

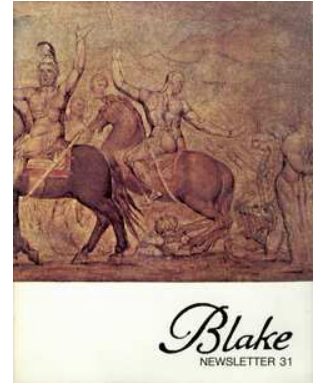
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D I S C U S S I O N

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Bromion's Usurped Power—Its Source, Essence, and Effect: A Replication

by Roland A. Duerksen

In their respective responses to my note, both Professor Jackson and Professor Murray present some good insights that are conducive to a better understanding of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* as a whole. Yet, with reference particularly to the one line in question, I find fewer difficulties when I continue to read it as my note suggests. Let me first point out what I consider the strengths of the two responses.

The relating of Oothoon, Theotormon, and Bromion to Blake's emanation-and-spectre concept strikes me as the most solid aspect of Jackson's commentary. That Theotormon is essentially aligned with Bromion is also an important insight. And corollary to it is the assertion that the destinies of Oothoon and Theotormon are inextricably intertwined. Murray's best argument, it seems to me, comes in his final paragraph. If Bromion does indeed see in the offing the success of Oothoon's address to Theotormon, he has cause (from his limited, ego-oriented perspective) to be terrified because of the coming end of his dominion.

But strong though these points are, they do not solve the problem I find in the conventional reading of the crucial line. I am not at all convinced that Theotormon has any strength of his own in the emanation-spectre entity. Separated as he is from his emanation (Oothoon), he has fallen prey to his spectre (Bromion) who has usurped his realm. That is why Bromion rapes with impunity in "Theotormon's reign." Bromion is the power ethic that is commissioned from the lofty heaven of reason by Urizen himself. But Theotormon should not be dominated by this power ethic; he should receive his primary direction from Oothoon, the imaginative impulse, and should make a venture parallel to her plucking of the marigold. Bromion would then necessarily find his rightful subservient place as keeper of the outer bound of reason around their life of joyous energy. The question, then, is not about Theotormon's power; in himself he has none. Nor does Oothoon stand a chance, by herself, to overpower Bromion. If, however, she could break through to Theotormon, the two together could simply do all that Bromion forbids.

And it is this possibility that Murray finds as the terrifying element for Bromion. Yet I find no indication in the poem that Bromion senses any need to fear. His questions (4:13-24) are all of the "Don't you know that?" variety--clearly indicating that he does not doubt the reason-oriented basis of his power system. Nor does it seem that the horror at his own acts (Jackson's suggestion) would be adequate for the drastic depiction of terror--such horror not being indicated in the text. And since I find no indication in the poem of his losing control over Theotormon, whose hearing shows no signs of being restored, I fail to see coherence in any character-

ization of Bromion himself as terror bound to meekness.

The poem would appear to be considerably weakened by the interpretation that Oothoon's spirit is in any sense subdued after once she has plucked the marigold. By that act, symbolically, she has achieved what Herbert Marcuse calls "the end of utopia"¹; that is, she has broken through to the new state of being in which what is generally called utopian (unattainable) is actually achieved. The rape does not defile her or make her feel guilty. She purposefully, "with holy voice," calls the eagles to rend her breast--to demonstrate to Theotormon her absolute invulnerability to the restrictive codes that torment him. Her lamentations are not meek, subdued supplications but, rather, emphatic and desperate argumentations. Granted, there appears to be a certain degree of irony or ambiguity in her situation of being in a new state of freedom and yet wailing and lamenting over Theotormon's unresponsiveness. Again Marcuse's theory may serve to elucidate:

All the material and intellectual forces which could be put to work for the realization of a free society are at hand. That they are not used for that purpose is to be attributed to the total mobilization of existing society against its own potential for liberation. But this situation in no way makes the idea of radical transformation itself a utopia.²

Throughout the poem, after her experience of "radical transformation," Oothoon never once appears to doubt the validity and power of that experience. That Theotormon is totally mobilized against this potential for liberation does not obliterate the knowledge that she has gained from her own experience--though it does frustrate her efforts.

A number of particular points raised by the two respondents deserve individual attention, and I shall now add my commentary on these.

1 "The End of Utopia," in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 62-69.

2 "The End of Utopia," p. 64.

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I do not agree with Murray that the graphic art needs to have the narrative consistency or coherence that we rightfully expect of the literary art. Since the engraving in question is a full-page representation apparently meant to serve as frontispiece, since the women depicted in the various plates are not individually identifiable by specific traits or features, and since Blake frequently presents the female figures in a similar way (and without more particular identification) throughout his engravings, it does not seem necessary to conclude that he intends the female figure in each of the plates for *VDA* consistently to represent Oothoon.

Unlike Murray, I see on the title page, not an Oothoon fleeing in terror, but a joyous Oothoon, leaping and running in her enjoyment of new-found freedom while a disgruntled Urizen stalks after her.

I agree with Murray that the rock and cloud imagery has reference to Bromion. But since the entirety of the poem after the plucking of the marigold (as I see it) takes place in a realm usurped from Theotormon by Bromion, this background symbolism is only a matter of consistency.

Both Jackson and Murray deal with the question of the chain depicted in plate 4. In my note I should have referred to the chain not as loosened, but as broken from its mooring or as apparently attached to nothing more solid than the dark wave in which Oothoon appears. My view is that Blake wished, in this particular plate, to symbolize Oothoon's former imprisonment--prior to the plucking of the marigold--and that the broken chain achieves this symbolism.

Jackson's assertion that Oothoon is not entirely free from Theotormon is true enough, but only in the sense of her love for him, not in the sense of her enslavement to him. I do not see any indication that Oothoon accepts Theotormon's

judgment of her. She knows that the eagles will rend away the appearance of defilement and reveal her "pure transparent breast." When this occurs, Theotormon "severely smiles," indicating not his dominance over her, but a dull, stupified wonder that indicates his lack of both comprehension and identification.

In regard to plate 6, I agree with Murray's view that Theotormon is depicted in the act of self-flagellation, and it appears that Oothoon is reacting in agonized, pitying love. Consequently, I must disagree with Jackson's assertion that this plate has to do with Oothoon's being shamed by Theotormon's judgment of her.

That Oothoon addresses Urizen instead of Bromion in the later portion of the poem would appear to be evidence of her recognition of the source of Bromion's power, not evidence (as suggested by Jackson) that Theotormon's power is greater than Bromion's.

Because I think it a critical aspect, I have left until the end my response to Jackson's reading of lines 3 and 4 of plate 2. I see the folding of the "adulterate pair" in Theotormon's "jealous waters" not as his act of angry assertion, but as his means of avoiding both thought and action. By accepting as substantial the laws of Urizen (whom Oothoon later refers to as "Father of Jealousy"), Theotormon can fold this event from his sight--can in essence wash his hands of the affair. In his jealousy, he does precisely the opposite of what Oothoon (7:28) declares that she would do: "Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous cloud come in the heaven of generous love." Since Theotormon wraps in the dark waters what could be his and Oothoon's "heaven of generous love," the realm remains under the usurped control of Bromion, and Theotormon remains at the threshold of the cave in which Bromion's control is symbolized by the enslaved juxtaposition of terror and meekness.