William Blake and the Global Imagination

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AT first glance, the English poet and artist William Blake (1757-1827) may seem an unlikely candidate for a discussion on questions of the global in literature. After all, Blake resided in England his entire lifetime, and is celebrated for penning the lines that have attained the status of an unofficial national anthem. Set to orchestral music by Hubert Parry in 1916, the hymn now known as "Jerusalem" articulates the glorious hope of restoring England to a golden age:

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
> Till we have built Jerusalem,
> In Englands green & pleasant Land.[1]

Such nationalistic sentiments were by no means uncommon in the period, continuing the long-standing identification of Britain with Biblical Israel that heightened the status of the British as a chosen people prevailing over their rivals.[2] As Linda Colley has demonstrated, the long eighteenth century marked the consolidation of British national identity and the idea of the Britons as a unified people; above all, the nation was invented by defining itself in strict opposition to Europe and the alien cultures of its colonial territories. Britishness, Colley argues, emerged predominantly "in response to contact with the Other, and above all in

1. The lines are actually from the "Preface" to *Milton: A Poem* and are not associated with a distinct title in Blake, not to be confused with Blake's long prophecy *Jerusalem*. Cited from William Blake (1982), *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, David V. Erdman (ed.), pp. 95-96, hereafter abbreviated as *E* with page references.
2. See Colley (1992), pp. 30-33. For a reading of "Jerusalem" in its national context, see Worrall & Clark (eds.) (2006), pp. 1-19.

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response to conflict with the Other" (6). Indeed the spirit of martial valor might be seen to permeate the final stanza of "Jerusalem" through its metaphors of combat and conflict, reinforcing an idea of the nation that has distinguished itself by virtue of its conquests. At the same time, however, Blake envisions "Mental Fight" as an imaginative and constructive process that carries within it the universal potential to transcend limited, bounded senses of nationhood and nationalism.[3]

The recurring references in Blake's work to British exceptionalism, which simultaneously occur with an imaginative impulse toward universality, must be understood within the context of global forces that dominate the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Historians of globalization have long recognized the significance of the period in the formation of global imperial networks that were developing up to peak of the British Empire in the early twentieth century. In formulating his World-Systems Theory, Emmanuel Wallerstein designates the century between 1750 and 1850 as an era exemplifying "the incorporation of vast new zones into the world-economy" (129). Rather than viewing history as an aggregate of events in discrete nation states, Wallerstein uses the globe as an integrated unit of analysis; within the dates that bracket the European Romantic movements, the amplification of global trade and imperial interest resulted in the expansion of colonial peripheries that were assimilated and subsumed into the world system. Likewise, Fernand Braudel observes that by 1775, British trade networks had dominated the globe and London had effectively become the economic center of the world (3: 29). Braudel's long-durational analysis of the consolidation of capitalist economy allows for a highly interconnected representation of world history that eventually gives rise to the Industrial Revolution and modern capitalist structures. Thus though the Romantic period is not typically associated with the full-fledged global imperialism that would dominate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the era nonetheless occupies a privileged and pivotal juncture in the evolution of global modes of thinking and experiencing the world. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* underscores the era's historical and cultural relevance:

> Most historians of empire speak of the "age of empire" as formally beginning around 1878, with "the scramble for Africa." A closer look at the cultural actuality reveals a much earlier, more deeply and stubbornly held view about overseas European hegemony; we can locate a coherent, fully mobilized system of ideas near the end of the eighteenth century, and there follows the set of integral developments such as the first great systematic conquests under Napoleon, the rise of nationalism and the European nation-state, the advent of large-scale industrialization, and the consolidation of power in the bourgeoisie. (58)

3. See Ford (2008) for a reading of these lines within a global context as an "imaginative project carried out by a network of laborers and revolutionaries… the process requires a re-apprehension of global relations, and so is imaginative as well as physical" (548).

Since Said's groundbreaking work, studies of British Romantic literature have evolved by incorporating a more fluid and shifting notion of the material, cultural, and ideological exchanges in an emerging globalized world undergirded by the expansion of Western imperialism. Said defined imperialism primarily in terms of a binary construction of power, the "pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories" (xi).[4] Yet Said's clearly demarcated model of metropole/colony has been variously interrogated and revised in the subsequent decades.[5] Focusing on cultural hybridity, Homi K. Bhabha has emphasized the "in-between spaces" and "the emergence of interstices" that articulate far more ambivalent and indeterminate dynamics in colonial discourse and the construction of national identity (1-2). Describing the contemporary global order that has arisen from the legacy of imperialism, Arjun Appadurai argues for "a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (6). This hybrid and decentered worldview has in turn influenced our understanding of the incipient globalization present in the Romantic era. In their seminal volume *Romanticism and Colonialism*, Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson recognized that "rather than a simple opposition between colonizing Britain and its Oriental empire, a more complex geo-political imaginary was crucial to the formation of Romanticism" (47).

One form of "geo-political imaginary" that has received widespread attention in recent years concerns *the global*: to what extent did Romantic writers articulate a worldview informed by a sense of the globe as a totality, connected by networks of power and information, dominated by the flow of transnational capital, and influenced by the hybridity of cosmopolitan and local cultures? In a recent collection of essays titled *Global Romanticism*, Evan Gottlieb traces the sociopolitical reorientation of the period into one that emphasizes decentralization and deterritorialization, arguing that "dynamic concepts like network and system have begun to replace the more static, dualistic models of colonizer/colonized and metropole/periphery that previously held sway" (xvi). The volume articulates a recent conceptual shift from a binary construct of the imperial nation and its territories to a diffuse and distributed global framework in which power and mobility are intertwined through lattices, matrices, and networks. As we shall see in Blake, imperial power is no longer perceived or felt as being concentrated in the metropole or territorial Great Britain; instead, that power has been diffused and disseminated globally through a universal ideology of domination and

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4. Said defines both imperialism and colonialism in terms of a dominating relation between center and periphery: "'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism,' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (9).
5. It should be noted that despite the predominant binary structure, Said's writings are punctuated by moments emphasizing the hybridity and heterogeneity of empire: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxv).

subjugation. The spatial construct of imperial power, once construed primarily as linear and uni-directional, expands into a network that submerges continents, races, and religions across the globe.

Especially relevant to my purposes here is Saree Makdisi's positioning of Romanticism on a global horizon as an ambivalent, resistant stage within the inexorable narrative of imperialism, modernization, and globalization. Romanticism is situated as a movement simultaneously resistant to and constitutive of that globalizing narrative.[6] As Makdisi argues, "the romantic period in Britain marks the earliest sustained (though largely doomed) attempt to articulate a form of opposition to the culture of modernization… romanticism marks the inception of a new culture of modernization, of which the late twentieth-century phenomenon of globalization appears as the climax" (1998: 9-10). Makdisi proposes the term "Universal Empire" to characterize this new unitary, teleological, and all-encompassing culture of modernization, which transcends specific geographic and territorial realities of empire. One might characterize this as a universal ideology of empire, which seeks to incorporate all forms of power unto itself and to neutralize competing narratives or local resistances. This new conception of empire is distinct from the metropole-periphery or colonizer-colonized dichotomy prevalent in previous studies; rather, it is a conceptualization of the universal ideology of power and conquest, which has been diffused and disseminated throughout the known world. As we shall see in Blake, this vision is articulated not only through the colonial/hegemonic operations of Britain and the European powers, but also by how the non-Occidental world has been infiltrated and co-opted by the selfsame ideologies that underpin Western imperialism. For Makdisi, Blake is nonetheless a critical figure in articulating a particularly incisive form of critique and resistance against empire from within: "Blake's understanding of the Universal Empire hinges on its status as a world-system, and moreover on his sense that it could only be contested by being first understood and then resisted on a world scale" (1998: 20).

Blake's concept of a world-system along with its pernicious effects is first introduced in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), with a pointed critique of the system of religion. Charting the development of religious ideology from its ancient origins in poetry and mythology, Blake depicts a process of reification by which mythical deities are systematized into the gods of organized religion. The hardening and ossification of poetic tales into a system of religion leads invariably to hierarchies of power and class exploitation, which Blake designates "Priesthood": "Till a *system* was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to

6. I would add that Makdisi's overall narrative of romanticism emphasizes its *resistance* to modernization even while it is simultaneously absorbed into that dominant trend. Even with all its anti-modern modes of critique, romanticism is ultimately constitutive of modernization by the sheer fact of its contemporaneity with the beginnings of the political and economic formations that define global modernity. In a strictly historical sense, romanticism has been unable to stem the overwhelming tide of modernization, though its discourses persist as pockets of local resistance. See Makdisi (1998), pp. 5-10, 17-20.

realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood" (*E* 38; emphasis mine). For Blake, established systems of ideology have been developed to serve only the interests of power and domination; the function of Blake's art is to create spaces of local resistance, offering competing narratives that provoke and challenge those systems. The system of religion emerges as one essential component of the world-system that comes under Blake's analysis and critique.

The aspiration toward global universality presents a double-edged sword to radical writers in the Romantic era. On the one hand, the inception of the French Revolution ushered in a spirit of enthusiasm among British Romantic writers, hopeful of the flourishing of democracy that had awakened in the American colonies and which would now spread from France throughout the continent and encompass the world. The great hope among radicals of the era was that liberty and freedom would eventually be swept back to England, giving rise to Blake's sentiment that Jerusalem would be rebuilt "In Englands green & pleasant Land" (*E* 96). On the other hand, the idea of global universality could not preclude what Makdisi terms "Universal Empire"—the world-system of imperial dominance that was contemporaneous with the age of revolutions. The simultaneous awareness of the system of global exploitation *and* a new consciousness of worldwide liberation generates much of the tension in Blake's global imagination. Blake's aesthetic and moral imperative is to create art and poetry that would imaginatively dismantle the global system, while attempting to prevent his own work from being appropriated as an instrument of imperial ideology. Yet this is by no means a straightforward task—as Makdisi points out, "the project of the Universal Empire is to seek out and to contain and rewrite those other forms in terms of itself" (1998: 20). To maintain universal aspirations in the face of discontent and disenchantment with the global system, as well as the possibility of being absorbed and assimilated by that system, becomes a recurrent imaginative struggle in Blake's writings.

Blake's work in the 1790s captures the early radical and enthusiastic spirit of revolution, heralding a new age of freedom and the regeneration of human society through the American and French Revolutions. The illuminated books of the decade present themselves as "prophecies," charting a course of visionary history from oppression to resistance and ultimately, liberation. *America: A Prophecy* (1793) introduces the fiery revolutionary character Orc, "Lover of wild rebellion" (*E* 54), who manifests the will of the American colonies against the British monarchy. The voice of revolution prophesizes an apocalyptic end to oppression and the creation of a new heaven and earth:

> The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
> And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
> For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease. (*E* 53)

The Lion and Wolf are symbolic of the devouring violence of oppression; the prophetic lines heralds the end of empire and the cessation of conflict brought about by the American Revolution. Yet the British imperial forces, represented ironically by

the voice of "Albions Angel" (*E* 53), react to the incipient revolution by furiously sounding the alarms of war:

> Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my Thirteen Angels!
> Loud howls the eternal Wolf! the eternal Lion lashes his tail!
> America is darkned; and my punishing Demons terrified
> Crouch howling before their caverns deep like skins dry'd in the wind. (*E* 53)

The Lion and Wolf have been provoked to fight and primed to strike; Britain is preparing itself for the Revolutionary Wars in order to maintain sovereignty over its American colonies. From the perspective of the British Empire, the continent across the Atlantic is "darkned" by revolutionary fervor and must be subject to military containment; yet Blake ironically inserts a note of cowardice and impotence in his portrayal of the vengeful British suppression effort: "my punishing Demons terrified / Crouch howling" (*E* 53).

Despite its specific references to the American Revolution, *America* simultaneously presents a universal narrative about oppression and liberation that can be generalized across time and space. In terms of its date of composition, Blake's text is also proleptic of the aftermath of the French Revolution and the subsequent disintegration of European monarchies. Indeed, critics have argued that *America,* written a decade after American Revolutionary War, is technically not a "prophecy" about a revolution that has already occurred, but rather aims to chart the course of the Anglo-French Wars currently in progress.[7] Blake represents the revolutionary fervor as an intense agitation spreading from America over Western Europe: "Stiff shudderings shook the heav'nly thrones! France Spain & Italy, / In terror view'd the bands of Albion… unable to stem the fires of Orc" (*E* 58). The promulgation of universal peace and freedom is depicted as originating over the Atlantic Ocean, where the chains that bind Britain and its American colonies are dissolved by the fires of Orc. From the Atlantic, this universalizing force is propelled eastward to encompass the European nations, and by extension, the entire globe.

Yet accompanying this sense of liberation is a counterforce of violent cataclysm that cannot be controlled or disciplined. In Blake's illustrations to the illuminated books, Orc is typically represented as a virile youth with flowing locks of hair and outstretched arms, surrounded by expansive flames. The flames appear to be generated by Orc himself as they follow the silhouette of his contorted body, giving a visual impression of unbridled impetuousness.[8]

The rise of Orc is a monstrous birth that literally materializes Yeats's line, "A terrible beauty is born"; it is a bloody affair associated with the blacksmith's furnace

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7. Erdman draws parallels between the "English Crusade against France" in 1793 and the failed subjugation of the American colonies a decade earlier, suggesting that Blake wrote *America* in part to prophesy the abortive attempt to suppress revolutionary activity (201).
8. See in particular *America* plate 12 for Orc as a fiery youth and *The Book of Urizen*, plate 18, which depicts the birth of Orc. Illustrations may be found online in Blake (1996).

and the towers of hell:

> As human blood shooting its veins all round the orbed heaven
> Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood
> And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea;
> Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge
> Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire
> With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers
> Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere (*E* 53)

The scene is reminiscent of the depiction of hell in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: the blood-red Atlantic Ocean corresponds to "A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great Furnace flam'd" (I.61-62); the rising of Orc against a background of "banners dark & towers" parallels the eminence of Satan surrounded by his troops and banners at Pandemonium. Blake's detail of "heat but not light" recalls the blazing darkness of Milton's hell: "from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible" (I.63). Blake's visual set piece at once alludes to the magnificent energy of Satan's rebellion as well as the hellish aftermath of his grand ambitions. To depict universal liberation as Satanic (in all of its Miltonic implications) is to temper revolutionary enthusiasm with the troubling implications of such unbridled energy. This is confirmed by the full-page illustration on the title page of *Europe* (1794), depicting a large coiled serpent rearing its head and extending its fiery tongue, which may be interpreted as the serpentine/Satanic form of revolutionary energy. Furthermore, the turbulent release of frenzied passion has destructive consequences that are sweeping and indiscriminate. "Fury! rage! madness!" blast in a wind through America as the "red flames of Orc… roaring fierce" make their way across the continent, striking fear into ordinary citizens (*E* 57). The uncontrollable surge of energy spreads like the plague and cannot be contained: "The plagues creep on the burning winds driven by flames of Orc… with mildews of despair / With fierce disease and lust" (*E* 57-58). Blake's enthusiasm for a radical annihilation of the imperial system of power is mitigated by his misgivings about the sheer violence of apocalyptic destruction. The ramifications of a global transformation rooted in monstrosity are far more complex than a mere poetic statement that all revolutions have violent beginnings. The political valences of Orc's birth extend beyond the topical reality of the Revolutionary War and the Reign of Terror at the time of Blake's writing; it reveals Blake's insight into the inherent instability and volatility in establishing models of universality.

Blake's universal aspirations are persistently manifest in the subsequent prophecies *Europe* (1794) and *The Song of Los* (1795), the latter comprising the sections "Africa" and "Asia." Taken together, the series of illuminated books amount to a global narrative depicting the liberation of human consciousness across national and continental boundaries. The revolutionary violence and consequent freedom associated with the American and French Revolutions are carried across Europe, Africa, and Asia, documenting a far-reaching imaginative movement of resistance to counter the effects of global hegemony. If those attempts are at times troubled by

doubt, discontent, and confusion, they also reveal an idealism tempered by the difficulties of establishing a new and just global order.

The book *Europe a Prophecy* (1794) purportedly narrates a dream vision of European history by following the trajectory of the female figure Enitharmon, who has given birth to the revolutionary Orc of *America*. Following the historical sequence of *America*, the narrative at first appears to prophesy the imminent end of the French Revolutionary Wars: "War ceas'd, & all the troops like shadows fled to their abodes" (*E* 61). In reality, peace between Britain and France was only temporarily achieved nearly a decade later with Treaty of Amiens in 1802. But the coming of peacetime is not the primary concern of *Europe*, as the narrative arc turns out to be temporally warped and fantastically disruptive. The prophecy is simultaneously set in an alternate timeline, in which the reader is teleported back eighteen centuries to the birth of organized religion. *Europe* transforms itself into an analysis of how the grand march of history has affected the contemporary world, tracing the ordeals of the present to the centuries-old oppressive reign of priests and kings. Stephen Behrendt encapsulates the historical process succinctly: "Employing the twin cudgels of superstition and plain brute force, under the perverse and sinister direction of Enitharmon, these power establishments have propelled the European nations through a series of ethical disasters whose outward temporal symptoms are reckoned in human carnage" (383). The origin of systemic global repression is traced back to the figure Urizen and his book, which contains the universal code of power and domination:

> Albions Angel rose upon the Stone of Night.
> He saw Urizen on the Atlantic;
> And his brazen Book,
> That Kings & Priests had copied on Earth
> Expanded from North to South. (*E* 64)

Visually, the character Urizen is portrayed in the illustrations as a hoary old man with a long white beard, repeatedly staring down at his enormous book that is lying open symmetrically on the ground.[9] Urizen's book represents the textual power of authority and convention as passed down through the ages, for the purposes of political and religious subjugation and surveillance. Urizen's antiquity and infirmity contrasts strikingly with the youthfulness and vigor of Orc the revolutionary, and his "brazen" laws of ideological repression are set in opposition to the fierce flames of Orc. It is also important to note the geopolitical implications of Urizen's appearance over the Atlantic Ocean. Urizen's visual representation on the frontispiece of *Europe* shows him materializing from the darkness and outstretching his fingers, forming a pair of giant compasses. The compasses signify, among other things, Urizen's mastery and dominion of geographical space, which is concurrent with the development of Western imperialism and modernization. The Atlantic Ocean here represents a region signifying global expansion, associated with the bordering continents of Europe and

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9. For instance, see *The Book of Urizen*, plate 1 and plate 4, in Blake (1996).

America as designating the Occidental world. The north—geographically represented by the ancient land of Albion, the modern metropolis of London, and the nation-states of Europe – is nearly universally associated in Blake with tyranny and repression, and with the figure of Urizen. Urizen's repressive code of law is propagated via political and religious authority "from North to South," mapping the progress of colonial domination in the remainder of the world. As we will see, Blake will expand this vision spatially in later works to encompass the entire globe.

The dormant Enitharmon, after her dream of eighteen hundred years of oppressive history, is ultimately awakened by Newton, who "siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!" (*E* 65). As the founding figure of the British Enlightenment, Newton signifies the discovery of immutable principles that provided a universal basis for understanding the physical world, eventually translating into a general theory of mind in Locke and universal ideas of democracy in Paine and Rousseau. The intellectual formation of ideas prefigured by Newton would give rise to the flourishing of democracy and equality that Blake witnessed in the 1790s. Yet for Blake, Newton is more frequently a symbol of the tyranny of philosophical empiricism and the subjugation of imagination to the confines of the empirical world. Critics have rightly taken this moment as ironic and derisive, undermining the authenticity of the apocalyptic moment and the supposed dawning of a new era.[10] Indeed, Newton's blast of the trumpet of apocalypse is a failed attempt on several counts. First, the sequence reverts back to the revolutionary fervor of Orc already narrated in *America* and which had apparently ended at the beginning of *Europe*:

> But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
> Shot from the heights of Enitharmon;
> And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his fury. *(E* 66)

The déjà-vu effect makes the pivotal moment anticlimactic; the apocalypse is reabsorbed into cyclical history and a circular framework of time, much like the image of the coiling serpent depicted within the poem. Historical progress in this trajectory is "Shut up in finite revolutions… Heaven a mighty circle turning; God a tyrant crown'd" (E 65). The poem has ended exactly where it began, and no historical progress has been achieved in overcoming tyranny. Furthermore, as the revolutionary mantle is transferred from Orc to the figure of Los, the final lines revolve around another repetition:

> Then Los arose his head he reard in snaky thunders clad:
> And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,

10. Michael Ferber goes so far to equate Newton with the repressive figure of Urizen: "Newton here is the revealed form of Urizen, the errors of Urizen consolidated so that they may be cast off" (232). Another link between Urizen and Newton is displayed visually in Blake's illustrations: both figures appear holding a pair of large compasses, symbolic of the laws of the physical and moral world. See the frontispiece to *Europe* and "Newton" in the large color printed drawings of 1795, in Blake (1996).

> Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood. (*E* 66)

The final war cry of "strife of blood" appears to be no different from the warfare and barbarism that has tormented human history throughout the centuries encompassed by *Europe*. Universal liberation in *Europe* is a deliberate failure, an outcome generated not only from the circularity of time and history, but arguably from the limitations of geographical space as well. Critical reception to *Europe* has generally focused on the problematic of time and history—the extent to which cyclical or linear models of time prevail in the poem (Swearingen 109-121), and the ways in which history becomes a narrative constructed through the very representations of history (Mulvihill 373-394). Yet the representation of global space has rarely been considered. *Europe* stops short of universal prophecy, possibly because Blake considered the geographical scope of Western Europe insufficient to incorporate his grander project of a narrative encompassing the globality of imagination. The sense of geographical confinement in *America* and *Europe*, which limits the extent of global resistance, perhaps served as one impetus for Blake to continue producing "continental" prophecies in the following year.

The speculative narrative sketched in *Europe* is expanded spatially in *The Song of Los* (1795), a short illuminated book that encompasses "Africa" and "Asia." The two sections constitute a highly condensed vision of the effects of oppression and liberation throughout the globe. Remarkable here is the intensity of compression whereby Blake telescopes disparate regions and religious traditions into an ambitious though succinct global narrative. From the geographical totality of the continental prophecies, it is evident that Blake conceives of the forces of repression and surveillance as global and universal in scope. Makdisi has characterized Blake's anti-imperial project as a critique of "Universal Empire," the structure of imperialism and modernization that extends its network throughout the globe. For Makdisi, Blake's poetry is written with the aim of resistance, a "retelling of the global struggle against the Universal Empire" that proceeds by "understanding the potential globality of both the Universal Empire and any possible mode of resistance to it" (1998: 20). It is important to note that globality in Blake is not limited to an empirical notion of geography, but rather encompasses the network of ideologies that underlie and sustain the material structures of global imperialism and domination. "Africa" and "Asia" attempt to show that the non-Occidental regions of the world are bound by, and have been infected by, the very same ideological forces that have propped up Western empires.

The Song of Los represents Blake's attempt to venture earlier into antiquity as he explores the origin of Biblical history and its far-reaching effects on the globe. The figure of "Los, the Eternal Prophet" is located in "heart-formed Africa" as he chants his narrative of global repression (*E* 67). To sing from Africa is to reframe one's subject position as marginal and colonized, in ironic juxtaposition to one safely ensconced within the "heart" of the British Empire, England and/or London. *The Song of Los* is the first of Blake's illuminated books to be located principally outside the northern hemisphere, and serves as a vehicle for exploring the global effects of

political ideology.

The section "Africa" begins at the dawn of Biblical history, with Adam placed in the Garden of Eden and Noah situated at Mount Ararat. The patriarchs become key witnesses of a cataclysmic event: "Urizen give his Laws to the Nations" (*E* 67). For Blake, the Fall is equated with the promulgation of the Mosaic Law, a negative event that is associated with the rigid and unforgiving power structures of church and state. The Law is a crucial instrument in creating the hegemonic ideological formation that Blake terms "Priesthood" (*E* 38). Moses is here conflated with the repressive figure of Urizen, and what he has mistaken for the Laws of Jehovah are in fact the false teachings of Urizen: "Moses beheld upon Mount Sinai forms of dark delusion" (*E* 67). Those forms of the Law represent political and religious ideology in their most treacherous guise, and their closest alignment with tyranny and subjugation. The global repercussions of Urizen's system are manifested as ideological shock waves affecting the world's regions:

> Adam shuddered! Noah faded! black grew the sunny African
> When Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East:
> (Night spoke to the Cloud!
> Lo these Human form'd spirits in smiling hipocrisy [*sic*]. War
> Against one another; so let them War on; slaves to the eternal Elements) (*E* 67)

In this complex passage, the regions of Africa and India are drawn into the detrimental force field of Urizen's repressive ideology. There has been much critical discussion about the originally "sunny" African and Blake's idea of blackness as a postlapsarian feature.[11] Blake does seem to imply here that blackness is generated as a consequence of the Fall, contemporaneous with the "Abstract Philosophy" that is characteristic of the Laws of Urizen/Moses. However, this would not necessarily contradict his identification with the plight and suffering of characters such as "The Little Black Boy" in the *Songs of Innocence*. In that poem, the child narrator seems at first to echo the identification of blackness as inferior to the pristine fairness of the white race: "And I am black, but O! my soul is white; / White as an angel is the English child" (*E* 9). By the end of the poem, however, it is evident that the child views race and skin color as arbitrary earthly attributes that bear no relation to divine salvation:

> And thus I say to little English boy.
> When I from black and he from white cloud free,
> And round the tent of God like lambs we joy: (*E* 9)

Just as the black boy will ultimately shed off his dark color in the afterlife, the

11. Nelson Hilton argues that "Blake seems to identify particularly with 'black'" –a reversal of identity with the implication of revealing "the ultimate inconsequence of racial coloring" (200).

white English boy is likewise enshrouded in the "cloud" of his skin tone and needs to be liberated from this social construct of physical attributes. From this perspective of racial equalization, Blake might well have added to "black grew the sunny African" a parallel rejoinder such as "white grew the pale Englishman."

Yet there is certainly more at stake in the promulgation of Urizen's laws to Africa and India, regions that encapsulate the global reach of the British Empire and the Anglo-American slave trade. One might argue that it is precisely the dissemination of repressive ideology that generates the allegorical blackness of Africa as a subjugated land and the color of its people as seen from an Occidental perspective. Blackness may be said to be a metonymic attribute of slavery and colonization that have dominated the African peoples. As Susan Matthews argues, "it is the diaspora of the slave trade which turns Africa into a lost land, threatening to destroy even its memory" (2006: 107). In the above passage from "Africa," the natural elements, the night and the cloud, allegorically perceive the reality of the imperialist underpinnings of Urizen's laws, which lead to warfare and slavery while being justified by hypocrisy. As a critique of the civilizing mission of British colonists in Africa and India, it is sadly appropriate that both continent and subcontinent are amalgamated in Blake's phrasing. The parallel downfall of the "sunny African" and "Brahma in the East" bespeaks the hegemony of the British Empire across the globe and crystallizes the inexorable logic of colonialism. For Blake, the "Abstract philosophy" that results in the debasement of India is one and the same as the repressive law of Urizen/Moses; in the contemporary context, "Abstract philosophy" represents the monolithic system of European rationalization and instrumentality that lies behind the exploitation of the African and Indian peoples.

Like the radical telescoping of history presented in *Europe*, "Africa" rapidly fast-forwards through centuries to the birth of Christianity and Islam. The "abstract law" of Moses/Urizen has only intensified in its global effects, contaminating the world's major religions:

> Then Oothoon hoverd over Judah & Jerusalem
> And Jesus heard her voice (a man of sorrows) he recievd [*sic*]
> A Gospel from wretched Theotormon (*E* 67)

Oothoon and Theotormon are characters who have appeared previously in Blake's *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* (1793): Oothoon the brave, innocent virgin who has been violated, and Theotormon her tormented, craven lover who refuses to accept the purity of her soul. To equate the Gospel of Jesus with the thoughts of the tormented god (*Theo-tormon*) is to imagine the birth of Christianity as a process of agony stemming from the repression of desire. By linking the distant events in one compressed narrative, Blake insinuates that organized Christianity is a continuation and repetition of, rather than a foundational revision of, the Mosaic Law. Blake imagines the aftermath of established religion as the crippling of human culture and the spread of religious corruption around the world:

> The human race began to wither [. . .]
> So Antamon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight:
> And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave.
> But in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War,
> Because of Diralada thinking to reclaim his joy. (*E* 67)

Blake's mythical scheme of history now progresses to the medieval era, with the development of Islam and the myths of Odin that became prominent in Norse mythology. Odin's "Code of War" is the antithesis of the gospel of peace and associated with envy and power, being yet another manifestation of the inexorable Urizenic Law that has spread to the northern regions of the globe.

Blake's depiction of Islam is fraught with complications.[12] The "loose Bible" that Mahomet allegedly receives has predictably sparked controversy among Blake scholars. Harold Bloom's commentary asserts that the phrase "presumably means only that the Koran is a poor reflection of the Bible" (*E* 905). Edward Larrissy goes further to argue that "loose" draws on Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim licentiousness, largely stemming from the practice of polygamy that had become a common association with the Prophet in nineteenth-century England. Larrissy reads the preceding line, "So Antamon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight," as the erotic narrative context: Antamon signifies the male principle while Leutha represents a degraded version of the female sex. Thus Antamon "calls upon the best remaining hope for sexual activity under these diseased conditions: the shame-infected sexuality of Leutha," which is directly related to lascivious aspects in the contemporary representation of Islam (10).

On the contrary, Makdisi acknowledges that Blake was "the only major poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who categorically refused to dabble in recognizably Orientalist themes or motifs" (2003: 209-210). For Makdisi, the "loose bible" received by Mahomet would not be symptomatic of conventional Orientalist depictions of Islam but rather an assertion of the continuity among world religions. As Blake declared and argued in his early illuminated book, "All Religions Are One," there is no essential difference between world religions since they are theoretically all manifestations of the universal Poetic Genius: "The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy" (*E* 1). In "Africa," the idea of universal religion takes on darker reverberations as the narrative centers on fallen religion, or religion corrupted by Urizen's laws. Blake mounts a near-universal critique of the corrupted form of religious ideology, amalgamating world religions into one fallen religion. Since the lines concerning Islam immediately follow the negative portrayal

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12. See Whitehead (2009) for a summary of various critical positions on the issue. Whitehead argues that Blake's depiction of Islam was informed by George Sale's 1734 translation of the Koran as well as by a vibrant Muslim community residing in early nineteenth-century London. Blake may have had access to a much wider range of sources concerning Islam than commonly assumed.

of Christian religion as "A Gospel from wretched Theotormon," both religions in the text are shown to share a similar predicament. Thus it is difficult to interpret the "loose Bible" of Mahomet as the abrupt corruption of a pristine Christian religion—the Bible itself having been characterized as arising from impure and adulterated origins. If all religions in the text devolve into their most stereotypically degraded forms, then Christianity is equally suspect and corrupt as the dominant religion in the West. What Blake emphasizes is the alignment of the world's religions in their collusion with tyranny and violence, as parallel developments of the originary system of Urizenic law. By leveling and flattening out the moral status attached to Christianity and its Others, Blake attempts to dismantle the imperial rhetoric of difference that pervades nineteenth-century conceptions of non-Western cultures. As Makdisi argues, Blake drew on "a heterogeneous underground tradition that stressed the continuity of European and Afro-Asiatic cultures, rather than the sharp differentiation between Europe and its others which would prove essential to modern imperialism" (2003: 204-205).

Yet "Africa" not only mounts a scathing critique of religion itself; the poem implicates the entire world system that has led to the corruption of religion, both ancient and modern. The grand narrative of "Africa" proceeds irrevocably in its global trajectory, leaving no major religion unaffected. The origin of global inequality and suffering is clearly traced back to the defining moment when "Urizen gave his Laws to the Nations" (*E* 67). It is worth considering this moment again in context. The event is undoubtedly a reimagining of the Mosaic Law given to the Israelites by Yahweh—an event that is localized and confined in its geographical scope, limited to a chosen race of people and an elect nation. In contrast, the contemporary effects of the Urizenic Laws have become spatially expansive and ripple across the globe apparently without any demarcation of boundaries. For Blake, a historical connection also underlies the apparent identity between Moses and Urizen. That history has been established by the centuries-old dominance of Christianity throughout the European continent, and its influence in diverse regions of the world by means of the civilizing mission of imperialism. That an originary ideology would eventually account for systematic and worldwide oppression implies a global imagination that could only come into existence in the aftermath of Western imperialism. For what entity would be powerful enough to give "Laws to the Nations" other than the powers of colonial subjugation? In this regard, Urizen's Laws might be seen as a consequence of the imperial world-system that Blake applies anachronistically to his visionary history with devastating effect.

The conclusion to the section takes the progression of history to the present day with the advent of the Enlightenment:

> Thus the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave
> Laws & Religions to the sons of Har binding them more
> And more to Earth: closing and restraining:
> Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete
> Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton & Locke

> Clouds roll heavy upon the Alps round Rousseau & Voltaire:
> And on the mountains of Lebanon round the deceased Gods
> Of Asia: & on the desarts [*sic*] of Africa round the Fallen Angels
> The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent (*E* 68)

Newton, Locke, Rousseau, and Voltaire become representative of the tyranny of empirical philosophy which Blake views as yet another iteration of Urizen's Laws in the modern era. Throughout his work, Blake expresses disdain for the "Philosophy of Five Senses," the foundational worldview of empiricism in which sense perception of the external world is constitutive of the totality of human experience and thought. For Blake, Locke's conception of the mind as *tabula rasa* is limiting and deterministic because of its confinement to external sensory impressions. As an antithesis to Lockean determinism, Blake aims to create "Visionary or Imaginative Work" (*E* 555) containing the possibility to generate radically new perspectives unbound by past experience. In *The Marriage of Heaven of Hell* (1793), Blake repeatedly refers to the five senses as a restrictive boundary that hinders the exercise of imagination and perception of the infinite:

> How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
> Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five? (*E* 35)

For Blake, the "closing and restraining" of the five senses is merely a logical step following the suppression of human freedom and imagination through the institutions of "Laws & Religions" (*E* 68). Even if the Enlightenment is regarded as a primarily secular movement, Blake finds no difference in kind between the forms of oppression that plague religious and secular belief alike. In "Africa," the relentless course of disenchantment and secularization, signified by the "deceased Gods" and "Fallen Angels," has been expanded in geographical scope to include Asia and Africa. Yet the emerging formation of Enlightenment secularism cannot be separated from the contemporaneous development of Western imperialism. Instead of a secular liberation from organized religion, the Age of Reason has only instituted an imperial regime that has spread worldwide. That regime is static, unremitting, and devoid of imaginative agency, visually represented by the dark confines of the final line, "The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent." The spatial progression of the text circles back to Britain, the geographical nexus of empiricism and imperialism, which further solidifies the totality of global repression. Incidentally, the same line is an exact reprise of the first line of *America* (E 52), recalling the Britain that awaits the cataclysms of the American and French Revolutions in a state of inertia and paralysis.

Taken in its entirety, "Africa" becomes an allegory of political and religious corruption of the global system, its origin identified as the propagation of the Judeo-Christian tradition in its most repressive guise. The wide-ranging scale of global subjugation could only come about as a consequence of European dominance and influence, in the forms of ideological and material conquest that accompany imperialism. To view those repercussions from "heart-formed Africa" is to introduce a

contrary perspective into the social acceptance of the British Empire in Blake's time. Moreover, to imply that the same forms of tyranny rule Europe and its Others is to eradicate the distinctions between East and West that have sustained the pernicious "civilizing missions" of European settlement. As Makdisi suggests, Blake seeks to interrogate and deconstruct the "imperial European subjectivity against the Afro-Asiatic objects of European rule" (2003: 212). Furthermore, Blake aims to demonstrate how a global system has been constructed from the dominance of Western subjectivity.

Blake extends the reach of his global imagination in the following section of *The Song of Los*, entitled "Asia." The temporal sequence appears to succeed the events of "Africa," as Europe's revolutionary fervor spreads to the Orient and agitates its imperial systems:

> The Kings of Asia heard
> The howl rise up from Europe!
> And each ran out from his Web;
> From his ancient woven Den;
> For the darkness of Asia was startled
> At the thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc. (*E* 68)

Here the "Web" and the "woven Den" are not only symbols of feebleness and cravenness but also representative of the insidious and intertwining matrices of power that underlie the structures of monarchical rule in the Orient. The images resonate with the global network of tyranny that has been established with the spread of Urizen's laws, as Asia has likewise become enmeshed in those structures. Those fixed ideological structures are threatened by the liberating ideas of Orc's "thought-creating fires" in the wake of the American and French Revolutions. Faced with the possibility of political upheaval, the Kings of Asia react by merely reiterating their ideology of dominance and suppression:

> Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath?
> Nor the Priest, for Pestilence from the fen?
> To restrain! to dismay! to thin!
> The inhabitants of mountain and plain;
> In the day, of full-feeding prosperity;
> And the night of delicious songs. (*E* 68)

The political motives of the regimes in Asia are shown to be atrocious in their intentional and fully knowing subjugation of their subjects. Famine and pestilence become, in the hands of the rulers, malicious tools of populace control. In this regard, the kings and priests are no different from their counterparts in the West as consistently depicted in *America*, *Europe*, and "Africa." Instead of recycling Orientalist stereotypes about the backward and uncivilized ways of despotism in Asia, Blake makes little distinction between the cultures that produce tyranny and subjugation. As David Erdman points out, the lines could just as well refer to the

English bread riots of 1792-1793 and famine in 1795; the ideology of subjugation is one and the same (247). The universal voice of the kings is echoed back to the great originator Urizen, as the worldwide system of domination begins to trigger its own disintegration:

> Urizen heard them cry!
> And his shudd'ring waving wings
> Went enormous above the red flames
> Drawing clouds of despair thro' the heavens
> Of Europe as he went:
> And his Books of brass iron & gold
> Melted over the land as he flew,
> Heavy-waving, howling, weeping. (*E* 69)

The melting of Urizen's books signals the deterioration of his iron laws of oppression as revolutionary fervor displaces tyrannical rule in late eighteenth-century Europe. However, the movement is no longer confined to the western hemisphere: Urizen's collapse follows the cry of the kings of Asia and is depicted almost as a consequence of their downfall, as if the momentum of liberation is being carried from east to west. The effect is that of a wave of redoubling and reechoing of the revolutionary spirit across the globe. Instead of resorting to Orientalist motifs, Blake assigns an instrumental role to Asia in the dismantling of oppression worldwide. Blake is prescient in imagining the globe as an interconnected and integrated network in which events in one region rapidly spread to affect the entire system, thus eradicating the conventional dichotomy between a center and periphery. This sense of a global network constituted by conjunctive and synchronic forces is further expanded into a universal vision as "Asia" ends on an apocalyptic note:

> Forth from the dead dust rattling bones to bones
> Join: shaking convuls'd the shivring clay breathes
> And all flesh naked stands: Fathers and Friends;
> Mothers & Infants; Kings & Warriors:
>
> The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes
> Her hollow womb, & clasps the solid stem:
> Her bosom swells with wild desire:
> And milk & blood & glandous wine
> In rivers rush & shout & dance,
> On mountain, dale and plain. (*E* 69-70)

Blake's use of apocalyptic language reveals a drive toward the universal in his imagination of global liberation. Death and resurrection correspond to the states of political tyranny and liberation; just as citizens are reduced to dust and bones under oppression, so they awaken into life when released from subjugation. Clay, the fundamental element of human existence, is violently animated into life and joined

together, echoing the revolutionary movements that bind humanity with common aspirations. "*All* flesh naked stands," regardless of race or gender or nationality, stripped bare to the universal biological facts of human existence. The principal relationships of human kinship are acknowledged: "Fathers and Friends; Mothers & Infants; Kings & Warriors." Even the hierarchical, power-based relationship of the last pair is reimagined in this context as a reciprocal bond of family and kinship. Faced with the ubiquity of power struggles across the globe, Blake attempts to imagine an alternative, mythical network in which the human race is bound by commonalty, rather than divided by national or geographical difference.

Granted, the Resurrection that recurs in Blake's resolutions is a uniquely Christian narrative that we now recognize as inadequate to represent the diverse cultures of the world. For Blake, however, the apocalypse was a powerful metaphor to erase worldly distinctions and enact universal justice—which serves as a compelling reminder of the commonalty of human life. The elements in the closing stanza of *The Song of Los*—life, death, love, family, nature, freedom—cohere into a statement about the possibilities of life freed from restrictive ideology. As Makdisi argues, Blake's ultimate project is "to rescue against all odds the possibility of a political aesthetic of immortal joy, which we can understand as an affirmation of joyous unity and collective freedom. This amounts to a refusal of the very logic of domination" (2003: 258). That collective freedom is also circumscribed in Blake's politics of artistic creation. Realizing that the world order in his time has become primarily a system of global imperial domination, Blake labors against that hegemonic system by creating his own counter-system of art and freedom. In Blake's final illuminated book *Jerusalem*, Los the blacksmith-creator emphatically declares his overriding mission:

> I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans
> I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create (*E* 153)

For Blake, aesthetic creation is not narrowly individualistic but replete with social purpose in its opposition to enslavement and exploitation. The endpoint of Blake's global imagination is an imaginative release from the capitalist-imperialist system that has ensnared colonizer and colonized alike through false ideology. Blake's poetry, paintings, drawings, and illuminated books collectively form a nexus of texts that struggles against the systems of repression and exploitation: "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (*E* 154). Despite misgivings of systemic violence and convulsion in the revolutionary process, Blake ultimately holds fast to a universal ideal of global emancipation. The fact that universal deliverance is necessarily imperfect and incomplete does not, for Blake, diminish the ethical value of his project. If the march of modernity and system of global repression could be replaced by the universal determinants of human freedom, humanity would be united by a new, imaginative, and liberating network of relationships that would triumph over the enmeshed power structures of the modern world order. That this transformation might be accomplished through the literary imagination is a possibility that should not be too readily dismissed in our time.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the formation of global imagination in the work of British Romantic poet and painter William Blake (1757-1827). Known for the lines to the hymn "Jerusalem" that has attained the status of an unofficial national anthem, Blake's work abounds with the aspiration to restore England to a golden age of peace and glory. Yet Blake's recurring references to British exceptionalism simultaneously occur with an imaginative impulse toward universality that transcends the boundaries of the nation state. The twin impulses must be understood within the context of global imperial forces that dominate the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Drawing on recent work in global Romanticism that emphasizes concepts of network and system, this paper traces the development of Blake's global imagination that attempts to envision the known world as a totality. While Blake's early work captures the early radical and enthusiastic spirit of the American and French Revolutions, Blake's universal aspirations are persistently manifest in the subsequent continental prophecies *Europe* (1794) and *The Song of Los* (1795), the latter comprising the sections "Africa" and "Asia." Taken together, the series of illuminated books generate a narrative depicting the liberation of human consciousness across national and continental boundaries, and constitute a struggle to define a new sense of the global and to articulate a new world order.

Keywords: William Blake, global imagination, imperialism, *Europe*, "Africa," "Asia"

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摘　要

本文試圖探討英國浪漫時期詩畫家威廉·布雷克(1757-1827)之作品如何發展對於全球的想像。布雷克的詩句被譜成讚頌曲〈耶路撒冷〉而成為英國非官方國頌，其作品亦透露英國重返黃金年代的國族理想。然而，布雷克的英國例外論述與非屬英國的普世價值並行，此想像卻超越了民族國家的疆界；作品中的兩種動能必須在十八世紀末、十九世紀初的全球帝國局勢下理解。近年浪漫主義研究的全球論述頻以網絡、系統等概念探討文學作品，本文亦將追溯布雷克全球想像的演繹，分析作品如何將已知的世界化為整體而思構。布雷克早期作品讚揚美國與法國革命的激進立場，而後在《歐洲》與《洛思之歌》（後者涵蓋〈非洲〉與〈亞洲〉二章）轉向探索全球的普世價值。此系列作品試圖開創跨國界、跨版圖的意識，並企圖定義嶄新的全球意涵、敘說未來的世界秩序。

關鍵詞：威廉・布雷克、全球想像、帝國主義、《歐洲》、〈非洲〉、〈亞洲〉

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