

THE FALL AND REDEMPTION OF THE NATIONS IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE

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In the poetry of William Blake, all of space and time, and all the forms which appear in the physical regions of earth, have their origin in the spiritual realms of Eternity. That is, all that exists first becomes manifest in the holy fires of God's love and imagination where "every Particular is a Man, a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus".¹ This is so because, in Eternity, which Blake equates with the Golden Age of Innocence, all individual forms are so endowed with the spiritual qualities of the divine humanity with which they are consubstantial that each Cloud, Clod of Clay, Valley, Hill, Flower and Herb is endowed with a human face, form and voice (as may readily be gathered from the text and pictures of "The Book of Thel").

In Innocence, every Minute Particular of existence is not only one in spirit with Jesus, but also with the feminine emanation of Jesus, whom Blake calls "Jerusalem",² and whom he visualises as both the "Bride" of the "Lamb of God", as well as the holy city of Jerusalem built on Mount Zion in Eternity:

I see thy Form, O lovely, mild Jerusalem, Wing'd with Six Wings ...
Thy forehead bright, Holiness to the Lord, with Gates of Pearl
Reflects Eternity;
I see thy mountains & thy hills
And valleys & thy pleasant Cities....
I see the River of Life & Tree of Life,
Bells of silver round thy knees living articulate
Comforting sounds of love & harmony, & on thy feet

Germany, Poland & the North wooed my footsteps; they found
My Gates in all their mountains & my curtains in all their vales;
The furniture of their houses was the furniture of my chamber.
Turkey & Grecia saw my instruments of music; they arose,
They seiz'd the harp, the flute, the mellow horn of Jerusalem's joy;
They sounded thanksgiving in my courts. Egypt and Lybia heard,
The swarthy sons of Ethiopia stood round the Lamb of God
Enquiring for Jerusalem: he led them up my steps to my altar.³

This passage evokes the mystical union of all the Nations of Earth with Jesus and his Bride, Jerusalem, and is particularly suggestive of the delight of all beings, throughout the sacred landscape of Eternity, in participating in the holy marriage of the divine couple. It locates the "Source of the Sacred" in the divine imagination of God whose love for all his children is manifest in their ceaseless participation in the holy unions of Jesus and Jerusalem. Here, a "continual cloud of salvation" rises from the myriads who are devotees of Jerusalem, and "the Four-fold World" rejoices "among the pillars of Jerusalem between [her] winged Cherubim".⁴ Since everything that exists in Eternity is a portion of God, and "all equal share Divine Benevolence & joy," the multitude of spirits filling the air with rejoicing appear as "One Family, One Man blessed for ever."⁵

When the spiritual inhabitants of Eternity expand the wings of their souls fully into God's light, they themselves become godlike in being able to "Contract or Expand Space" and "Time" at will, but this ability contains within itself the potential to contract from Gods into their symbolic opposite: into the serpent forms of "Worms" who have lost the "perfect Integrity" of their divinely "Human Organs".⁶ An Eternal spirit may even darken and contract to such a degree that portions of the "Eternal Man" become scattered throughout the physical universe.

Blake equates the creation of the physical universe with such a dire event in which

The Bodies in which all Animals & Vegetation, the Earth & Heaven
Were contain'd in the All Glorious Imagination, are wither'd & darken'd ...
The Golden Gate of Havilah and all the Garden of God
Was caught up with Sun in one day of fury and war.
The Lungs, the Heart, the Liver, shrunk away far distant from Man
And left a little slimy substance floating upon the tides...
The visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,
Are become weak visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows of
death...⁷

This darkening and contraction of the divine spiritual form of man results in all the heavenly beings who once shone brightly in his bosom becoming embodied in the physical matrices of the cosmos and so losing their divine

human forms.

The cataclysmic events which cause the "Four Universes" of paradisaical Innocence, created by the four Princes, or Zoas, of one of the blessed eternal, Albion, to become "chaotic" and sink "downwards in dire ruin"⁸ are as follows. First, Albion succumbs to a deadly "torpor" of the soul in which he falls "asleep", and in this state, succumbs to the sluggish, deluded reasonings of his Prince of Intellect, Urizen. That is, Albion has nightmarish dreams which he mistakes for reality, and in which he is persuaded by Urizen that Jerusalem, because she is beloved by all in Eternity, is a "harlot". Urizen, rearing himself against the God of Eternity in mistaken holy zeal, demands that all the female emanations of Albion cease from becoming one in spirit with Jerusalem, and that they cast her out of their bosoms, homes and temples and revile her as a "whore".

When one remembers how central a role Jerusalem played in sustaining all the spiritual children of Albion in Innocence, the tragic implications of this reversal become apparent. Blake describes the reviled Jerusalem as follows:

Naked Jerusalem lay before the Gates upon Mount Zion
 The Hill of Giants, all her foundations levell'd with the dust,
 Her Twelve Gates thrown down, her children carried into captivity,
 Herself in chains, ... & the twelve gates were fill'd
 With blood, from Japan eastward to the Giants causeway west
 In Erin's Continent; and Jerusalem wept upon Euphrates' banks
 Disorganiz'd: an evanescent shade scarce seen or heard among
 Her children's Druid Temples, dropping with blood...⁹

In Jerusalem's place, Urizen elevates Babylon (also known as Rahab, or Vala)¹⁰, and gives her "power over... The concave Earth" which he creates in the dark abyss of "Entuthon Benython" - a name in itself suggestive of the travesty of heavenly bliss which Urizen creates in the dark voids beneath the realms of both Eden and Beulah in Innocence.¹¹ With the entrenchment of Babylon, who becomes adored by all the nations of Earth in place of Jerusalem, a reversal of such tragic dimension takes place that Blake describes it as an attempt on the part of Urizen "to destroy the Lamb [of God,

Jesus] & usurp the Throne of God".¹²

This story clearly has parallels with the story of the fall of Lucifer and the revolt of the rebel angels, an event which Blake illustrated pictorially, and aspects of which he develops in poetically evoking the wars in heaven consequent on Urizen's rejection of the divine vision of love. It also has very close parallels with the Kabbalistic and Gnostic versions of how the divine light of the Eternal Man becomes scattered into the dark abyss, and of how the female aspect of the eternal God of love is in exile until the world is released from its physical, and, in Blake's view, "mind-forg'd manacles".¹³

Jerusalem herself is persuaded by Urizen's emphatic moral censoring of the free loves of Eternity, in which all aspired to mingle their essences with Jerusalem, that she is a "sinner", and laments the drastic change in her status in elegaic verse in which all the images of sacred landscape we have already encountered become reversed:

My tents are fall'n! my pillars are in ruins! my children dash'd
Upon Egypt's iron floors & the marble pavements of Assyria!
I melt my soul in [false] reasonings among the towers of Heshbon.
Mount Zion is become a cruel rock, & no more dew
Nor rain, no more the spring of the rock appears, but cold
Hard & obdurate are the furrows of the mountain of wine & oil:
The mountain of blessing is itself a curse & an astonishment.
The hills of Judea are fallen with me into the deepest hell.
Away from the Nations of the Earth & from the Cities of the Nations
I walk to Ephraim. I seek for Shiloh. I walk like a lost sheep
Among precipices of despair; in Goshen I seek for light
In vain, and in Gilead for a physician and a comforter. ...
They are become narrow places in a little and dark land,
How distant far from Albion! his hills and his valleys no more
Receive the feet of Jerusalem: they have cast me quite away,
And Albion is himself shrunk to a narrow rock in the midst of the sea!¹⁴

Jerusalem is not only cast out of the affections of all the inhabitants of all the nations, but, ultimately, the soft fibres of her spiritual human form are "defaced" beyond recognition by Vala-Babylon who, begins

To weave Jerusalem a body according to her will,
A Dragon form on Zion Hill's most ancient promontory...
a form against the Lamb of God, oppos'd to Mercy.¹⁵

What Blake implies here is that Babylon, like Urizen, destroys the divine vision of love in Innocence and defaces the human form of the Eternal Man, Albion, because she falsely construes the holy unions of Eternity – in which all beings commingled essences in fiery ardours of adoration of God – as sinful harlotry.¹⁶

Filled with self-righteous wrath at the sins of Albion's Children, Urizen builds for himself in the "Satanic Void" a "Mighty Temple" which is constructed of all the Nations:

Jordan sprang beneath its threshold, bubbling from beneath
 Its pillars: Euphrates ran under its arches: ...
 Canaan is his portico. ...
 Egypt is the eight steps within. ...
 Within is Asia & Greece, ornamented with exquisite art.
 China & India & Siberia are his temples for entertainment.
 Poland & Russia & Sweden, his soft retired chambers.
 Britain is Los's Forge .

(This is so because it is the nation which Blake perceives as having the most potential – perhaps through his own work – to restore the divine face of humanity to Albion, who represents Britain, as well as all the other Nations desiccated by Urizen's sterile visions of sin.)¹⁷

Once Urizen has destroyed the unity and humanity of all beings in Innocence, there is perpetual weeping among the Valleys and Hills of Albion where once Jerusalem walked and the landscape becomes one where, in place of the "Golden clime" of Eternity, incessant "storms & snows" prevail, and where "howling winds" and "roaring seas" create chaos – particularly around the white Rock of Ages on which Albion's sleeping form is laid. Here, "the famish'd Eagle screams on boney Wings" and "the Wolf of famine howls".¹⁸

However, while Urizen, Albion's Prince of Reason, is intent on rooting out sin and building "the Mundane Shell" of the wintry world, Albion's sleeping humanity is defended by Los, his Prince of Imagination, who tries valiantly to maintain his belief in the joys once created by the holy unions of Jerusalem and Jesus. Labouring at his forge in Britain, he

ceaselessly tries to restore warmth to the cold, fallen wintry world created by Urizen's false visions of good and evil. His voice is everywhere heard, summoning Albion to awaken from his Sleep and rousing Albion's Children to cast off the mental chains which bind them in misery:

Fear not, my Sons ... we shall be united in Jesus.
Will you suffer this Body of Doubt that Seems but Is Not,
To occupy the very threshold of Eternal Life?....
Contemning the Divine Vision & Fruition, Worshipping..
The God of This World, & the Goddess Nature,
Mystery, Babylon the Great...¹⁹

Los is the hero-figure in Blake's vision of the Fall and Redemption of man since it is he who, by never losing faith in the divine vision of love, labours to create "Heavens... within the Mundane Shell" so as to "awake the Prisoners of Death", who are Albion's Children, and Albion himself, and restore them to their "eternal day". Labouring at his Furnaces of Inspiration, Los seeks continually to restore warmth to the wintry world created by Urizen and to rebuild Jerusalem in the hearts of mankind.²⁰ Blake describes Los as striding from Furnace to Furnace, keeping the fires of eternal delight burning, and contending against all the cruelties forged in the dark fires of the human heart and brain:

The blow of his Hammer is Justice, the swing of his Hammer Mercy,
The force of Los's Hammer is eternal Forgiveness...²¹

Los's ardour for the divine is so passionate, and his vigilance against all that threatens to defeat and misinterpret divine love so constant, that he ultimately succeeds in rousing Albion from his "Sleep". When Albion awakens, he is smitten by remorse and horror of the sordid selfishness into which all his Children have fallen and cries:

...O my Cities & Counties,
Do you sleep? rouze up! Eternal Death is abroad!

Casting himself into the Furnaces of Los to destroy his fallen, spectral

self, he finds that, because God's mercy is indeed abundant, and the divine vision of generous love espoused by Los a reality,

...the Furnaces became
Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine.
And all the Cities of Albion rose from their Slumbers, and All
The Sons & Daughters of Albion on soft clouds, waking from Sleep....
Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds
Of Heaven, Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity.²²

When Albion's senses are fully restored to their original integrity, he reassumes his former ability to create "Space" and "Time, according to the wonders Divine of Human Imagination" where everything that exists has a divine human form – even "the Words of the Mutual Covenant Divine", which appear as riders "On Chariots of gold & jewels, with Living Creatures... starry & flaming with every colour".²³

Then a great cry of thanksgiving is heard from all the "Thirty-two Nations of the Earth":

Where is the Tree of Good & Evil that rooted beneath the cruel heel
Of Albion's Spectre, the Patriarch Druid? [Urizen] Where are all his Human
Sacrifices
For Sin in War & in the Druid Temples of the Accuser of Sin, beneath
The Oak Groves of Albion that cover'd the whole Earth beneath his
Spectre?
Where are the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory that grew on
Desolation,
The Fruit of Albion's Poverty Tree....?²⁴

In the short space of this paper, I have tried to follow a few of the many of Blake's strands of imagery related to the landscape of heaven and hell, and to indicate something of the cosmic scope of his poetic endeavour. From his sustained use of symbolic landscape, several clear spiritual themes emerge. A prime one is that human beings will labour in sorrow until the clear understanding dawns that the Selfhood is nothing, and the "most sublime act is to set another before you", as Christ did in his willing act of self-sacrifice on the Cross.²⁵

Closely related to this is Blake's perception that

... Man is Love

As God is Love; every kindness to another is a little Death
In the Divine Image, nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood.²⁶

Blake's depiction of the Divine Marriage of Jesus and Jerusalem as the prototype of all the other unions in *Innocence*, implies that the divinity manifests itself, even on this fallen earth, equally in the masculine and feminine aspects of all things. A corollary of this is that no cruel moral or religious fetters need to be placed on the imaginative, artistic and loving energies of humans, once they know, beyond doubt, that everything is holy because the divine human form dwells within every particle of space and time. That is, God is a God of love who never abandons, or absconds from, this world of mixed joy and sorrow, but is immanent in it.

All of this is what Blake implies when he avers that now "the time returns again" when "our souls exult" for the "hills and valleys" of the Nations which once saw Jerusalem walk among them, dispensing beauty and harmony, will do so again, and so "Receive the Lamb of God to dwell / In [their] "green & pleasant bowers".²⁷

The ultimate restoration of Jerusalem to her rightful place as the Emanation of all beings in *Innocence* in Eternity ensures that they are once again united to Jesus in whom Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love meet together so that the state of satanic Accusation is swept away, and the unity of all beings through continual mutual forgiveness of sins assured. This is the "Spirit of the Place" which Blake terms Eden in Eternity.

REFERENCES

- ¹ William Blake, *Jerusalem* 91, 30-31, *Complete Poems*, edited Geoffrey Keynes, 738.
- ² *ibid.*, 86, 1-32, 730-31.
- ³ *ibid.*, 79, 36-52, 720-21.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, 79, 56-59, 721.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, 55, 8-9, 46, 686-87.
- ⁶ *ibid.*, 55, 36-37, 686.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, 49, 13-22, 679.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, 59, 10, 17, 691.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, 78, 21-29, 719.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, 78, 15-20, 719.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, 78, 13-17, 719.
- ¹² *ibid.*, 76, 18-20, 719

¹³ London, "Songs of Experience", 9, 216. The idea that man is in bondage in the fallen world of Experience is sustained by Blake throughout his poetic dramatisation of the Fall, and the imagery of chains and fetters can readily be related to those in the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, in which the divine light is seen as imprisoned in "husks" or "shells" of matter. Such issues are beyond the scope of this paper but have been adumbrated by critics such as Kathleen Raine, Desiree Hirst, and Harold Bloom. My own extensive but as yet, unpublished, research in this field leads me to a conclusion similar to that expressed by Peter Sorensen in *William Blake's Recreation of Gnostic Myth: Resolving the Apparent Incongruities*. Lewiston, New York/Salzburg Austria, 199537: "I am convinced that with few exceptions, femaleness in Blake's poetry is *deliberately* portrayed as fallen, sucked into the Urizenic material universe as part of Blake's Gnostic mythos. This... is not the result of the failure or fragmentation of mind, myth or language, or any other such postmodernist snare" (by which Sorensen also implies that feminist critics such as Susan Fox, Ann Mellors, and Alicia Ostriker are misguided in their feminist bias).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 79, 1-17, 720.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 80, 35-36, 79, 722-23.

This sort of imagery unfortunately seems to offend those feminist critics of Blake who do not grasp the universality of Blake's symbolism, such as Diana Hume George who, in "The Feminine in Blake", 185-87 (in Harold Bloom, ed. & intro. *William Blake: Modern Critical Views*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), writes: "The image of woman in *Jerusalem* solidifies... into unfortunate extremes... her aspect in the fallen world... is ghastly... Blake forgot his own first rule. Women... are not portrayed as "Minute Particulars," but as abstractions of the Female Will, utterly identified with nature... Blake resented nature and what he called the Female Will, and he probably also resented real women as embodiments of those forces."

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 81, 3-4, K 723-4, in which Vala confesses self-righteously to replacing the free loves of Innocence with "chastity" and turning the "Images of Love" offered by Merlin, a man of pity and mercy, in the image of Jesus, "out into the streets for Harlots, to be food for the stern Warrior." Blake's perception of fallen Vala as the obverse of Jerusalem in Innocence may have been influenced by the doctrine of the double Shekhinah found in the Kabbalistic Book *Bahir* and expounded on by the Provençal kabbalists, as well as by the Gnostic doctrine of the double Sophia. According to Gershom Scholem, in *Origins of the Kabbalah*, (ed. & revised by R. Zwi Werblowsky) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, 91, "the Gnostics, especially those of the Valentian school, developed the idea of two aeons, that are both called Sophia. One, the "upper Sophia", is high above, in the world of the pleroma; the other, however, which is also related to the symbolism of "the virgin of light", is found at its lower end.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 58, 21-41, 690.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 94, 1-4, 15-16, 741.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 93, 18-25, 741.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 76, 23-26, 716.

²¹ *ibid.*, 88, 49-50, 731.

²² *ibid.*, 96, 36-43, 744.

²³ *ibid.*, 98, 31, 41-43, 746. Harold Bloom (in "Jerusalem", *William Blake*, 96) does not see Blake's promise of renewed joy as being as replete with a sense of renewal of the lord's presence in the "city" as is Ezekiel's prophecy in 48:35. He finds Blake's evocation of the restoration of Jerusalem to Eternity "more restricted and warier" claiming that "the Judgment will restore London to Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will still be a smelting furnace of mind, subject to the alternation of Beulah and Eden, creative repose and the artist's activity". However, his conclusions are based on too narrow a reading of Eden and Beulah. If these are seen as the places in which Jesus and Jerusalem walk, conversing with their children, all of whom emulate their holy unions of Jesus and Jerusalem - as outlined in this paper - then Blake's vision can be seen as perfectly in harmony with that of Ezekiel, and also with the kabbalistic concept of the Grand Jubilee at the end of time.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 98, 47-53, 746.

²⁵ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 7, 17, 151. In his Gnostic interpretation of Blake's work, Peter J. Sorensen, in *William Blake's Recreation of Gnostic Myth: Resolving the Apparent Incongruities*. Lewiston, New York/Salzburg Austria, 1995, 40, rightly perceives Jerusalem as a Sophia figure who, "not having power to redeem herself... relied upon the merits of the gnostic redeemer, who was able to awaken the divine lighttrapped in mankind and in the creation, allowing it to escape back to its point of origin. The redeemer accomplished this, not through blood atonement, but through the conveying of gnosis, or secret knowledge'.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 96, 26-28, 743.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 77, 9-12, 718.