

rible world offering no compensations for such denial, Thel can bear reality no longer and with a shriek flees back "unhinder'd" into her paradise. It will turn in time into a dungeon of Ulro for her, by the law of Blake's dialectic, for "where man is not, nature is barren" and Thel has refused to become man.

The pleasures of reading *The Book of Thel*, once the poem is understood, are very nearly unique among the pleasures of literature. Though the poem ends in voluntary negation, its tone until the vehement last section is a technical triumph over the problem of depicting a Beulah world in which all contraries are equally true. Thel's world is precariously beautiful; one false phrase and its looking-glass reality would be shattered, yet Blake's diction remains firm even as he sets forth a vision of fragility. Had Thel been able to maintain herself in Experience, she might have recovered Innocence within it. The poem's last plate shows a serpent guided by three children who ride upon him, as a final emblem of sexual Generation tamed by the Innocent vision. The mood of the poem culminates in regret, which the poem's earlier tone prophesied.

VISIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ALBION

The heroine of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Oothoon, is the redemption of the timid virgin Thel. Thel's final grief was only pathetic, and her failure of will a doom to vegetative self-absorption. Oothoon's fate has the dignity of the tragic. She attempts to carry Innocence over into Experience, but fails because her tormented lover cannot accept the gift.

The motto of *Visions* is "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows," and so the poem concerns not a failure in perception but an inadequacy in the knowledge and understanding of the heart. Oothoon sings hymns to the hope of free love which were not to be matched until the Shelley of *Epipsychidion* dared to venture those rocks on which high hearts are wrecked. If the *Visions* ends hopelessly, its heroine yet maintains her protest and passion, and her final cry hints at an awakening still to come:

Arise, and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!

Except for the names given its tortured characters—Oothoon,

Theotormon, and Bromion—the *Visions* has little to do with Ossian, or any other bard of the age of Sensibility. The atmosphere of the *Visions* depends upon the Revolution's ethics of release, and the poem's exuberant diction expresses a libertarian hope that sexual slavery will cease with all other forms of repression. Albion, in Blake, is the fallen archetypal Man, from whose fragmented form the existent world takes its being. Blake, commenting on his own painting of "The Ancient Britons," identified Albion with Atlas, and Atlas with the ruler of the lost continent Atlantis: "The giant Albion was Patriarch of the Atlantic; he is the Atlas of the Greeks, one of those the Greeks called Titans."

Heracles, in his eleventh labor, sailed into the ocean of the far west to obtain the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides (the "daughters of evening," identified also as daughters of Atlas, and therefore Blake's Daughters of Albion). At the opening of Blake's poem the Daughters of Albion weep, and their lamentation sighs toward America, where their sister, "the soft soul of America, Oothoon," wanders in unhappy isolation seeking a flower to comfort her loneliness. She plucks not a golden apple but a golden flower, a bright Marygold of Leutha's vale. At this point in Blake's work, Leutha is only a representative of sexual potentiality. Like the apples of the Hesperides, the Marygold represents an Innocence to be recovered through sensual fulfillment. Placing the flower between her breasts, the virgin Oothoon flies east across the Atlantic, which is the realm of her lover, Theotormon, hoping to find him and present him with her love. But Theotormon, an ocean Titan, is an agent of division. As the Atlantic he separates Oothoon from her sisters. Within himself he is a sick and divided soul, tormented by his conception of God (hence his name). Before the awakened Oothoon can reach this unworthy lover, she is evidently raped by a thunder Titan, Bromion (whose name is Greek for "roaring"). Bromion has not the moral courage of his own lust, and proceeds to classify his victim as a harlot. As befits a thunder deity he is a slave-driver, and ironically offers Oothoon to Theotormon as a more valuable property now that she carries a thunderer's child.

The remainder of the poem consists in a fierce dialectical interplay between the three demigods. Theotormon, consumed by jealousy, is too divided either to accept Oothoon's love or to reject her entirely. Bromion is desperately concerned to demonstrate that

his mad morality is a natural necessity, by insisting that Experience must be either uniform or chaotic. He is, as Frye observes, more a Deist or natural religionist than he is a Puritan, for he associates morality and nature as binding codes.¹⁶ But Oothoon, though she has entered into sexual reality through the wrong agent, has been liberated by it from the negations of natural morality. She denounces Urizen, the god of restraint worshiped by both her ravisher and her beloved, and asserts against the oppression of his reasonable uniformity the holy individuality of each moment of desire:

“The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin
 That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys
 In the secret shadows of her chamber: 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? why dost thou seek religion?
 Is it because acts are not lovely that thou seekest solitude
 Where the horrible darkness is impressed with reflections of
 desire?”

This remarkable passage is more than an anticipation of contemporary theories of psychic repression. Oothoon states the dark dialectic that makes man fall from a divine image to a human abstract. Sexual hindrance of oneself leads to imaginative crippling, and at last to the Ulro of solipsism, “the self enjoyings of self denial,” here equated both with masturbation and Urizenic, that is, conventionally orthodox religion. Supreme embodiment of energy as she now is, the exultant Oothoon is all but trapped between the negations of her profoundly stupid males. The frontispiece of *Visions* shows Oothoon and Bromion chained back to back in a cave, while the oceanic Theotormon weeps outside. The binding is what Theotormon sees, not what is, for Oothoon cries out that love is as free as the mountain wind. To find the path past negation in Blake, we need to turn back from *Visions* to the poet’s greatest polemical work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, etched about 1793 but written in 1790. The rhetoric of antinomian desire,

splendidly but vainly employed by Oothoon, is combined in the *Marriage* with Blake's definitive account of the contrary laws of human process.

THE CRYSTAL CABINET

The Crystal Cabinet (manuscript lyric, 1803) opens with a youth dancing merrily in the Wild of unorganized Innocence. The Maiden catches him, puts him into her Cabinet, and locks him up with a golden key; probably this is an account of initial sexual experience. The youth is passive; no resistance or even surprise is mentioned. He gives an ambiguous description of the Cabinet:

This Cabinet is form'd of Gold
And Pearl & Crystal shining bright,
And within it opens into a World
And a little lovely Moony Night.

The exterior is precious or semi-precious in substance; the pearls are those "of a lovesick eye," and the gold "of the akeing heart," to quote *The Mental Traveller*, a poem in the same notebook. The crystal, judging by the title, dominates the façade, so that the Cabinet appears "shining bright." Within, the Cabinet opens into the "little lovely Moony Night" of Blake's sexual state of Beulah. Everything in the outer Wild has its counterpart in this inner world. The movement of the inward vision is centripetal, from another England to another London to another pleasant Surrey Bower dominated by another Maiden, each *like* its prototype in the outward air:

Another Maiden like herself,
Translucent, lovely, shining clear,
Threefold each in the other clos'd—
O, what a pleasant trembling fear!

O, what a smile! a threefold Smile
Fill'd me, that like a flame I burn'd;
I bent to Kiss the lovely Maid,
And found a Threefold Kiss return'd.

The youth now sees a threefold boxed image or triple mirror outline, which inspires sexual fear and desire. The threefold smile