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Rachel V. Billigheimer

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The Eighth Eye: Prophetic Vision in Blake’s Poetry and Design

by RACHEL V. BILLIGHEIMER

I. Prophetic Vision in Blake’s Poetry

IN A PREVIOUS study, the seven Eyes of God in Blake’s prophetic books were correlated with biblical and historical periods. Directed by the spirit of imagination, these cycles were seen as intrinsic to apocalypse. Here we examine the poetic inspiration of Blake's eighth Eye and relate it to the prophetic vision in some of Blake's designs. In structure, style and imagery, Blake's illustrations bear a close relationship to his poetry. In describing the seven Eyes, Blake takes his readers through progressive stages of imaginative development, till through the eighth Eye man is able to cast off the error of tradition and dogma and achieve individual inspiration. This is the vision of the eternal Sun inspired by Los, the spirit of prophecy, the god of time and the messenger of Eternity. Through the inspiration of Los man builds the city of Golgonooza in a process which expands his imaginative perception till his eyes are opened to the divine vision.

In The Four Zoas man achieves re-integration in the seventh Eye through love, forgiveness and self-sacrifice. The zoas re-unite and each zoa unites in harmony with its own Emanation. In Milton and Jerusalem there is the presence of an eighth Eye, representing the redeeming power of man's inner vision, which has been purged by the gyrations of experience. In Jerusalem this is the “twenty-eighth Church” of the Covering Cherub which redeems mankind as it casts off error through the enlightenment of the imagination. In Milton the eighth Eye represents the prophetic inspiration of the individual. In Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job there is a faint appearance of the eighth Eye, the faintness indicating the individual's necessity for deep inner searching. This act of introspection withstands intense trials and suffering to relinquish the reliance on a God of tradition and dogma and to find the power of inspiration within man as the ultimate revelation. Blake thus progresses from the idea of the fully integrated man achieving harmony and completeness through traditional virtues to the idea of the perfect man as one
whose spirit of imagination predominates over the rest of his faculties. Through individual inspiration, man receives the revelation of the true divinity.

In Blake’s epic Milton, in answer to Milton’s self-accusations, Lucifer, the First Eye, instructed by the seven Angels, explains to him that the seven Eyes are not Individuals but are states through which man must pass:

We are not Individuals but States: Combinations of Individuals  
We were Angels of the Divine Presence: & were Druids in Annandale  
Compelled to combine into Form by Satan, the Spectre of Albion,  
Who made himself a God & destroyed the Human Form Divine  
But the Divine Humanity & Mercy gave us a Human Form  
Because we were combined in Freedom & holy Brotherhood. . . .  
(M, II:32:10-15; E 130)

On Milton’s descent the wrathful Eternals push the divine vision into Ulro but it remains ubiquitously attainable to the Human Imagination. Ololon intercedes with the wrathful Eternals. Los, Enitharmon, the Sons of Albion and the Four Zoas plead forgiveness from the “Eight / Immortal Starry-Ones, guarding the Couch in flaming fires.”2 Forgiveness is granted at the descent of Ololon. Milton’s descent into the world of generation, his reverence for Reason and his struggle to supersede it till he becomes spiritually transformed and united with Blake and Los and ultimately with his Emanation Ololon, lead to an apocalyptic vision transcending the gyrations through the seven cycles of Experience. In the final redemption, the “Starry Eight”3 is seen as One Man.

The descent of Los to Blake can be seen, as Erdman points out,4 as the divine parallel to Milton’s descent, the moment of divine inspiration. Blake explains in his Annotations to Lavater: “For let it be remembered that creation is. God descending according to the weakness of man for our Lord is the word of God & every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God” (E 589). In the spiritual conflagration of the flaming sun descending and uniting with the poet, “God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is” (“THERE is NO Natural Religion” [b], E 2).

Los, the “terrible flaming sun,” the fourth Property Sol in Boehme’s Seven Forms, “the creative flash that links the ternaries,” and by whom in Boehme’s theory, “the Arts were brought forth to light,”5 is the god of creative time who delivers man from the world of clock time, the poetic genius in man. It is of this moment of deliverance from the cycles of time that Boehme writes, “you shall see the seventh Seal with the Eye of Sol.”6

3. M, II:35:34.

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As in Boehme's seven dialectically related Forms, the seventh Eye opens with the coming of apocalypse which ends history. Blake's spiritual light of the Imagination is seen to be significantly influenced by Boehme's Higher Ternary. The lighting of the darkness of error and imprisonment within the Mundane Shell by the sun and moon symbolizes the creativity of Los which mirrors the creation of the divine Imagination through divine love. In contrast to Milton's conception of the sanctity of divine light symbolized by the heavenly bodies, "Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born," we see a demoniac element in the starry realm of Blake, "... the abstract Voids between the Stars are the Satanic Wheels." Blake uses the cosmos of *Paradise Lost* as a symbolic landscape of man's inner world, a world "stolen from the Abyss." In this world of illusion where man is bound to time, space and sensual experience, he cannot perceive the divine love and forgiveness symbolized by the divine light beyond the whirling stars of Eternity.

The eighth Eye in Blake, opening the passageway from history to apocalypse, is identical with the twenty-eighth Church in the twenty-seven folds of Orc. Outside the cycles of history, the twenty-eighth Lark delivers the eternal moment to the present. The seven angels of the divine presence accompanying the Shadowy Eighth indicate that man can discover his own individual inspiration and surmount history to attain a transcendent state without waiting for the end of time:

_Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sound_  
_My bones trembled. I fell outstretched upon the path_  
_A moment, & my Soul return'd into its mortal state_  
_To Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body_  
_And my sweet Shadow of Delight stood trembling by my side._  

(*M*, II:42:24-28; E 142)

The eighth Eye is the state of momentary illumination in fallen man. In *Jerusalem* Blake ironically likens fallen man, whose error is revealed in the labyrinths of Experience, to the beast that conceals itself in Albion's forests of the night, searching with its burning eye for the fire of self-liberation:

... Albion must Sleep  
The Sleep of Death, till the Man of Sin & Repentance be reveald.  
Hidden in Albions Forests he lurks. (*J*, 2:43:11-13; E 189)

The revolutionary figure, fearful in its portrayal of the beast in man and yet at the same time awe-inspiring in its invocation of prophetic inspiration, sends out an isolated gleam of light "burning bright" in the "forests of the night."

10. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 5; E 34.  
emerge, however, till the fires of Experience have forged and hammered it into its "fearful symmetry":

And they Elected Seven, call'd the Seven Eyes of God;
Lucifer, Molech, Elohim, Shaddai, Pahad, Jehovah, Jesus.
They nam'd the Eighth he came not, he hid in Albions Forests.

(J, 3:55:31-33; E 202)

The errors of the "forests of the night" must be purged before divine power can be revealed, as otherwise man will be punished by divine wrath through the Spectre of Orc. As error is cast out, the fires of oppression are transformed into illumination and in this process man has revealed to him momentary visions of Eternity. This is the emergence of Blake's shadowy eighth Eye. Man in his limited corporeal state, wandering through the serpentine labyrinths symbolizing confused and constricted vision, must lose his way in order to find it. He can find his way through this crooked and dangerous path only by turning his eyes inwards to the imaginative vision of the eighth Eye, which will guide him through the terror of the jungle or the raging sea:

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God... The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man...
The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.

("Proverbs of Hell," MHH:8,9; E 36)

The fire in the eyes of Blake's Tyger has the paradoxical character of both Promethean and prophetic qualities. J. E. Grant points out that both Prometheus, who had stolen fire from the gods and brought it to man, and Hephaestus, who had become the renowned creative blacksmith, were tormented by the wrath of the Greek god of fire, Zeus. Both the created and the creator must suffer the anguish and terror of creation. Significantly repeated is the image of the awe-inspiring conflation of the creator and the created in the lines:

What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The hand of the creator, guided by the imaginative vision of his eye, lends a supernatural significance to the image of the Tyger. Its glittering eyes in the darkness of the forest suggest revelation through visionary perception.

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake argues paradoxically that the creation of man's world was achieved through the fires of Hell:

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss . . . the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire. ("The Argument," MHH; E 34-35)

In the fiery eyes of the Tyger we see a link to Orc, chained to the rock for his passion and "over them a flame / Of circling fire unceasing," the Promethean image bound and tortured by flames for the transgression of destroying the innocence of mankind by usurping the divine creative property. On the one hand, the fire is stolen from Hell, "the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss," while on the other hand, the fire stolen from Heaven for man's use, also led to destruction instead of creativity. Although, as Adams states, Blake would call these interlopers heroes, since they characterize the revolutionaries or the Reprobate, the veil of materialism cannot be rent until man has been purged of Lucifer (self-pride), Molech (brutal human sacrifices), Elohim (judgment and execution), Shaddai (anger and accusation), Pachad (blinding terror) and Jehovah (corruption of the Law and hypocrisy). Only after this will he be received through the seventh Eye, Jesus (love and forgiveness), and ultimately transcend his corporeal state by finding the true God in his inner vision. The reign of love which ensues after the unbinding of Shelley's Prometheus is akin to Blake's vision of the reign of humanity in the seventh Eye.

Blake's heroes must be purged. Grant draws attention to Frye's elucidation of the ambivalent character of the Tyger, with its contrary natures of strength and weakness represented by the Covering Cherub based on Ezekiel 28:13-19. However, the Tyger, evoking the terror of divine judgment by its burning brilliance, as in the case of the overwhelming force of the Whirlwind that appears to Job, yet promising its protective-ness and guidance to man through the "forests of the night," can also be seen as a paradoxical representation of the Covering Cherub. The king of Tyre as the Covering Cherub, awe-inspiring in his perfect uprightness-ness, honoured by the magnificent robe of brilliantly decorated jewels and walking in the midst of stones of fire as protector of the "garden of God," having been cast to the ground by his corruption through self-pride, on the other hand evokes the terror of divine judgment in those who witness him being devoured and turned to ashes by a fire brought

15. FZ, V; E 334.
16. H. Adams, "Reading Blake's Lyrics: 'The Tyger,' " pp. 50-63 in J. E. Grant, ed., Discussions of William Blake, p. 57. Includes the parallel of Icarus soaring towards the sun with wings attached by wax only to find himself hurrying into the sea when the wax melts. To this image we may also add that of the golden apples of power guarded by the dragon in the Garden of Hesperides and that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden through which man's aspiration to divine power brings destruction to humanity.
19. A suggested interpretation is that by the splendour of the king's appearance, "as he walked about, he appeared to be surrounded by flashing rays of light" (Ezekiel, Tr. and Commentary by S. Fisch [London: Soncino Press, 1972], p. 192).
forth from his midst. Yet ultimately, having passed through Blake's twenty-seven Churches of the Covering Cherub, man will be redeemed, as the Covering Cherub in Ezekiel will ultimately be redeemed: "The prophet's idea is that God does all . . . with one great design in view—to make Himself, the true and only God, known to all Mankind."20

The eighth Eye illuminates and reveals itself as the apocalyptic conflagration in the eyes "burning bright" of the Tyger, as the Sun of Los, symbolizing the creative unification of artist and Emanation and the ultimate conflation of creator and created. Blake describes this as a time when the voids between the stars will be transformed as the Satanic mills of destruction which grind man to dust turn to the light of truth, when "Los reads the Stars of Albion! the Spectre reads the Voids / Between the Stars."21 Los will reveal to man the opening out of the macrocosm of the starry heavens:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. *(MHH:14; E 39)*

Los, his Spectre and Enitharmon must re-unite and embrace each other in mutual forgiveness before apocalypse can take place. The relationship of form and light may be paralleled to that of the individual and his Emanation which projects the consciousness of the external world. With the fall, consciousness assumes the form of the Selfhood or the egotistic male will, while the external world of Nature becomes the female will. Thus, in the fallen world, imaginative form and light are transformed into opposing sexual principles.22 As the feminine separates from the masculine and becomes "a Veil & Net / Of Veins of red Blood,"23 she ceases to be his Emanation. Thus the restored Jerusalem cannot take on the human form. In Eternity men are united through their Emanations:

*In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision And the Light is his Garment. This is Jerusalem in every Man A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness.* *(J, 3:54:1–4; E 201)*

II. Prophetic Vision in Blake's Design

In his inverted perspective of Milton's view, Blake portrays the Messiah of Milton's Paradise Lost as Satan in the Book of Job: "in the Book of Job Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan." Contrary to Miltonic and traditional doctrine, which holds that Job was tested as to his perfection, Blake argues that Job was prodded by his trials to relinquish a complacent abiding in tradition and to search for the prophetic inspiration in man. The tormenting passages of Experience which Job undergoes and through which he is transformed are interpreted in S. Foster Damon's Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job as the cycles of the Eyes of God leading to revelation and redemption through imaginative vision.

On the title page of the Illustrations of the Book of Job Blake has designed a group of seven angels arranged in an arc. Blake identified the seven angels with the seven Eyes of God, and Damon suggests that here they symbolize the seven stages through which Job must pass to regain communion with God. Blake's Eyes of God are symbolic states in the epic journey of man as well as symbolic historical periods. According to Blake, every man must pass through the Eyes of God for they are the stages of the passageway of Experience.

In the first ten illustrations we may follow the pattern of the Seven Eyes from the state of Innocence when Job is surrounded by his wife and children in material prosperity worshipping the God of tradition. With the loss of his sons and the destruction of his house Job passes through the stages of Experience. In Illustration V a large circle of fire which Satan has placed behind Job's head symbolizes guilt. In Illustration IX Job's friends preach to him that his tragedy is punishment for his sins. At the crucial point in Job's life he recognizes Satan the Accuser posing as the God of Justice, and the God of Forgiveness is revealed to him. From the Whirlwind, (Illustration XIII, see fig. 1), Job experiences the divine revelation. The God of Forgiveness of sins appears to him out of the Whirlwind and speaks to him. The friends of Job cannot see the divine vision. The force of the wind throws them on the ground. Above the circular motion of the Whirlwind a stream of six angels move in circular flight, as they, in their rotation, have reached the seventh Eye. In an outer margin an eighth Eye is slightly discernible. This is the individuality, the imaginative vision of Job:

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24. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: 5; E 34.
27. The fiery Whirlwind of the divine presence presaging the Apocalypse occurs in Isaiah 66:15.
Fig. 1. Blake, *The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind*. Courtesy, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.
an Eighth
Image Divine tho' darken'd; and tho walking as one walks
In sleep; and the Seven comforted and supported him.

(M, I:15:5-7; E 108)

S. Foster Damon comments, "And Man, who began as the first Eye of
god, becomes the Eighth, his real Humanity." It is because man must
search and strive with his inward sight to find his own individual essence
that in Blake's illustration of the Whirlwind the eighth Eye is hardly visi­
able. After reaching this pinnacle in Blake's system, according to Damon,
the cycles in the Illustrations of the Book of Job are reversed, till on re­
turning to the first Eye, Lucifer (Illustration XXI), Job is pictured again
as blessed in the harmony of a large family in the New Life. In this state
he has been purged of error through Experience which "is bought with
the price / Of all that a man hath his house his wife his children."

Bo Lindberg, in his comprehensive study and critical survey of Blake's
illustrations of the Book of Job, disagrees with Damon's interpretation of
the Eyes of God cycles. He observes that the scheme of the Eyes and
their reversal does not accurately correspond to Blake's composition and
that such an explanation is neither necessary nor helpful in elucidating the
contents of the design. He himself, in a deeper-going analysis, describes
the Job series as following two simultaneous plots, the fate of Job and the
transformations of God, based upon Blake's theology that God is the
vision within man's soul as well as the creator outside man and his world.

In Illustration XVIII of Blake's Job God has been transformed from
his human form to a great sun, which expands till it fills the heavens,
separating the world above which is within man from the world below of
external form. Elsewhere, Blake writes:

So I spoke & struck in my wrath
The old man weltering upon my path.
Then Los appear'd in all his power:
In the Sun he appear'd, descending before
My face in fierce flames; in my double sight
'Twas outward a Sun: inward Los in his might.

In the illustration Job turns his back to the spectator and directs his eyes
towards the great sun, while in the margin of the illustration there is
a mystical descent of angels. The idea of the merging together of the human

In Damon's explanation of Paracelsus's astrological theory, the star standing eighth in order is born
of the imagination of man and is superior to all the rest.
Damon makes the identifications: "Lucifer is a fallen form of Urthona; Molech of Tharmas; Elohim
of Urizen; Shaddai of Luvah; Pahad of the animals; Jehovah of men; while Jesus is the 'superior star';
and the 'shadowy Eighth' is Man himself." (William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols, p. 389.)
29. FZ, II; E 318.
A Humaniora, XLVI (1973), 81-82.
32. Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, in G. Keynes, ed., Blake: Complete Writings (Lon­
with the divine, “What is above is Within”\(^{33}\) as pointed out by Wicksteed,\(^ {34}\) is versified in *Jerusalem*:

There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within
Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One.

\((J, 1:18:2-3; E 161)\)

Wicksteed makes the observation that Blake’s theory of the poetic inspiration in man is expressed as the conjugation of the human and the divine in reversed visionary forms: “Jerusalem is the story of God becoming Man, as Job is the story of Man becoming God—and as Los is the spiritual or universal man in his bodily aspect, so Job’s story is of the spiritual aspect of an earthly man.”\(^ {35}\) W. B. Yeats remarks on the similarity of the qualities of strength and clarity of Blake’s circles in Los and in Job: “The circles in Los, and in Job, and wherever strength is to be represented, have a recognisable similarity, as sort of family likeness.”\(^ {36}\)

Los, pictured with his back to the spectator, is symbolic of inner vision. On the frontispiece to *Jerusalem* Los is carrying a sun, his “globe of fire,” as he walks into the arched entrance to illuminate the dark vaulted interior of Nature.\(^ {37}\) On *Jerusalem* 62\(^ {D}\) (*IB* 341) a diminutive figure of Los looking inwards is contrasted with the giant image of Luvah pictured as the material sun looking outwards and appearing tormented with its head constricted by the coils of the Serpent of revolution. The difficulty of Los’s mission amidst the overwhelming forces of materialism is highlighted by his diminutive bent figure between the threatening giant feet. On *Jerusalem* 73\(^ {D}\) (*IB* 352) Los, looking into the sun, performs his mission of transforming the world of Generation into a world of inner significance. Albion, pictured with his back to the spectator towards the end of *Jerusalem*, signifies the re-integration of the zoas within him together with their Emanations through the inward vision of Los. On *Jerusalem* 76\(^ {D}\) (*IB* 355) Albion has risen from the state of passivity in which he gazed outwards towards a fettered and cruel world as pictured on *Jerusalem* 25\(^ {D}\) (*IB* 304) and now becomes what he beholds, Resurrected Humanity, as he looks upwards and inwards to Jesus, behind whose head to the left are two suns. As Albion awakens, the material sun may set while the sun of imagination may expand to reveal the light of inner vision. On *Jerusalem* 95\(^ {D}\) (*IB* 374) Albion “opend his eyelids in pain,” “the wrath of God breaking bright flaming on all sides round,” “the Sons of Eden praise Urthonas Spectre in songs / Because he kept the Divine Vision in times of trouble.” As Albion looks upwards towards the flames, he stretches his right arm and right leg forward, “speaking the

\(^{33}\) J, 3:71:6; E 222.

\(^{34}\) J. H. Wicksteed, *Blake’s Vision of the Book of Job* (New York: Haskell, 1971), p. 120.

\(^{35}\) Wicksteed, p. 134, n. 2.

\(^{36}\) W. B. Yeats, MS. Fol. 251, Reading Univ. Library. Manuscript copy kindly lent to the author by Robert O’Driscoll, Univ. of Toronto.

\(^{37}\) *IB* 280.
Words of Eternity in Human Forms,” “As the Sun and Moon lead forward the Visions of Heaven and Earth / England who is Brittanias enterd Albions bosom rejoicing.” On Jerusalem 97⁷ (IB 376) Albion appears as Los, carrying the sun in his left hand with his right hand over his head and right thumb touching his head as if to signify his perception of the divine vision:

> The innumerable Chariots of the Almighty appeard to Heaven
> And Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer
> A Sun of blood red wrath surrounding heaven on all sides around
> Glorious incomprehensible by Mortal Man. (J, 4:98:8-11; E 254)

Yeats, in his edition of Blake, reproduces an interesting sketch³⁸ to Vala which he interprets as “The female turning the circle of the eyes of God. She is the labourer at the Nine Months with which the Seven Eyes, when Elohim is triple, are counted.”³⁹ In this drawing a female figure, facing eastwards and looking downwards and outwards as she kneels with her left knee purposefully forwards to support her strength, turns the eyed wheel upwards with both hands, controlling human destiny. Thus, although she is supported by her left knee, the left side being symbolic of the malevolence of a material world, and with her long twining snaky hair looks downwards, her leaning forwards to turn the eyed wheel upwards indicates humanity’s final destiny in redemption. In G. E. Bentley’s edition of Vala this sketch appears on page 104, Night VIII. A drawing which appears to be of the Circle of Destiny resembling a coiled ouroboros, controlled by a female figure above who is bending downwards as she turns it with her right forefinger, is reproduced in Bentley’s Vala on page 61, Night V, and again on page 119, Night IX.⁴⁰ In Bentley’s Vala on page 82, Night VIIa, a female figure turns a circle enclosing eight stars. Yeats also reproduces this drawing in his edition of Blake.⁴¹ In Yeats’s interpretation it represents “Vala exalting her power even to the stars.”⁴² To this we may add that the stars which form the orbit of the Circle of Destiny become transformed to the “Starry Eight”⁴³ when the seventh Eye has been transcended and prophetic vision is achieved. In this moment man is perfectly reunited with his Emanation and the Female no longer asserts her will over his destiny.

Yeats explains Blake’s symbolism of the Eyes of God as a physical confinement progressively leading to the birth of the freedom of the imagination:

³⁹. Ellis and Yeats, II, 361.
⁴⁰. Blake borrowed this design from his Illustrations to Young’s Night Thoughts.
⁴¹. Ellis and Yeats, Vol. III, Drawings to Vala, No. 10.
⁴². Ellis and Yeats, II, 361.
⁴³. O how the Starry Eight rejoic’d to see Oolon descended!
   And now that a wide road was open to Eternity,
   By Oolons descent thro Beulah to Los and Enitharmon. (M, II:35:33-35; E 134)
In the Head division of the Heart, the falling light, Lucifer, the intellectual or formative portion of the emotional life descends to organize the external reason into a personality, into an image of the unity or self consciousness of god whose abode is in the heart, thus it may be saved finally from the indefinite. This personality is itself shaped in six stages which correspond to the first six eyes of god. . . . These seven states were the first beginnings of mortal personality the first stirring of “the human form divine” the great Regenerator. . . . the philosophy of five senses is completed at the moment when in Boehme the physical forms life is ready for birth. . . . The seven states or periods are also equivalent to the Seven Eyes . . . the great difference being that the Eyes of God complete the “Human Form Divine.”

Yeats explains that in *Jerusalem*, Chapter 3:

... they elect the Seven Eyes of god to rule over the gestation and over the seven formative states that follow the “true dark creations” [Boehme]. Their mission is to “labour well the minute particulars” to make the indefinite definite for physical “gestation” is but a type of their multitude of purposes. Their way having been prepared for the clothing in flesh of the imaginative principle.

Yeats writes, “Blake cries out that the only way to Eternity is within: ‘turn your eyes inward’ he cries.” The eye of imagination is the human microcosm of the vision of Eternity, what Blake terms the “human form divine.” It has the intense power of perception to relate every particular condition and event in human experience to a comprehensive design of the nature of all things and to lead man towards apocalypse and redemption. Blake ascribes to imaginative vision a significance for the whole conduct of life viewed as art:

... he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
Must see it in its Minute Particulars . . . .
... General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every
Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus.

*(J, 4:91:20–21, 29–30; E 249)*

To see beyond the vortex of wheels in which man is caught and relate the Minute Particulars to the Divine Vision is the power of the visionary’s eye:

A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the 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.

Blake describes Milton as having achieved, through his poetic genius, the vortex vision of experience leading to the fourfold vision of Eternity. In his fourfold consciousness on the “infinite plane,” Milton perceives his ultimate role in his own imaginative vision. To Blake, the visionary is the igniting force of a united religion: “The true Man is the source he being

44. W. B. Yeats, MS. Fols. 162, 18, 183.
45. W. B. Yeats, MS. Fols. 116, 117.
46. W. B. Yeats, MS. Fol. 111.
the Poetic Genius.” Having created artistic forms, “the bright Sculptures of Los’s Halls,” the poet has, in his poetic vision depicted the archetypal existence of man which exists in the imagination:

All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of Los’s Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works. (J, 2:16:60-61; E 159)

To Blake, the workings of the imagination create a complete integration within each man and at the same time unite all men in transcending the devouring wheels of the conflicting and dividing forces in the Circle of Destiny, the womb-tomb of space and time, and in realising the divine vision: “The religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation’s different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy” (“All Religions are One,” E 2).

A comprehensive vision of life connecting the state of mortality to eternity can also be seen in terms of the ascending and descending winding stair. Yeats remarks,

“Life as a whole is a harmony of states and spaces—a Jacobs ladder ascending from man to god—but like all else has dual nature. For these two sides Blake uses the symbolism of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in which Beddoes has told us no birds sang and of the Tree of Life. The first is said in one place to have its roots in the heavens and its branches in the earth, following the analogy of the man falling headlong and the inverted pentagram.”

Yeats’s winding stair, winding from birth to death and leading to immortality, can be seen as the Yeatsian parallel to Blake’s Eyes of God cycles, progressing from the Fall to apocalypse and redemption. The concept of this circling passageway from man to God is pictured in Blake’s beautiful water colour of Jacob’s Dream of the spiral staircase stretching from earth to heaven with angels of God ascending and descending upon it (see fig. 2). The heavenly region at the top of the ladder is indicated by the bright sun of spirituality whose rays radiate from the ladder illuminating the passing angels. The depth of blue against the stars above the earthly globe conveys a sense of the infinite. The illumination of the sun’s rays is strongest on Jacob, who sleeps at the bottom of the vertical ladder with his arms outstretched and with his head raised on the bottom step and inclined towards the sun. At the lowest turning point of the stairway, a descending Newton figure carrying compass and scales is shown a great scroll being unravelled by a female angel as she ascends to return it to the sun of spiritual vision. Descending in front of them, an angel shows an opened scroll to his partner who carries a large closed book. In front of them, ascending, a female angel carries a child on her right shoulder, while passing her two descending angels carry spiritual food and water. John E. Grant explains that the scrolls and the book teach the “everlasting

48. “All Religions are One,” E 3.
49. W. B. Yeats, MS. Fol. 22. (See Ellis and Yeats, I, 318.)
Fig. 2. Blake, *Jacob's Ladder*. Courtesy, British Museum, London.
lesson,” “not a device for binding down the Word, but instruments for gathering the scattered leaves in a single meaningful volume.” 50 Thus the book and scroll seal the prophecy of revelation. This concurs with the imagery of Jacob lying with outstretched arms, foreshadowing the salvation of humanity through love, forgiveness and self-sacrifice.

At the climax of the ascent to the top of the vortical staircase, we have the sublime vision of Revelation represented in Blake’s illustration of Ezekiel’s Vision (see fig. 3). Blake designed several versions of Ezekiel’s Vision. An illustration earlier than the “Whirlwind” version is given in Blake’s Illustrations to Young’s Night Thoughts. 51 Here we see eyed orbs, encompassed by larger eyed orbs and guarded by angels. Below this appears to be the earthly counterpart of the visionary eyed wheels. Eyes are affixed to wheels which resemble serpentine coils. A cringing figure kneeling at the bottom seems to be asking for forgiveness for its errors. The “Whirlwind” version conveys the epitome of Blake’s sense of the sublime. John E. Grant characterizes this design as the sublime counterpart to the vision of The Lazar House, “in which the blind God on a cloudy throne smites the three classes of Men with arrows of disease which emanate from the ends of the bow-scroll he holds in his out-spread arms.” 52 However, this sublime vision can also be seen in the form of a parody in The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan. Here Blake pictures a demonic tyrant oppressing fallen humanity, encompassed by serpentine wreathings in which are enfolded the anguished nations of the earth. As Grant points out, the scene of The Lazar House 53 literally parodies Ezekiel’s Vision: “There God has abandoned his weird blockbook, re-integrated his victims with their jailor, and, most of all, opened his eyes to produce a tremendous image of four-fold vehicular power.” 54 The outstretched arms of the blind god holding the unwound scroll as he smites the three classes of men parody the outstretched arms of the omnipresent divine attendant figure with four-fold vision 55 (representing the four “zoas” with four faces and four sets of wings). The prophetetic figure who looks down with sorrow and confusion in The Lazar House is transformed in Ezekiel’s Vision, sitting above the divine figure and look-

51. Ezekiel’s Vision in the Night Thoughts Designs, No. 474 (9:56), repr. Keynes, ed., Illustrations to Young’s Night Thoughts (1927), Pl. 28. Blake affixes this illustration to Young’s description of Ezekiel’s vision in Night IX.

Orb above orb ascending without End!
Circle in Circle, without End, inclos’d! Wheel within Wheel, EZEKIEL! Like to Thine!
Like Thine, it seems a Vision, or a Dream.

53. Darrell Figgis, The Paintings of William Blake (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), Pl. 73.
55. Janet Warner draws to our attention that Blake uses the gesture of outstretched arms for representations of man at his spiritual extremes, from corruption and spiritual death to self-sacrifice and creativity. (“Blake’s Use of Gesture,” Blake’s Visionary Forms Dramatic, pp. 176-80.)
Fig. 3. Blake, *The Whirlwind: Ezekiel’s Vision of the Cherubim and the Eyed Wheels*. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
ing straight ahead with his right hand up and his fingers apart as if he were
annunciating to humanity the advent of redemption, "Behold!" The
crushed figure looking down in agony, on which the blind god stands in
*The Lazar House*, is in *Ezekiel's Vision* transformed into a figure looking
upwards to the divine vision with his arms held up with open palms,
representing humanity awaiting redemption. The eyed wheels above him
move upwards and inwards towards the centre. The constant motion of
the wheels is symbolic of constant creativity, the intellectual wars of men­
tal creativity. Yeats ascribes the vision of the Four Faces to the vision of
mental creativity described in *Jerusalem*: “The description in symbolic
terms of the re-union of the contraries of Humanity—called the four faces
is in Jerusalem p. 98, l. 26”.56

The Four Living Creatures Chariots of Humanity Divine Incomprehensible
In beautiful Paradises expand These are the Four Rivers of Paradise
And the Four Faces of Humanity fronting the Four Cardinal Points
Of Heaven going forward forward irresistible from Eternity to Eternity
And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
In new Expanses, creating Exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
Of Human Imagination. *(J, 4:98:24–32; E 255)*

This visionary drama creates the mental forms of the eternal city:

> In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,
> To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating.
> *(M, II:30:19–20; E 128)*

Edward J. Rose, who also sees the design of *Ezekiel's Vision* as underly­
ing *Jerusalem* 98, refers to the “Four Faces of Man” as a symbolic
“squared circumference.”57 The circle of the mundane egg of the cor­
porate eye is lopsided or oval shaped. The circle of the visionary's eye,
which has the prophetic insight to see the spiritual city, is a perfect circle
which can see the perfect circle of the realm of eternity. The perfect circle,
in distinction to the oval, is able to contain a perfect square within its cir­
cumference whose vertical side can be as long as the horizontal side.
Hence the encircled square, the perfect square, is symbolic of eternity
while the incomplete or lopsided circle is symbolic of the mundane world.
The four sides of the square are symbolic of the visionary’s perspective:

> But in Eternity the Four Arts: Poetry, Painting, Music,
> And Architecture which is Science: are the Four Faces of Man.
> *(M, 1:27:55–56; E 124)*

Through the building of Golgonooza in which he involves his creative
imagination, man will ultimately achieve the vision of the eternal city:

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56. W. B. Yeats, MS. Fol. 246.
57. Edward J. Rose, “Visionary Forms Dramatic: Grammatical and Iconographical Movement in
"The eyes expand to an infinite circumference so that all is contained in one man. The cosmic man metaphor of the human form divine is perception itself establishing a unity or oneness impossible in any other way." In the perception of the visionary's eye Blake describes the interval separating history from eternity as spatial rather than temporal:

The Vegetative Universe, opens like a flower from the Earth's center:
In which is Eternity. It expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell
And there it meets Eternity again, both within and without.

(J, 1:13:34–36; E 155)

The ultimate goal of the human journey through the Seven Eyes is to achieve the vision of the eternal city. Blake takes his readers through each Eye as a progressive step upwards along Jacob's Ladder, past the summit of Yeats's visionary tower from where the prophet embraces human tragedies with its triumphs, to the prophetic inspiration of the eighth Eye:

I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once
Before me. (J, 1:15:8–9; E 157)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario