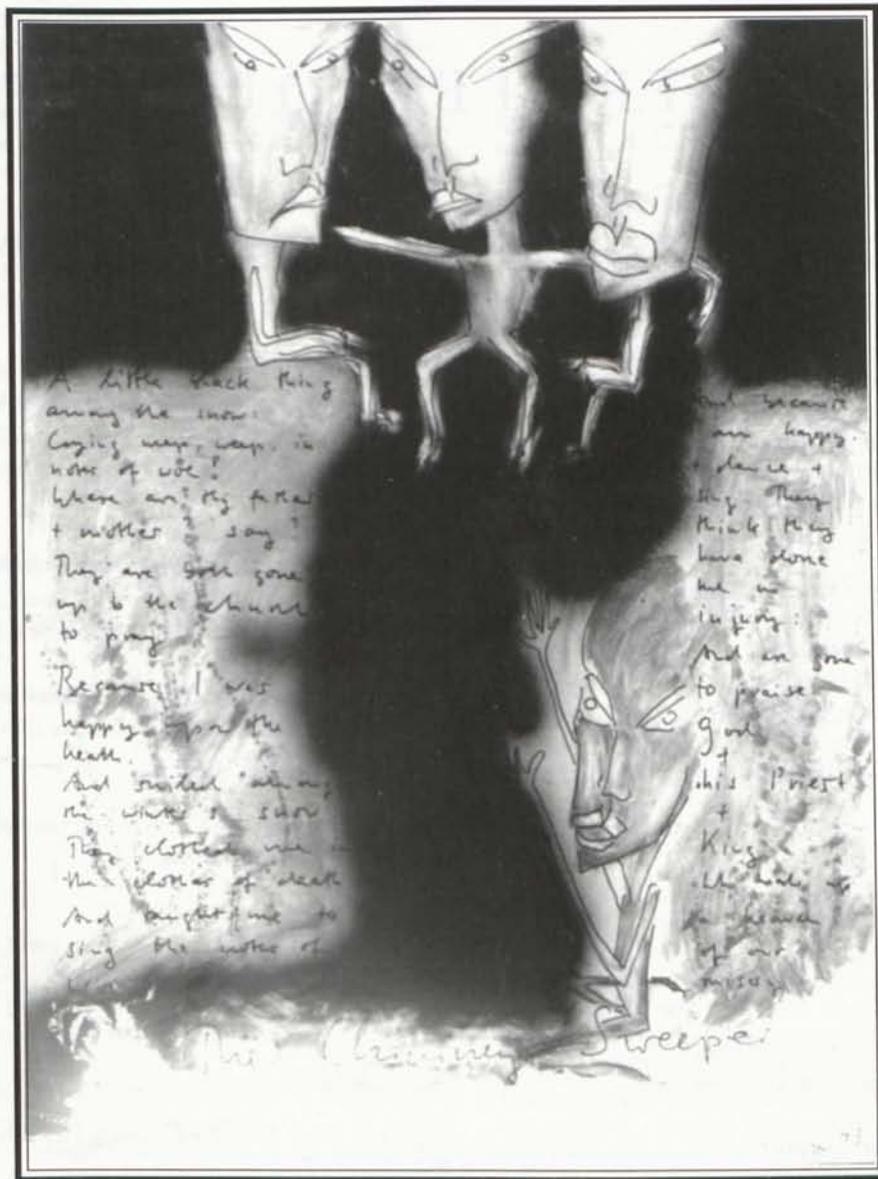


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Blake, Wollstonecraft, and the Inconsistency of Oothoon

BY WES CHAPMAN

William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* has long been taken to be a response to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Understanding Blake's attitude towards Wollstonecraft is troublesome, however, because Blake's attitude towards women in general has seemed so contradictory. Although some critics have taken Blake's apparent affirmation of Wollstonecraft in *Visions* as a sign of his support for feminism—Mark Schorer, for example, claims that “the poem is a perfectly direct allegory of [Wollstonecraft's] doctrines” (290)—Susan Fox, in an influential article, has argued that Blake's conception in the prophetic works of “a perfection of humanity defined in part by the complete mutuality of its interdependent genders” is belied by his representation of women as either “inferior and dependent” or as “unnaturally and disastrously dominant” (507), a view that Anne Mellor confirms (*passim*). Alicia Ostriker shows up the problem nicely when she writes that there are in Blake's work not one, but four different sets of attitudes towards gender and sexuality, indeed four Blakes: “the Blake who celebrates sexuality and attacks repression”; the Blake who “depicts sexual life as a complex web of gender complementarities and interdependencies”; the Blake, “apparently incompatible with Blake number one, who sees sexuality as a tender trap rather than a force of liberation”; and the Blake “to whom it was necessary, as it was to his patriarchal predecessor Milton, to see the female principle as subordinate to the male” (“Desire” 156).

Commendably, Ostriker does not try to resolve or reduce these contradictions, and I shall try to follow her example in this respect. But if these contradictions are irresolvable they are nonetheless comprehensible. Blake was sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's condemnation of women's oppression, at least at the time he wrote *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (he was considerably less sympathetic in his later, more Miltonic works), but he was critical of the beliefs which underlay her argument, particularly her faith in reason and her distrust of sexuality. At the same time, Wollstonecraft's critique of male sensualism posed a strong challenge to his own sexual ideologies, a challenge he could neither ignore nor fully reconcile with his own beliefs. Conflicted as he was, Blake anticipated the crucial problems men have had in responding to feminism, constructively or otherwise. In the end, I will argue, Blake

decentered a woman-centered undertaking, appropriating parts of it for his own political purposes and projecting upon it his own reimaginings of female character.

Wollstonecraft's Enlightenment Principles and Sexuality

The opening pages of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* situate Wollstonecraft's polemic squarely in the mainstream of Enlightenment thinking, while emphasizing certain terms above others. She argues that “[in] the present state of society it appears necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudice every inch of the ground” (81). The return to “first principles” to counter “prevailing prejudice” is characteristic of writings in Wollstonecraft's political tradition—of Rousseau, particularly, who, finding that “our wisdom is slavish prejudice, our customs consist in control, constraint, compulsion” (*Émile* 10), turns back to nature, “which never lies” (*Discourse on Inequality* 10), as the foundation for his political philosophy. Yet Wollstonecraft, in her exposition of “first principles,” does not allude explicitly to nature. She has not abandoned the concept of nature as a grounding for the truth of her discourse; references to nature and “natural” states abound in her work. But she de-emphasizes nature as a first principle, placing the emphasis instead on reason, virtue and knowledge. The three are carefully linked together: knowledge with reason, in that reason establishes “man's pre-eminence over the brute creation” while knowledge is “denied to the brutes”; both are enlisted in the struggle with passion (the passions were implanted so that “man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes”) and so are aligned with virtue (81). In part, Wollstonecraft, knowing full well that any challenge to conventional gender roles would ensure a counterattack on her sexual morality—and indeed, as Alicia Ostriker points out, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* called the *Rights of Woman* “a scripture, archly fram'd, for propagating whores” (rev. of Todd 130)—is establishing the moral high ground. But more specifically this fiercely impeccable triumvirate of first principles sets her up to attack Rousseau, whose notorious anti-feminism needed to be answered, since he was a major figure in her own radical tradition. In Book V of *Émile* Rousseau had claimed to be arguing from nature when he deduced that “woman is specially made for man's delight” (322); rather than pursue Rousseau onto the same ground, which would lead to an irresolvable dispute over what was “natural,” Wollstonecraft argues that Rousseau's conception of the natural leads him to an inconsistent conception of virtue.

In attacking Rousseau, Wollstonecraft aligns herself with conventional sexual morality and against sensual pleasure. Conceding that men have greater physical strength, she warns that men's claims to further superiority are founded not on rational argument but on interested sensuality: “not

content with this natural pre-eminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment" (74). She counts upon her audience to condemn such men who succumb to the "influence of the senses" and to the women who are "intoxicated" by their adoration (74). Aligning herself with conventional morality in this way, Wollstonecraft, far from exempting women from her criticism, condemns them too for their own sensual short-sightedness. She likens them repeatedly to courtiers, who accept servility as the price of attendant power and pleasure. "Men have submitted to superior strength to enjoy with impunity the pleasure of the moment," she says, referring to "the courtier, who servilely resigns the birthright of a man"; she continues, "women have only done the same" (106). The remark cuts two ways. On the one hand, she is alluding to the common radical argument that the natural reason of members of the aristocracy was corrupted by power and luxury, and thus implies that women who do not act like rational and morally responsible people do so because they too are corrupted by their upbringing in and treatment by society. On the other hand, her language tends to support the stereotype of women as frivolous and irrational beings. As Cora Kaplan says of a similar passage, the language of her analysis of gender inequality is "more innovatory, less secure, and less connotative than the metaphorical matrix used to point and illustrate it. As a consequence, there is a constant slippage back into a more naturalized and reactionary view of women, and a collapse of the two parts of the metaphors into each other" (43).

Whereas Rousseau had treated the alleged irrationality and frivolity of women as women's natural condition, however, Wollstonecraft attributes these qualities to false education:

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty. . . . One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers. . . . (73)

In twentieth-century terms, Wollstonecraft is arguing that gender has been socially constructed;¹ but she does so from a late eighteenth-century standpoint, with eighteenth-century assumptions. She avoids the specifically sexual biological essentialism of Rousseau (although the flower metaphor implies that there is a "healthy" female self,

¹ Cora Kaplan makes this point in her discussion of Wollstonecraft (46).

Wollstonecraft does not imply that we can know what it is),² but in place of sexual essence she posits a human essence and a moral *telos*. The essence of all humanity is reason; that is what establishes humanity's "pre-eminence over the brute creation" (81); and the end of reason, its purpose, is to lead its possessor to virtue. That "the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love" is only partly a political problem, a subordination of women to male desire; it is at the same time, and perhaps for Wollstonecraft more importantly, a moral problem, resting upon the assumption that "they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect" (73)—which is after all perfectly conventional morality; Wollstonecraft's radicalism lies in the fact that she is willing to take that morality seriously as a guideline for the behavior of both men and women. So, in the dedication to Talleyrand-Périgord which prefaces *Rights of Woman*, she writes that in "[c]ontending for the rights of women, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue" (66).

Virtue—not liberty, or equality—is the end of Wollstonecraft's argument, its final cause. Building her argument around virtue allows her to sidestep, at least temporarily, the highly charged and overdetermined problem of the nature of men and women. Having accepted the conventional assessment of female behavior, Wollstonecraft must explain it; she finds an explanation right at hand, in radical arguments about the corruption of human nature in society. But those arguments, particularly in Rousseau, depend upon a conception of a "natural" self, dangerous ground, since the prevailing arguments over what were "natural" gender differences were by no means in her favor. To argue from nature directly, as Rousseau had done, would be to argue from diversity, the plenitude of creation, and thus for a potential validation of double standards; to found her argument on virtue is to argue for a single moral essence, and thus for a repudiation of all double standards. Thus she attacks Rousseau not for his assessment of women, but for his relativism: "If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim" (94-95).

Brilliant as this strategy is, she adopts it at a terrible cost. As Kaplan points out, in defining her position against male

² So, for instance, when she does speculate on the respective positions of the sexes in a society in which women were properly educated, she only does so ambiguously: "when morality shall be settled on a more solid basis, then, without being gifted with a prophetic spirit, I will venture to predict that woman will be either the friend or the slave of man" (104).

sensuality, Wollstonecraft repudiates female sexuality as well (35ff.); in arguing for better education for women, she confirms contemporary prejudices against women that no twentieth-century feminism would find tenable. In sum, she denies sexual difference—"the first object of laudable ambition," she writes, "is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex" (75)—which in effect valorized the value systems of contemporary male-dominated society, even as it tried to apply those value systems consistently. Her valorization of reason and virtue aligned feminism with the successful revolutionary ideologies of the era, but it also led her to assume a male norm, and it affirmed the conventional morality that for a century and a half would be used to condemn her and her work.

It also proved extremely difficult to live by during the years surrounding Wollstonecraft's composition of *Rights of Woman*, as Blake might have seen in Wollstonecraft's relationship with Henry Fuseli.³ William Godwin, in the *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*, describes Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fuseli as one which forced Wollstonecraft to come to terms with the potential conflict between reason and sexual desire. As Godwin describes it, Wollstonecraft's pleasure in the relationship conflates intellect with sensation and emotion: "Mary was not of a temper to live upon terms of so much intimacy with a man of merit and genius, without loving him," he writes. "The delight that she enjoyed in his society, she transferred by association to his person" (60), as if the origin of her sexual feelings were, naturally enough, Fuseli's intellect. Thus far, the relationship—at least as Godwin describes it—seems to follow the principle that Wollstonecraft purportedly laid down for herself, "that the imagination should awaken the senses, and not the senses the imagination" (61). As it developed, however, sense and sensibility became harder to reconcile. Although Godwin writes that Wollstonecraft "scorned to suppose, that she could feel a struggle, in conforming to the laws she should lay down to her conduct" (61), clearly she did feel such a struggle. At least, her codes of sexual conduct began to change: presumably in deference to the tastes of Fuseli, who disliked women with the appearance of a "philosophical sloven" (Knowles 164), Wollstonecraft began to dress more fashionably, discarding her old black dress and powdering her hair (Ferguson and Todd 12, Knowles 164-166). "She began to think," writes Godwin,

that she had been too rigid, in the laws of frugality and self-denial with which she set out in her literary career; and now added to the neatness and cleanliness which she had always scrupulously observed, a

³ For discussion of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* as reference to Wollstonecraft and Fuseli, see Hilton, Ostriker (rev. of Todd), and Wasser.

certain degree of elegance, and those temperate indulgences in furniture and accommodation, from which a sound and uncorrupted taste never fails to derive pleasure. (62)

"Temperate indulgences" they no doubt were, but Godwin's haste to assure the reader of Wollstonecraft's—and Godwin's own—"sound and uncorrupted taste" shows the effort required to reconcile sensual pleasure of any kind or degree with accepted English Jacobin principles. Such a reconciliation must have been much more difficult for Wollstonecraft, to whom sexual morality was always a more central concern than it was to Godwin, and who, as a woman, was under far more pressure to conform to the conventional sexual code.

Eventually, according to Godwin, the strain of having to reconcile her morality with her feelings became intolerable to Wollstonecraft, and to avoid Fuseli's company she fled to France. What Godwin does not record is the sequence of events leading up to Wollstonecraft's departure. According to John Knowles, Fuseli's biographer, Wollstonecraft—believing that "although Mrs. Fuseli had a right to the person of her husband, she, Mrs. Wollstonecraft might claim, and, for congeniality of sentiments and talents, hold a place in his heart, for 'she hoped,' she said, 'to unite herself to his mind'" (165)—proposed to the Fuselis that she move in with them in a non-sexual menage à trois (Knowles 167). That Wollstonecraft herself did not see this arrangement as immoral is evident, for when Fuseli warned her of "the impropriety of indulging in a passion that took her out of common life," she replied, "If I thought my passion criminal, I would conquer it, or die in the attempt. For immodesty, in my eyes, is ugliness; my soul turns with disgust from pleasure tricked out in charms which shun the light of heaven" (Knowles 167).

Godwin's reliability as a character witness may be doubted,⁴ and Knowles surely had his friend Fuseli more at heart than Wollstonecraft. But the picture of Wollstonecraft during this era in her life that emerges from their accounts is fairly consistent with the persona of *Rights of Woman*—a picture of a highly principled woman who believed fervently in reason and distrusted sexuality, who either found her exaltation of mind over body unsatisfying in her relationship with Fuseli, according to Godwin, or found her society unwilling to accept her personal fu-

⁴ Godwin frequently uses Wollstonecraft as a foil for his own self-image. For example, he writes that "Mary and myself perhaps each carried farther than to its common extent the characteristic of the sexes to which we belonged" (131), which gives him occasion to describe, at some length, his self-reported "love of intellectual distinction" (131), as opposed to Wollstonecraft's particular strengths, which he takes to be "feeling," a "sensitive and generous spirit . . . left to the spontaneous exercise of its own decisions," and "the warmth of her heart," which "defended her against artificial rules of judgment" (132).

sion of the intellectual and the sexual (or sublimation of the sexual into the intellectual), according to Knowles; whose Enlightenment belief in reason, that is, failed her when she tried to live by it.

Oothoon's Contradictory Character

The first word of the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, "ENSLAV'D," if read in intertextual juxtaposition with the *Rights of Woman*, calls attention to the problematic position of its feminist protagonist, Oothoon:⁵

ENSLAV'D, the Daughters of Albion weep: a trembling lamentation
Upon their mountains; in their valleys, sighs towards America.

(VDA 1:1-2)⁶

⁵ In calling into question Oothoon's reliability, I am following the general trend of a number of articles of the past decade. As Thomas Vogler has written, until recently Oothoon was taken "as the speaker of a prophetic Truth that would transform the world, if only Theotormon would listen to her and act accordingly" (271). Recent critics, however, have challenged that view. Mark Anderson finds that Oothoon fails to achieve the prophetic stance that Blake was seeking to define, because she "ends by seeing her freedom but failing to know it: she sees through Urizen's morality to the potential eternity in the moment of desire, but cannot realize it while she continues to depend on Theotormon rather than on herself for her liberation" (14). David Aers, while still holding up Oothoon, with "so clear a revolutionary critique of sexual and social exploitation" and "so full an understanding of the psychological effects and perverted indulgences of repressed sexuality," as one who is "able to transcend the consciousness of her fellow women *absolutely*," treats the clarity of her understanding as an undialectical mistake—"the illusion [of] assuming that revolutionary consciousness can ever be as uncontaminated by dominant structures as Oothoon's appears to be" (31). In writing *Visions*, Blake came to see "the need for deepening his sexual dialectic to include the notion of 'female will,' casting out the vestiges of delusions about consciousness as free from all the effects of the system against which it is struggling" (32). Nelson Hilton goes further, arguing that "in suggesting that 'conversing with shadows dire' represents Theotormon's involvement with his own narcissistic projections, the closing lines put forward the depressing possibility that *Oothoon herself is one of those projections: herself, to repeat, 'a solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity'*" (102). Vogler's view is similar; he argues that "[a]s a representation of speaking woman, [Oothoon] serves conveniently as a ventriloquating mirror for acts of narcissistic self-completion on the part of those male readers who like to have their truths of feminine desire come out of the mouths of 'women'" (300). Harriet Kramer Linkin, on the other hand, challenges these negative views of Oothoon, arguing that the narrator's pessimistic view of Oothoon's stasis at the end of the poem is called into question by the illustrations that accompany the poem and that Oothoon's experience throughout the poem is "ultimately progressive rather than degenerative" (185). I agree with Linkin that Oothoon progresses towards prophetic status in the poem, but to me this only shows up the disjunction between her visionary power and her complicity with her oppressors.

⁶ All references to Blake's work are from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982). References to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are cited as *MHH*, followed by the plate number; references to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* are cited as *VDA*, followed by plate and line numbers; other references are cited as *E* followed by the page number.

As Nelson Hilton points out, slavery is "the master trope of the *Vindication*."⁷ Women are slaves, for Wollstonecraft, not only because they have no freedom but because, in their lack of freedom, they come to accept the values of their oppressors. Just as one cannot "expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious," so "it will also require some time to convince women that they act contrary to their real interest on an enlarged scale, when they cherish or affect weakness under the name of delicacy" (116). Blake uses the image similarly in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*: the "swarthy children of the sun," says Bromion, "are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge: / Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent" (VDA 1:21-23). Bromion's concern in these lines is to establish his control over Oothoon, but his words describe aptly the condition we now call "identification with the oppressor." The opening lines of *Visions*, then, immediately raise the issue of perspective. If one cannot "expect virtue from a slave"—nor expect, presumably, self-knowledge—then how does a slave come to know his or her own position, and speak truthfully about it once it is known? Oothoon is not one of the Daughters of Albion, but she is a woman, and like them is bound by her oppressors; we should expect her analysis of her own bondage to reflect to some extent her oppressors' thinking. Moreover, she is the "soft soul of America," and as such is a figure for imperfect liberation. *Visions* was printed fewer than 20 years after the beginning of the American Revolution, the full effects of which were only beginning to be felt in France. In *America a Prophecy*, printed in the same year as *Visions*, America is the birthplace of Orc, the spirit of Revolution. So the Daughters' "sighs towards America" reflect their desire for liberation, and Oothoon's identification as the "soft soul of America" suggests that Oothoon is a liberator figure; yet in the context of these opening lines, with their reference to slavery, America carries a very different meaning as well, because America was a country in which slavery was thriving. America had thrown off its old English fetters but had not ceased forging new ones.⁸

Oothoon is not strictly a representation of Wollstonecraft; but she is caught, as Blake might have thought Wollstonecraft was caught, in the disjunction between her sexual feelings and her intellectual allegiances. The Argument to the poem shows the quandary Oothoon is in:

⁷ See Hilton for a partial listing of references to slavery in the *Vindication*, with particular emphasis on images of slavery to the senses.

⁸ For discussion of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion's* debt to the abolitionist movement, see Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*. By the time he came to write *Visions*, Blake had engraved the illustrations for John Stedman's *Narrative of an Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, so he was well acquainted with the issue.

I loved Theotormon
And I was not ashamed
I trembled in my virgin fears
And I hid in Leutha's vale!

(VDA iii: 1-4)

This deceptively simple lyric reveals some contradictions in Oothoon's attitude towards sexuality. Although Oothoon alleges that she is "not ashamed" of her love for Theotormon, she "tremble[s] in [her] virgin fears / And [hides] in Leutha's vale." We might recall Wollstonecraft's words to Fuseli: "If I thought my passion criminal, I would conquer it, or die in the attempt. For immodesty, in my eyes, is ugliness; my soul turns with disgust from pleasure tricked out in charms which shun the light of heaven" (Knowles 167)—a declaration, like Oothoon's love, not at all ashamed, yet from the point of view of someone like Blake, a fervent if troubled believer in sexuality, strangely contradictory. Wollstonecraft defends what she explicitly calls her "passion," yet her most ardent language is reserved for her "disgust [with] pleasure tricked out in charms which shun the light of heaven," language not of the passionate lover but of the moralist.

Blake might have found Wollstonecraft's attitude towards modesty in general contradictory, in fact, for in the *Rights of Woman* she at once eulogizes and condemns it. Modesty can be "purity of mind, which is the effect of chastity" (191): "something nobler than innocence, [modesty] is the delicacy of reflection, and not the coyness of ignorance. . . . so far from being incompatible with knowledge, it is its fairest fruit" (192). Yet as it is practiced in society, it can be the opposite of purity: "the modesty of women, characterized as such, will often be only the artful veil of wantonness instead of being the natural reflection of purity" (265). Wollstonecraft does distinguish the two kinds of modesty; the modesty which is purity of mind is a non-sexual virtue, practised for its own sake, while the modesty which is wantonness is a standard of propriety to which only women are subject, practiced solely to protect reputation. But the boundary between the two kinds of modesty sometimes blurs disconcertingly, as in the chapter titled "Modesty.—Comprehensively Considered, and Not as a Sexual Virtue":

Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!—true delicacy of mind!—may I unblamed presume to investigate thy nature, and trace to its covert the mild charm, that mellowing each harsh feature of a character, renders what would otherwise only inspire cold admiration—lovely!—Thou that smoothest the wrinkles of wisdom, and softenest the tone of the sublimest virtues till they all melt into humanity;—thou that spreadest the ethereal cloud that, surrounding love, heightens every beauty, it half shades, breathing those coy sweets that steal into the heart, and charm the senses—modulate for me the language of persuasive reason, till I rouse my sex from the flowery bed, on which they supinely sleep life away! (191)

This eulogy of modesty borders on parody: the language of the passage, with its archaic thou's, and its extravagant—even romantic—metaphors and personifications, align the passage with the "turgid bombast of artificial feelings" and "flowery diction" she condemns in the introduction, the "pretty superlatives" which, "dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth" (76). Modesty acts in the passage as a kind of non-specific cosmetic, "smooth[ing] the wrinkles of wisdom," "soften[ing] the tone of the sublimest virtues," "breathing those coy sweets that steal into the heart and charm the senses," more like "the artful veil of wantonness" Wollstonecraft condemns than the "purity of mind" she praises. Nevertheless, one cannot take the passage wholly as parody: "true delicacy of mind," in the passage above, foreshadows "purity of mind, or that genuine delicacy which is the only virtuous support of chastity" and the "delicacy of reflection" which is "nobler than innocence" in her later, serious discussion of modesty as a non-sexual virtue (192). It is not so much that there are two kinds of modesty, as that modesty itself has an ambivalent character. As the "offspring of sensibility and reason," it may live up or down to its parents' respective reputations.

Blake was not one to praise modesty, even ambivalently, nor was he a friend to conventional morality generally. Therefore the Oothoon of the *Argument*, though she is "not ashamed," still "tremble[s] in [her] virgin fears" and hides in Leutha's vale. Leutha's vale is a land of delusion; in a fragment intended for *America*, when "In vain the dreamer grasps the joyful images," the images "fly / Seen in obscured traces in the Vale of Leutha" (E 59). (The possibility that Oothoon has changed is discussed below.) In *Europe*, Leutha is one of Enitharmon's daughters, the "lureing bird of Eden," whose description echoes the language of Wollstonecraft's description of corrupt female sensuality:

Soft soul of flowers Leutha!
Sweet smiling pestilence! I see thy blushing light:
Thy daughters many changing,
Revolve like sweet perfumes ascending O Leutha silken
queen!

(E 65)

As in Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, images and adjectives associated with conventional femininity—"soft soul of flowers," "sweet smiling," "blushing," "sweet perfumes," and "silken"—are linked with corrupt aristocracy, the "queen" who is a "pestilence." Modesty here, represented by Leutha's blushing, is unequivocally an "artful veil of wantonness." For Oothoon to hide in Leutha's vale, then, is for her to indulge in the self-deluding, deceitful sensualism Wollstonecraft condemns in her work. She does so, too, not in spite of her morality but because of it, for it is

her "virgin fears" that drive her to Leutha's vale in the first place.⁹

Although Oothoon brings an ambivalent attitude towards sexuality with her to the sexual act, she is not the source of that ambivalence: the source is the "terrible thunders" that tear her "virgin mantle in twain." The tearing of the mantle is a figure for rape, but it is also a figure for doubleness; the problem all along has been that the "virgin mantle" is torn "in twain," i.e., that sexual morality is ambivalent, paradoxical: modesty is wantonness; "virgin fears" lead to Leutha's vale, home of the "lureing bird of Eden." But the "virgin mantle" is torn "in twain" after Oothoon plucks the flower and "[rises] up from the vale"; the contradictory assumptions Oothoon brings to the sexual act are caused by or at least confirmed by the aftermath of that act, a temporal incongruity that points out the destructive circularity of sexual codes. Conventional morality's condemnation of sexuality is internalized by the individual, for whom sexuality is inevitably compromised; sexuality then becomes the destructive force it is assumed to be, and the cycle starts all over again. As Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion" (MHH 8).

The "terrible thunders" that tear the mantle are the acts and ideologies of Bromion and Theotormon. Bromion is the most obvious oppressor, if not finally the most dangerous. He is a rapist, who after raping Oothoon, brands his victim as "Bromions harlot" (VDA 2:1). He is a slave owner and an imperialist, who will reproduce in the new lands he seeks to conquer the evils of his own civilization, because he forces the multiplicity of existence to match up with his own narrow set of assumptions; he enforces "one law for both the lion and the ox" (VDA 4:22), and, as we know from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (MHH 24). But Theotormon, whom Oothoon loves, is at least as much her oppressor as Bromion. Theotormon is a moralist whose sense of shame and sin torments him, and spuriously justifies his torment of others. Whereas Bromion takes pleasure directly from the exercise of power and the acquisition of "riches and ease," Theotormon takes pleasure from his self-righteous sorrow over sin and suffering, suffering which his religiosity only increases. Indeed, the text suggests that his religious sufferings are really a corrupt form of sexual enjoy-

⁹ That for Blake this kind of sensualism is compatible with conventional morality is made clear in *Europe* by the figure of Enitharmon herself, who, desiring that "Woman, lovely Woman! may have dominion" (E 62), is the archetype of feminized aristocracy, or, since the images work two ways, female tyranny. She tyrannizes by encouraging moralistic judgments upon sexuality: she asks Rintrah to "... tell the human race that Womans love is Sin! . . . / Forbid all Joy, & from her childhood shall the little female / Spread nets in every secret path" (E 62).

ment. After Theotormon rolls his waves around Bromion and Oothoon in Bromion's cave, he weeps at the cave's mouth; beneath him sound the "voice of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with money" who "shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires / Of lust, that belch incessant from the summits of the earth" (VDA 2:8-10). The slaves and children are "beneath" Theotormon; they are also "beneath" the fires of lust, implying that Theotormon, although he condemns and spurns Oothoon, is within those fires. His repressed desires "belch incessant from the summits of the earth," taking the form of what Oothoon will call, by the end of the poem, the "self enjoyings of self denial":

the youth shut up from
The lustful joy, shall forget to generate, & create an amorous image
In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow.
Are not these the places of religion? the rewards of continence?
The self enjoyings of self denial?

(VDA 7:3-9)

Theotormon's weeping is, in effect, a form of masturbation, a way of creating an "amorous image" in the secret "places of religion," and a particularly sado-masochistic form of masturbation at that; it feeds off suffering, both the "self denial" of the masturbator and the more genuine sufferings of those it condemns.

Oothoon at least has the decency not to weep, and is in general more honest and less corrupt than Theotormon; but her love for Theotormon drives her to a similar kind of behavior.

Oothoon weeps not: she cannot weep! her tears are locked up;
But she can howl incessant writhing her soft snowy limbs.
(VDA 2:12-13)

Bloom argues that Oothoon's writhing is not a form of suffering, but of sexual arousal (Bloom 106, E 901). The context of the line confirms this; this description immediately follows the passage describing Theotormon's masturbatory weeping in the fires of lust, and the image of Oothoon, with her "soft snowy limbs," is itself sexualized. Her own "self enjoyings," however, take the form not of solipsistic weeping, but of a masochistic desire for purification at the hands of "Theotormons Eagles."

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 pure transparent breast.
(VDA 5:14-16)

Blake's punctuation, though frequently baffling to me, sometimes tells; here, the full stop after "reflect" makes one read that word in two ways.¹⁰ Read as the end of a sentence consisting of the first two lines, "reflect" means something like "cogitate." Wollstonecraft uses the word "reflect" often in this sense, most tellingly when she writes about modesty: modesty "is the delicacy of reflection, and not the coyness of ignorance. . . . so far from being incompatible with knowledge, it is its fairest fruit" (192); or later, "modesty, being the child of reason, cannot long exist with the sensibility which is not tempered by reflection" (200). In these passages, as indeed throughout the *Rights of Woman*, reflection is the exercise of reason. If "reflect" is read in this way, the first two lines of the passage quoted above summarize Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*: Wollstonecraft calls for an end to the corruption of women by a partial education in a partial society, in order that women may take their place as reasoning creatures ("rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect," says Oothoon). Likening Oothoon to Prometheus (a likeness reinforced by Blake's illustration in plate 6, in which Oothoon's arms are thrown back, as if bound, while an eagle tears at her abdomen), the lines imply that such a call requires courage and imagination. But the Promethean sacrifice seems somehow less noble if it is self-inflicted; in context, following immediately upon the image of Theotormon's masturbatory sorrow, Oothoon's call to the eagles looks suspiciously like another form of the "self enjoyings of self denial." In other words, "to reflect," in the sense of "to reason," is also to "reflect," in the sense of "to mirror," and specifically to mirror Theotormon's image: to "reflect. / The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent breast." Oothoon's struggle with her oppressors is a noble one, and is depicted as such, but it is doomed to fail so long as she desires to "reflect," and above all to reflect the image of Theotormon, i.e., so long as she valorizes reason and internalizes conventional morality's sado-masochistic standards of purity. Loving Theotormon, Oothoon has internalized the values of her oppressors, and is bound to them. Thus Theotormon binds Oothoon to her more obvious oppressor Bromion: after the rape, and after Bromion calls Oothoon "Bromions harlot," Theotormon "fold[s] his black jealous waters round the adulterate pair / Bound back to back in Bromions cave terror & meekness dwell" (VDA 2:4-5).

I have dwelt long upon the complicity of Oothoon with her oppressors, because I want to emphasize what seems to me a fundamental disjunction in the poem between the position from which Oothoon speaks and what she actually says. The body of the poem has three parts, each ending with the line, "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes,

¹⁰ The edition of *Visions* (copy G) in *The Early Illuminated Books* has a comma after "reflect" (250) rather than a full stop; my argument remains the same for both versions.

and echo back her sighs." The first part tells the action of the story: Bromion rapes Oothoon and Oothoon calls Theotormon's Eagles to her. In the second part, Oothoon, Theotormon and Bromion each speak; in the third, Oothoon alone speaks. Counting the Argument, then, there are four parts. The first two, the Argument and the narration of events, call into question the political reliability of Oothoon in a number of ways: she is "enslav'd," her attitudes towards sexuality are contradictory (so that, despite Oothoon's morality, she hides in the immorality of Leutha's vale), and she desires to reflect the image of Theotormon, of sexuality repressed into sado-masochistic religiosity. We would expect, then, that in the last two sections of the poem, in which Oothoon analyzes and protests her oppression, her analysis would be flawed in some way recognizably traceable to the thinking of her two oppressors. For the most part, however, Oothoon's response to her oppressors is eloquent, more eloquent than it would seem possible to be, and—this is important—only intermittently consistent with Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*.¹¹

Oothoon's analysis of modesty shows the contradictions in her character. As—sometimes—for Wollstonecraft, who writes that "the modesty of women, characterized as such, will often be only the artful veil of wantonness instead of being the natural reflection of purity" (265), for Oothoon modesty is not a reflection of innocence but a corruption of it: "subtil modesty" teaches Innocence to "dissemble all [its] secret joys" (VDA 6:7-8). This corrupted sexuality then becomes bound into a system of economics, "nets . . . to catch virgin joy" and "sell it in the night" (VDA 6:11-12). As such it is a means of gaining illicit power, at the cost of losing freedom. The "virgin joy" the "modest virgin" spreads her nets for is not attributed to any one person or gender, for it is applicable to all the victims of conventional marriage: to the wife, who by using her sexuality to, as it were, "net" a husband, becomes a commodity; to the husband, who is trapped in marriage; to the prostitute, the necessary other of sexual repression, who is, like the wife, a commodity but, unlike her, is "brand[ed] . . . with the name of whore" (VDA 6:12).

In *Rights of Woman*, too, degraded sexuality is characterized as a costly means of attaining illicit power, although Wollstonecraft's metaphors are of monarchy rather than economy; she argues that women, for whom "[p]leasure is the business of . . . life," choose the "sovereignty of beauty," and thus choose "rather to be shortlived queens than labour

¹¹ Goslee describes the differences between Oothoon and Wollstonecraft in terms similar to those I am using in this article: "Both her attack upon a patriarchal God and her attack upon a unitary, consistent, and rational image of God in the human signal that Oothoon's vindication of women will follow a very different route from Mary Wollstonecraft's, because a careful presentation of the latter and an unexamined acceptance of the former are Wollstonecraft's most basic premises for deducing equality between the sexes . . ." (120).

to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality" (124). Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, for whom the "artful veil of modesty" is necessitated by male tyranny over women, Oothoon implicates religion in this corruption of innocence. Addressing first the "modest virgin knowing to dissemble," and then Theotormon, she says,

Religious dreams and holy vespers, light thy smoky fires:
Once were thy fires lighted by the eyes of honest morn
And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty!
This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling
hypocrite.
Then is Oothoon a whore indeed! and all the virgin joys
Of life are harlots: and Theotormon is a sick mans dream
And Oothoon is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.

(VDA 6:14-20)

Oothoon is slave, not to male sensuality, but to "selfish holiness," to the kind of hypocritical religiosity that we have seen in Theotormon. Religion is the corrupter of innocence, lighting the "smoky fires" of the modest virgin's sexuality, once lit by the "eyes of honest morn." As Oothoon says later, the "places of religion" are the "shadows of . . . curtains" and the "folds of [the] silent pillow" where "the youth shut up from / Lustful joy, shall forget to generate. & create an amorous image" (VDA 7:5-7); religion is no guardian of the soul against the corruption of sexuality, but rather a corrupted, solipsistic form of sexuality.

Oothoon's analysis of sexuality and religion is standard Blakean fare. But what is surprising about it is that Oothoon should be able to offer it. For she has been described from the very beginning of the poem as exactly the "modest virgin" whose duplicity she deplores, who "tremble[s] in [her] virgin fears / And . . . hid[es] in Leutha's vale," and whose masochistic quest for purity reflects Theotormon's "self enjoyings of self denial." Conceivably she has changed, and become enlightened to her condition; the poem is often read this way, the change usually ascribed to her openness to sexuality.¹² But there are at least three problems with this reading. First, the flower that Oothoon picks—the symbol of her sexual openness—is *in* Leutha's vale; that is, her sexual experience is corrupted from the very beginning. Second, Oothoon calls to Theotormon's Eagles after she plucks the flower; if her enlightened perspective is due to her sexual openness, then we would expect her to see through her quest for purity long before she does. Third—and most tellingly, I think—her new perspective too shows

¹² Bloom, for instance, after his discussion of the scene in which Oothoon calls to Theotormon's Eagles to rend her, writes, "This is Oothoon's most exploited and deceived moment, but her liberated passion does not permit her, or us, to abide in it. . . . By her increase in sensual enjoyment Oothoon has done what Thel failed to do—broken through the philosophy of the five senses, not by ascetic avoidance, but by expanding the crucial sense towards an infinite of desire" (110).

symptoms of Leuthan corruption. After decrying the modesty that would make her "a whore indeed," Oothoon offers her own vision of sexuality, free of Theotormon's jealousy and rigid morality:

silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,
And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold;
I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon:
Red as the rosy morning, lustful as the first born beam,
Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous
cloud
Come in the heaven of generous love; nor selfish blightings
bring.

(VDA 7:23-29)

Oothoon's idea of non-jealous love here—essentially to act as procurer for and voyeur within a private brothel for Theotormon—seems very different from her earlier desire for "purity," but the language of the passage makes clear that it amounts to much the same thing. Just as the "modest virgin" uses nets "to catch virgin joy," so too Oothoon will spread "silken nets and traps of adamant" to catch for Theotormon "girls of mild silver, or of furious gold." That the nets are "silken" also suggests that Oothoon's offer to Theotormon follows the same pattern of sexual entrapment, for in *Europe*, Leutha is described as the "silken queen." In short, there is little to choose between branding "virgin joy . . . with the name of whore" and procuring whores oneself; they are simply opposite aspects of the same thing. Put another way, since brothels are made of the bricks of religion, freedom lies, not in the brothel that Oothoon would offer Theotormon, but in some new way of thinking that can stay out of church and brothel both.

If one wishes to argue that Oothoon has changed, then, one must argue that she has changed at least twice—from the "modest virgin" enslaved by her assumptions about sexuality, to the clear-eyed analyst of her oppression, to the procurer again enslaved—and enslaving. The causes of these changes are not clear; the only plausible cause, the plucking of the flower itself, comes at the wrong point in the poem to explain anything. At some point it seems less confusing simply to accept that Oothoon is not a consistent character; what she is described to be and do, and what she says, are at odds.

Oothoon's vision of a brothel for Theotormon also shows that, although in many ways she is very much like Wollstonecraft, she is in other ways completely unlike Wollstonecraft as well. Oothoon's depiction of "subtil modesty" and Wollstonecraft's analysis of the kind of modesty that is "the artful veil of wantonness" are similar, but Wollstonecraft would hardly have found Oothoon's vision of the brothel a satisfactory alternative. In fact, Wollstonecraft uses a similar image, the image of the seraglio, as a metaphor for the lives of women corrupted by an

education designed only to make them pleasing to men: she writes that the "weak beings" whose "strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty" "are only fit for a seraglio" (76). For Wollstonecraft, brothels are not built with the bricks of religion, but with the bricks of female education designed and controlled by male desire. The harem, then, far from being a figure for a kind of sexuality which is liberated because it is not possessive, is a figure for marriage in corrupt contemporary society, in which women's freedom and potential are sacrificed to "libertine notions of beauty."

Moreover, the central tenets of Wollstonecraft's political philosophy in *Right of Woman* are directly opposed to the philosophy Oothoon espouses in her lament. Whereas Oothoon protests the "one law for the lion & the ox" which treats everyone the same, Wollstonecraft argues against treating them differently: "If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim" (58). Emphasizing virtue as she does, Wollstonecraft argues up the Chain of Being to God, the single unitary point on the chain; Oothoon argues down the chain, to the diversity of living creatures. To argue upwards, according to Blake, is to be both complicit with oppression and utterly self-deluding, for the "Creator of men" is a "mistaken Demon of heaven." "Thy joys are tears!" says Oothoon to Urizen, "thy labour vain, to form men to thine image" (*VDA* 5:3-4)—vain too, presumably, to emulate that image, or any image which tries to enforce conformity.

The contradictions in Oothoon's character lie along the fault lines of these two conflicting sets of ideologies. The Oothoon of the Argument and the first section of *Visions*, who, by "reflecting" Theotormon's religiosity, and seeking masochistically for purity, is bound back to back with the oppressor Bromion and his "one law for the lion & the ox," is like Wollstonecraft in that she accepts conventional standards of sexual morality and is committed to a single standard of conduct for all. The Oothoon who speaks in the second and third parts of *Visions*, on the other hand, condemns single standards, arguing instead for the value of diversity and individuality, and is much more like the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* than Wollstonecraft. Along the fault lines between these two positions, too, lies—most uncomfortably—the issue of sexuality. Accepting conventional morality leads to Leutha's vale, and the sexual corruption implied thereby; but so too do Oothoon's politics of diversity—the "silken nets and traps of adamant" that Oothoon spreads in an attempt to defy the law of the Jealous god Urizen are indistinguishable from the nets the "modest virgin" finds to "catch virgin joy."

These contradictions are not, in my opinion, resolvable. Indeed, it is important not to attempt to reduce or dissolve them, for, as more than one critic has noted, Oothoon's advocacy of multiplicity—of the revolutionary force of

contradiction, one might say—is an important part of her power as a character.¹³ These contradictions do require some explaining, however, especially since Oothoon's advocacy of multiplicity is itself a surprising feature in a character who desires to "reflect" the "image of Theotormon" (*VDA* 2:15-16). To understand these contradictions, we need to consider one more difference between Oothoon and Wollstonecraft. Although, by the standards of twentieth-century feminisms, much of what Wollstonecraft has to say about women in *Rights of Woman* is enmeshed in reactionary discourse, Wollstonecraft never wanders in that text too far from her main aim, which is the improvement of women's position. The same cannot be said of Oothoon. Her political targets are many—slavery, imperialism, jealousy, forced conformity, modesty, single-mindedness, etc.—but very little of her political critique can be said to be aimed specifically at improving the lot of women. Wollstonecraft was concerned with a broad spectrum of political issues also, of course, in *Rights of Woman* and even more evidently in other works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. But as a topic, the oppression of women has a specificity and woman-centeredness in Wollstonecraft's work that it simply does not have in Blake's, even in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, with its female and sometimes feminist protagonist. In taking up Wollstonecraft's cause, Blake changed its object; he tried to trace women's oppression to the same masters he traced all other oppressions to, rationality and religion, abstraction, etc.—to Urizen, in a word—and in doing so, he lost sight of anything specific to the oppression of women. In fact, as I shall try to show, it clarifies many of the contradictions in the poem simply to say outright that the poem is not about women at all, but about men.

Appropriations

In his annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, Blake writes: "let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders, the female life lives from the life of the male. see a mans female dependants you know the man" (*E* 596). Fox writes of this passage that its "condescension disguised . . . as appreciation marks an ambivalence towards women

¹³ In "Blake's Oothoon: The Dilemmas of Marginality," James A. W. Heffernan argues that Oothoon's contradictions are a central aspect of her character as a marginal (and therefore a revolutionary if disempowered) figure: "What makes her marginal is precisely her resistance to classification, her refusal to be polarized. Straddling the line between defiant assertion and helpless submission, Oothoon challenges all binary oppositions" (6). As the Introduction to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in *The Early Illuminated Books* points out, Oothoon's embrace of multiplicity ought to encourage a non-reductive reading of her character: "perhaps we should not try to answer these questions [of interpretation raised by Oothoon's complicity] on their own either/or terms when confronted by a poem that announces a plurality of 'Visions' in its title and presents a character who rejects unitary reduction and embraces multiplicity" (234).

which is a significant feature of all Blake's poetry. He admired women, but not enough to imagine them as autonomous human beings" (508). I agree with this assessment, but I think that part of the ambivalence in Blake's remark arises not so much from a contradiction within Blake's work—although, as I have tried to show, contradictions abound in Blake—but from differences between twentieth-century feminism and late eighteenth-century feminism. For what Blake argues in his annotation to Lavater is in important respects more closely aligned with the feminism of his time than with its misogyny.

The aphorism to which Blake responds consists of a series of misogynist clichés: "A great woman not imperious, a fair woman not vain, a woman of common talents not jealous, an accomplished woman, who scorns to shine—are four wonders, just great enough to be divided among the four quarters of the globe" (E 596). Blake's response to this depiction of female vices resembles, to a point, Wollstonecraft's response to Rousseau. Whereas Lavater implies that imperiousness, vanity, etc., are characteristics inherent to women, Blake argues that their ultimate cause is men: "let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders." So too argues Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft accepts contemporary prejudices about female behavior, but attributes that behavior to deficiencies in education, deficiencies which, she makes quite clear, are designed to fit women to male desires. Women's "infantine airs," their "cunning" and "propensity to tyrannize," Wollstonecraft attributes to "false notions of female excellence"—excellence the primary criterion of which is the ability to "excite desire," for in a system in which women are wholly dependent on men for subsistence and status, "all the power [women] obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness" (77, 131). Like Blake, then, Wollstonecraft would remedy the weaknesses of women by correcting the deficiencies in men: "let men grow more chaste and modest," and women should "grow wiser in the same ratio" (77).

Both Blake's and Wollstonecraft's arguments here are derivatives of the "natural man" argument, in that they presuppose that the corrupted self, if freed from the constrictions and falsehoods which corrupt it, will naturally grow wiser and more virtuous. As this argument is applied to gender relations, however, it takes on new characteristics: it targets as corrupting influences not society in general but a specific group within society, namely men; and it takes up new issues of inherent worth. In the traditional "natural man" argument, what merits or deficiencies members of the aristocracy would have in an uncorrupted society is not important; as the argument is applied to issues of gender, heavily overdetermined by traditional assumptions about men and women, the respective natures of the "natural man" and the "natural woman" are unavoidably at issue.

This question of the natural—as opposed to conventional—qualities of men and women can be taken up in a

number of ways, which is why Blake's annotation can be at once feminist in its contemporary context and thoroughly sexist in our own. Wollstonecraft tries to leave the question open as much as possible; so, in the passage above, she does not claim positively that in an uncorrupted society women's understandings would be the equal of men's, but leaves that judgment to those whose understandings are not themselves corrupted by contemporary society: "if women do not grow wiser in the same ratio" that "men become more chaste and modest," *then and only then* "it will be clear that they have weaker understandings" (77). Blake, on the other hand, less philosophically consistent than Wollstonecraft, seems to have decided the issue already: "the female life lives from the light of the male," he writes, assuming male precedence. This assumption of male precedence is confirmed by his annotation to the Lavater aphorism. At the same time that he attributes women's supposed imperiousness, vanity, etc., to men, he covertly affirms Lavater's implied conception of female virtues. In the sentence "let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders," "such" is not an intensifier but a demonstrative adjective; i.e., women will be not any wonders, but the "four wonders" Lavater describes—"a great woman not imperious, a fair woman not vain, a woman of common talents not jealous, an accomplished woman, who scorns to shine." By implication, then, this "natural" woman, not imperious, not vain, not jealous, who scorns to shine, will be humble, whatever else she may be, and in all likelihood quite content to live "from the light of the male." Blake is consistent with the letter of Wollstonecraft's philosophy, but utterly at odds with its spirit.¹⁴

Much the same thing occurs in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. *Visions* shares a number of images and arguments with the *Rights of Woman*: the tropes of slavery and flowers (and with them assumptions about the corrupting effect of social conditioning on individual consciousness), an analysis of "subtil modesty" as the "artful veil of wantonness," and the assumption that undesirable female thought and behavior is caused by men. Yet, as I have said, Blake redirects this material to ends very different from Wollstonecraft's: Wollstonecraft is concerned with the political and moral advancement of women, the primary obstacle to which is male sensualism; Blake is concerned most of all with the freedom of individual propensities, the greatest obstacle to which is Urizen, the jealous god primarily

¹⁴ Blake probably annotated Lavater's *Aphorisms* in 1788 (E 583), four years before the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, so his remarks cannot be considered to have been influenced by Wollstonecraft's feminism (he and Wollstonecraft may well have met by this time, but how clearly formulated Wollstonecraft's political principles were at this point, and how much if at all she and Blake would have discussed them, cannot be reliably assessed). I juxtapose these texts only to show that while Blake and Wollstonecraft shared much in the way of political assumptions and strategies, their political goals were at odds.

associated with reason. In short, Blake appropriates Wollstonecraft's critique for his own purposes.

Indeed, although I do think that Blake was sympathetic to women at the time he wrote *Visions*, his entrance upon the terrain of female oppression might well have been motivated not so much by sympathy as by philosophical necessity. In his last annotation to Lavater's *Aphorisms*, Blake posits an essential link between denial of individuality and men's opinions of women. Whereas Lavater, and those like him who knowingly or unknowingly inherit the doctrine of original sin, believe that "the vicious propensity" is "a leading feature of the man," and that vice is not only inherent but active, Blake redefines vice as accidental and negative: it is the "omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another." Just as the "natural man," until corrupted by civilization, is inherently good, so too the "leading propensity" of every person, "his leading Virtue & his good Angel," must be good also. But whereas the traditional "natural man" argument, by focusing on the condition of the species in nature, effaces the differences between individuals, Blake emphasizes individual character above all else: each person has a unique "leading propensity," which it would be oppression to hold to a single standard (what "laws of Kings & Priests" do in calling "the Staminal Virtues of Humanity" by the name of Vice). Blake's defense of diversity requires him to address the issue of female nature, for "the origin of this mistake [making the "vicious propensity . . . a leading feature of the man"] in Lavater & his cotemporaries is, They suppose that Womans love is Sin" (E 601). For Blake this equation of women with sin matters a great deal politically, for it taps into the mythological origins of Lavater's "mistake." According to the doctrine of original sin, the guilt for Eve's disobedience is transmitted to all future generations, so that sin is an inherent feature of human beings—so that, in other words, the "vicious propensity" is a "leading feature of the man." The stereotypical image of woman as vain, jealous, sensual is thus intricately connected with the Urizenic denial of individuality and diversity which Blake protests vehemently in *Visions* and elsewhere. For Blake to affirm the sacredness of individual character, then, he needed to nullify the equation of "Womans love" with sin, and therefore to reimagine female character.

Blake's quarrel with the doctrine of original sin explains why, in a poem of which the primary political claim is that individual character is sacred, Blake found it congenial to appropriate parts of Wollstonecraft's feminism; he required what she had to offer, a new Vision of the Daughters of Albion, to break the equation of Woman's love with sin which he felt led his contemporaries to make the "vicious propensity . . . a leading feature of the man." But his quarrel with the doctrine of original sin does not in itself explain why, given that Blake took exception to many of the fundamental principles of Wollstonecraft's work, the vision of women that he promotes should also be a woman's

vision (Oothoon's)—why, in other words, the "of" in the title *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* indicates the genitive case as well as the objective. For that we need to return to the final sentence of the first Lavater annotation discussed above: "see a mans female dependants you know the man." In some ways this sentence is the most interesting part of the annotation, personalizing and bringing into the present the necessary abstraction of arguments about a "natural" self. Whereas the first part of the annotation, "let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders," projects a future utopia, and the second part, "the female life lives from the light of the male," claims to state a universal truth, the third part argues about concrete conditions in the present: "see a mans female dependants" *under current conditions*, and "you know the man." Although this sentence, like the one before it, shows little respect for women's autonomy, nevertheless in a small way it shows an internalization of responsibility for women's oppression. For a male to take seriously Wollstonecraft's argument that female weakness is caused by male sensuality would mean more than simply supporting education for women, because Wollstonecraft attributes the corruption of female character not merely to the system in which men are dominant but to the personal characteristics of men themselves; to take her argument seriously, a male would have to come to terms somehow with the part of male identity which is implicated in that corruption.

One would expect, then, that in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, a work which explores the limits of change in female identity, Blake would betray some anxiety about male identity as well. In fact, patterns of male sexual identity in the poem are as limited as patterns of female sexual identity: the only models are Bromion, the sensualist and imperialist, and Theotormon, the solipsist and religious hypocrite.¹⁵ Both are corrupt; both are oppressors. If we consider these options as responses to Wollstonecraft, we can see what a quandary Blake was in. According to the narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the moment when "the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite, and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt" will "come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (MHH 14). Sensual pleasure, then, and especially sexual pleasure, is for Blake politically crucial. But Wollstonecraft had argued that the underlying cause of female oppression was male sensualism; and while he could and did fault Wollstonecraft for her alliance with conventional morality, Blake could not avoid her challenge to his political program, and her challenge to male sexual desire.

¹⁵ Ostriker also notes the limitations of male sexual identity in the poem: Bromion "represents the social and psychological pathology of sexual violence" while "Theotormon represents its pitiable underside, sexual impotence" ("Desire" 157). In the Introduction to *Visions in The Early Illuminated Books*, these two patterns of sexual identity are traced, as I have traced them here, to the "mistake" identified by Blake in his annotations of Lavater of "suppos[ing] Womans love is sin" (232).

To put this in other terms: just as Blake could see no sexual alternative for women, in contemporary conditions, to the delusive coquetry of Leutha's vale, so too he could see no sexual alternative for men, in contemporary conditions, to the rape-mentality of Bromion. To restrain male desire, as Wollstonecraft proposes, is merely to be Theotormon, an oppressor at one higher level of abstraction. This is why "none but Bromion can hear [Oothoon's] lamentations" (VDA 3:1); Bromion's perceptions are limited, but Theotormon, by repressing sexuality, has closed off perception entirely.¹⁶

The limitations of male sexual identity explain the contradiction between the compromised position Oothoon speaks from and her astute political critique, and brings us to Blake's second strategy of responding to feminism: utopianizing, a form of projection. Blake's assessment of male character was similar to Wollstonecraft's, in that he too attributed what he took to be the limitations of female character to the limitations of male character. When he tried to imagine a male character which could break free from the oppressive roles which men are raised to play, he found that the political strategies he had employed in earlier works were already claimed by the enemy. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake tries to break free from the oppressive abstractions of "Good," defined as "the passive that obeys reason," by countering them with "Evil," defined as the "active springing from Energy" (MHH 3). In short, he counters Heaven with Hell, one supernatural force with another. The supernatural aspect is important, because it allows a perspective from which to speak; Blake can attribute his critique of contemporary patterns of thought to the Devil, or whoever speaks the "Proverbs of Hell." This strategy ensures Blake a position from which successful critique is possible; attributing his critique to a supernatural source allows him to bypass the problem of imagining a human character immune to the corruptions of society, while emphasizing the partiality of that critique (Heaven must be countered with Hell and vice versa) postpones the impossible project of putting that critique into practice. Thus he can, for instance, advocate acting on sexual desires—"Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (MHH 10), without having to imagine too specifically what form "an improvement in sensual enjoyment" might take in mere humans.

When, in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake does try to apply his political agenda of sexual release to men and women, these strategies are no longer available. At the level of Heaven and Hell—i.e., at a high level of abstraction—it is possible to consider sexuality as an abstract force,

¹⁶ It is for this reason, I believe, that *America a Prophecy* begins with a rape, and that the "nameless shadowy female" he rapes is revealed in *Europe a Prophecy* to be the daughter of Enitharmon. Blake requires new patterns for both male and female sexuality, but these patterns must arise from conditions as they are; any child born of Orc, the revolutionary spirit, must be born of the male rapist (Orc) and the female coquette (of the lineage of Enitharmon).

as Energy with a capital E. At a more human level, however, sexuality has already been coded by gender and corrupted by social conditioning. Male sexuality is torn by contraries, what we might call the sexuality of the church and the sexuality of the brothel: the sexuality of the solipsist and passive oppressor Theotormon or the sexuality of the rapist and active oppressor Bromion. For an effective critique, then, Blake needed a third party upon whom he might project his political vision. He found that third party in Oothoon, who as a woman was not subject to the contradictions of male sexuality.

Projecting upon Oothoon a political vision may at first appear absurd, since, as discussed above, female sexuality too is subject to contraries of church and brothel, of the "modest virgin" or "Leutha's vale." But men and women hold unequal positions within Blake's ideological economy, making it absolutely necessary—if hopeless—to at least attempt to reimagine female character. Because, according to Blake, "the female life lives from the light of the male," women hold ideological value; men project ideological value. The two Lavater annotations show this inequality clearly. Lavater's mistake of making "the vicious propensity . . . the leading feature of the man," a mistake which, because it denies individual character, underlies a host of inequalities, originates in the supposition that "Womans love is Sin"; that is, Lavater has projected onto women a negative value. This is a "mistake" for Blake only because it leads to other mistakes, i.e., false conceptions of virtue and vice; whether this value accords with women's actual character hardly seems to matter. In fact Lavater's assessment of women may even be true: because women "live from the light of the male," they hold the value that men place upon them. Hence the future tense in "let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders"—clearly women are not such wonders now, and will not be until men make them so. The verbs themselves are telling: men do; women are.

What men do, besides rape, colonize, abstract and weep, is project: Bromion brands Oothoon as "Bromions harlot," while Theotormon "severely smiles" and Oothoon's "soul reflects the smile" (VDA 2:18). Until the men cease to project upon Oothoon the particular image they do project upon her, they will continue to be trapped by the limitations of their perceptions, limitations the poem takes care to describe. Bromion can see nothing but the wars, poverty, and riches that he himself has brought into being, while Theotormon can see nothing but his own thoughts: "Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?" (VDA 3:23). What must change in this economy of projection, limited perception, and oppression is the ideological value of women; Oothoon must become something different from what she has been made out—or simply made—to be.

Blake, writing self-consciously from within the ideological boundaries of his time, tries to show as much of this

transformation as possible, which explains many of the contradictions in the poem. He shows the limited perceptions of men, and the corresponding limitations in women, who "live their life from the light of the male." He shows the transformation in Oothoon, not so much in her repeated assertions of purity, which are undercut by her relationship with hopelessly corrupt Theotormon ("How can I be defiled," she asks him, "when I reflect thy image pure?"), but in her acquisition of a voice which tells more than either Bromion or Theotormon knows, and a vision which sees more than they can see. And finally, he shows the consequences of such a transformation, in the content of her vision: however compromised Oothoon is by her love of Theotormon, she has at least ceased to assume that "Womans love is Sin," and can therefore see that all manner of living creatures are different, and that "every thing that lives is holy." What Blake does not attempt to show, what I think he simply could not imagine and realized he could not imagine, is the nature of gender uncorrupted by false assumptions about gender. However bold Oothoon's vision is, it still includes Leuthan nets and traps, and neither Theotormon nor Bromion changes at all. The poem ends, therefore, with the promise of political renewal frustrated and Oothoon's protest unheard: "Thus every morning wails Oothoon. but Theotormon sits/ Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire" (VDA 8:11-12).

In describing Blake's strategies for dealing with feminism, I have used terms familiar in political arguments: appropriation and projection. Customarily, both terms are used negatively, the first signifying a strategy by which a dominant class nullifies a potential political threat, the second signifying a strategy by which a dominant class can speak for an oppressed other and avoid listening to what the other might have to say. Both of these negative meanings are applicable to Blake's strategies, which is why I retain these terms. Nevertheless I believe that in practice these strategies have ambivalent political values. Just as women cannot hold as subjects the place that male ideology has defined for them as objects, so too men cannot hold as subjects the place that feminism has defined for them as objects. But both men and women do respond as subjects to discourse in which they are defined as objects, and thus take up that discourse with a difference. For women this has meant, among other things, that throughout the works of women who were on the surface far from rebellious—Christina Rossetti or Emily Dickinson, for instance—one can trace substantial undercurrents of rebellion. For men responding to feminism, I think this has meant and will continue to mean that assimilation of feminism is always in part appropriation of feminism. To put this at the crudest—and perhaps the least useful—level, let me ask, was Blake feminist? In my opinion, if by feminism we mean any twentieth-century feminism that I know of, then the answer must be a resounding no. If by feminism we mean

the feminism of Wollstonecraft, then the answer is much less clear; he was true to many of the fundamental principles of Wollstonecraft's feminism, but, because he prejudged the ultimate nature of gender, he was already moving in a direction directly counter to the spirit of Wollstonecraft's feminism, even in *Visions*, the work of his most sympathetic to feminism. In some ways, the most admirable thing Blake did was the most questionable: he gave Oothoon a voice, which meant that he dared to dream of female autonomy, and at the same time denied that autonomy by trying to project his own voice onto the woman whose autonomy he imagined.

For men sympathetic to feminism now—and they are my main concern here, since it is hardly my place to speak for feminism, or try to define its direction—I believe that it is impossible to avoid appropriation of feminism, or projection onto it, and probably impossible to avoid responses which are inimical to feminism. We believe what we believe, and concealment, rooted in defensiveness, can only make matters worse. But we can at least try to see clearly how we are responding to feminism, and why. Nearly two hundred years have passed since Blake wrote *Visions*, and the manner of his appropriation and projection look uncomfortably familiar; and he was neither the first nor the last male whose response to feminism might teach us about our own. "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows," runs the motto of *Visions*, an appropriate motto for a poem which tries to see beyond the limits of the self. Male critics who wish to be useful to feminism, and who wish to avoid the charge or the act of trying to conquer feminism as a new terrain, might start by examining how men have responded historically to feminism—might try, that is, to see how our eyes have seen, in hopes of seeing a little more.

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Not from Troy, But Jerusalem: Blake's Canon Revision

BY R. PAUL YODER

In chapter 2 of Blake's *Jerusalem* Los undertakes an investigative quest that I have come to see as emblematic of Blake's own quest in relation to England:

Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision
 Los took the globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions
 Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves
 Of despair & death, to search the tempter out, walking
 among
 Albions rocks & precipices! Caves of solitude & dark de-
 spair,
 And saw every Minute Particular of Albion degraded &
 murdered
 But saw not by whom.

(*Jerusalem* 45: 2-8, E 194)

Los's search provides a good way to think about the Blake who emerges from a roughly chronological reading of the illuminated books. From the initial assertion by the "Voice of one Crying in the Wilderness" that "All Religions are One" to *The Ghost of Abel*, addressed to Byron in the Wilderness, Blake sets forth principles ("All Religions are One" "There is No Natural Religion"), identifies social and moral problems (*Songs*), provides admonitory exempla (*Thel*, *Visions*), satirizes his adversary (*Marriage*), mythologizes history (*America*, *Europe*), and then begins a series of books (the "minor" prophecies) that seeks to get at the genesis of the wilderness of England. By the time he etched *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake had discovered what he took to be the source of England's problems; he had discovered the error that had led to Albion's continuing fall and fragmentation: the acceptance of the classical epic tradition, as embodied in the myth of Trojan Brutus as the founder of the British nation. In order to correct England's error, Blake recognized that, like Milton, he had to write an English myth of origin.

Milton, of course, set the stage for such a rewriting of English mythic history, and not only in *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Regained* the Savior himself authorizes a dismantling of the classical tradition, saying,

Who therefore seeks in these
 True wisdom, finds her not, or by delusion
 Far worse, her false resemblance only meets,
 An empty cloud.

(*Paradise Regained* 4.318-21)

More important to my discussion is Milton's recognition of this falsity at the outset of his *History of Britain*.

Here Milton remarks that of the tales he is about to relate, "That which we have of oldest seeming, hath by the greater part of judicious antiquaries been long rejected for a modern fable" (*Columbia Prose 2, Yale Prose 2-3*). After a brief comment on the tendency of time to change fiction to fact and visa versa, Milton adds that he has "therefore determined to bestow the telling over even of these reputed tales; be it for nothing else but in favor of our English poets and rhetoricians, who by their art will know how to use them judiciously" (*Columbia Prose 2-3, Yale Prose 3*). The tale Milton has in mind is the English myth of national origin popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the myth of the founding of the British people by Trojan Brutus. The myth of Brutus had been severely undermined by Polydore Vergil, but Milton here suggests that even such a rejected myth might be turned to good use by future writers.

It is easy to see why Milton thought the myth might prove useful to others, for it is in the myth of Trojan Brutus that the political and the aesthetic are most obviously joined. The story of Brutus supported the English appropriation of classical authority at both an ideological and a poetic level. The poetic myth, Christianized by Milton in the "Nativity Ode," and perhaps epitomized in Thomas Gray's *Progress of Poesy*, claims a movement of the classical muse from Greece to Rome to England. This historical/geographical "Westering," as it is sometimes known, is evident in the epic high marks—Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and these epics are also associated with turning points in the various national myths—the gathering and death of the Greek heroes at Troy, Aeneas's flight from fallen Troy to found Rome, the founding of a decidedly English-sounding human race. Paralleling this poetical progress is a racial continuity in which the line of Priam, King of Troy, is continued in Rome through Aeneas, and in England through Aeneas's great-grandson, Brutus, commonly known as "Trojan Brutus." Moreover, in Gray's *Progress*, which Blake illustrated, this westward movement is explicitly ideological, for the departure of the poetic muse for a new home in the west is always a consequence of the collapse of liberty first in Greece and then in Rome, until muse and ideology find a home in England. So it is that in his aborted epic, *Brutus*, Alexander Pope recognized Trojan Brutus, the descendant of Priam, as the "Patient Chief" who brought "Art Arms and Honour" to England's "Ancient Sons" (1-3).

Pope's muse in this fragment suggests how Blake may have responded to the myth of Brutus, for Pope invokes the "Daughter of Memory" (4) to inspire him, and so in Blake's eyes, Pope's project would have been doomed from the start. Indeed, as Hugh A. MacDougall has shown, this Trojan myth of origin "had spent itself" by the mid-eighteenth century, to be replaced by an alternative myth of "Anglo-Saxonism," sometimes called "Gothicism," which posited a different point of origin and implied a different ideology (26). This transition corresponds to a change in

attitude at this time toward the classics. Stuart Curran, for example, has documented the growing criticism of Homer, Virgil, and the classical tradition during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Joel Barlow's remark that Homer's "existence has really proved one of the signal misfortunes of mankind" (in Curran 170). Barlow charges that Homer's poems tend

to inflame the minds of young readers with an enthusiastic ardor for military fame; to inculcate the pernicious doctrine of the divine right of kings; to teach both prince and people that military plunder was the most honorable mode of acquiring property; and that conquest, violence and war were the best employment of nations. (Curran 170)

Barlow's criticism of the epical warrior ethic is very similar to what Anne Mellor has noted as "feminine Romanticism's" rejection of "the epic, with its implicit assumption that the male hero embodies the character and aspirations of the nation and thus is 'representative' of mankind" (6). For my purposes the important point here is that for these writers canon revision is political and social reform.

It is in this context that less than 40 years after Pope's death, Blake satirizes the "Patient Chief," "Trojan Brutus," in *King Edward the Third*; in his prophetic song-within-a-song Brutus foretells a time when "Our sons shall rule the empire of the sea (6:42, E 438), and his speech both recalls and undermines the imperial prophecies of "Old Father Thames" for England in Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, and of Pope himself for Jerusalem in his "Messiah." In Blake's play, a minstrel sings of the bloody battle by which Brutus and his army wrested Albion's land from the native giants, "the enormous sons / Of Ocean," and the "wild men, / Naked and roaring like lions" (vi: 20-23, E 437). Standing among the "giant bodies, streaming blood, / Dread visages, frowning in silent death," Brutus, according to the minstrel, is "inspir'd," and sings of a time when England's "mighty wings shall stretch from east to west," an image that anticipates the wings of the Covering Cherub in *Jerusalem* (vi: 37-43, E 438). In his vision of the new Troy, Brutus claims that "Liberty shall stand upon the cliffs of Albion," but this "Liberty" is like the Spectre in *Jerusalem* who keeps claiming to be God, for Brutus's Liberty also "Stretch[es] her mighty spear o'er distant lands" (vi: 55-58, E 438).

Blake's criticism of Brutus's warrior ethic—if not the connection to Pope—has been noted by Erdman and others, but my emphasis is on Blake's evolving critique of the classical canon, which leads him finally to deny the substance of Pope's claim that the descendants of Aeneas had brought art to England: in about 1820 Blake writes in *On Virgil* that "Rome & Greece swept Art into their maw & destroyed it" (E 270). For Blake, the problems of England—its imperial dreams, its aggression, its failure to support

what he saw as true art, its insensitivity to the suffering of its own people—stem from England's error in yoking its history with that of Troy. Opposed to this destructive classical myth, Blake identifies Gothicism as "living form" and associates it with a Hebraic myth. Blake's last major poem, *Jerusalem*, is his greatest effort to correct England/Albion's error. As he had offered his "Bible of Hell" as a supplementary canon to the Bible, Blake offers *Jerusalem* as an epic alternative to the classical model. *Jerusalem* is an epic answer to the *Iliad* as if Homer's poem had been entitled *Helen*, but Blake's *Jerusalem* is both the besieged city and the captured heroine, and his poem is an attempt to replace the legacy of Trojan Brutus with a national/poetic myth based on Jesus, whose "feet in ancient time / Walk[ed] on Englands mountains green" (*Milton* 1: 1-2, E 95).

The claim that Jesus walked in ancient England seems to be an extension of the legend that Joseph of Arimathea had visited England, preaching and bringing the Holy Grail. If Joseph, why not Jesus himself, perhaps during the unknown years of his youth? Blake engraved the plate "Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion" while still a "beginner" (E 671), but his most obvious rewriting of English mythic history comes toward the other end of his career in the preface to chapter 2 of *Jerusalem*, addressed "To the Jews." Here Blake parodies the shocked reaction of his audience ("Can it be? Is it a Truth that the Learned have explored?") to his claim that the Jews "Ancestors derived their origin from Abraham, Heber, Shem, and Noah, who were Druids" (27, prose, E 171). By conflating Jewish and English history in this way, Blake does not simply replace Troy with Jerusalem in English mythology. Instead, he usurps priority altogether, basing history on the vision of Albion before the arrival of Brutus, glimpsed only briefly in the histories of Geoffrey or Milton. "All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore," (*Jerusalem* 46:15, E 196; 27, prose) and the beginning of history is Albion's separation of himself from Jerusalem. This separation results later in the geographic removal of Jerusalem, which had "coverd the Atlantic Mountains & the Erythrean" (24:46, E 170), from England to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, so that "wild seas & rocks close up Jerusalem away from / The Atlantic Mountains where Giants dwelt in Intellect" (49:77-50:1, E 199). Against this background, the founding of London as "Troia Nova" by Brutus can only be seen as a sign of Albion's fatal Covenant with what is called in *Milton* "the detestable gods of Priam" (14:14-15, E 108). In this context *Jerusalem's* long epic catalogues, overlaying the map of English counties with a map of the twelve tribes of Israel (16:28-60, E 160-61; 71:56-72:44, E 226-27; cf. 71:10-49, E 225-26), are an essential part of reclaiming England's true heritage. If Wordsworth wrote poems on the Naming of Places, Blake in *Jerusalem* wrote a poem on the renaming of places.

Blake's image for the spread of Albion's error is the "mighty Polypus nam'd Albion's tree" which grows on eter-

nity like "Mistletoe grows on the oak" (*Jerusalem* 66:48, 55, E 219). The polypus is a powerful visual image that Morton Paley has described as "combining the images of a sea creature, a network of associated beings, and a cancerous growth," a "symbol of cancerously proliferating Selfhood" (*Continuing City* 214, 211). Indeed, the polypus's image of the writhing branches weaving out from the central trunk unites a host of Blake's images and enemies. Not only does it suggest the branches of Albion's "deadly tree" which "spread over him its cold shadows" at the beginning of *Jerusalem* chapter 2 (28:13-19, E 174); it is also "the roots of Albions Tree [that] enterd the Soul of Los" at the beginning of chapter 3 (53:4, E 202). The image of the polypus suggests the pattern by which Blake's characters are ultimately derived from the single source of Albion: Albion divided into the four Zoas, then their emanations, then the Sons and Daughters of Albion, all branching out from the single trunk, all subdividing or reuniting in Blake's vision. It is also the shape of Aristotelian hierarchies, systems based on the abstraction of similarities by the denial of "minute particulars." Paul Miner has shown how the polypus "is associated with man's muscular fibers, the Couch of Death, the fetal web, the roots of the Tree of Mystery, and the heart, lungs, and genitals" (199). The polypus is ultimately the emblem of how one error can spread "till the Great Polypus of Generation coverd the Earth" (67:34, E 220).

Like Adam, Albion/England committed a single error from which derived a world of woe. In *Jerusalem* that choice is rendered in terms of a sort of family feud—the family of Albion versus the "Divine Family"—and the feud is about whether there are really two families at all or only one. In the opening of the poem, Albion turns away from the Divine Family, rejecting Jesus as "a brother and a friend," choosing instead to believe that "By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith" (4:18, 28, E 146, 147). This denial of faith is the mathematical form that Blake associates with the Classical world, and Albion's decision is identified later in the poem with the "Covenant of Priam" (98:46, E 258). By the end of *Jerusalem*, the "Covenant of Priam" is gone and Albion has rejoined the Divine Family. He has welcomed Jerusalem back into his bosom. Troia Nova is gone, and Jerusalem has returned to Albion's ancient shores.

Indeed, one theme that unifies *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is the relationship between Albion and Priam. In *Milton a Poem*, Milton the poet is inspired by the Bard's Song to leave Eternity and return to earth in order to correct the errors perpetuated by his life and work, and especially by *Paradise Lost*. When Milton rises, his first words are "I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam" (*Milton* 14:14-15, E 108). These words suggest that Blake's critique of Milton is also a critique of the classical tradition which Milton explicitly engaged (in the invocation to Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, for example) but which in Blake's eyes, he failed to dispatch. And if Milton leaves eternity in order finally to dispatch the "Gods

of Priam," his success (in Blake's poem, at least) is apparent in the last speech on plate 98 of *Jerusalem*, when "the Cry from all the Earth" (98:54, *J* 258) opens with the question, "Where is the Covenant of Priam, the Moral Virtues of the Heathen" (98:46, *E* 258). This Covenant is no more; it has been replaced by the "Covenant of Jehovah, "the mutual Covenant Divine" according to which all things "Humanize / In the Forgiveness of Sins" (98:41-45, *E* 258). In *Jerusalem's* battle "To decide Two Worlds with a great decision: a World of Mercy, and / A World of Justice" (65:1-2, *E* 216), the World of Mercy, based on the myth of Jerusalem and Jesus, triumphs.

The Covenant of Jehovah constitutes the "World of Mercy," but what exactly is implied by the "Covenant of Priam," the "World of Justice"? Paley has described Priam as "the epitome of heathenism" for Blake, and he adds that the Covenant of Priam "would be the Biblical Covenant as misunderstood and misapplied by the churches" (*Commentary* 295n). But the polypus of the Covenant of Priam reaches beyond the churches; it comprises all that we have come to think of as the Adversary in Blake's universe. When Milton departs from Heaven to dispatch the Gods of Priam, his description of the circumstances emphasizes both the absence of the Savior (and all he represents) and Milton's personal culpability in the Covenant of Priam:

... The Nations still
Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp
Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.
When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping
body
From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?
Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.
I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
I will go down to the sepulcher to see if the morning
breaks!
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
And I be seiz'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood
The Lamb of God is seen thro' mists & shadows, hov'ring
Over the sepulchers in clouds of Jehovah & winds of
Elohim
A disk of blood, distant; & heav'ns & earth's roll dark be-
tween
What do I here before the Judgment? without my Ema-
nation?
With the daughters of memory, & not the daughters of
inspiration[?]
I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
He is my Spectre!

(*Milton* 14[15]:14-31, *E* 108)

The worship of the "Gods of Priam," the Covenant of Priam, is characterized by the "Pomp of warlike Selfhood," the ideology that Barlow and others recognized in the classical epic, and also by the corruptibility of death, and the absence of the Resurrection. Milton confronts the error in

himself, and he sacrifices his own position in eternity to return to Generation to correct these errors, for he was himself a part of this covenant. Now he faces judgment, like Albion at the beginning of *Jerusalem*, without his emanation, a thrall to the same "Daughters of Memory" that Pope had invoked in his unfinished epic of *Trojan Brutus*.

At the end of *Jerusalem*, when the Covenant of Priam has been replaced by the Covenant of Jehovah, the "Cry from all the Earth from the Living creatures" indicates how far this error had enrooted itself into the world. After asking "Where is the Coventant of Priam," the "Cry" continues

... [Where are] the Moral Virtues of the Heathen
Where is the Tree of Good & Evil that rooted beneath the
cruel heel
Of Albions Spectre the Patriarch Druid! where are all his
Human Sacrifices
For Sin in War & in the Druid Temples of the Accuser of
Sin: beneath
The Oak Groves of Albion that covered the whole Earth
beneath his Spectre
Where are the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory
that grew on Desolation
The Fruit of Albions Poverty Tree when the Triple Headed
Gog-Magog Giant
Of Albion Taxed the Nations, into Desolation & then gave
the Spectrous Oath

(*J* 98:46-56, *E* 258)

The Covenant of Priam is gone, but its impact had been explicitly religious, moral, political and economic. The myth of the Fall, of the Tree of Good and Evil and the Accuser of Sin, and of the demands for human sacrifice—obviously including Jesus, but also including those killed in war, and those who die in poverty—are for Blake all signs of the contamination of Albion's history by Hellenic culture in the broadest sense. The result of this contamination has been the Kingdoms of the world built on Desolation, Poverty, and Taxation, and the Covenant was sealed with the Oath of the demonic Spectre. All of this, of course, was foreseen by Brutus himself at the end of *King Edward the Third*.

Replacing the Covenant of Priam is the Covenant of Jehovah:

And I heard Jehovah speak
Terrific from his Holy Place & saw the Words of the Mu-
tual Covenant Divine
On Chariots of gold & jewels with Living Creatures starry
& flaming
With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle
Dove, Fly, Worm,
And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich ar-
ray Humanize
In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of
Jehovah

(*J* 98:40-45, *E* 258)

Through the "Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah," even the Serpent is identified as a Human Form. Not only is "every Word & Every Character / . . . Human" (J 98:35-36, E 258) but they can even be seen riding in golden chariots. The Covenant of Jehovah seals the return of the four-fold universe, in which "every Man stood Fourfold"

Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death
& Resurrection

Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing
in Unity

In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circumference &
Form, for ever

In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation. it is the
Covenant of Jehovah.

(J 98:12, 20-23, E 257)

The change from the Covenant of Priam to the Covenant of Jehovah is a change of world view that transforms in a moment the entire landscape. In *A Vision of the Last Judgment* Blake remarks that error "is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it" (E 565). This moment is dramatized in the fifth Memorable Fancy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, when by the simple removal of the angel's "metaphysics," the vision of Leviathan "advancing . . . with all the fury of a spiritual existence" is replaced by a scene "on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light hearing a harper who sung to the harp" (18-19, Prose, E 41-42). Similarly, in *Jerusalem*, after a long scene of divine pedagogy in which the Savior appears in the "likeness and similitude" of Albion's "friend" Los, Albion finally admits his error to the Savior and throws "himself into the Furnaces of affliction" for his friend. Here is no epic battle of champions, but a scene of self-sacrifice, and in that moment the landscape is transformed: "All was a Vision, all a Dream: the Furnaces became / Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine" (J 96:35-37, E 256). This transformation spreads and all the cities, counties, sons and daughters awaken, and the four Zoas are reassimilated into Albion's bosom. Then is Albion fully restored: "Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds / Of Heaven Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity" (J 96:42-43, E 256). Thus does the Covenant of Jehovah replace the Covenant of Priam.

Like Milton, Blake understood that there were topics "more heroic than the wrath / Of stern Achilles" (PL 9:14-15). Blake apparently also came to agree with Pope that "Nature and Homer were . . . the same" (*Essay on Criticism* 135), but for Blake this is exactly the reason *not* to follow Homer. As he puts it in the Preface to *Milton*, "The stolen and perverted Writings of Homer and Ovid; of Plato & Cicero. Which all men ought to contemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible [But] We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but true to our own Imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which

we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord (2, prose, E 95). As Blake read him, Milton did follow Homer too closely, for Milton was not yet ready to make the move that Christopher Smart was to make almost one hundred years later when he asserted that the psalmist, shepherd king, David was "the best poet which ever lived [and] was thought worthy of the highest honour which possibly can be conceived, as *the Saviour of the world was ascribed to his house, and called his son in the body*" (contents, *A Song to David*). Blake may not follow David as a poetic model—he prefers the prophetic mode of Isaiah, Ezekiel, even Balaam—but he does continue Smart's project to educate and reorient English taste, because for him, there is no difference between aesthetic and political education. Put down thy *Iliad* and thy *Aeneid*, he seems to say, and pick up thy Bible.

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The Chimney Sweeper

Lorenz Becher: An Artist in Berne, Switzerland

BY LORENZ BECHER

I was born in 1961 in Berne and I work in a studio in the center of Berne. The address is Kornhausplatz 14, 3014 Bern, Switzerland.

Since 1990 I have mainly worked on projects rather than individual paintings. The first one was called *Faces*, the second one, in 1991, *Faces II*. In 1992 I did the *Faces on Board Project* and in 1993, the *Blake Project* happened.

About 200 years after William Blake's writing, illustrating and printing of his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* I copied the songs on pieces of cardboard (averaging 100 cm. by 70 cm.) with black, water-resistant felt pens. The pattern thus constituted by Blake's words in my handwriting became the basis of my visual reaction first drawn into and onto all the texts in black and white and then painted, sprayed, printed, masked on and steel woolled off the *Experience* texts with gouache, acrylics and synthetic resin. Hand-framed black and white in the case of the *Innocence* poems and framed in various colors in the case of the *Ex-*

perience poems, the entire project was first shown in the rooms of the Swiss Telecom International building in Worblaufen, Berne in spring 1996. Among my conscious concerns in the making of the project were the amazing topicality of the texts, not so much on the level of their language, but on the levels of psychological, cultural and historical questions of all sorts. In addition I was greatly inspired and fascinated by Blake's handling of the theme of confinement and emancipation as well as his very modern and complex perception of the notions of system and chaos. My visual work is a reaction to Blake's poetry, not to his own illustrations, and I was also influenced, no doubt, by Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, and The Doors, who were all, in turn, greatly influenced by Blake themselves. It is a great wish of mine to see my Blake paintings published in a book, side by side with Blake's own illustrations and his texts some day. Should this publication get somebody outside Switzerland interested in exhibiting or printing my work, I will be able to get financial support from a Swiss foundation.

In 1994 I did the *Double Bind Project*, in 1995 the *Magic Carpet Ride Project* and the *Phases of the Moon Project*. In 1996 I painted the *Schattenraumprojekt (Rooms in the House of Shade Project)* in collaboration with Regula Radwila, a Swiss writer. I also completed my *Milespiration Project*, which is the music of Miles Davis transformed into my painting.

This spring I saw Jim Jarmusch's movie *Dead Man* and was fascinated by the fact that almost synchronically he and I, two artists working with pictures in completely different ways one ocean apart, were inspired by one and the same poet. Blake is magic and so are words and pictures!

(For more information call Lorenz Becher [931 03 00]. Studio address is Kornhausplatz 14 in Berne.)



Holy Thursday

Frank Vaughan, *Again to the Life of Eternity: William Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Thomas Gray*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995. 139 pp. \$65.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER HEPPNER



The Poison Tree



London



Tirzah

First the book itself. It is large and handsome, and one opens it with a pleasure that does not quite survive unmodified through the process of reading. Susquehanna University Press should find and use both a good designer and a good copy-editor. The text is laid out in single wide and long column format on a large page, with rather small print; it is not a comfortable page to read. In addition, it looks as if the text was simply run through a spell checker. Errors are of the kind that notoriously escapes such programs—Lawrence Stone, for instance, is cited as having written of the “apparent rise in the amount of martial unhappiness, leading to adultery and martial breakdown” (111); I live in hope, but fear that is not what Stone wrote. A good copy editor could have taught Vaughan the difference between “as” and “like,” that “Similar to the speaker, Blake also . . .” (100) will not do, and that “at” cannot consort with both verbs in “the opening lines at which she both stares and personifies” (68). Such an editor would also have caught sentences like the following: “Thus, against this social background, Blake’s handmaid concept is a belief in the ‘gentle subservience ministering to harmony’ . . . which [while?] the apparent feminine detachment expresses to some degree the period’s gender disharmony” (111). A university press should be able to do better than this for the reader.

The viewer is better served; all 116 of the Gray illustrations are reproduced in high resolution glossy black and white, though the plates are low in contrast, so that the white background to the texts of the poems appears as a middle grey against which the texts scarcely stand out, though they remain clearly legible. The text makes many references to earlier illustrations by Bentley and others, but none is reproduced.

Vaughan has both a great deal of information, and a program to advance, which is laid out in the Introduction. This embraces a historical and political contextualization, which concludes:

The Gray designs, if they are to be viewed as an intelligible whole and not as an elaborate but discontinuous series of responses, need to be viewed as Blake’s composite works are now viewed. As [sic] the composite works, the Gray designs represent either the events and ideas of the period, or represent the essen-

tial principles inherent in the events, and/or show Blake forming principles through his use of the forms of literature and the Bible. (15)

Vaughan thus claims that there is a program, structured like one of Blake's own poems, that makes the whole series "an intelligible whole." On a more local scale, Blake's handwritten list of the titles of individual designs before each poem is interpreted as a sign that each set of illustrations constitutes a narrative created by Blake.

That leaves unaccounted for the place of Gray's poems in these Blakean narratives. Vaughan writes that the illustrations use gentle persuasion rather than confrontation to achieve the reeducation and refocusing of the viewer's perspective (17). But Vaughan also suggests that Blake kept the printed form of Gray's poems (he could have written them out again in his own hand) as a way of asserting "an opposition between the public and mechanical vision of Gray and the private and spontaneous vision of Blake as it expands from the kernel in which it started" (19). The volume (the 1790 Murray edition given to Blake by Flaxman) gives the poems not in chronological order, but in one that "makes organic sense by imitating the natural life cycle, which Blake sought to thwart in the design set" (19). Different models of the relationship coexist within these statements: "Accommodation or transformation" and "Gentle . . . persuasion" (17), but also "opposition," "thwart[ing]," and confrontation. And sympathy too: "Blake did perceive Gray as being some sort of visionary kin because Gray saw the remnants of the Ancients . . . , but his kinship with Gray is complex and not wholehearted" (20). We shall see how this works out in looking at Vaughan's readings of specific designs.

In outlining the general plan governing the illustrations Vaughan builds on one discerned earlier by Irene Tayler, who wrote that Blake had in mind "a broad division of the poems into three groups or movements." The first group comprises Gray's early poems, the second the Pindaric odes, translations and two other later poems, the third the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. The evidence Tayler offers for Blake's grouping is that each begins with a design showing the poet at work, the first as a youthful poet, with curly hair in an abandoned fervor, the second as a seated and more sedate figure, the third as almost grotesquely hunched over: "the surroundings . . . grow increasingly specific and detailed, and so place Gray increasingly in the mundane rather than the eternal world."¹

Vaughan wants more than that simple outline. He sees "a substructure of order . . . that is consistent with Blake's other prophecies." He describes a first section that begins with the "failure of the imagination to arise in *Spring*,"

¹ Irene Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 24.

which leads to "a process of education." Then follows the second section, which

begins with *Progress*, a series shaping itself around man's rejection of an empirical or experimental self-definition. . . . Beginning with the dual notions of 'Study' given in *Progress 2*, and then through *Progress*, *Bard*, the three translation series, and *Music*, the movement flows through the recognition of one's existence in a community of error, moves through the nadir of experience and then toward an actual rejection of the notion that man exists primarily as a material being.

Then the third "movement":

Beginning with the *Clarke* series and the "Author" in *Elegy 1*, we see a confrontation of the last . . . infirmity of the fallen mind that must be overcome, belief in death as it is really belief in the primacy of the material world. The movement in *Clarke* and *Elegy* is a tentative movement forward toward the postlapsarian world, an ambiguous hope that the imagination can arise again. (30)

Vaughan writes that "Once aware of Blake's revolutionary, prophetic intent we can see how he wove connections between designs through his use of repeated figures, through color, through compositional elements, and through thematic interests" (29). He adds a warning: "when we read the Gray designs as a totality, we need to avoid looking into the logic and emotion of the text to find Blake's rationale. We should not presume the designs are more or less dependent upon the text for their order. We should not presume the primacy of the text—though the designs are 'illustrations'" (30). This sounds potentially dangerous advice—to urge the *avoidance* of evidence that would seem relevant, if not necessarily completely determinative, is a risky strategy.

Vaughan is honest and open; he declares his program, which we can test against his readings of the designs. If the program leads to illumination, good; if it avoids, obscures, or distorts what is visible, we shall be justified in questioning it. The problematic nature of Vaughan's situation as interpreter is universal and unavoidable; the interpreter needs an initial hypothesis with which to read and assess evidence, but must also be sensitive to visual evidence that disqualifies that hypothesis; we are always within the hermeneutical circle, unable to know adequately both detail and the whole, while condemned to move ceaselessly between the two in the quest for illumination. Only a few illustrations can be looked at in a review, but I shall try to give a feel of the modes of argument in play.

The attempt to split Blake's illustrations away from Gray's text begins immediately. The first illustration, showing in Blake's own title "The Pindaric Genius receiving his Lyre," draws this comment: "Yet for all the harmony in flight be-

tween poet and swan, and for all the upward determination, the lyre is received into the left hand while the bridle is held, if ignored, in the stronger right hand. Finally, *Spring 1* is also an image of receptivity, not an image of actual playing or 'uttering' that is necessary for the prophet/poet by Blake's definition" (37). Perhaps; but the loose bridle could also be read as imaging the perfect sympathy between rider and mount, and one could point out that Blake has shown exactly what his title declares, the poet "receiving his lyre"; the second illustration shows "Gray writing his Poems," the natural sequel. Even Blake invokes the descent of Muses in the opening plate of *Milton* as a prelude to the utterance of prophetic song; he has illustrated an exactly analogous process here. Vaughan has been too impatient, too intent upon being "Blakean" to remember that Blake himself accepts the sequence that he illustrates in Gray.

The third illustration to *Spring* shows "The Purple Year awaking from the Roots of Nature. & The Hours suckling their Flowery Infants." The whole design is said to "focus on delusion"; the figure of the Purple Year is said to personify "the energy of spring" and to have "a look of exhilaration on his face"; yet he "is also fixed by two flying, bare-breasted females" and "for all his vigor he cannot leap upward from the off-balanced, thrown-back position he is in. Even if he did manage to lift himself up, he would wreak havoc on the harmonious creative circular flow. . . . If he leaped up he would become entangled both into the swirling tendrils above and the flowery-infant-suckling Hours below." He "expresses male force with a zeal that can only result in a casual or wanton destruction of maternal love and joy." This sexual tension is generalized: "Blake is aware that for the human form to stay in the dance-like beauty of the circular swirl, all the forms must be feminine, reflective of the natural joy and energy, not powerful, male, creative, primary" (38).

When I look at the design, I see a figure with a solar halo (noted by Vaughan) who personifies the central energy that motivates all the figures that fly and play; the free but energized (note the tension in the right arm) curve of his body has been harmonized with the swirl of the tendril above him, that seems almost to caress his body; male and female elements are in concord. He seems about to rise and enter the aerial games played above and around him. Vaughan has warned us not to look into the "logic and emotion of the text to find Blake's rationale," but his "fixed" is a vague substitute for the text's "wake the purple year," which Blake seems to have accepted—the two pointing figures are sounding a wake-up call, and that in turn suggests a happy union of male and female figures in reciprocal action within the design. Blake is playing around and with, not against, Gray's imagery. I am not persuaded by Vaughan's attempt to insert a warring sexual politics here; one only has to turn to *Spring 5* and even better *Long Story 1*, which Blake has titled "A Circular Dance," to see images of male and female figures together in circular dances (I am assuming that the

figure at the bottom of *Long Dance 1* is male, though I would not bet my last dollar on that).

Vaughan often shows a readiness to find negative connotations amounting to moral failure in the figures of Blake's designs, usually in the search for evidence to support the view that Blake is critical of Gray. The Muse of *Spring 4*, for instance, is described thus: "while in *Spring 3*, the creative force was humanized as an independent and possibly destructive male force, in *Spring 4* the force has become a feminine dream-vision suffering from acedia, a frustrated, directionless intensity" (39). Is escape possible from Vaughan's Scylla and Charybdis antinomies? Sometimes figures seem to fall foul of both simultaneously; after setting up "harmonious creative circular flow" as an image of the desirable, Vaughan responds like this when he finds it in *Spring 5*: the circular dance there is "another example of the bliss of ignorance. . . . a ritualized behavior, an instinctive unity, a oneness in nonrational activity that ignores the 'reality' below. It is less an example of the desperation of *carpe diem*, however, than the joyous denial of mortal limits that expresses eternity in the fallen world" (41-42). Does one respond to this with applause, or with deep sadness over humanity's apparent inability to both know and celebrate simultaneously?

Vaughan reads the last of the series, *Spring 6*, "Summer Flies reproaching the Poet," like this: "The male creative energy has dissolved below the threshold of a potential for radicalized, destructive bursts of energy." The cause is left a mystery: "There has been a failure to rise, and a reduction in the level of energy, but what remains are four questions: What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen? Where do we go from here?" (42). Here is Keynes on the same design, commenting on the winged flies that point at the figure of the poet: "His face has a sullen expression, and Blake takes the opportunity to reproach him for his celibate life. Two pink-winged flies hover above him pointing derisive fingers."² Keynes is basing this on the poem: "Poor Moralist! and what art thou? / A solitary fly! / Thy joys no glitt'ring female meets . . ." Surely Keynes is right; Blake is responding to the autobiographical ironies of Gray's poem, and rooting his illustration firmly in the text. Vaughan's insistence on reading the illustrations as far as possible without the text has led him to a generalized comment on the politics of sex, where Keynes finds a more concrete textual reference. Vaughan could have built his case for a weakening of "male creative energy" on Keynes's particular, but there is no reference to it in his text, doubtless due to an insistence that "Blake did not seek dialogue or dialectic with the individual poems" (33).

One of Vaughan's interests, as the Introduction makes clear, is in finding broader political implications in Blake's

² Geoffrey Keynes, *William Blake's Water-Colours Illustrating the Poems of Thomas Gray* (Chicago: J. Philip O'Hare in association with Trianon Press, 1972) 43.

designs—sexual politics are not the only kind in play. Blake without doubt was a deeply political animal, but one should think about the implications of his comments, which range from “I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics” (E 580) to “Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion” (E 207). Blake’s politics are not something to be taken easily or for granted.

Sometimes Vaughan seems to use political events to provide an analogy to the events of a poem; thus he reads *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat* through a parallel with what had been happening in France—“By 1798 France had looked outside of herself as a predator and attempted to assimilate another (i.e., Switzerland)” (46). This constitutes analogy rather than analysis, in the style made familiar by some New Historicist critiques—juxtaposition rather than close connection; I am not sure that the method illuminates the designs in any specific way, but it does produce an unexpected and interesting commentary.

Sometimes Vaughan claims a closer kind of connection. We can follow one strand of political interpretation through the use made of George III. In *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College* the reference to “Henry’s holy Shāde” is interpreted as including a contemporary allusion: “the connection between Henry VI and George III in the public eye, especially in the highly charged 1790s, was obvious. Both were widely considered to be pious, educated, royal innocents, and, eventually, perfect gentlemen” (49). George, we are told, underwent an “apotheosis” around 1795 in which he “came to embody the image of the ‘Perfect Gentleman’ that could counter both the crude and amoral English Jacobins and the unrestrained Napoleon” (50).

This sympathetic and popular George III is invoked again in *Hymn to Adversity* 3, which Blake has titled in the words of the poem “And purple tyrants vainly groan / With pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone.” Vaughan argues that Blake has chosen “to avoid the speaker’s generalized gloating over a monarch’s fall, and to expose the viewer to a moment of individual pain” (63). But Gray’s words are cited by Blake in his title, and speak of “groan” and “pangs” that are “unpitied”; Vaughan’s reading raises questions he does not answer about the relationship he sees between Blake’s chosen titles, which he generally reads as evidence for a strongly Blakean narrative component, and the illustrations they name or describe. Vaughan here sees Blake as “insisting the viewer see the mercy of Jehovah over the justice of Elohim” (63), but surely a “purple [with blood as well as royalty?] tyrant” is likely to win Blake’s anger? He was not sparing in *America*, nor in the episode in the garden at Felpham (whatever exactly was said there); why should we expect him to be more generous here?

In his commentary on the eighth design for *The Progress of Poesy*, Vaughan writes: “asses’ ears were also associated by caricaturists of the day with faulty patronage, especially

George III’s ‘patronage of unworthy artists’” (71). George appears again in the commentary on the seventh and ninth designs for *The Bard*. In the former, we have “the pain the English monarchy too commonly and obviously itself inflicted through imprisonment, Tyburn’s tree, press-ganging, conscription, and flogging” (79)—a “purple tyrant” in action? In the ninth, we see “not only Richard’s sudden recognition of what he had done, but also George’s recognition of what he was causing—England’s loss, and its immorality” (80). In the eighth design for *The Fatal Sisters*, the king that “shall bite the ground” was identified by Erdman as George III, shown in what Vaughan describes as “ground-pounding, impotent rage” (89).

I have the uncomfortable feeling that George has become a floating signifier, a name that can be attached to any figure that can be associated with any of the variegated and even contradictory qualities that were at one time or another attributed to George. Only in the case of *The Fatal Sisters* is the association based on a claim of visual resemblance.

Another, differently structured, example. In the designs for *The Fatal Sisters*, Vaughan reads the Fates in the fifth design as transformed into representatives of the working poor slaving at their home looms; this is not impossible, though the only specific evidence adduced is that “they are all . . . bare-headed with their hair tied up in the back as an expression of modesty and restraint . . . the foremost woman has on a common, unfashionable shoe that Blake didn’t color” (88). Of the next design, Vaughan writes that “the distraught look is gone. Three women, two whose eyes we see and at least one more behind, willfully participate in the cruelty of an execution as they weave.” From victims they have been transformed into images of the “brief but violent dictatorship” of the revolutionary mob (89). The illustrations are thus made to track a contemporary understanding of the progress of the Revolution in France.

One can sympathize with the program Vaughan has outlined without being quite convinced; for instance, the “shoe” is probably just a bare foot, and the feet of the women seem bare also in the ninth design, in which the women are in armor again (no longer images of the working poor) and their hair is bound up again under a headdress, though not as an indication of “modesty and restraint.” It is always tempting but risky to attach fixed meanings to signs whose sense is largely determined by context. Vaughan’s narrative program for these designs has some attraction, but is based on slim and uncertain evidence, and in general his political readings rouse more interest than conviction in this reader.

Sometimes Vaughan’s search for a program results in doubtful readings of the visual evidence. Blake has given the sixth design for *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College* the title “Yet see how all around them wait / The vultures of the Mind,” referring to the passions Gray has listed:

Disdainful Anger, palid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind;
Or pining Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy, with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the fiercest heart;
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visag'd comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

Vaughan makes no attempt to describe or identify the monsters except for the "Despair" that embraces one of the girls, but as in *Ode on the Spring* makes a sharp distinction between male and female figures. Males meet these vultures through education, females through "maternal charity." The boys "see the monsters and are in worried flight," while the girls "do not seem to be aware of the monsters" (51). The boys are involved "only with their own plight. Their torments stem from their own learned (i.e., Etonian), torturing metaphysics . . . or ignorance, which creates a rationale for their fearful monsters" (52).

This reading of the design worries me. The boys do not in my judgment "see" the monsters; Blake has made the monsters translucent to convey precisely that point. The children feel the monsters inwardly, are threatened by the feelings that they represent. The boy at our left moves away from a scaly, long eared creature with a serpent wrapped around an arm—possibly pallid Fear; almost certainly the piggish snout "that skulks behind" is Shame. The boy carries a bat and looks back over his shoulder with dismay; has he been guilty of some fearful and/or shameful behavior on the field? Has he just been bowled out, and feels caught between Shame and Anger? The other boy runs forward, apparently carefree, with a hat in his right hand (cf. the ninth illustration). Jealousy (?—greenish in any case) has ghostly arms around him, and Anger looks disdainfully at or through him: another mini-tragedy in the offing?

Of the girls, the one playing with a small ball—not illustrative of "maternal charity"—may be safe for the moment, but the other, holding a doll in her hands, is embraced by "comfortless Despair," and the weird serpentine and greenish head of some passion—Care? Envy?—descends apparently towards her, though possibly towards the ball-player. The girl looks at her doll with an apparently impassive face; does she see there a future illegitimate or dead child? That perhaps takes the narrative implications further than is warranted, but Vaughan's approach sidesteps the question of just what these children are doing, and how they relate to the specific passions depicted, in favor of a sexual differentiation which does not hold up well. Blake has invented his monsters to represent specific passions, and there is meaning in their connection with the games the children play, games which do not fully support Vaughan's focus on sexual difference.

In the next design, Vaughan suggests that the figure of the Queen of Death "symbolically is a hermaphrodite state, a parody of the eternal androgynous state"; he supports this reading by suggesting that "The source of the breasts . . . appears to be the crushing action of the serpent" (53). But the fully exposed and rounded breasts make this quite implausible: there are limits to what a serpent can do as a corset.

One last reading. Vaughan gives a political turn to the illustrations of *The Bard*, who is judged to be guilty of the error of "Samson, or that of the English Jacobin's vision of freedom turned into accepting physical war in place of mental warfare." Vaughan describes the Bard in *Bard 1* like this: "he stares out toward the viewer blankly. He is barefoot on solid rock, Blake's common devices of 'abstract reasoning and material substance'. . . His dull blue gown is ornamented with stars, generally in Blake an expression of the fixed Newtonian, material, and rational universe as well as a familiar symbol of the occult or magical" (76); a decidedly negative portrait. In defending this view, Vaughan argues that Blake's acknowledged "affinity for 'The Bard' in 1809 had little to do with the intensity of the Bard's self-righteous wrath and desire for oxymoronic 'retributive justice'" (75). Here is Blake's statement from the 1809 Descriptive Catalogue: "Weaving the winding sheet of Edward's race by means of sounds of spiritual music and its accompanying expressions of articulate speech is a bold, and daring, and most masterly conception" (E 541). That identifies the weaving of a winding sheet—which does imply a death—as a "masterly conception," without any anxiety over its retributive ethics. "[S]piritual music" and "articulate speech" are weapons in the intellectual warfare with which Blake was always in sympathy, but in addition Blake's painting (Butlin 655) shows the royal figures prostrated below the Bard, with blood-red tendrils descending from the harp to run over them and their horses; intellectual war can have physical results, of which Blake was not afraid. Vaughan sometimes gives the impression of aiming at a politically correct version of a Blake who never welcomed the overthrow of those who injured society, despite the implications of, for instance, the prints *Our End is Come* and *Lucifer and the Pope in Hell*.

The critique of the Bard becomes more ambiguous when applied to his harp: in *Bard 1* "the yellow harp he holds is symbolically too large to be mobile," and is said to possess a transfixing "rigidity"; however, the breaking of the harp shown in *Bard 2* indicates "the death of true inspiration" (76), and the broken harp is an image of "what has happened to the true revolutionary spirit of the 1780s" (77). Its meaning is shifted very easily from rigidity to revolutionary freedom, as George III is shifted from perfect gentleman to causer of England's harms within the space of a few designs. I agree that meaning is contextual, but there must be some specific element in a design to trigger or attract such extra-visual meaning, and I see none here.

The reading of the designs for *The Bard* has some real interest, and Vaughan's reservations over the titular figure deserve to be followed up, but his overall reading is rendered less persuasive by such inconsistencies. That typifies the book as a whole; it offers interestingly revisionist views of Blake's illustrations to Gray, making one think again about readings that one had come to take for granted. But it achieves this within the framework of an overall thesis that too often ignores or misreads details. In discussing *The Triumph of Owen*, for instance, Vaughan says that Owen "is wearing a ruby crest (III.4), as Blake picked up Gray's allusion to the real source of war, Satan (*Paradise Lost* IX.499)" (98). But is that Gray's allusion? Gray attached a note to his text stating that "The red Dragon is the device of Cadwallader, which all his descendants bore on their banners"; that note is a more likely source for what Blake has shown than Vaughan's suggestion. In addition, Milton describes Satan in the lines given not with a red crest, but as "Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes"; it is his eye, not his crest, which is red. Is any reference to the color red to be taken as an indication of a Satanic state of war? "Ruby tears" are shed from the Lion's "eyes of flame" in "The Little Girl Lost" (E 21), but most readers do not interpret this as a demonic sign in any simple sense; context, as always, plays a large part in determining the meaning of signs.

One's trust is further weakened by disturbing errors of fact. There is a reference to "Panofsky's unpublished essay on 'Perspective as Symbolic Form' held in xerox at the New York Institute of Fine Arts" (120n16); the essay was published in Berlin in 1927, then translated into several European languages; an English translation by Christopher S. Wood appeared in 1991. Joseph Viscomi is credited with the engraving of "the plates for the replication of the 'Songs' from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the plates of which still exist from the production of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (New York: Phaeton Press, 1969)" (120n17). Viscomi wrote a fine essay to accompany the Manchester Etching Workshop facsimile, but he did not "engrave" the plates used for it. In the fourth design for *The Progress of Poesy*, Blake illustrates the lines "Perching on the Scepter'd hand / Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feather'd king." Three lines before this Gray mentions the "Lord of War" of "Thracia's hills" curbing "the fury of his car." Vaughan conflates Mars and Jove in writing that "Blake's Lord of War is a large and congenial-looking man with curly black hair and beard" (69). Such errors distract the reader from the case Vaughan makes.

J. M. Q. Davies in his book on the Milton illustrations distinguishes between what he calls the "footnote hypothesis," which assumes that Blake's primary concern is to illuminate Milton's poems, and leads to our finding "our imagination moving in a predominantly 'vertical' direction between text and individual designs," and a competing alternative: if we assume Blake was roused "to a bolder

and more comprehensive counterstatement in his illustrations than can be accommodated by this hypothesis . . . we would expect the internal orchestration of the particulars, the 'horizontal' progressions and relationships as they unfold in narrative sequence, to be at least as crucial to interpretation as their 'vertical' relation to the text."³ The distinction is useful, though one can imagine other relationships at play—to previous illustrations of the same text, to Blake's illustrations of other texts, and so on. In Davies's language, Vaughan pays much more attention to "horizontal" than to "vertical" relationships, sometimes to the detriment of sensitivity to what Blake is responding to in Gray, and sometimes to what is actually portrayed.

The interpreter must remain open to the varied interactions that can occur at the interface between two creative and imaginative intellects. Each of Blake's designs or set of designs presents its own problems and potential riches. Vaughan has made us look again at Blake's response to Gray, and has raised interesting possibilities for interpreting them in the light of contemporary political history. But his specific interpretations bend the evidence uncomfortably at times, and should remind us that the search for a politically involved as well as politically correct Blake must respect both his other interests and the specifics of his texts and designs.

Angela Esterhammer, *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. xvii + 245 pp. \$45.

Reviewed by DAVID L. CLARK

In a book described as the concluding chapter of a decade long investigation of the aesthetic ideology, Jerome McGann argues that Blake is exemplary for radically resisting the "formal" and "organic principles of poetry and imagination" entrenched by Kant and Coleridge, principles unreflectively reproduced by a certain high romantic criticism ever since.¹ Blake's poems and designs are not, or not merely, "a dance of forms," McGann insists, but "the textual 'performances' of his imaginative communications" (32); they are "deed[s] of language" (18) and "a set of actions carried out in the world" (4), whose "great task" it is to effect "social and psychic overthrow" (25). Significantly, the critical rhetoric with which McGann brings out this

³ J. M. Q. Davies, *Blake's Milton Designs: The Dynamics of Meaning* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1993) 12.

¹ Jerome McGann, *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989). Page numbers hereafter cited in the body of the review.

resistance to the aesthetic ideology is drawn largely from speech-act theory. The point is that Blake's texts *do things with words*, disruptive and self-consciously "gestural" and "performative" (12) things, and, as such, they "must be grasped [*pace* Habermas] as a type of communicative action." Their "truth-experience" (7)—McGann does not say "truth"—lies *entirely* in the lively social transaction that they create, complicate, and to which they are contingently exposed. The year that McGann's study was published also saw the appearance of Robert N. Essick's *Blake and the Language of Adam*, a signally important book that, like McGann's, evokes speech-act theory in the context of a broader hermeneutical argument. And like McGann, Essick shifts the emphasis from what Blake's texts *mean* to their productive or illocutionary force within a social context. But it is there that the similarity ends. Far from exploiting the absences and differences inhabiting his own performances, as in McGann, Essick's Blake strives for an ideal speech situation in which all semiotic things—sign, referent, recipient—are identified. For Essick, Blake certainly recognizes the differential and arbitrary nature of conventional signification, but remains committed to a radicalized literal expression patterned after the "kerygmatic or 'performative' gesture" of Christ's blessing hand or Adam naming the beasts.² In speech-act terms, the complete uptake of Blake's signs and the realization of their saving significance are at least theoretically possible within "the community of faithful recipients" (26). Under these conditions, "Jerusalem" would be what Alphonso Lingis calls, in a quite different context, a "city of communication maximally purged of noise,"³ the site of an absolutely felicitous performance in which the shared apocalyptic competencies of speaker and listener ensure the realization of meaningfulness without remainder. As a preface to his evocation of this perfected linguistic "State," Essick reads Blake's *Adam Naming the Beasts*, where he espies two mutually exclusive ways of doing things with words: on the one hand, the privileged performative that names the *zoa* into existence; on the other hand, the slippery coils and recoils of unmotivated language games that Essick identifies with "Nietzsche, Sartre, and Derrida" (16)—presumably the postmodern equivalent to Blake's "Bacon, Newton, & Locke."⁴

The fact that the principles of speech-act theory insinuate themselves into these quite divergent, if similarly strong readings of Blake says as much about the complex fate of

that theory in contemporary criticism as it does about the artist's linguistic practice. McGann's and Essick's studies form important critical pretexts—acknowledged as such—for Angela Esterhammer's lucidly argued and elegantly written book, the first to take up the question of performativity in Blake's work in a sustained and explicit fashion. As an inaugural study, the book can only introduce us to this very large subject, but what it does say is consistently illuminating and often provocative. (Esterhammer's study is nominally about speech-acts in Milton and Blake, but I do not think that it is unfair to the book to claim that its focus and its most engaged negotiations lie with Blake.) For Esterhammer, speech-act principles offer a clarifying precision to the discussion of Blake's texts, texts that forthrightly seek to create and recreate worlds with words, and that challenge (but, also, in some cases, reproduce) the forms of authoritative speech that police and produce the social body. That Blake was fascinated by the effectual nature of language and visionary art is of course nothing new. What is sharply original about Esterhammer's study is its emphasis not only on the variety of performativities in Blake's texts, but also on the ways in which the question of doing things with words goes to the heart of a number of related issues and problems: the constitution of the creative subject, the limits of aesthetic representation, the hermeneutics of prophetic discourse, and the poet's negotiations with origins and originality.

Paradoxically enough, from a certain perspective speech act theory would seem to find unpromising ground in Blake. It is true that he creates texts that deliberately eschew constative statements—"forms of worship" (E 38), he would call them—preferring instead to conceive of his work as a performance "where meaning emerges in and through the encounter between reader and text" (175); but he is also the notorious builder of those "wall[s] of words"—to use De Luca's memorable phrase⁵—whose "despotism in symbols"—as Coleridge once said⁶—threatens the very basis of performativity; by short-circuiting what J. L. Austin calls "audience uptake,"⁷ Blake's utterances always run the risk of failing to do anything, as most of his contemporaries and many of my struggling students could well attest. Blake's vision of words and deeds is almost always self-complicating. For example, the English visionary calls for freedom from the coercive force of conventional speech acts; yet he also recognizes that revolutionary subjects—epitomized by Orc—are actants who play roles in social and psychic scripts that can exceed and precede them. When Los's song is described as "'uttered with Hammer & An-

² Robert Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989). Page numbers hereafter cited in the body of the review.

³ *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994) 86.

⁴ David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 218. Hereafter cited as *E* followed by the page number.

⁵ Vincent Arthur De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 89.

⁶ "To C.A. Tulk," in *Blake Records*, ed. G.E. Bentley, Jr., (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 252.

⁷ Cited by Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 5.

vil" (206), Blake's alter ego clearly embodies the power of speech that has become act; yet Blake reserves his most vivid visual depiction of him in *Jerusalem* (plate 6) with his tools standing silent beneath the smothering presence of the Spectre. As an idealist, Blake can pattern his creative work after God's *fiats*, even though as a more suspicious cultural critic he condemns the scurrilous ways in which "societal institutions take words like 'God' and 'eternal,' which in other contexts would convey transcendent authority and evoke a realm of language in which saying and doing are the same, and appropriate them into a logic of human laws and conventions" (157). Finally, as Esterhammer argues, Blake is conspicuously uncomfortable with the notion of an other-worldly authority speaking on behalf of humankind, and knows, like Nietzsche, that "cognition requires restriction and knowledge is never knowledge of a whole" (147); yet the redemptive plot of *Jerusalem* depends for its denouement—if that is what it is—on the outside intervention of the "Divine Voice" whose purely effectual utterances authoritatively announce an escape from the prison house of language.

Esterhammer begins her examination by in effect refining the hierarchized opposition between motivated and unmotivated language that underwrites Essick's study. In its place, she works up a distinction between the "sociopolitical performative" and the "phenomenological performative," each of which tends to generate its own mode of interpretation. Sociopolitical performatives explicitly obtain their illocutionary power from the cultural and historical circumstances of their utterance, and are associated with speech-acts made by figures *within* Blake's texts. The moralizing declarations of the Priest in "A Little Boy Lost" are a case in point: here, normative terms like "holy" and "fiend" are much more than mere descriptions; they are disciplinary *acts* that *subject* the child, fitting him to the regulatory ideal of the theological regime. As Esterhammer demonstrates in close readings of selected passages from *Songs of Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Book of Urizen*, and *Jerusalem*, what drives Blake's social work is the far-reaching "recognition that societal institutions only exist in so far as they are created by speech acts (charters, vows, declarations of independence) and kept in existence by the exercise of verbal performativity" (27). The phenomenological performative, on the other hand, grants a certain privilege to the speaker, and prompts an analysis that focuses on the way the utterance (re)produces the power and originality of the speaker or poet. The paradigm for this kind of creative and effectual language is the divine creation by the Word, the originary speech-act, as it were, that Blake mimics by creating illuminated texts that derive "authority from private visionary consciousness" (25). For this reason, Esterhammer argues, visionary poetry "in its entirety may be regarded as performative discourse in that it is a sustained act of asserting authority" (33) on the part of the poet.

Where the function of sociopolitical performatives is to control *and* to disempower the listener, phenomenological performatives serve the purpose of constituting and empowering the speaker.

Esterhammer argues that Blake's Bardic admonitions—like Milton's "Mark well my words" (*E* 100)—constitute both a construction of subjectivity and an assertion of the subject's authority. Or in her neat paraphrase: "The one who is saying this is I, and I am the one authorized to say it" (33). As the circular logic of this phrasing suggests, however, the visionary's authority comes at a price, for it "risks being exposed as always and only a function of language" (33). This is a risk that Esterhammer acknowledges but perhaps underplays in her book, since she is clearly drawn—as are so many Blakeans—to the heroic image of Blake creating a world "in defiance of the existing one, to demonstrate the poet's imaginative independence from the social conditions of his or her utterance" (25). From the perspective of contemporary language theory, this independence is an illusion, for performative acts are always at a certain level reenactments, the reiterative or citational effect of socially sanctioned practice. In as much as phenomenological performatives refer to utterances that are "non-conventional, extra-societal, deriving from the will or intentionality of the speaker *alone*" (13; emphasis mine), they are, strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms: an utterance spoken without reference to *any* social context would be what Derrida calls "the vocative absolute,"⁸ and unintelligible as such. Blake does not see performative language as always already sociopolitical, an argument that Esterhammer makes with such vigor that her position would at times appear to be indistinguishable from that of her subject. Consistently wary of contemporary readers making Blake over into their own ("post-structuralist") image, Esterhammer insists that Blake, especially the vatic, inspired Blake, boldly lays claim to the presentist notion that he is the exclusive origin of what he says. Here, the uptake of prophetic meaningfulness is presumably more a matter of shared *belief* (or faith) than linguistic competency, and, as literary critics we do not talk about such things because they make Blake too dangerous by half. Perhaps we could say that the pure phenomenological performative functions not so much as an achieved fact—we can *say* that it happens, but how would we know it had happened?—and more as a figure of visionary *desire*, no less powerful for being that. It is the image of linguistic perfection, whether we believe in it or not, that throws the contingent and often coercive nature of fallen speech-acts into sharp relief.

For Esterhammer, the sociopolitical performative and phenomenological performative interact and contradict each other by turns throughout Blake's work. The artist

⁸ *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 112.

comes by this dichotomy naturally, however, since, as Esterhammer shows, the same thing is to be found in Blake's two great precursors, the Bible and Milton. In a manner reminiscent of some of the work of Kenneth Burke, Esterhammer reads Genesis as a pretext for both the argument and the rhetoric of modern language theory. In the "Priestly" or "P" myth of creation in Genesis 1, we of course witness the most vivid example of a vision of language "which can create things from nothing so that the resulting world is co-existent and perfectly correspondent with the words" (52). Against this spectacularly effectual but asocial (or pre-social) instance of doing/saying, Esterhammer contrasts the "Jahwist" or "J" text of Genesis 2 and 3, in which God's prohibiting, cursing, and naming—speech-acts all of them—organize and regulate an already existent life-world through the power of authoritative utterance. Explicitly oriented towards a present and future disciplinary social context that is at once instituted and dominated by speech acts, the "J" text thus represents the inaugural example of the sociopolitical performative. Not unlike what Blake provides in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Esterhammer's reading of Genesis amounts to a genealogy of morals that brings out how the Judeo-Christian culture naturalizes its socially circumscribed norms: in so far as God's speech-acts "establish domination and subordination as the characteristic terms of relationships" between men and women, humans and animals, humans and the natural world, they provide a kind of theological alibi for the human, all too human, history of suffering, inequality, and "power relationships" (57) that follow.

The conflictual nature of the performative emerging from the Genesis account has important implications for texts claiming visionary or inspirational status. Esterhammer begins by pointing to tensions inhabiting some of Milton's prose works as well as *Paradise Lost*, where his "desire to represent and imitate the phenomenological performative, as it appears in divine creation, is repeatedly threatened by the intrusion of the sociopolitical performative" (67). Interestingly, for Esterhammer this threat does not come from any explicit sense that *all* utterances are conventional, even and especially those that naturalize their authority by affecting to be purely "creative" or "expressive" in the manner of God's *fiats*. That is a knowledge about performative language that must await Blake and romanticism, although why precisely the late eighteenth century would possess it where the late seventeenth did not is a question that could stand a little clarification in the book. Instead, the hazard that Milton confronts is displaced into a kind of hubristic embarrassment about presuming that one's work is or can be truly self-originating. This is never more sharply legible than at those points where Milton reflects upon the origins and nature of his own visionary power, as in the invocations to *Paradise Lost*. Milton starts with explicit gestures towards firstness but finally figures himself "in the

position of one who comes second, a revisor and reshaper of received material" (77). In Books 1 and 3, Milton reveals his desire for and faith in the performative ability of his language to summon a world of phenomena into existence, but by Book 7 this desire is overtaken by a counter-sense that creative utterances are also a matter of arbitrary, violent impositions and articulations spoken out of a limited position whose inspirational authority rests in large part with the consent of a community of believers—i.e., language acts that more closely resemble the conventionalized utterances of the sociopolitical world than the protected inward realm of the phenomenological performative. This crossing between what Milton desires and what he knows, or between what he says and what he does, represents an important—though underthought—moment in literary history, for here Milton takes "a first step toward implicating creative utterance in a structure of repetition" (89).

The same questions of authority, performativity, and representation pre-occupy Blake, whom Esterhammer characterizes as "much more conscious of, and therefore anxious about, the dichotomy between language which derives its creativity from individual will and language which wields by common consent" (64). Curiously, the Blake that actually emerges from Esterhammer's discussion does not come across as particularly anxious, and, indeed, seems most often in command of his vision of words, coolly manipulating the performative dichotomy in which he is also said to be caught. Nevertheless, the ways in which the phenomenological and the sociopolitical performatives interact in Blake's texts varies considerably over the course of the production of the illuminated works. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* stage them as a non-dialectical opposition: "Innocence" names a condition of felicitous speech-acts in which the Child's illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects are immediate and forceful; "Experience" is the realm in which speech acts either fail, as in the case of the Bard's summons to Earth, or succeed only too well, as is the case with the social discourses that subjugate their auditors. Against the almost canonical position in Blake studies to interpret *Songs of Innocence* through the ironic lens of *Songs of Experience*, Esterhammer thus presses for a reading that "more fully" appreciates the significance of the "idealized scene of discourse" (130) being envisioned there.

I take Esterhammer's point; part of recovering a more dangerous Blake may well lie in allowing him to have a vision of words wholly different from that of the late twentieth century. But the question remains why it is *necessarily* the case that the communicative action of the Bard is in effect ironized by the felicity of the Child, but not vice versa. In other words, aside from our firm persuasion that it is not so, why can't the Child's performative success be read as a dreamy projection about language rather than an ideal against which to measure the infelicities of spoken experience? I am not sure if this question can be dismissed sim-

ply as one emerging out of “a Derridean anxiety imposed onto the Blakean text” (129), especially since Esterhammer’s subsequent discussion of *The Book of Urizen* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* fully demonstrates Blake’s extreme sensitivity to the fact that phenomenological performatives, with their claim to authority and efficacy, can instantly become the alibi for speech-acts of sociopolitical violence. (We might further ask what a phenomenological performative *is* and must be *in the first place* if it is supplementally open to such violent “appropriation” (157) by its demonized other? Does the phenomenological performative suffer this appropriation as a kind of accident, or does its susceptibility to corruption point to its always already being sociopolitical in nature? Is it possible that the sociopolitical realm produces the conceit of an appropriated or repressed “creativity” in the realm of the phenomenological in order to rationalize its own strategies?) Even if Blake held out the possibility of a truly ideal speech situation when he produced the *Songs*, the subsequent reprinting of that text alongside *The Book of Urizen* and *The Marriage* exposes it to a hermeneutics of suspicion that inevitably reframes its idealistic claims about an “innocent” performative language of individual vision.

The *Marriage*—which Esterhammer characterizes as the Blakean text most open to speech-act analysis—would seem to be a text that is framed by the linguistic problematic it frames, unwilling to dwell on either side of the performative dichotomy that organizes *Songs*. Through his parody of “the Bible’s various language games, including prophecy, wisdom literature, law, and history” (160), Blake denounces the authoritarian claims of those utterances that claim universality but in fact expressly perform the disciplinary labor of Church and State. Against the systematizing codes of the Priests, Blake opposes the creative language of the Poet; but he does so even though the *Marriage*’s pervasively dialogical form reminds us that *all* utterances are dependent upon context and perspective, even as every quantum of energy relies upon its circumference to make it legible. The title of the text nicely captures the problem: the marriage ceremony evokes the primary example of sociopolitical performativity in language theory, the exemplary instance of an utterance whose illocutionary power and perlocutionary effect rely upon a certain minimal agreement between speaker and audience; yet Blake makes his marital declaration, like all the other declarations in the poem, “utterly without the authority or the societal consensus that would give him the right to make such a pronouncement” (170). The (un)solemn union of “Heaven & Hell” asserted by the poem is thus not the effect of a collective accord, but an imposition—even an act of rhetorical violence—whose authority is produced only in and through its own performance. How to account for this curious contradiction in speech-act terms? Or as Geoffrey Hartman once asked, “Where does Blake get his authority from?” (216). Esterhammer implies that while intellectu-

ally Blake recognizes that his devilishly individualistic and non-conventional claims are made without any substantiating authority, emotionally he remains attracted to the self-grounding power of phenomenological performative, especially since the *Marriage* marks the “turning point” (172) in which Blake begins to lose “whatever interpretive community he was ever able to address” (173). At the conclusion of her discussion of the *Marriage*, Esterhammer recuperates the situation somewhat by suggesting that even without an audience to make his utterance felicitous, Blake “performs” a “marriage . . . in the writing of the poem itself, and we instantiate it in reading” (172). Yet her own suggestive reading of the poem rightly complicates what this instantiation could mean. Far from simply realizing the communicative action of Blake’s performative utterance, Esterhammer’s instantiation of Blake’s work in her *own* study helps to bring out how the problem of performative legitimacy is complexly symptomatic of a cleft inhabiting declarative discourse in general. As Derrida has shown with regard to declarations of independence, revolutionary assertions involve a strangely duplicitous twist in thinking: they create the very state that they must already be in in order to bring that state about.⁹ Lacking any consensual authority, the force and efficacy of Blake’s visionary utterance is derived from its own declaration in the form of his text. Yet in order to *have* a vision and to *make* his pronouncements, Blake must already in some sense *be* visionary. Or in Geoffrey Bennington’s terms, “there is no performative which does not also involve an at least implicit description of the state of affairs it produces.”¹⁰ The authority of Blake’s declaration of independence from conventional speech-acts—again, not unlike all declarations—is thus scandalously unstable, since it is grounded in its own act of grounding. The circular and recursive logic of the illocutionary force of Blake’s poem is this: it must verbally effect what it requires to be effectual. As such, the performance always lags slightly behind itself, never a purely phenomenological utterance springing from the creative will because of the hidden way in which it derives its authority from an always earlier speech act extending “backwards” towards an irrecoverable “past.” To pick up on Esterhammer’s language: visionary speech is “a *hybrid* of the phenomenological and the sociopolitical performative” (177; emphasis mine), that is, a *grafting* of an act upon a description.

Esterhammer divides her concluding chapter on *Jerusalem* into two movements. Beginning with an analysis of different speech-act strategies adopted by figures within the text, she shows how those utterances provide a means by which to apprehend the visionary performance of *Jerusa-*

⁹ See, for example, “Declarations of Independence,” trans. Thomas Keenan and Thomas Pepper, *New Political Science* 15 (1986): 7-15.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 233.

lem as a whole. True to the teleological assumptions underwriting her account of Blake's development as an artist, Esterhammer treats Blake's epic as the culmination of a life-long negotiation with performativity. It is here, in the act of "creating states," that Blake finally finds a "compromise" to the problem of transcendent and convention-based ways of doing things with words. "Jerusalem" is the pre-eminent example of this settlement, a socio-political and visionary "State" that is said to be named—and framed?—into existence by the poem's first and last words. Between these apocalyptic pronouncements, the narrative is noisy with unhappy speech acts—lamentations, exhortations, and curses—almost as if the true performative can emerge only when all the false have exhausted themselves. Albion's sorrowful cry at the end of chapter 1 marks a critical moment in this progress: "What have I said? What have I done? O all-powerful Human Words!" (E 169). Albion's apostrophe to signs registers his self-conscious awareness that language harbors an articulate life of its own, and that the authority of his words is thus not of his own doing. (Today, we would call this overwhelmingly mighty language *discourse*.) Esterhammer contrasts the agonistic and derived nature of Albion's speech acts to the forcefulness of the "Divine Voice" that anticipates the redemptive outcome of *Jerusalem* and brings this outcome about in the form of the poem itself. The "Divine Voice" may be the direct expression of the creative will of the "Divine Family," but the rhetoric and the strategies of its redemptive utterances are resolutely social. As an accommodation to the inhabitants of Albion's Land, the "Divine Voice" awakens Albion by creating and recreating "States," a word, Esterhammer astutely emphasizes, that possesses important political and communal resonances. Although Esterhammer does not describe it in these terms, a "State" possesses a formal rather than substantive integrity; as the sum of its speech-acts, it is an ongoing articulation and rearticulation of itself that has its "permanence" (as Blake puts it) in the continuity of this process. Blakean "States," like nation states, are thus more or less provisional arrangements with the express purpose of "continually" staging a redeemed social universe. Esterhammer characterizes this felicitous outcome as a truce between the two forms of performativity, but it is perhaps more accurately a linguistic apocalypse in which the distinction no longer obtains because language itself has somehow been redeemed. It is precisely this transformation that Esterhammer sees being described (or perhaps even effected) in *Jerusalem's* concluding plates.

Esterhammer identifies herself with those for whom Blake is interestingly resistant precisely because he is *not* postmodern, even if his insights illuminate and reproduce elements of contemporary language theory. In addition to its readings of individual texts, the strength of this book is that it opens up so many possibilities in other areas of Blake studies. For example, how do the principles of speech-act

theory help us investigate Blake's vexed representation of the feminine? At a recent Romanticism conference, I heard Anne K. Mellor roundly declare that Blake "was sexist to the core,"¹¹ but one of the things that speech-act theory has done—especially in the work of Judith Butler¹²—is to demonstrate how no one is anything "to the core," not even *gendered*. Speech act theory might well prove useful in moving us past the critical impasse created by Mellor's curiously dismissive and preemptive statement. In critically discerning how ideological and gendered positions are produced and reproduced in performative acts of authoritative speech, we will perhaps understand more clearly what "sex" and "sexism" mean in Blake's texts. In other words, speech-act theory encourages us to continue the task of *reading*—rather than dismissing—Blake as a complex speaker in a shifting cultural context. In this regard, Esterhammer's book is exemplary. To be sure, Esterhammer offers us a melioristic interpretation of Blake, as perhaps befits a book dedicated to Northrop Frye. Yet she also emphasizes a Blake who was resolutely pragmatic, a Blake who might have said that although all speech is equal, some is more equal than others. Blake dispels the peculiar legal-constitutional hallucination that speech is free, and that what one says is entirely divorced from what one does. As Esterhammer concludes, "One could say that the aim of Blake's art, like that of *How To Do Things with Words*, is to demonstrate the illocutionary force of constative statements, or to emphasize that all speech *acts*" (207). Speech does not simply happen; it is made by individuals in specific social contexts, in which some speak with authority, and thus with real consequences for those who are compelled to listen. The fractious and strangled cries that resound through Blake's texts repeatedly show and tell us two things: words are never *only* words, and those who are not in a position to speak effectually are kept in that position of inequality by those who are.¹³

¹¹ Mellor made this remark during the discussion period following the session on "Framing the Subject: Portraits and Frontispieces," at the conference on *Romanticism and the Ideologies of Genre*, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, 26 August 1993.

¹² See, for example, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 223-42.

¹³ I am thinking here, of course, of the argument that Catharine MacKinnon makes in *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 1993) 71-110.

Andrew Lincoln, *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake's Vala, or The Four Zoas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. xvi + 322 pp. \$79.

Reviewed by JOHN B. PIERCE

Critical work on *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* has become something of a growth industry in the last two decades. While speculation about any point of origin is always risky, I might provisionally locate a moment of emergence around 1978 with the appearance of two important but very different publications devoted to the poem. The first was a special issue of *Blake* devoted entirely to *Vala*,¹ particularly the textual cruxes arising from the incompleteness and uncertain readings occasioned by the physical state of the manuscript itself. The importance of these articles cannot be understated in the history of the poem's reception since together they generated a set of debates about the handling of the two Nights VII² and a reliable text for Night I,³ for example, that informed the production of Erdman's presentation of *Vala* in his revised edition of the *Complete Poetry and Prose* in 1982. As the "Standard Edition" of Blake's works, Erdman's edition exerts what might be considered an undue influence on subsequent critical readings of the poem.⁴ Moreover, continuing in this tradition, articles devoted to consideration of the material condition of the manuscript have continued a series of debates in *Blake* about whether the poem is incomplete or unfinished and about what other material form the manuscript might have been destined for (although these debates tend to be more general than particular in their discussion of the state of the manuscript).⁵

The second notable event of 1978 was the appearance of Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson's *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream*, the first book-length reading of the poem. This first extended reading made the poem accessible in such a way that Wilkie and Johnson's book has become essential for anyone attempting to understand the basic narrative of the poem since the compressed symbolism, the allusive characterization, the sometimes tortured

¹ See Blake 12.2 (1978).

² Kilgore, Lincoln, "Revision," and Lefebvre engage in a debate about the placement of Night VIIIb, a debate which was instrumental in causing Erdman to integrate VIIIb into the end of VIIa.

³ Lincoln, "The Four Zoas" and Erdman, "The Four Zoas," discuss the potential reconstruction of the text on pages 5, 6, and 7.

⁴ The Santa Cruz Blake Study Group's review of Erdman's *Complete Poetry* offers a trenchant commentary on the critical influence of typographic editions on the understanding of Blake. See 13-16 for specific commentary on *Vala*.

⁵ The debate begins with Mann, "The Final State," and Essick, "The Four Zoas," continues with Otto, "Final States" and culminates in the exchange between Mann, "Finishing Blake," and Otto, "Is There a Poem in This Manuscript?"

and often ambiguous syntax, the narrative disjunctions and the constant rewritings of major texts of Western thought from Milton and the Bible and Young to Locke and Newton to Rousseau and Voltaire create the feeling that the act of paraphrase is not a heresy but a heroic action. This book prepared the way for Donald Ault's magisterial *Narrative Unbound* in 1987 and George Anthony Rosso's *Blake's Prophetic Workshop* in 1993.

What is intriguing about the legacy of these two publications from 1978 is the degree to which they have entrenched a separation of approaches to the poem into those which concern themselves with the minutiae of manuscript revision and those devoted to a sustained, coherent and complete reading of the poem. Indeed, what is yet perhaps more intriguing is the separation of these two approaches into different forms of publication. Treatment of the material difficulties of the poem occasioned by its status as a manuscript appears most notably only in article form, continuing in the tradition of the *Blake* special issue. Interpretive readings (and I stress the idea of a *reading* here) of the poem appear in book form with an obligatory nod to the difficulty occasioned by the state of the manuscript but little more than a few pages noting this in the preface or introduction and an appendix (almost a convention by now) on the "problem" of the two Nights VII. The tireless attempt by Bentley (back in 1963) to record types of paper, stitch marks, variations in the use of pen, pencil and crayon, writing styles, and other aspects of the poem's physical make up (along with Erdman's extensive reworking and critiques of Bentley's findings) have had limited visible impact on the construction of arguments by present-day critics of *Vala*. I do not mean to say here that these critics have not considered such matters fully and carefully in their private studies, but that the critical arguments following upon these private researches do not make full use of the material complexity of the manuscript. While these books have offered and continue to offer new avenues into the study of the thematic, contextual and narrative difficulties of the poem, none has yet fully embraced the material resistances of the poem—its state as manuscript with alternate readings, cancelled possibilities, uncertainties in direction and variations in pen, ink, crayon, color wash, stitch marks, writing styles, paper and so on. These matters mark the poem as graphically as its characters, themes and narrative complexities.

One is not hard pressed to find some rationale for this separation: even brief articles on the complexities of the *Vala* manuscript require extraordinary exertions on the part of the writer and the reader, and it would be difficult to sustain such close attention to detail over a two- or three-hundred page book. Moreover, the desire by publishers to produce books for the widest possible audience necessarily dictates the kinds of criticism that can be published in book form. The problem with such separations, of course, is that they leave us with an incomplete understanding of

the complexities of Blake's poem, and often only a repressed sense of the importance of connecting the material form of the work with the interpretive act for a fuller understanding of both. The extensive work by authors such as Eaves, Essick and Viscomi (to name only a few) and the recent publication of the facsimiles by Princeton University Press and the Blake Trust have brought about a return of this repressed dimension in a treatment of the illuminated poems, but the technical complexities of the *Vala* manuscript have not yet received full attention.

Andrew Lincoln's *Spiritual History* thus marks a significant departure from its forerunners, not so much in its reading of the poem as in its incorporation of the material exigencies of the manuscript in the construction of its argument. While Lincoln argues that he mainly attempts to provide a contextualizing "reading" (ix), it is a reading with a difference, since *Spiritual History* bases the interpretive activity initially on "the process of revision," and seeks to address "the question of how the different 'layers' of the text might be related" (ix). Key to Lincoln's approach is the idea that this poem can (and should) be read in terms of coherent "layers" of textual additions, layers that were added as part of a series of related and coherent sets of revision. The notion of distinct layers offers Lincoln a way out of the morass of detail that might weigh down a line-by-line and variant-by-variant reading of the poem and offers entrance into a systematic reading of consecutively composed and transcribed layers in the poem. Thus Lincoln avoids the minutiae of particular revisions in favor of more general issues in the poem's development. With this approach in mind, Lincoln cautions that his "aim is not to provide a comprehensive history of the poem's development, but to allow a staged reading—one that moves, as Blake himself moved, from simpler to more complex forms of writing" (ix). Thus, his treatment of the poem is to approach it in terms of four layers or stages. Part 1 looks at what Bentley called the Copperplate text, "the earliest part of the surviving manuscript" (ix); part 2 considers "the narrative as a whole, but leave[s] out of account the references to Jesus & his role in history (mostly contained in revisions)" (ix), while part 3 turns to these explicitly Christian revisions. Finally, part 4 turns (very briefly) to "Blake's unfinished attempt to place the myth within a specifically British framework" (ix). The result of this approach in the first two parts, for instance, is a view of the manuscript with a thematic or narrative structure that pivots around the change in paper and writing styles at page 42. Pages 1 to 42 are written in the Copperplate Hand on blank sheets of J. Whatman paper; pages 43 to 139 are written in Blake's usual hand on proof sheets for Young's *Night Thoughts*. This physical change is accompanied by a change of events in the text; at this point Urizen casts out Ahania, his Golden World collapses and the chaos of Tharmas returns. Lincoln points out a series of intriguing parallels between these two sections. Pages 1 to 42 offer a portrait of a fallen world

animated by divine power aspiring towards an ideal cosmic harmony, one which "corresponds to the teleological, homocentric world-view that survived until the Renaissance" (72). Pages 43 to 139 depict a view of the universe animated by natural powers, a world-view that corresponds "to the scientific universe that displaced [the Renaissance view] . . . in the seventeenth century" (72). Lincoln's argument is much more subtle and complex than my summary sounds, but I think it is essential to note the way in which his interpretive approach grounds itself in the material complexities of the manuscript.

Lincoln establishes the importance of this approach in his preface where he argues that the failure of editors and later commentators to take note of the layered nature of *Vala* has fostered an ongoing sense that the manuscript is intrinsically fragmented. In offering a counterbalance to this sense, Lincoln states, "I do not assume that the revised narrative does or should constitute a perfect unity—but I do attempt to provide a reading that has more coherence, and may be more accessible, than the disordered appearance of the manuscript might lead us to expect" (ix). Recognition of the coherent layers, argues Lincoln, may lead to a greater sense of "coherence" and accessibility than has generally been observed by editors and critics. I can concur to some extent with his arguments about "coherence"—however odd that word may sound in relation to Blake—but arguments about greater accessibility may seem a bit abstracted. His critique of the editions presented by Keynes and Bentley—editions which attempt to indicate layers of addition through brackets, italics or other typographical indices—makes me wonder how *Vala* should ideally be read. Can there be an edition which makes the poem accessible? Moreover, what Lincoln's book both hides and reveals is the weighty textual scholarship by Blake's editors (Bentley and Erdman in particular) that brings scholars to the current level of understanding of the manuscript. Lincoln offers brief introductory notes to each part of his book which summarize the portions of the manuscript which constitute a distinct layer, but these notes compress an enormous amount of textual scholarship within a narrow range and do not indicate fully the rationale for such choices. In this criticism I may be speaking from the perspective of the more specialized reader, asking Lincoln for a book somewhat different from the one he has written. He does point out that "This book is intended to serve as a guide to new readers of *The Four Zoas*, although . . . [he] hope[s] it will also be useful to those who are already familiar with the poem" (i), and I can concede that to introduce extensive defenses and rationales for textual choices may limit the audience for his book and the accessibility of his arguments for "new readers." Having said this, I am inclined to ask at what cost we gain accessibility to such a complex work.

Lincoln's notion of separate layers, however, offers a good entry point into the manuscript, although, as I suggested

before, the content of these layers must be accepted on faith rather than rational demonstration. I am left wondering, for instance, why the additions to the end of Night VIIa are treated in part 3 along with the Christian additions. While Los and Enitharmon mention the Lamb of God in the final portions of Night VIIa and therefore this passage has some connection with the Christian additions, it might be argued that the several extensions of VIIa take the poem in a different direction—towards the personal artistic revelation rather than the universal theocentric revelations of the Christian additions.

Moreover, the revision of the Los-Enitharmon story is extensive both in the latest portions of Night VIIa (and VIII for that matter) and in the earliest portions of the Copperplate text (see, for example, Blake's revisions to pages 10 and 11) and offers a potential disruption across all four of the layers of *Vala*. As part of the preparation for (or accompanying development of) Los's central heroic portrait in Jerusalem, the revisions could be treated as a separate layer, since for many readers these revisions open out *Vala* into the later works. Lincoln presented some background arguments in a very important article on the composition and transcription of Nights VIIa, VIIb, VIII and IX ("Revisions"), and some of the useful discussion in that article could have been incorporated in this book without compromising the clarity of *Spiritual History*.

The interpretive dimension of Lincoln's argument attempts to place *Vala* within the cultural and intellectual contexts of its own time. In so doing, Lincoln situates his work alongside that of Jackie DiSalvo and George Anthony Rosso and this does seem a fair assessment of his critical approach. Concerned with illuminating the contemporary contexts of *Vala*, Lincoln sets *Vala* against such contemporaries as Young and Pope, Volney and Condorcet and Adam Smith and Gibbon in an attempt to lay to rest the extreme views either that *Vala* represents a retreat from historical engagement or that revisions to the poem "represent an attempt to keep up with the rapidly changing events of contemporary history" (290). I think Lincoln is persuasive on these points throughout his book; however, I remain slightly unclear about the exact parameters of his notion of "history." If history is not, as he claims, "a given sequence of events, but . . . a discourse that shapes and is shaped by consciousness" (xiii), does this give it a Frygian archetypal form or does this draw history into the Foucauldian realm? His idea of a "spiritual history" appears to have strong affinities with archetypal structures, affinities which seem to strain against Lincoln's intensive concern for careful contextualizations. He states that

This reading constructs the text as a 'spiritual history', a history that attempts to delineate the forms which all temporal developments must take, forms that may illuminate eras widely different in chronological time.

It is a history that is nearly always in dialogue with other versions of history, and which is often closely engaged with other texts. (xiii)

While this passage suggests that the poem is engaged with the temporal and spatial developments that constitute history, the spiritualization of such history would seem to lift these contextualizations, as it were, out of context and into general and universal forms. Such a procedure moves the ultimate concerns of his argument closer to the archetypalism of Frye and away from the Marxism of DiSalvo. To some extent, Lincoln confronts this difficulty by arguing that the poem's revisions went through "a process of engagement with, and final renunciation of, Enlightenment assumptions [about universalizing frameworks and Christian theology]" (1). When dealing with the final revisions to the poem, revisions which introduce particularized references to British geography and druidic traditions, Lincoln does argue that later additions offer a critique of the tendency in the earlier transcribed text to universalize history: the late revisions, he writes, "can be seen as a renunciation of the Enlightenment influence, an attempt to free the 'acts' of history as far as possible from the generalizing arrangement or 'disarrangement' of them" (285). I find this suggestion of self-critique tantalizing but (alas) this last set of revisions receives only the briefest of treatments. This is a pity since part four of Lincoln's book might be drawn out into more extended speculations on the process of textual self-critique in *Vala* in particular and perhaps lead to further speculation on self-critique in Blake in general. Moreover, the latent critiques of universalism and providential schemes that Lincoln describes in part 4 seem part of an attempt by Blake to draw the poem directly into intensive engagements with national history. This possibility is an intriguing one and calls for further development by Lincoln.

I think here I am not asking for a much longer book, but instead some added commentary along the way about the relation between the four layers of the manuscript. The idea of a progression through layers of text is, as I have said, a fruitful way into *Vala*, and although Lincoln offers some occasional statements regarding the developments and even contradictions between layers, I would be interested to see such a commentary brought to the fore. The sense of stress and strain between and among the manuscript layers does not lead to a serious lack of coherence, but instead creates a dynamism, a vitality that leaves the resulting artefact an ongoing site of study and debate. At times, however, there seems to be a tension within Lincoln's book between the attempt to acknowledge the significance of the physical dimensions of the manuscript and the desire for a thorough, coherent reading of the poem. Often it seems that the latter receives the fullest emphasis, leaving several aspects of manuscript revision to minimal coverage in a set of appendices. Lincoln's book does, however, set a new standard for critical discus-

sions of *Vala*. In light of Lincoln's book, the physical aspects of the manuscript can no longer be separated from interpretive discussion. This new standard adds a level of sophistication and complexity to considerations of *Vala* that has already emerged in treatment of the illuminated works. Such wide-ranging considerations of the material and thematic complexities encountered when reading this difficult manuscript may also renew our way (or ways) of thinking, talking and writing about Blake.

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20/20 Blake. Written and Directed by George Coates. North American Premiere: Civic Center Theater, San Francisco, 17 January 1997. World Premiere: Teatro Sérgio Cardoso, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 4 September 1996.

Reviewed by JAMES MCKUSICK

20/20 Blake, a dramatic and musical performance based on the life and work of William Blake, recently concluded a production at the Civic Center Theater in San Francisco. Perhaps the most innovative feature of this lush scenic production, written and directed by George Coates, is its digital manipulation of Blake's paintings and engravings to create the illusion of three dimensions when viewed by the audience through special 3-D glasses. Familiar images from Blake's illuminated books are magnified to enormous size and projected onto the stage, thus enabling the performers to walk into, through, and behind the engravings. This technique, initially somewhat disorienting to the observer, is nevertheless effective in drawing the audience

into and across the uncertain boundaries between Blake's lived and imagined worlds.

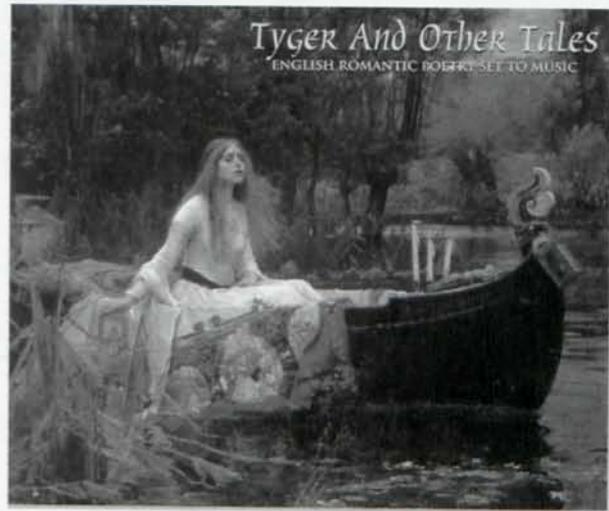
20/20 Blake does not attempt a linear narrative of Blake's life story, but rather presents a series of climactic moments that are vividly realized in choral music performed by the San Francisco Chamber Singers and represented in dance and pantomimic gesture by the actors. The music is challenging and eclectic, weaving together traditional plainsong and orchestral music with elegantly embroidered lyrics from Blake's poetry, and even at times incorporating a four-piece rock-and-roll band with Urizen playing the bass guitar. There is very little spoken dialogue, although Robert G. Kennedy gives a fierce and compelling portrayal of William Blake as a strenuously embattled poet-artist at odds with the universe; he rattles off Proverbs of Hell and related apothegms in a pithy counterpoint to the lush visual and musical texture of each set-piece. The other characters portrayed on stage are his wife Catherine (who doubles as Enitharmon), Mr. Wedgwood (appearing mainly as a villainous enforcer of bourgeois artistic standards), Thel, and Los. The latter two characters provide a lavishly choreographed rendition of their eponymous books, allowing an escapist and frankly erotic fantasy to emerge briefly before it is beaten back into submission by the nay-saying likes of Wedgwood and Urizen.

This production is unlikely to appeal to those Blake scholars who insist on a faithful adherence to Blake's subtlety of design and meaning, since the ethos of his life and work is painted here with rather broad strokes. But this production is both innovative and appealing in its own right, and it does comprise a sustained effort to represent the passionate intensity of Blake's poetry in a dynamic contemporary medium. It certainly reaches out to new audiences who might otherwise never encounter the rich imagery of Blake's illuminated books.

Correction

In Deborah McCollister's article "The Seduction of Self-Abnegation in *The Book of Thel*" in volume 30, #3, pages 90-91, a line was inadvertently dropped. The sentence which read "As Thel searches to discover meaning in the vapor to her their own worth in the life cycle . . ." should have read "As Thel searches to discover meaning in the vapor of mortal life, personified natural elements demonstrate to her their own worth in the life cycle. . ." Also, with regard to her contributor's note: "Less crucial is the note in the 'contributors' section that I will lead a tour to Christian and literary sites in England. Although we southern women have an appreciation for agriculture, I think we'll decline this opportunity on our trip" (letter, 25 March 1997). The word should have been *sites*. Our apologies to Deborah McCollister.

Summer 1997



Tyger and Other Tales

Those with a hankering for soft and smooth "art-rock" renderings of romantic poems will be interested in *Tyger and Other Tales: English Romantic Poetry Set to Music*, a new CD with vocals by Kryisia Kristianne, backed by various combinations of guitars, keyboards, bass, drums, and violin. The CD includes a poem each by Blake, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge—plus, less scrupably, two Renaissance lyrics, an instrumental, the last paragraph of *Wuthering Heights*, and an abridgment of Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott." The CD is available from record shops or direct from Sentience Records, 24049 Chestnut Way, Calabasas, CA 91302-2367. \$15.98 + \$2.00 shipping and handling (+ 8.25% sales tax for CA residents). Telephone (818) 591-2709, fax (818) 843-0301.

Blake Society Web Site

On the Blake discussion list (blake@albion.com), Keri Davies, Chair of the Blake Society, announced the URL for the Blake Society:

<http://www.efirstop.demon.co.uk/BlakeSociety/>

Blake Society Program for 1997

22 July, 7: 30 pm, Jeanne G. Moskal, "Forgiving Blake"; 10 August, noon, meeting at Blake's grave at Bunhill Fields; 30 September, 7:30 pm, David Worrall, "Blake's Mrs. Q: A Late Portrait Engraving"; 15 October, 7:30, Joint meeting with the Wilfred Owen Society, Chris Rubenstein, "Blake and Owen in Peace and War"; 28 November, 1 pm, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*; 4 December, 7:30, General Meeting of the Blake Society; 27 January 1998, 7:30 pm, Terence Watson, "My Course Through Darkness: William Blake and Creative Depression."

Allen Ginsberg

1926 - 1997

“He was asked recently to define himself. He replied, ‘Oh, that’s easy. Beat writer, Blake scholar, Buddhist harmonium-player, Jewish punk rocker, once dangerous subversive. Or maybe just poet.’”

The Sunday Times, 6 April 1997