

"WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL":  
THE MYSTICS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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“WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL”:  
THE *MYSTICS* OF WILLIAM BLAKE

by

Barry Hanlon

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## Abstract

In the following thesis, titled “‘Wheel within Wheel’: The *Mystics* of William Blake,” I discuss William Blake’s writing with respect to the debate over whether Blake’s poetry and prose is most aptly described as predominantly engaging in the mystical or the visionary. I dispute the interpretation that Blake’s works are visionary in opposition to the mystical. Instead, I claim that the visionary analysis of Blake’s writing is founded on an exclusionary understanding of the mystical. Moreover, if we take into account the various explications of the mystical and the visionary, then we see that Blake’s poetry and prose exhibits characteristics of both the mystical and the visionary. Thus, it is necessary to give an overview of Blake criticism stretching back nearly a century. In doing so, we observe how the critical debate developed over whether Blake is pursuing the mystical or the visionary. Furthermore, it becomes evident that this debate centers on a singular understanding of these terms. An exposition of other interpretations of the mystical and the visionary demonstrates that Blake’s works cannot be labeled as either mystical or visionary. Finally, I briefly discuss Blake’s final epic, *Jerusalem*, to illustrate how Blake’s writing displays characteristics of both the mystical and the visionary. The conclusion leaves room for further study and research in terms of reading Blake’s works with an eye for both the mystical and the visionary and therefore not focusing on one to the exclusion of the other.

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Masters Thesis

English

“Wheel within Wheel”:  
The *Mystics*<sup>1</sup> of William Blake

“Translation ... always has to ignore many aspects of the poet’s original achievement.” (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 419)

“I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans  
I will not Reason and Compare; my business is to Create.”<sup>2</sup>  
(Blake, *Jerusalem* 10.20-21)

“The sayable continues to be wounded by the unsayable.”  
(de Certeau, *Mystic Fable* 78)

This thesis primarily engages the enigmatic works of William Blake on the grounds of a mystical affiliation that has long been a source of rigorous debate. I posit an understanding of Blake’s illuminated works that is complementary with contemporary interpretive models while simultaneously engaging in a comparative analysis with earlier Blake criticism. The question of whether mysticism is found in Blake’s works is the primary concern in terms of an identifiable critical friction for labeling Blake as a visionary poet or as a mystic poet; particularly as exemplified in the highly influential and insightful critical work of renowned literary scholar, Northrop Frye, author of *Fearful Symmetry*, a pillar in the heritage of Blakean interpretation. I use Frye as indicative of the mid-twentieth-century critical trend that tends toward an archetypal reading of Blake’s verse and prose; a trend that describes Blake’s prolific canon as visionary, with the seemingly crucial qualification that vision is not to be confused with the mystical. In the

following discussion, I discuss the terms vision and mystical with respect to the multiplicity of possibilities and descriptions that are found in a wide range of academic work.

Recent Blake critics such as Dan Miller note a general critical trend (that applies to readings of Blake's works) whereby literary scholars use a predetermined set of expectations, deriving conclusions from these expectations and not the work itself (Miller 147). Northrop Frye's reading of Blake's works is exemplary in illustrating how one's critical impetus can directly influence the conclusions derived from a specific reading of a work of literature. However, Frye's archetypal analysis of Blake's works cannot be simply and generally described. In the present discussion, I assert it is Frye's description of mysticism that directly influences his reading of Blake's writing, a description offered within the opening pages of *Fearful Symmetry*. This is not to say that archetypal analysis is therefore a useless interpretive device in reading Blake's poetry, but to acknowledge the developing contemporary readings of Blake's poetry and prose while offering an alternative depiction of the critical debate over vision and mysticism.

With this problem in mind, the aim of the thesis is twofold: 1) to expound an analysis of Blake's works using French scholar Michel de Certeau's notion of *mystics* and thus, 2) to address the debate over whether Blake's works are mystical or visionary. I maintain that Blake's works do not neatly fit the interpretive mold that they have been given, especially with respect to the mysticism that Blake is apparently not engaged in, as Frye declares in his reading of Blake's works, a reading which yields an exclusionary demarcation of mysticism. According to Frye, mysticism is not complementary with Blake's ideas of divinity. In other words, since Blake is a visionary writer, then he is not engaged in mysticism, and Frye attempts to separate the two as distinct fields. However, as stated throughout this discussion, Frye's argument exemplifies the critical trend of predetermining one's reading of literary works before reading or discussing

those very same works. The present discussion is not an attack on Frye's intellectual achievements in Blake studies, but part of a larger point with respect to terminology, illustrated through the discussion of vision and mysticism. In this way, Frye predetermines that Blake is a visionary poet and not a mystic writer. I avoid this problem (if it can be avoided at all) by maintaining that although I presently discuss Blake's works in terms of *mystics*, I do not simultaneously exclude the possibility of reading his poetry and prose as visionary.

Blake's final epic piece, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, serves as an apt focal point in the present discussion of *mystics*. However, as Frye asserts in the above opening quotation: "Translation...always has to ignore many aspects of the poet's original achievement." Thus, immediately the danger inherent in this statement arises, that the present discussion excludes emphasis on most of Blake's works, and to a larger extent ignores a multitude of possible readings. On the other hand, Frye's reading of *Jerusalem* attempts to interpret Blake's prose and verse as deriving from one single archetype with minor variations, that archetype being the Bible. In this way, Frye seems to incorporate all of Blake's works into the one archetypal narrative, thus rendering a more generalized reading that ignores certain details in favor of, as Miller notes, a "purely literary idealism" (155). Thus, in my reading of *Jerusalem*, the focus is on Blake's verse, not on an archetype that supposedly holds the poem together, except, perhaps, where Blake directly addresses such issues in his own words.

The first chapter discusses a number of critical perspectives on Blake to yield a sense of the variety of interpretive angles, especially in current studies in the past twenty years. Consequently, it is evident that recent Blake studies, while respecting the advances of critical trends developed in the early to mid twentieth century, push beyond the borders of these readings. The second chapter is an intensive analysis of the terms mystic / mysticism, vision /

visionary, and *mystics* from a number of different scholars, including but not limited to Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, Blake critic Sheila A. Spector, Michel de Certeau, and Northrop Frye. The various definitions of mysticism and vision yield an impression of the intricate nature of these elusive concepts, concepts that therefore cannot be simplified into one perspective or disposition. Chapter three is a reading of significant passages from Blake's *Jerusalem* grounded on the developments and conclusions from chapter two. The conclusion gives a brief discussion of the implications of the previous analyses of *Jerusalem* for future studies of Blake's works.

## Chapter 1: The Heritage of Blake Studies

"To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the  
 Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are  
 those Knowledges that Idiots pesses."  
 (Blake, Annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* 641)

The aim of outlining various critical angles on Blake's works is to demonstrate the importance of the debate over vision and mysticism in addition to illustrating the number and diversity of these interpretations and the consequent impossibility of a comprehensive reading of Blake's works. The counter argument is that there must be a definitive approach to Blake's works, that literary criticism demands such a reading. However, as recent readings of Blake's canon show, appeals to purely literary interpretive models result in self-contradictions and necessary omissions. I use de Certeau's *mystics* to develop a particular reading of *Jerusalem* that does not make exclusionary generalizations about mysticism with respect to Blake's works. I begin with a summary of early Blake criticism that centers on the debate regarding Blake's mysticism.

One of the earliest and most influential critics of Blake's prose and poetry, S. Foster Damon, offers a reading completely in terms of mysticism. In *William Blake*, published in 1924, he asserts, "The key to everything Blake ever wrote or painted lies in his mysticism" (1). Damon takes a specific notion of mysticism, which he derives from the work of Evelyn Underhill, and utilizes this concept of mysticism to yield insight into Blake's intentions as a poet and painter, "his mysticism," which Damon then uses to describe the whole of Blake's works. Three years later, Helen C. White published a similar study that focuses on mysticism and compares the categories mystic, prophet, or visionary. White differs from Damon by being critical of Blake's mysticism, concluding: "he is not a great mystic in any sense that means anything" (White 245).

Instead of responding to these and other studies of Blake's works, Frye commits little space and energy to an interpretation of Blake's works as mystical; instead, Frye focuses on a visionary orientation, set in opposition to a mystical reading.

In his study of Blake's verse and prose, *Fearful Symmetry*, published in 1947, Frye asserts that "Blake's poems are poems, and must be studied as such. Any attempt to explain them in terms of something that is not poetry is bound to fail" (6). The aim of Frye's analysis is therefore to clearly delineate the parameters of this assimilation into the canon in terms of Blake's works being "not aboriginal...neither a freak nor a sport" (5). In addition, Frye insists that Blake's works require strictly literary interpretation as opposed to "deciphering: there can be no 'key' and no open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation" (7). However, Frye's archetypal analysis of Blake's works itself posits an "open-sesame formula" grounded on one "central myth, that myth being the Bible" (109). On the other hand, it is difficult to cover every detail of any work of art without omitting or overlooking other aspects, as Frye goes on to admit that "many aspects of the poet's original achievement" may be ignored.

On the one hand, Frye claims that Blake's writing cannot be read through a singular "patented system of translation," yet on the other Frye describes the interpretation of Blake's *Jerusalem* as grounded on two qualifications: "[1] how Blake interpreted the Bible, and [2] how he placed that interpretation in an English context" (356). Frye appeals to the subconscious and to the "Romantic tradition" for furnishing an archetypal pattern, one that fits the "analogue" of the Biblical pattern that is found to be expressed in Blake's works:

A study of comparative religion, a morphology of myths, rituals and theologies,  
[which] will lead us to a *single visionary* conception which the mind...is trying to

express, a vision of a created and fallen world which has been redeemed by a divine sacrifice and is proceeding to regeneration. (424; italics mine)

Frye appeals to early twentieth-century theoretical models for being foreshadowed in the ideas found in Blake's works: "Twentieth century culture has produced a large number of theories which seem to demand some kind of fitting together, and we have found a good many of them in Blake" (425). The result of such an analysis is tantamount to declaring that no matter what subject area one engages in, all the results, the labor, of scientists and artists alike, are to be pieces, mirror images of the one all-reflecting archetype, the one pattern of which everything is a part to whole. Blake's Albion, the mythical figuration of the British Isles itself, whose "body" incorporates the characters, actions, setting and dialogue, can be interpreted through an archetypal analysis that posits a "fitting together" into a "single visionary conception." In other words, Frye's archetypal analysis allows a reading that glosses over the many particularities and inconsistencies of Blake's epic poems. Consequently, Frye's analysis is a milestone in Blake criticism, as his archetypal reading continues to be highly influential in current discussions of Blake's verse.

Two contemporaries of Frye, David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom, offer interpretations of Blake's poetry and prose that are posterior to Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, and are thus deeply influenced by Frye's archetypal reading. For example, in *Blake's Apocalypse*, published in 1963, Bloom claims: "To Mr. Frye's work I have a...pervasive obligation, for by reading him I learned to read Blake" (x). Bloom's analysis yields an expanded and rigorously close reading of Blake's verse, thereby engaging in a discussion that complements Frye's archetypal analysis. Bloom discusses Blake's *Jerusalem* in accord with Frye's analysis in maintaining that Blake's last epic piece is constructed from the Biblical archetype of a fallen world seeking redemption. For

Bloom, Blake specifically follows the tradition of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel: "Like Isaiah and Ezekiel, Blake believed he had the decisive power of the eternal moment of human choice as a direct gift and trust from the Divine, and he seems to have imitated the organization of their books even as he believed his election as prophet was in direct succession to their own" (405). Bloom places Blake's works within the prophetic tradition, particularly as exemplified in English literature by the epic poems of John Milton, one of Blake's personally acknowledged influences, although the degree of criticism Blake engaged in is here overlooked, particularly with respect to Blake's comment: "Imitation is Criticism" (Annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* 643). In other words, Bloom does not pay enough attention to the political implications of Blake's art, instead glossing over Blake's imitation and criticism of the English heritage in favor of pursuing an archetypal, visionary reading.

In *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, published in 1954, Erdman takes a different critical route by focusing on the biographical and historical influences that shape Blake's prose and poetry. In place of Frye and Bloom's literary and Biblical emphasis, Erdman discusses the historical context in which Blake wrote: "William Blake lived through sixty-nine years of wars and revolutions, political, historical, and intellectual" (3). Erdman reads *Jerusalem* specifically in terms of an historical, political and biographical construction:

The contemporary frame of reference is the latter part of the war [the Napoleonic War], the years of Napoleon's decline and fall and of the triumph of British and German arms, when the problem is not simply to dissuade Albion from fighting but to oppose his making a conqueror's peace. Hence the motif of *Jerusalem* is *peace without vengeance*. (462)

In a critical correspondence to Frye and Bloom's discussions, Erdman asserts that the conclusion of *Jerusalem* "is simple but effective...a hymn to the spiritual regeneration of man and nature" (484). Thus, in the criticisms advanced by Frye, Erdman and Bloom we can identify similar discussions of the disorder found throughout *Jerusalem*. Moreover, from this comparison we see the subsequent focus on the order that is achieved in the concluding section of Blake's last epic work, thereby focusing on "fitting together" Blake's design in *Jerusalem* and therefore in the whole of Blake's works.

However, throughout the present discussion of *mystics* and *Jerusalem*, the question remains whether this "fitting together" is actually to be found in Blake's verse and prose, or whether it is a critical model that is forced upon the interpretation. For example, a similar problem is extensively discussed with respect to literary studies of Franz Kafka's prose. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discuss how archetypal analyses operate: "the archetype works by assimilation, homogenization, and thematics" (7). For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's writing is consistently construed as ordered by certain principles and themes, "the transcendence of the law, the interiority of guilt, the subjectivity of enunciation," which 1) gives a reading of Kafka's works based on certain themes and therefore, 2) ignores and excludes those components of Kafka's writing that do not fit these principle motifs (45). However, what Deleuze and Guattari mean is that having reached a critical consensus on Kafka's writing it is now time to read Kafka's work from a different perspective. A similar critical consensus has developed with respect to Blake's writing in terms of the debate over whether Blake ought to be defined as a visionary or a mystic. Another significant point of interest is Deleuze and Guattari's designation of literary criticism as "territorialization" such that if Kafka's prose is perceived as a territory, than the criticism of his works is an invasion of that

territory. Deleuze and Guattari assert that their analysis is a “deterritorialization,” a process of interpretation that peels the critical discursive layers back to reveal the nature of this criticism, although this is far from simplifying the literary work or rendering it into one archetypal pattern. For, as Deleuze and Guattari state, the author’s intent with respect to artistic labor is itself a territorialization that sets and maintains its own parameters. Hence, the significant focus for interpretation shifts to those points which rupture the author’s own intent and design, those ambiguous sites that cannot be contained, that consequently dismantle from within the intended order of the work itself.

The aim of noting Deleuze and Guattari’s work on Kafka’s writing is to demonstrate the shift in literary theory from archetypal, generalizing analyses to more radical interpretations that lay no pretense to a general understanding of Blake’s artistic direction or success in achieving this direction, as is currently ongoing and developing in contemporary readings of Blake’s works such as that offered in Dan Miller’s discussion. The following outline of recent Blake criticism serves to illustrate the similar paradigm shift in literary studies of Blake’s works, a shift that focuses on an internal reading of Blake’s verse that acknowledges inconsistency instead of developing a precise order that is forced upon Blake’s works, as is the case in archetypal analysis. Blake’s artistic goal is precise, meaning that Blake strictly adhered to ideas that did not allow for ambiguity, since Blake perceived in ambiguity the possibility, manifested all around him, of taking ambiguous material, such as the Bible, and using the multitudinous nature of scripture to manipulate individuals and societies. However, Blake’s verse and prose display an inner tension of disorder and chaos, a motif discussed with respect to Blake’s works for over a century. However, recent studies concentrate on those aspects that are ignored for the sake of

argument, various parts of Blake's writing that contradict the archetypal nature of Blake's prophetic epics that Frye, Erdman and Bloom claim are visionary.

At present, the range of Blake criticism has proliferated beyond the field of literary theory to interdisciplinary studies that consider elements of Blake's poetry that are not thematic on any generalizing or archetypal pattern. In "'Self-Annihilation' and Dialogue in Blake's Creative Process: *Urizen, Milton, Jerusalem*," published in 1994, John H. Jones discusses Blake's major prophetic epics in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, a literary theory that focuses interpretation on the nature of dialogue and discursive interaction. Jones discusses Blake's works in terms of the multiple voices that make up an entangled interactive web of multiple relationships and communications:

Since no utterance can be isolated completely from this dialogic matrix [i.e. of multiple interactive discursive relationships between characters], each utterance, as a response, has its source in the discourse of others. These references in Blake's writings to other figures, in statements and in addressees, indicate a profound realization of the dialogic nature of discourse. (3)

Jones reads *Jerusalem* as a network of different dialogues that reciprocally influence each other in a complex narrative, as opposed to a thematic archetype that is based on the Biblical paradigm of a fallen world. Of course, Blake's verse is concerned with the fallen state of a post-Edenic world, and part of his solution is undoubtedly intended to be a clarity of vision, the precise hammering of Los' artistic forge.

Other interdisciplinary readings use political theories to interpret Blake's works with respect to the possibility of discovering a political agenda. For example, Vincent O'Keefe discusses Blake's final prophetic epic in "Debunking the Romantic Ideology: A Review of

Blake's *Jerusalem*," published in 1996. O'Keefe claims that despite the historical chronology, Blake's works do not conveniently fit the Romantic period. In contrast, O'Keefe argues that Blake's *Jerusalem* "is more akin to new historicism [Marxism] than to any romantic ideology" (40). O'Keefe's discussion is concerned with interpreting a specific political motif, in this case Marxism, in Blake's writing. This political motif is comparatively discussed with respect to Blake's ideas in terms of Blake's social concerns about the class struggle between those in positions of power and wealth and those individuals who are weaker and poorer.

Steven Goldsmith's "Blake's Agitation," also published in 1996, offers a reading of Blake's poetry and prose similar to both Jones' and O'Keefe's interpretations. Goldsmith discusses *Jerusalem* through the idea of agitation, which he maintains is a crucial notion for reading Blake's works in general. He cites multiple meanings of the word "agitation," ranging from the purely physical notion to a philosophical understanding that describes agitation as public friction. Moreover, Goldsmith asserts that Blake's poetry itself agitates, and that Los, Blake's predominant protagonist throughout his major epics, is the main agitator: "Los is Blake's arsonist-agent...[who fights] on behalf of 'Minute Particulars' against the 'Generalizing Gods'" (761). Goldsmith's reading complements Jones' dialogic discussion, particularly in his claim that the "mind's monologue is always already dialogic" (780). Goldsmith and Jones both yield a reading of Blake's poetry that is not singular or archetypal but is a testimony to a multiply-voiced, reciprocally influential interactive world that is mirrored in Blake's works.

Other readings of Blake's works are more conventional, whether structurally or thematically based. Robert F. Gleckner, in "Blake's 'Dark Visions of Torment' Unfolded: *Innocence to Jerusalem*," published in 1996, discusses the poetic affiliation between Blake's verse and John Milton's influential works. Of course, with an epic poem titled *Milton: A Poem*,

Blake directly invites readings in terms of Milton's poetry, a theme that Frye and Bloom discuss and that Gleckner engages in his reading of the entirety of Blake's illuminated works. In addition, Gleckner insists that Blake's poetry is an attempt toward dispelling Blake's own inner irritation and consequent solution for the fallen state of the world. Another conventional analysis is found in W. H. Stevenson's "Blake's Progress," published in 1999. Just as Gleckner notes that Blake's poetry could not move beyond the fallen state it attempts to liberate, Stevenson illustrates a similar phenomenon with respect to Blake's intent as a revolutionary poet in revolutionary times: "The legend that Blake first devised has proved invalid, leaving him no choice but to devise a new myth to replace it" (204). For Stevenson, the tenor of Blake's voice changes throughout the chronology of his poems from the disposition of a spiritual "warrior" to an evangelical "healer" (202-203). Both Gleckner and Stevenson survey the entirety of Blake's works. Gleckner concludes that *Jerusalem*, despite the overcoming of the fallen world through apocalypse, nevertheless focuses on apocalypse and somehow therefore never escapes that focus, whereas Stevenson asserts that *Jerusalem* is the concluding and most elaborate step in the direction of Blake's ultimately reconciliatory temperament in opposition to his initial poetic demeanor of revolutionary energy.

From another critical perspective, R. Paul Yoder discusses *Jerusalem* in terms of a copy-text issue in "What Happens When: Narrative and the Changing Sequencing of Plates in Blake's *Jerusalem*," published in 2002. There are five different copies of *Jerusalem* labeled A, C, D, E and F such that A, C, F and D, E constitute two different versions of the epic poem, differing on the plate sequencing of chapter two. The ongoing debate centers on which version Blake intended as the most favorable or authoritative copy text. Yoder argues that, contrary to the predominant interpretation of Blake's changing the sequence, Blake changed the plates based on

narrative considerations. Many readings of Blake's works are often synchronic and non-linear, although Yoder maintains that *Jerusalem* is a diachronic, chronologically based narrative poem. In contrast to Yoder, Stevenson and Gleckner, other analyses of Blake's works are interdisciplinary studies, such as Wai Chee Dimock's "Nonbiological Clock: Literary History Against Newtonian Mechanics," published in 2003. Dimock posits an interesting comparative analysis, which argues that the radical break in Albert Einstein's physics from those of Isaac Newton is analogous to the significance of Blake's works with respect to the history of literature itself. Dimock asserts Newton is targeted in Blake's poems for the static rigidity described in Newtonian mechanics, especially with respect to linear, chronological time. Moreover, Dimock suggests that Newton's physics represent for Blake the death of the imagination through numerical incarceration and what Dimock labels the "law of serialization" (167). Dimock concludes that Blake's poems seek to disentangle Newtonian time by exploding it through his epic verse and that in much the same way Blake's verse explodes the tradition of literature itself:

Literary history...is not sequential, not governed by the law of serialization. Those who dwell in it are free to take what they want, in whatever order, for the raw material here – as Blake's steadily cascading sentences make clear – is nothing more than words, a *lexis* not sequenced, as malleable as clay, and as commonly available. (167)

Dimock implies that Blake's poems, by taking as a main crisis the acceptance of Newtonian physics, also criticize the mechanical age taking hold in Blake's time and illustrated all throughout Blake's writing. For example, Newtonian time, universal in its demand to make everything understood in terms of chronological order, thus permeates every field, including that of literature and literary history. However, Dimock maintains that Blake's poems signal a direct

rejection of this linear model: "literary history is...both a shelter from serial numbers and a sharp reminder of their dominion" (168-169).

In another interdisciplinary study, under the general title "Mysticism and Misogyny: Contraries and their Mystical / Metaphysical Background in the Works of William Blake," three different critics, Josephine A. McQuail, Pamela Beal and Rachel V. Billigheimer, apply feminist theories of misogyny to determine whether or not Blake's works are overtly misogynist or forcibly made to be in a campaign to root out misogynist poets, published in 2000. In "Trembling Before the Eternal Female: Blake's Call to a Transcendental Eros," Beal gives an analysis of Blake's "Female Will" and "Eternal Female," a discussion that does not stipulate Blake's poetry and prose as misogynist. Beal argues that the Female subject plays a crucial role in Blake's epic verse, specifically in the construction of the general human subject, both physically and psychically: "Blake refutes the idea that such attributes as good or evil belong to the subject and insists that intellect alone, the capacity for subjective judgment, constitutes the self. The subject is not the aggregate of its experiences but the capacity to organize experience, to give shape to experience" (83-84). Beal's comments here draw to mind Blake's often quoted declaration: "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (*Jerusalem* 10.21-22). One of Blake's central ideas is political in terms of an individual's independence from manipulation through various religious, economic and political institutions, much in the same way Dimock describes Blake's break with prevalent Newtonian mechanics in order to disrupt a system that homogenizes perception and experience as chronologically fixed in an inescapable succession of time and duration. However, according to Beal the subject is not to be understood this way in Blake's poems, but rather as organizing its own time, not as a homogenous "aggregate" of "experiences," but instead in terms of the

subject's capacity, through the imagination, to organize experiences, to "Create a System, or be enslav'd by another."

In "Conflict and Conquest: Creation, Emanation and the Female Will in William Blake's Mythology," Billigheimer discusses the Female Will and emanation in Blake's poems in terms of the dichotomous nature of the Female that fluctuates between passive and aggressive representations. In addition, Billigheimer asserts that, in labeling Blake's poems as misogynistic, many critics overlook the importance the Female plays in the apocalypse and return of divinity, the way in which "the ultimate union of the female Emanation with her male counterpart precipitates the vision of eternity" (94). Moreover, Billigheimer states that female characters display as much cunning and power as male characters in Blake's works: "Blake...demonstrates there is just as much discord...between women as there is between men and women and this is rooted in the divisions within the individual's psyche. The Female Will can be seen as a metaphor for the urge to power and domination possessed by humanity in general" (108). Billigheimer focuses on both dimensions of women in Blake's poetry and prose instead of concentrating on a strictly negative or supposedly misogynistic representation of women.

The final article in the series on feminist issues in Blake's verse, Josephine A. McQuail's "Passion and Mysticism in William Blake," discusses a misreading of misogyny in Blake's works owing to a misapprehension of the mysticism found in his poetry and prose. McQuail's central aim is to question a feminist psychoanalytic analysis of Blake's works in response to the stereotypical feminist reading that asserts Blake's poetry is misogynistic. McQuail addresses the general question of whether Blake's verse is best described as misogynistic or as mystical, concluding that what is construed in Blake's poems as misogynistic is in actuality a mysticism and prophetic vision: "psychoanalysis cannot explain prophecy except to say it is a neurosis"

(131). Furthermore, McQuail uses Michel de Certeau's description of *mystics* to explain the element of mysticism in Blake's poetry and prose.<sup>3</sup> Beal, Billigheimer and McQuail all discuss Blake's works in defense of his use of women against what each describes as stereotypically dismissive feminist criticism.

Other recent criticism of Blake's works offer readings that are largely at odds with predominant mid-twentieth-century, archetypal interpretations, as demonstrated in the contemporary writings of Dan Miller, Hazard Adams, Paul Youngquist, Molly Anne Rothenberg and Dominic Rainsford. In "Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude," published in 1987, Miller claims that Blake's works are up for reevaluation in terms of the archetypal interpretation that has settled as a given mode of understanding Blake's poems and ideas. Miller describes Blake's poetry as occupying "a secure and even central place in the [literary] tradition: he is a name to be invoked, a figure by which to define English Romanticism and, after Northrop Frye, the totality of literature" (139). As described above, Miller is critical of archetypal interpretation for predetermining readings of Blake's works and thereby ignoring those aspects of the poems that contradict the predetermined reading (147). Moreover, Miller asserts that mid-twentieth-century readings conform to a thematic idealism that eradicates narrative and structural inconsistencies like Frye and Bloom's insistence that Blake's works perfectly fit the English literary canon in terms of a Biblical archetypal pattern. These readings therefore overlook other issues such as the above interdisciplinary articles regarding copy text issues, feminist concerns or the relation between Blake's poems and the shift from Newton's universal physics to Einstein's relativity (155). Of course, Frye and Bloom would not have been able to foresee the future of literary theory, and Miller contrasts their theory only to draw attention to a different critical approach to Blake's writing.

Ironically, Miller posits that, contrary to both Blake and his critics, the concept of allegory is a fitting description for those aspects of Blake's poems that resist and disrupt archetypal readings: "[allegory] marks the place of all that vision seeks to transcend but cannot leave behind – the inevitability [or inescapability] of some mode of representation within all perception, the figural component of the imagination" (162). Miller interprets Blake's works as attempting to give a vision of divinity that is a pure and elevated perception, reconciled with the fallen state of the world found in Blake's epic poems, but is inevitably presented through the medium of language, a descriptive device in the production of this elevated perception. In simplest terms, Miller asserts that if Blake seeks to reject allegory on the grounds of its ambiguous and dangerous nature, then Blake's writing fails immediately since all language, even that which describes visions of eternity, is prey to the same ambiguous and dangerous nature of allegory that Blake strongly criticizes.

In "*Jerusalem's* Didactic and Mimetic-Narrative Experiment," published in 1993, Hazard Adams has a similar agenda in explicitly claiming not to offer a reading that predetermines the interpretation of Blake's works and gives a more rigorous discussion of Blake's verse, whereas Miller's analysis is more focused on theoretical concerns. Adams describes *Jerusalem* as a "proliferation" of actions, spaces and utterances that cannot be isolated into one "monomyth" constructed out of one archetypal pattern (629). Adams challenges given assumptions with respect to Blake's unique poetic mythology and *Jerusalem*. For example, Adams discusses Blake's emanations, which are personalities that separate from predominant characters, particularly in the fallen state of the world (thus, the character after which the epic is named, Jerusalem, is the emanation of Albion). In general, emanations represent the feminine aspect of a whole person in the unfallen, Edenic world of divinity. Adams locates one point in *Jerusalem*

where the assumption that emanations are feminine is disputed (or disrupted), and the character Shiloh is described as a masculine emanation (645). For Adams, the critical consensus with respect to *Jerusalem* has become reified and overlooks, whether intentionally or not, the dynamic of the epic poem that resists archetypal interpretations.

Paul Youngquist, in "Reading the Apocalypse: The Narrativity of Blake's *Jerusalem*," also published in 1993, discusses a similar problematic with respect to a reified interpretive model of Blake's works. As with Miller, Youngquist gives a more generalized analysis that does not pay as close attention to Blake's verse as Adams does, although all three write in response to earlier archetypal analyses. Youngquist makes a claim parallel to Miller's with respect to *Jerusalem* in terms of thematic and archetypal readings:

It was not until critics began to recover stable patterns beneath the shifting surface of Blake's poem that it acquired the life of canonical literature. In a move I would call formalist, *Jerusalem* was rendered coherent, or at least partially so, through an appeal to formal or thematic structures that silently organize its disorderly narrative. (602)

Furthermore, Youngquist cites Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* as initiating an archetypal analysis of Blake's works "on a grand scale" in terms of a "permanent structure" or archetypal pattern, particularly based on the Bible (603). However, as with Miller and Adams, Youngquist asserts that such readings, though allowing for some readable interpretation of *Jerusalem*, which is frequently depicted as a chaotic and confusing epic poem, still overlook and even subordinate those interpretive angles that are problematic for maintaining an archetypal perspective (604).

For example, Youngquist claims that Blake's use of proper names is an embarrassing characteristic that causes friction within archetypal readings, supposedly unconstrained by

historical time. Youngquist asserts that Blake's use of proper names does not fit the type of symbolism that Frye describes: "Symbolism in Frye's sense does not legitimate historically specific names" (609). However, Youngquist overlooks Frye's description of *Jerusalem*, and Blake's works in general, in terms of "how Blake interpreted the Bible, and how he placed that interpretation in an English context" (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 357). On the other hand, Frye does contradict this specification with the Biblical archetype: "the real relation to a predecessor is the common relation of both to the archetypal vision" (356). Frye is not interested in the particularities as an end but rather as a means to an end, that end being the general absorption of all heterogeneous elements into a homogeneous pattern, in this case the Bible. That is to say, the heterogeneous elements are those aspects that cause disturbances and ruptures in the homogeneous archetypal pattern. For Youngquist the proper names Blake uses in *Jerusalem* are heterogeneous and quite distinct from an archetypal pattern that is strictly blueprinted to the Bible, particularly in localizing Blake's works biographically, with respect to Blake's use of names from Blake's trial for sedition (610). Youngquist's analysis concentrates on those aspects of *Jerusalem* that do not neatly fit a literary canonized poem that supposedly portrays an archetypal pattern: "reading *Jerusalem* is a matter neither of extricating from its structure some fixed and higher meaning nor of playing with its signs until signification itself yields ecstasy...Any reading of *Jerusalem* proceeds in the present through alternative descriptions of events, some of which become substantiated while others do not" (616). Thus, we come across Frye's own words paraphrased in a different light, that "translation...always has to ignore many aspects of the poet's original achievement" (Frye 419).

Dominic Rainsford and Molly Anne Rothenberg both give similar discussions to Miller, Adams and Youngquist in terms of addressing and engaging in the contemporary field of Blake

criticism. Rainsford, in *Authorship, Ethics, and the Reader: Blake, Dickens, Joyce*, published in 1997, discusses Blake's poems in terms of a larger context pertaining to the "ethical status of the idea of the author" (1). Rainsford analyzes the relation of Blake's poetry to ethical concerns, specifically with respect to whether Blake can be trusted for his moral self-representations of his poetry as a medium for the revelation of divinity and the overall reconciliation of the world with its fallen and overall depraved state. However, Rainsford interrogates the self-proclaimed ethical and moral poet: "But just how reliable is Blake, this assemblage of textual voices and the man who seems to stand behind them, as a source of wisdom" (13). For Rainsford, *Jerusalem* is not a testimony to the perfection of the author and the author's vision of a redeemed world; instead, it is a testimony to Blake's wholeness as a real life human being, not a poet of a perfect vision, but a poet who is as fallible as the fallen world he describes (Rainsford 94-95). However, Rainsford qualifies his analysis by claiming that acknowledging Blake's flaws is not an attack on Blake's poetry and prose:

My point in drawing attention to signs of weakness in Blake, moments when he appears to act or speak in opposition to certain principles which he may have propounded in other places and at other times, has not been in any way to condemn or diminish him as a human being, an artist, or a thinker: if anything, they make him greater, more complete. (94)

Rainsford's analysis, like Adams', gives a close reading of some of Blake's verse, not an overly generalized discussion.

In *Rethinking Blake's Textuality*, published in 1993, Rothenberg critiques Blake's poems in terms of a heavily laden theoretical context that is arguably accessible only to readers immersed in Rothenberg's terminology. Rothenberg posits a parallel claim that *Jerusalem* does

not conform to a neat fit of a complete archetypal pattern, as a prototype to the Bible in the heritage of the English literary tradition: "I have tried to produce an account of the poem that does not pretend to any 'completeness' and that brings to the fore Blake's crucial revisions of and responses to a predominantly discursive arena that, in his view, constantly contests (or actively represses) the radical implications of the speculations that emerge within it" (3). On the other hand, Rothenberg does admit that she runs the same risk of appealing to "completeness" through exterior sources such as Immanuel Kant's philosophy (with which Rothenberg claims Blake was acquainted), or other sources that may have influenced Blake's ideas (3-4). In addition, Rothenberg asserts that she departs completely from any predominant critical consensus on Blake's works: "The refusal of all appeals to authority, the exposure of those appeals as grounded on false or illegitimate premises, and the careful revelation of the strategies by which such appeals are made to appear metaphysically valid – these concerns mark the theoretical project of *Jerusalem*" (4-5). Having carefully qualified the discussion as on the one hand teetering on the edge of discursive nihilism while on the other potentially falling prey to what Youngquist would call formalist thematic appeals, Rothenberg dives head first into the bold claim of rejecting all "appeals to authority" (even literary theory and criticism itself), which begs the question of what can be read into Blake's verse from such a stance.

The aim of the present critical assessment of Blake criticism has been twofold: 1) to illustrate the diversity of studies of Blake's writing over the past century, and 2) to place particular focus on the variety of criticism in the past two decades, a variety that belies the predominance of what many describe as archetypal and thematic readings which seem to force an interpretation upon Blake's poems rather than engaging in what is already present within the poetry and prose itself, even if such a study runs into severe contradictions in accord with

inconsistencies that resist systemic interpretation and classification. Mid-twentieth-century studies of Blake's poems share a critical consensus, as Bloom himself admits, with the advent of Frye's "Bible," *Fearful Symmetry*, a persuasive reading of Blake's canon that one way or another serves as a philosophical touchstone in understanding Blake's writing and ideas. However, the critical consensus of Blake's writing has come under critical review with various departures from predominant archetypal analyses. Youngquist describes the criticism of *Jerusalem* as on the brink of a new interpretive field: "A new future awaits *Jerusalem*, one that attends scrupulously to its complex narrativity. In passing beyond structure as a primary strategy for analysis, criticism must entrust itself to the vagaries of discourse" (606). However, criticism of Blake's writing must remain a balanced endeavor between a close analysis of Blake's verse itself and an understanding of the various contexts and influences surrounding the shaping of Blake's ideas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

## Chapter 2: Mysticism, Archetypal Vision and Michel de Certeau's *Mystics*

"Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably ... The Hebrew Bible & the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists."  
(Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment* 554)

The central concern of this chapter is whether Blake's writing presents a clear vision of the reconciliation of the fallen world through apocalypse or divine revelation, or whether Blake's visionary writing is contradicted by a description of an ineffable, individual and therefore indescribable experience, which Blake condemns in various ways throughout his work. I begin with Damon and White's readings of Blake's mysticism, followed by Frye's response and the subsequent predominant consensus that Blake's poetry is visionary and not a form or expression of mysticism. A series of descriptions and definitions of mysticism and vision follows, culminating in a discussion of de Certeau's *mystics* with respect to Blake's verse. Throughout this comparative analysis it becomes clear that the same critical problem that is discussed in the first chapter with respect to mid-twentieth century archetypal readings still crops up. In other words, since there are many variations and understandings of the term mysticism (as I show in the present chapter), it is difficult to single out one notion of mysticism from its many possible meanings. However, I do not here endorse any particular strain of mysticism as superior to another; the intent of the present chapter is to display the multitudinous nature of mysticism and to open the door for an alternative understanding of Blake's works from a consideration of mysticism radically different from earlier claims regarding Blake's words with respect to particular forms of mysticism, both in critics who favor reading Blake's poems in terms of

mysticism and those who argue it is erroneous to interpret Blake's poetry and prose through the lens of mysticism.

#### The Central Debate: Mystic or Visionary?

Damon discusses Blake's poems in terms of five stages of the mystic's development:

(1) the awakening to a sense of divine reality; (2) the consequent purgation of the Self, when it realizes its own imperfections; (3) an enhanced return of the sense of the divine order, after the Self has achieved its detachment from the world; (4) the 'Dark Night of the Soul,' or the crucifixion of the Self in the absence of the divine; (5) and the complete union with Truth, the attainment of that which the third state had perceived as a possibility.

Blake passed through these identical five states. His complete works, which are an accurate record of his life, fall into these same divisions. The first three states are named by him 'Innocence,' 'Experience,' and 'Revolution.' The fourth state was passed in silence; while the fifth state was a return to 'Innocence' with the added wisdom of 'Experience.' (Damon 2)

Damon takes these stages, or states, as the blueprint for the development of both Blake as an individual and as a poet. Parallel with the stages of the mystic's development, Damon situates *Jerusalem* in the last stage, mirroring Blake's own emergence from the "dark night of the soul" into union with divinity, although Damon finds many inconsistencies in Blake's final epic poem:

It is perfectly evident ... that Blake had not developed his narrative powers. There are many incoherences, and even some contradictions ... The surmise is that Blake did not conceive the fall as one steady act, but as a spiral alternating upward and downward ... [Blake] undoubtedly preferred accurate psychology to an over-simplified map of the Mystic Way [i.e. the five stages of the mystic's development]. (193)

However, Damon qualifies this description of Blake's "narrative powers" by claiming that Blake's "vision" nevertheless still shines through in the form of his teachings and aphorisms: "Obscure as Blake's plot may be, his teachings are never in doubt. Cloudy as his Eternity may seem, his 'spiritual arrows' are sharp and well aimed" (195). Turgid and murky though it may be, *Jerusalem* is, according to Damon, resplendent with transparent didacticism, a moral teaching through the example of the mystic's journey through the fall and rise of his or her own soul, as in the case of Blake and his poetry.

In a similar analysis, Helen C. White studies Blake's works in terms of a potential, instead of specific, form of mysticism, interpreting Blake's poems through an open-ended possibility of whether Blake's writing is mystical or visionary. White's intent is quite different from Damon's, especially in her discussion of the myriad of definitions and historical figures often associated with mysticism. She divides them into three potential categories: "typical mystic," prophet, and visionary. Each of these has other divisions such that a "typical mystic" is to be distinguished from a marginal one (52). As with Damon, White concludes that Blake's mysticism is a testimony to clarity and a transparency of vision, "There is no suggestion of the ineffable in these lines" (205). White's discussion does not engage in a close reading of Blake's verse, instead concentrating on a discussion of various types of mystics and forms of mysticism.

Of particular interest is White's claim throughout her discussion that the prophet and visionary are explained through the concept of the mystic: "the discussion of the issues raised by the first [mysticism] will cover much of the ground of the other two [prophet and visionary]" (208). For White, mysticism is in some sense the ineffable, the belief in or experience of a supernatural reality that is latent in and interconnected with the present reality, analogous to many paradigms of heaven and earth, although in terms of mysticism this world can be experienced but not tangibly grasped or consciously known (208-209). However, in conclusion White dismisses many of Blake's works, "by which he himself set most store," as well as his illuminations and "pictorial art" (245). However, it is difficult to separate Blake's verse, the corpus of his ideas, in "which he himself set most store," from his "pictorial art" since almost all of Blake's verse is illuminated with visual art. White describes Blake's verse in terms of a fixed pattern in his "pictorial art," yet the verse remains, and remains unexplored, presumed to yield nothing but contradiction and disorder. As generally stated above, Northrop Frye completely dismisses a mystical reading of Blake's works and ideas in reaction to interpretations such as those offered by White or Damon.

Frye responds directly to Damon's claim that the "key" to reading Blake's poems lies in an understanding of Blake's mysticism, particularly as Frye uses the identical word "key" to affirm that there is no "open-sesame formula" that can unlock the ambiguities and narrative problems found in Blake's larger epic poems. For Frye, mysticism denotes a particular field of subjective experience in terms of a specific understanding of what exactly defines mysticism:

[Mysticism] means a certain kind of religious technique difficult to reconcile with anyone's poetry. It is a form of spiritual communion with God which is by its nature incommunicable to anyone else, and which

soars beyond faith into direct apprehension. But to the artist ... this apprehension is not an end in itself but a means to another end, the end of producing his poem. The mystical experience for him is poetic material, not poetic form, and must be subordinated to the demands of that form. From the point of view of any genuine mystic this would be somewhat inadequate, and one who was both mystic and poet, never finally deciding which was to be adjective and which the noun, might be rather badly off. If he decided for poetry, he would perhaps do better to use someone else's mystical experiences. (*Fearful Symmetry* 7-8)

In this passage, Frye argues for a subject-oriented notion of mysticism, individuated to personal experience, an experience "incommunicable" to others. Moreover, Frye claims that "genuine" mystics would deem the "poetic form" insufficient for communicating the mystical experience to others. However, is Frye here arguing for an objective field of experience, thereby arguing against individual communion with divinity with the added ramification that all mystical experience must boil down to the same archetype? Frye then posits that poets would be better off using "someone else's mystical experiences" instead of their own personal experience. Frye overlooks Blake's comment "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans," which could clearly be read as contradicting Frye's claim that poets ought to appeal to "someone else's mystical experiences." Frye's point is valid, and Blake does appeal to other experiences in his poetry and prose, although Blake also states, as noted above, that "Imitation is Criticism," meaning that even if Blake uses other experiences that are not his own, he uses them critically, and not in terms of an exact replica which leads to a homogeneous archetypal pattern.

Frye asserts that Blake's poems are most aptly characterized as visionary rather than mystical: "most of the poets generally called mystics might better be called visionaries, which is not quite the same thing. This *is* a word Blake uses, and uses constantly. A visionary creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this one have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism ... It is a perceptive rather than a contemplative attitude of mind" (8). Frye separates the perceptive from the contemplative, or reflective, in the sense that the perceptive is a clarity of vision, that is attained through the reconciliation of the world with its fallen and twisted state, and that this represents the best interpretive model for understanding Blake's works. Furthermore, Frye distinguishes Blake's poems from mysticism through the example of Plotinus, who "four times in his life, with great effort and relentless discipline, achieved a direct apprehension of God" (8), in comparison to Blake who claimed to be in direct communion with God every waking day, which to someone like Plotinus, who is a "genuine mystic," would constitute disrespect and blasphemy.

Frye adds to his comments on mysticism in the concluding "General Note: Blake's Mysticism," in which he further identifies vision as overcoming the philosophical dichotomy between the subject and object, a problematic contradiction dating back to Plato:

The true God for ... visionaries is not the orthodox Creator, the Jehovah ... who must always be involved with either an eternal substance or an eternal nothingness, depending on the taste of the theologian, but an unattached creative Word free from both. Unity with this God could be attained only by an effort of vision which not only rejects the duality of subject and object but attacks the far more difficult antithesis of being and non-being as well. This effort of vision ... is to be conceived neither as a human attempt to reach God nor a divine attempt to

reach man, but as the realization in total experience of the identity of God and man in which both the human creature and the superhuman Creator disappear.

(431)

Frye covers a lot of territory in this passage, referring primarily to the relationship between language and divinity in terms of the feasibility of the endeavor to express the divine clearly through the figurative and symbolic medium of language or what Frye designates as the “unattached creative Word.” In his conclusion to the general note, Frye appeals to the “prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the human mind” (432), connecting his comments on mysticism to his earlier description of an archetypal pattern. For Frye, Blake’s works serve as a precursor, constructed out of twentieth-century theories “which seem to demand some kind of fitting together,” leading to an idyllic “whole pattern” (425). It is clear that Frye’s attack on interpretations of Blake’s poetry as mystical is directly connected with his argument for a poetic archetypal pattern that furnishes proof of an even larger blueprint that subsumes duality, whether subject-object or being-nonbeing, to an ideal “unattached creative Word.”

Frye’s argument for a visionary reading of Blake’s works influenced other major Blake critics such as David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom. Erdman also characterizes Blake’s poetry and prose as visionary, claiming that interpretations that emphasize that Blake is a mystic poet fail “to recognize that the community of London artists which was Blake’s only college was a milieu that encouraged visionaries – not those who had ‘ineffable’ but those who had vivid and distinct revelations” (3). Erdman argues that Blake’s ideas present a transparent revelation as opposed to an opaque or “ineffable” mysticism. Bloom does not offer a lengthy argument against a mystical reading, although at certain points throughout his discussion he takes a similar stance to that of Frye and Erdman. For example, Bloom analyzes a passage from *Jerusalem* that could

be construed as mystical and asserts that the passage should not be read as in “any way mystical” (410). In the passage, the narrator declares and pleads, “Annihilate the Selfhood in me” (*Jerusalem* 5.22). Bloom claims that the passage clearly refers to Blake’s previous epic poem, *Milton*, in which the character Milton attempts to rid himself of “the Not Human, to cast off the rotten rags of every covenanted religion, and indeed to liberate the spirit from every convention of belief, every shred of institutional or historical Christianity” (410). Bloom also argues against a mystical reading for a clear and transparent interpretation grounded in actualizing on a real life scale the reconciliation of the world with its diseased condition, in the practical release from “every convention of belief,” whether “institutional or historical.”

Recently, certain Blake critics, such as Asloob Ahmad Ansari and Sheila A. Spector, offer a specific understanding of mysticism in the Jewish tradition. In “Blake and the Kabbalah,” published in 1969, Ansari discusses Blake’s borrowings from Jewish culture, particularly with respect to Jewish mysticism, or the Kabbalah: “Blake, like Milton, did owe something to the Hebraic sources” (199). However, Ansari gives a generalized discussion in terms of a universal understanding of Jewish mysticism, which does not address the specific form of Jewish mysticism that Blake would have known. In “Kabbalistic Sources: Blake’s and His Critics’,” published in 1984, Spector discusses the particular strains of Jewish mysticism that Blake would have been acquainted with in terms of the evolution of this field of mysticism in the context of and under the influence of Christianity:

As is true with any study of influence, the only way to determine how – or even if – Blake knew or used the Kabbalah [i.e. Jewish mysticism] is to go to his source of information ... however, we cannot rely on modern scholarship even for rudimentary background information, for the kind of Kabbalah available in

eighteenth-century England was far different from that published at any time during the following two hundred years ... Blake ... had no access to anything other than the distorted interpretations of the Latin kabbalists. (96)

Spector's discussion of Blake's affiliation with Jewish mysticism is modified by her claim that if one compares Blake's poems with Jewish mysticism in terms of Blake's intent in borrowing from "Hebraic sources," then one ought to be aware of the specific type of Jewish mysticism available in England during Blake's time.

#### From Mysticism and Vision to *Mystics*

This section focuses on various definitions and descriptions of mysticism and vision, beginning with Evelyn Underhill's study of mysticism and vision, followed by studies in the same field by Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, American literary critic Sheila A. Spector and philosopher Steven T. Katz, and concludes with a brief exposition of Michel de Certeau's *mystics*. I have yet to make any claim or argument "on Blake's behalf," meaning I have not acknowledged that Blake admittedly labels himself profusely as a visionary, as Frye, Erdman and Bloom correctly point out. However, I posit here that Blake's intent might not be as relevant as some critics maintain. Surely, Blake would not be the first poet who, intentionally or not, misrepresented his own art. Moreover, my use of the terms mystical, mysticism and visionary are only general so far, leaving unanswered the following questions: What is a mystic? What is a vision? Is there a substantial difference between the two? And lastly, how do the answers to these questions bear on our understanding of Blake's poetry and prose?

Underhill's work serves as a good point of departure in discussing mysticism since she writes at the beginning of the twentieth century, and because it is from her work that Damon takes his understanding of the mystical element in Blake's poems. Underhill is therefore indirectly the source of the description of mysticism that Frye and others criticize in their subsequent studies in favor of a visionary interpretation. Like Damon, Underhill discusses five stages of the mystic's development. For Underhill, mysticism is a transparent revelation instead of an ineffable secret:

I understand it to be the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; *whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood*. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called "mystic union," attains its end. Whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World-soul of Pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it – *so long as this is a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation* – is the proper subject of mysticism. (xiv-xv; italics mine)

In this passage, Underhill speaks vaguely of a "transcendental order," referred to throughout the rest of the passage as "it," and described as a union with the divine, no matter what "end" is the context. This point is emphasized in Spector's analysis of potential sources of influence with respect to Blake's poems, although Spector gives a detailed account of mysticism whereas Underhill's discussion contains a more generalized definition.

Of particular interest is Underhill's claim that the visionary and the mystical are fields of experience completely and unequivocally at odds with each other. Vision is described as a perceptive, clear, concrete experience in opposition to mysticism, which is an obscure, elusive, opaque and generally ineffable occurrence (279). On the other hand, Underhill notes that it is very difficult to communicate visionary experience, if we take into account the similar criticism against vision that is usually leveled at the incommunicable nature of a mystical experience: "We forget ... that it is impossible for those who have never heard a voice or seen a vision to discuss these matters with intelligence ... No second-hand account can truly report the experience of the person whose perceptions or illusions present themselves in this form" (279). Underhill favors the mystical over the visionary, or at least demonstrates that the same problem affects both – the problem of communicating a personal experience through any means of representation. Moreover, Underhill asserts that mystics have a general tendency to discredit perception as somehow polluting the experience of eternity, which is a contradiction since the only way any individual can experience divinity is through some mode of perception, whether abstract meditation or a physical vision.

From a different angle, Underhill claims that vision is a "means" to mystical experience, in terms of being a mode of representation not simply of communicating these experiences between individuals but also being the mode of representation for experience (297). In other words, the mystic's "mystical" experience, the actual occurrence of what Underhill describes as "union" with the divine, can itself only be mediated through the individual's consciousness. However, Underhill would disagree with this extension of her argument as it takes away from the purity of the mystic's experience by taking the experience down to the level of representation, a fact which may explain Frye's insistence on Blake's unattached Creative word; an approach that

circumvents the notion that representation, in this case the representative medium of language, somehow pollutes the attainment of the description of divinity.

Gershom Scholem discusses mysticism in terms of religious-historical struggles over dogmatic systems, revolutionary spirituality, and the hegemony of orthodox institutions. Scholem describes the mystic much in the same way as Underhill: "A mystic is a man who has been *favoured* with an *immediate*, and *to him real*, experience of the divine, of ultimate reality, or who at least strives to attain such experience" (*On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* 5; italics mine). The mystical experience is often described as a union with divinity, not an observation that can be easily passed on or communicated. Scholem gives more detail in his discussion of mysticism, explaining that various descriptions of mysticism penetrate beyond matters of the corporeal, physical world to the degree that language fails to portray the experience:

Because mystical experience as such is formless, there is in principle no limit to the forms it can assume. At the beginning of their path, mystics tend to describe their experience in forms drawn from the world of perception. At later stages ... the world of nature recedes, and these 'natural' forms are gradually replaced by specifically mystical structures. Nearly all the mystics known to us describe such structures as configurations of lights and sounds ... For light and sound and even the name of God are merely symbolic representations of an ultimate reality which is unformed, amorphous. (8)

The forms from the "world of perception" that the mystic uses to describe mystical experience are the particular contextual religious constructs, such as Christianity, which informs the mystic's mode of understanding and subsequent communication of the experience to others: "the

mystic's experience tends to confirm the religious authority under which he lives; its theology and symbol are projected into his mystical experience, but do not spring from it" (9).

Scholem is similar to Underhill in his differentiation of the terms of mysticism, prophecy and vision. Placing vision within the category of prophecy, Scholem asserts that mysticism is not to be confused with prophecy or vice versa:

The prophet hears a clear message and sometimes beholds an equally plain vision, which he also remembers clearly. Undoubtedly a prophetic message of this sort lays direct claim to religious authority. In this it differs fundamentally from mystical experience. And yet, no one would think of denying the prophet's immediate experience of the divine. Plainly, we are dealing with two distinct categories of experience, and I very much doubt whether a prophet can justifiably be called a mystic ... [the] mystic's experience is by its very nature indistinct and inarticulate, while the prophet's message is clear and specific ... Though many mystics have attempted such 'translation,' have tried to lend their experience form and body [i.e. interpretation], the center of what a mystic has to say always remains a shapeless experience. (10-11)

Unlike Underhill, Scholem does not criticize prophecy and vision for the same fallacy inherent in mysticism wherein the experience is individual, subjective, and therefore incommunicable.

Instead, Scholem claims that vision and prophecy are experiences of the divine, "ultimate reality" and yet somehow can perfectly be communicated to others as well. What is ineffable and what is transparent? How are the two "distant categories of experience," which are both experiences of the same divinity, to be distinguished if their end is the same? Admittedly, the

experience of a visionary and prophet is quite different than a mystic's insofar as the former is a vision of divinity that can be communicated to the public domain whereas the latter is a solitary, individual experience meant solely for the individual and is therefore incommunicable to society. The problem is partially solved by Scholem's observation that the reason prophets have a "claim to religious authority," is to circumvent the contradiction that the prophet's experience of the divine is translatable while the mystic's experience is not.

The difference seems to rest upon the opposite intentions of mystics and visionaries, although Scholem demonstrates that these contrary intentions are not simply individual motives and choices. Scholem posits other contributing factors such as the particular religious symbolic context, or whether the mystic desires to change and revolutionize the predominant religious model or reinforce already existent structures and institutions: "For the same experience, which in one case makes for a conservative attitude, can in another case foster a diametrically opposite attitude. A mystic may substitute his own opinion for that prescribed by authority, precisely because his opinion seems to stem from the very same authority" (9). However, whatever the description of the experience, whether mystic or prophetic, it is simply that – an experience. In a different study, published in 1997, Scholem argues that a union with divinity is impossible as a description of mysticism, that instead mysticism is a "consciousness or experience of divine matters" (*On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism* 7). Thus, Scholem focuses on symbolism in his studies of mysticism, since, "Symbols, by their very nature, are a means of expressing an experience that is in itself expressionless ... The richness of meaning that they seem to emanate lends new life to tradition, which is always in danger of freezing dead forms – and this process continues until the symbols themselves die or change" (*On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* 22).

Mystics take long-established symbols and, even in respecting their traditional dimension, reinterpret their significance.

An example can be found in Blake's *Book of Urizen*, a minor prophetic that takes the Christian creation myth found in Genesis and gives it a dark and satirical representation, although the *Book of Urizen* might not be construed as a "pious veneration," but as an outright rebellious attack on Christian theology. Scholem briefly describes Blake's poetry in terms of a trend that does not appeal to religious authority with respect to what he calls a secular understanding of mysticism:

This problem of the secularized interpretation of amorphous mystical experiences has been raised repeatedly since the Enlightenment. The situation is somewhat obscured by the fact that certain authors, disregarding or rejecting all traditional authority, describe their mystical experience in resolutely secular terms, yet clothe their interpretation of the same experience in traditional images. This is the case ... with William Blake ... Even in such revolutionaries, who seek their authority essentially in themselves and in a secular interpretation of their visions, tradition asserts its power. (16)

Scholem states that Blake's experience is mystical on the one hand and visionary on the other, and therefore interchanges mysticism for vision or mysticism for prophecy, possibly owing to Blake's references to himself as dealing in vision and not obscurities or ineffable experiences. However, Scholem does not explain this statement, and we observe how one of the most specialized scholars of mysticism can become entangled in the gray area between mysticism and vision, an area of unrelenting debate between an ineffable, untranslatable or a clear, coherent

experience that can be communicated to other people; between what Scholem labels “two distinct categories of experience.”

Spector addresses the debate over ineffable mysticism and transparent vision in “Death in Blake’s Major Prophecies,” published in 1984. Spector argues that the inconsistencies and contradictions found in Blake’s epic poems are not symptoms of an ineffable mysticism, though they are elements of a mysticism that she claims are overlooked or ignored. For her, the traditional understanding of mysticism is outdated:

It used to be axiomatic that mystical visions are ineffable. Since by definition the mystical experience exceeds the dimensions of physical reality, it was believed that only those who themselves had transcended our world of time and space could comprehend reports of other, similar experiences, and that language traditionally used to describe the ... world is inadequate for conveying visions of another dimension. As a result, the mystic who claimed that words failed him was taken literally, and the mystical testimony was assumed to be unintelligible except as a statement that some kind of mystical experience had occurred. (3)

Spector argues that the interpretation of mysticism is changing, and that the ineffable characteristic generally associated with mysticism (that it is incommunicable), is confused equivocally with the particulars of individual experiences: “each [mystical experience] is unique and ineffable” (3). In order to surpass the obstacle of ineffability, Spector claims that critical focus should be placed on the contextual theological particulars that shape and inform the individual mystical experience. In Blake’s case, this amounts to assessing the influence of Blake’s immediate biographical, intellectual and religious-spiritual context upon his “mystical” experience and subsequent poetic illuminations.

Spector interchanges vision and mysticism, not acknowledging, as in the case of Underhill, Frye, Erdman and Scholem, the difference between transparent, definable, translatable vision (or prophecy) and opaque, indefinable, amorphous mystical experience. Instead, Spector compresses vision and mysticism together, defining each as potentially ineffable or transparent, rather than combining mysticism with the unknowable and vision with the identifiable. Spector claims that the solution to understanding the ineffable aspect of mystical and visionary experience lies in what is called a "mystical grammar," which describes the author's intent to utilize inconsistency, paradox and contradiction purposefully. In other words, where paradox and contradiction are presumed to be mistakes, Spector argues that the author intends these elements:

Very often, the mystic views himself as a teacher or guide, and the vision, not merely the passive transcription of a personal experience, is the means of leading the reader out of his own limited sense of reality, as controlled by a self-limiting use of language, into the spiritual freedom gained from transcending a physical world view. Thus, the mystic's apparently illogical use of language is not only deliberate, but logical in its own way, predicated on ... a "mystical grammar," the means of both shaping language into an instrument suitable for conveying his vision and, at the same time, providing the willing reader with the means of breaking free from his own linguistic limitations.

We no longer need assume that inconsistencies and contradictions reflect either the vagaries of an illogical mind or an ineffable experience which cannot be described. (4)

For Spector, then, mysticism and vision can be interpreted in a number of ways, and to describe an experience as ineffable is a matter of perspective. In terms of poetry and prose, Spector asserts that paradoxical, inconsistent language is not necessarily a symptom of an indescribable, ineffable experience but instead is an intentional use on the author's behalf to take the "reader out of his own limited sense of reality." Spector demonstrates that what is largely depicted as unknowable due to contradiction is misread and misinterpreted, or discussed in such a way that describes the paradoxes but "neither interprets nor attempts to resolve them" (6).

Spector derives part of her contextual approach from Steven T. Katz, who emphasizes that the vehicle for mystical experience is the human body and thus focus should begin with the modes of representation and signification through which the body expresses itself. Katz reminds us that in any study of mysticism and mystical experiences, we are dealing primarily with what is actually secondary and sometimes even tertiary to the object of study – the mystical experience. The only evidence we have of mystical experiences is to be found secondhand in writing: "We have no access to their special experience independently of these texts. What we call the great historical mystical traditions of the world are in fact a series of documents of differing sorts. No one has any privileged access here to the original mystics' experience outside its textual incorporation" (4). Not only is the "original mystics' experience" inaccessible and presented secondarily at best, but the writing itself, the recording of the experience, whether factual or poetic, is "encoded" with the direct context of the individual mystic (4).

For example, Blake's writing is "encoded," with the historical context of his time, not simply in terms of events that shaped Blake's life, but the style and structure of his writing as well influences the interpretation of his poetry and prose today. Not only would the historical and biographical particulars of Blake's life influence his experience (whether described as mystical

or visionary), but the style of his recording those experiences affects and dilutes that experience further, making it difficult at best to ascertain the predominant characteristic of Blake's experience with respect to whether it can be generally defined as mystical or visionary. Katz's central point, then, is to illustrate how our understanding of mysticism, and I would venture of visionary experiences as well, is already predetermined by the mystic's particular historical conditioning, a notion that has already been alluded to above by Underhill and Scholem in their studies of mysticism.

The final perspective of mysticism, Michel de Certeau's *mystics*, criticizes most of the scholarship and academic work that has defined mysticism, since many of the scholars and thinkers who give these definitions are not mystics and have not had mystical experiences. For de Certeau, since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mysticism is predefined before being defined at all:

In the course of our history, "one" place has been given to mysticism; it has been assigned, within social or scientific life, a region of its own, with its own objects, itineraries, and language. In particular...since the sixteenth or seventeenth century ... one no longer designated as mystical that form of "wisdom" elevated by a full recognition of the mystery already lived and announced in common beliefs, but rather an experimental knowledge that slowly detached itself from traditional theology or church institutions, characterized by the consciousness, received or acquired, of a fulfilling passivity in which the self loses itself in God. In other words, what becomes mystical is that which diverges from normal or ordinary paths ... on the margins of an increasingly

secularized society and a knowledge that defines its own scientific objects. (*The Mystic Fable* 13)

De Certeau maintains that around the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the adjective “mystical” changed from a descriptive word into a noun and a category: “Previously, ‘mystique’ [i.e. mystical] was only an adjective that qualified something else ... At the same time that its proper name appeared ... mysticism [having become a noun] constituted itself in a place apart” (13-14). This shift from adjective to noun, from mystical to mysticism, is accompanied and partly determined by “a knowledge that defines its own scientific objects,” which is, according to de Certeau, knowledge associated with the rapidly evolving and pervasive discipline of science. For de Certeau, the advent of secular studies, the predominance of science and the hegemony of observable, empirical “data,” demarcates and defines the field of mysticism in such a way that ignores mysticism itself and predefines “its own scientific objects.”

The core of de Certeau’s argument directly reflects the argument of this thesis with respect to Blake’s writing and the idea of mysticism that has been posited and denied in Blake’s works. In the same way that science defines its own objects, archetypal analysis of Blake’s poetry and prose defines its own interpretation, and thereby ignores and overlooks particulars that belie the archetypal reading. In a different study involving a discussion of the predominance of scientific thinking, published in 1984, de Certeau asserts that science delineates its own “proper” field in which it “defines its own objects”: “Statistical inquiry [the mode of science] breaking down ... [knowledge] ... into units it defines itself ... reorganizing the results of its own analyses according to its own codes, ‘finds’ only the homogenous” (*The Practice of Everyday Life* xviii). Miller makes similar comments in his discussion of Blake criticism and the archetype, such Blake’s writings are revealed to homogenize into one pattern, placing on the

margins those aspects that would disrupt the archetypal reading such as Frye does in defining a mysticism incompatible with Blake's poems. Frye does not allow for any notion of mysticism other than the one he posits and then denies with respect to Blake's writing.

Marsanne Branner describes de Certeau's mysticism: "The scientific objectification of the mystical reveals more about the developing sociocultural predominance of certain analytical practices [i.e. scientific reason] than it does about mystical experience itself. Mysticism is neither a religion nor a philosophy, but is grounded in lived experiences and practices that are heterogeneous, nonlinear, particular" (29). In much the same way, archetypal interpretation reveals more about the nature of the pervasive, generalizing archetype of literary studies than it does about the literature itself, presuming that what is being interpreted fits the mold of the archetypal pattern. De Certeau adds to his work on mysticism in his study, *The Mystic Fable*, published in 1992, which reinforces his earlier stance in the article "Mysticism," also published in 1992. Here, de Certeau elaborates on the shift in mysticism around the sixteenth, seventeenth century, in this case emphasizing that the advent of the printing press and the concurrent availability of the Bible to the public, forced mystics to question what remains after the written word:

From the Reformation on, the Scriptures opened up the road to writing and literacy. The primacy of the book was established. The cosmos spoken of by God and church institutions is replaced by the production and methodical learning of an elementary or theological knowledge, a 'clericalization' of religious authority, an administrative technicalization of the Churches, and so on. (12)

Blake invokes this point through the lines quoted above, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans," although in this case "another Mans" "System" is the institutionalization and

systematization of the Church, a point Blake variously illustrates throughout his poetry and prose.

De Certeau traces what he calls the evolutionary history of mysticism. The core of mysticism remains the same for de Certeau throughout this historical evolution; it is the understanding and importance of this core (the core being the mystical experience itself) that is in a constant fluctuation. For example, the present discussion demonstrates the fluctuation of the understanding of mysticism with respect to Blake's works in terms of the many alternative interpretations of Blake's mysticism. These interpretations do not reduce to the duality between opaque mysticism and transparent vision, but are instead irreducible particular readings of Blake's works which each yield a specific description of mysticism or vision. De Certeau asserts that *mystics* (la mystique) is the actual field of mystical experience, not the definitions and descriptions that have been handed down throughout history. The translator of de Certeau's *Mystic Fable*, Michael B. Smith, translates "la mystique" into *mystics*:

This term cannot be rendered accurately by the English word 'mysticism,' which would correspond rather to the French *le mysticisme*, and be far too generic and essentialist a term to convey the historical specificity of this study. There is no need here to retrace the steps by which *la mystique*, the noun, emerged from the prior adjective, *mystique* ... it may be of some interest to note that this grammatical promotion has its parallel ... in the development of such terms as 'mathematics' or 'physics' ... also taking their names from an adjectival forerunner. I have ... adopted the bold solution of introducing ... [an] English term, *mystics* ... to render *la mystique*. (ix-x)

De Certeau claims that *mystics* could not last, that it was inherently doomed to failure. As soon as *mystics* became more than an adjective, taking on the status of a specialized discipline, it died out:

Once it had become . . . a noun, *mystics* had to determine its procedures and define its object. Although . . . it succeeded in carrying out the first part of this program, the second part was to prove impossible. Is not its object the infinite. It is never anything but the unstable metaphor for what is inaccessible . . . Therefore, *mystics* only assembles and orders its practices in the name of something that it cannot make into an object . . . something that never ceases judging *mystics* at the same time that it eludes it. Mysticism vanishes at its point of origin. Its birth pledges it to the impossible, as if, stricken by the absolute from the very beginning, it finally died of the question from which it was formed. For a while, this science [*mystics*] was sustained only by the poem . . . The poem was the substitute for its scientific object. It was a paradoxical alliance. (77)

In this passage, de Certeau discusses the “object,” of *mystics*, which is the mystical experience itself, not the interpretation of that experience. For example, the object of physics would be the physical dynamics of the universe, and the interpretations offered by physicists are presented in terms of theories and formulas. However, the interpretation of *mystics* is continuously and consistently disrupted and sabotaged by the experience itself. Thus, I further designate the term mysticism as the field of interpretation that manifests after the experience itself, whereas *mystics* refers to the field of mystical experience, as it happens and not after the fact. In this relation,

mysticism can never fully expound what occurs in *mystics*, directly relating to Underhill's comment that mysticism can never be an intellectual reflection but is an active, engaging and lived experience that defies any rigid systematization.

Furthermore, de Certeau elaborates that the demise of the authentic discipline or science, *mystics*, was predominantly accompanied by the scientific field's homogenizing descriptions and definitions of mysticism, particularly those created and maintained by "psychology or pathology" (*Mystic Fable* 77). In other words, with the advent of psychology and pathology came the psychological and pathological assessment and judgment of mysticism and mystical experience in terms of "normal" modes of behavior and deviations from the status quo such that mystical experiences were reevaluated as symptomatic of madness and delusion. Josephine A. McQuail uses de Certeau's study of *mystics* to argue against a psychoanalytic reading of Blake's writing and ideas, particularly de Certeau's notion that mysticism is predefined by other disciplines, such as psychology and psychoanalysis, as indicative of erratic, deranged and absurd behavior. McQuail asserts that the subject matter of both mysticism and psychoanalysis is essentially the same, but in a bid for legitimacy psychoanalysis categorizes mystical experience as indicative of deep-rooted mental illnesses, traumas, and other pathologies of the mind. However, McQuail argues that "psychoanalysis cannot explain prophecy except to say it is a neurosis" (131). Whether an unconscious pathology designated by psychoanalytic theory or an experience depicted as mystical, McQuail claims that neither is exactly definitive in interpreting Blake's inspiration and art: "was it neurosis or divine inspiration...was he exploring the unconscious or the soul? After all, neither has been isolated as a physiological entity" (131).

In his own life, Blake was often labeled a deluded mystic while the reception of his art suffered similar criticisms. Blake himself was aware of the potential for being seen as a lunatic:

“There are states in which all Visionary Men are accounted Mad” (“The Laocoön 274). Blake often criticized science for these very same reasons – for defining and constricting through scientific “logic” other possibilities, specifically spiritual in nature, that are manipulated into unobservable and therefore irrelevant data by the discourse of science. In *Jerusalem*, John Locke, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton form the scientific trinity who represent the cold logic of the fallen world in creating and maintaining a fallen perception aligned with a fallen reality:

That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose.  
 For Bacon and Newton sheathd in dismal steel, their terrors hang  
 Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents  
 Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations  
 I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe  
 And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire  
 Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. (Blake, *Jerusalem* 15.10-16)

Albion is not a figurative symbol of the world but the actual physical universe (not to be confused with the Albion that represents the British Isles from which Blake takes the name), constituted by and through his body, a fact which leads into another significant point de Certeau makes with respect to *mystics* and the notion of the body. For de Certeau, the body is the site of *mystics*, both its vehicle through mystical experience and subsequent interpretation: “Mystical literature composes scripts of the body. From this point of view, it is cinematographic” (81). The predominant example of this occurrence is the story of Jesus Christ, whose body, de Certeau argues, “composes” the script of the entire Christian tradition, a tradition that is based on blind faith (81-82). De Certeau describes the Christian tradition as a “privation of body,” one that is complemented by blind faith to the figure of Jesus Christ, whose body signals faith in the unseen

and unknown. For example, Jesus' resurrection has the impact of testing the Apostles' faith, particularly if we consider, as de Certeau illustrates, the story of "doubting Thomas," in which Thomas did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead, although in this case Jesus appears and gives observable evidence to prove to Thomas that he had indeed died and come back from the dead, thus giving Thomas the infamous aphoristic acronym. Thus, in this Biblical story, Jesus' body composes the script in being the site of a tension between the human capacities for faith and doubt.

More importantly, the body of Jesus serves as a rhetorical piece of evidence whose presence is proof to have blind faith, as we see in the story of "doubting Thomas." The Bible, both New and Old Testaments, is riddled with similar stories that are composed of bodies – bodies being healed, miracles performed, tortures inflicted, and so on, all of which yield some ethic or moral. As well, these occurrences are experiences that can be doubted unless one is actually a witness to the event, a description that fits mystical experience as well. The body serves as a site for argument and invention, for creating hegemonic institutions, maintaining their predominance, defining the marginal such as the mystical experience, giving it a pathology and statistically dividing between the two poles of coherent religion and pathological, deluded mysticism. In this light, it is no small wonder that critics who want to critique Blake's writing in terms of its literary heritage would have to subtly dismiss the mystical question, for mysticism involves a field of experience that is anything but stable, fixed, or archetypal, by and through its very definition. De Certeau consistently admits that even his own discussion of *mystics* is doomed from the outset because of the impossibility of communicating the mystical experience, although he simultaneously reminds us of the contradiction that we still attempt to communicate the incommunicable, as de Certeau does in his study of *mystics*. For de Certeau, the problem is

summed up in his phrase (quoted above), "The sayable continues to be wounded by the unsayable" (78). I investigate this problem in Blake's works, particularly his final epic, *Jerusalem*. If Blake does have a clear vision in mind, one that he wishes to convey to others through his poetry, then does he succeed in communicating his clear archetypal vision? Does he find a "sayable," a vision that is coherently presented throughout the one hundred illuminated plates that constitute *Jerusalem* or is there an "unsayable" that continuously antagonizes Blake's "sayable" vision?

"A Golden String"

At the beginning of Chapter 4, "To the Christians," Blake gives the preliminary aphoristic claim:

I give you the end of a golden string,  
 Only wind it into a ball:  
 It will lead you in at Heavens gate,  
 Built in Jerusalem's Wall. (*Jerusalem* 77)

In the illuminated print, the figure of a woman is seen holding the end of a string while walking and looking up into a dark, cloudy sky, with the string leading her from the right hand side of the page to the left, under the words quoted above; nowhere is there seen a ball wound out of the string. Furthermore, the string slopes on an upward angle, separating the above passage from an adjacent statement: "Devils are / False Religions / 'Saul Saul' / 'Why persecutest thou me.'" As discussed above, many critics read into *Jerusalem* an archetypal pattern, and from this perspective, the golden string represents the path through apocalypse to redemption, to Beulah,

the unfallen state of reality, the totality of which, from the archetypal perspective, is represented by the wound up golden ball. However, if Blake wished to emphasize the ball wound from the string, then perhaps he might have included it in the illumination, which focuses on the string and not the ball. Moreover, the winding of the string leads across into the comment about "False Religions," which implies that to wind the string up into a ball is to fall prey to "False Religions." Youngquist maintains that the golden string is akin to the particulars that make up any context or general form, from the particulars of a life to those of a poem, whereas the ball wound up is every individual's capacity to generalize and universalize that which is actually composed out of particulars (609).

In addition, readings of this passage reveal the many ways of interpreting *Jerusalem*. In Bloom's discussion, focus is given to the "False Religions" phrase, specifically in terms of Saul and conversion, an approach which reinforces the perfect archetypal pattern of fallen man being redeemed through apocalypse, although in this case Saul was blinded and given back his vision, which serves as an apt metaphor for the fall and redemption of Blake's Albion (Bloom 462). Thus, Bloom does not discuss the golden string side of the passage, instead emphasizing the figure of Saul in relation to the overall pattern of *Jerusalem*.

In an alternative interpretation, Youngquist uses the golden string as an analogy for reading *Jerusalem* through various critical perspectives. Primarily, he argues that the golden string is Blake's own prescription for the way to read *Jerusalem*, "implied rules to govern the game of reading" (606). Since the passage appears on Plate 77, Youngquist asserts it forces the reader to reflect upon the activity of reading *Jerusalem*, "a position that complicates a process already well under way" (606). Youngquist maintains that the golden string passage refers directly to a field of particular possibilities and not a homogenizing, generalizing pattern: "A

golden string is not an archetypal pattern, not even a special thread for weaving one. It is an undetermined length of possible relations. The contract specifies less the formal coherence than the discursive possibility of *Jerusalem*" (606). However, what does "discursive possibility" have to do with Blake's *Jerusalem*? Is not a discursive possibility more akin to philosophy than poetry?

For Youngquist, "discursive possibility" signals the variety of possible readings that can be derived from *Jerusalem*, in place of taking a predefined archetype and forcing it upon the interpretation. Youngquist asserts that *Jerusalem* cannot be read as one single story or narrative, that it is neither a synchronic "event" nor a "diachronic" narrative, but ought to be read as an open-ended piece, the interpretation of which is contingent upon a variety of factors ranging from the understanding of Blake's intent as a creative poet to his historical, biographical context and a variety of other critical considerations. The bottom line of Youngquist's argument is that no single critical disposition is more accurate than another; instead, *Jerusalem*, because of its wide array of characters, states of reality, states of being and so on, invites this myriad of critical dispositions. As illustrated above in chapter one, criticism of *Jerusalem* ranges from considerations of Einstein's physics to feminist arguments for and against a misogynistic reading of Blake's presentation of women throughout his poetry and prose. With so many various types of interests, styles, subject matters, mythologies and variations on a wide range of social, political, religious, scientific, philosophical concerns, it is impossible to develop an archetypal reading that comprehensively takes stock of every element of Blake's writing. The question constantly emerges: "golden string" or ball? Opaque *mystics* or transparent vision? What, then, does Blake declare with respect to his experience and its description through his art? The answer

is neither, that Blake's writing essentially displays characteristics of vision and mysticism and that neither can be excluded in favor of the other.

There is an obvious tension within Blake's writing between espousing a clear vision of eternity and acknowledging the damning impossibility of such an endeavor. In his general disposition, Blake always maintains the necessary feasibility of communicating a transparent vision, a vision free from an insidious ambiguity of expression that is then used for selfish, immoral designs, such as the institutionalization of the Christian faith. In the opening quotation to this chapter, Blake claims that the Bible is not allegory but "Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists," and that "Eternal Vision" must not be equivocally understood as "Fable or Allegory." In the single engraved plate piece, "The Laocoön," Blake states:

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination

...It manifests itself in his [i.e. God's] works of Art (in Eternity All is Vision)

All that we See is Vision from Generated Organs gone as soon as come

Permanent in the Imagination. (273)

Here, vision is everything, from "Eternity" to physical reality, although in the corporeal world, vision is to be found "Permanent in the Imagination," for after the body has died, its form lives on in the imagination through vision. Blake also equates the "Eternal Body," with the imagination, which is consequently demonstrated through creation, or God's "works of Art." Elsewhere, Blake insists that vision, as the modality of all artwork, is a mode of perfection and not ambiguity, "The Man who asserts that there is no Such Thing as Softness in Art & that every thing in Art is Definite & Determinate has not been told this by Practice but by Inspiration & Vision because Vision is Determinate & Perfect & he Copies That without Fatigue Every thing being Definite & determinate" (*Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* 646). Thus,

vision for Blake is not to be confused with any figurative ambiguities “because Vision is Determinate & Perfect” as well as “Definite,” even though vision is paradoxically a vision of an indefinite Eden.

However, Blake did not necessarily mean that eternity is definite or fixed, especially if we read his words carefully. Consider the statement: “This World is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike” (“Letters” 702). This claim can mean that what Blake sees of the physical world is proof to him of divinity, or it can mean that Blake actually witnesses eternity within the corporeal world in the forms of spirits, saints and angels. According to Blake, it is the latter case:

I can alone carry on my visionary studies ... & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity. See Visions, Dream Dreams, & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals. perhaps Doubts proceeding from Kindness. but Doubts are always pernicious Especially when we Doubt our Friends. (“Letters” 728)

In this description, we get another elaboration of Blake’s visionary experience in terms of a social phenomenon wherein Blake’s proclaimed visions, as already mentioned, are not shared by his contemporaries and Blake is subsequently deemed mad and deranged. Moreover, Blake had come to realize that those around him did not respect his unique experience: “Blake learned a bitter truth: no one cared anything about his visions. As an engraver, he had won a modest place in the world...as a poet, he heard some of his early lyrics still repeated; but as a visionary, as a revealer of fundamental truths, he was adjudged at best eccentric, and at worst crazy” (Damon, *William Blake* 154).

Blake also claims that true vision is only fit for certain people: "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care" ("Letters" 702). However, who are weak men? Why is it that what "can be made Explicit to the Idiot" is not "worth" Blake's time and "care"? This could be misconstrued for creating class divisions between privileged and poor, between strong and weak, but if we take a closer look at other references in Blake's writing, we see that conventional notions of weak and strong are inverted in Blake's ideas. For Blake, idiocy is weakness either in terms of ignorance or an intentional misuse of power. For example, Blake describes the misuse of scripture as resulting in "the Divinity of Yes & No...The Yea Nay Creeping Jesus" ("Letters" 783). Here, Blake references his perspective on contraries, on dichotomies of "Yes & No" and "Yea Nay." In *Jerusalem*, the following description of contraries is presented:

And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion in their strength  
 They take the Two Contraries which are calld Qualities, with which  
 Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil  
 From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation  
 Not only of the Substance from which it is derived  
 A murderer of its own Body: But also a murderer  
 Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power  
 An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing  
 This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power  
 And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation. (10.7-16)

The "Sons of Albion" are Blake's "Idiot[s]," who designate and manipulate contraries under the direction of "the Holy Reasoning Power," which is therefore a complete misuse of intelligence and power.

Thus, on the one hand Blake describes the strong overpowering the weak through the creation of contraries, whereas on the other Blake stipulates that the strong and predominant upper classes are weak precisely because of their selfish misuse of knowledge, which Blake maintains is itself a form of idiocy. It is fitting, then, that the above passage is followed by the declaration, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans." Blake elaborates on the relation between negations and contraries: "Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist: / But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs / Exist Not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever" (*Jerusalem* 17.33-35). Blake is evidently aware of the discursive power of knowledge in terms of selfish motivations and hegemonic institutions. Blake's recurrent example is the institutionalization of the church and Bible, the "Yes & No" power to create and manipulate systems that revolve around dichotomies such as "Good & Evil." However, the question remains as to what this all has to do with the present discussion of Blake's writing in terms of the mystical question.

The connection is relatively simple: if Blake is critical of the manipulation of knowledge for selfish reasons, as the "Sons of Albion" do in *Jerusalem*, then he would have an equal distaste for those experiences that allow for any ambiguity, such as an ineffable mystical experience, from which assertions of knowledge and revelation are made, or a "Negation," an ambiguity that can be directed by those who would maintain power over others. By extension, then, Blake would designate mystical experience as "Weak," since it is not "Definite," "Determinate & Perfect." Blake perceives an inherently dangerous potential in ambiguity for the

manipulation of the interpretation of that particular ambiguity, in this case in the form of mystical experience. In a parallel criticism, Blake attacks Isaac Newton's physics and John Locke's empirical philosophy for predefining and categorizing the experience of the world and therefore for constricting our understanding of perception. A substantial part of Blake's criticism rests on the scientific drive, as discussed by de Certeau, to predefine its own object in terms of its own axiomatic precepts and from the perspective of a discursive domain only interested in its own predefinitions, as psychoanalysis does by describing mystical experiences in terms of predetermined pathologies and descriptions of mental illnesses and traumas. However, for all of Blake's claims with respect to his "Determinate" and "Definite" vision, he also doubted whether this vision could be imparted to others, and not in terms of "Weak" minds that cannot appreciate such a vision, but because of the sheer audacity of taking an image of eternity, claiming it to be authentic and artistically copying it down to share with others.

For example, in the first chapter of *Jerusalem*, "To the Public," Blake implores the "Reader" to recognize Blake's humble disposition in the bold endeavor of presenting his vision: "I am perhaps the most sinful of men! I pretend not to holiness! yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with daily, as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore [*Dear*] Reader [*forgive*] what you do not approve, & [*love*] me for this energetic exertion of my talent" (Plate 3, italics Erdman's). In this passage, the narrator declares himself to be potentially unfit for being the medium for the verse he is about to create. Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom and other Blake critics identify *Jerusalem* as being composed of various antitheses: "As a general principle of organization, a series of gradually sharpening antitheses leading to a necessity for moral choice, this resembles the pattern of the major prophetic books of the Bible. Blake calls himself 'a true Orator' in the preface to Chapter I, and true orators are

precisely what the Hebrew prophets attempted to be" (Bloom 405). Notwithstanding brief criticisms of narrative structure and consistency, Bloom describes *Jerusalem* as "a very orderly poem, much more so than the comments of many of Blake's critics would lead us to expect" (404). With respect to the preface, Bloom focuses on the narrator's comments of creating a "more consolidated & extended Work," and overlooks the qualification that the narrator may not be fit for recreating the vision through the artistic medium, and the plea with the public to "[love] me for this energetic exertion of my talent."

To paraphrase in terms of de Certeau's analysis of *mystics*, does Blake find a "sayable," a vision that can be coherently imparted to all individuals? Is this Blake's ultimate goal or is it even possible to sift through Blake's seemingly contradictory thought process, which in the one instance declares that "All deities reside in the human breast" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Plate 11), while in another, maintains, "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men?" In this case, Blake apparently contradicts himself by claiming on the one hand that the experience of eternity is available to everyone, while on the other asserting that the vision of eternity is not meant for "Weak" persons. This duality might be further read as implying the practical and social characteristic of Blake's writing and ideas, which is therefore closely linked with Blake's own observations of mysticism. The description of weakness here is a weakness in terms of humanity's potential for selfish and greedy behavior, selfishness and greed instead of what Bloom describes as "a necessity for moral choice," and this weakness is what causes individuals to intentionally ignore the dictates of conventional morality for selfish designs. Religious authority that exerts its power through discursive recourse to scriptural interpretation can be founded on ineffable, mystical experiences that are subsequently manipulated and tailored to the design of religious institutions more interested in perpetuating power and control than spiritual

enlightenment and fulfillment. Blake distrusts mystical declarations that leave room for ambiguous, opaque interpretations. However, based on Blake's comments in the opening plates of *Jerusalem*, where he begs the "Reader" to recognize the inherent futility of transmitting a divine vision of such "Determinate" and "Perfect" clarity, we may note that perhaps Blake understood too well the nature of prophetic work, both a gift and a damnation, to converse with spirits and eternity; but to do so alone, rejected to the point of wanting to be alone, "from the Doubts of other Mortals." Dominic Rainsford describes Blake's plea with the "Reader" in similar terms of the shortcomings of the visionary's endeavor "as an independently fallible mortal who may have taken on more than he can manage" (92-93).

Blake uses the word vision throughout his writing to describe an experience of eternity that does not leave room for equivocation, and at certain points to give his preferred description for his artistic aim. However, Blake does not therefore use the word mystical to delineate the opposite of his visionary experience, but simply uses the adjective as a descriptive word in his poetry. Thus, in a canceled plate from Blake's poem, *America: A Prophecy*, the description "mystic ornaments" appears to give an ethereal tone to the passage (Plate b), and in chapter three of *Jerusalem* Blake describes "The Mystic Union" of the "Emanation" to "Man" (53.24). In Blake's cosmology, the Emanation is the Female counterpart to a whole that is fragmented in the fallen world and is unified in eternity. When the fall occurs, the Female counterpart separates (emanates) from the male and is often called the emanation. In this passage, Blake uses the word "Mystic" to give a similar, ethereal connotation. Nowhere does Blake give a detailed account for or against mysticism, most likely owing to what de Certeau and others describe as the transition from the adjective mystical to the commonly known term, mysticism. Whether or not Blake identified the opposite of vision with the word mystic, his verse is engaged in the common

domain shared by both mystical and visionary experience. At this point in time, mysticism has predominantly crossed into the segregated, predetermined field for a particular sort of experience as opposed to an adjective potentially applied to any experience. In our current understanding, mysticism is a field of experience cut off from and opposite to the status quo of observable perception, particularly in being an ineffable, "unsayable," event.

In this chapter, I have analyzed an array of different descriptions and definitions of both mystical and visionary experience, from Blake scholars to religious and theological theorists. Throughout the course of this discussion, it becomes evident that most of these descriptions demarcate a duality between mysticism and vision. With respect to Blake's writing and ideas, what can be said of these experiences and their relation? As mentioned above, Blake has a fundamental suspicion of those descriptions of knowledge and experience that invite ambiguity or a malleability of open interpretation. However, Blake also states "Every body does not see alike," which can mean either that there are a multitude of perspectives and dispositions of visionary experience and experience in general, or that there is only one unflinching, "Perfect," "Determinate" and "Definite" vision of eternity, to which Blake is specifically privy and which he subsequently transmits through his illuminated verse.

From a different angle, is there an "unsayable," ineffable characteristic latent to the surface vision? Either way, it does not seem logical to assert that the same author who claims he must create a system to avoid being "enslav'd" to another would then claim that his vision is more correct and accurate than another individual's perception or experience of divinity. Thus, I interpret Blake's comments as indicating the open-ended potential for knowledge, imagination and diversity of perception rather than shackling possibility. In other words, Blake admires the human potential for imaginative diversity, but detests the use of this imaginative potential for

selfish and greedy reasons. In the final chapter, I engage with the following potentiality: that Blake detests interpretations of eternity that allow for the subsequent misuse and institutionalization of those same interpretations, and that this is the reason critics have derived an inherent critique of mysticism within Blake's poetry and prose. However, this does not necessitate the conclusion that Blake detests the genuine mystical experience. In other words, Blake would not condemn those who strive to communicate their mystical experiences, though he must present the fallen world first before revealing his vision of eternity. The narrator's comments in the opening preface of chapter one in *Jerusalem* serve as an apology for the necessary darkness of his vision, "I am perhaps the most sinful of men! I pretend not to holiness!" Blake may be indicating here that he is sinful in criticizing the Christian church (and all religions) from within through his presentation of an apocalyptic world in his poetry. In other words, since he is predominantly engaged in representing the antithesis to "holiness," he does not concentrate directly and positively on eternity, but indirectly through divinity's negative.

### Chapter 3: "O all-powerful Human Words!"

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour" (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence 1-4).

*Jerusalem* is far too vast and intricate a poem to expound comprehensively all of its characteristics here, even if I were to dedicate the whole of the present thesis to its explication. Instead, I rigorously discuss certain passages from a number of critical perspectives, focusing on the debate over a mystical or a visionary expression found in the epic poem. As stated earlier, a critical consensus has developed from Northrop Frye's significant work *Fearful Symmetry*, David V. Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* and Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse*, which all focus on Blake's emphasis on a visionary and not mystical description of eternity. With this in mind, this chapter discusses *Jerusalem* in terms of the debate over whether Blake is a visionary or a mystic. In the previous chapter, I illustrate the complex nature of the relation between vision and mysticism, and the range of possible definitions, culminating in de Certeau's *mystics*. De Certeau draws attention to the shift in the acceptance of what constitutes mysticism and how it differs from supposedly objective modes of experiencing divinity, such as vision. Throughout the present chapter, I address specific contemporary readings of Blake's writing that are similar to de Certeau's notion of *mystics* and his subsequent explanation of how scientific discourse predefines mysticism according to scientific axioms. With this in mind, I begin with the conclusion of *Jerusalem* since it is here that Blake delivers one of his most elaborate depictions of a vision of eternity, in addition to being the target of many Blake interpretations. The second passage discussed, taken from Plate 45, draws out a comparison between Blake's

Albion and de Certeau's discussion of the body. The third excerpt, taken from Plates 30 and 31, demonstrates the understanding Blake has of the importance of perception in relation to knowledge and power, particularly in terms of the power to manipulate individuals through the manipulation of knowledge. Similarly, de Certeau describes the power of scientific discourse to manipulate the definition of mysticism. Plate 54 gives a summary account of Albion's fall as well as a description of Blake's criticism of the manipulative power of knowledge and discourse. Finally, Plate 91 yields insight into Blake's concern with the relation between perception, knowledge and control, a relation that helps in illustrating Blake's dislike of describing his vision as mystical or ineffable. It is exactly the degree of Blake's visionary achievement that Miller questions in his reading of Blake.

With respect to archetypal analysis reaching a critical consensus, Dan Miller asserts, "the Blake we now have is the prophet of eternal vision and transcendent imagination" (155). Miller cites the description of vision, quoted above, found in Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, in which Blake criticizes "Fable or Allegory" in favor of "Vision or Imagination." However, Miller asserts that he is not engaged in complementing the predominant critical consensus, but is interested in interrogating Blake's verse with respect to its visionary status. Miller does not phrase his criticism in terms of mysticism and vision, but instead focuses on "what the concept of vision includes, what it denies, how it operates within Blake's argument, and what principles govern the distinction between vision and allegory" (156). Miller claims that many critics agree with Blake's criticism of allegory and his preference for vision, although Miller argues that Blake's visionary poetic form is not as consistent in its endeavor as the archetypal analysis maintains. Miller uses the term "allegory" to describe what he calls the "disruption" of Blake's vision of eternity: "It marks the place of all that vision seeks to transcend but cannot leave

behind – the inevitability of some mode of representation within all perception, the figural component of the imagination. Allegory, therefore, can serve to suggest that moment when the argument [on vision] ... reaches its limits and finds the distinctions untenable” (162). In other words, Miller maintains that Blake’s poetic aim to avoid the equivocal nature of “Fable or Allegory” through the agenda of a visionary is implicitly doomed from the outset, much in the same way that de Certeau describes his own study of *mystics*, by the inability of language to perform the task that Blake sets out to accomplish.

I begin with the conclusion of *Jerusalem*, Plate 98, as this marks, according to many Blakean critics, a monumental argument on Blake’s behalf for a visionary experience of divinity:

The Four Living Creatures Chariots of Humanity Divine

Incomprehensible

In beautiful Paradises expand These are the Four Rivers of Paradise  
And the Four Faces of Humanity fronting the Four Cardinal Points  
Of Heaven going forward forward irresistible from Eternity to Eternity

And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright  
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions  
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect  
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine  
Of Human Imagination, 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 varying

According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character  
Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the

Translucence or

Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time & Space  
Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary & they walked  
To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen  
And seeing: according to fitness & order. And I heard Jehovah speak  
Terrific from his Holy Place & saw the Words of the Mutual

Covenant Divine

On Chariots of gold & jewels with 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  
In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah.

(98.24-45).

In the conclusion of *Jerusalem*, Albion awakens and rejoins with his emanation, Jerusalem, and thus the fallen state of the world is healed. The veil of death and generation, the world of organic decay, is torn away, through apocalypse, to reveal divinity “clearly seen / And seeing.” Here, ambiguity, “Fable or Allegory,” is overcome by “Visionary forms dramatic” and “the wonders Divine / Of Human Imagination.”

To date, most readings of *Jerusalem* make reference to Plate 98, whether as a coup de grace of Blake’s visionary endeavor, or as a part of a critique of Blake’s success in producing through poetry a “Perfect” vision of “Eternity.” Damon reads this passage as the last stage of the

mystic's development, a union with God, having come through the dark night of the soul and emerging into the light of divinity. White gives similar praise to Plate 98, although for different reasons:

As to the achievement of the life of vision on universal lines probably the best picture Blake draws of it ... is to be found in the brilliant paean of joy that closes *Jerusalem* ... Such is the consummation of Blake's philosophy of the creative imagination. It is not the union with the ineffable in the spirit of the solitary worshiper ... It is a social redemption, an intercourse of the awakened in visions of eternity. That is the clearest and most express account Blake ever vouchsafed of the great regeneration. (205-206)

In a certain light, White's analysis bridges the critical gap between Damon's mystical interpretation and Frye's archetypal analysis in that White engages in the mystical question but does not agree that there is a predominant mystical characteristic to be found in Blake's poetry and prose, but instead criticizes such a reading in favor of Blake's own self-proclaimed visionary writing. White maintains that, as a mystic, Blake falls short of the traditional description since Blake's writing "is not the union with the ineffable in the spirit of the solitary worshiper." Erdman also reads Plate 98 and the conclusion of *Jerusalem* as the epic's climactic emergence through apocalypse.

For Erdman, Plate 98 is the completion of Blake's visionary world, giving a visual glimpse into the author's own divine imagination: "Without Good and Evil will the new Jerusalem be a tame society? Far from it. This may be 'incomprehensible by Mortal Man,' but there will be 'A Sun of blood red wrath...Glorious ' and occupying no mere spot in the sky but 'surrounding heaven, on all sides around.' And under the illumination of this furious sky, man

with man will converse together ... In William Blake's paradise the intellectual lions and lambs will not exactly lie down together but will roar and bleat at each other in an energetic comradeship ranging over all topics which the Human Imagination can conceive" (486). Erdman notes the apocalyptic undertone of Plate 98, but interprets its presence as the energy of "intellectual" "comradeship," which takes the form of the "Human Imagination" and is therefore a necessary ingredient in the convalescence of the fallen world. Bloom describes an analogous build up to a perfect "vision of contraries prepared for the mental wars of the restored state" (479).

In Bloom's discussion, the climactic Plate 98 signals a perfection of the visionary archetype which Blake strives to communicate through his writing:

Word and vision are one here, with the image evident immediately it is uttered. The mind so directly creating space and time, regenerates even the nonexistence of death, inventing it or destroying it at will. In the presence of a Word altogether humanized, the forms of individuals accomplish that last paradox of being, according to desire, One Man, the perfect freedom of humanistic communion, of dialogue and mutual vision. (480)

Bloom and Erdman maintain that *Jerusalem* successfully concludes with a poetic vision of Blake's fallen world redeemed through apocalypse and ready to engage in "mental wars," all made possible by the divine or "Human" imagination. As with their general discussion of Blake's writing, Bloom and Erdman, preceded by White, leave no room for an interpretation of mysticism, but emphasize the success of Blake's self-proclaimed visionary endeavor in the concluding plates of his last epic poem. However, this critical consensus is challenged in more

recent readings of *Jerusalem*, as illustrated in the discussions of Plate 98 offered by Rainsford, Rothenberg and Miller.

For Rainsford, the conclusion of *Jerusalem* is not a testament to visionary perfection, “Determinate” and “Definite,” but instead it acts as a quick fix to the fallen state of the world: “All in all, the closing pages of *Jerusalem* involve a tremendous tying up of loose ends. Through the implied Blake who narrates the poem, or through Los, or through Albion, Blake suppresses his contraries, incorporates his Emanation, subdues his Spectre ... and engages generally in an allegory of self-perfecting. The violence which Blake had addressed and in which he had vigorously participated, earlier in the poem, is not resolved but comes to be avoided” (91). Rainsford argues that the conclusion contains a latent problem of betraying its own hypocrisy in not adequately dealing with the state of crisis in the fallen world, “to be avoided” by appeals to visions of eternity. In a parallel criticism, Rothenberg claims that perhaps Blake’s intent as an author is contradicted by his own artistic creation: “The possibility that language will escape the intention of its author, that the text will free itself from its supposed referent, that the poem works to sever itself from a determinate context” (49). This notion of predetermining an interpretation of a literary work is discussed above with respect to Blake’s writing, an occurrence that also predefines Blake’s categorization as a visionary poet and not a mystic. However, here Rothenberg challenges not only critics’ predetermining interpretations, but also the intent of Blake himself as the author of *Jerusalem* who, as Rainsford states, “may have taken on more than he can manage” (92-93).

Miller argues that in this climactic sequence there should be found the culmination of Blake’s vision: “If we hope to find the imaginative image in its purest, most transcendent form, it should be here, when the nightmare of history has come to a close and the false garment of

nature has fallen away to reveal the true image of humanity and the human world. An apocalypse of vision, a revelation of eternal images, an imaging of the imagination itself" (162). As with Rainsford and Rothenberg, Miller asserts that Blake's vision is inherently infected with what it seeks to transcend: "While the imagination seeks to overcome the differences and distinctions of fallen perception, a system of oppositions still governs Blake's discourse" (165). Examples of Miller's claim that "a system of oppositions still governs Blake's discourse" can be found on Plate 98, where Blake references elements of the fallen world, after the awakening of Albion:

Circumscribing & Circumcising the

excrementitious

Husk & Covering into Vacuum evaporating the lineaments of

Man

Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death & Resurrection

-----

Where is the Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the Heathen

Where is the Tree of Good & Evil that rooted beneath the cruel heel

Of Albions Spectre the Patriarch Druid! where all his Human

Sacrifices

For Sin in War & in the Druid Temples of the Accuser of Sin: beneath

The Oak Groves of Albion that covered the whole Earth beneath his

Spectre

Where are the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory that grew on

Desolation

The Fruit of Albion's Poverty Tree when the Triple Headed

## Gog-Magog Giant

Of Albion Taxed the Nations into Desolation & then gave the Spectrous

Oath

Such is the Cry from all the Earth from the Living Creatures of the

Earth (98.18-20, 46-54).

Here, its former inhabitants, who question what has happened since Albion has awoken, seem to pine for the fallen world in its startling absence. For Miller, the parts that describe the fallen condition reveal the narrator's dependency upon "a system of oppositions" as well as showing that in divinity the fallen world still remains as an idea and in the imagination.

Miller reads Plate 98 in terms of a tension between an archetypal, idyllic vision of divinity and the language that represents this vision. Miller appeals to a mysticism when he implies that Blake's language inevitably confounds the vision of divinity it seeks to describe. Since Miller claims that if Blake's language fails to express that which cannot be said in words, de Certeau's "unsayable," then he is inadvertently stating that Blake's poetic aim is the ineffable. However, Blake labored to create a vision free from the ineffable, one that illustrates the deception of knowledge through power and manipulation.

Blake, like the mystics de Certeau describes, clearly sees the illness within religion, politics and society in general, but is hard pressed to effectively heal the problem, much in the same way that Los struggles with the fall of Albion. De Certeau discusses the discursive aspect of mystics: "mysticism is less a heresy or a liberation from religion than an instrument for the work of unveiling, within religion itself, a truth that would first be formulated in the mode of a margin inexpressible in relation to orthodox texts and institutions, and which would then be able to be exhumed from beliefs" ("Mysticism" 24). Blake similarly works with the Christian and

Biblical symbolic domains to unveil their corruptions and misrepresentations at the hands of authority. This passage is comparable to Bloom's description of Plate 98 in terms of divine "mental wars," since de Certeau discusses a healthy antagonism with orthodox religion, although de Certeau's *mystics* takes place in the corporeal world whereas the "mental wars" of Blake's vision take place between Divine Imaginations, reconciled from the fallen world. Moreover, de Certeau implies a politics here when he states that knowledge derived from mystical experience is necessarily born on the margins of orthodox religion. Blake distrusts ambiguous or ineffable experiences that either remain on the margins of a conventional norm, as Blake's own poetry did during his lifetime, or become utilized by orthodox "institutions." In chapter 3 of *Jerusalem*, the narrator asks, "Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion / O Demonstrations of Reason Dividing Families in Cruelty & Pride" (57.10-11). Blake also equates science, or "Reason," with "Religion & Politics," all of which have the same institutionalizing, "Dividing...Cruelty & Pride." Furthermore, Blake identifies an institutionalized problem that causes repression even within the literary tradition in terms of the style he uses to write *Jerusalem*.

In the opening preface to chapter one of *Jerusalem*, Blake comments:

When this verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern language of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables...Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race. (Plate 4)

Even Blake's language must be free from the "Fetters [of] the Human Race," "Fetters" that threaten to control every aspect of an individual's life. Similarly, de Certeau's mystics leave the "Fetters" of orthodox religion behind in their pursuit of eternity. Frye claims that Blake's insistence on emancipation, summarized in the statement "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Mans," should be understood "in its context, not identifying the 'I' with Blake, but seeing it as defining a necessary activity of the poetic process. One should never think of Blake as operating or manipulating a 'system' of thought, nor should we be misled by his architectural metaphors to think of his symbolic language as something solidified and crustacean" (*Fearful Symmetry* "Preface"). However, how can the language that supposedly describes a "Definite" and "Determinate" vision of divinity not be "solidified?" Is it not a contradiction endorse the "Definite" vision on the one hand and claim that the language, as the vehicle of representing the vision, cannot structurally fit the vision itself on the other?

I offer a brief expository experiment, before launching into the reading of Plate 45. I take some inspiration from Rothenberg's critical stance in not referencing previous Blake scholarship on names, characters, and Blake's mythic world in general: "I regard virtually all of the commentary on Blake's work as exercises in fixing a fundamentally indeterminate text. I do not interpret...Blake's text by reference to any of the scholarship that tries to create a symbol key" (70n3). I do not completely agree with Rothenberg's critical nihilism in omitting a whole corpus of Blake criticism, although I initially copy her critical design, followed by other potential perspectives and readings of Plate 45.

In terms of the basic plot, if such a description can be applied to any part of *Jerusalem*, Plate 45 takes us into Los' journey through Albion's body:

Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision

Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions  
 Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves  
 Of despair & death, to search the tempters out, walking among  
 Albions rocks & precipices! caves of solitude & dark despair,  
 And saw 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; and there they take up  
 The articulations of a mans soul, and laughing throw it down  
 Into the frame, then knock it out upon the plank, & souls are bak'd  
 In bricks to build the pyramids of Hebar & Terah. But Los  
 Searched in vain: clod from the minutia he walkd, difficult.  
 He came down from thro Hackney & Holloway towards

London

Till he came to old Stratford & thence to Stepney & the Isle  
 Of Leuthas Dogs, thence thro the narrows of the Rivers side  
 And saw every minute particular, the jewels of Albion, running down  
 The kennels of the streets & lanes as if they were abhorrd.  
 Every Universal Form, was become barren mountains of Moral  
 Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend into grains of sand:  
 And all the tenderesses of the soul cast forth as filth and mire.  
 (45.2-21).

At this point in *Jerusalem*, we already know that the state of the fallen world is somehow connected with the figure of Albion and his circumstances because he erroneously ignored “the Divine Vision,” which is variously described in terms of Albion’s sleep, death and other states of unconsciousness.

When the character Los somehow enters “Albions Bosom,” there is an immediate suggestion of a radical physical relation whereby either Los is a miniature creature or Albion is some sort of giant. There are “caves” and “rocks & precipices” within Albion, as well as place names such as London, which hints at an explanation of Albion as the personified figuration of either England or the world. While searching through Albion’s body, Los discovers that some unseen enemy has “degraded & murdered” “every Minute Particular of Albion.” Furthermore, the minute particulars are taken and utilized for the oppression of “mans soul.” Los sees that from “Universal Form” to “minute Particular,” every part of Albion is corrupted from the present crisis. There is nothing here to suggest perfection of vision, nor an ineffable mystical experience. Los bears witness to the devastation and aftermath after Albion turned “his back against the Divine Vision,” which also means that Albion intentionally turns his back on eternity and is consequently responsible for being the catalyst of the state of his fallen body.

Bloom claims that the verse on Plate 45 is some of Blake’s best poetry, and interprets Los’ journey through Albion’s “inner abyss of the mortal self,” as a search for the “alien invaders within man,” only to find that “the irreducible individualities that make up a human, are murdered within man by the hidden Accusers” (Bloom 441-442). Bloom describes Blake’s comments about “Universal Form” as an attack on generalizing practices, whereas Blake favors “only one Universal Form: the Human Form Divine, man as he was and as he might be” (443). However, there is a significant roadblock in the way – “the hidden Accusers,” who have laid

waste to Albion's minute particulars. In other words, as stated above, the vision of eternity is implicitly contradicted by the fallen world, even in idea and imagination.

From another angle, de Certeau discusses the importance of the body to mystics and their experience:

What is the body? Mystic discourse is obsessed by this question. What it focuses on is precisely the question of the body. It haunts the suburbs of the body, and if it enters, it is in the manner of the Hebrews who once marched around Jericho with their trumpets until the city opened of its own accord. The body had not yet been colonized by medicine or mechanics. As a hypothetical model, that enigmatic focal point may be represented by a center, constructed from three points that shift according to variations in their interrelationships. These points represent: (1) an event pole (the surprise of pain, pleasure, or perceptions, which institutes a temporality); (2) a symbol pole (of discourse, stories, or signs, which organize meaning or truths); and (3) a social pole (a network of communications...that institute a 'being there' or an 'inhabiting')."

*(Mystic Fable 80)*

One initial difference here is that de Certeau refers to the sixteenth and seventeenth century whereas Blake wrote at the end of the eighteenth, beginning of the nineteenth century. By Blake's time the body had started to become "colonized by medicine or mechanics," which means that individuals were determined by institutions and definitions that manipulate and the body, in much the same way that religious institutions manipulate the spirit, as Blake often describes in his writing. Plate 45 is an excellent description of de Certeau's hypothetical model.

The model is essentially a representation of the body in the form a triangle. Each focal point, or pole, is a line on the triangle, so as to stress the fundamental relation between each pole. De Certeau does not clarify whether the body is the physical or spiritual (soul), but in its mystical aspect the body is this relation between the event, the symbol of that event, and its communication or responsibility to the community. If Albion is the body, then the pain and lack of perception is the event, the symbol or model of meaning is Blake's verse and mythic world, and the communication is actually a series of communications between characters within the pages of *Jerusalem*. Or, the communication is through the medium of Blake's verse in terms of an availability of the poem for all to read. One of Blake's central concerns is with the relation between knowledge, perception and the manipulation of individuals.

Blake discusses perception as the mode of the reception of knowledge, and the malleability of perception according to different modes of understanding and observation, as described in the following passage from chapter two:

Reuben slept in Bashan like one dead in the valley  
 Cut off from Albions mountains & from all the Earths summits  
 Between Succouth & Zaretan beside the Stone of Bohan  
 While the Daughters of Albion divided Luvah into three Bodies  
 Los bended his Nostrils down to the Earth, then sent him over  
 Jordan to the Land of the Hittite: every one that saw him  
 Fled! they fled at his horrible Form: they hid in caves  
 And dens, they looked at one another & became what they beheld  
 Reuben return'd to Bashan, in despair he slept on the Stone.  
 Then Gwendolen divided into Rahab and Tirzah in Twelve Portions [.]

Los rolled, his Eyes into two narrow circles, then sent him  
Over Jordan; all terrified fled: they became what they beheld.

*(Jerusalem 30.43-54)*

Reuben is one of Los' sons, who in this passage is being awoken by Los, possibly to help in waking Albion. However, Los fails and Reuben constantly returns to "Bashan," only to go to back to sleep. In the meantime, Reuben apparently scares away people, who "became what they beheld," a phrase Blake uses more than once. The phrase, "they looked at one another & became what they beheld" can be read as a comment on the force and vivacity of perception since it is strong enough to influence someone into becoming what they perceive, or "beheld." De Certeau's notion of scientific definition of mysticism in terms of scientific axioms also points to the manipulative power of the perception of eternity as classified by scientific discourse. In the present discussion, we see how definitions of mysticism and vision shape our understanding and reception of Blake's writing.

In the remainder of Plate 30 and the beginning of Plate 31, Blake addresses perception more directly:

If Perceptive Organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary:

If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also:

Consider this O mortal Man! O worm of sixty winters said Los

Consider Sexual Organization & hide thee in the dust.

-----  
Then the Divine hand found the Two Limits, Satan and Adam,

In Albions bosom: for in every Human bosom those Limits stand.

And the Divine voice came from the Furnaces, as multitudes without

Number! the voices of the innumerable multitudes of Eternity.  
 And the appearance of a Man was seen in the furnaces;  
 Saving those who have sinned from the punishment of the Law  
 ... No individual can keep these Laws, for they are death  
 To every energy of man, and forbid the springs of life.  
 (30.55-58, 31.1-6,11-12)

Perception is the key to this passage, in that it makes individuals become what they observe owing to its malleable nature to alter the "Objects" that are seen. Thus, in opposition to individuals becoming what they perceive, perception can also alter the reception of the "Objects" observed. An example may be seen in the comparison of a blind person's and a deaf person's reception and perception of the world. However, Blake is not just discussing physical objects, but also objects of the mind, or ideas such as one's perception of an idea, like the mathematical equation one plus one equals two. The "Two Limits, Satan and Adam" are Biblical perceptions of the two moral extremes good and evil, ideas that reside in "Albions bosom," and within all humanity, the possibility of contraries that emerge in the fallen state in the same way that the female emanation separates from the male in the fallen world. Furthermore, the "Law" hinders the individual's energy through repression and the institutionalization of knowledge, which can only take place through the divisive, mechanistic oppression of the individual through authority, an authority that can be derived from ambiguous sources and claims, such as scripture, mystical experience and the interpretation of both. In terms of whether Blake is a mystic or a visionary, we see once again that it is the danger of open-ended ambiguous interpretation that leads to the possibility of manipulating individuals through the control of institutions. The next passage,

taken from Plate 54, demonstrates Blake's understanding of knowledge and the manipulation of power.

The following passage also serves as a good example of Blake's cosmology:

In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates  
 Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision  
 And the Light is his Garment This is Jerusalem in every Man  
 A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness Male & Female Clothings.  
 And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion  
 But Albion fell down a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurl'd  
 By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man  
 Into his own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man  
 The silent broodings of deadly revenge springing from the  
 All powerful parental affection, fills Albion from head to foot  
 Seeing his Sons assimilate with Luvah, bound in the bonds  
 Of spiritual Hate, from which springs Sexual Love as iron chains:  
 He tosses like a cloud outstretch'd among Jerusalem's Ruins  
 Which overspread all the Earth, he groans among his ruin'd porches.  
 (54.1-14)

In eternity "Male & Female" are one in each other, "Jerusalem in every Man," in a perfect harmony of "Mutual Forgiveness." However, this all changed after the fall, when Albion is described as a rock cast out of eternity by his "own Spectre." In the fallen world, "Memory" is in total chaos in a tension "between Man & Man," owing to conflict and struggle over power and control. Albion bears witness to the fallen state of himself, the world, but is polluted by the same

struggle for power, particularly in an authoritative position of “All powerful parental affection,” which parallels positions of institutions in manipulating individuals, although Albion is here described in a position of influence but does not actually exert that power.

Tossing “among Jerusalem’s Ruins,” Albion observes the twisted developments of the fallen world in the remainder of Plate 54, as described by his “spectre”:

But the Spectre like a hoar frost & a mildew rose over Albion  
 Saying, I am God O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power!  
 Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach Humility to Man!  
 Who teach Doubt & Experiment & my two Wings Voltaire: Rousseau.  
 Where is that Friend to Sinners! that Rebel against my Laws!  
 Who teaches Belief to the Nations, & an unknown Eternal Life  
 Come hither into the Desert & turn these stones to bread.  
 Vain foolish Man! wilt thou believe without Experiment?  
 And build a World of Phantasy upon my Great Abyss!  
 A World of Shapes in craving lust & devouring appetite (54.15-24).

Albion’s spectre describes the problem of “an unknown Eternal Life” that is not observable and should therefore not be believed or trusted. Instead, the spectre implies that the only God is observable through “Experiment,” and therefore declares itself God since it, the spectre, is the “Rational Power” of every individual. Here, we get a direct criticism of the mystical ineffable experience within Blake’s poetry, “A World of Shapes in craving lust & devouring appetite.” I qualify this criticism by stating that although Blake denies the individual ineffable experience, the object or aim of visionary experience is yet the same as the mystical in being in the presence of and experiencing divinity or eternity. In other words, Blake does not necessarily deny the

genuine mystical experience; instead he denies the description and manipulation of experience and knowledge that leads to the institutionalization and control of knowledge itself. We must also not forget Blake's qualification that everyone perceives differently, or has a different and unique perspective and disposition that cannot be homogenized through the "Rational Power" that Blake calls the spectre.

However, if Blake here criticizes the "Rational Power" for being oppressive and divisive through appeal to "Experiment," then the same criticism can be leveled at Blake's argument here since his vision itself appeals to "Doubt & Experiment" by claiming that a vision of eternity must be "Definite" and "Perfect," therefore doubting the existence of divinity and demanding proof in a "Determinate" form. Blake certainly felt the awesome power and responsibility of dealing in prophecy and vision, especially in copying it down through poetic form, as is evident through his constant and consistent insistence on a coherent, clear and distinct vision of an eternity free from an intentional and immoral use of ambiguity and the power of knowledge. It takes one hundred engraved illuminated plates of apocalypse and struggle within Blake's mythic and prophetic epic poem, *Jerusalem*, before reaching this eternity freed from the shackles of "Doubt & Experiment."

Toward the conclusion of *Jerusalem*, on Plate 91, Los addresses and criticizes those individuals who keep Albion asleep and also keep all people manipulated through deceit and an inappropriate use of knowledge and power:

so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole  
 Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized & not as thou  
 O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine is a Disorganized  
 And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War

You smile with pomp & rigor: you talk of benevolence & virtue!  
 I act with benevolence & virtue & get murdered time after time:  
 You accumulate Particulars, & murder by analyzing, that you  
 May take the aggregate; & you call the aggregate Moral Law:  
 And you call that Swelled and bloated Form; a Minute Particular.  
 But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every  
 Particular is a Man  
 ... The Spectre builded stupendous Works, taking the starry Heavens  
 Like to a curtain & folding them according to his will  
 ... Los reads the stars of Albion! the Spectre reads the Voids  
 between the Stars. (91.20-37)

Los describes the “Fiend of Righteousness” as taking “Particulars” and transforming them, “murder[ing] by analyzing,” and then collecting the data and writing it down into what he calls “Moral Law.” A “Minute Particular” that is taken, analyzed and then predefined according to a certain preconceived idea can be compared to de Certeau’s description of *mystics* - the particular mystical experience of an ineffable, “unsayable” union with eternity that is taken and predefined by science and psychology. Similarly, the spectre takes the perception of the “starry Heavens” and transforms it through “stupendous Works” that allow the spectre to take the “Heavens” “Like to a curtain...folding them according to his will.”

The spectre is capable of bending the perception of the “Heavens” since it is through the vehicle of perception that individuals receive their world, and if the understanding of perception is altered, then the perception of the world itself is altered and therefore the understanding of the world is changed. This is the dangerous potential that Blake senses and perceives within the

power of knowledge and in particular knowledge of control and the manipulation of knowledge. Blake similarly distrusts a mystical experience owing to the same potential of manipulating the interpretation and utilization of the experience to the design of control and power. Los' comments here reflect de Certeau's description of the tendency on the part of scientific and psychological fields of study to predefine what the mystical experience is based on the precepts and axioms on which science and psychology are based.

When Los declares, "you talk of benevolence & virtue! I act with benevolence and virtue," he means that the "benevolence & virtue" talked about is not the same as "benevolence & virtue" in action. Similarly, instead of looking at what is there, at the stars themselves, the spectre looks to what is not there in the "Voids between the Stars." In both instances, the deceiver shifts the meaning to their own designs, their own "benevolence & virtue" or understanding of the cosmos, whatever slant is required for the manipulation and control of power is readily available through "Doubt & Experiment." Thus, the answer to "Doubt & Experiment," to the malleability of knowledge and perception, is a transparent and coherent vision that does not allow for ambiguity or potential for use in establishment of power and control through the manipulation of how the world is understood. Moreover, the world that exists throughout most of the plates of *Jerusalem* is reconciled with its fallen state in the sequence of Albion's awakening leading up to Plate 98.

Albion is suddenly awakened:

Her voice pierc'd Albions clay cold ear. he moved upon the Rock  
 The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills, Albion mov'd  
 Upon the Rock, he open'd his eyelids in pain; in pain he mov'd  
 His stony members, he saw England. Ah! shall the dead live again

The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills  
 Albion rose  
 In anger: the wrath of God breaking bright flaming on all sides around  
 His awful limbs: into the Heavens he walked clothed in flames  
 Loud thundering, with broad flashes of flaming lightning & pillars  
 Of fire, speaking the Words of Eternity in Human Forms, in direful  
 Revolutions of Action & Passion, thro the Four Elements on all sides  
 Surrounding his awful Members. Thou seest the Sun in heavy clouds  
 Struggling to rise above the Mountains, in his burning hand  
 He takes his Bow, he chooses out his arrows of flaming gold  
 Murmuring the Bowstring breathes with ardor! Clouds roll around the  
 Horns of the wide Bow, loud sounding winds sport on the mountain

Brows. (95.1-15)

Albion hears England, "Her voice," who is also called Britannia, and slowly begins to wake up, although it is questionable whether he really was asleep since Albion does participate in many dialogues throughout *Jerusalem*, although of course this could be seen as a metaphor for when Albion intentionally turned his back on the "Divine Vision." Albion's awakening is slow, painful and is an intermediary step to the full re-awakening to eternity, described metaphorically as "the Sun in heavy clouds Struggling to rise above the Mountains." Furthermore, Albion seems to prepare himself for some sort of immediate struggle to come, as he sets to getting ready a "Bow" with "arrows of flaming gold." Albion's "Bow" can be interpreted as language itself, especially if we consider a description earlier in *Jerusalem* of "bars of condens'd thoughts" which are forged "Into the sword of war: into the bow and arrow" (9.4-5). In other words, Albion's "Bow" is the power of knowledge and discourse, as he prepares for some conflict to come, but this

conflict is essentially his own fault in turning his back on divinity and causing his own fall out of the "Heavens."

Finally, we come back to where this chapter began, Plate 98, the culmination of Albion's awakening from what Evelyn Underhill calls the dark night of the soul before emerging into the light of eternity. However, as stated above, even the vision of eternity found on Plate 98 is contradicted by continual reference to the fallen world, and as Miller claims is still subject to contraries and the possibility of duality and ambiguity. Blake's program for a visionary poem meets with the same problem found in mystical experience in terms of the "unsayable" on the one hand or a vision of eternity that can be communicated to all individuals on the other. For Blake, the visionary poetic description includes the very trait it attempts to critique in the constant and multitudinous depiction of the fallen world of repression and oppression. Bloom's description, which attempts to consolidate Blake's vision, declares that in eternity everyone will be engaged in peaceful yet rigorous and energetic "mental wars," though this could also be read as Blake's own form of realism where even in the Heavens individuals struggle with each other.

In this chapter, I have discussed certain passages from *Jerusalem* that yield a particular impression of Blake's perspective on the relation between knowledge, vision and the utilization of each in the world. I postulate that for Blake visionary experience is something quite real, real enough to influence the manipulation and control of the world in terms of certain interpretations that lead to the institutionalization of knowledge and the consequent regulation of the individual. Blake understood day-to-day manipulations of knowledge, which led him to try and fuse visionary experience with a responsibility to the social repercussions of describing divinity or eternity to the public. For this reason, Blake is not a mystic, although he is engaged in describing the same divinity that *mystics* seeks to espouse, and *Jerusalem* is most aptly described as

conditionally visionary, depending on which part or plate we read. In this light, Blake is in one respect a visionary while in another a social commentator on political and religious institutionalization and repression. Blake's vision of eternity is in a constant race to keep up with the corruptions of the world, and in this pursuit vision sometimes falls short of its own goal of experiencing or perceiving eternity.

## Conclusion(s)

I began this discussion by claiming that, in accord with recent trends in Blake criticism, a certain consensus of Blake's writing is largely overdue for a critical review, particularly with respect to whether Blake is best described as a visionary or a mystic poet. In response to previous criticisms that label Blake as a mystic or a visionary, I maintain that he is better described as displaying characteristics of both vision and mysticism, and that neither solely defined Blake's writing and ideas. The predominant understanding, as established by Frye, Erdman and Bloom in the mid-twentieth century, describes Blake's poetry and prose as achieving a perfection of vision, described throughout the present discussion. Chapter one demonstrated the variety of Blakean criticism and the shift in critical perspective from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Chapter two offered multiple definitions and descriptions of mysticism and vision, including de Certeau's significant discussion of *mystics*, concluding with a discussion of Blake's own views with respect to his visionary agenda. Chapter three took up an analysis of key parts of *Jerusalem* that illustrate the tension within Blake's poem between a vision of eternity and the fallen world that constantly threatens to pollute divinity.

Blake's understanding of the relation between perception and knowledge leads him to be cautionary in creating his visionary world. He warns the reader constantly of the power of knowledge, particularly the power to manipulate and control through appeal to false ideas. There is an "unsayable" aspect to Blake's ultimate visionary goal, although this is not to say that Blake's writing is therefore meaningless. Blake's poetry and prose is an intricate "aggregate" itself, although Blake's aggregate of characters and dialogues is designed to aid every individual's understanding and not to hinder perception and knowledge. In the end, it is more

fitting to say that Blake is engaged in elements of mystical and visionary experience, as each lend a mutually complementary reading of Blake's sometimes unfathomable and other times transparently coherent writing and ideas.

## Notes

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The term *mystics* is to be distinguished from the nouns mystic and mysticism, described in detail below in chapter two.

All references to Blake's poetry, prose and letters taken from David V. Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). References to Blake's visual art taken from Morton D. Paley's *William Blake: Jerusalem* (New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1991).

This correlation between de Certeau's *mystics* and McQuail's discussion is explained in detail in the next chapter.

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