

“The Knife of flint passes over the howling Victim”: Rethinking Sacrificial Violence in William Blake’s *Jerusalem**

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Abstract

In William Blake’s final epic *Jerusalem*, human sacrifice plays a significant role. Presented as a distortion of the Passion, its abolition functions pivotally in Blake’s Christian revisionism. Generally, critics interpret human sacrifice as a gruesome reification of religious falsehood, stagnant rationalism, sexual repression, social control and surveillance, and imperialistic atrocity. This article reconsiders the established interpretations by examining two specific episodes in *Jerusalem*: Los’s construction of Golgonooza, the City of Art, in Chapter 1 and Luvah’s torture in Chapter 3. I would argue that Blake’s overtly explicit, excessively detailed depiction of such violence goes beyond the representation of religious oppression and sexual repression as proposed in preceding studies. Blake’s unrestrained visualization of human sacrifice, “[g]lowing with beauty & cruelty,” insinuates a certain fixation on the body that outperforms his rightful assertion of Jesus’s self-annihilation and the spiritual completion it brings forth. In Chapter 1, the sacrifice motif has already permeated Los’s apparently righteous effort of artistic creation, attesting to Blake’s awareness of the intrinsic symbiosis between art and violence. And in Chapter 3,

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Blake's versification of Luvah's sacrifice disturbingly yet mesmerizingly obscures the boundaries between the self and the other and breaches the spirit-body dualism. Engaging with Georges Bataille's conception of the sacred, I would propose that ritualistic violence and bodily consumption proffer an alternative route to Romantic artistic imagination, challenging the critical consensus that Blake leans towards the spiritual and renounces the corporeal in his late works.

Keywords: William Blake, *Jerusalem*, human sacrifice, ritualistic violence, Georges Bataille, the sacred

Introduction

Near the end of William Blake's *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, the once split Albion awakens from his despondent slumber, "speaking the Words of Eternity in Human Forms, in direful Revolutions of Action & Passion" (95.9-10, E 255).¹ He hears Jesus's key message about selfless "Friendship & Brotherhood": "Thus do Men in Eternity / One for another to put off by forgiveness, every sin" (96.16, E 255). In the moment of epiphany, Albion, representing both Britain and entire humanity, "threw himself into the Furnaces of affliction" (96.35, E 256). Emulating Jesus's sacrifice, Albion reunites with his estranged Emanation Jerusalem and reintegrates the Four Zoas: "Urizen & Luvah & Tharmas & Urthona arose into / Albion's Bosom" (96.41-2, E 256), thus restoring the perfect "Universal Man" in Eternity. We see an epic conclusion that likens the Christian motif of the Passion to the Romantic ideals of artistic authenticity, epistemological truth, and spiritual fulfillment. However, the completion of the ultimate "human form divine" relies on drastic alterations of human subjectivity: the self-renouncement of pre-existing identity, often manifested in the imagery of extreme bodily pain such as Albion's immolation in "Furnaces of affliction." That is, the relation between the aforementioned Romantic ideals and violence in Blake has to be recognized. Blake's poetic thought is usually projected with violence and destruction, particularly in the form of religious and artistic enthusiasm, what Jon Mee calls the "dangerous enthusiasm" that functions "as the basis of poetic inspiration" but also needs to be "regulated into a healthy form" (17). Even in *Jerusalem*, an epic that celebrates spiritual triumph, such enthusiasm often escapes regulation and "healthy forms," epitomized by extreme violence against the body.

Bearing this critical awareness, my essay examines Blake's representation of ritualistic violence that pervades *Jerusalem*: the manipulating, maiming, and consuming of the human body, and the ensuing mental becoming that consists of affliction and, paradoxically, unnamable pleasure. By "ritualistic" I not only mean the violence performed in a religious ritual, but also the violence that generates "automatic effect" and underscores "the danger of crossing forbidden boundaries," in Mary Douglas's words (27). In *Jerusalem*, this form of violence is embodied most compellingly in Blake's depiction of human sacrifice. After the disintegration of Albion into the Four Zoas, this bloody Druidic practice

¹ All quotations of Blake's works, unless indicated otherwise, are from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* edited by David V. Erdman, hereafter cited as E. The texts from longer poems such as *Milton*, *Jerusalem* and *The Four Zoas* will be specified with the number of the plate and lines.

becomes the standard ritual of the false religion and haunts the material world. At the end, it is to be replaced by Jesus's self-annihilation that restores Jerusalem as the bride of the Lamb and reintegrates the split Albion as the Universal Man. The motif of Druidic human sacrifice for Blake is thus the contrary to Christ's death, a distorted parody of the Passion, and the abolition of human sacrifice is crucial in Blake's Christian revisionism.

As a key element in his corpus, Druidic sacrifice in Blake has drawn considerable critical attention. S. Foster Damon's early work informs us of the contemporary view of Druidism in Blake's time. Originally regarded as pre-Christian paganism of Gallic and Celtic origins, Druidism in eighteenth-century England had started to be associated with Hebrew figures in the Old Testament such as Noah and Abraham. This reflects the religious movement at that time to identify Britain as a place that participates in biblical history. This idea is not unfamiliar to Blake, who fervently envisions that Jesus once set foot "upon Englands mountains green" in the Preface to *Milton* (E 95). Under the influence of contemporary antiquarians, Blake appropriates Druidism into his mythical system. It then becomes a religious antithesis of the poet's ideal Christianity. In Blake's works, Druidism is presented as an erroneous form of worship exercised in institutionalized state religion that misunderstands Jesus's Passion as a form of atonement, thus accusing the sinful while persecuting the innocent in the name of divine retribution. Moreover, Druidism promotes the virtue of chastity and apathetic rationalism, visualized by the images of rocks—particularly Stonehenge—which signifies the "petrification of human feelings" (Damon 109).

The mental negativities Druidism represents are actualized by human sacrifice, a significant motif that has been extensively discussed in Blake studies. According to Northrop Frye, it is "the most symbolic act" that "illustrates every aspect of the Fall and parodies every aspect of eternal life" (397). Originally a pagan ritual, human sacrifice is performed in accordance with seasonal alternations for vegetation gods, thus representing the fallen perspective limited by time and space, subject to "the cyclic order of nature" (397). Frye reads Druidic sacrifice in Blake as "an effort to express the ascendancy of nature and reason in society" (399), opposed to the state of "Humanity Divine" that Blake aspires to with poetic imagination. In a later study, Mee also confirms that Druidism in Blake represents "an original prophetic inspiration which degenerated into a corrupt cult" dependent on the theology of divine rewards and retributions, a mechanism that reinforces "the coercive rhetoric of the state" (91, 95). Appropriating contemporary antiquarian discourse, Blake creates a twisted version of Christianity that incorporates pagan imageries and alludes to the current state religion in Britain. Blake's method reflects the radicalism

to critique the religious and political status quo by evoking “the notion of an original liberty” with the help of literary primitivism (76).

Mary-Kelly Persyn's essay examines the linkage between Druidism and the virtue of chastity.² She pays specific attention to Blake's design in which female characters are the ones who torture and murder males in *Jerusalem*. By posing women as executioners and men as victims, Blake discloses the dire consequences of promoting female sensibility and chastity to lampoon the “construction of female identity and possibility” in the late eighteenth century (54). In *William Blake and the Body*, Tristanne Connolly traces Blake's inspiration from contemporary texts such as Stukeley's *Stonehenge* and Francesco Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, proposing that Blake incorporates customs in ancient civilizations to present human sacrifice as a social critique of slavery, child labor, and war, as well as a denouncement of the doctrine of atonement as an exchange in which the victim is endowed with certain values, “admitted to have that material and spiritual power, but only through being treated as the currency of sacrifice” (140). More recently, G. A. Rosso interprets Luvah's sacrifice in Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem* as “a form of psychic violence that carves out a new subjectivity, implanting a conscience that can regulate (spy on) sexual impulses and redirect them in socially acceptable way” (178). Similar to Persyn, Rosso locates human sacrifice in Blake in the context of sexual ideology, but he maintains that this motif is significant in Blake's design of the metaphor and his larger scheme to attack the virtue of chastity “as a marketable commodity and religion as a commercial enterprise” (179).

The above studies, though valid and insightful, treat human sacrifice as a subsidiary motif that is summoned only to be expelled to accomplish the Blakean ideals of artistic imagination, sexual emancipation, religious dissent, political liberty, and anti-imperialism—ideologies that have long been confirmed in Blake studies. Blake's representation of human sacrifice in *Jerusalem*, as I discern, indicates a disturbing attachment to ritualistic violence against the human body.

² Blake's espousal of sexual freedom has already been subject to a considerable body of criticism that reconsiders what being sexually “free” really means in Blake, especially in the context of gender issues such as sexism, misogyny, and unconventional sexual orientations. The studies that approach Blake from the perspective of gender and sexuality are too numerous to name. For the most representative, see early scholarly works such as Susan Fox's “The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry,” Anne K. Mellor's “Blake's Portrayal of Women,” Helen P. Bruder's *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion*, and Alicia Ostriker's “Desire Gratified and Ungratified: William Blake and Sexuality.” For more recent studies, see Christopher Z. Hobson's *Blake and Homosexuality*, Richard Sha's *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750-1832*, Susan Matthews's *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness*, and the two important essay collections after the 2010s, *Sexy Blake* and *Queer Blake*, both edited by Bruder and Tristanne Connolly.

To ascertain this position, my discussion focuses on the sacrifice motif in two specific episodes in *Jerusalem*: Los's construction of Golgonooza, the City of Art, in Chapter 1 and Luvah's torture in Chapter 3. I would argue that Blake's overtly explicit, excessively detailed depiction of such violence goes beyond the representation of religious oppression and sexual repression as proposed in preceding studies. Blake's unrestrained visualization of human sacrifice, "[g]lowing with beauty & cruelty" (66.33, E 218), insinuates a certain fixation on the body and outperforms his rightful assertion of Jesus's self-annihilation and the spiritual completion it brings forth. In Chapter 1, the sacrifice motif has already permeated Los's apparently righteous effort of constructing the City of Art, attesting to Blake's awareness of the intrinsic symbiosis between art and violence. And in Chapter 3, it is upon Luvah's torture—this parody of the Passion—that Blake exerts his fullest artistic creativity that disturbingly yet mesmerizingly obscures the boundaries between the self and the other and breaches the spirit-body dualism. Engaging with Georges Bataille's conception of the sacred, I would argue that ritualistic violence and bodily consumption function as an alternative route to Romantic artistic imagination, challenging the critical consensus that Blake leans towards the spiritual and renounces the corporeal in his late works.

Bodily Violence and Consumption in Los's "terrible labours"

Jerusalem begins with the disintegration of Albion caused by the estrangement from his Emanation Jerusalem. Albion falls apart into the Four Zoas warring ceaselessly with each other, thus creating the postlapsarian world of materiality, the actual world of human experience. Los, "the manifestation in time and space of Urthona" (Damon 246), the Zoa that represents imagination, stands up against this degeneration as an inspired blacksmith, a counterpart of Blake himself. Los aspires to counter sexual repression and political and religious oppression in the fallen world, now terrorized by the practice of Druidic human sacrifice. His endeavor mainly lies in his construction of Golgonooza, the City of Art. With this well-justified purpose to prevent humanity from further alienation, Los's task parallels Blake's own poetic enterprise, the poet's "words" that "are of your eternal Salvation" (*Milton* 4.20, E 98). However, in Chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, Los's construction of Golgonooza—itsself constructed by Blake's poetry—is permeated with ritualistic violence, the very feature of Druidic human sacrifice that Blake/Los seeks to nullify. A reexamination of Los's work will lay bare the inherent affinity between art and bodily violence, indicating that for Blake,

utilizing artistic representation to access “Divine Vision” and spiritual perfection constantly risks overdependence on the somatic—the violent consumption of the body that Blake urgently wishes to expel as he declares that “Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies” (*Milton*, 4.26, E 98).

Despite being positioned against Druidic human sacrifice, Los’s “sublime labour” is imbued with sacrificial imageries from the outset. On Plate 5, Blake presents a dire view of the fallen world: “Jerusalem is scatterd abroad like a cloud of smoke thro’ non-entity: / Moab & Ammon & Amalek & Canaan & Egypt & Aram / Receive her little-ones for sacrifices and the delights of cruelty” (5.13-5, E 147). The thriving of human sacrifice—especially children cast into fire—in the listed heathen nations is one of the consequences of the alienation between Albion and Jerusalem. But the specific picture of child sacrifice by fire evoked by Moab, the nation that worships Chemosh/Moloch, finds a disturbing resonance in “[t]he Furnace of Los” (5.28, E 147), the primary instrument of his artistic construction of Golgonooza.

In his illustrations for Milton’s “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” Blake reserves a full-page design for the heathen deity who relishes child sacrifice. The painting titled *The Flight of Moloch* (Fig.1) visualizes Stanza 23 of Milton’s poem that recounts the deposition of Moloch, who “fled / Hath left in shadows dread / His burning idol all of blackest hue; / In vain with cymbals’ ring” (Milton 11). In Blake’s design, a black statue of Moloch is situated in the



Figure 1. *The Flight of Moloch*, Whitworth Art Gallery.

center upon the furnace of burning fire, wearing a spiked crown and holding a scepter. A child attempts to walk out of the flames but is pushed back by two kneeling women who turn their faces away in despondence. A crowd surrounding the furnace celebrate the atrocity with musical instruments, “cymbals’ ring” in Milton’s line. A winged figure upon Moloch’s statue soars in smoke, which suggests that the spirit of this deity has emanated itself from its material existence, referring to Moloch’s flight in Milton’s poem. As an illustration for a poem that glorifies Christ’s ascension and the dethronement of pagan gods, Blake’s image presents a strong presence of the practice of human sacrifice, the terrible immolation of children, haunted by a mystical phenomenon that compounds excruciating pain and exultant ecstasy. Blake puts artistic emphasis on the overflowing ritualistic violence rather than the Christian triumph over the fleeing heathen deity. In sum, Blake’s design in *The Flight of Moloch* attests to his tendency to foreground bodily violence, which often borders on excess, even with the elevated purpose of spiritualization.

Human sacrifice by fire is a motif interwoven in Los’s artistic labor. The composition of *The Flight of Moloch* bears certain similarities to Plate 6 of *Jerusalem* (Fig. 2), which depicts Los at the center holding his hammer in front of the burning furnace. His Spectre is presented as the winged figure hovering above him. The instruments he utilizes—the tongs and chains—are placed on both sides. In *The Flight of Moloch*, the winged figure represents the god himself as a spiritual entity that is alienated from his material form, while on Plate 6, Los’s Spectre is painted in an almost identical figure. The difference lies in the direction of its flight. In the former it soars upwards away from the statue of Moloch; in the latter it dives towards Los, who raises his head staring at the Spectre: the “black and opaque” portion of his own split selfhood. Holding the hammer—a phallic object resembling Moloch’s scepter—Los assumes a posture similar to Moloch on his throne atop the furnace and has his tongs on the left and chains on the right, placements that resonate with the cymbals and trumpets carried by the two groups of worshippers on both sides of Moloch’s statue. These compositional similarities between *The Flight of Moloch* and Plate 6 of *Jerusalem* indicate that Blake, perhaps unconsciously, parallels Los’s construction of Golgonooza with human sacrifice; that is, he parallels artistic creation with ritualistic violence.

As an artist who aspires to “Create a System” and be free from being “enslav’d by another Man’s” (10.21-22, E 153), Los acts as a tyrannical figure with absolute authority, combining the power of creation and that of destruction in his furnace. This famous line has been constantly quoted to celebrate individual creativity, but in the context of Los’s “terrible labours” (8.15, E 151), it insinuates a direr truth



Figure 2. Plate 6, *Jerusalem*, Yale Center of British Art.

about art. If “another Man’s” system imposes enslavement, what exempts Los’s/ Blake’s “System” from this possibility? Art, even in its freest expression, cannot transcend a system and the ensuing regulation, subjugation, and victimization. The subtle visual parallel between *The Flight of Moloch* and Plate 6 of *Jerusalem* exposes the similar mechanism operating behind artistic creation and human sacrifice; both are essentially based upon power dynamics and ritualistic violence, actualized by the consumption of the body. This parallel can be further investigated in Blake’s poetics in narrating Los’s construction of Golgonoosa.

With Los’s “terrible wrath” (6.8, E 149), the Spectre’s division from Los is read conventionally as the struggle between rationalism and poetic imagination and between balanced mentality and excessive masculine aggression.³ In addition, Diana Hume George sees it as the conflict between the life drive and the death drive in the human psyche (159). And from a cultural historicist point of view, Daniel Schierenbeck argues that Blake’s depiction of the division

³ Within the context of Blake’s mythology, Los’s struggle with the Spectre is an internal psychodrama, as the latter represents merely one aspect of the former: the “self-sustained, domineering masculine ego” (Essick 259) and from a Freudian perspective, “the murderous, ravaging selfhood . . . untampered libido, or id impulse unmodified by repression and sublimation” (George 159). But the Spectre is also the “portion of each male character necessary to the accomplishment of his task in the material world and yet resisting that goal” (Essick 261).

“derives from his own experience as an artist and especially as an engraver, an occupation that was particularly impacted by the division of labor in art” (29). However, despite these readings, the division’s somatic nature is ascertained by Blake from the outset: “In pain the Spectre divided: in pain of hunger and thirst / To devour Los’s Human Perfection” (6.13-14, E 149). The image of consumption—eating and drinking—and the potential connotation of cannibalism are noteworthy here. Maggie Kilgour observes that “[t]he need for food exposes the vulnerability of individual identity, enacted at a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body” (6). The desire to eat and the choice of what to eat constitute identification, as the act of consuming temporarily breaches the bodily boundary between the inside and the outside, which in turn determines a series of dichotomies that sustain human society: the presentable and the unrepresentable, the pure and the impure, the sacred and the blasphemous, the civilized and the barbarian. An extreme form of eating, cannibalism represents one of the most important taboos in human civilization and the most powerful signifier of the racial Other in the colonialist discourse. Moreover, Kilgour points out that cannibalism is “an act that involves both desire and aggression, as it creates a total identity between eater and the eaten while insisting on the total control—the literal consumption—of the latter by the former” (7). This emotional ambivalence suggests profound intimacy within this extreme violence, which is particularly relevant in Christianity, as the ritual of the Holy Communion that originates from Jesus’s crucifixion, the most significant incident of ritualistic violence in Western history, is essentially cannibalistic. By consuming the bread and the wine, transubstantiated to Jesus’s flesh and blood, Christians participating in the ritual experience his all-encompassing love and access divine intimacy.⁴ The motif of cannibalism, therefore, indicates the fundamental connection between sacredness and violence.

With this critical premise, I turn back to *Jerusalem*. The division between Los and the Spectre is dominated by bodily pain, and as Blake writes, this pain

⁴ The doctrine of transubstantiation was established in the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215, which decreed that the bread and the wine in the sacrament not only represent but are Jesus’s body and blood. According to the Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent, “by the consecration of the bread and the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation” (qtd. in Toner 218). During and after the Reformation, Protestants condemned this doctrine as a superstition and a form of cannibalism, “a bloodthirsty rite, in which the priests ate God over and over again” (Kilgour 83).

is “of hunger and thirst” with a cannibalistic desire to “devour” Los. “Devour” is the word that Blake frequently uses to refer to a malicious tendency to dominate and even annihilate other individuals with a certain animalistic, predatory characteristic. For example, on Plate 5, the fallen sons of Albion threaten to “devour the Sleeping Humanity of Albion in rage and hunger” (5.30, E 147). This is reiterated by Los in his fiery response to the Spectre on Plate 9: “I saw disease forming a Body of Death around the Lamb / Of God, to destroy Jerusalem & to devour the body of Albion / By war and stratagem” (9.9-11, E 152). The act of devouring denotes an intense aggression propelled by the desire for death and destruction. Blake’s description reflects the contemporary view of cannibalism practiced by the people of the New World against their enemies in war, such as William Robertson’s depiction in *History of America*: “it is impossible to appease the fell spirit of revenge which rages in the heart of a savage, this frequently prompts the Americans to *devour* those unhappy persons, who had been the victims of their cruelty (43; my emphasis). In *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, with which Blake was familiar, Thomas Robert Malthus gives a similar account of the cannibalistic natives in America, whose “object in battle is not conquest, but destruction” and whose battle cry is “[l]et us go and eat that nation” (170-71).⁵ Blake’s association between devouring and extreme antagonism corresponds to Robertson’s and Malthus’s records based on colonialist bias, which might be reinforced by the Spectre’s physical appearance as “blackning dark & opaque” (6.5, E 149).

But Blake complicates the nature of cannibalism in the struggle between Los and the Spectre. As Los’s hypermasculine manifestation, the Spectre’s cannibalistic urge is bizarrely imbedded with effeminate and erotic undertones, as he attempts to “lure Los: by tears, by arguments of science & by terrors: / Terrors in every Nerve, by spasms & extended pains” (7.6-7, E 149). The femininity of luring with tears combines with the masculinity of arguing with reason. This disturbance of gender propriety is rooted in the “Nerve,” an organ that in Blake represents not only the human faculty of sensibility but also the erotic connection between individuals.⁶ With the motif of consumption that

⁵ Malthus’s treatise was first published in 1789. As David V. Erdman notes in *Blake: Prophet against Empire*, Malthus’s thesis regarding how to contain the overgrowth of population was widely circulated in Blake’s time, and Blake’s *Song of Los* presents a potential critique of Malthus’s work (285).

⁶ In *Blake and the Body*, Connolly discusses comprehensively Blake’s use of the image of nerves. She argues that in Blake nerves are “the bodily vehicle of feeling and sympathy” (20). In addition, she highlights the Latin etymology of the word as penis (*nervus*) and proposes that nerves signify Blake’s ideal of “a community of eroticized friendship, energized by eroticized communication, much like the eternal community he envisions at the end of *Jerusalem*” (21).

breaches the somatic boundary, the Spectre delves into the unrepresentable bodily inside, which is indecorously exposed with the involuntary convulsion that mixes pleasure and pain in sex. Furthermore, in his plea for Los's detachment from Albion, the Spectre accuses Albion of "this deceitful Friendship" because "He drinks thee up like water! like wine he pours thee / Into his tuns" (7.10-12, E 149). In these lines, homoerotic jealousy is accompanied with another body trope of cannibalistic connotation. This recalls Jesus's offering of the wine as his blood in the Gospels, in which the lifeless object is endowed with symbolic meanings and spiritual significance. But in the Spectre's queer simile, the process of signification is reversed. Los is poured "like wine" into vessels and drunk up "like water." His human subjectivity is materialized in a sense of sexual possession and consumption.

Against the Spectre's seduction with cannibalistic desire that mingles hatred and love, violence and eroticism, Los's/Blake's artistic endeavor appears to be supported by "Pity," with which he "could abstain from wrath" and achieve "mutual forgiveness between Enemies" (7.59, 66, E 150). But such a "Mental Fight" is empowered by Blake's extensive poetics of bodily violence. In his thundering threat against the Spectre that "unless thou desist / I will certainly create an eternal Hell for thee" (8.7-8, E 151), Los declares that his Furnaces "are ready to receive thee" (8.9, E 151). Los's main engine for his construction of Golgonooza echoes the burning furnace of human sacrifice in *The Flight of Moloch*. This association is intensified by the subsequent lines of exceptional brutality: "I will break thee into shivers: & melt thee in the furnaces of death" (8.10, E 151). The nature of Los's Furnaces and his artistic creation is problematized when Los claims that "I am inspired! I act not for myself: for Albion's sake / I now am what I am" (8.17-18, E 151). The divine inspiration that constitutes the poet's creative imagination, however, leads to "a horror and an astonishment" and stern command "to look upon me: Behold what cruelties / Are practised in Babel & Shinar, & have approached to Zion's Hill" (8.18-19, E 151). The colon between "look upon me" and "Behold what cruelties" curiously equalizes Los's mission with the heathen atrocities. This identification is then confirmed when the Spectre, now in an abject posture, submits to Los, who resembles a predator with "glowing eyes to leap upon his prey" (8.22, E 151), as Los "opend the Furnaces in fear. the Spectre saw to Babel & Shinar / Across all Europe & Asia. he saw the tortures of the Victims" (8.22-23, E 151). As Essick observes, the "labor in and of *Jerusalem* is directed toward overcoming the oppositions and 'unnatural consanguinities'" and "an integration of inside and outside that in itself provides a model for artistic creation and a more fully human universe" (262). And according to George, opposite to the Spectre, Los stands for positive masculinity that aims for creation rather than destruction (159). But as the lines quoted above show, the core of

Los's artistic engine is fueled by bodily violence and victimization, challenging the standard interpretations of Blake's characterization of Los. For Los/Blake, art and poetry are certainly concerned with the "integration of inside and outside" in Essick's words, the annulment of the boundary between the subject and the object that leads to the divine experience of continuity and communion. However, in *Jerusalem*, what we see regarding the internal-external dynamics is the violation of bodily boundaries: the battering, burning, and laceration of the flesh, and the exposure of the bodily interior.

The engagement of bodily violence in Blake's poetic imagination is attested to by Los's denouncement of the Spectre: "Thou art reveald before me in all thy magnitude & power / Thy Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity must be cut in sunder" (8.31-32, E 151). Blake's reference to the Judaic ceremony of circumcision evokes the covenant between Abraham and God in Genesis: "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Gen. 17: 13-14). Edward J. Rose's early essay provides a valid but predictable explanation of the circumcision symbolism in Blake, which indicates that art is "the means by which reality was revealed rather than hidden in any kind of secret mystery open only to the initiate" (16). The state of being uncircumcised symbolizes limitation of imagination and inspiration, and the foreskin represents the bodily restraint that needs to be removed: "sexual religion, virginity, chastity, cruelty, holiness, spectrous vegetation, all that characterizes the false body" and detaches the "soul and spiritual body from Divine Vision in one pretense to life after another" (20). Rose's reading of circumcision in Blake accentuates the binary division that distinguishes those who can access divine intimacy through inspiration (the circumcised) and those who are alienated from divinity because their visions are obstructed by a fallen part of the body (the uncircumcised). The same mechanism of division can be found in the conventional interpretation of Genesis 17, which "creates a binary between the circumcised insider who participates in the covenant of Abraham and the uncircumcised outsider, who falls outside the domain of God's covenant" (Thiessen 31). As Rose sums up, "Blake reconceives the physical act or religious rite of circumcision as a mental or aesthetic act of art or vision" (18). That is, combining artistic authenticity, sexual liberation, and the divine relationship with God, circumcision in Blake is read as a positive means to resolve division and achieve spiritual integration.

But what scholars have overlooked is Blake's latent recognition of circumcision's nature as a ritual of violence against the body sanctioned by

religion, the laceration and dismemberment of the flesh, despite its apparently spiritualized meanings. Blake's appropriation of the verb "cut" from the biblical line of the Authorized Version suggests a subtle shift from the spiritual to the corporeal. In Genesis 17, the "cut" pertains to the alienation of the "soul" from the Israeli community and the Jewish God, while the "cut" in Los's threat against the Spectre is directed at the bodily part of the "Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity," which is the male counterpart of the "veil" imagery in *Jerusalem* associated with Vala, the fallen female entity that promotes the virtue of chastity: "the Infernal Veil grows in the disobedient Female: / Which Jesus rends" (69.38-39, E 223). As the "Infernal Veil" represents the hymen "which adds to the secrecy and privacy" that must be removed by Jesus (Connolly 102), the "Uncircumcised pretences" stands for the male foreskin that "must be cut in sunder" by Los. Blake's circumcision imagery implies that the spiritual process of approximating divine vision through art and poetry is still inevitably dependent upon the body. Not only the presence of the body has to be acknowledged, but furthermore, Los's artistic enterprise is empowered by the acts of lacerating the flesh, looking into the somatic interiority, and cutting away the part that is naturally there.

In Los's speech to the Spectre, the inevitable dependence of art and spiritualization on the body, or more specifically, on the breach of bodily boundaries precipitated by ritualistic violence, culminates on Plate 9, when Los strives to counter the dire situation of "Inspiration deny'd; Genius forbidden by laws of punishment" (9.16, E 152). In this moment, Los "took the sighs & tears & bitter groans" and "lifted them into my Furnaces; to form the spiritual sword / That lays open the hidden heart" (9.17-19, E 152). Los's "spiritual sword" is forged by emotional negativities and the uncontrollable bodily reactions, and the heart carved out anticipates the central image of the Druidic human sacrifice that Blake powerfully depicts in Chapter 3. Subsequently, Los mutilates the extracted organ, "the pang / Of sorrow red hot" (9.19-20, E 152), on the anvil and in the furnaces with the flames of Albion's fallen sons and daughters, and his labor leads to the famed line of artistic and epistemological concerns: "he who will not defend Truth, may be compell'd to defend / A Lie" (9.29-30, E 152). Connolly has rightly discovered in Blake's depiction of Luvah's sacrifice in Chapter 3 that "Blake emphasizes the innards were previously hidden, doubly hidden in body and in armour, suggesting divination from entrails which seeks to discover hidden truths, to unveil the obscure future, by penetrating the body's equally secret interior" (135). Though positioned as the opposite to human sacrifice, Los's work subtly reflects the essential elements of the heathen practice that Blake intends to denounce, with the imageries of Moloch's furnace, cannibalism, circumcision, and heart extraction, again attesting to the important role bodily

violence plays in Blake's art and poetry. In the next section that centers on Luvah's sacrifice in Chapter 3, by engaging with Georges Bataille's theorization of the sacred, I will further investigate how the focus of Blake's poetic power is often displaced from the justified purpose of spiritualization in *Jerusalem*. Rather, it is unsettlingly channeled on the ritualistic violence against the body and such violence's mesmerizing effects on the human psyche, laying bare the heterogeneous experience of sacredness and violence.

Blake's Druidic Sacrifice and the Bataillean Sacred

As is generally agreed in Blake studies, human sacrifice is a degenerate parody of the Crucifixion and embodies what Blake wishes to annihilate with Christ's Passion in Chapter 4. As Sarah Haggarty observes, Blake links "sacrifice, insofar as it was perceived in substitutionary or in punitive terms, to an earthly economy of self-interest" (163). Accordingly, in line with the antithesis between mutual forgiveness and the doctrine of atonement, Blake should present Luvah's sacrifice as an ultimate reification of the fallen relationship of exchange—expiation and propitiation—between human beings and divine power for ulterior purposes, the paganist form of ritualistic violence to either appease vengeful gods or win their favor. As I have proposed at the outset of this essay, however, despite his efforts to establish the antithesis, Blake's poetic narrative of Luvah's sacrifice implies his obsession with excessive bodily violence. Moreover, Blake implies the intricate psychological effects of ritualistic violence that generate an atmosphere of heterogeneous sacredness. Such sacred experience annihilates the economy of exchange and self-interest through an alternative route. In a perhaps unintended fashion, Blake endows sacrificial violence against the body with his utmost poetic power and ascertains its essential position in artistic creation, which has been subtly conveyed in Los's task in Chapter 1, as my discussion has demonstrated. This unique phenomenon is fully expressed in Blake's depiction of Luvah's sacrifice, which can be explored with Georges Bataille's philosophical understanding of sacrifice and his conceptualization of the sacred.

As a philosopher whose works are devoted to topics related to religion, violence, and eroticism, with a particular focus on the transgressive nature of human activities, Georges Bataille offers a useful perspective to examine Druidic sacrifice in Blake.⁷ The religious ritual of sacrifice (both human and animal)

⁷ The concrete literary connection between Bataille and Blake lies mainly in the former's *Literature and Evil* (1957). In his extensive discussion of Blake's works, Bataille regards the English poet, along with other writers such as Marquis de Sade and Emily Brontë, as exemplifying the sovereign power of

occupies a crucial position in Bataille's philosophical thinking. Jean-Luc Nancy notes that Bataille "sought not only to think sacrifice, but to think according to sacrifice" (20). Bataille's discourse of sacrifice as an exemplification of "general economy" that focuses on expenditure rather than production can be found in his major works such as *The Accursed Share* (1949), *Erotism* (1957), and the posthumous *Theory of Religion* (1973). As postulated in the essay "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice" cowritten with Jonathan Strauss, Bataille's apprehension of sacrifice is a critical response to Hegel's dialectic ideas that humanity is realized in the destruction of the body: "in sacrifice he destroyed the animal in himself, allowing himself and the animal to survive only as that noncorporeal truth which Hegel describes and which makes of man" (18). In Bataille's view, Hegel's interpretation of sacrifice promotes the negativity and negation of the body, failing to grasp the very essence of the ritual. Sacrifice, for Bataille, is the destruction of the body indeed, but not the effacement of the body for achieving idealism. What he values is the process of this destruction, not the end of it: "In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living—watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-)consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being" (19). The moment in which the executioner cuts open the victim's flesh emanates a mesmerizing aura of sacred ecstasy that engulfs both parties, and such mysterious experience, as Elisabeth Arnould-Bloomfield points out, is "linked to the very essence of man's communal being" (99). Bataille elicits from the practice of human sacrifice in ancient cultures a conception that can account for all nonpragmatic human activities: "man's consciousness is constitutively bound with tragic terror and sacred ecstasy" and "communities murder ritually to share in the violent exuberance of being" (102). In the sacrificial ritual, the relationship between the killer and the killed is not simply of victimization, but of intimacy that transcends the profane world dictated by the order of work, utility, and accumulation of resources. Bataille illustrates that "[s]acrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane. Servile use has made a *thing* (an *object*) of that which, in a deep sense, is of the same nature as the *subject*, is in a relation of intimate

literature, its heterogeneous qualities that resist confinement by any moral systems. Bataille and Blake also share similar understandings of the symbiosis between religious experience and art. Bataille proposes that "[p]oetry alone, which denies and destroys the limitations of things, can return us to this absence of limitations—in short, the world is given to us when the image which we have within us is sacred, because all that is sacred is poetry and all that is poetic is sacred" (69). The equation in the last line corresponds to Blake's belief in the inner divinity of humanity achieved through poetic creation: "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (E 3).

participation with the subject" (*Accursed* 55).⁸ Also, in sacrifice human bodies are emancipated from the fate of being "disciplined, made to fit in rigid borders that facilitate production and growth" (Direk 94). In other words, what Bataille sees in ritualistic violence is a heterogeneous "inner experience" that nullifies not only the exterior purpose of sacrifice as "a tool for propitiation and expiation" (Arnould-Bloomfield 102), but also the boundary between the subject and the object, the self and the other, through the approximation to death. Such a sacred state is curiously akin to the Romantic understanding of poetic imagination based on powerful feelings and free from the restriction of practical ends, and the poetic imagination's immense capacity to synthesize the self, the other, and the external world. The depiction of Luvah's sacrifice, though positioned as the antithesis of real sacredness in Blake's intent, anticipates some of the key elements in Bataille's conception of sacrifice.

The orgiastic ecstasy of ritualistic violence noted by Bataille as "the erotic convulsion" that "gives free rein to extravagant organs" (*Erotism* 92) is vividly presented by Blake in the later lines on Plate 65: "Howling the Victims on the Druid Altars yield their souls / To the stern Warriors: lovely sport the Daughters round their Victims; / Drinking their lives in sweet intoxication" (65.63-65, E 217). Here the Victims have relinquished the control of their own bodies, exposing the somatic interior: "their souls" analogous to the beating heart carved out on the next plate. Their executioners consume the Victims, with both parties in an ecstatic state, transgressing the bodily boundary between the inside and the outside. The relationship between the executioner and the victim in sacrifice goes beyond the simple distinction between the active doer and the passive receiver of violence. This is intriguingly acknowledged by both Blake and Bataille. The Daughters of Albion and the Victims are both lost in uncontrollable bodily reaction, "in spiral volutions intricately winding / Over Albions mountains" (65.66-67, E 217), the "erotic convulsion" in Bataille's words. And the division between the executioner and the victim is annihilated:

While they rejoice over Luvah in mockery & bitter scorn:
Sudden they become like what they behold in howling & deadly pain
Spasms smite their features, sinews & limbs: pale they look on one another.
They turn, contorted: their iron necks bend unwilling towards

⁸ Bataille's understanding of sacrifice is also a critical response to anthropological theorization by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss. Hubert and Mauss identify three phases of sacrifice: the initiatory sanctification of the participants, the ritualistic killing, and the purification ceremony that restores the secular order. Unlike Hubert and Mauss, who put emphasis on the last phase that points to utilitarian ends, Bataille believes that the significance of sacrifice lies in the second phase, in which the participants are brought "to commune with the anxious yet joyous rapture of death" (Arnould-Bloomfield 103).

Luvah: their lips tremble: their muscular fibres are cramped & smitten
 They become like what they behold! (65.74-79, E 217-18)

Blake's poetic representation of human sacrifice in these lines conveys a unique understanding of violence and bodily pain in British Romanticism. It can be seen as a radical case of Adam Smith's conception of sympathy, as the highly mobile form of "fellow-feeling," which is "transferred from one man to another, instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of what excited them in the person principally concerned" (15). But what Blake underscores here exceeds the range of Smithian sympathy, as the utter identification can be formed not only between the sufferer and the onlooker, but also between the sufferer and those who inflict pain on them. In his study on bodily pain in Romantic literature, Jeremy Davies insightfully writes that "[b]odily pain is never an unmediated sensation consequent on physical injury, but is instead a complex perception within which affects, interpretations, and self-images play a necessary part" (10), and it is surprising that Blake is not included in his discussion. While wielding the knives and maiming their victims, the Daughters of Albion do not unilaterally relish the suffering they cause. Rather, in a mystic atmosphere, they sympathize unconditionally with the victims, forsaking their own subjectivity as the agent of violence and experiencing the "deadly pain"—"They become like what they behold." Such an intimate relationship that dissolves the subject-object boundary is what Bataille identifies as "continuity of beings, the communal experience in which the *object*—the victim—is of the same nature as the *subject*, is in a relation of intimate participation with the subject" (*Accursed* 55).⁹ In addition, Blake incorporates erotic imagery (the ecstasy, intoxication, and convulsion) into the sacrificial violence, which exposes fibers and sinews with overflowing blood. This predates Bataille's key alignment between eroticism and sacredness, both as the "exuberance of life" that is paradoxically "not alien to death" (*Eroticism* 11), evoking Blake's own line in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Exuberance is Beauty" (E 38).

Through Bataille's views, we have seen how Blake powerfully versifies Druidic sacrifice to merge ritualistic violence and eroticism. By doing so, somehow violating his own design, Blake demonstrates the imaginative capacity that suspends the subject-object distinction and transgresses the boundary

⁹ In her analysis of the same passage, Connolly draws upon Douglas's *Purity and Danger* and Gené Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*. She argues that human sacrifice in Blake reflects the key concept of division in religious rituals: "The victim marks the point of definition and separation. The sons and daughters who divide and unite among themselves perpetrate divisions and unifications on their victims" (147). The cutting open of the flesh, according to Connolly, is analogous to the internal splitting of the psyche and the separation between the sacred and the profane.

between the self and the other, the profound capability promoted as typically Romantic. Apart from this, another crucial point lies in how Blake addresses the issue of human sacrifice as a false ritual performed for the false doctrine of atonement, as highlighted previously. If Druidic sacrifice is the antithesis of Jesus's Passion, it should be presented as a ritual for expiatory purposes. Scholars have identified the source of Blake's depiction of Luvah's torture on Plate 66: Francisco Javier Clavigero's *History of Mexico*, which describes the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice in graphic detail.¹⁰ It seems reasonable that Blake appropriates a non-Christian culture to design the degenerate ritual that resulted from erroneous understandings of religion. Coincidentally, the Aztec ritual is the primary example in Bataille's conception of sacrifice and the sacred, because such a ritual "destroys an object's real ties of subordination" and "draws the victim out of the world of utility" (*Theory* 43). A close examination of Plate 66 indicates that Blake's poetics aestheticizes ritualistic violence in a way that resonates with the Bataillean sacredness, despite his intent to denounce it as an embodiment of false religious ideologies.

On Plate 66, we witness the incident through Los's perspective:

The Daughters of Albion clothed in garments of needle work
Strip them off from their shoulders and bosoms, they lay aside
Their garments; they sit naked upon the Stone of trial.
The Knife of flint passes over the howling Victim: his blood
Gushes & stains the fair side of the fair Daughters of Albion.

...

They take off his vesture whole with their Knives of flint:
But they cut asunder his inner garments: searching with
Their cruel fingers for his heart, & there they enter in pomp,
In many tears; & there they erect a temple & an altar: (66.17-21, 26-29, E 218)

Connolly refers to Clavigero's account and highlights Blake's appropriation of the Aztec practices of flaying and heart extraction. She argues that Blake reverses the original gender roles; instead of male priests who put on the victim's skin, the Daughters of Albion adorn themselves with their male victim's skin and genitals. According to Connolly, this represents "Blake's condemnation of females pretending to be—dressing up as—ultimately human, rather than subordinating elements of male human forms" (151), a despicable usurpation of power and abuse of violence. The extraction of Luvah's heart, on the other hand, is a penetration that parallels sexual intercourse, but it is a failed parody of sex, "through violence rather than imagination" (152), which only generates

¹⁰ See Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant's note in the Norton Critical Edition of *Blake's Poetry and Design*, p. 295 and Connolly's discussion in *Blake and the Body*, pp. 149-52.

mutual pain rather than pleasure. Connolly's interpretations are valid and adhere to the general teleology of Blake's design of *Jerusalem*. But she seems to assume several dichotomies that are dismantled in Blake's depiction of human sacrifice, such as the binary oppositions between violence and imagination, pain and pleasure. Violence in this case becomes the catalyst of poetic imagination. The cutting knife establishes an uncanny connection between Luvah and his executors, as the Daughters of Albion receive his blood; imagination's capability to supersede the boundary between the self and the other is again manifested. The Daughters' disrobing and nakedness on the altar with the victim also reinforces this connection with an erotic suggestion. In his account of the Aztec sacrifice, Bataille specifically highlights the extravagant privileges the victim received before being killed in the ritual; he enjoyed dancing, music, food and drink, and even sex with women, all of which point to the notion of bodily consumption and the divine intimacy it incurs. Blake's depiction again predates Bataille's observation, as the Daughters of Albion "feed his tongue from cups / And dishes of painted clay" (66.32-33, E 218).

According to Clavigero's record, one of the sources of Blake's Druidic sacrifice, the Aztec priest offers the extracted heart to the sun. This motif is much underlined by Bataille in *The Accursed Share*, in which he points out that all acts of expenditure surrounding the Aztec sacrifice are based on the belief that the sun must constantly consume offerings or it would cease emitting heat and light. The logic seems to comply with the principle of exchange, but Bataille observes that such a belief has nothing to do with the fear of divine punishment or desire for the sun-god's favor, but an adamant conviction in consumption itself. For the Aztecs, the purpose of war, the very source of sacrificial victims, was not conquest or plunder for lands and resources, but a necessary means to participate in the grand feat of solar expenditure. The pragmatic aims were outweighed by destruction *per se*, epitomized by the sun as a gigantic red globe that burns ceaselessly. This image is central in the Aztec religion as depicted by Bataille. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille recounts a sixteenth-century Spanish document: the sun "looked very red, appearing to sway from side to side, and none of them could keep their eyes on him, because he blinded them with his light. He shone brightly with his rays that reached in all directions . . . the gods had to die; the wind, Quetzalcoatl, killed them all: The wind tore out their hearts and used them to animate the newborn stars" (49). The image of an all-devouring sun, for Bataille, conveys the idea "that sacrifice negates utilitarian relationships with the world" and "sacrificial consumption is the mimesis of the universe's excess" (Arnould-Bloomfield 105). In other words, the teleological end of propitiation and expiation is absent in the process, as even gods become the "accursed share"

like the sacrificial victim to be consumed violently in the perpetual cycle of creation and annihilation.

Like Bataille, Blake appropriates the Aztec custom in his design of Druidic sacrifice, as already noted by critics. What I would highlight is the intriguing similarity between Blake and Bataille regarding the solar image and the notion of consumption that nullifies the exchange value of sacrifice.¹¹ On Plate 66 of Jerusalem, after Luvah's sacrifice and the total identification between the Daughters and their victim—"at the sight of the Victim, & at sight of those who are smitten, / All who see. become what they behold" (66.35-36, E 218)—the similar solar image emerges:

The Divine Vision became First a burning flame, then a column
Of fire, then an awful fiery wheel surrounding earth & heaven:
And then a globe of blood wandering distant in an unknown night:
Afar into the unknown night the mountains fled away:
Six months of mortality; a summer: & six months of mortality; a winter:
The Human form began to be alterd by the Daughters of Albion
And the perceptions to be dissipated into the Indefinite. (66.41-47, E 219)

In Blake, "the Indefinite" usually refers to the postlapsarian state of chaos and obscurity and is also associated with the empiricist reasoning of Locke and Newton despised by Blake.¹² The negativity of this term is then affirmed by the cancerous growth of the "mighty Polypus nam'd Albions Tree" (66.48, E 219), the vegetative and materialistic degeneration of the spiritual, which attests to the tenet on Line 56: "He who will not comingle in Love, must be adjoind by Hate" (66.56, E 219). However, I would underline the disjointed transition from Blake's depiction of sacrificial violence to the very lesson that he seeks to convey by denouncing it. As emphasized several times, in *Jerusalem*, graphic violence (which is supposed to be condemned) often outweighs the rightful ideals that Blake espouses, showing his keen attention to bodily consumption and the heterogeneous religious experience activated by it, which anticipates the Bataillean sacred. In the lines above, sacred experience undergoes a materializing

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the sun as a glaring globe has an imposing presence in Blake's art and is associated with ritualistic offering. On the frontispiece of *The Song of Los*, a kneeling figure on the altar is overwhelmed by a gigantic, gold-black sun that emits piercing light. Another example is Blake's 1825 watercolor painting *The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve*. In this illustration of the aftermath of Cain's murder of Abel, an incident that resulted from Cain's failure to offer burnt sacrifice, the flaming red sun torments Cain, who flees from the corpse of Abel.

¹² For critical discussion of Blake's criticism of Locke's idea of "indefinite form" based on sensory and materialistic observation, see Dennis M. Welch, pp. 224-32. In his 1827 letter to George Cumberland, Blake laments that "I know too well that a great majority of Englishmen are fond of The Indefinite which they Measure by Newtons Doctrine of the Fluxions of an Atom. A Thing that does not Exist" (E 783).

transformation from “a burning flame,” “a column of fire,” and “a fiery wheel,” to “a globe of blood,” a solar image that evokes sacrificial violence and the notion of all-encompassing consumption in the Aztec religion. The “unknown night” in which the now materialized “Divine Visions” wander without an aim suggests the renouncement of epistemological and teleological ends of the sacred, and death itself becomes the sole agent that propels the cycle of time. The victimized “human form” is drastically altered by the executioners’ violence, not only regarding the bodily mutilation, but also the dissipation of “the perceptions.”

Blake’s word choice of “dissipated” is worth noticing here. Blake appears to simply mean that perceptions are dispersed and lost in “the Indefinite,” the degenerate state of human mentality. But in the eighteenth century, the word “dissipation” can also denote “wasteful expenditure or consumption of money, means, powers, faculties” (“dissipation” def. 4). In his annotations to Joshua Reynolds’s *Discourses*, Blake refutes Reynolds’s argument that “no part of their [the most eminent Painters’] time was spent in dissipation” by reappropriating the negative term “dissipation”: “Idleness is one Thing & Dissipation Another. He who has Nothing to Dissipate Cannot Dissipate” (E 643). By referring to Rafael who “died of Dissipation,” Blake elevates what Reynolds condemns as reckless expenditure to the level of artistic creation as a drastic act of consuming the artist himself, namely his physical and mental beings. In other words, Blake’s use of “dissipation” suggests a sense of immanence of art that does not point to any exterior ends. Following this understanding, the line “the perceptions to be dissipated into the Indefinite” yields interpretations that counter its apparent negativity. The perceptions do not fall into dysfunction, but are driven to their full exertion, to the extent of “dissipation,” the violent consumption of life energy essential in artistic creation. And “the Indefinite” might go beyond its denotations of obscurity and chaos. Rather, it indicates a sense of “extending beyond any assignable limits; boundless, infinite” (“indefinite” def. 2), curiously corresponding to Blake’s assertion that “[h]e who sees the Infinite in all things sees God” and “[t]herefore / God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he / is” (E 3). In sum, sacrificial violence, reified by the fiery solar image that engulfs all, leads to the consumption of human faculties that in turn constitutes the immanence of artistic creation and inner divinity of men. Being “dissipated into the Indefinite” embodies a poetics of an alternative state of freedom, unfettered by the economy of exchange—the doctrine of atonement—and what Bataille terms “the servile use” and “the poverty of things” (*Accursed* 56, 57). Luvah’s Druidic sacrifice, though designated as a horrendous example of false religiosity in Blake’s mythical system, again articulates the intrinsic propensity for bodily

violence in artistic and sacred experiences. That Blake constructs the antithesis between Jesus's self-sacrifice and the Druidic human sacrifice to champion an ultimate synthesis of the spirit and the body in his final epic is generally agreed in Blake studies. However, a Bataillean reading complicates this critical consensus and leads to a subversive interpretation that aesthetically Blake might be "of the Druid's party without knowing it."¹³

Conclusion

As the famous anecdote goes, on Bataille's desk was a photo of a Chinese man suffering the torture of *lingchi*, "the death by a thousand cuts" (Fig. 3), an image with which the French philosopher was so fascinated: "I would stare at the photographic image—or sometimes my memory of it—of a Chinese man who must have been tortured during my lifetime . . . his chest flayed, twisted, arms and legs cut at the elbows and knees. Hair standing on his head, hideous, haggard, striped with blood, beautiful as a wasp" (*Inner Experience* 121). The most mesmerizing part of the photo, for Bataille, is the victim's uplifted face. Undergoing this excruciating agony from the slow laceration of his body, he looks upwards with a pair of disoriented eyes and a half-open mouth, but his facial expression is paradoxically ecstatic with the entire picture of torture emitting a mystic and ritualistic atmosphere. "The young and seductive Chinese man," Bataille writes, "I loved him with a love in which the sadistic instinct had no part: he communicates his pain to me or rather the excess of his pain, and it was precisely this I was seeking, not to enjoy it, but to ruin in me that which is opposed to ruin" (121-22). The image of *lingchi* enralls him not because of sadistic pleasure, but because gazing at it annihilates a certain portion in human mentality which is subject to the "utilitarian relation" and "servile use of things" in the secular order (*Accursed* 56). This Bataillean process, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, "only matters through its negative moment, in which the finite must be annihilated; and this moment remains nonetheless a transgression of the law, the law of self-presence" (25). The annihilation of the secular self is for Bataille fundamentally artistic, as Nancy illustrates: "art lets us commune, by means of a transgression that is still effective, with horror . . . with the enjoyment of an instantaneous appropriation of death" (29).

Blake's visual designs of the Druidic sacrifice in *Jerusalem*, especially Plate 25 and Plate 69, present an intriguing analogy to Bataille's *lingchi* photo. On

¹³ In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake famously remarks that in *Paradise Lost* Milton is "of the Devil's party without knowing it" (E 35).



Figure 3. *Lingchi, The Tears of Eros*, p. 204



Figure 4. Plate 25, *Jerusalem*

Plate 25, the victim is kneeling before the altar, surrounded by three female executioners, one of whom pulls out his entrails from a gash on his abdomen that seems to be carved by the knife held in her right hand (Fig. 4). Enduring extreme bodily pain, the victim turns his face upwards in an ecstatic expression similar to the Chinese man. And this intense mixture of affliction and pleasure is infectious, transmitted to his executioner, who sheds tears while performing ritualistic violence. The image at the bottom of Plate 69 also depicts a sacrificial victim being flayed by two executioners with knives, with the same uplifted



Figure 5. Plate 69, *Jerusalem*

countenance lost in the intoxication that approximates death (Fig. 5). Blake's powerful visualization of ritualistic violence again attests to how violence and bodily consumption serve as the base materials for his artistic creation to activate the sacred experience of emotional mobility that annuls the subject-object distinction, a kind of experience hailed in British Romantic poetry. As my discussion has demonstrated, sacrificial violence has been lurking underneath Los's heroic endeavor of constructing the City of Art in Chapter 1, and Luvah's sacrifice in Chapter 3 further certifies Blake's understanding of ritualistic violence as a necessary component in religion and a heterogeneous way to transcend the secular order of exchange, anticipating Bataille's conception of the sacred and challenging the scholarly consensus that philosophically, Blake is inclined to the spiritual and renounces the corporeal in his late works.

I would conclude this essay with a glimpse of the full-page design on Plate 76 of *Jerusalem*, which presents Albion's glorious awakening inspired by Jesus's crucifixion (Fig. 6). In this design, Christ is nailed not on a cross but a tree, which has been read as an emphasis on his corporeality and humanity. Albion's outstretching arms emulate Christ's posture but with a less restricted movement; by doing so, as Haggarty suggests, he "shares in Christ's crucifixion by a kind of 'perpetual eucharist'" and "reconstitutes its precursor rather than repeats it verbatim" (182). But beyond Haggarty's observation, the relationship between



Figure 6. Plate 76, *Jerusalem*

Christ and Albion also generates the emotional dynamic that emerges between the Chinese man and Bataille, between a sacrificial victim and his spectator. Albion's identification with Christ centers on the ritualistic violence the latter suffers, which constitutes the divine intimacy that Bataille terms "seductive" and "love." As Bruder and Connolly rightfully note, in Blake's works we see "the prevalence and ambivalence of violence" (Introduction 13). In addition to representing Blake's critique of religious oppression and the embodiment of his gender ideologies, as discussed and debated in Blake studies, bodily violence operates more inherently in Blake's aspired synthesis of art and religion. Further transtemporal engagement between Blake and Bataille might contribute to our understanding of the idealization and aestheticization of violence, which still predominate our popular culture and social reality.

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石刀與血肉：再探威廉·布雷克 《耶路撒冷》中的獻祭與暴力

摘要

在威廉·布雷克的晚期長篇史詩《耶路撒冷》中，活人獻祭扮演了極為重要的角色。布雷克認為獻祭的機制扭曲了耶穌受難的精神。因此，揚棄此墮落儀式成為回歸原初神聖境界的關鍵。長久以來，論者皆認為布雷克運用獻祭的意象具體化宗教謬誤、性壓抑、道德規訓與政治壓迫所帶來的可怕後果，並加以批判。有鑑於此，本文試圖透過檢視《耶路撒冷》中的兩個重要場景，來重新思考此一學術共識。本文指出，布雷克對獻祭的描述瀰漫著令讀者難以卒睹的暴力，其程度與細節已經超越了批判政治宗教和性別意識形態的範疇，反映出詩人對暴虐肉體意象的異常執著，甚至在詩歌美學的層面上壓過了《耶路撒冷》本詩宣揚耶穌自我犧牲精神與人類救贖的主旨。在第一章中，代表靈感的洛斯在打造藝術城市葛歌諾薩的過程交織著獻祭的意象，透露出布雷克思想中暴力與藝術／詩歌創作的共生關係。接著，本文納入哲學家巴代伊對神聖的論述，分析第三章中阿比恩的女兒們對路瓦施行的殘虐儀式，彰顯出布雷克詩學對自我與他者、心靈與肉體二元界線的逾越。簡言之，儀式性暴力與肉體毀傷的意象在《耶路撒冷》中，體現了另類的浪漫主義想像，挑戰了學界認定布雷克晚期作品崇尚精神、厭棄身體的傳統理解。

關鍵字：威廉·布雷克、《耶路撒冷》、活人獻祭、儀式性暴力、喬治·巴代伊、神聖

