

Becoming-zoa

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The political, economic and print machinery of the 1790s brings Blake to a moment of crisis and visionary insight made evident in *The Four Zoas*. This essay questions the notion that *The Four Zoas* is simply a manuscript. A look at the complex politics of printing in the 1790s suggest that the *Zoas* is part of Blake's working through the problems of publication during the reign of a conservative, nationalistic government at war with France. To begin with, *The Four Zoas* is written on proof sheets of Blake's illustrations to Young's *Night Thoughts*. This detail leads to an examination of two types of literature in the mid-1790s, state approved literature and state censored literature. Blake's work is at a crossroads between the two since he wants to produce a lavish illuminated folio like the Blake-Edwards edition of *Night Thoughts*, but also include radical material that would be censored. Standing between printable national literature and banned anti-government works, Blake's *Zoas* is a highly unstable text which because of its instability defies and critiques the political, economic and industrial machinery of publication during the turn of the century.

Blake's construction of the *Zoas* makes the act of reading both traitorous and insightful. Editorial marks, multiple ways of arranging pages, and lined and etched drawings become part of the system of signification for the verbal text. Words, phrases and images in the *Zoas* are so deeply overdetermined that the reader struggles to produce meaning via ordered patterns of relations without shutting down or shutting out the surplus of possible readings. In order to keep a maximum of possibilities open, I devise a method of reading involving "vector" relationships. I use pages 99 and 100 of *The Four Zoas* as an example of the complex nexus of lines, marks, drawings, words and spacings made visible by a vector reading. Ultimately, Blake envisions that the dizzying experience of reading will open the readers' "doors of perception," challenging the way readers think about texts and the interface between text and world.

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By the mid 1790s William Blake has left traditional printing methods behind. He has also forgone much work in commercial designs and instead has taken up writing a series of small illuminated prophecies. But forced to make a living and finding no audience for his own illuminated poems, in 1795 Blake takes on a commission to illustrate a new edition of *Night Thoughts* by the mid-eighteenth century graveyard poet Edward Young. Yet, even as he is working on this commission, Blake begins writing his own epic prophecy on the discarded proof sheets for his engraved designs of *Night Thoughts*. While his commission ends in 1797, Blake continues his own epic poem, *The Four Zoas*, for another ten years. Most scholars consider the poem an unfinished manuscript abandoned after the poem was completed but before Blake could incorporate late additions and editorial rearranging of the text into a fair copy for print (see figure 1). Consequently, *The Four Zoas* is not often read as a work that stands on its own; rather, it is considered the rough manuscript used to work out ideas for Blake's later epic poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

Due to the sheer unwieldiness of *The Four Zoas*, this text becomes classified as an abandoned manuscript and a workshop of ideas for his later poetry. While readers of Blake are accustomed to the weaving of multiple levels of material into a disjunctive narrative, *The Four Zoas* is simply too demanding and too Blakean even for readers of Blake. Texts of Blake are often made more accessible by reading through the lens of archetypal criticism that makes analogies between the strands of meaning that weave through his poems. In an archetypal reading each of Blake's main male characters has an Eternal Name (Luvah, Urizen, Tharmas, and Urthona) as well as a Time Name (Orc, Satan, Covering Cherub, and Los) and has a particular female counterpart or "emanation."

The male characters accompanied by

their emanations are related to the senses (Nose, Eye, Tongue, Ear), and parts of the body (Loins, Head, Heart, and Legs) as well as elements in nature, cardinal points and regions of Blake's universe.¹ My own reading of Blake privileges the minute particulars of Blake's texts over the abstract generalizations of archetypal criticism to help make sense of why Blake would leave *The Four Zoas* in the contorted state critics have called a "manuscript." By connecting the detailed points of the text through what I call a vector reading, I arrive at an understanding of *The Four Zoas* not as a manuscript but rather as an impossible text, a text that defies normalization of any print apparatus and evades British regulations of the 1790s that would censor Blake's revolutionary text.

As a means of proceeding, I have randomly chosen a particular leaf of *The Four Zoas* as a nodal point from which I intend to follow a series of vector relations. Vectors are the traveling of a minute particular in a text and its contextual meaning across the field of the text from the standpoint of another minute particular through which it travels and which provides the vector's directedness. The notion of vectors takes seriously the idea that "the words [and other textual details] of the plates have their own plots."² Not all the passages that would be considered "important" by an abstract scheme of archetypal criticism have relevance to the convergence of vectors, and some of the "less important" passages take on new found value. The "noise" of the text — its inconsistencies, materials of production, history of production, stray marks, editorial instructions, etc. — becomes increasingly relevant for the production of meaning.³ Investigation into this particular leaf has uncovered a quality of relation between Blake's figures I call transformation or becoming. Such a quality is antithetical to archetypal criticism's dependence on similarity as a method of scanning a text. Rather than looking for moments of similarity and conformity in a character's action, my attention to minute particulars assumes a stance of textual difference between any sections of the text. Radical difference without a grounding in similarity allows for the possibility of transformations, changes which un hinge the "character" from his/her locus of identity.

I have chosen the opening of the chapter called "Night Eight," pages 99 and 100, as the starting point for reading *The Four Zoas*. Having taken Night Eight as a starting point, a new series of questions arise in the inquiry of minute particulars. For example, what are the possibilities for the production of Blake's Night Eight of *The Four Zoas*? How is Night Eight possible? The words of the text are written on a proof sheet for Blake's illustration of Young's *Night Thoughts*. Richard Edward's edition of *Night Thoughts* which Blake illustrated is possible materially because of Whatman's new mills for the production of high quality folio paper in England and because of the rising demand for engravers at the end of the eighteenth century. *Night Thoughts* is made possible economically by the rise in popularity of the graveyard poets and folio editions of literary works. The rise of a national literature, which after 1793 feeds a national pride as Britain goes to war with France, creates a demand for sumptuous

editions of poets such as Shakespeare, Milton and even Young. And so in reading Night Eight of *The Four Zoas*, it is useful to inquire into its history of production. Such a history entails both how Blake is commenting on Young's text and its historical context as well as how Blake becomes proficient in using illuminated manuscript to verbally and visually depict the transformation of characters and objects.

There are two types of change at work: 1) Blake's reappropriation of the proof sheets of *Night Thoughts* in order to work against nationalism and 2) the metamorphosis of characters and objects in illuminated texts to confound identity based on similarity and repetition. As we shall see, transformation of objects and characters becomes a means of thinking revolutionary and political change.

1793

1793 presents Blake's work with the question of what is national literature, and as we shall see later, the political transformation of literature in 1793 opens the more abstract question of how to transform the writing surface. The war with France begun in 1793 provides conservatives in the English parliament with an excuse for tightening control at home and extending the grip of the State into the lives of its citizens. (Blake personally feels the overly zealous grip of the Law when in 1803 at Felpham he is arrested and charged with sedition.) To produce literature at the time of war is either to become a part of the State machine via national literature or to defy the State and to risk arrest via subversive literature; the options are appropriation or condemnation under the Law of the State.

In May of 1792, partly in anticipation of Part Two of Paine's *Rights of Man*, a royal proclamation against "wicked and seditious writings" tightens government control over authors, printers and distributors. Prime Minister Pitt explains to Parliament that "principles had been laid down by Mr. Paine which struck at hereditary nobility, and which went to the destruction of monarchy and religion, and the total subversion of the established form of government."⁴ In November, Lord Grenville and Henry Dundas, Home Secretary, vigorously urge enforcement of the May proclamation. Within a week another royal proclamation against seditious materials is issued. During the year 1793 more prosecutions for sedition occurred than any other year in the tempestuous decade of the 1790s. Nonetheless, persecution and threats by the government continue till the end of the century with suspension of habeas corpus (1794), the Two Acts (1795), Suppression of Seditious and Treasonable Societies (1799) and the Combination Acts (1799 and 1800).

With the pursuit and prosecution of Paine and Paineites, the government places limits on the debate about constitutional reform. Paine claims that Britain as yet did not have a constitution. He proposes to herald the Age of Reason in Britain with a constitution similar to that of the French Republic. Pitt is correct in seeing that such a claim would lead to "the total subversion of the established form of government." Later reformers tried for sedition such as John Baxter and Henry Yorke are forced to appeal to "the existence of our constitution" and couch their subversive politics in nationalist terms by an appeal to "our ancestors."⁵ In seeking to enter the conversation of political reform, all participants are forced to recognize their subjugation under the present form of government. Either reformers such as Paine and Priestly overstep the limits of the debate and are subjects of prosecution and public scorn or the terms of the debate prevent politicians such as Baxter and Yorke from challenging fundamental tenants of the government: monarchy, heredity, property and the Church.

So, the question becomes how to write without falling under the either/or demarcation of nationalist or traitor. How can Blake escape subjugation under the State apparatus and State ideology? A simple answer might be to write but not to publish. But the decision not to publish would be a decision not to publish *now* because of social circumstances. This would still make Blake subject to State apparatus since he would be responding to the ideological and legal force of the Pitt government. Thus, social confines affect not only published texts but also those texts that in other circumstances would be published but for political reasons cannot be published at the

present. Withholding publication is still under the tyranny of the State, under the threat of the Law, "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life. . . I have been commanded from Hell not to print this as it is what our enemies wish" ("Annotations to an Apology for the Bible" 611).⁶ To write and not fall under the tyranny of the State is impossible.

As will be shown, *The Four Zoas* is an impossible text. Its complex amassing of minute particulars which are unreproducible in print technology defies the desire to print the text and yet is not a refusal to print. Its narrative disjunctions, eruptions of novelty and vector connections confound a State apparatus which makes all citizens subjects — both subjects of State law and a discourse which serves the law through its ideology.

1797

Consider that the first leaf of Night Eight of *The Four Zoas* is written on a proof sheet of Blake's illustration for the Edwards edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* (see figure 2). *Night Thoughts* is under the scrutiny of the State; it is part of a national literature, the rise in popularity of the graveyard school of poets. While Blake's illustrations drawn from 1795-97 are used for this national literature, Blake reappropriates sheets of *Night Thoughts* for the *Zoas*. Illustrating *Night Thoughts* entails mis-illustrating. The "bad" copies are used by Blake for his own work. This in itself upsets the value system that selects the printer's copy as valuable and considers rejected copies as valueless. As we shall see, the bad copy returns to haunt the good copy, to transfigure the figure from the good copy of *Night Thoughts* into something unexpected. Consequently, *The Four Zoas* undoes this privileging of the printed copy as the good copy or "correctly" drawn copy. Consider the *Night Thought* illustration to be but one moment in a series of sketches and reworkings of an image. There is no point of arrival, no goal, to provide stability to the image; it is always becoming something else.

A flawed proof sheet for page 24 of *Night Thoughts* is used by Blake for page 99 of his own work, *The Four Zoas*. The flaw serves as a starting point for reading *The Zoas*. A foot is redrawn on page 99. It is not the long toed, awkward left foot which is redone, but the firm-footed, stable right foot. Harold Bloom reads the left foot as symbolically impermanent, incomplete, (Erdman 915) and thus the right foot would be the sure foot, permanent and essential. On page 99 it is the essential foot, the right foot, that is changing. Along with this change comes the destabilization of identity.⁷ The territory of the

body begins to deterritorialize. The foot is no small matter in the *Zoas*. In Night One the Spectre issues from the feet of Tharmas, thus dividing him. In Night Two, Vala does not recognize her beloved Luvah except for his feet; the foot marks his identity. The foot is power: Orc's feet nailed to a rock or Los's unleashed in stamping the nether abyss, the power of stars around the feet of Urizen or Ahania submissiveness at Urizen's feet. On page 99 the big toe is redrawn, once next to the foot and again at a half-inch distance from the foot where a big toe appears on the banks of water or clouds. Power and identity, found in the "rightness" of the foot, are redrawn and, in being redrawn, their lines begin to unravel and transform. What will become of this figure?

From out the Womb of Thomas receiving them
 Into his hands. Then Methusalem creeps down in a baby's posture
 And calls the beams Collection in their forms he won the Specter
 Books of Negation. Longing falling sideways to throw away
 Dispar from the poor wandering Specter and his loved them
 With a parental love for the form hand composition here
 Has upon the hammer & the form construction here
 In Epiphany looking down the daughter of Babelah and
 With joy the bright night & in of a human form
 And knew he was the answer even joy & they worshipped

Jan. 1800 c.

2

~~And Methusalem~~ Methusalem the daughter of Babelah
 And Methusalem delighted in notes of Babylonian Babylon
 And Babelah stood astonished looking down to the ground
 They saw the answer beyond the pit of death & destruction
 For Methusalem they both rejoiced they saw the form
 Or whether they both rejoiced till they saw the form
 Surrounding them in all their joyous in a death & hell

Methusalem was in love singing songs of lamentation
 And Methusalem as the night with on the word the Specter
 Also the Specter being which Methusalem was
 Open within their hearts & in their bones & in their brain
 To Babelah & the dead in the descent from the River
 Of Wagon & Thomas & from the Madrigal families
 And some were more ^{troubled} & some joyful & some three fold
 In head or heart or brain according to the father's order
 Of most merciful joy & composition to the Specter's dead

But Wagon his mighty rage let loose in the mid sleep
 Speeches of den affliction and from round his frozen limbs
 Mouths holes & rats he found leaving the words of iron
 The drops & million millets cast in yellow glory & word
 Tubes in petrified steel & round unbroken shells & wheels
 And chains & pulleys fabricated all round the corners of my
 Commencing with the trumpet of joy in dark determination
 And with the organ of Satan in each ^{substance}
 To determine the words of joy & less bright Methusalem



Figure 3. Page 100, The Four Zoas. Night VIII. Pencil and chalk drawing with chalk shading.

Before we look at what the figure is changing into, let us inquire into what it is changing from. What is this character with scythe and wings? In brief, the figure is an analogy. Dress up a man, put wings on his back and a scythe in his hand and now he is Father Time. According to the *Night Thoughts* text the line being illustrated is "Time, in advance, behind him hides his wings." Analogy is not transformation. Analogy is based on similarity while transformation is based on difference. Analogy uses an idea of difference based on mediation of difference by a higher concept. Analogical thought respects the governing or mediating concept which subsumes difference. Such thought is based on imitation. For Blake, the Daughters of Memory who work from Imitation are lesser than the Daughters of Inspiration who awaken the Imagination to creation over allegorical representation. The concern in page 99 is not for identity based on similitude but for Vision by transformation. Archetypal criticism that works by analogy fails. Blake's transformational becoming-other is not a reproduction of the same.

Sameness and imitation serve as traps for the engraver of the late 18th century. It is the artist working with oils who creates, while the engraver is hired to reproduce the works of the oil painter. The divide is between artists and craftsmen. Furthermore, print makers show concern that each print of an illustration come out as similar as possible to the one before it in order to standardize a product for the commercial market. Blake's methods of intaglio printing maintains an element of randomness and uniqueness to each print. Blake is capable of making commercial prints when necessary, but of interest here is his move toward blurring the line

between artist and craftsman and his move away from standardization as a means of commercial mass production. By using proof sheets from *Night Thoughts*, Blake deterritorializes the commercial venture. He unravels the territory, power and meaning of commercial printing. He interrupts the flow from engraving to print to bound book by taking misdrawn engravings as the starting point for an-other unbound text. One means by which Blake escapes the constraints of nationalized literature and the constraints of commercial production is by transforming the nationalized work for profit, the folio edition of *Night Thoughts*. While Edwards wants to market to the public correct and standardized engravings, Blake uses the "flawed" engravings as unique moments for his Vision.

1800

The right foot is redrawn — twice (see figure 4). Something is about to change. Look at the illustration on page 100. Again there is the face and beard of an old man as on page 99. Again there are wings. Again there is a stable right foot and a left foot in motion. But this is not a man, nor is it an animal, despite the lion- or tyger-like body, despite the horse- or deer-like legs. Not man nor animal, this is becoming-animal of a man.⁸ In the body organized by organs, in the organism, each body part takes on a habitual way of functioning. Habit is standardization and mechanization, performing the same action again and again over time. Thus organs take on different functions and each function distinguishes itself. Consider Los who in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas* continually swings a hammer in forging body parts. His mechanized motion turns his actions into habits till “he became what he beheld.” Los gains limbs by reducing his motions to redundancy and thus limiting the freedom and possibilities of these limbs. Becoming as a transformation of the organs is bodily thought as opposed to rational schematization.⁹ Becoming opens the organs to new dimensions, opens “the doors of perception” as Blake claims in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Instead of the same forces acting on a body for the same functions, new forces are applied so that the body functions differently and so that no organ remains caught within the redundancy of identity. Becoming follows a line of flight, a toe that refuses to stay in its place, for example. By redrawing the foot and then again redrawing the toe, mimesis is called into question. No longer does the drawing of a foot represent a foot. Instead, it is an abstract series of lines. Page 100 is filled with random lines not representing any object. Some of these lines reconfigure into an object at the bottom of the page.



Figure 4. Detail of page 99, *The Four Zoas*.

In physically turning page 99 to read the verso side, page 100, the reader participates in the process of bodily thought that breaks redundancy of identity. By a flip of the wrist and a turn of the page, the reader becomes the agent of change. Moving from page 99 to page 100 the figure shifts between FatherTime and a half man, half animal form. Notice that it is not only the eye that reads but also the hand and the wrist. Blake makes us aware of reading as a bodily process in which readers give over their whole bodies to the process of reading. There is no

longer a safe distance between the eye of the reader and the material (of the) text. As the eye shuttles between Father Time and the man-becoming-animal, and as the hand flips between two temporal and spatial moments of reading, the reader is drawn into the text and made aware of his/her participation in the act of reading. In this way Blake breaks the redundancy of identity common for the complacent reader who keeps a safe space between him/herself and the text. Blake hopes to have the reader call into question his/her role and thus "open the doors of perception."

While the figure of page 99 looks to his left toward the text, the figure on page 100 emerges from the darkness of a future description and looks toward the past page, 99. The two figures face each other, one of the

past (99) and one of the future (100-02). The futurity which Urizen has dreaded since Night Two is now facing the past. The text itself describes two creatures hovering over the Fallen Man, "Two winged immortal shapes one standing at his feet/Toward the East one standing at his head toward the west." It is worth noting that because many of the lines regarding wings are crossed out in the *Zoas* "manuscript," the *Zoas* in the Erdman *Complete Poetry and Prose* edition gives little attention to wings on pages 99 and 100. In contrast, the "manuscript" shows a much larger concern for wings. Not only are the figures on these pages winged, but also five deleted lines in the right margin or wings of the manuscript are marked through. These lines describe "other wings" in addition to the ones in the body of the text. Are we to disregard the crossed out margins in the wings of the text or are we to read the crossing out and recognize this moment in the text as a struggle between winged creatures — Father Time and the man-becoming-animal? Here we see Blake playing against print technologies and editorial conventions. These wings as "other," in the margins and crossed out, makes them virtual or suspended. It is *possible* that the body of the text can stand alone without a winged margin; however, it is *also* possible that since a winged margin does exist — highlighted by the lines which mark its deletion — the transformation from feathered wings to bat wings is intensified.

With the problem of wings in the margins we see how the visual placement of text and verbal words of the text play off one another and amplify resonance. The visual transformation of pages 99 and 100 illustrates the “War of Urizen and Tharmas” (page 99) in which the corpses of the dead reanimate into a new protean mass for further battles:

*They humanize in the fierce battle where in direful pain
Troop by troop the bestial droves rend one another sounding loud
The dire confusion till the battle faints those that remain
Return in pangs & horrible convulsions to their bestial state
For the monsters of the Elements Lions or Tygers or Wolves
Sound loud the howling music Inspird by Los & Enitharmon Sounding
loud terrific men
They seem to one another laughing terrible among the banners
And when the revolution of their day of battles over
Relapsing in dire torment they return to forms of woe
To moping visages returning inanimate tho furious
No more erect tho strong drawn out in length they ravin
Flatten above & beneath & stretch out into bestial length
Weakend they stretch beyond their power in dire droves till war begins
Or Secret religion in their temples before secret shrines*
(Erdman 374; 101:45-102:13)

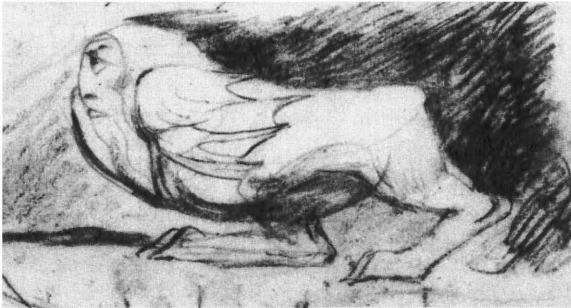


Figure 5. Detail of page 100, *The Four Zoas*.

The “They” functions as an amorphous mass which takes on various forms depending on the forces at work upon it. Unformed matter is forced to humanize by the resounding noise of “instruments of sound” and takes on the attributes of a pack of animals rending one another to pieces. Eventually the humanized troops force the battle to humanize, “the battle faints,” and the animal attribute becomes attached to sound, “Sound loud the howling music.”

The troops themselves become a phallus (see figure 5), erect in war and then limp

*Relapsing in dire torment they return to forms of woe
To moping visages returning inanimate tho furious
No more erect tho strong drawn out in length they ravin*
(Erdman 374; 102:8-11)

The drawing on page 100 has bat wings. Since more than analogy is at work, wings of Time from page 99 do not simply translate into bat wings. The bat wings replace arms and feathered wings. What guides transformation in becoming is not similarity but rather a constellation of vector forces applied to an object. The war forces have been evident since Night One. Likewise, weighing animal against man begins in Night One. In dire misery, Enion laments that "The Horse is of more value than the Man. The Tyger fierce/ Laughs at the Human form. The Lion mocks & thirsts for blood" (15:1-2). And also, sexual division has played its role in the narrative of the "torments of love and jealousy," as the poem is subtitled. The phallus combines with the troops of war and the animals to express at various levels the conflicts of the narrative.



Figure 6. Detail from page 42. Night III. Pencil and chalk drawing.

Granted the figure on page 100 does not look overtly phallic but the protruding head does look like a penis. What makes the phallic attribute evident is actually the bat wings. Page 42 (*see figure 6*), shows clearly a bat winged phallus, another flying bat winged phallus appears on page 134.¹⁰ Thus, the constellations of war, sexual division, and the animal attributes of both move the line of the deterritorialized right foot into a human becoming lion-tyger-wolf-bat winged-phallus. As readers, we

are affected by the vector relatedness of textual elements. We have to re-member the various dismembered fragments of text. We are given the most difficult task of assembling the forces of war, animality and sexuality which surface at various moments in the text. There is no grand scheme to Blake's text outside the reader's assembly of fragments and forces. Objects throughout the text apply a force and move with a trajectory toward the point in the text under scrutiny; here pages 99 and 100. As trajectories of contending objects pile one on the other and as distances between converging objects increases, readers strain their faculties of memory to recalling past occurrences of words and strain their faculties of imagination to combining these occurrences. In this sense the readers experience dilemmas similar to those of Blake's characters who forget lost or fictionalized origins, who struggle to combine objects and who forge new configurations.

The figure on page 100 is effected by such a constellation of vector forces that it takes on multiple forms, none of them fixed or certain. Just as the bat-winged phallus pulls together various narrative tensions, so too the words on pages 99 and 100 attempt to pull together these same narrative forces. In both versions of the text's Night Seven, the instigation of action for the Night is Urizen's attempt to win victory over Los. Night Seven (a) works with the sexual division plot. Urizen plots to destroy Los by luring the shadow of Enitharmon down the tree of Mystery. Heeding the cries of Orc, the Shadow of Enitharmon descends the tree of Mystery where, by dialogue and sexual union with the Spectre of Urthona, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to dead males without female counterparts who burst from their tombs. After dialogue with the Spectre, Los and Enitharmon build and weave forms for the dead. Seven (b) develops the war plot. Urizen assembles his troops for victory in battle against Los. Orc, jealous that Vala is the harlot of Urizen and Los, takes on a serpent form and enters the war. Luvah is nailed to the tree. Orc rends the Shadowy female and/or Vala who meets Tharmas. And as in Seven (a), so too in Seven (b) dead burst from their tombs. The war plot and the sexual division plot come together in pages 99 and 100.

This coming together becomes evident in the last lines of page 99 and the first lines of page 100:

[page 99]

*She sighs them [the dead] forth upon the wind
Of Golgonooza Los stood receiving them
For Los could enter into Enitharmons Bosom & explore
Its intricate Labyrinths now the Obdurate heart was broken
[page 100]*

*From out the War of Urizen & Tharmas receiving them "Los stood &c"
Into his hands. Then Enitharmon erected Looms in Lubans Gate
And called the Looms Cathedral in these Looms She wove the Spectres
Bodies of Vegetation*

Moving from 99:25 to 100:2, the passage could just as easily have read "Of Golgonooza Los stood receiving them/ Into his hands." The last two lines of page 99 seem to be a late addition. They have a unique position in relation to the rest of the body of the text on this page since these two lines are written over the illustration of Father Time. These lines look back toward page 90, the end of Night 7 (a) and the sexual division plot. The first line of page 100 recalls the end of Seven (a), the dead as "victims of the battle," and the war of Seven (b) as well as looking toward the war on pages 101-02.

Between 100:1 and 100:2 is a note to insert "Los stood &c" Erdman speculates that Blake considered bringing in the end of Night Seven (a) 90:2-64 at this point. This idea was abandoned since page 90 could tighten the ending of Seven (a). Left as is, "the thematic material of 90, amplified with marginal additions, seems all an amplification backward from the 'Looms in Lubans Gate' in 100:2" (Erdman 840). Thus the marginal note "Los stood &c" distorts the narrative sequence. Page 90 mingles briefly with page 100 in superimposition, or page 100 is amplified by resonating with page 90. *The Four Zoas* often repeats a brief sequence of words in order to signal a shift in the narrative.¹¹ In this case, the narrative on page 100 repeats the weaving which has already begun on page 90. Drawing a vector line of force from page 90 through 99 to 100, the repetition of "Los stood" picks up new images of divinity from page 99 thus adding to page 100 the "Divine hand" and "the Savior Even Jesus." Additionally, page 100 moves back into the war cycle which remains unresolved at the end of Night Seven (a & b).

The move back into the war cycle is marked in the manuscript by a circled passage. At the editorial level the circle marks a transfer of the last nine lines of page 100 into the middle of page 101. Graphically, the circle brackets off the violent war passage from the hopeful restoration passage of weaving. The war scene is an-other territory, one marked with a circle to be moved or de- and re-territorialized. The war theme which is circled is then illustrated by the human becoming lion-tyger-wolf-bat winged-phallus at the bottom of the page. (Circling this passage recalls the Blake-Edwards edition of *Night Thoughts* where an asterisk marks the passage illustrated.) The circle around the passage corresponds to a circle around the groin of the human

becoming lion-tyger-wolf-bat winged-phallus. There is a playfulness here. Is the anatomical part being illustrated circled; and thus, circling the area of the penis means the illustration is a giant penis? The figure is twice marked, once by circling the verbal text and once by circling the groin of the figure. Consequently, the figure is intensified by this double circling. (It is also possible that the circling of the figure is a sort of question: can an illustration of a phallus have a penis? *A mise en abyme*.) The circle of the text and the circle of the figure resonate till the circles become possible points of intensification, in much the same manner as the resonance and amplifications of "Los stood &c" explained above.

It is not a matter of moving or not moving marked passages; "Los stood &c" and the last nine lines of page 100 with its war scene, "But Urizen his mighty rage . . ." Rather than relate passages serially — page 90, 100, 101 or move them into a new serial order as Erdman has done 90, 100 i, 101 i, 100 ii, 101 ii; of interest is how these passages defy a serial order. Present computer technology uses hypertext for non-serial relation. However, in *hypertext* one text is always visible above the other which remains covered or the two texts may remain beside each other but at a reduced rather than an amplified size. The marks of resonance in the Blake text call for a correlation between these passages without a causal relation between them. The passages inter-relate without either necessarily preceding the other (as in a narrative ordering and origin) or one on top of the other (hierarchies established in hypertext screens or bound books with sequential pages one before and/or on top of the other). *The Four Zoas* "in itself" as a non-published text, conveniently called a "manuscript," achieves resonance between passages without a hierarchy of causality or primacy by marking passages to be moved or inserted but at the same time not actually moving the passage, only marking them to be moved. Who will do the moving? Erdman as an editor, for example, must make decisions regarding *serial relation* of passages where the text establishes *resonances* between passages.

Plateaus of Becoming

The Four Zoas is more than a manuscript for an unpublished folio. Deterritorialized lines are part of the text. A published version of *The Four Zoas*, if such a thing were possible, would clean up stray marks and by doing so reterritorialize and make solid the flux and destabilization of the "manuscript." The foot would not be redrawn twice. The random vertical lines of page 100 would be re-inscribed within a pattern or design. Publication would mean erasing flying phalluses due to their distastefulness to the public. After all, following the advice of friends, Richard Payne Knight recalled his first edition of his study on Priapic worship because of bat-winged phallus illustrations (Paley 45). Blake is looking to circumvent the censoring of "little glancing wings" which "sing your infant joy" (Erdman, *Daughters of Albion* 51). Looking at the way the words, marks and figures of the *Zoas* interrelate, we begin to understand how *The Four Zoas* is an impossible text. Within the confines of State censoring of literature during the war with France thus making all literature National Literature or conspiratorial, within the confines of a traditional print market which seeks standardization and normalization of a text, within a market of copyright such that to re-use illustrations of the Blake-Edwards *Night Thoughts* (even if they are the bad copies) would be

illegal within a whole state and capitalistic apparatus, *The Four Zoas* is an impossible text. Of course, modern facsimile editions of *The Four Zoas* come the closest to reproducing the problems of the text "in itself." Yet, as I will argue later in this essay, the very materials used to produce a page in the 1790s and the method of production effect the text in a way different from a facsimile edition.

What Blake has achieved is a becoming-zoa, no particular animal, several animals at once, a bat, a snake-Orc-phallus, a feather-winged bird... The becoming, the transformation, does not stop.¹² There is no final goal, no teleological end to the assembly of vector forces. Rather there is a rhythm of territorialization, deterritorialization, transformation, reterritorialization and back again to deterritorialization. The term "manuscript" is used to denote a text which is in route toward publication — even if it never makes this destination. But *The Four Zoas* as manuscript has no such destination. The imperfections, editorial markings, line revisions, etc. of the text are so much a part of the text that it defies the State and commerce established dichotomy of publishable and unpublishable.

Thus far this essay has explained the domain of reading Blake's text by reading not just the verbal text but the verbal in conjunction and disjunction with the illustrations; yet, there are still other thresholds to explore. Not only the words and images but also the very material apparatus of the paper and ink deserve notice. These other levels of the text often remain overlooked by readers of *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*. And *The Four Zoas* facsimile edited by Magno and Erdman makes no mention of the Whatman paper nor the

printing ink. Nevertheless, the complex relations of the *Zoas* to State and commercial interests occur again at the micro-level of paper on which the text is printed, drawn and written.¹³

Whatman's paper which is used in the *Zoas* is tied to nationalism. At a time when most paper in England was imported from France due to poor quality paper at home, Whatman was selected as the English paper maker for the illustrations of the *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain* and the Society of Antiquaries' *Vetusta Monumenta*, both of which Blake drew illustrations for in the 1770s. Whatman issued a new extra large and notably durable paper made especially for these antiquarian drawings. Using Whatman paper linked antiquarianism to national pride even at the level of notably British paper. Such a nationalistic link increased during the war years. Once the nation was at war with France, the British paper industry became increasingly responsible for producing paper for books.

The woven 1794 J WHATMAN paper used for the *Zoas* is itself heterogeneous. The paper is a conglomerate of English rags amassed from sails, ropes (pounded with hammers), and clothing of rich and poor all held by a

glue made with 7-10 percent animal leather, usually of cattle but also of rabbits, calves and oxen — another level of becoming-animal. Additionally, paper has various colors. There is whitening by bleach (lucrative methods were patented in 1790s) and blueing by “blues” and smalt (grounds of glass which have been oxidized with cobalt). All this coloring is to prevent the yellowing of paper. The very paper as content or base of the *Zoas* at one level is at another level an expression and holding together of forces applied to the contents — blues, smalt, glues, rags, etc. The vector relations of variable forces in the text of the *Zoas* is doubled at the level of the production of the text’s paper.

Additionally, just as written texts increasingly fall under State law during the 1790s, so too paper becomes appropriated by the State by means of Excise taxes which come into effect in the early 1700s but are heavily revised between 1792-1794 and are raised due to the war. By the mid-1790s paper must be named, marked and dated. (Dating of paper is a court matter, as when Whatman testifies to the date of his paper in a 1770 trial of a counterfeiter.) Here the question of State appropriation of the writing surface re-appears. And the elements used to transform raw materials into paper re-appears in the verbal text of the *Zoas*. Paper is woven, and the character Enitharmon weaves. Ropes and rags are beaten with a hammer, and the character Los uses a hammer in his forging. The wooden frame used to lower a mold for paper into a vat is called “bellows,” much like the iron work bellows of Los. And the words “Bulls of Luvah” are written on paper made of an oxen glue.

It is not just the text and the paper of the *Zoas* which is heterogeneous but also the ink for writing and the acid used for biting the copper plates of the rejected *Night Thoughts* leaf.¹⁴ Thus, not only at the level of the text, but also at the micro-level of the making of the text there is a series of mixtures and of forces combining and becoming something new.

In 1793 Britain goes to war with France. In 1797 the Blake-Edwards edition of Young’s *Night Thoughts* (Nights 1-4) is printed, and Blake begins work on *The Four Zoas*. By 1800 the narrative of the *Zoas* is well under way, and Blake moves to the coastal village of Felpham. There he will become obscure, as will the *Zoas*. John Johnson asks Hayley “is our dear Blake dead.” He is not dead, or rather as Blake himself proclaims on several occasions, he has died several (as many as twenty) times (Erdman 316, 756). Blake is deterritorializing, unraveling his identity outside of recognizable boundaries, becoming-zoa. The text of *The Four Zoas* undergoes revisions beyond any hope of publication. Blake claims to have died. He is outside the State and commercial apparatus. Yet, Blake lives on, differently. The *Zoas* as impossible text is worked and reworked until in exhaustion it is put down around 1810.

1793 marks for Blake a transformation of what is possible and impossible in print. '93 opens a new space, a space for becoming-zoa. This space acts like a level and consistent plane, field or plateau which holds together heterogeneous forces. Converging verbal, graphic, material, political, commercial and personal vectors are held together in an intensive state. 1793, 1798 and 1800 are plateaus in which Blake creates from incongruous forces and unstable combinations. Plateaus find their expression in the pages of Blake's texts. Each page acts as a flat surface holding together converging vectors of disparate material. The act of holding together of divergent material intensifies the state of the surface. In 1793 Blake finishes *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, produces *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America*, and *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, and beginnings *Songs of Experience and Europe*. The flurry of activity and diversity of subject matter addressed in these texts suggests that something has taken hold of Blake in this year. Blake's work in the 1790s reveals increasingly complex combinations of forces which contribute to an effect that I've called transformation — the recognition of a ground not of similarity but of difference which propels an object into an overturning of its identity and a becoming-other. Transformation of an object, its becoming-other, forces the reader into the awkward position of continually questioning the identity and stability of any object or any event in *The Four Zoas*. Such an unsettling feeling keeps the reader alert and aware of the reading process and his/her role in the creation of the text's meaning.

The becoming or transformational quality of Blake's text, and even of Blake himself, had begun long before the *Zoas*. Its trace can be found in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and in *America*. But '93, '97 and 1800 mark thresholds which, as Blake crosses over them, cause his texts to become increasingly intense. *The Four Zoas* resonates with an increasing instability and probability of collapse as Blake continues to add, combine and re-combine segments of the text. He garnishes an image here, a sketch there; moves a block of text, adds text from his *Milton* manuscript, and signals with editorial marks the moving of another block. Each year forms a plateau of creative intensity, and each page expressing that intensity leaves an afterimage, an effect that reveals the way Blake relates image to text and even his idea of a text itself.

In April of 1785 Blake produces his last Stothard engraving. While he will continue to do commercial engravings to earn a living, such work is a mere camouflage, a disguise of fitting into the social-commercial apparatus while working against it.¹⁵ In 1788 Blake produces his original stereotype printing, which becomes a means of expression counter to the sentiments of the age:

Blake used relief etching exclusively for original composition and never attempted to disguise it as another medium. Variations in inking and subsequent coloring — the products of both chance and intention — distinguish each impression from all others. In their means of production and basic characteristics, original relief etching and reproductive intaglio engraving are the “contrary states” of Blake’s graphic art. (Essick 120)

Blake’s poetry, illustrations, illuminations and even his process of producing them work by way of surface detail rather than abstraction — by immanence on a surface rather than by transcendence and removal at a distance, by Vision rather than Allegory. This means taking seriously Blake’s comment on his art in his “Vision of the Last Judgment,”

“not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular <as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass <Insignificant> much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark>” (560).

This essay tries to attend to the details of the “Letter” and the “Blur or Mark.” By treating *The Four Zoas* as a manuscript of a work meant for publication, the modern machines of commerce have been able to capture the zoas, stabilize the text and move from manuscript to printed text. This is not to belittle the feat of such editors as Erdman. Capturing and territorializing the highly unstable *Zoas* is obviously a difficult task.

The task is difficult because becoming-zoa is meant to defy capture. A typeset and edited Blake undermines the Blakean project (Essick 120).

Edited and published editions of *The Four Zoas* often censor the sensual enjoyment of reading caused by a shuttling back and forth between images and words, and the enjoyment found in creating resonances and amplifications which result from engaged reading. The anomalies presented in the text often force editors into difficult positions. For example Erdman adds the “Globe of Blood” section to page 55 ii following a line in *The Four Zoas* reading “Bring in here the Globe of Blood as in the B of Urizen.” Erdman explains “Editors have shirked their duty heretofore, but Blake plainly wanted the *Urizen* lines inserted here” (832).

The question here is not whether editors shirked their duty or whether Erdman has over-extended his. Rather, ask why Erdman takes these lines of the text as a command to himself, Erdman as editor, but does

not find other lines such as “Los stood &c” as compelling to follow. Erdman’s addition to the *Zoas* can make the reader of the standardized and normalized *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake* aware of the *Zoas* as a text which in the eighteenth century and even today defies conventional printing methods. To enter Blake’s text is to take up the challenge of becoming-zoa, of passing thresholds of the senses and crossing over to the plateau marked by *The Four Zoas*.

- ¹ Northrop Frye. 1947. *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 277-78.
- ² Nelson Hilton. 1983. *Literal imagination : Blake's Vision of Words*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 4.
- ³ Donald Ault. 1987. *Narrative Unbound: Re-Visioning William Blake's The Four Zoas*. Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, xi.
- ⁴ John Keane. 1995. *Tom Paine: A Political Life*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 335.
- ⁵ E. P. Thompson. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 87-88.
- ⁶ All quotations of Blake's work are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, David V. Erdman, editor. New York: Anchor. Henceforth referred to by the editor, Erdman. Page numbers for quotations from *The Four Zoas* include the page in the Erdman edition followed by the page number of the "manuscript."
- ⁷ George Bataille's "The Big Toe," 1985. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-39*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 20-23.
- ⁸ Deleuze and Guittari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Chapter 10, "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . ." Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- ⁹ Brian Massumi. 1993. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guittari*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 99.
- ¹⁰ Morton D. Paley. 1978. *William Blake*. New York: Greenwich House, 45.
- ¹¹ Ault, *Narrative Unbound*. 32-40.
- ¹² Blake professes a state of unfettered change in his letter to Hayley of Oct. 23, 1804.
- ¹³ Thomas Balston. 1957. *James Whatman Father and Son*. London: Methuen, chapter 10.
- ¹⁴ Joseph Viscomi. 1993. *Blake and the Idea of the Book*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, chapters 9 and 10.
- ¹⁵ Iain McCalman. 1993. *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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