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Homelands: 'Blake, Albion, and the French Revolution'

Introduction: Receiving the Divine Vision

'Jerusalem', Blake's lyric invocation of the nation, envisions the homeland as a complex relationship of time, space, and activity. The first stanzas evoke the legend of the infant Christ accompanying Joseph of Arimathea to England, poised against a sceptical, interrogative mood ('And did those feet in ancient time | Walk upon Englands mountains green: | And was the Holy Lamb of God, | On Englands pleasant pastures seen!').¹ Then, England was an ecology of 'mountains green' and 'pleasant pastures'; at present it is marred by 'clouded hills' and 'dark Satanic mills'. A universal divinity ('the Countenance Divine'), figured as sunlight, is refracted through the national space of present England. The imperatives of the final stanzas ('Bring me my Bow of burning gold') issue in a prophetic promise to actively recreate a flourishing homeland in a utopian future, opening the bounded present to Eternity. The prophet's active 'Mental Fight' aids the divine revelation, but the conclusion still mediates it through 'Englands green & pleasant Land'. In the ambiguous feet, Blake collapses the historical distance between Jesus and the prophetic activity of both Milton and himself. Their prophetic work is a national modulation of the divine, facilitating its revelation to their countrymen.

Blake's balance of universal and national perspectives draws upon the Enlightenment discourse of national manners. *All Religions are One* (1788) distinguishes 'the Poetic Genius' as 'the true Man', modified by 'the body or outward form of Man':

PRINCIPLE. 5. The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy. (1, E1).

The 'Poetic Genius' can only be discerned through specific national manifestations. In the illumination, the bard-like 'Spirit of Prophecy' is juxtaposed with a seated adult instructing children in a tent, suggesting the mediation of the Poetic Genius within a defined but temporary space. If the nation is an inescapable condition of experience, it is properly thought of as a finite medium through which the Divine Vision can be perceived and produced.

Nationalisms and Reciprocity

Many historians of nationalism trace its modern origins to the period of the French Revolution.² As Bell notes, in this period 'nationalism' superseded older forms of 'national sentiment' with a directed political programme to construct the nation. The term itself was coined only in the late 1790s.³ A.D. Smith identifies the 'time of the French and American Revolutions' as the moment when in the West 'the "nation-state" became the predominant, and soon almost the only legitimate form of political organisation, as well as the dominant vehicle of

¹ *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, 3rd edn (New York: Anchor, 1988), 95, Plate 1, ll. 1-16. Subsequent references to this edition include an abbreviated title: FZ = *Vala*; or, *The Four Zoas*, M = *Milton*, and J = *Jerusalem*. Poems have plate (or, for *The Four Zoas*, Night and manuscript page) and line numbers, followed by the page number from Erdman prefixed by E. References will thus follow the format (M1:1-16, E95).

² See A.D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 17.

³ Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, 3, 6.

collective identity'.⁴ Grafting state institutions onto national identity was especially fostered in Britain and France by French revolutionary wars. As Charles Tilly argues, 'War made the state, and the state made war'.⁵ Conceptualising the nation as a homeland to be defended was central to this development: in 1797, Casanova observed that France had 'become a worshipper of its *patrie*, without ever having known, before the Revolution, what a *patrie* was, or even the word itself'.⁶ The threat of French invasion, especially in 1798 and in 1803-5, galvanised Britons to imagine the homeland in defensive terms. Blake's works respond to these developments, endorsing and challenging patriotic images of the nation in complex ways.

Blake's critics have often distinguished him from 'official' British nationalism during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. But Susan Matthews notes that his patriotism may not necessarily be benign: in *Jerusalem*, his 'myth [...] continually moves out from nation to world in a process which disturbingly echoes not only the revolutionary universalism of the 1790s but also the language of empire'.⁷ For Julia M. Wright, 'Blake indulges in imperial discourse and schema in order to fictively generate a New Jerusalem that assimilates, rather than, as in earlier Blake works, celebrates difference'.⁸ Paralleling Blake's rhetoric and Evangelical missionaries of the 1820s, Steve Clarke suggests that the critique of imperialism in *Jerusalem* is compromised by 'an abrasive brand of Protestant nationalism formed in opposition to France and Catholicism projecting an imagined community of empire'.⁹ Troublingly, Blake is both proponent and critic of nationalism.

Blake's representations of homeland and nations engage with the Enlightenment discourse of manners, which enabled him to represent revolutionary Europe and reactionary England, especially the rise of the modern European nation-state. He struggles to wrestle liberatory potential from the emotive appeal of official, martial nationalist discourse. For example, in his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) he adapts Nelson's famous signal at the Battle of Trafalgar, 'England expects that every man should do his duty' to elevate the 'Arts' to the prominence of 'Arms' and 'the Senate' (E549). Blake redirects nationalist solidarity away from war towards culture. His nostalgia for a symbolic pastoral homeland of Albion is distinctive for the ways in which he frames it as an affective centre of experience but also infuses it with openness and permeability to external national identities.

Blake's epic poems *Vala; Or The Four Zoas* (c.1796-c.1807), *Milton* (c.1804-11), and *Jerusalem* (1804-c.1820) are fundamentally concerned with imagining the nation as homeland. From *The Four Zoas*, there is a new emphasis on the figure of Albion. Blake retitled the earlier draft of *Vala* to include 'the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man',¹⁰ foregrounding questions of national identity. These poems dramatise Albion's arrested development; 'Selfhood' dominates his relation to other nations. Frequently, Albion sounds like a petulant, egocentric child. Turning from the Divine Vision at the outset of *Jerusalem*, Albion insists 'My

⁴ Smith, 70.

⁵ Charles Tilly, 'Reflections on the History of European State-Making', *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D.990-1990*, ed. eadam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 3-84 (p.42).

⁶ Quoted in Bell, *Cult*, 9.

⁷ Susan Matthews, 'Jerusalem and Nationalism', *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts, 1780-1832*, ed. by Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), 79-100 (p. 82).

⁸ Julia M. Wright, *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 137.

⁹ Steve Clark, 'Jerusalem as Imperial Prophecy', *Blake, Nation and Empire*, ed. by Steve Clark and David Worrall (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 167-85 (p. 171).

¹⁰ See title page reproduction in David V. Erdman and Cettina Magno, *The Four Zoas: A Photographic Facsimile of the Manuscript With Commentary on the Illuminations* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987).

mountains are my own, and I will keep them to myself' (J4:29, E147). Albion's rejection of a common humanity initiates the poem's crisis.

This relates to Blake's familiar contrast between the imagination and reason. In *Jerusalem*, the 'mechanical philosophy', associated with Bacon, Newton, and Locke, as well as the Enlightenment scepticism and naturalism of Voltaire, Hume, and Rousseau, sicken Albion. His Spectre, like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Regained* (1671), tempts Albion out of belief. 'Like a hoar frost & a Mildew' he rises over Albion and pronounces himself God, embodied in Enlightenment thinkers teaching 'Humility', 'Doubt & Experiment' (J54:15-18, E203). He asks:

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 Desart & turn these stones to bread.
Vain foolish Man! wilt thou believe without Experiment?
And build a World of Phantasy upon my Great Abyss! (J54:19-23, E203-4)

The Spectre's placeless 'Desart' contrasts with 'the Nations'. The 'Friend of Sinners' unifies by teaching singular 'belief' to plural 'Nations', establishing common ground. Belief in 'an unknown Eternal life' requires imagination, which can actively 'build' a 'World of Phantasy' in contrast to the Spectre's cold desert void. Blake's notion of connective, universally human imagination enables a reciprocity and development into mature humanity. Blake identifies this process of individual psychology with that of nations. Albion's development is arrested as he turns away from the reciprocal Divine Vision, towards the influence of his Spectre:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio
Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars.
(J74:10-13, E229)

The 'Reasoning Power' blocks the imagination from identification beyond the self. Blake links the Spectre's anti-imaginative impetus both to institutions ('Laws'), persecutions, and nationalist war, opposed to the 'Divine Body' of humankind. Jerusalem, by contrast, maintains the Saviour's connective 'Fibres of love from man to man' (J4:8, E146) via the affections and creative imagination.

As Linda Colley notes, Blake's identification in 'Jerusalem' between England and the chosen nation of Israel adopts imagery 'at the centre of Protestant thought in Britain since the early seventeenth century'.¹¹ Clark and Worrall imply that Blake's Anglo-Hebraism fits broadly into this 'national idea of a chosen people, predestined to triumph over a Catholic and tyrannical France',¹² but Blake both registers the analogy's deep appeal while also criticising exceptionalist nationalism. In the introduction to Chapter Two of *Jerusalem*, Jerusalem's pillars originally stood in north London before the Fall, but Satan 'witherd up sweet Zions Hill, | From every Nation of the Earth: | He witherd up Jerusalem's Gates, | And in a dark Land gave her birth' (J27:49-52, E 173). The poem challenges wartime Anglo-Hebraic exceptionalism:

¹¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 30. See Wright, 113, for the analogy in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667).

¹² Clark and Worrall, Introduction to *Blake, Nation and Empire*, 4.

Is this thy soft Family-Love
Thy cruel Patriarchal pride
Planting thy Family alone
Destroying all the World beside.
(J27:77-80, E 173)

In contrast, Blake envisages a more mobile and relational identification with Israel, open to all nations and produced through mutual recognition:

In my Exchanges every Land
Shall walk, & mine in every Land,
Mutual shall build Jerusalem:
Both heart in heart & hand in hand.
(J27:85-88, E 174)

The repetitions reinforce mutuality. '[E]very Land' mirrors home and foreign lands, while the possessive is both subject and object of the verb 'walk'. The interconnection of 'heart' and 'hand' leads the reader to imagine a passionate form of international brotherhood.

France and England: Nations and Manners

Blake was always aware that British national identity was forged antagonistically, especially during Britain and France's wars.¹³ This is evident in *Poetical Sketches* (1783), in which a play fragment called 'Edward the Third' represents English nobles on the eve of the Battle of Crécy in 1346. As David Erdman argues, the play and the accompanying 'War Song to Englishmen', which appeals to 'sons of Trojan Brutus, cloath'd in war' whose voices roll 'dark clouds o'er France, muffling the sun | In sickly darkness like a dim eclipse' (E437), draw ironic parallels between past and present British aggression towards its neighbour.¹⁴

Blake envisaged the outbreak of the French Revolution as the people's reclamation of their homeland, in terms similar to the nostalgic and renewable pastoral of 'Jerusalem'. In *The French Revolution* (1791), Blake repeatedly collocates 'Nation' with the people's representatives in the National Assembly, never with the king and nobles, and represents the French crisis of 1788-89 in ecological images. The king's 'scepter too heavy for mortal grasp' will no longer 'in cruelty bruise the mild flourishing mountains' (ll.4-5, E286). Seyes prophesies that the oppressed people, whose 'village and field is a waste' (l.208, E295), will become free, and 'the Priest in his thund'rous cloud' (l.223) will escape superstition and clerics 'May sing in the village, and shout in the harvest, and woo in pleasant gardens, | Their once savage loves' (ll.229-30, E296). The free nation temporally returns to a bright, pastoral homeland, in contrast to the *ancien regime's* overshadowing darkness. Blake's enthusiasm for a French conception of its own distinctive homeland suggests a reciprocal sense of relative national belongings.

This is prominent in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c.1790-93). On Plate 3, the prophetic voice pronounces 'Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise;

¹³ Colley, *Britons*, 17-18, 33-37.

¹⁴ David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 3rd edn (New York: Dover, 1991 [1954]), 72-74.

see Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV Chap:' (3, E 34). The compressed biblical references reinforce the imagery of *The French Revolution*. Esau was the ancestor of the Edomites, Edom being the nation south east of Israel. In Genesis (26:29-34) Jacob tricks the hungry Esau into exchanging his birthright for a lentil stew (traditionally 'a mess of pottage'). Blake's complex of allusions links the cheated man's reclamation of the homeland with the reversal of the Fall and Isaiah's apocalyptic vision, in which God's vengeance and desolation of the earth is followed with a vision of how 'the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose'. Blake is invested in the advent of the French Revolution as a type of a universal return of the dispossessed to the homeland.

Blake's annotations to Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1797) likewise sympathise with France: 'To what does the Bishop attribute the English Crusade against France. is it not to State Religion. blush for shame' (E613). Nevertheless, his sense of Christian duty is patriotic: 'to him who sees this mortal pilgrimage in the light that I see it. Duty to [my] <his> country is the first consideration & safety the last' (E611). An annotation to Bacon's *Essays* sharpens the contrast: 'The Increase of a State as of a Man is from Internal Improvement or Intellectual Acquirement. Man is not Improved by the hurt of another States are not Improved at the Expense of Foreigners' (E625). Blake's epic poems elaborate an attempt to imagine a redirected, imaginative nationalism.

At certain moments, Blake foregrounds his mythological characters' most important associations. In *Jerusalem*, Chapter Three, Luvah is tortured in 'A building of eternal death' which is 'Natural Religion' and 'its Altars Natural Morality'. Blake states: 'Luvah is France: the Victim of the Spectres of Albion' (J66:8-9, 15, E218). Blake's epics encode a vision of the Anglo-French wars, repeatedly showing Luvah tortured by Albion's agents. Luvah is also aggressor, an invasive threat in Night Three of *The Four Zoas*: 'Luvah strove to gain dominion over the mighty Albion' (FZ3:41.13, E328). Like Satan in the Book of Job, he leaves the 'dark Body of Albion [...] Coverd with boils from head to foot. the terrible smitings of Luvah' (FZ3:41.15-16). These broad identifications between Luvah and France may be reinforced by other associations, such as his compass point in the East, his description as a gallant 'Prince of Love', and his connection to looms, vineyards, and wine.¹⁵

This personification draws on long-standing English perceptions of the French, given additional impetus by Enlightenment accounts of national manners. Blake was aware of this discourse, quoting from Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) in annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1798, E636). In 'Of National Characters' (1742), David Hume asserts that 'each Nation has a peculiar Set of Manners' and 'some particular Qualities are more frequently to be met with among one People than among their Neighbours'.¹⁶ Frequent association of peoples into 'one political Body' leads them to 'acquire a Resemblance in their Manners, and have a common or national Character, as well as a personal one, peculiar to each Individual'.¹⁷ Hume suggests 'we have Reason to expect greater Wit and Gaiety in a *Frenchman* than in a *Spaniard*'.¹⁸ Blake seems to allude to this national character when at the outset of *The French Revolution* 'the cloud and vision descends over chearful France' (l.1, E286).

David Simpson notes that English commentators viewed France as 'the home of craven Catholics and bold atheists, subservient royalists and extreme anarchists, licentious libertines

¹⁵ See S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 255-57.

¹⁶ David Hume, 'Of National Characters', *Essays, Moral and Political*, 3rd edn (London: A. Millar, 1748), 267-88 (p. 267).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 273-74.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

and cold calculators. The French were, in other words, felt to be prone to radical extremes'.¹⁹ Associated during the 1790s with philosophes and Jacobins, this volatility was contrasted by a supposedly natural British 'revolt against theory'.²⁰ The contrast prevails in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in which Burke bemoans the loss of traditional French chivalry in what he calls 'a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions'.²¹ Despite this, Revolutionary violence originates in pre-existent French character:

France, when she let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the licence, of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners, and of an indolent irreligion in opinions and practices; and has extended through all ranks of life, as if she were communicating some privilege, or laying open some secluded benefit, all the unhappy corruptions that usually were the disease of wealth and power.²²

For Burke, the French combine extreme indolence and ferocity, and without firm control of these manners, violence is inevitable. Mary Wollstonecraft represented French manners pejoratively, albeit to liberal ends, in *A Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794). The French people's 'sensations are ever lively and transitory; exhaled by every passing beam, and dissipated by the slightest storm'.²³ Wollstonecraft argues that 'the enthusiasm of the french [...] in general, hurries them from one extreme to another'.²⁴ By 1789 'the french were in some respects the most unqualified of any people in Europe to undertake the important work in which they were embarked'.²⁵ The Revolution's impetuosity expressed corrupt national manners: 'the character of the french, indeed, had been so depraved by the inveterate despotism of ages, that [...] the morals of the whole nation were destroyed by the manners formed by the government'. As a result, 'when they changed their system, liberty, as it was called, was only the acme of tyranny'.²⁶ Despite this, Wollstonecraft believed that the Revolution's achievements would, in the long-term, ameliorate French manners, an analysis echoed by later apologists for the revolution.²⁷

This is a useful context for one of Luvah's puzzling associations. At several points, he is closely associated with Jesus. In Night the Seventh of *The Four Zoas*, the warriors crucify Luvah:

They sound the clarions strong they chain the howling captives
they give the Oath of blood They cast the lots into the helmet,
They vote the death of Luvah & they naild him to the tree
They piercd him with a spear & laid him in a sepulchre.

(FZ7:92.11-14)

¹⁹ David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 64.

²⁰ Simpson, 4.

²¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 119.

²² Burke, *Reflections*, 54-55.

²³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 26-27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 510-11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

²⁷ See Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to *The Revolt of Islam* (London: C. and J. Ollier, 1818), viii-ix.

For Wilkie and Johnson, 'the unfallen aspect of Luvah is almost wholly absorbed in the figure of Jesus', while his 'fallen aspect' appears in the warlike and serpentine Orc.²⁸ In this poem, Jesus (as the Divine Vision) takes on Luvah's 'robes of blood' and the Eternal Man appears 'as One Man infolded | In Luvah[s] robes of blood & bearing all his afflictions' (FZ1:13.8-9, E308; see also FZ2:32.14 and 33:11-15, E321; FZ4:55.10-12, E337). In *Jerusalem*, Albion looks back to a time before war, when 'England encompassd the Nations, | Mutual each within others bosom in Visions of Regeneration': 'The footsteps of the Lamb of God were there: but now no more | No more shall I behold him, he is closd in Luvahs Sepulcher' (J24:44-45, 49-51, E170). The regions of Beulah chorus 'As the Sons of Albion have done to Luvah: so they have in him | Done to the Divine Lord & Saviour, who suffers with those that suffer' (J25: 6-7, E170). The close identification between Jesus's crucifixion and burial and Luvah's suffering under the Sons of Albion links France and the Divine Vision.

A cancelled passage from *Night the First of The Four Zoas* may illuminate this link. Los tells his emanation Enitharmon how the Eternal Man refuses 'to behold the Divine image which all behold | And live thereby' (E825). Los urges that 'we immortal in our own strength survive by stern debate | Till we have drawn the Lamb of God into a mortal form' and tells Enitharmon that they 'will so receive the Divine Image that amongst the Reprobate | He may be devoted to Destruction from his mothers womb' (E825). The Divine Vision is to be incarnated in a limited medium and an antagonistic context. Blake stresses that Luvah's robes of blood distort the Eternal man: 'As the sun shines down on the misty earth Such was the Vision' (FZ 1:13.10, E308). Contrariwise, in *Milton*, Satan's 'infernal scroll, | Of Moral laws and cruel punishments' helps 'pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth | With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease | Punishments & deaths musterd & number'd' (M9:21-25, E103).

Luvah, identified as both France and a garment for Jesus, suggests the French Revolution as a distorting medium for the Divine Vision, whose pure light is occluded by its opponents as well as refracted through the human limitations of the French. Blake seems to suggest that the Revolution has violently miscarried, partly through the unprepared tempers of the people who enacted it.²⁹ Despite its corruption, the Revolution allowed a glimpse of a deeper utopian potential. Los's prophetic capacity uniquely attunes him to the redemptive import of the Divine Vision clothed in Luvah's robes. Addressing Enitharmon in *Night the Seventh*, he exhorts her to 'look! behold! take comfort! | Turn inwardly thine Eyes & there behold the Lamb of God | Clothed in Luvahs robes of blood descending to redeem' (FZ7:87.42-44, E369). In Blake's hopeful prophetic vision, the failure of the French Revolution might yet be transformed by its contribution to a larger narrative of human redemption.

If Blake's epics play on stereotypes of French character, his depiction of Albion reciprocally draws on unfavourable caricatures of English manners. Blake appears familiar with *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in which Burke praised British manners in contrast to the restless speculation of French and English revolutionaries. Referring to England after the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, Burke asserts:

I believe we are not materially changed since that period. Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not (as I conceive) lost the

²⁸ Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 43.

²⁹ This might explain why France's emanation is called 'Shiloh' (J55:29, E204), which was the name of the Messiah to whom Joanna Southcott's followers believed she would give birth in 1814 but who failed to appear.

generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century; nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages.³⁰

French theory, over-refinement, and ferocity contrast with English solidity and common sense, curiously associated with the cold and damp climate. Continental stereotypes of the English during the long eighteenth century frequently linked the dismal weather with tendencies towards xenophobia, materialism, taciturnity, fretful gloom, and suicide.³¹ The English were believed to be particularly prone to 'spleen' and a melancholy which George Cheyne termed the 'English malady'.³²

Blake's fallen Albion exhibits these English traits. Albion turns xenophobe, and rejects the mutuality of the nations in Jerusalem's exchanges, leaving 'the Body of Albion [...] closed apart from all Nations' (J94.14, E254). Prior to Albion's renovation, Blake imagines him iconically, in terms which tragically suggest Burkean English languour:

Albion cold lays on his Rock: storms & snows beat round him. [...]
The weeds of Death inwrap his hands & feet blown incessant
And washd incessant by the for-ever restless sea-waves foaming abroad
Upon the white Rock. England a Female Shadow as deadly damps
Of the Mines of Cornwall & Derbyshire lays upon his bosom heavy
Moved by the wind in volumes of thick cloud returning folding round
His loins & bosom unremovable. (J94: 1, 5-10, E254)

Storms, clouds, fog, and cold combine with pale cliffs to merge the island environment with the sick personified nation. Yet this is moments before the 'Breath Divine' (J94:18 and 95:2, E254) passes over Albion and initiates Albion's awakening, the return of Jerusalem, and Albion's dynamic regeneration. The storms may suggest upheaval, as his brooding winter contends with new life and an energetic revolution in manners.

National Roots and Wandering Rootlessness

In 'Jerusalem', Blake's patriotism seems organically connected to England's 'green and pleasant land'. But the writer who wrote of 'Natures cruel holiness' (M36:25, E137) also questioned the rhetoric of a rooted connection to the nation. Martin Heidegger's essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1951) draws on this rhetoric. Heidegger represents a two hundred year-old Black Forest peasant's hut as a model of authentic, harmonious 'dwelling', organically absorbed into the environment. The house and peasant lifeworld exist in 'simple oneness' with the surroundings, exemplified by the co-presence of the childbed and the *Totenbaum*, the coffin perceived as a tree.³³ All human life, from birth to death, takes place within one natural space. An idealised, authentic human existence is rooted in the homeland's soil.

³⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

³¹ Eric Gidal, 'Civic Melancholy: English Gloom and French Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37 (2003), 23-45. For English gravity, materialism, taciturnity, and xenophobia see Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56-64, 73-82, 175-84, 219-25.

³² George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, A treatise of nervous diseases of all kinds* (London: G. Strahan, 1733).

³³ Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', trans. by Albert Hofstadter, in *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2011), 243-55 (pp. 253-54).

The idealised peasant life in nature takes on a darker shade from Heidegger's support for the National Socialist Party during the 1930s, particularly its ideology of 'blood and soil', which fetishized German ethnicity connected to territory, in contrast to rootlessness modern forms of being. Blake would seem to be straightforwardly opposed to such thinking. His texts and designs are pervaded by menacing roots. Plate 4 of *Jerusalem* uses the motif to distinguish freedom and slavery. A dark cloaked and seated figure (possibly Vala) extends her hands outwards. On her right hand side a praying man leans beyond reach, while a flying woman guides three youthful upwards and points to three stars and a crescent moon, labelled 'Jesus Alone' in Greek. The cloaked woman's left hand grasps the head of a seated figure, whose left arm vegetates into a network of roots down the page's right-hand side. The image contrasts the Natural Man's rootedness to the freedom of the Spiritual Man, and has implications for nationalism. Albion (in the guise of Reuben) is sundered into tribes by the Daughters of Albion:

They have divided Simeon he also rolld apart in blood
Over the Nations till he took Root beneath the shining Looms
Of Albions Daughters in Philistea by the side of Amalek.
(J74:44-46, E230)

Here, roots are associated with fallen nations as natural entities. Recurrent root imagery across Blake's oeuvre figures institutional religion, exemplified by Urizen's tree of Mystery in *Night Seven of The Four Zoas*. Urizen seeks to forestall Orc's inevitable rebellion by cooling his flames:

Age after Age till underneath his heel a deadly root
Struck thro the rock the root of Mystery accursed shooting up
Branches into the heaven of Los they pipe formd bending down
Take root again wherever they touch again branching forth
In intricate labyrinths oerspreading many a grizly deep.
(FZ7:78.4-8, E353)

This fixed foot under which roots shoot seems markedly different from the mobile, divine feet in 'Jerusalem'. The rock is a standard symbol of the church (linked to St Peter's Greek name, Petrus) and Blake associates the corruption of Christianity with institutionalisation, leading to priestcraft and Mystery. Blake fuses this imagery with nationalism. Addressing his preface to Chapter Two of *Jerusalem* 'To the Jews', Blake asserts 'Your Ancestors derived their origin from Abraham, Heber, Shem, and Noah, who were Druids: as the Druid Temples (which are the Patriarchal Pillars & Oak Groves) over the whole Earth witness to this day' (J27, E171). Blake associates the oak with the druids' temples and sacrifices of victims of their moral law and natural religion. In visionary converse, the restored Zoas cry:

Where is the Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the Heathen
Where is the Tree of Good & Evil that rooted beneath the cruel heel
Of Albions Spectre the Patriarch Druid! where are all his Human Sacrifices
For Sin in War & in the Druid Temples of the Accuser of Sin: beneath
The Oak Groves of Albion that coverd the whole Earth beneath his Spectre.
(J 98:46-50, E258)

While druidism is part of Blake's visionary conception of human history, it has a specifically national character: "All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore" (J27, E171). The oak had long been a national symbol of England, with royal associations, but its prevalence in the epics suggests Blake is responding to its ubiquity in conservative and loyalist propaganda, in which it represents England's rooted traditions and constitution, exemplified in *The Loyalists Alphabet* (1803), where 'O, Stands for Britains fam'd OAK'.³⁴

If Blake distrusts organic rootedness, we might expect his embrace of mobile cosmopolitanism. However, a sense of homeland remains an important source of vitality. This is evident in his representation of the Polypus, the total form of Albion's warlike Sons:

And Hand & Hyle rooted into Jerusalem by a fibre
Of strong revenge & Skofeld Vegetated by Reubens Gate
In every Nation of the Earth till the Twelve Sons of Albion
Enrooted into every Nation: a mighty Polypus growing
From Albion over the whole Earth: such is my awful Vision.
(J15:1-5, E159)

The Polypus fascinated eighteenth-century scientists, combining plant and animal life and a tenacious ability to root and reproduce endlessly. For Blake, it encapsulates the formless vegetation of Natural Man, who enroots indiscriminately in all nations. While the Polypus may suggest an organic, unified structure, it is a chaotic compound of scepticism and living death, comprised of warring males:

A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death.
Going forth & returning from Albions Rocks to Canaan:
Devouring Jerusalem from every Nation of the Earth.
Envyng stood the enormous Form at variance with Itself
In all its Members: in eternal torment of love & jealousy.
(J69:3-7, E223)

Although the Polypus seems rooted in Albion's rocks, the warriors' focal point is actually Vala and her cognates: 'I must rush again to War: for the Virgin has frownd & refusd' (J68:63, E222). The self-divided members cohere around Vala, who is not national but, as I will suggest, institutional. Despite rooting into nations, the sons' nomadic warrior existence is alienated from the positive emotional connection with a homeland Blake associates with Jerusalem.

In *Jerusalem*, Blake distinguishes between society and institutional government, describing 'the Polypus nam'd Albions Tree', in which humans are 'By Invisible Hatreds adjoind', and asserting that 'He who will not comingle in Love, must be adjoind by Hate' (J66:48, 53, 56, E219).³⁵ Blake wrote during a period in which French and English societies had become increasingly integrated with the state. Karen Swann helpfully links the philosophical and political dimensions of Albion's fall 'from humanity into a "state" – the state of Ulro, or, we might

³⁴ See Alexandra Franklin and Mark Philp, *Napoleon and the Invasion of Britain* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2003), 98-99.

³⁵ This may echo the famous distinction in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776), 1.

say, a bristling nation-state'.³⁶ Swann's latter comment is worth exploring further. Wright notes how patriotism 'under the guise of allegiance to institutions' became 'more powerful during Blake's lifetime', especially during war.³⁷ In a curious moment towards the end of the first chapter of *Jerusalem*, 'Albions Circumference was clos'd' (J19:20, E164) and, fleeing inwards, he finds 'Jerusalem upon the River of his City soft repos'd | In the arms of Vala, assimilating in one with Vala' (J19:40-41, 45, E164), and 'Dividing & uniting into many female forms' (J19:40-45, E164). This may be the embrace depicted on Plate 28, and suggests Albion becomes unable to distinguish between the 'assimilating' emanations. Vala is repeatedly connected to the corrupt, earthy Natural Man, Jerusalem to the regenerative Spiritual Man: 'Vala produc'd the Bodies. Jerusalem gave the Souls' (J18:7, E163). Jerusalem personifies freedom ('JERUSALEM IS NAMED LIBERTY AMONG THE SONS OF ALBION' (J26, E171)), achieved through imagination, intellect, and creative culture: 'Let every Christian as much as in him lies engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem' (J77, E232). Blake seems to suggest that the liberty, culture, and creativity Jerusalem represents has become assimilated into her dark double.

Vala is usually identified as a goddess of nature and war, worshipped by the Spectres. But at key moments, Blake suggests her affinity to the militarised nation-state:

Then All the Daughters of Albion became One before Los: even Vala!
 And she put forth her hand upon the Looms in dreadful howlings
 Till she vegetated into a hungry Stomach & a devouring Tongue.
 Her Hand is a Court of Justice, her Feet: two Armies in Battle
 Storms & Pestilence: in her Locks: & in her Loins Earthquake.
 And Fire. & the Ruin of Cities & Nations & Families & Tongues.
(J64:6-11, E 215)

Like the Polypus, Vala agglomerates the Daughters into one entity, feeding an aggressive appetite via institutional limbs. She personifies the warlike nation state. In Albion's confusion, he cannot distinguish Jerusalem from violent institutional government. However, Vala also transcends national boundaries, her body comprising two foot-armies and the ruin of plural nations. Vala embodies multiple nation states, particularly England and France orientated towards war. Jerusalem's liberty and culture have become absorbed into and distorted by the claims of these nation states. In *Jerusalem*, Los must distinguish and protect Jerusalem's independent reality from destruction by Vala and the Sons and Daughters of Albion.

Conclusion: The 'Human Harvest'

Denise Gigante provocatively argues that *Jerusalem* itself embodies an 'epigenesist poetics', linked to biological theories of self-generation and self-renewal. 'For Blake regeneration was a material process with spiritual correlatives', and positive visual and verbal images of natural growth, especially linking branches and wings, challenge 'the widespread critical assumption that the processes of Vegetation and Generation are symbolically negative

³⁶ Karen Swann, 'Blake's *Jerusalem*: Friendship with Albion', *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 538-53 (p. 539).

³⁷ Wright, 115.

for Blake'.³⁸ This can be clarified to show Blake complicating straightforward oppositions of rootedness and rootlessness. The most negative images of rooting occur in the depictions of Urizen's Tree of Mystery, modelled on the Indian Banyan tree in fallen Eden (see *Paradise Lost* 9:1101-10) and the reputedly poisonous Upas tree of Java.³⁹ In *Jerusalem*, it is identified as the 'deadly Tree' or 'Moral Virtue, and the Law' (*J* 28:15, E174). Albion sits beside it at Tyburn:

The Tree spread over him its cold shadows, (Albion groand)
They bent down, they felt the earth and again enrooting
Shot into many a Tree! an endless labyrinth of woe!
(*J*28:17-19, E174)

This cold, dark tree absorbs life (its assonantal 'o's echoed in Albion's groan) and issues in formless vegetative growth. In contrast, *Jerusalem's* exuberant plant life rises up the page, aspiring beyond its rooted origins. While Albion's oak groves also 'overspread' the earth, this is associated with the rooting of the Polypus and the Tree of Mystery. Blake envisaged a contrary form of natural growth, moving from roots towards spiritual fruition. After a catalogue of counties and nations, the narrator urges 'Return! O Albion let Jerusalem overspread all Nations | As in the times of old!' (*J*72:35-36, E22). This growth nurtures and involves culture in both senses of the word.⁴⁰ Its telos is the human harvest of *The Four Zoas* and *Milton*, the final plate of which promises 'To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations' (*M*43:1, E144) and depicts two human ears of corn either side of a nude vine-like woman. The nation, then, can be conceived of as a necessary space in which human cultivation takes place. Human destiny ultimately lies in reintegration into the Divine Humanity, but the Natural Man resists, with the nation-state institutionally facilitating rerooting.

Blake's approach to the nation and the homeland is distinctive and sometimes contradictory. He evokes and contests primordial, rooted nationhood, while at the same time trying to evade the attenuation of an abstract Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. The nation conceived as a homeland seems for Blake to be a necessary foundation upon which 'those feet' may walk and Jerusalem may be built, but only if it remains open, imaginative, and free enough to enable its people to open out to other nations and aspire towards their ultimate homeland in Eternity.

³⁸ Denise Gigante, 'Blake's Living Form', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 63 (2009), 461-85 (pp. 463, 473).

³⁹ See S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 411 and Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1791), *Part II: The Loves of the Plants*, 115-16 (3:237-54), 188-94.

⁴⁰ Whereas for Wright, 158 and 165, Blake's 'Fibres of love' are 'structurally similar' to the Polypus, my analysis suggests important differences between two forms of growth. Blake's imagery foregrounds their confusability, as with the merging of Jerusalem and Vala.