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尋找精微個相：布雷克與寓言體

In Search of Minute Particulars: William Blake and
Allegory

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摘要

本論文延續近年布雷克(William Blake)研究的歷史化典範，即重視其歷史脈絡如何形塑布雷克的思想及詩學，以及布雷克作為當代的基進派如何透過其文學實踐批判當代的意識形態。然而，此一典範中對於詩學形式的研究之不足尚待彌補。本論文宣稱形式乃意識形態的載體，此形式形塑了社會文本及其論述霸權。本論文所探討的形式即為寓言體，並將寓言體視為不只是一種文學文類，而是一種思考模式與論述形式：此形式具有隱喻及換喻的雙重性，在語義上有互文性及多義性。十七世紀以來寓言體的形式漸漸由隱喻及換喻的雙重性，轉為換喻的一元性，並經由洛克(John Locke)、柏克(Edmund Burke)、潘恩(Tom Paine)迄柯立芝(S. T. Coleridge)建立起一個具保守主義特徵的，意識形態的形式霸權。本論文以布雷克的《耶路撒冷》(*Jerusalem*)與《拉奧孔》(*Laocoön*)兩作品為例，探討布雷克對寓言體的使用如何形成一意識形態批判，抵抗當代的形式霸權。並將探討布雷克「精微個相」的概念與此一概念的詩學實踐如何改造寓言體，恢復其隱喻及換喻的雙重性，並成為他的基進詩學的基礎。



Abstract

Two of the paradigms in William Blake scholarship – analyzing the inner structure of Blake’s symbolism and contextualizing Blake in his time, can be integrated in an ideological criticism. The poetic form in Blake is profoundly associated with the eighteenth-century radicalisms their conservative counter-forces. Blake’s discursive interaction with his time is as much reflected in the content, the direct statements of his thought, as in his form, which is the major carrier of his critique of contemporary ideology.

The form on which this thesis concentrates is allegory, which reflects the contemporary ideology most profoundly. From seventeenth to eighteenth century there emerge anxieties about and suspicions of allegorical expressions and its effectuality and authenticity to facilitate and secure genuine communication and the acquisition of knowledge. Allegory, as a form of expression encompassing multiple levels of meaning and confounding disparate materials, has become a threat to clear knowledge and unalienated communication.

Blake wrote at a time of the crisis in allegory, which lost its supremacy at the rise of rationalism and neoclassicism from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. The first chapter surveys several important cultural and intellectual paradigms such as puritan aesthetics, neoclassicism and some linguistic organicisms to demonstrate the increasing anxiety about the allegorical form and the nascent preference for a certain form of allegory. It then concentrates on some key thinkers such as John Locke, Edmund Burke, S. T. Coleridge and Tom Paine to see how the anxiety about allegory is constitutive of their thinking and what they provide as the solution. It argues specifically that these individual thinkers virtually contribute to a hegemony of the metonymic dimension of allegory by downplaying its metaphoric complexity.

In counteracting the hegemony, Blake develops the idea of the minute particular with two later works, *Jerusalem* and *Laocoön*, which are discussed in chapter two and three respectively. By the allegorical as well as counter-allegorical techniques of parataxis, repetition, and dramatization in *Jerusalem*, Blake presents a rich array of minute particulars that question and react to the ideologies and politics and counters the hegemony from neoclassicism to the prestige of metonymic allegory. This rhetorical politics is advanced in *Laocoön*, in which the very nature of allegory is taken into question. The third chapter on *Laocoön* demonstrates how Blake makes his allegorical style a self-undoing irony, and realizes a main source of the contemporary politics of allegory, money and the commodity culture. All these formal manipulations or experimentations are Blake's poetic commitment to searching for the minute particulars – the troubling, haunting residues that threaten allegorical purity and force an ongoing dialectics and dynamics.

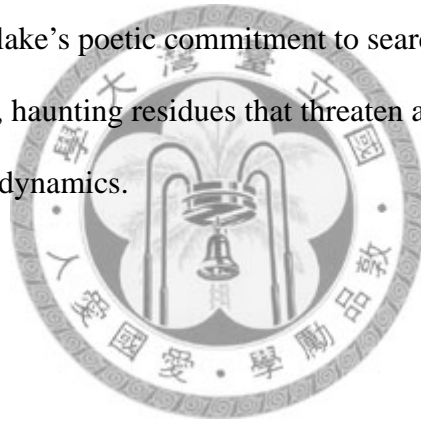


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List of Abbreviations

- E David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed., 1988.
All Blake quotations are from this edition.
- A *America: A Prophecy*
- M *Milton: A Poem in Two Books*
- MHH *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- J *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*
- VLJ *A Vision of the Last Judgment*





Introduction: The Ideology of the Allegorical

The Blake academic industry since the twentieth century is virtually inaugurated by the Northrop Frye's comprehensive study in Blake's system. In 1947, Frye produced his magisterial *Fearful Symmetry*, mightily intervening into Blake criticism, establishing Blake as a definitive literary monument whose voice is a continuation of a tradition unacknowledged by earlier criticism. Frye shrugs off the doubt of Blake's sanity by articulating a grand system of mythology on his behalf. For Frye, the value of a poem is its radical autonomy: "A poem's 'meaning' is its existence: as a modern poet [Archibald MacLeish] has said, poetry should not mean but be" (115). Art, as he finds in Blake poetry, is the radical disinterestedness that rejects utility and external interpretation, defying secondary concerns for moral or political issues that are outside the realm of pure aesthetic: "what is usually called allegory, that is, art the meaning of which points away from itself toward something that is not art, is a profane abomination" (115-16). Frye esteems Blake's poetry to be "mythopoeic": mythical but not obscurantist, because his poetic practice has not alienated the readers but realized the universal imaginative faculty. For Frye, Blake's myth achieves intelligible coherence in Frye's reconstruction, but this revelation of timeless consciousness contributes to Frye's definition of the Western humanity in general.

For Frye, allegory is the form of expression that draws from external resources to create denotations and subtexts, that "points away from [its literal self] toward something else" (116). Allegory is created with metaphors that can only partially illustrate a certain quality of the subject rather than the subject itself. For example:

The artist, contemplating the hero, searches in his memory for something that reminds him of the hero's courage, and drags out a lion. But here we no longer have two real things: we have a correspondence of abstractions. The

hero's courage, not the hero himself, is what the lion symbolizes. And a lion which symbolizes an abstract quality is not a real but a heraldic lion. Some lions are cowardly; some are old and sick; some are cubs; some are female.

(116)

Frye considers this allegorical act of comparison insufficient. To understand Blake, Frye demands, one always has to recognize and be absorbed into a systematic, synchronic, self-sufficient framework within Blake's grand poems. For Frye, the idea of allegory is the secondary meaning-making that is always about what Blake wants to say, and what he wants to teach us, *by* his words. Frye insists that Blake's word is its value in itself; it does not *mediate* other meanings. It is *beyond* "good and evil" that a conventional allegory concerns.

Frye's reassessment of Blake prepares for his project of a literary evangelism. Textuality, he believes, is self-sufficient for world-making. He emphasizes Blake's super-empirical vision which goes beyond secular practice of allegorical interpretations. However, as in Christopher Hobson's deconstruction (1998) of the "Orc cycle," a key plank in Frye's symmetry, Orc is virtually a tool for a new allegory as the deviance, rebellion and violence of Orc are replaced by a more serene and positive labor of Los. This set of substitution actually reveals, Hobson argues, the utopia of art in the postwar ideology (24-29).¹ Frye's critical effort in effect ironically brings back the allegorical aspect of Blakean myth. Allegory seems to be an irreducible dimension in interpreting Blake.

Frye's book meets its counterpart in David Erdman's *Prophet against Empire* (1954). It remains the highly regarded contextual study, whose investigation of the

¹ Later on in his *The Chained Boy*, Hobson rejects the traditional claim that Blake retreats from practical affairs in his later literary productions. He argues that Blake's poetics constantly engages in revolutionary politics, and his later works contain even subtler and more profound advocacy for social upheaval.

historical events and their connection to Blake is considered to be a series of historical annotation to Frye's de-historical symbolic readings. It situates Blake in revolutionary liberalism and makes Blake a proponent of the Revolution. But it actually reiterates Frye's theory with historical examples: it chronicles how Blake retreats from wartime practical politics into a serener literary activity, championing peace and toleration. Erdman in fact consolidates a critical assumption that the later Blake is isolated from the practical arena and engages in his own artistic labor, his later work remaining "autonomous" that echoes Frye's formulation. The discontent of history-minded scholars and critics grows in the following decades at the rise of historicist and political criticism. The paradigm of Blake criticism, then, has gradually undergone a shift to contextual interpretation. Frye's effort to bring Blake back to our world from the incommunicable isolation depends on a *symbolic* understanding: that Blake's trans-historical vision brings the common, archetypal, symbolic humanity to consciousness beyond quotidian activities. Recent scholarship, on the other hand, tends to focus on more *literal* factors of Blake's poetics by relocating him in the historical, social and cultural context. While Frye constantly argues for the autonomy of art, history-minded critics insist that Blake's text can not be produced out of social, historical vacuum.

Recent scholarship is more and more focused on more immediate contexts. History-minded critics argue that Blake is not only far from self-imposed isolation but constantly interacts with his time and his circles. The time when Blake is active is one of an extremely volatile and complex heteroglossia. Therefore critics seek to resituate Blake in more various contexts than earlier critics have recognized. This recognition results in works on the various contexts: first, Blake's artisan origins and his

association with popular radicalism, a major subculture in the eighteenth century;² second, religious enthusiasm, which continues from the seventeenth century and by which Blake is influenced and in which is involved;³ third, artistic division of labor (artisan and artist) which Blake contests with and the circulation and marketing of art commodity which Blake criticizes.⁴ Political issues in Blake's works like gender and imperialism receives more and more attention.⁵ In sum, Blake's work has become an important source of cultural meanings: not only aesthetic, theological and philosophical readings are validated as in earlier scholarship, but also the sublunary affairs of class, economics, politics, and empire. In other words, the Blake we have now has emerged from Frye's self-referential mythmaking poet to become the treasure trove of multiple references. Blake becomes again an allegorist, his works an index to the complicated cultural milieu of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶ Jackie DiSalvo calls Blake a "Bakhtinian ventriloquist" who "attentively listen[s] to and communicate[s] to the reader the voices of an entire culture" (xxiv). In the consensus of the historicist critics, Blake is not a detached observer of the sounds and furies of his time but participates in the dynamic clashes of various dialogisms of social and cultural practices, enacting them into a drama enacted, literally as well as figuratively, in his textual practices.

Frye insists that Blake's text be considered symbolically. He is adamant in his refusal to give way to secondary interpretations of Blake. He refuses to limit Blake to

² For Blake's artisanal context and/or its radical tendency, see Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Art Conspiracy*; Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*.

³ Elaborations on the historical context of Blake's participation in religious enthusiasm can be found in Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*; E. P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast*, which specifies Blake's association to the Mugglestonians. For the sociopolitical significance of his religious enthusiasm, see Saree Makdisi, *Impossible History of the 1790s*.

⁴ See Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 78-203.

⁵ For feminist (gender) criticisms, see, e.g., Helen Bruder, *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion*; Bruder, ed., *Women Reading William Blake*. For discussions on Blake and imperialism, see Makdisi 204-59.

⁶ For collections of essays that bespeak the divergence of the historicist tendency of recent Blake scholarship, see three of the collections edited by Steve Clark and David Worrall: *Historicizing Blake* (1994), *Blake in the Nineties* (1999), and *Blake, Nation and Empire* (2006).

a specific context of social questions, and considers Marxist, liberalist, feminist interpretation, etc. depart from Blake's true message. Therefore, the nomenclature Blake draws from his personal experience should not be taken as a literal allegory of his personal experience or of his time. For example, although some of the sons of Albion are named after the judges at Blake's trial⁷, "Blake shows no rancor and makes no personal allusions: he simply needed such name in his symbolism" (*Fearful Symmetry* 375). Also, the highly-debated misogynist characterization of the feminine should not be taken to connote actual females, but to be considered as integral in Blake's mythology whose end is to transcend sexuality along with any narrower sociopolitical concerns.

However, the recent political readings of Blake would not end the debate with Frye's symbolic solution. Critics often assess Blake in political registers and bring forth conflicting opinions. For example, some critics continually accuse him of his complicity with sexist and/or imperialist ideologies. Anne K. Mellor remains one of the most scathing commentators who devote themselves to demystifying Blake as literary and cultural icon in both scholarship and readership. But her methods of enquiry are too literal at times. She charges, for example, *Songs of Innocence* of conveying imperialist and sexist message: "In 'The Little Black Boy,' Blake suggests that the appropriate solution to racism is the *assimilation* of the black boy into the white, for – as the black boy insists – 'my soul is white'" (89). Mellor ignores, however, that *Songs of Innocence* is being ironic or mockingly innocent in tone, and only partial when confronted to its contrary vision, *Songs of Experience*. What the boy says could reveal his experienced internalization of European privilege of the color white rather than serves as the vicarious confession of Blake's conviction. This poem

⁷ Hand, Hyle and many others of Albion's sons are believed to be named after the judges at Blake's 1804 trial for treason. See biographies by Gilchrist and Ackroyd for details.

expresses a condition of pathos when the subaltern subject is so degraded that the boy blindly accepts Christian doctrines, which works in conjunction with imperial conquests, to the degree that the European mindset even dominates the heaven he envisions. In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Experience*, on the other hand, an understatement of disillusionment emerges. “The little black thing,” unlike the Black Boy, declares his “happiness” (ll. 5, 9) with irony, because the entire social apparatus, “God & his priest & King,” work in complicity of hypocrisy and oppression: they “think they have done me no injury, but actually “make up a heaven of our misery” (E 22-23). The “snow” as white in color becomes a disconcertingly ironic imagery. White color is no longer a promising sign as in “The Little Black Boy,” but sort of symbolizes coldness and apathy that make “A little black thing among the snow” looks abandoned and helpless.

Same words, same images, same ideas or characteristics in Blake often dissimulate, contradict, remake and redefine with each other. Blake seems always to refuse to assign a strict semantic correspondence to signs but produces polysemy by placing identical signs in various contexts. His constant plays with meaning and style highlight rhetorical surplus in Blake’s poetics. More precisely, it is Blake’s formal structure of the counterbalanced contrary of *Innocence* and *Experience* that makes Mellor’s straightforward reading problematic. Most of the recent political criticism has been too much absorbed in the literal *content* of Blake’s writing while overlooking and thus downplaying the significance of his *form* which is always an integral part of the content. One of the indispensable legacies of Frye’s criticism is this concentration of the (symbolic) form that, however insufficient for historicist concerns, should not be altogether discarded.

Under all these assertions of Blake's symbolic self-sufficiency is Frye’s belief that Blake transcends his immediate contexts and achieve a trans-historical, archetypal

vision. For Frye, Blake's poetic autonomy is warranted by his colossal symbolism that renders every particular approach partial. Frye insists that Blake is to be understood in his autonomous, intra-referential symbolic network because it contains more than the sum of its external exegesis. Reading Blake in Frye's fashion entails a symbolical baptism. But doesn't this understanding of the simplicity of Blake stem from his extreme complexity? Doesn't Blake, the "Bakhtinain ventriloquist," involve as many disparate voices as possible that result in the extremely rich and colossal poetic visions, like a mighty blackhole that absorbs everything within its reach, constantly expanding to infinity? If his "symbolic" text is beyond any particular, contextual approach, isn't it because the text itself is the product of too many contextual particulars?

I argue that behind the debate of the humanist (represented by Frye) and the historicist concerns, there is the logic of the stratification of meanings. There are many levels of meaning in Blake: the literal, the contextual, the symbolical, the theological, the practical. Frye refuses to focus on practical, contextual ones; the historicists are skeptical of the primacy of the symbolic meaning. But both positions implicitly acknowledge the fact that Blake's text is characterized by the various, at times intractable, levels of meaning. The question of Blake's radical poetics, then, can not depart from the allegorical dimension. Because allegory is of semantic multiplicity: there are always two or more levels of meaning co-present in allegorical practices and interpretations. While Frye and the historicists both provide indispensable criteria for assessing Blake, their criteria are to be integrated to transcend their partial visions.

Therefore, this thesis will take a middle path between Frye's approach and historicist criticism. Although I agree with the insistence of the historicist critics on the contextual conditions of Blake's textual production, I argue that this kind of

historical, political approaches should take into account the formal aspect. This thesis aims to conduct an ideological criticism of Blake and his context. I will argue that there is an ideological form in Blake's time that affects social and cultural practices, and Blake responds not only with the face value of direct remarks and critique but also in the stylistic rendition of his poetic form.⁸ I seek to reinstate the significance of Blake's formal play in the context of his time. By responding radically to the contemporary social currents in his textual practices, Blake can be seen as an allegorist of his time. But the most fruitful method of analyzing his allegory is to scrutinize, I will argue, the form, which carries the nature and the language of allegory itself. Allegory, etymologically speaking, is a trope of "speaking (goria) other (allos-)." It is incomplete in itself and always needs to involve other texts. Therefore, it is always already an intertext. It is a form of mediation, linking various texts onto a common horizon, accommodating diverse signs while seeking to contain their irreducible differences.

Allegory is often defined as a sustained metaphor, or a series of metaphors that often constitutes a narrative. Metaphors standing in isolation from each other do not constitute an allegory but have to be associated to make up a body of secondary meanings. Therefore allegory comprises two major operations of language, metaphor and metonymy. Individual signs are supposed to be joined to a chain so that each sign could find its correspondence in the allegorical referent. It is done through approximation, with each sign, built on its anterior, pointing closer to the ultimate meaning. A standard form of allegory is constituted by parallel chain of signs with one-to-one correspondences between the individual elements from each chain. Each

⁸ This ground of my thesis can also be related to an observation put succinctly by J. J. MaCann: "Because Blake came to grips with the problem of truth as a practicing artist, rather than as an academic or a philosopher, his philosophical significance is to be sought, and defined, in his graphic and poetical work, and not in his ideas as such" (56) Blake does not simply state his ideas literally but performs it in his work with the formal devices.

sign is allocated to a distinct allegorical meaning and all together make a general sense. But what if the correspondence should fail to be achieved that result in the breakdown of the continuity between each sign? This often occurs when some individual signs are polysemous in themselves, full of surplus denotations and irreducible to a single referent, thus rendering the correspondence to its assigned referent unstable. To secure the linkage of allegorical sign, one way to resolve the problem of correspondence is to reduce the polysemy of words to unitary meaning. In other words, their metaphorical variety needs to be restrained in order not to threaten metonymical continuity. Jon Whitman identifies that, besides semantic correspondence, “divergence” is another essential character and serves as the self-undermining tendency in allegory. With the accumulations of signs, each sign interact with other signs and their contexts. Each sign brings in its specific interpretive contexts, causing tensions and dynamic interactions with other signs, producing figurative subtexts and semantic surplus. The working of allegory, as Whitman argues, always results in paradox: the more the allegorist employs “correspondent” signs to reinforce the intended meaning, the more surplus subtexts he creates destabilize the allegorical clarity and continuity (1-13).

This rhetorical understanding of the nature of allegory provides us a vantage point to Blake’s use of this form of expression. Blake’s most direct treatment of the question of allegory is found in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. In that piece the contradistinction of “vision” or “imagination” versus “allegory” is established:

Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really
& Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Formd by the Daughters of Memory.
Imagination is Surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration (E 554).

This dichotomy is understood in terms of Blake’s adherence to biblical typology. Leslie Tannenbaum has demonstrated Blake’s adherence to Pauline (Christian)

tradition of allegory and his rejection of The Platonic (Classical) one (86-123). In Classical allegory it is the idea, the moral message behind the allegorical narrative that is primary. The signs that demonstrate the ideas are only shadowy, secondary representation to the ultimate truth. The signs serve to conjure up, in Blake's phrase, the "Daughters of Memory" to revive the primordial truth, to which these signs are but mirages. In the Biblical "type," however, emblematic images and events contain in themselves the truths. Biblical events are not secondary fabrications of spiritual truth like those of the Classical allegory. They are considered to contain both historicity and spirituality, i.e. literal and symbolical reality. Blake constantly expresses his hostility to the classical morality because in his opinion, it always assumes a pre-given moral message to which the allegory is merely a secondary representation:

Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Vision and Real Visions Which are lost & clouded in Fable & Allegory [which] <while> the Hebrew Bible & the Greek Gospel are Genuine (VLJ; E 555)

Blake does not then discard the term "allegory" even in his literal dismissal of the figure. Instead, in his letter to Thomas Butts, he makes up the oxymoronic "sublime allegory" (E 730). The morphology suggests a subgenre of allegory whose end is paradoxically to transcend the limit of its master genre. It suggests that Blake wants to efface the *hierarchy* of allegorical meaning. Not a level of meaning is truer to another; all meanings are equally true. As in Blake's ultimate vision, all things coexist in "universal brotherhood."

If all levels, all traces of meanings are at least indispensable, then complexity, tensions and even self-contradicting and self-undermining tendency are inevitable. In the following chapters I will argue that Blake welcomes these tendencies. Blake's

allegory is nothing but extravagant: emblematic designs, conflated genres, obscure imageries, complex references to historical, mythical and biblical realities. This form and style embody the Blakean idea of the “minute particular”-- those residual, contingent, and heterogeneous materials and individuals destroyed or sacrificed at the rise of Urizen, Blake’s symbolic character for uniformity. Read with neoclassical/ Enlightenment/bourgeois ideology in mind, Urizen becomes an obvious caricature of Blake’s contemporary political and cultural hegemony. Under this hegemony, those “minute particulars” are at a permanent peril of being erased from history. This is what Saree Makdisi, in his *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, sets out to investigate. He seeks to restore the erased voices of the disabled and the disenfranchised, which being eliminated from the hegemonic discursive practices have retreated into the “impossible history.” In fact, Blake not only messes the purity of his contemporary allegory but also disrupts its continuity and coherence. As Makdisi argues, many of Blake’s contemporary social, political, economical and religious practices work in complicity under the logic of reification and homogenization that effaces minute particularity. Blake’s poetry and design powerfully expose that ideology and react in his radical aesthetics. This thesis agrees that Blake’s radicalism works against hegemonic ideologies of his time, but will try to advance the argument by analyzing Blake’s radical nonconformity to the form of expression that serves the hegemony.

This thesis will contend that Blake’s radical poetics combats his contemporary tendency to play down the complexity and self-undermining tendency of the allegorical form. It can roughly be translated to Los’s poetic battle with Urizenic reductionism (of the allegorical form). Furthermore, it does not limit itself to analyzing a specific genre of allegory. It seeks to investigate the logic and the ideology of the allegory: the logic of its operation, its working, its possibilities and

dangers. In other words, it focuses on the “allegorical”: a form of expression, a way of thinking that nurtures ideologies. The political Blake, I will argue, is profoundly implicated in the logic and ideology of this form of expression.

This thesis wishes to start an enquiry into the relation of Blake’s allegorical form and the ideological context of his time and to contribute to building a link of formal and contextual criticism of Blake scholarship. The first chapter of this thesis will survey several important cultural and intellectual paradigms such as puritan aesthetics, neoclassicism and some linguistic mysticisms to demonstrate the increasing anxiety about the allegorical form and the nascent preference for a certain form of allegory. It will then concentrate on some key thinkers such as John Locke, Edmund Burke, S. T. Coleridge and Tom Paine to see how the anxiety about the allegorical expression conditions their thinking and what they provide as solutions. It argues specifically that these individual thinkers, despite their diversity, virtually contribute to a hegemony of the metonymic dimension of allegory by downplaying its metaphoric surplus.

In counteracting the hegemony, Blake develops the idea of the “minute particular” with two later works, *Jerusalem* and *Laocoön*, which are discussed in chapter two and three respectively. The stylistic structures and expressions of the two texts not only demonstrate the range of allegory but also respond to the ideologies of the time and its contemporary thinkers. From neoclassicism to the dominance of metonymy, allegory has undergone transformations but all these transformations contribute in their own way to reinforce its increasing uni-dimensionality. Blake, by the allegorical or counter-allegorical techniques of parataxis, repetition, dramatization and some compelling imageries in *Jerusalem*, reacts and questions the ideologies and politics and counters the privileged form of allegory in the modern bourgeois ideology.

The issue of allegory is radically advanced in *Laocoön*, in which the very nature

of allegory is taken into question. “Minute particular” is as a matter of fact not in the text of *Laocoön*; yet the rendition of its subject matter suggestively performs and illustrates this idea. The third chapter will demonstrate how the “particular” is performed and illustrated, and how Blake makes his allegorical style a self-undoing irony, and realizes his critique on one of the main sources the contemporary politics of allegory – money and the commodity culture. All these formal manipulations (perhaps experimentations) are Blake’s pursuit of the minute particulars, the troubling, haunting residues that disturb allegorical purity and force dialectics and dynamics as the path to the redeemed time and humanity as Blake envisions it.



Chapter I

The Vicissitudes of Allegory: Transformations and Hegemony

In the seventeenth century there is an increasing anxiety about the capability of human language in communication. This anxiety is particularly manifest in their understanding of allegory. On the other hand, alternative forms of allegory are championed to supercede the allegory that is increasingly distrusted and discredited. This chapter concentrates on several key figures whose concerns about language are manifested in their attitudes to allegorical forms of expression. It shall demonstrate that some social issues of communication, representation and authority are coterminous with ever-changing idea of the allegorical.

Language, Taxonomy and Organicism

Situating Blake in this context, Robert Essick conducts a survey of the linguistic theories that are much concerned with the mystic origin of Adamic language of the Eden myth (28-103). He distinguishes between the “motivated” and the arbitrary mode of signification in the linguistic discourses of the time. In the mystical reconstruction of the Adamic language, signs are “motivated,” i.e., enabled by the identity of name and essence. Linguistic signification is the natural incarnation of being, and communication knows no distance in the universality and immediacy of linguistic practice. Such identity is lost from our present humanity, and its cause was attributed by these linguists either to the sins of man that brought the Fall or to the multiplication and confusion of tongues after Babel. The present condition of human language is characterized by arbitrary signification, indeterminate wordplay, limited by historical contingency, deprived of universality and mutual understanding, a condition of human language that applies to Walter Benjamin’s understanding of our

state of being as allegorical.

Essick's survey of various individual authors appears mildly miscellaneous; but we can still identify two major approaches which seek to redeem the corrupted human language. On the one hand, a strict taxonomy is designed as an alternative to a "primary" motivation of the Adamic language. Now mechanical correspondence between signifiers and signifieds takes the place of an ideal language. Thereby, as Essick defines it, a "secondary motivation" is established which is a self-regulated practice without the bond to the paradisaal origin. Linguistic mimeticism which demands exact representation of reality and discredits excessive rhetoric, wordplay, semantic confusion, comes to enjoy intellectual prestige. This position of "linguistic Puritanism," as Essick calls it, is taken by Francis Bacon and along this line came John Wilkins, Isaac Newton, Thomas Sprat and others. The shared distrust of rhetorical figuration expresses their worry that ambiguity caused by wordplay would impede understanding and the dissemination of knowledge. An "ideal" language must be established by a rational scheme that assigns words to its proper usage with a conscientious practice of logic. Thomas Sprat in particular demands a radical mimeticism as the remedy of the "corruptions of speech" in rhetorical excess and luxury. Every "thing" must be assigned one single proper "word" as its only and ideal match.⁹ This taxonomic linguistic can be compared to what Michel Foucault calls the "Classical" episteme from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century: classification, categorization, differentiation that reduces infinite, contingent phenomena to finite, analyzable variables (125-65).¹⁰ Taxonomy and linguistic mimeticism is not necessarily congruent with Classical episteme: if "things" are infinite then words,

⁹ See Essick 42; Kelley 55-56 for some discussions.

¹⁰ *The Order of Things*, chap. five. The focus of Foucault analysis is on natural history and natural science which embody this Classical episteme. But it is worthwhile to infer that the sweeping scope of Foucault's analysis that goes well beyond the scientific discourse to the general mode of thinking of the time is backed by his understanding of the Classical practice of language, which contributes to, if not define, the consciousness of the time.

corresponding to each, must be so as well. But what is comparable is their shared attitude that representation becomes the very operation of thought, and language is secondary human practice that only “represents” but does not participate or intervene in the causality of practical affairs.

On the other hand, as the dawn of Romanticism draws near, the theorization of poetry comes into focus. Poetry is esteemed for its messianic power to redeem language. This is foreshadowed by Jacob Boehme and Emmanuel Swedenborg who develop theories that seek to go beyond rationalist mimeticism of taxonomic correspondence. Both argue for a language, still existing in humanity, whose material signifiers can bear immanent spiritual meaning and can become its incarnation rather than mere reflection (Essick 48-54). The search for the “natural sign” in replacement of arbitrary sign contributes to the philosophy of the poetic language as a remedy for the labyrinthine practice of human language. “Poetry, rather than a decorative feature superadded to language, was viewed by Blair, Rousseau, Herder, and many other theorists, as superior to logical discourse because of its contact with origin.” (Essick 70-71). “Poetry” is constructed for a recovery of a once lost “origin,” the Adamic paradisaic state: “When Adam named the beasts he composed a poem, not a taxonomy. The poets, not the philosophers or theologians, would lead man – or at least his language – back to ‘the blissful golden age’” (Essick 71).¹¹

¹¹ Essick further explicates the theorization, in reviewing the “primitivist” poetry theory of G. E. Lessing, Herder and others :

According to primitivist theory, the tropes of poetry recall a linguistic condition only once removed from natural signs. . . . Linguistic signs, with the exception of onomatopoeic words, cannot become natural signs. To overcome this imitation in the referential capabilities of the vast majority of words, the poet (like the primitive speakers of the first language) must substitute relational parallels: one word will relate figuratively to another in a manner isomorphic with the relationships between the things named. This type of secondary motivation . . . bears some similarities to the taxonomic programmes of seventeenth-century ideal language projectors, but with the crucial substitution of the figural for the grammatical matrix as the ground on which the relationships between terms will be constructed. And while a taxonomic system requires exclusive and direct correspondences between signifiers and their signifieds, the figural system requires that the signifier be freed from its arbitrary bondage to a single signified so that its manifold relationships with other signs can become apparent. Only then can language replicate the complex interrelationships among things – assuming, of course,

Whatever the approach, allegory is always one of the principal targets. Its playful rhetoric is considered one source of the linguistic “corruption.” There is a pervasive anxiety in the intellectual milieu about the lame status of human language, and allegory, in general opinions, contributes to (or manifests) that status. Arbitrariness defines the law of signification in human language; meaning multiplies, complicates, and confuses itself. Such is exactly the operation of allegory: it multiplies, complicates and sometimes confuses meaning by drawing arbitrarily two or more levels of significations. This anxiety derives from the ideology since Protestant iconoclasm: images, emblems, and icons are targeted because these devices of religious allegory diversifies visual objects, multiplies allegorical meanings, arouses sensual pleasures, deviates believers from the right paths of religious orthodoxy and disrupts spiritual oneness with the One. The idea of corruption defined by the fixation on and indulgence in these sensual, material, locally specific objects in the allegorical religious practices reveals the fear of the Protestant iconoclasts, as in Weber’s theorization, of the obstacles that impedes solidarity, industry, and progress. This line of ideology would pass down to neoclassicism and the Burkean notion of the sublime which contribute to consolidate the rising hegemony of Protestant ethic: bourgeois individualism, capitalism, etc.¹²

Theresa Kelley in her *Reinventing Allegory* conducts a comprehensive survey of the fate of allegory as literary expression from the early modern to the present. Allegory materializes the ideological war of modernity and its counter-forces and counter-voices. Facing the hostility of modernity, allegory has undergone metamorphoses to survive. Allegory is discredited in neoclassical period while the

that nature is organized tropologically, not logically (71-72).

¹² That Protestant (Puritan in particular) iconoclasm has its ideological affinity with bourgeois capitalism has probably been a well-worn academic topic and clichéd consensus. Yet it is still worthwhile to point out that the iconoclastic ideology not only prepares for capitalism but has hegemonic influence on the mode of thinking of contemporary minds. For ideological histories and critiques of iconoclasm and its affinity with modern bourgeois culture, see Mitchell, *Iconology*.

Romantic period serves as the pivot that, holding ambivalent attitudes to allegory, virtually promises its modern survival. As Kelley points out, the seventeenth-century political context concerning the increasing distrust of allegory is the rise of nationalism (or imperialism): “As vitriolic partisan rhetoric on all sides of the English civil war had made clear, allegorical figures give a particular, human shape to abstraction, convey knowledge to secret sharers, and thereby magnify fractures in the English body politic” (70). Uniformity of language would engender the homogenization of the nation’s subjects and, consequently, the concentration of national energy and power. The enemy of the nation is exactly the “partisan rhetoric” whose comprehensibility is restricted to members, the “secret sharers” within a given political or social fraction. Political authority is also anxious to control verbal productions to ensure governmental stability.¹³

Allegory becomes increasingly untrustworthy in neoclassical period precisely because of its arbitrary, diverse thus unstable signification. “Like the realm of abstractions and ‘complex ideas’ to which they belong,” as Kelley expounds in Lockian epistemology, “allegorical figures are a ‘mixed mode,’ born troublemakers to theories of epistemology because they are so far removed from sense experience” (76). Since the Renaissance, allegory has been continually diminished of its authenticity due to this “troublemaking” potential, and the distrust of this figure culminates in the mimeticist discourse of neoclassical writers. This is more salient in their attitude

¹³ Hannah Dawson sketches the probable cause of the anxiety, ranging from the divergence proliferation of writing in the increasing press liberty to the crisis of governmental stability:

The concern about linguistic deception is part of a more general anxiety about the public persona parting company with the private self [and vice versa?], a divergence best perpetrated by language. This divided self haunts seventeenth-century texts on account of the new, Protestant emphasis on individual conscience, the increasing democratization of authorship and the divisive demands of formal obedience from the fast-changing governmental and religious authorities in the period. The unturnable tide of print culture, the pockets of and the pressure for press liberty, and the valorization of *libertas philosophandi* worked vigorously against oaths of allegiance, calls for religious observance, and censorship laws. This explosive dialectic heightened, exposed and forced painful discrepancies between inner belief and outward speech. (170)

toward allegorical personality. In order to control allegorical signification, personification in allegory ought to be functional: allegorical persons cannot act like actual personality but ought to be reified into a transparent material carrier for the “idea” behind the person. Contingent behavior that impairs the conveyance of the idea should be avoided; character should be flattened. Characters are abstracted in this way, and their residual material quality does not intervene with the meaning-carrying. Kelley concludes that it underscores the neoclassical distrust of particularity in favor of abstraction (70-92).

Neoclassical critics insist that allegory is or ought to be “open, accessible, and transparent,” and should offer a stable, one-to-one correspondence between image and idea (Kelley 72-73). In that insistence, however, a paradox ensues: when neoclassicism demands openness of allegory when meaning can be immediately acquired, it creates a *closed* system. The transparency is at most a currency circulated within a selected group of readers who agree upon one particular meaning to be *the* meaning. This facile universality, after all, evades the problem of communication. The universality of verbal exchange is at best the “secondary motivation.” “Primary” motivation, in which the communicative currency is at one with the essence, remains the irrecoverable loss. A more subliminal concern surfaces when communication in a given society that is essentially fractured, stratified, hierarchical, conflictual will give birth to all sorts of problems. Neoclassical discourse, punctuated with anxiety about the discursive power, tries to efface the social heteroglossia by reducing play to rule, and, as Kelley points out, annexing particulars to the general and the abstract.

The anxiety about the arbitrariness of human language continually distresses intellectuals down to the nineteenth century when S. T. Coleridge develops his poetic theory. Coleridge seeks to overcome the linguistic predicaments by rejecting earlier linguists of their assumption of the ontological status of language. Earlier linguists

regard language as secondary instrument whose function is to represent primary experiences. Coleridge in particular rejects the empiricists that ideas are derived, and that language is the posterior existence to a primary experience.¹⁴ For Coleridge, language has a primary essence in itself. His contradistinction of symbol versus allegory in *Statesman's Manual* alludes (conscious or not) to the primitivist model of the ideal language:

Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. (30)¹⁵

This well-known elevation of symbol over allegory echoes his contemporary German aesthetics. Coleridge regards the abstract, being shapeless and unsubstantial, as lifeless, empty or fanciful. For Coleridge, allegorical expression is vain and worthless because of its arbitrary signification: “the empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter” (31). Allegory violently yokes the matter, the *thing*, together with some far-fetched idea translated into a *sign*. Coleridge hereby reveals the post-Adam anxiety in language. In order to overcome the arbitrary allegory, Coleridge proffers a theory that defines the optimized form of language, the symbol, as a “tautogorical” (same-speaking) trope. Allegory’s impotent “other-speaking” must be superceded by the symbol’s transcendent spontaneity, speaking of its own essence

¹⁴ For a discussion of Coleridge’s response and criticism to the empiricist and rationalist tradition of linguistics, see McKusick, esp. 61-70.

¹⁵ The quote is from the edition collected in *Lay Sermons*, 3-114.

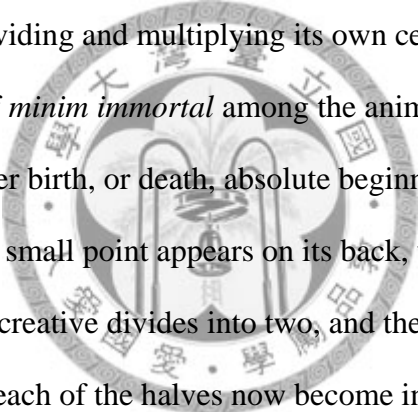
and not being an apparitional representation to a preexisting reality as allegory does.

Apparently, this contradistinction is homologous to that of the organic and the mechanic. Allegory for Coleridge is inauthentic and unpromising because of the arbitrary binding of two separate realms of signification. The correspondence of the two or more levels of meaning in an allegory is artificially, mechanically made rather than naturally born. Symbol, on the other hand, is an expression of an organic unity from which integral particular derives. Every particular is a part to the whole: “The Symbolical cannot perhaps be better defined in distinction from the Allegorical, than that it is always itself a part that, of the whole of which it is representative. – ‘Here comes a sail,’ – (that is a ship) is a symbolical expression. ‘Behold our lion!’ when we speak of some gallant soldier, is allegorical” (*Miscellaneous Criticism*, 29; qtd. in Fletcher 17). Here Coleridge identifies symbol with synecdoche in which the part (sail) represents the whole (ship), while the allegorical is made up of semantic substitution in which “lion” replace the “soldier.” The distinction can therefore be assimilated in that of the metonymic versus the metaphoric. In privileging symbol, Coleridge hereby privileges metonymy over metaphor. Moreover, as Fletcher points out, the theory assumes a sort of “participation mystique” of the symbol; and an “unmediated vision,” which can be produced directly without secondary representation, i.e. without arbitrary metaphor (17-18).¹⁶

The fundamental logic that supports Coleridge’s privileging the organic and the metonymic can be found in his theory and practice of “desynonymization.” James McKusick has demonstrated that Coleridge’s theory of desynonymization is at one with the evolution of language (91-99). Words evolve from insignificant phonetic differences to distinctive semantic significations. The formation of language is an

¹⁶ Fletcher borrows the idea of “Participation mystique” from the anthropologist Levy-Bruhl’s, and “unmediated vision” from Geoffrey Hartman.

ongoing process when the lexicon enlarges by differentiating the formerly confused equivalents into subtle differences in signification. It is the task of the poet to catalyze the development of language: not by confusing similar words, but by constantly desynonymizing them because the synonym, Coleridge would suggest, if not practically improbable, is the flaw of language: “By synonyms I mean words really equivalent, both in material meaning & in the feelings or notions associated with them / all which are defects of language” (*Notebooks III*, #3312, qtd. in MaKusick 93). Moreover, Coleridge implicitly differentiates (by desynonymizing) authentic and inauthentic uses of language as well as the *growth* of it. He puts forward an organic metaphor for the act of desynonymization by making an image of a seed of language organically evolving by dividing and multiplying its own cells or molecules:



There is a sort of *minim immortal* among the animalcula infusia which has not naturally either birth, or death, absolute beginning, or absolute end: for at a certain period a small point appears on its back, which deepens and lengthens till the creature divides into two, and the same process recommences in each of the halves now become integral. This may be fanciful, but it is by no means a bad emblem of the formation of words, and may facilitate the conception, how immense a nomenclature may be organized from a few simple sounds by rational beings in a social state.

(*Biographia Literaria I*: 83n)

As McKusick point out, Coleridge’s view of the desynonymizing process is “primarily automatic” (96). I would further suggest “organicist” because of its use of the metaphor of an organism. In Coleridge, the authentic use of poetic language, in line with language’s natural development, is ramification, branching like the growth of a tree. The seventeenth-century solution to linguistic confusion by taxonomic correspondence, on the other hand, is modeled on serialization that guarantees

one-to-one correspondence of two parallel chains, the signifiers and the signifieds. Each bears relation only to one specific correspondent. This parallelism is now replaced, in Coleridge, by a myth-making of a universal seed from which all signs and its meaning evolves. The “origin” subsumes all of its linguistic derivatives yet does not homogenize them or reduces them because they evolve by differentiating from each other.

Coleridge’s attempt to distinguish symbol and allegory is, however, caught in an ideological predicament. Paul de Man, in his article “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” offers his reading of the symbol-allegory dichotomy to deconstruct Romanticist autonomy of the self and the discourse of transcendence. In his analysis, the dichotomy of allegory and symbol becomes that of temporality and a-temporality. In symbol it becomes possible for the image to coincide with the substance instead of simply to represent them, and the distance between matter and idea are imagined to be nullified. “Simultaneity” is the law of symbol which suspends the movement of time. The symbol “postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, [whereas] allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and renouncing the nostalgia and desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference” (207).

Here de Man points out the illusory identification with permanence and synchronicity that a symbol can create. A symbol not only transparently links the “temporal” with the “eternal” but identify the self transcendently, yet irreconcilably and illusorily, with a-temporal categories of mystical simultaneity. Allegory functions as a reminder of the distance to its origin, of the temporality of linguistic practice where past and present are separated. In this regard he defines allegory as a trope of irony:

Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure

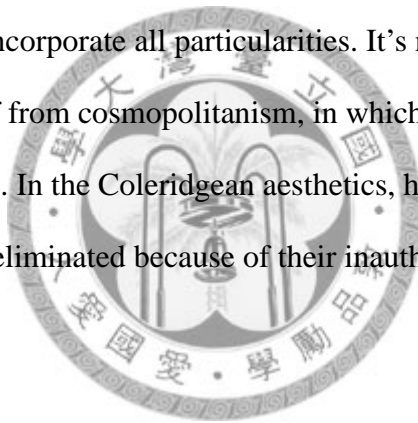
mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse with the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but can never overcome it. . . .

The temporal void that it reveals is the same void we encountered when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority. Allegory and irony are thus linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament. They are also linked in their common demystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide. (222)

If symbol is for de Man an illusory construction based on misrecognition of the poet's self, allegory is hardly more promising in its essential kinship to ironic demystification and self-undoing, caught in the temporal predicament. For De Man, allegory is a *constituent* of rather than an antithesis to symbol, which is never made up without an immediate revelation of the temporal, historical, subjectivity mistakenly displaced to the imaginary origin.¹⁷ De Man's skepticism often renders a text so self-deconstructed that a critical dialectic tends toward the nihilistic. He rightly points out the irony in Coleridgean symbol but avoids (or fails) to come to terms with that with conditions Coleridge's poetic discourse. Coleridge's thinking method of dichotomy (symbol versus allegory, fancy versus imagination, etc.) can be traced to many intellectual traditions: for one thing it can be seen as a continuation of classical classification and differentiation; for another, it inherits a Burkean conservatism which is to be explored in the next section. Above all it is formulated by his theory and practice of desynonymization.

¹⁷ Essick, on the other hand, regards theorization of the symbol, in particular that which proposed by Coleridge, as an attempt at a return to the Adamic primary motivation. Yet he also expresses his doubt of the primitivist ideal in actual practice, which can not do without allegorical mediation in the establishment of a symbol (90-99).

In developing a discourse of our *reunion* with the eternal, Coleridge has to ironically rely on a method of *separation*. Coleridge is fighting linguistic confusion as earlier linguists do; his method, distinguished from his predecessors, is to establish a special form of hierarchy. In desynonymization, the binary concepts are not equal contrary; they are superiors and inferiors. Symbol over allegory is close to the operation of Blakean “negation”: sanctioning one while discrediting the other in the construction of the contrary. Coleridgean philosophy of language is built not simply on differentiation, but on elimination. Those inauthentic modes of language are to be filtered out to, in a sense, purify language. The organicist content in Coleridge seems to subsume all particulars into a unified organism; but the method of his criticism, paradoxically, refuses to incorporate all particularities. It’s notable that Coleridge’s organicism distances itself from cosmopolitanism, in which all particulars, (however petty), coexist in tolerance. In the Coleridgean aesthetics, hierarchy is implied. Some particulars are even to be eliminated because of their inauthenticity for an organic unity.



The Invention of the Pre-Text¹⁸

Coleridge’s poetic discourse is not without ideological predecessors. As is briefly mentioned, the problem of language since the seventeenth century is coterminous with the contemporary socio-political issues. Language is not exclusively an intellectual subject but a pervasive concern in the social milieu. Coleridge, in particular, inherits a great deal of ideological legacy from the social-political thinkers. The problem of language is to be regarded as a discursive battle onto which practical, socio-economical issues are often displaced. Eighteenth-century writers in particular

¹⁸ By pre-text I don’t mean the lexical definition of “subterfuge,” but a priority of reference, a prior text as a source to derived meanings.

confront the problems of language, mainly about its inefficacy, insufficiency or instability. Such skepticism about the capacity of language was inseparable with the political realm. Protestant iconoclasm, for example, was in ideological corporation with the ascending class against the *ancien regime*. Rhetorical mimeticism and taxonomy aligned with rationalist scientism leading to bourgeois revolution. Neoclassicism is ambivalent in its demands of decorum which helps sustain the ideology on which the maintenance of social hierarchy depends, but on the other hand shows its affinity to the emerging hegemony of bourgeois scientism. The writings of Edmund Burke are exemplary of the intertwined issues. The aesthetic treatise, *Enquiry into . . . the Sublime and Beautiful*, for example, contributes to the invention of the pre-text. As W. J. T. Mitchell has argued, it contributes to iconoclasm in that the sublime privileges non-visual to the visual (116-49). Since Burke's theory of the sublime privileges the obscure over the clear, visual illustration which elicit mostly primary understanding of things is not conducive to the emotional effect of the sublime: "there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication; and so far is a clearness of imagery from being absolutely necessary to an influence upon the passion, that they may be considered operated upon without presenting any image at all" (*Enquiry* 60). Turing away from the images, he announces: "The proper manner of conveying the *affections* of the mind from one to another, is by words" (*ibid*; Burke's emphasis). Burke is essentially an anti-mimeticist for whom clear representation is less affective. Burke upholds the verbal sublime as capable of breaking loose from the object it represents, causing "affect" in the mind of the subject even in the absence of the physical source: "The sounds being often used without reference to any particular occasion, and carrying still their first impressions, they at last utterly lose their connection with the particular occasions that gave rise to them; yet the sound without any annexed notion continues to operate as before"

(*Enquiry* 165).

The power of the sound, even when coming from afar, can do without the presence of visual aids. In this sense, Mitchell's judgment of Burke's being an iconoclast is based on the latter's mistrust of the *immediacy* of the aesthetic (visual) sublime. Visible material suggests more immediate, more ready-at-hand sensation. But Burke's suspicion of human sensory faculty compels him to rely on something that is not immediately available via human cognition. For Burke, the "love" for the visible object blocks the way to our experience of the sublime because it allows the subject to become attached to the object, creating something close to fetishism that fixates one's mental being on the material. Burke would confess that the sublime comes stronger in its *posterior* effect: "when we recover our health [from the previous pain], when we escape an imminent danger, is it with joy that we are affected? . . . The delight which arises from the *modifications* of pain, confesses the stock from whence it sprung, in its solid, strong, and severe nature" (*Enquiry* 60; my emphasis). What constitutes the sublime is already a mediated one, a secondary construction, an experience of pain and terror even in its posterior retrospection. As Terry Eagleton writes, "The sublime . . . is a phallic 'swelling' arising from our confrontation of danger, altogether a danger we encounter figuratively, vicarious, in the pleasurable knowledge that we cannot actually be harmed" (54). It is a "vicarious" experience at an aesthetic distance, sufficient to arouse intense emotion yet insufficient to cause actual damage to the subject. "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible [only delight *in* terror can cause sublime]; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience" (*Enquiry* 40). This experience of terror, in other words, is *represented* with "modification" in order to transform it into delight. The sublime, therefore, is always an allegorical experience: it brings up an

idea of terror (not terror par excellence) that is outside the literalness of sensuous experience, outside its immanent signification. The body suffers in imagination, which is itself a transcendent move; the materiality of the sublime is a faint shadow of the obscure remoteness. When displaced to temporality, the nostalgia for the past becomes the source of an overwhelming terror, always larger than the individuals yet too distant to affect them. “In this sense,” Eagleton remarks, “the sublime is a suitably defused, aestheticised version of the value of the *ancien régime*” (54). If the terror should always be attenuated in order to produce a true “delight” in the sublime experience, it must then be indirect in case that the direct confrontation of terror causes actual harm.

Burke’s notion of the sublime over the beautiful is, as Tom Furniss argues, hostile to the indulgence in sensual pleasure that impedes the practice of Protestant ethics of industry and frugality, which is essential to bourgeois individualism and capitalism. The sensible qualities the “small,” the “smooth,” and the “delicate” as identified by Burke as the three principal properties of the beautiful indicates the material indulgence of our creaturely existence. For Burke, such indulgence attaches individual to the minute particulars of material. These particulars bond each other to inhabit in individual pleasures, eventually disabling the ability to differentiate:

The mind of man has naturally a far alacrity and satisfaction in tracing resemblances than in searching for differences; because by making resemblances we produce *new images* [Burke’s italics], we unite, we create, we enlarge our stock; but in making distinctions we offer no food at all to the imagination; the task itself is more severe and irksome, and what pleasure we derive from it is something of a negative and indirect nature. . . . Hence it is, that men are much more naturally inclined to belief than to incredulity. And it is upon principle, that the most ignorant and barbarous nations have

frequently excelled in similitude, comparisons, metaphors, and allegories, who have been weak and backward in distinguishing and sorting their ideas.

(*Enquiry* 18)

Allegory is here demoted precisely because it is made up of “similitude, comparisons, metaphors” that weaken the ability to distinguish and sorting ideas, and here we see how Burke anticipate Coleridge. To elevate oneself from that creaturely bondage of “allegorical indulgence”, we need to fall back on our mental faculty to distinguish. Burke would define man as primarily an epistemological being: “The first and the simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity. By curiosity, I mean whatever desire we have for, or what ever pleasure we take in novelty” (*Enquiry* 31). The unexpected and the unprecedented promise access to new knowledge. But the curiosity must be based on the capacity to distinguish the relevant and the irrelevant.

The practice of material indulgence indicates the religious practices in the worship of icons, images and emblem whose excess are seen as the source of evil by the iconoclasts. Allegory, along with other rhetorical devise, brings confusion and incredulity because of its semantic indeterminacy. It suggests, in the Burkean register, that an image or a material icon leads one astray because its fetish allure has one’s mind hovering over some wayward ideas. In Burke, the danger of fetishism lies in its arbitrary, paranoid linkage between matter and idea, a symptom that allegory is likely to produce. As an antidote, Burke presents, in the wake of the French Revolution, an alternative form of allegory which is far from immediate perception: the idea of genealogy and tradition. For Burke, the “love” for the visible object blocks the way to our experience of the sublime because it allows the subject to become attached to the object, creating something close to fetishism that fixates one’s mental being on the material.

Burke's conservative discourse is of course a response, if not literally a reaction, to the rising bourgeoisie. However, Burke's defense of the *ancien regime* is not an unconditional resolution to discard modern social system and conduct a retrograde move to a bygone order. The objective, at any rate, is to diagnose and meliorate what he considered a flawed system. The French Revolution, in his view, reveals such flaw: the deficiency in the popular insurrection as too literal a terror. What annoys Burke in the French Revolution is its sheer, naked directness, its visible presence of terror. In Burke, the real legitimate "allegory," by definition "indirect speech," has to be as indirect as possible. The "allegory" he derides in *Enquiry* is its *metaphorical* aspect: a metaphor made up of paranoid, arbitrary linkage between matter and idea which manifest the danger of fetishism. The metaphoric form of allegory which attaches sign with referent allows the sign to be only *once* removed from the referent. Burke is in favor of the allegory that avoids such proximity between sign and referent. He is in favor of a more *metonymic* form of allegory, in which the long chain of connection from signs to more signs prolongs the process of signification, and disrupts immediacy. With this prolonged process, the terror of immediate presence is attenuated and a sense of continuation and permanence is sustained, providing individuals a sense of stability, security, and constancy.

However, the more we are removed from the ultimate source of meaning, the less we are able to examine it, and the less we are to take it as the object of our inquiry. In the end, it will be reified into an absolute, like a Platonic idea, remote yet permanent. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke takes up the task of materializing tradition as a intangible source of authority to defy the popular insurrections of the "swinish multitude" (68). If the sublime is transcendent of material quality associated with the beautiful, such reifying impulse seems incongruent with his earlier thought. Yet this again has its origin in the anxiety about language which Burke struggles to

overcome. Language has been a source of anxiety, as we have seen, in the seventeenth century. Linguists recognize the semantic instability of language and seek to repair whether by mimeticist taxonomy or other methods. Among the linguists, it is John Locke who acknowledges semantic instability as the inherent imperfection rather than controllable anomaly.¹⁹ The thesis that words signify ideas alone marks the irreversible consequence of abstraction. While Locke insists on his empiricist position that our knowledge comes from sensory experience alone, words for him comes to intervene our acquisition of true knowledge. If ideas only stand on the ground of the senses, words hover in the air can anytime hijack the ideas. Language detaches the particularity of the idea that once attaches to the sense and sets the idea adrift.

This epistemological anxiety displaced in the philosophy of language reveals the anxiety about communication, about the common ground of our knowledge. Words ‘in every man’s mouth, stand for the ideas he has’ (*Essay* III.II.3)²⁰: here we saw Locke “wield [the semantic instability] to expose the gulf between words and the world: words can only ever signify the speaker’s ideas” (Dawson 219). Locke reiterates the post-Babel condition in his epistemological system yet refuses to stop at that dead end. What we can still rely on as the prerequisite of linguistic communication, Locke announces, is a “tacit consent” (*Essay* III.II.8). Communication is enabled by this tacit consent of convention, contract and custom. It is this acknowledgement of language as social practice that Locke distances further from semantic universalists such as John Wilkins, who proposes a proto-structuralist theory of language, in which the “universal character” of human speech is inherent in the mentality of every individual, and guarantees mutual comprehensibility. If social

¹⁹ For a discussion of semantic instability in Locke contra other linguists, see Dawson, chap. five and eight.

²⁰ Here, for convenience, all the references to Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding* conform to the conventional format in scholarly citation, i.e. *Essay* [book number].[chapter number].[section] (e.g. “*Essay* III.II.3” stands for Book III, Chapter II, Section 3 of the *Essay*).

contract or the more fragile idea of “trust” is all we have to secure the common use of language, then true communication can only be created by the total elimination of verbal infidelity.²¹ Deception breaks the congruity of the signifier and the signified; it is the moment when the signified betray the signifier. Rhetoric is advised to be avoided because its play can also betray the primal semantic link of signs and ideas even if one doesn’t mean to lie; “irony” is another possibility of the break of the signifier with the intended signified. On the other hand, what guarantees the foremost connection of a given signifier to its proper signified, is, as Locke pronounces it in the very beginning of this *Essay*, is the “arbitrary” convention and custom.

Locke displays his misgivings in semantic stability; yet this is no less problematically compensated by his relative confidence in the inalienable sensory experience. A fact is often ignored that we may be fooled by our senses, that sensation can be illusory. Locke’s anxiety about the stability of custom and convention compels him to emphasize the foundation of sensation even if that sensation should already be *socially* constructed illusion rather than natural phenomena. The doctrine of custom and convention that not only conditions but also enables communication in the first place, is later inherited by Burke in good faith, and displaced onto the drama of the sublime. Locke sets himself in a dilemma: on the one hand the activity of meaning-making is individualistic that borders on pluralist mutual-incompatibility; on the other hand meaning secures its authenticity only in the social character of communication. This dilemma, when re-enacted in Blake, turns out to be a promising ambivalence. Blake once speaks of the autonomy of meaning-making and of interpretation of the Scripture in *A Descriptive Catalogue*: “Tell me the Acts, O historian, and leave me to reason upon them as I please; away with your reasoning

²¹ The following discussion of trust, custom, then money economy, has been drawn from Dawson 285-90.

and your rubbish. . . . Tell me the What; I do not want you to tell me the Why, and the How; I can find that out myself, as well as you can” (E 544).²² But if this passage sounds Lockean, why does he reject empiricism as the heart of Lockean philosophy? One reason, as we conjecture, is that empirical data for Blake is already *socially mediated* one.

What Locke’s linguistic mechanism displays most conspicuously, however, is its one-way dynamic. The matter available to the sense is like a quarry for our knowledge; we base upon it to produce and proliferate with meanings. But our productions of meaning are principally a pyramidal process: sensible material as the base, then “simple ideas,” then, on the base of simple ideas, the “complex ideas” (*Essay* 104-66). The divorce of word and thing in Locke lies in the lack of reciprocity between them. Meanings are proliferated in the prison-house of language because words signify ideas alone, leaving its material origin unaltered or even intact. The production mode of language is radically divorced from that of physical goods. A Lockean allegory would be like one-way signifying chains in which semantic reciprocity can not be enforced, and which is ironically a threat to communication that Locke always worries about. Countering this one-way dynamic, Blake writes in a style characterized by his blunt circularism: “Allegories are things that Relate to Moral Virtues Moral Virtue do not exist they are Allegories” (E 563);²³ “To Generalize is to be an Idiot . . . General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess” (E 641); ... etc. (Let us suspend the content of the quotes for the moment and concentrate on the logic of its form.) Blake’s circular expressions, whether self-conscious or not, can be seen as an

²² Convincing or not, Steve Clark reassesses Blake’s relationship to Locke against critical consensus of their polarized incompatibility. Denouncing Locke’s rational empiricism as Blake does, Clark argues for his affinity with Locke by pointing out their shared positions: knowledge comes through perception of the particular (Blake: “all knowledge is particular”); that toleration, or what Blake calls “forgiveness,” is the guarantee of true communication; that biblical exegesis should be literal rather than allegorical. etc. See Clark’s “Blake’s response to Locke.”

²³ This line can be seen as one of the probable source of Frye’s belief that Blake’s work is beyond allegory.

implicit reaction to the linear dynamic of verbal-ideological-political practice. If that dynamic harbors the bourgeois hope – that an individual starts from particular origin then breaks loose *and* breaks free of that condition, and goes strait ahead toward total emancipation, Blake’s circularism here provides us a counter-image – that the laborer is not lucky enough to break free but remains enmeshed in the repetitious, circular labor. In *Jerusalem*, as we shall see, Blakean circularism is presented in the form of repetition. Same images and words are reiterated and revisited in repetition, not only to postpone the linear progress, but also to reveal the semantic surplus of the same words and images when out in different contexts.

Under Locke’s liberalism there is a potential of stronger conservatism: that the artificial pre-given is as important as the natural pre-given, if not even more so. Man-made rules should be preserved. If Locke has altogether managed to avoid pronouncing his conservative implications, Burke reveals his by replacing the nebulous idea of trust with a materialized notion of tradition. Although Locke denies innate ideas, he doesn’t deny the inbuilt faculties that are pre-given (“Those Powers Nature hath bestowed upon us” (*Essay* I.IV.22)) to utilize them to process empirical data. Sensation is passive, but perception is active. The linguistic activity is to make profit out of the raw data we receive in sensation. Language can produce as well as represent, and the sublime operates in a similar manner in that *something more* can be produced. The sublime, as Furniss points out, can be seen as the *surplus value* that is generated by language beyond the representational functionalism of language itself (102). Burke, however, refuses to allow that surplus value to flow free, boundless and unlimited. Skeptical of rhetoric as he is, Burke employs rhetorical speech in defense of the *ancien regime*.

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life,

and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. (*Reflections* 66)

Burke is bewailing the loss of chivalry with the spectacle that is enacted in his description of the abduction of the French queen Marie Antoinette. If mediation is necessary for the “true” sublime, such “veils” and “draperies” would function as mediation. Naked, direct presentation is dangerous just as the immediate confrontation with the scene of terror. For Burke, sublime practice ought to be rhetoricized as well as aestheticized, with its brutal potency and crude qualities moderated by verbal modification. In other words, the sublime must be mediated by the beautiful. Critics have pointed out the gendered rhetoric in Burke’s discourse: with the beautiful attributed to the feminine, woman becomes auxiliary to the sublime masculinity.²⁴ The masculine (man) and the feminine (woman) are analogized as essence and appearance: the sublime as essence appears in beautiful form. There remains a distance, however, between the essence and appearance, when the appearance is but a *representation* of the essence. Such representation does not go only once from sign to idea as in a quick metaphor; it remains itself to be represented and represented, metonymically, to infinity. Eagleton remarks that the sublime is “the

²⁴ Eagleton, drawing on Wollstonecraft’s critique of Burke, concludes that woman, “or beauty . . . becomes a kind of mediation in man . . . what Wollstonecraft rightly sees is that this process does not operate in reverse” (59). Tim Fulford argues that Burke’s discourse of power and authority is mediated by gendered terms (31-65).

infinitely unrepresentable which spurs us on to yet finer representations, the lawless masculine force which violates yet perpetually *renews* the feminine enclosure of beauty” (54; my emphasis). The form of beauty is provisional and always has to be renewed, i.e. to be newly represented. The source of authority, the sublime, or what Burke calls in his political writings, the tradition, remains unchanged, but is only renewed.

Burke, inheriting and advancing Locke, helps to establish what I mean an authoritative pre-text. Custom and convention precede all individuals; to make any plausible sense is always to refer back to the social pre-text of custom and convention. Burke in particular contributes to consolidate a form of allegory of seamless continuation. Burke, and indeed the majority of contemporary intellectuals, has secured a certain form of metonymic dominance: that we must be bound to a pre-text; and we are in this sense homogenized by our function to that pre-text. Metonymy in a sense is organized by homogeneity: the individual elements are part to a whole because they share some sort of universal quality so that they can be classified together. The dominant allegory of the time is made up of the “universal particulars,” each being allegorical sign congruous with each other and together making up the universal referent. Burke’s anxiety may lie in the drama of divorces as previously mentioned. If the signifiers can “divorce,” i.e. break free from the signifieds to which it is originally bound, it could assume autonomy and launch its own structural play which is threatening to Burke.

While Burke is obsessed with the consolidation of a pre-text, Tom Paine, his intellectual rival, sets out to break that particular myth. His *Rights of Man* is partly an attempt to revive the language of Adam in renouncing Burke’s establishment of a genealogy: “Though I mean not to touch upon any sectarian principle of religion, yet it may be worth observing, that the genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam. Why then

not trace the rights of man to the creation of man? I will answer the question. Because there have been upstart Governments, thrusting themselves between and presumptuously working to *un-make* man” (*Rights of Man* 31; Paine’s emphasis). Paine’s idea of man is radically autonomous; it rejects all pre-text that conditions man’s existence. For Paine, any attempt to pinpoint a definite source of reference is paranoid reification (“Why not trace the right to . . .”). What would “un-make” man are these authoritative pre-texts because for Paine “man” is not the product of social mediation. Paine is in some sense an anti-allegorist, in that he refuses to acknowledge that “man” is a function, an allegorical persona of a grand (repressive) social structure. This of course will not solve the problem because the individual is always socially conditioned in the first place. This problem of social pre-text has thus generated two symptomatic solutions: Burke to reify it, and Paine to nullify it.

Paine’s effort is to replace the pre-text with what Hannah Arendt terms the cult of “Supreme Being,” exemplified by the popularism of Robespierre in the French Revolution (176-77). The cult of “reason,” “man,” “general will,” the virtue of “terror,” etc. that serves alternately as the Supreme Being provides an absolute signifier that attracts and directs popular energy. Individual differences are suspended; people are collectivized under this simple and immediate signifier as immediate authority. In this kind of discourse, the allegorical is virtually suspended as well: the semantic pluralism of allegory is unnecessary under the universal cult of one signifier. A supreme text comes to take in place of the pre-text. For intellectuals like Burke, this is dangerous because it suspends too much: it suspends every social preconditions that defines individual differences. Further, temporality is annihilated: when Paine insists on voicing for the right of the “living,” regardless of the dead, the past is put into brackets and the flow of time is flattened. Consciousness is concentrated on the present, and on the immediate presence of a supreme signifier. Burke fears that the

loss of the sense of time will result in the loss of history altogether, and he works to reconstruct a genealogy of tradition that connects all historical particulars metonymically together. This position results in the defense for “prejudice” without which the maintenance of a historical line is impossible. Burke declares:

You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess that we are generally men of untaught feelings, that, instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices. . . . Many of our own men of speculation . . . think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. (*Reflections* 74)

As Nicholas Williams expounds, Burke charges that the Enlightenment preoccupation with the “now” not only cut itself off from the past, but also cut off all the sources of the causes, motivations and dynamics we need from the past. The “naked reason” is ineffective for Burke because it is like a machine without fuel – the fuel of the past legacy that promises future continuation of progress. As Williams succinctly puts, it is prejudice with its ties to the past that ‘has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence’” (Williams 107-08). However, if prejudice is to be “cherished” to secure a line of continuity, Burke must presuppose that the “prejudice” in different times will always remain identical in content. Such view downplays the fact of historical discontinuity and the unexpected surge of historical trends. He ignores the possibility of inconsistent, plural prejudices in the supposed line of history. Burke’s limit, like his nineteenth-century inheritor Coleridge, is to take historical organism for granted: history simply evolves, and all particulars

are ramified from the same root. They come short of emphasizing, if not recognizing, historical ironies, contradictions, discontinuations, the unbridgeable gap between past and present, as de Man has points out discussing Coleridgean notion of symbol. The sense of history in the allegorical much concerns Blake, whose style and its allegorical-historical implication we will investigate in the next chapter.

Money and Modern Allegory

Although Kelley has usefully traced the vicissitudes of allegorical practice in the rise of modernity, she fails, I would argue, to spell out modernity's most tremendous allegorical device – money. Money is the symbol of wealth not because, in Marxist theorizations, of the material use-value but because of its exchange-value. It allegorizes the relations of properties in the society. It is the modern representation of value that dominantly as well as hegemonically defines the law of exchange. It is an index to the material goods, its latent meaning and value lies not in the face-value of the sign but in the allegorical referents of the more palpable entities in the commercialized society. By reducing all particular use-value of material to a non-substantial number yet always hijacking the material contingency of commodity form, it is a quasi-pure form which always flirts with allegorical material content. It is the modern version of icono-fetishism because its social hieroglyphic of universal value somehow allures the individual to the imaginary and illusory relations with each other. It is to make up a universal fetishism, which is meant to eliminate all other particular iconized fetishes of the pre-Iconoclast age.

No later than the seventeenth century, there is Locke who has distinguished two principles of value: “natural” or “intrinsic [sic] value,” which is determined by the utility or material quality of a commodity “to supply the Necessities or serves the Conveniences of human Life; and the more necessary it is to our Being, or the more it

contributes to our Well-being the greater is its worth” (*Money* 258). On the other hand Locke identifies “marketable value,” determined not simply on utility but on scarcity, the dynamics of supply and demand, etc (254, 56, 58). Locke’s “intrinsic” and “marketable” values not only anticipate the modern equivalent of use- and exchange-value, but also identify within the twofold value system that defines the operation of modern commerce. He recognizes that exchange value has superseded utility to become the primary determinant of value; the price of a commodity is influenced more by the change of proportion of quantity and vent than by individual utility. Locke is much concerned with the maintenance of the balance and order of trade, and such maintenance must be guaranteed by a stable medium of the exchange value, a tacit agreement between commercial individuals. Money, being the main medium, predominantly decides the stability of exchange. Yet Locke isn’t confident of its capacity to remain a long-term measure of value because its value changes over time as other commodities do.²⁵ Locke’s theory of value may imply that there is not a single absolute determinant of value change and value is relativized with the complex interactive network of relative quantity, demands and social contract, therefore even money could fail to serve as universal reference of value.²⁶ Utility can’t serve as universal criterion of value either, for it varies for individual users. The value has eventually to rely on an agreement in the social relation that can determine value, a certain “trust.” His theories of value and of language, therefore, are mutual translations to each other: the use-value that varies among individual consumers is structurally analogous to individual meaning-making that varies in similar way. The

²⁵ Locke points out that the amount of silver has multiplied by ten times since the discovery of West-Indies, thus reducing the value of money. Wheat, with its constant proportion between quantity and vent, and being the general food of England, is what Locke thinks is needed to stabilize value change (262-63).

²⁶ Here we won’t bother to investigate into the rationale of the value of money which concerns issues of economic science; for a summary of Locke’s theory of money, see, Patrick Hyde Kelly’s introduction to *Locke on Money*, 1-105.

exchange-value, on the other hand, is this linguistic social contract, this “trust,” that guarantees social consensus of value, or, of meaning. The law of modern commerce reveals Locke’s anxiety over social relations.

When the more radically de-materialized form of currency, the paper money, gradually comes to prestige in commerce, the problems are more deepened. Such medium of modern socio-economic relation is powerful yet dangerous: it has the potential to exploit any given property into its economy, and it can also start unrestrainedly free-floating, cutting up completely with its material origins to engage in the semioticised financial game. In other words, it has the potential to become an allegory of pure signifiers, its referents nullified. Locke has expressed his worry of this economic form of paper money by calling it “hazardous paper-credits” (Locke, *Money* 451), in precisely the same sense with his worry about “trust.” If Locke recognizes the money game and the law of exchange based on credit and trust as hazardous, he in a sense foresees our recent financial breakdown due to the insane game of credits. If money, once a semi-material representation of physical properties, should become completely insubstantial in the end, should it always lead to self-destruction? This is probably why Burke feels so compelled to materialize the source of a traditional order. In a long passage that expresses intensely his worries, Burke articulates what is at peril if society should be reduced to monetary system:

In England we feel the influence of the bank; though it is only the center of a voluntary dealing. He knows little indeed of the influence of money upon mankind, who does not see the force of the management of a monied concern which is so much more extensive, and in its nature so much more depending on the managers than any of ours. But this is not merely a money concern. There is another member in the system inseparably connected with this money management. It consists in the means of drawing out at

discretion portions of the confiscated lands for sale; and carrying on a process of continual transmutation of paper into land, and land into paper. When we follow this process in its effects, we may conceive something of the intensity of the force with which this system must operate. By this means the spirit of money-jobbing and speculation goes into the mass of land itself, and incorporates with it. By this kind of operation, that species of property becomes (as it were) volatilized; it assumes an unnatural and monstrous activity, and thereby throws into the hands of the several managers, principal and subordinate, Parisian and provincial, all the representative of money, and perhaps a full tenth part of all the land in France, which has now acquired the worst and most pernicious part of the evil of a paper circulation, the greatest possible uncertainty in its value. (*Reflections* 162)

The mutual convertibility of paper and land, Burke insists, hinges on institutions, laws and customs that enable this management. These are what Burke means by “another member in the system” consisting of the “means” of property exchange and management. As Furniss argues, Burke could appear a better champion of capitalism than Paine because he understands its operation better.²⁷ Because in order to maintain an order a given body of foundation must be centralized to contain and control the free-floating money economy instead of renounce all order. Burke implicitly expresses his worries that commercial exchange-value would become the sole determinant of not only economic but all forms of order. For

commerce, and trade, and manufacture, the gods of our oeconomical politicians, are themselves perhaps but creatures; are themselves but effects, which, as first causes, we choose to worship. . . . Where trade and

²⁷ For an argument that what Burke champions in the name of *ancien regime* is already a capitalist order, see C. B. Macpherson 51-70, who suggests that Burke’s defense of social hierarchy is to maintain the *economic* hierarchy brought by capitalism.

manufactures are wanting to a people, and the spirit of nobility and religion remains, sentiment supplies, and not always ill supplies their place; but if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles, what sort of a thing must be a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same time, poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter? (*Reflections* 68)

Trade and commerce for Burke are provisional means of maintaining social relations. For Burke, (paper) money is not only pure form hollowed out of social substance, it also has the potential to nullify all social preconditions, all social *mediations* that has in the first place conditioned the individuals and should not be renounced.²⁸

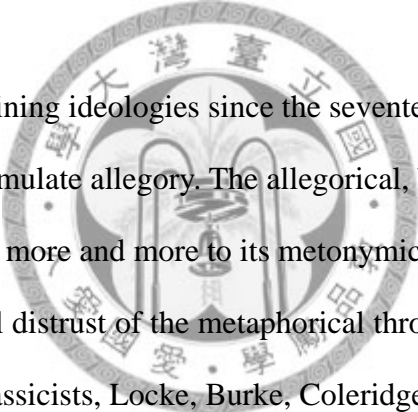
In the third chapter, I shall investigate how Blake responds to the capitalist world order with money as its main enforcer, and how Blake utilizes to question himself, his position, his limit, his allegory within that order.

²⁸ For investigations in Burke's fear of the commercial order and paper circulation, see also J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* 193-212; and Furniss 220-42.

Chapter II

Labor at Los's Furnaces: *Jerusalem*²⁹ and the Allegorical

Let the Indefinite be explored. and let every Man be judged
By his own Works, Let all Indefinites be thrown into Demonstrations
To be pounded to dust & melted in the Furnaces of Affliction:
He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer:
For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power. (*J* 55: 57-63)



The complex, intertwining ideologies since the seventeenth century virtually redefine, remake and reformulate allegory. The allegorical, both as an expression and as a way of thinking, leans more and more to its metonymical aspect due to the intellectual and ideological distrust of the metaphorical through the eighteenth century. The iconoclasts, the neoclassicists, Locke, Burke, Coleridge, and in some sense Paine, contribute to the establishment of the supremacy of the metonymic allegory. They seek to associate or incorporate the particulars with a common source of meaning. If any minute particular should assume their significance, they must acknowledge the significance of the pre-given universal in the first place. Such is a cultural milieu in which Blake's poetic form is situated. Blake's literary style, as we shall see, also has a strong metonymic character. However, this chapter will try to demonstrate that Blake's style is not an uncritically ideological conformity to a hegemonic cultural milieu represented by the figures discussed earlier. It will investigate how Blake's

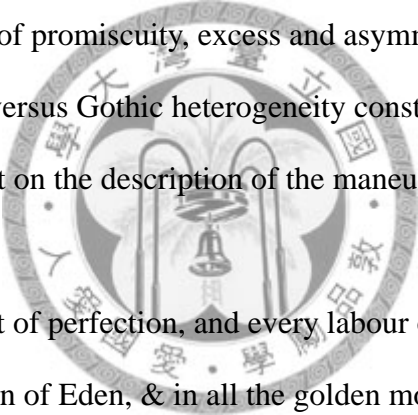
²⁹ All references to the graphic designs in *Jerusalem* are from Morton Paley's illuminated edition (1990). Textual quotes are from Erdman's with no exception.

presentation of metonymic form engages with, intervenes, criticizes, if not reshapes, the dominate form of allegory. It will take Blake's grandest allegory, *Jerusalem*, as an example which displays his peculiar vision of the allegorical.

Jerusalem is constituted by the theme of human separation and the path to reunion. The postlapsarian and pre-apocalyptic intermission of the painful state of "generation," or the long "Sleep of Ulro" (*J* 4: 1) in *Jerusalem*, is initiated by Albion's fallen selfhood when he in jealousy hides his emanation, Jerusalem the Liberty, in his bosom from anyone's reach. From the very beginning onward, the universe is separated by Albion's faulty deed, and the separation is deteriorated by his assuming the supremacy of his self-imposed "law." Jerusalem as the character that bears the title, and as a symbol for the promise of the (re-)unity of humanity, is paradoxically sidelined for the majority of the poem. The warring selfhoods of individual characters are the dramatic motivator as well as a theme and motif in the poem. The theme of forgiveness that is stressed throughout the poem achieves its didactic effect by the irony of its dramatic plot – the series of the selfhood wars that runs counter to forgiveness as disarmed unification. The character of Jerusalem thus becomes a structural absence: her symbolism of liberty, forgiveness and brotherhood, when being abandoned by antagonistic characters (such as Albion) in their warring selfhoods, becomes ironically an indicator of a void in every bosom. Because "selfhood" characters deny the immanent virtue of forgiveness in themselves, this virtue shrink from a universal attribute into a symbol fixated on a single object. The presence of "Jerusalem," then, is the absence of a Jerusalem *in every mind*. This chapter will deal with Blake's idea of the minute particular in *Jerusalem* that calls metonymic linkage into question. But it is necessary to bear in mind that the minute particulars are not isolatable monads which can defy any form of metonymic interrelations. As the

narrator proclaims in the beginning of chapter one: “Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil” (*J* 4: 20). Here, giving the word “forgive” in present participle, the narrator suggests the synchronicity of cause and effect of the act of forgiving and the return to unity.

One of Blake’s constant targets has been the way that knowledge is acquired through abstraction and rational, mathematical analysis. His hostility toward what he calls the “finite” underscores the attack on several historical or intellectual paradigms, such as empiricism, neoclassicism, rational materialism, etc. These antagonisms can be summed up by the contrast of the “Grecian Form” and the “Gothic Form.”³⁰ Grecian cultural legacy is characterized by its discreteness, moderation and symmetry, in contrast to Gothic form of promiscuity, excess and asymmetry. Grecian (Romanesque) simplicity versus Gothic heterogeneity constitutes a main theme of *Jerusalem*. This sheds light on the description of the maneuver of Albion at the beginning of chapter two:



Every ornament of perfection, and every labour of love,
In all the Garden of Eden, & in all the golden mountains
Was become an envied horror, and a remembrance of jealousy:
And every Act a Crime, and Albion the punisher & judge.
And Albion spoke from his secret seat and said
All these ornaments are crimes, they are made by the labours
Of loves: of unnatural consanguinities and friendships
Horrid to think of when enquired deeply into; and all
These hills & valleys are accursed witnesses of Sin

³⁰ *On Virgil*: “Grecian is Mathematic Form / Gothic is Living Form” (E 270). In his late career Blake identifies, perhaps confounds, the Grecian-Classical with the Neoclassical as opposed to his pro-Christian, pro-Hebraic position here also identified as the “Gothic.” The contrast of the Christian versus the Classical will be more extensively discussed in chapter three.

I therefore condense them into solid rocks, stedfast!

A foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth:

That Man be separate from Man, & here I plant my seat. (*J* 28: 1-12)

Vincent De Luca (154-63) and Morton Paley (“Sacred Theory”) have elaborated the influence of Thomas Burnet’s *Sacred Theory of the Earth* on Blake’s presentation of the landscape in his poetry. Here, as another example, the postdiluvian creation of ruinous landscape of “hills & valley” is considered as the consequence of “Sin.” The neoclassicists desire a return to the smooth surface of the earth which is manifested in Albion’s declaration: “I therefore condense them into solid rocks, stedfast!” Albion therefore reflects neoclassical mentality of a uniform harmony. Natural deformity, grandeurs and terrors are the catastrophe that needs to be overcome by turning back the clock to its harmonious antiquity. Such mentality of uniformity will also deem those excessive “ornaments” as inappropriate, as another source of “Sin” or “Crime” even after the Deluge. The ornaments, which can be taken as Gothic ostentation that violates the principle of simplicity, are considered “crime” that needs to be eliminated. Albion here acts in the Urizenic manner whose “one Law” (*E* 72) deems the ornaments as “unnatural consanguinities,” while is in favor of “certainty and demonstrative truth.” By making the claim that “here I plant my seat” Albion claims his authority in a monarchical manner and ironically magnifies his desire to control everything. The seat that symbolizes his throne doesn’t guarantee absolute sovereignty and he soon finds himself in dire agony again:

A deadly Tree, he nam'd it Moral Virtue, and the Law

Of God who dwells in Chaos hidden from the human sight.

The Tree spread over him its cold shadows, (Albion groand)

They bent down, they felt the earth and again enrooting

Shot into many a Tree! an endless labyrinth of woe! (*J* 28: 15-19)

He is ironically victimized by the Tree of the Law to which he is a major contributor. Albion is the paradoxical character in Blake's mythological creations in terms of dramatic structure: he is at the centre of Blake's system that would suggest a role of the protagonist, yet his fall into Urizenic principle defines him as a prisoner to his "selfhood." He is wavering between vision and blindness, belief and doubt, tolerance and jealousy throughout *Jerusalem* so that no allegorical traits can be definitely assigned to him. His unstable character runs parallel to the structure of the poem, a poem with no definite form, which runs counter to its quaternary division.

The "Law" that represents the Mosaic Law or the (Urizenic) abstract rationalism is constantly despised by Blake. Recent scholarship has explored other possible targets of Blake beside the Christian moral Law, Lockean empiricism or Newtonian rational materialism that Blake specifically names in his writings. Makdisi, for example, argues that Blake's target should be considered as a much wider and grander accomplice system that goes far beyond the specific, separated individual practices or paradigms. He argues that eighteenth-century discourses of political liberalism and economic industrialism work in complicity to reify individuals into instruments of maintenance of the grand machinery of the bourgeois empire. Individuals are homogenized in the hegemonic discourse of liberal citizenship, and in the modernized method of reproduction of the factory assembly-lines (78-155). This process homogenization makes the minute particulars cease to be unique particulars. As Makdisi argues, Blake's social vision lies in the penetration into the generalizing and homogenizing of modern discourse (251). Hence Blake states: "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars/ General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer:/ For Art and science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars/ And not in generalizing Demonstrations of Rational Power" (*J* 55: 60-63).

As Makdisi expounds, for Blake, all being exists in “minute particulars.” All forms of being share and realize their immanent faculties in rearticulating their particularity. The network of coexisting, irreducible, unique minute particulars formulates a dynamic that assures the productivity of life. Blake’s vision consists of “a unity of minute particulars, some or all of which may at different times be shared with others – rather than as static hardened selfhoods; as ever-changing composites, rather than as a stream of interchangeable monads ‘unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again’” (319).

Blake’s philosophy of the minute particulars is developed particularly in *Jerusalem*. It is necessary to note that it best displays Blake’s vision of the minute particulars in its formal structure. Because this poem is precisely composed of minute particulars: personal symbolisms, inserted mini-narratives, materials drawn from almost every aspect of Blake’s experience. It is regarded as the most difficult of Blake’s works exactly because such insanely rich materials can not be reduced to a unifying structure to subsume all (minute) particulars. The following discussion will focus on how his formal presentation of all these minute particulars reveals his engagement with the contemporary allegorical.

What most perplexes generations of critics is his narrative pattern of *Jerusalem*. Stuart Curran identifies seven structures in *Jerusalem* (“Structures” 331-39).³¹ Curran argues that these structures work simultaneously because: “Blake’s foundation is Christ, the elemental symbol, and upon that simplest of bases he erects an edifice of

³¹ In Curran’s own summary these co-present structures are: “a primary structures of four divisions, obviously linked by calls to various classes of reader [i.e. the four chapters designed to address four different groups of audiences, the public, the Jews, the Deist, the Christians]; a two-part structure delineating the marked contrast between Ulro and Eden; a three-part structure whose pivots are climactic representations of the fallen state; a threefold and a fourfold division within each chapter stressing the dialectical mode of the poem; a sixfold division emphasizing the continuity of major events; a second three-part structure, derived from the sixfold, which surrounds the central two-thirds of the work, the world of Albion, with perspective of Los’s visionary labor; and a sevenfold structure stressing the poem’s genre as epic prophecy and recalling its heritage with the tradition of Christian apocalypse” (339).

multiple structures, enlarging, contracting, interacting, continually shifting in their combinations of focus – truly ‘Visionary forms dramatic’ (98:28)” (“Structure” 346). Curran’s argument is based on Christian ethic of love, forgiveness and a vision of cosmopolitanism, for which Blake is supposed to champion. This slightly idealized argument suggests that the form of the poem embodies Blakean concepts. I agree that Blake’s form is structured by his vision/ideology, but I’m more inclined to regard the form of *Jerusalem* as disjointed rather than dynamically unified. Leopold Damrosch warns us against approaches to Blake with confidence in Blake’s discourse on imagination, art, its symbols, etc.: “Blake’s imaginative vision is admirable because it wrestles so honestly with the intractable facts of fallen experience” (365). These “intractable facts,” instead of being considered as Blake’s aesthetic flaw, are to be more suggestively taken as the candid dramatization of the author’s artistic struggle. As Damrosch adds, Blake’s meanings “command our imaginative as well as scholarly respect because they are forged and reforged in the furnace of that vision; Blake does not force us to accept his answers, but he demands that we enter into his mental strife and make it ours” (371).

Blake’s work is an allegory about allegory, because all the allegorical narratives and characters he creates are meant for self-examination, self-conscious performance. It is through these allegorical devices that Blake makes his unusual inquiry into the nature of allegory, its success and failure, its legitimacy and authenticity. More precisely, it is the allegory about the production of an allegory, allegory that is, to borrow Damrosch’s phrase, “forged and reforged in the furnace” of Blake’s art work. If Los’s furnace allegorizes Blake’s studio and Los himself Blake’s *dramatis persona*, then his labors, struggles, errors, bewilderments, visions, ignorance and learning, and incessant mental strife brings Blake into the labyrinth of his own work rather than maintains his authorial detachment. This drama is best presented in *Jerusalem*, a work

in which no easy narrative sequence can be decided, no message apparent enough to reach critical and readerly consensus.

Incorporating so diverse and numerous materials, the content of *Jerusalem* could nonetheless be taken in such a simple way: a series of drama of struggle. *Jerusalem* is considered as the aftermath of the fall, the presentation of the universe as ruin and fragments both in content and in form. More precisely, it is to rewrite the relative fourfold counterbalance of *The Four Zoas* with imbalanced structure. The four Zoas as major characters in Blakean symbolism retreat into the backgrounds as “minor” ones like Vala, Rahab, Enitharmon, the sons and daughters of Albion come to the front stage. As in the only time when the four Zoas are mentioned together:

Urizen, cold & scientific: Luvah, pitying & weeping

Tharmas, indolent & sullen: Urthona, doubting & despairing (*J* 38: 2-3)

All four lost interaction, much less communication, with each other. Their emanations, Ahania, Vala, Enion who are supposed to accompany them are separated. The counterbalance of the four Zoas is virtually lost: Tharmas is almost invisible through the narrative; Urthona is absent, and his symbolic function is carried out by his temporal form, Los; Urizenic principle overrides the other three and dominates the fallen universe. The endless series of “selfhood” struggle which constitute the narrative body of *Jerusalem* is initiated by Albion’s hiding Jerusalem; from then on, the narrative is constituted by the tiresome succession of particular battles. Los fights his specter in the first chapter, then fights Albion’s sons; Vala’s struggle with Jerusalem ensue in chapter two; Albion feuds Luvah in chapter three and triumphs; Los and Albion struggle throughout; just before the final apocalypse it finds a new antagonism of Los and Enitharmon in chapter four. Yet in this series of drama too many definitions of ideas, historical allusions, styles of expression demands our attention that it seems almost impossible to be exhausted of its content, especially

when it is presented in fragmented narratives. It has generated various interpretations of its “theme”: Erdman’s “peace without vengeance”; Mee’s “enthusiasm” in “sensuality”; Witke’s “unbound imagination,” etc.³²

The disjointed narrative sequence has always been a problem for *Jerusalem* criticism. Michael Ferber describes: “As many critics have complained, Blake’s narrative sense is very weak . . . ; negotiating the plot of *Jerusalem* is like watching the slow crawl of prickly caterpillar along a branch, only to have it burst into a butterfly and soar away” (148). The “butterfly” can denote not only a sudden, *deus-ex-machina*-like apocalypse at the end of the poem, but all the interludes and digressions that crop up in the middle of the narrative sequence. Among the critics on the narrative structure of *Jerusalem*, Paul Youngquist articulately rejects what he calls “formalist” critics who try to resolve the problem of its narrative disorganization by delineating its formal unity. He also rejects previous critics who take its structure to be a “spatial form” whose narrative components must be read synchronically. For earlier critics, a linear sequence of the narrative is replaced by an alternative form of a synchronic horizon of dramatic struggles. Youngquist shifts our attention from authorial manipulation of formality to the act of reading itself. He calls *Jerusalem* “a field of reading” which enables various relations with the text. The act of reading is still a temporal rather than spatial experience for each reader can choose their route of

³² Erdman, *Blake, Prophet against Empire*, p 462 ff. As he explains: “In all these cases the emphasis is comparable to Blake’s transfer of leadership from a fiery Orc to a merciful Los. All, including Blake, assume that no great movement of change will succeed unless the young men of New Age are sober intellectuals who have annihilated the specter of Selfhood which haunts the warlike” (430n15). For Erdman, in the shadow of Frye, the warlike Orc must retreat into the background in this mature epic so that Los, the real promising artist can move to the center of the stage and acts out his visionary power without destructive vengeance. Mee, “Energy and Enthusiasm in Blake.” Mee’s recent study on *Jerusalem* emphasized Blake’s defense of enthusiasm against eighteenth-century cult of reason. Mee accounts Enlightenment’s distrust of enthusiasm because its reliance on sensual excitement is dangerous of the contamination of the sensual “distractions” of the impure materials. Its tone of passion is an obstacle to the practice of Reason which can purify sense experiences with clear and simple “ideas.” Mee emphatically points out that Blake’s position against the puritanist distrust of the miscellaneous sensations of the “minute particulars.” Witke, *William Blake’s Epic*. She elaborates on Blake’s criticism of Reynolds and neoclassicism that is seen in the form and content of *Jerusalem*, a practice of the unbound imagination from neoclassical constraint.

the narrative line and generate a different story. For Youngquist, if there is a “unity,” it “exists *in potentia* as the sum of all possible playings” (612). The text is governed by the law of contingency instead of sequential causality. One of the modes of the “playing,” as Youngquist formulates, is “ramification,” “the tendency of the field of reading to branch out as it develops along possible but unpredicted narrative trajectories” (613). Therefore, the separation of Albion from Jerusalem either results in his fall from eternity (in plate 54) or fall into Jesus’s arms (in plate 47) or, contradictorily, fall into mere illness instead of complete fall (in plate 23), or even arise from fall (in plate 95). Youngquist compares *Jerusalem* to J. L. Borges’s “Garden of The Forking Paths,” whose narrative repeatedly takes off at the same point and lands at a different destination every time.

Youngquist provides an interesting reformulation of the “structure” of *Jerusalem* as labyrinthine plurality of radical contingency and “chance.” We can conduct a closer investigation comparing him with Curran. First, he and Curran seem to stand at two poles of the structural criticism of *Jerusalem*: openness versus closure, contingency versus formality, readerly response versus authorial manipulation, poststructuralism versus formalism. Yet a closer look at their arguments would reveal that they are not completely incompatible to each other. In Youngquist, the unity as “*in potentia* as the sum of all possible playings” in effect annotates and reiterates Curran of the Blakean ethic of forgiveness, that is, a cosmopolitan inclusiveness as “an edifice of multiple structures.” For Curran, these structures that are ever “enlarging, contracting, interacting, continually shifting in their combinations of focus” do not really run counter to Youngquist “ramifying”: contingency which also “enlarges” its textuality and “continually shifts” its trajectory. What is at issue here is Blake’s characteristic aesthetic of accumulations, whether of structures, of materials, or even of thematic effects. In *Jerusalem*, accumulation is especially at play where all the sources of

Blake's material are included: Blake's personal life, intellectual schools, religious discourses, British history, biblical and classical heritage. These materials are collected in the form of cross-reference, each making sense to the other by thematic, metaphoric, or metonymic interrelations, whose working we will investigate later. In short, Blake's work has become an allegory of the entire body of his experience, an allegory that tries to make sense for itself by interrelating different semantic planes and fields of knowledge. But what could be the dynamism or the structure, if there is any like those proposed in Curran and Youngquist? The question of structure, I will argue, extends to the more "basic" issue of the rhetoric in Blake and its implications of allegory.

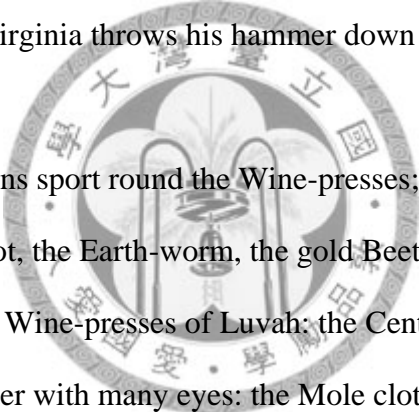
One of the main features of Blake's rhetoric is the use of parataxis, a technique employed frequently in his later work. This is a reasonable feature, since Blake's constant ambition to include all possible materials finds an expression in this trope of an all-inclusive catalogue. In *Jerusalem*, the City of Golgonooza and the topography of England, for example, are presented in this paratactic structure, like a list with no particular order. As Angus Fletcher notes of parataxis:

This term implies a structuring of sentences such that they do not convey any distinction of higher and lower order. 'Order' here means intensity of interest, since what is more important usually gets the greater share of attention. In parataxis each predication stands alone. . . . This means that paratactic sentences do not attempt modification by relative clauses, subordinating conjunctions, phrases in apposition, and the like. (162)

In numerous passages in Blake, the use of juxtaposed clauses that introduced each of the quaternary structures and substructures implies this avoidance of the hierarchy of "intensity of interest." Each of the components is given more or less equal weight, together forming a sight of all-inclusive conglomerate. By presenting the panorama,

Blake invites the reader to attend to the minute particulars rather than to privilege some “major” while overlooking other “minor” details. Vincent De Luca also remarks: “subordinating syntax creates static structures endowed with centers and dependencies, whereas the isochronous, parallel, and independent clauses in paratactic syntax distribute emphasis evenly over an indefinite continuum; the center is ever-shifting, residing in different objects in the fleeting moment” (68). This trope is widely used in Blake, who seems to be fond of cataloguing the categorical groupings:

The citizens of New-York close their books & lock their chests;
The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
The scribe of Pensylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear (*A* 14: 14-17)



Timbrels & violins sport round the Wine-presses; the little Seed;
The sportive Root, the Earth-worm, the gold Beetle; the wise Emmet;
Dance round the Wine-presses of Luvah; the Centipede is there:
The ground Spider with many eyes: the Mole clothed in velvet
The ambitious Spider in his sullen web; the lucky golden Spinner;
The Earwig armd: the tender Maggot emblem of immortality:
The Flea: Louse: Bug: the Tape-Worm: all the Armies of Disease (*M* 27:
11-17)

. . . Living Creatures starry & flaming
With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle Dove, Fly, Worm,
And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array Humanize (*J* 98:
42-44)

Blake’s sanctification of the minute particulars is exemplified in these and other

passages, where creatures, even as mean and petty as the insects and lower-class people have their spectacles in the world of imagination. Yet De Luca remarks (on the passages of natural creatures in particulars):

Everything in the verse, from the punctuational halts of colons and semicolons to the vivid descriptive tags attached to some of the creatures, serves to emphasize the isolated particularity of each creature and to minimize the relations they bear to one another. The narrator surveys an indefinitely extended set of life forms, notes certain individual members of the set and passes on; it is the multiplicity or abundance of particulars, not the nature of the particulars that catches his attention. At the same time, it is a fleeting abundance; each particular shines momentarily before the reader's eye, then slips backward and away from the ever-moving present of the unremitting bardic voice. (69)

For De Luca, all those particulars that are merely named in passing suggest their interrelations, interactions and dynamics are understated. Particulars matter in their "abundance" rather than their "nature." This, and other similar tropes such as parallelism and repetition, he argues, marks the mutability and temporality of the matters in the flux of phrasing; in the succession of the loosely connected particulars it makes up an "artificial infinite" that is fragmented in reality in its continuous appearance. In this language style, De Luca argues, Blake displays the Burkean sublime whose qualifications of disfigurement, fearful "ruin," obscurity, and the terror of grandeur see its expression in Blake's large-scale yet obscure compilation (62-75). It is very true of his emphasis on the emotional impact of this trope, and his understanding of the "ruin". But the point about the affective effect may presuppose the *immediacy* of this effect in reading. It has been a cliché (yet a reality) that in reading such difficult poet as Blake one has to go as slow and as repeatedly as it takes

to extract something from the inexhaustible and monstrous body of work. De Luca ignores the reality of numerous *rereadings* in Blake readership as we see in the radical case of Youngquist. De Luca's argument is one-sided in the unconscious assertion of the sufficiency of authorial voice (the "bardic voice"). If these named-in-passing particulars are attended times and again, will they still be fleeting or, if we are to venture to suggest further, forgettable? Wouldn't they become conspicuous problematic, sedimented from the body of text, compelling the reader to delve into it even deeper for their possible significances, interconnections, and undercurrents not recognized? These things would loom large in view rather than lapse into fleeting oblivion.³³

Essick, discussing parataxis in Blake, draws attention to its metonymic structure in the language of Jakobsonian formulation: "Paratactic verse of this type generates metonymic structures – that is, patterns of association built up along the syntagmatic axis as distinct from metaphoric operations across the paradigmatic matrix" (*Language* 180). If Blake has ever been aware of his language as allegorical, then he must have penetrated into the very qualification of this figure. Allegory is metonymic in that signs must be joined into a chain so that each sign could find its correspondence in the allegorical referent. An isolated metaphor does not constitute allegory because in the semantic working of allegory it is partial. As Paul de Man points out: "it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* . . . of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to the pure anteriority" (207; de Man's italics). A conventional allegory works in a sequence of metaphors that link

³³ Simply take a look and how a four-line problematic in *America* 14: 14-17 of American citizens, quoted above, exhausts the critical energy of Makdisi. See esp. chap. 2.

the signs and the referents isomorphically, each sign becoming the metaphoric vehicle for a certain referent only when its connection to the previous metaphorical vehicle, as “the pure anteriority,” is established. It is done through approximation, with each sign, built on its anterior, pointing closer to the ultimate meaning. But what if the metonymic connection breaks? One possibility is that one unequivocal meaning will fail to be anchored, and multivalent references may result. It could bring Youngquist’s argument into play when an allegorical signifying chain is broken down and reshuffled into a cluster of intertwined chains. The constant interruptions and digressions in the narrative and the blending of diverse materials in Blake’s later works, especially in *Jerusalem*, produce such effects. Yet Blake’s ingenuity lies not only in his multilayered or multivalent allegory but also in his questionings into its limits. One of the questionings is seen in the Golgonooza passage where paratactic as well as paralleled syntax unfolds its allegorical irony.

This key passage in *Jerusalem* that provides a quarry for our knowledge of Blakean allegory is in plates 12-13, a description of the geography inside and around Golgonooza, the center of the (creative) activity of one of the protagonists, Los. The content and structure of Golgonooza is given in 12: 46-13:49. The syntax employed here is parallelism, or quasi-parataxis in the sense that the content in each of the four cardinal directions are evenly catalogued. Blake enacts in this parallelism of his quaternary metaphysic which must coexist in egalitarianism. Yet the structure of the city is stratified into structures and sub-substructure, represented in the subordinate clause within each paratactic unit. This rendering complicates the use of parallelism or parataxis by incorporating dependent clauses into it.

In the ensuing passage, moreover, about the space surrounding Golgonooza, the Vegetative Universe or the world inside the Mundane Shell, a disheartening picture is brought to view:

Around Golgonooza lies the land of death eternal; a Land
 Of pain and misery and despair and ever brooding melancholy:

 There is the Cave; the Rock; the Tree; the Lake of Udan Adan;
 The Forest, and the Marsh, and the Pits of bitumen deadly:
 The Rocks of solid fire: the Ice valleys: the Plains
 Of burning sand: the rivers, cataract & Lakes of Fire:
 The Islands of the fiery Lakes: the Trees of Malice: Revenge:
 And black Anxiety; and the Cities of the Salamandrine men:
 (But whatever is visible to the Generated Man,
 Is a Creation of mercy & love, from the Satanic Void.)
 The land of darkness flamed but no light, & no repose:
 The land of snows of trembling, & of iron hail incessant:
 The land of earthquakes: and the land of woven labyrinths:
 The land of snares & traps & wheels & pit-falls & dire mills:
 The Voids, the Solids, & the land of clouds & regions of waters:
 With their inhabitants: in the Twenty-seven Heavens beneath Beulah:
 Self-righteousnesses conglomerating against the Divine Vision:
 A Concave Earth wondrous, Chasmal, Abyssal, Incoherent!
 Forming the Mundane Shell: above; beneath: on all sides surrounding
 Golgonooza: Los walks round the walls night and day. (*J* 13: 30-55)

The geographical elements of the vegetated universe are also presented in parataxis, yet a contrasted tone can be detected. In line 38-43, the cave, the rock, the tree, the lake and others are listed here miscellaneously, crowded in a few lines. This syntactic manipulation enhances Blake's presentation of the wasteland as the vegetated universe, "the land of death eternal," which is formless, unorganized, devitalized. In

this light, line 46-49 looks ironic because the parallelism of the syntax, with each line starting with “the land,” only reinforces the deformity because each is not assigned to a specific position in a structure that is absent, if not nonexistent. They are simply piled up in an unorganized storage like the items of line 38-43 whose compilation looks like a junkyard. The discrepancy of the deformity of the vegetated universe and the form of Golgonooza bespeaks the ambivalence of paratactic syntax: on the one hand it helps deploy the particulars in parallelism; on the other hand it suggests the breakdown of associative order. In Blake’s use of parataxis, metonymy is suggested but not perfectly executed. In Blake’s use of metonymy (through parataxis), the syntactic elements are listed rather than logically deduced or associated. If the Burkean metonymy is characterized by a temporal continuity and the Coleridgean, more advanced, by synchronicity, then the Blakean tends toward their radical opposite. Burke and Coleridge suggest a *verticality* in their discourse of genealogy descending from the past down to the present. Blake, on the other hand, *horizontalizes* it by presenting the figurative juxtaposition of parataxis. In *Jerusalem*, geography outweighs history in that geographical mapping occupies more space than historical genealogy.

But the profounder issue in this syntactic feature is its association to the allegorical practices of Los’s labor in Golgonooza. Through the voice of Los, Blake makes the poetic claim in *Jerusalem*: “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by any other Mans / I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create” (10: 21; E 153). The famous lines are taken consensually to be the tagline of Blake’s poetic manifesto with which now Los is identified as Blake’s *dramatis persona* and his advocate. Yet Robert Essick notes: “Almost all readers of *Jerusalem* have taken Los to be the avatar of the poet’s imagination, but this identification must be accompanied by a recognition that he is presented in the poem as ever labouring, building, working. To

cease is to fall into ‘despair and ever brooding melancholy’” (*J* 13: 31; *E* 157) (*Language* 185-86). Essick implicitly questions the supposedly “finished” status of Blake’s work, for to cease from his creative labor is to fall into Urizenic inertia. However, Los’s status as Blake’s poetic advocate is not to be readily proven because of their analogous function as the creative, redemptive laborer in the postlapsarian humanity; it can only be confirmed when Blake not only discourses but also *acts* in the Losian manner. Blake must reveal his incessant struggle that undergoes doubt, self-irony, self-questioning just like the condition of Los’s labor. As in the following passage:

. . . . Los builded Golgonooza,

.....

. . . In fears

He builded it, in rage & in fury. It is the Spiritual Fourfold

London: continually building & continually decaying desolate! (*J* 53: 15-19)



The building of Golgonooza is not linearly progressive. Because it is continually “decaying,” some steps have to go over again; or rather, Los may have to redirect his procedure, reworking on the collapsed part so that it will meet the requirements better. Such is the case for Blake, whose work is, to quote Damrosch again, “forged and reforged in the furnace,” the furnace called his studio.

Back to the quoted passage. The order in Golgonooza is met by the chaos around it. Los has tried to reconstruct the quaternary universe, the essence of the prelapsarian world, by materializing its image. It is the material mimicry of the spiritual fourfold; yet its presence only marks the absence of that mythical ideal. Golgonooza is a mundane allegory to a paradise lost, and its existence could overwrite the reality since in reality the referent is absent. Blake provides a diagrammatic illustration to the

fallen universe in *Milton* 33, where the existence of the mundane shell seems to block out Golgonooza from the connection to the interlocking boundaries of the four Zoas. If Golgonooza is mimetic of the Zoas that is outside of an outside (i.e. the mundane shell as the first outside of Golgonooza), can it be said that Los's creative effort is thrice (twice) removed from the truth? One can find an interesting phenomenon that there is no illustration of Golgonooza in Blake, not even in diagram. Is this city a textual mirage that can not be brought into graphic shape? In his chart to Golgonooza in the *Dictionary*, Foster Damon acknowledges: "Golgonooza, being four-dimensional, cannot be reduced to a chart of two dimensions. Each of the four gates not only opens into each of the other gates but does so 'each other within other toward the Four points' (*J* 12: 48)" (163). So complex and tricky to be envisioned, Golgonooza materializes the limit of representation to bring a visionary city into palpable shape. If, in an apt phrase, Los is an "allegorical anti-allegorist" (Gleckner 69), this is to be regarded as anti-mimeticism. Damrosch comments, "Golgonooza represents the best that can be done with physical materials – with *material* materials – but in using them at all it confesses its distance from Eden" (321; italics is his).³⁴

As a result, paratactic phrases and lines sometimes fall into inarticulate noises, meaningless in the allegorical workings. But in producing noise Blake attempts more than simply to perform its own failure. Essick is inclined to call Blake "our noisiest poet," for "[a] glance at the word count in the *Concordance* [by Erdman] shows that Blake may be our noisiest poet, at least in the number and variety of human utterances he names. 'Voice' appears more frequently than any other human attribute or activity, more even than 'see' or 'human.'" Essick then mentions 'weeping,' 'groan,' 'said,'

³⁴ Damrosch grounds this remark on his understanding of masculinity versus femininity in Blake. Blake's conception of the female as the abstracted physicality is exemplified in the rigid point-for-point allegory of Golgonooza. Therefore Golgonooza as a construct in the fallen world of physical material "cannot escape the confinement of the female" (321). This thesis does not intend to tackle in particular the question of gender and sexuality, yet it seems Blake's gender ideology, if there is, is a foundation of his metaphysics. For discussions on sexuality and related issues, see in particular Damrosch 181-220.

‘cried,’ the human sounds that are more frequently seen than other important words. He notes: “Sometimes the noises cluster together and overwhelm all other senses. ‘The howlings gnashings groanings shriekings shudderings sobbings burstings / Mingle together to create a world for Los,’ and a cacophony for the reader, in Night the Sixth of *The Four Zoas*” (E 346) (*Language* 173). Essick’s view corroborates the argument about Blake’s writings as oral practices.³⁵ His observation would seem mildly naïve in its empiricism: as a work saturated with interactions in the form of *verbal* exchange among characters, words like “voice” or “said” is expected to appear in high frequency. *Jerusalem* is a dramatized work whose narrative is chiefly constituted by dialogues and monologues of characters; in other words, speeches and sounds enact the story. What is at issue, here, then is how the dramaticity of *Jerusalem* could stylistically lend meaning to the noises that seem at first glance disturbing residues that supposedly threaten the formal unity. Michael Ferber suggests that the noises be taken as the displaced warfare in the revolutionary era in Blake’s time. The warfare in Blake’s textual practice is transformed from the physical to the spiritual realm. As Ferber explains, “Spiritual warfare is, after all, warfare, and not the polite academic conference or a support group for the victimized. In his obsessive, over-compensatory elaborations of the means of a warfare, however, one feels the poignancy of Blake’s yearning to give words the efficacy of things, to give his poor pieces of paper covered with verses and pictures the same force in the world as the man on horseback with blood-stained sabres” (“Two Swords” 163). The noise vividly demonstrates Los’s struggle:

I took the sighs & tears, & bitter groans:

I lifted them into my Furnaces; to form the spiritual sword.

³⁵ These noises, along with patterns of repetition, alliteration and the like, are taken by Essick as evidences of the oral nature of Blake’s writings. Essick suggests that these techniques are to establish the speaking presence of a vivid voice (172-180).

That lays open the hidden heart: I drew forth the pang
 Of sorrow red hot: I workd it on my resolute anvil:

 Loud roar my Furnaces and loud my hammer is heard:
 I labour day and night, I behold the soft affections
 Condense beneath my hammer into forms of cruelty
 But still I labour in hope, tho' still my tears flow down. (*J* 9: 17-27)

Los's noisy labor at his furnaces, for Ferber, not only symbolizes the spiritual war but also *performs* it. As Ferbert claims: "If war is noisy, very well, nothing will be noisier than Los at his forge" (167).

The spiritual warfare is launched, apparently, by the disheartening reality of fallen humanity since the beginning of *Jerusalem*. The world is presented as fragmented ruin, with the symbolic characters feuding with each other in their warring selfhood. This allegorical narrative often points to the biggest tenor of his allegory which is the British nation. Britain, like the fallen humanity, needs to be brought back to life from its "eternal death." Blake displaces the scared city from Jerusalem to Britain, embodied in the figure of Albion, the primal body of the nation. The history and geography of Britain become allegorized components of a New Jerusalem. Peter Ackroyd regards this work the most "English," and Curran calls it the "British national epic."³⁶ This allegorical correspondence does not start as late as in *Jerusalem*. In *Milton*, a perfect version of the fusion with scriptural myth and the British one is provided in the description of every part of Albion's body unified with individual British place (*M* 39: 32-52, *E* 140-41). Regarded as "the strongest and clearest image

³⁶ Ackroyd, *Blake*, discusses *Jerusalem* as within the tradition of epic: "The end of *Jerusalem* is to create a national identity by recreating a national mentality," and in doing so he accomplishes "the British national epic" (179). Curran explains: in *Jerusalem*, Blake "employs the various powers of lyric, panegyric, epic, dialogue, song and dramatic verse, with these prosodic changes as an important aspect of the 'Contraries' he pursued. Such heterogeneity of forms and procedure seems indeed to be an authentic aspect of the English sensibility. . . ." (*Poetic Form* 321).

of the unity of giant and country” (Whittaker 55), Blake depicts its “unity” in a point-to-point correspondence of geographical places and body components. Albion and the country are interchangeable as tenor and vehicle to each other in rhetorical aspect, but both substantial in themselves, harmonized co-entities.

In contrast to *Milton* read as “recovery of innocence,”³⁷ the prolonged song of experience that is *Jerusalem* reworks the allegorical correspondence in a less organized way. Plate 16 provides us a notorious example of Blakean encyclopedic inclusion, this time of British typography, in the characteristic manner of monstrous corpus of paratactic heap. Words consisting of catalogues of proper nouns cram the entire plate, while 140 of them, mostly British geographical names, are jammed in the lower half of the plate alone. De Luca postulates the idea of “wall of words”: the crammed plates of the illuminated books make visual appearances of the text plates resemble that of the mural panel. It exemplifies W. J. T. Mitchell’s notion of “composite art,” in which the artistic product fuses the textual and the graphic. Words transform from merely textual to visual units as well; they become *images* of “mute monuments in the stream of vocality.” These words look like the building blocks of the textual “wall,” together provoking the sublime effect in the reader. The sublime effect is triggered, as De Luca also argues for extended parataxis, paralleled lines and other syntactic features in Blake, by the monstrous verbal flood that violates neoclassical doctrine of decorum and moderation, and in turn fulfills vision of “fearful symmetry” (De Luca 89-94). Later we will see how words and images are more radically fused and interchanged in the separate plate of *Laocoön*.

The emotional effect verbalized by De Luca would seem a subjective experience presumed as objective effect. As Morris Eaves remarks: “De Luca’s metaphor of Blake’s ‘wall of words’ . . . is too elegantly architectural. In my experience, Blake’s

³⁷ See Bloom, *Visionary Company* 97-108.

works is a *heap* of words [my italic] – and pictures – that starts to become a wall when we readers apply the necessary intellectual pressure to get what we want from it: sense, structure, coherence” (“On Blakes” 140). The metaphor of words as building blocks should reduce them to functional elements as the meaning-making of the wall of “sublime.” The problem of De Luca’s reading is that his emphasis on the material function of individual words effaces their possible incongruities in the semantic dimension. In other words, the metaphoric are nullified in the metonymic operation. However, the words are material particularities in any rate; they pose as inerasable remains in the flow of the text. In spite of my disagreement with De Luca on this point, nonetheless, he has provided a profound suggestion as to how, following Mitchell, material qualities of the text intrudes our semantic decoding in reading a text as abstract symbolic units.

Blake’s text is constantly wavering between assigning its allegorical signs to their proper semantic places, as we see in *Milton*, and undoing the chain of signifiers into heaps before revisiting and reworking on them. Such ambivalence is often accentuated by the quest of stable source of reference, the quest of origin. This triggers the cry:

. . . O Albion let Jerusalem overspread all Nations

As in the times of old! (*J* 72: 35-36)

Compared with the vision in *Milton*, this is doubly depressing: Albion is no longer the candidate of the body reunion with British topography; his fallen selfhood even hinders Jerusalem, his vicarious deputy, from accomplishing the task for him. If *Milton* 39: 32-52 is tuned in optimism of imminent apocalypse, these two lines quoted above are punctuated by nostalgia; while that looks forward, this looks backward. The nostalgia would lead Blake back and back to the mythical *in principio*, to Albion in and as the primal state of the British nation, to the remotest moment of time, the

cosmogony of Urizen. The present is an undesirable condition for Blake as it is for Burke. Burke traces back to the past to search for a beginning that can serve as the legitimate origin of a genealogy. Blake, however, in so doing, finds the origin a wrong direction: the cosmogony of Urizen results in the fall. In *Jerusalem*, specifically, Blake finds a genealogy of Britain that “all things begins and ends in the Druid.” For Blake, Druidism represents rational-mathematic principle that deprives human imagination. Here Blake presents an origin that he considers wrong in the first place. With the vertical metonymy, i.e. genealogy, going wrong, the horizontal metonymy, i.e. a vision of cosmopolitanism, appears far from accomplished. This results in this unaccomplished (cosmopolitan) vision of the thirty-two nations:



The Nations wait for Jerusalem. they look up for the Bride
France Spain Italy Germany Poland Russia Sweden Turkey
Arabia Palestine Persia Hindostan China Tartary Siberia
Egypt Lybia Ethiopia Guinea Caffraria Negroland Morocco
Congo Zaara Canada Greenland Carolina Mexico
Peru Patagonia Amazonia Brazil. Thirty-two Nations

And under these Thirty-two Classes of Islands in the Ocean

All the Nations Peoples & Tongues throughout all the Earth (*J* 72: 37-44)

Acknowledging the fact that these thirty two nations are highly selective and the reason for the selection unexplained, it is uncertain where this vision will lead us to. Hence parataxis: a sign of arbitrary juxtaposition. The wrongful vertical line results in this horizontal disjunction, which compels Blake to “reforge and reforge” continually to look for the right path that leads to reunion. Blake’s use of parataxis might tempt us to take it as a signal of his failure or inarticulation of allegorical signification. But when he is breaking up the chain of signs into randomized succession, whose noises and visual intensity disturb us, it perturbs our sensibility and compels us out of our

illusory Beulah.

However, Blake does not stop at the breakdown of metonymic coherence in his allegorical practice. Allegory in Blake is problematized by arbitrary serialization of partial metaphors or a more disorganized, paratactic compilation of loosely connected particulars. However, particulars are not to be left in mutual isolation, working in incommensurable differences: true vision for Blake is found in minute particulars as “organized” (*J* 55: 63; *J* 91: 21). Metonymical associations are not annulled but reworked through an effort of reorganization of the particulars. The next part of this chapter will explore repetition, a major stylistic feature that reconstructs metonymy through metaphorical complication. In Blake, repetition is stylistically multilayered: in a sense, syntactic features of parallelism and the like are repetitions; the sense of “reworking” and “reforging” such as we see in the example of the British myths is a form of repetition as well. In Blake, the question of repetition is two-folded: there is repetition in the products (repeated units of meaning and perception in the works) and that in the production (the reproduction of plates). Critics often address the question with attention to both. Their positions align in their shared belief that Blake resists the modern mode of mechanical reproduction. This is a mode that reduced individual product into uniform commodity whose identity overwrites their difference, and against which Blake “deliberately” creates variants in each of the copies, so that each copy can be uniquely independent. Such hypothesis is contested by Joseph Viscomi (1993), who argues that variation is intrinsic in the very execution of his engraving mode of production.³⁸ Viscomi offers a fusion of technical and thematic approaches

³⁸ Viscomi contends a critical assumption that the individual differences made by Blake in each copies are deliberate and that these difference has ideological significance. He scrutinizes Blake’s printing and editing technique (in Part II of the book) and argues (Part IV, esp. 163-176) that these variations are inevitable because the process of production and the technique in illuminated printing (unlike mass-production commercial printing) don’t produce identical copies. He concludes: “The Blakes were not graphic purist; they were not interested in making an edition’s copies look exactly the same, but neither were they interested in making them completely different” (176).

to Blake, enabling us to see how Blake's technique contributes to the authorial presence and intervention into the meaning-making of his system.

Viscomi's observation is one important step beyond the traditional critical assumptions of the uniqueness of every single copy of the illuminated books. That critical assumption, when taken to the extreme, would eventually confront an impossibility of a general, comprehensive argument: the uniqueness of each copy would lead to a more radical assumption of the incompatibility to each other. For Viscomi, if not a single copy is reducible to any other and all are radically unique to resist a common significance, it will prevent us from making any general claim – virtually any claim at all – and disorient, if not dismantle, Blake scholarship. Indeed, identity and difference is one key issue in Blake not only because it is situated at the intersection of technical and ideological/intellectual topics in Blake studies but also because it is enmeshed with the issue of repetition. In repetition, how is identity or difference produced, preserved, multiplied, cancelled, destroyed, or transformed? And how does it shed light on the intersected area of technology and ideology in Blake?

Blake's mode of production – the “illuminated printing,” includes painting and writing with pens and brushes and an acid-resist medium directly on the surface of the copperplates. It enables him to produce words and images simultaneously and integrally in contrast to conventional printing's division of textual and graphic labor. Moreover, as Viscomi and others point out, the direct execution of the designs on the plates makes each illuminated books an original composition. There is hardly a conceptual “prototype” that governs the execution that produces each copy. Therefore Makdisi advances on Viscomi's view in proposing the idea of “original copy”: “It is important to note that both conventional typography and engraving were in Blake's time essentially reproductive activities, used primarily for the dissemination of a series of more or less identical copies of original, ontologically prior, texts and

images. . . . What makes Blake's work distinctive is that it breaks down the logic of 'original' and 'reproduction' and leaves us instead with the oxymoronic logic of 'original copies,' or impressions that have no prototype, images that are repeated, but that remain original at the same time" (190). Makdisi suggests that the significance in the variations of the illuminated books should not be derived solely in "symbolic and iconographic reading." We should also address it on the ground of the *logic* of contemporary mode of production, namely factory production line that produces identical commodities. As Viscomi is suspicious of the "ideological" significance concerning capitalist commodity culture in the illuminated books, Makdisi offers a way out in descriptive language of its literal significance: since slight difference is inevitable in Blake's method of printing, it means that Blake literally developed a mode of production that *necessarily* produce heterogeneous copies (200-01).

For Makdisi, Blake's mode of production makes similarities (or identity) "become differences" (200), since each copy is original in its own right. An "original copy" without iconographical or conceptual "prototype" leads Makdisi to recognize that in the illuminated books, "philosophical concept and material practice merge into each other and become inseparable" (198). What helps our investigation in Blake's allegory is this deconstructive move concerning original and copy. If certain forms of allegory serve to "represent" something, to mimeticize it, then it is a copy to its ontological priority, that is, the "original" ideas or matter. In Blake's technical treatment, as Makdisi suggests, the "original" would lose, or at least be attenuated of, its relatively secure and permanent status as ontological priority in contrast to the provisional "copies." The original is presumably the ultimate source of reference. Burke tries to pinpoint a prior "tradition" and Paine tries to make absolute the "rights of man" by fixing any talk of interest on the selected group of subjects, the "people." Both, in spite of their intellectual prudence, reify their respective points of reference

as permanent, ultimate, ontological priority.

However, despite the neatness and sophistication of Makdisi's argument, he hasn't fully fathomed the problem of the distinction of identity/similarity and difference. How are identity and difference perceived and distinguished? And what could be the dialectical relation between them? Makdisi is perhaps too preoccupied with the either/or of identity and difference of past critics and tries to go beyond it by claiming its both/and in the logic of Blakean production: these productions are oxymoronically *both* same *and* different. He comes short of articulating identity and difference as epistemological duality. Pure difference is unnamable and virtually unthinkable. One can perceive and name the difference between two objects of observation only if there is a point of comparison, a common criterion of evaluation, only if they are placed on the same plane to be recognized as two distinct objects. Without identity, the attempt to name difference will be vain. Pure similarity, in the same token, will be unthinkable without the acknowledgement of the intrinsic differences of the objects being compared. Similarity is named among objects only when they are perceived, as a *sine qua non*, as distinct objects: in some sort of a Deleuzian logic, two or more objects, even if they appear identical, necessarily reveal their difference in the first place; pure identity is synonymous with oneness. Repetition, then, is the common denominator of similarity and difference. It is through repetition that the distinctness of objects can be perceived. Repetition enables comparison among objects that are repeated and enables epistemological determination of identity and difference. Through repetition the paradoxical coexistence of identity and difference are brought into play.

Repetition is a major leitmotiv in Blake. Through the leitmotiv, the logic of identity and difference is demonstrated. Repetition in Blake, as critics may not have been sufficiently aware of, is not only syntactical, lexical or graphical, that is, not only

literal, but also *figurative* or sometimes even metaphysical. This is practiced in his treatment of his characters and their symbolic meanings. Now we will investigate Blakean characters and symbols in terms of their identities, mutations, confluences. We will look at how Blake resists symbolic strictness of allegorical characters.

In the previous chapter I briefly introduced Kelley's study in the vicissitudes of allegory. But there is an issue concerning her schema. It is built on a binary opposition between abstraction/the general and the particulars which enables her to deal with the historical juncture – the crisis of allegory brought by the iconophobic logic of neoclassicism which eliminates particular in favor of abstraction, and which impels the reaction of Romantic writers, including Blake, who work to bring back the particularities of allegorical practice. However, Kelley's binary system is slightly inflexible in its implication of the incompatibility of abstraction and particular. Thus, in her formulations, authors are often confronted with the either-or dilemma of abstraction or particulars, or at best creating ambivalence. Kelley's argument should be improved with the acknowledgement that the dialectic of general and particular is similar to that of identity and difference. This is not to say that the general and the particulars are in an epistemological duality. The logic is that they can be interchanged, and they are their mutual origins. In fact, Blake knows this logic:

When the Individual *appropriates* Universality

He divides into Male & Female: & when the Male & Female,

Appropriate Individuality, they become an Eternal Death. (*J* 90: 52-55; my emphasis)

For Blake, universality does not preexist but is "appropriated." The appropriated universality in turn "appropriates individuality," and could resume this cycle to infinity. But this closed circle is the cause of "eternal death" since the relationship between universality and individuality is fixated to lead to fetishism or reification.

One has to recall that the superimposed supremacy of Urizen, accounted in the *Book of Urizen*, is not prescribed or predetermined as ontological absolute. Urizen was only one part of the fourfold cosmos; but his partial selfhood overtakes other symbolic beings before he can dominate others. To put it bluntly, his centrality originates from his *peripherality*; or the claim of the authenticity of his *general* or *abstract* principle comes from the fault line of assuming universality with his *particularity*. The general is not a pre-given; it the result of *generalization*.

Los once pronounces:

I am inspired: I act not for myself: for Albions sake

I now am what I am . . . (*J 8: 15-18; my italics*)

This speaks of the relative definition of characters. As these lines suggest, Los was not what he is; he is defined by his relation to Albion. When he becomes able to define his relationship with Albion he becomes able to acknowledge his identity. Identity in Blake is not pre-given; it is trough their “act” of defining themselves. As W. J. T. Mitchell observes:

Blake’s characters . . . are not related to one another in terms of the moral antithesis and hierarchies of allegory, romance, and myth: they are, despite the abstract surface, more like the complex matrices of intersubjectivity we find in the novel, without the novel’s controlling dimension of low mimetic realism. Characters are parts of one another, capable of becoming one another, or at least metaphors for one another. They are capable of change, conversion, degeneration, transformation, mutual absorption or repulsion, and indefinite subdivision and differentiation. That is why “Sublime Allegory” addressed to the “Intellectual Power” is so much more demanding of its readers than mere “Fable or Allegory” addressed to the “corporeal” intellect which wants to see virtue rewarded and vice punished in a

confirmation of its own righteousness. (*Composite Art* 118)

Problematizing the contradistinction of characters, Mitchell argues that Blake later develops the formula that “they become what they behold” (esp. in *J* 32) that disturb the comfortable attribution of good and evil to specific characters as absolute terms. Mitchell points out that Los can serve as the ironic mediator of the two opposing camps of the Eternals and of Urizen (120), because the latter two have things in common. In Blake, allegorical persons now and then cease to incarnate fixed ideas; for Blake always avoids reifying his characters by making their actions incongruous to the representation of preconceived ideas. In other words, he avoids the arbitrary metaphorical linkage of the characters and the ideas. However, as we shall see later, Blake doesn’t altogether nullify the metaphorical dimensions of his allegorical narrative.

We shall investigate some motifs in Blake’s visual designs. The frontispiece of *Jerusalem* presents Los in a dark coat and broad-brimmed hat with a lantern that evokes the image of London night watchman. Morton Paley identifies conflated references in the detail of the design: his sandals and lantern recall Blake’s Isaiah in *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; the watchman image indicates biblical Isaiah and Ezekiel addressed by God as watchman (*Jerusalem* 130). Usually portrayed as blacksmith with hammer in hand instead of lantern, this bizarre image of Los further inter-textualizes Los by the implicit allusion to other mythical figures of prophets. The prophetic figure is now conferred upon Los who has been primarily portrayed as a laborer from *Book of Urizen* to the poem in question. Now he becomes the desirable combination of a visionary (prophet) and an activist (laborer). But he is so because he *performs* thus: it is the guise he puts on that enables us to complicate his identity. Allegorical persons in Blake are not ontological incarnation of prescribed conceptions and ideas. Their functions are reified; their significances are fixated. Through a series

of various performances, they show that their supposedly fixed, permanent identities are provisional. And this provisionality indicates the mutability: they can become *different* from what they used to be, and they can also become identified with each other – which mean identity at work.

This frontispiece is only a prelude. In the following plates of *Jerusalem*, we see a dizzying masquerade in which character performs almost ever-changingly the principles of other character's performances. Urizen is a rather inactive or inert character who imprisons himself in incessant brooding, shutting off every channel of interaction with other characters. But his principle lives and dominates all. Albion becomes Urizen's advocate when he is seen combined with the mathematical principle of Druidism (*J* 27; 46: 15). Moral Law is neither reified as any specific character. Though Foster Damon attributes Law to Rahab in particular, he fails to point out that there are many Rahabs performing the principle of the Law: Albion's will to power by prohibition and the making of criminal law at the beginning of chapter two; Los's specter's claim of self-righteousness in plate 8; Gwendolen and the daughters of Albion in the cult of sanctioned chastity that negates the virtue of friendship and forgiveness. Enitharmon turns Satanic in her struggle for selfhood/subjectivity; and Satan has already been identified with Urizen ("Then Los & Enitharmon knew that Satan is Urizen," *M* 10: 1). Vala was the material nature itself, then impersonates the practitioner of Natural Religion in chapter two.

The only character who probably never changes is Urizen, who usually broods in isolation but does not act, except the reaction to Fuzon's rebellion by nailing him on a tree in *Book of Ahania*. This is an intriguing case, and perhaps a brilliant move in Blake's satire on Natural Religion and rationalism. For Blake this "satanic" or "urizenic" gang of abstract philosophers commits the fault of stasis and inertia. "Thought is Act" (E 623), as he proclaims in his annotations of Bacon. Blake's sense

of “eternal death” refers to this inactivity, which refuses to communicate, to move and to change. Death is the cessation of change that results from inaction. Blake here makes a dramatic irony with the image of Urizen: his long and white beard and aging appearance suggest bodily decrepitude. His intellect wishes to rest on the permanence of abstraction, while his concrete body reminds us of material change.

In the images and visual design, Blake’s allegory is even more playful. Repetition is here at work again. “Compass” was the tool for the (Jehovah) creator of the universe in, for instance, *The Ancient of Days*. But when the image is repeated in the form of Los's tong in the final plate of *Jerusalem*, it generates some new significance. The tong, similar in shape to the compass, is one of the essential tools for Los’s redemptive labor, essential for Los to give form to the fallen universe. We are at time tempted to anticipate that Los repeats the fault in the Creation. Will form-giving lapse into formal constraint? In fact, Los is running the peril of the negative result when he bends the senses of Reuben (plate 30). This ambivalence is always at work in Blake’s allegory: with repletion of the compass image, for instance, Los’s labor could lapse into identity with its past possessor.

One of the most central constitutive proponents in Blake’s art is line. Many major images are essentially made up of lines: the chain, the worm, the serpent, the weaving thread, the fiber, etc. These images are often presented in similar ways so that each recalls the other. In *J 65* the image of chain is presented in long wiggly line on the right of the plate; in *J 82*, the same shape *repeats*, but this time it is a worm (Hyle’s native form). In *J 63*, a giant worm coils a female body, evoking the serpent coiling Eve’s body, tempting us to assimilate the two images. With the contextual variety and indeterminacy, the “meanings” of the images in Blake differ and proliferate. It produces a circular network; its working is not the semantic connection between abstract textual signs but their material resemblance. Line as a “grapheme”

(Makdisi 187), moreover, has deeper significance.

One of its major linear imageries, the fiber, has been given close attention by Nelson Hilton (79-101). For instance, *J* 25 offers the image with various senses. Albion, at the center, is being tormented by three female figures (often identified as Rahab, Vala and Tirzah from left to right) by eviscerating the fibers of his body, while Vala's fingers and hair trail off in fibers. Vala's appearance here evokes that of Los in *Milton* 19, where his limbs and finger also trail off in fibers. In this visual resemblance, Los and Vala, who seems to have no relation at all, are grotesquely linked together. But when taking a broader perspective, we find the fibrous beings are Blake's recurrent visual motif, bringing together various figures and images.

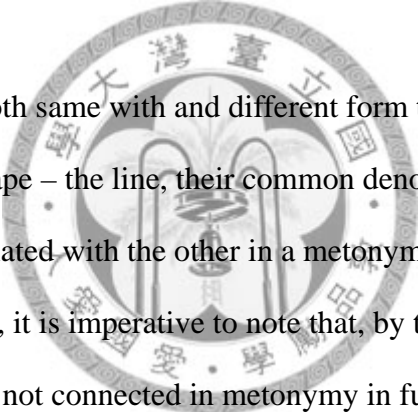
Everywhere in the illuminated books there are other graphic forms of fiber, the veins, the nerves, the roots, not only in visual but in textual connection: "my wild fibres in veins / Of blood thro all my nervous limbs. soon overgrown in roots" (*J* 87: 5-6). In the text itself, the words (materially) often sprout into vegetation. On the bottom right of *J* 36 the right arm of the human figure is replaced by vegetated vines and leaf stems. These imageries suggests explicitly, as Hilton observes, the living organism who not only vegetates into being and other forms of being, but also linking different forms of being all together in grotesque images of metamorphosis. What is more, *Jerusalem* 9 gives an image of vine stems vegetate into a serpent. The supposedly closed cross-reference of fiber-vein-nerve-root is now linked, organically, to another referential network, serpent-chain-worm. Their semantic possibilities are further complicated by their lexical and etymological connections.³⁹ Blake's texts and images multiply indications, meanings, and references in a fascinating yet frustrating way. Because the ever-expansion of cross-references incessantly broaden the horizon

³⁹ Hilton also points out that nerve is penis in Latin (*nervus*) (92); the mentioning of fiber in *J* 90:21-22 suggests a relation to semen (Hilton 91-92).

of meaning and complicate their interrelation. An ideal allegory of stable and determined one-to-one harmonious correspondence is impossible and undesirable in Blake. It seems any attempt to pin down the meaning of each allegorical sign in Blake (including the mythical characters, the historical figures, the metaphysical concepts, etc.) is futile; any given allegorical sign should be taken as itself a range of references and metaphors that effect simultaneously under the name. Hilton concludes with the formula (96):

chain = spine = worm/serpent = penis = root = nerve = fibre

line



Each graphic element is both same with and different from the other, precisely by the repetition of the shared shape – the line, their common denominator in the formula. Each graphic sign is associated with the other in a metonymical way because of their common feature. However, it is imperative to note that, by the common denominator, these graphic elements are not connected in metonymy in full sense. The metaphorical dimensions as the respective symbolisms of the images are also fused and exuberated. Thus associated, discrepant images gain far-fetched yet enriching implications in addition. “Chains” that symbolize confinement, for instance, lends meaning to “fibre,” adding a new metaphorical dimension of “fibre” that often symbolizes vegetation (physical nature) in *Jerusalem*. Here, themes of vegetation and confinement are conjured up from each individual image to comparison which further enriches the already complex symbolism. In Blake’s allegorical narrative, the metaphorical dimension is not sacrificed at the metonymic rendering. It hovers above the metonymic connection as a ghostly yet irreducible feature, attaching to individual images to engage them in the symbolic dialectics.

On the other hand, we should warn ourselves against the implication of organicism provided by the imageries of vegetative metamorphoses. Revisiting plate 25 of *Jerusalem*, we can find an overtone in the presentation of Albion's body as woven fiber. As Hilton notes of the "depressing possibility that the woven body, far from being the organized . . . is just another unconscious web or net" (91). The image of weaving thread comes to our mind, and here is a depressing one in the speech of the Shadowy Female:

I will lament over Milton in the lamentations of the afflicted
My Garments shall be woven of sighs & heart broken lamentations
.....
I will have Writings written all over it in Human Words
That every Infant that is born upon the Earth shall read
And get by rote as a hard task of a life of sixty years
I will have Kings inwoven upon it, & Councillors & Mighty Men
The Famine shall clasp it together with buckles & Clasps
And the Pestilence shall be its fringe & the War its girdle
To divide into Rahab & Tirzah that Milton may come to our tents
For I will put on the Human Form & take the Image of God
Even Pity & Humanity . . . (M 18: 5-20)

"Garments" are exterior addition rather than integral part to human body; "woven" suggests *organization* rather than *organism*. Weaving as a material labor is incorporated into Blakean metaphysic. For Blake, this form of material practice is false and lifeless because it is devoid of "human form." This leads us to reflect on other dimension of allegory: allegory as made by woven signs. Each sign must link metonymically to the other to produce the intended meaning. The work of the Shadowy Female is a form of allegory, with "kings," "counselors" and "mighty men"

woven together as account of some sort of history or heraldry. If Albion is the primal symbol of the British nation, this image of weaving disturbingly reminds us of its possible nature of arbitrarily woven signs. The body of Albion here is made up, paradoxically, of non-biological material. At this point we would also recall the “vegetative” state in Blake: it does not refer to the spontaneous, harmonious organicism but to the character of fallen universe (the “vegetated universe”). In this sense, the imageries of vegetation in the illuminated books will strike a rather ironic tone, in which the organic metamorphosis is “fallen” in the metaphysical sense. The image of weaving reminds us that Blake’s text is artificially knit rather than naturally grown. The fabric of the text is always and already *fabricated* (“made up”). Blake here distances himself from Coleridgean discourse of the organic growth.

Let us explore the metaphysical implication of repetition, and its implication in Blake. Repetition is unequivocally a temporal practice. It not only has to be accomplished in time; it is a reminder of the temporality of our linguistic practices, indeed of human labor at large. It is a way through the paranoia of permanence of some transcendental stability. Allegory lapses into fetishized or reified absolute because it delusively confers upon its individual sign a permanence of symbolic effect. Blake always reminds us of this illusion embodied in the image of Urizen, who broods on false permanence without noticing that change is the only constant factor of history. Blake’s time sees turbulent changes and intractable differences that prompts intellectuals to rethink of history, authority and knowledge as we see in Burke, Paine, Coleridge and others in the previous chapter, but their reductionism and singular genealogy run counter to the historical reality. This is what Blake probes into: the untraceable origins, intractable differences, and unnamable margins, whose currents and undercurrents make up the time. We don’t have to regard Blake as successively go beyond them. His deliberate complication of his allegorical signs through syntactic

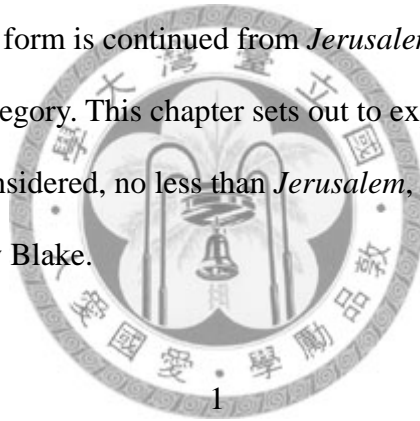
manipulation and infinite material and symbolic interconnections often become too complicated that produces obscurities and contradictions as many critics has recognized. But in his repetition he makes his case an ongoing re-organization of the intractable remains of history. It is “reorganized” because it is the task of repetition to redefine identity and difference among diverse materials, thus re-determining their relations. And Blake does it for the redemption of time which has to be done *in time*, rather than in “permanent” abstractions.



Chapter III

Remaking *Laocoön*: Irony and the Blakean Allegory

The idea of the minute particular is developed in as late as *Jerusalem*, yet it remains throughout the poem an abstract conceptualization that is integrated in his symbolic system rather than a close inspection of a specific “particular,” a theory rather than a practice. Blake’s idea of the minute particular is flexible enough to embrace from as colossal as an epic like *Jerusalem* to as “minute” as a single-plate design like *Laocoön*: here, *Laocoön* is presented as an example of the minute particular. Blake starts to work on the plate of *Laocoön*, one of his last projects, in 1826.⁴⁰ The idiosyncratic form is continued from *Jerusalem* and continues to foreground the issue of allegory. This chapter sets out to explore this single-plate design which has been considered, no less than *Jerusalem*, to be one of the most perplexing works of art by Blake.



The title of the plate was given by Blake editors. The central image of the figures is identified by Blake, in the text right under the plinth image, as “[Yah; “Yahweh”] and His Two Sons Satan and Adam,” which Morton D. Paley believes to be its intended title (*Traveler* 81).⁴¹ Blake again displays his technical idiosyncrasy, especially in textual arrangement. The typography is disarranged: Blake seems to have randomly stuffed his words into the margin surrounding the *Laocoön* figure

⁴⁰ Blake begins this project in 1815 as a commission of Abraham Rees’s *Cyclopedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature*, for which he designs seven engravings. *Laocoön* was one of them, as an illustration to John Flaxman’s article on sculpture in *Cyclopedia*. Here I refer to the final revised version when the text surrounding the image was produced. The date of revision is conjectured by Essick and Viscomi (241). For further discussion of the date and duration of the project and its implications, see Paley, *Traveler* 70 ff., and Paice, *passim*.

⁴¹ Some critics, however, would be suspicious about the point of determining a “title” for this piece. Paice, for example, regards that the central image itself to be the “title” (54).

without any clue to its organization. Blake fills the margin of this plate with a welter of his aphorisms, many of them being the reiteration or recapitulation of his ideas developed earlier in his career. Typographically unreadable, this piece not only breaks down the linear succession of words and its narrative or argumentative logic of composition, but also manipulates the spatial arrangements by presenting the words vertically or horizontally, various in size, spacing, and typeface (e.g. some words are written in quasi-Gothic style). Blake deliberately renders the text in a radically spatial rather than temporal form so that, as David Erdman recognizes, “there is no right way to read them – except all at once” (E 814).⁴² Temporal linkage is disrupted in favor of spatial network, yet the problem remains in that the verbal elements always bear this temporal nature. One can not read everything simultaneously, and an order should be chosen no matter how arbitrary in the process of reading. This allows the reader freedom to read in whatever sequence according to individual understanding of the text on the plate.

Words fill the margins of the plate in a rather crowded manner. In some of the phrases or sentences, a few words must shrink in size in order to fit in the narrow space; some has to finish in another line because of space. The text is so crowded that it induces a sense of suffocation. The suffocating effect is not only on the reader but also on the three figures: the pressing physical presence of the text not only illustrate, but also participate in and enact the breathless life-or-death struggle of the figures

⁴² Erdman arranges his transcription in accordance with his supposed “coherent thematic sequence” (E 814). But it will play down the effect of Blake’s spatial rendition. Essick and Viscomi’s edition do not follow Erdman’s “thematic” structure, but “have recorded the captions below the sculpture first, then the inscriptions immediately contiguous to the outline of the pictorial image (moving from left to right), and finally the outermost inscription, beginning in the bottom left corner and proceeding clockwise around the left side, top, and right side of the print” (231n15). Morton Paley cogently finds this arrangement more sensible (*Traveler* 91). Nonetheless, a completely “faithful” representation of the original can not be done with this transcription, since they has their interpretation as Erdman does of the content of the plate: namely the supposition of the text being properly read outward, concentric to the central image of the sculpture rather than otherwise. But at least we will not lose the tension and dynamic in the plate design, which Erdman overlooks in favor of the thematic coherence.

with the two serpents. Blake hereby foregrounds again the materiality of the text, because its physical property of spatial occupation participates in the sensuous effect and meaning-making of the work. The text is not only an abstract semantic unit, but a physical entity subject to material conditions and contingency.

The uncomfortable typography forces the reader to engage themselves into the struggle of the figures. Morton Paley draws our attention to the physical intensity of the graphic design with emphasis on suffering. As Paley argues, an eighteenth-century aesthetic view holds that the “purpose of great art is to reconcile the viewer with suffering through the transmutation of the suffering into an aesthetic object” (*Traveler* 59). This view sets the tone of the opinions of the Laocoön in German aestheticians such as Johannes Winckelmann, A. W. Schlegel, Goethe, and G. E. Lessing. The physical torment perceived by the viewer still retain some sort of artistic “equilibrium,” as this pain triggers a aesthetic transcendence of the mind. Yet the presence of intense torture would hinder the process of sublimation; therefore a softened presentation of the suffering is deemed proper in classical art. Mitchell observes that in doing so Lessing works on an ideological establishment of the visual and the aural as the contrast between the sensual and the spiritual, with priority placed on the latter. In Paley’s view, Blake’s Laocoön is set against this grain, as he features the intense and violent gestures of howling, body-twisting, the contraction of the muscles on the waist of Laocoön (or “Yah”) being bitten by a serpent. Blake invites the reader to feel the pain and to actively enter the struggle instead of reifying the statue as an aesthetic object (*Traveler* 59-67).⁴³ Renditions under the principles of moderation, artistic balance and beauty would be opposed to by Blake, as the material intensity and disturbance suggests.

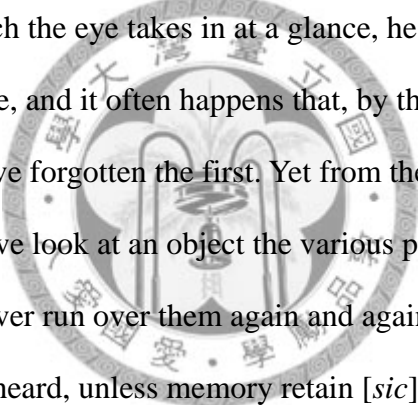
⁴³ This feature may corroborate Mee’s assertion of Blake’s emphasis on sensuality. See Mee, “Energy and Enthusiasm in Blake.”

There is another interesting point to consider. The plate doesn't seem so messed up and formless at a second glance: it seems that it is Laocoön (as much as Blake) that utters these words; it seems he blurts out these words at a stroke in his dying moment. In this sense not only the image of Laocoön visualizes the written word, but the words visualize themselves: the words are not just textual transcription of Laocoön's dying words, but the graphical illustration of them. Unlike the majority of Blake's work in which the texts and the accompanying images often lack clear correspondence to each other, in this piece text and image interact most intricately. Text completes the image, if we understand it as spoken by Laocoön in his fatal struggle with the serpents.

In this regard, W. J. T. Mitchell's address (1978) on the blurring of the boundary between verbal and visual arts is revealing. He draws on the example of Laocoön in Lessing's theory and remarks: "The space-time distinction was invoked by Lessing in his *Laocoön* (1766) to refute the pictorialist tendency to blur the differences between the arts" (30n50). As Mitchell further elaborates, "Painting was linked with the spatial, bodily, sensuous world, and poetry with the temporal, mental realm, a division which reflected the traditional feeling that poetry was the 'higher' art. . . . For Blake, the dualistic world of mind and body, time and space, is an illusion which must not be imitated, but is to be dispelled by the process of his art (30-31). As Blake states: 'the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosive, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid' (*MHH* 14, E 38)"

Later in his *Iconology* (1986), Mitchell revisits and elaborates on Lessing's discourse on visual and verbal art. Lessing grounds his argument on the contradistinction of temporality and spatiality, which are respectively the primary nature of poetry and painting. Their natures are so inherent in themselves that the

boundary-crossing, i.e. making painting temporal, narrative and poetry spatial, phenomenal, is to be taken as the secondary, accidental performance in violation of their respective rules. Mitchell contends that the distinction can not really work out, and that “the tendency of artists to breach the supposed boundaries between temporal and spatial arts is not a marginal or exceptional practice, but a fundamental impulse in both the theory and practice of the arts, one which is not confined to any particular genre” (98). Mitchell not only points out that the spatial or temporal characters bears not so much of a difference in kind but in degree, but also calls our attention to the figurative and metaphorical foundation of Lessing’s discourse when Lessing turns to the representation of bodies by poetry:



The details, which the eye takes in at a glance, he [the poet] enumerates slowly one by one, and it often happens that, by the time he has brought us to the last, we have forgotten the first. Yet from these details we are to form a picture. When we look at an object the various parts are always present to the eye. It can never run over them again and again. The ear, however, loses the details it has heard, unless memory retain [*sic*] them. And if they be so restrained, what pains and effort [*welche Muehe, welche Anstrengung*] it costs to recall their impressions in the proper order and with even the moderate degree of rapidity necessary to the obtaining of a tolerable idea of the whole. (*Laocoön* 102-03; qtd. in Mitchell 102)

Mitchell observes that the entire logic of this passage is based on the analogy – that of linking spatiality and temporality to the empirical faculty of sight and hearing. The metaphor of the physical entity of the eye and the ear is transferred onto the ideal category of “space” and “time” independent of material or empirical substances.

Blake, though he was unlikely to come across Lessing’s book during his own *Laocoön*

project,⁴⁴ would have rejected Lessing's theory. Blake would constantly demonstrate the interpenetration of visual and verbal arts and the problematic, if not the impossibility, of the distinguishing criteria of space and time. Such boundary-crossing expression enhances the impure that defines the Blakean allegorical: the visual and the verbal cease to be purely visual and verbal, and the mutual transgression and the interchangeability that undoes formal purity and distinctness becomes the very nature of the allegorical as entangled intertext. It breaks down the segregation of allegorical strata which will be discussed later.

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Blake fills the margin of this plate with a welter of his aphorisms, many of them being the reiteration or recapitulation of his ideas developed earlier. The themes of these aphorisms would be familiar to readers of Blake: the tyranny of Moral Law, the divine redemption in art and poetry, the sterility of Natural Religion, the lifeless practice of Deist science, the unproductive naturalism and the imperative of the practice of imagination to transcend corporeal understanding, the fault of the Classical culture and the promise of the Hebrew art, etc. The rhetoric of repetition, as we have seen in *Jerusalem* and in other illuminated books and in their cross-references, can also be seen here, but its operation is different. Some aphorisms paraphrase or revise those from earlier works. He remains literally constant to his ethic of forgiveness against the Moral Law: "All is not Sin that Satan calls so all the Loves & Graces of Eternity" (E 275). He faithfully insists, continuing his manifesto in *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that the imagination immanent in the material being of humanity is the incarnation of divinity: "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination. God himself / that is / the Divine Body" (E 273). In good faith, almost all the major themes

⁴⁴ See Paley, *Traveler* 65 for chronological evidence.

in Blake are collected in this single plate. In other words, we are therefore inclined to call this piece a synopsis of Blakean philosophy and symbolism. Yet a problem immediately emerges: how can a synopsis presented in an unreadable manner so that the conventional virtue of a synopsis, such as clarity, simplicity and digestibility looks unattainable. This is probably why Erdman has attempted to work out a “thematic sequence,” but, I would emphasize again, Erdman plays down the effect of Blake’s spatial rendition and the ensuing irreducible dynamics and dialectics.

Moreover, the aphorisms are radically intertextual. The earlier works serve here as the essential repertoires of reference, and those who wish to make sense of the aphorisms have to cross-refer to the external body of his work. Paradoxically, if this is to be taken as the summary of Blake’s work, it serves, at the same time, as a mock-summary. Although the inner cross-references between this plate and his earlier works thus establish a sense of coherence, the laborious process, of the ideas of “Art,” “Science,” “Nature,” and “Imagination” requires explication rather than merely cross-reference. Blake here conducts a kind of double irony: that his system is somewhat beyond paraphrase and summary, and the wish to grasp the entire Blake at one time will likely be to no avail. Just as Laocoön and his sons are struggling for freedom and life, Blake might as well strive to break free from his previous words. Attempts to pin down or to weave a coherent context for his texts are likened to the serpents’ strangulation. Blake demonstrates the dead end of inner-referential network. The jammed text of the plate looks like a claustrophobic struggle which can’t bring itself back to life if it does not go out.

In this regard, we have to explore further in the light of allegory, whose working in this piece is obviously the *source* of the material. The classical mythology of Laocoön, Blake’s source, is appropriated here. The figure of “Laocoön” is not referred to as the Laocoön of Classical mythology, but identified in the inscription as:

[Yahweh] & his two Sons Satan and Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact. or. History of Ilium (E 273)

Blake implies that the “Rhodians,” the original producers of the statue, not only copied but also *appropriated* the figures, for they applied it to Deist Naturalism or Classicism: here the “Rhodians” applied to “Natural Fact” or “History of Ilium.” Blake often renders Deist science and Classicism interchangeable as in one the aphorisms: “The Gods of Greece . . . were Mathematical Diagram” (*Laocoön*; E 274). But Blake further suggests the plagiarism of Classicism-Deism by refusing to give credit to their “original”:

Hebrew Art is calld Sin by the Deist Science (*Laocoön*; E 273)

The Rhodians in Blake’s presentation are working on a form of classical allegory – the allegory of deist worldview and classical mythology, which for Blake are always inclined to reification or fetishization into “pure” ideas that may find corporeal correspondences in the phenomenal world. The paranoia of neoclassical allegory emerges here again – the simplified and rigidified correspondence of idea and thing.

The plate raises among critics the question of the copy and the original. Laocoön statue has been widely reproduced in various forms of art. Each reproduction has its differences, whether salient or nuanced, from the original statue.⁴⁵ Blake’s own “reproduction” has some features from the statue as well as from others’ reproductions. First, appropriation of the myth into his own systems of ideas. For example, the two serpents are substantiated with Blake’s own system of symbolism. Serpents in Blake can refer to rebellious spirits like Orc, or henchmen of the Moral Law, and so on.⁴⁶ As the words near the serpents’ heads reads “Good” and “Evil,” it

⁴⁵ For discussion of some reproductions, see Paley, *Traveler* 53-100.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the serpent imagery in Blake, see Thompson, esp. 96-101.

seems that they may refer to Moral Virtue, from which we would conjecture that the three human figures struggling with the serpent collectively represent the poet. But why has Blake called them Yahwah, Satan and Adam who, in Blake, have their blindness and limits in tyrannical lawgiving, “Opacity” and “Contraction”? Here again, Blake conducts his stylistic play of irony.

In his review of Blake’s relationship with his sources (classical mythology, Virgil, etc.), David E. James argues that “Blake’s archaeological restitution . . . moves from one level, the level of allegory, to another, where allegory is rejected” (229). As Blake puts in this plate:

If Morality was Christianity Socrates was the Saviour (E 275)

Socrates, in particular, is portrayed either as an inheritor of the abstract Deist science (that Blake considers a source of the world’s misery): “Palamabron gave an abstract Law: To Pythagoras Socrates & Plato” (E 67); or, making an accord with the line from Laocoön, the practitioner of the imperative of morality: “What made SOCRATES *the greatest of men*? His *moral truths--his ethics*. What *proved* JESUS CHRIST to be the SON OF GOD . . .” (E 667). In Blake’s interpretation, the classical culture saturated with allegory: “Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Vision . . . Which are lost & clouded in Fable & Allegory”(E 555). Furthermore, the allegory Blake has in mind here is that which is mediated by classical morality. James argues that Blake goes beyond the classical allegory that concerns moral message alone and elevates it to the allegory of the production itself – art against commodity.

As mentioned, the work begins as an engraving commissioned for Rees’s encyclopedia Blake struggles in his lifetime for artistic freedom from commercialism,

refuses to comply with the criteria of his commissioners or patrons, and refuses to appeal to popular taste as the obstacle to true art. In this piece, Blake's resistance to commercialism is the most articulate. Money is mentioned more often than in any of his other works:

[bottom right vertical]

Christianity is Art & not Money

Money is its curse (E 274)

[right margin horizontal]

Empire against Art . . . For every Pleasure Money Is Useless (E 274)

[top margin horizontal]

Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only . . .
(E 275)

The opposition of Art against Money is set up. James points out that this word only appears twice in his earlier works (231). James takes it as the theme of this work as well as his article, and argues that Blake attacks commercial art production which reifies art into commodity. Indeed, I think, in commodity culture there is an imagined "original" (which doesn't necessarily exist) which provides the mould of its own reproduction. Uniformity in production suppresses the material differences of the particular reproductions. Blake's reproduction, as in the logic of repetition I discuss in the previous chapters, is to produce particular differences, however minute, in the seeming identity of the reproduction. Blake wrestles with this to release the uniqueness and the originality of the minute particulars.

Money is defined as an antithesis, or in Blakean terminology, a "Negation," to "art." It is a new theme lately, but not belatedly, introduced in Blake and integrated into Blake's system of contrast. However, Blake does contrast in a more intricate way than the easy dichotomy would suggest. The primary material he chooses here is a

popular story in classical mythology. We have seen how Blake enacts, performs and dramatizes his struggles in the example of *Jerusalem*, whether mentally, spiritually, ideologically, materially. This trajectory is seen again in *Laocoön*, where Blake's social critique is grounded on the issue that concerns himself. Blake doesn't simply offer didactic messages, whether addressing money, empire, the ideology of Deism or of Natural Religion. He does not stand aloof from his material of observation, treating it as *perceptum* while claiming his subjective independence with an omniscient voice. The sensual qualities of the plate suggest that Blake *attends* to his material, and he attends not only mentally but physically. We don't necessarily have to identify Laocoön, or the central figure in the plate, with Blake, but Blake's attentiveness assumes intersubjectivity with his artistic "object."

It seems that Blake's hostility to the reduction of artwork into commodity is more than obvious: his obscure style, unusual printing method that runs against mass production, and classical or popular materials that are grotesquely represented, each of these literally works against easily consumable commodity. To explore how Blake fights against commodity culture seems to illustrate a self-evident truism, reducing such an exploration to intellectual exercise. Blake associates his critique of commodity culture to its complicity with "Empire."⁴⁷ Some critics also notice this feature and addresses of the ideological connection between commercialism and imperialism.⁴⁸ However, the production of *Laocoön*, I will argue, sheds light on some

⁴⁷ The aphorism that "Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only" highlights the antagonism of "Art" to "War and Dominion," which is the purpose of "Empire." Here Blake arrives at the conclusion of "Empire against Art." The connection is clear, but its logical details remain unarticulated.

⁴⁸ Julia M. Wright argues that Neoclassicism imposes formal standard, which leads to a cultural hegemony of government propagandist art where the claims of empire was founded (120-21). But the linkage of propaganda with imperialism and commodity culture is underdeveloped. Paley consults Blake's other texts such as *On Virgil*, *Songs of Experience* and the Biblical texts which at best corroborate rather than prove the logic of the identification of commercial capitalism and imperialism. His conclusion is nevertheless plausible: "In [*Yah*] & his two Sons *Satan* & *Adam* Blake attacks empire by subverting one of its own artistic icons. Regarded by Blake as a copy of a Hebrew original that its adapters did not even understand, the *Laocoön* represents the inauthenticity of imperial culture,

other dimensions. It was produced after a series of “retreat” into mystic prophecies like the *Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem* that have become regarded as his major works. (Again we should be cautious that these prophecies are not “private” in character, which would tempt us to dismiss Blake as “mystic,” especially in his late years, cutting off from this world.) These works are extremely limited in the number of copy,⁴⁹ and its readers are supposed to be no less limited in number. But this is generally because he chooses a method of production that takes extreme amount of hard labor that doesn’t result in proportionate output, and an unprecedented presentation of self-made mythological, cosmological, and theological system. In the case of *Laocoön*, however, Blake returns to the appropriation of classical subject, one which is supposed to be well-known among his contemporary readers.

However familiar it would seem to the reader, the Laocoön myth is frustratingly de-familiarized by Blake’s grotesque presentation. An irony emerges when Blake chooses a familiar topic only to make it less accessible. Like many other Blakean adaptations of literary materials, they are actually appropriations for his self-developed themes, issues and systems. The originality of the original is questioned: the Rhodian sculptors are not credited as the creator of the statues, but suggested to be plagiarizing a Hebrew original “from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple.” Blake seems to suggest that the classical tradition is apocryphal since its antiquity, that there is not a secure, readily legitimate “origin,” from which an undisputed genealogy can be established. Julia M. Wright situates Blake’s

whether that of Troy, Greece, Rome, France, or Britain. Blake transforms it into *[Yah] & his two Sons Satan & Adam* by surrounding it with texts denouncing money, war, and empire and affirming the ultimate value of art, texts representing the late Blake at his most uncompromising” (*Traveler* 100). This is probably why Blake chooses this subject as the material from which he produced an excerpt of his lifelong ideas and opinions: because Laocoön is a “cultural icon” of a historical enterprise, which is one of Blake’s “spiritual enemies” (*Traveler* 97-100).

⁴⁹ *Jerusalem*, for example, has only five copies surviving, and very likely little more than that number of copies has ever been produced by Blake, since his production method is extremely laborious and time-consuming.

engagement with tradition and genealogy in his struggle with neoclassicism, whose claim of the supremacy of classical artwork contributes to its discourse of the artist's duty to follow that tradition as their ideal, a discourse to which Blake is hostile (110-12). By making the classical artwork as a legacy of an usurped authority, Blake, in a Painite manner against Burkean defense of genealogy, reveals the risk of genealogy that it may inherit and preserve the errors of its origin. But this is not to be taken as Blake's rejection of the classical tradition. I would venture to suggest a kind of Harold Bloomian "misreading." Blake intervenes into the tradition in order to rewrite it for his own sake, to develop his own poetics under the influence of the formidable tradition. And what is the tradition? Laocoön as an embodiment, a personification of the classical spirit of tragedy: a hopeless yet heroic fighting with a hostile environment or a more mysterious idea of "fate."⁵⁰ But what is more, this classical idea of tragedy is accompanied by another ethical function of spiritual purification (Aristotle's *catharsis*), which assumes some distance of the viewer and the view. As said before, for Blake, (neo-) classicism reifies artwork into artistic object from which the viewing subject maintains a distance. This was echoed rather than challenged in Romantic "aesthetic distance," in which disinterestedness is its guiding principle as well as prerequisite. Disinterestedness as ethical imperative is here subtly mocked by Blake, as he restores the interest of a material already harbored in neoclassical doctrines. Neoclassicism demands submission to classical art. Such position is established particularly in Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*, in which Reynolds insists on the priority of classical legacy. Blake, combating lifelong with

⁵⁰ Another association with Aristotelian definition of tragedy is provided by Paley, who argues that German discourse of the dramatic effect of *Laocoön* speaks of quasi-Aristotelian view of "[f]ear, terror, and compassion" aroused by the tragic theme of Laocoön. Of Blake's attitude toward this, Paley writes: "This would not have struck a responsive chord in the Blake who in *Jerusalem* condemned Greek tragedy for what he regarded as its exploitation of pity and terror to the end of the satisfaction of the self: 'as at a tragic scene./ The soul drinks murder & revenges, & applauds its own holiness' (73: 29-30, E 183)" (*Traveler* 64).

Reynoldsian doctrines, experiences the best of his retort not so much in the *Annotations* of Reynolds than in this piece by defamiliarizing and ironizing a (neo-) classical icon. In favor of the general form to which all artistic production need to conform, minute particularity (what Reynolds calls “minute discriminations”) is dismissed as “accidental” and needs to be eliminated to preserve the integrity of the general form. In combating Reynolds’s demand for the general form, Blake finds a more effective way than turn away from sources of the general form. *Laocoön*, being reproduced widely for popular consumption, and becoming a favorite cultural icon representing the ideal of spiritualized aesthetics, is a source of the general form. Blake’s idiosyncratic rendition of this icon is therefore a direct punch on the faces of the neoclassicists. The neoclassical version of the adaptation runs the risk of fixating its meaning onto the aesthetic absolute. It is discarded by Blake, not by turning his back on it, but by confronting it, engaging it and *presenting* it in an ironical way. If the classical *Laocoön* has been reduced (in neoclassical establishment) into an example of the general form, this also commodified, iconized artwork is then turning into a carrier of exchange-value.

In this light, money as anti-art gains its relevance. As discussed earlier, modern anxiety about money is its potential to efface individual differences in use-value in its law of the exchange-value. Money serves as the extreme version of the general form that reduces particular material practices into an index to a mathematical number that represents value. The use-value of the minute particulars is suspended in order to enforce the rule of the exchange-value. Blake’s stylistic reproduction of a commodified object is to revive its use-value that is hollowed out from the reified, commodified, iconized artwork. Its material intensity, emotive effect and ironic rendering squeeze out from the reified image a trace of the materiality, particularity which is the residue of that “general form.” It is in this unique use-value, this material

quality, untranslatable to the general, reductive exchange-value, that the once-lost minute particularity can be unearthed.

Here, no single element in this plate is literally original. The image is a reproduction of a classical sculpture; the text is a (summarized) reproduction of his poetry. Blake's idea of the original evolves with this idiosyncratic execution of the reproduction. By juxtaposing two sets of reproductions, Blake's *Laocoön* intriguingly gains a touch of originality. As Paul Mann remarks,

Blake's production-aesthetic is labor-intensive in order to maximize the presence of the artist; individual identity is maximized even at the level of the copy. . . . The term 'copy' makes little sense here because the production-aesthetic is anti-mimetic at every turn: the books are not copies of anything, there is no 'original' behind them. (13)

This agrees with Makdisi's comment on original and copy in terms of Blake's mode of production. In the example of *Laocoön*, however, the original is not denied or nullified, but rendered illegitimate as it is plagiarized (i.e. already a copy) in the very beginning. John Barrell is right to state that Blake is not opposed to copying *per se* (226) if the copy has a critical edge of the original instead of paying unconditional homage to it. This is probably how we will come to understand what Blake means by the oxymoron that "Imitation is Criticism" (*Annotations to Reynolds*; E 643). As Barrell expounds, "Whereas if the Greeks copy these they produce only imitation, if Blake copies then he will produce work of art equally original; and the difference is that while Blake sees them with his imaginative eye, the Greeks either saw them with their moral . . . and copied only the memory of them as transmitted perhaps by intermediate copies" (229).

This is how we come to understand that the "difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great Deal: The Good one Really Does

Copy a Great Deal” (E 645). The bad art does not copy a great deal because he copies only, e.g. the general form. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, the general for Blake is only the result of generalization of the partial. Refusing to stick to the partial, Blake strives for his lifetime to copy as much as possible the minute particulars, as we see the all-inclusive cosmos in *Jerusalem* and other major prophesies. On the other hand, the bad artist is “Natural Man” for whom “imagination” is “considered as Nothing” (E 373).

4

Irony, ambivalence and paradox set the tone of *Laocoön*. We are perplexed at certain aspects. In some other, we are frustrated when we think we are close to formulate something only to find that something is undone. Blake continually flirts with meaning yet works against it at crucial points. This is a small piece that includes most of the major themes in Blake, and one would expect that Blake would have condensed them. The assemblage of them into a heap of aphorisms, omitting much of the elaborations, materializations, logical deductions, argumentations in other more “narrative” works of Blake enlarges the gaps in Blake’s thought even if “spatially” they are compressed onto the same plane. Blake directs a mockery at himself of his art and its interpretation.

Undoing recurs in the process of deciphering in this plate. For instance, we are tempted to construe the collection of aphorism as the synopsis or summary of Blake’s oeuvre before the compressed quality of its presentation frustrates any coherent analysis. Or, when we are ready to identify *Laocoön* as a classical tragic figure, we find it presented here in a style which bears resemblance to contemporary political

cartoons or caricature.⁵¹ It lends some comic effect to the image which might somehow attenuate the tragic intensity. The caricature quality of the figures parodies the serious intent, the high tragic core, of classical art. Moreover, the tragic effect would seem superfluous when we recall that for Blake, the three Rhodians who represent classical artists, usurps the Hebraic supremacy and in turn produces a fault-line of classicism, which of course includes the idea of tragedy. To name another example, some of the aphorism is footnoted with scholarly imperative (“See Plato’s works”; “See Virgils Eneid. Lib. VI.v 848”; “See Luke Ch 2v. 1,” etc.), which is at odds with Blake’s own language of innovation, wild fantasy and free association. What is being taunted in imitation are classical scholastic tradition and biblical exegesis. This is another characteristic Blakean mockery, in which he highlights his stylistic performance. Even if he does want us to refer to these sources, the absence of argumentation and explication will not substantiate both the footnotes and the text and leave a rational reader unconvinced. Of course, Blake wouldn’t care less if his assertions defeats those practitioners of “reason.”

As mockery, undoing, and irony permeates the text, a suspicion may be aroused that Blake is making a joke. This joke plays at the level of style, language, even the message. The plate works as the envoi to his audience, a gesture of the final resignation from the cultural, political, ideological, religious battlefield, a disillusioned negation of his artistic practices. But if it is a joke at his oeuvre, then it would render the entire work nihilistic as the joke undoes all the previous poetic endeavor of a formidable body of thoughts and ideas. Are we to take this plate so negatively? The point here is that even if it is a joke, it is, paradoxically again,

⁵¹ Graphic satire is a popular print culture of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. For informative studies see Mark Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth* (1999); Amelia Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (2008); Richard Godfrey, *James Gillray: the Art of Caricature* (2001). Blake’s *Laocoön*, satirizing the classical culture and put in mass printing of an encyclopedia, can be considered as part of this culture in a liberal sense.

practiced with high seriousness. Blake works on the Laocoön project over ten years (1815-26)⁵²; he returns to the Royal Academy to attend to the statue in person and draw it; over the years he revises, alters and supplements his graphic transcription. We are here again reminded of Damrosch's point of Blake's mental strife: "Blake does not force us to accept his answers, but he demands that we enter into his mental strife and make it ours" (371). As in *Jerusalem*, here in *Laocoön* Blake dramatizes his strife, this time in the manner of (self-) mockery, irony and conceptual ambivalences. But in the same token, Blake invites his reader into the enterprise. As in the "unfinished" state of *Jerusalem*, *Laocoön* is presented as unfinished by reworking on this topic over years and including all conflicting and contradicting features that disrupt any seeming coherence.

Therefore, Blake uses different allegorical strategies in *Jerusalem* and in *Laocoön* to reclaim minute particularity. One of the differences is the focus on the metonymical and the metaphorical, respectively. In *Jerusalem* the semantic horizon is broadened by including every possible source of material. The minute particularity is revived by the tensions and dialectics among the objects. In refusing to harmonize and homogenize the diverse objects, Blake renders them irreducible to abstract ideas, resisting metonymic continuity and uniformity, thus preserving their particularity. In *Laocoön*, however, Blake advances on his previous style: the semantic horizon is not broadened but *imploded*. By producing ironies, Blake renders the inner working of metaphorical linkage of sign and meaning, or meaning and secondary meaning, betraying each other to create semantic residues which are amounting to over-saturation just like the over-saturation of the plate's layout.

In Angus Fletcher's apt phrase, irony is "the extreme degree of ambivalence" (229). Ambivalence suggests the coexistence of the disparate meanings and

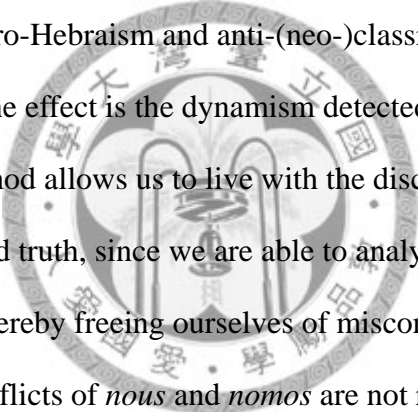
⁵² Paice suggests that the starting date may have been even earlier than 1815 (50).

significances. Sometimes these disparate meanings and significances detach themselves from one another as they go separate ways, thus simply diverging the semantic networks rather than confusing it. Irony, on the other hand, directs its semantic function against its literal signs, and provokes a disconcerting clash of meanings. By constantly producing ironies in this plate, Blake carries his allegorical form into a different level. Of the significance of irony in allegory, Fletcher writes:

Irony we often equate with paradox, that is, with seemingly self-contradictory utterances where tenets normally in polar contradiction to each other are collapsed together into one single ambivalent statement. In irony and paradox extremes meet, while the tension of the ambivalence increases proportionately. Because irony seems to collapse the multileveled segregations of allegory (e.g. a fourfold schema would collapse), it has been called “antiallegorical.” This seems to me an unfortunate usage, since irony still involves an otherness of meaning, however tenuous and shifty may be our means of decoding that other (*allos*) meaning. Rather, I think we might call ironies “collapsed allegories,” or perhaps, “condensed allegories.” They show no diminishing, only a confusion, of the schematic and syntactic process of double or multiple-levelled polysemy. (229-30)

The metaphorical link between the signifier and the signified is broken by irony, as the signified betrays the intended meaning of the signifier. The “multileveled segregations of allegory,” the clear-cut allegorical strata, are meant to establish a hierarchy which is essential to a structure, in which each component functions in accordance with the demand of its position in that structure. With irony, the metaphoric structure is threatened to be undone, thus revealing its precariousness, its inner conflicts, even the illegitimacy of the hierarchy it tries to maintain. The

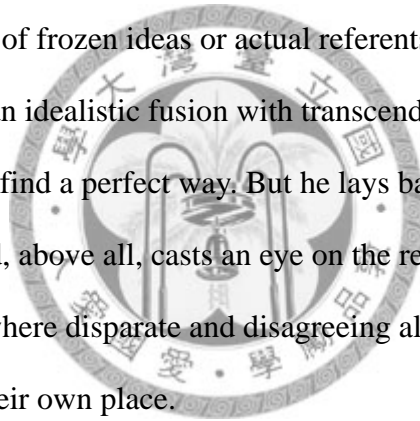
“structure” that Blake’s irony sets out to question is not only that of the contemporary social and cultural milieu on which critics has elaborated extensively, but also Blake’s own. Blake has already been aware, as we see in *Jerusalem*, that clear-cut contrasts are done at the peril of reducing indeterminate dialectics to contrary categories. Here in his ironic rendition he displays the potential of his allegory on the verge of collapse, in a manner similar to what Fletcher calls “collapsed allegory.” This “collapsed allegory,” I will add, is not failed allegory, but self-reflexive one, a meta-allegory. In the example of this plate, the meta-allegory lies in the allegorical irony directed at the moral convention of (neo-) classical art. The classical icon contains the classical allegory that sustains its iconicity; Blake’s ironic reproduction, with all the *particular* additions of visual style, pro-Hebraism and anti-(neo-)classicism, foregrounds the meta-allegorical aspect. The effect is the dynamism detected by Fletcher:



The ironic method allows us to live with the discrepancy between appearances and truth, since we are able to analyze our situation dialectically, thereby freeing ourselves of misconception. The ironies remain; the conflicts of *nous* and *nomos* are not resolved in this world; but they do not remain unobserved, and perhaps even, in little everyday situations, they can now be dealt with. (231-32)

By moving diametrically to the opposite side of the semantic structure, the operation of irony is to lay bare the very structure while user is probably unconscious of it. With irony, metaphor has the opportunity to examine itself of the legitimacy of the link between sign and idea. In a sense, all allegory can be said to be meta-allegorical: because it must be self-conscious that its signifiers must distance from its literal meaning to create room for extra-textural references; it must be self-conscious that it is allegorical. This makes meta-allegory an ontological precondition of allegory. In this sense, Blake with meta-allegorical techniques of irony simply highlights this very

nature of allegory. If *Jerusalem* questions and reworks the metonymic aspect of allegory, *Laocoön* calls metaphor into question. It is to reveal that the structure is insufficient in itself because irony always unfolds a third dimension beyond the semantic correspondence which can not situate everything securely, especially those contingent elements and residual materials that can't be incorporated in works like *Jerusalem*. This is the “animating” aspect of Blake’s allegory which is always promoting the “living form” (*On Homer’s Poetry*), always giving dynamism to the contingent materials. The “discrepancy” is not necessarily between “appearances” and “truth,” but also between an allegory and its inner failing and disturbing incongruity. We have investigated allegory’s dangerous ambivalence either of crystallizing a signifying chain into a set of frozen ideas or actual referents, or reifying or fetishizing its material signifier into an idealistic fusion with transcendent symbol. Blake tries to avoid both, and has yet to find a perfect way. But he lays bare of his ideological process of production, and, above all, casts an eye on the reader who is no less caught in the ideological forces where disparate and disagreeing allegories, i.e. all the minute particulars, struggle for their own place.



Conclusion

If Blake's own ongoing aesthetic project has not concluded by the end of his career, then it would seem pointless for a secondary work to conclude on Blake. Albion constantly changes his state of being; Los's redeeming labor does not finish in smooth progress but is forced to restart repeatedly. The sudden, deus-ex-machina-like recuperation and reunion at the end of *Jerusalem* is less of a resolved dramatic conflict than of a visionary wish-fulfillment. Even the "synoptic" *Laocoön* turns out to be a multileveled irony which resists closure. Blake's constant reworking of his mythologies, punctuated by ironies and self-ironies, and self-undoing, allegorizes not so much a set of fixed, pre-given message but the tensions, confusions, conflicts and dialectics in the production of allegory itself.

Blake's style of compilation and irony is to problematize the ordered array of metaphor and metonymy in conventional allegory. In compilation, the metonymic continuity is disjointed or reshuffled; in irony, the metaphoric linkage between the signifier and the signified is broken. Blake reworks his allegory to prevent the minute particulars from lapsing in oblivion. The allegorical form he employs includes the most incongruous and disparate signs so that each can not be reduced to the other. Each particular sign, in a sense, gains its "subjectivity," instead of being subsumed into a homogeneous totality, rendering each particular optional and dispensable. Blake's method, as we have seen, is to create surplus by repeating the particular elements in different contexts. Therefore, as Edward Larrissy remarks, "the alternations in meaning of key terms in different contexts, the digressions and inconsequentiality, put readers into a position where they are endlessly trying to read in terms of a definite structure and are endlessly involved in a process of deferred sense-making" (145). Larrissy notes that ambivalence is everywhere in Blake's text,

endlessly broadening semantic horizon and rendering immediate understanding of the structure of Blake's text impossible. As he comments,

it is probably more helpful to think of Blake's later prophesies as allegorical rather than as "symbolic" poems. For "symbolism" may suggest some wealth of penumbral connotation, which Blake's prophesies lack. At times, they are every bit as abstract as their bitterest critics have claimed. It is just that abstraction tends, to a generation which cherishes concrete description above all, to suggest every kind of literary dullness. In fact one may pleasurably follow, or keep learning to follow, the peculiar laws of Blake's prophesies, as long as one is willing to allow abstraction as part of the game. Since there is no ultimate myth, one is constantly engaged in a process of endlessly deferred sense-making. (153)

Larrissy understands the "allegorical," in a poststructuralist manner, as the deferral of sense-making. The key, however, is the recognition of Blake's resistance to the dominant "dullness" of the abstraction. Blake attends to the concrete particulars, presenting them in a way now obscure, now challenging, now self-contradicting in order to force the reader not to dissolve them into any abstract structure.

If Blake's aesthetics is to be understood as a resistance to uniform totality, then we may venture to connect him with postmodernist aesthetics as a persistence of anti-totalization. I want to stress that this anti-totalization does not lead to the denial of any totality. Blake's poetics, originated from a very specific eighteenth-century context, is far from postmodernist concerns. Moreover, Blake does not altogether avoid to "totalize" when he confidently pronounces his vision of the "universal brotherhood," and the insistence of "poetic genius" that is universal and immanent in each minute particular.

In some sense, Blake's aesthetic bears a subtle comparability to that of Walter

Benjamin. Blake insists on the attentiveness to the minute particulars that are effaced at the rise of the general principle. This is in tune with Benjamin's imperative to absorb oneself into tradition of the oppressed, which is the source of genuine history repressed by the unilateral genealogy in the Historicist narrative. Blake's presentation of the present state of humanity can be compared to Benjamin's idea of history as ruin. Blake's style of parataxis or repetitive compilation reminds one of Benjamin's aesthetic strategies of constellation. His ironic rendition of the commodity artwork disturbs the general exchange-value with the created residues of particular use-values. This reminds us of Benjamin's dialectics of the aura, the historicity and unique cult-value that become absent in the mechanical reproduction of the commodity. Many comparisons may be drawn between Blake and Benjamin. Yet the task will require elaborations on the parallels of Blake's and Benjamin's historical and intellectual contexts, which goes beyond the scope of this thesis. I would like to suggest, however, as both figure are considered as radical or revolutionary, their respective aesthetics are comparable in terms of their subversive potential of the dominant aesthetics of modernity. Both articulately seek "redemption" from the present state of humanity *within* that heaps of ruin. Benjamin wants to unearth the missing yet inescapable history of the oppressed as articulated in "Theses on Philosophy of History." Blake also tries to "brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, "Theses" 257), but his method is, after all, not identical with Benjamin's historical materialism. Benjamin avoids talks of unity; Blake, however, works toward a redemptive, alternative "unity" that is not to lapse back to uniform totality which he condemns.

Michael Ferber suggests that Blake's fondness in cataloguing the most diverse and intractable materials in mutual tolerance have more significance than cosmopolitanism. He calls it Blake's "apocatastasis," in which every fallen characters

of the minute particulars, even Satanic and Urizenic ones, can eventually be redeemed to return to apocalyptic unity. Blake does not want Satan and Urizen to be destroyed, but to be overcome (to “annihilate” their selfhood) so that their universal brotherhood can be reasserted. As demonstrated in my thesis, the general, abstract principle of Urizen does not originate from a pre-existing “general” or “abstract” in the first place; it is always a product of generalization or abstraction. Urizen’s hegemonic imposition of his partial principle onto others is one of the main causes of the imbalance of the universe. The same logic can be applied to Satan, his self-assertion of holiness presupposes the primacy of his partial being and dismisses the unconsecrated beings as insignificant, “unholy.” The statement that “every thing that lives is Holy” (*MHH* 25; E 45) reveals Blake’s cosmopolitanism, in which every minute particular has its immanent significance that requires coexistence in mutual tolerance (“forgiveness”).

The prerequisite for apocatastasis, as Ferber implicitly recognizes, is to sanctify every minute particular as significant enough to be constitutive of the ultimate reunion. To enact Blake’s ethic of forgiveness is to willingly acknowledge differences among the minute particulars. This may entail clash and contradictions among particulars which in turn requires advanced dialectics, reworking and redefinition. Blake’s constant reworking of his systems is to come to terms with all the conflicts, contradiction, intractable diversity and difference. The assertion that “all are alike in the Poetic Genius” (*All Religions are One*; E 1) is not to be considered as hegemonic uniformity. Blake notes that the “Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy” (*ibid.*). Blake’s paradox of identity and difference is that we are identical *because of* the individual differences which is performed by our shared natural faculty, the immanent “poetic genius.” The “poetic genius,” then, is the immanent identity of all beings *as* the immanent source of the individual differences. The true

reconciliation of the general and the particular is the realization of the duality similar to that of the identity and difference: as identity is found in the universal fact of individual difference, a homology can be made that the general lies in the shared particularity among the individuals. Blake names that particularity the Divine Humanity (as the poetic genius):

Swelld & bloated General Forms, repugnant to the Divine-
Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form
To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy
All broad & general principles belong to benevolence
Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity. (*J* 38:
19-23)

The generalized, partial and particular principles, the “Swelld & bloated General Forms,” usurp the “Only General and Universal Form” which is to reclaim its legitimacy of the universality over the others. This is the Blakean “unity”: the oxymoronic “unity *as* diversity” or *unified* diversity. This vision is the promise in Blake’s very early career, but still in progress by the end of his life.

In this sense, the allegorical form gains its promising capacity. Allegory is a form of inclusion: it includes different semantic horizons in a single body of texts. It is also a form of conflation: it conflated disparate, distinct realms of experience. On the common single plane, heterogeneous materials are forced to confront each other in a painful yet fruitful dynamics and dialectics. Blake’s presentation of the allegorical, in particular, refuses to avoid clashes and conflicts in a pseudo-harmony. Each minute particular assumes its own primacy, and acknowledges no pre-text to which it is only a handmaiden, a secondary representation. Blake’s allegory is not Coleridge’s and Burke’s construction of the metonymic continuity and uniformity but a horizon, a network. Blake rejects hierarchy as it is implied in Coleridgean or Burkean allegory.

Blake wishes to revive the counterbalance of individual differences of the minute particulars by assuming their equality to act spontaneously, unmediated by any reigning pre-text. By the allegorical, he wishes to plant a seed of universal brotherhood, and waits for it to sprout when time is eventually redeemed.



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