

# Blake's Golden Load

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How many bards gild the lapses of time ! (Keats)

At the threshold of William Blake's poetic career we find a small, much-mined volume of poems called *Poetical Sketches* (1784). His only work published in conventional letterpress, it begins with a little poem of beginnings, *To Spring*, followed by three other poems addressed to each of the remaining seasons. On the face of it, these poems would seem to be eminently simple and comprehensible as representations of a human voice as it changes and develops in an ongoing relationship with an external Nature. But like the rest of the volume, these poems are unreadable—save in the most banal sense—unless we locate them in a context of discourse mapped by codes of literary practices. Considered as the clearly imitative and derivative work of a late eighteenth-century adolescent, to bring them under the reins of interpretive control seemed at first to pose few problems.<sup>1</sup> But as Blake's reputation for 'originality' and 'creative genius' has grown in the last few decades, the situation has become more problematic. How can the point/place/moment of origin of an original genius be a belated scene of copying or imitation? A reading of origins is clearly called for, and interpreters of Blake have answered,

There are several lines approach that tempt Blake scholars when confronting the *Poetical Sketches*. One of the most popular has been dismissed by Robert Gleckner as the "anticipative fallacy" (*Prelude* 2), an apt phrase for those like Harold Bloom who maintain (ed) that "at an astonishingly early age, Blake has grasped in sure potential all the fundamentals of his great program and theme" (*Apocalypse* 17). Even Gleckner himself cannot resist anticipation's power when he comes to Blake's season poems, which for him embody a theme "clearly anticipative of Blake's states of Innocence and Experience..... it (the theme) anticipates Los the creator and Urizen, the destructive, tyrannical 'god of this world.'" (63–64).

Most critics do not limit themselves to looking forward but—Janus-like—look backwards to Blake's sources. Here too a special form of double-reading seems inevitable. Prowling through the Bible, works of Spenser and Shakespeare, various Elizabethan songs, Milton, Thomson Young, Collins, Gray, Beattie and the Warton, Chatterton and the Ossianic prose poems, we can collect an impressive flood of words, phrases and images that reappear in the *Poetical Sketches*. As we do so, we find Blake sounding more and more like his precursors, becoming not an origin but an echo. Fortunately, through the miracle of interpretive ingenuity, we have ways to show that the more he sounds like them the more different he is from them. For example, Geoffrey Hartman can read the last two lines of *To Winter* ("till heaven smiles, and the monster/ Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla.") as deliberately conventional, so that they become in his oxymoronic formulation "an inspired period cliché" ("Progress" 204). Or, to borrow from Gleckner again, we find Blake "amid the remnants of conventional, even hackneyed, phraseology and diction" (68) engaged in "ostensible apishness" (12) which manages somehow to transform "the verbal and imagistic traditions he inherited" into "vision inspired and articulated by true art" (12). Blake seems to have anticipated Borges' Pierre Menard, whose "*i. ible* work" is unexceptionable and conventional, but whose "other work..... perhaps the most significant of our time" is a "subterranean" project "to produce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes....." Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)" (38-42). For Menard, the technique of the "deliberate anachronism" allows him to trope his precursor; it is a technique that "fills the most placid works with adventure" and "has enriched.....the halting and rudimentary art of reading" (44) which concerns us here, as would-be miners of textual riches.

Blake's text appears in a context where copying and allusion, or 'imitation,' was not only an expected first stage in any artistic career, but an essential part of the poetic enterprise as an accepted style or mode of composition.<sup>2</sup> For Blake to offer us "echoes and themes from the Bible, the classics, and even the high odic tradition of the eighteenth century" is not simply "poetic diction in search of its truth" (Hartman 194) but poetry in search of a *context*, and finding one in an 'echo chamber' where it is impossible to echo the Bible directly, without also echoing a style or mode of echoing in which the original source of sound has long been lost. The

task of the reader is similarly difficult, if s/he wants to hear the voice of a controlling and self-contained individual poet escaping all the forces that undermine and challenge his individuality. How can we grant Blake a distance from the conventions he seems to invoke, granting him that origin-ality that means 'being present' at the time and place of a *neu* beginning? There is more at stake here than a reading of a few individual poems: we are contemplating the birth of an 'original poetic career, one which signals the coming of the new era of Romanticism. To seek this understanding is to contemplate a poetic act as a rebirth of language itself, comparable to the originary event that might have generated the first human utterance; and since individual words can do their work only in a field of discursivity, we must locate Blake's work in a completely new context rather than as a moment in a series that is governed by prior organization and differentiation. We must do this in spite of the fact that the discourse of Romanticism was not yet in place (though it is for us, hence we may well bring it with us *to* Blake), and in spite of the fact that the external form or surface of Blake's work presents itself to us in a form which Hartman can call a "splendid pastiche" (194). Splendid or not, a "pastiche" is a work that imitates the style of prior works, a style which is itself a principle of organization where 'originality' is either not valued or not possible. Finally, what if a text represents itself to us as an echo of a series of echoes of an originary voice, echo invoking the master-trope of irony, to distance itself from the naive presumption of saying something new?

Morris Eaves has tried a reading of Blake's "theory" which argues for a "radical" Blakean transformation, where he "may in some respects seem to echo Reynolds and Opie," but in fact is "not recycling classicism but performing a critical experiment in encoding radical romantic ideas in an Enlightenment vocabulary."

It is fair to say that Blake parodies Enlightenment criticism in such instances but essential to see also that the parody is in another way true. The method involves nothing more unusual than retaining the manner of the object of parody while altering the matter, or, more specifically, silently shifting the grounds on which decorum rests. Reynolds's concessions to truth for the sake of oversetting truth are grounded in Enlightenment mimesis, Blake's truth in romantic expression. (159)

For Eaves the same terms can function as "mimesis" or "expression" through some kind of shift of "grounds" which doesn't involve the *surface*

of the text, which functions only as a mask. We might well ask how "parody" (which is dependent on its object) can either signal or effect a shift of grounds. Similar problems are found if we invoke the trope of irony, a rhetorical mask which signals the metalinguistic code which is either the most distant from the essence of an autonomous expressive subject (the *ieron* is not responsible for what he says) or the closes to it (his *personal* meaning is not determined by the conventional meanings of the words he uses). In the ironic mode only the speaker knows what he really means, and sometimes perhaps even he does not know.

What we have in these approaches is a system of similarities and difference, where even the most extreme similarity is seen as superficial, while the difference claimed is radical. In the precursor text the poetic surface hides error, while in Blake it reveals truth. In one case any simplicity of the surface reveals radical simplicity, but in another it proves radical complexity. Writing of "To the Muses" in the same volume, Gleckner notes "the fundamental Augustan conventionality of the diction," yet claims that "it owes virtually nothing to any poetic model and achieves a bold complexity belied by its limpid surface" (29). Even the conventional tropes of eighteenth-century verse can be transformed if we agree with Bloom, who claims that "Thomson's personifications are clear and simple," but Blake's "become actual mythmaking" (*Apocalypse* 1).

Were I to develop it here, my own interpretation of the season poems might in some ways provide a similar instance, since it would doubtless sound *like* various aspects of other readings. I do agree with the general view that these poems are early and vigorous instances of what Blake would later call "Mental Fight" — not "the mental warfare that resurrects the crucified truth" or "demands that we fly with him on his plumed wide wings to the realms of truth" (Gleckner 11, 13-14). To put it another way, Blake does not give us his "golden load" of song and truth, but rather follows in an epitomizing and ironic way the seasonal and tropological system for producing "truth" that prevailed in the 18th century. One of the problems of fully appreciating parody is that we cannot understand it unless we have some minimal sense of the original. A parody (*parodia*) is a song written alongside another song, as though in the margins or between the lines of a prior book. The qualities we associate with style or 'voice' are important for its recognition, and Blake gives a great deal of attention to qualities of voice throughout the *Sketches*. His attention is not merely to isolated nuances or repetitions of prior voices in the form of verbal echoes, but to the power and potential of those voices as they are

inscribed in and practiced within a systematized code of poetic discourse—including those rhetorical techniques or strategies (like apostrophe, use of the pentameter) that operate to create the representational effect of a ‘speaking voice’ In the *Sketches* Blake may be read as ‘trying on’ a variety of voices, not in the superficial manner that one can try on a suit of clothing, but in the manner of his advice to God: “If you have formd a Circle to go into / Go into it yourself & see how you would do” (516).

Such trials do not in every case have to be critical or ironic, even if they are self-conscious and tentative. In *L’Allegro* Milton pretends to test the Allegro mode partly to see how it would do (“These delights, if thou canst give, / Mirth with thee, I mean to live.”), but also to find grounds to bid it go “hence,” to trope on it in order to *turn from* it to the pleasures of the melancholy prophetic mode in *Il Penseroso*. Like all poets after Milton, Blake tries both modes, but in doing so—in a poem like “Memory, hither come”—he shows that he understands how the two modes have been structured by Milton and his followers into a system, a poetic progression from the “merry notes” of the music of day to “places fit for woe; / Walking along the darken’d valley, / With silent Melancholy.” Blak’s “Mad Song” shows signs of discomfort with and in the systematic progression, representing the singer’s awareness that even though the system is constituted by his own song (“My notes.....strike the ear of night, / Make weep the eyes of day; / They make mad the roaring winds, / And with tempests play.”) he can imagine no way out of a system which links his potential for song with a cyclical diurnal progression. He must continually “turn” his back to the illusory “comforts” of the east, the daily return of the sun and the annual return of spring and eros, in order to remain in a metaphoric night of his own making.

I turn my back to the east,  
From whence comforts have increas’d;  
For light doth seize my brain  
With frantic pain.

The conventional seasonal invocation begins with an apostrophic address to the “east,” with the poet figuratively turning his back to the implied audience. There is then a ‘rhetorical’ madness in Blake’s song, where the fictive singer while trying to turn against the system can only turn within it. Light, whether the false light of the physical sun, or the metaphorical “light” of philosophical insight, seizes his *brain* in its epistemological grasp. He is much more like a lyrical photophobic

Edward Young than the Elizabethans with whom he is so often compared. The song "How sweet I roam'd" is quite different in tone and effect, but deserves comparison on a number of points. Chief among them is that recurring shock of recognition each time we read the poem and realize that *this* is the "song" that is sung in the "golden cage," with its "golden pleasures" and its "golden wing" incapable of free poetic flight. In it we can simultaneously hear Blake singing the song, indulging in its golden pleasure, and taking the role of the Phoebus who

loves to sit and hear me sing  
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me ;  
Then stretches out my golden wing,  
And mocks my loss of liberty.

There is a complex system of poetic power at work here, in which the seductive force of a poetic mode is inextricably intertwined with the powerlessness of that mode.

The seasons poems give us a three-fold use of the word "golden," with the third instance concluding the third season, as Autumn departs leaving behind his "golden load" or harvest of song.

#### TO SPRING

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers ; pour  
Thy soft kisses on her bosom ; and put  
Thy golden crown upon her languish'd head,  
Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee !

#### TO SUMMER

O thou, who pass'st thro' our vallies in  
Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat  
That flames from their large nostrils ! thou, O Summer,  
Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft  
Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld  
With joy, thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

#### TO AUTUMN

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit  
Beneath my shady roof.....  
Singing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.  
"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
"The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins ;  
"Blossoms hang round the brown of morning, and

"Flourish down the bright cheek of modest eve,  
 "Till clust' ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
 "And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.  
 "The spirits of the air live on the smells  
 "Of fruit ; and joy, with pinions light, roves round  
 "The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."  
 Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,  
 Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak  
 Hills fled from our sight ; but left his golden load.

Clearly there is here some version of a 'progress of poesy, that we must understand in order to read the poem. The Spring-Summer-Fall progression has tempted many critics to perceive a poetic alchemy in which Blake transforms his raw material into what Bloom calls "This 'golden load' " of lyricism, which "the departing poet bequeaths us" before leaving. Whereas 'How sweet I roam'd' is for Bloom an account of "the deceptions of nature as the responsible agent of transition" (19), he detects in *To Autumn* "a mature harvest bard who sings a song of fruition" (16).

Gleckner's essay of Blake's golden load determines, as so many readings do, that the Spring-Summer-Autumn series is superior visionary poetry, complete in itself, representing "the imaginative achievement of oneness, fullness, end joy" (69) in "a vision of what eternally exists really and unchangeably" (68). At the end "Autumn flees, but only from corporeal vision" (68), in a move that escapes the seasonal cycle which for Blake represents "error." Blake is thus deconstructing the "prevailing seasonal paradigm" (70) and "the conventional framework of the cycle" (71) which asserts "the comforts of a conventional rebirth of Spring to console our sense of loss in Winter—the very mythological construct and tradition Blake is at some pains to subvert. Time is not *the* Time" (73). In thus raising the question of Blake's relationship to discursive structures, and in particular to "seasonal and diurnal paradigms," Gleckner is moving towards an important context. However, by not having an adequate sense of those seasonal and diurnal paradigms—as they are embodied in 18th-century works such as Thomson's *Seasons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Cowper's *The Task*, Gleckner is unable to perceive either the similarities or the differences that might profitably guide our attention. In missing the point, he re-enacts the seasonal paradigm itself, ironically (for us) attributing that re-enactment to Blake, and confirming one of the basic truths of the paradigm—that what is most attractive in nature is also the most dangerous.

A more careful reading of Blake's precursors would show that the season of Winter was important for them precisely because it was the season *within* the seasons that forced a rupture of the otherwise endless cycle of the physical ratio. Winter provided the opportunity to experience the rupture of the moral sublime, in the form of a felt experience of the incomensurability between the empirical and the spiritual or rational, an experience that was occasioned by external sense yet forced a recognition of the need to transcend the limitations of external sense. Poets of the eighteenth century had already made a turn that Gleckner and others have missed, contrasting the authentic colors of Nature with the 'colours of rhetoric,' which were figurative only. But with the epistemology of Locke, linked with the discoveries of Newton in the *Opticks*, the colors of Nature were themselves brought into the realm of human language and rhetoric, requiring a new reading and opening the way to a new writing. The seasons themselves could thus be read as tropes—or 'turns' in a rhetorical progression and a tropological curriculum in which the *absence* of color (wintry whiteness for Thomson and Cowper, the blackness of night for Young) is the final trope of insight. Thomson's claim that his song called "Spring" is *painted* by Spring means that it is colored by the same "bright enchantment" that deceives those who do not have the "sage-instructed eye" which can separate the "ethereal" colors of the rainbow from the "white mingling maze" that cannot be directly perceived by the human eye or expressed in human language.<sup>3</sup>

The apostrophic trope that opens most poems addressed to seasons has the appearance of an authentic event, an act of power and participation. As a 'turn' (*apo—strophe*, turning away) from the reader to Nature, the poet can discover that the seasons are themselves turns in the year, consequences of the turns in the circuit of the sun. In apostrophizing Spring, Blake's opening poem turns to Spring ("our longing eyes are turned/ Up to thy bright pavillions") to ask Spring to "turn/ Thine angel eyes upon our western isle." For the first three seasons, natural event seems to correspond with and the respond to poetic event, responsive to the pathos of human desire, until we reach Winter where "He hears me not" and "I dare not lift mine eyes"—unable to perform the turning gesture which inaugurated the re-turn of Spring. Or did it? Turn in Winter is a turn in the circuit of communication which emphasizes a *break* in that circuit, and raises the possibility that the turning eyes and voice in the apostrophic discourse were united only in a contingent and illusory union.

Blake's Season poems need to be read in the context of a self-conscious use of figurative language in the interests of a verbal self-negation that

marks so much of the poetry of his precursors, and leads them to locate their vantage-point in *Winter*, on the metatropological level of irony which, though having to continue to use the naive tropes can, by using them self-consciously, evoke a difference that is expressed as the non-expressible, or represented as the non-representable. The "natural" seasonal turn to winter becomes a rhetorical turn to the trope of irony and difference, a turn away from the naive tropes of resemblance and contiguity that produce an illusory metaphoric golden load as the unproblematic affirmative fruit of the union of Logos and Eros—a turn that anticipates Elliot's world-weary equivalent of Blake's "Mad Song" which experiences April as "the cruelest month" and tries to turn its back to the east, as well as the humorous perspective of Burns' ode to spring in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* :

Latona's Sun looks liquorish on  
 Dame Nature's Grand impetus  
 Till his pego rise, then westward flies  
 To roger Madame Thetis

If we return now to Gleckner's reading of Blake's seasons, we can see more clearly some of the problems he has in adequately defining for Blake a "vision" that "is complete with the end of *To Autumn*, in its totality inherent in and symbolized by Autumn's 'golden load.'" The negative truth that Gleckner attributes to that vision is Blake's discovery of the 'error' of a contrary vision based on the paradigm of the natural cycle. This truth requires a final 'turn' *To winter*, and our reading of it as "a spectrous parody, in proper sequence, of Spring-Summer Autumn" (70). Such a reading, while claiming to define a Blake different from his seasonal precursors, unwittingly locates him in a prior discourse of Truth, already inscribed in a rhetorical system especially designed to produce it, so that interpreters can recognize its familiar iterability at the same time that they insist that it comes forth with the novelty and freshness of a new spring. In such a system, the same truth needs the same error, time after time, and cannot exist without it. The cycle of Truth ("coming and going . . . united") is inseparable from the cycle of Error. The truth that language can express in sensory images to express the truth.

Readers can 'find' this message in Blake's poems, not because they are different from the tropological curriculum of other season poems, but because they are in fact so much like them in general outline and technique. No doubt Blake was trying on the seasonal paradigm, going into and repeating its progression 'to see how he would do, and to see how *it*

would do. I imagine him therefore in a much more problematic and interesting situation, feeling strongly the tug of what Vico called "sensory topics," the libidinal tug of the East, and of the Sun continually rising as "the unique, irreplaceable, natural referent, around which everything must turn, toward which everything must turn" (Derrida, *Margins* 251). But I imagine Blake also feeling the counter-tug, of the sun as the paradigm of metaphor, the sensory sun which may exist in poetic discourse only as metaphor, that heliotropism which is both a movement turned toward the sun and the turning movement of the natural sun that *sets* each day as surely as it rises. Blake ambivalently contemplates this ambiguous "golden load," left behind by his troping precursors and by the ever-westerling Sun. Then he too flees from our sight, leaving a rhetorical "golden load" for our assay.

## II. MADE IN THE SHADE

*Sol tibi signa dabit. solem quis dicere falsum audeat ?* (Vergil)

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea

Of this invention, this invented world,

The inconceivable idea of the sun

(Wallace Stevens)

What we want is to . . . re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen.

(D.H. Lawrence)

The sun is the sensory object par excellence. It is the paradigm of the sensory *and* of metaphor: it regularly turns (itself) and hides (itself). As the metaphoric trope always implies a sensory kernel, or rather something like the sensory, which can always not be present in act and in person, and since the sun in this respect is the sensory signifier of the sensory par excellence, that is, the sensory model of the sensory . . . then the turning of the sun always will have been the trajectory of metaphor. (Derrida)

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But phoebus was

A name for something that never could be named.

There was a project for the sun and is.

(Wallace Stevens)

One of the most widely shared views of the eighteenth century was that civilization and the arts flourish best, and could only have started, in a temperate zone. In an imagined golden age before the fall, when the ecliptic and equatorial circles coincided, this special relationship with the sun would have been perpetually maintained in certain favored

equinoctial areas where sowing and harvest could follow their own rhythm. With the tilting of the earth's axis, the ecliptic became oblique, and the alternations of the seasons began. Whether Christian or pagan, seasonal poetry must locate itself in a special relationship to the sun in order to flourish. We can see Blake's test carefully defining this relationship in *To Summer*, in preparation for the 'fruitful' song of Autumn:

Beneath our thickest shades we oft have heard  
Thy voice, when noon upon his fervid car  
Rode o'er the deep of heaven; beside our springs  
Sit down . . . , .

Our bards are fam'd who strike the silver wire:  
Our youth [s] are bolder than the southern swains:  
Our maidens fairer in the sprightly dance:  
We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,  
Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,  
Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

The sun leaves Virgo near the end of August to enter Libra, where the autumnal equinox coincides with the 'time' of Blake's *Autumn*. Blake's "shades" here are autumnal, as the song of jolly Autumn evokes the full vegetable spectrum from spring to harvest. It is a special kind of shade conducive to poetry, but it is also the special 'shade' of the laurel wreath, the shade of pastoral poetry, which defines a situation close to but protected from nature; not a transitory diurnal shade, or a seasonal equinox, but a literary *topos* (i.e. "place") which presumes to escape the contingencies of a fallen natural world and reconstitute of the golden age before the fall. By Blake's time, as recorded in Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" (1768), the "track" of pastoral had followed the sun westward, leaving 'parnassus' for the Latian plains, "moving north to "climes beyond the solar road" so that Shakespeare could be born "far from the sun and summer-gale."

It is by locating Blake's inaugural poems in the context of pastoral poetic tropes that we can best see his point of entry into the practice of poetry, and see his work as paradigmatic for poetry and its interpretation. Pastoral has a special place among the genres as a set of organizing and enabling conventions and a hallowed function as the organizing genre for the progression of the poetic 'career.' As such part of its function is to be ostensibly left behind by the poet, while its organizing effects, though hidden, continue to determine the fate of poetry. "What is the pastoral convention, then, if not the eternal separation between the mind that distinguishes, negates, legislates, and the ordinary simplicity

of the natural ? . . . There is no doubt that the pastoral theme is, in fact, they only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself" (de Man, *Blindness* 239).

This 'convention' was inaugurated in England by Spenser's *Shepherd's calendar* (1579), confirming the vergilian 'progression' and making pastoral the inevitable beginning point for a poetic career. In this tradition the young poet finds his starting-point to be situated by the pastoral *umbra* and especially prepared for his beginning efforts.<sup>5</sup> Although sheltered, it is a place in a dynamic system which turns, moving the poet forward, so that the beginning gesture in the genre receives the promise of self-transcendence: "to invoke it is already to assume the insufficiency of the tradition in the very act of rehearsing its tropes" (Fish, 6) "That is, the desire of the poet to rise above the pastoral is itself a pastoral convention and when the speaker . . . gives voice to that desire he succeeds only in demonstrating the extent to which his thoughts and actions are already inscribed in the tradition from which he would be separate . . . he is only playing out the role assigned him in a drama not of his making" (Fish, 10). Pastoral is thus continuously aiming at (or turning, troping towards) something it is not, something absent, something greater on the ascending scale of generic progression. But it is much easier to get into this pastoral machine than to get out of it, as the singer in Blake's "golden cage" ("How sweet I roam'd . . .") found out too late.

A comparison of the infant's entry into language (*infans*, incapable speech) with the poet's entry into poetic discourse can add a certain emphasis to this point. Both are instances of the individual's assumption of the place produced for him by a complex of discursive formations; and in both cases what appears to be a new beginning reveals that the subject always already finds itself and its discourses in place.<sup>6</sup> As tales of origin, both take the same form of a 'diachronic fable of a synchronic functioning' (MacCabe 87). In the development of a child there is a moment when the child enters language by becoming aware of certain places which s/he can occupy as a speaking subject; these places are identity-producing points of insertion into language. In pastoral winter is typically represented as a time before speech is possible, the silence before speech blossoms in spring and to which it returns in the cycle ("He withers all in silence" *To Winter*). In the meantime there is a 'temperate' zone of poetic utterance, that pastoral zone which defines in de Man's phrase--the only poetic theme . . . poetry itself."

Vergil's first *Eclogue*, in the pastoral convention that provides the aegis for all seasonal poems, had articulated the poet's place as that occupied by Tityrus (*Lentus in umbra*, "relaxed in the shade"), whose special

location allows uninterrupted fertility for his crops and flocks, and the corresponding leisure for poetic production. In this he differs markedly from Meliboeus, whose lack of protection means he must drive his goats on an unending path, a slave to the seasonal sun, ranging the world from the torrid deserts of Africa to the frigid climes of England (*At nos hinc alii sititientes ibimus Afros . . . et Penitus toto divison orbe Britannos*). Commentary has speculated since Servius on the human identity of the absent protector / benefactor who provides Tityrus with his creative *libertas*, but I would like to suggest as a metaphorical alternative that the absent benefactor is the sun, whose *absence* (as natural force and object) is necessary to provide an artistic place of *libertas* for the free reign of the poet's tropes.

If the possible subject of poetic enunciation is already inscribed in the synchronic pastoral machine which constantly provides the only and already-available position characteristic of any discursive formation, then that position can be seen to have a special relationship to the sun, a prototypical relationship characteristic of that between all signifiers and their 'real' signifieds, which are mental constructs rather than the natural objects with which they have only a rhetorical relationship. Our experience of the natural sun embodies this relationship of presence / absence with unusual clarity, so that the natural relation has become exemplary for poetic troping.<sup>7</sup> we are affected by the sun without seeing it directly, and our mediated perception (in the 'shade' of language) is *figured* by the literal impossibility of looking directly at the sun without becoming blind. Lucretius warning that the sun will blind you if you gaze at it (*sol etiam caecat, contra si tendere pergas*) can only be ignored in language used as allegory:

Last of all, he would be able to look at the sun and contemplate its nature, not as it appears when reflected in water or any alien medium, but as it is in itself in its own domain. (230)

Plato's metaphor for ultimate philosophical insight here does not contradict the fact that "unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility" (de Man, *Blindness* 9) but embodies that fact in its language-mediated troping on the equation between natural blindness and philosophical insight.

The epistemological model of this relationship was worked out by a number of thinkers in the seventeenth century, with Descartes third meditation being one of the clearest and most accessible examples. The distinction he makes between "adventitious ideas" (that appear "foreign to me and coming from without"), ideas that are "innate," and those that are "made or invented by me" (196-7) leads him to the example of the sun as exemplary instance :

For example, I find present to me two completely diverse ideas of the Sun; the one in which the Sun appears to me as extremely small is, it would seem, derived from the senses, and to be counted as belonging to the class of *adventitious ideas*; the other, in which the Sun is taken by me to be many times larger than the whole Earth, has been arrived at by way of astronomical reasonings, that is to say, elicited from certain notions *innate in me*, or *formed by me in some other manner*. Certainly, these two ideas of the Sun cannot both resemble the same Sun; and reason constrains me to believe that the one which seems to have emanated from it in a direct manner is the more unlike. (198-99 italics added) <sup>8</sup>

Since the 'made' sun (one of the *factae vel factitiae* 19) has "more objective reality" than the natural sun, it can be carried over metaphorically to figure the "innate" idea of the sun which hides its rhetorical origins in the image of the "inexhaustible light" of a God who dazzles the powers of the human mind as the natural sun dazzles its powers of sensory perception. <sup>9</sup>

Hobbes echoes the dynamic aspect of this 'constructed' sun by finding the model for its making already in the mediated structure of sensory experience. For him our sense of outward forms comes neither directly from external objects nor from the "divers motions" exerted by those objects on the senses. Instead, it is the "resistance or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself" of the pressure of those motions (85). What we call "sense . . . in all cases, is nothing else but originall fancy, and our image making faculty ["Imagination"] is what "is called *Sight*; and seemeth not to be mere Imagination, but the Body itself without us" (85, 657). Imagination is a faculty of mediation (i. e. an *umbra*) which functions in the *absence* of the objects of sense perception: "and the motion made by this pressure, continuing after the object is removed, is that we call *Imagination* and *Memory*" (658).

For Hobbes our "image" of the sun, like our "idea" of it, is known only through the inward motions of the heart, an inward imagination that produces light in spite of the 'blindness' of natural perception. Imagination, or "decaying sense" (88) can reappropriate as metaphor the solar phenomenon of the eclipse as an external image of internal phenomena: "The decay of Sense in men wakig, is not the decay of the motion made in sense; but an obscuring of it, in such manner, as the light of the Sun obscureth the light of the Starres, which starres do no less exercise their vertue by which they are visible, in the day, than in the night" (88).

These two models, the ontological and the epistemological, exhibit the conceptual basis for the endless set pieces on the sun that shine out with special brilliance in seventeenth- and eighteenth century poetry. Cut off from sensory perceptions, safe in the rhetorical shade of his nocturnal *umbra* ("from objects free, from passion cool . . . these tutelary shades/ Are man's asylum") Young revels in the "Darkness [that] strikes thought inward . . . drives back the soul/ To settle on herself, our point supreme!" (*Night V*, 120-130). From this withdrawn vantage point the domain of language turns heliotropically towards the "dominions" of the sun:

Full ample the dominions of the sun !  
Full glorious to behold ! How far, how wide,  
The matchless monarch, from his flaming throne,  
Lavish of lustre, throws his beams about him,  
Farther and faster than a thought can fly,  
And feeds his planets with eternal fires !

(*Night IX*, 1617-22)

The dazzling radiance of the absent sun becomes an implicit figure for the poet, also "lavish of lustre," who throws out his tropes like rays of light emitted from the sun. In both cases the *effect* of presence and familiarity hides by its brightness and vividness the absence that makes it possible:

Behold the light emitted from the Sun,  
What more familiar, and what more unknown ?  
While by its spreading Radiance it reveals  
All Nature's Face, it still itself conceals.

Blackmore ii/ 386-9)

If we can leap now, from Descartes in his little room and Edward Young at his midnight desk, to Proust in his corklined study, we find him writing a passage in *Swann's Hay* that both hides and reveals his scene of writing. Having resisted his grandmother's suggestion that he go outside to play, Marcel finds his place "stretched out on [his] bed, with a book, in [his] room which sheltered, tremblingly, its transparent and fragile coolness from the afternoon sun."<sup>10</sup> The only light in the room is a "glimmer of daylight" which is captured in the image of "Yellow wings" as it remains "motionless . . . poised like a butterfly."

It was hardly light enough to read, and the sensation of the light's splendor was given me only by the noise of Camus . . . and also by the flies executing their little concert, the chamber music of summer: evocative not in the manner of a human tune that, heard *perchance* during the summer, afterwards reminds you of it but *connected to summer by a more necessary link*: born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, *containing some of their essence*, it does not only awaken their image in our memory it guarantees their return, *their actual, persistent, unmediated presence*.

The dark coolness of my room related to the full sunlight of the street as the shadow relates to the ray of light, that is to say it was just as luminous and it gave my imagination the total spectacle of the summer, whereas my senses, if I had been on a walk, could only have enjoyed it by fragments . . . (italics added).

De Man gives this passage what he calls "a rhetorically conscious reading" (*Allegories* 15) by following the movement of its tropes as they express two different ways of evoking the natural experience of summer--the difference between chance/contiguity (metonymy) and necessity/analogy (metaphor). For my purposes here the names of the tropes are not as important as the underlying distinction, which is the same one that marks the crucial Romantic opposition between symbol and allegory. For Coleridge the symbol is a motivated sign; "it always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative," while allegorical signs are "but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter" (30).<sup>11</sup> For Proust the indirect sunlight and the music of the flies seem at first

to offer the necessary link" of the motivated sign or symbol, free from the fortuitous chance of sensory experience which can yield only fragments. The passage can be seen as self-referential in its implicit claims to have transcended the contingent natural world through the kind of mastery by which a lepidopterist captures a specimen and mounts it on a board. But de Man exposes the dependence of this dominion (of essential figures of substitution) on contingent figures of substitution, so that the "return" or "resurrection" of the flies in the text is a "rhetorical mystification" in which "metaphor becomes a blind metonymy" (102).

De Man's concern here with the battle between the tropes can create its own mystification, but it can also help us to see that the real battle being staged is between 'nature' and 'art'. In this encounter *both* metaphor and metonymy are crucial weapons, but each has a drawback which makes it inadequate alone to create the illusion of permanently present value. Metaphor, which relies on resemblance and analogy, can create the effect of an unchanging relationship in the absence of one of its terms or elements; but the other side of this effectiveness is that its terms must always be separate and distinct-- I can assert "x is y" metaphorically when x is *not* y (otherwise I would be making a literal statement, not a figurative one). So if I write "Love is golden," only certain parts of the 'gold' are carried over in the metaphoric transfer because--as Midas found out--love and gold are different. As signifiers both words are present in my discourse, their signifieds absent; yet I can claim a link or relationship that obtains between "love" and "gold" even if there is neither love nor gold in the world. If I write "the air is golden" (even though at the moment it is raining) my implicit claim is that the sun is shining or glimmering through the air; the air will be golden only as long as the contingent relationships (sun, air and clouds, my position, etc.) remain the same. But these are notoriously transitory.

As the metaphor finds a permanent link dependent on separation metonymy finds a contingent link, a moment of proximity that cannot remain in a world of comings and goings. With this distinction in mind, we can now see more clearly the strategy of proust's text, which is to achieve the *combined* effect of metaphor and metonymy, thereby convincing us that Marcel *really was* in that room as described. Of course that fleeting moment ("fragile . . . poised like a butterfly") is gone; but its departure testifies to its authenticity, since it must have been there to

fade. It can be "resurrected" in the 'present' text being written by "Marcel" ("I had stretched out...") and the resurrection confirms for us that Marcel was there in the shade "with a book" that he was writing about "a book" that he was reading *in the same shade*. But the real 'Marcel' for us is Proust, whom we must read and 'resurrect' in *our shade*.

The important opposition here is not simply between metaphor and metonymy for both are, in spite of their differences, merely tropes. The difference is between "the chamber music of summer" and a 'human tune' only "heard perchance during the summer" which therefore will only "remind you" by an accidental association. For Coleridge this was the distinction between the Imagination (which worked like nature in achieving its organic unities) and the Fancy, which was arbitrary and mechanical. We can see in it also the contrast between the plenitude of nature with its motivated signs and the emptiness of human writing, the arbitrariness of human signifiers. It is precisely this distinction that allows writing to triumph over nature by losing to nature, since the Nature that triumphs over art is itself an *effect* produced by an art that hides its artfulness. Proust's text must suggest the evocative quality of the "flies little concert," which in turn is evocative of summer because the song is "born from beautiful days, resurrecting only when they return, containing some of their essence." The text's change at this point to the present tense emphasizes the paradoxical *identity* of the two modes of song which are being contrasted; what was is, and will always be, because of the "necessary link" between the flies' "little concert" and beautiful days. The ambiguous reference of the pronoun ("it does not only awaken their image in our memory; it guarantees their return, their actual, persistent, unmediated presence") / "*elle n'en reveille pas seulement l'image dans notre memoire, elle en certifie le retour la presence effective, ambiante, immediately accessible*") and the emphatic shift to the present tense wagers a redemptive identity between the music of the flies and the evocative power of the text. The punning trope "chamber music of summer" ("*la musique de chambre*") shows that the music, like the flies themselves, can exist for us only as textual effects, chamber music produced and consumed in the pastoral *umbra* of a darkened room ("*dans ma chambre Cette obscure frocheur de ma chambre*"). For we too are figured in the triumph of the text, produced as readers who like Marcel turn our backs on nature for the text which has captured and unified its essence.

At this point we could linger over Proust's text, and listen also to the 'chamber music' of Keats's "small gnats" that provide their similar fragile

[ metonymic link ("borne aloft/ Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies"  
*To Autumn*), or listen to Yeats's "sensual music" in *Sailing to Byzantium* :

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
— — Those dying generations — at their song,  
The salmon — falls, the mackerel — Crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.

Yeats changed his opening from "This..." to "That...", reflecting the way in which the voyage "to Byzantium" is always over before the poem begins. A "that" can only be produced by a "this", in a mutual production. In order to escape from being "Caught in that sensual music" and to get "out of nature" the poet aspires to a higher "artifice of eternity" In the meantime *that* "sensual music" has been caught in the golden cage of *this* poem's form, the 'Chamber music' of its ottava rima stanzas (*stanza*, "room").

Once the effect of the opposition between nature and art (symbol and allegory, metonymy and metaphor, inside and outside, etc.) has been established *within* a text, then the text (or its 'textuality') will always win. The strategy of Gray's "Ode on the Spring" can provide a final, more humorous example. In the first 'stanza' the poet calls on spring to "wake the purple year" to new life, so that the poet can retire beneath an "oak's thick branches."

Beside some water's rushy brink  
With me the Muse shall sit, and think  
(At ease reclined in rustic state)  
How vain the ardour of the crowd,  
How low, how little are the proud,  
How indigent the great !

Nature would seem to have produced a special vantage - point from which position, paradoxically elevated though "reclined," the poet can look down on the many, the proud, the great. As the images of shade and coolness in the first stanza evoke in turn the mediating shade and metonymic presence of the sun, so in the second stanza the generic flies appear as "insect youth," floating "amid the liquid noon" and reflecting sunlight in their "gaily-gilded trim." In the third stanza the poet conspicuously

appropriates the flies for reflection in "Contemplation's sober eye" and for a metaphor of the "race of man." The "race" image is ironic, for all progressive motion is circumscribed in the "airy dance" of lives that "end where they began" whether "brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,/ Or chilled by age." At this point we might well be struck by the circularity of a poetic progression looking for its origin and finding it first in the shade (whence the poet called on the sun and spring to come and *make* the shade), and then in the 'dead' cliché of the flies' dance of death, causing the poem itself to end where it began, in the dust of dead metaphors. But this closed circuit of bookish rebirth is ruptured in the fourth stanza when the flies ("the sportive kind") turn the tables on Contemplation's sober eye, labling the poet "A solitary fly!" who violates the "race" of nature, who *begins* where he should *end*, with death.

On hasty wings thy youth is flown ;  
 Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone—  
 We frolic, while 'tis May.

The chain of substitutions here seems to lead to the desired effect of a structured truth—progression that moves towards victory for an authentic originary voice of Nature. That voice says "we frolic" *now* "while 'tis May", providing a putdown/send-up of the pedantic poet caught in the intertextual circuit or pastiche of his clichés. We can see, however, that the flies have not broken the circuitous web through their opposition between "we" and "thou", but have simply taken their preinscribed place. Seeming to win, they instead lose to the poet who has 'won' by staging his own defeat. The endless regression of preinscribed commonplaces is ruptured by a 'return' to the synchronic 'return' of nature, reborn every year as fresh as ever, redeeming dead metaphors as well as the dead land. The implied redemption of poetic language is made explicit by Rosamund Tuve in her assertion that "the commonplaces of seasons poetry are.. not traceable to any 'influence' except life under the same stars" (58). But that vision of life and art unified under and by the stars is only an effect produced within language, a (very common—) place within discourse ready long before Tuve occupied it, a self-serving commonplace *about* commonplaces that can be repeated indefinitely ("Moreover, as Rosamund Tuve *properly* has warned us .." Gleckner 57).

If we glance now at Blake's texts (especially *Summer - Fall*) we can see that he has exploited the same devices in the same ways to the same effects, although the ambiguity of his structure makes it equally possible to read several messages; art is superior to nature, nature is superior to

art, Blake's art combines both nature and art, is superior to both nature and art, etc. The complete annual circuit of the sun is evoked, from absence ("our longing eyes are turned/ Up") in spring to absence ("I dare not lift mine eyes") in winter. The effect of presence is produced in summer ("we oft have heard thy voice") through the mediating figure of echoes and reflected light :

We lack not songs, nor instruments of joy,  
Nor echoes sweet, nor waters clear as heaven,  
Nor laurel wreaths against the sultry heat.

The effect is intensified in *To Autumn* by a move to the imperative present tense ("Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers"), and the quotation marks suggest that we have the actual *words* sung by Autumn, in the form of "a song of praise for what the land does under Autumn's auspices" (Gleckner 67). But the effect of the quotation marks also confuses the identity of the singer. Autumn does not produce words put fruits; if words are the 'fruits' of Autumn they are so by metaphor only, so that we can take these as the words of the poet (or "a mature harvest Bard" for Bloom, *Apocalypse* 15) indulging in an implicit prosopopoeia. The confusion is further compounded by the effect of another song *within* this song within a song, as the response to "Sing now" is the turn elsewhere, back to spring when "The narrow bud opens her beauties to/ The sun... Till clust ring Summer breaks forth into singing." The authentic and authenticating "jolly voice" (as "song of fruits," song that grows like fruit, is about fruit, and is fruit) doubles the poet's own song of seasonal/solar progression from Spring to Summer. It starts not with full-blown flowers, but with "blossoms" that "hang." And the present tense, like the blossoms themselves, turns out to be past, anticipating the climax of Autumn's song in the "singing" of "clust' ring Summer" which is also past and then the Autumn's song (where *was* it ?) gives way to the past of "He sang", and to the absence that turns out to have governed the whole 'progression which, while seeming to move forward, has only produced a series of copies of itself within itself, a *mise-en-abyme* of representation without origin or referent'

But few readers read the poems this way, because they are designed to focus our attention elsewhere and to produce a different effect of organic progression and unity. It is in this "clust' ring" effect of union (a cluster is a group of things or persons 'growing together' into a 'clot') that the combined play of metaphor and metonymy can best hide itself as rhetoric, so that we 'hear' the song of Autumn as we 'heard' Marcel's flies. That

the effect can be overpowering is evidenced by Gleckner's ecstatic rhapsody in the verb-mood of reality, the indicative: "Love now *is* united with the land: earth and season *are* one. Blacke accents this union .. the song of the season and the songs of the land *are* the same songs. Autumn indeed *is* definable now only in terms of its union with the earth: it *is* 'laden with fruit'; it *is* 'clust' ring Summer'; it *is*, in succession, poetry, dance, fruits and flowers, buds and beauties, the sun, love and the blood pulsing through human veins, blossoms, morning and eve.. song, spirits of the air, joy, gardens, trees." Blake's Autumn is no allegorical "Spenserian reaper holding 'in his hand a sickle'. Instead he *is* his fruits" (67-68, italics added). It is "Blake's vision" that reveals all this to us, a vision based on "ideas, concepts, not percepts" but which has the "solidity of symbol and the sensory verbal qualities" (68). This Autumn that "*is* his fruits" flees for Gleckner, but "only from corporeal vision" (68) so that "Blake's vision" can be "ontologically verified by his (Autumn's? Blake's?) disappearance from sight" (69) "Autumn may be 'fled from our sight, but his 'golden load' is clearly the wholeness of the seasons as Blake's vision has just revealed that to us" (67).

### III. Nor all that glisters gold

Money is a kind of poetry (Wallace Stevens)

The poem functions like gold (Ezra Pound)

I would have some body put the Muses under a kind of contribution to furnish out whatever they have in them that bears any relation to Coins. (Addison)

But how *has* "Blake's vision" revealed that "golden load" to us, and what are we as readers left with in the form or figure of a "golden load?" Have we too become like "The spirits of the air (that) live on the smells/ Of fruit?" If there is the *smell* of fruit, there must ("through his (Blake's) fusion of cause and effect, tenor and vehicle, literal and figurative" (68) *be* fruit 'there' somewhere. But the fruit has always gone, leaving behind only the metonymy of 'smell', and even metonymies can only 'smell' figuratively. So what can we make of the ambiguous "golden load" that seems to shimmer before us, offering itself as a reward for reading the poem as Melville's "gold doubloon" offered itself to the first one to "see" the white whale? At the threshold of its departure the light of the sun is caught briefly by clouds and motes in the air which 'reflect' it most just before the darkness of its absence. But this is the most transitory of phenomena, and since the sun is always coming and going it is our contingent relationship—or vantage point—that constitutes

the threshold of arrival or departure. To trope on the image of shimmering air is to trope on the contingencies of transitory relations, to lose the golden load even in the act of imaging it. Something of the permanent effect of metaphor is necessary if the "load" is not to slip through our fingers, but it must be a "symbolic" metaphor, one that in Coleridge's terms "always partakes of the Reality which is renders intelligible" rather than "empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with the apparitions of matter" (what Melville's Ishmael would call a "hideous and intolerable allegory"). The task for the poet's words is an alchemical one, to trope on tropes themselves, as "a material of vulgar origin," turning them from a de-based analogon of 'real' gold into the thing itself.<sup>12</sup>

But 'real gold' is already so implicated in tropological circuits that for the poet it can only function as the metaphor of metaphor; and it is gold's remarkable availability to be taken *as something else* which allows it to circulate as the measure of that 'real value' which is always elsewhere. As Marx points out, the precious metals are useless in the direct process of production and easily dispensed with as articles of consumption or means of existence (130). Their value inheres instead in how they appear: "*Sie erscheinen gewissermassen als gedigenes Licht, das aus der Urteruelt hervorgegeben wird, indem das Silber alle Lichtstrahlen in ihrer ursprunglichen Mischung, das Gold nur die hochste Potenz der Farbe, das Rot, zuruckwirft's* (130) / "They appear in a way, as spontaneous light brought out from the underground world, since silver reflects all rays of light in their original combination, and gold only the color of highest intensity, viz. red light" (Stone 211). Traditionally gold stands for the absent sun, its 'shining' ability to reflect red light giving it the effect of a literalized metaphor of the sun, or of an actual deppcit produced and left behind by it. Since the sun is the putative source of all 'natural' production, the *appearance* of gold produces the effect of an essential value. "Nature no more produces money than it does bankers or discount rates. But since the capitalist system of production requires the *crystallization* of wealth as a fetish in the form of a single article (*den Reichthum als Fetisch in der Form eines einzelnen Dings kristallisieren mus'*"), gold and silver appear as its appropriate incarnation (*Inkarnation*). Even while denying its 'naturalness,' Marx here invokes the metaphor of the myth of natural solar production (*kristallisieren, Inkarnation*) for that 'silver or gold money crystal' which is "not only the product of the process of circulation, but in fact is its only final product" (131)<sup>13</sup> Thus "the universal product of the social process or the social process itself as a peculiar natural product, a metal hidden in the bowels of the earth and extracted therefrom (131).

The 'peculiarity' of gold as a 'natural product' is its combination of durability, malleability and relative indestructibility, together with its *Schein*, all of which allow it to "appear, in a way, as spontaneous light." "Spontaneous" is only one of many ways to translate the adjective in Marx's *gediegenes Licht*, but all of them emphasize genuine value (*gediegen*, "solid, massy, unmixed, pure, genuine, true, superior"). The relationship of gold to that value is its "shining in a certain way" (*Sie erscheinen gewissermassen*"), so that it has a *Schein*, an "appearance" (the meaning can range from "light" to an I. O. U. or paper money. Thus insofar as the power to appear (i. e. to reflect or represent) is understood to be an essential part of the gold itself, we might say that gold offers itself oxymoronically as a *gediegan Schein*, a source of value and the appearance of value combined, as if the gold reflects itself or is its own reflection.

There is another way in which gold "becomes idealized within the process of circulation" (116). For gold properly to circulate as money, it must be stamped with an inscription that indicates its value, and the fact that the inscription is *on the coin* gives it an indisputable authenticity. But in spite of its special natural properties, the process of circulation which *realizes* gold's ability to function as a medium of exchange also *idealizes* its essence. "The circulation of money is a movement through the outside world... In the course of its friction against all kinds of hands, pouches, pockets, purses, money-belts, bags, chests and strong-boxes, the coin rubs off, loses one gold atom here and another one there and thus, as it wears off in its wanderings over the world, it loses more and more of its intrinsic substance. By being used it gets used up... It is clear, says an anonymous writer, that, in the very nature of things, coins must depreciate one by one as a result of ordinary and unavoidable friction" (88). This leads the coin almost instantly to a situation in which it "represents more metal than it actually contains" so that the longer it circulates the greater the discrepancy between its form (as inscribed coin) and its substance, until finally "the body of the coin becomes but a shadow" (89). This inevitable decay—so often compared with the *usage* of language and metaphor—assures that the gold coins will become "transformed by the very process of circulation into more or less of a mere sign or symbol" (91)

"But no thing can be its own symbol" (91), and gold will be 'brought to rest' to form a *hoard* or "*Schatz*" (105), which will be substituted for in the process of circulation by "subsidiary mediums" "*subsidiären Zirkulationsmittel*" (91) which can "serve as symbols of gold coin not because they are symbols made of silver or copper, not because they have certain value, but

only in so far as they have no value." We thus have a series of substitution (from exchange value of commodities to gold money, sublimated by circulation into its own symbol, first in the form of worn coin, then in the form of subsidiary metal currency) which ends "finally in the form of a worthless token, paper, mere *sign of value*" (94). At this point the state, which at first only impressed its stamp on gold, "seems now to turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp" (98). And paper money, worthless in itself, can circulate as a signifier of difference, mediating between the relative worth of commodities based on the consumers' faith in the presence elsewhere of the absent signified whose value is governed by labor value or the system of 'natural productivity' governed by the sun. The importance of 'faith' in this system of exchange is brought home by Marx's approving paraphrase of Bishop Berkeley, who asked, "if the denomination of the coin remains, after the metal has gone the way of all flesh, cannot the circulation of commerce still be maintained?" [*Werke*, 97: "*Wenn die Denomination der Munze beibehalten wird, nachdem ihr Metall den Weg alles Fleisches gegangen, wurde nicht dennoch die Zirkulation den Handels fortbestehn?*"]. Berkeley's point is that the presence—even elsewhere—of something that is absent from "the circulation of commerce" is unnecessary, since it functions precisely as an absence. With this comment we find ourselves located in a structured system of exchange that needs both absence and faith the structure of writing:

When a man writes, he is in a structure that needs his absence as its necessary condition (writing is defined as that which can necessarily be read in the writer's absence), and entails his pluralization. Writers ignore this troubling necessity and desire to record the living act of a sole self—an auto-biography. Whatever the argument of a document, the marks and staging of this resistance are its 'scene of writing.' When a person reads, the scene of writing is usually ignored and the argument is taken as the product of a self with a proper name. Writers and readers are thus accomplices in the ignoring of the scene of writing. The accounts of texts are informed by this complicity. (Spivak 19)

Whether we call it "complicity" or "faith," this newest fable of writing is the rediscovery in our time of a link between absence and writing that is probably as old as the invention of writing as a practice that depends on and exploits.<sup>15</sup>

We can now see the importance of "Blake's" in my title, and in Gleckner's repeated phrase "Blake's vision." After the sterility of a

debased rhetorically wintry age, Blake's voice seems to call out and by its power transform the 'climate' of English poetry into the spring of Romanticism. The imputed power of his authentic word not only names being as a presence, it *calls itself into being* as the authentic utterance of a subject William Blake who says (i. e. writes) "Sing now" and whose voice becomes one with nature, present to us as the natural emanation of a transcendental principle higher even than nature, an epiphany of a permanent presence ordinarily hidden from 'vision', which can be revealed through the poetic word. The poet in this system takes the place of the dazzling absent sun/god, who can both sanction and be *credited* with everything discovered in his verse. Blake's vision is the "golden load" of a treasure which he has produced alchemically from the debased coin of previous poetic discourse, and that is his property—"proper" to him—as the effective agent of transformation. It is a treasure hoard which he has taken out of the value-destroying "circulation" of language or prior discourse, a poetic treasure removed even from the circuit of the natural sun and the seasons ("language *turns*, so to speak, as the earth turns" / Derrida, *Grammatology* 216) and kept elsewhere to prevent decay :

Re—engravd Time after Time  
 Ever in their youthful prime  
 My Designs (shall still *del.*) unchangd remain  
 Time may rage but rage in vain  
 For above Times troubled Fountains  
 On the Great Atlantic Mountains,  
 In my Golden House on high  
 There they Shine Eternally (480-81)

This is one of Blake's many versions of the system of circulation, and one which contains an interesting change precisely at the point of asserting the permanence of an absent treasure, suggesting perhaps that what the work of art is, is not what it is supposed to be. Instead of presence, we have yet another golden metaphor of presence. Presence itself is preserved by remaining absent. What circulates 'below' the "Golden House on high" are only messengers, Blake's 'messages' that circulate like paper money, their value dependent on faith in the author as autonomous subject and source of value, dependent on the authority of his intentions. Like the sun itself, we cannot see those intentions directly, only the *Schein* of its golden load. The relationship is one for which Locke takes gold as his prime example, where the appearance of gold in its secondary qualities must "depend" on (i. e. "hang from") its "substance" (that which

“stands under”). For Locke, the gap between the essence of a substance and its *Schein* means that we can never know true gold. “For let it be ever so true, that all gold, i. e. all that has the real essence of gold, is fixed, what serves this for, whilst we know not, in this sense, *what is or is not gold*? For if we know not the real essence of gold, it is impossible we should know what parcel of matter has that essence, and so whether *it* be true gold or no” (2, 97).

Added to the uncertainty of the relation between the appearance and the essence of gold is the inevitable slippage between the signifier “gold” and its signified, for “the precise signification of the names of substances will be found not only not to be well established, but also very hard to be so” (2, 114). “That which I mean is this, that these being all but properties, depending on its real constitution, and nothing but powers, either active or passive, in reference to other bodies, no one has authority to determine the signification of the word gold (as referred to such a body existing in nature) more to one collection of ideas to be found in that body than to another : whereby the signification of that name must unavoidably be very uncertain” (2, 116).

Marx provided an alternative to this lack of authority when he observed that as the state, in fixing its mint price, gave “a certain name to a piece of gold,” so the state “can turn paper into gold by the magic of its stamp (98). For those involved in the economy of poetry and literary interpretation this function of the state is performed by the literary establishment through its various departments or ‘interpretive communities,’ which seem to be the agencies that establish the exchange value of the poet’s “endless monument” reared against the way of all flesh.<sup>15</sup>

De Man has identified as a typical response to the poetic “monument” that practice which he calls ‘monumentalizing’ in which “the dead are made to have a face and a voice which tells the allegory of their demise and allows us to apostrophize them in our turn. No degree of knowledge can ever stop this madness, for it is the madness of words” If *knowledge* cannot stop the madness of language itself, what are we to do? “What would be naive is to *believe* that this strategy .. can be a source of value and has to be celebrated or denounced accordingly” (Shelley” 73, italics added), Either to celebrate or denounce “accordingly” would be to play the same naive game ‘of the heart’ (*accordare*, from *cor*) which seeks to bring into agreement the play of language and the real world. The high rhetorical tone of de Man’s announcement that we must give up the pursuit of literature as a *source, of value* and that we must also renounce

the temptation to denounce, would thus be yet another example of that madness of language. For him to *announce* is rhetorically to *denounce*, to become a 'messenger' (both words come from *nuntius*, 'messenger', and originally meant the same thing) of a different truth, a truth—or inevitability (*toujours d'ja*)—of the no—truth of *differance*. A "renounce" is the failure to follow suit in a card game. We might say that de Man has taken up Descartes invitation to *jouer aux cartes*, but failed to follow suit, instead trumping Descartes' ontological suit with that of a 'trickster god' of language who makes and rules (madly) all discourse—the only game in town while we wait for another trump, the last trump that signals the harvest of death. Until the end, he pursued his project to show that the claims of metaphor and symbol, the most privileged of Romantic tropes, can always on closer reading be decomposed into chains of metonymic or causal—associative formations. The attempts of Romantic metaphor to 'carry over' a metaphoric golden load that bridges the gap between the dualisms of subject/object, man/nature, inward outward, can do so only by hiding its own rhetorical path, passing off as self—sufficient metaphor or symbol a golden load that can always be seen to be a kind of allegory whose 'message' is artificially contrived and sustained.

Relentlessly, he called our attention to the paper money of allegory, that 'other word' which is all we can ever *read*. Paradoxically, such efforts can seem to value the efforts of Romanticism precisely because they so clearly fail to make good their promise, producing instead language that approaches an inevitable limit in self—conscious reflection on its own nature and genesis. In doing so, de Man had to resist even the temptation "to conclude that our own literary modernity has reestablished contact with a 'true' Enlightenment that remained hidden from us by a nineteenth—century Romantic and realist epistemology that asserted a reliable rhetoric of the subject or of representation," since all such "syntagmatic narratives" are themselves "part of the same system as paradigmatic tropes...a correlative of rhetoric and not the reverse" ("Epistemology" 29–30). An "epistemological discipline" can always discover the same gap between faith and knowledge, pointing us towards Paul's truism that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11. 1).<sup>16</sup> whether we like it or not, the result will always be "as you like it," with faith our only 'touchstone' for determining the value of the golden load.

AUDREY I do not know that poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

TOUCHSTONE NO, truly ; for the truest poetry is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry, and what the swear in poetry may be said, as lovers, they do feign.

The pun on "feign" (to take and to desire) points to the link between lovers and poets and readers that enables them to persuade themselves that they have found the object of their desire, whether it be an "ill-favored thing" or a "golden load." Art and interpretation are rhetoric, and rhetoric is the art of persuasion.

Isaiah answer'd. I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception ; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd ; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God. I cared not for consequences but wrote.

Then I asked : does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so ?

He replied. All poets believe that it does, & in ages of Imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains ; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing. (Blake, 38-39)

## Notes and References

As always. I wish to acknowledge an unrepayable debt of gratitude to a stimulating and ongoing exchange of ideas and manuscripts with Nelson Hilton and Paul Mann.

1. Blake was 26 when the volume was published ; the "Advertisement" says they were written between the ages of 12 and 20.
2. For example, when he collected his *Poems* in 1768, Gray acknow-

ledged a large number of 'imitations', all of them notably acceptable according to traditional standards, and some of them so obscure as to suggest ostentation. And he wrote to Edward Bedingfield (*Correspondence*, II. 477) that he "could shew them a hundred more instances, which they never will discover themselves." Some critics, like Young (*Conjectures on Original Composition*, 1759)

were beginning to protest that the best way to 'imitate' the originality of the renowned ancients was *not* to copy them. But others, like William Duff (*Essay on Original Genius*, 1767), argued that any form of true originality was no longer possible for the modern poet.

3. I discuss these issues at greater length in "The Tropology of Silence in Eighteenth-Century English Blank Verse" (*The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 26. 3 (Fall 1985) 211-238.

4. The geographical / tropological sense of a 'temperate' zone in Europe had already by the time of Rousseau become "a most banal opposition" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 216). Always accompanied by some dimension of libidinal 'temperance', this aspect was dominant by the end of the century. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft could observe that "the mass of mankind" are "the slaves of their appetites" (133) and speculate that "if from their birth men and women be placed in a torrid zone, with the meridian sun of pleasure darting directly upon them, how can they sufficiently brace their minds...? (116). 'Happy the nations of the moral north!' (l. 64. 1) echoed Byron, far from "that indecent sun" (l. 63. 2) "Where all is virtue, and the

winter season/ Sends sin, with-  
out a rag on, shivering forth"  
(l. 64. 2-3). Freud emphasizes the necessity of mastering both internal and external 'heat' in his famous micturation myth (37),

5. The range of modes of entry extends from the relatively straight forward approach of Pope, who "imitates expressly those which now stand first of the three chief Poets in the kind, Spenser, Virgil, Theocritus" (note to first edition, p.15 Oxford) through the ironic self-mocking futility of Gray in his first major poem in English, writing "At ease reclined in rustic state" ("Ode on the Spring" (1741) to the heroic ambition of Wordsworth, receiving "assurance of some work/ Of glory" while stretched out at ease in his "green shady place" (3)

6. "Discourse" comes from the Latin verb *discurrere*, to run about, by way of the French *discourir*. The poet's "career" ("a course of continued progress," from *Carraria*, road for vehicles) finds its path already laid out.

7. See Derrida's "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" (*Margins*) for an exploration of the 'sun' in the rhetoric of philosophy. Ricoeur

dismisses the exercise as "fantastic extrapolation" (289).

8. This conclusion was to become a commonplace of the eighteenth century. For John Dennis, the natural sun was "a round flat shining Body, of about two foot diameter" but the Cartesian sun, "made or invented" in 'mediation' is "a vast and glorious Body, and the top of all the visible Creation, and the brightest material Image of the Divinity." Blake rewrites the distinction as that between "a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea" and "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window (cf. "the clear windows of the morning" in *To Spring*) concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it" (565 66).

9. Blakean apocalypticists should note that Descartes has here already achieved in meditation an 'uncovering' of the Truth hidden behind the natural sun. Is this the Truth Blake's inverted sun Zoa Los/Sol is reaching for?

Los his vegetable hands, Outstretched his right hand branching out in fibrous sterength Seizd the Sun. His left hand like dark

roots coverd the Moon And tore them down cracking the heavens across from immense to immense Then fell the fires of Eternity with loud & shrill Sound of Loud Trumpet.

Blake's Presentation of Los as the forger of poetic truth, pounding his anvils to build the 'real' Jerusalem, may be prefigured by Descartes, emphasis on the man-made status of the 'real' sun.

10. My English quotations from Proust are taken from de Man's translation (*Allegories* 13-14). French references are to the Pleiade edition).
11. Coleridge is often credited as the 'source' of this distinction. Todorov's chapter on "The Romantic Crisis" traces it back to Karl Philipp Moritz, though he admits "a certain arbitrariness in this decision" (148).
12. Paul Valery deviness poetry as "an effort by one man to create an artificial and ideal order by means of a material of vulgar origin" (192). This is the '*alchimie du verbe*' of Rimbaud which later inspired Breton and his group-
13. Marx uses these figures repeatedly in the *Kritik*. "In its virgin metallic state it holds locked up all the material wealth which lies unfolded in the world

of commodities.....it is the direct incarnation of universal labor in its form, and the aggregate of all concrete labor in its substance" (103).

14. When Herodotus' *Histories* we find the story of Deioeces the Meda a king famous for establishing one of the world's first bureaucracies, and for combining invisibility and absence with writing. First he built his seven-walled city (Ecbatana) in concentric circles, with the innermost wall of gold, for his inner sanctum where he lived and ruled; then he introduced written communication as his medium of ruling, in order to assure his invisibility. "And when all was built, it was Deioeces first who established the rule that no one should come into the presence of the king, but all should be dealt with by the means of messengers: that the king should be seen by no man" (1. 99). Similar stories are told of Kublai Khan.
15. For Pound, to locate the source of value in the interpretive community would amount to that practice of usury which is "contra naturam" (*Kultchur* 281), or false value created *ex nihilo* with nothing 'real' to back it up, with no congruency between sign and referent. But his argument for genuine money (and authentic poetry or art) as a "representa-

tion of something else" (*Prose* 443) simply raises the same problem of the relationship (correspondence, difference) between the metaphor's tenor and vehicle. It must thus evoke precisely that which will always be *absent* from the metaphor or word, inscribed in a system of *difference*. "It is nature, the actual existence of goods, or the possibility of producing them, that really determines the 'economic' capacity of the state (or poem).....Economic habits arise from the nature of things (animal, mineral, vegetable)" (*Prose* 312, 257). In such a system both money and language operate by effacing their own materiality, disappearing (as signifier) when they mediate (as a signified *difference*) between the relative values of commodities. See Andrew Parker for a more detailed discussion of Pound's economic models.

15. "Substance" here translates Paul's *hypostasis* ('that which stands under'). The meaning seems to be either that things without reality in themselves are made real (given "substance") by faith, or that there are realities for which we have no material evidence, whose real existence, we can only know through faith.