

“Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand And Eternity in an
hour”: William Blake’s Visions of Time and Space in the Light
of Eastern Traditions

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis examines William Blake's conceptions of time and space in the light of the philosophies of Hinduism and Islam. In order to perform this analysis, source material, often from rare and neglected texts, is utilized to examine Blake's possible unorthodox influences. The analysis of influences takes a three-pronged track: literary, symbolic, and linguistic; Blake's possible knowledge of Orientalist translations; the symbols in his poetry, prose, and paintings are analyzed; and his potential knowledge of major Orientalist languages is also examined. Once this has been examined in sufficient depth, an excavation of Blake's views on time and space is then undertaken. This analysis of Blake's philosophical perspectives utilizes a comparative phenomenological approach in order to show their similarity to the perspectives of the Hindu Vedanta and Ismaili Islam. Throughout this analysis, I aim to demonstrate both that Blake's views on space are inherently mystical (space as limitless and unbound by the physical universe), and that his view on time, having a similarity to that of the Platonists, views Eternity as the one true reality.

Acknowledgments

There is nothing more gratifying for a student of literature than encountering a work, or an author whose writings, both in the theme(s) addressed and the symbolism of language, paint a picture of events that transcend the common bounds of the time and place in which they were created. Even more so, if they succeed in contributing to the *eudaemonia* of one's mind and soul; then the initial task of transforming the reader has been accomplished. Throughout my scholarly immersion into works from different literary traditions and periods, one author in particular has profoundly impacted the manner in which I have come to perceive the world, namely William Blake. With his very unique, and ostensibly multi-faceted linguistic and visual symbolism, Blake's works open the gates into a world where contraries blend into a unified and harmonious whole in both the terrestrial and heavenly planes. While working on Blake has been a highly challenging task that required a tremendous amount of research and an exhaustive investigation into a number of varied sources, it has also been very rewarding, for it taught me a very important lesson: the pursuit of wisdom is cyclical, but eternal.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the assistance and support of several people I feel greatly indebted to. Throughout the entire writing process, my mother and father have been a tremendous moral and emotional support. None of what I have written would have been possible if it was not for them introducing me to literature and writing at an early age. Thank you *mama* and *tata*! I would also like to acknowledge the support of a very special person, Farasha Euker, who has been wonderful throughout the entire process: her loving support and kindness have encouraged me to pursue my passion for Blake to the fullest. My most sincere thanks also go to my advisor, Tristanne Connolly whose thorough instructions and detailed comments have taught me to become a better writer, and whose views on Blake stimulated me to have an even greater appreciation of his work; Jeff Wilson for his superb advice throughout, and for guiding me in alternative approaches to my thesis; and Jay Dolmage who has been very supportive, and whose perspicacious advice has greatly improved my writing.

Dedication

To all the pandas of the world, who, though small in number, are high in wisdom, and like me, are great lovers of Blake!

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Epigraph

Man does not have to renounce the command of matter and of souls, since he does not possess the power to command them.[...] We live in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the center, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of our soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence.

*(Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*
99–100)*

Introduction

Learn, O Musæus, from my sacred song
What rites most fit to sacrifice belong.
Jove I invoke, the earth, and solar light,
The moon's pure splendour, and the stars of night[...]
End and Beginning (greatest this to all),
These with propitious aid I suppliant call,
To this liberation, and these sacred rites;
For these t'accede with joyful mind, my verse invites.¹ (Orpheus 25)



THE NEED TO LOCATE THE ORIGIN OF THE PRINCIPLES that frame our beliefs, knowledge, methods of perception, and the paths we follow has perpetually puzzled the human mind, but at the same time it has served as an incentive for transcending the epistemological limits of humanity and the perception of the world around us. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Blake made an intriguing remark on the origin of thought and universal knowledge, stating that “the philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 39), and thus, shed a light that only recently started to be examined with more attention. Likewise, his intricate statement in *The Song of Los*, which suggests that “Abstract Philosophy” was given “to Brama in the East” (67) calls for further examination. What exactly did Blake mean by this? Do statements of this kind prove that Blake’s perception of the world was influenced by something more than just the generally acknowledged influence of Western thought and philosophy, that of the Bible, Milton, or Swedenborg and Boehme’s Christian teachings? Why have so many scholars and students of Blake failed to point to his fascination with Eastern teachings, undermining other possible interpretations of Blake’s textual and visual symbolism? Overall, why have some of

¹ Musæus, as remarked in the writings of Plato and Sophocles, was a seer who uttered oracles that were used as a guidance for many philosophers and poets in ancient Greece. Though not equally hailed as a prophet during his own times, one could say that William Blake was in search of oracles and traditions that could provide answers to the existential questions that incessantly trouble the human mind. Not only that, but Blake’s own literary and pictorial works could be approached as oracles that may lead us to a path of spiritual acuity and intellectual illumination.

the most dominant concepts in Blake's works, namely those of time and space, been pushed onto the margins of Blake studies in the last decade or so?²

The passages mentioned above are highly significant in adding to the comprehensive character of Blake studies, as well as in summarizing some of the important teachings that potentially shaped Blake's contextual and linguistic metaphors, and ultimately, his *visionary* knowledge. In the chapters that follow, I intend to prove that Blake's visions of time and space, while considerably shaped by the teachings of various Christian traditions—sometimes heretical—and Blake's critique of rationalism and empirical thought, are also a product of his fascination with and possible influence by Eastern thought and teachings, primarily Hinduism and Islam. Through this quest for answers, the exploration of Blake's mysterious worlds trapped within time and space will take on a distinct approach. Blake's concepts of time and space will be addressed through the theories of modern sages—namely Henry Corbin, René Guénon, and Ananda Coomaraswamy—whose writings reflect upon the debased state of human thought in the face of technological and industrial advances. Just as Blake's pen wanders through each page of his poetic prophecies, trying to dismantle “the mind-forged manacles” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 27) in humans, Corbin, Guénon, and Coomaraswamy reach back to the teachings of the classical Eastern civilizations so as to expose ideas aimed at a common spiritual quest: to evoke truth about human existence and the importance of the soul in the world—as well as the World Soul—as manifested in every civilization and all religious traditions. Whereas Coomaraswamy's theories are largely based on Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics, and Guénon's on Muslim and Hindu metaphysics (and his training in mathematics), Corbin functions as the overarching synthesis with his focus on pan-Abrahamic, Ismaili and Neoplatonic metaphysics to advocate for the importance and nurturing of Active Imagination above the generally acknowledged concepts of modern philosophy, which holds that reality is to be comprehended only through empirical or rational investigations.

For a long time, Blake's fascination with the East was overlooked by many scholars. Modern Blake scholarship, in particular, attests to this problem, with the majority of scholars heeding the belief that Blake's religious and philosophical concepts, in addition to the Christian teachings mentioned earlier, were shaped by a more recently acknowledged Moravian tradition through Blake's mother. In particular, E.P. Thompson's study of Blake's religious affiliations, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, proclaims Blake a staunch antinomian who followed in the footsteps of Moravianism. However, Thompson's claims about Blake's Moravian and/or Muggletonian influence through his mother have been discredited (see K. Davies and Schuchard). Perhaps the need to tie Blake's thought and sym-

² Magnus Ankarsjö, Keri Davies, E.P. Thompson, David Erdman, and Marta Keith Schuchard are primary examples of this trend.

bolism solely to the Christian tradition and Protestantism is a result of a well-rooted belief that Christianity and the Church, powerful as they were during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, could not possibly permit the colonization of the Western mind with teachings from the East. “Toward the end of the eighteenth century, in which almost every attempt to represent otherness seemed to slip into the exoticizing political aesthetic that would enable and justify imperial conquest” (Makdisi 204), England felt obliged to defend and protect its status of colonial superpower and Protestant religious authority in Europe. Despite that, many intellectuals of the day—in an attempt to find that which could possibly re-illuminate the path to the Divine, or serve as mnemonic tools for the traditions that could inspire the search for long lost metaphysical knowledge—embarked on expeditions to the East, and conveyed the images they saw and experienced either with their eyes or minds to the English, and European public at large.

Some of the Blake scholars who take on the political and gender-analysis approaches, such as Thompson, Erdman, and Ankarsjö, claim that Blake’s religion was shaped by Christian Swedenborgianism and Moravianism, negating other possible interpretations. Is it possible that such negations stem from the fear of acknowledging that Blake viewed not necessarily the world itself, but the workings of the human mind and imagination as corrupt and decaying? And while Ankarsjö pursues his claims of the Dissenting influence of Moravianism and Swedenborgianism on Blake, and states that “we can safely call him [Blake] a Moravian” (Ankarsjö 139), and that “the foundation of his [Blake’s] thinking is sexuality” (139), he seems to disregard the fact that Blake was, first and foremost, a Neoplatonist, a gnostic visionary whose foundation of thinking is the attainment of the Divine imagination and mystical knowledge in the face of institutionalized religions and materialism. In her thorough research of the intersections of religion and sexuality in Blake, Marsha Keith Schuchard shares a somewhat similar view to that of Ankarsjö, and contends that Blake’s depictions of “free love” and erotic pleasure, as exemplified in the “Cradle Song” or *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, are clear proofs of Blake’s awareness of the “Moravians’ infant and maternal sexual psychology” (Schuchard 130). Nonetheless, Schuchard’s claims seem incredibly one-sided. By drawing on the teachings of Nicolaus Zinzendorf, the bishop of the Moravian Church, who believed in the experience of “the full impact of the mystical marriage” (134) through art and artistic expression, Schuchard argues that Blake, in both his poetic and pictorial works, stresses “that worshippers must become child-like before they can realise their passionate desire for union with Jesus” (140). Schuchard also claims that Blake’s depiction of human desire to become infinite stems from the Moravian tradition.

While this might be possible on a certain level, one must bear in mind that Blake could have easily borrowed the element of man’s infinity from a number of other traditions, including the traditions of the East. While Blake’s drawing to the *For Children: The Gates of*

Paradise, with an inscription “I want! I want!” might echo the Moravian tradition, it also points to Blake’s view of the body that follows both the Platonic and Vedantic views. If we look at the “I want! I want!” drawing in the context of the entire set of drawings in *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, then we can notice that Blake constantly associates the body with the “prison-house [and urges us to] realize that soul is the substance, and body the shadow” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I 120). As Raine further claims in *Blake and Tradition*, in his depictions of a human being brought down to the level of a child trapped in his/her own egg shell, or the body, Blake seems to draw on the Vedantic myth of *maya* or the veil (see Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 182–3) from which one needs to break away in order to attain the level of *divine humanity*: “As the veil deludes the fallen man, so he takes a hand in the weaving of it, realizing the horrible nightmare in what he creates—profane cities” (183). Once humans drop this veil of delusion, only then will they be able to soar beyond their physical desires and see the path leading to Ultimate Reality. The child in them will re-awaken, and in an attempt to escape the material world, will ascend a ladder to the heavenly realm.

Raine, along with Damon, Percival, Harper, Weir, Makdisi, and Whitehead, has been an exception in the approach to Blake and his ideas in the last few decades. Throughout the works of these authors, a significant trend has emerged that approaches Blake from the perspective of Eastern³ teachings. Among them, Raine, Damon, and Harper, in particular, have addressed Blake from a more traditional(-ist) perspective, placing Blake within a world where imagination rules for the purpose of traversing spatial and temporal limitations experienced through the body, only to reinstate the human into a world where time and space have no limitations whatsoever. When time and space become complementary to one’s spiritual development and existence in the universe, they form a world in which temporal and spatial concepts are in a unanimous harmony with humanity.

How exactly Blake uses time and space to restore harmony to a world lacking in recognition and respect for spiritual values will be shown in the following chapters. After addressing the wide gap between the modern, material, and scientific values in the world Blake inhabited, and the traditional, spiritual, and artistic values permeating the world of divine vision, which he longed to inhabit, the discussion in Chapter One will unfold into an analysis of Eastern and Western philosophies and their influence on Blake. The first chapter goes on to analyze various philosophies and their possible impact on Blake and his world. Chapter Two continues with the themes of the first chapter, but goes on to examine the possible influences

³ Throughout, I use the imperfect terminology of East and West, for lack of a better term, to refer to the predominant spiritual traditions that have risen and subsided in those geographical regions generally corresponding to these terms. The use of East in a positive sense and West in an occasionally negative manner is meant in no way to disparage the great spiritual traditions of the West. The West, as I use it, refers solely to the modern materialistic culture that is predominant today and has its sources in the Roman Empire and post-Renaissance Europe.

of Hinduism and Islam on Blake's works. In addition, the chapter analyzes Blake's possible knowledge of languages outside of his native tongue. Chapter Three performs an in-depth analysis of Blake's ideas of space, and compares them to Hindu and Islamic doctrines. Building on this, Chapter Four analyzes Blake's views on time and Eternity. The chapter utilizes a vast array of source material in order to unearth the deeper meanings of Blake's symbolism. Finally, the Conclusion ties all of the previous lines of thought together by discussing the importance of the balance of time and space in the universe.

If we consider that the concepts of time and space interfere with the formation and sustainability of "certain cycles or certain particular states such as the human, or even only certain modalities of these states such as the corporeal modality" (Guénon, *The Multiple States of the Being* 62), namely, that our individual beings or the corporeal parts of our beings are subject to temporal and spatial conditions in "the whole of the domain of universal Existence" (62), then the discussion of time and space seems more pertinent than ever, especially since the age we inhabit is largely occupied with the eradication of the non-corporeal/spiritual. More than ever, our perception of the world and the gifts of nature has become utterly distorted by materialism, for we have now reached the stage of false needs and desires where the mind seeks not ancient wisdom, Truth, and beauty, but truth and knowledge within material science. As Guénon observes:

When an exclusively material science claims to be the only science possible, and when men are accustomed to accept, as an unquestionable truth, that there can be no valid knowledge outside this science, [...] how could these men not in fact be materialists, or in other words, how could they fail to have all their preoccupations turned in the direction of matter? It seems that nothing exists for modern men beyond what can be seen and touched; or at least, even if they admit theoretically that something more may exist, they immediately declare it not merely unknown but unknowable, which absolves them from having to think about it. (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 83)

And yet, it is in the nature of every living being to analyze and question their existence in this terrestrial abode, where the actions they perform are subservient to the enigmatic concepts of time and space. The way we conceive of life determines to a great extent the way we approach, act, and interact with the environment, as well as the criteria for the analysis of the unity/disjunction of body and soul, but most importantly, it establishes our relationship to the energies of the spiritual abode. Life, as a dominion shaped by will and fate, can take us onto the path of compelling questions, with each one of them opening a gate into worlds already experienced and seen, or worlds yet uncovered and unknown.

Henry Corbin, in his attempt to provide answers to the riddles of human origins, our connection to the Divine, and human existence in relation to time and space, reflects back to the Mazdean tradition and writes:

[T]he moment of birth and the moment of death, recorded so carefully in our vital statistics, are neither our absolute beginning nor our absolute end. [...] [T]ime, as we commonly conceive of it, as a line of indeterminate length, losing itself in the mists of the past and the future, has literally no sense, but is simply the absurd. If a modern mathematical philosophy has taught us to conceive of time as a fourth dimension added to the three dimensions of space, we may say that the myth of Mazdean cosmogony reveals to us something in the nature of still another dimension (a fifth dimension?), the one which situates a being's "elevation" of light or depth of darkness. (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis 2*)

In Romanticism, more than in any other literary period of Britain, the dividing line between the "absolute beginning" and "absolute end" (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis 2*) of human existence in the face of the insurgence of new and revolutionary philosophical, aesthetic, political, social, and religious ideas and concepts, became blurred to an extent not seen since. Whether in the writings of the six well-known Romantic authors, or other authors deserving more than just a trifle of critical acclaim, the Romantics strove to uncover the dimensions that stretched beyond their own time and surroundings. With science and industrialism being in its initial stages of threatening the development of human thought, the Romantics turned to imagination as a tool for cultural and social emancipation.

What were the moments of the birth and death of Romanticism? As suggested by Jon Klancher, the "Romantic period[...] may have had several different points of origin, and perhaps only a provisional ending (estimates have ranged from 1798–1830, to 1789–1832, or 1776–1837 among others). [...] [T]here is no certain or consensual dating of this nonetheless watershed cultural moment" (Klancher 1). What is more, the cultural and social aspects of Romanticism continue to leave their imprint to this day, and to a relatively equal extent in both Western and Eastern literary traditions. The Romantics' concern with the immense possibilities of the mind, the ability of nature to revive the realms of the imagination and spiritual tendencies within us, nationalism, industrialization and imperialism, and the domination of religion and politics over humankind are just some of the indicators that testify to the growing fascination with Romanticism in the postmodern age. With the political uprisings and revolutions raging across the European continent, and the rapid advancement of industry and science, time became a barrier the Romantics had to fight against, while the natural world was, for them, to be replaced with the world of the imagination, for "if there were not within

us that same power of Imagination, which is not imagination in the profane sense of ‘fantasy,’ but the Active Imagination (*quwwat al-khayāl*) or *Imaginatrix*, none of what we show ourselves would be manifest” (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 187).

However, it was William Blake, who among the great six went far beyond the topics addressed by his own contemporaries, and whose works, dominated by visionary concepts that are intertwined with unique mystical and mythological aspects, have managed to surpass the limitations of his age. Just as “the myth of Mazdean cosmogony may reveal to us something in the nature of a fifth dimension” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 2), Blake’s works unfold a dimension stripped of the temporal and spatial constraints of this world, to be discernible only to those able and ready to renounce their material desires: “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 39). Humans tend to view themselves in relation to what they can offer to the material, but also in regard to what the material can offer to their physical needs. This inclination to view the self as separate pieces comes from the deeply rooted belief that time is a concept divided between past, present, and future, and that space itself is defined by depth, immensity, and seeming infinitude. According to Blake, while our bodies may be trapped by the limitations of the time and space we live in, our soul and our spiritual existence are able to transcend such limitations through the nurturing and re-awakening of our creative imagination, which Blake terms the Poetic Genius: “That the Poetic Genius is the true Man. and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius” (1). Blake viewed space not as a concept having a beginning and an ending—a construct having a finite point for one’s destination—but rather as something in which our supposedly limited selves can expand to become something more than we ever thought we could be. As he writes in *Milton*:

For every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood.
Is visionary: and is created by the Hammer of Los
And every Space smaller than a Globule of Mans blood. opens
Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127)

For Blake, space is a construct of our minds, a construct of Western thought and philosophy, which holds that space is limited only to the empirical world, to the things we can feel, see, or hear through our senses. Time, on the other hand, is viewed as something very limiting to the space we inhabit: space becomes either a repository of memories, or the symbol of new beginnings, and this is mainly because humans view time in terms of what once was, and what will be. In doing so, they neglect the present and substitute the “Eternal Now” (Blake, *The*

Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 592) with the eternal may-be. Blake's poems stand as a proof that he viewed time as something that has no absolute existence, as a construct constrained by beginning and ending only through our minds. If we look at the following lines from Blake's *Jerusalem*, it is evident that both space and time stand as manifestations of eternity:

The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,
Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows of death. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 198)

Blake's world of eternity symbolizes not only an infinite, unknown space where the soul departs, but also a meeting point of the human mind and untarnished imagination, which comes into life once we abandon the need for the material. In Blake's worlds of eternity, as Kathleen Raine explains, "events and enactors [belong] to a universe in which times and places [are] correspondences of states of being, rather than possessing even such location and duration and sequence within a stable world as Milton has established in *Paradise Lost*" (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 1).

How does the soul travel through time and space? Is the soul really capable of surpassing the temporal and spatial confines of the material world, finally ascending into the realms of eternity? As Corbin notes in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*:

The Earth has to be perceived not by the senses, but through a primordial Image and, inasmuch as this Image carries the features of a personal figure, it will prove to "symbolize with" the very Image of itself which the soul carries in its innermost depths (*Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* 4). [...] The soul cannot be explained; it is the soul itself which is the principle of every explanation and the key to it. (5-6)

One has to keep in mind that the soul animates our body, making us aware of the existence of something higher and more profound than what the physical senses may convey to us. In a sense, we already know what we are, which is the Eternal Itself, but our state of *anamnesis* prevents us from seeing this until we sever our ties with the body and begin to know our Self. The image of the world that the soul has the potential to convey to us is the primeval image, a projection of the world as it once was, devoid of the unnatural and superficial creations of humanity. If, let's say, our perceptions became uninhibited by the material needs the societies impose upon us, and shaped solely by the immaterial essence of our existence, perhaps then we would be able to acknowledge the world around us in its full glory and beauty, the world in its most natural and pristine form as created by God.

Imagination is the energy that flows within all humans, and yet not all of us manage to experience its power and turn it into acts of creation reflecting Reality. The reason for this is that most of us treat imagination not as a spiritual faculty, but as an inherently bodily faculty, which—as pointed out by Corbin—is a view upon which the commonly accepted Aristotelian philosophy bases its theories (see Corbin’s essay “Towards a Chart of the Imaginal,” Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran* xii). The way we perceive the world is subdued to political and social principles; time and space become materialized, turning into something that we have to conquer through physical means. It is precisely because of a need for the domination of the physical—and this includes the intellectual—over the spiritual that we measure time and space in terms of immensity and length, thus restraining the realm of our imagination. Just as Raine suggests that Blake creates a “universe in which times and places are correspondences of states of being” (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 1), Corbin explains that the world of imagination, or *mundus imaginalis*, is not to be interpreted as that which reflects the fantastical or the imaginary. On the contrary, the *mundus imaginalis* is

The place, and consequently the world, where not only the visions of the prophets, the visions of the mystics, the visionary events which each human soul traverses at the time of his *exitus* from this world, the events of the lesser Resurrection and of the Greater Resurrection “take place” and have their “place,” but also the *gestes* of the mystical epics, the symbolic acts of all the rituals of initiation, liturgies in general with all their symbols. (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran* xi)

How do we ascertain the extent to which we are blinded by bodily desires and our senses? Despite our efforts to do so, it is impossible—as Blake would suggest—to reach the higher realm until we learn to place due importance on traditional, non-industrialized and non-scientific realms of reality.

The truth is that there is really no “profane realm” that could in any way be opposed to a “sacred realm”; there is only a “profane point of view”, which is really none other than the point of view of ignorance. This is why “profane science”, the science of the moderns, can as we have remarked elsewhere be justly styled “ignorant knowledge”, knowledge of an inferior order confining itself entirely to the lowest level of reality, knowledge ignorant of all that lies beyond it, of any aim more lofty than itself, and of any principle that could give it a legitimate place, however humble, among the various orders of knowledge as a whole. (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 54)

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake, under the guise of the Devil himself (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 34), challenges the duality of human existence, and points to the body as but a supportive apparatus, “a portion of Soul” (34), which, if nurtured, makes the soul more replete, thus outlining the path to the world of Imagination, or Energy, which is “Eternal Delight” (34). Blake further notes that “the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this [he] shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid” (39). Blake’s denial of the body and soul as the “two real existing principles” (34) is not to be taken literally though. On the contrary, Blake’s aim is to challenge the notion of the body as the main repository of the senses, for it is through the soul, not the body, that one can feel, hear, and see. By granting the soul the attention it deserves, and using it as the guiding force in life, we give subsistence to the things we create, for, as Proclus relates, “soul on account of intellect participates of perpetual intellectual energy, just as body on account of soul possesses the power of moving itself. For if perpetual intellection were primarily in soul, it would be inherent in all souls, in the same manner as the self-motive power” (Proclus, *Proclus’ Elements of Theology* 13). Modern science and empirical thought have instituted the belief in the body as the fundamental mode of existence: the body is perceived as an object which entirely defines our actions and the way we approach the world around us. According to Blake, the body is a veil that hinders our ability to see and experience the world in its most natural and sanguine form. It is precisely because of this submissiveness to bodily desires that humans are unable to reach any higher principle, and attain to knowledge outside of the material realms. As Blake further expands upon this in *The Marriage*:

How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five? (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 35)

Interestingly, Coomaraswamy, while drawing on the Vedantic philosophy and the Upanishads, expresses similar views on the body and soul in his writings. In his essay “That Beauty Is a State,” Coomaraswamy uses the example of diverse ways of perceiving a work of art in order to underline the importance of judging a creation not according to its aesthetic values, or that which our eyes can see, but according to the ability to place a created reality outside of one particular event, time, or space: “For beauty [...] does not arise from the subject of a work of art, but from the necessity that has been felt of representing that subject” (Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays* 40). Likewise, if we look to the pictorial works of Blake, which are integral to his writings, we have to bear in mind that Blake did not paint events nor physical bodies as seen or felt through the senses: “He chose to depict images of

the mind, and he found no difficulty in presenting Free Will, Good or Evil, Clouds or Stars as individuals” (Sinderen 20), or in delineating the contours of the human soul, and in exhibiting the means to cast aside the physical state and “attain the *supreme State*” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 247). In *Jerusalem*, Blake supports the idea of attaining to the state of *henosis*, or unity with the Divine, writing:

And be thou created into a State! I go forth to Create
States: to deliver Individuals evermore! Amen. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 178)

When Blake speaks of states, he refers primarily to the spiritual states of forgiveness, annihilation of the ego, resurrection, memory, reason, and the states of love and wisdom that the soul passes through, on its way to self-realization. As he elaborates in *Milton*, “We are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 131). Moreover, one should therefore

Distinguish[...] States from Individuals in those States.
States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease: [...]
The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
Affection or Love become a State, when divided from Imagination
The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 132)

The one who is able to cast away his/her ego, or what Blake calls Selfhood, will achieve that perfect balance of body and soul, and come to the realization that “every natural object [and every work of art] is an immediate realization of His being. [...] The human artist who discovers beauty here or there is the ideal *guru* of Kabīr, who ‘reveals the Supreme Spirit wherever the mind attaches itself” (Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays* 45). Once the mind stops relying on the perception obtained through the offerings of the material world, one’s path to truth and reality outside of the physical world will be attained more easily.

For Blake, states also symbolize various roles every human being has to carry out throughout their lives, and live up to the expectations that come along with each one of them: “infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, pantaloons, all these are states; and the man, like a traveler, passes through them [...] [I]n other words, the states are the man, who has no existence apart from them. This is the true metaphysical hell” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 242–244).

Indeed, is not the majority of the world we live in now trapped in the hell Blake speaks of? We live within the confines of the states presented to us from the day we are born, thinking that nothing else exists beyond them. And while the states that one inhabits are susceptible to constant change and transformation, one is not willing to reject his/her lower selves or egos, even for the sake of attaining spiritual knowledge. In this process of heeding “Selfhood,” we fail to see beyond the single constructed reality in which perpetually haunting time and space become the primary criteria deciding the nature of our existence:

Of thy poor broken Heart I see thee like a shadow withering
As on the outside of Existence but look! behold! take comfort!
Turn inwardly thine Eyes & there behold the Lamb of God. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 369)

Eternity and Infinity, ever-debated concepts in the world we inhabit, cannot penetrate human existences so long as we place the ego, created through the image of the material world, above the soul. As Raine notes, “[o]nly the living—the spiritually living, that is—can dare to ‘annihilate’ the spectral selfhood; for to the specters the human personality is all. To the spiritually dead the claims of imagination are meaningless, as they were to Locke” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. II* 248). While the spiritually dead might have an illusion of control and domination over their own lives, their minds and souls will never embody that role of an intermediary—for every human is in a way supposed to serve as one—who not only clears the paths to “the world of Mystery (*ālam al-ghayb*) and the world of visibility (*ālam al-shahādāt*)” (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 189), but uses their corporeal part of being as a form that is to be shaped through spiritual cognition and knowledge, not through physical needs and desires. This same idea can be applied to artists, who probably more than any other type of humans possess an ability to transcend the superficial veils (*maya, hijab*) that obscure the human eye, and expose those aspects of the world generally conceived of as invisible or mysterious. However, one has to bear in mind that not every artist is capable of this. True artists will manifest their genius not in the visible accomplishments of the corporeal, but in their abjection of the ego and the ability to establish the connection between humans and the Divinity. As Blake wisely contends in one of the plates of *Jerusalem*:

[...] the Worship of God, is honouring his gifts
In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according
To his Genius: which is the Holy Ghost in Man;
[...] I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts but have only made enemies: I never
made friends but by spiritual gifts;

By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 251)

Both Blake's doctrines and Eastern teachings suggest that humans feel confined in the material world only because they fail to realize that the states they think they embody are of a lesser reality: "Souls are held prisoner in the hells and the heavens only by their own proprium, and can at any moment find release in entering the Divine Humanity" (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 243). Raine points to the similarities between Blake's states of human existence and Eastern teachings on heavens and hells, which Blake may have come across in the *Proceedings of the Calcutta Society*, as well as through Dante and Swedenborg⁴. Blake does not draw a dividing line between Heaven and Hell, which he perceives as states the soul can pass through any time, and most importantly, that the soul can pass from one state to another, depending on how close we are to the spiritual realm. As suggested by Raine, the Indian religions teach that "both the heavens of bliss and the hells of torment are, in the final instance, illusory. Nirvana is a state beyond anything conceived as 'heaven'; for heaven belongs, still, to the human personality" (247). As outlined in the Upanishads, the reason for this comes from the simple fact that the Self or *Ātmā* (the Universal Spirit/Soul), "the principle by which all the states of the being exist, each in its own domain" (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 23), is no different from Brahma, the One, the Supreme Source of Being, or as they say in Sanskrit, *tat tvam asi* ("thou art that"). *Ātmā* flows through all things, thus making the states of being nothing other than the manifestation of the Supreme Self. Modern science and current analytic and continental philosophy, following Immanuel Kant's distinction between phenomena and numena, draw a binary between the self and *Ātmā*—if recognizing it at all—and this is primarily due to the fact that they acclaim the corporeal state of being rather than recognizing the corporeal as yet another facet of the whole being that is dependent on the balance of other portions. We must keep in mind that sensory knowledge cannot serve as the only medium for our understanding of the world, since this will distort our perception of the differences between the individual and universal states of being. One could say that modern humans are, in a way, enveloped in a hell, an intellectual and spiritual hell, for the ideology of late capitalism⁵ acknowledges nothing beyond the corporeal, rejecting, at the same time, the notion that the individual states of being flow from the unmanifest or universal states of being.

4 Many parallels can be drawn between the doctrines of Swedenborg and non-Judeo-Christian religions, as can be witnessed in the monographs on Swedenborg and Islam, and Swedenborg and Buddhism, published respectively by Henry Corbin and D.T. Suzuki

5 Notice how the two most popular current belief systems, religious fundamentalism and the new atheism, are both materialist to the core.

[T]he sum of all [the] states is still nothing at all in relation to the personality, which alone is the true being, because it alone represents its permanent and unconditioned state, and because there is nothing else which can be considered absolutely as real. [...] We thus observe that existence, that is to say conditioned and manifested being, is at once real in one sense and illusory in another; and this is one of the essential points which Western writers, who have distorted the *Uedānta* by their erroneous and highly prejudiced interpretations, have failed to grasp. (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Uedānta* 29)

And indeed, so long as our personalities or egos determine the way we perform actions, or shape the thoughts of our minds, our conception of reality will be limited only to the world experienced through a body. In today's world, an illusion is understood as something that does not exist, as something that occurs due to an illness of the mind or as a result of unnatural causes; however, one thing that most of us fail to grasp is that the way we live our lives is quite illusory, and this is primarily due to the fact that our selves fail to comprehend anything that is outside of the *here and now*. For those who do not see beyond what their eyes can register, or acknowledge anything beyond their physical domain, time and space will remain an eternal enigma believed to affect both the body and the soul, or the individual self. The important point here is that for most humans today, and according to the teachings of the philosophy of uninhibited progress, action and all that is created with the body is placed above contemplation and the creations of the mind and soul; thus, we see the emergence of materialism as the new dominant philosophy which has supplanted the once dominant and ubiquitous idealism⁶. The need to preserve the world in its original, intact state has been replaced with the "need for ceaseless agitation, for unending change, and for ever-increasing speed" (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 38). The need to preserve ancient wisdom and knowledge has been replaced with the need to create and consume transitory and meaningless things that provide superficial pleasures for the body. According to the "Katha-Upanishad":

The ignorant man runs after pleasure, sinks into the entanglements of death; but the wise man, seeking the undying, does not run among things that die. [...] The wise man by meditating upon the self-dependent, all-pervading Self, understands waking and sleeping and goes beyond sorrow. Knowing that the individual self, eater of the fruit of action, is the universal Self, maker of past and future, he knows he has nothing to fear. (*Katha-Upanishad*, Yeats and Swami 33–4)

6 Ironically, the transitory dualism of the deeply devout Descartes led to the overthrowing, not only of idealism, but eventually even his own dualism, leading to the ascendancy of materialism starting in the nineteenth century

The wise human sinks into contemplation and searches for the reasons behind his/her own being and becoming: he or she contemplates on the transcendent nature and unity of the individual and the Supreme Self, and learns how to eradicate the desire for the superficial products of a society largely based on incessant change and action.

In his attempt to point to the fleeting character of action and absurd obsession with change and material progress, Blake, in his *Poetical Sketches*, devotes an entire poem to contemplation, pointing to the wisdom and unbiased perception of the world it elicits in those who follow in its footsteps. Here, contemplation is depicted as a pristine and virtuous woman who tempts the mysterious and inaccessible domain of divine creations with the beauty and inspiration it bestows upon the human mind. At the same time, it tempts the humans' debased position in a world seemingly shaped and maneuvered by them, yet inherently controlled by the workings of the Divine.

Who is this, that with unerring step dares tempt the wilds, where only Nature's foot hath trod? 'Tis Contemplation, daughter of the grey Morning! Majestical she step-peth, and with her pure quill on every flower writeth Wisdom's name. Now lowly bending, whispers in mine ear, "O man, how great, how little thou! O man, slave of each moment, lord of eternity! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 442)

Blake further expands upon this in one of his other poems from a Manuscript Fragment, and writes:

Sweet Contemplation. She brings humility to man Take her She Says & wear her in thine heart lord of thy Self thou then art lord of all. 'Tis Contemplation teacheth knowledge truly how to know. and Reinstates him on his throne once lost how lost I'll tell. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 447)

Blake's mentioning of the throne can here refer to the central palaces of wisdom and sublime cognition, or the center of innocence and inherent connection with the Divine that all humans nurture until they face the world of experience. On a deeper level, Blake's image of the throne can signify the seat of the ineffable or the place of mystical knowledge that humans attain to once they come to learn how to transcend their physical and spiritual obstacles. This process of reinstatement on the throne came as quite a challenge for most people in Blake's society, going through the initial stages of industrialization, but especially today when, by a massive denial of the existence of the spiritual and the Supreme Power, we choose to absolve ourselves and the results of our actions and creations from any negative impact on the environment. This is exactly what Blake feared for his own society, and the human race at large:

that our devotion to constant action, the practical and the material, will result in a complete “desacralization of man and of his world” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 387). This throne that humans need to rediscover, or what Corbin also terms as the Temple, used to be

the place through which Heaven and earth were in communication, the intermediary *locus* “at the meeting-place of the two seas”, linking Heaven with the earth. The destruction of the Temple is destruction of the field of vision: contemplation collapses for lack of space, for lack of a horizon beyond this world. Heaven and earth have ceased to communicate: there is no longer either temple or contemplation. (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 388)

If we consider the fact that the majority of humans tend to live *outside* of their own bodies, refusing to observe and follow universal principles, and thereby acknowledge the existence of knowledge outside of the material world, then Corbin’s claim that contemplation cannot be realized without the Temple, comes as quite a challenge to current modes of human existence. After all, the Temple is “the sanctuary, [...] the place of a divine Presence and of the contemplation of this Presence” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 386).

Interestingly, Blake on a number of occasions speaks of both earthly temples (note the amount of times he refers to the Druid Temples) and celestial temples. However, one thing that also stands out in Blake’s images of temples is his portrayal of the temple as the dwelling place of God, and the temple as the origin of goodness and the imagination triggered once we have established a connection with the Divine. Whenever Blake speaks of earthly temples, he presents us with images of darkness, suffering, vice, and destruction, as if trying to channel his criticism of the humans’ need to erect and kneel before the material shrines, instead of heeding the temple/shrine *inside* themselves. Moreover, Blake’s criticism here is also directed towards our hypocrisy in building the temples not for the sake of obtaining spiritual knowledge, but for the purpose of exercising dominion over the Divine. After all, temples built by human hands do not seem to justify their religious purpose, primarily because of the people’s constant need to negate and destroy that which does not comply with their own religious teachings and dogmas. The image that follows is representative of both the suffering which human beings inflict upon each other for the sake of beliefs implanted in them through religious and social authorities, but also of the falsehood and hypocrisy humans embody in their expressions of religiosity:

The Serpent Temples thro the Earth, from the wide Plain of Salisbury
Resound with cries of Victims, shouts & songs & dying groans
And flames of dusky fire, to Amalek, Canaan and Moab[.]
[...] she [Rahab] hoverd over all the Earth

Calling the definite, sin: defacing every definite form;
 Invisible, or Visible, stretch'd out in length or spread in breadth:
 Over the Temples drinking groans of victims weeping in pity,
 And joying in the pity, howling over Jerusalems walls. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 237)

Note the resounding difference in Blake's description of the heavenly Temple in the lines below:

The Temple stands on the Mount of God from it flows on each side the River of Life on whose banks Grows the tree of Life among whose branches temples & Pinnacles tents & pavilions Gardens & Groves Display Paradise with its Inhabitants walking up & down in Conversations concerning Mental Delights. Here they are no longer talking of what is Good & Evil or of what is Right or Wrong & puzzling themselves in Satans Labyrinth But are Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 562)

These lines, that survived in Blake's *Notebook*, are part of what is left of Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, supposed to accompany one of his paintings, now lost. What stands out in the example above is not necessarily the description of beauty and purity that surrounds the celestial Temple, but an ability to capture Heaven itself with the human eye whose field of vision is not constrained by the material world. The Temple that "stands on the Mount of God" is not the Heavenly temple in the ordinary sense of the word, but a temple that resides within each one of us: this Temple is the center of the imaginative faculty which resides in the heart and soul, and distinguishes a regular believer from a mystic. As Blake reminds us in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "All deities reside in the human breast" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 38).

Both Corbin and Guénon, along with Coomaraswamy, point to the heart as the principal center of intelligence and the source of imagination. Guénon and Coomaraswamy rely on Hindu teachings in this respect, pointing to the belief that the Supreme Power in the Hindu religion, Brahma, resides in the heart, with the heart being the seat "not only of the corporeal individuality, but of the integral individuality capable of indefinite extension in its own sphere, [...] and of which the corporeal modality constitutes only a portion" (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Uedānta* 32). In light of the same analysis, Guénon further points to a distinct belief of the Greek philosophers, who unlike most modern philosophers, deemed the heart the fountain of intellectual, rather than emotional thought and action. If we are to heed the belief of the Greeks, and treat the heart as the center of our intelligence, and our brains as the primary root of emotions/senses, in what ways does that affect

our perception of the world? To what extent would our actions, and our image of the world itself, be different—if at all—if we are to rely on the intellectual abilities of the heart?

After all, “if one perception comes through the eyes and another through hearing, there must be some one thing to which both come. Or how could one say that these sense-perceptions are different, if they did not all come together to one and the same [recipient]? This then must be like a centre, and the sense-perceptions from every quarter, lines coming together from the circumference of the circle, must reach it, and that which apprehends them must be of this kind, really one.” (Plotinus, *The Enneads* 355)

This brings us to the earlier discussion on the soul and the ability to construct a world around us through the soul, “for reason cannot proceed from any thing else than from soul” (Plotinus, *On the Immortality of the Soul* 286). If reason does not proceed from the brain, it should thus be evident that the world around us is shaped through nothing but “a primordial Image” (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran* 5), the image that is to be found within the center of intelligence that the Greeks speak of, i.e. the heart. The soul resides within the heart, and the soul is the primary center that receives the sense perceptions, which help create the image of the worlds around us. According to the Platonists, the soul itself is also a repository of intellect and all the knowledge of the world; what is more, the Platonic philosophy is of the belief that everything we learn, and the ability to retain memories of the things we see, hear, or learn are all due to the soul. As Plato elaborates in *The Phaedo*:

Is the body an impediment or not, if any one associates it in the investigation of wisdom? What I mean is this: Have sight and hearing in men any truth? or is the case such as the poets perpetually sing, that

We nothing accurate or see or hear?

Though if these corporeal senses are neither accurate nor clear, by no means can the rest be so... When then does the soul touch upon the truth? (Plato 242) [...] - Can a man, who possesses science, render a reason concerning the objects of his knowledge, or not? [...] - But when did our souls receive this science? for they did not receive them from those from whom we are born men. - Certainly not. [...] - Our souls therefore...had a subsistence before they were in a human form, separate from bodies, and possessed intellectual prudence. - Unless [...] we received these sciences while we were making our entrance into the present life; for that space of time is yet left for us. (254)

It seems that Blake was also very much puzzled by the question of the origin of knowledge in humans. This is primarily to be witnessed in the principles Blake pursued in his works, but also in the ways he conducted his life. Blake's lyrical and pictorial works, especially his *Notebook*, which came to be regarded as a kind of manifesto of Blake's thought and genius, witness to an uncanny beauty and mysteries his mind aimed to convey to the human generation. As Keynes writes: "It is at once evident that Blake himself placed a high value on his *Notebook*, for it cannot have been economy alone that induced him to keep this apparently insignificant volume beside him for forty years, turning to it again and again to confide to its pages the most intimate outpourings of his genius, until it was filled from end to end" (Keynes 13). Based on the writings it contains, or the unusually simplified and non-embellished drawings and sketches—when compared to the rest of Blake's artwork—Blake's *Notebook* stands as the confirmation of his objection to the brutality and rigidity of the laws that limit one's ability to express the creative imagination. Even more so, Blake proves this negation of the laws in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, when he writes: "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative it is an Endeavour to Restore the Golden Age" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 555). And indeed, even when it comes to the teachings of the Platonic school of thought, that Corbin, Guénon, and Coomaraswamy refer to so often in their writings, Blake's theories on the heart are not as remote from the teachings of the Greeks. Consider the lines in which Blake reaffirms Plato's conception of the heart as a thinking organ: "No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth" (1); or the following: "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows" (45), referring to the spiritual or *third-eye*, which has insights into all things Divine, and which can never be known but only felt. Moreover, in *The French Revolution* Blake makes a solid argument about the soul as the primary center of the human imagination and knowledge, with the heart and brain being nothing else but the soul's constituents:

Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful? can the man be
bound in sorrow
Whose ev'ry function is fill'd with its fiery desire? can the soul whose
brain and heart
Cast their rivers in equal tides thro' the great Paradise, languish
because the feet
Hands, head, bosom, and parts of love, follow their high breathing
joy? (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 294)

This is Blake's invocation of the soul and its power to bequeath one with the contemplation, imagination and an ability to *see* God and Its creations. Blake unfolds a very intriguing

puzzle here: Can the power of our bodily desires become so strong that it makes the perception through the soul extinct, or is the soul an entity that the body and its desires can never breach? Does the soul really discount the workings of the heart and brain, and lead us onto the path of contemplation? What really stands out in these lines is Blake's attempt to show that space—note the lines which suggest the bonding of the human in sorrow, or the bodily parts following the “high breathing joy”—while limiting to the body, does not limit the soul's destination. The soul transgresses the limitations of time and space, and travels from one human form to another, through the human habitations on Earth, all the way to the gardens of God's paradise:

And every Human Vegetated Form in its inward recesses
Is a house of ple[as]antness & a garden of delight Built by the
Sons & Daughters of Los in Bowlahoola & in Cathedron. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 229)

Lines such as these, along with the previous reference to Blake's visions of the soul, suggest Blake's knowledge outside of the predominant Christian orthodoxies of Blake's day (various forms of Protestantism and Catholicism)⁷. Other religions, both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic—Hinduism and Islam in particular—consider the body as a sheath for a soul that escapes its bodily prison upon death and merges with its Source⁸. In both Islam and Hinduism, the soul is as a gem in the garden, the garden here being the body itself. It is with the release of the soul from the garden, or the bodily confinement, that one attains the state of the mystic and is showered with divine contemplation. In his attempt to explain this attainment of mystical states, Corbin reflects on the fundamentals of Ibn Arabī's *theophany*, and writes:

The spiritual progression from the state of simple believer to the mystic state is accomplished through an increasing capacity for making oneself present to the vision by the Imagination (*istihdār khayālī*): progressing from mental vision by typification (*tamthīl*) by way of dream vision (*rū'yā*) to verification in the station of *wallāya*, imaginative witnessing vision (*shuhūd khayālī*) becomes vision of the heart (*shuhūd bi'l-qalb*), that is to say, vision through the inner eye (*basīra*), which is the vision of God by Himself, the heart being the organ, the “eye,” by which God sees Himself:

7 There is reason to suppose that Blake was aware of certain aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy, but that is outside of the scope of this thesis

8 A thoroughly Platonic doctrine that has always been the majority opinion in Islam, but is a minority opinion in post-medieval Christianity outside of Orthodoxy, due to the influence of Thomas Aquinas, who in turn was influenced by Aristotle, and put forward the idea that the soul has no reality outside the reality of the body, and hence the need for a bodily resurrection

the contemplant is the contemplated (my vision of Him is His vision of me) (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 231–2). [...] The vision of the “Form of God,” as configured for and by the mystic’s “Creative Imagination,” can no longer be imposed by a collective faith, for it is the vision that corresponds to his fundamental and innermost being. (232–3)

Based on this, one may conclude that the heart represents not only the microcosm of the body, but also stands as the microcosm of the world and the divine form(s). Many forms of Islamic theology⁹ teach that the heart contains all knowledge¹⁰, and that only once we reach that knowledge are we able to discern the *Image of God* and reach “the absolute divine Unity (*ahadīya*), which demands the negation, the rejection (*tanzīh*) of all attributes and all relation” (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 234).

In his poem “The Divine Image,” Blake captures the essence of the human form, and elucidates the ways in which the human attains to divine Unity and mystical perception. The sentiments of the heart Blake mentions, namely Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love, are all manifestations of the Divine and the realization of the Divine in the human being. While Blake associates mercy with “the human heart” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 12), it is interesting that only Love attains the state of “the human form divine” (13). It is evident that one of the purposes of this poem is “to construct a utopian image of a paradise on earth that shall come into being as soon as all men, individually and communally, realize their potential divinity and affirm that everything that lives is holy, and that ‘the virtues of delight’ [sic]—mercy, pity, and love—can create a heavenly society of mutual trust, harmony, freedom, and peace for all living men, women and children” (Mellor 12–13). While the poem seems to possess a starkly Christian character, primarily due to its clear reference to Jesus¹¹ as the perfect manifestation of the Divine, Blake does, however, allude to the importance of other religions and their followers. In the last stanza, he makes a reference to followers of Paganism, Islam, and Judaism—“heathen, turk, and jew”—and calls for the unity of all religions, for this world cannot coexist and sustain itself before the social, political, and spiritual hardships, until we learn to embrace the uniqueness, as well as the diversity and resemblances of teachings that each religion has to offer.

9 There are a multitudinous number of Islamic sects, schools of philosophy and theology, and practices. The focus, in this thesis, will be on the Ismaili school of thought.

10 Though, at times, certain statements may appear illogical to the mind of one trained in the modern, scientific, manner, the goal throughout this thesis is to use phenomenology as the primary epistemological method for understanding doctrines from diverse times and places. This in no way implies a value judgment for or against any of these doctrines, but is simply viewed by the author as the best method for understanding diverse views and practices through the eyes of those that believe and practice the aforementioned religions/philosophies.

11 In Islam, Jesus, other prophets, and the great saints—such as Ibn Arabi—are considered *insān al-kamil*, i.e. perfect men. It should be noted that *insān*, in the Arabic language, is gender neutral, much like the German *Mensch*, and as such, is also used to refer to female prophets, such as Mary.

It is for a good reason that Blake associates the heart itself with “the human form divine,” for God is, according to the Qur’an, “a dispenser of grace, a fount of love!” (Asad 11:90). As such, the image of the world we behold is reflective of our ability to render the love contained in our hearts onto the beings and things in the outside world. Moreover, our image of the world is reflective of the amount of active imagination with which we interpret the things we behold through our senses, or distinguish between the things known and unknown to our corporeal existence. The realization of love for the human form, and the recognition of God in human form will be achieved once we open our hearts and souls to the benefits of the active imagination and its respective function. According to Corbin, the function of the active imagination is:

[T]o typify, to transmute everything into an Image-symbol (*mithāl*) by perceiving the correspondence between the hidden and the visible. And this typification (*tamthīl*) of immaterial realities in the visible realities that manifest them, accomplished by *ta’wīl* as the function par excellence of the Active Imagination, constitutes the renewal, the typological recurrence of similitudes (*tajdīd al-muthul*), and that precisely is creation renewed and recurrent from instant to instant (*tajdīd al-khalq*). (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 242–3)

Blake’s creative opus, whether we are referring to his poetic or pictorial works, is deeply symbolic in a way divergent from other works of his time, and closer to works from the periods of antiquity and the early Renaissance. Blake’s symbolism, while abounding in religious meanings, is at times baffling and intimidating due to its ability to reflect the connections between the visible or the material, and the invisible or immaterial worlds. Even if the symbolic images in Blake’s poetry and art appear unfathomable and inexplicable to most readers, this is mainly due to his uncanny ability to “transmute [simple and everyday] things into symbols, into typical Images, and [cause] them to exist on another plane of being” (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 243).

Blake’s vision of humans and deities, his vision of the universe altogether, reached far beyond material evidence: the vision Blake conveyed in his works embodies the theophanic imagination, without which creation would be impossible: “Blake had come to acknowledge that the most important point about his visionary universe was not that it was a universe but that it was visionary” (Beer 263). This visionary universe is not a universe impenetrable to humans, but a universe locked inside our hearts, which is to be conveyed once we cease to rely on the rational in our interpretations of the outside world. Blake’s images of the heart are very often paralleled with a highly ornamented chest lavishing in riches—“The countless gold of a merry heart” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 470); “For every

human heart has gates of brass & bars of adamant” (114); “And every one a gate of rubies & all sorts of precious stones/ In their translucent hearts” (158)—that may refer to the Ark of the Covenant, which as mentioned in the Bible¹², is a box furnished in gold. Nonetheless, Blake might have found inspiration for his images of the heart somewhere outside the Bible. If we look to the Qur’an, the word heart is at times referred to as *tabut* (see note 239 to *surah 2, ayat 248* of Asad), which in the literal translation from Arabic signifies a chest or a box. Just as the box usually serves to conceal things that are supposed to remain invisible and secret, the heart treasures the sentiments that might limit or reveal one’s true personality. The heart can truly be compared to an ornamented box containing riches, since the sentiments our hearts contain are capable of enriching the person’s life, and of illuminating the world in its true substance. Similar to this, the Hindu religion associates the heart with the temple or the shrine. Shrines or temples to Hindu Gods—the most sacred places of worship for the followers of the Hindu religion—are known for their abundant decoration and the riches they contain. According to Hinduism, the greatest portion of wisdom comes from the heart, since it is through purity of heart, not brain, that we establish a connection to the Spirit. Blake confirms this when, in his “Annotations to Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*,” he writes:

He who Loves feels love descend into him & if he has wisdom may perceive it is from the Poetic Genius which is the Lord (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 603). [...] And hence it also follows, that the Understanding does not lead the Will, or that Wisdom does not produce Love, but that it only teaches and shows the Way, it teaches how a Man ought to live, and shows the Way in which he ought to walk. (606)

It is not unlikely that Blake had access to Eastern teachings, for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of great discoveries and heightened European interest in Eastern metaphysics. As David Weir explains, Blake “explored the Oriental Renaissance far in advance of Coleridge and Shelley [...] The eighteenth century was the great age of mythography when the religions of the world were described, compared, and criticized” (Weir 3). There are numerous theories about Blake and his works, and many different interpretations of what his philosophy and ideas really mean. As a man and an artist who lived during a time of great socio-political transformations and revolutionary industrial advances and discoveries, Blake came to witness the power of humans in the fight for their rights and freedoms¹³, but he also saw the devastating effects that the desire for power and progress can bring upon a society¹⁴

12 King James Bible (1611), *Hebrews 9:4*: “Which had the Golden Censor, and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the Golden pot that had Manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the Tables of the Covenant.”

13 In reality, the rights and freedoms that were being fought for were not those of the people but of the bourgeois class.

14 Namely the after-effects of the French Revolution.

and, more extensively, the human race. To this day, Blake's ideas, especially the root cause of his visionary thought, remain a puzzle to many. Throughout the study of his pictorial and written production, much attention was devoted only to the influences of Christian thought and antinomian philosophy—with the exception of Raine, Damon, Percival, and Harper—without the full declaration that Blake's stream of thought was more in tune with the Platonic school, whose fundamental goal is “the practice of philosophy for the cultivation of the soul” (Uždavinys, *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* 9). But unlike Plato or Socrates who were followed by a large number of disciples eager to be instructed in the ancient doctrines, practices, and mysteries of life, Blake's self-imposed task to lead the people onto the path to “the cultivation of the soul” turned out to be somewhat more challenging.

Chapter 1

William Blake, Artisan of the Spirit

The history of ideas can never be contained within prescribed channels; poets are unscrupulous borrowers from the philosophers, and Blake among English poets the most triumphant animator of abstract thought with the turbulent life of prophetic mythology. (Raine, *Blake and the New Age* 151)



AS CAN BE CONCLUDED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGES, Blake was a great mythographer of the Spirit who aimed to discover Truth wherever it may be found; in the coming pages, it will be demonstrated that, in addition, Blake aimed to invert the hegemony of Western materialist thought, which reified the Spirit into matter, aiming to turn matter into pure mind. Just as Blake's works complement each other in many different respects and depict a contrast between a society heeding the path of the spiritual, and a society blinded by the material, Blake's own existence was divided between the modern and the traditional, mundane life and the Divine, and materialism versus idealism.

In the first known account of Blake's life, the two-volume *Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* by Alexander Gilchrist, published in 1863, there exist a very few, but compelling references to Blake's fascination with and appreciation of Eastern teachings and cultures. It is interesting that some of Gilchrist's statements went unnoticed, such as: "He [Blake] had his own peculiar views. He thought that the Gymnosophists of India [...] who went naked, were, in this [the pursuit of imagination], wiser than the rest of mankind—pure and wise" (116); or the fact that "Ozias Humphrey, a miniature painter of rare excellence [...] was himself a patron as well as friend, for whom Blake had expressly coloured many of his illustrated books. Humphrey had passed three years of his life, 1785–88, in India, and had reaped a golden harvest in Oude by painting miniatures of the native princes" (215–16). David Weir expands upon Humphrey's interest in the East and suggests that his "credentials as an orientalist are further certified by the appearance of his name on a list published in the 1798 reprint of the first volume of the *Asiatick Researches* under the heading "Members of the Asiatick Society."

He is also one of the few people known to have received a special invitation to Blake's 1809 exhibition of *The Bramins* and other works" (Weir 45–6).

Another notable fact mentioned in Gilchrist's account of Blake's life is the acknowledgement of Benjamin Heath Malkin's contribution to Blake's biographical data. Malkin, who among other things, is known for being an antiquarian and a lawyer, and for his drama piece *Almahide and Hamet, a Tragedy*¹⁵, had the honor to enjoy Blake's presence and witness his genius during his lifetime. As suggested by Gilchrist, Blake designed a frontispiece for Malkin's work *A Father's Memoirs of His Child*, depicting the departure of Malkin's son from this world. In another considerably in-depth account of Blake's reception, *William Blake: The Critical Heritage*, G.E. Bentley confirms the friendship between Blake and Malkin, suggesting that not a single commentary of Blake's poetry and art existed or was known to the public, until "Malkin reprinted, in his *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* (1806), Blake's 'How Sweet I Roamed' and 'I Love the Jocund Dance' from *Poetical Sketches* (1783), 'Laughing Song', 'Holy Thursday', and 'The Divine Image' from *Songs of Innocence* (1789), and 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience* (1794)" (Bentley 44). Other than bringing Blake's life and his work the attention it deserved, for it was owing to Malkin that even Gilchrist himself managed to obtain a handful of information on Blake, is it possible that Malkin was also one of the main contributors to the introduction of the some of the doctrines of the East to Blake? Even more so, did Blake's friendship with Humphrey, who spent three years of his life in India and possibly became instructed in the teachings of Hinduism, play a significant role in his knowledge of the Eastern religions?

One of the first Blake scholars to declare Blake's love for and appreciation of Eastern teachings, as well as the influence of the East on the formation of his ideas was Foster Damon. In his 1924 illuminative study of Blake's thought, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, Damon stepped out with a conspicuous claim that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in addition to being based on Swedenborg's ideas and the Bible, "shows a peering into many other books which [deal] with the cultivation of the mystical faculty[:] the *Kabala*, the *Baghvat-Geeta*, Plato, Porphyry, [...] Agrippa, [...] and probably the Gnostics" (*William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 21); or a simple fact that "Blake was never known to reject the gospel of Jesus; though he often protested against what he considered the Church's lapse from the Everlasting Gospel. Mohammedanism he neither rejects nor defends" (127). Damon confirms these statements in 1965, in yet another major study of Blake's thought and symbolism—*A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*—where he writes:

¹⁵ Based on John Dryden's play *The Conquest of Granada*, Malkin's *Almahide and Hamet: A Tragedy* is a depiction of the love story between Almahide, the Queen of Granada, and Hamet, a young Moorish soldier. The story is set on the backdrop of the 1492 Spanish conquest of Granada and the cessation of the Islamic rule in Spain.

Blake never accepted anything that was not a psychological fact. He knew his Bible thoroughly, reading it symbolically [...] He knew his Milton by heart—he apparently was the first man to understand what Milton was writing about [...] Although at first ignorant of other languages, he covered an extraordinary range of material, particularly seeking out those uncanonical writings which the authorities had ignored or “answered” and condemned. Somewhere he found the repudiated doctrines of the ancient Gnostics. [...] He studied Plato and dismissed Aristotle. [...] He read and was much impressed by the Bhagavad-Gita. He borrowed a couple of ideas from the Koran. He found Lilith in the rabbinical tradition. [...] Blake’s religion was planned to be all inclusive. To be exclusive would be incomplete. (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 343)

This need for an all-inclusive superstructure of symbols, Blake felt was necessary for eighteenth-century Western society, which, with the birth of rationalism and the idea that the human being is “material to be formed by an external world and not [...] the imager of the material world” (Frye 23), began to search for ways to learn of the Truth of humankind through the tangible or the material. Once humans reach this stage of worship of matter, traditional knowledge and the exercise of morality and religion become less important and function as facades which prop up societies that at heart no longer know what it is like to know the unknowable. In *The Four Zoas*, Blake voices a rather vivid condemnation of any individual negligent of their intellectual and spiritual intuitions, and incapable of reaching the realms of true knowledge:

They wander Moping in their heart a Sun a Dreary Moon
 A Universe of fiery constellations in their brain
 An Earth of wintry woe beneath their feet & round their loins
 Waters or winds or clouds or brooding lightnings & pestilential plagues
 Beyond the bounds of their own self their senses cannot penetrate
 As the tree knows not what is outside of its leaves & bark
 And yet it drinks the summer joy & fears the winter sorrow. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 347)

As remarked by J.G. Davies in his *The Theology of William Blake*, the denial of the power of the soul, as well as the “over-emphasis of reason,[...] led, in Blake’s view, to a far too narrow conception of the nature of man and God; the heart and soul were divorced from the mind” (13). This explains Blake’s rejection and critique of Deism and the teachings of the Age of Reason, for not only did they promote the separation of the human and the Divine, but they relegated the existence of a knowledge higher than reason to something far off and so

transcendent to this world that it has no effect upon the universe. For Blake, an eighteenth-century human trapped in the world of industrialization and scientific progress is a fallen individual (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 192). This same individual is torn between the world he/she inhabits—Blake calls this world Ulro (the world of matter)—and the world he/she desires, i.e. the world of Eternity, the world not shaped by time and space. In Blake’s system, the world of Eternity is the world realized through the blossoming of the imagination and the complete balance among all of the four zoas in the human. Damon elaborates on Eternity in the following manner: “It is vulgarly supposed to be an endless prolongation of Time, to begin in the future; it is instead the annihilation of Time, which is limited to this temporal world; in short, Eternity is the real Now” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 129).

As the eighteenth century witnessed the ravages of materialism and poverty, it became extremely difficult for anyone wishing to preserve the imaginative soul to defeat the scientific methods, which with the denial of the Supreme Being and classical teachings, decried the spiritual states of the human. With the rise of science and rational thought, the world of Eternity came to represent a space outside of time, inaccessible to those deprived of understandings of qualitative analysis, and who suffer under the dominion of mind and body over soul. Possibly more than any other author in the English literary canon, Blake was concerned with finding ways to restore humans to the primeval state of the imagination in the midst of the new principles decreed by science. Even when he speaks of his enigmatic “fourfold” universe, Blake creates an alternate world where traditional beliefs¹⁶ are the cherished valuables, and where time and space are the states of the soul. What results from this is a world where humans are not subjected to change and decay, but “sublimity and pathos” (Beer 6). Since Blake’s universe is located in the human consciousness, his “universe [is] not organized quantitatively at all, nor [are] its poles poles in space. The opposites of this universe [are] human extremes: the ‘contracting’ of a man in the moment of pathos on the one hand, his ‘expansion’ in the moment of sublimity on the other” (6).

Blake’s representations of a universe shaped by science and matter very much resemble the final stage of cyclical existence that Hinduism speaks of. That is the age of the *Kali-Yuga*, also referred to as the Dark Age¹⁷. It is the age of spiritual and intellectual decay of humans, the age of destruction of truth and beauty; or as Guénon confirms, this is the age humanity has been living in for “more than six thousand years, that is to say since a time far earlier

16 Traditional does not refer to a specific place or time, but a mode of being in which one lives their life vertically in order to ascend to the Divine, rather than horizontally, living for the things of this world. In addition, a *traditional* way of living emphasizes the tripartite virtues of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness; for example, a single unique piece of art is valued much more than something quantitatively larger, but qualitatively its inferior. For further reading, see the works of René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Simone Weil.

17 For a corresponding myth, originating in the Western hemisphere, see the works of Hesiod, who describes a similar age as the *iron age*.

than any known to ‘classical’ history” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 7). Guénon makes an interesting connection between the Western and Eastern division of human cycles.¹⁸ Namely, the *Kali-Yuga* that the Hindu doctrine speaks of is in correspondence with the Iron Age mentioned in Western philosophy. Blake makes numerous references to the sequence of six thousand years, but each time he does so, we are provided with very dark, almost apocalyptic images depicting human suffering, pain, and sorrow. The following lines are among the many examples portraying the fall of humanity, as well as the soul’s inability to access the pure state of sublimity in a corrupt civilization: “Such is the World of Los the labour of six thousand years. / Thus Nature is a Vision of the Science of the Elohim (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 128) [...] The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood / Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing / Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression: / A Garment of War, I heard it namd the Woof of Six Thousand Years (143). [...] To die a death of Six thousand years bound round with vegetation / The sun was black & the moon rolld a useless globe thro Britain! (216)... Then Los plucked the fruit & Eat & sat down in Despair / And must have given himself to death Eternal But / Urthonas spectre in part mingling with him comforted him / [...] But This Union / Was not to be Effected without Cares & Sorrows & Troubles / Of six thousand Years of self denial and of bitter Contrition” (369).

All of these images of blood, death and warfare that have entrenched humanity in the last six thousand years are reminiscent of the depictions of the Hindu goddess Kali. Hinduism teaches that Kali, one of the female aspects of the Divine, descended from her mother Durga “on a field of battle in order to combat demons” (Hay 174). Kali is a manifestation of destruction, which explains why she is depicted as desiring blood and death. To this day, followers of the Shakta strain of thought in Hinduism offer animal sacrifices to Kali, and “Hindu theology suggests that she represents both the difficulties of life and the fear of death itself, two factors that must be faced and overcome if one wants to grow spiritually” (175). Similar to this, Islamic theology speaks of Iblis, a creature created of fire, who refused to obey the Divine Law. In the Qur’an, Iblis is sometimes referred to as *shaytan* (Satan), and denotes the one who is remote from the truth. Despite the common meaning of evil and vile propensities in humans, the *shaytan* or Iblis¹⁹ symbolizes the denial of truth and morality in one’s life. As Muhammad Asad explains in his commentary to the Qur’an, a *shaytan* is a man or woman who chooses to follow their “immoral impulses, which results in their failure to submit to the idea of the

18 This dichotomy between East and West did not, in fact, exist until the arrival of Christianity. Classical Greek and Pagan European civilizations were almost uniform in their acceptance of cyclical, non-linear time.

19 An alternative Islamic view of Iblis is that he was an angel who was foremost both in knowledge of the truth and in monotheistic worship of God, and, as such, he refused to bow to the primordial humans out of his devotion solely to God. For this act, God rewarded him with the unenviable task of being the *tempter* of humanity. For more on this perspective, see the writings of Mansur al-Hallaj and Louis Massignon, who was a teacher of Henry Corbin.

human responsibility to a Supreme Being, who, by definition, is ‘beyond the reach of human perception’; consequently, they choose to worship certain perceivable natural phenomena instead” (Asad 811).

Blake’s depiction of Los eating the fruit and sitting in despair (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 369) is highly interesting. Los, an embodiment of the creative imagination located in every human being, is the creator of everything we behold on Earth, but above all, he is the creator of art and beauty. Los himself is an artist—a blacksmith—who uses his hammer to destroy the instruments used for war and bloodshed, and to fight against institutionalized religion and political oppression. As Blake states in *Milton*, “Los seizd his Hammer & Tongs; he labourd at his resolute Anvil / Among indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning” (96–7). Los uses his craftsmanship to give life to the basic truths and beauties in a world that has fallen upon the sword of materialism and rational thought. He is that glimmer of spirituality hovering among the humans, hoping to restore their faith in the Supreme Being: “Los creates Golgonooza, the city of art; he creates Jerusalem, the idea of liberty; he creates Erin, the belief that all living things, especially the body and its impulses, are holy” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 247). Damon compares Los to Jesus primarily because of his embodiment of Divine Humanity; however, the scene from *The Four Zoas*, in which Los, after plucking and eating the fruit from the tree, sits down in despair is very reminiscent of Adam. If we regard Adam as the first example of the Divine Human, who after yielding to temptation, lost that divinity, why then should the rest of humankind yield to him and his creations? By succumbing to his ratio, did Adam cease to incarnate God, and start to embody an “Iblis-Ahriman in the pure state” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 45)?

Through an application of the Ismaili teachings, Corbin—in his work *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*—justifies Adam’s moment of weakness and states:

In his inexperience, the young Adam lets himself be convinced and commits the supreme “error of the hierophant”: he reveals the secret to men who are unfit to receive it, betrays the symbols to the unworthy. [...] And Adam, having approached the forbidden tree—that is to say, the Gnosis of Resurrection—“escaped through the wide-open door of Mercy.” Like the Angel readmitted to the pleroma, Adam by his repentance returns with his posterity to the “paradise *in potentia*” [quoted in the original text]—that is, the *da’wat*, the esoteric Ismaili Church on earth. Its members are the “Angels *in potentia*,” like the incarnated Fravartis of Mazdaism, carrying on the battle against the demons with human faces, who are the posterity of Iblis-Ahriman. (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 46)

Just as Adam revealed the existential secrets to other humans, Los reveals art, beauty, and truth to the rest of humankind. Nonetheless, he sits in despair primarily because he realizes that the inhabitants of Earth have already become deeply entrenched in non-spiritual pursuits. It is only when Urthona and his manifestation Los, “two beings in one” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 46)²⁰ merge together that “the fruit of the positive religion, and the final Resurrection (*qiyamat*), can spring forth” (46). Until then, sorrows and troubles will remain an everyday burden to those resolved to extinguish spiritual degradation and materialism from humans. Not even Justice or Mercy emanating from the blow and swing of Los’ hammer (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 247) will liberate and broaden the perceivable scope of humanity, at least not until we cease to give priority to our bodily senses. In *The Song of Los*, Blake, through the voice of Los—an artist and a creator—mourns the disconnection of humanity with the worlds of Eternity and Infinity:

And all the rest [became] a desert;
Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated & erased [...]

Laws & Religions...closing and restraining:
Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete
Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton & Locke

Clouds roll heavy upon the Alps round Rousseau & Voltaire:
And on the mountains of Lebanon round the deceased God
Of Asia; & on the deserts of Africa round the Fallen Angels
The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 67–8)

After a long period of empiricism and its promotion of materialism, scientific progress, the denial of human imagination, and the draconian rule of religious and political authorities, the 1789 French Revolution exposed people within and outside of Europe to the ideas of liberation, equality, democracy, and the attainment of basic social rights. The equation of past events with the future became breached, for the Revolution’s aim was not to take the people back to a state they abhorred. Nonetheless, instead of dawning light upon the people, the initial ideals of the Revolution became subverted into yet another set of despotic and tyrannical tactics, enveloping France, and subsequently Britain, in a cloud of darkness and injustice. Humans became infatuated with the belief that they could exceed the power of the Divine

²⁰ Corbin, in an attempt to solve some of the long-pondered riddles of existence, refers to *Eve-Adam* as something akin to a Janus-faced deity, that like Hermaphroditus or the beings described in Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, embody both the masculine and feminine principles equally and simultaneously.

through the rational faculties of their minds²¹, along with the corresponding suppression of their imagination. Time and space became reduced to concepts controlled and limited by the dictates of science. People's immense need to live outside of the confines of time and space by denying their own imagination signified the belittling, and finally, rejection of temporal and spatial energies and their unconquerable powers.

And not only Plato, but likewise the oracles of the Gods have revealed these things to us. For in the first place indeed, they order those divine men who were thought worthy to be the auditors of those mystic discourses, “*not to look upon nature, because the name of it is fatal.*” And again, they order them “*not to co-augment Fate.*” Every where also, they exhort them to turn from the life which is according to Fate, and to avoid “*becoming corporeal with the fatal herds;*” by all which they withdraw us from the senses and material desires; for through these we become corporeal, and are then acted upon from necessity by Fate. (Proclus, On Providence, Fate and That Which is Within our Power 18)

A vast number of philosophers and scientists in Blake's time were following Descartes' theories, and extensions thereof, which may be, and were, interpreted in such a manner that matter is reduced to nothing but extension, and which may also imply that matter is impenetrable outside of chronological time. The Cartesian view of the world may prove to be unsound, for if

[S]pace were purely quantitative it would have to be entirely homogeneous, and its parts would have to be indistinguishable one from another by any characteristic other than their respective sizes (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 31); [...] Space cannot possibly extend beyond the world in order to contain it, because an empty space would then be in question, and emptiness cannot contain anything: on the contrary, it is space that is in the world, that is to say, in manifestation, and if consideration be confined to the domain of corporeal manifestation alone, it can be said that space is coextensive with this world, because it is one of its conditions (36) [... Therefore,] if space is not pure quantity, time appears to be less so: temporal magnitudes as well as spatial magnitudes can be spoken of, and in both cases continuous quantity is involved. (38)

Unfortunately, for the modern human who lays importance on quantity above quality and cannot conceive of the existence of different conditions in the universe, both space and

²¹ Blake's “Furnaces with fire” and “dark Satanic Mills,” mentioned in *Jerusalem* and *Milton*, may be an allusion to the modern human's desire to channel all of the might and power of the Greek god Hephaestus.

time will remain purely quantitative concepts. Since modern humans view the environment and its changes in relation to the corporeal, space and time are understood as barriers that define their perception, movement, and the way their lives unfold.

Blake recognized the plight of the eighteenth-century mind, and saw art as a medium that could prevent the degeneration of the imaginative faculty in his nation. Whereas institutionalized religions, governments with draconian laws, factory-hells, and polluted cities destroyed and already demoralized population, art emerged as a weapon for the liberation of the body and spirit: “The satisfaction she [art] gives is a disinterested one that carries man beyond the narrow circle of himself into a world where the more limited instincts of material possession, of egoistical interest, of vanity, of inertia are swept away in a broader vision” (White 224). And while he also aimed to show that art should not be separated from the social and philosophical climate in which it was produced, Blake wished to urge his nation to look to art not only as a source for truth and beauty, but also as something complementary to religion and philosophy. When used for the sake of material profit and the attainment of power over the masses, art, philosophy, and religion can—as Blake conceived—become soul destroying in the eyes of an entire nation, which eventually results in the complete aberration of anything that contains truth: “And all the Arts of Life. they changd into the Arts of Death in Albion” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 216).

One may distinguish between four major changes or movements that brought about the spiritual decay of the English nation, and the post-Enlightenment world that Blake speaks of. For these purposes, it is helpful to reflect on René Guénon, who provides a powerful analysis of the plight of the modern world. Moreover, Guénon’s theories will help us to understand why Blake and many other writers and intellectuals at the time embraced teachings from the East. One of the first movements that brought about the rise of materialism and initially placed emphasis on human existence above the Divine is humanism, which in the eighteenth century turned to a perverse form, far different from the humanism of the Renaissance that saw humanity as an image/mirror of God. “Humanism,” in the words of Guénon, “was the first form of what has subsequently become contemporary secularism [...] men were indeed concerned to reduce everything to purely human proportions, to eliminate every principle of a higher order, and, one might say, symbolically to turn away from the heavens under pretext of conquering the earth” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 17). Despite their contributions to natural philosophy and the insurgence of skepticism about the perception of the universe as dictated by the Church, Locke, Newton, Bacon, Hume, Gibbon, Hobbes, and Voltaire, promoted materialism and the separation of humans and their actions from the Divine forces. This is exactly what Blake detested about science in general and the promoters of humanism, who tried to put an end to imagination and innate cognition as the supreme mental faculties. As can be witnessed from his writings, Blake was well read in the works

of Europe's most celebrated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century humanist philosophers, to which he even made annotations²² in his young age. Blake never accepted their criticism and humiliation of Christianity as a religion, or their denial of humanity as an embodiment of the Divinity. In *Jerusalem*, he hones the sharp sword of his words to do intellectual battle with Bacon, Locke, and Newton. Blake writes:

[I]f Bacon, Newton, Locke
Deny a Conscience in Man & the Communion of Saints & Angels
Contemning the Divine Vision & Fruition, Worshiping the Deus
Of the Heathen, The God of This World, & the Goddess Nature
Mystery Babylon the Great, The Druid Dragon & hidden Harlot
Is it not that Signal of the Morning which was told us in the Beginning? (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 253–4)²³

Through the denial of conscience in humans, or the defamation of spirituality in the religious—"Voltaire Rousseau Gibbon Hume. charge the Spiritually Religious with Hypocrisy!" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 201)—promoters of empiricist and humanist theories exposed Britain, and Europe altogether, to the view that humans do not and cannot embody divinity, and that owing to the physical imprints they receive through their senses they form an image of the outside world, i.e. they dispose of themselves as non-thinking slates, and become thinking subjects. Once Bacon, Locke and Newton's "Philosophy of [the] Five Senses" (68) gave rise to the denial of "Inspiration and Vision" (660), the perception of time and space confined humans to corporeal domains. With the concept of individual reason as the highest form of knowledge, Western philosophy developed the notion of interpreting worldly phenomena only through things that are considered conceivable and thinkable. Modern philosophy, which currently either denies metaphysics completely (Anglo-American analytic philosophy) or accepts metaphysics in some sense, but denies the possibility of the reality of truth, language, or even human selfhood (continental philosophy), is incapable of conveying the simple ontological truths that ancient and religious philosophies were able to present almost effortlessly. Rather than conceiving of mind as a place for the exercise of "the Divine Arts of Imagination" (231) and the ineffable, the mind, in the eyes of the followers of the aforementioned materialist philosophies, is a mechanism tied to the body, without an ontological status of its own. Moreover, the mind is viewed as a

22 As Foster Damon has confirmed, Annotations to Bacon's *Essays* are the only thing that has survived in this respect. Blake was known to have annotated Burke's essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Locke's *Concerning Human Understanding*, and Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, among other things. Unfortunately, none of these works have been retrieved. (For further reference, see Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 34–5).

23 Blake here, is quite likely referring to that *Great Day*, the Resurrection, which is explicitly referred to in all Abrahamic traditions.

tool for the constant invention of new doctrines and ideas, aimed at creating unsolvable and oftentimes meaningless problems. “Philosophy,” as Guénon elaborates, “was bound at least to respect that of which it was ignorant, but whose existence it could not deny; but when this higher knowledge had disappeared, its negation, already a fact, was soon erected into a theory, and it is from this that all modern philosophy has sprung” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 58–9). Furthermore, modern and so-called postmodern philosophers are driven by the “desire to be original at all costs, even if truth should have to be sacrificed to this ‘originality’: a philosopher’s renown is increased more by inventing a new error than by repeating a truth that has already been expressed by others” (56).

In this respect, Blake’s Urizen might be viewed not necessarily as the destroying force in this world²⁴, but more as a manifestation of the modern human whose failure in the celestial universe is attributed to an inability to acknowledge Truth, traditional sources of knowledge, and his/her own divinity, or a belief that humans are naturally incapable of divinity because of an inherent trait of sinfulness. And while Urizen hands the “Philosophy of Five Senses” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 68) to humankind, contributing to its decay, Los works towards reinstating humans into their assigned spiritual states. Los, namely, creates “a living spiritual entity” (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 103), the city/state within every human bosom that is emblematic of the traditional and artistic values bound to survive in a world oblivious to materialism, and unbound by Cartesian time and space. As we are told in *Milton*, “Los conducts the Spirits to be Vegetated, into / Great Golgonooza, free from the four iron pillars of Satans Throne” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 128). Nonetheless, the mind instructed in the principles of rationalism and materialism will continue stooping before the “four iron pillars of Satans Throne,” simply because the heeding of the “philosophy of the five senses” forms the image of space as a vacuum defined by its ending points, and time as restrained by its threefold division between past, present, and future. When in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon voices her lamentation of the partition between that which the soul, oblivious to material needs, sees and desires and that which the conformist societies teach one to desire, she at the same time voices anger against the teachings of modern philosophy and its aim to eradicate all ideas of the Supreme Being from the human imagination:

They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;
 They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.
 And they inclos’d my infinite brain into a narrow circle.
 And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning
 Till all from life I was obliterated and erased. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*

²⁴ Urizen can be compared to Satan, due to his deep sense of pride and desire for dominion.

of William Blake 47)

A human being that views the world and himself/herself in relation to the five senses is not living: he or she is a spiritually deceased entity that follows the path of *natural philosophy*. This brings us to the second major change reflective of the current state of spiritual decay that the world is experiencing, which is the separation of art from the ancient crafts. As pointed out by Guénon, modern humans tend to approach art and industry as a form of luxury that manifests the correspondence between the exterior and the interior. Late capitalism and hyper-consumerism have caused a revolutionary change in consciousness from a love of simple, handmade and unique products produced by a skilled master craftsman to the idolizing of cheap reproductions produced in developing countries. This modern product-based materialism sprung up from the profane conception of quantitative rather than qualitative methods of production. The sole purpose of artistic expression and industrial production in the current era is self-preservation, and hence without the conception of beauty, the existence of Truth and esoteric principles are undermined. In relation to this,

it is useful to note first of all that the distinction between the arts and the crafts, or between “artist” and “artisan”, is itself something specifically modern... To the ancients the *artifex* was indifferently the man who practiced an art or a craft; but he was, to tell the truth, something that neither the artist nor the artisan is today... he was something more than either the one or the other because, at least originally, his activity was bound up with principles of a much more profound order. (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 55)

To see what Guénon really means by this, it is only necessary to look at the means used for production today, as opposed to the means applied in the past, less than three centuries ago. It seems that Blake had predicted the decay of arts and artistic production long before others. In his “Annotations to Bacon’s *Essays*,” Blake points to an interesting contrast between the strength and perseverance of craftspeople and soldiers. He seems to give credit to Bacon for his treatment of craftspeople: in erecting sturdy barriers and fortresses with their own hands, craftspeople would oftentimes contribute to the defeat of enemies, even more than soldiers.

Bacon calls Intellectual Arts Unmanly
Poetry Painting Music are in his opinion Useless & so they are for Kings & Wars &
shall in the End Annihilate them. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 629)

Though their skill and precision generally go unacknowledged, artisans, at least in the ancient days, would work towards making a product that would embody beauty—instead of

superficial practicality—and reflect the unity of the terrestrial and celestial worlds. Moreover, as Blake confirms in his writings, art—even if defined by quill or pen—leaves an imprint that is more powerful than a lethal weapon, and this is primarily because of its ability to invoke or rekindle the imaginative faculty all humans are endowed with. On the other hand, when Blake condemns Bacon’s denial of imaginative arts/crafts, he at the same time voices a critique against the invention of “the distinction between the sacred and the profane” that Guénon speaks of (see Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*; also Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*), which arose with the birth of modernity:

Any scholar of Blake should be aware of the fact that Blake never separates art from the crafts. A blacksmith or a carpenter is, in Blake’s opinion, equally skilled and as worthy of praise as a painter or poet, and this is primarily because true artists and artisans are “Spiritual & laugh at Mortal Contingencies” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 577), and thus use their skills to penetrate the world of “Eternal Delight” (34) and “a place where Contraries are equally True” (129). Every human being is, according to Blake, capable of practicing an art or craft²⁵, i.e. he or she is able to attain the unity of the interior and exterior, but only once they realize that the “initiatic knowledge” (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 60) or the knowledge of being One with the Divine Principles is inseparable from an artistic expression. The value of an artistic product should not be judged by the material used or the techniques applied; instead, a work of art ought to display a hierarchy between the spiritual and non-spiritual states of being. As Porphyry has confirmed, “even now, the most ancient [works of art] ²⁶ [...] are thought to be more divine, both on account of the matter and the simplicity of the art by which they were fashioned” (Porphyry 54). Blake harshly criticized any artist unlearned in the principles of the ancient artistic crafts, and those who treated the original modes of artistic expression as less worthy. As he writes in *A Descriptive Catalogue*,

As there is a class of men, whose whole delight is in the destruction of men, so there is a class of artists, whose whole art and science is fabricated for the purpose of destroying art. Who these are is soon known: “by their works ye shall know them.” All who endeavour to raise up a style against Rafael, Mich. Angelo, and the Antique; those who separate Painting from Drawing; who look if a picture is well Drawn; and, if it is, immediately cry out, that it cannot be well Coloured—those are the men. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 538)

25 Blake writes in *The Laocoön*: “The whole Business of Man Is The Arts & All Things Common / [...] Prayer is the Study of Art / Praise is the Practise of Art / Fasting &c. all relate to Art / [...] Practise is Art If you leave off you are Lost” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 273–4)

26 Porphyry uses an example of a vessel.

Blake himself was much impressed by the Italian school of the Renaissance painters, Michelangelo in particular, and as such, he attempted to convey his own profound symbolism even on canvas. Regardless of the fact that most critics refer to him as either a poet or painter, or both, Blake was an artisan in the true sense of the word²⁷. He used his craft in correspondence with his ideas, proving that one skill cannot and should not be separated from the work as a whole. It is for the right reasons that William Vaughan calls him a “pictorial poet” (Vaughan 27), for Blake’s poems display a strikingly close relationship with the paintings that accompany them. To Blake, the separation of one craft/art or one creative process from another is something unimaginable: the writer’s thoughts and ideas will remain incomplete so long as the object in which they are contained is not executed by them. In Blake’s case, “painting was not simply the illustration of poetry, or even its rival. It was a counterpart, a genuine other half. Indeed, one might see the relationship as that of two voices singing a duet. At one point the two will sing in unison” (28). This unison is not only reminiscent of the perfect correspondence between arts and crafts, but it points to the body and soul as unified in the same center.

Unfortunately for the modern world, the division of arts and crafts has resulted in a distorted view of one’s existence in time and space. Spaces are no longer perceived as indefinite: if anything, they have become shrunken and limited to units of plain and unembellished constructions produced with the tools of modern industry. Human crafts and traditional means of production have been overrun by machines, and as such, in the modern world, few works of art are created for the purpose of enduring time or as artifacts that will remain for future generations. The products of modern industry are supposed to work as temporary constructs relevant only for the present’s sake, since they are expected to be replaced by other, seemingly *practical*, yet equally soulless products. When, in his *Notebook*, Blake prays: “Then God defend us from the Arts I say / Send Battle Murder Sudden Death O pray”, (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 514), he is requesting the preservation of arts and crafts in their original sense, as well as the cessation of the use of the machine as a tool “that will really fabricate the object. [Therefore,] servant of the machine, the man must become a machine himself, and thenceforth his work has nothing really human in it, for it no longer implies the putting to work of any of the qualities that really constitute human nature” (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 60).

Blake himself had witnessed extraordinary changes in art during his lifetime. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, painters were expected to depict their subjects in a re-

27 As Kathleen Raine relates, “Blake remained, all his life, a poor engraver working for his bread, with the skill of his hands. It is recorded that, when no money remained to pay their simple household expenses, Mrs. Blake used to set an empty plate before her husband at dinner-time and that he would then turn (with the remark ‘Damn the money!’) from his prophecies and visions of other worlds, and take up his graver to work on some humble task” (Raine, *William Blake* 10).

alistic manner, apply the technique of *chiaroscuro* and through the interplay of light and dark shadows create a three-dimensional volume on canvas. Blake broke from these conventions in order to capture the power of the imagination and prove that the creativity of the human is more powerful than the work of a machine or an invented technique. In *A Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake upbraids the painting style of Flemish²⁸ and Venetian painters, and writes:

[Their] Pictures [...] were [...] labouring to destroy Imaginative power, by means of that infernal machine, called Chiaro Oscuro, in the hands of Venetian and Flemish demons [...] They cause that every thing in art shall become a Machine. They cause that the execution shall be all blocked up with brown shadows. They put the original Artist in fear and doubt of his own original conception. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 547)

The third cause of spiritual degeneration is an attempt to reduce everything down to quantity. Measures, calculators, and machines are utilized to such an extent that it becomes difficult to think of doing anything without their aid; anything that cannot be expressed in purely quantitative terms then becomes deprived of its essential value. Discussed previously, this desire for quantity above quality is also one of the reasons for the extinction of traditional crafts. As Guénon suggests, the most notable example of the “reign of quantity”²⁹ among modern humanity can be found in the scientific realm. Namely, we have now “reached the point of supposing that there can be no science, in the real meaning of the word, except where it is possible to introduce measurement, and that there can be no scientific laws except those that express quantitative relations” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 84). Mathematics has become purely quantitative in a desacralized sense; no science—including physics, that most mathematical of sciences—can be reduced to quantitative principles only. For the Greek philosophers, physics and psychology were all part of the metaphysical order of disciplines dealing primarily with the concepts of nature, being, and becoming. In his treatise on physics, Aristotle notes that time and space, just like natural bodies, can possess the Infinite. Matter, as Aristotle suggests, is exposed to continuous change and movement, and thus, it cannot be reduced to extension only:

But since every thing which is moved, is moved in something, and in a certain time, and since there is a motion of every thing which is moved, it is necessary that there should be the same divisions of time and motion, of the being moved, and of that which is moved, and of that in which motion is effected; except that there is not similarly a division of all things in which motion is: but of quantity the division is essential, and of quality according to accident: for let the time in which any thing is moved

²⁸ Rembrandt in particular.

²⁹ Guénon uses this term throughout his works.

be A, and the motion B. If, therefore, it accomplishes the whole motion in the whole time, it will certainly effect a less motion in half the time; and this again being divided, it will effect a motion less than this; and thus perpetually. (Aristotle 120)

Blake was well aware of the empiricists' need to promote the Cartesian definition that "matter can be reduced simply to extension and nothing more" (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 25), meaning that a manifested being is believed to be comprised of substance, but not essence. The *materia* that Aristotle speaks of is not matter, as is often conceived of presently. In modern times, the word *matter* has come to represent any thing that can be assigned a quantitative value, and that can be distinguished by its size, length, weight, shape or color. For many ancient societies, *materia* stood as an approximation of "a universal principle, [...] in which nothing is distinguished or 'actualized', and it constitutes the passive 'support' of all manifestation" (16). This means that when Blake speaks of the world of matter as "Shapeless Rocks / Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Breadth & Highth / Calling the Human Imagination: Which is the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against Its own Qualities" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 132), he points to a tendency of modern science to quantify human consciousness. Many forms of modern science refuse to attach themselves to immaterial principles, which they are supposed to analyze. In his writings, Blake refers to the desire of the materialists to undermine the existence of a spiritual universe, and to envision the Higher Principle—at least among those who acknowledge the existence of It—as a creator of a universe quantifiable according to the limited perceptions of space and time.

Since "God is not a Mathematical Diagram" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 664), then He is naturally not the creator of a numerically defined universe; moreover, God's universe cannot and should not be measured or quantified according to spatial and temporal determiners. Consequently, reality should be felt and experienced through the mind and soul, not through the bodily garment trapped in a universe that can, allegedly, be weighed and measured. Or in yet another definition, reality "must not be sought on the substantial side, but on the contrary it must be sought on the essential side; translated into terms of spatial symbolism, this is equivalent to saying that every explanation must proceed from above downward and not from below upward [...], [and it is this] that immediately gives the reason why modern science actually lacks all explanatory value" (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 17–18). Finally, for Blake, the world is bathing in the "mild fields of happy Eternity" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 359) and the "garden[s] of delight" (366) whose visionary principles guide us to the laws of imagination forming space and time within the human breast:

[R]eal space and time are not, as modern conceptions would have them, merely homogeneous containers and modes of pure quantity, but...on the contrary temporal and spatial determinations have also a qualitative aspect. (Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* 69)

The fourth important change that hastened the rise of materialism and the exploration of outer spatial and temporal zones was the decline of traditional Christianity. Of all the changes that shook the Western world, this was the one that affected Blake's view of his fellow Europeans on the deepest level. Once materialism³⁰ took its full swing in the eighteenth century, Christian religion possessing the traditional outlook, as was known to exist still in the Middle Ages, became dominated, in intellectual circles, by Deism, or that which Blake calls "Natural Religion" (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 2, 113). The belief that God, after creating the world, abandoned the human race and left them to their own demise was intolerable to Blake. If we all carry the potential for divinity, and can behold the image of God in "every flower & every leaf [that] rejoices in his light" (396), then why should we base our beliefs in assumptions which have been deduced from a materialistic view of the universe? For as Blake relates: "There is a Throne in every Man, it is the Throne of God" (176), meaning that humans should not dispose of themselves as purely carnal entities operating in the world of intellectual descent. As Raine writes: "What the Deists really believed in was science; their successors are our own humanists, most of whom nowadays have dispensed with deity altogether (Raine, *Blake and the New Age* 32) [...] Whereas for the humanist God is a fiction made in man's image, spiritual tradition has always taught that man is made in the image of God" (34).

If anything, Deism has shown humans the way to a spiritual death, opening the eyes of humanity to the gates of agnosticism. As Guénon writes in *The Crisis of the Modern World*: "It was[...] only in the nineteenth century that men began to glory in their ignorance—for to proclaim oneself an agnostic means nothing else—and claimed to deny to others any knowledge to which they had no access themselves" (*The Crisis of the Modern World* 45). When Blake witnessed the first signs of this human phenomenon, he did not step aside in his quest to display an alternative, but rightful path, to divine perfection. Never once did he lose faith in humanity's determination to restore their lost divinity and to detach themselves from the realm of material existence and scientific modes of thinking. Blake fought hard against prevailing opinions and aimed to reveal a knowledge of the contraries in the universe, such as how to pass from the state of darkness to light, from the material to the spiritual realm. Agnosticism, in addition to the denial of the possibility of attaining to knowledge of the One,

30 Note that the word *materialism* was coined by the English Idealist philosopher George Berkeley. For further reference, see Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*.

may also profess the denial of tradition and history in one respective society. Since there is a deep correspondence between authentic religions and the land/nature, it is not surprising that even those who profess belief in a particular faith are losing touch with their tradition, since the natural revelations of the Divinity have been, and are being, systematically destroyed. A common opinion among Christians is that the history of humanity did not commence until exactly the sixth century before the Christian era (see *The Crisis of the Modern World* 9–10). As Guénon further elaborates,

This is very noticeable even in the case of countries of whose history we possess more than a few scattered vestiges, such as Egypt, for example; but what is perhaps even more astonishing is that in an exceptional and privileged case like that of China, which possesses annals relating to far more distant periods and dated by means of astronomical observations that leave no room for doubt, modern writers nonetheless class these periods as “legendary”, as if they saw in them a domain in which they have no right to any certainty, and in which they do not allow themselves to obtain any. (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 10)

Similar to Guénon’s critique of modern historians’ refusal to take an archetypal journey to the realms of the unknowable, Blake accused the English nation of hypocrisy in their perversion of practices that contribute to spiritual knowledge, and their appraisal of oftentimes unreliable historical facts. As he writes in “The Ancient Britons” of *A Descriptive Catalogue*: “His opinions, who does not see spiritual agency, is not worth any man’s reading; he who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all History and retain doubts only” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 544). In addition to this, Blake ridicules the work of modern historians, who in their attempts to convey history as a sequence of events related to one another purely through physical plurality and political agendas, neglect the stark unsustainability of evidence or deny any sort of events that might possibly point to the intervention of the Divine powers in the course of human existence. Consider the following lines by Blake: “some Historians [...] cannot see either miracle or prodigy; all is to them a dull round of probabilities and possibilities; but the history of all times and places, is nothing else but improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say, was impossible if we did not see it always before our eyes” (543).

Earlier in this chapter, I analyzed Blake’s use of the sequence of six thousand years, pointing to his images of death and suffering that humanity has been experiencing throughout the entire period of the recorded history. However, Blake in addition to this reference, uses the sequence of six thousand years to point to a tendency of his fellow English citizens to undermine and to entirely push aside the Celtic tradition and spirit that originally inhabited the British Isles, and this especially applies to the religious practices of the Druids. “The truth is

that the surviving Celtic elements were for the most part assimilated by Christianity in the Middle Ages” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 26), and due to that, the remnants of a traditional Celtic spirit can still partially be located in today’s Irish Catholicism. When Blake stated “Awake Albion awake! reclaim thy Reasoning Spectre. / Subdue Him to the Divine Mercy,[...] / Let the Four Zoa’s awake from Slumbers of Six Thousand Years” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 140), he may have tried to compel the English nation to turn away from the counter-traditional propaganda served by an already schismatic Christian church, and to resort to their ancestral and traditional spirit of Celtism instead. Blake had a deep interest in the Celtic tradition, Druids in particular, which according to some scholars, such as Frye, might have been one of the possible inspirations for his symbolism, but one thing that intrigued him the most was the claim about the culture of the British Druids being “the oldest on record” (Frye 175), as was firmly stated by the famous English antiquarians William Stukeley and Edward Davies³¹, who lived during Blake’s lifetime.

One should bear in mind that in addition to underlining Britain’s decline into the state of ancestral oblivion and distorted attitudes towards tradition, Blake believed that it was finally the time for Albion and its citizens to come out of the six-century-old slumber of historical deception laid out by the country’s dominating religious institutions. When Blake wrote in his epistle “To the Jews,” “Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion! Can it be? Is it a Truth that the Learned have explored? Was Britain the Primitive Seat of the Patriarchal Religion? If it is true: my title-page is also True, that Jerusalem was & is the Emanation of the Giant Albion./[...] ‘All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore’.” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 171), he was on the one hand questioning the authenticity of his contemporaries’ beliefs that Britain itself was the primeval center of the Biblical tradition, while on the other hand, he tried to challenge the ways in which the whole of Western Europe conceived of the truth about Christianity. It was Francis Wilford, one of the members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and contributor to the journal *Asiatick Researches*, who broke out with the claim that the Biblical patriarchs lived in Britain (see Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 108). This may have sounded convincing to the English public of the time, since it tied in with William Stukeley’s claim that the Druids—prior to Britain becoming Christianized—were “Phoenicians who had preserved the religion of Abraham uncorrupted,” (108) or with Edward Davies’ proclamation that “they were descendants of Ashkenaz, eldest son of Gomer and great-grandson of Noah” (108). Nonetheless, one thing that might have provoked Blake’s interest in Wilford’s

31 As suggested by Frye, “Blake follows Davies and...Stukeley in identifying the original world-culture with Druidism. According to Davies, the Druid culture began with the dispersion at Babel; Stukeley, who was the first important antiquarian to pronounce Stonehenge a Druid temple, thought it began with Abraham. Neither suggests that the Druid culture was pre-Adamic, but the idea that Druid civilization was titanic, or rather gigantic, Blake may have taken over from Davies” (Frye 174).

unsubstantiated claims of Britain being the original seat of Christianity was his firm belief in yet another, but highly puzzling claim that the entire European mythology was based on the teachings of Hinduism. Wilford, who shared his deep interests in the East with other Orientalists of the time (William Jones, H.T. Colebrooke, and Charles Wilkins), argues in his essay “On Mount Caucasus” (1801) that the province of Bamiyan³² is the true location of the Biblical garden of Eden, or that the prophet Noah disembarked with his family from the ark in the Kabul province. Undoubtedly, these were very bold claims made by Wilford, who despite being ridiculed by many European historians of his day, never stopped believing that “Aryavata, or India, is *probably*, the Ararat mentioned in scripture, whence the patriarchs journeyed from the east, to settle in Shinar” (Wilford 162).

Wilford’s claims seemed to have triggered an extensive amount of research and interest in the exploration of the possible roots of European religions and philosophies, not only during Blake’s time, but also long after. In the last two centuries, we have witnessed a collective interest in the study of, and affirmation of a bond between Western philosophy and the philosophies of the Middle East. Some current historians and philosophers have invested a great effort to show the possible connections between the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Eastern philosophies. In 1995, Peter Kingsley published a ground-breaking study *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, which aims to prove that Empedocles³³ (who supposedly lived in the fifth century B.C.), conjectured to have traveled widely across the Middle East, transmitted his ideas to Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. Even more compelling is Kingsley’s claim that Empedocles, as well as the Pythagoreans, formulated much of their teachings by borrowing from Eastern philosophies, and that the Indian philosophy of today owes much to the ancient Greeks. In his study, Kingsley establishes a remarkable parallel between the Greek and central Asian traditions through a recourse to the Persian Magi in the Zoroastrian tradition. Kingsley writes:

[I]t is certainly no accident that the closest parallel from ancient literature to Empedocles’ image of a person capable of descending to and returning from the underworld at will is the account by Lucian of the practices of a Zoroastrian magus at Babylon. Not only were these Persian Magi the people who provided the Greeks with their word *magos* or “magus” in the first place: we also know that their own religious and magical traditions are inextricably linked with the traditions of north-Asiatic shamanism, and a major problem in understanding the influence of shamanic traditions on the Greeks has been due to failure to appreciate the role played by Iranians as intermediaries in the process of transmission. (Kingsley 226–7)

³² Also known as Bamiyan, located in today’s Afghanistan.

³³ Kingsley notes that Empedocles is, “as far as we know, the first person who specifically reduced all of existence to four fundamental elements” (Kingsley 13), those of earth, air, fire, and water.

In addition, Kingsley makes a link between Heracles' name in Greek mythology to the name of the Assyrian hero Nergal (Erragal), claiming that the name Heracles has etymological roots in an Assyrian one; but he also attaches the representation of certain astrological and mathematical concepts in Pythagorean philosophy to those of Babylonia, and states that the Pythagorean mystery traditions have their origin in the region of Anatolia, and most likely Crete and Egypt.³⁴

Another study worth mentioning in this respect is *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, written by Thomas McEvilley; however, unlike Kingsley, whose primary focus is on establishing a link between the Greek Pythagorean tradition and the teachings from the Middle East and Ancient Persia, McEvilley explores the relation of the Greek Orphic, Pythagorean, and Platonic traditions to the teachings that sprung up in Asia Minor, India in particular. By employing the transmission of knowledge from India to pre-Socratic Greece, and its repeated exchange from Greece back to India during the Hellenistic period, McEvilley shows that the Hindu metaphysical system thus has many things in common with Plato's ideas, one of them being the relationship of the One-and-Many. McEvilley suggests that Plato is most like the Vedānta in his "description of the living world-being as a self-contained process, 'designed to feed itself on its own waste, and to act and be acted upon entirely by itself and within itself' (*Tim.* 33c–d), [which] is echoed in the Upanishadic definition of the *brahman* as 'the food that eats'" (McEvilley 164). McEvilley further proceeds with the statement that

In both Platonism and Hinduism, the adventure of the soul takes place within the framework of a doctrine of cyclical time which proceeds by a series of degenerating ages, culminates in destructions, and begins again. Plato's myth in the *Politicus* is very like the later Vaisnava myth of an age (*kalpa*) in which Visnu projects a world from himself, followed by an age when he draws it back into himself and sleeps; in each instance, an age in which god is active is followed by an age in which he is inactive (*otiosus*). (McEvilley 166)

With the rest of the book centered around the display of stark similarities between Neoplatonism and the teachings of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, one may say that McEvilley succeeded in completing what historiographers like Wilford aimed at exposing a few centuries before him. Western philosophy³⁵ has a close linkage to the teachings from Asia Minor and the Middle East, and most of what has been preserved today from the Greek and Roman civilizations, especially the writings from the Neoplatonic school³⁶ can be attributed to the

³⁴ For further details on the possible links between the Pythagorean tradition to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian teachings, see Kingsley's chapter on Pythagoreans and Neopythagoreans in *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 317–34.

³⁵ By Western I here specifically mean the philosophy of the Greco-Roman periods.

³⁶ The ascendancy of Christianity as the official religion of Rome and Greece, forced the Greek pagans, including the Neoplatonists to seek refuge in Persia.

Persian and Arabic civilizations where the physical manuscripts of the Neoplatonists were preserved, and India where the Neoplatonic spirit echoes in the Vedāntic texts.

In his own time, Blake, despite the then common European attitude of animosity towards anything that could possibly jeopardize the actual antiquity of Christianity or undermine its reliance on history that cannot and *should not* be disputed, showed signs of curiosity in the statements of Wilford and other European explorers of the Eastern world. As Damon asserts, “Blake was an enthusiast but no fool; and his claim of the British origin of everything is to be taken in precisely the same spirit which led him to put Gothic churches as well as druidic ruins in the land of Uz during the days of Job, and to assert that the Lamb of God in ancient times lived in England’s pleasant pastures, and that Jerusalem was built there among the mills” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 109). Since “all Religions are One” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 1), and derive from the same principle, then Jerusalem is not to be treated as a physical or geographical center of one particular religion, that is Christianity. Rather, Jerusalem is the center in which all world religions collide: it cannot be located on the map, nor is it defined by size or age. To Blake, Jerusalem is the center that lives within every human being, inspiring and directing all of our spiritual movements: “As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similars have one source / The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (2).

Naturally, “Blake’s seeming heresy” (Raine, *Blake and the New Age* 35) was not received with much enthusiasm from the English nation and the rest of Christian Europe, which, at all costs, regarded history as more legitimate than poetry. Jerusalem had to remain the seat of the world’s most ancient religion, and no attempt could be made to even try, at the least, to fix a multitude of the imprecise dates established by the colonial powers and religious authorities. When in *Jerusalem* Blake seemingly acclaims the antiquity of Christianity and its indisputable authenticity as laid out in the Gospel, he at the same time agrees with what Coomaraswamy openly confirms in his works, which is that “the reliance of Christianity upon supposedly historical ‘facts’ seems to be its greatest weakness” (Coomaraswamy, “Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge” 88). Consider the following lines by Blake, which, in a rather satirical manner, fully embrace Coomaraswamy’s daring statement mentioned above:

It is True, and cannot be controverted. Ye are united O ye Inhabitants of Earth in One Religion. The Religion of Jesus: the most Ancient, the Eternal: & the Everlasting Gospel—The Wicked will turn it to Wickedness, the Righteous to Righteousness. Amen! Huzza! Selah! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 171)

Blake’s attitude towards the Christian religion in Europe was largely shaped by the religious atmosphere pervading England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the

troubled period of Protestantism and numerous upheavals all across Britain in the seventeenth century³⁷, the English state was insistent, more than ever, in an “effort to monitor and control public religious practice in its own interest. The specific occasion of conflict in the 1790s was the increasingly insistent demand by Protestant Dissenters for removal of the civil disabilities they incurred by their refusal to accept the doctrine and liturgy of the Established Church” (Ryan 151). The gravity of ideological and religious upheavals in eighteenth-century England could not be minimized, as proven by the 1791 “Church and King” riots aimed specifically against the Dissenters and antinomian sects that were against the *exteriorization* of faith through the Bible or the Holy Trinity. Damon relates to this in the following manner: “As the Church clung to Reason and cast out Faith, so these [referring to some of the Dissenting churches] in their turn exalted Faith and rejected all Reason utterly” (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 17).

Blake was never able to come to compromise with the dictates of “the State religion” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 616), nor did he ever fully acknowledge the teachings of the antinomians and Dissenters. While he did praise them for their refusal of institutionally outlined religious laws, he possessed an open distaste for their inability to exemplify metaphysics in their teachings. The lines that follow have often been interpreted as heretical and disrespectful of the common Christian view of Jesus; however, it is also possible that they reflect Blake’s condemnation of the antinomian and Dissenters’ promotion of sin³⁸, as well as their complete denial of religious laws.

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
 Is my Visions Greatest Enemy
 Thine has a great hook nose like thine
 Mine has a snub nose like to mine...
 ...Thine loves the same world that mine hates
 Thy Heaven doors are my Hell Gates...
 ...Both read the Bible day & night
 But thou readst black where I read white. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 524)

37 In *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Guénon remarks that traditional Christianity in the Western world ended with the Middle Ages. Not only that, but “an altogether extraordinary fact is the rapidity with which Medieval civilization was completely forgotten; already in the seventeenth century, men had lost all idea of what it had been, and its surviving monuments no longer had any meaning for them, either intellectually or even aesthetically” (Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* 16). This might explain Blake’s admiration for the Middle Ages (which is also when the idea of the Everlasting Gospel originated, set out in the preachings of Joachim of Fiore, in the 12th century), as well as the fact that he looked for his primary inspiration in the authors who resorted to medieval mysticism, namely Jakob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg.

38 In addition to following the teachings of the Everlasting Gospel, all antinomian sects (and some Dissenters) promoted a belief that humans may sin as much as they please in this world, since God takes pleasure in pardoning them.

Many of the early Blake biographers have emphasized Blake's devotion to Christ and God: whether it was in his dedication to writing, painting or engraving, or even his treatment of his wife, friends and acquaintances³⁹. While Blake is clearly antinomian in his refusal of the Law as outlined by the Jewish or Anglican authorities, he strays far from denying the laws of Jesus, especially the ones specified in the Gospel of John. One of the most reliable pieces of evidence that can attest to this is an account from Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1830), where we are provided with Blake's reflections on life and God in one of his final speeches to his wife Catherine:

I glory[...] in dying, and have no grief but in leaving you, Katherine; we have lived happy, and we have lived long; we have been ever together, but we shall be divided soon. Why should I fear death? Nor do I fear it. I have endeavoured to live as Christ *commands* [emphasis added], and have sought to worship God truly—in my own house, when I was not seen of men. (Bentley 193)

Earlier in his life, Blake had acknowledged God's laws, as revealed by Christ, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where he, in the voice of an Angel, wrote: "Thou Idolater, is not God one? & is not he visible in Jesus Christ? and has not Jesus Christ given his sanction to the law of ten commandments and are not all other men fools, sinners, & nothings?" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 43). Right after this, Blake, in the voice of the Devil, proves that even the Devil's words contain partial truths: "if Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree; now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments: did he not mock at the sabbath, and so mock the sabbaths God? murder those who were murdered because of him? turn away the law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? [...] I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules" (43).

The image of Christ that Blake saw was not the unanimous and all-encompassing image of Christ as God. On the contrary, Blake's Christ does not carry eternal forgiveness for everyone in this world: Christ, according to Blake, is the Divine Human unsympathetic to those who flaunt his name for the accumulation of wealth and power, or serve God and his prophets only to mask their deceitful hearts. As Swinburne notes in his study of Blake's life and works, *William Blake: A Critical Essay*, the "confusion of the Creator with the Saviour[...] was to Blake the main rock of offence in all religious systems" (Swinburne 80), and this is exactly

39 In a letter to his son, engraver and artist James Ward—a personal acquaintance of Blake—praised Blake for his genius and incommensurable goodness. As he wrote in June 1855: "It is evident Blake's [order of spirits] was not an evil one, for he was a good man, the most harmless and free from guile" (Gilchrist 325).

where Christianity, as understood today, loses in its metaphysics. For if Jesus is/was God, would that also mean that God died instantaneously with Jesus' crucifixion? That is certainly not the case. As Blake confirms with the line "But thou read'st black where I read white" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 542), one's image of God as a manifestation of entire humanity is another person's misconception of God as Jesus. As Blake instructs, all of us, including Jesus, exemplify God's image, which can be fully realized once we learn of the ways to replace the bodily garment with the imagination. To further support this claim, it is worth noting that, for Blake, the duty of every human being is to attain to the state of Divinity. As Crabb Robinson notes in his diary: "On my asking in what light he viewed the great question concerning the Divinity of Jesus Christ, he said—'He is the only God.' But then he added—'And so am I and so are you'" (quoted in Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 146).

In *There Is No Natural Religion*, Blake shows that "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only. / Therefore God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he is" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 3). What is more, Blake once again—this time in his "Annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*—reminds us of the ability to embody Divinity, when he writes: "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (664). How we construct the image of God and his prophets is very much dependent on our perception and recognition of God's creations, particularly humans. And again in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake points out, this time in the voice of the Devil, that "The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius. and loving the [PL 23] greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God" (43). This also means that the worship of God should not necessarily come through the book, but should instead be achieved through the multiplicity of spiritual states existent in the universal order. The spiritual states of the human are epitomized in the human face, "for the mortal face is formed in the likeness of the God within. Every being bears outwardly the 'signature' or, to use Swedenborg's term, the 'correspondence' of its inner nature; and humanity is formed according to the archetype of the Divine Humanity" (Raine, *Blake and the New Age* 36).

The inward journey requires one to pass through different stages of the unseen and unknowable realities, and to undergo a set of experiences that finally result in "Deliverance" (Guénon's term in Guénon, *The Multiple States of the Being*) or the attainment of a supreme identity. Undertakings of this kind became an impossibility during Blake's time, for the majority of the English nation chose to side with the teachings of contemporary philosophers who strictly instructed that "A Spirit and A Vision are[...] a cloudy vapour or a nothing" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 541); or yet, with the Church's estrangement from the "metaphysical structure and iconography of the *mundus imaginalis*, [... and]

the knowledge of [specific] noetic realities” (Uždavinys, *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* 42). Being corrupted as it was during Blake’s lifetime, Christianity in the West no more embodied that theosophical or traditional outlook that it used to carry for centuries, implanting the concept of Eternity as an element present only in another world, the world reserved for the souls that have departed from the terrestrial world. With human existence reduced to meager survival in a world bound by the armors of time and space, the road to *sophia* (metaphysical wisdom) was made very difficult and almost impassable. Once philosophy started denying the ability to work towards the flourishing of the soul and its inherent quality of uniting humans with God, alternative teachings and traditions had to be sought.

It was primarily this search for the metaphysical, and geographically remote traditions which had represented a great mystery and awe to the Western world, that gave rise to a heightened interest in the East throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Following the German, Italian and French antiquarians, who were rushing back to their homelands to recount the stories of their *exotic* and enlightening encounters with the Indian gurus, Buddhist monks, or Muslim saints and mystics, England resolved to once again fortify their colonial supremacy in the world, this time through archaeological research and scholastic accumulation of diverse mythological and religious texts from the East. As multiple translations of Eastern texts were becoming accessible in the English language, owing to a handful of philologists and Orientalists—Charles Wilkins, William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed—the Romantic authors across Britain were showing unmitigated interest in that mysterious, almost sublime part of the world. Never before did England witness such a boom in travel literature, or an emergence of poets who, while still retaining the typical literary principles of the previous generations, began to traverse—either through physical or mental modes of travel—the boundaries of India, China, and the Middle East.

The Romantics’ literary expeditions offered an insight and unexpected entry into imaginary lands and regions, but at the same time, they managed to break the disparaging attitude towards religions outside the Western traditions: Coleridge’s opium-seduced mind takes us into the enchanting gardens of Kublai Khan; and while Byron boasts of the captivating beauty of the Mediterranean women and the fatal seduction of women in the Orient, Shelley recounts the story of a young poet (in *Alastor*) whose search for “strange truths in undiscovered lands” (Shelley 95) takes him all the way to Egypt and the Levant (Athens, Tyre, and Jerusalem). As David Weir recounts: “In principle, then, there is no reason why Blake should not have been receptive to the antiquities of Asia that were coming to light in his lifetime. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that Blake took an interest in Eastern mythology [and traditions,] and incorporated elements of it into his own system” (Weir 7). Whether it was for the purpose of proving that “religion cannot be replaced with rationality,” or “to replace

institutional religion with individual mythology” (7), or yet, to find the lost, metaphysical⁴⁰ strains of thought lacking in the part of the world he physically inhabited during his time, Blake’s art and poetry exhibit some astonishing traces of Eastern teachings and philosophy, including a highly positive treatment of both Hinduism and Islam.

⁴⁰ Coomaraswamy states the following: “It is from metaphysics that the West has turned away in its desperate endeavor to live by bread alone, an endeavor of which the Dead Sea fruits are before our eyes. It is only because this metaphysics still survives as a living power in Eastern societies, in so far as they have not been corrupted by the withering touch of Western, or rather, *modern* civilization... and not to Orientalize the West, but to bring back the West to a consciousness of the roots of her own life and of values that have been transvalued in the most sinister sense, that Guénon asks us to turn to the East” (Coomaraswamy, “Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge” 90–1).

Chapter 2

The Study of Hinduism and Islam as an Impetus for Blake's Imagination

The preposterous *Urizen* trilogy was written, apparently, to prove that “it was not Satan, but the God of this world, the author of the moral codes, who fell” [...]; whilst *The Song of Los* is a eulogy of Mahometanism at the expense of Christianity. (Osmond 281)



HIS CHAPTER UTILIZES DIVERSE HISTORICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL methodologies to explore the reception of Hindu and Islamic texts that reached Europe, Britain in particular, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, I provide a historiological analysis of carefully chosen evidence from Blake's works, in order to show that he not only possessed expertise in his native language, but that he had at least a working knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Italian. Before they became accessible in the English language, several Hindu and Islamic texts were already available in these languages. In addition, the chapter utilizes different sources to show Blake's possible knowledge of Islamic and Hindu source texts.

The exact date marking the beginning of Blake's interest in the East cannot be determined with complete accuracy. Critics often point to the period between 1785 (see Weir; and Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*), when the first known English translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* became available, and 1790, when Blake probably started composing *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which according to Damon, shows the first clues to his knowledge of and fascination with the Hindu teachings. Based upon the hermeneutical ideas in *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (1758) by Swedenborg⁴¹, who in Corbin's words is “the [true] prophet of the internal sense of the Bible” (Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* 38), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* shows that Blake was also very

⁴¹ It is well-known that Blake made annotations to Swedenborg's works, more specifically to *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, *Divine Providence*, and *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*

familiar with the rest of the works from the Swedish theosopher. If anything, there is no reason to doubt that Blake had acquainted himself with Swedenborg's earlier writings, namely his *Memorabilia* or *Spiritual Diary* (1747), or even his last work, *True Christian Religion* (1771). It was exactly here that Swedenborg, through an exhaustive analysis of the Old and New Testaments, openly declared that God's revelations, even before they were revealed to the people of Israel, were given to the people in Asia. As Swedenborg writes:

From all this it can be seen that there was in the world, especially in Asia, an ancient Word before the Israelitish Word... [and] this Word is preserved in heaven among the angels who lived in those times; and moreover, that it is still in existence at the present day among the nations of Great Tartary (Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion* 266). These ancient people, among whom that Word is still in use in heaven, were in part from the land of Canaan and the neighboring countries, as Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Chaldea, Assyria, Egypt, Sidon, Tyre, and Nineveh; the inhabitants of all of which kingdoms had representative worship and consequently a knowledge of correspondences. (279)

Tartaria Magna or Great Tartary most likely applies to "Tibet or, [...] to Outer Mongolia" (Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam* 53), which could possibly point to "the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism" (53). This is an altogether interesting aspect worthy of further analysis; however, what is really striking in Swedenborg's visionary analysis of the root of God's revelations, outlined in the paragraph above, is that he assigns the Word upon the inhabitants of countries which, while having a great significance in the formation of Christianity, are at the same time either the birthplaces of the Islamic religion, or were at some point in history largely dominated by Islam. In addition, all of the listed countries represent the centers of Zoroastrianism, and the Ismaili-Shi'a version of Islam. Whether or not Swedenborg was trying to suggest that the "knowledge of correspondences" is representative of the Islamic aspect—or has a superlative existence in the Islamic tradition—cannot be easily discerned, but one has to bear in mind that spiritual states and Divine truths can, according to Swedenborg, all be located simultaneously in different religions, meaning that Swedenborg's "vision of hierarchy, [is] vast enough to contain all religions" (53).

To what extent, if at all, did Swedenborg influence Blake in his understanding of the ancient seat of religions? Was it Swedenborg's claims about Asia as the starting point of God's providence that forged Blake's belief in the Middle and Far East being the source of all traditions and cultures? Were Blake's attitudes towards the philosophies from Asia, and possibly Africa, shaped solely through an examination of a number of writings made by the English antiquarians and Orientalists during his time, or would Blake receive most of his information firsthand, by having ties to particular circles that performed or were acquainted with the

religious and ontological practices of Hindus and Muslims? In an age when the “solvents of transcontinental exploration, of colonisation and of scientific discovery were eagerly welcomed” (Cavaliero ix), Blake voiced a summative judgment of the undeserving neglect of non-Christian traditions. Namely, in his 1809 *Descriptive Catalogue*, he writes: “The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews[...] How other antiquities came to be neglected and disbelieved, while those of the Jews are collected and arranged, is an enquiry, worthy of both the Antiquarian and the Divine” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 543). Prior to this, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it seems as if Blake harshly condemns the Judeo-Christian conviction that the Old Testament is the oldest sacred document in human history. Speaking through the voice of Ezekiel, Blake remarks:

[...]and we so loved our God. that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled; from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews.

This,[...], like all firm perswasions, is come to pass, for all nations believe the jews code and worship the jews god, and what greater subjection can be. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 39)

When Blake speaks of “the vulgar” who mock the sacredness of other religions, he primarily refers to the English people, whose fabricated myths depicted religions of other nations as ruthless and primitive. “In Blake’s time,” as David Weir explains, “the realization that the Hindu [or any other] religion might be of greater antiquity than the ancient Hebrew faith helped to undermine the authority of the Bible” (Weir 47). The Bible, that “State Trick, thro which tho’ the People at all times could see they never had. the power to throw off” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 616), was England’s sacred code, firmly established with the arrival of Protestantism, that the priests and statesmen used in order to justify many of the ills in the eighteenth century, as well as the people’s sufferings induced by the imperialistic need for wealth and power. This would very much explain Blake’s concern for non-Christian religious traditions, for both the Church and the state had to preserve the Bible as an uncompromising tool used to stultify the people’s right to intellectual freedom and the power to practice religion as experienced and interpreted by their own hearts. As Blake once declared: “The Bible or Word of God, Exclusive of Conscience or the Word of God Universal, is that Abomination which like the Jewish ceremonies is for ever removed & henceforth every man may converse with God & be a King & Priest in his own house” (615).

The major factors in Blake’s exposure to the East were the mythographic and scholarly achievements made by members of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. Founded in 1784, by Sir William Jones, the Asiatic Society played a crucial role in framing “the discourse surrounding

contemporary India, and trying to assimilate India and the East more generally into the European imaginative landscape” (Rudd 56). At the time when the overseas operations of the East India Company came under scrutiny⁴², William Jones and Charles Wilkins—both largely funded by Warren Hastings, and both members of the company itself—were exploring the culture of India and other parts of the East through an immersion into a study of Eastern languages, and the translation of ancient Eastern texts and holy manuscripts. Not only that, but “Jones[... also] used his position as a jurist to help establish a system whereby legal disputes in India would be adjudicated by Indian laws, and Charles Wilkins used his skills as a printer to fabricate the first movable Devanagari typeface to make the printing and distribution of Sanskrit texts possible” (Weir 21). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Jones’ accounts on India and Persia reached immense popularity across England. His translations of Hindu and Persian texts, as well as his studies on Hindu mythology, were being published in several periodicals, such as the *Critical Review*, the *Monthly Review*, the *Analytical Review*, the *British Critic*, and the famous Oriental journal the *Asiatick Researches*. While both Andrew Rudd⁴³ and David Weir question Jones’ true intentions behind his interest in the East, we cannot deny the positive contributions Jones made in transforming the stereotypical views of the English in their assessment of Eastern cultures.

Upon his arrival at Calcutta, India, in 1783, Jones was fairly ignorant of Hindu religion, literature, and the Sanskrit language. Modern readers will find it striking that it took him only three years (1785–88) to master the language fully, which he managed to learn with a help from a non-Brahman teacher. George Hendrick, in his introduction to Charles Wilkins’ translation of the *Gita*, has suggested that Jones was also considerably aided by Wilkins in his study of Sanskrit (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* vi). Jones’ ability to master Sanskrit promptly might not seem unusual, after all, considering his inclination to acquire the knowledge of

42 It took more than a hundred years before the unsupervised actions of a British company of merchants in India came under investigation. In his book *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770–1830*, Andrew Rudd mentions some of the incidents that changed the public perception of the company: the responsibility of the East India Company in the notorious 1769–70 Bengal famine (as the company exercised the *de facto* rule in Bengal, they had ownership over the land, which they used for the growth of indigo and poppy seeds—at the cost of rice and other nutrition crops—as well as to gather money through extremely high taxation), the exploitation of the people in the Indian region, and the allegations against Warren Hastings for his supposed “high crimes and misdemeanours” (Hastings was tried before the House of Lords for eight years, and was finally acquitted in 1795). David Weir has pointed out that the main initiator of the trial against Hastings was Edmund Burke, who made his accusations “in the form of humanitarian outrage against the treatment of Indians during Hastings’s tenure as Governor-General. Basically, Burke made Hastings the scapegoat for all the disorder and exploitation that had occurred during his direction of the Company” (Weir 25).

43 Rudd seems to be in accord with Edward Said’s contention that Jones’ interest in Eastern texts springs primarily from his need to turn the Orient into an entity intellectually subdued to the tastes of the European audience.

other languages⁴⁴. Jones believed in an ability of languages—both ancient and modern—to nurture one’s mind with diverse knowledges and cognitions. As he notes in “A Discourse on the Institution of a Society”:

But I have ever considered languages as the mere instruments of real learning, and think them improperly confounded with learning itself: the attainment of them is, however, indispensably necessary; and if to the *Persian, Armenian, Turkish, and Arabic*, could be added not only the *Sanscrit*,[...] —but even the *Chinese, Tartarian, Japanese*, and the various insular dialects, an immense mine would then be open, in which we might labour with equal delight and advantage. (Jones, *A Discourse on the Institution of a Society for Enquiring into the History, Civil and Natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia, Delivered at Calcutta, January 15th, 1784: A charge to the Grand Jury at Calcutta, December 4th, 1783: and a hymn to Camdeo, translated from the Hindu into Persian, and from the Persian into English.* 10)

The thing that inspired Jones to learn Sanskrit in such a short period was, as suggested by Garland Cannon and Siddheshwar Pandey, his “non-literary and humanitarian zeal to translate the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Ordinances of Manu) so that the Indian people might be ruled justly according to ‘their own prejudices, civil and religious, and suffered to enjoy their own customs unmolested’” (Cannon and Pandey 528). What is more, his desire to prove wrong the European scholars who held the opinion that Oriental languages lack poetic beauty and richness resulted in an unprecedented outcome: towards the end of the eighteenth century, a substantial amount of Jones’ works started reaching England, and they popularly received. After his death, Jones played a crucial part in inspiring an interest and love for the East among the European Romantics. Among his works, it is worthy to mention his translations of poems from several Asian languages—Hafez’s ghazals from the Persian language (1772), the Turkish ode on the spring by Mesihî (1772), Hatifi’s⁴⁵ *Laili Majnun* (1788), the Gita Govinda of the twelfth-century poet Jayadeva (1792); the translation of a famous Indian drama *Sacotalá*, or *The Fatal Ring*, by Kālidās (1789), moralistic Hindu fables, extracts from the Vedas, and of various Hindu odes and hymns; and Jones’ essays on the mythological and literary tradition of India, as well as his essays on Dante, Ariosto, and Aristotle, to name a few. On top of this, what actually made Jones famous were his comprehensive studies on the grammar of the Sanskrit and Persian languages. Today, Jones is considered to be one of the founders of comparative linguistics, and this is primarily due to his observation that Sanskrit,

44 Even though modern linguists debate Jones’ knowledge of certain languages, it is believed that he knew twenty-eight languages, including Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Persian, Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, and the runic alphabet.

45 Hatifi was a sixteenth-century Persian poet.

Greek and Latin have the same root, and that they are related to Persian, Celtic, German, even Semitic languages. His attempt to transliterate the Sanskrit letters into the English alphabet, though not perfect, was in a way groundbreaking, because Jones managed to import more than a hundred Sanskrit words into English. In his translations, Jones would often leave the words in their original, in order to retain the beauty of Oriental languages⁴⁶, and to convey the mythological and mystical aspects of certain literary works. The extent to which Jones actually affected the English language can be seen in the fact that “even modern translators still use these words [Sanskrit words], not their English equivalents” (531).

When Jones' *Grammar of the Persian Language* was circulated in London, in 1771, not only did it provoke considerable attention among literary circles, but it also became a revered book for many European travelers going overseas into India or the Middle East. The *Grammar* made Jones into a renowned linguist, even before he began studying the Sanskrit language and grammar. Already in the Preface to the *Grammar*, Jones points to the neglect of Eastern literary traditions, which—according to him—hold the key to an understanding of “rich, melodious, and elegant” (Jones, *Kitāb-i Šakarīstān dar nahvī-yi zabān-i pārsī tasnīf-i Yūnus-i Ūkštūrđī = A grammar of the Persian language i*) writing, and unravel the world of undefiled wisdom and unknowable concepts. Jones' critique of the neglect or avoidance of Eastern traditions in Europe is highly interesting. One may say that, perhaps better than any other scholar during his time, Jones—as shown in the passage below—managed to superbly sum up the general feeling of Europeans towards the literary, artistic, and cultural heritage of the East:

Some men never heard of the Asiatick writings, and others will not be convinced that there is any thing valuable in them; [...]some detest the Persians, because they believe in Mahomed, and others despise their language, because they do not understand it: we all love to excuse, or to conceal, our ignorance, and are seldom willing to allow any excellence beyond the limits of our own attainment: like the savages, who thought that the sun rose and set for them alone, and could not imagine that the waves, which surrounded their island, left coral and pearls upon any other shore. (Jones, *Kitāb-i Šakarīstān dar nahvī-yi zabān-i pārsī tasnīf-i Yūnus-i Ūkštūrđī = A grammar of the Persian language ii*)

Whether or not Blake had actually read Jones' studies on the Sanskrit and Persian languages is something that cannot be confirmed; nonetheless, he was doubtless well aware of

⁴⁶ In his essay “On the Hindus”, Jones praises the structural beauty of Sanskrit, placing it above Greek and Latin: “The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident”(Jones, “On the Hindus” 26).

Jones' work and his efforts to develop sympathy—as in the words of Andrew Rudd, who sees Jones' exposition of Eastern texts as an incentive for a sudden use of sympathy in the treatment of non-European themes by late eighteenth-century authors, or rather, of his passionate search for the teaching(s) that could possibly tie all religious and philosophical traditions together. If we assume that Blake had at some point in his life read Jones' Preface to *A Grammar of the Persian Language*, he would have certainly admired Jones' audacity to reproach the ignorance and close-mindedness of the European people, especially the religious orders, in their perception of the East and the classification of religions into separate strains, according to the sources they originated from. It is exactly this radical attitude towards religion that Blake had in common with Jones. Additionally, we have to realize that Blake would also have admired Jones for his unique ability to obtain knowledge of multiple languages. Blake himself was very fond of learning new languages, which he believed are capable of addressing “to the Imagination” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 703) and contributing to the flourishing of wisdom.

It truly is an astonishing fact that most scholars, even if they happen to ascribe the knowledge of foreign languages to Blake, will not mention anything beyond Greek and Latin. Raine, Damon, and Harper (see *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*) were among the first to suggest that Blake's thought was largely shaped by Neoplatonic philosophy. There is no reason to doubt this, for Blake has shown through his paintings that he was very interested in indulging himself in the metaphysical interpretations of Greek art and literature, as can be seen in his drawings “The Sea of Time and Space,” “The Judgment of Paris,” “Hecate,” or, his engraving for Darwin's *Botanic Garden*. Blake was affiliated with several individuals whose lives were devoted to the study of the art and teachings of the Greeks. Firstly, William Hayley, a poet, and a major patron for whom Blake did several engravings, was known to be a great admirer of the Greek language and philosophy. Secondly, John Flaxman⁴⁷, a sculptor and a drawer, whose works of art exhibit the neoclassical style, is now remembered as an admirer of Homer and illustrator of Pope's *Homer*. Thirdly, George Cumberland, another artist and writer who was a very close friend of Blake's, in 1798, published a book entitled *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar*, in which he created a utopia called Sophis, characterized by the classical Greek virtues. And finally, there is Thomas Taylor, revered by Raine as England's greatest philosopher, now famous for his elaborate studies of the Greek philosophers that resulted in the most magnificent English translations of the metaphysical teachings of ancient Greece. As Raine confirms, Taylor would come to Flaxman's house to deliver lectures on Platonism, and this was “presumably before 1787, when Flaxman departed for Italy, there to remain for several years” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I 70).

47 Blake and Flaxman were very close friends, and several of Blake's “Greek” paintings were based on Flaxman's drawings.

In her basic outline of Blake's life and work, *William Blake*, Kathleen Raine suggests that Blake "might not have studied Latin and Greek beyond the rudiments" (*William Blake* 12); however, there is a great likelihood that Blake pursued his training, at least in Greek, beyond reading comprehension. Foster Damon points out that it was Hayley himself who "taught Blake Greek, through the medium of Cowper's Homer" (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 169). Damon's claim can be easily verified by one of Hayley's letters to the Rev. John Johnson, to whom he would provide bits and pieces about his encounters and working hours with Blake. As Hayley wrote in his 1801 letter to Johnson:

Blake and I read every evening that copy of the Iliad which your namesake (the book-seller) of St. Paul's was so good as to send me; comparing it with the first edition, and with the Greek, as we proceed. We shall be glad to see Odyssey also, *as soon as it is visible*. (quoted in Gilchrist 163)

In a letter to his brother James, dated January 30, 1803, William Blake confirms his ability to read and understand Greek, but what also stands out here is his affirmation of the knowledge of the Latin and Hebrew languages. Teeming with both enthusiasm, and slight regret for not immersing himself into a study of languages at an earlier stage in his life, Blake writes:

I go on Merrily with my Greek & Latin: am very sorry that I did not begin to learn languages early in life as I find it very Easy. am now learning my Hebrew אִבְרִית I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar & the Testament is my chief master. astonishing indeed is the English Translation it is almost word for word & if the Hebrew Bible is as well translated which I do not doubt it is we need not doubt of its having been translated as well as written by the Holy Ghost. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 727)

Blake was surely impressed by Homer's *Iliad*, and its portrayal of the "struggle which is the soul of the Greek world: Occident *versus* Orient. The spiritual separation of Hellas from the East, passing into complete opposition, is the key-note which Homer strikes in the *Iliad*" (Snider 184). Blake's comment on the validity of the English translation of the New Testament—his ability to judge that is remarkable—as well as his usage of the Hebrew script comes as very striking⁴⁸. Knowing how much of an avid reader of the Bible he was, Blake

⁴⁸ Note that Blake also used Greek alphabet right above Chapter 1 to *Jerusalem* (transcribing the names of Moses and Jesus), or in his "To the Public," the opening of *Jerusalem*, where he provides Jesus' last words entirely in Greek (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 145–6). In addition, he wrote an entire epigraph to *The Four Zoas* in Greek (see *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 300), placing it above the passage from the King James Bible. This could be a potential proof that his knowledge of Greek consisted beyond the mere ability to read its alphabet. Another thing that could sustain this claim is that the Greek language is very complex due to the fact that verbs have synthetic inflectional forms.

would have surely been interested in studying the Old Testament in the original language. In addition, his search for that peculiar link between the spiritual and physical needs in time and space could have very possibly led him to the study of Hebrew, since “both the ancient Greek poets and the Hebrew prophets apparently wrote as though they had a divine commission” (Fisher 178).

If we also consider Raine’s claims about Blake’s possible interest in the tradition of Cabalism (see “Jesus the Imagination,” Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. II* 189–213), which is very gnostic in its essence, plus the likelihood that some of Blake’s terms might be derived from Cabbala (most likely through Agrippa or Fludd), then this would further explain Blake’s desire to study Hebrew. Northrop Frye points to the similarities between the fallen giant mentioned in the Cabbalistic teachings and Blake’s usage of a giant, Albion, whose fall resulted in the universe we currently live in: “This myth of a primeval giant whose fall was the creation of the present universe is not in the Bible itself, but has been preserved by the Cabbala in its conception of Adam Kadmon, the universal man who contained within his limbs all heaven and earth, to whom Blake refers” (Frye 125). On a few more occasions, Blake uses the Hebrew script in his poems, namely *Milton* and *The Laocoön* (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 131; *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 273), which cannot fully testify to his possible mastery over the language. Nonetheless, what is worth noting is the way Blake uses Hebrew in his work. Along with Greek, the Hebrew alphabet in Blake’s poetry works as an additional piece of the puzzle in his symbolism: compared to the familiar Latin alphabet, the alphabets of the Hebrew and Greek languages look like a sequence of carefully designed symbols, which Blake uses to refer either to God or his prophets, or other creations in the universe physically invisible to humans.⁴⁹ Blake’s usage of the Hebrew and Greek script, in line with the Latin one used in English, might also come from the need to underline an indispensable unity of both the Old and New Testaments, so terribly overlooked in the Western Christian tradition—especially in Blake’s time—and, on a larger scale, to point to the unity of all religions. As such, Blake invites us to read his works as an affirmation of God’s principles and the totality of Divine manifestation.

That Blake instructed himself in Latin is a long established fact. Gilchrist was among the first to acknowledge this: “He [Blake] taught himself something of Latin” (Gilchrist 332), and later on, both Raine and Damon confirmed Gilchrist’s statement. Blake was an avid admirer of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* “Ovid make[s] us reverence The Word of God,” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 270), and Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* (“Apuleius’s Golden Ass & Ovids Metamorphosis & others of the like kind are Fable yet they contain Vision in a Sublime degree” (556))—both written in Latin—so there is a great likelihood that

49 Note also that in one instance, namely in *The Laocoön*, Blake uses the Hebrew word for Lilith, which, according to the Hebrew mythology, is supposed to symbolize Satan’s wife, and the first woman before Eve.

Blake tried reading their works in the original, despite the fact that English counterparts were available at the time. One also needs to bear in mind that Swedenborg would write his works in Latin, and Blake would probably have been interested in reading them in the original language.

Blake's interest in languages does not end here. In fact, Blake in the course of his life showed a deep appreciation of and interest in Italian and French⁵⁰. Once introduced to the works of Dante, Blake became impressed by his genius, and at the request of another British painter and engraver, John Linnell, started making illustrations for Dante's *Divina Commedia*. And so, "with characteristic fervour and activity of intellect, he [Blake], at sixty-seven years of age, applied himself to learning Italian, in order to read his author in the original. Helped by such command of Latin as he had, he taught himself the language in a few weeks; sufficiently, that is, to comprehend that difficult author substantially, if not grammatically" (Gilchrist 332). Gilchrist further supports this claim when he provides us with another account of the role John Linnell played in Blake's introduction to Italian. As Linnell once recounted:

I believe that the first copy of Cennino Cennini's book seen in England was the one I obtained from Italy, and gave to Blake, who soon made it out, and was gratified to find that he had been using the same materials and methods as Cennini describes, particularly the carpenter's glue. (Gilchrist 369)

The book Linnell refers to is nothing else but Cennini's guidebook centered mainly on fresco painting, different painting techniques, and painting with tempera. *Il Libro dell'Arte* (*The Book of Art*, or *The Craftsman's Handbook*, as it is often translated) dates back to either the late 14th or early 15th century⁵¹, with the first English translation of the book, as suggested by Daniel Varney Thompson, done by Mrs. Merrifield (1844) (see d'Andrea Cennini ix). Since Blake left his mortal coil in 1827, this means that he could read Cennini only in Italian, and that his understanding of Cennini's painting techniques was possible only through a good command of the language itself. Geoffrey Keynes points to yet another noteworthy fact that could relate to Blake's immersion in the study of the Italian language, and that is Blake's friendship with Henry Francis Cary, one of the translators of Dante and a friend of Charles Lamb. "Cary's biographer thinks that it was most likely [Thomas Griffiths] Wainwright who introduced Cary to Blake, in 1825, the year in which Crabb Robinson, calling on Blake on December 17, found him at work on the Dante illustrations with Cary's translation open

50 Compared to his solid knowledge of the Italian language, Blake does not seem to have had such a good grasp of French. Raine affirms his ability to read French (see Raine, *William Blake* 12), and Gilchrist mentions that Blake, prior to studying Italian, taught himself some French. Blake biographers have not yet been able to discover documents that could possibly prove Blake's acquisition of the language.

51 Critics seem to disagree on the specific date.

before him” (Keynes 102). In addition to Cary’s superb command of Dante’s purity of diction, Blake would have been interested in using the translation accompanied by engravings of his close friend John Flaxman, which greatly added to the visions Dante conveyed in his *Divina Commedia*.

In 1808, London welcomed the publication of Charles Wilkins’ *A Grammar of the Sanskrit Language*. In the Foreword to Wilkins’ *Grammar*, it is suggested that the book itself was originally intended as a part of Wilkins’ project in which he would also contribute the translations of the entire *Mahabharata*, and a dictionary of the Sanskrit language: “The Grammar was the only part of the project that was completed. He never finished the dictionary, and only translated about one-third of the [*Mahabharata*],” including the entire *Bhagavad-Gita* (see Foreword to Wilkins, *A Grammar of the Sanskrit Language*). As with Jones’ *Grammar of the Persian Language*, Blake would have certainly been interested in Wilkins’ study of Sanskrit⁵². And while we can be fairly certain of Blake’s awareness of the book itself—knowing that critics have already established Blake’s involvement with certain Orientalists of his day—we cannot determine whether Blake ever read Wilkins’ *Grammar*. Nonetheless, Wilkins’ translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* seems to have intensified Blake’s interest in the Orient. Despite the translation already being available in 1785, Blake, interestingly, made his first reference to it twenty-four years later, in his *Descriptive Catalogue*. As he wrote in his elaboration of *The Bramins—A Drawing* (a painting now lost), “The subject is, Mr. Wilkin, translating the Geeta; an ideal design, suggested by the first publication of that part of the Hindoo Scriptures, translated by Mr. Wilkin” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 548). It remains a mystery why it took Blake so long to refer to Wilkins’ *Gita*, and finally recognize one of the major scholarly breakthroughs of the eighteenth century: “it is unclear when in this time span Blake produced the painting, or read the *Geeta*” (Connolly 145). Nonetheless, there is a great likelihood that Blake read and became fully acquainted with Wilkins’ translation in 1790, when Joseph Johnson—a prominent London based publisher who, among other things, would sell books illustrated by Blake—made a reference to Wilkins’ *Gita* in the *Analytical Review*, in a summary of an article “On the Literature of the Hindoos”:

Since Europeans are indebted to the Dutch for almost all they know of Arabic, and to the French for all they know of Chinese, let them now receive from our nation the first accurate knowledge of Sanscrit, and of the valuable works composed in it; but if they wish to form a correct idea of Indian religion and literature, let them begin with forgetting all that has been written on the subject, by ancients or moderns, before the publication of the Gita. (quoted in Weir 91)

52 According to one of the volumes of the *Asiatic Journal* (Volume xx), Wilkins published his last study on the Sanskrit language, namely on “the roots of the Sanskrit language,[...] in 1815” (K.H. 169)

David Weir makes a very significant point in his mentioning of Blake's birth of interest in the antinomian strains of thought right at the time of circulation of Wilkins' *Gita* (Weir 40; Weir 91). However, Blake's interest in antinomian traditions did not reach its peak before 1787, when Blake's brother Robert died. In addition, this was the time when Blake's thought became considerably shaped by Swedenborg and the teachings of the New Jerusalem Church, and most likely other antinomian teachings. One also has to keep in mind that around this time, possibly much earlier⁵³ than is generally thought, Blake immersed himself in a study of Boehme's philosophical writings. And yet, Blake's first actual mentioning of Boehme appears in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the writings of the German mystic are placed alongside the invaluable musings of Paracelsus and Swedenborg (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 43).

Therefore, Wilkins' remarks in a Preface to the *Gita* could have found their way to Blake, whose unwinding of "the end of a golden string" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 230) works towards leading humanity to a universal origin of philosophy and religions. A human being is "a form & organ of life" (367) that operates within the plane of Divine manifestation, i.e. human creations descend from the Divine, and ascend back to the Divine. "This world," as Frye puts it, "is one of perceiver and perceived, of subject and objects; the world of imagination is one of creators and creatures. In his creative activity the [human] expresses the creative activity of God; and as all men are contained in Man or God, so all creators are contained in the Creator" (Frye 30). To Blake, humans and their creations are all contained in one source, in one God alone,⁵⁴ meaning that everything in the material world has a spiritual substance. It is exactly through this substance that Blake sees the material world (not the other way round), and envisions a universe in which humans resist superficial desires, and pursue "a limitless life" (Kabīr, as quoted in Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays* 7) clothed in the garments of the soul. "This inseparable unity of the material and spiritual world," as Coomaraswamy explains, "is made the foundation of the Indian culture, and determines the whole character of her social ideals" (7). Thus, when Blake labeled the *Gita* a "part of the Hindoo Scriptures" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 548), he clearly meant something more than simply aligning the *sacred testament* of Hinduism, the *Mahabharata*, with the Christian faith. Apart from

53 In a letter to John Flaxman, dated 12 September 1800, Blake recounts on his visions in the following manner: "Paracelsus & Behmen appear'd to me. terrors appear'd in the Heavens above/ And in Hell beneath & a mighty & awful change threatend the Earth/ The American War began" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 707–8). If we are to recognize Blake's chronological account in a vision, then we have to sign with Foster Damon (*A Blake Dictionary*) and Bryan Aubrey (*Watchmen of Eternity*) in their claims that Blake discovered Boehme as early as 1775, or even before the American Revolution.

54 Assuming the voice of Urizen, the creator of this world, Blake states in *The Book of Urizen*: "Laws of peace, of love, of unity:/ Of pity, compassion, forgiveness./ Let each chuse one habitation: / His ancient infinite mansion: / One command, one joy, one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, One God, One Law" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 72).

viewing the *Gita* and an entire written legacy of Hinduism in purely theological terms, Blake saw in it a philosophical teaching—a teaching similar to his beliefs—that recognizes ethereal, non-worldly realities, and cultivates the unity of all creation(s) in one source, and one substance. As Tristanne Connolly suggests: “Like Wilkins [...], Blake shows genuine interest in and respect for Indian cultural productions as contributing to collective human knowledge, revealing portions of divine truth and ultimate reality” (Connolly 146).

Wilkins’ claim that “the most learned *Brāhmins* of the present time are Unitarians according to the doctrines of *Kṛēṣhnā*; at the same time [...] they believe but in one God, an universal spirit” (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 24) could have drawn Blake to explore the teachings of Hindus more closely. David Weir relates that it was mainly Wilkins’ radical and antinomian claims about the Brahmins that impelled Blake to take on a sudden interest in India. In addition, some of the reviews of Wilkins’ *Gita*, published in various magazines and journals during Blake’s time, contributed to the overall perception of Hindu teachings as antinomian. One such review was presented in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, and it compared the Brahmins to modern Behmenists⁵⁵. Weir’s claims are further supplemented by an elaboration that Wilkins’ analysis of Hinduism also comes from a need to point to the hypocritical tendency of Christian authorities to use the different practices of the Brahmins and portray them as vulgar, or as Connolly remarks: “Wilkins finds reflected in Hinduism not only the Christian doctrines he admires, but also the Christian corruptions he condemns” (Connolly 151). One such corruption that Blake so vehemently condemns in the predominant religion of the European continent is the imposition of capitalistic and imperialistic structures. The ideas “of ‘progress’ and ‘development,’ running through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [culminated in] the opposition of material and immaterial, [...] vice and virtue, manly and unmanly, East and West” (Makdisi 245).

Both Weir and Makdisi place Blake’s interest in the East in the context of “the political aesthetics of empire” (Makdisi 246) and religious radicalism, i.e. his acceptance of antinomian praxis, but at the same time, they absolve Blake from complicity in the promotion of British colonialism and contemporary imperial discourse. Makdisi explains that “Blake’s religio-political aesthetic is an attempt to resurrect a lost immanent unity—identified in those ‘stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age’—without placing one culture in a position superior to that of another” (249). As previously shown in this chapter, Blake proved that the directions he pursued in life, and reflected in his poetry and paintings, were in stark opposition to imperialism, profit, and stagnantly literalistic religiosity. Even if he encouraged Orientalism among the English people, this was mainly for the purpose of

55 “The spiritual discipline of the Brahmins is not unknown to some of the religious orders of Christians in the Romish church; in short, that of the ancient Ascetics or modern Behmenists: a total abstraction of the mind from every object but the contemplation of the Deity, his perfections, or even his name” (from *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, quoted in Weir 90).

awakening them to sublime doctrines about their Creator, and awakening their potential to realize the “the seeming substantiality of appearances” (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 41), in order to take them into a state of eternal life and non-simulated reality:

Reality was Forgot & the Vanities of Time & Space only Rememberd & calld Reality
Such is the Mighty difference between Allegoric Fable & Spiritual Mystery Let it here
be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Vision and
Real Visions Which are lost & clouded in Fable & Alegory. (Blake, *The Complete
Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 555)

The difference between spiritual mysteries and Greek fables is the difference between “mystical and epic ascents” (Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* passim.) of the being that Algis Uždavinys speaks of in his *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism*. An epic ascent, as Uždavinys explains, is very much based on the idea of attaining the seat of God, or becoming like God, in the literal sense of the word. Contrary to that, the mystical ascent implies that the process of spiritual rebirth is achieved through a complete renunciation of the physical, and the attainment of Divine inspiration or revelation through a submissiveness to the soul:

The ascent to heaven may be viewed either as a bodily ascension to see in a mythological fashion the enthroned universal Sovereign, or as an ecstatic mystical experience of attaining nearness to God and anticipating the soul's heavenly journey after death, thereby assuring personal immortality, or at least implying a spiritual transformation. (Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* 54)

As noted further by Uždavinys, the mystical ascent presupposes the awareness of “the prophets of one's own being” (Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* 59): this awareness comes from an ongoing practice of the divine rites and ceaseless invocation of God's Names, thus transforming the *reality* we inhabit from an illusion into a mystical Vision that opens the gates to the spiritual mysteries that unify the terrestrial and celestial worlds.

In his study of Jewish mysticism, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, Elliot Wolfson comments on the importance of invoking the Name of God, and the spiritual transformation that results from it. As he writes:

That is, the one who possesses knowledge of the name is transformed into an angelic being and thus receives passage through the heavenly realms until his soul is bound to the throne[.] In a fundamental sense [...] the angels are identical with the letters of

the name. By uttering the name, then, one not only causes the light of the glory to be illuminated but is in the process mimetically transformed into an angelic being. The magical and mystical aspects of the praxis of mentioning the name are inseparable. (quoted in Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* 99)

Blake instructs that failure to invoke the Divine Name results in the eventual loss of wisdom, and corruption of the soul. This, in turn, brings about the domination of corporeal desires over the immaterial portion of the being. Blake's Los is the champion of the wisdom of the soul over the vegetated body; he is also responsible for assigning souls at birth and retrieving them after the death of the body: "Los conducts the Spirits to be Vegetated, into Great Golgonooza" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 128), and his distribution of souls is administered in two different directions—South and North. "There are Two Gates thro which all Souls descend. [...] The Souls descending to the Body, wail on the right hand [South] Of Los; & those deliverd from the Body, on the left hand [North] / For Los against the east his force continually bends." (123) It should further be noted that Los, along with Enitharmon, is Urthona's emanation, created once Urthona falls from the spiritual realm of existence. Unlike the Zoas and the rest of their emanations, Los "never lost the Divine Vision in time of trouble. He is the great friend of Man, and his form is that of the Divine Appearance itself" (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 147). In this respect, Los could even be said to be a true manifestation of Brahma, who stands as the Supreme Principle in Hinduism. Los is "*the Eternal Prophet*" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 67) located at "the center of each individual" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 246–7). His major preoccupation is retrieving the citizens of Albion, as well as the mind trapped by the products of materialism, back to the Divine Vision (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 146). Los grants inspiration to Blake himself (116–117), thus implanting in him and the rest of humankind the belief that all that lives is holy, as embodied in Erin:

Yet ceas'd he not from labouring at the roarings of his Forge
 With iron & brass Building Golgonooza in great contendings [...]
 [...] Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems; [...]
 [...] Then Erin came forth from the Furnaces, & all the Daughters of
 Beulah
 Came from the Furnaces, by Los's mighty power for Jerusalems
 Sake: walking up and down among the Spaces of Erin:
 And the Sons and Daughters of Los came forth in perfection lovely!
 And the Spaces of Erin reach'd from the stary heighth, to the stary depth. (Blake,
The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 154)

Brahma, like Los, resides in “the vital center of the human being” (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 32), and is often described as the creator of the things we see. One should note that Los is the only emanation who is the creator of both the sun and the moon. Not only that, but he uses his “globe of fire” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 194) to inspect the hearts and minds of Albion’s inhabitants, and take them onto a path of the imagination. As instructed in the *Gita*, a human being becomes one with the Self and learns to rejoice in happiness once he/she abandons the desire to satisfy the physical.

The man whose passions enter his heart as waters run into the unswelling passive ocean, obtaineth happiness; not he who lusteth in his lusts. The man who, having abandoned all lusts of the flesh, walketh without inordinate desires, unassuming and free from pride, obtaineth happiness. This is divine dependence. A man being possessed of this confidence in the Supreme, goeth not astray: even at the hour of death, should he attain it, he shall mix with the incorporeal nature of *Brāhm*. (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 43)

Los could also be compared to the Vedic god of the Sun, Surya⁵⁶, who after rising above water, created time and space, setting them in motion. In Blake’s myth about Los, Los rises from the water and creates time and space, which then limit one’s existence in the world, and like Surya, Los could also be proclaimed the Sun God, since he is the one who creates the material sun in the universe. In *The Book of Los*, Blake describes Los’ rise from the water followed by his eventual sinking into its torrents. The abyss of water is in Blake’s system a symbol of matter, and Los’ sinking into it overshadows humanity’s sinking into the “Sea of Time & Space” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 110) that Los created:

He [Los] arose on the waters, but soon
Heavy falling his organs like roots
Shooting out from the seed, shot beneath,
And a vast world of waters around him
In furious torrents began.
Then he sunk, & around his spent Lungs
Began intricate pipes that drew in
The spawn of the waters. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 93)

⁵⁶ Surya is mentioned in the tenth book of the *Rig Veda*.

That Los stands as one of the primary Hinduism-inspired characters in Blake's works is shown in *The Song of Los*, in which Los⁵⁷ relates a "prophecy" that Rintrah, one of his sons, "gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 67). This here is Blake's only mentioning of Brahma in his work; however, it carries a significant meaning for Blake's recognition of the possible roots of philosophy and knowledge in the world, which was a discussion so pertinent to the intellectual elite in Blake's England. As Weir suggests, Blake, "by making Brahma the first recipient of Urizen's laws, conveyed to the East by Los's corrupted son Rintrah, [...] accommodates Hinduism as the most recent candidate (circa 1795) for the most ancient faith" (Weir 8). It seems as if India somehow "held the [mysterious] key to [Blake's] quest for ultimate self-knowledge" (McEvelley xxii), reflecting Blake's participation in the debate between the Hellenocentric and Indocentric⁵⁸ outlooks on the world. The realization that the "Abstract Philosophy" that had been preached to the European minds for centuries might not, after all, be of Greek, or Biblical origin, would have been curiously terrifying to Blake and his contemporaries.

If we explore Blake's opening stanza from *The Song of Los* in greater depth, we can notice that he did not stop with his subversion of the historiographic testing of the Biblical tradition by *landing* on the Indian sub-continent. By locating both Eden and Ararat in Africa, Blake poses a new historiological threat to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and invokes the religious traditions of the Islamic Orient. As he writes:

Adam stood in the garden of Eden:
And Noah on the mountains of Ararat; [...]
Adam shudder! Noah faded! black grew the sunny African
Times rolled on o'er all the sons of Har, time after time [...]
The human race began to wither, [...]
And the disease'd only propagated:
So Antamon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight:
And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 67)

While Rintrah grants the "Abstract Philosophy" to Indian civilization, Antamon—another of Los' sons—performs a similar role of a spiritual emissary as his brother, but unlike

57 If we consider Damon's interpretation of the Four Zoas in relation to the Hindu teachings, then Los, the emanation of Urthona, could easily be tied to Dharma. As Damon wrote in *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, "Urthona is Dharma; Urizen Karma; while both Tharmas and Luvah are included in Maya" (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 145).

58 It should be noted that the French philosopher Voltaire, whom Blake considered one of the instigators of the philosophy of materialism, thought of India as the seat of all religions: "Religion in general [...] is derived and has degenerated from, the pure natural revelation of which the Indians were the first possessors" (quoted in McEvelley xx).

Rintrah who imprints the teachings of the human civilization in India, Antamon, upon witnessing the spread of monasticism and the preaching of false ideals in the Western world, gives “a loose Bible” to “Mahomet”. Blake’s mentioning of the prophet Muhammad is just one in the line of several references to Islam, which attest to his fascination with this religion.

As interest in Hinduism was rapidly spreading within England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so did a corresponding interest in Islam experience an enormous, sudden rise; but, while the British public looked upon Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Zoroastrianism, with fascination, Humberto Garcia suggests that Islam, on the other hand, “posed the longest and greatest threat, theologically and politically, to the Christian narrative of redemption: the socioeconomic and military superiority of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires threatened to supplement and thus displace Christocentric views of history and politics” (Garcia 7). The threat itself was further supplemented by a view that all Islamic countries were ruled by despots, who would put an end to any kind of cultural enlightenment. As Roderick Cavaliero explains, “Islam[...] was held to be as hostile as it had seemed to be throughout European crusading history, when resistance to invasive Islam was a Christian virtue. As a culture it had little to offer the investigative, arrogant *Weltanschauung* of ‘enlightened’ Europe” (Cavaliero xvi–xvii). But despite all of the preconceived opinions about the Islamic world as *primitive, unenlightened, and tyrannical*, the fact is that “since the early eighteenth century,” as Cavaliero points out, “*The Arabian Nights Entertainments* had been the source of oriental dreams in the West [including England]” (xii). The tales of the powerful and lascivious empires, exotic harems, mighty caliphs, beautiful women, and extraordinary larger-than-life heroes of Arabia and Persia and their triumphant adventures, brushed upon the imagination of the English public.

So far, much has been told and written about the study of the Islamic Orient in the works of the Romantics, especially in Byron, Shelley, and Coleridge; however, Blake’s references to and treatment of Islam have received very little attention. Actually, there has not been a single major study of Blake’s possible exposure to Islam, providing the rationale behind his decision to include Islam in his visionary universe. What the reasons for this are cannot be easily determined; however, it should be noted that Blake was, during his life, most certainly exposed to a number of works on Islam, as well as different personalities who could have introduced him to Islam and its teachings. In his work *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*⁵⁹, Norman O. Brown noted that “We will not get ‘Blake and Tradition’ right until we see the tradition as the Prophetic Tradition, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and heresies in Judaism, Christianity and Islam” (46). Brown’s statement most certainly sounds like something Blake himself would have said, if he were to explain the unity of all religions, particularly Abrahamic

59 Note that the essay “The Prophetic Tradition,” in which Brown originally voiced the quoted statement was published in 1982; however, his work *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* dates back to 1991.

religions, in his *All Religions are One*. Moreover, by placing Blake against the radical environment of English republicanism and imperialism, Brown displays the inscrutable need for seeing Blake's approach to religions as an attempt to unify all religious teachings and traditions under a single prophetic tradition, a tradition that does not exclude Islam:

Blakeans should be able to see that there is no way to accept "Again He speaks" [see "To the Public," in *Jerusalem*] in Blake unless we accept that again He speaks in the Koran. It is time to discard the time-honored prejudice that treats Koranic theology as a confused echo of half-understood Jewish or Christian traditions, selected and polemically distorted to concoct a new-fangled monotheism to supply "backward" Arabs with a "cultural identity." (Brown 48)

Islam, in Brown's view, becomes a necessary path through which Blake attempts to discard the common flaws of Christianity, especially when it comes to the concept of the Trinity, "the notion of vicarious atonement" (Brown 52), or that of "an Incarnate Son of God"⁶⁰ (53). In his own analysis of Brown's essay, Humberto Garcia argues that Brown provides "a useful alternative to natural supernatural Orientalism" (Garcia 18), where Blake's anti-materialist and anti-imperialist views are repositioned against the backdrop of the Islamic tradition. Garcia affirms Brown's statement that "The line from Jesus to Blake goes through Muhammad" (Brown 63) when he writes that Blake, "[l]ike[...] Muhammad,[...] resists a corrupt Roman Christianity; he is a radical poet who wants to restore primitive monotheism to its egalitarian-prophetic roots in the ancient Near East" (Garcia 18). In order to show how Blake tried to restore dignity to the religions of the Arabian Peninsula in the minds of Blake's fellow Europeans, Garcia offers an example of what appears to be Blake's self-portrait, which he named *Mahomet*⁶¹. Most likely drawn several years before Blake's death—Garcia and Whitehead mention that the sketches were made any time between 1819 and 1825—the visionary head of Muhammad (For the drawing, see Garcia 19) and his white face force a viewer "to imagine the Islamicizing of a 'White' English individual (a disruption of the English national imaginary)" (18). Garcia also points to the fact that Muhammad's depiction does not fall within the pattern of a typical eighteenth-century image of a Muslim. If anything, Muhammad "does not resemble the dark-skinned, turban-wearing despot traditionally depicted in Western writings" (18).

60 Whereas the common view in Christianity is that of Jesus as the son of God, Islam teaches that "[t]he Prophet possessed eminently both the human (*nasut*) and spiritual (*labut*) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the *labut* into the *nasut*, a perspective which Islam does not accept (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, quoted in Brown 53). The prophet is not an incarnation but a revelation, a theophany" (53).

61 The portrait itself was done as a part of Blake's sketches of the Visionary Heads, alongside Edward I, David, and King John. For the complete reproduction and discussion on the portrait of Blake as an incarnation of Mohammad, see Garcia's *Islam and the English Enlightenment*, 19.

Following the lead of traditional Islamic writings, Angus Whitehead has, on the other hand, pointed to Muhammad's rather close resemblance to his noted appearance, believed to be authentic among the Muslim believers: "the Prophet is described as having large wide luminous eyes, long lashes, extensive, slightly arched but not joined brows, an aquiline nose, a wide and finely shaped mouth, tanned white skin and 'a light on his face [...] especially apparent on his broad forehead" (Whitehead 35). Whitehead also argues that Blake, however, diverts from the traditional descriptions of Muhammad. Namely, the portrait does not feature Muhammad's "hair reaching midway between the lobes of his ears and his shoulders, and a beard of similar length" (36). This decision for a slight deviation in the portrayal of the Prophet of Islam is in itself very interesting, if not puzzling. And while we might think of it as Blake's attempt to avoid engaging himself in a then common Orientalist discourse, one can rather agree with Whitehead, who explains that Blake's "atypical portrayal" (36) depicts Muhammad at a younger age, either prior to his reception of the Qur'an, or right at the time⁶² of his reception of God's prophecies and the sacred teachings of the Qur'an revealed to him, through Gabriel, in a dream. What appears to be more likely is that Blake chose to portray Muhammad at the time of his reception of God's revelation. If we pay closer attention to the portrait, we can notice that Muhammad's face resounds with a sheer sense of pride and inner peace, but at the same time, it displays all the glory of a spiritual commitment (in *Jerusalem* Blake calls this "Spiritual fires") that a prophet is believed to possess. Muhammad's large, piercing eyes are gazing upwards, as if looking at a vision—possibly, of Gabriel—that has descended down to reveal God's message. Now, if we consider the fact that of all the four portraits of the Visionary Heads, the one called "Mahomet" is in closest resemblance to Blake himself, then this shows Blake's deep appreciation and respect for the Prophet of Islam; however, it might also point to Blake's identification with Muhammad. This may show a need on Blake's part to manifest his own prophetic spirit, and submissiveness to "the rule of God" (Brown 51).⁶³

Blake's need to possibly manifest the spirit of prophecy through Muhammad comes primarily from Swedenborg and his teachings. That Blake believed himself to be a prophet is clear from his writings. The actual year of his birth (1757) was—according to Swedenborg—the year "when a 'Last Judgement' had been passed on the Apostolic Church 'in the heavens'—that is to say in mankind's inner worlds—to be followed by an epiphany of the Divine Humanity in His full glory in the inner worlds or 'heavens'. With this inner event a new kind of realization, a new kind of consciousness, began to dawn within Christendom" (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 78). In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,

62 The Qur'an teaches that Muhammad was forty years old when angel Gabriel (*Azrael*) appeared to him to reveal the Qur'an.

63 Note that in Arabic, in addition to meaning "peace," Islam also means "submission."

Blake lays great importance on the “Last Judgment” in the heavens, and reflects: “As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 34). Could Blake have possibly found this “new kind of consciousness,” a new kind of prophetic realization in Muhammad⁶⁴? If so, how would that have contributed to his own vision of the Last Judgment that Swedenborg speaks of? Blake conferred his own view of Swedenborg’s “Last Judgment” in the heavens, in what could be considered as one of his most elaborate drawings, “A Vision of the Last Judgment.” Along with the rest of the prophets, the drawing shows Muhammad, positioned right below Ishmael, which proves that Blake was aware of the fact that the Prophet descended from the line of Ishmael.⁶⁵

Like the rest of the public in his own time, Blake could have learned of Muhammad and Islam from a well-known English Orientalist and translator of Arabic texts, George Sale, whose translation of the Qur’an into English became available as early as 1734. Upon its publication, Sale’s translation received high praise even from Voltaire, who in his 1745 letter to Pope Benedict XIV described Islam as “a false and barbarous sect,” and called its founder “a false prophet” (Voltaire). Blake, on the other hand, appears to have been very impressed by Islam and its teachings. That he very likely read parts of Sale’s translation of the Qur’an, or perhaps all of it, is very noticeable in the line “And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 67), which calls into attention Sale’s statement in his essay “Of the Qur’an Itself, the Peculiarities of that Book; the Manner of Its Being Written and Published, and the General Design of It,” in the *Preliminary Discourse*, where he wrote: “the opinion of some learned Arabians, who would have the Qur’an so named because it is a collection of the loose chapters or sheets which compose it—the verb *karaa* signifying also *to gather* or *collect*” (Mohammed Section III). In his own analysis of Blake’s line from *The Song of Los*, Whitehead⁶⁶ confirms that “the Qur’an is commonly referred to as the *mushaf* meaning a collection of pages. It was collated in its present written form during the caliphate of Uthman, c. 650 CE, approximately eighteen years after Muhammad’s death” (Whitehead 28).

64 Islam considers Muhammad to be the final prophet in the sense of being the final person in this cycle of history to bring a Book, but Muslim theology accepts a hierarchy of revelatory, non-law giving individuals, including saints and sages, who have direct access to and knowledge of God; and finally, regular people who may experience prophetic visions through dreams.

65 For a detailed insight into Blake’s painting, see Foster Damon’s Key to “A Vision of the Last Judgment” in the list of illustrations in *A Blake Dictionary*, Illustration I.

66 For other possible influences on Blake, regarding the analyzed line from *The Song of Los*, see Whitehead’s “*A Wise Tale of the Mahometans: Blake and Islam, 1819–26*,” pp. 28–30.

It should be noted that Sale's commentary on the Qur'an and its design may have influenced Blake in his writing process of *The Four Zoas*. The poem itself follows a distinctly different pattern, when compared to the rest of Blake's poetic works, and unlike his other poems, the *Zoas* is the only major work that Blake left incomplete. As his longest work, *The Four Zoas* was Blake's "magnificent attempt to incorporate all [of his] myths into a single narrative" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 142). A narrative of a wide gap between humans and the Divine, the resurrection of the spiritual in the light of the material, a symbolically epic story with "recurrent repetitions,[...] sudden intrusions, even out-and-out contradictions" (143), the myth of the *Zoas* was conceived in 1797, at least that is the date Blake put on the title page of the work. Whether or not Blake was grappling to show the work itself as the book of *Divine Essence* that was revealed to him by an angel, a book that conveys the prophetic tradition, might help us visualize Muhammad's face in Blake's drawing "Mahomet." This also may make one wonder whether Blake's own age—he was forty years old in 1797—at the time of the myth of the *Zoas* was revealed to him, coincides with the Prophet Muhammad's age—again forty—when he received the knowledge of the Qur'an. As Brown notes: "Muhammad is not an angel but, like Blake, receives dictation from the Angel. He also has overwhelming visionary experiences in which he sees the Angel" (Brown 64). Interestingly, Blake—at the beginning of *Milton*—points to being under the influence of the Divine inspiration ("Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song," (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 96)). Like the Qur'an, which "is divided into 114 larger portions of very unequal length, which we call chapters" (Mohammed Section III), Blake's *Zoas* is also divided into chapters, i.e. nine nights, each one of them being of a fairly unequal length. Like the Qur'an, that is comprised of a set of loose sheets which might "serve as an answer to those who object that the Qur'an must be a book forged at once, and could not possibly be revealed by parcels at different times during the course of several years, as the Muhammadans affirm" (Sale Section III), *The Four Zoas* initially was a composition of loose sheets created separately, in the span of several years (possibly between 1797 and 1806/7). David Erdman explains that:

After Blake's death the ms was in loose sheets, but stitch-marks show he had once sewed together into one group all the sheets with elegant script and into another group those sheets containing pages 43–84 and 111–112, all in his usual hand. Possibly he thought of one group as finished, the other as preliminary, and any existing sheets not stitched as rejects (for example, Night VIIb, when he thought of replacing it with VIIa). (Textual note to *The Four Zoas* Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 817)

In *A Blake Dictionary*, Foster Damon points to Blake's inclusion of the theme of the final downfall of humanity or "a period of *mutual retaliation*" (*A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 259), described in the Qur'an as a stage when "every creature will take vengeance one of another, or have satisfaction made them for the injuries which they have suffered" (Sale quoted in *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 259). The passage Damon relates this to is:

Start forth the trembling millions into flames of mental fire
 Bathing their limbs in the bright visions of Eternity
 Then like the doves from pillars of Smoke the trembling families
 Of women & children throughout every nation under heaven
 Cling round the men in bands of twenties & of fifties pale
 [...] Their oppressors are falln they have Stricken them they awake to life. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 387)

Throughout the entire poem, the Four Zoas, filled with immense amount of jealousy and love at the same time, take vengeance against each other, which does not really make them stand out from the four aspects of the *nafs* (self) that some Sufi psychologists speak of. As Muhammad Asad explains in an annotation to his translation of the Qur'an, the *nafs* is a manifestation of the psyche and embodies all four aspects of the human soul. Asad relates that *nafs* is "the human self or personality as a whole: that is, a being composed of a physical body and that inexplicable life-essence loosely described as *soul*" (Asad 91:11). In its unrefined state, the *nafs* is limited to different levels of the ego, which can cause imbalances between the material (body), intermediate (self), immaterial *ruh* (soul) parts of one's being, resulting in psychological and spiritual poverty/destitution. This is exactly what happens with the Four Zoas, which for the most part reflects the *nafs* in its various states. It is only towards the end of the poem that they attain to spirit in its purest forms, once humans have learned to abandon the physical world and to inhabit the universe within⁶⁷. As Corbin writes: "And here is the point: in the whole of the universes of this Earth of Truth, God has created for each soul a universe corresponding to that soul. *When the mystic contemplates this universe, it is himself (nafs, his Anima), that he is contemplating*" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* 82). Note what Blake writes in *Milton*:

for Cities
 Are Men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers & Mountains
 Are also Men; every thing is Human, mighty! sublime!
 In every bosom a Universe expands, as wings

⁶⁷ Interestingly, in Islam, one must explore their own soul if they want to know God.

Let down at will around, and call'd the Universal Tent. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 180)

Swedenborg's possible influence on Blake's formation of the views on Islam have been rather overlooked by many scholars. Other than Sabri-Tabrizi's mentioning that Blake identified "Swedenborg's religion [which placed Muslims in hell] with the 'jews' code and his God with Jehovah" (Sabri-Tabrizi 168), or Marsha Keith Schuchard's reference to Swedenborg's interest in the "Muslim ideas of the after-life" (Schuchard 148), or his copying of certain passages from the Qur'an, we do not really find much about Blake's probable reading and analysis of Swedenborg's writings on Islam. In his *Spiritual Diary* (1758), Swedenborg mentions the "Mohammedans" in two different contexts. In a section Swedenborg entitled "The Greeks and the Mohammedans," we are given an account of the denial of the Trinitarian concept of God in Islam, which Swedenborg ascribes to the "ignorance" and the "fear" of the Islamic law in Muslims. As he writes: "I afterwards related why the Lord came into the world—not in order to reconcile the human race to the Father, but to make the Human Divine, and thus to keep the heavens in order even to the last, and also the human race, to which, but for this, the Divine could no longer reach. On hearing these things they were silent, and many acquiesced.[...] the Mohammedans [said] that they live according to the precepts of their religion, and that these are the laws themselves" (Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary* Section 5952). In another of his essays in the *Diary*, "The Destruction of Ethereal Spirits by Mohammedans, Babylonians and Reformed," Swedenborg is even harsher with his views on Islam and the Muslims. Namely, he blames Islam for the "infestation" of the Christian world, and casts its followers "down into hell" (*Spiritual Diary: The Destruction of Ethereal Spirits* Section 5857). Swedenborg also argues the following: "It was observed, that, beyond the most wicked of the Babylonian communion in the west, there are hells by degrees not so atrocious; also, that the wickedness is lessened by degrees till you reach the Mohammedans and Gentiles; and this for the reason that there may be equilibrium" (Section 5895).

Swedenborg's views on Islam do not deviate much from those of Dante, who in his *Inferno*, of the *Divine Comedy*, locates Muhammad and Ali in the ninth layer of hell, where according to Dante, "the sowers of scandal, schismatics, and heretics" (Alighieri 95) dwell. In Canto XXVIII of the *Inferno*, Muhammad is made into a beheaded "unbeliever," punished by a faceless, sword-wearing fiend behind him. It is well known that Blake was a great admirer of Dante; however, in his own depiction of Muhammad in Dante's Hell, he departs from his teacher. In an illustration to Dante's depiction of Muhammad, *The Schismatics and Sowers of Discord: Mahomet* (For the painting, see Whitehead 39), Blake placed Dante and Virgil very close to both Muhammad and Ali. Whitehead notes that "Blake's positioning [here] suggests an intimacy and sympathy between the pagan and Christian poets and the Muslim prophet

and first Shia Imam” (39–40). As can be seen, Blake does not behead Muhammad or make his body mutilated; instead, he “endows Muhammad with a distinct appearance. William Michael Rossetti suggested that Blake’s representation of Muhammad ‘retains some symptom of the traditional likeness of the prophet’. [...] From his reading of Sale, Blake is likely to have known of both Ali’s piety and his revered position, especially in Shia Islam, as fourth caliph, first imam, martyr and a repository of esoteric knowledge” (40).

Significantly, Blake’s positive engagement with Islam on his paintings can also be noticed in several other works, which, while not exemplifying specific Islamic authorities, contain typical emblems of the Islamic Orient. An example of this is the illustration to Plate 4 of *Jerusalem* (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 301), where Blake depicted a man in a greyish-blue traditional Muslim dress *djeleba*,⁶⁸ native to the countries of North Africa. The man in the dress is spreading his arms to both his left and right sides, and is placing them onto the heads of Ulro’s inhabitants. He serves as a mediator between Reality and Eternal Life, and the “land of shadows” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 146) where humans are trapped in a sleep of delusion and death. Blake mentions “the Saviour over [himself] / Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of [...] love divine” (146). The fact that Blake undressed all of the individuals around “the [mysterious] Saviour” (146) may quite possibly point to his need to expose humans in all of their goodness and cruelty before God. It also points to an emphasis on the body/the physical in the inhabitants of Ulro. The only bodily parts of “the Saviour” that Blake allows us to see are his face, hands, and feet. The depiction of the Saviour calls into mind the ritual of the Muslim prayer, during which one—man and woman alike—is supposed to cover all but their face, hands, and feet. Blake could have easily come across this information in Sale’s version of the Qur’an, where Sale noted that bare feet during a Muslim prayer stand as “a mark of humility and respect” (Mohammed 236) for God.

According to Whitehead, there is a possibility that Blake became exposed to Islam directly, through encounters with the Muslim community in London, in the later stage of his life. Whitehead remarks: “It is clear,[...] that during the first three decades of the nineteenth century a Muslim community was present and visible in the British metropolis. Furthermore, at trials at the Old Bailey during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was customary and acceptable for Muslims to swear to the truth of their statements on a copy of the ‘alcoran’ rather than the Bible” (Whitehead 31). This would be a very interesting thing to explore, if any conclusive evidence were to be found, for if Blake truly had ever met with any of the

68 Also note the ominous symbol of the crescent moon, directly above “the Saviour,” which happens to be the primary symbol of Islam. During Blake’s time, North Western Africa was a bastion of both physical freedom and intellectual audacity, so one may wonder as to Blake’s interests in this area of the world, original home to figures as diverse as Saint Augustine, Ibn Arabi, and the Cathars (who also wore a dress similar to “the Saviour”).

members of a Muslim community in London, that could provide greater insight into his ideas on the unity of religions and the possible effect of Islam on his symbolical language.

In addition, the earlier mentioning of Blake's painter-friend Ozias Humphrey, who spent three years of his life in India, should be brought into attention, since Humphrey could have introduced Blake to Islam and/or Hinduism and some of their teachings. Prior to the British conquest of the Indian sub-continent, the region was ruled by a Muslim dynasty, the Mughals, which was one of the most ecumenical in history.⁶⁹ In addition to introducing novel forms of art and architecture to the Indian people, the Mughal period also saw the conversion of a number of individuals from Hinduism to Islam, and Islam to Hinduism, without fear of persecution (see Schimmel). Therefore, when the East India Company officially established its rule in India in 1757, it inherited a remarkably diverse and relatively tolerant society in which Hindus and Muslims freely mixed, and even openly shared philosophical and religious ideas and ideals. Much of the current conflict in the Indian sub-continent between Muslims and Hindus is due to the policies of the British.

Finally, it should be noted that it is even more likely that Blake had an insight into a great number of books on Islam, or the traditions and history of certain Islamic countries through the work of his close acquaintances, such as John Flaxman's collection of important historical works on Egypt,⁷⁰ or Fuseli's illustration *Fertilization of Egypt* in Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, which Blake engraved in 1791. A very significant name to be added to this list is that of Rebekah Bliss, the famous collector of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Sanskrit and Chinese manuscripts, as well as a collector of Blake's books, who, as Keri Davies asserts, served as the main source of access to Oriental books to Blake. In her 1806 will, Bliss mentioned some of the books from which Blake could have very easily learned of the literary and cultural traditions of the Orient. As Davies mentions, among the books listed in her will, "[t]here [were] natural history specimens ('the Minerals & case with Contents') and books—of Chinese drawings and *Flora Danica*—and Persian manuscripts—still unidentified copies of the *Five Poems* of Jami, the *Baburnama*, and the *Gulistan* (or Rose Garden) of Sa'di" (K. Davies 41). Blake's engagements with Hinduism and Islam either through his direct acquaintances or through a number of manuscripts and translations that were available in England gave rise to a new creative consciousness, a consciousness that saw a range of opportunities to decipher the secrets of the eternally sought angelic spheres. Unlike the stereotypical conceptions about Islam and Hinduism that pervaded eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Blake became very enthusiastic about their teachings and prophecies, which he accepted as a divine favor.

69 It even led to the failed creation of a Muslim-Hindu hybrid religion called the Din-i-Ilahi (religion of God). The outpourings of non-denominational *bhakti* poets, such as Kabir, and the formation of the Sikh religion stem from this period.

70 For a complete list of the works on Egypt that Flaxman contained, see Kazuya Okada's "Typhon, the lower nature': Blake and Egypt as the Orient," in *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, 29.

Chapter 3

The *Imago Templi* and Blake's Vision of a Non-Euclidian Universe

Although the One in itself is not in space, and in this sense it is nowhere [...] it is also present everywhere because that everywhere is the "place" wherein actuality (or the emanations) will occur. (Damiani 73)



MY PURPOSE IN THIS CHAPTER IS TWOFOLD: to reflect on the Hermetic and Neoplatonic approaches to time and space, which will be paralleled with Blake's creation of time and space in *Los* and *Enitharmon*; and, to take this discussion gradually into an analysis of the Divine Throne and Corbin's concept of the *Imago Templi*, both of which are crucial for showing Blake's non-materialistic and starkly anti-empirical views on space as the realm of the infinite spheres created with the mind. By employing Corbin's interpretation of the Ismaili approaches to space, and Guénon and Coomaraswamy's Hindu analyses of the visions of space, the chapter will focus greatly on discussing Blake's creation of an imaginal⁷¹ universe. In addition, the possible ties of the Islamic and Hindu interpretations of the cosmological order to that of Blake will be shown through the spatial symbolism Blake included in his written and artistic works.

Now that Blake's possible use of Hindu, Islamic, and other non-Christian texts may be assumed, given the evidences in the previous chapters, it is time to turn to Blake's interpretations of human existence as shaped by time and space, and relate them to elements of Eastern religions that Blake may have assimilated. In this respect, it is important to note that Blake was very much in accord with the Neoplatonists' views of time and space. Like Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus, Blake held both time and space as concepts residing within the mind and soul;

⁷¹ It is important to note here the usage of this term "imaginal," coined by Henry Corbin, as opposed to imaginary, since the latter refers to something that does not exist, whereas the former refers to something that is even more real than what we see, and is based on the archetypes of the imaginal realm, alternatively known as the *alam al-mithal*, Plato's realm of the Forms, or the *barzakh*, which is the realm of the angels and subtle matter where mind can make anything appear.

or that time and space are contained in the Supreme Being, i.e. God, rather than conceiving of them as platforms in which God and all His creatures are contained, instead. In his poetry and paintings, Blake evidently carries an attack upon the materialistic philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the view that the body and the mind are nothing but “a substance extended in length, breadth and depth” (Descartes, as quoted in Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 131) that linearly travels from the past, to the present, and toward the future. In *Blake and Tradition*, where Kathleen Raine devotes great attention to placing Blake's ideas on time and space in line with ancient Greek perspectives, we are also given an overview of Swedenborg's and Berkeley's ideas in regard to the construction of time and space by a science-dominated mind, as opposed to the mind instructed in spiritual practices. Raine explains that,

For Blake, as for Berkeley, Swedenborg, and the ancients, time and space are mental concepts—“visionary” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 134). [...] Before their fall into the inflexible eternal Cartesian mode, Time and Space were flexible, imaginative; and Blake is doubtless following Swedenborg's account of the state of the angels, in whose world love determines space, wisdom time. [...] As in dreams, times and spaces are only apparent; they still appear progressive, because angels and spirits are finite. Only in God times and spaces are not progressive, “because He is infinite, and infinite things in Him are one... the Divine is in all time without time.” (139–40)

When Raine speaks of the non-progressive character of times and spaces in the Divine realm, she primarily refers to the Platonic epistemology of human existence within the spatial and temporal confines, which denotes that space is an ever-expandable entity that fills *all*, and time an illusory concept measured not by motion, but according to that which ended in the Now and commenced from the Now. Space, as we generally conceive of it, does not have defined beginning and ending points, and it cannot be possessed by the corporeal, since the body itself does not perform the role of a possessor, but is instead possessed by the soul.⁷² On the other hand, Time, when viewed in relation to the external world, is often separated from the soul, instead of being treated as its composite that takes part in the formation of internal spheres. As Plotinus wrote in his essay “On Eternity and Time,” “It is necessary, however, not to assume time externally to soul, as neither is eternity in the intelligible world external to being. Nor again, must it be considered as any thing consecutive, or posterior to soul, as neither is eternity to being. But it must be beheld within, and subsisting together with soul, in the same manner as eternity with being” (Plotinus, On Eternity and Time 277–8).

72 I refer here to the common doctrine shared by Platonists, Muslims, and Hindus, that the body acts solely as a vehicle for the soul.

In his vastly diverse symbolism, which, among other things, is reflected in the names of characters, Blake creates the two characters that fully embody his views on time and space. Whereas Los uses his powers to bind the Sun and applies his hammer to the control of time on Earth, Enitharmon uses her beauty and wisdom to weave the immaterial spaces. Born of Enion, both Los and Enitharmon were originally embodied in one zoa—Urthona: they work in harmony (as can be inferred from Enitharmon's Greek derivative *Ἀρμονία*), despite the fact that Enitharmon chooses to be independent in a male-dominated universe⁷³. Without the help of Enitharmon, Los is incapable of accomplishing his task of building the perfect "Jerusalem" on Earth. Enitharmon is very often depicted as the inspirational muse of Los, who works together with Los to restore the spiritual order to a fallen universe where Time and Space are subdued to materialistic impulses. As Blake explains in *The Four Zoas*, Los' "head beamd light & in his vigorous voice was prophecy / He [Los] could controll the times & seasons, & the days & years / She [Enitharmon] could controll the spaces, regions, desert, flood & forest" (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 305). As Blake also suggests, both Los and Enitharmon reside in "the Moony spaces of Eno" (305), the daughter of Beulah who perceives eternity in all things. In a certain way, Eno is the creator of Eternity and Infinity in the universe, since after Los and Enitharmon's birth, she "took a Moment of Time / And drew it out to Seven thousand years with much care & affliction / And many tears & in Every year made windows into Eden / She also took an atom of space & open'd its center / Into Infinitude & ornamented it with wondrous art" (304–5).

When Blake speaks of Infinitude, he refers to the possibility of creating infinite worlds with our mind, or the *mundus imaginalis* (Corbin's term, meaning "imaginal realm"), where the terrestrial and celestial worlds collide and merge into a mental sphere, shaped by the divine creativity of the human. Blake's insistence on seeing the world as infinite comes from a need to lead humans away from the desire to perceive the universe as a one-sided entity, rigorously defined by territorial boundaries, and the length or breadth of places. In his *Green Man, Earth Angel*, Tom Cheetham rightfully predicted that "[w]e are at great risk of succumbing to the Single Vision that Blake so feared—at the hands of Scientism, Fundamentalism, Capitalism, all the 'isms.' And our response, our duty, is to right the Balance" (Cheetham 27). And while with the rise of empiricism, industrialism, and religious schisms across Europe, Blake's fears were already slowly coming true during his time, he never stopped pursuing the fight against the creation of unanimous visions of the universe as a space existent only outside ourselves.

73 Note how in *Jerusalem*, Enitharmon, testifying to the female will and pride, responds to Los' attraction to her and his propositions to produce the children of Albion together: "No! I will seize thy Fibres & weave / Them: not as thou wilt but as I will [...] / [...] be thou assured I never will be thy slave / Let Mans delight be Love; but Womans delight be Pride / [...] Know that I never will be thine:[...] / [...] This is Womans World, nor need she any / Speçtre to defend her from Man. I will Create secret places" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 246–7).

As Blake wrote in this respect, in his letter to Thomas Butts (1802): “Now I a fourfold vision see / And a fourfold vision is given to me / [...] May God us keep / From Single Vision & Newtons sleep” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 722). As representatives of the mortal race, humans have to realize that spaces do not necessarily exist outside the corporeal masses. On the contrary, the corporeal mass is just a cloud enclosing the interior regions impenetrable by the senses, and naturally, unconstrained by the illusory conceptions of space. As Damon states: “Man originally was, and shall be eventually, the whole; and even in his fallen state he has not lost the rudiments of anything. Therefore, the analysis of the Universe is nothing but an analysis of himself” (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 144).

While Damon puts an emphasis on Blake's view of the Divine Throne⁷⁴ as the central point of the human, from which all other spheres emanate, Raine—in *Blake and Tradition*—follows in similar footsteps, but in addition, she points to Blake's adherence to the Hermetic teachings on the flight of the soul through spaces. As Raine cites from the tenth book of the *Pyramander*:

[i]ncrease thy self unto an immesaurable greatness, leaping beyond every Body, and transcending all Time, become Eternity, and thou shalt understand God [...] Become higher than all height, lower than all depths, comprehend in thy-self the qualities of all the Creatures, of the Fire, the Water, the Dry and Moist; and conceive likewise, that thou canst be everywhere, in the Sea, in the Earth. (Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. II* 140)

The passage that Raine makes a reference to is of remarkable importance for understanding Blake's creation of the spiritual universe, or the universe within. In his views on the cosmos, Blake does, to a great extent, follow the ideas of space outlined in the writings of the Hermeticists. The Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* depicts the universe as a body, and views place or space as incorporeal in which the planetary spheres move contrary to one another⁷⁵. As suggested further in the *Hermeticum*,

Since the cosmos is a sphere—a head, that is—and since there is nothing material above the head (just as there is nothing of mind below the feet, where all is matter), and since mind is a head which is moved spherically—in the manner of a head, that is—things joined to the membrane of this head (is the soul) are by nature immortal, as if they have more soul than body because body has been made in soul; things far away from the membrane, however, are mortal, because they have more body than

74 For further details, see Foster Damon's *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, 144–5.

75 For further reference, see *Corpus Hermeticum* II, in *Hermetica*, 8–9.

soul; thus, every living being, and likewise the universe, has been constituted of the material and the mental. (Copenhaver 32–3)

In “Night the Sixth” of *The Four Zoas*, which is greatly focused on the depictions of the downfall of humanity in Urizen’s world, i.e. the material universe, Blake provides us with an image of an uncorrupted universe as contained in the mind, and the presence of matter under our feet. The description Blake provides is very similar to the Hermetic writings:

They [Urizen’s children and the children of Luvah] wander Moping in their heart
a Sun a Dreary moon / A Universe of fiery constellations in their brain / An Earth
of wintry woe beneath their feet & round their loins / Waters or winds or clouds or
brooding lightnings & pestilential plagues / Beyond the bounds of their own self
their senses cannot penetrate (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William
Blake* 347).

As can be inferred from the lines above, Blake’s refutation of Newton’s and Locke’s theories⁷⁶ of the universe as a mass defined by magnitude and the laws of attraction to one particular center⁷⁷, came as a very justified cause. Namely, if we suppose that the mechanistic philosophy is accurate in its claim of the universe as a non-expandable entity, then that would also imply that matter itself cannot be expanded. Just because the expansion of one thing can be witnessed through the physical senses, that does not have to mean that the thing invisible to the eye—in this case the universe as a whole—is non-expandable. In spiritual terms, the universe is expandable, so long as we come to understand that the *physical* universe we live in is not the world of Ultimate Reality. Ultimate Reality exists outside this world, outside of Newtonian space: it resides within the mind, where the universe is non-spatial, limitless, and not determined by measure and quantity. Blake confirms this aspect of the expansion of spaces in *Jerusalem*, proving that the spaces contained within the human bosom are limitless. As he writes in Chapter 2 of the poem:

There is a limit of Opakeness, and a limit of Contraction;
In every Individual Man, and the limit of Opakeness,
Is named Satan: and the limit of Contraction is named Adam.

⁷⁶ In April, 1827, just a few months before his death, Blake wrote a letter to his friend George Cumberland. Among other things, he spoke about his disdain for the appraisal of the mechanistic philosophy by his fellow countrymen. As he said: “I know too well that a great majority of Englishmen are fond of The Indefinite which they Measure by Newtons Doctrin of the Fluxions of an Atom. A Thing that does not Exist. [...] For a Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance a Line is a Line in its Minuteſt Subdiviſions Strait or Crooked It is Itſelf & Not Intermeaſurable with or by any Thing Elſe” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 783).

⁷⁷ This would imply that the universe can be contracted, but not expanded.

But when Man sleeps in Beulah, the Saviour in mercy takes
Contractions Limit, and of the Limit he forms Woman: That
Himself may in process of time be born Man to redeem
But there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of Translucence.
In the bosom of Man for ever from eternity to eternity. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry
and Prose of William Blake* 189)

Blake conceives of the material or phenomenal world as the dwelling-place of Satan, which is remote from the Divine Illumination. The spiritual universe, on the other hand, is the dwelling-place of the spiritually alive, blessed with the Divine Imagination and the Divine Light. Henry Corbin, in his study of the cosmological order, *Temple and Contemplation*, speaks of the Divine Light as the cosmic Throne (*Arsh*) or Temple that serves as a dividing line between material and spiritual orbs. “[A] vision of the world [is],” as Corbin explains, “in both its horizontal and vertical dimension [...] dominated by the Image of the Temple, *Imago Templi*” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 264). This *Imago Templi* reveals itself only to the saints or visionaries, in the world in-between the material and spiritual universe, “at the level of the imaginal world (*ālam al-mithāl*), [...] at ‘the meeting-place of the two seas’. (267) [...] He [the visionary] sees it as the place where the world of pure Ideas in their intelligible substantiality meets with the world of the objects of sense perception. It is the world where everything that appeared inanimate in the world of sense perception comes alive, the world to which Moses came before meeting his initiator (*Khezr, Khadir*)” (266). The Ismaili teachings suggest that the *Imago Templi* ought to be understood as a reflection of the *Other*, i.e. the Divine and His Throne. The *Imago Templi* does not reveal itself in the material universe, primarily because at “the meeting-place of the two seas’ we are in the ‘eighth clime’, a ‘clime’ whose events and recitals take place in the *Malakūt*, the world of the soul and of visionary awareness” (267). In line with the depiction of “the meeting-place of the two seas” as the “eighth clime,” it is interesting to note how Blake, in one of the stanzas in *Milton*, reflects on Milton, who has been residing in Eternity as the eighth angel. However, Milton’s Spectre descends into the material universe in hopes of reuniting with his wives and daughters. Consider what Blake writes:

As when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps,
Else he would wake; so seem’d he [referring to Milton] 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. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 109)

Blake's line, "an Eighth Image Divine," might also be a play on words, for while symbolizing one of the manifestations of God—in a form of an angel—there is no doubt that it could not represent that level of the imaginal realm that is driven by the "eighth clime" mentioned in Ismaili writings, especially in the writings of Ibn Arabi and Suhrawardī. Moreover, the fact that Blake makes Milton an eighth "Image Divine" ties in perfectly with his view of Milton and his writings as visionary, and the occurrence of visionary activities in the eighth clime. In his "Annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*," Blake makes it clear that his term "the Image Divine" simply suggests something more than just an image or manifestation of God. As he writes in the "Annotations:" "The All in Man The Divine Image *or* [emphasis added] Imagination" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 663).

After Milton's shadow fell into the "Sea of Time and Space"⁷⁸, we have to bear in mind that his "real and immortal Self" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 109) remained in the world of Beulah, which Blake "placed [...] as an intermediary between Eternity and Ulro" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 43). With Ulro being below, and Eternity above Beulah, Beulah might be viewed as the level of the imaginal world, or the meeting-place of the two seas that Corbin speaks of. Also, Beulah is a place where only visionaries can enter, before they ascend to Eternity⁷⁹. Beulah is "the place of night, lighted by the Moon of Love. It contains hills and vales and caves of sleep, also streams and rivers. It is a land of flowers—i.e. sexual pleasures. [It is filled with] couches for the sleepers" (43). Blake persistently refers to Beulah as a place of "moony shades and hills" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 129) and "land of rest" (113) that is visible to the inhabitants of Eternity on all sides. Beulah is, on the one hand, the sphere of the fixed stars, which would explain its linkage to the land of "moony shades and hills." In addition, we need to remember that Enitharmon, who is considered a manifestation of Space, has the Moon as her symbol. Raine remarks, in *Golgonooza: City of Imagination*, that Beulah is "a private world of tenderness and kindness where the 'seed' of cities grows, not in the political and public sphere, but within the lives of individuals" (*Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 105). And in spite of the regions of Beulah basking in "a dark & unknown Night" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 163), one has to keep in mind that "within / Opening into Beulah every angle is a lovely heaven" (183), which

78 Milton falls into the Sea of Time and Space, or the world of matter, after witnessing the intellectual and spiritual death of England's inhabitants. When Blake speaks of the Sea of Time and Space, he primarily refers to England.

79 It is remarkable how similar Blake's descriptions, throughout his works, of female companions (in Beulah) are to Qur'anic (56:15–56:40) descriptions of dark-eyed, virginal, female companions in Paradise, who recline on golden couches.

therefore implies that Beulah is nothing but the *mundus imaginalis*, residing in the mind and the soul of a visionary. With the term being coined by Corbin in his 1964 essay “Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imagination,” *mundus imaginalis* or *alam-al mithal* is an intermediary world of subtle realities, where things are perceived through the active imagination. The *Mundus imaginalis* is also regarded as the world where prophetic dreams and inspiration come to life.⁸⁰

In Islamic teachings, the earlier mentioned “eighth clime”⁸¹ is identical with the *mundus imaginalis*, just as Beulah is identical with the state of consciousness of higher things. In the Qur’an, it is mentioned that the prophet Muhammad journeyed into the realm of higher things at night-time. The Night Journey (*al-isra’*) is concerned with the Prophet Muhammad’s mystical journey from Mecca to Jerusalem⁸², and his subsequent Ascension to heaven (*mi’raj*). As Muhammad Asad suggests in his commentary and translation of the Qur’an, it is very difficult—almost impossible—to tell whether Muhammad’s journey, along with the Ascension, was a physical, or simply spiritual occurrence. Islamic theologians have been largely divided on this issue; however, some of the best-renowned theologians, such as Ibn Kathir and Zamakhshari, have commented that Muhammad left the mortal world only in his spirit, and that the angel Gabriel showed himself in Muhammad’s dream. As Asad notes, “the Apostle of God [Muhammad], accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, found himself transported by night to the site of Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem, where he led a congregation of many of the earlier, long since deceased prophets in prayer; some of them he afterwards encountered again in heaven” (Asad 1311, Appendix IV). On an esoteric level, God bestowed the prophet Muhammad—during his Night Journey—with an insight into *some* of the absolute truths of Divine creation⁸³. It is striking that Blake does something similar in *Milton*: he takes Milton into the realm of Beulah, placing his “real and immortal Self,” i.e. his soul, outside the material world, and bestows him with an unearthly knowledge⁸⁴. Additionally, Blake allows Milton’s Spectre/Shadow or his body to descend into the material world and testify to its downfall. It is also believed that the Prophet Muhammad, on his way to Jerusalem, “encountered an old woman, and was thereupon told by Gabriel, ‘This old woman is the mortal world (*ad-dunya*)’”

80 Note that Blake also refers to Beulah as the place where poetic inspiration (“Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song,” *Milton*, p. 96) and dreams (“he thought it was all in Vision / In Visions of the Dreams of Beulah among the Daughters of Albion,” *Jerusalem*, p. 214) are bestowed upon its dwellers.

81 In his writings, Suhrawardī speaks of the eighth clime as *nā kujā ābād*, which literally means the land of no-where, or utopia. Blake’s Beulah could also be perceived as the land of no-where.

82 “Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem]—the environs of which We had blessed—so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing” (Asad 17:1).

83 For a more comprehensive commentary of Prophet Mohammed’s Night Journey and his ascension to heaven, see Appendix IV of Muhammad Asad’s commentary of the Qur’an.

84 Note how Milton becomes aware of the existence of the three heavens/spheres of Beulah, and how he is sent on a journey to behold the realms of Golgonooza

(1312). Considering the setting in which Blake's Milton is placed, there is reason to suppose that Milton is in the state of a dream, a dream in which he also is being led to the gates of the Divine mysteries.

Like the Islamic tradition, Hinduism has its own version of the mystical journey and ascension to heaven. Namely, the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of it as "the journey of supreme happiness" (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 75, Lecture VIII), attained by those who aspire to the Divine with their hearts and minds. As Krishna said to Arjuna, only

He who thinketh constantly of me, his mind undiverted by another object, I will at all times be easily found by that constant adherent to devotion; and those elevated souls, who have thus attained supreme perfection, come unto me, and are no more born in the finite mansion of pain and sorrow. Know, O *Ārjōōn*, that all the regions between this and the abode of *Brāhm* afford but a transient residence; but he who findeth me, returneth not again to mortal birth. They who are acquainted with day and night, know that the day of *Brāhmā* is a thousand revolutions of the *Yōōgs*, and that his night extendeth for a thousand more. [...] The universe, even, having existed, is again dissolved; and now again, on the approach of day, by divine necessity, it is reproduced. (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 75, Lecture VIII)

Just as in Islam the ultimate destination of one's spiritual journey is the unification with the wisdom of Allah, so in Hinduism the ultimate goal of the "journey" is the ascension to the world of Brahma. As propounded by Guénon in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, the human being who has entered the realm of divine wisdom and immortality, finds himself/herself "incorporated" by assimilation into *Hiranyagarbha*; and this state, in which [he/she] may remain until the end of the cycle, [...] is what is most usually meant by the *Brahma-Loka*. However, just as the center of each state of the being contains the possibility of identification with the center of the total being, so the cosmic center where *Hiranyagarbha* dwells is identified virtually with the center of all the worlds" (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 149). In his depictions of the cosmic center, Blake seems to be very much in agreement with Berkeley's views on the habitation of the world within the soul. As Berkeley notes in his philosophical treatise *Siris*, "the word *space* or *place* hath by itself no meaning, and [...] it is impossible to understand what space alone or pure space is. And Plotinus acknowledgeth no place but soul or mind, expressly affirming that the soul is not in the world, but the world in the soul. And farther, the place of soul, saith he, is not body, but soul is in mind, and body is in soul" (quoted in Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 32–3). In his poems, Blake takes living and non-living objects and shows that the cosmic center, and infinity itself, can also be contained in things such as a flower or a grain of sand. Just because the principles of quantitative science

have taught that bigger and more massive objects are comprised of more particles than the smaller objects, that does not have to mean that minute creations should be stripped of an ability to embody unprecedented immensity and infinitude. As Blake writes in *Milton*,

Thou perceivest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours!
And none can tell how from so small a center comes such sweets
Forgetting that within that Center Eternity expands
Its ever during doors, that Og & Anak fiercely guard. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 131)

In *Jerusalem*, Blake expands on the importance of using the inherent wisdom of our hearts and capturing the center of the world in naturally created objects. Those whose minds have become entirely confounded by the domination of the senses will continue to be guided by the hand of Satan and his creations: their hearts will turn into stale and unilluminated entities, and their minds will shrink into a state of dire submissiveness.

There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent & has many Angles
But he who finds it will find Oothoons palace, for within
Opening into Beulah every angle is a lovely heaven. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 183)

Hinduism draws attention to the presence of infinity in that which is seemingly the smallest in its physicality. In “The Symbolism of the Forms of the Cosmos” of the *Fundamental Symbols*, Guénon explains that the Hindu tradition teaches about the importance of seeing “the principle of the being” (*Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science* 146) and the place in which it resides—i.e. the heart’s cavity, as the spatially *greatest*, for that which is contained in the heart is, indeed, greater than anything we can conceptualize or imagine with our senses. Guénon further notes: “[J]ust as the point is spatially infinitesimal and even null, although it is the principle by which all space is produced, or again, just as the number one appears as the smallest of numbers, although it contains them all principally, and produces from itself all their unending series” (146), the heart or the spiritual center—while being physically small in respect to other organs—binds one’s entire physiognomic system together and gives life and functionality unto the rest of an organism. Or to draw on the Ismaili tradition of cosmological creation, God is often manifested in the smallest number—number one, which according to the Ikhwān, is the number of creation, that determines the other eight states of the being. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes in *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, the number one—according to the Ikhwān order—stands

for the Creator, “who is one, simple, eternal, [and] permanent” (*An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* 51). Additionally, the number one is in correspondence with the letter A,⁸⁵ known as the *alif*, in the Arabic language, which in turn can correspond to different things, such as “the Firmament: the eighth Sphere, [...] the fourth Sphere: the Heaven of the Sun, [and] the Sphere of Water” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 91–2). An interesting point to note is that in his depictions of space and the cosmological order, Blake always places the sun above the moon, for the sun, in Blake’s symbolism, is an embodiment of the active imagination and the vision of God. While the element of water is mostly associated with the world of matter, Blake also represents it as the source of energy and the giver of life, such as in the “Annotations to Berkeley’s *Siris*” where he writes: “The Four Senses are the Four Faces of Man & the Four Rivers of the Water of Life” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 663). Nonetheless, in *Europe*, Blake’s images of water are resemblant more of the material world that encapsulates the body.

I wrap my turban of thick clouds around my lab’ring head;
And fold the sheety waters as a mantle round my limbs.
Yet the red sun and moon,
And all the overflowing stars rain down prolific pains. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 61)

The image above is just one of the multiple examples typifying Blake’s incessant use of the image of the cloud in relation to his depiction of spatial concepts and the creation of forms. Blake’s usage of the cloud is almost always representative of the dwelling place of the spirits and/or angelic beings. The act of wrapping the “turban of thick clouds around [the] head” suggests that the cloud is a form that can fill all spaces, and it can, to an equal extent, serve as a sphere that hides and animates the immaterial. In *Blake and Tradition*, Raine remarks that Blake’s images of the cloud largely echo Swedenborg’s writings and his representation of the angelic societies in clouds, as well as the appearance of God in “a cloud of multitudes of spirits” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. I* 9). As Raine further notes, Swedenborg held that

Every spirit has its “ambient Sphere” — “in Heaven sometimes under the Appearance of attenuated Flame, in Hell under the Appearance of crass Fire; and sometimes in Heaven under the Appearance of a thin and white Cloud, and in Hell under the Appearance of a thick and black Shower.” Blake makes frequent use of both these forms

⁸⁵ It is necessary to note that Hinduism, just like Islam, places high importance on the letter A and its invocation. In the Prashna-Upanishad, it is suggested that the one who “meditates on the syllable A alone he is soon born again on this earth. If he has chanted the Rig-Weda, he is born among men, a great, austere, self-controlled, God-fearing man” (Yeats and Swami 46).

of ambient sphere, and spirits in or on clouds are no less frequent in his designs than in the text. Spirits surrounded by flames and clouds meet and embrace on the pages of the *Marriage*; in *Urizen*, Orc is characteristically enveloped in his own fires; Oothoon is cloud-born. (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I 9–10)

And while Blake's images of the cloud are typically Swedenborgian and inherently Neoplatonic⁸⁶, it should also be noted that, as a symbol, "the cloud" carries important meanings in Hindu and Islamic traditions, and surprisingly enough, these meanings seem to be similar to Blake's views. Corbin suggests that Islam speaks of a "primordial Cloud," an intermediary between the Divine essence and the world of spiritual realities, and the world of sensible realities. This primordial Cloud is associated with the act of God's creation of the universe, and is a crucial element in the overall understanding of the cosmic order. When the prophet Muhammed was asked about the location of God before the creation of the visible spaces, he responded that "He [God] was in a Cloud; there was no space either above or below" (this line, originally from the *hadith*, is quoted in Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 185). In their interpretations of the primordial Cloud or *amā*⁸⁷, both Henry Corbin (see *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*) and Samer Akkach, in his *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, seem to agree on envisioning the Cloud as a place that accommodates all forms of the universe, "highest and lowest, subtle and dense, spatial and nonspatial" (Akkach 120). And while the primordial Cloud stands as the original locus and the foundation of everything that resides in the world, Akkach also points to another very important observation: that the form of the Cloud⁸⁸ must be seen as "the cosmic expression of the first qualified form of unity, [and] totality, [... which] encompasses both the metaphysical and the physical" (122). Or to go more in line with Ibn Arabi's major interpretation, the Cloud is also to be seen as the cosmic equivalent of that which is *the greatest*—which brings us back to the discussion of the number one and the Arabic letter *alif*—and most importantly, as the symbol of the Divine Imagination.

If we look to Blake and compare his depictions of the cloud to the Islamic teachings, the curious thing is that the images of clouds in his work seem to perform a twofold purpose:

86 In the writings of the Neoplatonists, the cloud is often associated with the fleeting body that will become replaced with the soul, once we learn to stop being dependent on the body as our main tool for the spatial orientation. Very often, Blake describes the body as vanishing in a smoky cloud, which, as suggested by Raine, bears similarities to Paracelsus' images of the body. As Paracelsus wrote, "Briefly, whatsoever hath a body is nothing but curdled smoke, wherein a particular predestination lyeth hid... For all bodies shall passe away and vanish into nothing but smoke, they shall all end in a fume... Man is a coagulated fume" (quoted in Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I 10).

87 In Arabic, the word *amā* means thin and subtle cloud.

88 We need to bear in mind that both Corbin and Akkach largely base their interpretations of the Cloud on the writings of Ibn Arabi, who speaks of the form of the cloud as circular. For Ibn Arabi, the cloud stands as the possible manifestation of a perfect circle. For a complete insight into Ibn Arabi's visions of the primordial Cloud, see chapter "Cosmic Order" in Akkach's *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*.

the first one is that of the cloud as the universal matter or the *materia prima* from which all other forms emanate; the second purpose is that of the cloud as a repository of the absolute imagination and Divine Energy. To explain how Blake uses the cloud to show the creation of all other forms and shapes in the universe, including those on Earth itself, it is helpful to reflect upon his frontispiece to *Europe: A Prophecy*. What came to be known as one of Blake's most celebrated paintings, "The Ancient of Days" (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 174) shows Urizen—who, among other things, stands as an embodiment of God, the creator of the world we inhabit—stretching down his hand to create and shape the spaces of Ulro, or the material universe. The painting displays a stark contrast between the celestial and material spheres⁸⁹, and casts an ominous fate on the human world where reason and materialism predominate. In their analyses of the painting, some of the Blake critics, such as William Vaughan, have pointed out that placing Urizen in a circle seems a rather peculiar choice, for the circle is "an ancient symbol for the perfection of Heaven" (Vaughan 8). However, one aspect that is more pertinent to the present discussion is Blake's emphasis on the form of the cloud, and the position of God (Urizen) in it. Corbin's and Akkach's insightful approaches to the image of the primordial Cloud, as explained earlier, seem to go very much in line with what Blake had intended for Urizen. Placed within the cloud that resolves itself into what seems to be a perfect circle,⁹⁰ Urizen is also located in a kind of a non-spatial entity. Since the painting is emblematic of God's creation of the universe, it is clear that God (Urizen) resides in and creates the world from the cloud, with no space above or below him. More than once, Blake attests to the image of the cloud as God's dwelling place in *Jerusalem*, and states that "the Vision of God [is] cload in clouds" (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 213), in "the merciful clouds of Jehovah" (214). Except for the black, and therefore invisible void below Urizen, the only other thing Blake allows us to see on the painting is the golden compasses held by Urizen, who uses it to measure and "to explore the Abyss [the material world]" (81). As Vaughan notes, "This might seem to be a completely traditional image. God the Father is often represented in medieval art measuring out the earth with a pair of compasses, like an architect or master craftsman" (Vaughan 8). And even though Blake may have based "The Ancient of Days" on the precepts of medieval art, it would, however, be helpful to meditate on the thought of the likely influence of the more remote traditions of the East. Namely, the pyramid-like contours resembling a pair of compasses can also be suggestive of the three-dimensional character of space, or more importantly, of the triple number of

89 Though the colors in various copies of Blake's designs differ, each displays similar contrasts.

90 We can now recall Ibn Arabi's comparison of the primordial Cloud to a circle. Note also that the same image of the circle, this time without Urizen in it, is to be seen in Blake's opening painting to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, which depicts Bromion and Oothoon tied against each other, with the weeping Theotormon beside them. Revealed by the expansion of the clouds, the circle is looking down on the despair and pain of the Earth's mortal inhabitants (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 143).

worlds/spheres in the universe mentioned in both Hinduism⁹¹ and Islam.

The universe, according to Hinduism, is divided into three worlds, which also stand as the manifestations of the three spaces formed by the separation of Heaven and Earth⁹². In his essay “The Hindu Tradition: Theology and Autology,” Coomaraswamy suggests that aside from Heaven and Earth, the third world is “the in-between World (*antariksa*) [that] provides the ethereal space (*ākāśa*) in which the inhibited possibilities of finite manifestation can take birth in accordance with their several natures” (“The Hindu Tradition: Theology and Autology” 278–9). Coomaraswamy’s argument can further be supported by Guénon’s statement in his work *The Symbolism of the Cross*, that the intermediary world between Heaven and Earth is what we could call the *True Man*. According to Guénon, it is exactly in the True Man that the unity of Heaven and Earth, “which are identified with *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the two poles of universal manifestation” (Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross* 124), can be accomplished, for the True Man—unlike Heaven and Earth—has an ability to comprise both essence and substance, the Divine and human. The True Man, above all, is in a state of divine perception and ineffable consciousness, and is able to keep Its human form non-fragmented and expandable. As Blake proved in his works, every human being is able to attain to the state of the True Man, and see the world in its primeval infinity and eternity, because after all, God and humans are inseparable. Blake explains this in *Jerusalem* in the following manner:

For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains Cities Villages,
All are Human & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk
In Heavens & Earths; as 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. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 225)

In *All Religions are One*, Blake compares the True Man to the concept of the Poetic Genius, and in doing so, he draws an important distinction between the True and Universal Man. The True Man, in Blake’s view, is not identical with the Universal Man. Foster Damon states that, in actuality, Blake’s True Man is “the essential Man, especially [the one in] whom [the Poetic Genius] manifests, [i.e. in] the poets or prophets” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 330). In *Blake and Tradition*, Kathleen Raine expands on the concept of the True Man, claiming that “all religious traditions are manifestations of [it], [...] and not of the ratio” (*Blake and Tradition, Vol. II* 112). Since “[t]he true Man is the source” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 1) of all

⁹¹ Also note the similarity to Hindu Shakta views of God as three-sided.

⁹² “The Ancient of Days” bears a very clear separation of Heaven and Earth, shown by the over-arching presence of the colors red and yellow above the Earth, and the presence of black below it.

religions, he/she is also the bearer of the imagination and poetic inspiration. That the True Man is not the same as the Universal Man can be inferred from a simple fact that True Man is “someone who has attained to the fullness of the human state” (Guénon, *The Great Triad* 124), whereas the concept of the Universal or Divine Man “can only be applied to what is beyond that state” (124). Guénon further suggests that the True Man possesses the stage of a primordial man, and that the Universal Man⁹³ is the one who has “attained the ‘Supreme Identity’. Strictly speaking he is no longer a man in an individual sense, because he has risen above humanity and is totally liberated not only from its specific conditions but also from all other limiting conditions associated with manifested existence” (124). Notice how in the beginning of *The Four Zoas*, even Blake himself chooses to place the Universal Man above the level of the True Man. As Blake writes, “The Universal Man. To Whom Be Glory Evermore Amen” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 301).

When Blake speaks of the Universal Man, we have to keep in mind that he primarily refers to Jesus, who, in Blake’s view, embodies Heaven and Earth, and all that God created. According to the teachings of the Hindu religion, the Supreme Identity is embodied in Brahma, but the act of the universal manifestation came to be known as *samsāra*, which “includes an indefinite series of cycles, that is to say of states or degrees of existence, each of which terminates in a *pralaya*” (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 127).⁹⁴ In other words, *samsāra* came to signify the cycle of life and death, the confluence of all the cycles of manifested existence in the cosmic order, or what Coomaraswamy calls “the Eternal Becoming” (Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva: Fourteen Indian Essays* 10). In short, it is related to an idea of reincarnation: in Sanskrit, the word *samsāra* is also very often understood as a term for the universe as revealed in the Ōm, or the Imperishable Word or the Self⁹⁵, to which beings return in the hope of reaching a state of perfection. The idea of reincarnation or the return to the material world for the sake of achieving perfection in soul and spirit, is also present in Ismailism⁹⁶, which speaks of this aspect as recapitulation or reintegration, instead. One of the best interpretations of the recapitulation *per se*, is to be found in Corbin’s work *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, where he writes: “Just as all the Prophets since Adam are ‘recapitulated’ in Christ, so all the Imams, all the partial *Qa’im*, are recapitulated or integrated in the last among them (whose *majma*’ is the Temple of all their Temples of Light)” (*Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 68–9).

93 Drawing on the Hindu and Buddhist teachings, Guénon also applies the name “Transcendent Man” to the Universal Man.

94 For an explanation of the term *pralaya*, please see (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 126–7).

95 For more details on the concept of Ōm, see the Māndookya-Upanishad.

96 Note that Ismailism is the only denomination (strain) of Islam that speaks of and acknowledges reincarnation.

To explain what exactly Corbin means by this, it is useful to turn to the writings of Ostad Elahi, the Iranian philosopher and mystic of the twentieth century, who approached the subjects of the journey of the soul and unity with the One in a unique light. In what became one of his most famous writings, *Knowing the Spirit*, Elahi suggested that every human being, in their search for Truth and Perfection, goes through an extensive process that includes a thousand and one spiritual stages, with “the thousand-and-first stage [being] the world of Perfection and of reunion with the True One, the Reality of that Point of divine Unicity and Singularity” (Elahi 94). Furthermore, Elahi notes that if one fails to reach all of the one thousand and one stages during their time in the material world, they would then become transported to the intermediate world, “either by means of transposition from the material world into the intermediate world, or through the establishment of a spiritual connection between (that being in) the intermediate world and (another creature) in the material world” (94). Therefore, when Blake wrote in *Milton* that “every Space that a Man views around his dwelling-place: / Standing on his own roof, or in his garden on a mount / Of twenty-five cubits in height, such space is his Universe; / [...] And if he move his dwelling-place, his heavens also move,” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127) he was trying to point to the sacred connection between human beings and the cosmos, for after all, “[t]o behold the cosmos with the eye of the intellect is to see it not as a pattern of externalized and brute facts, but as a theater wherein are reflected aspects of the Divine Qualities, as a myriad of mirrors reflecting the face of the Beloved, as the theophany of that Reality which resides at the Center of the being of man himself” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 169).

That Blake was aware of the idea of reincarnation is evident from his treatment of all of the four Zoas, which after experiencing death come back to life and return to their original states. In *Jerusalem*, for example, Tharmas is slain by Luvah (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 214), to finally appear holding his “Bow of Brass pure flaming richly wrought” (256), and aid in the formation of the spiritual Jerusalem. In addition, David Weir mentions that Blake’s descriptive approach to some of the characters in *The Four Zoas* is very suggestive of the reincarnation passages in the Hindu texts. The exemplary passages from the *Zoas* that Weir mentions are the ones in which characters, after surviving the battles, “Return in pangs & horrible convulsions to their bestial state / For the monsters of the Elements Lions or Tygers or Wolves” (Blake 374; quoted in Weir 73). If we also look at Blake’s design “What is Man!” (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 135), originally found in Blake’s *Notebook*, we can notice that the way Blake portrayed the human echoes the idea of reincarnation, at least in a visual way. What we see on the design is a human being, laid out on a leaf: his/her body is the body of a caterpillar, but the head is still human. Above the humanoid creation trapped in a body of the caterpillar is another caterpillar, resting on what also appears to be a leaf. On the one hand, Blake here seems to be suggesting that what we

are in the present form does not have to mean that we embodied that same form in the past, and that we will retain it in the future. This can further be supported by the image of Orc's physiognomic development. In *The Book of Urizen*, Blake describes Orc as a helpless "Worm" lying "[i]n the trembling womb" (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 79) of Enitharmon, who in the meantime "grew to a serpent" (79), then "[m]any forms of fish, bird & beast" (79), until, at last, "an Infant form [descended] / Where was a worm before" (79). Contrary to this interpretation, we have to bear in mind that through his "What is Man!" design, Blake was also trying to point to the humans' limited vision of the world and the idea of space as limiting to our physical existence, or "[i]n other words, things are as they are perceived; man as a worm cannot perceive the true light" (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 84). When Blake wrote in *The Four Zoas* that "Man is a Worm [...] Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love in selfish clay" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 401), he undoubtedly referred to the human tendency to forsake the heart and the mind, and lay unnecessary importance on the body. When the physical portions of the being become more important than the immaterial, the body truly devolves into a worm—at least on a metaphorical level—and obstructs the development of the immaterial portions and the attainment of a possible unity with God. As Blake instructs in *Jerusalem*:

Let the Human Organs be kept in their perfect Integrity
 At will Contracting into Worms, or Expanding into Gods
 And then behold! what are these Ulro Visions of Chastity
 [...] Such are these Ulro Visions, for tho we sit down within
 The plowed furrow, listning to the weeping clods till we
 Contract or Expand Space at will: or if we raise ourselves
 Upon the chariots of the morning. Contracting or Expanding Time!
 Every one knows, we are One Family! One Man blessed for ever (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 205)

The division of oneself into body, mind, and heart brings us back to the earlier discussion of the Hindu triad of the worlds. Aside from the division between Heaven, Earth, and the intermediary world of the True Man, it is useful to note that Hinduism also makes a distinction between the three fundamental degrees of manifestation. In *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, and *The Great Triad*, Guénon has observed that these three degrees of manifestation are what he calls the supra-formal, subtle, and gross, "which are described as the 'three worlds' (*Tribhuvana*) by the Hindu tradition" (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 49). Guénon parallels the degrees of manifestation in the following manner: the realm of supra-formal manifestation corresponds to the heavenly realm; the realm of subtle manifestation is the intermediary world or *antariksha*, while the realm of gross

or corporeal manifestation is representative of the terrestrial world. In Blake's symbolical system, the three realms or degrees of manifestation are related to "the Three Heavens of Beulah" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 98), or the three gates/entrances into Beulah, distributed between the head, heart, and loins. As Blake writes in *Milton*:

And this is the manner of the Daughters of Albion in their beauty
Every one is threefold in Head & Heart & Reins, & every one
Has three Gates into the Three Heavens of Beulah which shine
Translucent in their Foreheads & their Bosoms & their Loins (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 98)

Blake's description here echoes the institution of castes as outlined in Book 10 of the *Rig-Veda* (Hymn XC), in which we are provided with the description of the primordial giant Purusha from whom all of the four castes or *varnas* emanated. As suggested in the Hymn:

When they divided Puruṣa how many portions did they make?
What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rājanya made.
His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the Śūdra was produced. (Rig-Veda, Hymn XC)

In this respect, the *chakras* of the head, heart, and loins correspond to the *varnas* of the Brahmins, Kshatriya (Rājanya), and Vaishya, born from the mouth, arms, and thighs. The final caste, that of the Shudras, created from the feet of Purusha⁹⁷ is considered the lowest in this hierarchy.

Every human being, and naturally the cosmos which he/she occupies, is threefold in head, heart, and loins. Interestingly, Blake distributes the division of head, heart, and loins among the daughters of Urizen, more specifically among Eleth (the head), Uveth (the heart), and Ona (the loins) (see Damon's interpretations of Urizen's daughters in *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 118, 308, 427), who fail on the cosmic plane of existence due to their disproportionate levels of manifestation. It is exactly because of this disproportionate manifestation, or the placing of more balance on the physical rather than the immaterial parts of oneself that humans fail to realize their unity with the Divine and attain to the Throne. It is interesting that Blake's distribution of the worlds among the head, heart, and loins resembles the division we come across in Islamic teachings. In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr mentions the three worlds that could correspond to Blake's "Three Heavens of Beulah,"

⁹⁷ For different interpretations of the manifestations of Purusha, see (Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 46–50).

and these are: “the archangelic world (*jabarūt*), the subtle and psychic world (*malakūt*), and the physical world (*mulk*)” (*Knowledge and the Sacred* 175). Corbin, on the other hand, in his book *Temple and Contemplation*, goes a bit further into the subject and explains that all of the three worlds “are invested in the human being” (*Temple and Contemplation* 193); but only the worlds of *jabarūt* and *malakūt* “constitute [one’s] essential, [...] real, [...] inner being, so that even when [one] withdraws from the phenomenal world which envelops [them], he [or she] does not cease to subsist integrally as [a human being]” (193–4). With the formation of the head-heart-and-loins trinity, Blake was quite possibly following an example of Eastern teachings. While Enitharmon creates the vegetated bodies that contain this trinity, she at the same time creates the spaces in the universe, embodied in the head, heart, and loins. The trinity Blake created corresponds to Corbin’s division of the universe, for Corbin himself matches the universe with bodily parts. Namely, Corbin relates the phenomenal world or *alam al-shahadah* (*mulk*) to that which is perceptible to bodily senses (i.e. Blake’s Loins). Corbin’s suprasensible world or *ghayb* (i.e. *malakut*) is the realm “whose organ of perception is cognitive imagination” (192). This in turn corresponds to the realm Blake locates in the Head. And finally, the realm which occupies the Heart in Blake’s understanding is “the intelligible world of the pure Intelligences or Angel-Intelligences, commonly designated *Jabarut*, whose organ of perception is the intuitive intellect” (192).

All of the three worlds mentioned above converge in the Divine Energy, or the primeval energy whose motion creates and animates all spaces, both on a spiritual and physical realm of manifestation. This brings us back to the second most prominent role of Blake’s cloud as the confluence of absolute imagination and Energy. To Blake, Energy is the mover and creator of all things: “Energy is the only life and is from the Body” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 34), but at the same time, it is the essence of the Deity and humans. As Raine observes in *Blake and Tradition*: “Every living creature is [Energy or] a ‘world of delight,’ for delight is the *esse* of life. The Infant Joy of the *Songs* says, ‘Joy is my name,’ for that is the ultimate nature of the life principle, the *ananda* of Vedanta” (*Blake and Tradition, Vol. I* 368–9). In *Temple and Contemplation*, Corbin proclaimed that the Divine Energy “is designated sometimes as *Nafas al-Rahman* (the Breath of the Merciful One), and sometimes as the Primordial Cloud” (*Temple and Contemplation* 192). Thus, when Blake speaks of “a man from a cloud born” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 81), or that “Luvah⁹⁸ descended from the cloud” (192), he intends to point to the cloud as not only the incorporeal place from which everything else emanated, but also as the symbol of divine

98 In Blake’s mythological depiction of the four Zoas, Luvah resides in the world of Beulah, and becomes closely associated with Jesus, for he embodies love and mercy: “Jesus is love in the human form. He bears all Luvah’s afflictions” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 255).

love and mercy⁹⁹, visible to the mind that has attained to Absolute Imagination. When in *The Four Zoas*, Blake wrote that “All nations look up to the Cloud & behold him who was Crucified” (393), he provided an image of the cloud as the embodiment of Jesus; however, the image of the cloud we get in the Preface to *Milton* becomes transformed into the *invocation* of a cloud for the sake of achieving dominion over the material world through the power of the imagination. As Blake writes:

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!
I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 95)

In *America: A Prophecy* (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 157), Orc, the fighter for the spiritual liberation of humankind, is depicted as a hero trying to rise from the deepest pits of the universe, and eventually destroy the material world.¹⁰⁰ While depicted in a somewhat inferior position to Urizen¹⁰¹, Orc is also literally supporting the universe with his shoulders¹⁰², which brings into focus a very interesting image that Blake might have had in his mind. Blake's depiction of Orc in the above mentioned design seems to echo the idea of earth or the sensible world as supported by the back of the whale, just as the cloud in a way serves as a support to both Urizen and Orc.

Damon was among the first to point to the possible Hellenic ties to Orc's name, and its derivation from the word *orca*, used to describe a species of killer whales: “in one of his forms[,] he [Orc] is a whale¹⁰³ in the South Seas” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas*

99 The Qur'an teaches that God created the world as an act of mercy: while He wished to make Himself known, He also decided to grant life and the universe to other beings (creatures). In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna echoes a similar view when he proclaims: “I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. [...] and all things hang on me. (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 70); I am the creator of all things, and all things proceed from me. [...] I gladly inspire those, who are constantly employed in my service, with that use of reason, by which they come unto me; and, in compassion, I stand in my own nature, and dissipate the darkness of their ignorance with the light of the lamp of wisdom” (84). Just like in Islam, “[c]reation, in Hindu thought, was not caused *ex nihilo*. It was part of the conscious design of God. Moreover, it was an act of mercy” (Singh 129).

100 We have to remember that Orc, among all other characters in Blake's system, is the staunchest revolutionary trying to eliminate the rule of the material universe. At the same time, he fights for the cause of liberty and unity in the revolutions and wars raging under the heaven.

101 Note the crouched position of Orc's body, who is buried like a tree root in the ground and is trying to raise himself above it.

102 Like Atlas from the Greek myths.

103 In Plate 2 of *America, A Prophecy*, Blake writes: “I see a Whale in the South-sea, drinking my soul away” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 52).

and *Symbols of William Blake* 309). And just as the whale dominates among other creatures in the seas, Orc's desire to restore imagination and liberty to the inhabitants of the material world prevails over Urizen's deceiving force. In *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, Akkach remarks that the early Islamic texts "describe the earth as being spread out on the back of a fish, a whale (*hūt*) called 'nūn' (literally 'N') whose ends touch the extremities of the sky" (136). In addition, the Hindu religion speaks of Vishnu appearing in the form of the fish, at the end of the *Mahā-Yuga*, to Satyavrata to warn him about the destructive flood headed towards the Earth. Vishnu orders Satyavrata to construct an ark, which he then guides over the flooded world in the form of the fish. In *The Fundamental Symbols*, Guénon notes that the Hindu myth of Vishnu as the savior who appeared in the form of the fish carries an important significance, for it speaks of the destruction of the previous, corrupted state of the world to be replaced by a new one, in which Vishnu introduces spiritual knowledge, in the form of the *Veda*, to humankind. The story of Vishnu as a fish-savior is analogous to the story of Noah in the Old Testament, and would have certainly been of interest to Blake, not only because of the ties to its Biblical counterpart, but due to the fact that it holds a meaning on the cosmological level. Guénon connects the story of Vishnu to the form of the Arabic letter *nūn*, which "consists of the lower half of a circumference and a point that is the centre of this same circumference. Now the lower-half circumference is also the figure of an ark floating on the waters, and the point within it represents the seed enveloped or contained therein.[...] It may be noted, too, that the half-circumference[...] is to be identified with the lower or 'terrestrial' half of the World Egg" (Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science* 110). Regarding the letter *nūn*, it should be noted that "geometrically, [it] is written as half a circle with a diacritical point representing its center.[...] Ibn Arabi says, the *nūn* was a complete circle, representing the spherical form of the world" (Akkach 136). Akkach further notes that the two halves of the *nūn*—visible and invisible—can be assigned to the sensible and intelligible halves of the world. Nonetheless, the image of the world constructed by the majority of humans is laid out differently from the image represented by the letter *nūn*. What is the intelligible half of the world in the *nūn* becomes the sensible half in the eyes of most humans. Contrary to this, that which occupies the inscribed lower half of the letter *nūn*—and this half is the sensible half—becomes the inscribed upper half, or the visible, in the eyes of common perception. To get a better understanding of the location of the cosmological spheres in the *nūn*, see Akkach's Fig. 3.9 (136).

If we compare Akkach's designs to Blake's representation of the Mundane Egg on Plate 33 of *Milton* (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 133), we can see that the egg contains the circumference and a diacritical point that converges into a center formed through an intersection of what appear to be four equal and perfect circles. Each of the circles embodies one of the four Zoas—Urthona, Luvah, Tharmas, and Urizen—which

according to George Mills Harper and Kathleen Raine “may be considered as four aspects of mankind” (Harper 129), or “the four [...] faculties of the human soul” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 263). Damon, on the other hand, equates the Zoas with the four sides of the universe, or the four elements: earth, fire, air, and water. The four circles Blake depicted in the design can also stand as symbols of the four universal principles, Intellect, Soul, Nature, and Matter, which, as Akkach relates, are “the four bearers of the Throne,[...] and the four rivers of paradise” (Akkach 175). Just as the sensible or lower half of the *nūn* is sunk in the waters—the symbol of the material and degenerate world—the lower half of Blake’s Mundane Egg, occupied by Urizen, is sunk into the fiery abyss of desolation and decay. There is a reason why Blake decided to inscribe the name of Satan in the lower half of the Egg, and Adam’s name in the upper half, for to those humans who look to the terrestrial world as the manifestation of the intelligible, and to that which is beyond the visible skies as non-existent or non-sensical, their minds’ state becomes that of a rotten vegetable, which is eternally blinded by the visible aspects of this world. As Blake writes in *Milton and Jerusalem*:

For the Chaotic Voids outside of the Stars are measured by
The Stars, which are the boundaries of Kingdoms, Provinces
And Empires of Chaos invisible to the Vegetable Man (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 138)
[...] Have you known the Judgment that is arisen among the
Zoa’s of Albion? where a Man dare hardly to embrace
His own Wife, for the terrors of Chastity that they call
By the name of Morality. their Daughters govern all
In hidden deceit! they are Vegetable only fit for burning (179)

The lower half of the Egg is analogous to what the Ismaili teachings designate as *Mulk*, or the visible world (i.e. Earth), whereas the upper part would be identical with the angelic sphere of *Jabarut*, or the Heavens. The very center of the Egg, the meeting-place of all of the Four Zoas, is the world of the Soul, or *Malakut*: it is the place where the divine and human presences meet. Moreover, the Universal Soul residing in *Malakut*, “receives from the Intellect all the virtues, forms, and positive qualities, and transmits them in turn to the whole of the Universe.[...] All change in the Universe[...] is directed by the Soul” (Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* 56–7). In Blake’s system, Luvah is an embodiment of the center, located in the Heart, and “unapproachable for ever” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 156). If we turn back to Blake’s drawing of the Mundane Egg, it is evident that Luvah’s point is the east, meaning that the east occupies at the same time the central point on the universal plane. This in itself brings into question Blake’s fourfold division between the Zoas. To Blake, the center (Luvah) is also the birthplace of all other forms in the

world, and is created before the terrestrial world: “The Vegetative Universe, opens like a flower from the Earths center: / In which is Eternity. It expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell / And there it meets Eternity again, both within and without” (157). Akkach relates that God, after “creating the Intellect, the Soul, the Throne, the Footstool, the *atlas* sphere, and the sphere of the fixed stars” (Akkach 137), sent an angel to form the center of the universe that is “always the source from which things proceed forth and to which they will eventually return” (137). What is more, He sent an angel to form the center, prior to Him creating the visible world. When Blake speaks of the expansion of the visible world “to the Mundane Shell” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 157), he primarily refers to the human tendency to envision the world as expanding up to the visible portion of the sky, only. The Mundane Shell is nothing but the visible sky, regarded as the veil that hides the rest of the universe; or as Damon relates, it is a “hard coating of matter which separates us from Eternity” (quoted in Harper 132). While the humans encapsulated in the lower part of the Egg cannot witness the worlds above the visible sky, the ones who go beyond the center and attain to the upper part will be able to rejoice in the sphere not controlled by spatial determinants. Interestingly, Blake assigns the upper part of the Egg to the one Zoa which initially is not given an emanation, Urthona, who when divided into Los and Enitharmon, i.e. Space and Time, starts to embody creative imagination and spiritual beauty. As “the deepest and most mysterious of the Zoas” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 426), Urthona corresponds to yet another spatial point, that of the nadir¹⁰⁴. In *Jerusalem*, Blake explains the distribution of the spatial points among the Zoas in the following manner:

And the Four Points are thus beheld in Great Eternity
West, the Circumference: South, the Zenith: North,
The Nadir: East, the Center, unapproachable for ever.
These are the four Faces towards the Four Worlds of Humanity
In every Man. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 156)

With the nadir being assigned to Urthona, and the center to Luvah, Blake assigns the zenith to Urizen, and the circumference to Tharmas. Even though Urthona’s location is in the north, and naturally, in the heavenly sphere, the spatial point assigned to him is the lowest, which makes the nadir located in the subconscious. Urizen’s place, on the other hand, is in the highest point, the zenith, which at the same time would symbolize the Head. Blake’s inversion of Urthona’s and Urizen’s spatial points might appear somewhat puzzling at first, considering the principal roles of both of these Zoas; however, we have to bear in mind that in spite of the assigned cardinal point of the nadir, Urthona is the only Zoa that stands as the

¹⁰⁴ Note that Luvah is associated with the spatial point of the center

symbol of the Sun.¹⁰⁵ In Blake's symbolism, the Sun occupies a highly valued position, and is often tied to the vision of God. As Blake writes in Plate 43 of *Jerusalem*: "Then the Divine Vision like a silent Sun appeard above Albions dark rocks" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 191). Contrary to this, the Zoa located in the zenith—Urizen—can be identified with the cycle of no moon, or the state of complete spiritual darkness and endless stagnation. In this respect, Blake seems to be close to the Ismaili doctrine, for as Corbin explains, "in the Mazdean schema, the light is in the north, the shadow and darkness are in the south" (Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* 62). In addition, Blake's inversion of the nadir and the zenith between the southern and northern sides of the world is very close to the *pradakshinā* process of circumambulation in Hinduism¹⁰⁶, where the center of the world is placed on the right side¹⁰⁷ and the locations of the south and north are inverted, meaning that the south which comes to occupy the upper half of the world in the *pradakshinā* brings with itself the corresponding nadir to the same place. When Blake decided to place the zenith in the lower half of the world and assign it to Urizen, he did so primarily to mock the spiritual blindness of humans, who instead of feeding off the fruits of the imagination and beauty, choose to hail reason, placing it at undeservingly lofty heights. At the beginning of the Plate 16 of *America, A Prophecy*, Blake describes how, after the corruption of the imagination and the victory of reason in human beings, the intelligible and sensible halves (the Heaven and Earth) became replaced in the eyes of humanity, thus placing the Earth and every material thing in the zenith. As Blake writes:

Over the hills, the vales, the cities, rage the red flames fierce;
The Heavens melted from north to south; and Urizen who sat
Above all heavens in thunders wrap'd, emerg'd his leprous head
From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous
Falling into the deep sublime! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 57)

With the decrease of the imagination and spiritual death, the half of the Egg originally plunged in the lower waters, starts to claim a place in the higher waters, thus pushing the celestial realm into the dark abyss. Blake's depiction of the descending creation of the world (the Heavens melting down to south) is similar to an earlier mentioned description provided by Akkash, who, by analyzing Ibn Arabi's vision of the universe, relates to the creation of the sensible world as an event that occurred after the creation of the celestial realm and the

¹⁰⁵ Los' name is very likely an anagram of the Greek word *sol*.

¹⁰⁶ One of the primary tenets of Islam that all Muslims are supposed to do, at least once in their lives, is to visit Mecca and circumambulate the Kaabah.

¹⁰⁷ Luvah, the Center, also occupies the right side in Blake's design of the Egg.

center.¹⁰⁸ With the spiritual and intellectual fall of humankind, everything in Blake's universe, including the poles of orientation, became inverted. Everything except for an ability of the center and circumference to embody one another, and expand into Eternity. In the light of this, Blake relates:

What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:
The Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center
And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.
And the Center has Eternal States! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 225)

Blake's representation of the center-circumference duality is nothing but a portrayal of the contrast between the inward and outward, between the Heart (Luvah) and the Body (Tharmas). Every human being is torn between the heart and the body, between the open gates of the East (Luvah) and the closed gates of the West (Tharmas), for as Raine remarks, "[m]aterialist Western philosophy destroys for man precisely the material world, which it externalizes, banishing the phenomena into 'the far remote.' This handicap is, as it were, innate in the people of Golgonooza: *The Western Gate fourfold is clos'd*" (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 269). Unlike the western circumference where the Divine is non-existent or invisible, "the east is the place of the rising sun, where the divine Being is always seen by Swedenborg's angels—'unapproachable for ever,' the 'dayspring from on high' in every man" (264). Since in Blake's system the west is the manifestation of the outer world, the east or the center becomes the manifestation of possibly every point existing outside of the manifested world. In *The Symbolism of the Cross*, Guénon, in his analysis of the differences between the center and circumference, states that "[a]ll that can be seen, heard, imagined, stated or described, necessarily belongs to manifestation, and even to formal manifestation; it is therefore really the circumference that is everywhere,[...] whereas the centre is nowhere[,] since it is unmanifested" (*The Symbolism of the Cross* 129–30). Hinduism teaches that the cosmic center, and therefore, the center of the total being, is revealed in Brahma, who is the eternal and all-pervading existence.

For "[w]hen the Sun of Spiritual Knowledge rises in the heavens of the heart (that is, at the center of the being, called *Brahma-pura*), it dispels the darkness,[...] it pervades

¹⁰⁸ Aside from the linear descending order in the creation of the universe, Ibn Arabi held the view that God, after forming the center, created the rest of the universe in an ascending order, with the Earth being the principal point of creation. The rock, the symbol of the world's center in Ibn Arabi's writings, "formed the 'sacrum' of the world's structure, the focal point whence the body of the world unfolded in the six directions—front and back, left and right, up and down—materializing the spatial structure of the human presence" (Akkach 138).

all, envelops all and illumines all. He who has made the pilgrimage of his own 'Self', a pilgrimage not concerned with situation, place, or time, [...] in which neither heat nor cold are experienced, [...] he knoweth all things (in *Brahma*), and he attaineth Eternal Bliss." (Shankarāchārya's *Ātma-Bodha*, quoted in Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta* 172–3)

When a human being has passed from the outer form of existence to the state of inner cognition and knowledge, or from the circumference to the center, he/she comes to fulfill "the function of 'unmoved mover' in relation to" (Guénon, *The Great Triad* 69) the universe. Just as Swedenborg spoke of our ability to carry "a Universe within" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 158), which opens into a "dark and unknown night, indefinite, unmeasurable, [and] without end" (148), Blake took Swedenborg's goal further and used his Zoas to create a universe in which all of the four spatial points are joined into a common Center—the Throne. As he writes in Plate 19 of *Milton*¹⁰⁹:

Four Universes round the Mundane Egg remain Chaotic
One to the North, named Urthona: One to the South, named Urizen:
One to the East, named Luvah: One to the West, named Tharmas
They are the Four Zoa's that stood around the Throne Divine! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 112)

If we consider Blake's design of the Mundane Egg, we may say that Urthona, Urizen, Tharmas, and Luvah serve almost as the supporting pillars of the universe, which manifests itself in centrality and circularity. At the same time, they are the pillars of the Mundane Egg, or the "three-dimensional world of time and space" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 287–8) that we live in. In *Temple and Contemplation*, Corbin points to the presence of the four pillars or *awtad* supporting the Divine Throne, which according to the Ismaili teachings, "stand at the four cardinal points of the world and on whom rests God's gaze when he looks at the world" (*Temple and Contemplation* 65). Furthermore, the Ismaili doctrine equates the four *awtad* with the four archangels supporting the Throne, namely with Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael. In respect to this, one cannot disregard Blake's watercolor "When the Morning Stars Sang Together," intended for the *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (see Vaughan 67), where Job, who is still suffering, is visited by God, who descended from his Throne in the form of the cloud to show Job the mysteries of the universe. What really stands out in the upper section of the watercolor are the four archangels spreading their hands towards the starry heavens, as if supporting them. With the tips of their legs, they

¹⁰⁹ Blake repeats almost the exact same lines in the Plate 59 of *Jerusalem*.

are touching the cloud encircling God. God, who is placed in the center of the painting¹¹⁰ is here shown spreading his arms in two opposite directions, one to the east, the other to the west. To the east side is what appears to be Enitharmon¹¹¹, while Los appears to be in the west, bathing in the Sun. Below God and the celestial realm is an imperfect world, the terrestrial realm¹¹² where humans are doomed to death and suffering. The four archangels that originally support the Throne are the cardinal points of the world that Corbin speaks of, but at the same time, “each of them corresponds to the heart of one of the four great prophets, Adam, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 65). What is more, the four archangels in Blake’s watercolor represent the fourfold character of God and humans, as well as the fourfold manifestation of the universe in Blake’s poetry, that of Ulro, the World of Generation, Eden, and Beulah.

Like the watercolored print of the Mundane Egg (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 279), in which all of the Zoas abide in perfect circles, “When the Morning Stars Sang Together” shows Blake’s emphasis on the design of geometrical bodies, such as the circle, and its importance on the cosmological level. While Job and his family are placed in the Mundane Egg, which is in the shape of the imperfect circle, God occupies the perfect circle, embodied in the cloud. In fact, having the cloud completely guarded from spatial and temporal constrictions¹¹³ preserves the perfect unity of the circle. Once in Eden, the Four Zoas reach the state of perfect unity, and operate in harmony. Once the Zoas reach the state of harmony, the human being becomes elevated to the higher circles of existence. Since, as in the words of Guénon, the circle is “the geometrical shape corresponding to Heaven” (Guénon, *The Great Triad* 63), the four circles, as contained in the Zoas, attract each other and unify in one common circle. As Blake illustrates this in *Milton*:

But all the Family Divine collected as Four Suns
 In the Four Points of heaven East, West & North & South
 Enlarging and enlarging till their Disks approachd each other;
 And when they touch’d closed together Southward in One Sun (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 116)

One of the most prominent meanings of the circle in Blake’s poetry is that of its endlessness, which testifies to one’s inability to contain the spaces within it. Harper, who also points to Blake’s use of the circle in relation to spatial symbolism, notes that “[t]he endless round in

110 This may be a possible allusion to God dwelling in the center of the human, i.e. the heart, and in the cosmic center, the Throne.

111 Notice that the female figure bears the Moon on her head, and as we know, the Moon is Enitharmon’s emblem.

112 Note that Job and his family are trapped in something resembling the opening of a cave.

113 Notice how neither Los nor Enitharmon penetrate the cloud.

space parallels or symbolizes the infinity of eternity.[...] Since whatever is beautiful on earth must be patterned after the eternal ideal, (the Forms, i.e.) and since the heavens have a circular form, the most perfect objects on earth must have a circular form and must be descended from the heavens” (Harper 124–5). It is for this reason that both Islam and Hinduism relate the geometrical shape of the circle to the Heavens, and the square to Earth. In addition, they both speak of the Universal Matter as the first creation of the Divine, from which the three spatial dimensions emanated. Whereas Ibn Arabī explains that the length descended “from the Intellect, the breadth from the Soul, and the depth [from] the vacuum, extending from the outermost perimeter to the innermost center” (Akkach 142), the Upanishads suggest that the first manifestation of *Ātmā* is the higher intellect, which at the same time symbolizes the immutable length/extent of Brahma, while the second manifestation, the living soul or the Self, is regarded as more expansive than both the manifested and unmanifested worlds.

When Blake relates to the endlessness or infinity of space(s) as manifested in the circle, he not only refers to the Sun as the sole example of circular perfection, but also exhibits that perfection in the Moon.¹¹⁴ In doing so, Blake shows that the Moon—along with the Sun—is “the only heavenly body whose motion around the Earth, traced by observation in the heaven of fixed stars, is a circle, or at least nearly so” (*An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* 161). Blake proves this notion when, in *Milton*, he speaks of the infinite universe as the region opening outside the lower realm, where the world starts to expand into indefinite points once human beings learn to go beyond the center enclosing them physically. As Blake notes:

The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its
Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
Has passd that Vortex, he 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. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 109)

An individual who devotes his/her life to the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, but does so with a complete reliance on what is perceived by the senses, will go back to the Earth spiritually malnourished and fairly ignorant of the divine powers. However, those who acknowledge the presence of something other than just the bodily senses, and accept it in their “wondrous

¹¹⁴ By representing Los and Enitharmon as incarnations of the Sun and the Moon, Blake confirms the ancient belief of (in) the Moon “as the symbol of the feminine principle of the Universe[, which] measures the heavens in a passive manner as the Sun does in a masculine and active way” (Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* 161).

journey on the earth” shall experience the planes of existence ungraspable and unaffected by the Cartesian worldview.

With an affirmation of a perfect unity through the symbolism of the Sun and the Moon, and the recognition of the circle’s infinity, Blake calls to attention the dependence on the world outside of the material realm. Like Swedenborg, Blake reiterates the idea of the existence of spaces in the spiritual world, where unlike in the sensible world, “[e]verything is assessed according to states” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 187), meaning that spaces are determined based on one’s inner states. Ultimately, “spaces which are measured by inner states presuppose, essentially, a qualitative or discontinuous space of which each inner state is itself the measure, as opposed to a space which is quantitative, continuous, homogeneous, and measurable in constant measures” (187). So when Blake compares space to “a red Globule of Mans blood” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127), and affirms that only immaterial or discontinuous spaces—spaces “smaller than a Globule of Mans blood” (127)—can be expanded infinitely, he voices the proclamation of hearkening to self-expansion. By casting off the illusion of quantitative spaces, and by departing from the reliance on the physical body, humans will open ways for the expansion of inner spaces and reunion with the initially endowed Infinity.

Chapter 4

Eternal Duration and Cyclical Time in Blake's Visionary World

The riddle of time is the riddle of the beginning. [...] We live in time. We live out of the fact that we always begin anew: on awakening in the morning, at the beginning of the year, with every task we undertake, with each move from one place to another. And we do not understand this magic of the new beginning, this eternal transition from past to today, from today to past. The mysterious divide between yesterday and tomorrow, the intangible now, in which and through which we have our existence, is incomprehensible to us. (van der Leeuw 325)



WHEN, IN HIS "ELEMENTS OF THEOLOGY", PROCLUS STATED that "Eternity itself[...] is an eternity of eternities, and time itself is a time of times; and they give subsistence, the one to participated eternity, but the other to participated time. [...] For every thing which measures, either measures according to a part, or it measures the whole at once when it is adapted to that which is measured. That which measures, therefore, according to the whole is eternity; but that which measures according to parts is time. Hence, there are only two measures, the one of things eternal, but the other of things in time" (Proclus, *Proclus' Elements of Theology* 31), he made a clear point that time itself is a constituent of Eternity, not necessarily determined by that which has ended or begun, or that which shall begin and end. Like other philosophers of the Neoplatonic school of thought, Proclus considered time and duration only veils obscuring the one true reality, which is eternity. What is more, the Neoplatonists regarded time as inseparable from the act of creation, and a reflection of the pristine world that is Eternity: "(1) it [time] and the universe were produced simultaneously; (2) it is "flowing," eternity is at rest; (3) it represents multitude, eternity abides in one" (Harper 135).

There is no need to stress the importance of the concept of time in Blake's work. While George Mills Harper points to Blake's classification of time above space and its reflection

through the world of generation,¹¹⁵ Foster Damon points to Blake's depiction of time as "an illusion of our senses" (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 140), divided between "Moments & Minutes & Hours / And Days & Months & Years & Ages & Periods" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 126). When Blake speaks of time, he approaches it, first and foremost, from the perspective of the Hermetic and Neoplatonic doctrines, both of which construct time as the "movable image of eternity" (Plato in *Timaeus*, quoted in Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 147), and lay emphasis on the immortality of the soul, as opposed to mind and matter, which are transitory. Additionally, both regard time and history as not surviving outside of the confines of the vegetative world, but view the eternal Now as being a window unto Eternity. Blake takes the concept of the eternal Now, and through the construction of Los, he shows that "[f]or every thing [that] exists[...] not one sigh nor smile nor tear, / One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 158). With these lines, Blake suggests that all existence repeats itself in different cycles and ages, which incessantly enables humans to climb the ladder of being, culminating in the Ultimate Reality. Just as spaces "suggest that the infinite and unified world has been made to seem finite and diverse" (Percival 84), time suggests that the ability to transcend infinite spaces has become hindered by what has been made to appear as an existence constrained by past, present, and future.

With Blake's philosophy of time resting firmly on the Hermetic and Neoplatonic teachings, it should be observed that by considering time and duration as unreal, and Eternity as the true home of the soul, he shows signs of potential awareness and knowledge of the doctrines of time in Eastern teachings. That Blake's descriptions of the creation of time and the inclusion of the world's major historical events, or even the entire periods, within a moment is in deep resemblance to the length of the cosmic cycles in Hinduism, or that his division of time between Absolute Time and limited time corresponds to the definitions of time in Ismailism, is no coincidence. After a brief recourse to Blake's examination of historical time and Time as Eternity, the rest of the chapter analyzes Blake's classification of time into four different cycles addressed from the perspective of Hindu and Ismaili teachings. Most of all, the chapter shows that, in his rejection of the linear pattern of time, Blake's time takes the form of the cycle, where time does not recede into oblivion and is terminated, but instead goes back to the origin, where the past and future converge in a single point and survive in the eternal Moment or the eternal Now.

One needs to bear in mind that Blake's concept of time functions as a polar opposite to space, as a masculine principle embodied in Los, which is opposed to the feminine principle that abides in Enitharmon. Their contrast is also noticeable in the fact that Los is an active

115 (For further details on Harper's views on time as the symbol of evil and death in Blake's poetry, see Harper 137–8).

principle in the universe—for it is he who creates times and spaces—whereas Enitharmon functions as a nurturing, mother-like principle—as opposed to the great destroyer Time—that bestows poetic inspiration upon Los. Additionally, if Los’ name is truly to be understood as an anagram of the Sun, this could explain why Blake ascribes the concept of time specifically to his name, and creates a contrast between the solar measurement and partition of time (days, ages, centuries, millenia, etc.) and the *numberless*¹¹⁶ character of Enitharmon. When Blake speaks of time, he makes a clear distinction between time as a lower principle in the universe, and Time as a pattern of Eternity¹¹⁷. Those who see their existence as shaped by temporality, and as bound by the past, present, and future, indulge in a life in which the body follows the straight line of existence, or what is generally conceived of as linear time. In this respect, Blake, in the *Songs of Experience*, explains that when “weary of time” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 25), we count “the steps of the Sun: / Seeking after that sweet golden clime” (25), and in doing so, we fail to realize that the life perceived according to linear time is but a faint shadow, an illusion of Reality and eternal existence. Unlike the scientific definitions of time given by the main materialist scientists of the Enlightenment period, who claimed that time should be experienced as change and transience, and that it should be classified according to the span of duration (moment, day, month, year, etc.), Blake’s arguments on time suggest that one should not distinguish between absolute and relative time *per se*, based on whether or not they are apparent to our bodily existence. On the contrary, time itself—if supposed to be measured at all—should be measured according to the journey of the soul, and our ability to overcome Urizen’s bow of reason and intellectual prison.

Blake points to the necessity for the metaphysical measuring of time, in which an individual relies on time as a merciful manifestation of Eternity and takes the circular path of existence where moments work hand in hand with the ever-existent Eternity. As he elaborates in *Milton*:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found
It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 136)

The image above displays a stark opposition to the Aristotelian definition of time, which measures time according to the motion of celestial objects. Mathematical and physical time, as

¹¹⁶ In *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, Foster Damon suggested that one of the likely sources of Enitharmon’s name comes from the word *anarithmon*, a Greek word for “numberless.” (For further details, see Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 124).

¹¹⁷ Note that in this instance, Blake refers to time with capital “T”

the primary definitions of time in Blake's England, worked against the metaphysical or psychic definitions of time that exist outside of the domain of the physical motion of objects and the universe. The "Watch Fiends" of Satan that Blake speaks of are embodied in the devices consumed by modern humanity, which fails to look beyond the mere physical determinants of the universe; however, contrary to Satan's "Watch Fiends," the Industrious work towards placing time within eternity, and measuring that eternity, but also time itself, according to the movement of psychic or inner states. Blake calls them the Industrious primarily because, through a recourse to the infinite depths of the soul, the Industrious learn that time is more than just a chronological sequence of events that went down in history. The Industrious class of humanity that Blake mentions views time in relation to the changes and events caused by the Divine Force, and with the movements and changes in the soul. Or as Corbin relates:

We cannot do away with the intervals of quantitative time that serve to measure historical events; but the events of the soul are themselves the qualitative measure of their own characteristic time. A synchronism impossible in historical time is possible in the *tempus discretum* of the world of the soul or of the *ālam al-mithāl*. And this also explains how it is possible, at a distance of several centuries, to be the direct, synchronous disciple of a master who is only chronologically "in the past." (Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* 66–7)

Much like in the doctrines and teachings of Plato, time in Blake becomes an illusion, a shadow that emanated from Eternity. Time as Eternity—not the chronological or linear time measured by the motion of the physical and celestial objects—is the "symbol of the ideal world" (Harper 135): it stands as "an attribute of that reality which *is* but does not *become* and in fact transcends even Being" (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 195). When in *Milton* Blake describes time as "the mercy of Eternity" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 121), or yet, when in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he states that "Eternity is in love with the productions of time" (36), he aims at showing that every moment of time is infused with Eternity in such a way that all of our existence in time; existence in the past, present, and future, keeps us closer to the gates of the Eternal. In Blake's system, duration and moment become principles leading us to Eternity. To Blake, the moment is not what Locke defines as "a small Part in Duration,[...] the time of one *Idea* in our Minds" (quoted in Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. II* 144), which, with the occurrence of a new idea, is lost for eternity. If looked at within the context of Absolute Time, which in the words of Corbin "can neither be completed nor destroyed" (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 31), the moment is that part of the original creation that survives in the eternal present, and transcends the terrestrial life as we know it. Only in the context of a limited time that is "moving toward exhaustion and completion" (31) is the moment reduced to a transitory and non-expandable segment of

our temporal existence. With the contraction of our spiritual centers, time will appear longer than it really is. With the nurturing of the spiritual centers, however, our experience of time becomes less overbearing, and while in this case, time passes not only more rapidly, it also creates moments unmanageable by the passage of time in the terrestrial world.¹¹⁸ In the opening Night of *The Four Zoas*, Blake reflects on this in the following manner:

Then Eno a daughter of Beulah took a Moment of Time
 And drew it out to Seven thousand years with much care & affliction
 And many tears & in Every year made windows into Eden (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 304)

If we recall, from the previous chapter, Eno's expansion of space into infinite and unknowable realms, it appears that Blake ascribes higher value to time and its expansion. Unlike an "atom of space" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 305) that becomes embellished with "wondrous art" (305), or that can instead be developed from a fabricated reality or falsehood, "Terrified at the Sons of Albion they took the Falshood which / Gwendelon hid in her left hand. it grew &, grew till it / Became a Space & an Allegory around the Winding Worm," (243), the expansion of the moments of Time reveals the path to the world of primordial beauty, eternity and unity, i.e. the world of Eden, where the past and future are non-formative in the overall functioning of the universe. Consequently, in the intermediary world of Beulah, it is not Space but Time that installs beauty in the face¹¹⁹ of materialist constructions. As Blake writes in *Jerusalem*:

Los smild with joy thinking on Enitharmon [...]
 And gave a Time & Revolution to the Space Six Thousand Years
 He calld it Divine Analogy, for in Beulah the Feminine
 Emanations Create Space. the Masculine Create Time, & plant
 The Seeds of beauty in the Space¹²⁰. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 243)

In his display of an expandable character of "a Moment of Time" and the construction of eternal Time, one number in particular carries a special significance for Blake: the number six thousand, which appears in the passage above. As Blake further suggests in *Milton*,

118 It is common to see within ancient Greek myths, the Vedas, and Ismaili teachings, this doctrine that during the ages in which people were more spiritual, they lived longer, but time also passed more quickly. For more on this, see below.

119 Just as the Qur'an speaks of the Face of God, here we can speak of the face of matter.

120 In *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, Harper also refers to these lines from *Jerusalem*, and reaffirms the importance of time over space in Blake's work. As he writes: "Although Blake usually linked time and space together in his references to the mundane world, he made clear, [...] that time takes precedence over space (the world)" (Harper 136).

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.
For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
Events of Time start forth & are conceived in such a Period
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127)

The image of the moment as equal to the period of six thousand years might be of a remarkable importance here. Firstly, the period of six thousand years is, as conveyed by Raine, “the supposed duration of the time-world, calculated from dates in the Bible” (Raine, *Blake and the New Age* 178). However, this same time frame of six thousand years is rejected, for example, in many Eastern teachings, such as the case with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shi’a Islam, which indicate that the world we inhabit is much older than six thousand years. In this light, the first humans the Bible speaks of (Adam and Eve) were only successors to other creatures on Earth. In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, for example, Nasr relates that Islam teaches something similar, and states that “over a thousand years ago, Muslim scientists were perfectly aware that sea shells on top of mountains meant that mountains had turned into seas and seas into mountains and that land animals had preceded man on earth and that sea animals had come before land animals” (*Knowledge and the Sacred* 204–5). Secondly, Blake’s compression of six thousand years into a single moment calls to attention the unique construction of time outlined in the Hindu scriptures. The value of the moment in Hinduism is emphasized to such an extent that in the Upanishads the moment is hidden in the name of the Divine. Life, according to the Hindu teachings, is marked by an eternal existence and an inability to become contained by the physical senses. The Brihadāranyaka-Upanishad instructs that “[l]ife and heart are immeasurable, immortal, unstable, ungraspable; they come from the ungraspable, from God that shines in the right eye, the substance of the ungraspable” (Yeats and Swami 129). This ungraspable aspect of God is the divine immanence that can only be detected in His endless creations—both animate and inanimate—since all beings and objects of the past and future ages are a reflection of that immanence.

In their analyses of time through the lens of Hindu thought, both Coomaraswamy and Nasr lay their primary focus on the Maitri Upanishad, which makes a distinction between the two aspects of Brahma: time and the Timeless. The Timeless or the Eternal is that which carries the sacred, as well as an unprecedented power and immutability of God. It is from Brahma or Time that all things emanate: “From Time flow forth all beings, / [...] Time is the formed and the formless, both” (Maitri Upanishad, quoted in Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 198); and, as Nasr explains, this Time that the Upanishads speak of, is “in reality none other than the moment which always is, the ‘in the beginning’ which is always present” (198). The time

and the Timeless aspects of Brahma have, among other causes, their roots in both the creation of the solar system and its rotation: “That which is prior to the sun is the Timeless (*akāla*) and partless (*akala*); but that which begins with the sun is the time that has parts (*sakala*), and its form is that of the Year[...] Prajāpati[...] Self” (Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* 15). More precisely, the Timeless is that form of Brahma which conveys Truth, and embodies a potential for the everlasting existence in the world, while time itself pertains to either a certain point or periods of time. The Timeless aspect or form of Brahma is comprised of unmeasurable units of time, where moments are not determined by duration, but instead, through the attainment of self-knowledge they become joined in the everlasting present. In the opening of Lecture ix of the *Gita*, Krishna tells Arjoo that the attainment of self-knowledge and the knowledge of the One is “a sovereign art, a sovereign mystery, sublime and immaculate; clear unto the sight, virtuous, inexhaustible, and easy to be performed. Those who are infidels to this faith, not finding me, return again into this world, the mansion of death” (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 78).

Therefore, when Blake speaks of the “Great Events of Time” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127) as being accomplished within a moment, he seems to echo Krishna’s lecture on the inexhaustible value of Absolute Time. In addition, Blake’s emphasis on the production of the works of sublimity and greatness in the span of a moment is very reflective of the division of time into the four *yugas* or cycles of Hinduism. Before proceeding into a further analysis of the cyclical nature of time, it should be noted that Hinduism makes a distinction between grand and smaller temporal cycles. As Nasr writes in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, “each grand cosmic cycle (*kalpa*) consists of a thousand *yugas* which comprise ‘a day of Brahma.’ Moreover, each smaller cosmic cycle concerning a particular humanity is comprised of four *yugas*, beginning with what the Greeks called the Golden Age (the *Kṛta Yuga* of Hindu sources) and ending with the Iron Age (*Kāli Yuga*)” (*Knowledge and the Sacred* 199). In the *Kāli Yuga*, which we live in now, we are made to believe that moments of time are longer in their duration, while the subjective experience of time in the *Kṛta Yuga* was believed to be shorter. However, it should be remarked that while people’s experience of time in the *Kṛta Yuga* was thought of as relatively short, this particular *yuga* or the cycle itself is according to all Abrahamic religions considered the longest in the chronological measuring of time. Nasr makes a very important point when he contends that “[f]or men of the Golden Age, time as an element of ‘secular’ change was not of any significance. [...] It was only during later phases of the cycle that gradually the experience of time in its noncyclic aspect became consequential and that history began to gain significance” (199). And even though “individuals did grow old and die [in the Golden Age], the world in which they *lived* seemed to be located in a paradisaal permanence in which the cosmos was rejuvenated by temporal cycles but not affected in a nonrenewable manner by time. For so-called primitive man, the cosmos

and history were the same, in fact identical, as were time and transcendence and reality and the symbol" (200).

One could say that Blake's endeavors to bring one from a mundane concept of time to a sacred concept of time led to his fight against ideas in which the construction of the cosmos was based upon continuous chronological progress; he, therefore, attempted to restore the bygone age of beauty and sublimity, and eventually divert our perception to that which lies beyond the ever present mortality in the terrestrial world. By following in the footsteps of the Hindu classification of the universe into four *yugas*, it appears that with the creation of the worlds of Eden, Beulah, Generation, and Ulro, generally regarded as the different spiritual states of the human, or the interchangeable spaces humans inhabit or descend into, or which, according to Frye's definition, are to be viewed as the differing "levels of imagination" (Frye 48), Blake's intention was to paint in these worlds the four cycles of human history. This is especially noticeable in Blake's depiction of the worlds of Eden and Ulro, which stand as extreme opposites. One could most certainly agree with Percival who argues that "[a]t one extreme is the definite and integrated reality of Eden, the world of eternal life; at the other is the unreal chaos of Ulro, the world of eternal death" (Percival 77). In the Hindu cosmology, the *Kṛta Yuga* (also known as the *Satya-Yuga*), with all the beauty and sublimity revolving around it, is the world of eternal life, while the *Kāli Yuga* is the world of perpetual misery and death. On several occasions, Blake mentions the descent of his characters into Ulro, e.g. Milton and Ololon, where materialist delusions and false appearances are taken as realities. Time in Ulro is in a state of perpetual progression, but this is not a progression into states of beauty, spiritual cognition, and attainment of eternity. The world of Ulro is trapped in its own time that is a product of the laws of science and the negation of divine intervention. The reason why Ulro is known as "the world of Death, [is] not merely because all things die here, but because they are spectres 'dead' to Eternity" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 416). That is why Ulro is also the world where iron is its symbolic metal. If we remember Blake's design of the Four Zoas, displayed in *Milton* (see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 133), we are aware that Urizen is the Zoa that generally occupies the southern regions, or the world of Ulro. Despite the fact that Urizen's primary metal "is Gold" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 419), which would symbolize the predominantly materialist character of the terrestrial world, Blake often attaches iron—the metal of destruction—to Urizen. Urizen's daughters, for example, are described as "the iron hearted sisters" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 373), and in *The Book of Ahania*, Urizen, after being expunged from Eternity, writes "[i]n silence his book of iron" (86).

In contrast to Urizen's "book of iron" that is a reflection of human life in all its spatial and temporal limitations, Los carries imagination and spiritual revolution, which instruct

one in the experience of joy and peaceful existence on Earth. As Nasr relates, “[t]his joy and sense of peace are none other than the mark of eternity as it touches the human soul” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 195). Unlike Urizen who uses his “book of iron” to preach his laws and doctrines to the inhabitants of the terrestrial world, and prevent the use of the imaginative faculty, Los uses his song and strength to glorify Eternity, and create “the golden armour of science / For intellectual War” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 407). Los and Urthona’s position is in the North, where the world of Eden is located. However, it is interesting that while Los and Urthona’s metal is iron (both are depicted as blacksmiths), the world of Eden they sometimes occupy is basking in “golden mountains” (174) and “mountain palaces” (188). Compared to the darkness, despair, and “the Cruelties of Ulro” (110), as well as “the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire / Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton” (159), Eden is blessed with the presence of immortality, and the *wheels* of harmony and peace: “[...] as those in Eden: which / Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace” (159). Aside from that, Eden is the dwelling-place of one’s spirituality and comprehension of the Divine Force: it is “the highest possible state, [...] the union of [...] creator and creature, of energy and form (Frye 49). [...] Eden in Blake’s symbolism is a fiery city of the spiritual sun” (50). Compared to limited time in Ulro, time in Eden is uninterrupted by either the past or future; instead, it is ever expanding into indefinite and infinite moments. In the world of Eden, as Percival describes, “the Divine Vision, the brotherhood of man, binds all the minute particulars of life into a completely integrated whole” (Percival 82). Just as in the Golden Age or the *Kṛta Yuga*, when time was regarded as the merciful agent which leads humans back to the union with the Divine Existence or Eternity, time in Eden functions as a concept whose purpose is, above all, to purify the soul and take it back to the place of the universal origin.

Blake’s line that “Every two hundred years has a door to Eden” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 197) is very suggestive of his vision of Eden as an Eternity in which time constantly returns upon itself, and is not bound to actual creation. Interestingly, Blake equates the period of two hundred years with seven ages, where every age is being “Moated deep with Bridges of silver & gold” (127), and with a possibility for each age to be manifested in “each Moment Minute Hour Day Month & Year” (127). But in all this sequence, a moment of time is given the highest level of importance, and all due to the fact that time enacts itself in a circular movement. Now, lines of this kind confirm Raine’s claim that “Blake had probably read in Sir William Jones’s essay *On the Chronology of the Hindoos*” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 144) about the ability of smaller units of time—or at least that which empirical thought defines as smaller—to contain those units which are perceived as temporally longer. The passage from the *Chronology* that Raine had in mind is the one that Jones quoted from the preface to a *Uaránes* almanack, which states the following:

A *thousand* Great Ages are a day of Brahma; a *thousand* such days are an *Indian* hour of Vishnu, *six hundred thousand* such hours make a period of Rudra; and a million of *Rudra's* (or *two quadrillions five hundred and ninety-two thousand trillions of lunar years*), are but a *second* to the Supreme Being. (Jones, *On the Chronology of the Hindus* 284)

Jones goes on with his study of the Sanskrit writings on time, and explains that the Hindus believe that “[a] year is a day and night of the Gods; and that [it] is[...] divided into two halves; the day is, when the sun moves towards the north; the night, when it moves towards the south” (Jones, *On the Chronology of the Hindus* 282). If looked at in Blake’s symbolism, the night comes with the disappearance of Los, who in his attempt to restore Eternity and destroy the “vast world of Urizen” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 73), is forced to clash with Urizen and his mighty armies.¹²¹ After the clash, Los finds himself bound by Urizen’s tyrannical laws, and instead of basking in the light of the sun and fire (Los’ element), he awakens to the darkness and the curse of the non-Eternal world. As Blake writes in *The Book of Los*:

Raging furious the flames of desire
Ran thro’ heaven & earth[...]
[...] In the midst The Eternal Prophet [Los] bound in a chain
Compell’d to watch Urizens shadow [...]
[...] But no light from the fires all was
Darkness round Los: heat was not; [...]
[...] Coldness, darkness, obstruction, a Solid
Without fluctuation, hard as adamant
Black as marble of Egypt; impenetrable
Bound in the fierce raging Immortal.
And the separated fires froze in
A vast solid without fluctuation,
Bound in his expanding clear senses. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 91)

Thus, Los sinks into the south, where Urizen’s world of darkness is, waiting to ascend back to the north, into the world of Eden and the rule of the imagination. The fight for the rule of limited, linear time of the terrestrial world over Eternal Time reaches its full climax in the fourth Night of *The Four Zoas*, when Los, under the control of Urizen, binds time into

¹²¹ Blake provides the scene of Los’ and Urizen’s combat for the ultimate domination, i.e. the domination of Eternity versus mortality and decay, in Chapter III of the *The Book of Urizen* (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 72–4).

past, present, and future which incessantly converge into each other. As a result, Los, instead of sowing the seeds of cyclical time in the minds of mortals, weaves a historical, limited time in which the possibility of attaining to the Divine sinks into mortality. Los' disconnection with Eternal Time, Blake describes in the following manner:

Round him [Urizen] Los rolld furious
 His thunderous wheels from furnace to furnace.[...]
 Frightend with cold infectious madness. in his hand the thundering
 Hammer of Urthona. forming under his heavy hand the hours
 The days & years. in chains of iron round the limbs of Urizen
 Linkd hour to hour & day to night & night to day & year to year. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 335)

And just as Urizen's commands stretch out "from North to South / in mighty power" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 335), so does time recede from its infinity and cyclical course into a straight line of descent leading to its final termination. At the same time, the descent of spiritual states in humans sweeps across the terrestrial world. Consequently, the once inhabited world of Eden turns into a deserted abode, and the world of Ulro takes over as the dwelling-place of human existence. Thus, the descent of humans from Eden to Ulro comes to symbolize not only the descent of one's imagination, but also the receding of humanity's spiritual states as they move into succeeding periods or ages.

Through a study of ancient Hindu writings, William Jones had also observed that humanity's progress across the four ages has proven to be rather counterproductive, for instead of advancing towards an actual progress, both in terms of spiritual enlightenment and social improvement, humans have instead been sinking into an ever deeper pit of suffering and demise. In his essay "On the Chronology of the Hindus", Jones explains how Hinduism looks at the four ages or *yugas* in a descending order. As he writes:

[I]f we take ten cyphers from a *Rudra*, or divide by ten thousand millions, we shall have a period of 259200000 years, which, divided by 60 (the usual divisor of *time* among the *Hindus*) will give 4320000, or a Great Age, which we find subdivided in the proportion of 4, 3, 2, 1, from the notion of *virtue* decreasing arithmetically in the *golden, silver, copper, and earthen, ages*. (Jones, *On the Chronology of the Hindus* 285)

During his attempt to capture the span of the Iron Age and the actual start of it, Jones challenges Christianity's emphasis on historical time, and by following the Hindu elaboration on the beginning of the Iron Age, he remarks that "if the *Pandits* of *Cashmir* and *Varanes* have made a right calculation of Buddha's appearance, the present, or *fourth*, age must have

begun about *a thousand* years before the birth of Christ" (Jones, *On the Chronology of the Hindus* 302). While lines of this kind might have incited rather non-welcoming reactions from those who held to an orthodox Biblical chronology, especially the religious authorities, they most certainly inspired Blake, who, in his deification of Eternity and Time as regenerative concepts that can never be removed or destroyed, contradicts Christianity's depiction of time. Namely, when Blake calls attention to the permanent character of time, declaring that "not one Moment Of Time is lost" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 117), or that Los spends his worldly existence walking "up & down continually [so] That not one Moment of Time be lost" (230), he openly shows the renunciation of the Christian emphasis on history.

In his essay "Gnosis and Time," Henri-Charles Puech remarks that when compared to the Greek conception of time, Christianity instructs that "the world[...] is created in time and must end in time. [...] This created, unique world, which began, which endures, and which will end in time, is finite, limited at both extremities of its history. It is neither eternal nor infinite in its duration; it will never be repeated, nor will the events that occur in it" (Puech 46). Puech further explains that the reason why Christianity views time in this respect is because it originated as a product of "an apocalyptic ferment. It was dominated—exclusively at first, according to some critics—by an expectation of the end of the world, an expectation which oriented the mind of the believer toward the future, toward a concrete event which would complete that other great event, the first coming" (51). Naturally so, time in Christianity became subdued to the events that occurred before the present moment, and that which will occur after that. Christianity dissected the human mind into two time-dominated states: a state where memories of the past, and historical events, are taken as lessons that shape one's future, and the state in which the future is seen as a retribution or a repetition of events that happened in the past. Nonetheless, in all this process, the importance of the present, of the Eternal Moment, started to wane, thus limiting humans in their attempts to transcend their historically conditioned existence. In line with Puech, Nasr also calls attention to Christianity's emphasis on historical time and its treatment of time as linear. As he remarks:

Christianity in its exoteric formulations—not of course in its sapiential teachings which saw Christ as the Logos who said, "Before Abraham was I am"—came to perceive history as marked by three fundamental points: the fall of Adam on earth, the incarnation of the Son of God as the second Adam in history, and the end of the world with the second coming of Christ. This view of the march of time, combined with the idea of the birth of Christ as a unique historical event and the incarnation of the Son in the matrix of time and of history, created a special religious situation which, once Christianity was weakened, gave way easily to that idolatry of the wor-

ship of history that characterizes much of the modern world. (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 201)

In line with Christianity's treatment of time, one cannot help but wonder about the possible *fate of time* once the world ends with the second coming of Christ. If one agrees with the set of theologians who claim that time was created only once God started creating the universe, does that mean that time will end with the end of the world itself? Or, if, on the other hand, one accepts the view of Time as a condition that preceded an actual creation of the universe, a condition from which the world itself emanated, does that mean that even with the second coming of Christ time will outlive the universe only to circumambulate itself, and begin again in that same point in which it started off in the first place?

Both Hinduism and Ismaili Islam speak of time's potential for the so-called "Eternal Return," where time partakes of a continual process of creation, destruction, regeneration, and repetitive creation. In "Time and Eternity in Indian Thought," Mircea Eliade remarks that Hinduism holds a view where eternal or cyclical time is accomplished through an emotional and spiritual distancing from the material world, but at the same time, it teaches that, while in the process of rejection "of the profits one might derive from action" (Eliade 182), one should not necessarily avoid "the action itself" (182). Likewise, in his/her acceptance of action, one needs to abstain from seeking reality in the material products caused by such action, and seek Reality and cosmological knowledge as it unfolds in the eternity of a moment. The illusion of time as the domineering reality to which the life of a human being is subdued creates a situation where existence is not really limited by historical time itself, but by one's insistence on seeking the meaning of life within the pattern of that same historical time. Eliade reflects on this in the following manner:

If time as Maya is also a manifestation of the godhead, to live in time is not in itself a "bad action"; *the bad action consists in believing that there exists nothing else, nothing outside of time*. One is devoured by time, *not* because one lives in time, but because one believes in the *reality* of time and hence forgets or despises eternity. (Eliade 199)

This takes us back to the whole concept of *yugas* and the Western idea of the end of time that will occur with the end of the last, Iron Age. However, it should be noted that in the process of transition from one *yuga* to another, each *yuga* ends in darkness, but only with the end of the *Kali Yuga* will the smoke of ultimate blackness envelop the terrestrial world, causing complete destruction.¹²² After complete destruction, as Hinduism teaches, comes a

¹²² In Lecture xi of the *Gita*, Krishna tells Arjoon that he, as the manifestation of Time and Death, destroys humankind as it progresses towards the final age or *yuga*. Krishna states: "I am Time, the destroyer of mankind, matured, come hither to seize at once all these who stand before us" (Wilkins, *The Bhagvat-Geeta* 93).

new beginning, a new Golden Age that will eventually become replaced by the Dark Age, and thus so infinitely, for the cosmic cycles regenerate and repeat themselves. And while the *Kali-Yuga* sucks the world and the fruits of human labor into oblivion, the *Kṛta-Yuga* embodies all time and creation, showing that the time it contains is an eternal present from which nothing can ever perish. This is why the *Kṛta Yuga* has come to symbolize the cycle of perfection and totality, an age in which time and humans are in harmony with one another, not simply because of the better moral conduct or the flourishing of human intelligence, but also because of the lack of consciousness of past, present, and future. In this respect, it is useful to turn to Coomaraswamy, who states that

[F]or the Vedanta, the reality or actuality of things is only momentary; it is folly to say of the world that it “is; and” neither is “I” a substance, since “it” can only be seen for an instant (*ksanikatvadarsanāt*); how can the words “I am omniscient” hold good for the I, etc. that exists for a moment only?” (17) [...] [The] Universal Self, when it inhabits any seed, is “of merely atomic measure” [...] “that imperceptible minutium (*animan*) that you cannot detect in the seed by dissection, but from which the whole tree grows, that intangible taste as of salt in water, *that* is the Truth (26) [...] [T]he ultimate reality [holds]—that Brahma, and Truth, that is the target of our aim [...]—is so minute, [...] is so tiny as to be imperceptible to deluded men and visible only to those who have overcome anger and mastered the powers of the soul. (Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity* 27)

Although mastery over the material objects that are constantly forced upon us in the terrestrial world will lead to a unity with the Divine experienced in the Eternal Moment, the question is, how does one escape the past and future to begin with, and learn to live and act solely for the purpose of experiencing the present? In his works, Blake never once separates the moment from its eternal aspect, though he does display time's likelihood to come to an end, when for example Urizen cries, in *The Four Zoas*, that the “Times are Ended” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 400), or when after the fall of Albion, described in Plate 94 of *Jerusalem*, Blake voices the ominous fate of the world, and says: “Time was Finished!” (254). As readers we are not yet fully convinced of Blake's vision of the end of Time. The image from *Jerusalem* referenced above takes on an unexpected twist. Namely, Britannia—originally thought of as dead¹²³—is brought back to life, after “[t]he Breath Divine Breathed over Albion” (254). Along with Britannia, Albion awakes and thus *dooms* humanity itself to life in Eternity:

¹²³ Blake makes Britannia die, for she stands for the “deadly female shadow” (Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* 59).

Her [Brittannia's] voice pierc'd Albions clay cold ear. he moved upon the Rock
 The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills, Albion mov'd
 Upon the Rock, he open'd his eyelids in pain; in pain he mov'd
 His stony members, he saw England. Ah! shall the Dead live again [...]
 Then Jesus appeared standing by Albion as the Good Shepherd [...]
 & Albion saw his Form
 A Man. & they conversed as Man with Man, in Ages of Eternity. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 254–5)

With the image of Brittannia's and Albions's reawakening, Blake shows that time itself does not have an end, and, moreover, that moments are timeless units that open into Eternity. Most importantly, just as Blake employs a form of the circle to show the endlessness and the perfection of space, one could say that he does the same in his depiction of time. The reinstallation of Albion and Brittannia is an apparent example that Blake apprehends the form of every human existence to be permanent. Human beings, as Blake understood, need to come to terms with their own mortality, i.e. to accept that they were created by the Eternal and for the Eternal. Only then will they be able to understand the plane of immortal existence, and approach life in accordance to the cyclical movement of time.

In "Gnosis and Time," Henri-Charles Puech remarks that in the cyclical movement of time

nothing is created and nothing lost (40). [...] No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once[...] every event has been enacted, is enacted, and will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle. Cosmic time is repetition and *anakuklosis*, eternal return. [...] In other words there can never, strictly speaking, be a beginning and end of the world; it has always moved in an infinite succession of circles and is eternal: any Creation or Consummation of the universe is inconceivable. Passage of time can never be represented by a straight line limited at its beginning and end by an initial and final event. (41–2)

Even with the end of time in the terrestrial world, time continues to operate in the realm of Eternity, only to come down in its pristine form and continue its existence in cycles. Just as the Four Zoas continue to perform their functions in Eternity, "Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine / Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions immense / Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 258), they perform their creative roles in the terrestrial world, inducing the temporal cycles of Eden, Beulah, Generation, and Ulro within the human cycle or *Manvantara*. In Blake's depiction of time, one thing, in particular, seems to stand out: the

rebirth of time induced by a reawakening from what appears to be an eternal sleep. *Jerusalem* is highly exemplary of this: the eternal sleep is interrupted once Eve literally springs out of Adam during his sleep (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 332), or when Albion rises from his sleep once Britannia faints “seven times” (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 254) on his body. More than any other prophetic book, *Jerusalem* has multiple instances of visual representation of characters who are in a state of eternal sleep. One such depiction, aside from the image of Eve and Adam mentioned above, is that of Albion, who while in a slumberous state and a seemingly comfortable repose, has his back turned to the Emanation of Jerusalem levitating in an egg-shaped cloud behind him (see Blake, *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* 311). Blake recounts this in Plate 14 of *Jerusalem*:

And Los beheld the mild Emanation Jerusalem eastward bending
Her revolutions toward the Starry Wheels in maternal anguish
Like a pale cloud arising from the arms of Beulahs Daughters:
In Entuthon Benythons deep Vales beneath Golgonooza. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 158)

Jerusalem is Albion's Emanation, who embodies liberty and innocence in the world. She is that fleeting aspect of divinity in humans, working towards restoring humankind to its rightful path: “[S]he is the inspiration of all mankind. She is the Divine Vision in every individual. [...] As the Bride of the Lamb, she is communion with God, 'the Mystic Union of the Emanation in the Lord' (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 206). After Albion snatches Jerusalem away from the Divine Vision, and hides her in his bosom, she becomes split into two forms. With her inward form rejoicing in the harmony and peace of Beulah, Jerusalem—in her outward form—is, as Damon suggests, “reduced to an inoperative theory” (207), struggling to annihilate her human form.

This would explain why Jerusalem appears inside the cloud in Blake's design. The cloud in which she descends on Earth is made to look as an almost transparent mass, but with a clearly defined border. Ironically, Jerusalem becomes trapped both in her inward—a cloud—and outward—Albion's bosom—forms, nonetheless, it is her inward form that finally sets her free. While being trapped in a human body within the cloud and unable to come out into the terrestrial world where time is defined by its limitations, Jerusalem's “maternal anguish” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 158) of an inward form wakes her body in Beulah, from which she then departs. In the meantime, Enitharmon is “Weaving the Web of life for Jerusalem. the Web of life / Down flowing into Entuthons Vales glistens with soft affections” (242), thus paving the way for Jerusalem's ideal form. And indeed, Jerusalem comes down among the humans in a perfect, ideal form, that is made in a such way mainly

because her existence will not be touched by the tides of time. The cloud itself also serves as a protective shield to her existence, in which time cannot be destroyed. The sleeping Albion, depicted right below Jerusalem, stands as a personification of every human being, who in his/her existence split between the past and future, descends into a deadly sleep of ignorance and perverted vision, unable to envision life within the Eternal Now. On seeing humanity in its descent and deadly sleep, induced by its vision of time as linear, Jerusalem cries out:

[...] such is my awful Vision.
 I see the Four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep
 And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.
 I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once
 Before me; O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings!
 That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 159)

What really stands out about the whole design is the setting in which Jerusalem and Albion are pictured. With a rainbow stretching above their heads, Albion and Jerusalem are enclosed within the night sky filled with stars and different planets. Now, this whole depiction of astronomical bodies is reminiscent of a cyclical movement of time, since according to the Greek conception of time, time follows the actual movement of stars and planets in the sky. Puech observes that “Time is part of a cosmic order; on its own level it is an effect and an expression of that order. If it moves in a circle, it is because, in its own way, it imitates the cyclical course of the stars on which it depends. Its endlessness, its repetition of conjectures, are, in a mobile form, images of the unchanging, perfect order of an eternal universe, eternally regulated by fixed laws[...]” (Puech 43–4). If we pay close attention to the design, we will notice that stars and planets occupy the realms beneath and above the rainbow¹²⁴, thus highlighting the course of time as cyclical in both terrestrial and heavenly spheres. As in the case of Jerusalem, human beings—if they wish to experience the Eternity of time—must renounce their human form and ascend into the realm of the imagination; however, they cannot be permitted to dwell in Beulah for too long, since they need to return to the world where their physicality dwells and learn to live in a time where every moment “is impregnated by the Eternal” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 197). Kathleen Raine explains that the “cycle of descent and return, the journey of the traveler who leaves his native country to return again, is not Christian: it is Platonic” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. I* 97). Nonetheless, other than being Platonic, Blake’s image of the soul’s return into a world where time finally moves in cycles has some very striking similarities to the view of time in Ismailism. The upcoming

¹²⁴ The rainbow itself could be perceived as a border between these two spheres.

pages will address the Ismaili concept of time as cyclical, and analyze its aspects in relation to Blake's symbolism.

In his study of time from the perspectives of Ismaili and Mazdean teachings, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Henry Corbin has established that the concept of time in the archaic Ismaili writings does not divert much from the Neoplatonic view. This is to be observed primarily in the fact that both traditions regard "the terms 'time,' 'duration,' and 'eternity' as one and the same thing considered under two aspects: unmeasured Time (independent of the movement of the Heavens and even of the soul, since it refers to a plane of the intelligible universe that is superior to the soul) and Time measured by the movement of the heavens" (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 32). Corbin proceeds further with an observation that Absolute or Eternal Time, according to the Ismaili cosmology, operates in cycles, to finally come back to the place from which it originated. This Absolute Time, aside from constituting moments characterized by an eternal duration, is highly reflective of the changing inner states of humans, that evolve and transform continually, each according to its own level of intensity. Corbin confirms this relation of the eternal Time to the change in spiritual states in his work *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, where he writes: "[S]piritual facts [...] are discontinuous and irreducible; they do not succeed one another in a homogeneous time; they *are*, each of them, their own time" (*Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* 52).

In order to understand how time varies and moves in line with the change of spiritual states, it is useful to consider Blake's rejection of a physical body and the recognition of the mind and the spirit as regions that shape our temporal existence, and determine the length of temporal duration. Since, as in the words of Raine, "[a]ll times and spaces, all the numberless places and times of existence, have their being in universal Imagination [this would mean that] life is 'eternal' not through temporal duration but because being itself is not in time and space" (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 48). One could distinguish between the two aspects that Blake applies for the purpose of proving the existence of Absolute Time, as well as time's cyclical movement:

1. The origin of Absolute or Eternal Time lies in the primordial intelligence, or the World Soul, or what Jakob Boehme termed "an imagination of the *ungrund*," the *ungrund* being his term for Godhead, as an object unknowable" (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 48), and 2. Urizen's creation of the world in seven days resulted in a contraction of human mind, while in the world of Eternity, this same span of seven days constitutes a completely different length that contributes to the expansion of one's mind.

Regarding the first aspect, it is necessary to note that Blake treats the primordial intelligence in connection with Divine Wisdom. In this respect, he follows Swedenborg, who associated the Divine Wisdom with time, and turned time into an entity that can achieve its eternal existence only within the mind. Like space, time—according to Swedenborg—cannot be measured through quantitative means; consequently, time “cannot[...] be comprehended by any natural Idea, but only by a spiritual Idea” (quoted in Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 133). When measured by the laws of the ratio, and tailored to a physical existence, time descends into mere matter, or non-existence. It becomes transformed into a materialized non-entity that impedes various aspects of human existence, and gradually hinders the development of the imagination. In the second book of *Milton*, Blake defines the non-entity as “the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 142), which, if not cast off, invades one’s perception of the universe in the spatial, as well as the temporal dimensions. This “Reasoning Power” is “a false Body: an Incrustation over [one’s] Immortal Spirit; / a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away / To cleanse the Face of [one’s] Spirit by Self-examination” (142). Almost every character in Blake’s visionary world has his/her own specter or shadow, which works in a noticeable opposition to the imaginative mind. The specter obstructs the vision of the Divine, and forces humans into the lowest stage of existence where time is not seen through the eyes of Eternity, but is, instead, envisioned through the movement of the Moon and the Sun.

“But although the Spectre is the Rational Power, he is,” as Damon warns, “anything but reasonable: rather, he is a machine which has lost its controls and is running wild” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 381). The specter is on a mission to destroy every human being, to take control of one’s imaginative power, and hinder one’s ascent to spiritual knowledge. To humans, time itself is just as devouring and fatal as the specter: “man lives in time; his actions are determined by time; and he is finally devoured by time, for to be born in time is to die” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 195). Every creation, whether it is animate or inanimate, will be devoured by time; however, every such creation will return to the primordial origin in Eternity. In other words, every thing that once had, or currently has an existence in the material world has originally descended from the immaterial/heavenly realm, and will return to this realm. Any time Blake’s characters fall from the worlds of Eden or Beulah into the worlds of Generation and Ulro, they are turned into a non-entity, “The Negation” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 142). As a result, they become confined to “the Sea of Time & Space” (134), i.e. the limitations of the material world, where time is turned into a *deadly storm* that eradicates the minds and spirits of human beings. Once humans descend into a state of non-entity, their souls also sink into a state of degradation. Harper points out that in this respect, Plotinus expressed “essentially the same idea, the mire representing the fallen soul in the state of generation: ‘When the soul

... has descended into generation she participates of evil, and profoundly rushes into the region of dissimilitude, *to be entirely merged in which, is nothing more than to fall into dark mire*" (Harper 164).

There is only one way to break away from the state of negation/non-entity, or limited time, where human existence is wrapped in the "weeds of Death" (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 254): through an exercise of "the infinite creativity of the Imagination" (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 51) where the unknowable dwells, and through a realization that time is an instrument of the soul that returns to the Eternal. Most importantly, that life in time as an Eternal concept is a ladder that leads to a unity with the Divine Intellect and the attainment of intellectual intuition which ultimately leads to a "knowledge [...] in which all things are eternally present and to which all things return" (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 204). Nasr explains that Islamic esoterism holds that

Objects in this world "emerge" from what [is called] the "treasury of the Unseen" (*khazānāy-i ghayb*); nothing whatsoever can appear on the plane of physical reality without having its transcendent cause and the root of its being *in divinis*. There is, metaphysically speaking, no possibility of any temporal process adding something to the Divinity or to Reality as such. Whatever grows and develops is the actualization of a possibility which had preexisted in the Divine Order, this development or growth being always of an essence while total reality resides in the immutable world of the archetypes. (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 204)

As an invisible concept, time itself proceeds from the "treasury of the Unseen," having its roots of existence in the Divine, and since the Divine is eternal, then time is also eternal. As a concept that preexisted in the Divine, time—even though it occupies a separate place on Earth—must return to the Divine, for the cycle of descent and ascent must be completed: "In a sense, the ascent [of time] to the Divine Throne[...] and the descent back to the terrestrial *temenos*[...] is repeated every instant. [E]very instant a sort of *mi'raj* to the supreme Centre is mysteriously conducted. This is like climbing the cosmic mountain of Qaf in the company of the angel" (Uždavinys, *Ascent to Heaven in Islamic and Jewish Mysticism* 101). What one may conclude from this is that time renews itself at every instant, it goes through a process of re-creation; however, the renewal of time is subject to one's inner world(s). With the amount and intensity of changes in mind or spirit, come the changes of time. An instant goes through a contraction when the spaces in the inner world contract, and with the expansion of such spaces, an instant undergoes an expansion as well.

In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr remarks that according to a distinctly esoteric belief in Islam, that of the Sufis (who lay a profound importance on the existence within the Eternal

Now), time is a set of timeless repetitions of instants or moments, during which “the whole world returns to the Origin through the movement of contraction (*al-qabd*) and is recreated through expansion (*al-bast*) like the two phases of breathing” (*Knowledge and the Sacred* 202). What stands out in this whole repetition of instants is the fact that the link between God and the human becomes solidified. As a result, the human being moves within the universe of “the eternal present[...] from which nothing ever really departs” (202). It is based on this very same repetition of instants that the Ismaili doctrine divides time mainly into Absolute and limited. Like the vision of Eternal Time in the Sufi version of Islam, the Eternal or Absolute Time of the Ismaili cosmology travels in a cycle, and unlike linear conceptions of time that lead *nowhere*, time in Ismailism leads back to the place of Origin. In Absolute Time, the past is not viewed as an obstacle to one’s existence or spiritual advancement; instead, the past becomes a place of “redemption” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 35), or as in the words of Nasr, it becomes a form of material “imperfection,” a reminder of “all that man has left behind in his spiritual journey, the world that man leaves for the sake of God” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 196). Consequently, the future does not represent unexpectedness or uncertainty any longer, but starts to embody an “ideal which is to be attained, the paradise that is to be gained” (225) in one’s quest for sacred knowledge. This redemption through Time becomes, in itself, a gate that leads to an adoration of the Cosmos reflected in the soul, which with all its purity and imperfections, transports itself into Eternity: “Thus cyclical [or Absolute] Time leading back to the origin becomes itself an exegesis, the total exegesis of mankind, the archetype of all exegesis” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 36).

Like an Ismaili tradition, which instructs that the cause and the *measure* of Absolute Time is in the Soul of the World and the primordial Intelligence, Blake’s system specifies that both the Soul and the Intelligence shape Time, and that without their adequate functioning, Time as Eternity is dead. The Soul and the Intelligence function as great sculptors in the cosmos: both are the modes of one’s being, and both leave the mark of permanence on humankind, a permanence which then becomes transferred to the Divine Realm. Even with the departure of the body on the terrestrial plane, the Soul and the Intelligence become released from their material prison, and thus return to the Origin. When Blake writes in *Milton* that “The generations of men run on in the tide of Time / But leave their destined lineaments permanent for ever & ever” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 117), he expresses his avid admiration and full acclamation of the Absolute “duration of the living immortal—that is to say, of the Intelligence and of the Soul” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 33). Despite the fact that in the human chain of being Blake gave the highest praise to artists, and regarded their works as true testaments of both the Soul and the Intelligence, he also intended

to show that every other human creature, whether he/she is an artist¹²⁵, has the capacity to leave his/her “destind lineaments” (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 117) on the cosmological pattern. If not through physical means, every human being is capable of leaving his/her own mark or lineament by spiritual means, in which case time proceeds on its way to Eternity: “the Soul [along with the Intelligence] is itself in the horizon of the Archangel; it is not in time, for time is in the horizon of the Soul [just as it is in the horizon of the Intelligence]” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 33).

In the chain of Being that possesses a temporal aspect, as Kathleen Raine suggests in *Blake and Tradition*, Blake uses Los, Urthona, and the Spectre of Urthona to show the triple “aspects of time (or of eternity)” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 149); however, while in the terrestrial world, they become associated with the aspects of fleeting past and present, and an unpredictable future, in the immaterial realm, these same aspects become associated with ontological manifestations of being. Of all the three aspects, the Spectre of Urthona is the one that carries the darkest side to himself. As Blake describes him in *The Four Zoas*:

Thou fierce Terror
Go howl in vain, Smite Smite his fetters Smite O wintry hammers
Smite Spectre of Urthona, mock the fiend who drew us down
From heavens of joy into this Deep. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 309)

Enveloped in all of his darkness that smites humankind with agitation and suffering, the Spectre of Urthona stands as the symbol of times past, which Blake usually associates with death and spiritual distancing. As Raine notes, “the Spectre follows like a shadow, ‘devouring’ all that Los creates, and forever seeking to possess Enitharmon, whom he claims as really his” (Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. II 150). Los, on the other hand, stands as an embodiment of the present time, “the immortal agent of time and of all sensible appearances” (150), enveloped in the cloak of light and sublimity. Los is the point where the past and future meet; he is the moment in which one experiences all that ever happened, and all that is about to happen. Consider Blake’s description of Los, which is characterized by a deep emphasis on his immortal existence in the universe, and his obsessive creation of eternal days and nights:

Los was the fourth immortal starry one, & in the Earth
Of a bright Universe Empery attended day & night
Days & nights of revolving joy, Urthona was his name
In Eden. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 301)

¹²⁵ In *The Laocoön*, Blake proclaimed that any man or woman who is not an artist is naturally incapable of being a Christian. As he wrote: “A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man / Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian / You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & Lands / if they stand in the way of ART” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 274)

Blake's depiction of temporal order in the universe through Los, Urthona, and his Spectre is in very close resemblance to the ontological creation of being outlined in the Ismaili cosmology. To fully demonstrate how this analogy exists, let us consider Corbin's interpretation of the creation of events and things according to Ismaili teachings. In *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Corbin relates to the writings of a famous Iranian/Persian thinker Nāsir-e-Khosraw, who captured the perennial mystery of the creation of events and things in the universe in the following three terms: *azal*, *azalīyat*, and *azalī*. "Thus we have an eternally-being (*azal*) as *nomen agentis*[...]; an eternal actuation of being (*azalīyat*) as *nomen verbi*[...]; an eternally being made-to-be (*azalī*) as *nomen patientis* (*Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 34). Corbin further proceeds in explaining the pertinence of Nāsir's terms to our mortal existence, and our understanding of the perpetual cycle of Eternity as promoted in Ismailism. As he writes: "We must bear in mind that in terms of Ismaili philosophy the eternally-being constitutes the supreme godhead, absolutely unknowable and unpredictable. But what this godhead is eternally in actuating its being, in revealing it, is the first archangelical hypostasis (*al-mabda' al-awwal*), its eternal Personification, its very Ipseity, the Only One forever being revealed" (34). Thus, *azal* or the eternally-being becomes a reflection of the present now in its eternal existence, which constantly actuates itself through the archangelical modes of the Intelligence and the Soul.

In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr provides an interesting interpretation of Nāsir's concepts in a slightly different manner. By employing the division of Eternity into the *before* and *after* the present moment which we inhabit, or the *before* and *after* the world in which we presently live, Nasr states that

Eternity is then before all that was and after all that will be, before and after meaning not in time but in principle. It is in this sense that the Islamic tradition speaks of *al-azal*, that is, preeternity and *al-abad* or posteternity, the two being in their own reality none other than *al-sarmad* or eternity as such. The morning of *azal* referred to so often in Sufi poetry refers to eternity in its aspect of coming before all creation. It refers to that "early dawn" when man made his eternal covenant with God. (*Knowledge and the Sacred* 198)

The preeternity of *al-azal* corresponds to the eternally being made-to-be or *azalī*, which is a reflection of the eternal, Divine Past, rather than of the subjective experience of past as the time which cannot be retrieved any more. The posteternity of *al-abad* is in correspondence to Nāsir's eternal actuation of being or *azalīyat*: it is the Eternal Future in which the Intelligence and the Soul are in a state of eternal motion towards an eternally forthcoming actuation of being. From this, it can be inferred that *azalī* and *al-azalīyat* converge in an eternally-being or *azal*, and thus, they both prove to embody Time in its constant movement from one point to

another, from the point of Eternal Past to Eternal Future, to finally reach the center of Eternal Existence, or Origin, in the Eternal Now (*azal*).

If we consider Blake's system, we can notice that Los—in his very nature—is identical to the concept of *azal*, for like *azal*, he forms the very genesis of Urthona and the Spectre, i.e. of the Eternal Future and Past. He is the agent (*nomen agentis*) that conducts time in the universe, and attracts Eternal Past and Future to his center. Although the Spectre is believed to embody darkness, and is received as the fleeting past among the humans, on an ontological level, the Spectre is the Eternal Past that is “eternally actuated; it does not *become* a past, it is not *thrust into* the past, it does not sink into a past that is more and more past, as we say that the past sinks into time” (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 35). Moreover, the Spectre shows his willingness to preserve the spiritual aspect of humanity, when he rebels against Urizen and aids in the binding of his powers that could bring about the triumph of the corporeal domain. Blake writes in *Jerusalem*:

They perceived that corporeal friends are spiritual enemies
They saw the Sexual Religion in its embryon Uncircumcision
And the Divine hand was upon them bearing them thro darkness
Back safe to their Humanity as doves to their windows:
Therefore the Sons of Eden praise Urthonas Spectre in Songs
Because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 193)

The reason why the Spectre eventually fails is because he refuses to stoop to Los' will, and because in giving in to the material laws of the terrestrial world, he disobeys the Divine Laws and contributes to the downfall of humanity. The Spectre's major error is that he becomes deceived through an illusion that he himself is the main agent (*nomen agentis*) whose actions shape the universe, and that he has an ability to act as an *Imam of his own being*. Just as the Angel Zervān of the Ismaili cosmological pattern becomes trapped in the same illusion, which leads to his downfall, the Spectre suffers through the same set of failures. The Spectre becomes

remove[d...] from eternal actuation, from the eternal advent of being. His doubt stops him to himself, thrusts him into the past, and by this fall into the past his own rank is *surpassed* (here again space is born from time). At this moment, “temporal (or limited) Time” is born, a time in which there is a remoteness, a past that is no longer eternal, a past that is no longer. (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 35)

In a sense, an experience of past in the terrestrial world becomes an experience of time as a sequence of limited moments, which results in one's distancing from the eternal realm: every

occurrence or event in the universe shows the wisdom of God in itself, which means that every event, even the time that exists in the terrestrial world, is enacted from *above* by the Soul of the World, i.e. that time itself—like space—follows the vertical line of ascent from *below* to *above*. Nasr writes: “If in the embrace of the earthly beloved hours pass as if they were but a moment, in union with the Divine Beloved all the eons of time past and future pass not only as if they were a moment but as they *are* actually a moment, in fact *the* supreme moment in which the spiritual man lives constantly” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 198). This supreme moment, as mentioned in the Qur’an, is the moment of the death of one’s body, after which the illusion of limited or temporal time becomes removed, giving way to a restoration of the primeval Time from which our beings originated. In this supreme moment, ontologically speaking, time is measured according to the motion of spiritual states. This is why one of the verses in the Qur’an states: “One day for your Lord is like *one thousand* years in your reckoning” (quoted in Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 87), or why the myth of “the seven sleepers in the cave, the *ashāb al-kahf* mentioned in the Quran, falling asleep in the cave for a short moment corresponded to the passage of several generations in the outside world” (Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* 198).

The rest of this chapter will revolve around the discussion on the second aspect that Blake applies to his work in order to show time’s cyclical movement, that of Urizen’s creation of the universe in seven days. When, in *The Book of Urizen*, Blake describes Urizen’s creation of the world, he presents the image of a world in which humans are eternally bound by Urizen’s limitations of time and space. In *Golgonooza, City of Imagination*, Raine suggests that “[t]he seven days of Urizen’s labours of creation were the seven stages of the binding and circumscribing of the Eternal Mind” (*Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 55). After creating the world in six days, Urizen rested on the seventh day; however, the “black globe” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 73) he created sucked humans into its material vortex, which finally caused the contraction of human minds. But with the creation of the terrestrial world, Urizen also contributed to the contraction or reduction of time from Absolute to limited. “The *seventh day*,” as Raine writes, “represents ‘the limit of contraction’ of eternal into temporal life through the narrowing perceptions of mankind” (Raine, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 55). After the creation of the world, the inhabitants of Urizen’s cities have followed blindly the laws of Urizen, and in doing so, they have weakened their links to the Divine, and have erased the possibility of existence in Absolute Time. Blake describes this in *The Book of Urizen*:

Six days they shrunk up from existence
 And on the seventh day they rested
 And they bless’d the seventh day, in sick hope:

And forgot their eternal life.
And their thirty cities divided
In form of a human heart
No more could they rise at will
In the infinite void, but bound down
To earth by their narrowing perceptions. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 83)

To draw comparisons to Blake's depiction of the receding of the Eternal mind and the denial of the cyclical course of time among humans, it is useful to look at Corbin's examination of God's creation of the world according to Islamic teachings. Namely, in *Temple and Contemplation*, Corbin relates that the span of six days, during which God created the universe, i.e. the Heavens, the Earth, and the intermediate world, comes to a total of eighteen thousand years, since "one day is equal to a thousand years," and "[t]he six days assigned to each of [the] three worlds gives a total of 18" (*Temple and Contemplation* 87). Now, the number seven is ascribed a special importance in Islamic teachings, particularly in Ismailism¹²⁶. Just as in Blake's *The Book of Urizen*, the number seven becomes reduced into a symbol of contraction. Ismailism teaches that in the seven-day procession around the temple of the Ka'bah¹²⁷, "only the number *seven* is important, because it always symbolizes in this episode the interval of lost time to be made up, the 'lost time of eternity' which is redeemed by the *seven* periods or 'millenia' of the cycle of prophecy. This[...] is why *seven* ritual circumambulations are performed around the earthly Ka'bah, one for each *millenium*" (234). Corbin further explains that the Ka'bah should not necessarily be viewed as a physical shrine of worship. On the contrary, the Ka'bah can also relate to the temple of the heart, and its circumambulation would, therefore, signify the adoption of "the 'seven veils' which[...] mark the distance between God and created being" (252).

Ismaili gnosis instructs about the existence of a Grand Cycle, where each cycle within the grand one is comprised of seven periods or millenia. The first of the cycles is the Cycle of Epiphany, during which Lucifer, or "the form of Iblis" (Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* 43), is placed away from humans, and is therefore unable to obstruct one's connection to the Divine. The last to come is the Cycle of Occultation¹²⁸, invested in "calamity and desolation" (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 161): it is a cycle "during which the Sages were obliged to take refuge in the 'Cave'. It is the time of the catastrophe which succeeded the day when Adam[...] surrendered the secret and the Vision of Paradise to the rage and mockery of

¹²⁶ Not least from the fact that the name Ismaili comes from the seventh Shi'a Imam, Ismail.

¹²⁷ Ka'bah is the sacred shrine for Muslims.

¹²⁸ Shi'a Muslims believe that their final Imam disappeared from this world and has gone into Occultation, but will reappear to usher in the end of this era and the beginning of a new cycle.

Iblis-Ahriman” (161). The Cycle of Occultation is the cycle of our own times, the *Kāli Yuga* that humanity has brought upon itself, in an attempt to *improve* the material, and repress the spiritual. While the seven cycles represent the procession of time in an Absolute pattern—after the last cycle is concluded by the Grand Resurrection—appears a new Grand Cycle, the seven periods or millenia contained within each cycle are seen as the symbols of the seven Temples of God.

These seven Temples of God would in turn correspond to Blake’s “Seven Eyes of God,” which he mentions a number of times in his poems. In *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye observes the following: “The seven attempts made by God to awaken Albion divide history into seven great periods, each with a dominating religion. These Blake identifies with the ‘Seven Eyes of God’ mentioned in Zechariah, and he gives these ‘Eyes’ the names of Lucifer, Moloch, the Elohim, Shaddai, Pachad, Jehovah and Jesus” (Frye 128). The Seven Eyes of God are made by the Eternals, to perform the role of the archangels in the universe. In *Milton*, Blake refers to them as “the Watchers in a fiery circle” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 114) and the “Watchm[e]n of Eternity” (119), since one of their missions is to watch over humankind. In Frye’s statement above, it can be observed that he relates Blake’s “Seven Eyes of God” to the different periods or movements in religion. The claim itself is very similar to how Ismailism portrays the seven millenia of a cycle. Namely, Ismailism relates that each of the seven millenia or periods within a cycle comes to an end once a religion that had dominated the cycle “has exhausted its *appeal*” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 162); however, with a beginning of a new Grand Cycle, a religion that died in a period of a previous cycle “*revives* in the new religion proclaimed by a new Annunciator (*natiq*)” (162). The Seven Eyes of God, despite their contraction and eventual end in one cycle, renew themselves in a succeeding cycle, thus showing that the world of angels—just like the world of humans—gradually matures, according to the degree to which they are able to form a link with the Divine, and show whether or not they are able to inhabit the Eternal Present.

In any case, the riddle of time will continue to penetrate life in the terrestrial world, and shape the decisions one makes. Blake believed that time, like space, is an important element, vital in distancing humans from their material needs, and in guiding them towards an existence in an infinite, eternal realm. This realm is always present in the primordial source, to which cyclical time draws us back. It is through the subversion of an existence within a limited time that one learns of an eternity of the moment in which the past and future are subsumed by the Eternal Now.

Conclusion: The Harmony of Time and Space in “the Science of the Balance”

[W]e must be born *in the first place* into *this* world, that we may, perhaps, be born again beyond it. (Cheetham 25)



ONE OF THE PRIMARY LESSONS TO BE TAKEN from the study of Blake’s creative opus is that the concepts of time and space need to be envisioned as creative tools that contribute to the reinstitution of the human bond with Divine Unity. However, time and space have the potential to loosen our bond with the Divine, thus accelerating the process of the descent of the soul, through the denial of the heavenly spheres. To seek existence outside the bounds of the material world means to reach out for the ineffable source of life, and view time and space as agents of infinite duration and limitless expansion. When existence is reduced to a cave of the physical body, time and space become instantaneously reduced to a set of finite concepts that are in control of the way one’s life unfolds. Consequently, time and space fall victim to corporeal forms, giving way to a perpetual formation of ideologies that entrap the spiritual centers within the material womb. With the flourishing of such ideologies, the material womb contracts around the soul, suffocating it, and blocking our ability to see things outside of the material realm.

As Raine writes: “Our society is for ever thinking in terms of changing outer circumstances;[...] We have created our nightmare world in the image of our ideologies; but with the awakening of our humanity we will see a different world, and create a different world” (*Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* 177). To see that different world, basking in the balance of the opposites and the balance of the Divine and the human, was what Blake desired throughout his entire life, and this is why his search for that balance within the infinity of space and eternity of time may have a great importance in understanding Blake’s thought and philosophy. This is why his formation of a world within the bounds of eternal time and infinite space stands in remarkable resemblance to Eastern thought, Islam and Hinduism in particular. Moreover, Blake has once again shown, through his ideas on time and space, his belief in the unity of *all* existence, and the unity of all religions under the

heavenly realm. Through a unique construction of time and space, Blake confirms that "he is hardly to be ranged in the ranks of even Christianity" (Osmond 278), or that he never was "in an exclusive sense Christian" (Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Vol. I* 75), and ended up seeking answers outside of the cosmological and ontological foundations of modern philosophy and science. The stress laid by Blake upon existence in the Divine *hypostasis* and Eternal Now shows his fixation on the esoteric correspondence between the intellect and the universal Soul, the earthly and heavenly realms, and the material and spiritual universes. As Blake asks (in the voice of Oothoon) in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*:

How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys
Holy, eternal, infinite! and each joy is a Love. (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 48)

To bring closure to the discussion of Blake's ideas on time and space—if such a discussion can ever truly come to an end—one has to finally consider the everlasting correspondence between time and space. To be exact with my application of the word "correspondence" here, it is useful to consider Corbin's referral to the "science of the Balance," which according to Islamic gnosis, including that of Ismailism, is "the metaphysical and mystical basis of the science of correspondences" (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 55). Corbin further elaborates that "[i]n Islamic gnosis, the Balance signifies the equilibrium between Light and Darkness" (57), or as suggested in Ismailism, the Balance of sacred things opens up a path for looking into "the correspondence between the earthly esoteric hierarchy and the celestial angelic hierarchy and, more generally, the correspondences between the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The visible aspect of a being presupposes its equilibration by an invisible and celestial counterpart; the apparent and exoteric (*zahir*) is equilibrated by the occulted and esoteric (*batin*)" (57). That both time and space exhibit a balance in the universe is due to the activity of *anaphora* or an act of elevation to the higher realms, in which time and space do not, like everything material, descend downwards, but ascend upwards. The only way for space and time to maintain the state of balance is through a preservation of the inner state, for "the space [and the time] of this world [are], precisely, the *qualitative* dimension[s] of an inner state" (188–9). With the failure of inner states comes the failure of balance in the universe, which thus results in the lack of space and time that provide a horizon beyond this world. A perfect example showing how the phenomena of time and space retain their balance is the image of the circle, or cycle, which "not only show[s] us temporal succession finally stabilized in the order of spatial simultaneity" (59), but also reflects spatial expansion as stabilized in the order of temporal simultaneity. In essence, a circle is simply the expansion of a point, and right now, all beings are points within a circle (the universe), but according to Blake and the mystics, each point will reunite in the center with the One or Ultimate Point, God.

Space and time, as Blake proves, both follow the course of a circle, where the inception point becomes the final point, and vice versa. As space and time act in linear codependency, space is in balance when the aspects of time are all harmoniously contained in a single point (the Eternal Now), and when the cyclical movement of time supersedes the time that flows in a historical fashion. Likewise, time itself will retain its balance when all space is contained in the center of infinitude from which all regions of the universe emanate. While “to mortal Men” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 127), time and space appear as measurable units, Blake’s Zoas view them as extensions or the “twin aspects of Eternity” (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* 404) that are contracted only through the closed senses and limited imagination, both products of a life guided by material philosophy. As Blake writes in *Jerusalem*,

Let the Human Organs be kept in their perfect Integrity
 At will Contracting into Worms, or Expanding into Gods
 And then behold! [...]
 Such are these Ulro Visions, for tho we sit down within
 The plowed furrow, listning to the weeping clods till we
 Contract or Expand Space at will: or if we raise ourselves
 Upon the chariots of the morning. Contracting or Expanding Time!
 Every one knows, we are One Family! (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 205)

The Ulro Visions, with all of their spiritually lifeless abominations, are such that they completely hinder the development of the human imagination, and impose an existence in which time and space are viewed as units threatening to the development of material creations. Once these material constructs take hold of one’s existence, time and space can no longer be expanded into indefinite units that stretch outside of the physical body, container of the soul. They become a set of unbalanced units believed to work against the duration and expanse of one’s existence. Ironically, the body and matter, which contain and limit the soul, are apparatuses necessary for the soul’s development, so that it can eventually dispense with them and move to purely spiritual realms.

On the higher plane of existence—the immaterial one—the balance of space and time is an indispensable requirement, necessary for the re-affirmation of “the harmony and equilibrium of things” (Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* 57), embodied in the concept of the Balance. Without the steadiness of the Balance in the universe, harmony itself will fade; and when harmony fades, all that once was created and perceived will perish into a cloud of disharmony and disorder. While modern science attempts to define and measure time and space in quantitative terms, separating their existence from the Divine powers, it fails to grasp their

fundamental role in the creation of the universe, that is, that time and space—as agents of harmony and order—contribute to the actual harmony of creation. Time and space are simply concepts which have no higher or lower realms, since, from the perspective of the Divine, there is only one true Reality, in which time and space are unreal; for the realized soul which exists in harmony, the entire universe, past, present, and future, all exist within it. Therefore, Blake rightfully proclaims that “Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony” (Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* 145). After all, as Wattson states, “The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work” (614), and It (the Word) revives itself through an orderly motion of time and space, the motion perceptible only within the imaginal planes.

When the Science of the Balance, which measures and determines the harmony and unity of temporal and spatial concepts, is applied to the prophetic symbolism of Blake, it frames a system in which a human being must pass through a mystical darkness and death before attaining to true immortality and Life in the Divine, in which the infinity and eternity of space and time become manifest. Blake showed that time and space, as much as they may appear destructive to one’s survival in the material world, are the same everywhere and always, and their true colors are to be discerned through the opening of our inner vision. The balance of time and space on the material plane is not to be accomplished simply through a mechanical involvement in the evocation of the Divine, but by crossing over the layer of bodily needs and desires, and coming to terms with the secret meanings, or invisible layers of the things that take place beyond the earthly realm. Unfortunately for humanity, the correspondence between time and space will never be realized in its full potential in the earthly realm, for the crossing over to the angelic, spiritual spheres is a process that will have to repeat itself perpetually. Nonetheless, it is exactly in this crossing, as Blake proves, that the Science of the Balance comes to the fore, thus making space and time into the principles that govern the order of nature, but also in some sense function as catalysts for the harmony and order of sacred history.

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