

William Blake's
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

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Introduction

religious
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About 1788, Blake read and annotated Swedenborg's *Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*. Blake was not brought up a Swedenborgian, that being one of the many biographical myths about him that David Erdman has demonstrated to be inaccurate or irrelevant. Much in Swedenborg must have seemed unimaginative to Blake from the start, but clearly Blake progressed from feeling some affinity with Swedenborg to a strong sense of outrage, as he realized how limited the affinity actually was. Blake read as he lived, painted, and wrote: to correct other men's visions, not into Blake's own, but into forms that emphasized the autonomy of each human imagination, both as against "nature" or what our eyes see when they are tired and deathly, and as against any received notions that might seek to set limits to perception. So, to Swedenborg's "In all the Heavens there is no other Idea of God than that of a Man," Blake added:

Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man, as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness. But God is a man, not because he is so perceiv'd by man, but because he is the creator of man.

Swedenborg touches upon a religious humanism, but halts his imagination before realizing its potential. Blake, as an artist, knows that his own best being is in his creations. So God, whose best creation is man, must find *his* own best being in man. Man is the form that God creates and loves, and so God must be a man. That the converse is not always true, that man is only partly God, is the burden that Blake's poems exist to lighten, and hope at last to annihilate.

Swedenborg, though he ended as a visionary and the founder of yet another Christian sect, had begun as a reasoner from nature, and his reports of what he took to be the spiritual world read now like parodies of the eighteenth-century search for a science of sciences. The result is that the direct satirical basis of much

From *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument*. © 1963 by Harold Bloom. Cornell University Press, 1970.

in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has lost its point. Even if Swedenborg had any relevance to our condition now, we would not need Blake to satirize him. But Blake has much in common with Swift as a satirist. The satire in each has survived its victims, because the structure of that satire comprehends eternal types of intellectual error and spiritual self-deception. A reader of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* needs to know of Swedenborg only what Blake took him to be:

O Swedenborg! strongest of men, the Samson
 shorn by the Churches,
 Shewing the Transgressors in Hell, the proud
 Warriors in Heaven,
 Heaven as a Punisher, & Hell as one under
 Punishment.

(Milton, 22:50-52)

He [Swedenborg] shews the folly of churches, & exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, & himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net.

(*The Marriage*, 21)

Swedenborg is the eternal type of the prophet who becomes a new kind of priest, and by becoming a church loses his imaginative strength, until he concludes by renewing the religious categories of judgment he came to expose as impostures. The psychological root of this ironic cycle of transformation is in the prophet's growing and pernicious conviction of his absolute uniqueness. The contempt of Blake for this kind of self-deception is based on a conviction that the entire process is another triumph of nature over the integrity of vision. Whatever faults of passion Blake possessed, and he recognized each of them in turn as they became relevant to his poetry, he never allowed himself to believe he was "the single one on earth that ever broke a net" of religious orthodoxy.

The literary form of Blake's *Marriage* is best named by Northrop Frye's term, an anatomy, or more traditionally a Menippean satire, characterized by its concern with intellectual error, its extraordinary diversity of subject-matter, a mixed verse-and-prose form, and a certain reliance on a symposium setting. Relentless experimenter as he was, Blake created in the *Marriage* what may even have surprised himself, so original is the work in its structure. It opens with a free-verse "Argument," and then passes to a statement of creative oppositions that Blake calls "Contraries." Two sets of contraries are then stated in a passage headed "The voice of the Devil," which concludes by a remarkable brief reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Following is the first of five "Memorable Fancies," clearly originating as parodies of Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations," in which the Swedish

visionary had described the wonders of the spiritual world. The first Memorable Fancy leads to the famous "Proverbs of Hell," seventy aphorisms unmatched in literature for their intellectual shock value. The remainder of the *Marriage* alternates Memorable Fancies with groupings of apocalyptic reflections. The first of these gives a brief history of religion; the next relates Blake's art to the "improvement of sensual enjoyment" that will precede the Apocalypse; and the final two deal with the strife of contraries again, and with the errors of Swedenborg. After the final Memorable Fancy, the whole work ends with a proverb previously gasped out in Tiriell's death agony: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression."

The unity of this structure is a dialectical one, and depends upon a progression in understanding, as one proceeds from engraved plate to engraved plate of the work. The title plate shows a sexual embrace amid flames, in its lower half; the upper part depicts wanderers between twisted trees, and a loss of Innocence beneath two trees of Mystery, with a raven overhead. The center of the plate features lovers rising upward from the flames, but aspiring towards the roots of the sinister trees above. The visual process is purely ironic; to rise away from the sexual fire can only lead to loss. This picture epitomizes the rhetorical emphasis of the *Marriage*, with its "diabolical" preference for desire over restraint, energy over reason. But the *sequence* of plates transcends this antinomian rhetoric, and demonstrates the necessity for both sets of creative oppositions. The Argument states the problem of the work's genesis: the breakthrough of the contraries into history. The Memorable Fancies are all on the rhetorical side of the "Devil," though they continually qualify the supposed demonism of that party. The sections between the Fancies carry forward the dialectic of the work; they exist to clarify the role of the contraries. Blake asks of his reader a subtle alternation of moods; to move constantly from a defiant celebration of hertofore repressed energies to a realization that the freed energies must accept a bounding outline, a lessened but still existent world of confining mental forms.

Our actual reading of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* can begin with a consideration of the title itself. Annotating Swedenborg's *Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* in 1788, Blake came to a particular statement urgently needing ironic correction by a restatement ostensibly in agreement with it:

SWEDENBORG: Man is only a Recipient of Life. From this Cause it is, that Man, from his own hereditary Evil, reacts against God; but so far as he believes that all his Life is from God; and every Good of Life from the Action of God, and every Evil of Life from the reaction of Man, Reaction thus becomes correspondent with Action, and Man acts with God as from himself.

BLAKE: Good & Evil are here both Good & the two contraries
Married.

It is probable that this interchange is the seed of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Blake perceives in Swedenborg an instance of the two moral contraries of good and evil being so held in relation to each other that they exist in harmony without losing their individual characteristics. The key term in the Swedenborg passage is "correspondent"; in the Blake comment it is "contraries." In Swedenborg, "correspondent" means that the Reaction and Action of the passage do subsume one another; they become for pragmatic purposes a unity of mutual absorption. But Blake's "contraries" never absorb one another; and his point is that the "Good & Evil" of Swedenborg were never really moral good and moral evil, but merely forms of the good in the first place. For Blake's Man creates life, and does not only receive it from God. All contraries are born within the human existence: Blake's last note on Swedenborg's *Divine Love* is: "Heaven & Hell are born together." Yet Swedenborg either forgot or had never learned this. Reading Swedenborg's *Divine Providence* two years later, in 1790, Blake is outraged at the flowering of Swedenborg's error into the dead fruit of the doctrine of Predestination. From this outrage the title of Blake's *Marriage* takes its origin.

Blake's title also has ironic reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell and their Wonders*, though his annotated copy of that book is lost. So is his copy of Swedenborg on the *Last Judgment*, where it was declared that:

The evil are cast into the hells, and the good elevated into heaven, and thus that all things are reduced into order, the spiritual equilibrium between good and evil, or between heaven and hell, being thence restored. . . . This Last Judgment was commenced in the beginning of the year 1757.

That was the year of Blake's birth, and so Swedenborg's heaven and Blake's hell were born together. In 1790, Blake was thirty-three years old, and thirty-three years had elapsed since the Last Judgment in the spiritual world. The outward apocalypse had been slow in coming, but by 1790 it must have seemed to Blake that the prophesied time-of-troubles that must precede apocalypse was surely at hand. We have seen Blake tracing those portents in his poem *The French Revolution*. Though the satiric motive for the *Marriage* is Blake's desire to expose Swedenborg, the work has a half-serious religious and political impulse within it as well. The French Revolution and the British reaction to it suggest to Blake a contemporary manifestation of the ancient turning over of a prophetic cycle. The *Marriage's* Argument begins:

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the
burden'd air;

Hungry clouds swag on the deep.

As with the appearance of Luvah in *The Book of Thel*, and Urizen in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, here we encounter another introduction of a symbolic personage before Blake is quite ready to make full use of him. What this suggests is that Blake may have formulated a large part of his mythology some years before he incorporated it into his poetry. Rintrah is Blake's Angry Man,² John the Baptist or Elijah figure, the wrathful spirit of prophecy driven out into the wilderness. The outcry and fires of Rintrah are in the burdened clouds, hungry with portents, that heavily sink down on the deep that separates France from England. The cycle of human existence turns over, and the just man is driven out by the villain:

Once meek, and in a perilous path,
The just man kept his course along
The vale of death.
Roses are planted where thorns grow,
And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.

Then the perilous path was planted,
And a river and a spring
On every cliff and tomb,
And on the bleached bones
Red clay brought forth;

Till the villain left the paths of ease,
To walk in perilous paths, and drive
The just man into barren climes.

Now the sneaking serpent walks
In mild humility,
And the just man rages in the wilds
Where lions roam.

The meek just man begins by regulating his course in that perilous path of life that always is shadowed by death. Yet that path is already involved in existential contraries; roses and thorns come up together, and the honey bees sing on a heath with no provision for them. The joy and grief of this existence are woven too fine; the course kept by the just man is *planted*, and becomes a natural custom, or falls into vegetative existence. Yet this naturalizing of the just man is a creation as well as a fall. The barrenness of cliff and tomb yields to a water that people may drink, and on the bleached bones of an earlier world the red clay that is Adam is brough forth.

But a turning natural cycle is an invitation for the villain, who leaves the paths of ease (which must be in a realm of non-existence, since for Blake existence is a struggle) and usurps the just man's place. Very likely on the social level this is a parable of exploitation. The villain becomes the sneaking serpent or "Angel" of mild humility, who stalks through the now ironically titled "perilous paths," and the just man becomes the "Devil" or outcast prophet, menaced by everything in nature that fears prophecy. The contraries of natural cycle are not true contraries, else the cycle could not go on unchanged. So Blake breaks off his "Argument" and begins to state the laws of progression:

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise. See Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV Chap.

Blake is thirty-three, and remembers that Christ rose in the body at that age. Swedenborg sits at the tomb, Angel to Blake's Devil, to testify that Blake has awakened from the error of death into the more abundant life of the risen body. Poor Swedenborg's writings are but the linen clothes folded up, neatly put aside by Blake, who does not need the coverings of death to shield his passionate body from apocalyptic light. For the prophesied times are come; the dominion of Edom is at hand. The blessing of Esau, the red man of Edom, was that he should some day have dominion over Jacob. The prophet Isaiah saw this red man coming from Edom, with the day of vengeance in his heart, and knew this to be the troubled time before the Judgment, when Adam would at last return into Paradise. In 1790 Edom is France, and the red man will soon be identified as Blake's Orc, Spirit of Revolt, who seems a creature from Hell to those dwelling at ease in the Jacob or Israel that is Pitt's England.

The red man comes into Isaiah's vision late, at the start of chapter 63, where the judging climax begins to gather together. Blake's own reference is earlier; to two contrary chapters, 34 and 35, for some historical progression will be necessary before England attains to its climax. In chapter 34 the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and the wild beasts of the desert come to possess the world. But in chapter 35 the troubles yield to revelation: the eyes of the blind are opened, waters break out in the wilderness, and the perilous path becomes the highway of holiness upon which the redeemed shall walk. Both states, the outcast and the redeemed, are crucial; to us and to one another. For:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,
Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.

Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

The philosopher Heraclitus condemned Homer for praying that strife might perish from among gods and men, and said that the poet did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe. The vision of Heraclitus is of an attunement of opposite tensions, of mortals and immortals living the others' death and dying the others' life. Blake read little with any care besides the Bible and Milton; he is not likely to have derived anything really central to him from ancient philosophy, or from the theosophy of the Cabala or Boehme. His doctrine or image of contraries is his own, and the analogues in Heraclitus or in Blake's own contemporary, Hegel, are chiefly interesting as contrasts. For Heraclitus, Good and Evil were one; for Blake they were not the inseparable halves of the same thing, but merely born together, as Milton had believed. For Hegel, opposites were raised to a higher power when they were transcended by synthesis; for Blake, opposites remained creative only so long as each remained immanent. Good and Evil could not refute one another, for each was only what the religious called Good and Evil, passive and active, restrained and unrestrained.

The usual misinterpretation of Blake's contraries (stemming from Swinburne) is that they represent a simple inversion of orthodox moral categories. Blake is then pictured like Milton's Satan on Mount Niphates, passionately declaiming: "Evil be thou my Good." Blake of course is doing nothing of the kind; he is denying the orthodox categories altogether, and opposing himself both to moral "good" and moral "evil." Frye usefully remarks that the Swinburnean error in interpretation "ignores the fact that Blake attaches two meanings to the word 'hell,' one real and the other ironic." The real hell is in the fearful obsessions of the Selfhood; the ironic one is that just quoted from the *Marriage*: an upsurge of desire whose energetic appearance frightens the Selfhood into the conviction that such intensity must stem from an external hell.

From this point on, the vocabulary of the *Marriage* is altogether ironic, and requires close attention. If Hell is the active springing from Energy, and the Eternal Hell revives with Blake's assumption of the Christological role, then "The voice of the Devil" that follows is Blake's own, but diabolical only because it will seem so to Swedenborg or any other priestly Angel. The Devil's voice attacks the dualism of Christian tradition, the negation of setting the body's energy as evil against the soul's reason as good. Against these "Errors" the Devil Blake sets his contraries:

1. 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.

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Hegel vs Blake

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

3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

Blake is not saying that the soul is part of the body, but that the body is the outward circumference or boundary of the soul. In former ages, Blake implies, the more numerous and enlarged senses of man were able to discern a larger portion of the soul than the five senses can now. But what *can* be discerned of the soul now is chiefly the body; if the body is inadequate, it is nevertheless by necessity the way back to the soul. Asceticism is then exactly the wrong way to handle the body. It is by an increase and not a diminishment of sensual enjoyment that we can begin to expand our souls, to their former dimensions. Donne in *The Extasie* affirms that the soul must repair first to the body before it can flow into another soul, but Donne's language is paradoxical and his remarkable poem abides in a philosophical dualism. But Blake really does believe that Energy is the only life, and is from the body, so that the greater wealth of a more abundant life, a more capable soul, must be the body's gift. The body's exuberance is the eternal delight that Coleridge and Wordsworth were to identify as the joy that alone made possible any artistic creation. For Blake, the running-down of that delight defines the place of reason in the creative life; the outward circumference where a vision recedes into merely natural light. In an ironic play upon an ancient Christian adage, the mind of the archetypal creator is for Blake an everlasting circle whose exuberant center is everywhere, and whose reasonable circumference is nowhere.

no Verb ✓ The archetypal creation, for Blake, was not the outward nature of the Coleridgean Primary Imagination, but the complete vision exuberantly manifested in the King James Bible. If a single poet since the Prophets and Jesus had incarnated that archetypal creative mind for Blake, surely that poet could only be John Milton. The *Marriage* passes therefore to the failure (as Blake saw it) of final exuberance in the maker of *Paradise Lost*. Plates 5 and 6 are a reading of the great English epic deliberately, which is to say ironically, from a Devil's point of view. Why did Milton restrain his poet's desire, and how did the restrainer, or reason, usurp desire's place and come to govern the unwilling poet?

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 and Death.

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

For this history has been adopted by both parties.

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out; but the Devil's account is, that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss.

This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter, or Desire that Reason may have Ideas to build on; the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in flaming fire.

Know that after Christ's death, he became Jehovah.

But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son a Ratio of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!

Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.

Few passages of literary analysis, and this is surpassingly excellent analysis, have been as misread as Blake's excursus on *Paradise Lost*. The traditional misinterpretation, with its distinguished lineage from Swinburne to C. S. Lewis, holds that Blake's reading is an antinomian one. But Blake is as uninterested in moral evil as he is in moral good; neither category seems imaginative to him. *Paradise Lost* and the Book of Job are theodicies; they seek to justify the existence of moral evil by asserting the ultimate reality and providence of moral good. Against such theodicies, with their final appeal to the necessity of fallen nature, Blake makes a double attack, on the one hand rhetorical and ironic, on the other argumentative and prophetically serious. The rhetorical attack seems antinomian, but is actually aesthetic, and concerns the relative failure (in Blake's view) of both *Paradise Lost* and Job. The prophetic attack is as serious as Blake can make it, and seeks to correct Milton's error in vision.

Paradise Lost, Blake judges, is written out of Milton's despair of his earlier apocalyptic hopes, and is a Song of Experience, a poem that accepts the fallen world's restraint of human desire. Milton is willing to restrain the desires of Satan and Eve, or see them punished for not accepting such restraints, because his own desires for knowledge and for the complete fulfillment of his imaginative potential have become weak enough to be restrained. Reasoning from nature usurps the place of imaginative desire and governs Milton's visionary powers, though they are unwilling to be so governed. By degrees, Milton's exuberance of invention becomes passive, until it is only the shadow of the power that creates the opening books of *Paradise Lost* and the past prophetic glory of *Areopagitica*.

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The inner history of this psychic process of repression is written in *Paradise Lost*, where it is externalized as the progressive inhibition of Satan, who is degraded by his fall, from active rebellion into passive plotting against the restraints of Right Reason. The restrainer, called Messiah by Milton, is called Satan in the Book of Job. Here Blake is at his most subtle. Milton's Messiah drives Satan out of Heaven with fire, and "Eternal wrath / Burnt after them to the bottomless pit." Hell is thus created by an act of Messiah. In the Book of Job a hell of external torment is created for Job by Satan, who serves as God's Accuser of sins, going to and fro in the earth to impute sin to the righteous.

This crucial resemblance between Milton's Christ and Job's Satan—that each creates a world of punishment, a categorical judgment that militates against mutual forgiveness of every vice—inspires Blake's blandest irony: "For this history has been adopted by both parties." The two parties are Devils—or true poets who write to correct orthodoxy, and Angels—or ruined poets and theologians who write to uphold moral and religious conventions. According to Blake, Milton was like Swedenborg in that he aged from a Devil into an Angel. It indeed appeared to Milton the theologian, that Satan or Desire was cast out into Hell, but the true poet or Devil, working away within Milton and the authors of the Bible, gave another account—though to read that account now we need to read Milton and the Bible in their "diabolical" sense.

This infernal sense of meaning is to Blake *the* poetic sense of Milton or Job or the Gospels. If it appeared to the curbers of desire that all illicit energies had been cast out into an abyss of heat without light, it appears to the supposed outcasts that the heaven of restraint, abandoned behind them, is only a stolen and frozen form, out of the many living forms constantly being created in the "abyss" of realized desires. The heaven of orthodoxy, or idea of restraint, was formed by the Messiah or Reason, but to get the stuff of creativity he had to "fall" into the energetic world of imaginings, or else Reason could have no ideas to build on. So the Gospel promise to send the comforter is a desire for Desire, and the answering Jehovah of imagination, the Jehovah of the Bible, is a creator who dwells in flaming fire, not in the cold light of Milton's static heaven. If the Son was truly human desire, and the Father, Desire removed from all encumbrances, then their identity in the resurrection of the human body is an identity of fire, of an impeded desire flaming into that which delights in its own form. But in Milton, the Father is not the self-determining form of fire, but the determined form of Destiny. The Son is not the human desire to attain a more imaginative body, but a Ratio of the five senses, a reductive argument from the limitations of natural perception. And the comforter or Holy Ghost is not a mediating desire binding man to his envisioned fulfillment, but rather a vacuum, for he is not there at all, in a poem that places all positive action in the past,

and assigns to its historical present a choice only of obedient passivity or demonic defiance. Yet, as Blake's altogether ironic *Note* to this section adds, Milton the poet could not be content with this desperate quietism. Energy and desire enter into the poem when Milton writes at liberty, for Milton's greatness was, at last, in spite of himself. Because he was a true poet, his creative exuberance burst the fetters of Right Reason, and the Satan who dominates the first third of the poem came into his powerful existence.

As a reading of *Paradise Lost*, there is much to be said against this, and more to be said for it than most contemporary critics of Milton would now acknowledge. But whether Blake's reading of Milton is correct is not altogether relevant to a reader's understanding of the *Marriage*. What matters is that momentarily he learn to read the poem as Blake read it.

When Milton's Satan goes off on his perilous journey through chaos to the earth in book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, his fallen host remains behind him in Hell, where they busy themselves with their equivalents of Olympian games, with composing and singing poems on their fate, with metaphysical and ethical discussions, and with explorations of their sad new world. One need not endorse Milton's theology to feel the force of his point: detached from God, such activities are demonic, and these enjoyments of fallen genius are sterile because they seek to serve as their own ends. But Blake's next section, the first of his Memorable Fancies, is an apt reply to Milton. Blake goes "walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity." To walk among those fires is to compose a poem or engrave a picture, and to collect the Proverbs of Hell, as Blake proceeds to do, is to express the laws of artistic creation in a series of aphorisms. When Blake came home from his proverb-collecting:

On the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world, I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock: with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, and read by them on earth:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts
the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by
your senses five?

The Devil is the artist William Blake, at work engraving the *Marriage*, and the corroding fires refer metaphorically both to his engraving technique and the satiric function of the *Marriage*. The flat-sided steep, frowning over the present

world, is fallen human consciousness, and Blake is an old Rocky Face like the Yeats of *The Gyres* whom he influenced. The stony cavern of the mind has been broken open by Blake's art; the imagination rises from the mind's abyss and seeks more expanded senses than the five making up that abyss. The gnomic couplet etched by the Devil Blake is adapted from one of Thomas Chatterton's best poems, and is meant to serve as an introductory motto to the following Proverbs of Hell. In thus using Chatterton, Blake precedes Keats in honoring that Rimbaud of the English eighteenth century as a prophet of later poets' sensibilities.

Chatterton, for Blake, knew in his life, if not altogether in his work, that every object of natural perception contained an immense world of delight, closed off from us by the inadequacy of our five senses as we tended to use them in our minimal perceptions. The idea of raising our intensity of perception and so triumphing over nature through nature is the central idea of the Proverbs of Hell. Sexual exuberance, breaking the bounds of restraint and entering a fullness that Angelic Reason considers excess, will lead to a perception of a redeemed nature, though this perception itself must seem unlawful to fallen reason. The Proverbs emphasize an antinomian rhetoric but expect the reader to recognize the implicit argument that underlies and finally absorbs this fierce vocabulary. Blake is not saying that active evil is morally better than passive good, though he wants the shock value that such a statement would have. Blake's good is the active springing from energy; there is therefore no such thing as a passive good, except to the Angels who identify act and evil. Blake's definition of an act is only implied in the *Marriage*, but had been set down clearly by him in 1788 when he annotated the aphorisms of his contemporary, the Swiss poet and theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater:

There is a strong objection to Lavater's principles (as I understand them) & that is He makes every thing originate in its accident; he makes the vicious propensity not only a leading feature of the man, but the stamina on which all his virtues grow. But as I understand Vice it is a Negative. It does not signify what the laws of Kings & Priests have call'd Vice; we who are philosophers ought not to call the Staminial Virtues of Humanity by the same name that we call the omissions of intellect springing from poverty.

Every man's leading propensity ought to be call'd his leading Virtue & his good Angel. But the Philosophy of Causes & Consequences misled Lavater as it has all his Cotemporaries. Each thing is its own cause & its own effect. Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another; This is Vice, but all Act [from Individual propensity] 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

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hinder'd, for he who hinders another omits his own duty at the same time.

Murder is Hihdering Another.

Theft is Hindering Another.

Backbiting, Undermining, Circumventing, & whatever is Negative is Vice. But the origin of this mistake in Lavater & his cotemporaries is, They suppose that Woman's Love is Sin; in consequence all the Loves & Graces with them are Sin.

Of all Blake's annotations upon other writers, this seems to me the most profound, and the most central for a reader's understanding of Blake himself. Here indeed is the imaginative seed of not only the Proverbs of Hell but the whole of the *Marriage*, and of Blake's ideas of good and evil to the end of his life. What is hindrance and not action is evil, whether one hinders the self or another. Restraint for Blake is a mode of indecision, and proceeds from a mind in chaos. Decision, true act, proceeds from the whole man, the imaginative mind, and must be good, for whatever is negative is a restraint upon another, and not an act. Act stems from the only wealth, from life, but restraint is an omission of intellect, and springs from the poverty of lifelessness, the absence of the exuberance of mind delighting in its own forming powers. The paradoxes of Blake's Proverbs of Hell nearly always arise from an ironic awareness of the gap between "what the laws of Kings & Priests have call'd Vice" and what an artist sees as Vice: "the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another." In form, Blake's Proverbs parody what he might have called the "Proverbs of Heaven," the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible, which claim "to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." In contrast, Blake's Proverbs exist to break down orthodox categories of thought and morality. To accomplish this end Blake employs an apparent dissociation of customary meanings, both within many of the Proverbs and in their curious disarrangement. Since the Proverbs seek to destroy a pattern of preconceived responses, they rely on a final association of meanings after the initial dissociation has done its work.

The reader can arrive at this association by considering the Proverbs as falling into four overlapping groups, largely defined by their imagery. The first is clearly and intensely sexual, so intense that in it the act of sexual union assumes the mythic dimension familiar to us from the work of D. H. Lawrence. In the Proverbs, this sexual imagery is presented in a variety of ironic disguises, including the sacraments of baptism and communion, with their water and wine symbolism, and a complex association of plowing and harvest imagery with the idea of the fulfillment of prayer. Thus, "In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy" looks like a traditional description of man's life, but refers also

four overlapping groups

to the sexual rites of initiation. To "Drive your cart and plow over the bones of the dead" is to renew human life by a refreshment of sexuality, even at the cost of defying the codes of the past. In the third Proverb, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," a second grouping of ideas and images are introduced. To increase sexual fulfillment is to take what the Angels consider the road of excess that will lead one to the palace of the diabolical principle. But this excess Blake considers as the contrary to the deliberate self-frustration of the Angels, expressed in the next Proverb, which is a brilliant allegorical story in one sentence: "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity." Repressed energy culminates in neurosis: "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence." But what is genuinely acted upon may be injured yet is augmented: "The cut worm forgives the plow," an unequivocal image of phallic plenitude.

The themes of sexuality and excess meet in "Dip him in the river who loves water," for this cleansing baptism is the total immersion of the soul in the body's sexual wealth. Sexual excess as initiator meets its apocalyptic result in the following Proverbs, as the two further imagistic groupings, turning upon antinomianism and increased perceptiveness, make initial appearances. "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees," for the wise man, as a creative Devil, sees the tree in a context more exuberant than any an unvitalized nature could sustain. The fool is self-condemned to a status of minimum vitality in nature, for "He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star." We see the light we emanate, and our creativeness is responsible not only for a different tree than the fool sees, but a different time in which vision takes place, for "Eternity is in love with the productions of time," not with time's passivities. In creation the oppressiveness of clock time vanishes, for "The busy bee has no time for sorrow" and "The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom, no clock can measure."

In creative or human time, the restraints of fallen experience, the nets and traps of natural morality, tend to lose their immediacy, and desire and gratification are near-allied, an intimation of psychic health because "All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap." The psychic abundance of the creative life scorns the conventionalizing forms of tradition, whether in the social elaborations of manners or the closed couplet of Augustan poetic decorum, for restricted forms ration the meager, not the prolific: "Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth." The net of convention is broken by the imagination capable in itself, and in the consciousness of its own powers: "No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings." As for the offended conventions, they can do no harm, for "A dead body revenges not injuries."

So far the Proverbs of Hell have mostly been assaults upon conventional evasions of human energies. But Blake is not content to attack timidity; he desires also to replace the tired mind's naturalizations of its own best moments, by

showing that mind the meaning of its own rejected strengths. In the human confrontation of another human, in the moment where the self acknowledges the full reality of another self, the relationship of equal immediacies is a recognition of the imaginative act itself: "The most sublime act is to set another before you."

We have considered, so far, the first seventeen of the seventy Proverbs of Hell. To go through each of the Proverbs in this way would be to usurp the reader's individuality of response, for the Proverbs should mean a variety of things, quite correctly, to different readers. There is perhaps more potential value in exploring the general pattern of the remaining Proverbs. The sexual and harvest images lead to the vision of excess, by which apparent foolishness culminates in the wisdom of a further horizon of human aspiration. This aspiration is emphasized obliquely in the group of antinomian Proverbs that concern animal powers and violently revenge stifled energies upon the restraints of Law and Religion. Hence: "The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God," and "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."

When this antinomian intensity is carried over into a human admonition, the result is deliberately shocking: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." A moment's reflection grimly clarifies Blake's meaning: to *nurse* an unacted desire is to feed a monster, after already having murdered the cradled infant desire, and the unacted desire, nursed to full size, will be a demon of destruction. The only way out of this cycle of repression and torment is through a perception that transforms time into the eternity of a creative now, and that renders space as form until nature itself becomes art. These abstractions are mine, not Blake's, who prefers the more palpable particulars of his Proverbs. "Exuberance is Beauty," and "Where man is not, nature is barren," for exuberance is the stuff of human desire, and the dull round of nature can bear nothing unless man will marry it with the animation of his overflowing energy.

The coda to the Proverbs of Hell is a brief account of the hardening of poetic myth into priestcraft. The ancient Poets, who were one with the titanic ancient men, animated all sensible objects because they perceived them with "enlarged & numerous senses." The weak in courage, being strong in cunning, chose forms of worship from these poetic tales: "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast," and thus the contraries of priestly Angels and prophetic Devils sprang into existence.

A Memorable Fancy follows, in which Blake entertains two prophetic predecessors, Isaiah and Ezekiel, at dinner and questions them as to their certainty of being divinely inspired. Isaiah expresses his "firm persuasion" that an honestly indignant human voice is the voice of God, while Ezekiel more directly stresses the necessity for extreme action if the prophet is to raise other men into a perception of the infinite, the human reality that masks as natural appearance.

This prophetic encouragement inspires one of Blake's most passionate perceptions: the natural world is on the point of being purged by fire. The fire here is the fire of intellect and art, which must begin "by an improvement of sensual enjoyment." The active intellect of the artist, raised to its full powers by sexual completion, will consume the whole creation and bring man back to the tree of life, driving away the lesser fire of the guardian cherub's flaming sword. But this sexual completion cannot begin without expunging the pernicious Angelic notion of dualism, and for such work the visionary satirist like Blake is essential. His engraved poems, like the *Marriage*, will be salutary and medicinal corrosives. Even as he creates his plates by melting apparent surfaces away, so the function of his art will be to display the hidden infinite, hid in the phenomenal world. To imitate the artist is to see as he sees:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

This cavern is the skull of fallen man, or in a larger dimension the whole of his fallen body. To see more, we must cleanse the doors of perception we still have, the five senses, but to cleanse them, for Blake, means to begin by raising them to the heights of their sensual power. You do not expand your sense of touch by avoiding sexuality, but only by rising through it, and to see more, you must begin by seeing everything you can.

This insistence on the role of increased sensual enjoyment in creation is followed by a sardonic Memorable Fancy confirming that role. Blake is "in a Printing house in Hell," a six-chambered establishment that serves as an allegory of the creative process. In the first chamber is a phallic Dragon-Man "clearing away the rubbish from a cave's mouth," and so cleansing the human sense of touch. Within, other dragons are at work "hollowing the cave," widening the body's potential for imaginative knowledge. Art ensues in this aggressive sexuality, but the next chamber introduces the censorious restrainer, "a Viper folding round the rock & the cave," seeking to confine man within his fallen limits. But a Proverb of Hell comes to our aid: "When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head!" So in the next chamber an Eagle combats the Viper by causing "the inside of the cave to be infinite," and the artists who share in a portion of Genius are seen as "numbers of Eagle-like men who built palaces in the immense cliffs." We remember the mighty Devil Blake of an earlier plate, where he hovered on the sides of the rock and wrote sentences in corroding fire. The Eagle-like men prepare us for the fourth chamber of the creative mind, where the archetypes are seen as "Lions of flaming fire, raging around & melting the

metals into living fluids." These metals were introduced by the restricting Vipers of reason; now they are melted down into the basic fluids of imaginative life. In the fifth chamber the metals are cast into the expanse of human existence by "Unnam'd forms," who are like the smiths of Yeats's Byzantium. Hell's Printing house ends in a sixth chamber where men take on the forms of books, and the finished creation is at last evident.

These men appear again, in an interlude directly after the Printing house fantasy, as "the Giants who formed this world in its sensual existence, and now seem to live in it in chains." They are our buried energies, our waking appetites, our more than natural resources. Blake now terms them a class of men called the Prolific, and their cunning contrary the class called the Devouring:

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.

In this beautiful passage Blake's concept of contraries undergoes a change into a more balanced theory of human existence than was first set forth by "The Voice of the Devil." If ever Blake speaks straight, forgoing all irony, in the *Marriage*, it is here. Reason is still only the outward bound or circumference of Energy, and still fancies that its reductive idea of existence is the whole, rather than a part, of the Human. But the productive Prolific would cease to be itself, would stifle by its own exuberance of invention, if the Devourer ceased to be a primal sea of forms into which the excess of Prolific delights could be received. We are hearing not the Devil's story, and certainly not an Angel's, but the law of human process itself. The Devourer is an outer limit of the Prolific, even as Freud's ego is of his id, but unlike the ego, the Devourer can never manifest itself independently, for Blake will never recognize the validity of a physical world different from the self. Yet the *appearance* of an independent Devourer mocks Blake's Prolific by assuming the shadowy form Blake will later call the Spectre. The process of assumption is remarkably like the constitution of Freud's super-ego, as set forth by Philip Rieff:

The ego is but an outer portion of the id—crystallizing independently as soon as the infant becomes aware of a physical world different from the self. Then, onto this acceptance of reality lodged in the perceptual system, are superimposed the exhortations of society: first embodied in the figures of the parents and later constituted as a part of the personality, the superego.

As repression is the function of the Devourer, so is it of the Freudian ego. But the Prolific, unlike the id, is not chaotic; it can become chaotic if it lacks all bounds, but this chaos will be an overflow, a superabundance of creativity. By re-stating the contraries as classes of men, Blake has transformed his psychic terms into social ones, and his equivalent of Freud's "civil war" that takes place within the mind now becomes a conflict within culture:

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.

Orthodox religion seeks to transcend the strife of existential contraries by absorbing the Prolific into the Devourer, the energies of men into the organizing categories of the Church. The religious believe that God alone is the Prolific; but Blake is a pragmatic humanist on this issue: "God only Acts and Is, in existing beings or Men." And Blake's Christ, ironically like "Satan or Tempter," is identified in the *Marriage* as another of "the Antediluvians who are our Energies," the Titans repressed by the Sky-gods of reductive reason.

Blake's demonic impiety in making this identification provokes an Angel into commencing the next and longest of the Memorable Fancies, a Swiftian exercise in direct satire. The Angel warns Blake of the dungeon in hell awaiting him. Blake asks to see it:

So he took me thro' a stable & thro' a church, & down into the church vault, at the end of which was a mill: thro' the mill we went, and came to a cave: down the winding cavern we groped our tedious way, till a void boundless as a nether sky appear'd beneath us, & we held by the roots of trees and hung over this immensity; but I said: "if you please, we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also: if you will not, I will:" but he answer'd: "do not presume, O young man, but as we here remain, behold they lot which will soon appear when the darkness passes away."

So I remain'd with him, sitting in the twisted root of an oak; he was suspended in a fungus, which hung with the head downward into the deep.

The stable may be either the home of the tamed "horses of instruction" of the Proverb (Foster Damon's suggestion) or simply the stable of Christ's birth, ironically leading into the grander structure of the Church. The vault is emblematic of Christ's burial. In the resurrection of the body Christ passes out of the vault, but the Angel and Blake go to the vault's other end which aptly leads into a

mill, mechanical symbol of reductive reason. Once through the mill, and we are in the winding cavern of the fallen mind, in which any groping yields a way that is both downward and tedious, until we hang with Blake and the Angel over the abyss of nature, the unimaginative chaos of reductive intellect. The roots of trees hold us on to the minimal vegetative forms that precariously abide in this mental void. Blake at least has an oak's twisted root for support; his vision paradoxically has a stubborn attachment to natural fact, but the ascetic Angel is properly suspended in a fungus, since those who deny nature for the soul live as parasites *on* the body, not as natural forms within the body. What Blake and the Angel see is the Angelic vision of hell as a torture chamber, complete with a sun giving heat without light, tormenting spiders, and the great Leviathan of Job coming out of the burning East of unrestrained passion, "tinging the black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward us with all the fury of a Spiritual Existence." But the Angel, though a Spiritual Existence himself, climbs back from his fungus into the mill; retreating from this king over all the children of pride into the windings of theology. Left alone, Blake finds that the horrible vision is no more:

I found myself sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight, hearing a harper, who sung to the harp; & his theme was: "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind."

The metaphysics of Angels creates Leviathans, but Blake's vision, to which the Angel must now submit, makes monkeys out of theologians:

"Here," said I, "is your lot, in this space—if space it may be call'd." Soon we saw the stable and the church, & I took him to the altar and open'd the Bible, and lo! it was a deep pit, into which I descended, driving the Angel before me; soon we saw seven houses of brick; one we enter'd; in it were a number of monkeys, baboons, & all of that species, chain'd by the middle, grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains: however, I saw that they sometimes grew numerous, and then the weak were caught by the strong, and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with, & then devour'd, by plucking off first one limb and then another, till the body was left a helpless trunk; this, after grinning & kissing it with seeming fondness, they devour'd too; and here & there I saw one savourily picking the flesh off of his own tail; as the stench terribly annoy'd us both, we went into the mill, and I in my hand brought the skeleton of a body, which in the mill was Aristotle's Analytics.

The "seven houses of brick," as Swinburne surmised, are the seven churches in Asia to whom St. John the Divine addressed his revelation. To reach these temples, Blake takes in his hands Swedenborg's weighty volumes, that Devil and Angel may sink together into the holy void. The gruesome lewdness of Blake's vision of a theological monkey-house has not lost its shock value; it still offends orthodoxy. Swift himself could not have done better here, in the repulsive projection of an incestuous warfare of rival doctrines, ground together in the reductive mill of scholastic priestcraft.

The smack at Swedenborg is sharpened in Blake's next interlude, where we are given an invaluable guide to Blake's notions of cultural precedence:

Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespear an infinite number.

But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine.

This little passage not only dismisses Swedenborg and all systematic reasoners in spiritual matters with him, but quietly implies a truth about Blake that many of his more esoteric scholars might have pondered; Dante and Shakespeare are valued infinitely above the theosophists Paracelsus and Boehme (Behmen), for the great poets are a sunshine in which any mystical writer is only a candle.

The last full section of the *Marriage* is the wisest of its Memorable Fancies, illustrating the Proverb Angels generally will not learn: "Opposition is true Friendship." Blake sees a Devil in a flame of fire rising before an Angel sitting on a cloud. The fire-cloud opposition is premonitory of the symbolic figures into which the Devil and Angel will develop, the fiery Orc of desire and the cloudy Urizen of restraint. Blake's Devil defines the emergent religion of the *Marriage*:

The worship of God is: Honouring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best: those who envy or calumniate great men hate God; for there is no other God.

Greatness here means artistic greatness. As God is a Man, for Blake, and finds his being in human acts of creation, so any man who achieves greatness in art is God to the extent of being himself constituted by his own creative acts. The outraged Angel invokes the Ten Commandments and the visibility of God in Jesus Christ, only to hear the Devil proclaim that Jesus was one of the antinomian party:

I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules.

Blake is resorting again to the rhetoric of shock, as he did at the start of the *Marriage*. As argument, this last Memorable Fancy is weak, but we are not intended to take it as more than a fiery polemic, uttered for its fire and not its light. The Angel at least is drawn to it, embraces the fire, is consumed, and rises again as the archetypal prophet or Devil, Elijah. With an ironic "Note," Blake closes this last section of his gnomic work. The Angel-turned-Devil is the poet's particular friend; together they read the Bible in its infernal or diabolical—that is, in its originally poetic—sense. If the world behaves well, Blake blandly insinuates, they shall have this reading, but in any case they shall receive from Blake "The Bible of Hell," or canon of his engraved poems.

As he works upon writing and engraving the *Marriage*, Blake evidently arrives at the central organizing principle of his life's work. The experiments in pastoral of *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence* suggest an emulation of the classical kind of canonical principle, as Blake follows Virgil, Spenser, and Milton in preparing for epic by explorations in man's golden age. But now, in the *Marriage*, Blake declares himself a Biblical poet, in the tradition of the later Milton who repudiated the classical Muses and sought Zion's springs instead. The English Bible, as Blake read it, began with a Creation that was also a Fall, proceeded to the cycle of history, with alternate movements of vision and collapse, and achieved the pastoral art of the Song of Solomon, the tragedy of Job, and the triumphant prophecy of greater poets like Isaiah and Ezekiel. The entrance of this poetry into history in the Gospels was culminated in the Apocalypse, and set a pattern for the Christian poem, a pattern that Milton, in Blake's view, had almost succeeded in emulating.

But the proper poetic use of this pattern, for Blake, depended upon an achieved freedom from the interpretative tradition of priestcraft. The Protestant passion for the Bible as an individual possession, to be read finally by the inner light of each believer's spirit, is Blake's most direct heritage from the radical element in English religious tradition. Blake's Bible of Hell, the sequence of his engraved poems, is the first of the great Romantic displacements of the Biblical revelation into the poetic world of an individual creator, the first of the heterocosms.

Blake chooses not to end the *Marriage* with this promise of his own oncoming world, but with an emblem of the negation of vision. The nightmare of Nebuchadnezzar, fallen from great Babylon down to a dwelling with the beasts of the field, is the nightmare of history unrelieved by the prophet's transforming vision. The *Marriage's* last plate is dominated by a picture of the metamorphized king with the prophecy fulfilled upon him:

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body

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Blake
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of
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was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

(Dan. 4:33)

Blake's picture suggests this, and also the great beast of Yeat's *The Second Coming*, with lion body and the head of a man, portending the coming of "mere anarchy" upon the world. Beneath the horror of Nebuchadnezzar, Blake inscribed, as covering Proverb, the dying tyrant Tiri'el's gasp of wisdom: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression." With this outcry against the imposition of any code of uniformity upon contrary individualities, Blake brings *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* to its proper conclusion. We are left with the memory of the Voice of the Devil, crying aloud in the desert places of a repressive society, and reminding society that it tempts the fate of Nebuchadnezzar, a fall into dazed bestiality, if it will not heed the warnings of vision.

A Song of Liberty

Engraved in 1792, this vigorous prose poem was associated by Blake with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, to the extent that he sometimes bound it as a coda or pendant to the greater work. In language and conception, *A Song of Liberty* suggests a mature (and politically minded) Rimbaud, exchanging his season in Hell for a summer of unbounded exuberance and imaginative passion. Indeed Blake's *Song* is written in an effective kind of imaginative shorthand, as though the rising enjoyment of poetic fulfillment does not allow time for expansion into even a short romance or prophecy. What Blake gives us is a kind of scenario for an ode of revolutionary triumph. I suspect that *A Song of Liberty* was intended originally as a separate emblem book, in twenty or more plates, and that the twenty numbered sentences of the work were each meant to serve as caption for an individual plate. Certainly each sentence concentrates on a separate image, or an adumbration of an image, until the total image is gathered together in the *Song's* Chorus: -

Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn no longer, in deadly black,
with hoarse note curse the sons of joy! Nor his accepted brethren —
whom, tyrant, he calls free—lay the bound or build the roof! Nor
pale religious lechery call that Virginity that wishes but acts not!
For everything that lives is Holy!

The Raven of dawn is the sky-god Urizen, associated with the Raven because that is the emblematic bird of Odin, the sky-god of Northern mythology. Urizen's accepted brethren are the vested powers of Europe, who lay the boundary for

man's liberty and build the roof of the orthodox heaven above man's head. The whiteness of religious chastity is the paleness of sexual repression, murderously nursing unacted desires. But all true desire is sacred, for everything that *lives* is holy. A *Song of Liberty* reaches this conclusion by a rhapsodic mythic narrative that outlines the main characters and events of more finished prophetic poems by Blake. In attaching it to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake provides us with an introduction to poems like *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America*, *Europe*, and *The Book of Urizen*.

A Song of Liberty begins with the groaning in childbirth of an Eternal Female, later to be named Enitharmon, the Queen of Heaven. She is giving birth to a "new born fire," Orc, a muttering shiver among the tyrannies of Europe, for the temporal manifestation of this fire is the French Revolution. But the "new born terror" is not powerful enough to overcome Urizen, "the starry king":

8. On those infinite mountains of light, now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea, the new-born fire stood before the starry king!

Blake is introducing his version of the myth of lost Atlantis, later to be developed in *America*. The confrontation between Orc and Urizen takes place in the unfallen world, from which we are separated by the Atlantic, chaotic sea and sinister emblem of our minimal notions of space and time. Orc seems to lose the battle, and like Lucifer is hurled down flaming into the abyss. But the falling fire makes an ironic appearance on earth as the Revolution, the active springing from energy that seems diabolical to orthodox society.

Urizen and his host fall also, so that Blake's version of Milton's Fall of the Angels brings down both Jehovah-Urizen and Lucifer-Orc. With fine irony, Blake parallels Urizen's gathering together of his forces with Satan's rallying of his host in *Paradise Lost*. In a more daring analogue, worthy of the Bible of Hell, the figure of Moses is invoked as the next stage in Urizen's career:

18. With thunder and fire, leading his starry hosts thro' the waste wilderness, he promulgates his ten commands, glancing his beamy eyelids over the deep in dark dismay,

19. Where the son of fire in his eastern cloud, while the morning plumes her golden breast,

20. Spurning the clouds written with curses, stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying:

EMPIRE IS NO MORE! AND NOW THE LION & WOLF SHALL CEASE.

The Ten Commandments are set here in the most negative of contexts, and their close association with Empire marks the passage as one of the most antinomian in Blake. Yet even at his most turbulent and rebellious, Blake does

not altogether forget the necessity of contraries. The dens of night, from which Orc looses the horses, releasing them from Instruction to Wrath, are referred to earlier in *A Song of Liberty* as "Urthona's dens," where Urizen and his starry host lie all night beneath the ruins. Urthona is the unfallen or eternal name of the being who will evolve into the hero of Blake's myth, Los, the imaginative shaper who must be the agent of a human apocalypse. To be in Urthona's dens is to have fallen into the lowest regions of creativity, and yet to be still within a possibility of further creation. *A Song of Liberty* therefore does not simply describe a conflict between tyrannizing restraint and revolutionary desire, with all our sympathies given to desire, but hints at the conflict as being a clash of creative forces, blindly striving against a background that Blake has yet to clarify.