

Echoing Innocence

The Figures of Memory and Echo in Blakean Pastoral

“sit tibi copia nostri”
(Ovid, *Metamorphoses*)

Of all goddesses, perhaps Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses received the harshest treatment from some of those romantic poets who regarded art as the supreme form of knowledge. Blake and Coleridge, who were equally eager to crown poetry, with the same gesture seem to have been also eager to dethrone the governing deities of the arts. This may have its reasons in the history of ideas, but seems strange enough a gesture to provoke one into questioning. The particular question I am intrigued by is if the Goddess of Memory is indeed so easy to forget.

“Imagination has nothing to do with Memory,” claims William Blake, scolding Wordsworth in one of his marginalia.¹ Though the statement would not bear much scrutiny with respect to Wordsworth’s best poetry, it comes as no surprise from Blake, and Wordsworth and Coleridge also repeatedly made like claims in their critical writings. Particularly Blake’s and Coleridge’s rejection of memory as a part of the creative process has to do with their fundamental rejection of Locke’s views on perception and knowledge, and is part of their forceful assertion of the creativity of the

¹ David Erdman, ed.: *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* Commentary by Harold Bloom. Newly Revised edn. (New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1988.), p.666. Quotations from Erdman’s edition of Blake’s texts will be henceforth indicated in the text and abbreviated as E.

imagination. There is, thus, an obvious context in which the attacks on memory in the prose writings of these poets arise as a theoretical necessity for the formulation of their ideas. There is, however, a wider context in which the insistence on excluding memory from the imaginative process may appear far more radical a gesture than an opposition to certain ideas of Locke. When Blake expresses this opposition in terms of the rejection of the Daughters of Memory, he is not only personifying a mental process, but rejecting a metaphor. He is not only arguing a point of philosophy or psychology, but is claiming to exclude from poetry a trope that is conventionally very much a part of poetry. Put yet another way, he is not only saying that Lockean “reflection” is no part of imaginative perception, nor only that adherence to such a perception locks one up in the “animal self-absorption” of Selfhood.² He is also claiming that poetry is not presided over by the Muses, and with that he is brushing aside the *meanings* that may be involved in the existence of the convention according to which the Muses are the goddesses of the arts.

There is, I think, a distinction to be made between treating memory as a mental process, and memory as a metaphor for the imagination. In a critique of Locke, we are referring to it as a mental process; in asking what the rejection of the Muses may do to poetry – and this is the question I want to ask here – we are referring to memory as a metaphor. The two, of course, are not unrelated. I am nevertheless stressing this difference even before clarifying their relation, or the terms in which I want to discuss memory, because I want to indicate that my enquiries in this essay do not directly relate to memory as a mental process – points of psychology or of the philosophy of the mind are not among my concerns. Neither is it the peculiar ways Blake thought of perception and imagination that I wish to reflect on. When asking what role the rejection of memory has in Blake’s poetry, I am asking about the work of a figure, or the results of its exclusion, in poetic texts, in the hope of coming to some kind of understanding of how, and towards what, those texts work. Here I want to begin to examine this through the analysis of a particular example, concentrating on only one segment of Blake’s work, the state he calls Innocence. First, however, I want to outline what I mean by treating memory as a figure.

² Frye, in *Fearful Symmetry. A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947) pp.15 and p.58, tells us that “Blake always refers to Locke’s reflection as ‘memory’” and that Selfhood is Blake’s term “used ... to replace ‘memory’ and ‘reflection’.”

THE FIGURE OF MEMORY

That imagination does have something to do with memory finds one of its oldest expressions in the family kinship between Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, and the Muses, the presiding deities of imaginative works. When Blake expresses his rejection of memory in terms of the rejection of the Muses, he is attacking, and getting involved in, the metaphor that expresses the relation of two mental processes through divine genealogy. Thus, when we are asking what it is that Blake is rejecting, we are in a context where the question about the relation of imagination and memory is a question about divine genealogy; in other words, asking about the origin of the idea that these mental processes are related, is asking about the origin of Mnemosyne: why is it memory that is thought to mother the Muses, what are the features attributed to memory that make it suitable for fostering the imagination?

On the one hand, it seems fair enough to ask such a question, because as most scholars of myth seem to agree, these origins and genealogies are explicatory of the world.³ But as such, they, in a certain sense, function as figures of speech: their 'explanations' are not direct (not psychological, philosophical, speculative, discursive, etc), they say more, or something other, than the actual words convey. On the first level, they are allegories; but, on the next level, they are more than one-to-one-correspondences and create explanations more by metaphorical than by allegorical means; furthermore, they are not fixed stories, they have versions, they are recreated, and in the process of this recreation the metaphors alter; in these alterations, however, the 'original' metaphor does not vanish, but in fact plays an active part in the very process of alterations, its figurative sense shaping the new figure. Mythography thus seems often to resemble an endless hunt after metaphors 'standing behind' metaphors.

Thus, on the other hand, such line of enquiry may not take us very far, because in trying to unfold the meaning of a metaphor we can only arrive at other metaphors. We need not proceed to discuss the parents of Mnemosyne and what they are metaphorical of, because it is now clear that this would lead not to a final understanding of the relation of memory and imagination, but only to more metaphors that would need to be unfolded, which would have to be unfolded through other metaphors – etcetera. However, there is something very important to be learned from

³ Scholars of such different disposition as Mircea Eliade or G. S. Kirk could both be recalled as authorities arguing along these lines.

observing this. We learn that not only the elements of, but genealogies themselves are metaphors; and thus we learn that the figurative meaning of genealogies cannot be other but that we cannot find our way out of metaphors to some hypothetically purely-discursive explanation (e.g. psychological or philosophical).

There is perhaps no clearer example for this than the relation of Mnemosyne and the Muses. The *stories* establishing the origins in which we seek the explanation of the relation of memory and imagination prove to be the origins, in the end, not of the deities, but of literature, of imaginative constructs – which of course are themselves presided over by deities, who are mothered by Memory. That is to say, the figurative import of the *origins* of the Muses and of Mnemosyne is to remind us that we do not know the origins and can never go beyond imagining them. To the question why the Muses originate in Mnemosyne, why imagination originates in memory, we can only get an answer that is the work of the imagination, which itself claims its origin to be memory. Mnemosyne cannot be got around: in enquiring about the origins of Mnemosyne and the Muses, the Muses are our guides, and they will vindicate the plausibility of their answers by directing us to the realm of Mnemosyne herself. The child indeed becomes mother to the woman, to alter the gender in Wordsworth's famous line attached to one of the major romantic statements on the relation of memory and imagination.⁴ This, in turn, gives us a clue as to the meaning of the metaphor Mnemosyne expresses, which is the very vanity of trying to ascertain origins. If 'memory' thus expresses the necessary presence in our explanations of a mental process that is imaginative, we can only grasp the relation between memory and imagination as memory being a metaphor for the imagination.⁵

To see what it is that Blake rejects when rejecting memory through dismissing the Muses, we therefore have to rephrase the initial question and ask why, then, is it 'memory' that is thought a fit metaphor for the imagination? As we have seen, mythic genealogy works by explaining one metaphor through another. The metaphor standing behind the figure we are trying to unfold is the vindication for the meaning of that figure. Thus we arrive at the final form of our question: why is it memory that

⁴ "The Child is father of the Man" – runs a line of the 1802 lyric beginning "My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky." Wordsworth later attached the stanza as epigraph to the Immortality Ode.

⁵ "Mythological statements," says a critic arguing in a different context along similar lines, "lead to questions. Then follows something strange, for to these questions only the story itself can make an answer. The myth turns back upon itself because *it is a question that figures its own reply* (...). This ... is not muddle or mystification, however, but *an indication of method*." Elizabeth Sewall, *The Orphic Voice. Poetry and Natural History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960) p.4, emphases mine.

vindicates imagination? We have two mental processes that seem to be metaphorically related. What are the points of similarity that make this metaphor possible, and what are the points of difference that endow the metaphor with expressive power? The point of similarity I think is this: memory as a mental process is itself a form of imagination inasmuch as it presents to the mind what is not immediately given to the senses. The important distinction between memory and imagination in this respect is that memory presents to the mind what has once, in some form, been already present to it. This is a restriction that does not, in theory, apply to the imagination: we are free to imagine whatever our capacities enable us to, while we can only remember what has (mentally or physically) taken place.⁶ It is this similarity and this difference that makes memory capable of vindicating imagination, and thus this is the meaning of Mnemosyne standing behind the Muses: memory metaphorically grants a truth-claim for the imagination. If we remember what we imagine, what we imagine has in some sense taken place, and is therefore not mere make-believe but true. The Muses are not just blabbering any phantasmagoria but – because they are the Daughters of Memory – are telling us truths.

Let us throw light on this matter from another angle to see how this metaphorical vindication of imagination works in literature. I will use the most obvious example, the epic convention of invocation, where the poet directly calls on the Muses. The figurative role of the invocation, due to the genealogy of the Muses who are being called on (the first ‘metaphor’ standing behind a convention, behind which stands another metaphor, Mnemosyne), is a plea for the refreshing of the poet’s memory. The poet must tell a story; not merely a story of make-believe, but a story that (in some sense or other) has happened – since an epic is to fulfil the function of accounting for the world, the nation, the origins and ends of our life within the time known to us, it cannot afford to be put down to make-believe. However, the poet cannot remember the events he is to recite, as they took place before his lifetime, or often, when events of heaven or hell, or Olympus are also involved, before that of any man. Thus he must ask the Daughters of Memory to render him a service and help him recall what he would

⁶ It may be a separate question, of course, if our capacities enable us to imagine anything that has not in some sense taken place. This is a question that may well pertain to one of the arch-questions of art-theories, which is if the artistic imagination creates anything new or merely imitates what is in some sense – physically, historically or even only on the level of platonic ideas – given. Luckily it is not our concern to answer this question, but it should be noticed that its very emergence in this line of thought indicates the degree to which the relation between memory and imagination penetrates thinking about art; it indicates, in other words, that Memory seems to be present in the foundations of the concept of imagination.

have no way of recalling on his own account. Neither could the poet ask his listeners to believe that what he says is in any sense true and thus should matter for them, unless he could claim that he is helped to remember what he himself could never have seen by deities who were 'actually present' at the events recited, and whose memories are therefore to be trusted.

Such a description of the convention of epic invocation may seem simplified almost into silliness, but the convention itself does seem to make sense as *an acting out of a figure*. Figuratively we are not only talking about the limited memories of the poet, but the limits of the human mind, and the limits of human knowledge: this knowledge may embrace the whole of time, but it is limited by time, i.e. it cannot reach beyond it *as knowledge* into the realm where divinities dwell. Therefore, the figurative sense of the invocation, asking the Muses to help to remember, is in fact the poet's claim that he will sing of times immemorial. This also implies that poetry presided over by the Daughters of Memory is in some sense concerned with beginnings and ends, with Creation and Apocalypse, with origins and with truth. The service the Daughters of Memory render is in fact the guiding of the mind into realms beyond time.

We find that the fact that imagination can and does move in a realm beyond time is expressed by a 'metaphor' (the Muses) that figures *human memory* as reaching beyond time. The human mind can encompass what is within time by its ability to remember. To remember what is beyond time, divine assistance is needed, and quite naturally, this assistance should come from the Daughters of Memory. If mythological figures are, as it were, metaphors relating to the world within time, the Muses are indeed metaphors for human memory and explicative of what imaginative speech does. Their assistance, in a sense then, is nothing but the figurative expression of that which is unverifiable by human knowledge, of speech about the humanly unknowable, of speech about beginnings and ends, about truth. We find that the figure of Mnemosyne looming behind works of imagination is itself a trope for the truth-claim of the imagination. Thus, we find therefore that memory is not only a form of imagination as a related mental process, but is in fact the figure for the imagination, a figure grounding the importance and validity of imaginative discourse within man's verbal wisdom.

It is such transitions of meaning that characterise figures of speech, as indeed, we have reason to think of mythic characters and stories as functioning like figures of speech. In discussing the role of memory in poetry, it is such a 'figure of memory' that I want to concentrate on. I find 'figure' or 'trope' the appropriate expression because we are not talking about mental processes, but meanings that literary convention has attached to them. When Blake dismisses the Daughters of Memory thus, he is not only

quarrelling with Locke or the imaginative quality of the works of classical antiquity, but I think he is also dismissing the figure of memory. However, as we have seen in our glance at the nature of myth as a kind of a trope, as a figure of speech, and as we know from the renewed concerns with rhetoric and with the figurative power of language our century has witnessed in philosophy and literary theory, figurative expression carries in its nature a tendency for not staying stable. We can expect the figure of memory itself to keep altering. That is to say, to observe the role of memory not as a mental process but as a figure in specific imaginative texts, the task is not simply to pin down instances where we can catch glimpses of fixed meanings carried by literary conventions (such as an invocation), but much rather to observe how the texts alter the figure and how the figure shapes the texts in their interaction. Blake's case in this respect seems especially interesting, because he explicitly exiles the Muses from his work. What happens to the figure of memory in this process can thus account for some of the things happening in Blake's texts. We have seen how difficult it is to get around Mnemosyne. Blake's attempt to do so can thus be expected to be an important element of the shaping of his poems.

BLAKE'S REDEFINITION OF THE FIGURE OF MEMORY

That for Blake the Daughters of Memory indeed determine the kind of poetry one comes to write becomes clear from, amongst others, some of the passages of *A Vision of The Last Judgement*.

The Last Judgement is not Fable or Allegory but Vision. Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Formed by the Daughters of Memory. Imagination is Surrounded by the Daughters of Inspiration who in the aggregate are called Jerusalem
(E554)

The distinction Blake makes here is often cited in explaining the difference between the kind of visionary poetry Blake called for, and imaginative writing which Blake labels 'Fable or Allegory.' The difference depends on substituting the Daughters of Memory with the Daughters of Inspiration, and with that, on excluding memory from what Blake means by Imagination. The last sentence of this quote may be rather enigmatic without further explications of Blake's terms, yet even in the state of being innocent of Blake's terminology, one can notice a further difference, namely that the

Muses ‘form,’ while the Daughters of Inspiration ‘surround,’ which suggests that their role in imaginative work is not so much an activity, but merely a presence: they need to be recognised as being present instead of, like the Muses, being asked to remind. Let us also side-step the complexities of what Blake means by ‘Jerusalem’ throughout his work and simply read ‘Jerusalem’ as the Holy City – even this understanding directs us right back to “what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably.” This, then, on the one hand is the aggregate of the Daughters of Inspiration, and on the other it is what Imagination represents. Imagination, then, is not so much a means to artistic forming, but *the recognition of the existence* of what is unchangeably real; it is not so much a mental activity enhancing a specific way of speaking, but rather a mental state enhancing a specific way of seeing. Hence the virtual identity of Imagination and Vision in Blake.

This already tells us something about the point where Blake deviates from the figure of memory: he does not need the help of the Muses, because the poet must *see* all that they could tell us about. Why this is so, we can begin to gather from a passage a little further on:

Jupiter usurped the Throne of his Father Saturn & brought on an Iron Age & Begat on Mnemosyne or Memory the Greek Muses which are not Inspiration as the Bible is. Reality was Forgot & the vanities of Time & Space only Remembered & called Reality. Such is the Mighty difference between Allegoric Fable & Spiritual Mystery. Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Visions and Real Visions Which are lost & clouded in Fable and Allegory while the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Gospel are Genuine Preserved by the Saviours Mercy. The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients called the Golden Age

(I:555)

The begetting of the Daughters of Memory, as we learn from this passage, is a part of man’s Fall, or, in classical terms, of the decline of the Golden Age into the Iron Age. To Blake’s mind, memory encompasses only life within time and space, which themselves only arise in a fallen state, and which are thus erroneously called reality. On this account, Blake seems to be cutting out with surgical precision the very heart of the figure of memory. Blake is saying that in the state where only time and space are remembered, reality is forgotten. Now, we have seen that in its figurative sense, memory was a going-beyond-time, precisely the opposite of what Blake here seems to be saying. We have speculated that the figure of memory is expressive of imagination’s journeys beyond (actually remembered) time, whereas for Blake, time and space mark

out the limits of memory, and within these limits the poet is restricted to 'Allegory and Fable.' It seems, then, that Blake is not merely dismissing the Muses, but *inverting* the role the figure of memory gives them.

Yet that "Unchangeable Reality" which belongs to the Golden Age and which Blake aims to "Restore" is not described as disappearing or becoming invisible, non-existent, but as having been *forgotten*. Is it merely splitting hairs to make such a distinction (after all, what is forgotten is invisible to the mind's eye), or is it – as I tend to think the case is – indeed significant that Blake sticks to a term within the semantic sphere of remembrance to describe the non-existence of something (here the Golden Age) in the mind's eye? There may be several explanations for his use of the word 'Forgot.' The most obvious one is the pressure of the figurative language employed: in describing how memory blots out Reality, we are merely sticking to the metaphor used when describing this process as the forgetting of that Reality. Another explanation, along similar lines, is that the word is used to emphasise the destructive work of memory, namely that it is not a recollection, but instead a forgetting of final things. This explanation suggests a higher degree of consciousness in using the word, as it is not merely produced by the rhetorical swing of the passage but by an analytical approach to the nature of memory, according to which memory, by marking out what is remembered, also defines what is forgotten. For Blake, what matters is what is forgotten. Yet this second explanation leads to a third thought: for if what is remembered and what is forgotten define each other in binary opposition, Blake's use of the word "Forgot" signals that his denouncing of memory does not mean he would have done away with the figure of memory, i.e. that he would have gone beyond metaphoric remembering. He claims he aims to restore the Golden Age, which is beyond memory. He aims to restore what is forgotten – and how else could this be done if not by extending memory further, restoring to it the forgotten. If Blake wants to "Restore" what is "Forgot," he may as well say that he wants to remember it.

Of course, there is a reason why Blake *does not* say this, and my intention is not to pretend that Blake is contradicting himself. The previously quoted passage has shown us that he does not want to remember the Golden Age, he wants instead to *see* it. The difference is in the immediacy of the experience: remembering is seeing at a remove (it is the recalling of what is not immediately given, Locke's 'reflection' and abstraction), while Blake's Vision is an experience always immediate and particular. Thus to extend his memory further is precisely what he refuses to do, as that would result in the wrong kind of imagination. Yet to avoid this fallacy, he claims to "Restore" what is "Forgot" – which is, after all, precisely what the Muses help the poet do, and

which, thus, is identical to the figure of memory. Mnemosyne is there, looming behind Blake's "Endeavour," and thus a huge part of the endeavour is to exile the goddess.

To resolve the latent contradiction helps us in understanding Blake's meanings. For instance, it follows from the above that by 'restoring' he means (belying the prefix 're-') immediate presentation. This in turn means that the Golden Age is for Blake not a past to be remembered, nor a future to be prophesied, but a present to be recognised – the analysis of what he means by the Daughters of Inspiration also pointed in this direction. Once recognised as present, the time-marker in the notion 'present' disappears because we have recognised an Eternal Present, and have reached a state beyond time (the golden age or redemption).

These are all-important shifts in meanings of words, and to understand them is of great help in coming to some kind of an understanding of Blake. Yet the endeavour of his imagination is not so different from the one we have noted as carried in the figure of memory: Blake also speaks of origins and ends, creation, apocalypse and truth. He even goes as far as speaking of his endeavour as restoring the forgotten. Only, for him origin and end, creation and apocalypse seem to be not points on a line, events in a sequence, but as eternally and simultaneously present – thus he must redefine 'restoring' into something like 'storing' (simultaneous presence of things), and memory into forgetting (we have forgotten Unchanging Realty because memory binds us to time and space). Because Blake denounces memory as a mental process, he must also denounce memory as a figure, but if he completely erased the figure of memory from his work, he would have erased much more than he would have liked to. The solution seems to be to try to deprive memory of its figurative sense. Thus the inverting we have noted: in its figurative sense memory exceeds Time, in Blake it binds to Time; thus 'extending' memory would merely be extending Time, so instead of this, the trope has to be redefined; Mnemosyne and her daughters must be deprived of authority over the imagination, because for Blake it is not them on whom the foundation of the truth-claim of the imagination is built.

But if this is the case, if we are witnessing not merely a dismissal, but a redefinition of the trope, are we not also witnessing the process in which the figure of memory shapes texts as texts are altering the figure? We have seen Blake speaking in terms of the figure of memory about his aims (a "Representation of what Eternally Exists," a condemnation of the fact that only the "Vanities of Time & Space" are "Remembered," an "Endeavour to Restore ... the [forgotten] Golden Age") and can thus discern Mnemosyne doing her figuring work when Blake has recourse to such metaphors as the Daughters of Inspiration. He thinks of the Muses as metaphors

expressing nothing but a mental process which he connects to Lockean reflection, to abstraction and generalisation. When he also thinks of it as a mental process bound by Time and thus as binding Imagination, he is already within the realm of the figure of memory, not only talking about a mental process but a metaphor he finds harmful. It is not the mental process that has to be exiled from the mind: it is the figure that has to be altered to free the imagination. When this is done “all will be set right: ... the Daughters of Memory shall *become* the Daughters of Inspiration,” as he claims in the Preface to *Milton* (E95, emphasis mine). Mnemosyne, as Blake’s choice of words has revealed, is not killed off – she merely refuses to stay stable, she becomes something other, she keeps altering, as figures will.

We have taken here a glimpse at how the figure of memory alters the meaning of certain words used in passages activating the figure. We have also caught sight of how the process can aid our understanding of the texts. Now I want to look at how a text alters the figure, that is, at the fate of Mnemosyne and the Muses in poems altering the figure of memory.

“INTRODUCTION” TO THE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AS PASTORAL INVOCATION

The first poem of *The Songs of Innocence*, “Introduction” (E7), introduces not only the following poems, but also a piper who is given the authorship of all the Songs of Innocence. This right away warns us to keep an eye on a double dimension of meaning: one given by the piper, and one by a mind creating the fiction of the *Songs of Innocence*, which is the same mind creating the fiction of the *Songs of Experience* and which therefore has a presumably wider perspective than the piper. This initial warning taken, the instruction given to the piper by the child he sees on a cloud in the opening of the first song may itself be less straightforward – in fact, it may well turn out to be something other than a plea or instruction for the writing of the Songs.

This is of major importance, because I think the poem is out to manipulate this plea and instruction and one way it can do this is to use a persona to whom the manipulation happens. The manipulation itself concerns the figure of memory, which we can start to suspect when we realise that “Introduction” takes the form of an invocation: the singer of the ensuing songs is inspired in his song by a divine intervention (the child on the cloud being quite emphatically an angelic image); the poem describes the moments of this inspiration; as the opening song, this seems to equal an appeal to a Muse to help the singer in singing what follows. On this account, Blake in fact invokes the figure of memory in his opening poem. Is Blake unaware of

this? Not at all, as we shall see. In fact, he seems so much aware of it that I am led to believe that what he does with the figure in the Songs is done almost consciously. Only almost, because Blake had no need to ponder about the nature of the figure and its figuring power. It was for him enough to be well aware of some generic peculiarities of the pastoral mode, which he employs in the Songs, and as Blake was a thorough reader of Spenser, we have every reason to suppose that he was indeed aware of the peculiarities of pastoralism, triggering the activity of certain figures. On this, more presently. For now, it suffices to observe that if “Introduction” is an invocation, it takes a peculiar form of that convention. To begin to see what Blake does with the figure of memory, it is by closely observing this peculiar invocation we should begin.

Piping down the valleys wild
 Piping songs of pleasant glee
 On a cloud I saw a child.
 And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb;
 So I piped with merry cheer,
 Piper pipe that song again -
 So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
 Sing thy song of happy cheer,
 So I sung the same again
 While he wept with joy to hear.

Piper sit thee down and write
 In a book that all may read -
 So he vanish'd from my sight.
 And I plucked a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
 And I stain'd the water clear,
 And I wrote my happy songs
 Every child may joy to hear

First of all, “Introduction” begins with the piper already piping, and that the song piped before the child’s appearance is to the liking of the angelic phenomenon can be discerned from the movement of the first stanza, which ends with the child’s

reaction to the song, and that reaction is laughter. The piper begins to be instructed with the opening of the second stanza ("Pipe a song about a Lamb"), and even though the theme of the song is dictated to the piper, the angelic consent to his "Piping down the valleys wild" is given – he is on the one hand asked to continue piping just as he has been doing, and on the other is dictated a theme. We shall soon have more to say about this double-edged instruction that is and is not an instruction.

It may be curious to note at this point that to the song piped about the Lamb in the second stanza, the child reacts by weeping – does this signal dissatisfaction on the part of the inspirer? My conjecture is that if we take the plea of the third line for repeating the song at its face value, that is as a sign of satisfaction, then weeping is as much an expression of satisfaction as laughter. Read thus, the conclusion of the third stanza, where the child weeps with joy, is, as it were, the verification of the implication that laughing and weeping are, as it were, identical. What emerges with this understanding is that the state of Innocence is one of relatively undifferentiated feelings, where joy and sorrow can easily coincide and their expression mingle in one feeling. Naturally, the point I wish to make is *not* that laughter and weeping are the *same* things here and that thus in Innocence there is no difference between joy and sorrow. At least seven of the nineteen Songs of Innocence contain some sort of weeping and it is more often than not an expression of sorrow, though this instance is not the only one where the relation of tears and smiles to sorrow and joy seems not to be clear-cut ("A Cradle Song" and "The Blossom" are interesting examples). Without clarifying the matter further, at this point it is sufficient to emphasise that the weeping of the child is not simply an expression of sorrow and that the mingling of laughter and tears seems to be characteristic of the state of Innocence – their combination reminds us that we are to adjust our points of view while reading according to context.⁷

Though we may not yet be in a position to explain fully the meaning of this feature, what is important to stress is that we here come to see a similar ambiguity emerging as in the case of the child at once asking the piper to continue the piping that pleases him, yet at the same time also telling him to change his song. Thus we are beginning to see that there may indeed be a contradiction at work in the poem, an opposition that is not, as it used to be customary to claim, between the states of Innocence and Experience, but within Innocence. It is important to see this because it indicates the paradox that there exists some kind of a contradiction in a state that we

⁷ David Wagenknecht, *Blake's Night. William Blake and the Idea of the Pastoral* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, The Belknap Press, 1973) p. 78 calls this feature a "lexical detail of an elaborate language of perspectives."

are given to understand as pure, unified and unproblematic. We will have to grasp this inherent contradiction to understand Innocence.

The latent opposition remains present in the remaining parts of the third stanza as well. The child proceeds in instructing the piper, yet it says “sing *thy* song” - the song is by now even more clearly prompted by the child, while it nevertheless remains the song of the piper, not that of the child. The third line, triggering the third kind of reaction from the child, is in keeping with this ambiguity, as it emphasises that the piper sung the *same* song *again* - this should enhance the argument that weeping with joy also holds together essentially the same kind of reactions and is not a progress from one to another. More important than that for the time being, however, is that these ambiguities create the sense that the song within the poem is essentially the same from the beginning - the source of and the reaction to the song are both cast in ambiguity implying that the reaction may as well be undifferentiated and the source unchanged. The child’s appearance of course does create some sort of change, and if we claim that this is not a change in the song, this will have to be accounted for. The reading here offered will do this in due course. The ambiguities so far uncovered in connection to the reactions of the child, and to whether it instructs at all or not, seem related, and I will be arguing that their relation can be grasped in seeing that the change that does take place in the poem is created by the shaping activity of the figure Blake activates when he - by replacing the Muse with this ambiguously behaving child - avoids invoking the Muses, and thus, avoids the figure of memory in his invocation. But to see this, there is still some way to go.

The change that takes place in the course of the poem concerns primarily not the song itself, but only the medium: the songs may be the same, but their medium is not. The explicit movement in the poem is from pipe to voice to writing, and parallel with that is the movement from the appearance to the inspiration to the vanishing of the child. The parallel itself obviously suggests a connection, which we can at this point only safely pin down in the third stage: the child no longer thinks its presence necessary when writing begins. Most readings of the poem put emphasis on this aspect: it has been interpreted as the piper internalising the child, becoming child enough not to need the child any more, and thus arriving in the Innocence the angelic inspirer represents; or, as a process of decline from the purity of music through language to text.⁸

⁸ Cf. Joseph Wicksteed, *Blake’s Innocence and Experience* (London, etc.: J. M. Dent, 1928), p.81: “The child is a mere happy vision inspiring the poet from without until he begins to work. He then cannot see the child any more for the same reason that we cannot see ourselves. The child is now something within.” Wagenknecht (p.67) quotes this evaluation more or less in agreement some fifty years later. Seeing a decline

However, if we maintain the important point that the piper is an authorial persona who is within the state of Innocence (as opposed to the mind creating the fiction of Innocence), whatever should need to be internalised must be present in him from the start. The observation that the child instructs and inspires, but nevertheless keeps on calling for the same song underlines this.

Turning the song into a text may be read as a gradual distancing from the immediacy of the experience, and as such, it may indeed suggest decline. This explanation, however, relies on some theorising either about the relative value of the media for romantic poets, or the relative value of forms of expression for Blake. But Blake did not have scruples about the writing of poetry being already a loss of the immediacy of the experience expressed. As we have seen, he did have scruples about *certain kinds* of poetry, but not about writing in general, or his own writing in particular. Thus, if the changes in the poem suggest decline, that is not a general statement, but pertains only to Innocence. In other words, if the change is a critique of the lack of immediacy of expression, the critique applies only to what the piper is doing. For the piper himself, of course, there is no lack whatsoever. If the song is indeed the same from beginning to end, what the piper is doing is recapitulating, maintaining, echoing the presence of the child. This echoing is done, ultimately, in the writing. Nor can we simply say that the piper's writing falls short by merely *imitating* the child, and thereby creating a distance between himself and the child, between writing and song, since the song that is being written down, in this reading, is not only the same as the one prompted by the child, but also the same as the piper was piping before the appearance of the child. Because of the identity of the song from beginning to end, writing is not imitating, but echoing the song – which is another reason why the piper need not be worried either about lack of immediacy, or about the vanishing of the child: in his piping, singing and writing the *same* keeps resounding. This may well be one of the reasons why Blake doubles the possible points of view of the Songs through the introduction of the piper: *within* Innocence the piping, singing and writing echo each other; the media are unproblematic as they maintain an equal degree of immediacy. If the poem does suggest any decline, this can then only be rooted in the kind of poetry the piper produces and will then apply to *The Songs of Innocence* as a whole. And the kind of poetry he produces, we are now coming to see, has to do with one specific way of maintaining immediacy.

in the poem is not only prompted by the vanishing of the child, but also by the loaded word “stain’d” in the last stanza.

At this point it is well to remember that Blake's rejection of memory involves the rejection of (retrospective) 'reflection' on experience, of abstraction as opposed to immediacy. We have also seen that the child unmistakably resembles a Muse as the poem unmistakably resembles an invocation to the Muse. We are now also coming to see that Blake is refiguring the Muse into a barely substantial child prompting songs of Innocence to imply that in these songs memories granted by the Muse are being replaced by some sort of immediacy. Just how this immediacy is created is what we now need to observe.

So far, we have seen that part of this immediacy seems to be that regardless of the changes in medium and of the reactions to the song, the song itself does not change. This should then also imply that – as opposed to the conventional relation of poet and Muse – the piper learns nothing from, is 'reminded' of nothing by the child. "Pipe a song about a Lamb," says the child, and we could argue that it in fact *does* bring a theme to the poet from the clouds – which does seem to resemble the figure of memory, lending knowledge from above and beyond the span the piper's mind can encompass. But if in pondering just what this knowledge may be we turn to "The Lamb," we find that even though in this poem the child is teaching the lamb about its origin and identity, the child and the lamb themselves turn out to be identical: "He is meek & he is mild, / He became a little child: / I a child & though a lamb, / We are called by his name." (F9). The "He" of these lines "calls himself a Lamb" and if the child is also "called by his name" the child, too, is a lamb - or, if he who calls himself a lamb "became a little child" then the lamb, too, is a child.⁹ And if this poem establishes a virtual identity between child and lamb, then in "Introduction" the child's plea for a song about a lamb is in fact a plea for a song about the pleading child itself. This is an important interaction between these two poems as it presents to us the child of "Introduction" as so self-contained that even the song it inspires is merely an echo of itself. Moreover, this Muse has no relation to Memory, as all it can offer for subject is itself: the child inspires not by aiding the poet's memory, but solely by presenting itself to the piper.

The poem thus is indeed a peculiar sort of invocation, which undermines the figure of memory, and this undermining of the convention, in turn, tells us something

⁹ I am now overlooking the Biblical relevance of the Lamb - the poem with that in mind celebrates the identity of all creation in Christ. I am at the moment not concerned with the allegorical meaning of the poem, but only the verbal structure. Nevertheless, the fact that "The Lamb" on this allegorical reading is a central piece of the *Songs of Innocence* all the more validates bringing it into the discussion of the child who represents Innocence.

about Blake's state of Innocence. It is an entirely self-sufficient state, where knowledge is merely a spontaneous, unreflected awareness of what is present to the senses. Whatever lies beyond the immediately given – memory or foreknowledge – is practically non-existent, and the themes of the songs are thus themselves. The figure of memory, as we have seen, functions in invocations as a divine authority sanctioning the song. Innocence, however, knows no authority apart from itself: any outside authority would stain the self-sufficiency of the state. Innocence granted or demanded by an outside authority not itself in complete harmony with, and thus already within, the state, Blake seems to be implying, verges on idiocy. The almost insipid simplicity of these songs is obviously a conscious rhetorical strategy, warning us of the dangers of Innocence: this state is only valuable viewed from within – but, then, 'within' Innocence one does not 'view' at all; viewed from without, it may appear as mere childishness. The Daughters of Memory cannot be invoked because if we merely remember Innocence, we may be caught up in inane sentimentality.¹⁰ Yet this is only one aspect of the matter. More importantly, if we see the poem as an invocation, and recall the work the figure of memory is asked to do there, we will see that in this poem Memory is the very authority that has to be evaded to keep the poem a song of Innocence describing the state from within. Memory has to be evaded because authority as such has to be evaded. This Blake does by making "Introduction" resemble an invocation that calls on the figure of memory, but an invocation in which the Daughters of Memory are replaced by an inspirer unrelated to memory. Supposing that the invocatory form of the poem is conscious, we may also suppose that Blake is in fact calling attention to his rejection of the figure of memory, and by this he is already outlining the state of Innocence.

But if this is the case, what can be said of the piper – does he 'learn' Innocence from the child, does he accept the authority of the inspirer? I have been arguing that the poem can be read as treating the same song from beginning to end, and here we come to see the significance of this possibility. If the child merely asks the piper to keep

¹⁰ All this may sound rather harsh if we consider the possibility that the *Songs* was a book written for children. Children's books is in fact one convention on which Blake reflects with his own book, as Heather Glen shows in *Vision and Disenchantment. Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), but these reflections of course were not meant for children. One may even argue that the pretence of the *Songs* being a book for children itself creates the sense of the danger of Innocence: those 'innocent' adults who read it as a book for children and 'remember' their own innocence get the simplistic sentimentality anyone outside Innocence sees of Innocence; while a hypothetical 'innocent' reader (not a child, but a soul in the state of Innocence) will enjoy the songs without reflecting on them.

up his song which is to the child's liking, as the opening stanza implies, the piper is in fact not acting under authority at all. This is what we have termed as the piper not acting under the child's instruction but merely echoing the child.

It is at this point that it becomes important to involve in our discussion the fact that Blake places the Songs into a pastoral context. This enables him to capitalise on a motif that the pastoral carries among its conventions, namely the pastoral echo. The piper, we are told, is "Piping down the valleys wild" – the opening image evokes a characteristic pastoral scene, a shepherd piping his song in a natural setting.

Now, such a scene in pastorals is characteristically accompanied by the motif of nature echoing the song of the piper. This motif, I believe, is also evoked in the opening of the Songs. In a sense, it is evoked merely by the opening image, by placing the reader firmly in a conventional pastoral scene, inviting all the conventions that go with the pastoral mode. But there are instances in the illustration of this poem that also point in the direction of evoking the motif of echoing. The illustration is framed on both sides by the trunks of two trees and on the top by the entwining branches. Behind the piper are grazing sheep, the flock melting in the background into bending tress. The natural setting on the picture seems to be in motion, in movement that seems to be continuous with the movement of the piper, who is pictured striding forth, one of his arms moving back, looking up at the child, the wind blowing his hair. "The trees," as Erdman comments, "set a stately rhythm for his dance. (...) The living forest and grazing sheep [appear] as a visual chorus behind the piper ..."¹¹ Erdman's remarks may ensure that it is not just the present reader's/viewer's fancy to see on the illustration nature, as it were, echoing the piper. Erdman's term is "visual chorus," but it could just as well be a 'visual echo.' All the more so on account of the pastoral context, where nature is not a chorus but an echo to the piper's song.¹² Thus, taken together with the illustration, it is perhaps not too fanciful to say that as the first line sets off an echo for

¹¹ David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake. William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with Plate-by-Plate Commentary* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992) p. 43.

¹² To be fair, Erdman's interpretation of the illustration is not identical with my argument. He goes on (p.43) to quote from *All Religions are One*: "all ... are alike ... & ... have one source" (1:2), and, he adds with Blake, the one source is the Poetic Genius. He also says that the cloud in which the child floats and which creates an opening in the trees above the piper's head is the opening of the realm of the imagination. Indeed, I have also argued that in the poem "all ... are alike," but as I hope to show further on in my arguments, the "one source" is not so straightforward in the state of Innocence, the Poetic Genius not being at the height of its powers here. If the opening at the top of the picture is into the realm of the imagination, in Innocence the characters, as in the picture spatially, stay metaphorically 'below' it.

the reader, the echo of pastoral poems, so the piper sets off at the same moment the echoes of his piping: as nature echoes his movement, the valleys re-sound the sound of his pipe.

Furthermore, as we shall see in more detail in a moment, it belongs to the characteristics of such pastoral echoing to cast a shadow of doubt on whether it is nature that echoes the piper, or the other way around, the piper who echoes nature. The point of blurring the source of the sound is to convey the harmony of man and nature, which is what the motif of echoing is primarily expressive of in pastoralism. Now in our poem it is obviously the piper who originates the sound, but by evoking the pastoral context and its motif of echoing, the song in the first line is set into a context in which the source of the sound is neither decidedly the piper, nor decidedly nature.

If, as has been argued, there is no progress in the nature of the song throughout the stanzas, then it also seems fair to say that what we find in the poem is the echoing of this same song in different media. If the child indeed asks the piper not for a different song, it is in fact asking him to echo the same song that is sounding already when the child appears, which song, under this reading, may almost be the product of the pastoral scene, nature, just as much as of the piper. But one does not even need to imagine nature as the source of the sound to see that the memoryless Muse of this invocation actually enters an echoing landscape, reacts with joy, and prompts further echoes.

In the opening of Virgil's First Eclogue, the opening of one of the books which we can conveniently regard as the fountainhead of pastoral poetry, Paul Alpers notes the ambiguity concerning the source of the echoing sound alluded to above. I quote the first ten lines in his translation:

Melibeus: You, Tityrus, under the spreading, sheltering beech,
Tune woodland musings on a delicate reed;
We flee our country's borders, our sweet fields,
Abandon home; you, lazing in the shade,
make woods resound with lovely Amaryllis.
Tityrus: O Melibee, a god grants us this peace -
I've a god to me, upon whose altar
A young lamb from our folds will often bleed.
He has allowed, you see, my herds to wander
And to play as I will on a rustic pipe.

These are rich stanzas, were we to compare them with Blake's pastoral Innocence with the god (who in Virgil's Eclogue turns out to be a Roman benefactor,

presumably Octavianus) granting peace and being gifted, in return, with a lamb that becomes a victim of the authority presiding over the idyllic state. But we must stick to our more restricted theme. It is noteworthy in our context to quote Paul Alpers's interpretation of the passage: "Tityrus is represented as living in a 'timeless' present, his *otium* an extended, blissful moment rather than a complete way of life. His song is represented not as the piping in the fields that he himself describes, but rather as (...) an 'echoing song' that fill the space around him."¹³ Alpers does not mention Blake in his work on pastoralism, but as we shall see, the extended bliss that is not a complete way of life hauntingly resembles what Blake makes of Innocence. More important for the moment than this is the nature of the song, which is rather an echo than the piper's own product in Alpers's reading of Virgil. We have seen that the authority for the Songs of Innocence is not fully the inspiring child; taking into account the pastoral context Blake's poem evokes and the ambiguous relation of piper-nature-echo Alpers uncovers in the opening of the major source for European pastoralism, we are led to think that this authority is not in the full sense the piper either (who, furthermore, gives up authority over his song, if he ever had any, by following the instructions of the child in the further echoing of the song). We recognise an identical ambiguity as to the source of the song in Virgil, as Tityrus claims the song his own (l.10), while in Meliboeus's stanza, the same song is represented as an echo resounding in the woods.

Alpers also directs attention to a further, not unconnected, ambiguity in the Virgilian passage:

'He has allowed me to play as I will on a rustic pipe' both indicates his [Tityrus's] dependence on his patron and brings out, in balancing 'quae vellem' (what I want) and 'permisit' (has allowed), the problematic relation of freedom and dependency. [...] The final line of Meliboeus's speech, on the other hand, gives a quite different version of the pastoral song: '*formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas*' (you teach the woods to resound lovely Amaryllis). Here man and landscape are intimately responsive to each other The singer teaches the woods to sound his beloved's name; on the other hand, the actual sounding is attributed to the woods alone ..."¹⁴

In this passage Alpers implies something that is very much to our point: the blurring of the source of the echo seems to be closely connected to another ambiguity,

¹³ Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 25. The English translation of the Virgilian passage is also quoted here, as is the original.

¹⁴ Alpers p. 25.

that concerning dependence and freedom. By now, this should not surprise us, as we have seen that Blake's poem struggles with evading the authority of a Muse that an invocation demands. If the child instructs the piper or not is expressive of this very ambiguity of dependence and freedom, which also seems to be implicit in pastoral echoing.

Surely, echoes too have sources, there is, if we like, an authority producing them. But if it is precisely the source of the sound that is shrouded in ambiguity – and if this sense is created in Blake's poem, that is obviously not because he is following this Virgilian passage but because he unleashes a motif brought along by his use of the pastoral mode – then all we are left with is the echo itself: a sound that keeps resounding, repeating itself. "Piper, pipe that song again ... So I sung the same again"; "So I piped with merry cheer ... Sing thy song of happy cheer" – Blake's poem with its emphasis on repetitions enhances the sense that the song that sets off echoing, or, conceivably, even begins in echoes, is kept echoing throughout the poem. The child's inspiration does not take the form of advising the piper of things he himself could not have known and would have to be, as by a Daughter of Memory, told, taught or reminded of. Instead, the child merely tells the piper to echo the echoes. This is very much in keeping with the child giving itself for theme: the child in fact has the piper echo the child itself. This Muse, then, because unrelated to memory, instead of reminding of what is not known, merely echoes what is given in its own person. The authority of memory is replaced by the echoing sound of the state of Innocence.

Because memory is no part of Innocence, the child-muse offers itself for theme, and even then is only echoing the piper's song which itself may, on the account of how pastorals blur the actual source of the sound, be only an echo. The child's reactions define for us the nature of this echo, and thus also the nature of Innocence, as breaking down the distinction between sorrow and joy, that is, as presenting an undifferentiated state of emotion. This lack of differentiation seems smoothly consonant with echoing: as in sound, so in feeling, we have in Innocence a state lacking authoritative source, self-sufficient, self-generating, self-sustaining, disallowing the definitions and differentiations of the reflective, reasoning faculty. Differentiating requires a kind of awareness that spoils Innocence and that hears echoing not as sourceless resounding of sound, a kind of awareness that is capable of locating the source of the echo and of seeing that as authentic sound it is illusory.

Blake infuses into his poem through the pastoral context not only a motif, or a sound, but a figure that is laden with meanings, a metaphor expressive of the state of Innocence. My supposition is that what is at work in the poem is not merely an echoing

sound, but the ‘figure of echo’ (as analogous to the figure of memory). This figure is set up by the time we get to the closure of the third stanza, and thus the child can vanish and the piper can begin writing the songs of Innocence. We have seen in the discussion of the change of medium that this writing is indeed echoing the previous piping and singing, and we have said that the writing, from the piper’s point of view, preserves some kind of immediacy. This is the immediacy of echoing. And because the piper is in fact *writing echoes*, we have reason to believe that the Songs of Innocence are imbued with echoing. Echoing here is a form of immediacy, it is a metaphor for the specific kind of imagination at work in Innocence, for the means of (re)presenting reality, the means of getting as close to it as possible, reproducing it in a degree that exceeds imitation, as the source of a sound and its echo are virtually the same. At least apparently so.

This is why the feature of mingling weeping and laughter is so important. It may characterise Innocence, but viewed from outside Innocence – from the perspective of the reader and also of the poet for whom the piper is just one of several personas – joy and sorrow are not merely echoes of each other: they *are* two different things, which makes it clear that sorrow, too, is part of Innocence, even if within Innocence this does not appear so. We are reminded, that is, that Innocence is not perfection, even if within Innocence there is no awareness of any lack. Our reading of the poem as an invocation has shown us that the poem displaces Memory in order to displace authority and thus create the self-sufficiency of the blissful state of Innocence. We have uncovered the figure of echoing as replacing the figure of memory to achieve this end. But if we also observe that Innocence is only a state of bliss from a certain perspective and that it, too, has its shortcomings, that writing echoes is only a form of immediacy within an echo-chamber (such as the state of Innocence may be), we may expect to find that the figure of echo, as the authority replacing the figure of memory, itself carries this shortcoming in its figurative structure: in other words, if Echo should be the presiding authority over the songs of Innocence, we can expect its figurative activity to create the shortcomings of the state of Innocence. In order to grasp how this figuration, which we have uncovered as shaping “Introduction” and presumably to a large degree the whole of Innocence, works and what it does, we must take a closer look at the figure of echo itself. I shall have more to say about “Introduction” – we have only read the first three stanzas, and the famous crux of the poem, the word “stain’d” still awaits explication, but first we must come to a better understanding of the figure of echo, so it is there we now have to turn.

THE FIGURE OF ECHO

We have already glimpsed one context of echoing in Virgil's First Eclogue and saw that implicit in the motif is an ambiguity as to the source of the echo, and connected to that, as to the freedom or dependency of the shepherds. The context was relevant not only on the account of the nature of echoing but also because Blake creates a pastoral context for the Songs, and thus while considering the figure of echo, it is well to do this primarily within the pastoral convention which is permeated with it and which Blake uses in the Songs, thereby allowing the figure to be active in his poems.

To begin with, however, let us, as we have done in our treatment of the figure of memory, observe some mythological roots of echoing, which are obviously relevant for pastoral echoing. The story of the nymph called Echo has several versions, and even in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a text Blake knew thoroughly) two different ones are used.¹⁵ According to one, Echo distracted and detained Juno with endless chattering so that the nymphs could flee when Juno could have caught them lying with Jupiter. In revenge, Juno reduced Echo to have "only the briefest possible use" of her voice - to mere repetition. This story tells us little about Echo herself, apart from that she had no greater power of speech before Juno's penalty than after, and implies no more than that echo is a figure for imitation lacking creativity. This, however, should already make us suspicious of the kind of authority Echo can grant the songs of Innocence. However, Ovid then goes on to a different story about her, picking up a fable that associates Echo with Narcissus, in a section of the *Metamorphoses* that John Hollander sees as the "locus classicus of echoing."¹⁶ This story recites Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus and their unsuccessful erotic encounter is developed through echoing: to Narcissus's "Huc coeamus" ('here let us meet') Echo responds "Coeamus" ('let us make love').¹⁷ Yet as Echo advances, Narcissus flees her and cries "emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri" ('may I die before I give you power over me') and is answered by the echo "sit

¹⁵ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Penguin, 1955, prose translation by Mary M. Innes) pp.83-84.

¹⁶ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo. A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981) p.25. Hollander's book has a very different focus than I do in this essay, but it may be worth mentioning that its Introduction and first chapter ("Echo Allegorical") argue for an interpretative method similar to the one used here.

¹⁷ Originals and these translations come from Hollander's account, p. 25. He suggests for an English equivalent of the exchange: 'Here let us come together' answered by Echo's 'Let us come. Together.'

tibi copia nostri” (“I give you power over me”).¹⁸ As the reference of the pronoun changes, Echo hands over power, and by subduing herself, she is in fact resigning authority over her passion. This story, too, gives us Echo as a dubious figure for authority, and added to this is the erotic dimension – her voice being imitative rather than creative is paralleled by her lack of power in initiating sexual encounter. All this I believe is very noteworthy in the context of reading Blake, for whom mere imitation is not a form of imagination at all and for whom unhindered desire and creative imagination are related. If the figure of Echo enters “Introduction” from this Ovidian story, we can see the figuring work as two-edged. On the one hand, the figure of echo is indeed one that undermines any authority, but on the other, this lack of authority does not result in real freedom: under the authority of such a figure, Innocence is indeed devoid of exterior sanctioning, but the creative power of the state is reduced, and reduced in the form of the incapability of fulfilling erotic desire; that is, in the form of sexual impotency. This, as we shall see, does in fact apply to Innocence to a great degree, especially in the form this state of the human soul takes in the figure of Thel in the early prophetic book titled after her.

There are, however, some further associations mythology has burdened the figure of echo with. Most significant in our context is the fable reciting Pan’s love for Echo. In this version, Echo is a nymph taught by the Muses to sing and who, being much concerned about her virginity, flees all erotic advances. Among the refused is Pan, who, having failed to seduce her, becomes envious of her music and “sends a madness among the shepherds” who

tore her all to pieces and flung about them all over the earth her yet singing limbs [‘adonta ta mele’ - punning on ‘limbs’ and ‘song’]. The Earth in observance of the Nymphs buried them all, preserving to them still their music property and by an everlasting sentence and decree of the Muses breath out a voice. And they imitate all things now as the maid did before, the Gods, men, organs [instruments], beasts. Pan himself they might imitate when he plays on the pipe; which when he hears he bounces out and begins to post over the mountains, not so much as to catch and hold as to know what clandestine imitator that is that he has got.

¹⁸ In Innes’s translation the exchange is: “I would die before I would have you touch me” answered by “I would have you touch me.” This version emphasises erotic desire, the other dependence. Obviously what we actually have is dependence on, or as a result of, erotic desire. *Sit tibi copia nostri*, more literally ‘let you have the profusion/wealth of me,’ is a phrase beautifully condensing these senses.

The quoted passages are from the third century A. D. pastoral romance *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, which is, if not the only, but certainly the central source for this version of Echo's myth.¹⁹ The translation in which it is quoted is George Thornley's Elizabethan version, which signals that the text may have been available for Blake, or for his own renaissance sources to pastoral echoing, notably Spenser.

The relevance of this story to "Introduction" lies on the one hand in its link to Pan, who lurks behind our context by virtue of pastoral piping. We can, however, still broaden this context and follow Hollander in tracing yet another tendency in this "tradition of interpretation," which associates Echo and Syrinx. As Hollander puts this: Pan's "sigh of disappointment at the armful of reeds he came up with when he clutched for the metamorphosed nymph [Syrinx], blowing through those very reeds and producing 'a faint and plaintive sound,' as Ovid puts it, ... is a version of an echo."²⁰ Not only are we back to an Ovidian story (which Blake is certain to have been familiar with) featuring a figure of echo, but also to "Introduction" featuring the "hollow reed" the piper is left with as pen at the end of the poem. Pan's pipe turns into the pen of Blake's piper and thus Pan's aborted desire and the echoes of his song turn into the *Songs of Innocence*.

We should for a moment return to *Daphnis and Chloe* and observe also the haunting resemblance in its account of Echo to the Ovidian story of Orpheus: the sexually fuelled jealousy of the opposite sex, for which Echo and Orpheus, both indulged in song, have no concern, results in their being torn apart; but - Longus even echoing the Ovidian pun - their limbs keep up their song.²¹ Orpheus's remains drift to the island of Lesbos, which is where the plot of *Daphnis and Chloe* is set. Orpheus and Echo, moreover, are as it were relatives, both being a descendent of a Muse.

If so far we have noted that the figure of Echo carries in her constant imitation of sound a lack of creativity, which is also connected to incapability to fulfil sexual desire, we now also note another strain active in her figure, the Orphic strain that pastoralism seems to have taken up. Wagenknecht's study of pastoralism in Blake's poetry, following Richard Cody's analyses of the genre, points precisely to Orpheus as the mythological figure invoked by pastorals. The invocation of Orpheus "in an appropriate context of love, landscape and poetry can be said to signalize the

¹⁹ The English translation of this passage is from Hollander p. 8; the parenthetical comments are also Hollander's. Alpers p. 323 dates Longus's text as earlier, belonging to the second century.

²⁰ Hollander p.10. cf. also Ovid, I. 708; pp.47-48 in the Penguin edition.

²¹ More precisely, in the case of Orpheus it is only the head that keeps singing, but this does not invalidate the resemblance of the two stories. Cf. Ovid p.247.

renaissance pastoral mode.”²² In Cody’s understanding, the aim of pastoral fiction is a reconciliation between this-worldliness and otherworldliness, and Orpheus “both as lover and theologian, is credited with finding a single voice for all the intimations of this world’s beauty and the other world’s that solicit the human mind.”²³ It seems to be no accident that scholars of the genre tell us that Orpheus is the figure invoked in pastoralism, that it is notably a pastoral romance that is the primary source for the association of Orpheus and Echo, and that we have found Blake inviting the figure of echo in his invocatory poem to a sequence set in the pastoral mode. In the figure of Echo is a motif that makes her an eligible addressee of an invocation. Moreover, especially in the pastoral mode, this figure is a likely candidate to replace the figure of memory by virtue of her relation to Orpheus, the arch-poet. “[P]astoral echoing,” says Hollander, “from Theocritus and Virgil on comes to be associated with a response of nature, in kind, to poetic discourse itself.” Nature, of course, responds to the song of Orpheus, and the “essence of Orpheus,” as Wagenknecht comments on the figure from its other end, “is the authority and the power of the poetic voice.”²⁴

We are now coming more clearly to see both the importance of reading “Introduction” as an invocation, a convention that seeks for an authority for the poetic voice, and Blake’s use of the pastoral context in which, via Orpheus as such an authority, the essentially authorityless Echo can be invoked as a figure presiding over the song. The mythographic connection observed between Orpheus and Echo surfaces in the transference of the “authority and the power” of Orpheus to pastoral echoing as a figure for “poetic discourse itself.” We have also thus uncovered two strains active in the figure of echo. One is erotic desire, doomed to fruitlessness because of creative and sexual impotence and lack of authority over this very desire, the other is the authenticity of the poetic voice it triggers. This authenticity in pastoralism is expressed by the figure coming to mean the harmony of man and nature created in the echoing song. The dependence implied in the figure is itself two-faced: on the one hand Echo is dependent on what is said to her, on the other, the pastoral song seems to be dependent on the echoes of the landscape, and by a remove, on the authority of

²² Richard Cody, *The Landscape of the Mind* (Oxford: OUP, Clarendon, 1969) p.14. Quoted by Wagenknecht p.4. To remind again, references in these studies to renaissance pastoralism should not worry us because it is especially the renaissance stage of the development of the genre Blake was familiar with through his intimate knowledge of Spenser, which Robert Gleckner demonstrates in abundance in his *Blake and Spenser* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985).

²³ Cody pp.12, 29; quoted in Wagenknecht p.4

²⁴ Hollander p.7; Wagenknecht p.4.

Orpheus standing behind the song as presiding figure. Yet this double-edged nature of the figure is resolved at once, as Orpheus as a 'metaphor' is expressive of poetry creating a harmony between man and nature, and thus the presiding figure behind pastoralism is that of harmony – and an authority that is in harmony with what is subdued to it no longer requires dependence. The Orphic element of the figure of echo that pastoralism brings to the surface apparently saves Echo from her dependence, turns the figure of echo from expressing dependence into expressing harmony.

However, the redeeming of Echo in pastorals is indeed only apparent, the reason for which is that figures cannot be redeemed: they stay active, carrying with them all the burdens literature has put on them and keep figuring the texts that employ them with the import of the whole of that burden. The metaphor 'standing behind' cannot be eradicated, its figuring power remains active in the new context and meaning as well. We have seen, under the magnifying glass of Paul Alpers, that the opening of Virgil's First Eclogue, a poem pastoral enough, still carries the ambiguity of freedom and dependence, and moreover that this ambiguity finds its way into the ambivalence of the source of the echo, which otherwise would be put down to expressing the harmony of man and nature. To point out that pastoralism does not in fact resolve the contradiction in the figure (the contradiction of harmony and dependence, of the presiding figure being a completely authorityless authority) by way of making it expressive of harmony, it is instructive to put briefly beside each other two differing views on pastoralism. Alpers claims that in the observed Virgilian passage we find the development of two distinguishable versions of the pastoral, one in Meliboeus's stanza, and another in Tityrus's. The first, labelled by a "woodland muse," is one in which the idyllic world is longed after and is thus connected to desire and unreachability in which erotic pleasures are imagined to sound in the echoing woods, thus connecting the longing after the idyllic state with erotic desire.²⁵ This version seems to be prominently connected to echoing, as it is Meliboeus's stanza that describes the song Tityrus claims as his own as an echoing sound. The second is a version labelled by Tityrus's "rustic pipe," in which the longing of Meliboeus is accommodated primarily as a result of the acceptance of the ordering and authority of ethical and social norms, which acceptance brings fulfilment to the longing after the Golden Age. If we put beside this Thomas Rosenmeyer's observation that what made Virgil transfer the scene of Theocritan bucolics into the woods of Arcadia is that woodlands are a more suitable place for the continual resounding of echoes, and thus for the responses of nature, we have a line of development that gives increasing prominence to echoing to give prominence to

²⁵ See for instance Virgil, *Eclogue I*, 35-40.

harmony, but with that (as the ‘woodland muse’ is associated with the version of pastoral that emphasises longing) also to the presence of an unfulfilled desire. The figure, it seems, does not allow itself to be redeemed, it is beyond salvage as it keeps figuring its contexts with all its import. Rosenmeyer also argues that Theocritus hardly works with echoes and that his herdsmen move in freedom without awareness of any obligation or authority.²⁶ This latter statement is of course also applicable to Blake’s Innocence, but the fact that Blake *does* use echoing shows that his application of the pastoral context limits this freedom via the dependence implicit in the figure of echo. And the form this dependence takes is Echo’s futile longing, which obviously is a limitation to spontaneous freedom.

Let us now finally collect all these threads and point to the relation of what we have learned about the figure of echo to Blake’s own pastoral. We have seen on the one hand Echo’s figurative association to Orpheus, which establishes pastoral echoing as poetic discourse creating harmony between man and nature. Blake’s use of the pastoral context implies that Innocence is such a state of harmony. All the more so, because if the echoing we have observed in the first three stanzas of “Introduction” is a reverberating sound with the figure itself casting doubt on the source of the sound, the Songs derive from no particular authority, and the poetry the echoing inspirer prompts presents a state of self-sufficient, self-sustaining harmony and spontaneous, unreflected freedom. This is what Blake brings to the Songs by the use of the convention.

Yet this is not *all* that he brings to them, because, on the other hand, we have also seen that Echo is connected to a lack of creativity and a lack of sexual fulfilment. Her handing over of power in the Ovidian story (handing over her capability to initiate, to be the source of sound and, by a remove, of authority over voice) reflects a rather different nature of her separation from authority, as the lack of authority in this case results not in a notion of harmonious equality but endless, and endlessly futile, desire. If Echo echoes the sound of nature, she is also dependent on nature. Pastoral echoing may turn echo into an expression of harmony, but the figuring power brings to light an element of dependency in this harmony. Echo echoing nature is metaphorically echoing the natural instinct of man, i.e. man’s dependence on natural instinct, which thus limits spontaneous freedom and unreflected joy. *Sit tibi copia nostrī*: ‘I give you power over me’; ‘I would have you touch me’; ‘let you have the profusion of me’: in the realm of Echo man is giving power over himself to nature, admitting that until nature cuddles us, until

²⁶ In this passage I have condensed (in a harshly simplified but hopefully not distorted way) analyses from Alpers pp.24-26, 161-163, and Thomas Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet. Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1969) pp. 148-150, 186, 237.

we are in the laps of nature, as the children are so often cuddled in the texts and designs of the Songs in the lap of a protective mother, we are also cuddled by our own nature, in which desire may at any minute erupt into fruitless longing, undermining the harmony apparently achieved in the lap of mother nature. Harmony with nature actually means a protection from longing, but as in nature longing is not eradicable since desire is part of nature, this protection leads to the impossibility of fulfilment: *harmony expressed through the figure of echoing subsumes desire instead of fulfilling it*. It is this mechanism that the figure of echo activates. It may well be worth noting at this point that perhaps the most memorable and thus most strongly reverberating echoes of English poetry in Spenser's *Epithalamion* are silenced (or begged to be silent) as night descends and love at the end of the marriage day is finally fulfilled.

Ovid's story of Pan and Syrinx, obviously important in Blake's pastoral recapitulating even the "hollow reed" of that story, works to the same effect. Pan's sighing into the hollow reed is a version of echoing, and the piper's song and its echoes carry in them the sound of Pan's unfulfilled desire that survives as the undertone of pastoral piping and echoing landscapes that came to express the harmony of man and nature. We may also note that if this harmony created by poetry roots in the story of nature responding and being tamed by the song of Orpheus, then the undertone in question can be found in this story as well, as Orpheus himself suffered from unfulfilled desire after having lost Euridyce to the underworld, and as he was torn apart by those whose desire he was not willing to fulfil, being instead concerned with his own longing and creating harmony with nature. In this story, the deceptiveness of this harmony beautifully comes into the open, as while Orpheus is busily harmonising, not only is he numbed by his own longing, but ends up torn apart by sex-driven women – not a soothing image of harmony, to be sure. It is an image of harmony with nature that carries the seeds of its own destruction in that harmony. Orpheus's fate is as much carried in the figure of echo as in his harmonising song – we may well read the episode where the head of Orpheus is singing as an echo of his previous songs, if we remember Longus's account in his pastoral romance, replete with the figure of echo along the lines of the fate of Orpheus.

THE STATE OF INNOCENCE AND THE WRITING OF ECHOES

The child appears in "Introduction" in place of a Muse and activates, instead of the figure of memory, the figure of echo. When it vanishes from the poem in the fourth stanza and leaves the piper behind to write echoes, the undertones of the figure are also

activated: the piper picks a “hollow reed” and makes a “rural pen” – applies, in a sense, Pan’s pipe to write his pastoral Innocence; but after having seen what kind of a sound emanates from Pan’s reed-pipe, which is the source of much pastoral echoing, we may not be surprised at the ambiguity of the word “stain’d” in the next line as the piper “stain’d the water clear” for ink for his reed-pen. As he sets the hills echoing (echoing his inspirer, who’s instructions themselves resembled echoes), he also activates an undercurrent of longing and desire, inimical to that blissful, spontaneous state of joy and fulfilment we come to know as Innocence.

The ambiguity of the word “stain’d” signals the presence of such an undercurrent of meaning by implying a stain on the purity of Innocence as soon as the piper obeys his inspirer and begins to write echoes. It seems that it is precisely the echoing that creates this stain: Blake replaces the authority of a Muse over his song to exclude memory from the state of Innocence by a self-generated sound consonant with the self-sufficiency of Innocence, and introduces instead, as the form of that self-generating sound, echoes. In this sense, Echo becomes the authority over the song, and her figurative relation to Orpheus in the pastoral tradition does seem to make her fit for such a role. With the same gesture, however, the songs of Innocence are also made to resound with Echo’s phrase, *sit tibi copia nostri*. In Blake’s context, the power given over is the power of imagination. Writing echoes may be a form of writing that eludes the authority of memory, which, as we have seen, for Blake is a prerequisite for the writing he calls Vision, but, paradoxically, this detachment from authority creates dependence. As reverberating echoing, as sound voiding itself of authority, the figure of echo is suitable for expressing a harmony of man and nature (harmony being based not on dependence but equality) and the spontaneous joy and memoryless imagination of Innocence; yet the undercurrents of this figure seem to create dependence on nature and lack of creative ability to fulfil the desires incurred by that dependence. (Man’s natural instincts and desires are of course part of what is meant by ‘nature,’ as the figure of echo itself has implied.) This may well explain the ambiguities of the child instructing-yet-merely-echoing and of its laughing-yet-weeping observed earlier: it is in fact the figure of echo that may be creating these ambiguities. As if, by using such ambiguities in the Songs, Blake were indeed echoing Echo, making Innocence yield to the power of the figure, saying ‘I give you power over me.’ Which, going further, may well throw light on how these poems are shaped, and that, quite naturally, should also tell us something about the nature of Innocence.

The staining in the last stanza, then, seems to be the staining of Innocence by the figure of echo: echoing as pure poetic discourse – the figure finally set up by the

poem's movement from piping and singing to the writing of the *same* song – is stained by echoing as fruitless desire. The shortcoming of the state of Innocence is, on the one hand, that its safety from the despairs of natural desire is only apparent, and on the other that at the same time it lacks sexual potency and, by one remove, it lacks creative energy. Memory may have been displaced, but writing echoes is still not a sufficient form of imagination. Thus, as the piper begins to write echoes, he stains the clear water with Pan's reed: he, as we have said, through the figure of echo, infuses futile longing into the apparently idyllic state, and he also writes the wrong kind of poetry. This poetry is perhaps of a higher order than the one written under the authority of the Muse, as it excludes abstraction and reflection, but is still not "Visionary or Imaginative" (F:555). On the same score, one may suspect that Mnemosyne has not been fully exiled – her Daughters have merely been refigured, and they keep refiguring the poems, as a Muse is being refigured into Echo. But then, in mythic genealogy Echo and Orpheus are themselves descendants of the Muses.

Of course, to the piper the word "stain'd" has no connotations that would throw shadows on Innocence or his writing. The majority of the ambiguities of the Songs work on this principle: the face value of the such words expresses the point of view within Innocence. For this reason, one must not be quick to undo the apparent innocence of ambiguous words in the poems. It is by continually switching our perspective between the explicit and the implicit that we are given both an outline of Innocence, and a critique of the state or form of imagination that Innocence outlines.

Thus, when we read that darkness descends over the pastures in the concluding line of "The Echoing Green" (F8), we are invited to interpret this as signalling with equal force the end of the day in the simplistic fiction of the poem, and as a threat to the bliss the fiction describes. In fact, one need not move beyond the verbal structure of the poem to hear the ominous ring of the last line. There is an easily visible movement in the poem from "The Sun does arise" (l.1) to "The sun does descend" (l.23) and from "On the Echoing Green" (l.10) to "On the darkening Green" (l.30). It is again worth working out just how the echoing of the Green is created in the first stanza:

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,

The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells cheerful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Echoing Green.

It is by the end of the stanza that the Green is set echoing with all sorts of sounds of nature. The first sound is that of the bells, which sound is then echoed by the birds (they sing “to the bells ... sound”). The bells themselves sound in welcome to Spring, thus, by analogy, they echo Spring as the birds echo the bells. Spring being conventionally metaphorical for birth, a metaphor enforced here by the rising of the Sun in the first line, the sounding of the bells echoes this birth by setting the landscape into motion - or, better, echoing metaphorical ‘Spring’ by setting the landscape echoing, giving it voice or imaginative birth. In this sense, then, it is Spring that is the source of the echoing, and this makes it necessary to postpone the reading of this poem and turn to “Spring” (E14-15) to see more clearly the nature of these echoes.

Sound the Flute!
Now it's mute.
Birds delight
Day and Night.
Nightingale
In the dale
Lark in Sky
Merrily
Merrily Merrily to welcome in the Year

Little Boy
Full of joy.
Little Girl
Sweet and small,
Cock does crow
So do you.
Merry voice
Infant noise
Merrily Merrily to welcome in the Year

Little Lamb
Here I am,

Come and lick
 My white neck.
 Let me pull
 Your soft Wool.
 Let me kiss
 Your soft face.
 Merrily Merrily we welcome in the Year

This poem, in Wagenknecht's reading, is "very much in the Orphic tradition," and presents the "process of creation."²⁷ Nature responds to the sound of the flute, comes out of the silence into day and night, the flute animates birds, and then children. As in "The Echoing Green," everything that is animated in this poem 'welcomes' the year with its sounds and actions. The poem also depicts, in the process of responses, the arising of erotic desire as the child woos the lamb in the fashion of a lover in the last stanza.

Yet if this is indeed, as Wagenknecht suggests, a dance of the season to an Orphic pipe, why does the pipe become "mute" already in the second line? The sound of the flute seems to be replaced by birdsong in the third line, and the fourth line affirms that this birdsong is bound to nature, to the nature the pipe has awoken. The natural world and the powers of the piper indeed are in harmony, as we would expect from an Orphic poem, but it is noteworthy that at the first sound of the pipe, other voices take over, as if the pipe was no longer needed, because its echoes are henceforth sufficient to keep the poem in motion – as indeed the echoing refrain suggests. This closely resembles the vanishing of the child in "Introduction." Thus when we ask if the motion of the poem can reach as far as completing the kiss, we are also asking if writing echoes (which the piper begins after the vanishing of the child) can achieve the imaginative rebirth that in the union of child and lamb would here repeat the Orphic creation or the coming of Spring to the echoing green.

Blake etched this poem on two different plates; on the first, there is a child in the lap of a mother figure, and some sheep farther off, while on the second the child is seen with a smaller and two bigger lambs, pulling the face of the small one towards its face. This enforces the sense of movement towards eroticism. Yet the two bigger lambs on the second plate seem to be the parents of the small lamb – as the protecting mother disappears from the first plate, protective parents appear on the other side on

²⁷ Wagenknecht p.25. My reading here owes to Wagenknecht's analyses of this poem and its illustrations (cf. pp. 24-29).

the second. This is yet another instance of what we have called a visual echo. It must also be noted that there is a slight change in the refrain in the third stanza: “to welcome” changes into “we welcome,” suggesting the harmony of child and lamb, or, if we like, the success of the wooing. The illustrations, however, imply that there is in fact no exposure of the ‘lovers’ to the dangers of an independent relationship, the dangers implied by the biblical reference of betrayal in the second stanza (“Cock does crow / So do you”). The ever-present guides (the mother on the first, the parent-sheep on the second etching) are there to protect child and lamb from a world where betrayal has also been evoked. Design and text together imply that the appearance of “we” in the third refrain may well indicate harmony, but is not the consummation of the kiss. The poem’s development stops short before this would take place, and the consummation is replaced by the return of the line that echoes through the poem, as the image of the mother is ‘echoed’ on the second plate by the image of the parent-sheep.

The two-fold nature of echoing comes out very clearly on these plates. The pictorial echoing of the mother by the parent-sheep on the designs is also expressive of their harmony, just as the word “we” in the last refrain is expressive of the harmony of child and lamb in the text. At the same time, the echoing itself, both by pictorial means and by means of the refrain, is what stops the kiss short of being actually made. The protection of the parents is present and is necessitated by the potential betrayal, implying the dangers of the world beyond the pastoral that approach with the poem’s approach towards eroticism. Innocence is not entirely safe, not entirely devoid of desire, the innocent require protection. Harmony here is not exactly a fulfilment of love; it seems to coincide, paradoxically, with a stopping short of fulfilment, which is necessary in order to stop short of exposure to an unprotected state. Neither is this a bad thing *within* Innocence. There, it is plainly harmony. Harmony, expressed by Orphic piping and pastoral echoing.

But the figure of echo does its work here as well: while Echo, unsatisfied by Narcissus, resounds her words of longing, her voice turns into the pastoral echo expressive of the harmony of man, song and nature. ‘I give you power over me’ – in Blake’s Songs, Echo gives power over to the harmony of pastoral song; the song admits her desire, but instead of fulfilling it, subsumes it in a harmony that claims to protect us from the despairs of longing. This protection is benevolent, as it keeps up the realm of Innocence, but is abortive in that with the same gesture it keeps up the echoes of longing. The work the figure of echo does in the poem beautifully comes to the open as the refrain, with the word “we” inserted, follows the phrase “Let me kiss / Your soft face”: we get harmony instead of fulfilment.

Spring, as the birth of the Year, is in this poem heralded in by the sound of a flute – it is, in this sense, itself an echo, as it is an answer to the Orphic song. If we now return to “The Echoing Green” with what we have learned about Spring here, that it is itself an echo, giving birth to a year that will be spent under the ambiguous authority of the figure of echo, we will have a by now rather unsurprising answer to our initial question concerning the source of echoing in that poem. The birds echo the bells, the bells metaphorically echo Spring, and this sets up the Blakean scene of Echoing Innocence, as Spring itself is an echo initiating further echoing. “The Echoing Green” is not an ‘Orphic poem’ in the sense Wagenknecht describes “Spring” – here we have no initiating flute. With the rising of the Sun Spring arrives and echoing is set off to “make happy the skies.” The source of this happiness is of course pastoral echoing, the children’s harmony with nature. The turning of the “Echoing Green” into “darkening Green” within Innocence is only the end of one blissful day that will be followed by the next; viewed from without, however, we may well suspect that more than that is implied. The more ominous sense is made almost explicit by saying that the children who retire to the laps of their mothers at the end of the day “No more can be merry” (l.22). This, of course, is also the moment when echoing comes to an end. As opposed to Spenser’s *Epithalamion*, however, the descending night and the dying down of echoing is no Hymen, but a night spent in the mother’s lap – in the lap of mother nature, if we like, that maintains the potential for longing.

If the poem indeed describes a natural cycle, as seems to be the case, then this implies that the bliss of Innocence is dependent on this cycle. It is perhaps well to remind ourselves at this point that echoing is not only a figure, but also a physical phenomenon in which the figure roots: as such, echoing depends on nature. If Blake replaces the figure of memory with the figure of echo, he also replaces a mental process with one that is dependent on nature. If he is replacing it to escape imaginative dependence on a Muse, he is playing a deceptive game. If we set up a metaphoric connection between memory and echo saying that what we remember are echoes from our past, then there is still an important difference between the two: while memory can and does reshape the remembered, echoes recapitulate the same. Under the authority of the figure of echo, dependence on nature cannot be escaped. The figure itself turns this dependence into a harmonious relation, which is precisely the sense of Blake’s use of pastoral echoing. But this does not erase the dependence inherent in the figure. The children in their mother’s laps, which features often in the designs and texts of the *Songs of Innocence*, is expressive of just this dependence. But this also means that with natural decay, Innocence also decays. The “organic decay” Harold Bloom notes in the threat of

the 'darkening' green²⁸ is itself encoded into the Songs from the start by the echoing invocation.

That this decay is in fact a regressive element in the imagination that writes echoes can also be discerned in the "The Echoing Green." The poem counterbalances the approaching darkness by the lines

Round the laps of their mothers,
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest.

The children retire into safety; but they are also retiring into their dependence on (mother) nature. That the retiring of the children into their natural safety should coincide with the darkening of the green brings into the open the threat inherent in the harmony of Innocence. So far, however, we have not treated the middle stanza of the poem, to which we must now turn.

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say,
Such such were the joys,
When we all girls and boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Echoing Green.

The elders, too are in harmony with the natural scene and the children: their age does not contrast them to the little ones, as they, too, by seeing the children, "laugh away care." The old folk, however, speak in the past tense – this apparently connects them to memory, since what they utter is what they remember. Yet they share in the present bliss and remember their own past bliss at the same time. They also join into the echoing scene by, as it were, echoing the joy of the children. Their experience is one from the past, actualised by resounding in the present – and this is precisely what an

²⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company. A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961) p. 31

echo does to sound. The relation is nicely brought out aurally (by the repetition) and conceptually (by the past tense) in the line “Such such were the joys.” In Innocence, the reminiscences of the old folk are turned into echoes instead of memories. This, I believe, is once again the means to lend their joy immediacy instead of making it nostalgic.

Now if we imagine Innocence to be an eternal state of bliss and take “darkening” at its face value, that is, as the end of a day followed by a next blissful day and so on, the children who now retire into their mothers’ laps will after a good number of such days become the “old folk” sitting in this scene under the oak. In other words, the echoing of the Green will remain the form of experience for the children as it is now for the old folk. But the children themselves are even now playing on an *echoing* green, their form of experience being thus no different from the direct yet indirect experience of the old folk. “Darkening” with all its ominous connotations describes the state when echoing remains the form of experience for ever. By inversion, the old folk echoing the children themselves remain children. The old and the young are not contrasted; they echo each other; they are the versions of each other. True, this also implies that the old folk remain innocent – in this sense, they are the positive contrast to the elders of Experience who are not in harmony with, but repress children. But then, these old folk also keep retiring to the laps of their mothers. They do not exceed the protective cuddling of nature, they do not become creative minds, they lack the power for imaginative rebirth because they sing under the authority of Echo.

The elders in this poem are absolutely positive figures, but that is only because we are here within Innocence. Viewed from an other perspective, it is in the unengraved prophetic book written around the same time as the Songs, *Tiviel*, that we find the equivalents of these elders:

And Har & Heva like two children sat beneath the Oak
Mnetha now aged waited on them. & brought them food & clothing
But they were as the shadow of Har. & as the years forgotten
Playing with flowers. & running after birds they spent the day
And in the night like infants slept delighted with infant dreams

(E:277)

I do not think it is exaggerating to say that where “shadow” is written in this passage we may easily have ‘echo.’ A shadow is the visual equivalent of an echo, but that is not the only reason. The elders of “The Echoing Green” are viewing their former selves, they echo the children, in a sense they are the echoes of themselves. The

vales of Har, of which Har and Heva are the shadows, is the pastoral world of *Tiriel*. Likewise, the elders are themselves the echoes of the pastoral scene of Innocence – their laugh is presumably also echoing in the landscape as they echo the laughs of the children. Were we not within Innocence in the poem, as we are not in *Tiriel*, we may as well weep at seeing them. The relation of the ‘shadow’ in *Tiriel* to the echo in the Songs seems even more tenable by recalling a passage from the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained ... And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire” (E34). The figure of echo, as we have seen, infuses into the Songs the echo of desire, which, as Echo’s own desire, can only be passive. The figures of Har and Heva make explicit the regressiveness the figure of echo creates implicitly in the old folk of “The Echoing Green.”

It is also noteworthy that in *Tiriel* Mnetha, “tutelary genius” of the state of Har and Heva, the regressed innocents, bears a name that is presumably made up of the names of Athena and Mnemosyne, goddesses of wisdom and of memory.²⁹ Thus in *Tiriel* those who are incapable of imaginative rebirth are presided over (partly) by the Mother of the Muses, by memory, while in the Songs, where the shortcomings of Innocence are essentially the same as what produces the vales of Har, Echo has been found to be the governing figure. The echoing green valleys of Innocence and the vales of Har are, one could argue, of course *not* the same place, but as Northrop Frye reminds us, “all imaginative places are the same place” for Blake.³⁰ Mnemosyne and Echo are no aliens to each other, echoing does not defeat memory by its illusory immediacy. Innocence seems to be Beulah instead of the vale of Har of *Tiriel* in Blake’s mythology merely by virtue of the viewpoint, by the imaginative act of taking up a viewpoint *inside* Innocence.

The imaginative act in question – the form of imagination in Innocence – is one that claims to do away with memory as a part of the imagination. But this, as Blake achieves it through the reliance on pastoralism, as we have seen, has its own consequences. Not only does this form of imagination appear in a sense regressive, not only is it not “Vision,” but consequently it also has the added shortcoming that once we are within this state, there is no way to exceed the limits of Innocence.³¹ The

²⁹ Bloom, Commentary in E, p.946.

³⁰ Frye, “Blake’s Introduction to Experience” in Frye, ed.: *Blake. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice – Hall, 1966) p. 27

³¹ The vale of Har in Bloom’s phrasing (pp. 45-6) is “a lower paradise and seed bed of potential life which undergoes its own cycles but never dies into the life of human existence and so never becomes altogether

conclusion of *The Book of Thel* makes explicit just how ultimately binding this state of the soul and the writing of echoes are. Thel is allowed a glimpse beyond her pastoral world and upon hearing the “voice of sorrow” she flees aghast:

Why cannot the ear be closed to its own destruction?
 Or the glistening Eye to the poison of a smile!
 Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
 Or an Eye of gifts & graces, show'ring fruits & coined gold!
 Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright.
 Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy!
 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?

The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek.
 Fled back unhindered till she came into the vales of Har
 (E.6)

Thel is obviously being frightened away from the world beyond her pastoral bliss by the exposure of the sensuality awaiting her. This is completely in keeping with what we have observed about Innocence, with Echo's incapacity to participate in this sensuality, and in *Tiriel* Blake shows us what becomes of the virgin who flees back into the vales of Har, the pastoral world – our reading of “The Echoing Green” has revealed the same process. Furthermore, as Robert Gleckner has pointed out, the sex of the voice of sorrow remains ambiguous and “Blake is at some pains ... to allow the voice to be, in effect, Thel's own as well.”³² With this in mind, the first line of this speech – “Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?” – may well be read also as Thel's own lament on her captivity in echoing Innocence. The “destruction” is, in this reading, that of echoes, for it is to her, who cannot hear but echoes, that the world of sensuality appears as terror. She has fully given power over herself to the figure of echo, and thus she is doomed to imaginative passivity.

The Book of Thel, *The Songs of Innocence* and *Tiriel*, all of which employ or reflect on pastoralism, outline a similar state of the soul and the imagination, though from

real.” We are now throwing a glance at the cycle of this state of imagination, but what matters in the present argument is that “it never dies” into life; in other words, exit from it is not possible.

³² Gleckner, *Blake and Spenser* p.33.

different viewpoints. That the point of view makes all the difference can be discerned from the different impressions Thel and Har and Heva are made to make: Thel is a fragile, pure, innocent spirit, while Har and Heva are ridiculous and pathetic. If, as I have been arguing, in *The Songs of Innocence* Blake tries to avoid memory, he does allude to the presence of Mnemosyne in *Tiriel*, in the book depicting the future fate of Thel, who herself is quite evidently in the state of Innocence. That is to say, in the *Songs* Blake creates a form in which the imagination claims to do without memory, but as soon as he makes us take up a different point of vantage and gives us a broader view of the pastoral world of echoing Innocence, he re-admits memory into the state of the imagination his versions of the pastoral describe. On this score, we could obviously conclude that Blake is giving a satire of pastoralism and through that also of a certain kind of imagination which he, largely due to its connection to memory, finds wanting. I do not want to pretend that the satiric dimension of Blake's pastoralism should be disregarded, but it is quite a different point I want to conclude with. I think that on the basis of observing Blake's strategies of excluding memory, we can also begin to grasp the nature of his oeuvre – in other words, we can grasp how Blake's work is formed through observing his struggle to exile Mnemosyne from the work of imagination.

As we have seen, in creating his state of Innocence, instead of writing traditional pastoral, Blake has his piper write echoes – this on the one hand is an avoidance of the authority of memory, and on the other it is outlining the central features of this state via its imaginative potential. In this sense, avoiding memory itself has a role in shaping the poems: the specific altering of the figure Blake activates here accounts, as I have tried to show in some of its details, for much that made these poems take their specific shape. However, if the fate of the Muse here is to be refigured into Echo, we are still witnessing the vicious circle of mythological statements (and rejecting the *Muse* is such a statement), where metaphors stand behind one another and disallow the poet's exit from the realm ruled by Mnemosyne. Thel's incapacity of leaving the vale of Har is itself an indication of the difficulty, and the re-admission of memory through the figure of Mnetha in *Tiriel* shows us that though the Muses may have been exiled from the *Songs*, Mnemosyne has not been exiled from the form of imagination these texts employ. As in our discussion of the figure of memory, here too, we may ask if there is any getting around these metaphors, and here too, we find that the metaphors do not vanish, but are only refigured: in this particular case we have found the figure of memory being refigured into the figure of echo. Furthermore, this very refiguring plays an active part in how the presence of the metaphors effects and shapes the texts. But then, Blake seems to be well aware of this (which we can discern

from his manipulation of generic peculiarities). He seems to be implying that far more needs to be done to avoid memory, which he indicates by presenting the pastoral world from different viewpoints. He is, I think, aware that memory and imagination are so fundamentally bound up that to undo this tie, he must in a sense undo poetry, or, to tone down the provocation in this statement, to undo our ways of understanding poetry. The aim of which, ultimately, may well be to achieve a way out of the vicious circle of interpreting metaphorical statements through other metaphors. Should this be achieved, not only would poetry be liberated from the realm of Mnemosyne, but our understanding of poetry may also have to be cut loose from the realm of literature. That Blake's aspirations may in fact go this far can be grasped in his attempt to *write visions* and in his demand that we read visions.

AFTERTHOUGHTS: BLAKE'S FORM OF POETRY BEYOND MEMORY

As we notice that understanding Blake depends to a great degree on understanding the shifting of viewpoints, we may remember that in contrasting the Daughters of Memory and the Daughters of Inspiration, Blake seems to have been asking precisely for a specific *way of seeing* for the right kind of poetic imagination – in other words, we can easily connect Blake's technique of viewpoints to a demand for an emphatically visual understanding of poetry. Furthermore, the visual element seems smoothly consonant with some of the reasons for Blake's rejection of memory. Memory is to be exiled from the imagination because it binds the mind to time by enhancing seeing in sequence and because it binds it to generalisation by enhancing thinking in abstractions. Sequence, and what seems its necessary concomitant, abstraction, may be more comfortably evaded by images than by texts, since the literary is necessarily temporal, while the pictorial is spatial. The pictorial, theoretically, presents to the mind all elements of its subject simultaneously, while language cannot but work in sequence; and we can also argue that images (again strictly theoretically) achieve a higher degree of immediacy of perception than words, which cannot but contain an element of abstraction due to the process of signification. Consequently, it seems likely that Blake's combination of text and image is a necessary part of his endeavours for excluding memory from the imagination, for presenting an atemporal Vision.

The counterpart here of the visual imagination in literary technique is Blake's manipulation of points of view. We have seen that one specific point of view will never give us the full sense of what Blake is saying, nor are we asked to *progress* from one viewpoint to the next. Innocence is not just one *stage* of the imagination, out of which

one can progress to higher stages. This is precisely what writing echoes implies: echoes cannot generate other kinds of sounds, only repeat the same. Likewise, writing echoes cannot develop into another kind of poetry. This is precisely what echoing reveals in connection to the state of Innocence: because Innocence is echoing with its own sounds, it can only be echoed by its dwellers. The piper will keep being inspired to write the same song, the only one which he seems capable of writing, Old John will keep hearing the echoes of the joy of the children and stay a child in imagination, Thel will forever flee the voice of sorrow which echoes her own terror at what lies beyond Innocence, and Har and Heva will never see themselves as Blake makes us see them. But Blake makes us see them as regressed Innocents only through the conjunction of several works, and of several points of view. Only by seeing simultaneously all the viewpoints Blake has to offer can we grasp all he meant to say in individual works. Surely, there is nothing very surprising in the observation that new light will be thrown on a poem by other poems of the poet. In the case of Blake's work, however, our very misunderstandings of a poem which can result from disregarding other poems is an essential part of any one of Blake's poems. In its radical form, this will mean that none of Blake's particular texts will yield to understanding without considering the *whole* of Blake's poetry; or, the misunderstanding that derives from not considering the whole oeuvre is itself part of what each poem has to tell us – but then again, we will only understand our misunderstandings through observing the whole work. Without holding in mind all the viewpoints simultaneously, our interpretations will act out the fate of Thel, just as a limited understanding of, in our case, *The Songs of Innocence* will yield nothing but sentimentality. If our interpretation only echoes Innocence, we will remain entrapped in a limited form of imagination.³³

This is very probably one of the features of Blake's poetry that makes it so difficult to understand: in a sense, we have to read all his poetry to be able to see into

³³ Robert Gleckner's important essay, "Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs" (first published in *The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LXI, 11, November 1957, and reprinted in Northrop Frye, ed., *Blake. A Collection of Critical Essays* pp. 8-14) opens by giving a critique of Joseph Wicksteed's reading of "My Pretty Rose Tree" as guilty of just the kind of fallacy I am describing. Among other instances of the consequences of such readings we could mention Gillham's avoidance of noting or interpreting the ambiguities of the poems, in *Blake's Contrary States* (Cambridge: CUP, 1966), which is the result of seeing Innocence as simply 'good' and Experience as simply 'bad.' Of course I am not implying that excellent critics dabble in sentimentality when reading from restricted viewpoints, but one does find a good deal of sometimes tedious moralising when such criticism attempts to make these simple poems seem important in themselves.

any one piece, and to *see* whatever it is that Blake wants us to see, we should, because we can but *read* his poetry, read it all at once, as it were, simultaneously. But then, this is probably the very reason why Blake writes the way he does, using constantly shifting viewpoints, giving us not a sequence of poems, but showing us the vast panorama of a single work. It is from the same perspective that it becomes very significant that Blake was not only a poet but also an artist, and the fact that he also produced designs is an essential part of the way he wrote. What I am driving at with these points is my impression that Blake is asking the reader to see his poetry as if it were a single image, thus attempting to break down the inherent temporality of the literary text and the abstraction inherent in words. Blake's books to a certain extent testify to this, since what Blake produced were in the majority illuminated books: not merely words on paper, but exquisite art-objects to be treated, *seen* and read, *as* objects. For instance, in one version, the *Songs of Experience* is etched on the other side of the plates of the *Songs of Innocence*, the result of which is that when we see or read one side, we cannot see the other, but in fact we hold both in our hands, we have both states *at once* before us.³⁴ The idea I want to inject here is that this is of importance in Blake's work: his book is also an object with spatial dimensions, which if we 'flip through' in sequence will lose some of its dimensions.

But Vision seems to mean even more than the presentation of the world as one image. If Blake presents his poetry as a vast picture, it is furthermore to be seen as a four-dimensional image, the fourth dimension being the simultaneous Vision of the three distinguishable dimensions of images – only thus will Vision indeed belong to the imagination and not only to the eye. The three dimensional image, if we like, is what we see *with* the eye, but imagination looks "thru [the eye] & not with it" (E566). Correspondingly, Blake's whole mythology (if we wish to give it that name) is itself "Fourfold," built up as it is of Ulro, Generation, Beulah and Eden, where fourfold vision belongs only to Eden, and so does what only qualifies as fully human for Blake: "The Human is Fourfold" (E97). Innocence cannot be the final form of imagination: it may pretend to have done away with memory, but it is still only part of the whole picture.³⁵ Because to Blake memory binds the mind to time, sequence and abstraction, it is relegated to Ulro.

³⁴ See Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Quality Paperbacks Direct, 1995), pp.121, 141. Ackroyd argues (pp. 141-42) that due to the "technical process" of the production of the book, it "becomes resistant to conventional interpretation (...)."

³⁵ See Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p.233: "Beulah is a place of perilous equipoise, being as it is the region of the imagination which falls short of the disciplined unity of art. Eden is 'human'; Beulah is 'sexual,' the region

That Blake's rejection of memory is an important part of his rejection of a certain kind of imagination and poetry, and a part of his endeavour to write *Visions*, is made explicit by Blake and is a well-established point in Blake scholarship. What I hope to have shown, on the one hand, is that if memory is not merely regarded as a mental process but as a metaphor for the imagination, the exclusion of the metaphor has inevitable consequences, the interpretation of which is likely to aid our interpretation of the poems. The point of these perhaps somewhat rash afterthoughts is that it is also likely that Blake's whole poetic oeuvre takes its specific shape as a result of his radicalism in exiling Mnemosyne from the realm of poetry. A body of poetry that is asked to be seen as a huge image seems to be Blake's final form of a poetry that can do without memory. Through the serious interest and work of a number of poets and critics, Blake's work is to a certain extent redeemed from obscurity, but it remains rather inaccessible and impenetrable for the general reader or even for the non-specialist critic. The reason for this is not necessarily the peculiarity of Blake's ideas, but rather the peculiarity of the artistic form he chose to express his ideas in. Yet form, of course, cannot be separated from, but is dependent on and formative of the ideas. The fact that among these ideas is the conviction that "Imagination has nothing to do with Memory" (E666) determines to a large extent the form of Blake's poetry – what I have been implying is that this form is, as it were, on the verge of being something other than poetry. The strength of the figurative kinship between memory and imagination, and of the metaphor expressing this (which I have here called the figure of memory) seems to be such, that their annihilation demands something short of the annihilation of poetry as a temporal art.

This does not mean that I would not regard Blake's poetry as poetry – to say this would be to say that there exists some preconceived notion of poetry as separate from actually existing poems. On the contrary, what I am suggesting is that Blake's work is pushing poetry beyond the limits his predecessors' works have ascribed to it, and that he is compelled to do this in his urge to divorce imagination from memory. Mnemosyne and her Daughters may be expelled from the realm of poetry, but the price of that seems to be that the very nature of poetry itself will have to go through a radical transformation. The nature of Blake's work, just as much as its obscurity and its grandeur, all have much to do with the relentlessness with which he pursued this transformation.

of passive pleasure, a Freudian land of dreams in which all images are erotic." To which we could add that Beulah is all the more Freudian as its erotic dreams are always suppressed and unfulfilled, as the poetry of Innocence is determined by Echo's longing.



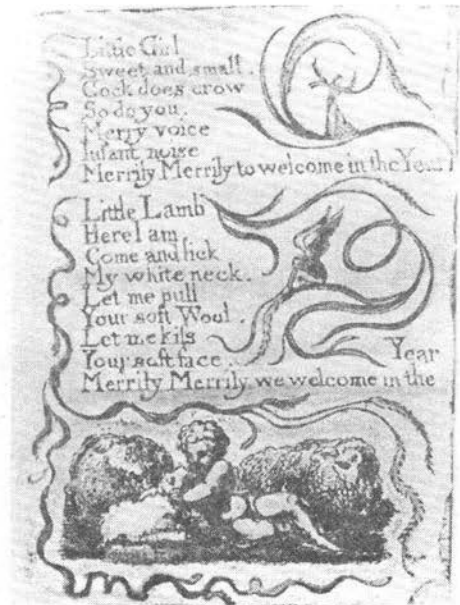
Blake: Frontispiece to
Songs of Innocence,
illustrating "Introduction"



Blake: "The Echoing Green"



Blake: "Spring," first plate



Blake: "Spring," second plate



Blake: *The Whirlwind of Lovers. Divine Comedy, Plate 10.*



D. G. Rossetti: *Paolo and Francesca*