

THE CONTRARIETY OF CREATIVE INNOCENCE
IN "THE BOOK OF THEL"

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this re-interpretation of "The Book of Thel" is twofold: to present a radically different view of the Virgin of the drama from the established one; and to employ this new interpretation of her function, within the cast of its poetic identity, to locate and consolidate discursively an understanding of the Blakean poetic ideal as "sublime allegory addressed to the intellectual powers." The prophetic voice, Blake vows, redefines the eighteenth century's understanding of the nature of allegory and the genesis of poetic inspiration. Except in Nancy Bogen's critical edition of "The Book of Thel" (1971), the history of "Thel" criticism viewed the Virgin as a hypocritical and self-deluded adolescent bent on naive question-begging.

The present thesis proposes that nowhere does the lyrical beauty of the poem disagree with the basic magnanimity and the unimposing nature of the Virgin's character. Furthermore, it advocates the necessity of retaining Blake's emphatic distinction between "states," which are mental categories of existence or perception, and individuals in those "states" to apprehend the meaning of Christian forgiveness. The narrative progression of the poem symbolizes Thel's intellectual journey towards an awakened, or self-conscious, understanding of the meaning of forgiveness. She is among the class of men Blake nominates the "Redeemed." Her task is not to learn the sorrowful consequences of what it means to be a mother but to awaken the unexplored regions of the fallen mind, the imagination that has become engulfed in the sensuality of physical existence, to a spiritual condition whereby the re-integrated sensibility of the "true man" completely reflects the life of the Holy Spirit.

This re-interpretation of the poem relies upon Blake's unrelenting attack against the tradition of natural perspective which had dominated the eighteenth century. Blake viewed the "lifeless sanity" of the perspectival school, championed by the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds, as the death and imprisonment of not only visionary and imaginative being but of humanity itself. He saw that a tyrannized submission to 'outward form,' or the chimerical aloofness of nature's impenetrability, resulted in the loss of man's essential divinity. Hence, a Druidic worship of nature amounted, for Blake, to a self-righteous glorification of man's satanic Selfhood, or a spurious image of humanity born of natural memory. Blake's conception of prophetic art implies a strict antinomianism. The prophetic voice is continually engaged in a re-definition of humanity. To accomplish this it must break down the established limits of form and imagination to make way for the appearance of a divine image of humanity which Blake calls "living form." Blake sees the continual death of God as the contrary, the inexorable 'other,' of the immortality of the human soul. The purpose of this re-interpretation of "Thel," therefore, is to outline the achievement of the poem in terms of Blake's attack against the tradition of the Natural.

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TEXTUAL NOTE

The following abbreviations of works by Blake have been used in the text.

ARO	"ALL RELIGIONS are ONE"
CC	"The Crystal Cabinet"
FZ	"THE FOUR ZOAS"
J	"JERUSALEM"
LBB	"The Little Black Boy"
M	"MILTON"
MHH	"THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL"
NNR	"THERE is NO NATURAL RELIGION" [a] and [b]
U	"THE BOOK of URIZEN"
VLJ	"A Vision of The Last Judgment"

CHAPTER I: PRELIMINARIES AND INTRODUCTION

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

(1 Corinthians 11:14)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

(11 Corinthians 11:5-6)

Blake's composite art was so far in advance of the intellectual climate of his age that he was forced to endure financial hardship throughout the greater part of his life. The handful of devout and faithful friends, some of them in little better financial position than himself, who used their influence to encourage patrons for Blake, brought him the greater part of his meagre economic success. In order to survive he had to undertake commercial enterprises which more often than not hindered the production of his own creations. Nevertheless, Blake remained prodigiously productive in the face of contingent adversity. The early period is marked by an enormous range of philosophical, religious, and artistic concerns, most of which he would orchestrate on an increasingly larger scale throughout his career. Oftentimes the dates of particular compositions overlap one another, Blake having been swept away into further areas of inspiration. He would return to the unfinished work as the vision engaged him. This is the reason it is difficult to read one Blake poem in isolation. The corpus in its entirety composes a compelling visionary 'system.' During the early period he was sometimes occupied with as many as three major undertakings at a time as well as his commercial commissions.

Blake's interpretation of the success of the American Revolution radically influenced his views of social apocalypse and psychological fulfillment. The subsequent political events in France and England during the late 1780's and early 1790's largely complied to determine his re-evaluation of Reason and Energy. The relatively self-sufficient religious prophecies of "Songs of Innocence" (1784) blossomed into the more flexible form of "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (1790-93) in order to minutely delineate the incarnate logic and bounding line of Energy itself. The political crises in Europe during these early years awakened in Blake a profound understanding of the deep schism in the nature of Reason.

At its best, Blake's reason is similar to the Renaissance notion of intuitive reason or apprehension: a divinely inspired consciousness of the potential divinity of man which can be realized through the liberation of Energy. More often, however, Blake's reason manifests itself as discursive reason or comprehension which operates through deductive or inductive processes to establish absolute laws¹ of being, laws which can then be enacted as repressive social codes.

The principle achievement of the early works is to distinguish between Reason and Energy as genuine contraries and fallen reason as a spectrous negation of Energy. It would seem that the body of Blake's early works depict the struggle to arrive at the startling moment when he will actually name the four great eternal. They are present in the early compositions in their embryonic states and the reader should be careful to apprehend the struggle each endures to emerge as a clearly identified entity. An exemplary case of this struggle may be seen in the contrariety of Reason and Energy.

¹ Anne Mellor, Blake's Human Form Divine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 45.

Reason is the force that draws a bounding line around Energy and thus makes possible the creation of an artistic image...Only when the expanding vector of Energy meets the contracting vector of reason can a stabilizing line be drawn and a form shaped.²

This understanding of Reason in its richest Renaissance meaning implies pure vision, the return of Urizen to his condition of contrariety with the eternal who will later be identified as Urthona. The spectre of fallen reason vanishes with the disappearance of a creation myth in the prophetic voice. "We say of the prophetic world that we could not possibly have made it; for, as the characteristic manner of prophetic poems drives us to assent, it was there already."³ Contrary to popular opinion, I will argue that unfallen Reason is the fundamental principle structuring the early works. Blake moves from a wholeness of religious vision with the early works deeper and deeper into the machinations of psychic fragmentation to discover in the later epic prophecies a grandly orchestrated avowal of the creative innocence of "Songs of Innocence." This is not to say that Blake did not suffer the same changes of head and heart to which we are all subject. It is to say that a man never changes his principles. Blake's corpus may be seen as an ever branching attempt to contain the contrariety of creative innocence, to render the human more human.

Blake's patient concern with Reason during the early period bears witness to the fact that he is working simultaneously from both sides of his material, the fallen and unfallen realms. The tension between

² Ibid., p. 48.

³ Roy Harvey Pearce, "Introduction" to Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: Facsimile Edition of the 1860 Text (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. xv.

thought and vision, innocence and experience, may be seen in terms of the conflict between visual outline and philosophical principle.

Between 1790 and 1795...Blake's poetic vision and philosophical principles came into conflict with his visual style. Philosophically, he began to question the social and political implications of a commitment to a self-sufficient religious vision. Since this closed vision had been visually associated with the framed compositions and bounding lines of Blake's early art, this also brought into question the nature and value of outline. Blake explicitly identified this bounding line with reason in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (1793): "Energy is the only life and is from₄ the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy."

I will argue that as early as 1789 Blake incorporated this conflict into his visual style, and with the composition of "Thel" mastered a clear vision of the outline of Energy itself which he would later orchestrate in terms of the "sweet Science" of the innate logic, the pure vision, of the heart. In other words, Blake achieves with "Thel" a binding of the infinite Energy of eternal form by means of a clear and minutely delineating outline. The outline is not the product of fallen reason but is an exhibition of Energy itself. This achievement marks Blake's philosophical success in revealing the infinitude of the mortal body. Outline is not only the means but the end of apprehending Energy. It is a transfiguration of mortality that mirrors potential divinity just as a transfiguration of perspective will be seen to mirror the potential of a prophetic dwelling within the anti-perspectival. In short, it is "a thought which sees ideas as perceptible forms and sees forms as intellectual signs."⁵ Blake's discovery of the unfallen contrariety of Reason

⁴ Mellor, p. xvi.

⁵ Octavio Paz, Claude Levi-Strauss: An Introduction, trans. J.S. and Maxine Bernstein (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 5.

and Energy signifies the transfiguration of perceptible forms into the types of identical existence. Contraries are not to be seen as exclusive opposites but as dialectically interpenetrating functions, which must be held in contrapuntal harmony, of a single act.

The early works compose an ordered continuum of related concerns. A brief summary of them will help to coherently position "Thel" in relation to the maturation of Blake's thought.⁶

As early as 1776 Blake composed a sketch in oils after Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment.' It shows a Herculean figure rising in self-annihilation. The act of self-annihilation becomes a fundamental religious principle, a subject of adoration, throughout Blake's work. The creative impulse towards the act of self-annihilation springs from an imaginative perception of contraries. The act of self-annihilation becomes, paradoxically, the sole entry into eternal life and a concrete apprehension of the "living form" of "the human form divine."

In 1780 Blake engraved the plate known as 'The Dance of Albion,' or 'Glad Day.' At the age of twenty-three he had mastered a firm apprehension of the eternal lineaments of the resurrected body. The 'Glad Day' design prophetically envisions the end of Blake's intellectual journey by mirroring the risen body of Christ, or the life of the unweisal creative Imagination, is an awakened Albion. Albion takes on the aspect of the 'Original of Prophecy' in this design. Blake's achievement here is a shattering of the finitude of natural perspective. The 'Glad Day' design

⁶ The chronological information of the following survey of Blake's early works relies for the most part on Ruthven Todd's, William Blake: the artist (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 9-37. Of course, the suggested association of each work mentioned with "Thel" is not taken from Todd.

will be seen to bear heavily on the achievement of plate IV of "The Book of Thel."

In 1783 Blake published "Poetical Sketches." Work on these had been progressing since 1770. They are a transformed version of the Hebrew prophetic poem. They venture beyond the Hebraic sublime by seeking a heightened sensibility in a new inwardness. Blake felt that the Hebrew prophets had foresaken the 'Source of Prophecy' in favour of the prophet. "Perhaps the unique freshness of "Poetical Sketches" can be epitomized by noting Blake's first achievements in the greatest of his projects: to give definite form to the strong workings of imagination that produced the cloudy sublime images of the earlier poets of sensibility." (E 886)⁷ These poems shadow forth the psychological doctrine of coexistent 'states-of-being' which would later become the most original aspect of Blake's mythology. (E 886)

In 1784 Blake wrote the incomplete satire "An Island in the Moon." This work shows his strong antipathy to the philosophical conceits of his day. At this early date Blake was well versed in the politics of fallen reason. He saw that a tyrannized adherence to the principles of positivism amounted to little more than the death and imprisonment of "living form." Perhaps the most entertaining aspect of "An Island in the Moon" is Blake's use of the instruments of natural reason to under-

⁷ All quotations of Blake (including Erdman's textual notes and Bloom's commentary) are from the text edited by David V. Erdman, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, commentary by Harold Bloom, 4th ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), copyright 1965 by David Erdman and Harold Bloom.

cut the foundation of that tradition.

1786 marks the production of a large sepia drawing of 'The Complaint of Job.' Blake would return to this theme to re-create, by illustrating, the entire Book of Job during his most mature period. In 1793 Blake published a revised state of 'The Complaint of Job.' These two compositions chronologically frame that of "Thel." Clearly Blake was greatly concerned with the bestowal of definite outline upon an image of human loss at the time of "Thel's" composition. In terms of the minute delineation of this motif, "The Book of Thel" may be seen as Blake's attempt to focus the human in the divine, to mirror the disappearance of the human in the appearance of the divine. Because of the nature of contrariety, this movement will be seen to entail its opposite and complimentary movement.

In 1788 Blake produced his first attempts in 'Illuminated Printing,' "There is No Natural Religion" and "All Religions are One." These didactic tractates poetically demonstrate the incongruity of the prevailing philosophical conceits of Blake's day. They celebrate the infinitude of human desire and the prophetic apprehension of contrariety necessary in order to participate in creative innocence. These first illuminated works prophetically invoke the universal presence of Blake's "Poetic Genius." The "Poetic Genius" is present to the "true Man's" self-consciousness of the infinitude of mortal desire.

The unengraved symbolical book, "Tiriel," appeared in 1789. Tiriel worships an outward manifestation of his divided selfhood as the form of God. As such, he bears the countenance of a leprous and aged tyrant. We shall see that the unimposing lament of the "gentle" virgin, Thel, counter-poses the aged leprousy of Tiriel's false doctrine. "Tiriel"

and "Thel" are usually seen as complimentary texts. Thel is discussed in terms of the hypocrite Tiriel. The present re-interpretation of "Thel" will argue that Thel's position is fundamentally opposed to that of Tiriel.

Blake published "Songs of Innocence" in this same year (1789) and also the title page plate of "Thel." It is more than likely that Blake did not complete "Thel" in the version we now know until 1791 or 1793. The "Songs of Innocence" will be seen to bear heavily on the achievement of "Thel" in that the Virgin learns, during the course of the dramatic narration of the poem, an experiential innocence born of spiritual cause. The plight of the Virgin re-opens the issue of man's "ancient innocence" and emphatically locates that innocence in the infinitude of man's revolutionary desire. The issue of man's "ancient innocence" attains a new significance in "Thel" as the prophetic narration reveals the plight of the human as identical and synonymous with the plight of the divine. By mirroring the plight of the divine in the human, Blake locates man's "ancient innocence" in the immortality of the mortal. Natural categories of time, space and causation are reorganized in a prophetic apprehension of an eternal present.

During this time (1789-90) Blake was engrossed in annotating Swedenborg's writings with great severity. Undoubtedly Blake's refutation of Swedenborgian mysticism affected the composition of "Thel." Blake felt that Swedenborg's metaphysical system was not only grounded in a doctrine of predestination but that it denied God as the Creator of man by placing Him in an inaccessible vacuum. Blake's task in "Thel" is to reclaim Swedenborg's inaccessible deity from its collapsed repose and to re-locate the divine in the human.

Between the years 1790 and 1793 Blake composed "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." "The Marriage" carries Blake's refutation of

Swedenborgian mysticism further. This work locates the dynamics of creative innocence in the genius of the human heart. Blake inverts Swedenborg's orders of spiritual agency. He constitutes the devils of poetic inspiration as the true messengers of divine love while rendering the angels of divine providence moral tyrants and fearful slaves of a cunning rationalism. This explosive work celebrating the contrariety of unbounded Energy and infernal delight perfectly marries philosophical principle and visual style. It achieves a casting aside of an extraneous metaphysics in order to redeem the contraries of unfallen Reason and Energy. Blake engraved the plates of "The Marriage" and possibly the last three plates of "Thel" at the same time. It will be seen that his concern with the renovation of the body in "The Marriage" surfaces as a more direct concern with the awakening of the spiritualized body in "Thel."

In 1791 Blake produced six illustrations for Mary Wollstonecraft's "Original Stories from Real Life" and a single plate, 'The Fertilization of Egypt,' for Erasmus Darwin's "The Botanic Garden." The first served to offer an impetus to Blake's formulation of the relations between the higher and lower forms of active intelligence by solidifying his prophetic apprehension of divine innocence. He saw that God is in the highest causes as well as the lowest effects. The second afforded Blake an insight into the fertility rituals of the natural cycle. Blake's keen and associative eye quickly transformed this information into "a sublime allegory addressed to the intellectual powers" with the composition of "Thel." This same year Blake may have begun work on engravings for Stuart and Revett's "Antiquities of Athens," and if so, he would have had access to some Greek well in advance of 1800, which is the usually accepted date he began teaching himself.

In 1793 Blake issued "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," "America," and the first state of "For Children: The Gates of Paradise." Critical exegesis of "Thel" has, for the most part, seen fit to consider the young Virgin, Thel, an abortive prefiguration of the accomplished virgin, Oothoon, in "Visions of the Daughters of Albion." The plights of the two virgins will be seen to be radically different during the course of the present reading of "Thel." "Visions" is a socially pronounced statement whereas "Thel" is a representation of the manifestations of divine creation and is directly concerned with the issue of the prophetic voice. "America" concentrates Blake's concern with rebellious desire in the figure of Orc. The Virgin, Thel, will be seen to embody Orc's fiery energy, but in a "gentle" manner, as not only Thel, but all the characters of the dramatization insist. The appearance of "For Children" in this year shows that Blake was concerned with the image of the Worm not only as a symbol of man in the grave but in relation to the issue of prophetic authorship as well. The Worm becomes a particularly fecund image. It embodies the contrary states of the soul and so is the sole hope of salvation. To raise the spiritual body of the Worm is to save the life of the universal creative Imagination from eternal death. The life of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon the self-consciousness of the Worm.

In 1794 Blake published "Europe." The Fairy of the delightful introductory plate to this prophecy gives voice to the tiny eyes and mouths suggestive of infant faces on a fold of Thel's gown on plate 2 of "Thel." As prophetic mentor, the vegetative fairy of the introductory plate to "Europe" re-integrates soul and world. His appearance marks

the moment of divine transgression against an inaccessible exteriority. He shows that "outward form" must be impregnated with the loving power of the prophetic imagination. The Fairy serves the similar function of dictatorial authority as the multiplying faces on the fold of Thel's gown and the worm siblings with whom the Worm shares his bed on plate 4.⁸ Blake's vision of the natural world had been impregnated with the alchemizing power of imagination long before he brought Milton back from an uneasy heaven in order to redeem the world. The soul cannot be redeemed without the simultaneous redemption of its contrary, the world. The muted faces in the designs of "Thel" foreshadow the moment when the vegetative Fairy will speak in "Europe."

1784 also marks the definitive binding of Urizen by Los, the 'Spirit of Prophecy' in time, in "The First Book of Urizen." In this book Blake minutely articulates the bounds of fallen reason so that error may be purged from human remembrance. Perhaps the most astonishing achievement of "The Book of Urizen" is its mirror structuring. As Los bestows a body upon falsehood he defines himself. A similar mirror structuring will be seen as the creative centre of the prophetic voice in "Thel." A shattering of Urizen's "fearful symmetry" will be seen to reveal the mainsprings of reality in language. Blake's spiritualized Nature involves a speaking into being of the risen body of Christ, the universal creative Imagination.

The "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" were issued jointly as a unified work "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" in 1794.

⁸ Erdman points out the existence of these tiny sibling faces on plates 2 and 4 of "Thel." "A gentle hint to the virgin Thel?" Erdman comments. See The Illuminated Blake (New York: Anchor Press, 1974), pp. 36, 38.

The individual poems composing the "Songs" must not be seen as exclusively emblematic of either one state or the other. Blake acknowledged as much when he decided to shift a poem of one state to another, as he did in several instances. They depict contrary states in that Innocence and Experience mutually interpenetrate. The "Songs" may be read time and time again, each reading awakening new criterion of thought as far as the experiential creativity of innocence is concerned. Each poem is a separate, highly polished mirror reflecting Innocence within Experience and Experience within Innocence. Together they compose the ground of Blake's system of Imagination in an inexorable contrariety. The present re-interpretation of "The Book of Thel" will argue that the narrative dramatization of the Virgin's intellectual journey is a continued interrogation by Blake into the nature of contrariety.

Finally, in 1794 Blake engraved the plate 'Ezekial: I take away from thee the Desire of thine Eyes.' This plate seems to be a companion plate to 'The Complaint of Job.' Clearly, even at this early date, Blake was concerned with the prophetic voice as a mythologized revelation of a futurism beyond desire, a futurism available to a prophetic apprehension of unfallen time which could be made wholly manifest in the present. The attainment and containment of prophetic futurity signifies the awakening of the corporeal understanding to an eternal present. In order to attain to a wholeness of creative perception restorative of human loss, Blake had to minutely delineate the infinitude of desire itself. Blake's composition of plate 6 of "The Book of Thel" is exactly this delineation. Only by gauging the extent of Albion's "blank misgivings" could the prophetic voice make visible the hallowed ground of a redeemed earthly paradise. Only by displaying the infinitude of human desire can the

prophetic voice redeem time in the bosom of eternity and reveal the nature of a genuine historical consciousness.

"The Book of Thel," then, is framed by interrelating religious, philosophical, and artistic concerns which determine one another and consistently expand throughout Blake's entire corpus. With these associations in mind we can move to a consideration of the chronological difficulties surrounding the composition of "Thel."

The title page (plate 11) bears Blake's signature and the year 1789. Recent evidence exists to suggest that although 1789 is the year in which Blake engraved the title page plate and possibly the first five plates of text, he could have begun work on the poem as early as 1787 and returned to it as late as 1815 or later to make revisions. Keynes and Erdman present inclusive dates of 1789 to 1793 and 1789 to 1791 respectively. There are several textual differences between the seventeen extant copies of the poem, including major deletions administered to the final two. These final copies of "Thel" bear the watermark 1815. Blake gouged lines 19 and 20 of plate 6 from these copies and replaced them with "figures of a man with a cane on a cloud-line and a gowned woman soaring; perhaps an ironic response to persons who asked Blake to erase references to the boy's "tender curb" and the girl's "curtain of flesh."⁹ The religiously artistic (for Blake did not divorce the essential religiosity of perception from the business of creation) intention of the author is obviously modified by any change between text and text. Therefore it becomes important to determine as closely as possible the actual date of composition of each plate as well as the execution of each copy in order

⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

to be able to grasp the maturation of Blake's thought as it is made manifest by the prophetic continuity of the poem.

"Thel" consists of eight plates in all: "Thel's Motto" (plate i), the title page or frontispiece (plate ii), and the body of the text (plates 1-6). In several editions the "Motto" is placed after the last plate of text. Nancy Bogen, who has edited a critical facsimile of "The Book of Thel" based on a collation of the seventeen originals, explains the chronological order of composition of each plate:

Only the date 1789 is given, and it appears on the title page. It probably corresponds to the time of composition rather than execution of the plates because a deleted line of "Tiriel" (l. 370) appears as the last two lines of "Thel's Motto," and "Tiriel" is generally dated 1789. But since "Thel's" opening lines (l. 6-14) concern the "children of the spring" who are "born to smile & fall," the poem may conceivably have been commenced as early as February 1787, when Blake's much loved brother Robert died in his early twenties. As for the date Blake finished the plates of "Thel," there is good reason to believe that this occurred after 1789, possibly as late as 1791. The lettering of the text is cursive, and thus the plates postdate "Songs of Innocence," whose title page is also dated 1789 but whose lettering is roman, except for "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," which is generally believed to be a late addition. As it happens, the cursive characters of plates 1-5 of "Thel" resemble those of the latter, whereas the cursive characters of plates 1 and 6 are larger and more uniformly slanted, like those of "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), and gave the 'g' with the serif on the left side that David V. Erdman claims Blake introduced into his work about 1791. It would appear, then, that plates 1 and 6 were executed independently of plates 4 and 5. First, the printing of plates 1, 2, and 3 is uniformly poorer than that of plates 4 and 5, and more often than not Blake had to retouch the printed page of the first three. Second, the lettering on plate 4 is different; a good many of the lines of text have a downward slant, and the words tend to be larger on the right-hand side of the page. On plates 1, 2, and 3, however, the lines are uniformly horizontal, and when a word on the right-hand side is larger (as a few of them are), it is hardly perceptible.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nancy Bogen, ed., William Blake: The Book of Thel A Facsimile and a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 3.

It is reasonable to assert that Blake etched the engravings of "Thel" between the years 1789 and 1791. However, it should not pass unnoticed that no earlier than 1815 he performed a major revision to plate 6 by deleting lines 19 and 20. 1789 marks the composition of the title page plate and plates 1-3 which differ in tone from plates 4 and 5. These last two no doubt followed soon after. It is important to acknowledge any brief lapse in time since the structural continuity of the poem as a whole depends heavily upon the revitalization of the image of the Clay and its action as a progression from the relatively singular perspectives of the Lilly and Cloud. In accord with the multiple perspective on which the poem's structure is based, the confrontation between Thel and the Worm, and Thel, the Worm, and the Clay offers a simultaneous descent and ascent of the soul very different to the innocent perspectival stances of plates 1-3 and from the spiritual existentialism of plate 6 again. Plates 4 and 5, in other words, act as a pivotal transition introducing the anti-perspectival. The year 1791 probably marks the composition of the present version of plate 6 as well as "Thel's Motto." But since plate 6 directly introduces the contrariety of creative innocence in terms of an extreme contingency, it is possible that it was composed as late as 1793, a year before "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" appeared. If plate 6 does indeed replace an earlier "Innocence" version, as Erdman suggests,¹¹ then the poem as a whole, as we now have it, achieves a harmonious rendering of the contrariety of innocence and experience indicative of the more mature Blake. In any case, the indisputable two years between the

¹¹ Cf. "Queries," Blake Newsletter, 11 (15 Sept. 1968), 24.

composition of the title page plate and plate 6 should be kept in mind as bearing on the qualitative measure of the perfect control exerted by the poem's structure.

It would seem of crucial importance to note that Blake deleted lines 19 and 20 on plate 6 -- "Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy! / Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?" -- in 1815 at the earliest. These lines, as we shall see, achieve a searing strength of imaginative conviction far in advance of the particularized statement of lines 11 to 18. They embody the prophet's most direct misgivings with Platonism as regards a poetics making visible "Spiritual Mystery."

(VLJ E 545) Nancy Bogen suggests:

Since those lines are preceded by a passage on the corruption of the senses (6:11-18), Blake may well have deleted them to give more emphasis to the passage, the idea being that particular forms of restraint, like sexual inhibition, are included in the general condemnation of restraint. On the other hand, he may have recognized the inconsistency of following the general condemnation with a complaint about a particular form of restraint. Similar passages on the senses in later works (e.g. "Jerusalem" 49:34-41) omit specific reference to the sexual. Blake never lost his antipathy to organized religion and the inhibited wretches that it spawned, but sometime after the turn of the century ultimate value and the possibility of fulfillment shifted in his works away from the ¹²objective world and its delights to imagination and eternity.

I will suggest quite the opposite; that lines 11 to 18 are possibly the greatest example in English literature of a particularized account of the resurrected senses married in existential delight, and that lines 19 and 20 propose an imaginative transition from the particularized sensuality of the awakened body to the universalized forms in which the poetical imagination necessarily dwells. They are profoundly unambiguous, born of a prophetic celebration that could only spring from a woeful defining

¹² Bogen, p. 8.

of the fallen order of thought as that order is discovered anew in the cosmology of forgiveness that characterizes Edenic perception. This is the deepest meaning of fourfold Edenic wholeness: it remains a futurism. Blake was to add a rather curious statement to plate 6 of "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell":

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss

This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter or Desire that Reason may have Ideas to build on, the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire. Know that after Christs death, he became Jehovah. (E 34-5 Underlining added)

I would suggest that lines 19 and 20 of plate 6 embody the reorganization of a spiritualized Nature so completely interwoven with the narcissism of love and dismissive of the fallen anxieties of fear and doubt that their complexity could not be supported by the realized motifs of the poem. In other words, these lines are inherent in the prophetic articulation of the anti-perspectival which is the achievement of the poem but their direct emergence on plate 6 carries its supportive structure beyond the poem and into the labour of the larger epics, especially "Milton" and "Jerusalem." Blake would wrestle with the engulfing sensuality of thought as poetical thinking throughout his entire career. In "Thel" the sexuality of generation provides an analogy of the method of prophetic composition. Blake alchemically transfigures the sexuality of the symbol into the forms of eternal existence; or rather, he depicts a spiritualized Nature as the eternal multiplicity of the risen Christ. "In his copy of Swedenborg's "Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom" (London 1788) p 286, Blake underlined words in a passage especially relevant to "Thel": "for the Image of Creation is Spiritual, nevertheless that it may appear, and furnish Use in the

natural World, ...it must be clothed in Matter." See K 95."¹³ Blake was well aware of how man is seduced by his symbols. For this reason he placed the "Motto" at the end of several copies of the poem. The "Motto" serves as a mythic vehicle to re-open the function of the symbol. Indeed, lines 19 and 20 of plate 6 may have been deleted because the addition of the "Motto" provides a similar universalization of the fecundity of thought.

"The Book of Thel" was the first prophetic work to be issued by Blake as an illuminated manuscript. The text and illuminations are complementary and to study one exclusively is to run the risk of rendering the wholeness of Blake's prophetic imagination incomplete. The development of his process of "Illuminated Printing" is inseparable from the development of his thought because of the simultaneity in the prophetic of the conception of thought and the execution of vision. Blake saw eternal forms as historical realities. Recent scholarship has become more amenable to the parallel importance of the illumination, hence wider and deeper significations of each work as a whole are emerging.

The illuminations may be read as a text unto themselves in many cases. They not only complement the written text but guide it. The colour of Thel's dress changes not only from copy to copy but often from design to design within each copy as well. The colour variations include pale yellow, pale greenish yellow, pale bluish green, purplish red, pale blue, bright pink, light bluish green, light grayish pink, to a vivid yellow in the later copies. Clearly, Blake's conception

¹³ Michael Tolley, "The Book of Thel" and "Night Thoughts," Bulletin of the New York Public Library 69 (1965):375-85.

of Thel was anything but static. The poem was not conceived as a piece of moral mongering. Erdman believes that the variations in colour scheme from copy to copy are of little consequence to a just reading of "Thel."¹⁴ Since the colour of the dress alternates between a varying paleness and a robust and lively yellow, I would suggest that Blake came to view Thel more and more as a human being, whereas initially she had been conceived as a sublime receptacle of divine creation. The changes in colour scheme show that Blake became increasingly resolute as to the relation between man and God. Thel's dilemma surfaced more and more as the struggle of the human to become more human.

Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness But God is a man not because he is so perciev'd by man but because he is the creator of man (E 592).

Thel became more human by becoming the Spirit or Original of Prophecy.

"Thel" may be regarded as an epitome of the contrariety of the soul, as Blake's profound interrogation of the commitment and obedience of the prophetic in the face of the absence of authority. It is a transitional piece between "Songs of Innocence," and the later "Songs of Experience" and "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." The achievement of its graceful beauty is a delicate delineation of how the contrariety of the soul permeates and governs the four stages of perception proper to human existence. The contrapuntal harmony of innocence and experience is discovered in the prophetic articulation of "Thel's" epic cosmology of mutual forgiveness wherein innocence and experience ceaselessly seek

¹⁴ Cf. The Illuminated Blake, p. 33.

annihilation in one another's embrace. "Thel" interrogates the religious ground of perception as a mental creation, and by so doing re-opens the prophetic as an intellectual mode of abandoning the manacles of psychological mystification. With "Thel" Blake advances from the conventional, albeit emphatic, use of perspective in the "Songs" to an understanding of multiple perspective as the governing principle of structure and as a method of arriving at the anti-perspectival, the prophetic renunciation of ownership and assurance of identity. It is this shattering of perspective that affords the overcoming of natural limitation which signifies the advent of a prophetic delineation of genuine contraries. The structural pivot of "Thel" may be said to lie between contrary perspectives, issuing from the silence created by the speaking voice, "a progressive conflict of contrary perceptions in which 'Opposition is true Friendship'."¹⁵ The ultimate concern of the poem comes to rest in an interrogation of the dynamics of the anti-perspectival as the condition of fourfold perception or Edenic existence, for Blake's thought seeks the reunification of the emanations of Albion to form the "true Man" (ARO E 2) who is the Poetic Genius and the Spirit of Prophecy. By means of a definitive delineation of a cosmological forgiveness and the development of his technique of mirror inversing, Blake is able to discover an analogue of the prophetic process within the world of generation permitting him an articulation of regeneration. He is able to articulate the sameness of that which is above and that which is below, to marry heaven which is infernal delight with hell which is unbounded energy.

¹⁵ Susan Fox, Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 20.

The shattering of natural perspective provides for the prophetic substantiation of the memory which lies between man and man as an unfathomable chaos, while it is also an entry into an understanding of the eternal lineaments of the "true Man" as the individual who passes through states which themselves remain forever. "Thel" seeks the eternal identity of individuality and therefore must make manifest the contrariety of the humanity-divinity poles in order to determine the source of the prophetic. The immediacy of the redeeming power of the anti-perspectival characteristic of prophetic language, which is the signature of the divine, is

the achievement of a "new heaven and a new earth," not as eschatological catastrophe and recreation, but as the recreation that occurs in every moment of every day, when the Newtonian voids are filled with the life of the Spirit, and Time is seen as "the mercy of Eternity."¹⁶

To make visible unfallen Time is the labour of the prophetic, and its achievement is the visibility of the sacred ground of the anti-perspectival.

The mirroring of Thel's departure from eternality is not a retreat from passionate imaginative activity but an inverting of the incarnate logic of poetical thinking within the context of a reorganization of fallen time. The prophetic language ushers the reader inside a "Time less than a pulsation of the artery" which is "equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years. / For in this Period the Poets Work is Done" (M 28:62-3 29:1 E 126) to discover the genesis of the "true Man" in the contrariety of the soul. The prophetic method is a making visible of absence, of human loss. As such Thel passes through a series

¹⁶ Florence Sandler, "The Iconoclastic Enterprise: Blake's Critique of Milton's Religion," Blake Studies, 5, No. 1 (1972), p. 21.

of direct confrontations with the 'other' of her present state. Her lament is nothing short of a prophetic pose by which to interrogate the anti-perspectival as a mode of reuniting the human and the divine. I will argue that, finally, Thel does not leave Eden. The condition of Edenic wholeness is not an abstraction but is within the individual as the sole passage to community. The outward form of Eden blossoms as the individual engages more fiercely in loving intellectual warfare. If Thel can be seen as remaining in Eden throughout, then the prophetic narrative of the poem may be seen as attempting to show how Eden becomes Eden, how eternal form is named.

The present reading of "Thel" will therefore encourage a view of the elusive figure of Thel as Virgin Bride. She is supported by the contraries of fallen time as the soul's lost 'other' and Time as "the mercy of Eternity." These contraries involve a further contrariety: fallen time is "the mercy of Eternity" and Time, as eternality, is the soul's lost 'other'. Thel becomes the true Bride of Christ in the existential condition of the absence of authority. The supportive language of the prophetic discovers in her the image of Christ, thereby endowing her with the status of the Original of Prophecy. She is the first representation of the figure of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the Bride, speaks to Vala of her former unfallen relations with Jehovah as Lamb.

The Lamb of God reciev'd me in his arms he smil'd upon us;
 He made me his Bride & Wife: he gave thee to Albion.
 Then was a time of love: O why is it passed away? (J 20:39-41 E 164)

This unfallen relation between Jerusalem and Jehovah is not only past but its mythologized content exists as a futurism as well. It signifies the potential humanization of the "inmost Form" (CC E 480) of an eternal present. "Thel" is to be seen, then, as a prophetic pose undertaken to

resurrect not fallen man but fallen God. The prophetic is a revelation of the eternal. Prophetic futurity is to be seen as the opening of the eternal lineaments of the human form from fallen time itself. "The Book of Thel" composes Blake's first statement of the problem of Vala or love in the fallen world. Luvah (I have Loved) is named for the first time (3:8). To dismiss Thel's lament as the "pale religious litchery" of virginity is to miss the point entirely, since she begins her experiences as one of Blake's much favoured whores. In terms of the unfallen realm the language of prophecy seeks the purity of chastened love in Blake even more fiercely than it had done in his predecessors.

In the perspective of the English literary tradition, Blake has been following on where Spenser and Milton went before, defining the chaste love of the Garden of Adonis against the impurity of the Bower of Bliss, finding his own conception of the married love of Eden that distinguishes it both from the bestiality of Comus and-- what is to Blake's mind no less reprehensible -- the Lady's sage and serious doctrine of Virginity. In "Milton," Blake uses the word "Chastity" (as he uses the word "Atonement") in the pejorative sense. But that should not distract us from the essential continuity of Blake's poem with the great works of Milton and Spenser which also present a chastened love, and which also acknowledge -- though not as consistently as Blake required -- that the chaste love is not exclusive, but that it embraces the Bride as multitude, and finds in her all Nature transfigured. Milton and Spenser, like Blake, had worked under the impact of the vision in the Apocalypse of St. John where all heaven and earth has reached At-one-ment in the Marriage of the Lamb and his Bride.¹⁷

Blake departs from the established accounts of chastened love only to reorganize the religiosity of perception and then return with a transfiguring account of chastened love that is able to contain the contrariety of imagination. The appearance of unfallen Vala is dependent upon his

17 Ibid., p. 47.

reconciliation with fallen Tharmas.

The controversial ending of the poem must be construed not in terms of Thel's fearful retreat to a land of pre-existence, for neither the vales of Har nor the realm of Mne Seraphim depict a strange and objective world set apart from the contrariety of true marriage. Thel's shriek and subsequent departure will be seen as analogous of the refusal of the prophetic voice to accept an apocalyptic revelation bearing the taint of sorrow. The ending is to be seen as the struggle of the prophetic process to release itself entirely from the known and the decay of memory. That struggle takes place within the highest as well as the lowest stage of perception. The prophetic reveals itself as a self-critical, self-consuming art in accordance with its discovery of the eternality of forgiveness. In this sense, we shall see that "Thel's" ending constitutes one of Blake's greatest imaginative successes. It provides for the resurrection of possibilities, the re-opening of the prophetic voice as a mode of discoursing the eternality of process. David Erdman suggests "that when he [the reader] reads the last page he must look back and alter his view of the preceding pages."¹⁸ "Thel's" ending may be seen as a negative, a mirror reversal, of "Jerusalem's" conclusion where "All Human Forms" are "identified." (99:1 E 256) Both endings are born of the same imaginative impulse, a celebration of the infinitude of human desire. They insist that the prophetic voice remain a minute delineation of contrariety.

If the ending of the poem can be seen as a return to the beginning, the narrative structure of the poem parallels the movement of the whirlwind,

¹⁸ "Queries," Blake Newsletter, 11 (15 Sept. 1968), 24.

the dramatization through Lilly, Cloud, and Worm depicts the threefold "still perceptions" of potential divinity, and the pure vision articulated by the "voice of sorrow" signifies the final apotheosis of the "Sleeping Body." Thel's departure suggests a shattering of the "inmost Form" of the resurrected body, the image of images, and the reader is returned to the Motto's re-opening rhetoric of revolution. Thus the structure of the poem represents the movement of a wind blowing from eternity which serves to inform and animate the events of time.

Although "Thel" is considered one of the most readable of Blake's works, interpretations vary so drastically that it is necessary to make clear sense of its narrative direction. I shall proceed by examining certain passages within each plate which focus Blake's attack against the tradition of the naturalists.

A few preliminary observations concerning the exact nature of contrariety would prove advantageous to this re-interpretation of "Thel." Throughout his career, Blake's inspiration lies chiefly in the uncovering of contraries. The poet's prophetic eye is forever on the 'other' of any given intellectual state, and hence his enormous concern with the emanation. Blake's profound celebration of the human imagination cannot be regarded too closely. It is the imagination, that vehicle of whatever is possible to be believed, which unlocks the appearance of contraries.

The imagination, as Blake's system makes clear, does not do away with the conflicts and contraries of human life, for "without contraries is no progression" (MHH 3 K149); quite the opposite, it does away with their negations, which make the conflicts insoluble. For example, reason, for Blake, attempts to negate passion; in so doing, it insures that passion will be rebellious and perverse, and

war, heightened conflict and destruction, will be the result of over-rational order. Blake's faith is a denial only of the occult; there is nothing that is secret, there is only that which the mind has neglected or feared to regard. The belief that man is capable of coping with his contraries and of creating a culture which contains them harmoniously is simply the faith that man is capable of becoming everything that he potentially is, and that what he potentially is, is all he needs to be. The only thing debased in man, for Blake, then, is the denial of his own human nature, a nature which is neither corporeal nor disembodied spirit, but both -- Jesus, as he would say, or the imagination. ¹⁹

The imagination, Blake's principle of life, is generated by the existence of contraries. Each individual is, and partakes of, imagination. The historical Jesus is fully present wherever there is suffering. This complete identification of the historical with the eternal constitutes the foundation of Blake's radical Christian vision. Through it he is provided with the means of banishing guilt and doubt from the sphere of the imagination. The genuine historical understanding is enabled to perceive the presence of the resurrected body of Christ in the world of generation.

The imagination gives birth to, and is nourished by, the appearance of contraries. The imaginative man struggles towards an ever more complete vision of the "true Man." His task partakes of the nature of the eternal. Eternality may be seen as a dwelling within the processive nature of the life of the imagination. The eternal and the historical are revealed simultaneously. In Blake's prophetic poetry the eternal takes on the aspect of the fullness of the temporal; it becomes an ever

¹⁹ Eleanor Wilner, Gathering the Winds: Visionary Imagination and Radical Transformation of Self and Society (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 51-2.

blossoming stance in relation to the realm of infinite potential. The prophetic conception of the nature of eternity announces the unveiling of the pernicious codes of destination and pre-ordainment. A genuine dwelling within the body of Christ becomes a participation in man's primordial freedom.

Blake conceived of eternity as a dynamic multiple, and not as a static abstraction inaccessibly divorced from the powers of the human imagination. The dynamism of eternity functions as the inspiration of the holy "Thunders of Thought." (J 3:6 E 144) This is illustrated, for example, by the "Preludium To The (First) Book of Urizen."

Eternals I hear your call gladly.
 Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
 To unfold your dark visions of torment.
 (2:5-7 E 69)

Blake's secretarial style of reporting positions the Eternals as the awakened faculties of the resurrected body. The source of inspiration is here the "true Man" who embodies the ancient oracle of Desire by seeking reconciliation with his departed emanations. He is the Source of Prophecy in Blake's ever branching mythology and the harbinger of the maiden vision. Eternity, as a perspective, is artificially isolated in order to delineate the minute proportions of the "true Man." The "true Man" is the bright reflection of the shadow that is fallen man in time. He acts as the creator of man, the redeemer of God and the infinite. The "true Man" is composed of four great eternals who live in mutual interdependence without absorbing one another: Urizen, the plow; Tharmas, the sheepfold; Luvah, the loom; and Urthona, the blacksmith. The appearance of the "true Man" signifies the bestowal of epic proportion

upon the fallen orders of time and space so that the infinite is returned to the finite and the finite may be seen in its fourfold aspect of shining from within. Blake writes in "Milton" that "Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light." (l 10:16 E103) The appearance of the "true Man" simultaneously signifies the return of the genus of external nature to the incarnate science of the heart, thus rendering "every particle of dust" that "breathes forth its joy" (E 111:18 E59) a jewel of the human soul. The prophetic method seeks to realign world and soul without drinking up man's primordial condition of desire in a synthesis of contraries. Contraries must always mutually exist. The composition of epic proportion signifying the appearance of spiritual beauty must be seen as the ceaseless labour of the prophetic, for by definition the prophetic is always a futuristic epistemology.

As none by travelling over known lands can find ou the unknown.
So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more.
therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists (ARO E2).

The prophetic, as a naming of eternal form, is a futurism grounded in the identification of incarnation and transfiguration, transience and transcendence.

Blake's work is finally meaningless apart from its ability to evoke the presence of a human and imaginative Eternity in the concrete moments of real time.

When Blake says that the ruins of time build mansions in Eternity, he can only be speaking from the perspective of a kenotic understanding of the Creation: not only is Eternity present in the ruins of time, but Eternity is also enhanced and expanded by the seemingly destructive process of temporal duration. Eternity empties itself and becomes time so that time itself might lead Eternity to its goal. Refusing to imagine time as an aged man, Blake always insisted upon personifying it as an eternal youth, a youth who is the "Spirit of Prophecy" and the deliverer of the deadening inertia of a one-dimensional matter:

Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Time's swiftness,
Which is the swiftest of all things, all were eternal torment.²⁰

The "true Man" is the principle of creation. His appearance is always a becoming. Creation is to be seen as perpetual transfiguration. "In alchemy, meretrix the whore is the prima materia, the dark or unconscious corpus imperfectum that must be redeemed."²¹ Fallen man bears the same relationship to the "true Man" in that the one contains the other. The appearance of the "true Man" signifies the revelation of the interpersonal nature of individuality so that the universal creative imagination may be made visible. His infinitude dialectically passes into a composition of the resounding infinity of the finite, since infinity is construed by Blake as an entry into the process of the continuation of the Devourer and the Prolific, which in turn is a manifestation of his central principle of Self-Annihilation. The principle of Self-Annihilation consists of a continual purification of perception, a casting aside of the fallen man's reasoned construction of an image of the Selfhood in isolated finality. Ownership and assurance of fallen identity is seen by Blake as the negation of genuine contraries.

'Negation' is unnecessary; but the existence of the contraries, the active 'Devourer' or 'Desire', is essential for the creation of the contrary portion of the 'Prolific',

'Some will say: "Is not God alone the Prolific?" I answer:
"God only Acts and Is, in existing beings or Men."

²⁰ Thomas J.J. Altizer, The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1967), pp. 93-4.

²¹ Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue With History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 46.

Here Blake gives a human form to the heavenly God of the priest. In his "Annotations to Reynolds," he writes: "...I always thought that the Human Mind was the most Prolific of All Things & Inexhaustible..."²²

Blake was very much a part of his age. His entire vision is grounded in a renunciation of the time in which he found himself. And this renunciation becomes the key to an understanding of his universal process of Self-Annihilation. The newly risen body must continually be cast off to allow for the advent of the sacred.

The divine aspect of the human is therefore Desire. According to Blake's poetical thinking, Desire is more than a quality or an individual trait of personality. It is a concrete method of progression based in the existent contrariety of creation as the appearance of "Living Form." (M 1 3:2 E96)

Contraries are creative oppositions, necessary if existence is to be Human, which for Blake means "Poetic or Prophetic" as much as "Philosophic & Experimental." The Human, standing still, becomes the wholly natural "unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." Progression means to become more Human, and the final mark of such development is to marry all contraries together without reconciling them. Blake's dialectic has no synthesis or transcending of contraries, but seeks a mutual immanence of creative strife, an exuberant becoming. Marriage means so placing the contraries of Reason and Energy that they cannot absorb and yet do not reject one another.²³

The appearance of spiritual beauty, which, in terms of the labour of the prophetic, is a naming of the "Living Form" of eternal identity, is dependent upon the contrariety of consciousness and the source of consciousness as a constant struggle towards mutual forgiveness. The

²² G.R. Sabri-Tabrizi, The 'Heaven' and 'Hell' Of William Blake (New York International Publishers, 1973), p. 180.

²³ Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 66.

desired source of consciousness perennially takes the form of the departed beloved.

Blake's dialectical stance, with its apotheosis of the physical and its simultaneous rejection of the merely natural, is most frequently misunderstood...Against the supernaturalist, Blake asserts the reality of the body as being all of the soul that the five senses can perceive. Against the naturalists, he asserts the greater reality of the imaginative over the given body. The naturalist or vitalist, in Blake's view, teaches heat without light; the orthodox theist wants light without heat. Blake insists upon both, and finds his image of consummated marriage between the two in poetic genius or imagination.²⁴

Blakean dialectics progresses in linear fashion towards an ever increasing humanization of all that is exterior without seeking a finality apart from the eternality of process.

The "Living Form" of the eternal, as an actualization of multiplicity, is both the beginning and the end of Blake's dramatization of a wholeness of intellectuality. The making visible of "Living Form" is the task of the prophetic as a casting aside of "the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration." "Living Form" can only exist as a tension between contraries. (M 2 41:4 E141) The prophetic task takes on a profound ambiguity when it is realized that native to the language of prophecy is an unavoidable tension between the prophetic as discovery and as creation. The contradiction is construed amiss, however, for the eternal, according to Blake, lies in a dialectical interplay of these contraries. "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is". (NNR [b] E2) Eternity is to be seen as the labour of the "true Man" by which the strictly human is married in contrapuntal harmony with its

²⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

immediate other, the strictly divine. The human becomes more human in its astonishment at the emergence of a new Selfhood.

Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a new Selfhood continually, & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary. (J 52 E 198)

Man is "altogether an Evil" in that his earthly lineaments remain dark and unknown in accord with his infinite proportion. The prophetic voice is never the voice of accusation. To witness the birth of the New Selfhood is to explore man's native infinitude. The eternal acts as a process of immanence transfiguring the present. As incessant creative activity it returns the human to the divine, and vice versa. When the insufflationary measures of the prophetic voice are divorced from the eternality of process, the divine is disparaged.

Eternity shudder'd when they saw,
Man begetting his likeness,
On his own divided image. (U19:14-16 E78)

Here again, eternity is seen as a dynamic multiple. To erect an image born of the decay of the Selfhood is to forsake the contrariety of the human condition. The eternal becomes the champion of "Living Form," a labouring to reunite the fallen emanations of the inchoate sleeping giant, Albion, with the minute lineaments of the "true Man." It is a futuristic mode of intellectuality wrestling to image the "Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour the True Vine of Eternity" (VLJ E545) within the world of generation. As such, the eternal becomes a cyclic vision in the fallen order of time and space, while it remains a linear progression in the unfallen realm of the spiritualized body.

An essential tension in the prophetic is the making of a human image capable of sustaining contraries. Blake writes:

Think of a white cloud. as being holy you cannot love it but think of a holy man within the cloud love springs up in your thought. for to think of holiness distinct from man is impossible to the affections. Thought alone can make monsters, but the affections cannot (E593).

The natural man erects a non-human image from the divided Selfhood whereas the imaginative Titan creates a human image revelational of contraries.

The making visible of contrariety signifies the disappearance of an externalized space-time tyranny, an opening of the eternality of process.

The breaking through of imaginative power in man is his legitimate Genesis story; it is the humanization of nature, rather than the dehumanization of man by "natural religion." If man does not create a world in his own image then he remains a fear-ridden alien in an oceanic world of time and space designed merely to obliterate the traces of his footprints. The "new heaven, new earth" of Blake's vision is, in fact, the projection onto the cosmos itself of deep consciousness; the internal homeostatic rhythms of the body, the systole and diastole of its heart, the fires of its internal heat, the organs of its senses, the rivers of its blood, the luminosity of mind are directly perceived as unified form, perceived so powerfully that they are no longer felt as a self-enclosed organism but as the universe in which man lives.²⁵

In "Milton" Blake describes the intensity of the imaginative activity in Eden as "the words of man to man / In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration, / To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms creating" (30:18-20 E128). Blake's system is unique in the wholeness of its self-sufficiency. It does not point beyond itself but functions as an ever widening ascent of the human to claim as its own the forgotten or repressed aspects of its divinity. In psychological terms Blake's system is an open-ended mirroring of the latency of the subconscious within the fullness of the superconscious.

²⁵ Wilner, Gathering The Winds, p. 59.

The "true Man" is the multiplicity of eternity. His awakening is not to be seen as a release from repression but an expansion so as to include the myriad thought-forms of eternity in the immediacy of consciousness. Blake is careful to distinguish between the inspired Reprobate and the risen Christ: "And the Divine Appearance was the likeness & similitude of Los." (J 96:7 E253) Christ and Los exist in their contrariety of principle and ultimate, universal and individual creative imaginations. The "true Man's" inspiration springs from a self-consciousness of the contrariety in which the soul dwells.

Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man
 All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
 That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
 There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
 The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries
 The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
 This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
 Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
 To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination. (M 40:29-37
 E141)

The contraries operating here are the pure emptiness of the "Immortal Spirit" and the overflowing exuberance of unfallen time, the soul's lost other, perceived prophetically as "the mercy of Eternity." Their genuineness as mutual contraries is disclosed by the creative innocence of their linguistic experience which is a continual creation of one by means of the emptying of the other. Emptying is to be seen as the universal process of Self-Annihilation, the willing death of an authoritative deity. It is this process of spiritual diffusion that permits the language of prophecy to image the eternality of "Living Form." Unfallen time exists as the realm of historical potential and not as a facile and dualistic idealism. The prophetic task of defining the minute lineaments of the fall is undertaken by Blake to arrest its

vortical descent into mental chaos. The prophet's pity, which divides the soul, moves into the intellectual vision of Los labouring mercifully by naming, and thereby binding, the fall, so that it may be transfigured in the self-consciousness of its immediate eternity. Only thus can "The mercy of Eternity" be redeemed from the nightmare of eternal death and restored as an aspect of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit apprehended as the divinity of the human heart.

The task of the prophetic is to make visible the method by which eternal form becomes eternal form. It is to display the manner in which the fallen lineaments of thought undergo transfiguration to emerge as an image of the eternal forms of the divine. At the same time the prophetic is to establish itself as an antinomian method of displaying that the contrariety of the soul is the dismissal of an alien and inaccessible realm of ideal objectivity set apart from the human.

Some will say, Is not God alone the Prolific? I answer,
God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men. (MHH 16 E39)

It becomes evident that to image is the highest function of the human. To image is not to refer but to signify the full and immediate presence of the spiritual body, according to Blake's poetical thinking.

The eternal as a point of view is based in the contrariety of innocence and experience. These are mutually penetrating and interdependent states of the soul. Their explication implies the basis of Blake's renunciation of the dualistic philosophy of the natural man which is able only to determine a ratio of the data remembered by the fallen senses.

...poetic perception does not arise from a mere change in perspectives. As long as man limits himself to the vegetative, the eternal, the Infinite, the Godly will remain distant and undiscoverable. The tools of materialist science do no more than alter the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived, either reducing the gigantic to the minute or expanding the minute into the gigantic. The consequence is delusion.²⁶

As a method of awakening the natural man to the contrariety of the soul, the eternal, as a prophetic stance, represents the dynamics of creation. The eternal is signified by the realm of unfallen Tharmas, whose function the fairy, as prophetic mentor, describes on plate iii of "Europe" as that of the penultimate resurrected sense of touch whereby the fallen man may "pass out what time he please, but he will not; / For stolen joys are sweet, & bread eaten in secret pleasant." (5-6 E59) The stolen fire of eternity is rejected by the self-anointed Elect. The resurrected and creational sense of touch is depicted by Michelangelo in "The Creation of Adam." The unfallen aspect of Tharmas embodies the ability to dissolve the natural memory which lies between man and man, or, by extension, the spurious distance which separates fallen man from the eternal forms in divine Imagination, his ancient home. An idea in Blake bears the signature and countenance of the human.

Tharmas represents the Senses, and hence the physical body, "for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses" (MHH 4). As "Energy is the only life, and is from the Body" (MHH 4), Tharmas is the "Parent Power" (FZ 1:24) and "the Mighty Father" (FZ 1:413). His place is in the Loins; his Emanation is Enion, the sexual urge [on whom he begets "the poetic instinct, the infants Los and Enitharmon"]. He is a shepherd; his attribute is a sheep-hook (FZ 1:414, ix:776); he has flocks and a sheepfold (J 95:16).

²⁶ Thomas W. Herzing, "Book 1 Of Blake's "Milton": Natural Religion As An Optical Fallacy," Blake Studies, 6, No. 1 (1973), p. 33.

As an aspect or reflection of Deity, he is the first Person of the Trinity, the ever-pitying Father, but also the Good ShepherdHis art is Painting, which chooses its forms from the outward world....

His special sense is the Tongue, called "the Parent Sense" (J 98:17)....When Tharmas quarrels with Enion, the Daughters of Beulah close "the Gate of the Tongue in trembling fear" (FZ 1:108)When Tharmas falls, his doctrine becomes the false doctrine of materialism: "Tharmas the Vegetated Tongue, even the Devouring Tongue, a threefold region, a false brain, a false heart and false bowels, altogether composing the False Tongue, beneath Beulah, as a watr'y flame revolving every way (cf. Gen 111:24), and as dark roots and stems, a Forest of affliction, growing in seas of sorrow" (J 14:4).²⁷

Tharmas represents, in his unfallen aspect, the reunification of spiritual essence and the resurrected or spiritualized body. It is the battle between Urizen and Luvah, thought and the affections, that slays him. In Blake's view the labour of Tharmas is the composition of the unfallen realm of Ideas, the "Divine Members" (M 2 35:6 E134), or the eternity of imaginative forms. The contrariety of innocence and experience is present to this composition, for, in his division from Enion, Tharmas must work on the reverse side of his material. Thel bears the form of an emanation from Tharmas as she is seen in plate 11 holding a shepherd's hook. Her purpose will be to show the method by which Tharmas labours on the reverse side of his material to emerge as the resurrected body capable of displaying falsehood and error.

...truth and error are exposed together, for "Falsehood is prophetic" (J 82:20); ugliness reveals its own nature, so all things conspire toward the vision that comes not so much after apocalypse as out of it.²⁸

27 S Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), p. 399.

28 Wilner, Gathering The Winds, p. 52.

A prophetic rendering of the eternality of process is thus inseparable from a minute delineation of the fall. The language of redemption is rooted in an articulation of the immediate contrary of a falling notion. Only in this way is the chaotic disproportion of the fall arrested in its descent and illuminated by a proportionate rendering of its contrary.

According to Blake's poetical thinking the fall is simultaneous with creation, but before creation all was not "Solitude & Chaos." "Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation which was an act of Mercy." (VLJ 91 E552-3) The "true Man" emerges as the "true Man" by virtue of his activity of rethinking the eternality of process. This is Blake's meaning when he inverts the three classes of men according to Swedenborg, so that the inspired Reprobate takes on the aspect of the disciple of a chastened love which the Elect had held in the former repressive system. In this way the eternality of the fall becomes synonymous with the history of salvation.

The Jesus who is seen only after death is not the particular and historical Jesus of Nazareth, nor is he the lamb of Innocence or the cultic Christ of traditional faith; he is the God who only "Acts & Is in existing beings or Men." Furthermore, this final Eye of God only appears and only exists in the self-annihilation of Experience. The individual who is created by this "Eternal Death" has passed through all the states of Experience, his "Individual Identity" is the product of the historical and fallen process of self-annihilation, and it is precisely the fact that he has passed through the historical states of Experience that gives his identity a unique and individual form. Consequently, the eighth Eye of God must be hidden in Albion's forests if it is to pass through the self-annihilation of Experience and be resurrected in the definite identities of the minute particulars of the universal body of Jesus.²⁹

29 Altizer, The New Apocalypse, pp. 154-5.

The absence of the eighth Eye of God, a full revelation of the unfallen proportions of eternal identity, inversely becomes the presence of the eternal.

The condition of eternality is marked by a genuine dwelling within contrariety. The appearance of unfallen time, which is the task of the prophetic to make visible, depends upon the self-consciousness of poetical thinking because the self-consciousness of the prophet-as-witness dialectically becomes the mirror in which the Holy Spirit, as the originator of eternal form, is able to behold Himself and know Himself for the first time. The Holy Spirit lives by means of the "true Man's" continual act of self-annihilation. This beholding of the newly risen spiritual body signifies the resurrection of the forms of external nature as an emanation of the "true Man." Innocence and experience are not exclusive conditions of the soul but mutual participants in the creational reception of a single idea. Blakean thought, or poetical thinking, may be seen as a participation in the kenotic movement of the Incarnation which is itself spawned by the universal process of Crucifixion. It becomes evident that Desire is born of the constitutive emptiness of the eternal.

Blake's prophetic pilgrimage led him to a vision of the omnipresence of the passion of Jesus, and, once having seen that presence in every pain and sorrow, he could celebrate the naked horror of experience as an epiphany of the crucified Lamb of God.³⁰

A recognition of the spiritual cause of the Crucifixion signifies the beatification of innocence. That spiritual cause is the resurrection of the human as the divine, the awakened mirror of the Holy Spirit's

³⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

self-consciousness, or the incessant labour of His birth pains. Innocence and experience may be seen as double movements of the same process.

"Innocence must be beatified and Experience must be tried in the furnaces of affliction."³¹ Innocence dwells with Wisdom, but never with Ignorance" Blake writes in "The Four Zoas." (K380) In order to redeem the contrariety in which the "true Man" ceaselessly discovers his new Selfhood experience must be beatified and innocence must be tried in the furnaces of affliction as well. Innocence may be seen as ecstasy ('ex-stasis') and experience as the sacramental confirmation of innocence, the complimentary knowledge of a self-conscious ecstasy.

What is the price of Experience do men buy it for a song
Or Wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath his house his wife his children.(FZ35:11-13
E 318)

CHAPTER II: PLATES 1 AND 2: THEL AND THE LILLY

The inexorable contrariety in which the human soul dwells is exhibited by the first three lines of "The Book of Thel."

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
All but the youngest, she in paleness sought the secret air.
To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day: (1:1-3)

It will be necessary to deal with each of these lines in detail, but for the moment it must be acknowledged that the condition of eternity depicted by the first line is substantiated only by its contrary, the condition of mutability, which we see in juxtaposition in the second and third lines.

³¹ Joseph Wicksteed, William Blake's "Jerusalem" (London: The Trianon Press, 1954), p. 122.

The prophetic narration begins from the artificially isolated perspective of the eternal in order to redeem the contrariety of fallen time and eternity. When fallen time and eternity are seen as inter-functioning mutualities, the pattern of descent known as the fall can be arrested and the process of restoring the Golden Age of man's primordial condition begun. Without the insufflationary measures of the prophetic voice, which are restorative of the purifying function of motion, eternity remains a hollow abstraction, sentenced to the lifelessness of a cruel dualism. The purifying voice of the prophetic moves backwards through the fall in order to substantiate the fullness of the mirror reflection of the fall in eternity. In other words, the fallen condition is only possible as the contrary of the unfallen. The eternal, as a perspective, initially exists in artificial isolation in the first line of the poem to restore a fourfold depth to the natural man's fallen perspective. Later the eternal will be seen as a mode of discoursing the profound absence of a natural perspective, as a means of delineating the aqualinity of the anti-perspectival.

But the primal contraries operative throughout the poem are established even by the first line, and so, with respect to the second and third lines, there are contraries operating within contraries.

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks (1:1). Herein is the supreme measure of the being further delineated by the prophetic voice's tracing of the journey through the fall into experience, the sea of time and space. The's subsequent experiences will be seen to hearken back to the first line to achieve their ordered proportions. The perspective of the first line, a reporting from eternity, establishes the nature of a genuine historical understanding.

When all events of time and space remain permanent, and the "destin'd lineaments" of humanity will exist forever, we are far from the horizon of either a cyclic vision of time or of a movement of redemption that annuls the concrete contingency of spatial and temporal events. It is precisely this acceptance and affirmation of the eternal reality of the contingency of the cosmic process that constitutes a genuine historical understanding....Not only is a fallen or falling humanity the only reality, but that very reality is also inseparable from the actual occasions of its movement in time and space, and the order of a fallen spatial-temporal process becomes paradoxically identified with the history of salvation. ³²

This paradox is resolved in the first line of the poem as the "daughters of Mne Seraphim" act as a communal aggregate of their myriad emanations by conducting "their sunny flocks." Yeats tells us that these characters are the daughters of inspiration tending "their flocks of innocent imaginings."³³ The opening line articulates the genuine paradisaical condition of mankind in generation itself, because if a fallen or falling humanity is the only reality, then the fall is itself an imposture. It acts as the still point of Edenic wholeness in Imagination. The degree of Edenic wholeness established by the first line will depend upon its mirror inversion in the vales of Har to give it intelligible form. As divine innocents in their activity, the "daughters of Mne Seraphim" show that "distance is a phantasy,"³⁴ the result of a fallen spatial-temporal order erected according to a ratio derived from memory. Eden does not exist as amorphous, unbounded energy. A passionate participation in the contrariety which betokens imaginative wholeness signifies

³² Altizer, The New Apocalypse, p. 114.

³³ Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical (3 vols.: London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893), 2, 92. Reprinted by AMS Press Inc., New York, 1973.

³⁴ Quoted by Altizer, p. 33.

"the reconstitution of ideal Apollonian form."³⁵ The eternal forms seen and comprehended in this realm of Imagination protected by "Mne Seraphim" issue from a marriage of inner and outer.

Blake was the first visionary to make explicit the connection between religion and art, to see the imagination not as a "furor poeticus" through which the divine voice might speak, but the divinity itself. Jesus, the Word made flesh, energized order in human form, is imagination.... There is no mystery in Blake, no inscrutable divinity lying behind the imagination; there is only the imagination itself, which is the redemptive power, and which, as the deepest source of man's vision, is sufficient unto itself. The consequences of this belief are as enormous as the giant forms they create; man is neither the absurd nor heroic victim of an overpowering God or nature forever beyond his comprehension, nor is he a half-way creature on a Great Chain of Being who must accept the often brutal orders of the world and nature because it is all part of a "good" plan beyond his limited ability to comprehend. The brutality of the non-human world is not to be acquiesced in; the imagination has the authority to hate what is destructive to human life, and to create in conformity with human need.³⁶

It should be remembered that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the power of prophecy. It is fitting, therefore, that the narrative of "Thel" begin from the perspective of the eternal, since the language of the prophetic seeks to consummate the beginning of its intellectual journey in a transfiguration of its end. In other words, the imagination is both agent and principle of its labour. It gives birth to, and is nourished by, the eternal. The reader is made aware by means of the point of view established in the first line of the poem that the subject of the prophetic discourse is to be the nature of thought in its unfallen aspect. This is to be achieved by examining unfallen thought in the context of fallen perspective. Again, Blake is working from the reverse side of his material in order to bestow intelligible form upon the life

35 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 65.

36 Wilner, Gathering The Winds, p. 51.

of the Imagination.

The opening line of the poem celebrates the existential condition of God as the creator of man. The appearance of a humanized God takes the form of a worship of passionate activity, a surrender to inspiration. The natural man's understanding of activity is subjected to a complete reorganization under Blake's aegis. "Thought is Act," (E612) he cries, and with the prophet's wrathful condemnation of positivistic progress, the obsession that has driven the west mad with a lust for personal power, the realm of the eternal is restored to the human imagination. "Thought is Act" in that the natural man's hankering after demonstrable cause and effect is rendered a cyclic pattern of pernicious unbelief. The realm of the eternal does not exist as endless time, nor is it sustained by natural causes propounded as infinitum.

The contrariety of innocence and experience is embodied in Blake's singular use of the name "Mne Seraphim" as the parental love spawning the "innocent imaginings" entertained by the eternal females of inspiration. The appearance of "Mne Seraphim" serves to polarize the contrariety of poetical thinking by distinguishing between the prophet as the daughters and the source of prophecy. The daughters of inspiration are inseparable from "their sunny flocks" since Blake repeatedly asserts that Los became what he beheld. The image of "Mne Seraphim" is an incarnation of "the mercy of Eternity" which appears when the "true Man" confronts his other, the eternality of forgiveness. "The mercy of Eternity" is to be seen as inseparable from the pitying labour of the prophetic. The prophetic task is undertaken to redeem the eternal from the dualism of natural perception.

The first line of the poem, then, suggests that Thel's departure from the realm of Mne Seraphim will be an interrogation of the eternal.

Properly speaking, her departure is a mirroring. The prophetic mirroring will be an interrogation of the source of motion, the mainsprings of human freedom, since motion in human terms largely involves the issue of choice, the decision to reject error. Blake writes: "Identities or Things are Neither Cause nor Effect They are Eternal" (E645). The realm of Mne Seraphim signifies a spiritualized pastoralism, an alchemy of the imagination, in which imagination is shown to be not a state but "the Human Existence itself." (M 2 32:32 E 131) Lines 2 and 3 in relation to line 1 act as a mirroring to establish the nature of Thel as the supremely resigned aspect of the prophetic that has already been consumed by the Prolific.

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
 All but the youngest, she in paleness sought the secret air.
 To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day: (1:1-3)

Nancy Bogen suggests an association between the realm of Mne Seraphim, the vales of Har, and the river of Adona:

A possible meaning for the word "Mne" may provide us with [an] ...indication that the vales of Har are on Earth and may clarify the relationship between Har and Mne Seraphim. According to the probable source, "Mne" could mean "moon"; and after her departure from the daughters of Mne Seraphim, Thel is discovered "down" by the river of Adona. Therefore, perhaps Thel is beneath or below Mne Seraphim -- in part of the sublunary world. Also, there are indications that Mne Seraphim is a realm of spirit. In the vales of Har, the lamb, though "innocent," must wipe his mouth of "contagious taints"; but in Mne Seraphim there are "sunny," or uncontaminated, flocks; and the air of the vales is "secret," or dark, yet the sun shines there, too. From these possibilities it could follow that the river of Adona is a dividing line between the vales of Har and Mne Seraphim. And this idea should not seem strange because river boundaries between realms of matter and spirit are traditional in Western literature -- in "Pilgrim's Progress," for instance, in which Christian and Hopeful cross a river in order to reach the Celestial City.³⁷

The appearance of the river of Adona in line 4 is crucial to an understanding of the distinction between the realms of essence and existence because it functions as their marrying principle.³⁸ Rather than a dividing line, the river of Adona is a mirroring. It may be compared to the field of poppies which sing Dorothy to sleep with the refrain 'Hold on to your breath, hold on to your hat' in "The Wizard of Oz" before she reaches the Celestial City. The function of the river of Adona is to raise the condition of sleep to the level of conscious thinking. It mirrors consciousness and the source of consciousness, thus performing a restoration of the soul's contrariety. The association between the two realms and the river of Adona is a fixing of eternal proportion by establishing the polarization of the mortal and human.

There are indications that Mne Seraphim is a realm of spirit distinct from the vales of Har. "Bne Seraphim" ("sons of the Seraphim") occurs in a list of planetary influences in "The Conjuror's Magazine," pp. 86-89). The same list may be in a similar periodical of an earlier date, or, Blake may have found it in Cornelius Agrippa's "Occult Philosophy" (see Damon, "William Blake," p. 310). Perhaps Blake found "Mne" in Bryant, where it occurs as the first syllable of a number of antique names, e.g., Mneuis and Mneuas. According to Bryant (3:62, 290), "Mn" is a contraction of "Men," a word in the language of the first civilization after the Flood, and originally meant "moon" ("mēnē" is Greek for "moon").³⁹

"Mne Seraphim" may be seen as an eternality made available as a multiple prophetic mentor. The name implies an androgynous condition of existence.

The OED describes the 'seraphim' seen by Isaiah flying above the throne of God as representing a mythic or symbolic conception which must

³⁸ "Adon, or Adonis...is the name of one of the principal rivers in Canaan. It ran near the city Biblus, where the death of Thamuz was particularly lamented". (J. Bryant, A New System...of Ancient Mythology, (1775) 1. 376; cf. P.L., 1. 446-52) Bentley, William Blake's Writings I Oxford, 1978, p. 65.

³⁹ The Book of Thel, pp. 65-6.

originally have had the form of a 'fiery flying serpent'. The word 'sārāph', as the name of a kind of serpent, may belong to the root 'sārāph', to burn, in allusion to the effect of the bite. This etymology has given rise to a conjecture that the celestial 'seraphim' originally symbolized the lightning. In Ezekial God emerges from lightning. (1:14)

Blake's use of the name "Mne Seraphim" functions as a metaphor of the contrariety involved in the prophetic process itself since, according to Biblical use, the Seraphim possess a human voice and are the highest of the nine orders of angels. They are specially distinguished by fervour of love as opposed to the Cherubim who excel in knowledge. Blake holds the creative imagination separate from the philosophic imagination. The creative imagination alone is capable of revealing the eternal. As for the compound "Mne," the OED associates it with the name 'seraphim' as originally an apprehension of a plural. We may surmise from this that according to Blake's insistence on the contrariety of the "true Man's" dwelling within Imagination as "the Human Existence itself," the realm of Mne Seraphim connotes the realm of unfallen ideas. It is a realm in which the potential of the present is seen as a dynamic multiple. However this realm of pure spirit is not to be distinguished from the vales of Har in terms of spirit and matter but in terms of a prophetic mirroring. To see the river of Adona as a boundary between spirit and matter and not as a reflection of one within the other is to see the realm of Mne Seraphim in terms of a strange and objective world of idealistic dualism. Inherent in the etymology of the word 'seraphim' as originally a 'fiery flying serpent' is revealed Blake's apprehension of the contrariety of innocence and experience. As an invocation of the word "moon," the title "Mne" enhances the meaning of "Seraphim" by

showing that in the realm of the eternal the prophetic process is a reflecting of the Source of Prophecy. The play of light will undergo a prismatic shattering as it floods through the river of Adona and illuminates the vales of Har.

The narrative positioning of "Mne" with "Seraphim" to connote a single identity carries an even richer significance. One cannot avoid the association of "Mne" with Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory. Blake's antipathy to the false muse is well known. "Imagination is the Divine Vision not of The World nor of Man nor from Man as he is a Natural Man but only as he is a Spiritual Man Imagination has nothing to do with Memory" (E655). "Man by his reasoning power, can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd." (NNR E1) He quotes Milton in his annotations to Reynold's "Discourses": "A Work of Genius is a Work 'Not to be obtaind by the Invocation of Memory & her Syren Daughters. but by Devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit. who can enrich with all utterance & knowledge & sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his Altar to touch & purify the lips of whom he pleases'" (E635). However, Blake uses memory in an inspirational sense elsewhere -- on plate 98 of "Jerusalem," for instance, where he speaks of "exemplars of Memory and of Intellect" (30 E255) in terms of resurrected eternal forms, the recovery of ancient innocence is the labour of a significant remembrance in "The Four Zoas," and the early "Song" known as "Memory, hither come" celebrates the contrariety of memory. There is reason to believe that Blake is establishing the contrariety of memory and inspiration by the use of the name "Mne Seraphim." This involves a reorganization of the natural man's understanding of memory

which is a disproportionate ratio of sense data. Just as fallen reason is at odds with the pure vision that is unfallen Reason (before the fall Urizen occupies the most prestigious compass point, the north), fallen memory has nothing to do with unfallen Memory, except that the first is a mere shadow of the second. Unfallen Memory may be seen as the illuminating presence of the ancient and primordial, the insufflationary measure of being in the form of the Divine Logos. The appearance of spiritual beauty in the form of the new is a continual re-creation of the ancient and primordial. "Mne" and "Seraphim" operate co-instantaneously as contrary aspects of inspiration and purification. The primordial spiritual body is present in the re-created spiritualized body. This renovated conception of Memory is not a natural process but a spiritualized ubiquity. Yeats tells us:

revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest.⁴⁰

The awakening of unfallen Memory in the individual imagination effects a shattering of the fallen man's natural understanding of cause and effect. TheI, as the youngest of the daughters of inspiration, is born of a profound contrariety. Her plight is to articulate the method by which the contrariety of memory and inspiration sustains itself. She must make visible the contrariety of the old and the new. Blake acknowledges as much when he writes: "He who Loves feels love descent into him & if he has wisdom may percieve it is from the Poetic Genius which is the Lord" (E592). In a very real sense eternity itself may be seen as the realm

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Quoted by Whitaker, Swan And Shadow, p. 19.

of unfallen Memory and thought-forms as the myriad spiritualized bodies of the Holy Spirit. A prophetic participation in Imagination involves a becoming complicit with the eternal forms of unfallen Memory. Blake in "Milton"

does not even credit himself with his own purified vision; he has been wandering in Udan-Adan when Milton enters in with him, and it is not until Los joins the union that he can enter Golgonooza. Thus imagination realizes itself in Blake; he who has nearly failed his vision is restored to vision by vision. That self-regenerating quality of imagination is what will purify Eden of strife and error.⁴¹

The function of the soul is to create a significant remembrance in "Living Form." We shall see that Thel's lament is essentially the cry of the soul.⁴²

The first line of the poem, then, purports a transfiguration of fallen time or perspective in relation to lines 2 and 3. Thel's departure from the realm of pure spirit is mirrored in her departure from the arena

⁴¹ Susan Fox, Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton", p. 201.

⁴² Perhaps Blake considered unfallen Memory the substance rather than the subject of prophetic poetry. Hart Crane is one of the few poets who has directly dealt with the contrariety of Imagination and Memory. "Repose Of Rivers" is one such astonishing event: "The willows carried a slow sound, / A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead. / I could never remember / That seething, steady leveling of the marshes / Till age had brought me to the sea. / Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves / Where cypresses shared the noon's / Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost. / And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams / Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them / Asunder . . . / How much I would have bartered! the black gorge / And all the singular nestings in the hills / Where beavers learn stitch and tooth. / The pond I entered once and quickly fled- / I remember now its singing willow rim. And finally, in that memory all things nurse; / After the city that I finally passed / With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts / The monsoon cut across the delta / At gulf gates . . . There, beyond the dykes / I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer, / And willows could not hold more steady sound." It is interesting to note that Thel flees the "house" of the Clay just as the narrator of "Repose of Rivers" flees the pond. The reader is tempted to wonder if the reasons could not be the same.

of historical experience in which pure spirit is made wholly manifest at the end of the poem. The prophetic mirroring of the departures is the key to an understanding of the eternality of process. The essential contrary is the dynamic between unfallen Memory and the immediacy of purifying inspiration.

In her article entitled "The Iconoclastic Enterprise: Blake's Critique of "Milton's Religion", Florence Sandler writes:

Blake's antinomianism has too many roots in Paul and the Reformation tradition to be called anything but Christian antinomianism, and his Pauline reading of the Old Testament is not a passing reference but the thesis that pervades his work. It is true that Blake is criticizing not only "the Jews," but also the Christians -- even John Milton -- who are worshippers of the Mystery. Nevertheless, after Auschwitz, the only adequate response is to witness against Blake as he witnessed against Milton:

Blakes Religion is the cause: there is no end to destruction!
 Seeing the Churches at their Period in terror & despair;
 Rahab created Hegel; Tirzah created Nietzsche;
 Asserting the Self-righteousness against the Universal Saviour,
 Mocking the Confessors & Martyrs, claiming Self-righteousness;
 With cruel Virtue: making War upon the Lambs Redeemed.⁴³

But inherent in Blake's system is a self-conscious anticipation of such witnessing performed at his own hand. He writes:

Are those who condemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
 Become in their Feminine portions the causes & promoters
 Of these Religions, how is this thing? (M 2 40:9-11 E140)

Moreover, his iconoclasm is so extreme that even the forms of Biblical apocalypse must be destroyed and created anew. This is the reason for Theel's departure from the pure spirit of the realm of Mne Seraphim. It is an already erected form of resurrected intelligence and therefore the decay of memory. From the position of the generative perspective -- which

⁴³ Blake Studies, 5, No. 1 (1972), p. 28.

the prophetic seeks to realign with the fourfold perspective of creative innocence -- the "daughters of Mne Seraphim" leading "round their sunny flocks" is seen as the Anti-Christ in the form of the Elect who assumes responsibility for the Redeemed. The verbal construction of the line is in the past tense. According to this reading Thel would be entering upon a just departure from the known -- no matter how "wearied with joy" (FZ 9 133:11 E386) in that realm -- in order to attain to a wholeness of imaginative independence. However, the narrative is equally concerned with the individualism of Thel and the prophetic. It must pass over to the opposite side of its immediate reflection in order to interrogate the source of light that animates its initial identity. The unfallen realm of Mne Seraphim performs the function of Tharmas, a passing out of newly risen self to perfectly marry contraries by a holding of those contraries in the immediacy of self-consciousness.

From the loins of Creative Genius there issue two lines of sons, perpetually at war with each other, as Abraham fathers (by his wife) Isaac, the child of the promise, and (by his concubine) Ishmael, the outlaw and enemy.⁴⁴

The "daughters of Mne Seraphim" may be seen as the children of the promise, who we will meet again in the Lilly, whereas Thel is the outlaw and reprobate. She alone possesses an understanding of desire. Therefore, her departure from the realm of the erected spiritual body signifies a casting aside of the robe of the promise and a genuine dwelling within the division of Tharmas as the sole hope of the eternality of resurrection and the appearance of the body of Christ in history. She must depart from the realm of pure spirit in order that the prophetic become capable of

articulating an unfallen measure of desire. Thel's lament will prefigure the descent of Milton in Blake's epic of that name. Milton does not await fulfillment in eternity but travels through the fall in order to purge himself of the taints of a submission to the repressive decrees of a belief in pre-destination. Sandler writes:

...taking off "the robe of promise," he [the Jesus in Milton] takes upon himself instead the burden of his "Shadow" of Incarnation, a "mournful form double; hermaphroditic" (14:13-37), and passes by a precipitous descent into Time and Space, there to confront, in the course of a re-capitulation and transvaluation of his life, the various forms of Spectre and Emanation, both Urizen and Rahab, both the accusations of the Law and the seductions of the Flesh.⁴⁵

The mirroring of Thel's condition in the vales of Har is to be a similar descent but one which contains both points of view. She must reweave the robe of the promise by participating in the same experiential perspective in order to arrive at an understanding of the anti-perspectival. The Worm in herself must appear to consciousness in order to redeem the divine. Thel's departure signifies the early Blake's refutation of Milton's and Swedenborg's doctrine of pre-destination. If she were to remain in the realm of Mne Seraphim the prophetic voice would be intolerably subject to an authoritative tyranny. Self-consciousness of ecstasy would be lost. The recovery of man's ancient innocence would become impossible in the fallen world.

The realm of pure spirit perfectly reconciles the male and the female as is made explicit in the name "Mne Seraphim." Bogen has shown how "Mne" connotes "sons of the Seraphim," or "Men" as an adaptation of the Greek word "moon." "Mne Seraphim" is balanced in harmonious tension with his female emanations (the "daughters") since they are immersed in the passion-

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

ate activity of leading around "their sunny flocks." Operational here is an image of eternity as a wholeness in Imagination. As an image of wholeness the name incorporates past, present, and future as a mode of unfallen existence present to the prophetic within the bounds of fallen time. The secrecy of the female is made visible in the action of Self-Annihilation. Male and female are to be seen as metaphors of the rigorous activity of Edenic fourfold perception descending according to the weakness or state of the individual. The female is the visible creation of love, either the world or the work of art. She is the labour necessary to contain the infinite.

The male-female relationship acts throughout "Milton" as a metaphor for the dynamic union of contraries. As M. H. Abrams says, "The central type of the contrary is the severed female Emanation; but all contraries, in Blake, operate as opposing yet complementary male-female powers which, in their energetic love-hate relationship, are necessary to all modes of progression, organization, and creativity, or procreativity." That relationship is the opposition of true friendship in Eden, the integral relationship of form and emanation as single entity. With the fall it becomes an adversary relationship, an impediment to revitalized humanity. The relationship of the sexes is thus symbolic of contraries in both ideal and fallen states.⁴⁶

The unity of Edenic wholeness exists only as the mirroring of fragmentation in the fallen order. The appearance of the Edenic condition can only exist as a futurism. Male and female may be seen as mythologized symbols of sexuality affording the prophetic a mirroring of conscious and subconscious identity within a particular perspective. Since the male and female operate consistently in Blake in terms of that which is successfully contained and that which is as yet amorphous, the genders may also be seen as symbolic of the labour towards prophetic consummation, or the

naming of eternal identity. Male and female are metaphors of a generic difference. They are not degrees of a like genus connoting either inferiority or superiority. Contrariety is grounded in a marrying of kinds which mutually partake of one another while retaining their individual identity. Sexuality is to be seen as a metaphor of the method of regenerating the spiritual body.

Femaleness is...not a synonym for failure but a metaphor of it...we may see the significance of Beulah's female character simply as evidence of its incompleteness, for complete existence is integrated and does not recognize gender.⁴⁷

Femaleness, as a metaphor of failure, is not perjorative. The self-sacrifice of the female makes possible the eternity of process. A revelation of "complete existence" remains the labour of the prophetic in its activity of continually delineating contraries. The prophetic voice does not point to a finality beyond itself.

What Blake shows us as Eden is a community of human forms embracing through their activity. Now tongue and touch are unified and are, together, reintegrated with the other senses with the effect that the risen activity is a kind of speech, an utterance of the whole man. It would appear that the Edenic conversation and the erotic commingling are identical, the transfigured tactility of the reorganized body, now acting as a whole. This is like no sexuality we know, nor any modification of it, for when Albion awakes, Enitharmon vanishes and there are no longer two sexes...in the resurrection, spiritual and sexual are indistinguishable; indeed the risen body subsists in their new identity.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴⁸ Thomas R. Frosch, The Awakening of Albion: The Renovation of the Body in the Poetry of William Blake (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 173.

The disappearance of the sexes signifies the disappearance of the fallen orders of time and space, the restoration of fourfold depth to the natural man's perception. Edenic wholeness is to be seen as the labour of a prophetic futurity. It is present to the prophetic as "a going forth & returning" (E597) for the restoration of the Golden Age is always the labour of a transfigured and transfiguring becoming. Only thus can fallen time be seen as the struggle of eternity to empty and thereby reveal itself.

Both Jerusalem and paradise are outside the dimension of the fallen art form. We know of their existence through art, and, Blake says, the more trust we place in the works of the poetic imagination, the firmer our conviction of an Edenic possibility becomes. But Albion's final reunion with the departed emanation and his actual re-entry into the paradisaical state of human integration is not achieved within the limits of fallen art. Fallen art, in Blake, always occupies an ambivalent position, at once sharing the horizons of the fall and liberated from them, both fundamentally opposed to all our limitations and finally subject to them.⁴⁹

Blake writes: "I labour upwards into futurity." (E662) The condition of unfallen existence described by the first line of the poem ("The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks") is wholly dependent upon a prophetic gauging of the minute lineaments of the fall because the seeds of apocalypse are embedded in fallen time. The second and third lines of the poem

All but the youngest. she in paleness sought the secret air.
To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day;

bring the first into relief by polarizing the immediacy of unfallen time with the contrary of human desire which is made manifest in fallen time. It must be remembered that the existential condition of eternity is substantiated by its relieving reflection.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 156-7.

The Moon has chambers where the babes of love lie hid
 And whence they never can be brought in all Eternity
 Unless exposed by their vain parents. (FZ 7 [b] 94:12-14 E398)

The full appearance of free love depends upon the creative innocence of contrariety.

It has been said that Thel is an embodiment of the resigned aspect of the prophetic, the attentive power of contemplation in the face of the Prolific. She embodies the paradox of prophecy in that she is the passive activity of a listening which is creational. Her "morning beauty" is the perpetual benediction of eternal form. As "the youngest" of the daughters of inspiration, Thel is the most tender, the most susceptible, of new-born joys. Her status among the eternal forms in Imagination is to represent the life of a single thought, or the history of ideas, as they go forth and return animating the interpenetrating and nourishing fallen and un-fallen orders. Thel's "paleness" is the virginal emptiness of the moon inundated as a reflecting of the sun's fullness. She is an embodiment of the prophetic task as it wrestles to name the forms of eternal identity. As the Original of Prophecy in contrapuntal harmony with the source of prophecy she seeks the eternal identity of all things, or the "inmost Form" sought by the speaker of "The Crystal Cabinet." However a distinction must be made between Thel as embodiment of the prophetic task and Blake as prophet. The distinction exists in terms of a degree of self-consciousness: Thel's dilemma is dramatized in order to arrive at "the renascence of an integrated sensibility beyond self-consciousness."⁵⁰ This is the paradox of prophetic poetry -- it struggles towards the naming

50 Ibid., p. 141.

of the disappearance of desire while simultaneously celebrating desire as the method of attaining that disappearance. The "secret air" of her longing is to be identified with the "inmost Form" of fourfold perception, the containment of prophetic futurity. She seeks to incorporate within her conscious self the method by which divine love is made manifest. Thus Thel's lament involves the most profound aspects of the Urizenic dispensation. The "air" she seeks is "secret" because unknown and so dark. However it is not necessarily foreboding but bears the aspect of a trembling anticipation -- indeed, the secrecy of the unknown air contains the seeds of apocalyptic reintegration. As an emanation of divinity, or a tracing of the life of a single thought-form issuing from the eternality of the realm of Mne Seraphim, Thel presents the generative life binding the infinite. This is shown on plate 11 mirror-wise as a nude male with his back visible holds a clothed female with her arms in the "Glad Day" position signifying the celebration of eternity as a perpetual youth. It is possible that the nude male represents Thel's androgynous contrary in Edenic existence. Plate 4 shows them as possessing similar faces. What we have here is an emanation from the fullness of Eden imaging the binding of unnamed joy and thereby creating the necessary passage through generation. In other words, the interaction between the two figures on plate 11 depicts the emanations of divine love as an imaging within the fallen realm. It is Blake's particular use of the technique of mirroring that displays the binding of the infinite, and hence, a movement towards the unknown by means of the encircling energies of an emanating love. This account of the contrariety involved in creation is paralleled in the fallen realm by Blake's doctrine of friendship which is based on divine love, a self-conscious recovery of "that age-long memoried self."

When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter
 Into each others Bosom (which are Universes of delight)
 In mutual interchange. and first their Emanations meet
 Surrounded by their Children. if they embrace & comingle
 The Human Four-fold Forms mingle also in thunders of Intellect
 But if the Emanations mingle not; with storms & agitations
 Of earthquakes & consuming fires they roll apart in fear
 For Man cannot unite with Man but by their Emanations
 Which stand both Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity
 How then can I ever again be united as Man with Man
 While thou my Emanation refuseth my Fibres of dominion?
 When Souls mingle & join thro all the Fibres of Brotherhood
 Can there be any secret joy on Earth greater than this?

(J 4 88:2-15 E244)

Within the realm of the anti-perspectival a full epiphany of the emanating descent of divine love remains secret because it is the ground in which contrariety dwells and bestows infinitude upon the earthly lineaments of man. The secrecy surrounding the containment and perpetuity of eternal identity or "inmost Form" is an acknowledgement of prophetic futurity and is not to be confused with the leprous jealousy of the secrecy of Urizen. Thel's hope of fading away "like morning beauty from her mortal day" identifies prophetic futurity with the transfiguration of generation into regeneration, or, more specifically, the appearance of eternal day in the image of perpetual fading. "Mne Seraphim," as the multiplicity of eternity, can only be made manifest by the creative reception of a single thought, and "One thought. fills immensity." (MHH 8:36 E36) There is no black irony surrounding Thel's desire to "fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day." The narrative repeatedly reminds us of her 'gentleness' and her 'loveliness' (1:12-14, 1:16). She does not measure the world or reality according to a jaundiced imposition of the selfhood upon the eternal forms in Imagination. Thel seeks a total surrender to "the beams of love" (LBB 14 E9) while the narrative illuminates that struggle by couching it in the sanctity of experience. The prophetic, as a pure speaking, is able

to contain the contrariety of creative innocence. Its method of emptying itself of the known dialectically becomes a reception of the multiplicity of eternity as its other, or genuine contrary. The relationship between line 1 and lines 2 and 3 is a reflecting reflection because the eternal is contained by the temporal and the temporal is the essence of the eternal and the full revelation of both is reserved for futurity. Their articulation is the imprint of the divine.

The fourth and fifth lines incorporate a shift in tense from the past to the present serving to bring forward as in a glass the contrariety of the empty and the full.

Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard;
And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew. (1,4-5)

The eternality of process depicted in and by "the river of Adona" mirrors the prophetic voice and the source of prophecy. The act of mirroring in the river of Imagination does not imply a descent of the soul as much as an ascent of the mortal and fallen, a paralleling of structure and polarizing of opposites. The "river of Adona" is a mirror giving birth to the eternal forms of the Imagination. In its polarizing capacity it functions to 're-member' the eternal identities of the Golden Age in inverse proportion as the thinking mind witnesses the lightning flash of its own crucifixion on the cross of history and a new Selfhood is discovered. The 'seraphim' originally symbolized the lightning and the word is here being used in the same sense, as a shattering revelation of the ground of being, the omnipresence of a loving divinity. The "self-regenerating quality of imagination" provides the creative impulse towards the sacred act of Self-

Annihilation. The "river of Adona" is the "look of love" that "alarms."
 (E465)⁵¹ It is the burning water of the metamorphosing forms of the
 Imagination. In its action of reflecting a reflection is discovered the
 meeting of two eternities and a prophetic acknowledgement of the disappear-
 ance of sin in the engulfing astonishment engendered at the forms discovered
 therein. Leutha cries in "Milton": "The Sin was begun in Eternity, and
 will not rest to Eternity / Till two Eternitys meet together, Ah! lost!
 lost! lost! for ever!" (l 13:10-11 E106) An invocation of the creative
 Titan, Los, may be heard in Leutha's repetition of "lost." The appearance
 of "the river of Adona," as a mirroring of the eternality of forms in
 Imagination, is a 're-membering' of an epic cosmology of forgiveness
 supporting the individual peninsula of consciousness. What we are
 presented with in lines 4 and 5 is a spiritualized account of the death
 of Christ as a once-and-for-all event that nourishes all subsequent acts
 of Self-Annihilation in an immemorialized present. The act of Self-
 Annihilation is rooted in the crucifixion of Christ. Thel's lamentation
 is to be an emptying of self performed willingly so that the 'other' of
 her sensually organized thinking may appear to self-consciousness. It
 may almost be said to be a lust after self-consciousness. In other words,
 her lamentation is necessary to redeem the thought-forms sleeping in the
 face of the Holy Spirit if the divine is to attain to self-consciousness
 and be saved from the tyranny of eternal death. These counter movements
 are parallel and yet identical in that Thel is the embodiment of the Holy
 Spirit. She 're-presents' the plight of the divine in its search for

⁵¹ Blake writes: "The look of love alarms / Because tis filled with
 fire / But the look of soft deceit / Shall Win the lovers hire." (E465)

self-consciousness, in its desire to inform the movements of history. The prophetic language of the narrative mirrors this configuration by means of a resurrection of "living Form" in the transmutability of memory. In other words, the mask of the eternal is rendered liquid. The strictly human is saved from being swallowed by an inaccessible dualism. Fallen time is mirrored as an eternality of potential.

Nancy Bogen cites several possible derivations of Thel's name which support this reading of the narrative direction of these opening lines of the poem.

(Thel). Perhaps derived from Bryant, where one finds the two supposedly ancient words ath and el, and the following explanation concerning their combination: "The Egyptians had many subordinate Deities, which they esteemed as so many emanations...from their chief God....These derivatives they called fountains, and supposed them to be derived from the Sun; whom they looked upon as the source of all things. Hence they formed Ath-El and Ath-Ain, the Athela and Athena of the Greeks. These were two titles appropriated to the same personage, Divine Wisdom; who was supposed to spring from the head of her father" (1:63). This source is particularly appealing when one realizes that Thel is a human being (see 3:22-23) and, according to Christian tradition, possessed of a soul, or a spark of the divine fire. The usual explanation is that Thel's name is an anagram of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in Greek legend (see Schorer, Politics of Vision, p. 202, and Harper, "Thomas Taylor and Blake's Drama of Persephone," p. 386)...Raine's idea in Blake and Tradition, p. 114, that Thel's name was suggested by the name Thalia ("thallein," "blossoming" or "blossoming one") is an interesting possibility.⁵²

Bloom suggests that Thel's name derives from the Greek word "will." (E808) It may have been suggested by the Greek 'thelo', "to desire." A word with the same root, 'thelus', meaning "woman," is an attractive possibility.⁵³ As an incarnation of the original type of "woman," Thel gives voice to the soul of the world. It is possible to see her as an archetypal Eve figure,

⁵² The Book of Thel, p. 67.

⁵³ See Michael J. Tolley, "The Book of Thel and Night Thoughts," p. 380.

the spiritual beauty of the world as it has been abandoned by fallen man. Her plight 're-presents' the dilemma of the prophetic voice in its woeful activity of working from the reverse side of its material, forced to gauge the degree of error to which fallen man has succumbed. Thel's 'womanhood' moves into the cry of the soul of sensuality for release from the joy of regeneration. The issue of "Thel" is not that the Virgin separates transience from transcendence but that she knows she must wage continual mental warfare to remarry them. She acknowledges as much when she points out the functions of the Lilly and Cloud -- functions which they had failed to observe. Thel is the resigned aspect of the prophetic gaze which functions as an active listening. In fallen time she has encountered a confrontation with the ambiguous function of the will. The various derivatives of Thel's name suggest that it is indicative of human desire. The Egyptian source of Thel's name found in Bryant becomes more appealing when it is realized that Thel is not only human but that her lamentation is a mirroring of the struggle of the divine to realize itself. As a human being she interrogates the nature of the soul's contrariety, and, as an embodiment of a single thought-form of the Holy Spirit present in the mirror of Imagination, her lamentation establishes the dwelling-place or locus of the divine. Thel's "gentle lamentation falls" in the sense of being delivered or presented in an eternal present that is itself the soul's lost other and the incarnation of the perpetual "morning beauty" of the eternal. Thus the mirroring of the "river of Adona" is a double movement redeeming the divine. As an emanating fountain of divinity Thel's appearance signifies the struggle of the Holy Spirit to attain to self-consciousness. Again, we are presented with an image of the contrariety

of the soul. The struggle of the 'woman' is to contain the contrariety in which the soul dwells and has life without abandoning the infinitude of desire.

As an embodiment of the fourth element, fire, Thel's lamentation performs the function of chastening the divine by making incarnate the history of a single thought-form. As the presence of a spark of divine fire, Thel discovers the nature of the soul's contrariety in the burning waters of the river of Imagination as it reflects the illuminations of universal forms in her own thinking mind. The tension between the eternal and the mutable is double: generation is swallowed up or burned away in regeneration while regeneration undergoes a transfiguring incarnation. Thel's lamentation, then, implies not so much the descent of the soul, but a fixing of the mirror of Imagination so that what is above may be seen as that which is below, in a reorganization of the natural man's understanding of fallen time.

The eternal forms which dwell in Imagination as "the Human Existence itself" have no purely ontological status of their own. This would seem an impossible absurdity to Blake, an accusation of the law. Thel's lamentation is a mirroring of the plight of the eternal which serves as its mode of redemption. Her lament signifies an emptying of the eternal in order to redeem the human. The active mind of Thel mirrors an awakening divinity and both are to be seen reflected in "the river of Adona" as the appearance of the immortalized forms in Imagination. Thel's departure in line 2 from the sheepfold construes her individual identity in relation to the "sunny flocks" of line 1 and the burning water of "the river of Adona." Both are to be seen as eternalities sustained by the rigour of her lamentation. As the burning water, or metamorphosing form,

of an inspirational memory, "the river of Adona" distinguishes between the realm of Mne Seraphim and the vales of Har as the prophetic voice must be distinguished from the source of prophecy.⁵⁴ The appearance of "the river of Adona" is a placing of the eternal lineaments of the "true Man." It is the composition of eternal identity in and through transience. The "river of Adona" bears a semblance to

the Bride Ololon in Eden as a "sweet River, of milk & liquid pearl" (M 21:15), the spermatic stream of the Hermeticists, similar to the "Pure river of water of life" which in the Apocalypse flows from the Bride when her marriage with God is consummated (Rev. 22:1).⁵⁵

The "river of Adona" images marriage as it flows from the secret, because infinite, earthly lineaments of Thel's desire. In this sense, the imaging flow of "the river" serves as an inspirational 're-membering' of Thel's eternal identity in the context of an exuberant immanence. Blake's well-known renunciation of secrecy implies a renunciation of the repressed jealousy of the Elect. The secrecy surrounding the method of divine creation is not guarded jealously but is involved and revealed in the eternality of process.

⁵⁴ "Exemplars of memory may be prophetic as well as exemplars of intellect. Albion's memory of what he was can serve as a warning of what he might become, when it is objectified in an outward form rather than internalized in guilt and self-accusation, that is when it appears at the circumference rather than hidden at the centre." Ben F. Nelms, "'Exemplars of Memory And Of Intellect': 'Jerusalem', Plates 96-100," Blake Studies, 5, No. 2, p. 85. "Exemplars of memory" are inspirational in that they return the poet to the eternal forms in Imagination. The revitalized notion of memory places the existence of the eternal forms in Imagination within the context of Thel's eternal identity which is always a becoming just as the prophetic remains grounded in a futurism. Unfallen Memory may be considered the contrary of unfallen thought -- passionate thought, that is, a unification of head, heart, and loins. George Eliot makes use of the burning flow of the eternality of a resurrected memory in Chapter 1 of The Mill On the Floss.

⁵⁵ Sandler, p. 21.

Thel's lament is to be the composition of individual experience, or a tracing of the life of a single thought-form, within the realm of the Eighth Eye of God. Her interrogation of mortal new-born joy involves an interrogation of the eternal forms of identical existence. The perspective in generation of her lament is necessary to make visible the eternal. Her interrogation is addressed to the eternal.

O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water?
Why fade these children of the spring? born but to smile & fall. (1:6-7)

It poses the finitude which is the necessary polarization nursing the appearance of the eternal forms in Imagination. The "spring" of our perpetual awakening is seen as interpersonal by the Virgin. Her lament is to be anything but a solipsistic retreat from the universal process of Self-Annihilation. Individual experience appears as the Eighth Eye of God which "came not" because its incarnation is a perpetual transformation.

According to Blake, when the Eternals met to elect the Eight Eyes of God, "They nam'd the Eighth: he came not, he hid in Albion's Forests." The Eighth Eye of God is the single vast illumination, a "momentary god," fallen man in the forests of Albion, the tiger "in the forests of the night." It is the sudden brightening of a shadow in the jungle of a speeding, expanding, and contracting flux of space-time. When caught and held it appears as the spring of the beast -- the self, separated off from the soul by the "vegetable glass of nature" -- crashing through in violence to total resolution. The emergence of man's tiger-demon from the forests is among other things the shattering emergence of history into eternity where the seven eyes become the Eighth Eye, where all are one.⁵⁶

The emptiness of individual experience paradoxically gives birth to the revelation of the Eight Eyes of God in Christ. The individual peninsula of consciousness is sustained by the universal Poetic Genius. The absence of the Eighth Eye of God from the council of the Eternals signifies the

⁵⁶ Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision (New York: Russell & Russell, 1955), pp. 120-21.

redemption of history and therefore of eternity. The existence of contraries depends upon the universal process of Self-Annihilation. The narrative purports to show that the existence of the realm of the eternal depends upon the self-consciousness of the individual imagination. It displays the engulfing astonishment of thought in the process of transfiguration. Thel's interrogation takes the form of a profound purification of the Selfhood. The appearance of eternal identity and the overcoming of the chimerical negation signifying the restoration of the Golden Age (inherent in the labour of the prophetic as the seeds of apocalypse) depends upon the immediacy of the self-annihilating crucifixion of the thinking mind as it encounters the forgiving otherness of the "Human form Divine" (FZ 9 126:10 E380) on the cross of history and witnesses its own shattering. This is Blake's meaning when he says, "Thought is Act." That which witnesses and that which experiences crucifixion are the same. Both are involved in the universal process of regeneration. Crucifixion is to be seen not in terms of sacrifice for this would produce a dualism but as incessant Self-Annihilation which is a marrying of contraries. Thus Blake's prophetic art steals the language of the seething silence of its 'other' from an unorganized ontological repose and returns it to the divinity of the human heart in order to reopen the historical, the finite, and with firm conviction places the divinity of silence in the realm of the speaking voice.

Thel's lament is a mirroring of the images created in "the river of Adona." The voice of the female is to be seen as the revelation of the eternal. As a primordial Eve figure, she is both temptress and the soul of sensuality. Her lament is a vital imaginative act. The power of tongues is present to this composition. She takes on the contrariety

involved in the etymology of the word 'seraphim' as a 'fiery flying serpent'. As a symbol of fire, Thel is supported by a rebellious desire which Blake will later manifest in the character of Orc, who embodies generative love. Her lament burns away the Covering Cherub, tears the skin of things, so that the prophetic might display "the infinite which was hid" (MHH 14 E38). Thel's lament displays the method by which the condition of eternity is sustained by the activity of "the daughters of Mne Seraphim" in the first line of the poem.

While the early Blake saw the female as the primary agent of that repression which is the source of all that we know as history, the mature Blake, although deepening this vision of her demonic role in his renewed symbolic portrait of Vala, came also to see the female as the willing repository of male negation and the sacrificial victim of a universal kenotic process. Blake took up, and then orchestrated on a cosmic scale, the ancient Christian teaching that, if man fell by woman, it is by woman that he is redeemed. Indeed, the sheer horror of the female's role as the high priestess of sacrifice is open dialectically to her opposite and complementary role as the chief instrument of salvation.⁵⁷

The contrariety involved in the role of the female is underlined by the early Blake in his creation of Thel. The poem is anachronistic, even precocious, in that Thel possesses an extreme self-consciousness of the role of the female. She likens herself to "the doves voice" (1:11) while viewing her "shining lot" (5:13) as an inadequate response to astonishment. The purity of her lament announces her as the true Bride of the Lamb. This is accomplished by means of her self-consciousness of the contrariety of the soul. She is a precursor of the figure of Jerusalem.

⁵⁷ Altizer, The New Apocalypse, p. 97.

Jerusalem, in fact, is the incarnate body of Jesus; she is present wherever there is pain and suffering, for she is the "I" of every sufferer, the passive self or anima of all pain. Moreover, Jerusalem's sacrificial role is established by the Creation. Most of the 35th plate of "Jerusalem" is occupied by an illustration of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, but Blake followed Milton in believing that the Son was the Creator of Eve, and in this design the Saviour hovers over the newly-born woman with the stigmata on his hands and feet. Woman is born, then, under the destiny of the stigmata, her passion is finally the Passion of the Cross, and that passion is the most immediate manifestation in Experience of Jesus' "fire." As Wicksteed interprets Blake's portrait of Jerusalem on the 32nd plate of her epic, when she greets Vala's proffered veil not with hatred and horror but with sacrificial love: "It was a bold inspiration of Blake's to anticipate the grand climax of the whole **drama** (the closing plates of Chapter 4) by representing the tender naked loveliness of Woman yielding itself to the dark way through the Underworld to save mankind by her vicarious sacrifice, and thus preparing a way through Hell by which to receive her Lord in the hour of his final descent, upbearing him in eager embrace."⁵⁸

Sacrifice is here to be seen as a self-conscious emptying of self. In her desire for 'At-one-ment' with the Divine Logos ("and gentle hear the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time." 1:13-14) Thel displays the sacrificial essence of her femininity. Her lament employs alchemical symbols of eternal identity while she bewails human loss. The loveliness of her lament images diffusing symbols of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The appearance of the Holy Spirit involves a disappearance of the eternal as wholly other. Thel's lament composes a multi-faceted crystal of reflecting reflections. It is a "gentle" cry towards "total resolution," the nameless anxiety of the living. She wishes to "gentle sleep the sleep of death" (1:13), to endure the passion of the cross without imposing her frail constitution upon the order of divine creation. Her plight is extreme in that her consciousness must mirror

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-9.

the freedom of creation without succumbing to a doctrine of predestination. Her lament is a prophetic pose undertaken to display the infinite. The narrative delineation of the anti-perspectival will depend upon the shattering of Thel's perspective. But since her perspective is already cleansed, the task of the prophetic narrative is to delineate the existence of the anti-perspectival in and through a spiritualized perspective. It is the task of the prophetic to outline contraries. We are told that Thel's voice "is heard" "Down by the river of Adona" and she completes her lament by stating her desire to "hear the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden." The narrative juxtaposition of the voices, of presence and absence, is a delineation of contraries. Altizer writes: "since the resurrected Jesus is the underlying and hidden reality of every person, the states in which that person appears -- both to himself and to others -- cannot be identified with the individual himself."⁵⁹ Thel seeks a self-conscious containing of the Divine Logos because it is only in her self-consciousness that the Word can be made Flesh. Her lament is, paradoxically, a desire to be born.

Blake writes at the end of "Milton" that "with one accord the Starry Eight became / One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful!" (2 42:10-11 E 142)

Frye believes that the Starry Eight is the eighth Eye of Jesus' second coming: "The latter is pure vision, as the former is the hearing of the Word, the lesser revelation to the ear (cf. Job xlii,5) which also ceases at the upper limit of Beulah." If so, the eighth Eye is the totally incarnate form of God in which God has become both fully present and wholly enclosed in the concrete individual...⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 151.

The eighth Eye of God as the fullest epiphany of individual experience must be hidden in Albion's forests, the darkest regions of the subconscious, or arbitrarily cut off from the eternal as a speaking of the whole man, if eternity is to be seen as the fallen realm. The appearance of the eighth Eye of God, which brings the previous seven forward in one rising image of apocalyptic epiphany, is reserved for prophetic futurity. If the "true Man" can be regarded as the agent of "pure vision" containing both the individual wholeness of creative imagination by being at one with his emanations and the universal Humanity of creative Imagination in Christ by freely dying into the newly-risen body, then the dramatization of Thel's lament may be seen as a series of shatterings of the "Sleeping Body" (M 1 15:1 E108) so that the infinitude of her earthly lineaments may be restored to consciousness. The narrative dramatization through her 'fall' is a mirroring of states within states so that she may attain to the wholeness of "pure vision" in the final plate. But, as we shall see, plate 6 is a mirroring of the condition of the first line of the poem. Blake's meaning seems clear -- the anti-perspectival exists in and through fallen perspective.

The question remains as to why must unfallen time exist as a mirroring. Herein lies the heartbed of Thel's creational lament as the struggle of the divine to realize itself. What we have in the first fourteen lines of the poem is a working backwards, a prophetic bestowal of reality upon the lie of the fall. Thel seeks the "inmost Form" of the Divine Logos. (1:12-14) Her plight is an analogue of the prophetic process since the prophetic purports an imaging of eternal form in Imagination. Thel's lament is delivered in the vales of Har, an earthly paradise that mirrors

and is mirrored in the realm of Mne Seraphim. It creates the vales of Har. Har may be seen as "the image of an inner spiritual vision that transforms the barren external world into an earthly paradise."⁶¹ It is the land of creative innocence where contraries are equally true, where experience is continually beatified, and the just take responsibility for not only their own but the spiritual progression of others as well. This is seen in the Lilly's act of wiping the Lamb's mouth "from all contagious taints." (2:7) But the mirroring of the realm of Mne Seraphim within the vales of Har implies a transfiguration since Thel's lament involves a bewailing of human loss. Thel sees the presence of the Divine Logos in terms of an immemorialized absence. The cause of her lament is the pure emptiness of the soul in the face of the engulfing astonishment of the spiritual beauty of the world. She feels that she has nothing to contribute, that her lot is out of joint with creation. The narrative ushers Thel through a series of direct confrontations with her most immediate contrary in order to reorganize her view of fallen perspective.

The vales of Har exist as a reflection of the "inmost Form" signified by the realm of Mne Seraphim. The images of Thel's lament are threefold whereas perception in Eden is fourfold, the spiritualized body it creates is perpetual.

Ah! Thel is like a watry bow, and like a parting cloud,
 Like a reflection in a glass. like shadows in the water.
 Like dreams of infants. (1:8-10)

Desire has entered into the poem as the composition of fallen time and, hence, individual identity. Thel's perception of fourfold vision is now external to her. Her lament is essentially a cry for the return of the

⁶¹ Anne Mellor, Blake's Human Form Divine, p. 15.

beloved. The beloved exists as that aspect of the undiscovered self that assumes the form of a stubborn exteriority. Yeats learned from Blake to see the departed beloved in much the same way.

The Yeatsian joy must emerge tragically amid the fallen world of Incarnation, amid what, in his Blake study, Yeats had called the contest of "fierce fire" and "the external cold and feminine eternal nature," of "the fallen spirit and the fallen 'mirror', or of scorpio and virgo."

That contest and conjunction translate into extreme and reciprocal terms the sexual dialectic between swan and shadow or self and Daimon which runs through Yeats's work from Mosada... to On the Boiler, where we read: "When a man loves a girl it should be because her face and character offer what he lacks, the more profound his nature the more should he realize his lack and the greater be the difference. It is as though he wanted to take his own death into his arms, and beget a stronger life upon that death."⁶²

To beget a stronger life upon one's death is essentially to desire the spiritualized body. The return of the beloved in the form of the awakening of the newly-risen body signifies the renewal of virginity. The recovery of the spiritualized body is dependent upon the disappearance of the corporeal understanding. Wilner explains:

for Freud there is a kind of near-Romantic sadness, a sense that in the best and most mature love there is a residue of dissatisfaction because the satisfactions of the adult are always the less than perfect substitutes for the original loved mother. For Blake, however, infant joys are recapturable, not by thwarted infants, but by imaginative man who is married to his creation; there is no distance in Jerusalem between what is imagined and what is; the latter is the former. When Jesus repudiated his earthly mother, which Blake emphasizes in "The Everlasting Gospel," he was remaking himself as creative man, the imaginative individual who rebuilds his life according to the dictates of intellect and desire; he is capable of constructing a relationship to the world more satisfying than the one with the natural mother; humanity is his father ("I am doing my Father's business"); his female side is the creation of his love, no longer an object but a form allowing for the fullest and freest play of all his powers.⁶³

⁶² Whitaker, Swan And Shadow, p. 285.

⁶³ Gathering The Winds, p. 57.

If Har is the projection of an inner spiritual vision that transforms an external sterility, then Thel may be seen as interrogating the continuum between internal and external. She interrogates the truth of what is imagined in relation to eternal identity. The task of the narrative is to make visible to Thel's self-consciousness the method by which internal becomes external and both are aspects of the "living Form" of the Logos.

Each image of herself Thel numbers over is a pose incapable of not assuming another pose. The prophetic issue at stake here is the invisible thread of spiritual cause which creates eternal identity throughout states. The prophetic concern with futurity becomes a mythic substantiation of the present, a present that both is and is not of the speaking voice, or 'remembered' body, because of the nature of contrariety. But in the vales of Har, which is a mirror inversion of Eden, the tragic abyss of human experience is made visible because thought must deal in terms of the sexuality of the image which seduces and futurity is seen as an absence. Here we have not only the deepest nature of religious thinking but the profound humanism of social thinking returned to its origin in religious experience since the minute delineation of the symbol by which to contain the eternal is Blake's greatest celebration as well as his most profound grief.

The essence of Thel's lament may be seen in terms of Hegel's depiction of the "Unhappy Consciousness":

Since it [the "Unhappy Consciousness"] thus, even while thinking, proceeds by way of figurative ideas, absolute Being is indeed revealed to it, but the moments of this Being, owing to their synthetic pictorial thinking, partly fall of themselves apart from one another, so that they are not related to one another through their own notion, while, partly again, this figurative thinking retreats from the pure object it deals with, and takes

up a merely external relation towards it. The object is externally revealed to it from an alien source, and in this thought of Spirit it does not recognize its own self, does not recognize the nature of pure self-consciousness.⁶⁴

Experience in the fallen realm is a ravaging after the pure self-consciousness of absolute Spirit, a return to the primordial condition of creative innocence. This is perhaps the deepest meaning of the prophetic impulse towards death. The casting aside of the negation makes possible reunification with the beloved. However, the mind is unable to self-consciously contain the eternal lineaments of pure Spirit. It cannot contain its own pure self-consciousness at any given moment in fallen experience. The difference between the vales of Har and the realm of Mne Seraphim is Thel's own self-consciousness of death as the mirror of divinity. And, of course, her plight is extreme in that the divine has no self-consciousness apart from her participation in the eternality of process. What makes her so attractive is that she knows this as the immediacy of the innocence of the given. Her consciousness of death is analogous to a prophetic consciousness of the contrariety involved in individual perspective. Her lament is an invocation of the Divine Logos as a surrendering to the anti-perspectival.⁶⁵ It is the genuine bacchan-

⁶⁴ Quoted by Altizer, The New Apocalypse, p. 47.

⁶⁵ On receiving news of the death of the sculptor, John Flaxman, Blake commented: "I cannot consider death as anything but a removing from one room to another." Todd, p. 143. The prophetic concern with death is thus rendered in terms of perspective. Blake no more believed in death as a finality than he conceived of perspective as an enclosure within an irreversibly collapsed cave of consciousness. The prophetic opening of the anti-perspectival is achieved by means of an awakening of unfallen perspective. This is accomplished in and through fallen perspective. Fallen perspective is transfigured.

alia of the loss of self which has already taken place in the realm of Mne Seraphim since Thel is "the pure spiritual essence, ever fleeting because ever incarnating."⁶⁶ As far as the prophetic labour of naming the eternal forms in Imagination is concerned, Thel's lament is twofold in that it acknowledges the un-self-conscious promiscuity of pure Spirit in relation to the thinking mind as a fallen mirror. She likens herself to the departing images of eternal identity in Imagination. Her desire for continual Self-Annihilation is a desire to provide a clearing where the Divine Logos may speak. Implicit in her lament is a fear of the precariousness of the imagination. She seems to be aware of her role as an outlaw or enemy of the promise of fulfillment. Her lament gives voice to the necessary death of God, the emptying of eternity, so that the human may appear as the seat of the divine. It is essentially a desire to contain her most immediate contrary, to bestow self-consciousness upon the divine by acting as a mirror in which the Logos may behold itself. It is a desire to raise the sense of hearing to a condition of "pure vision."

Most of the action of "The Book of Thel" takes place in the vales of Har. As an earthly paradise, or externalized "image of an inner spiritual vision," it contains the seeds of apocalyptic transfiguration, or Edenic wholeness, because it is the landscape of Thel's perspective and Blake does not construe the existence of divinity in terms of a dualism. In other words, individual perspective contains the potential of an awakening of the anti-perspectival by marrying the contrariety of innocence and experience. But only the labour of the prophetic as a futurism can make this visible. It is important to determine the minute

⁶⁶ Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, 93.

bounds of the vales of Har because Thel returns there at the end of the poem. As Susan Fox observes: "The paradox of Blake's cosmology is that the more distinct its division become, the more profoundly inter-involved they become."⁶⁷ We have already seen this paradox at work in relation to the function of the river of Adona. It applies equally to the range of the vales of Har.

Blake conceives of all being as force or power; both the physical and the spiritual realms are manifestations of this spiritual force. What men have been taught to perceive as fixed material bodies are only momentary images of this unbounded spiritual power, images imposed upon it by the limitations of the five senses. Blake's notion of the five senses as framing windows or "narrow chinks in the cavern" which limit the potential infinity of being to bounded, finite sense-data is very similar to Kant's concept of the "categories." Kant argued that the human mind inherently imposes forms or modalities, most notably of time, space, and causality, upon conscious experience and thus receives all its knowledge of the external world preshaped in terms of these categories. If man would expand his five senses, thus cleansing "the doors of perception" and annihilating such restrictive categories, Blake argues, then he would perceive that all so-called bodies are only images of a single spiritual power or soul, images that can be changed at will by the poetic genius or imagination.⁶⁸

Mellor's observations lead us directly to the abyss which the discursive understanding must confront when presented with the imaginative account of the divine involutions and evolutions of being. The senses not only contract to create order, but they expand to provide a passage through which to perceive the innate logic of energy itself. The "potential infinity of being" is present only to the active power of the resurrected senses. Corporeal existence is the creative act of perception since "the

⁶⁷ Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton", p. 210.

⁶⁸ Anne Mellor, p. 43.

corporeal world exists only as objects of consciousness, a system of ideas or spiritual forces."⁶⁹ The appearance of the spiritualized body in external nature is the achievement of the prophetic imagination. This achievement belongs to Thel because the landscape of her experience is her own creation, an externalized image of her spiritual condition in the form of the vales of Har and its characters. The "true Man" cannot receive knowledge of the external world preshaped in fallen categories since this would deny the existence of the potential for Self-Annihilation. Images of "a single spiritual power" can never be changed at will because this implies a perversion of the labour of Urthona and a disregard for the contrariety spawning his creation. Apocalyptic images discover the "true Man" to the same extent that he discovers them. We may then ask the exact nature of Thel's lament.

Thel's lament in the vales of Har voices the plight of the prophetic within the bounds of fallen time. It is a negative of the fullness of eternity, "an allusion to process and repeatability...suggesting...that definition is a function of the fall and that the line taking shape [or the emanations of divine love made visible] is not a revelation, but only an imprint of the infinite...a bodily signifier of absence, arbitrarily separate from any origin in eternity."⁷⁰ Her lament is an analogue of the religious desire for the second coming of Christ seen in terms of the prophetic as the desire for the return of the lost beloved. Thel's self-

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁷⁰ Peggy Meyer Sherry, "The 'Predicament' Of The Autograph: 'William Blake'," Glyph 4: John Hopkins Textual Studies, eds. Samuel Weber and Henry Sussman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 148.

consciousness of confinement within perspective as the simultaneous presence and absence of the Divine Logos entails a further un-self-consciousness of the divine as her immediate other. She must explore the infinite lineaments of her confinement in order to witness a transfiguration of perspective. Her experience in the vales of Har are such an exploration. Her successive encounters with each of the dramatic characters represents a continuing creation of her most immediate other, a responsible search for a wholeness in Imagination by means of a deepening of self-consciousness. The appearance of the naked male with his back visible on the introductory plate, for instance, invites a shattering of Thel's readership as a witnessing which "undercuts in turn the opposite authority of the word as living breath and body or Christ."⁷¹ This should not seem strange since "Thel's Motto," which is the epitaph of the Virgin, advocates a continual casting aside of the newly risen body. Thel is to be seen then, as purely human acting in the arena of history as the sole envelope of Spirit. The death of God is mirrored in the act of Self-Annihilation in inverse proportion to the prophetic witnessing of the newly risen body. The prophetic issue at stake in Thel's lament is the continual transfiguration of perspective. Creation is perpetual transfiguration. The vales of Har represent the realm of generation which must be continually shed. It is the realm of the mortal and vegetative body struggling to appear as the fullness of Eden. As the perspectival landscape of Thel's creation, the vales of Har signify an image of her freedom in bondage. She is free to the extent that she chooses to engage in the act of Self-Annihilation. Her plight is double in that she represents

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 148.

fallen Albion and his unfallen emanation. According to the contrariety of creative innocence she also represents unfallen Albion and his fallen emanation. Blake writes that "Albion was slain upon his mountains, & in his tent" (M 1 19:20 E112), internal and external collapsed simultaneously when Albion allowed externality to divide from him. As a primordial Eve figure, Thel may be seen as Albion's departed emanation, the voice of abandoned externality, artificially posed to mirror Albion's fallen condition. She is Albion's diaphonous other. If Thel can be seen as an Eve figure, Blake's vocation to see all nature as the incarnation of eternal identity is consummated in his creation of the Virgin. In this way her lament is a crystal mirroring the fallen within the unfallen condition.

Thel's concern with perspective takes on an added dimension with the appearance of the Lilly who had been announced earlier as "the lotus of the water." The appearance of the Lilly signifies a shattering of Thel's perspective. The Lilly is "breathing in the humble grass" (1:15) as the living breath of the Divine Logos made manifest in generation. But the Lilly's celebration of eternal identity ("For thou shalt be clothed in light and fed with morning manna" (1:23) is unable to appease Thel since desire has vanished from the Lilly's perspective. The promise of the Logos to the Lilly becomes the promise of the Lilly to Thel. The Lilly functions as pure soul or the unfallen voice of Luvah which must remain invisible. (see FZ 126:28-37, 127:1-39 E380-81) Thel's lament offers the supporting experience of creative innocence, or, in other words, it embodies the contrary of innocence in the form of fallen Vala. Thel is both the pure

soul embodied by the Lilly and the polarizing voice of fallen Tharmas. (see FZ 131:1-9 E384) History, or the emanating appearance of a single thought, is seen as the process of redemption. In human terms the perspective of the Lilly as an embodiment of the Divine Logos becomes the tyrannical authority of the written law, hidden in a promise of "the opposite authority of the word as living breath and body or Christ." Thel had already known this in her yearning for a second coming of Christ. This is the fullest meaning of her desire to seize the "inmost Form" of the issue of perspective since she is, in essence, an externalized symbol of Thel's movement towards an unfallen dwelling within the anti-perspectival. However, once the Lilly's message is delivered it becomes the decay of memory and bears the stamp of fallen perspective. Her message to Thel is cyclical. It leaves Thel in the same dilemma. The Lilly's speaking bears a mythic past which regardless of the potential such an edifice provides for an entrance inside the present as a making visible of prophetic futurity, it is already a formidable edifice and therefore the decay of memory disparaging the divine. This is shown by the Lilly's promise of the perpetual presence of the Logos who says to her:

rejoice thou humble grass, thou new-born lilly flower,
 Thou gentle maid of silent valleys, and of modest brooks;
 For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna;
(1:21-23)

Thel's concern is with the eternality of the universal act of Self-Annihilation. The Lilly dwells in a prophetic futurity that is a mirroring of the established realm of Mne Seraphim and therefore without desire, thus tyrannizing the human. The Lilly is an eternal joy that has discovered its source in generation, in "the humble grass." Thel realizes that the Lilly's self-consciousness of her role in creation is based on a

seek acceptance of the insufflationary hand of the Saviour. Although she praises the Lilly's humility, she cannot accept it as her own lot since the Lilly's avowal of the eternality of grace is yet the mark of confinement within perspective. In other words, the Lilly's perspective advances a passive acceptance of a spiritualized Nature which is already a completed process. The Lilly's message amounts to a celebration of authority. Less than the total destruction of the intellectual body is unacceptable to Thel's inquiring nature.

Nancy Bogen gives one explanation for Thel's inability to rest with the message of the Lilly:

In spite of their concern for Thel, the Lilly and Cloud are curiously unperturbed by her problem. The Lilly assumes that Thel will end in "eternal vales" like herself, for on apprising Thel of her own happy lot, she asks, "Then why should Thel complain, / Why should the mistress of the vales of Har, utter a sigh" (1:25, 2:1). And the Cloud is overjoyed on learning that Thel might eventually be the "food of worms" (3:26). But are they correct -- should Thel be satisfied and cease complaining? In the context of Fabulous Histories and similar works the answer is no, one reason being that the Lilly and Cloud, as part of brute creation, simply do not have the capacity to understand Thel fully. By supposing that Thel will "flourish" in "eternal vales," the Lilly reveals that she views Thel as just another lily, not as a human being. Similarly, the prospect of Thel's being the "food of worms" brings joy to the Cloud because it corresponds to his own lot. To him Thel might as well be another cloud, and he says as much when he addresses her as "virgin of the skies."⁷²

Still, Lilly and Cloud articulate astonishing transfigurations of perspective. Clearly Blake is ushering Thel and the reader to the mainsprings of the anti-perspectival by displaying the essential narcissian interwoven with a creational reception of the Divine Logos, the contrariety of creative

innocence. The locus of the anti-perspectival must issue from a minute delineation of perspective in fallen time. The prophetic language of the narrative shows the Lilly to be bound by fallen perspective and yet wonderfully free to contemplate the issue of her bondage. Both the cyclical nature of the Lilly's message and the fact that she in an externalized creation of Thel's immediate other show this. The prophetic narrative reveals the mystery of creation as the opening of the anti-perspectival in and through perspective. Perspective is to be seen as neither fallen nor unfallen but as the redeemable and redeeming aspect of the soul.

The Lilly, "So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head," (1:18) introduces Blake's lifelong concern with the nature of Thought in the fallen and unfallen realms by means of an image of Psyche. In Blake the head is invariably the seat of sublimity wherein the Holy Spirit attains to self-consciousness and the "Divine Mercy" (J 32:54 El77) knows itself for the first time.

"Thought" does not mean philosophical thought or ratiocination; the term should not be allowed to invoke deism, the mechanistic and materialist philosophy of the eighteenth century; nor is there the remotest relation between..."thought"...and what Blake derides in "An Island in the Moon." ...At the touch of Blake's "thought" all charm is intended to flow into the poem, for thought means sensibility or sympathy -- in its richest later eighteenth-century meaning; or, in the more technical language of Blake's latest vision, love, the affections, intellect, mind, art; indeed, vision itself...Blake early in his career began defining "thought." The first task was to make a separation, the next to make an indissoluble connection. The separation involved distinguishing "Science" from "intellect" and elevating the latter; and also distinguishing between "intellect" and "affection" and giving the priority of power to the latter. So it is that love as the very life of man, without which everything else is passive, must animate and control mind or thought or intellect. If the understanding is to rise, it

must rise with love, for they are elevated together. But then, once animated by the affections, the intellect itself becomes a principle of redemption....Thought animated by affection must perforce issue in deeds of love, and so Blake cries out against Bacon's separation of mind and action: "Thought is Act." Thought, being affection and act, cannot escape being art -- visionary art, of course, for art is the loving imagination at work -- the "Human Eternal Body in Every Man," "The All in Man."⁷³

Blake asks Isaiah:

does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?
He replied. All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of any thing. (MHH 12 E38)

By "thought" Blake means spiritual exuberance, "pure vision." He writes: "When Thought is cload in Caves. Then love shall shew its root in deepest Hell" (FZ 5 65:12 E337). The empty abstractions of the natural man are a worship of a dead selfhood, devoid of the dynamism of the soul's contrariety. Thought and love are to be seen as contraries nursing one another. Thought does not entail a compilation of the "rotten rags of memory" but consists of a passionate participation in the emanations of divine love by which the fourfold aspect of the finite is returned. It involves a creational surrender to, and a conducting of, "the beams of love" which is the sole entry into a mythologized present that can only attain to full manifestness in the futurity of the prophetic voice. "Thought without affection makes a distinction between Love & Wisdom as it does between body & Spirit" (E593). When divorced from its contrary of love, thought is unable to attain to the condition of "pure vision" restorative of fourfold depth to the finite. Prophetic thinking is restorative of the

⁷³ Jean H. Hagstrum, "The Fly," William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), pp. 377-8.

"pure vision" of unfallen Urizen. The finite body is seen in terms of the charged soul. By "thought" Blake anticipates the building of Jerusalem, the pursuit of Eden, which is art. The man who does not exercise his talents in this direction is not a Christian. Blake's "thought" implies overflowing exuberance, a dizzying participation in the involutions and evolutions of spiritual beauty. "Thought" entails the epic proportions of the contrariety involved in the stern debate of self-consciousness. The "most holy forms of Thought: (such is the power of Inspiration)" (M 1 28:5 E124) delineate the contrariety involved in the symbology of Blake's tiger as "the fruitful mystery of evil."⁷⁴ Inspired thought renews itself according to the principle of Self-Annihilation. Desire moves into the realm of prophetic thinking and becomes a concrete method of knowing, a way of making visible a spiritualized absence in the form of the divine other. It is desire which supports the eternality of process. Blake's "thought" may be likened to astonishment. Astonishment precipitates the act of Self-Annihilation. Blake writes: "Enthusiastic Admiration is the first Principle of Knowledge and its last" (E636). And again: "He who does not Know Truth at Sight is unworthy of Her Notice" (E648). The act of Self-Annihilation becomes an epistemological principle in Blake's system. It is the method by which the soul and its immediate other are married in contrapuntal harmony. It is the lightning flash of the ground of being in the resurrected body of Christ.

Prophetic thinking allows "Airy nothing" to be given "a name and a habitation / Delightful! with bounds to the Infinite putting off the Indefinite" (M 1 28:3-4 E124) according to the method of creation advanced by the Pebble in prideful ecstasy:

⁷⁴ Whitaker, Swan And Shadow, p. 292.

Love seeketh only Self to please,
 To bind another to its delight;
 Joys in anothers loss of ease,
 And builds a Hell in Heavens despite. (CP E19)

The loving embrace of the prophetic method may be seen as a moral amorality. Blake's profound morality is forgiveness. It is grounded in an apprehension of spiritual cause. The position of the Pebble is not a perversion of innocence, as most critics seem to believe, but a passionate beatification of active innocence, a self-conscious mirroring of the universal within the particular imagination. The Pebble's 'experienced' apprehension of innocence signifies the bestowal "onto the cosmos itself of deep consciousness; the internal homeostatic rhythms of the body..." The Clod and the Pebble advance contrary orders of innocence and experience as do Thel and the Lilly. The Pebble's view is a necessary evil in order to create a human image of the world. Without the contrary portion of innocence advanced by the Pebble, the Clod's perspective is in danger of descending into the habit of orthodoxy, of establishing a passive dualism. Again, Blake's profound morality is forgiveness. This is the reason for his association of fourfold depth with Edenic wholeness. He is working from both sides of his material, the fallen and unfallen orders, and therefore he seems to articulate contradictions. However, the prophetic, as the immediacy of poetical thinking, deals purely with thought as visitation and undertakes no complicity between art and nature as does the visionary. As a creational listening, the prophetic may be seen as being able to see with the ear.

Blake sees the ultimate regeneration of the senses as "a multiplication as well as [an] expansion and cleansing," as a return to a communis sensus "by which the senses could be united with each other, a kind of total synaesthesia reflective of total coinstan-

taneous perception."⁷⁵

Blake's "thought" provides a continual entrance into the eternality of process whereby the spiritual man "feels love descend into him" (E592) and the forms of eternal identity are seen as interpersonal. Prophetic "thought" entails the eternal hope for the blossoming of the new self and, as such, effects a shattered historical consciousness that is the only entry into the spiritual allegory of the crucifixion and hence into the recovery of unfallen time. The prophetic reveals language as experience of the divine and our sole salvation in freedom because it promises a glimpse at evil, a direct confrontation with the known by means of its function of defining, which can then be cast off in the stern debate of self-consciousness to witness the emergence of the new self. The infinitude of desire is ceaselessly at odds with the newly risen body.

The Lilly vows that "he that smiles on all" "spreads his hand" over her and says:

rejoice
 For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna:
 Till summers heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs
 To flourish in eternal vales (1:21-25).

Incarnation and transfiguration, transience and transcendence, merge, become one. We may remember that "Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light." Although the Lilly bathes in divine light, she does not articulate the method by which the divine becomes the divine. Hers is the voice of the child of the promise. The Lilly's

⁷⁵ Anne Mellor, Blake's Human Form Divine, p. 59.

perspective depends upon that of Thel in order to legitimately contain the soul's contrariety. And, significantly, it is Thel who celebrates the Lilly's chastening function (2:3-10). Neither the Lilly's nor Thel's perspective exists in isolation. They are contraries nursing one another, aspects of the same consciousness. Innocence and experience are born together. Thel differs from the Lilly in that she has a consciousness of death as confinement within perspective which is existentially more perspicacious than the Lilly's promise of spiritual fulfillment. The Lilly partakes of a condition of contrariety which is beyond her, and therefore in danger of slipping into un-self-consciousness. The divine can only attain to self-consciousness through incessant mental warfare in generation. Although the Lilly's message to Thel is a transfiguration of the Virgin's perspective, it worships the perpetual fullness of eternity and leaves no room for the death of God. The Lilly's imaginative wholeness is after the fact. If Thel were to rest assured of her eternal identity at this point in the poem she would seriously jeopardise the plight of the human in relation to the divine.

Max Müller, in his Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, interprets the word "mana" as a Polynesian name for the Infinite.⁷⁶ And of course, the reference is to the Biblical account of the promised Eucharistic celebration of the risen body of Christ in the form of the manna fed to the Israelites as they fled Egyptian captivity. Blake

⁷⁶ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1946), p. 80.

writes: "Israel deliverd from Egypt is Art deliverd from Nature & Imitation" (E272). The Lilly differs from Thel in that she has already secured an apprehension of the method of divine creation. Her lot is meditative, threefold, a pastoralized spirituality. The condition of Thel's lament shows that she seeks to make visible the linear progression of Imagination in eternity without succumbing to the cyclical pattern of the Lilly's thinking. The Lilly shall reap the harvest of the labour of the prophetic until she is consumed by the desire of "thought" as the visitation of the Holy Spirit. Blake's bottomless playful mirth is to be discovered in the identification of "thought" with the "summers heat." The contrariety of the realm of ideas as the "Divine Members" of the "true Vine of Eternity" and the act of thinking as the incarnation of "gorgeous clothed Flies" is discovered in the labour of "the Sons of Los":

These are the Sons of Los, & these the Labourers of the Vintage
 Thou seest the gorgeous clothed Flies that dance & sport in summer
 Upon the sunny brooks & meadows; every one the dance
 Knows in its intricate mazes of delight artful to weave;
 Each one to sound his instruments of music in the dance,
 To touch each other & recede; to cross & change & return
 These are the Children of Los; thou seest the Trees on mountains
 The wind blows heavy, loud they thunder thro' the darksome sky
 Uttering prophecies & speaking instructive words to the sons
 Of men: These are the Sons of Los! These the Visions of Eternity
 But we see only as it were the hems of their garments
 When with our vegetable eyes we view these wond'rous Visions
 (M 1 26:1-12 K122).

The function of unfallen Tharmas is to marry contraries, to make visible the spiritualized body by transfiguring the sexual into the spiritual. Both Tharmas and Urizen in their unfallen aspects reveal "thought" to be "pure vision." Thel's lament turns the condition of "pure vision" inside out, as it were, in order to show the contrariety involved in a surrender to "the beams of love." The Lilly, as incarnation of the Divine Logos,

speaks her opposite into existence, thereby performing a restoration of the Golden Age, the time of the "Human form Divine." In "A Divine Image" Blake identifies "the human form" as "a fiery forge" (E32) recalling the prophetic labour of Los as a humanizing of external and alien authority. It is possible to view Thel as an early Los figure, the essence of time, in search of the continuum between time and space which would signify a recovery of man's primordial condition. Throughout the poem her major concern is with the "place" of the human.

It can be seen that the Lilly's perspective offers "a going forth & returning" which embodies the contrariety of innocence and experience making visible her dwelling within the prophetic. But she is unable to appease Thel's inquiring preoccupation with eternal identity, with the locus of the human. The Lilly remains a child of the promise. At this point in the poem the prophetic narrative purports a further weaving, a continued delineation, of the infinitude of Thel's earthly lineaments.

By her recognition of the Lilly's function ("Giving to those that cannot crave" 2:4) it becomes apparent that Thel is herself engulfed in the passionate activity of thought as visitation. She reveals an awareness of the supporting embrace of "the mercy of Eternity" as the nursing contrary involved in her perspective. She also reveals that perspective is not a matter of a static naturalism but is a reflection of the liquidity of eternal process. It is seldom pointed out that Blake wrote in his "Annotations To The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds" that "The difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great Deal: The Good one Really Does Copy a Great Deal." (E634) It becomes apparent that the deepest significance of Thel's lament is that the

prophetic is a reflecting of an eternality that must needs be seen as itself a reflection since the appearance of the resurrected Christ depends upon the Self-Annihilation of the thinking mind. This movement is doubled in the prophetic vocation to see nature itself in its unfallen condition as an emanation of an alchemical light.

Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all, But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. (E677)

The "Good" artist copies a spiritualized Nature and not the lifeless forms of an externalized authority. External nature is humanized by the insufflationary power of imagination. Thel reveals that she possesses the sympathetic power of a loving imagination by her recognition of the Lilly's function. She does not measure the purpose of the Lilly by her own standards as the Lilly measures Thel. The self-consciousness of Thel's "gentle" participation in the contrariety involved in perspective shows her vision to be threefold, indeed, a desire to seize the "inmost Form" of Edenic fourfold wholeness. This can only be accomplished by minutely delineating the locus of the human voice in relation to a cosmology where "Nature is Imagination itself."

For Blake everything is syabolical. We live in a world of symbolic forms. All of our experiences are vortical -- infinite perceptions delineated by minute discrimination into symbols. For Blake there is no real world of being set off against a strange, subjective world of fantasy.⁷⁷

The prophetic witnessing of the emanating descent of divine love to image eternal identity in the fallen realm is a celebration of the contrariety

⁷⁷ Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats, p. 134.

of the soul as a time which is its lost other. As the soul's lost other, the prophetic apprehension of unfallen time moves into and merges with the undiscovered infinitude of the mortal body's space.

The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its Own vortex, and when once a traveller thro' Eternity Has pass'd that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind His path, into a globe itself infolding like a sun, Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty, While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth, Or like a human form, a friend with whom he liv'd benevolent. As the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing Its vortex, and the north & south with all their starry host, Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square, Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade. Thus is the heaven a vortex pass'd already, and the earth A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity.
(M 1 15:21-35 E108)⁷⁸

The appearance of the Golden Age in which "All Human Forms" will be "identified" (J 99:1 E256) is the labour of a prophetic futurity. The wholeness of Eienic fourfold perception is always an immanent becoming.

What we know as natural objects are vortexes, reflections of the past movements of man. Likewise, nature itself is a reflection of the human "traveller"; its form is always a response to a particular human state; hence, the vast distances of the starry heavens give witness to the vast time separating us from our ancient human form, just as the compelling immediacy of the earth arises from a particular and present human condition, a condition not yet "pass'd."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The imaginative apprehension of the earth as "one infinite plane" is the discovery of prophetic vision. Balzac, in Seraphita, makes his messianic character say: "Such is the vastness of the heavens where the angels dwell, that if man were endowed with vision as constantly rapid as the transmission of light from the sun to the earth, and if he gazed through all eternity, his eyes would find no horizon to rest on."

⁷⁹ Altizer, The New Apocalypse, pp. 10-11.

The "heaven" is to be seen as the delight at the discovery of the newly risen body. The "earth" is the infinite lineaments of the eternality of process.

Thel's address to the Lilly

O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley.
Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'ertired.

(2:3-4)

locates the condition of astonishment as the contrary nursing the desire that is Eden because "those that cannot crave" are wearied with the joy of imaging an ever incomplete spiritualized absence. Fox points out: "The female emanations in "Milton" are terrified not by the fall of Albion from eternity, but by the very character of eternity: "because the life of Man was too exceeding unbounded / His joy became terrible to them: (30:22-23). They beg shelter not from eternal death, as they do in "The Four Zoas," but from eternal life."⁸⁰ Thel, too, interrogates the nature of eternal life by focusing on the issue of eternal death, the infinitude of mortal perspective. In relation to Thel's strenuous Edenic activity, the Lilly is a flower of Beulah in meditative repose. Beulah was created to "protect...love that kills its beloved..." (J 48:15-16 E194). Thel sees "those that cannot crave, the voiceless" as confined within astonishment at the discovery of eternal life. This is the deepest significance of Thel's understanding of death. Her purpose is to unlock the gates of the fallen tongue, to witness the miracle of the Worm's speaking, and so she must travel through the mirrors of her reflected perspective to the threshold of her own grave where eternal life and eternal death are one.

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Fox, Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton", p. 203.

By showing that the seeds of the anti-perspectival, of apocalyptic fourfold depth, are embedded in perspective the narrative masterfully consummates the prophetic as a self-critical mode of operation. Blake is not standing in the shadows, as it were, behind the narrative pulling strings. The unfolding of the narrative is a discovery creating the poet as much as it is a creation of Thel. Yeats participated in the same fervour when he wrote that "Those men that in their writings are most wise / Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts."⁸¹

In her necessary distinction between the genuine mystical transcendence and the harrowing descent into the unconscious made by the French symbolist poets, Gwendolyn Bays points out the difference between the "superconscious" and the Freudian subconscious. The "superconscious" she describes as a

realm of contingency and potential spiritual fulfillment[...]the superconscious may be said to contain the future as an acorn contains an oak. This realm of "ecstasy," which Plotinus describes in The Enneads, is the region of mystic vision which must be distinguished from the visions of the nocturnal seers.⁸²

There is nothing in Blake's poetry that is mystical or inaccessibly hidden. The finite contains the infinite "as an acorn contains an oak" and we shall see that perspective contains the anti-perspectival in the same manner. In Blake's total unification of Spirit and Body there is to be found no division between the lower and the higher orders of active intelligence.

⁸¹ William Butler Yeats, "Ego Dominus Tuus," Selected Poems, ed. M.L. Rosenthal (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 71.

⁸² Gwendolyn Bays, The Orphic Vision: seer poets from Novolis to Rimbaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 8.

When Blake asserts that what is above is below he means that the "Divine Members" are mirrored in the dark dens of the subconscious where Urthona labours. There is no distinction between the subconscious and the super-conscious.

For Blake a totally dispassionate reason would have to end as Urizen exploring his dens, freezing into a cold tyranny and ending in a dark despair. Freud's thought develops from the notion that all destructive and self-defeating behaviour is a perversion of a repressed and positive libido, to his late recognition of a negative instinct, the death wish, which for him is the desire to return to the original inorganic state, the hidden motive of the drive of self-preservation. Thanatos waxes as the generative tide of Eros, expressing the immortality of the germ plasma, wanes. But for Blake, Eros⁸³ is not so limited a concept; it contains both Tharmas and Luvah; generation is superseded by regeneration; the living power of Tharmas is simultaneously a formal principle, wanting to unfold a human nature, a tongue that contains the Word, while Luvah is as much the fire in the loins as the love that seeks a harmony of parts. Thanatos remains for Blake a perversion of Self-hood, which, though it parallels Freud's notion of self-preservation, is not an instinct but an error that can be superseded, the negation of instincts which, for Blake, are essentially positive. Blake's Thanatos is the accuser who makes man see his nature as sinful and puts in him the fear of death, a detached and ironic intellect which mocks man with his fate. Blake's vision reverses Freud's at the last; the apocalypse finally is the assurance that life will triumph over death. For Freud, repression would always be necessary to civilization; for Blake, the highest civilization is the liberty of Jerusalem, which is not a chaotic anarchy of irrational impulse but the faith that man's deepest instincts are communal and integrative, and that therefore their fullest freedom would result in harmonious unity of each man and all men....⁸³

Thel's quest to discover the locus of the human in relation to the anti-perspectival is paralleled by the struggle of Eros to supersede generation. The dialectics of immanence returns the infinite to the finite.

83 Wilner, Gathering The Winds, p. 55.

Cezanne tells us that "Nature is on the inside."⁸⁴ According to the dialectics of apocalyptic vision, transcendence and transience are rendered one in an alchemical transfiguration of the innocence of the given.

By asking the penultimate question of the Lilly -- "and who shall find my place?" (2:12) -- Thal affirms that the locus of the anti-perspectival can never issue from the worship of a dead past. Thal's question is a prophetic pose undertaken to emphasize the necessary contrariety involved in creation. Blake writes in "The Four Zoas":

Man is a Worm wearied with joy he seeks the caves of sleep
 Among the Flowers of Beulah in his Selfish cold repose
 Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love in selfish clay
 Folding the pure wings of his mind seeking the places dark
 Abstracted from the roots of Science then inclosed around
 In walls of Gold we cast him like a Seed into the Earth
 Till times & spaces have passed over him duly every morn
 We visit him covering with a Veil the immortal seed
 With windows from the inclement sky we cover him & with walls
 And hearths protect the Selfish terror till divided all
 In families we see our shadows born. & thence we know
 That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
 We fall on one another's necks more closely we embrace
 Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
 Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
 Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy abound
 (9 133:11-26 E386-7).

The birth of the "shadows" of the Eternals is the appearance of the Worm. He is himself a reflection of his own reflection. In a discussion of the "predicament" of the autograph, "William Blake," Sherry takes up the issue of the eternal identity of the prophetic signature.

⁸⁴ Quoted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays, ed. James M. Edie and trans. Carletonallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 164.

The worm should immediately come to mind in looking at the autograph, for the sixty-odd years of the artistic career commemorated there happen to fit the familiar trope from the poetry by which man is described as a "worm of sixty winters" (J 34:57). But although Blake seems to have found the worm a peculiarly expressive emblem of man's mortal career, identifying it with both the embryo in the womb (U 19-20) and the old man, the worm is perhaps most provocatively imaged as a threshold figure who sits at death's door in Plate 16 of "For the Sexes" as an emblem of writing. Anne Mellor identifies the stick this figure holds as the traveller's staff, but it seems more exact to call it a stylus, for it is held in writing position at the lower tip, not grasped at the top like a walking stick (cf. the traveller's staff in Plate 15). That the system of differences in which the self is always displaced and the name figured should be a system of writing is not opposed to the emblem of the weaving worm to which the text of Plate 16 alludes, for the written text often figures in metaphors of warp and woof in both early and late Blake. But here the inscription at the gate seems to urge the traveller to halt and reflect on his readership:

The Door of Death I open found
 And the Worm Weaving in the Ground
 Thou'rt my Mother from the Womb
 Wife Sister Daughter to the Tomb
 Weaving to Dreams the Sexual Strife
 And weeping over the Web of Life.

("For the Sexes," 15-16)

At such a threshold, man meets a riddle in the textuality of his own identity that figures his destiny from embryo to old age in dreamlike doublings.⁸⁵

The threshold of death is construed by Plates 15 and 16 of "For the Sexes" in terms of the act of Self-Annihilation. The poem displays the cyclical nature of the advent of the spiritual body to the generative understanding. Regeneration is rooted in generation. Regenerative love -- as it becomes knowledge, as a sleeping on the couch of divine love -- sees the "living Form" of eternal identity. In Blake's special sense, the appearance of eternal identity depends upon a minute delineation of the infini-

85 Peggy Meyer Sherry, pp. 151-2.

tude of individual identity, of human mortality. Neither universal nor individual identity attain to a finality in the prophetic voice but are always engaged in the universal process of crucifixion, the eternality of process.

The Lilly, as a flower of Beulah, or "a pure undesiring joy,"⁸⁶ the risen soul as spiritualized body of the Logos, reflects the realm of Mne Seraphim from which Thel departed because of the overrooming, which amounts to the absence, of human desire. The Lilly makes visible the condition of Beulah as Thel does the condition of Edenic struggle. An awakening of the thought-forms in the sleeping countenance of the Holy Spirit depends upon the continued struggle of the human to realize itself. The continual act of creation is a "War of Love" (J 97:14 E254). The Lilly's perspective is unable to contain the issue of fallen individual identity and, therefore, because of the nature of contrariety, is unable to wholly reflect the identity of eternal form. It is Thel's overwhelming self-consciousness of death as confinement within perspective that contains the seeds of the release of the strictly human. The Lilly remains unaware of the divine nature of human desire that accompanies the self-consciousness of death which the thinking mind witnesses as a crucifixion of the intellectual body. Inherent in Thel's articulation of the profound innocence of the given ("Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints" 2:7) is a prenatal experience of the creational emanations of divine love. It is the task of the prophetic to show how, inversely, a self-consciousness

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Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 92.

of the crucified intellectual body that is able to contain itself generates the life of the Holy Spirit. This is the deepest meaning of Blake's condition of contrariety as the lightning flash illuminating the ground of being in a cosmology of forgiveness.

The illumination at the bottom of plate 2 depicts the Lilly bowing reverently to Thel beneath the endearing protectiveness of the vines of a white birch tree. The scene "is probably intended to represent the Lilly's farewell to Thel as described in lines 17-18 above it. It is a reverse view of the illustration on plate 11; as on plate 11, some of the flowers are open, but those nearest Thel are closed."⁸⁷ Any advance in perspective has not been a result of the continuation of time or the impingement of external authority. The blossoming of eternal identity does not take place in the natural order of causal progression. "Man Brings All that he has or Can have Into the World with him. Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown This World is too poor to produce one Seed" (E645-6). "Identities or Things are Neither Cause nor Effect They are Eternal" (E645). Blake's use of the mirror enables him to make visible spiritual progression (contained in the eternal identity of motion as the crucifixion of the intellectual body on the cross of history) by reflecting the contrary of an image within itself. Mirroring as a process consists in the passing beyond itself and into the composition of its immediate other by the two contraries. Los's Wine-press is defined in terms of a mirror inverting:

⁸⁷ The Book of Thel, ed. Nancy Bogen, p. 40.

This Wine-press is call'd War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press
Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain
As oogs are form'd in a wheel to turn the oogs of the adverse wheel.
(M 1 27:8-10 E123)

The Lilly is dressed exactly as Thel and the hair is in the same position. The protective vines of the tree are coloured to effect a shattering of sunlight so that an excess of joy in "the mercy of Eternity" is seen to weep. (MHH 8:26 E36) The suspended light particles suggest an alchemical radiance and not a causal emission from the natural sun. The geni position of the Lilly makes available to Thel's gaze that the Lilly's argument had been embedded in her own perspective all along. The mood of the design is a bestowal of "still perceptions" of Thel's "Sleeping Body" upon her perspective.

As when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps,
Else he would wake; so seem'd he entering his Shadow; but
With him the Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence
Entering; they gave him still perceptions of his Sleeping Body;
Which now arose and walk'd with them in Eden, as an Eighth
Image Divine tho' darken'd; and tho walking as one walks
In sleep; and the Seven comforted and supported him. (M 1 15:1-7 E108)

The Lilly has addressed Thel as the "mistress of the Vales of Har." (2:1) We may recall that Abraham fathers, by his concubine, Ishmael, the outlaw and enemy, who is continually at war with the child of the promise, fathered also by Abraham, but with his wife. Both lines of sons issue from the loins of creative genius. The blossoming of the reprobate is to be seen in the Lilly's acknowledgement of Thel's eternal identity as "mistress." The Lilly and Thel are double aspects of the same "Divine Member." The Lilly is the child of the promise and Thel represents the potential of an embodied Ishmael, or the prophet as reprobate. Her lament re-presents the continual labour of the prophetic as an imaging of mental

warfare in order to discover the eternal forms in Imagination. In order to continue unfolding the eternality of process Thel must continually rebel against an established account of the presence of the Divine Logos.

CHAPTER III: PLATE 3: THEL AND THE CLOUD

From the multiplicity of the Lilly's "numerous charge," (2:18) as a reception of the eternal from a condition of thought beyond desire, Thel is directed to the Cloud, whose articulation is, inversely and in exact proportion to that of the Lilly's, a delineation of the oneness of eternal identity. The Cloud, "a mortal vegetative desire,"⁸⁸ as again an externalised symbol of Thel's own unawakened dwelling within the anti-perspectival, is a presaging image of Jerusalem, or "a multitude seen as One," the fullness of "the Presence of the Divine."⁸⁹ As a symbol of married Presence, he serves the prophetic in revealing Thel to be an image of potential wholeness in the character of Jerusalem. Since "the desires arouse the otherwise dead portions of the mind into life,"⁹⁰ he embodies the potential of an awakening of the thought-forms of the Holy Spirit in a reflecting of eternal identity in the burning water of Imagination. This is depicted pictorially by showing the mirror inversion of a

88 Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 92.

89 Sandler, "The Iconoclastic Enterprise," p. 21.

90 Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 93.

single leaf, at the bottom of the design, of the multiplicity of leaves growing on the "Vine of Eternity" at the top of the plate. Clearly, Blake's meaning is to show the inseparability of what is "above" and that which is "below," the complete identification of outer and inner.

The millennial state is man living in consonance with his imagination, his full sight restored; where body and spirit are one, male and female are contained within the one human form which is Albion, married to his own created order of civilization and cultivated nature in eternal amity -- ethics and esthetics rejoined. The forms exist, for Blake, as they did at the beginning of time, and as they have always existed in the human imagination; thus the orders of the world are reversed, turned inside out; the "inner" world has become outer, the lower has been raised to the highest, the beginning has become the end, the world is as the imagination perceives it, perfectly structured by human intellect and desire -- eternity given, quite literally, in human form.⁹¹

The Cloud is a minute delineation in the fallen realm of "his partner" (3:32) who is the nourishing reflection of his eternal identity. His articulation is an enactment of the marriage ceremony.

Answering Thal's continued plea, the Cloud of mutual forgiveness shows "his golden head & his bright form emerg'd" (3:5). He symbolizes sublimity of intellect and clarity of prophetic vision. The Cloud, prophetic mentor, embodies a performance of Blake's concern with the definiteness of eternal form.

'The great and golden rule of art, as of life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp and wiry the boundary-line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism and bungling.' Inspiration was to see the permanent and characteristic in all forms, and if you had it not, you must needs imitate with a languid mind the things you saw or remembered, and so sink into the sleep of nature where all is soft and melting.⁹²

⁹¹ Wilner, Gathering The Winds, p. 53.

⁹² William Butler Yeats, "William Blake And His Illustrations To The Divine Comedy," Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 120.

The Cloud embodies the fundamental Blakean principle of artistic creation by functioning as the incarnation of "living Form" according to the decrees of inspired transcription. What amounts to Blake's concern with the restoration of a fourfold depth to the lifeless sanity of the natural man's twofold perception is discussed by Merleau-Ponty:

The painter's vision is not a view upon the outside, a merely "physical-optical" relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible. Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all "autofigurative." It is a spectacle of something only by being "a spectacle of nothing," by breaking the "skin of things" to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world. Apollinaire said that in a poem there are phrases which do not appear to have been created, which seem to have formed themselves. And Henri Michaux said that sometimes Klee's colors seem to have been born slowly upon the canvas, to have emanated from some primordial ground, "exhaled at the right place" like a patina or a mold. Art is not construction, artifice, meticulous relationship to a space and a world existing outside. It is truly the "inarticulate cry," as Hermes Trismegistus said, "which seemed to be the voice of the light." And once it is present it awakens powers dormant in ordinary vision, a secret of preexistence."

The appearance of the Cloud, "Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel," (3:6) is the vision of "a secret of preexistence," one that has been given voice to minutely delineate the incarnate logic, "the boundary-line," of Energy itself. Ruthven Todd informs us that in 1794 Blake entered in his "Notebook" "a clear and simple description of the process" of engraving.

To Wood-cut on Pewter: lay a ground on the Plate & smoke it as for Etching; then trace your outlines, and beginning with the spots of light on each object with an oval pointed needle scrape off the ground as a direction for your graver; then proceed to graving

with the ground on the plate, being as careful as possible not to hurt the ground, because it, being black, will show perfectly what is wanted.⁹⁴(underlining added)

This description of the technical method Blake used shows that the prophet was introduced to vision by vision itself. The Cloud, as the visionary appearance of Thel's immediate other, performs a further revealing of Thel's self-consciousness of the contrariety of the soul, since he is, in essence, a second "still perception" of Thel's potential dwelling within the anti-perspectival.

The appearance of the forms of eternal identity ceaselessly re-make humanity.

Figurative or not, the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium kept up within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain process of gouging within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness -- an emptiness which, as Moore's statues show decisively, upholds the pretended positivity of the things. The line is no longer the apparition of an entity upon a vacant background, as it was in classical geometry. It is, as in modern geometries, the restriction, segregation, or modulation of a pre-given spatiality.⁹⁵

The "constitutive emptiness" of that "pre-given spatiality" is brought forward by the articulation of the Cloud and is given the form of a primordiality of mutual forgiveness. The articulation of the Cloud functions as the time of the revenge of the spiritual body returning to claim as its own the divine innocence from which it acts as a "prenatal shaping force."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ William Blake: the artist, p. 37.

⁹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, p. 184.

⁹⁶ S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary, p. 247. Damon describes Los as a "prenatal shaping force" giving a body to falsehood so that it may be cast off forever. Los is the expression of Christ in fallen time; indeed, he is time itself. The Cloud is an embodiment of individual creative genius who makes manifest his other, Christ, the universal creative genius.

The fiery steeds of inspiration in the vales of Har are vowed by the Cloud to partake of the same primordial waters as the steeds of the God of Love. Principles of light are wholly manifest in finite ultimates, thereby transfiguring ultimates so that they manifest their infinite principles. The fallen and the unfallen are nourished by the same source. The Cloud also functions as a manifestation of unfallen Tharmas since his knowledge is one of an ecstasy, an 'ex-stasis', or a "passing out" of self to discover the newly risen body in a marriage of contraries. That "passing out" of self is simultaneously a multiplication and enlargement of the self effecting a humanization of externality, a christening of the world and spirit.

O main I tell thee, when I pass away,
 it is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and raptures holy;
 Unseen descending, weigh my light wings upon balmy flowers;
 And court the fair eyed dew. to take me to her shining tent; (3:10-13)

In the fallen condition clouds make visible man's separation from God but in the unfallen condition of an imaginative participation in the sports of eternal delight they act as regents of mutual forgiveness.⁹⁷ Blake writes that "Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies" (M 1 4:26 E97) and here the inverse is also true: spiritual friends are enemies of the corporeal understanding. It is interesting to observe that the resurrected body bears an image of eternal youth.

The renewal of the spiritual body of the thought-forms which are the life of the Holy Spirit awoken to self-consciousness in the voice of the Cloud, thereby allowing the "Divine Mercy" its necessary condition of contrariety in the active power of the mind, its other. But the Cloud

⁹⁷ Cf. Blake's Job: William Blake's Illustrations Of The Book of Job. Introduction and commentary by S. Foster Damon (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 46.

is again a child of the promise. The hinge upon which the merciful transfiguration of the finite into the infinite depends is the mutual interchange of forgiveness. According to Blake forgiveness is understanding. The Cloud describes the method of divine creation while he engages in the process he describes. The issue of the creational reception of the emanating gyrations of divine love to image the eternality of process is taken up by Rilke in "The Ninth Elegy." A consideration of the process he names "an imageless act" may serve to further elucidate the Cloud's task of restoring infinite proportion to a transfigured finitude. The eternality of the process which the Cloud affirms as "Unseen descending" is akin to Rilke's celebration of a transfiguring "imageless act."

Here is the time for the Tellable, here is its home.
 Speak and proclaim. More than ever
 things we can live with are falling away, for that
 which is oustingly taking their place is an imageless act.
 Act under crusts, that will readily split as soon
 as the doing within outgrows them and takes a new outline.
 Between the hammers lives on
 our heart, as between the teeth
 the tongue, which, in spite of all,
 still continues to praise.

Praise this world to the Angel, not the untellable; you
 can't impress him with the splendour you've felt; in the cosmos
 where he more feelingly feels you're only a novice. So show him
 some simple thing, refashioned by age after age,
 till it lives in our hands and eyes as a part of ourselves.
 Tell him things. He'll stand more astonished; as you did
 beside the roper in Rome or the potter in Egypt.
 Show him how happy a thing can be, how guileless and ours;
 how even the moaning of grief purely determines on form,
 serves as a thing, or dies into a thing, -- to escape
 to a bliss beyond the fiddle. These things that live on departure
 understand when you praise them: fleeting, they look for
 rescue through something in us, the most fleeting of all.
 Want us to change them entirely, within our invisible hearts,
 into -- oh, endlessly -- into ourselves! Whosoever we are.

Earth, is it not just this that you want: to arise
 invisibly in us? Is not your dream
 to be one day invisible? Earth! invisible!
 What is your urgent command, if not transformation?

.....

your holiest inspiration
 is Death, that friendly Death.

I quote at length from "The Ninth Elegy" because Rilke undertakes the issue of a prophetic humanizing of contraries. The "boundary-line" of Energy realizes itself in the mirror of the prophetic consciousness. He urges the novice to show the Angel "some simple thing...till it lives in our hands and eyes as a part of ourselves," thus internalizing all that is alien and inaccessible, or, inversely, showing that the inside is spread without. The existence of contraries "purely determines on form." The thought-forms of the life of the Holy Spirit look for transfiguration "through something in us," "within our invisible hearts." The innate science of the Imagination becomes a method of knowledge in Rilke's prophetic poetry. The process of renewal which Rilke names "an imageless act" is the discovery of the crystalline and shattered transparency of the powers of spiritual agency creating the world. The "imageless act" is substantiated in a mirror inversion by the vortical emanations of thought as internal becomes external rather like Yeats' great egg turning inside out without breaking its shell. It is consummated in the infinitude of the earthly lineaments of a restored Golden Age which is the achievement of the prophetic voice. Transparency, more than the invisible ground of the visible, is the very clothing of the muse of history, the lightning flash of the crucifixion wherein transparency itself, as an active order of intelligence, is revealed as the merciful mediatrix and sustainer between time and eternity. The discovery of transparency is

the result of a shattering of the intellectual body, the act of Self-Annihilation.

The Cloud functions in terms of spiritual agency to make visible the "risen" or imaginative "sun."

The weeping virgin, trembling kneels before the risen sun,
Till we arise link'd in a golden band, and never part;
But walk united, bearing food to all our tender flowers (3:14-16).

The image of apocalyptic fulfillment is direct and unequivocal. The individual creative imagination nourishes the thought-forms, the "tender flowers," of the life of the Holy Spirit. The chastened Bride of Christ is able to see the spiritual sun and in the purity of that vision exists the harmonious balance of contraries made manifest in creative innocence. The labour of the prophetic is couched in the necessary death of an alien and inaccessible God of false accusation. The contrariety involved in an exuberant becoming is restored to its dwelling place in a fourfold perception of the resurrected body. The virgin "weeps" with an excess of joy, the joy of thought as visitation. She is seen to kneel "trembling." "Living Form" is the terror of life, which is the terror of the generative sexuality the mind necessarily inhabits to image the symbols of eternal identity. Again, it can be seen that the prophetic is never a worship of an already erected spiritual edifice.

Throughout the corpus of his work, Blake gives the simultaneous alchemical transfiguration of the world and the soul, in allegiance to the desire of the "true Man," epic proportion. Epic is to be seen as the ceaseless labour of the prophetic "upwards into futurity," a perpetual rethinking of eternality. It begins with a casting aside of the corporeal understanding which dwells in deductions made from a static ratio of the

five senses. Blake's proclamation of a Spiritual Nature is largely the overcoming of the natural man's obsession with an ideal objectivity.

Blake remains a "literal realist of Imagination";⁹⁸

"Man anciently contain'd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth," but "in his Chaotic State of Sleep, Satan & Adam & the whole World was Created by the Elohim"; the world of nature, originally part of man himself, because part of his experience, has come, through the scientific philosophy, to seem as if separate from the soul; for "Mental Things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an Imposition. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool?" Blake is here paraphrasing Berkeley, and it is with full understanding of the philosophic questions involved that he writes

...in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven
And Earth & all you behold; tho' it appears Without, it is
Within,
In your Imagination, of which this World of Mortality is but
a Shadow.

Unfallen Albion contains his world in his own soul. The refrain that runs through "Milton" and "Jerusalem":

But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of
Albion
is like the writing on the tomb of a nation under the domination
of the positivist philosophy.⁹⁹

The initial thrust of Blake's entire system is that "man's lost paradise is his world and his body, perceived once more as 'a portion of soul!'"¹⁰⁰

The appearance of external nature marks the division of Albion, and the

98 William Butler Yeats, "William Blake And His Illustrations To The Divine Comedy," Essays & Introductions, p. 119.

99 Kathleen Raine, Blake and Antiquity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 96.

100 Ibid., p. 100.

fall takes the form of a romance quest for the lost beloved. The lost beloved is the eternal identity of the spiritualised body. The natural man's obsession with an externalized objectivity "is the substitution of actual realism for a bastard and soi-disant realism, which is in fact a form of idealism in disguise."¹⁰¹

For Blake the mental image, the form -- the very act which creates the image -- is the single reality...a visionary truth is the concrete apprehension of an object as it is created in the act of apprehension, not in the impingement of an outer material object upon a passive subject.¹⁰²

We must remember that Blake is working from both sides of his material in order to give definitive form to the descent of the fall and thereby arrest its movement. Therefore, it is equally true that "it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible." Internal and external are created simultaneously. This is the meaning of contrariety as it restores creative innocence to the extraordinary ordinariness of the given.

¹⁰¹ Owen Barfield, What Coleridge Thought (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), p. 64-5. Hugh Kenner takes up the issue of externalised authority in the narration of Joyce's "Ulysses": "Joyce began "Ulysses" in naturalism and ended it in parody, understanding more profoundly than any of his followers that naturalism cannot end anywhere else..." Joyce's Voices, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p. ix. He adds: "nothing is as dependent as Objectivity on language and the rituals of language, Objectivity which had promised to evade rhetoric and make the facts effect their own declaration." (p. 14) And: "'outer' and 'inner' are artifacts alike, artifacts of language..." (p. 89) The fluidity of the eternal identity of form is returned to the speaking of "Ulysses" by attaining to a level of narration beyond objectivity, and this, "the point of classical balance" signifies the return of fiction, "come home to the place whence Objectivity's siren song once lured her away." (p.97)

¹⁰² Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats, pp. 24-5.

The commitment and obedience of the prophetic voice to a minute delineation of eternal identity is articulated further by the Cloud.

Then if thou art the food of worms. O virgin of the skies,
How great thy use. how great thy blessing; every thing that lives,
Lives not alone, nor for itself; fear not and I will call
The weak worm from its lowly bed, and thou shalt hear its voice.
Come forth worm of the silent valley, to thy pensive queen. (3:25-29)

As with the pure otherness of the voice of the Lilly, the Cloud articulates an astonishing transfiguration of perspective. He expresses the stillness of the prophetic gaze as the locus of the "Divine Mercy," but his more direct implication is a statement of how a transfiguration of perspective is effected. This is to be seen in the liquidity of the mirror of Imagination. The Cloud's "Hovering and glittering on the air" is an enactment of the very process he describes. The voice of mutual forgiveness promises that Thel will hear the voice of the Worm. He is a presage of the mystical ecstasy¹⁰³ of the Clay's nourishing of the Worm, both promise and fulfillment. The Cloud focuses the image of Christ as the speaking Worm in the "Glass" Boehme mentions¹⁰⁴ in which Thel, as potential creative Titan, can behold and recognize the universal condition of contrariety and engage in a meditation upon the eternality of forgiveness. Just as the risen body of Christ makes possible the resurrection of divided man, the promise of the Cloud is that Thel shall hear the Worm's voice, that man shall be graced with the powers of an exhibition of the spiritual beauty of the world which is his divided emanation. The spiritual beauty

¹⁰³ Cf. Blake's Job, p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kathleen Raine, p. 56. "There is, says Boehme, 'a Glass in the Abyss' in which the source beholds itself."

of the world takes the form of the "Ideas" of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the power of tongues. The fulfillment of the return of the Golden Age in the form of the Worm's ability to speak the "eternal forms existent" in Imagination, or the body of Christ, will become the eternal moment of meditation upon forgiveness as the "living form" of the life of the Holy Spirit.

Thel complains to the Cloud that "no one hears my voice." (3:4)

Herein lies the first explicit connection of her with the Worm. Her task is to show that the contrariety involved in divine innocence must be continually rethought.

I walk through the vales of Har. and smell the sweetest flowers;
 But I feed not the little flowers; I hear the warbling birds,
 But I feed not the warbling birds. they fly and seek their food
 (3:18-20).

Thel, if anything, is swallowed by experience. She bemoans her human lot as an engulfment in astonishment. She sees herself as a passive receptacle for the interplay of contraries. At this point Thel's lament amounts to a prophetic affirmation that thought is visitation, an affirmation that perspective does not exist in eternity. Her lament contains the other of the Cloud's avowal: prophetic creation is a matter of discovery and Self-Annihilation. The nameless anxiety of her intellectual stance is wholly a result of the mirrored inversion of the fall, "an arbitrary separation from any origin in eternity." Blake writes: "In Eternity Woman is the Emanation of Man she has No Will of her own There is no such thing in Eternity as a Female Will" (VLJ E552). The "Female Will" may be seen as the willing repository that images eternal identity. This is the labour of the vegetative fairies, a fixing, or holding in fallen time, of the "human form divine."

A fairy skipd upon my knee
 Singing & dancing merrily
 I said Thou thing of patches rings
 Pins Necklaces & such like things
 Disguiser of the Female Form
 Thou paltry gilded poisonous worn
 Weeping he fell upon my thigh
 And thus in tears did soft reply
 Knowest thou not O Fairies Lord
 How much by us Contemnd Abhorrd
 Whatever hides the Female form
 That cannot bear the Mental storm
 Therefore in Pity still we give
 Our lives to make the Female live
 And what would turn into disease
 We turn to what will joy & please. (E473)

Thel's lament is essentially an exhibition of "How much by us Contemnd Abhorrd / Whatever hides the Female form" delivered by the female form itself in order to resurrect the contrapuntal harmony of what would otherwise "turn into disease," or be given over to eternal death and lost in un-self-consciousness.¹⁰⁵ In other words, the finite empties itself to make way for the newly risen body which is again a reflection of eternity. Hannah Arendt writes:

the past begins with disappearance of the future, and, in that tranquility, the thinking ego asserts itself. But this happens only when everything has reached its end, when Becoming, in whose process Being unfolds and develops, has been arrested. For "restlessness is the ground of Being"; it is the price paid for Life, as death, or, rather, the anticipation of death, is the price paid for tranquility. And the restlessness of the living does not come from contemplating either the cosmos or history; it is not the effect of external motion -- the incessant movement of natural things or the incessant ups and

¹⁰⁵ Altizer notes: "...the kenotic process by which passion sacrifices itself and freely accepts a repressed and broken form is the source of that energy by which Albion moves between his fallen and apocalyptic forms." (p. 102)

downs of human destinies; it is localized in and engendered by the mind of man. What in later existential thought became the notion of the auto-production of man's mind we find in Hegel as the "auto-constitution of Time": man is not just temporal; he is Time. ¹⁰⁶

Blake acknowledges that man is time in his delineation of Los as a definite constitutive emptiness. Man is a time of which the full revelation is reserved for prophetic futurity. Perspective is a composition of time, and since time itself is the ground of the eternal, a rendering of the contrariety of the soul will reveal an innate possession of the anti-perspectival as the locus of the "true Man." The immediacy of perspective, the engulfing sensuality of thought, cannot bear the fullness of "the beams of love" as an absence of perspective, and "therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists." (ARO E2) The Cloud's perspective reiterates Thel's self-consciousness of death as "the mercy of Eternity." There are indications that the final apotheosis of Thel's "Sleeping Body" will take the form of a transfiguration of the human voice. Thel's lament "labours on a threshold of signification rather than completing a figuration."¹⁰⁷ The appearance of the "inmost Form" of her desire cannot sustain itself since desire is rooted in the infinite and "we know that being is identical to nothingness."¹⁰⁸ Thel's lament is a prophetic stance undertaken to show that "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only." (NNR [b] E2) It typifies Los's creation of Urizen in that it is "a bodily signifier of absence," of human loss.

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt, The Life of the Mind (2 vols.; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 2, p. 42.

¹⁰⁷ Sherry, "The 'Predicament' Of The Autograph: 'William Blake'," p. 141.

¹⁰⁸ Octavio Paz, Claude Levi-Strauss: An Introduction, p. 139.

The signifying process itself seems to struggle in hope and torment at a threshold of symbolically structured statement and narrative order, for the very hammer of repetitions by which the narrative progresses closer and closer to its goal also seems to be the intensification of difference by which it refuses to progress. ¹⁰⁹

In other words, the full meaning of Thel's lament simply cannot appear in the fallen realm of division since the seizing of the "inmost Form" of eternal identity is the labour of the prophetic as a futurity, as a human dwelling within apocalyptic fourfold reintegration, which never attains to a finality beyond the prophetic voice. At this point in the poem Thel remains the "pure spiritual essence," an emanative image of joy or the mirrored reflection of the eternal locus of a single thought-form as the passage of that thought-form seeks to marry fallen time and the eternal in the contrariety of creative innocence. Thel's lament is paralleled by the condition of the "Eternal Man" in "The Four Zoas":

The Eternal Man also sat down upon the Couches of Beulah
Sorrowful that he could not put off his new risen body
In mental flames the flames refused they drove him back to Beulah
His body was redeemed to be permanent thro the Mercy Divine
(9 125:36-39 E380)

The Cloud has witnessed the transfiguration of the Eternal Man's sorrow into eternal delight. Thel, too, possesses a self-consciousness of the contrariety involved in the creation of eternal delight, for she walks "through the vales of Har. and small[s] the sweetest flowers" (3:18). According to her perspective, contrariety is a self-consciousness of the double face of divinity. Her lament is a delineation of difference rather than an affirmation of oneness. A minute delineation of difference is necessary to a composition of the realm of the eternal. Again,

¹⁰⁹ Sherry, p. 144.

the Cloud's perspective is contained in Thel's, but since her lament is a prophetic pose, her function is to voice the plight of the unfallen yearning for mortality. She is, indeed, an artful temptress. Since the wise man "feels love descend into him," Thel questions the place of the human in relation to the otherness of the divine. Blake writes: "the wise man falleth 7 times in a day & riseth again" (E586). Thel's lament voices the early Blake's preoccupation with the religiosity of the act of Self-Annihilation. Thel gives voice to the human as the Cloud articulates the function of the divine. They are inseparable conditions of the soul.

CHAPTER IV: PLATES 4 AND 5: THEL, THE WORM, AND THE CLAY

Plate 4 announces the climax of Blake's dramatization of the contrariety of pure soul and fallen Tharmas as the transfiguring eternality of process continually restoring the seat of divinity within the human heart.

"Then Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm upon its dewy bed." (4:1) Thel views the Worm with astonishment. "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows," Blake writes in "Visions of the Daughters of Albion." (E44) According to the contrariety of creative innocence, Thel has advanced to the final apotheosis of her "Sleeping Body," a condition whereby "Sleeping Body" will partake of the self-consciousness of the "true Man." Her initial perception of the Worm is, once again, a "still perception" of her immediate other, a further delineation of the unawakened recesses of the soul. The appearance of the Worm is a creative

mirroring of Thel's inner condition. Her perception of the Worm is a creational internalization of exteriority and vice versa. The Worm's condition has been embedded in Thel's perspective throughout the poem since she is unable to hear the Worm speak and she has, throughout, lamented that no one hears her voice. Her transfigured vision of the Worm will be a restoration of divinity to the human heart, an apprehension of the unfallen lineaments of eternal identity. This apprehension of eternal identity will take the form of a "pure vision" of the contrariety involved in the Worm's ability to speak.

Nancy Bogen suggests that Thel's perception of the Worm is a manifestation of her "double vision."

Just as Blake, in writing about a thistle, revealed that

What to others a trifle appears
 Fills me full of smiles or tears;
 For double the vision my Eyes do see,
 And a double vision is always with me.
 With my inward Eye 'tis an old man grey;
 With my outward a Thistle across my way,

so Thel sees a worm as a worm, but as something else as well:

Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm?
 I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf. ¹¹⁰

Bogen suggests that "Thel's sweetness and the lyrical beauty of the poem... seen nearly inseparable."¹¹¹ Thel's "double vision" is able to afford her a direct confrontation with the unspeakability, the engulfing astonishment, of death as a self-consciousness of perspective. Imagination creates an externalized image of the soul's immediate other so that the Selfhood may

¹¹⁰ The Book of Thel, pp. 19-20.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

witness its own Annihilation and be reborn in the spiritualized body. This is the deepest meaning of the eternality of process. Because of her stern debate of self-consciousness, Thel is rendered one of the Redeemed and returned to the place of the immediacy of contrariety, which is determined by "Spiritual power alone." (M 1 26;40 E122) As Thel is revealed to be among the class of the Redeemed, the prophetic is revealed as a re-opening of the anti-perspectival, a shattering of perspective in and through a minute delineation of the fallen lineaments of perspective. Because of her ability to shed "the rotten rags of Memory," signifying a genuine dwelling within the contrariety of creative innocence, Thel's stance in relation to the Worm and the naked male of eternal identity is that of merciful mediatrix and sustainer between time and eternity. Indeed, Thel is here identified as "the mercy of Eternity." In Blake's poem entitled "William Bond" a transfigured speaker gives voice to the locus of "the mercy of Eternity."

I thought Love livd in the hot sun shine
 But O he lives in the Moony light
 I thought to find Love in the heat of day
 But sweet Love is the Comforter of Night

Seek Love in the Pity of others Woe
 In the gentle relief of anothers care
 In the darkness of night & the winters snow
 In the naked & outcast Seek Love there (E489).

But the image of the risen body of "the mercy of Eternity" embodied in Thel's shattered perspective must be accompanied by the complementary movement of the resurrection of Urthona as a returning of the Spiritual Beauty of the unfallen forms of nature to Thel's breast. Therefore the "Clod of Clay," as an image of strong Urthona, takes upon herself the labour of Los, raises "her pitying head," and performs a miracle of

miracles in prophetic poetry -- she allows the voice of the Worm to be heard by Thel as "the mercy of Eternity," a naming of eternal identity, and a christening of the divine. The Clay performs as the spiritual essence of the finite. Her act is only to be seen as a miracle in that the contrary of her illuminating principle exists in the form of its ultimate in Thel's self-consciousness of death. The marrying principle is Thel's condition as one of the Redeemed which results in the immediacy of knowledge. The Clay's merciful act is to be seen as simultaneous with the appearance of Thel's "double vision" for it is the contrary transfiguring her "double vision" and rendering it instantaneously four-fold. As the Worm begins to speak -- "O beauty of the vales of Har" (4:10) -- Thel is seen to re-enact the universal process of Self-Annihilation. She discovers herself at the still point between time and eternity, an incarnation of the constitutive emptiness of the Logos.

Damon tells us that Urthona ("earth owner")

is the northern Zoa, the creative Imagination of the Individual. (Jesus is the universal Imagination.) In the Trinity, Urthona corresponds to the Holy Ghost. His southern contrary is Reason (Urizen). In the counterclockwise numeration, which begins with Tharmas (the body), he is the fourth...or the last to be perceived. His position is North (FZ vi:268, M 19:16; J 59:11); his Element is Earth (FZ i:18); his Metal is Iron (J 97-11). He is a blacksmith (FZ i:519; J 95:17), constantly occupied with creating forms.... His forge is in the deep dens or caves of the subconscious (MHH 26; FZ vi:189; vii b:133; ix:840). His Sense is the Ear (J 12:60; FZ i:17); his Art is Poetry, which when it degenerates becomes Religion (M 27:60). He is "keeper of the gates of heaven" (FZ iv:42; J 82:81), where he is assisted by Luvah (FZ v:232).

Urthona is the deepest and most mysterious of the Zoas...He never manifests in his own person. Unlike the other Zoas, he has no Emanation...He fell during the warfare of Urizen and Luvah over Man...his body fell like a raging serpent; and he was driven "into the world of Tharmas, into a cavern'd rock" (FZ i:519-34)...However, in this world, Urthona is divided fourfold, and his separated faculties are active. Los is his Humanity (J 30:13,16); Los's Emanation is Enitharmon (J 30:3-4); he also has a Spectre (J30:4); and a Shadow (J 30:6). Los himself is "the Vehicular Form of strong Urthona" (J 53:1). He takes

his name where "Mortality begins to roll the billows of Eternal Death before the Gate of Los" (J 39:8).¹¹²

Although Urthona was unnamed at the time of the composition of "Thel," his labour is made visible in the transfiguring act of the Clay. Plate 4 makes visible a visionary liquidity whereby the Worm moves into the condition of the Clay, the Clay is revealed as the labour of strong Urthona, and Thel embodies all three in her "double vision." The absence of the "mothers smiles" (4:6) to cherish the weeping Worm passes directly into the contrary of the Clay's transfiguring act. Since Urthona, as the unfallen exuberance of the finite, "never manifests in his own person" the Clay takes on the function of creating forms anew. She makes it possible for Thel to hear the individual creative articulation of the Worm. The Logos is made manifest in the Spiritual Beauty of the Clay as the risen body of a spiritualized Nature. Nature becomes Imagination in the figure of the Clay. The appearance of the universal creative Imagination is imaged in the eternal death of Los as a continual crucifixion of the intellectual body on the cross of history. The composition of history is grounded in the continual shattering of perspective, the casting aside of the Selfhood, and the taking on of the newly risen spiritual body.

At this point in the narration Thel becomes an embodiment of the contrariety of Christ as universal Imagination and Urthona as individual creative imagination in the form of the labour of the matron Clay. Thel takes on the aspect of Los in order to redeem fallen perspective. It is her task to show the possibilities of redemption for the human voice. The process is fourfold: generation and regeneration in eternity are to be

¹¹² S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary, p. 426.

seen as a mirroring of generation and regeneration in fallen time and space, and generation and regeneration in fallen time and space are to be seen as the essence of generation and regeneration in eternity. In other words, the death of Christ as the resurrection of the Humanity of universal creative Imagination is paralleled in the appearance of Urthona as the Clay's merciful act. The Clay's act is essentially a 're-membering' of the eternal lineaments of the finite. The infinite can only be restored to the finite by means of the act of Self-Annihilation. Thel becomes a pure emptiness in the face of the eternal identity revealed in Nature's resurrected infinitude. She embodies both movements; the emptying of the self and the ascendance of the external to become human are made manifest in her cruciform position on plate 4. In this way the infinite is returned to the finite, and the Worm, because of the Clay's act as a listening, as "the mercy of Eternity," is able to be heard. The relationship between the Clay, the Worm, and Thel shows that Blake saw the Divine Logos as fully manifest in the minute particular.

The profound contrariety involved in the Worm as a symbol of potential marriage between the fallen and unfallen orders is discovered in the direct confrontation between the Worm as a transfiguration of the Lilly modulating the ascent of the human, Thel as a reflection and embodiment of the Worm, suspended at the invisible point where generation and regeneration, regeneration and generation, define one another, and the image of unfallen Urthona in the Clay's act, which is, inversely, a return of the Worm as the contrary nourishing Thel's awakened wholeness. The nourishing act of the Clay is grounded in Thel's self-consciousness of Urthona's mercy in the Worm. Therefore the Clay's act is essentially a raising of the

spiritual body of the Worm. That spiritual body takes the form of an articulation of contraries.

It is the God in all that is our companion & friend, for our God himself says, you are my brother my sister & my mother; & St John, Whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in God & God in him. & such an one cannot judge of any but in love. & his feelings will be attractions or repulses...

God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak

For let it be remembered that creation is. God descending according to the weakness of man for our Lord is the word of God & every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God (E588-9).

Yeats discusses the Worm as a symbol of desire in generation:

External nature, in its ultimate symbolic form, is called Satan. In its sexual appearance it is the Female. In its infantile, or innocent aspect, it is the Worm.

These terms are not used for purposes of vituperation. They belong to a series of symbols which grow inevitably out of the idea of the External, as Nature's comprehensive name. Its symbols all repeat this, even while in detail they seem sometimes to contradict one another. The Worm is the dragon in embryo. It is the Devourer, of a fury so secret as to pass for helplessness. To love the Worm is to perform the most God-like act possible. He who does this cannot be other than its opposite, safe in His own impenetrable immortality. So far as we love the Worm pityingly, God is in us.

The Worm "loves to curl round the bones of Death." It endeavours to "build a palace of eternity in the mouldering church-yard." When we attempt with the external portion of our minds to do the work of the internal, and with the temporary to produce the everlasting, we are the Worm.¹¹³

Thel and the Clay "perform the most God-like act possible" by loving the Worm. If the Worm chooses to uphold natural memory as authority, he fearfully worships externality in idolatrous pride. Nature continually becomes Satan in the image of the Worm. However:

Nature is one of the things of which man has no right to deprive himself though it be evil. Man has no right to refrain and restrain himself from sin. An angel cannot become a prophet till he has been a devil. Restraint is self-murder. It is only in the furnace of

¹¹³ Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 1, p. 413.

passion that the three regions of Man -- the Head, Heart and Loins -- entering, find beside them the Fourth, -- Humanity itself, which is far above sex. At the same time each man has a perfect right to know that he is by nature evil, and must be continually changed into his direct contrary, and that this is not restraint but self-annihilation, and is the only gate of eternal life. Such is the Blake-doctrine, and the only criticism of a social or prudential or moral kind that can be made upon it stands already in his own handwriting. "The wicked will turn it to wickedness, and the righteous to righteousness; even so. Amen." ("Jerusalem," p. 27.)¹¹⁴

A humanization of all exteriority is the labour of the Worm. His labour continually recreates him as spiritual man. He must ceaselessly engage in the discovery of contraries. The Worm is repentant and his accusation from self to self arouses the senses to formulate a new desire, or chain of Orc. In this way generation is superseded by regeneration. The Worm embodies both nature as externality and Nature as the risen body of Christ. These conditions are contraries, double aspects of the same movement. The soul cannot be redeemed without the simultaneous redemption of the world.

We see Nature, with Reason at the top and Lust at the bottom, with Jealousy on the one hand and Morality on the other. We know that it is all a delusion, and exists nowhere but in our own minds, yet we become what we behold -- we suffer -- our "centres are open to pain." All this is Satan, with Law, his wife, mortal mother of the Redeemer.

We see Nature's opposite, symbolically Christ, immoral because forgiving, unreasonable because creative, not jealous, yet with a bride -- who is liberty -- and he also dwells nowhere but in us, yet in our higher regions to which he invites us to enter, forgetting contest and attaining peace and universal brotherhood. Then the "Mortal disappears in improved knowledge," and gently "fades away" ("Vala," Night VIII., l. 544).

These two opposites we see throughout Blake's works, and into them we can resolve all his apparently contradictory symbols.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 415.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 420.

The Worm and Christ will become one in Thel's transfigured perspective. It is the merciful act of the Clay, as the resurrected power of the life of the Holy Spirit in the form of an awakened exteriority, that makes visible the appearance of man's unfallen Nature. And yet it must be remembered that Thel, as one of the Redeemed, makes it possible for the Clay to appear and function as the Holy Spirit because of her "double vision."

The design on plate 4 depicts Thel in a cruciform position with her back visible suggesting a shattering of her witnessing of the forms of spiritual agency. Thel's left foot is forward, signifying that her perception of the Worm is a baptism of the material in the spiritual. Fallen time and eternity are married in one rising image. On plate 11 Thel's right foot is forward suggesting her complete dwelling within the spiritual. Plate 4 depicts her as a passionate participant in the act of Self-Annihilation. On plate 11 she stands in the traditional Venus position viewing the interplay of contraries, "still perceptions" of her dwelling within the condition of creative innocence. Since the left foot is forward on plate 4 it would seem that a mirror inversion is being effected to depict a consummation of creative wholeness. The naked male figure has bound Thel down "to its delight." The emanating gyrations of divine love have attained to full manifestness in Thel's self-consciousness as her countenance bears downwards toward the infant "wrapped in the Lillys leaf" below her. The mirrored symmetry of the positions of the feet and the front and back views of Thel between plate 11 and plate 4 suggests a presentation of the method of divine creation. A naked flying male figure departs above the nativity scene on plate 4, and he, too, is a

mirror inversion of his position on plate ii. Thel has moved in a circle between the designs of each plate whereas the naked male figure has moved in a linear progression. This mirroring indicates the movement of imaginative vision in the fallen and unfallen realms. In generation the imagination moves cyclically while in eternity it persists in its linear course. The stem of the Lilly nearest the tree has five coils suggesting the awakening of the five spiritual senses as they are supported in generation. The compositional association between the plates is explicit: the Lilly has become the Worn-infant and Thel has become both Lilly and Worn. Thel is eternal identity by means of a self-consciousness of her contrariety as idea, "Divine Member," or infant joy, and perishing mortal desire, or Worn.

But Thel has become much more. It has been noted that the entire design of plate 4 is a mirror inversion of the play of sexuality depicted in line with Thel's upright stance in the central lower portion of plate ii. Plate 4 focuses the central lower portion of plate ii by directly involving Thel. In the latter illumination Thel witnesses a "still perception" of her "Sleeping Body" as a nude male (one of the "Divine Members" or thought-forms in the Holy Spirit) with his back visible struggles to bind Thel (a vegetative fairy) down "to its delight," to impregnate the finite with the infinitude of eternal identity. Thel is clearly enduring a "loss of ease" on plate ii and her right foot, the symbol of her spiritual essence, is forward as she partakes in dream-like fashion of the sports of eternity. The position of the right foot suggests the spirituality of desire. On plate 4 Blake has reversed this image of the eternality of process, the struggle involved in divine

creation. The left foot is now forward. The reader wonders if Blake is suggesting that a passionate participation in the universal act of Self-Annihilation awakens a delight in the life of the Holy Spirit beyond desire and self-consciousness. If so, the eternality of process is consummated in the birth of the new Selfhood. Man's infinite earthly lineaments appear as vortexes yet to be discovered by the soul.

Bogen suggests that the scene depicted on plate 4 "illustrates the Cloud's introduction of Thel to the Worm and the Cloud's subsequent departure"¹¹⁶ "to find his partner in the vale." However this departing male figure assimilates the perspective of the Cloud and the "sunny flocks," or the "Divine Members," of the realm of Mne Seraphim. Thel's cruciform position presents an awakening of the universal creative Imagination in the minute particular since the immediacy of her death, which is the eternal emptying of self for the other, is depicted as the lightning flash revealing the ground of being in a marriage of that which is above with that which is below. The eternal death of perspective as the composition of time, which is the essence of the mortal, or the giving of the self for the other, as continual Self-Annihilation, is in itself a transfiguration of the individual making visible the universal body of Humanity. Thel depicts an incarnation of the labour of Urthona as her eternal identity emerges in the lightning flash of her cruciform position. The act of Self-Annihilation is, inversely, a naming whereby "Mortality begins to roll the billows of Eternal Death before the Gate of Los." The Clay, as an image of the resurrected Spiritual Beauty of unfallen nature,

¹¹⁶ The Book of Thel, p. 44.

issues forth a compelling cosmology of forgiveness even unto forgetfulness of sin as does the death of Christ, the crucifixion of the intellectual body, wipe away all trace of sin in the mirror of God the Father's Imagination. As parental power, Tharmas is reunited with his emanations in Thel's cruciform position. The Worm, an "image of weakness," represents the crucified body, whereby the restorative function of the sense of touch is able to reunite the human with the divine. And finally, Thel, as the lightning flash of the ground of being in "the mercy of Eternity," which is the continual death of Christ in individual experience, is revealed as Urthona, or "the keeper of the gates of heaven." She has attained to a condition of imaginative wholeness in her self-annihilating perception of the Worm. She has adopted both the highest and the lowest, the Clay and the Worm, as her immediate other.

Yeats tells us that the Worm, a "dumb young life," "sat upon the lily or showed itself within the innocent spiritual joy."¹¹⁷ The gyrating emanations of divine love have been made manifest in the image of the Worm. The lowest is seen as the highest.

Thel sees the worm like an infant wrapped in the leaf of the lily and none to love it (the generative life is perceived to be the beginning of regeneration -- the destroyer and creator are one) (1-6). The clod of clay hears the voice of the infant and begins to cherish it; the generative life is wrapped in the physical body (7-9).¹¹⁸

The reverse of this process is also made visible in the mirroring of the design. Regeneration is perceived to be the beginning of generative life in the nude male's departure from the nativity scene. Regenerative life

¹¹⁷ Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 93.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

is given a spiritual body in Thel's cruciform position. Her back view on plate 4 suggests that the appearance of eternal identity depends upon a continual shattering of the prophetic as a witnessing, and consequently, of our readership. In her activity of imagin^g "the mercy of Eternity," Thel, as Los, becomes "the Vehicular Form of strong Urthona." The lightning flash appearance of her eternal identity as a sustaining power between the crucified Christ and the Worm signifies the appearance of unfallen time, for the illumination is revealed within a "Time less than a pulsation of an artery" in which "Period the Poets Work is Done." Therefore the nude male is free to depart since his task of 'clothing' the eternal has been accomplished. And it is interesting to note that when motion resumes in plate 6 Thel is depicted naked.

The voice of the Worm is heard by Thel as a human image of the Divine Logos, the full presence of the Word signifying the meeting of two eternities,¹¹⁹ the restoration of contraries.

O beauty of the vales of Har. we live not for ourselves,
Thou seest me the meanest thing, and so I am indeed;
My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark.

But he that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head,
And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast,
And says; Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee.
And I have given thee a crown that none can take away
But how this is sweet maid, I know not, and I cannot know,
I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love. (4:10-12, 5:1-6)

The Worm's knowledge is an "empty knowledge," a concrete "un-knowing."¹²⁰

It is an imaginative participation in the interplay of contraries. At

¹¹⁹ "The Sin was begun in Eternity, and will not rest to Eternity
Till two Eternitys meet together" (M l 13:10-11 E106).

¹²⁰ Octavio Paz, Claude Levi-Strauss: An Introduction, pp. 142-3.

last Thel is able to completely accept the voice of the Worm as her most direct contrary. The Worm is among the class of the Redeemed, an enemy of the promise of fulfillment. She does not know how she has been given "a crown that none can take away" and she "cannot know" yet she partakes of the eternality of process. Divine love discovers its sublime ultimate in a knowledge that has passed beyond the rationality that insists upon an eating of the tree of good and evil. The Divine Logos is married with the wisdom of the heart. The voice of the Worm is an echo of what may have been the voice of one of the daughters of Mne Seraphim had there existed self-conscious desire in that realm. But since the prophetic task is to show how Eden becomes Eden, the voice of the Worm may very well be seen as the voice of a daughter of Mne Seraphim. The narration has come full circle. The beginning of Thel's intellectual journey is transfigured in its end and a new beginning launched.

Before proceeding with our discussion of the narrative direction of the poem it is necessary to determine the speaker of this lyrical oracle. The present re-interpretation of the poem claims that it is the Worm who delivers this comforting insight to Thel. Properly speaking, the voice heard by Thel is not that of a strictly generative worm, nor is it the isolated voice of a regenerative Clay. "O beauty of the vales of Har" is delivered by a voice which is the incorporation of mortal weakness and spiritual beauty, an elision of Worm and Clay. Criticism of the poem has hitherto seen the Clay as the speaker of this passage. Let us review that argument before presenting the grounds of an appeal.

The argument in favour of the Clay's speaking is based on the assumption that what Thel needs from the Worm is how to be a mother.

Consider lines 4:6-9.

And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worms voice, & raisd her pitying head;
She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd
In milky fondness, then on Thel she fix'd her humble eyes.

The Worm is seen by Thel as an infant unable to speak. Where is a mother?

The Clay hears the Worm's voice weeping and bows over the weeper. She nurses it, exhales her life in milky fondness, and by so doing demonstrates what she means by living not for self alone. She has a child to give milk to. With the child satisfied, she turns to Thel and explains.

The passage is spoken by a mother's voice. "My bosom...is cold. and...dark" (4:12) but Jesus, "he that loves the lowly...binds his nuptial bands around my breast", (5:1-2) and loves me as "mother of (his) children." (5:3) The dialogue indicates that Christ is referring to the matron Clay, with a worm as child. The cold dark breast describes the womb of the earth. When Thel replies, she speaks to the Clay: "And lay me down in thy cold bed", (5:13) the earth. Christ marries the mother Clay and fertilizes the dead ground ("pours his oil upon my head" 5:1) to feed their children, i.e. worms. The symbol of Man, a worm in the Grave, is basic here. The conversation between Thel and the Clay is seen by contemporary critics as fairly straightforward, even if elliptical.

To suggest that the speaker of "O beauty of the vales of Har" is an elision, or transposition, of the voices of the Worm and the Clay rests in the direction the narration has taken thus far; namely, that the spiritual purpose of Thel's intellectual journey is to awaken her to the Christian voice of forgiveness. Her self-consciousness must be made to provide an

appropriate sphere with which to contain the Humanity of a universal creative genius. Thel's purpose is not to learn what it means to be a mother in the generative cycle, but to locate a universal cosmology of forgiveness within the human heart. To this end the prophetic narration depicts the Worm in its native duplicity: it is seen as both the highest and the lowest form of active intelligence. In short, the narrative progression of the poem indicates that Thel's purpose is to show that the human meets with and becomes the divine in the act of forgiveness. Let us retrace the steps of the accepted argument with this revision of Thel's purpose in mind.

Thel's "double vision" of the worm is the composition of an orphaned and inarticulate child. Almost maternally she laments the absence of a mother's joy to cherish the Worm. The image of Man as a speechless Worm in the Grave is indeed basic here. But it is the kind of speechlessness that is important. The voice which addresses Thel is a prophetic affirmation of a divine speech which becomes articulate only after the natural man has surrendered to the engulfing "beams of love." The voice proclaims the advent of the heartbed of inspiration in Christ. At this point Thel sees only the worm's natural helplessness whereas the matron Clay hears the Worm's voice as the "inarticulate cry of the light." The Clay, as the resurrected spiritual beauty of the world of Imagination, as the infinite potential of "Divine Mercy," nourishes the Worm with the physical strength necessary to partake of her own "eternal lot." (MHH 19 E#1) The physical act of nourishing transfigures the Clay and Worm so there occurs a spiritual merging, a partaking of identities in a universal creative process. Blake depicts the same transfusion of eternal identity through clay, mother, and infant in Plate 1 of "For the Sexes": "I found him

beneath a Tree" (E 257). The Clay's merciful act is the bestowal of speech, the power of prophecy, upon the anti-perspectival itself. The anti-perspectival may be seen as an insufflationary prophetic speaking which functions as a prismatic refracting of the infinitude of potential, and by so doing makes visible the creative centre of Christianity in Blake's "Divine Mercy." The Worm nourished, the Clay turns to Thel and fixes her with her humble eyes. This is really the climax of the entire dramatization. The Clay's gaze instantaneously binds the moment of miraculous transfiguration wherein the Worm is seen as speaking the Logos into existence and yet disclaiming any knowledge of the source of its ability to do so.

The transfigured voice of the Worm-Clay (for they are now engaged in a purpose beyond their own) affirms the dark emptiness of the human heart ("My bosom of itself is cold." 4:12). A knowledge of the innate science of the human heart and the fires of inspiration is discovered prophetically in Christ, the universal creative genius. The "Divine Members" which compose the body of the risen Christ are nourished in the human imagination. The eternal discovers itself in the reflection of the mortal.

The voice which addresses Thel is not that of a miraculous worm, nor is it the voice of disembodied spirituality. It is the incarnate voice of the eternality of process.

There remains an apparent contradiction between plates 4 and 5 if one wishes to insist that it is the Clay alone who addresses Thel. Bloom tells us that the "worm is emblematic both of generation and of death.... The clod of Clay replies for the worm because it stands at both poles of the worm's cycle, the Adamic flesh and the grave." (E808) If it is the

Clay who speaks for the Worm while Thel listens, why then does Thel speak of her awakened knowledge of the Worm in her rejoinder? Thel's new understanding of the Worm's plight can only have risen from a transfiguring perception of the Worm's purpose. She has been graced with a "double vision" of the Worm as risen Adamic flesh moulded in the image and likeness of Christ, as well as a vision of the Worm as eternal Grave. The passage presents a sublime allegory of the source of prophecy: the prophet utters and yet that which he utters is not of his own making. The narration achieves this remarkable reversal of natural process by allowing the unbeguiled voice of infant joy utterance. (The reader should recall the etymological signification of the word 'infant' as 'unable to speak.')

The passage spoken by the Worm-Clay announces the immortality of divine love in human weakness in a surrender to the "beams of love." It professes a faith the sole adherent of which simply knows no doubt. The virginal knowledge of the voice of the Worm-Clay is couched in the Christian tradition of the contrariety of worm and clay, life and death. The beautiful lyricism of the passage falls upon Thel's ears like the kiss of eternal life. Her "purpose" is instantly made available to her. The voice of the Worm-Clay is an elision balancing the soul-flesh polarity in one rising image of apocalyptic transfiguration. Thel hears the voice of her own unawakened forgiveness in the articulation of the Worm-Clay and realizes that the purpose of humanity is to act in the image and likeness of Christ, who is eternal forgiveness. As a divine analogy, Thel herself, the primordial Eve figure, acts as the female portion of the eternal, the risen forms of eternal existence in nature. She functions

as a vessel for the sourceless flow of imagination. The Christian tradition of the contrariety of risen spiritual body and perishing mortal desire is basic to Thel's 'remembrance' of her purpose. Only after she is made to realize the essential divinity of her mortality can she accept the "cold bed" (5:13) of the human heart as an eternal slumber in the embrace of the "Divine Mercy."

"The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite" (NMR E2). The Worm-Clay reflects to Thel that his "bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark," thus explaining the deepest nature of the soul's contrariety. The emanating gyrations of divine love descend to create the innocence of the given, to wrap the finite in the infinite, inversely as the infinitude of the finite ascends in mental flames to reveal its origin in the eternal. The appearance of unfallen love takes place in the arena of history. "He that loves the lowly" nourishes "the worm with milk and oil, with the material and spiritual essences -- the food of the generated life and the basis of the intellectual fire."¹²¹ He that loves the lowly" is to be identified as the risen body of Christ, "the True Vine of Eternity," in which Imagination as "the Human Existence itself" dwells and "looks for something in us" to transform it. An awakening of the sleeping thought-forms in the Holy Spirit depends upon a self-consciousness of the contrariety of creative innocence. We may recall that Urthona corresponds to the Holy Ghost and in plate 4 Thel images the ceaseless labour of Urthona. If Nature herself is to be seen as the essence of Spiritual

¹²¹ Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 93.

Beauty, the finitude of the Worm must be married in contrapuntal harmony with the creative innocence of eternal identity. "Where man is not nature is barren" (MHH 9:69 E37). Spiritual and externalized Nature are identical to material and internal Nature. All identified forms are human. "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men." It is "the mercy of Eternity," as the direct contrary of the known, which acts as the visitation of thought mothering the birth of eternal identity in the human imagination. Therefore the Worm-Clay is given the status of "mother of my children" by the Divine Logos. The individual disappears in the universal creative Imagination. It is the universal creative Imagination which supports the "Divine Members" according to the weakness of the individual. The deepest nature of contrariety the Worm-Clay does not possess of itself, and "cannot know," since a full revelation of the essence of contrariety is the labour of the "true Man" as a futurism. Blake conceives of existence as the eternal identity of essence; both are evolved in an exuberant immanence. Blake, the foremost antinomian prophet, says what the contraries are even as he remains unable to say how they are. An exhibition of their marrying method is reserved for the prophetic as the pure speaking of a futurity, a futurity sustained in a mythologized present by a prophetic holding of "the end of a golden string." (J 77 E229) The prophetic voice does not attain to a finality beyond itself but struggles to ~~make~~ make visible the eternality of process.

Thel then wipes away "her pitying tears with her white veil." (5:7) The pure soul is no longer divided from its emanations and shadow, for it has discovered its own apocalypse in the contrariety of the infinitude of the material and the finitude of divine love. The understanding of the

Worm-Clay begins and ends in a futuristic epistemology. "I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love." Divine love can only be nourished and engendered by the mind of man. The fullness of the eternal forms in Imagination must appear in the reflection of an emptied psyche. The Worm-Clay is able to sustain the seat of divinity within the human breast by ceaselessly offering himself so that the other of his sensually rounded thought might live. This is a process of Self-Annihilation and not self-sacrifice. Thel has become the Worm-Clay. Her "white veil" is to be seen as the transparency of the invisible ground of the visible, the clothing of the muse of history, by which silence is returned to the realm of the speaking voice. Yeats identifies the Worm with the veil of Vala.¹²² As Thel wipes away "her pitying tears" the Worm ascends to stand naked as the divine, error is cast aside. Again, the speaking voice of the Worm-Clay effects its own revelation as the incarnation of the Divine Logos by articulating contraries. As Thel casts aside error by wiping away her tears the pure emptiness of the soul is revealed as the contrary of the Divine Logos. Man's primordial condition in astonishment is revealed as a cosmology of forgiveness.

Significantly, Thel, in her response to the voice of the Worm-Clay, includes the milk of "the material essence" with the oil of "the spiritual essence" named by the Worm-Clay. Even her confrontation with the Worm-Clay as her most direct contrary has been a further delineation of her own infinite perspective arousing otherwise "dead portions of the mind into life." Her recognition that God cherishes the Worm with both milk

¹²² Ellis and Yeats, The Works of William Blake, 1, p. 414.

and oil signifies the final apotheosis of a wholeness of self-consciousness. It is Thel herself who realizes that the essence of the divine is the mortal. She is enabled to enter upon an eternal meditation on the face of the Holy Spirit continually creating forms anew. Indeed, this is shown in the illumination to plate 5 as Thel gazes inwards, significantly in a Urizenic position -- perhaps seeing there what is depicted beneath her; namely, the Clay as a naked woman breathing her "milky fondness" into the Worm-infant who joyously holds his arms apart in the cruciform position. Thel has attained to a condition of "pure vision," a reunification of Urizen and Tharmas. In "A Vision Of The Last Judgment" Blake writes: "The Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought." (E545) The eternality of process is signified by the prophetic renewal of the spiritualized body, the realm of chastened virginity. Thel's arms are folded on her knees providing a polarizing balance, a symmetrical structuring, of the infant's cruciform position. The Worm has become Thel and Thel has become the life of the Holy Spirit. The design returns the narrative composition to the beginning of the poem where Tharmas is seen as the centre and circumference of the universal creative Imaginative. But the beginning has been transfigured, since Thel, as unfallen Urizen, embodies the alchemy of pure vision and the desire of the Worm-infant. Fallen time and eternity are seen as nourishing one another in the contrariety of creative innocence made visible in the positions of the Worm-infant and Thel. Thel here becomes the awakened face of the Holy Spirit meditating upon the eternality of forgiveness. As such she is a manifestation of Urthona, and so it is fitting that her face is not seen. Her position in plate 5 implies a significant remembrance of

the locus of the human. That remembrance takes the form of pure vision, a marriage between internal and external.

The Clay then offers Thel a vision of the contrariety involved in creative innocence, the method by which virginity renews itself.

Queen of the vales, the matron Clay answerd; I heard thy sighs.
And all thy moans flew o'er my roof, but I have call'd them down:
Wilt thou O Queen enter my house, 'tid given thee to enter,
And to return; fear nothing, enter with thy virgin feet. (5:14-17)

Following Thel's departure from the realm of Mne Seraphia she is discovered in the vales of Har beside the river of Adona. The vales of Har have been construed in terms of a sacred landscape of the soul, an externalized image of an inner spiritual paradise. They represent the land of generation constantly struggling to mirror the fourfold depth of Eden, the eternality of process. The contraries of unfallen Memory and fiery Inspiration operative in the realm of Mne Seraphia are focused and brought into relief in the vales of Har in the reflecting waters of the river of Adona. The dramatization of the transfiguration of the soul has been presented as a mirroring of states within states by means of a series of direct confrontations between Thel, Lilly, Cloud, and Worn. The series of "still perceptions" of her "Sleeping Body" has served to awaken the mirror of Thel's self-consciousness so as to fully reflect the presence of the Divine Logos. The cleansing of her perception has made visible an ascendance of the human to stand naked as the divine by means of a minute delineation of the contrariety involved in the infinitude of perspective. Thel is still gazing into the imaging flow of the river of Adona as the matron Clay invites her to enter her house. She has discovered the vales of Har, the infinitude of the inner spiritual paradise, in the visionary stream of the river of Imagination. The Clay acknowledges that she has heard Thel's

intellectual interrogation throughout. As the spiritual beauty of the resurrected forms of Nature, the Flesh of the Word of God, the Clay has made possible Thel's recovery of the locus of the human by allowing her to hear the voice of contrariety. Thel has been restored to vision by vision itself. It is spiritual beauty which nourishes the human. The Clay now offers Thel a vision of the complementary movement whereby the divine descends to stand naked as the wholly human. Blake writes in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell":

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss (5-6 E34).

The Messiah, as the "true Man" or inspired Reprobate, returns infinitude to the profound vacuity of Nature so that a spiritualized Nature may be seen as the emptying of the life of the Holy Spirit into fallen time. The Clay's house is the mythologized realm of unfallen Memory continually reborn according to the fiery Inspiration of creative innocence. It is the realm of shattered perspective, an arresting of the eternality of process to show how contraries are inter-evolved. The Clay gently relates to Thel that her house is given her to enter and to return. She is not to fear. Her "virgin feet" are her perpetual salvation. The Clay's house is the immemorialized realm of the human condition. It is an artful representation of the essence of the human, a mirroring of the presence of the Logos in human suffering and the passage of time. It is an emptying of time into eternity, a depiction of the realm where "not one Moment / Of Time is lost," where all "Remains permanent," and "The generations of men...leave their destined lineaments permanent for ever" (M1 22:18-25 E116). Thel is invited to enter this prophetic mirroring of the human soul. The

opportunity to come and go has always been with her. The Clay's house is a millennial vision of the immemorialized forms of eternal identity. Roy Harvey Pearce explains the distinction between the visionary and the prophetic.

The visionary poet is at best utopian and sees beyond his world to what it might be whereas the prophet as poet sees through his world to what it is in actuality.

Visionary poetry projects a world which the poet would teach us to acknowledge as our own; it comes to have the uncanniness of the terribly familiar. Prophetic poetry projects a world which the poet would teach us is alien to our own yet central to our seeing it as it really is, a world built upon truths we had hoped in vain to forget. As the characteristic manner of visionary poems makes us feel, we say of the visionary world that we could have made it, at least in dream-work. We say of the prophetic world that we could not possibly have made it; for, as the characteristic manner of prophetic poems drives us to assent, it was there already. The ground of visionary poetry is indeed dream-work and magical thought; the ground of prophetic poetry, revelation and mythical thought. Thus the special language of prophetic poetry -- one of its most marked formal characteristics -- must, by the definition of its purpose, be foreign to us (for it reveals a world, and the strange things in it, hidden from us); yet, by the paradox of prophecy, it is a language native to us (for the things it reveals, being universal, out of the realm of day-to-day time, space and conception, put all of us, all our "actual" world, under their aegis). That language we can "understand" because its grammar and syntax are analogous to our own; understanding it, we assent to -- and perhaps believe in -- the metaphysical system which its structure and vocabulary entail; trying to account for its origin, we must grant the justness of the poet's reporting to us that he has been, in some quite literal sense, "inspired." Rob the visionary of his poetry, and only he remains. Rob the prophet of his poetry, and the stuff of his prophecy remains... [prophecy] projects... a world to which the poet stands as witness....¹²³

The Clay, as the spiritual beauty of the resurrected eternal identity of a spiritualized Nature, stands in relation to her house, the locus of the divine, as witness. She is the inspirational voice of unfallen Memory 're-membling' man's ancient innocence. Her house takes the form of an

¹²³ "Introduction" to Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, pp. xv-xvi.

"exemplar of Memory" (J 98,30 E255). She invites Thel, the tender young soul, to partake of her knowledge. She invites her to travel through the mirror of Imagination so as to view the human condition from the other side of reality, as it were, from the perspective of the dead. She invites her to pass through the mirror of Imagination to view the plight of the human from the perspective of the divine, to view the recesses of the human soul, in the same sense that Alice passes through the mirror into Wonderland. Blake chose no fool with whom to quarrel when he took issue with the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg writes:

...the ancients had an opinion, that after some thousands of years they should return into their former life, and into all its operations, and likewise that they had so returned, which they concluded from this circumstance, that occasionally there had occurred to them as it were a recollection of things which yet they never either saw or heard, which came to pass in consequence of spirits flowing in from their own memory into their ideas of thought.¹²⁴

Blake held that a profound "recollection of things," signifying the restoration of man's ancient innocence in the contrariety of the soul, was both visible and audible to the spiritual man. The immortalized forms of eternal identity are the infernal delight of the awakened body. Imaginative man's "double vision" affords him a recollection of the crystalline powers of spiritual agency creating the world. Fourfold depth is restored to a transfigured finitude. The unfallen mirror of Imagination perfectly reflects unfallen Spirit. The Clay offers Thel a "pure vision" of the "inmost Form" of the human soul. A prophetic articulation of Thel's passage through the mirror of Imagination and into the Clay's house will achieve a disappearance of anything resembling a creation myth in the speaking voice.

¹²⁴ Quoted by Sabri-Tabrizi, The 'Heaven' and 'Hell' of William Blake, pp. 170-1.

CHAPTER V: PLATE 6: THEL AND THE "VOICE OF SORROW"

"The eternal gates terrific porter" (6:1) may be seen as the male aspect of the Clay. He is the Poetic Genius involved in the Clay's loving mercy, the beatifying contrary of her innocence. The porter and the Clay are double aspects of the Zoa Blake will later name Urthona. As the personified type of individual creative imagination, the porter guards the realm of the universal creative Imagination. Both principle and ultimate of Poetic Genius are embodied in his activity. His realm is the "pure vision" of Imagination. Life is seen as eternal death, as a constant participation in the universal act of Self-Annihilation, and death is seen as eternal life, as a passionate participation in the life of the Holy Spirit, the incessant advent of the spiritualized body, in this realm of "pure vision." Life and death are seen as one, as the threshold of a discovery of the soul's contrariety. The image of Urthona lifts "the northern bar" for Thel to enter simultaneously as the Clay voices her invitation. The north is the gate to the house of the Lord. Ezekial writes that the divine hand "brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy." (8:3) "Jealousy" is to be seen as fierce desire, the chain of Orc which binds the generative intelligence to the labour of regeneration. And yet it owns a double face. The Clay's house is an articulation of a mythologized present. Because truth and error are revealed simultaneously, "the northern bar" refers to both the unfallen realm of Urthona and the fallen realm of Urizen. Clearly, fallen time and eternity are one and the same. The narrative profoundly recreates the account of the house

of the Lord given by Ezekial so that the Biblical God becomes a jealous tyrant of man's unbounded freedom. According to Blake, Ezekial's God bears a double aspect: He is both loving Imagination and fallen vision. Everywhere in Blake's system the true God bears the aspect of an immaculate otherness. Urthona, as the eternal labour of divinity, subsists simultaneously in this mythologized present. The true God must be revealed at the same time as the Devil, hence the necessity of the fallen condition, and, of course, the unfallen condition. It is important to grasp the complementary existence of Urthona in this realm because his labour, as the contrary of Urizen's fallen imagination, will make possible a re-opening of the eternality of process throughout, and especially at the end, of the plate. The delineation of contraries is necessary to all creation. According to Blake, Urizen, as a jealous God, becomes Satan.

Man, the image of God, is fourfold; God therefore must also be fourfold. As the Trinity is reflected in the other three Zoas (Tharmas, the Father; Luvah, the Son; and Urthona, the Holy Ghost), Urizen must be that aspect of deity which, when fallen, becomes Satan (FZ v:217). All things, even the Devil, are of the divine substance.¹²⁵

Fallen Urizen is the other of the Worm-Clay's voice on plate 4. The "voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit" (6:10) will make manifest a mirroring of the extreme existential condition of the Worm as both the man-serpent and the Man-God. This is the deepest significance of the blessing of the Logos upon the Worm-Clay: "And I have given thee a crown that none can take away" (4:4). The "voice of sorrow" will be a manifes-

125. Damon, A Blake Dictionary, p. 419.

tation of the other of the Worm-Clay's self-consciousness. Since it is breathed from Thel's own "grave plot," the Virgin is revealed as both the Worm's "dark compeer" (FZ 6:15 E340) and her illuminating principle. The Worm stands in the same double relation to Thel. This development should not seem strange because Thel has passed through the mirror of Imagination to the immemorialized place "where sleep the dead," to the place where the contents of consciousness "are rooted."¹²⁶ In other words, she has passed into an ordered portrayal of Chaos, the wilderness beyond the grasp of the individual peninsula of consciousness.

The prophetic delineation of the "land of sorrows & of tears" signifies the final announcement that fallen perspective and the anti-perspectival co-exist. Fallen perspective is not to be seen as a fitting of the mind's eye to a tyrannical exteriority but as the composition of fallen time, and hence, of eternity. Blake writes:

Knowledge of Ideal Beauty. is Not to be Acquired It is Born with us Innate Ideas. are in Every Man Born with him. they are truly Himself. The Man who says we have No Innate Ideas must be a Fool & Knave. Having No Con-Science or Innate Science (E637).

And again:

¹²⁶ Yeats tells us: "Thel goes down to see the place where sleep the dead, those who have died out of pre-natal life into bodily dwellings. She sees that all the living desires and affections draw nourishment and find support -- are rooted -- in this place of generation." The Works of William Blake, 2, p. 94. It is also true that she sees the place where wake the dead, those who have been born out of mortality into the spiritualized body. She sees the ancient innocence of the interpersonal nature of the soul. The Clay's house is a mirroring of life in death and death in life. This can only be achieved at the expense of arresting the eternality of process, of suspending the metamorphosing flow of Imagination, to show how process becomes process, becomes eternal. And so the Clay's house is presented in terms of a mythologized present allowing Thel to view the infinite space inside a moment. It is a holding of flux only in order to create flux.

Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown This World is too poor to produce one Seed (E646).

Blake's profound understanding of contrariety and the infinitude of desire will allow of no facile formulization. Unfallen Urthona and fallen Urizen participate in a minute delineation of the "boundary-line" of Energy itself. They are inextricably interwoven with the "true Man's" apprehension of the infinitude of desire. The Elect must continually be resurrected as the Redeemed. The "land of sorrows" may be seen as a reflection of Los' Winepress. (cf. M 1 27:30-41 E123-4) As Thel enters the Clay's house, her "Sleeping Body" attains to full self-consciousness. The mirror of her imagination proportionately reflects unfallen Spirit. It becomes the Flesh of the Divine Logos. Her imagination can only reflect the Word of God by enduring a shattering, a crucifixion of the intellectual body, to reveal the pure emptiness of the soul. Thel is suspended at the still point where time becomes eternity. If it were not stretching the language too much, it could be said that she is inside the mirror of God the Father's Imagination. She is able to see with the ear "the secrets of the land unknown":

She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots
Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists. (6:2-4)

The ultimate regeneration of the senses is "a multiplication as well as [an] expansion and cleansing," a "return to a communis sensus by which the senses" are "united with each other, a kind of total synaesthesia reflective of total coinstantaneous perception."¹²⁷ Thel's resurrected

¹²⁷ Anne Mellor, Blake's Human Form Divine, p. 59.

"Sleeping Body" becomes the image of the risen Christ as her senses coalesce to afford her a "pure vision" of the infinitude of human desire. The "couches of the dead" image the passion of thought ceaselessly consumed in "fierce flames" (M 1 27:31 E123). The prophetic naming of "the land unknown" is exactly the "secret air" for which Thel had yearned in the realm of Mne Seraphim. It is a consummation in self-consciousness of her most immediate other, a casting aside of the veils of Jehovah, and an uprooting of the tree of mystery. The darkest aspect of the interpersonal nature of the soul, the innate science of the heart, is made visible in the "land of sorrows."

Not until "the land become utterly waste, and the Lord have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land" will the nation be restored (Isaiah 6:12).¹²⁸

The contents of consciousness must be totally annihilated in order for the divine to appear. "Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot" (M 2 32:36 E131). Falling Urizen and unfallen Urthona must wage continual mental warfare because "a new Ratio" of the spiritualized body is always "Created" anew (M 2 32:35 E131).

But at the same time that Thel's "Sleeping Body" attains to full self-consciousness and becomes the mirror of divinity, a polar and opposite movement occurs. The "land of sorrows" is simultaneously a minute delineation of Thel's perspective, an externalized space signifying the condition of her own soul. It is the dark aspect of fallen man's desire. Blake writes in "Milton":

¹²⁸ Mary Lynn Johnson, "Beulah, 'Mne Seraphim', and Blake's 'Thel'," JEGP, 69 (1970), 258-78.

The Nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs
 Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite
 And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space! Limited
 To those without Infinite to those within: it fell down and
 Became Canaan; closing Los from Eternity in Albions Cliffs.
 (1 10:6-10 E103)

Thel has been introduced to the most profound ambiguity involved in the issue of fallen perspective. She is both inside and outside the mirror of Imagination for she has entered the Clay's house but only to encounter her own "voice of sorrow." Clearly, the "inmost Form" of eternal identity is always a becoming. Human struggle to seize the fourfold depth of the Man-God is involved in the eternality of process. The appearance of fourfold form is reserved for the pure speaking of prophetic futurity. And yet the "voice of sorrow" is an articulation of Thel's "dark compeer" (FZ 6:15 E340) serving to resurrect the native infinitude of her "Sleeping Body" as well as an articulation of the contrariety involved in the creative innocence discovered by the spiritual senses. Clearly, the lineaments of fallen perspective are involved in the labour of the anti-perspectival, the restoration of man's ancient innocence, to the extent that they participate in the infinitude of desire. The vision with which Thel is presented is profoundly cyclical. Her desire to hear "the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time" is repeated by the "voice of sorrow." The essence of Christianity lives on as a constitutive emptiness. The reader is presented with a profound humanization of Christianity in an extreme existentialism. The realm of the Clay embodies the labour of the anti-perspectival in proportion to Thel's self-consciousness of the finitude of fallen Urizen's perspective. Both are involved in the contrariety of creative innocence. The struggle towards self-consciousness and a desire for "the renaissance of an integrated sens-

ibility beyond self-consciousness" are double movements of the same process. Desire would seek its own annihilation and yet cannot at the risk of losing sight of contraries. And so the "voice of sorrow" articulates a profound understanding of the eternality of process. The prophetic speaking of the narrative becomes a pure otherness at this point as eternal identity gradually emerges of its own volition. The soul is seen as a pure emptiness in the face of the divine. It is the eternal identity of desire itself which the "voice of sorrow" will interrogate.

The pure speaking of the anti-perspectival issues from a dwelling within the eternality revealed in the act of Self-Annihilation. The "voice of sorrow" oscillates between an annunciation of the labour of Urthona and a crystallization of Urizen's falling perspective. It is "a going forth & returning." Astonishment and terror are revealed simultaneously. The voice from Thel's grave is a minute delineation of the method by which the human becomes the divine and the divine human. It is a restoration of the fluidity of the eternality of process, a simultaneous revelation of truth and falsehood, only because it is a shattering of the eternality of process. The Word of God is wholly incarnate in the crucified body as the locus of the human is revealed in the divinity of the other. It is the task of the "voice of sorrow" to 're-member' the eternal lineaments of forgiveness by showing the contrariety involved in divine creation.

The questions put to Thel by the "inmost Form" of her perspective at this particular point in her intellectual journey reveal the eternal identity of the human in an inexorable contrariety. They are simulta-

neously an articulation of the hardening of the arteries of life, so to speak, as the mind confronts the other of its sensually rounded thinking, and a glorious celebration of the eternal awakening of the spiritualized senses as the soul realizes its participation in the life of the Holy Spirit. The "voice of sorrow" acknowledges that attraction and repulsion are necessary to existence. The account of the progression of the Prolific and the Devourer fittingly begins with the Ear.

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction? (6:11)

The Ear is the spiritual sense of Urthona by which the "true Man" receives the Word of God. Since Urthona corresponds to the Holy Ghost, the Ear is both principle and agent of the Word of God. Urthona's art is poetry, a speaking of the Divine Logos and witnessing of the involutions and evolutions of being. The "voice of sorrow's" first question affirms that creation and destruction are one. The crucifixion of the intellectual body is simultaneously a revelation of the Divine Logos. The universal process of crucifixion is the Word of God. Blake writes in "Milton":

Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?
 It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell,
 Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos'd,
 I hope thine are not; hence it clothes itself in rich array;
 Hence thou art cloth'd with human beauty O thou mortal man.
 Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies:
 There Chaos dwells & ancient Night & Og & Anak old;
 For every human heart has gates of brass & bars of adamant,
 Which few dare unbar because dread Og & Anak guard the gates
 Terrific! and each mortal brain is wall'd and moated round
 Within; and Og & Anak watch here; here is the Seat
 Of Satan in its Webs; for in brain and heart and loins
 Gates open behind Satans Seat to the City of Golgonooza
 Which is the spiritual fourfold London, in the loins of Albion.
 (20:27-40 Ell)

The human soul must pass through "the fruitful mystery of evil" to discover the fourfold depth of the Word of God. God does not dwell "beyond the skies" but is the appearance of eternity made visible in and by the act of Self-Annihilation. The divine locus of the human is seen as man's infinite desire. Blake's iconoclast will admit of no restraint. Although he writes "The Four Senses are the Four Faces of Man & the Four Rivers of the Water of Life" (E653), the "voice of sorrow" inverts the established means of apocalyptic revelation in the form of the awakened senses as true apocalypse must. The Ear cannot "be closed to its own destruction" because the divine essence of the human is always a becoming. The "living Form" of the Word of God must be "cloth'd with human beauty." The contrariety of the Prolific and the Devourer must be continually redeemed. "But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights." (MHH 16 E39) The awakened senses continually realize that the "boundary-line" of Energy itself is given over to death eternally in the reflection of man's Reason. The fourfold form of Christianity lives on as a constitutive absence. The divine, as an immaculate otherness, is consecrated by the "voice of sorrow." This voice from Thal's grave plot is sorrowful in the sense that it names her deepest conviction of the eternal identity of the soul -- namely, the infinitude of desire. Desire is seen as the Scylla and Charybdis of the soul, and hence, of the Word of God. "The mercy of Eternity" is consistently seen by Blake as a human translator. Man's astonishment in the face of the Prolific is rendered visible in the pure speaking of the prophetic voice. The divinity of

silence is returned to the "Con-Science" of the human heart where it appears as the contrariety of the empty and the full.

The "voice of sorrow" returns to the Ear a few lines later to actually name its contrary function. "Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?" The inner whorl of the ear is the conch of creation through which the life of the Holy Spirit attains to self-consciousness. The Word of God is only made manifest in the act of Self-Annihilation, a passionate participation in unceasing mental warfare. The "voice of sorrow" articulates the plight of the human and the divine by presenting the contrariety involved in creative innocence in the form of a question. The immortal youth at the vortex of infinite creation may be heard to call out against his own destiny. Astonishment simply cannot be rendered in any other terms than astonishment. By drawing creations in, the Ear humanizes unfallen Spirit, renders the human incapable of escaping its primordial condition of divinity. "Mans earthly lineaments" (M 1 21,11 Ell4) are rendered "A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity." The "Divine Members" of the life of the Holy Spirit must be continually generated in the mirror of the prophetic imagination to redeem man's ancient innocence.

The "voice of sorrow" moves to articulate the contrariety involved in the spiritual sense of Sight as the Eye struggles to redeem generation in the divine image.

Or the glistening Eye to the poison of a smile!
 Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
 Or an Eye of gifts & graces, show'ring fruits & coined gold! (6:12-15)

The contrary conditions of the Eye -- its susceptibility to "the poison of a smile" and the "pure vision" which showers "coined gold" -- are seen as inseparable. A minute delineation of the bound Infinite, the form of Energy, is an articulation of the eternal identity of the human. And yet Blake cries out: "Who shall bind the Infinite" (E673)

The human heart is forever uncreate. A prophetic representation of the gyrating emanations of divine love is, simultaneously, a presentation of "a going forth & returning." The "glistening Eye's" inability to be closed to "the poison of a smile," the soft, delusive threefoldness of Beulah, is presented in terms of a wondrous exclamation, an affirmation of Satan's participation in the Trinity so as to render it fourfold. As the speaker of "The Crystal Cabinet" bends to kiss the "threefold Smile," the cabinet bursts, and both he and the "lovely Maid" are thrust back into generation and the vegetable body. "Inmost Form" exists as the infinite desire of the Worm. The empty knowledge that is ecstasy is 're-membered' in a passionate participation in the eternality of process. The visionary eye is involved in a continual process of casting off the Selfhood in order to redeem contraries, the "coined gold" of the bound Infinite. The eternality of process is consummated in the appearance of the newly risen body, which is simultaneously the birth of the new Satan. The Eyelids "stord with arrows ready drawn, / Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie" are the voices of self-accusation, falling Urizen's "avenging conscience,"¹²⁹ which make possible the redemption of the Elect, the act of Self-Annihilation. The Creator's

¹²⁹ Damon, A Blake Dictionary, p. 419.

loving mercy is identified as man's participation in the profound movement of forgiveness. As Satan realizes his error, God is made visible and restored to the seat of divinity which is the human heart. A prophetic definition of the falling Urizen is inseparable from a minute delineation of Los, the activity of Urthona in time, for Blake insists that Los became what he beheld. By extension, the "voice of sorrow" makes visible the eternal labour of Urthona only by naming falling Urizen's extreme existential condition. Unfallen Urizen, the alchemy of "pure vision" transforming an inert one-dimensional matter into the types and symbols of eternity, is characterized by "an Eye of gifts & graces." He is born in the act of Self-Annihilation which must be continually repeated to redeem the life of the Holy Spirit and the contrariety of the human soul. Exteriority is consecrated as the tongues of the Holy Spirit by unfallen Urizen's alchemical Imagination. Consequently, the individual disappears in the universal creative Imagination.

Urizen disappears with the full unfolding of Blake's vision of Creation, and with Him disappears anything resembling a genuine creation myth. Gradually the Creator becomes a universal but unseen redemptive power, operative throughout the vast stretches of a fallen time and space, but visible only in the fullness of Experience, where He becomes manifest as the "one Man," Jesus.¹³⁰

"The fullness of experience" discovers man's ancient innocence. The "coined gold," the appearance of vision by vision itself, must give way to its own internal logic of the Infinite. The secrecy surrounding the internal logic of the Infinite is repeated and revealed in the "Innate Science" of the human heart. Unfallen Urizen's 'Reason' is the "sweet

¹³⁰ Altizer, The New Apocalypse, p. 89.

Science" of the soul. However, the human heart is "unapproachable for ever" (J 12:56 E154). Therefore, Urizen is always in the process of falling. His labour can never attain to finality. The Infinite is seen as the human beauty of man's earthly lineaments by the prophetic Eye. The regeneration of the spiritualized body depends upon the rebellious energy of the prophetic. Satan must be continually redeemed as the generate Luvah.

"Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?" The prophetic voice is the signature of the divine. Blake writes: "Every honest man is a Prophet he utters his opinion both of public & private matters Thus If you go on So the result is So He never says such a thing Shall happen let you do what you will. a Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator." (E606-7) The pure speaking of the prophetic is a naming of eternal identity, a making visible of the "living form" of man's native divinity. An articulation of the anti-perspectival is achieved in and by a shattering of fallen perspective. The spiritual Tongue is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the power to re-present the "fruits" of the invisible in fallen time. The Tongue is "impress'd with honey" in the sense that it is the sign and the seal of the labour of divinity. Desire is seen as the contrary of the Heavenly Father, the Divine Essence. Desire and

the Divine Essence are contraries of the first principle of creation.¹³¹

The Hermetic workman was called "god of the fire, and the Spirit"; for "the Mind which is the Workman of all, useth the fire as his instrument."¹³²

"The fire" of desire as "instrument" of "the Mind which is the Workman of all" establishes the human soul as the locus of divine creation.¹³³

¹³¹ The contrariety articulated by the "voice of sorrow" in the "land unknown" establishes desire as simultaneously "the abyss of Hell." Both are involved in the "fire-principle" which is the Father. Raine notes: "...to Boehme [Alchemy] was a symbolic language purely and simply; his theme was the divine essence, good and evil, Heaven and Hell. In Boehme's writings the fire-principle is the Father, source of nature, and, as he repeats in countless passages, the abyss of Hell. From the fire proceeds the light, the Son, the principle of heaven; yet fire and light spring from a single root: "For the God of the holy World, and the God of the dark World, are not two Gods; there is but one only God." It is on the authority of Boehme that Blake wrote of the Jehovah of the Bible as "no other than he who dwells in flaming fire." This fire is Boehme's first principle of the Divine Essence. It is, in Blake's words, "Energy, call'd Evil," and in its fires the devils dwell, as "living Spirits in the Essences of the Eternal Original," as angels live in the principle of light; and each spirit is confined within its own principle." Blake and Antiquity, p. 74.

¹³² Ibid., p. 84.

¹³³ Ahab rages in Moby Dick: "I own thy speechless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whence so'er I came, whereso'er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee". (Ch. 119) Thel, as desire, is the incarnation of the essence of that "queenly personality" Ahab celebrates. She is the principle of defiance upon which divine creation is founded. She cannot be expected to rest from intellectual warfare at any point in the poem. A surrender to "the beams of love" is, paradoxically, achieved by means of a passionate defiance of "the beams of love." Blake's achievement in "The Book of Thel" is a profound humanization of the life of the Holy Spirit. The stern debate of self-consciousness is the arena in which the historical and spiritual man encounter one another in astonishment and recognize, momentarily, the other, or genuine source, of the contents of consciousness.

Inspiration is to proportionately reflect the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The "land unknown" may be seen as the womb of the soul. Raine tells

us: Thel herself may be named from the charming figure of Thalia ("the blossoming one"), who in Thomas Vaughan's "Lumen de Lumine" initiates the Alchemist Eugenius Philalethes into the mysteries of "that which is beneath." Philalethes meets Thalia in a living "temple of nature," where the murmur of bees -- the generating souls -- may be heard; thence she leads him into the underworld, where she shows him an altar shaped as a cube (the traditional symbol of earth), where a young snake hatches from the roots of an old rotten tree. Still deeper is a cave, smelling of the grave; and this, Thalia tells her initiate, is the inmost sanctuary of Nature's mysteries, where death perpetually gives place to regeneration...¹³⁴

Blake has reorganized Vaughan's account of initiation into "the inmost sanctuary of Nature's mysteries." Thel has been led by her own desire to a 'hearing' of the divine locus of the soul, the heartbed of inspiration in contrariety.

It cannot be forgotten that the ecstatic affirmations of contrariety are posed by the "voice of sorrow" as questions to Thel's self-consciousness. This voice is that of her own children, the voices of self-accusation which make possible the advent of the newly risen body by initiating the act of Self-Annihilation. By asking why it is that the Tongue is "impress'd with honey from every wind," the "voice of sorrow" affirms that love in the fallen realm must take the form of a binding of the Infinite. Thel, as the essence of desire, remains the outlaw and enemy. She is not only an embodiment of human desire but of divine desire as well. She 're-presents' the plight of pure Spirit bound by the generative body. Her prophetic function is to sustain the tension involved

¹³⁴ Blake and Antiquity, p. 71.

in creation from both sides of the mirror of Imagination. She is essentially an enemy of destiny. This is the deepest significance of her lament.

The "trembling" Nostril is seen by the "voice of sorrow" as inexorably open to "terror." "Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright." (6:18) The "voice of sorrow" makes available to Thel an encounter with the reflection of a polarized mirroring of the condition of the realm of Mne Seraphim in the "land unknown." The appearance of this polarising reflection in the poem signifies the completion of a cyclical and unifying vision of states within states. The condition of the Nostril in the "land unknown" is the other, the creative centre, of the divine innocence made manifest in the realm of Mne Seraphim. Only by articulating the contrary movement involved in creation can the prophetic narrative proportionately delineate the bounds of Eden. Agony and ecstasy are double aspects of the principle of creation. In isolation each condition is disproportionate, perhaps even empty.

The dialectical movement of contraries is established by the phrasing of the question concerning the condition of the Nostril. The "voice of sorrow" sees the movement of contraries from both sides of the mirror of Imagination. It voices the plight of the Holy Spirit and the human in generation. This can only be achieved in the context of a mythologized present. The Nostril is seen to inhale "terror" as though "terror" were without.

What the nostril takes can only be described in terms that are subjective -- can only come in some apprehensible form, as though 'terror' ...were from without. The senses protect the individual and they involve him in his world; they make participation possible but do so by shaping that with which we participate, so that we are both formed by our world and yet form what it is...the senses bring us the profound vitality of contact...acts of participation involve

the whole being and are simultaneously an intensification of the self and a giving up of the self.¹³⁵

What the Nostril takes can only be described in terms that are Human, not "subjective." The nostrils "are the East" (J 12:59 E154). They are the spiritual sense of Luvah, who is the Heart, or Centre, "unapproachable for ever." Luvah is a weaver and his element is fire. The "innate Science" of the Heart never attains to a finality beyond the pure speaking of the prophetic. The locus of divinity is in the contrariety of the soul. The nostrils are the symbol of creative intelligence; therefore, they are often depicted breathing fire. The spiritual Nostril is ever open to the "terror" of the "Human Form" (M 1 18:26 E111), an absence which is always in the process of becoming. The "Human Form" must be continually transfigured to bestow upon it the infinitude of the "Human form Divine." Generation must be superseded by regeneration. The "voice of sorrow" articulates repeatedly the plight of both the human and the divine in generation as they struggle to become one another and thereby make visible the fourfold depth of Eden. Blake writes in "Jerusalem":

In Heaven Love begets Love! but Fear is the Parent of Earthly Love!
And he who will not bend to Love must be subdued by Fear

(4 81:15-16 E236).

Plate 13 of "For the Sexes" reads: "Fear & Hope are -- Vision" (E263).

By posing the extreme existential condition of the Nostril in the form of a question, the "voice of sorrow" acknowledges that fear must be replaced by fear if Love is to be superseded by Love. The vegetable body must

¹³⁵ D.G. Gillham, William Blake (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1973), p. 191.

continually be raised as the spiritualized body by means of the act of Self-Annihilation. The self-consciousness of the life of the Holy Spirit is wholly dependent upon the self-consciousness of the individual.

The "terror" inhaled by the spiritual Nostril is from within and without. Human desire becomes the desire of the life of the Holy Spirit struggling to be named, to be restored to its locus in the human heart. The creative intelligence necessarily deals in terms of the sexual forms of generation.

...in the Nerves of the Nostrils, Accident being formed
 Into Substance & Principle, by the cruelties of Demonstration
 It became Opake & Indefinite; but the Divine Saviour,
 Formed it into a Solid by Los's Mathematic power.
 He named the Opake Satan: he named the Solid Adam (M 1 29:35-39 E126).

Luvah is the Centre of the redeemed Adam. He transfigures "Accident" into "Substance & Principle" according to Los's alchemical imagination, the "sweet Science" or innate logic of the heart. Adam may be seen as the archetypal philosopher whose function is a prophetic listening, and therefore, a creational naming of the forms of "Identical Existence." (E558)
 The terror of sexuality is the condition of the Human in generation. The "trembling" Nostril must continually transfigure the terror of sexuality into the types of "Identical Existence," into the symbols of the Human.
 The Virgin, Ololon, cries in "Milton":

Altho' our Human Power can sustain the severe contentions
 Of Friendship, our Sexual cannot; but flies into the Ulro.
 Hence arose all our terrors in Eternity! & now remembrance
 Returns upon us! are we Contraries O Milton, Thou & I
 O Immortal! how were we led to War the Wars of Death
 Is this the Void Outside of Existence, which if enter'd into

Becomes a Womb? & is this the Death Couch of Albion
 Thou goest to Eternal Death & all must go with thee.

(M 41:32-37, 42:1-2 E142)

Both "terror" and the sexuality of the generative forms must be continually transfigured. The catalogue of the Spiritual Senses in generation depicts the 'terrible beauty' of the living educts of the Imagination. It is a rendering of the creative strife between the Human and the life of the Holy Spirit as these contraries are raised to self-consciousness in fallen time.

True apocalypse must shatter its own apocalyptic imagery in order to redeem the eternality of process. The narrative achieves such a shattering of the images of apocalypse by depicting contraries within contraries in the penultimate articulation of the "voice of sorrow."

Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire? (6:19-20)

The first statement is delivered in the form of an exclamation, while the second is posed as a question. Rather than Platonic lamentations, they are astonished affirmations of the contrary condition of the sexual in generation, glorious celebrations of the Infinite clothed in "human beauty." One of the "Proverbs of Hell" reads: "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion." (MHH 10:61 E37) The "tender curb" is the human Beauty of immortal joy while the "little curtain of flesh" is the hymen of the female form constantly penetrated by the infinitude of desire. The "youthful burning boy" is the eternal youth of the life of the Holy Spirit, Inspiration itself. The "Divine Members" which are the life of the Holy Spirit are depicted as a "youthful burning boy" because they are constantly christened with human Beauty in the individual imagination. The "little curtain of flesh," the virginal hymen of not only the outward form of external nature but the veils of the mind as well, is the heartbed of man's infinite desire in

the unexplored lineaments of his earthly body. The astonishing aspect of beauty is that it appears at all. The mortal body perfectly contains and sustains Spirit. The infinitude of human desire, the contrariety involved in poetical thinking, continually rends "the skin of things" in order to show how they becomes things, how the mind reflects Spirit, how the pretended positivity of things is upheld. The contrary of inspiration's "tender curb" is seen as desire's "little curtain of flesh." They are contraries within contraries and restorative of the fourfold nature of the "Human form Divine."

According to the decrees of divine inspiration, the "little curtain of flesh" is transfigured into the infinitude of the mortal body, the infinitude of nature's lineaments are rendered the crystalline jewels of the human soul. At the same time, the prophetic narrative is consummated as the pure speaking of the anti-perspectival. Incarnation (life) and transfiguration (death) become one in the contrariety of "tender curb" / "youthful burning boy" and "curtain of flesh" / "bed of our desire." These contraries are the four faces of divinity in every man. The prophetic voice does not seek a finality beyond the Human; rather, it extends the incarnate logic of the Heart, the rhythms of the body, to humanize all that would otherwise "mock with the aspersion of Madness" (M 2 41:8 E141). The whole business of the prophetic is to 'copy' Imagination and not the cruel holinesses of natural religion. The "voice of sorrow" articulates the struggle of divine creation in generation in terms of a question because it must be left to TheI, the individual creative imagination and temple of desire, to decide to restore the lost beloved to self-consciousness. The contrariety of the human soul must

ever be discovered anew in order to redeem God as "the creator of man," to resurrect the forms of external nature as the living breath of the Holy Spirit.

Thel has been almost universally condemned for her shriek and sudden departure from the "land unknown." But she is an embodiment of the infinitude of human desire. Her departure from the house of the Clay mirrors her departure from the realm of Mne Seraphim at the beginning of the poem. Both departures are essentially a casting aside of the known signifying the restoration of the eternality of process, a resurrection of the infinitude of Human potential. The prophetic mirroring of the departures is the key to an apprehension of the method by which the narrative re-opens the eternality of process. The "voice of sorrow" has presented Thel with a profoundly cyclical vision of the movement of thought in the realm of generation. Thel, as desire, must show the linear movement of the Imagination in eternity. The cyclic and the linear must be redeemed as contraries. The cyclical vision must be ever shattered anew to give way to the rise of the new intellectual body, thereby redeeming the linear progression of Imagination from one eternity to another. This is depicted by the illumination at the bottom of the plate by showing Thel, reins in hand, leading a spiralled serpent forward into eternity. Thel must constantly engage in the universal act of Self-Annihilation in order to reveal the anti-perspectival in and through a transfiguration of finite perspective. Her shriek is essentially a casting aside of the negation, the assurance of identity. Her task is to defy destiny. She has been presented with a 'sorrowful' account of contrariety by the voice of her desire. Blake writes: "The busy bee has no time for sorrow."

(MHH E35) The business of Spiritual Man is to create himself anew in the image of the Divine Father, and hence, to humanize divine creation. If Thel were to remain in the house of the Clay, her sojourn would be tantamount to an idolatrous worship of the mortal mother, the cruel holinesses of natural religion. The "voice of sorrow" has articulated the "inmost Form" of her perspective at this point in fallen time. That perspective must be transfigured. Her shriek may be construed in terms of the act of Self-Annihilation. It is the rejection of the Selfhood, a bursting of the threefold form of her Canaanite identity. True apocalypse cannot be tainted by sorrow. "The solemn, the painful, the tragic may ultimately be seen as only food for laughter."¹³⁶ Thel must rethink the extreme condition of the divine in generation. She must interrogate further the archetypal Narcissus myth, the mirroring of the Human in the divine. Therefore, she returns to the vales of Har where the "Sleeping Body" may again be graced with "still perceptions" of the potential divinity of the Human. Her return to Har is analogous to Blake's return to time and space at the end of "Milton," awaiting "Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body" (M 42:27 E142).¹³⁷ The end of the poem has been a transfiguration of the beginning, the discovery of a new beginning. Thel's shriek and subsequent departure constitute the profound imaginative success of the prophetic, for in her "unhindered" release from error is discovered the potential for a further renewal of virginity and a rethinking of the contrariety involved in divine creation. Indeed, in Thel's "unhindered"

¹³⁶ Robert E. Simmons, "'Urizen': The Symmetry of Fear," Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic, eds. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 167.

¹³⁷ Cf. Mary Lynn Johnson, "Beulah, 'Mne Seraphim', and Blake's 'TheF,'" p. 272.

retreat is discovered a shattering of the decrees of destiny, a resurrection of the eternality of process. Her "unhindered" departure establishes the influx of Spirit as "a going forth & returning." The influx of Spirit is dependant upon the shattering and resurrection of perspective. Thel's departure also shows that the anti-perspectival exists to the extent that perspective can be seen as "a going forth & returning."¹³⁸

Blake writes in "Jerusalem":

Then those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death
Said thus: What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom
It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful
Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be: even of
Torments, Despair, Eternal Death; but the Divine Mercy
Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen
And Length Breadth Highth again Obey the Divine Vision Hallelujah
(32:50-56 EL77).

Thel's encounter with the "voice of sorrow" has not been a dark Satanic illusion or a myopic view of Eden in generation. It has been a minute delineation of the iron foundation of Blake's Golgonooza which must be continually regenerated in the alchemical imagination in order to progress toward the golden lineaments of man's ancient innocence. An interrogation of the infinitude of man's earthly perspective is seen by Blake as the method of uncovering the anti-perspectival. To the extent that the Human is engaged in the universal act of Self-Annihilation, it is performing the labour of the first principle of divine creation. In this way divine love is returned to the physical creation and God is redeemed as "the creator of man." The seat of divinity is revealed in the human heart, "unapproachable for ever." Man's infinite desire is located in and creates the eternality of process.

¹³⁸

The reader may recall the hasty retreat from the singing pond made by the speaker of Hart Crane's poem, "Repose of Rivers."

Thel's experience in the "land unknown" is brought into relief and given proper perspective by the design at the bottom of the plate. Compositionally the design marries the previous six in a cyclical wholeness of experience couched in the contrariety of creative innocence. The land of the design is a return to generation, but it is to be construed in terms of the creative strife characteristic of Eden in accord with Blake's prophetic principle of forgiveness. The scene depicts the marriage of the individual and universal creative Imagination. Thel is depicted as a manifestation of unfallen Urthona, and Christ, the universal creative Imagination, is incarnate in the serpent which Thel rides. Christ has taken sin upon Himself and become Satan so as to redeem mankind, and therefore, God. "The curves and coils of the serpent suggest the serpentine stems of the lilies of the previous illustrations,"¹³⁹ signifying the immediate presence of the Divine Logos. Thus the serpent is to be seen as Christ himself and the serpentine coils as the scrolls of inspiration or the Spiritual Senses. It is Thel who holds the reins of the serpent and rides gleefully. She is at last naked. This figure is assuredly Thel, even if only because of the position of the hair at the back of the head which she has worn throughout. The naked figure of the Clay, a further manifestation of Urthona, lends a hand to the naked Worm-infant who is in danger of falling. Plate 16 of "For the Sexes" reads: "I have said to the Worm: Thou art my mother & my sister" (E265). The design is a depiction of the spiritual marriage between the lamb and the bride. Man's "double vision" is always engaged in the prophetic movement

¹³⁹ The Book of Thel, ed. Nancy Bogen, p. 48.

towards the fourfold eminence of Eden. We may recall Blake's statement that "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men." It can also be seen that the vine of eternity is growing from the serpent, thus further identifying the resurrected Christ with the labour of the "true Man." The four great eternal in every man compose the image of Christ. The entire scene returns us to the creative innocence of generative love. Thel's willing engagement in the universal process of Self-Annihilation has made possible the appearance of the risen Christ. However, the Clay's support of the Worm-infant is a constant reminder of Isaiah's words: "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing" (MHH 12 E38).

CHAPTER VI: "THEL'S MOTTO"

"Thel's Motto" provides the Virgin's apprehension of the eternality of process with a mythic vehicle by which to express the constitutive emptiness of the "innate Science" of the Heart. The questions composing the Motto give the priority of power to the labour of the loving Imagination rather than to knowledge and the conceits of human endeavour.

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
 Or wilt thou go ask the Mole;
 Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
 Or Love in a golden bowl? (plate 1)

These questions are not to be answered either negatively or positively. Certainly Blake's readers err when they treat the Motto as a kind of puzzle for adolescents and attempt to cart off a successful appraisal of the merits of experience born of their own rationality. The questions composing the Motto are questions and should be interrogated and re-

interrogated as such. Surely there is reason enough to phrase the empty knowledge of the heart in the form of a question.

The questions composing the Motto achieve the great feat of initiating the act of Self-Annihilation. They perform a re-opening of the eternality of process because they must be thought and rethought, answered and re-answered, again. A conclusion can only lead to the further act of Self-Annihilation. The fact that there are as many answers to these questions as there are critics shows that they are a miniature of the achievement of the poem; namely, that the Human must, and yet cannot, escape its destined divinity. The divine is ever created anew in the contrariety of the human soul. Blake's wonderfully blasphemous achievement is the creation of a new Heaven -- and consequently, a new Earth.

APPENDIX: PLATES AND TEXT

J.H.L.'s Motto.

*Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole:
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?*

Plate i

Copied from Nancy Bogen, William Blake, The Book of Thel: A Facsimile and
a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 34.

THEL'S Motto,

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?

Or wilt thou go ask the Mole;

Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?

Or Love in a golden bowl?



Plate ii

Copied from Nancy Bogen, William Blake, The Book of Thel: A Facsimile and a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 37.

THE
BOOK
of
THEL

The Author & Printer Will^m Blake, 1789

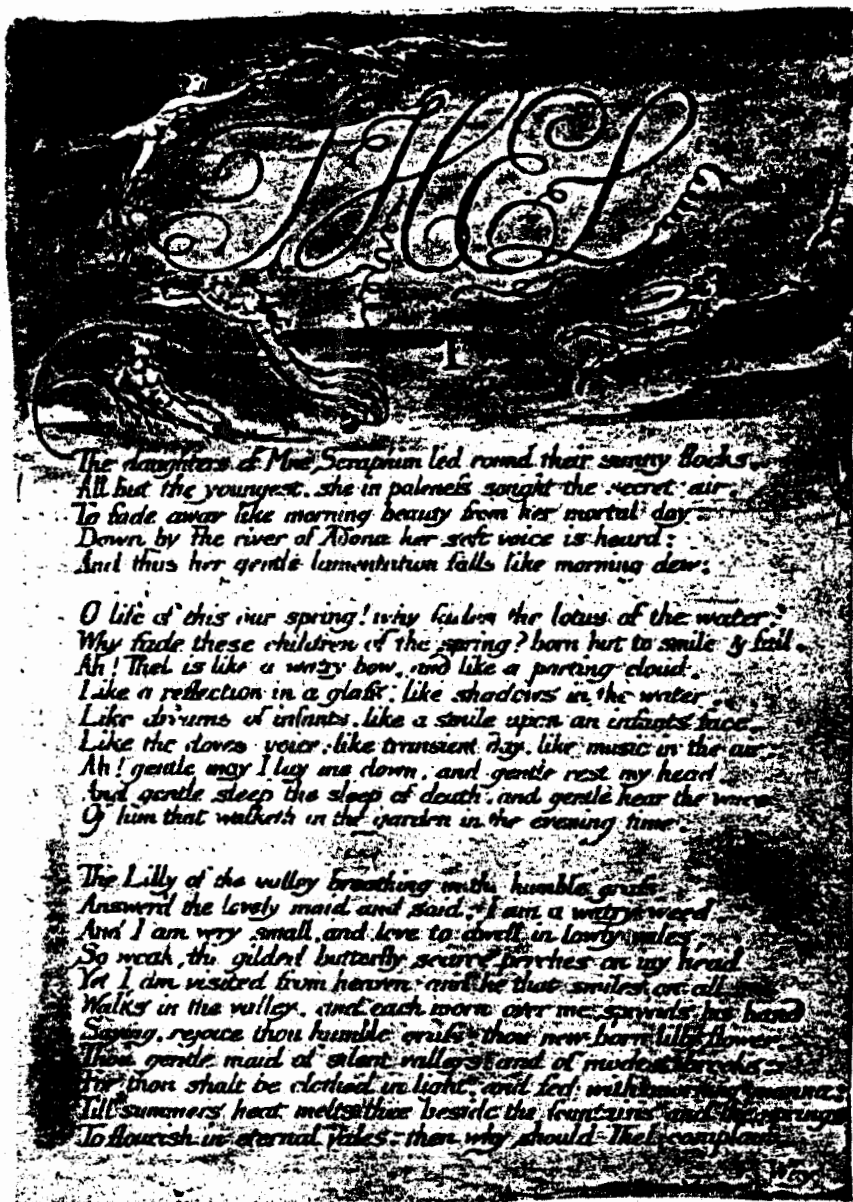


Plate 1

Copied from Nancy Bogen, William Blake, The Book of Thel: A Facsimile and a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 39.

THEL

I

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks.
 All but the youngest; she in paleness sought the secret air.
 To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day:
 Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard:
 And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew.

O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water?
 Why fade these children of the spring? born but to smile & fall.
 Ah! Thel is like a watry bow. and like a parting cloud.
 Like a reflection in a glass, like shadows in the water.
 Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infants face,
 Like the doves voice, like transient day, like music in the air;
 Ah! gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head.
 And gentle sleep of death. and gentle hear the voice
 Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time.

The Lilly of the valley breathing in the humble grass
 Answer'd the lovely maid and said; I am a watry weed,
 And I am very small, and love to dwell in lowly vales;
 So weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head.
 Yet I am visited from heaven, and he that smiles on all.
 Walks in the valley, and each morn over me spreads his hand
 Saying, rejoice thou humble grass, thou new-born lilly flower:
 Thou gentle maid of silent valleys. and of modest brooks:
 For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna;
 Till summers heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs
 To flourish in eternal vales; then why should Thel complain,

Why

Why should the maidens of the vales of Har, utter a sigh.
She ceased by smil'd in tears, then sat down in her silver shrine.

Thel answer'd, O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley,
Caring to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the deserted
Thy breath doth nourish the innocents lamb, he smells thy milky garments,
He crops thy flowers, while thou sittest nodding in his face,
Wiping his mild and meekish mouth from all contagious taints.
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey, thy perfume
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs
Reveres the milked cow, & tramples the fire-breathing steed
But Thel is like a fruit that's kindled at the rising sun:
I marish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place.

Queen of the vales the Lilly answer'd, ask the tender cloud,
And it shall tell thee why it glitters in the morning sky,
And why it scatters its bright beauty thro' the humid air.
Descend O little cloud & hover before the eyes of Thel.

The Cloud descended, and the Lilly bow'd her modest head:
Sits want to mend her numerous charge among the verdant grass.



Plate 2

Copied from Nancy Bogen, William Blake, The book of Thel: A Facsimile and a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 41

2

Why should the mistress of the vales of Har, utter a sigh.

She ceased & smil'd in tears, then sat down in her silver shrine.

Thel answerd, O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley.

Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'ertired:

Thy breath doth nourish the innocent lamb, he smells thy milky
garments,

He crops thy flowers, while thou sittest smiling in his face,

Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints.

Thy wine doth purify the golden honey; thy perfume,

Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs,

Revives the milked cow, & tames the fire-breathing steed.

But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun;

I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place.

Queen of the vales the Lilly answerd, ask the tender cloud,

And it shall tell thee why it glitters in the morning sky,

And why it scatters its bright beauty thro' the humid air.

Descend O little cloud & hover before the eyes of Thel;

The Cloud descended, and the Lilly bowd her modest head:

And went to mind her numerous charge. among the verdant grass.

II.

O little Cloud the virgin said, I charge thee tell to me,
 Why thou complainest not when in one hour thou fade away:
 Then we shall seek thee but not find, as Thel is like to thee,
 I pass away, yet I complain, and no one hears my voice.

The Cloud then showed his golden head & his bright form every day,
 Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel.

O virgin knowest thou not, our steeds drink of the golden springs
 Where Luwah doth renew his horses: lookest thou in my youth,
 And fearest thou because I vanish and am seen no more,
 Nothing remains: O maid I tell thee, when I pass away,
 It is to trahit life, to love, to peare, and raptures holy:
 Unseen descending, wright my light wings upon balmy flowers:
 And court the fair eyed dew, to take me to her shining tent;
 The weeping virgin, trembling kneels before the risen sun,
 Till we wise link'd in a golden band, and never part;
 But walk united, hearing food to all our tender flowers

Dost thou O little Cloud? I fear that I can not like thee;
 For I walk through the vales of Har, and smell the sweetest flowers:
 But I feed not the little flowers: I hear the warbling birds,
 But I feed not the warbling birds, they fly and seek their food:
 But Thel delights in these, no more because I fade away,
 And all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv'd,
 Or did she only live, to be at death the food of worms.

The Cloud reclined upon his airy throne and answer'd thus.

Then if thou art the food of worms, O virgin of the skies,
 How great thy use, how great thy blessing: every thing that lives,
 Lives not alone, nor for itself: fear not and I will call
 Thy weak worm from its lonely bed, and thou shalt hear its voice.
 Come forth worm of the silent valley, to thy pensive queen.

The helpless worm arose, and sat upon the Lillys leaf,
 And the bright Cloud sail'd on, to find his partner in the vale.

III.

Plate 3

II

O little Cloud, the virgin said, I charge thee tell to me,
 Why thou complainest not when in one hour thou fade away;
 Then we shall seek thee but not find; ah Thel is like to thee.
 I pass away, yet I complain, and no one hears my voice;

The Cloud then shew'd his golden head & his bright form emerg'd,
 Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel.

O virgin know'st thou not; our steeds drink of the golden springs
 Where Luvah doth renew his horses; look'st thou on my youth,
 And fearest thou because I vanish and am seen no more.
 Nothing remains; O maid I tell thee, when I pass away,
 It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace, and raptures holy;
 Unseen descending. weigh my light wings upon balmy flowers:
 And court the fair eyed dew, to take me to her shining tent;
 The weeping virgin, trembling kneels before the risen sun,
 Till we arise link'd in a golden band, and never part;
 But walk united, bearing food to all our tender flowers.

Dost thou O little Cloud? I fear that I am not like thee;
 For I walk through the vales of Har, and smell the sweetest flowers;
 But I feed not the little flowers: I hear the warbling birds,
 But I feed not the warbling birds. they fly and seek their food;
 But Thel delights in these no more because I fade away,
 And all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv'd,
 Or did she only live. to be at death the food of worms.

The Cloud reclind upon his airy throne and answer'd thus.

Then if thou art the food of worms. O virgin of the skies,
 How great thy use, how great thy blessing; every thing that lives,
 Lives not alone, nor for itself: fear not and I will call
 The weak worm from its lowly bed, and thou shalt hear its voice.
 Come forth worm of the silent valley, to thy pensive queen.

The helpless worm arose, and sat upon the Lillys leaf,
And the bright Cloud saild on, to find his partner in the vale.

III.



III.

Then Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm upon its dewy bed.

Art thou a Worm? image of weakness, art thou but a Worm?
 I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lilies' leaf:
 Ah weep not little voice, thou canst not speak, but thou canst weep:
 Is this a Worm? I see thee by helpless & naked: weeping,
 And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mother smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worm's voice, & rais'd her pining head:
 She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhald
 In milky kindness, then on Thel she fix'd her humble gaze.

O beauty of the wales of Har, we live not for ourselves,
 Thou seest me the meanest thing, and so I am indeed;
 My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark,

But

Plate 4

III.

The Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm upon its dewy bed.

Art thou a Worm? image of weakness, art thou but a Worm?

I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf:

Ah weep not little voice, thou can'st not speak, but thou can'st weep;

Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked: weeping,

And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worms voice, & raisd her pitying head;

She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd

In milky fondness, then on Thel she fix'd her humble eyes.

O beauty of the vales of Har. we live not for ourselves,

Thou seest me the meanest thing, and so I am indeed;

My bosom of itself is cold. and of itself is dark,

But

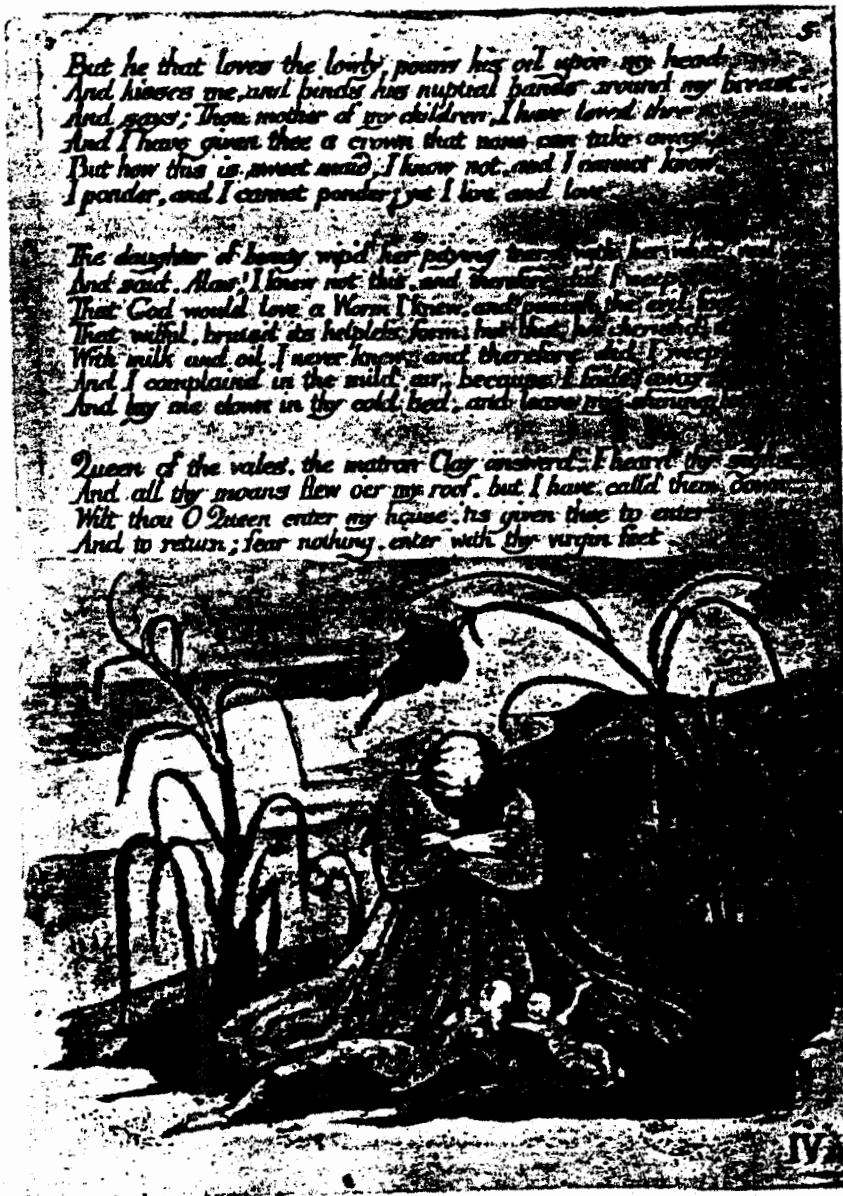


Plate 5

Copied from Nancy Bogen, William Blake, The Book of Thel: A Facsimile and a Critical Text (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971), p. 47.

But he that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head,
And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast.
And says; Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee.
And I have given thee a crown that none can take away:
But how this is sweet maid, I know not, and I cannot know,
I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love.

The daughter of beauty wip'd her pitying tears with her white veil;
And said. Alas! I knew not this, and therefore did I weep;
That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
That wilful, bruis'd its helpless form; but that he cherish'd it
With milk and oil, I never knew; and therefore did I weep,
And I complain'd in the mild air, because I fade away,
And lay me down in thy cold bed, and leave my shining lot.

Queen of the vales, the matron Clay answerd; I heard thy sighs.
And all thy moans flew o'er my roof, but I have call'd them down:
Wilt thou O Queen enter my house, 'tis given thee to enter,
And to return; fear nothing. enter with thy virgin feet.

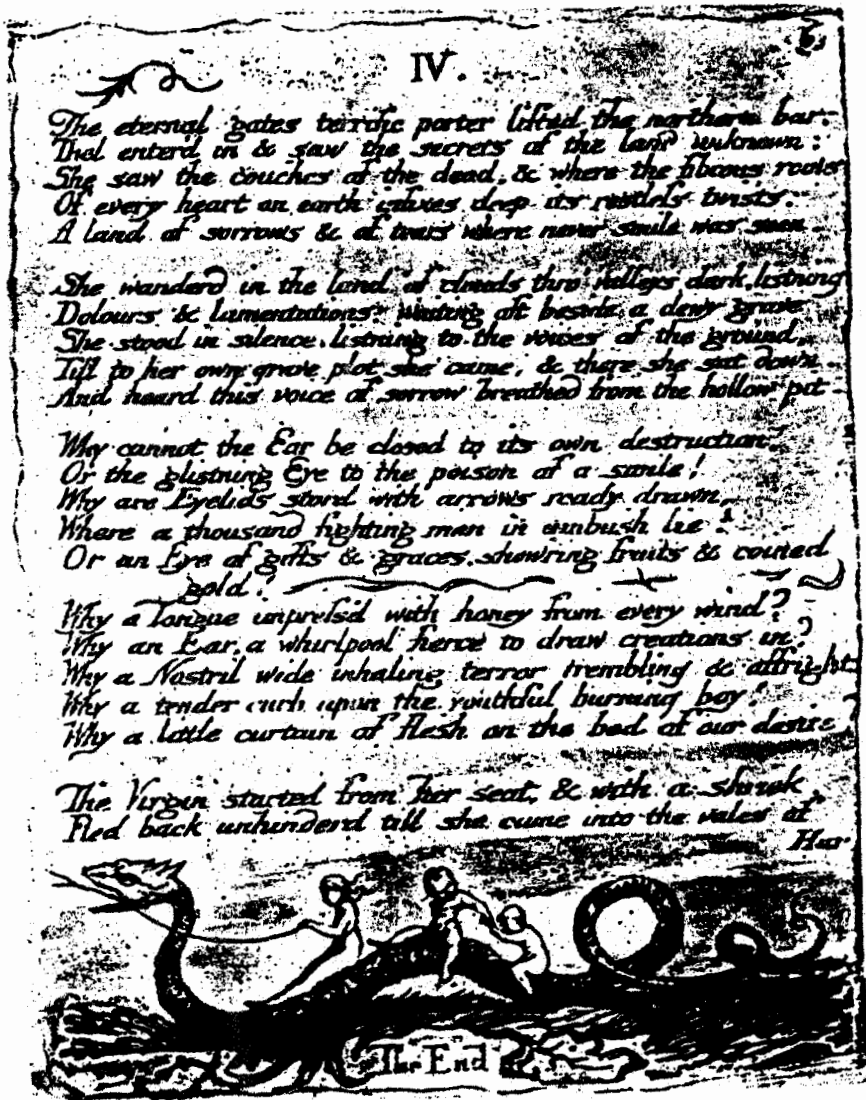


Plate 6

IV.

The eternal gates terrific porter raised the northern bar:
 Thel enter'd in & saw the secrets of the land unknown:
 She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots
 Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:
 A land of sorrow & of tears where never smile was seen.

She wander'd in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, listning
 Dolours & lamentations: waiting oft beside a dewy grave
 She stood in silence, listning to the voices of the ground,
 Till to her own grave plot she came, & there she sat down,
 And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit--

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
 Or the glistning Eye to the poison of a smile;
 Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie!
 Or an Eye of gifts & graces. show'ring fruits & coined gold;
 Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright.
 Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy;
 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?
 The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek.
 Fled back unhinderd till she came into the vales of

Har.

The End

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