“I give you the end of a golden string”;
The Gothic Element in William Blake

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgave ser på hvordan det Gotiske utarter seg i poesien og ideene til William Blake gjennom å bruke teoriene til John Ruskin fra *The Stones of Venice* og *Modern Painters.* Ved hjelp av Ruskin's teori, som fokuserer på samspillet mellom det indre og det ytre, form of innhold, kan vi finne nye måter å lese det Gotiske elementet i Blake på. Det er tidligere forsket på den visuelle arven fra middelalder Gotisk kunst i Blake's arbeid, men man har ikke vurdert de ideologiske implikasjonene dette innebærer, og heller ikke hvordan man også kan finne middelalderske ideer i tekst materialet. Målet i denne oppgaven er å se nærmere på denne arven i alle aspekter av Blake's arbeid, det poetiske, ideologiske, teoretiske, og visuelle. I tillegg blir også sammenhengen mellom Blake og Ruskin sine ideer vurdert i lys av begges forhold til middelalder Gotisk kunst for å se om de store likhetene man finner kan tilskrives en delt arv fra ideer i denne perioden. Fokuset er spesielt rettet mot ideer om forestillingsevne, kunstneren som håndverker og poeten som profet.

Etter å ha vurdert Blake gjennom Ruskin sin teori om det Gotiske, blir også deres estetiske ideer og teorier vurdert, og man finner her at begge deler et syn som har store likhetstrekk med ideer fra middelalderen. En studie av to av Blake sine lengre dikt: *Europe* og *The Book of Urizen*, viser hvordan dette fungere innad i det poetiske landskapet til Blake.

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A note on the Text

All quotations from Blake will be in the form given in CW. With regards to quotations from John Ruskin, I have kept his spelling and punctuation even when this is ungrammatical. The abbreviations listed below will be applied in the references, while full titles will be given in the text. Notes will be in the form of endnotes to each chapter.

List of Abbreviations

SIE – Songs of Innocence and Experience

T – The Book of Thel

MHH – The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

A – America

E –Europe

U – The Book of Urizen

M – Milton

J – Jerusalem

FZ – The Four Zoas

DC – A Descriptive Catalogue

VLJ – A Vision of the Last Judgment

PA – Public Address

CW – The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake

CIB – William Blake The Complete Illuminated Books

MP – Modern Painters

SoV – Stones of Venice

Chapter 1;
”…true Art Calld Gothic in All Ages”[1]

William Blake defies categorisation. His work is manifold and profuse and Blake scholarship equally so. One thing generally agreed upon, however, is that there is something Gothic about Blake. How this manifests itself and how an understanding of the Gothic in Blake can contribute to the understanding and interpretation of his work is the concern of this thesis. My concept for investigating these aspects is two-fold. On one hand I want to look at the ideological and philosophical aspects of William Blake’s adaptation of medieval Gothic art through John Ruskin’s theories from *Stones of Venice* and *Modern Painters*, where I will focus particularly the ideas of relation between form and content as a specific Gothic trait and belief system. In addition to Ruskin’s theories, Irwin Panofsky’s theory on iconology from *Meaning in the Visual Arts* will serve as a vantage point from which to view Blake’s adaptation of Gothic in his text. I say text, and not images, because I believe that there is much to discover in also investigating how Blake’s adaptation of Gothic is embodied in his poetry, theoretical ideas, and last but not least his craft. I will throughout the discussion refer to Blake’s work as text, by which I include poetry, illuminated poetry, prose, and separate images. The inseparability of word and image in Blake is one of the reasons why the term text is a fitting one to apply to all his productions.

In the discussion of the Gothic element of different aspects in Blake’s text the idea of the poet as prophet will be central; it is reflected in his attitude toward his craft, is an essential idea in his poetry, it is important with regards to his view on himself as a visionary, and a paramount concern in Blake’s idea of the function of art and the artist, which ties in with the ideal of the medieval craftsman. On the other hand I will look at how the ideas of Blake and Ruskin are kindred through Gothic art, the hypothesis being that there are certain elements in Gothic art that accommodate the focus on spirituality so prominent in both writers, and the

ideas of the spiritual function of art is one of the features that situates both Blake and Ruskin in the Gothic tradition.

But what is the Gothic tradition? This seems to be an unstable term since Gothic has a lot of different nuances, many of which are context dependant, and some of which are hard to distinguish from one another. There are two different strains of the term that need to be paid attention to, which I will differentiate as Gothic and Gothick. 'Gothick' is a pseudo-archaic form used in the eighteenth century to denote the rise of fiction focusing on gloom, terror, and desolation such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, along with the architecture represented by his famous house, Strawberry Hill. 'Gothic', on the other hand, usually refers to the period of medieval Gothic and the artistic style developed in that period. There are of course important cross-currents between the two different branches of Gothic and a continual awareness of this complexity is important, especially so in relation to Blake, as there is no doubt that much of Blake's text reflects the ideas of Gothick, one example being *Urizen* with its emphasis on suffering and isolation. My emphasis, however, will be on the Gothic currents in his text.

'Gothic' first appeared as a label, derived from the name of Northern tribe of the Goths, denoting the 'barbarous' architecture of the North as opposed to the more civilized classic architecture of southern Europe. Blake uses the term partly in this sense when he distinguishes between Greek as "mathematic form" and Gothic as "living form" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270). Many of Blake's ideas are founded upon this opposition and the discussion in the subsequent chapters will elaborate on the development of this opposition in Blake's poetry and ideas. The *OED* informs that the meaning "barbarous, rude , uncouth, unpolished" (2nd ed. p. 702), originating in the fourteenth century, is still valid which implies that the early use of Gothic as a derogatory term still carries some residue with the connotation of something wild, unpolished, and ancient still being associated with it. The correlation of something

ancient and mythical is arguably also present in Blake's appropriation of Gothic, where the stress on art as a timeless language of vision is an important feature: "living form is eternal existence" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270).

Interestingly, Blake only uses the word 'Gothic' twelve times in his entire body of writing (Erdman, 1967 'gothic' p. 829): seven times in relation to architecture, twice referring to the font, once referring to the Gothic artists of the middle ages, and only twice in a more theoretical sense as "living form" and "true art called Gothic" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270 and *VLJ*, *CW* p. 559). Gothic is, more than anything else, an innate quality in Blake's text that manifests itself theoretically, poetically, and visually.

Looking to Ruskin's definition of Gothic from "The Nature of Gothic" we find that the character of Gothic "is made up of many mingled ideas, and can consist only in their union" and that:

> Gothic architecture has external forms and internal elements. Its elements are certain mental tendencies of the builders, legibly expressed in it; as fancifulness, love of variety, love of richness, and such others. Its external forms are pointed arches, vaulted roofs, etc. And unless both the elements and the forms are there, we have no right to call the style Gothic. It is not enough that it has the Form, if it has not the power and life. It is not enough that it has the Power, if it have not the form (*The Stones of Venice* Vol. 2 p. 140).

The notion expressed here regarding the interconnectedness of the interior and the exterior members in Gothic art is, in my opinion, something that pervades the tradition of Gothic art, and is especially relevant to Blake's idea of Gothic as 'living form'. In both Blake and Ruskin's ideas, as I will show throughout this thesis, there is a close relation between form and content, idea and execution, which also addresses the function of art and the role of the artist.

There is a question of whether it is a valid approach to examine Blake through the theories of Ruskin, and how these can serve to elucidate Blake's use of Gothic. One reason for choosing this approach is the striking similarity found in some of their ideas. In the article

"Journeys Through the Doors of Perception: John Ruskin and William Blake" Alan Davis establishes a connection between Blake and Ruskin: "This is a paper about vision – a subject of great importance for both John Ruskin and William Blake", and his article "draws attention to some important parallels between Ruskin's idea of vision and Blake's; and also their respective approaches to the recording of their perception" (*The Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, Lent Term 2006, p. 24).[2]

In the subsequent chapters I will elaborate on some of the parallels found by Davis, but in addition venture to discuss further similarities between Blake and Ruskin. Chapter two will be devoted to examining and comparing Ruskin's theory on Gothic with ideas in Blake, and will serve to initiate an understanding of how their conceptual ideas are related to ideas found in medieval Gothic art. Evidence of Blake and Ruskin's preference for art that embodies aesthetic ideas and functions similar to ideas in medieval Gothic can be traced out by paying close attention to the overall ideology of both writers. Chapter three will therefore be an examination of the aesthetic ideas of both Blake and Ruskin in relation to ideas in medieval art. The connection between exteriority and interiority in art is paramount in both writers and is one of the overarching principles that will be discussed throughout this thesis, as well as their view of the artist as craftsman and the poet as prophet. Also Blake and Ruskin's ideas on truth and imagination are essential factors in determining the relation between their ideas and medieval Gothic. Some light will be shed in this area by exploring their similar views on the theories of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and this issue will mainly be dealt with in chapter three. A subsequent part of chapter one will provide a presentation of the relation between the ideas of Blake, Ruskin, and Reynolds in order to show how the opposition towards the neoclassicism of Reynolds and The Royal Academy situates Blake and Ruskin in the Gothic tradition.

In using Ruskin's definition of Gothic I hope to provide new insight into Blake's adaptation of Gothic art beyond stylistic similarities. Blake's visual debt to images from medieval Gothic art has already been established by other scholars, the most well known examples being Anthony Blunt, Jean H. Hagstrum, W. J. T Mitchell, and David Bindman. However, in their various studies into Blake's adaptation of Gothic all of the mentioned scholars focus on the visual relation between individual images in Blake and various Gothic sources. In *The Art of William Blake* Anthony Blunt points to several medieval Gothic sources which he believes Blake to have modelled images on, such as an initial from a thirteenth century Psalter in New College, Oxford, 'The Angel of the Apocalypse' from the *Lambeth Apocalypse*, a boss from York Minster, and an initial from the twelfth century manuscript, the Winchester Bible[3] which shows a resemblance with Blake's *Michael Binding the Dragon*. Despite this rich variety of possible sources from which Blake drew upon in his own designs, none of the examples pointed out by Blunt is commented upon beyond the compositional likeness they exhibit.

Hagstrum calls attention to yet another medieval source based on stylistic likeness with Blake's illuminated poetry, namely the *Bedford Hours*, but she states that "books of emblems and illuminated manuscripts did doubtless contribute visual motifs, but it is more important for my purpose that Blake's work *are* illuminations and emblems" (p. vii). The question is whether or not separating the function of Blake's text as illuminations and emblems from the function of the source does not narrow the understanding of his text.

My argument is that the visual connection between images in Blake and Books of Hours testify to a deeper ideological relationship where Blake's books of illuminated poetry share a similar function with these medieval texts, which I will discuss at grater length in the subsequent chapters.

Mitchell in his *Blake's Composite Art*[4] has a more differentiated approach, pointing out that there is "something which is hunted at but nit adequately defined as the 'Gothic' element in Blake's art" (p. 58), and that Blake's text poses the choice between classical and Gothic form as opposing values, using a plate from *Jerusalem* (figure 18) as an example (p. 28-29). However, even he does not endeavour to include in his discussion the philosophical and ideological aspects implied in Blake's adaptation of Gothic, but focuses mainly on Gothic as an issue of form.

David Bindman's essay "Blake's 'Gothicised Imagination' and the History of England" focuses mainly on Blake's early work and its influence from medieval and Gothic sources, but whether it be illustrations to English early history or Blake's influence from Gothic sculpture Bindman does not enter into any discussion of the ideological implications. In fact, he ascribes the affinity to the fact that "Blake saw in Gothic monuments 'the simple and plain road to the style of art at which he aimed, untangled in the intricate windings of modern practice'," and he goes on to claim that this is the same as what the neo-classicists were doing, but that "Blake was probably the first to find it embodied in English Gothic sculpture as well as in Greek and Early Renaissance art" (p. 30). The whole of Bindman's inquiry is concerned with discussing aspects of the origin and possible sources of Blake's early work with images from medieval history.

In light of the interconnectedness of the inner and outer elements of Gothic art, as pointed out in Ruskin's definition of Gothic, there are obvious gaps in the understanding of Blake's adaptation of Gothic; it is obvious that the Gothic in Blake is deeply vested in the ideology of medieval Gothic and closely connected with Blake's own ideas. This, together with Panofsky's theory on iconology, makes it clear that key elements in the understanding of Blake's use of Gothic have not been addressed. Panofsky writes:

> Iconological interpretation, finally, requires something more than a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources. When we wish to

> get hold of those basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation of images, stories and allegories, and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed, we cannot hope to find an individual text which would fit those basic principles (p. 64).

A discussion, then, of the visual similarities between Blake's designs and certain medieval Gothic images, without also addressing how the iconological meaning of the source image is carried into and adapted in the design is to only scratch the surface of a much larger issue. In Blake, especially, considering the inseparability of images and words, the issue of how the iconology of Gothic images is present in the totality of his text needs to be addressed. The issue of what Blake's adaptation of Gothic means in relation to ideas expressed in his own poetry and prose remains very much an unexplored area of research.

The relation between the outer form and the inner spirit and function of art is an important convergence point in Blake's and Ruskin's ideas on art, and it is arguably their affinity for Gothic art that brings out this aspect in their thought. Looking at Blake through Ruskin's definition of Gothic and its different elements addresses the question of how Blake's stylistic appropriation of Gothic embodies deeper ideological aspects. Again the idea of the artist as craftsman is an essential point, and this idea is vested on a symbiotic view of the creative process form idea to execution, meaning that one cannot separate Blake's visual debt to Gothic art from the adaptation of its ideas. A continual awareness of this factor is an essential aspect in understanding the importance and function of the Gothic element in Blake. In light of Blake's comment: "Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence. Grecian is Mathematic Form Gothic is Living Form" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270), used by scholars, examples of which can be found in Blunt, Hagstrum and Mitchell, to exemplify Blake's preference for Gothic, it comes across as a certain irony that the inner life or quality of this form is so blatantly left out of the discussion.

The stylistic resemblance between one of the images form the Lambeth Apocalypse and Blake's engraving *Satan Smiting Job*, as pointed out by Blunt, makes it likely that Blake was familiar with this manuscript and had an understanding of the function of the illuminated manuscripts.[5] Blake's apprenticeship to James Basire and the time he spent working with the monuments of Westminster Abbey under Basire's tutelage, and working for the Society of Antiquities, contributes in making it likely that Blake had an understanding of more than the formal aspects of medieval Gothic art. The question of how his apprenticeship influenced Blake's artistic preferences and style will be discussed at greater length in chapter three, where a closer look at some examples of his text created during this time will serve to shed some light on the matter. Bearing in mind Blake's preoccupation with the philosophical and metaphysical facets of art, it is highly unlikely that he would not be indebted to the deeper ideological aspects of reading medieval texts. Something that testifies to this understanding is the thematic connection between the Apocalypse and *Jerusalem*, but also the earlier prophetic books show thematic connections with ideas in Gothic illuminated manuscripts. These will be addressed in the latter part of chapter two along with Blake's and Ruskin's ideas on perception and allegory as factors in understanding the function of Blake's illuminated poetry.

I have included a wide ranging selection from Blake's text in the discussion due to the nature of the subject, the intersective nature of Blake's text, and his view of himself as visionary and craftsman. The title pages to his illuminated poetry with the signature: "William Blake Author & Printer" are a strong indicator as to the integrated nature of the creative process from idea to execution. To separate Blake's work as artist and craftsman from his prose writing and marginalia is to misunderstand part of the ideological background in his text, which in this study is vital in understanding the full scope of Blake's adaptation of Gothic. I will view Blake's painting, poetry, and prose as one text, although some separate works are not directly discussed. The poetic examples will mainly be taken from the

illuminated poetry because of the importance of image text relation in my discussion. The inclusion of some of Blake's prose is necessary in order to show how ideas found here are related to his adaptation of Gothic in his poetry and images. I am also devoting the whole of chapter three to the exploration of Blake and Ruskin's aesthetic theories to show how these are connected to what one might term a Gothic aesthetic.[6]

The use of the expression 'Gothic aesthetic' can be understood as a contrast to the Neo-classicist ideal, which was the prevailing paradigm in art at in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Royal Academy established in 1768, right around the time when Blake started his apprenticeship to Basire, with Sir Joshua Reynolds as its president was a prime contributor in spreading this ideal, and Reynolds ideas from his yearly lectures to the Academy, his *Discourses on Art*, became the leading theory of the day. He favoured a classicist aesthetic where art is considered an intellectual and rational pursuit, and advocated the Platonic ideal which the student of art could achieve by having "an implicit obedience to the *Rules of Art*, as established by the practice of the great MASTERS" who should be considered as "subjects for their imitation, not their criticism" (*Discourses* I: 92-93 and I: 96-97 p.17). The conflict with Blake is immediately apparent when reading his annotation on this particular paragraph: "Imitation is criticism" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 643). Indeed Blake's first comment to the *Discourses*: "This Man was Hired to Depress Art" shows his strong indignation to the ideas expressed by Reynolds. The central ideas in Reynolds with notion that painters should strive to imitate according to the Platonic ideal, and that original conception and knowledge of beauty can be taught as central points is something Blake fervently speaks out against. Blake's views on the ideas of Reynolds manifest themselves, among other things, in the significance Blake places on outline as the determining factor and in his views on the importance of rendering particular character in art. In chapter three these issues will be discussed and exemplified in relation to the aesthetic ideas of Blake and Ruskin.

At present it is sufficient to note that the ideals set forth by Reynolds makes him a

'generalizer' to Blake who on his part wants art to be specific.

> Let the Indefinite be explored. and let every Man be Judged
> By his own Works, Let all Indefinites be thrown into Demonstrations
> To be pounded to dust & melted in the Furnaces of Affliction:
> He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars
> General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer:
> For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars
> And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power.
> The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity
> (*J* 55: 57-64)

[1] William Blake A *Vision of the Last Judgment*, *CW* p. 559

[2] Davis also mentions how Ruskin became familiar with Blake's work: "Ruskin was introduced to the work of Blake as a direct result of his friendship with the painter George Richmond, whom he had first met in 1840. For the young Richmond, the influence of Blake had been enormously important" (Alan Davis "Journey Through the Doors of Perception: John Ruskin and William Blake, *The Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, Vol. 2. no 2, Lent term 2006, pp. 24-45

[3] Plates 64b, 54c, 42b, and 39b in Anthony. Blunt *The Art of William Blake*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959

[4] Hagstrum was, according to Mitchell, the first to call Blake's work composite art. See W. J. T. Mitchell *Blake's Composite Art; A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1978, 3n

[5] For a discussion of how the English Illustrated Apocalypse functions as a book of images see Suzanne Lewis *Reading Images; Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1995, introduction, For a discussion of how the English Illustrated Apocalypse functions as a book of images.

[6] For a discussion on the validity of this term see Umberto Eco *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986

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Chapter 2:

Medieval Craftsmanship and The Essence of Gothic

As mentioned in chapter one, Ruskin's definition of Gothic stresses the fundamental connection between interiority and exteriority, content and form, in Gothic art. This relationship works on many levels. The idea that art has a deeper spiritual meaning is one aspect of this view, another is the idea that the function of the artist is to convey this through art, the idea of the poet as prophet. In relation to Blake this idea is interesting because of his emphasis on the poetic genius, or imagination and the function of art as a vehicle for vision and this will be a key idea in this chapter.

In "The Nature of Gothic" from *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin establishes what he terms the six "characteristic or moral elements of Gothic art" (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 141): Savageness, Naturalism, Changefulness, Grotesqueness, Rigidity, and Redundance[1], which in order of their importance constitute a greater or lesser degree of Gothicness. I will argue that Ruskin's definition of the different elements of Gothic is related to Blake's text through his insistence on the inseparability of body and soul, poetic constructions in his text, and the nature of his mythic characters and the significance they bear to each other, as all of these examples reflect the symbiosis of internal-external.

The three most significant elements to Ruskin: Savageness, Naturalism, and Changefulness, are also the most essential in relation to Blake and will be given particular focus. Savageness embodies the ideal of the medieval craftsman, Changefulness addresses the concept of variety and its connection to energy, while Naturalism incorporates the Gothic mode of representing the human figure, all three of paramount importance in Blake's text. A brief elucidation of how the three remaining elements relate to Blake's adaptation of Gothic is also necessary after all, for as Ruskin explains:

> So in the various mental characters which make up the soul of Gothic. It is not one nor another that produces it; but their union in certain measures. Each of them is found in many other architectures besides Gothic; but Gothic cannot exist where they are not found, or, at least, where their place is not in some way supplied (*Stones* Vol. 2 p. 141).

There is a very strong ideological thrust in what Ruskin terms the Savageness of Gothic. Ruskin particularly emphasises the nobility he finds in the roughness of Gothic architecture and he contrasts this wild spirit of the Northern tribes, manifested in Gothic art, to the more refined sentiments of the Southern peoples whose art and architecture lack the quality of Savageness. Ruskin relates this difference between the Northern, or Gothic, style, and the Southern, Greek or Classical style, to what he defines as three different classes of ornament: Servile, Constitutional, and Revolutionary. The Greek is classed as Servile ornament where "the execution or power of the inferior workman is entirely subjected to the intellect of the higher" (*Stones of Venice* Vol. 2 p. 144), the example being that the worker has to produce columns and capitals that are all equal after a set norm, Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian. Because each of these three Greek styles only allows for one particular form there is no room for the worker to use the imagination. The uniform nature of Classical architecture and its emphasis on precision and perfection that Ruskin here speaks of is much the same as the sentiment found in Blake's *On Virgil*: "Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence. Grecian is Mathematic Form. Gothic is Living Form" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270). Ruskin defines Gothic as belonging to the class employing Constitutional ornament "in which the executive inferior power is, to a certain point, emancipated and independent, having a will of its own, yet confessing its inferiority and rendering obedience to higher powers" (pp. 144-145).

The comparison results in the idea that while art employing Servile ornament makes the workman a slave, the Gothic, in its use of Constitutional ornament allows the workman to use his imaginative faculties in the creative process. Ruskin states that one should "never

demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble end" (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 151), and he praises the possibility the medieval craftsman had of employing the imagination in his work, even if this opens up to potential flaws and imperfections. Ruskin stresses that "It is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two can not be separated with impunity" (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 155). The need expressed for all the human faculties to be employed in the creation process reflects the relationship between the interior and exterior forces in Gothic explicated as 'form' and 'power and life' by Ruskin.

In Blake's illuminated poetry this idea is manifested through the symbioses of images and words and in his view on the interconnected relationship of imaginative creation and craft. He explicates this in one of his letters: "he who can Invent can Execute" (*Letters* 2**,** *CW* p. 699). The championing of the relationship between the imaginative and executing faculties points out as a deception the idea that the two can be separated. Ruskin goes even further and says that all ideas regarding the division of creative labour between one thinking and one executing aspect are "founded upon two mistaken suppositions: the first, that one man's thoughts can be, or ought to be executed by another man's hands; the second, that manual labour is a degradation, when it is governed by intellect" (*Stones of Venice* Vol. 2 p. 154). A closer look at the function of Blake's craft in relation to his poetic ideas will serve to elucidate the importance placed on the artist as craftsman, and craftsman as artist, in both Blake and Ruskin's texts.

Blake's stance on the significance of craftsmanship is manifested in several of the title pages of his illuminated poetry, for instance *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and *Thel* (figure 1) which read "The Author & Printer W. Blake". In later books this is replaced by "Printed by W Blake" except in *Milton* where he used the earlier signature. His view of himself as craftsman, first and foremost, is also reinforced by his continued engraving after

the work of other artists even until the last days of his life. In a letter to Rev Dr. Trusler, dated August 23, 1799, Blake describes his ideas on the subject:

> I have no objection to Engraving after another Artist. Engraving is the profession I was apprenticed to, & should never have attempted to live by anything else If orders had not come in for my Designs & Paintings, which I have the pleasure to tell you are increasing Every Day. Thus If I am a painter it is not to be attributed to Seeking after. But I am contented whether I live by Painting or Engraving (*Letters*, *CW* p. 703).

In relating Blake's statement to Ruskin's idea it is of course a matter of definition whether one counts engraving and illustrating the works of another artist as one man executing the ideas of another. I would argue against this in relation to Blake as the art of engraving and illustration is interpretation and creation in its own right. It functions on the same level as Ruskin's example of the medieval worker executing the overall design of the master-mason in Gothic cathedrals but still using his imagination in his craft. Thus, to Blake, engraving after another art object is also a form of creation employing the imagination, and it actually reinforces the integrated nature of craft and imagination. The fact that Blake was trained as an engraver is an important reason for the importance placed on craft in his poetic ideas, and some explanation of the development of Blake's craftsmanship is necessary to understand the full scope of its importance.

Blake was apprenticed to the famous engraver James Basire. The method he learned was line engraving, where an instrument called a burin is used to carve out lines in a plate of copper which is later inked and printed. This technique, as the name indicates, is based on mainly using lines, instead of dots and lozenges, to impress the desired image into the plate. This stress on line became the basis for the new technique of illuminated relief etching Blake invented and used in his own illuminated poetry. The linearity is still the most prominent feature, but instead of graving the lines they are drawn in wax on the plate, which is later put in bath of acid where the parts unprotected by the wax are etched away. The plate is then

inked and printed, and the prints coloured, or illuminated, by hand.[2] The immediacy of this process makes it analogous to the handwritten medieval manuscripts.

The fact that Blake uses engraving not only for the images, but also for rendering the words, is a unique feature. Nowhere does he employ any form of typesetting, and since each plate is coloured by hand, he eliminates any form of mass-production; it is pure craftsmanship through and through and affiliates Blake with the ideal of the medieval craftsman as set forth by Ruskin. The remarkable result of Blake's method is a page unlike anything that has ever been created in the history of the book, perhaps with the exception of medieval illuminated manuscripts, with which Blake's illuminated poetry shows some resemblance. An important similarity is that both these forms of texts are vested on the continual play between images and words and the interdependent relationship between the two. However, there is an important difference between Blake's illuminated books and medieval illuminated manuscripts. While "the richly complex medieval experience of image-text reading" is "a dynamic transactional process involving author, text, compiler, scribe, designer, and reader-viewer" (Lewis p. 12), Blake's illuminated poetry eliminates several of these layers and unifies the different constituents in the creative process, placing an even stronger emphasis on the amalgamation of words and images.

The notion of the unity of imagination and creation can be viewed as a consequence of Blake's stance that the body and soul are inseparable. The division of the human faculties only occurred as a result of the fall from grace: "Upon the precipice he stood ready to fall into non-entity" (*J* 32:2). Man's "fall into Division & his Resurrection to Unity" (*FZ* 1:21 *CW* p. 301) results in a continual strife for unity in an effort to once again ascend to the un-fallen state. This struggle is echoed in Blake's craft since he does not divide the imaginative process from the process of execution. The ideological and philosophical implications of this view are

carried into the actual engraving process, where the method used becomes analogous to a meditative thought process whose function is to expose the misconception of division:

> Firs the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I 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. If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite (*MHH* 14, figure 1).

We see here that the engraving process becomes a way of using art to gain a higher understanding of spiritual truth. The idea of the engraving plate as medium already holding hidden images that only need to be revealed by the artist corroborates the idea of the artist as prophet, not in the sense of a diviner of the future, but as a seer of hidden truths. The process of engraving here becomes a reflection of the dual nature of Blake's illuminated poetry, and reflects the aim of his prophesies.[3] Portraying the imaginative process of creating and printing poetry as an alchemical process lifts it into the realm of the ethereal and makes it an emblem of human divinity.

In the next plate (*MHH* 15); featuring the third "Memorable Fancy", the method of printing is allegorized in alchemical symbolism pictorialized by the symbol of the serpent in the eagle's claws at the bottom of the page (figure 2). In alchemical philosophy this symbolizes the unification of the male and female elements, thus emphasising the theme of unification to the perfect un-fallen state. Damon describes it as "a soaring Eagle uplifting the serpent of Nature" (*A Blake Dictionary* p. 112) An earlier reference, "When thou seest an eagle thou seest a portion of Genius" (*MHH* 9), comments on the status of the eagle as a symbol of the inspired and divine. Perhaps 'Genius' even refers to the 'Poetic Genius', since the position of the eagle is North (*J* 98:43) the same as Los, the eternal poet (Damon pp. 246-47). The serpent is a symbol for Nature (Damon pp. 365-366), but in light of the text: "In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air, he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite" (*MHH* 15) together with "Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent" (*E* 10:16) the

Eagle-Serpent emblem can be seen as the continual battle between the finite and the infinite; a symbol for the Eagle, or the Poetic Genius's, possibility of revealing the infinite in the finite.

The six different stages described in the text can be seen as an analogy to the six days of creation in Genesis; artistic creation becomes a way of creating the world anew. The creative process described here and the knowledge "transmitted from generation to generation" (*MHH* 15) is put into books, resulting in "the Bible of Hell" (*MHH* 24, figure 6), perhaps Blake's own books of illuminated poetry. The idea of Blake's prophetic books as a Bible of Hell has been commented upon and discussed by S. Foster Damon (see his commentary on *MHH* in *William Blake; His Philosophy and Symbols* p. 325). I would argue that the most important implication of the idea of Blake's poetry as a Bible of Hell in this context is that it establishes the spiritual and visionary nature of the poetry as well as commenting upon it as allegory and thus metaphysical truth. The idea of the creation of poetry as an alchemical process, or the Great Work, as discussed above also gives testimony on the aim of Blake's prophetic books. Just as the interconnectedness of imagination and craft is a reflection of the struggle to return to the unity of the un-fallen state, the prophetic books are a poetic attempt at explicating the divided state of humanity as error and thus functioning as guidance to the spiritual truth of unity and infinity.

A specific example on how the division is manifested in the world are the "dark Satanic Mills" (*M* 1: 8), which according to Damon "visualize as the enormous mills of the Industrial Revolution, but signify the philosophy under which all England was suffering" (*A Blake Dictionary* p. 273), the result of the division of the imaginative and executing faculties as discussed above. The problem of wanting "one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working" (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 154) is a result of the industrial revolution. Ruskin's praise of the workers' possibility of employing the imagination in Gothic elevates it to a realm of higher moral quality and places it as a more humanistic form of art, thus idealizing the

medieval craftsman. The mechanised production of industry, where the only aim is perfection and precision, is de-humanizing because

> the eye of the soul must be bent upon the finger-point, and the soul's force must fill the invisible nerves that guide it, ten hours a day, that it may not err form it's steely precision, and so soul and sight be worn away, and the whole human being be lost at last – a heap of sawdust, so far as its intellectual work in this world is concerned (*The Stones of Venice* Vol. 2 pp. 147-48).

The problem of industry and mechanical production is also addressed by Blake in the *Public Address*: "A Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art it is Destructive of Humanity & of Art the Word Machination [*seems*]" (*Public Address* 46 CW p.575). The lack of mechanical elements in the creation process of Blake's art, apart from the printing press of course, which was a hand press, relates Blake to the ideal of the medieval craftsman and is an opposition to the ideas of industrialization in itself.

Moreover, based on the fact that Ruskin not only terms Classical art, but also the neo-classicists as using Servile ornament, it can be argued that the Royal Academy and the theories of Reynolds are another example of the 'mind forg'd manacles' and 'Satanic mills' Blake warns against in his text. Especially the prescriptive nature of Reynolds theory of imitation based on the Platonic ideal, and his view on the importance of imitating after the great Masters is opposed by Blake. Not that Blake disagrees with the importance of imitating great art; but he has an altogether different view on what this imitation signifies. Reynolds writes:

> I would chiefly recommend, that an implicit obedience to the *Rules of Art*, as established by the great MASTERS, should be exacted from the *young* Students. That those models, which have passed through the approbation of ages, should be considered by them as perfect and infallible guides; as subjects for their imitation, not their criticism (*Discourses* I: 92-97).

Blake's annotation to this paragraph reads "Imitation is Criticism" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 643). In *The Laocoön* he goes even further saying that: "Israel deliverd from Egypt is Art deliverd from Nature & Imitation" (*CW* p. 274), here imitation is seen as slavery. The two

different views on imitation given by Blake here are both derived from the importance of the imagination. Blake's own imitation of other artists, of which there are plenty of examples, is never just copying but always entails some form of adaptation or analysis of the idea in the original. The problem of imitation addressed in the statement from *The Laocoön* is that imitation governed by law undermines the value of individual thought and thus is counter-progressive. The importance of progression and change is a marked feature in Blake's text and the mentality of changing, developing, and elaborating on his work applies on several levels related to the second moral element of Gothic, Changefulness.

The element of Changefulness is a direct result of the possibility of employing the imagination opened up to by the Savageness of Gothic. Once the imagination is allowed to flourish, greater variety necessarily follows. There is also an important aspect of energy embedded in artistic variation and it can be argued that Orc is a manifestation in Blake's myth of the Gothic spirit explicated in Ruskin's writing:

> the second most essential part of the Gothic spirit, (is) that it broke through that law wherever it found it in existence; it not only dared, but delighted in, the infringement of every servile principle; and invented a series of forms of which the merit was, not merely that they were new, but that they were *capable of perpetual novelty* (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 160).

The birth of Orc, "revolution in the material world" (Damon p. 309), is a result of the struggle between Urizen, the limiter or ratio, and Los, the eternal poet. Orc opposes the laws of Urizen and, like Prometheus stole fire from the gods, Orc steals the fire of Urizen fire: "I well remember how I stole thy light & it became fire consuming" (*FZ* 7). Orc is in many instances pictured surrounded by flames (figure 8), which in their nature are an ever changing form capable of 'perpetual novelty'. Orc, as the son of Los, is an embodiment of the revolutionary power of poetry and art. However, there is a danger in continuous change and revolt. Ruskin calls it the diseased love of change and the parallel to Orc in Blake's myth can be traced here as well. Despite the capability of perpetual novelty, there is a need for both change and

monotony; “both having their use, like darkness and light, and the one incapable of being enjoyed without the other” (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 161). Understanding the function of such oppositions is of supreme importance in Blake for “without contraries is no progression” (*MHH* 3). The function of Orc in relation to Ruskin’s idea of diseased love of change becomes even more interesting when we consider his meaning as error. Orc is the fallen state of Luvah, the place where there are no contraries, and this is the state to which he returns when he burns himself out (Damon p. 310). This is the same thing that happens to the effects of change when it is constant and unbroken by monotony: “if the pleasure of change be too often repeated, it ceases to be delightful, for then change itself becomes monotonous, and we are driven to seek delight in extreme and fantastic degrees of it. This is the diseased love of change of which we have above spoken” (*SoV* vol. 2 p. 162). The spirit of revolution can have the same trajectory, occurring when desire to revolt is without purpose or meaning but merely the never-ending cycle of revolt for revolts sake; perpetual novelty for the sake of novelty.[4]

However, looking to Blake’s illuminated poetry we also find very specific manifestations of the healthy love of change Ruskin speaks of. On a straightforward level the watercolour washes applied to the pages of the *Songs* are an example of the variety ever present in Blake’s work, as they vary from copy to copy. There are of course abundant examples of such variety in Blake’s illuminated poetry; the various copies are sometimes widely different both in colouring and assembly of the different plates, sometimes even additional plates exist in some copies as is the case with for instance plate 3a of *Europe*.

On a more complex level the manifestation of variety also appears in the ornamental quality achieved through the structure of images and words on individual plates in the illuminated books. In reading Blake’s illuminated poetry one is struck by the extraordinary richness of the details found in the margins and between the lines; there are words and letters

growing into curling vines, flames, or serpents, and maybe even growing into and becoming part of a larger image on the plate, emphasising the dynamic structure of word-image. This interaction occurs both thematically and physically in the individual plates, and there appears to be no end to the amount of detail Blake manages to include on a single printed page. The rich detail and the structure of the image-text again accommodates association with pages from medieval illuminated manuscripts (see figures 3 and 5)

David Erdman's extensive research into this area goes a long way in providing an understanding of the meaning of the curling vines and sprouting leafs in Blake's designs, although it is admittedly lacking in respect of a complete listing and understanding of every detail found in Blake's illuminated books. The strong organic element apparent in many of the plates of the illuminated poetry, where words and letters grow into leaves, flames, vines, creates an interlaced design stressing the inseparability of images and words. A trait similarly found in medieval Gothic manuscripts, and corresponding to Ruskin's idea of Naturalism and the focus on organic growth in Gothic.

Comparing plate seventeen from *America* (figure 4) with a page from The Ormesby Psalter (figure 5), we see that not only do they share a resemblance in the overall structure of the page, but both show a very strong interaction of image and text. There is almost a sense of the image invading the text. In Blake's design the human form growing into a treelike shape extends into the initial 'T' of the second stanza, the line reading: "The Plagues creep on the burning winds driven by flames of Orc". This is emphasised by the flames in the bottom design which can be followed up into the tendrils behind the naked human figure and all the way into the text: "What Fires of Hell". In psalm fifty-one from The Ormesby Psalter the emblematic design in the middle of the page appears out of the mouth of the dragon in the left margin. Additionally, the human figure on the dragon's back reaches up, in a manner very similar to the figure mentioned in Blake's design, and interacts with the floral border design.

The border reaches all the way around the text, and some of the individual flowers extend almost into the text, stressing the integrated nature of the relation between text and image. In both examples the interchange of images and words brings out the idea of the image-text as organic creation with potential for growth, transmediated as spiritual growth in the reader.

There are several important aspects arising out of the employment of the interlinear and marginal details in the illuminated books. First, the overall impression of individual plates as well as a whole illuminated book has an aspect of ever changing as there is a restless quality in the visual impression of these designs. The organic ornamentation emphasises the progressive thrust of the words and their growing autonomous quality. Ruskin's words sum up the attitude one finds on the page of the old Gothic texts as well as in Blake's illuminated poetry:

> It is that strange *disquietude* of the Gothic spirit that is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wonders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied (*SoV* Vol. 2, p. 165)**.**

The organic element also reflects very specific ideas of life and energy that are a paramount stance in Blake's text: "energy is eternal delight" (*MHH* 4). It emphasises the connection between word and image as a physical manifestation of creative thought energy and situates the poetry in the vegetable world, but, through its ever changing quality, also brings out the idea that there is something more beyond the physical aspect of this world. This idea ties into Blake's idea of fourfold vision and will be discussed in chapter three. Another interesting feature of the organic details in Blake's illuminated books in relation to Ruskin's idea of Gothic is that besides connecting to Changefulness, they are also a manifestation of Naturalism.

Ruskin defines Naturalism as "the love of natural objects for their own sake, and the effort to represent them frankly, unconstrained by artistical law" (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 166). In light of Blake's stance on laws in art I will address the latter part of Ruskin's definition first. An

example of Blake's view is his famous aphorism "one law for the lion & ox is oppression" (*MHH* 24) accompanied by the image of Nebuchadnezzar (see figures 6 and 7). As explained above, the problem arising out of imposing general laws on the creation of art according to ideas found in both Blake and Ruskin is that it encumbers and limits imaginative thought and thus progression, and the importance of the human imagination as a main thrust in Blake's text is again relevant to our discussion. While Ruskin stresses that the workman must look to nature for material, Blake advocates the imagination as the main source for artistic invention. The seeming conflict between Ruskin's view of 'truth to nature' and Blake's idea of 'truth to the imagination' makes it necessary to explore ideas expressed in their texts on the nature of truth and its relation to the imagination.

The aphorisms from *MHH* are a good place to start exploring ideas of truth in Blake's text. In linking "Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth" (*MHH* 8) and "Truth can never be told as to be understood and not be believ'd" (*MHH* 10) to "What is now proved was once, only imagin'd" (*MHH* 8) it becomes cleat that in Blake's text the distinction between truth and imagination is not necessarily present; imagination is a necessary step in the course of reaching new truths. Turning to Ruskin's views on truth and imagination one notices that there are some important parallels to Blake's stance. Ruskin explains:

> The imagination has three totally distinct functions. It combines, and by combination creates new forms; but the secret principle of this combination has not been shown by the analysts. Again, it treats or regards both the simple images and its own combinations in peculiar ways; and, thirdly it penetrates, analyzes, and reaches truths by no other faculty discoverable (*MP* Vol. 2 pp. 338-39).

The remarkable feature here is the belief that the imagination actually is a means of discerning truth, an idea very much akin to the sentiment found in Blake. My argument is that this similarity can be explained through the affinity to Gothic in both writers, and particularly so in its relation to ideas on the function of art and the role of the artist.

The significance placed by Blake's text on the imagination in relation to the creative artist cannot be over emphasised, and the poetic genius is the creative manifestation of the imagination. In Blake's earlier texts he refers to it as 'the Poetic Genius' and the word 'imagination' was actually not used to any degree until the later prophesies (see Morton Paley's *The Development of Blake's Thought* pp. 24-29). Los, the character in Blake's myth that embodies the idea of the poetic genius, has in several studies been related to Blake himself. However, the connection between the character of Los and the poet-artist in more universal terms is more interesting than the relation between Blake and Los.

Los is "the Eternal Poet" (*Song of Los* 3:1) who also is the creator of time and space:

> Such are the Spaces called Earth & such its Dimension:
> As to that false appearance which appears to the reasoner,
> As of a Globe rolling thro Voidness, it is a delusion of Ulro
> The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope. they alter
> The ratio of the Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouched
> 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:
> The red Globule is the unwearied Sun by Los created
> To measure Time and Space to mortal Men (*M* 29: 14-24).

Los corresponding to the artist has the important function of rising human understanding to a higher level and can only do so by use of the imagination as "All Things Exist in the Human Imagination" (*J* 69:25). Just as Los in *Jerusalem* is the one "Giving a body to Falsehood that it may be cast off for ever" (12:13), the artist can by use of the imagination through poetry and art provide a means by which to understand the underlying structures of the world, or the deeper truth of humanity. In *Modern Painters* Ruskin explicates how the imagination is an indispensable force to the artist:

> A powerfully imaginative mind seizes and combines at the same instant, not only two, but all the important ideas of its poem or picture, and while it works with any one of them, it is at the same instant working with and modifying all in their relations to it, never loosing sigh of their bearings on each other; as the motion of a snake's body goes through all its parts at once, and its volition acts at the same instant in coils that go contrary ways (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 345).

The outlook expressed here is doubly interesting in relation to Blake, considering his duality as both poet and painter. In integrating the ideas not only of the poem or picture, but also combining the meaning of image and text into a symbiotic entity, Blake's illuminated poetry is an exemplary model for the idea of the imagination expressed here by Ruskin. The function of the image-text of also conveying ideas and poetic meaning becomes an even more powerful entity in relation to Ruskin's view of the imagination. The arbitrary relation between truth and imagination is also addressed and in this case there is no complete distinction between the two in Ruskin's thought either. The artist's imagination is the organising principle behind artistic utterance, whether it be in painting or poetry, or as in Blake, both functioning as a complete entity.

Yet, establishing how Blake and Ruskin's ideas on the imagination are related to their affinity for Gothic needs careful thought. The ideological kinship between Ruskin and Blake's stance on the imagination and their opposition to laws in art places the two writers in conflict with the neo-classical ideas of Reynolds. Indeed this is even more apparent when looking at Ruskin's view on the connection between truth and imitation together with Naturalism and comparing them with the idea of imitation propagated by Reynolds in the *Discourses.* A mentioned before, the neo-classicist idea of imitation is based on the Platonic ideal. The idealization of the subject material advocated by Reynolds and the neo-classicists are completely contrary to the Naturalism of Gothic, where there is an

> extreme love of truth, prevailing over the sense of beauty, and causing it to take delight in portraiture of every kind, and to express the various characters of the human countenance and form, as it did the varieties of leaves and the ruggedness of branches (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 181).

Reynolds places great importance upon the artist's ability to render ideal beauty in art, and this is achieved by imitating only the best parts of other renditions. He advocates the view that art should imitate general forms and not the particular form of the individual subject matter.

For instance in “Discourse V” Reynolds states that “if you mean to preserve the most perfect beauty *in its most perfect state*, you cannot express the passions, all of which produce distortion and deformity, more or less, in the most beautiful faces” (Reynolds V: 35-37). Blake exclaims in his annotation to this paragraph: “Passion & Expression is Beauty Itself” (*Annotations to Reynolds, CW* p. 653). In comparing these two different outlooks on what should be rendered in art it is clear that Blake’s view is a lot closer to the Naturalism in Gothic, as he allows for the truth needed to render particular character in art. This is of course also a matter of aesthetics and I would argue that in contrasting the neo-classical aesthetic with Blake’s stance in relation to Ruskin’s theory, one finds that both Blake and Ruskin are advocates for what I will term a Gothic aesthetic. That is, their ideas are closely related to ideas on the function of art and beauty in the middle ages.

Ruskin makes an important distinction regarding the possibility for error in his idea on truth in Naturalism: this occurs when “the love of truth is too hasty, and seizes on a surface truth instead of an inner one” (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 180). The distinction made between the inner and outer quality of truth is another example of the dialectic relationship between inner and outer in Gothic explained in chapter one. The expression of inner qualities in art is another reason for Blake’s opposition to Reynolds idea that the passions should not be rendered in art; they are an intrinsic part of human nature. The human form in all its varieties is in Blake’s text the most important form of all and “Art can never Exist without Naked Beauty Displayed” (*The Laocoön, CW* p. 275). The importance for all the different aspects of human character to be rendered in art will also be discussed on chapter three in relation to Blake’s aesthetic ideas.

Concluding paragraph needed.

A further implication of the element of Naturalism is Ruskin’s element of Grotesqueness: “the tendency to delight in fantastic and ludicrous, as well as in sublime images,” which is “a universal instinct of the Gothic imagination” (*SoV* Vol. 2 p. 185). In

Blake it is not so much a delight in the grotesque as it is an important component in illustrating all the different facets of human spiritual life. *Nebuchadnezzar* (figure 7) is a good example of how the grotesque is used to portray the debasement of human life that occurs when focus on the corporeal has overshadowed the spiritual aspects of life. In the image animal features like claws and fur are employed symbolising the lowering of the human to the state of animal. This is a manifestation of the symbiotic relationship between the interior and exterior in Gothic art and Blake uses it as statement of the spiritual in the physical. In *Urizen* the use of the grotesque takes on a slightly different form; it is the portrayal of the rational mind, or limiting aspects of human thinking, that necessitates the use of grotesque imagery. In the images of Urizen this manifests itself in his locked and introverted postures; in his self-created world of the *ratio* he illustrates the constraint this has put on his flexibility both mentally and physically through his postures. Urizen personifies the abhorred rigidity of the mind criticised in Blake's text as the result of rational thinking: "Rational truth is not the truth of Christ but of Pilate" (A*nnotations to Bacon*, *CW* p. 621).

The element of Rigidity in Ruskin's Gothic is not the limiting, passive, and rigid ideas of Urizenenic law, but Ruskin stresses that by Rigidity he means

> not merely stable, but *active* rigidity; the peculiar energy which gives tension to movement, and stiffness to resistance, which makes the fiercest lightening forked rather than curved, and the stoutest oak-branch angular rather than bending, and is as much seen in the quivering lance as in the glittering of the icicle (*SoV* Vol. 2 pp. 185-86).

One could of course debate whether the quality, used by Ruskin to describe an inner force or energy at work in Gothic architectural structures, really can be transferred from the three-dimensional art of architecture to literature and the two-dimensional art of illumination. However, Ruskin's continual insistence on the connection between what he calls 'the moral elements' and their physical manifestation in art accommodates the relevance of the ideological implications of Rigidity.

In using the term, then, as metaphysical concept as well as a physical feature, Rigidity is particularly noticeable in the postures of Blake's figures. The muscular tone of Blake's figures adds to the feeling of their inner energy, and the possibility of movement is forever present in the physique of many of his characters, especially Orc in the *America* designs (see figure 8), and the figure on the title page of *Milton*. In Orc, Rigidity represents another aspect of the potential for change, or Changefulness, reflecting unrealized potential in revolutionary energy.

Contrasting the images of Urizen with the renderings of Orc, who embodies active Rigidity, I would argue that Orc represents the Gothic while Urizen represents the ideals of neo-classicism that Blake protests against. Los is also significant here, and his craft as blacksmith can also be related to Rigidity. The energy of the blows involved in hammering out the world as he does and the result this produces and the process itself also manifests itself in the poetry.

The last element of Gothic, Redundance, defined as "the uncalculating bestowal of the wealth of its labour" (*SoV* Vol. 2, p. 189), is quite interesting in relation to Blake's work. Ruskin further describes it as

> a magnificent enthusiasm, which feels as if it never could do enough to reach the fullness of its ideal; an unselfish sacrifice, which would rather cast fruitless labours before the altar than stand idle in the market; and, finally, a profound sympathy with the fullness and wealth of the material universe, rising out of that Naturalism whose operation we have already endeavoured to define (*SoV* Vol. 2, p. 189).

The enthusiasm here described has already been touched upon in the discussion of Changefulness, and I believe that it is closely connected to this idea. In relation to Blake's text it is difficult to distinguish what relates to one or the other. One could distinguish Redundance as referring to the stylistic changes Blake applies to different copies of his illuminated poetry, comparing for instance early and late versions of *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (figures 9 - 12) and to the ornamental quality in some of his designs. I would argue against

such a division as this would not only diminish the importance of these traits, but also is a fundamental misconception of Ruskin's idea that the different elements of Gothic are moral, referring to interiority and attitude as much as to style. It is indeed an embodiment of Blake's idea that " Exuberance is Beauty"(*MHH* 10). I will instead argue that Redundance in Blake is closely connected with Changefulness and Naturalism, which is quite fitting considering the interconnected nature of images and words, truth and imagination, and craft and poetry.

Moreover, it is not only Redundance that is interlaced with the other elements of Gothic. As we have seen, this applies in the relation from Savageness to Changefulness and further into Naturalism, which in Blake also entails aspects of Grotesqueness, which in turn connects to Rigidity, with its connection back to the aspects of energy in Changefulness. This string of connection between the different elements of Gothic and the connection between their manifestations in Blake's text becomes yet another emphasis on the interconnected nature of Gothic. Thus, in venturing to establish Blake's adaptation of Gothic through Ruskin's theory it is evident that Blake, in more ways than one, reflects the Ruskin's elements of Gothic. On one hand, Blake embodies the ideal of the medieval craftsman as he is the visionary, the poet, the printer, and the publisher of his own work; there is no part of the creative process, from invention to final execution, untouched by his imaginative faculties. On the other, the nature of Blake's text in its emphasis on interconnectedness of image-word relation, mythic characters and poetic ideas, and the paramount importance of the function of poetry as a means of deeper understanding relates to the idea of Gothic as both form and power and life.

[1] Capitalization will be used throughout to distinguish these as Ruskin's terms from other uses of these words.

[2] For an even more detailed description of Blake's methods of engraving see Raymond Lister *Infernal Methods; A Study of William Blake's Art Techniques*, London, G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1975 and Anthony Blunt *The Art of William Blake*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959 pp. 44-46.

[3] For a broader discussion on this see Jerome J. McGann,"The Aim of Blake's Prophesies" in *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, Eds. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973

[4] Ruskin classes the element of Changefulness in late schools of Gothic architecture as diseased love of change.

Chapter 3:
The Aesthetic Ideas of Blake and Ruskin

> Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
> To human sense th'invisible exploits
> Of warring Spirits; how without remorse
> The ruin of so many glorious once
> And perfect while they stood; how last unfould
> The secrets of another world, perhaps
> Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
> This is dispenc't, and what surmounts the reach
> Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
> By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
> As may express them best, though what if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein
> Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?
>
> *Paradise Lost*, v 563-576

In chapter one I stated that I will view all of Blake's production as one body of work, including his prose. Since my argument is that Blake's adaptation of Gothic goes a lot deeper than just a borrowing of images, but is also founded in Gothic concepts and ideas it is necessary to examine how this can be traced through his theoretical ideas. Blake's aesthetic views show an especially close affinity with ideas in medieval Gothic art, as does Ruskin's theory of beauty, which again will prove useful as a means of elucidating concepts in Blake's text. The continued comparison with Ruskin's aesthetic theory alongside his definition of Gothic will serve to elucidate the connection between Blake and Ruskin's aesthetic views and Gothic art. One concern in this chapter is to discuss how Blake's early work, as an apprentice to Basire and working for the Society of Antiquaries, influenced his aesthetic views, the argument being that his artistic practice, his theoretical and poetic ideas, and his adaptation of images from Gothic art in his own designs are all deeply vested in this early work with Gothic.

Testimony on the importance of the early work and Blake's stance on the development of style can be found by looking to the *Descriptive Catalogue* to his 1809 exhibition where Blake included a version of *The Penance of Jane Shore* (figure 13)[1] with the following text:

"This Drawing was done over Thirty Years ago, and proves to the Author, and he thinks will prove to any discerning eye, that the productions of our youth and of our maturer age are equal in all essential points" (*CW* p. 550).[2] The importance Blake places on his early work by giving such a statement is also of value to the critic, as it affirms the difficulty of separating one part of the text from another. Blake's prose, poetry, and images are all important constituents in the discussion of his aesthetic ideas, and starting with a closer look at some of Blake's images from Westminster Abbey together with some of his early independent work will shed some light on the matter.

Already in the engravings done from Westminster Abbey Blake's preference for a clear and precise outline is noticeable. There is a certain serenity of form in Blake's copying of these Gothic monuments; by using calm and undisturbed light as well as a steady subtle line he captures the ethereal quality of the statues transposing their function as spiritual images of the dead from their three-dimensional space in the cathedral to the two-dimensional medium of the page. This quality is an important presence in Blake's own designs and it embodies the idea of the transcendental nature of art. In the image of Queen Eleanor (figures 15 and 16) this is noticeable if one compares it with a photograph of the effigy (figure 17). One can observe, especially in the facial features of the statuary, what can be described as an emphasis on linearity and a simplification of detail, not in the sense of lacking detail, but in the clarity of it, which communicates the function of the monument better than any photograph ever could. My argument is that this serenity of detail and focus on linearity, as an influence from the visual impression of Gothic art, is something he carries into his later images as well as his aesthetic theory.

In comparing the Westminster Abbey drawings, where Blake sketched and drew several of the royal effigies, with subsequent work there is clear evidence of the stylistic inheritance from Gothic art, particularly in the representation of the human figure. The

characteristic linear and elongated figures in medieval Gothic are adopted by Blake in his own art, of which the early image *The Penance of Jane Shore* (figure 13) is an example. Here there is a resemblance in both costume and posture with the effigies from Westminster Abbey, a similarity also carried into the *Thel* images. In the title page (figure 14) Thel stands to the right in a posture resembling the posture of Jane in *The Penance of Jane Shore*, while the drapery of Thel's dress is formed in the likeness of Gothic statuary (compare figure 14 and 15?). The significance of this trait works on two levels. Firstly, the use of this kind of drapery in the *Thel* design situates the text outside physical time; the allusion to the drapery of Gothic effigies, the images of people ascended to a different realm, adds to the universal significance of the poetry as prophesy situated outside time and space. Secondly, by doing so it also emphasises the timelessness and universality of art itself, a trait which in turn can be viewed as a sign of revivalism "asserting the timeless, paradigmatic authority of the aesthetic form" (Argan quoted in Duncan note 13). This idea of the timelessness of art is something that can be traced also in Blake, and it manifests itself in his view on imagination and spirituality in art, which again relates to ideas on perception.

Both Blake and Ruskin advocate a view that places perception in close alliance with the divine, though with quite different religious basis of course. They both share the idea that the senses can open up to an understanding of spiritual and divine truth. The importance of sensory perception in relation to art as a spiritual entity is present in both, and this idea can be traced back to the beginning of medieval Gothic art, especially the ideas of Abbot Suger of St. Denis. Suger championed the use of elaborate decoration and the opening up the dark space of the old Carolingian basilica into the space of what later evolved into the great Gothic cathedrals. His views were founded on the belief that the interior of the church should reflect the glory of God. This could be achieved through specific distribution and representation of light, which also effected the impression of space in the interior of the church. Another means

of reflecting the divinity of God was the use of elaborate decoration, rich colours, gold, and gems in the interior. Suger believed that all these features would guide the mind in devotional meditation, and could raise spiritual awareness in the viewer.

The focus developing in the Gothic era on the divinity of all things grows out of a more personal sense of worship, as emphasis shifted from the communal to the individual spiritual experience. The increased use of personal Psalters and Books of Hours is one element that testifies to this change.[3] The relation between this concept and Blake's work will be discussed in chapter four, where I will examine how his illuminated poetry facilitates a spiritual and meditative process; a process deeply vested in the interplay between word and image aided by the visual splendour of the page. Thus, the idea of beauty has specific spiritual implications in Blake's text.

In Blake's myth beauty is as a concept related to the representation of energy, imagination, and sensory perception which associates it with the land of Beulah. Damon defines Beulah as "the realm of the Subconscious. It is the source of poetic inspiration and of dreams," further stating that "Blake placed Beulah as an intermediary between Eternity and Ulro (this world of matter)" (*Dictionary* pp. 42-43). This links it to the character of Los, the eternal poet, as well as any concept or character that is representative of the creative and limitless. Ideas of beauty and their implications in Blake's text, then, facilitate an aesthetic view based on metaphysical concepts. The fact that Ruskin's theory of beauty is vested in these kinds of ideas makes it especially suitable for comparison with Blake's stance, and also affiliates it with ideas of beauty in medieval Gothic art. Ruskin's bifurcated theory of beauty can be linked to similar notions in medieval idea on art where "the contrast between external and internal beauty was a recurrent theme" (Eco p. 9). Another factor that relates Blake's aesthetic ideas to medieval ideas is the structure of his writings, or perhaps more fittingly referred to as the lack of structure and division between his aesthetic views, his ideas on

artistic techniques, and his poetry. All of these aspects are entangled in much of his writing; consider for instance the references to craft and imaginative creation in his poetry and the poetic nature of the language in *A Descriptive Catalogue* and *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. Blake's aesthetic ideas are a puzzle where the pieces are scattered throughout the range of his production, and there is no division between idea and execution, which arguably is one of the overarching principles that connect Blake to medieval Gothic art.

The idea that the physical world reflects another, more spiritual reality is one of the most important bases for Blake's aesthetic views and the comprehension of beauty has an important premise: "Knowledge of Ideal Beauty is Not to be Acquired It is Born with us Innate Ideas. are in Every Man Born with him" (*Annotations to Reynolds, CW* p. 648). The idea is that beauty is something universally present in the human mind and thereby an eternal principle. Traces of a similar notion can be found in Ruskin's theory when he separates what he calls the theoretic form the imaginative faculty, and makes the interesting move of placing the concept and our understanding of beauty under what he calls the 'theoretic faculty', not the imagination. He states that the theoretic faculty

> is concerned with the moral perception and appreciation of idea of beauty. And the error respecting it is the considering and calling it aesthetic, degrading it to a mere operation of sense, or perhaps worse, of custom, so that the arts which appeal to it sink into a mere amusement, ministers to morbid sensibilities, ticklers and fanners of the souls sleep (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 200).

This view also opposes that of Reynolds, who believes that ideas of beauty can be taught, which is what Blake reacts against in the above quotation. To Ruskin the imaginative faculty is where "the mind exercises in a certain mode of regarding or combining the ideas it has received from external nature, and the operations of which become in their turn objects of the theoretic faculty to other minds" (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 200). The division made by Ruskin between the theoretic and imaginative faculties is somewhat at odds with Blake's notion. To Blake intellect and the imagination are interconnected faculties, and his view on Lockean doctrine

testifies to this. Blake's idea that ideas of beauty are innate places him close to medieval philosophy, where the idea of Divine creation of all the human faculties is the normative view; in medieval philosophy beauty is related to harmony and to the central will of God as the creator of all things. As we shall see, despite Ruskin's divided idea of the faculties discerning ideas of beauty his theory is closely connected with medieval notions that beauty is connected with divinity.

Ruskin divides beauty into two main categories: Typical Beauty, which is concerned with visual manifestations, and Vital Beauty[4], which is concerned with the emotional states and their expression (Landow pp. 85-86). Typical Beauty is again divided into six categories, all are visual embodiments of divinity: Infinity, or Divine Incomprehensiveness, Unity, or Divine Comprehensiveness, Repose, or Divine Permanence, Symmetry, or Divine Justice, Purity, or Divine Energy, and Moderation, or Government by Law. The spiritual emphasis Ruskin gives the different categories makes the point quite clearly that the beautiful is to be considered as a gift from God and as an emanation of the Divine in the physical world.

Although all of Ruskin's categories have interesting implications in relation to Blake's ideas, not all of them are particularly relevant to the discussion here. Ruskin's idea of Unity is somewhat at odds with his views on the positive aspects of Changefulness in Gothic. Ruskin's thoughts on Repose show a certain religious view related to the eternal nature of the creator, but although this forms an interesting dialectic to Blake's conflicted ideas of divine and malign creation it constitutes a digression form the main discussion. The aspect of Symmetry is mainly described in ideas of symmetrical opposites in design, and as such not of particular importance in a discussion focused around the ideological aspects of beauty. Ruskin's idea of Moderation is clearly deeply connected with Victorian ideas on morality; he calls it "the girdle and safeguard" of the other aspects of Typical Beauty (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 275), an idea that is very much at odds with the view given in Blake's text with statements such as "Those who

restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained" (*MHH* 5) and "Exuberance is Beauty" (*MHH* 10). I will therefore focus on the categories of Infinity and Purity as these are the ones that resonate most immediately with both Blake's stance and ideas in medieval Gothic art.

The idea that art inheres the ability of "displaying the infinite which was hid" (*MHH* 14) also finds expression in Blake's prose. The importance of infinity and its expression in art is of paramount concern in all of Blake's text, and is made particularly explicit in his views on the importance of linearity in art. There are two important aspects in relation to the significance Blake gives linearity. On the one hand, Blake emphasises the need for a clear and precise outline, and this is manifested in several aspects of his work. His choice of engraving technique, where he prefers line engraving as opposed to the technique of using dots and lozenges, is one example. Another is his idea on the use of colour: "Colouring does not depend on where the Colours are put, but on where the lights or darks are put, and all depends on Form or Outline. On where that is put; where that is wrong, the Colouring never can be right" (*DC, CW* pp. 529-530). The importance of the line is also embedded in Blake's poetic conceptions and is mythologized in the Urizen-Los dichotomy, which will be discussed in chapter four, and the idea of the line of rectitude: "what is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions" (*DC, CW* p. 550). The importance of linearity in art, then, is not only a stylistic concern for Blake, but also has deeper ideological implications.

The significance of linearity in Blake becomes even more apparent when he emphasises the possibility embodied in the line and speaks of "the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements" (*DC, CW* p. 550). The element of potential rests in the use of the word 'bounding', and Raymond Lister points out its double meaning:

> The word 'bounding' has two distinct meanings, and I do not think that there is much doubt that Blake's use of it embraced both. The first meaning is here more apparent; to

> quote Webster's *New International Dictionary*, Third Edition, it is 'the external or limiting line of an object, space or area'. The second meaning, although not so apparent in Blake's context, provides a vivid description of the quality of Blake's linear compositions: 'a leap or spring usually made easily or lightly' (p.10).

I agree that this is a likely interpretation of Blake's use of the word as it embodies the duality which is so characteristic of his thought, and can be viewed as a reflection of the idea from Ruskin's definition of Gothic on the connection between internal and external qualities; outline has a stylistic aspect, namely to determine form, and an inner quality which is its infinite possibilities. An example where this idea is visualized can be found in plate 32 of *Jerusalem* (figure 18) where the leaping figure to the far right, fittingly posed over the form of a Gothic cathedral, embodies the leaping facet of the bounding line, while the veiled form on the left, usually identified as Vala (Erdman *Illuminated Blake* p. 325), posed near the dome of a classical church, represents the limiting aspect of linearity. Both aspects are needed, of course, and equally important to Blake because "without contraries is no progression" (*MHH* 3).

The linearity of Blake's art has very strong associations with medieval Gothic art, a resemblance pointed out by Nikolaus Pevsner when he speaks of Blake's flaming line (pp. 128- 156). The importance Blake places on outline can be attributed to his adaptation of Gothic, which of course does imply a certain aesthetic view; "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art" (*DC*, *CW* p. 550). To Blake the importance of outline is a symptom of the importance he gives clarity and the specific, which will be discussed at greater length later, but it is also related to the idea of art as something transcendent which functions as a gateway into the realm of the spiritual. The idea that artistic technique is connected to the ideology of art is a view also found in Ruskin, and in viewing Blake's propagation of linearity in art through Ruskin's theory of Typical Beauty one finds an interesting dialectic.

Ruskin discusses line as a reflection of infinity, or Divine Incomprehensiveness. He further describes the beauty of lines in the following manner:

> I assert positively, and have no fear of being able to prove, that a curve of any kind is more beautiful than a right line, I leave it to the reader to accept or not, as he pleases, that the reason of its agreeableness, which is the only one I can at all trace, namely that every curve divides itself infinitely by its changes of direction (*MP* p. 237).

Ruskin's idea that the lines are a reflection of infinity, and thus an expression of divinity is an important stance in his theory and testifies to the notion discussed earlier that art is timeless. Ruskin's 'divine' is arguably the same as Blake's 'infinite' which means that the implications of the curved or flaming line is one of reflecting the metaphysical. Outline is the only way of conveying the necessary clarity and art has to be clear precise and definite in order to "reveal the infinite which was hid" (*MHH* 14), or as expressed in *Jerusalem*:

> I rest not form my great task!
> To open Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
> Of man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination (*J* 5:17-20)

A clear and precise outline is thus a further means of revealing deeper spiritual truth which to Blake is the great task of the artist: "in Eternity the Four Arts: Poetry, Painting, Music, / And Architecture which is Science: are the Four Faces of Man" (*M* 27: 55-56). The importance for precise outline for Blake can thus be related to his stance on the purpose of art and the function of the artist. The artist is a prophet and seer of divine truth and precise and firm outline is an artistic tool for – as well as an embodiment of – this view. In Blake's view there is no division between artistic techniques and artistic ideas, no separation between the stylistic and the ideological; the two are different aspects of the same idea.

Blake uses the line to achieve the ethereal quality found in many of his figures, which associates them with images in medieval English painting where there is "an unconcern with the solid body and a watchful interest in the life of line instead" (Pevsner pp. 135-36). Blake thus relates the idea of the 'bounding line' to Gothic as "Living Form" and "Living Form is

Eternal Existence" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270). Blake's stress on the vitality of linearity in art also implies a somewhat organic view, where it is the line that gives life to the form. This importance of the organic aspect of line is stressed even more fervently by Ruskin: "The eye is fed in natural forms with a grace of curvature which no hand or instrument can follow" (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 237). The problem of the artist's inability to reproduce in art the refinement of form found in nature does not exist in Blake's thought. He asserts that "All Forms are Perfect in the Poets Mind. but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature, but are from Imagination" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 648), an idea that relates to the importance he places on the imagination and not nature as the source for artistic expression as discussed in the previous chapter (in Ruskin's view the imagination is applied after the impressions from nature have entered the mind of the artist).

Ruskin's idea of 'truth to nature' also affects his view on gradation, which is another reflection of infinity: "what curvature is to lines, gradation is to shades and colours. It is *there* [sic] infinity, and divides them into and infinite number of degrees" (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 238). Nature is the unattainable ideal to which the artist can only hope to achieve some closeness: "nearly all the gradations found in nature are so subtile [sic] and between degrees of tint so slightly separated, that no human hand can in any wise equal, or do anything more than suggest the idea of them" (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 238). Blake on the other hand suggests that it is the imagination that is the source for the best colouring: "Imagination only can furnish us with colouring appropriate" (*DC*, *CW* p. 545). This difference in outlook is interesting and sheds some new light on the relation between truth and imagination discussed in the previous chapter.

Even though both writers share the idea that the imagination is related to truth, there is an important difference in what function the imagination has in relation to the sensory perception of nature, which in turn comes down to Blake and Ruskin's different views on

nature itself. Blake and Ruskin's ideas converge in the notion that nature embodies qualities beyond the physical, but to Ruskin nature is a divine creation and for that reason it cannot be surpassed in art by the human artist. To Blake, on the other hand, "the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally" (*M* 32: 19), is the supreme manifestation of divinity. Blake's view that "All Things Exist in the Human Imagination" (*J* 69:25) means that as long as the source for any aspect of artistic creation comes form the imagination it will be closer to divine truth than nature ever could.

Blake does however share Ruskin's sentiment that colouring is a question of gradation but again proclaims the superior importance of form: "Colouring does not depend on where the Colours are put, but on where the lights and darks are put, and all depends on Form or Outline. On where that is put; where that is wrong, the Colouring never can be right" (*DC*, *CW* pp. 529-530). Blake's illuminated books, and particularly *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, are a good example of how colour is added as a means of adding to the sensuous visual impression of the page without necessarily having any symbolic significance. Compare for instance two different editions of "the Divine Image" (figure 9 and 10), where one has a range of colour in the watercolour-wash while this is completely absent in the other, and as mentioned in chapter two this also exemplifies the element of Redundance where decoration does not necessarily have to add meaning to the overall design, besides the ideological implication the trait in itself inheres. Blake's stance that form is the paramount principle in art is very close to the practice of medieval Gothic art where the importance of form prevails over colour as the determining principle. The most telling example of this is of course the stained glass windows of medieval Gothic churches and cathedrals where there is a very determined form that the colouring has to be filled into, but also in medieval painting the prevalence of form, with a strong linear thrust, is the norm. I would argue that this trait is

something that Blake adopts from his work with Gothic art, and his cry for clarity in relation to the outline is an example of how this influenced his aesthetic views.

Blake's opinion on chiaroscuro is a testimony to his closeness to the mode of colouring in Gothic art. Blake opposes "that infernal machine, called Chiaro Oscuro" (*DC*, *CW* p. 547), which in his view produces a generalizing effect that blurs meaning and imaginative thought in art. On the colouring of the Venetian painters he says: "Colouring formed upon these Principles is destructive of All Art because it takes away the possibility of Variety & only promotes Harmony or Blending of Colours one into another" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 661). The darkness produced by the effect of chiaroscuro is contrary to everything Blake proclaims art should be. In painters such as Rubens the result is that even "though the original conception was fire and animation, he loads it with hellish brownness, and blocks up all the gates of light, except one, and that one he closes with iron bars" (*DC*, *CW* p. 547). The importance and purity of colour, then, also rests on the use of light. This notion is also explicitly expressed in Ruskin's theory:

> And again in color. I imagine that the quality of it which we term purity is dependant on the full energizing of the rays that compose it, whereof if in compound hues any are overpowered and killed by the rest, so as to be of no value nor operation, foulness is the consequence; while so long as all act together, whether side by side, or from pigments seen one through the other, so that all the coloring matter employed comes into play in the harmony desired, and none be quenched nor killed, purity results (*MP* p. 270).

The stress put by both Blake and Ruskin on the importance of clarity is, as mentioned above, vested in a certain ideology and philosophy on art which forms the background for their view. This ideological view also permeates Blake and Ruskin's views on light in art and the importance of clarity also is as a strong force here.

Ruskin relates the use of colour to the representation of light when he says: "On the right gradation or focussing of light and color depends in great measure, the value of both" (*MP* p. 239). The importance of colour in the representation of light then, is an intersecting

point in Blake's and Ruskin's theory, and emphasis on light is of course also one of the most important attributes of Gothic art. It can be argued that the ideas of Blake and Ruskin in this area partly are a result of their affinity for Gothic art. The significance of light to the idea of clarity and purity in the theories of both Ruskin and Blake is closely related to medieval Gothic notions of light as something spiritual. This becomes evident in examining Ruskin's notion of light in relation to ideas in medieval Gothic art and to Blake's stance.

In his theory of Typical Beauty Ruskin discusses light mainly as a representation of purity, or what he calls Divine Energy, and most importantly light is a sacred symbol. He makes an important distinction, however, in discussing the beauty of light since "it is not *all* light, but light possessing the universal qualities of beauty, diffused or infinite rather than in points, tranquil, not startling and variable, pure, not sullied or oppressed, which is indeed pleasant and perfectly typical of the Divine nature" (*MP* Vol. 2, p. 266). In relation to the beauty of light we also return to the idea of infinity as an important aspect, but the aspect of purity entails more specific connotations of divinity because: "With the idea of purity comes that of spirituality, for the essential characteristic of matter is its inertia, whence by adding to its purity or energy, we may in some measure spiritualize matter itself" (*MP* p. 271).

With the idea that light represents something spiritual the connection between Ruskin's theory and ideas of light in medieval Gothic art reaches an even more striking point. The first resemblance with the medieval notion of art is the idea that the beautiful, by being present in art, facilitates a spiritualization of things present in the physical world. This idea of spirituality in matter is also related to the medieval way of representing light in pictorial art: "In the world of medieval images, light is immanent in the world of things that reach the eye of the beholder as sources of their own luminosity" (Lewis p. 9). The idea of light being present in all things can be ascribed to a lack of scientific knowledge of the nature of light, but in this context it is far more interesting to view this idea as a manifestation of medieval

religious belief, which acknowledged light as being a representation of divinity and purity in the physical world. The medieval habit of representing light as an innate quality in the different elements of the art image can also be viewed as an extension of the medieval allegorical mode of representation, a way of furthering, in the image itself, a sense of the Divine presence. " 'Materialia lumina, sive quae naturaliter in caelestibus spatiis ordinate sunt, sive quae in terries humano artificio efficientur, imagines sunt intelligibilium luminum, super omnia ipsius verae lucis' ('The material lights, both those which are disposed by nature in the spaces of the heavens and those which are produced on earth by human artifice, are images of the intelligible lights, and above all of the True Light Itself')" (John the Scot quoted in Panofsky p. 165). The focus developing in the Gothic era on the divinity of all things grows out of the more personal sense of worship and this also plays a significant role in the representation of light in medieval art. This idea especially applies to the special effect of light produced by the stained glass windows of Gothic churches and cathedrals, where the outside light, the actual divine light, emanates from the images, projecting their divine and spiritual content into the interior space which then becomes something more than a physical space; it is given new meaning being elevated into spiritual space.

Blake's rendering of light comes very close to the medieval Gothic representation of it, as he rarely uses shadows or external light sources in his images. Blake's notion of light, and the importance of it, is concerned with the need for light in order to see clearly; this he expresses when he dismisses the chiaroscuro of other painters such as Rembrandt and Coreggio, and on the other hand Blake's concern with light is on a metaphysical level; as a symbol for imagination, clarity of vision, and spiritual energy. The notion of light as a spiritual entity is expressed clearly by Blake in passages from both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*:

Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light (*M* 10: 16).

And:

> In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth and Emanates
> Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision
> And the Light is his Garment. This is Jerusalem in every Man (*J* 54: 1-3).

Here the medieval manner of representing light, as explained above, is moved into the realm of the metaphysical; light is a symbolic representation of Divine vision, which in Blake's system of ideas is an attribute of the imagination and thus also the true poet. It represents the purity achieved when the divided state of the world and man is united again in its purest form.

The idea of purity can thus be connected to the importance of the human form in Blake's text which is the ultimate representation of beauty in art. Proclamations such as "Passion and Expression is beauty itself" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 653) and "Art can never exist without naked Beauty displayed" (*The Laocoön*, *CW* p. 275) are embodiments of his view on beauty where the human form divine is the central idea. The idea that light is the garment expresses that it is the spiritual not the man made that is appropriate to render in art, and thus also emphasises the idea of the prelapsarian human form. These statements embody the belief that it is the human form that is the main source for beauty in art, in addition to stressing that it is the connection between the inner qualities and outer form that produces beauty. The relation between inner qualities and form become even clearer when one considers Blake's view on ugliness: "what is truly Ugly; the incapability of intellect" (*DC*, *CW* p. 545). This idea is allegorized in *Nebuchadnezzar* (figure 7) and, as discussed in chapter two, the animal- like features of claws and fur represent the debased intellect. Interestingly this state has come about as a result of overindulgence of the senses. As explained earlier sense perception can serve as a means to spiritual enlightenment, but the state envisioned in the *Nebuchadnezzar* image is the negative aspect of sensuality and Blake makes an important distinction between the gluttonous tendency envisioned in the image and the enjoyment of sensory perception related to spiritual growth.

The example of *Nebuchadnezzar* also proves useful in a comparison between Blake and Ruskin's notion of the physical expression of the interior human state. Ruskin attacks the neoclassic mode of representing subject matter in art according to the Platonic ideal proclaiming that they are "wholly losing sight of what seems to me the most important branch of the inquiry, namely, the influence of good and evil of the mind upon the bodily shape, the wreck of the mind itself, and the modes by which we may conceive of its restoration" (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 304). The Grotesqueness of the human form as a result of a debased intellect becomes an important contrast to the beauty of the human figure in its eternal form where it is spiritual beauty which is rendered. Even though Blake's nudes are undoubtedly classical in form they are not renderings of a universal idea of an ideal human form; in Blake ideal beauty is a means of visualising the internal. Ruskin puts great emphasis on the right moral feelings as being a positive influence on the human form and its beauty. Feelings explicated as wrong in this respect are listed by Ruskin as for instance selfishness and anger which are improper because they overpower reason. Sensuality is not included because it overgrows and chokes reason, which also Ruskin uses Nebuchadnezzar as an example of. Neither agitation, fear, cunning nor deceit is included in the right moral feelings. Ruskin's view on the beauty produced by the proper moral feelings differs form Blake's idea of "Passion & Expression" as beautiful regardless of what moral feelings lie behind since, as mentioned above, the only instance Blake gives as being truly ugly is the absence of intellect. Even if Blake and Ruskin differ in the view of which human emotions can be considered as adding beauty to the human form, their ideas are congruent in the overall belief in the importance of portraying the influence of the "intellectual powers upon the features" and expressing "energy and intensity" (*MP* Vol. 2 pp.304-5).

The significance given to the interior qualities of the human figure and their aesthetic importance in the ideas of both Blake and Ruskin also leads to their unified view on the

importance of particularity in art. “Ruskin’s religion, for example, supports an aspect of his philosophy of beauty when he derives the characteristic romantic demand for particularity and detail in art from his own belief in man’s fallen state” (Landow p. 168).The importance of the particular is especially related to the rendering of human character, which is an echo of Ruskin’s element of Naturalism in Gothic. Ruskin believes that

> The love of the human race is increased by their individual differences, and the unity of the creature, as before we saw all unity, made perfect by each having something to bestow and receive, bound to the rest by a thousand various necessities and various gratitudes, humility in each rejoicing to admire in his fellow that which he finds not in himself, and each being in some respect the complement of his race. Therefore, in investing the signs of the ideal or perfect humanity, we must not presume the singleness of that type (*MP* Vol. 2 p. 308).

This is an interesting outlook on the necessity for individuality and the expression of particular character in art, which lifts Ruskin’s theory of the Vital Beauty in man beyond the realm of aesthetics and places it in a socio-cultural context. Based on this trait on Ruskin’s aesthetic theories, and the importance he gives individuality one could argue that his views in *Modern Painters* are closely connected with his views on Gothic art as an ideal. Ruskin’s view on the socio-cultural importance of art both for the artist and the viewer/reader share the ideological basis with the element of Savageness, which is, as discussed in chapter two, the cornerstone for the structure of the other elements of Gothic, and his idea of Vital Beauty in man as a manifestation of rendering the particular, thus delighting in “portraiture of every kind” (*Stones of Venice* Vol. 2 p. 181).

Blake firmly believes in the necessity of rendering particular character, and this view is based on his view on truth. To Blake the particular is the true, and truth is never general: “To Generalize is to be an Idiot” (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 641) and “All Knowledge is Particular” (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* p. 648). Ruskin expresses similar sentiments when he says that “it is the distinctiveness, not the universality of the truth, which renders it important” (*MP* Vol. 1 p. 127). The idea of Blake and Ruskin with regards to expressing the

particular in art can be related to the mode of representation developed in the transition from the medieval Romanesque to the Gothic period, where the less stylized rendering of for instance the Christ figure is closely related to the need for more explicit imagery in order to make art more immediate to the viewer.

The emphasis on the specific human experience and on the particular is also related to Blake's idea of the Sublime: "Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime" (*Annotations to Reynolds, CW* p. 647). Blake also states that "Without Minute Neatness of Execution the Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas (*Annotations to Reynolds, CW* p.646). This view is undoubtedly influenced by Longinus' ideas of the Sublime which gives several sources for sublimity "the first and most important is power to conceive great thoughts," and "the second is strong and inspired emotions" (*On Sublimity, Norton* p. 140). Blake's view on the importance of energy and imagination certainly accommodates a Longinian view of the Sublime. It also explains his antipathy towards some of the ideas in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, a milestone in the theoretical development of the Sublime. One major gulf between Blake and Burke's ideas regards what the sources of the sublime are. Burke asserts that the Sublime is related to fear of pain and death:

> Whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling (Burke, *Norton* p. 549).

To Blake pain and terror in the sense discussed by Burke are related to the corporeal, or the sleep of Ulro, which is only a transitory state. The spiritual state of man is not affected by such emotions. Blake is thus closer to Longinus' idea that "some emotions, such as pity, grief, and fear, are found divorced from sublimity and with a low effect," and "the orator must not have low or ignoble thoughts" (*Norton* p. 140). Longinus' view can be related to the idea expressed by Ruskin with regards to the right moral feelings elevating the beauty of the

human form, whether or not Ruskin was directly influenced by this thought or not is hard to say, but there certainly is a similar ideological basis; Ruskin's idea of the positive influence of the right moral feelings parallel Longinus idea of the possibility the nobility of the orators thoughts have of conveying sublimity. The Longinian focus on the orator as the mediator of sublimity can also be related to Blake's idea of the poet as prophet, who by the means of art can convey the Sublime to the reader/viewer by use of the imagination.

Blake strongly opposes Burke and claims that "Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions," subsequently stating that "They mock Inspiration & Vision. Inspiration & Vision was then & now is & I hope will always remain my Element my Eternal Dwelling place" (*Annotations to Reynolds*, *CW* pp. 660-61). Despite this fervent negation of the validity of Burke's treatise, there are some intersecting points with Blake's own views. They both agree that the Sublime is produced through contraries and both propagate the Old Testament as a prime source for the Sublime. "This eighteenth-century view of the sublimity of the Old Testament merges with an older tradition in medieval and Renaissance critical theory, according to which the prophets were poets" (Paley p. 20). The dichotomy of poet-prophet is an ever recurring view in Blake's thought and is highly influential also on his views on the Sublime. In the *Descriptive Catalogue* the full implication of this view is expressed:

> The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not as modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and minutely organized than anything seen by his mortal eye. Spirits are organized men: Moderns wish to draw figures without lines, and with great and heavy shadows; are not shadows more unmeaning than lines, and more heavy? O who can doubt this! (*DC*, *CW* pp. 541-542).

The idea of the poet-prophet culminates in Blake's idea of speaking "to future generations by a Sublime Allegory," and "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (*Letters* 27, *CW* p. 730). Easson points out that "the verb 'sublime' means that a substance may pass from solid to gas without passing into the intermediate liquid state" and argues that "so, too, Blake is using the word. Sublime allegory is poetry that speaks to the intellectual powers without penetrating the intermediate stage of the corporeal understanding" (Easson p. 316). The idea of the Sublime, the need for particularity, clarity, outline, and the idea of the poet-prophet all come together as united aspects in the aim of Blake's prophesies, and all are closely connected with his idea of fourfold vision.

> Now I a fourfold vision see
> And a fourfold vision is given to me
> Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And three fold in soft Beulahs night
> And twofold Always. May God us keep
> From single vision & Newtons sleep (*Letters* 23, *CW* p. 722).

Blake's idea of fourfold vision is closely connected to the allegorical nature of his poetry, especially the illuminated books where the duality of the text and images form a visionary base for the interpretation. The intricate relation between text and images is an important factor in aiding the interpretation towards Blake's idea of fourfold vision. The fact that some images relate directly to the text, while others visualize an interpretational consequence of the allegorical events in the text is a feature that testifies that the idea of fourfold vision is incorporated as a devise for unlocking deeper spiritual truth. This type of correlation between images and words is the same that one can find in some medieval manuscripts. Blake's illuminated poetry follows in the tradition of Gothic illuminated manuscripts where Blake's idea of fourfold vision can be related to the medieval practice of exegesis[5], and particularly the Gothic illustrated Apocalypse and its numerous commentaries.

The connection between Blake's idea of fourfold vision and medieval anagogical thinking has been made before, and Dante is given as the probable source, or at least the most probable origin of Blake's idea. My argument however is that this is not the only possibility, and discussing other potential links makes it possible to more thoroughly understand the connection between Blake's illuminated poetry and his adaptation of medieval Gothic ideas which in turn can add new levels of interpreting his text.

Considering Blake's work with Gothic art in his early years as an apprentice and young artist, combined with the fact that the Lambeth library had several Gothic illuminates manuscripts, the Lambeth Apocalypse to mention one, supports the idea that Blake could have read and known other medieval sources on anagogical vision. The commentary of Richard of St. Victor is especially interesting as it shows some interesting parallels to Blake's idea. It is impossible to say whether Blake actually read Richard of St. Victor's commentary, but there are some factors that aid the probability. First of all the abbey of St. Victor was one of the most important monasteries in the Gothic era, and Lewis points out that this is the probable origin of the famous *Bible Moralisée*. The abbey also had close connections with England and a translation of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin minor* was exported to England during the early thirteenth century (Lewis p. 378 n. 11). In examining Blake's idea of fourfold vision together with the notion expressed by St. Victor some interesting correspondences appear.

St. Victor firstly differentiates between corporeal and spiritual levels of seeing. The first corporeal level is seeing "the figures and colours of visible things in the simple perception of matter" (St. Victor quoted in Michael Camille's *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* p. 16)[6]. This corresponds to Blake's idea of single vision, which he related to the Newton and his complete materialism. St. Victor's definition of the second level of corporeal vision is seeing the "outward appearance" and in addition, seeing its "Mystical significance" (p. 16).

This is the parallel to Blake's idea of seeing through contraries recognising the presence of something beyond the physical appearance of things. The spiritual levels are divided by St. Victor into seeing "the truth of hidden things … by means of forms and figures and the similitude of things" (pp. 16-17), which relates to the visions of St. John in the Apocalypse, and the Mystical mode which constitutes "the pure and naked seeing of divine reality" (p. 17). This highest level is described in Corinthians 13:12: "for now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face". In the Gothic illustrated Apocalypse the third level is visualized in the images by including St. John as he sees his vision together with the actual visions, making him both *auctor et actoritas*, and thus effacing the difference between vision and narration making the visions more immediate to the reader. The same effect is achieved by the text in the inclusion of both the original biblical text and the commentary. A similar structural plan is found in Blake's *Jerusalem*: "This narrative is composed of four elements – authorial intrusion, dramatic narration, visionary narration, and visionary definition which represent different aspects of *Jerusalem*'s narrator" (Easson p. 312). Each of these corresponds to one level of vision, and the totality of their presence invites the possibility for the reader to achieve the highest level.

Interestingly there is also a similar notion of vision in Ruskin's writings and it ties in with the idea of the poet as prophet. Davis has pointed out that there are "some important parallels between Ruskin's idea of vision and Blake's" and that "Ruskin's visual exploration of the world, then, was an essentially spiritual journey, as indeed it was for Blake" (Davis p. 24), and the four levels described by Blake also find an echo in Ruskin's thought:

> And thus, in full, there are four classes; the men who feel nothing, and therefore see truly; the men who feel strongly, think weakly, and see untruly (the second order of poets); the men who feel strongly, think strongly, and see untruly (the first order of poets); and the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them. This last is the usual condition of prophetic inspiration (5:209) (Ruskin quoted in Davis pp. 34-35). Find original!

Ruskin's notion of the four different classes of men and the different levels of vision related to each is explicitly linked to the function of the artist, while Blake's notion of fourfold vision is more allegorical in its expression. Their shared basis is the importance of vision and a certain view on sense perception, the importance of which will be explored more fully in the following chapter. There are several instances where Blake comments on the nature of vision. In "Auguries of Innocence" he states: "We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see not Thro the Eye" (*Songs and Ballads*, *CW* p. 496), and a similar example can be found in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: "I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it not with it" (*CW*). The similarity between Blake and Ruskin is pointed out by Davis as he quotes Ruskin's statement: "You do not see with the lens of the eye. You see through that, and by means of that, but you see with the soul of the eye … Sight is an absolutely spiritual phenomenon" (p. 37). These ideas of vision together with the idea of fourfold vision manifests the view of the poet as prophet and explicates the aim of Blake's prophesies as a means of rising spiritual awareness in the reader.

> Poets of the allegorical renascence who uses the informing metaphor of visionary experience undertook to describe the entire course of human life both as personal history and as a progressive movement toward salvation and the vision of God. Between verbal beginning and conclusion, writers strove to encompass specific time and space within the visionary perspective of the end of time (Nolan p. 133).

Fourfold vision and the function of Blake's prophesies to open up to spiritual vision in the reader is the ultimate function of the poet as prophet, but it also implies a more complex level of narration. It also provides the notion that the reader by ascending in an anagogical manner to the higher levels of spiritual vision can be become a prophet too, narrating his or her own spiritual visions by the aid of the illuminated page. The prominence given to the senses in Blake's text is one of the factors that contribute to this idea and this will be explored in the following chapter.

[1] There are several known copies of this image, of which the earliest (Cat. 67) is usually dated 1779. See Martin Butlin *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 Vols. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981figure 59.

[2] Another interesting point about *The Penance of Jane Shore* drawing is the fact that it was meant to constitute part of a larger cycle of images illustrating the early history of England. For further discussion of this see David Bindman "Blake's 'Gothicised Imagination' and the History of England" in *William Blake; Essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* eds. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973

[3] For a more specific discussion on this development see Eamon Duffy *Marking the Hours; English People and their Prayers 1240-1570*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006

[4] Capitalization will be used throughout to distinguish these as Ruskin's terms.

[5] The tradition of reading scripture in this way was a method Ruskin was familiar with. See George P. Landow *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1971 pp. 329-356.

[6] All subsequent quotations of St.Victor are from Michael Camille *Gothic Art; Glorious Visions* London, Perspectives Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996

Chapter 4:
A Study of ‘Urizen’ and ‘Europe’

This chapter will be a case study, looking at two of Blake’s illuminated books, *Europe* and *The Book of Urizen*. By relating them to the ideas discussed in the previous chapters I aim to explain how ideas in these texts are related to medieval Gothic art. The discussion will particularly focus on how poetic conceptions in these texts exemplify Blake’s stance in relation to the importance of the imagination and the senses, which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, are closely connected to conceptions in Gothic, especially in relation to Ruskin’s theory. The importance of imagination and sense perception in Blake’s illuminated poetry is intimately connected with the function of the illuminated books as spiritual guides, or a Bible of Hell. My focus will include looking at how Blake’s mythological universe in these two poems manifest his ideological views on the function of art and the artist, with special emphasis on Orc and the Urizen-Los dichotomy. The importance of these characters in Blake’s myth is the basis for selecting these particular poems, as this is where they first start to play major roles. My argument is that many of the ideas connected with these characters are derived from or connected to Blake’s use of Gothic; a mythologizing of Gothic ideas.

4.1 *Europe*; A Book on Leaves of Flowers

Europe is a poem concerned with the problems and shortcomings of the material world, and the ideas and issues presented here are in many ways the origins of the ideas in later poems. This is also where we meet Los for the first time, whom, together with Urizen, is one of the most important characters and concepts in Blake’s myth. The relationship between text and image is complicated and sometimes even abstruse. Some of the plates (for instance plates one, six, seven, and possibly eight) can be argued to be depictions of the contemporary

consequences of the events in eternity described by the poem. As such, the relationship between these plates and the text is congruent with text-image relations in medieval Gothic manuscripts where the images do not always seem to be directly related to the actions in the text, but form an alternate view contributing to the overall interpretation. Some plates are teeming with life, with rich use of marginal details while others offer bleak and dismal visions in sombre colours, but all are an integral part in creating the dual vision of spiritual potential on one side, and closed Newtonian perception on the other where "the reader becomes caught between the paradoxical forces of unshakable stasis and relentless progression, between the perception of immobility and the belief in the possibility of transformation" (Lewis p. 22).

The introduction to *Europe* is included in only two of the twelve known copies, but it makes an astounding statement, giving an organic focus and functioning as a visionary portal into the poem. Many of the most important aspects of Blake's adaptation of Gothic can be drawn out from this short piece, and the ideas presented here can be traced throughout the rest of the poem. The introduction as a whole addresses the idea of poetry as vision and the role of sense perception and imagination as necessary agents in the creative process. This relates the theme of the introduction to the importance of the imagination in Ruskin's definition of Gothic, and the organic symbiosis of idea and visualization, or text and image, is emphasised through the metaphors used. Other scholars have pointed out that the introduction mainly addresses issues of the sensual, and particularly the sexual, path to spiritual vision and understanding; a setting of the tone for the rest of the poem.[1] However, I will argue that the visionary focus created by the introduction in *Europe* goes beyond merely setting the tone, and that the function of the introduction is similar to the function of the introduction in medieval Gothic visionary quest literature where "proper interpretation of the introduction reveals the symbolic structure and spiritual function of the whole composition in miniature" (Nolan p. 136). The intro functions on a metapoetic level, addressing issues like the nature of

poetic imagery, poetry as vision and inspiration, and the poeticality of writing poetry, all of which are major concerns in Blake's poetry. In particular Blake's view of poetry as prophesy and the poet as prophet, as discussed in the earlier chapters, is an important idea.

The prophetic role of the poet in the introduction to *Europe* can be brought out by a comparison with the Apocalypse as there are some structural ploys incorporated in the poem that connect the two. Both *Europe* and the Apocalypse start with a visionary encounter which results in the writing of a text, and "the generic medieval structure of the illustrated Apocalypse is dominated by vision, as both internally generated by the imagination and externally perceived by the senses" (Lewis p. 40). Additionally, the function of the poet speaker in the introduction is similar to that of St. John in the Apocalypse, more particularly to the role assigned to him in the Gothic illustrated Apocalypse, as a mediator of spiritual truth.[2] As mentioned in the previous chapters, there is a new focus on the personal spiritual experience and this focus was an important factor in the rise of popularity of the illustrated Apocalypse, this also contributed to shaping its form, and gave it great prominence in medieval church wall painting, and it "constituted a powerful, pervasive presence in the dominant discourse of medieval culture" (Lewis p. I).

The importance of Apocalyptic and cyclical imagery provides another link between *Europe* and the Apocalypse as the actions in the Preludium and the main Prophesy following the introduction are very much apocalyptic in nature. The vision following the introduction is related to the question posed in the third stanza of the introduction: "What is the material world and is it dead?" (iii: 13). The nameless shadowy female is, according to Damon, "this material world, a fallen form of Vala" (*Dictionary* p. 369). She is tired of the cycle of life on earth that she is responsible for and wants to retract "that my place may not be found" (1: 5). The fact that her roots are "brandish'd in the heavens" (1: 8), and her "fruits in earth beneath" (1: 8) reflects the idea that the world of generation is connected to the heavenly, asserting

Blake's stance on the inseparability of body and soul, imagination and creation. The apocalyptic aspect of the Preludium arises out of the retreat she makes, which hides and even separates the connection between the spiritual and material.

The reason for her retreat is the decaying and dismal state of the material world signalled in the poem by the phrase: "my fruits in earth beneath / Surge, foam, and labour into life, first born & first consum'd! / Consumed and consuming" (1: 8-10). There is a strong presence of organic imagery suggesting growth and productivity but the use of phrases such as "dark cloud disburdend" (1: 7) and "labour into life" (1: 9) as a metaphors for birth signal toil and hardship rather than positive progress. Her torment is even more evident in the second plate where she is "drown'd in shady woe, and visionary joy" (2:12) suggesting the duality in her connection with both earth and heaven. In light of Damon's definition, there is a certain world view being portrayed here; the spiritual is the origin of the physical world but it is in the physical world that the fruits of the spiritual are created. The shadowy female's 'shady woe' is not a result of the material world in itself, but of the attitude and actions of life, more explicitly human life, as a never-ending circle of consumption without focus on spiritual ascent. In Blake's belief system this problem can be mended by applying a metaphysical use of the five senses.

The spiritual potential of the five senses is portrayed in the first stanza of the introduction, which , considering the function of the introduction as an equivalent to the one in medieval quest literature, gives this aspect prominence in the interpretation of the poem as a whole:

> Five windows light the cavern'd Man: thro' one he breathes the air;
> Thro' one, hears music of the spheres; thro' on the eternal vine
> Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes; thro' one can look.
> And see small portions of the eternal world that ever growth;
> Thro' one, himself pass out what time he please, but he will not;
> For stolen joys are sweet, & bread eaten in secret pleasant (iii: 1-6).

The use of the word ‘windows’ alludes to the idea of seeing beyond the limitations of one’s own position into a different sphere. The ‘cavern’d man’ is an allusion to Plato’s cave parable, but aligned with ‘windows’ it brings another aspect to the metaphor; it can be interpreted as an allusion to the interior space of a church or cathedral where the ‘windows’ in Blake’s metaphor have a parallel function to the stained-glass windows of the Gothic cathedral. The ideas of Abbot Suger on the potential for spiritual elevation by meditation on the splendours of the church room can be aligned to the beauty of sense perception when they are used metaphysically. The light flowing through the windows, or in this case the sense impressions, elevates the interior to the realm of the spiritual, relating Blake’s idea of the senses with ideas propagated by Suger as discussed in chapter three. This metaphor also addresses Blake’s belief that “deities reside in the human breast” (*MHH* 11), which means that the potential for spiritual enlightenment lies in man himself and can be accessed via the senses. The importance of the ethereal is emphasised further by ‘music of the spheres’, another allusion to medieval ideas, referring to the notion that all the seven heavenly spheres emitted music on different pitch levels.

The sense of taste also involves the eternal and spiritual rather than the transitory and corporeal as ‘the eternal vine’ is another use of religious imagery, the vine being commonly used as a symbol for the spreading of Christianity. In relation to the sense of sight it is interesting that Blake chose to use ‘small portions,’ almost giving an impression of limitation. The sense of sight only enables the ‘cavern’d man’ to see a certain part of the eternal, partly because the other senses are also important in giving a fuller spiritual experience, and partly because to see completely also entails the use of fourfold vision; this is also arguably another reference to seeing “in a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12), the biblical idea related to anagogical vision. However, my argument is that this is only one aspect of this metaphor.

The ‘small portions’ also reflect Blake’s idea of minute particulars which is “To see a world in a grain of sand” (*Auguries of Innocence*, *CW* p. 490). The issue of particularity is addressed again later in the poem, towards the end of Enitharmon’s summons, and is visually emphasised by the increased use of marginal and interlinear detail in plate twelve. Again the designs are teeming with life and forms expressing energy, especially the last two plates of the book. There is a small detail in the text, a key position in Blake’s system of ideas, that brings out the idea of the particular even more clearly: “Between two moments bliss is ripe” (14: 23). This idea is also found 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 (*M* 35: 42-45).

Both the quotation from *Milton* and *Europe* stress the importance of the particular and in *Milton* the importance of labour and awareness as a positive force is particularly emphasised. The idea of time and its particularising function is given even more prominence in *The Book of Urizen*, discussed in the second section of this chapter.

Catching this moment can be achieved by using the senses as a portal, where the last sense, the sense of touch, is probably the most important to Blake, as it inheres the highest potential for spiritual ascent.[3] The last line of the poem deals with human unwillingness or neglect to use the sense of touch, or the senses for that matter, to achieve a higher spiritual awareness, another aspect of the Nebuchadnezzar curse, where the senses are purely corporeal and their metaphysical aspect is excluded form the human mind. The first stanza thus sets the tone and puts a strong emphasis on the connection between spirituality and sense perception, also emphasising the divine potential in man. These aspects in turn relate to the idea of imaginative vision, to Blake the most important faculty of the poet.

The next stanza addresses these issues more directly through interaction between the poet speaker and the fairy, a symbol for the imagination. The use of the phrase “command

me, for I must obey" (iii: 12), signals that the poet speaker is in control of the visionary aspect, symbolised through the fairy. Aligning the fairy with a butterfly (iii: 9) stresses the relationship between vision and nature, or the spiritual aspect of the material world. The butterfly symbol is present also in plates four and fourteen where the visual impression of the page is one of energy and life due to the relatively large amount of marginal and interlinear details. This highlights the presence of imagination, and it is worth noting that the butterflies are only present before and after Enitharmon's sleep, thus emphasising the dismal state of the imagination during her absence.

The necessary attitude towards the imaginative faculty and vision is provided in the poem when the poet speaker takes the fairy in his "warm bosom" (iii: 19). Vision and imagination needs to be welcomed, internalized, and nurtured in order to produce illuminating poetry, that is, poetry "addressed to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding" (Blake *Letters* 27, *CW* p. 730). The poetic image of the poet speaker carrying the fairy is reminiscent of an earlier image from *Songs of Experience*, where the frontispiece with the shepherd and the child provides a parallel to this metaphor. Mitchell connects the frontispiece to earlier medieval images of St. Christopher carrying the Christ-child, stressing the importance of the poet, or artist as protector of the imaginative faculty.[4]

The fairy-imagination sets as a premise for creative inspiration that the poetic speaker feeds him on "love-thoughts" (iii: 14) and "sparkling poetic fancies" (iii: 16), emphasising the importance of the senses, not just for initial inspiration, but throughout the creative process. The use of 'sparkling' gives connotations to drinking, emphasised by the "sparkling wine of Los" (4: 6) in the Prophesy. The word 'sparkling' gives the allusion to something luxurious, an adjective which can be related to the visual splendour of illumination, and to Ruskin's theory on the beauty of purity as being represented by a certain rendering of light as discussed in chapter three. 'Sparkling' also addresses the clarity of vision and imagination, reflecting

Blake's idea on the clarity of vision: "he who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than the perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all" (*DC, CW* p. 541). The use of 'feed' establishes that vision is necessarily dependant on imagination and other visions in order to exist, and this relationship forms a metaphysical 'circle of life' where vision begets vision and the results in a spiritual ecstasy signalled by the phrase "when I am tipsie" (iii: 16). This idea, together with the last two lines of this stanza: "shew you all alive / The world, when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy" (iii: 16-17), connects to the idea of fourfold vision, since spiritual ecstasy is also an important aspect in the medieval idea of anagogical vision. This ties up the idea of the infinite with the idea of the particular and these realizations can only be achieved on the spiritual levels of seeing, that is threefold and fourfold vision. It is also the only way the answer to the question of the first line of this stanza can be answered. In Ruskin's idea of the four classes of men, this is the mode where men, or poets, are "submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them" (Davis pp. 34-35). This can also be related to Ruskin's idea on the beauty of infinity since, as mentioned in the previous chapter, infinity represents what he calls Divine Incomprehensiveness.

The whole third stanza of the introduction is a microcosm of Blake's stance on art and poetry, and also exemplifies his adaptation of Gothic on an ideological level. Ruskin's idea of Savageness, as established in chapter two, is closely related to the use of the imagination, emphasised in this stanza by the fairy, and this in turn opens up to the element of Changefulness. One can interpret the use of the plural "flowers" (iii: 14, iii: 20) as alluding just to the plural, but it can also imply the use of several different types of flowers. Either way, considering the diversity in minute details of the same species of plant, the idea of the plurality of natural objects, so important in Ruskin's theory, is present here. Naturalism through the use of the organic metaphor, and the idea of the book as a natural object

emphasises the "love of natural objects for their own sake" (*SoV* Vol. 2 pp. 165-66). The organic nature of craft is also addressed through the metaphor "write a book on leaves of flowers" (iii:14) as it connects the immediacy of illuminated poetry, as a handwritten text, with organic creation. This in turn exemplifies Blake's view of art, and more specifically poetry, as living form and his statement that "Gothic is Living Form" (*On Virgil*, *CW* p. 270). The idea of living form is closely related to what Ruskin's calls the element of Naturalism in Gothic, the 'love of natural forms for their own sake'. The connection between Ruskin's different elements of Gothic is also important to keep in mind here. It is ultimately the element of Savageness, with its potential for imaginative creation resulting in the interconnectedness of craft and design, the physical and the metaphysical, that is the determining factor for organic creation.

The introduction addresses the nature of the material world and its connection to the spiritual, and the third stanza poses one of the key questions in Blake's poetry: "what is the material world, and is it dead?" (iii: 13). The question comes as a result of the fairy's song in the first stanza, and considering the role of the fairy as the imagination it is the poet speaker's question to his or her own imagination seeking answers on the metaphysical. The answer to the question in the next line shows that art is the agent for answers as the fairy-imagination function's as a catalyst for writing the "book on leaves of flowers" (iii: 14). The metaphor alludes to Blake's own illuminated poetry being a source for answers to spiritual questions, but also suggests that answers are available by using the organic as a portal into seeing the spiritual significance of the material world.

The answer to the question of whether the material world is dead or not lies in Blake's idea of infinity, a notion explicitly present in the fourth and last stanza of the introduction where the second line reads: "Wild flowers I gathered; and he shew'd me each eternal flower" (iii: 20). The repeated use her of 'flower' connects back to the third stanza and arguably gives

a deeper meaning to the function of the metaphor “book on leaves of flowers” (iii: 14), as it implies that also this has an eternal form and can display “the infinite which was hid” (*MHH* 14).

The idea of infinity is best presented by a line, a curve with “infinite inflexions and movements” (*DC, CW* p. 550) like the spiral shape of Orc in his serpent form. The serpent Orc is the main focus in the title page of *Europe* (figure 19), and the spiral form of the serpent can be seen as an example of ‘living form’ and thus a reflection of the ideas related to Blake’s adaptation of Gothic. The spiral contains the idea of ‘inflexion’ and ‘movement’ emphasising Orc’s potential as revolution and energy, and the spiral form of the serpent is echoed in the initial ‘E’ in ‘Europe’ showing that also the poem is a meant as a vehicle for progression. The revolutionary element of fire is present in the serpents tongue which is formed as a red flame, and the serpent transgresses the boundaries of the page signalling the impossibility of containing revolutionary energy. The contrast between Orc in the title page is an altogether more organic image than the frontispiece (figure 20), and provides the dual focus needed in the reading of the rest of the poem. My argument is that the two images function as an awareness of the proverb “Without Contraries is no progression” (*MHH* 3) in the reading of the poem as the reader is made aware of two contrasting world-views; the rationalistic, or in Blake’s view neo-classical, sentiments on the one hand, and the imaginative, or Gothic, on the other. Urizen’s presence in the frontispiece as an idea of the static and immovable, signalled in the image by his firm posture and the fact that it is not effected by the strong wind blowing through his hair and beard, strengthens the ideas of circular limitation in the poem. One could say that the mathematical depiction of Urizen is a contrast to the Gothic rendering of figures such as Orc, where symmetry and circularity are replaced by asymmetrical more progressive forms.[5]

The dual focus created by the frontispiece and title page is reflected throughout the poem, one instance being the already mentioned divided state of the shadowy female between "shady woe, and visionary joy" (2:12). The passage immediately following this line is a key passage in the poem:

> And who shall bind the infinite with an eternal band?
> To Compass it with swaddling bands? and who shall cherish it
> With milk and honey? (2: 13-15)

The idea of binding the infinite can be viewed as a contradiction in terms. However, considering this line in light of Blake's "bounding outline" (*DC*, *CW* p. 550) it becomes clear that there is also another possibility; the shadowy female is asking for someone to give form to the infinite, a mediator between the spiritual and the material world. The duality of her sentiments can also be related to the frontispiece, often referred to as *The Ancient of Days* (figure 20) with Urizen and his limiting compasses, in connection with which the use of the word 'compass' becomes an irony, and a warning on the dangers this entails. Urizen's compasses are, as pointed out by Michael J. Tolley, probably derived from earlier sources such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* vii, but interestingly this image is also common in medieval manuscripts, a likeness pointed out by Blunt, but here they are often in the hand of Christ (figure 21). I would argue that the medieval imagery is an important aspect to Blake's use of 'compass' in the above passage as a dual image. This is also supported by an image from *Jerusalem* where the compasses are placed in the hands of Los, the Eternal Prophet.

The compass does have certain attributes, or consequences related to the negative notions in Blake's belief system**.** One such notion is their function as an instrument for drawing angles, a characteristic of 'mathematic form', and the aspect of them as a scientific symbol is a theme addressed in the painting *Newton* (figure 22). The compass is also the instrument used to draw a circle, a fact reflected in the frontispiece by the circle surrounding Urizen. This facet of the compass-symbol from the gives an emphasis to the issues of

circularity presented in the Preludium by “Consumed and consuming” (1: 10) and “Devouring and devoured” (2:5), and it is this never-ending circle of creation and destruction without evolvement the shadowy female wants to escape from. This becomes evident in the next stanza when Los speaks:

> Again the night is come
> That strong Urthona takes his rest,
> And Urizen unloos’d from chains
> Glows like a meteor in the distant north (3:9-14)

The image of Urizen points back to the frontispiece, again making the contrary relationship between him and the serpent Orc relevant, but the word ‘distant’ implies that the consequences of Urizen’s freedom are not an immediate danger. I would argue that the danger is not so much the presence of Urizen as it is the rest of Urthona who, as the un-fallen form of Los is the origin of imaginative creation, and the result is that the material aspects are free to take over. There is a disagreement among scholars about who the speaker of the next lines is. Harold Bloom believes the whole section from 3: 9 to 4:14 is spoken by Los, while Erdman ascribes the passage to Enitharmon with the sons of Urizen speaking lines 3-9. Considering the association of Urizen’s sons with the four elements “the Four Elements are the inexorable forces of Matter in the unending strife of Nature” (Damon *Dictionary* p. 117), and the nature of the sentiments expressed I would argue that Bloom’s interpretation is more likely. However, I would argue that the sons of Urizen are direct speakers even if the passage is assigned to Los. It is Los’s pride that provokes him to encourage the wakening of the sons of Urizen so that they can “look out and envy Los” (4: 2). Their reaction is a key passage in the poem:

> Seize all the spirits of life and bind
> Their warbling joys to our loud strings
> Bind all the nourishing sweets of earth
> To give us bliss, that we may drink the sparkling wine of Los (4: 3-6).

Again the ideas from the introduction are relevant where it is clear that the elemental, or material world is only one aspect of a dual existence. The sons of Urizen are right that the senses can be a path to bliss, but the supposition that this can be achieved on the corporeal level only is false. The first two lines is reminiscent of a poem from Blake's notebook: "He who binds to himself a joy / Does the winged life destroy" (*CW* p. 470)**.** The sons of Urizen are wrong in presuming that binding a joy, or restricting it to a merely physical sense perception, will enable them to enjoy Los's "sparkling poetic fancies" (iii: 16), which is something that can only be achieved through the freedom of the imagination and by opening the senses to the infinite.

The poem addresses how the senses are, during Enitharmon's sleep closed off from divine vision:

> Plac'd in the order of the stars, when the five senses whelm'd
> In deluge o'er the earth born man; then turn'd the fluxile eyes
> Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things.
> The ever-varying spiral ascents to the heavens of heavens
> Were bended downwards; and the nostrils golden gates shut
> Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite (10: 10-15).

This again brings the thoughts back to the intro, where the importance of the senses as a portal to infinite vision was explicated. Returning to these ideas in the prophecy makes it clear that the poet by his relation to the fairy-imagination also sees the consequences of having a limited view of the material world; the poem thus employs three-fold vision. It is the age of reason that has left the world in the "mind-forg'd manacles" ("London" *SIE*, *CW* p. 27) of Newtonian single vision and divided sensual perception from the spiritual, and this is made clear in the next stanza:

> Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent; that which pitieth:
> to a devouring flame; and man fled from its face and hid
> In forests of night; then all the eternal forests were divided
> Into earths rolling in circles of space, that like an ocean rush'd
> And overwhelmed all except this finite wall of flesh.
> Then was the serpent temple from'd, image of infinite

> Shut up in finite revolutions, and man became an Angel;
> Heaven a mighty circle turning; God a tyrant crown'd (10: 16-23).

There is a duality embedded in the reference to the spiral form of Orc (figure 23) as 'finite revolutions'; on the one hand the word 'revolution' means the revolving form of the spiral, but it also refers to revolution as upheaval and here the idea of the Orc cycle is important. It is evident that the Orc cycle is not a circular cycle, but, as reflected in his serpent form, an upward spiral; an ascent increasingly getting closer to the final stage where the infinite is again accessible. The visionary potential of the senses is one way of achieving this.

The expansion of Urizenic thought is symbolised by an image of a pope to symbolize Urizen with "his brazen book" (11 or 10: 3) that extends its influence form north to south, and the "last doom" (12:13) is ushered in when Urizen "unclaspd his Book" (12: 4). The final step comes when Newton "seiz'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!" (13:5), resulting in the death of the spiritual world:

> Yellow as leaves of Autumn the myriads of Angelic hosts,
> Fell thro' the wintry skies seeking their graves;
> Rattling their hollow bones in howling and lamentation (13: 6-8).

The world has now fallen into Newtonian single vision, and an explanation of the effects of the closed senses comes in the last stanza of the tenth plate:

> & in a vale
> Obscure, inclos'd the Stone of Night; oblique it stood, o'erhung
> With purple flowers and berries red; image of that sweet south
> Once open to the heavens and elevated on the human neck,
> Now overgrown with hair and coverd with a stony roof,
> Downward 'tis sunk beneath th' attractive north, that round the feet
> A raging whirlpool draws the dizzy enquirer to his grave (10: 25-31).

There are several interesting metaphors here that are important to address in relation to Blake's adaptation of Gothic. First the problems of unclarity are addressed by the obscure vale, while the word inclod's echoes the ideas of limiting the infinite. As explained in chapter three the idea of clarity also relates to light and the passage above provides a contrast to the

fairy's song in the intro. The contrast between the closed and open sense is also given through the opposition of north and south, a reference to the positions of the four Zoas, where Urizen now rules the south and 'strong Urthona' the north. Blake's notion of the four directions and their symbolic significance brings an interesting aspect to interpreting his poetry. The association of Urthona with north is remarkable because it does not fit with the conventional position given to the four elements and their qualities. The north is traditionally associated with earth, the rational, and the practical, east is associated with air and intellect, south is related to the element of fire and to action, while west is connected to water and emotion and is usually considered the most creative section out of the four. It could possibly be argued that the change from the traditional system arises from Blake's view on the different geographical areas representing different forms of art. North being the place of Urthona can be related to Blake's view on Gothic, the living form of the North, while Urizen's location in the south relates to the mathematic Greek form. Later Urizen is 'given a place in the north' signalling how the southern ideas, and mathematic form, have been rooted in the north, a result of enlightenment philosophy.

It all ends in a revolution, the French revolution, but it is also analogous to the spiritual battle of once again ascending to the heights of multiple vision, and once again restoring energy and imagination, and giving freedom of though to human kind.

It is evident that many of the ideas in *Europe* have clear similarities to the different elements of Ruskin's Gothic, as well as sharing features found in medieval texts. Particularly the different associative meaning of North and South as representative of the opposition between Classical form and Gothic form, Los and Urizen, is an important principle. The idea of opposition works on many levels in the poem, and can be related to the idea in Ruskin's Gothic of the symbiotic relationship of inner and outer, which despite their apparent division can never be truly separated because they are mutually reflexive. The same is the case with

ideas in Blake's poem, where opposing forces constitute a whole and are necessary because they represent the spiritual truth of the opposing forces in human reality. This focus on duality as a necessary progressive force is even more elaborate in *The Book of Urizen*, where the Urizen-Los dichotomy foregrounds the opposing ideas of reason and imagination, 'mathematic' and 'living' form.

4.2 Swift Winged Words; *The Book of Urizen*

In relation to Ruskin's theory of Gothic *The Book of Urizen* is interesting because of the mythic ideas on reason and imagination, but also because of the focus on creation. The whole poem is structured around the idea of creation, in both the positive sense of imaginative craftsmanship and the negative sense of limitation and stasis. The apocalyptic undertones from *Europe* are present here as well but this time it is related to even deeper levels in the spiritual world, as the inner forces of the mythic eternals, Los and Urizen result in the creation process described in the poem. The idea of the symbiosis of inner and outer from Ruskin's theory is highly relevant here as the study of both Los and Urizen in the poem will show, and *The Book of Urizen* builds and elaborates on many of the issues discussed in relation to *Europe* in the previous section.

There are some important structural similarities between *The Book of Urizen* and *Europe*, as they both have introductory elements before the main poem. In *The Book of Urizen* there is only a Preludium and this is considerably shorter than the one in *Europe*. It has a similar function, though, of providing a means for interpreting the main poem, providing the visionary focus needed to frame the narrative. This time it is not the imagination dictating the poem as it was in *Europe*, but the Eternals, and the tone is altogether more dismal:

> Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
> When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;
> And gave him a place in the north,

Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.

Eternals I hear your call gladly,
Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
To unfold your dark visions of torment (2: 1-6).

The ‘swift winged words’ are probably a reference to the shorter verse line applied here compared to *Europe*, which means that also here the poem directly comments on its own form. The use of ‘winged’ brings an association to elevation and thus establishes that the poem, despite its ‘dark visions of torment’, is a spiritual creation designed to enlighten the mind of the reader, a trait that connects *The Book of Urizen* to the Apocalypse. The two last lines of the Preludium can also be viewed as a comment on the relation between images and words in the main poem, where ‘swift winged words’ refer to the text, while ‘dark visions of torment’ can be seen as referring to the images. This amplifies the sense of self-awareness within the poem illustrating its autonomous nature, placing it in a context of prophetic writing manifesting Blake’s view of the poet as prophet connected to the prophets of the Bible. This is especially evident in considering the ideas of division and loss of eternal vision for both Urizen and human kind presented in the poem, while the poet speaker in the Preludium is able to commune with the eternals.

The biblical parallel is emphasised by the division of the text into columns, chapters, and verses calling up the idea of the illuminated poetry as a Bible of Hell, and it also gives it a structure associated with medieval illuminated manuscripts. Mitchell briefly explores the use of columns in *The Book of Urizen* and concludes that the result is a stronger division of word and image (p. 110-11), but this is not necessarily the case. My argument is that the columns and the mirroring of them in some of the designs function on a meta-textual level, commenting on the creative process and its power, as well as explicating that *The Book of Urizen* is a poem in the form of a book, about a book, the brazen book of Urizen. The most obvious example is plate five (in most copies, but four in the example given here, figure 24)

where Urizen opens his book and it is perfectly aligned with the columns in the text, but there are several other examples where there is a symmetry in the design that follows the text.

Although the connection between word and image is somewhat different here than in *Europe*, it is nevertheless equally interlaced with the textual elements. In some plates the impression is that the designs have been painted on the page with text, intruding on, or even devouring the text. In the third plate the figure running across the top almost steps on the first word on the page (figure 25), while the flames of anguish issuing from Los in the seventh plate seem to eat into the text (figure 27). My argument is that this emphasises the symbioses of text and image as sometimes mirror images of each other, and sometimes distortions designed to provide deeper and more complex meanings. This is a common trait in Gothic manuscripts where the images do not always seem to be related to the text, but nevertheless endow the text with extra-contextual material broadening its relevance and interpretational range.

The imagery itself is even more apocalyptic than in *Europe* but here we dealing with the beginning of existence. The function of *The Book of Urizen* as part of Blake's Bible of Hell has been addressed by Damon (*Dictionary* p. 46), and in presenting the mythology of Urizen and Los and their beginning it is a kind of Genesis, even if Damon claims that the parallels are not as clear as between *The Book of Los* and Genesis. The connection between these two characters is particularly interesting in relation to creation, with Urizen's creation of the material world in one side and Los's creation of time and a human form for Urizen on the other. Many of the ideas found in *Europe* also find expression here, and the ideas of creation, the five senses, the role of the imagination, and the opposition between 'living' and 'mathematic' form, forms an ideological basis for this poem, linking with Ruksin's idea of the opposition between mechanical and imaginative creation and the element of Savageness.

In Blake's myth Urizen is the embodiment of 'mathematic' form and *The Book of Urizen* is the one of Blake's shorter illuminated books that give the best insight into the nature and importance of this character. The first chapter introduces Urizen as "a shadow of horror" (3: 1), which is "self-closed, all repelling" (3: 3), and in comparing this description with the idea of the closed senses from *Europe* it is evident that Urizen's nature is one of limitation. It is important to keep in mind that is the eternals words we are reading and not an objective account as they also are participants in the dramatic events of the poem. My argument is that Urizen have many traits associated with human nature; he is inquisitive and contemplative, trying to understand his own existence. The idea of contemplation is present through the use of the word "brooding" (3: 7), along with the idea of incubation.[6] The third stanza of chapter one builds on this image:

> 3. For he strove in battles dire
> In unseen conflictions with shapes
> Bred from his forsaken wilderness (3: 13-15)

Considering Urizen's state as "A self-contemplating shadow" (3: 21) where nothing enters it is clear that the shapes he fights with are his own thoughts. The reason for his battle is given when he speaks in chapter two:

> I have sought for a joy without pain,
> For a solid without fluctuation (4: 10-11).

The problem of Urizen is one of fundamental misunderstanding. he is trying to find a way of dividing good from evil, but his whole agenda is formed upon false ideas. In Blake's system of ideas the idea of good and evil does not exist; it is the misconstrued idea of organized religion:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason Evil is the active springing from Energy (*MHH* 3).

There is also a visual connection between plate three of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (figure 26) and plate three of *The First Book of Urizen* here that strengthens the association between these two passages. The running figure in *Urizen* corresponds both to the image at the top, and at the bottom of the plate from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The flames surrounding them both and their outstretched postures are very similar, even if one is facing the reader and in *Urizen* the figure faces inwards, perhaps reflecting Urizen's self-contemplation (3: 21). The reference to the flames is also given in the text:

> 5 First I fought with the fire; consum'd
> Inwards, into a deep world within:
> A void immense, wild dark & deep,
> Where nothing was: Natures wide womb (4:14-17).

The difference of Urizen's battle with his inward fire and the association between Orc and the flames of energy is one of attitude. Where Orc's energy explodes in revolution, Urizen implodes and enters a route of self-destruction. Orc is, as I discussed in chapter two, an embodiment of the qualities of Changefulness which entails growth and expansion, while Urizen represents a negative form of Rigidity, incompatible with the organic nature of positive growth in Gothic. The different attitudes are reflected in the images and the similarity between the figure in plate three in *The Book of Urizen* and the figure from the bottom right in the plate from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the postures are more or less precise mirror images of each other is even more striking. The different attitudes are signalled in the design by the direction they are running in; the Urizen-figure runs towards the beginning of the poem, while the figure in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* runs towards the continuing pages. This difference signals the error Urizen is about to commit and that he is about to leave energy behind in his misconstrued efforts to find the 'joy without pain'. It is interesting to notice, as Erdman points out (*Illuminated Blake* p. 185), that the footprint-like marks at the bottom of the plate from *The Book of Urizen* are going on the opposite direction of the figure at the top, signalling the actual direction of the narrative. The mood in this plate

and the next is also markedly different which is another way of visually emphasising the erroneous path of Urizen. He is actually walking into his own nightmare.

The nightmare consists of Urizen's "wide world of solid obstruction" (4: 23) in which he forms his books of metal, and where he has

> ... written the secrets of wisdom
> The secrets of dark contemplation
> By fightings and conflicts dire,
> With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
> Which the bosom of all inhabit;
> Seven deadly Sins of the soul (4: 25-31).

Urizen's books, although they are made from metal which could align them with Blake's illuminated books, lack the organic nature of illumination. The difference is that Urizen's books are made "Of eternal brass" (4: 33) and thus never printed. In relating this idea to the process of creation of Blake's illuminated books, one could argue that Urizen's books only consists of the "bounding line" (*DC, CW* p. 550), written in reverse (Blake's mirror writing) and have not yet been ornamented and given life; they are therefore un-organic and do not have "living form" (*On Virgil, CW* p. 270).

In an effort to rectify what Urizen has done Los is the one who creates his form; "Giving a body to Falshood that it may be cats off for ever" (*J* 12: 13). This reflects Blake's idea of the bounding outline which can be related to the function of his painting and poetry; he gives a from to error so it can be limited and understood and thus overcome. In the poem error is pointed out by relating it to ideas of light, clarity, particularity, and circularity. In relation to Urizen we find words such as "dark" (3:7), "shadow" (3:21), and "featureless" (7:5) expressing that he is associated with all the things which in Blake's stance are symbolic of lack of vision and understanding. Where Gothic is related to light, "pure, not sullied or oppressed" (Ruskin *MP* Vol. 2 p. 266), Urizen is connected with darkness. Blake's emphasis on the particular shows that Urizen, being "abstracted" (3: 6), is a generalizer. The association of Urizen with ideas fundamentally un-Gothic is expressed also in relation to images of

circularity. He is constantly described and linked to the idea of circular motion. He is: “Dark revolving in silent activity” (3: 18), calling up the idea of the circle of life, a self-enclosed series of activity, which Urizen himself sees as a horror because “he saw that life liv’d upon death” (23: 27). The imagery of the self-contained circularity of Urizen’s “enormous labours” (3: 22) is expressed by the “rolling of wheels” (3: 30), which, as a reference to the most important scientific invention, illustrates how the Urizenic world grows and evolves by scientific, rational development and not through spiritual enlightenment.

Los on the other hand is described in images emphasising his function as prophet and craftsman, and he is continually associated with the spiral in contrast to Urizen’s circle, which aligns with Los with the idea of the vines and tendrils in both Blake’s illuminated books and Gothic ornament (see figure 3). Urizen is enclosed “In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke” (4: 47), and later ”in whirlwinds / Of darkness the eternal Prophet howl’d” (10: 6-7). The use of spiral images for Los associates him with the serpent form of Orc which expresses his prospective fatherhood to the spirit of revolution.

The five senses play an important part in *The Book of Urizen* and here we find the story of their development from the beginning in eternity until their contemporary state. The first mention of the senses comes in chapter two in relation to Urizen: “The will of the Immortal expanded / Or contracted his all flexible senses” (3: 37-38). The state of the senses in eternity, before the creation of the material world, was one without restrictions directed by individual determination. Sense impression in eternity is not something imposed by existence but is something that comes from within.; a form of mental energy directing perception. In this un-fallen state of the five senses they are an integral part of the collective faculties. It is only after the fall, which, as previously discussed, is a fall into division in both Blake and Ruskin’s system of ideas, that the senses become restricted. When Urizen ventures into his introverted contemplations resulting in the creation of Urizenic law and his division from Los

his senses can no longer attain their ‘flexible’ state. This is the result when one divides reason from imagination because “reason must work in harness with faith and love to draw the fiery chariot of inspiration” (Easson p. 320). Urizen’s books are not sprung from inspiration but from an enclosed rigid state of introspection.

After Los has given shape to Urizen, binding him in physical form, Urizen’s senses are also bound and his eyes are “fixed in two little caves / Hiding carefully from the wind” (11: 14-15), while his hearing is described as being “petrified” (11: 23). The limited condition of the senses after Los has forged a form for Urizen becomes apparent in chapter five:

> With hurtlings & clashings & groans
> The Immortal endur’d his chains,
> Tho’ bound in deadly sleep.
>
> 2.All the myriads of Eternity:
> All the wisdom & joy of life:
> Roll like a sea around him,
> Except what his little orbs
> Of sight by degrees unfold
>
> 3.And now his eternal life
> Like a dream was obliterated (13: 25-34)

Interpreting the ‘chains’ as both Urizen’s material form and his five senses means that eternal life is no longer available as long as the senses are closed. In fact, ‘All the wisdom & joy of life’ is now without and unattainable; the search for ‘a joy without pain’ has resulted in no joy at all, just emptiness. This emptiness is transferred unto the sons of Urizen, the four elements, and humankind, and the last mention of the senses expresses the dismal state of this situation:

> No more could they rise at will
> In the infinite void, but bound down
> By their narrowing perceptions (25: 44-46).

The state of the senses described here is the same as the narrow perception of purely scientific and rational thought, and the poem functions as a warning against the errors of circular, and self-contemplative thought. It is important to notice that in also here, as well a in

Europe, one of the last vision we are given is one of Orc, and this image together with the last lines of the poem gives the idea that a change is taking place:

> 8. So Fuzon call'd all together
> The remaining children of Urizen:
> And they left the pendulous earth:
> They called it Egypt, & left it
>
> 9. And the salt ocean rolled englob'd (28: 19-23).

The biblical reference to Egypt as a symbol for slavery might give the impression that the material world of Urizen is unbearable and thus abandoned by the sons of Urizen, the eternal elements (Damon *Dictionary* pp. 425-26), leaving only the material. I would argue that instead this provides hope as the biblical exodus from Egypt, despite its toil and hardship, also ends in arriving in the promised land, the land of milk and honey. So the reader by understanding and interpreting the narrative can leave the slavery of the purely corporeal and achieve a higher understanding of the underlying spiritual structures of human life. The last line gives association to the biblical flood, which of course leaves the earth purged from sin providing a fresh start for the worthy.

Form the above discussion it is clear that ideas in *The Book of Urizen* as well in *Europe* clearly resonate with Ruskin's idea of Gothic, as well as with conceptions found in medieval Gothic art. The fact that the Urizen-Los dichotomy can be related to Ruskin's element of Savageness in Gothic by the shared focus on craft and imagination as well to his idea of the ideological difference between Greek classical form and Gothic provides by itself important proof that the relation between Blake's poetry and medieval Gothic is an significant force.

[1] See the commentary in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* David V. Erdman ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982, pp. 903-906

[2] For a discussion on this see Suzanne Lewis's *Reading Images; Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 19-39
[3] The recent book *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision*, 2008 deals explicitly with this idea in Blake.

[4] For a further discussion of this similarity see W. J. T Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art; A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 6-9.

[5] Mitchell provides a discussion on the meaning of different geometric forms in Blake's poetry and myth in *Blake's Composite Art; A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 58-69

[6] The use of 'brooding' also has a clear connection to the beginning of John Milton's Paradise Lost. There are also several other parallels to Paradise Lost throughout the poem, which are discussed in Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse; A Study in Poetic Argument* Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1970, pp. 164-175

Chapter 5:
Final Remarks

After looking at Blake through Ruskin's definition of Gothic it has become clear that there are many congruencies between Ruskin's idea of Gothic and ideas in Blake's text. Particularly Blake's idea of Gothic as 'living form' resonates strongly with the ideas from "The Nature of Gothic", as does the importance of craftsmanship and the importance of the imagination. The overarching principle of the symbiosis between the interior and exterior qualities in Ruskin's definition of Gothic has strong resemblances with ideas in Blake's text. The inseparability of word and image in the illuminated books is the most important aspect that links Blake to the medieval Gothic tradition, but this also works on other levels. Arguably the total structure of Blake's text, that is the interrelated nature of his poetry, prose, and painting in relation to his aesthetic ideas, and poetic conceptions, characters, and themes is a common trait in medieval theories as well, where there is no clear distinction between what is theory or philosophy and what is poetry, narration, and theology.[1]

The particular elements form Ruskin's theory of Gothic: Savageness, Changefulness, Naturalism, Grotesqueness, Rigidity, and Redundance have proved to resonate well with important ideas and poetic conceptions in Blake forming a new vantage point from which to view his text. The cornerstone of Ruskin's theory is the element of Savageness where the key aspect is the importance placed on the imagination, and the significance of the imagination is one of, if not the most important facet in Blake's ideas. This, together with Changefulness as an idea of energy, and Naturalism and the importance of the organic and the human form divine in Blake creates a strong base for the idea that Blake's poetry can be viewed as fundamentally Gothic in character.

The discussion has shown that many of the most important aspects of Blake's ideas, in his poetry, prose, and painting can be related to medieval Gothic ideas. There is evidence throughout his illuminated books that the function of his poetry is related to the idea of the artist as craftsman and the poet as prophet. The relation between text and image in Blake's illuminated books is deeply vested in the earlier tradition of medieval illuminated manuscripts, and not only in the formal aspects of this likeness but also in the ideology of the poetry itself. One of the most important connections between Blake and medieval Gothic, which I would argue is one of the strongest indicators of Blake's indebtedness to this tradition, is his views on the function of art, and in particular poetry: Blake's idea of 'Sublime Allegory'.

The importance of fourfold vision in the structure and interpretation of Blake's poetry had been briefly visited before, but the full scope of this has not been sufficiently addressed. The possibility of connecting Blake's idea of fourfold vision to the ideas found in Richard of St. Victor's commentary on the Apocalypse, opens up to a wider scope of possible medieval sources as basis for Blake's own ideas. This thesis addresses the possibility of viewing Blake's text more closely in relation to medieval ideas and in so doing also opens up new interpretative possibilities.

One focus that is strengthened by viewing Blake's text as part of the Gothic tradition is the idea of poetry and art as a meditative discourse where the goal is to reach spiritual truth, and in a sense provide one's own glossing of the text. Arguably this function is also the reason why sense perception has such a prominent role in medieval Gothic philosophy, Blake's text, and the theories of Ruskin. The ideas of for instance Suger have strong parallels in Blake's poetry, as was shown in the reading of *Europe* and *The Book of Urizen* in chapter four and these ideas are also akin to Ruskin's views on the importance of perception.

The importance of perception and the spiritual is also found in Ruskin's *Modern Painters* where he provides us with his aesthetic theory. As I discussed in chapter three, the ideas found here on Typical beauty are closely connected with his ideas on Gothic and they also share close affinity with Blake's aesthetic ideas. Their ideas on linearity and colouring in particular show similarities in the mutual connection made between artistic technique and ideas on spirituality, he idea of infinity being the most important notion. Blake's idea that art has the power to 'display the infinite which was hid' can be related to the medieval spiritual quest, such as in the instance of *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*, where the reader enters into his own meditative spiritual quest through the reading experience. Such too is the function of Blake's prophesies: interestingly the relation between the different books can be said to form a certain spiritual quest in itself, as Blake continually elaborates and provides deeper understanding over the time of his production, culminating in *Jerusalem*. I believe that by concentrating more scholarly effort on the Gothic element in Blake's text one could discover interesting dialectics between the individual poems or prophesies, as well as discovering new meaning by examining how they respond and relate to medieval philosophy and ideas.

I would argue that there are several very specific issues that also connect Blake's poetry and images with medieval ideas. One is his use of gesture and body posture, a subject visited by Janet Warner in her article "Blake's use of Gesture". However, in addition to connecting this with certain attitudes and energies I would argue that it also can be seen as continuing the earlier medieval tradition of using gestures as a form of communicating specific messages to the viewer.

Another area that has received little attention is the organic nature of Blake's poetry, its 'living form' if you will. As my discussion of *Europe* shows there is a certain preoccupation with organic imagery and natural cycles in the poetic images, which is also reflected in the visual aspects of the page, especially the use of interlinear and marginal detail.

I also related this to ideas of energy and to Ruskin's element of Changefulness in Gothic which means that the focus on ideas of growth applied to research on medieval illuminated manuscripts would also be a valid approach to Blake's illuminated books.

All in all, it is evident that there are close relations between Blake, Ruskin, and ideas in medieval Gothic art, of which this thesis has discussed some of the issues. It is clear though that this is an area of research that has been widely neglected and that there are vast amounts of possibilities in making new, discoveries as well as elaborating on the findings I have made here.

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it to a ball:
It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
Built in Jerusalems wall.

(William Blake, *Jerusalem* 77)

***

[1] See Umberto Eco *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* , New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986 ch. 1-3

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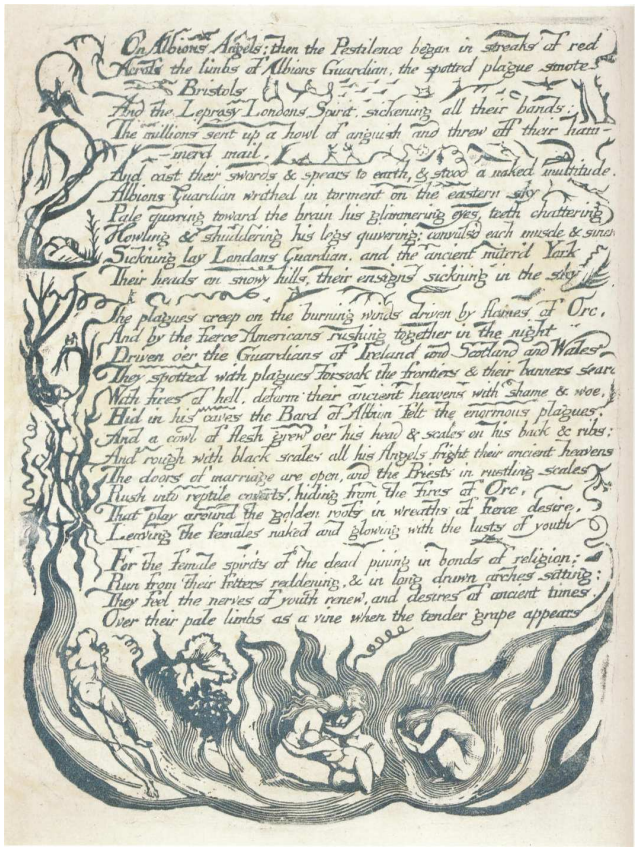
[1] See Umberto Eco *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* , New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986 ch. 1-3

Figures

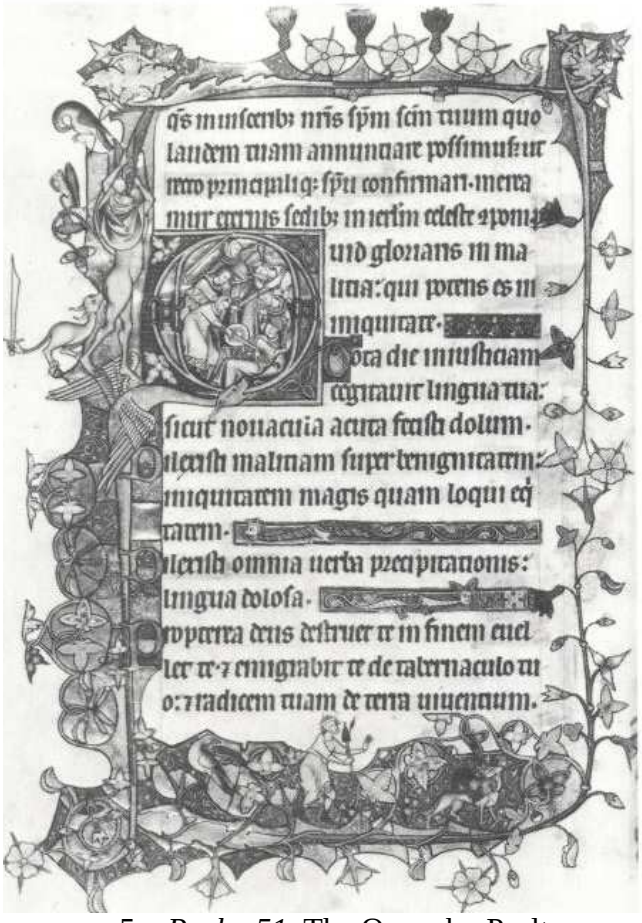
1. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 14

2. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 15

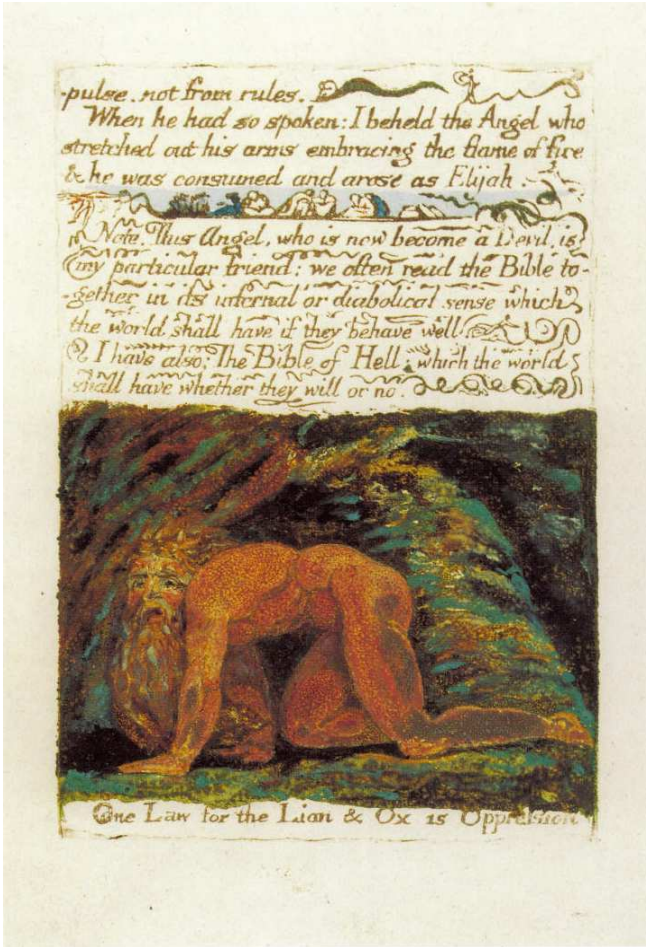
3. The Petite Heures of John, Duke of Berry, *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness*



4. *America* 17

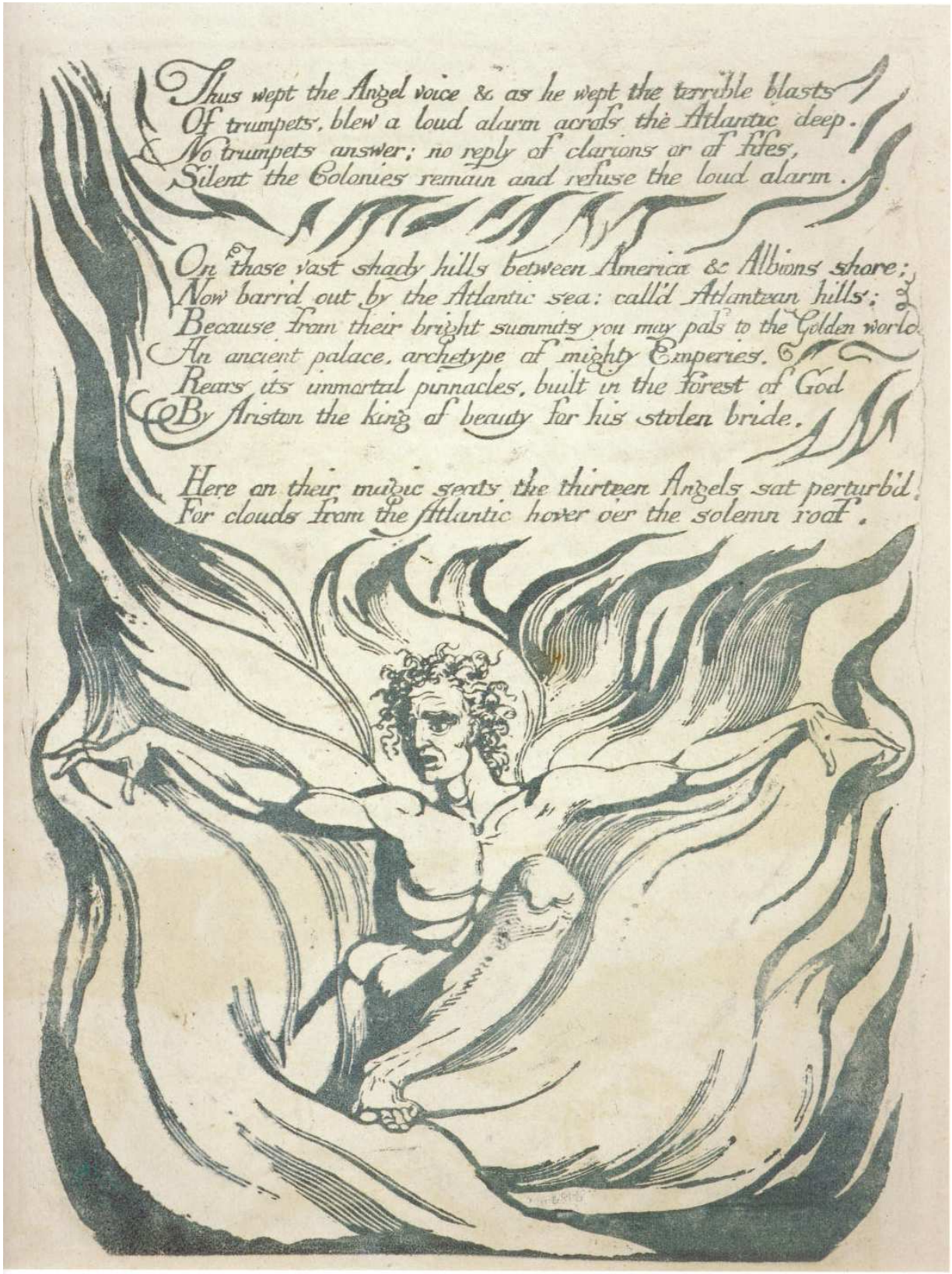


5. *Psalm 51*, The Ormesby Psalter

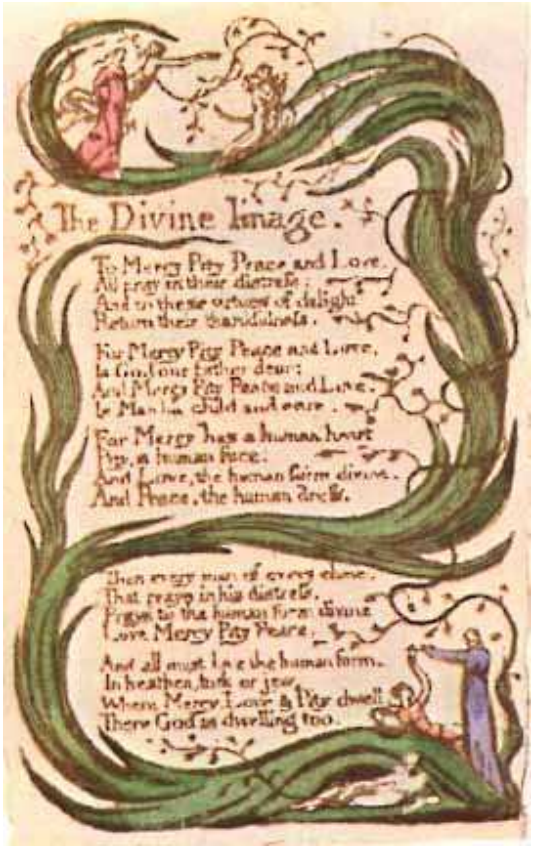


6. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 24

7. *Nebuchadnezzar*


Thus wept the Angel voice & as he wept the terrible blasts
Of trumpets, blew a loud alarm acrofs the Atlantic deep.
No trumpets answer; no reply of clarions or of fifes,
Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.
On thase vast shady hills between America & Albions shore;
Now barrid out by the Atlantic sea: call'd Atlantean hills;
Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies.
Rears its unmortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
By Ariston the king of beauty for his stolen bride.
Here on their mufic seats the thirteen Angels sat perturbid.
For clouds from the Atlantic hover oer the solemn roof.

8. *America* 12



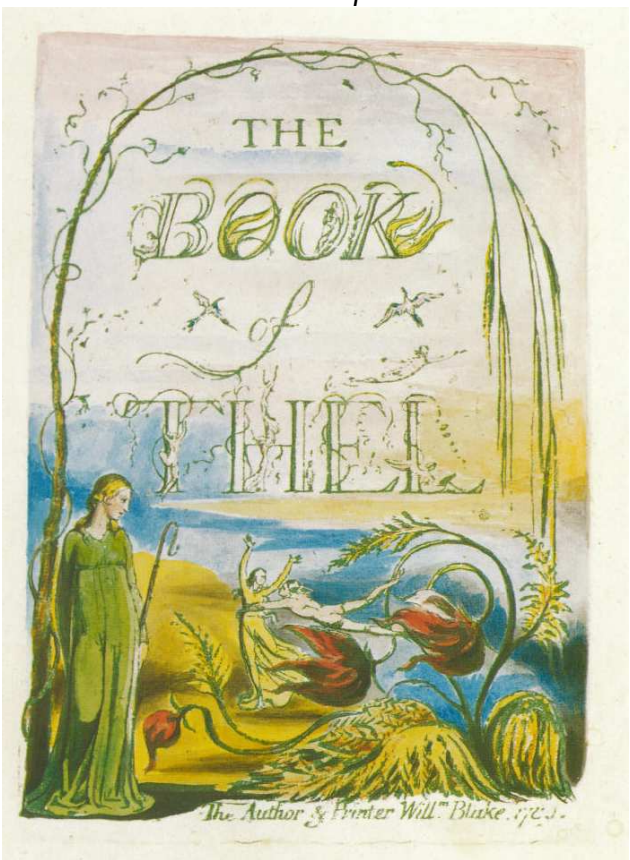
9. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
"The Divine Image"

10. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
"The Divine Image", Copy W

11. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
"The Blossom"

12. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
"The Blossom"

13. *The Penance of Jane Shore*

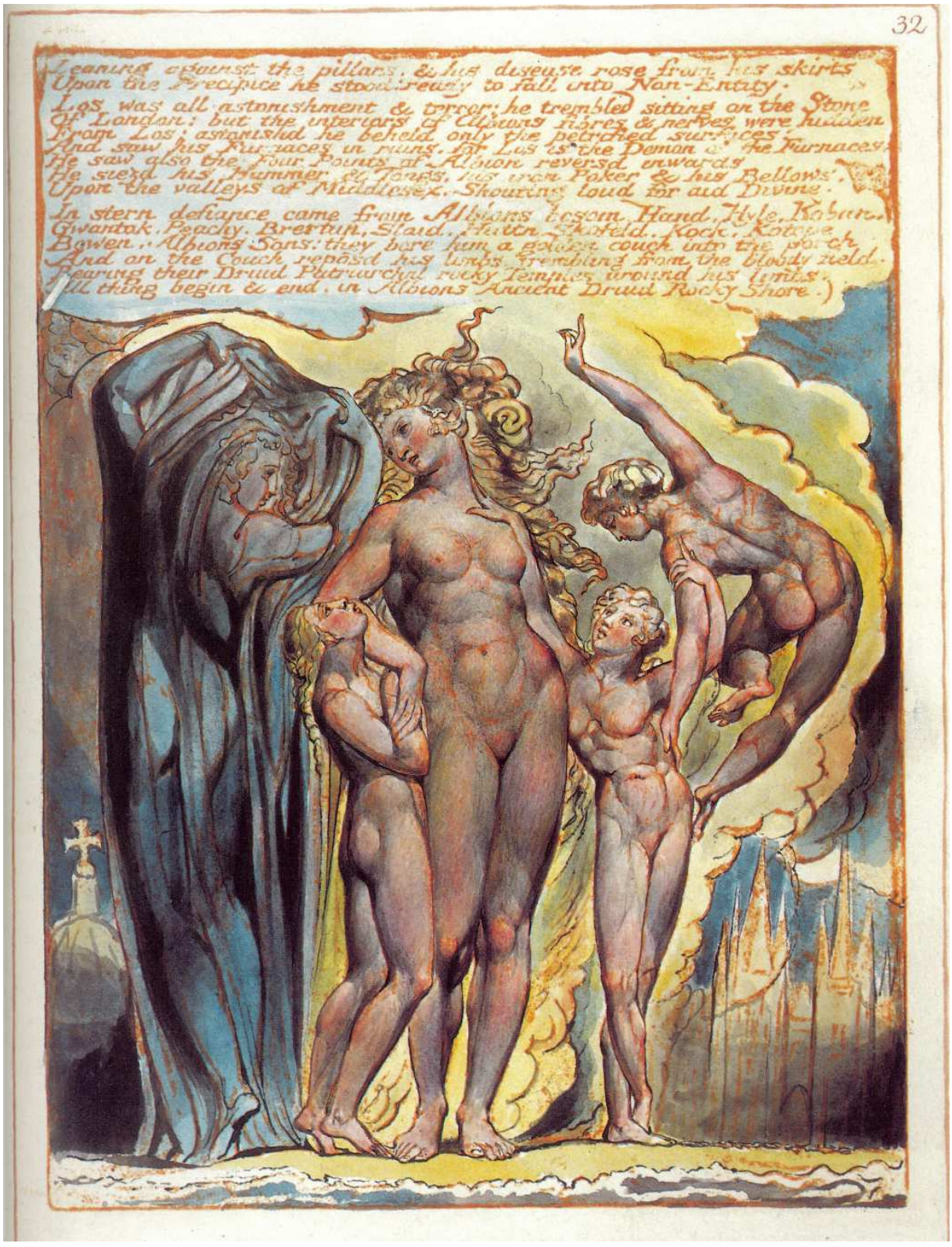


14. *Thel* title page

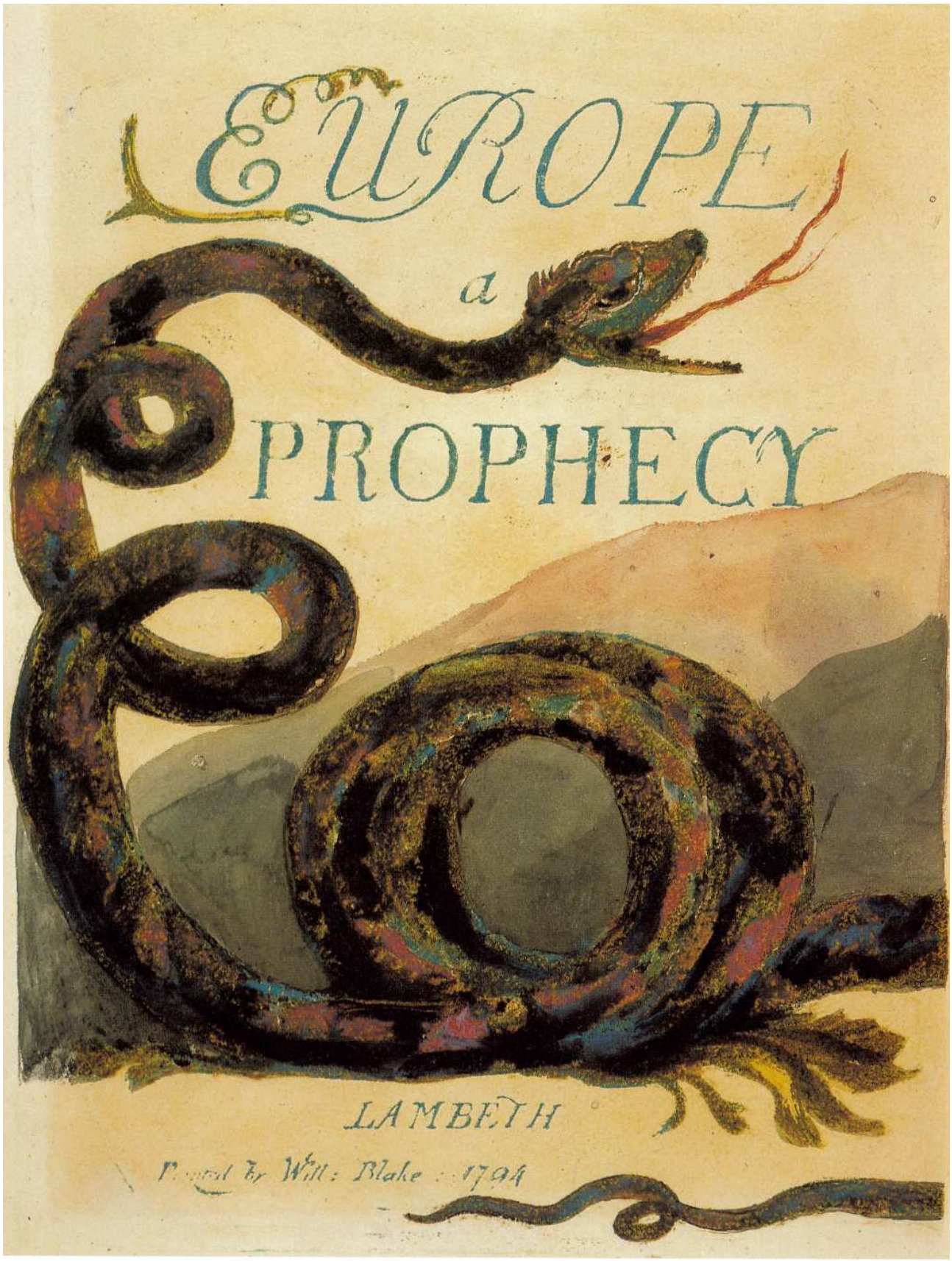
15. W. Blake *Queen Eleanor*

16. W. Blake *Queen Eleanor* detail

17. Queen Eleanor photo



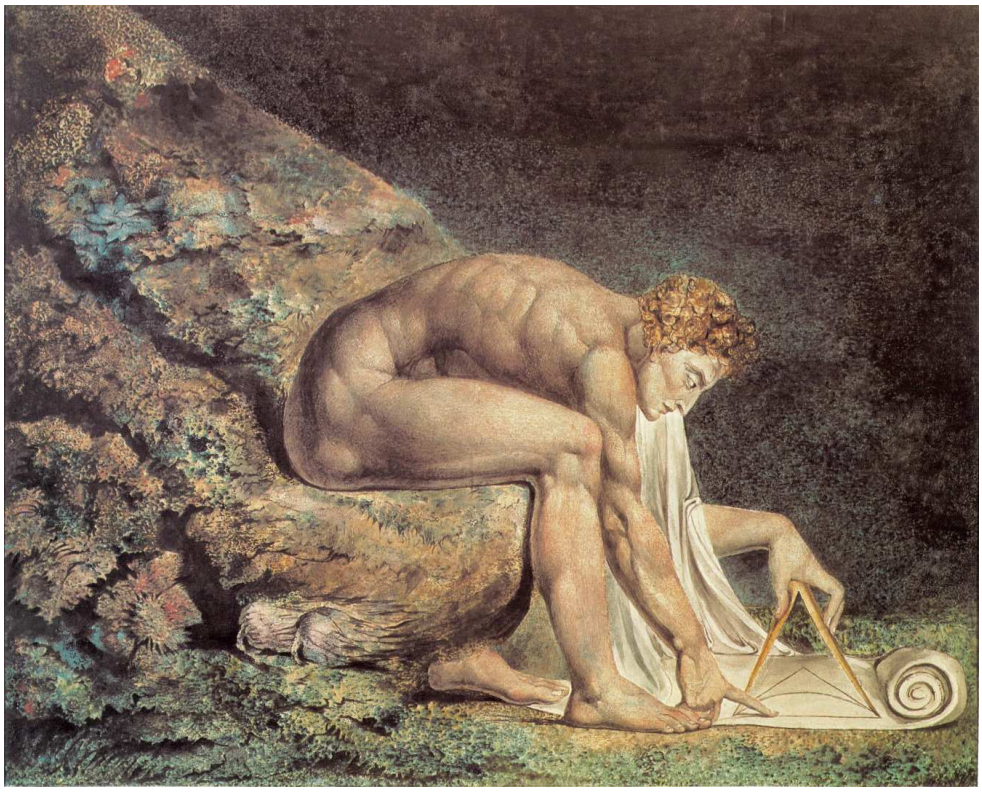
18. *Jerusalem* 32



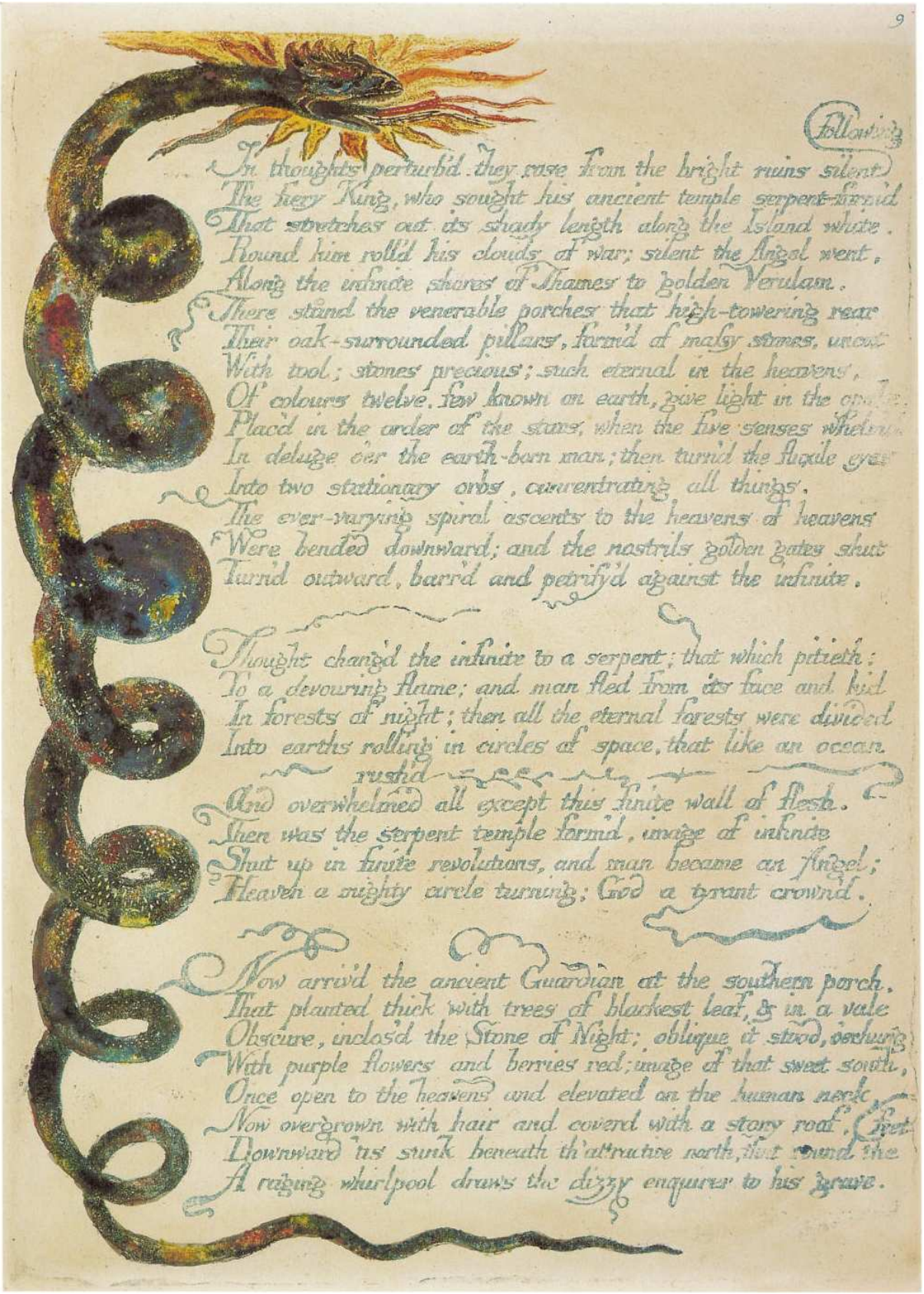
19. *Europe* title page

20. *Europe* frontispiece

21. “The first four days of Creation”, *Bible Moraliseé*



22. *Newton*



Following

In thoughts perturbid they rose from the bright ruins silent
The fiery King, who sought his ancient temple serpent-formed
That stretches out its shady length along the Island white.
Round him roll'd his clouds of war; silent the Angel went,
Along the infinite shores of Thames to golden Verulam.
There stand the venerable porches that high-towering rear
Their oak-surrounded pillars, form'd of massy stones, uncut
With tool; stones precious; such eternal in the heavens,
Of colours twelve, few known on earth, gave light in the cave.
Placed in the order of the stars, when the five senses wherein
In deluge o'er the earth-born man; then turn'd the fluxile eyes
Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things.
The ever-varying spiral ascents to the heavens of heavens
Were bended downward; and the nostrils golden gates shut
Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite.

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

Now arrived the ancient Guardian at the southern porch,
That planted thick with trees of blackest leaf, & in a vale
Obscure, inclosed the Stone of Night; oblique it stood, o'ershuming
With purple flowers and berries red; image of that sweet south,
Once open to the heavens and elevated on the human neck,
Now overgrown with hair and covered with a stony roof. Yet
Downward 'tis sunk beneath th'attractive north, that round the
A raging whirlpool draws the dizzy enquirer to his grave.

23. *Europe* 9

24. *The Book of Urizen* 4 (in this copy)

25. *The Book of Urizen* 3

26. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 3

27. *The Book of Urizen* 6 (in this copy)