

THE INFLUENCE OF JACOB BRYANT
ON WILLIAM BLAKE

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ABSTRACT

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To understand William Blake's complex mythology, one must understand the sources of his theories. A primary source of mythic material in the eighteenth century was the research and writings of the antiquarians, principally of Jacob Bryant. Blake shared with the antiquarians a desire to understand the origins of man and of the development of man's political and religious institutions. But while the mythographers concentrated on giving simply a temporal account of the development of man and society, Blake expanded on their accounts of history by analyzing the importance of inner man in the development of his social institutions.

In A New System, Jacob Bryant discusses three points of mutual interest for Blake. First, he dismisses Greek mythology for having corrupted the truth concerning man's past. Second, he attributes the degeneration of religion to man's error of materialism. And third, he discusses the fragmentation of society and man's subsequent fall from an earlier period of unity, freedom, and peace.

Blake's writings contain concepts similar to those of Bryant, but Blake modified and refined them to fit into his unique mythological structure. Blake's most significant departure from Bryant is his paralleling of man's social and political conflicts with man's failure to maintain an equilibrium of his inner essences in his establishing a ratio between the inner man and the outer world. Blake's mythopoeic imagination surpasses those of Bryant and the antiquarians in meaning and significance when he goes on to foresee man's return to unity, to a Golden Age of freedom and peace.

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CHAPTER I

BLAKE AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MYTHOGRAPHERS

As a critic of his society and of its concept of history, William Blake utilized his creative genius in combatting the view of man espoused by the eighteenth-century rationalists: the bulk of his poetry is devoted to attacking the "tyranny of reason" which he felt had been generated by the teachings of such as Bacon, Newton, and Locke. It should be emphasized, however, that Blake did not condemn the faculty of reason in toto; rather, he objected to the overemphasis on reason as the supreme attribute of man. Such an emphasis, Blake felt, served not only to narrow and restrict the individual's perception of his social situation, but, more important, it degraded the individual's concept of his own being. More specifically, he rejected the efforts of the eighteenth-century historians to impose a causal sequence on history --that is, to force history into a pattern of cause-and-effect actions and reactions. Such rational theorizing, Blake argued, ignored completely the visionary or spiritual aspects of man's past and thus affected his attitude towards his present state. Thus, the histories of Hume, Gibbon, and Voltaire tended to become dehumanized, the efforts of earlier mankind being simply dissected and catalogued to fit the specific system. In A Descriptive

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Catalogue (1809), Blake summarized his attitudes towards the historians of his century:

The reasoning historians, turner and twister of causes and consequences, such as Hume, Gibbon, and Voltaire, cannot for all their artifice turn or twist one fact or disarrange self evident action and reality. Reasons and opinions concerning acts are not history. Acts themselves alone are history, and these are neither the exclusive property of Hume, Gibbon, nor Voltaire, Echard, Rapin, Plutarch, nor Herodotus. Tell me the Acts, O historian, and leave me to reason upon them as I please; away with your reasoning and your rubbish! All that is not action is not worth reading. Tell me the what; I do not want you to tell me the Why, and the How; I can find that out for myself, as well as you can, and I will not be fooled by you into opinions, that you please to impose, to disbelieve what you think improbable or impossible. His opinions, who does not see spiritual agency, is not worth any man's reading; he who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all History and retain doubts only.¹

The last sentence of the above passage pinpoints Blake's most sweeping indictment of the eighteenth-century historians--their ignoring of the spiritual forces in man's existence. To implement and support his own mythmaking, Blake thus turned to those historians who he felt produced the facts to support the spiritual history of man--the eighteenth-century mythographers.

In contrast to the rational historians, the speculative mythographers attempted to prove that all the ancient myths could be explained as historical events involving real individuals rather than feats beyond the range of mortal men performed by super men. Rather than attempting to interpret history, they tried to prove the

events recorded in the Bible were the historical bases for all the varying myths which followed. Such euhemerists as Edward Davies, Francis Wilford, and Jacob Bryant were indeed partially influenced by the rational, fact-finding spirit of the age; they were attempting to show that the spiritual or mystical legends were all variants of one text, the Bible. Blake interpreted their efforts from the point of view of a believer in revealed religion. And thus the results of their studies, while attempting to provide proof of actual events, provided Blake with a mythological framework in which to express his own particular concept of history--a history integrating the spiritual, mental strife of the individual man and the social struggles of peoples.

A brief look at these mythographers will help to illustrate some of their influences on Blake's mythmaking. For example, Edward Davies rejected the concept of progress and instead exalted the concept of a Golden Age, an age which occurred in the antediluvian period. Accepting the Biblical account of the origins of man, he not only speculated that the English Druids were themselves direct descendants of the wandering Biblical patriarchs, but also that Britain itself was both the Paradise and Hell of Greek mythology.² In Blake's prophetic books, he indicates quite clearly his belief in a Golden Age in Eternity--that is, when all of mankind's diverse elements were unified.

This was the perfect state of man and society, a state to which man is to return. Francis Wilford's theories carried the concept of England's connection with Biblical events much further than Davies' did: he claimed that he had found conclusive proof for England's being the actual spot where all the great events of antediluvian times--from Eden to the Flood--had taken place.³ The placing of the origins of mankind in England must have provided some support for Blake in his assertion that the future, eternal heaven on earth would be centered in the British Isles. Blake's concept of Christianity, it should be noted, did not center around the man Jesus; rather, it was focused on a state of blessedness, expressed as "Jerusalem" in his poetry, which existed in the imaginations of those who had achieved an understanding of the true God, an understanding he associated with the original and eternal religion of the Druids and the Patriarchs.⁴

A more ambitious and complex work based on the literal truths of the Bible was Jacob Bryant's A New System; or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology. Since this work is to be more fully discussed in Chapter Two, all that need be emphasized here is that Bryant attempted to trace all the ancient myths back to one source--the Bible. Bryant's expressed purpose was to eliminate all distorted concepts of man's history and return to the original, uncorrupted truths of man's ancient beginnings and evolution, a

period when mankind was unified and lived in its purest state of freedom. Blake's high opinion of Bryant and his fellow mythographers is also found in A Descriptive Catalogue: "The antiquities of every nation is no less sacred than that of the Jews. They are the same thing as Jacob Bryant and all antiquaries have proved. . . . All had originally one language, and one religion: this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting gospel. Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus."⁵ Basing their historical researches more on speculative hypotheses rather than on logical deductions, these mythographers' emphases on the literal truths of the Bible could only have stimulated Blake's poetical reaffirmation of the spiritual origins of man and of man's need to reattain this original state of unity and freedom.

It should be apparent from the preceding paragraph that the eighteenth-century mythographers were not only very contemptuous of scientific methodology, but also totally lacking in the scientific spirit of free inquiry. All were fundamentalists, beginning researches by accepting the truths of the Bible a priori; from this point they sought the necessary facts and devised the concepts to fit the particular theory they were advocating. Coming before the scientific methods of the great nineteenth-century philologists had been established, these eighteenth-century antiquaries examined whatever ancient source they

could find, but they accepted as valid only those which supported their original theses. For example, Francis Wilford based his theory of England as the center of the antediluvian world on ancient documents supplied him by Hindu priests. Not until he had almost completed his research did he discover that the priests had, after having discovered which type of source he would pay the most for, forged, doctored, and even inserted extra pages into the "evidence" which Wilford needed to support his theories. After his discovery of the fraud, Wilford himself printed a public retraction of the essays which he had already published in England.⁶ Jacob Bryant is described by Edward Hungerford as having devoted most of his life to painstaking scholarship, the results of which was not one single sound conclusion: "His erudition was equaled only by his capacity to misuse it." A New System is based on a fantastic theory of comparative etymology: "Bryant had a gift for perceiving mysterious and dramatic analogies in the most obviously unrelated things." Indeed, through his very obscure analogies, he was able to perceive etymological similarities in myths ranging from those of Syria to those found in Japan.⁷ Casting more doubt on his methods was the fact that he had no knowledge of Oriental languages. However, despite the controversies surrounding their theories, and despite the absurd and often contradictory properties of their systems, these

"new" mythographers found many of their concepts accepted not only by Blake, but also by most of the major romantic poets.

During the eighteenth century, the use of ancient mythology in poetry had degenerated to a point where the myths no longer informed any significant philosophical or religious systems, but rather they had become simply an instrument of polite and conventional erudition. Thus, in reacting against the outworn, purely decorative uses of classical mythology, many of the romantic poets originally turned to the new mythologies for a new framework of reference from which each could operate according to his own abilities and inclinations. As Hungerford explains, poets such as Blake and Shelley found in the new mythological systems a new language by which to reexpress the essential religious truths. Even in poets of such diverse interests and purposes as Keats and Goethe, Hungerford indicates their poetic uses of the mystifying theories of the new mythographers. Thus, many of the romantic poets were interested in the new mythologies for the new set of symbols and meanings they provided, a framework allowing them to diversify and to deepen their own visions of the essential truths. For some of the poets, however, the new mythographers provided simply different figures and events to be used in the place of the ancient mythological heroes and deeds, a new terminology with which to reexpress

the old meanings. One last reason for the acceptance of the antiquarians' theories was that they gave the poet a chance to display his wide range of learning, a pedantic and thus the most shallow use of the new mythologies.⁸

Blake's acceptance of the new mythological theories which disputed the validity of classical myths coincided with his rejection of the purely mechanical uses of the figures and events of classical mythology in poetry; he was not interested in decoration, but in meaning. References to the classical myths are scarce in his works; they are found mostly in his juvenile efforts, such as "To the Muses" and "An Imitation of Spenser." Mars is mentioned in the prophetic book America, and Bacchus, Venus, Thor, and Frigga are included in the myriad of historical and mythological figures mentioned in Jerusalem. Such negligible uses of the classical mythologies offer sufficient evidence of Blake's awareness of their "degraded place in the decor of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."⁹ In his Public Address, written about 1810, Blake refers to the use of classical figures in painting, a comment which also clearly indicates his contempt for any use of an essentially meaningless form of expression: "Bloated Gods, Mercury, Juno, Venus & the rattle traps of Mythology & the lumber of an awkward French Palace are thrown around Clumsy and Ricketty Princes & Princesses higgledy piggledy."¹⁰ Blake's rejection of classical

mythologies led to his creating his own system: to convey his vision of life to his readers he relied essentially on his own mythopoeic and prophetic inspiration. But to supplement his own ideas, and perhaps to give them more authority, he read and was influenced by the multitude of theories being advanced by the eighteenth-century antiquarians.

Perhaps a deeper reason for Blake's rejection of the classical myths was their intimate connections with the eighteenth-century myths of science and reason; not only classical mythology, but also the history and the ideals of Christian mythology had been subordinated to a new myth--the superiority of man's reasoning powers. Led by Alexander Pope, most of the major poets of the eighteenth century used the framework of classical myth to impose the mechanistic, rational concept of religion on what Blake considered to be the revealed truths of the Bible. For Blake, this represented the most flagrant misuse of the ancient systems of myth; not only had the use of classical myths degenerated to merely mechanical and decorative purposes, but even the Christian myths, the framework supporting the spiritual concept of man, had been reinterpreted to support the new God of reason. Blake's mythmaking may thus be viewed as an attempt to revitalize the Christian, spiritual concept of man and to inform it with a new mythological system that would also

recognize man's physical origins and his social evolution. In other words, Blake attempted to integrate into one unified system all the various eighteenth-century interpretations of man, his major objective being to reveal that man and his society would be the most perfect and free when all elements of man's nature were given equal respect and emphasis.

Blake's rejection of the eighteenth-century's misuse of classical and Christian myths thus necessitated his turning to original sources for a new mythic structure in order to avoid having his meanings confused with the standard meanings of the outworn myths. Such an effort coincided with the scientific attempts of the new mythographers who sought to expose the errors of ancient myth by showing them to be simply variants of Biblical history. Perhaps ironically, the rational and scientific approaches of the new mythographers provided Blake ^{with} ~~was~~ the "facts" necessary to reinforce his own visionary and spiritual approach to history. The mythographers themselves, in their efforts to defend the literal truths of the Bible, ran the danger of completely removing the spiritual and the miraculous aspects of the Biblical sagas. Hungerford notes that many of the mythographers' attempts to explain the classical mythological figures and events as simply variants of Biblical history often had the reverse effect of implying that the Biblical heroes and their feats were

actually myths themselves.¹¹ Blake sidestepped this pitfall by avoiding the direct transfer of any of the old or new mythological systems into his new system; instead, through his poetic and prophetic synthesizing genius, Blake created a system which employed various figures and events similar to those in various other myths, but they were transformed in such a way so as to be congenial to the view of experience he was attempting to convey. Even though he borrowed ideas and figures from the various old and new myths, Blake impressed upon all of them his distinct interpretation; in this way, Blake's transcending of his sources allowed him to create a system in which various social, historical, and spiritual concepts could be incorporated into a unified system without fear of any obvious misinterpretations or contradictions of the entities within the system.

The extent of Blake's indebtedness to the eighteenth-century mythographers and particularly to Jacob Bryant has been noted in the studies of Northrop Frye, S. Foster Damon, Ruthven Todd, and Edward Hungerford. Northrop Frye stands unique in this group in that ⁱⁿ his classic study of Blake--Fearful Symmetry--he asserts that Blake had not read Bryant's A New System;¹² in other words, any similarities found between Bryant's theories and Blake's mythmaking would have to be considered as being purely coincidental. However, in A Blake Dictionary, S. Foster

Damon notes that certain similarities do exist between A New System and Blake's works and engravings; for example, Blake shares with Bryant a contempt of the Greeks, Blake agrees with Bryant on the location of the Erythrean Sea, and Blake accepts Bryant's identification of Arthur with Atlas and Bootes. Damon further accepts the suggestion of A. G. B. Russell that Blake himself may have actually designed and engraved some of the plates appearing in the first edition of A New System, a guess viewed favorably by Geoffrey Keynes and Ruthven Todd.¹³

Even though all four men refer to Blake's comment in A Descriptive Catalogue singling out Bryant for personal praise, it is Todd and Hungerford who actually attempt to trace more fully the influences of Bryant on Blake. However, neither man confines his studies exclusively to Bryant and his influences on Blake's poetic output. In Tracks in the Snow, Todd devotes most of his discussion to the influence of the Druidical mythographers, such as Stukeley, Davies, and Pughe, on Blake's writings, contenting himself with a few general comments on the influence of Bryant. In Hungerford's Shores of Darkness, a more encompassing study is made of the influence of the new mythologies on the poetry of Blake, Shelley, Keats, and Goethe. However, even though Hungerford's study is more comprehensive than Todd's, he also fails to examine in any close detail the influence of Bryant on Blake.

The purpose of this study is to discuss Bryant's A New System and to indicate the various events and figures described therein which bear close resemblance to events and figures found in Blake's own mythmaking. More specifically, by first describing Bryant's purposes, concepts, and results, and then by indicating certain parallels found in Blake's mythological system, it will be readily demonstrated how the eclectic genius of Blake could borrow, assimilate, and transform material which coincided with his own world view, and incorporate it into a larger system which far surpassed the original in complexity and significance.

CHAPTER II

JACOB BRYANT AND A NEW SYSTEM

Jacob Bryant (1715-1804) was perhaps the best known and certainly one of the most published of all the eighteenth-century antiquarians, or "new" mythographers. Educated at Eton, he later attended King's College, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1740 and his Master of Arts in 1744. Following his graduation, he came under the patronage of the powerful Marlborough family. They allowed him one thousand pounds a year, living quarters at Blenheim, and, most importantly for Bryant, the use of their extensive library. From here poured forth such scholarly volumes as Observations and Enquiries relating to Various parts of Ancient History, . . . the Wind Euroclydon, the island Melite, the Shepherd Kings, etc. (1767) which attacked the opinions of such earlier antiquarians as Bochart, Beza, Grotius, and Bentley. In 1774, he published the first two volumes of his most renowned work--A New System; or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology: wherein an Attempt is Made to Divest Tradition of Fable; and to Reduce the Truth to Its Original Purity, hereafter referred to as A New System; the third volume was published in 1776. The Dictionary of National Biography sums up Bryant's scholarship in this work by stating that, "His research is remarkable, but he

had no knowledge of oriental languages, and his system of etymology was puerile and misleading." Also, in 1775, he wrote A Vindication of the Apamaen Medal, which contained opinions that the Society of Antiquarians found highly objectionable. In 1781, he published, in two volumes, Observations on the Poems of Thomas Rowley in which the Authenticity of these Poems is ascertained, a work which added little to his reputation but which expressed an opinion shared by Blake concerning the Rowley poems.¹ In 1793, A Treatise on the Authenticity of the Scriptures and Observations on a Controverted passage on Justyn Martyr; also upon the Worship of Angels were published. Bryant wrote two treatises concerning Troy--Observations upon a Treatise . . . (on) the Plain of Troy (1795) and A Dissertation concerning the War of Troy (1796)--in which he advanced his theory that there had never been a Trojan War, that, indeed, no such city as Phrygian Troy had ever existed. Needless to say, he won no converts with these theories and was soundly attacked on all sides. In contrast to these rather ponderous documents of scholarship, Bryant also wrote a number of humorous poems imitative of elegant Latin and Greek verses.² With regard to Bryant's death, Hungerford notes that it was one suitable to his vocation: while doing research in his library, Bryant reached for a volume which was a bit too heavy; it fell on his leg, mortification set in, and he passed away on

November 14, 1804.

Of all Bryant's works, A New System most influenced Blake and his theory of man. Briefly, Bryant had hoped that his research and theories would reaffirm the authority of the Bible by giving a new perspective on ancient mythology and history. He felt that by using historical evidence, he would be able to convince many of the skeptics of his age of the literal truths of the Bible. With the help of a fantastic and quite inaccurate theory of language, Bryant felt that he had succeeded in relating most of the pagan divinities and events, particularly those of Greece and Egypt, to Noah and his sons, or to religious symbols associated with the Flood. Indeed, Bryant's central evidence in his task was the great Flood of Christian mythology, an event for which Bryant found symbolic evidences in almost all other mythologies. Thus, for Bryant, the ark, the first family of Noah, the dispersal of man, the mundane egg, and other kindred archetypal symbols formed the true meaning of heathen mythology. Such an attempt--to support the authenticity of the sacred by showing it to be the source of the pagan--can be viewed as an interesting parallel to Blake's later efforts to reveal the divine nature of man which underlies the material facts of his existence. A comprehensive analysis of A New System would be a task beyond the limits of this paper; this chapter will be limited to a discussion

of Bryant's purposes in undertaking this laborious research, the methods he employed, and the actual theories and conclusions of his research which most concern Blake and his mythmaking.

Byant's purpose in all of his writings revolves around his "Firm persuasion of the truth of Christianity."³ In the "Preface" of A New System, Bryant made quite clear the religious motivation behind his work:

I shall endeavor particularly to compare sacred history with profane, and prove the general assent of mankind to the wonderful events recorded. My purpose is . . . to divest mythology of every foreign and unmeaning ornament, and to display the truth in its native simplicity: to show, that all the rites and mysteries of the Gentiles were only so many memorials of their principle ancestors; and of the great occurrences to which they had been witnesses. Among these memorials the chief were the ruin of mankind by a flood; and the renewal of the world in one family. They had symbolic representations, by which these occurrences were commemorated: and the ancient hymns in their temples were to the same purpose. They all related to the history of the first ages, and to the same events which are recorded by Moses.⁴

Bryant's entire mythology thus rests on this basic assumption of the literal truth of the Bible, particularly on the truths found in the history of Moses. He does not discuss antediluvian history, but rather dates the beginning of modern man with the events following the Flood. With regard to "profane" or pagan histories and mythologies, Bryant attempts to relate all of their heroes, events, and meanings to the events involving the one great family which survived the Flood. In

attempting this mammoth task, Bryant first dismisses the theories of earlier mythographers, such as Jacob Bochart, in their interpretations of ancient history. In attempting to "divest mythology of every foreign and unmeaning ornament," Bryant particularly attacks the early mythmaking of the ancient Greeks:

The mythology of Greece is a vast assemblage of obscure traditions, which have been transmitted from the earliest times. They were described in hieroglyphics, and have been veiled in allegory; and the same history is often renewed under a different system, and arrangement. A great part of this intelligence has been derived to us from the Poets; by which means it has been rendered still more extravagant, and strange.⁵

Bryant's attacks on the Greeks and their interpretations of events and heroes of the past continue throughout A New System. Characterizing them as a vain, self-satisfied people, Bryant felt that the Greeks had "no love for anything genuine, no desire to be instructed." Their errors, according to Bryant, lay in their attempts to attribute to their forefathers "many great performances to which they were utterly strangers."⁶ By examining closely many of the various ancient mythologies, Bryant hoped to prove conclusively that all these myths were simply variants of the actual truths revealed in the Bible. This research, he hoped, would ultimately convince those hostile to the revealed truths of the Bible and lead them "to a more intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures."⁷

Bryant's method of research was essentially two-fold: first, he compared and contrasted the various sources of ancient histories in order to deduce similarities; secondly, to confirm these similarities which he discovered in names or events, he created and employed a rather eccentric system of etymology. Bryant's ability to discern the common truths, those confirming the Biblical account of man's past, he himself summarizes for the reader:

What may appear very presumptuous, I shall deduce from their own histories many truths, with which they were totally unacquainted, and give to them an original, which they certainly did not know. They have bequeathed to us noble materials, of which it is time to make serious use.⁸

And, two pages later, Bryant states: ". . . my business is to abridge history of everything superfluous and foreign; I shall be obliged to set aside many ancient law-givers, and princes, who were supposed to have formed republics, and to have founded kingdoms."⁹ Bryant questioned the validity of all the ancient myths, including the quasi-histories of such men as Deucalion of Thessaly and Inachus of Argos. He actually preferred the writers who were farthest removed from the times which they describe; he felt that most of the poets, particularly the Greek poets, were guilty of distorting the facts of their past. This accounts, perhaps, for his going to Roman writers for their explanations of Greek mythology, rather than to the Greeks themselves. For Bryant, the Greeks, as well as

peoples such as the Egyptians, had committed a basic error of assuming that all local traditions were native to their people's history, and thus, if necessary they had modified the story and the original language to better coincide with their own time and circumstances. Thus, Bryant supposed, since each new colony which settled in a land brought with them their own past, the subsequent grafting of its traditions on the old inhabitants could be traced back to their original source. Bryant's theory asserts that the original survivors of the Deluge--the Amonians--carried not only the story of the Deluge from Mount Ararat to Egypt, and then to Greece and the entire Mediterranean area, but also that they transmitted the stories of their heroes, their customs, and their adventures to the new lands.

Bryant's etymological theory involved the tracing of ancient places, persons, terms of science, plants, ~~minerals~~, and even minerals back to what he considered to be the original, universal language--Amonian: "Their names seem to be composed of the same, or similar elements; and bear a manifest relation to the religion in use among the Amonians, and to the deity which they adored. This deity was the sun: and most of the ancient names will be found to be an assemblage of titles, bestowed upon that luminary."¹⁰ Bryant's etymological method thus consisted of collating various words from different languages and then

drawing parallels between peoples whenever there was an agreement of even two letters in two words signifying the same meaning in each language. By such a method, he felt that he could succeed in tracing the migration of peoples back to the original Amonians. For example, Bryant spends much time tracing the etymology of names related to the Deity; the Amonians, or sons of Ham, were worshippers of the sun. However, their ancestors transferred some of the titles related to sun worship to their deification of the great Patriarch himself. Thus, they formed a mixed religion with Noah being worshipped as the fountain of light, with the sun becoming only an emblem of his influence and power. The new deity was called Bal, or Baal, and was worshipped by Chus, a descendant of Ham. Bryant then traces the etymology of the names of the deities as related to the original terms as a basis, such as Ham, Cham, and Chus. For example, the Egyptian deity "Am-Om," a name implying heat or the consequence of heat, is interpreted by Bryant as being a direct borrowing from the title "Ham." Bryant believed further that almost all of the Grecian gods were Egyptian in origin; thus he claimed that, "Ham was esteemed the Zeus of Greece, and Jupiter of Latium."¹¹ The bulk of A New System is concerned with tracing these various etymologies involving scholarship which Bryant felt provided conclusive proof for his theories. There is little need to detail further his

methods, for it is the actual results of his research that most concern his relationship to Blake.

From his studies of the works of such ancient and obscure historians as Berosus, Abydemus, Polyhistor, and Appolodorus, Bryant concluded that the Flood was the "grand epocha of every ancient kingdom." Accepting the Biblical history attributed to Moses, Bryant argued that civilization was recreated through the descendants of the eight survivors on the Ark. Such an event would have been commemorated by those eight, and transmitted to their descendants, such remembrances thus forming the interwoven mythologies of various peoples. Noah, he felt, was honored by many titles--each relevant to some particular part of his history; for example, Bryant felt that Prometheus, Deucalion, Atlas, Osiris, and Zeus were all various peoples' name for the same historical personage. According to Bryant, the residence around Mount Ararat was the Golden Age--". . . there was a season of great happiness."¹² The people lived under the "mild" rule of the great Patriarch; there were no laws nor any penalties. When mankind had sufficiently multiplied, God decided to allot to the various families different regions to which they were to migrate. But there was one family which did not accept the divine dispensation: these were the sons of Chus, who were descended from the family of Ham. The descendants of Chus, also called the Cuthites

or Cuseans, together with the collateral branches of their family--the Mizraims, the Caphtorims, and the sons of Canaan--formed the large group of people which Bryant called the Amonians. All of these tribes were in the line of Ham, whom they called Amon; they revered him as a divinity and worshipped him as the sun. Thus, for Bryant, the Amonians included the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Phoenicians, and the Canaanites; they were a people who preserved their past and the memories of the great events which had preceded the dispersals.

In A New System, Bryant distinguished between two different dispersals of mankind: the first was the formal migration of families to the several regions appointed to them by the Almighty; that is, the tribe of Shem was given Asia, the tribe of Japhet assigned Europe, and the tribe of Ham assigned Africa. The second dispersal concerned those who refused to follow the divine dispensation, and stood their ground; these were the sons of Chus, who went off under the leadership of the arch-rebel Nimrod. They drove Ashur, son of Shem, from his desmesnes and established the first monarchy on earth; from this event ensued bloodshed and tyranny in the world. Bryant refers to the ancient poets in contrasting the emergence of monarchy with the rule of the Patriarch: life before the dispersal was simple and virtuous; there were no laws, and man lived in a state of nature without pains and

penalties. Nimrod and his aggression marked a falling off from man's primitive simplicity: ". . . men grew proud and unjust; jealousy prevailed, attended with a love of rule; which was followed with war and bloodshed."¹³

The second dispersal would thus coincide with the building of the tower of Babel. The leader of the Cuthites then was Belus, a person of great impiety, who attempted to counteract the ordinances of God. Bryant narrows the confusion of languages at Babel chiefly to the Cuthites; this was thus not a universal event in that it was directed primarily at the sons of Chus who had intended to create an empire to exceed that of God's. To support his etymological theories, Bryant claimed that the traditional story of the confusion produced at the Tower of Babel was the result of a temporary speech impediment, and not a multiplication of languages; thus, for some ages, a universal language continued to be spoken. The dispersal of the Cuthites from Babel is an important event for Bryant and his research in that it is at this point that Moses closed his general history of the world. What follows for Moses is related to the family of Canaan and to a private dispensation. Of the rest of the nations of the earth and their histories, nothing more is noted excepting as their histories chance to be connected with that of the sons of Israel. It is at this point that Bryant began to collate the available non-Jewish

authorities in order to supplement his theories of the subsequent development of the rest of mankind.

The sons of Chus were then the last peoples to be scattered over the earth. Previous to the dispersal of the Cuthites, the other great families had settled in the areas assigned according to the divine dispensation. In their new lands, the first families formed the first nations and established the first kingdoms. But, according to Bryant, ". . . great changes were soon effected, and colonies went abroad without any regard to their original place of allotment. New establishments were soon made, from whence ensued a mixture of people and languages."¹⁴ It was to these new lands that the Cuthites, or Cuseans, migrated. Bryant believed that these people were ". . . looked up to by the native population as a superior order of beings, and were called such names as Heroes, Daemons, Heliadae, and Macarians."¹⁵ Bryant traces the similarities in rites, customs, and traditional histories among different peoples back to the influence of the Cuthites. In their migrations, the Cuthites were actually rejoining the original collateral branches of their Amonian family, the sons of Ham who took part in the first dispersal. Each new colony grafted its past upon the subsequent events of its place of settlement. Imposing the genealogy of their past rulers, the new settlers in effect created a mythic line of rulers which,

Bryant claimed, went back to the great Patriarch himself: "it will be found, under whatever title he may have come, that the first king in every country was Noah." In the various histories, such a figure is represented as a great traveller, a mighty conqueror, and sovereign of the whole earth. Bryant found that his account concurred with what he found in the annals of the Egyptians, and it coincided "very happily" with the accounts given by Moses.¹⁶ Thus, as far as Bryant was concerned, all the ancient histories could be related back to the original Amonians and thus be shown to demonstrate the validity of Biblical history.

Of the different branches of the Amonians, Bryant specifies the sons of Chus as the most enterprising. Wherever they settled, they were celebrated for their skill in building and their superiority in science. Because of their intellectual superiority and partly because of their superior armed strength, they easily gained access to every nation that they encountered. According to Bryant, this family was "met with in the histories of the first ages under different names and titles; being denominated sometimes from the cities they built; sometimes from the worship which they professed . . ."¹⁷ Travelling eastward from Babylon, they migrated to the Indus and Ganges river basins, and also to Egypt, Syria, Greece, Italy, and to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. In each land encountered, they were regarded as a great

civilizing force, introducing the skills of medicine, agriculture, wine making, and road building. Such events, Bryant very carefully points out, were often attributed to individual mythic heroes of the particular region being settled, for example, the mythic figures of Osiris, Hercules, and Bacchus (the etymological similarity of Chus and Bacchus did not go unnoted by Bryant). For example, the exploits of Hercules, the title of a deity worshipped in many countries, were actually the works of the Herculeans, a race of people who, according to Bryant, were the same as the Osirians and the Cuthites.¹⁸ This theory advanced by Bryant states, in essence, that so-called mythic heroes were no individuals at all, but rather composite figures made up of the exploits of a whole people over a period of time.

The social and political dispersal of mankind--from a state of unity and purity to a multiplicity of contending peoples, nations, and customs--was paralleled, according to Bryant, by a similar fragmentation of the concept of God and religion. Bryant notes a "fast degeneration of religion from its early purity," with "gloom and horror" succeeding as "superstition increased."¹⁹ As man multiplied, he came to regard the eight survivors of the Deluge as highly favored by Heaven. Looked up to with great reverence by their posterity, they came at last to be represented as deities themselves.²⁰ Noah himself came

to be honored and idolized as "one of the first among the sons of men, to whom divine honors would be paid."²¹ In various regions, with the passage of time and a corresponding falling away from the truth, the personage of Noah, as mentioned earlier, became honored by many titles, such as Prometheus, Atlas, Osiris, and Zeus. It was the Amonians, however, who became the first to corrupt the true religion when they raised Ham to a divinity and worshipped him as the sun. According to Bryant, all the ancient deities from the various nations were originally derived from one source, but as the peoples branched to different parts of the world and became more diversified so did their religions. The nations of the east originally acknowledged but one deity--the sun, but when they began to give the titles of Orus, Osiris, and Cham to some of the heads of the ancient families, they too, in time, came to be regarded as gods and some were even worshipped as the sun. Another example of the fragmentation of religion would be the theorizing of the Egyptians: believing that there were several emanations of divinity, they particularized each by some title and originally proceeded to worship these as attributes of the one deity. But with the passage of time, this system created a multiplicity of gods and the emanations came to be regarded as distinct beings, thus creating a "most inconsistent system of polytheism."²² Indeed, the Egyptians became so refined in their

superstitions that they conferred the names and titles of their deities upon vegetables and animals of every species, upon parts of the human body, and even upon the "very passions of the mind." Whatever they deemed of great value, they called by the title of "sacred."²³ According to Bryant, the Greeks next assimilated the Egyptian religion, misconstrued what they had received, and subsequently added to the "absurdities." The Greeks made a god out of every title, or emanation, derived from the Egyptians, and the Romans compounded the corruptions when they incorporated the Grecian gods into their mythology. But for Bryant, ". . . however they may have separated, and distinguished them under different personages, they are all plainly resolvable into one Deity, the Sun."²⁴ While his fellow mythographers discerned parallel gods in the various cultures, Bryant adamantly asserted that all were simply derivatives of the original sun god of the Amonians, the descendants of Noah.

This is a brief outline of the main concepts advanced in A New System; the bulk of the work is concerned with providing a mass of supporting material for his theories. Within this discussion have appeared a number of concepts of special significance to Blake's works, for example, Bryant's desire to obtain truth by using the original sources, his analysis of the fragmentation of religion, and his analysis of the fragmentation of

society. Left out of this discussion have been the various specific details found in Bryant's supporting material, details of particular significance to individual works of Blake. These points will be discussed in detail in the next chapter to clarify Blake's understanding of Bryant's overall concept of man's ancient history and to illuminate how Blake interpreted and incorporated this material into his own personal concept of man and the "Cosmic Drama."

CHAPTER III

BLAKE AND BRYANT

At the end of Chapter One, the various scholars who have detected an influence of Bryant's A New System on the engravings and ideas of Blake were noted. S. Foster Damon mentions only the possible influence of A New System on a few of Blake's images and engravings, while Ruthven Todd and Edward Hungerford venture a bit further in discussing various concepts offered in A New System which parallel certain ideas found in Blake's own mythology. It is the purpose of this chapter to expand more fully on the connections between Bryant's analysis of ancient mythology and Blake's uses of this analysis in his own mythmaking.

In discussing any writer's sources, one must proceed with caution to avoid hasty generalizations. Indeed, many assertions concerning sources should be regarded as simply "educated guesses," especially when the writer himself has left no specific comments on the source in question. That Blake had read Bryant is no longer in question; that Blake was directly influenced by specific ideas in A New System must be demonstrated. A sound approach would be simply to indicate that certain parallels in ideas exist between A New System and the works of Blake, parallels which not only indicate a familiarity with the work in question, but which also tend to suggest a direct influence.

It must be remembered that Blake's own original genius, plus his ability to absorb and transcend countless volumes of history, philosophy, and mythology, complicates most attempts to pigeonhole any specific concept or figure found in his mythology. However, research into Blake's sources not only enables a student to achieve a better understanding of the complex meanings of his works, but also permits him to become more aware of the eclectic genius of Blake which allowed him to create his Cosmic Drama.

In order to reveal the various parallels in concepts, this chapter will first examine certain ideas expressed in A New System and then discuss their similarity to ideas expressed by Blake. Included in the discussions on Blake will be how the various ideas resemble Bryant's, how they differ, and how they go beyond Bryant's theories of mythology. Specifically, this chapter will compare and contrast their respective attitudes towards original sources, religion, and society.

First of all, both men rejected the mythology created by the ancient Greeks. In A New System, Bryant very explicitly attempts to discard all ancient mythological systems by showing that they were ultimately derived from one source--the Bible. Blake also denounces the Greeks as perverters of the original truths of man and his past. While also preferring the Bible to Greek

mythology, Blake believed also that the truth of man lies even beyond the Bible in some great Ur-myth, which the bulk of his poetic prophecies attempts to recreate.

Secondly, both men are concerned with tracing the causes and effects of the degeneration of religion from its early state of purity and unity. The bulk of A New System is devoted to explaining how all the various pagan religions were originally offshoots of the true, revealed religion of the Bible. Similarly, Blake devotes much of his mythmaking to pinpointing the causes and the effects of man's fall from his early state of spiritual unity into a state of materialism. For Blake, when inspiration and vision were made dogma and rule, mankind fell into its gravest error.

A final point of common interest was their concern with the social dispersal, or fragmentation, of man. While similar to the fall from spiritual unity, the social, or political, division of man finds expression in both man's concept of the Golden Age, why it was lost, and its resulting effect on man. In detailing the dispersal of man from his early state of unity and peace, Bryant emphasizes the rebellion of Nimrod and the sons of Cush, a rebellion marking man's falling away from the Divine and the establishment of rules, repression, and tyranny. Blake also is concerned with the social fragmentation of man. However, for Blake, the social man is on a parallel with the inner man;

that is, as the individual's being is corrupted by a disruption of its inner attributes, so is that individual's social environment. The arch-rebel for Blake is thus symbolized by the figure of Urizen, who represents the faculty of Reason. When Reason parts from the other faculties and proclaims itself supreme, the individual and his society become separated from the Divine Unity, the Golden Age when man was in direct communion with the Eternal.

In looking first at Bryant's attempt to validate the Bible as the true source of man's spiritual and temporal history, we note perhaps the most consistent opinion he expresses in A New System: from Volume One through Volume Six, Bryant directs a steady stream of invective against the Greeks and their mythology. Bryant's main argument with the Greeks is that they had had access to the original sources of history and yet had distorted them. Instead of repeating the simple and original history of man as transmitted by their ancestors, the Greeks instead had devised a new system, praising their own interpretation of the past, and thus had disguised and obscured the essential truths to which they had had access:

The mythology of Greece is a vast assemblage of obscure traditions, which have been transmitted from the earliest times. They were described in hieroglyphics, and have been veiled in allegory; and the same history is often renewed under a different system, and arrangement. A great part of their intelligence has been derived from the Poets by

which means it has been rendered still more extravagant and strange. . . . in the allegorical representation of Greece, there was always a covert meaning, though it might have escaped our discernment. In short, we must look upon ancient mythology as being yet in a chaotic state, where the mind of man has been wearied with roaming over the crude consistencies without ever finding one spot where it could repose in safety.¹

Indeed, one of Bryant's expressed purposes in his work is to clear away those misconceptions and distortions which evolved out of the myths created by the Greeks; he believed that he had accomplished this purpose by relating not only the Greek mythologies, but also all the other ancient mythologies to the true history revealed in the Bible.

The basic cause for the errors in Greek mythology Bryant ascribes to the arrogance and great pride of the Greeks. They had assumed that all history emanated from their own traditional concepts of the past:

The Greeks were so prepossessed with a notion of their own excellence and antiquity, that they supposed every ancient tradition is to have proceeded from themselves. Hence their mythology is founded upon the grossest mistakes: as all extraneous history, and every foreign term, is supposed by them to have been of Grecian origin.²

Describing them as a "bigoted people, highly prejudiced in their own favor,"³ with "no love for anything genuine, no desire to be instructed."⁴ Bryant further accuses the Greeks of failing to make any attempt to distinguish between fact and fiction in their mythmaking; they simply adopted all traditions which would be favorable to their

own national pride and which would serve to exalt their idealistic concept of their place in human history:

An idle zeal made them attribute to their forefathers the merit of many great performances to which they were utterly strangers, and supposed to have them founded cities in various parts of the world where the name of Greece could not have been known, cities which were in being before Greece was a state.⁵

In criticizing the Greeks for their misinterpretation of history, Bryant is essentially attacking the last major dissemblers of the original truths revealed in the Bible. Bryant spends much time in A New System in tracing the migrations of the survivors of the Flood--the Amonians--as they migrated to the Middle East, to Egypt, and finally to Greece; each of these movements produced a grafting of legend upon history until the original history became so distorted as to be unrecognizable. The Greeks are thus the last of all the previous corruptive forces working on the original truths known to the Amonians; as such, the errors produced by their nationalism and pride have to be regarded as an indication of how extensive all previous mutations and corruptions had been. Their errors become magnified in Bryant's eyes because they were, for so long, considered to be Western man's main source of ancient history, and thus they bear the brunt of Bryant's attack for having so distorted it:

But the chief cause of this uncertainty in profane history,

and the many errors in consequence of it, has arisen from the false delicacy of the Grecian writers; through whose hands these histories have been transmitted to us. . . . they could not stand to represent things in their native dress, but changed the names both of men and countries, in order to accomodate them to their own idiom and pronunciation. Nor were they content with bare inflexions of words and terminations; but were guilty of a puerile levity, in catching at every similitude of sound; and thinking that the etymology of every name which they met with was to be found in the Greek: at least their language was a canon, by which all others were to be modelled. This was the standard, to which everything was brought; and if they met with any names that would not abide the trial, they deemed them barbarous, and entirely omitted them.⁶

The expressed purpose of Bryant's mythology is to "divest mythology of every foreign and unmeaning ornament, and to display truth in its native simplicity."⁷ To accomplish this end, he had to discredit all the previously accepted mythologies as totally misrepresenting the true history of mankind. Thus, the Greeks and their elaborate mythological system are condemned, not only the actual system, but also the Greeks themselves for their errors of pride and arrogance in assuming that their nation was the source of all knowledge and history. In place of the corrupt mythologies, Bryant promotes the Bible as the only true account of man's spiritual and social history.

Blake's rejection of the Greeks and their mythmaking compares with Bryant's in that he also regarded the Greeks as lacking in originality and as perverters of the original sources from which they had derived their myths. In a passage from Milton (1804-1820), Blake strongly

criticizes the Greeks for perverting the truths revealed in the Bible, and further advocates the inspiration found in the Bible over the weak imitations produced by the ancients:

The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid, of Plato & Cicero, which all men ought to condemn, are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible; but when the New Age is at leisure to pronounce, all will be set right, & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration. Shakespeare & Milton were both cur'b by the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword.⁸

This passage also underscores Blake's emphasis on inspiration rather than imitation; Greek mythology and art were not the results of their own inspiration and genius, but rather were pale copies of the earlier visionary works produced by men who had seen the Eternal truths. This belief of Blake's is further emphasized in the following passage from the Descriptive Catalogue (1809):

No man can believe that either Homer's Mythology, or Ovid's, were the production of Greece or of Latium; neither will any one believe, that the Greek statues, as they were called, were the invention of Greek Artists; perhaps the Torso is the only original work remaining; all the rest are evidently copies, though fine ones, from greater works of the Asiatic Patriarchs. The Greek Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne, of Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination, therefore not authors of such sublime conceptions.⁹

Further disparaging comments on the Greeks and their mythology are found in his Public Address (see Chapter One, page eight) and in "On Homer's Poetry & on Virgil" (circa 1820).

Both passages repeat Blake's basic criticism of the Greeks for their lack of originality in art, and Blake applies this criticism to his theory of art--that is, art must proceed from the Poetic Genius within the individual rather than being imitative of the forms of earlier civilizations. Failure to look to the Poetic Genius will result simply in the perpetuation of error as man will continually repeat the meanings derived from the Greeks.

Blake thus shares with Bryant a profound distrust concerning the originality and inspiration contained in the Greek myths. Not as concerned as Bryant over the historical validity of the myths, Blake concentrates more on criticizing the Greeks for their lack of vision and inspiration. Rather than attempting to confirm the Bible as the historical source of all myths, Blake instead praises the Bible as a spiritual source of vision and inspiration. It is important to note that Blake considered his own mythmaking to supercede even the truths he found in the Bible. While Bryant is content with his "proof" of the Bible as the one true source of man's past, Blake feels it is necessary to go beyond the Bible to create his own mythological system which would most accurately describe his vision of man. In his notebook concerning "A Vision of the Last Judgment" (1810), Blake acknowledges his regard for the spiritual qualities of the Bible, he notes the distortions of the Greek fables, and

then he reveals his purpose as a visionary poet:

Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Visions, which are lost & clouded in Fable & Allegory, while the Hebrew Bible & the Greek Gospel are Genuine, Preserv'd by the Savior's Mercy. The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age.¹⁰

Despite his great love for the Bible, not even its visionary structuring of man and his history could satisfy Blake in his attempt to create a mythology to coincide with his own conception of the Cosmic Drama. Through the mythic figure of Los in Jerusalem, Blake states clearly his attitude towards all the mythic systems available to him:

"I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's./
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."¹¹

A second area of mutual concern for both men is the fragmentation of religion, its causes and effects. The bulk of A New System is devoted to tracing the various religious beliefs and practices of peoples in order to prove that all had been ultimately derived from the original, revealed religion described in the Bible. The transmission of religion is assigned by Bryant to the migrating Amonian tribes, the original descendants of Noah. Bryant believes that the falling away from the true religion began some time after the Deluge; that is, with the passage of time and as the descendants of Noah left their original habitat, religion degenerated further and further

from the original truths. Indeed, with the passage of time, Noah himself and even his sons came to be honored and idolized as the first of the sons of men.¹² To support this belief, Bryant claims that the mythic figures of Ammon in Egypt, Zeus in Greece, and Jupiter in Rome were all derivatives of Ham, the son of Noah.¹³ As each new migration occurred, the resulting mingling of traditions caused the original accounts of man, his heroes, and his God to be reinterpreted and even renamed to coincide with the new peoples' concepts of themselves, their past, and their gods.

The fragmentation of religion rapidly accelerated because not only did the eight survivors of the Flood come to be regarded as gods, but also the nations of the East who worshipped the sun came to regard attributes of this deity as holy. Such a multiplicity of gods and a falling away from the Eternal found its fullest expression in the religion of the Greeks, since all of their gods had been derived from those of the Egyptians. Bryant particularly emphasizes the erroneous belief of the Egyptians that there were several emanations of their deity: "they affected to particularize each by some title and to worship the Deity by his attributes. This gave rise to a multiplicity of Gods--in time the emanations were esteemed distinct beings, and gave rise to a most inconsistent system of polytheism."¹⁴ Not only was this one deity fragmented into emanations, but also the Egyptians, refining their

superstitions further, conferred the names and titles of their deity's emanations upon vegetables and animals of every species, and also upon parts of the human body and the "very passions of the mind." Whatever they deemed of great value, they called by the title of "sacred."¹⁵

For Bryant, the degeneration of religious worship of the one Deity followed a pattern set when the spiritual world became corrupted by the influence of the material world. He concludes that, "The ancients were in general materialists, and thought the world eternal."¹⁶ From such a misinterpretation of man and God, the ancients fragmented the original concept of God as taught by Noah into a countless number of attributes of the Deity, these attributes and gods varying from people to people as migrations and settlements continued to occur. As the religion of Noah multiplied into various opposing dogmas, Bryant notes a corresponding increase in gloom and horror as these "superstitions" increased.¹⁷

Blake was also very much concerned with the degeneration of religion from an original state of purity and unity. Creating his own individual interpretation of visionary Christianity, Blake conceives of a god found in every man, the "divine" imagination or Poetic Genius. Man's realization of this god within himself is perhaps the goal Blake seeks to attain in his prophetic writings. The highest possible state for man, according to Blake,

would be when the material world, a derivative of man's reasoning powers, would be replaced by one of vision and imagination; only then could man reestablish communication with the Eternal Unity which binds him to his fellow man. While definitely going beyond the visionary aspects of traditional Christianity, Blake nevertheless praises the Bible as man's best available source of inspiration and truth. However, through his communication with his Poetic Genius, he sought to recreate the eternal truths which he felt existed previous to those revealed in the Bible. Blake's belief in one original religion, or source of truth, is expressed clearly in his early writings. In "All Religions Are One" (1788), Blake expresses a belief similar to Bryant's contention that all religions were originally derived from one source: "The Religions of All Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere call'd the Spirit of Prophecy."¹⁸ Thus, while Bryant places the origin of religion in the historical period immediately following the Flood, Blake feels that the true source of religion is in each man's Poetic Genius, an attribute he feels that all men possess but are no longer able to recognize.

That man fails to recognize the Divine within himself Blake blames, in part, on the multiplicity of deities, an error perpetuated by the ancients. Blake's belief as

to how the gods had been multiplied is very similar to Bryant's description of how the Egyptians had created new deities out of divine attributes, animals, parts of the body, and the "passions of the mind." In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-1793), Blake discusses the causes and effects of the proliferation of new gods:

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, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity;

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast.¹⁹

Blake here describes the dangers inherent in the multiplication of gods and religions: the attributes made divine are interpreted in turn by the priests as the one Divinity and thus man is led further from the original truth.

In Blake's Cosmic Drama, the mythic figures of Urizen, Urthona, Tharmas, and Luvah represent the four main components of the One; on another level, they represent the four essences of the individual's being. To worship only one of these aspects, as did the eighteenth century with its exaltation of reason, is to err grievously. For

Blake, man must learn again to understand the essential unity of his existence in order to return to this state. The reason for man's fall from spiritual unity is his failure to comprehend the totality of existence, a comprehension which had been available to the ancient poets, but which had since become increasingly corrupted. In A Descriptive Catalogue (1809), while discussing the universal qualities of the characters in The Canterbury Tales, Blake strongly condemns man's worshipping of the attributes of the Eternal, rather than the Eternal itself:

Visions of these eternal principles of characters of human life appear to poets, in all ages; the Grecian gods were the ancient Cherubim of Phoenicia; but the Greeks, and since then the Moderns, have neglected to subdue the gods of Priam. These gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which, when erected into gods, become destructive to humanity. They ought to be the servants, and not the masters of men, or of society. They ought to be made to sacrifice to Man, and not man compelled to sacrifice to them; for when separated from man or humanity, who is Jesus the Savior, the vine of eternity, they are thieves and rebels, they are destroyers.²⁰

The ancient Greeks and modern man are both criticized for their failure to recognize that their divinities are simply aspects of the Divine. By perpetuating this error, man in turn enslaves himself to a system he has created; by worshipping only reason, man denies himself access to the Eternal world which only his neglected imagination can provide.

It should be noted that Blake appears to employ one

of the symbols which Bryant ascribes to the religion of Egypt, that of Psyche the butterfly. The symbol of the butterfly as representing a rebirth process may be found in many mythologies; however, Blake's early contact with A New System through his engravings would seem to indicate that it was here that he first encountered this symbol. Before looking at his uses of this symbol, it is first necessary to look at the passage in question:

But the most pleasing emblem among the Egyptians was exhibited under the character of Psyche. This was originally no other than Aurelia, or butterfly: but in after times was represented as a lovely female child with the beautiful wings of that insect. The Aurelia, after its first stage as an Eruca, or worm, lies for a season in a manner dead; and is inclosed in a sort of coffin. In this state of darkness it remains all the winter: but at the return of spring it bursts its bonds, and comes out with new life, and in the most beautiful attire. The Egyptians thought this a very proper picture of the soul of man, and of the immortality to which it aspired. But they made it more particularly an emblem of Osiris; who having been confined in an ark, or coffin, and in a state of death, at last quitted his prison, and enjoyed a renewal of life. This circumstance of the second birth is continually described under the character of Psyche.²¹

Blake uses the butterfly symbol in many of his engravings; two which come most readily to mind are located in For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise (1793) and the title page of Jerusalem; The Emanation of the Giant Albion (1804-1820). In The Gates of Paradise, a child is shown sleeping on a leaf in a cocoon, possibly Blake's concept of the soul in the material world. Taking the passage from Bryant into consideration, perhaps Blake is intending the engraving to

indicate the potentiality of man's being born again, this time into a state of immortality. His last prophecy--Jerusalem--is itself concerned with man's rebirth, his returning to a visionary, eternal state which Blake feels is possible for all men. Thus, he included at the bottom of the title page a reclining female with the wings of a butterfly. Such a picture of repose would tend to suggest that the soul is reawakening and is preparing for its re-entry into a state of immortality. In future readings of Blake's works, it thus becomes apparent that Bryant's discussion of the butterfly symbol could be helpful in unveiling meanings not readily apparent at a first reading of the text.

Returning to A New System, we recall that Bryant assigns much of the blame for the proliferation of deities to the materialism of the ancients; that is, when their imaginations became restricted by their senses, the ancients came to regard the material world as eternal. Such an error finds a corresponding expression in Blake's concept of the creation of the material world. As early as The Book of Urizen (1794), Blake expresses quite clearly his belief that the creation of the material world was the result of a fall from the Eternal Unity; that is, material existence is in itself an error, an error compounded when man accepts his material existence as marking the definition of his possibilities. Man's acceptance of

such limitations leads to the formulation of moral laws and restrictions to reinforce his concept of material existence. All in all, man thus tends to perpetuate his fallen state and to enclose his vision even further within his material world, his access to the Divine being completely shut off.

Blake's interpretation of the gloom and horror of man's self-imposed restriction is also made apparent in The Book of Urizen: "death," "pity," "woe," "cruelty," and "pain" are all concepts which emerged when man fell into his complete and willing bondage to a material concept of existence. Thus, Blake's emphasis on man's fall into materialism appears to coincide with Bryant's condemnation of the ancient poets as materialists. In both instances, man loses his spiritual and visionary concept of existence which he had once enjoyed and falls instead into a state of self-perpetuating error. While Bryant's emphasis is on a temporal account of the historical fragmentation of religion, Blake expands this degeneration to include the causes and effects of such a fall on the individual being.

The concern for man's social fragmentation is the third and last area of mutual interest for Bryant and Blake. In A New System Bryant devotes much time discussing the dispersal of man from his earliest social state, and the causes and effects of this dispersal. Blake, while evidencing a similar concern, further deepens the meaning of this fragmentation from unity by also indicating

its parallel in the fragmentation of the individual man's essential attributes. Bryant states early in A New System that one of his main reasons for writing it is to give a history of the first ages and to show the origins of nations. He feels that the nations themselves were originally allotted according to the Divine Dispensation to the various families descended from Noah. However, prior to this dispensation and during the Flood itself, all of nature was in a state of chaos. The earth was totally hid and the heavens obscured; all the elements were in complete disorder.²² After the flood waters had subsided, the first family began a period of residency around Mount Ararat, a period which Bryant describes in terms strongly suggestive of a Golden Age: "During the residency of mankind in these parts, we may imagine that there was a season of great happiness. They for a long time lived under the mild rule of the great Patriarch, before laws were enacted or penalties known."²³ The emphasis on mild rule is reemphasized in the same volume when Bryant states that during this period--the Golden or Cusean age--the world was unified in one family, the family of Noah.²⁴

According to Bryant, there had been two dispersals of mankind: the first was that Divinely ordained in which different regions of the world were assigned to various branches of the family of Noah. The sons of Chus, refusing to obey, ejected Ashur and his family from their

assigned desmesnes and established a great monarchy, ruled by the arch-rebel Nimrod. With the building of the Tower of Babel, the resulting disorder of breaking away from the Divine plan was compounded, the second dispersal resulting from the Cuseans' impious attempt to become as gods. As a result of the rebellious acts of Nimrod, Bryant states that: "there was a mighty falling off from their primitive simplicity. . . . Men grew proud and unjust; jealousies prevailed, attended with a love of rules; which was followed with war and bloodshed."²⁵ The newly scattered sons of Chus thus became the last people to be dispersed. Migrating from nation to nation, they rapidly became known as great men of science and as introducers of the practical arts, such as medicine, agriculture, wine making, and road building.²⁶ More importantly, Bryant considers the Cuseans as the first "apostates from the truth"--they introduced the worship of the sun.²⁷ The turning away from the spiritual to a materialistic approach to existence was accelerated and implemented by the priests of the Cuseans: all the new colonies went abroad under the sanction and direction of the priests and carried with them the rites and restrictions of their corrupted religion.²⁸

The results of the first rebellion were thus the establishment of the first monarchy and the beginning of man's fall into a history of usurpation, tyranny, and restriction.²⁹ Bryant traces the corruption not only of

religion, but also of society, in order to underscore man's original sin of materialism--an error compounded and perpetuated by the priesthood. The fragmentation of society, begun originally under Divine Guidance, became corrupted as man lost his ability to discern the spiritual causes of his material existence. The fall from a state of simplicity and unity resulted in monarchy, priesthood, and tyranny: the social man became enslaved along with his spiritual brother, both being corrupted by the materialistic philosophy of life which stated that the material world was eternal.

For Blake, there exists a definite correspondence between the fragmentation of the social world and the disruption of the inner, psychological world; that is, Blake expresses in his prophetic writings a belief that man's fall into materialism and rationalism was paralleled by man's subsequent enslavement by his religious and political systems. Blake feels, however, that this self-imposed bondage can be removed and a return to freedom and unity effected if man would once again recognize the Divinity within himself. Such a recognition of his essential being and the realization of his spiritual union with his fellow man would result in man's return to a state of the Eternal. As a prophet of the Poetic Genius, the faculty of imagination in every man, Blake states in his notebook concerning "A Vision of the Last Judgment" (1810) his divine

purpose on earth: "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavor to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age."³⁰

In A New System, Bryant spends much time discussing man in the age of Noah, the Golden Age when mankind was unified and free from restrictions and tyranny. The fall from this original paradise derived from the revolt of one family and with man's subsequent acceptance of a material concept of eternity over that of a spiritual. Blake's concepts of the original state of man, its fragmentation, and its subsequent recovery are found mainly in his prophetic works. For example, in The Book of Los (1795), Eno, perhaps a symbol of material bondage, bemoans the loss of "Times remote," an idyllic past when neither covetousness, envy, nor wrath existed. These characteristics come into being only when man's spiritual concept of himself and his society become materialistic, the same error that Bryant charges the ancients with perpetuating.

A more detailed analysis of the degeneration of man and society is found in The Book of Urizen (1794). This prophecy deals directly with the fall from Eternity: on one level, it may be read as an account of man's descent into social and religious restrictions, and on another, as the failure of the individual who allows one aspect of his being--his reason--to dominate his other faculties. In this poem, Urizen is somehow separated from the other three

states of being, the faculty of reason establishing itself as a separate entity. To perpetuate its claim of uniqueness requires the creation of the "Book of eternal brass," which contains the laws of moral and social restriction. However, Urizen cannot exist alone; his concept of existence based on laws and restrictions is doomed to non-entity without the support of another of Blake's mythic figures--Los. Called the Eternal Prophet, Los is the one who creates the material world so that Urizen's fall would be halted. Materialism is thus created by the Eternal Prophet Los in much the same way that Bryant accuses the ancient poets of perpetrating this error. Blake viewed the effects of man's descent into the material world in the same way that Bryant viewed the effect of the Cuseans' worshipping of the sun--man became cut off from his earlier knowledge of the Divine:

The Eternals closed the tent,
they beat down the stakes, the cords
Stretch'd for a work of eternity.
No more Los beheld Eternity.³¹

Urizen's defection from the Eternals also affected man as a social being, effects similar to those resulting from the rebellion of Nimrod and the sons of Chus from the Divine Dispensation. The sons of Chus, in defying the spiritual dispersal, set themselves apart from the rest of humanity and established their own laws, kings, and gods; they turned away from the spiritual basis of existence and

established their own corrupt vision of existence. The falling away from a state of unity results in the restriction of joys and desires. Urizen decrees:

Let each chuse one habitation,
His ancient infinite mansion,
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure,
One King, one God, one Law.³²

To further restrict man, science is created to define the limits of man's potentialities; and for Bryant, the sons of Chus were noted as great men of science. To bind men morally, to restrain his pleasures, the "Net of Religion" also results from Urizen's fall into material existence; and for Bryant, the sons of Chus migrated and carried their corrupted religion with its laws and restrictions under the instructions of their priests.

For a final discussion of the influences of Bryant on Blake, we turn to Blake's last and most complex prophetic poem--Jerusalem. Not only does this poem contain almost all the points of similarity previously mentioned, but more importantly, this poem demonstrates how Blake, as visionary and prophet, transcends his source to create a wholly original mythopoeic statement on man and society. Early in the poem, the names of Cush and Nimrod are evoked in connection with pestilence and war. A few pages later, after Jerusalem has lamented the passing of the Golden Age when it was a "time of love," Nimrod and Cush are again

connected with war, hatred, restriction, and the falling away from vision:

Great is the cry of the Hounds of Nimrod along the Vally
Of Vision, they scent the odor of War in the Valley of Vision.
All Love is lost! terror succeeds, & Hatred instead of Love,
And stern demands of Right & Duty instead of Liberty.³³

Most of the poem is concerned with the separation and the reunification of the four Zoas, the inner essences of man. In the Universal man, these attributes have become chaotic, first one, then the other assuming control of the Universal Man. Los attempts to explain the essential unity of man to Albion, mankind in its fallen state:

Albion! Our wars are wars of life, & wounds of love
With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought.
Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude, or expanding, we behold as one,
As One Man all the Universal Family, and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him
Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the land of life,
Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.³⁴

The concept of man's union with his fellow man, a state Bryant conjectured existed immediately following the Flood, is symbolized by Blake in the concept of Jesus, a state of forgiveness, love, and unity, an eternal state awaiting man's return. The disruption of this unity and the rejection of the divine Bryant incorporates in the figure of Nimrod; Blake's villain who prevents a return to this unity is Urizen, the mythic representative of man's

reasoning powers. In Jerusalem, the function of such a power is clearly expressed as a negator of the imaginative and the spiritual. Just as Nimrod and his sons built Babel so that they could become as gods, so Reason sets itself on a throne and demands worship:

. . . I am God, O sons of Men! I am your Rational Power!
 Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach humility to Man,
 Who teach Doubt & Experiment? & my two Wings, Voltaire,
 Rousseau?
 Where is that Friend of Sinners? that Rebel against my Laws
 Who teaches Belief to the Nations & an unknown Eternal Life?
 Come hither into the Desert & turn these stones to bread
 Vain Foolish Man! Wilt thou believe without Experiment
 And build a World of Phantoms upon my Great Abyss,
 A World of Shapes in craving Lust & devouring appetite?³⁵

The remainder of the poem describes the return of man to the "Universal Family;" the four Zoas are reunited, each in equal respect to one another, and man is rejoined to Humanity in Eternity. This poetic evocation of the apocalypse is what marks Blake's most obvious departure from the concepts expressed in A New System. Bryant, as an antiquarian, was not interested in the outcome of man's fall from the divine vision; he just wanted to correct historical errors, not spiritual ones. He was not a philosopher nor a theologian; thus he left the ultimate issues to the poets. Blake--a prophetic poet--read the conclusions of Bryant, and connected them with the ultimate issues. Blake incorporates the "facts" of Bryant into his own mythology, a mythology which foresees a time when man would recognize his errors

and once again return to the Divine. It was to convince man of this possibility that Blake devoted his entire creative life.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

To create his mythology, Blake drew on many outside sources for inspiration and for ideas which would support his concepts of man and society. For example, such varied writers as Emanuel Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme, Saint Teresa, Thomas Taylor, and John Milton are each considered to have had an influence on Blake's theories and thus on his poetry; indeed, many of these individuals have had their significance to Blake expounded in lengthy studies. Instead of discussing the effect of individual writers on Blake, the studies of Ruthven Todd and Edward Hungerford analyze the collective influence of a large group of writers--the eighteenth-century antiquarians--on Blake. Of this group, this paper has been devoted to discussing the importance of one of its members--Jacob Bryant--to the mythmaking of Blake. Even though present scholars now regard Bryant's A New System as being totally discredited, this study has revealed that certain important parallels do exist between Bryant's theories and ideas found in Blake's own Cosmic Drama. Bryant's denunciation of the Greeks and their mythology, his concern for and analysis of the degeneration of religion, and his interpretation of the fragmentation of society are all matters of concern which find similar expression in Blake's writings.

Even though Blake was indebted to outside sources, his mythological system becomes, in the end, totally his own. He probably took from Bryant, as he did from all his other sources, that which most appealed to him and to his concept of the Cosmic Drama. By a continual process of borrowing and modifying, Blake clearly demonstrates his creative ability to expand on the materials available to him. Blake appears to have assimilated Bryant's factual, scholarly account of ancient man and society into his own "history" of man's struggle with his inner faculties and the effect of this inner struggle on man's social and religious problems. Blake, however, most clearly departs from the pseudo-historical research of Bryant when he goes on to foresee an eventual regeneration of man, a returning to a state of unity and freedom. This merging of Blake's concept of society with his prophetic, visionary concept of man thus places his myth^hmaking far above that of all the antiquarians in meaning and significance.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter One

¹Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966), p. 579.

²Edward Hungerford, Shores of Darkness (New York, 1941), pp. 25-26.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁴Ruthven Todd, Tracks in the Snow (New York, 1947), p. 55.

⁵Complete Writings, pp. 578-579.

⁶Hungerford, pp. 30-31.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 12-15.

⁹Mark Schorer, The Politics of Vision (New York, 1959), p. 31.

¹⁰Complete Writings, p. 599.

¹¹Hungerford, pp. 8-9.

¹²Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, 1947), p. 173.

¹³S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary (Providence, 1965), p. 61. Both Damon and Todd refer to A. G. B. Russell, The Engravings of William Blake (London, 1912), p. 191.

Chapter Two

¹"Annotations to Poems by William Wordsworth," Complete Writings, p. 783.

²The Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Leslie Stephens and Sidney Lee (Oxford, 1921-1922), III, 155-157.

³Bryant, A New System (London, 1807), I, viii.

⁴*Ibid.*, I, xxxix-xl.

- ⁵Ibid., I, xlv.
- ⁶A New System, I, 192-193.
- ⁷Ibid., I, 1.
- ⁸Ibid., I, xxxiii.
- ⁹Ibid., I, xxxv.
- ¹⁰Ibid., I, xlii.
- ¹¹Ibid., I, 6.
- ¹²Ibid., IV, 29.
- ¹³Ibid., IV, 47.
- ¹⁴Ibid., I, xxviii.
- ¹⁵Ibid., I, xxx.
- ¹⁶Ibid., I, xxxix.
- ¹⁷Ibid., IV, 246.
- ¹⁸Ibid., II, 346.
- ¹⁹Ibid., I, 269.
- ²⁰Ibid., III, 49.
- ²¹Ibid., III, 6.
- ²²Ibid., I, 382.
- ²³Ibid., II, 18.
- ²⁴Ibid., I, 383-384.

Chapter Three

- ¹A New System, I, xlv.
- ²Ibid., I, 162.
- ³Ibid., I, 179.
- ⁴Ibid., I, 192.
- ⁵Ibid., I, 192-193.
- ⁶Ibid., VI, 38-40.
- ⁷Ibid., I, xxxix-xl.
- ⁸Complete Writings, p. 480.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 565-566.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 605.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 629.
- ¹²A New System, III, 6.
- ¹³Ibid., I, 5-6.
- ¹⁴Ibid., I, 382.
- ¹⁵Ibid., II, 18.
- ¹⁶Ibid., III, 227.
- ¹⁷Ibid., I, 269.
- ¹⁸Complete Writings, p. 98.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 153.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 571.
- ²¹A New System, III, 247-248.
- ²²Ibid., III, 202.
- ²³Ibid., IV, 29.
- ²⁴Ibid., IV, 211.
- ²⁵Ibid., IV, 47.
- ²⁶Ibid., V, 93.
- ²⁷Ibid., IV, 194.
- ²⁸Ibid., I, 350.

²⁹A New System, IV, 23.

³⁰Complete Writings, p. 605.

³¹Ibid., pp. 232-233.

³²Ibid., p. 224.

³³Ibid., p. 644.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 664-665.

³⁵Ibid., p. 685.

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