

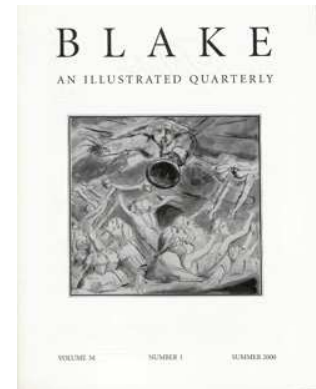
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A R T I C L E

Blake and Feminism: Romanticism and the Question of the Other

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I. Romanticism, Unity and Difference

How we define romanticism is more than a quibble over literary history and periodization; it concerns our very self-definition. Indeed, it raises the question of whether collective self-definition is desirable, avoidable or possible. Such questions are also crucial for an understanding of Blake and his relationship to our time. For Blake is at once the very icon of *self-definition* in opposition to unified identity: phrases such as "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's" and "One law for the lion and ox is oppression" are repeated and quoted beyond the context of romanticism and literary studies. At the same time, *Jerusalem* stands as an intense project of unification, integration and collective redemption, such that even sexual difference is sublated in the final utopian gestures of this prophecy. This essay will explore the ambivalence of romantic unity through the figure of sexual difference and will argue that Blake offers a way of understanding the relation of difference *positively*—that is, not as a relation between two self-identical terms, and not as a relation within some pre-differential unity, but as a difference that dynamically sustains each term *in relation*. This understanding of positive difference has recently been articulated in feminist theory, most specifically in the work of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray's work is exemplary of the post-enlightenment tradition within which Blake was also writing. Both Blake and Irigaray seek autonomy and freedom from imposed authority, but both also seek to temper or chasten this autonomy by arguing that the dynamic existence of a self can only be achieved in an ethical relation. As ethical, this relation must be more than just a mirror of one's self; the other must be a different self. This is why sexual difference is a crucial figure for defining a romantic, as opposed to enlightenment, unity. If we are to conceive of a politics that recognizes others, and not just those who can be included within a fraternity of brothers all possessing the same reason, laws and desires, then we need to think of *different* subjects.¹ The "other" must be both other than myself but also recognizable as other. How

¹ In *The Politics of Friendship* Jacques Derrida has explored this possibility of a post-enlightenment politics that extends beyond relations of recognition, knowledge and active inclusion; such a politics would consider all those effects, relations and events that exceed the determi-

do we preclude recognition from returning all otherness to the "same dull round"? To be a different subject one must be recognizable *as a subject* (and not an inert, passive and determined object), but one must also be recognisable (and therefore risk being included within the same). According to Irigaray the relation of sexual difference offers just this possibility (*Ethics* 5). Perhaps this is why, from Blake to D. H. Lawrence and contemporary feminism, it is sexual difference that represents the possibility of thinking a relation of difference that does not fall back into a static unity.

Recent assessments of the contemporary critical terrain have opened with the question of romantic unity, and its relation to self-becoming. According to Andrew Bowie, for example, our current zeal for post-structuralism might be tempered if we were to realize that debates regarding the limits of knowledge and representation were already played out in the romantic tradition.² Furthermore, Bowie argues that the romantics might offer a more valuable, ethical and politically enabling response to our textual condition. If it is the case that language and representation preclude any possibility of apocalyptic unity or return to self-presence, then we might follow two paths: we might celebrate fragmentation, disunity, disintegration, difference and anti-foundationalism; or, as Bowie advocates, we might recognize unity or the absolute as a utopian possibility—not capable of being represented in language, but intimated through certain art forms (*From Romanticism* 299). This might help us to re-politicize high romanticism, for the initial canonization of romanticism concerned just this relation among unity, difference and political resolution³—a relation that is given a unique reformulation in recent feminist theory and in Blake's use of images of sexual difference.⁴

nation of the subject. Such a politics would be affirmative by moving beyond the enlightenment paradigm of self-determination, for it would also be open to what exceeds the cognition of the present. This politics of the "perhaps," as Derrida calls it, might help us to make sense of Blake's utopian striving for a relation beyond the self and the present, alongside Blake's resistance to any resting point for this striving.

² An earlier criticism of French post-structuralism was made by Peter Dews in *Logics of Disintegration* who, like Bowie, insisted on the specific value of the romantic theorization of utopian unity in opposition to the French passion for difference and "disintegration."

³ According to M. H. Abrams, romanticism proper emerges in 1795 when political unity is no longer sought, and resolutions are achieved through poetry and individual expression. And Marilyn Butler, as late as 1981, also argues for an "internalisation" of romantic striving after 1795 (although Butler is less concerned to establish any aesthetic merit *per se* in this depoliticization) [*Romantics, Rebels* 50].

⁴ According to Rosi Braidotti, for example, the problem with post-modern fragmentation is that it arrives just at that moment when women are forming their own subjectivity; the disintegration of the self is one final moment of a Cartesianism that refuses to recognize that there might be more than one general mode of becoming (*Patterns of Dissonance*). Similarly, while Blake resisted all those Urizenic images of a reason that had become one more tyrannical authority, he also lamented the fall of the self into complete disintegration.

Now there are three ways we might respond to this question regarding politics and unity. The first would be to challenge the supposed de-politicization of romantic poetry in its striving for integration. Not only have Jerome McGann and Marjorie Levinson questioned the construction of romanticism through the conventional canonization of the more inward or psychologically-oriented works; they have also provided politicized and historical readings of those poems that ostensibly seek spiritual rather than political unity. (On such a reading canonical romanticism would be an apparently conservative moment, awaiting its critical redemption through attention to its actual historical conditions.) The second possibility, along the lines offered by the quite different work of Andrew Bowie, Steven Goldsmith and others, would be to sustain the idea of a turn to aesthetic or formal problems in romantic unity, but argue that this aesthetics has a political and ethical force. There is, it is argued, a specifically poetic striving in romanticism, and one that is at odds with any achieved, or achievable, political unity. However, it is just this disjunction—between the aesthetic and the political—that has a liberating and ethical force. According to Andrew Bowie, art can intimate a unity that will take any political debate beyond its given terms of reference and meaning. For Steven Goldsmith, it is precisely the recognition that any apocalyptic unity must be *represented* or poetically envisioned that precludes the imposition of any final, single or totalitarian unity over the arena of different voices. For Geoffrey Hartman, the need to re-invigorate the romantic “retreat” from culture is more urgent than ever. In the face of a cultural studies industry that wishes to reduce the world to representation and simulacra, poetry foregrounds the *difference* between word and world. In so doing poetry warns against its own risks of narcissistic self-enclosure. On this picture, “spiritual” or “poetic” unities are not de-politicizations but utopian gestures that hold the political open to question.

One perceived problem with both these lines of approach is their failure to consider the politics of discussing unity and fragmentation *in general*; what if these were gender-specific motifs? What if the aims of re-integration were inherently masculinist, and what if the acceptance of an otherness that lay beyond the self characterized a feminine way of existing? The third negotiation of unity concerns not just the relation between political and spiritual resolutions but the figuration of these resolutions through gender. Here, the striving for unity—whether political or spiritual—is argued to be inherently masculinist. The figure of original unity that romanticism seeks to retrieve is a displacement of an original maternal plenitude. In order to emerge *as a subject* there must be some subject/object differentiation, and this difference is represented as the difference between a male identity and a female object. The first object is the mother; and so the subject emerges as *other than* maternal. (Masculinity would therefore be produced through objec-

tification, autonomy and self-definition, while femininity would be nothing more than the ground or object against which the masculine defines itself.)⁵ Understood pessimistically, this has disastrous consequences for women. Less capable of differentiating themselves from their maternal origin, women never attain full subjectivity.⁶ Understood positively, this diagnosis allows for a critical re-reading of romanticism *and* for an autonomous feminine aesthetic.

Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender*, for example, subsumes Blake's theory of the feminine within a general romantic failure to recognise the *otherness*, or autonomy, of female experience. According to Mellor:

Blake's gender politics conform to those of the other Romantic poets: the male imagination can productively absorb the female body, but if the reverse occurs, as when Vala or the Female Will covers the body of Albion in her veil, the image is negatively equated with a fall into death and self-annihilation. (23)

Romanticism can be read as a sustained attempt to refigure the subject's maternal origin in the subject's own terms. And so all those images of unity would function to reintegrate a subject that must disavow its debt to the maternal origin from which it is necessarily alienated. This definition of Blake within a “Masculine Romanticism” is not unique to Mellor and is problematic for several reasons.⁷

Mellor also makes a further claim. If women are less differentiated, more other-directed and less inclined to objectify the original (m)other, then their poetry will have less to do with self-definition and the reintegration of unity, and more to do with care, empathy and otherness. Mellor's argument thereby brings the issue of romantic unity in line with the question of sexual difference. Mellor articulates a common feminist objection to romanticism: “Masculine Romanticism” she argues “entails the elimination of Otherness” (27). Female romantics, on the other hand, “typically endorsed a commitment to a construction of subjectivity based on alterity” (3).

What needs to be noted, of course, is that Mellor's reliance on psychoanalytic theory is itself a reliance on romanticism; for Freud's theory regarding the yearning for a re-

⁵ The psychoanalytic explanation of this process of identification and objectification is given in Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, while the ethical implications of this theory are spelt out in Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, where Gilligan argues that the paradigm of moral autonomy is inadequate to explain women's specifically other-directed forms of ethics.

⁶ This is why, for example, the early work of Julia Kristeva argued that women would have difficulty acceding to the Symbolic order, while male avant-garde writers such as Joyce and Celine would have to be relied upon to re-negotiate the relation between identity and non-identity.

⁷ Other criticisms of romanticism along these lines are offered by Barbara A. Schapiro in *The Romantic Mother* and Marlon B. Ross in *The Contours of Masculine Desire*.

turn to maternal plenitude was itself an articulation of late German romanticism. What I will argue here is that recent feminist theory, and Blake's use of sexual difference, provides a challenge to this supposedly romantic elimination of difference. We need to question whether romanticism was a striving for unity and indifference, regardless of whether this striving be interpreted as a liberating utopianism or a masculinist narcissism. Blake offers not so much an answer to this question as a reformulation, and one that can provide fruitful interchange with recent issues in feminist and literary scholarship. The argument for a specifically feminine mode of difference marked second-wave feminism, but a third-wave or "difference" feminism has moved beyond the opposition between equality and difference. Whereas Mellor draws upon those psychoanalytic theories that *explain* the difference between masculinity and femininity, more recent forms of feminism have regarded this explanation as one-sided. The idea that masculinity originally negates the feminine assumes an already-given difference between male and female. But, as Irigaray has argued, any such difference is achieved through a process of differentiation, and this process might be conceived differently—not as negation but as a positive relation. Crucial to this argument is the figure, metaphor, fantasy or image of the natural female origin. For Irigaray, the subject traditionally emerges as other-than some presence; only with the positing of an object is the subject able to define himself as actively self-representing (*Speculum* 182). The standard figure for this original object is the maternal origin. This original unity has been fantasized through figures of sexual difference. But what if the subject were to relate to another subject, and not just to objectivity? Transforming thought would demand refiguring female difference—no longer as inert original presence but as itself capable of its own becoming (Irigaray, *I Love*). This would mean that a critique of the natural, eternal feminine would be achieved, not by reversing the hierarchy and asserting the value of women as passive and less autonomous, but by imagining a different form of difference. No longer a subject/object distinction, there might be two modes of subject. (In Blake's terms, the female nature that is seen as alien, natural and immutable will be transformed by recognizing that any self is already achieved in relation to another self. This self will be neither one's own spectral image, nor an objectified other. Just what this new mode of self would be is explored through a relation of sexual difference.) The "feminine" is at once the image that has underpinned masculine self-representation and a figure whose redemption will open reason to its disavowed dependence. As Irigaray has argued, it is only sexual difference—two subjects whose recognition of each other goes beyond reflection—that can open an ethics. Blake, I will argue, presents one complex form of what such an ethics might be. We might see Blake, then, as an exception to a romanticism that has, from Mary Shelley to Mellor, been diagnosed as narcissistic and hubristic in its striving for totality.

II. Blake and Sexual Difference

In order to be critical of the loss of sexual difference Blake did not need to anticipate the romantic narcissism that Mellor and others have diagnosed; he needed only to look back to Milton's divorce tracts. In these prose works Milton argued that a man's wife should not be his corporeal chattel but be, rather, a "spiritual helpmeet." Just as God created human beings free so they could properly reflect back his divinity, so a Christian wife should reflect God's own image in her husband. Women are not *other*; they differ from men only in degree. They may be *associated* with a realm of alterity (the body, sexuality, visual attractiveness) but a true Christian wife likens towards her husband in order that she may reflect back his divine goodness. Milton was quite clear that the feminine should play the subordinate role within a distinct hierarchy: "Who can be ignorant that woman was created for man, and not man for woman" (*Complete Prose Works* 2: 344). But he was also critical of any image of the feminine that would not reflect masculine glory: "man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which god proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely as his own image and glory" (*CPW* 2: 589).

Blake clearly rejects the Miltonic conception of gender whereby the feminine is the same as the masculine in kind and differs only in degree. Contrary to the standard feminist critique of Blake, Blake stresses the significance of gender alterity. The centrality which Blake grants the concept of sexual difference is evidenced in the culmination of *Jerusalem* where the union between the male (Albion) and his female emanation (Jerusalem) is the condition for the possibility of regaining human paradise. While such an apotheosis can be interpreted as an annihilation of the feminine it can also be read as a celebration of sexual difference. Determining whether the feminine is either complementary or subsidiary at the conclusion of Blake's epics would therefore be central to the feminist critique of romantic narcissism as it relates to Blake. What renders Blake's project different from yet one more mobilization of the feminine to resuscitate a flagging masculine subject is the ambivalent status of his final unity. For Blake presents more than just a retrieval of the female for a completed masculine subject; redemption is achieved through the recognition of two terms that are essentially related, yet never fully unified or integrated.

There is also a double movement in Blake whereby sexual difference is both a symbol and symptom of alienation as well as the means for redemption. Throughout his prophetic books Blake sees the division between male and female as a consequence of the fall from eternal unity. In the opening of the first book of *Milton* Los attempts to give Urizen definite form. As Urizen takes on a biological and limited body Los becomes enslaved to the finitude of his creation: "Terrified Los stood in the Abyss & his immortal limbs / Grew deadly

pale; he became what he beheld" (*Milton* 3: 28-29, E 97). As Los moves toward this fallen form, sexual differentiation occurs: "he wept over it, he cherish'd it / In deadly sickening pain: till separated into a Female pale" (*Milton* 3: 32-33, E 97). After the emanation of the female form there emerges "a Male Form howling in Jealousy" (*Milton* 3: 36, E 97). The "Jealousy" of this male form is important for the subtlety of Blake's argument. When sexual difference is constituted through opposition or conflict it is symptomatic of the general fall into disunity. Blake's alien female emanations—Vala, Rahab and Tirzah—are external, objectified and threateningly independent to their male counterparts.

However, it by no means follows that Blake supports the idea of a primordial and eternal androgyny to which human existence should return.⁸ Nor is it self-evident that for Blake feminine "otherness" should be subsumed within the masculine "same." Indeed Blake negotiates a subtle distinction between the narcissistic assimilation of otherness and a dynamic relation of recognition of otherness.⁹ Albion's emanation, Jerusalem, is a more benign female form because, though different, she complements, fulfills and recognizes male selfhood while chastening the masculine will to autonomy and "self-righteousness." At one level she can be read as a domesticated and internalized feminine. But she can also be seen as a subtle critique of the masculine terror of female "Otherness"—the entirely alien femininity of Vala, Rahab and Tirzah. These negative female figures represent not an independent or autonomous femininity but a masculine projection of female alterity—hence their connection with other ideological constructs such as Nature and Religion. The total denial of sexual difference can be as pernicious as the other extreme: the elevation of gender distinctions into two totally independent and warring opposites. In the prophetic books all qualities have their place in the eternal "man" including masculinity and femininity. In this respect Blake's Albion is "man" in the generic sense insofar as he represents humanity, and this tendency to universalize the masculine is always present in Blake's work. But Blake

also exploits the fact that Albion is specifically "man" insofar as he needs to reinstate his female emanation; it is *this* aspect of Blake's figuring of gender which articulates a freedom, ethics and autonomy that also sustains an essential recognition of alterity. Humanity has been "man" because it has rejected its integrated and original femininity (Jerusalem) and externalized and elevated an independent and dominating female form (Vala). Nature, the feminine and spirituality have been set over against the autonomous self; this is why these forms become tyrannical in Science, "harlots" and Religion. It is the externalization and objectification of these forms which results in despair and terror. Just as Blake's figure of Urizen represents a human projection of an externalized deity, so the alien "female will" is the feminine as figured by a fallen and alienated (masculine) consciousness. In *The Book of Urizen* Blake anticipates the emergence of the female form that he describes at greater length in *Milton*:

9. All Eternity shudder'd at sight
Of the first female now separate
Pale as a cloud of snow
Waving before the face of Los

10. Wonder, awe, fear astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads;
At the first female form now separate

They call'd her Pity, and fled

(*Urizen* 18-19: 9-15 & 1, E 78)

The female form here embodies pity—a quality which Blake saw as valuable in its place but also as a threatening element of the patronizing and domineering spirit of Christian charity. Significantly, this female form elicits wonder and becomes capable of the idolization we see later in Vala. Los attempts to embrace the female but she controls and dominates him through denial. Significantly, Blake located the doctrine of denial not in any feminine essence, but in the ideology of religion which exploited certain representations of the feminine:

But Los saw the Female & pitied
He embrac'd her, she wept, she refus'd
In perverse and cruel delight
She fled from his arms, yet he follow'd

(*Urizen* 19: 10-13, E 79)

However, Blake's female figures are not seen as threatening because of their bodily charm,¹⁰ but because of the gen-

⁸ The clearest defence of androgyny as an ideal in Blake's poetry is offered by Diane Long Hoeveler in *Romantic Androgyny*.

⁹ Jeanne Moskal accuses Blake of remaining within a fraternal model of self-recognition that "excludes the more radical versions of alterity" such as "sexual alterity" (106). Like Mellor, Moskal accuses Blake of demonizing what is other than the self. Most forms of otherness are recognised and overcome through forgiveness, but the feminine remains threateningly external. What I would argue here, though, is that Blake contributes to more than an ethics of forgiveness, for forgiveness still relies on recognition between selves. Blake challenges the very boundary of self and voice; and this is why the attribution of voice is so difficult in the prophetic books. It is often as though we hear the voice of moralism, sexism, accusation or piety speaking through certain characters, rather than being owned by characters. The word "harlot," for example, functions in "London" and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* to show us what a way of speaking does. Similarly, the figures of masculinity and femininity are played off against each other, with any position or over-arching point of view remaining undecidable.

¹⁰ Again Blake challenges the Miltonic theory of gender. Adam in *Paradise Lost* falls because of Eve's "too heavenly form"; the feminine is thereby associated with the physical and visual aspects of experience. In Blake the feminine is threatening only from a certain (fallen) way of seeing.

eral human process of externalizing and idolizing what should really be seen as inward and human. Significantly, Blake is also critical of the Miltonic idea of woman as man's own image. When woman serves merely as an external reflection of male selfhood, solipsism as well as alienation occurs. Los does not see an *other* self in a relationship of mutual recognition but his own divided likeness:

Eternity shudder'd when they saw,
Man begetting his likeness,
On his own divided image.

(*Urizen* 19: 14-16, E 79)

It is in such passages as the above that Blake most clearly attacks romantic narcissism. The feminine should not be the "other of the same," a mere reflection of the creator's own self, or as Shelley put it in "Alastor" "a prototype of his conception." In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* Blake had already pointed out the hypocrisy of this doctrine of the woman being a reflection of masculine glory. After Oothoon has been raped by Bromion she internalizes his punishing doctrine and becomes self-condemnatory as she sees herself as an inadequate reflection of Theotormon:

I call with holy voice! kings of the sounding air,
Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect.
The image of Theotormon on my transparent pure
breast.

The Eagles at her call descend & rend their bleeding
prey;
Theotormon severely smiles, her soul reflects the smile;
(*VDA* 2: 14-18, E 46)

But Oothoon does not remain reflectively subservient to Theotormon and eventually points out the contradiction of Theotormon's self-righteous accusations: "How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?" (*VDA* 3: 16, E 47).

Clearly, as well as repudiating the idolized and externalized "feminine" Blake also rejects the conceptualization of sexual difference along lines of similarity and "reflection." In fact the loss of the particularity of sexual difference is symptomatic and symbolic of a loss of identity in general. This is evidenced in Blake's use of the term "hermaphroditic" in a highly pejorative sense. In *Milton* Blake lists the cycle of churches and refers to them as "Giants mighty Hermaphroditic" (*Milton* 37[41]: 37, E 138). As Blake continues the list and includes the central figures who have united religion with statehood he emphasizes the loss of sexual difference:

... these are the Female-Males
A Male within a Female hid as in an Ark & Curtains,
Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul, Constantine,
Charlemaine

Luther, these seven are the Male-Females, the Dragon
Forms
Religion hid in War, a Dragon red & hidden Harlot
(*Milton* 37[41]: 39-43, E 138)

In this passage Blake associates the loss of gender contraries with the political appropriation of the spiritual. In so doing he demonstrates the ways in which a valuable aspect of experience (either spirituality or gender) can be represented as alien and therefore oppressive. Blake's list of names, including Constantine and Charlemaine, signifies the decline of Christianity into imperialism, the formation of a state religion. The rhetoric of concealment ("hid . . . Curtains . . . hidden") emphasises the extent to which the experience has been deformed by its political externalization. An absence of sexual difference ("Female-Males") is the feature of the "Dragon Forms" which construct a femininity which is not autonomously *other* but a sexuality harnessed to Church ideology. The confusion of sexual difference is at the heart of the fall of religion into statehood. It is when the spiritually redemptive capacity of sexual difference is externalized and made political that authentic difference is annihilated.

There appears to be a contradiction between Blake's lament of the loss of sexual difference in the "Female-Male" of state religion and his frequently expressed idea that gender differentiation occurs with the fall of the self into disunity. This can be clarified by seeing that the idea of a "fall" into sexual difference refers, not to difference *per se*, but to the alienation of masculinity from femininity—in seeing the feminine as thoroughly external to a universalized masculinity. If the feminine is simply outside or different from the masculine, then this will result in what Hegel referred to as "indifferent" difference: where the self-identity of a thing has nothing to do with its difference from other things (*Difference* 108). But if difference is understood as essential to autonomy and identity, then masculinity and femininity will require each other's difference in order to be. This might be why Irigaray invokes Hegel's idea of the concrete universal as crucial for the process of recognition; my identity or specificity depends upon recognizing the specificity of an other (*I Love* 144). This also makes sense of the ambivalent figure of the feminine in Blake who, like Hegel, was responding critically to the enlightenment assertions of identity, autonomy and self-determination. If otherness is regarded as simply external to my being, then it will be alien, negative and threatening. But if otherness—in all its difference—is what sustains identity, then we will need to *recognize* any seemingly negative other as at one with the self—not unified in a ground of indifference, but related through a sustained dynamic of difference. So, in *Milton*, we are warned of the "female space" which would set itself outside experience and limit the capacities of perception: "The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs / Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite" (*Milton* 10[11]: 6-7, E 104).

Here Blake uses the word "female" adjectivally to describe what is external to experience, but he also exploits the sense in which what is constituted as feminine has, historically, been marginalized and excluded. By recognizing this we can see why Vala is united with the concept of nature. For Blake both nature and the feminine are valuable when seen as humanized and integrated with the imagination; but when either femininity or nature is elevated above human experience (as in either the "nature" of science or the femininity of virgin cults) they can limit and impoverish existence. Blake unites his theory of gender with his general ontological claim that what *appears* to condition and determine experience is merely experience alienated from itself. Thus Blake's character Vala unites both external nature and external femininity. In *Milton* Ololon calls the theorists of natural religion "feminine" because their concept of nature is external and independent of experience just as the "feminine" has been externalized. The Deists have reduced the world to an alien, uniform substance. They are therefore no better than the traditional Christians who have set up and worshipped an other-worldly and alienated God. In both cases there is an oppressive exteriority (Nature/God) that is figured as feminine insofar as it is radically exterior, becoming a "Newtonian Phantasm":

Are those who condemn Religion & seek to annihilate
it
Become in their Femin[in]e portions the causes & promoters
Of these Religions, how is this thing? this Newtonian
Phantasm
This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon &
Bolingbroke
This Natural Religion! . . .

(*Milton* 40[46]: 9-13, E 141)

III. Positive Difference and Redemption

Unlike the enlightenment Deists Blake posits a world of interactive difference rather than lawful and stable uniformity. For Blake sexual difference has a truly redemptive capacity. Because the history of Western thought has been a history of the isolated "selfhood," Blake sees the extension of the self to include alterity as the condition for the possibility of renewal. (This "inclusion" would refigure the concept of self and would problematize any clear boundary between identity and otherness; and this would be what distinguishes Blake's position both from androgyny and Jungian arguments for an anima. Renewal will be achieved, not through a unity that contains two terms, but in a constant dynamic between two continually differentiating moments.) Because the primary mode of alterity for Blake is sexual alterity, the union of masculine selfhood with its female emanation becomes the symbol for the regaining of human plenitude. Insofar as Blake uses the concept of the "feminine" as a meta-

phor for alienated otherness in general it is possible to understand all his supposedly "misogynist" statements (which criticize the feminine) as actually grounded in the historical observation that what we experience as the feminine is an alienated and perverted construction of patriarchal culture. Phrases such as "cruel delight," "female will" and "harlot" have their origin in a system of the projection of certain qualities and doctrines onto the feminine. This is most clear in Blake's use of the word "harlot," which in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* clearly refers to the fallen condition of the speaker. When this word is used again in more opaque contexts, alongside terms such as the "female will," it should lead us as readers to be careful of immediately attributing such misogynist intentions to Blake himself. The retrieval of alienated femininity represented by the "female will" lies *not* in eradicating sexual difference but in transforming the opposition from one of mutual exclusion to mutual recognition. Consequently, Blake seeks both to maintain the particular integrity and value of the feminine and to unite both masculinity and femininity within the eternal human form. Blake's reinclusion of the feminine *within* human experience, as the culmination of *Jerusalem*, completes a process of internalization that began in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* with its critique of the forgetting of the human origins of religion.

In *Milton*, Milton's molding of Urizen in clay reincludes and subordinates the faculty of reason to the imagination. Indeed, the epic in general is concerned with overcoming alienated transcendence in various forms: spirituality externalized as religion, experience externalized as nature, and femininity externalized as the emanation. Milton descends from eternity, becomes embodied, encounters Urizen and in so doing enables a retrieval of his female emanation. In *The Four Zoas* these themes are also present but Vala, as a symbol of nature, provides a figure for the possible renewal of the alienated physical world. In "Night the Fifth" Vala is described as "the lovely form / That drew the body of Man from heaven into this dark Abyss" (FZ 5. p. 59: 1-2, E 340). She is the alluring quality of nature which can lead to a forgetting of the spiritual character of human existence where nature is seen as independent to human experience. The discourse of the sciences, like the ideology of the feminine, has served to alienate human experience from itself. The characters in *The Four Zoas* desperately fight against the discourse of empiricism. After Albion has handed over power to Urizen, a world is built with "golden compasses, the quadrant & the rule & balance" (FZ 2. p. 24: 12, E 314). In response to Enion's jealousy of Tharmas's display of pity towards Jerusalem, Tharmas laments Enion's dissection of his soul:

Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul
Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax
to dry

The infant joy is beautiful but its anatomy
 Horrible Ghast & Deadly nought shalt thou find in it
 But Death Despair & Everlasting brooding Melancholy
 Thou wilt go mad with horror if thou dost Examine
 thus
 Every moment of my secret hours . . .

(FZ 1. p. 4: 29-35, E 302)

Tharmas imagines Enion as a natural being: "Sometimes I think thou art a flower expanding / Sometimes I think thou art fruit breaking from its bud" (FZ 1. p. 4: 41-42, E 302). He sees himself, however, as a scientific entity: "I am like an atom / A Nothing left in darkness yet I am an identity" (FZ 1. p. 4: 43-44, E 302). The division between Tharmas and Enion symbolizes the division between man/science and woman/nature. Natural feminine being separated from masculinity and viewed as independent becomes Vala the cruel nature goddess.

Although Vala in *The Four Zoas* represents a frightening and alien form of nature, Blake still accords her a place in the original unity from which the eternal man fell. Enitharmon narrates the "Song of Vala" in which she describes how "Luvah and Vala woke & flew up from the Human Heart / Into the Brain" (FZ 1. p. 10: 11-12, E 305). The use of the word "Brain" is significant, already showing how a Cartesian notion of mind as "thinking stuff" (*res cogitans*) creates just the sort of dichotomy that divides male reason from female nature. But nature or Vala, viewed from an expanded point of view that can encompass difference, is part of the total unity of existence; it is only when elevated above the imagination that she can become enslaving.

While Vala represents nature and its renewal in *The Four Zoas*, she is also important in the process of reunification because of her femininity. Although she is the "female will" of *The Four Zoas*, the process of reintegrating the feminine is central to the narrative of this and Blake's later prophecies. The horror of the "Spectres of the Dead" in "Night the Seventh" is a consequence of their being without their female counterparts, thus precluding their possibility of vision: "Each Male formd without a counterpart without a centering vision" (FZ 7. p. 87: 30, E 369). Vala as a representation of alienated female will and independent nature is then joined by Jerusalem. The emergence of Jerusalem occurs after Enitharmon has woven bodies for the spectres; this process is described as "humanising" (FZ 8. p. 101: 46, E 374). It is only after the embodiment of the male spectral self that the retrieval of the female emanation can occur. In this sense, the hallmarks of romantic masculinism—narcissistic self-presence and a spiritualization of self—are seen as impediments to redemption. Los and Enitharmon together create a form for human life, "a Vast family wondrous in beauty & love" (FZ 8. p. 103: 37, E 376). Immediately after this Enitharmon names and acknowledges Jerusalem:

And Enitharmon namd the Female Jerusa[le]m the
 holy
 Wondring she saw the Lamb of God within Jerusalems
 Veil
 The divine Vision seen within the inmost deep recess
 Of fair Jerusalems bosom in a gently beaming fire

Then sang the Sons of Eden round the Lamb of God &
 said
 Glory Glory to the holy Lamb of God
 Who now beginneth to put off the dark Satanic body
 Now we behold redemption Now we know that life
 Eternal
 Depends alone upon the Universal hand & not in us
 Is aught but death In individual weakness sorrow &
 pain

(FZ 8. p. 104: 1-10, E 376)

With the appearance of Jerusalem, the body is no longer dark and Satanic, but a created and imaginative body woven by Enitharmon.¹¹ More importantly, the atomization of the individual self is overcome with the recognition of the transcendence of the "Universal hand." Jerusalem, the agent of this moment of redemption becomes the site against which a war of sexual difference is conducted:

The war roard round Jerusalems Gates it took a hid-
 eous form
 Seen in the aggregate a Vast Hermaphroditic form
 Heavd like an Earthquake labring with convulsive
 groans
 Intolerable at length an awful wonder burst
 From the Hermaphroditic bosom Satan he was namd
 Son of Perdition terrible his form dishumanizd mon-
 strous
 A male without a female counterpart a howling fiend
 Fo[r]lorn of Eden & repugnant to the forms of life
 Yet hiding the shadowy female Vala in an ark Curtains

(FZ 8. p. 104: 19-28, E 377)

Blake uses the figure of Satan elsewhere (for example, the Bard's Song of *Milton*) to represent the impulse towards an annihilation of identity and particularity. Here, Satan as an "Hermaphroditic form" is a figure of the primary loss of difference—the difference of gender. He becomes the war-like "female hid within male" by concealing Vala. This "con-

¹¹ Morton D. Paley has argued that Blake's theory of creation-as-emanation in *The Four Zoas* forces him to see the body as fallen despite his avowed valorization of the body elsewhere. The figure of weaving, or the garment, is therefore introduced to overcome this difficulty by placing an intermediary between the spiritual and natural levels of being: "In introducing the figure of the garment, Blake makes it possible for us to view the body as a buffer zone between the drives and appetites which constitute man as mere spectre and Beulah, the potential earthly paradise within." Morton D. Paley, "The Figure of the Garment in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*," Curran and Wittreich, *Sublime Allegory* 126.

cealment" or "hiddenness" expresses itself in external nature and idolatry; hence the hermaphroditic character of Satan is associated with a "dishumanizd" form. But the "hiddenness" or mystery of Vala is overcome when the Lamb of God descends through Jerusalem's gates (FZ 8. p. 104: 30-35, E 378). Vala herself is later redeemed in "Night the Ninth." As Albion awakes he gives Luvah and Vala their rightful place in the human form (FZ 9. p. 126: 5-10, E 395). After this has been achieved Vala, united with Luvah, emerges from a pastoral landscape and acknowledges to Luvah the vegetative sleep which has consumed her past:

Come forth O Vala from the grass & from the silent
Dew
Rise from the dews of death for the Eternal Man is
Risen

She rises among flowers & looks toward the Eastern
clearness
She walks yea runs her feet are winged on the tops of
the bending grass
Her garments rejoice in the vocal wind & her hair
glistens with dew
She answerd thus Whose voice is this in the voice of
the nourishing air
In the spirit of the morning awaking the Soul from its
grassy bed
Where dost thou dwell for it is thee I seek & but for
thee
I must have slept Eternally nor have felt the dew of
thy morning

(FZ 9. pp. 126-27: 31-37 & 1-2, E 395-96)

Following this image of Vala's resurrection, Vala conducts a dialogue with the sun. She at first accuses the sun: "O be thou blotted out thou Sun that raisedst me to trouble" (FZ 9. p. 127: 20, E 396). But after being reproved by the sun Vala begins an ode which praises the sun and natural harmony in general:

Rise up O Sun most glorious minister & light of day
Flow on ye gentle airs & bear the voice of my rejoicing
Wave freshly clear waters flowing around the tender
grass
And thou sweet smelling ground put forth thy life in
fruits & flowers
Follow me O flocks & hear me sing my rapturous Song
I will cause my voice to be heard on the clouds that
glitter in the sun
I will call & who shall answer me I will sing who shall
reply
For from my pleasant hills behold the living living
springs
Running among my green pastures delighting among
my trees
I am not here alone my flocks you are my brethren

And you birds that sing & adorn the sky you are my
sisters

(FZ 9. p. 128: 4-14, E 397)

Vala, no longer a nature goddess, is now more like the Christian shepherd. Her discourse is no longer that of individual will but of reciprocity, brotherhood (and sisterhood?) Vala's overcoming of her own selfhood prefigures the conclusion of "Night the Ninth" where the importance of the recognition of others, rather than individualism, is proclaimed by the Eternals:

In families we see our shadows born. & thence we
know
That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
We fall on one another's necks more closely we embrace
Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy
abound

(FZ 9. p. 133: 21-26, E 402)

The importance of sexual difference to the fall lies in Blake's interpretation of the fallen state as self-division. The emanation emerges before the separation of the spectre. Antagonistic sexual opposition is the first stage towards self-disintegration. The pathology of this type of sexual difference is made clear by Urizen who likens Ahania to Vala, the archetype of female will, as he casts her out:

Saying Art thou also become like Vala. thus I cast thee
out
Shall the feminine indolent bliss. the indulgent self of
weariness
The passive idle sleep the enormous night & darkness
of Death
Set herself up to give her laws to the active masculine
virtue
Thou little diminutive portion that darst be a counter
part
Thy passivity thy laws of obedience & insincerity
Are my abhorrence. Wherefore has thou taken that fair
form
Whence is this power given to thee! once thou wast in
my breast
A sluggish current of dim waters.

(FZ 3. p. 43: 5-13, E 328-29)

Urizen's yearning for a past when Ahania was not a counterpart but a "diminutive portion" recalls the Miltonic idea of hierarchical subordination, where Ahania would be a necessary but inferior aspect of Urizen's masculine self. Blake demonstrates the futility of this model of sexual difference; it is the self-enclosed and domineering Urizen who demands subordination. Because Urizen perceives himself as pure

masculine activity, feminine passivity can only be a threat; even in his supposedly unified past Ahania's passivity is likened to a "sluggish current." Urizen cannot envision a sexual difference of equal contraries; he even adopts a perverted form of the Miltonic trope of the feminine self as a reflection of the masculine superior: "Reflecting all my indolence my weakness & my death" (FZ 3 p. 43: 18, E 329). As we have seen, this metaphor of reflection is subverted in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* where Oothoon challenges Theotormon's subordination with the rejoinder: "How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?" (VDA 3: 16, E 47). The problem with Urizen's attitude towards sexual difference is the same as with his attitude towards being in general. Reason must always totalize, define and assimilate that which it examines. Urizen's assertion that Ahania is a diminutive portion of his existence is all part of his "self-closed" universe which cannot acknowledge others or otherness.

IV. Conclusion

While recognizing the importance of alterity and thereby challenging the enlightenment doctrine of the self-authoring subject, Blake also saw the importance of interaction with the other. An entirely alienated femininity is merely a further consequence of the masculinist narcissism that demands its own reflection; all that falls outside the realm of this masculine "same" would be a chaotic and oppressive feminine exteriority. In order to acknowledge the integrity of the other it is essential that the other forms part of what it means to be human. It is this humanizing of gender contraries that represents one more aspect of Blake's challenge to the universalizing masculinist humanism of the enlightenment.

Rather than simply affirm the passive side of the male/female hierarchy—a hierarchy that has underpinned the enlightenment notion of a subject set over against nature—Blake's poetry imagines an ethical relation between the sexes, where what is other than the self is neither a mirroring self nor an object but a different dynamic of self. Blake argues for an affirmative, rather than negating, relation between spirit and body, male and female, the past and the future, and the present and utopia. Otherness, figured through the two sexes, is therefore an ethical recognition of that which exceeds the self. What Blake's romanticism offers is an articulation of ethical difference and integration, in opposition to what has been described as a history of logocentrism (where one mode of being or "logic" has represented and determined being in general).¹² This romanticism is a striving beyond political unity, precisely because it sustains a perpetual question in relation to that unity, a question of what

exceeds representation, selfhood, knowledge and determination. But for Blake this "beyond" is not the empty and negative beyond of what exceeds the limit of one's self; it is the specific, desiring, embodied and different becoming of the other sex.

This is not to argue, then, that we ought to simply include women in romanticism as it is already defined,¹³ and reject the notion put forward by Mellor that male and female writers write differently. Rather, romanticism itself opens the question of the boundaries between self and other, and the crucial figuration of sexual difference in the production of these boundaries. Romanticism thus paves the way for later movements, such as psychoanalysis and post-structuralist feminism, that will challenge any supposedly self-evident definition or limit of the subject. It is not that there are pre-given male and female selves who are then expressed (Mellor) or figured (Fox) in romantic poetry. Romantic poetry is an exploration of the self and its constitutive figures, fantasies and metaphors of sexual difference.¹⁴ In the case of Blake, this refusal to *decide* the nature or boundary of sexual difference is clearly evidenced by his continual criticism of any sexual dichotomy that has fallen into a clear self/other divide; for it is sexual difference that is most resistant to resolution in his work.¹⁵ As Irigaray shows in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, it is not the avowed intention (or sexism) of a philosopher that is central for a critical reading, for it is at the level of the "imaginary" that texts are produced and work. All those Western metaphysical ideas of matter, presence, passivity and foundation are, Irigaray demonstrates, only conceivable through an originating fantasy that figures an active masculine reason set over against a passive feminine nature. (This is not to argue that thought is corrupted by images, but that thought is given through the opening of certain images.) Irigaray's radical ethics, like Blake's poetry, therefore employs a double strategy: first, begin by mimicking all those sexually determined figures that have represented what it is to think. (For Blake, Urizen is the very personification of reason, thus showing how a supposedly abstract universal quality has a quite specific body and sex); second, refigure what it means to think by imagining new types of difference. This explains the open-endedness of

¹³ This is certainly the suggestion of Elizabeth Fay's summary of the relation between romanticism and feminism. Fay concludes her brief history by noting the presence of typically romantic themes in women writers of the period (400).

¹⁴ This would mean taking criticism beyond the sex/gender distinction, a distinction that separates the natural biological body from its cultural representation (Wolfson 385). For, as Blake so clearly showed, it is only through representational processes, such as poetry, that dichotomies such as that of biology and culture or sex and gender are effected.

¹⁵ This non-resolution is noted by both Kaplan and Moskal, although both regard this sustained difference as a sign of Blake's sexism.

¹² The term "logocentrism" is crucial to Jacques Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics, a tradition that Derrida sees as being determined by a project of returning all that "is" to a present, identical and unified logic of the same. See, in particular, "Tympan" in *Margins of Philosophy*.

Blake's prophecies, and the continual motif of a redemption from images and systems that then reifies into yet one more system. Blake's maintenance of sexual difference is neither, as Mellor argues, yet one more typically masculinist incorporation of otherness, nor a sustained hierarchy (Kaplan). Perhaps, like so many feminists after him, Blake saw sexual difference as a question and a project, and not as a category by which the politics of texts could be judged in advance.

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