in exchange for riches, having made the virtues wait 'On abject JAMES in allegoric state' and 'deified the meanest of our Kings'. By contrast Milton was obliged to 'sell his heaven-illumin'd page' for 'a pittance, so ignobly slight | As wounded Learning blushes to recite!'[16] Hayley opposes the painter's self-interest with the poet's integrity, commitment to the public interest, and greater claim to immortality.

Because of these Counter-Reformation associations, the apotheosis genre was largely avoided by British painters. Nevertheless, several Royal Academicians attempted to rehabilitate it during the 1780s and 1790s, adapting it for sentimental tributes to the dead. Benjamin West's *Apotheosis of Prince Octavius* (1783) commemorated George III's son, who died after a smallpox vaccination. The painting met with a mixed response. In *Lyric Odes to the Royal Academicians* (1783), the satirist Peter Pindar compared West to Richard III for the embarrassing depictions of Octavius and his surviving brother Augustus:

> Ghost of Octavius! tell the Bard,
> And thou, Augustus, used so *hard*,
> Why *West* hath murder'd you, my tender lambs?[17]

Pindar deflates West's apotheosis, identifying his only talent as flattery, 'gaining whispers from the Best of Kings'. Henry Fuseli adapted the genre

to more private commemoration in *The Apotheosis of Penelope Boothby* (*c*.1792), a tribute to the daughter of Whig MP Brooke Boothby, which was also the engraved frontispiece to Boothby's *Sorrows. Sacred to the Memory of Penelope* (1796). While reviewers praised the tenderness of the poems and the accompanying artworks, *The British Critic* could not resist puncturing the dignity of the apotheosis by pointing out that in the engraving the angel, 'from the pencil of Fuseli, is, we know not from what waywardness, represented with six toes'.[18] Aesthetic and political distrust lingered around the genre of the apotheosis until, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, it was reinvented for wartime commemorations.

The genre was more easily adapted to comic effect in caricature. The mock-epic depiction of elevated political figures in the form of heavenly bodies was common. In James Gillray's *Light Expelling Darkness* (1795), William Pitt rides a chariot bearing the sun of the constitution across the Milky Way, dispersing murky French revolutionaries and domestic opposition. Gillray echoed the conceit in *Phaeton Alarm'd* (1808), in which George Canning steers 'the Sun of Anti-Jacobinism' while opposed by Whig constellations. In perhaps his most elaborate caricature, Gillray parodied Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* for *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798). Mocking the French general's extravagant funeral, Gillray depicts him holding a guillotine like an angelic harp and ascending over the devastated Vendée into a satanic heaven of *sans-culottes*.[19] The satire in *Phaeton* and *Hoche* relies upon a bathetic contrast between the protagonists' lofty aspirations and the gravitational pull of their all too human weakness.

## 'Lodged Among the Shining Stars': Literary Apotheosis

Blake's profound interest in Greek and Roman literature has tended to be obscured by his later denunciations of classical culture as an engine of war, as in *On Homer's Poetry* and *Virgil* (*c*.1822). Classical myth, however, with its abundant source of representations of apotheosis, is an abiding presence in his work.[20] His letter to the Reverend Trusler in August 1799 praises 'Homer Virgil & Milton' (E702) as belonging to the highest rank of art. Homer briefly mentions deified mortals such as Ganymede in the *Iliad* and Leukothea and Kleitos in the *Odyssey*.[21] The most famous literary examples of apotheosis were Roman, particularly in relation to the emperor cults of Julius and Augustus Caesar. Suetonius recorded that after Julius Caesar's death he was 'consecrated among the Gods by a Publick

Decree' and soon after 'a Blazing Star appear'd at the Eleventh Hour, and shone for seven Days together; and this was believed to be *Cæsar*'s Soul receiv'd up into Heaven'. This was known as the *sidus iulium*, Caesar's Star or Comet.[22] In the eighteenth century there was a tendency to assume that common Romans literally believed in apotheosis, but the reality was more complex.[23] Although not translated in the eighteenth century, the *Apocolocyntosis Claudii* (*c*.54), the 'pumpkinification' or 'gourdification' of Claudius, usually attributed to Seneca the Younger, thoroughly mocks the convention of apotheosis, particularly for the egregious Claudius. This burlesque satire deflates the emperor's transcendence, in the process settling scores with Claudius, who had previously banished Seneca to Corsica.

Classical representations of apotheosis were freighted with political significance. In the *Aeneid* (*c*.29–19 BC), Virgil draws parallels between Aeneas, the mythic ancestor of the Roman people, and Augustus, the present ruler. While some modern scholars detect ambivalence towards Augustus, at face value Virgil's use of apotheosis seems to connect the divinity of Aeneas, Julius Caesar, and Augustus to flatter the latter and emphasise his legitimacy.[24] In the first book, Jupiter placates Venus, promising that Aeneas will fulfil his destiny of founding Rome and becoming divine: 'Thou shalt behold thy wish'd *Lavinian* Walls, | And, ripe for Heav'n, when Fate *Æneas* calls, | Then shalt thou bear him up, sublime, to me' (i.352–54).[25] He tells her that Julius Caesar 'fraught with *Eastern* Spoils, | Our Heav'n, the just Reward of Human Toyls, | Securely shall repay with Rites Divine' (i.392–94). This honour enhances Augustus; in the underworld, Anchises reveals to Aeneas the glorious future awaiting his descendants: 'next behold the Youth of Form Divine, | *Cæsar* himself, exalted in his Line; | *Augustus*, promis'd oft, and long fortold' (vi.1077–79). Augustus's political rule draws authority from his father's apotheosis and his own implicit divinity.

Ovid also made memorable use of the apotheosis trope, ostensibly to flatter Augustus. In *A Vision of the Last Judgement* (1810), Blake praised 'Ovids Metamorphosis' for containing 'Vision in a Sublime degree' (E556) and Samuel Palmer affirmed that Blake 'delighted in Ovid', especially the *Fasti* (*c*.2–17 AD) and the *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), both of which prominently feature apotheoses.[26] In the latter, a number of humans are transformed into constellations. In Book Nine, Hercules's wife Deianira accidentally gives him a shirt soaked in the poisonous blood of the centaur Nessus. Hercules wears it and his skin corrodes. He desperately asks Juno if this agony is deserved, enumerating his success at the twelve tasks she

set him, before laying himself upon a burning pyre. Jove decrees that his eternal portion will be received into heaven:

> As a Serpent, renewed by casting off old Age with his wrinkled Skin, gathers fresh Strength, and glitters in recent Scales; thus the Tyrinthian Hero, when divested of mortal Limbs, flourishes in his better Part, looks more majestick, and becomes venerable by an awful Divinity. Him the almighty Father, snatching up in hollow Clouds, bore aloft on a four horsed Chariot, and lodged among the shining Stars.[27]

The epic simile and the parallel sequences of verbs give these lines a cumulative rhetorical force appropriate to Hercules's ascent to Jove's celestial pantheon. His catasterism prefigures the later apotheoses of Aeneas, Romulus, Julius Caesar, Augustus, and ultimately Ovid himself.[28] *Metamorphoses* concludes with a politic description of Julius Caesar's many achievements, foremost producing his son, which entitle him to be 'fix[ed] among the Stars' (xv.749). Upon Caesar's murder, Venus descends to the senate unobserved and places his soul 'among the Stars of Heaven':

> And, as she bore it, she perceiv'd it to give Light, and glow with new-born Fires. Upwards it sprung from her Bosom; and, mounting above the Lunar Sphere, shot behind it a long Trail of Light. Now he shines a Star; and, beholding the glorious Deeds of his Son, owns them to surpass his own; and joys to be thus outdone. (xv.846–51)

In a circular argument, the putative divinity of Augustus requires the catasterism of his predecessor. Since Augustus came to power 'Heaven has lavished her Bounty on the human Race', therefore so that 'this Prince might not be a Descendant of meer Mortals, his Father must reach the skies' (xv.758–61). The narrator likewise foretells Augustus's own deification, but only when, 'advanced in Years', he 'shall he enter the Ætherial Habitations, or be placed among his kindred Stars' (xv.838–39). Linking Hercules, Aeneas, Romulus, Caesar, and Augustus through their apotheoses, Ovid appears to legitimate the current emperor's rule. But in a work that often mocks and satirises Roman deities, the ambiguous verbs in 'ille deus faciendus erat' (literally, he must be made a god) imply Caesar's catasterism was a calculated piece of statecraft. Ovid concludes the poem by asserting that, through poetry, 'I shall soar above the lofty Mansions of the Stars; nor shall my Name ever cease to be in Honour' (xv.875–76). Granting himself the privilege accorded to Rome's illustrious rulers, the poet can rival and even surpass the emperors.

British writers tended to treat the motif comically and satirically. This is exemplified by perhaps the most famous instance in the eighteenth century. In the 1714 version of *The Rape of the Lock*, Alexander Pope's narrator solves the squabble over Belinda's lock by stellifying it, in a decorous allusion to the catasterism of Romulus and the story of the constellation *Coma Berenices*:

> But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,
> Tho' marked by none but quick Poetic Eyes:
> (So *Rome's* great Founder to the Heav'ns withdrew,
> To *Proculus* alone confess'd in view.)
> A sudden Star, it shot thro' liquid Air,
> And drew behind a radiant *Trail of Hair*.
> Not *Berenice's* Locks first rose so bright,
> The Heav'ns bespangling with dishevel'd Light.
> The *Sylphs* behold it kindling as it flies,
> And pleas'd pursue its Progress thro' the Skies.[29]

The stellification of the lock is a beautiful fiction, a courtly compliment to Belinda's beauty. Alongside this, the bathetic mock-heroic mode deflates conventions of the masculine hero's apotheosis in the epic. Alluding to Proculus who reported to the Senate that he had seen the transformed Romulus travelling to the stars, Pope privileges his own 'quick Poetic Eyes'. The transformation of the lock testifies to the poet's power to confer immortality on his subjects.[30]

On the rare occasions when British writers used apotheosis seriously as a formal genre they followed classical precedents, usually honouring a monarch or a martial hero. John Henley's baroque *Apotheosis* (1722) was delivered as a eulogy at the full state funeral for the soldier and statesman John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough. Henley proclaims it 'Form'd upon the Manner of the Antients' and the printed text's epigraph from Ovid refers to Julius and Augustus Caesar's divinity. The grand opening describes the hero's ascension and asserts that the speech is performative: the tribute will 'loose the Sacred Eagle' to bear Churchill's soul to the heavens.[31] The speech gathers rhetorical force, enumerating Churchill's achievements in paragraphs beginning with emphasised connectives ('YET', 'BUT', 'HERE') and concluding with weighty, resounding nouns ('*ALBION*', 'Glory'). The oration ebbs and flows from one rhetorical climax to the next and progressively intensifies, culminating in Churchill's reception into the heavens. Henley hopes he will act as a tutelary deity, supporting military supremacy and dispensing 'a Shower of endless

Blessings' upon Britain.[32] The eulogy draws on the emotive force of the classical apotheosis to immortalise Churchill and the eighteenth-century British triumphalism his victories sustained.

The apotheosis was an equally appropriate tribute to British intellectual heroes. For example, in 1727 James Thomson published *A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton*.[33] Thomson adapts the apotheosis genre to honour Newton's scientific and especially astronomical discoveries, and opens by asking:

> Shall the great Soul of NEWTON quit this Earth,
> To mingle with his Stars, and every Muse,
> Astonish'd into Silence, shun the Weight
> Of Honours due to his illustrious Name![34]

The apotheosis is a particularly apt conceit for a man who, in Blake's phrase, 'numbered the stars' (E533). Unlike Henley's predominantly classical and martial oration, Thomson incorporates traditional motifs into an ostensibly Christian framework, but similarly enumerates and accumulates his hero's earthly achievements, rhetorically bearing him up to the heavens: 'HAVE ye not listen'd while He bound the *Suns*, | And *Planets* to their Spheres! Th' unequal Task | Of Humankind till then' (ll.17–19). The immortal Newton now 'wanders thro' those endless Worlds | He here so well descry'd'. The poem concludes with a benediction to Newton, entreating him to 'chiefly o'er thy Country's Cause preside, | And be her *Genius* call'd!' as the nation 'points Thee out | To all her Sons, and bids Them eye thy Star' (ll.190–92, 204–9). Thomson represents Newton's apotheosis as transcendence, providing an eternal inspiration to Britons.

Apotheosis was strongly identified with primitive culture and the role of bards, as I will discuss in Chapter 9. Blake claimed to admire 'Ossian equally with any other Poet whatever' (E666), and is likely to have read Malvina's apotheosis in *Berrathon*. In this elegy, the aged bard laments his son's betrothed, Malvina, who has been his muse. In his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763), Hugh Blair claimed that Ossian's lamentation and Malvina's 'apotheosis, or ascent to the habitation of heroes' were 'in the highest spirit of Poetry'.[35] The 'apotheosis' is a section in which Ossian describes Malvina in terms of starlight and lustre, as a fading 'lovely beam' that rises to Fingal's heavenly hall 'like the beam of the east, among the spirits of thy friends, where they sit in their stormy halls, the chambers of the thunder'. Listening to Ossian's elegy, 'lesser heroes, with a thou-

sand meteors, light the airy hall. Malvina rises, in the midst; a blush is on her cheek'.[36] While there is room in this heaven for sentimental feminine fidelity, as in classical culture, apotheosis is predominantly the reward of martial and chivalric virtue, replicating earthly hierarchy.

## Apotheosis and Christian Euhemerism

Blake celebrates Christianity when it is most humanised, proclaiming at the end of *There is No Natural Religion* (*c.*1788) 'God becomes as we are, | that we may be as he | is' (E3). This is Blake's version of the traditional Christian 'exchange formula'.[37] Christianity is founded on the paradox of a god who became incarnate and then rose to immortality after death in order to transform mankind and, as such, it was vulnerable to attacks by deists and sceptics for being merely a variant of pagan apotheosis. This section shows how the original critique emerged from Protestant attacks on what were identified as residual pagan elements in Roman Catholicism but took an increasingly subversive direction towards the end of the century.[38]

In the scriptures, a number of events have been construed as apotheoses. For example, many eighteenth-century Christians believed that when in Genesis 5:24 Enoch 'walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him' and in 2 Kings 2:1–14 Elijah is swept up in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind the patriarchs were truly translated. These elevations to heaven without death subsequently became corrupted into pagan heroic apotheoses.[39] They are traditionally interpreted as types, anticipating Christ's ascension after resurrection in Acts of the Apostles 1:9–11. More often, apotheosis is used as an analogy, as in Genesis 15:15, where the Lord compares Abraham's future offspring to the myriad stars, and in Daniel 12:1–3, where the prophet asserts that resurrected bodies 'shall shine as the brightness of the firmament' and those that 'turn many to righteousness' will gleam 'as the stars for ever and ever'.

While pagan apotheoses primarily focused on the recipient's personal immortality, biblical ascensions suggest absorption into the deity. This notion is referred to as deification in certain Christian traditions, discussed at greater length in Chapter 9, which often focus on St Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul's epistles attempted to maintain Christian practice among the churches he had founded and to reconcile humans with God in a fashion that would persuade pagans to convert.[40] He describes the resurrection as the transformation of the body from natural corruption to spiritual immortality, from a 'terrestrial' to a 'celestial' body, affirming

'It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15:40–44). Blake's familiarity with this passage is evident in the design for 'To Tirzah', added to later printings of the *Songs of Experience*.[41] The narrator spurns cruel Nature, the 'Mother of my Mortal part', who kept his senses bound until 'the Death of Jesus set me free | Then what have I to do with thee?' Below, two women hold a slumped male body with 'It is Raised | a Spiritual Body' written down his leg (E30), while a bearded patriarch is poised over him with a jug. The term 'spiritual body' suggests dualism, but as Keener notes, Paul insists on 'the Jewish notion of bodily life' against 'the common Greek philosophic goal of disembodiment'.[42] In Pauline resurrection, the body is not discarded but transformed, emerging into a collective state of divine participation: 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular' (1 Corinthians 12:27).[43]

While the exact nature of Christ's humanity has caused fierce disagreements during the course of Christian history, it remains integral to almost all traditions. Christians were particularly keen to distinguish the true relationship between the human and divine from its debased pagan equivalents. A number of early Church Fathers, especially Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Lactantius, drawing in part from Wisdom 14:15–21, regarded all profane gods as deified men, not just those identified as such by pagans themselves. With the sanction of St Augustine, this became a powerful argument in Christian polemic.[44] While Humanist scholarship tended to favour Neoplatonic interpretations of classical myth as moral allegory, often foreshadowing the truth of Christianity, Euhemerism remained a helpful approach for decoding pagan myths and beliefs.[45] John Milton used the theory when in *Paradise Regained* Jesus decries the false military glory of conquerors who despoil peaceful nations:

> Then swell with pride, and must be titl'd Gods,
> Great Benefactors of mankind, Deliverers,
> Worship't with Temple, Priest and Sacrifice;
> One is the Son of *Jove*, of *Mars* the other,
> Till Conquerour Death discover them scarce men.
> (iii.81–85)

This Euhemerist passage helps to reinforce Milton's distinction between Jesus's true divinity, revealed through his inner resolve, and Satan's failure to tempt him with the external, worldly allure and power of pagan culture.

English Protestant polemicists opposing Roman Catholicism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently drew on the critique of apotheosis, representing papal infallibility and the beatification of saints as vestiges of pagan superstition supporting the church's temporal power. Protestants and freethinkers attacking priestcraft often argued that clerical authority could become entheosis. In *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton imagined a busy wealthy man who 'resolvs to give over toyling' at his religion, deputing 'the whole managing of his religious affairs' to 'som Divine of note and estimation':

> To him he adheres, resigns the whole ware-house of his religion, with all the locks and keyes into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety.[46]

Rather than Milton's active, independent Protestant ideal, formalism becomes superstition and substitutes the clergyman for God.[47] Such critiques effectively Euhemerised Catholicism.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, recent scholarship shows that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment substantially took place within rather than against Christian culture. Many Protestant writers in the eighteenth century drew on the same critical techniques as more sceptical writers, albeit to vindicate revelation rather than human reason. William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1737–41), for example, paradoxically used deist premises to defend Christianity, in the process making the Euhemerist argument that all pagan gods were originally local heroes, the superstitious polytheistic worship of whom by the common people had been fostered by Egyptian priests for the purposes of political power.[48]

Similarly, Jacob Bryant's epic work of Protestant mythography, *A New System, or an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774–76) adopted the Euhemerist method to argue that all pagan religions were corruptions of Noah's antediluvian theism. Like Newton and Samuel Shuckford before him, he made pagan history and myth conform to biblical chronology. His diffusionist narrative found evidence of the tribes stemming from Noah's sons (the Noachidae) dispersed across the world. Over time, their revealed patriarchal religion became adulterated, with ancestors and their symbols becoming the focus of worship instead of God. Bryant traced linguistic components of place names, temples, and religious groups, discerning in pagan religion corrupted traces of original theism. Ham 'was held by his

posterity in the highest veneration. They called him Amon: and having in process of time raised him to a divinity, they worshipped him as the Sun: and from this worship they were styled Amonians.'[49] Slippage between symbolism and literalism, compounded by reliance on the oral transmission of tradition, became paganism:

> The Deity, which they originally worshipped, was the Sun. But they soon conferred his titles upon some of their ancestors: whence arose a mixed worship. They particularly deified the great Patriarch, who was the head of their line; and worshipped him as the fountain of light: making the Sun only an emblem of his influence and power. They called him Bal, and Baal: and there were others of their ancestry joined with him, whom they styled the Baalim. Chus was one of these: and his idolatry began among his sons.[50]

Worship of the sun becomes apotheosis. Bryant identifies these practices originating in the Middle East, especially Babylonia and Egypt, forming a tradition superstitiously followed by polytheist groups. Other Christian Euhemerists identified apotheosis with political cults. East Apthorp argued that 'The ADORATION of Princes originated in the East, and was an effect of the Asiatic despotism.'[51]

While the etymological component of Bryant's method was somewhat anachronistic by 1774, and his conclusions seem preposterous to most modern readers, the aim he pronounced as his subtitle, 'to divest TRADITION of FABLE; and to reduce the TRUTH to its Original Purity' belongs to the Christian Enlightenment. He was engaged in a contemporary pursuit, and his focus on the trauma of the Deluge as a source of mankind's ancient religions drew, sometimes without acknowledgement, on Nicolas Antoine Boulanger's *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages* (1766), which significantly influenced the radical materialist Enlightenment of the Parisian circle around the Baron d'Holbach.[52]

Blake possibly engraved plates for Bryant's book whilst apprenticed to James Basire and the work had a lasting impact on him.[53] In the *Descriptive Catalogue* for his 1809 exhibition, Blake proclaimed 'The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews. They are the same thing as Jacob Bryant, and all antiquaries have proved' (E543). Blake's convictions that 'Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus' and that antiquities which are 'neglected and disbelieved, while those of the Jews are collected and arranged' are 'no less sacred', however, strike a subversive note. Whereas Bryant's account privileges Christian revelation over its corrupted traces in paganism, Blake does not make such a clear

hierarchy between them, instead suggesting that, if viewed in a sympathetic visionary light, ancient mythology is identical to 'the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel' (E543).

Mainstream Christian commentators found it useful to historicise apotheosis as a foundational error in primitive religion, fostered by superstitious ancestor-worship, thereby establishing the modernity of their own faith. The critique of apotheosis took on a life of its own, however, and emerged in Enlightenment 'natural histories' of religion which did not stop at paganism but controversially encompassed Christianity.

## Apotheosis and Enlightenment Histories of Religion

Primordial monotheism, revealed to man by God or inferred through observation of nature, was the premise of both Christian and deist histories of religion, both of which regarded pagan polytheism as evidence of fallible human understanding. This common starting point, however, was increasingly challenged from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. One of the distinctive developments in Enlightenment history was its attention to primitive human psychology as a determining factor in the origins of religion. Blake's *An Island in the Moon* (*c.*1784–85) and, later, his annotations, notebook squibs, and epic poems, indicate a keen if fractious engagement with two writers for whom primitive man's mental life held the key to religion: Voltaire and Hume.

In *The Philosophy of History*, appended to the *Essai sur les Moers et l'Esprit des Nations* (1756; English translation 1759), Voltaire provides a broadly teleological narrative of man's religious impulse, which, in symbiosis with the degree of human civilisation, becomes progressively rational. Blake was evidently familiar with the *Essai*, quoting it in his annotations to Joshua Reynolds (E636). While Voltaire's account is not entirely linear, he believes the evolution of religion culminates in deist monotheism, based on the universe's ordered mechanism. Primitive man, preoccupied with immediate survival, 'could not soar to the Author of life' nor comprehend 'those innumerable causes and effects, which to the wise proclaim an eternal architect'.[54] Religion arose when primitive pastoral peoples, 'little better than savages', suffered failed harvests, floods, or fires caused by thunder. They attributed the catastrophe to a 'secret power', a wrathful deity whom they tried to appease.[55] As human cultures and societies advanced, so did their religions:

> The most polished people of Asia, on this side the Euphrates, adored the planets. The Chaldeans, before the time of Zoroaster, paid homage to the sun; as did afterwards the Peruvians in another hemisphere. This error must be very natural to man, as it has had so many followers in Asia and America.[56]

This represents an advance because it is 'natural', implies a capacity to reflect and connect cause and effect, and is animated more by wonder than fear. The next stage involved apotheosis, which 'could not have been devised till long after the first kinds of worship'. Emerging in advanced cultures, it absorbed religion into social and political life. While it 'is not natural immediately to make a god of a man whom we saw born like ourselves, suffer like us maladies, chagrin, the miseries of humanity', the practice 'happened to almost all nations'. In the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), Voltaire regards the reverence for 'signal benefactors to their own species' as 'excusable, and even an incentive to virtue'.[57] But in the *Philosophy of History*, the practice soon degenerated. '[E]nthusiasts' believed a leader or benefactor's 'eminent qualities' derived from a deity, and thus 'he was the son of a god'. Men, being 'fond of the marvellous' found 'no great distance between a son of God and God'. Soon worship of these deities became habitual, institutionalised in temples and ritualised by priesthoods.[58] Apotheosis amalgamates the irrational extremes of enthusiasm and superstition.

The *Philosophical Dictionary* frequently implies that religion projects man's social and political life. Thus the stars and planets became the habitations of the gods: 'the general council of the gods was held in a large saloon, to which they went by the Milky Way; for men having council-chambers on earth, the gods, to be sure, should have one in the heavens'. Likewise, angels are God's equivalent of the couriers and messengers of princes.[59] Voltaire repeatedly parallels Christian and pagan practice, while making deeply ironised distinctions between them. Whereas Greeks and Romans augmented their pantheons with conquerors and emperors, 'Of a very different kind are our apotheoses; if we have saints answering to their demi-gods and secondary gods, it is without regard to rank or conquests', commemorating the 'exemplary virtues' of those who 'would not have been known on earth, had they not be placed in heaven'.[60] Voltaire focuses on apotheosis as a means to undermine Christians' sense of superiority to pagan antiquity. Ironically, because of his animus against Catholicism, in England Voltaire's ideas were frequently absorbed and mediated by Anglican clergymen.[61]

David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) began from the premise that polytheism rather than theism was man's primordial religion, verified against contemporary travellers' accounts of native American, African, and Asian peoples. Hume contrasted Milton's Adam, portrayed in *Paradise Lost* as an instinctive philosopher and monotheist, with real primitive man, a Hobbesian 'barbarous, necessitous animal', whose fragile psyche determined the earliest religions.[62] This fear theory drew on Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, a work with which Blake was familiar, referring to 'the Gods which Came from fear' (E446) in 'then She bore Pale desire'. In this state, the 'vulgar polytheist' cannot reason, and thus 'deifies every part of the universe, and conceives all the conspicuous productions of nature to be themselves so many real divinities. The sun, moon, and stars are all gods, according to his system: Fountains are inhabited by nymphs, and trees by hamadryads.' Over time 'every place is stored with a crowd of local deities' who correspond to a variety of natural events and human needs.[63] Alongside these impulses, man's 'primary religion arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events' and his 'active fancy still farther multiplies the objects of terror'.[64] As polytheism develops, one god emerges 'as the prince or supreme magistrate of the rest', mirroring earthly sovereigns. This leads to monotheism, but built upon 'irrational and superstitious opinions'. A natural 'flux and reflux in the human mind' leads peoples to conceive of an omnipotent unitary deity, only to relapse into polytheism as their 'feeble apprehensions' require the interposition of 'inferior mediators or subordinate agents' between the god and man.[65] For Manuel, Hume's account of primitive man's capacity to abstract, especially to conceive of a 'divinity as a cause' was his most distinctive innovation.[66] Divinities conceived in these primitive circumstances are terrifying and, in proportion to the power of their god, men increasingly yield their 'natural reason' and submit to the 'ghostly guidance' of its priests.[67] For Hume, theistic religions incorporate philosophy into 'a system of theology' but, as exemplified by Scholasticism, it becomes 'perverted to serve the purposes of superstition', with 'Mystery affected: Darkness and obscurity sought after' and the independent exercise of reason punished.[68]

While Hume emphasised primitive religious psychology, he also used Euhemerism as a demystificatory tool. Like Voltaire, Hume believed much of mythology originated in 'historical fact', 'disguised in every successive narration' as it passed orally through generations: 'thus the fables of *Hercules*, *Theseus*, *Bacchus* are supposed to have been originally founded in true history, corrupted by tradition'.[69] Most ancient divinities 'are

supposed to have once been men, and to have been beholden for their *apotheosis* to the admiration and affection of the people'. Their histories, 'corrupted by tradition', become 'a plentiful source of fable; especially in passing through the hands of poets, allegorists, and priests, who successively improved upon the wonder and astonishment of the ignorant multitude'.[70] For Hume, the natural history of religion is dominated by men's passions and imaginations, which cloud the understanding, with fatal consequences.

Hume's *Natural History* was extremely influential, not least in France. It left a substantial mark on Paul-Henri Thiry, the Baron d'Holbach, whose Paris salon was a hub for Enlightenment thinkers and men of letters. Hume was entertained here during his visit to Paris in October 1763, when his host reputedly revealed the majority of those present to be atheists.[71] D'Holbach's *Système de la nature*, pseudonymously attributed to Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud, was published in London in 1770, although the manuscript may have circulated at least a decade prior to publication.[72] Like Hume, he asserted that man's first religious impulse was polytheistic, with nature and the elements 'the first divinities of man'. Primitive men 'have always commenced by adoring material beings' and each individual 'made to himself a particular god, of every physical object which he supposed to be the cause of those events in which he was most interested'.[73] D'Holbach emphasised the role of poetry in fixing ideas of different deities: 'at its voice the entire of nature was animated, it was personified as well as all its parts [...] the elements were deified', and the sky 'became the first of gods'.[74] Benefactors and legislators such as Bacchus, Moses, and Numa fixed overarching national divinities, but individuals retained their own subordinate gods.[75] As mankind gradually developed 'experience and reflection', the animation of natural objects began to be attributed to 'some secret cause' or 'invisible agent' in 'obscurity', which became the focus of reverence.[76] D'Holbach's account, however, has a more radical emphasis than Hume's. By forgetting the original source of the gods, and assisted by 'leisure and vain researches', 'NATURAL PHILOSOPHERS and POETS' became 'METAPHYSICIANS' or 'THEOLOGIANS', and men worshipped an unknown 'abstract and metaphysical being', while nature 'was despoiled of her rights'.[77] As abstract theology gained ground, priests fostered religious mystery and superstition, and supreme deities took on the character of earthly tyrants.[78] The logic of d'Holbach's argument becomes Euhemerist as he argues that deities are superstitious projections of distorted collective consciousness, fostered by those holding

social and political power. Despite metaphysical theology, 'man never sees nor ever will see in his God but a man [...] gigantic, exaggerated man'.[79] While d'Holbach dismisses this anthropomorphic tendency, for Blake this is a decisive proof of the Divine Humanity. In his annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, he asserts: 'Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness' (E603).

Charles de Brosses was an important influence on d'Holbach's narrative. In his *Du culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), he compared classical accounts of Egyptian religion to the practices of contemporary natives of Central and West Africa to argue that fetishism, the projection of divine powers onto animals and other natural objects, was universally mankind's earliest form of religion. While de Brosses cautiously allowed for an earlier theism erased by the Deluge, his theory offered Enlightenment philosophers a purely material account of man's earliest religious impulses, rejecting Christian diffusionist and allegorical interpretations of pagan religion.[80] Hume was an important influence on the work; de Brosses strengthened an early, more anthropologically focused draft, by synthesising his work on fetish cults with arguments from the *Natural History*. Indeed, in 1763 Hume wrote to de Brosses praising this consolidation and extension of his own narrative.[81]

De Brosses was not translated and d'Holbach's *Système* only appeared in English in 1795, but, alongside Hume's *Natural History*, their account of primordial animism as the foundation of religion was influential and became familiar to many in England. Another visitor to the d'Holbach coterie, Edward Gibbon, drew on this narrative in *An Essay on the Study of Literature* (in French 1761, translated into English 1764) for his account of 'the pleasant and absurd system of Paganism'. While Gibbon accepts a Euhemerist approach to the classical worship of heroes, who were originally distinct from but gradually became identical with deities, this was a later development. Instead, he traces the religious impulse back to fearful 'uncultivated savages'. Without reason, primitive man 'attributes life and power' to natural objects and 'prostrates himself before imaginary beings he hath thus created'. He 'sees himself surrounded with deities: every field, every forest swarms with them', before reflection and reason consolidate polytheistic profusion.[82] In each case, primitive, concrete, and animistic religions become abstracted into monotheism.

The purpose of the preceding account is not to fix particular sources for Blake, but rather to recognise a significant intersection between a

late-Enlightenment discourse of natural religion and Blake's ideas about primitive worship. His condensed history of religion in Plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* engages with narratives which give priority to animistic polytheism:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under its mental deity.
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood.
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (11, E38)

Men begin with animism, deifying immediate 'sensible objects' before expanding their conceptions to locales, cities, and nations. The progression of verbs traces the sophistication of the religious impulse, from the active and creative ('animated', 'calling', 'adorning') to a passive construction for a gradual process ('was formed'), followed by active verbs now associated with exploitation ('enslavd', 'abstract'). Blake shares with Enlightenment discourse the narrative arc from fetishism, through abstraction, to superstition and priestcraft. Whereas Hume, d'Holbach, and de Brosses emphasised primitive fear, Blake depicts primordial animism as vital, creative, and cultivated by poets. Paradoxically, his account squares primitive polytheism with monotheism, with the former an expression of what he calls in the early tractates and *The Marriage* the universal 'Poetic Genius'. Drawing on the critical strategies of Enlightenment accounts of religion, the passage exemplifies what Gilmartin calls 'Blake's ability to appropriate sceptical historical methods for his own spiritual purposes'.[83]

While late-Enlightenment natural history of religion was inevitably controversial, in England it could be quietly incorporated into Protestant polemics against Catholicism's gradual corruption of Christianity with older pagan doctrines. In the 1780s, however, Joseph Priestley provocatively applied this critique of apotheosis to also encompass the Anglican Church.

## Apotheosis and Controversy in the 1780s and 1790s

Protestants and freethinkers frequently identified the Catholic doctrines of the beatification of saints and papal infallibility as contaminations of pure Christian theism with pagan apotheosis. While in fact Catholicism distinguishes veneration of the saints as *dulia*, as opposed to worship of God, *latria*, its opponents tended to ignore or deride the distinction, exemplified by Voltaire's disingenuous differentiation of Catholicism and idolatry on this basis in the *Philosophical Dictionary*.[84] While Anglicans confidently distinguished their own faith from the errors of Catholicism, in his *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782) Joseph Priestley stirred controversy by arguing that the established Church of England retained many of these pagan corruptions of true Christianity. Blake's substantial engraving work for Priestley's Unitarian publisher, Joseph Johnson, particularly in a plate for Priestley's abridged edition of Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1791), and his friendship with key members of the Johnson circle, especially the painter Henry Fuseli, make his familiarity with the arguments of Priestley's *History* likely.[85]

Priestley's Unitarianism distinguished Christian monotheism from interpolated polytheistic practices and doctrines. He thus rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the atonement, and, crucially, the distinction between the body and the soul upon which pagan apotheosis and much conventional Christian theology depended. While Priestley was independently moving towards materialism, James Dybikowski notes the shift coincided with an extended European trip in 1774, accompanying the Earl of Shelburne. During his travels, he mixed in Paris with materialists and atheists and visited d'Holbach's coterie, engaging in its philosophical discussions. He conceived his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780) as a corrective to the outright atheism he encountered in Paris, convinced that materialism was not incompatible with true Christianity.[86] Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) set out the philosophical and scientific basis for his theology, and this work has frequently been regarded by Blake critics as a probable source for the devil's assertion in *The Marriage* that 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul' (4, E34).[87] Despite the complexity of Priestley's monism, his opponents routinely vilified him as a materialist and atheist in works such as *The Putrid Soul: A Poetical Epistle to Joseph Priestley* (1780). In his late poem 'The Everlasting Gospel', Blake links 'd$^{r}$ Priestly & Bacon & Newton' as experimental philosophers opposed to 'Spiritual Knowledge' (E519) and in 1855 Samuel

Palmer asserted that Blake 'was no disciple of Priestley', but this does not preclude the likely appeal of Priestley's critique of the established church to the combative Blake of *The Marriage*.

The *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* began from the premise that primitive Christianity was Unitarian but, as the church grew into an institution with a body of theology, it became adulterated with pagan philosophy and religious practices. The *History* drew deeply on Priestley's classical learning, familiarity with the history of Christian churches and their theologies, and the critical strategies of freethinkers and materialists, to challenge orthodoxies in the Catholic and the Anglican churches. Priestley frequently drew on patristic authorities, especially Cyprian and Arnobius's Euhemerist attacks on paganism. His central proposition, the unity of God, necessitated the humanity of Christ. This argument was Euhemerist: the messiah anticipated by the Jewish prophets was nothing 'other than a man like themselves', but subsequently mythologised. Analysis of ancient texts and scripture showed that while Christ was occasionally described in terms of divinity, censure of belief in his humanity was a much later 'innovation'. Christ became accounted divine when Christians absorbed polytheistic corruptions, both through efforts to attract pagans and the converts' retention of earlier beliefs. Heathen philosophers 'could not submit to become the disciples of a man who had been exposed upon a cross, like the vilest malefactor' and the doctrine of the *Logos* provided a useful solution. Later Christians, attracted to the 'oriental or the greek philosophy' began to 'raise the dignity of the *person* of Christ, that it might appear less disgraceful to be ranked amongst his disciples'.[88] Platonism and Oriental theology led Christians to believe 'that the soul was a thing distinct from the body, and capable of existing in a separate conscious state when the body was laid in the grave'. Jesus's figurative description of the Holy Spirit became literalised as the third person of God in the Trinity, which Priestley depicted as polytheism masked only by the indefensibly mystical doctrine of the hypostatic union.[89]

The *History* maps out a narrative of Christianity that has parallels with Hume and d'Holbach's account of the natural history of religion. For many Anglicans, this was more insidious because it was an internal critique of established Christianity rather than one delivered from an obviously hostile position. Priestley's sceptical account of superstitious practices such as venerating saints and icons was part of a long tradition of Protestant attacks on Catholic superstition, but he also noted that Martin Luther

retained baptism and exorcism, both rituals predicated upon pagan dualism. Alongside his account of Christian theology's increasing abstraction and superstition, Priestley subversively charted the rise of priestcraft. He gravely criticised the Anglican clergy's civil influence, which he regarded as the residue of priestly functions in paganism. Concluding the second volume, while Priestley opposed Gibbon's sceptical swipes at the early Christians, he equally targeted 'the Advocates for the present Civil Establishment of Christianity', especially George III's favourite, Richard Hurd, Bishop of Worcester.[90]

Priestley blamed 'the superstitious respect that was paid to dead men by christians' on 'heathen philosophy' and 'pagan religion'. While initially Christians honoured martyrs for their selfless godliness, increasingly burials involved psalm-singing and lighted tapers to imitate 'carrying in triumph those who won the prizes in the Grecian games'. Prayers for the souls of deceased saints at their graves followed. Christians instituted festivals for them on the same days as those for pagan deities and erected temples on the graves of the martyrs, so that 'each remarkable saint had his proper temple, just as the heathen gods and heroes had theirs'. Pagan superstitions appealed to 'the ignorant multitude'. Whilst the saints, Jesus, and the deity became more abstract, Christianity accreted material, ceremonial, and especially ecclesiastical additions.[91]

Christians originally prayed for the safe repose of saints' and martyrs' souls until resurrection, believing them underground, but they soon 'became the objects of their proper *devotion*'. No longer associated with particular locales, these souls were believed to be admitted 'to the immediate presence of God' where they enjoyed his favour. Christians prayed for their intercession with the deity, so that 'prayers were no longer confined to the place of their interment, or to the chapel and churches erected over them'.[92] This abstraction increased the role of angels ('celestial beings'), paralleling the growing authority of priests as mediators between the people and God.

Priestley's strictures against the clergy's civil power implicated Anglican bishops, who in the 1780s sat in the House of Lords. Likewise, he attacks the temporal authority of the papacy:

> [T]he popes proceeded to assume other titles, and forms, not only of royalty, but even of *divinity*; which having been first assumed by the princes of the East, were from them adopted by the Roman emperors, and from them by the popes.[93]

He traces a genealogy of apotheosis as an enduring pagan corruption, implicitly extending to the present Church of England, with the king as its Supreme Governor and divine representative. Such convictions led Coleridge, as a radical Unitarian lecturer, to pronounce in 1795: 'He who sees any real difference between the Church of Roman and the Church of England possesses optics which I do not possess—the mark of antichrist is on both of them.'[94]

Blake's mockery of Emanuel Swedenborg in the *Marriage* occupies similar terrain to Priestley in the early 1790s. William and Catherine Blake signed as attendees at the 13 April 1789 General Conference of the Swedenborgian New Church.[95] Priestley's *History* stimulated debate among Swedenborgians. Early editions of *The New Magazine of Knowledge Concerning Heaven and Hell* (*c.*1790–91) include letters to Priestley by 'Clericus', who acknowledged a shared concern that 'christianity, so called, is now in a very corrupted state'. While they differed over the nature of the corruptions, Clericus believed they arose whenever 'the traditions of men' were taught as opposed to 'the Word of the living God'.[96] Unlike Priestley, he asserted the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity, albeit as a tripartite division of the sole deity, Christ. New Church members evidently saw themselves as allies with Priestley in a critical and enlightened campaign to reform Christianity from within. Priestley responded to the establishment of a Swedenborgian temple in Birmingham in *Letters to the Members of The New Jerusalem Church* (1791). While he agreed with Swedenborgians that Anglican doctrines and rituals were corrupted, he also criticised the aspects of the New Church targeted in Blake's *Marriage*. This is especially suggestive, given both writers' connections to the bookseller Joseph Johnson and the fact that at this time Johnson was willing to sell Blake's books at his shop.[97] Priestley chastises the followers of Swedenborg for their refusal to countenance 'that any other person has had similar communications with God and the invisible world, in confirmation of his',[98] an exceptionalism also attacked by the *Marriage*'s narrator, who complains that Swedenborg 'shews the folly of churches & exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious. & himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net' (21–22, E43). Notably, however, Blake's narrator is much more willing than Priestley to attribute an enlightened, critical impetus to Swedenborg. Priestley also objects that Swedenborg is merely derivative: any 'person of reputable character, and not apparently insane' can gain followers by 'gravely and repeatedly asserting his inspiration, and his intercourse with God or angels' whilst 'advancing nothing contrary, to

what other acknowledged prophets had advanced before him'.[99] The narrator of the *Marriage* similarly asserts that Swedenborg wrote 'only the Contents or Index of already publish'd books' (21, E42). In addition, he 'has written all the old falshoods' (22, E43), compromising his critique of orthodoxy. Both Priestley and Blake balance scepticism towards the New Church with fierce opposition to state religion, and it seems highly plausible that Blake's mockery of Swedenborg in *The Marriage* reflects the influence of Priestley in the radical Johnson circle.

In Britain during the 1790s, especially as the radicalism of the French Revolution intensified, conservatives identified domestic opponents of state religion with French atheists, whom they believed had targeted established religion as a first stage in the subversion of the whole established order. As I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 6, two works were particularly influential in England: Constantin-François Volney's *The Ruins* (1791) and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1794–95). Both of these radical polemics make continuities between pagan apotheosis and Christian beliefs central to their arguments and, in differing ways, adopt Euhemerism as a demystificatory tool with which to undermine monarchy and aristocracy's religious foundations. Joseph Johnson published the first English translation of Volney's *Ruins* in 1792 and for Thompson this makes Blake's familiarity with the text highly probable.[100] Firmer evidence of a connection is lacking, but Blake need not have known Volney's book directly; in many respects, it was not original but rather a popular compendium of sceptical Enlightenment theories of religion. For Volney, the deities of all religions were a corruption of primitive myths based on the powers of nature and the heavenly bodies, with the sun 'taken for a legislative king, a conquering warrior' from which men 'formed the stories of Osiris, of Bacchus, and other similar Gods'. In the narrator's vision, Bramins, Bonzes, and Shamans berate Catholic clergymen, who through 'indulgences and absolutions have arrogated' to themselves the 'power and functions of God himself'. While naturalism is Volney's primary weapon to disarm Christianity, by implication he also Euhemerises its supernatural truth-claims as myth, the basis of which is the worldly self-interest of its proponents, especially the clergy.[101]

Paine, who was part of the Johnson circle in the early 1790s, made this point explicitly. He asserts that all national religions are 'no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit'.[102] Paine focused his account of the major religions on claims to divine inspiration by their founders, especially Moses, Jesus, and

Muhammad. Therefore, he Euhemerised Jesus as a religious leader, the followers of whom, susceptible to the superstitious 'heathen mythology', incorporated apotheosis into Christianity by 'making the reputed founder to be celestially begotten'. The 'theory of what is called the Christian church, sprung out of the tail of the heathen mythology' and continued paganism, with the 'deification of heroes, changed into the canonization of saints'. For Paine, the 'Christian theory' was 'little else than the idolatry of the ancient mythologises accommodated to the purposes of power and revenue' and the 'amphibious fraud' of state religion required rational demystification.[103] As subsequent chapters will show, during the 1790s what had once been a traditional Protestant critique of pagan and Catholic apotheosis became radicalised and extended into an attack both on the religious and political establishment but also on Christianity as a whole.

In the context of the role of apotheosis in eighteenth-century history of religion, I will conclude this chapter by returning to Barry's lecture. As with Priestley's *History*, during the 1780s ostensibly historical attacks on paganism could mask more contentious contemporary matters. Barry naturally objected to apotheosis on moral and religious grounds, but he seems particularly horrified by the 'cursed Titanic example of deifying regal families' and its imitation by later cultures. Barry preferred the practice of the ancient Ethiopians, who guarded against the crown's excessive power by electing their kings 'out of the best of the sacerdotal or learned order, and under the control of its laws'.[104] Behind these obscure references, Barry seems to be adopting Whig and radical support for Americans rebelling against the British government, on the basis that the crown's power was extending beyond the sanction of the constitution into tyranny. The intensity with which Barry attacked apotheosis in his lecture perhaps reflects an honour recently bestowed upon George III.

On 13 March 1781, the astronomer William Herschel observed a star of striking magnitude in Gemini; it moved over several nights and thus could not be a fixed star. He initially thought it was a comet, before he and the Astronomer Royal concluded it was a new planet, and called it *Georgium Sidus*, the Georgian star, and then the Georgian planet, although continental astronomers eventually prevailed in establishing the name Uranus.[105] The discovery and its royal title were widely reported and discussed during 1781 and 1782, and the republican Barry may have been motivated to his attack on regal apotheosis by the king's recent distinction.[106] Although it was a decorous compliment, it clearly parallels George III with Julius and Augustus Caesar. This would have had disturb-

ing undertones for those who suspected the king believed his authority was divinely sanctioned rather than originating in the constitution and the people. In the context of the place of apotheosis in the various narratives of the history of religion outlined in this chapter, Blake's art and poetry were engaged with a contentious mythological concept and a trope with established political connotations.

## Notes

1. Bentley, *Stranger*, 50. For 'Barry' see E872. Blake later recalled how 'Barry told me' that whilst painting his great murals 'he Lived on Bread & Apples' (E636).
2. Barry, 'Lecture I', 65. Paley makes this connection in '"Wonderful originals"', 178–80.
3. Lenihan, *Writings of James Barry*, 56. See Barry, *Commonplace Book*, 428–29. For Banier, see Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*, 86–88.
4. Hungerford, *Shores of Darkness*, 23–25. In 1798, Barry refers to Bailly's theory in *A Letter to the Dilettanti Society*, 62–63.
5. Croker, *Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, I, *s.v.* 'Apotheosis'.
6. For the history of the apotheosis of Roman emperors and their wives, see Beard and Henderson, 'The Emperor's New Body'.
7. For Tyburn, see Goldsmith, *History of the Earth*, V, 292–93.
8. *Bell's New Pantheon*, I, 79, 222.
9. Ibid., I, 223.
10. Baretti, *Guide*, 10, 18, 22, 27.
11. Jenkins and Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes*, 185, and Irwin, *John Flaxman*, 22–24.
12. See *PD* I, 216, and II, 66–67.
13. *BR* 562, and Baretti, *Guide*, 16–17.
14. Cited in White, *Rubens*, 253.
15. Ibid., 249–58.
16. Hayley, *Essay on Epic Poetry*, 80–81 [ll.197–219].
17. Pindar, *Loyal Odes*, 6.
18. *The British Critic*, 8 (Aug. 1796), 130.
19. *BMC* 8644, 10972, 9156. See Godfrey and Hallett, *James Gillray*, 138–39, 164, 116–17.
20. For the burgeoning market for classical translations in the late eighteenth century, see St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 115.

21. Homer mentions the apotheosis of Ganymede (*Iliad* xx.230–40), Leukothea (*Odyssey* v.334–40), and Kleitos (*Odyssey* xv.250–1).
22. Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Cæsars*, I, 55. See also Pandey, 'Caesar's Comet'.
23. See, for example, Warburton, *Divine Legation*, I, 93–95.
24. See notes in *The Whole Genuine Works of Virgil*, 116, and Greene, *Critical Essays*, 316. For Virgil's ambivalence towards Augustus, see Putnam, *Poetry of the Aeneid*.
25. *Virgil's Aeneid, Translated by John Dryden*, 12. Further references to *The Aeneid* are identified with book and line numbers and come from this edition.
26. *BR* 752. For Ovid's influence on Blake, see Frye, *FS* 11, 42, 110 and Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, I, 49–50, 63, 145, 221–22, 282 and II, 41–42, 84–85.
27. *A New Translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 325 [IX: 266–72]. Subsequent references to *Metamorphoses* are from this edition.
28. Otis, *Ovid*, 199, 279. Ovid narrates the apotheosis of Aeneas (xiv.581–608) and Romulus and his wife Hersilie (xiv.805–51).
29. *The Rape of the Lock* in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 241 [v.123–33].
30. See Grenander, 'Pope, Virgil, and Belinda's Star-Spangled Lock'.
31. Henley, *Apotheosis*, 3–4.
32. Ibid., 33–34.
33. For Thomson's influence on Blake, see *FS* 177–79 and *BPAE* 65, 81–82, 276.
34. Thomson, *A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton*, 5–6 [ll.1–4].
35. Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, 47.
36. Macpherson, 'Berrathon' in *Fingal*, 259–60.
37. See Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature*, esp. 50–67, 96–98, 155–62.
38. See Jacob, 'Enlightenment Critique of Christianity'.
39. Moses's secret death and burial by God in Deuteronomy 34:1–6 was sometimes similarly interpreted. See Gray, *Key to the Old Testament and Apocrypha*, 58–60, 352–53. See also Tabor, 'Returning to the Divinity', and Begg, 'Josephus's Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah, and Moses'.
40. See Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, 122–25.
41. Erdman suggests later than 1803 (E800), while Viscomi argues for 1795, in *BIB* 238–39, 291.

42. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, 135.
43. For Paul and Blake, see Tannenbaum, *BT* 75–85, 89; Riede, 'Blake's *Milton*'; Roberts, 'St. Paul's Gifts to Blake's Aesthetic'; Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, esp. 200–16; Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, esp. 104–7, 124–25.
44. See Cooke, 'Euhemerism'.
45. See Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas*, 20–32, 160–69.
46. *RM* 1016.
47. See Edwards, *The Doctrines Controverted*, 324, and Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 123, 130.
48. Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*, 112–17.
49. Bryant, *A New System*, I, xiii, vi–vii.
50. Ibid., 2.
51. Apthorp, *Letters on the Prevalence of Christianity*, 303.
52. See Manuel, *Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 134, 210–28. For Bryant, see Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*, 241–48, and Hungerford, *Shores of Darkness*, 20–22.
53. Russell, *Engravings of William Blake*, 191, first suggested Blake engraved designs for *A New System*.
54. Voltaire, *Philosophy of History*, 18.
55. Ibid., 19–20.
56. Ibid., 24.
57. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, I, 185.
58. Voltaire, *Philosophy of History*, 24–27.
59. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, I, 5.
60. Ibid., II, 36.
61. See Gibson, *Church of England 1688–1832*, 149.
62. Hume, *Natural History of Religion* in *Four Dissertations*, 3–4, 6.
63. Ibid., 35, 20.
64. Ibid., 94.
65. Ibid., 45, 48–49, 54–57.
66. Manuel, *Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 170.
67. Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, 110–11.
68. Ibid., 69–71.
69. Ibid., 8–9.
70. Ibid., 38.
71. For Hume's influence on d'Holbach, see d'Holbach's effusive letter to Hume of 23 August 1763, in Burton (ed.), *Letters of Eminent Persons*, 252–53 and Manuel, *Eighteenth Century Confronts the*

*Gods*, 229. For Hume's visits to d'Holbach's salon, see Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie*, 41, 102–5, 109, 252.

72. See Curran, *Atheism, Religion and Enlightenment*, 30.
73. Mirabaud [*pseud*], *System of Nature*, III, 50–51. See also III, 26–28, 67, 72. For the sake of rough contemporaneity, I quote from the English translation of 1797.
74. Ibid., 58–59.
75. Ibid., 53–54, 58.
76. Ibid., 29, 32–33.
77. Ibid., 68–69.
78. For priestcraft, see ibid., 30–31, 51, 68, 83–84, 98–100, and on tyrants, see 88–90.
79. Ibid., 72.
80. See Manuel, *Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, 200, and Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*, 168–76.
81. Jones, *Reception of David Hume in Europe*, 68–69.
82. Gibbon, *Essay on the Study of Literature*, 114, 121–30, 132–36.
83. Gilmartin, 'Romanticism and Religious Modernity', 642.
84. See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, II, 207, and Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 35–36.
85. See Tyson, *Joseph Johnson* and Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent* for Priestley's importance in the Johnson's circle and *BR* 54–66, for Blake's interactions with Johnson and his group. For possible satires of Priestley's theories in *An Island in the Moon*, see *BPAE* 106–9, 93.
86. Dybikowski, 'Joseph Priestley', 85. For Priestley's contact with d'Holbach and his circle, see Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie*, 105 and Schofield, *Enlightened Joseph Priestley*, 7, 37.
87. See Paley, *EI* 66–67; Mee, *DE* 138; and Mertz, 'A Visionary among the Radicals', esp. 37–73.
88. Priestley, *History of the Corruptions*, I, 2, 20–23.
89. Ibid., I, 23, 330, 25, 104.
90. Ibid., I, 406, 364–72, 410–26, and II, 8–72, 86–111, 196, 467.
91. Priestley, *History of the Corruptions*, I, 330–44.
92. Ibid., I, 346, 363.
93. Ibid., II, 296.
94. Coleridge, quoted in Gilmartin, 'Romanticism and Religious Modernity', 630.

95. For Blake and the New Church, see Paley, '"A New Heaven is Begun"'; Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 129–34, 154–55, 167–68; Bentley, *Stranger*, 126–29 and *BR* 50–53; Rix, *William Blake*; Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*; and Worrall, 'Blake, the Female Prophet and the American Agent'.
96. 'A Society of Gentlemen', *The Magazine of Knowledge Concerning Heaven and Hell*, I, 291–93.
97. *BR* 64–65.
98. Priestley, *Letters*, xiv.
99. Ibid., xii–xiii.
100. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 199–203, 207–15. See also Mee, *DE* esp. 138–42.
101. Volney, *Ruins*, 190–91, 246, 309.
102. Paine, *Age of Reason*, 2.
103. Ibid., 6–7.
104. Barry, 'Lecture I', 65–66.
105. For Herschel and the *Georgium Sidus*, see Olson and Paschoff, *Fire in the Sky*, 96–101; Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 96–103; and Lemonick, *Georgian Star*.
106. See, for example, *The British Magazine and Review*, March and April 1783.

CHAPTER 3

# 'Spirits of Fire': Ambiguous Figures in *The French Revolution*

Blake's recently discovered votes for Charles James Fox in the 1790 Westminster election represent his only recorded electoral participation.[1] Such records rarely reveal nuanced ideological positions, but Blake's support for Fox suggests his politics were complex, not simply always radical. This chapter contextualises Blake's votes and shows how *The French Revolution* (1791) dramatises problems of representing 'the people' politically, drawing upon Enlightenment critiques of superstition to demystify *ancien régime* France. The poem encodes political and philosophical positions in the imagery of apotheosis, an analysis of which reveals tension between Blake's Whiggish and more radical tendencies.

## Blake, Fox, and the 1790 Westminster Election

The Westminster elections had an unusually wide franchise. Prior to the 1832 Reform Act, as many as three-quarters of householders were eligible.[2] Westminster became an important site of opposition to patrician government and, as Baer argues, because of the relatively democratic nature of its politics 'Westminster was the one site in Britain where the local *was* the national, maintaining a certain prestige from the sense that the borough represented national public opinion in contrast to the aristocratic-dominated parliament.'[3] While ostensibly a constituency vote, Blake's endorsement of Fox indicates views on larger national and international issues.

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The 1790 Westminster election was controversial because both the ministerial candidate, Admiral Samuel Hood, and the opposition Whig, Charles James Fox, agreed to stand without another candidate in order to take the two available seats without the huge expenditure of the 1788 election. John Horne Tooke, a leading figure in the reformist Society for Constitutional Information (SCI), surprised everyone by nominating himself, forcing a genuine contest and thwarting Fox and Hood's attempt 'to seize with an irresistible hand the Representation of the City of Westminster'.[4] After the election, Tooke petitioned Parliament to challenge his opponents' corrupt electoral practices. This failed, leaving him liable to Fox for costs.[5]

Blake used both his votes to support Fox rather than Tooke's ostensibly reformist campaign. This was a public political profession: all votes were declared at the hustings in Covent Garden.[6] Although Tooke had close connections to the Joseph Johnson circle and, later in his career, Blake expressed admiration for him, in 1790 many regarded him as untrustworthy and doubted his reformist credentials.[7] Tooke had supported Pitt's ministry and candidates during the 1788 election and his 1790 speeches make clear that his campaign was primarily against Fox. He received support from the ministerial press and the opposition newspapers hinted that his campaign was funded by the Treasury to undermine Fox.[8] Tooke generally supported hereditary monarchy and the Anglican Church, and had little sympathy for Dissenters and the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts.[9] Such positions compromised Tooke's campaigning rhetoric of independence and liberty.

Blake supported Fox's candidacy despite the shabby pre-election agreement, perhaps on pragmatic grounds; Fox's successful campaign to abolish the Shop Tax benefited small businesses.[10] However, his appeal to voters was tied up in national political issues. After George III dismissed the Fox–North coalition government in 1784, Fox dedicated himself to resisting the unconstitutional growth in power and influence of George III's executive function and court at the expense of the Commons.[11] Fox followed John Wilkes in appealing to 'the people', urging Westminster electors to defend their liberties from the king and his aristocratic ministry.

Fox supported the nascent French Revolution, believing France was imitating England in 1688. He regarded French leaders, including the Duc d'Orléans, Lafayette, and Talleyrand, as personal friends and European fellow-travellers in the cause of aristocracy-led Whig liberty.[12] Fox had moved towards a more democratic form of Whiggism and, for Baer, 'by

opportunistically flirting with radicals and their ideas, Fox became Wilkes' successor as "man of the people"', serving his constituents as 'the uniquely visible parliamentary representative of *vox populi*'.[13] Fox's populist republican language frequently contrasted his own manly and independent values to 'oppressive ministerial *influence* or *thraldom*'. Popular agitation 'out of doors' was central to his electoral campaigns.[14]

Fox prominently supported the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. In March 1790, ahead of the election, he proposed a parliamentary motion to this end. During the debate, Fox drew connections between revolutionary France and Britain. Although he deplored French seizures of ecclesiastical property, he attributed the 'moral causes' of the backlash against the French church to 'the haughty and insolent demeanor, to the proud establishments, and to the arrogant spirit of superstitious priests'.[15] He criticised how in England 'the church may become a party in the state': 'the high church, odious as that name is to every friend to civil liberty, is again rearing her head, and preparing to scatter her poison around', promoting 'passive obedience and non-resistance'.[16] Fox dismissed the 'imaginary dangers' to the church cried up by this party as a 'cloak for injustice and persecution', instead appealing to the progressive values of 'this enlightened age'.[17] Despite Fox's eloquence, Pitt and his ministers defeated the motion by a majority of 189 votes.

When Blake voted for Fox in 1790, therefore, he was attracted to the reformist 'man of the people', the opponent of Pitt and the king. The contradictions of Fox's democratic Whiggism had yet to emerge clearly, as they would do later in the decade with the radicalisation of the French Revolution and the democratic movement in Britain. Instead, Fox plausibly represented himself as a progressive politician and the people's friend, defending them from the collusion of the High Church and ministerial Toryism.

In eighteenth-century Britain, 'the people' held an ambiguous place in political discourse. They were ostensibly incorporated into government through the Whig doctrine of virtual representation, whereby each MP represented the interests of the entire nation, despite usually being elected by a local elite. But *the* people in a more democratic sense could challenge and exert power over the political fiction of Parliament as 'the people' via different forms of popular agitation: issuing instructions and petitions to MPs, forming political associations, and joining often boisterous election mobs.[18] Much of John Wilkes's success as a radical MP can be attributed to his rapport with and ability to stir up the often violent London crowds who supported 'Wilkes and Liberty'. This tension between 'the people' as

embodied by political representatives and the political agency of *the* people was evident in the events of the French Revolution as well as in British responses to the upheavals across the Channel.

## The People in the French Revolution

Most English commentators viewed the advent of the French Revolution in the summer of 1789 and the ascendancy of National Assembly deputies over the old elite as a belated rebalancing of political power towards the Commons. From 1789 to August 1791, the Assembly hammered out France's new constitution. Nevertheless, Schama argues that the contradictions which would lead to the Terror of 1793–94 were present from the start. Assembly deputies related uneasily to the Parisian mobs driving the revolution on the ground. While 'expectations of a citizens' millennium' issued from 'the antimodernist impulse that had mobilized crowds in the streets', the politicians who benefited sought 'a modern, workable, powerful state; a constitutional monarchy with a Gallic accent, not a populist democracy'.[19]

In his influential, *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état?* (*What Is the Third Estate?*) of 1789, the Abbé de Sieyès articulated the Third Estate's demands for political recognition during the States General crisis of 1788–89. Sieyès opposed the dominance of the monarch and aristocracy by identifying the Commons with Rousseau's concept of the nation's General Will. Unlike Rousseau, however, Sieyès favoured representative government, not direct democracy. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau made the General Will the only basis of political sovereignty, in an attempt to reconcile civil society with the retention of man's natural birthright of liberty. The individual renounced his natural rights but gained them back as a political citizen whose interests were identical to those of the General Will of the nation.[20] For Rousseau, the General Will was an inalienable metaphysical principle by which the good of the whole people transcended private interests. Sovereignty would always be retained by the people, although the General Will required an elected executive to enact it. Rousseau rejected the use of legislative representatives, preferring direct democracy and plebiscites. Naturally, this raised the problem of how, in a large modern nation, the General Will could be known and expressed. Rousseau evaded this issue by arguing that alienated modern man was unable to imagine this possibility. Property ownership was irrelevant: enthusiasm for the public good was the only requirement for political participation.[21]

Dart argues that, in using the General Will, Sieyès blended 'two fundamentally incompatible political discourses—a politics based on property and interest, and one based on popular sovereignty', a contradiction also at the heart of the National Assembly.[22]

Early qualifications for active political participation in France demonstrated this problem. In November 1789, *The Times* reported the Assembly's debate on constituting its membership. Deputies decided to impose a contribution of 'one mark of silver' and the possession of land as necessary qualifications, debarring the lower orders from the legislature.[23] Although the Assembly abolished all titles of hereditary nobility on 19 June 1790, *ci-devant* nobles were prominent in the new government. Sieyès's faction contained as many citizen-nobles as the *monarchiens*.[24] Furthermore, the Assembly divided the people into 'active' and 'passive' citizens. Men who could contribute the equivalent of three days' labour in taxes were eligible to vote in primary assemblies. A higher tax burden was required to serve in an electoral assembly. 'Passive citizens' did not participate, and included women, servants and dependants, vagrants, and the poor. The authority of the National and subsequently Constituent Assembly lay in its deputies' claim to paternally interpret, mediate, and exercise the General Will of the people. Radicals such as Desmoulins, Robespierre, and Marat criticised the limited franchise. But until the king and queen's flight to Varennes in June 1791, the goal was constitutional monarchy rather than a republic.

The British Whig tradition had similar contradictions regarding popular sovereignty. While British supporters of the French Revolution believed the French people had overcome feudal tyranny, what exactly constituted 'the people' was unclear. The ambiguity was at the heart of Fox's claims to be 'the man of the people'. The advent of Painite republicanism from 1792 onwards divided reformers over the extent to which *the* people should have political agency. Symptomatic was a serious split between radical and more traditionally Whiggish members of the SCI.[25]

## Blake and the English Response to the French Revolution

These fault lines run through Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791). The title page date suggests that the poem judges the significance of events of 1789 in the light of intervening developments from 1790 to 1791. Blake, like many British reformers, saw the revolution in terms of enlightenment

dispelling feudal superstition. In particular, he shares in a critical approach to apotheosis, undermining the aestheticisation of *ancien régime* authority in heavenly figures. However, this also problematises his representation of the revolution's heroes. This ambiguity suggests Blake's complex relationship with the poem's most probable intended audience. The title page bears Joseph Johnson's imprint. Blake carried out engraving work for Johnson from 1780 and during 1790 and 1791 produced many plates for his books.[26] Blake also undertook commissions for their mutual friend Henry Fuseli, a central member of Johnson's reform-minded circle and contributor to the latter's journal *The Analytical Review*.[27] Blake seems to have been at most a peripheral figure. Even dubious anecdotes which describe him rubbing shoulders with Paine, Wollstonecraft, and Godwin at Johnson's renowned dinners present him as eccentric and jarringly enthusiastic.[28] If Blake's poem appeals to enlightened reformists among Johnson's circle and customers, the text registers tensions with this audience. These affinities and differences are inscribed in the poem's approach to mythical discourse, especially in its figures of apotheosis.

While many Englishmen believed 1789 marked France's embrace of the English model of constitutional monarchy, its more radical supporters argued that it had gone further. In his sermon to the London Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, on 4 November 1789, Richard Price described it as the triumphant ascendancy of the popular will over absolute monarchy. The voice of the people was clearly heard; law and reason superseded tyranny and superstition:

> I have lived to see THIRTY MILLIONS of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice; their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects.[29]

The sermon culminates with rousing prophetic rhetoric. Price envisages 'the ardor for liberty catching and spreading' and encourages the 'friends of freedom' to continue their work:

> Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting AMERICA free, reflected to FRANCE, and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes, and warms and illuminates EUROPE!
>
> Tremble all ye oppressors of the world! Take warning all ye supporters of slavish governments, and slavish hierarchies! Call no more (absurdly and wickedly) REFORMATION, innovation.[30]

The imperatives emphasise the oppressors' vulnerability, but the distinction between legitimate and 'slavish' governments and hierarchies suggests limits to popular agency. Goodwin notes that reformers' euphoria at early events in France was quickly moderated when the implications for British politics were considered. Leading up to the general election of 1790, for example, the SCI were 'tentative and accommodating' towards 'inadequate popular representation at Westminster'.[31] On 4 March 1790, SCI member Henry Flood's motion in the Commons for parliamentary reform called for the transformation of the House from a 'second-rate aristocracy' into an assembly representing the people, but emphatically 'not the rabble'.[32]

Johnson's circle could encompass as revolutionary a figure as Paine and was certainly less conservative than Whigs such as Flood. Despite their enthusiasm for Rousseau, many of its members preferred to think of the French Revolution as establishing representatives of the people's political will, rather than enabling directly exercised democracy. Thomas Christie, a founder of and contributor to Johnson's *Analytical Review*, visited Paris in early 1790. He met Mirabeau, Sieyès, and Necker and became a supporter of the revolution.[33] In response to Edmund Burke's horrified account in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Johnson published Christie's *Letters on the Revolution in France* (1791), an account of the new government being established by the National Assembly. He discussed active and passive citizens and various restrictions on membership of the government. Christie was confident that the Assembly had created a constitutional monarchy in which the people's representatives rather than an aristocratic cabal would guide the king.[34] He insisted that the revolution was moderate, with the Assembly sidelining those 'who wished for a pure Democracy' and a republic. Instead, they 'preserved the ancient form of Government, but corrected its abuses; they kept their King, but deprived him of the power of doing evil.[35] Christie pointedly refutes interpretations of the revolution as democratic, countering Burke's representation of the French revolutionaries and their English supporters, especially dissenters, as extremists.

Blake seems to have been more enthused by the agency of the popular will in the original act of resistance. Viscomi deduces that Blake completed and printed the *Marriage* in 1790. If so, 'A Song of Liberty' represents Blake's response to the early events of the revolution.[36] The narrator specifically celebrates the popular assault on the Bastille, prophetically exhorting France to 'rend down thy dungeon' (25:3, E44). Where Price celebrated 'the people' reasserting their authority by leading the king 'in triumph',

Blake's song represents the conflict in complex mythic and apocalyptic terms. The 'starry king' tyrannically hurls 'the new born fire' from the heavens, while the latter brings the sky-borne 'jealous king', his court, and his armies crashing down in ruins. The conclusion pits two sublime powers against each other:

> 18. With thunder and fire: leading his starry hosts thro' the waste wilderness he [the king] promulgates his ten commands, glancing his beamy eyelids over the deep in dark dismay,
> 19. Where the son of fire in his eastern cloud, while the morning plumes her golden breast,
> 20. Spurning the clouds written with curses, stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying
>
> Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease.
>
> (25–26, E44–45)

The king presides over the dark void of night, demonstrating authority through his command of 'starry hosts', his celestial 'beamy eyelids', and 'ten commands'. Blake associates his antagonist, the 'son of fire', with the brightness and heat of the morning sun's chariot. While the contrast between this Moses-like patriarch and the fiery son suggests the latter is a redemptive messiah, Blake eschews obviously Christological imagery: the natural diurnal cycle promises renewal. He also complicates the conflict. The king and the 'son of fire' are both identified with metaphors of light and cloud, but differ in their intensity and relation to 'the stony law'. Paradoxically, Blake connects this law to 'clouds written with curses'. Religious and regal authority are elevated, but also easily dispelled, by enlightenment. Whereas Price and Christie believed the revolution displaced arbitrary rule with benevolent rational laws, the 'Song' concludes on an emphatically antinomian note, annihilating 'the stony law' so that 'Empire is no more!' This song suggests that France is witnessing an uncontainable redemptive power which will vanquish the superstitious and feudal night in a blaze of light.

In the British debate on the revolution, reformers wrote more to demystify regal and aristocratic authority than to endorse the people's direct political participation and agency. Largely, these writers responded to Burke, who had put the status of an elite chivalric culture and the spectre of a monstrous democratic mob at the heart of the British debate. Implicitly rebuking scurrilous pornographic representations of Marie Antoinette, *Reflections* describes her in an adulatory peroration:

> It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in,—glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. Oh! what a revolution! and what an heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! [...] I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.—But the age of chivalry is gone.[37]

While Burke's description of the queen as the morning star is a simile, he effectively merges social and astronomical discourses. 'Glittering' and 'sphere' blur the boundaries between worldly glamour and starlight, the royal court and the morning star's orbit. Burke's stirring metaphor sanctifies the dauphiness. He contrasts this heavenly figure with the brutally physical (and in the case of the Paris fishwomen, revoltingly unfeminine) revolutionary mob.

Burke's detractors particularly satirised this passage, suggesting it exemplified the fawning over aristocracy that the newly enlightened French had abandoned. They played on Burke's rumoured Catholicism, presenting the effusion as superstitious Mariolatry. Several antagonists attacked it as a royalist apotheosis. Burke's emotive rhetoric was found wanting against Enlightenment rational norms. David Williams added a special section to later editions of his *Lessons to a Young Prince, by an Old Statesman* (1790), in which he attacked Burke as a 'political Swedenbourg', whose truths rest 'on heavenly authorities'. The *Reflections* deceived with 'all the properties and effects of a *Camera Obscura*, or of a magic lanthorn':

> Government and Royalty are displayed, not as arising from the mud and filth of popular interposition; but descending from Heaven, at the command of Religion, which waves her wand from a turret of the Inquisition, and awes the nations into implicit faith and unconditioned loyalty.—Kings and Queens are glorious suns and chaste moons. [...] while the multitude, is irretrievably and eternally fixed to the earth, and forms the immeasurable pavement supporting the privileged and consecrated scene![38]

Burke's extravagant spectacle represents royal and aristocratic authority as part of an eternal cosmic order, an apotheosis which displaces the people's political primacy. But while the French people were asserting themselves against the *ancien régime*'s domination, Williams insisted that the National

Assembly would not ‘introduce a democracy’ or ‘imitate the measures of the English revolution’, but would rather ‘connect the extremities with the seat of reflection and thought’ in a body politic founded on sympathy, but with an appropriate hierarchy.[39]

Likewise, in *Man As He Is* (1792) Robert Bage targeted Burke’s elevated imagery. The naïve narrator rhapsodises on a book ‘which has lately enchanted all kings, all queens, all bishops’ and ‘has been wrote to amplify and sublime them’:

> Sure never were the rich powers of eloquence so displayed! The apotheosis of the lovely queen into a star, is an instance of the sublime and beautiful, for which you may seek in the wide world of authors, a parallel in vain.[40]

Bage uses Burke’s own aesthetic categories to expose his transformative artifice. By mythologising the queen, Burke stimulates the narrator’s superstitious reverence, but the ironic term ‘apotheosis’ suggests paganism, instead humanising the queen, hinting that her appeal is more erotic than celestial.

## Demystifying Apotheosis in *The French Revolution*

In *The French Revolution* Blake exposes Burkean rhetoric through his representation of the French feudal order. He also shares in the enlightened critique of aristocratic apotheosis. The Duke of Burgundy exemplifies unreconstructed *ancien régime* nobility. Bindman regards his speech as ‘a sublime parody of Burke’s defence of aristocracy’.[41] A fictional rather than historical character, Burgundy, ‘the ancientest Peer’ (l.83, E289), personifies chivalric aristocracy. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, founded the Order of the Golden Fleece (albeit in the fifteenth century), an honour still bestowed by the Habsburgs at the time of the French Revolution.[42] Blake mythically magnifies the character: ‘o’er the council he stretched his red limbs’ (l.85, E289). He seems to allude to Milton’s Moloch (*PL* i.392–93, ii.50–105) when ‘around him croud, weeping in his burning robe, | A bright cloud of infant souls’ (ll.87–88, E290). Blake’s Duke defends aristocracy in mystical Burkean terms:

> Shall this marble built heaven become a clay cottage, this earth an
> oak stool, and these mowers
> From the Atlantic mountains, mow down all this great starry harvest

> of six thousand years? […]
> Till the power and dominion is rent from the pole, sword and sceptre from sun and moon.
>
> (ll.89–90, 94, E290)

Burgundy represents the revolt as the apocalyptic degradation of an entire historical and cosmic order, but inadvertently reveals that aristocratic heaven is materially 'built'. The durability of marble suggests immortality in contrast to the commoners' transient human clay, but as well as distinguishing the 'heaven' and 'cottage' the parallelism also links them as habitations. Frye glosses Burgundy's 'starry harvest of six thousand years' as 'Blake's conventional figure for the interval between creation and apocalypse'.[43] But it also connects the poem to contemporary political discourse. While 'harvest' might suggest regal and aristocratic wars, it also ironically concedes the aristocracy's ripeness for cutting. Burgundy advises the king 'Thy Nobles have gather'd thy starry hosts round this rebellious city, | To rouze up the ancient forests of Europe, with clarions of cloud breathing war' (ll.100–101). Erdman rightly identifies the 'starry hosts' with the armed forces of the *ancien régime*.[44] As in the 'Song of Liberty', Blake conflates the political with the apocalyptic, alluding to Isaiah's prophecy that 'the host of heaven shall be dissolved' (34:4). Introducing Joseph Johnson's 1791 edition of Robert Lowth's translation of Isaiah, John Smith interpreted heavenly bodies referred to by prophets as 'kings, queens, and princes or rulers' and 'the highest in the world politic'.[45] Later, in *A Word in Season* (1795), James Bicheno emphasised the radical connotations of apocalyptic star-fall, for him clearly 'the fall of the princes and rulers of the world'.[46]

The stars are just one of the figures in Burgundy's speech that ascribe immortality and eternity to the *ancien régime*. Blake demystifies these figures to expose human domination beneath Burgundy's aestheticised and naturalised images of aristocratic legitimacy.[47] He repeatedly collocates 'Heavens' with the feudal court and council. The king laments that 'The nerves of five thousand years ancestry tremble, shaking the heavens of France' (l.70, E289). Revolutionary upheaval unsettles the human framework supporting the traditional heavens, themselves imagined as the head of a body politic.[48] The term 'tremble' recalls Price's imperative addressed to the 'oppressors of the world'. Blake suggests the supposedly transcendent elite has received a physical shock.

Other disembodied forms reinforce Blake's connection of the *ancien régime* with mystificatory apotheosis. The present king's gothic vision of 'spirits of ancient Kings' and counsellors (ll.72–78, E289) dramatises Burke's conception of political tradition. For Burke, the organic constitution embodies a permanent 'partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'.[49] This non-negotiable contract grants political ancestors a supernaturally durable authority over the present. By contrast, in the first part of *Rights of Man* (1791) Paine identified himself 'contending for the rights of the *living*' against 'the manuscript assumed authority of the dead'.[50] Blake's necromantic king and nobility suggest that Burke's transhistorical compact applies to hereditary kingship rather than civil society. Representing a ghostly conspiracy against the people, Blake emphasises how this supernatural authority requires mediation—these spirits' voices only come into the 'real' world via the king's vision and speech.

Blake's most vehement denunciation of the *ancien régime* is personified by the haughty Archbishop of Paris, who exhorts the king in his 'command of Heaven' to 'send forth thy Generals' and 'shut up this Assembly in their final home' (ll.153–54, E293). He appears like a stagey villain 'risen from beneath' with 'rushing of scales and hissing of flames and rolling of sulphurous smoke' (ll.126–27, E291), ironising his claim to provide heavenly counsel. As well as a Protestant caricature of French Catholic superstition, the Archbishop also suggests the authoritarianism of the English High Church party that Fox attacked. The Archbishop's authority rests on his privileged mediation of 'heaven utter'd counsel' (l.152, E293) from a dream-vision of the deity as an 'aged form, white as snow, hov'ring in mist' (l.131, E292). It tells him

> My groaning is heard in the abbeys, and God, so long worshipp'd,
> departs as a lamp
> Without oil; for a curse is heard hoarse thro' the land, from a godless
> race
> Descending to beasts; they look downward and labour and forget my
> holy law;
> The sound of prayer falls from the lips of flesh, and the holy hymn
> from thicken'd tongues;
> For the bars of Chaos are burst; her millions prepare their fiery way
> Thro' the orbed abode of the holy dead, to root up and pull down and
> remove,
> And Nobles and Clergy shall fail from before me, and my cloud and
> vision be no more. (ll.137–43, E292)

The deity narrates his own demystification; he is dependent on the prostrate, obedient worshippers. He is vulnerably material: he 'groans' with death pangs and departs 'as a lamp | Without oil'. The celestial abstraction of the noble and clerical 'orbed abode of the holy dead' is no longer a bulwark against 'chaos', the fluctuating, collective, and unlimited energies of the revolting 'millions'.

*The French Revolution* balances anti-court iconoclasm with an attempt to express the liberation of the people's political voice. Although radical writers tended to focus on refuting Burke's arguments, some shared Blake's interest in adequately representing the popular political body. In her *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Act* (1790) and her poem 'To a Great Nation' (1793), both published by Johnson, Anna Laetitia Barbauld uses personification to demystify political hegemony but also to reattribute political force to popular agents, in order to stimulate activism.[51] Laura Mandell identifies a tendency, evident in Burke's *Reflections*, of personifying political agency in the gigantic, monolithic form of 'Government', against which Barbauld opposes the 'Nation'. The latter is an immanent unity that simultaneously preserves the people's multiplicity and independent agency. Barbauld's poem represents France, in its collective effort to repel foreign counter-revolutionary forces, as the hundred-handed giant Briareus, a figure also evoked in a similar context by Erasmus Darwin.[52] Mandell identifies two stages of reform proposed in the *Address*:

> First, gigantic but inanimate forms must be broken apart. The ruling forces have seemed gigantic, have been envisioned as monumental or marmoreal, because they consist in the tyrannic imposition of a minority perspective on the public. But resistant multitudes are bursting through the ice, granite, and marble embodiment.[53]

Combined with the imagery of apotheosis, Blake similarly represents regal and noble authority in images of cold, ice, and marble. Burgundy's solid 'marble built heaven' is echoed in the nobles who 'fold round the King' with faces 'lock'd up as with strong bands of iron' and limbs 'bound down as with marble' (ll.65–66, E289). Like apotheosis, Blake uses marmoreal imagery ostensibly to symbolise unyielding authority and immortality, only to subject it to bathos. The opening of this poem associates the declining king with ice:

> Sick, sick: the Prince on his couch, wreath'd in dim
> And appalling mist; his strong hand outstretch'd, from his shoulder down the bone
> Runs aching cold into the scepter too heavy for mortal grasp. No more
> To be swayed by visible hand, nor in cruelty bruise the mild flourishing mountains. (ll.2–5, E286)

Blake imagines the tyrant king as a deity looming over the nation, an image similar his depiction of Edward III in Gray's 'The Bard'. A sceptre that is too heavy for mortal grasp and no longer 'To be swayed by visible hand' implies that a less autocratic, more collective mode of political sovereignty is being imagined and created.

## Blake's French People and Representatives

Blake seeks to articulate the French people's revolutionary identity and agency, but this endeavour poses the problem of describing their power so as to distinguish it from *ancien régime* authority. The representative status of the Assembly members sits uneasily with their pronouncements that political sovereignty resides in the people. Although Blake dramatises his critique of the *ancien régime* using figures of apotheosis, its reappearance in descriptions of the Assembly's delegates indicates problematic continuities.

While Blake's imagery clearly distinguishes between an aristocratic night and the new political dawn, his description of the National Assembly represents the delegates in celestial language:

> For the Commons convene in the Hall of the Nation; like spirits of fire in the beautiful
> Porches of the Sun, to plant beauty in the desart craving abyss, they gleam
> On the anxious city; all children new-born first behold them; tears are fled. (ll.54–56, E288)

The sun has obvious positive connotations of warmth, nurturing, and perhaps sovereignty here. But the 'Hall of the Nation' is shadowed by the king's 'chamber of council', and Blake's simile locates the Commons representatives in a privileged proximity to power, as they 'gleam' over a supposedly sovereign populace infantilised as 'children new-born'. Given Blake's pointedly critical use of apotheosis imagery for *ancien régime*

authority, its reappearance suggests ambivalence towards the new political arbiters. When Orleans describes France to the king's council as a newly roused giant, the Assembly's delegates seem to inadequately represent the body politic:

> Can the fires of Nobility ever be quench'd, or the stars by a stormy
> night?
> Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful? [...]
> And can Nobles be bound when the people are free, or God weep
> when his children are happy?
> Have you never seen Fayette's forehead, or Mirabeau's eyes, or the
> shoulders of Target,
> Or Bailly the strong foot of France, or Clermont the terrible voice,
> and your robes
> Still retain their own crimson? mine never yet faded, for fire
> delights in its form. (ll.181–82, 186–89, E294)

Unlike Barbauld and Darwin's democratic Briareus, this French giant is comprised not of multitudes but representative organs. Orleans's speech ostensibly asserts *egalité*, but its meritocratic nobility seems undermined by the poem's symbolic economy. The 'fires of Nobility' and 'stars' associated with Burgundy remain unquenched after the storm; Orleans envisages the Assembly as a transformation rather than dissolution of aristocratic power. Even an apparently democratic statement to the king is equivocal:

> But go, merciless man! enter into the infinite labyrinth of another's
> brain
> Ere thou measure the circle that he shall run. Go, thou cold recluse,
> into the fires
> Of another's high flaming rich bosom, and return unconsum'd, and
> write laws.
> If thou canst not do this, doubt thy theories, learn to consider all men
> as thy equals,
> Thy brethren, and not as thy foot or thy hand, unless thou first fearest
> to hurt them. (ll.190–94, E294)

The last line seems ironic if Bailly is 'the strong foot of France'. For Lincoln, the ostensible antinomianism of Orleans's peroration is compromised because it transforms the concept of nobility, 'dissolving distinctions of rank', but also asserting 'a community of interest that may

transcend social distinctions without destroying them'.[54] Orleans's final phrase implies that men *may* be subjugated to the law provided the sovereign 'fearest to hurt them'. He argues for reconstituted regal authority that sympathetically identifies with its subjects and is lenient, but this merely softens legislative and executive power over the people. Orleans, whose original joined the National Assembly, promotes aristocratic paternalism. Lincoln finds that in his speech 'hierarchy reasserts itself in the very terms used to dissolve hierarchy'.[55] Notably, Blake locates this argument for constitutional monarchy in the king's council rather than in the Hall of the Nation.

The Commons also represent reconstituted paternal authority, particularly their spokesman, the Abbé 'Seyes'. As Seyes heads to the king's council, the noble Aumont describes how 'a dark shadowy man in the form | Of King Henry the Fourth walks before him in fires' (ll.164–65, E293). This ghostly presence recalls those with which the king and Archbishop superstitiously commune. 'Good King Henry', the hero of Voltaire's *Henriade* (1723), personified the enlightened patriot king, associated with religious tolerance and a concern for the welfare of the French people. During the early stages of the Revolution, this was a role many hoped Louis XVI would fulfil.[56] In the face of the courtier Aumont's resistance the romantic spirit of popular kingship dissipates:

> Aumont went out and stood in the hollow porch, his ivory wand in his hand;
> A cold orb of disdain revolv'd round him, and covered his soul with snows eternal.
> Great Henry's soul shuddered, a whirlwind and fire tore furious from his angry bosom;
> He indignant departed on horses of heav'n. (ll.198–201, E295)

Aumont's ivory wand suggests superstition and his 'cold orb' links him to the aristocratic heavens. He personifies forces of reaction threatening Seyes, perhaps paralleling the Catholic extremist François Ravaillac, who assassinated Henri IV. Blake represents Henri's departure as an apotheosis, perhaps recalling Rubens's painting *The Apotheosis of Henry IV* (*c.*1623–25).[57] In doing so, he suggests doubts over hopes for a patriot king. The Abbé, however, absorbs Henri's divine paternal authority. He ascends the steps of the Louvre[58] 'like a voice of God following a storm' and follows Aumont into the chamber:

> [A]s a father that bows to his son;
> Whose rich fields inheriting spread their old glory, so the voice of
> the people bowed
> Before the ancient seat of the kingdom and mountains to be renewed.
> (ll.202–5, E295)

A father yielding to his son suggests a disruption resulting in rejuvenation, but the inheritance and suggestion of harvest also imply continuity with the aristocracy. Seyes describes the valleys of France calling to the soldier to 'throw down thy sword and musket, | And run and embrace the meek peasant' as a result of which the nobles will 'weep, and put off | The red robe of terror, the crown of oppression, the shoes of contempt' and will 'unbuckle | The girdle of war from the desolate earth' (ll.220–23, E296). He voices the people's demand for sympathetic government, but the nobles only divest themselves of the symbols of authority insofar as they express tyranny. Although Seyes prophesies that the elevated 'Priest in his thund'rous cloud' will penitently 'weep, bending to earth embracing the valleys' (ll.223–24), it is unclear whether the cloud completely precipitates or serves a milder, more nourishing function. Seyes anticipates a paternalistic millennial future, where the 'mild peaceable nations' are 'opened to heav'n, and men walk with their fathers in bliss' (l.237, E296). 'Heaven' in the poem, however, has connoted political authority. Like Orleans, the Abbé proposes a liberalised and reconstituted civil and religious authority rather than fundamental transformation. Tellingly, Seyes himself appears apotheosised when he returns to the Assembly 'Like the morning star arising above the black waves, when a shipwreck'd soul sighs for morning' (l.255, E297), recalling Burgundy's 'starry harvest' as well as Jesus's associations with this star (2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16). As representatives of the people, Seyes and the Assembly delegates may be improvements on the king's council, but the imagery of apotheosis suggests troubling continuities.

Part of the ambiguity lies in the poem's scant representation of the French people themselves. Aers criticises its lack of 'any differentiation of the third estate', its 'homogenizing language of "the Commons"', and the agentless passive verbs that describe apocalyptic change ('the bottoms of the world were open'd, and the graves of the arch-angels unseal'd' (l.301, E299)).[59] Yet the poem problematises the adequacy of this representation of the revolution. Seyes begins his speech with the invocation 'Hear, O Heavens of France, the voice of the people, arising from valley

and hill' (l.206, E295), fashioning himself as the mouthpiece for passive victims of oppression and arrogating the expression of popular discontent. In Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the people themselves voice and enact the unalienated General Will in free assemblies, but Seyes and the reformed priest he describes suggest that in this millennial state the people and God still require mediators. Blake's opposition to priestcraft in this poem and in the *Marriage* make it doubtful that he would share the Abbé's vision. Hints of continuities between old and new orders unsettle the Commons representatives' claims to embody popular sovereignty.

Other Assembly figures are ambiguous. Hobday plausibly proposes that the Marquis de Lafayette was the intended hero of Blake's poem. Lafayette's popularity collapsed after the Massacre on the Champ de Mars on 17 July 1791, when, under his direction, the National Guard fired upon a crowd protesting against the Assembly's support for Louis XVI as constitutional monarch despite his attempted flight to Varennes. Hobday suggests Blake then abandoned the poem.[60] In 'Who will exchange his own fire side', Blake appears to attack Lafayette around this time, accusing him of betraying of the Revolution, by sympathising with the French king and especially queen (E500).[61] In terms of the *French Revolution*'s symbolism, he seems dubious. After the Assembly votes to move the army out of Paris, Fayette appears divinely favoured:

> The aged sun rises appall'd from dark mountains, and gleams a
> dusky beam
> On Fayette, but on the whole army a shadow. (ll.270–71, E298)

Lincoln notes that this 'dusky beam' echoes the description of the king surrounded by his nobles 'like the sun of old time quench'd in clouds' (l.68, E289) and 'Gleams' of sulphur which streak the earth 'from Fayette as he lifted his hand' (l.278, E298) recall the Archbishop's 'sulphurous smoke'.[62] Blake depicts Fayette in conventional apotheosis imagery. Although Paris is saved from the threat posed by the troops, the 'dusky beam' associates Fayette more strongly with the waning power of the king than with the millennial 'morning's beam', under which, at the conclusion, sits 'the Senate in peace' (l.306, E300). The general and Assembly bask in divine favour, but the beams also recall aristocratic claims to celestial authority. Despite the army's shadowy darkness, they remain 'starry hosts': officers are 'glittering' and the 'bright infantry […] glitter like fire' (ll.287–92, E299).

The intellectual heroes of the revolution hold similarly troubling attributes. Voltaire and Rousseau hover above the army, driving out spectral monks who insubstantially 'dash like foam' against the army (l.277, E298). Whilst they lead the enlightened dissolution of superstitious religious orders, the *philosophes* loom over the soldiers like sky-gods. As Fayette stands controlling his army,

> Over his head the soul of Voltaire shone fiery, and over the army
> Rousseau his white cloud
> Unfolded, on souls of war-living terrors silent list'ning toward
> Fayette,
> His voice loud inspir'd by liberty, and by spirits of the dead, thus
> thunder'd. (ll.282–84, E298–99)

Voltaire as a fiery 'soul' and Rousseau as a 'white cloud' are tutelary deities of revolution, Ossianic 'spirits of the dead' whose inspiration of Fayette and the army mirrors the influence of 'the holy dead' over the monarch, Archbishop, and courtiers. Blake's imagery paradoxically mythologises Voltaire and Rousseau's demystificatory power. Again, the power and authority of the *ancien régime* expressed through apotheosis seem to live on.[63]

The common people who do appear in Blake's poem are far less active than those who drove the revolution itself. For Aers, Seyes depicts fallen humanity as 'thoroughly passivized'.[64] Likewise, when Necker retires from the court like 'a dark cloud' and 'thunder', the 'women and children of the city' who 'Kneel'd round him and kissed his garments and wept' (ll.117, 122–23, E291) suggest a feminised and infantilised people, subordinate to the Christ-like political figure (see Luke 7:37–38). The voice of the French people is muted throughout *The French Revolution*. In contrast with the Abbé's claim to speak for the people, the poem's brooding and ominous atmosphere of cloud, storm, and thunder suggests that the sublime provides an aesthetic mode in which Blake could attempt to express uncontainable popular energies. From the outset, the king and nobles are menaced by reverberating forces from the nation that dwarf the king's palace:

> Troubled, leaning on Necker, descends the King, to his chamber of
> council; shady mountains
> In fear utter voices of thunder; the woods of France embosom the
> sound;
> Clouds of wisdom prophetic reply, and roll over the palace roof

heavy.[…]
Again the loud voice of France cries to the morning, the morning prophecies to its clouds.

For the Commons convene in the Hall of the Nation. France shakes! And the heavens of France
Perplex'd vibrate round each careful countenance! Darkness of old times around them
Utters load despair, shadowing Paris; her grey towers groan, and the Bastile trembles. (ll.10–18, E286)

For Erdman, the impending storms and lowering clouds here and in the *Marriage* represent counter-revolutionary violence.[65] They also suggest *ancien régime* repression, mystery, and the threat of the royal armies. But Blake also associates thunder and clouds with popular discontent, which makes the Bastille tremble. While the nobility's 'heavy brow'd jealousies lower o'er the Louvre', the 'loud thunders' that 'roll, troubling the dead' and sickening kings across the earth (ll.59–61, E288) mythically project the people's emerging power. Other prophetic texts suggest this usage. In *A Word in Season*, Bicheno opposes sun, moon, and stars as types for royalty, government, and military heroes against clouds as images of the multitudes.[66] In 1789, the Parisian crowd fulfilled what in the poem the king and Duke of Burgundy ironically request of the Abbé, the miraculous power to command the Bastille and La Force prisons to move. Seyes can merely bring the unwelcome request to the Assembly; presumably, Blake planned to include in a later section of the poem a sublime set-piece in which the Parisian crowd achieved this feat.

Just as Fox's electoral campaign in 1790 and the early French Revolution made political appeals to an ambiguous 'people', *The French Revolution* seems drawn towards both representative and unmediated expressions of the 'voice of the people', which remains obscure, essentially nascent, inarticulate, and unformed. Its sublime energy is amplified through the poem's defamiliarising idiom. For Lincoln, 'the complexity of the language is a general strategy designed to challenge conventional reading habits'.[67] Blake's long, irregular lines of what Frye calls 'thundering anapests'[68] suggest liberty unleashed and the sublime energy of a magnitude too great to be contained in conventional metre. While the political energy of the masses may receive regulated expression through the Assembly's representatives, the people's sublime power is incommensurate with the former's broadly rational discourse, instead emerging indepen-

dently through aural effects, parallel constructions, exclamations, repetition of words and sounds, and rapid rhythmic modulations. For example, when the 'shady mountains | In fear utter voices of thunder; the woods of France embosom the sound; | Clouds of wisdom prophetic reply, and roll over the palace roof heavy' (ll.10–12, E286), the genitive phrases connect the sounds in a mounting sequence, while the fearful mountain thunder becomes amplified then overwhelmed by the numerous 'o' sounds echoing back from the nation.

It is unclear why only one book of *The French Revolution* remains out of the seven the title page promises. Many commentators have suggested that Blake abandoned his epic because Joseph Johnson dismissed such a commercially unviable, enthusiastic, and irregular poem.[69] Others argue that Blake or Johnson decided against publishing such a pro-revolutionary and anti-clerical poem in the British political climate, although conditions were much more benign in 1791 than they would be a year later.[70] It is likely that Blake was struggling with contradictions in *The French Revolution* between the energy of a revolutionary populace and its political representatives, who risked reifying it into merely another form of institutional authority. By 1791, Blake would have been aware that the Assembly's constitutional settlement had effectively left most common Frenchmen disenfranchised as 'passive citizens'. Reports were reaching England suggesting Lafayette and his associates were 'effecting the re-establishment of the antient Orders and Distinctions as fast as possible'.[71] Hobday's argument that Blake became disillusioned with Lafayette is symptomatic of a larger dissatisfaction with the Assembly's claims to represent the people.

As a corollary, much of Blake's imagery remains conventional. Hobday suggests the debate in the royal council maps onto that of the devils in Hell in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, whilst the scene in the Assembly mirrors the discussion in Heaven of Book III.[72] Blake consistently associates the *ancien régime* nobles and armies with hellish 'flames of red wrath' (l. 67, E289), while Seyes and Fayette make unconvincingly Christ-like intercessions. The orthodox division of these associations lends weight to Phillips's argument that the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a later work, closer in spirit to *America*.[73] Nevertheless, there is much that in this poem that is innovative. In particular, Blake paradoxically adopts a mythical mode to represent members of the *ancien régime* so as to encourage his reader to demystify their authority, for example in his use of apotheosis imagery and his allusions to Milton's Moloch in his depiction of Burgundy and the dragon in the portrait of the Archbishop. Simultaneously, he adopts

a more positive mythic and yet natural register of storms and thunder to amplify the nation's collective power. In this context, Blake's representation of the Assembly seems closer to the nobles than these elemental forces. This tension in the poem marks a movement towards a mature prophetic style, through which Blake developed more germane means to represent sublime popular agency.

## Notes

1. Blake's votes are recorded in the Westminster Poll Books (1790): St James WR/PP/1790/5, Pollbook 482:83. See Corfield, Green, and Harvey, 'Westminster Man', 174 and Corfield, 'British History: The Exploding Galaxy', 520.
2. Baer, *Radical Westminster*, 3.
3. Ibid., 10.
4. Tooke, *To the Electors.*
5. Werkmeister, *1772–1792*, 331–34 and Bewley and Bewley, *Gentleman Radical*, 93–99.
6. Corfield, Green, and Harvey, 'Westminster Man', 163.
7. Johnson regularly published for Tooke from 1778, and issued his account of the petition and subsequent prosecution, *Proceedings in an Action for Debt* (1792). George Cumberland communicated Blake's admiration to Tooke in a letter, 19 February 1798, quoted in *BR* 80.
8. Werkmeister, *1772–1792*, 332–33.
9. Bewley and Bewley, *Gentleman Radical*, 78–79.
10. See Corfield, Green, and Harvey, 'Westminster Man', 177.
11. Ibid., 173 and Mitchell, *Charles James Fox*, 65–71.
12. Ibid., 109–11.
13. Baer, *Radical Westminster*, 14; Corfield, Green, and Harvey, 'Westminster Man', 161.
14. Baer, *Radical Westminster*, 14; Corfield, Green, and Harvey, 'Westminster Man', 182.
15. *The Debate in the British House of Commons*, 11. See also, 21–22.
16. Ibid., 9–10.
17. Ibid., 10.
18. Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 174–233. For virtual representation, see 240–45.
19. Schama, *Citizens*, 497.

20. Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre*, 22. The discussion that follows is indebted to Dart, especially 22–25.
21. For Rousseau's account of the General Will, see *The Social Contract* (1762) in *The Basic Political Writings*, 203–8.
22. Ibid., 26.
23. *The Times*, 6 November 1789. The new French franchise was still considerably wider than elsewhere in Europe.
24. Schama, *Citizens*, 477, 516–18.
25. Keane, *Thomas Paine*, 328–29.
26. See *BR* 813–17, and Bentley, *Stranger*, 106–20.
27. *BIB* 233 and Bentley, *Stranger*, 106. See Phillips, *The Marriage*, for a convincing argument that the book was published in 1793. For Blake's relationship to Johnson's circle, see Mee *DE* 214–26, and Mertz, 'A Visionary among the Radicals'.
28. See Gilchrist, *Life* (1868), 90–94, and Samuel Palmer's comments in *BR* 55–57.
29. Price, *Discourse on the Love of our Country*, 49.
30. Ibid., 40.
31. Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 116.
32. Ibid., 118.
33. See *DNB* entry for Thomas Christie.
34. Christie, *Letters on the Revolution of France*, 155–82, 202–204.
35. Ibid., 207.
36. For 1790, see *BIB* 233–40, 259–61, 376. For 1792 or 1793 see Erdman (E801) and *BPAE* 152, 192–93, and Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror', 290–94.
37. Burke, *Reflections*, 112–13.
38. Williams, *Letters to a Young Prince*, 121–22, 125–26.
39. Ibid., 72–73. Blake's notebook poem 'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened' testifies to his familiarity with at least the terms of this debate. He used Burke's rhetoric of apotheosis from the *Reflections*: 'The Queen of France just touchd this Globe | And the Pestilence darted from her robe' (E500).
40. Bage, *Man As He Is*, IV, 71–72.
41. Bindman, '"My own mind is my own church"', 115.
42. For its equivalence to the English Order of the Garter, see *The Works of the Late M. De Voltaire*, II, 284.
43. Frye, *FS* 202.
44. Erdman, *BPAE* 167, 194.

45. Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation*, 8. Johnson is among the booksellers on the title page.
46. Bicheno, *A Word in Season*, 12–13.
47. See Aers, 'Representations of Revolution', 249.
48. See Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 62–65 for Blake and contemporary theories of the nervous system.
49. Burke, *Reflections*, 144.
50. Paine, *Rights of Man*, 10. See Mee, *DE* 15, 163, 173.
51. See Mandell, '"Those Limbs Disjointed"'. Johnson published Barbauld's *Address.*
52. See *The Economy of Vegetation*, Canto II, ll.377–94, in *The Botanic Garden*, 92–93.
53. Mandell, '"Those Limbs Disjointed of Gigantic Power"', 33.
54. Lincoln, 'Politics and Desire', 189.
55. Ibid., 190.
56. See Williams, *Letters Written in France*, 9, 21, 86, 92–94, and Schama, *Citizens*, 423, on revolutionary enthusiasm for Henri IV.
57. This painting perhaps featured in the Rubens Gallery shown by Moser to Blake at the Royal Academy; see *BR* 20.
58. Hobday notes the error in locating the king's council at the Louvre, but suggests an allusion to the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, planned there. See 'Blake and Lafayette', 9, 11.
59. Aers, 'Representations of Revolution', 248–50.
60. Hobday, 'Blake and Lafayette', 14.
61. Erdman's date of 1792–93 (E861–62) is tenuous, the prison referring to Lafayette's internment in Austria in October 1792. But as early as November 1790 Lafayette was suspected of being a 'favourite with the Queen', and was believed to be complicit in the Flight to Varennes in 1791. See *The Public Advertiser*, 27 November 1790 and *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 28 June 1791.
62. Lincoln, 'Politics and Desire', 194.
63. If Blake composed the poem during 1791, this may reflect official adulation for Voltaire when his body was moved into the Panthéon in Paris. *The Times*, 28 July 1791, reported the ceremony as 'The Apotheosis of Voltaire'.
64. Aers, 'Representations of Revolution', 249.
65. *BPAE* 190.
66. Bicheno, *A Word in Season*, 14.
67. Lincoln, 'Politics and Desire', 189.

68. *FS* 184.
69. For a mismatch with Johnson's polite poetic preferences, see Rix, *William Blake*, 151–52; Mertz, 'A Visionary among the Radicals', 133–35. For enthusiasm, see Mee, *DE* 223.
70. See discussions in Gilchrist (1868), 90; Erdman, *BPAE* 152–53; and Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing, and Dissent*, 119–20.
71. *Public Advertiser*, 19 October 1791.
72. Hobday, 'Blake and Lafayette', 12.
73. Phillips (ed.), *Marriage*, 26, 42.

CHAPTER 4

# 'Breathing! Awakening!': Contesting and Transforming Apotheosis in *America a Prophecy*

Writing to John Flaxman in September 1800, Blake reflected on his 'lot in the Heavens' and connected revolution with visions on a grand scale: 'The American War began All its dark horrors passed before my face | Across the Atlantic to France. Then the French Revolution commencd in thick clouds' (E708). This chapter will argue that Blake embodies this expansive perception of revolution in *America*'s mythical mode, its use of apotheosis imagery, and the sublime personification of Orc.

The impact of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (Part I, 1791; Part II, 1792) especially expanded the political public sphere and put pressure on the fiction of 'virtual representation', whereby each MP embodied and represented 'the people' of Britain. Radicals advocated more inclusive notions of the public and the political nation. The first meeting of the London Corresponding Society (LCS) took place in January 1792 and its rules included 'That the number of our Members be unlimited'.[1] For Thompson, the LCS implied the possibility of political association which 'trusted to self-activating and self-organizing processes among the common people', a departure from eighteenth-century mobs stirred up by parliamentary factions.[2] Blake does not appear to have involved himself with the organisation, but associates such as the engraver William Sharp were active in it and several critics have found suggestive parallels between Blake's texts and those from the London radical milieu.[3] Blake's work is not strongly invested in the discourse of individual natural rights and manhood suffrage which was so central to this urban radicalism, but it is

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clearly aligned with a broader liberal resistance to tyranny. *America* voices a profound enthusiasm for liberty, but one which admits of both traditional Whig and more radical interpretations.

## The British and European Political Context

The formation in April 1792 of the Society of the Friends of the People by Grey, Sheridan, and other associates of Fox indicates the importance reformist Whigs attached to acknowledging 'the people' as a political force, even if the organisation aimed to forestall the Painite democratisation of politics and rather to lead and speak for the lower orders. Despite its relatively modest agenda, Fox remained aloof from the organisation, embarrassed by the group's lack of caution.[4] Nevertheless, he continued to affirm a Whig commitment to freedom and opposed monarchical tyranny in uncompromising terms, dubbing Prussia and Austria's coalition as an 'unexampled and infamous conspiracy not against France but against Liberty in general'.[5]

This coalition followed Louis XVI's failed flight in June 1791, which effectively left him a prisoner in Paris. In August, Leopold II of Austria issued the Padua Circular to rally fellow European monarchs behind the French royal family. The Declaration of Pillnitz in August united Austria and Prussia in a commitment to restore Louis's liberty. By 1792, a successful attack on France by well-organised Austro-Prussian armies looked likely. In April 1792 the French republic declared war on Austria. Austria, soon followed by Prussia, launched what was anticipated to be a victorious offensive against France.[6] The Duke of Brunswick's threat in July to wreak vengeance on Paris should Louis XVI come to harm generated panic and led to the September Massacres, but it also galvanised French forces to unprecedented victories over Prussia and Austria in September and November at Valmy and Jemappes.[7] This appears to be the European context in which Blake composed *America*. In Blake's Lambeth prophecies Behrendt understands the American Revolution 'as an analogical prototype' for the French Revolution and 'potentially imminent' British and global revolutions.[8] Certainly, Blake's reimagining of a nation throwing off the shackles of regal tyranny had plenty of contemporary resonance.

On the evidence of his prospectus, 'To the Public', dated 10 October 1793, Blake had completed *America*, indicating that he produced the work between spring 1792 and autumn 1793, when Phillips identifies a relaxation in Blake's commercial engraving obligations.[9] Viscomi notes

that *America* is the most 'printlike' of the early illuminated books and, at 10*s* 6*d*, the most expensive and least profitable.[10] Blake's decorous language in the prospectus appeals to 'persons of eminence and fortune' and promises 'the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured', repeatedly addressing 'the public' (E692–93). It seems he hoped to court a polite bibliophilic audience for this and his other illuminated poems. Composing and printing *America* during a period in which the politicised imagining of 'the people' was highly topical, Blake envisioned competing notions of 'the people' clashing in the American War of Independence and this may have been calculated to appeal to those at the more radical end of Whig politics.[11]

The poem's medium and prophetic idiom represent a major development in Blake's art. He continued to exploit Enlightenment strategies to demystify the rhetoric of apotheosis in projections of crown and aristocratic authority, but his adoption of a self-consciously mythic mode propels the poem into a more radical territory. *America*'s imagining of popular resistance in action draws readers beyond the ostensible subject of political revolt to perceive through it even more sublime possibilities. Blake's mythical and apocalyptic mode reanimates the people's energies previously displaced in figures of apotheosis, but not without raising disturbing tensions and ambivalences.

As I will go on to discuss, in *America* Blake reimagines and idealises the American Revolution as a democratic revolt. The poem's democratic enthusiasm is, however, distinct from much contemporary radicalism, which focused primarily on asserting individual natural rights. In *The Majesty of the People* (2014), Green notes that in late eighteenth-century political discourse the concept of popular sovereignty admitted of constitutional Whig and more radical interpretations. Green notes Negri's identification of popular sovereignty with 'constituent power', a term which Kalyvas distinguishes as a pre-constitutional 'power to form governments' as opposed to traditional sovereignty's 'power of command'.[12] Blake's poem dramatises the moment at which the 'right of resistance' to arbitrary power is acted upon by the people as a whole. Whereas for Whigs the people could legitimately exercise the right to resistance 'in extraordinary politics', in order to defend the constitution against executive tyranny, Blake depicts the American Revolution releasing long-restrained human mental and physical energies in excess of such constitutionalism, inviting a utopian imagining of new political formations. At the close of the poem, as the guardians of Albion, France, Spain, and Italy seek 'to shut the five

gates of their law-built heaven' opened by the American revolt, 'the five gates were consum'd, & their bolts and hinges melted' (16:19–22, E58). The perceptual underpinnings and starry structures of the *ancien régime* governments dissolve, potentially clearing the way for an unrestrained and utopian body politic to emerge. Blake's myth of American resistance to British tyranny and military might is analogous to France's contemporary struggle against European forces of reaction.

## Albion's Angel and Apotheosis

A substantial proportion of *America* deploys the Euhemerism Blake adopted in *The French Revolution*, whereby the myths of regal and aristocratic divinity are exposed as vulnerably material. But Blake also develops the unusual approach of the earlier poem by which that demystification is represented through a mythical and prophetic mode. *America* repeats many of *The French Revolution*'s symbolic patterns, but expands them in an attempt to move beyond the earlier poem's contradictions. Blake again adopts figures of apotheosis to represent tyrannical authority, but now the networks of regal, religious, and martial historical agents are absorbed into the figures of 'Albion's wrathful Prince', 'Albions Angel', and 'Albions Guardian', seemingly interchangeable personifications of repressive authority.[13]

In the first line of the prophecy, 'The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent' (3:1, E52), this figure of traditional authority appears as a star-formation and spreads war in the form of red meteors:

> The eastern cloud rent; on his cliffs stood Albions wrathful Prince
> A dragon form clashing his scales at midnight he arose,
> And flam'd red meteors round the land of Albion beneath[.]
> His voice, his locks, his awful shoulders, and his glowing eyes,
> Appear to the Americans upon the cloudy night.
>
> (3:14–17, 4:1, E52–53)

As well as the Red Dragon of Revelation 12:3, the peculiar 'dragon form' alludes to the constellation Cetus (Fig. 4.1), which Blake depicts heading westwards at the top of Plate 6 (Fig. 4.2).[14] This composite of the red dragon and Cetus, the whale or sea-monster in Greek myth to which Andromeda was sacrificed before being rescued by Perseus, seems an apt figure for the naval predations of British authority, perceived by

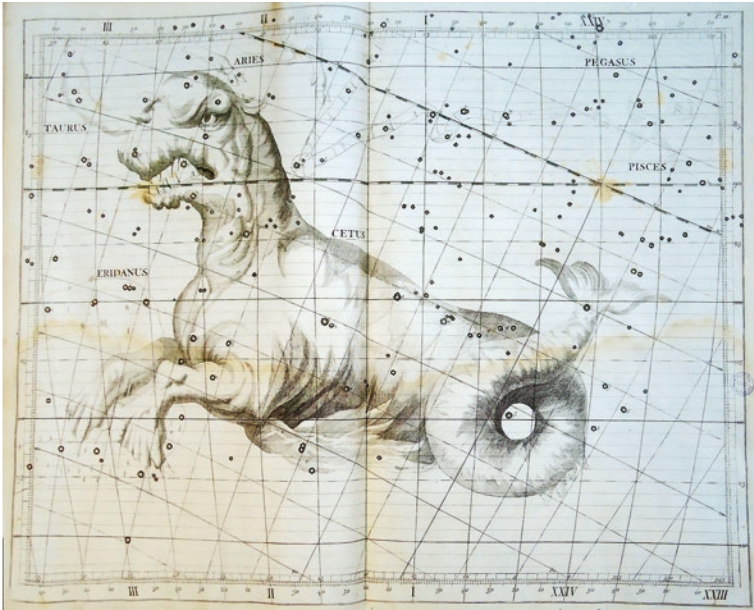


**Fig. 4.1** *Cetus* from John Flamsteed, *Atlas Coelestis* (1729). The Lit and Phil, Newcastle

the Americans in a celestial visionary form. The poly-scenic visual narrative morphs the dragon into a composite of a priest with a book and the constellation Centaurus or Sagittarius with a spear or arrow, which immortalised the pious centaur Chiron.[15] The images echo Edmund Burke's description in 1775 of England's remote authority over its colony: 'You have, indeed, winged ministers of vengeance, who carry your bolts in their pounces to the remotest verge of the sea.'[16] The logic of Blake's sequence is, however, Euhemerist. Albion's starry 'wrathful prince' is progressively humanised and finally demythologised at the bottom of the plate. Under the line 'The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision' (4:12, E53), a kneeling, despairing figure pulls his hair next to a bizarre shape like a beached whale, while a nearby figure sheltering a small child remains awestricken, looking up at the starry dragon form. The illumination invites a contrast between the heavenly projection of authority and its underwhelming human reality.

**Fig. 4.2** *America*, Copy E, Plate 6. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2015 William Blake Archive

Blake continues to associate the 'heavens' with structures which support established power. Through the inspiration of Orc, the Americans' successful revolt against Albion's Angel reveals the contingency and mutability of the latter's heavenly self-representation. At the conclusion of the poem, 'The Heavens [melt] from north to south' (16:2, E57), a process that reveals Urizen to the subjects over whom he has exercised unseen despotic sway:

> Urizen who sat
> Above all heavens in thunders wrap'd, emerg'd his leprous head
> From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous
> Falling into the deep sublime! flag'd with grey-brow'd snows
> And thunderous visages, his jealous wings wav'd over the deep;[…]
> Leprous his limbs, all over white, and hoary was his visage.
> Weeping in dismal howlings before the stern Americans
> Hiding the Demon red with clouds & cold mists from the earth;
> Till Angels & weak men twelve years should govern o'er the strong:
> And then their end should come, when France receiv'd the Demons light. (16:2–15, E57)

Blake associates Urizen with a number of attributes of the Burkean sublime here (thunder, mists and obscurity, power, and tumult), but seasons the description with sickness and weakness. While Urizen's counter-revolutionary activity and the obscure 'twelve years' between American and French revolutions have drawn most critical attention,[17] his physical and emotional frailty are more significant; this divinity's transcendence is compromised. Orc forces him to emerge from an invisible, thunderous abode 'Above all heavens' and reveal his diseased limbs to the people's gaze. At the very moment when Urizen exercises supposedly divine power against Orc, Blake exposes him as a vulnerably human projection. On the final plate, an aged, kneeling figure with Urizen's attributes bows his head and raises his hands in prayer, whilst numerous smaller human figures adopt a range of attitudes on and around him. He wears a grey or dark green priestly cassock in the coloured copies, and his beard flows from his face as a river, recalling Blake's plate *The Fertilisation of Egypt* in Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791), a fitting image for a weeping god.[18] Small figures at liberty upon or around his body either mock or ignore the giant form. One reads a newspaper, pamphlet, or small book on Urizen's head, whilst another histrionically mimics his praying posture. The former sky deity of Albion, now humanised, neither contains his subjects nor is worshipped by them.

## *America*'s Mythical Mode

*America*'s medium as composite art and its expansive mythopoetic and apocalyptic style move beyond the prophetic vision of contemporary events and persons in *The French Revolution*. For Carretta, Blake 'increasingly transcends particular historical contexts as his vision becomes more universal in application', changing his technique because 'a simple one-to-one equivalency between an allusion in his verse and a historical person would diminish his poetic purpose'.[19] Blake's mythopoesis certainly thwarts this kind of naïve allegorical reading, but rather than transcending history the poem seems motivated by its contemporary moment, drawing out its significance within a broader visionary history of human existence.

Two discarded early plates retain more explicit political references and indicate Blake revised the poem to amplify its mythical and apocalyptic content and to foreground Orc's role. On cancelled Plate *b*, the illuminations for which appear with alternative text on Plate 6, Blake initially made relatively straightforward historical connections when describing the descent of Albion's Angel:

> To this deep valley situated by the flowing Thames;
> Where George the third holds council. & his Lords & Commons meet:
> Shut out from mortal sight the Angel came. (*b*:8–10, E58)

The Angel appears to be an emanation returning to its source in the king, Lords, and Commons, and these lines effectively Euhemerise this mythical spirit of authority. While Blake might have removed the reference to the king in response to political repression from May 1792 onwards,[20] the final plate concludes with the hardly less explicit line 'The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision' (4:12, E53). The text in the finished plate, by contrast, describes the advent of Orc:

> As human blood shooting its veins all round the orbed heaven
> Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood
> And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea;
> Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge
> Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire
> With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers
> Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere.
> (4:5–11, E53)

These lines subvert the trajectory of apotheosis. Orc falls from the heavens into earth's atmosphere and glows over the Atlantic, but Blake represents this in terms of incarnation and visceral human energy. The red clouds are like veins of 'human blood shooting', and Orc is 'naked', a 'Human fire' with burning 'terrible limbs'. As Damrosch and Tannenbaum note, Blake alludes to Isaiah 63:1–3, which envisages the Messiah coming from Edom in red garments.[21] The simile of the 'wedge | Of iron heated in the furnace' foregrounds manufacture, suggesting Orc is a human rather than transcendent deity. The terrible limbs of fire are surrounded by the 'cloudy terrors' and 'banners dark & towers', elsewhere associated with the feudal trappings of the English soldiers (13:8–9, E56). The phrase 'heat but not light', alludes to the torments of Satan and the rebel angels in *Paradise Lost* (i.62–63), leading several critics to suggest Blake deliberately undercut Orc's appeal.[22] But this effect is produced by Albion's armies surrounding Orc's limbs, attempting to hide his fiery light, just as Urizen later pours his snow and ice 'Hiding the Demon red with clouds & cold mists from the earth' (16:13, E57). Orc's Satanic properties arise from the military repression and mystification of the revolt he personifies.

## Blake's Sublime Personification

In *America*, Blake appears to have been conscious of the risk of merely reconstituting the patriarchal authority of Albion's Prince and Angel in heroicised revolutionary patriots, statesmen, and military leaders. The poem's unfamiliar personifications are a means to escape this impasse. Simon Bainbridge notes how much political poetry of the 1790s represents 'world affairs and political developments' acted out by personified 'giant forms' such as Liberty, Tyranny, War, and Peace,[23] and Blake's poem is a characteristically subversive response to this trend. Blake's staging of historical figures alongside mythological entities is amongst *America*'s most distinctive features, which particularly confused Gilchrist:

> The very names – Urthona, Enitharmon, Orc, etc. – are but Ossian-like shadows, and contrast oddly with those of historic or matter-of-fact personages occasionally mentioned in the poem [...] [Amid this] chaos the merely human agents show small and remote, perplexed and busied in an ant-like way.[24]

Swinburne similarly felt that 'in the interludes of the great fight between Urizen and Orc the human names of American or English leaders fall upon the ear with a sudden incongruous clash', with the action 'wholly

swamped by the allegory'.[25] Rather than aesthetic solecisms, the discontinuous modes and diminished historical individuals of *America* are part of a reimagining of the American Revolution as a sublime event driven by collective energies. Beneath the historical facts of the revolution, *America* reveals a utopian surplus of significance.

Stephen Knapp has described how eighteenth-century critics disputed the propriety of mixing 'real' and allegorical agents in epic poetry. Milton's encounter between Satan, Sin, and Death in Book Two of *Paradise Lost* became the *locus classicus* of the debate. Joseph Addison, Richard Hurd, and Samuel Johnson lamented this 'gothic' intrusion into the continuum of epic 'realism'. They particularly noted the radically destabilising effect of allegorical figures upon the status of 'real' or historical characters when both interact in the same narrative reality. The metamorphosis of supposedly rhetorical personifications into narrative agents implied its potential reversibility:

> If personifications are animated through the intensification of a metaphor (or more precisely, through the intensification of a metaphoric vehicle at the expense of its supposed "tenor"), then mimetic agents may have a converse tendency to slide "back" into metaphor (that is, the agent may turn out to be the vehicle of a previously unsuspected or forgotten tenor).[26]

Blake's opening roll-call of familiar names, 'Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green' (3:4, E52), generates an expectation of the sort of panegyrics to individual republican heroes found, for example, in Joel Barlow's *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) and Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*.[27] However, Blake draws his readers into a much less familiar narrative of the revolution, focusing on the conflict between Orc, figures of Albion's authority, and ultimately Urizen. Their presence alongside the historical Washington et al. merges normally distinct levels of reality. The leaders' authority appears provisional, responding to rather than commanding the giant, collective forms who act out the conflict. From the outset, Washington's role becomes that of chorus; he describes and interprets the drama to the 'warlike men' (3:3, E52) standing with him. Albion's Angel, calling for war, bemoans his ineffective 'punishing demons' and angels and describes the defiant American heroes:

> For terrible men stand on the shores, & in their robes I see
> Children take shelter from the lightnings, there stands Washington
> And Paine and Warren with their foreheads reard toward the east
> But clouds obscure my aged sight. A vision from afar!
>
> (9:9–12, E54)

Washington, Paine, and Warren merely 'stand', while the 'terrible men' embody benevolent but reactive paternalism. The major contribution of these patriots is iconic resistance (perhaps echoing Ezekiel's defiant forehead in 3:7–8), rather than direct agency. Dörrbecker suggests these lines allude to mediaeval images of the Virgin Mary sheltering children from the wrath of God.[28] Such a vision is appropriate to its viewer: Albion's Angel bemoans his obscure 'aged sight', reflecting both physical decline and a worldview tinctured by superstition.

By sidelining the representative heroes of the rebellion, Blake rewrites America's history from the perspective of giant forms, who personify the collective psychology involved in the conflict.[29] Washington is one of the few American patriots to speak, and outlines the colonists' subjection:

> Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea;
> A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain
> Descends link by link from Albions cliffs across the sea to bind
> Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;
> Heads deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands work-bruis'd,
> Feet bleeding on the sultry sands, and the furrows of the whip
> Descend to generations that in future times forget.——
> (3:6–12, E52)

The chain binding America to England alludes to the 'golden Chain' which connects Earth and Heaven in *Paradise Lost* (ii.1050), but whereas God's chain is gold, suggesting love, Albion's is repressive iron. More significantly, Blake's image points to Milton's source in the *Iliad* (viii.18–27). There Zeus mocks the lesser gods, asserting his omnipotence by challenging them to combine with mortals and attempt to pull him by his golden chain linking heaven to earth, which he has fixed to the summit of Olympus. Blake's allusion mythicises the conflict, asserting America's vulnerability in the face of its apparently omnipotent parent's tyranny.

Washington envisages the American body politic as a Briareus-like giant uniting multiple faces, heads, eyes, hands, and feet, and describes its enslavement in lines whose parataxis suggests links in the chain of oppression but also contrasts America's physicality to England's heavenly tyranny.[30] The image of chained slaves, however, also suggests limits to the patriot rhetoric of liberty. For Makdisi, Blake foregrounds the 'slave-labor' not normally prominent in contemporary accounts of 'the genteel work or the political struggles' of Washington and his fellow leaders.[31] Many American leaders were known slave-owners, a point Samuel Johnson made

forcefully in *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775): 'how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?'[32] Washington's catalogue of depredations practised by the English on 'our' limbs also suggests that, like Seyes in *The French Revolution*, he claims to speak as the 'voice of the nation'. Yet it remains unclear whether he is really addressing the people, or 'the people' as embodied by his fellow-leaders. Makdisi's account of the poem foregrounds the prominence of urban crowds in the early stages of the struggle against England, before these popular energies were redirected into legislative assemblies representing 'the people'.[33] While the debates over representation during the settlement of the American constitution were complex, the mechanisms established for choosing a federated national government favoured what Morgan terms a 'natural aristocracy' of educated gentlemen of wealth and property.[34] Blake depicts these American political and military leaders as passive witnesses:

> In the flames stood & view'd the armies drawn out in the sky
> Washington Franklin Paine & Warren Allen Gates & Lee:
> And heard the voice of Albions Angel give the thunderous command.
> (14:1–3, E56)

These airborne 'armies' recall the 'starry hosts' of *The French Revolution*, while the 'thunderous command' of Albion's Angel aligns him with Zeus or Jove. Blake certainly resists attributing tangible leadership and agency to Washington and the patriot leaders, using Orc to personify a power too sublime for embodiment in individual representatives. His visionary history of the rebellion, however, provides the legislative assemblies with a more significant role in the resistance than Makdisi would allow.

## Resistance to Tyranny: American Angels and Crowds

The Americans' own representatives are implicated in Albion's heavenly hierarchy. The 'thirteen Angels' from whom Albion's Angel demands assistance correspond to the thirteen American colonies, effectively representing their territories like tutelary deities. Blake again draws on astronomical discourse to describe political authority distant from the people's energies. The Angels hold their council in a Platonic 'ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies' situated 'in the forest of God' upon the 'Atlantean hills' (10:6–9, E55). Mysteriously, the palace was raised 'By Ariston the king of

beauty for his stolen bride' (10:10), an obscure allusion which probably merges Poseidon, who built Atlantis for Cleito, and Ariston, a Spartan king, who tricked his friend to take his beautiful wife.[35] There may also be an allusion to Asterion (or Asterius), a king of Crete whose name means 'star-ruler'. Cretan merchants abducted Europa for him, the Euhemerist explanation for the myth of her abduction by Zeus.[36]

As Plato described it in *Critias*, Atlantis was governed by ten regional kings, adhering to traditions laid down by Poseidon, but it declined into worldly corruption and was punished by Zeus.[37] In a poem dealing with colonial struggle, the allusion to a stolen bride and the wrath of a superior power suggests England's tyranny. In Blake's poem, America's 'decline' is from obedient fealty to Albion. The 'forest of God' recalls 'the forests of the night' (E24) in which Blake's tyger rages and indicates that the palace is in the night sky. Most significantly, as an 'archetype', it is an ideal, Platonic government and thus a model for later 'mighty Emperies'. Not only does this suggest heavenly elevation, its corruption and destruction in Plato's myth foreshadows the fall of England's colonial government.

The Angels become 'perturb'd' (10:11), a term denoting astronomical deviation from a regular orbit around a primary body. Drawn from their allegiance to Albion by the mass of popular resistance, the Angels resign their heavenly stations. Led by 'Bostons Angel', the thirteen reject Albion's demands of martial support and spurn their celestial trappings, prior to emerging onto the revolutionary stage. Boston's Angel affirms the right of resistance to tyranny, declaring 'no more I follow, no more obedience pay' (11:15):

> So cried he, rending off his robe & throwing down his scepter.
> In sight of Albions Guardian, and all the thirteen Angels
> Rent off their robes to the hungry wind, & threw their golden scepters
> Down on the land of America. indignant they descended
> Headlong from out their heav'nly heights, descending swift as fires
> Over the land. (12:1–6, E55)

The robes and sceptres symbolise sovereignty and are returned to the nation. Echoing Satan 'Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky' (*PL* i.45), the Angels descend and 'by Washington & Paine & Warren they stood' (12:7). Despite this dramatic entrance, they also become mere spectators of the revolutionary battle, all being secondary to Orc and the American people. Nevertheless, as contemporary commentators including Burke and early historians such as David Ramsay noted, the provincial

American legislative assemblies were important factors in the revolution; popular in nature, they enabled the colonies to develop 'nearly to the magnitude of a nation'.[38] In this dramatic instant, Blake represents a longer historical process of disaffiliation from British governmental and regal authority.

As Makdisi observes, a crowd of American citizens are the only human agents to act decisively when, in response to Albion's plagues, 'all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire' (14:19, E56). The energetic alliteration of 'rush', 'wrath', and 'raging fire' indicates a close relationship between the politicised crowd's activity and the giant rebel Orc. The repeated adjective 'fierce' aligns the personification and populace:

> Fury! rage! madness! in a wind swept through America
> And the red flames of Orc that folded roaring fierce around
> The angry shores, and the fierce rushing of th'inhabitants together:
> The citizens of New-York close their books & lock their chests;
> The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
> The scribe of Pensylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
> The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear.
>
> Then had America been lost, o'erwhelmed by the Atlantic,
> And Earth had lost another portion of the infinite,
> But all rush together in the night of wrath and raging fire
> The red fires rag'd! the plagues recoil'd! then rolld they back with fury
> On Albions Angels. (14:10–20, 15:1, E56)

The wind, Orc's flames, and the rushing inhabitants all merge, without a clear hierarchy of causation. Makdisi suggests that the men drop tools symbolising individual trades, thus 'not simply losing but altogether detonating their prior individuality', a prerequisite for joining the 'fierce rushing' crowd and a sign of Blake's critique of modern individual subjectivity.[39] The process is, however, slightly more complex and less immediate and voluntary. The initial 'rushing' seems prior to these men's actions, and the citizen, mariner, scribe, and builder respond by fearfully ceasing activity. The additive anaphora suggests a sublime moment of blockage, with these astonished figures halting activities making up the communal life of America. When the citizens of New York close their books and chests, they seem isolated in individual subjectivity: a Blakean pun on 'chests' indicates a loss of sympathetic interaction. The builder drops his hammer 'in fear', suggesting the passive astonishment which Burke associated with

the experience of the Sublime as terror.[40] At this moment of individualised incapacity, the danger of America being 'lost, o'erwhelm'd by the Atlantic' and Earth having 'lost another portion of the infinite', links America to the fate of Atlantis, sunk by the wrathful Zeus. At this crisis, Blake draws on the dialectic of the sublime. Conventionally, the mind is astonished by a sublime stimulus, the immensity, power, or danger of which threatens to overwhelm the self. However, in expanding itself to comprehend the sublime object or idea, the mind is invigorated and achieves a new sense of its own capacity, power, and unity.[41] Blake, however, replaces the reconfirmed subject with a transformed, collective form of consciousness signified in the 'wrath and raging fire' and 'red fires' (14:19–20, E56). Neil Hertz notes the connections between the metaphor of blockage and the mind's 'major experiential transformation' in narratives of religious conversion, and the Americans seem to undergo this process communally.[42] When the members of the body politic recombine, the Americans recover from threatened dissolution and reaffirm their subjectivity on a national rather than individual level. The sublime mode of this encounter allows them to face up to the might of their oppressors, in the process absorbing and transforming this power into a superior form which allows them to triumph.

It is unclear in what exactly the rushing consists, but the Americans' success is unmistakably the product of cooperative energy and physical effort, and it invites readers to respond with wonder at the miraculous event and imagine the process. The fierce rushing gives the Americans the agency to recoil Albion's plagues. These plagues may refer to war-crippled social and economic intercourse, because 'the spotted plague smote Bristols | And the Leprosy Londons Spirit, sickening all their bands' (15:2–3, E56–57). The retaliation strikes the tutelary 'spirits' of pre-eminent trading cities and sows discord in the social bodies which comprise them. 'Bands' also carries military resonance, suggesting the revolt undermines British martial fervour and unity behind the war. The Americans' spontaneous, free association contrasts with their enemy's militaristic hierarchy. Enraged, Albion's Angel burns 'outstretchd on wings of wrath cov'ring | The eastern sky, spreading his awful wings across the heavens' (13:11–12, E56), whilst 'Beneath him roll'd his num'rous hosts, all Albions Angels' (13:13).[43] Albion's Angel assumes total control of subordinate tutelary spirits. Being 'camp'd' suggests these angels also burn in nightly tents in the sky, and their presence darkens 'the Atlantic mountains' (13:14). Armed with diseases to cast down, they number 'forty millions, must'ring

in the eastern sky' (13:16), far in excess of historical fact. Albion's Angel assumes the role of a wrathful God in dispensing plagues, and he requires compulsion from his subjects. The verbs 'roll'd' and 'must'ring' describe the 'hosts' as clouds set in motion beneath his wings, with the troops gathering in formation. Albion's Angel appears to be the apotheosis of hierarchical, militaristic authority.

Cancelled Plate *c* foregrounds the vision of England as an enslaved martial body politic. The Angel prepares his forces:

> [*Then Albions Angel rose*] resolv'd to the cove of armoury:
> His shield that bound twelve demons & their cities in its orb,
> He took down from its trembling pillar; from its cavern deep,
> His helm was brought by Londons Guardian, & his thirsty spear
> By the wise spirit of Londons river: silent stood the King breathing
> damp mists:
> And on his aged limbs they clasp'd the armour of terrible gold.
> (*c*:1–6, E58)

Blake ironically alludes here to Achilles's shield decorated with the zodiac and his helmet in *The Iliad*, drawing on Pope's translation (v.5–10).[44] He adapts his source, refashioning the shield from a celestial gift to a tool of superstition kept deep in darkness, which oppressively binds the energy of twelve major cities. Despite the sickly 'damp mists' he breathes, the inadequate aged king is supposedly deified by his gold armour and his grasp on the twelve cities.

## Orc and the Transformation of Apotheosis

In contrast to the twelve demons, Orc breaks his fetters. Although Albion's Angel still sees him in astronomical terms, 'like a comet, or more like the planet red' (5:2, E53), Orc embodies visceral energy as an 'Intense! naked! […] Human fire fierce glowing' (4:8, E53). In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*'s 'Song of Liberty' the apotheosis trope is clearly reversed as the jealous 'starry king' hurls the 'new born fire' through 'the starry night' and into the 'western sea' (E44), but in *America* Orc is not entirely materialised. He appears in the morning's red clouds over the Atlantic, more proximate than the stars but still elevated above the Americans. Blake distinguishes the actors in the revolt, representing the rebelling American Angels, the rushing of 'all' the American populace, and the energy of Orc as distinct but related political forces. Rather than a

simple allegorical figure of revolution or the spirit of the American people, Orc is a complementary force in the revolt. His colossal stature suggests a popular giant, consonant with the people's energies but to a degree independent of them. When the Americans rebuff the English blasts, 'The plagues creep on the burning winds driven by flames of Orc, | And by the fierce Americans rushing together in the night' (15:11–12, E57). The connective is ambiguous. 'And' initially suggests Orc and the Americans produce the burning winds, but the lines can be read as describing two separate agencies which interact; Orc's flames heat the air, while the rushing together of the Americans blasts it across the Atlantic. Orc here has affinities with Rousseau's General Will, in that both signify a polity's collective desire for liberty but neither can act without executive agents.[45] Unlike Rousseau, however, Blake can imagine the populace as enactors of their own revolutionary will. While this perhaps indicates a scepticism towards representative politics even more profound than that of Rousseau, it is also tied to a defensive act of resistance rather than to framing new laws.

Blake's complex description of Orc in *America* has led to much critical debate over the nature of the character, from a heroic embodiment of liberty to a nascent despot, informed by Frye's influential model of the 'Orc cycle' in which the victorious rebel turns tyrant.[46] Dorfman more cautiously suggests the poem is 'provisional, descriptive, and engaged in a troubled valorization of change'.[47] The sinister gothic trappings of Albion's agents necessarily invite sympathy with the Americans, but Orc blurs conventional boundaries of good and evil, representing an amoral life-force and will to gratified desire. As the narrator of the *Marriage* asserts, moral categories belong to the vocabulary of 'the religious', while 'Evil is the active springing from Energy' (3, E34). Blake personifies in Orc a sublime and exponential excess of energy, which absorbs individual human subjectivity. Orc's amoral power creates the conditions for action, but it seems to be the people who determine the nature of that action.

Despite the ostensibly binary opposition between Orc and Albion's Angel, *America* does not simply apply the Enlightenment critique of apotheosis to undermine the myths of English hegemony, but transforms it in order to reaffirm the value of a distinctly utopian mode of mythical thinking. Numerous commentators have noted how in Plates 10 and 12 Orc mirrors Urizen, drawing attention to continuities as well as contrasts.[48] Urizen appears amidst clouds and over waves while Orc is surrounded by flames. Their opposite feet are exposed. Urizen appears at the top of the

page, an Old Testament sky-god in priestly vestments whose outstretched arms form a curved boundary, with the text below like that on a tablet or tombstone. This suggests repressive authority, containing Orc's expansive, apocalyptic speech. Orc springs up from the bottom of the page, his outstretched arms suggesting propulsion rather than domination, and the flames around him seem to burn through the text above. Orc mimics but transforms the pose in which Urizen assumes divine status, suggesting by contrast a volcanic eruption of physical human energy from the earth. But there are also hints of continuity with Urizen's apotheosis; Carretta notes Blake's representation 'of rebirth through the phoenix image of Orc in the flames'[49] and this figure may allude to the constellation Phoenix. Blake's transformation of the apotheosis motif is evident in later versions of Plate 4.[50] The monochrome Copy H (1793) depicts Orc climbing out of the earth. In Copy A (1795), Blake adds a dawning sun in the bottom right-hand corner. In Copy M (*c*.1807), he places it behind Orc's head, and augments this in Copy O (1821) with additional radiance. The progression increasingly suggests a halo, merging a traditional image of holiness with the natural warmth of the sun.

Blake also transforms stellar imagery in complex ways. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Orc falls from an initially heavenly form. Worrall notes how Blake's text and designs trace the character's progress via constellations, with Orc 'appearing first as Orion, then as Andromeda, next as the star Algol, and finally as a comet of revolution'.[51] When Orc compares himself to a sublime eagle, lion, whale, and a serpent in the Preludium, each animal corresponds to a constellation (Aquila, Leo, Cetus, Serpens). In Plate 7 (Fig. 4.3), the unusual illuminations form a poly-scenic narrative. Amidst the clouds and flanked by floating forms holding scales and a flaming sword, a male figure raises another aloft, about to hurl it downwards. At the bottom left, the thrown figure clutches his head as he approaches hellish flames, before falling headlong into a vortex formed by a serpent coiled into a question mark. Erdman interprets this as 'a revolutionary tribunal of three naked youths up in the heavens', who judge against 'the King', although the text contains no hint of such a tribunal.[52] Doskow's suggestion that this represents 'the story of Orc's judgement and expulsion from heaven' is suggestive in the light of the prophecy's frequent allusions to Satan's fall in *Paradise Lost*.[53] These figures are further constellations, which Blake freely arranges: Libra holds the scales, Orion wields the sword, and Hercules stands in the centre. Blake associates these starry figures with Urizen's forces of repression; Libra's scales heavily weighted

towards her left suggest despotic injustice. In this narrative sequence, Orc is expelled to hell, followed on Plate 8 with an image of his resurrection and liberation. Blake's illustrations imply that Orc's fall from

**Fig. 4.3** *America*, Copy E, Plate 7. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2015 William Blake Archive

heaven mirrors that of the American angels and is necessary in order to achieve earthly political agency. The illuminations to *America* include a number of constellations accompanied by human figures. On Plate 13, for example, humans ride Cygnus, the Swan that commemorates one of Zeus's disguises, and a serpent figure, either Serpens or Draco. The distant constellations, no longer symbols of a divine order, are now reclaimed as humanised forms of energy.

When Orc's 'hairy shoulders rend the links' and his 'wrists of fire' break free (2:2, E52), Worrall links this to Betelgeux, a star in Orion known as 'The Shoulder'.[54] 'Hairy' contributes to a series of allusions connecting Orc to Esau, the hirsute red brother tricked out of his inheritance by Jacob in Genesis 25:23–34.[55] At the top left of Plate 5, the figure with broken chains suggests Orc, modelled on Andromeda (Fig. 4.4). Worrall also ingeniously finds in the references to Orc as the 'Demon' allusions to the star Algol in the constellation of the Gorgon's head. Algol was the subject of controversy among astronomers over its fluctuations, making it an apt vehicle for Orc's rebellion against Urizen's order of fixed stars.[56]

Blake's more overt allusions are, however, enough to account for this. Albion's Angel perceives Orc 'like a comet, or more like the planet red | That once inclos'd the terrible wandering comets in its sphere' (5:2–3, E53). As a planet, a word derived from the Greek *πλάνητης*, literally 'wanderer', Mars appears to deviate from the constellations' regular movements and is notable for its dramatic colour and retrograde motion.[57] *America* is partially structured around a series of allusions which connect Orc to the Greek god of war, Ares, and especially his Roman equivalent, Mars. Albion's Angel's perplexing lines 'Then Mars thou wast our center, & the planets three flew round | Thy crimson disk' (5:4–5, E53) draw on classical myth and ritual. Under Romulus, the old Roman calendar began in March, sacred to Mars, and in the *Fasti* Ovid associates this with Romulus's apotheosis as the god Quirinus.[58] Ferber suggests that the 'planets three' may refer to *The Iliad* (iv.439–41), where Ares appears on the plain of Troy accompanied by Phobos, Deimos, and Eris: respectively, Fear, Terror, and Strife.[59] This obscure reference points to a prior cosmic order from which Mars has been displaced.

Book V of the *Iliad* depicts the gods participating in the warfare, providing a precedent for Blake's mixture of mythological and historical agents in the prophecy. *America* partially rewrites this section of Homer's epic. While Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera lend their aid to the Greeks, Ares spurs on the Trojans. With Zeus's agreement, Hera and Athena intervene,

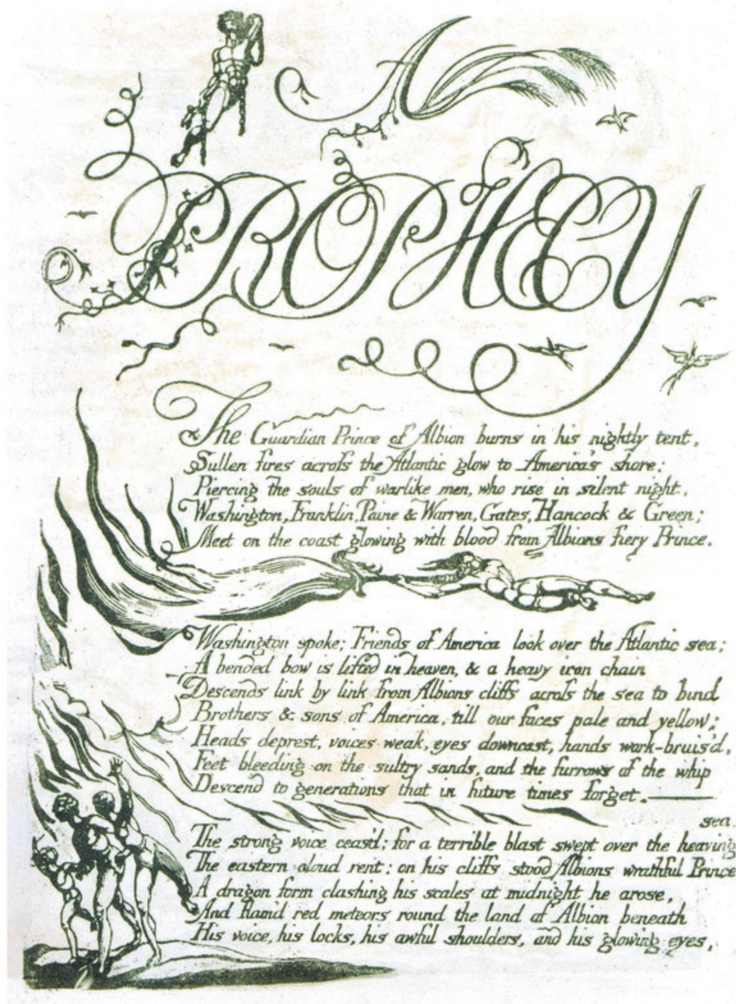


**Fig. 4.4** *America*, Copy E, Plate 5. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2015 William Blake Archive

leading Diomedes to injure Ares, who flies to Mount Olympus to complain to Zeus. The address of Albion's Angel to Orc echoes the speech in which Zeus rebukes Ares for his rebellious spirit, derived from his mother Hera (here Romanised by Pope to Jove, Mars, and Juno):

> Of lawless force shall lawless *Mars* complain?
> Of all the Gods who tread the spangled skies,
> Thou most unjust, most odious in our eyes!
> Inhuman discord is thy dire delight,
> The waste of slaughter, and the rage of fight.
> No bound, no law thy fiery temper quells,
> And all thy mother in thy soul rebels.[60]

Blake alludes to the antinomianism of Mars when Albion's Angel describes Orc as 'Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities; | Lover of wild rebellion, and transgresser of Gods Law' (7:5–6, E53–54). But Blake also merges this with a mythological allusion to the Greek Titan Kronos, who slew his father, the sky-god Uranus. When the Angel asks 'Art thou not Orc, who serpent-form'd | Stands at the gate of Enitharmon to devour her children' (7:3–4, E53), he perceives Orc in the guise of the deity who devoured his own sons, the Olympian gods, until overwhelmed by Zeus.[61]

Blake's classical allusions envision how established political authority, representing itself as divine and immutable, might be subverted by popular agency, thus rewriting one of the master-narratives of Western culture. The combination of classicism and the right of resistance to tyranny suggests Blake was appealing to a Whiggish audience invested in the radical implications of their creed. The parallel to Book V of *The Iliad* figures the Americans as Trojans besieged by the invading might of the English armies. But whereas Mars is defeated and injured, Orc leads a successful revolt which opens historical narrative out towards future possibilities. Nevertheless, Orc's victory remains provisional. Whereas Mars flees to Olympus after being wounded by Diomed, Orc remains present but hidden by forces of reaction and superstition: Urizen's 'deluge' of tears, his 'stored snows', 'icy magazines', and 'clouds & cold mists' (16:4, 9, 13, E57).[62]

Blake's allusions to Mars in *America* reflect the poem's investment in the masculine, civic humanist language of classical republicanism, but giving its traditionally aristocratic ideology a more radical edge. This gendered political discourse was based around the notion that civic virtue is only possible in a republic of autonomous, politically active citizen-landowners,

and required vigorous and selfless commitment to the public good, and vigilance against the encroachment of tyranny, corruption, passivity, and the effeminacy associated with luxury.[63] An aggressive form of this appears, troublingly, in the notorious Preludium. Initially, Orc is helpless and passive, fed by 'the shadowy daughter of Urthona' (1:1, E51) whilst 'still on high [his] spirit soars' (1:12). In civic humanist terms, his active masculine virtue is sapped by an emasculating subjection to feminine power and is sublimated into compensatory forms of the eagle, lion, whale, and serpent constellations, but ultimately unleashed in his aggressive coupling with, or rape of, Urthona's daughter.[64] Nevertheless, as Lincoln argues, Orc's condition recalls Enlightenment philosophical history's narratives of paradoxes in social development, so that 'the means by which he is oppressed are also the means by which he is nourished and stimulated'.[65]As Lincoln and other critics have noted, Urthona's daughter appears to be an indigenous Indian (naked, shadowy, helmeted, with dark hair and a bow and quiver), a common eighteenth-century personification of America. She is seized by Orc and his fires of revolution and war.[66] Lincoln suggests that in the Preludium her desire 'is apparently already conditioned by repression', and in hostile colonial conditions 'liberation becomes indistinguishable from conquest'.[67] The Preludium's sequential relation to the events of the poem proper is unclear, but if read as antecedent to the rebellion it may suggest what several contemporary historians believed, that republican and revolutionary conspiracy marked America from the time of the first Puritan settlers and broke forth in the revolution.[68] In addition to this, the contemporary historian David Ramsay argued that the 'natural seat of freedom is among high mountains, and pathless deserts, such as abound in the wilds of America'.[69] Orc's sublime aspirations and subsequent breaking of his shackles manifest the latent republican and natural energy of America.

The peculiar illustrations on Plates 3 and 4 of *America* connect these territorial associations with Orc's analogy to Ares/Mars, alluding to the obscure tale of his imprisonment underground for thirteen months in a bronze urn (see Pope's *Iliad*, v.475–80). Blake syncretically combines Mars's interment with that of Briareus, the hundred-handed giant imprisoned by Uranus within Gaia, the earth.[70] In various traditions (particularly Roman culture and alchemy) Mars is associated with iron, the material in which Urthona's daughter delivers Orc's food and drink.[71] Orc's revolutionary emergence collapses the dualism which conventionally sustains apotheosis, converging physical and earthly power with divine energy in a process that issues in radical social and political transformation.

This convergence of human and divine energy in the Preludium is structured by an important classical allusion to the founding of Rome. In the *Fasti*, Ovid explains the origins of the Lupercalia festival with reference to the legend of Rhea Silvia. She was established as a Vestal Virgin by her uncle Amulius, who deposed her father Numitor as King of Alba Longa and wished to prevent her conceiving offspring who might unseat him. Mars waylaid her and from their union she conceived Romulus and Remus. Amulius cast the twins adrift on the Tiber to die but they survived to found Rome.[72] The allusion enables Blake to draw an analogy between Rome and America, based on the rebellion against a tyrannical patriarch and the foundational roles of conflict, desire, and nature in merging the human and divine and creating a new civilisation.

Blake's classical allusions coexist with Christian paradigms, particularly the resurrection. When his voice shakes the temple, Orc proclaims:

> The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
> The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
> Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
> (6:2–4, E53)

These lines allude to Ezekiel's vision, in which the prophet's agency reanimates the bones of the House of Israel (37:1–10), and also its New Testament antitype, the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:6–7 and Luke 24:1–2). Orc's prophetic rhetoric envisages human liberty and renewal and the tricolon lines accumulate with mounting intensity. The biblical allusions suggest the reanimation of a body politic infused with divinity. But the prominent image of the freed slave remains troubling for a nation so reliant on slave labour and is clearly in excess of the achievements of the historical American Revolution. This suggests that Orc personifies a utopian horizon for freedom that can only be realised imperfectly within history.

## Blake's 'Portions of Eternity'

In *America*, Blake matches dramatic political transformation with formal and artistic experiment, especially in his creative approach to mythology. Textual strategies for representing Orc, for example, disrupt basic narrative paradigms in a panoply of biblical, literary, and visual allusions to Mars, Cronus, Satan, Jesus, Esau, Samson, and Prometheus, among other

figures.[73] Orc's origins in myth and scripture suggest Blake's poetry draws on the syncretic procedures of Enlightenment mythography. But whereas the mythographers sought to rationalise the mythical figures, tracing them to an originary myth or allegorical meaning, Blake's *America* reanimates the imaginative power of myth. By combining similar but incommensurate sources, Blake disrupts the procedures of rational allegoresis. The poem's syncretic mode also has radical implications. While allusions to Christian scripture abound in the poem, they do not have a clear precedence over pagan myth. These disorienting references combine with the overwhelming torrents of prophetic rhetoric to thoroughly defamiliarise the historical narrative and to demand the reader actively participates in generating meaning from the text and designs.

Orc provides the American people with a unified mouthpiece. He is a sublime, collective personification, emphatically fictional, who speaks in self-consciously prophetic language and expresses a popular voice beyond the mediation of representatives, such as Washington, or Seyes in *The French Revolution*. Of course, if Orc can be said to communicate the voice of the people, that voice is imagined by Blake, although Orc's provisional and contradictory nature helps maintain heterogeneity in the popular voice. He can be described in terms of Knapp's phrase 'sublime personification', when a character combines 'fanatic self-absorption and overt fictionality', matching 'the dual criteria of the sublime, its conflicting requirements of identification and distance'.[74] Orc's speeches and spectacular flourishes are distinctly theatrical, but Blake also complicates his fictionality by linking him with the Americans' historical political agency. In presenting the complex interaction of the American people with Orc's personification of their collective desire, Blake seeks to imagine the possibility of embodying and giving agency to popular sovereignty without allowing its reification.

In *America*, Orc exemplifies the humanised sublime, always exceeding the terms used to describe him but, once manifest to humans, recognisably personified. Appearing as an airborne eagle, a lion, a whale, and erupting over 'the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood' (4:6, E53), Orc echoes sublime aphorisms from the *Marriage*: 'When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius—lift up thy head!' (9, E37) and 'The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man' (8, E36). Orc appears to Albion's Angel in terms associated with the Burkean Sublime. He is 'The terror like a comet' (5:2, E53), a 'Spectre' of 'horrid length'

(5:6), and a 'terrible birth' whose 'ever-hissing jaws | And parched lips drop with fresh gore' (9:22–24, E54). There is, however, a clear disparity on Plate 9 between the Angel's denunciation of Orc as horrifying demon and the pastoral scene, in which naked children rest on a sleeping ram.[75] The illumination undermines the authority of the Angel's narrative, inviting alternative ways of imagining Orc and the revolution he drives. Mars was a Roman fertility god prior to becoming a god of war,[76] and there may be a visual pun here, connecting Ares with Aries, the constellation associated with spring and rebirth. As Tannenbaum notes, when Urthona's daughter tells Orc 'Thou art the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa' (2:8, E52) Blake draws on the Swedenborgian idea that Africans strongly identified God as a man, quite unlike the horrors Albion's Angel imagines.[77]

Orc's illimitable desire gestures towards an economy of the sublime at odds with Burke's. Here, proliferating pleasure educes the divine from the human body and environment:

> For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life;
> Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.
> Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumd;
> Amidst the lustful fires he walks: his feet become like brass,
> His knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold.
> (8:13–17, E54)

The antithetical and reinforcing parallelisms mimic man's expansive transformation. The lines adapt several passages from the Book of Daniel, with the figure in the fire as an image of mankind, whose component parts become immortal, distinct yet unified.[78] The reader is invited to conceive of a corporate human body without an externally imposed form. Makdisi describes a similar logic in Orc's description of the risen slave, where it is 'not the organism that unilaterally controls and determines the action of the organs; it is the organs that recombine to produce a new organism'.[79] A body spontaneously transformed or generated by its organs requires a reimagining of possibilities beyond the confines of conventional human physiology. As De Luca suggests of Blake's poetry more generally, in *America* his positive conception of the sublime in a human form remains in dialectic with the dark and 'lurid grandeurs' of Burke's sublime, 'presented as an antithetical negative, the object of a critique'.[80] In this context, it is important to note that Orc is imagined in opposition to Albion's Angel and Urizen, and thus conditioned and compromised by this opposi-

tion. The peaceful image of the ram and children on Plate 9 invites readers to imagine alternative forms Orc might take in contexts other than war.

The poem derives much of its sublime effect from Blake's composite art, which gains its first fully prophetic manifestation in *America*. Many scholars have discussed his marked aversion to the letter of the law and the word as fetishised in written and printed form.[81] In the *Marriage*, the Devil spurns authority by rejecting the errors contained in 'All Bibles or sacred codes' (4, E34) and Orc's peroration in *America* rejects Urizen's commandments and the institutional view of Christianity they underpin: 'That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad' (8:5, E54). Blake's composite art and prophetic rhetoric stimulate interpretation, in contrast to the authority Urizen imposes through his laws and sacred book. *America*'s heterogeneous and disruptive form encourages a reading process with affinities to the American people's active self-assertion.[82] Orc's embrace of Urthona's silent daughter in the Preludium is an aptly disturbing overture to a text which violently disrupts passive reading habits.[83] The frontispiece suggests Blake's self-conscious desire to challenge his readers. Underneath the title, to the left a woman sits poring over a book. A child leans against her back and points down to 'Prophecy', whilst another guides her reading. To the right, a man looks down at his book, whilst a youth to his left points to the word 'AMERICA' and another to his right gestures beyond the margin, emphasising that *America* is not simply text on the page but requires active participation and imaginative completion by its readers. This may explain Blake's decision to remove the final lines of the Preludium in all copies except A and O:

> [*The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song; enrag'd he swung*
> *His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against*
> *A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,*
> *And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings.*]
> (2:[18–21], E52)

After the aggressive sexuality of the Preludium, the lines perhaps comprise an apologia, with Blake '*asham'd of his own song*'. They may also record his ambivalence towards the violence of *America*, reflecting horror at the September Massacres of 1792, when Paris mobs, stirred up by the Duke of Brunswick's threats, butchered prisoners in the city jails. Alexander Gilchrist describes Blake as a proud 'Son of Liberty' who bravely donned a cockade and the *bonnet rouge* in support of the early French Revolution, but tore them off in response to the bloodshed in Paris.[84]

Blake's removal of the lines certainly excludes a definitive authorial position from which to interpret the prophecy that follows. If multiple constructions of the text are possible, as the figures around the readers on the title page indicate, then interpretation might become a collective process, the play of different perspectives, even though the limited contemporary circulation of the poem necessarily problematises this. As Blake's letter to Dr Trusler of 23 August 1799 said of the 'wisest of the Ancients', his composite art 'rouzes the faculties to act' (E702). *America* might be seen as engaging the reader in a form of active textual citizenship, making the act of reading itself partake of the popular energy which inspires the rebellion and the poem.

In later years, Samuel Palmer did not recall hearing Blake 'express any admiration for the American republic'.[85] Certainly, *America* shows little interest in the nation beyond the point at which its people combine to exercise their right to resist tyranny. This is, however, momentous enough to melt the 'heavens' and Tannenbaum notes in the poem 'a feeling of optimism that is unique in Blake's early prophecies'.[86] The freedom Blake invites us to envisage exceeds the actual achievements of the American Revolution, after which, of course, slavery and oligarchy continued. But Blake's reimagining of the historical events suggests they harboured a more profound possibility of transformation, perceptible within but going beyond the popular political revolution. The poem's mythical mode, which resists assimilation into a linear narrative, seems devised to convey utopian possibilities within the historical revolt. By June 1793, however, Blake's revolutionary optimism had turned into despair, and he wrote in his notebook 'I say I shant live five years | And if I live one it will be a | Wonder' (E694).The lifeblood of the revived body politic in *America* had been poisoned and in *Europe* Blake returns to the imagery of apotheosis to diagnose the disease.

## Notes

1. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 1–27.
2. Ibid., 24.
3. Mee, *DE* 4, 9.
4. Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 203–7 and Mitchell, *Charles James Fox*, 117–19.
5. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox*, 124.
6. Black, *British Foreign Policy*, 368–69, 375, 389.

7. Ibid., 397, 404–5, 408–9.
8. Behrendt, *Reading William Blake*, 105.
9. Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror, 1792–93', 264.
10. *BIB* 264–66.
11. George Cumberland, for example, owned Copy B. See *BB* 91.
12. Green, *Majesty of the People*, 4–9.
13. See Dörrbecker, *CP* 130, for the relationship between Albion's Prince and Angel.
14. References to illuminated plates correspond to Copy F. Worrall, in 'Immortal Tent', 283, notes the resemblance to Cetus and suggests a similarity to Draco.
15. See Andrews, 'Ordering Space in Renaissance Times', 84–94. Calè discusses the technique in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery. See *Fuseli's Milton Gallery*, 126–29. For Chiron's apotheosis as Centaurus and Sagittarius, see Condos, *Star Myths*, 79–83, 183–86.
16. 'Mr Burke's Speech on Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies' (1775), in *Edmund Burke on Empire, Liberty, and Reform*, 86.
17. See, for example, Bloom's commentary (E903), and Bindman, *Blake as Artist*, 79.
18. Butlin, *PD* I, 213.
19. Carretta, *George III*, 154–55.
20. See Ackroyd, *Blake*, 167.
21. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 328 and Tannenbaum, *BT* 128.
22. See Paley, *EI* 61.
23. Bainbridge, 'Politics and Poetry', 94.
24. Gilchrist, *Life* (1863), 109–11.
25. Swinburne, *William Blake*, 262.
26. Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime*, 60.
27. See Erdman *BPAE* 23 for comparison with Washington in Book V of Barlow's poem.
28. *CP* 132. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 31–32, argues these figures mostly 'stand around in declamatory poses whose absurd severity makes them almost comical'.
29. McCord, 'West of Atlantis', 386.
30. For a parallel, see Volume II of *The History of New-Hampshire*, 323–34, in which Jeremy Belknap argues that to submit to England's stamp duty 'was to rivet the shackles of slavery on ourselves and our posterity', while to 'revolt, was to rend asunder the

most endearing connexion, and hazard the resentment of a powerful nation'.

31. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 33.
32. [Johnson], *Taxation No Tyranny*, 89.
33. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 46.
34. Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 46.
35. Plato, *Critias*, 113c–e, trans. Robin Waterfield, in *Selected Myths*, 110–11, and Damon, *BD* 27.
36. See *Bell's New Pantheon*, I, 101.
37. *Critias*, 119c–121c, in *Selected Myths*, 118–21.
38. Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, I, 4. See also Burke, 'Conciliation', 82–84.
39. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 34–39.
40. See Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 57–60, 95–98, 246–53.
41. Hertz, 'The Notion of Blockage', 47.
42. Ibid., 48–53.
43. Tannenbaum, *BT* 139, suggests this alludes to the vision of an eagle in 2 Esdras 11:39–44.
44. Noted by Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 309. In Homer's *Iliad* the passage occurs in Book xviii.
45. See Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), Book II, Chapters I and vii, Book III, Chapter i.
46. Fuller sees Orc as wholly positive in *Blake's Heroic Argument*, 68. Paley critiques Orc's 'will-to-power' in *EI* 61–65. For the 'Orc Cycle', see Frye, *FS* 205–35. Hobson challenges Frye's cyclical model in 'The Myth of Blake's "Orc Cycle"'.
47. Dorfman, '"King of Beauty" and "Golden Word"', 134.
48. Dörrbecker, *CP* 60–63, summarises opinions, from Orc mocking Urizen to continuities between the two indicating Blake's guarded attitude towards revolution.
49. Carretta, *George III*, 182.
50. The dates are attributed by Viscomi, *BIB* 376–80.
51. Worrall, 'Immortal Tent', 273–95, 281.
52. *EIB* 143. See also Paley, *William Blake*, 29, and Dörrbecker, *CP* 55–57.
53. Doskow, 'William Blake's *America*', 180.
54. Worrall, 'Immortal Tent', 281–82.
55. Tannenbaum, *BT* 124–33.
56. Ibid., 281–88.

57. Rabkin, *Mars*, 48.
58. See *Ovid's Fasti, or the Romans Sacred Calendar*, 5–6, 124–29, and Boyle and Woodward's translation of *Fasti*, 4, 57, 166–67. Blake may allude to the displacement of the archaic or pre-Capitoline triad of Roman gods (Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus) in favour of the Capitoline triad (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva). See de Cazanove, 'Pre-Roman Italy', 49.
59. Ferber, 'Mars and the Planets Three', 136–37. Ferber suggests that the three planets may denote Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The moons of Mars were only discovered in 1877, but Gulliver reports that the Laputans discovered 'two lesser stars, or satellites, which revolve about Mars'. See Swift, *Travels*, II, 42–43.
60. *The Iliad of Homer*, 255 [v.1095–1111].
61. See Hesiod, *Theogony* ll.453–96, in *Hesiod: The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, 113–15. Priestman notes this connection in *Romantic Atheism*, 110–12.
62. This may reflect English state and church responses to defeat in America: see Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, 86, for sermons emphasising divinely ordained hierarchy.
63. For classic overviews, see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 49–80, and Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 41–48.
64. For criticism of misogyny in this disturbing scene, see Aers, 'Dialectics of Sex', 251, and Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 124–25. Ferber and Matthews relate the Preludium to traditional narratives of traumatic rape at the founding of nations: see respectively 'Blake's *America* and the Birth of Revolution', 94–96, and 'Blake, Hayley and the History of Sexuality'. In *Blake, Sexuality*, 96, 144–51, Matthews distinguishes the scene from eighteenth-century rapes such as those in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). She persuasively argues that Blake challenges the reader's ability to apply the label of rape here, emphasising the Shadowy Female's bodily pleasure: sexual knowledge is equally the preserve of the female. For Matthews, Blake's scene reflects contemporary interest in rape as representative of human society prior to the process of civilisation and feminisation.
65. Lincoln, 'Blake, America, and Enlightenment', 66.
66. Ibid., 71–72. See Carretta, *George III*, 181, and Wright, '"Empire is No More"', 26–29.

67. Lincoln, 'Blake, America, and Enlightenment', 67.
68. See Morgan, *Debate on the American Revolution*, 10, 19, 28.
69. Ramsay, I, 28. Paine makes a similar point about the magnitude of American nature in *Rights of Man, Part the Second*, 2–3.
70. Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll.147–66. Compare *America* Plate 4 with Flaxman's image of Briareus emerging from the earth in *The Iliad of Homer Engraved by Thomas Piroli from the Compositions of John Flaxman* (1793).
71. Rabkin, *Mars*, 18, 36–38.
72. *Ovid's Fasti*, 81–83, ll.441–84, and Boyle and Woodward, *Fasti*, 38–39, 193–94 [ii.381–422]. Blake engraved Rhea Silvia on the Portland Vase for Joseph Johnson's 1791 edition of Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* and her encounter with Mars in an illustration to Charles Allen's *A New and Improved Roman History* (1798).
73. See Tannenbaum, *BT* 124–51, Mee, *DE* 69–70, and Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 109.
74. Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime*, 3–4. Although more usually associated with enthusiasm, Kant's 'fanaticism' merges with superstition in that it becomes an idolatry of the self.
75. See Fuller, *Blake's Heroic Argument*, 64–65 and Ferber, *Poetry of William Blake*, 86.
76. See Rabkin, *Mars*, 14.
77. Tannenbaum, *BT* 142.
78. Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 124, and Ferber, 'Blake's *America*', 88, both link this image with Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:31–35. Ferber notes Blake also interpolates the great man in Daniel 10:6, which recurs in Revelation 1:15 and 2:18. For this image in popular prophecy, see Mee, *DE* 64–65. For George III as Nebuchadnezzar, see Carretta, *George III*, 162–66 and Barrell (ed.), *Exhibition Extraordinary!!*, 6–8.
79. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 88.
80. De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 5–6.
81. See, for example, Mee, *DE* 12–19, 161–212, and Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 59–113.
82. Larrissy hypothesises a cohesive prior narrative, comprised by Plates *a* and *b* with Plates 9 and 10 of *Europe*, suggesting Blake aimed at discontinuity in the final work. See 'Blake's *America*: An Early Version?'

83. Wright, *Blake, Nationalism*, 91–100, argues that the descriptions of sexual violence and pregnancy in the Preludium draw on the language of reproductive printing.
84. Gilchrist, *Life* (1868), I, 103–4.
85. Palmer to Anne Gilchrist, 2 July 1862, in *Letters of Samuel Palmer*, II, 663.
86. Tannenbaum, *BT* 148.

CHAPTER 5

# 'The Night of Holy Shadows': *Europe* and Loyalist Reaction

The situation for political reformers changed drastically during 1792. By December, Joseph Johnson's friend William Roscoe believed that 'a general panic has seized the kingdom'.[1] It is difficult to be certain when Blake composed and engraved *Europe*. The title page date of 1794 perhaps records when the work was illuminated or completed; the prophecy more meaningfully relates to the conservative reaction of 1792–93.[2] *Europe* is a complex meditation on contemporary political repression and draws on Enlightenment narratives of the history of religion and especially the imagery of apotheosis to view it in a larger historical and mythical context.

King George III issued a Proclamation against Seditious Writings on 21 May 1792, addressing the 'wicked and seditious' texts which had been 'industriously dispersed' to 'excite Tumult and Disorder' and discontent against the 'happy Constitution of Government, Civil and Religious'. 'Public Peace and Prosperity' would come through 'due submission to the Laws', and 'zealous attachment to the Government and Constitution of the Kingdom'. The aim was to divide constitutionalist reformers from radicals. Local boroughs and corporations followed up with series of loyal addresses thanking the king and affirming allegiance, especially to the constitution.[3]

Thomas Paine was a particular target. In September, he fled to France, and was found guilty of seditious libel *in absentia* in December 1792 for *Rights of Man* Part Two. He continued to attack the British government in print. Paine's *Letter Addressed to the Addressers, on the Late Proclamation* (1792) argued that the Proclamation and Addresses had

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D. Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*,
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actually stimulated public interest in *Rights of Man*, which itself stirred up 'the People of England', who had 'almost resigned the prerogative of thinking' whilst a 'universal langour [*sic*] had spread itself over the land'.[4] Rejecting the Whig aim of limited parliamentary reform, he appealed beyond the constitution: only a National Convention of the people could express 'the will of the nation'.[5] For Paine, the addressers 'have assumed to pass themselves upon the public as part of the public' when they were interested beneficiaries of public taxes: 'They are to the public what the locusts are to the tree'.[6] Representatives in Parliament feared doing any good 'lest it should awaken the nation to a sense of all the wrongs it has endured'.[7] Nevertheless, he believed the people were waking. In a public letter to the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, in June 1792, Paine attacked the 'chains of political superstition', which were 'now dissolving fast', sped along by 'proclamations and persecutions'.[8] His contentious arguments were widely discussed, and Blake may have known him through the Johnson circle. His notebook contains what is probably a sketch of Paine's face.[9]

Despite the addresses, the government felt impelled to issue a second Proclamation in December, censuring disobedience towards the first and preparing for war by embodying the militia.[10] They were assisted by the loyalist Association movement. Led by the barrister John Reeves, the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers held its first meeting on 20 November 1792 at the Crown and Anchor Tavern and published its proceedings, encouraging others to 'support the Laws' and 'suppress seditious Publications'. Similar societies rapidly developed across the country.[11] Phillips argues that the response to requests for 'declarations of loyalty and for information', was 'on a scale unknown before in Britain', dwarfing radical activity.[12] The Lambeth Association was particularly vigorous, and Phillips notes that David Evans, an eager loyalist and correspondent with Reeves, lived near the Blakes.[13] Blake's unorthodoxy, revolutionary sympathies, and printing activity made him suspect in this increasingly repressive atmosphere.

The Association's activities drove an increase in trials for seditious libel and generated fears of prosecution. Early 1793 saw the arrest and imprisonment of a number of booksellers and printers in London and across the country.[14] Among the victims of provincial associations was Richard Phillips, a Leicester bookseller imprisoned for eighteen months in April 1793 for selling *Rights of Man*.[15] Phillips became an eminent London publisher, having founded the liberal *Monthly Magazine* in 1796, and in

1804 Blake negotiated with him over a new edition of Hayley's *Ballads* (1802). Writing to Hayley on 7 April 1804, Blake praised Phillips's 'solidity of character' and noted 'he is the man who applied to Cowper for that Sonnet in favor of a Prisoner at Leicester which I believe you thought fit not to print So you see he is spiritually adjoind with us' (E746).[16] The final comment indicates political sympathy for Phillips at the time of his arrest.

A number of liberal Whigs launched the Friends of the Liberty of the Press to combat the threat posed by the Associations to English liberties. The organisation held several dinners between June 1792 and April 1793 before fizzling out.[17] On 10 January, Blake's friend George Cumberland informed his brother of his intention to 'Dine on Saturday with the Friends of the Liberty of the Press' and to financially support them, complaining of 'detestable Reeves and his shameless Society' and the widespread use of 'Spies'.[18] Cumberland owned several of Blake's illuminated books from this period, including Copy C of *Europe*. They seem to have had congenial outlooks on a range of artistic, social, and political issues.[19]

The activities of loyalists policing the public sphere are a crucial context for Blake's *Europe*, which expands *America*'s mythopoetic mode to explore the origins of the current crisis. Blake draws on Enlightenment critiques of apotheosis in representing government and Association attempts to restrict the public sphere from 1792 onwards. His prophecy probes into Europe's dark religious past to locate the roots of what Paine called 'political superstition'. Unlike the utopian *America*, *Europe* dwells less on Orc and more on exposing the myths of regal, aristocratic, and priestly authority, figured in terms of apotheosis.

## Passive Obedience and Gendered Political Discourse

*Europe* suggests Blake's increasing investment in masculine republican political discourse. Throughout the eighteenth century, various political groups sought to occupy the traditional ground of civic humanism. Its language fetishised 'masculine' independence, active and disinterested citizenship, martial commitment to the nation, and vigilance against corruption and 'effeminate' luxury. Civic humanism was central to traditional aristocratic republicanism, but 1790s radicals adopted its language to attack the aristocracy itself. In this discourse 'female' characteristics threaten the masculine civic virtue upon which the state's survival depended, risking conflict with Christian virtues frequently regarded as passive and feminine.

As I will discuss in Chapter 9, writers in the classical republican tradition, from Machiavelli to Voltaire and Gibbon, believed Christianity incompatible with masculine civic virtue, and their arguments influenced radical anticlericalism and atheism in the 1790s.[20]

Alongside political conflict, the 1790s also witnessed increased attention to women's morality and behaviour. Cheap tracts had long encouraged Christian piety, virtue, and self-restraint among the lower orders.[21] Female sexual indulgence outside marriage was castigated as impatient desire, a rejection of moral law, duty, and the life hereafter. The penny tract *An Exhortation to Chastity* (1793) warns against 'Fleshly lusts' which extinguish 'all Sense of Virtue and Religion', leaving young women 'altogether unmindful of a future State' and disqualified from the purity of heaven.[22] Loyalists adapted the moral tract for the fight against Jacobinism. Reeves's Association connected political and sexual waywardness; a notice in the *Public Advertiser* on 12 December 1792 warned print-shops they would be prosecuted for displaying 'licentiousness' and 'libellous Pictures and Engravings'.[23] The Associations linked domestic and political authority, regarding the family as a microcosm of the patriarchal state. Conservative tracts frequently enjoined readers to offset discontent at worldly inequality against future heavenly rewards, a tactic adapted from moral campaigners. Sexual and political upheaval required deferral and regulation; present discontent or desire should be sublimated by imagining heavenly eternity.

Once war was declared in 1793, many Anglican clergy promoted passive obedience to monarchical government and opposed atheist France from their pulpits.[24] Ministers discouraged political debate. William Paley, Archdeacon of Carlisle, delivered his sermon *Reasons for Contentment* on 10 January 1793. Disparities between rich and poor were insignificant: 'Religion smooths all inequalities, because it unfolds a prospect which makes all earthly distinctions nothing.'[25] The Association quickly circulated cheap reprints. The British constitution was to be viewed in the same light. For the public fast for 19 April 1793, William Gilbank addressed 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 'And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business', urging the congregation to be 'content' and to 'beg of God to continue us in the possession of a Constitution, which in its principles at least seems to be the summit of political perfection'. Discontent was 'the issue of a restless and perturbed Spirit'.[26]

Mee argues that in *Europe* Blake's rhetoric moves towards the scepticism of 1790s radicals such as Paine and Volney, which threatened the status quo precisely because it directed attention away from the tranquil consola-

tions of an afterlife and towards present discontent.[27] Many Christians also disputed the orthodox position that religion should be disengaged from political debate. In May 1794, the linen-draper Thomas Bentley argued that 'it is impossible for a man faithfully to search the Scriptures, but he must see the duty and danger of the *governors*, as well as of the *governed*'. Old Testament prophets and Jesus himself exemplified the Christian duty to intervene in politics:

> I am persuaded that if serious, upright men did properly reflect upon the consequences of the determination of government, then instead of forbidding remonstrances to rulers, they would say, *wou'd God that all the Lord's people were prophets or preachers to them, and that He wou'd pour out His Spirit upon them for that purpose.*—We know that Kings, Counsellors, and Parliaments are *only* men.—always fallible,—often mistaken,—sometimes very foolish and wicked.[28]

Bentley's politically engaged Christian is a masculine, active prophet. He was defending his own Christian duty against intimidation: the Sudbury Association had passed reports on Bentley to Reeves and gathered evidence of his sedition for the Treasury Solicitor.[29]

Bentley, like other opponents of the government and Associations feared that the people were being lulled into passivity. Under the pseudonym 'Aratus' (the Greek poet of the constellations), the radical satire *A Voyage to the Moon, Strongly Recommended to All Lovers of Real Freedom* (1793) describes Barsilia, a lunar region of snakes ruled by a tyrannical 'Great Snake' and his retinue. A philosopher, Seeclear, explains to the narrator how originally popular assemblies had degenerated. Their representatives were 'afflicted with a strange disorder, which lulled them fast asleep, whenever the dearest interests of the community required them to wake'. A mysterious opium wand (featured in much anti-Pitt satire) renders the majority passive 'under the barbarous influence of an uncommon long dream'. The Great Snake and his retinue 'are very solicitous not to awaken them, or to suffer others to do it' because recently 'a neighbouring nation of reptiles suddenly awoke, and took a severe though just revenge, on all their cruel oppressors'.[30] The satire claims the masculine ground of political virtue for republicans, opposed to luxury, indolence, and apathy. The common snakes are policed by spies, with draconian penalties threatening 'Even *the freedom of discussion*'.[31] When the narrator is imprisoned for questioning the government, Seeclear assures him the

apocalyptic prophecy of Daniel 7:1–28 is being fulfilled: the masses will awaken. Upon their release, they visit the 'C—— and ——' tavern, where an assembly of '*terrible devouring locusts*' resolve to repress liberty and preach up divine right.[32] As in Bentley's *Appeal*, a climate of repression and passive obedience necessitates active, masculine prophecy.

Erdman identifies Rintrah as Pitt, drawing Britain into the European conflict, and from this Bloom reads *Europe* as a 'broad political allegory' following 'the process by which England entered into war with France in 1793'.[33] These schematic interpretations, however, oversimplify Blake's complex mythopoesis in *Europe*. He uses apotheosis imagery to dramatise the night of superstition and tyranny giving way to mental awakening, resistance, and revolt. Blake approaches myth in distinct but related ways, sceptically critiquing myths of hierarchy which support political stasis and superstition, but also using myth to imagine the transformation and revival of the people's mental and physical energies.

## *Europe*'s Celestial Scenery

*Europe*'s dramatic designs merge legendary figures in the night sky with political motifs drawn from 1792–93. As in *America*, Blake's illuminations feature well-known constellations. The coiled snake on the title page recalls the polar Draco, formerly the dragon Ladon, who guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides. Hera placed it as a constellation after it was slain by Heracles.[34] *Europe*'s dramatisation of forbidden sexual and political knowledge makes this an apt frontispiece image.

In a twilight scene on Plate 6 (Fig. 5.1), a man and woman embrace in an eroticised reimagining of Gemini. This constellation commemorated the Dioscuri or Castor and Pollux, loving and dutiful brothers honoured with catasterism by their father Zeus (or Jove).[35] The twins sometimes kissed on star maps. To the left, one figure droops in an exhausted posture, whilst two others stir, suggesting the rousing of the constellations as night approaches. The third figure from the left, a reclining woman, is similar to the figure labelled 'Luxury' on a page of Blake's sketches, indicating that Enitharmon's night subdues masculine energies.[36] Miner interprets the spider's web on Plate 14 as a sky map; the flies are Musca Australis and Musca Borealis.[37] Additionally, the creatures pictured on Plates 14 and 16 include spiders, snails, and worms, constellations added by John Hill to his popular and eccentric catalogue of star lore, *Urania* (1754).[38]

**Fig. 5.1** *Europe*, Copy A, Plate 6. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

The despairing winged woman on Plate 5 (Fig. 5.4) has been identified with the Nameless Shadowy Female, Enitharmon, Cassandra, or even Marie Antoinette anticipating her beheading.[39] In Copy D of *Europe*, George Cumberland made marginal annotations which reflect his knowledge of *America* and quote from Edward Bysshe's *Art of Poetry* (1702).[40] Cumberland glosses this design as 'A Comet', appending lines from Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703), Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Pope's *Iliad*, and Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part One*. This rare commentary from a sympathetic reader anticipates astronomical phenomena. Blake's model here is Virgo (see Fig. 5.2). Among various traditions, Virgo was Diké, goddess of Justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis, and personified divine law. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, with her sisters Eunomia ('Order'), and Eirene ('Peace') she was one of the Horae, who guard the gates of Zeus's heaven in Book V of *The Iliad*.[41] Alternatively, she was Astraea ('star-maiden'), daughter of Astraeus, the father of the stars, and Eos, the goddess of dawn. During the Golden Age ruled by Cronus, Diké

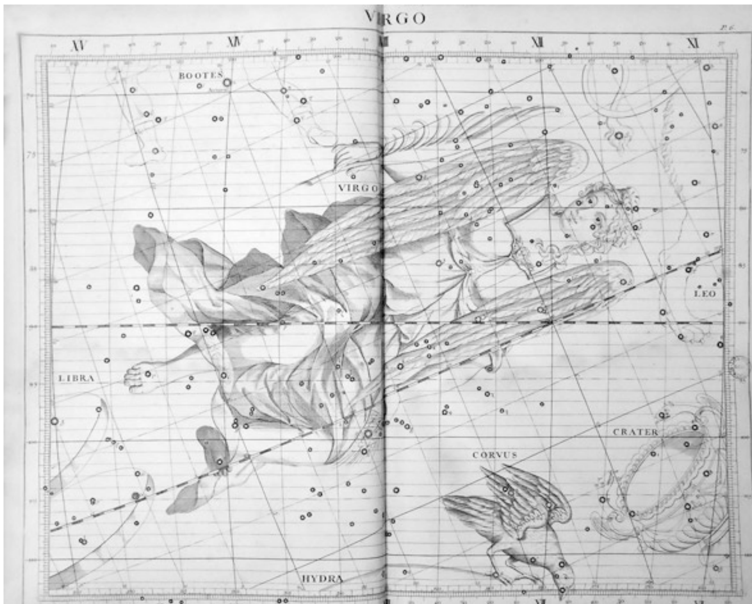


**Fig. 5.2** *Virgo* from John Flamsteed, *Atlas Coelestis* (1729). The Lit and Phil, Newcastle

or Astraea resided on the harmonious Earth, but after Zeus overthrew Cronus and humans became corrupt and warred with each other she fled to the heavens.[42] Blake's figure weeps over the embryo Orc, suggesting that he threatens the heaven she guards and the law, order, and peace she personifies.

Blake's nocturnal backdrop is appropriate for a period during which many reformers believed British liberty had been eclipsed. William Godwin termed Reeves 'the assassin of the Liberties of Englishmen' and claimed the 'reign of despotism began on the 20th November, 1792' when the Association met 'under pretence of protecting liberty and property' but actually plotted to destroy constitutional freedoms.[43] This is a suggestive context for Plate 3, where a malevolent figure with a dagger lurks in a cave, ready to dispatch a genial traveller sporting the 'buff and blue' of American and Whig patriots.[44] The assassin, pointing heavenward, claims divine sanction.

The concept of apotheosis connects the poem's mythical dimension with its historical and political content. On Plate 4, for example, a ruddy-limbed man flees from three bald figures. The central one kneels and head-locks the figure to his right and strangles the one to his left. The central wrestler suggests the constellation Hercules, depicted in star atlases kneeling and clubbing a foe, usually Cerberus. Labelle detects echoes of Caius Cibber's statues of melancholy and raving madness, bald figures adorning the gates of Bedlam. In copy B, the central figure's prominent brows and bulbous eyes suggest George III's features in caricatures. Radical satirists often depicted him as a mad tyrant.[45] Blake's design may imply a conjunction between the *Georgium Sidus* and Hercules and perhaps echoes Foxite polemics against the king's dominance of the Lords and Commons. The dynamic, fleeing red figure suggests sunset: the night sky is the theatre of tyranny.

Blake hints at loyalist repression in other designs. An interlinear illustration on Plate 6 appears to be a locust on an ear of corn, recalling the image used by Aratus and Paine respectively for Associators and placemen.[46] At the bottom of Plate 3, a figure falling headlong is pulled by either a weight or padlock. This anticipates a powerful image in protests against prosecutions for seditious libel and the treason trials in 1794, the 'Free-born Englishman' padlocked at the mouth.[47] Blake's cosmic myth is bound up in contemporary anxieties for liberty.

## Blake's Shadowy Female

*Europe* features two prominent female characters, the 'nameless shadowy female' of the 'Preludium' and Enitharmon. Enitharmon seems powerful and oppressive. Critics have speculated on her villainy: a version of Marie Antoinette or Queen Charlotte, dominant Nature, the Christian church under the cult of the Virgin, or an anticipation of the Female Will in Blake's later epics.[48] Bruder helpfully positions *Europe* within polarised discourses concerning femininity, especially in France. She notes that because the patriarchal Urizen dominates the frontispiece, Enitharmon may not be as malignantly powerful as mostly male Blake critics have found her.[49] Bruder's reading allows a more ambiguous Enitharmon to emerge. Blake's intertext is crucial to this character's meaning.

Blake reimagines Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity' (1645) in order to attack state religion and the repression of political debate from late 1792.[50] Milton's celestial Christ held a peculiar fascination for Blake. Illustrating the poem for Reverend Thomas around 1809, Blake depicted *The Night of Peace*.[51] The infant Jesus, with a radiant glory, sleeps, while a shining Mary shuts her eyes. Behind, Joseph looks down upon the child, while two heifers feed at the back. Four angels guard outside and two angels play lyres in the stars, while a charioting figure suspends a star over the stable. Milton's Peace presides alertly over this nativity scene as a celestial goddess, contrasting with Mary and Jesus's slumbers. The night of Peace is feminised; the angels' weapons are downed. Only Joseph remains awake. Vertically, he is the painting's central focus, but horizontally Mary displaces him. Joseph seems emasculated, draped in a shawl and, as Lawson suggests, forced into a posture of adoration by the roof.[52] The horned cattle recall the ode's supposedly vanquished 'horned Priest' of Ammon, perhaps also insinuating that Joseph is cuckolded. The feminine angels in the stars suggest Milton's poetry is ethereal and attenuated.

Enitharmon may be pre-eminent as 'Queen of Heaven', but *Europe* draws her into relation with other female characters.[53] The 'nameless shadowy female' of the Preludium is her disenfranchised other, personifying aspects of femininity displaced by Enitharmon's elevation. She recalls Urthona's daughter in the Preludium to *America*, and critics have persuasively identified her as Wisdom, Earth, or Nature. Several critics believe the Female's 'shadowy' complexion suggests an oppressed colonial 'other'.[54] An important dimension of her meaning also emerges when she is recognised as a constellation.

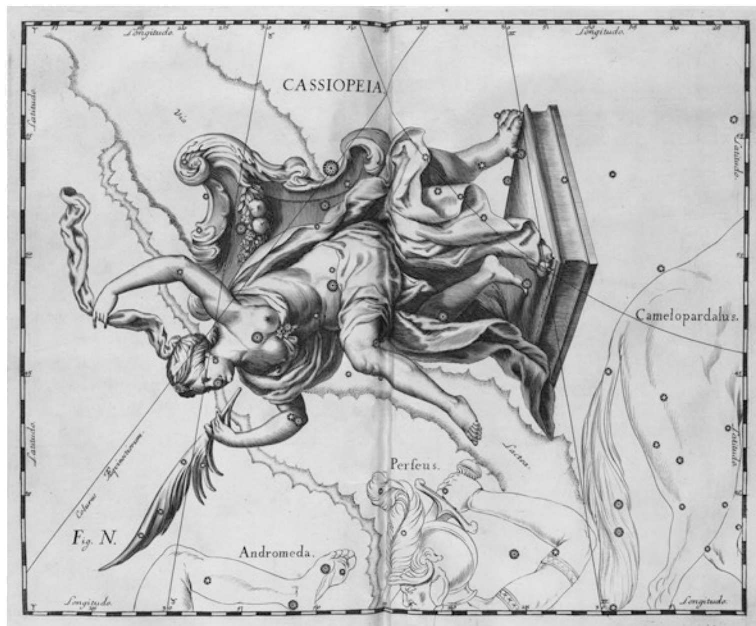


**Fig. 5.3** *Cassiopeia* from Johannis Hevelli, *Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia* (1690). Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology

She exclaims that she is ‘faint with travel!’ (1:6, E60), suggesting both journeying and ‘travail’ in labour. The adjective ‘faint’ connotes light, tiredness, and feminine sensibility. *Europe* begins as ‘The nameless shadowy female rose from out the breast of Orc’ with ‘snaky hair brandishing in the winds of Enitharmon’ (1:1–2, E60).[55] The participial ‘brandishing’ is an obscure usage, listed in the *OED* as ‘vibrating, quivering’ or ‘gleaming, flashing, sparkling’. The verb ‘rise’ is later associated with stars ascending from a salt lake (9:15, E63) and she originates in Orcian desire. Blake alludes to the constellation Cassiopeia (Fig. 5.3): the ‘shadowy female’ laments being upside down, wears a turban, enfolds herself in ‘sheety waters’, and sits ‘in fathomless abyss of [her] immortal shrine’ (1:8–13, 2:2, E60–61). Cassiopeia was wife to the Ethiopian king Cepheus and in star atlases she wears a turban, sits on a throne, and sometimes holds a plait of hair. The Milky Way runs like a river through the constella-

tion. According to Hyginus and Aratus, she was placed upside down in the stars to punish her boasts that she was more beautiful than the Nereids.[56] In addition, Julius Schiller's quirky *Coelum Stellatum Christianum* (1627), which reassigns the constellations to biblical characters, makes her Mary Magdalen.[57] Blake associates the 'nameless shadowy female' with Cassiopeia as a divinely punished woman.

Tannenbaum believes that in *Europe* Blake 'embraces what Milton in the process of the *Nativity Ode* reluctantly abandons—both the fays and the poetic fancy'.[58] The Shadowy Female personifies qualities suppressed during Enitharmon's chaste night, particularly fecundity and the inspiration that, according to Plate 11 of the *Marriage*, populated the ancient natural world with genii. She is akin to the strange fairy, who in Plate 3 of *Europe* (copies H and K) parodies Milton's chaste Christian muse, describing a vision of natural vitality, 'when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy' (iii:18, E60). In the prophecy Enitharmon's dream displaces the Shadowy Female's lament. Tannenbaum notes that her complaint 'My roots are brandish'd in the heavens. my fruits in earth beneath | Surge, foam, and labour into life' (1:8–9, E60) inverts Wisdom, represented as a fruit-bearing tree of life in Proverbs 3:18, and Ecclesiasticus 1:16–20 and 24:12–19.[59] Whereas Nature in Milton's ode 'doffed her gaudy trim' and hid 'her guilty front' and 'foul deformities' with 'innocent snow' at the arrival of 'the heaven-born child', Blake's Female is less obedient.[60]

The Nameless Shadowy Female opposes Enitharmon's night of peace, urging desire, natural vitality, wisdom, creativity, and freedom. Indeed, she seems a degraded Liberty, whom one radical poem in 1792 imagined 'more refulgent than the morning star', a 'fair daughter of the sky' whose 'wild locks' dance 'to the frolic wind'.[61] Blake's Female anticipates the outcast Jerusalem in his later epics, dissenting from Enitharmon's divine chastity and courtly femininity. This is part of *Europe*'s challenge to Burkean conservatism, with its enthusiasm for the Christian age of chivalry and deference, especially to noble women, supporting traditional hierarchy.[62] In the poem proper, Urizen, the priest-king deity, 'Glows like a meteor in the distant north' (3:12, E61) and presides over Enitharmon's night. Their reign transforms starry energy into the hierarchy of the fixed stars. The Shadowy Female's prolific, creative inspiration initially forms 'howling terrors' and 'fiery kings'. She complains that Enitharmon enslaves them:

Unwilling I look up to heaven! unwilling count the stars!
Sitting in fathomless abyss of my immortal shrine.
I sieze their burning power
And bring forth howling terrors, all devouring fiery kings.

Devouring & devoured roaming on dark and desolate mountains
In forests of eternal death, shrieking in hollow trees.
Ah mother Enitharmon!
Stamp not with solid form this vig'rous progeny of fires.

I bring forth from my teeming bosom myriads of flames.
And thou dost stamp them with a signet, then they roam abroad
And leave me void as death:
Ah! I am drown'd in shady woe, and visionary joy. (2:1–12, E61)

The 'fiery kings' line is densely ambiguous. Its parallelism may invite contrast, with the energy of 'howling terrors' opposed to and devouring the 'fiery kings', or it may reinforce a connection, in which case 'all' of the 'howling terrors' become 'devouring fiery kings', undermining the exceptional status of monarchs. Alternatively, the 'fiery kings' could be 'all devouring' rapacious rulers. Blake perhaps again alludes to Cronus devouring the Olympian deities conceived by Rhea Silvia. The Female's reluctance to count her progeny and see them fixed into solid forms associates her with natural creativity and flux. The 'howling terrors' express their energy in continuous movement, warfare, and ever-shifting power in the heavens. The Female's appeal to Enitharmon to 'Stamp not with solid form this vig'rous progeny of fires' sets sublime energy against fixity. A fluid conception of dynamic stars vies with the traditional, stable zodiac. Enitharmon's stamping also recalls Bromion's dominance over his slaves, who in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) are 'Stampt' with his 'signet' (1:20, E46). Wright observes that the Female's lament draws on the language of printing, contrasting free textual production with state-sanctioned print.[63] Her ability to stamp links Enitharmon to Urizen's official power.

Despite Enitharmon's reputation as a 'malevolent Queen of Heaven', Bruder notes Blake's complex relationship to contemporary discourses of femininity. Enitharmon is more ambiguous than she seems.[64] The famous frontispiece, with Urizen as the patriarchal 'Ancient of Days', dominates the book and suggests that Enitharmon has less repressive agency than

many critics believe.[65] Like the Shadowy Female, she is circumscribed. Indeed, the mother and daughter are interdependent. Enitharmon personifies the apotheosis of chaste femininity produced by the abjection of the physical and sensual Shadowy Female, an insight akin to Mary Wollstonecraft's question: 'Why are girls to be told that they resemble angels; but to sink them below women?'[66]

Tannenbaum identifies Enitharmon with Milton's 'heavenly muse', Urania. Milton's ode solicits her to inspire a 'sacred vein' and 'solemn strain' of poetry to welcome the infant Christ. Urania, the Greek Muse of Astronomy, was appropriated by Christian Renaissance poets seeking a chaste, spiritual muse.[67] Milton's appeal to Urania becomes in *Europe* a denial of the Nameless Shadowy Female's vital natural energies and creative inspiration. Blake implies Milton's Jesus is likewise abstract and ineffectual. Enitharmon is, like Urania, a Queen of Heaven, summoning and displacing her sons' and daughters' energies. Blake's Preludium represents the apotheosis of an astral muse associated with chastity and courtly hierarchy at the expense of another potential muse, associated with liberty, desire, and productive conflict. This is an apt, albeit oblique, perspective on the policing of public opinion during 1792 and 1793. Despite its obscure mythical idiom, *Europe* draws on Enlightenment ideas to critique power, affirming active, independent thought and pleasure against superstition and ascesis.

## The Secret Child and the Starry Family

The prophecy proper begins with 'the secret child' descending through 'the orient gates of the eternal day'. At this moment 'War ceas'd, & all the troops like shadows fled to their abodes' (3:2–4, E61). Blake alludes to the incarnation of Christ in the 'Nativity Ode'. Critics have often regarded the remainder of *Europe* as an account of how this Christian dawn becomes corrupted by the insidious paganism of Enitharmon's family.[68] But Blake tends to use the adjective 'secret' negatively. In Plate 3, the Fairy echoes Proverbs 9:17, disparaging 'stolen joys' and 'bread eaten in secret' (iii:6, E60). For Beer, 'secret' indicates 'the Christ whom the Christians worship, a figure of secrecy and shame'.[69] Although this child descends through the heavenly gates, it never reaches earth and seems to remain at heaven's threshold.

*Europe* disturbs the Christian peace of the 'Nativity Ode'. The end of war and the fleeing of troops inaugurates not Christ's kingdom but

**Fig. 5.4** *Europe*, Copy A, Plate 5. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

Urizen's reign, during which Enitharmon's children 'Like pearly clouds' meet together in 'the crystal house' (3:5–6). Whereas Milton celebrates Christ's peace, 'war' in Blake's poem is equivocal. The 'secret child' emerges when the masculine energy, sexual desire, and conflict associated with the Shadowy Female's children and Orc in *America* cease. On Plate 5, Peace, whom Milton's description envisages like Virgo, dreads Orc's birth (Figs. 5.4 and 5.2). Orc is enclosed within a fiery womb-like orb, perhaps the 'planet red' from *America*. He appears to forebode the uncompromising Christian mission of Matthew 10:34: 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword'.

Enitharmon's starry 'crystal house' reimagines the 'crystal spheres' to which Milton appeals for music to celebrate Christ's birth.[70] Mee suggests that Los performs Milton's role in the 'Nativity Ode'.[71] Possessing the chaste moon, he 'joy'd in the peaceful night'. Blake often uses 'Joy' as sexual verb. The conventional associations of the moon with female chastity perhaps suggest what Oothoon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* calls the tormented 'self enjoyings of self denial' (7:9, E50): Los's Apollonian sunlight and poetry are eclipsed. His speech, delivered 'while his num'rous sons shook their bright fiery wings' (3:8, E60), a nod to the 'winged words' of inspired poetry, foregrounds the poet's urgently prophetic vocation:

> Again the night is come
> That strong Urthona takes his rest,
> And Urizen unloos'd from chains
> Glows like a meteor in the distant north
> Stretch forth your hands and strike the elemental strings!
> Awake the thunders of the deep. (3:9–14, E61)[72]

Urthona, associated with Los in the later prophecies, here signifies declining masculine vigour. His sleep frees Urizen who, unloosed like Satan in Revelation 20:7–8, glows 'like a meteor in the distant north', an ominous but perhaps short-lived astronomical god.[73] For Ferber, Blake describes Urizen as Lucifer in his guise as Hesperus, the evening star, but a more fitting star is the northern Polaris, reputed to be the constellations' axis.[74] In the 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience*, the Bard appeals to 'the lapsed Soul' that 'might controll, | The starry pole; | And fallen fallen light renew!' (30:6–10, E18). 'Earth's Answer' similarly complains of domination by 'Starry Jealousy' (31:7). *Europe*'s opening reveals the decline of the

poet-prophet Los and the rise of the priestly patriarchal deity Urizen. Los calls to his sons to 'strike the elemental strings' and awake 'the thunders of the deep'. 'Elemental' suggests nature and purity, as in *Paradise Lost* (vii.265). Los attempts to raise sublime poetry, but bathetically 'The shrill winds wake' (4:1, E61). In a passage recalling Plate 11 of the *Marriage*, Urizen's sons wish to commandeer the poetic genius:

> […] all the sons of Urizen look out and envy Los:
> Sieze all the spirits of life and bind
> Their warbling joys to our loud strings
> Bind all the nourishing sweets of earth
> To give us bliss, that we may drink the sparkling wine of Los
> And let us laugh at war,
> Despising toil and care,
> Because the days and nights of joy, in lucky hours renew.
> (4:2–9, E62)

The sons of Urizen steal the 'spirits of life' and their 'warbling joys', natural and poetic energy. While Erdman believes these lines reflect the sons' cavalier attitude to war's horrors,[75] their distaste for 'toil and care' suggests luxuriant passivity, evading vigorous inspiration and independent intellectual effort. The banished warfare recalls the lively anti-authoritarianism of Orc and the antinomian devils and Christ of the *Marriage*. Blake's troping of war here anticipates his later ideal of 'Mental Fight' (E95). The contrast between creative intellectual clashes and their silencing by an exploitative and decadent elite resonates with radical and Whig fears for the freedom of political debate and publishing between 1792 and 1793.

As in *America*, Orc's transformative utopian potential is displaced into the stars. Enitharmon calls on him to 'Arise' from his 'deep den' so she and her associates may 'crown thy head with garlands of the ruddy vine | For now thou art bound' (4:10–12, E62). In response 'The horrent Demon rose, surrounded with red stars of fire, | Whirling about in furious circles round the immortal fiend' (4:15–16). Worrall discerns a reference to Algol, 'the Demon-star' in the Medusa's head; Enitharmon's descent into the red light and the illumination on Plate 6 (Fig. 5.1) represent one star occulting another.[76] The stars circling Blake's Demon, however, suggest Mars, believed by many to be surrounded by bands or other objects.[77] Enitharmon's descent and binding of Orc suggests she eclipses his energies, and alludes to the amours of Aphrodite and Ares (or Venus and Mars)

and their affair in Hephaestus's palace.[78] In one tradition, their offspring included Harmonia, personifying peace. Certainly, Enitharmon subdues Orc's warlike nature, but she is a chaster mate than Venus.

Having bound Orc, Enitharmon summons her obscure family. De Luca notes that the role-call is 'ceremonial'; Mulvihill persuasively argues that Blake draws here on court masque conventions.[79] The bewildering string of characters has produced some equally bewildering interpretations. Erdman insists that Leutha and Elynittria must be the 'Queens of England and France as they appear to youths going to fight', while Damon maps the children as 'The Repression of Sex Under Enitharmon' in an anti-clockwise rotation from west to north.[80] Blake in fact associates Enitharmon's children with the constellations, with more imaginative than systematic logic. She is like Milton's Urania and her song addresses the stars. I will delay discussing the more obviously condemnatory Plates 5, 9, and 14; without these sections, Enitharmon is a more neutral figure.

Enitharmon first calls Rintrah and Palamabron. The former is a furious 'king of fire', 'Prince of the sun', each of whose numerous sons 'ramping his golden mane shakes' (8:8–11, E62). 'Ramping' is the erect posture of fierce animals, connecting him to Leo, a suitably regal constellation.[81] Palamabron is Rintrah's ally. This 'horned priest, skipping upon the mountains' suggests Aries, the ram, often depicted with frolicking legs in star atlases. Traditionally, its horns were identified with Jupiter Ammon and Schiller transformed this constellation to 'St Peter the First Apostle'.[82] The name may pun on father ('Pa') and 'lamb'. Refashioning Milton's ode, *Europe* suggests the ascendancy of Jupiter Ammon and the pagan deities supposedly banished at Christ's birth.[83] Rintrah's obscure consort, 'lovely jealous Ocalythron', is an absent woman. She is perhaps Coma Berenices, Berenice's hair, which received its catasterism close to Leo, or more likely Corona Borealis, the crown of Theseus's stolen and then abandoned bride princess Ariadne, which Latin poets sometimes called 'Oculus'.[84] 'Silent Elynittria the silver bowed queen' is Diana as the moon, a suitably chaste partner for the priest.[85] King and priest are the primary agents of Enitharmon's night, accompanied by jealousy and chastity.

Waking from her intervening dream of human history, Enitharmon continues to summon her children 'To the sports of night, | Within her crystal house' (13:13–14, E65). She tells Ethinthus, the 'queen of waters' (14:1), that 'tho' the earth-worm call; | Let him call in vain' until 'the night of holy shadows | And human solitude is past!' (13:16–19). Ethinthus feminises Eridanus, the river (Fig. 5.5). Her passive progress

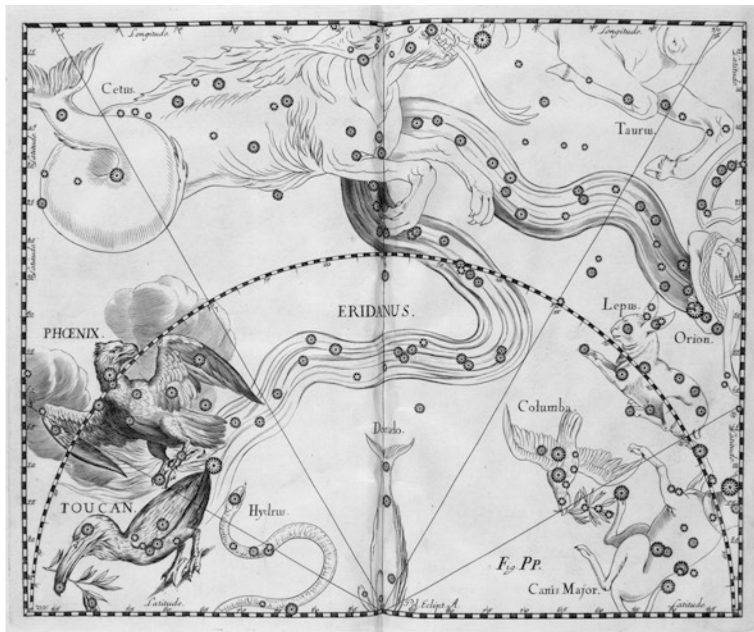


**Fig. 5.5** *Eridanus* from Johannis Hevelli, *Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia* (1690). Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology

comforts Enitharmon, particularly the sound as her 'waters warble' (14:5). The phallic 'earth-worm' might be the obsolete star-group Lumbricus.[86] Ethinthus's children, who 'flock around | Like the gay fishes on the wave' (14:2–3) are the nearby constellations known as the 'Southern Birds', near Piscis Austrinus, the 'Southern Fish'. The next child, Manathu-Vorcyon, suggests to Dörrbecker an Indian juggler, and is probably the constellation Indus, the Indian, flanked by several exotic birds, including the Phoenix (Fig. 5.6).[87] Leutha, the 'lureing bird of Eden' upon whose wings 'the many colourd bow delights' (14:9–10), suggests Apus, the bird of paradise. The 'crystal form' of 'youthful Antamon. prince of the pearly dew' is 'alone', 'Floting upon the bosomd air', hinting at infant satisfaction. In his *Atlas Coelestis* (1729), John Flamsteed depicted the constellation Antinous as a smiling child teetering close to the Milky Way and reaching out. Antinous commemorated the apotheosis of a youth loved

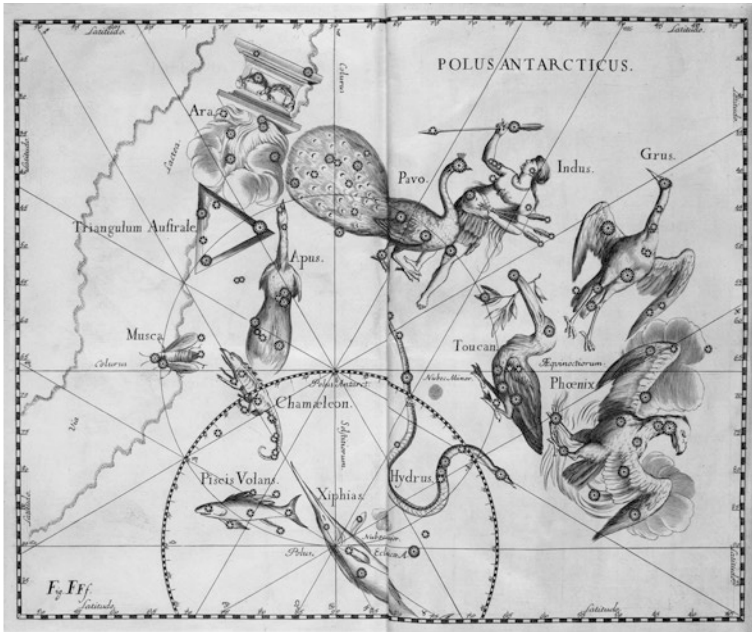


**Fig. 5.6** *Polus Antarcticus* from Johannis Hevelli, *Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia* (1690). Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology

by Emperor Hadrian. Infant or sexual satisfaction explains his 'lineaments of gratified desire' (14:15–19, E66). These sensual associations, especially with 'pearly dew', perhaps semen or milk but also morning moisture, suggest physical fulfilment. Enitharmon asks 'why wilt thou leave thy mother' (14:16, E65), telling him that 'the seven churches of Leutha seek thy love' (14:20, E66). This alludes to the seven Churches of Asia in Revelation 2:1–3:22, the seven cardinal sins, and perhaps also the chaste influence of the constellation Pleiades, the virgin Seven Sisters.

Enitharmon castigates 'soft Oothoon' for abandoning 'womans secrecy', urging that 'Between two moments bliss is ripe' (14:21–23). This refers to Oothoon's paean to free love in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), the final plate of which depicts her chained. Her sexual rebellion in *Europe* suggests Andromeda, bare-breasted and stretching out arms with broken chains. Theotormon, 'robb'd of joy', whose 'salt tears' Enitharmon observes flowing 'Down the steps of my crystal house'

(14:24–25) may be Cepheus, whose head borders the Milky Way. He may be 'robb'd of joy' because he had to sacrifice his daughter Andromeda to the sea-monster Cetus.[88] Enitharmon's pantheon closes with the mysterious Sotha and Thiralatha, 'secret dwellers of dreamful caves'. She calls them to 'please the horrent fiend' with 'melodious songs' (14:26–27). Sotha may be linked to Sothis, the dog-star worshipped by the Egyptians and associated with Thoth. Their mother's injunctions to 'Still all your thunders golden hoofd, & bind your horses black' (14:28) perhaps obscurely connects them to Pegasus and Equuleus.[89]

Most of these constellations are mythological humans or animals, immortalised as a divine honour. Blake's unconventional names defamiliarise the traditional star-formations, eliciting active and imaginative rather than passive and traditional interpretative responses. He disturbs notions of a familiar heaven to which the pious soul will ascend and reminds readers that the order of the fixed stars is not an eternal structure but rather a product of human perception and imagination. Even the heavenly hierarchy can be unsettled and transformed.

Like Urania, Enitharmon presides over the fixed stars, a patron of apotheosis. She calls to Orc to 'smile upon my children!' and 'give our mountains joy of thy red light' (14:29–31). While she may, like Urizen's sons, wish to appropriate Orc's energy for her crystal house, she perhaps also yearns for the red light of sunrise. As the Bard in *Songs of Experience* reassures Earth, 'The starry floor' is 'giv'n thee till the break of day' (E18). Enitharmon cannot resist, and perhaps desires, its advent.

## A Dream of History

'Enitharmon's Dream' interrupts her children's progress. Lincoln posits an early version of *Europe*, into which Plate 5 and Plates 9–13 were interpolated.[90] Without this material, Enitharmon is less obviously malevolent: she predominantly calls her starry offspring and their consorts to arise. The additional plates introduce a more imperious tone and repressive intent. In Plate 5, Enitharmon orders Rintrah and Palamabron:

> Go! tell the human race that Womans love is Sin!
> That an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters
> In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come:
> Forbid all Joy, & from her childhood shall the little female
> Spread nets in every secret path. (5:4–9, E62)

These lines reveal Enitharmon's orthodox heaven of deferred gratification after 'sixty winters' of suffering and abasement to be ideological. The king and priest communicate the injunction to passivity. Her orders echo the proclamations and preaching of conservative moral and political reaction, yoking together sexual and political repression. Matthews makes a fascinating link between *Europe* and Fuseli's *Remarks on Rousseau* (1776). Fuseli attacks religious repression of sexuality in children and discusses how female dreams passively resolve the conflicts raised by desire.[91] Although Blake's lines are frequently cited as evidence of his misogyny, they describe the complex reproduction of ascetic ideology to reinforce power. The 'little female', not yet a conscious adult agent, spreads rather than creates the nets, and the imperatives and the modal verb 'shall' are causally related. Not only does *Europe* endorse Fuseli's argument against institutional control of sexuality, it also connects it with the gendered republican language reformers used to oppose the 'effeminising' effects of restrictions on public political debate.

Lincoln argues that Enitharmon's 'female dream' of eighteen hundred years of Christian history (Plates 9–13) is a later addition. The section depicting contemporary political crisis interrupts the outer myth as 'She slept in middle of her nightly song' (9:1–4, E63), but it also concludes with an account of mankind's fall that ties together the narrative levels. De Luca notes the prophecy's rich and complex layering, in which we 'pass through a series of concentric stylistic and narrative frames into a deep center of speculative awareness, and then back out again'.[92] The interpolated historical section resists but ultimately yields to the inevitable advent of dawn. Orc's appearance in France is obviously apocalyptic, but ambiguously hovers between pre- and post-millennialism. Pre-millennialism embraces sudden, disruptive transformations and was associated with popular enthusiasm, while post-millennialism envisages a more gradual improvement of the world towards a future state of perfection.[93] The cycle of the constellations rising and setting would suggest Orc emerges at the culmination of historical progress, but the description of how he 'Shot from the heights of Enitharmon' to appear in France in 'his fury' (15:1–2, E66) sounds an aggressive pre-millennial note.

During Enitharmon's eighteen hundred years of sleep, 'Man was a Dream!' Both mankind's collective unity and vigorous masculine activity are suspended. This 'female dream' is 'The night of Nature and their harps unstrung' (9:2–5, E63): prophecy and vision, gendered as male, are subdued. The preposition is ambiguous: nature itself may asleep, or nature

may reign during mankind’s dark night. The narration abruptly shifts into the present tense. Mirroring the partition of the stars among Enitharmon’s offspring, ‘Shadows of men in fleeting bands upon the winds: | Divide the heavens of Europe’ until ‘Albions Angel smitten with his own plagues fled with his bands’ (9:6–8). Like the rebel angels in the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, the ‘smitten Angels of Albion’ gather in their ‘council house’ under a cloud that ‘bears hard’ upon them (9:12–13), recalling the storms in *The French Revolution*. The house collapses under the weight of ‘immortal demons of futurity’ (9:10). Erdman notes the echo of *America* and interprets these lines as the fall of Lord North’s ministry after Britain’s defeat in the War of Independence. More generally, Blake refers to widespread debate after the defeat over the ruling classes’ fitness to govern.[94]

What follows obscurely narrates what Colley calls the ‘patrician renaissance’, during which the governing classes recovered authority and reaffirmed their power. Echoing *Paradise Lost*, Albion’s Angels ‘arise in pain’, ‘as the stars rise from the salt lake’ (9:15), a diminished apotheosis. The council and Angels mirror Enitharmon’s crystal house and starry family, but the astronomical pun on the Angels’ ‘thoughts perturb’d’ signals vulnerability. Blake expands the analogy. The angels follow ‘The fiery King’ to his druidic ‘ancient temple serpent-form’d | That stretches out its shady length along the Island white’ (10:2–3). This draws on William Stukeley’s description of Avebury as a serpent temple. Stukeley associated the Anglican establishment with the religion of the druids, inherited from the biblical patriarchs.[95]

By locating the temple in ‘golden Verulam’, Blake super-adds complex symbolism. Francis Bacon, the father of modern empiricist philosophy, was made Baron Verulam in 1618. The Roman settlement Verulam, through which the ancient road Watling Street passed, became St Albans. Worrall notes ‘Watling Street’ was a traditional English name for the Milky Way.[96] The adjective ‘golden’ recalls *America*’s Atlantean palace: this serpent temple is also an archetypal or originary structure of power. In the context of 1792–93, it suggests the conservative vision of the British constitution. The king is a Moses-figure, leading his hosts from captivity, recalling Abraham Cowley’s ‘To the Royal Society’ (1668), in which Bacon, like Moses, leads the British tribe out of the deserts of scholastic philosophy. Blake, however, associates his empiricism not with progress but with prescriptive precedent. Bacon was often linked with the dictum that ‘Kings are God’s Vicegerents’, regularly repeated by Anglican ministers during these years.[97] Albion’s king leads his retinue to renew their traditional

power at its source, the serpent temple, which connects traditional regal authority with the starry heavens.

Many eighteenth-century mythographers believed ancient serpent-worship was originally an astronomical phenomenon. For Bryant, the snake was a fetishised symbol for the sun's progress and comparative histories of religion noted traditions in which the universe itself was a starry serpentine cloud. Volney argued that primitive man 'called by the name of rings and serpents the figured traces of the orbits of the stars and planets'.[98] Blake appears to have been familiar with the idea: *The Old Dragon* in the 'Nativity Ode' designs depicts a starry serpent stretching over Christ's stable.

The title of Blake's prophecy therefore has mythological significance. The Lambeth 'continental prophecies' only clearly became a cycle in 1795, with the addition of 'Africa' and 'Asia' in *The Song of Los*. In classical mythology, Europa was a Phoenician noblewoman whom Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducted and ravished.[99] The constellation Taurus immortalises this episode. This myth suggestively connects with Blake's poem in its historical context, as Austro-Prussian military forces invaded France, attempting to reassert regal control over a Europe teetering on the brink of widespread revolution.

Blake was perhaps familiar with Bryant's spurious etymology for Europe in *A New System*. Europa personifies 'people styled Europians from their particular mode of worship'. After 'purer Zabaism', religion degenerated into 'Ophiolatreia, or worship of the serpent' and spread through 'Babylonia, Egypt, and Syria'. The 'Cadmians, and Europians, were Ophitæ' and gave serpentine names to their 'temples, and cities, also the hills, and rivers, where they settled'.[100] The King's 'ancient temple serpent-form'd' (10:2, E63) recalls *Europe*'s title page snake. The temple's 'oak-surrounded pillars' (10:7) link the British state to druid groves, star-worship, and priestcraft. It consists of 'stones precious; such eternal in the heavens, | Of colours twelve, few known on earth' which 'give light in the opake', alluding both to the zodiac and the gems on the priestly Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28:15–21).[101] The stones mark the Fall, 'Plac'd in the order of the stars, when the five senses whelm'd | In deluge o'er the earth-born man' (10:8–11). Bishops in the House of Lords controversially supported war against France; Blake mythicises this as druid sacrifice.[102]

In the next passage, state religion supplants the 'heaven of heavens' (10:13, E63). Previously located within each human mind, the divine becomes projected onto the stars. Mystery and superstition enable the powerful to elevate themselves:

> Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent; that which pitieth:
> To a devouring flame; and man fled from its face and hid
> In forests of night; then all the eternal forests were divided
> Into earths rolling in circles of space, that like an ocean rush'd
> And overwhelmed all except this finite wall of flesh.
> Then was the serpent temple form'd, image of infinite
> Shut up in finite revolutions, and man became an Angel;
> Heaven a mighty circle turning; God a tyrant crown'd. (10:16–23)

This dense passage compresses Enlightenment narratives of the corruption of the religious impulse. A human conception of the divine turns into Sabaism, identifying the stars with a mysterious and punitive God.[103] Man, now 'hid | In forests of night', worships heavenly bodies and divides the 'eternal forests' into fixed constellations. The serpent temple institutionalises this mystery religion. Blake's syntax parallels the eternal and its diminished, authoritarian forms. God presides over a deterministic universe, but also merely expresses the apotheosis of the king, 'a tyrant crown'd'.[104] As a priest, man becomes a quasi-divine mediatory 'Angel'.'Man' becomes paradoxically diminished; man's power as a collective body politic is absorbed by a hallowed representative of authority.

The 'ancient Guardian', presumably the king, arrives at 'the southern porch, | That planted thick with trees of blackest leaf, & in a vale | Obscure, inclos'd the Stone of Night' (10:24–26, E63–64). This grotesque image of the human head merges anatomy, mythology, and politics. It is a druid grove, simultaneously a primitive stage in the institutional evolution of state religion and a wry description of Parliament as a satanic serpent temple. The 'southern porch' suggests the entrance to St Stephen's Chapel, used as the hall of the Commons and entered from the south. The 'image' of the 'sweet south, | Once open to the heavens and elevated on the human neck' but 'Now overgrown with hair and coverd with a stony roof' (10:28–29) traces a process by which kingcraft and priestcraft petrified the people's freedom of thought and political primacy, shrinking their sublime energies down to the dimensions of Westminster. The 'raging whirlpool' that 'draws the dizzying enquirer to his grave' (10:31) symbolises the intricate and bewildering mysteries of elite political authority.

Blake's myth of the apotheosis of monarchical and clerical power is Euhemerist, identifying Urizen as a god projected by kings and priests, who disseminate patriarchal superstition and tyrannical ideology:

> Albions Angel rose upon the Stone of Night.
> He saw Urizen on the Atlantic;
> And his brazen Book,
> That Kings & Priests had copied on Earth
> Expanded from North to South. (11:1–5, E64)

Frye and Carretta identify the 'Stone of Night' with the Stone of Destiny set in the Royal Chair in Westminster.[105] 'Rose' merges regal dignity with the ascent of the stars, linking the seat of his power to Enitharmon's crystal house. The Angel's actions parallel Rintrah and Palamabron's service for Enitharmon. The illumination on Plate 12 (Fig. 5.7) adds a subversive

**Fig. 5.7** *Europe*, Copy A, Plate 12. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

contemporary dimension. Flanked by two angels with fleurs-de-lis sceptres, a fat bat-winged man sits on a cloud with a book opened across his lap. He sports a papal triple-mitre, has asses' ears, and in most copies wears deep red robes; in copy B especially, he has the face of George III.[106] The image blends Urizen, the sky-god with the brazen book, and the king as a mad tyrant enthroned at Westminster. Blake extends Protestant critiques of Catholic apotheosis to the head of the Church of England. The king's throne is Westminster, which merges with his body. The braiding of his robes suggests decorative human figures adorning the Abbey exterior but also hints at the people whom Parliament should represent, but whose power the 'tyrant crowned' has absorbed.

Blake intensifies his attack on the state clergy's involvement in political repression. The scene shifts to contemporary England, where during Enitharmon's night 'clouds & fires pale' roll round 'Albions cliffs & Londons walls':

> Rolling volumes of grey mist involve Churches, Palaces, Towers:
> For Urizen unclaspd his Book: feeding his soul with pity
> The youth of England hid in gloom curse the paind heavens; compell'd
> Into the deadly night to see the form of Albions Angel
> Their parents brought them forth & aged ignorance preaches canting,
> On a vast rock, perceiv'd by those senses that are clos'd from thought:
> Bleak, dark, abrupt, it stands & overshadows London city
> They saw his boney feet on the rock, the flesh consum'd in flames:
> They saw the Serpent temple lifted above, shadowing the Island white:
> They heard the voice of Albions Angel howling in flames of Orc,
> Seeking the trump of the last doom. (12:1–13, E64)

Mystery shrouds the institutions of state authority. Blake puns on 'volumes', emphasising the textual dissemination of superstition. The youths resist aged authority and their curses at the 'paind heavens' perhaps suggest Paine's *Rights of Man* has damaged the king's claims to divine authority.[107] Albion's Angel, the aged preacher, and the parents are conduits for Urizen's patriarchal ideology; the Bible is its fountainhead. Blake's syntax makes Albion's Angel and 'aged ignorance' seem to merge, but the latter's 'canting' directs the minds of the assembled youths to 'the Serpent temple lifted above'. Worrall interprets this as the constellation Draco, although it could be the serpentine Milky Way.[108] The serpent temple symbolises the ancient constitution, its renewal figured as an apotheosis. In a mythical

idiom, *Europe* shares William Godwin's concern in February 1793 that while 'a zeal for the Constitution is echoed from all parts of the island' its genuine principles, especially freedom of speech, were endangered and 'those who sanctify their proceedings with its name, are taking the direct road to erect despotism on its ruins'. The majority of Englishmen 'are led heedlessly on by the magic of a name'.[109]

The sublunary preaching mirrors the mythical plane. Enitharmon calls on the kingly Rintrah and priestly Palamabron as emissaries so that 'Woman, lovely Woman! may have dominion' (5:3, E62):

> Go! tell the human race that Womans love is Sin!
> That an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters
> In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come.
> (5:5–7)

Blake blurs boundaries and causal relationships between mythical and contemporary narrative levels, but Enitharmon seems as much an emanation of Urizen's earthly agents as they are products of her dream. Her prohibition of 'joy' and injunctions to postpone fulfilment are analogous to the king and druid priests' displacement of popular political agency and freedom of thought onto the heavenly vision of the serpent temple. Blake attacks as 'allegorical' the deferred heaven into which the Anglican clergy urge the populace to sublimate their discontent and desire.

Erdman recognised in the next section a visionary reimagining of Pitt dismissing his 'Guardian of the secret codes', the Chancellor Lord Thurlow, in June 1792 after he had criticised Pitt in the Commons.[110] In *Europe* the Guardian's 'furr'd robes & false locks | Adhered and grew one with his flesh, and nerves & veins shot thro' them | With dismal torment' (12:15–17). This alludes to Lycaon, who disputes Jove's divinity in Book I of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and is turned into a wolf in punishment. The specific political allusion is less typical of Blake's practice than Erdman implies, but it again fuses mythical and political levels. While *Europe* seems Euhemerist, connecting its myth to earthly agents, this episode exemplifies a countervailing movement, amplifying and mythologising the significance of Thurlow's fall.

Orc delights at the rulers howling in pain from Westminster and throughout Europe. Palamabron responds, shooting 'his lightnings trenching down his wide back' while 'Rintrah hung with all his legions

in the nether deep' (12:23–24). Palamabron, like a necromancer, discharges punitive repression at home. 'Trenching' suggests physical tearing and war, but also infringements on liberty and, indeed, the entrenching of power. Palamabron's attacks rend Orc's and the people's collective bodies. Like Albion's armies in *America*, Rintrah and his legions hang suspended, the deep suggesting both the night sky and the seas. They wait to crush revolution at home and abroad, reflecting the augmentation of the armed forces in November and December 1792.[111] State power musters to awe the British and French peoples into passivity:

> Enitharmon laugh'd in her sleep to see (O womans triumph)
> Every house a den, every man bound; the shadows are filld
> With spectres, and the windows wove over with curses of iron:
> Over the doors Thou shalt not; & over the chimneys Fear is written:
> With bands of iron round their necks fasten'd into the walls
> The citizens: in leaden gyves the inhabitants of suburbs
> Walk heavy: soft and bent are the bones of villagers.
> (12:25–31, E64)

The cooperative repression of the Associations and the government brings Enitharmon's zenith. In terms of eighteenth-century republican discourse, female passivity has overwhelmed active masculine citizenship. Yet Enitharmon only observes rather than produces these scenes. Passive verbs ('are filled', 'wove over', 'is written') reinforce the people's submission and the seeming invisibility of repression's agents. Images of citizens choked, bound, and weighed down evoke trials and imprisonments of printers, booksellers, and radicals between 1792 and 1793.[112] The closed house symbolises the effects of surveillance on free thought and discussion. The 'windows wove over with curses of iron' recall the five sensory windows which 'light the caverned man' (iii:1, E60) according to Blake's fairy muse. Doors with 'thou shalt not' and chimneys with 'fear' written over them prevent individuals sharing their opinions beyond the private sphere. Even within the home, private citizens could be spied on and reported for suspect political views.[113] Enitharmon's 'triumph' as she vanquishes the public sphere means the allusions Damrosch and Carretta detect to the goddess Dulness's empire in Book Four of Pope's *Dunciad* (1743) are highly significant: culture, thought, and human civilisation are threatened.[114]

## Apocalypse Now: Versions of the Messiah

Conflict between the superstitious 'clouds of Urizen' and the 'flames of Orc' (12:32, E65) which consume Albion's Guardian culminates in a 'red limb'd' Angel's attempt to blow 'The Trump of the last doom' (13:1–2, E65). Erdman views this as Pitt's efforts during the 1780s and early 1790s to take Britain to war.[115] The beginning of Enitharmon's dream, however, implies that war is already underway. The angel's attempt to galvanise the 'dead' to war fails and, bizarrely, Isaac Newton intervenes in the crisis:

> A mighty Spirit leap'd from the land of Albion,
> Nam'd Newton: he seiz'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!
> Yellow as leaves of Autumn the myriads of Angelic hosts,
> Fell thro' the wintry skies seeking their graves;
> Rattling their hollow bones in howling and lamentation.
>
> (13:4–8, E65)

For many critics Newton's effort represents continuities between state domination and science, the consolidation of error as deism, or science's corrosion of institutional religion.[116] The comic effect is evident: Newton's gravitational trumpet pulls the angelic hierarchy to earth, travestying the resurrection of the dead. This also suggests the demystifying effects of Newtonian Euhemerism.[117] Blake alludes to the trumpeters of Revelation 8–9 and 11:15: the angels of British hierarchy are the stars falling at the third blast. Despite this passage's Euhemerist connotations, Blake mythologises Newton as a demi-god, a leaping 'Mighty spirit' blowing the 'enormous blast'. Milton's 'Nativity Ode' again provides the crucial intertext. In *Europe*, Newton arises as a *deus ex machina* during the millennial crisis of angelic rule. The 'Preludium' and the prophecy's opening anticipate a messiah, but Newton is a false saviour in Orc's place. He was born on Christmas Day, an irony Blake no doubt relished.[118] Newton is an adult incarnation of 'the secret child', a parody of Milton's 'heaven-born child' (3:30); his advent renews rather than supersedes repressive law. Nevertheless, Newton also retains a subversive potential.

Enitharmon's subsequent summons to her children suggests that, rather than heralding revolution, Newton reinforces Albion's starry hierarchy, now more fully realised: 'All were forth at sport beneath the solemn moon | Waking the stars of Urizen with their immortal songs' (14:32–33, E66). Enitharmon calls Orc to 'arise' into this chaste lunar scene 'and give

our mountains joy of thy red light' (14:31).The advent of a millennialist dawn, however, banishes the stars, enabling Orc to descend to earth:

> But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
> Shot from the heights of Enitharmon;
> And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his fury.
> (14:37–15:2, E66)

His first unconstrained act merges mythical and contemporary narrative levels. Whereas in *America* Orc is realised in a sublime human form, here only the 'light of his fury' appears in the 'vineyards of red France'. Critics naturally connect the conclusion to the bloodshed of the radicalised French Revolution and war in Europe:

> The sun glow'd fiery red!
> The furious terrors flew around!
> On golden chariots raging, with red wheels dropping with blood;
> The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
> The Tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide:
> And Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay.
> (15:3–8, E66)[119]

Blake foregrounds Orc's associations with Mars and war. These lines are, however, ambiguous, and in the context of *Europe*'s mythical symbolism, Orc's red glow also has positive associations: Isaiah's vision of the Messiah coming from Edom in red garments (Isaiah 63:1–2); the red of dawn; and the circulation of blood in a healthy, virile body. The red sun and flying 'terrors' locate the action in the sky, with the 'ruddy tide' as reddening morning. Worrall suggests the lions and tigers are the constellations Leo and the Lynx at daybreak.[120] The flowing red tide implies a body awakening from cold sleep. Enitharmon's 'groans & cries in anguish and dismay' do not simply express defeat but also suggest the physical pangs of childbirth.[121] Los's reawakening is a new feature in the Blakean apocalypse:

> Then Los arose his head he reard in snaky thunders clad:
> And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,
> Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood. (15:9–11)

Los reasserts masculine republican virtue, recalling Blake's early 'Prologue to King John': 'full oft did Patriot rise, when Tyranny hath stain'd fair

Albion's breast with her own children's gore' (E439). Here, Los ascends as a vigorous prophetic sun, heralding the end of Urizen's reign over an attenuated, starry night of superstition.

There now appear to be two distinct but related dimensions to revolution. Orc's ruddy tide perhaps links Blake to liberal Whig and radical celebrations of France's late 1792 victories over invading armies at Valmy and Jemappes as a vindication of the sovereign nation against its encroaching enemies. Even the French army's incursion into the Low Countries could plausibly be seen to emancipate subject peoples. Many British supporters believed France's warfare ultimately aimed at long-term European peace.[122] Blake thickens Orc's meaning beyond merely personifying war or revolution by super-adding a dimension of Dionysian abandon. Los has a related but more Apollonian sublimity, associated with thought (it is his 'head' that is 'reard'). His thunders promise to dispel Urizenic clouds of superstition, renewing the sublime 'thunders of the deep' he previously failed to raise. Now this energy causes nature to shudder into life, recalling the Fairy's vision in Plate iii. The 'strife of blood' suggests energy and sexual arousal, not simply destruction. Awaking in Orc's red dawn, Los returns to the mental warfare which ceased with the secret child's advent. He recommits to the prophetic vocation of galvanising the public and shaking the 'pole' of Urizen's authority. Los is inspired by but also independent of Orc's rebellion. His prophetic role personifies the revolution's reawakening of human thought out of superstition and passive obedience to traditional authority.

## *Europe* as Republican Prophecy

The sections in *Europe* in which Enitharmon malevolently seeks to impose 'female' passivity, indicate that contemporary repression of public political debate inspired Blake to more emphatically embrace republican rhetoric. The aggressive masculinity of Orc and Los emerges from a context in which the government and Association movement had made moderate reformist positions difficult to sustain.[123] *Europe*'s Painite scepticism towards the constitution suggests that Blake became more radical in response to loyalist activism, adopting polarised and gendered civic humanist language used by Pitt's opponents.[124] Even though the Nameless Shadowy Female complicates this discourse's homogenisation of femininity, the conclusion of the poem does not recuperate her.

*Europe*'s aesthetic mirrors Los's ultimately active, masculine, and prophetic role. The poem's concluding enthusiasm animates *Europe*'s style

throughout. From Milton's ostensibly neoclassical 'Nativity Ode', Blake educes a prophecy, drawing especially upon Isaiah and Revelation.[125] Bloom notes variations on a basic septenary line in what 'looks like free verse, but tends to be four-stressed lines with the unstressed syllables omitted', which Ostriker suggests forms a 'lengthened, unfettered version of the *Nativity* stanza'.[126] Blake's poem is a hybrid, prophetically cadenced revision of Milton's ode, emphasising strenuous mental activity and sexual pleasure. Contemporary scholars linked biblical prophecy to primitive vision, expressing the enthusiast's emotional and physical frenzy. What Bloom calls Blake's 'startling' metres jolt readers accustomed to the sedate and ethereal rhythms of poetry inspired by Urania and instead awaken more visceral and unpredictable energies.[127] *Europe* disrupts the stately progress of Milton's stanzas, with large designs, dense and obscure passages, and sudden transitions all fragmenting the narrative. Blake forces his readers out of passive reading and into creative interpretative activity.

*Europe*, however, lacks *America*'s exhilarating optimism that a collective body of the people might be realised. At the close of the prophecy, Orc and Los are more associated with light than the energy of a realised human form. Where *Europe* represents a collective social body, it retrospectively narrates its solidification and shrinkage. The poem seems primarily to dwell on how the body of the people becomes subdued by superstition. Although dawn dispels Enitharmon's chaste influence, the masculine apocalypse at the conclusion does not seem to offer liberation for the Nameless Shadowy Female. Blake's allusions to Milton's 'Nativity Ode' invoke Jesus only to leave traces of his absence. Perhaps the influence of Anglican preachers during the loyalist reaction had for Blake compromised Jesus's potential as a scourge of mystery and passivity. *Europe* focuses more on demystifying regal and clerical myths of divine authority than envisioning utopian rebirth. Blake had begun to move his writing towards tracing the genealogy of tyranny. Present Europe's 'mind-forg'd manacles' were fashioned during the dark rise of state priestcraft.

## Notes

1. Roscoe to Lord Lansdowne, December 1792, cited in Mitchell, 'The Association Movement', 57.
2. Blake's prospectus 'To the Public' (10 October 1793, E692–93) does not list *Europe*. It may have been in progress but was not completed.

3. *By the King. A Proclamation* (21 May 1792). See Werkmeister, *1792–1793*, 80–83, and Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 207, 232–33.
4. Paine, *Letter Addressed to the Addressers*, 3.
5. Ibid., 56.
6. Ibid., 22.
7. Ibid., 68.
8. Paine, *Letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas*, 7–8.
9. *BR* 55–57, 63, 93, 186. Frederick Tatham originated the dubious tale of Blake warning Paine and facilitating his escape: see *BR* 685–86.
10. Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 266.
11. See Mitchell, 'Association Movement', 56–77, Werkmeister, *1792–1793*, 134, 141, and Black, *The Association*, 233–74.
12. Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror', 271.
13. Ibid., 277.
14. Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 272.
15. Ibid., 232–33 and Black, *The Association*, 262.
16. See Paley, 'William Blake, Richard Phillips'.
17. See Werkmeister, *1792–1793*, 40, 83, 155, 183, 234–37, Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution*, 51, and Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 273–74.
18. Add. MS 36, 497, fols. 107–108v, quoted in Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror', 282.
19. See *BB* 91, 102, 146, 158, 384, 414, 463, 473.
20. See my '"She Cuts his Heart Out at his Side"'.
21. For Enitharmon's affective rhetoric in the context of 'feminine' Evangelical Christianity, see Lincoln, 'Alluring the Heart to Virtue'. St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, 504–11, identifies a surge in didactic texts aimed at women in the 1790s. See also his *The Reading Nation*, 275–77, 592–604, 621–22, 655–57.
22. *An Exhortation to Chastity*, 7.
23. *London Public Advertiser*, 12 December 1792, in Phillips, 'Blake and the Terror', 273.
24. See Cookson, *Friends of Peace*, 7, for liberal distaste at episcopal support for war.
25. Paley, *Reasons for Contentment*, 9. For an extended reading, see Gilmartin, *Writing against Revolution*, 19–38.
26. Gilbank, *Duties of Man*, 12–13, 17, 19.
27. See Mee, *DE* 96–97.

28. Bentley, *An Appeal to Scripture and Reason*, 1, 12. See Worrall, 'Blake and 1790s Plebeian Radical Culture', 200–201, and Rix, *William Blake*, 43.
29. Black, *The Association*, 261.
30. 'Aratus', 4–7.
31. Ibid., 8–9.
32. Ibid., 12–13, 25.
33. Bloom (E903) and Erdman, *BPAE* 209–225. Mee, *DE* 95–97, connects *Europe* to conservative preaching and pamphleteering in 1793.
34. Ridpath, *Star Tales*, 64–65 and Condos, *Star Myths*, 101–103. Discussion of the illuminations gives plate numbers from Copy A.
35. Ridpath, *Star Tales*, 68–70 and Condos, *Star Myths*, 111–13. This motif also appears at the top of Plate 5.
36. *PD* II, 247.
37. Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 308.
38. See Hill's entries for 'Aranea', 'Limax', and 'Lumbricus' in *Urania*, and Drennan, 'Whatever Happened to Bufo the Toad?'
39. *IB* 162, and Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 163. The text does not capitalise the Nameless Shadowy Female, but I do so for clarity.
40. Bentley attributes the annotations to Cumberland in *BB* 159. See Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 157–60.
41. Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll.901–6, and Homer, *Iliad*, v.749–51 (v.926–33 in Pope's translation).
42. Ridpath, *Star Tales*, 131–34, Condos, *Star Myths*, 205–7.
43. 'Mucius' [William Godwin], *The Morning Chronicle* (8 February 1793).
44. Bogen, 'Blake's Debt to Gillray'.
45. LaBelle, 'Blake's Bald Nudes'. See also Carretta, *George III*, 226.
46. Erdman, *IB* 162, describes it as a grasshopper, while Dörrbecker, *CP* 184, identifies it as a locust.
47. See, for example, *A Freeborn Englishman* ([1795?], *BMC* no. 8710) and *A Free Born Englishman!* ([1795?], *BMC* no. 8711).
48. See *BPAE* 220–21; Tannenbaum, *BT* 166; Whittaker, *Myths of Britain*, 30; Beer, *Blake's Humanism*, 124; and Bloom, E904. Bruder gives an excellent critique of the patriarchal bias of much Blake criticism in *Daughters of Albion*, especially 1–36, and on *Europe*, 133–66.
49. Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 162, 156.

50. Damon, *Philosophy and Symbols*, 343, identified Plate 3's allusion to Milton's ode. For detailed parallels, see Tolley, '*Europe*: "to those ychain'd in sleep"', and Lawson, 'Blake's *Europe*'.
51. *PD* II, 665.
52. Lawson, 'Blake's *Europe*', 54.
53. Aers, 'Dialectics of Sex', 500.
54. See *CP* 143–44 for a summary of interpretations. For the character as a colonial 'other', see Lincoln, 'From *America* to *The Four Zoas*', 212–13, and 'Blake, America, and Enlightenment'.
55. Worrall, 'Immortal Tent', 285, argues for an astronomical reference: the Medusa's head, with Orc as the binary star Algol.
56. Condos, *Star Myths*, 75–77.
57. Hill pejoratively comments on Schiller throughout *Urania*, especially *s.v.* 'Aaron' and 'Mary Magdalen'.
58. Tannenbaum, *BT* 161.
59. Ibid., 161–62.
60. 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', *RM* 105 [ll.33–44]. Mee, *DE* 30–31 compares the Female to desolate Jerusalem as a weeping woman in Jeremiah and Lamentations.
61. See 'Ode on Liberty', *Morning Chronicle* (17 July 1792).
62. See Burke, *Reflections*, 112–19. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume II*, 296–306, provides valuable commentary on Burke's sophisticated understanding of chivalry's legacy for modern manners and civilisation.
63. Wright, *Blake, Nationalism*, 100–101.
64. *BPAE* 265 and Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 133–55, 159.
65. Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 162.
66. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 211.
67. Tannenbaum, *BT* 157, and *RM* 38 [ll.15–17]. For the genesis of Urania as muse of sacred poetry see Campbell, 'The Christian Muse'.
68. See Frye, *FS* 262, Ferber, *Social Vision*, 163, Bindman, *Blake as Artist*, 79, and Mee, *DE* 40.
69. Beer, *Blake's Humanism*, 122.
70. *RM* 42 [l.125].
71. Mee, *DE* 43. See also Squibbs, 'Preventing the Star-Led Wizards', 372.
72. The lines from 3:9–4:14 lack clear attribution. Dörrbecker, *CP* 145 and 268–69, summarises different approaches. I follow Erdman's

attribution of 3:9–14 to Los, 4:1–2 to a description of the effect of his call, 4:3–9 to the sons of Urizen, and 10–14 to Enitharmon. See *BPAE* 266.

73. In the later epics, Urthona keeps 'the gates of heaven': *The Four Zoas* (4.48:19, E332) and *Jerusalem* (82:81, E241).The simile alludes to Satan in *Paradise Lost*, i.537, echoed by Gray in 'The Bard', ll.19–20.
74. Ferber, 'Finite Revolutions', 218.
75. Erdman, *BPAE* 268.
76. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 285–88.
77. See Chapter 4 and Hill, *Urania*, 'Mars', *s.v.*
78. See, for example, Homer, *The Odyssey*, viii.266–369, and Ovid, *Fasti*, iv.129–30.
79. De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 108 and Mulvihill, 'Called to the "sports of night"'.
80. Erdman, *BPAE* 223, and Damon, *BD* 124.
81. Rintrah roars at the outset of the *Marriage*, suggesting Leo's ascendancy in the hot summer between 23 July and 22 August 1789, when the French Revolution began.
82. See Condos, *Star Myths*, 43–47 and Hill, *Urania*, 'Aries', *s.v.*
83. See Frye, *FS* 262, Tannenbaum, *BT* 167, and Mee, *DE* 44.
84. Condos, *Star Myths*, 125–28, 87–91 and Allen, *Star Names,* 175.
85. See Charlotte Smith's 'To the Moon', addressed as 'Queen of the silver bow!' in *Elegiac Sonnets*, 4 [l. 1].
86. See Hill, *Urania*, 'Lumbricus', *s.v.*
87. *CP* 277–78. The constellation is actually an American Indian.
88. See Condos, *Star Myths* 83–84.
89. Other possibilities include Monocerous and Sagittarius. Taurus's hooves might also produce thunder.
90. See Lincoln, 'Blake's *Europe*: An Early Version?' Lincoln refers to Erdman's plate numbers.
91. Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 36–41, 99.
92. De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 100.
93. See Mee, *DE* 36–38 and Kitson, 'Coleridge, Milton, and the Millennium'.
94. *BPAE* 211. See Colley, *Britons*, 148–49.
95. See Todd, *Tracks in the Snow*, 48–54, and Mee, *DE* 92–93.
96. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 275–76.

97. For conservative use of this axiom in 1792 and 1793 respectively, see Horsley, *A Sermon*, 18, and Nares, *Principles of Government*, 81. For a challenge to this view, see the letter to the editor in *The Morning Chronicle*, 12 September 1794.
98. Bryant, *A New System*, I, 507, Volney, *Ruins*, 240, 361.
99. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ii.833–75.
100. Bryant, *A New System*, II, pp. 160–61.
101. Frye, *FS* 141, also noted by Tolley, '*Europe*: "to those ychain'd in sleep"', 136.
102. See Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation,* 11–32, for politicised druid history in the period.
103. Blake echoed these lines in his later painting, the *Epitome of James Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs'* (*c.*1820), *PD* I, 967. The words 'God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire' appear above the Old Testament deity.
104. For the influential reading with God as the tyrant of a clockwork Newtonian cosmos, see Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 155–56, and Nurmi, *William Blake*, 100.
105. Frye, *FS* 224 and Carretta, *George III*, 219–20.
106. Erdman, *BPAE* 213–14, Carretta, *George III*, 222–26, and Mee, *DE* 93.Carretta associates the bat-wings with satire on the mad king. Blake perhaps alludes to Schiller's replacement for Boötes, the pope St Silvester, who sits on a cloud wearing a triple mitre.
107. See Worrall, 'Plebeian Radical Culture', 206 for a radical pun on 'pain'.
108. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 291.
109. Mucius [William Godwin], 'To the Editor', *The Morning Chronicle* (1 February 1793).
110. Erdman, *BPAE* 216–18.
111. Werkmeister, *1792–1793*, 137, 139, 143–44.
112. 'Citizens' suggests both republicans and inhabitants of the City of London. See: Werkmeister, *1792–1793*, 234, 268–69, 279–80, 341–49; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 272–73; Alexander, *Richard Newton*, 34–38, 120–21; and Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 53, 103–104, 178, 212.
113. See Barrell, *Spirit of Despotism*, 100–102, for the testimony of Thomas Muir's domestic servant against him during his trial for sedition.
114. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 360, and Carretta, *George III*, 241.

115. Erdman, *BPAE* 212.
116. See, for example, Bloom (E904).
117. Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 32, suggests an allusion to Newton's Euhemerism and compendious *Chronology*.
118. See, for example, *British Biography*, VII [150].
119. For these describing French revolutionary violence, see Beer, *Blake's Humanism*, 132, and Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 160. Erdman, *BPAE* 211, links them to 'the English crusade' of 1793–94 against France.
120. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 292.
121. The mother 'groand' during childbirth in 'Infant Sorrow' (48:1, E28).
122. Black, *The Association*, 254, discusses large-scale celebrations in Sheffield. Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 247–48, notes enthusiastic toasts at the London Revolution Society on 5 November 1792. See also Barbauld's poem 'To a Great Nation' published in *The Cambridge Intelligencer* (2 November 1793). For the Low Countries and Brussels, see Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 249–51.
123. Black, *The Association*, 274.
124. Despite the currency of republican language, radicalism in the 1790s was not necessarily misogynistic. Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 176–78, notes the importance of feminist ideas to many radicals.
125. Tannenbaum, *BT* 181.
126. Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 152 and Ostriker, *Vision and Verse*, 169.
127. See, for example, Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, I, 79–80, and Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 152.

CHAPTER 6

# 'Serpentine Dissimulation': Apotheosis in *Urizen*, *Ahania*, and *The Song of Los*

*Europe*'s concluding confidence that the people could assert their independence against tyranny was short-lived. Blake's next works reflect the difficulties of maintaining free thought and debate in a climate of repression. He probably produced *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794) between engraving work on Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), dated 2 December 1793, and six plates for George Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline* (1796), dated 5 November 1794.[1] British reformers experienced deepening crisis. In May 1794, the government arrested key members of the SCI and LCS, charging them with 'constructive' treason, extending the meaning to 'compass or imagine the Death of our Lord the King'. Barrell has shown how the October trials focused on political constructions of the imagination as treasonous or alarmist. For the government's opponents the collapse of the trials was a triumph for constitutional liberties and freedom of thought over a repressive government. Optimism was soon dampened by the repressive Two Acts at the end of 1795, which clamped down on reformist publications and meetings.[2]

*The [First] Book of Urizen*, *The Song of Los* (1795), and the *Book of Ahania* (1795) represent the human mind's faculties, especially of perception and imagination, compromised by oppression. These illuminated books primarily trace genealogies of the Fall and its present repercussions. *Urizen*, in particular, reflects Blake's interest in Enlightenment narratives of the evolution of religious consciousness, particularly the shift from polytheism to monotheism. This chapter shows how Blake drew on

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the significant role of apotheosis in both myth and eighteenth-century anthropology of religion to investigate the ascendancy of kings and their state religion over the people's minds.

These texts, especially *The Song of Los*, suggest that by the mid-1790s Blake was increasingly drawn towards scepticism. They seem to represent a low point in his relationship with Christianity. Writing to Blake in September 1800, Thomas Butts predicted his move to Felpham would help him become 'a Member of that Community of which you are at present, in the opinion of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but a Sign to mark the residence of dim incredulity, haggard suspicion, & bloated philosophy'.[3] The Archbishop personifies orthodoxy here; Butts suggests Blake suffers from scepticism and infidelity. Certainly, the mid-1790s poems dwell on religious, mental, and physical constraint. The manifestation of revolutionary energy in popular resistance to tyranny seems less possible in these works than in *America*.

## *The Book of Urizen* and the State Clergy

In *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Blake brings *Europe*'s Enlightenment critique of priestcraft centre-stage. The poem evidently parodies the Genesis creation narrative. The suggestion of 'reason' in Urizen's name and the poem's obscurity and lack of obvious political referents have led critics to interpret it as an attack on the investment of Joseph Johnson's circle in Enlightenment philosophy or a turn away from debates in the public sphere towards ahistorical private myth.[4] The statement in *Urizen*'s Preludium that Eternals call the narrator to tell 'Of the primeval Priests assum'd power' (2:1, E70), however, foregrounds a critique of state religion's ministers. McGann links *Urizen* to the mediation of new German textual scholarship in England by Alexander Geddes and the Johnson circle.[5] Geddes introduced his 'fragment hypothesis' in a controversial new translation of Genesis. Like prominent German scholars, he approached Genesis as a redaction of various myths, historically grounded in the culture of the primitive Hebrews. Mee and Worrall relate this to Paine's attack on institutional religion in *The Age of Reason* (Part One 1794, Part Two 1795) and the prominence of the clergy and the Bible in 1790s British political debate.[6] Mee connects *Urizen* with Plate 11 of the *Marriage*, discerning a shared opposition between oral bardic 'poetic tales' and their reification into scripture, priestly ritual, and law, with *Urizen*'s heterogeneous form resisting this process.[7] This chapter argues that Blake's poem

complicates this opposition. Urizen's apotheosis marks a historical epoch, in which his ideology determines the entire structure of reality and conditions the mental faculties Los personifies.

*Urizen*'s oppositional animus is evident in its parody of the chapters and verses of Genesis. In place of the grandeur of God's creation, Blake substitutes harsh, negative language and what Gilchrist called 'the heaping up of gloomy and terrible images' in pages 'characterized by the monotony of horror'.[8] The poem also draws on Enlightenment narratives of religious history to address the public roles of king and priest during the mid-1790s. Despite its mythic style, *Urizen* is surprisingly Euhemerist; Blake re-narrates Genesis to conflate the fall of mankind with the apotheosis of the state priest.

From 1793 to 1794, the established clergy's social role shifted. Hole identifies 'a fundamental change of emphasis in Christian argument from political theory to social theory'. Clerical politics had focused on the extent to which God required subordination to government: Tories opposed Whig clergy, who argued that men could determine their forms of government and retained the right to rebel against tyrants. These traditional arguments persisted, but the impact of the French Revolution and radicalism in the 1790s shifted Anglican rhetoric: 'from 1793 onwards churchmen were increasingly turning away from the discussion of political theory and the rights of man and moving to consider social theory and the nature of man'.[9] Only Christianity could restrain fallen man's intrinsic sinfulness, selfishness, and appetite, a view of human nature supported by reports of the violence unleashed in France. Official Fast Day sermons to pray for British success in the war emphasised human sinfulness. On 28 February, the Reverend John Grose preached that human history, 'from the remotest periods of antiquity, to the present moment' was 'one general detail of vice and folly'. Modern refinements had merely 'varied the form and modifications of evil'. Despite 'the splendid discoveries of literature, or the boasted advancement in philosophy' the 'moral deprivation which is coeval with fallen man' was ineradicable. Deference and due 'consciousness of future responsibility' were essential, and religion was the 'triumph of wisdom', which allowed humans to humbly fill their 'respective stations'.[10] Likewise, the Lord Mayor's chaplain urged members of the Corporation of London 'whose minds are not yet perverted by infidelity' to 'walk in the "good old paths"; and to "train up their children," in the *fear* not the *denial*, of God'.[11] These exhortations to submit to temporal authority spurred anticlericalism. 'The Fast Day' in Daniel Isaac Eaton's *Politics for the People:*

*Or, a Salmagundy for Swine* (1795) lambasts Anglican ministers, addressing 'the Supreme Being, who, true religion tells us, enjoins brotherly love, forgiveness, humanity and virtue' as if 'more merciless and blood-thirsty than any divinity that ever disgraced paganism'. Like their princes, priests 'felt themselves interested in the cause, and their zeal shook the pulpit with exhortations to vengeance'.[12] The piece Euhemerises the deity as a projection of royal and priestly bloodthirstiness.

In *The Age of Reason*, Paine adopted a Euhemerist premise to undermine sacerdotal authority. In Part One, Paine asserts that 'a revolution in the system of religion' is the inevitable corollary to political change. State churches would be exposed, 'human inventions and priestcraft would be detected; and man would return to the pure, unmixed, and unadulterated belief of one God, and no more'.[13] Blake seems to have been distrustful of deist monotheism in addition, but *Urizen* and especially *The Song of Los* adopt a similarly Euhemerist critique of superstitious state religion. Blake's annotations in 1798 to Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (1796), which attacked *The Age of Reason*, suggest much sympathy with Paine. To Blake, 'Paine has not Attacked Christianity', while Watson, previously associated with liberal Whig Anglicanism, 'has defended Antichrist'. Instead, Paine had 'Extinguished Superstition' and exposed 'perversions' of Christ and the Bible (E611–12) in the spirit of Christ himself, who 'died as an Unbeliever' (E614). Blake scowls at Watson's 'Serpentine Dissimulation'. Watson pointed out that *The Age of Reason* was derivative, drawing on earlier Enlightenment arguments, which Blake rejected as 'Dishonest Misrepresentation' (E612).[14] Paine's lively popularisation of Enlightenment critiques of state religion was immensely influential on British radicals. For Paine, leaders and their priests appropriated the reverence due to the single deity:

> Every national church or religion has established itself by pretending some special mission from God communicated to certain individuals. The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet; as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.[15]

Each religion's God is Euhemerised, reflecting a founding figurehead's pretence to special revelation. Paine's conflation of Protestant and Catholic Christianity and equation of Moses and Jesus with Mahomet are provocative, flattening different religions, cultures, and historical periods into a

universal mechanism of social control. In his account of Moses, the 'commandments carry no internal evidence of divinity with them', only containing precepts 'any man qualified to be a lawgiver, or a legislator, could produce' without 'supernatural intervention.[16] For Paine, state religion mystifies state domination.

Several *Songs of Experience* (1794) suggest Blake's intense anticlericalism at this time. The 'Little Boy Lost' is 'siez'd' by the priest, publicly denounced for setting 'reason up for judge | Of our most holy Mystery' (50:10, 15–16, E28–29), and bound and burned. The motivation for the uncharacteristic sympathy with 'reason' is opposition to priestcraft. 'I saw a chapel all of gold' contains bitter anticlericalism. Composed on a notebook page with drafts of 'The Garden of Love', 'My Pretty Rose Tree', and 'The Clod and the Pebble', it is probably coeval with *Experience* and with *Urizen*.[17] A serpent forces open the door of a golden chapel and draws his 'slimy length' onto the altar, 'Vomiting his poison out | On the bread & on the wine'. In the context of the other poems, Blake attacks ascetic morality and religious hypocrisy, which despoils the innocent, perhaps sexual, communion. In response, the narrator 'turnd into a sty | And laid me down among the swine' (E467–68), suggesting a gesture of solidarity with the common people Burke dismissed as 'the swinish multitude', a term 1790s radicals enthusiastically embraced.[18] Nevertheless, Blake is ambivalent to the masses; their grimy sty is no bright 'chapel all of gold'.

## Priestly Apotheosis

Despite *Urizen*'s prophetic obscurity, the poem is invested in Enlightenment strategies of demystification, by linking priesthood to a particular historical conception of God. The Preludium indicates alternative modes of being associated with unidentified 'Eternals' who predate Urizen, destabilising the poem's veracity as a myth of origins and also implicating the Eternals in Urizen's rise. This aligns it with Enlightenment writers for whom polytheism naturally preceded monotheism.[19]

The narrator calls to the Eternals to tell:

> Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
> When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;
> And gave him a place in the north,
> Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.
> (2:1–4, E70)

'Priests' lacks a possessive apostrophe, merging Urizen's and the priesthood's arrogation of religious authority. Mee notes Paine uses 'assumed' in *Rights of Man* for political power that is not delegated by the people but imposed upon them. Ferber foregrounds connotations of ascension to heaven, usually of Mary.[20] Additional meanings include taking up an official position and undue self-importance. Blake's 'assum'd' merges these political, religious, and moral domains in one moment of change. The Preludium introduces the poem's theme as the apotheosis of the state priesthood as Urizen: the moment when temporal authority becomes mystified into a specific form of deity. Urizen's solitary 'place in the north' recalls Satan's preparations for the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost* (v.683–93). The 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience* also suggests this association, with the Bard hoping the 'lapsed Soul' might 'controll | The starry pole' and 'fallen fallen light renew!' (E18). The 'starry pole' is the North Star, Polaris. In 'EARTH'S Answer', the 'Starry Jealousy' of the 'Selfish father of men' keeps Earth and 'free Love' bound (E18–19). Urizen's northern location is one of stars, coldness, and chastity.

Critics arguing for Blake's Gnosticism frequently focus on *Urizen*'s conflation of the Fall and the Creation. In this poem, however, the Fall is a repeated trope rather than a single event. Iterations include Urizen's withdrawal from the Eternals, the Eternals' spurning of his religion, Urizen's announcement of his laws, the formation of the mortal body, Los's cessation of his work, the separation of the sexes, and the shrinking senses of the inhabitants of Urizen's cities. Each time, the Fall suggests new developments in human existence, as Los struggles against a reality now determined by Urizen.

McGann notes that Geddes and German scholars interpreted Genesis as 'an edited collection of mythological narratives which have their basis in the cultural history of the ancient Hebrews', with the Fall reflecting 'the ideas of primitive Judaism'.[21] Geddes argued that the 'God of Moses is a *jealous God*' and 'irascible and avenging', adding 'the whole tenor of the Pentateuch convinces me, that the more ancient Hebrews were real anthropomorphites'.[22] Blake's apotheosis of Urizen shares these premises, describing the historical formation of the gloomy, tyrannical, and legalistic God as an event coeval with the rise of a priestly cabal that fosters superstition.

Raine proposed that Urizen's name derived from the Greek verb to limit (*ούριζειν*), suiting his restrictive nature.[23] McGann connects Urizen to Geddes's discussion of the Greek term during a footnote in his Bible

translation.[24] Raine's other conjecture, however, is often overlooked. She suggests 'the cognate form Uranus, signifying Lord of the Firmament', the 'starry Heaven' mentioned at the outset of Hesiod's *Theogony*.[25] This fits Urizen the sky-god, uniting his associations with astronomy as well as gloomy clouds, rains, and snows. In addition, Urizen's second syllable suggests the other supreme Greek god, Zeus. Urizen syncretically compounds the two supreme Greek deities with the Judaeo-Christian God.

Urizen's first syllable connects him to Old Testament patriarchy. In *A New System*, Bryant associated 'Ur' with a group of radicals ('Aur […] Or, Ur, and Our') referring to both stars, light, and fire, part of titles given to Noah's son Chus.[26] Mee notes that the opening lines 'Lo, a shadow of horror is risen | In Eternity!'(3:1–2, E70) echo Genesis 15:12, where the Lord casts a 'horror of great darkness' over Abram (later Abraham).[27] From verses five to seven, God compares Abram's promised seed to the profusion of the stars, perhaps the origin of Urizen's 'starry hosts'. In Genesis 11:26–31, Abram leaves this ancestral home of Ur in Chaldea at God's bidding. He is the first post-diluvian patriarch to directly communicate with the deity and receive a mission. In *Jewish Antiquities* (*c.*94 AD), Flavius Josephus implies that Abram was a monotheist priest:

> Eminent in all exemplary virtues, he was the first who undertook to rectify the erroneous opinions men entertained of the Supreme Being, to instruct them in the nature of his attributes, and to inculcate, that there were but one God, the creator of all things […] These doctrines he enforced by argument deduced from the operations of nature in general, and the planetary system in particular.[28]

Josephus then tells of Chaldean and Mesopotamian mutinies against Abram. While the patriarch is familiar with the astronomical religion of these peoples, he departs from it by deducing from the stars and planets a mysterious, regulating deity. Eighteenth-century historians of religion commonly associated the Chaldeans with a priestly caste and in the 1790sVolney's *Ruins* connects the civil institution of the priesthood with the rise of eastern Sabaism, especially in Chaldea and Egypt.[29] By associating Urizen with Abram's Chaldean heritage, Blake links the invisible, jealous god to worship of astronomical bodies, led by the priesthood.

Urizen hides from the Eternals in an area rich with astronomical associations. His 'shadow' suggests night, while the 'abominable void' and 'soul-shudd'ring vaccuum' are the empty sky:

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

3. For he strove in battles dire
In unseen conflictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.
(3:8–17, E70)

Astronomy is characterised by measurement and poetic convention describes the extent of the heavens as 'ninefold'.[30] For Worrall, the 'dividing rule', 'brazen quadrant', and the 'golden compasses' (20:33–39, E80–81) with which Urizen later measures his universe all indicate constellations.[31] Urizen's desolate 'mountains' are the barren heights of the sky, especially since clouds can also be 'rifted'. Here he fights against irregular forces of 'perturbation'. His struggles against clouds and vapour and shapes of 'beast, bird, fish, serpent' suggest attempts by ancient astronomers to rationalise the profusion of stars into constellations and, more broadly, his battle against polytheism. The Eternals subsequently behold Urizen's 'vast forests' whilst he lies 'Brooding shut in the deep' (3:23–25), recalling the Tyger's 'forests of the night'. The narrator describes Urizen like an astronomical sphere himself, 'Dark revolving in silent activity' (3:18). Urizen has been transformed by an apotheosis, but one which is secretive - dark, silent, and unseen.

## Urizen and the Rise of Priestcraft

Urizen's concealment associates him with eighteenth-century histories of primitive religion. On Plate 23, Urizen squats in a dark cave.[32] This image recalls accounts of the ancient ritual use of caves as a decisive religious development. For Bryant, gloomy worship in mountains, subterranean hollows, and rocky caverns marks a shift from a religion of 'reverential awe' to one of 'unnatural horror' and 'superstition'. Volney also connected caves and priestly mystery, to more radical effect.[33] In *Indian Antiquities* (1794–1800), Thomas Maurice, while opposing Enlightenment orientalism, also associated gloomy caverns and forest

groves with 'The BRAMINS of Asia and the DRUIDS of Europe' and the 'earliest devotions of mankind'. The 'deep shade', 'solemn silence', and 'profound solitude' inspired 'holy horror'. Persian and Indian priests worshipped in caves decorated with stars and sculptures of myths and deified heroes to foster the awe of devotees.[34]

Recesses are apt environments for Urizen, echoed in his emptiness and the narrator's 'un-' prefixed adjectives: 'unknown' and 'unseen' appear five and three times respectively in the first chapter. The illustrations similarly depict mystery. On Plate 24, Urizen faces away from the reader, engaged in obscure activity. This alludes to Exodus 33:16–23, where God agrees to reveal only 'his back parts' to Moses, stationed in the cleft of a rock. Likewise, on Plate 8 Urizen presents his brazen book towards the reader, but its pages are filled with undecipherable characters, suggesting the theory that hieroglyphics were codes by which Egyptian priests kept the vulgar in ignorance of their religion.[35]

The narrator describes Urizen 'Brooding secret' (3:7) and 'clos'd, unknown | Brooding shut in the deep' (3:24–25). The repeated participle alludes to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in *Paradise Lost* (i.19–22).[36] Dwelling on the creation myth, however, obscures Blake's critique of priestcraft. Urizen's 'brooding' merges the contemplative priest with the deity itself. Solitary habits and asceticism were objects of much Protestant and sceptical anticlericalism, especially targeting Catholics.[37] This is evident in Plate 4. This plate does not appear in copies D, E, F, and J, perhaps to minimise Urizen's direct communication, his heroic and creative aspects, and his attempt to establish 'Laws of peace, of love, of unity: | Of pity, compassion, forgiveness' (4:34–35).[38] He writes down 'secrets of dark contemplation' (4:26, E72) in his book, which he unfolds on a rock, suggestive of Mount Sinai but also of Jesus's pun on Peter as the founding 'rock' of the church (Matthew 16:13–19). Urizen's sermon to the Eternals on the 'Seven deadly Sins of the soul' (4:30, E71) is connected to his ascetic activities, during which he is 'Unseen in tormenting passions' (3:19, E71) and wrestles 'With terrible monsters Sin-bred' (4:28, E72). Urizen has 'sought for a joy without pain, | For a solid without fluctuation', asking 'Why will you die O Eternals? | Why live in unquenchable burnings?' (4:10–13, E71). In medical discourse, 'fluctuation' referred to the undulation of fluids in the human body.[39] Urizen's horror at the Eternals' sensual 'burnings' and his account of how 'First I fought with the fire; consum'd | Inwards' (4:14–15, E72) indicate that he seeks divinity through denying eternal physical energies and desire. Urizen is 'unpro-

lific' (3:2), paradoxically creating an 'abominable void' (3:4, E70) and a 'petrific abominable chaos' (3:26, E71). His elevation requires the negation of human energies.

The narrator briefly introduces a vision of the eternity Urizen negates, a unified prelapsarian existence in a sublime, fluid state, where 'The will of the Immortal expanded | Or contracted his all flexible senses. | Death was not, but eternal life sprung' (3:37–39, E71). 'Senses' implies bodily faculties and the singular article suggests the 'Immortal' is a unified human body, albeit without discernible organs or limbs, from which Urizen separates. He unclasps his 'Book of brass', which redefines desires as sin:

> 3. Sund'ring, dark'ning, thund'ring!
> Rent away with a terrible crash
> Eternity roll'd wide apart
> Wide asunder rolling
> Mountainous all around
> Departing; departing; departing:
> Leaving ruinous fragments of life
> Hanging frowning cliffs & all between
> An ocean of voidness unfathomable.
> (5:3–11, E73)

The gloomily Burkean sublime landscape leaves only fragmentary traces of eternal energy. Blake's typography emphasises cleavage and restriction, with four contracted present tense verbs in the first and third lines. 'Rent' and 'Sund'ring', echoed in 'asunder', connote slicing and tearing tissue, 'sunder' also holding legal connotations of annulled union. To the right, a bird of paradise ascends, a motif repeated above the final noun in Urizen's description of his 'eternal abode' where he dwells in his 'holiness' (4:7, E71). Power previously immanent in the 'Immortal' human body becomes displaced into a distant heaven, 'days of futurity' (4:9), and onto Urizen himself.

Urizen narcissistically mythicises his activities: 'self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void | I alone, even I! the winds merciless | Bound' (4:18–20, E72). While the obvious allusion is to Raphael's account of creation in *Paradise Lost* (vii.242), Blake draws on its source in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: during the reign of Chaos, the 'Earth was not hung self-balanced in the surrounding Air'.[40] Indeed, throughout *Urizen*, Blake undermines *Paradise Lost* and Urizen's monologic narratives of creation by reinscribing polytheism and echoes of *Metamorphoses*. The shadow is 'unknown' and 'Some' Eternals speculate 'It is Urizen' (3:5–6, E70), echoing Ovid's

casual phrase for the former of the universe: 'he, whoever he was of the Gods' (i.32). Likewise, when Urizen is rent from Los's side and 'The Eternals' say 'What is this? Death | Urizen is a clod of clay' (6:9–10, E74), Blake undermines Urizen's claims to bring order by echoing Ovid's description of Chaos: 'a rude and indigested Mass; nor any Thing but a lifeless Lump' (i.7–8). Residual polytheism, exemplified by the elemental gods Thiriel, Utha, Grodna, and Fuzon (23:11–18, E81), challenges Urizen's monotheistic supremacy.

Critics rightly associate Urizen's tyranny with scripture and books, but his oral communication is equally malignant. His preaching emphasises the suppression of desire and suggests Blake's distaste towards Anglican Fast Day sermons. Urizen promulgates a narrative of original human sinfulness which enjoins self-denial and retrenchment, his gospel reinforced by inflexible metal books and the institution of the church (the 'rock'):

> 6. Here alone I in books formd of metals
> Have written the secrets of wisdom
> The secrets of dark contemplation
> By fightings and conflicts dire,
> With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
> Which the bosoms of all inhabit;
> Seven deadly Sins of the soul.
>
> 7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
> This rock, place with strong hand the Book
> Of eternal brass, written in my solitude. (4:24–33, E72)

Ovid's Golden Age knew no 'threatening Penalties grav'd on Tables of Brass', but in the ages of Brass and Iron humankind declined into cruelty and warfare.[41] The obscure characters on Urizen's book in the illumination make his text inscrutable. He pre-empts interpretative latitude by constraining legitimate meanings available in his Bible of Sin. His speech perorates with 'One King, one God, one Law' (4:40, E72). The primacy of the 'King' in this triad Euhemerises the deity.

## Los and the Eternals

While Urizen claims sole credit for his creation, Blake involves the Eternals in his division from Eternity. Their reaction and their narrative of his rebellion shape the development of mystery.[42] As the Eternals rage

against Urizen's sermon, 'Rent away with a terrible crash | Eternity roll'd wide apart' (5:4–5, E73). The ambiguous verb perhaps implies Eternity's willed separation. The Eternals become complicit with the rise of mystery religion:

> 11. "Spread a Tent, with strong curtains around them
> "Let cords & stakes bind in the Void
> That Eternals may no more behold them"
>
> 12. They began to weave curtains of darkness
> They erected large pillars round the Void
> With golden hooks fastend in the pillars
> With infinite labour the Eternals
> A woof wove, and called it Science. (19:2–9, E78)

Rather than referring to Bacon, Locke, and Newton's empiricism, this ambiguous primal 'Science' derives from the Latin *scientia*, knowledge. It partly manifests eternal creativity that resists mystery, the *Four Zoas*'s 'sweet Science' (139:10, E407) in contrast to Urizen's 'Void'. Its 'golden hooks' and 'infinite labour' suggest a wonderful structure, although as a 'Tent' it is provisional. The eternal fabric stretching from high pillars over the void implies that 'Science' involves astronomy and astrology. But the structure conceals Los and Enitharmon from the Eternals; 'cords & stakes' that 'bind' merge building with captivity. The 'curtains of darkness' indicate that 'Science' is implicated in superstition. In Volney's *Ruins*, those deputed by primitive societies to 'watch the appearance and settings of certain stars' for agriculture 'penetrated the great phenomena of nature, and dived into the secret of various of her operations', especially 'the course of the stars and planets'. Particular families monopolised this 'science' and 'assumed to themselves exclusive privileges', convincing the people that they had 'intercourse with celestial powers'. As 'astronomers, divines, naturalists, physicians, necromancers, interpreters of the Gods, oracles of the people, rivals of kings or their accomplices', priests established 'an empire of mystery'.[43] 'Science', paradoxically, becomes absorbed into superstition.

Los is both one of the Eternals and their emissary, who 'round the dark globe of Urizen' watches 'for Eternals to confine, | The obscure separation alone' (5:38–40, E73). The comma indicates that he restrains both Urizen and the Eternals themselves. Plate 20 depicts three aerial figures, probably remaining Eternals. A central youthful figure, perhaps Los, touches the

earth below and is flanked by two bearded patriarchs: the Eternals now appear in Urizen's image. Los is likewise implicated in Urizen's ascendancy. For Mee, Urizen reifies 'poetic tales' into 'forms of worship'.[44] His book of brass certainly contrasts with the 'swift-winged words' the poet beseeches from the Eternals in the Preludium. Los, however, does not yet seem bardlike. Paley identifies him with what in *All Religions are One* (1788) Blake terms the 'Poetic Genius', the 'faculty which experiences'.[45] His identity as 'the Eternal Prophet' only arises gradually. Lincoln suggests Los's early activity is instinctual adaptation to a new environment resembling *Paradise Lost*'s Hell.[46] Los's tangled response to Urizen personifies the mind struggling to create a vision of reality in circumstances already established by Urizen. The Urizenic god bounds the horizon of what it is possible to perceive, imagine, and create.

Although this complicates the opposition of poet and priest, Blake retains *Europe*'s contrast between Los and Urizen in gendered republican terms:

> 9. Los wept howling around the dark Demon:
> And cursing his lot; for in anguish,
> Urizen was rent from his side;
> And a fathomless void for his feet;
> And intense fires for his dwelling.
>
> 10. But Urizen laid in a stony sleep
> Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity. (6:2–8, E73–74)

The active and passive verbs reflect priestly Urizen as secondary, a passive Eve-figure drawn from the rib of the active Los. Blake distinguishes between this metaphorical 'feminine' passivity and the emergence of woman. Although Enitharmon emerges from Los, the language describing their relationship is affective and visceral. The emanation is a globe of life blood dividing from 'his bosom' which 'earthquak'd with sighs', her birth characterised by 'pangs' and 'trembling': the lines express desire, albeit thwarted (13:49–59, E77–78). The globe of blood grows vitally in active verbs: 'branching' and 'writhing' (18:2–3, E78). On Plate 11, a red globule issues not from the male's side but from his chest, head, back, and thighs. Unlike Urizen's division, the intimate and animated relationship between Los and the woman echoes the 'unquenchable burnings' of eternal desire. Under a reality defined by Urizen, however, Los's sexual desire is torment and becomes Sin, just as the 'enormous forms of energy' of the

Eternals appeared as 'All the seven deadly sins of the soul' (4:48–49, E72). Enitharmon's child, Orc, emerges as a serpent enfolding her loins, echoing Sin in *Paradise Lost* (ii.648–59). In Urizen's world, eternal energy becomes threatening and satanic.

Los observes Urizen's 'stony sleep' in a 'dreamless night' and is 'affrighted | At the formless unmeasurable death' (6:7, 7:7–9, E74). While Los creatively shapes Urizen into human form, in the process he becomes complicit in producing the Urizenic world. By orbiting Urizen, the 'dark Demon' (6:2, E73), Los becomes a satellite body.[47] A similar dynamic occurs with the sublime. De Luca describes Urizen as 'an almost frantic factotum of the Burkean sublime', associated with thunder, clouds, whirlwinds, rocky mountains and fragments, ice and snow.[48] Los is 'smitten with astonishment' (8:1, E74), absorbing Urizen's stoniness: the verb suggests being struck or infected, but also, perversely, of being enamoured. Once Los beholds the Urizen he has formed over seven ages, 'his prophetic voice' is 'Siez'd' (13:38–39, E77). Likewise, when Enitharmon separates, 'Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment' seize and 'Petrify' the 'eternal myriads' (18:13–14, E78); by contrast, Los embraces her. For Matthews, sexual difference in this scene arises from 'the inability of the eternals to look at the intense feelings of others'.[49] Whereas the dynamic of the sublime normally involves a transfer of power to the observer, the Eternals and to some extent Los are disempowered and absorb their antagonist's unyielding hardness.

*Visions*, *America*, and Plate iii of *Europe* describe the limitations of the human body and sensory organs in general terms. Urizen's physical mutations are often linked to these earlier narratives of bodily constriction; for Bloom, this section is 'only the forming of our own natural body'.[50] Blake, however, draws on its social and political significance; Urizen's changes represent the hardening of the collective body, with order imposed by external restraint rather than generated from within by its members. Los perceives and shapes this social body in the image of its ruling principle, the king-priest deity.

Architectural terms resonate amid the descriptions of the body, mapping the institutionalisation of Urizen's mystery religion onto his physical development. In its first age the mind is enclosed in a 'roof shaggy wild', an 'orb' (10:33–34, E75) that indicates the concave sky and the 'forests of the night'. This is followed by a 'Spine' writhing 'Upon the winds' (10:37–38), suggestive of *Europe*'s starry serpent, and 'caverns' which recall early cave-cults. The 'red | Round globe' in the 'Abyss' (11:1–4)

conflates the heart with sun-worship. 'Branches' surrounding the heart allude to worship in druid groves, while eaves and petrifying spires are recognisable architectural features. In the sixth age, the 'ribs' suggest vaulting and the 'channeld Throat' a chancel. During the 'seventh Age', as Urizen throws 'his right Arm to the north' and 'His left Arm to the south' (13:13–14, E76), he adopts the shape of a traditionally aligned cruciform church.

Los's production of the constrained social body reflects creative contributions by poets, artists, and craftsmen to the rise of nations, but his actions also have redemptive Euhemerist implications. Urizen's human body fixes and demystifies him and his ideology. Rather than an invisible, transcendent force, Los imagines and embodies Urizen in human form as patriarch and priest, reminding us that 'All deities reside in the human breast' (11, E38). Los's creation reveals that this deity originates in social relations forged under the domination of king and priest.

As the narrative progresses, Los becomes more clearly an Adam-figure. On Plate 18, his patriarchal appearance suggests he has internalised Urizen's ideology. His girdle, an item associated with priestly vestments and chastity, grows around his bosom by day and bursts at night, forming the iron 'Chain of Jealousy' (20:24, E80). This recapitulates Urizen's 'chains of the mind' (10:25, E75) within the microcosm of the family. Blake echoes conservative analogies between allegiance to the king and to the father in the family unit, but also resists Archbishop Paley's confident pronouncement that the public need not feel political discontent because 'the exercise of domestic affections' is a 'constant spring of satisfaction, and almost infallible support of chearfulness and spirits'.[51] The anguish of Urizen's worldview permeates even the family. When Los chains Orc on the mountain-top, Blake merges allusions to Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac to God (Genesis 22) as well as Hephaestus chaining Prometheus on behalf of Zeus. The contemporary scene on Plate 25 of a praying child looking up, outside a closed door adorned with a cross, links this primal repression of youthful energy with the present. The sublime energy associated with Orc in *America* and *Europe* is sacrificed on the mountain to the jealous sky-god. Orc's Promethean howls animate 'The dead' and 'All things' in nature (20.26–29, E80), even inspiring Urizen to explore 'his dens around' (20:32) and develop means of measuring and dividing the abyss. As yet, though, there seems no prospect of Orc's release.

Compared to *America*'s exuberance, *Urizen*'s critical and Euhemeristic narrative supersedes optimistic visions of a renewed body politic. The

glimpse of the flexible will and senses of an immortal body offers a more abstract and epistemological freedom than the vision of the body 'breathing' and 'awakening' in *America*. The immortal body appears only in the distorted forms of Urizen and the enchained Orc. Life is painful conflict against solidification and death; growth comes in 'pangs of hope', states 'of dismal woe', and 'ghastly torment sick' (11:19–27, E76). Erle notes that while 'pain and emotion' characterise Blake's representation of embodiment, they also indicate Los's limitations: man's 'new likeness does not quite fit'.[52]

## Fuzon and Urizen: Exodus and Return

At the close of *Urizen*, the 'Net of Religion' shrinks the senses and minds of inhabitants of the thirty cities in Africa, which the 'children of Urizen' name 'Egypt' (28:20–22, E83).Tannenbaum and Mee link Egypt here to Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* (1737–41), where it is the origin of pagan state religion, the rites of which Moses introduced into Israelite practice.[53] Like Moses, Fuzon leads a rebellious exodus of Urizen's sons from Egypt, spurning his tyranny and mystery. *The Book of Ahania* (1795) begins with redemptive allusions. Fuzon's flaming chariot and globe 'of wrath' like a 'thunder-stone' echo Christ's chariot and thunders during *Paradise Lost*'s battle in Heaven in Book Six. However, Fuzon's hunger for power and his crucifixion undermine this hope.[54] Following Frye, many critics see Fuzon's career in *The Book of Ahania* as a nascent version the 'Orc cycle', whereby Orc triumphs only to inevitably become a Urizenic despot in turn. Erdman and Worrall equate his revolt and will-to-power with Robespierre's career in the French Republic.[55] Blake's mythical style, however, resists the Euhemerism of this historical allegory.

While in *Ahania* Fuzon initially revolts against the superstitious 'Demon of smoke' and 'abstract non-entity (2:10–11, E84), he is compromised by echoes of Urizen's rise to power. After wounding Urizen in the loins and dividing him from Ahania, Fuzon vaunts: 'I am God. said he, eldest of things!' (3:38, E86).The episode reimagines the Greek myth of Cronus's emasculation of Uranus, from whose severed genitals Aphrodite emerges.[56] Zeus's overthrow of Cronus in turn is mirrored by Urizen's vengeful crucifixion of Fuzon. Indeed, Fuzon's name suggests both 'son' and 'fusion'. His rebellion ironically reinforces Urizen's reign, just as Cronus connects the patriarchal deities Uranus and Zeus.

Whittaker argues that Fuzon loses his status as liberator when he declares 'a Mosaic code of tyranny' and undergoes an 'apotheosis as the divine son who propagates his father's religion even as he seeks to remove it'.[57] This equates, for Mee, to 'a court revolution which brings about only a change of persons' rather than more fundamental change.[58] As a 'Son' of Urizen, Fuzon continues the line of patriarchal king-priests and remains within Urizen's conceptual horizons. Indeed, with Fuzon as the 'Son of Urizens silent burnings' (2:9, E84), Urizen's filicide recapitulates his inaugural battle 'with the fire; consum'd | Inwards' (4:14–15, E72). Urizen retaliates when Fuzon openly pronounces his divinity, which contrasts with his own secret rise. Urizen obliterates this obvious, violent deification and re-establishes mystery:

> 9: Sudden sings the rock, swift & invisible
> On Fuzon flew, enter'd his bosom;
> His beautiful visage, his tresses,
> That gave light to the mornings of heaven
> Were smitten with darkness, deform'd
> And outstretch'd on the edge of the forest
>
> 10: But the rock fell upon the Earth,
> Mount Sinai, in Arabia. (4:39–46, E86)

The rock again symbolises institutional religion. Blake merges two allusions: Moses's receipt of the Decalogue on Mount Sinai and Rhea's substitution of the infant Zeus with a stone to prevent Cronus devouring him, in an attempt to thwart the prophecy of his overthrow. This rock is reputed to be the Omphalos at Delphi, which is the *axis mundi* connecting heaven and earth, as Mount Sinai is in Jewish traditions. Penetration by the rock darkens and distorts Fuzon's radiant, Apollonian appearance, which 'gave light to the mornings of heaven' (3:42, E86). Blake makes use of the traditional typological identification of Moses and Jesus, whose redemptive potential becomes absorbed into the fabric of the Urizenic mystery religion. The rebel Fuzon is now analogous to the passive Christ of state religion, subject to the doctrine of atonement.[59]

Fuzon's crucifixion is also an ironic apotheosis. His 'dead corse' is 'Lifted on high' and nailed to Urizen's Tree of Mystery, which 'hung over the Immensity' (3:52–54, E86). Mee links this to Mallet's description in *Northern Antiquities* (1770) of the universal 'great ash tree' sacred

to Odin,[60] another traditional *axis mundi*. Blake represents Christ's crucifixion as a pagan apotheosis, which deifies the now powerless Fuzon and issues in 'Arrows of pestilence'. Urizen's display of this potentially redemptive figure's corruption perhaps echoes English loyalist writings, in which France was held up as a warning to Englishmen inclined to support reform. Should the will of the people gain ascendancy, Reverend Robert Nares warned, 'your Clergy' would be 'plundered, insulted, banished' and 'your Churches levelled to the ground' and opponents would be banished, or 'massacred by thousands'. He advised readers to 'look to France, or back to your own History, for what would be by far too probable'. Fuzon's rebellion serves to consolidate rather than weaken Urizen's reign.[61]

Los again forges a restricted body for Urizen, creating a new mode of social existence based on worship of Fuzon's passive image and attenuated resurrection as the 'pale living Corse on the tree' (4:10, E87). Pestilence hardens the skulls of those below, leading them to a state of subjection called 'Asia', in which 'They reptilize upon the Earth' (4:41, 43, E88). Fuzon's fate suggests that by 1795 Blake viewed Christianity, at least in its orthodox forms, with considerable scepticism. The inert messiah's apotheosis reinforces the authority of a king-priest deity, expressing republican frustration at a Christianity that suppresses rather than stimulates the people's vital energies.

The end of *Urizen* also suggests Blake's republican animus. The sky-god Urizen drifts over his sons and daughters' habitations:

> 6. Cold he wander'd on high, over their cities
> In weeping & pain & woe!
> And where-ever he wanderd in sorrows
> Upon the aged heavens
> A cold shadow follow'd behind him
> Like a spiders web, moist, cold, & dim
> Drawing out from his sorrowing soul
> The dungeon-like heaven dividing. [...]
>
> And the web is a Female in embrio
> None could break the Web, no wings of fire.
> (25:5–19, E82)

Erle notes that after Urizen identifies parts of the human body, he uses his web 'to make the fragments hold together'.[62] Drawing his dismal 'Net of Religion' across the sky, he ensnares citizens in a social body defined by his

tormented and self-denying interior world. As in *Europe*, the feminising snare echoes gendered mid-1790s republican discourse: Urizen's religion promotes passive submission rather than active masculine citizenship.

*Urizen*'s representation of the monotheistic deity links him to the patriarch, king, and priest. Blake applies to Christianity and Anglicanism critical strategies associated with Enlightenment writers on pagan religion. Nevertheless, he also involves deism and reason in Urizen's mystery religion. Urizen plans an ordered, perfect, utopian universe, benevolently governed by 'Laws of peace, of love, of unity' (4:34, E72). His world is a 'dark globe' (5:38, E73) comprised of spheres: Enitharmon emerges from a 'round globe of blood' (14:58, E77) and even the 'salt ocean rolled englob'd' (28:23, E83). According to Plato's *Timaeus* (*c*.360 BC), the world's spherical shape reflects its maker's perfection. Deists frequently pointed to nature's regular processes and cycles as evidence for a divine creator.[63] Urizen's fallen world, however, is imperfect and nature cruel. Hidden in darkness, he views his progeny and 'his soul sicken'd' because 'no flesh nor spirit could keep | His iron laws one moment'. He sees that 'life liv'd upon death' (24:22–27, E81). Flawed nature reflects the attributes of its mysterious creator.

In its complex self-consciousness, *Urizen* goes beyond the deist confidence of Paine's *The Age of Reason* and Volney's transcendent vision in *The Ruins*.[64] The Preludium foregrounds the mediation of the ensuing narrative, inviting a hermeneutics of suspicion:

> Eternals I hear your call gladly,
> Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
> To unfold your dark visions of torment.
> (2:5–7, E70)

Urizen's negative associations with books reflect irony on *The [First] Book of Urizen* itself. 'Dictate' links the narrator's special revelation to Urizen's own scribal role on the frontispiece. While muses, the Eternals are complicit in the Fall. 'Unfold' and the 'dark visions' are echoed in Urizen's sermon: 'Lo! I unfold my darkness' (4:31, E72). Blake's Preludium ironises any claim to a transcendent perspective. Whereas textual self-consciousness liberates the reader in earlier works, here it sceptically destabilises any narrative authority. This critical turn in Blake's thought leads to a profoundly Euhemerist approach to myth and religion in *The Song of Los*.

## *The Song of Los*: 'A Mouldering Skeleton'

The bipartite *Song of Los* supplements *America* and *Europe*, completing a continental cycle of prophecies encompassing all human history from Fall to Apocalypse. As with *Europe*, however, an emphasis on this structure obscures the titles' other functions. In 1795, 'Africa' and 'Asia' echo contemporary political debate.

'Africa' has obvious associations with slavery, both of the Israelites in Egypt and African slaves in the eighteenth century. From 1793 to 1795, West India interests prevented motions for abolition in the House of Commons and the Lords.[65] Blake's title draws on these associations in a poetic genealogy, which traces how peoples of different nations and times arrive at a state of universal subjection under Urizenic ideology. A series of historical figures, each of whom shapes their society's consciousness, mediate this 'Abstract Philosophy' (3:11), claiming heavenly origins for law, dualistic philosophy, and monotheistic religion.

The poem is '*a song of Los*' in his guise as '*the Eternal Prophet*' (3:1). The title suggests his song will be unmediated, but an unidentified 'I' recounts how it was sung '*to four harps at the tables of Eternity. | In heart-formed Africa*' (3:2–3). Swedenborg's belief that Africans were particularly receptive to 'the Divine Humanity' perhaps makes it an appropriate scene for Blake's historical panorama.[66] The introduction ends in a fantasy of prophetic efficacy: upon the original recital, '*Urizen faded! Ariston shudderd!*' (3:4). Prophecy can weaken and shake the priest and king.

Los's song narrates the progress of Urizenic law in a compressed style that Behrendt identifies with the biblical idyllium, a short song recounting historical events.[67] 'Africa' is intensely Euhemerist. Each major form of Urizen's ideology originates with an individual founder of a civil and religious polity or influential philosophy who is elevated by their communication of a special revelation from the deity. The iconic moments recall apotheosis paintings in which protagonists are mythologised at a moment of triumph, death, or assumption to heaven. Blake represents an archetypal event temporally iterated in each instance. Los's song demystifies the leaders, exposing the transcendent deity's origins in a chain of cultural and historical moments. Urizen's proponents are vulnerably human. Moses, for example, sees 'forms of dark delusion' (3:17, E67), echoing the language of *Urizen*. He is dim-sighted, not inspired, a typically Euhemerist conclusion.

The poem begins with Adam and Noah. Adam traditionally personifies the entire human race, while Christians often interpret Noah as a 'new Adam'. Both witness Urizen's laws delivered to the nations by the 'hands of the children of Los' (3:9). Mee identifies this with the reification of poetry into ritual.[68] But Los and Enitharmon's children can be interpreted as constellations, as in *Europe*. Los links each patriarchal figure's authority to dualistic abstract philosophy, deduced from observing heavenly bodies. Adam 'stood in the garden of Eden', Noah 'on the mountains of Ararat', while Abram 'fled in fires from Chaldea' and Moses 'beheld upon Mount Sinai forms of dark delusion' (3:6–17, E67). With the exception of Chaldea, which itself has strong astronomical associations, these mountain locations are the earth's closest points to the heavens.[69]

The first revelation is Rintrah's communication of 'Abstract Philosophy' to 'Brama in the East'. In response, 'Adam shudderd! Noah faded!' (3:11), the transposed verbs linking them to Urizen and Ariston. The priority of 'Brama' indicates Blake was influenced by controversial Enlightenment research, which challenged the precedence of Judaeo-Christian scripture.[70] Richard Gough regarded Brahma, with whom the priestly Brahmins identified themselves, as Bacchus, deified as founder of India's civil and religious polity. The connection of 'Brama' to Rintrah echoes scholarship connecting Hinduism with star worship.[71] Warburton identified Hermes Trismegistus as the 'great Hero and Lawgiver of the old Egyptians', famed for writing the Smaragdine Tablet, a foundational hermetic text asserting one deity and the dualistic analogy 'That which is below, is like unto that which is above; and that which is above, is like unto that which is below'.[72] His hermetic books included instructions for legislation, the secret education of priests, and rituals. Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato were all associated with astronomy and dualist beliefs, reputedly derived from sun-worshippers and the Egyptian priesthood.[73]

Jesus's place in this genealogy is striking, suggesting Blake's pessimism towards or perhaps even disillusionment with Christianity. A 'man of sorrows', Jesus hears Oothoon as she 'hoverd over Judah & Jerusalem' but instead receives 'a Gospel from wretched Theotormon' (3:22–24). His liberatory potential, heard in Oothoon's voice, gives way to Theotormon's self-denial. As a response, the 'healthy' seclude themselves, 'fearing the joys of Love', while 'the disease'd only propagated' and the 'human race began to wither' (3:25–27). Even Christ is Euhemerised, no divine redeemer but merely another human link in Urizen's chain. His passive

relation to Oothoon and Theotormon implicates him in dualistic 'abstract philosophy' and star-worship.

Islam follows the same dynamic: 'So Antamon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight: | And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave' (3:28–29). The 'loose Bible' has often been construed as referring to polygamy, but most likely refers to the Koran's revelation to Muhammad in fragments.[74] Like Oothoon, Antamon has positive sensual connotations in *Europe*, albeit compromised here by his connection to Leutha, the earlier poem's 'Sweet smiling pestilence' (14:12, E65). Blake may have been impressed by accounts of Muhammad's antipathy to priestcraft, superstition, and the mortification of the senses.[75] The prophet rejected Arab polytheism, dominated by Sabian star-worship, but in Sale's translation Surahs 53 ('The Star', narrating Muhammad's ascension to heaven during his night-journey), 85 ('The Celestial Signs'), and 86 ('The Star that Appeareth by Night') may have suggested the connection with constellations.[76] The section perhaps also echoes the notorious Spinozist tract *Traité des trois imposteurs* (1710–11), which attacked Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad, indicating the influence of the European radical Enlightenment.[77] Both Jesus and Muhammad's bibles, however, appear relatively benign in contrast to Sotha's 'Code of War' (3:30), bequeathed to Odin in the north.

The abrupt shift to 'Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces' which, like 'nets & gins & traps' act to 'catch the joys of Eternity' (4:1–2) connects the revelations to institutions that produce and enact Urizen's ideology in the present. Ominously, Urizen himself gives the 'Philosophy of Five Senses' directly 'into the hands of Newton & Locke' (4:16–17), intensifying the transmission. Finally prophetic clouds roll 'upon the Alps round Rousseau & Voltaire | And on the mountains of Lebanon round the deceased Gods | Of Asia; & on the desarts of Africa round the Fallen Angels' (4:18–20, E68). Rousseau and Voltaire live, in contrast to the fallen gods, but they are ambiguous; they may merely be the latest in the Urizenic genealogy or be linked with Orc's howls on Mount Atlas (3:21, E67).[78] In 'Asia', Orc 'Arose like a pillar of fire above the Alps' (7:27–28, E69) and Blake's comments in 1826 to Crabb Robinson concerning Voltaire's exposure of 'the natural sense' of the Bible, suggest a positive, demystifying function for Enlightenment scepticism.[79] Yet Rousseau and Voltaire's connection to mountains also implies continuity with the preceding patriarchs, and syntactic parallelism links this line with those on the deceased Gods of Asia, the Fallen Angels, and the Guardian

Prince of Albion. They remained tutelary deities of the French Republic: in October 1794, Rousseau's ashes were interred alongside Voltaire's in the Panthéon, in a fête that the President of the National Convention described as an apotheosis.[80]

As the final continent in the cycle, 'Asia' alludes to the churches of Asia to which John of Patmos addressed Revelation. But it also draws on associations between oriental apotheosis and European stereotypes of the East as the realm of despotism. Blake's use of the discourse of oriental tyranny in 1795 resonates with contemporary Whig and radical satires of George III and Pitt as eastern despots, which I will discuss in Chapter 7.[81]

Like 'Africa', 'Asia' Euhemerises Urizen. He emerges when the Asian kings call on the king, priest, 'Councellor', and 'privy admonishers of men' to restrain the people's energies. The 'admonishers' suggest the king's Privy Council, which in 1794 examined the accused prior to the Treason Trials and issued the warrant to suspend Habeas Corpus.[82] To government opponents, it was the engine of tyranny: 'The Privy Council may scheme eternal despotism, *but* We are the People!'[83] The state seems to conjure Urizen:

> Urizen heard them cry!
> And his shudd'ring waving wings
> Went enormous above the red flames
> Drawing clouds of despair thro' the heavens
> Of Europe as he went:
> And his Books of brass iron & gold
> Melted over the land as he flew,
> Heavy-waving, howling, weeping.
>
> And he stood over Judea
> And stay'd in his ancient place:
> And stretch'd his clouds over Jerusalem.
> (7:9–19, E69)

Urizen attempts to smother revolt with clouds of mystery darkening either the emergent New Jerusalem, or England patriotically identified with Israel. The alarmed 'cry' of his ministers becomes his dejected 'weeping'. As in *America*, Orc's fires decompose the mythological figure. Urizen's scripture and law melt, until he is humanised with physical verbs: he 'stood' and 'stretched'. Mankind has reached its nadir:

> For Adam, a mouldering skeleton
> Lay bleach'd on the garden of Eden;
> And Noah as white as snow
> On the mountains of Ararat. (7:20–23)

Adam and Noah, who 'shudderd' and 'faded' at the start of 'Africa', have completely attenuated. Urizen unfurls his clouds over Judah and Jerusalem, attempting to obscure the revolutionary fires and his weakened authority.

Just as the 'Guardian Prince of Albion' is menaced by the 'Fallen Angels' and deceased Gods of Asia in 'Africa', the Kings of Asia face destruction from 'the thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc' (6:6, E68). As in *America*, Orc personifies a Dionysian energy that inspires and also enlightens, perhaps expressed in Los's song itself. While Blake devised 'Asia' as the apocalyptic conclusion to his continental prophecies, in the fraught political atmosphere of 1795 the despotic 'Kings of Asia' suggest 'Asia' is a metaphorical state, echoing radical analogies between luxurious Eastern tyrants and Britain's ruling classes.[84] 'Asia' brings the genealogy in 'Africa' to the present, figuring food shortages and disease as means by which politicians, clergy, and loyalists seek 'To restrain! to dismay! to thin!' (6:11) the body of the people. But the response to Orc's rage in superstitious 'European darkness' is that the 'sullen Earth | Shrunk!' (7:29–30, E69), a seismic prelude to human resurrection.

Blake seems to shift in these texts towards a more pessimistic, or at least ambivalent outlook, tinged with materialism. *America* and the conclusion of *Europe* express confidence in the possibility of rousing a collective, animated body of the people. By contrast, *Urizen* and *The Song of Los* feature restricted and tormented bodies. The disturbing final plate of *Ahania* depicts a jumble of body parts including a severed male head.[85] 'Asia' concludes with a highly physical apocalypse and resurrection, but seems torn between despair and hope for collective regeneration. The conclusion alludes to Ezekiel 37:1–14, where Ezekiel's prophecy to the bones reanimates them into the tribe of Israel. In Blake's poem the only collective noun is dehumanised: 'all flesh naked stands'. In this resurrection the humans remain individual rather than united: 'Fathers and Friends; | Mothers & Infants; Kings & Warriors' (7:33–34, E69). While, as Bruder writes, the final lines envision 'a wildly orgasmic' Grave, they also minimise any female contribution to human liberation, as the 'hollow womb' aggressively 'clasps the solid stem' (7:35–36). The scene

recalls Lucretius's description of the Earth as both mother and grave.[86] The Grave abjectly fetishises the vagina and bosom independent of other female organs, as it craves the life-giving tide of 'milk & blood & glandulous wine' (7:38, E69) from the phallus. If this is sublime congress, it also expresses a misogynist phallic pride and a fear of emasculation. The rivers of bodily fluids promise physical renewal, but they 'rush & shout & dance' (7:38–39, E70) into the Grave.

## Blake's Impasse

Murry asserted that 'Africa' 'marks the nadir of Blake's conception of Jesus'.[87] The judgement might also apply to his representation of women. Blake's response to the political crisis in the mid-1790s seems to have been an intensified investment in masculine republican discourse, reflected in Los, Orc, and Fuzon's battles with a sometimes feminised Urizen. The poems' republican indignation largely sidelines traditionally feminine and Christian affection, sympathy, and compassion. A change from italics to a standard Roman typeface differentiates the final lines of 'Asia':

> The SONG of LOS is Ended.
> Urizen Wept. (7:41–42, E70)

Blake alludes to the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:35), but whereas Jesus wept as a prelude to revival, Urizen weeps at his own fate. The allusion is ironic but also ambiguous: Urizen seems to absorb Jesus, while Orc promises regeneration. Blake's scepticism seems to have gained the upper hand over faith in these poems fixated on attacking superstition, state religion and its clergy. Ahania's lament suggests a new emphasis on recuperating feminine sympathy and forgiveness, which comes to the fore in *Jerusalem*. For Quinney, the lament shows that Urizen 'is not simply a villainous principle', but 'had an unfallen state and is hence redeemable'.[88] Affective and compassionate Christian values largely absent amid the agonistic male struggles of *Urizen* and the *Song* subsequently energised Blake's epics. *Urizen* and *The Song of Los* prioritise demystification in their attack on superstition, but in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, Blake finds a newly positive role for the idea of apotheosis, transforming it in order to reimagine a collective human form divine.

## Notes

1. *BIB* 270, 286.
2. Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, esp. 1–49, 182–251, 338–53, 551–642. In 1794–95, Cumberland wrote to the *Morning Chronicle* protesting at slumbering Englishmen and the harm of censorship. See Bentley, *George Cumberland*, 55.
3. *Letters of William Blake*, 26.
4. For the critique of Johnson's circle, see Essick, 'Blake, Paine, and Biblical Revolution'. For the Gnostic myth, see Damon, *Philosophy*, 116, Paley, *EI* 66–67.
5. McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text'.
6. Mee, *DE* 161–213. Worrall, introducing *UB*, examines Paine's influence.
7. Mee, *DE* 12, 105, 124, 172–81.
8. Gilchrist, *Life* (1880), I, 130–31.
9. Hole, *Pulpits, Politics*, 7, 15–27, 102–26.
10. Grose, *A Sermon*, 3–4.
11. Townley, *A Sermon*, 11–12, 16–18.
12. Eaton, *Politics for the People*, I, 12–15.
13. Paine, *Age of Reason*, 3–4.
14. See *The British Critic*, 7 (May 1796), 557–58 for this sort of conservative attack. See Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, 177–95, for his influences and impact.
15. Paine, *Age of Reason*, 4.
16. Ibid., 5.
17. Phillips, *Creation of the* Songs, 34–38. See also *N* 115.
18. Burke, *Reflections*, 117. For connections with London radicalism, see Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment*, 167.
19. See the discussion of Hume and Voltaire in Chapter 2.
20. Mee, *DE* 173, and Ferber, *Social Vision*, 49.
21. McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text', 318. Mee, *DE* 164–71, and Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 2, 16–17, discuss Geddes's influence.
22. Geddes, *The Holy Bible*, xii, cited in McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text', 318.
23. Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, II, 56. The link was first proposed by Pierce, 'Etymology as Explanation in Blake'.
24. McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text', 317–18.

25. Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, II, 56. See Hesiod, *Theogony*, l.126.
26. Bryant, *A New System*, I, 13.
27. Mee, *DE* 189–90.
28. *The Whole and Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, 12–13. Blake engraved three of the plates, including *The Parting of Lot and Abraham*, which appears between these pages.
29. Volney, *Ruins*, 233–37.
30. See, for example, Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', l. 131, and *Poems of Henry Howard*, 253.
31. See Worrall, 'Immortal Tent', 278–79.
32. References to *Urizen*'s illuminations give plate numbers for copy A.
33. Bryant, *A New System*, I, 217 and Volney, *Ruins*, 263, 367–78, 372–73.
34. Maurice, *Indian Antiquities*, II (1794), 33.
35. Warburton in *Divine Legation of Moses*, 66–151. For parallels between Blake and Warburton see Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition*, 187–88, and Mee, *DE* 126–29 and 194–96.
36. In *DE* 174–76, Mee discusses Geddes's and Paine's critical treatment of 'dove' as a mistranslation from the Hebrew.
37. See Priestley's discussions of clerical and monastic asceticism in *Corruptions*, especially II, 200–35.
38. For Plate 4, see *BIB* 283, Worrall, *UB* 56–59, and Erle, *Blake, Lavater*, 169.
39. See Hunter, *A Treatise on the Blood*, 196, 199, 200, 461.
40. 1:12, quoted from *A New Translation*, 3.
41. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10–13 [i.89–131].
42. Otto, 'Time, Eternity and the Fall', 365–68, 371.
43. Volney, *Ruins*, 250–52.
44. Mee, *DE* 12, 123–24.
45. Paley, *EI*, 65.
46. Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 18.
47. In 'Immortal Tent', 288, Worrall links Urizen here to the 'Demon' star, Algol.
48. De Luca, *Words of Eternity*,158.
49. Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 33.
50. Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 170. See Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 73–94, for an illuminating discussion of *Urizen*'s links to solidification in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and contemporary medical discourse.

51. Paley, *Reasons for Contentment*, 8.
52. Erle, *Blake, Lavater*, 78.
53. Tannenbaum, *BT* 187–189, Mee, *DE* 194–96.
54. Tannenbaum, *BT* 227–8, Frye, *FS* 214, and Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, 175–81.
55. Erdman, *BPAE* 314–15. Worrall develops these ideas in *UB* 157–59, 162–63.
56. See Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll.164–206, Tannenbaum, *BT* 230, and Priestman, *Romantic Atheism* 111.
57. Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 124.
58. Mee, *DE* 194.
59. See *DE* 97, 100, 199–201 for links to Priestley and Paine on the Atonement.
60. Mee, *DE* 97–98. See also De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 194.
61. Nares, *Man's Best Right*, 42. Fuzon anticipates Luvah's crucifixion in *The Four Zoas* (7b:166, E364) and *Jerusalem* (63:5–6, E214 and 65:1–11, E216). For further discussion, see my 'Homelands: Blake, Albion, and the French Revolution'.
62. Erle, 'Shadows in the Cave, 160.
63. *The Cratylus, Phædo, Parmenides and Timæus of Plato*, 461–62 (32c–34b). For *Urizen*'s links to Taylor's translation see Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, 203–18. For this form of deism, see Paine, *Age of Reason*, 32.
64. See Marks, 'Structure and Irony' for the poem's complex ironies.
65. See Aikin, *Annals*, I, 486 and II, 4.
66. Swedenborg, *A Treatise*, 64–69.
67. Behrendt, *Reading William Blake*, 111.
68. Mee, *DE* 123.
69. *Paradise Lost* locates Eden on a mountaintop (iv.131–83), where Adam quizzes Raphael over the motions of the heavens (viii.15–38).
70. Mee, *DE* 127–28.
71. Gough, *A Comparative View*, xi–xiii. In *Indian Antiquities*, II, 107–13, Maurice associates Indian and Persian religion with worship of the stars as the location of favoured souls after death. In *Brahma*, 59–65, 84–88, 118, Weir notes numerous parallels between Maurice's and Blake's texts.
72. Warburton, *Divine Legation*, I, 497. The tablet is quoted from *The Hermetical Triumph*, 17.
73. Dörrbecker, *CP* 348, Tannenbaum, *BT* 187–88, and Mee, *DE* 192.

74. See Sale, 'Introductory Discourse', *The Koran*, I, 85–86 and Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, V, 208. Whitehead lucidly summarises debate over the 'loose Bible' in '"A wise tale of the Mahometans"'.
75. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, V, 213–14.
76. Sale, *Koran*, II, 401–405, 490–91, 491–92.
77. For the *Traité*, see Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, esp. 217–33, Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 694–703, and for an extended account, Minois, *The Atheist's Bible*. Voltaire's poem *Épître à l'Auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs* (1770) counters the atheists by asserting 'if God did not exist, he would have to be invented', but I have been unable to find an English translation available to Blake. See Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 105–6.
78. See Tannenbaum, *BT* 192; *CP* 350; Erdman, *BPAE* 258, and 'The Symmetries of *The Song of Los*', 182. Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 106, links Lebanon here to Volney's *Ruins*, opening at the remains of Palmyra.
79. 19 February 1826, in *BR* 703.
80. See *The Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 10 November 1794.
81. For example, George III is depicted as Nebuchadnezzar in the broadside *The Comical Tragedy of the Long Faces* (1794). See Barrell's *Exhibition Extraordinary!!*, 6–7.
82. See Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, 246–47 and Wharam, *Treason Trials*, 93–95, 101, 130.
83. *A Letter from a Chancellor*, 148.
84. Erdman notes similar rhetoric in Coleridge and Thelwall's lectures during 1795. See *BPAE* 283–84.
85. See Worrall's discussion: *UB* 162–63.
86. Bruder, *Daughters of Albion*, 177. Lucretius, *Of the Nature of* Things, II, 456 [5:293].
87. Murry, *William Blake*, 145.
88. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, 64–65.

CHAPTER 7

# 'The Name of the Wicked Shall Rot': Blake's Oriental Apotheoses of Nelson and Pitt

On 15 May 1809, Blake advertised an exhibition to be held above his brother's hosiery shop in Broad Street, London. His advertisement particularly addressed an elite public, 'of the Rich and those who have the direction of public Works' and the 'Noblemen and Gentlem[e]n' subscribers to the Royal Academy and British Institution (E527). Blake objected that his art was excluded from these arenas. His motto, Milton's dictum '*Fit Audience find tho' few*' (E527), suggests that although he did not anticipate many sympathetic viewers he could appeal to connoisseurs of truly inspired art. The accompanying polemical and visionary *Descriptive Catalogue* would help this specific public to recognise the exhibition's significance. In May 1809, Blake made his only known invitation to an individual, the Royal Academician and Portrait Painter in Crayons to the King, Ozias Humphry. Blake acknowledges their different estimations of Venetian painting, but adds 'I inclose a ticket of admission if you should honour my Exhibition with a Visit'(E770). Humphry purchased several of Blake's illuminated books, although his commission of the *Small Book of Designs* (*c*.1796), in which the plates appear without the poetry, suggests he primarily collected the images.[1] Notably, Humphry had worked as a miniature painter in India between 1785 and 1787 and remained interested in the country and its culture, perhaps making him a 'fit audience' for paintings Blake modelled on oriental art.

Blake's bizarre images of Pitt and Nelson confused the exhibition's visitors. The advertisement highlighted these 'grand Apotheoses' (E527)

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as works with special public significance. In the only published review, Robert Hunt of *The Examiner* complained of the exhibition's 'wretched pictures, some of which are unintelligible allegory'. In 1812, having seen *Nelson* and *Pitt* displayed at the Associated Painters in Water Colours, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* remarked, 'we dare say they may be very fine, but they are also too sublime for our comprehension.'[2] These were strange images of public figures who were usually clearly celebrated in artworks. Blake's confidence in a 'fit audience', however, suggests the paintings may have been more meaningful and politically resonant to informed contemporaries than has hitherto been recognised. They represent his most direct engagement with individual public figures. Commentators have tended to interpret the paintings either as evidence of Blake's reconciliation to the British war effort or, more commonly, as satirical images.[3] An outburst in the 'Public Address' (*c*.1810–11) is revealing in this regard: 'I wonder who can say Speak no Ill of the Dead when it is asserted in the Bible that the name of the Wicked shall Rot' (E578). Presumably referring to illuminated books in progress, Blake promises 'I will pour Aqua fortis on the Name of the Wicked & turn it into an Ornament & an Example to be Avoided by Some & Imitated by Others if they Please' (E579). The paintings likewise strip away the familiar public meanings of Pitt and Nelson to reveal Blake's visionary perception of these men, while allowing viewers two quite different responses.

Blake was evidently conscious of his audience and the paintings are connected to Royal Academy fashions during the 1800s. For Ward, 'Blake's relationship with the Academy was more complex' and 'more continuous' than is usually acknowledged.[4] As this chapter will make clear, Blake's paintings appealed to a vogue for oriental art among Academicians, but also criticised his contemporaries' tastes and courted liberal and radical factions in the institution. The conception of these 'Spiritual Forms' as apotheoses is integral to Blake's enterprise.

## Heroes and Heroic Villains

The *Descriptive Catalogue* labels Nelson and Pitt as modern 'heroes'. Despite being fascinated by cultural representations of the heroic, Blake was repelled by the modern cult of military heroism. Annotating Bacon's essay 'Of Envy', Blake asked 'What do these Knaves mean by Virtue   Do they mean War & its horrors & its Heroic Villains' (E623). Writing to William

Hayley on 28 May 1804, he thanked him for books, which included John Marshall's *Life of George Washington* (1804). Blake was not enthused:

> I suppose an American would tell me that Washington did all that was done before he was born, as the French now adore Buonaparte and the English our poor George; so the Americans will consider Washington as their god. This is only Grecian, or rather Trojan, worship, and perhaps will be revised [reversed?] in an age or two. In the meantime I have the happiness of seeing the Divine countenance in such men as Cowper and Milton more distinctly than in any prince or hero. (E749–50)

Blake is initially Euhemerist, conflating American, French, and English worship of military heroes, and tracing a genealogy back to Homer. The ironic reference to Washington's pre-natal achievements dismisses Marshall's opinion that Washington led America 'as if the chosen instrument of Heaven, selected for the purpose of effecting the great designs of Providence'.[5] While Blake rejects the apotheosis of individual war-leaders, he counters this by mythologising Cowper and Milton as artistic conduits for a collective vision of the divine.

Painters frequently adopted the apotheosis genre to commemorate military or political heroes. Annotating Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, Blake attacked the opinion that history painters depicted mankind: 'A History Painter Paints The Hero, & not Man in General. but most minutely in Particular' (E652). Blake's *Nelson* and *Pitt* disturb the conventional horizon of expectations for an apotheosis. Reynolds advocated unambiguous representations of the hero, who should be distinguished from subordinate figures by position and shading, drawing the eye to the central figure.[6] This is evident in Benjamin West's famous *Death of General Wolfe* (1770), a thinly veiled apotheosis. Light suffuses the general at the centre of the tableau, linking him with the bright sky to which his soul is destined. Wolfe radiates light onto the surrounding generals and soldiers' faces. Subordinate figures, including a doting American Indian, draw around Wolfe in a centripetal arrangement, reinforcing his heroism. The painting was a popular model for tributes to Nelson. West conceived his *Death of Lord Viscount Nelson, K.B.* (1806) as a companion piece to *Wolfe*. The expiring admiral is similarly surrounded by admiring officers and tars. Light and shade link Nelson with the rising pillar of smoke and the bright sky above the battle-clouds. Blake's 'Spiritual Forms' challenged contemporary painters' recourse to this genre, but also targeted sculptural tributes.

## 'More Is Meant than Meets the Eye': Oriental Originals

The *Descriptive Catalogue* explicitly compares *Pitt* and *Nelson* to sculptural representations of apotheosis. They are 'compositions of a mythological cast, similar to those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity, which are still preserved on rude monuments, being copies from some stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age'. Blake recounts travelling 'in vision into the ancient republics, monarchies, and patriarchates of Asia' where the Cherubim were 'sculptured and painted on walls of Temples, Towers, Cities, Palaces, and erected in the highly cultivated states of Egypt, Moab, Edom, Aram, among the Rivers of Paradise' (E530–31). These 'wonderful originals', 'called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim' (E531), flanked the Mercy Seat (Exodus 25:20) and adorned Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:23–27). Discussing his *Canterbury Tales* painting, Blake links the 'eternal principles or characters of human life' to 'the ancient Cherubim of Phoenicia'. Originally 'visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names', they became corrupted into the 'Grecian gods' and military 'gods of Priam' and, as such, 'masters of man' and 'destructive to humanity' (E536). Despite their accomplished execution, celebrated ancient Greek statues were mere inferior copies of these 'greater works of the Asiatic patriarchs' (E531).[7] The visionary Cherubim contained 'mythological and recondite meaning, where more is meant than meets the eye'. Blake implies a similar approach to his own paintings. His conception of them as oriental apotheoses brings an unsettling exoticism to Protestant England's heroes.

Paley links *Nelson* and *Pitt* to standard works on ancient classical and Egyptian sculpture available to Blake as a Royal Academy student. Representations of Persian sculpture at Persepolis were also accessible.[8] As an apprentice, Blake may have engraved images of Persian religious architecture in Bryant's *New System*.[9] Source-hunting, however, can obscure the contemporary significance of Blake's gestures towards Eastern and especially Indian sculpture. The paintings' oriental mode allows Blake to pique antiquarians' and Academicians' interest in Indian art, but also subvert the legacies of Nelson and Pitt.

During the early 1780s, papers delivered at the London Society of Antiquaries described extraordinary cave and pagoda sculptures at Elephanta, Salsette, and Ellora.[10] First-hand sketches by James Forbes circulated among fascinated artists and antiquarians. James Wales based

his painting *The Temple of Elephanta* (1784) on one of Forbes's images, displaying it in the Royal Academy's 1785 exhibition, which also featured four drawings by Blake.[11] In this year, Horace Walpole was horrified by members of the Society of Antiquaries who believed the Greeks copied from oriental sculpture:

> [...] *the learned* have the impertinence to tell one that the Grecians borrowed from the Egyptians, Tartars, Indians, etc. That is, they stole the genuine principles of all beauty and all taste from every idea of deformity and absurdity! The Apollo and the Venus from mummies and idols with four heads, more hands, and two legs as immovable as oaks in an avenue![12]

For Walpole, grotesque Asian works could not have inspired Grecian harmony and grace. Makdisi believes similar prejudices informed *The Examiner*'s attacks on Blake's bodily representations of spiritual agency.[13] D'Hancarville's *Supplément aux Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et les progrès des artes de la Grèce* (1785) and Richard Gough's *A Comparative View of the Antient Monuments of India* (1785) featured some of the earliest reproductions of the Indian images. Blake copied sketches of *The Apotheosis of Bacchus* and *A Bacchic Mystery* from the original *Recherches* and may have been familiar with the *Supplément*.[14] There are striking scenes from Elephanta amongst the engravings for d'Hancarville and Gough, including images later identified as Shiva Mahesamurti, Shiva Nataraja-Tandava, Shiva and Parvati's marriage, Shiva Ardhanarisvara, and Gangadhara Shiva. The latter three feature upright central figures surrounded by smaller, subordinate beings, a configuration similar to Blake's *Pitt* and *Nelson*. Blake's reference in the catalogue to 'Hindoo' temples connects his paintings to these mysterious images.

D'Hancarville and Gough believed the statues represented the worship of Bacchus, identical with Brahma, being the deified 'founder of their civil and religious polity'.[15] Blake echoes this Euhemerist analysis in *The Song of Los*, where Brahma is a divine lawgiver (3:11–19, E67). For Gough, this apotheosis catalysed the corruption of Hindu religion, an argument adopted by Thomas Maurice, who linked Egyptian, Persian, and Indian temple sculptures with Sabaism and ancestor worship.[16]

During the late 1790s and early 1800s, the painter Joseph Farington noted debates among Royal Academicians over the significance of Elephanta, Salsette, and Ellora. In September 1798, George Dance, the Professor of Architecture, intended to argue for the precedence of Indian

over Greek sculpture, but failed to lecture at all during his tenure, which ended in 1806.[17] As noted in Chapter 2, James Barry recommended study of the cave sculptures in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Painting in 1799. In summer 1805, the Academy unanimously agreed to buy Thomas and William Daniells' elegant engravings, *Oriental Scenery* (1795–1807), featuring interior images of Elephanta, Salsette, and Ellora, for their library.[18]

In January 1810, Sir John Soane, the Academy's new Professor of Architecture, delivered his first lecture. Along with Persian and Egyptian architecture, he particularly emphasised the Daniells' engravings of Indian sculptures. He enthused over these sublime forms that 'produce the most lively sensations' by 'their magnitude and grandeur', resembling 'the works of the most polished nations in the most enlightened times'.[19] Blake's seemingly eccentric description in fact engages with the latest artistic trends and appeals to an audience substantially consisting of Academicians, artists, and connoisseurs.[20]

The frank sexual imagery of Indian sculpture particularly interested antiquarians, artists, and intellectuals.[21] Accounts in the 1780s of the Hindu caves and temples described recesses containing sculptures of the divine male and female generative principles, the lingam of Siva (sometimes termed the 'mahody') and the yoni of his consort Shakhti, usually combined in the form of the linga-yoni.[22] In the mid-1780s, the collector Charles Townley bought several Indian sculptures, including a small temple from Rohilla, featuring a linga-yoni, and a notorious 'erotic group' from Elephanta, which depicted a male and female figure engaged in mutual oral sex. Artists could visit Townley's private sculpture gallery and in 1805 the British Museum acquired these items.[23] The Dilettante Richard Payne Knight viewed the sculptures in 1785 and linked them to Greek, Roman, and Egyptian fertility cults in his notoriously phallic *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786). Influenced by French mythographers including Charles Dupuis and d'Hancarville, Knight believed all religion originated in sexual symbolism.[24] More orthodox commentators were disgusted: Maurice regretted Elephanta's 'solitary but degrading emblem of the great creator' and the designs 'remarkable for licentiousness'.[25] Gough's book includes an engraving representing what is now recognised as Shiva Andhakasura Vadha, Shiva slaying the evil Andhaka. Maurice, however, identified the image as 'The Evil Principle of India' sacrificing a child.[26] Gough's engraving gives the figure a prominent penis, but it was discreetly hidden in most other reproductions.

As well as connecting Blake's works to these contentious debates on the significance of Eastern art, the catalogue's allusion to Indian and Persian sculpture slyly introduces political satire. Blake's vision of the 'Divine Image' in 'heathen, turk or jew' (E13) is appealingly egalitarian, but his works also include contemporary orientalist discourse. Larrissy suggests that Blake shared prejudiced views of Eastern 'despotism, cruelty, treachery, benightedness, and so on'.[27] Makdisi, by contrast, argues that Blake resists the binary categories of 'self' and 'other' which structured proto-imperialism, claiming that he was the 'only major poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who categorically refused to dabble in recognizably Orientalist themes or motifs'.[28] Blake's oriental models for English heroes certainly collapse this ontological opposition, but the paintings' satire also exploits the widespread association of the East with political tyranny. Blake's *Pitt* harks back to 1790s radical attacks on the government, which often set classical republican virtue and citizenship against stereotypes of Eastern tyranny and subservience. In Part One of *Rights of Man*, Paine depicted Burke's social contract between the living and the dead as slavish oriental worship: 'a formality of words, of as much import, as if those who used them had addressed a congratulation to themselves, and, in the Oriental style of antiquity, had said, O Parliament, live for ever!'[29] Apotheosis was a reflex of tyranny.

It is difficult to establish when Blake produced his paintings, but it is likely that they were spurred by the deluge of written and artistic tributes to Nelson and Pitt immediately following their deaths.[30] Statues were a particular talking-point. On 21 May 1806, Farington recorded a General Meeting of the Royal Academy for establishing 'a Committee to fix upon proper places for 3 monuments in St. Paul's & one to Mr. Pitt in Westminster Abbey'. Designs or models would be also accepted from non-Academicians.[31] Nelson's monument was to be the centrepiece of statues in St Paul's. The extension of the competition to the whole London art world ensured widespread interest. Ward's argument that Blake was still seeking recognition by the Academy into the mid-1800s would suggest his Pitt and Nelson paintings respond to these well-known commissions.

The dramatic Wolfe-like apotheosis in West's *The Death of Lord Nelson*, the austere virtue of Pitt in John Hoppner's 1805 portrait, and the classical styling of warrior and statesman in the sculptural tributes all emphasise the heroic figure as the viewer's sole or dominant focus. By contrast, Blake's oriental apotheoses abound with dynamic and chaotic surrounding details which compete with the central figure for the viewer's attention. Blake's

anguished subordinate figures, looking away from the heroes, undermine the centripetal logic of the conventional apotheosis, instead suggesting a centrifugal force. Where the hero in art usually has a socially unifying function, here war and tyranny produce entropy. This was not immediately obvious. Paley suggests that *The Examiner*'s attack on the exhibition was partly politically motivated, with Hunt objecting to the sanctification of British war leaders.[32] Blake, however, presented to his 'fit audience though few' a subversive satire on the cult of the national heroes.

## 'England's Glory': Nelson in Space

Blake's audience would have been familiar with the notion of Nelson's apotheosis, even whilst he lived. After leading British naval forces to victory in 1798 against the French at Aboukir Bay in Egypt, Nelson was feted as a British hero.[33] In William Fitzgerald's *Nelson's Triumph* (1799) immortal Nelson adds to the nation's glory:

> While Arabs, witness to the Gaul's defeat,
> With shouts of triumph hail the British fleet!
> As long as Egypt's Pyramids shall stand,
> Long as the Nile shall fertilize her land;
> So long the voice of never-dying Fame,
> Shall add to England's glory NELSON's name![34]

The repetitions of 'long' mount Nelson's name up to immortality, while the last line's inversion emphasises Nelson's over England's glory. Likewise, James Gillray's caricature *Extirpation of the Plagues of Egypt;— Destruction of Revolutionary Crocodiles;— or— the British Hero cleansing ye Mouth of ye Nile* (1798) depicts a colossal Nelson raising his club of 'British Oak' over a fleet of tiny, vanquished Gallic crocodiles, alluding to Hercules defeating the Hydra.[35] Aboukir became part of his formal heroic identity in November 1798, when he was ennobled as Baron Nelson of the Nile and Burnham Thorpe.

Nelson's death at Cape Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 led to an unprecedented public outpouring of emotion. Gratitude for the victory was mingled with sorrow and pride at the hero's self-sacrifice for the nation. His apotheosis was a conspicuous motif. Britons were overwhelmingly united in their response, but some radical journalists objected that Pitt's supporters selfishly exploited Nelson's victory and death for political gain.[36] Nelson's state funeral was on a scale usually

reserved for monarchs, leading Hannah More to object that 'It is not a funeral but an Apotheosis'.[37] Theatrical tributes frequently concluded with Nelson ascending to the heavens: in January 1806, the German Theatre staged 'NELSON'S ARRIVAL IN ELYSIUM'.[38] Nelson's apotheosis appealed because it emotionally restaged his final moments, immortalising the admiral, his victory, and national self-confidence following Trafalgar.

The metropolitan culture industry capitalised on the public mood. Blake would have been aware of the boom for engravers. Writing to Hayley on 7 October 1803, he complained that while 'Art in London flourishes' and 'Engravers in particular are wanted', 'no one brings work to me' (E736). His pique would have intensified from late 1805, when demand for engravings of Nelson and Pitt presented major commercial opportunities. James Heath gained lucrative commissions for a portrait of Nelson and a reproduction of West's *Death of Nelson*. Boydell and Company launched a competition to produce a picture of the admiral's death. The advertisement in *The Times* on 22 January 1806 called for something 'in the manner of *The Death of Wolfe*', and added:

> Respecting the engraving, experience has taught them not to employ artists who, to the disappointment of the public, and their great private detriment, have delayed the publication of prints on popular subjects.[39]

Blake was renowned neither for a fashionable style nor prompt execution. This pointed remark might even be directed at him. He engraved Opie's *Romeo and Juliet* for Boydell's *The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* (1799), but accidentally in a folio rather than elephant size print. Bentley believes this mistake cost Blake further work from Boydell.[40] The other great London printsellers, Macklin and Bowyer, also solicited engravings of Nelson's Wolfe-like apotheosis.[41]

In a notebook poem following his exhibition, Blake vented frustration at these businessmen:

> Was I angry with Hayley who usd me so ill
> Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill
> Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard
> Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death botherd
> Or angry with Macklin or Boydel or Bowyer
> Because they did not say O what a Beau ye are
> At a Friends Errors Anger shew
> Mirth at the Errors of a Foe. (E504)

Blake dismisses those with whom he fell out in the mid-to-late 1800s. He felt ill-used by Hayley over the disastrous 1805 edition of his *Ballads*. Blake's relationship with Flaxman deteriorated during the mid-1800s. Cromek preferred Schiavonetti for the lucrative engravings of Blake's designs to *The Grave* (1806) and Blake believed him responsible for Stothard copying his Canterbury Pilgrims painting.[42] Blake's sympathy for Schiavonetti may concern the engraving of Devis's *Death of Lord Nelson*. The original engraver of this work, Schiavonetti was incensed by Boydell's harsh deadline and financial terms. Instead, in August 1806 Bromley gained the commission. Schiavonetti died in 1810.[43] Blake discussed the lucrative illustrated book projects of the 1790s in a letter to Hayley on 11 December 1805, expressing resentment at being considered 'Incapable of Employment' for 'Boydells Macklins Bowyers & other Great Works'. Believing 'it may turn out so again notwithstanding appearances' (E767), Blake evidently still hoped he might gain a commission.

It was, however, the sculpture competitions that fascinated Blake as well as the art world in 1806. The *Descriptive Catalogue* entries for *Pitt* and *Nelson* refer to statuary, and the latter is clearly modelled on the Apollo Belvedere. Between 1806 and 1807 there were competitions to design a national monument of Nelson in the 'Naval Pantheon' in St Paul's and a statue for the Corporation of London in Guildhall. Again, non-Academicians could submit designs.[44] Yarrington notes these monuments' significance, representing 'the only consistent state patronage of the arts during the first half of the nineteenth century'.[45] The national competitions represented a rebuff to the Royal Academy, which was relegated to advising on the monuments' placing in St Paul's and Westminster, while a government-appointed Committee of Public Taste chose the designs.[46]

Blake's sometime friend Flaxman won the Nelson commission for St Paul's and the little-known James Smith that for Guildhall. Blake may have viewed the models, which were publicly displayed at the British Institution.[47] His 'Public Address' (*c*.1809–10) laments that the 'Painters of England are unemployd in Public Works', whilst 'Sculptors have continual & superabundant employment'. *Pitt* and *Nelson* are perhaps examples of the grand paintings he envisaged above 'the Great Public Monuments in Westminster S$^{t}$ Pauls & other Cathedrals', which would enhance the '[*dead*] Marble' (E581). The corresponding catalogue entries reflect on Blake's visionary originals; he wishes 'it was now the fashion to make such monuments', because he 'should not doubt of having a national commis-

sion' (E531) for large-scale versions. He simultaneously positions these paintings within and outside contemporary commemorative culture.

A war-hero such as Nelson posed problems for Protestant Britain. On the one hand, he defended Britons against atheist France. On the other, his martial vocation and secular cult raised objections among pacifist Christians. Yarrington notes that in Birmingham, Quaker anti-war sentiment led Richard Westmacott to sculpt 'Nelson as a citizen hero, the ordinary man who, overcoming physical weakness, had achieved glory through courage and patriotic fervour'.[48] The St Paul's naval monuments raised similar anxieties. Even fellow Academicians criticised Thomas Banks's 1802 monument to Captain Burgess for its ridiculous mixture of naturalism and classical allegory. Allan Cunningham later objected that the admiral was deified, a Greek god with an English head.[49] Clergy in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's complained that monument-building impacted on the primary purposes of their spaces.[50] Farington noted Flaxman's discomfort at a Royal Academy meeting that discussed Nelson in December 1805:

> Flaxman much opposed an idea which has prevailed of having a Monument erected under the *Dome* of St. Paul's, which he observed wd. interrupt the eye on looking to the *Choir*, & present as a first object in a place formed for the *Worship of the Almighty* the figure & the idea of Mortal Man as the principal object of attention.[51]

Others, however, approved this site, including James Paine the Younger, who submitted *The Apotheosis of Lord Nelson—A Monumental Sketch* (*c*.1806) to the competition.[52] Flaxman objected to the idolatrous implications of Nelson's apotheosis. His national monument therefore balanced classical heroism and Protestant piety, an equilibrium Blake's *Spiritual Form of Nelson* subverts.

Flaxman signed the contract for the statue in April 1807, finally unveiling it in 1818 (Fig. 7.1).[53] Its realistic detail is subtly heightened with heroic grandeur. The admiral is raised above subordinate sea gods on a pillar bearing the names of his victorious battles. Below, to his left, is a couchant British lion. To his right, Britannia directs two boys towards the admiral, encouraging emulation. For Hoock, this careful work is 'a noble portrait', with Nelson's eyesight restored and a tactful 'fur-lined cloak over the shoulder concealing the amputated arm', realistic but perfected.[54] Writing to Reverend Gunn in September 1814, Flaxman described the

**Fig. 7.1** John Flaxman, *Horatio, Viscount Nelson*. St Paul's Cathedral, London. Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London

statue as lifelike rather than mythological: 'divine attributes, moral virtues or national characteristics represented by allegory, are addressed to the speculation of the philosopher, or the imagination of the poet' but 'general feelings are more gratified by the likeness of the man'.[55] Flaxman's *Nelson*,

however, subtly mirrors the Apollo Belvedere. Nelson leans with his left hand against an anchor, where the Apollo's right hand rests on a tree stump. Apollo's extended left arm, partially cloaked, becomes Nelson's amputated right arm, tastefully draped. Even the coil of rope suggests a serpent subdued by Nelson. While Flaxman's design ostensibly eschews myth and the motifs of apotheosis, Nelson remains god-like.

This makes Blake's adaptation of the Apollo Belvedere in his *Spiritual Form of Nelson* (Fig. 7.2) pointed. Whereas artistic tributes tended to tone down mythological detail, Blake transgresses commemorative etiquette. His nude Nelson, barely concealed in cloudy underpants, is clearly Apollo's double. He holds a Jovian thunderbolt in his right hand, and loosely reins Leviathan with his left. This serpent encircles him, entwining terrified personifications of 'the Nations of the Earth'. The giant reptiles in *Nelson* and *Pitt* appear in *Jerusalem* as 'Leviathan | And Behemoth: the War by Sea enormous & the War | By Land astounding' (91:38–40, E251). In Blake's 349th watercolour for *Night Thoughts*, a scaly state bishop sporting a mitre and crozier directs Leviathan underwater.[56] Blake's Nelson likewise guides what he elsewhere called 'the English Crusade against France' (E613). Nelson's face is the only naturalistic detail, raised upwards in a beatific glance and circled by a god-like glory.

The surrounding design deviates from the conventional apotheosis. Subordinate figures would usually surround the hero, their faces reflecting his light and admiring his virtuous self-sacrifice. Those around Nelson, however, are imprisoned within Leviathan's folds, and in one case its teeth. Their faces contort in agony and fear and their bodies squirm in various directions. Leviathan's circle around Nelson suggests the auras of spiritual energy circling deities in Hindu sculpture. Blake's Nelson seems deified by the energy of compulsion and destruction.

Blake's oriental style is particularly appropriate to Nelson. After Aboukir, he was powerfully, sometimes comically, associated with the East. In September 1798, Selim III presented him with a chelengk (a plume of diamonds and feathers) and a fine pelisse, and honoured him with the specially created non-Muslim Order of the Ottoman Crescent.[57] Nelson's ostentatious display of his Ottoman decorations was often mocked, as in Gillray's *The Hero of the Nile* (1798).[58] His controversial private life was also associated with oriental lasciviousness; Isaac Cruikshank's *A Mansion-House Treat; or, Smoking Attitudes* (1800) depicts Nelson and Emma Hamilton gazing into one another's eyes, while the former smokes a phallic hookah.[59]

**Fig. 7.2** *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* (*c.*1805–9). Tate Britain. © Tate, London 2015

Blake perhaps nods to this in his *Nelson*. A reproduction from 1915, prior to damage sustained during flooding in 1928, appears to show a trace erection jutting from the crotch (Fig. 7.3). Blake subtly incorporated penises into other images, such as Plate 38 in copies A and B of *Milton*. While not necessarily overt when the painting was exhibited in 1809, at some stage this seems to have been part of the design.[60] Nelson is associated with the male generative principle and phallic worship in

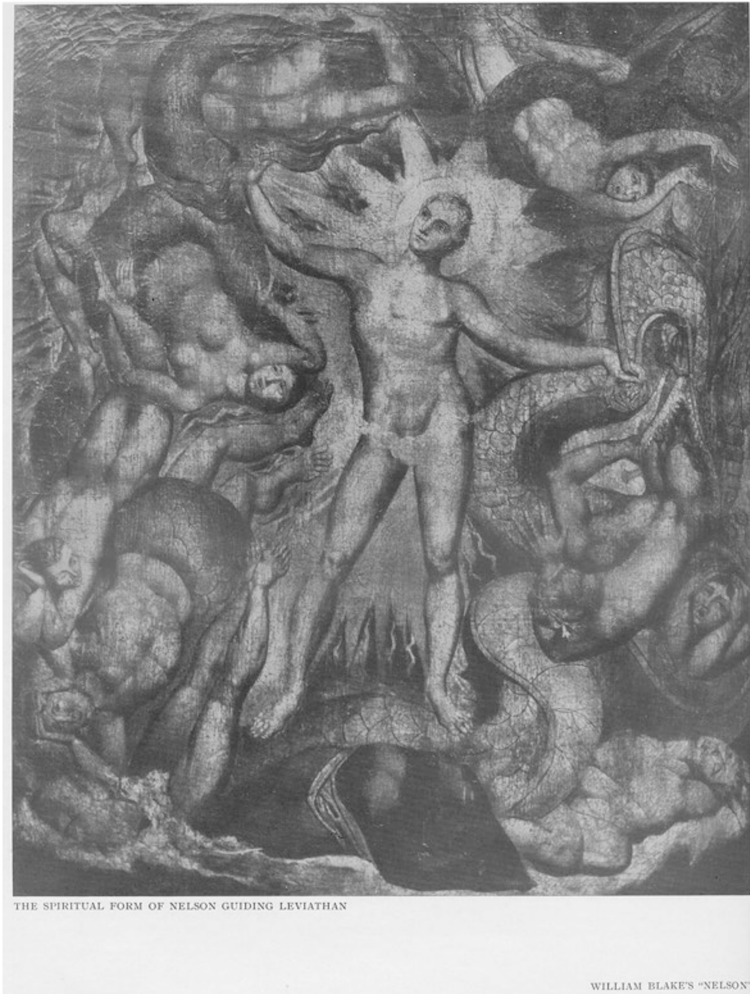


**Fig. 7.3** *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan. The Burlington Magazine* 26 (January 1915)

oriental art, here envisaged as war's perversion of the erotic impulse, as in the warrior's song in *Jerusalem*: 'I am drunk with unsatiated love | I must rush again to War: for the Virgin has frownd & refusd' (68:62–63, E222).

Blake's *Nelson* satirically represents the admiral's catasterism. He is based on the constellation Ophiuchus (Fig. 7.4), who grasps Serpens. The formation was identified with a range of figures, but the most relevant here is Hercules Lydius, commemorated for subduing a serpent in the river Segaris.[61] Blake's barely-controlled, devouring reptile, however, suggests Nelson is its partner rather its vanquisher. The Apollonian Nelson also radiates sunbeams, which have ostensibly positive associations. However, the sun is offset to the left, not quite centred on Nelson, who emits blue-green light. Behind him, the jagged star shape is similar to the insignia of the Order of the Bath, of which Nelson became a knight in 1797. The sunlight below the star appears like hellish flames, with red tints suggesting bloodshed, challenging widespread admiration for Nelson as the nation's saviour.

Other details indicate Blake's engagement with Nelson's public identity. The striking African figure at the base of the picture is an unusual detail compared to other tributes. Bindman views him as an emblem of

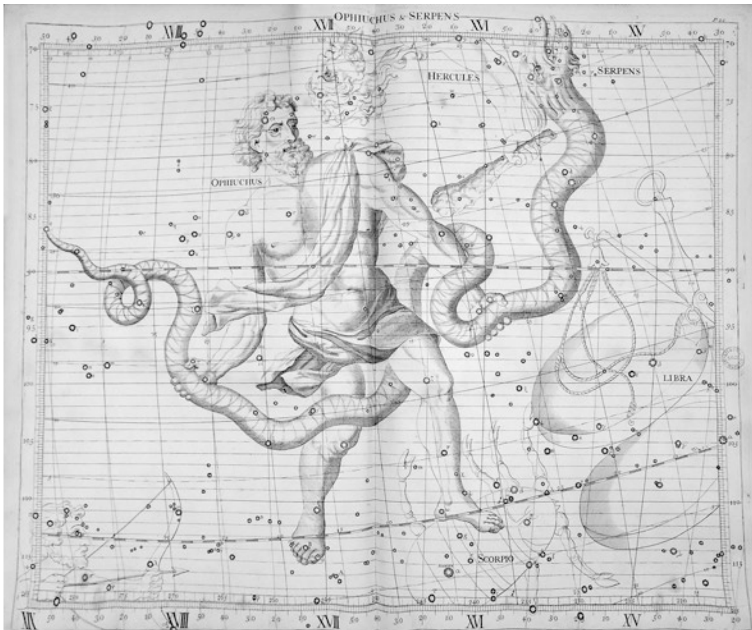


**Fig. 7.4** *Ophiuchus* from John Flamsteed, *Atlas Coelestis* (1729). The Lit and Phil, Newcastle

the 'human consequences of conquest by sea', while Erdman perceives a contrast between 'heroism at the top and slavery at the base of British naval power'.[62] Nelson's apotheosis certainly seems to be based on subjection, and it recalls the figure trampled by Kali in an engraving from Volume Two of Maurice's *Indian Antiquities*. Erdman also suggests a reference to abolition of the British slave trade in 1807.[63] Nelson's opposition to abolition was, however, little-known at the time. The loin cloth on Blake's African figure flows like a river into the sea below. This iconography featured, for example, on the frontispiece of Robert Bowyer's edition of *Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1809). If Leviathan enfolds the nations of the earth, this represents Africa and alludes to Nelson's title Baron of the Nile.[64] His victory at Aboukir subdues rather than liberates Africa in Blake's painting.

Nelson ensnares other national personifications in the coils of British naval supremacy. France, rather than Christ as Erdman suggests, may be the figure devoured by Leviathan.[65] To the left, perhaps a cowering Napoleon clutches his rotund cropped head. Below Nelson's thunderbolts, the woman with dark hair and prominent breasts represents America, frequently personified as a native Indian.[66] Blake adopts this iconography in *Europe supported by Africa & America* for Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition* (1796), and its inclusion may refer to Nelson's earlier involvement in the American War of Independence.[67] The frosty spike-haired figure in the bottom right may suggest Nelson's victory at Copenhagen in 1801.

Blake's painting closely engages with Nelson's public profile, magnifying his titles and victories to epic scale. In his right hand Nelson clutches Jovian thunder.[68] He was particularly proud of his Dukedom of Brontë, bestowed by the Neapolitan King Ferdinand, and often signed letters 'Nelson and Bronte',[69] delighting in his association with the mythological giant who wrought Neptune's trident and Jupiter's thunderbolts. The thunderbolt presents Nelson as the instrument of the divinity, as he reputedly regarded himself, bringing victory to the divinely favoured British nation and king.[70] The companion painting likewise subversively mythologised another British hero.

## 'That Angel Who Rides the Whirlwind': Blake's Oriental Apotheosis of Pitt

William Pitt died on 23 January 1806 and, as with Nelson, there was an outpouring of eulogy, often exploiting the apotheosis motif. Thomas Maurice's *Elegy on the late Right Honourable William Pitt* (1806) magnifies its hero:

> 'Midst Virtue's, Britain's, Freedom's mingled sight
> Immortal PITT ascends his native skies [...]
> Enlighten'd STATESMAN! whose expanded soul
> Pervaded Europe to the frozen pole;—
> Her empires in thy mighty balance weigh'd,
> And propped the sinking with thy pow'rful aid.[71]

The ascent of Pitt's soul was also a central image in James Sayers's 'Elijah's Mantle' (1807), which envisages Pitt as the protector of the chosen nation, taken up into heaven, with Grenville as his successor, Elisha. Gillray memorably represented this theme in *Disciples Catching the Mantle* (1808).[72] The image of Pitt's translation confers legitimacy, authority, and popular appeal on successors such as Grenville and Canning, who promised to uphold his principles of government.

Motions were brought before Parliament on 27 January 1806 and the Corporation of London on 6 February 1806 for monumental commemorations of Pitt. Despite hopes that they would be unanimously approved, some of Pitt's opponents objected. Both tributes were passed, but at Guildhall the motion only squeaked through by six votes.[73] The lucrative sculptural commissions involved widely discussed competitions, for which artists put forward sketches and models. Entries were solicited from February 1806. 'J.N.' (probably the Royal Academy sculptor Joseph Nollekens), wrote to *The Gentleman's Magazine* on 12 February 1806 to announce the state contest. The design was to contain 'no pagan ornament whatever' and Pitt should appear in 'the Gown of Cicero, in the act of Speaking', with an inscription highlighting his disinterested virtue, Christianity, and selfless death in the service of his country. Pitt was reputedly lukewarm towards religion while alive, but this description and subsequent accounts of his death developed a myth of his Christian piety.[74] Sculptors adopted the Ciceronian dress for statues of Pitt in Westminster, Guildhall, and later Cambridge University, as well as in Nollekens's widely sold bust.

By late summer 1806, the City of London had selected James Bubb's design, controversially choosing the cheapest proposal.[75] In March 1807, the Committee of Taste chose Richard Westmacott to complete the Westminster Abbey statue.[76] Bubb's monument is more classically allegorical, with Pitt flanked by Apollo and Mercury, while Westmacott adhered to the suggestions of 'J.K.', adding figures of Anarchy in chains and History.[77] In both statues, Pitt is a classical orator, whose inspired gaze looks beyond the present to futurity. The sculptures aimed to immortalise

him as the disinterested preserver of God's chosen nation, testifying to the solidity of his political principles.

Caricatures and satires of Pitt clustered into easily visualised tropes. From the mid-1780s onwards, Whigs and radicals lampooned him as a magician and illusionist, as in Charles Pigott's *Political Dictionary* (1795):

> *Necromancer*,—Mr. Pitt, who, by means of charms and spells, and his opiate wand, conjures up the House of Commons and the Privy Council to his opinions. For many years, by the force of his incantations, he kept Liberty bound up in a little bottle, containing a solution of gold in the *sudorous acid*, extracted from the brows of the labouring poor.[78]

Such satire peaked in 1794, after Hardy, Thelwall, and Horne Tooke's acquittals on charges of treason. Mid-1790s broadsides mocked Pitt as a conjuror, quack doctor, and tyrant. *Wonderful Exhibition!!!* (1794) advertises the magician Pittachio's deceptions, describing him as 'THE HEAVEN-BORN CONJUROR' in allusion to the Duke of Chandos's fawning compliment in 1789 that Pitt was 'a heaven-born minister'.[79] Depictions of Pitt as an oriental tyrant reached their apogee in a 1795 series entitled *Mustapha's Adoration of the Sublime Sultan Pittander Omnipotent* (1795). A caricature servile oriental, Mustapha, gushes praise at the warlike Sultan Pittander in verse akin to the Song of Songs. Pittander's 'forehead smiteth the skies', his 'breath is desolation' and at his disposal are the 'treasures of the globe'. Mustapha elevates him as the 'HEAVEN-BORN SULTAN' and 'first created of Beings'. The satire collapses distinctions between the reasonable Protestant nation and an irrational and superstitious East. Mustapha promises Pittander 'ABUNDANCE OF WINE', alluding not only to Pitt's frequently caricatured binge drinking with Henry Dundas, but also to an oriental luxury and excess contrary to his austere public persona.[80] Further instalments liken Pitt to a sun god and a destroying angel delivering death to fathers, mothers, virgins, and babes alike.[81] In the final part, Mustapha has a vision of the giant Mankind banishing Pittander and bringing peace and liberty to the whole earth. Ironically, Mustapha reassures his master that this is merely a dream.

The repressive Two Acts of 1795 and the threat of French invasion perhaps caused these satires to diminish, although William Beckford's *Azemia* (1797) mocks Pitt in song as 'For the State a rare physician | To bleed and sweat'.[82] Following Pitt's resignation in 1801, at the beginning of May 1802 *The Times* reported that the Corporation of London planned

to raise a statue of him. By mid-May, subscribers agreed it should only be erected posthumously, rather than immortalising a living politician. By June, the committee decided to erect the statue after a delay of a year to allow the subscription to increase.[83] Several caricatures mocked the project as Pitt's apotheosis, intended to position him for readmission to the premiership. Most memorably, *The Apotheosis of a Virgin in Breeches!!* (8 June 1802) shows Pitt in a pink dress ascending towards the Treasury on a cormorant and a lame duck.[84]

The roguish Whig satirist Peter Pindar was particularly vitriolic towards Pitt. Pindar's *Odes to Ins and Outs* (1801) and *Out at Last! or the Fallen Minister* (1801) celebrated the resignation, depicting Pitt as a demon, despotic sultan, and frigid woman-hater. *Pitt and His Statue: An Epistle to the Subscribers* (1802) attacked the planned memorial, disabusing the public of their distorted image:

> 'Tis very kind of ye, I'm sure,
> Yet 'tis but *rouge* on an old w—,
> That can't conceal the wrinkles and the scab:
> The Nation's eyes are vastly clear;
> Their scrutinizing pow'r severe,
> Discerns a vestal from a dirty drab.[85]

The statue is a subterfuge 'To snatch his *glory* from the grave, | That seemeth in a terrible decline' (ll.16–17). Pindar advises that it should be 'form'd of *kindred brass*'(l.19) and imagines it as a hubristic deification:

> Colossal it will be no doubt,
> To push his head among the gods;
> Cocking his pert, imperious snout,
> Much like the bully of old Rhodes. (ll.21–24)

Whereas Pitt's worshippers would adorn the pedestal with noble virtues, Pindar suggests more fitting labels:

> There shall we see the name of WAR,
> That many a soldier sends, and tar,
> To sleep with their *still* fathers and *still* mothers;
> For WAR, though seeming very *dread*,
> By knocking thousands on the head,
> Makes comfortable elbow-room for *others*. (ll.31–38)

Many reformers believed Pitt relied upon continued war with France to maintain control over Parliament.[86] Other suggested inscriptions record betrayals on 'REFORM', 'OLD BAILEY', 'INCOME-TAX', and the 'PENNY-POST' (ll.38–46) and Pindar recommends locating the statue outside the debtor's door at Newgate. With Pitt out of office, Pindar was uninhibited:

> I think subscriptions will be thin,
> For flatt'ring our Great Nation's Hope:
> Heav'ns! how the guineas had pour'd in,
> 'Stead of a Statue had it been a *Rope*! (ll.167–70)

In 1801, Blake's friend George Cumberland felt similarly, sketching in his notebook a likeness of Pitt replete with devil's horns.[87] These responses suggest how anti-Pittites might have felt in 1806 about the proposals for the Westminster and Guildhall statues. With the exception of William Cobbett, few made public criticisms of Pitt, perhaps the motivation for Blake's complaint in the 'Public Address' of the tendency not to speak ill of the dead.[88] Writing to Butts on 11 September 1801, Blake equates Pitt's oppression with that of his philosophical bugbears: 'Bacon & Newton would prescribe ways of making the world heavier to me & Pitt would prescribe distress for a medicinal potion' (E716). This caricature of Pitt as a dabbling apothecary echoes the 1790s Whig and radical satires.

In its very indeterminacy, *Pitt* (Fig. 7.5) frustrates viewers more used to clearly allegorical commemorations. Blake defamiliarises Pitt, inviting speculative interpretations and reflections upon him. Many details in the painting satirically subvert standard commemorative tropes, especially the idea of his apotheosis. Blake's Pitt is an astral giant. To his left-hand side, the premier's star ascends to the firmament. With a beatific gaze, he floats over a tormented world, guiding Behemoth, in *Jerusalem* 'War | By Land astounding' (91:39–40, E251). The beast contains spectral heads, some regal, suggesting Pitt's financial and military support of Europe's *ancien régime* monarchs in the wars against France. The rotund, jowly face at the bottom may even depict George III.

Worrall identifies 'the Reaper' and 'the Plowman' (E530) flanking Pitt with constellations: Boötes and the Plough.[89] The catalogue identifies Pitt as an 'Angel'. His flowing gown suggests Virgo, traditionally personifying justice and peace (Fig. 5.2). Blake's irony is obvious, but he also echoes Whig and radical jibes at Pitt's asexuality.[90] Seven planetary bodies orbit

**Fig. 7.5** *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth* (*c*.1806–9). Tate Britain. © Tate, London 2015

Pitt's head, englobing constrained bodies, perhaps imprisoned reformers. The serpentine glory around his head suggests a satanic system of power gravitates around him, and the detail recalls Shiva's flaming halo in d'Hancarville and statues of Buddha at Salsette.[91] While subordinate

bodies circle the central figure, Blake disrupts the integrity of the conventional apotheosis tableau as surrounding destruction draws the viewer's eye away from Pitt. Just a few tiny and terrified human figures look up to him, pleading for mercy rather than admiring him.

Blake's description of Pitt as '*that angel who, pleased to perform the Almighty's orders, rides on the whirlwind, directing the storms of war*' (E530) allowed viewers to interpret the painting as a patriotic, albeit bizarre, representation of the leader of God's nation against atheist France. He alludes to Addison's *The Campaign* (1705), in which the 'God-like leader' Marlborough defeats France at the Battle of Blenheim and is compared to 'an angel, by divine command' who 'pleas'd th' Almighty's Orders to perform, | Rides in the Whirl-wind, and directs the Storm'.[92] While the analogy with Marlborough appears flattering, Pitt hardly achieved such a decisive victory. Blake may also allude to Canning's tribute to Pitt as 'the pilot that weathered the storm'.[93] But in this description Pitt actively 'rides' on the whirlwind and 'directs' the storm. The promise to turn the name of the wicked 'into an Ornament & an Example to be Avoided by Some & Imitated by Others if they Please' (E579) is exemplified in the painting's evocation and contestation of commemorative rhetoric. Blake's slippery title might suggest Pitt is a divinely sanctioned angel of apocalypse (Revelation 14:14), but the painting also challenges Britain's arrogance in regarding itself as God's chosen nation.[94] He saw his visionary originals in the 'highly cultivated states' of Egypt, Moab, Edom, and Aram (E531), frequently Israel's enemies in the Old Testament. This invites a challenge to nationalist analogies between modern England and ancient Israel. Pitt seems an Old Testament angel of death rather than a Christian leader: beneath his left hand, Blake depicts Lot and his daughters escaping from the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18–19). Pitt's Persian appearance likewise unsettles eighteenth-century Britain's identification with Greek liberty against the Persian despotism of France. Ciceronian robes become dark mantles, like those of fire-worshippers, sorcerers, and *deevs* associated with Persia.[95] Pitt emits crackles of lightning and a beam from his left hand destroys Lot's wife and scorches the earth. The painting intensifies and mythologises 1790s satires of the state conjuror.

The catalogue entry alludes to the apocalyptic reaper and the ploughman from Amos 9:13 and the figures who work the winepress of God's wrath in Revelation 14:14–20.[96] Blake may slyly joke here. The ploughman's face resembles Henry Dundas, Lord Melville from 1802. Dundas was Pitt's close ally, his War Secretary from 1794 until Pitt resigned in

1801 and First Lord of the Admiralty from 1802 to 1806, and a drinking partner. Melville would have been an embarrassing associate in the painting. In April 1805, a Naval Inquiry implicated him in peculation of naval funds. Following a parliamentary censure, he resigned his post in the Admiralty. Impeachment hearings began in April 1806, but in June 1807 Dundas was cleared by fellow MPs, if not public opinion.[97] Blake's figure wears green breeches, perhaps hinting at the Scots plaid Dundas often sported in caricatures.[98] Pitt's order to '*the Reaper to reap the Vine of the Earth*' subverts the idea of a spiritual and apocalyptic last harvest and vintage and perhaps nods to Pitt and Dundas's legendary wine consumption. For these figures, the vintage is corporeal, their war policy bloody intoxication.

## 'Unworthy Men Who […] Govern Mankind After Death'

Blake's paintings addressed a varied audience in complex ways. As oriental apotheoses, they appealed to the vogue for the East among Royal Academicians. Their satire perhaps particularly courted Academicians with Whig and radical inclinations. Soane's discussion of Elephanta, Salsette, and Ellora suggests Blake could have expected this audience to recognise his models and explore his adaptation of them to modern heroes.[99] As Ward argues, Blake still sought attention from Royal Academy members as late as 1809.

Shanes notes that political radicalism was 'rife in the Royal Academy' around 1800 and in 1803 led to a serious dispute over whether Academy affairs should be governed by the eight-man Council or the more inclusive General Assembly.[100] Many were open or suspected radicals, including James Barry, Thomas Banks, Thomas Stothard, Martin Arthur Shee, the Robert Smirkes (senior and junior), Fuseli, and even Benjamin West.[101] In 1806, Farington recorded a furore regarding the painter James Northcote's 'improper expressions' regarding Pitt's death.[102] Northcote had been overheard saying 'That if, while Mr. Pitt was at his last gasp, He had been present & Mr. Pitt sensible enough to have known that He did, He wd. have spit in His face'. Farington admonished 'such unchristianlike & inhuman expressions' and Northcote's reputation suffered.[103] Humphry believed he 'holds up Bonoparte as the greatest of all human beings'.[104]

As such, perhaps Blake's companion to *Nelson* and *Pitt*, which did not feature in the exhibition, may have addressed Academicians sharing Northcote's enthusiasm. The *Spiritual Form of Napoleon*, which in 1880 William Michael Rossetti described as a 'very powerful example of effect' and in 'the same style as the Nelson and the Pitt', is now lost. Erdman suggests it responded to Napoleon's death in 1822, but the period of the exhibition seems more probable.[105] In 1876, H. H. Statham described it. Napoleon, flanked by angels, is a 'strong energetic figure grasping at the sun and moon with his hands, yet chained to earth by one foot, and with a pavement of dead bodies before him in the foreground'.[106] He strains towards the heavens, seeking perhaps to tear them down or to become divine, with the corpses an obscene pediment. If the painting was also an oriental apotheosis there may be a specific reference to the 'black legend' of Napoleon's massacre at Jaffa and poisoning of troops after the siege of Acre.[107] Indeed, the very notion of Napoleon's apotheosis tapped into controversy. In February 1803, the French government pushed Britain into prosecuting a London émigré journalist, Peltier, for a criminal libel on Napoleon; the consul's imagined apotheosis was construed as incitement to his murder.[108]

The similarities between these three paintings suggest that Blake was visually embodying the sentiments of his May 1804 letter to Hayley, undermining national war-hero cults. In patriotic tributes, Nelson and Pitt were frequently paired.[109] Blake's comparison to 'the Cherubim', which flank God's Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 25:20, implies by analogy that Nelson and Pitt support the throne of Britain's God, George III. His 'Advertisement' suggests that a '*portable Fresco*' would allow him to 'divide Westminster Hall, or the walls of any other great Building, into compartments and ornament them with Frescos, which would be removable at pleasure' (E527). This mobile medium courts the hope that the political state of the nation will improve.

According to Blake's catalogue, *The Ancient Britons* depicted three survivors from the '*last Battle of King Arthur*'. The tales of Arthur were 'fables': 'Arthur was a name for the constellation Arcturus, or Bootes, the Keeper of the North Pole' (E542). For Blake, Arthurian legends refashioned the ancient British people's history into a myth of the heroic monarch. Arthur is one of *Jerusalem*'s line of kings from Satan and Cain, which, according to Erdman's recovery of an excised line, culminates in George III (73:36–37, E228). Unlike the Arthurian legends, Blake privileges collective national identity:

> The giant Albion, was Patriarch of the Atlantic, he is the Atlas of the Greeks, one of those the Greeks called Titans. The stories of Arthur are the acts of Albion, applied to a Prince of the fifth century, who conquered Europe, and held the Empire of the world in the dark age, which the Romans never again recovered. (E543)

Blake remythologises Arthur's exploits into a popular national triumph. His images of Nelson and Pitt similarly undermine individual hero-cults, but he believed his paintings would still honour the nation. In the catalogue, Blake wishes, with apparent sincerity, for 'a national commission to execute these two Pictures on a scale that is suitable to the grandeur of the nation, who is the parent of his heroes' (E531). As an inspired artist, he aspires to supersede official, martial nationalism with an alternative patriotism, expressed through British artistic and cultural pre-eminence.

The Nelson and Pitt paintings also differ significantly. Their links to Hindu sculpture suggest they represent the active male and passive female powers of the state. As Apollo, Nelson is more conventionally heroic and Blake provides him with an appealing radiance, which Pitt lacks. Blake opposed war as a tool of the state and criticised its glorification, but he remained fascinated by heroism.[110] Like his countrymen, he found Nelson captivating, and discerned great potential in his leadership. At the end of the *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake even adapts Nelson's famous Trafalgar signal:

> It is not the want of genius, that can hereafter be laid to our charge, the Artist who had done these Pictures and Drawings will take care of that; let those who govern the Nation, take care of the other. The times require that every one should speak out boldly; England expects that every man should do his duty, in Arts, as well as in Arms, or in the Senate. (E549)

The artist rivals the warrior and politician as a hero motivated by national 'duty'. Blake's use of Nelson's signal implies he drew inspiration from the admiral's ability to galvanise the nation against its enemies. His injunction that 'every one speak out boldly' urges that national vitality best emerges through a public sphere open to dissenting views.

Blake's use of the apotheosis genre in these paintings reflects his awareness of the power of national memorial culture. Commemorative art, especially statuary, invests individuals or events with an enduring official meaning. Images of dying heroes whose souls soared heavenward at the moment of victory appealingly combined martial success with self-

less patriotic and Christian virtue. Just as Cobbett sought to contest the official eulogies, Blake mischievously intervened in the verbal and visual rhetoric which aimed to elevate Nelson and Pitt beyond criticism. His term 'spiritual forms' invites a range of interpretations, but Blake's comments on the now lost painting *The Spiritual Preceptor* suggest these forms had real agency in the present world:

> Unworthy Men who gain fame among Men, continue to govern mankind after death, and in their spiritual bodies, oppose the spirits of those, who worthily are famous. […] [T]hey possess themselves of the bodies of mortal men, and shut the doors of mind and thought, by placing Learning above Inspiration. (E546)

These 'spiritual bodies' are products of collective memory. For at least the next decade, the agenda for British and European political life had been determined by Pitt's policies. An influential group of MPs vowed to uphold Pitt's political 'system', allowing his influence to extend beyond his lifetime.[111] For Blake, inspired art called on the active powers of the imagination and could disrupt the habitual perception of heroism fostered by official commemorative culture. He aspired to rouse his fellow Britons to imagine for themselves alternative, divine forms of heroism and nationhood, themes pursued in his astonishing epic poems.

## Notes

1. Humphry owned copies of *America*, *Europe*, and *Songs*. See *BB* 91, 158, 384, and for the *Small Book of Designs*, 356–58.
2. Robert Hunt, *The Examiner*, 7 September 1809, and *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, June 1812, in *BR* 283, 313–14.
3. For patriotic interpretations, see Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, I, 359, and Beer, *William Blake*, 161–62. 'M.A.', in 'William Blake's "Nelson"', during war in 1915, asserted Blake's meaning 'is plain to all […] "Rule Britannia, rule the waves!"' Erdman, *BPAE* 448–55 and Paley, *EI* 171–99, construe them as political satires.
4. Ward, '"S$^{r}$ Joshua and His Gang"', 75.
5. Marshall, *George Washington*, I, iv.
6. Barrell, *Political Theory*, 102–103.
7. Paley, *EI* 177, links Blake's discussion of the Cherubim to Barry's first lecture.

8. Paley, '"Wonderful Originals"', 174, 177. See *Persepolis Illustrata* (1739), Robert Wood's *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753) and *Ruins of Balbec* (1757).
9. For Blake and Persian sculpture, see Jackson, 'Blake and Zoroastrianism'.
10. See articles in *Archaeologia*, 7 (1785), 290–315, 323–31, 333–35, as well as the brief account of Elephanta by Lieutenant-Colonel Barry, *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1785), 414–16.
11. James Philipps published his engraving of the painting in June 1790. See de Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 40–42, 47. For Blake's exhibits, see *BR* 39–40.
12. Walpole to Lady Ossory, 9 July 1785, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, XXXIII, 479.
13. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 243–44. See also Erdman, *BPAE* 454, and Mee, '"As Portentous As the Written Wall"'.
14. D'Hancarville, Gough, and Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* seem more likely sources for *Nelson* and *Pitt* than Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810). Weir, *Brahma*, 74–84, speculates that Blake could have seen Haughton's engravings prior to publication by Joseph Johnson.
15. Gough, *Comparative View*, xi.
16. Maurice, *Indian Antiquities*, II, 131–82. See Weir, *Brahma*, 46, 59–65 for parallels with Maurice's works.
17. Farington, 29 September 1798, III, 1061.
18. Barry, 'Lecture I, 61–62. Farington, 1 August 1805, VII, 2599–2600.
19. Soane, 'Lecture I' (1810), *Royal Academy Lectures*, 33.
20. Patenaude, '"The Glory of a Nation"', 61–62, suggests Blake's brother's shop was 'in the heart of the contemporary artistic community, including the homes of many of the members of The Royal Academy'.
21. See Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 47, for Egyptian art as sexualised.
22. De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 50–52.
23. Ibid., 52–53 and Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, 365.
24. De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 52.
25. Maurice, *Indian Antiquities*, II, 300. See also William Daniell's distaste for the imagery, in de Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 46, 54.
26. See Maurice, *Indian Antiquities*, VI, Plate 1.

27. Larrissy, 'Blake's Orient', 3.
28. Makdisi, 'Immortal Joy', 24.
29. Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part I, 206, and Part II, 265. Makdisi discusses radical orientalism in *Impossible History*, esp. 204–32.
30. There is no conclusive date for the Pitt and Nelson paintings. Butlin, II, 472, speculatively links the Nelson painting to West's *The Death of Lord Nelson* displayed in 1806 or to Flaxman's statue of Nelson begun in 1808. In *William Blake*, 36–37, he dates *Pitt guiding Behemoth* as 1805 and *Nelson guiding Leviathan* as *c.*1805–9. I would suggest they originate around 1806–7, the period of intense interest in the sculptural competitions, though Blake no doubt worked on them later.
31. Farington, 21 May 1806, II, 2768.
32. Paley, *EI* 172.
33. See Czisnik, 'Nelson and the Nile'.
34. Fitzgerald, *Nelson's Triumph*, 13 [ll.107–12].
35. 6 October 1798, *BMC* 9250.
36. *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 16 November 1805, 737–54.
37. Quoted in Stott, *Hannah More*, 198. Thanks to Susan Matthews for this reference.
38. *Morning Herald*, 7 and 8 November 1805 and 23 and 25 January 1806.
39. *The Times*, 22 January 1806.
40. Bentley, *Stranger*, 179.
41. See *Morning Herald*, 29 November 1805 and *The Times*, 28 January 1805.
42. Bentley, *Stranger*, 274–76, 284, 276–85, 291–304.
43. Farington, 16 August 1806, VIII, 2837.
44. For the St Paul's competition, see Farington, 21 May 1806, II, 2768. For the Guildhall monument, see *The Times*, 27 November 1805 and for details of the competition *The Morning Herald*, 5 December 1805.
45. Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, viii.
46. Hoock, *King's Artists*, 263–69.
47. For Smith's 'deplorable mass of stone', see Walter Thornbury, 'Guildhall', in *Old and New London*, I, 383–396. *The Times*, 22 November 1807, expresses disappointment that models and designs for sculptures including Pitt and Nelson were removed from display once the Committee of Taste had judged.

48. Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, 111.
49. Hoock, *King's Artists*, 263. Cunningham, *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*, III, 101, quoted by Hoock, 'Nelson Entombed', 125.
50. Hoock, *King's Artists*, 270.
51. Farington, 14 December 1805, VII, 2660.
52. Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, 84–85. Letters appeared in the December 1805 *Gentleman's Magazine* promoting this location.
53. Hoock, *King's Artists*, 260. Flaxman's statue incorporated elements of Westmacott's design, see Farington, 16 March 1807, VIII, 2989.
54. Hoock, 'Nelson Entombed', 124.
55. BL Add. MSS 39790, fols. 28–29. Discussed in Hoock, 'Nelson Entombed', 125.
56. A link made by Paley, *EI* 179–80.
57. Pocock, *Nelson*, 181.
58. 1 December 1798, *BMC* 9269. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 206, describes these orientalist clichés.
59. 18 November 1800, *BMC* 9550.
60. For the damage and restoration of this and Blake's other tempera paintings, see Ormsby, Singer, and Dean, 'The Appearance of the Temperas Today'. For the *Milton* plate, see *M* 32.
61. Hill, *Urania*, 'Ophiuchus' *s.v.* See also Condos, *Star Myths*, 141–45.
62. Bindman, *Blake as Artist*,162, and Erdman, *BPAE* 450. Erdman's analysis was probably hampered by damage sustained by the painting because of the chalk ground used and the effects of the Thames flooding the Tate Gallery lower ground floor in 1928. See Butlin I, 876 and II, 472.
63. Erdman, *BPAE* 450.
64. The Nile, now mainly associated with Egypt, was then primarily linked with Africa. See Leask, *Curiosity*, 54–101.
65. The spiritual 'sword' Erdman discerns is actually Leviathan's lower jaw.
66. See Carretta, *George III*, 169–220.
67. Lambert, *Nelson*, 8–14.
68. Blunt, *Art of William Blake*, 102–103. See also Paley, '"Wonderful originals"', 176.

69. Pocock, *Nelson*, 207.
70. See *Nelson's Triumph*, 12 [ll.87–92], and Coleman, *Nelson*, 1–7.
71. Maurice, *Elegy on the late Right Honourable William Pitt*, 45–48 [ll.27–28].
72. Sayers, *Elijah's Mantle*. Gillray's dated his caricature 25 June 1808: *BMC* 10992.
73. *The Times*, 7 February 1806.
74. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1806, 132. See Sack, 'The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt', 632–35.
75. Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture*, 174.
76. Farington, 12 March 1807, VIII, 2987.
77. According to John Kenworthy-Brown, as cited by Busco, *Sir Richard Westmacott*, 76, these figures recall the Sistine Chapel: Pitt is Christ, History the Libyan Sibyl, and Anarchy condemned.
78. Pigott, *Political Dictionary*, 84. For the magician caricatures, see Barrell, *Exhibition Extraordinary!!*, and Mee, '*The Magician No Conjuror*'.
79. Barrell, *Exhibition*, 9, 11.
80. *Mustapha's Adoration* […] *Part I*, reprinted in Barrell, *Exhibition*, 20.
81. *Mustapha's Adoration* […] *Part II*, Barrell, *Exhibition*, 24.
82. Beckford, *Azemia*, II, 15.
83. *The Times*, 2 May, 19 May, and 1 June 1802.
84. *BMC* 9872. See also *John Bull and His Favourite Statue of Bronze!!* (10 May 1802, *BMC* 986) and *The Brazen Image Erected on a Pedestal Wrought by Himself* (29 May 1802, *BMC* 9869).
85. Pindar, *Pitt and His Statue*, 2 [ll.9–14].
86. Franklin and Philp, *Napoleon*, 11.
87. BL Add MSS 36519.A f.26v. See Whitehead's discussion in 'Blake and George Cumberland's Pocketbooks', 192.
88. See *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 1 February 1806. Johnson and Harvey find no examples of significantly outspoken criticism following Pitt's death.
89. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 276–77, reads the rising star as a comet, but in the context of an apotheosis, it probably represents the ascending star of Pitt's soul.
90. See Part II of *Mustapha's Adoration*, in Barrell, *Exhibition*, 24. Reisner, 'Effigies of Power', 489–90, notes Blake's satirical depiction of Pitt as the asexual Pardoner in his *Canterbury Pilgrims*.

91. D'Hancarville, *Supplément*, Plate 4. Blunt, 'Blake's Pictorial Imagination', 206, first noted the halo's oriental style, suggesting Buddhist influence.
92. Addison, *The Campaign*, 4, 14 [ll.63, 287–92].
93. 'The Pilot that Weathered the Storm' (1802), in *Poetical Works*, 26–27.
94. See Rowland, 'Blake and the Bible', 145, for the former.
95. For Greece and Persia, see Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 195–211. Milton's Spectre (*Milton*, Plate 41) and Vala (*Jerusalem*, top of Plate 4) have similar dark robes.
96. *PD*, II, 474.
97. Ehrman, *Consuming Struggle*, 752–64.
98. For a Highland Dundas in plaid, see *The Wine Duty,—or—The Triumph of Bacchus & Silenus* (20 April 1796, *BMC* 8798) and *Low Comedians amusing the Wise Men of the East!!* (9 February 1800, *BMC* 8798).
99. See Farington, 1 August 1805, VII, 2599–2600 and Soane, *Royal Academy Lectures*, 33.
100. Shanes, 'Dissent in Somerset House, 40–45, and Hoock, *King's Artists*, 195–97.
101. Shanes, 'Dissent in Somerset House', 43.
102. Farington, 16 April 1806, VII, 2720.
103. Ibid., 21 April 1806, 2728.
104. Ozias Humphry on Northcote, ibid., 15 October 1803, VI, 2143.
105. Gilchrist, *Life* (1880), II, 254. Erdman, *BPAE* 494.
106. Statham, 'The Blake Drawings', 61, cited in Butlin, II, 474. See also Miner, 'A Possible Sketch'.
107. See Franklin and Philp, *Napoleon*, 14, 113.
108. Burrows, *French Exile Journalism*, 108–25.
109. See for example 'On the Death of those Friends to their Country, Nelson and Pitt', *Morning Post*, 25 January 1806.
110. For Blake's more ambiguous attitude to revolutionary violence, see Keach, 'Blake, Violence'.
111. Ehrman, *Consuming Struggle*, 840–42.

CHAPTER 8

# Transforming Apotheosis in *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*

Blake relocated from London to Felpham in September 1800, perhaps partly motivated by a sense of spiritual disorder. The poem introducing Chapter Two of *Jerusalem* addresses both crisis and the process of recovery:

> And O thou Lamb of God, whom I
> Slew in my dark self-righteous pride:
> Art thou return'd to Albions Land!
> And is Jerusalem thy Bride?
>
> Come to my arms & never more
> Depart; but dwell for ever here:
> Create my Spirit to thy Love:
> Subdue my Spectre to thy Fear.
> (27:65–72, E173)

His confessional regret at past pride is compensated by the tentative hope that the 'Lamb of God' has 'return'd to Albions Land' with Jerusalem. The imperative verbs and passionate appeal for embrace emphasise the emotional nature of this Christian renewal, but there are also two dimensions to the process. The Lamb will emerge through both artistic and affective spiritual activity ('Create my Spirit to thy Love') and disciplinary control ('Subdue my Spectre to thy Fear'). This chapter argues that in *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*, Blake envisions individual and collective renewal as

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a product of both of these impulses, evident in both utopian and critical uses of apotheosis imagery. Blake does not fully reject strategies associated with Enlightenment critique, but rather co-opts the necessary impulse to demystify myths of power into the production of a utopian counter-myth of national and universal human renewal. Blake's epics ultimately reconfigure apotheosis to symbolise mankind's potential recovery of collective coexistence in Jesus.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, Blake's friend and patron Thomas Butts expressed concern over Blake's spiritual state and hoped the move to Felpham would reinvigorate his Christianity. Blake's reply on 2 October 1800 thanks Butts for his 'reprehension of follies by me fosterd' and looks forward to becoming the 'determined advocate of Religion & Humility the two bands of Society' (E711–12). Nevertheless, Blake's letter remains characteristically independent. The address to the 'Friend of Religion & Order' (E711) seems an affectionate joke that responds to Butts's concerns by hailing his friend as an upright figure of orthodoxy. In the poem that follows, Blake describes a far from orthodox 'first Vision of Light', which narrates both his own and humanity's apotheosis. It begins as he sits on Felpham's 'yellow sands' under the 'Glorious beams' of the sun (ll.2–5, E712). In a moment of illumination, Blake's 'Eyes did Expand | Into regions of air' and the sunlight's 'particles bright' become profoundly humanised: 'I each particle gazed | Astonishd Amazed | For each was a Man | Human formd' (ll.8–9, 19–22). Through a catalogue which rises up from 'Each grain of Sand', Blake perceives the universe as a human divinity:

> Each herb & each tree
> Mountain hill Earth & Sea
> Cloud Meteor & Star
> Are Men Seen Afar. (ll.29–32)

These lines culminate by merging men and stars, simultaneously a humanisation of the heavens and the apotheosis of the human. The vision climaxes with 'Felpham sweet | Beneath my bright feet' (ll.35–36) and Blake absorbed into a unified divine humanity:

> My Eyes more & more
> Like a Sea without shore
> Continue Expanding

The Heavens commanding
Till the Jewels of Light
Heavenly men beaming bright
Appeard as One Man
Who Complacent began
My limbs to infold
In his beams of bright gold
Like dross purgd away
All my mire & my clay
Soft consumd in delight
In his bosom sun bright
I remaind. (ll.45–59, E713)

Blake reimagines more conventional forms of apotheosis. Instead of individual immortality, he envisions absorption into a communal divinity, anticipating the negation of the 'Selfhood' and the aspiration towards 'Self-Annihilation' in the epic poems. This transformation resists the abstraction of an apotheosis in which the immortal soul is purified by the death of the physical body. Blake's experience is sensory, produced by the expansion of the eyes and, while elevated, he retains his 'limbs'. The vision concludes in 'delight' and a greater embodiment in the One Man's bosom.

The vision of the earth and the universe as divinely human suggests that Blake had rediscovered some of his earlier enthusiasm for Swedenborg. In *Milton*, this enthusiasm remains tempered by criticism. Rintrah and Palamabron assert that Rahab and Tirzah 'perverted Swedenborgs Visions' (22[24]:46, E117) and lament 'O Swedenborg! strongest of men, the Samson shorn by the Churches!' (22[24]:50). By contrast, the *Descriptive Catalogue* entry for *The Spiritual Preceptor* affirms that 'The works of this visionary are well worthy the attention of Painters and Poets; they are foundations for grand things' (E546).[1] Blake's enthusiasm is for Swedenborg the visionary, whose imaginative interpretations of the Bible were compromised by doctrinal and institutional religion.

As this suggests, Blake regarded inspired artists and art as conduits for the Divine Humanity. Writing to Flaxman on 19 October 1801, Blake was delighted by the recent peace agreement between Britain and France:

> The Kingdoms of this World are now become the Kingdoms of God & his Christ, & we shall reign with him for ever & ever. The Reign of Literature & the Arts Commences. Blessed are those who are found studious of Literature

> & Humane & polite accomplishments. Such have their lamps burning & such shall shine as the stars. (E717–18)

Peace is conducive to the artist, the nations and their peoples, and God. Blake's figure of apotheosis indicates his hope that the divinity expressed through inspired art will now become visible.

Blake developed these new ideas of Christian apotheosis in *Vala, or The Four Zoas* and *Milton*. In the course of producing the former, he used proof sheets from his engravings for the 1797 edition of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. His designs and the text in *The Four Zoas* correct many aspects of Young's poem that Blake regarded as erroneous, but Night Nine of *Night Thoughts* may have suggested the idea of an absorptive apotheosis in the deity to Blake. Here, Young's narrator attempts to persuade the libertine Lorenzo to embrace Christianity by narrating a sublime journey to the stars. He speculates:

> When This vile, foreign, Dust, which smothers All
> That travel *Earth*'s deep Vale, shall I shake off?
> When shall my Soul her Incarnation quit,
> And, re-adopted to Thy blest Embrace,
> Obtain her *Apotheosis* in Thee?[2]

Unlike Blake's Felpham vision, Young's aspiration divides the soul from the body, but both poets express a passionate desire for embrace and absorption by the divinity. Blake depicted these lines on page 67 of his *Night Thoughts* watercolours. A penitent young figure reaches a summit and bows his head into the breast of an embracing Jesus, whose head radiates a fiery star-like light.[3] The apotheosis envisaged here is incorporation into a greater, divine human body, an ideal to which Blake aspired even before he penned the lines to Butts. His later poems retain politically motivated strategies of demystification, but these are now co-opted into a larger imaginative and utopian myth of collective human apotheosis.

## The Starry Heavens of *The Four Zoas*

The palimpsest of *The Four Zoas* materially embodies tensions between a more sceptical Enlightenment outlook and Blake's renewed Christian faith.[4] After page 42 of the manuscript, his largely neat copperplate text is succeeded by more scrawled writing on proof pages for *Night Thoughts*.

De Luca and Lincoln note that the narrative to this point describes a historical process of social development, evolving from Tharmas's primitive shepherd existence into Urizen's civilisation, a shift Lincoln links to Enlightenment models of stadial history and the transition from the largely pastoral Genesis to bondage in Egypt in Exodus.[5] Blake's substantial revisions, especially to the copperplate pages, intensify the poem's Christian vision. For Lincoln, Blake subordinates the poem's earlier Enlightenment mode of historical narrative: 'In place of a relativizing perspective which blends different traditions, the revision appears to give universal validity to a single prophetic tradition.'[6] Distinctively, Blake works a utopian myth of apotheosis into these Christian sections.

In their unfallen state, the Four Zoas, Blake's personifications of primary human energies, have divine starry forms. The final version of the first page tells us that 'Los was the fourth immortal starry one' in his unfallen guise as Urthona (3:9, E301). Towards the end of the poem, the regenerate Zoas in the 'Cloud of Blood' that heralds Christ's Second Coming are 'Four Starry Universes going forward from Eternity to Eternity' (123:39, E393). As avatars of time and space and the prophetic imagination, Los and Enitharmon retain flexible eternal senses, facets of the Divine Humanity. In Night One, Los's 'head beamd light & in his vigorous voice was prophecy | He could controll the times & seasons, & the days & years | She could controll the spaces, regions, desart, flood & forest' (9:26–28, E305). Likewise, in Night Two Urizen realises he is now constrained by the world he has created and envies Los and Enitharmon, whose sensory freedom is akin to apotheosis: 'Contracting or expanding their all flexible senses | At will to murmur in the flowers small as the honey bee | At will to stretch across the heavens & step from star to star' (34:10–12, E322).

In the copperplate text, Blake elaborates a historical account of the rise of kingship and priestcraft as types of apotheosis. This is evident at the outset of Night Two, originally intended as the poem's opening. Albion, feeling himself wounded and sickening, summons Urizen and orders 'Take thou possession! take this Scepter! go forth in my might | For I am weary, & must sleep in the dark sleep of Death' (23:5–6, E313). The larger, communal polity now becomes passive, ceding power and authority to Urizen, the 'Prince of Light' (23:8), the deity of king and priest. Blake's narrative follows Enlightenment historical models in which the pastoral societies associated with Tharmas in Night One give rise to a priestly caste

who observe the stars. As in *Urizen*, the apotheosis of the priest marks a decisive historical epoch:

> Urizen rose from the bright Feast like a star thro' the evening sky
> Exulting at the voice that calld him from the Feast of envy
> First he beheld the body of Man pale, cold, the horrors of death
> Beneath his feet shot thro' him as he stood in the Human Brain
> And all its golden porches grew pale with his sickening light. (23:9–13)

The simile signals an apotheosis, but the details of Urizen's feet and the setting within the porches of the Human Brain suggest embodiment. Likewise, the illustration at the bottom of this manuscript page of the recumbent Man feebly lifting his head also belies Urizen's belief that he has achieved transcendent supremacy. Nevertheless, he attempts to create a rational, ordered universe, and as 'the great Work master' (24:5, E314) orders the 'Bands of Heaven' (24:9) to create a starry universe. Worrall notes that the instruments created to carry out the building are themselves constellations: 'The golden compasses, the quadrant & the rule & balance' (24:12).[7] They create the Mundane Shell of the visible universe, which is the zodiac:

> Twelve halls after the names of his twelve sons composd
> The wondrous building & three Central Domes after the Names
> Of his three daughters were encompassd by the twelve bright halls
> Every hall surrounded by bright Paradises of Delight. (30:15–18, E319)

This fixed structure orders Urizen's sons and daughters into a hierarchy that underpins his kingship. At the opening on Night Three, he sits as 'the King of Light on high upon his starry throne' (37:1, E326), as Lincoln notes, a hybrid of Satan and God in Books II and III of *Paradise Lost*.[8] Later, in Night VIIb, the 'wooly sheep', 'Bull', 'Lion', 'Tyger', 'Serpent', and 'scorpion' wander through Urizen's reconstituted heavens and seem to give power to the priestly Prester Serpent, as he urges warriors to battle (90:16–31, E363). Ault argues that in Night Two, Urizen's vantage point in the Abyss and in the 'golden porches' of Man's brain presupposes the constituent elements of the starry world he believes he has created.[9] According to Ault, Urizen's consciousness infuses all other characters and the narrative voice in Night Two. While the redemptive dimension of Urizen's creation is most immediately prominent, details of its foun-

dations in slavery and sexual repression remain visible albeit suppressed elements in the narrative.[10]

Urizen's starry universe is doomed because it is built out of stifled desire. His heavens are fed by the sublimation of Luvah, who Urizen has 'cast into the Furnaces of affliction' (25:40, E317). When these are unsealed, Urizen's agents construct his cosmos from Luvah's molten energies (28:7–10, E318). As Miner suggests, Urizen's constellations now fix Man's passions in estranged forms.[11] Alongside this, Blake develops the narrative of *Ahania*, with Urizen now adopting the republican language of masculine virtue that animated Blake in *Europe*. Seizing Ahania by the hair and casting her from his icy throne, Urizen berates her as 'the feminine indolent bliss', who dares to give 'laws to the active masculine virtue'. Her 'passivity' and 'laws of obedience & insincerity' are Urizen's 'abhorrence' (43:5–11, E328–29). Urizen's hope of achieving transcendence by ascetically rejecting the passion of Luvah and Ahania is reflected in the rarefied poetry that describes the 'mathematic motion wondrous' (33:24, E322) of his sons and daughters, moving 'triangular right angled' and 'others obtuse | Acute Scalene, in simple paths. but others move | In intricate ways biquadrate' (33:32–34). For Ault, 'As the universe becomes more inexorably geometrical, more explicitly excluding sexuality and bodily life from itself, the language becomes more desperately engrossed in precise abstract terminology.'[12]

Blake associates this abstraction with a new figure, the Spectre. In Night Seven, Los's Spectre describes his nature to Enitharmon:

> Thou knowest that the Spectre is in Every Man insane brutish
> Deformd that I am thus a ravening devouring lust continually
> Craving & devouring but my Eyes are always upon thee O lovely
> Delusion. (84:36–39, E360)

The insatiable Spectre seems anything but rational here, but *Milton* makes it clearer that he symbolises reason's lust to assimilate all aspects of human experience, especially emanations, to itself. Milton tells Ololon that 'The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man' and as an 'Incrustation over my Immortal | Spirit; a Selfhood' it must be constantly annihilated (40[46]:34–36, E142). In *The Four Zoas*, the Spectre merges self-abasement, apotheosis, and political domination. At the opening of Night Three, Ahania recounts to Urizen how Albion 'The Darkning Man' walked with Vala and 'looked up & saw thee Prince of Light thy splendor faded':

> Then Man ascended mourning into the splendors of his palace
> Above him rose a Shadow from his wearied intellect
> Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy; in white linen pure he hover'd
> A sweet entrancing self delusion, a watry vision of Man
> Soft exulting in existence all the Man absorbing. (40:2–6, E327)

The ideal selfhood symbolised by the golden Spectre belongs to the world-view for which Urizen is the sky-god, up to whom Man looks. The golden statue alludes to Chapter 4 of the Book of Daniel, in which the Babylonian tyrant Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem. He erects a golden effigy of himself on the plain of Dura and commands all his peoples to worship it. In the *Four Zoas*, it symbolises both the individual human's externalisation of the divine and also the estrangement of the people from their own sovereignty.

Blake relates this to the disordering of critical and creative activity. In Night One, Ambassadors from Beulah provide a narrative of the Fall's origin during the war between Luvah and Urizen. Urthona, preparing iron 'spades & coulters' on his anvil, realises his sons have fled to join the war, ceases his activity, and 'dropd his hammer' (22:16–20, E312), at which point his emanation and spectre separate from him. The agricultural instruments he was fashioning are for tilling and ploughing, breaking up solidified earth to enable new growth. These were the means to subdue the Spectre: critical and creative activity were in harmony. Later in the same Night, Urizen opposes Los as 'a visionary of Jesus the soft delusion of Eternity', sulkily asking:

> Why should the Divine Vision compell the sons of Eden
> to forego each his own delight to war against his Spectre
> The Spectre is the Man the rest is only delusion & fancy.
> (12:25–29, E307)

Urizen, the deity of rationalism, priestcraft, and kingship, is projected by the Spectre, itself an expression of self-absorbed and unimaginative passivity. Like other aspects of humanity, inspired art is rejected as 'delusion & fancy'.

When Urthona's Spectre later mingles with Los to comfort him, he beholds the 'Spectres of the Dead' in gendered terms, 'Each Male formd without a counterpart without a concentering vision' (87:29–30, E369), for whose separate existence the Spectre of Urthona blames himself. In

Night Eight, the warring Spectres consolidate into the hermaphroditic Satan: 'Son of Perdition terrible his form dishumanizd monstrous | A male without a female counterpart a howling fiend' (104:24–25, E377). Erdman suggests that this figure embodies the armies and war councils of Britain, France, Prussia, Russia, Austria, and Spain around 1804.[13] Containing 'the shadowy female Vala', Satan is 'multitudes of tyrant Men in union blasphemous | Against the divine image. Congregated Assemblies of wicked men' (104:29–30, E377–38), a destructive parody of the Divine Humanity and the ultimate consequence of the Spectre's apotheosis in Night Three.

Blake's depiction of Satan as a 'state' distinct from the Spectres who find themselves within it (elaborated by Los in 107[115]:23–25, E380) allows readers to extend sympathy towards individual Spectres. Quinney notes the deep pathos of Nights Six and Seven, where the Spectres figure the 'fate of ordinary people' dehumanised into 'a dismal anonymous mass'. Likewise, Urizen's remorse 'constitutes a striking new development', which allows for his redemption.[14] For Damrosch, 'the reintegration rather than repudiation of reason' and 'the rehabilitation of Urizen is therefore a decisive stage in the reconstruction of the self'.[15]

Alongside this, Los and Enitharmon's rapprochement suggests Blake reintegrates feminine attributes viewed with suspicion in the more masculine continental prophecies of the 1790s, especially *Europe*. This can certainly be interpreted, as Mellor does, as giving the masculine function 'logical and temporal priority over feminine activities' or absorbing them, but the rehabilitation of previously antagonistic figures marks an important development.[16] Indeed, Blake gives Enitharmon some agency: she urges Los to restrain his masculine prophetic rage, so as to create forms 'in sweet moderated fury', allowing the recuperative work of art to begin. In the moving end to the 'a' version of Night Seven, Los 'drew a line upon the walls of shining heaven' and 'Enitharmon tincturd it with beams of blushing love', creating 'a lovely form inspird divinely human' (98[90]:35–37, E370–71). The lines mythologise Blake and Catherine's artistic work as a means of bringing the Divine Vision into contact with spectral humans, mediated through these 'forms sublime' (98[90]:22, E370). The careful craft of inspired art connects spectres to imaginative emanations, comforts Orc, and draws Los's 'Enemy Urizen now | Into his hands' as an infant for whom he feels love (98[90]:64–65, E371). Art is divine because it has power to redeem and to communicate forgiveness.

This redemptive turn also emerges through Blake's star imagery and, thus, his approach to apotheosis. In the last Night of Young's *Night Thoughts*, during his sublime voyage amidst the stars and planets, the narrator finds his faith confirmed by God's work as the 'glorious Architect' (l.766) of the universe. Young's God is Urizenic: 'Could we conceive *Him*, GOD He could not be; | Or *He* not GOD, or *we* could not be *Men* […] *Man*'s Distance how immense!' (ll.844–36). Nevertheless, Blake may have found redemptive potential alongside the more orthodox Christianity of *Night Thoughts*. Young envisages apocalypse as renewal. While 'final *Ruin* fiercely drives | Her Ploughshare o'er Creation!', the result is sublime:

> Far other *Firmament* than e'er was seen,
> Than e'er was thought by Man! Far other *Stars!*
> Stars animate, that govern these of Fire. (ll.67–72)

Young's apocalypse suggests a perceptual transformation, with the material universe yielding to its spiritual reality. While in Night Nine of *The Four Zoas* the regenerated Zoas topple the starry temple which in Young's poem guides the soul to God, a similar sense of apocalyptic mental liberation sweeps through the end of Young's and Blake's poems.

Los initiates the apocalypse by stretching out his 'vegetable hands' and seizing the sun and moon: he 'tore them down cracking the heavens across from immense to immense' (117:6–9, E386). In doing so, Los rips up the fabric of the worldview he has been instrumental in creating under Urizen's reign. The ensuing apocalypse is violent and disturbing, for Lincoln 'in many respects the most horrific thing Blake ever wrote'.[17] Certainly, the process begins with vengeance:

> The thrones of Kings are shaken they have lost their robes & crowns
> The poor smite their oppressors they awake up to the harvest
> The naked warriors rush together down to the sea shore
> Trembling before the multitudes of slaves now set at liberty.
> (117:18–21, E387)

Kings lose the symbols of divine authority, warriors their impregnable armour. The vision of the freed slave from *America* is amplified to express the liberation of 'multitudes'. They target their violence, however, at superstition and the redeemed Orc's wrath demystifies: 'Loud the Serpent Orc ragd thro his twenty Seven | Folds. The tree of Mystery went up

in folding flames' (119:3–4, E388), liberating 'trembling millions into flames of mental fire' (119:22).

This transformation humanises the heavens. In one of the most horrifying images, 'Blood issud out in mighty volumes' from 'the flood gates of the Sky The Gates are burst down pour | The torrents black upon the Earth the blood pours down incessant' (119:5–6, E388), the deluge indiscriminately levelling kings, shepherds, cities, and villages. Written during the Napoleonic wars, the Night's gruesome imagery of war, torture, and violent conflict come disturbingly close to viewing war providentially as a necessary stage in human renewal. But in contrast to the more recognisable war in Nights Seven and Eight, Blake supplements this violence with pastoral and georgic imagery, suggesting redemption. The torrent of blood pouring from the skies also suggests the renewed circulation of physical human energies, akin to the 'strife of blood' at the close of *Europe*, part of a re-humanisation of the heavens more disturbing than *America*'s images of human constellations.

While Urizen's universe of mystery is consumed, the stars are renewed. The regenerated Urizen uses a 'Flail', sometimes an attribute of Hercules in star atlases, under which 'all Nations were threshed out & the stars threshd from their husks' (134:1, E402). The last time we see Urizen, his demystificatory work leads on to further regeneration. At the very conclusion of Night Nine, the renewed Man now sees the cosmos re-energised:

> His eyes behold the Angelic spheres arising night & day
> The stars consumd like a lamp blown out & in their stead behold
> The Expanding Eyes of Man behold the depths of wondrous worlds
> One Earth one sea beneath nor Erring Globes wander but Stars
> Of fire rise up nightly from the Ocean & one Sun
> Each morning like a New born Man issues with songs & Joy.
> (138:23–28, E406)

Whereas the Lambeth books demythologise the stars as symbols of superstition and tyranny, in *The Four Zoas* Blake follows this by investing them with a redemptive, utopian potential. At the apocalypse, the threshed stars are no longer fixed. They perform vital functions, forming the 'starry jingling ornamented' Plow to be harnessed to the 'Eternal horses'(124:11, 23, E393), Urizen's 'brazen sickle' and 'scythe of iron' (132:3, E400), as well as the horses, bulls, tygers, and lions (124:15–16, E393). The stars are integrated into the 'Vision of God' in the cloud of blood, in which the

regenerate Zoas are ‘Four Starry Universes going forward from Eternity to Eternity’ (123:34–39, E393).

Blake recuperates apotheosis for the redemptive drama. In Night Nine, each Zoa ascends to assume their eternal role. The Eternal Man repeatedly calls Urizen, the ‘Prince of Light’ and ‘great opposer of change’, to ‘arise’ (120:20–29, E389). As Lincoln notes, this mirrors Albion’s invitation for Urizen to take his power at the beginning of Night Two.[18] After resisting, Urizen repents and undergoes a redemptive version of his apotheosis in Night Two:

> So Urizen spoke he shook his snows from off his Shoulders & arose
> As on a Pyramid of mist his white robes scattering
> The fleecy white renewd he shook his aged mantles off
> Into the fires Then glorious bright Exulting in his joy
> He sounding rose into the heavens in naked majesty
> In radiant Youth. (121:27–32, E391)

Losing the ascetic snows and priestly robes and mantles associated with state religion and rationalism, Urizen takes on the Lamb’s ‘fleecy’ quality. Whereas the apotheosis in Night Two expressed his aspiration to transcendence, Urizen’s immortality here expresses the radiant and eternal energy of the body, enabling him to reunite with his emanation of delight, Ahania. Likewise, Luvah (135:22, E403), Tharmas (137:7, E405), and finally Urthona (139:4, E407) rise up in new strength.

Lincoln has identified how Blake’s major revisions to the copperplate text interpolate ‘a comprehensive history of Jesus’[19] and reframe the poem as a Christian narrative. Apotheosis features in one important revision to Night One. An earlier version described how

> […] those in Great Eternity Met in the Council of God
> As One Man hovering over Gilead & Hermon
> <He is the Good Shepherd He is the Lord & Master
> To Create Man Morning by Morning to Give gifts at Noon day>
> (E823–24)

The allusion to Christ is clear but not explicit, and the ‘Council’ is relatively abstract. The revised passage emphasises the Council as a Christian polity and foregrounds the manifestation of Jesus’s body as a social and political process:

> Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God
> As one Man for contracting their Exalted Senses
> They behold Multitude or Expanding they behold as one
> As One Man all the Universal family & that one Man
> They call Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life
> Consulting as One Man above the Mountain of Snowdon Sublime.
> (21:1–7, E310–11)

The new lines emphasise the sensory and energetic body of Jesus and its enfolding of multitude in unity. Lincoln detects Swedenborg's influence, the passage echoing descriptions of the celestial Divine Humanity in *Heaven and Hell* and *The Wisdom of Angels*.[20] Jesus is constituted by the interaction of his myriad particular members. For Lincoln, the 'Council operates as a democratic brotherhood that takes on the form of Jesus whenever it achieves unanimity', allowing Blake to portray divine power 'with both the authority of a democratic council and the loving intimacy of a personal saviour'.[21] The lines certainly invite readers to imagine the universal Divine Humanity as a sublime utopian body politic combining unity and heterogeneity, dynamic energy and harmony. Whereas in *The Song of Los* mountain-tops are locales of mystery, the Council of God is above Snowdon, a utopia intersecting with and capable of changing the ordinary world. Originally it was the biblical 'Mount Gilead' (E827), associated with the restorative Balm (Jeremiah 8:22), but Blake's revision to Snowdon implies that this divine body is the model for the renewal of the British political body, a process he envisages in *Milton*.

## *Milton*'s Dialectic of Apotheosis

*Milton*'s title page date of 1804 most likely marks its inception rather than completion. For Viscomi, the poem was probably first printed in 1811.[22] This brief epic refocuses the insights of *The Four Zoas*, with Milton embodying an intersection for the renewal of the individual, the artist, and the nation. As a great figurehead for the Commonwealth and Whig traditions during the eighteenth century, Milton represented the public and prophetic artist Blake aspired to be. In these years, he remained committed to political reform and linked the artistic and the political health of nations, bemoaning 'The wretched state of the Arts in this Country & in Europe originating in the Wretched State of Political Science which is the

Science of Sciences' (E580). While the conclusion of *The Four Zoas* seems esoteric, the state in which 'The dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns' (139:10, E407) evidently involves enlightened thought and political liberty.

Behrendt argues that *Milton*'s 'simultaneity' of events and dramatic visual content make the epic poem 'an interdisciplinary analogue to grand style eighteenth-century history painting'.[23] Indeed, as a visual object *Milton* has affinities with the apotheosis genre. Were the plates disbound, they could be conceived of as a large poly-scenic narrative structured around the central image of Milton, radiant and haloed, divesting himself of the 'robe of the promise' and the girdle of 'the oath of God' (14:13, E108).[24] Paradoxically, Milton is most divine when rejecting the trappings of holiness. Indeed, *Milton* as a whole inverts the conventional apotheosis, with Milton rejecting heaven and returning to earth. In this sense, the poem is animated by a Euhemerist urge to demythologise and rehumanise the holy Milton of legend. Nevertheless, this aspect of the narrative is in a dialectic with the poem's remythologising impulse, by which Milton, Blake and Catherine, and Los are all transformed into aspects of the Divine Humanity.

Blake's poem narrates Milton's journey back to earth to rectify the failings which comprise his Selfhood, especially his classicism, rationalism, self-righteousness, and misogyny. *Milton* begins with the poet dissatisfied in an abstract heaven:

> Say first! what mov'd Milton, who walked about in Eternity
> One hundred years, pondring the intricate mazes of Providence
> Unhappy tho in heav'n, he obey'd, he murmur'd not. he was silent
> Viewing his Sixfold Emanation scatter'd thro' the deep
> In torment! (2:16–20, E96)

This idly cogitating, obedient, silent Milton is far from the combative author of *Areopagitica* who asserted that 'Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.' Cerebral 'pondring' is weaker than Milton's own idiom, in which the pursuit of knowledge is represented as arduous labour 'in the deep mines of knowledge' and physical battle in which 'Truth' and 'Falsehood grapple'. Milton's martial language infuses intellectual endeavour with fractious, passionate, and palpable vigour. Truth is a tangible entity, in

contrast to the shadowy lassitude of Error's 'weaknes and cowardise'.[25] Blake's Milton has achieved a passive apotheosis at the expense of his feminine 'Sixfold Emanation' and the active energies of the body. The 'Bards prophetic Song' (2:22, E96) therefore 'moves' Milton in two senses: rousing him out of this passivity but also stimulating affections and passion, which culminates in what Butler calls 'the bardic apotheosis of Milton-Blake'.[26]

The Bard's Song describes an initial state in which Los and Enitharmon together successfully build the city of art, 'Great Golgonooza', by labouring 'from Particulars to Generals | Subduing his Spectre' (3:37–39, E97). This work involves Los subordinating rationalistic classicism to passionate Christian vision: 'Satan fainted beneath the arrows of Elynittria| And Mathematic Proportion was subdued by Living Proportion' (5:43–44, E99). Later, in *On Virgil* (*c*.1820), Blake aphoristically opposes static and dynamic form: 'Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence. | Grecian is Mathematic Form | Gothic is Living Form' (E270). Gothic form expresses human energies, from which Grecian or mathematic form is an abstraction. The Bard's Song narrates the disruption of Los's prophetic economy, as he allows the Satanic rational faculty to usurp Palamabron's role operating the 'Harrow of the Almighty' (7:10, E100). For Quinney, the episode diagnoses Milton's shortcomings: 'the Selfhood subtly tempted him to shirk the harder work of self-reformation in favour of authority and righteousness'.[27] *Milton* meditates on how a liberatory and utopian vision of human potential becomes corrupted, with Milton, Swedenborg, the French Revolution, and Blake himself all compromised by Satan's ability 'To pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth' (9:23, E103).[28] Milton's journey expresses Blake's faith that such deformations of the Divine Vision can be corrected.

Milton's unprecedented rejection of the false heaven and return to earth to reclaim Ololon, his feminine emanation, radically subverts the linear trajectory of apotheosis:

> Milton bent down
> To the bosom of death, what was underneath soon seemd above.
> A cloudy heaven mingled with stormy seas in loudest ruin;
> But as a wintry globe descends precipitant thro' Beulah bursting,
> With thunders loud and terrible: so Miltons shadow fell
> Precipitant loud thundring into the Sea of Time & Space.

> 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;
> But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe.
> (15[17]:41–50, E110)

Milton embraces his demonic side, echoing the fall of Mulciber, the Roman god of metal-workers, who in *Paradise Lost* 'Dropt from the Zenith like a falling star' (i.745). Simultaneously descending through the universe and the human body, Milton plunges from a celestial heaven of mental abstraction, through the stormy bosom of Albion, to Blake's foot.[29] The bird simile foreshadows the lark's later prophetic role, but also figures the poet's freedom to imaginatively rise or descend. The physical ecstasy of the 'WILLIAM' and 'ROBERT' plates shows their bodies charged with energy from Milton's star. This fusion of the divine and human unites individuals in brotherhood. Blake becomes able to 'walk forward thro' Eternity' (21[23]:14, E115), suggesting Milton's notion of progress derived through the palpable clash of contraries can inspire and galvanise the artist to perform new feats.

Whereas the conclusion of *Europe* valorises the masculine exertions of Los as a prophetic citizen-poet, the actions stimulated by *Milton*'s Bard combine epic male intrepidity with traditionally feminine Christian compassion and self-sacrifice:

> To go into the deep her to redeem & himself perish?
> What cause at length mov'd Milton to this unexampled deed[?]
> A Bards prophetic song! for sitting at eternal tables,
> Terrific among the Sons of Albion in chorus solemn & loud
> A Bard broke forth! all sat attentive to the awful man.
> (2:20–24, E96)

Milton's 'unexampled' deed is spontaneous, rather than tied to precedent. Even the proximate cause, the Bard's narrative, thwarts conventional causation: 'I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing | According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius', which is 'the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity' (13[14]:51–14[15]:1, E107–8). His sublime song generates discordant responses, emotive debate, and 'great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion', a visionary version of the public sphere. Albion's body mirrors this tumult, trembling across the earth and leading the Bard

to seek 'refuge in Miltons bosom' (14[15]:6–9, E108). Milton then rises up 'from the heavens of Albion ardorous!', rejecting the robe and the oath of God, signs of holiness, embracing human mortality instead:

> And Milton said, I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still
> Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp
> Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming. [...]
> The Lamb of God is seen thro' mists & shadows, hov'ring
> Over the sepulchers in clouds of Jehovah & winds of Elohim
> A disk of blood, distant; & heav'ns & earth's roll dark between
> What do I here before the Judgment? without my Emanation?
> With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration[?]
> (14[15]:14–16, 25–29, E108)

Milton recognises his own complicity in Albion's failure to purge classical martial values in favour of Christianity, while the interrogatives suggest the renewal of passionate self-questioning as opposed to idle 'pondring'. Milton perceives Jesus as 'A disk of blood', far off in the dark heavens at present, but capable of reviving the circulation in Albion's sleeping body, a possibility tied up with embracing the 'daughters of inspiration'.

While Milton's journey inverts apotheosis, the mention of the Poetic Genius recalls the conclusion of *There is No Natural Religion*: 'Therefore | God becomes as we are, | that we may be as he | is' (E3). Blake's visionary absorption into the divine Los suggests a counter-movement to Milton's descent:

> Los descended to me:
> And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun: just close
> Behind my back; I turned round in terror, and behold.
> Los stood in that fierce glowing fire; & he also stoop'd down
> And bound my sandals on in Udan-Adan; trembling I stood
> Exceedingly with fear & terror, standing in the Vale
> Of Lambeth: but he kissed me and wishd me health.
> And I became One Man with him arising in my strength.
> (22[24]:5–12, E116–17)

Blake's 'trembling' recalls Albion's response following the Bard's song and, combined with his 'fear & terror', suggests an encounter with the sublime of plenitude, previously associated with Orc in *America* but here Christianised. If Milton's journey has an Euhemerist logic, this scene

dramatises a countervailing remythologisation, with Blake and Milton absorbed into the Apollonian personification of the Poetic Genius. Whereas traditional apotheosis establishes the immortality of the individual recipient's self, here collective divinity is constituted through Milton and Blake's loss of selfhood. This is encapsulated in the design on Plate 41. In the process of reclaiming his Selfhood, Milton gains a halo. The Selfhood is a blocking agent, which forces a sublime and divine Milton to emerge through the process of struggle. Troublingly, this suggests that the Divine Human only emerges through a clash with the Selfhood, the two being inextricably entwined. Los's appearance to Blake is a less ambiguous encounter with the sublime, but his affectionate treatment of Blake suggests this is a reimagined sublime, the power of which is constituted by Christian love and nurturing rather than Burke's masculine economy.

As in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*'s stars have a redemptive role. In what seems a direct address to the reader, the narrator links them to the Divine Vision:

> Thou seest the Constellations in the deep & wondrous Night
> They rise in order and continue their immortal courses
> Upon the mountains & in vales with harp & heavenly song
> With flute & clarion; with cups & measures filld with foaming wine.
> Glittring the streams reflect the Vision of beatitude,
> And the calm Ocean joys beneath & smooths his awful waves!
>
> These are the Sons of Los, & these the Labourers of the Vintage.
> (25[27]:66–71, 26[28]:1, E123)

In contrast to Night Two of *The Four Zoas*, constellations here symbolise the movement and sensory life of the Divine Humanity. Like 'the gorgeous clothed Flies that dance & sport in summer | Upon the sunny brooks & meadows', they are 'Children of Los'. In their 'intricate mazes of delight', they 'touch each other & recede' and 'cross & change & return' (26[28]:2–7, E123), while mountain trees are also Sons of Los when the wind surges through them 'Uttering prophecies & speaking instructive words to the sons | Of men' (26[28]:7–10). Blake associates Los's children with beautiful and harmonious interactions between dynamic multitudes of particulars. Their familiar natural forms are only 'the hem of their garments' when viewed 'with our vegetable eyes'; in their divine reality they are imaginative 'Visions of Eternity' (26[28]:10–12). When

perceived mythically and creatively, the nightingale's song (31[34]:28–45, E130–31), blooming flowers (31[34]:46–63, E131), and the 'Wild Thyme' (35[39]:54–60, E136) all have a sensory vitality far in excess of their material appearances. The beauty of these springtime phenomena is surprising when Blake's poem describes 'Visions' of 'Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural Religion' (36[40]:24–25, E137). However, the 'cruelty' of nature originates in an ontology in which 'holiness' is derived from a nature conceived as external to the perceiving mind. Blake opposes this with a mode of vision whereby humans imaginatively deify the regenerating natural world, expanding the argument on Plate 11 of *The Marriage*.

Blake's critique of apotheosis is integral to this transformation. Positive images of stars exist alongside their demystification when associated with priestcraft, natural religion, and pagan sacrifices. The 'high-reard Druid temples', amidst which Los rages at Satan's duplicity, 'reach the stars of heaven & stretch from pole to pole' (9:14–15, E103); on Plate 3's illustration, they host human sacrifices. Likewise, Blake's vision of Milton's Shadow, the Covering Cherub containing Satan and Rahab, appears as a violent parody of the Divine Humanity, 'the Wicker Man of Scandinavia in whom | Jerusalems children consume in flames among the Stars' (37[41]:11–12, E137). In this passage, the catalogue of 'The Monstrous Churches of Beulah, the Gods of Ulro dark | Twelve monstrous dishumanizd terrors Synagogues of Satan' provides 'their Names & their Places within the Mundane Shell' (37[41]:16–19). These obscure lines link the distorted religions to the zodiacal constellations. The spaces mapped out by the stars form 'a mighty Incrustation | Of Forty-eight deformed Human Wonders of the Almighty' (37[41]:53–54, E138). Ulro's dark gods are divided into 'A Double Twelve & Thrice Nine' (37[41]:18, E137), the latter forming the 'Twenty-seven Heavens & their Churches' (37[41]:35, E138). Blake explains that 'The Heavens are the Cherub, the Twelve Gods are Satan | And the Forty-eight Starry Regions are Cities of the Levites' (37[41]:60, 38[43]:1, E138). The twelve gods of natural religion comprise Satan, out of which the twenty-seven heavens and churches of the Cherub evolve. Damon links the forty-eight starry regions to the twenty-seven northern and twenty-one southern constellations.[30] Blake connects the stars to the forty-eight cities of the Levites (Numbers 35:1–8), whose priestly roles and privileges derived from slaughtering idolaters of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:25–29). Blake's dense figure sug-

gests that while he was more assertively Christian, his antipathy towards ministers of state religion endorsing persecutory war was as intense as ever.

Nevertheless, in *Milton* the stars ultimately serve a positive function. The Bard's Song describes Satan's triumph and the spread of his 'Druid Temples' as Albion's estrangement from his prelapsarian energies: 'But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion' (6:20, 26, E100). As in *The Four Zoas*, the stars also preserve Albion's divine energies and mark a merciful limit to his fall. While the narrator's injunction to 'Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies: | There Chaos dwells & ancient Night & Og & Anak old' (20[22]:32–33, E114) appears to attack star-worship, when these figures reappear later Blake subtly distinguishes them from the stars:

> For the Chaotic Voids outside of the Stars are measured by
> The Stars, which are the boundaries of Kingdoms, Provinces
> And Empires of Chaos invisible to the Vegetable Man
> The Kingdom of Og. is in Orion: Sihon is in Ophiuchus
> Og has Twenty-seven Districts; Sihons Districts Twenty-one
> From Star to Star. (37[41]:47–52, E138)

Stars now bring form and limits to the 'Empires of Chaos' which they demarcate. The prophetic poet has the potential to reclaim these displaced aspects of human divinity. At the conclusion of his song, the Bard praises Jesus for dying as a 'Reprobate' and 'Transgressor' and shouts 'Glory! Glory! Glory! to the Holy Lamb of God | I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord!' (13[14]:27–29, E107).

While the Bard's masculine song initially seems to spur Milton's descent, later sections of the poem emphasise the transformative agency of his feminine emanation Ololon. The 'Songs of Beulah' identify Ololon as the cause of the Starry Eight's descent: '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). Ololon herself has celestial attributes. She delights the Four Zoas and Starry Eight by descending, her trail of myriads leaving a 'wide road […] open to Eternity': like the Sons of Los, 'mighty were the multitudes of Ololon, vast the extent | Of their great sway, reaching from Ulro to Eternity | surrounding the Mundane Shell' (35[39]:37–39, E135–36). Blake's poem complicates causation: Ololon is as much the agent of Milton's reformation as the Bard.

Jesus is linked with Ololon and manifests at moments when she acts, most strikingly at the conclusion. Ololon embraces her true feminine identity as a productive contrary to Milton, at which her virgin Selfhood and 'Sexual' power flees into Milton's Satanic shadow. For a feminist critic such as Mellor, this is a telling example of how 'the masculine function takes logical and temporal priority over feminine activities'.[31] Quinney, by contrast, sees Ololon as 'in part the feminine "mildness"' that Milton 'had exiled from his personality' and follows Frye's suggestion that Ololon's virginity projects Milton's 'sexual morality' and 'enthusiasm for the cult of female chastity'.[32] In this passage, Ololon is actually compatible with 'Fires of Intellect' and her descent a precondition for that of Jesus:

> Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felphams Vale
> In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thunderings
> Into the Fires of Intellect that rejoic'd in Felphams Vale
> Around the Starry Eight: with one accord the Starry Eight became
> One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful! round his limbs
> The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
> Written within & without in woven letters.
>
> (42[49]:7–13, E143)

The collaboration of Ololon and the Starry Eight produce 'Jesus the Saviour', who merges the celestial Eight with the fleshly garment, collapsing the distance between transcendence and corporeality. The incarnated Jesus stimulates national renewal, but whereas the imitation of Christ is a central part of Christian faith, Jesus decisively imitates Milton:

> Jesus wept & walked forth
> From Felphams Vale clothed in Clouds of blood, to enter into
> Albions Bosom, the bosom of death.
>
> (42[49]:19–21, E143)

The allusion to Jesus's tears over Lazarus's corpse (John 11:35) anticipates the resurrection of Albion, the body of the nation. Blake continues to be invested in the idea of a sublime and liberated social body, suggested by the way the non-hierarchical brotherhood of the Starry Eight and the multitudes of Ololon collectively form Jesus. This receives its clearest expression in Book Two, when Hilel and the Seven Angels inform Milton about 'States':

We are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals
We were Angels of the Divine Presence: & were Druids in Annandale
Compelld to combine into Form by Satan, the Spectre of Albion,
Who made himself a God &, destroyed the Human Form Divine. כ
But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human Form דבים
as multitudes
Because we were combind in Freedom & holy Brotherhood Vox Populi
While those combind by Satans Tyranny first in the blood of War
And Sacrifice &, next, in Chains of imprisonment: are Shapeless Rocks
Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Bredth & Highth.
(32[35]:10-18, E131-32)

The Angels' account of States contrasts two models of social organisation: one tyrannically imposed upon individuals by Satan and associated with abstraction and war; the other, an immanent principle of unity emerging from spontaneous, free, and mutual association and the gift of the Divine Humanity. Blake slightly misquotes the Hebrew gloss, writing 'Cherubim' rather than 'kerabim', multitudes, but the Latin portion clearly echoes the political axiom *Vox populi, vox dei*, 'the voice of the people is the voice of god'. This phrase associates Blake's vision of an egalitarian body politic with early nineteenth-century agitation for political reform. Writing in *The Quarterly Review* in 1816, Robert Southey bemoaned the ubiquity of this radical slogan, used especially by 'demagogues who were labouring to deceive the people, and who despised the wretched instruments of whom they made use! But it is the Devil whose name is Legion.'[33] Blake evidently remained committed to popular liberty, but his complex vision integrates the renewal of the body of the nation synechdochically within a more universal human restitution figured in the Divine Humanity.

While *Milton* is unusual among Blake's poems for its clear autobiographical content, this marginal gloss indicates that Blake conceived the poem as addressed to the public. The 'Preface' in copies A and B that denounces 'Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University' who wish to 'depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War' (1, E95) is part of a broad popular patriotism opposed to political corruption and war-profiteering. Blake probably had the Dundas and Duke of York scandals in mind.[34] The concluding appeal 'Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets', alluding to Numbers 11:29 and Milton's use of the phrase in *Areopagitica*, affirms the public, prophetic purpose of his poem.

*Milton* concludes with the prophet's recommitment to public duty. As Quinney observes, the epic poems frequently conclude with apocalypse delayed or deferred. This poem 'stutters, ending on a liminal note', bringing readers 'to the verge of apocalypse'.[35] We are left with mythicised versions of Blake and Catherine returning to London from Felpham:

> […] Los & Enitharmon rose over the Hills of Surrey
> Their clouds roll over London with a south wind, soft Oothoon
> Pants in the Vales of Lambeth weeping oer her Human Harvest
> Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud
> Over London in volume terrific, low bended in anger.
> (42[49]:31–35, E144)

*Milton*'s counter-current of remythologisation culminates in this scene. As with the Zoas at the conclusion of *The Four Zoas*, Los and Enitharmon 'rise' to perform their tasks. Blake positions these personifications above but still proximate to London. The syntax suggests 'his Cloud' equally pertains to Los and the Poor Man, foreshadowing an apocalyptic dissolution of the oppressive atmosphere smothering London. Critics seeking evidence of Blake's rejection of the Enlightenment frequently invoke *Milton*, especially the denunciations of Voltaire and Rousseau. As Los and Blake head to 'his supreme abode' (presumably Golgonooza and London), Rintrah and Palamabron meet them at the 'Gate of Golgonooza' and share their fears that Milton will let loose Orc, Satan, Og, Sihon, and Anak on Albion. They report that the Daughters of Los deceitfully create a new religion:

> Seeing the Churches at their Period in terror & despair:
> Rahab created Voltaire; Tirzah created Rousseau;
> Asserting the Self-righteousness against the Universal Saviour,
> Mocking the Confessors & Martyrs, claiming Self-righteousness;
> With cruel Virtue: making War upon the Lambs Redeemed.
> (22[24]:40–44, E117)

Rather than enemies of religion, as Voltaire and Rousseau were identified in conservative conspiracy theories such as the Abbé Barruel's *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797–98), here they are its unconscious agents, passively renewing self-righteous persecution and delaying apocalypse. Their failure seems to be in not pursuing Enlightenment to its full extent, which in Voltaire's case Damrosch suggests results from a mind shaped and educated by Jesuits, conditioning even his reaction against

Catholicism.[36] The second denunciation of Voltaire and Rousseau comes when Ololon faces Milton. Describing Milton and the Four Zoas 'striving | In Self annihilation', Ololon asks:

> Are those who contemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
> Become in their Femin[in]e portions the causes & promoters
> Of these Religions, how is this thing? this Newtonian Phantasm
> This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon & Bolingbroke
> This Natural Religion! this impossible absurdity.
> (40[46]:7–13, E141)

These thinkers' deism is complicit with the orthodox religion they attack, retaining its hierarchical worldview and echoing unforgiving intolerance in their polemics. Embedded as these denunciations are within characters' speech, they cannot simply be attributed to Blake. But if Enlightenment is broadly defined as the attack on superstition, then the term encapsulates Milton's denunciation of Satan and his earthly representatives:

> Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
> Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach
> Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness.
> (38[43]:37–39, E139)

Milton's affirmation of human dignity and self-reverence against superstitious abasement is quintessential Enlightenment. However apocalyptic Blake's expression, the final harvest and vintage anticipated at the close of the poem are demystificatory labour, purging the mists that envelop Albion, and a Christian version of the work of Enlightenment, rather than its opposite.

Ololon and the Bard's achievement is 'moving' Milton, and consequentially Albion. The crucial roles of Ololon and, at the conclusion, Oothoon, indicate that Blake sought to reintegrate conventionally feminine Christian attributes of compassion and affect into his ideal of the active Christian prophet. *Jerusalem*'s guiding fantasy is that this reconstituted citizen-poet could reinvigorate the body politic, transforming it into a collective Divine Humanity.

## Notes

1. For the influence of Swedenborg at this time, see Otto, *Blake's Critique*, esp. 16–17, 36–50.
2. Young, *The Complaint, or Night-Thoughts*, 275 [ll.1341–45].
3. British Museum, 1920, 0713.244.
4. The exact nature of Blake's faith in the nineteenth century remains unclear, but various influences have been identified: for Methodism, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm*, 262–64 and Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists*; for Evangelicalism, see Lincoln, 'Restoring the Nation'; for, ultimately, orthodox Anglicanism, see Ryan, *Romantic Reformation*, 43–79.
5. De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 118 and Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 32, 56.
6. Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 26.
7. Worrall, '"Immortal Tent"', 278.
8. Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 62.
9. Ault, *Narrative Unbound*, 117.
10. Ibid., 115–17.
11. Ibid. 121–24, Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 52, and Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 311 (in reference to Night VI, 73:35–39, 74:1–8, E350–51).
12. Ault, *Narrative Unbound*, 130.
13. Erdman, *BPAE* 401.
14. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, 92, 109–17.
15. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 131.
16. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, 22.
17. Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 190.
18. Ibid., 194.
19. Ibid., 26, 223–24.
20. Ibid., 230. Ault and Otto note this passage problematically implicates the Council of God in the narrative that follows: Ault, *Narrative Unbound*, 94–98, and Otto, *Blake's Critique*, 97–99.
21. Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 230.
22. *BIB* 325.
23. Behrendt, *Reading William Blake*, 155, 157.
24. For a provisional analysis of apotheosis and resurrection imagery in *Milton* see my '"Creating new flesh on the Demon cold"'.
25. *RM* 1019–21.

26. Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 177.
27. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, 145.
28. For Blake's views on the distortion of the French Revolution's utopian potential, see my 'Blake, Albion, and the French Revolution'.
29. I discuss the significance of the tarsus in '"My Left Foot"'.
30. *BD* 288.
31. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender*, 22.
32. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, 148.
33. [Southey], 'Parliamentary Reform', 276. See Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution*, 222. For contemporary discussion on the phrase's radical connotations, see *Lady's Monthly Museum* (1 August 1812), *The Examiner* (12 June 1814), *The Morning Post* (8 September 1819). See also Fairclough, *Romantic Crowd*, 148–49, and Green, *Majesty of the People*, 141–67.
34. See Franklin and Philp, *Napoleon*, 19.
35. Quinney, *Self and Soul*, 152.
36. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 100.

CHAPTER 9

# 'Ever Expanding in the Bosom of God': Deification and Apotheosis in *Jerusalem*

Critics such as Frye, Abrams, and Bloom who draw Blake into Wordsworthian Romanticism depict *Jerusalem* as a move towards individual mystical Christianity, with the apocalyptic impulses of the 1790s internalised in the imagination, akin to Milton's 'Paradise within thee, happier farr' (*PL* xii.587).[1] Even as firm an advocate of public and political interpretations of Blake as Erdman argues that, after the failed exhibition, his work was 'destined rather for the record' rather than for a contemporary audience.[2]

Blake, however, clearly considered *Jerusalem* a public, patriotic artwork, addressing the preface to the first chapter 'To the Public', and heading subsequent chapters with prefaces 'To the Jews', 'To the Deists', and 'To the Christians'. Viscomi argues that, in the context of a smaller fine arts audience rather than mass print culture, 'Blake's claim to have an appreciative public is truthful'.[3] Indeed, Blake displayed 'Detached Specimens of an original illuminated Poem, entitled "*Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion*"' at the Associated Painters in Water Colour in 1812.[4] For Williams, the difference between *Milton* and *Jerusalem* lies in a shift from 'an individualistic psychological mode to a social communicative mode for the depiction of utopian change',[5] precisely the opposite to the Romantic compensatory turn inward, away from failed political revolution towards private imagination.

Blake's renewed Christianity is similarly no retreat from the political: the two merge rather than being mutually exclusive. Albion's Friends, identified with 'the Divine Vision', attempt to recall him from his cruelties, ask-

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ing 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion' (57:10, E207). Both religion and politics are forms of social being. This chapter argues that Blake transforms the idea of personal apotheosis into collective Christian deification, imagining in Jesus a non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, and universal form in which humans truly live together. While visionary, Jesus's embodiment of a Christian praxis of forgiveness provided Blake with a concrete utopian alternative to England's corrupt war-fixated polity.

*Jerusalem*'s attacks on Bacon, Newton, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, and Hume all suggest Blake's Romantic rejection of the Enlightenment. For Butler, from *Vala* onwards, 'Blake began to value the mystery and secrecy which in his revolutionary period he denounced as the characteristic of priestcraft.'[6] Yet, as I will argue, Blake primarily takes aim at these figures' philosophy of mind and, for the latter four thinkers, their civic humanist attacks on 'effeminate' Christianity. *Jerusalem* continues Blake's efforts to demystify state religion and superstition, now more self-consciously in the service of a Christian vision. Again, while an Enlightenment critique of apotheosis is prominent, *Jerusalem* follows *The Four Zoas* and *Milton* in foregrounding the refashioning of apotheosis as part of its prophetic utopian vision.

Blake's recalibration of his art is allegorised in Los's agonistic relationship with his Spectre. The 'Spectre of Man' tempts Los to shame and despair, and is 'An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing': 'the Holy Reasoning Power' (10:14–15, E153). For Damrosch, the Spectre represents a flaw in Blake's myth. It 'must be expelled utterly', meaning 'he will not admit the necessary role of the "other". He wants contraries but not otherness.'[7] In many respects the Spectre does function as a contrary in *Jerusalem*. While subject to repeated annihilation, he remains a constant spur to Los's creative activity. Los orders the Spectre 'Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Bellows | Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient' (8:39–40, E151) and the Spectre is subdued: 'Groaning the Spectre heavd the bellows, obeying Los's frowns' (9:33, E152). At the end of the poem it is evident that Los and his Spectre engage in a dialectic, albeit with the imaginative contrary ultimately achieving primacy: 'Thus Los alterd his Spectre & every Ratio of his Reason | He alterd time after time, with dire pain & many tears | Till he had completely divided him into a separate space' (91:50–52, E252). The language of finality here is at odds with the repetition, which suggests an ongoing process. It recalls the conclusion

in *There is No Natural Religion* that the 'Poetic or Prophetic character' (E3) is vital to renew reason which has ossified into ratio. Blake retains a positive role for reason in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and especially *Jerusalem*, but it must be united with instinct and creativity, for which complex he increasingly adopts the term 'intellect'. Los implores his Spectre to 'Go! put off Holiness', associated with domination and Reason, and instead to 'put on Intellect' (91:55–56, E252). As Sklar puts it, 'reading *Jerusalem* involves using reason in the *service* of the imagination'.[8]

The imagination's regulation of reason produces *Jerusalem*'s ultimately positive telos. For Williams, the poem is 'Blake's most positive utopian vision', conspicuously addressed to a public audience. Despite this, it is written 'in a language which has driven away all but the most persistent readers'.[9] This chapter will argue that *Jerusalem*'s notorious difficulty and obscurity facilitate a glimpse of that utopia, by baffling the reasoning powers of man considered as a natural, individual being, in order to liberate communal creative capacities. Frye aptly describes *Jerusalem* as an 'apotheosis […] of intellect'.[10] Blake daringly sought to represent and prophetically perform a collective apotheosis of the nation and of mankind.

## Deification

Blake reconceives apotheosis through the Christian metaphor of deification. Deification (also termed divinisation or theosis) is the belief that a Christian can partake in or be absorbed into God's divine nature. Conventionally this is a form of ethical imitation, maintaining God's transcendent otherness, but more radically it can be interpreted as real participation in the godhead. Deification is important in Orthodox Christian doctrine, but became much less common in Catholic and Protestant theology after the fifth century, although traces remain in texts by Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin.[11] It features in traditions linked with Blake, including Cambridge Platonism, German Pietism (including Moravianism), the Methodism of John Wesley and George Whitefield, and especially in the mysticism of Joachim de Fiore, Jacob Boehme, Teresa of Ávila, Madame Guyon, and Archbishop Fénelon.[12] The latter three, with Whitefield and James Hervey, guard Los's southern gate (72:50–51, E227), while Whitefield and Wesley feature in *Milton* (22:55, 61, E118) and Blake defends Whitefield in 'To the Deists' (52, E201).

Adherents of deification justified it from scripture. 'I have said, Ye *are* gods; and all of you *are* children of the most High' (Psalm 82) was the most often-cited 'proof text' for early Christians, gaining additional authority because Jesus used it to defend his claim to be the Son of God (John 10:31–36).[13] In Peter's second epistle, by knowledge of God and his promises 'ye may be partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:3–4). Early Church Fathers were keen to distinguish this from notions of pagan apotheosis and most traditions treat 'participation' as a collective communion in Christ.[14] Adherents of deification also drew on St Paul's description of the body of Christ as comprised of human members (especially in 1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 27 and Romans 12:3–5). As Rowland and Sklar note, however, while Blake draws on Pauline participatory language, he emphasises its universalism and also challenges Paul's recommendations of holiness, purity, and chastity.[15]

Blake's 'Jesus' is part of a field also including the Saviour, the Lamb, the Divine Vision, the Divine Voice, and the Divine Humanity. This proliferation of terms contributes to Jesus's embodiment of human mutuality and interrelationship. At the outset of the poem, the Saviour sings to wake Albion:

> I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:
> Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land [...]
> I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and a friend;
> Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
> Lo! we are One, forgiving all Evil; Not seeking recompense!
> Ye are my members O ye sleepers of Beulah, land of shades!
> (4:7–8, 18–21, E146).

The lines allude to another text drawn upon by adherents of deification, John 17:21–23, with 'afar off' echoing Deuteronomy 30:11–13 and Psalms 10 and 138. Unlike in John, however, Blake emphasises belonging to Jesus rather than God the Father. The duplication of pronouns, prepositions, and verbs imitates the connections between divinity and humanity and suggests the possibilities of collective divinity in Christ. This is a mode of perception: the Divine Family assert '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' in the form they call 'Jesus the Christ' (34[38]:17–20, E180). When Jesus offers support to Jerusalem in Chapter Three, he is 'the Resurrection & the Life' because when he

dies he passes 'the limits of possibility, as it appears | To individual perception' (62:18–20, E213). Likewise, the importance accorded to mutual 'bosoms' ties in to Blake's sense of his own task:

> To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
> Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination.
> (5:18–20, E147)

The bosom unites imagination to affections, connecting participants in a larger deified human body, comprised by fibres of love. In Chapter Two, when the Saviour follows Albion, who flees from him in 'Thunders of deadly war', he displays

> 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]:9, 11–13, E179–80)

Emotional interactions constitute human existence, transforming the individual 'natural' human into a social and divine entity. 'Similitude' here suggests deification is an imitative relation to divinity, but more often Blake literally conceives of participation in Christ.

*Jerusalem* conflates deification in the Divine Humanity with the imagery of apotheosis. On Plate 4, a sibyl-like figure in a hooded black robe, probably Vala, holds out both arms. Her left hand grasps the head of a seated 'natural' man, whose left arm vegetates into a network of roots down the page's right-hand side. A 'spiritual' man on her right side prays, leaning beyond her grasp and forming the base of a rising chain of youthful bodies curling round the left of the title 'Jerusalem'. These youths lead up to a woman, who points to three stars and a crescent moon, in which appears the Greek phrase '*Μονος ό Ιεςους*', Blake's slightly mistranscribed Greek for 'Jesus only', alluding to Christ's transfiguration in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 18:8, Mark 9:8, and Luke 9:36) and to the woman taken in adultery (John 8:9).[16] The dual frame of reference suggests forgiveness transfigures the human into the divine. The phrase appears amidst the stars, indicating that the rising human figures achieve their apotheosis in Christ. Miner identifies the three stars as the constellation Aries, the first sign of the zodiac ascendant in spring, which augurs renewal for humankind and Britain in particular.[17]

## *Jerusalem*'s Context: 'The Ruin of Cities & Nations & Families & Tongues'

Locating *Jerusalem* in a specific historical context is extremely difficult. The date of 1804 on the title page may refer to the poem's initial conception, composition, or engraving, and there is no firm end date until John Linnell's accounts record receiving the final completed section on 24 February 1821. Erdman suggests the poem evolved between 1804 and 1820, the latest watermark in the first four copies.[18] A substantial proportion of *Jerusalem* is likely to be what George Cumberland referred to in a summer 1807 entry in his notebook: 'Blake has eng.[d] 60 plates of a new Prophecy!' On this basis, Paley concludes the poem saw 'rapid progress during the years 1804–7 and much slower or interrupted progress from 1808 to 1821'.[19] Bentley identifies thirty-seven 'late' plates added after 1807, suggesting most of the remaining material derives from the 1810s. Ward instead argues that Cumberland must have seen *Milton*, with the 1810s 'a far more meaningful context' for *Jerusalem*, explaining Blake's seeming disappearance between 1810 and 1818. Bentley disagrees with her deduction.[20]

The poem's broad historical context is evidently the war between Britain and Napoleonic France. Vine notes the Hebrew meaning of Jerusalem ('abode of peace') has obvious significance during the years in which Blake produced his epic.[21] The poem narrates the spiritual and political crisis during which Albion shuns his emanation, Jerusalem, and Jesus, the Divine Humanity, instead seduced by the pagan goddess of nature and war, Vala. The Sons of Albion threaten to destroy Jerusalem throughout the poem. Jerusalem personifies a wide range of interrelated qualities, including liberty, affect, sexuality, particularity, inspiration, and imagination. The boldest identification comes on Plate 26, depicting Jerusalem's resistance to the Satanic figure of Hand. The legend 'JERUSALEM IS NAMED LIBERTY | AMONG THE SONS OF ALBION' appears around her. At the outset of the poem, Albion rejects Jesus, hiding Jerusalem, whose love for Jesus he regards as betrayal. He seeks to monopolise her, a possibility Jerusalem rejects: 'Albion I cannot be thy Wife. thine own Minute Particulars, | Belong to God alone' (45[31]:44–45, E195). As liberty, her love for Jesus as the Divine Humanity extends to all humankind. *Jerusalem* does not simply displace Blake's social and political commitments into private spiritual and aesthetic concerns. Blake defended his anger in the unpublished 'Public Address' (*c.*1809–10) by claiming

that 'Resentment for Personal Injuries has had some share in this Public Address But Love to My Art & Zeal for my Country a much Greater' (E574). He interlinks public art and patriotic endeavour. Annotating Bacon's *Essays*, Blake objects that 'The Increase of a State as of a Man is from Internal Improvement or Intellectual Acquirement. Man is not improved by the hurt of another States are not Improved at the Expense of Foreigners' (E625). Notably, Blake equates the nation with the body: the health of both results from cultivation. *Jerusalem* poses a choice: a civilised form of liberal patriotism personified by Jerusalem, and an allegiance to the militarised nation-state, the spectral shadow Vala.[22] Whereas Jerusalem idealistically proposes that human society can be spontaneously and freely organised by its members, Vala personifies the compulsion of external state authority. Describing the cruelties of the Daughters of Albion, the narrator warns: 'He who will not comingle in Love, must be adjoind by Hate' (66:56, E219).[23]

Nevertheless, *Jerusalem*'s narrative complicates this opposition. Fleeing inwards, away from Jesus, Albion finds Jerusalem asleep on the Thames, 'soft repos'd | In the arms of Vala, assimilating in one with Vala' and 'Dividing & uniting into many female forms' (19:40–45, E164), perhaps the embrace depicted on Plate 28. Albion cannot distinguish between the 'assimilating' emanations. Vala is repeatedly connected to the corrupt, earthy Natural Man, Jerusalem to the regenerative Spiritual Man: 'Vala produc'd the Bodies. Jerusalem gave the Souls' (18:7, E163). Vala is usually identified as a goddess of nature and war, worshipped by the Spectres. A. D. Smith identifies the 'time of the French and American Revolutions' as the moment when in the West 'the "nation-state" became the predominant, and soon almost the only legitimate form of political organisation, as well as the dominant vehicle of collective identity'.[24] During the revolutionary wars, the British and French governments increasingly tried to graft state institutions onto national identity. Vala seems to personify the militarised nation-state:

> Then All the Daughters of Albion became One before Los: even Vala!
> And she put forth her hand upon the Looms in dreadful howlings
> Till she vegetated into a hungry Stomach & a devouring Tongue.
> Her Hand is a Court of Justice, her Feet: two Armies in Battle
> Storms & Pestilence: in her Locks: & in her Loins Earthquake.
> And Fire. & the Ruin of Cities & Nations & Families & Tongues.
> (64:6–11, E215)

Vala destructively parodies the Divine Humanity, embodying England and France as nation-states orientated towards war. When Jerusalem assimilates into Vala, liberty and culture merge into the claims of the nation-state. Albion cannot distinguish Jerusalem from the violence of institutionalised nationalism, while Los attempts to protect her independent existence from Vala and the Sons and Daughters of Albion.

The opaque textual history of *Jerusalem* makes particular historical references difficult to discern, but Erdman makes some convincing identifications. When the Friends of Albion see 'Tharmas dash'd on the Rocks of the Altars of Victims in Mexico' (38[43]:7, E184) Erdman detects the executions of Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos by the Spanish and the defeats of Mexican insurgents between 1811 and 1815.[25] Albion's trembling Friends see 'America clos'd out by the Oaks of the western shore' (38[43]:6, E184), for Erdman a product of 'the various efforts of France and Britain to exclude each other from the American trade' via the Napoleonic Decrees and Orders in Council.[26] Britain enacted the Orders in January and November 1807 and in April 1809 to prevent neutral trade with France, generating fervent opposition among Dissenters and liberals, especially the mercantile classes. Cookson notes the Orders 'killed off European demand by letting Britain trade on terms that suited her alone', widening the conflict.[27] In September 1807, attempting to prevent the Danish joining Napoleon's Continental System, the British navy brutally bombarded Copenhagen. Blake copied the Birmingham poet James Bisset's indignant verses on the attack into his notebook.[28] The Orders strained Anglo-American relations, leading America to declare war on 18 June 1812. Their belated repeal in June reflects the impact of the liberal and dissenting 'Friends of Peace' upon public opinion.[29]

For Lincoln, contemporaries would have identified Blake's attacks on Voltaire and Rousseau with 'counter-revolutionary conspiracy theories' and Evangelical campaigns pitching British Christianity against French infidelity. While conceding Blake's suspicion of the government, he views Blake's renewed Christianity flowing with the tide of reaction.[30] Rejection of deism and atheism, however, need not mean conservatism. Cookson notes that infidelity had little national consequence and 'anti-war protest remained predominantly Christian', 'culminating in the petitions of 1812–13 raised in the name of "The Friends of Peace and Christianity"'.[31] Blake's attacks in the Prefaces to *Milton* and *Jerusalem* directed against

a selfish and corrupt cabal prolonging the war echo those by liberal Christians opposed to the Orders in Council and ongoing conflict.[32]

Cookson notes a 'tacit connection' between peace and political reform for the Friends of Peace, for whom fair political representation would rein in war.[33] In *Jerusalem* Albion repeatedly spurns his Friends' and even the Saviour's appeals against war:

> Thy brethren call thee, and thy fathers, and thy sons,
> Thy nurses and thy mothers, thy sisters and thy daughters
> Weep at thy souls disease, and the Divine Vision is darkend.
> (4:11–13, E146)

Public opinion here includes women and children. Parallelism unites both genders with the verb 'weep', which seems causally connected to the present passive 'is darkend', suggesting that the Divine Vision and Albion's friends are inextricable. The light comes from their collective love, and is diminished when Albion rejects it.

Erdman identifies Bath in *Jerusalem* as Richard Warner, a Foxite Anglican clergyman whose controversial Fast Day sermon given on 25 May 1804 and 20 February 1805 was published as *War Inconsistent with Christianity* (1804).[34] While this direct link to Warner is tenuous, his pamphlet encapsulates Christian anti-war discourse. Both *Jerusalem* and Warner's sermon envisage liberal Christianity as the basis of the body politic, framed in terms of St Paul's contrast in 1 Corinthians (2:14 and 15:44) between the 'natural man' and the 'spiritual man'.[35]

While Blake's understanding of the 'natural man' is primarily religious, it also has political significance. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes describes life in the hypothetical state of nature as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short', lacking culture and society.[36] Every individual has the natural right to do anything to survive. Life is continual 'Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man'.[37] While for Hobbes civil society suspends this condition, ceding the 'right of nature' to an absolute political authority, for Blake natural man's rapacity continues within institutions of domination and in war. The war-hungry Sons of Albion exist in a violent state of nature; Los describes how they 'accumulate | A World in which Man is by his Nature the Enemy of Man' (38[43]:51–52, E185), a phrase Erin later echoes when she describes Luvah in the state of Satan (49:68–69, E199).

Many Friends of Peace saw the war in similar terms. Warner believed that the duty of 'preachers of the Gospel' was not to support government but 'to disrobe the natural man of all carnal sentiments and violent emotions; and to clothe him with spiritual affections, and Christian principles', to 'utter only the sounds of brotherly love'.[38] God remedied natural man's weakness by making him 'a *social* being; gifted with feelings that link him to his fellow-creatures in the chain of social harmony', with a benevolence which 'includes the desire of reciprocating kindnesses with "all his brethren in the world"'. But '[t]o the very root of this natural feeling War directs its pernicious axe' and 'commences with narrowing the sphere of philanthropy; in its progress it freezes up all the genial charities of our nature'.[39] Warner regards God as the source of this 'natural feeling'. Blake, by contrast, denies that social feeling originates in nature: it is a divine gift requiring continual cultivation. While in 'To the Public' the 'Primeval State of Man, was Wisdom, Art, and Science' (3, E146), its origins are divine, not natural. At the outset of *Milton*, Blake invokes the 'Daughters of Beulah', muses located within the brain, by the 'ministry' of whom 'The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise', causing 'the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms | In likeness of himself' (2:1, 7–10, E96). The imagination animates nature and produces the sympathy which enables human society. Blake attacks deism and natural religion as the basis not only of regal domination but also the dangerous political philosophy of natural rights:

> Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary. But your Greek Philosophy (which is a remnant of Druidism) teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre: an Opinion of fatal & accursed consequence to Man. (52, E200)

Blake's terms are idiosyncratic, but echo Warner's argument. As solely natural beings, individual humans are vulnerable and hence aggressive, instincts which endure in political domination. For Blake, revolutionary France's faith in natural benevolence is deluded: 'Rousseau thought Men Good by Nature; he found them Evil & found no friend. Friendship cannot exist without Forgiveness of Sins continually' (52, E201). Proponents of natural rights are invested in 'Natural Morality or Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart', attempting to settle political society on anti-social foundations.

*Jerusalem* merges legendary, historical, and contemporary wars in Europe in a panorama of natural man's destructiveness. Albion's warrior Sons become a formless parody of the Divine Humanity, the 'Polypus of Death', a 'Spectre over Europe and Asia | Withering the Human Form by Laws of Sacrifice for Sin' (49:24–25, E198). Likewise, in war Albion and his enemy Luvah merge into 'One Great Satan' (90:43, E250). In the Polypus, Spectres are impermeable, anti-social Selfhoods, forced together by violent natural impulses:

> Then 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.
> Going forth & returning from Albions Rocks to Canaan:
> Devouring Jerusalem from every Nation of the Earth.
>
> Envying stood the enormous Form at variance with Itself
> In all its Members. (69:1–6, E223)

The polypus fascinated eighteenth-century scientists, as it blurred the boundaries of plant and animal life, tenaciously rooting and endlessly reproducing.[40] In contrast to this organic model, Blake's Polypus is a chaotic compound of living death, its male members continuously at war. The horrific image of the Polypus as a 'Cancer' in the female 'Devouring Jerusalem' symbolises Natural Man consuming the liberty and the feminine affections which constitute healthy human society and the Divine Humanity.

By contrast, the Divine Humanity emerges through voluntary activity and forgiveness from an immanent principle of growth. Los describes it as

> the Only General and Universal Form
> To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy
> All broad & general principles belong to benevolence
> Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity.
> (38[43]:20–23, E185)

Its utopian form preserves difference within a harmonious united body, with present tense verbs emphasising its eternal, ongoing existence. Whereas political theories of social contract posit an agreement in the distant past to leave the state of nature and form civil society, Blake's fluid social body is eternally in process. Agency in this body can never be alienated from its myriad agents: multitudes of private acts constitute collective social being.

*Jerusalem*'s contrast between warm 'fibres of love from man to man' and Albion's 'frozen Spectrous wrath' (33:3, E179) resonates with Warner's anti-war rhetoric. In Chapter Three, Blake uses the metaphor of clothing the Natural Man to describe the apotheosis of mankind in the Divine Vision's radiant vesture:

> In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates
> Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision
> And the Light is his Garment This is Jerusalem in every Man
> A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness Male & Female Clothings.
> And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion.
> (54:1–5, E203)

Clothing the Natural Man derives from St Paul (for example, Romans 13:14, 1 Corinthians 15:53). Blake associates the 'clothings' that constitute Jerusalem with intellect, art, and, traditionally feminine and affective Christian virtues.[41] He resists dualism, however, showing the divine emerging from within the natural world. The nostalgic lyric prefacing Chapter Two describes London, prior to Albion's crisis, suffused with Jerusalem's light:

> Her Little-ones ran on the fields
> The Lamb of God among them seen
> And fair Jerusalem his Bride:
> Among the little meadows green.
> (27:5–8, E171)

Myriad 'Little-ones' playing on 'the little meadows green' make manifest the Lamb and Jerusalem in real London locations. Jerusalem is not simply the Natural Man's antithesis: she emerges through activities by which the individual Selfhood opens out into relationship. Jerusalem spiritualises Natural Man.

## Stars and the Apotheoses of Albion's Sons

While *Jerusalem* refashions apotheosis imagery into its utopian Christian vision, the epic maintains a productive dialogue with Enlightenment demystification. Blake continues to apply Euhemerist and naturalist strategies to undermine myths of state power. In Chapter Two, Los rebukes the Friends of Albion for their feeble appeals for help from a sky-god:

> Then Los grew furious raging: Why stand we here trembling around
> Calling on God for help; and not ourselves in whom God dwells
> Stretching a hand to save the falling Man. (38[43]:12–14, E184)

The gerunds contrast Man's 'falling' and the Friends' passive 'trembling' and 'calling' with Los's active 'raging' and the human God's 'stretching'. The collective pronouns implicate Los in the Friends' failure but also the Friends in God's saving action. Los urges concrete Christian sympathy and forgiveness as opposed to powerless appeals to an abstract God.

As in the Lambeth prophecies, Blake represents collective human energies displaced into figures of apotheosis, figures which also symbolise state and church tyranny. The complex of symbolism representing the Sons of Albion as bloodthirsty druids connects star-worship, priestcraft, state religion, and war. They themselves become constellations, mechanical and destructive 'Starry Wheels', linked to the 'Wheel of Religion' (77:13, E232) in the proem to Chapter Four. This devouring 'Wheel | Of fire surrounding all the heavens', rotates 'From west to east against the current of | Creation'. It is named 'Caiaphas, the dark Preacher of Death | Of sin, of sorrow, & of punishment' (77:2–5, 18–19, E232), after the High Priest who plotted Jesus's execution. In Chapter Two, the 'narrow Sea between Albion & the Atlantic Continent' becomes

> a boundless Ocean bottomless,
> Of grey obscurity, filld with clouds & rocks & whirling waters
> And Albions Sons ascending & descending in the horrid Void.
> (39[44]:14–17, E186)

The druid Sons achieve apotheosis in Albion's night of sick sleep. Miner identifies the twelve Sons with the signs of the zodiac, which *Milton* and *Jerusalem* link to Asia's deities.[42] When Los drives the Sons and Daughters of Albion from 'their ancient mountains' they became 'the twelve Gods of Asia Opposing the Divine Vision' (74:20–22, E229; see also 60:10–25, E210). Notably, the moony maternal night of the Daughters of Beulah and Erin's bow (50:18–22, E200) contain the Sons' destructive motions, symbolising the transformative powers of imagination and affect. This complex of symbolism suggests that Blake continues to draw on Enlightenment strategies of Euhemerism and naturalism to demystify state religion.

As with *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*, however, stars also preserve Albion's energies. Describing Golgonooza and the 'Twenty-seven Heavens', Blake

tells his readers how Eternity, from its place at the centre of the Earth, 'expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell | And there it meets Eternity again, both within and without' (13:34–46, E157). If perceived imaginatively, the stars maintain Albion's lost energies in his 'tomb', offering the hope that they will be reincorporated: 'Los reads the Stars of Albion! the Spectre reads the Voids | Between the Stars; among the porches of Albions Tomb sublime' (91:36–37, E251).[43]

Hungerford and Whittaker link Albion in *Jerusalem* to the *Descriptive Catalogue*, in which Blake identifies Albion with Boötes and its star Arcturus. Hungerford argues that most of Albion's movements are those of the constellation Boötes.[44] The torturing Starry Wheels symbolise Albion's self-division: he perceives them as external forces but they are really part of him. Certainly, Blake associates his primal energies with the stars. On Plate 25, Albion kneels as three female figures torture him, a design Paley links to Poussin's *The Martyrdom of St Erasmus* (1628–29). Erdman notes that Albion's body is adorned with 'two bright stars (Jupiter or Mars and Venus), Orion's belt, and the seven Pleiades' as well as the sun and moon.[45] His kneeling posture suggests the constellation Hercules, usually wielding a club, but here emasculated. Albion bemoans the loss of his vital, heavenly energies: 'The Sea; the Stars: the Sun: the Moon: drivn forth by my disease' (21:10, E166).

The Sons rend apart Albion's body, particularly his loins, through druidic ritual sacrifices, repeatedly associated with war and the destruction of the human body. At the end of Chapter One, Albion recalls 'We reared mighty Stones: we danced naked around them: | Thinking to bring Love into light of day, to Jerusalems shame'. The giants, suddenly ashamed, become repelled by each other:

> […] the Blue
> Of our immortal Veins & all their Hosts fled from our Limbs,
> And wanderd distant in a dismal Night clouded & dark:
> The Sun fled from the Britons forehead: the Moon from his mighty loins.
> (24:4–10, E169)

Albion's divine energy is erotic and affective, lost through shame and ascesis. In 'To the Jews', Blake repeats from *Milton* 'But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion' (E171 and *Milton* 6:25, E100). Variations on this phrase recur across *Jerusalem*, creating a structural rhythm emphasising Albion's separation from his divine primary energies.[46]

The critical dimension of Blake's 1790s prophecies remains active in *Jerusalem*, notably in the passages on Albion's druid Sons. However, Blake subordinates this dimension to positive images of apotheosis. Los counters his Spectre's temptations to despair by envisioning Albion's rebirth:

> Comfort thyself in my strength the time will arrive,
> When all Albions injuries shall cease, and when we shall
> Embrace him tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality.
> (7:54–56, E150)

This prophecy fuses Jesus's resurrection, transfiguration, and ascension. Los anticipates that the 'strength' of his prophetic artistic efforts will culminate in the utopian moment of Albion's transformation.[47] The adjective phrase 'tenfold bright' applies both to Albion's radiance and the embrace of Los and the Spectre. Los's prophecy is fulfilled when Albion rises from his sepulchre and achieves a form of apotheosis.

At the poem's conclusion, Albion actively walks into the heavens, clothed in flames like 'the Sun in heavy clouds' and firing his 'arrows of flaming gold [...] with ardor!' (95:11–14, E255). Blake fuses apotheosis with erotic physical energy. Albion regenerates into a fluid human body, changing 'according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or | Opakeness of Nervous fibres' (98:36–37, E258). As in *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*, the narrator's apocalyptic vision revitalises the stars:

> And I 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 & rich array Humanize
> In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah.
> (98: 40–45, E258)

The constellations quicken and humanise at Jehovah's words, identified here with a *mutual* covenant expressed in 'the Forgiveness of Sins'. Notably, 'The innumerable Chariots of the Almighty' which appear 'in Heaven' include 'Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer' (98:8–9, E257): even this rationalist arch-trinity is redeemed when brought into a dialogue with the creative and prophetic poetic imagination.

*Jerusalem* identifies Albion's displaced starry energies with distinctively feminine qualities. Early in the poem, the Starry Wheels divide Los from his Spectre and his emanation Enitharmon, who 'divided in pain, | Eastward toward the Starry Wheels' (5:67–68, E148). Albion similarly loses his affective dimensions when Jerusalem ascends into the stars in a negative apotheosis:

> The Starry Wheels revolv'd heavily over the Furnaces;
> Drawing Jerusalem in anguish of maternal love,
> Eastward a pillar of a cloud with Vala upon the mountains
> Howling in pain, redounding from the arms of Beulahs Daughters,
> Out from the Furnaces of Los above the head of Los.
> A pillar of smoke writhing afar into Non-Entity, redounding
> Till the cloud reaches afar outstretch'd among the Starry Wheels
> Which revolve heavily in the mighty Void above the Furnaces
> (5:46–53, E148)

Like the Shadowy Female in *Europe*, Jerusalem is associated with the Milky Way's starry clouds. Nevertheless, Los encourages the utopian 'builders in hope' in Golgonoozato continue, 'tho Jerusalem wanders far away, | Without the gate of Los: among the dark Satanic wheels' (12:43–44, E156). A desire to return liberty and affect to Albion motivate his civic efforts.

## Republican Virtue and Christian Sympathy

In *Jerusalem* mutual and sympathetic private interactions, exemplified by forgiveness, revive the body, both of the nation and of humankind. Blake reformulates *America* and *Europe*'s republican opposition of active, masculine citizenship to feminine passivity. *Jerusalem* reintegrates 'feminine' affections, which supply the vigour of the nation. The austere, masculine and martial virtues of the ancient republics paradoxically weaken Albion's body politic, severing the 'fibres of love' which form its fabric. Jerusalem has affinities with the 'mildness and moderation' that for Hume distinguished modern, commercial states, whose strength lay in the myriad individual manufactures and transactions which strongly tied society together.[48] Blake had a consistent republican distrust of the 'Fiends of Commerce' (E479) and the primacy of self-interest in their social model, but in *Jerusalem* Christianity offers an alternative version of a 'mild' soci-

ety based both on egalitarian, sympathetic exchanges and the creative arts. In 'To the Christians', Blake asserts 'I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination', with 'the Treasures of Heaven' being 'Mental Studies & Performances' (E231). Sympathy and the imaginative arts socialise and enculturate the Natural Man, as in *The Four Zoas*, where the 'spectrous dead' assimilate to the forms of the 'immortal works' (98[90]:41–42, E371) lovingly crafted by Los and Enitharmon. Christian virtues and culture together constitute Blake's vision of the active citizen, exemplified in Los, and the vigorous body politic Albion finally becomes at the end of *Jerusalem*.[49]

In *Jerusalem*, Albion's Sons and Daughters threaten the 'minute particulars', and Los labours to protect Jerusalem and her 'little ones'. While frequently associated with Blake's philosophical and aesthetic resistance to abstract general forms, the 'little ones' are ethically and socially significant constituents of the endangered Christian body politic. When Los addresses the Friends of Albion in Chapter Two, he distinguishes Jerusalem's minutely particular forgivenesses from the Sons' generalising moral virtues:

> Instead of Albions lovely mountains & the curtains of Jerusalem
> I see a Cave, a Rock, a Tree deadly and poisonous, unimaginative:
> Instead of the Mutual Forgivenesses, the Minute Particulars, I see
> Pits of bitumen ever burning: artificial riches of the Canaanite
> Like Lakes of liquid lead: instead of heavenly Chapels, built
> By our dear Lord: I see Worlds crusted with snows & ice.
> (38[43]:59–64, E185–86)

Intimate forgiveness builds Jerusalem's decentralised sympathetic communities, symbolised by 'heavenly Chapels', nodal points for the Divine Humanity's myriad 'Fibres of love' (4:8, E146). The Sons replace them with the absolute singular cave, rock, and poison tree, and 'Worlds crusted with snows & ice', freezing the social body. The division of gendered characteristics is an important dimension of this crisis. As the Sons and Daughters of Albion sever the tribes of Israel from Albion, 'no more the Masculine mingles | With the Feminine. but the Sublime is shut out from the Pathos | In howling torment, to build stone walls of separation' (90:10–12, E249). The return of Jerusalem represents the reintegration of these divided facets of humanity.

Nevertheless, Blake remained invested in the active model of citizenship at the centre of republican discourse. Albion's body is an index of the health of the body politic. Blake genders his fall into passive fear, sleep, and wasting disease as a loss of the republican citizen's masculine vitality:

> Art thou Vala? replied Albion, image of my repose
> O how I tremble! how my members pour down milky fear!
> A dewy garment covers me all over, all manhood is gone!
> At thy word & at thy look death enrobes me about
> From head to feet, a garment of death & eternal fear.
> (30[34]:2–6, E176)

This dark outer layer is symptomatic of Albion's disease, emerging from female fibres woven by Rahab and Tirzah. They use institutions to proliferate their ideology, figured by the narrator as the fabric of a decaying, insular body politic:

> I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe
> And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire
> Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black the cloth
> In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation. (15:14–17, E159)

The 'heavy wreathes' make national bodies passive, just as Albion's Sons weigh him down by 'Rearing their Druid Patriarchal rocky Temples around his limbs' (46:14, E196).

Blake's assaults on Rousseau, Gibbon, Hume, and Voltaire in *Jerusalem* have long been identified with their natural religion and sceptical philosophy. But more significantly, Blake attacks their investment in classical citizenship, particularly the stance that Christianity's passive 'feminine' virtues are incompatible with the exercise of civic virtue. In *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), Hume scowled at 'popery':

> The place of HERCULES, THESEUS, HECTOR, ROMULUS, is now supplied by DOMINIC, FRANCIS, ANTHONY, and BENEDICT. Instead of the destruction of monsters, the subduing of tyrants, the defence of our native country; whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission and slavish obedience are become the means of obtaining celestial honours among mankind.[50]

Hume's criticism of Catholic apotheosis implicitly applies to all Christianity. Similarly, in the first volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), Gibbon notoriously attacked primitive Christianity for sapping Rome's civic virtue and causing its decline. Blake perhaps had sympathy with these views when representing the Christian era as a 'female dream' in *Europe*, but *Jerusalem* rehabilitates Christian virtues and reintegrates them into republican discourse. In the poem's Christian vision, the citizen's and the body politic's vigour is fostered by these supposedly passive virtues.[51]

Blake merges Christian non-violence with the republican language of active citizenship. The preface to Chapter Three includes a short poem in which, like officers of the Inquisition, Gibbon 'with a lash of steel' and 'Voltaire with a wracking wheel' (52:5–6, E202) attack a Grey Monk, mocked for being 'lazy' and 'condemning glorious War' (52:9–10). The Monk is a type of Christ: 'The blood. red ran from the Grey Monks side | His hands & feet were wounded wide' (52:13–14). Blake transmutes the Monk's Christian resistance into metaphorically martial virtues:

> Titus! Constantine! Charlemaine!
> O Voltaire! Rousseau! Gibbon! Vain
> Your Grecian Mocks & Roman Sword
> Against this image of his Lord!
>
> For a tear is an Intellectual thing;
> And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King
> And the bitter groan of a Martyrs woe
> Is an Arrow from the Almighties Bow! (52:21–28)

The lines challenge classical oppositions of private and public, feminine and masculine virtues by asserting the agency of emotional and intellectual activity. Blake's invigoration of 'feminine' characteristics also animates the Daughters of Los, whose work at the looms humanises the Spectres: 'Endless their labour, with bitter food. void of sleep' (59:30, E209). Their selfless nurturing complements Los's disinterested friendship to Albion, as 'they labour for life & love, regardless of any one | But the poor Spectres that they work for' (59:37–38). By contrast, the martial virtue that Albion's Daughters demand emasculates their father.

Blake's descriptions of the sadistic 'Female Will' (30[34]:31, E176) have dominated critical attention to gender in *Jerusalem*, but women are

essential to the renewal of the social body. Whilst challenging Albion, Los tells him how the Saviour creates Woman from Adam, humanity's Limit of Contraction (42:29–36, E189). She enables Jesus, the Universal Humanity, to be born within time and begins the expansion of the shrunken national body. Jesus is both agent and product of the divine energy of the universal body politic, as feminine as it is masculine. Plate 35 shows Woman erupting from a dormant man's side, with her head radiant as if with a halo. She looks up to Jesus, suspended above, their bright flames attesting to kindred divinity. Likewise, Los tells Enitharmon 'Man cannot Unite with Man but by their Emanations'. While the Emanations 'stand both Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity' (88:10–11, E246), as Connolly observes, they are predominantly female.[52] Communal existence and the Divine Humanity are impossible without them.

In *Jerusalem*, Los reflects Blake's continued investment in the republican ideal of the selfless citizen-hero devoted to the nation, but whereas in the classical tradition this is expressed in martial commitment, Los's heroism is Christian, combining masculine and feminine characteristics. Los fights to protect Jerusalem, Albion's emanation of liberty, and to reunite Albion with his banished affect, dashing the Spectres 'with his mace of iron' and dividing them into males and females 'lest they destroy the Feminine Affections' (78:3–8, E233). Los founds the city Golgonooza on the banks of the Thames 'for the protection of the Twelve Emanations of Albions Sons' (53:23, E203). He continually renews it 'in rage & in fury' against national decline. It is 'Outside of the Gates of the Human Heart, beneath Beulah | In the midst of the rocks of the Altars of Albion', the 'Spiritual Fourfold | London: continually building & continually decaying desolate!' (53:15–19). 'Outside' suggests a walled city, preserving the beating heart of a human community within from barbarism without. Los's continuous labour to preserve the city suggests the civic humanist emphasis on the citizen's constant vigilance against luxury, corruption, and tyranny. His activity provides the conditions for the reappearance of the New Jerusalem at the conclusion. When the risen Albion calls the Zoas to fulfil their apocalyptic roles, Los is praised as the nation's saviour:

> Urthona he beheld mighty labouring at
> His Anvil, in the Great Spectre Los unwearied labouring & weeping
> Therefore the Sons of Eden praise Urthonas Spectre in songs
> Because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble.
> (95: 17–20, E255)

Fellow-citizens distinguish Los with 'glory' or 'honour', the chief accolade towards which the republican citizen aspired. Los's weeping, more typical of feminine sensibility than austere classical republicanism, strikes an unusual note that harmonises with Blake's redefinition of citizenship for a Christian national vision.[53] Los's tears for Albion allude to Jesus weeping over the corpse of Lazarus before performing his resurrection (John 11:35). Accompanying these tears, Los's poetic and prophetic work expresses the divine power that reanimates Albion.

## The Bard and the Apotheosis

In the *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake's entry for *The Bard, from Gray* asserts the power of poetry: 'Weaving the winding sheet of Edward's race by means of sounds of spiritual music and its accompanying expressions of articulate speech is a bold, and daring, and most masterly conception' (E541). He gives primacy to the 'spiritual music' of poetry, whereas 'expressions of articulate speech', while important, are secondary. Blake is enthused by the idea that the Bard's spiritual poetry has the agency to ruin the despotic king's line. Several critics have identified *Jerusalem*'s public, oratorical dimension; Blake seems to have seen affinities between the Bard in Gray's poem and his own work in his epic.[54]

Blake's recognition of poetry's distinct but interrelated 'spiritual music' and 'articulate speech' and emphasis on the precedence of the former suggest affinities with Julia Kristeva's account of poetic language. Kristeva distinguishes two inseparable modalities of the signifying process, the 'semiotic' and 'symbolic'. The former's '*heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification' is present in rhythm and melody, which express traces of the fragmented body's energy charges, drives, and stases prior to the formation of the ego and the activities of predication and signification.[55] This originates in what she terms 'the Chora', which is 'a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated', being 'constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases'.[56] Kristeva associates it with the subject's fragmented body prior to 'evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality' and identifies it with the rhythms of the maternal body as well as being ordered by mediated external socio-historical constraints.[57] She derives 'the Chora' from Plato's *Timaeus*, from which Blake seems to draw in *Urizen*'s description of the eternal body's flexible senses prior to Urizen's emergence. Kristeva's 'symbolic', by contrast, is that in language depen-

dent upon distinctions between subject and object and reliant upon grammatical logic, which enables denotation, judgement, and meaning. The dialectic between these modalities determines the type of discourse produced, with poetry characterised by the flow of the disruptive semiotic into the symbolic. All texts thus have two dimensions. Kristeva identifies the 'genotext' with the text's semiotic dimensions derived from the body, particularly 'transfers of drive energy' in 'phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation and rhythm)', while the phenotext is 'language that serves to communicate' and obeys 'rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee'.[58] There are important differences between Blake and Kristeva's thought on poetry, not least Kristeva's materialist ontology and identification of language and culture's origins in nature, but her emphasis on the semiotic as a feminine somatic energy, rhythm, and music, prior to and in excess of modes of rational symbolic meaning, provides an illuminating model for Blake's distinctive emphasis on poetic affect in *Jerusalem*.

Around this period, Blake frequently reflected on poetry's aural dimensions. The 'Public Address' aligns Pope and Dryden's heroic couplets with the corruption of the visual arts by Rubens, Rembrandt, and Titian, all of whom turn 'that which is Soul & Life into a Mill or Machine' (E575).[59] Likewise, in her lament over Albion's collapse and shrinking senses, Erin bemoans 'The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out | True Harmonies, & comprehending great, as very small' (49:36–37, E198). For Blake, uninspired poetry reflects the attenuation of the body's sensory energy, associated with a fall away from the collective Divine Humanity to an individual selfhood. Inspired poetry expresses the vitality or otherwise of humanity and the body of the nation.

The preface to Chapter One of *Jerusalem* suggests that the poem's apparently unpoetic cacophony reflects Blake's attempt to reactivate the senses of the spiritual body rather than the natural senses and rational mind, spurring individual readers to *feel* their membership of the Divine Humanity. Blake rejects the 'Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming' (3, E145), alluding to Milton's description of the verse in *Paradise Lost* as the first English example '*of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Rimeing*'.[60] This politicised precedent indicates the socio-political charge of Blake's poetics. He found that 'in the mouth of a true Orator

such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself' (3, E146). The preface to *Milton* claims Milton and Shakespeare, representing English poetry and culture, were 'curbd by the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword' (1, E95). Poetry's metre and content are restrained when co-opted to the martial values of classical heroic poetry. Blake projects himself as a bard, 'a true Orator', who defies constrained metre:

> I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts—the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race! Nations are Destroy'd, or Flourish, in proportion as Their Poetry Painting and Music, are Destroy'd or Flourish! (3, E146)

Swinburne described *Jerusalem* as 'so vast in reach, so repellent in style, so rich, so vehement, and subtle', identifying 'effective significance' in its deviations from 'ordinary metre', its viscerally jarring rhythms, and impassioned voice.[61] Blake draws attention to each word and line's distinct identity, but also to constant variations, patterns of fluctuation, and relationships within the poem's anatomy, the interconnected 'terrific', 'mild & gentle' and 'inferior' parts. His final comments ally this poetic body's vitality to the flourishing of the national body politic.

*Jerusalem*'s poetics can be glossed with a moment in *Milton*. The narrator experiences an impasse whilst attempting to describe Milton's struggle to sculpt Urizen out of clay:

> O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,
> Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd
> Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord
> Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity.
> (20[22]:15–18, E114)

This seemingly un-Blakean expression of frustrated self-abasement alludes to Raphael's response to Adam, who requests an account of Creation in *Paradise Lost* (vii.110–30). Blake reframes it as a moment of sublime blockage which, through the annihilation of the poet's rational and individual self, allows the poetry of the Divine Humanity to emerge. The narrator identifies a 'starry' poetic strain appropriate to the divine 'Four-

fold Man'. Alongside performing the critical work by which Gray's Bard weaves the winding sheet of a tyrannical line of kings, *Jerusalem* is also an epic apotheosis of Albion.

Esterhammer finds affinities between Milton and Blake's aim to use 'language to alter the behaviour of their contemporaries at a crucial historical juncture'. Los's utterances in *Jerusalem* frequently stress 'the perlocutionary effect the words should have on an audience, as if his hearers could never quite be trusted to recognize the authority of his language'.[62] Blake depicts Los's work in *Jerusalem* as blacksmithing, symbolising the inspired poet's desire for a palpable effect on his audience. The narrator of *Jerusalem* has similar intentions:

> I rest not from my great task!
> To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
> Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination.
> (5:17–20, E147)

The poet's great task is to induce the deification of *Jerusalem*'s readers, conceived here as a participatory and collective version of apotheosis. The image of absorption into the 'Bosom of God' recalls the image on page 67 of the *Night Thoughts* watercolours. By emphasising fusion with the divine body, Blake indicates that this form of apotheosis is to be achieved by imminent communion rather than transcendence.

As discussed in Chapter 6, 'Asia' in *The Song of Los* alludes to Ezekiel's prophecy, which animates bones into the living house of Israel (Ezekiel 37:7–10). *Jerusalem* shares this conception of prophetic agency. Blake also draws on a traditional function of the bard, according to several antiquarians between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata* (1676), Aylett Sammes describes Bards performing apotheoses:

> These sort of People were (no doubt) at first of a Religious Order, and made use of in the Deifying of Great men, singing the *Praises* of *Hero's* at their *Apotheosis*, which in Ancient times was not only esteemed glorious for the Dead, and useful for the Living, but also a Religious and acceptable act for the Gods.[63]

In *Jerusalem*, Blake aspires to the Bards' incantatory agency. In a curious metapoetical moment, Enitharmon bemoans 'The Poets Song draws

to its period & Enitharmon is no more' (92:8, E252). It seems as if the conclusion of both Los's poetic creation of time and Blake's own poem deliver Albion's awakening and transformation. The narrator announces that 'Time was Finished!' and 'The Breath Divine Breathed over Albion' (94:18, E254), as if what echoes from the completion of Los's creative work is pure inspiration itself. This divine inspiration animates Albion, who arises in an embodied apotheosis full of volition and passionate energy:

> The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills Albion rose
> In anger: the wrath of God breaking bright flaming on all sides around
> His awful limbs: into the Heavens he walked clothed in flames
> Loud thundring, with broad flashes of flaming lightning & pillars
> Of fire. (95:5–9, E255)

The lines merge apotheosis and resurrection. Whereas apotheosis in *Europe* denoted a feminised passivity, Albion's ascension here expresses the male Sublime. Nevertheless, it is 'England who is Brittannia' whose voice has 'pierc'd Albions clay cold ear' (94:20, 95:1, E254) and precipitated this wrathful ascent. Her influence also transforms his wrath. Once she has 'entered Albions bosom rejoicing' (95:22, E255), Jesus appears to Albion in 'the likeness & similitude of Los' (96:7) and converses with him on forgiveness, brotherhood, and self-annihilation. This leads Albion to throw himself 'into the Furnaces of affliction' (96:35, E256) for Jesus's sake. They turn into 'Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine' (96:37), causing the Zoas to arise into 'Albions Bosom' and Albion to stand 'before Jesus in the Clouds | Of Heaven Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity' (96:42–43). Los's tireless creative work and England's feminine voice reunite Albion with his divine humanity.

More concretely, the circulation of utopian energy constituting the divine social body emerges through individual acts of forgiveness. The Divine Voice encourages Jerusalem with a tale of Joseph's anger towards and forgiveness of Mary. Joseph rejects her as an adulterer with an illegitimate child. Her appeals lead him to recall a dream featuring Jehovah's Angel, who tells him 'Jehovahs Salvation | Is without Money & without Price, in the Continual Forgiveness of Sins | In the Perpetual Mutual Sacrifice in Great Eternity!' Acts of forgiveness allow God to exist among men: 'If you Forgive one-another, so shall Jehovah Forgive You: | That He Himself may Dwell among You' (61:21–26, E212).[64] Forgiveness and God are not abstractions, but rather exist in human sympathy and love.

Mary responds in rich language which fuses spiritual with sensory experience: 'if I were pure, never could I taste the sweets | Of the Forgive[ne]ss of Sins!' (61:11–12, E211). Joseph mirrors her physical and emotional response, 'weeping over & embracing her closely in | His arms' (14–15). Jehovah does not dispense forgiveness but instead requires its exercise by humans for his own existence. Forgiveness is sublime and exponential: divine human energies circulate and the social body expands. When Joseph forgives and embraces her:

> 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, E212)

Forgiveness elicits emanation, and growth, vitality, and freedom radiate from an intimate, private origin. This episode epitomises *Jerusalem*. All the instances of mercy, pity, and kindness gather momentum as the poem progresses. By Plate 96 the scale of forgiveness is magnified: England forgives Albion, 'adoring his wrathful rebuke' and enters his bosom 'rejoicing' (95:22–23, E255); as a result, Albion sacrifices his Selfhood for Jesus; in turn, the 'Furnaces of affliction' overflow with 'Living Waters'.

*Jerusalem* is formed on the analogy of the renewed human body. Paley notes that the only finished copy of the poem, copy E, has russet text, representing 'the "Fibres" out of which the bodies of all living things are made'.[65] The colourful words and lines become arteries in the body of *Jerusalem*, through which poetic energy vitally circulates, counteracting Albion's 'blue death' (33:10, E179). Blake's attention to words as minute sources of a larger, spontaneously developing form of life suggests affinities with what Gigante identifies as *Jerusalem*'s 'poetics of epigenesis on an epic scale'.[66] In contrast to *Milton*, which 'narrates the restoration of Albion to living form', *Jerusalem* 'attempts an embodiment of that form'.[67] Blake's varied prosody therefore contrasts traditional 'Monotonous Cadence' with the fluctuating, exuberant rhythmical energies of the Divine Humanity and the revitalised body of the nation.

*Jerusalem*'s incantatory apotheosis of Albion culminates in the final word of the penultimate line:

> All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all
> Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied
> Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing
> And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.
> (99:1–4, E258)

The relentless accumulation of connected clauses and anaphoric repetitions from Plate 97 onwards sustains the conclusion's extraordinary energy and oratorical momentum, sweeping the reader irresistibly towards 'Immortality'. The sound and rhythm imitate the rising movement of apotheosis. The accent falls most emphatically on 'Life', which modifies 'Immortality' as activity rather than a final state and vies with it for the reader's attention. The profusion of participial verbs suggests immortality is a state of continuous, endless, and sublime proliferation.

Repeated tropes, characters, and events throughout *Jerusalem* contribute to its density. Disparate lines and phrases connect across the poem and narrative energy flows in all directions. This dynamism is partly due to Blake's recurrent use of Hebraic antithesis and parallelism, with short phrases and whole lines contrasting or reinforcing each other and constructions repeated and modified, thereby accumulating rhetorical force.[68] Paley admires Blake's metrical variety, with lines 'departing from and returning to a seven-foot base, the dominant feet being iambic and anapaestic' and moving 'from five to seven and sometimes even more feet'.[69] Even some of Blake's most laborious catalogues of counties and names maintain lively rhythmic variety. Jerusalem, described at key points in the poem as 'liberty', can be *heard* in the poetry. The poem's form expresses the Divine Body as a unified entity composed of myriad distinct and interacting nodes of energy. In the last plates of the poem the verse's long lines modulate into predominantly octosyllabic metre, expressing the expansion of Albion into the Divine Humanity.[70] Paley suggests the profusion of Plate 98 emerges from the 'extraordinarily long', heavily enjambed lines dominated by present participles, contributing to 'a sublimity striving to burst through the very boundaries of expression'.[71] If the russet text suggests the poem is a body, then the extended lines in the final plates suggest the sublime expansion of that body towards an unlimited form. A deluge of imagery and rhetorical and musical force overwhelms the reader's natural, rational understanding. The reader must participate in the visions and hence be incorporated into the Divine Humanity. Damon described the effect of *Jerusalem*'s 'choral tempest' as a 'new, great symphony', which

'involved development-passages of huge emotional sweep and change, which finally bust out into the triumphant apotheosis'.[72]

Longinus conceived of the Sublime as a rhetorical mode, whereby the orator persuades his audience by overwhelming their rational powers through powerful tropes, sounds, and imagery: 'sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery, and get the upper hand with every hearer'.[73] Blake's identification of his poetry with oratory suggests an intention to sweep the reader irresistibly into intellectual vision. His letter to Butts of 6 July 1803 describes the poetical mode of his epics as 'Sublime Allegory', that is, 'Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding' (E730). *Jerusalem*'s sublime poetry confronts the Natural Man's corporeal understanding with blockage and thereby liberates the Spiritual Man's 'Intellectual Powers'. Annotating Berkeley's *Siris* (1744), Blake defines the imagination as 'the Divine Body in Every Man'; the dialectic of the sublime in *Jerusalem* releases this latent divinity and deifies the reader by incorporating them in the Divine Humanity.

The poet's work in *Jerusalem* therefore has two dimensions. Los is involved in a critical enterprise, subduing his Spectre and also compelling the Spectre to do critical work that contributes to the defeat of Albion's spectre, Satan. This is not an end in itself, but rather draws Los into a strategic alliance, harnessing the Spectre's 'ravening' nature (8:38, E151) to purge Albion of his disease and to break open his covering, woven from Vala's 'dark threads' (45[31]:67, E195). For Deen, *Jerusalem* is 'a systematizing of error', 'designed to fall away' so that '[w]hat remains when Satan is annihilated is simply the risen Albion, the great body of universal humanity, the family of men living in universal brotherhood'.[74] Certainly, critical work in the apocalyptic conclusion of *Jerusalem* is subordinated to revelation of the Divine Humanity:

> Circumscribing & Circumcising the excrementitious
> Husk & Covering into Vacuum evaporating revealing the lineaments of Man
> Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death & Resurrection.
> (98:18–20, E257)

The present participles lack an obvious subject, plausibly applying to the 'innumerable Chariots of the Almighty' which 'appear in Heaven' (98:8), or to 'every Man' who 'stood Fourfold' (98:12), or to the regenerated senses (15–17). The present tense foregrounds the continuous critical and creative activity necessary for fully human existence, akin to the energies of

'the Poetic or Prophetic character', which in *There is No Natural Religion* (*c*.1788) bursts 'the same dull round' of the 'Philosophic & Experimental' ratio (E3). Even at its most utopian, *Jerusalem* requires the exercise of critical intellect.

In distinction to Albion's previous passivity, the interaction of critical and creative impulses in the conclusion ensures that Albion remains active in the process by which the Divine Humanity is revealed. This process of purgation enables Jerusalem to fully emerge from her latent state. Her song is both the agent and effect of Albion's transformation. The final line supplements the preceding rhetorical climax: 'And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem' (99:5, E259). This line embodies the continuous generation of life by going beyond the terminus of 'Immortality'. 'Jerusalem' gains a syntactic position that both equates it with 'Immortality' and gives it even more emphasis. As the final word in the last line of the poem and, with the postscriptum 'The End of The Song | of Jerusalem', the book itself, 'Jerusalem' gestures back towards the title page, inviting a rereading to mirror the continuous activity of eternity. Hilton notes that Blake's paronomasia here connects *name*, *emanation*s, and *Amen*.[75] The line's thickened texture also draws attention to its patterning and emphasises the distinctly polysyllabic words 'Emanations' and finally 'Jerusalem'. The last line thus implies that the divine liberty Jerusalem personifies is most vitally present in the poem's semiotic dimension, to use Kristeva's term. The verb invites us to imagine Jerusalem in the line's aural qualities, beyond its rational, denotative meaning.

Williams puts it well when he describes Blake's conception of Christ as 'the utopian surplus which exceeds the ideological formulation'.[76] The overwhelming final lines represent the ceaseless flow of 'Human Forms', circulating between 'the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours' and 'the Life of Immortality' (99:3–4, E258). The poem concludes with the divine body constituted by continuous process, activity, and interpenetration of its component parts; it draws its reader towards the ceaseless activity of eternal life along with Albion.

## Notes

1. See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 263–64, 334, 339–42; Frye, 'The Drunken Boat', 16–17; Bloom, 'Internalization of Quest Romance', 8–9; Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 152.
2. *BPAE* 458.

3. *BIB* 338.
4. *BR* 311–12.
5. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia*, 173.
6. Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, 51.
7. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 179.
8. Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 1.
9. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia*, 171, 173.
10. Frye, *FS* 27.
11. Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature*, 49, 72–76.
12. See Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature*, 118–64. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 282, and Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 23, connect Blake and the Cambridge Platonists. For Jesus's body in Moravian spirituality, see Davies and Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family', and Davies, 'The Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family: Snapshots from the Archive'. Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 110, links deification and Moravian worship.
13. Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature*, 27, 32–34, 53–73.
14. Ibid., 1, 41–42, 59–61, 72, 116–19, 155–58. For Blake and this phrase, see Haggerty, *Blake's Gifts*, 174–75.
15. Collins, *Partaking in the Divine Nature*, 42–46. For Blake and Pauline membership of Christ's body, see Davies, *The Theology of William Blake*; Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 30; Roberts, 'St Paul's Gifts to Blake's Aesthetic'; Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, esp. 12, 210–16; Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, esp. 5, 10, 104–107; and Haggerty, *Blake's Gifts*, 160–61.
16. Paley, *J* 135, relates the phrase to Matthew 17:8, Mark 9:8, and Luke 9:36.
17. Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 330.
18. See *BR* 780, *BPAE* 462, and *BB* 226.
19. *BR* 370 and Paley, *Continuing City* 2–7.
20. In *BB* 225–28, Bentley identifies 37 'late' plates, contested by Ward in 'Building *Jerusalem*', 183–85. Both make further responses in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 41 (2008), 166–67.
21. Vine, *William Blake*, 95.
22. For Vala and the nation-state, see my 'Homelands: Blake, Albion, and the French Revolution'. For the implication of *Jerusalem*'s nationalism in imperialist discourse, see Matthews, '*Jerusalem* and

Nationalism', Wright, *Blake, Nationalism*, 154–67, and Clark '*Jerusalem* as Imperial Prophecy'.
23. This may echo the famous distinction between society and government in Paine's *Common Sense*, 1.
24. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 70.
25. *BPAE* 482.
26. Ibid.
27. Cookson, *Friends of Peace*, 66, 215.
28. See *N* 96–97. For Erdman's attribution to Bisset, see *BPAE* 452–53, and 'Blake's Transcript'.
29. Cookson, *Friends of Peace*, 215–37.
30. Lincoln, 'Restoring the Nation to Christianity', 153–66 (156).
31. Cookson, *Friends of Peace*, 4–5.
32. Ibid., 144, 150, 218–19, 225.
33. Ibid., 7.
34. *BPAE* 476–78. See also Erdman, 'Blake: The Historical Approach'. Warner was also a vociferous critic of the Evangelical movement.
35. This distinction is also important in Swedenborg. See §401 from *Arcana Cœlestia*, in *Extracts from the Theological Works*, 23.
36. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186.
37. Ibid., 190, 185–86.
38. Warner, *War Inconsistent*, 25.
39. Ibid., 26–27.
40. See Hutchings, *Imagining Nature*, 188–204.
41. For links to clothing imagery in Boehme's writings, see Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 31.
42. Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 306.
43. For the stars as part of Albion's tomb, see Miner, 'Visionary Astronomy', 310.
44. Hungerford, *Shores of Darkness*, 53–55 and Whittaker, *Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 47–48.
45. *IB* 304. In 'Blake's *Jerusalem* and the Visionary History of Britain', Worrall links these markings to John Speed's images of ancient British body-art in his *History of Great Britaine* (1611), available to Blake in Hayley's library.
46. See 30[34]:19–21, E176; 70:32, E224; and 75:27, E231.
47. For the Transfiguration, see Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 46–47, 96–97, 150–51.
48. Hume, 'Of Refinement in the Arts', in *Essays and Treatises*, I, 291.

49. See Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality*, 59–60, for Blake's related revaluation of the term 'polite' between 1798 and 1801.
50. Hume, *History of Natural Religion*, 440–41.
51. For an extended discussion, see my '"She Cuts his Heart Out at his Side"'.
52. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 175.
53. For a more secular language of sympathy in the cheap radical press after Peterloo, see Fairclough, *Romantic Crowd*, 159–66.
54. See Behrendt, *Reading William Blake*, 167; Wright, *Blake, Nationalism*, xvii; Essick, *Language of Adam*, 174–78, and '*Jerusalem* and Blake's Final Works', 258–9, 271.
55. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 133–34.
56. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25.
57. Ibid., 26–27.
58. Ibid., 86–87.
59. See also 'Blake's apology for his Catalogue' (E505), ll.5–6.
60. *RM* 352.
61. Swinburne, *William Blake*, 307, 317, 328.
62. Esterhammer, *Creating States*, 25, 199.
63. Sammes, *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata*, 99. For Sammes as a source for *Jerusalem*, see Beer, *Humanism*, 255; Worrall, '*Jerusalem* and the Visionary History of Britain', 191; and Whittaker, *Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 60, 166. For the bard's performance of apotheoses, see O'Halloran, *A General History of Ireland*, 187–88; and Jones, *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards*, 3, 7–8. Examples of Welsh bardic poems invoking the hero's translation to heaven appear in Davies, *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids*, 346–47, 377. For Blake and Davies, see Frye, *FS* 173–5, and Fisher, 'Blake and the Druids', 589–612. See Chapter 2 for Ossian performing this conventional role in *Berrathon*.
64. See *J* 229, for links to the traditional ballad 'The Cherry Tree Carol'.
65. Paley, *Continuing City*, 92.
66. Gigante, 'Blake's Living Form', 465.
67. Ibid., 463.
68. For parallelism in *Jerusalem*, see Paley, *Continuing City*, 45–50.
69. Ibid., 42, 44.
70. See Damon, *Philosophy and Symbols*, 56; Raine, 'A Note on Blake's "Unfettered Verse"', 391; and Ostriker, *Vision and Verse*, 198.

71. Paley, *Continuing City*, 233.
72. Damon, *Philosophy and Symbols*, 195.
73. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 100.
74. Deen, *Conversing in Paradise*, 228, as quoted in Wright, *Blake, Nationalism*, 154.
75. See Hilton, *Literal Imagination*, 4.
76. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia*, 180.

CHAPTER 10

# Conclusion

Focusing on apotheosis in Blake's poetry, prose, and art helps to reveal the complex interaction between the critical and imaginative dimensions of his myth-making. I want to finish by considering the broader implications of Blake's mythopoesis, particularly how he makes the friction between these approaches creatively productive. Blake adopts a strategy consistent with the Enlightenment, when broadly conceived, to demystify the ideological myths sustaining state political and religious dominance. Nevertheless, his texts do so primarily in a mythological mode, retaining a commitment to myth's creative and utopian possibilities at odds with the mainstream Enlightenment. Blake's positive investment also sits uneasily with a tendency among Marxist traditions for myth to be a pejorative term for false consciousness, a vehicle of ideology that must be demystified.[1] For example, identifying everyday myths as a means by which the conservative bourgeoisie 'transforms history into nature', Barthes asserts that they obscure the contingency and flux of reality: 'the very end of myths is to immobilize the world'. Nevertheless, Barthes also recognises their centrality to social existence and that to reject the myths at the heart of a whole community is to become disenchanted and estranged from it.[2]

The utopian potential of myth in Blake's texts lies in its fluidity. As Cassirer observed, myth's 'vital principle [...] is a dynamic not a static one; it is describable only in terms of action'.[3] This enables myth to assume a narrative function, what Ricoeur calls its 'primordially dramatic structure' in which 'narrative form is neither secondary nor accidental, but primitive and essential'.[4] The polarisation of critical thinking and myth

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is itself a product of Enlightenment polemic, and Gay acknowledges that 'Mythical thinking is true thinking; it reduces the world to order, but its categories are unsettled, alive.'[5] While Blake is more concerned with amplifying the world than reducing it to order, mythical narrative allows him to shape and recreate that world. Myth provides a symbolic form that enables intellectual activity but resists the reductions of analytical reason. Writing to Dr Trusler in 1799, Blake praises 'Homer Virgil & Milton' and the Bible 'because they are addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason'. He supports this with reference to Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, which explains how 'Sense sends over to Imagination before Reason have [*sic*] judged' (E702–3). Blake's poetry and art, therefore, primarily address the reader's senses and imagination; their critical impulse is contained within the mythical mode, with the function of liberating spiritual vision from the ideological myths that restrict it.

Damrosch discerns in Blake's poetry a resistance to Enlightenment: 'In an age when skeptics were demythologizing Christianity, Blake sought to remythologize it.'[6] But this account risks obscuring criticism's necessary role in the larger utopian trajectory of his myth. There are similarities here with Ricoeur's aspiration towards a form of criticism that is constructive, an initial '*defeat of knowledge*' that is 'the other side of working toward the recovery of meaning'.[7] Likewise, in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1969), he argues for criticism as a means of recuperation, 'a criticism that is no longer reductive but restorative'.[8] Cassirer and Gay even regard the transformation of criticism into a creative and productive force in itself as a hallmark of Enlightenment philosophy.[9] While Blake privileges the imaginative over critical faculty, personified for example by Los and his Spectre, I have shown in the preceding chapters how he dramatises the critical attack on ideological myths in a mythical mode. Blake gives the imagination primacy as the fundamental form of human existence. But, as in Plate 11 of *The Marriage*, imagination can ossify into restrictive forms of thought tied to tradition and precedent. The secondary critical faculty is valuable when exercised to clear the way for utopian vision rather than as an end in itself. Ricoeur encapsulates this potential in symbolism when he asserts that 'poetry and myth are not just nostalgia for some forgotten world. They constitute a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other *possible* worlds which transcend the established limits of our *actual* world.'[10] What emerges, then, from these two elements of Blake's

work is a form of utopianism refined and reinvigorated by its encounter with critical thought that it requires but also exceeds.

This relationship between Blake's critical and imaginative approaches to religion and myth is evident in Crabb Robinson's anecdote regarding Blake's interpretation of 'the Bible in a Spiritual Sense' against the 'natural Sense': '*Voltaire* was commissioned by God to expose that'.[11] Voltaire's sceptical role is ultimately constructive, uncovering the literal 'natural Sense' of the Bible that underpins superstitious state religion. By demystifying the Bible, however, Voltaire opens the possibility of interpreting scripture in the 'Spiritual Sense'.

Critics usually understand Blake's later attacks on classical culture in terms of Christian opposition to Greek and Roman paganism and warmongering, but classical attitudes to religious and mythopoeic thinking are equally important.[12] Gay describes the core Enlightenment philosophers as 'modern pagans', inspired especially by Lucretian Epicureanism and Ciceronian scepticism to wage a modern campaign against religious superstition, calling 'for a disenchanted universe, and end to myth'.[13] Blake believed ancient philosophy led the attenuation of faith among his contemporaries. Indeed, in a watercolour illustrating Night Five of Young's *Night Thoughts* Blake distinguishes Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* with books by Plato, Plutarch, and Locke among the volumes of 'Wisdom shallow' (E670). Hume is just one example of the many eighteenth-century philosophers who drew substantially on *De Natura* for their sceptical accounts of religion.[14] Blake focuses on classical attitudes to myth, therefore, in two key texts at the end of his career which reveal an ongoing dialectic between criticism and faith.

## Translation in Thornton's *The Lord's Prayer*

Between 1827 and mid-1828, Blake annotated *A New Translation of the Lord's Prayer* (1827) by his sometime patron Robert John Thornton. The annotations seem to have been a bravura performance for the entertainment of his friends.[15] His parody of Thornton's translation is primarily critical, strategically and satirically adopting Euhemerism:

> Our Father Augustus Caesar who art in these thy <Substantial Astronomical Telescopic> Heavens Holiness to thy Name <or Title & reverence to thy Shadow> Thy Kingship come upon Earth first & thence in Heaven. (E669)

This God's 'Kingship' arises on earth before in heaven, merging with Augustus's apotheosis. Blake burlesques Thornton's ridiculous attempt to add sublimity to God with decorous astronomical language: 'THOU, who dwellest in the highest of the HEAVENS [...] THY Will may be done upon the Earth, | as it is in the MANSIONS of Heaven'.[16] The comically verbose '<*Substantial Astronomical Telescopic*> *Heavens*' are a classical materialist heaven, the Urizenic stars to which the emperor's soul ascends, rather than the authentic spiritual heaven, the 'Treasures' of which Blake asserts are 'Mental Studies & Performances' (77, E231).

Yoking Thornton's God with Augustus, Blake reveals political domination lurking at the heart of Anglican state religion. As Roman emperor at the time of Jesus's birth, Augustus's kingdom was the worldly antithesis to Christ's. There is perhaps contemporary significance, as Augustus was George IV's second name and that of several of his brothers.

Blake foregrounds allegory in the conclusion of his parody:

> For thine is the Kingship <or Allegoric Godship> & the Power or War & the Glory or Law Ages after Ages in thy Descendents <for God is only an Allegory of Kings & nothing Else> Amen (E669)

Allegory projects, magnifies, and mythologises kings' political power, reinforcing their dominance the minds of their subjects. Priests are the agents of state religion which, as a medium of political power, concerns itself with material reality and thus is a form of natural religion:

> I Nature Hermaphroditic Priest & King Live in Real Substantial Natural Born Man & that Spirit is the Ghost of Matter or Nature & God is The Ghost of the Priest & King who Exist whereas God exists not except from [*them*] <their Effluvia>. (E669)

Blake's unusual references to ghosts here (and his earlier assertion that only 'Royal Gin is lawful spirit' (E668)) identifies another allegory, an impoverished understanding of 'Spirit' as merely vapours emitted by dead humans or matter. The annotations show that Blake's republican political commitment remained profound even in his last years. His animus against the power of the crown and High Church Anglicanism is consistent throughout his works. Blake seems to remain within the parameters of a Whiggish political tradition, but in contrast to contemporary

parliamentary Whigs he emphasises the political primacy of 'the people' in their widest sense and the radical implications of the right of resistance.

Blake's exaggeration of the already unwieldy translation outlines two distinct hermeneutic approaches to Christianity. Euhemerism is useful only insofar as it demystifies Thornton's God; his own version of the prayer, beginning 'Jesus our Father who art in <thy> Heaven<s> calld by

**Fig. 10.1** *Laocoön*, copy B (*c*.1826–27). Collection of Robert N. Essick. Copyright © 2015 William Blake Archive. Used with permission

thy Name the Holy Ghost' (E668), shows that the ridicule of Thornton's prayer clears a space in which authentic Christianity can emerge. The parody's ironic allusion to 'Jesus <that Evil one>' (E669) and the sarcasm with which its tenets are expressed imply a positive alternative: faith in communal being in the Divine Humanity.

## Classical Naturalism and *The Laocoön*

The late work usually referred to as *The Laocoön* (*c.*1825, Fig. 10.1) crystallises Blake's resistance to Euhemerist and naturalist hermeneutics. He revisited an earlier engraving of a cast of the statue, now surrounding it with a swirl of aphorisms.[17] Blake titled his design 'יה & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact. or. History of Ilium' (E273). This copy of a copy restores what he believes to be its lost Hebraic symbolism. Blake follows Pliny in attributing the Greek sculpture to the Rhodians Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus, but asserts that these Greek imitators misinterpreted and thereby impoverished the sublime spiritual meaning of the original by assuming it represented an episode in their own cultural history.

The Greek sculptors superimposed an incident later recounted in *The Aeneid* when the gods send two huge serpents to destroy the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons, to prevent him revealing that the wooden horse contained Greek warriors.[18] Blake's attack on classical Greek culture in *The Laocoön* therefore hinges on a distinction between hermeneutic premises. The design, 'applied to Natural Fact', becomes distorted, its mythopoeic and spiritual amplitude diminished. For Blake, the Greeks assimilated a Hebrew representation of eternal spiritual states to their own understanding of reality conceived of in primarily materialist terms and foregrounding martial history and individual heroism. Indeed, even the Greek image may have been suggestive to Blake; Laocoön is a prophet, able to discern what lies beneath the material surface of the horse. Ignored by his society to their detriment, he is crushed by the tyrannical Greek deities.

During the eighteenth century ancient Greeks were often accused of having distorted the cultures of other nations as they interpreted them, a claim made by writers as different as Bryant and Diderot.[19] By contrast to the Greek artists' culturally determined vision, Blake's engraving affirms what he regards as the group's universal meaning and sublime multiplicity. The aphorism circling יה or Laocoön's right hand asserts that 'The

Gods of Priam are the Cherubim of Moses & Solomon The Hosts of Heaven' (E274). Primarily, the title asserts that in their reproduction of ancient Hebrew art the Greeks contracted the myriad 'Hosts of Heaven' into their own worldview, dominated by aggressive gods and a history of war. But given Blake's association of the 'Hosts of Heaven' with Urizen in his poems, the aphorism may also suggest that the Cherubim in the temples of Moses and Solomon reflect a religion already at one remove from the Divine Vision.

In the context of these opposed interpretative frameworks, it is particularly significant that Blake portrays the Greek copyists interpreting the design in terms of 'Natural Fact'. This suggests he is concerned with a specific development in Greek thought, often referred to as 'Greek naturalism' following Aristotle's term for its adherents, *phusiologi*.[20] Aristotle identified Thales of Miletus (*c.*624–*c.*546 BC) as the originator of a new philosophy that defined itself against mythology, repudiating Homer and Hesiod, and instead embracing only that which could be rationally demonstrated. Anticipating Materialism, the Naturalists identified the deity with nature. Many Enlightenment philosophers modelled their own approach on classical naturalism, exemplified by Hume's enthusiasm for Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the first page of which he regards as 'the commencement of real history' because '[a]ll preceding narrations are so intermixed with fable, that philosophers ought to abandon them, in a great measure, to the embellishment of poets and orators'.[21] Blake's illuminated books resist this separation of natural and spiritual realms, immersing them in a mythical idiom which allows history and divine or spiritual agency to interact on the same plane.

Blake's *Laocoön* emphatically rejects Greek philosophy and culture. Its central concern is the distinction between an imaginative, mythological outlook and a Naturalist one: 'Satan's Wife The Goddess Nature is War & Misery & Heroism a Miser' (E273) while 'Israel deliverd from Egypt is Art deliverd from Nature & Imitation' (E274). The engraving promotes culture as the pre-eminent activity of human life: 'Jesus & his Disciples were all Artists' and 'Prayer is the Study of Art | Praise is the Practise of Art | Fasting &c. all relate to Art'. Nature and the Natural Man are art's antitheses. Culture for Blake is the means to foster the imagination, 'The Eternal Body of Man', which is 'The Divine Body | יש[ו]ע [Yeshua] JESUS we are his Members' (E273). Art is a principle of connection between humans and brings about a state of communal

being. Rather than representing the 'Natural Fact' of three individual Trojans, then, Blake's engraving remythologises the figures as a vision of mankind's collective struggle against the aggressive instincts of the individual Natural Man. By doing so, he elevates art into the primary means of man's deification.

## Blake's Allegory

In rejecting Greek 'Natural Fact. or. History of Ilium', Blake seems to have more in common with Plato than with Euhemerus when it comes to myth. Nevertheless, he resisted the abstract allegoresis of the Platonic tradition. Blake is frequently hostile to allegory, particularly classical allegory, when it denotes empty, non-human referents, whether 'allegoric riches' (6:18, E68) in 'Asia' or abstract concepts such as Chastity. In *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, he protests that 'Allegories are things that Relate to Moral Virtues Moral Virtues do not Exist they are Allegories & dissimulations' (E563). This refers to the tendency in much classical allegoresis to divide myths into their disposable narrative *mythos* and a more valuable philosophical *logos* contained within it. For Blake, this type of allegorical interpretation draws abstraction out of a more vital imaginative form: '<Fable is Allegory but what Critics call The Fable is Vision itself>' (E563).

Confusingly, however, Blake concedes that 'Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision' (E554). His poems have evident allegorical qualities. He described them in these terms to Butts in July 1803, discussing a 'Grand Poem', most likely *Milton* or *Jerusalem*, which he believed would 'speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory':

> Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry. it is also somewhat in the same manner defind by Plato. (E730)

Blake finds potential in allegory because it is non-mimetic and hence disrupts what appears to be 'natural' or self-evident reality. It thereby has the potential to thwart the mind from assimilating its perceptions to the Natural Man's 'Corporeal Understanding', which in effect makes a false allegory of eternal reality. In *The Laocoön* Blake emphasises that the Rhodian sculptors impose their own natural allegory on the sublime original. He makes a similar point in *A Vision of the Last Judgement*: 'What

it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty' (E565–66).[22] Blake's 'Sublime Allegory' educes the open-ended and utopian dimensions of myth. Ricoeur argues that 'the claim of the *logos* to rule over *mythos* is itself a mythical claim'.[23] The tendency for Blake's works to thwart rational explanation demands continuously new creative acts of interpretation that activate the 'Human Imagination', which is 'the Divine body of the Saviour' (E555).

Blake's reading practice and his own poems were significantly influenced by Swedenborg, whose readings of the Bible in its 'internal' or 'spiritual' sense enabled Blake to interpret its characters not as individuals and its narratives not as historical events, but rather as mythical visions of the eternal states of human existence. Blake believed Swedenborgian allegoresis was compromised by some conventional methods and assumptions, telling Robinson '*Swedenborg* was wrong in endeavour[g] to explain to the *rational* faculty what the reason cannot comprehend'.[24] Despite this, he seems to have been indebted to this approach to biblical interpretation. In the extended description of *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, Blake is explicit about his hermeneutics: he does not represent 'the Persons Moses & Abraham' but rather 'the States Signified by those Names the Individuals being representatives or Visions of those States as they were reveald to Mortal Man' (E556) in the Bible. Reading these figures as historical individuals produces a weak allegory of modes of eternal and collective human being within the Divine Vision.

As the revisions between the cancelled plates and final version of *America* suggest, Blake developed a mythical mode in which personifications remained stubbornly resistant to interpretation as specific individuals. The collective nature of myth reflects Blake's conviction that the momentous events of his time were driven by larger forces affecting multitudes of men. If they were to be represented adequately, these forces required an amplified, 'spiritual' mode which would capture their sublimity and dynamic relationships. Approaching Blake's poetry and designs through a Euhemerist hermeneutic frame reduces their rich and complex myths to a form of allegory denigrated in Blake's own writings. There is no doubt that Erdman's groundbreaking historicist scholarship in *Prophet Against Empire* has enormously enhanced our understanding of Blake and his texts in their political and historical context. The book remains essential reading. Nevertheless, as Mee has observed, Erdman

'has a tendency to identify the political dimension of the poetry and designs with the representation of historical events'.[25] In addition, he presupposes a Euhemerist hermeneutic, in which Blake's personifications allegorise historical individuals. For example, Rintrah is Pitt in *Europe*, Fuzon in *Ahania* equals Robespierre, and Satan in *Milton* is simultaneously William Hayley, Cromwell, and Napoleon.[26] Erdman does, however, concede that his readings are often tentative and he links the political allegories to other dimensions of the texts. While these readings introduce helpful stability and clarity into Blake's frequently bewildering texts, they can also diminish some of the fluidity and complexity of the mythical narratives. Political Euhemerism becomes the hermeneutic key to unlock the poetry.

Allegory is unavoidable if critics wish to present an account of Blake's texts with any lucidity and the present study is no exception. I hope, however, to have forestalled the impoverishing effect of Euhemerist allegoresis, which often assimilates the details of the poems into predetermined narratives. For example, Schuchard tortuously links the 'secret child' spoken of by a Kabbalistic oracle in Avignon in 1789 and reputedly trained in Rome to bring about the downfall of the Roman Catholic Church with the 'secret child' Orc in *America*, *Urizen*, and *Europe*.[27] This reading suggests Blake's primary referent is the historical activity of individuals in the European esoteric underworld; in so doing, it diminishes the amplitude of Orc's dense complex of associations with, among others, Jesus, Satan, the serpent, Esau, Adam, Ares and Mars, Prometheus, Dionysus, the element of fire, and sexual energy, all of which interact to overwhelm the reader's rational interpretative faculty.

As this book has argued, Blake partially draws on Euhemerist strategies, primarily in his poetry's efforts to demystify political superstition. The interpretative model he privileges, however, gives primacy to myth as a positive expression of communal states of being in the Divine Humanity. As I discussed particularly in relation to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, while Blake's illuminated books ultimately give precedence to the utopian dimensions of myth, they retain their critical animus as a necessary part of that movement towards utopia. The conclusion of *Jerusalem*, with the converse of 'Visionary forms dramatic' (98:28, E257) and the endless circulation of myriad and yet united immortal 'Human Forms' (99:1, E258), is perhaps, through its pulsating rhythms and proliferating images, his most successful intimation of regenerated human existence.

## Blake: A Misfit for Our Times

In part, the tragedy but also the triumph of Blake's myths may lie in their incongruity with the predominant reading practices of his contemporaries. The German historian Rolf Engelsing has argued that the end of the eighteenth century witnessed a 'reading revolution', marked by a shift from the regular and often communal 'intensive reading' of a small range of usually religious texts towards a more secular and individualised 'extensive reading', whereby a greater range of texts were read with a focus on their variety, novelty, and entertainment. Wittmann suggests that traditional intensive reading 'was increasingly regarded as obsolete and socially inferior'.[28] Engelsing's argument provides a generalised view of complex and uneven changes across different reading matter as well as countries, social classes, and interpretative communities. A number of historians have rightly challenged his assumptions and conclusions.[29] Nevertheless, the distinction between intensive and extensive reading is suggestive in relation to Blake's mythical illuminated books. Makdisi notes that as a producer of engraving he was in a 'privileged location' to consider the economic and political dimensions of Britain's rapid modernisation and 'transition to a consumer society'.[30] Blake was certainly aware of an expanding market for print culture; in July 1800 he observed to Cumberland that London had quickly become 'a City of Elegance in some degree' and that there were now 'as many Booksellers as there are Butchers & as many Printshops as of any other trade' (E706). His dense, fractured, and often opaque narratives and unfamiliar personifications throw up seemingly insuperable barriers for readers accustomed to assimilating new texts to a familiar horizon of expectations or to interpreting allegory structured by clearer equations between levels of meaning. Likewise, the illuminated books resist assimilation into the reading habits of a culture that increasingly valorised the consensus realism tending to underpin the novel. Blake's strange books appeal most to those willing and able to invest time and intensive interpretative effort, or equally those happy to suspend rational interpretation that seeks out a hidden *logos* and instead savour the pleasure and mysteries of the narrative *mythos*.

Further critical attention is needed on Blake's engagement with the public sphere, Whig discourse, and classical mythology in his works. Likewise, the narrative dynamics of Blake's illuminated books require further critical scrutiny. I hope, however, that this book has made a contribution

to understanding these areas and sketched out some possible directions future research might take.

The language of apotheosis remains remarkably enduring in the present: stars, celebrities, luminaries, and even the 'influential' (originally an astrological term for the effect on humans of ethereal fluid from the stars) engross widespread attention and have the aspirations of millions of people projected onto them. This forms a powerful cultural hierarchy that partly reflects material social and political structures of power. Blake's poetry and art critically oppose such structures of power, but he also recognises the deep appeal of the human aspiration to eminence and transcendence, harnessing its potential to a collective vision of human transformation. His mythology, while it may evade purely rational analysis, fascinates precisely because it plays a committed critical impulse against the utopian and mythical, producing something in excess of either and drawing its readers towards an imaginative state of transformation and the hope of participation in the Divine Humanity.

## Notes

1. See Feldman and Richardson, *Rise of Modern Mythology*, 301.
2. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 129, 155–57.
3. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 79.
4. Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 170.
5. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 89.
6. Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 70; see also 12.
7. Ricoeur, '"Original Sin"', 266.
8. Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 350–51.
9. See Gay, *Enlightenment*, xi, 295, and Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 278.
10. Ricoeur, 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds', 489–90.
11. *BR* 703.
12. See Fisher, 'Blake's Attack on the Classical Tradition'.
13. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 98, 145, 408.
14. See Fosl, 'Doubt and Divinity: Cicero's Influence on Hume's Religious Skepticism'.
15. Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 279–80.
16. Thornton, *Lord's Prayer*, 1.
17. *BR* 322–23.
18. Virgil, *Aeneid*, ii.51–74, 266–95.

19. See Bryant, *A New System*, I: 388, 431, 453, and Diderot, 'Grecs (philosophie des)' from the *Encyclopédie*, quoted in Gay, *Enlightenment*, 79.
20. For an overview, see Irwin, *Classical Thought*, 20–67.
21. Hume, *Essays and Treatises*, II, 223. See also Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 173; Gay, *Enlightenment*, 74.
22. For some key approaches to Blake on allegory, see Frye *FS* 9–11, 115–17, 383; Damon *BD* 17–18; Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art*, 24–39, 117–18; Mee *DE* 12–14, 18, 160; and Tambling, *Allegory*, 43–44, 73–76.
23. Ricoeur, 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds', 486.
24. *BR* 423. The comment may also be fairly applied to Blake criticism.
25. Mee *DE* 1–2.
26. *BPAE* 314–15, 423–32.
27. Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 255–56. See also Hobson, *Blake and Homosexuality*, 79–93, who interprets 'Satan fainted beneath the artillery' in *Milton* (5:2, E98) as King James's indecision and loss of the military advantage John Churchill sought against William of Orange.
28. Wittmann, 'Was there a Reading Revolution', 285, 286. See also Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*; Porter, *Enlightenment*, 76.
29. See Raven, 'New Reading Histories'; Outram, *Enlightenment*, 19–20; and Bannet, 'History of Reading'.
30. Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 9. For Blake's intensive reading of the Bible, see also Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 9.

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