

# **BLAKE, POLITICS, AND HISTORY**

---

Edited by  
Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso and  
Christopher Z. Hobson

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WILLIAM BLAKE



ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WILLIAM BLAKE

---

Volume 1

BLAKE, POLITICS, AND  
HISTORY

---

*This page intentionally left blank*

# **BLAKE, POLITICS, AND HISTORY**

Edited by  
**JACKIE DISALVO, G. A. ROSSO AND  
CHRISTOPHER Z. HOBSON**

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1998 by Garland Publishing, Inc.

This edition first published in 2016

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1998 Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-93813-7 (Set)

ISBN: 978-1-315-67509-1 (Set) (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-93910-3 (Volume 1) (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-93922-6 (Volume 1) (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-67517-6 (Volume 1) (ebk)

### **Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

### **Disclaimer**

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

# BLAKE, POLITICS, AND HISTORY

EDITED BY

JACKIE DISALVO, G.A. ROSSO,  
AND CHRISTOPHER Z. HOBSON

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.

A MEMBER OF THE TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1998

Copyright © 1998 by Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, and  
Christopher Z. Hobson  
All rights reserved

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blake, politics, and history / edited by Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, and  
Christopher Z. Hobson.  
p. cm. — (Garland reference library of the humanities ; v.  
1842. Wellesley studies in critical theory, literary history, and culture ; v. 17)  
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.  
ISBN 0-8153-1679-8 (alk. paper)  
1. Blake, William, 1757–1827—Political and social views. 2. Politics  
and literature—Great Britain—History—18th century. 3. Politics and  
literature—Great Britain—History—19th century. 4. Political poetry,  
English—History and criticism. 5. Literature and society—Great Britain—  
History. 6. Literature and history—Great Britain—History. 7. Social  
problems in literature. I. DiSalvo, Jackie. II. Rosso, G. A., 1954– .  
III. Hobson, Christopher Z. IV. Series: Garland reference library of the  
humanities ; vol. 1842. V. Series: Garland reference library of the  
humanities. Wellesley studies in critical theory, literary history, and  
culture ; vol. 17.  
PR4148.P6B58 1998  
821'.7—dc21 98-15870  
CIP

Cover illustration of *The Mecoo and Kishee-Kishee Monkeys* by William Blake.  
Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796.

Printed on acid-free, 250-year-life paper  
Manufactured in the United States of America

## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The volumes in this series, Wellesley Studies in Critical Theory, Literary History, and Culture, are designed to reflect, develop, and extend important trends and tendencies in contemporary criticism. The careful scrutiny of literary texts in their own right of course remains a crucial part of the work that critics and teachers perform: this traditional task has not been devalued or neglected. But other types of interdisciplinary and contextual work are now being done, in large measure as a result of the emphasis on "theory" that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s and that has accelerated since that time. Critics and teachers now examine texts of all sorts—literary and non-literary alike—and, more generally, have taken the entire complex, multifaceted field of culture as the object for their analytical attention. The discipline of literary studies has radically changed, and the scale and scope of this series is intended to illustrate this challenging fact.

Theory has signified many things, but one of the most crucial has been the insistent questioning of familiar categories and distinctions. As theory has grown in its scope and intensified in importance, it has reoriented the idea of the literary canon: there is no longer a single canon, but many canons. It has also opened up and complicated the meanings of history, and the materials and forms that constitute it. Literary history continues to be vigorously written, but now as a kind of history that intersects with other histories that involve politics, economics, race relations, the role of women in society, and many more. And the breadth of this historical inquiry has impelled many in literary studies to view themselves more as cultural critics and general intellectuals than as literary scholars.

Theory, history, culture: these are the formidable terms around which the volumes in this series have been organized. A number of these volumes will be the product of a single author or editor. But perhaps even more of them will be collaborative ventures, emerging from the joint enterprise of

editors, essayists, and respondents or commentators. In each volume, and as a whole, the series will aim to highlight both distinctive contributions to knowledge and a process of exchange, discussion, and debate. It will make available new kinds of work, as well as fresh approaches to criticism's traditional tasks, and indicate new ways through which such work can be done.

William E. Cain  
Wellesley College

To Joseph Wittreich  
Mentor—Teacher—Friend

And in memory of Edward P. Thompson

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

Figures	ix
Acknowledgments	xii
Introduction <i>Jackie DiSalvo</i>	xiii
Abbreviations and Short Titles	xxxiii
<b>Part I</b>	
Blake and the Question of Revolution	
1. The Myth of Blake's "Orc Cycle" <i>Christopher Z. Hobson</i>	5
2. Blake's Bible of Hell: Prophecy as Political Program <i>Stephen C. Behrendt</i>	37
3. The Anxiety of Production: Blake's Shift from Collective Hope to Writing Self <i>Eric V. Chandler</i>	53
4. William Blake's Figural Politics <i>James E. Swearingen</i>	80
Blake and the Underground	
5. "The Doom of Tyrants": William Blake, Richard "Citizen" Lee, and the Millenarian Public Sphere <i>Jon Mee</i>	97
6. Blake's <i>Tiriel</i> and the Regency Crisis: Lifting the Veil on a Royal Masonic Scandal <i>Marsha Keith Schuchard</i>	115
Laboring Into Futurity: A Response <i>Joseph Wittreich</i>	136
<b>Part II</b>	
Art and Politics	
7. "Lovers of Wild Rebellion": The Image of Satan in British Art of the Revolutionary Era <i>John Hutton</i>	149

8. The Mob and “Mrs Q”: William Blake, William Benbow, and the Context of Regency Radicalism <i>David Worrall</i>	169
“The French Revolution,” “America” and “Europe”	
9. Politics and Desire in Blake’s <i>The French Revolution</i> <i>Andrew Lincoln</i>	187
10. “The Lion & Wolf shall cease”: Blake’s <i>America</i> as a Critique of Counter-Revolutionary Violence <i>William Richey</i>	196
11. The Finite Revolutions of <i>Europe</i> <i>Michael Ferber</i>	212
12. Re-Framing the Moment of Creation: Blake’s Re-Visions of the Frontispiece and Title Page to <i>Europe</i> <i>Peter Otto</i>	235
<b>Part III</b>	
Blake, Empire and Slavery	
13. Empire of the Sea: Blake’s “King Edward the Third” and English Imperial Poetry <i>G.A. Rosso</i>	251
14. Revolted Negroes and the Devilish Principle: William Blake and Conflicting Visions of Boni’s Wars in Surinam, 1772–1796 <i>Anne Rubenstein and Camilla Townsend</i>	273
Blake and Women	
15. Albion and the Sexual Machine: Blake, Gender and Politics, 1780–1795 <i>Catherine L. McClenahan</i>	301
16. Transfigured Maternity in Blake’s <i>Songs of Innocence</i> : Inverting the “Maternity Plot” in “A Dream” <i>Harriet Kramer Linkin</i>	325
17. Maenads, Young Ladies, and the Lovely Daughters of Albion <i>June Sturrock</i>	339
Blake, Gender and Imperial Ideology: A Response <i>Anne K. Mellor</i>	350
Works Cited	354
Contributors	377
Index	380

## Figures

Following page xxxiii.

1. William Blake. *America a Prophecy*, 1793. Plate 8. British Library, London.
2. William Blake. *America a Prophecy*, 1793. Plate 10. British Library, London.
3. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Plate 11 (E plate 10). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
4. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Title page. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
5. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Plate 16, (E plate 14), detail. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
6. William Blake. *Vala or The Four Zoas*, c. 1796–1807. Page 73. By permission of the British Library.
7. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Plate 10 (E Plate 9), detail. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
8. William Blake. *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, 1806. (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Courtesy, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums. Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.
9. William Blake. *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve*, 1808. (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
10. William Blake. *Vala or The Four Zoas*, c.1796–1807. Page 77, detail. By permission of the British Library.
11. After J.B. Medina. *Satan Summoning His Legions*. From John Milton, *Paradise Lost*. London: Printed by Niles Flesher for Richard Bently, 1688. 4th edition. By permission, Rare Book and Special Collections Library, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.
12. William Hogarth. *John Wilkes, Esq.* Etching, 1763. By permission of the British Museum.
13. James Gillray. *The Tree of Liberty,—with, the Devil Tempting John Bull*. Etching, May 23, 1798. By permission of the British Museum.
14. James Barry. *The Fall of Satan*. Etching and aquatint, 1777. Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow. By permission.
15. James Barry. *Satan and His Legions Hurling Defiance Toward the Vault of Heaven*. Etching (black ink), c. 1792–94. By permission of the British Museum.
16. Henry Fuseli. *Satan Rising from the Flood*. From Milton's *Paradise Lost. A New Edition, adorned with Plates*. Du Bouveray, 1802. By permission, Rare Book and Special Collections Library University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

17. Henry Fuseli. *Religious Fanaticism Attended by Folly, Trampling Upon Truth*. Etching intended for Joel Barlow's *Columbiad*, 1779–80. By permission of the British Museum.
18. James Barry. *Passive Obedience*. Pen and brown ink and grey wash with black chalk, c. 1802–1805. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.
19. William Blake. *Albion Rose (Glad Day)*. Line engraving, color printed, with pen and watercolor, 1794. By permission of the British Museum.
20. Jean-Baptiste Regnault. *La Liberté ou la Mort*. Oil, on canvas, 1794. Hamburg Kunsthalle.
21. William Blake. *Good and Evil Angels Struggling Over the Soul of a Child*. Color print, with watercolor. Tate Gallery, London.
22. William Blake. *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion*, 1804–?20. Copy E. Plate 76. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
23. After Richard Westall. *Satan Alarm'd*. From *The Works of John Milton*, Vol. 1. London:Boydell, 1794–97. By permission, Rare Book and Special Collections Library, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.
24. Edward Frances Burney. *Satan and Uriel*. Engraving, 1799. By permission of the British Library, London.
25. William Blake, after Jean François Marie Huet-Villiers. *Mrs Q*. London: I. Barrow, June 1820. By permission of the British Museum.
26. Anon. *A PEEP at The P\*V\*\*\*\*N; or, Boiled Mutton with Caper Sauce, at the Temple of Joss. A Satirical Poem*. [Title page.] London: E. Wilson, [1820]. By permission of the British Museum.
27. Anon. after J.F.M. Huet-Villiers. *Mrs. Q*. London: [William] Benbow, May 1822. By permission of the British Museum.
28. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*. 1794. Copy I. Frontispiece. George Grey Rare Books Collection, Auckland Central City Library, Auckland. By permission.
29. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*. Title page, re-drawn version from the William H. Herriman Album. (IB plate iid.) By permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. PML 77019.41.
30. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*. Title page, re-drawn. (IB plate iib.) Private collection. By permission.
31. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*. Copy b recto. Title page, re-drawn. (IB plate iia.) By permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. PML 9948.12.
32. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*. Portion of the title page. c. 1794–1820. Relief etching printed in brown ink, pencil, watercolor on paper. (IB plate iic.) Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
33. William Blake. *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*. Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for J.G. Stedman, *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* [etc.], 1796.
34. William Blake. *A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*. Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796.
35. William Blake. *The Mecoo and Kishee-Kishee Monkeys*. Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796.
36. William Blake. *The Quato and Saccawinkee Monkeys*. Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796.

37. Francesco Bartolozzi. *Frontispiece*. Engraving after J.G. Stedman, for Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796.
38. Anon. *The Barbarous Cruelty Inflicted on a Negro at Surinam*. From *Curious Adventures of Captain Stedman, During an Expedition to Surinam, in 1773* [etc.]. London, n.d. [1809?]. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.
39. William Blake. *Jerusalem the Emancipation of the Giant Albion*, 1804–?20. Copy E. Plate 25. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
40. William Blake. *Jerusalem the Emancipation of the Giant Albion*, 1804–?20. Copy E. Plate 69, detail. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
41. *La République*. Musée Carnavalet. Photo Bulloz.
42. *The Contrast. British Liberty, French Liberty*. January 1793. British Museum, London. BMC 8284.
43. *The French Feast of Reason, or the Cloven-Foot Triumphant*. Nov. 10, 1793.
44. *Grand Disbanding of the Constitutional Army*. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our contributors for their patience and support throughout this process and especially for their excellent and diligent work. Jackie DiSalvo acknowledges the generous support of a Professional Staff Congress–City University of New York Research Award from 1994 to 1996, and G.A. Rosso thanks Southern Connecticut State University for a sabbatical leave in the fall of 1994 to work on this book. The editors particularly wish to offer their warmest appreciation to Charles Douglas Ferrari for invaluable aid in managing our computer files, preparing the manuscript and hosting our many meetings with such delightful good humor. And we give thanks and praise to Rich Squibbs for labor on the index. Finally, we express our gratitude to and respect for William Cain, Series Editor, for his encouragement in this project and to Phyllis Korper, our editor at Garland Publishing.

We gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint James E. Swearingen, “William Blake’s Figural Politics.” From *ELH* 59 (1992): 125–44. Copyright 1992. Reprinted by permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press.

# Introduction

*Jackie DiSalvo*

Blake aspired in his art to be like Thomas Paine, who could “overthrow all the armies of Europe with a small pamphlet” (E 617). However, rather than becoming the prophet of a popular movement that would bring down the “dark Satanic Mills” of emergent capitalism and build in their place the liberated creativity and community of a new Jerusalem, Blake exerted little influence in his own time or for decades afterward. Jerome McGann has asserted that the obscurity of his prophetic works and the costliness of his art have meant that, even in our own day, Blake for the most part “would play his part in the closet dramas of the academy and the struggles of the auction salesrooms,” rendering him “the most ineffectual of that period’s many angels” (*Social Values* 232–33). This paradoxical contrast between Blake’s public aspirations and apparently limited audience and influence continues to pose fundamental questions about his aesthetics and politics.

So—is Blake dead? Well, he’s the only canonical poet alive enough to inspire a contemporary movie on the issue, *Dead Man* by the experimental filmmaker Jim Jarmusch. In this visionary, allegorical film a nineteenth-century U.S. drifter named William Blake embarks on a spiritual journey when, after traveling to the satanic mills of a western border town called Machine, he is mortally wounded and meets a woman named Thel and a peyote-tripping Amer-Indian named Nobody, an English-educated Native who believes he’s meeting a reincarnation of the Romantic artist. Nobody seems to have embraced Blake as the one dead white man whose outlawry will make him a “killer of white men”—genocidal missionaries, lawmen, merchants—just as Blake’s poetry passes a Last Judgment on Eurocentric civilization. While the plot has Nobody trying, in an inversion of *Milton*, to guide the poet back to the spirit world, Jarmusch apparently considers Blake quite alive, remarking that in London “a lot of these younger rave and techno kids are into Blake again” (Taubin 68). At almost the same time, Peter Ackroyd’s deeply respectful and evocative biography of Blake was issued by a major trade publisher in a handsomely illustrated edition, indicating confidence in a serious work on the poet directed at a non-academic, general audience. Blake has, undoubtedly, myriad other resonances among intellectuals, artists, and rebels outside the academy, although in circles not often frequented by academics or recorded in the annals of scholarship.

We raise the question of Blake’s death to frame the paradox that shapes our concerns in this introduction: beyond the world of academic English studies, Blake is finding a limited yet vital audience as he has almost since his death in 1827<sup>1</sup> while, simultaneously, leading professional Blake scholars insist on his lack of relevance. We suggest that there is a deeper reason for this paradox than simply the ingrown character of academic literary criticism. Rather, the *kinds* of

Blake perceived outside the academic milieu differ from those inside. Outside, readers are interested in what Blake has to say about culture (in general) and, in a prophetic way, about our present-day culture (in particular). They are attracted to Blake's mix of materiality and spirituality, his insights into class, sexual, and ideological suppression, and they seek out a Blake who connects his time and place and ours, who embodies a tradition of prophecy and historical resistance.

Within the world of professional Blake studies, however, one often finds an insistence on Blake's divorce from history or historical relevance. This insistence takes two forms. On one side, deconstructionist approaches tend to wrest Blake out of history altogether, considering his works solely as linguistic practice. Though such studies may incidentally situate Blake historically, they focus on what happens within the text either as self-contained or self-deconstructing entity and between the text and its reader—removed from specific time and place. These studies argue that, by fracturing conventional polarities, exploring contradiction, and denying closure, Blake's texts create a linguistically open world that denies the tyranny of fixed meaning and destiny and encourage a similar liberation from absolute categories for the reader. The Blake who emerges is not talking in any important way about history, either of his time or ours, but about language within a self-referential linguistic field. Such, simplified, is the deconstructionists' Blake. A second trend historicizes Blake but paradoxically situates him so securely within the circumstances of his own time that his ideas and imaginative forms lose much resonance. In some approaches, his radical beliefs are treated reductively as responses to career frustrations and the like (Mann *passim*); in others, his belief in historical redemption is given independent weight but treated as historically particular, as a time-bound idea that belongs to an outmoded intellectual context. (We discuss both the deconstructionist and narrowly historicizing approaches more fully below.) Neither approach fully accounts for Blake's own sense of history. To historicize Blake fully, we propose, is to situate him within a historical tradition, one that he accepted, which connects past with present and future history. One need not endorse this conception of history to understand it as part of what it means to historicize Blake.

That tradition is both one drawn *from* history—usable by Blake because familiar to him and his readers—and one *about* history, which saw in history an ultimately redemptive pattern. M.H. Abrams has made this pattern familiar as the Christian paradigm of fall, redemption, and apocalypse (*Natural Supernaturalism* 32–37) but neither Abrams' thesis that Romantics ultimately internalized this pattern within the mind nor the deeply embedded idea of the pattern as immanent in providence or history and independent of human will apply fully to Blake. In particular, Blake reacted deeply against the latter idea in ways we cannot fully explore here. In *Milton*, Los promises that the moment of redemption is approaching, "But how this is as yet we know not, and we cannot know;/Till Albion is arisen" (23:33–34). Los, here, we believe, argues for a final redemption achieved by human agency and hence not fully knowable in advance.<sup>2</sup> Historical pattern, then, appears to mean that people make use of the past to alter the present toward a desired future—a future not given by design but constructed through ethical choices about the kind of world people want to live in. The choices, of course, are made within constraints given by the past—those of human biology, material production, political and class structures, gender and sexual suppression, and much else, including ideological and religious ideas.

Nevertheless, we would argue, for Blake these constraints do not determine the future either in a negative or a positive sense; the moment when Albion becomes conscious is one when the entire human past becomes available for present choices. That is one meaning of the lines Blake uses several times, “all that has existed in the space of six thousand years: [is]/Permanent, & not lost nor vanishd, & every little act,/Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still” (*J* 13:59–61). Walter Benjamin states similarly: “only for a redeemed mankind has the past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l’ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day” (254). Further, as we argue below, Blake articulates this moment as shaped by a multiplicity of voices that utilize the material given by the past, and by the debates of Blake’s own time, to make choices about the future; to make available “all that has existed in the space of six thousand years” is to listen to these voices, so that the choices are made through dialogue and debate.

We return to the question of Blake and apocalyptic transformation below. For now, we wish to suggest that in turning its back on this kind of Blake tradition, recent work on Blake has “dropped the hammer”—Blake’s phrase for the moment when his prophet-laborer Los loses his faith in transformation and capitulates to a historical present defined by the awesome power of the Urizen he helped form. Something like this seems to be happening to a “Blake industry” that has produced a Blake fully in tune with postmodern ideas of the emptying out of historical possibility. And yet, as already noted, uses of Blake outside the academy seem consonant with a different kind of postmodernism—one that seeks to transcend “modern” bourgeois society and Enlightenment culture by struggling towards new integrated paradigms that connect microcosm and macrocosm, social and psychic, physical and spiritual, past and future. This paradoxical confrontation between a living Blake and a Blake who lies grievously wounded by his own interpreters shapes the rest of our introduction. In the pages below we wish to take on the apolitical biases of recent Blake criticism, while situating them in the context of the overall development of Blake studies; we sketch our perspective (which, of course, is not necessarily shared by all our contributors) for approaching such issues as Blake’s heteroglossia and its relation to social action; finally, we return to the relevance of non-academic ideas about Blake—those of popular culture and also of intellectuals engaged in the construction of new paradigms. Our purpose in doing so is to urge academic Blake studies to help recover the prophetic and popular Blake, situated within the discourses and history of his own time, and make him more available to the nonacademic discourses now seeking a Blake with meaning for our time.

This book forms part of an ongoing effort to restore politics and history to the center of Blake studies. For a half-century or more Blake interpretation has been divided between socially- and politically-focused studies and what we can call ahistorical schools of interpretation. The former have focused on Blake’s relation to the large-scale historical issues of his time: the French Revolution and the English radical movements of the 1790s and 1810–20 (the latter almost unexplored territory for Blake commentary); divisions between rich and poor, men and women; issues of slavery and imperialism; struggles among monarchist, constitutionalist, and communitarian social ideals. Ahistorical trends have related Blake to universal myth, models of the psyche, and, increasingly, concerns over the operation of language. Naturally, the boundary

lines are not as neat as a schematic view would suggest; for example, Robert N. Essick's study of Blake's idea of language deeply historicizes its arguments within eighteenth-century theories on the subject (*William Blake and the Language of Adam*, 1989). Nevertheless, the difference in emphasis between "political," "historical," and "ahistorical" approaches is one that most readers of Blake interpretation will recognize. Further, these emphases have been geographically as well as intellectually distinct. Because of divergent political and intellectual traditions and different responses to the impact of French theory in the last two decades, the "historicist" trend in Blake studies has been more prominent in Britain and Australia than in the United States. In the U.S., on the other hand, ahistorical approaches have firmly occupied the chair, both in the heyday of thematic interpretation from about 1965–1985 and in the more recent period of linguistic and deconstructionist studies.

In arguing for the continuing importance of social and political Blake interpretation, we pick up a discussion begun in 1994 by Steve Clark and David Worrall's collection *Historicizing Blake*, whose introduction points to the centrality of E.P. Thompson in the British tradition of historical Blake criticism. As Clark and Worrall put it, "Blake serves as a cross between a presiding deity and a diffused rhetorical presence" in Thompson's enormously influential *Making of the English Working Class* (1963), from its epigraph ("The Beast & the Whore rule without control") to its last paragraph (referring to the "myriads of eternity"). Thompson, they observe, adopts Blake as a figure for a continuous radical presence. His Blake, the "voice of a long popular tradition" that reminded London radicals "that their own forbears once executed a king" (52), provides evidence for a "continuous thread of communitarian ideas" (47) and bequeaths his legacy to the political resurgence of 1810–20 and beyond—"the claims made in the 1790s by Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake and Thomas Spence were never wholly abandoned" (415). Thus, Worrall and Clark point out, Thompson constructs a very Blakean historical narrative, with the working class (or even at times the London Corresponding Society) as heroic protagonist in a romance which became by 1832 "the most significant factor in British political life" (11), a conclusion based, they think, as much on Thompson's Marxist teleology as on his evidence. Worrall and Clark are critical (we would say overcritical) of the ways in which Thompson can invoke Blake as a not-fully-examined token of larger moods. Yet they rightly gauge Thompson's determining impact on recent British Blake studies. Less concerned than Clark and Worrall (or Thompson) with Blake's specific place in the history Thompson recounts, we are more sympathetic to his view that a collective consciousness developed in these years—though we would agree with recent historiography that finds this consciousness more fractious than Thompson did. Moreover, we are sympathetic to Thompson's assumption that this development can be treated as narrative, that is, as a sequence rather than a succession of separate moments; moreover, since Blake, too, treated history in this way, Thompson's appropriation of him seems deeply logical.

Inspiring a whole generation of social historians, Thompson helped secure the predominance of David V. Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954)—already the leading social interpretation of the poet—in British and Commonwealth Blake studies. While Jacob Bronowski (1943) and Mark Schorer (1946) had both attended to Blake's political context and vision, Erdman's was the first work to thoroughly trace the myriad strands linking the poet to the

political issues and movements of his own tempestuous times. This detailed account of the twists and turns of that political history reads Blake's poems as responses to its vicissitudes, sometimes in overly topical ways. Erdman's study was so comprehensive—and the literary climate so inhospitable—that it would be many years before scholars would amplify his presentation of the politics of Blake's poetry and designs.

Erdman's legacy in Blake studies has been mixed, especially in the United States. His direct influence was on historical and political criticism that emerged in the tumultuous social atmosphere of the late 1960s and 1970s and continued through the next two decades. Articles by Aileen Ward (on revolution, 1972), Jerome McGann (on the politics of Blake criticism, 1973), Fred Whitehead (on materialist bases for Blake's myth, 1976), David Punter (on dialectics, 1977), E.P. Thompson (on "London," 1978), and David Aers (on violence and misogyny, 1987) provided a steady stream of political interpretations of Blake's texts. Combined with Erdman's influence, Christopher Hill's ongoing excavation of seventeenth century traditions led to full-length studies by Jackie DiSalvo (*War of Titans: Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion*, 1983) and Michael Ferber (*The Social Vision of William Blake*, 1985), which rooted Blake in the plebeian antinomian stance first explored in A.L. Morton's *The Everlasting Gospel* (1958). The contexts for Blake's radicalism would continue to be explored throughout the 1980s, especially in Britain: Stewart Crehan (1984) and Edward Larrissy (1985) examined traditions of radical Dissent, sans-culotte Jacobinism, left antiquarianism, and the social contexts of artisan radicalism, while G.A. Rosso's *Blake's Prophetic Workshop* (1993) situated *The Four Zoas* within the social context of eighteenth-century apocalyptic discourses. These studies encompassed a wide range of viewpoints, and we would be critical of some, but they kept up a political focus within Blake interpretation.

Less directly related to Erdman's work, Joseph Wittreich's studies of Blake and the apocalypse tradition also emphasized his commitment to social transformation—indeed, social rebirth. Wittreich's studies of Milton and of apocalyptic commentaries placed Blake in a radical, Miltonic tradition that united visionary poetics with social commitment. Wittreich's "Opening the Seals: Blake's Epics and the Milton Tradition" (1973) laid the basis for understanding Blake's apocalyptic aesthetics, and his *Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* (1975) stands as a magisterial study of Blake's relation to Milton. Wittreich's approach drew on many elements of mainstream Blake interpretation, such as its emphasis on an apocalyptic transformation within the mind, and yet it maintained the idea of a Blake dedicated to collective social redemption. Further, Wittreich's central concern with historically changing interpretations of Christian apocalypse situated Blake in an ongoing tradition of learned and popular debate and polemic. Hence, Wittreich's work and that of many of his students (including several of our contributors) helped maintain a historical, political Blake from a compass point distinct from Erdman's.

Yet the works in these two traditions represent a minority trend within Blake studies as a whole. A far more frequent response to Erdman's legacy has been an embrace that leads to marginalization, indeed trivialization. Typically, Morris Eaves endorses Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), Erdman's *Prophet*, and S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary* (1965) as the best all-round works on Blake: "If Blake is where you're going, Frye, Erdman, and Damon

should be your guides" ("Foreword," Damon, *Dictionary* ix). But the practical result of such an endorsement often is to wall off Blake and history, with Erdman as guide, from whatever the writer thinks is more important. Frequently, Blake scholars have incorporated Erdman's specific identifications into their studies, in effect and often literally as footnotes, while ignoring Erdman's insistence that Blake's political vision was central to his work as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Erdman, as Lenin said about Marx, has been turned into a "harmless icon" by those who reject his work in practice.

The primary responsibility for this state of affairs lies in another appropriation of Blake, before Thompson's and contrary to his, as the Muse of a fundamentally ahistorical literary method. In his enormously influential *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), Northrop Frye argued that the interpretation of any work depended on locating it in a universal "iconography of the imagination" (420), a consistent system of archetypes that could be synthesized from the entire body of literature. (Frye elaborates this view in *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 1958.) Frye's brilliant, if idealist, *Symmetry* rendered Blake's seeming obscurities intelligible, both through a thematic exposition of his views on "Natural Religion," Lockean philosophy, and the like, and through reading each poem within symbolic patterns that could be traced throughout Blake's canon. Frye offered a lucid, luminous translation of Blake's figurative and symbolic language that firmly established the coherence and rationality of his poetry. The negative sides of Frye's project were a frequent inattention to detail; the implication that Blake's symbols and meanings, related as they were to universal archetypes, were intrinsically divorced from history;<sup>4</sup> and, most specifically, the definition of Blake's "apocalypse" as an atemporal transformation of consciousness rather than society: "By an apocalypse I mean primarily the *imaginative conception* of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate" (*Anatomy* 119, our emphasis).<sup>5</sup> The contrast between a view of apocalypse as internalized "imaginative conception," accepted in nearly all criticism within the Frye tradition, and a social, historical apocalypse is one of the hallmarks of the ahistorical-historical split in Blake interpretation.

Frye's criticism, supplemented by Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963) and the theorizing works of M.H. Abrams (1963, 1971), formed the core of what Donald Ault, though with an emphasis different from ours, has called the "dominant paradigm of Blake studies" (*Narrative Unbound* xv), including distinguished works by Morton D. Paley, Leopold Damrosch, and many others. These works differ, of course, on many issues, notably on whether Blake's concerns were always internal and psychic, or became so only in the second half of his career. Yet they agree that Blake's ultimate direction was toward a transhistorical visionary mentalism. Abrams, in turn, provided a still-influential theorization reflected in many specific studies—ironically, a historicized argument for Romanticism's essential ahistoricism. In Abrams' view, the Romantic poets secularized, and finally aestheticized, what was originally a religious vision. Recognizing the central impact of the French Revolution, first in his essay "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" (1963) and later in his full-scale *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), Abrams formulated his grand synthesis of Romanticism as a transformation of political liberation into poetic redemption, dramatized in Wordsworth's *Prelude*:

The militancy of overt political action has been transformed into the paradox of spiritual quietism: under such militant banners is no march, but a wise passiveness. . . . [T]he restoration of Paradise, as in the Book of Revelation, is still symbolized by a sacred marriage. But the hope has been shifted from the history of mankind to the mind of the single individual, from militant external action to an imaginative act; and the marriage between the Lamb and the New Jerusalem has been converted into a marriage between subject and object, mind and nature, which creates a new world out of the old world of sense. ("English Romanticism" 58–59)

Bloom would later term this idea "The Internalization of Quest Romance" and McGann the "Romantic Ideology"; Abrams' paradigm also supplies the premise for the "thesis of fracture" in Blake studies, discussed below.

Frye, Bloom, and Abrams legitimated both the increasing centrality of Blake to Romanticism and the predominance of mythopoeic and psychological readings of his work. However, much in his artisan poetry extruded, like awkward knees and elbows, from their paradigm: sooty child laborers, crafty priests, industrial drudgery, orphan asylums, depictions of poverty and satire of its Malthusian rationalizations, narrations of the American and French Revolutions, denunciations of imperial wars and celebrations of insurrection. Yet these could be incorporated, not without a few stifled cries, within the Frye-Bloom machinery through the trivializing appropriation of Erdman noted earlier. Bloom's commentary in the canonical Erdman or "E" Blake text is an extended exercise of this kind: pages of psychological and archetypal interpretation are punctuated with brief notations—"For the historical allegory here, see Erdman . . ."; "This passage . . . gives a vision of industrial tyranny (see Erdman . . .)"—that create a surface impression of inclusiveness (Bloom, "Commentary," E 941, 961).

If the "dominant paradigm of Blake studies" remained hegemonic in the United States, despite the crop of fine historicist and political studies noted earlier, almost the opposite situation existed in Britain. There, stronger Marxist and Labor traditions, combined with the impact of Thompson's work and its invocation of Blake's spirit, led to a proliferation of historical studies focusing on eighteenth-century social injustice and radicalism. Among historical works, we note those that appropriate Blake as guiding spirit or situated him in the period's events, including *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (1975), by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, Thompson, and others, and Linebaugh's *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1991). Among cultural and literary studies, several strongly historicized recent works, either focusing on Blake or touching on him within broader discussions, have enhanced our appreciation of Blake's radical contexts: Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (1988); Jon Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (1992); Worrall's *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790–1820* (1992); E.P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (1993); and Clark and Worrall's *Historicizing Blake* (1994). This leftist Blakean tradition, however, tended to separate historical from literary study and thus left undone the task of engaging the dominant ahistoricist

tendency in Blake criticism from the inside. Relatively isolated from both the “dominant paradigm” and the newer deconstructionist trend in U.S. Blake studies, many British writers concentrated on elaborating historical contexts with little interpretive emphasis, as if good empirical work could outflank bad interpretation without an explicit confrontation.

Meanwhile, with the retreat of radical politics since the 1980s, Blake has been conscripted as the oracle of a new wave of ahistorical criticism. Deconstructionist methodology retained the critical stance of radical culture but displaced the antithetical contestations of literature from the social and ideological to the linguistic arena and identified Blake with an attack on logocentrism. Works like Nelson Hilton’s *Literal Imagination: Blake’s Vision of Words* (1983) endorsed the constant verbal and graphic play of the poetry as validating the contemporary switch of focus from signified to signifier. Donald Ault’s *Narrative Unbound: Re-Visioning William Blake’s “The Four Zoas”* (1987) countered earlier treatments of the poem as the repository of Blake’s mythic paradigm and apocalyptic vision; painstakingly teasing out the text’s almost interminable contradictions, Ault canonized it as the ultimate self-destructing narrative. Other writers focused on the multiple plate sequences and other inconsistencies of Blake’s multi-copy works as revealing a conscious celebration of textual instability. In general, these studies saw the alterations, repetitions, irresolutions, and inconclusive reorderings of Blake’s narratives as well as the conflation of his characters, the difficulty in identifying speakers and the migration of speeches among them as deliberately foregrounding a principle of indeterminacy.

Along with attributing to Blake a deconstructionist epistemology, several recent works have also assigned him a deconstructionist politics. What we would describe as Blake’s ideological attack on the tendency of a Urizenic consciousness to identify its own mental creations with immutable reality and to restrain the dynamic flux of being through fixed laws seems to others an attack on any concept of an ideal society as coercive and limiting. Molly Anne Rothenberg, for example, in *Rethinking Blake’s Textuality* (1993), praises the indeterminacy that “precludes characterizing Blake either as an advocate of traditional liberal political reforms or as a prophet of the Utopia of radical Christian brotherhood”; his indeterminacy makes him, instead, a critic of “the evils produced by utopianism” (4) and of the way “tyranny arises in Paradise” (137). In *Unbuilding Jerusalem* (1993), Steven Goldsmith presents much the same idea but from a hostile standpoint: in his reading, which seeks to recuperate a classical Marxist indictment of liberal democracy, Blake’s “counter-apocalyptic aesthetic” implies a politics limited to mere verbal representation and confuses “the subversion of truth and authority as they are represented in discourse with the subversion of power formations themselves” (164). Rothenberg’s praise of anti-apocalypticism has, however, been the main tendency in deconstructionist Blake interpretation. Criticism has come full circle to 1950s ideas of the “end of ideology.”

Deconstructionist readings, with their acute observations and magnification of the complex problematics of Blake’s texts, have shown great ingenuity. They have usefully underlined Blake’s call for an active reader who contributes to the signification of his texts. They aptly have claimed Blake as prophet of the postmodern critique of rationalism and reclaimed his skeptical impulses, ironic perspectivism, and demolition of conventional notions of subjectivity. And yet,

readings that begin and end with absolute indeterminacy seem to us out of touch with much that remains most valuable in Blake's legacy. Deconstructionist readers like Ault brilliantly describe the remarkable self-transforming dynamics of Blake's texts but they cannot reconcile this characteristic with Blake's own insistence that we repudiate "A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death" (*J* 69:3) and keep faith in an apocalypse reached through fraternity: "Then patient wait a little while till the Last Vintage is over" (*M* 23:59). Those who most applaud Blake's refusal to resolve the contraries do not appreciate equally his penchant to call in question "the idiot Questioner who is always questioning/But never capable of answering . . . /Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair" (*M* 41:12–15). Steven Shaviro, for example, bemoans Blake's remonstrance that "He who replies to words of Doubt/Doth put the Light of Knowledge out" (*Aug. of Inn.*, 95–96, E492), asking "what can be more desperate, or more despairing, than this dread of even the merest suggestion of skepticism?" (171). Such readers' lack of empathy with Blake's vision, we suspect, has less to do with recent proof of the limitations of language than with academia's present detachment from any social movement whose praxis would require such vision.

The major response to deconstruction in U.S. Blake criticism has been the historicism of Jerome J. McGann, the initiator of a broad New Historicist tendency in Romantic interpretation. McGann's work both represents a wide historicizing trend in U.S. Blake studies and exemplifies the limits of a particular kind of historicism and the compromises it has made, over time, with deconstructionism. As one who considers himself a radical, engaged academic, McGann insists that poetry and criticism be understood as social acts and that "art carry out its work within the complex spheres of competing social interests" (*Social Values* 43). From this position he has waged a theoretical battle against the criticism of both liberal humanists, like M.H. Abrams, and conservative deconstructionists of the Yale school. McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) presented a devastating exposure of mainstream Romantic criticism for its uncritical identification with the disillusioned and apolitical poetic of later Wordsworth and Coleridge, which transmuted unpleasant social data into opportunities for aesthetic epiphany. In recent works McGann has focused upon Blake as the initiator of an alternative "activist and contestatory poetics" (*Social Values* 42). Blake remains important to him for recognizing, in opposition to Wordsworth's claim that "the deep power of joy" can transform "all this unintelligible world," that "the social given was precisely what it seemed to be: a chaos of war, self-interest, and widespread social fragmentation" (*Social Values* 42–43, quoting "Tintern Abbey" lines 48, 40). Beyond this dimension, Blake's aesthetic matters to McGann "because it insists that poetry" refers to social reality and "is not just a play or dance of language" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 4). McGann explicitly advocates a critical method that draws equally on historicism, formalism, Marxism, and deconstructionism.

At his best McGann focuses on the epochal issues; here, like Thompson, he often takes Blake as muse, though for a very different kind of historicism. What history offers us, McGann believes, is largely "loss," and he continually glosses the pun in "Los" as embodying this idea (*Social Values* 243, *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 2). In doing so he ignores—or discounts—Blake's insistence on the other side of this pun, the recovery of Los and recuperation of loss. McGann criticizes, for example, Blake's assertion that "in Six Thousand Years . . . not

one Moment/Of Time is lost" (*M* 20:18–19) as "a wilful distortion of the truth in an effort to supply what is ultimately a Christian consolation for the losses we suffer and endure" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 34). McGann does not find, here, the active sense of recovery—the use of the past not as consolation, but to shape the future—that we perceive in the cognate passage in *Jerusalem* discussed earlier.

This difference is no accident. McGann repeatedly assaults Blake's Christianity as an "ideological deformation" (*Social Values* 242; see also *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 34), but not because it entails belief in God—McGann is not concerned with this issue—but, rather, because it implies redemption:

Because his ideas were developed in a Christian framework and along a Romantic salient, he saw in poetry and "the human imagination" the vehicle for a literal redemption of the world. On the contrary, what poetry after Blake essays is the descent of all the gods. . . . What one may aspire to imagine, therefore, is a world without redeemers, a world where redemption is as much at a loss as are all other human things. (*Social Values* 245)

Though he recognizes its importance to Blake, McGann believes we simply cannot take the idea of redemption seriously today; hence, he localizes it as part of a historical, unrepeatable, intellectual framework. McGann still values Blake's oppositional insistence on unmasking and resisting oppression, but his interest in Blake's liberatory potential shifts to the poetry's epistemological aspects. Consequently, while he proposes that Blake's poetic looks "toward social and psychic overthrow" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 25), McGann emphasizes only the psychic. His treatment of this issue is largely deconstructive. Blake is praised because "he does everything he can to destabilize his texts"; they affirm seemingly transcendent values only to undermine them through contradictions, indeterminacies, ambiguity, and insistent provisionality, since "every transcendence will be (correctly) seen, from any (and every) other point of view, as another form of error" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 20, 32). In the process, Blake himself commits what McGann regards as errors, but his texts correct for them by their own process of self-cancellation (34–35). These emphases indicate the deconstructionist bent of McGann's commentary.

McGann is aware, as we have seen, that his refusal of redemption is not Blake's, and we need to contextualize this aspect of McGann's thinking. Historically, the insistence on "loss" itself needs to be related to a social-political scene in the 1980s and 1990s, both in the United States and internationally, that devalues utopianism and seems to show the emptiness of its promises. In the closing paragraph of *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* McGann invokes Tennyson's "Ulysses"—truly a poem of loss—to encapsulate his resulting sense that historical goals are illusory and that a self-sustaining ethical perspective is valuable and necessary:

We move towards a literature of knowledge along the trajectory of a desire to change what we believe to be wrong, to repair what we see is broken, and to redeem what we know has been lost. Through poetry we learn that we cannot succeed in any of these quests, and how, on that

very account, we are called upon to maintain them and “not to yield” to their repeated, illusory achievements. (134)

But Tennyson’s presence is also, as deconstructionists would have it, an absence; as McGann to his credit understands, Blake’s poetry maintains a belief that McGann and recent culture critics have not been capable of sustaining.

Blake’s unique synthesis of epistemological and political radicalism might offer a significant alternative to the impasses of our own time; this synthesis has yet to be adequately explicated, however, and we would not venture to do so here. Nevertheless, without claiming to solve the present crisis of utopian politics, we refuse either to reify these impasses as unvarying truths of human society (“loss”) or to universalize them as theoretical problems of language. Moreover, if Blake’s texts gesture toward indeterminacy and defy closure, we surmise that these qualities have less to do with inherent slippages of language than with the problem of representing the multiple determinations of social life and the plenitude of historical possibility. These points suggest that the language theory of Mikhail Bakhtin may offer a better frame than structuralist and poststructuralist theory for understanding Blake’s partisan and engaged art. Bakhtin is, above all, the theorist of language as social act and of linguistic complexity in literature as traceable to different social discourses. Writing under the name of his collaborator, V.N. Voloshinov, he argued in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* that language was a practical social activity, since “[c]onsciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse” (13). Language, for Bakhtin, is not a relation between word and thing, as in mimetic theories, or word and word, as in structuralist and poststructuralist ones, but between speakers. Communication need not fall into the gap between signifier and signified, since it is continually given historically changing significance by the speech activity of socially interacting individuals.<sup>6</sup> We find these ideas useful in approaching the jangle of voices that one hears so often in Blake.

In the culminating vision of *Jerusalem* Blake wrote of his four Zoas, now aspects of the united Albion, that

... they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which  
bright  
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions  
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect  
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine  
Of Human Imagination[.] (*J* 98:28–32)

Here Blake embodies his view of reality as a social and historical drama produced by human beings through mutual acts of conversation in a creation which encompasses, as for the engraver, both conception and production. Robert Essick underscores the centrality of conversation in Blake as “an activity promoting change in both the language and its users,” a “social product” which is “a formal property of works as early as *An Island in the Moon*” and which “becomes thematic in Blake’s later poetry, particularly *Jerusalem*.” Essick argues that Blake moves language from within the signifier-signified nexus toward a conception of “social Logos.” “Simply put,” Essick continues, “community in human form is an extended conversation manifesting itself as the social body.” In an analogous way, author and readers converse through a text

that “becomes the motivation for a hermeneutic community whose members share a common language” (*William Blake and the Language of Adam* 217–223).

As Essick acknowledges, multivoiced conversation is not merely a communitarian ideal in Blake; it is also an operative method. Blake’s highly allusive, intertextual, and parodic texts not only highlight their incorporation of various discourses but point explicitly to their social motivations. His work, therefore, exemplifies the kind of art Bakhtin praises as polyphonic for representing most fully what he called the “heteroglossia” of social intercourse. (The correspondence is ironic, given Bakhtin’s belief, derived from Romantic-era theorists, that both lyric and epic were inherently monologic.) Despite differences in culture and temperament, Bakhtin and Blake both insist that any speaker’s language inscribes a particular world view and social position. Speech, therefore, is not only dialogic but a dialogue between social discourses. A careful analysis of any language reveals the drama of voices and subtle interpenetrations of what Bakhtin called a “double-voiced discourse,” exposing the social legacies and investments defining individual speakers.

While Bakhtin celebrated the dialogic poetics of the novelist who declined to squelch positions other than his own, Blake achieves a similar inclusiveness in the cacophony of voices which enact in his poems the “Intellectual War” of his society. Blake is a Bakhtinian ventriloquist attentively listening to and communicating to the reader the voices of an entire culture. Wandering through “London” as an itinerant of the streets, he translates the cries of frightened infants and chimney sweepers, the sighs of soldiers and curses of harlots, so that we hear “in every voice” of the oppressed as in “every ban” of authoritative language the “mind forg’d manacles” of internalized and such double-voiced discourse. Likewise, we follow him “walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius” amid the city’s heretical and rebellious plebeians, collecting their subversive sayings. In the dense intertextuality of his art’s verbal and visual quotation, past discourses infuse present: “Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me and I asked. . . .” Blake assimilates not only Homer and Virgil, still potent in the language of imperial England, but the contemporary contests of orators, pamphleteers, orthodox preachers in their pulpits, and self-appointed prophets in the parks; the urban polyphony of hymns and street ballads; and the newly proliferating images of book illustration, political cartoons, and popular religious iconography. We hear Milton as well as the songs of liberty repeated by his Dissenting heirs; the “hum of multitudes” of charity children and the smug condescension of their “wise guardians”; repressive religion’s “Thou shalt not” and the voices of desire and delight; howls of war and pleas for peace; authority proclaiming its Urizenic laws and Orc’s raging voice of revolt.

By the remarkable range of debates and issues transmuted in his poetry, the self-educated Blake is revealed as heir to the great Renaissance polymaths like Rabelais. Among the polyphonic conversations recorded in Blake we must include, surely, the French Revolution debate, as traced by Erdman and more recent historicist interpretation: the pro-French voices of Richard Price, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and Tom Paine, the horror of Burke and Pitt, and the temporizing of Foxite liberals are all traceable in Blake’s poems, as are both the sans-culotte voices across the channel and, at home, the constitutional reformers of the London Corresponding Society and their artisan cohorts in the early years of radical hope. We can trace, too, Blake’s responses

to the 1793 treason trials, Pitt's anti-sedition acts, and the poet's own prosecution. Thanks to Iain McCalman, David Worrall, and others, we can now hear in Blake's sometimes bloody-minded imagery the voices of the radical underground of Thomas Evans and Thomas Spence and their subterranean networks, reading Spence's *Pig's Meat*, singing radical songs, demanding redistribution of property and plotting sedition in their "free and easies"—tavern gatherings hidden from official surveillance.

Equally pervasive is the contest among religion and rationalism, orthodoxy, Enlightenment, and heresy. We are only beginning to appreciate how many voices clash on this issue in Blake. Through Blake's angels we hear not only the popularizers of doctrines of sin and submission like Isaac Watts, Hannah More, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, not only Methodist revivalists and armies of Sunday School teachers, but also their self-blaming victims. We hear the rights of reason trumpeted not only by philosophers and biblical exegetes but also by the popular infidels of the debating societies. And beyond the binary poles of reason and authority, Blake echoes the stranger proclamations of an "enthusiast," revelation-minded counter-culture: Blake debates Swedenborg, redeems Richard Brothers, lampoons Joanna Southcott, echoes Muggletonian hymns and doctrines, and vocalizes the antinomianism of mechanic preachers like James Rely of William Huntington's Providence Chapel. Blake's devils, with their cheerful blasphemies, capture the subversive culture reported in William Hamilton Reid's *The Rise and Dissolution of Infidel Societies*—"Alchemists, Astrologers, Mystics, Magnetizers, Prophets and Projectors" gathering in what Iain McCalman has termed "the plebeian counterpart of Voltaire's salons—London's real republic of letters" with its "[S]arcastic or facetious conversation across the tables,' 'noisy approbation' of entertainments, 'extemporaneous effusions,' bloodthirsty, comical and inspirational toasts, mutualist rituals, theatrical gestures debunking the mystique of church and state" ("Infidel" 32, quoting Reid).

We can only briefly observe a few other intellectual brawls staged in this venue. Now that we have come to understand Blake's era as one that hotly contested the development of what would become Victorian patriarchy, pitting ideals of female modesty and submission against those of free love and feminist resistance, we can better contextualize Blake's foregrounding of the politics of the family and the range of his female characters with their complex and varied ideological positions. Such is the case with colonialism, slavery, and political economy. Thanks to Erdman and others, we have long understood how Blake's verses and designs incorporate the discourse of slavers, abolitionists, and slaves themselves—though the nature of his response is still open to debate. We can hear in Blake, too, the voices of empire and commerce, celebrated in patriotic eighteenth-century rhetoric, the doctrines of Malthus and Adam Smith, and—when we begin to listen—the opposing voices of trade union, cooperative, and Luddite resistance.

In all these debates—many of which, though by no means all, are traced in our volume—Blake broadens the clash of doctrines beyond those heard in literary and polite culture. While Blake has sometimes been portrayed as an isolated visionary or, more recently, as a skeptical experimentalist, we might better understand his work as a divine Rabelaisian comedy, a vast expansion of his *Island in the Moon* from its parody of bluestocking salons into an ebullient

literary “free and easy,” which brings the entire culture before the bar of its lower-class irreverence.

Blake’s own class affiliations were those of an artisan directly threatened by new print technologies, commercialization, and the growing separation between the fine arts and crafts. He attempted to personally resist the new forms of exploitation by subsuming in himself all the roles of artist, engraver, printer, publisher, and bookseller, and by aspiring, unsuccessfully, to join in the popularization of art attempted by Barry and others. His strident attacks on Joshua Reynolds of the Royal Academy and his “Gang of Cunning Hired Knaves,” Morris Eaves has recently argued, were less idiosyncratic than supposed, imbued rather with the outrage of British engravers excluded from the Academy by what they often saw as a “Counter-Arts Conspiracy.” In place of an image of Blake “talking to himself or the ancient dead” like “a religious fanatic harassing passers-by on a street corner,” Eaves presents him as “joining an important conversation with a history”; in particular, Blake challenged the patriotic “English-school discourse,” which blamed the backwardness of English art on foreign intervention, with his own attack on the domestic abuses of patronage and mechanization (xvii).

This last example makes clear that as an interested party, Blake is never neutral in these dialogues. What E.P. Thompson has described as the counter-hegemonic function of religious antirationalism can be extended to the other disruptive voices present in Blake:

[I]f we accept the view that in most societies we can observe an intellectual as well as institutional hegemony, or dominant discourse, which imposes . . . a general “common sense” as to what is possible and what is not, a limited horizon of moral norms and practical probabilities beyond which all must be blasphemous, seditious, insane or apocalyptic fantasy . . . then we can see that . . . antinomianism’s intellectual doctrines (the suspicion of “reason,” justification by faith, hostility to the Moral Law) constituted . . . a defence against the reigning hegemony. (108–109)

Having identified humanity’s fall into oppression with the closing of the Gate of the Tongue, Blake is committed as an activist to restoring, not only to his texts but through them to the public sphere, the voice of the oppressed majority which has been squelched by what he calls the Beast and Whore of State-Religion, the hegemonic discourse of the dominant classes. He seeks to deconstruct its univocal Urizenic text, its Book of Brass, not merely to expose the repressive character of all language but also to articulate the resistance of the collective which has thereby been silenced, scattered, reduced to inarticulate rage, or lulled to sleep. His art thus strives to awaken Albion, revive the prophetic Milton, restore the emanations, set free Orc from his chains, reunite the Zoas, and build the *Jerusalem* of his beautiful book as a contribution to its being built in society.

Finally, then, Blake is not just about discourse. Blake’s language practice indeed incorporates jarring, cacophonous voices but not to celebrate discourse alone—this point encapsulates our disagreement both with “dominant paradigm” emphases on mental transformation and with deconstructionist emphases on linguistic openness. The near-universal appropriation of *Jerusalem*’s “Visionary

Forms Dramatic” passage by Blakeans of sharply different views may illustrate the perils of assigning defined meaning to Blake, but it also shows the perils of taking him out of context and of a limited celebration of discourse as such. For Blake’s master stroke in the closing pages of his greatest poem is to combine the ideas of collective dialogue and a repudiation of authoritarian discourse with those of social upheaval and the sweeping away of oppressive institutions. The “Visionary Forms” passage follows an apocalyptic narrative that is also a narration of collective solidarity, resistance to oppression, and social upheaval, in which Albion rouses Britain’s cities and counties to thwart the advancing Antichrist—in one meaning, the English state, its armies, and its prisons (*J* 96). And the passage leads on to a concluding hymn by the “Living Creatures of the Earth,” a hymn of social leveling and the end of war, sexual repression, and poverty:

Where is the Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the  
Heathen. . . .

Where are the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory that grew on  
Desolation

The Fruit of Albions Poverty Tree . . . (*J* 98:46, 51–52)

To view *Jerusalem*’s close as envisioning only a “hermeneutic community” in which “the author and his readers ideally meet and converse together” (Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* 223, quoted above), whatever insights such an approach provides into Blake’s idea of language, is to see only part of the verses’ meaning. Blake also envisions a transformed *world*, in which the “Living Creatures” can converse freely because they have freed themselves.

When E.P. Thompson chose Blake as his Muse, it was as a comrade in struggle. Thompson’s historical vision, like Los’s, seeks to “comfort Orc in his dire sufferings” (*FZ* 98[90]:13). Thompson writes out of the needs of political praxis to give the British working class an understanding of its past that can help to shape its future. This understanding brings us back to McGann, for in his attack on romantic ideology, McGann has faulted critics who replicate the perspectives of the texts they study. Recognizing a lack of critical distance as a danger, we would add that too much critical distance can be a danger as well. Blake calls for a perspectivism that is blatantly partisan. His corrosive wit is applied to Urizen, the oppressor’s, ideology; he criticizes Milton, Los, or Orc for having insufficiently purged it from their own vision. He does not acquiesce in the paralysis of self-canceling viewpoints but identifies such hopeless relativism as the consequence of Urizen’s false objectivity. He celebrates the “subjectivity” of an oppressed majority and radical opposition in its developing self-awareness. One need not share these commitments, in an absolute sense, to understand Blake but, in our view, one must understand them in order properly to historicize Blake.

No doubt, however, our idea of Blake’s historicity is only one of several held by those who approach him in a historical context. This volume, therefore, adopts a three-pronged approach in presenting its essays: it seeks to promote a return to the political Blake; to deepen understanding of some of the conversations articulated in Blake’s art by introducing new historical material or new interpretations of texts; and to highlight differing perspectives on Blake’s

politics among historically focused critics. The collection includes essays with varying methodological assumptions and differing positions on questions central to historicist Blake scholarship. While many of the authors seek to recuperate a radical Blake who opposes imperialism, slavery and patriarchy, differences emerge about the nature and consistency of this radicalism and about the relative importance of revolution, violence, pragmatic politics, and democratic pluralism overall and at different points in Blake's career. The articles explore diverse contexts: the movement for collective art production, popular opposition to the Regency, critiques of religion and Scripture, pro- and anti-imperialist poetry, female iconography during the French Revolution, abolitionism, and artistic Satanism. They expand our understanding of millenarian politics and add the occult as another radical discourse. In the process a number of non-canonical figures are recuperated, including Richard "Citizen" Lee, Charles Churchill, and Thomas Chatterton. The volume includes more women's voices than previous, overwhelmingly male collections. In all the book includes seventeen essays, grouped in three sections, as well as evaluative responses by distinguished Blake scholars Joseph Wittreich and Anne Mellor, which extend as well as comment on the implied dialogues among the authors.

In Part I, the opening group of essays, "Blake and the Question of Revolution," examines the political character of Blake's work. Several of these essays, though not all, involve what Clark and Worrall have usefully called the "thesis of fracture" (10), that is, the idea that Blake's early work envisions a social-political revolution while his later work retreats or advances (take your pick) to the idea of psychic or religious transformation. This idea, associated with Abrams's "internalization of apocalypse," is widely though not universally accepted in thematically oriented Blake interpretation, and it is alive and well in Peter Ackroyd's recent biography (182). In "The Myth of Blake's 'Orc Cycle,'" Christopher Z. Hobson examines one of the bases for this view, Northrop Frye's postulate that Orc, Blake's emblem of revolt, has a cyclical existence and hence exposes the futility of revolution. (Frye himself argued for a unitary mentalist Blake, but others have felt that Blake turned to an "Orc Cycle" idea after the 1790s.) Examining relevant poetry and artwork, Hobson rejects Frye's model as a product of conservative ideology and argues that Blake's art, early and late, was directed toward social transformation. To the contrary, in "The Anxiety of Production: Blake's Shift from Collective Hope to Writing Self," Eric Chandler upholds the idea of a shift in Blake's commitments; Chandler contrasts the "communicational optimism" of the early works, produced in the context of various collective projects for establishing a popular art with radical possibilities, to later works' rejection of the marketplace in favor of an imaginative production which is an end in itself. For James Swearingen, an appreciation of the poet's ongoing commitment requires a redefinition of the nature of "William Blake's Figural Politics"; Swearingen argues that *Jerusalem* offers, in lieu of a political program, an ongoing democratic process in which "Mental warfare describes an economy of difference" and plurality functions as an end in itself. Stephen Behrendt defends the position that for Blake religion is politics, urging that *Urizen*, *Ahania* and *The Book of Los* be seen in the context of contemporary critiques of religion as fulfilling his promise to create a "Bible of Hell" which offers a subversive reading of Scripture.

The other section in Part I, “Blake and the Underground,” elaborates historical contexts for Blake. Jon Mee’s “‘The Doom of Tyrants’: William Blake, Richard ‘Citizen’ Lee, and the Millenarian Public Sphere” cites a contemporary analogue of the poet’s radicalism as evidence for his participation in a counter- enlightenment response to the development of a rationalist bourgeois public sphere. In “Blake’s *Tiriel* and the Regency Crisis: Lifting the Veil on a Royal Masonic Scandal,” Marsha Keith Schuchard documents the poet’s engagement with another irrationalist subculture, the occult, but also illuminates some of the political divisions in occult circles.

Part II begins with two essays on “Art and Politics.” Turning to Blake’s iconographic contexts, John Hutton’s “‘Lovers of Wild Rebellion’: The Image of Satan in British Art of the Revolutionary Era” documents the parallel artistic legacies of a heroic Satan and allegorized political art as contexts for Blake’s fusion of the two in images of energy and rebellion. Then David Worrall argues that even a minor engraving of “Mrs Q,” George IV’s mistress, has political overtones that suggest Blake’s affiliations with a radical popular culture as late as 1820.

The second group of essays in Part II examines the political content of Blake’s representations of the American and French revolutions. Observing that Blake’s *The French Revolution* is the only poem in which he addresses specific political means and objectives, Andrew Lincoln contends that the poem reveals a contradiction between Blake’s support for struggles for power and his endorsement of the claims of unconstrained individual desire. William Richey argues that Blake’s *America* intervenes in the controversy over the French Revolution by taking Burke’s writings and speeches as primary intertexts to exonerate the revolution from Burke’s charges of criminal violence. Michael Ferber attempts to comprehend *Europe*’s stubbornly opaque “Minute Particulars” within a unified interpretation. Finally Peter Otto returns us to the politically charged issue of the Orc-Urizen parallel; in examining revisions of the title page of *Europe*, he argues, contra Hobson, for a conflation of the two figures. If, as he urges, this identification was implicit in its earliest version, it would suggest that Blake was already emphasizing the limits of revolution in the early 1790s.

In the first section of Part III, “Blake, Empire and Slavery,” Blake’s opposition to empire and slavery forms the basis of studies by G.A. Rosso and by Anne Rubenstein and Camilla Townsend. Rosso contextualizes Blake’s early dramatic fragment “King Edward the Third” within the contest between the empire poets who celebrated a Virgilian imperialist vision of English history, notably Denham, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, and Whitehead, and such anti-imperial opponents as Charles Churchill and Thomas Chatterton. Rosso restores the centrality of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* as Blake’s model and argues that Blake’s opposition to imperial panegyric makes this early work more consciously revolutionary than often assumed. Rubenstein and Townsend examine Blake’s illustrations of the narrative of Captain John Gabriel Stedman to show how Blake transformed its advocacy of a more benign form of slavery into a powerful abolitionist text. Paradoxically, the authors argue, Blake’s use of various seemingly naive graphic modes produced images of striking power that long remained anti-slavery and anti-imperialist icons.

The volume’s final section, “Blake and Women,” focuses on an issue that remains unsettled and has called up both apology and critique since the emergence of feminist perspectives in the early 1970s. Three basic positions

have taken shape since Irene Tayler's groundbreaking "The Woman Scaly" in 1973. Largely affirmative readings by Tayler, DiSalvo (1975), and Judith Lee (1983) have acclaimed Blake for attacking patriarchal culture and championing a revolutionary humanism. More critical readings inaugurated by Susan Fox's "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry" (1977), followed by Margaret Storch (1981, 1990), Anne Mellor (1982), and Brenda Webster (1983, 1987), have argued that despite Blake's programmatic sympathy for woman's cause, his work is marked by animosity toward women, revealed in its elaboration of gender stereotypes into a metaphoric system and its sexist portrayals of female characters. Finally, mixed treatments by Diana Hume George (1980), Alicia Ostriker (1982), and Helen Bruder (1994) have found in his work both "homocentric gynophobia" and "a richly developed anti-patriarchal and proto-feminist sensibility" (Ostriker 233). While contributors to our volume recuperate a Blake critical of patriarchal discourse, all would agree that "a final synthesis of the sexes in a genderless humanity remains ambiguously expressed in Blake's work" (George 244). Within this context, the "Blake and Women" articles try to supersede general discussions by relating Blake to historical discourses concerning women. Catherine L. McClenahan argues that his contradictory gendering of the figure Albion in poems and engravings from 1780–1795 deconstructs the hierarchical system of binary gender differences and undermines the linguistic construction of other relations of dominance. By challenging innocent readings of the idealized maternity plot of "A Dream," Harriet Kramer Linkin demonstrates how that poem instances a repudiation of domestic ideology. Similarly, June Sturrock demonstrates Blake's ironic inversion of the conservative image of violent, revolutionary women in *Jerusalem*, where he associates such monstrous figures not with radicals and feminists but with the idealized female of the conduct books.

As long as the cultural battles he fought continue, Blake's influence can only grow, if not in academic circles, then in popular ones. His continuing popular relevance is most evident in Britain, where it is encouraged by a radical culture that recognizes him as an early antecedent. Thus, his "Jerusalem" lyric, set to music by Sir Hubert Parry, has been sung as an anthem of the Labour Party since it came to power in 1945 and as the closing number of outdoor summer "Proms."<sup>7</sup>

In the United States, Blake's last great mass appropriation came during the cultural-social rebellion from about 1960–1975, with Allen Ginsberg as precursor and transmitter. Like Milton to Blake, the Romantic poet descended to Ginsberg in the conservative Fifties, inspiring him to sing Blake's songs and appropriate his long, biblical line, his visionary aspirations, his celebration of sexual transgression, and his political indignation. By May 1968 the slogan "All power to the Imagination" would appear on Parisian walls, and in 1969 a poster in the U.S. would proclaim that "The Panthers of Wrath are Wiser than the Horses of Instruction." By 1977 one critic could write, "If the present age is the age of any one artist of the English past or present, it is surely, the Age of Blake" (Harvey 129).

From today's vantage point, the claim that ours is "the Age of Blake" might seem overblown and singularly unprophetic. But this is itself a short-sighted view. With the restoration of institutional power and the aggressive propaganda for a new anti-utopian orthodoxy in the last two decades, Blake's popular influence has narrowed somewhat. Still, his stature remains high among

contemporary intellectuals and artists—from, for example, modern classical composers like Benjamin Britten, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Virgil Thomson, to rock and roll musicians.<sup>8</sup> It was to Blake's contemporary public significance that William Bolcom pointed in accounting for his extravagant symphonic setting of the *Songs*:

Blake is the most urgent of poets. He came from an epoch of social change as total as ours and we can learn from him in times of our deepest crisis. Blake saw where the human race was heading; it could be argued that the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* may be the clearest explanation of what brought us to this impasse.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, references to Blake in titles, headnotes, and illustrations identify him with a remarkable body of continuing cultural criticism based in psychology, politics, cultural studies, and even visionary science.<sup>10</sup> Blake is evoked especially when attempts are made to bridge the gaps and contraries which have divided the Western mind: in challenges to the mind/body split, attempts to reconcile politics and psychology, or to connect sexuality, physics, or political economy with spirituality.

In this context, Blake recovers his prophetic status as the first modern thinker totally to reconceive culture, its discourses, and social relations. Blake and his prophetic Los revive whenever the Jacobin "spirit of 1793" periodically breaks out again. Until then this book seeks to make a small contribution to rediscovering the historically specific and politically relevant Blake.

## NOTES

1. See Suzanne R. Hoover's "William Blake in the Wilderness," *passim*.
2. We agree with critical approaches that regard Los in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* as an often-flawed character, not merely a mythic symbol or a spokesperson for Blake. Nonetheless, we would argue that at his moments of greatest insight Los does function as an authorial persona.
3. See Morton D. Paley, *Continuing City*, 27–28, 77, 149n., 174n., 155 and n., 204–206 and nn. for examples.
4. For some criticisms of Frye's ahistoricism, see citations in Hobson's essay in this volume.
5. Though this sentence offers Frye's own view of apocalypse, it describes his understanding of Blake's apocalypse in *Symmetry*, where it is not expressed as succinctly.
6. This view of language, and its theoretical basis in Voloshinov/Bakhtin, are identified in Marxist literary studies with Raymond Williams; see *Marxism* 35–42 for a lucid discussion.
7. Sung by young working-class prisoners in the film of Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, it offers a devastating ironic comment on Labour's broken promises. Elsewhere Blake appears in British cinema as a symbol of anarchist revolt in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth* and of working-class cultural aspirations in *Educating Rita*.
8. See, for example works by Marianne Faithfull, the Fugs, and the Doors and, more recently the 1996 album "William Bloke" recorded by English radical Billy Bragg.
9. Qtd. in program notes to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: A Musical Illumination of William Blake* (1987), a setting of all the songs for full orchestra plus a chorus, madrigal group, children's choir and soloists, performed January

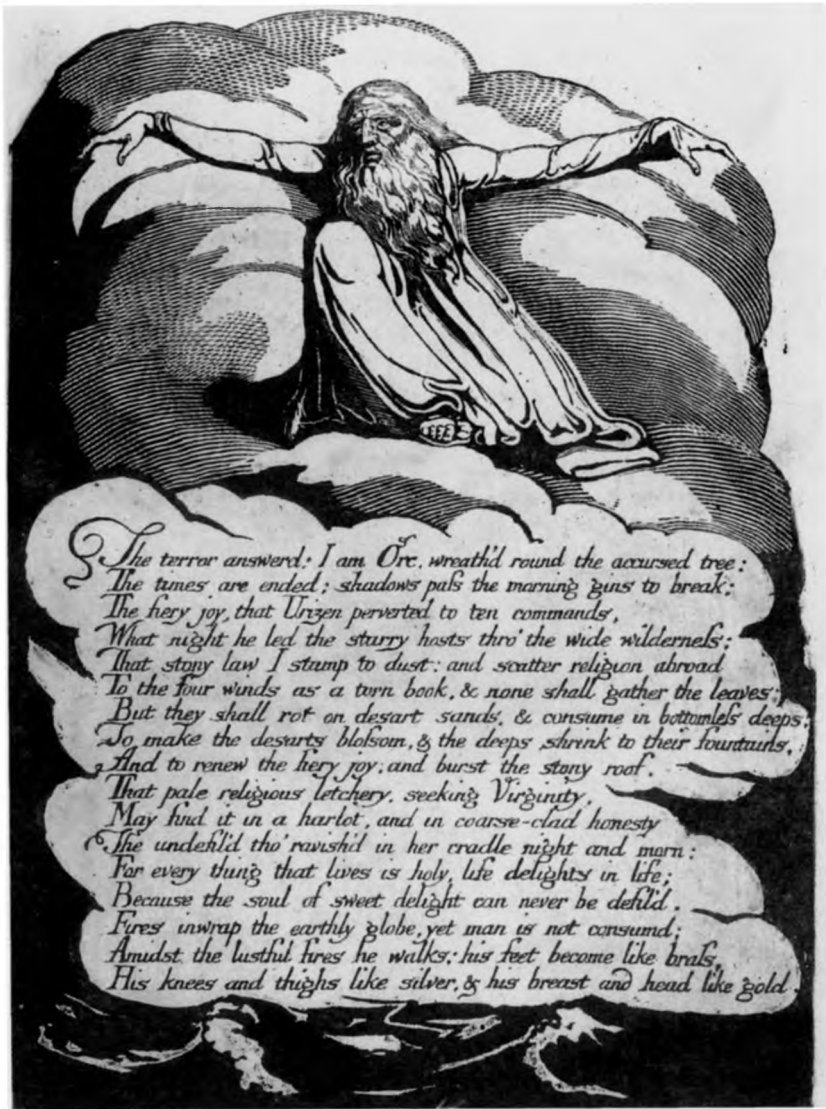
1987 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In Blakean fashion Bolcolm integrated classical and popular musical genres, from modern atonal to music hall, cowboy song, reggae and folk rock.

10. Some examples include *Coming to Our Senses* (1988), Berman's "somatic history" of Western culture; Roszak's *Making of the Counter-Culture* (1969); Kovel's *Radical Spirit* (1988) and *Spirit and History* (1991), an attempt to reconcile Marxism and spirituality; Turner's *A History of Hell* (1993); Rosenberg's *Tygers of Wrath* (1991), a fictional treatment of youth and police violence in New York City; and Champion's *Invisible Worm* (1972), a study of breast cancer and environmental toxicity.

## Abbreviations and Short Titles

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Blake's texts are to page and plate numbers in David Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), and to plate numbers in *The Illuminated Blake*, rev. ed. (N.Y.: Dover, 1974).

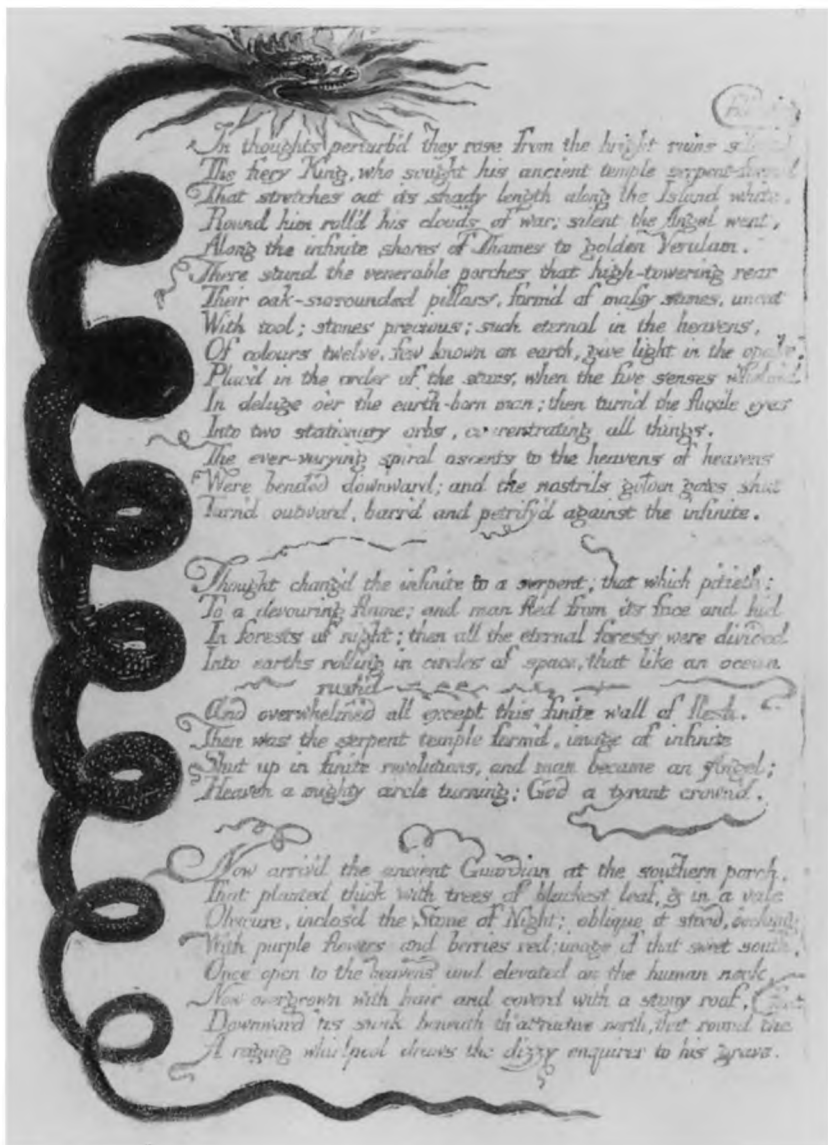
<i>A</i>	<i>America America a Prophecy</i>
<i>AH</i>	<i>Ahania The Book of Ahania</i>
<i>ARO</i>	<i>All Religions Are One</i>
<i>BL</i>	<i>The Book of Los</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>Descriptive Catalogue</i>
<i>E</i>	Erdman, ed. <i>William Blake, The Complete Poetry and Prose</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Europe Europe a Prophecy</i>
<i>EG</i>	<i>Everlasting Gospel</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>The French Revolution</i>
<i>FZ</i>	<i>The Four Zoas</i>
<i>G</i>	<i>The Gates of Paradise</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>The Illuminated Blake</i> . David Erdman
<i>J</i>	<i>Jerusalem Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion</i>
<i>Job</i>	<i>Illuminations for the Book of Job</i>
<i>LBD</i>	<i>A Large Book of Designs</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Milton Milton a Poem</i>
<i>MHH</i>	<i>Marriage The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
<i>NNR</i>	<i>No Natural Religion There is No Natural Religion</i>
<i>NT</i>	<i>Night Thoughts</i>
<i>PL</i>	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i>
<i>PR</i>	Milton, <i>Paradise Regained</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Songs of Experience</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Songs of Innocence</i>
<i>SBD</i>	<i>A Small Book of Designs</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>The Song of Los</i>
<i>T</i>	<i>Thel The Book of Los</i>
<i>Ti</i>	<i>Tiriel</i>
<i>U</i>	<i>Urizen The (First) Book of Urizen</i>
<i>VDA</i>	<i>Visions Visions of the Daughters of Albion</i>
<i>VLJ</i>	<i>A Vision of The Last Judgment</i>



1. William Blake. *America a Prophecy*, 1793. Plate 8. British Library, London.



2. William Blake. *America a Prophecy*, 1793. Plate 10. British Library, London.

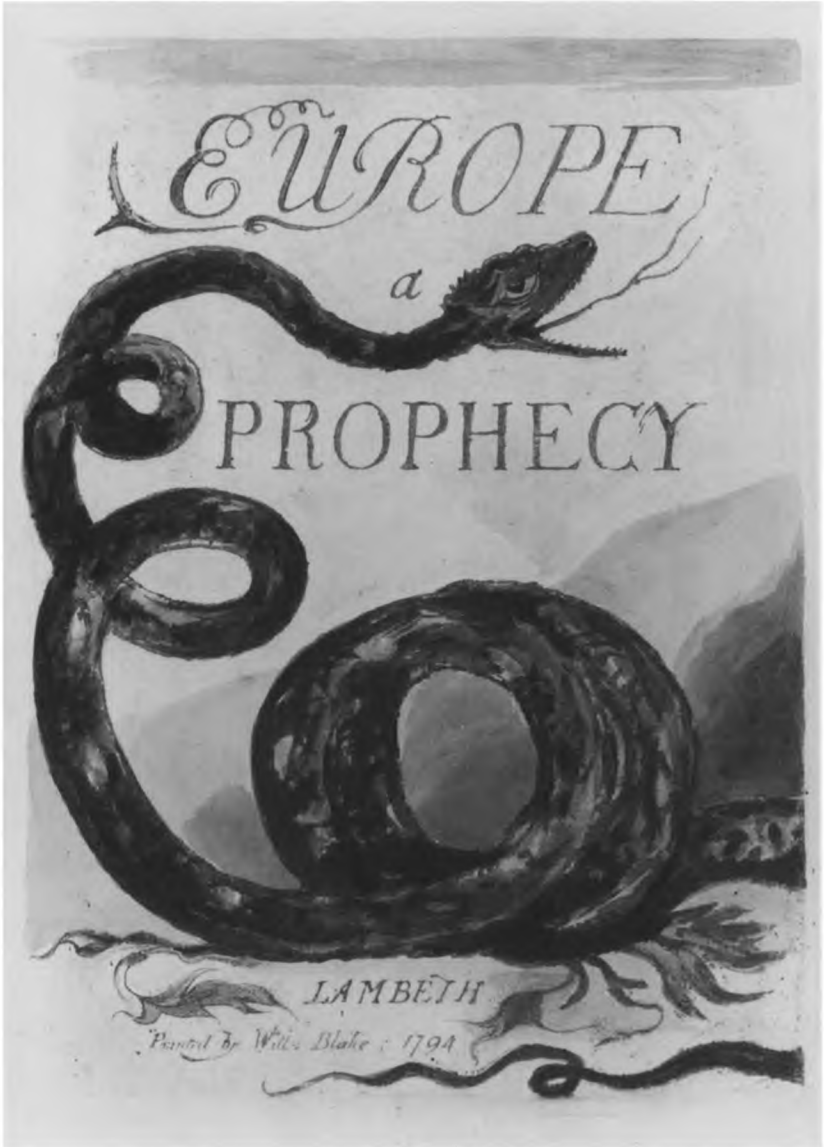


In thoughts perturb'd they rose from the bright ruins  
The fiery King, who sought his ancient temple serpent-temple  
That stretches out its shady length along the Island white.  
Round him rull'd his clouds of war; silent the flagel went,  
Along the infinite shores of Shames to Golden Verulam.  
There stand the venerable porches that high-towering rear  
Their oak-surrounded pillars, form'd of many stones, uncut  
With tool; stones precious; such eternal in the heavens,  
Of colours twelve, few known on earth, give light in the open  
Placid in the circles of the stars, when the five senses withdraw  
In deluge o'er the earth-born men; then turn'd the fugile eyes  
Into two stationary orbs, co-restraining all things.  
The ever-winding spiral ascends to the heavens of heavens  
Were headed downward; and the nostrils golden gods shut  
Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite.

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

Now arriv'd the ancient Guardian at the southern porch,  
That plant'd thick with trees of blackest leaf, & in a vale  
Obscure, inclos'd the Stone of Night; oblique & stord, looking  
With purple flowers and berries red; image of that sort south.  
Once open to the heavens and elevated on the human neck  
Now overgrown with hair and cover'd with a stony roof,  
Downward his snail beneath th' attractive north, that round the  
A raving whirlpool draws the dizzy enquires to his jaws.

3. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Plate 11 (E plate 10). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

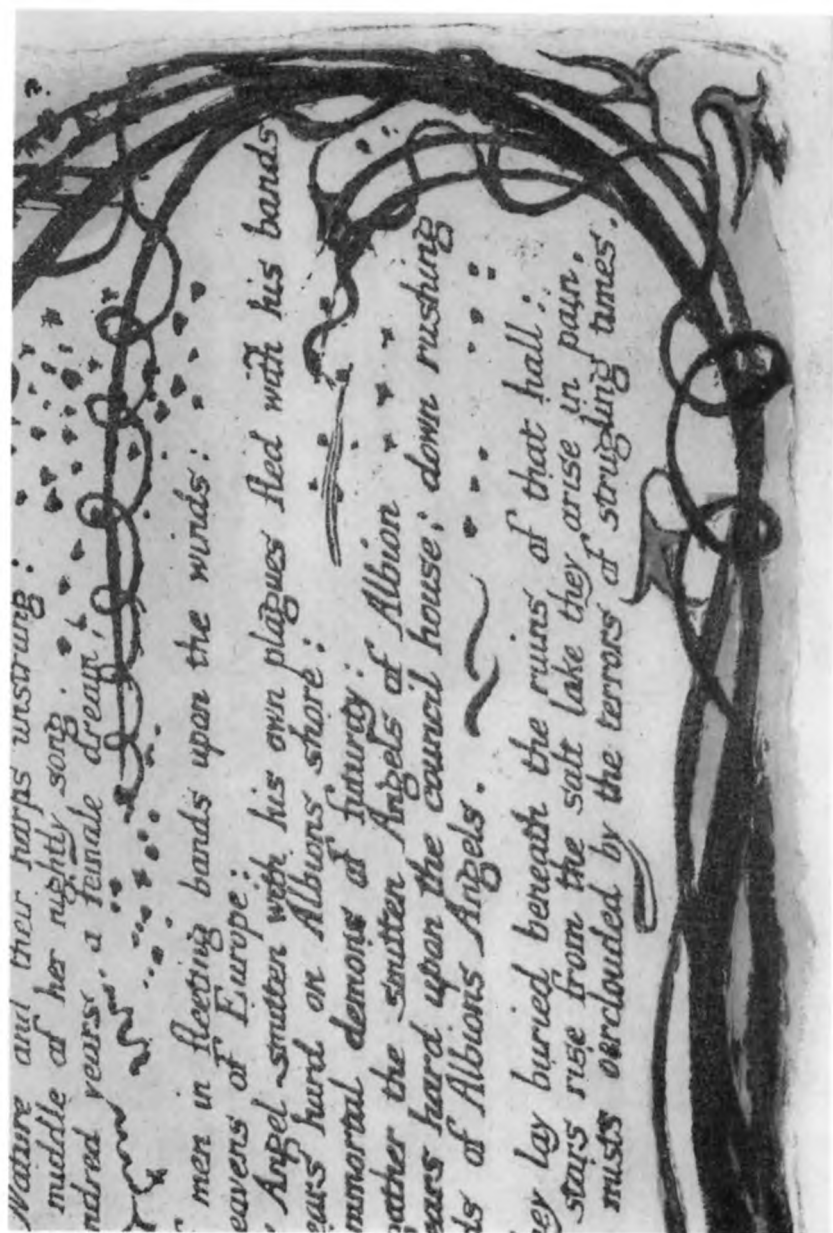


4. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Title page. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Sotha & Thralatha, secret dwellers of dreunibul caves,  
Arise and please the hurrant fiend with your melodious songs,  
Still all your thunders Golden heathel, & bind your horses black.  
Orc, smile upon my children!  
Spile sum of my afflictions.  
Arise O Orc and give our mountains joy of thy red light.  
She ceaseth, & all were forth at spart beneath the solemne moon  
Making the stave of Urizen with their immortal songs.  
That nature felt thro' all her pores the enurinous revelry.  
Till morning oped the eastern gate,  
Then every one fled to his station. & Enitharmon wept.  
The terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,

5. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Plate 16, (E plate 14), detail. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

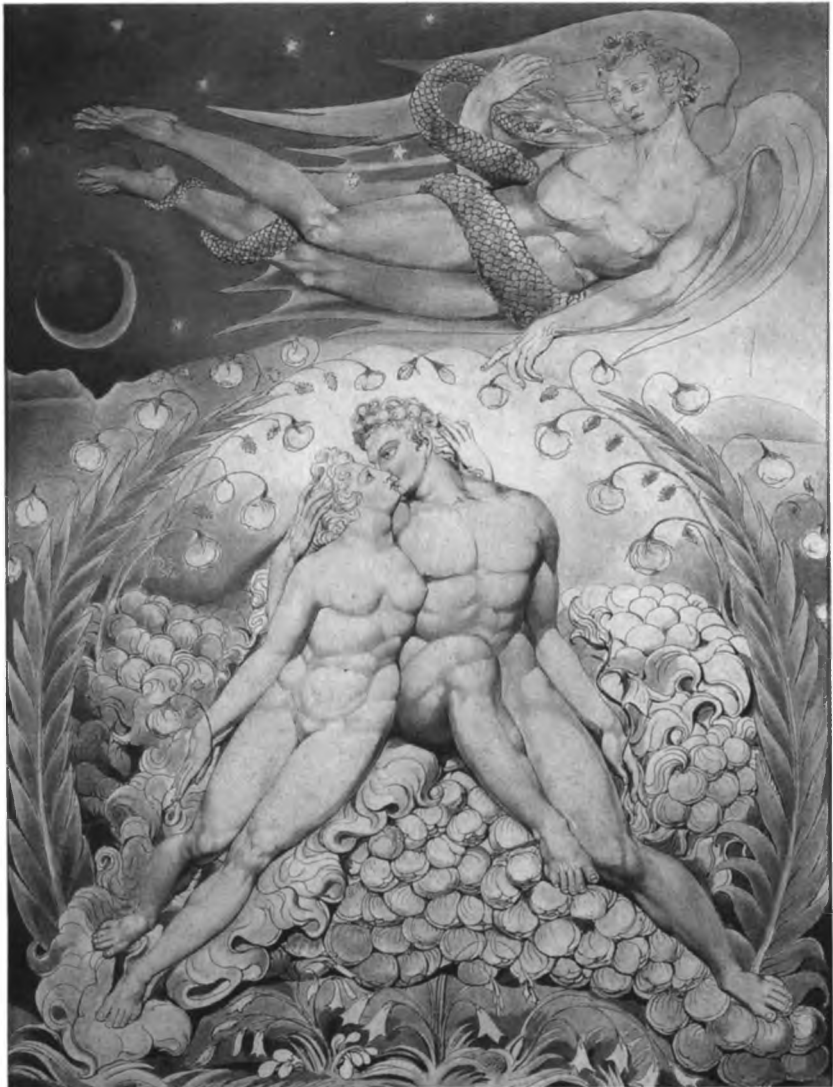




7. William Blake. *Europe a Prophecy*, 1794. Copy A. Plate 10 (E Plate 9), detail. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.



8. William Blake. *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*, 1806. (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Courtesy, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums. Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.



9. William Blake. *Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve*, 1808. (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.) Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.