

FRAMING, INVERSIONS, AND MATERIALITY IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S PRINTS AND
PRINTMAKING

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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ABSTRACT

William Blake sought, through his poetry and printmaking, to change the fundamental nature of reality and to set humanity on a redemptive course. Inspired in his studio, the artist channeled what he called "Divine Vision" into his complicated poetry and visual designs—what is commonly referred to as his unique "composite" art. The cosmic transformations that Blake sought to bring about through the dissemination of his art, however, began in the material processes of his studio, in the performance of the novel "relief etching" method of printmaking he invented. This paper examines two tropes Blake used extensively in his art, what I call "framing" and "inversions," and traces their origins in his works' production. I consider framing as it is displayed in the short lyric "The Tyger," which is about physical and conceptual acts of framing at the same time that it uses frames in its structure and poetics. To define and describe Blake's inversions, this paper focuses on Blake's epic poem *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, in which inversions infuse the language and visual designs even as they govern the poem's narrative order. A concluding section demonstrates the two tropes' intersection in a series of framings and inversions performed by the artist in his studio where, working the wheels of his press, Blake animates not only his illuminated books but, in his mind, alternative orders of reality.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Note: Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations from William Blake's works refer to David Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. The main exceptions are references to the poem "The Tyger" which I have taken from David Bindman's *Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*. For convenience, parenthetical citations for Blake's poetry will include abbreviated titles followed by plate and line numbers, as well as page numbers where they may be found in Erdman's edition. Blake's prose letters, marginalia, and other writings will be named in the text and referenced with Erdman's pages. Relevant abbreviations are as follows:

<i>A</i>	<i>America a Prophecy</i>
<i>BL</i>	<i>The Book of Los</i>
<i>BU</i>	<i>The [First] Book of Urizen</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>A Descriptive Catalog of Pictures</i>
<i>E</i>	Erdman
<i>FZ</i>	<i>The Four Zoas</i>
<i>J</i>	<i>Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Milton a Poem in 2 Books</i>
<i>MHH</i>	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
<i>PA</i>	[Public Address]
<i>SIE</i>	<i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i>
<i>Thel</i>	<i>The Book of Thel</i>

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Serious readers of William Blake have long noted the breadth and sophistication of his works' critical engagement with a range of historical formations and social institutions. In long epic poems and lyrics alike, Blake takes aim at the complex of social and political currents that underpin a recognizably modern cultural gestalt. Science, deism, organized Christianity, monarchy, industrial mass production, artistic praxis, and patriarchal conceptions of gender and sexuality are just a few of the points of contact between Blake's projects and the historical reality his work incorporates into its aesthetic order. Molly Rothenberg, for example, has argued that Blake "implicitly and explicitly participates in a critique of eighteenth-century philosophical assumptions" (1). Saree Makdisi notes an even broader set of concerns expressed by Blake scholars, among whom Blake's work "has often been taken to depict . . . the conceptual history of modernity itself, its sense of possibility and impossibility, and its fundamental conceptual categories" (*William* 2). Makdisi's own work is in alignment with Blake studies' general thrust when he argues that the artist's projects sought, in part, to challenge the emergent order, that in his illuminated books Blake is "tinkering with and disrupting the basic conceptual and ideological building blocks of modernization, in effect rewriting the conceptual language of modernization for alternative political and aesthetic purposes" (*William* 9).

Indeed, Blake intended his poetry and designs—analyzed most appropriately as the "composite art" first detailed by Jean Hagstrum (10)—to participate in reality in a fundamental way. He sought to describe, converse with, and rewrite it, and believed that doing so was to actively influence its deepest workings. At the very least, as Susan Wolfson puts it, Blake's "language in poetic form is no static product for Bake; it is an action that compels awareness . . .

not only of a poet's book but also of the world that such books penetrate and engage" (81). Blake himself hints at this orientation in his critique of rationalistic historiography in *A Descriptive Catalog of Pictures* where he charges that "All that is not action is not worth reading" (DC 45, E 544). History, for him, is not driven by "causes and consequences" dreamed up and legitimated by the likes of "Hume, Gibbon and Voltaire" who "cannot with all their artifice, turn or twist one fact or disarrange self evident action and reality" (DC 45, E 544). Historical progression, in Blake's view, is moved along by "spiritual agency" (DC 45, E 544); historical writings and intellectual systems not sensitive to this underlying foundation are grounded in coercive mechanisms of abstract causation. In *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, he figures such causation by contrasting the "wheels" of scientific naturalism with those he imagined rotating freely in heaven:

. . . cruel Works

Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic

Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden; which

Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace. (*J* 15.17-20, E 159)

"Cogs tyrannic" make the world go round only as the cosmos is artificially described in what Blake saw as vacuous intellectual paradigms expressed in the writings of mechanistic philosophers, "the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire . . . Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton," (*J* 15.15-16, E 159). For Blake these are "not worth any man's reading" (DC 45, E 544). In a sense that will become clearer in the course of this paper, Blake is here concerned more with the efficacy of writing than he is with getting history right; what's at stake is not a correct account of the social and physical world, but the ability to participate in it through writing and art. Blake, we will see, believes that his own methods may counter this "artifice"; in

important respects, his art will actively "turn," "twist," or "disarrange self evident action and reality" to reverse what he sees as humanity's fallen condition and restore universal harmony.

For Blake, art brings to life what he often referred to as "Divine Vision" by channeling spiritual energy rooted in an ancient reservoir of prophetic inspiration. True poetic expression is the mechanism by which the universe was created when, he imagines, "the ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive" (*MHH* 11, E 38). The corruption of this vision—its replacement by "a system . . . which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects" (*MHH* 11, E 38) constitutes the fallen state of the world, and corresponds with the advent of centralized authority, described here as "Priesthood" (*MHH* 11, E 38). Blake sought to follow the model he found in the "ancient Poets" to actively shape the world by naming it in accordance with his "enlarged" perception and, thus, to bring to life not just "all sensible objects," but to restore the primacy of mental, imaginative elements of reality that authoritarian intellectual systems had effaced with their "Brooding Abstract Philosophy. to destroy Imagination" (*J* 70.19, E 224). In making art, in applying imagination to the material universe, Blake believed that not only he, but any individual could participate in the unfolding creation, that, as Moses wished, not only priests but "all the Lords people [could be] Prophets" (qtd. in *M* 1.17, E 96).

Blake wanted, first, to set in motion the infusion of material reality with creative imagination—to "animate" the object world like the ancient poets—and, second, to turn it down a redemptive course. These two prongs of his project correspond neatly with two tropes that occur profusely throughout the poetry and designs that make up Blake's hybrid art; I will call

them, respectively, "framing" and "inversions." In short, this paper will explicate these two tropes which have been left generally underexplored by critics who, while attending at times to individual instances of either one, have not elaborated them as recurring motifs. As I will demonstrate, the oversight is more pronounced in context of a widespread emphasis in Blake studies on the materiality of the artist's production processes, the copper plates, inks, acids, and printing press that he uses, as well as the performance of complicated planning and etching work undertaken in his studio. Robert Essick, in 1986, called recently invigorated attention to Blake's "medium-reflexive" productions a "new field" growing in its focus on "the ontological and epistemological consequences of Blake's habit of creating his words and images in and through these unusual, even unique, media" ("How Blake's" 197). Sharing this emphasis, I will argue that "framing" and "inversions" name not only important tropes in Blake's work, but also important material processes performed by Blake in his unique artistic praxis. For Blake, that is, these are more than mere poetic devices just as his poems are much more than mere words on a page; framing and inversions are tools for giving life to the inspired vision Blake saw as necessary to positively transform the fallen world, to move humanity toward redemption. Blake deliberately aimed to perform such transformations while at the lever of his press.

The paper's second chapter will look closely at Blake's lyric "The Tyger" to demonstrate how he uses varied and sophisticated frames to vitalize his poetry and designs. "Framing" is present both as a topic in his work and as a structural feature of his poetics; it refers to literal aspects of historical reality such as a blacksmith's labor at the same time that it facilitates the interplay of intellectual perspectives construed as conceptual frames. In this respect, Blake's work instantiates what Anthony Wittreich argues is a central mechanism of literary prophecy, "a poetics wherein the form of a work is its essence, the vehicle conveying its theme" (Wittreich

111). The prophetic identification of form and content is evident in "The Tyger," which poetically frames a barrage of overlapping and intersecting perspectives—various "doors of perception" (*MHH* 14, E 39) perhaps—at the same time that it stacks complex references to instances of "framing" as activities evident in historical reality. Prominent among "The Tyger's" frames, for example, are the literal, visual frames, the illustrations and borderlines, that Wittreich argues "energize [all of Blake's illuminated] poetry" even while the words effect a counter-framing that "in turn ensures that the picture will not remain silent" (Wittreich 109); these are at once references to frames at the same time that they participate in framing a reader's conceptual approach to the poem. As we will see, the presence of references to frames embedded in the framings performed by the poem gives Blake's work a charged vitality and conditions its unexpectedly profound capacity to richly engage a reader's phenomenal experience.

Inversions—the series of inside-out poetic constructs, spatial and temporal paradoxes, complicated symmetries, and reversed pictorial designs that are the topic of chapter three—orient Blake's poetry along a convoluted multi-dimensional trajectory, a corrective path calibrated to reverse the world's fallen condition. Inversions are on display prominently in *Jerusalem's* language, narrative progress, and visual designs. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the spatially complicated trajectory initiated in that work by the artisan demigod Los, whose labors represent, among other things, Blake's printmaking work. In *Jerusalem*, Los works to turn the cosmos in all of its dimensions—physical, spiritual, and intellectual—back upon itself to invert it from what Blake presents as its inside-out, fallen condition. More broadly, by using and troping various inversions, Blake exceeds "the reasoning historian, turner and twister of causes and consequences," (*DC* 44, E 543) to act, instead, as the "turner and twister" of orders political, intellectual, and metaphysical. As with the fate of Albion in *Jerusalem*, human redemption, for

Blake, will come about through a turning around or, better, a turning outside-in, of mainstream ideas reified into static binaries like mind and nature, good and evil, or male and female; his work seeks to effect such inward/outward twisting on the mind and environs of readers, and to thus foster their deliverance from depraved, universal discord.

The paper's concluding chapter will trace the intersection of these two tropes back into Blake's studio, where, at the helm of his press, the artist and his wife Catherine act out and set in motion the transformations that he sees to be necessary in revising and rearranging the oppressive institutions and intellectual systems dominant in his day. The studio origins of Blake's aesthetics, his performance of printmaking production among his instruments and inks, his hammering of metal plates to plane them (Viscomi, "Illuminated" 42), his mixing and swabbing of acids, and his laborious working of a mechanical press, have been the object of a fruitful line of research in Blake studies. Joseph Viscomi's 1993 study, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, traces the author's own recreation of Blake's techniques using period materials. This work has profoundly informed recent critical assessments of Blake's oeuvre. Even before Viscomi's work was available, though, Stephen Carr had already demonstrated the material roots of "a logic of difference" inaugurated in "Blake's publication process itself" and proposed that the process "extends and accentuates the play of differences" (185) that infuses the artist's project. Recently, Makdisi has shown Blake's work to interrupt the logic of identical duplication that informs industrial mass production and illustrated how this "political aesthetic" (Makdisi, "Political" 110) begins in his studio where his method of production recycles images and ideas in its own "logic of repetition, albeit of material images rather than simply figural ones" (Makdisi, *William* 12). Following these examples, this paper will demonstrate the material genesis of Blake's logic of inversion and framing; it will explore, that is, the concrete engagement with reality that grounds

the dissemination and efficacy of his art, the point of contact between reality and prophetic vision.

These two tropes together—the embodiment in Blake's art of shifting, framed perspectives and their inverted orientation may key Wittreich's assessment of "the effect of Blake's multimedia art . . . to open the eye and, opening it, to guide the mind through spaces it has not traveled before" (Wittreich 108). Blake's narrator—taken by most critics to represent Blake himself—puts it similarly in the epic invocation to *Jerusalem*:

. . . I rest not from my great task!

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes

Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity

Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination (J 5, E 147)

Inspired, Blake located the animating powers of ancient "Gods or Geniuses" in his printmaking press. Working its levers, he channeled divine revelation into material reality. From here Blake aimed at nothing short of transforming the universe—its human political and social institutions, to be sure, as well as its spiritual possibilities—by liberating humanity into cosmic dimensions that remained hidden in the eighteenth-century intellectual imagination. Framing, we will see, brings Blake's vision to life by entrenching it in historical and material reality, and inversions chart its swiveling course. Blake used them together to imitate a creator god at the genesis of the universe, to enrich human experience by artistic fiat, the production and dissemination of "Divine Vision" in his poems and designs.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMING IN "THE TYGER"

Blake's poem "The Tyger" offers an instructive entry into the function of "frames" as a trope in his work. The poem is about framing as a creative act at the same time that it uses frames as poetic devices. I will describe three types of framing that are on display in the Tyger, what I will call conceptual framing, contextual framing, and perspectival framing. These framing functions have in common that they work to propose various types of order—symmetries, in one figuration—that subsequently break down as they are replaced by alternative frameworks arising in the poem. The first, conceptual framing, I will construe in terms of a hypotactic and paratactic interplay, a structural dissonance sustained between linguistic energies that aim to subordinate subsequent phrases and lines, and the counter impulses that defy their logic. This structure underpins the poem's famous sequence of rhetorical questions that floats a succession of conceptual frames, each replacing the last. The second type of framing, contextual framing, emerges in the rich complexities Blake builds into framing as a poetic conceit. Shifting contextual uses of the word "frame" progress through physical, verbal, and visual resonances. These contexts serve to lodge the poem in historical reality and at the same time participate in a blurring of metaphysical distinctions. Finally, perspectival framing provides a mechanism that, for Blake, facilitates the conflation of subject with object and, ultimately, of art with reality. Here a messy shuffling of perspectives rooted in ambiguities in the poem's grammatical person swings between speaker, reader, the Tyger's creator, and the Tyger itself. These three framing functions contribute to a unique poetics that infuses much of Blake's work with an unusual vitality. The net result of the series of frames, which flash into a reader's mind before being retracted, is to animate "The Tyger"—poem and beast—in a profound way. This startling effect instantiates the

method Blake used to give life to the prophetic visions he set in motion at the helm of his press. For the Tyger sustains a terrible but illusory presence for speaker and reader alike as a holographic life animated in a fluttering sequence of inter-referential contexts. All that exists in the poem are nested and overlapping frames; but they, like questions implying their own answers, like the revolutionary energies Blake sought to unleash on the world, give life to convincing realities.

"The Tyger" is rickety in its grammatically problematic questions, which fail, in some cases, to clearly designate an object and, in others, to designate any object at all. Ungrammatical disjunctions condition one variety of framing at work in the poem, conceptual framing. In doing so, they service the poem's embodiment of "framing"—its central conceit—by suggesting conceptual frames implied in each of the rhetorical questions and then suggesting additional frames that, in turn, replace the first. Thus, even as broken grammar admits the continuing resonance throughout the poem of line 4's verb "frame," it also reinforces the poem's basic structure, suggesting in its pretenses of legibility an order that will not hold. The poem's grammar and syntax barely admit orderly reading, failing, as I will show they do in stanzas two, three, and four, to adequately pair subjects with appropriate verbs and objects. In the end, they will not successfully impose anything like the "symmetry" line 4's framing "hand or eye" seek to accomplish.

Tension between a proposed, forced symmetry and its denial at every turn—what we will see to be first the proposal and then the replacement of various frames—is "The Tyger's" most important theme; it is embodied in the poem's interrogative structure. Questions train a reader's focus upon a particular range of relevant meanings. Consider the question: "Who ate my sandwich?" An intelligible response must fall within certain fairly clear boundaries. It must name

a person, say, or further clarify relevant information about the sandwich or its circumstances; it must, as well, conform to a certain set of assumptions that are implicit in the discursive situation, such as the fact that I am discussing a real sandwich and not an imaginary one, or that the relevant event is something that happened in the recent past and in relatively close proximity, instead of, say, in ancient Egypt. This is to say that a question leans heavily toward initiating a hypotactic series, in which further statements and questions are subordinate to the boundaries it sets up, either explicitly or by implication. Indeed, it is hard to read a question, which by its very logic demands an answer, as related to what follows it in anything but a hypotactic way. Thus, each of "The Tyger's" questions suggests a frame of reference that a reader will naturally carry residually to the lines that follow. But the overall effect of the grammatical and syntactic lapses that I will enumerate here is to apply an almost impassive paratactic logic; disjunctions like stanza 3's failure to supply verbs for its "dread hand" and "dread feet" and a *non sequitur* in stanza 2 work against the hypotactic orientation of each prior question. In other words, they refuse to conform to each question as it is framed, violating its established bounds to consider instead other subjects and objects—to replace, perhaps, the prior frame with a new one. This structural flexibility opens the poem to admit a range of meaningful associations, what I will describe below as contexts, that condition the poem's unique engagement with reality.

Stanza two admits the succession of frames by initiating a pattern of paratactic disjunction. The first question here, "In what distant deeps or skies. / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?" follows naturally from the prior question, the first stanza's concerning "symmetry." Both address the Tyger and take as their objects aspects of the Tyger itself. Then a *non sequitur* fractures the stanza by shifting unannounced to questions completely concerned with the Tyger's postulated framer. The first question (in stanza one) concerns the Tyger's fearful symmetry and

the second question might be glossed as asking about the Tyger's location, the latter not mentioning the creator at all. These questions, it would seem, progressively focus more acutely on the Tyger itself, as the poem's title suggests they might. But line 7's "On what wings dare he aspire?" introduces the pronoun "he" as its grammatical subject, slipping now into more direct consideration of the person (now gendered male) and temperament (the daring aspiration, as it were) of the "framer," and effacing completely any features of the Tyger itself. This personification of the "framer" continues in line eight as the "hand" returns as the topic of a new question. The mid-stanza disjunction generates poignant ambiguities that will become more pronounced in stanzas three and four. In these lines, though, they cause the phrase "the fire" to oscillate between literal and figurative resonances. Lines 7 and 8 offer, then retract, reinforcement of the literal connotation by alluding, in the latter, to Prometheus who, in the context of that myth, actually holds fire in his hand. But this tilts figurative immediately, of course, registering as a stock-metaphor for dangerous human aspiration, an allegorical move preceded in the line 7 allusion to Icarus, whose literal brush with the fiery sun grounds Western literature's famous anti-hubris morality tale. On the other hand, "the fire's" definite article suggests that line 8 names the same fire introduced two lines before, "the fire of thine eyes." If so, how can a hand grab abstractions like wrath or passion as this interpretation would seem to imply? These complications reinforce the *non sequitur* that obtains between the two couplets. "The fire's" polysemous forking, first to describe the Tyger's eyes and then to stand in simultaneously for fire itself and the dangerous objects of human desire, escapes the exigencies of orderly discourse. Moving between the two inflections, a reader considers the poem, at the very least, through two distinct conceptual frames. The first frame questions, roughly, the impact and significance of the Tyger's fiery presence; the second shifts to consider the Tyger's origins—

in hellfire, perhaps, or in human ambition.

A similar, even more problematic slippage and a resulting paratactic inertia occurs in both stanzas three and four. In the former, a first question asking about the "sinews of [the Tyger's] heart" is followed, in line 12, by the stunted questions "What dread hand? & what dread feet?" Neither of these questions contains a verb. The nearest candidates for an implied verb are "could twist" and "began to beat," both parts of questions in the prior lines. But the second of these, "began to beat," adjoined with line 12's questions by a comma, is reflexive (done by "thy heart" to itself). It does not grammatically match the subjects "hand" and "feet" which, in this context, demand transitive or intransitive verbs, though it is tempting to imagine them involved in a violent *beat-ing*, a pummeling, say. The only other verb around, "twist," is a poor candidate for the action of feet, which add an unusual addition to the already compound subject (syntactically parallel, that is, with the "shoulder" and "art" that have twisted the sinews in the stanza's first couplet). With the heart already beating, what action is meant to have been performed by the hand and feet? The hand, of course, echoes the hand of the prior stanza—Prometheus's fire-grabbing hand; together with the reference to "art" and the imagery of manual labor, these recall the framing hand of stanza one. A stanza four flourish picks up these threads to emphasize foundry framing as the poem's central action, partly by letting the first stanza's "frame" resonate through disjointed grammar similar to that of the preceding stanzas. Here, as well, there is no obvious verb for three incomplete questions: "What the hammer? what the chain, / . . . What the anvil?" Hammer, chain, and anvil each clearly do not pair with the stanza's main verb, "clasp" (16). And lines 13 and 14 harbor the poem's grammatically clunkiest couplet: "What the hammer? what the chain, / In what furnace was thy brain?" The only verb here, "was," and the question's grammatical subject, "thy brain," are unintelligible as the action and object of

a hammer or chain. Paratactically adrift, these images are allowed to resonate among a range of conceptual frames. "Brain" may synecdochically stand in for its interior, a mind, so that "grasp" implies understanding, in this case, of line 16's "deadly terrors." A toggle of the reader's mind, though, makes "deadly terrors" refer to "the anvil" and the stanza's other violent tools.

"The Tyger's" heavy punctuation also counters hypotactic subordination and admits toggling between conceptual frames. Enigmatic question marks, periods, commas, colons, and semi-colons, though they function at times as hard stops, work against anchoring the poem in any particular frame of reference. Out of place periods, for example, work together with commas to keep lines contained and forcefully end-stopped. But even these, on close inspection, prove unstable. Distinguishing between commas and periods requires some interpretation, as evidenced in the differing transcriptions provided in three standard sources: David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, and David Bindman's *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*. Doubtless, part of the inconsistency stems from each transcriber having copied his version from different editions of the 29 extant. For even a cursory glance at the eleven editions available in the *William Blake Archive* demonstrates a range of decidedly different punctuations. Some periods, such as that after the poem's first two feet in copy V's "Tyger Tyger. burning bright," have been transcribed into commas, in this case in two of the standard transcriptions. But in copy Z, to take just one example, the line's punctuation is clearly a period. In another significant example, what all three of the above sources transcribe as a semicolon after stanza one's "In the forests of the night;" and a colon where that line repeats in stanza six, appears as such (arguably) in copies A, C, and Z, but not so definitely in copy V or T, which appear to have colons in both locations. Another version, the one labeled AA, has a distinct semi-colon in stanza six. Colons admit the passage of

syntax and logic into a hypotactically subordinated clause, while semi-colons stop the sentence's flow, merely gesturing to the paratactically related next clause. A colon, for example, in stanza 6 may reinforce the final question's address to the Tyger; a semi-colon, on the other hand, especially if it is known to replace a colon, may subtly admit the question's address to another "thy"—the postulated creator, perhaps, or the reader. Below, we will see that this particular consequence of the poem's structural design admits a thorough confusion of the poem's subject and object; it participates, that is, in Blake's rearrangement of the vantage assumed by a reader approaching the poem. Shifting punctuation and disjointed grammar provide an architecture that permits a range of inflections to emerge and splinter as each conceptual frame gives way to another.

Unusual punctuation and grammar support the poem's hypo- and paratactic tension to undermine the consistent direction of syntactic traffic. Thus, they facilitate the stop and go sequencing of various conceptual frames. Working through the poem's questions reveals a series of associations flashed in sequence—a fearsome Tyger, a creator-god, an artist, a devil, an angel, or Prometheus, to name a few. Each adds a unique frame of reference that gives unique significance, for example, to the body parts scattered throughout the poem, the hands, eye, shoulder, brain, or feet. Considered in connection with the angel suggested in line 7's "wings," for example, the framing hand may resonate as an instrument of divine good that garners an affirmative answer to line 19's "Did he smile his work to see?" When the wings belong to Icarus, however, the hand may "aspire" too high and provoke a different answer. Each also effects a reorientation of the poem's action; as we have seen, some frames of reference imply the execution of violent labor, while others imply its reception. "His work" (19), which may seem, at first, to refer simply to the Tyger's divine creation, may refer, when framed differently, to the

projection onto the Tyger of psychic horrors already present in the mind of a speaker or reader. Moreover, the poem answers none of the questions, either directly or by implication. In a certain light, it is instructive to consider the poem as a simple list of questions ordered paratactically—germane to each other only by proximity, arranged in stanzas, by the subject established in the poem's title, "The Tyger," and mortared together by such poetic features as the poem's compelling rhythm and what Nelson Hilton calls "the power of literal imagination [to] join the wispy traces in words" (Hilton 184). Relying on these features—and not on syntax or punctuation, the usual ordering characteristics of language—to make the poem cohere allows various frames to inhabit the poem in near simultaneous succession.

"The Tyger's" structural movement from one framing question to the next, the flashing of successive frames of reference, underpins the poem's movement among the varied resonances of Blake's framing conceit. They permit and amplify, that is, the second type of framing at work in our analysis, contextual frames. Artisanal forge imagery, knitting, moral law, and other contexts parade in the mind's eye of an attuned reader and point beyond the poem to a barrage of social institutions such as Christianity and historical formations like industrial labor. In its varied contextual uses of the word frame, "The Tyger" instantiates what Morris Eaves writes is true of all of Blake's lyrics, that they are "components in an evolving narrative framework of fall and redemption that is applicable on several interpenetrating levels—individual, social, religious, political, artistic, cosmic" ("Introduction" 4). In "The Tyger," a back and forth oscillation among concrete types of framing—their nearly simultaneous presence as senses of the same word—has another profound effect: to undermine habitual distinctions between physical and non-physical reality. John Howard notes a similar effect in many of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where "analogies unite the physical and mental experience of man" (20). In Blake's

aesthetic, framing resonates both physically, as it does, for example, in mentioning the work of hammers and anvils, and verbally, as we have already seen, in its interrogative syntax. As the poem unfolds and each type of framing appears and then is succeeded by another, the distinction between the physical and verbal, the material and the non-material, collapses in a metaphysical blur. As we will see, this amounts to a historical and metaphysical self-referencing that allows Blake to insert the poem into reality in a compelling way.

In the eighteenth century, the verb "frame" commonly named physical acts of creation ("Frame," def. 4a). For Blake, though, it usually informs a more complete image: an aggressive, violent manipulation of existing materials. It is the verb he uses in his favored trope for the labors of Urizen and Los, who hammer away in fiery furnaces couched in repeated imagery shared with "The Tyger." The word occurs in *The First Book of Urizen* when the title character "Long periods in burning fires labouring / . . . / . . . a roof, vast petrific around, On all sides He fram'd" (*BU* 5.25-30). This "roof" comprises "the vast world of Urizen" (*BU* 5.37), "a black globe" (*BU* 5.33) that comes into existence while "Like a human heart struggling & beating" (*BU* 5.36). And Blake echoes the imagery in the *Book of Los*, when "Los beat on the Anvil; till glorious An immense Orb of fire he fram'd" (*BL* 5.33-34). Paul Miner has described what he calls the "alignment" of imagery in "The Tyger" and in "The Book of Los," naming several of the words the two works have in common: hands, feet, immortal, furnaces, anvil, hammer, iron links, framed, deeps, seizing, and smile (485). To round out the list, we may add bright, brain, heart, beat, fire, chaine, deeps, and night; all of these words, including those listed by Miner, are present in a nine stanza section of a single plate which details a raging, violent foundry scene of aggressive creation. That Blake imagines a similar scene in "The Tyger"—and uses "frame" in the relevant sense—is obvious; it connects the word and the poem to a battery of connotations

richly extended throughout Blake's oeuvre.

Other properly physical senses of the word "frame" are evident in Blake's lexicon as well; each adds a unique context to "The Tyger." Blake sometimes uses the term as a noun to refer to a human's physical body ("Frame." def. 4), a sense most relevant, perhaps, in imagining the Tyger's physical presence. On one occasion framing refers to a musical instrument, a bard's harp smashed in the early plates of *America a Prophecy* (A 2.19, E 52). This sense of frame and its association with the bard adds circumstantial support to a sense active in "the Tyger," framing by poetry, that I will discuss below. Also, it has been suggested that the "dread hand" and "dread feet" that may "twist the sinews of [the Tyger's] heart" refer to labor at a contemporary stocking-frame described in the *OED* ("Stocking-frame."). Textile imagery provides, for Blake, a very rich and widespread system of tropes, what Essick calls an "image field" that makes *Jerusalem* a "multi-seamed fabric of interwoven metonymies" (Essick, "*Jerusalem*" 265). Though Blake does not use "frame" to name textile work anywhere else in his oeuvre, "twist" or "twisted" occurs several times in relation to sewing or weaving and once, outside of "The Tyger," regarding a heart (*Thel* 6.4, E 6). John Grant notes a sewing reference in *Milton a Poem in 2 Books*, where the character Tirzah "ties the knot of bloody veins into the red hot heart" (qtd. in Grant, 597). In any case, textile imagery presents the labor of the character Enitharmon, Los' female counterpart, his "Emanation," with whom his fate and significance is intertwined. Her weaving is a direct counterpoint to Los' work at the forge and such a profuse motif in Blake's illuminated books that it is too weighty not to see it as active here, especially in light of Blake's general critique of industrial production, a theme signaled in "The Tyger's" artisanal imagery and sonic effects.

A precedent for using the verb "frame" to refer to material creation and to trope the word diversely exists in the work of Blake's poetic forebear, John Milton, a reference that extends the

term's reach into still further contexts. For Blake, though, Milton's work offered more than a literary example; in Blake's mind, the great poet had participated in what Wittreich calls a prophetic "line of vision" ("Poet" 97), what Blake saw as a reservoir of revolutionary energy connecting his visions backward historically to those of the biblical prophets. Blake's recycling of Miltonic language is an effort to tap into true prophetic inspiration or, as Mary Johnson puts it, to "reclaim the energy...and release the imaginative powers [he] urgently needed" (Johnson 234). Setting out to demonstrate the "complexities of [the] dynamics" (Miner 479) of imagery shared by "The Tyger" and the works of Milton, Miner argues that in the "intense scrutiny" leveled at Blake's poem "it has not been recognized that imagery referencing the genesis, evolution, and redemption of this fiery creature was influenced crucially by" Milton's works (Miner 479). It is surprising, then, that Miner's otherwise seemingly exhaustive cross-referencing fails to investigate either Blake's or Milton's uses of the word "frame." In *Paradise Lost*, Milton entrenches the action "frame" in contexts almost as varied as those used by Blake in "The Tyger." According to Milton's narrator, the Almighty makes trees and flowers when, as the "sovrän Planter" (IV.691), he "fram'd / All things [in the garden] to mans delightful use" (IV.691-692). As the "sov'ran Architect" he "fram'd" the Gate of Heaven and its golden hinges (V.256). This architectural "framing" neatly parallels an episode in *The Four Zoas* when Blake's "Eternal One . . . these dens thy wisdom framd / Golden & beautiful" (FZ 38.15-39.10, E 327). Using the word "frame" as Milton used it adds to "The Tyger" biblical and prophetic contextual frames.

In "The Tyger," these physical types of framing alternate with several non-physical ones. That Blake had a conceptual interpretation of "frame" in mind is supported, for example, by his use of the word elsewhere, such as in *Jerusalem* when a "Ratio / Of the Things of Memory . . .

frames Laws & Moralities" (*J* 74.12, E 229). More significant, though, is a use of the verb that names verbal acts ("Frame." def. 6c). We have already seen something of this in the poem's use of questions to frame the Tyger and its circumstances in grammatical legibility. In other verbal senses of "frame," the line between physical and non-physical begins to blur. In this respect too, Milton offers an instructive precedent. He uses "frame" in a sense that most completely fuses its verbal and physical inflections in a single use of the word; in *Paradise Lost*, it refers to divine fiat, a spoken act which, nonetheless, brings about physical creation. At the genesis of the universe Milton's Almighty "A mightie Spheare . . . fram'd" (VII.355). This framing of the sun is clearly an action both physical and verbal; in context it renames the event that begins "Again th'Almightie spake: Let there be Lights" (VII.339). But for Milton and for Blake, an even more significant precedent fuses "frame's" physical and verbal senses: the two intersect in the King James translation of the Bible, which declares that "the worlds were framed by the word of God" (*The Holy Bible*, Heb. 11:3). In this context, the metaphysical blurring effected in "The Tyger" reenacts the variety of framing Blake associated with divine creation—verbal commands manifesting physically.

The fusion of verbal and physical framing evident in Blake's overlapping conceits is embodied as well in the aesthetic rendering the poet gives them. For example, "The Tyger's" verbally created sonic effects—the pounding trochaic tetrameter, the hard consonants such as the bs, ts, and gs of "Tyger, Tyger. burning bright," and the ringing clangs of "chain" and "brain"—condition the aesthetic that brings life to the physical variety of framing referenced in the poem's foundry imagery and its imagery of violence. Furthermore, noise and rhythm are themselves physical effects of the poem's words; "The Tyger's" poetry poignantly highlights the poem's own materiality, the physicality of its sounds and visual impressions. Blake must have had this cross-

metaphysical fusion in mind when he wrote stanza 3; its enigmatic "feet" and "beat" are references to poetry—to metrical feet and poetic rhythm. These, like the poem's grammar, aim to frame the poem's content. Blake presents the Tyger's animation just as its "heart began to beat" (11); he has channeled these first beats into the meter and rhythm of the poem. Because all of the lines end in stressed final syllables, a pendulum-like energy swings tightly between them and the lines' stressed initial syllables, framing the meter, a shortened (catalectic) trochaic tetrameter, which is itself symmetrical (/ u / u / u /). Hard end-stops aim to reinforce those confines, often abruptly, such as when couplets that might admit enjambment are truncated with periods that do not belong (c.f. lines 3, 5, 11, and 15). The punctuation and the firmly stressed syllables that flank each line are like a cage made of poetic "feet" and the mechanical stamping in a "dread hand"—handwriting, perhaps—of materials banged or written into a uniform shape. That Blake is sensitive to meter as one location of restraint is clear when he defends *Jerusalem's* unconventional poetics. For him the "modern bondage of Rhyming" works tyrannically with the "Monotonous Cadence" of blank verse to limit the possibilities of poetic expression. "Poetry Fetter'd," he writes, "Fetters the Human Race!" (*J* 3.16-25, E 146). "The Tyger" dares, so to speak, to frame the beast in two senses that are active in stanza three—a poetic sense, in its rhythm and punctuation, and a physical sense, in the twisting labor of a shoulder and hand.

But like the rhetorical questions, the conceits fail at establishing the order—the symmetry—they propose. The possibility of symmetry is questionable as early as the first stanza where "symmetry" clanks as a discordant off-rhyme with "eye" and "thy." The answer to the question about who could frame the symmetry may, indeed, be "no one," as similar transgressions prevent the steady beat from caging the beast, for "The Tyger" varies from its strict, symmetrical meter in six of its 24 lines. This poetic rhythm—at once the beating of the

Tyger's heart and the hammer's pounding—drums away with an almost industrial sound, but trips up in lines 4, 10, 11, 18, 20, and 24 where an added initial syllable interjects. An extra flutter of the Tyger's heart, it would seem, has skipped the poem's metric confines. In the end, the Tyger's presentation achieves no symmetry. Stanza one fails in conjunction with stanza 6 to frame the poem by changing its central verb from "Could" to "Dare," and by changing the punctuation. Significantly, in no print does stanza 6's "Tyger Tyger" retain the period that interrupts line 1; by the end of the poem, apparently, the Tyger is not so easily cordoned off.

The dissonance that comes from the simultaneous suggestion of types of framing that are metaphysically disparate generates a kind of oscillation similar to that which I have found in the hypo- and paratactic interplay of the poem's rhetorical questions. As the poem gives rise to conceptual frames, and points through them to concrete instances of framing—to actual real-world activities—it materially embodies framing in its punctuation and meter. The poem's failed framing lodges the poem in material and historical reality, contributing another context—another instance, perhaps—of framing at work in the world.

Because of the failed hypotactic organizing pressures of the poetry, and because of the flurry of contexts—in spite, that is, of the furnace's heat and all the pounding—what emerges is a disjointed, Picasso-esque Tyger, with body parts scattered across the stanzas, its eyes flaming in stanza two, its heart beaten and twisted in stanza three, its brain hammered in stanza four. The ultimate effect of the scattering of the foot, hand, and brain, is to repeatedly suggest the Tyger's body, even while preventing a reader from imagining it visually. These features of the poem give shape to one final variety of metaphysically complex contextual frame that is central to the poem's function, the framing work of the "eye" posited in the poem's first question. This visual framing participates, as well, in the third function of framing on display in the poem, the

perspectival framing I mentioned above. Shifting perspectives in the poem refuse to settle into to any single vantage; as such, they are the mechanism that underpins what Karen Shabetai argues is central to “Blake’s method,” to expose “the dangers of a position of authority as the congealed, mystified projection of a single perspective masquerading as a totality” (559). A manifold of shuffling perspectives, a revolving conflation of subjects with objects serves to inseminate a reader's mind with a succession of perspectives at the same time that it implicates speaker and reader alternatively as viewers and as objects in view.

The interplay of verbal and visual modes of representation is a topic at the heart of “The Tyger,” as it is in most of Blake's poetry. Evidence from the earliest record of the artist's professional career indicates that he was concerned with fusing the two; his non-illuminated first work—executed before he had even conceived of the “relief etching” that he would use for nearly all of his life's remaining poetry—was published under the media-blurring title *Poetical Sketches*. Arguably, the visual has primacy in the work's title, as the adjective “poetical” qualifies “sketches,” anchoring the collection's description in that noun. “The Tyger,” it would seem, shares this emphasis, for both explicit mentions of framing in the poem propose it as the action of an “eye.” Stanza two momentarily considers the Tyger's eyes, which surface only briefly, wedged as they are between it and the framer's “hand or eye” in stanza 1 and its “wings” and “hand” in lines 7 and 8. This stanza's culminating verb is “sieve,” a homophone with “sees” that playfully recalls the “eye” that in this stanza is missing from the “hand” it had been paired with in stanza one; together, the two had metonymically named the Tyger's framer and at the same time sought to frame the poem by their presence in both the first and last stanzas. The first couplet of stanza 5 implies (but does not name) the crying eyes of the stars whose tears “water'd heaven” (18). This sets up the poem's most sweeping visual suggestion, the God's-eye-view

proposed in the line 19 question "Did he smile his work to see?"

For all of its verbal references to eyes and sight, though, other than the adjective "bright," the poem contains no visual descriptions at all. Line 19 flashes the creator's omniscient view only to retract it. Even the Tyger itself is not described. Steven Shaviro, perhaps more than any other critic, has emphasized that "the figure of the Tyger itself is strangely absent from the poem, despite its being repeatedly addressed and invoked by the speaker" (239). Indeed, I find little in the poem to suggest the visual responses articulated by commentators like Hazard Adams, who imagines that "in the dark of night, in a forest, a tiger's eyes would seem to burn," and then goes on to describe the tiger himself: "The tiger's stripes, the color of flame, suggest against the black this same conflagration" (Adams 23). Later, Adams discusses what he sees as "the image Blake draws of a burning tiger threatening to consume the forests with fire" (28). But, "color" and "black," "brilliance" and "stripes," and the look of a tiger's eyes that might seem to burn in the dark of night are not an "image" the poet has "drawn;" nor are they images he has suggested in his words. In fact, they would be decidedly unapt descriptions of the actual visual image that contains the poem; Blake, that is, in making the plate, has literally drawn an image of a tiger that counters what Adams—and, it is likely, numerous other readers—are given to imagine when they visualize the poem.

Thus, the denial of poetic visual images is immediately countered by the properly visual ones that, together with the words in Blake's etching, comprise the complete object of what has been called his composite art. The image—roughly a tree and a famously nonchalant tiger set against a hard-to-identify background—reprises the hypo- and paratactic conflict of the poem's syntactic structure. (I shift to the conventional spelling also current in Blake's day—"tiger"—to indicate we should not assume the pictured tiger is one and the same with the "Tyger" of the

poem.) The poem refuses to give verbal cues that would explicitly link the pictorial tiger with the poetic Tyger. But a reader can hardly help but to pair them even as they work against mutual association. They are constituent parts of the same composition, the same work of art; they coexist in mutual acts of framing. As critics, Hagstrum early among them, have long described, drawn visual frames hold Blake's compositions in a coherent stasis. Marginal and interconnecting floral patterns and even literal visual frames that are sometimes etched into the copper plates and sometimes added, later, to paper prints in ink or watercolor, "invade and cross the text, grow out of the title, or support the main designs" organically uniting the composition as "living members of a living body" (Hagstrum 41). At the same time, though, the tree, tiger, and landscape—all pictured but not described—frame the poem, a characteristic of Blake's lyrics sometimes "striking" to critics like Jennifer Michael who notes "how many of the plates in *Songs of Innocence* employ some sort of frame within the margin of the image" (41). Even as "The Tyger's" poetry and visual frames combine to make a single visual image—a single picture, arguably, since words are visible objects woven into the plate's overall design—they nonetheless undercut each other in way that is parallel to the framing done by the poem's questions.

Perhaps more significantly, "The Tyger's" nested visual frames work together with frames around other various poems where they are synonymous with changing perspectives. *Songs* itself issues a series of framed poems that pass before a viewer's eye in a progressive sequence, with each new frame commenting on the plates before it, and inflecting what comes next. It is in this respect that the frames participate most richly in perspectival framing. Again, the frames function, it would seem, at cross-purposes with themselves. At the same time that each plate's frame serves to order the poems and bind them together as a single object, to establish their order and sequence, the frames serve, as well, to cordon off each poem, to mark

them as individual objects of art that should be considered on their own. While frames help group the poems together as aspects of the work *Songs* and, likewise, group them as members of either the category "Innocence" or that of "Experience," they also isolate each poem, so that each presses a reader to consider its unique speaker, to puzzle over the unique perspective it represents. Each of Blake's framed poems effects a conceptual shift, what Howard calls "the straightforward strategy of creating a lyric voice that dramatizes some persona's state of mind" (13). For Michael it is the succession of visual framings that conditions each shift; regarding an urban pastoral aesthetic she finds in *Songs*, she argues that each new poem is like a "window—a view within a definite frame and limited perspective, mediated and refracted through the glass of the city's abstraction of experience" (45). Frames, for Blake, signal the introduction of new perspectives.

The poem's denial of visual imagery makes proliferating perspectival frames accessible to the reader as they successively arise to destabilize subject and object, reader and speaker. The absence of visual description allows the Tyger not only to be shredded beyond recognition, but abstracted into a registry of human experiences, to be subsumed into a reader's subjectivity. Metonymies immediately conscript each of the Tyger's body parts into the various discourses we have seen the poem to suggest—religious, political, or emotional. In this speaker's tongue, the heart stands in for human emotions while it slips immediately into the terrifying beat; "brain" defaults to the intellectual interior of a human mind. More importantly each mention of the Tyger's body is drowned in confusing references to the body of the framer in a messy stew of subject and object. The image of the Tyger's heart, named but not described, is overwhelmed by the "shoulder" and dread hands and feet of the framer, its beating all but hushed by the poem's noisy pounding. The circumstances of the Tyger's brain—apparently being worked by a

blacksmith—suggest only decapitation, and any hint it makes about subjectivity in the Tyger's mind is immediately replaced by the subjectivity of the framer, whose "grasp" a line later hints, in this light, at his own mental capacity. And "eye," by punning with "I," refers to the speaker whose words we have seen to be part of the framing at work. This hinted "I"—intoned by speaker and, of course, reader alike—joins with the poem's second person mode of address to implicate the reader's body in the flurry as well. A human reader—the actual if unnamed addressee of the poem—may be subtly coaxed, even if unconsciously, to experience the turning of the second-person questions upon him or herself, so that "thy heart" and "thy brain" refer as well to the heart and brain of the reader, and that all of the ambiguities present in "thy fearful symmetry" may resonate as attributes hypothetically present in the reader as well. Likewise, "The Tyger's" swiveling person is rendered largely in questions that compel the reader into alignment with the speaker's speculative mood, making the reader at once the interrogator and the interrogatee. The God's-eye-view flashed in line 19 is unimaginable partly because it is not described; it also implicates the speaker and reader as objects in that view.

The instability of the perspective and the disjunction of the Tyger's body together render incoherent a reader's position relative to the work; no point of reference will sit still long enough to solidify into a uniform image. As with conceptual framing and contextual framing, the shifting among various vantages creates an interplay of otherwise disparate perspectives that, in rapid succession, give shape to a convincingly real object. This multi-dimensional vantage fleshes out the Tyger like a holograph or an image reconstructed from SONAR plots, but as we have seen, it is not a visual representation that comes through, for the poem refuses to allow a coherent one in the reader's mind. Instead of merely giving a static rendering of a tiger seen from a fixed position, the poem provides a Tyger as it exists in the world, triangulated, say, by diverse and

changing minds. Conceptual framing—here effected in the disjointed grammar—gives the poem its joints, the flexible skeleton that admits the rapid shuffling of various frames. Contextual framing—here in the fast-sprung *tableaux vivant* of references—gives it historical presence by transcending the physical/verbal divide and engaging culture on the same plane of reality. Perspectival framing mixes subject and object—here by conflating speaker, reader, creator, and created—and burrows into a reader's consciousness to transform his or her epistemic situation, to blur the boundaries between self, poem, and world. "The Tyger's" three varieties of framing—conceptual, contextual, and perspectival—work together to poetically render not the Tyger per se, but the world, pulsing therein. These effects of framing combine with a similarly profuse and sophisticated trope, Blake's "inversions," to comprise the artist's prophetic strategy. Inversions are the topic of chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

INVERSIONS IN *JERUSALEM*

Almost every Blake commentator has been alert to the poet's concern with what he calls "contraries," opposites that he distinguishes from "negation." Erdman, in his now classic touchstone, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, puts the term at the heart of his assessment of "The Tyger" which, "raises the cosmic question: How can the tiger of experience and the lamb of innocence be grasped as the contraries of a single 'fearful symmetry'?" (*Prophet*, 194). Blake is most likely to use the term when his language shifts into a mode that imitates the discourse of philosophical analysis that he sees as hopelessly rooted in erroneous abstraction. Russell Prather argues that Blake borrows "contraries" from Aristotle, only to subvert the philosopher's restrictive use of it to describe "propositions" related such that "though one or both can be false, they can never both be true" (508). Blake, on the other hand, "scandalously . . . thinks of contraries as always both true" (508). Consider the following statement uttered in quiet by Los in *Jerusalem*: "Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist: / But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs / Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever" (*J* 17.33-35, E 162). Here and, for example, abundantly in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the abstract discussion expands into demonstrated contraries in particular contexts. As Prather notes, Blake's "'contraries' need not be propositions at all," illustrated as they are on *Marriage's* plate 3 in "mere pairs of words: "'Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate'" (Prather 508). In a richer figuration, also in *Marriage*, Blake makes a distinction between two contrary "portion[s] of being"—"the Prolific" and "the Devouring" (*MHH* 16, E 40). He describes their relative entrenchment in the universe of human intercourse, for "these two classes of men are always upon the earth, & they should be enemies." (*MHH* 16, E 40). He

defines religion as "an endeavour to reconcile the two" (*MHH* 16, E 40). In *Jerusalem*, contraries expand into sets of binary oppositions germane to broader social institutions and intellectual paradigms, such as when a frustrated Los, raging against the polluted institutions of a fallen world, impugns "A pretence of Art, to destroy Art: a pretence of Liberty / To destroy Liberty. a pretence of Religion to destroy Religion" (*J* 38.35-36, E 185). Elsewhere in the work, contraries proliferate still further, spreading ubiquitously into contexts that parallel the proliferating generations of Albion's "terrible sons & daughters" (*J* 5.26, E 147) who are "Divided into Male and Female forms time after time" and from whom "all the Families of England spread abroad" (*J* 5.32-33, E 148). As the families of England become immersed in the "terrible Family Contentions of those who love each other" (*J* 38.38, E 184), opposed contraries spar not only in social disorder, but in the widespread particulars of human life:

War and deadly contention, Between
Father and Son, and light and love! All bold asperities
Of Haters met in deadly strife, rending the house & garden
The unforgiving porches, the tables of enmity, and beds
And chambers of trembling & suspicion, hatreds of age & youth
And boy and girl, & animal & herb, & river & mountain
And city & village, and house & family. (*J* 18.21-26, E 163)

Negations and conflicting contraries form a backdrop that underpins much of each narrative's drama. They constitute the world's fallen condition and, at the same time, gesture to the species of philosophical abstraction that informs it. As such, the thematic resonance of opposed pairs have been the object of much scrutiny on the part of critics seeking to elucidate Blake's proposed alternatives to the discord that he sought, through his prophetic art, to bring to

equilibrium. Michael, concerned with Blake's representations of cityscapes, generalizes that *Jerusalem* "is about," the "definition and reading of space: the inversion of inside and outside, the hardening of human souls (and indeed all created things) from translucence into opacity" (159). Thematically, that is, the interplay of opposites register, at the very least, as one of Blake's most important concerns.

Less attention, however, has been devoted to the way that contraries infuse Blake's aesthetic project at the level of poetic and visual devices. Though readers have been aware of these features of Blake's poems and the unique difficulties they pose in, as Northrop Frye put it, "separating the inside from the outside, the top from the bottom, the convex from the concave" (27), none have rigorously explored their aesthetic function, even as they give figure to the more abstract, philosophical contraries that have been rightfully situated at the center of Blake's intellectual position. In the same way that "framing" at once structures and is a central subject of "The Tyger," a motif of opposites—what I will call "inversions"—gives aesthetic form to the contraries that are at the heart of Blake's thematic concerns. "Inversions," that is, refers collectively to contraries and other opposites, reversals, and reflections. They are abundant in the formal structures of Blake's works, and often take the shape of verbal chiasms and topsy-turvy pictorial designs. I use "inversions" as a general term covering a range of juxtapositions in which ideas or images are set against or offered in light of a relevant opposite idea or image. While the function of each variety and instance of inversion is specific to its particular context, the devices may be instructively analyzed in aggregate because, across Blake's oeuvre, they make up a widespread motif.

A kind of inversion, for example, is fundamental in the organization of *Songs*, where the relationship of paired poems like "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" entails the opposition of

complementary perspectives about similar subject matter (in this case the origin of good and evil, roughly, taken first in light of innocence and, later, of experience). These lyrics, as with other paired poems in *Songs*, comment on each other by using shared devices such as similar meters marshaled to widely varied tonal effects and rhetorical questions to achieve disparate poetic and philosophical ends. In their divergence, the two poems participate in a mutual reinforcement; they are fitting opposites, say, that seem to imply each other, "Shewing" as the work's subtitle suggests that they do, "the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" (*SIE* 1, E 7). A similar logic underpins structural instances of inversion such as Blake's widespread use of chiasm, both at the level of individual lines and in the narrative arrangement of his poems. *Jerusalem* and *Milton* both conclude with redemptive reversals of fortune mirroring the fallen states represented at each narrative's outset. Such structural mirroring along with spatial paradoxes, intellectual opposites, and other reversals all participate in Blake's varied devices of inversion. Thus, the "fearful symmetry" embodied in "The Tyger's" framing by nearly identical first and last stanzas, while not properly an instance of rigorous chiasm, nonetheless has a chiastic logic, a butterfly shape that I have described above regarding the poem's various proposed symmetries—its meter, for example, and its framing between similar first and last verses—as well as its complicated movement between the "thy" and "I" perspectives. As such, that poem, too, employs inversion.

Inversion is the most prominent poetic and visual device in *Jerusalem*. Indeed, paradoxical language appears frequently to present instances of inversion in spatial terms. Los' city of art, Golgonooza, has gates which open "each within other toward the four points" (*J* 12.48-49, E 156). The convolutions of Golgonooza echo the arrangement of cosmic reality as Los describes it: "There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within / Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One" (*J* 18:2-3, E 162). Similar language describes

reality as it is available to humanity, for whom all it may "behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In [the] Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow" (*J* 71.15-20, E 225). Inversions are evident in the work's visual designs as well; twenty-seven images in *Jerusalem*, by my conservative count, depict at least two human figures facing either toward and away from the viewer or toward and away from each other. These range from small, almost incidental images in the margins such as the flame ensconced figures swooping in opposite directions on plate 7, to images relating more directly to prominent characters and events. On plate 6, for example, a nearly full-page illustration has Los' forward facing body looking up at his Spectre, who looks down at him from an upside-down position with his back and wings facing out. An accordion-folded bellow in Los' furnace extends to his left and echoes the Spectre's similar bat-like wings. Here the visual inversion illustrates a theme, the opposition of Los, embodiment of creative vision and energy, to his Spectre, who represents, roughly, the stifling weight of reason.

In convoluted spaces as in inexact symmetries like that of "The Tyger" or the bi-directional referencing of paired poems in *Songs*, inversions do not give rise to relationships of direct, static opposition. Instead, they usually involve movement between two poles, such as in a progression from inside to outside. For example, paradoxes abound when, in a climactic moment, Jerusalem, in the long poem that bears her name, "out of Beulah . . . descended . . . / Within the Human Heart" and "[drew] out" "A Moment of Time" . . . "Into a Rainbow of jewels and gold, a mild Reflection from / Albions dread Tomb." A few lines later she "also took an Atom of Space, with dire pain opening it a Center / Into Beulah" (*J* 48.24-36, E 197). Paradoxes of movement like Jerusalem's descent—directed both "out" and "within"—or the seemingly impossible motions such as Jerusalem's "drawing out" of "A Moment" and the "opening" of

Beulah inside a mere "Atom of Space" move characters through Blake's poems' impossible spaces, and temporal orders. They can also participate in a poem's narrative trajectory and thematic orientation. Visual representations of Urizen's reversed condition between *Urizen's* first and last plates, a "framing element," to use W.J.T. Mitchell's terminology (140), demonstrates a progress of reversal followed in the plot.

In another important set of inversions, Blake implies motion in ongoing acts of division and separation, such as the division of each Zoa from his Emanation and Spectre. The Emanations embody the alienated interior aspects of a complete persona that have been extracted—violently—from their masculine counterparts. As such, each female Emanation is a physical manifestation of that which each male character lacks; each Zoa-Emanation pair embodies an inversion of ideas and energies as they are being forced into artificial opposition. The reconciliation of Emanations and their masculine counterparts, for example, allegorically figures the redemptive process. Nearly all of the important dramatic action in *Jerusalem* involves either the extraction of opposites, the separation of emanations from Zoas that proliferates into further discordant division—"For as his Emanation divided, his Spectre also divided" (*J* 6.3, E 149)—or their reintegration. Ultimately, all must be restored together in the body and person of Albion who simultaneously represents the nation of England as well as the "Four-fold Man" (*J* 6, E 159). Far, then, from being instances of static binaries, the Zoas and the energies they represent are in constant flux; thus it is the separating and integrating, the extraction and forced coalescence that drives the narrative, the movement through paradoxical spaces. The division and recombination of Los and his Emanation, Enitharmon, is represented in *Jerusalem* as a perpetual, spatially oriented process. On plate 5 Enitharmon begins to become from him "divided in pain, / Eastward" (*J* 5.67-68, E 148). When his "Spectre also divided" (*J* 6.3, E 149.),

progressive verbs break up the poem's usual past tense, and emphasize the event as ongoing. While the Spectre separates, he is "Howling in pain" and taking shape as "a blackning Shadow, blackning dark & opake," all the while "Cursing the terrible Los" (*J* 6.4-6, E 149). The repetition of this event, its reference at various points throughout the work, presents it as not a single occurrence, but an ongoing action that spans the entire narrative. Enitharmon's division on plate 15 begins a process that will not be complete until plate 86 when "she "became a separated cloud of beauty grace & love" (*J* 86.55, E 145). The main drama of *Jerusalem* involves Albion's rejection and eventual acceptance of his Emanation, the title character, Jerusalem. His fallen state figures a decaying world as a moving work in progress; in chapter 1, his "Circumference was clos'd: his Center began dark'ning into the Night of Beulah" (*J* 19:36, E 164). His redemption will correct this movement; upon Albion's restoration to his rightful "Seat upon the Rock," humanity may "behold the Divine Vision. open / The Center into an Expanse, & the Center rolled out into an Expanse" (*J* 57.16-18, E 207).

As oppositions in progress, inversions generally give tangibility—poetic resonance or visual shape—to what Blake in his more abstract moments presents as a model of moving, conversing contraries, a model to replace the doctrine of contradiction and negation he sees implied in scientific thought. "Without contraries," the artist tells us in *Marriage*, "is no progression" (*MHH* 3, E 34). Blake figures reason and scientific thought as confining, static impasses:

Bacon & Newton sheathd in dismal steel, their terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my lips, bruising my minute articulations (*J* 15.7-13, E159)

To confront the stasis of negation that results from scientific reason, Blake offers a logic of

movement and reversal. He renders this conflict partly by opposing negative words with words that imply moving inversions. Abundant use of prefixes "dis," "un," "in," and "non" point to the chaotic void that Blake sometimes calls "non-entity" (*J* 5.13, E 147) or Entuthon Benython, a region that in Blake's mythology figures the condition of oblivion, the worldly manifestation of philosophical negation. At key moments, words beginning with the syllable "re" oppose this stasis. What emerges is an audible linguistic clash between abstract negation and the logic of reversal that conditions the processes of redemption.

Negative syllables and the rhyming or near-rhyming puns that echo them generate a repetitive sonic punctuation that overlays lines like the following with a chaotic rhythm:

Darken'd! they are drawn thro' *unbounded* space, scatter'd upon
The Void *in incoherent despair!* Cambridge & Oxford & London
Are driven among the starry Wheels, *rent* away and *dissipated*,
In Chasms & abysses of sorrow, *enlarge'd* without *dimension*, terrible (*J*
5.2-5, E 147, my italics)

Or to take another example from the same plate:

But all *within* is open'd *into* the deeps of *Entuthon Benython*
A dark and *unknown* night, *indefinite*, *unmeasurable*, without *end*.
Abstract Philosophy warring *in enmity* against Imagination (*J* 5.56-59, E 148, my
italics)

The "warring in enmity" reverberates in a counterpoint with a chorus of words with the prefix "re" as the two face off in Blake's incantations, as "the cries of war & tumult / *Resound* into the *unbounded* night" (*J* 5.7, E 147). The Savior launches this motif in his speech on the first plate of chapter 1, when he calls out to Albion: "return Albion! return!" (*J* 4.10, E 146), and in calm,

long-vowel words in the same speech "Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me: / Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil; Not seeking recompense!" (*J* 4.19-20, E 146). A chorus of "re" words echo this speech throughout this plate and the next; "revolve" appears four times and "revolutions" once. "Redounding" occurs twice. In other instances on the plate, the "re" motif is reinforced by rhyming syllables, such as with "remembered," which chimes among the words "anciently," "every," and "they." The first syllable of the word "reaches" rings in the nearby segment describing a pillar of smoke "redounding / Till the cloud reaches afar outstretch'd among the Starry Wheels / Which revolve . . ." (*J* 5-31-53, E 148). Moving, inverting language intones *Jerusalem's* vibrant aesthetics that will not allow negation to settle into vacant annihilation, teasing it, instead, out of stasis and down a redemptive course.

The negation/inversion language is prominent again at an important moment near the end of chapter 1 when Albion "replie[s]" (*J* 22.36, E 167) to an injunction by Jerusalem. He tells her that he has overcome his "intention to annihilate" what he had judged to be her "unlawful pleasure" (*J* 23.2-3, E 168), a distorted perspective wrought by Vala's veil which has confined his soul "inwoven within" (*J* 23.2-5, E 168). Blake peppers the ensuing lines with an interplay of "re" and "in" words and rhyming syllables that accentuate them. Albion acknowledges that the veil had been "rent in ancient times" (*J* 23.6, E 168) and Jerusalem "repl[ies]" that she is hidden "remote from the divine Vision" (*J* 23.8-12, E 168). Albion stands "in jealous dark despair," reflecting that "Love and Pity are the same: a soft repose! / Inward complacency of Soul" (*J* 23.13-15, E 168). This speech and the warring syllables peak in a dramatic narrative action. Albion casts off the veil—"the Veil of Moral Virtue, woven for Cruel Laws"—in a turbulent climax: "He recoil'd: he rush'd outwards: he bore the Veil whole away / His fires redound from his Dragon Altars in Errors returning" (*J* 23.20-21, E 168). He collapses and speaks "his last

words, relapsing" (*J* 23.26, E 168). The pun on "Altars" seems to call explicit attention to the back and forth movement of the negation/inversion language. It also recalls an earlier passage in which Los compels his Specter to labour in his furnace "alternate with me" (*J* 8.40, E 151). Below, we will see that that scene, too, turns upon the moving, inverse interplay of philosophical negation (embodied, as it is in Los' Spectre) and the inspired Los' "art revealed" (*J* 8.31, E 151).

As we have seen, Blake's logic of redemption is not a binary one that entails the flat refutation of erroneous propositions or undesirable circumstances. Instead, correcting the world's fallen situation involves a progressive movement through it, the working out of its fluctuating discord into a desired equilibrium. This subject launches *Jerusalem* from the very first line of its epic invocation: "Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through / Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life" (*J* 4.1, E 146). The awakening of humanity from its fallen situation requires not a refutation, but a "passage through." In philosophical terms, perhaps, it involves "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (*J* 11.5, E 146). But as the separations that condition humanity's fall transpire in unfolding spatial distortions, so correcting humanity's fallen situation must involve their inversion, a going back through, in a sense.

Jerusalem's narrative direction follows the working through of contraries, especially as they are inverted in Los' labor. The delivery of individuals from systems is Los' self-described strategy in "labouring at the roaring of his Forge / With iron & brass Building Golgonooza in great contendings" (*J* 10.62-63, E 154) to birth not only the great city of art, but also the ultimate restoration of Jerusalem and Albion. Thus, "Striving with Systems"—using systems to undermine systematicity itself—describes his method and the unique challenge of his project. Los must reverse universal disorder via his creative capacities and strong-willed adherence to divine vision; his creative energy must counter the collapse and dismemberment of Albion. But

this cannot be accomplished by merely working directly against Albion's situation, by refuting or negating it. Instead Los must work backwards, in a sense, and pursue a counterintuitive approach to the processes of redemption. For example, though Los' rightful place is in unity with Albion, and his restoration there with the other Zoas will constitute humanity's redeemed condition, his extraction from "the Cliffs of Albion" where he had been "built in from Eternity" is necessary before he can begin work at his furnaces (*J* 11.14-15, E 154). Among Los' first tasks is to counter Albion's fallen sons who, with hammer and anvil, reify Albion's Emanations into "hard opaque substances," working the giant's "infant thoughts & desires, into cold, dark, cliffs of death" (*J* 9.1-2, E 152). They weaponize ideas—"bars of condens'd thoughts"—into "the sword of war: into the bow and arrow: / Into the thundering cannon and into the murdering gun" (*J* 9.4-5, E 152). Instead of destroying the reified ideas, however, instead of liberating the thoughts and desires, he applies his own anvil "to form the spiritual sword" (*J* 9.19-20, E 152) from the "sighs & tears, & bitter groans" of the Emanations "buried alive." Thus, he reenacts the sons' labors, even heating his own sword "in [their] flames" (*J* 9.21, E 152). Los laments the temporary results of his struggle: "I labour day and night, I behold the soft affections / Condense beneath my hammer into forms of cruelty / But still I labour in hope" (*J* 9.27-29, E 152). Violent destruction paradoxically undergirds the creative process that he sees as a necessary course of action.

Most importantly, to invigorate reality and restore it to its redemptive direction, Los must conscript the services of his Spectre. When he talks about "striving with systems," he immediately puts his strategy in violent terms specific to his Spectre: "That whenever any Spectre began to devour the Dead, / He might feel the pain as if a man gnawd his own tender nerves" (*J* 11.6-7, E 154). Using the Spectre, though, is a capitulation to failed modes of thought and action, for Spectres serve as an embodiment of the deepest failures of fallen humanity:

. . . the Two contraries which are calld Qualities, with which
 Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil
 From them they make an Abstract which is a Negation
 Not only of the Substance from which it is derived
 A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer
 Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power
 An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing
 This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power (*J* 8-15, *E* 152-153)

Rather than preventing his Spectre from dividing, from becoming, that is, unleashed in its
 terrible abstracted form, Los actively fosters its separation, in "fury compells it to divide" (*J* 17.1,
E 161). He must turn his Spectre to help him, "To labour in the fire, in the water, in the earth, in
 the air," (*J* 17.1-2, *E* 161). Los recognizes the Spectre as his adversary, "divided against [him]."
 "But mark," he cries, "I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours. To beat / These
 hypocritic Selfhoods on the anvils of bitter Death." Even as he works, Los continues to impugn
 the actions he performs: "I am inspired: I act not for myself: for Albions sake / I now am what I
 am: a horror and an astonishment" (*J* 8.13-18, *E* 151). Los' most explicit command issues at the
 end of a section of poetry on plate 8 that focuses a hammer-swinging alternation into Los'
 enraged address to the Spectre:

Thou art my Pride & Self-righteousness: I have found thee out:
 Thou art reveald before me in all thy magnitude & power
 Thy Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity must be cut in sunder!
 Thy holy wrath & deep deceit cannot avail against me

If thou wast cast forth from my life! if I was dead upon the mountains

Thou mightest be pitied & lov'd: but now I am living; unless

Thou abstain ravening I will create an eternal Hell for thee. (*J* 8.30-41, E 151)

The back and forth, Thou/I swing culminates in a windy, turbulent command: "Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Bellows / Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient" (*J* 8.30-41, E 151).

Alternating labor between the two thematically inverted adversaries drives Albion along his convoluted—inside out—course toward redemption. Eventually, it will reverse Albion's retreat "inward among the currents of his rivers" (*J* 18.39, E 164), and foster the inward restoration of his Emanation and other offspring, his "Affections" which "now appear withoutside" (*J* 19:17, E 164). Having, as Albion describes it, "turned my back upon [God] into the Wastes of Moral Law" (*J* 24.24, E 169), Albion is caught in a spinning confusion that alienates him from his own utterances: "What have I said? What have I done? O all-powerful Human Words! / You recoil back upon me in the blood of the Lamb slain in his Children." (*J* 24.1-2, E 169). The force/counterforce give and take continues when the Four Zoas, at Los' urging, "Albion surround with kindest violence to bear him back . . . to Eden: Four-fold; loud . . . Their Wings waving . . . to bear / Their awful charge back to his native home" (*J* 39.2-3, E 186). But, for now, this is "Against [Albion's] will" (*J* 39, E 186); the giant, "Repugnant; rolld his Wheels backward into Non-Entity" (*J* 39, E 186), a tumultuous chaos with "clouds redounding," "whirling waters," and Albion's sons "ascending and descending in the horrid void" (*J* 39. 8-17, E 186). Only in Jerusalem's final plates will Albion "find his way back" to his redeemed state (*J* 83.17, E 241).

In its prolific use of inversions, *Jerusalem* poetically embodies the inversions that also

underpin its theme. In opposition to abstract negation and the annihilating weight of philosophical scientific reason, Blake proposes moving relationships of inversion and figures them with a swiveling assortment of uniting and dividing binaries, a language of reversal, and inverse pictorial compositions. Instead, that is, of rendering a binary logic of judgment, negation, and annihilation, rather than proposing alternative models of good and evil, Blake's work demonstrates—and embodies—a logic of process, the working out of disunity driven by energies conflicting in paradoxical fluctuations of space and time. But the inversions that shape and structure Blake's work function not merely as a symbolic reflection of the ideas he and his narratives seek to turn around; they are more than a visible and poetic rendering of his works' themes. Rather, they are the manifestation of material inversions built deeply into the processes of Blake's printing methods. As we will see, the inversions acted out by Blake's characters are set upon their wobbling course by Blake, who performs the inversions himself as he lays out his hybrid compositions and etches them into copper plates. Blake's acts of inversion and their concurrent intersection with acts of material framing that transpire together in Blake's printmaking studio are the topic of this paper's final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

INVERSIONS AND FRAMING IN BLAKE'S STUDIO

As prior chapters have argued, Blake uses framings and inversions as devices to poetically render his engagement with the ideas that his works concern. But in neither case does the rendering transpire merely as an apt pairing of structure and form with content. It is a poetic and material embodiment, an "action," as Wolfson put it above, "that compels awareness" (81); it gives life and direction to processes of apprehension to be undertaken by a reader. Framing, for example, may cause a reader to take in a panoply of flashed perspectives that flesh out the mutual entrenchment of subject and object in a rich manifold of historical contexts and emotional responses. Inversions direct readers along a track that can be at once intellectual—the "progression" of Blake's "contraries"—and visceral. A reader attuned to Blake's inversions will experience recoiling oppositions, boggling spaces, and moving imagery that aid in imagining and comprehending, for example, *Jerusalem's* "Infold[ed]" "Reasonings" that underpin Los' revolt against "non-entity." Thus, to work through Blake's polysemous associations, Hilton's "wispy traces in words" (184) like "The Tyger's" "fire," "hand," and especially "frame," or the twisting narrative trajectory of *Jerusalem*, is to act out the processes the works imply. And this action has efficacy not only in the internal, fictional world of Blake's poems, but externally, as well, in service of multifarious points of contact with broader networks of meaning and experience. A reader of "The Tyger" participates in framing the Tyger and, at the same time, in reframing the world by looking at it through the poem's animated sequence of frames and its oscillating I/thy slip. A reader of *Jerusalem* participates in an ongoing reimagining of the universe, a reimagining that Blake implicates fundamentally in the cosmic sorting of inverted dimensions both spatial and intellectual, what, for him, constitutes human redemption in progress. But before a reader

may read the poetry and submit to its reworking, before he or she can be swept up, so to speak, in what Blake saw as its transformative processes, the poetry's energy and direction must be put in motion by Blake himself, channeled into socio-cultural and material reality alike; for Blake, the processes of printmaking issued a series of cosmic commands, a prolonged, performed artistic fiat that, like Milton's Almighty framing the universe, inverts chaotic discord into universal order.

Printmaking linked Blake to the social and political world in a concrete, practical way. As a professional printmaker, the exigencies of his work's production and distribution—its dissemination in the world—were central to his general well being, a connection he makes clear in a letter to George Cumberland: "I am still Employd in making Designs & little Pictures with now & then an Engraving & find that in future to live will not be so difficult as it has been" (E 706). His letters are full of descriptions of works in progress, negotiations with patrons and suppliers, assessments of prints by other printmakers, and evaluations of the current state of the industry. Blake identified as a veteran member of London's growing printmaking professional circle, which he proudly observed to have become increasingly established over the course of his career: "There are now I believe as many Booksellers as there are Butchers & as many Printshops as of any other trade We remember when a Print shop was a rare bird in London" (E 706). Membership in this community connected him to a unique set of social and political concerns. In an 1805 letter to William Hayley, for example, he discusses a current situation in which " Printing is suspended in London Except at private Presses," the result of "Journeymen Printers . . . at War with their Masters" with "Violence on both sides" (E 764). In printmaking, Blake was deeply connected with the local economy, which governed the possibilities of his art. According to Viscomi, one advantage of Blake's unique method of printing was that it reduced

production costs because Blake did not have to pay for printing labor or design. This is not to say, however, that it produced works cost-effectively enough for sale on the market. Illuminated works were slow to make, and output was sufficiently low that he could not make them affordable for buyers; thus, Blake's artwork had to be "mostly underwritten by his commercial work" (Viscomi, "Illuminated" 60). Negotiating the supply of materials and the demand of potential buyers brought balance sheet concerns to the fore in Blake's determinations about what to produce and how to produce it as well as the character of its audience and the extent of its distribution. The artist's entrenchment in social and economic circumstances permitted him to imagine his art to not just critique culture and society, but to exist as part of it and participate in its fundamental workings.

As economic entities and as products of social practices between the artist and other individuals, Blake's prints engaged the world in a broad field of impact that also extended to connect he and his work intimately with the material world. He needed space for production; Viscomi suggests that downsized working quarters (from ten rooms to only two) contributed to a drastically reduced production capacity later in the artist's life ("Illuminated" 39). Furthermore, in addition to materials such as copper plates, paper, and the press itself, producing the illuminated books required a range of tools and chemical solutions. Viscomi lists among them a hammer, brushes, dabbers, quills, varnishes, and inks as well as more elemental ones such as stones, water, oil, and acids. Blake and his wife, Catherine, who participated in the studio work, must have been keenly aware of their own immersion in the physical aspects of printmaking. As Essick puts it, Blake's copper plate "was for its maker an irreducibly material object" ("How Blake's" 203). Indeed, Blake's day to day grappling with the plates is almost tangible in a letter to John Flaxman describing the Blakes' move to Felpham "with Sixteen heavy boxes & portfolios

full of prints" (E 710). In moving his prints and materials from one location to another as in producing his art, Blake was cognizant that he literally shaped and organized material reality.

Blake believed that his powers of universal transformation stemmed from prophetic energies consonant with "Divine Vision," a source he shared with biblical prophets and their apocalyptic revelations. In his mind, true art participated in the ancient biblical story, the progress of humanity toward end-of-times redemption, by actively facilitating the unfolding of cosmic creation. On this point, Blake's estimation of his work is, in no uncertain terms, grandiose. While Blake usually shares credit with something like "Divine Assistance," to admit, for example, that he "dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary," for "the Authors are in Eternity" (E 730), he sometimes emphasizes his personal achievement. He claims to Flaxman that he is "famed in Heaven" where his current works and those he composed "in ages of Eternity," are "the delight & Study of Archangels" (E 710). Even at their most restrained, his pronouncements can issue with somewhat millennial overtones. In an advertisement for his engraving of "Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims," Blake's description of his intention, to save Britain from "what is Calld the English Style of Engraving," is intended quasi-humorously: "I hope this Print will redeem my Country from this Coxcomb situation" (*PA*, E 573). Elsewhere, though, Blake is unequivocal about his involvement in cosmic conflict. He writes in his annotations to R. Watson's *An Apology for the Bible*, that he has "been commanded from Hell not to print this as it is what our Enemies wish" (E 612). Most importantly, Blake expresses certainty that his work is ordained by divine sources who ensure its secure transmission to posterity so it may "speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory which is now perfectly completed into a Grand Poem" (E 730). Blake saw his art as a conduit for the transmission of divine will.

Transmission of the Divine Vision demanded a physical embodiment, an inverted,

framed infusion into materials performed by Blake and his wife at work in his studio. Though Blake writes to his patron Thomas Butts that he has "been borne on angels wings," he emphasizes as well that he has "labour'd hard indeed" (E 730). That Blake saw his work—his creative manipulation of materials—as active participation in the transformation of reality is reflected in the figure of Los, embodiment of inspired artistic creation. In *Milton*, a complicated figuration overlaps Los' productive labor with work at a cosmic "Wine-press." On Earth though, where the wine-press "is call'd War on Earth," the machine "is the Printing-Press / Of Los" (*M* 27.8-9, E 124). This printing press effects actual cosmic inversions when Los "lays his words in order above the mortal brain / As cogs are form'd in a wheel to turn the cogs of adverse wheel" (*M* 27.8-11, E 124). The frames are present here too, in a clear reference to the floral patterns that sometimes surround Blake's pages like trees that abound in *Songs*, for example, that Michael argues "suggest nature or matter, as the frame or medium through which human life takes its shape in this world" (41-42):

Timbrels & violins sport round the Wine-presses; the little Seed;
The sportive Root, the Earth-worm, the gold Beetle; the wise Emmet;
Dance round the Wine-presses of Luvah; the Centipede is there (*M* 27.11-13, E 124)

In printmaking's connections to social, historical, and material reality, in the "irreducibly material" processes and apparatus of relief etching, Blake's framing devices and his logic of inversions took root. The studio origins of Blake's aesthetics—his performance of printmaking production among his instruments and inks, his hammering of metal plates to plane them, his mixing and swabbing of acids, and his laborious working of a mechanical press—deeply condition the result, what Carr describes as "an invention always generated by its execution"

(Carr 178). Each of Blake's finished pages, for example, holds a doubly-reversed negative image of an original copper plate from which it has been printed by pressure exerted in a rolling press. First, it is backwards from the plate's image (or, in another sense, forwards, making the text legible). Second, the page's image is an impression left from an inked design that rises from the plate in elevated relief, and not from the plate's etched recessions. This reversal of standard printing methods is the central innovation in Blake's "relief etching," his invented method that "created a multi-media site where poetry, painting, and printmaking came together" in novel ways (Viscomi, "Illuminated" 42). Instead of using corrosive acids to cut away a design's positive lines and create narrow reservoirs to hold ink and transfer it to paper as in standard intaglio printing, Blake painted his verbal and pictorial compositions directly on his copper plates in an acid-resistant ink. The wash of acids would then cut away background fields and leave intact the positive, elevated image. Then Blake would prepare the plate with colored inks before applying the design to paper in the pressure of his press. Among other things, Blake's method allowed him to apply his designs with a freer hand in ways, as Viscomi puts it, that were "both original and characteristic of Romanticism's fascination with spontaneity and the idea of the sketch" (42). More importantly, though, it "freed him to think in new ways, to unite invention and execution in ways defeated by conventional printmaking" (42). Blake's new ways of thinking were cast, of course, in the apparatus and processes of the relief etching from which they arose, a new artistic praxis that gave material expression to the artist's political and philosophical engagement with the world.

That Blake imagined his art to bear a unique metaphysical power becomes explicit in what, outside of his letters, is the artist's clearest reference to his printing process and what he hopes it will accomplish. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell's* plate 15 describes the "method in

which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation" in a "Printing house in Hell" (*MHH* 15, E 40). Blake sets up the scene a plate before, though, when he announces that a metaphysical fusion of body and soul is the primary objective of "printing in the infernal method" (*MHH* 14, E 39). Blake, who has written himself into *Marriage* as a character, describes the art's redemptive goal, to "expunge" the "notion that man has a body distinct from his soul." While he here labels the distinction as a "notion," we would be too quick to argue that the problem is wholly conceptual, a matter merely of incorrect ideas. For Blake's "infernal method" will effect this change by "melting apparent surfaces away and displaying the infinite which was hid." That Blake intends something more than a metaphorical expression here is clear when we see that it is done "by corrosives," a literal reference to the chemicals he used to etch copper plates for printing and their literal melting away of actual surfaces.

Marriage's description of the "infernal method" comes in a textual environment overflowing with inversions; it also evidences Blake's concern with perspective and framing. The book, serving arguably as "The Bible of Hell" proposed on its 24th plate, is famous for its enigmatic pairings of opposed ideas. In fact, it is on this work's first plate of prose (immediately after its introductory verses, "The Argument") that Blake introduces his "Contraries" without which "there is no progression," arguing that opposed energies such as "Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (*MHH* 3, E 34). As we have seen to be the case with *Jerusalem*, oppositions structure the work, an explicit bit of social criticism leveled from a determinedly inverse position. *Marriage's* "Proverbs of Hell," for example, offer a wisdom that Blake opposes to "What the religious call Good & Evil" (*MHH* 3, E 34). He argues that "Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell . . . because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without

knowing it" (*MHH 5, E 35*). It is as a devilish "true Poet" that Blake performs his "infernal method," set, on the next plate, in "A Printing house in Hell," and it is from his position in the devil's party that he aims to reveal the true wisdom that will correct the body/soul division. The "corrosives" he intends to use are not destructive, but "salutary and medicinal" (*MHH 14, E 39*). Furthermore, as we have seen, Blake's use of corrosives in a way decidedly inverted from standard intaglio methods functions by removing "apparent surfaces" to leave the image in relief. This formulation, it seems, situates the transformation as a matter of perspective, for it is "apparent" surfaces that must be surpassed in order that the notion about bodies and souls be expunged—i.e. erased or removed from view. In this way, printmaking served to express an "enlarged" perception, to move beyond constricting ideas. For, also in these lines, the false position that distinguishes between soul and body is expressed as a result of "man [having] closed himself up" so that he may perceive the world only as it is framed by "narrow chinks of his cavern." The corrosives expand this limited view by admitting the proliferation of conceptual frames, by making it possible to see through "the doors of perception" (*MHH 14, E 39*). Printing, ultimately, is about making everything "appear to man as it is: infinite" (*MHH 14, E 39*).

At each stage in the "infernal method"—situated in *Marriage* in a series of six sequential "chambers"—the three-dimensional copper plate is an important site of both framing and inversions. The "cavern" referenced on plate 14 gives added spatial dimensions to the process described on plate 15. Illuminated printing involves a material and spatial hollowing. "Caverns" and "caves" along with "immense cliffs" that house "palaces" describe the landscape etched into Blake's copper plates. In *Marriage*, the step by step process allegorizes, as Viscomi describes it, relief etching's "major stages as fantastic acts" (41). The first chamber is the workspace of dragon-men and dragons who "clear away the rubbish from a caves mouth" and "hollow the

cave" (*MHH* 15, E 40), an action that Viscomi demonstrates to correspond with the degreasing and polishing of plates in preparation for the acid bath (43). In the second chamber, a "Viper folding round . . . the cave" (*MHH* 15, E 40) figures Blake's backward application of text to the plate by brush and pen in an acid-resistant ink (Viscomi, "Illuminated" 43). Labor in the third chamber, that of "an Eagle" working "wings and feathers of air," represents the process of agitating the plate's acid bath with a feather. It causes "the inside of the cave to be infinite" so that "Eagle like men" may build "palaces in the immense cliffs" (*MHH* 15, E 40). Though the cave gets no mention in any of the final three chambers, the copper plate's spatial dimensions are referenced in chamber five when "Unnam'd forms" are "cast . . . into the expanse" (*MHH* 15, E 40). If Viscomi is correct that Blake puns "Unnam'd forms" to suggest a "metal frame for printing," then framing has two references in chamber five, for the uncut folio sheets of paper run through the press, "the expanses" perhaps, are referred to as forms in nineteenth-century printing jargon (*Blake* 107). Already, framing and inversions are wrapped up in *Marriage's* poetical rendering of the printmaking performance.

Literal frames and inversions, though, make the two tropes and their origins more pronounced. Each prepared plate bears a physical frame, a border of acid-resistant wax that creates a reservoir for up to a quarter-inch-deep pool of acid. Viscomi, like Blake in *Marriage*, emphasizes the relief surface of each plate's image, describing its "cliffs and valleys" as "a minute particular manifesting creation itself" ("Illuminated" 48) and then goes on to describe the next steps, inking, coloring, and printing. After etching, the wax frame is removed, but it has resulted in a raised edge, a marginal portion of the plate that remains un-etched. As we have discussed concerning *Songs*, visual frames around each page of Blake's illuminated books signal the introduction of distinct perspectives—-independent, literal views as well as conceptual frames

suggested in changing poetic voices—vantages that inflect each page's poetry and designs. Even before Blake's pages were printed, though, before additional frames were inked into the full-color images or added in watercolor, a three-dimensional frame, a barrier establishing the limits of the acid's corroding reaction, provided the window through which Blake looked into the little world coming to exist in each copper plate, perhaps smiling "his work to see." Viscomi is eloquent when he imagines Blake, "like a god brooding over creation," watching his image come into focus on the prepared plate as he finally removes the acid and other detritus (48). At the same time, each plate's raised edge—its frame—is inverted from the borders resulting from the preparation of copper plates in intaglio etchings and engravings. According to Viscomi, copper plates in standard methods had to sustain more pressure during printing and, thus, their edges had to be beveled before printing to prevent cutting or embossing the paper ("Illuminated" 42). In illuminated printing, this framing border instead raised above the plate's background fields and provided the "cave" that it was Blake's business to hollow out and expand inward, the "cavern," perhaps, from which Blake sought a view through widened "chinks."

Further inversions are evident here as well. Polished copper plates reflect a mirror-image, and Blake may have seen his own face emerge as each etching came into focus when he poured off and dabbed away the acid. Perhaps more interestingly, the text—now elevated from the etched background field—has been printed backwards. This laborious feature of Blake's production is a necessary demand of the medium, for plates print reversed copies. As such the backward printing embodies the deep, material roots of Blake's inversions motif. Occasionally Blake calls explicit attention to this by composing sentences forward and allowing the backward-facing words to remain in the finished print. This is true on plate 41 of *Jerusalem*, for example, where a scribe is pictured reading reversed words and, for example, on plate 81 of the same work

where a few backward lines of verse wrap around two conversing figures. Writing backwards was, for Blake, one aspect of the design work that went into his visual compositions. As Visconti argues, Blake could "design directly on copper plates as though he were drawing on paper, which in turn encouraged him to integrate text and illustration on the same page" ("Illuminated" 41). This must have involved a kind of backwards thinking, for Blake had to imagine the finished product and reverse each composition accordingly. Sometimes he references the process of image reversal in his work, by printing reversed instances of the same images. This is the case, for example with *Milton's* "Robert" and "William" images on plates 33 and 29, respectively; Makdisi calls attention to one recycled image, the picture of a hunched old man entering a tomb on plate 15 of *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, which appears reversed in Blake's later engraving, "Death's Door."

Printing, then, effects a reversal of the already reversed text/image composition, a re-reversal, perhaps. But the printed image does more than straightforwardly mirror the etching; it is a collapsed, two-dimensional representation of the original plate's three-dimensions. It lacks the cliffs and valleys, and the hollowed cave that made the landscape of Blake's creation. In a certain light, this is one iteration of a problem that is central to much visual art, the difficulty of rendering the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two dimensional page. As we might expect, Blake's way of creating visual depth is another location of his anti-establishment aesthetics; it also involves the use of frames and inversions. Traditionally, the problem of space had been solved by some painters in their mastery of mathematical "vanishing point" perspective, a compositional technique also used by printmakers and engravers. But vanishing point is informed by a kind of abstraction—the structuring of a design along a grid of coordinates measured to match the experience of sight in the human eye—that privileged a version of visual

realism that Blake associated with the empiricist consensus and the vacuous imitation of nature. This point incites one of Blake's freest-flowing diatribes: "No Man of Sense ever supposes that Copying from Nature is the Art of Painting if the Art is no more than this it is no better than any other's Manual Labour any body may do it & the fool often will do it best as it is a work of no Mind" (*PA*, E 578). "Of no mind," for Blake, means "thoughtless," surely, but it also suggests a metaphysically vacant result, one showing exaggerated concern for the material world at the expense of the mental. Blake mapped space—indeed his whole cosmology, personified at times in the character Albion—not to a mathematically describable material world that exists independently from human experience, but to the human form itself. Janet Warner, in her enumeration of various human poses evident in Blake's visual designs and their symbolic resonances, argues that Blake "emphasiz[es] that *all* forms we perceive are also *human*, that is, extensions of the human form, if we will only recognize them" (23, emphasis in original). Thus, Blake's solution to the problem of space—like the framing that structures "The Tyger"—performs the rejection of mathematical abstraction that is one of his most important themes. In Blake's pictorial designs, spatial depth is a product of the interaction between juxtaposed volumes, especially humans and human-like bodies. At times, human bodies literally seem to comprise the physical space they inhabit, such as on *Jerusalem's* plate 23 where human forms are pictured entrenched in a landscape of boulders and roots. Blake is explicit about the human body's constitution of the universe's spatial and temporal dimensions in the same work: "Time & Space / . . . vary according as the Organs of Perception vary" (*J* 98.35-38, E 258). In other cases, such as on plates 15 and 47 of the same work, the movement of dancing, twirling human-like figures—usually two or more arranged inversely, either toward or away from each other—generate a spatial environment specific to their activity that seems to spin outward from their

movement. This is to say that the production of visual spaces keys off of the presence and action of human forms, their bodily "frames."

But the inward-expanded physical space that embeds Blake's painted figures is not the same depth that fails to transfer from copper plate to paper. What is missing, instead, are the caverns and cliffs that make up the landscape of the little world the artist had etched into the plate. Blake's solution to this problem—a kind of inverted framing—is partly responsible for much of his prints' buzzing energy. The spaces created by interacting figures participate in a dialogue with voluminous textual arrangements that are integrated into each design in spatially ambiguous clouds, waters, and abysses. These sets of volumes—the textual and pictorial—compete, arguably, to frame each other, and seldom settle into a harmoniously stabilized composition.

Makdisi is alert to this dynamic, arguing that on plate 6 of *America*, for example, "the verbal text produces a distortion in the plate's visual field" (119) that "can also be seen to open a new dimension in the space of the plate" (118). On this plate, a nude figure reclining on an earthen mound covers the plate's top half. Directly beneath this are sixteen lines of text on a solid background that extends nearly to the bottom of the plate where tufts of grass and plants seem to reassert and extend the landscape that includes the mound. In this case, as Makdisi describes, "the verbal text . . . seems to be framed by the visual elements at the top and bottom of the plate—the grave-like mound on which the youth is resting and the undergrowth at the bottom of the plate" (118). Makdisi is primarily concerned with correspondence or disjunction between the content of the text and that of the picture, "graphemes" in his terminology, and their links with other plates in *America* and elsewhere. He aptly reads the distorted space as an interruption in the landscape it presents, the creation of "a moment out of synchrony with the visual elements

surrounding and framing it," a pause that contrasts starkly with "strident (revolutionary) action" (120) expressed in the text. What I want to emphasize, though, is the buzzing visual tension that results as the block of text asserts itself as a focal object in opposition to the pictures that frame it. The two compete for space on the page and alternate back and forth in competition to anchor the plate's overall composition, the illusion of an inward/outward movement that, in a sense, allows for the foregrounding of one over the other and their nearly simultaneous inversion as they exchange positions. If Blake's inverted printing process will not allow him to reproduce every dimension built into the original copper plates, the interrelation of volumes in the prints (like the Zoas' incomplete "Emanations" perhaps) makes each one gesture toward the dimensions lost, rendering those dimensions marginally present.

Jerusalem's plate 41 visually and symbolically represents the inter-dimensional interruptions—the addition of visible spatial depth as well as the buzzing interplay of textual and non-textual volumes—that Blake's framed inversions sought to inflict amidst the universe's fallen orders. Here some backwards words printed on a scroll break the image's general symmetry—it shows a deflated Albion seated in a symmetrical position with his knees pulled to his chest—to participate in a subtle visual inversion of its own. The scroll is facing forward, opposite another scroll that extends behind Albion and into the background, away from the viewer. Relaxed in the curls of the scroll's forward-facing half is an artist with pen in hand—Viscomi flatly refers to him as Blake (*Blake* 23)—apparently looking over the words he has just penned in reverse:

Each Man is in his Spectre's power
Until the arrival of that hour,
When his Humanity awake

And cast his Spectre into the Lake (*J* 37, E 184)

These words encapsulate the basic movement of *Jerusalem's* narrative trajectory that takes Albion from sleep in the delusions of abstract reason to his awakening from them. In this picture, the Spectre's abstractions have lodged Albion in a frozen symmetry. The symmetry is interrupted, though, by backwards words on a scroll—a likely reference to Blake's illuminated works, for who else wrote backwards?—which, in its inverted juxtaposition with the other scroll, opens a new dimension in the image. But Albion is blind to the added depth his buried face cannot see. The flat space and abstract symmetry that make up the narrow possibilities of Albion's fallen condition are the result of his enthrallment to the Spectre. For now he is oblivious to the inverted writing that will chart his course toward redemption, the opening up of inwardly expanding space. Hovering above, occupying fully one-half of the plate and printed across what appears to be a cross-section of clouds issuing from behind Albion's sullen frame—are thirty-one lines of Blake's poetry—the final incarnation, perhaps, of what the pictured scroll-in-progress contains. The clouds frame the text as though opening them has revealed a tablet. But the heaviness of the block of text contrasts sharply with the ethereal clouds. Albion's hunkered body appears weighed down by the text itself, which frames the cramped space the giant nearly fills. Though the words exist in a dimension foreign to the pictured world, the unstable mutual framing of text and image allows the words to participate in its spatial reality.

Restoring hidden dimensions, broadening human perspective inward to reveal Divine Vision, effects, for Blake, a physical and intellectual expansion of reality, a re-conscription of interior aspects of human experience back onto the playing field of human redemptive drama. He describes Los' sons and daughters in *Jerusalem*: "Every one a translucent Wonder: a Universe within, / Increasing inwards, into length and breadth, and heighth: / Starry & glorious" (*J* 14.16-

19, E 158). Blake's illuminated books engage the universe as a work in progress, a process we have seen to be entrenched in realities social, economic, political, intellectual, and material. At work in his studio, Blake performs a series of "framings" and "inversions" in the earliest stages of his novel "relief etching" mode of production; he spring-loads his illuminated books with nested frames, in a sense, and sets them swinging into the world. Like Los "striving with systems," Blake hammered forms into copper plates and worked the roller of his press, "a wheel to turn the cogs of adverse wheel." Inspired, Blake frames the universe—recreates it in accordance with Divine Vision—and twists its inhabitants into multifarious redemptive dimensions. Blake, that is, like the "ancient Poets," like "Gods or Geniuses" creating the world by naming it, labors at his press to revise fallen reality; he steers humanity away from oblivion and toward salvation.

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