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Blake and Iconography: Analogues of Urizen and Vala

by JUDITH WARDLE

Images from traditional iconography played a major part in Blake’s work of the late 1790s. In using these images, he was answering the call for a revival of allegorical art made by the Abbé Winckelmann, especially in his Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks. Winckelmann wished for a revival of the “sublime” aspect of the allegory of the ancients “by which some mythological or philosophical allusion, or even some unknown, or mysterious rite, is expressed.”

Blake was no doubt encouraged to join this revival by his friend Henri Fuseli, whose translation of Winckelmann’s Reflections Blake owned. Another factor encouraging the use of allegorical images at this time was George Richardson’s two volume Iconology (1778-79), which drew extensively on earlier compendia, no longer so well known in England as they had been in the early seventeenth century, particularly the Iconologia of “Cesare Ripa.”

Although it is not the province of this article to deal with allegory in Blake’s poetry, the context of his work on allegorical art forms will be made clearer by noting the current situation with regard to literary allegory. While most critics despised literary allegory, while most poems using allegorical methods (except in the discontinuous form of personification) were bad, and while such works as The Divine Comedy and The Faerie Queene were little understood, there were faint voices throughout the eighteenth century advocating allegory as the field for writers of “Genius.”

4. The first edition of the Iconologia by “Cesare Ripa” (pseudonym of Giovanni Campani) was in 1593, the first to be illustrated in 1603, and there were at least eight more Italian editions up to 1669, involving considerable expansion both by Ripa and by other iconologists. A further major edition, in five volumes, appeared in 1764–67. The first version in English, a popularized selection, was not published until 1709, but the Iconologia is known to have been used by English artists from the time of Inigo Jones.
6. Even Thomas Wartert does not sound totally convinced by the excuses he offers for The Faerie Queene in his essays on the poem.
Blake’s general iconographical practice was to repeat and vary traditional images in such a way that the original concept came to be modified, and thus he assimilated images into his personal iconographic style. However, in some instances he simply adopted the conventional way of representing an idea, following Ripa and his successors.

Such individuality of style was not alien to the spirit of earlier artists who had used iconographical compendia. These compendia offered alternative ways of representing personifications from which an artist might choose one or more allegorical properties, termed “attributes,” to define any particular personification. Only in the hands of lesser artists did use of the compendia lead to a descent into cliche.

Blake’s evolution of a kind of iconographic shorthand, based on Ripa and his successors and on other forms of emblematic representation, began as early as the illustrations to the 1788 tractates. The process continued in the sketches in his Notebook, and intensified in the later Lambeth books, the illustrations for Young’s Night Thoughts (1795–97) and for Gray’s Poems (1796–1800?), and in the Vala/Four Zoas manuscript.

The depiction of Urizen and related figures in Blake’s work, for example, draws on the traditional image of Doctrine. Ripa’s Doctrine (“Dottrina”) is an old woman, seated facing the reader, with an open book on her knees (see back cover). Closely related in details of representation is Ripa’s Ratiocinatione o discorso (found as Raissonement in the eighteenth century work of Jean Baptiste Boudard). The open book which these figures hold obliges them to sit with their knees apart. A great many figures in Blake’s work of a Urizenic nature or suffering from Urizen’s restrictions sit thus open-kneed, with or without an open book. Many have one foot protruding from beneath their robes.

The iconography of Urizen himself makes considerable use of these motifs, generally modified to include allusions to other ideas. Examples may be taken from two very striking plates of The Book of Urizen. In plate 5, Urizen’s book has grown so large that his body is hidden behind it. On the open pages are pictures (copy A), blobs of colour (copy D), or weird sign writing (copy G)—these are the only copies I have seen. In all three cases, the designs on the book suggest some mysterious lore. The modification of the image of Doctrine may here have been created by the wish to refer to Saturn as depicted by alchemical emblematists. For instance, the twelfth figure in the Tractaculo Senioris Zadith de Chymia

10. Ratiocinatione is “tutta pensosa” and has one finger on her open book. Boudard’s Iconologia tirée de divers auteurs had two editions, in 1759 and 1766.
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(in volume two of a 1702 collection of alchemical works put together by J. J. Mangetus)\(^{11}\) shows Saturn seated with open knees and holding up a large book, open to show occult signs: three moons and two birds, beak to tail, on the left page; two suns and a circle of rays on the right. This is for alchemists an image of great power; for Blake of sinister power.

The size of Urizen’s book in this plate of *The Book of Urizen* has forced his arms apart into a crucifixion position in order to hold it. This is a gesture which may have contrary implications. When a god performs such a gesture, it may be the position in which he has been crucified, or it may be a blessing on his Creation. For humans, it may also be a gesture of delight, as in the colour print, *Albion Rose*. In this *Urizen* plate, two possible implications are united. Urizen’s Creation is a movement towards death, but it retains the potential for being redeemed into a more human creation.\(^{12}\) (The alchemical reference reinforces this dualism, since there were material and spiritual sides of alchemy.)

Urizen’s perversion of creation is even more apparent in the title-page of *The Book of Urizen* (see fig. 1), where also Blake uses the large book and crucifixion posture, and adds Urizen’s large foot. The idea of perverted creation is here expressed in terms of art as well as religion. W. J. T. Mitchell’s suggestion that this plate may parody the “sister arts” idea, in those copies where Urizen is seen to hold a pen in one hand and a burin or graver in the other (most clear in copy G)\(^{13}\) is supported by reference to traditional iconography. Ripa’s Art holds an engraving tool and a pencil in the same hand. In spreading out his arms in the crucifixion-creation gesture, Urizen has separated the arts. Indeed, he has brought them to a stand-still, since, as Morris Eaves notes, he is inactive.\(^{14}\) In trying to read, write, and etch all at once, he has done nothing. He is even asleep or blind, for his eyes are closed (emphasized by long eye-lashes). He presides like a vast incubus to stifle creation, to prevent the flourishing of the arts. The religious counterpart to this is expressed by the reference to the image of Doctrine given by the large book and the large foot with which he holds it down, and by the tables of the Mosaic Law behind him, which are divided, as Morris Eaves says, like his intellect. These aspects of the picture express the oppressive nature of the religion which has stifled the living creations of a fully integrated Christian vision.

In *Night Thoughts*, Blake used figures closer to the original image of Doctrine. In illustration 384 (see fig. 2), for instance, knowledge of the reference helps us to see that something is wrong with the “wise man”

Fig. 1. *Urizen* (G), title-page. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.
who "never will be sad" or merry, since he sits staring forward with an open book on his knees. The nature of his fault may be found by comparison with the following design (see fig. 3), in which the man who has been told to "Retire, and read the Bible, to be Gay" kneels to read a Bible held by a small angel, whilst a female angel crowns him with a garland. Whilst the bible-reader studies in a mood of delight conveyed by the witty picture, Blake shows the effect of the "wise Man's" adherence to the doctrine of the golden mean as bleak: he appears to have lost the capacity for happiness altogether.

The contrast between the significance of the books in these two pictures suggests a note of warning about interpreting iconographical attributes too inflexibly. The significance of an attribute depends to some extent on that of the figure with which it is related (and also to some extent on what he or she is doing with it). John Grant rightly says, in discussion of the title-page of Night I, that books are only symbols of tyranny if read according to the letter. That in no. 385 is being read spiritually. (Grant does seem to assume that scrolls are always positive, an idea undermined by the existence of one held by Grief in no. 175.)

With figures which are seated, staring ahead across open books, one can be sure of interpretation because there is not only the book but the attitude: examples are the bat-winged Pope of Europe 11, Job and his wife in the first Job engraving, and God (looking even more rigid) added in the second plate of the series. Even some figures without a book, but seated in this manner, can clearly be seen to be restricted in their viewpoints: for instance, in the Gray designs there is an imprisoned man in no. 37, Jove in no. 44, and "Tyrant power" in no. 48 (the first two of these have the detail of one large foot protruding from beneath their robes.)

THE AGE of Time was a matter on which Blake held strong views, as the well known lines from Milton make clear:

Los is by mortals nam'd Time
Enitharmon is nam'd Space
But they depict him bald & aged who is eternal youth
All powerful and his locks flourish like the brows of morning (24: 68–70)

An elaboration of Blake's view may be found in his notes on A Vision of the Last Judgment: "The Greeks represent Chronos or Time as a very Aged Man this is Fable but the Real Vision of Time is in Eternal Youth I have however somewhat accommodated my Figure of Time to the Common opinion as I myself am also infected with it & my Visions also infected & I see Time Aged alas too much so" (p. 91). An explanation of how the Greek Time came to be represented as an old man is given in

By venting Spleen, or dissipating Thought,
It gives a Scourge, or it makes a Fool.
And thus, as hurting Others, or Our-\dyes:
'Tis Pride, or Emotion's, applies the Straw,
That tickles Little Minds to Mirth effuse;
Of Grief as impotent, portentous Sign!
The House of Laughter makes a House of Woe:
A Man triumphant is a Monstrous Sight;
A Man dejected is a Sight as Mean:
What Cause for Triumph, where such Ills abound?
What for Defection, where preludes a Pow'r,
Who call'd us into Being to be Baffled?
So grieve, as conscious Grief may rise to Joy;
So joy, as conscious Joy to Grief may fall:
Most true, a wise Man never will be sad;
But neither will honours, bubbling Mirth,
A shallow Stream of Happiness betray;
Too Happy to be Sportive, He's Serene.

Yet wouldst thou laugh (but at thy own Expense),
This Counsel strange should I presume to give —

Retire,
Fig. 3. Night Thoughts 385. British Library.
Andrew Tooke's well known *Pantheon*: that because of the difference of only one letter between the Greek Kronos (the Roman Saturn) and Chronos, Time, the two were confused.\(^\text{16}\)

Saturn, and offshoots from this figure in the related iconographic representations of Time and Death, is of major importance for the creation of the visual forms of Blake's Urizen, and other characters of a Urizenic nature. Some parallels with Blake's figures are suggested by Jean Hagstrum when he points out that Saturn was sometimes represented with a huge right leg drawn up [it may also be the left one], holding a serpent that bites its tail, and with a large sickle behind him\(^\text{17}\)—he is so represented in Tooke's *Pantheon*. To this one may add some information from Erwin Panofsky on the classical forms of Kronos: he was associated with old age, poverty and death, given a sickle or crutch, and was shown propping his head on his hand.\(^\text{18}\)

The traditional personification of Time, developed as a result of this association with Saturn, is an old man with wings and a scythe or pick-axe, as in Richardson's *Iconology*. In some pictures he is bald except for a forelock blown forward, which derives from the figure of Occasion, implying that both time and occasion must be grasped by the forelock if they are not to be missed. Such a Time appears, for instance, in Quarles' *Emblemes*, Book I, Emblem IX.\(^\text{19}\) Quarles' Time holds an hour-glass, an obvious attribute for the concept. In some cases Saturn-Time is nude, such as Emblem LIII of Adrianus Junius' *Emblemata*, which was repeated by the English emblematist, Geffrey Whitney.\(^\text{20}\)

Blake has a simple basic image of Time in *Night Thoughts*, derived from this tradition: a bearded old man, nude and muscular, except when he has been made into a composite figure with Death. He is winged except at his last, dying appearances in illustrations 434 and 435, when Time's swiftness is said in the text to have been destroyed. Generally he is bald with the forelock, except that in some back views the forelock is hidden. This basic iconography is sufficient to identify the figure, while allowing for variations in appearance and meaning by the addition of other attributes. In spite of the beard, Blake is able to indicate his own conception of the youthfulness of Time through the nude body, except on those occasions when Young's text demands that Time's age be stressed: in no. 45 the figure is bowed by the weight of his scythe to express the decrepitude referred to on the following page; in no. 102 he uses his scythe, which is bent, as a stick to lean on, since the text contrasts Time and Eternity; and when, in no. 192, Young says "Time on

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this Head has snow’d,”’ Blake has a very grim-looking Time seated on a snow-cloud, with the closed, perhaps blind eyes of Urizen from the title-page of The Book of Urizen.

The presence or absence of Time’s traditional scythe in Blake’s representations seems to be largely a matter of visual effect. The sweep of the scythe’s blade could form a very impressive line: in, for instance, no. 36 (see fig. 4), where it forms the compositional basis of the picture, running beneath Time and Death, or in no. 49, where the sweep of the blade dominates the small humans who are being mown down. On two occasions, the scythe is suggested instead of shown directly. In one, no. 46, the reason probably lies in the need for variety at a point where Blake needed four representations of Time close together—the presence of the scythe is suggested here only in Time’s shadow. In no. 43, Blake’s technique is more subtle: a child is giving to an old man what could be a shuttlecock from his discarded game or perhaps a butterfly. The idea that the old man could be Time in disguise is implied by the scythe-like line of the lead to his dog. This implication helps to make clear Blake’s view of the effect on a child of following Young’s injunction to count every hour: “This, the good Heart’s prerogative to raise a royal tribute, from the poorest Hours.”

The hour-glass which may be associated with Time Blake uses in a manner which shows his sense of the possible variations in the significance of a symbol according to context. In no. 29 one stands above the text-box, indicating the moment of death. In the same position in no. 45, is an hour-glass leant upon by a weary figure. Here, the idea of the dragging of Time during leisure may have led Blake to refer to another personification, to Ripa’s Negligence, who is accompanied by an hour-glass on its side.

To explain the implications of another hour-glass, in no. 18 (see fig. 5), I believe one needs to look further afield. Here Death is shown wakening the poet, Young, with his bell. In the background are a lamp of the sauce-boat type, a quill in an ink-well, a book, and an hour-glass. While the first three things one might expect a poet to have (lamp and book may also suggest Ripa’s image for Study), and the hour-glass could refer to Young’s preoccupation with mortality, there may be other associations with which Blake, as an admirer of Dürer, was familiar. Dürer’s Melancholia I (see fig. 6), which Samuel Palmer said hung in Blake’s room, represents a fruitful type of melancholy, the type of Saturnine melancholy referred to by Cornelius Agrippa as inspiring the intuitive mind of artists, scientists, statesmen and prophets. Her posture is that which Ripa was to regard as characteristic of Meditation: head on left hand, elbow on knee. (Blake used this posture in Night Thoughts 326 for

Fig. 4. *Night Thoughts* 36. British Library.
With soft conceal of endless Comfort here,
Nor yet put forth her Wings to reach the skies?

Night-visions may befriend, (as fung above)
Our waking Dreams are fatal: How I dreamt
Of things Impossible? (could Sleep do more?)
Of Joys perpetual in perpetual Change?
Of Rable Pleasures on the tolling Wave?
Eternal Sun-shine in the Storms of life?
How richly were my noon-tide Trances hung
With gorgeous Tapefries of pictur’d joys?
Joy behind joy, in endless Perspective!
Till at Death’s Toll, whose restless Iron tongue
Calls daily for his Millions at a meal,
Starting I woke, and found myself undone?
Where now my Frenzy’s pompous Furniture?
The cocked’d Cottage with its ragged wall
Of mould’ring mud, is Royalty to me!
The Spider’s most attenuated Thread

Fig. 5. Night Thoughts 18. British Library.
Fig. 6. Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia I*. 
Thought, and again in no. 354 where a man, presumably Young, is thinking about the nature of the world.\(^{23}\) In the background of Dürer’s picture are the accoutrements of the sciences that Melancholy inspires, including a bell and an hour-glass. Conceivably, in placing an hour-glass behind Young, in proximity to Death’s bell, Blake is appealing to the associations behind Dürer’s engraving to counterbalance Young’s limited notions of poetic inspiration—Young is inspired by the thought of death that wakes him at this point in the text, not by the fruitful melancholy of the intuitive artist.

Blake’s reduction of the iconographic attributes of some of his major figures to the minimum enabled him to merge what he saw as related concepts, by transferring attributes from one figure to another, either quite directly, or by suggestion, through the use of design elements. Time and Death are often thus merged, to imply that a preoccupation with Time and a preoccupation with Death are but two sides of the same attitude to mortal life, Young’s attitude: that life is a vale of tears, a place of natural decay, where pleasure is to be shunned, and where the evidence of God’s existence is provided not so much by any visionary quality in natural things as by man’s ambition, which is a perverted form of spiritual aspiration (in Night VI), and by the grandeur of the stars:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thus, by kind Nature’s Skill,} \\
\text{To Man un-labour’d, that important Guest} \\
\text{ETERNITY, finds Entrance at the Sight:} \\
\text{And an Eternity, for Man ordain’d,} \\
\text{Or These his destin’d Midnight Counsellors,} \\
\text{The Stars, had never whisper’d it to Man.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Night IX, text of no. 477)\(^{24}\)

Blake’s Death is presented in even more simple iconographic terms than his Time. Death is basically an old man, like Time-Saturn or Jehovah, dressed in a flowing robe, and often with heavily fringed eye-lids (given very sinister implications when they are transferred to a bat-devil above nos. 409 & 410). He appears with no further distinguishing marks in such designs as nos. 61, 146 and 154. He may have additional attributes: a funeral bell to toll his arrival, as in no. 18, or a bow, in no. 198, or the dart that Milton gives to Death in *Paradise Lost*.

Blake establishes a close visual relationship between Time and Death when he places them together on the title-page of Night II (no. 36). From this point on the relationship of the concepts is shown by sometimes giving Death attributes normally associated with Time—Time’s scythe as well as his own dart in no. 40, and a clock that curls up to suggest Time’s wings in no. 53. In one illustration Death is associated

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23. This same idea may be present in the Contemplation of no. 64, asleep on a cloud with her head propped up.

24. It is easier to refer to Young’s text by the number of Blake’s illustration than by line numbers, since whoever numbered the text Blake used (London, 1742-45) made several mistakes in counting.
with another figure, that of Satan. This is no. 20 (see fig. 7), in which he is about to strike the sun held in one hand with his dart held in the other. Here Death, usually associated with tyrannical forces, has himself become the agent of revolution, as is indicated by a crowned head at his feet, for which there is no warrant in the text. (The ambiguities of this situation might remind the reader of plate 8 of *The Gates of Paradise*, where a Satan-Death is actually in conflict with a Saturnine figure.)

Death in Blake’s *Night Thoughts* illustrations is the developed form of a particular aspect of his Urizen. The basic iconography of Urizen was that of the white-haired, bearded, father-god. Where Blake shows his Death merely as an old man, with no other attributes, the association with Urizen is most apparent. Death is revealed as man’s God when, in no. 108, “Death, the great Counsellor, who Man inspires” is seen as an old man writing on a scroll, his head emanating light as a divine halo. There is an overt comparison of Death’s ruling rôle with that of a king when, in the twentieth illustration to Gray, all of Death that appears is his old, crowned head, with wings either side.

Outside of *Night Thoughts*, the associations of Urizen and Death have greater complexity, and the implications are not so bleak. In *The Book of Urizen*, Urizen’s actions lead constantly towards a state of death but the potential for regeneration remains. When the Eternals look at Urizen and say, “What is this? Death” they continue, “Urizen is a clod of clay,” the symbol of man’s mortal body in which he may achieve salvation.  

An earlier Death figure has yet more complex implications. The old man entering “Death’s Door” in *Gates of Paradise* 15 (see fig. 8) is repeated in *America* 12, and in one of the illustrations to Blair’s *Grave*; he leans on a crutch which reminds us of Saturn, and his hair is blown in front of him so that it suggests the forelock of Time. It may be that the tyranny of Time, and indeed the whole attitude to the natural world that Urizen was to represent, is here going to its death. This would make this plate one of the more hopeful ones of *The Gates of Paradise*. The other possible implications of the old man’s blown hair add to the positive suggestions. Peter Tomory points out that the blown hair of Parmigianino’s *Moses* was traditional for a seer in English painting. (Blake shows the prophetess in Gray 82 with such hair.) This old man’s powers of vision may be impaired—those of “The Ancient of Days,” who has similar hair blown sideways instead of forward, are certainly so—but he is entering the grave in search of that vision.

The old man at Death’s door is not only a Saturnine-Urizenic figure, but also an aged traveller. Blake’s travellers may roughly be divided

25. I am indebted to Janet Warner for this observation.
Of sweet domestic Comfort, and cuts down
The fairest bloom of sublunary Bliss.

Bliss! sublunary Bliss! proud words! and vain:
Implicit Treason to divine Decree!
A bold invasion of the rights of Heaven!
I clasped the Phantoms, and I found them Air.
O had I weigh'd it e'er my fond Embrace!
What darts of Agony had mis'd my heart?
Death! Great Proprietor of all! 'Tis thine
To tread out Empire, and to quench the Stars;
The Sun himself by thy permission thines,
And, one day, thou shalt pluck him from his sphere.
Amid such mighty Plunder, why exhaust
Thy partial Quiver on a Mark so mean?
Why, thy peculiar rancor wreck'd on me?
Infatiate Archer! could not One suffice?
Thy shaft flew thrice, and thrice my Peace was slain;
And

Fig. 7. Night Thoughts 20. British Library.
Fig. 8. *The Gates of Paradise* 15. British Library.
according to age, with the young ones being more likely to embody positive conceptions of spiritual progress than the old, though this rule is not inflexible. The young ones are to be associated with pilgrims and have some part of the traditional pilgrim attire of flat hat, staff and pack. (Blake uses this last detail only in *Europe 1*.) In traditional iconography, however, the addition of a blindfold to the pilgrim turns him into Error. It is this association that Blake uses for some of his old travellers. A traveller who is certainly in error is the Tiriel of the sixth drawing for the poem, compared by Robert Essick to the blind man tripping over his robes and groping forward in *All Religions are One* 9. The nature of this blind man’s errors is revealed by the tables of the Law above the text and the reference to “the confined nature of bodily sensation.” Since neither of these two old men has any of the attributes of a pilgrim, not even a staff, they clearly travel as wanderers, not pilgrims.

Old age in Blake’s illustrations is not necessarily a bad thing. (Anne Kostelanetz Mellor has noted the similarity in the iconography of Blake's Urizen and his Bards.) Only when old age makes no attempt to make new discoveries is it completely hidebound. When old age has definite pilgrim associations, there is hope that Error may be redeemed. The old man entering Death’s door may rise again renewed, as he does in the Blair illustrations. A similar figure, with two crutches, accepts the guidance of a child in “London,” and again in *Jerusalem* 84, where he is being led towards a Gothic church, a form of architecture which has redemptive associations for Blake. Some of Blake’s old men may not ever have fallen into error; for instance, the old man with a staff in *Night Thoughts 26* is an older version of the young traveller on the previous page, and his action of reaching towards a butterfly has similar implications to that of the child reaching towards a bird on the next page. The whole appearance of the picture, including its paradisal background, contradicts Young’s text which says that human happiness is a sad sight, and to rejoice is to be blind.

Young travellers in Blake’s work present fewer problems of interpretation. They may generally be regarded as mental travellers, on the pilgrimage of life. The earliest appears in *All Religions are One*, illustrating the text: “As none by travelling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more, therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists.” The spiritual journeys of pilgrims, dressed like this figure, are not “over known lands”—a fact which is relevant for reinforcing the positive implications of the similar figure in *Gates of Paradise* 14, the Traveller who “hasteth in the Evening” of his mental pilgrimage.

There are quite a number of such young travellers in *Night Thoughts*.

*Night Thoughts* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

**, Lift feeds the Murderer: Ingrate! he thrives On her own Meal; and then his Nurse Devours.

But, here, Lorenzo, the Delusion lies; That Solar Beauties, as it measures Life, It Life resembles too: Life speeds away From point to point, tho' seeming to stand still: The cunning Fugitive is swift by stealth; Too subtle is the Movement to be seen, Yet soon Man's Hour is up, and we are gone. Warnings point out our Danger, Gnomon, Time; As these are useless when the Sun is set; So these, but when more glorious Reason shines. Reason should judge in all: In Reason's eye, That Sedentary shadow travels hard; But such our Gravitation to the wrong, So prone our hearts to whisper what we wish, 'Tis later with the Wife, than he's aware; A Wilmington goes lower than the Sun; And all mankind mistake their Time of Day; Even
In some cases, such as illustrations 41 and 273, they are simply travellers through life. Nude, with only a staff to indicate his nature, the small figure in no. 3 seems courageous in undertaking his journey into the text; and in no. 25 he displays equal courage against the attacks of Passion and Calamities in the deserts of life. He may represent Mind, no. 11; Thought, no. 168; or a good man, no. 169 (the last two are dressed). Entering a Gothic door, opened by Death, in no. 61 (see fig. 9), he anticipates the pilgrimage of Los, which begins on the frontispiece of Jerusalem.

An attribute frequently found in association with Urizenic figures or Urizenic ideas is a pair of compasses. Its best known appearance is in the Frontispiece to Europe, called "The Ancient of Days" when printed separately.

It does not seem to me possible to establish a definite source for this compass-holding figure, since there are so many designs showing the Creator with compasses. The general background to Blake's use of the motif is given in Anthony Blunt's article "Blake's 'Ancient of Days': The Symbolism of the Compasses." The quotation from Proverbs viii. 27, to which Blunt refers, "when he set a compass upon the face of the depth," is relevant in spite of the fact that the reference to a compass is not to the instrument but to setting a boundary on the extent of the waters. The relevance arises via the medieval tradition (to which Blunt also refers) of representing the second day of Creation by compasses or dividers—'compasses' in Renaissance works and Blake's have identical arms; and via the passage from Paradise Lost written by George Cumberland into the copy of Europe in the British Museum Print Room. The passage refers to the Creation by the Son, through the power of the Father:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{in his hand} \\
\text{He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd} \\
\text{In Gods Eternal store, to circumscribe} \\
\text{The universe, and all created things:} \\
\text{One foot he center'd, and the other turn'd} \\
\text{Round through the vast profunditie obscure,} \\
\text{And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds,} \\
\text{This be thy Circumference, O World! (VIII, 224–31)}
\end{align*}
\]

It was the medieval and Renaissance symbolism of the compasses which enabled Blake to make the image of the Creation imply the attitude of rationalists. Blunt writes:

in the later Middle Ages the compasses were often shown with a ruler or set-square to represent a specific mathematical study, but they were still to be found as the attributes

29. Robert Essick commented on the number of such designs in his review of Keynes' 92 Pencil Studies, BS, IV (Fall 1971), 101.
associated with more general intellectual faculties. Ripa, for instance puts the compasses and set-square into the hand of Giudizio, and gives compasses and ruler to Consideratione. In these cases the presence of the mathematical instruments is intended to show that the conclusions of philosophy can only be arrived at by methods based on the logical and certain processes of mathematics.

Considered in more detail, Ripa’s compendium shows us that the Renaissance traditional uses of the symbol of the compasses played right into Blake’s hands. Not only were compasses given to figures representing the mathematical sciences, such as astronomy and geometry, but also to Natural Law, the Law which in Blake’s eyes was the basis of Deism, the Natural Religion.

Even more relevant to Urizen is the figure of Practice devised by Sig. Fuluio Mariotelli, and added to the 1630 edition of Ripa (see fig. 10). Practice is an old woman in mean, tawny-coloured clothes. She stands leaning forward to touch the ground with a large pair of compasses. In her other hand she holds a plummet. The compasses signify reason, necessary in all human affairs. Her downward gaze signifies that her concern is only with the lower part of the universe, which is also indicated by the base colour of her dress.  

Urizen, the upholder of the Law of Nature, ruler by Reason, and trapped by his worldly perspective is aptly defined by these images of Natural Law and Practice. The closest finished figure in Blake’s work to that of Practice is his Newton, for him an arch embodiment of Urizenic thought. The drawing in the Mellon collection, c. 1788, which is no. 6 of Keynes’ 92 Pencil Studies, may be seen as an intermediary between Practice and Blake’s Newton. This drawing shows the Creator crouched in a half-standing position, his gaze downwards towards the compasses which he holds with points down. The quotation beside the sketch is the one given above from Proverbs viii.27.

There are, of course, many paintings and drawings by other artists which use this symbolism of the practical, rational philosopher, and any one or more may have contributed to the particular forms in which Blake represents the idea. One detail, that of Urizen’s single arm, might have an emblematic source: the emblem with the motto “Labore et constantia,” showing only an arm with compasses, which was the signature of the house of Plantin, which produced many well-known emblem books—see, for instance, the title-page of Junius’ Emblemata (1566).

Blake’s earliest etched version of the figure with compasses belongs to about the same date as that ascribed by Keynes to the pencil study discussed above. In the tenth plate of the second series of There is No Natural Religion, there appears an old bearded man on all fours, like the

31. “… si potrà far la Pratica Vecchia con la testa e mani verso la terra, vestita seruilmente, di colore tanè, con un compasso grande aperto, & con una punta fitta in terra.” “Il compasso . . . significa la ragione, la quale è necessaria in tutto le cose humane.” “La faccia volta all’ingiu, mostra che la Pratica mira in basso solo quella parte di tutto l’universo, che si calpeste co’ piedì il che viene ancora significato dal colore della veste serulie, . . .”
Fig. 10. Cesare Ripa, "Prattica," *Iconologia*, 1630. Cambridge University Library.
later Nebuchadnezzar, holding compasses in his right hand and drawing or measuring a triangle. (The compasses of Natural Law touch parallel lines.) The proposition illustrated is “He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.”

The compasses became for Blake a means of making a rapid commentary on any view he regarded as limited by “the Ratio”—this involves a pun on the mathematical concept and the Latin, meaning “reason.” On *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 5, he drew what might be described as a small hieroglyph cryptically embodying his view of the philosophy of *Paradise Lost*. Under the reference to this work are, from left to right, a reclining figure, another with large compasses apparently instructing the first, and a serpent. In *Jerusalem* 12, when Los says:

> I saw the finger of God go forth
> Upon my Furnaces, from within the Wheels of Albion’s Sons:
> Fixing their Systems, permanent: by mathematic power
> Giving a body to Falsehood that it may be cast off for ever.
> With Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon with his own bow!

(ll. 10-14)

“Demonstrative Science” appears as a small marginal figure resting compasses upon a globe. Another creation myth is commented on by means of this symbol: Plato’s myth in the *Timaeus*. Blake’s third illustration to “Il Penseroso,” which, according to Gilchrist, has the title “The Spirit of Plato,” shows Jupiter, the rationalistic Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. Blake picked up the long tradition associating Jupiter with discursive reason, *ratio*, by showing him holding compasses and leaning wearily in his seat.

In illustrating *Night Thoughts*, Blake is much more critical of Demonstration than in the *Jerusalem* plate. When Young writes that at the death-bed of the good man “resistless Demonstration dwells,” Blake shows him personified on the next page (illustration 73) above the text. He is a young man with distorted features glaring over the edge of the box, compasses tucked beneath his arm, presumably in a gesture of concealment. There are cases in which Blake simply endorses Young’s sentiments, such as no. 293, where the compasses of “Love of Glory” refer merely to the worldliness of that glory, and the fact that the text refers to the construction of a building. There is some measure of agreement with Young also in no. 509, on the point that it is impossible for a telescope to discover God’s throne; but Blake emphasizes the restriction of the Newtonian attitude, which arrives at the nature of God by scientific deduction, by showing a man on his knees measuring a triangle on the ground with compasses, as in his *Newton* picture. On the other hand,

34. Ficino’s use of this idea is noted by Panofsky, *Dürer*, p. 169.
Young is strongly rebuked for his attitude to the education of children in no. 360 (see fig. 11). Young believed in the necessity of restraining children, even though this may be cruel: "Ah! what avails his Innocence? The Task / Injoin'd must discipline his early pow'rs." Blake represents the task as mathematical: a man holding large compasses points to a triangle he has drawn, and a child kneeling beside the triangle touches a line. The association with Practice makes it clear that Blake sees such discipline as forcing the child to concern itself only with the lower part of the universe, the realm of Practice.

A more complex and less obvious use of the association between compasses and Reason occurs in no. 444 (see fig. 12). Thomas Helmstadter comments in connection with this design that "Many of Young's glib generalizations throughout the Night Thoughts are innocent of much intellectual meaning." This leaves Blake to bring out the implications which Young does not perceive in his own words:

'Tis Heav'n's landsc Effort of Good-will to Man;  
When Pain can't bless, Heav'n quits us in Despair.

Reason absolves the Grief which Reason ends.

In the illustration, an old man in a blue robe kneels left beneath a rocky overhang, his palms together in prayer. Behind him strides a young man in green dragging thorns over his right shoulder. He has placed other thorns over the old man's back. Helmstadter rightly notes that the old man is Urizen in the fallen world of a cave: fallen Reason receiving a very dubious blessing from personified Pain. The idea of Pain as a blessing is a sick one. Helmstadter's identification is supported by a detail of which he takes no account: the thorns over the old man's back are in the form of a pair of compasses, so that Reason is indeed trapped here by the restrictions that he himself creates.

The traditional forms of images continue to appear in Blake's illustrations at the same time as such complex adaptations. Illustrating Gray's "Ode to Adversity," Blake combined elements from the figures of Doctrine and Practice to represent Adversity's rôle in the lines:

When first thy Sire to send on earth  
Virtue, his darling child, design'd,  
To thee [Adversity] he gave the heavenly birth,  
And bade to form her infant mind,  
Stern rugged nurse! thy rigid lore  
With patience many a year she bore:  
What sorrow was, thou bad'st her know,  
And from her own she learn'd to melt at others woe.

Adversity is shown as an old woman who sits, knees apart, feet crossed, so that her large left foot shows, and she is staring straight ahead: ele-

Fig. 11. Night Thoughts 360. British Library.
Fig. 12. *Night Thoughts* 444. British Library.
ments that characterize Doctrine. In her left hand, she has a closed book, touching the ground; in her right, she holds large compasses, also touching the ground, like those of Practice (see fig. 13). In combining the two figures, both of which he had used with Urizenic implications, Blake makes quite clear that he sees the miseries and “rigid lore” imposed on Virtue, which Gray thinks to Virtue’s ultimate benefit, as really impositions by the philosophy of Urizen.36 (Blake further supported his view by making the complete picture one of his many critical adaptations of the traditional image of Education: Virtue is kneeling in Adversity’s lap and writing on a large book or child’s drawing board.)

Blake established the particular significance that he wished to attach to symbols by means of repetitions with clear meaning before introducing variations. The process may be considered in relation to Night Thoughts 227 (see fig. 14), where again compasses are used in conjunction with other motifs, but this time understanding of the implications depends more on the context built up in preceding illustrations. This picture shows the back view of a nude youth holding a pair of compasses up to the sky with his right hand, and touching two small spheres with the points. His foot rests on another small sphere. Viewed in isolation, this could be taken as a simple illustration of Young’s “To rise in Science, as in Bliss, / Initiate in the secrets of the Skies.”

The picture adapts the figure of Theory (see fig. 15), who for Mario­tellli has a pair of compasses on her head, pointing upwards—in contrast to the figure of Practice.37 If we ignore the details of the sphere under the youth’s foot and his nudity, we could see the illustration as endorsing Young’s exalted view of the capacities of the theory of science. It would even be possible to take these details into account, and still think Blake was agreeing with Young. The youth might be a composite figure representing the truth of the theory of science, since Truth is traditionally a nude female with one foot on a small sphere, as an indication that she is above the things of this world.38 (Blake has her nude, though without the sphere, in no. 156.)

However, if we consider the context Blake had created by earlier illustrations, our interpretation must change. Towards the end of the previous Night (i.e. Night V), Young had been much concerned with Fort­une. Among the images Blake used for her was that of a nude female with her foot on a small sphere, in no. 208, adapting the traditional idea of Fortune and her wheel. (There is another variation after the design under discussion: in no. 249 the sphere is larger, the earth, and the

36. Irene Tayler rightly compares this figure of Adversity with that of Austerity, Night Thoughts 375—Tayler, p. 79.
37. “Onde facendosi la Theorica giovane, vestita nobilmente di color celeste, con la testa, e mani in alto, con le punte di un compasso verso il Cielo, in cima d’una scala: . . .”
38. The image appeared in the 1611 edition of Ripa, but the globe was not explained until 1630: “il mondo sotto l’ıpè, denota, che ella è superiore a tutte le cose del mondo, & di loro piu pretiosa, . . . .”
Fig. 13. Gray, Poems 38. From the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon.
(Mines, which support Arch-Angels in their State)
Our own? To rise in Science, as in Bliss,
Initiate in the Secrets of the Skies?
To read Creation; read its mighty Plan
In the bare Bofom of the Deity?
The Plan, and Execution, to collate?
To see, before each Glance of piercing Thought,
All Cloud, all Shadow blown remote; and leave---
No Mystery——but that of Love Divine,
Which lifts us on the Seraph’s flaming Wing,
From Earth’s Acedama, this Field of Blood,
Of inward Anguish, and of outward Ill,
From Darkness, and from Dust, to such a Scene?
Love’s Element! true Joy’s illustrious Home!
From Earth’s sad Contrast (now deplor’d) more fair.
What exquisite Vicissitude of Fate?
Blest Abolition of our blackest Hour!
Lorenzo! these are Thoughts that make man Man,
The Wise illumine, aggrandize the Great.

Fig. 14. *Night Thoughts* 227. British Library.
THEORIA.
Del Signor Fuluio Mariotelli.

Fig. 15. Cesare Ripa, "Theoria," Iconologia, 1630. British Library.
female figure has acquired crown and wings.)39 Returning now to no. 227, we may see the presence of the concept of Fortune. Moreover, Blake had so firmly established the meaning of compasses in his illustrations that their significance remains constant in spite of the new reference to the figure of Theory. With a knowledge both of traditional iconography and of the context Blake created within his work, we may see in this illustration the implication that Science is hide-bound by Reason (the compasses), and that trust in its ideas is as foolish as trust in the vicissitudes of Fortune.

The technique of transferring attributes from one personification to another to indicate his own views was one that Blake had begun to use as early as Poetical Sketches. In the Night Thoughts illustrations, he did not make his views so obvious as in the early work. In consequence, the uninitiated need not be offended, but those who are familiar with his pictorial conventions may find an underlying meaning in an apparently simple design.

Blake’s use of traditional symbols is by no means simplistic. Symbols like compasses may bear potentially redemptive associations as well as restrictive ones. Though most of Blake’s uses of the compasses motif have restrictive implications, they may express a genuine creative potential—when used in conjunction with energy and not against it. Anthony Blunt points out that in Christ in the Carpenter’s Shop, Christ is using compasses and set-square for his trade. In his hands they are creative, since in him reason and imagination are not in conflict.40

Symbols which are visually close may also be paired. Los’s tongs become the positive counterpart to Urizen’s compasses. In Jerusalem 6, Los labours at the furnaces using tongs as well as the hammer shown in earlier works. He is trying to create living forms where Urizen, now in the form of Los’s own Spectre, had created restricted mortal forms.

The female counterparts which Blake eventually devised to embody concepts related to those of Urizen are Vala and the Daughters of Albion. His most concentrated work on the development of the figure of Vala took place during the writing of the manuscript Vala/The Four Zoas. However, the coalescing of ideas for Vala can be seen in the illustrations for Young and Gray, which may be contemporary with the early stages of the manuscript.

The idea that “Blake’s conception of Vala came to him while he was

39. Blake’s other representations of Fortune draw on traditional images. Ripa’s version of her in a tree throwing down “varij instrumenti appartamenti à varie professioni, come scattri, libri, coroni, gioie, armi &c” becomes no. 210, where she throws down from the sky gold, baubles, a crown and what I take to be a cluster of leaves or fruit. No. 212, which concerns those who die beneath Fortune’s “load of lavish Grants” unites the idea of good and bad fortune: she is dressed in red and leans on the cornucopia of Plenty—the text refers to Abundance—which is held, appropriately, by Ripa’s Good Fortune; but this cornucopia showers out the darts of death as well as gold.

engaged on the *Night Thoughts*" was first suggested by H. M. Margoliouth. The details of his suggestion are: "Nature, Earth, Fortune, Venus may be her first name, but it is Vala (the Nature which can be a veil between man and his real life) that she is becoming, and most notably so in Night III, pp. 30 and 31"41—i.e. nos. 105 and 106. (There are other figures of a similar nature to the ones Margoliouth suggested, which I shall want to mention, some of which have more recently been considered by Morton Paley.)42

Some of the ideas for Vala began to develop much earlier than the illustrations to Young. The concept of the Female Will first appeared during Blake’s writing in his Notebook of poems for *Songs of Experience*. In these, some women are jealous and prudish, and some, because of these attitudes, impose crippling restrictions upon the lives of children.

One of the poems chosen for *Songs of Experience* is particularly interesting for the development that Blake made of the iconography of the illustration for later representations of Nature. There is nothing very oppressive about the illustration to "Infant Sorrow." The mother, or nurse, bending to pick up the naked child does not show any signs of repressing the eagerness expressed in his uplifted arms. Only the text reveals the child’s plight. However, Blake used the same child, with his predicament clearly expressed by visual means in an illustration to Gray’s "The Progress of Poesy," illustration 49 (see fig. 16). Gray’s text attributes Shakespeare’s powers to the inspiration of Nature:

> Far from the sun and summer gale,  
> In thy green lap has Nature's darling laid,  
> What time, where lucid Avon stray'd,  
> To him the mighty mother did unveil  
> Her awful face: the dauntless child  
> Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smil'd.

Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy!  
This can unlock the gates of Joy;  
Of Horror that, and thrilling Fears,  
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic Tears.

The child does indeed stretch up his arms in this picture, but he is not smiling. The female who bends over him is huge, dominating the child more completely than the one in "Infant Sorrow." Blake gives her some of the allegorical attributes demanded by Gray’s text: a veil that she lifts from her face and large keys, and there is a girl running across the front of the picture and pouring water from an urn, presumably representing the "sacred source of sympathetic Tears." Blake adds his own comment

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42. Paley, "Blake’s *Night Thoughts*: An Exploration of the Fallen World," in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, pp. 142-44. He discusses representations of Oppression (22), Life (105), Reason (151), Sense (162), Earth (185 & 405), the World (347), and Fortune (208, 210, 212, & 249).
Fig. 16. Gray, Poems 49. From the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon.
[115]
"First, in Fear's Volume, at the Page of Man—
Man's sickly Soul, she's torn'd, and rif'd for ever,
From Side to Side, can rev on nought but Time;
Here, in full Truth; Hereafter, in full Joy.
On Times, the promis'd, sure, eternal Down
Of Spirits, call'd in Travel thro' this Vale:
Nor of that Pillow shall my Soul depose;
For—Love Almighty! Love Almighty! (Sing,
Exult, Creation!) Love Almighty, reigns!
That Death of Death! That Cordial of Deflair!
And loud Eternity's triumphant Song!

Of Whom, no more.—For, O Thou Patron-God!
Thou God, and Mortal! Thence more God to Man!
Man's Theme eternal! Man's eternal Theme!
Thou canst not 'scape unjusr'd from our Praife.
Unjusr'd from our Praife can His escape,
Who, disembr'd from the Fathers, bows
The Heven of Heavens, to kis the distance Earth!
Breathes out in Agonies a soulless Soul!
Against the Cross, Death's Iron Sceptre breaks!
From famish'd Rosi plucks her human Poet!

Q. 3

" Thou art"

Fig. 17. Night Thoughts 533. British Library.
on Nature by showing her (head and arms only) leaning out of a yellow sphere, the lower part of which is a crescent: he thus combines the sun with the moon, symbol of Nature's fickleness. The addition of this moon suggests meanings for the other symbols which undermine the attitude expressed in the text—for Blake veils are delusive and restrictive, those keys could be for locking the child into Nature's world, and the pouring waters could be the waters of mortal generation.

This definitely identified Nature goddess enables one to interpret an earlier use of a similar Nature-Vala figure in *Night Thoughts*. In the text accompanying no. 533 (see fig. 17), Young exclaims, "Thou God, and Mortal! Thence more God to Man!" It is not immediately obvious who all the figures are that Blake used to illustrate this idea. That of Christ, the god-man, is easily identifiable, lying asleep or dead within the orb of the sun. There are three other figures within this sphere. Over him leans a large female, like Nature in the *Gray* illustration. She is in a grey garment, which forms a veil over her head, but shows her face. At Christ's feet is another woman in grey, who kneels and weeps. On close inspection, the 'couch' he lies on turns out to be a white-robed figure, with long hair tied back. Since Young's subject is partly Christ's mortality, and cross-reference to the *Gray* illustration suggests that he is here shown as subject to Nature, we may infer that these are the three Marys, who bore and tended his mortal body. Mary, the Virgin, and a Nature goddess thus coalesce during Blake's development of the concept of Vala.

Most of the other figures relevant to Vala in *Night Thoughts* represent ideas connected with Reason or the life of the senses. Just as the ideas of Reason and restrictive attitudes to the senses are connected in his writings, so he related the concepts iconographically. The appearance of Reason ("Ragione") in Ripa (see front cover) is like that used by Blake for Oppression in *Night Thoughts* 22 (see fig. 18): an armed and crowned woman (in Ripa she also has a briddled lion). Blake links the idea of oppression by Reason to that by religion by placing in Oppression's right hand a crozier, beside which are a cardinal's flat hat and a mitre.43 In adding these hats, Blake refers those familiar with the iconographic tradition to yet another aspect of tyranny: ambition. Ripa's Ambition is trying on a number of hats, including a crown, mitre and flat hat.

When, in later designs for *Night Thoughts*, Blake represents figures specifically named as Reason, the only iconographic attribute remaining from those so far mentioned is the crown, but she gains sensuous long yellow hair. One example is no. 151 (see fig. 19), where Reason is opposing Faith.44 She sits facing forward with one large foot appearing

43. Blake's religious comment in this illustration was noted by Thomas Helmstadter, "Blake and Religion: Iconographical Themes in the *Night Thoughts*," *SIR*, X (1971), pp. 202-3.
44. Morton Paley calls the large woman Virtue, a possible identification, but Reason is icono-
I rue the Riches of my former Fate;
Sweet Comfort's blasted Clusters make me sigh:
I tremble at the Blessings once so dear;
And every Pleasure pains me to the Heart.
Yet why complain? or why complain for One!
Hangs out the Sun his Lucre but for me?
The single Man? are Angels all beside?
I mourn for Millions: 'tis the common Lot;
In this shape, or in that, has Fate entail'd
The Mother's throes on all of woman born,
Not more the Children, than sure Heirs of Pain.

War, Famine, Pest, Volcano, Storm, and Fire,
Intellect, Broils, Oppression, with her heart
Wret up in triple Bras, besiege mankind:
God's Image, disinherited of Day,
Here plung'd in Mines, forgets a Sun was made:
There Beings deathless as their haughty Lord,

Fig. 18. Night Thoughts 22. British Library.
On passive Nature, before Thought was born?
My Birth's blind Bigot! And'd with local Zeal!
No: Reason re-baptiz'd me when adult;
Weigh'd True and Fals'd in her impartial Scale;
My Heart became the Convert of my Head;
And made that Choice, which once was but my Fate.
"On Argument alone my Faith is built!"
Reason pursu'd is Faith; and unpursu'd is False.
Where Proof invites, 'tis Reason, then, no more Free.
And such our Proof, that, or our Faith is right.
Or Reason lies, and Heaven design'd it wrong?
Absolve we This? What, then, is Blasphemy?

Fond as we are, and justly fond of Faith,
Reason, we grant, demands our First regard.
The Mother honour'd, as the Daughter dear;
Reason the Root, fair Faith is but the Flower's
The fading Flower shall die; But Reason lives and
Immortal, as her Father in the Skies.
When Faith is Virtue, Reason makes it so.

Fig. 19. Night Thoughts 151. British Library.
from her yellow robe, reminding one of Urizen by her position. She holds scales as required by the text. In no. 259, she is crowned, but with her hair up. No. 300 reduces her iconography still further, making it possible (as with Time and Death) for cross-references to be seen between figures embodying concepts which in Blake’s view are related: her only distinguishing attribute here is the long yellow hair. 45

The long yellow hair, the crown and the yellow robe worn by the Reason of no. 151, are used by Blake in various combinations to characterize Earth, Life and Sense, since he sees these as related preoccupations encouraged by the restrictions of Reason, all of them aspects of Vala. The rationalist view of Eternity is also identified by means of the same iconography. Since Young even describes Eternity as a queen: “ETERNITY now reigns alone! / Awful Eternity! offended Queen!” Blake can depict her in nos. 435 and 436 with a crown and yellow hair, showing his view of such an attitude to Eternity while being apparently faithful to the text.

While the Earth of no. 405 has the crown and hair, and is fully dressed, that of no. 185 is bare-breasted. Nudity in Renaissance iconography can create problems of interpretation. In many cases, it implies a divine quality: in Titian’s Sacred and Prophane Love the sacred figure is the nude one, and in Ripa the figures of Verity and Idea are nude—though the latter has a veil. On the other hand, Natural Law is also nude to the waist, with long free hair, and Nature is completely nude with swelling breasts. Blake’s nude figures may equally well be divine or creatures of nature, though semi-nudity can the more easily be given a lascivious appearance. Earth in no. 185 is one of these semi-nudes. So also is the only one of the named illustrations of Nature where Young’s text left Blake free to choose his own representation. 46 This is no. 35, where she is half-clad, in red and with a red chaplet, presumably of flowers. Blake’s World appears fully dressed, in unexpectedly classical attire in no. 347, with the yellow hair and crown of Reason. (She sits on a large sphere.) Life, on the other hand, still with the crown and hair, is completely nude, in nos. 105 and 106.

Blake’s allegorical representations of Sense are more complex. There are some which do relate to Vala. When Young writes:

I grant the Muse
Has often blusht at her degenerate Sons,
Retain’d by Sense to plead her filthy Cause:

Blake makes a comment on enslavement to false appearance, while re-

45. No. 229 shows a surprising failure on Blake’s part to comment on Young’s view. He accepts Young’s designation of Reason as an angel.
46. In the text for no. 465 Young described her in detail.
Then neareft These, when Others most Remote;  
And All, ere long, shall be remote, but These.  
How dreadful, Then, to meet them all alone,  
A Stranger! Unacknowledg'd! Unapprove'd!  
Now woo them; wed them; bind them to thy breast;  
To win thy Wit, Creation has no more.  
Or if we with a Fourth, it is a Friend;  
But Friends, how mortal? Dangerous the Desire.

**Fig. 20. Night Thoughts 81. British Library.**
jecting Young’s prudishness, as Paley has noted.⁴⁷ Sense is here (no. 162) a nude figure with the same crown and hair; perhaps related to Venus, since Cupid with his bow is sitting on her. She lies looking at herself in a mirror, as did the Reason-catterpillar of no. 17. To the right of the picture sits a Muse wearing a traditional laurel wreath and playing a flute. Her enslavement to Sense is indicated by a chain on her left ankle.

On the other hand, in no. 81 (see fig. 20), Blake shows Sense as a much more positive figure. Young’s theme here is

the wilderness of Joy,
Where Sense runs Savage, broke from Reason’s chain,
And sings false Peace, till smother’d by the Pall.

In the illustration, she does wear bracelets, suggesting her capacity for allurement.⁴⁸ However, Blake clearly delights in her freedom from the chain of Reason, the gyve of which has remained on her right foot. She is certainly not “savage” but beautiful and nude with long hair, but no crown.⁴⁹ She dances gaily in a country landscape, unaware of the Pall about to fall on her. Her beauty and gaiety, and the pity evoked for her plight, suggest that the Senses freed are truly divine, not subject to the false goddess, Vala.

Blake’s iconography is not inflexible. Needing both Reason and Sense for no. 119, he avoided using identical figures. His constant sensitivity to possible biblical situations suggested by Young’s text led him to use for his design a representation of Adam and Eve after the Fall, nude but for fig leaves. Eve’s long yellow hair connects her with Blake’s other earth-bound female figures.

On at least one occasion, Blake’s sceptical attitude towards Young’s sources of inspiration took him almost away from allegorical convention into the world of satire. When Young speaks of “Beings of sublime, immortal Make,” to whom “How shocking is All Joy, whose End is sure,” (no. 520) (see fig. 21), Blake shows personified falling and dead Joys in his usual allegorical manner, but the “Being of sublime, immortal Make” is a young lady fashionably dressed, in a pink robe bound below the breasts, and a blue flat hat.

⁴⁸ Cf. the figure below the text in Jerusalem 11.
⁴⁹ Anne Mellor describes this figure as an “image of liberated sensuality”—p. 178. It should be noted that although the preponderance of Young’s argument is against this world, there is a brief moment when he acknowledges its beauty, and the divine element in the senses. In Night VI (no. 243), he speaks of “senses, which inherit Earth and Heavens” and exhorts Lorenzo to “Enjoy the various Riches Nature yields” and to

Take in, at once, the Landscape of the world,
At a small Inlet, which a Grain might close,
And half create the wondrous World, they see.
Our Senses, as our Reason, are Divine.
But for the magic Organ’s powerful charm,
Earth were a nude, uncolour’d Chaos still.
Fig. 21. *Night Thoughts* 520. British Library.
Blake's deities of "Vegetative Existence," Urizen and Vala, seem to belong intransigently to his private world. They seem to exist in a sphere of being far remote from eighteenth-century poetry such as Young's, with its abstract mode of thought, its essentially rationalistic ethic, and its decayed allegory in the form of scarcely visualized personification. However, by bringing to bear on Young's work (and Gray's) the allegorical conventions of Renaissance iconographers, Blake was able not only to revitalize eighteenth-century personifications, but also to make apparent the traditional basis of his own mythological figures.

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