

Who Are Blake's Eternals?

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And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic ...

 Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Di-
 vine
 Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions
 immense
 Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age[;] & the all tremendous
 unfathomable Non Ens
 Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent ...
 (*Jerusalem* 98.28, 31-34, E 257-58)

1 THIS essay answers the question in its title by analyzing Blake's differing presentations of Eternal beings from their introduction in *The First Book of Urizen* (1794) through his culminating long poem *Jerusalem* (1804–20).¹ The essay proposes, as well, a meaning for this evolution. It argues that the limitation of Eternal awareness to immortals and the conception of a sharp divide between the eternal and material worlds, in *Urizen's* dominant narrative, clashed with earlier Blake presentations of similar issues, but that he turned back to his earlier conceptualizations in late work. In doing so, he came to present mortal humans, not only immortals, as able to inhabit Eternity, a possibility all but excluded in *Urizen*.

2 Blake's initial presentation of Eternal beings, usually called the Eternals in *Urizen* and by this and other designations later, is divided. In the dominant narrative within *Urizen*, Eternals appear as immortal and assumedly immaterial but, in a subordinate view, they are mortal and material even as they inhabit Eternity. As it develops, the poem

1. Blake's writings are cited from Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose*; artwork from the *William Blake Archive*.

places the Eternals in the divided cosmos already mentioned, a construct that becomes explicit in Blake's works around this time. *The Four Zoas* (1797–1807) then develops *Urizen's* dominant presentation to its logical conclusion, presenting the Zoas as suprahuman entities who remake the world in an apparently benevolent way. But in time Blake reverses course, arguably regarding *The Four Zoas* as having taken a wrong path, and uses previously marginalized ideas, including the alternative view in *Urizen*, to suggest new relations between Eternal and mortal beings.

3 In *Milton* (1804–21) and *Jerusalem*, he redefines the distinctions between the two levels of his universe and their inhabitants: immortals descend to and labor in the material world, and that world's mortal inhabitants participate in divine gatherings and can access Eternity mentally and imaginatively. These changes make the barrier between the levels of Blake's cosmos more permeable without fully removing it or the distinction between Eternal and material beings. Finally, in the eschaton he envisions at the end of biblical-historical time, narrated in *Jerusalem's* conclusion, Blake shows Eternity as containing both immortals and mortal, material humans with Eternal capabilities. Based on these changes, the essay proposes a major and a minor arc in his work, in order to determine which ideas were core convictions he returned to throughout life and which proved transient, and ventures an answer to the question it began with.²

Contradictory Views and a Divided Cosmos: *The First Book of Urizen*

4 Who, then, are Blake's Eternal beings? Milton O. Percival, in *William Blake's Circle of Destiny* (1938), answers intriguingly, "Who these Eternals are it is impossible to say. Are they those who never fell, those who have fallen, died, and reascended, or those who, though alive in the flesh, participate in immortality by their visionary powers? Or are they all three? To the writer, this last seems the most likely answer to this highly speculative problem" (45-46).³ Percival's suggestion, in common with his general synchronic approach to Blake, presents these possibilities as existing simultaneously in all Blake's works. In fact, Blake did not begin with a finished conception nor get to one easily.

5 As suggested, *Urizen* is where Blake introduces the Eternals as a specific class of beings, as distinct from other su-

2. Several ancillary aspects of Blake's treatment are not discussed in detail here in order to maintain a more focused approach. These include a premundane Eternity, sexual differentiation in Eternity, and how eschatological change may occur. The essay also does not consider possible sources for Blake's ideas of the Eternals.
 3. For Percival's brief elaboration, see 142-44.

pernatural actors in earlier works.⁴ At the start of chapter 2, the narrator establishes Eternals' immortality and flexible perceptions—a consistent part of all Blake's descriptions of full humanity—together with the prematerial Eternity that Blake assumes in this and subsequent works: "Earth was not: nor globes of attraction / The will of the Immortal expanded / Or contracted his all flexible senses. / Death was not, but eternal life sprung" (3.36-39, E 71). Eternals' immateriality is established by implication as Urizen and then Los acquire bodily form and lose Eternal awareness (chs. 3-6, E 72-80).⁵ Finally, the two-level cosmos emerges partly in Urizen's formation of a womb/globe and definitively through the Eternals' creation and closure of the "tent" around the Los-Enitharmon-Orc family, suggested in the (usually) preceding image of several figures viewing a planetary orb from above (5.28-34, E 73; 19.2-20.2, E 78-80; see *illus. 1*).⁶

6 The alternative view of Eternals becomes explicit only in Urizen's two questions to them in his sole speech, on plate 4: "Why will you die O Eternals? / Why live in unquenchable burnings?" (4.12-13, E 71). This plate is included in three copies (A-C), printed alongside or after others without it; hence, neither version is a definitive revision.⁷ If taken seriously, as they should be, Urizen's questions present Eternals as beings who are willing to die, assumedly do die at some point, and are also subject, like other mortals, to physical and psychic "burnings"—passions and emotional turmoil of such kinds as rage, jealousy, adoration, obsession, and sexual hunger.

7 The interpretive record on *Urizen* provides little discussion of this possibility, or of the divided presentation argued here. Northrop Frye and S. Foster Damon, in other contexts, see Eternal beings and groups as including living humans, as parts of Blake's all-encompassing Jesus (Frye 125) or of the Divine Family, "consisting of all the Elect, dead or

4. "Eternals" first appears in *Urizen*. "Eternal" (lowercase or capital) appears earlier in various senses, but not as denoting a class of beings. The Eternals are mentioned once in *Ahania*, in reference to Urizen's division from them in *Urizen* (3.55-56, E 86), and not at all in *The Song of Los* or *The Book of Los*.

5. See Connolly 78 on Blake's nonspecification of the form of eternal bodies.

6. Copy F, *Blake Archive* object 15, same in Erdman's numbering. Copy G has four figures, all others three.

7. Copies A and C were printed in 1794 alongside others lacking plate 4, and copy B separately in 1795 (Viscomi 280). Additionally, Robert N. Essick argues that plate 4 was produced for copy G (1818), but dropped because of misalignment (Essick). Joseph Viscomi believes plate 4 was, however, excluded as overfavorable to Urizen (283-84). It has not been suggested that lines 12-13 were a reason for omission. Since the lines exist in three copies and were intended for a fourth, they are, in any case, a real but not dominant part of Blake's conception.

alive" (Damon 105). Thus, some aspects of the present analysis are already familiar. However, neither applies the cited points to *Urizen*.

8 Most discussions of the Eternals in *Urizen* either pass over Urizen's questions in silence or explain them as a mental or perspectival error, a misapprehension of Eternal life. Such discussions usually treat 3.36-39 as ontologically true in this poem, and many also slide nonexplicitly from the Eternals' relation to death to issues of order and regularity. As an example, a thoughtful analysis by Robert E. Simmons implicitly responds to Urizen's questions in commenting on the "Earth was not ..." passage. Noting that the "key components" of Eternal life are "flux," a "creatively sensual existence," and unification of "all men's experience into one man's," Simmons asserts: "Such an existence makes all abstract notions, including that of the shape and motion of the planets, irrelevant. Similarly irrelevant, and thus nonexistent, is the abstract notion of death" (171). Simmons, then, sees Urizen's questions as a misconstrual of Eternal reality. Among current writers, Lucy Cogan goes further than most in observing that Urizen "absurdly" queries Eternals on death since "it is he who has introduced temporality and thus made death possible" (113). This formulation admits death for them, but as a new reality, not as an aspect of basic Eternal existence. In general, reading both questions as Urizenic miscomprehension remains the dominant critical response.⁸ An exception is Donald Ault, who accepts that Urizen's attribution of death to the Eternals (4.12) "conflicts with the narrator's explicit exclusion of Death from Eternity" and sees this polarity as basic to the poem's staging of contending viewpoints ("Blake's De-formation" 126; see also 124, 131). This point, for Ault, is the poem's main meaning, and so he does not further explore the idea of the Eternals as mortal.

9 The general approach just summarized has two weaknesses: it fails to adequately explain Urizen's concerns, and it neglects to contextualize his questions in relation to Blake's other works or even *Urizen's* full text. Simmons's essay exemplifies the first problem. If Urizen asks, "Why will you die O Eternals?," it is, most logically, because he believes they do die, and not because he thinks they find death as an abstraction unimportant. Further, Urizen's preceding statement, "I have sought for a joy without pain, / For a solid without fluctuation" (4.10-11, E 71), would not express only his desire for order and dominance, the usual reading. Rather, behind and helping to explain this desire, it would

8. On Urizen's second question, see Andrew M. Cooper's exegesis that Eternals' "kindlings and consummations of ... desire" are felt by Urizen "as an agony of ungratified craving" (216). For omission of the questions while referring to the Eternals, see articles/chapters by Choe, Goss, Fletcher, and Rajan.



1. Blake, *The First Book of Urizen* copy F, object 15. 14.8 x 10.9 cm. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Typ 6500.42 F. Image courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

reveal dread of discontinuance and extinction and a hope for endless bliss, elements in most views of an afterlife and heaven. In this case, Urizen's error is not one of supposing that flux equals death, but one of imagining that hierarchy, rigidity, and an ordered universe under his control can somehow negate his mortality.

- 10 Contextualizing the possibility of the Eternals' mortality shows that some features of their description in *Urizen* are ascribed to mortals in earlier and contemporaneous works. Specifically, the "ancient Poets" of *Marriage* (1790) possessed variable perceptions, seeing gods in "whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive," contrary to *Urizen's* reserving of this faculty for immortals (*Marriage* 11, E 38; *Urizen* 3.37-38, E 71). Similarly, Enitharmon's dream in *Europe* (1794) places the loss of flexible perceptions in a mortal human society, either within the dream's 1,800-year timespan or at the time of the biblical flood (10.10-31, E 63-64).
- 11 Moreover, within *Urizen* itself, elements of Blake's earlier conceptions appear largely unchanged except for the defining context of 3.36-39. The Preludium's reference to "the primeval Priests assum'd power," if construed to mean power over mortal populations, recalls *Marriage's* point that abstracting "the mental deities from their objects" was what "began Priesthood" (*Urizen* 2.1, E 70; *Marriage* 11, E 38), and this process of abstraction correlates with Urizen's abstractive reasoning in *Urizen* 4.34-40 (E 72). In the framework of the whole poem, the final segment—from Urizen's awakening to Fuzon's exodus, including the Net of Religion and the loss of perception of Eternity—is consistent with the focus on priesthood from the Preludium to plate 4. It is also compatible, with differences, with *Marriage's* elevation of priesthood over a society of mortals originally having expansive senses.⁹ Ideas of mortals with something akin to Eternal understanding, then, and of usurpations of power over them, are not new in Blake. The new element in *Urizen* is the occlusion of such possibilities in the dominant narrative.
- 12 Placing this occlusion in its own context, *Urizen* stands at a crossroads in Blake's development. Here, an earlier concept in which mortals have elements of Eternal awareness and knowledge of Eternity is revised into one reserving both abilities solely to immortals. The latter idea, dominant in *Urizen*, will become the only one in *The Four Zoas*.

9. In *Urizen*, Urizen's earthly descendants complete their mortalization and lose Eternal awareness as they become enmeshed in the Net of Religion (25.23-42, E 82-83).

13 The second major issue we must consider, *Urizen's* two-level cosmos whose levels are closed off from each other, emerges as a plot development within the dominant narrative. The idea of a tiered cosmos, in general, can perhaps be interpreted as a mental or perspectival misconception, a false belief reflecting Eternal humanity's imperfect awareness. (We have already encountered a similar approach in relation to Urizen's questions.) This interpretive tack, however, is too abstract. Blake's narratives are centered within the span of biblical-historical time and treat such divisions as real conditions within—and, we will see, beyond—it. In any case, a differentiation between earthly and higher existence is an explicit or tacit feature of both earlier and later Blake works.

- 14 A division between "eternal" and "material" worlds, for example, is explicit in the fairy's song in *Europe* (iii.4, 13, E 60, copies H and K). While earlier works do not state such a division directly, some *Innocence* poems imply an upper or spiritual world in references to angels and guardian spirits (1789; for example, "Night," "A Dream"). In these and other early poems, contact between the two spheres is frequent and knowledge of God seems innate ("The Little Boy Found" line 3, E 11; *TheL* [1789] 1.19, 5.1, E 4-5). However, the contrasted *Experience* poems (1794) show a material existence almost devoid of contact with or even awareness of a spiritual or divine realm, or direct awareness of God (for example, "Holy Thursday," "London," "The Chimney Sweeper"). In what must be considered a brilliant and fateful fusion, *Urizen* combines these attributes, presenting a two-level cosmos without contact between mortal and Eternal beings. In effect, *Urizen* theorizes the world of *Experience* as the sole condition of mortal humanity, with no "contrary" state of Innocence and over a timespan from material creation onward.
- 15 The vehicle for this shift in Blake's ideas is the Eternals' erecting and closing the "tent" hiding the Los-Enitharmon-Orc family in chapters 5-6 (19.2-20.2, E 78-80). This, as well as earlier actions by the Eternals, such as pouring fire on Urizen in chapter 3, has been seen as defensive and inadequate. Andrew Lincoln, for example, in his study of *The Four Zoas*, observes that the Eternals in *Urizen* "do not represent a foreknowing providence," and so share responsibility for "the terrible progress of history" (24-25).¹⁰ Lincoln's larger concern, to which we will return, is Blake's need "to retain in some capacity a supervisory providence" (25). These points, however, do not get to the core issue of relations between the levels in Blake's universe. On this issue, G. A. Rosso notes that a two-level division is basic to the

10. For criticisms similar to Lincoln's, see Goss 96, 101, 106-07; Rajan 68-70.

human accession of divine knowledge, which he defines as the fundamental meaning of “apocalypse” (“Redefining,” especially pars. 1-5, 34-35). The possibility of this accession is what *Urizen* appears to bar within its own context of primordial-biblical time. In imagery and plot, completing and closing the tent signify both that Eternals turn away from the lower world and that those in that world are deprived of Eternal perception: “Spread a Tent ... / ... / That Eternals may no more behold them”; “No more Los beheld Eternity” (*Urizen* 19.2-4, 20.2, E 78, 80). Those so blocked include Urizen (5.39-41, E 73); the Los-Enitharmon-Orc family; and, ultimately, mortal populations, initially Urizen’s human descendants, who “forgot their eternal life” (25.42, E 83). Analytically, the Eternals’ action is arbitrary; there is no necessary reason why the advent of human reproduction must close both worlds to each other, and in *Innocence* and *Thel* it does not. Evidently, though, this plot device fits Blake’s sense at the time of how Eternal-mortal relations did develop. Closing the tent begins a largely abstentionist role for Eternal beings, starting with their absence from later events in *Urizen* and continuing with modifications in *The Four Zoas*, that leaves non-Eternal immortals and mortal humanity to shift for themselves.

- 16 Both sides of this development are momentous. For mortals, inability to access or view Eternity will come to mean, for Blake, inability to save themselves. In *The Four Zoas*, this inability will produce the need for a supernal agency to save them through its own acts. For those immortals no longer in contact with Eternity (Urizen and Los in *Urizen*, the Zoas later), the Eternals’ continuing, though modified, abstention will mean that the Zoas—formally, collective aspects of “the Human Brain,” yet functioning poetically as agents over and above humanity—act as substitutes for Eternal beings in their relations with humanity, and do so without full Eternal awareness.

Intensifying and Offsetting the Division: *The Four Zoas*

- 17 In *The Four Zoas*, Blake intensifies but offsets *Urizen*’s account of separation between mortal and immortal beings. The Zoas emerge in this poem as supernal actors of potentially overbearing power who, in the end, purge and remold a passive human population. This role becomes a predominant theme in the poem. Its logic seems clear: if mortal humanity is cut off from transcendent or Eternal understanding, human renovation can occur only through some suprahuman entity. Countering this focus somewhat, Blake also portrays Eternal beings, no longer fully absent from mundane affairs, acting at certain junctures as a “supervisory providence” (Lincoln 25), though in limited ways. Finally, in one scene, Blake implies new possible relations between Eternal and mortal beings that point to his future work.

- 18 Dramatically, the Zoas function largely on a suprahuman level, intermediate between Eternal beings and mortal humanity. In doing so, they become the poem’s main driving force, immortal, immensely powerful, and yet, with the partial exception of Los and Enitharmon, acting without Eternal understanding or contact with Eternal entities.¹¹ The two-level dualism becomes most pronounced in Night 9, examined briefly here as the endpoint of the poem’s treatment of the Zoas’ development. An interpretive crux in study of the poem, Night 9 has been read variously as an intentionally disturbing but largely positive portrayal of human reformation (Wilkie and Johnson; Lincoln); as a culpable endorsement of elite terror (Aers); as enacting “counter-apocalyptic resistances” (Ault, *Narrative*); as a failed attempt to transcend the physical body (Otto); and in other ways.¹² Its political-cultural dimensions are seen here as linked to the Night’s role as a major, though later abandoned, development in Blake’s view of the relation between immortal and mortal beings.

- 19 In structure, following an introduction covering some major events of the Night in overview,¹³ Night 9 presents a series of segments shifting from actions by mortals to those by Zoas done to mortals, initially in distinct episodes but later in two-level actions, and marked by contrasting “above” and “below” images that are first implied and later explicit.¹⁴ These elements form a double pattern of imagery and action.

- 20 The Night’s above/below imagery begins at the juncture between the self-undertaken renovations of the Eternal Man and Urizen and the following explosion of the universe, as Urizen asks the Eternal Man, “Where shall we take our stand ... / Or where are human feet for Lo our eyes are in the heavens” (122.24-25, E 391).¹⁵ The two parts of Urizen’s question represent, topologically and sequentially, the remaining action of Night 9. After the universe explodes (122.26, E 392), the implied earthly locale of the feet ap-

11. The dividing line between levels is one of many points in his schema that Blake never defines precisely. In practice, it runs between mortal humans and both Zoas and Eternal beings in regard to immortality, but, with regard to awareness of Eternity and the divine, between Eternals and both Zoas and mortals.

12. See Wilkie and Johnson 228-37, especially 231-32 on the vintage; Lincoln 214-19 on the vintage; Aers 253-70; Ault, *Narrative* 347-465; Otto ch. 12, especially 331-35 on the vintage and 337-39 on the conclusion.

13. 117-119.23, E 386-88. Lincoln characterizes this section, added on new pages and over the erased original Night heading, as an “overture or ‘Preludium’ which summarizes some of the central issues of the Night” (193).

14. Ault first noted the “above/below” figuration; see *Narrative* 414, 430, 431, 434-35, 437-39 for analyses.

15. Erdman suggests two possible emendations (E 844). Neither changes the implied location of the feet.

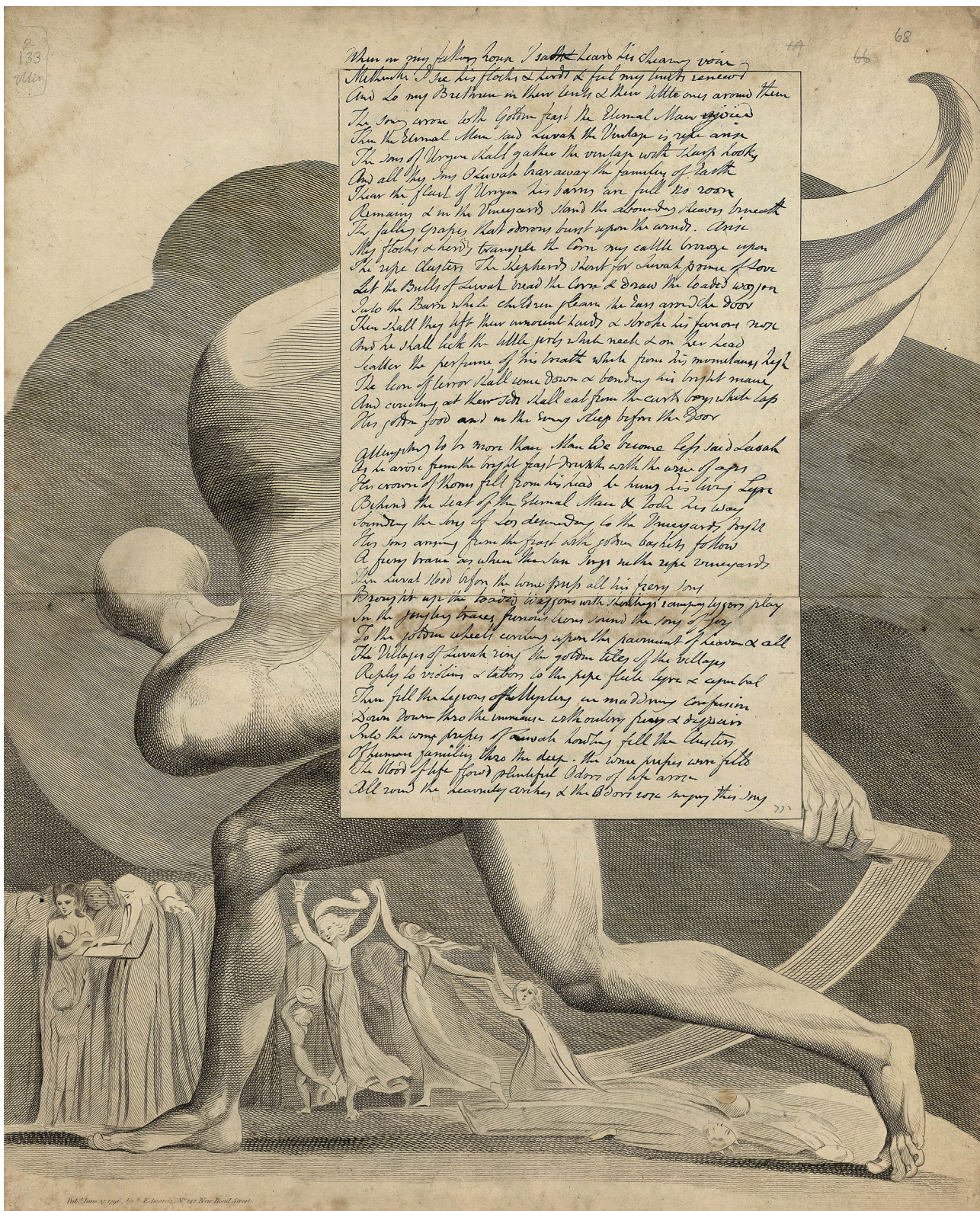
pears, as dead and living mortals take violent revenge against past and present tyrants, priests, merchants, warriors, and judges, ending as the prisoner's foot "dashd" his father's judge (123.32, E 393). These pages are the only part of the Night's main action in which mortals act on their own. The next pages move back to action by Zoas: Urizen's sons plow on the earth (124.8 and following, E 393); Urizen sows "immortal souls" that "fall like stars / Into their own appointed places" (125.4-7, E 394). Finally, on ground level, souls of "naked warriors" and "Kings & Princes" fall on or are driven upon seashores, rocks, and "unproducing sands," as "flames of Orc" and "the Trump of Tharmas" reenact the prior human uprising as a Zoic purification (125.8-13, E 394).

- 21 Above/below imagery fuses with active/passive action in the Night's harvest-vintage sections. As harvest commences, Luvah sits "Above in the bright heavens in peace" as "the Spirits of Men *beneath* / Cried out to *be deliverd*" (131.37-38, E 400); at the threshing, Urizen "rose" and the sound of his flail is "heard terrible by all *beneath* the heavens" (133.34-35, E 402). And at the vintage, "Thro all the golden rooms / Heaven rang with winged Exultation All *beneath* howld loud" (137.14-15, E 405; all emphases added). Similar imagery appears visually on page 135 (see *illus. 2*), a *Night Thoughts* design originally signifying Time that shows a huge figure with a scythe striding before cowering mortals, some already dead. Here, the image may refer to the scything by Urizen's sons (page 132), or may anticipate violence to come (Otto 327).
- 22 Following these episodes, topological imagery and active/passive plot events become tacit in the closing episode of Urthona's milling and baking. We read that "Los who is Urthona rose in all his regenerate power"; that "Terrible [was] the distress / Of all the Nations of Earth ground in the Mills of Urthona"; and that, as the bread bakes (inferably on earth), those "bound to sullen contemplations in the night / ... turn on beds of sorrow" and then "they rise they write the bitter words / Of Stern Philosophy & knead the bread of knowledge ..." (137.34, 138.2-3, 138.12-15, E 405-06). If turning, rising, and writing indicate counteractivity and, possibly, the bread of knowledge represents an opposing form of Urthona's "Bread of Ages" (138.17, E 406), these are responses of a small fraction of earth's people. Earlier, following the vintage, the narrator stated that once the "Lees" were discarded (and how many human souls were those?), "the Human Wine stood wondering in all their delightful Expanses" (137.23, 32, E 405). About the great majority of human souls who are ground and baked in the bread episode, we learn nothing at all.
- 23 What to make of such a narration? In earlier work, the present writer related Night 9 historically to events during the

French Revolution, with the extended torture episode of the wine presses representing and perhaps rationalizing the 1793-94 Terror (135.34-137.4, E 404-05; *Chained Boy* 200-05). Focusing differently, David Aers critiques Night 9 as justifying elite dictatorship based on an ahistorical denial of lower-class capacity for self-liberation (253-70). In either case, or both, the "Human Grapes" crushed in the vintage (136.21, E 404) and the grain ground in Urthona's mills represent whole human populations. During Urizen's sowing (above), the warriors, kings, and princes fell or were driven to barren land where they would not grow; it is those who lived under their rule who are planted and ultimately harvested, implying the need for purification before they can be fully human. They are the ones—shopkeepers, farmers, farm laborers, housewives, scullery maids, draymen, miners, country parsons, chimney sweepers, beggars, thieves—who, living in a Satanic system, have tried to get by, get a little ahead, and leave something to those they love. Their poetic fate has been determined by Blake's treatment of the Zoas as the actuating force in human restoration. Much later, he will draw up a balance sheet on this portrayal.

- 24 *The Four Zoas* only partly tempers this presentation in its main treatments of Eternal beings and, under various designations, Jesus as savior. Eternal beings act in several parts of the work. At the Council of God in Night 1, consisting of "those in Great Eternity," the Family Divine designates the Seven Eyes of God (both first introduced here). The Council meets again in Night 4, when the Saviour finds (that is, establishes) the limits of Opacity and Contraction, and at the start of Night 8, to "fix" the limit of Contraction, allowing the fallen Man to stir. Later in Night 8, "the Sons of Eden" or "they in Eternity" (before/after speech designations) sing their recognition of the Lamb in Jerusalem's bosom, and "those in Eden" or "the Eternals" nominate the specific forms of God assumedly constituting the "Eyes" (not so named here).¹⁶ These and other elements, many introduced in what Lincoln calls the "major revisions," add what he terms "A Christian Vision" to the poem (223). Their significance is enhanced by Lamb imagery that becomes prominent in Nights 7a and 8, and by artwork such as Night 8's large images of Jesus on the final three pages (objects 114-16, *Blake Archive*). These Eternal or divine ap-

16. 21.1-21 [19].11, E 310-12; 55.10-56.27, E 337-38; 99.1-14, E 371-72; 104.5-18, incorporating 113.1-37, E 376-77; 107 [115].42-50, E 381 (also discussed below). The composition of the Family Divine, mentioned only here in *The Four Zoas*, is not specified. It seems cognate with "those in Great Eternity" meeting as the Council and beholding "As One Man all the Universal family" (21.1, 4, E 310-11). Hence, it would include only Eternal beings; despite Damon's general suggestion that the Family includes mortals, there is no text indication of their presence.



2. Blake, *The Four Zoas*, object 135. 40.5 cm. x 32.8 cm. British Library Collection, Add MS 39764. Image courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

pearances are relatively ineffective, however, in imparting such a Christian vision to the Zoas themselves. Their main plot impact is on Los and Enitharmon (Nights 4, 7a extension, and 8); they do not similarly affect the other Zoas, and Los and Enitharmon themselves are absent from the Zoas' main actions in Night 9. The "major revisions," in fact, largely end on page 123, after the first third of Night 9.¹⁷ Equally, these acts are limited in scope. They take place within Eternal beings' upper tier in Blake's cosmos, as indicated at the end of the Night 1 conclave, when the Family Divine draws "up the Universal tent / ... / Till the time of the End," and in the song by the Sons of Eden/they in Eternity in Night 8, who "look down into Ulro" from Eden, without going there (21 [19].7-9, E 312; 113.22, E 377). Blake has not yet taken the steps of providing for Eternal beings' descent to the material world or mortal beings' access to Eternity.

- 25 Blake suggests further possibilities in one of three passages concerning the Eternals under that name. The earliest, already mentioned, specifies the individual "Eyes" of God. In the third, in Night 9, the Eternals rise "to labour at the Vintage / Beneath," confirming their complicity in the Zoas' vintage actions as well as their position above humanity (133.31-32, E 402). Between these, however, in an appearance at the harvest feast, the Eternals grapple with issues of Eternal status and their relation to mortals in ways that imply shifts in Blake's view of both.
- 26 These emerge when, shocked at Enion's presence at the feast, "Many Eternal Men," seeing "[t]he female form now separate," weep "to see their shadows" and say, "This is the Generative world" (133.5-9, E 401). The immediate focus, then, is on sexual division and generation, and the response, by "One of the Eternals," serves to reconcile Eternals to the presence of both in Eternity. Its relevance to the present analysis lies in its implications for Eternals' responsibilities and for correspondences between Eternal and mortal existence. The speaker asserts that

inclosed around
 In walls of Gold we cast him [Man] like a Seed into the
 Earth
 Till times & spaces have passd over him duly every morn
 We visit him covering with a Veil the immortal seed
 With windows from the inclement sky we cover him &
 with walls
 And hearths protect the Selfish terror till divided all
 In families we see our shadows born. & thence we know
 That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
 We fall on one anothers necks more closely we embrace

17. See Lincoln 222 for a list of "major revisions"; 223-79 for discussion.

Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
 Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
 (133.15-25, E 401-02)

- 27 The speech enlarges Eternal responsibility for mortal life to include providing care and protection to mortals—the veil, windows, walls, and hearths of lines 18-20. Equally new is the passage's implied correspondence between Eternal and mortal existence. The crucial words here are "families"/"family" (lines 21, 24) and "thence" (line 21). The echo of "families" in "the Eternal family" links human families with the Eternal one; the similar repetition of the Eternal men's "shadows" as part of the response (lines 8, 21) reinforces the link. "[T]hence" connects these points to the broad statement that follows, "Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love"—probably using "Man" for mortal and Eternal beings jointly. The implication is that Eternals know this truth both from their own work ("duly every morn / We visit him") and from the growth of human families, who embody these qualities, if imperfectly.¹⁸
- 28 Finally, beyond its immediate purpose and meaning, the speaker's linkage of "families" with "the Eternal family" implies a modified view of mortal existence. In an obvious but crucial way, generation gives families and communities a literal continuity, a kind of immortality outlasting individual death. Additionally, the possibilities of selfless conduct within families and communities, though limited and crosscut by negatives, provide partial and provisional access to the divine, a way "Man" can live "not by Self alone but in his brothers face" (line 25). All these implied changes in Blake's view of Eternals and mortals, though not realized in plot action in *The Four Zoas*, play out in the two poems that follow.

Descent and Linkage: *Milton and Jerusalem*

- 29 In *Milton and Jerusalem*, Blake revises his presentation of Eternal beings and their relations with mortal humanity in two pivotal ways. First, he expands Eternal beings' duties to require involvement with and care for mortals. (He also broadens his terms, referring to "Eternals" or an individual "Eternal" only twice in each poem.)¹⁹ In particular, to discharge their mission, Eternal beings must descend from Eden to labor in the material world, creating a link between these levels in Blake's cosmos. Simultaneously, Blake opens the membership of divine groupings so that mortals can be

18. See Otto 325-26 for a reading contrasting the human and Eternal families.

19. See *Milton* 11 [12].16 and 27, E 105 (repeated speech attribution), and 20 [22].43, E 114. In *Jerusalem*, see Albion's brief reference, 23.18, E 168, and Eternals' mockery of the Zoas, 32 [36].43, E 179, discussed below. There are also a few ambiguous uses of "Eternal" as an adjective.

part of them, and he proposes that mortals may mentally and imaginatively access Eternity. With these revisions in action and imagery, discussed in this and the following section, Blake maintains his core conception of a two-level universe, but qualitatively redefines the relation between the levels and the permeability of the divide between them.

- 30 The best context for understanding these changes is Blake's identification, in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, with evangelical and pietistic Christianity, based on and reinforcing his increasing sense of humanity's sinfulness, imperfection, and inability to save itself without divine contact. These affinities and concerns are emphasized in doctrinal expositions in *Jerusalem*, such as the apothegm "[H]e who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body; will never enter there" (3, prose, E 145) and the preface to chapter 3, and in lyric and dramatic passages in both poems, including references to prominent figures in both traditions.²⁰
- 31 Blake's expanding the responsibility of Eternal beings can be illustrated in a preliminary way through his successive accounts of selecting the "Seven Eyes of God." In *The Four Zoas*, they are chosen by the "Family Divine," and possess an apparently overseeing function as the "Seven lamps of the Almighty" (21 [19].7, 10, E 312). In *Milton's* Bard's Song, they are appointed by the "Great Solemn Assembly," consisting of "all Eden," which has been "called down" by Palamabron and has "descended into Palamabrons tent" (8.46, 9.1, E 102), an instance of the descent idea. The Assembly settles disputes between Rintrah and Palamabron and successively appoints the Eyes, but does not otherwise engage long term in the material world (9.9-10, E 103; 13 [14].12-29, E 107). In *Jerusalem*, finally, the focus is on descent and service; the Eyes are not the main point in the episode in which they are chosen.
- 32 This episode chiefly concerns involvement in or abstention from the material world. It recounts an "Assembly" formed among "those who disregard all Mortal Things," when, observing events in the material world, "Many ... / ... said, let us go down / And see these changes!" They are opposed by others asking, "[W]hat have we to do with the Dead?"—one of several examples of Eternal beings urging abstention in earthly matters, and ultimately a minority position (55.1, 3-6, E 204). As discussion proceeds, at first "far the greatest

20. Besides *Jerusalem* 3, see *Jerusalem* 52, prose, on sin, the need for religion, and monks and Methodists as "[w]e," and verse, "I saw a Monk of Charlemaine" (E 200-02). On individuals, see *Milton* 22 [24].55, 61 (E 118) on Whitefield and Wesley; *Jerusalem* 52, prose, on Whitefield; *Jerusalem* 72.50-51 (E 227) on Fenelon, Guion, Teresa, Whitefield, and Hervey. For discussion, see this writer's "Blake, Methodism, and 'Christian Perfection.'"

number" are "about to make a Separation," and they designate both the Seven Eyes and an unnamed "Eighth" (55.30-33, E 205). The "Separation" would, most logically, be between themselves and the mortal realm, leaving the Eyes to watch over the latter. If so, the separation is aborted. The narrator relates that "first they" (this majority) decide that whether they "sit down within / The plowed furrow, listning to the weeping clods" or rise "Upon the chariots of the morning," they remain "One Family! One Man blessed for ever" (lines 34-46), and then that "many" say:

It is better to prevent error, than to forgive the criminal:
Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones:
And those who are in misery cannot remain so long
If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth.
(55.50-53, E 205)

Thus, a major portion of those "who disregard all Mortal Things"—a group whose self-description as "One Family! One Man blessed for ever" bespeaks Eternal status (line 46)—accept, against their first inclination, a "duty" to involve themselves in mortal things ("labour well the teeming Earth"). This acceptance is the significant result of the Assembly. No more is heard of the Eyes; this is the only reference to them in *Jerusalem*.

- 33 The full meaning of descent, including its implications for mortal humans, can best be approached through *Milton's* plot thread involving Ololon, a plural, sexually mixed population living by the river of that name in Eden.²¹ Rosso calls Ololon's descent "arguably the most significant event in the poem" ("Redefining" par. 41). Their descent is, of course, paralleled in *Milton* by those of Los and Milton; and, in *Jerusalem*, Los's laboring in earthly locales extends through the whole work. Yet these plot threads do not share the full range of meaning seen in Ololon's descent, for immortals' relationship to mortals and for mortals themselves.
- 34 Unlike earlier bodies of Eternals, such as the Council of God in *The Four Zoas* and the Great Solemn Assembly in *Milton*, Ololon does not set "limits" or act as arbiter or judge, but descends in atonement and sacrifice—that is, in self-annihilation. They leave their riverine dwelling place to right a wrong—their having driven Milton into Ulro—and to give themselves for others. Further, they go not to an intermediate locale, but to the depths of human existence. First purposing to descend to "give / Ourselves to death in

21. Eugenie Freed, Mary Lynn Johnson, and others recognize Ololon's initially plural character. Few note their being sexually mixed, but see Elfenbein (for example, 16, 153, 166) and Rosso, *Religion* 141-56.

Ulro among the Transgressors,” they are advised by the Divine Family to halt in Beulah: “Watch over this World, and with your brooding wings, / Renew it to Eternal Life,” an allusion to *Paradise Lost* 1.20-21 (*Milton* 21 [23].45-46, 55-56, E 116.) Ololon, however, rejects this passive stance. As the account continues in book 2, they “[seek] the Or-Ulro & its fiery Gates,” described as the most “dreadful” among four sub-Edenic “States of Humanity in its Repose” (34 [38].19, 13, 8, E 134).²² There, “before the Gates of the Dead / ... Ololon looked down into the Heavens of Ulro in fear” (lines 48-49), seeing, amid much else, that

[l]oud roll the Weights & Spindles over the whole Earth
let down
On all sides round to the Four Quarters of the World,
eastward on
Europe to Euphrates & Hindu, to Nile & back in Clouds
Of Death across the Atlantic to America North & South
(35 [39].14-17, E 135)

Or-Ulro, then, represents evils spread across Blake’s contemporary society. Ololon’s descent there to prostrate themselves before the “Starry Eight” and to ask “with tears forgiveness / Confessing their crime with humiliation and sorrow” (35 [39].29-33, E 135) is an act of moral heroism paralleling Milton’s own, perhaps more significant as indicating the new role of Eternal beings giving themselves in sacrifice in mortal realms.

- 35 The effects of their action are equally important. Ololon’s descent has opened “a wide road ... to Eternity,” for “mighty were the multitudes of Ololon, vast the extent / Of their great sway, reaching from Ulro to Eternity” (35 [39].35-38, E 135). This last phrase implies more than a “road” for those specifically mentioned (Los and Enitharmon). Ololon’s “sway” over this whole span suggests a road for all under the “Heavens of Ulro,” including their extent “eastward on / Europe to Euphrates & Hindu, to Nile & back ... / ... to America North & South.” While it is not said that these others can take the “road,” neither is it stated that mortals cannot perceive or participate in Eternity while in their mortal bodies.²³

22. The other three states are Beulah, Alla, and Al-Ulro (lines 9-12, E 134). Previously, Beulah was called the place of “Rest” or “repose” (30 [33].14, 31 [34].7, E 129-30). Provision of four sub-Edenic states with this function, and of a two-level Ulro, is unique to this passage and seems done to emphasize the extremity of Ololon’s descent. Alla substitutes for Generation, the usual state below Beulah, and is mentioned also in *Jerusalem* 89.58, E 249; Al-Ulro and Or-Ulro are not named elsewhere.

23. As, in reverse, it is stated that Ololon cannot view Golgonooza while in immortal form (35 [39].18-25, E 135).

- 36 A further indication that mortals may travel the “road” opened by Ololon lies in the evocative passage on the Lark and Wild Thyme that immediately follows (35 [39].42-36 [40].12, E 136). Narratively describing Ololon’s point of transition into the material world, the passage also defines at least one form of mortal access to Eternity. Its details are well known: the Wild Thyme as “Los’s Messenger to Eden,” the Lark’s nest “at the Gate of Los,” the Lark as Los’s “Messenger” (35 [39].54, 66, 67). The symbolic values of thyme and lark are established earlier: the Mundane Shell “finishes where the lark mounts,” the Lark’s song reechoes “against the lovely blue & shining heavenly Shell,” and each flower, including the Wild Thyme, is a “Center” within which “Eternity expands.”²⁴ But we miss the passage’s full meaning if we read its nature imagery only in these symbolic terms. Rather, if the description is “concerned with each day, and not a particular day of Blake’s experience,” as Harold Bloom’s commentary rightly emphasizes (E 925), so also it does not concern only Los’s or Blake’s access to Eternity, but anyone’s. The ascending lark’s song or the smell of the thyme provides a kind of ascent to heaven, or a glimpse of a different life on earth—which is what Blake’s Eternity, in the end, means—and this moment is available for ordinary untutored children, men, and women, not only for bards and prophets. *Milton* does not further explore the ideas of a double road, from Eden to Or-Ulro and Ulro to Eden, but Blake returns to the idea, using different narrative devices and imagery, in *Jerusalem*.

Membership and Access: *Jerusalem*

- 37 In *Jerusalem*, Blake introduces two further changes not considered so far. First, he broadens his descriptions of Eternal assemblies such that, while mortals’ actual presence in Eternity remains unclear, it becomes impossible to deny their presence in these gatherings, and so of death in them. Second, he makes clear that mortals may intellectually and imaginatively enter the Eternal world. Together, these changes amplify and develop the possibilities suggested by the “wide road” image in *Milton*.
- 38 Blake establishes both points in an extended series of episodes in chapter 2, beginning with a debate among Eternals and ending with his descriptions, as author, of the four chief cathedral cities and, as narrator, of the twenty-four cities associated with them (32 [36].43-36 [40].57, E 179-83). These episodes lead from an assertion of the Eternals’ aloof existence to a recognition of humans as part of the Divine Family and as conscious of the Eternal realm.

24. See 17 [19].27, E 111; 31 [34].33, 48, 51, E 130-31.

- 39 The section opens with a dispute among Eternal beings, essentially on judgment versus mercy. As with the dispute at *The Four Zoas's* harvest feast, which it recalls, the immediate topic is gender among the Zoas but the underlying issue is rejection or acceptance of mortal humans and their lives as lived in generation. “[M]any of the Eternal Ones,” we are told, satirize the “Zoa’s of Albion” for deferring to their “Daughters,” who “are Vegetable only fit for burning.” The terms, of course, apply to mortal humans as well as to the Zoas. In response, “those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death / Said thus. What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be,” producing torments and “Eternal Death,” but “the Divine Mercy / Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen” (32 [36].43-55, E 179). Beyond the overt issue of acceptance or rejection of dismissive judgment, the salient point is that these Eternals accept death and sexuality, the defining qualities of mortal human life, as no bar to “the Divine Mercy,” although still remaining aloof themselves from mortal life.
- 40 The argument now takes a turn, moving from mercy to active sympathy and engagement. “One” of the Divine Family, soon revealed as Los, first berates Albion because he “forbid[s] with Laws / Our Emanations” (probably referring to Albion’s imposition of Moral Law), but “when he saw blue death in Albions feet, / Again he join’d the Divine Body, following merciful; / While Albion fled more indignant! revengeful” (33 [37].1-12, E 179). The significant points are that Los is counted as one of the “Divine Family” or “Divine Body” though he is gendered as well as divided from his Spectre, and that he and the Divine Family do not extend mercy but follow Albion to help and appeal to him. The accompanying images of Albion in the Saviour’s arms and the Spectre hovering over Jerusalem (see *illus. 3*) do not show the plate’s events directly but, rather, the consequences for the whole poem of the choice between aloofness and care.²⁵
- 41 The ensuing evocation of the Saviour or Divine Family who attend Albion (34 [38].10-13, E 179-80) states that he/they display “Eternal Vision! the Divine Similitude! / In loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and friends” (lines 11-12). Those mentioned can with difficulty be imagined as unembodied immortals, but more naturally (in both senses) as living humans, a point underlined by the similarity of this passage to the comparable list of those who call to Albion at the poem’s start (4.11-12, E 146). If those loves and tears are expressions of the Divine Similitude (“*In* loves and tears . . .”; emphasis added), then so too are those who show them, at least in this state of exalted empathy, and Blake is saying that humans in their mortal,

“Vegetable” forms, scorned by “many of the Eternal Ones,” are among those in this family, parts of Blake’s divine but also immanent Jesus. This is the person/group who appeal to Albion as “One Man all the Universal Family” (34 [38].19, E 180).

- 42 Blake now further expands his account of mortal participation in the Divine Family. Appearing as author, he testifies to his own “Vision of God upon my pleasant valleys”: “I behold London; a Human awful wonder of God! / He says: Return, Albion, return! I give myself for thee” (34 [38].28-30, E 180). London’s ensuing self-defining description—“My streets are my, Ideas of Imagination,” “my Inhabitants; Affections, / The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-vessels” (34 [38].31, 33-34, E 180)—makes clear that London’s components are the ideas and affections of mortal human individuals, families, and groups. (“[S]treets” and, by parallelism, “Inhabitants” are literal.) These human thoughts and emotions are equivalent to the “loves and tears” of families and friends presented as the Saviour or Divine Family, and, therefore, London as such, in this state of awareness, is part of that family. London’s speech, Blake states, still in his own voice, is the meaning of three decades of his work:

So spoke London, immortal Guardian! I heard in Lambeths shades:

In Felpham I heard and saw the Visions of Albion
I write in South Molton Street, what I both see and hear
In regions of Humanity, in Londons opening streets.

(34 [38].40-43, E 180)

- 43 Blake’s descriptions of London’s companion cities, starting with the remaining chief cities, continue his emphasis on their mortal inhabitants. Alongside London stand “Canterbury! venerable parent of men,” “York, crown’d with loving kindness,” and “Edinburgh, cloth’d / With fortitude” and marked by those “Who give themselves, in Golgotha, Victims to Justice”—most likely, as David Erdman argues, an allusion to the 1793–94 treason trials there (lines 45, 51-52, 54, E 180-81; Erdman, *Prophet* 476). Each phrase suggests not simply the city as spiritual entity, but its relation to its human occupants and their activities. Blake’s explanatory description, “for Cities / Are Men, fathers of multitudes” (lines 46-47, E 180), makes clear that the cities’ membership in the Divine Family includes their mortal occupants. Their participation, as the example of Edinburgh implies, may be as courageous and terrifying as Ololon’s descent from Eden to Or-Ulro, and it is undertaken in their mortal bodies.
- 44 Finally, Blake underlines the human component of the Divine Family with the introduction of the remaining twenty-four cathedral cities, who act sometimes with and some-

25. On cultural contexts and those in *Jerusalem*, see the Paley edition of *Jerusalem* (188).



3. Blake, *Jerusalem* copy E, object 37. 22.6 x 16.3 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(37). Image courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

times separately from the four chief cities, in a major episode starting on plate 36 [40]:

And these the Twenty-four in whom the Divine Family
Appear'd; and they were One in Him. A Human Vision!
Human Divine, Jesus the Saviour, blessed for ever and
ever. (36 [40].45-47, E 182)

As part of the Divine Family and of Blake's composite Jesus, the twenty-four are spiritual entities. Yet Blake's wording leaves unclear whether the Divine Family is manifested "in" (as a part or aspect of) the cities as entities, "in" (with-in) them in those who live there, or both. The ambiguity is also inherent in the earlier presentation of London and its sister cities ("my Inhabitants; Affections, / The children of my thoughts, walking within my blood-vessels"), and so both meanings seem valid. Almost immediately, in fact, the example of Winchester, the second named among the twenty-four, indicates that Zoic figures can act as members of the Divine Family when incarnate as mortal, sexual bodies. As Winchester stands "devoting himself for Albion," his "Emanations / Submi[t] to be call'd Enitharmons daughters, and be born / In vegetable mould: created by the Hammer and Loom / In Bowlahoola & Allamanda where the Dead wail" (36 [40].53, 54-57, E 182-83). Winchester's emanations, then, participate in the Family in mortal, sexual form. Overall, descriptions of the Family consistently imply that mortals form part of it.

- 45 Besides establishing that mortals may act within divine assemblies, Blake makes clear their awareness of and participation in Eternity. The living persons who act as part of the Saviour/Divine Family's attendance on and appeal to Albion (34 [38], above) share in the Family's "Eternal Vision" and its "contracting" and "expanding" senses (lines 11, 17-19, E 180). Here, as always for Blake, such "infinite" senses (line 17) are a marker of full, or Eternal, humanity. Further, in the incarnation of Winchester's Emanations in "vegetable" form, it is not suggested that, having become mortal and sexual, they "No more ... beheld Eternity" or "forgot their eternal life," as *Urizen* stipulated for Los when sexually divided and for *Urizen's* mortal descendants (20.2, 25.42, E 80, 83). Most comprehensively, Blake's description of the four chief cities asserts that within them, "In every bosom a Universe expands, as wings / Let down at will around, and call'd the Universal Tent" (34 [38].49-50, E 180). As "every bosom" shows, Blake means not simply the spiritual cities, but the individuals, families, and groups within them. The use of "Tent" reverses prior accounts of the tent as excluding non-Eternals (*Urizen* chs. 5-6, *The Four Zoas* Night 1). Moreover, the key description, "In every bosom a Universe expands," echoes an earlier one of Los's sons and daughters as having qualities like those of Eternal beings, including that "Every one [is] a translucent Wonder: a Universe with-

in, / Increasing inwards" (14.17-18, E 158). In both cases, the inner "Universe" bespeaks Eternal awareness—within themselves, they perceive everything, which is what Eternal perception sees.²⁶ All who take part in the Saviour/Divine Family, then, can view Eternity. Blake thus has opened his two-level cosmos to contact and communication in both directions—from the Eternal to the mortal world and from that to the Eternal. Logically, it would seem, this is the furthest the relationship can develop prior to an eschatological change to a new reality; that is, until this event, the great majority of earth's people do not develop Eternal awareness, and those who do are a minority.

Eternity: *Jerusalem*

- 46 At the end of *Jerusalem*, Blake does present such a change, and further shows the renovated, Eternal humanity he imagines as brought into being by it. This is the only place, other than *Urizen* 3.36-39, where he describes the defining life conditions of Eternity. Here, he modifies that earlier description, maintaining one of its terms, flexible senses; jettisoning a second, the limitation of Eternal beings to an immaterial world; and correcting and adding to the third, "Death was not, but eternal life sprung" (*Urizen* 3.39).
- 47 The overview of Eternal existence in *Jerusalem's* final text plates (98-99) is brief but comprehensive, covering life, death, and afterlife, and it reaches from earth to interplanetary space (99.3), yet it is most focused on the eschatological new earth. We see this, first, in the prominence, for those who "convers[e] together in Visionary forms dramatic," of "Creating Space, Creating Time"—preeminently the domains of materiality and mortal life. We see it also in the humanization of the natural world and the abolition of human tyranny and exploitation, forming a mutualist human society without government of any kind (98.28, 31, 42-44, 46-54, E 257-58). We see this earthly focus, finally, in Blake's picture of Eternal life. This reading proposes that, in this eschatological existence, those Blake sees as Eternals include both mortal and immortal beings. The former—infinite and flexible in perception and possessing Eternal powers—live, age, die, and are reborn. After death and regeneration, they assumedly are immortal and immaterial, alongside other such Eternals. About the latter, less is said. Blake certainly does not suggest that they cease to exist, nor that they become incarnate or are regenerated in material form (reincarnated), yet they may participate imaginatively in the life-death-regeneration sequence just mentioned,

26. While not calling the sons and daughters Eternal beings, Blake gives them several other qualities similar to those of such beings, such as translucence (above) and "gate[s]" to the vegetable world—that is, they are non-vegetable outside the gates (14.19-24, E 158).

since they share a collective existence with those who undergo it directly. These immortal Eternals, again assumedly, occupy an immaterial plane, and, therefore, this remains a two-level, or at least two-sector, cosmos. The relevant texts for our analysis are, first:

And every Man stood Fourfold. each Four Faces had. One to the West
 One toward the East One to the South One to the North. ...

 South stood the Nerves of the Eye. East in Rivers of bliss the Nerves of the
 Expansive Nostrils West, flowd the Parent Sense the Tongue.
 North stood
 The labyrinthine Ear. (98.12-13, 16-18, E 257)

Second:

Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
 Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions immense
 Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age[;] & the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens
 Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent ...
 (lines 31-34, E 258)

Last:

all

Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied
 Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing
 And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality. (99.1-4, E 258)

Though these are familiar texts, we should examine them afresh, in a purposefully “naïve” reading that views them without the preconception that Eternal life must be only immortal and immaterial. The first segment clearly presents an Eternal form of “Man,” using Blake’s later imagery of fourfold existence and referring to the senses as flexible (“Expansive,” “labyrinthine”), as also implied by the later reference to “the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or / Opakeness of Nervous fibres” (lines 36-37, E 258). Importantly, though the senses’ directional markers identify them with Zoas, the senses appear as those of all Eternal beings, the Zoas having resumed their roles as aspects of collective humanity.

48 The second segment, part of the “Visionary forms dramatic” section (lines 28-40), on its face suggests that Eternal beings live through the life stages (“Regions”) of youth, ma-

turity, and age; die into nonentity; and undergo regeneration. If directly compared with the first segment, as has rarely been done, these provisions further suggest that such beings may possess infinite senses within a mortal body. It is not necessary to assume that these mortals—or immortals, for that matter—factually possess four faces and senses oriented to the compass points, any more than to make similar assumptions about the “enlarged & numerous” senses of *Marriage’s* “ancient Poets.” Blake is speaking imaginatively, indicating the all-inclusive quality of Eternal perception and literalizing its fourfold character.

49 The last segment shares the same implied meaning, that “Human Forms” live through some span in which they may explore Eternity—since they then “return” (line 2) to the planetary world of time—and then die (“repos[e]”) and wake as immortals. As just noted, the segment further specifies a framework of material creation and measurable time (line 3), as “Creating Space, Creating Time” in the prior passage (98.31) also does. Finally, this segment, by considering death or “repos[e]” and regeneration or “Awaking ... in the Life of Immortality,” confirms the continuing two-sector nature of Blake’s cosmos.

50 The “Three Regions,” specifically, have proven problematic for interpreters, who have either related them to aspects of *Jerusalem* not otherwise mentioned in these plates, such as “Regions” of Ulro or the chapters of the poem (Doskow 167; Kiralis 147) or have omitted analysis (Paley 64, 282). Morton Paley may regard the whole “Visionary forms” passage simply as discourse, since he approaches it in terms of *Jerusalem’s* language.²⁷ However, the overall context suggests that the forms of “Man” and their visionary conversation are creating the conditions of their own Eternal life, and that, besides immortal existence, these include, for mortals, childhood, maturity, age, death as non-being, and regeneration. The present reading thus accounts comprehensively for the texts discussed.

Conclusions and Assessment

51 The ending to *Jerusalem* serves to complete both its own and *Milton’s* revisions of *The Four Zoas* and *Urizen*. We should now understand that the division between views of Eternal beings in *Urizen* is real, and that *Urizen’s* questions on mortality and “burnings” reflect Blake’s portrayal of mortal lives with something like Eternal vision in earlier and concurrent works. We should also understand that the

27. Karl Kiralis was the first to read lines 28-40 as reviewing the contents of *Jerusalem*. This approach may have influenced Paley’s, although he disputes Kiralis’s particulars (282). See Spector 18 and 27n29 for references to *Jerusalem* 98.32-34 and 99.1-4 without or with partial discussion.

presence of this view of Eternal beings in *Urizen* is spectral (in the ordinary sense), since Blake was in the process of altering his former approach to argue that only immortal beings have such powers and that they are separated from mortals by barriers of their own creation (the “tent”).

- 52 We should see further that in *The Four Zoas* Blake developed his sense of the intermediate beings, the Zoas—immortal but no longer with Eternal awareness—to what could be called a grotesque extreme, one that in any case involves dramatizing an assumedly rectifying slaughter of human populations. In this presentation, mortal beings are passive and indeed helpless, whether as victims of the Zoas’ actions or as beneficiaries (the “wine”).
- 53 Finally, we should understand that in *Milton and Jerusalem* (with a few suggestions in *The Four Zoas*), Blake dismantles much of what he built in *Urizen* and *The Four Zoas*. While maintaining his two-level universe, he places Eternal beings under a duty of care for and aid to mortal humans (“duly every morn / We visit him”; “labour well the teeming Earth”) and he specifies the presence of living human beings in divine assemblies and their ability to view Eternal reality (“In every bosom a Universe expands”). And in *Jerusalem’s* conclusion, he revises his view of Eternal reality so that Eternal beings on earth, with fourfold senses and Eternal awareness, live, die, and are reborn—also as Eternal beings. We now need to clarify how the sequence of Blake’s works dealing with these issues fits together.
- 54 Two sets of comparisons will help, one backwards from *Jerusalem* to *Songs of Innocence*, the second forwards from *The Four Zoas* to *Jerusalem*. If we ask, first, what life in the material eschatological world of *Jerusalem* 98-99 might look like, we realize that Blake has already given part of the answer:

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say,
Such such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Ecchoing Green.

(“The Ecchoing Green” lines 11-20, E 8)

To live in such a world, whether as child or as “old folk,” would be much like living in the world of mutuality presupposed in *Jerusalem’s* last plates. In the poem’s vision, one may grow old and die as part of a continuing community, one that existed before, and will assumedly remain long after, one’s own life. To do this, in mutuality with its other in-

habitants, is at least a part of Blake’s idea of Eternity (see *illus. 4.*)

- 55 Although “The Ecchoing Green” is an idealization, we should realize that, in *Songs of Innocence*, Blake already had communicated an essential component of what he would later see as the earthly life of Eternity. Heather Glen, in her study of *Innocence* as “Blake’s fullest imaginative expression of the ‘Divine Vision’ of human *potentia*” (129), seems right in her judgment of the poem:

“[[Joys]” here lie not in individual pleasure but in an “ecchoing” sense of mutual recognition—a sense which the old, having in their time received ... are able, unenviously, to give... And the unresentful recognition of it as an “ecchoing” place—one which has been occupied by others before ... affirms the possibility of a mutually created “World of Imagination” which “is Infinite & Eternal ...” (138-40, partly quoting *A Vision of the Last Judgment* p. 69, E 555)²⁸

- 56 A second aspect of Blake’s later sense of Eternity is visible in the *Innocence* poem “Night,” in which an upper world is not closed from, but intimately in touch with, ours. The scenario is of shepherds facing night in the fields, where “silent moves / The feet of angels bright.” The shepherd speaker knows the angels cannot save their lambs from predators, but can “Recieve each mild spirit, / New worlds to inherit.” There, they meet the comforter-lion, whose “ruddy eyes, / Shall flow with tears of gold,” and whose “bright mane for ever, / Shall shine like the gold, / As I guard o’er the fold” (E 13-14). This comforter is not (as he might first seem) a figure for Blake’s savior, present in many of these *Songs*. Rather, this extraordinary poem portrays the Comforter, or Paraclete, of John 14-16, sent to sustain the faithful in the darkness of this world. Such contact with the divine—pervasive in *Innocence*—provides the same fluidity of access to Eternity that is partly restored in the main plots of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, and restored fully in *Jerusalem’s* ending. In “Night,” then, as in “The Ecchoing Green,” we see a similarity in poetic content and vision of reality linking Blake’s early and later works, one differing from those governing his works from *Urizen* to *The Four Zoas*.

- 57 Turning to these works, a second comparison is in order: between the poetic and cultural vision of *The Four Zoas* and Blake’s later view of it, described earlier as recognition of a wrong path. In a sense, the whole development of Blake’s work analyzed here constitutes such a recognition. But more concrete evidence, at least regarding Night 9, lies in

28. Glen quotes Keynes’s edition, p. 605, identically worded and without Erdman’s angle brackets around “of Imagination.”



4. Blake, "The Ecchoing Green," second plate, from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy Z, object 7. 10.9 x 6.8 cm. Library of Congress, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, PR4144.S6 1826. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

two episodes in *Jerusalem* chapter 2. The first narrates the twenty-eight cities' attempt "with kindest violence to bear him [Albion] back / Against his will thro Los's Gate to Eden," only to have Albion resist, the earth grow dark, and the Family Divine intervene to safeguard Albion (39 [44].1-20, E 186).²⁹ The second incident is Los's long walk through London or "the interiors of Albions / Bosom," during which he sees "every Minute Particular of Albion degraded & murderd / But saw not by whom; they were hidden within in the minute particulars / Of which they had possessd themselves" (45 [31].3-4, 7-9, E 194) and asks:

What shall I do! what could I do, if I could find these
Criminals
I could not dare to take vengeance; for all things are so
constructed
And builded by the Divine hand, that the sinner shall al-
ways escape,
And he who takes vengeance alone is the criminal of
Providence ... (45 [31].29-32, E 194)

Despite the differences between the episodes—forcing Albion against his will, Los considering vengeance—and between both episodes and *The Four Zoas* Night 9, the two *Jerusalem* sequences recognizably reject and repudiate the core of the earlier work's harvest-vintage narration. Specifically, the first rejects the Zoas' claim of force, the second the presumption that those cut down are the deserving.

58 These two comparisons reveal distinct developmental arcs in Blake's work. The first runs from early work forward, is interrupted for a major period (1794 to 1804–07), and is resumed and completed in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. In this arc, awareness of Eternity, and intellectual-imaginative participation in it, are common to mortal and immortal beings, and these groups interact closely. In this developmental trajectory belong the non-dominant view of Eternals in *Urizen* and Blake's presentations in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, including *Jerusalem* 98-99.

59 The second arc is shorter. It reaches from *Urizen* to *The Four Zoas* and then breaks off. It draws not only on *Songs of Experience*'s portrayal of an absence of awareness of Eternity, as discussed earlier, but also on its elements of defiance and of envisioned future or alternative existence (for example, "Holy Thursday" lines 13-16; proems to "The Little Girl

29. Prior plates specify the cities as actors—Bristol and Bath, sixth and seventh of those previously named among the twenty-four, then the other seventeen (E 182-85), and, conjecturally, the four leading cities, bring the total to the "Twenty-eight" mentioned at 37 [41].23, E 183. The Zoas are also active here (37 [41].26 and following, E 183-84); Los appeals first to them and then to the cities, but "they" is used confusingly for both groups.

Lost" and "A Little Girl Lost"). These feed into *Urizen*'s awakening of "All things ... / ... to life" in response to Orc's cries (20.28-29, E 80), and become the rebellious principle in *The Four Zoas*. In essence, then, this poem constituted Blake's effort to show how oppression can spark rebellion and an ultimate reformation of humanity, based entirely on human processes undertaken by a humanity lacking awareness of Eternity or the divine. This situation, we have seen, impelled Blake's presentation of the Zoas as supernal actors accomplishing what humanity could not. Arguably, *The Four Zoas* retains the stamp of these origins even in its later, revised form. We can conclude, however, that in Blake's own eyes the attempt to show human renovation on these premises finally failed. Blake, we know, made an incomplete effort to introduce ideas of providence and divine inspiration into the poem, apparently feeling the inadequacy of a schema based only on human faculties, and then left the poem unfinalized. Further, if the argument above is correct, *Jerusalem* chapter 2 rejects and critiques key aspects of *The Four Zoas* Night 9. These considerations identify the second arc as abortive and point to the first as the main direction of Blake's work.

60 Blake did not find it easy to relinquish *The Four Zoas*'s paradigm, as his ten-year struggle to make the poem work shows. In some way, then, he must have believed mortal humans were indeed barred by their materiality from perceiving Eternity. There are aspects of his final synthesis, too, that he probably could not have formulated or admitted at the time of *Urizen*, including its sequences, in Eternal life, of childhood, maturity, old age, death, and regeneration and of return, repose, and awaking to immortality (*Jerusalem* 98-99). Nonetheless, his growing sense of the urgency of divine awareness for human renovation pushed toward that synthesis; once accepted, the need to communicate calls out for breaching the barriers between mortals and Eternals, as *Milton* and *Jerusalem* do with their treatments of descent and mortal access. From that point, the further affirmation of earthly Eternals' life-death-regeneration cycles, though no small step, becomes possible and even unavoidable.

61 Who, then, are Blake's Eternals? If this study's major points are right, we can say with some certainty that *Urizen*'s dominant view is one Blake later largely overturned, and that *Milton*'s and *Jerusalem*'s return to the two-level, permeable cosmos of early works, including in *Jerusalem* 98-99, represents the final form of his consideration of the nature of Eternal beings. Further, the conception of mortal humans with "enlarged" or "Expansive" perceptions, begun in early work, remains at the end, a seed idea retained over his lifetime (*Marriage* 11, *Jerusalem* 98.17, E 38, 257). Percival, then, was basically right, long ago, in his three-part schema (45-46, quoted earlier). Approached from the standpoint of

Eternity—as in Percival’s study—the groups named have always existed. From Blake’s more complex Eternal and historical perspective, access to Eternity has always been possible for some mortals; for the whole of earthly humanity, it takes the full span of history to reclaim what was theirs all along.

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