“Success Will Write Apocalypse Across the Sky”: William Blake
and the Eschatological Performative

by

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Abstract

Writing in an era of apocalyptic speculations and millenarian hopes, the Romantic poet and visionary William Blake made frequent and idiosyncratic use of eschatological themes and imagery throughout his poetry and art. While critics have long recognized the centrality of apocalyptic themes to Blake’s work, opinion has been largely divided as to the precise nature of Blakean apocalypticism. Critical attempts to address the complexities of Blakean apocalypticism have frequently been unable to reconcile Blake's celebration of the polysemous, indeterminate nature of reality with his triumphant vision of divine unity. In this essay, I argue that Blake’s eschatological aspirations are realized precisely through his embrace of multiplicity and his resistance to totalizing systems of normative authority.

Drawing on the work of Blake critic Angela Esterhammer, I contend that Blake’s apocalyptic writing is performative, in that it attempts to linguistically create the eschatological state it ostensibly describes. The goal of this Blakean eschatological performative is to radically transform the state of epistemological, social, and political closure which Blake characterizes as the post-lapsarian condition. Blake’s apocalyptic writing deconstructs the tendency of eschatological speech to calcify into a reinforcement of conventional social structures, while modelling a speech-community in which the fundamental legitimacy of all other subjects is a foundational and inalienable principle. This community, called by Blake “Jerusalem,” is based on an embrace of the Other in which their ineluctable alterity paradoxically forms the basis of a more expansive personal identity. Following Judith Butler’s work on the insurrectionary potential of performatives, I argue that this Jerusalem community has potent political ramifications, as it enables disempowered, marginalized voices to resist hegemonic power-structures and lay claim to an agency denied to them by society-at-large.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Alexander Thomas.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Gillian Dunks, with all my love.

“Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one”
Chapter One

“Behold I Make All Things New”: The Eschatological Performative and the Blakean Apocalypse

In 1794 Richard Brothers, a former Naval Officer from Newfoundland, published the first volume of *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times*, the culmination of three years of purported visionary experience. This work declared itself to be “the first sign of Warning for the benefit of All Nations; Containing with other great and remarkable things not revealed to any other Person on Earth,” (Brothers 1) and announced the coming destruction of London, revealed to be the Babylon of Revelations, the restoration of the Hebrews to Israel, and the imminent spiritual and temporal reign of one Richard Brothers, prophet, “Nephew to the Almighty,” (5) and heir to the throne of David.

Brothers' eclectic mix of Biblical prophecy, genealogical speculations, current events, geopolitical predictions, and visionary self-aggrandizement proved to be extremely popular. Both his sales and his following continued to grow until, in 1795, he was arrested and confined to an asylum in Islington for prophesying the imminent death of George the Third and the dissolution of the British monarchy. The failure of his prophesy to come to pass led to the rapid collapse of his readership and the dissipation of his acolytes. William Sharp, one of his most devoted followers, abandoned him for rival prophet Joanna Southcott, a domestic servant from Devon and self-proclaimed “woman clothed in the sun” of Revelations. Richard Brothers, “the man that will be revealed to the Hebrews as their prince; to all nations as their governor,” (Brothers 12-14) spent the next 30 years in an asylum designing the vestments, flags, and palaces of New Jerusalem, before dying destitute in London on 25 January 1824. (Rix 76-77)
The rapid rise and fall of Brothers' prophetic and literary fortunes was of a piece with the apocalyptic tenor of the time. War, revolution, and rapid scientific and cultural transformation combined to make the last stretch of the long eighteenth century a period rich in eschatological speculation, millenarian hopes, and apocalyptic terrors. Brothers was hardly alone in seeing in the American and French Revolutions a sign of the coming millennium. As M.H Abrams writes, “the later eighteenth century was another age of apocalyptic expectation, when the glory and promise of the American Revolution and, much more, of the early days of the French Revolution, revived among a number of English Nonconformists the millenarian excitement of Milton” (64).

In this climate of revolutionary tumult and millenarian hope, it is of little surprise that Romanticism, the signature literary movement of the period, is steeped in apocalyptic themes and imagery. As Abrams notes, “In many important philosophers and poets, Romantic thinking and imagination remained apocalyptic thinking and imagination” (65). The “characters of the great Apocalypse” which Wordsworth sees immanent in the natural world; the new heaven and new earth that follows the fall of Jupiter in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; the Unitarian Millenarianism of Coleridge's “Religious Musings”; and the nightmarish universal catastrophe of Byron's “Darkness” all illustrate the Romantic tendency to frame personal epiphany, existential anxiety, social transformation, and natural forces in apocalyptic terms. The Apocalypse provided for these writers and poets a language to articulate the emergent possibilities of radical social and spiritual transformation offered by the period, and the vast forces, both sublime and terrible, that accompanied these changes.

While all of the major Romantics worked to some degree with apocalyptic themes, William Blake's work, both poetic and visual, engages most extensively and innovatively with the
apocalypse, refashioning the genre to fit his idiosyncratic poetic and theological needs. From nearly the beginning of his poetic career, Blake identified his poetic project as fundamentally linked with the tradition of apocalyptic prophecy. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* depicts Blake, with great humour and wry irony, as the dinner companion of the Biblical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the implicit heir of their prophetic mantles. It announces the imminent conflagration of the world, liberating it from the constricting limitations of the five senses and leading to a radical expansion of consciousness. “The cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life,” Blake declares, “and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy” (Blake 121). In a flurry of paradoxical wisdom, pugnacious satire and Cockney mother wit, Blake goes on to attack the “errors of all Bibles or sacred codes,” taking particular care to skewer his prophetic rival Emmanuel Swedenborg. At turns hilarious and horrifying, startlingly lucid and stubbornly oblique, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* announces Blake's entry into the popular British genre of Apocalyptic prophecy, a genre he will tackle on his own terms.

This eschatological inclination only intensifies as Blake's poetic career unfolds. His later illuminated works, what are commonly referred to as his “prophecies,” are largely dedicated to the development of Blake's personal mythopoetic system. That system places Apocalypse at the centre of its concerns. Blake's mythology describes the Fall of the Eternal Man from the prelapsarian state of unity and harmony in the bosom of the Divine Humanity. This Fall was initiated by the rebellion of one of the four cardinal elements of the human mind, called by Blake the Four Zoas after the Four Living Creatures that surround the throne-chariot of God in the Book of Ezekiel. Urizen, the rebellious Zoa, represents the rational, objectifying function of the mind, and his drive for dominion drags the three other Zoas into warring chaos and leads to the
construction of the fallen “world of the five senses.” There Urizen strives to establish himself as “One King One God One Law,” (Blake 72) subjugating the shattered wreck of the human soul through totalitarian politics, religious law, and sexual oppression. Urizen in his fallen state represents absolute epistemological closure on every level: political, ideological, sensual, existential, and metaphysical, a bleak, isolated nightmare in which the only virtue is power, the only change is death, and the only love a brutal and joyless war of dominance.

The only hope in a landscape so bereft of possibilities is a radical shattering of this epistemological closure, the end of the world. This apocalyptic transformation is brought about in Blake's mythic account through the efforts of the Zoa Urthona (called in his fallen, or “vehicular” form, Los), who represents the poetic faculty of the Eternal Man. Los, who is identified in turns with Jesus, the Hebrew Prophets, and Blake himself, is depicted as a master architect, constructing out of the ruins of the fallen world a visionary city of art named, in one of Blake's more unfortunate mythic neologisms, Golgonooza. This spiritual city will, at the moment of eschatological fulfilment, replace the fallen world of Urizen and reveal itself as Jerusalem, bride of the Eternal Man and his companion in the eternal creative activity of the Divine Imagination.

Scholarship on Blake has obviously not been blind to the poet's eschatological orientation. “From its beginnings,” writes Steven Goldsmith, “modern Blake criticism has placed apocalypse at the centre of its investigations. We have never moved off that foundation, and for good reason” (135). Much of the credit (and perhaps blame) for this foundation can laid at the feet of Northrop Frye, whose seminal Blake study Fearful Symmetry still casts a long shadow over Blake criticism. Frye characterized Blakean eschatology as a rapturous aesthetic epiphany, the apotheosis of the literary experience. For Frye, Blake's Apocalypse represents the highest level
of literary understanding, what Frye calls the “anagogic” or universal phase of literature. Here “literature imitates the total dream of man, and so imitates the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the centre of its reality... Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic” (Anatomy of Criticism 119). This apocalypse is not social or communal, as Frye consigns community art and myth to an earlier, less sophisticated phase of artistic development, but a private vision of spiritual unity, the revelation of “the inner form of everything” (136). For Frye, the Blakean apocalypse is first and foremost a vision of the inner meaning of poetry, an illuminated and transcendent act of reading. Much as Revelations itself is “the vision of the total meaning of the Scriptures” (Frye Great Code 136), so too is “all of Blake's own art... an attempt to achieve absolute clarity of vision and a beginners guide to the understanding of the archetypal vision of which it forms part” (Fearful Symmetry 418). The apocalypse provides a key to art, the goal of which is to lead the reader back to deeper and deeper realms of aesthetic revelation.

Critical thought on Blakean eschatology can still be defined in relation to the apocalyptic formalism exemplified by Frye's ecstatic vision of literary transcendentalism. Following Frye, critics such as M.H. Abrams, John Beer, and Morton Paley have worked to historicize Blake's imaginative apocalypse, characterizing it as compensation for the disillusioning failure of the millenarian hopes of the French Revolution. Blake moves, says Ostriker, “from a faith in revolution perhaps assisted or exemplified by art to faith in Imagination as that which alone could prepare mankind for its harvest and vintage” (233). Abrams argues that this movement from political radicalism to imaginative vision is paradigmatic of the Romantic era, which saw “a widespread shift in the bases of hope from political revolution to the powers inherent in
human consciousness” (65). Paley, for his part, traces Blake's relation with radical Christian Millenarian Enthusiasm, linking Blake's early apocalypticism with sects like the Methodists and the Wesleyians (Paley 40). While these critics complicate Frye's tendency to see Blake as an atemporal, archetypal poet by rooting him in his concrete sociohistorical context, they ultimately reconfirm his transcendental arc by characterizing Blake's eschatological aspirations as a movement away from history. As Paley argues, the visionary climaxes of Blake's late-period prophecies “suggest Blake's realization that...he had promised apocalypse and millennium in history but had delivered them only within the self” (90).

However more recent scholarship has problematized this transcendent characterization of Blake's work. For critics such as Paul Mann, Tillototta Rajan, David Simpson, and Steven Goldsmith, Blake's insistence on an irreducible individuality, his “fierce materiality,” hostility towards abstraction, and commitment to the deconstruction of totalizing systems are fundamentally at odds with the advancement of formal, humanist Apocalypticism. These aspects of Blake have proved particularly appealing to critics of a deconstructionist or poststructuralist bent. Simpson writes, “Of all the writers I know Blake is... the most open to analysis in terms set forward by Derrida” (13). Mann and Goldsmith have gone so far as to characterize Blake's works as essentially anti-apocalyptic, seeing them as deconstructive acts of resistance against eschatological aspirations and their accompanying investment in a totalizing worldview. “The Book of Urizen,” Mann writes, “asks whether the very forms in which a visionary poet works are not ultimately futile, whether poetic apocalypse is not a contradiction in terms” (61).

Goldsmith sees a fundamental division between the eschatological and political elements of Blake's work, writing, “Blake's political millenarianism paradoxically required a resistance to literary apocalypse.” (139). Blake's commitment to democratic principles necessitated that his
work take on a representational form that “does its work precisely *by blocking apocalypse*” (138).

In short, critical attempts to address the complexities of Blakean apocalypticism have frequently been unable to reconcile Blake's celebration of the polysemous, indeterminate nature of reality with his triumphant vision of divine unity. This division is reflected in the priority given by these critics to differing periods of Blake's work. While for Frye and his fellow humanists, Blake's writing forms a coherent canon, a magnificent architectural whole which reaches its most perfect expression in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, for deconstructionists like Rajan “the late epics represent not a cumulative and climatic literary achievement but a falling off from the more directly political engagement of the early 1790s” (213). Poststructuralist critics do not prize Blake's promise of imaginative redemption; rather, they accentuate his depiction of unredeemed, fallen human life, in all its ambiguities and horrors. As Leopold Damrosch put it, “rather than rhapsodizing about Blake's apocalyptic breakthrough as if it were easily attained, we might dwell instead on the bitter honesty with which he has dramatized the preapocalyptic condition, which may be the only condition we can ever know” (140).

Nevertheless, these prevalent views of Blake's eschatology, namely the humanist, historicist, and deconstructionist, share a common view of the Blakean apocalypse as a fixed, identifiable state, whether that be one of aesthetic rapture, Christ's millenarian reign, or a futile, and dangerously authoritarian, fantasy of unity. However, I contend that for Blake the apocalypse is not a single reified event, imminent in history or the structure of existence, with a self-identical meaning unchanging in any context; instead, it is a perpetual upheaval which upends the epistemological, political, and metaphysical assumptions which make up a world-system. Rather than the end of history, and the imposition of a divine, utopian, and
unchanging order, Blakean eschatology is an embrace of pure, unanticipated contingency, the introduction of previously unimagining possibilities into an apparently closed system of thought. The epistemological closure symbolized by the Urizenic consciousness entirely forecloses the possibility of change or novelty, creating a ceaseless cycle called by Blake “the ratio” in which, as he writes in All Religions are One, one of his first illuminated works, the human mind “stand[s] still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” and [the] universe itself, circumscribed by its predetermined limits, “become[s] a mill with complicated wheels” (2). Standing in opposition to this epistemological calcification is “the poetic or prophetic character” which “sees the infinite in all things” and thus radically expands the circumference of desire beyond the dull round of the familiar, so that “the desire of man being Infinite, the possession is Infinity and himself infinite” (3). This expansion of desire allows for the possibility of change in a previously preordained cosmos\(^1\) shattering the definitional boundaries which order the experiential world in a radical manner characterized by Blake as apocalyptic.

Blake is hardly alone in explicitly characterizing the apocalypse, and the advent of the Kingdom of God, in terms of newness. The entry on “New” in Alan Richardson's Theological Word Book of the Bible notes that “the word 'new' acquires its distinctly biblical meaning whenever it takes on an eschatological significance and implies the passing away of the old order -the present world-age- and the breaking in of 'the new world to come.'” Thus the Old Testament looks forward to the making of a 'new covenant... the imparting of a 'new spirit'... the making of a new heavens and a new earth” (159). Richardson goes on to note that “the New Testament claims that the 'new age' has already broken in and has manifested itself in Jesus and the Church...

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\(^1\) Predestination is one of Blake's particular theological bugbears. See, for example, his annotations to Swedenborg’s Divine Providence, which are largely composed of Blake’s outraged accusation that Swedenborg advocates a defacto post-mortem Calvinism and that “Predestination after this life is more abominable than Calvins & Swedenborg is such a Spiritual Predestinarian” (Blake 610).
the 'New Spirit' has been given... the new creation has been achieved” (159). Biblical scholar Rudolf Bultman argues that this “future of the totally new… the *totaliter alter*” (Bultmann 30) becomes increasingly the primary meaning of the apocalypse in later New Testament writings such as the Gospel of John, rather than a faith in the imminent return and reign of a supernatural Christ. The writer of John, Bultmann claims “demythologized the eschatology in a radical manner” so that “the resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost, and the *parousia* are one and the same event” (33). Consequentially, the apocalyptic faith of the early Christians is reimagined as a “readiness for the unknown future that God will give. In brief, it means to be open to God's future in the face of death and darkness” (31). This, Bultmann argues, is the “deeper meaning of the mythologized teachings of Jesus – to be open to God's future which is really immanent for everyone of us; to be prepared for this future which can come as a thief in the night when we do not expect it” (31). The post-modern theologian John Caputo places this reckless openness to God's unknown future at the centre of what he calls his “theology of the event,” writing, “I pursue the experiment of thinking of God as the source of irregularity, of disordered and displaced orders...God is the force or element in things that interrupts their current drift. If 'nature' means the drift (*dérive*) of what is happening (*arriver*), the 'event' diverts and sets things adrift. The 'event' means what we cannot see coming... The name of 'God' has the effect of setting things on a new course, of making things new – for better or for worse” (34).

This view of the apocalypse, which conflates the Pauline “New Man” with the “New Spirit” of the spiritual Church and the “New Heaven and Earth” of Revelation not only works to immanenitze the eschaton, to borrow Voegelin’s memorable phrase (though without the pejorative connotations he attaches to it), but makes the eschatological utterance a fundamentally *performative* act, to use the term for speech-acts coined by J.L Austin in his 1960's lecture series.
How to Do Things with Words. Performative language theory, as outlined by Austin, distinguishes between two distinct categories of language, what he calls the constative and the performative. Constative language refers to propositions which may judged based on their truth or falsity, while the performative is a mode of speech which attempts to initiate action or change. “The Earth revolves around the Sun” is a constative statement, whereas “pass the salt” or “let my people go” are performative utterances, judged not by their truthfulness, but by their success, what Austin calls “felicity.”(Austin 5). This felicity, in the work of Austin and his immediate successors such as John Searle, is determined primarily by the speaker's social status and/or the positioning of her discourse within the larger political and social structures of society. “I pronounce you man and wife” for example, would only be felicitous if pronounced by a licensed officiant over two people consenting to be married. However, Blake scholar Angela Esterhammer coined the term “phenomenological performative” to describe a specific, poetic genre of speech-act distinct from sociopolitical performativity which refers to “an author's ability to 'create' reality through poetic or fictional utterances, independent of societal conventions but in accordance to literary conventions that ascribe creative (or visionary or prophetic) authority to the speaking voice and elicit the reader's or hearer's assent” (12).

This phenomenological performance gains a particular urgency when uttered in an eschatological context, in which the reality being “created” is not simply an alternative visionary world but a “new heaven and earth” ostensibly ordained by divine fiat. As scholars such as Bultmann and Richardson have argued, this new world is not confined to an indeterminate future but has “already broken in and manifested itself” (Richardson 159) in the here-and-now. Consequently, the apocalyptic utterance gains its performative force from its invocation of this eschatological reality, and its invitation (or demand) for the listener to participate in this
already-manifest new world. It is simultaneously a declaration, a warning, a prediction, and an invocation, calling into being the very state, whether political, spiritual, existential, or all three, which is being ostensibly described. In the Beatitudes, the series of blessings that open the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares, “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Luke 6:20). In doing so, he is inaugurating a new eschatological social order (“the kingdom of heaven”) that not only acts outside of the immediate social order, but in fact annuls and replaces it. In a sense, in the act of declaration, the eschatological performative accomplishes its own apocalyptic promise, imaginatively establishing a radically new society based on fundamental principles of higher justice and love. To this degree, the eschatological performative resembles David Barr's rhapsodic description of what he characterizes as the liturgical nature of the Apocalypse: “The liturgical recital of the Apocalypse becomes a real experience of the Kingdom of God... This is no ephemeral experience. The hearers are decisively changed... They live in a new reality in which lambs conquer and suffering rules” (27).

On the other hand, this eschatological fulfilment is deeply provisional. While Barr may claim that “persecution does not shock them back to reality” (27), the listener still emerges from this apocalyptic rapture to face a world in which Babylon the Great remains unfallen, and death retains his sting. While an apocalyptic pronouncement does in a sense contain its own fulfilment, it also contains what Frank Kermode calls its discomfirmation, the process in which an eschatological hope is disappointed without being discredited, a capacity to which Kermode credits much of apocalypse’s “remarkable resiliency” (8). The power and agony of the eschatological utterance lies in this dual nature, its transcendental victory over time and fate paradoxically coupled with the tragic awareness of its failure.

The Russian philosopher and theologian Nikolai Berdyaev explores this paradox in his
discussion of the creative act, an activity which he views as fundamentally eschatological.
Creative activity, Berdyaev writes in his treatise on eschatology *The Beginning and the End*, “is an end of this world and in its original outburst, it desires the end of this world, it is the beginning of a different world. Creative activity is, therefore, eschatological” (183). Its eschatological quality is, for Berdyaev, simultaneously its performative quality, in that it strives to illocutionarily realize what it ostensibly describes. As Berdyaev rhapsodizes, “the creative activity of Beethoven ought to have led to the whole world's breaking into sound like a symphony” (181). Creative activity, a category in which Berdyaev includes “eros-love and the love that is compassion” (184), overcomes the stultifying, objectifying powers of the world and opens up a new realm of fluid, dynamic possibility. However, this eschatological triumph is tempered by its tragic failure. “A new life does not advance to meet us,” Berdyaev writes. “The transformation of the world does not take place, nor a new heaven and new earth appear” (184).

The tragedy of eschatology, according to Berdyaev, is its need for embodiment. It originates in the noumenal, but it demands concrete expression in the phenomenal. “Within its existence in the world” he writes, “love grows cold, it becomes objectified and it is robbed of its eschatological character. And so it is with everything” (184). This fact, present in the creative act, is all the more achingly true with regards to more direct examples of eschatological speech. The tragedy of the failure of art to liberate us from objectification pales before “one most terrible creative failure, the failure of Christianity, of the work of Christ in the world... There is nothing more horrifying and more gloomy than the objectification in history of that fire which Christ brought down from heaven” (187). This is not to say, Berdyaev is quick to point out, “it was all without meaning and pure loss” (187). All genuine creative acts contain within them the seeds of eschatological transformation, and work to dramatize the tension between the kingdom of the
Spirit, the nouemenal world of pure subject, and the objectifying forces of the phenomenal world. However, this *agon* of noumen and phenomena, though not tragic in the sense that it never succumbs to the inevitability of fate, still plays itself out as all-too-fleeting moments of ecstasy that serve to ultimately heighten the overwhelming sense of failure and loss. “There is nothing more terrible, more hopeless” Berdiaev laments, “nothing more tragic than every act of realization.” (188).

This tragicomic, self-defeating dimension of the eschatological performative does not, however, simply render it a self-referential aesthetic object, a more poignant, less triumphant variant of Frye's apocalyptic sublime, as Harold Bloom suggests when he writes of Romantic apocalypticism: “They failed of their temporal prophecy, but they failed as the Titans did, massive in ruin and more human than their successors” (xv). Instead, as Christopher Burdon writes, “This unveiling is not entirely intellectual or aesthetic. It unleashes action” (7). The new life invoked by the apocalyptic utterance demands to be lived out, a desire that spills into temporal action as millenarian preparation, spiritual cultivation, or revolutionary violence. The eschatological performative works on the sphere of action not through a programmatic schema, but precisely through the longing created by its loss. It is, in effect, an erotic force, a desire with which, as Paul of Tarsus puts it, “the whole creation groaneth” (Romans 8:22).

The nature of this eschatological eros, however, is profoundly difficult to define clearly. While we can agree with Burdon that it “unleashes action,” and has historically inspired a great variety of activity, including mystical asceticism, revolutionary action, social protest, and cultic violence, it becomes difficult to reconcile how a single utterance (the Sermon on the Mount, for example, or the Book of Revelation) can lead simultaneously to revolutionary movements, religious quietism, and reactionary authoritarianism, as it has at various points in history. In other
words, while it is clear that apocalyptic utterances possess a strong illocutionary force, in that they warn, proclaim, denounce, and otherwise act on and move their audiences (a force often personified in the Christian tradition by the movement of the Holy Spirit), it is difficult to discern precisely what *perlocutionary* act, “what we bring about or achieve by saying something” (Austin 108), is being attempted. The conditions of the success of the eschatological performative, their *felicity*, to use Austin's terms, is unclear. This is due to a simultaneous theological and hermeneutic incommensurability of the address.

As Berdyaev outlines, there is a fundamental incommensurability between the “Kingdom of Heaven” invoked in the eschatological utterance and the dominant sociopolitical context. The Kingdom is not merely a new social system, or the reassumption of a previous ideal sociopolitical order, but represents the incursion of the absolutely new into a moribund world-system, and so requires, among other things, a complete linguistic revolution, in which words such as “time,” “death,” “meek,” and “kingdom” are unmoored from their conventional meaning and made strange and unfamiliar. The eschatological performative attempts a definitive break with its sociopolitical context, challenging not only the dominant social compact, but the epistemology and hermeneutics from which it derives its authority. As Derrida observes, “[i]t is a challenge to the established receivability of messages and to the policing of destination, in short, to the postal police or the monopoly of posts” (160). Apocalyptic utterances, teeming with visionary grotesqueries, gnomic warnings, symbolic figures and impossible social orders, present a daunting hermeneutical challenge to the would-be interpreter. Obscurity is part and parcel of prophetic authority, pointing as it does to its origin in an incomprehensible divine future, seen, as St. Paul would have it, “through a glass, darkly.” As Burdon writes, the apocalypse is “the disclosure of hidden knowledge. This knowledge... derives from the Creator himself, and the
visionary – like Isaiah in the divine council or Ezekiel seeing the chariot – is being admitted to the thoughts of God. But the knowledge is fragmentary and the books are sealed, awaiting (in their fictional world) the perfect reader who will possess the divine wisdom required to share the vision” (9). Apocalyptic texts are simultaneous veilings and unveilings, purported divine revelations that serve to baffle as much as they illuminate, and whose promise of perfect wisdom is linked inextricably to their thwarting of conventional interpretive strategies. “Whatever hermeneutical strategies one tries to adopt” Burdon writes of the Book of Revelation, “the text persists in destabilizing the alert reader” (8). While this destabilization is key to eschatological speech's transformative power, as its stubborn inability to be easily absorbed into conventional hermeneutic systems allows for the possibility of articulating genuine novelty, it proves problematic when analyzed in context of its performative nature, which is usually seen as gaining its force from conventional structure. Austin stresses the crucial role of social convention in the potential felicity of performative addresses. In outlining the conditions of performative success, he writes: “There must exist a certain conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances” (14). If this condition is not met, or the conventional authority is not recognized by the participants, “our performative utterance will be (in one way or another) unhappy” (15). A clear difficulty arises when dealing with the eschatological performative which purports to inaugurate a new world-order incommensurate with even the basic organizational principles of the dominant sociopolitical system. It claims to bring an end to time and history, the very conventions, precedents and community consensus upon which the Austinian performative rests.

Historically, this paradox has traditionally been resolved through the creation of what could
be called an eschatological community, an interpretive community which strives to make sense of the address, in which the impossible demands of the eschatological performative can be made comprehensible and, in some form, felicitous (or, to use the Biblical term, “Blessed”), if only in a symbolic or ritualized form. This community is, as Bultmann notes, traditionally embodied by what the New Testament calls the *ecclesia*, the assembly of the faithful, both actual and ideal, which claims to be “the eschatological community of the elect, of the saints who are already justified and are alive because they are in Christ” (Bultmann 32). In order to regulate the interpretive norms that govern this community or communities, a body of literature that models a felicitous response to the eschatological performative is required. The Acts of the Apostles, a hagiographic account of the formation of the primitive Christian community centred around the Apostolic mission of Paul of Tarsis, is a classic example of this process. The Book of Acts, which could just as easily be named the Speech-Acts of the Apostles, is the record of a formative series of felicitous and infelicitous eschatological performatives following the death of Jesus. This process is exemplified by the story of the Feast of Pentecost, the inaugural moment of the apostolic ministry. Here, as in the rest of Acts, illocutionary force is personified through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, who manifests through the miracle of the gift of tongues: “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of [the apostles]. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:2-4). This inrush of divine illocution leads to a triumphant eschatological pronouncement by the Apostle Peter, who declares that “the Sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts
This speech leads, after a great deal of hand-wringing on the part of the repentant audience, to the remarkable addition of “about three thousand” new believers to the ranks of the Twelve. This moment of miraculous conversion is followed immediately by a description of the new community created in response to the eschatological performative: “All who believed were together and had all things in common: they would sell their possessions and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:44-46).

This movement from eschatological speech-act to egalitarian community organizing is repeated over and over throughout Acts, forming one of the central narrative threads of the book. In effect, Acts provides the reader with a paradigmatic response to the eschatological addresses' in the work, providing a conventional framework in which the otherworldly demands of the apocalyptic speech-act can work concretely within a sociopolitical context. Felicitous sermons lead to the swelling of the Christian community, which continues to operate, we are assured, on strictly egalitarian grounds: “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as had any need” (4: 34-35). It is crucial that part of the hermeneutical structure offered by Acts, and the interpretive community that it represents, is a communitarian social praxis, a way of living which emerges from and somehow makes sense of the eschatological utterance. Interpreting the eschatological “reality” invoked by the Pentecostal declaration, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the Book of Revelation, requires, in the view of the Book of Acts, more than an exegetical gloss, but necessitates participation in a new kind of society, a new mode of Being. As Berdyaev writes, “The Kingdom of God, the seeking of which is the essence of Christianity, is not only the saving of separate souls, but also a spiritual society,
a communion of men. It is social in the metaphysical sense of the word” (214).

This modelling of felicitous and infelicitous eschatological speech-acts in the Book of Acts points both to the radical and reactionary elements of apocalyptic speech. On one hand, the hermeneutic challenges of eschatological language, the struggle to assign meaning to a purported divine announcement which transcends the conventional boundaries of social convention, religious and political authority, and even language itself opens the door to radical rethinkings of social and religious structures, as evidenced by the egalitarian communities of Acts and the challenges recorded throughout it, the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles to community boundaries, taboos, purity laws, sexual and social roles and hierarchy. Though not all of these challenges were, of course, successful, and a great deal of St. Paul’s efforts were devoted to containing some of the more revolutionary possibilities of the Christian kerygma, such as gender equality, their presence as part of the debates of the nascent Christian community points to the profound possibilities for social change initiated by the eschatological announcement of the Kingdom.

On the other hand, we see in Acts the beginning of a structure of codification that assigns a definite meaning to eschatological speech, and as such threatens to rob it of its disruptive, transformative capacity. The creation of a community to interpret and enact the eschatological performative, while necessary in making sense of the declaration, also solves the hermeneutic vertigo to which the eschatological performative owes its uniquely radical character. The Acts of the Apostles does not merely model felicitous and infelicitous moments of eschatological speech, but is also a community history, a hagiographic account of the founding of the primitive Christian Church, told from the perspective of Pauline Christianity. As such, the egalitarian groups created in response to the Apostolic mission are not merely spontaneous responses to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, but refer to specific communities, already established by the time
of Acts' writing, with pre-existent conventions, theologies, and hierarchies. The apocalyptic
declarations of Jesus or Peter are not received as incommensurable encounters with divine reality,
but as mythical foundation points which confirm the authority and legitimacy of the Christian
Church. The eschatological demand is answered in the institutions and rituals of the Church,
interpreted and fulfilled in perfect felicity by liturgy and theology. As Bultmann writes, “[i]n the
sacramental church, eschatology is not abandoned but is neutralized in so far as the powers of the
beyond are already working in the present” (24).

This shift of millenarian expectation to an Augustinian ecclesiastical City of God, in
which the apocalypse is hermeneutically resolved and the eschatological utterance has
successfully become, in the Austinian sense, entirely conventional speech, brings us back to
Berdyaev’s lament concerning the tragic fate of the noumenal in phenomena: “It must be
emphatically recognized that failure is the fate that awaits all embodiments of the creative fire, in
consequence of the fact that it is in the objective world that it is given effective realization.
Which stands at a higher level, St Francis of Assisi himself... or the Franciscan Order which he
founded and in which his spirit has been extinguished and the dull commonplace routine has
triumphed? Which reaches the higher level, Luther and the flaming religious drama that was his
experience, or the Lutheran Church which he founded, with its pastors and theologies of the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among whom rationalism and moralism flourished
victoriously?” (185-186). While one does not necessarily have to agree with the hierarchical
value judgement which Berdyaev places on this shift, the fact remains that the entrance of
eschatological speech into history inevitably changes the nature and meaning of the language,
making a social convention out of the purported end of conventional society.

However, eschatology's core longing “to explode the continuum of history,” as Walter
Benjamin put it, leads to an ineluctable instability at the heart of eschatological communities. They are fundamentally transitory and provisional, hostile to their own entrance into history, and resistant to assimilation into the dominant narrative. In apocalyptic typology, temporal power structures, whether political or ecclesiastical, are always Babylon, always the persecutors of the true community of God. While religious authorities such as Augustine have attempted to nullify this eschatological instability by defining the Kingdom of God as being identical with the institution of the Church, there remains in eschatological discourse an ungovernable deconstructive seed that yearns for a fuller, more encompassing fulfilment, and that threatens to raze any systems that work to dull that longing.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the apocalyptic writing of William Blake is profoundly engaged with these tensions between sociopolitical convention and the revolutionary possibilities of apocalyptic speech. Blake's poetry operates in a sociopolitical and linguistic landscape in which the language of apocalypse is a familiar trope, a conventional form of address that can be employed to lend force to religious, moral, and political proclamations of every stripe. As such, Blake is extremely conscious of how the language of apocalypse, if employed unreflectingly, can serve to reinforce the very systems of power that it purportedly condemns. Clearly, Blake could not accept the unproblematic association between the spiritual ecclesia of the apocalyptic new life and the institutional structure of the English or Roman Church assumed by the orthodox theologians of the day. Neither did he advocate the creation of an alternative, nonconformist ecclesiasia more in line with his own theological inclinations, as his disillusionment with the then-emergent Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem illustrates. While Blake did attend the first General Conference of the New Jerusalem Church in England in 1789 (his signature is on the guest book Rix 78), he savagely attacks Swedenborg in Marriage, writing,
“Swedenborg has not written one new truth... he has written all the old falsehoods” (43). In his later writings, Blake more sympathetically characterizes Swedenborg as “the Samson shorn by the Churches” (111), implying that the “old falsehoods” are less Blake's specific theological disagreements with Swedenborg (of which he had plenty) and more the codification of Swedenborg's individual visions into an official church doctrine.

None of this is to say, however, that Blake is concerned primarily with an interior, individualistic apocalypse that transcends social or political relationships. Recent scholarship from critics like Richard Sha, Christopher Hobson, and Sari Makdisi have convincingly highlighted Blake's fundamentally communitarian orientation, effectively challenging the still-common conception of Blake as the epitome of the solitary artist, the lone prophet whose single-minded commitment to his singular vision isolated him in the lonely tower of his own genius. As Makdisi points out, Blake advocated a model of existence in which “joy is not the property of a private self sealed off from an outside public sphere. It is, or rather it ought to be, the basis of community” (xiv). This Blakean eschatological community, however, is not a separate institutional religious or political polis. Unlike comparable figures like David Brothers or Gerrard Winstanley, the seventeenth century mystic and political activist whose theology bears many striking resemblances to Blake's, and whose visionary career culminated in the publication of England's first communist manifesto, *the New Law of Righteousness*, Blake's writing is entirely devoid of concrete political or social programs. Instead, Blake focuses on the structural basis of community, which he locates in language, and to which he assigns a simultaneous social and epistemological function. Genuinely apocalyptic speech for Blake requires not merely the creation of a new community, which inevitably calcifies into an institutionalized and authoritarian system, but on radically altering the conventions by which
speech is felicitous in a social sphere. Specifically, Blake advocates a movement from an
Austinian model of social convention, in which speech acts are regulated by a preexistent
structure of normative authority, to a more egalitarian speech community predicated on a
rigorously intersubjective mode of social interaction based on a radical recognition and
affirmation of the Other. In this way, Blake's project is of a piece with the broader work of
speech theorists of the Romantic period, for whom “among the effects of every speech-act is, at
least potentially, the founding of new conditions according to which speech does act”
(Esterhammer 17).
Chapter Two

“Break this Heavy Chain”: Eschatological Failure in *The Songs of Experience*

As we have seen, for William Blake the Apocalypse represents a radical, idiosyncratic expansion of human possibility. “Then the last judgement begins” he writes, “and it's Vision is seen by the Imaginative Eye of Every one according to the situation he holds”(554). Blake's attraction to apocalyptic language stems from its hermeneutically destabilizing potential, its capacity to disrupt dominant narratives and social mores while pointing to radical new social, epistemological, and ontological possibilities. Eschatological speech invites us to recognize that our social, linguistic, and epistemological boundaries are provisional, to imagine a world in which the margins form the centre, power gives way to love, and the separation between human and the divine is eroded. It is a call to a new kind of community, one not beholden to the tyrannies of necessity and convention.

However, by Blake's time, traditional eschatological language already fit into a long and rich interpretative tradition, beginning with texts such as Revelation and Acts which operated in part, as Goldsmith observes, as “act[s] of community formation in line with the incipient institutionalization of the Church...[which] function to create and even to impose the universal and metaphysical consensus in Christ that it claims to transcribe” (20), and in which “the unwieldy multiplicity of voices, the stubborn persistence of difference in history, society, and language... must be terminated in order to legitimate the unified image a new social order claims for itself” (20). This hermeneutic closure, which repurposes eschatological speech to serve the ready-made needs of Church and State authorities, and which de-claws its disruptive,
revolutionary potential by abstracting or aestheticizing its millenarian promises, was particularly active in Blake's time as a way of discrediting the apocalyptic claims made in support of the American and French Revolutions. As Goldsmith writes, “by the time Blake inherited and reworked an understanding of Revelation as a uniquely powerful text, the aestheticization of prophecy and apocalypse had rather effectively served the interests of state apologists” (109).

Blake viewed this foreclosure of the revolutionary potential of apocalyptic language, in which eschatology becomes appropriated and subsumed into discourses of power, as symptomatic of a larger postlapsarian condition rooted in the mythical Fall of language itself. Leonard Deen notes that the Fall in Blake's later prophecies is explicitly linked to a collapse of discourse: “Zoas separated from their Emanations – the power to reveal themselves to others – can no longer converse; their fall is a fall of speech” (Deen 17). In this postlapsarian landscape, speech is no longer a medium of communication and is instead a tool of power wielded by what John Jones terms the “monologic Selfhood” who “both alienates himself and herself from others and uses discursive practices to coerce others into sharing his or her point of view. Instead of several points of view engaged in dialogue, one point of view is monologically maintained as the only acceptable one, and all others are suppressed.” (16). The felicitous result of this monologic speech-act is the establishment of a social institution which “presents and maintains a single monologic viewpoint as a consolidation of abstract, single consciousness, and... then forces each individual member of that institution to deliver the same monologue” (16).

This dynamic reflects what Esterhammer characterizes as “Blake's increasingly self-conscious awareness of creation as, essentially, a speech act” (191). In Genesis, the world comes into being through the Word, is summoned forth through a series of ideal performatives in which the naming of a thing (“God said, let there be light”) leads to its immediate manifestation
(“and there was light”). However, for Blake, this creative process is not ex-nihilo, but interpersonal, and requires the constant negotiation of an intersubjective language-world. The image of the solitary Creator-God, creating worlds from the void, is overwhelmingly negative in Blakean mythology, associated as it is with the demiurgic power of Urizen, and its very attempt at an extra-social phenomenological performative is an act of tyranny, an attempt to force the world to conform to one series of inflexible, self-identical labels: “One King, One God, One Law.” As such, the role of the visionary poet is not to reiterate the Urizenic error and set her or himself up as a private god of their own poetic microcosm, but to work within the communal body of the language-world to deconstruct and refashion it, “Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems” (653). As Esterhammer observes, Blake recognizes that “[w]hile it is possible for new speech acts to supercede the old, there seems to be an ultimate awareness that our language cannot supercede the forms of sociopolitical discourse altogether; that performative utterance, as we know it, derives its power from convention and consensus; that a new vision must come to terms with an old language” (213).

The challenge, then, lies in pointing the way towards a new model of convention and consensus that is not merely a novel reiteration of the old Urizenic structure. To this end, Blake spends much of his work studying the manner in which eschatological speech acts in a sociopolitical setting, and assessing the conditions of its felicity and infelicity. The purpose behind Blake's use of eschatological speech is two fold. First, it attempts to deconstruct the manner in which conventional modes of apocalyptic address act to reinforce sociopolitical power structures and ideological constructs. Secondly, it points towards a mode of eschatological speech whose felicitous reception would prove genuinely transformative. This is not simply a matter of advancing an alternative theological system that Blake finds more appealing.
Conventional religious terms become profoundly problematic in an age in which the Divine is not taken to signify a solidarity with the marginal and oppressed, but instead, as Blake puts it, “God is only an allegory for Kings & nothing else” (659). In the Austinian model of performative language, any speech act relies for its potential felicity on an interpretive community that can understand and act on its imperative. For Blake's work to be anything other than the “Voice of one, calling in the wilderness,” or the gibberings of an ecstatic madman or holy fool as Blake has often been impugned, both in his time and ours, it needs to point towards an interpretive community in which it can be comprehended and acted upon, two processes which Blake held to be near synonymous (“Truth can never be told so as to be understood and not believ’d” (Blake 38)). As we have previously argued, this interpretative community should not be construed as a new religious or political institution, a First Church of St. William Blake as it were, but rests in changing the very conditions of linguistic felicity from the fallen model of monologic authoritarianism which works to foreclose all political, interpersonal, and epistemological possibilities unforeseen by normative, hegemonic social structures. In this way, Blake's eschatological aspirations dovetail with Judith Butler's contention that culture, even at it's most fundamental ontological and epistemological level (she famously makes this argument about gender, but Blake would apply it to all of our ontological assumptions) relies on its continual performance by its members in order to sustain itself, an act which is in many ways performed unconsciously, as “[t]he tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production.” (Butler 523). As such, while the individual performance of specific actions are required for upholding the collective social fiction, “[t]here are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all.”
Consequentially, “[t]he transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions” (Butler 526). For both Blake and Butler, social change necessitates the transformation of the conditions of felicity, the conventions, either explicit or hidden, by which speech is not only successful but even comprehensible.

In light of this, Blake places careful emphasis on the social context in which eschatological utterances act. Blakean eschatological performatives are distinguished by their placement within the larger narrative or lyrical context of Blake's poetic works. While traditional works of apocalyptic writing, and the contemporary writings that emulated them, presented their eschatological appeal as a direct address to the reader, using a framing narrative primarily as a way of establishing the prophetic authority of the alleged author, Blake embeds his apocalyptic proclamations in mythopoetic narratives and lyrical character studies. We are not presented with a remote, universally authoritative “word of God,” but instead each prophetic pronouncement is linked to a distinct character and has a specific place and function within the narrative. The “Song of Liberty,” for example, which serves as the centrepiece of America, and functions magnificently as a poem in its own right, is not a stand-alone prophetic proclamation, but a decisive move in the battle between Orc, the spirit of Revolution, and Albion's Angel, or guardian spirit (depicted in an earlier draft as a demonic caricature of George the Third). This performative duel, an epic, mythologized version of Skaldic flyting or a hip hop freestyle battle, has dramatic, transformative effects on the world of the poem, the nature of which will be examined in greater detail presently. The eschatological performative, and the sociopolitical performatives that are marshalled in opposition to its apocalyptic power, have clear diegetic function within the poem. Each has a felicity or an infelicity (or some measure of both) within
the text itself, and can be examined as a self-contained literary performative. However, it simultaneously has an extra-diegetic effect as well. It is a prophetic appeal to the reader, as well as a narrative event in the poem, and works to expose both the prevalent conditions of performative felicity in the fallen world, and to model those of the eschatological speech-act. As such, the degree of felicity or infelicity of the performative in the poem itself acts as a lens through which we can examine the potential extra-diegetic effect of the speech-act. If this eschatological performative is infelicitious, as it so frequently is, an examination of its diegetic failure can give an idea of the potential terms of its extra-diegetic felicity.

This failure of the eschatological performative is a central concern of Blake's early illuminated work. As Esterhammer points out, “Experience... is a state of failed speech acts” (136). The *Songs of Experience* opens with a rousing call to the Earth by a prophetic “Bard” to shake off its state of spiritual slumber and emerge renewed from the grave of its Selfhood. “O Earth O Earth return!” the Bard treats, “Arise from out the dewy grass; night is worn,/ and the morn/ Rises from the slumberous mass.” However, this entreaty proves woefully ineffectual, as in the accompanying “Earth's Reply,” the personified planet remains in a state of darkness and imprisonment: “Earth rais'd up her head./ From darkness dread and drear. Her light fled;/ Stony dread!/ And her locks covered with grey despair.” Esterhammer writes in her analysis of the poem: “In this world of Experience, even inspired language fails to provide a reliable transition between writing and action; ironically it is when the Bard takes on a self-consciously prophetic role and seeks to convey an urgent message that structures of dialogue and referentiality begin to fail, making communication difficult and unreliable” (141). While in *Innocence* there is a happy identity between sign and signifier, speaker and audience (“I a Child and Thou a Lamb/ We are both called by his name”) which guarantees near-perfect felicitous addresses, in *Experience* this
identity breaks down. While we recognize the Voice of the Bard as a performative demand, (“O Earth O Earth return!”), it becomes very difficult to discern what an appropriate perlocutionary response would be. The terms of the request itself are paradoxical, as the Bard demands the Earth to “Arise from out the dewy grass,” essentially asking the Earth to arise from the Earth. This baffling request can be in part explained by the slippage of addressee between the Earth and the “Lapsed Soul,” whose spiritual nature can presumably allow for such an act of self-transcendence, but the ambiguity still renders the utterance vague and abstract. As Bloom writes, “What the Bard urges is what ought to be, but Earth can no more arise ‘from out’ the grass than man's ‘lapsed soul’ can rise from the 'slumberous mass' of his body” (131).

The result of this impossible request is not only a failure but also the absolute inversion of the illocutionary goals of the Bard's utterance. The Earth gazes up, and is petrified by horror and despair. The reasons for this failure are attributed in the poem to the prohibitive presence of “the father of ancient men”:

Prison'd on watry shore
Starry jealousy does keep my den
Cold and Hoar
Weeping o'er
I hear the father of ancient men
Selfish father of men
Cruel selfish fear
Can delight
Chain'd in night
The virgins of youth and morning bear. (18)

This Urizenic patriarchal jailer represents the sociopolitical linguistic context that negates the Bard's eschatological utterance. It is our introduction to the world of *Experience*, a sinister landscape of political power, sexual coercion, and priestly authority in which speech-acts are not joyful acts of shared creation, as in *Innocence*, but exercises in institutional control and personal power. In the world of *Experience*, as John Jones writes, “power is built and maintained by
social institutions through monologic, self-closed discourse. As abstract entities that cannot be addressed, they issue laws governing ordinary human conduct, enforce them strictly, and refuse to respond to questions about their laws” (46). Language, in this context, is a power game, a method of asserting dominance and establishing authoritarian pedigree. Seen from this perspective, the Urizenic principle is less the outward manifestations of authority as encountered in the institutional power of Church and State, and more the underlying interpretive community that allows the pronouncements of these institutions to be socially effective, and which disempowers competing claims of authority. This Urizenic model of language dramatizes some of the more sinister implications of performative theory, that as the power of language is socially constructed, it is consequentially capable of being wielded successfully solely by those already socially empowered.

Stanley Fish, in his essay “Interpreting the Variorum” defines interpretive communities as “made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine what is read rather than, as is assumed, the other way around” (483). While Fish employs this concept in order to articulate a polysemous, reader-responsive approach to literature, in which the “only stability, then, inheres in the fact that interpretive strategies are always being deployed, and that means that communication is a much more chancy affair than we are accustomed to think it” (484), a more disquieting authoritarian implication lurks under this free-flow of interpretive strategies. Fish's first example of an interpretive community is contained in St. Augustine's “rule of faith,” “which is, of course, a rule of interpretation” (483). This rule postulates that “everything within Scripture, and indeed in the world when properly read, points to (bears the
meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake. If only you should come upon something which does not at first appear to bear this meaning... you are then to take it 'to be figurative' and proceed to scrutinize it 'until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced.'” Fish sees this as “both a stipulation of what meaning is and a set of directions for finding it, which is of course a set of directions – of interpretive strategies – for making it, that is for the endless reproduction of the same text” (483, emphasis mine). What Fish fails to account for, however, is that the inextricable intersection between the Augustinian interpretive model and the institutional apparatus of the Church which Augustine was instrumental in solidifying. One of the practical ramifications of the Augustinian exegetical strategy was to suppress the varied voices of the Biblical writers, whose identification, both then and now, has been crucial for articulating alternative approaches to Scripture and Christianity as a whole, into a single, univocal proclamation of the ecclesiastical City of God. In other words, the “endless reproduction of the same text” is simultaneously the endless reproduction of the institution that derives its authority from a predetermined reading of that text, and the consequent delegitimization of any competing interpretations, labelling these readings either incomprehensible or heretical. More disquietingly, by locating the meaning of texts entirely outside of themselves, Fish leaves little room for the possibility of a work or utterance to disrupt the consensus of the interpretive community, leaving the possibility of change solely in the hands of a nebulous process in which “[i]nterpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another”(484), though how precisely this process occurs remains unclear.

Bourdieu makes this connection between interpretive communities and authoritative structures explicit, positing institutional sanction as the central (or, indeed, sole) condition of
performative felicity. In Bourdieu's critique of Austin's attempts to find “in discourse itself... the keys to the efficacy of speech,” he writes: “By trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically, by looking at language for the principle underlying the logic and effectiveness of the language of institutions, one forgets that authority comes from outside… Language at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it” (109). Felicity, then, depends entirely on the authority of the speaker, or in his or her recognized right to legitimately represent that authority. Language in this view is reduced to the rote reinscription of power, in which dissenting voices are automatically and decisively excluded from effectively operating in the public sphere.

While the absolutism implicit in this position has been challenged by critics, most notably (for our purposes at least) by Judith Butler, who questions the sharp division between legitimate and illegitimate authority and suggests that there are points in which an utterance “calls into question the established grounds of legitimacy, where the utterance, in fact, performatively produces a shift in legitimacy as an effect of the utterance itself” (147), a vital point which we will be returning to presently, the fact remains that this seemingly absolute dependence of performative language on institutional sanction to be felicitous, or even comprehensible, is an accurate description of the daunting challenges faced by the Blakean visionary prophet when trying to effect change in the postlapsarian world. The overcoming of the profound epistemological closure which is for Blake the fundamental goal of eschatological speech becomes exceedingly difficult when the language-world which the speaker is trying to transform is not only deeply invested in maintaining this closure, but in fact relies on it in order to define even a basic sense of self identity. As Butler observes, “to become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be
legible as the speech of a subject” (133). To violate these conventions is not only to risk incomprehensibility, but “to risk one’s status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech. 'Impossible speech' would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the 'psychotic' that the rules which govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted” (133; emphasis in original). This spectre of psychosis, which labels the speaker not only as incoherent, but as a subject definitionally incapable of producing legible speech, is particularly resonant when discussing Blake, whose only public exhibition was lambasted by critic Robert Hunt as "the ebullitions of a distempered brain" produced by "an unfortunate lunatic" (cited in Frye 122). To attempt the “impossible” performative of the eschatological utterance is not only to risk incoherency, but threatens to banish the speaker entirely from the realm of the speakable. “Vision,” Esterhammer observes, “is possible within the world of experience, yet discontinuous with that world” (144).

However, this is not to characterize the Bard's address as a well meaning but ultimately quixotic attempt to invoke a visionary reality which is ultimately incommensurate with the world's “dull round,” as many of Blake's critics, such as Erdman, Grant and Gleckner have done, often conflating the struggles of the Bard to express his vision in the world of Experience with Blake's own prophetic despair. Insufficient attention has been paid to how the illocutionary failure of the utterance is built into the Bard's speech itself. Towards the end of his address, the Bard sings “Turn away no more/ Why wilt thou turn away?” apparently presupposing that his demand will fail, that his audience will “turn away” from his prophetic call for spiritual transformation. While Jones argues that this is an indication of the Bard's commitment to a dialogic model of discourse, stating that “the Bard incorporates the Earth's silent rejection as an
interruptive response to his own discourse” (53), the Bard's failure to engage with the genuine
spoken dialogue found in the “Earth's Response” and his implication that the fallen state of the
Earth is due to her own intransigent will rather than the oppressive power of the “selfish Father
of Men,” as the Earth herself claims, renders this reading somewhat unconvincing. Instead, this
move seems to indicate a shift in genre from eschatological performative to lament, a form of
speech long recognized by Blake critics as characteristic of the postlapsarian state. Deen gives
“lament” pride of place in his catalogue of characteristically Fallen modes of speech, a list which
includes “lament, lie, dissimulation, self-deceit, amnesia, paramnesia, [and the] struggle for rule
and dominance” (17). The genre of lament takes the failure of the address as one of its
constitutive elements. Francis Landy, discussing the Biblical use of laments, writes, “The
discourse attempts to explain, illustrate, and thus mitigate the catastrophe, to house it in a
familiar literary framework; it must also communicate its own inadequacy. Its success, in a sense,
depends upon its failure” (329). However, while Landy argues that the Biblical lament uses this
failure to point to the necessity of renewal, Blake's use of the genre points to a far more insidious
possibility, that the failure inherent in the lament can be used to foreclose the very possibilities
for transformation it seems to suggest.

*The Book of Urizen*, Blake's mythopoetic origin story of the Sovereign Self, is primarily
concerned with Urizen's attempt to deny the destabilizing diversity of Being through the
imposition of a single, normative standard of universal judgement, “One command, one joy, one
desire/ One curse, one weight one measure/ One King, one God, one Law.” Key to this Urizenic
system of control, however, is the constitutional inability of living beings to successfully submit
to this standard, even if they were willing to do so. As Urizen realizes to his horror, “no flesh nor
spirit could keep/ His iron laws one moment” (256). Jones writes, “[b]ecause Urizen's laws
represent his own, singular perspective, others cannot possibly live in accordance to them…

Urizen's sons and daughters are cursed because his iron law enforces his perspective and forbids all dialogue that would allow all perspectives to flourish” (109). However, rather than negating the power of Urizen's laws, this failure of the system gives birth to a whole regulatory body of laws and religious prohibitions which exploit the guilt and shame caused by the failure to live up to Urizenic standards of purity: “drawing out from his sorrowing soul/ The dungeon-like heaven dividing/ Where ever the footsteps of Urizen/ Walked over the cities in sorrow/ Till a Web dark and cold, throughout all/ The tormented elements stretch'd... And all call'd it, the Net of Religion” (Blake 256-257). In short, the failure of the Urizenic eschatological demand, the yearning for a salvation based on a system of purity and unity, leads to the creation and enforcement of an oppressive sociopolitical system, one which uses the very incommensurability of the apocalyptic utterance with the lived realities of human life as a tool of coercion and control.

There is certainly an immediate resemblance between the Bard and the Urizenic “Father of Men.” Several critics have highlighted the uncomfortable authoritarian connotations associated with the Bard's claim of divine inspiration. As Esterhammer writes, “While the Bard explicitly claims to have heard the Holy Word, his implicit claim is that he shares the perspective of God in Paradise Lost… who was for Blake a figure of tyrannical authority… The Bard's is the first of many voices in Experience which derive their power from ideology” (142). While critics such as Esterhammer, Bloom, and Leader have seen these links as evidence of the contamination the Bard's visionary proclamation with the authoritarian reality of Experience, which corrupts the Bard's address and renders it ineffectual, a closer examination of the Biblical context from which this allusion derives suggests that the Bard may not be the victim of authority, but its agent. “The
Holy Word/ Which walked among the ancient trees” is an allusion to Genesis 3:8, in which Adam and Eve, having recently eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” This divine voice does not offer redemption, but condemnation, demanding, “Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?” (Genesis 3:11), an accusation that culminates in the expulsion of Eve and Adam from the Garden, and the beginning of humanity's postlapsarian condition. Rather than being, as Henry Summerfield claims, “inspired by God the Son”(409) to incite the Earth to recover her unfallen state, the Bard is linked to the accusatory voice that barred humanity from Paradise in the first place. The Holy Word, then, from which the Bard derives his authority appears identical to the “father of jealousy” whose prohibitive presence inhibits the Earth's redemption. The Bard's dismal weeping which punctuates his lament (“Calling the lapsed soul/ And weeping in the evening dew”) has a striking resemblance to the self-pitying moaning of Urizen (“Urizen… emerged his leprous head from out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous/ Falling into the deep sublime… Weeping in dismal howling woe he dark descended howling” (57).

The slippage between these two figures becomes more compelling when we observe that the Earth herself also makes this connection. While it is often taken for granted in critical discussions of the poems that the “Father of the ancient men” is a distinct third character in the narrative whose silent and prohibitive influence results in the failure of the Bard's call to redemption, this assumption is not at all a given. A direct, narrative reading of the two poems sees the Bard, from an at least metaphorically elevated position, extorting the Earth to “Arise” to his celestial state, represented visually in the print by a supine man on an astral couch, surrounded by stars. In response to this, the Earth does in fact raise her head, presumably in
anticipation of the longed-for assent, and finds herself confronting with horror the petrific presence of the “Selfish father of men,” who she than proceeds to address for the bulk of the poem. Jones notes the Earth's conflation of the two figures, but takes it for granted that the Earth is “mistakenly identifying his voice as that of the Father” (55, emphasis mine). Rather than immediately presuming the Earth is mistaken (an assumption that somewhat undermines Jones' highlighting of the “dialogic” elements of the poem), it seems worthwhile to at least entertain the possible validity of the Earth's perceptions: that the Bard and this Urizenic Yahweh figure are in fact one and the same, or at least that the Bard is acting as the mouthpiece of Urizen, and that the Earth, in naming conditions for a truly felicitous eschatological address, is decrying the oppressive bid for control being made in the dissembling name of apocalyptic freedom.

Seen in light of this, the Bard's address bears a striking resemblance to Urizen's own authoritarian proclamations. Like Urizen, the Bard attempts to impose an idealized self on his listener, a transcendent, spiritualized subject dwelling in an abstracted heaven, then lambasts the Earth for failing to conform to this standard. The performativity of the Bard's address rests less in the specific actions he wishes the Earth to perform, which are after all vague and abstract, and more in its creation of a specific subject, the androgyne celestial being lounging on a couch of clouds, and then authoritatively declaring it to be the only legitimate subject. This process is what Butler refers to as “foreclosure,” a process by which “[t]he individual is constituted (interpellated) in language through a selective process in which the terms of legible and intelligible subjecthood are regulated.” This occurs through “a kind of unofficial censorship or primary restriction in speech that constitutes the possibility of agency in speech” (41). Certainly, the outcome of the Bard's address is quite precisely to rob the Earth of agential power. Rather than “aris[ing] from the dewy grass” in a transcendent gesture of redemption, the Earth is
literally petrified by a “Stony dread” that accompanies her raising her head to hear the Bard's address. Rather than her “fallen fallen light” renewing, instead “her light fled” and she finds herself seized by a terrible cold. Incapable of embodying the eschatological self created by the Bard, the Earth finds herself unable to act whatsoever, and is consequentially delivered into the hands of the restrictive socio-political system from which the Bard is ostensibly liberating her. Her inability to exercise the sovereign spiritual power demanded by the Bard, to “control the starry pole” (72) and so lift herself up by her spiritual bootstraps, immediately classifies her as an illegitimate self whose unruly subjectivity must be “charter'd” and regulated by the “heavy chain” of institutional authority. As Butler puts it, “the discourse of freedom in which one makes the claim of emancipation suppresses the very energies it purports to unleash” (136). The fact that the self-actualized sovereign self is an impossible fiction does not lessen its effectiveness as a tool of power. Butler observes that “the difficulty in describing power as a sovereign formation, however, in no way precludes fantasizing or figuring power in precisely that way; to the contrary, the historical loss of the sovereign organization of power appears to occasion the fantasy of its return” (78), a return which inevitably results in the reinscription of regulatory state authority.

However, while the Bard's prescription of an idealized self works to foreclose the Earth's possibilities of agency, the Earth attempts to resist this foreclosure through a series of questions which, in a fashion typical of the Songs of Experience, receive no answers. She sings:

Does spring hide its joy  
When buds and blossoms grow?  
Does the sower  
Sow by night?  
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

The Earth's address evokes Isaiah 28, in which the prophet explains the multiplicity of strategies at play in the Divine work of redemption, stating “Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth
he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barely and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.” Implicit in this allusion is a criticism of the generic nature of the Bard's address, its model of eschatological transcendence that results in an erasure of the subject's individuality.

Isaiah argues for the intimate specificity of God's redemptive act, the particular care for the ontological uniqueness of the individual in the “strange work” of Divine salvation: “For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod” (Isaiah 28:27). In effect, the Earth responds to the Bard's hectoring and alienating call with an alternative vision of eschatological liberation, one dependent on her own creative ontological self-expression. The plaintive litany of unanswered questions points to a radically different model of redemption than the Bard's call for transcendence. The Earth's evocative images contrast strikingly with the language of the Bard, who addresses the Earth in the near-intangible or celestial imagery of light, stars, and dew. The Earth, on the other hand, speaks in the concrete, material language of flowering and harvest. Both metaphors await an eschatological dawn for their fulfilment, but while the Bard's imagery rests on an assent from the terrestrial to the heavenly realms, the Earth's locates the site of redemption in the “minute particulars” of earthly life, specifically in erotic liberation. At the core of the Earth's salvific yearning is the release of “Free Love in bondage bound,” the liberation of the “Virgins of youth and mourning” from the shackles of their imposed virginity. The longed-for Day of the Lord is not a transcendence of material life, but its fulfilment.

More than its materiality, what is striking about the Earth's model of salvation is its
dependency on her unique ontological self-expression. Salvation for the Earth does not require the negation of her lived experience, but rather its articulation and celebration. The earth's redemption appears synonymous with her emergence as a legible subject, a subjectivity currently “chained in night” by sexual taboo and the “cruel Jealous selfish fear” that hypocritically attempts to regulate and control desire, especially female, by banishing it from public discourse and replacing the possibility of female sexuality with the negating, and regulatory, subject-label of “virgin.” In giving voice to this inadmissable subject, the erotic, desiring woman, the Earth counteracts the impossibility of the Bard's idealized subject with an “impossible” subjectivity of her own, a self whose impossibility stems from her incommensurability with the prevailing social consensus of what constitutes a subject. This speech makes visible what Butler calls “the alterity within the norm” that the norm struggles to suppress, a potentially radical act which exposes how “that norm is predicated on the exclusion of the one who speaks, and whose speech calls into question the foundation of the universal itself” (91).

This exposure of the “alterity within the norm”, and the consequent threat to normative structures which this alterity represents, is central to what Butler refers to as the “insurrectionary” capacity of the performative. It is also at the heart of Blake's conception of the Apocalyptic potential of language. Blake defines the postlapsarian state as the neurotic attempt to impose a “self clos'd, self-repelling” Selfhood on a dynamic, eternal creation, one pathologically obsessed with patrolling the boundaries of the self by aggressively rejecting the possibility of alternative subjectivities. The radical expansion of perception which characterizes the Apocalypse, in which “the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt” (188), can therefore be characterized as a giving voice to these suppressed voices, worldviews, and epistemologies in such a way that the Urizenic
Selfhood's monopolistic claim to legitimacy, upon which its entire identity rests, is threatened or annulled. Discursively, this requires a rejection of a monologic mode of address that reinforces the pretensions of the Sovereign Self and an embrace instead of dialogic speech that embraces a more fluid notion of identity. As Jones writes, this linguistic “self-annihilation” requires “a radical interchange between the contraries of addresser and addressee, one that removes the speaker as the univocal authority of his or her discourse and infuses it with other voices and perspectives. Through self-annihilation, a speaker acknowledges the validity of other viewpoints and resists his or her tendency to assert his or her perspective as the only possible truth” (18). Blake attempts to accomplish this through the introduction in his work of a dizzying array of alternative subjectivities that threaten to overwhelm the reader through a kaleidoscopic portrayal of the myriad possibilities of Being. Perhaps the most remarkable expression of this theme occurs in the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, in which the protagonist, Oothoon, rhapsodizes:

Does the whale worship at thy footsteups as does the hungry dog?
Or does he scent the mountain prey, because the mountains wide
Draw in the ocean? Does his eye discern the flying cloud
As the raven's eye? Or does he measure the expanse like the vulture?
… Does not the eagle scorn the earth and despise the treasures beneath
But the mole knoweth what is there, and the worm shall tell it thee.
Does not the worm erect a pillar in the mouldering churchyard?
And a palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave
Over his porch these words are written. Take thy bliss O Man!
And sweet shall be thy taste and sweet thy infant joys renew. (203-204)
Here, any concept of a hierarchy of subjects and submission of individuals to a regulating standard of value is entirely rejected in favour of an inviolable right to ontological self-expression, referred to Blake as “bliss.” At the core of this is a commitment to hermeneutic and epistemological plurality, the right to interpret the world in radically different ways, with no single reading being privileged. While the raven and eagle's eyes “discern the flying cloud” and find joy in the expanse of the heavens, the worm's comparatively limited senses, confined allegorically to a Tartarean world of darkness and death, are not degraded in relation to the eagle's lofty vision but instead open up a world of sensory delight unimagined by his brethren, finding “a palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave.” Each voice has an absolute claim to legitimacy, and as such they all are radically incommensurate with one another and unassimilable into an abstract, corporate salvation dependant on submission to a normative body of religious or secular authority. As Oothoon sings in defiance to Urizen, “How can one joy absorb another? Are not different joys Holy, eternal, infinite? and each joy is a Love.” This is central to what Blake means when he declares that “Everything that lives is Holy”: every living thing, be they human, animal, or even fictional, has the right, in Butler's terms, to “speak within and as the universal” (91), to speak, as it were, as the Voice of God. Blake vigorously resists the monopoly on divinity that characterizes the orthodox Christian emphasis on the sole sovereignty of God, answering the scandalized query of “Is not God alone the prolific?” by declaring that “God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men” (40). Consequentially, all living beings have the right, as Sari Makdisi eloquently puts it, “to participate in an infinite being in common called God... to affirm life as being in common, life as the making of that 'divine body' of which 'we are his members’”(266).

Makdisi's definition of the Blakean God as “an infinite being in common” points to a
paradoxical tension at the heart of Blake's eschatological aspirations. While fiercely resisting the coercive models of community consensus imposed by civic and religious authorities, he nevertheless insists on the centrality of a life “in common.” As Richard Sha writes, “Blake equates self-annihilation with a Christian intensification of mutuality, not a doing away with it” (47). The radical right to subjective self-expression does not necessitate a turning inwards towards a private, mystical reverie, as Blake criticism of the Frye school often suggests, but rather marks the inauguration of a model of community in which the fundamental legitimacy of all other subjects is a foundational and inalienable principle, what Christopher Hobson calls a “cooperative commonwealth,” a “self-managing society” based on “collective love and mutual forgiveness” (138). The recognition of this legitimacy is not simply a liberal tolerance that seeks to erase difference by imagining a neutral public sphere. As Hobson notes, Blake erodes the distinction between public and private by applying “what today would be called a 'private sphere' vocabulary of sexual reciprocity, personal forgiveness, and the like to such 'public sphere' matters as community in property” (137-138). Instead, it rests on the embrace of the Other's membership in a shared Divine Body, in which their ineluctable otherness paradoxically forms the basis of a more expansive personal identity as part of this communal self, an identity that is realized and maintained through dialogue. Deen terms this “identity-as-community” and observes that “conscious turning back to the source implies that the source has become other – a person not one's-self. Parent, lover, friend, or God, the other is a figure with whom the agent or speaker in the poem identifies himself – but only through a kind of dialogue, so that turning back to the source is turning back to the seed of community… [one] achieves full identity-as-community in conversation: speaking to another as to the image of God” (7). Identity, society, and even reality are therefore other-dependent, reliant on a collaborative, co-creative
discourse in which “As the breath of the Almighty, so are the words of man to man/ In great wars of Eternity, in fury of poetic inspiration,/ To build the Universe stupendous” (Blake 580-81). This vision of community requires a constant renegotiation of identity, a perpetual troubling of the entrenched, bounded selfhoods that attempt to delimit and control discursive possibilities to conform to their own (necessarily limited) epistemologies and ethics. This process, referred to by Blake in his later work as “the Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation,” is seen by Blake to be the “Covenant of Jehovah,” the fundamental social principle that sustains the ideal human community of Jerusalem, and is described in strange and vivid detail in the final Apocalyptic vision of Jerusalem: “Circumscribing and Circumcising the excrementious/ Husk & Covering into vacuum evaporating revealing the lineaments of Man/ Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death and Resurrection” (257). This “Eternal Death and Resurrection,” which is to say a model of society based on a fluid, expansive inclusivity, resonates with Butler's concept of an “anticipated universality,” a vision of a universal society “that has yet to articulated, defying the conventions that govern our anticipatory imaginings” (90-91). This is not to be taken as a Platonic idealism, but instead as a commitment to a continual challenging of the “established conventions of universality,” a vigorous, dynamic model of the universal “whose articulations will only follow, if they do, from a contestation of universality at its already imagined borders” (91).

However, it is crucial to recognize the gap between this ideal dialogic society and its genuine establishment. As John Mee reminds us, this “vision of 'mutual interchange' does not inaugurate a conversable world, not in any immediate sense anyway” (138), cautioning that “imagining this conversational plenitude should [not] be mistaken for its achievement” (139). Damrosh's warning against “rhapsodizing about Blake's apocalyptic breakthrough as if it were
“easily attained” is particularly apposite in this case, in which the Earth's plaintive protest goes unheard and unanswered, and the reader is launched instead into the hostile world of Experience. While the Earth's address may help to articulate the conditions of a felicitous eschatological performative, it is decisively infelicitous within both the diegetic context of the poem and the larger setting of the Songs. Clearly, the mere invocation of the “alterity within the norm” is not enough to overcome the vast institutional and epistemological constructs that constitute the normative structures of the fallen world. Instead, a more direct engagement with these principles as they are manifested socially, politically, and philosophically is required, through a complex series of rhetorical strategies that Blake calls “Mental Fight.” We will examine these strategies in the following chapter through the lens of Blake's political prophecy, “America.”
Chapter Three

“The Lion and Wolf Shall Cease”: The Politics of Eschatological Speech in Blake’s *America*

Blake's Jerusalem, his eschatological fulfilment of the Kingdom of Heaven, is ultimately a linguistic compact, a radical reimagining of the manner in which speech, authority, and legitimacy operate within a social sphere. It is rooted in an ontology that sees true identity as arising through a communal interrelation and troubles the borders of bounded individual selfhood. In *Jerusalem*, Los explains that “[When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter/Into each others' Bosom (which are universes of delight)/ In Mutual interchange” (Blake 246).

Essick notes about this passage, “In our world, the closest we can come to such interchanges is through language, for only words can flow freely back and forth between us, entering into and building our consciousness of self and of other selves” (219). In this view, the corporate body of Christ, “Imagination, or the Human Eternal Body in every man” (Blake 663) is not a fixed, pre-existent condition of undifferentiated unity, but instead is formed and reformed through the medium of an interdependent linguistic community, a “communal body [which] preserves the structure of the prepositions defining its linguistic outline, an articulated unity in which the members retain their distinct identities” (Essick 220). This linguistic body of Jerusalem is sustained by an ethics of radical hospitality, a perpetual openness to “the stranger who shatters the horizon of the familiar” (Caputo 42), what Essick characterizes as a “phenomenological view of language with transactional events rather than difference as its essence” (229) in which “any attempt to organize this body politic according to abstract, differential schema is tantamount to dismemberment” (220).

This “mutual interchange” necessitates a communitarian model of imagination, one that
stresses its empathic function. The philosopher Martin Buber calls this function “imagining the real,” an empathetic encounter with the unique character of the individual. It is “not a looking at the other, but a bold swinging – demanding the most intensive stirring of one's being – into the life of the other” (81). This visionary leap into the Other, which is essential to what Buber calls “genuine dialogue,” is an imaginative engagement with “the particular real person who confronts me, whom I can attempt to make present to myself just in this way, and not otherwise, in his wholeness, unity, and uniqueness, and with his dynamic centre which realizes all these things ever anew” (81). In Blakean terms, it is an entrance into the bosom of the Other (the dynamic centre which is a “universe of delight”) facilitated by one's Emanation (the expressive spirit whose loss, one recalls, corresponds with the universal Fall). This process is made possible by the ontological assumption, shared by Blake and Buber, that human life, in so far as it can be called properly human, is fundamentally interdependent, what Buber calls “interhuman,” as “Man exists anthropologically not in his isolation, but in the completeness of relation between man and man; what humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity” (Buber 69).

For both thinkers this essential nature is divine as well as human, or rather it is divinised in the very depths of its humanity. Much as Blake professes that “God only exists & Acts in living beings and Men,” Buber writes of the “primal power which has scattered itself, and still scatters itself, in all human beings in order that it may grow up in each man in the special form of that man” (83). Dialogue, then, is simultaneously a social bond, ontological realization, and spiritual revelation, a diffuse encounter with a God unfolding themself in the minute particulars of creation. This literal sanctity of life lends an additional urgency to avoiding an Urizenic imposition or absorption of the Other into one's imaginative construct of them, one that attempts to overwrite or negate the Other's essential integrity. “Genuine conversation” Buber writes,
“means acceptance of otherness” (69). Consequentially, “the chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is particular to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is” (79).

The Blakean eschatological community organizes itself around these principles of mutual recognition. And the eschatological performative is an uncompromising imperative to acknowledge and engage with the other as a necessary predicate to community membership. It is, in the words of John Caputo, “a call for being otherwise, for renewal, for a new and unruly rule, for another and more anarchic 'kingdom,' for rule of another kind, another way to be” (32). This “anarchic 'kingdom,’” what Mark Van Steenwyck calls the “unkingdom of God,” is a radically precarious social order predicated on the constant troubling of the centre by a divine alterity (or rather, by an understanding of divinity that sees alterity as divine), centered around what Caputo sees as the paradigmatic virtue of hospitality. He writes “Hospitality means welcoming the other, saying 'come' to the other… Hospitality in its paradigmatic sense requires putting ourselves at risk instead of creating a closed circle of friends (the same)… [it] means to say 'come' to what we cannot see coming, to what may or may not (perhaps) be welcome, to welcome the unwelcome” (39-40). The “‘come' of hospitality,” derived from the rapturous climax of the Book of Revelation, is the open embrace of an unknown and unprecedented future, a perilous exposure of “the serene horizon of the possible to the obscene shock of the impossible” (Caputo 42). This “commerce with the impossible” celebrated by Caputo would have resonated strongly with Blake,

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2 The Book of Revelation ends with an ecstatic invitation to the reader, in which the prophet announces: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come.” (Revelation 22:17).
who after all declared “the history of all times and places, is nothing else but improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say, was impossible if we did not see it always before our eyes,” (235) a declaration which, as Saree Makdisi observes, “preserves the hope of an as yet unimaginable history of freedom” (15). That this history is unimaginable is precisely what invites an imaginative participation in its realization (or rather, creation). “What is now proved,” Blake writes, “was once only imagined,” and it is this creative commitment to the ever-expanding horizons of existence that constitutes the foundation of the Blakean eschatological community.

However, it is insufficient merely to articulate the conditions of ideal discourse. As can be seen in the infelicitous apocalyptic speech of the Bard and the Earth in *Songs of Experience*, eschatological language is constantly confronted with the presence of a hegemonic, authoritarian speech-community which seeks to foreclose disruptive possibilities by legislating a single, normative model of existence, what Caputo calls “the confessional orthodoxies [who] seek to head off the event, not to welcome but to domesticate it, to fence in [its] anarchic and aphoristic energy” (50), symbolized in Blake's work by the Urizenic Selfhood. In order to prevent its automatic absorption into dominant narratives of authoritarian control and ineffectual longing, eschatological language must not only celebrate the ideal community of Jerusalem, but confront and expose what Harlem civil-rights lawyer and lay theologian William Stringfellow calls the “Powers and Principalities³,” the ideological structures and values that constitute the political and social life of the fallen world, among which Stringfellow includes “all institutions, all ideologies, all images, all movements, all corporations, all bureaucracies, all traditions, all methods and routines, all conglomerates, all races, all nations, all idols” (78). The apotheosis of

³ Derived from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12), also the epigraph to Blake's *Four Zoas*. 
these principalities is the nation, paradigmatically personified in the Biblical figure of Babylon. Consequently, the eschatological hope is not an “antiwordly vision” (44) but a concrete, and political, confrontation with the idolatrous power structures of Babylon in the name of the ideal human community of Jerusalem. Stringfellow writes, “A Christian lives politically within time, on the scene of the Fall, as an alien in Babylon, in the midst of apocalyptic reality. Coincidentally, a biblical person lives politically, on the identical scene, as member and surrogate of Christ's Church, as a citizen of Jerusalem, the holy nation which is already and which is vouchsafed, during the eschatological event” (63). The political action of a citizen of Jerusalem entails navigating this duel citizenship: “He exposes the reign of death in Babylon while affirming the aspiration for new life intuitive in all human beings and inherent in all principalities” (63).

The eschatological vision of Jerusalem, therefore, enables the substantial critique and resistance of the moribund structures of Babylon, while simultaneously articulating the possibility of their transformation. Nicolas Williams, commenting on the role of utopian structures in Blake's work, makes a similar point, relating the ideal state of Jerusalem to the Marxist utopia of an accomplished communism: “it is only against the utopian background of an accomplished communism – when modes of production will have become fully humanized – that the critique of alienated forms of production makes sense” (22). Similarly, in Blake's vision of a fully intersubjective, “hospitable” language-world, “the ideality of achieved communication is operative… either as a visionary confirmation of the ultimate meaning of conversation or (negatively) as a critical standard against which to evaluate failed or incomplete communication. Every utterance, however, actual or imagined, must be brought to the court of the ideal speech situation, to test whether or not a moment of Eternal Conversation has broken out in the 'ruins of
This dialectic between ideal and real, the erotic tension between Eternity and Time, is at the core of the Blakean Mental Fight, the struggle for spiritual liberty trumpeted at the opening of Blake's Milton: “I shall not cease from mental fight/ Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand/ Till we have built Jerusalem/ On England's green and pleasant land.” It is, in short, a highly politicized apocalyptic vision in which eschatological language acts as a position of resistance against the foreclosure of possibilities attempted by the “powers and principalities” of normative authority, a polysemous series of rhetorical strategies that denounce the calcified ideological structures of this world while heralding the coming of a “New Heaven and a New Earth,” which is not an otherworldly paradise but this world, made new by the startling presence of the Other whose “dynamic centre...realizes all these things ever anew” (Buber 81). As Caputo writes, “What is coming is not another world but another coming of the world, another worldling of the world, a coming otherwise. Transcendence is the insistence or the promise of the world” (Caputo 52).

What makes this resistance possible is the realization that the ideological and epistemological categories invoked by the powers and principalities to justify their rule are not preexisting ontological certainties, but the tools and result of what Bourdieu would call “symbolic violence,” which he defines as “the subordinating effects on people of hidden structures that reproduce and maintain social domination in covert ways” (62). As Makdisi observes, “it is precisely in accepting that what can be perceived defines what is possible, and that what is possible defines what can be perceived, that the fall takes places, every day. The fall, in other words, does not constitute a reality. Rather, it constitutes a certain highly circumscribed ontology of perception and being – a mode of perceiving which is precisely what makes reality
real to the limited forms appropriate to it” (261). The postlapsarian world sustains itself through the constant, ritual reinscription of its foundational principles, a fact that exposes the possibility of their performative hijacking. Judith Butler notes that “Because the action of foreclosure does not take place once and for all, it must be repeated to reconsolidate its power and efficacy. A structure only remains a structure through being reinstated as one… That language gains its temporal life only in and through the utterances that reinvoke and restructure the conditions of its own possibility” (139-140). Or as Blake puts it, “Error or Creation will be burned up and then and not till then Truth or Eternity will appear. It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it” (565).

The remainder of this chapter will explore Blake's application of this insight to the concrete sociopolitical setting of the American Revolutionary War, which he frames in the poem America as a rhetorical battle against the symbolic violence of Britain's imperialist ideology. Seen through the lens of Butler's exploration of the insurrectionary potential of performatives, coupled with Derrida's analysis of the Declaration of Independence and Frantz Fanon's discussion of the colonial subject, Blakean eschatological speech emerges as a potent tool for resisting hegemonic institutional discourse and for modelling the hospitality-oriented speech-community that Blake holds up as the only effective answer to the authoritarian and calcifying tendencies of political and religious speech.

*America: A Prophecy* is a mythopoetic account of the Revolutionary War in which revolutionary figures such as “Washington, Franklin, Paine, and Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green” (210) are depicted as larger-than-life demigods locked in visionary war with the “dragon form” of “Albion's wrathful prince.” *America* is a strange and disorienting vision of history seen through the eyes of prophecy. Though an atmosphere of violence hangs over the piece, from the
gory figures of the American leaders “glowing with blood from Albion’s fiery prince” (210) to Albion's Angel's repeated call to arms, “Sound! Sound! My loud war trumpets, & alarm my thirteen Angels” (215), the decisive blow in the war is not martial, but linguistic. At the core of America is a performative duel between Orc, the Spirit of Revolution, and Albion's Angel, the Principality of Britain and representative of the sociopolitical structures of Imperial England. It is this ideological war, this “mental fight,” that brings ruin to Albion's imperialistic agenda, not an act of heroic violence on the part of the “warlike men” of the Revolution. While critics such as Erdman and Mee have traditionally characterized this spiritual warfare as an unqualified support for the American revolutionary project (albeit one that becomes complicated by what they see as Blake's subsequent disillusionment with the apocalyptic potential of revolution), Makdisi has recently persuasively demonstrated how uneasily Republican ideals sat with Blake's own beliefs, specifically regarding the ontological assumptions inherent in liberal democracy's lionizing of the sovereign individual. Makdisi writes: “the individual whose political and commercial rights constituted the ultimate objective of the hegemonic liberal-radical movement is profoundly destabilized and rendered inoperative in Blake's work of the 1790's” (41). Rather than an unambiguous celebration of the American War of Independence, America can instead be read as an examination of the transformative potential of eschatological speech in a specific sociopolitical environment.

At the centre of America is Orc's triumphant “Song of Liberty,” an apocalyptic ode whose felicitous performance enacts radical change in his sociopolitical environment. The address begins as a pure, disembodied speech that echoes forth from the fiery, inchoate form of Orc, and, Christ-like, “shook the temple”(53). It then launches into a moving image of resurrection.

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk and dried.
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst. (53)

When contrasted to the Bard's failed eschatological address in the Introduction to Experience, the differences are revealing. The Bard's demand is self-divisive, calling the Earth to “Arise” from the “slumberous mass” of its physical form in a fashion reflective of his orthodox error “That Man has two existing principles Viz a Body and a Soul” (Blake 181) and that salvation requires the liberation of the latter from the former. It entails the creation of an idealized, transcendental subject, a move that results in the suppression of the audience's own subjectivity and agency.

Orc's utterance, on the other hand, focuses on the restoration of the colonial subject marginalized by imperial power. Using imagery evocative of both Christ's open tomb (“the linen wrapped up”

and the Day of Judgement, Orc links the political liberation of the colonized nation (who “spring like redeemed captives when their bonds and bars are burst”) with a bodily resurrection, the overcoming of the condition of existential death that afflicts the marginalized colonial self. The philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon describes the process of decolonization in similar terms, writing: “Decolonization… focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed into a non-essential state into a privileged actor… It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men” (2). This restoration and recreation of the subject, its movement from the marginalized, “non-essential” condition imposed upon it by religious and secular authorities to one “captured in a virtually grandiose fashion in the spotlight of history” (Fanon 2) is an essential precursor to its emergence as an agential power.

Crucially, Orc models this restored agency by claiming an authority entirely unrecognized

4 In the Gospel of John, the resurrection is first witnessed in the empty tomb of Christ, in which “the napkin, that was about his head, [is] not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself” (John 20:7).
by the hegemonic power structures. Orc entirely lacks the Bard's self-defeating pessimism, but instead ostentatiously claims an authority to which he has no socially recognized right. This self-appointed mandate dramatically demonstrates Butler's observation that “an invocation that has no prior legitimacy can have the effect of challenging existing forms of legitimacy, breaking open the possibility of future forms” (147). Butler uses the example of Rosa Parks’ epochal refusal to move to the back of the bus, commenting that “in laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy” (147). Similarly, while the Bard positions his failure as a foregone conclusion (“why wilt thou turn away?”), Orc's address presumes its own felicity. Echoing the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the enviably performative document which self-reflectively conjures up its own felicity through what Derrida, in his seminal work of performative theory “Declarations of Independence” calls a “coup of right” (10), Orc's “Song of Liberty” presents his eschatological aspirations as a fait accompli. As Derrida observes, this declaration “involves both constation and performance, indissociably mixed” (11), in that it both describes a purportedly existent state and, through a bit of performative sleight of hand, simultaneously establishes this state through the force of the declaration. These two actions happen concurrently, in what Derrida calls “the simulacrum of the instant” (11), and depend upon each other for their felicity: “the 'good people' of America call themselves and declare themselves independent, at the instant that they invent for themselves a signing identity. They sign in the name of the laws of Nature and in the name of God. They pose or posit their institutional laws on the foundation of natural laws and in the same coup (the interpretive coup of force) in the name of God, creator of nature” (11). This process, which “present[s] performative utterances as constative utterances” (11), has been identified by Angela
Esterhammer as characteristic of Blake's fundamental approach to visionary poetics, noting that “Blakean grammar relies on constative statements but invests such statements with performative effect” (206). Rather than cajoling and hectoring his audience, as the Bard does, Orc linguistically enacts the state of liberation he aspires to create, bringing it to pass through sheer visionary authority.

The nature of felicitous Blakean eschatological speech becomes more apparent in the subsequent lines of the poem. Orc rhapsodizes

Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field;
Let him look up into the heavens and laugh in the bright air:
Let the enchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in fifty weary years;
Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open. (53)

The repetition of the imperative “Let” in the first three lines illustrates concisely the goal of the Blakean eschatological project. In Blake's work, genuine eschatological speech is not prescriptive, but emancipatory. Its purpose is not to inaugurate a new legislative model of conduct, but to free individuals from the normative body of sociopolitical and metaphysical conventions that binds them in a state of political and spiritual slavery. Consequentially, it must remain committed to a dialogic mode of address, one that avoids what Buber calls the propagandist model, in which “a man tries to impose himself, his opinion and his attitude, on the other in such a way that the latter feels the psychical result of the action to be his own insight” (82). Instead, the speaker must “[see] each of these individuals as in a position to become a unique, single person, and thus the bearer of a special task of existence which can be fulfilled through him and through him alone” (83). As Blake writes in his annotations to Lavater, “Each man's leading propensity ought to be called his leading Virtue & his good Angel... Each thing is its own cause and its own effect. Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in
another, This is Vice but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act it is the contrary it is a restraint on action both in ourselves and in the person hindered. For he who hinders another omits his own duty at the time. Murder is hindering another. Theft is hindering another” (601). This melting away of sociopolitical and ideological “hindrance” is simultaneously an act of radical hospitality, a rapturous invocation of the eschatological “Come” which invites the precluded other into dialogue. The subjunctive “Let” of the address echoes Caputo's claim that “[t]he insistence of God belongs grammatically in the subjunctive, which subverts the settled nominations and conjunctions of the present” (55). These strategies represent a striving to nullify the tendency of eschatological language to calcify into new structures of authoritarian discourse, as Blake believed had occurred with Christian doctrine.

The action initiated by the Blakean eschatological performative is not a specific, codified activity, but an invitation to an un governed, and ungovernable, ontological self-expression, an opening up into, as Makdisi writes, “the joyous life of 'the prolific,' indefinite, open, reaching out toward an infinitely prolific number of re-makings, re-connections, re-imaginations – life as pure potential, life as constituent, rather than constituted power” (267). That this prolific life is first and foremost a recovery of creative agency, a restoration of the inalienable right to imagine and re-imagine the self through language, is expressed in Orc's address by the bursting of the freed slaves into song, “Singing. The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning/ And the fair moon rejoices in the clear and cloudless night” (53). This touching rhapsody, in which the natural world simultaneously gains a voice and becomes imaginatively animated participants in the singers' jubilation, is coincident with the performative act of decolonization, the thunderous declaration that “Empire is no More, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease”(53).

This correlation between the marginalized subject's restored capacity for speech and the
sociopolitical overthrow of colonial rule points to the intersection between eschatological speech and political action. The capacity for a marginalized individual to perform their own subjectivity, to “speak with authority without being authorized to speak” (Butler 157), is a necessary precursor to revolutionary praxis. This newfound identity emerges not as a transcendent, extrasocial self but as an active respondent to concrete specific sociopolitical conditions. The eschatological identity is a collective performance that allows its participants to act decisively on the stage of history without being subsumed by the inherited narratives of power. The potency of this eschatological community is powerfully demonstrated in the poem by the Americans’ collective resistance to Albion. Faced with the annihilating plagues of Albion, the manifestation of his poisonous sociopolitical performative, the Americans unite:

The citizens of New York close their books and lock their chests;
The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
The scribe of Pennsylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear
Then had America been lost, overwhelmed by the Atlantic,
And Earth had lost another portion of the infinite,
But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire
The red fires rag'd! The plague recoil'd! Then rolld they back with fury. (56)

The decisive act of resistance against Albion's annihilating speech is not armed rebellion, but the establishment of an alternative sociality to Britain's authoritarian imperialism, one which refutes what Sari Makdisi calls “the ontology of empire”(67). The “fierce rushing” that constitutes this communal resistance forms a collective identity that, as Makdisi writes, “is much more than the sum of its constituent parts. It is a form of belonging – a community – whose very existence is predicated upon the annihilation of those parts as self-sufficient, independent, sovereign units (i.e citizens)” (40). This shared being, whose egalitarian communalism collapses all boundaries of class and selfhood central to British national identity, is an embrace of the ungoverned energies of “Enthusiasm,” the dangerous passions of the disenfranchised majority which both
conservative and republican authorities strived to suppress. It gives voice, centrality, and agency to “the creative potential of the multitude, its ability to generate other modes of social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, and religious organization than the ones recognized by both the established authorities and the hegemonic liberal-radical reformers” (Makdisi 75). This unleashing of the populist imagination, experienced as a boundless, polymorphous, yet unified, body, cannot help but threaten the “compartmentalized, Manichean, and petrified” (Fanon 15) world of colonial power, as its unstable ontology and scandalous hospitality fatally undermines the well-patrolled borders of difference which constitute the grammar of hegemonic authority.

Once manifested among the Americans, this model of eschatological communitarian activity rapidly grows from an isolated instance of ideological resistance to an ontological contagion that spreads unchecked through the body politic. Experienced as a literal disease by the powers and principalities of Britain, a plague which “creep[s] on the burning winds driven by the flames of Orc/ And by the fierce Americans rushing together in the night” (Blake 57) and which horribly afflicts the Angel Albion and his subservient principalities, who “writhed in torment in the eastern sky/ Pale quivering toward the brain his glimmering eyes, teeth chattering/ Howling& shuddering his legs quivering; convulsed each muscle & sinew” (57). However, for “female spirits of the dead,” those marginalized voices whose subjectivity had been entirely precluded by normative discourse, it is a rapturous, erotic liberation. Caressed by the invigorating fires of Orc, they “feel the nerves of youth renew, and the desires of ancient times/ Over their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grapes appear” (220). In the accompanying illumination, naked female figures huddle in lily-like flames, which transform into vines and trees in the left-hand margin of the page. Along the corridor of this margin, two female bodies blissfully ascend. Between the words and stanzas of the text, vines wind and birds cavort. This dizzying riot of human, bird,
plant, and flame combines to create a portrait of a rapturous interconnection of being, an erotic blurring of the boundaries between creatures which nevertheless preserves their distinct identities in the midst of this orgiastic communion. Here, language itself hovers on the edge of transformation into pure joyous visionary activity, as the letters on the page blend with the vines and figures that surround it in a manner reminiscent of Blake's description of his writing process to Henry Crabb Robinson, in which he declared “the moment I have written I see the words fly about the room in all directions” (cited in Frye 200).

In contrast to this unifying diversity, the advocates of England's authoritarian rule, the Priesthood, are divided and mutated by Orc's flames, and “in rustling scales,/ Rush into reptile coverts, hiding from the fires of Orc” (220). Their ideological devotion to the imposed unity of hegemonic discourse stands revealed as an isolating denial of human possibility, and ultimately of their own humanity. Amusingly, among those figures reptilized by Orc's transforming fires is “the Bard of Albion,” who may or may not be connected to the Ancient Bard of Experience's Introduction (and may also be a caricature of England's poet laureate, and frequent target of second-generation Romantic scorn, Robert Southey), who grows “a cowl of flesh...over his head & scales on his back and ribs” (219).

Central to the felicity of this address is the redefinition of linguistic categories. Albion's Angel’s attempt to censure Orc's subversive performance rests on his wielding of conventional religious nomenclature in order to contain and classify his address as a satanic intrusion. He declares Orc to be a “Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities/ Lover of wild Rebellion and transgressor of Gods Law” (53-54), affirming the apocalyptic content of Orc's speech, while simultaneously framing the eschatological aspirations of the address not as an Isaiah-inspired invocation of the Day of the Lord, but as the insidious machinations of the
Antichrist, “speaking great things and blasphemy” (Revelation 13:5). This condemnation of populist revolution as not only dangerous but fundamentally Satanic is consistent with what Fanon calls the “Manichean” language of imperialist power.

Fanon observes that the colonized subject is characterized by their colonial overlords as “representing not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values… In other words, absolute evil. A corrosive element, destroying everything within his reach… an agent of malevolent powers, an unconscious and incurable instrument of blind forces” (6). This dehumanizing depiction of the colonial subject is not merely a reflection of the sociopolitical realities of colonial rule, but is in fact one of the primary ways in which this domination linguistically reinforces itself. As Butler notes, “hate speech constitutes its addressee at the moment of its utterance; it does not describe an injury or produce one as a consequence; it is, in the very speaking of such speech, the performance of the injury itself, where the injury is understood as social subordination” (18). However, the very institutional authority, the reliance on time-honoured conventions of prejudice and oppression, that lends hate speech its power also opens up the possibility of its subversion. “As an invocation” Butler writes, “hate speech is an act that recalls prior acts, requiring a future repetition to endure” (20). Consequentially, the possibility exists of “reworking the force of the speech act against the force of injury,” a potential that “consists in misappropriating the force of speech from those prior contexts” (40). Butler cites the reappropriation of the word “queer” by LGBT rights activists as an example of how “speech can be 'returned' to its speaker in a different form, that it can be cited against its original purposes, and perform a reversal of effects” (14).

Faced with the literally fatal hate-speech of Albion, Orc employs a similar strategy. In order to counter this institutional contextualizing, Orc redefines Albion's pejorative naming as a badge
of honour, declaring that “the fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,/ What night he
led the starry hosts through the wild wilderness;/ That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter
religion abroad” (54). Orc nimbly escapes the sociolinguistic net cast by Albion by redefining
language itself, recasting terms such as “Demon”, “Hell”, and “Antichrist,” which in
conventional theological language act as powerful tools to negate the efficacy of political or
religious speech (“Blasphemy” of course being the classic ecclesiastical trump card for rendering
an opponent's speech definitively, and often fatally, unfelicitous), as symbols of eschatological
liberation, translating Albion's negating rhetorical strategy into a new conventional context
which treats these terms as guarantees of the address' felicity: “Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet
man is not consumed; Amidst the lustful fires he walks, his feet become like brass/ His knee
and thighs like silver and his breast and head like gold” (54). Orc accepts Albion's consignment
of him to the fires of Hell, and transforms those fires into emancipatory flames, in language
evocative of Daniel's prophecy of the messiah, whose “feet were like burnished bronze, when it
has been made to glow in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters” (Daniel
10:6), an image echoed in the vision of Christ at the beginning of Revelation.

However, while America positions these successes within the context of the American
Revolution, the eschatological community whose establishment is central for this felicity is an
uncomfortable match when compared with historical and ideological realities of the American
War of Independence. As Makdisi points out, the ontological basis for community that Blake
presents, that of a shared root of being experienced through the “fierce rushing” of Enthusiast
ecstasy, is not one shared by the rationalist Founding Fathers, whose emphasis on the
sovereignty of the self, the enshrinement of property, and the principles of “natural rights” forms
part of the ideological cluster that Blake characterizes as the latest form of the Urizenic
false-consciousness (“Deism is the worship of the God of this World by the means of what you call Natural Religion and Natural Philosophy, and of Natural Morality or Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart” (738)). The American Revolution did not inaugurate a society of radical hospitality (the continuation of slavery, which overshadows America's constant references to chains and bondage, and the doctrines of white supremacy and patriarchy that fatally undermine the new Republic's claims to universal equality, would have been enough to disabuse Blake of any unwarranted idealism in that direction) nor did it open “the doors of marriage” and instigate the sexual revolution that Blake felt in this period to be central to an eschatological fulfilment.

This disharmony between the goals and events of the American Revolution and the manner in which Blake depicts this struggle can hardly be accidental, especially in light of our argument for Blake's awareness of the context-sensitive nature of the eschatological address. Indeed, the poem is full of moments that ironize or undermine the central celebration of revolutionary victory. In the two plates depicting the central performative duel between Orc and Urizen, a curious inversion occurs in the illuminations. The plate containing Orc's triumphant self-declaration is illustrated with a picture of an old man, resting on a throne of clouds whose classically God-like appearance suggests him to be Urizen, whereas its sequel, which contains Albion's Angel's retaliatory curse, shows a child surrounded by womb-like waves of water or energy in which curling vines can be faintly seen: clearly an illustration of Orc. This interchange of iconography suggests a troubling interrelation between the two figures. While there is nothing precisely in the poem to suggest the presence of Frye's “Orc-Urizen cycle,” in which the revolutionary transformation of Orc inevitably leads to Orc's assumption of an Urizen-like role of despotic authority (Frye 233), this inversion of figures does point to the fundamental
dependance of the combatants' rhetorical felicity on the dualistic opposition of the other. The opposition of Angel and Demon, of Law and Liberty, Heaven and Hell, even with the inverted values assigned to them by Orc, requires the presence of a villainized Other in order to be effective, a dualism that threatens to undermine the ethics of hospitality that underpins Blakean eschatology and reduce the call to liberty to a struggle for dominance.

While Orc's allusions to Christ and Isaiah position him as the messianic “messenger who proclaims peace” (Isaiah 52:7), an aura of violence surrounds him. Orc is introduced in a sequence of violent sexuality, which critics such as Leslie Tanenbaum have characterized as rape (45). Orc seizes “the panting struggling womb” of the Shadowy Female who has imprisoned him, who is overcome with a mixture of joy and agony at his grasp, crying “O what limb rending pains I feel. Thy fire and my frost/ Mingle in howling pains, in furrows by thy lightening rent:/ This is eternal death; and this the torments long foretold” (Blake 52). This mingling of sexuality and pain is a distorted mirror of the later sexual liberation of the daughters of Albion, and hints at a more sinister dimension to Orc's emancipatory message; it is less a freedom from institutional oppression than the triumph of a more vigorous form of power over an impotent and moribund political hierarchy. This triumphant erotic aggression points to the actual social context in which America occurs, one in which the War for Independence is not a “mental fight” to liberate humanity from the root causes of spiritual and political oppression, but a corporeal act of violence designed to set up a new political state; one which does little to challenge the systems of labour, sexual repression, and spiritual isolation that constitute the postlapsarian condition.

This disconnect between visionary possibility and sociopolitical reality returns us to Berdyaev’s lament for the tragic incommensurability of apocalyptic speech, its tendency within history to “[become] objectified and [be] robbed of its eschatological character” (184). Certainly,
when pronounced in the context of a political agenda, the eschatological performative risks being subsumed and instrumentalized by that agenda, its hermeneutic expansiveness tethered to a sociopolitical power play. The radical publisher Daniel Eaton, a contemporary of Blake, saw eschatological enthusiasm as a powerful force that could be harnessed for the achievement of a more moderate, rational liberal reform, writing “In Revolutions, Enthusiasts are necessary, who in transgressing all bounds, may enable the wise and the temperate to attain their ends. Had it not been for the Puritans, whose aim was equally to destroy both episcopacy and royalty, the English would never have attained that portion of civil and religious liberty which they enjoy” (cited in Mee 144). Here, eschatological speech loses its unique character and becomes at best a rallying cry for a sort of Enthusiast vanguard whose vulgar energies can be turned to productive ends by soberer minds, at worst a sanctified cover for brute political expediency. As with the Bard's lament in the Songs, the eschatological reality described by the address is robbed of its phenomenological integrity, no longer invoking an alternative world system whose impossible laws are sanctioned by a visionary prophetic authority, but instead serving as a way of channelling and deferring the “infinite desire” sparked by the address to a discrete sociopolitical end, either reactionary or progressive. Whether an opiate or a rabble-rouser, the eschatological performative fails to pierce the boundaries of its own self-contained world-creation, except in the predetermined fashion dictated by the authority sanctioning its use.

In *America*, this failure is represented in the twin illuminations bookending the work. The book opens with an engraving of Albion's Angel, crouched and hunched over in despair, a common Blakean symbol of spiritual blindness and epistemological closure. It ends with a figure in much the same posture, his hands upraised in supplication. Despite the triumphant words of the conclusion, which declares the overturning of the “law-built heaven” following the
apocalyptic triumph of the French Revolution, in which the “five gates” of finite human perception “were consumed, and their bolts and hinges melted,” the final image suggests an ironic scepticism of this success. As the figure closes his body and senses to the erotic eschatological possibilities contained in the poem, so too does the book itself enclose and seal up the eschatological demand it contains, emphasizing its isolation from the sociopolitical realities it ostensibly describes. The very exuberance of the diegetic success of the poem’s apocalyptic plot highlights this isolation, and points to the extradiegetic failure of any genuine millenarian hopes for the American and French Revolutions.

This disconnect should not be taken, however, as maudlin despair at sociopolitical change, but a necessary strategic element of the Blakean eschatological address, a vital preservation of its autonomy in the face of historical teleology. Eschatological speech operates, by necessity, in history, in dynamic conversation with concrete political and ideological struggles. It is, however, simultaneously an “end of history,” in that it resists the calcification of human life into abstract doctrines and theoretical generalizations characteristic of political thought in favour of an expansive, open-ended vision of human society. This tightrope act is maintained through what Butler calls the “lucky incommensurability” of language (to which we can attach the Austinian and Biblical synonyms, “felicitous” and “blessed”) in which, she claims, “resides the linguistic occasion for change” (102). Unlike Berdyaev, who imagines agency as an extra-social moment of transcendent creative freedom “outside the objectified world, outside the time of this world… it knows neither past nor future” (181), and which is thus tragically thwarted by its entrance into the phenomenal world, Butler locates the ground of genuine agency precisely in this failure of linguistic sovereignty. Political agency, especially for “those unauthorized by prior conventions or by reigning prerogatives of citizenship” is, Butler argues, derived predominantly “from the
failures in the performative apparatus of power, turning the universal against itself, redeploying
equality against its existing formulations, retrieving freedom from its contemporary conservative
valence” (93). In the face of seemingly intractable hegemonic power structures, our greatest hope
is their inevitable, felicitous, blessed failure: “Whether there are prophecies, they shall fail;
whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away”
(Corinthians 13:8). The incommensurability of language, the impossibility of guaranteeing a
single, self-identical meaning and efficacy to one's utterances, opens the way to the death of the
sovereign self and resitutes agency as dependent on the navigation of an intersubjective
language community. “[A]gency” Butler writes, “begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who
acts (who is not the same as the sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is
constituted as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from
the outset” (16). The failure of the myth of radical autonomy, the Urizenic selfhood making
worlds in the void, forces the speaker back to the only possible ground of genuine meaning and
agency, the fraught and troubling field of human speech-communities, which Blake often
portrays more like a war-zone than a paradise: the “wars of life, & wounds of Love/ With
intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought/ Mutual in one another's love and wrath all
renewing” (178). This contentious verbal sparring is a necessary component of the rigorous
commitment to dialogic address that forms the linguistic basis of the Jerusalem community. As
Buber writes, “I affirm the person I struggle with: I struggle with him as my partner, I confirm
him as creature and creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me” (79).

Blake's Jerusalem concludes with a visionary literalization of this discursive ideal.
Following the collapse of the hegemonic social norms represented by the fallen Albion, “the
Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the Heathen” (Blake 258), there is a miraculous restoration of voice and creative agency to both the human and animal world, so that “every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant Eagle Dove Fly, Worm, and the all wondrous Serpent… Humanize” (258) and join the collective dialogue, “the Mutual Covenant Divine”(258). Language itself becomes agential and independently participatory, so that “every Word & Every Character/ Was Human.” This polyphonic discourse forms a single, collective human body, which “walk[s]/ Too &fro in Eternity as One Man,” while still maintaining the integrity of its constituent parts, each of which is “clearly seen and seeing.” The substance of this discourse is in effect a co-creative, collaborative drama in which the participants “[converse] together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright/ [Redound] 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” (257-258). Here, Blakean eschatological speech is less a performative, either sociopolitical or even phenomenological, a declarative demand that solicits assent according to the social or visionary authority of the speaker, and more a performance, a collaborative project that requires mutual, voluntary participation. It is a shared creative act in which all participants rely on each other to compose and sustain the communal song. Jerusalem ends with the poet declaring “I heard the voices of their emanations they are called Jerusalem,” a line followed by the epigram “The End of the Song of Jerusalem.” In this ecstatic moment, “Jerusalem” is simultaneously the singer, the song, the eschatological state that unites them, and the poem that contains them all, which has now been retroactively retitled a “song” (in the frontispiece, the title of the poem is Jerusalem or The Emanation of the Giant Albion). Jerusalem emerges in the act of this performance, in its stubborn insistence on the integrity of the Other and its attentiveness to the ever-renewing
demands of dialogic discourse. While it is fraught, demanding, and perpetually threatened by the equally protean forms of normative orthodoxy, both from within and without, its radical hospitality and openness to unanticipated contingency provide both a credible social ethics and a compelling window into the manifold possibilities of interhuman life.
Bibliography


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