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D I S C U S S I O N

Vala's Garden

Andrew Lincoln

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objects, sometimes as a restraint, sometimes as liberation, always as an antitheticality. Antitheticality or contrariety resists romantic allegory and abstract law based on reason. It insists on the particular and exercises its ability to provide the other (but an involved other) in any cultural situation, any cultural moment always threatening the establishment of an external authority and the negation of freedom. But it is more than this resistance. It is also the ground of creation. Because it does not fix meaning according to logic², it allows always for possibility, though its *use* will be likely eventually to die into a tyranny and require a repetition of the antithetical gesture, which is the gesture Blake makes when he dramatizes his argument.

¹Lodovico Castelvetro, "The Poetics of Aristotle Translated and Explained," in *Critical Theory Since Plato* (ed. Hazard Adams), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 151.

²W. J. T. Mitchell, "Visible Language," in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism* (ed. Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, p. 87.

DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

Vala's Garden

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In her paper "Vala's Garden in Night the Ninth: Paradise Regained or Woman Bound?" (*Blake* 20 (1987): 116-24) Catherine Haigney cites a wide range of critics who have read the pastoral episode as a joyful celebration of innocence, and have thus tended to overlook "pitfalls" in the text, to "ameliorate the Tharmas/Enion seduction scene," and to ignore the circularity of Blake's myth. One might easily conclude from her paper that the "traditional view" of this episode has never before been challenged. For the record, at least one critic¹ has already suggested that the serenity of this episode is deceptive, that the relationships between Luvah and Vala, and between Tharmas and Enion are not necessarily harmonious, and that there is an element of circularity in the myth here (because the passage can be read as the prelude to Man's fall as well as to his resurrection). I feel I should point this out, if only because Catherine Haigney does not.

¹Andrew Lincoln, "Blake's Lower Paradise: The Pastoral Passage in *The Four Zoas*, Night the Ninth," *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 84 (1981): 470-79.

Reply to Andrew Lincoln

Catherine Haigney

Andrew Lincoln's article does indeed question the innocence of Night the Ninth's pastoral episode, and had I read his work before publishing, I certainly would have acknowledged its perceptive analysis of the interlude's uneasiness. The following insight of his sounds especially like my own:

The style of the passage is disarmingly simple . . . and may seem to invite a relaxed reading, especially in the context of the exuberant Last Judgement described in the rest of the Night. The context leads us to expect an onward movement towards reintegration and regeneration, and this expectation may lead us to overlook or minimize the significance of features which disturb the sense of progress. (Lincoln, 471)

And yet while we agree that this earthly paradise blends shadow with light, our explanations for its troubling darkness remain quite different. Lincoln treats Vala as an Evian figure whose suffering and doubt arise partly from "the dangers of wilful self-absorption" (475) and whose interaction with Tharmas and Enion shows us "the seductive power of matter and its tendency to leave the sense unsatisfied" (476). In extracting the universal spiritual significance of what happens in Blake's pastoral setting, Lincoln writes that "the interlude . . . illustrates the susceptibility of the soul to the pleasures of the material world, which may lead her to turn away from her maker" (477).

My reading differs from Lincoln's by treating Vala not as a representative soul conceived in Miltonic terms, but as a specifically "feminine" being opposing what is "masculine" in the poem. Whereas Lincoln uses a traditional framework of religious thought to explain what he sees as the main theme of innocence lost, I use a feminist methodology to reconsider the disturbing struggle between male and female in the *Four Zoas* as a whole. One example of how our two approaches diverge: when "reluctant" Enion is induced to follow Tharmas (131: 552; E 399), Lincoln sees her submission as Blake's affirmation of an ideal hierarchy—Eve's yielding to Adam in *Paradise Lost*. I, on the other hand, see the passage as enacting a sinister kind of sexual drama, with Vala (herself enclosed and subjugated by Luvah) aiding Tharmas in his domination of a woman who remains unwilling. For Lincoln, Vala is the central figure in a Miltonic psychomachia; for me, she and Enion both appear as counterparts in a shifting power-play between the sexes.