

Zoas. But the revised poem pleased him no better, and he left it in manuscript, though he used material from it in his final pair of poems, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, which constitute his definitive achievement, his vision and his word, difficult but rewarding, and worthy of the line of Spenser and Milton.

5. Bible of Energy:

THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

As the book of Isaiah gathers to its judging climax, a red figure comes out of Edom, moving in the greatness of his strength. His garments are like those of one who treads in the wine vat, the day of vengeance is in his heart, and the year of his redeemed is come. This apocalyptic figure is the red Orc of Blake's symbolism, an upsurge of the Hell of desire against the Heaven of restraint. In 1790, Edom is France and Orc the spirit of revolt which has moved first from America to France and now threatens to cross into England.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is an apocalyptic satire, created in response to the threatened dominion of Edom. Blake is thirty-three, the Christological age, and in this greatest of his polemical works he enters fully into the kingdom of his own thought and art. He has been reading the theology of Swedenborg (who died in 1772) and he likes less and less what may once have seemed to him an imaginative protest against orthodoxy. Swedenborg is another minor Orc aged into Urizen, another Devil become an Angel. Annotating Swedenborg, Blake observes that the contraries of Good and Evil can be married together, and finally asserts: "Heaven & Hell are born together." So it is in the *Marriage*. Swedenborg, in his *True Christian Religion*, had placed the Last Judgment in the spiritual world in 1757, the year that William Blake was born. Christ rose in the body in his thirty-third year. The Marys, come to his tomb, find the stone rolled from its door and an angel sitting upon it, who tells them that the dead has awakened. Blake, in his thirty-third year, now rises in the body, preaching the consuming of finite creation "by an improvement of sensual enjoyment." Swedenborg is only the angel sitting at the tomb. His writings are but the linen

clothes folded up, for Blake has thrown off the winding-sheet of imaginative death.

In form, the *Marriage* is a condensed version of what Frye has termed an "anatomy," a mixture of verse and prose, characterized by a satiric tone, variety in subject matter, and an intense concern with intellectual error.¹⁷ This anatomy opens with a verse "Argument." Rintrah, an angry prophet like John the Baptist, prepares Blake's way before him by hinting at the political and natural destruction that threatens. A cycle is turning over, the Eternal Hell is reviving, and a voice in the wilderness cries aloud the burden of surging energy and desire.

The "Argument" is an oblique and very effective poem. The truly "just man" or "Devil" rages in the wilds, having been cast out of "perilous paths" by the "villain" or "Angel." Yet this is not the reversal it seems, for:

Roses are planted where thorns grow,
And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.

The present tense establishes the coexistence of contraries. The just man is a river, a spring, red clay (Adam), while the villain finds his natural forms in cliff, tomb, and bleached bones. Cliff and river, tomb and spring, bones and Adam's red flesh alternate in nature, and so do the just man and villain in the history of society. As the cycle turns, a merely ironic progression is always taking place. The perilous generative path that leads at last to death is always being planted, and the just man is always being driven out. The villain usurps, over and again, this path of life-in-death. The just man always returns, and drives the villain again into "paths of ease," the roads that lead to Ulro. To this cycle, there can be no end until nature in its present form is cast out by the visionary eye. As the cycle keeps turning, the categories of "just man" and "villain" begin to merge into one another, and the more deliberately equivocal "Devil" and "Angel" come into being as the *Marriage's* contraries. As the villain comes upon the perilous path in 1790, a new "heaven" or "mild humility" of angelic restraint begins. Blake is thinking of Pitt's bans, of the entire repressive apparatus of British society as it self-righteously attempts to put down the popular unrest that be-

gins to respond to the hope of revolution. But Heaven and Hell are born together, and so "the Eternal Hell revives":

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

Contraries are creative oppositions, necessary if existence is to be Human, which for Blake means "Poetic or Prophetic" as much as "Philosophic & Experimental." The Human, standing still, becomes the wholly natural "unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." Progression means to become more Human, and the final mark of such development is to marry all contraries together without reconciling them. Blake's dialectic has no synthesis or transcending of contraries, but seeks a mutual immanence of creative strife, an exuberant becoming. Marriage means so placing the contraries of Reason and Energy that they cannot absorb and yet do not reject one another.

But *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a work written to its time, an age that fears energy as if the energetic and the demonic were one. Blake therefore resorts to antinomian rhetoric, and declares himself as one of the possessed, celebrating the active springing from Energy and thus embracing "what the religious call Evil" and assign to Hell. When the contraries are next stated, in "The Voice of the Devil" passage, they have ceased strictly to be contraries, for Blake declares one set to be error and the other to be true. Christian dualism is now seen as a negation, which hinders action and prevents movement toward the Human, while the identity of body and soul is a truth both pragmatic and imaginative:

Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

Energy is Eternal Delight.

Reason is the horizon or bounding circle of energy, and is not the same that it will be when our energy has expanded our consciousness. Urizen, the fallen Prince of Light in Blake's pantheon, takes his name from the same root as "horizon." Energy is Eternal De-

light, or Joy, as Coleridge and Wordsworth more simply call it. This delighted exuberance is the outward mark of a healthy imagination, and is definitive of beauty and identifiable with it. Though he declares for diabolical wisdom, and sees the *Marriage* as a Bible of Energy, Blake does not forget the dialectics of his theory of existence. Reason, the bound, is not Eternal Torment, though Reason's story claims unbounded Energy to be such torment. "For this history," Blake ironically observes, "has been adopted by both parties," Angels and Devils. *Paradise Lost* is an Angel's version of the story; Blake now gives a contrary account:

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*, & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan, and his children are call'd Sin & Death.

But in the *Book of Job*, Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan.

In the *Book of Job*, Satan is God's accusing agent, and with heavenly permission subjects Job to an external Hell of maximum tribulation, complete with soreboils and imputations of sin. In *Paradise Lost* the Messiah, with chariot of fire, drives the rebel angels out of heaven and thrusts them forth into Chaos. Eternal wrath burns after them to the bottomless pit. Messiah is thus the agent who creates an external Hell, a torture chamber for punishments, and so in Blake's view is one with Job's Satan, the restrainer of desire. Milton's Satan begins as desire, but, being restrained, he by degrees becomes passive, until he is only a Spectre, a shadow of desire. Yet Satan's lost substance is the stuff of life, which Milton's God and Messiah can only bind and order, in the present time of *Paradise Lost*, when all divine creation is in the past. The abyss of the five senses, chaotic substance, undifferentiated energy, is stolen by the Messiah, who undergoes a Satanic fall that he may perform his Promethean act of stealth. From this stolen substance, the orthodox bound of Heaven, the horizon of *Ah! Sun-flower* is

formed. Milton, according to Blake, wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell. As literary criticism this is true, for Satan is certainly more aesthetically satisfying than Milton's God, and Hell is livelier than Heaven. Milton, without knowing it, was of the Devil's or Energy's party, because he was a true poet. "The Poet," Blake said in his annotations to Dante's *Inferno*, "is Independent & Wicked; the Philosopher is Dependent & Good." And so "the grandest Poetry is Immoral, the Grandest characters Wicked, Very Satan." It follows that the grandest proverbs will be the Proverbs of Hell, seventy gnomic reflections and admonitions on the theme of diabolic wisdom, where Blake's antinomian rhetoric and more comprehensive dialectic meet in combat.

Blake's proverbs take their meaning from his dialectical definitions of "desire" and "act," though their overt force depends upon a rhetoric of disassociation which transvalues conventional beliefs. Desire leads to an action that is not the hindrance of another and that is therefore positive. Act is positive and is virtue. Blake, commenting on the moralist Lavater, defines the contrary of act as "accident":

Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another; This is Vice, but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act; it is the contrary; it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinder'd, for he who hinders another omits his own duty at the same time.

The Proverbs of Hell laud active Evil as being better than passive Good, but Blake's vocabulary is ironic, and to take the Proverbs as approving sadism is to misread them utterly. The organization of the Proverbs is complex, being based on delayed association after preconceived response has been altered by apparent disassociation. The Proverbs resolve themselves into four overlapping groups, defined by dominant patterns of imagery. One is apocalyptic and largely sexual in emphasis, and includes images of plowing and harvest, water and wine, prayer and praise, baptism and intercourse. Another deals with excess and frustration, and includes proverbs dealing with strength and weakness, desire and restraint, body and soul, wisdom and foolishness. A third group, more overtly antinomian, emphasizes animal powers, and organizes itself about

the themes of violence, revenge, law, and religion. The fourth and largest category is dominated by images of perception, and finds its subject matter in problems of time and eternity, space and form, art and nature, cycles and divisions, and in comparisons between the elements and man's body. The four groups can be brought together in a single diabolical formula: sexual excess leads to antinomian perception. By it, the whole creation is consumed and appears infinite and holy. The doors of perception are to be cleansed by an improvement of sensual enjoyment. The risen body becomes the expanding imagination, and finite and corrupt nature becomes an infinite and redeemed Human Form Divine.

Yet Blake does not forget his dialectic of immanence, the necessity of coexistent contraries. Both portions of being, the Prolific Energy of Desire, and the Devouring Reason of Restraint, are finally to be held in strenuous and warring balance:

Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring: to the Devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, received the excess of his delights.

Some will say: "Is not God alone the Prolific?" I answer: "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men."

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.

The Angel, or Devourer, has taken all the negative force of Blake's rhetoric, but the Prolific needs constraint, and flourishes on the battle against confinement. The Devourer is a sea, a bounding moat without which the fountain of creativity would be choked in the excess of its own delight, by an invention so extravagant that it could find no coherence. The enmity between Prolific and Devourer is the foundation of human existence, and whoever seeks to end such enmity would destroy the human aspect of existence. Such a destruction is religion's purpose, when orthodoxy attempts to inflict upon us the greatest poverty of not living in a physical world. Blake's dialectical stance, with its apotheosis of the physical and its simul-

taneous rejection of the merely natural, is most frequently misunderstood at just this point. Against the supernaturalist, Blake asserts the reality of the body as being all of the soul that the five senses can perceive. Against the naturalist, he asserts the greater reality of the imaginative over the given body. The naturalist or vitalist, in Blake's view, teaches heat without light; the orthodox theist wants light without heat. Blake insists upon both, and finds his image of consummated marriage between the two in poetic genius or imagination.

The humanistic satire of the *Marriage* is concentrated in a sequence of emblematic stories that Blake (in mockery of a phrase in Swedenborg) calls Memorable Fancies. The Fancies illustrate the central polemical truth that serves as the *Marriage's* last sentence: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression." The maker of that oppressive law is Urizen, the true Satan, who is worshiped as God of this World under the names of Jehovah and Jesus. The penultimate sentence of the *Marriage* promises the world the Bible of Hell, the imaginative reading of creation and apocalypse. Blake's Bible of Hell begins with *The Book of Urizen*, and goes on to the much-revised complexities of the epic poem called first *Vala* and then *The Four Zoas*. The *Marriage* is the prelude to that Bible, and a richer work than my brief description can suggest.

The last plate of the *Marriage* shows King Nebuchadnezzar crouching on all fours, reduced to the state of nature, as Daniel had prophesied. This is Man, of whom one of the Proverbs of Hell says: "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion." The distance between Nebuchadnezzar and the Proverb is the hideous gap that Blake's major poems exist to explain, and hope to close.

6. Bible of Hell:

THE BOOK OF URIZEN

The Book of Urizen (1794) is Blake's most powerful illuminated poem before the great abandoned *Four Zoas* and the epics that followed it. On the title page of *Urizen* the protagonist crouches, a hideous emblem of Ulro. We see an immensely old man, of godly