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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE SELF:
STUDIES IN THE SHORTER POEMS AND DESIGNS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH MAY 1995

By
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Beth Fowkes Tobin
Acknowledgments

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dissenting churches and to view the Blake collections in the British museum, the Tate and the Fitzwilliam. In addition, I must thank Joe Kau for introducing me to Professor Stempel and recommending that I study with him.

I am of course in debt to my parents for their ongoing encouragement and support, and I really do not have the words to express my gratitude to my brother Roger, his wife Bonnie, and their sons, Jason and Austin. All I can say is that we have had some wonderful times together. Thank you for everything.

I can see that I have left Eliot Deutsch, his wife Marcia Morse Deutsch, and David Hall to the end, but fortunately order in this context is not a measure of importance or they would be very near the beginning. Thank you all for your encouragement, for your helpful comments, and for your friendship.
Abstract

The thesis of this dissertation is that William Blake was an antinomian working in an obscure tradition of dissent that stretches back through his own century into the doctrines of the nonconformist churches of seventeenth-century England. His anti-Enlightenment stance on the hegemony of Reason undermines the univocity of language and the uniformity of symbol, and his denial of the authority of religious and civil law in favor of an "everlasting gospel" of Love challenges the conventional assumptions governing the role of the woman in society and in the patriarchal family. Although much of Blake's eccentric vocabulary, both verbal and visual, can be traced back to these earlier religious sects, there is little that he received from his sources that he did not reinterpret or radically transform for his own aesthetic and philosophical purposes. Indeed, Blake frequently used the original, orthodox meaning of a doctrine as an ironic foil for his own idiosyncratic, frequently heretical, sometimes richly paradoxical reading of biblical metaphor, and his deployment of the symbols and images of an insistently patriarchal culture and mythology in new aesthetic contexts reshaped Judeo-Christian mythology into a revolutionary new cosmology that is both intellectually coherent and psychologically compelling.
Also, like the narratives in the Bible, Blake’s poems repeatedly tell the story of humanity’s fall into division and its final reintegration into a single unified consciousness.

The first chapter begins with the historical recontextualization of the woman within the pre-Commonwealth world of seventeenth-century England that witnessed the rise and quick suppression of the dissenting churches as one aspect of a broad and popular cultural revolution. The second chapter picks up the largely underground antinomian tradition as it enters the eighteenth-century and describes how it struggled against the growing public acceptance of scientific rationalism and the quest for certainty, and attempts to locate Blake within this ideologically subversive movement. The final three chapters recontextualize the woman in selected short poems and designs of Blake and explore in these various narratives the poet’s attitude towards the contemporary woman’s role in society, and her place in his larger prophetic cosmology.
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A    America a Prophecy
Ah   The Book of Ahania
ARO  All Religions Are One
CR   Crabb Robinson in Arthur Symons William Blake (New York, 1907)
DC   Descriptive Catalogue
EG   The Everlasting Gospel
Eur  Europe a Prophecy
FZ   The Four Zoas
GoP  The Gates of Paradise
     (For Children and For the Sexes)
Gh   The Ghost of Abel
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>An Island in the Moon</td>
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<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion</td>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Illustrations for the Book of Job</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>The Book of Los</td>
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<td>Lac</td>
<td>The Lacoön</td>
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<td>Lav</td>
<td>Annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms on Man</td>
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<td>LBD</td>
<td>A Large Book of Designs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let</td>
<td>Letters</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Milton a Poem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misc</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Prose</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHH</td>
<td>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</td>
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<td>NNR</td>
<td>There is No Natural Religion (a and b texts)</td>
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<td>PM</td>
<td>The Pickering Manuscript</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Poetical Sketches</td>
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<td>Rev</td>
<td>Annotations to The Works of Joshua Reynolds</td>
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<td>Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>The Book of Thel</td>
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<td>U</td>
<td>The [First] Book of Urizen</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDA</td>
<td>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLJ</td>
<td>A Vision of the Last Judgment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wat</td>
<td>Annotations to Watson's An Apology for the Bible</td>
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Introduction

Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more.

(NNR b II; E 2)

Blake’s anti-Enlightenment stance that what we know now will be different when we know more provides some insight into why doctoral dissertations (and most other activities as well) are brought to an abrupt end but are never truly finished, and it is one explanation for the difference between the way in which this project got started and the shape it now takes. In the first two chapters of this study of Blake and his early work, I have tried to recontextualize the woman and the late eighteenth-century poet and thinker within specific anti-establishment traditions that emerged in the mid seventeenth-century as part of a brief, but passionate struggle to overturn the old social and political hierarchies, as well as the enduring philosophical and theological hegemonies of class and gender. This has necessitated some historical reconstruction of the Interregnum years in England, and particularly a review of the antinomian rhetoric and the radical doctrines of the independent churches that shook the conservative
establishment into taking draconian measures to stamp out what were seen as dangerous political and religious subversives.

For the poorer classes, the rise of the New Model Army was as much a religious movement against the state church and its bishops as it was a revolt against the political and economic tyranny of the king and his nobility. The majority of the rank and file, as well as many of the officers, regarded the Civil War as a class struggle in which the liberty and equality of the common people were at stake, but once the Grandees gained control of the parliamentary forces and executed the King, they purged the House of Commons and moved quickly to consolidate their power by crushing the Levellers in both the dissenting regiments and the population at large. By 1688 the victors were clearly the gentry and the merchants, the proponents of constitutional conservatism and religious orthodoxy, of profit and self-interest. And the losers were the popular advocates of democratic reform and civil and religious liberty. In these kinds of contests, the control of the press generally goes to the winners, and therefore when the dissenters were no longer of any use to the emerging new order, they were first betrayed by their leaders and then discredited by the party journalists as "heretics" and "schismatics," the "nicknames for any that oppose tyrants and oppressors."\(^1\) Towards the end of the century, it appeared that the revolutionary
spirit of the lunatic "rabble" had been broken and that the moderating authority of the Church and the State, of Priest and King, had been restored, but the fires of religious and political discontent continued to smolder among the independent tradesmen, yeomen, artisans, shopkeepers, itinerant laborers and in the forgotten ranks of the numberless poor. The antinomian ideas that kept these subterranean fires burning were preserved and disseminated, mostly verbally, in secret societies and gathered churches, and although we have little in the way of records from which to trace the spread of these subversive doctrines, there can be little doubt that they later played a role in the American Revolution and in the middle-class radicalism that flared up among French Revolutionary sympathizers in Blake’s London in the 1790s.  

The rapid proliferation of nonconformist churches in the middle decades of the seventeenth-century, and the wide circulation of their frequently aggressive literature was checked by the Blasphemy Act of 1650, and gradually driven underground by the returning conservatism that reshaped the pre-war hierarchies of power and privilege for the gentry, restored the rule of the monarchy, and then wrote it all into law in the political settlement of 1688. For a great many, however, antinomianism was synonymous with political and religious freedom, and it was both widespread and persistent, as was the practice of reading the Bible in its
spiritual sense as an allegory in which Christ is within man and English history is the struggle of Israel to recover the Promised Land.¹³

This use of Biblical myth to interpret historical events or to justify personal conduct took a variety of different forms. Early heretics like John Everard claimed that the wonders of Christ's kingdom are here in man, "but our eyes are blinded and we cannot see them." Prophets, like the notorious Lady Eleanor Douglas, used Biblical narrative to predict and decipher the spiritual significance of the unfolding political scene. Ranters like Coppe, Clarkson, Salmon, Bauthumley, Coppin, and Pordage argued that "Sin and transgression is finished" in the believer whose conscience is Jesus, and they used the eroticism of the Song of Songs to promote sexual license as a form of spiritual expression. Levellers like Winstanley and Bolton read the myth of the Fall as the Norman Conquest of "Israel" that began class division and property ownership. They insisted that "the worldling is a wrongful usurper of the riches, honour and preferments of this life; . . . [and that] the saint whilst he continues in this world, is rightful owner and possessor of the earth."⁴

Many of these religious leaders were millenarian enthusiasts. Their rhetoric, calling for the end to all moral and legal restraints in the last days, is very close to antinomianism, and thus it shares both tone and subject
with the prophetic voice of Blake. Like the Devil of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell who dined with Isaiah and Ezekiel in a "world turned upside down," Abiezer Coppe liked to say "My spirit dwells with God, sups with him, in him, feeds on him, with him, in him." One of the basic doctrines of the Ranters was that "God is all in one, and so is in everyone," or perhaps closer to Blake's language, "he is me and I am him," a belief that collapses the hegemonic dualism of God and man, soul and body, good and evil, and repudiates the orthodox notion that immortality in heaven is the posthumous reward for the virtuous. Winstanley insisted that God is discoverable in man through a clear-sighted perception of the world as a glorious spiritual garden, and that to attribute value to physical objects external to man is to corrupt the spirit.

Richard Coppin's claim in Divine Teachings that "the same God which dwells in one dwells in another, even in all; and in the same fullness as he is in one, he is in everyone" anticipates Blake's notion that "All deities reside in the human breast" (MHH 11; E 38), and that "all are alike in the Poetic Genius" (ARO 2; E 1). His fellow Ranters, Abiezer Coppe, makes a similar point in Some Sweet Sips of Spiritual Wine using suggestive metaphors that recall Blake's association of sexual love with the spiritual transcendence of the body. He writes that "external kisses have been made the fiery chariot to mount me into the bosom of . . . the
King of Glory." Echoing Jesus' advice to his disciples, Coppe declares that we all have the power to enter the kingdom of heaven in the present moment if we can first regain the sexual innocence of children and forget society's decree that love is sin. Also, Laurence Clarkson's argument that all true believers must act on their desires because "Without act, no life; without life, no perfection," is reminiscent of Blake's insistence on the need to act on desire in the Proverbs of Hell: "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence." "The most sublime act is to set another before you." and "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (MHH 7 5; E 35; 7 17; E 36; 10 67 E 38). But the similarities between the doctrines of the nonconformist churches and the ideas of Blake go much deeper than thematic parallels and metaphorical echoes. By the middle of the seventeenth-century many of the proselytizers of the new denominations had discovered a new voice in the prophetic vocabulary and the occult symbolism of the European mystics, particularly Jacob Boehme whose works had recently become available in translation. Among the obscure concepts and images which they appropriated and historically recontextualized was the arcana arcanorum that lies behind the mystery of alchemy, astrology and magic, and this is the knowledge that antitheses are the poles that enclose all relevant categories in a single identity, or in Boehme's xvii
terms, all things are contained between yes and no.' This is the many in the one suggested in the title of Laurence Clarkson's prophetic A Single Eye; it is the world seen from Eternity where contraries, such as Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, Innocence and Experience, Heaven and Hell, the Prolific and the Devouring, achieve unity in a single consciousness. These contraries include the woman and the man, and for Blake their constant and creative interaction is "necessary to Human existence." (MHH 3; E 34) until the Error of Creation, of Selfhood, or of gender, can be annihilated and the immortal eyes opened into "the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination" (J I 5:19-20; E 147).

The Ranters also shared Winstanley's belief that the coming of Christ had already taken place since it was "his coming into men by his spirit," a doctrine of the indwelling divinity that repeals "all of the commandments of God, both in the Old and New Testaments" as "the fruits of the curse." Many sects believed that through the inner light they had "attained to that perfection in Christ already which they lost in Adam," the logical extension of which for Adamites, Quakers, Ranters and others, was gender equality in a sinless world. This position gained wide support among the independent churches, if only briefly, and it was part of a much larger social movement that carried the
challenge to all forms of authority, both religious and secular, into the eighteenth-century. In this radical tradition, the doctrine that man's oneness in Christ makes all of his acts holy because they are the infallible acts of Christ, also makes church and secular courts, as well as the confining institutions of marriage and family, pointless. Blake too was a tireless enemy of the laws of Church and State, and he similarly rejected their domestic counterpart in the legal contract of the monogamous marriage and the patriarchal family.

Blake shared with these revolutionary sects the belief that affirmative love is holy and pure, and that a man and a woman can transcend their gender difference and enter Eternity through the compassion and the mutual forgiveness that comes with shared sexual intimacy. However, like the more perspicacious of his seventeenth-century predecessors, Blake recognized that gender inequality in a patriarchal culture is insistently sexual and that it is lived at every level of the woman's experience of her world. As daughter, bride, lover, mother, widow, spinster, as virgin and whore, the social construction of the eighteenth-century female was based upon her sexuality, and Blake traces the metaphors that have historically defined and valued her to the myth of the Fall in Genesis, and to God's sentence on the woman that she will conceive in suffering and in submission. Because of the importance of the woman's reproductive function in a
landed society, many of Blake's narratives describe the female child's physical and psychological initiation into womanhood as the dawning of her sexual awareness and the realization of its wide personal and social implications. For Blake, this profound and potentially liberating event in the woman's life is made frightening and dangerous by a rule-governed and hypocritical culture that is run in the interest of male property and power. Following in the antinomian tradition of the seventeenth-century dissenting churches, Blake's visual and verbal allegories provide a dramatic challenge to the social construction of the female in a great many of her traditional roles. In his early poetic narratives, he provides natural and domestic settings for naive and experienced girls, frightened and comforted mothers, tormented and joyful lovers, jaded and contented nurses, as well as frustrated spinsters and cunning femmes fatales. And, like the mechanic preachers of revolutionary England who regarded the Biblical stories as timeless allegories, Blake represents the struggles of the women of his time against various forms of social oppression as the trials of the women of Israel against the strictures of the moral law.

As Hill, Morton, and Thompson have demonstrated, some of the little churches of the Interregnum disappeared in the eighteenth-century, others evolved or were absorbed into more moderate denominations--the early Quakers, the
alternate Methodists, the Anabaptists, the Muggletonians—but others congregated in secret in private homes, or in the back rooms of public houses. Here, their unique doctrines were combined with a fear of established authority, and a distaste for the hegemony of Church and State, Priest and King. Also, in many of these churches, the woman was given an equal status with the man in terms of debating the doctrine, voting, and in the administration of church government. In some congregations, they were even allowed to exercise the traditional male prerogative of preaching the service.12

As we have seen, a goodly number of these seventeenth-century sects held beliefs in common, such as the primacy of the indwelling Spirit, the spiritual sense of the Word, and the relevance of the Scriptures to the growth of the individual's spiritual life. Many of these tenets are not surprising to modern readers since they have a continuing existence in the doctrines of long established and respectable churches. However, in a century that strove for a science of politics and prophecy, many important thinkers like Bacon, Dee, Kepler, Tycho, Newton, and Boyle regarded Hermetic alchemy, astrology, magic, and witchcraft, alongside medicine and natural science, as legitimate and profitable areas of inquiry. Towards the end of the century, the rise of scientific rationalism and the strive for certainty had marginalized many of these esoteric
disciplines, and with the widespread acceptance of natural theology the "enlightened" were quick to hoot them down as the preserves of superstition and primitive folklore.  

Ironically, ridicule and persecution sometimes strengthen and promote what they seek to discredit, and the result of the rationalists' attempts to invalidate the study and the practice of the arcane "sciences" was that the coteries of devoted practitioners simply went underground.  

The same happened with the radical sects; the multiplicity of unique, sometimes bizarre allegorical readings of Biblical narratives that infused the independent churches with free and spirited debates were suppressed by the official church as wide eyed heresies and replaced by a single coherent Biblical history and interpretation that allowed for little individual variation. Nevertheless, a number of the radical doctrines that gained broad currency among the congregations of these mid-century churches, and that now seem incredulous or silly to modern readers, were preserved by underground societies as alternate traditions to the ruling culture. Indeed, the heretical Biblical narratives, the enthusiastic language and symbolism of these splinter churches, did not simply vanish with the return of censorship to the printing press and episcopal hierarchy to the state church. Rather, these vehicles of dissent survived as a continuous underground stream and entered the final decades of the eighteenth-century as a subtext to
religious orthodoxy. Like the poorer classes in revolutionary England, the independent tradesmen and artisans who repeatedly swarmed the streets of Blake's London regarded the growing social unrest as a political and economic struggle to throw off the chains of class tyranny, but also as a popular revolt against the threat of renewed religious persecution. The rallying cries of the apprentices who joined the London mob during the Gordon riots of 1780 suggest how closely these two concerns were linked: "No Popery" and "Wilkes and Liberty and no King."¹⁴

Nearly forty years have passed since A. L. Morton's The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake traced the rhetoric and symbols of Blake back to the nonconforming churches of the seventeenth-century, and as recently 1993 E. P. Thompson's Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law has remade the case for discovering the sources of Blake's cosmology where they would be most accessible and acceptable to him, and that is in the antinomian tradition of dissent that resurfaced in London in the 1780s and 90s. I know of no historical study of the protestant churches of the English Revolution that does not mention that many of the extremist doctrines they advanced with such enthusiasm and confidence were also endorsed by Milton, and that the dissenting leaders' unique readings of Biblical narrative anticipate Blake's own. Blake shared the metaphorical constructs and the distinctive

xxiii
language of these nonconforming churches: the notion of the Last Judgement as man's ongoing rejection of error and reception of truth, the doctrine of the Everlasting Gospel as the unfolding prophecy that will bring about the universal salvation of man.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the details of Blake's unconventional vocabulary and symbolism, his radical interpretation of Biblical myth, his apocalyptic reading of English history as the emancipation of Israel from Babylon and the recovery of the Promised Land, and his notion of the divinity within man are much closer to, and more consistent with the doctrines of the independent churches than they are with the mythologies of the Eastern religions, or with the neo-Platonist, gnostic, Behmenist, hermetic and Kabbalistic traditions.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the ongoing problems with locating Blake within a specific tradition is that five years after his death his admiring friend and posthumous biographer, Frederick Tatham, made extravagant claims for the range and diversity of his reading. Tatham reported that "he had read almost everything in whatsoever language, which language he always taught himself."\textsuperscript{17} Somewhat later, Tatham reinforced this image of Blake by saying that he had a reading knowledge of all of the classics in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian, as well as his own language, and that his personal library contained a large number of works by occult and mystical writers, like Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg.

xxiv
Blake also contributed to his reputation as an accomplished scholar through his confident annotations to the works of many demanding thinkers, such as Lavater, Swedenborg, Watson, Bacon, Reynolds, Berkeley, Thornton, and Wordsworth, and through his enthusiastic remarks in letters to friends and family, like his claim to his brother, James, in January 1803: "I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar & the Testament is my chief master" (Let E 727). In support of this testimonial, an early Blake biographer, John Thomas Smith, alleged that the poet had a command of the Bible in a number of different languages, and Blake's friend in his later years, Crabb Robinson, recalled Blake's wide knowledge of heretical Christian doctrine and assumed that it was gnosticism. Not the least of Blake's champions was Algernon Swinburne whose warm praise of the poet and admiration for his extensive knowledge of the Scriptures brought critical attention to his work and established his place within both the literary and the Biblical traditions.

Despite Blake's metaphorical use of Biblical material it is important to remember that he was not interested in the historical accuracy of the Bible and was, like his antinomian predecessors, openly hostile to educated priests and to the critical Biblical scholarship of the protestant academy. It is also unlikely that he wanted to read, or had the time to "read almost everything in whatsoever language." As E. P. Thompson has pointed out in Witness
Against the Beast, Blake read widely, deliberately, even painstakingly, and he chose his texts as his enthusiasm and his eclectic interests directed, but he did not follow an organized or academic program of study. When he read a book, he usually did so with an unusual passion and directness, not passively, but debating and challenging the ideas on the page at every turn, and lecturing the author when he believed that he was in error, or when he thought he was simply backing the party line. To locate him in an academic tradition that makes him a scholar of comparative religion, classical philosophy, or European mysticism, then, is to misunderstand the way in which he educated himself and to divert critical attention away from the most obvious and revealing sources of the ideas that shaped his art.

There can be little doubt that Blake’s work participates in the obscure antinomian tradition that experienced a shaky revival in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, but that was given considerable political impetus, if only briefly, by the outbreak of the French Revolution. In his study of Blake, Thompson has suggested that he may have received his knowledge of the doctrine and iconography of the seventeenth-century dissenting churches from a member of his immediate family who had been a practicing congregationalist in one of the surviving underground sects, and he proposes a link between Blake’s mother, Catherine, and the secretive community of
Muggletonians. Another possibility is that he acquired his understanding of the antinomian tradition from an unrecorded association with one of a number of millenarian groups that met regularly in London, or he may simply have gleaned it from a perusal of the sectarian literature available to him in the book stores and in private libraries of close friends and associates. Whatever the case, antinomianism was not uncommon among independent artisans, laborers and "masterless men," as well as among groups of intellectual subversives and reformers in London in the 1790s, and Blake’s particular brand of it would no doubt have been stimulated by the enormous number of Biblical commentaries and radical religious tracts and pamphlets that fueled the late eighteenth-century evangelical revival. A good deal of this literature would have come out of the shop of Blake’s friend and publisher, Joseph Johnson, who was at the center of a circle of dissenting writers and artists that probably included in their number, Paine, Priestly, Fuseli, Alexander Geddes, the reviewer of books on the Bible, and Mary Wollstonecraft, whose translation of Salzmann’s *Elements of Morality* and her *Original Stories* Blake illustrated in 1790-91. Many of the older unorthodox doctrines may have also been kept alive in the extemporaneous sermons of the scores of itinerant preachers that drew crowds in the streets of London, and that Blake would have passed on his way to Johnson’s bookshop or to one of the printer’s dinner parties.

xxvii
The renewed religious enthusiasm that reached its peak in the last decades of the eighteenth-century flooded the London bookstalls with learned and popular commentary on Biblical prophecy, with chiliasm pamphlets and radical tracts that disseminated new interpretations of the doctrine or simply reprinted earlier discussions on a wide range of religious subjects. Blake would have had access to inexpensive glosses on the Bible and to analyses by popular writers like Robert Lowth, Thomas Scott, Matthew Henry, and John Wesley, as well as to published sermons and reflections on Biblical prophecy in the journals and periodicals distributed by, among others, the Unitarians, the Evangelicals, and the dissenting churches.

In addition to these written materials, there were numerous engravings, paintings and illustrations of Biblical subjects, both canonical and non-canonical, on display in London's galleries and printshops, and these visual representations of the inherently dramatic episodes in Biblical history were interpretations of the received doctrine by artists, many of whom Blake would have known. Some of these pictures used allegorical and symbolic elements to suggest typological connections in the Bible or to encourage the viewer to discover a wider significance or a narrative in the artist's rendering of his subject. In his annotations and pictorial commentaries, Blake expresses strong opinions on Classical, Renaissance, and Baroque
artists, on aesthetic theory and technique, and his response to the Venetian and the Flemish schools, to Reynolds and the Royal Academy, leaves little doubt that he had equally strong estimates of the work of his contemporaries.22

Blake was a visual artist as well as a poet, and his authoritative statements in the Descriptive Catalogue, in A Vision of the Last Judgement, and in his Annotations to The Works of Joshua Reynolds, reveal how committed he was to his calling and to preserving the integrity of what he believed was the legacy of Western religious art. For Blake, art and religion were the same thing, and he makes precisely this point on his engraving of The Lacoon when he claims: "A poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man / Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian", and "The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" (Lac E 274). As an artist, Blake saw himself in the tradition of the Raphaels and the Michelangelos, as a poet, in the tradition of the Old and New Testament prophets, and although he borrowed themes, motifs and images from the Bible, the great Masters, and anywhere he could find them, he regarded no artist or scholar of his own period, nor any of these celebrated geniuses and inspired oracles of the past, as his superior.

The first two chapters in this study of the social construction of the woman in Blake's shorter work also deal with the move from Renaissance humanism to Cartesian
rationalism and the quest for decontextualized theories of certainty as a philosophical reaction to widespread political and social unrest. Early in his thirties, Blake engraved and printed a set of tractates entitled *All Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion* that were his satiric response to the dualistic epistemology of abstract philosophy and pure science. Over the next forty years, he neither contradicted nor modified his position on the propositions he laid down on these plates. Like Swift, Blake saw value in traditional knowledge and in the investigation of practical, human concerns, and he had no interest in a world view that devalued ethnography, history, and art and rejected the particular and the concrete in favor of the universal and the abstract. Descartes' program for philosophy and Newton's for natural science sought to develop an impartial and comprehensive system of knowledge that would be grounded in quantitative certainty and experimental proof. This search for principles that are timeless and objective first required the bracketing out of the vagaries and uncertainties of human experience, and so it turned from a concern for time and circumstance to the dualistic Platonic model that bifurcated the world by separating ideas from facts, reason from imagination, nature from society, reality from appearance, permanence from changing illusion, independence from interdependence, God from world, the cognitive from the affective, and so on, all
the way to the male from the female. This epistemic
taxonomy is hierarchical and hegemonous, and historically
the metaphorical relationship between the autonomous and
self-sufficient "superior" order and the dependent and
derivative "inferior" order has been used to validate
inequality and domination, and to argue that a class
structure is both natural and divinely ordained. Blake
attacked this dualism in all of its social and political
manifestations, including gender. And his unwavering
opposition to what had become for many a "self-evident
truth" is a theme and even a preoccupation that he returned
to frequently in his writing, in fact, so frequently that it
is, ironically, the reason why some readers find him
dogmatic. Blake's habit of carefully annotating what he
considered to be the more important books on the various
subjects that interested him is an indication of the degree
to which he actively participated in the ongoing political,
philosophical, and theological discourses of his time, and
his comments, which often appear to be intolerant of
contrary opinion, are, when they are read closely, simply an
indication of his impatience with the advocacy and promotion
of hegemony.23

Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Funes the Memorious"
turns on the premise that to think rationally and abstractly
is to forget difference. In his Annotations to The Works of
Joshua Reynolds, Blake makes the same point. Great art, he
says, requires sharp outline and precise detail because all knowledge is based upon discrimination: "what is General Knowledge is there such a Thing All knowledge is Particular" (Rey 61; E 648). His contempt for his fellow artist's aesthetic theories in support of general forms and abstract reasoning is unmistakable: "To Generalize is to be an Idiot" because "All Sublimity is founded on Minute Discrimination" (Rey xcii, 9; E 641, 643). Blake believed that the apprentice must submit "To learn the Language of Art" (Rey back of title page; E 636), and therefore his metaphorical vocabulary, both verbal and visual, has important epistemological implications.

In the second chapter, then, we will need to look at seventeenth and eighteenth-century language theory and the various attempts by projectors to recover or invent an ideal, systematic, and univocal language. The goal of many of these thinkers was to find a universal language that could be used practically as a means to global peace through communication, and used theoretically as the language of the new rational science. In simple terms, the philosophers in this search for an ideal language set off from existing languages in two opposite directions: the first towards an abstract system of non-motivated signs organized on the basis of taxonomies, the second towards the perfect motivated sign of pre-lapsarian language in which the essence of the signifier and the signified are the same.
Theoretically, the first direction leads to a two-dimensional language of mathematical certainty, the second to a pictographic, metaphorical language that has ontological status because it is inseparable from the world that it describes. This investigation will lead us to a discussion of Blake’s theory of poetry and art as a kind of mutually reinforcing verbal and visual "allegory" that shares with the Book of Revelation the potential for a rich, inexhaustible plurality of narratives. Indeed, the number and the variety of critical commentaries on the Plate from the *Songs of Experience* entitled "The Sick Rose" is indicative of the depth and complexity that is discoverable in a seemingly short and simple lyric set in a colorful but uncomplicated design.\(^{24}\)

Blake belongs alongside Milton in the radical Christian tradition that rejected establishment politics, theology, and morality. But Blake was an antinomian artist as well; he was not satisfied with the standard intaglio method of engraving and so he devised a new process of relief etching that allowed him to combine language with image, he dismissed the popular Venetian and Flemish schools of painting and their Rembrandtesque use of oils in favor of Michelangelo, the Mannerists, and the medieval technique of tempera, he broke with the conventions of linear narrative and fixed genre, and he composed, designed, engraved, printed, painted, and marketed his own work rather than
relying on the support of the publishing industry. And when it came to Biblical metaphor and symbol, he reshaped the radical doctrines of the dissenting sects and undermined the orthodox teachings of the official church by using the techniques of inversion, parody and satire.

This does not mean, however, that his symbols mean whatever he wants them to mean at any particular time. What appears to be inconsistency in Blake is often times intentional ambiguity or paradox of the type Jacques Derrida refers to when he says that Christ is "an impossible sign, which belongs neither to nature nor to convention . . . , a sign giving the signified, indeed the thing in person."25 In other words, it is a sign that forgets all difference, not by abstraction, but, like the Bible, by containing within it all relevant categories of being. In his annotations to Lavater, Blake says that "God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak" (Lav 630; E 599). Without overwriting Blake with some sort of Coleridgean "metaphysics," Coleridge's concept of the perceiving mind as a pentad is one way of understanding what Blake means by God here; all relevant categories available to the individual are contained within the range from thesis to antithesis, and the primary imagination, as it moves from prothesis through mesothesis to synthesis makes sense out of its world by selecting from the possibilities and bringing

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its choices into a coherence. This gives us a world, as Northrop Frye says, "in which there is only one knower, for whom there is nothing outside of or objective to that knower, hence nothing dead or insensible. This knower is also the real consciousness in each of us." The mind does not need to be rational and systematic in the choices it makes or in its interpretation of them; it does not work towards the closure of a single consistent unchanging theory that meets the requirements of classical unity, but towards the disclosure of a plurality of coherent narratives that can be described in terms of richness and intensity, not in terms of universality and completeness.

This brings us to chapters three, four and five, and the reason why this dissertation took the form that it now has. Originally, my plan was to discover in the whole Blake canon a comprehensive symbolic system in which to contextualize Blake's poetic construction of the female self. In the process of attempting to understand this system, however, I came to the conclusion that Blake's symbols are themselves contextualized and that they achieve their coherence not from reference to a static verbal and visual lexicon--this is Swedenborg's "Contents or Index of already publish'd books" (MHH 21; E 42)--but through their interaction with the complex detail, or the minute particulars of the narratives in which they are imbedded. Those who attempt a study of all of Blake's work must be
satisfied with excerpting and cross-referencing passages and images from the longer poems, and this is a move away from the correlative thinking of the artist and towards the methodological thinking of the scientist. It involves the decontextualization of metaphors and meanings in order to discover the logical patterns that organize the work; a process, Blake says, of abstracting the "Pasteboard Man" from the "Human" on the grounds that "Every Man has Eyes Nose & Mouth" (VLJ E 56). As E. P. Thompson points out, Blake's antinomian treatment of myth and symbol makes his art uniquely resistant to the analytical approach, and as a consequence, those who resort to it have not always met with the greatest critical success. I have tried, instead, for a detailed commentary on a select number of early, shorter poems and designs that deal directly with women's issues in the late eighteenth-century. Moreover, because there is not the single dark lady in Blake's work whose idiosyncratic lineaments await the critic's archeological talents, I have been compelled to choose between a great many different women of various ages and circumstances. Unable, therefore, to recontextualize "the woman" in early Blake, I have instead sought to recontextualized a number of the more intriguing and instructive ones.

It remains to explain why this project ends where it does, and why it does not include a piece that is as important as the Visions of the Daughters of Albion to a
complete understanding of the woman in Blake's early poetry. I point out in the second chapter that towards the end of the century Blake became increasingly disenchanted with his society and with its inability to rise "from the slumberous mass" (SE "Introduction" 15; E 18) and join him in welcoming in a new spiritual day. In frustration, he turned a good deal of his attention to a more private, more esoteric exploration of man's fallen nature that was heavily symbolic and profoundly psychological. The *Visions* is a good turning point, I believe, because it is a transitional piece that begins the simultaneous move inward into an attempt to map the world of the fallen imagination and outward into the expanding constellations of creative vision.

Robert Essick points out in his article "William Blake's 'Female Will' and its Biographical Context" that most feminist critiques of Blake's poetry begin with the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* because those who see Blake as a misogynist generally agree that his subordination of the woman is only explicit in his later writings. If this is the case, the apparent shift in his poetic representation of the woman would coincide with the growing distrust he felt for society, a frame of mind that can be traced to a great many factors: his continuing sorrow over the death of his brother Robert in 1787, the reign of terror in France and Paine's indictment for sedition in 1792, England's declaration of war on France in 1793, the great
famine of 1795, and on top of it all, his near total neglect as an Artist and Prophet by the English public, the refusal of the Selection Committee at the Royal Academy and the British Institution to continue to exhibit his work, and his resentment at his widening reputation as a madman.28 Like the leaders of the seventeenth-century nonconformist churches, Blake’s discouragement simply forced him to abandon hope of an immediate spiritual awakening for his contemporary society and to look to an indefinite future when humanity would be more receptive to his prophetic message. With this reconsideration came an awareness of a new enlightened audience for his work, an audience that would join him in the Wars of Intellect in Eternity, and since he would not have to preach to the converted he could follow a new poetic and artistic compass that would not have to be accommodated to the imaginative limitations of his unappreciative contemporaries.29 This new heading was away from the allegorical ballad, the short narrative poem, and the compressed symbolic design as vehicles for direct social criticism, and towards the epic as an appropriate cosmic canvas for his creative vision of the spiritual and psychological Fall and resurrection of the Collective Human Consciousness, or the Divine Humanity.

Most of Blake’s feminist critics see this new aesthetic course as the point at which his misogyny begins to deepen. Thus, both those who interpret his representations of the
active, wilful female as the evil counterpart to the passive, virtuous one as evidence that he supported masculine hegemony, and those who argue that his target is not the woman but the division of the fallen consciousness into female and male principles, a metaphorical duality that is transcended in Eternity, turn their critical sights on the later prophetic books.³⁰ My own approach to Blake’s early poetry and designs is more of an attempt at a historical recovery and recontextualization of the woman in late eighteenth-century society, followed by a close critical reading of a number of his verbal and visual allegories that dramatize the social conditions of the subordinated woman in a world of male domination and privilege.

For Blake, the Fall in Genesis begins with the division of the Divine Consciousness into the sexes, an event that is represented metaphorically as the creation of Eve out of Adam’s rib. In the typology of the Bible, this Fall is reversed at the end of time by the resurrection of humanity into a heavenly kingdom established by Jesus, an apocalyptic event in which the Eternal Consciousness recovers into itself all aspects of its former divided being. Because Blake’s radical cosmology is grounded in the patriarchal myths of his Judeo-Christian culture, he balances the myth of the Fall and the fragmentation of Divine Consciousness with a new myth for its resurrection into a Oneness by
simply reversing Eve's symbolic birth and having her representative re-enter the body of her male complement. This is the reintegration of the sexes in the Divine Humanity, and although Blake sometimes represents this figure as the Divine Man in order to associate him with the familiar omniscient God of Christian doctrine, he makes it clear that this human form is properly androgynous. In the Introduction to her book *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Karen Armstrong explains that the concept of God as a male deity has been central to Western culture, and that despite her own feminist misgivings, she found the use of conventional masculine terminology unavoidable and necessary to historical clarity and precision. If Blake's work is anything, it too is a history of God, a poetic history of the Divine Creative Imagination. In choosing to use the patriarchal metaphors of the Bible in order to make his personal prophetic vision spiritually relevant to his Christian audience, he also faced the problem that all God-talk reinscribes patriarchy.

Many of the commentators who regard Blake, at least in his later work, as a disguised misogynist, support Essick's position that those who see Blake's females as "metaphoric vehicles for genderless meaning" are "blind to how tropes, and a poet's choice of the lingual signs he manipulates into tropes, carry unavoidable ideological orientations, in part
through their non-metaphoric references."³¹ I would argue that the females in Blake’s poems who enter the state of Experience are metaphorical vehicles for gendered meaning precisely because they are drawn from a culture and a ruling ideology that has historically defined the woman as a sexual commodity, and further, that it is not possible for the artist to represent the woman’s place in a Christian patriarchal society without using the tropes that it uses to define her.

Most of the modern critics who argue for Blake’s misogyny quote his observation in *A Vision of the Last Judgement* that "In Eternity Woman is the Emanation of Man she has No Will of her own There is no such thing in Eternity as a Female Will" (*VLJ E* 562). It is too easy to read this short passage as evidence that Blake underwrote the dated stereotype of the strong-willed woman whose constant rebelliousness makes her a drain on her husband’s creative energies and a threat to his peace of mind, a cliché that hardly recommends itself to modern readers, and taken seriously, is no longer amusing. More problematic is Blake’s inversion of the story of Eve’s nativity since it seems to suggest that the apocalypse depends upon the absorption of the female emanation into the male prototype, a process that neutralizes her independent qualities in a final victory of the active male over the passive female. Blake’s Eternity, however, is not a "metaphor of unity and
integration" that neutralizes anything at all. As Northrop Frye points out, it is "a metaphor of particularity [of] the kind Blake expressed in the phrase 'minute particulars' and in such lines as "To see the world in a grain of sand."
Again, it is Derrida's "impossible sign" that "turns the traditional form of the metaphorical structure inside out."
Blake's Eternity is a nonrational state of consciousness of the type that the philosopher D. T. Suzuki describes as "an infinite mutual fusion or penetration of all things, each with its individuality yet with something universal in it." There is no such thing as a Female Will in Eternity, and no such thing as a Male Will either, because Eternity is a single consciousness that transcends particular gender but does not neutralize it, and the collective "Will," or whatever it is that inspires and directs the Imagination's creative energies in Eternity, is gender neutral. Our concern here, however, is with the poetic representation of the woman in Blake's early poetry and designs, and in looking at his treatment of her in some of these narratives we may gain some insights that will help us to arrive at a clearer understanding of his attitude towards the proper role of the woman in relation to her male counterpart.
1. Anonymous, *The Poore-Mans admonition unto all the Plaine People of London* (London, 1647) quoted from D. W. Petegorsky's *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War* (1940), p. 113, by Christopher Hill in *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 81. Many of the enormous number of seventeenth-century tracts, treatises, and broadsides that came off the presses as radical critiques or angry defenses of the ruling ideology had at least an incidental element of irony or satire, and this, combined with their revolutionary matter, did not always lead to the accurate and complete disclosure of publication information. Where available, I have supplied the date and the place of publication.

2. For a discussion of the widespread political and economic dissatisfaction after the Civil War, see Christopher Hill's chapter on the "Masterless Men" in *The World Turned Upside Down*, and for the connection of seventeenth-century iconoclastic ideas with the American revolutionaries and with the radical movements in England in the 1790s, see pp. 115 and 307-309. Also, E. P. Thompson's study of Blake and the antinomian tradition entitled *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), passim, traces the underground nonconformist churches and their doctrines from the 1640s and 50s to the circles of dissent that Blake was familiar with in
London in the final decade of the eighteenth-century.

3. Among the Ranters, Quakers, Levellers and Muggletonians who denied the existence of hell and the reality of eternal damnation, who preached the divinity within man, and who read the Bible as an historical allegory were William Walwyn, Gerrard Winstanley, John Bidle, John Boggis, William Erbery, Peter Sterry, Thomas Tanny (Theaureaujohn), George Foster, Lodowick Muggleton, Robert Norwood and Sir Henry Vane. David V. Erdman makes the connection between the rhetoric of the dissenting preachers in Civil War England and the Biblical metaphors of Blake and Paine in *Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 50-51.


8. For a more complete discussion of Clarkson’s ideas about such subjects as freedom from sin through acting in faith and purity as if there were no sin see Hill’s *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 171-174, and J. C. Davis’ section on this Ranter Leader in *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 58-75.

9. In *Fear, Myth and History*, p. 61-64, J. C. Davis discusses the seventeenth-century interest in European mysticism in connection with the doctrines of the Ranter Laurence Clarkson.


He points out that when monarchical and domestic patriarchy are overturned "the whole of society and all of its institutions are open to review from the point of view of the inner light, reason, natural right, popular consent, common interest." He goes on to explain that during the Revolution many men and women spoke out against the woman's "limited educational opportunities, their confinement to domestic duties, their subjection to their husbands and the injustices of a commercial marriage market."


15. A. L. Morton numbers Crisp, Saltmarsh, Collier and Coppe among those writers who mention the doctrine of the Everlasting Gospel, and Hill adds to this list: Henry Denne, John Warr, Major-General Harrison, William Dell, Isaac Penington, and George Fox. See Morton's *The Matter of Britain: Essays in a Living Culture*, (London: Lawrence and


18. See Blake's annotations to Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, *passim*, but especially letters II and III. (Wat 10-25; E 616-618)

19. These possibilities are explored by, among others, E. P. Thompson in *Witness Against the Beast*, *passim*, and by Leslie Tannenbaum in the first chapter of his *Biblical Tradition*, pp. 8-24.

20. There is of course no record of Blake having met Mary Wollstonecraft, although there is a tradition of identifying her with Blake's poetic representations of women. This tradition dates from S. Foster Damon's association of her with Blake's "Mary" in *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (London: Constable, 1924), pp.100-101, and is expanded by J. Middleton Murry who suggested that "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" is the story of Wollstonecraft's life in *William Blake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p. 109.

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21. For a more complete discussion of the biblical exegetical and pictorial tradition in the late eighteenth-century see Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition*, pp. 8-16.

22. See Blake’s Annotations to *The Works of Joshua Reynolds*, *passim*, but especially pp. 94-100 (*Rey IV; E 651*) and "A Descriptive Catalogue" (*DC E*, especially 547-550) for his strongly worded preference for Florentine and Roman art over the productions of the Venetian and Flemish schools. He objects to the use of "Chiaro Oscuro" by Rubens, Titian, and Correggio because he believes that it obscures the "bounding line" with shadow, and he associates his own style and technique with that of "Albert Durer" (Albrecht Durer), "Rafael" (Raphael), and "Michael Angelo" (Michelangelo). Blake’s discussions here and elsewhere reveal how familiar he was with available reproductions of the Roman, Flemish, French and German masters.

23. Blake’s extensive and spirited annotations in the margins of the books of other writers were often aggressive, *ad hominem* dialogues with the authors that may have had their inception in his reading of the polemical literature of the seventeenth-century dissenting churches. The addition of his own signature beneath Lavater’s printed name on the title page of the latter’s *Aphorisms on Man* suggests that he considered his personal contributions and elaborations on the author’s ideas an entitlement to some form of co-authorship.
24. For example, see Elizabeth Langland's "Blake's Feminist Revision of Literary Tradition in 'The SICK ROSE'" in Critical Paths, pp. 225-243.


27. Robert N. Essick writes in "William Blake's 'Female Will' and its Biographical Context" in SEL 31 (1991), p. 616-617, that those "who defend Blake against the charge that he was unable to rise above the patriarchal sexism of his era generally begin their arguments with a straightforward reading of Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793)." He continues: "In Blake's later works . . . the evidence for misogyny increases, the active/evil and passive/good categories for females become more apparent, and there is no liberationist voice like Oothoon's. Why these shifts? Morris Dickstein has suggested one possible answer: Blake's 'stunning change' from Oothoon to the later 'portraits of feminine jealousy and possessiveness' seems 'rooted less in politics than in the nearly unknown terrain of Blake's personal life.'"

28. For a sympathetic reading of Blake's smoldering resentment but stubborn antinomianism even "when the revolutionary fires burned low" see E. P. Thompson's conclusion to Witness Against the Beast, pp. 222-229. Also, for Blake's personal reaction
to the charge of oddness see his letter to the Reverend John Trusler of 23 August 1799 (Let E 702), and for his characteristically defiant attitude towards those who would treat him with "contempt and derision" or accuse him of "eccentricity and madness" see his Advertisement to his 1809 Exhibition, p. 2 (DC E 527), and A Descriptive Catalogue, passim, but especially pp. 25-28 and 34. (DC E 537-538, 540)

29. Thompson makes a similar point about Blake's change of direction after the turn of the century in Witness Against the Beast, pp. 228-229.


32. Frye also uses this quote from Suzuki to describe a type of visionary consciousness. See The Great Code, pp. 167-168.
I. THE MYTH OF REALITY

Recontextualizing the Woman
in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century English Society
CHAPTER ONE

Old Metaphors in New Narratives:
The Woman in the Seventeenth Century

In the turbulent years that led up to the public execution of Charles I in 1649 and the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords in the same year, England experienced an unprecedented period of controversy in which the authority of such traditional patriarchal institutions as church, state and family was called into question. The unstable social and religious climate that precipitated the thirty years war on the continent and the violent dismantling of a political system in England, the absolute sovereignty of which was traditionally assumed to be sanctioned by and modeled on Divine government, encouraged a widespread ideological debate that challenged the legitimacy of other social organizations based on similar claims to power.¹ Unchecked by censorship and often by common sense, the heady republican spirit of the early years of the new Commonwealth fostered wild schemes on all fronts, political, economic, social, and religious. High-profile groups like the Levellers and the Diggers called for radical reform, such as the abolition of the peerage and the episcopal orders of church government, as well as the redistribution of the nation's land and wealth.² The members of the reactionary majority regarded this alarming flood of visionary programs for democratic reform as a type of

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national insanity that had to be contained and suppressed, and their push for tighter governmental control eventually led to the Blasphemy Act of 1650, and to the return of the Stuart King Charles II from exile a decade later.

The literal and metaphorical association of the Head of State with the head of the household, and the belief that they both received their top-down disciplining order from Deity suggested to a number of theorists of the period that, if a radical restructuring of one of these hierarchies was possible and desirable, then perhaps all of the others were equally in need of revision. Indeed, many of the writers who advocated change, and as many more who opposed it, described the political upheaval as part of a cosmic revolution that had its origin in the disintegration of the family order, an order that stretched back to the frailty of the first wife and mother, Eve. Writing in 1648, William Herbert of Somerset expressed the pervasive eighteenth-century belief that the end of the world was at hand, and he attributed its pending arrival to the breakdown of family relations:

This a time of division and insolence . . . Now are parents against their children, now the son seeks to supplant his Father, the Mother and Daughter differ, the Brothers fight, Sisters quarrel, Infants curse.
The Puritan doctrine of the unworthiness of all living souls before God, and of the need for intense Biblical self-study as a means to enlightenment and personal salvation, effectively removes the need for the mediation of the established church through its priests because it transfers the responsibility for the individual's spiritual condition from an external authority to an inner one. In the seventeenth-century, this sense of personal accountability manifested itself in the enormous number of splinter sects that opposed the orthodox doctrine of the state church with radical interpretations of the Biblical narratives and that replaced the search for a historical Jesus with the attempt to get in touch with a personal one. When the Old Testament is transferred from the stasis of historical fact, and the New Testament from the constraints of biographical detail into a spontaneous living experience, the concept of God is transformed from a Divinity who is external and unknowable to one who is personal and inseparable from oneself. Crabb Robinson recollected a conversation with Blake on exactly this subject:

On my asking in what light he viewed the great question concerning the Divinity of Jesus Christ he said; 'He is the only God.' But then he added--'And so am I and so are you.'

Expanding on Blake's response to Robinson, E. P. Thompson writes: "If we neither deny Christ's divinity nor elevate it
above that of mortal creation which shares in the same divine essence, then we have an intense and mystical humanism. If God exists in Men and nowhere else, then the whole cosmic conflict between darkness and light, things corporeal and spiritual, must be enacted within oneself and one's fellow men and nowhere else."\textsuperscript{10} He goes on to say that this notion of a personal God indistinguishable from man, a God who "becomes as we are, / so that we may be as he / is" (\textit{NNR} b; E 3), led Blake into the heresy of "breaking with any sense of conviction of original sin."\textsuperscript{11} This notion that God and man are one and that "Nothing is displeasing to God but Unbelief" (\textit{VLJ} 86; E 564) connects Blake's theology with the doctrines of many of the nonconforming churches that carried the legacy of radical dissent into the closing years of the eighteenth-century. Like the Sweet Singers of Israel, Blake took the extreme antinomian position of denying the historical reality of Satan, Hell and even of evil itself. Thompson's convincing study points out that many of these sects shared with Blake a common vocabulary, both rhetorical and symbolic, and like him they continued to assert the divinity of the indwelling Spirit, as well as the gnostic sounding "doctrine of Universal Restoration."\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell} is Blake's reply to the orthodox doctrine that claims that no one has the power to ascertain or alter his spiritual lot, and in the advice of
the self-righteous Angel of this satirical work he
constantly mocks the notion that the sinner's best
protection against pride is to make a show of humility, and
to agonize in guilt and self-degradation. Perhaps here
might be as good a place as any to make the point that Blake
had no problem with a healthy share of Pride; his voice
never quavers into doubt or uncertainty, but is invariably
strong, energetic and confident, to the point that some
unacquainted readers mistake the certainty of personal
conviction for evangelical arrogance, and find offence where
none was meant. Judging from the polemical tone of many of
the pamphlets and treatises that came off the presses of the
dissenting brotherhood in the seventeenth and eighteenth-
centuries, Blake certainly would have had little trouble
coming across examples of the religious zealot, and perhaps
this is why he was for so long dismissed as just another
self-righteous enthusiast. But Blake is different; he
speaks with the voice of the artist and the prophet, and he
speaks loudly because, like Jesus, he must be about his
Father's business, the "business of Eternity" (Wat. E 611),
and this means that he must worship God by "Honouring his
gifts" (MHH 22; E 43) in every man.

The incarnated Jesus, he told Crabb Robinson, "took
much after his mother, and in that respect was one of the
worst of men" (CR 271). Blake regarded man as Christ and
Christ as a lowly worm because they represent,
metaphorically, the contraries of conscious life that enclose in a single identity all of the categories of being. Blake describes this cosmic consciousness in metaphors that suggest that the role of causality in human experience is embodied in the incarnated God who entered the world of time and change in the meanest corporeal form so that he might bring forgiveness for all human frailty. The images in this passage also allude to the Genesis account of humanity's fall into generation, and its potential for spiritual resurrection through Christ: "God is in the lowest effects as well as the highest causes for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak" (AL 630; E 599). Blake renovates the traditional image of the worm as the most lowly of creatures and the purveyor of sin by making it a phallic symbol that represents the curse and the blessing of generation, and then identifying it with Jesus. Thus, it becomes at once the sacrifice that brings humanity into the world, and the forgiveness of God that delivers humanity out of it. The Cloud's answer to Thel's complaint that she is nothing but "the food of worms" is "How great thy use. how great thy blessing": (T 3 25-26; E 5), and this description of the young girl's purpose in life as the sexual complement to the male worm is not, as Thompson suggests, "to blaspheme against the godhead within him" or within her.14

The political unrest of the 1640s that culminated in the Civil War and the transfer of authority from the
monarchy and the ruling establishment to a republican form of government produced in 1653 a pseudo-monarchical constitution that simply conferred dictatorial powers on Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. Although the concentration of absolute power in the person of a single man had an immediate stabilizing effect on the political structure and essentially frustrated any new attempts to reshape the system, the unprecedented currents and eddies of religious and social liberalism that swept through the country undermined what were previously inviolable institutions, and gave the conservative majority moments of serious concern. The unsettled and somewhat egalitarian climate that followed the defeat of Charles I's Royalist army and the establishment of the new Puritan republic, was disturbed by religious and political radicals who began openly to disseminate their subversive opinions and to challenge the hierarchies of authority within the church, the state and the family.

On the spiritual front in England, the primacy of the Anglican Church was threatened and attempts were made to replace it with the Presbyterian Church since the Calvinist doctrine of the latter was severe, but seemed to many nonconformists to shift a good deal of the power and the responsibility for personal salvation from the institution and its elders to the layman himself. Before the Blasphemy Act of 1650 put a lid on extreme religious dissent, many
gathered churches and radical sects (among them the Millenarians, the Sabbatarians or Seventh-Day Men, the Thraskites, the Adamists, the Seekers, the Brownists, the Tryonists, the Shakers, the Anabaptists, the Family of Love, the Diggers, the Levellers, the Church of the First-Born or Behmenists, the Salmonists, the Heavenly-Father-Men, the Children of the New-Birth, the Philadelphians, the Independents, the Muggletonians, the Quakers, the Fifth Monarchy Men, the Sweet Singers of Israel, the Ranters, and later the Camisards, the irregular Methodists the Copinists, the Hutchinsonians and the Muggletonians) grew increasingly outspoken and militant in their demands for social and religious change. A great many of these movements used Pauline doctrine and a radical new symbolic and metaphoric vocabulary to argue for the physical and spiritual equality of the woman; many of them granted her a voice in church, some allowed her absolute control over her social and spiritual life, and a few even accepted her as an ordained member of the clergy.

Since the woman in the Western tradition has always been defined explicitly with respect to the man and implicitly with respect to her sexuality--as daughter, as wife, as mother, as widow, as virgin, as whore--any attempt to re-define her as man's equal on one level would necessarily have profound theoretical and moral implications at every other level of the patriarchal hierarchy. It is
important to emphasize here that, for the vast majority of the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, these hierarchies of reciprocal dependency remained both divinely ordered and arranged on the basis of natural and spiritual quality. The view of the moderate majority was that, in the proper scheme of things, the woman was simply created as an inferior human being, and any attempt she made to alter her relative position with respect to the man was a type of Eve's sin of presumption and a sure invitation to disaster.

On the radical fringe in the 40's and 50's were the Ranters, a highly vocal religious group that justified open sexual relations by claiming that its members were of the elect and that God had granted them a special release from the strict moral code that informed Christian society and the traditional patriarchal family. In *A Fiery Flying Roll*, the Oxford scholar, Ebiezer Coppe, a particularly outspoken and contentious Ranten, shocked the conservative majority by leveling a direct attack on the idea of the family as a divinely ordained and sacred institution. He charged parents and children alike to
give over thy stinking family duties, and thy Gospel Ordinances as thou callest them: for under them all there lies, snapping, snarling, biting, besides covetousness, horrid hypocrisy, envy, malice, evil surmising.
Abiezer Coppe and Laurence Clarkson expressed the extreme Ranter position on the "gospel of love" when they advocated the dissolution of the traditional nuclear family in favor of a type of sexual anarchy, where the man and the woman's mutual promiscuity were the evidence of their physical and spiritual equality. Coppe's unabashed identification of himself with Christ in his refusal to discriminate among those people upon whom to bestow his affections certainly confuses notions of physical chastity and spiritual purity with their opposites. Without its colorful and spirited rhetoric, Coppe's doctrine of "Universal Love" that he says was practiced in the interest of "putting down the mighty from their seats; and exalting them of low degree" seems to have been based not so much on the assumption that women are equal to men, as it was on a reluctance to turn away any potential disciple. In a loose paraphrase of the conclusion of Paul's address to the Galatians, he declared in Some Sweet Sips of some Spirituall Wine that "Male and Female are all one in Christ, and they are all one to me," and then, by tinkering with the seventh and the tenth commandments, he came up with the remarkable observation: "if I can, I will kiss and hug ladies, and love my neighbour's wife without sin."20

The members of the Puritan Long Parliament were not amused, and in direct response to Clarkson's scandalous behavior and Coppe's antinomian polemic they enacted a bill
in the summer of 1650 condemning those presumptuous writers who openly identify themselves with God and who shamelessly assert

that the acts of adultery, drunkenness, and the like open wickedness, are in their own nature as holy and righteous as the duties of prayer, preaching and giving thanks to God . . . that whatsoever is acted by them (whether whoredome, adultery, drunkenness, or the like open wickedness) may be committed without sin . . . that heaven and all happiness consists in the acting of those things which are sin and wickedness; or that such men and women are most perfect, or like to God or eternity, which do commit the greatest sins with the least remorse or sense . . . 21

The Ranters’ noisy challenge to the traditional values and morality of patriarchal family life was the source of some disquiet in the minds of the conservative majority during the middle years in England, but it did not pose a serious threat to the social order, and the husband and father remained the final authority in most seventeenth and eighteenth-century households. Perhaps more influential were the moderate writers who favored the retention of the family unit, but in some modified form. Among those who contributed to this ideological re-examination of the
institution of marriage was John Milton, an antinomian in spirit, whose own unhappy matrimonial experience no doubt motivated his publication of a number of tracts calling for a liberalization of the divorce laws. Other writers advocated comprehensive changes in the members' relationships within the family, and these debates included such topics as the nature and value of the arranged marriage, the limits of patriarchal authority, the power of the mother with respect to the disciplining of her children, the advantages of polygamy over monogamy and the marriage of family members to close relatives.

The challenge to political and domestic patriarchy was taken up by other exponents of religious dissent, such as John Bunyan, who saw in the authority of the father and the husband a rival secular influence on the wives, the children and the servants. This domestic form of antinomianism defied the traditional power and domination of the male, and this attack on patriarchy was carried into the eighteenth-century by social reformists like Mary Astell. She questioned:

If absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? Or if in a family, why not in a state? . . . Is it not then partial in men to the last degree to contend for and practice that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in
the state? . . . If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?24

The political, economic and social instability that surrounded the Interregnum years in England provided a favorable climate for a wide ranging ideological debate that examined and re-evaluated many of the country's traditional institutions, sometimes offering novel and imaginative alternatives to time-honored practices. One hotly contested issue that reveals the revolutionary nature of the Civil War years was the ongoing dispute over the legitimacy of the traditional marriage ceremony and the validity of the marriage contract. In 1653, a small Puritan minority in Cromwell's Protectorate Parliament passed the Barebones Marriage Act, a piece of legislation that declared church weddings legally invalid, and so for the next three years marriages were formalized only in the presence of a justice of the peace. This bold substitution of a secular bureaucratic process for a traditional church ceremony is clear evidence of the extent to which the anti-clerical reformers were willing to go in realigning the powers within the official Church, the State and the family.25 Here again, an important aspect of the nuclear family was brought under scrutiny in the continuing debate, both inside and outside the halls of Parliament, and a major cultural institution was abandoned (albeit temporarily) in the name of social reform. The subject that was most often raised in
conjunction with these discussions was the relative function of the woman within her family, and within her social and cultural community. As we have observed, this dispute invariably characterized the woman in sexual terms, regardless of whether the writer intended to promote or retard her cause.

Despite Parliament's restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and the return of the Lords and the Bishops to State and Church government, the struggle for social stability was not an even one. The antagonism directed against a system that turned England into a military state, that purged radicals from the civil service and from the management of corporate bodies, that made adultery a capital offence and tried to suppress "Stage plays, horse-racing, cock-fighting, maypoles, and brothels," occasionally erupted in acts of civil disobedience, but for the most part it was simply felt as a pervasive, smoldering resentment against political and theological repression, and a general distaste for Puritan values. During the revolutionary years, the conservative majority neither practiced nor approved of the type of radical experimentation advocated by many of the more vocal nonconformist sects that spread across the country, and this may be one of the reasons why they did not object more strongly to the consolidation of power in the hands of the landed class. In the 1660s and 70s, the JPs in the countryside and the rural villages were encouraged by the
local parsons and squires to stamp out the remaining pockets of dissent, while the merchants and the gentry in the towns and cities, no longer answerable to the Levellers in the people's Army, quickly silenced the voices of radical dissent and drove many of the nonconforming churches underground. Nevertheless, the energy with which the various heterodox factions brought themselves to the attention of the establishment during the middle years of the seventeenth-century certainly gave them a measure of credibility and an importance that their numbers did not actually warrant.
ENDNOTES


2. The Ranter leader, Ebiezer Coppe, also advocated the common ownership of property. See Christopher Hill, The Collected Essays, pp. 233-234.

4. In *Cosmopolis*, pp. 64-69, Stephen Toulmin quotes from John Donne’s 1611 elegy *Anatomy of the World*, subtitled "the Frailty and Decay of the whole World," which uses the occasion of the death of a child, Elizabeth Drury, to lament the general deterioration of the universe as the coming of the Last Things.

5. As Toulmin points out in *Cosmopolis*, p. 69, a number of radical sectarians who believed that the world was approaching the end of time followed the German philosopher, Jacob Boehme, in attempting to calculate exactly when the intersection between *chronos* and *kairos* would occur. Of course Blake would not have needed to figure this out. He would have insisted that this moment is the Eternal Now since the instant in which the infinite enters the temporal stream and dissolves the modalities of historical time is when the creative mind enters Eternity, and Blake refers to this metaphorically as the state called Jesus.

6. William Herbert, *Quadrapartit Devotions* (London, 1648), part 4, p. 10. Compare 2 Timothy 3:1-3: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, [w]ithout natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good."

7. I will follow Margaret Thickstun in avoiding a too narrow and exclusive use of the term "Puritan." In her Introduction

8. This seems to me to be the thrust of Frye's discussion of the Bible as myth in The Great Code, passim, but especially pp. 40-52.


10. Thompson, Witness Against the Beast, p. 159-160.


12. Thompson, pp. 55-56.

13. Frye makes a similar observation in The Great Code, p. 166, that we examine in light of our analysis of the metaphor of the worm in The Book of Thel.


15. This list was put together by a journalist in 1706 and is not exhaustive. See G. C. The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail (1706), pp. 423-431.

16. Mary Poovey makes a similar observation on the definition of the woman in terms of her sexual relationship with the man in her discussion of female stereotypes in the Preface to The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the
And, John J. Richetti points out that in the seventeenth-century the "woman was an established type, a clearly defined character in the recurring human situation as understood by western culture." Like Poovey, Richetti argues that women were "restrictively identified as daughters, wives, mothers, or mistresses . . . [and that they] participated to some extent in a cultural stereotype which ran continuously through the most familiar documents of European civilization." See "The Portrayal of Women in Restoration and Eighteenth-century English Literature" in What Manner of Woman: Essays on English and American Life and Literature, ed. Marlene Springer, (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 66.

17. Abiezer Coppe, A Fiery Flying Roll II (London, 1649), p. 12. J. C. Davis argues in Fear, Myth and History, passim, that contemporary reactionaries seeking to generate a moral backlash to what they regarded as an age of permissiveness, and curious historians attracted by the extravagance of the Ranter movement have focussed too much attention on what in actuality was a minor, a relatively insignificant or even a non-existent society. See also Christopher Hill's "Abolishing the Ranters" in A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Routledge, 1990). For the contrary position see E. P. Thompson's "On the Rant" in London Review
of Books (9 July, 1987). Whatever their exact numbers and whatever their influence, the Ranters were responsible for and received a good deal of press in 1649 and 1650, especially with respect to their views on sexual libertinism, gender equality and the indwelling God. A number of their leaders, like Coppe and Clarkson, were socially disruptive enough to do jail time.

18. The phrase is borrowed from E. P. Thompson’s discussion of "The ‘ranting’ impulse" in Witness Against the Beast, p. 23. For a brief account of the colorful history of the Ranters, Laurence Clarkson, and his mistress, Mrs Star, see Stone’s The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 625-626, and for a more extensive one, A. L. Morton’s chapter in The World of the Ranters entitled "Laurence Clarkson and the Everlasting Gospel."


23. The precedence frequently cited for close marriages, polygyny, concubinage, divorce and remarriage was of course the conjugal relationships described in the Old Testament, but more specifically the Family of Christ. Mary was Joseph's first cousin; she was his father's brother's daughter, and Joseph was the son of a leviritic marriage contracted in accordance with ancient Hebrew law.


CHAPTER TWO

Metaphorical Habits are Hard to Break:
The Woman in the Eighteenth Century

The Blasphemy Act of 1650 and the prosecution of Ranter leaders, the repatriation of Charles II in 1660 and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy, and finally the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the joint ascension of William and Mary to the English throne each in its way had a settling effect along the ideological fronts, but the ambiguity of this uneasy truce was nowhere more evident than in the long awaited resolution to the dispute over the legality of church weddings. In the early 1640's, the Puritans had acquired enough political power to draw attention to the unevenness and the complexity of current marriage laws, a problem for which they sought some legislative remedy a decade later in the form of the Civil Marriage Act of 1653. However, the troublesome matter of marital reform in a country steeped in and proud of its traditions was not solved by an Act that offered to replace custom and ceremony with uniformity and expedition, and the effect of the imposition of such an Act was general resentment combined with various forms of civil disobedience. As a result, the necessity and the consequences of altering the marriage laws remained a constant item on the Parliamentary agenda and a topic of intense debate until 1661, when Charles gave royal assent to an Act legalizing all civic marriages performed
after May 1642. Understandably, the absolute legality of the marriage contract was of material concern to the members of a society that based the legitimacy of rights to family property upon the laws of strict entailment, and thus, while the immediate concern for succession was satisfied by the King's passage of the 1661 Bill, a final settlement to the issue was not forthcoming until Hardwick's Marriage Act of 1753.¹

With the specter of Catholicism in flight and the reins of government safely in the hands of the new monarchy and the families of high descent, the large conservative element within the common majority joined the peerage in seizing the moment and effectively suppressing the radical fringe groups and the gathered churches that had for more than a quarter of a century sought wholesale change to traditional aspects of popular culture. The factional challenge to the Puritan ideology that rose and fell during the Commonwealth Period, a challenge that was frequently couched by the radicals in terms that were both heretical and sexually suggestive, and therefore repugnant to the spiritually and morally orthodox, did not simply disappear with the stifling of the bourgeois schismatics. Rather, the metaphorical vocabulary of an often harsh and blunt polemic that alternately swelled up and subsided during the early and middle years of the century was not lost, but simply channeled into the doctrines of more moderate religious communities, such as
the Baptists, the Quakers, the Philadelphians, the Muggletonians and so on, thus sending the spirit of dissent into the eighteenth-century in a less threatening form.

The voices of radical dissent that had rocked the established Christian community with visionary schemes for social and political reform, with alternate philosophical and biblical narratives, and with innovative symbolic and metaphorical systems to support them, were practically muted, and those that did not seek more moderate expression were driven into informal, sometimes clandestine societies that, like the Muggletonians, met in the back rooms of private or public houses. Whether Blake attended any of these meetings is unclear from historical record, but we don’t need historical record to find in his vocabulary, his symbolism and his radical interpretations of biblical texts evidence that he knew about them and shared their antinomian, anti-Enlightenment spirit. Indeed, his prose satire An Island in the Moon (1784) may very well be a parody of one of these gathered "churches," and his target might be the type of seekers and disputers who attended them and participated in conversations about philosophy, religion and mythology, broken occasionally by song.² A detail that would give support to this connection is the identification of the character of Inflammable Gas with the notorious Unitarian dissenter Joseph Priestly who Blake would likely have met in the company of Tom Paine, Henry Fuseli and Mary
Wollstonecraft at the dinner parties of Blake's dissenting publisher, Joseph Johnson. Priestley was a graduate of the Dissenter's school at Daventry, not the more prestigious colleges of Oxford or Cambridge, his scientific studies were carried on in Josiah Wedgewood's Lunar Society in Birmingham, not in the Royal Society in London, and his Jacobinism that led him to openly applaud the excesses of the French Revolution provoked the London mob into torching his residence in 1791 and finally driving him into exile in America. 3

Giving support to the growth of political, religious and domestic conservatism were the parallel developments in the seventeenth-century of rational philosophy and pure science under the auspices respectively of Descartes and Newton, both of whom claimed to be working in the interest of theological orthodoxy. The task was to develop a theory-centered, decontextualized science and philosophy that were written not oral, universal not unique, abstract not particular and timeless not temporal so that the results of systematic investigation would be universal and free of the ambiguity of rhetorical language and historical context. 4 This required the development of a rational experimental method that could be applied systematically to philosophical and natural problems in order to produce factual results that in turn would answer the quest for certainty. And, since these factual results had to be recorded with clarity
and exactness, there was a perceived need in science and philosophy, as well as in politics, economics and religion, for a universal language or a system of exact signification free of the ambiguities of imprecise grammar and the "Tropes and Figures" of metaphorical speech.⁵ Deciding that the problem with existing language is "the false appearances, that are imposed upon us by words," and that the secret to an ideal language might lie in pictographic or ideographic characters, Francis Bacon turned his attention to Chinese, proposing in the early seventeenth-century that it was composed of "Characters real, which expresse neither Letters, nor words in grosse, but things or Notions."⁶ Perhaps the most well known researcher into the motivated sign whose work was based on the theory that the fall of man involved a linguistic fall from the perfect language of Adam, was the eighteenth-century antiquarian William Warburton whose encyclopedic three volume Divine Legation of Moses (1738-1741) sought in the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptian priests some clue to the origin of language and the evolution of the meaning of Hebrew. Among the projectors who looked to invent what others had been unable to recover, a "language absolutely new, absolutely easy, [and] absolutely rational" through which linguistic and political harmony could be restored to the world, were John Amos Comenius in Via Lucis 1641), Francis Lodowyck in Common Writing (1647) and Ground-Work (1652), Cave Beck in The
Universal Character (1657), George Dalgarno in Ars signorum (1661) and John Wilkins in An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language (1668). Joining this visionary company in the final quarter of the century was the German philosopher and diplomat, Gottfried Wilhelm, Freiher von Leibniz, who combined the study of Chinese characters with calculus and the structure of the I Ching in the hope of finding the key to a *characteristica universalis* or "universal system of characters" that would articulate the ideas and feelings of any culture on earth with the purity of the mathematical symbol.

Robert Essick points out in William Blake and the Language of Adam that these seventeenth and eighteenth-century language theories fall generally along two lines; one, the rationalists or mentalists who decontextualize language and argue that words are arbitrary signs that have acquired their meanings through custom and make reference only to ideas, not things, and the other the sensibilists who argue that language is a motivated semiotic based on an contextual isomorphism between things and names, or between objective nature and the language man uses to describe it. The first set of linguistic theorists make claim to a two dimensional "Mathematical" system of signification that is useful to rational science because it dichotomizes language; it distinguishes between, in the words of the historian of the Royal Society, Thomas Spratt, "the knowledge of Nature"
and "the colours of Rhetorick," and it confines itself to the logical investigation of the former." Rather than taking a directly opposing position, their rivals seem to have favored a compromise between the two, such as the evolutionary theory of language development expressed by James Harris in his *Hermes: or, a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Language and Universal Grammar* (1751). Harris accounts for the metamorphosis of the original sensibilist language of motivated signs into the mentalist's subjective semiotic as a growth from an objective apprehension of the world into an intellectual one. He says "that the first Words of Men, like their first Ideas, had an immediate reference to sensible Objects, and that in after Days, when they began to discern with their Intellect, they took those words, which they found already made, and transferred them by metaphor to intellectual Conceptions." In his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke sees this blending not as a historical development, but as a feature of language itself: "Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind that uses them," but he says that some ideas are "particulars" that are triggered by objects in themselves or by the sensual perception of them, others are "essences" (3. 3. 18) that "come not under the cognizance of our senses." (3. 1. 5) For Locke, obscurity and confusion are not the result of a deterioration in the language of
communication since the Fall of Adam or the Tower of Babel, but are the result of the acquisition of sloppy habits of thinking.

The compromise in the sensibilist position seems to be a reluctance to assert that language in the fallen world retains the original prelapsarian identity between the essence of the signifier and the signified, or between the names and the things, and therefore it cannot be a purely motivated or an ontological semiotic. Essick makes the point that for eighteenth-century sensibilists as well as mentalists, the "linguistic sign becomes a double entity of signifying image (visual or auditory) and a signified image (mental or physical), with a gap between them bridged only by arbitrary representation."12 This seems to have been Joshua Reynolds's point in his Discourses when he claims that "we are obliged to take words as we find them; all we can do is to distinguish the THINGS to which they are applied."13 Blake's blunt annotation to this passage reveals an almost gnostic antipathy for materiality and for the hegemony of "THINGS" over "words": "This is False the Fault is not in Words. but in Things Lockes Opinions of Words & their Fallaciousness are Artful Opinions and Fallacious also" (Rev 199; E 659). Blake's position is clearly a mentalist one, but it is not the dualistic position of the rationalist projector who seeks in language a system of pure signification that privileges the written over the oral, the
universal over the particular, the permanent over the
temporal, the abstract over the unique, the theoretical over
the practical, the "real" over the apparent and the "purely"
scientific over the creatively artistic. Clearly, Blake's
conception of language does not discount the world that is
signified, but it does privilege the opposite set of
categories, and throughout his edition of *The Works of Sir
Joshua Reynolds* he makes his epistemological position clear.
To the passage: "this disposition to abstraction, to
generalizing and classification, is the great glory of the
human mind," he writes

To Generalize is to be an Idiot To Particularize
is the Alone Distinction of Merit--General
Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots
possess.

*(Rey xcvii-xcviii; E 641)*

And to Reynolds's "the minute accidental discriminations of
particular . . . objects," he responds with

Minute Discrimination is Not Accidental All
Sublimity is founded on Minute Discrimination.

*(Rey 9; E 643)*

Again, in his *Descriptions of the Last Judgement* he attacks
at length both the value of abstraction and the vagueness of
taxonomies:

General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in
Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too.

31
Both in Art & in Life General Masses are as Much Art as a Pasteboard Man is Human Every Man has Eyes Nose & Mouth this Every Idiot knows but he who enters into & discriminates most minutely the Manners & Intentions the Characters in all their branches is the alone Wise and Sensible Man & on this discrimination All Art is founded.

\textit{(VLJ pp. 82-83; E 560)}

Blake’s notion of a poetic or prophetic language lies in the tradition of a transcendental semiotic that Essick traces back to the early biblical exegetes like Philo and Aggripa von Nettesheim, the Jewish tradition of the Cabbala, the mystical writings and the biblical commentary of Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg, all of which claim that the \textit{Verbum Fiat} that brought the material universe into being and was recovered by man in the perfect language of Adam’s "naming" still exists but is hidden to the human understanding. One important distinction between these writers and Blake is that they find the spiritual power and significance in the "incarnational sign," the "semiotic equivalent" of which is the identity of the Word with Jesus, or the signifier with the signified, while Blake equates theology with Art. In Blake’s \textit{A Vision of the Last Judgement} (1810) he discriminates between what he calls Allegoric Fable & Spiritual Mystery\textit{(VLJ E 555)}, but by this time his definition of allegory has become inseparable
from Pilgrims Progress and therefore is synonymous with didactic literature, and art in the service to Moral Law offends his antinomian sensibilities. He continues: "Allegories are things that Relate to Moral Virtues Moral Virtues do not Exist they are Allegories & dissimulations" (VLJ E 563). "Poetry," he says, is "Vision or Imagination" [and] is a Representation of what Eternally Exist" (VLJ E 554). Blake conceived of metaphorical language in the same way that Boehme andSwedenborg did except that he took it one step further; they argued that Adam's appropriation of the Divine Fiat through naming the perfect creation was not lost with the Fall but is hidden from the corporeal understanding as a Signatum rerum in all things. Blake, on the other hand, believed that the "incarnational sign" is within the poetic and prophetic Imagination, which is God in man, and therefore the productions of the Poetic Genius are prophetic, and the spiritual significance or the Signatum rerum of the verbal and visual symbol meet beneath the literal level of the text on an "allegorical" level. This is when the motivated language of the mentalist becomes purely ontological because meaning is lost into image and the commentator's narrative expands into the inexhaustible metaphors of Revelation. Remark ing on his "Grand Poem" in a letter to Thomas Butts some seven years before his A Vision of the Last Judgement, he uses a more standard definition of allegory in defining "the Most Sublime Poetry":

33
I may praise [the poem] since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity I consider as the Grandest Poem that This World Contains. Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry.

(LET E730)

Rather than simplifying Robert Essick's detailed analysis of the place of Blake's semiotics in the mystical, theological and rationalist traditions, it might be more consistent with the focus of our narrative to look for the source of Blake's rejection of the hegemony of seventeenth and eighteenth-century language theories, as well as the literal language and dead metaphors of orthodox theology, in the antinomianism of the post civil-war dissenting churches. We have already noted the alternative and often ingenious interpretations that many of these sects worked out of the Christian doctrine of Love, and we have found that a number of the leaders, like the Ranter Laurence Clarkson, argued that "a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make[s] it so" (MHH 12; E 38). Preaching to a London gathered church called "My One Flesh," he convinced the congregation that "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence" (MHH 7; E 35), saying that "there was no sin but as a man esteemed it sin," and that "therefore till you can lie with all women as
one woman, and not judge it sin, you can do nothing but sin." Rejecting the sedimented and univocal definition of words for the openness of metaphor, or the closure of the rationalist’s mathematical model for the limitless and provisional character of aesthetic truth, Clarkson argues that the meaning of the word "adultery" depends entirely upon the context. He writes that "what act soever is done by thee in light and love is light and lovely though it be that act called adultery." After seeking scriptural support for his open and adulterous life-style (he had been married for many years) in a close study of "Solomon’s writings," and being undeterred by a brief run-in with the Privy Council in 1650, he eventually lost his faith to atheism only to be rescued by John Reeve, the Muggletonian, who taught him to renounce Reason and accept justification by Faith alone.

One of the major problems that Blake had with Cartesian epistemology and Christian transcendental theology was that they too made a distinction between the world of human thought and feeling over which the individual presides and over which he exercises his moral and rational control, and the insentient natural world of mechanical operations that exists independently of man and that functions in a causal, repetitive, unchanging and therefore predictable manner. Blake objected to this mind/matter or mind/body dichotomy in There is No Natural Religion (a and b texts) and again in
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell because he believed that it was at the center of an associationalist epistemology that broke everything in the world into higher and lower, superior and inferior categories that are organized in a top-down discipling order, such as God/world, good/evil, male/female, action/accident, reality/appearance, knowledge/opinion, thought/feeling, reason/experience, reason/rhetoric, reason/imagination, and so on. This hierarchical organization of the world that had come to be "a matter of common sense" to most educated people by the middle of the eighteenth-century was a hierarchy of consciousness and a scale of value and authority. Among its assumptions was the belief that lower forms of nature are senseless and inert and require the intervention of a higher agency to instill motion, it theorized that animals lacked the ability to remember or anticipate suffering and therefore they do not truly feel deprivation and abuse, it validated the existence of a hegemonic social hierarchy of privilege and authority that determined the quality of life of the powerless, and it claimed that God created the human physiology and the material universe a few thousand years ago but that He had since, presumably at the time of the Fall, abandoned man and nature to the operation of mechanical laws.

Blake rejected the basic preconceptions of the dominant discourse that go along with this rationalist world view
because he found them everywhere in the mouths of tyrants and oppressors as justifications for a dehumanized philosophy and science, for political, economic and social injustice, for intellectual, religious, cultural, aesthetic and affective hegemony, not the least of which he felt occurred in the patriarchal family as a consequence of gender inequality. *All Religions Are One* is Blake's reply to the "self-evident" concept of epistemology proposed by Descartes and later supported by Newton and Hartley that human "experience" is made up of the interactions of sensory stimuli received from an independent, material world, and then organized into patterns or complexes by rational thought processes.\(^1\) He begins the above tractate tongue-in-cheek with "The Argument": "As the true method of knowledge is experiment the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences. This faculty I treat of." and ends with the non-empirical, anti-rational conclusion that "The true Man is the source [of all religions] he being the Poetic Genius" (*ARO* E 1-2). Similarly, Blake uses the two antithetical texts of *There is No Natural Religion* to both ridicule the dialectical method inherited from classical philosophy and to challenge the notion of a dual nature within the individual that separates the higher mental or spiritual aspect of the person from the bodily or emotional aspect. Concerning Locke's notion that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, Blake makes his attitude toward
innate ideas very clear in his annotations to the Sixth Discourse of Joshua Reynolds:

Reynolds Thinks that Man Learns all that he Knows.
I say on the Contrary That Man Brings All that he has or Can have Into the World with him. Man is born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown This World is too poor to produce one Seed.

(Rey 157; E 656)

The rationalist "Argument" of the "a" text: that man "is only a natural organ subject to Sense" leads to the logical conclusion that man can have "no notion of moral fitness" because his experience is "limited to objects of sense" (NNR a; E 2). Thus, because rational science and philosophy can only map general causal processes, the morality the ethics and the logic of human behavior are unknowable and therefore unimportant areas of human concern. The companion "b" text takes the contrary anti-rationalist position that "Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception," and argues it to a radical theological position strongly reminiscent of a number of the seventeenth-century sectarians, particularly the Ranter leader, Ebiezer Coppe, shortly before his confinement: "God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he / is" (NNR b; E 2-3).

Regardless of social class, patriarchy is as much a guarantee of privilege within the family as it is within the state. It is not surprising, then, that Blake inherited by
way of the post-Restoration dissenting sects a profound distrust for domestic patriarchy, a distrust that made itself felt in the early years of the eighteenth-century as a serious challenge to the traditional model of the family. If we go back to the Commonwealth period and trace this attitude forward, the Wiltshire minister, Thomas Webbe, was typical of the antinomians who objected to the constraints of marriage. He is alleged to have claimed that "it was lawful for him to lie with any woman," and that "there is no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage." Around 1705, the publisher John Dutton continued the attack on the patriarchal family when he condemned husbands and fathers who make a claim for absolute authority as "no better than domestic tyrants and the perfect enemies to peace within doors." Two decades later in 1724, the satirist Bernard de Mandeville made a similar assault on the family as a flawed institution when he ridiculed a stern father by charging him with "preaching nothing but Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance to his daughter," and then by describing the offer of marriage as a contract in which "the person to whom [the suitor] pays his devotion would be so kind as to oblige herself solemnly, before witnesses, on the penalty of being damned, to be his slave as long as she lives, unless he should happen to die before her." Blake's attitude towards the beauty of the naked human body is obvious from the numerous figures in his designs, and his attitude
towards sex as "happy copulation" is central to his thought and will be an important focus of the commentary on selected poems in the chapters that follow. However, we can anticipate his stance on both of these subjects by quoting two aphorisms from the Proverbs of Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and at the same time locate the poet clearly in the liberal tradition that dates back to the Diggers, the Ranters and the Behmenists:

- The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.
- The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

(MHH 8 23, 25; E 36)

We have ample evidence from Blake's biographers that his marriage to Catherine was, though childless, a relatively amicable arrangement, and this seems on the surface to be inconsistent with his position on "free love" and "open marriage," a position that gives some credibility to the story that he once caused his wife considerable anxiety by proposing to her that he take a mistress. Since these kinds of biographical nuts are nearly always impossible to crack, a more interesting and relevant question to ask might be whether he shared with the radical sects this distaste for moral and civil law, and for the institution of the family. The metaphors that Blake used to represent marriage are telling; it is "the silken net," or the "Golden Net," the "golden cage," "Matrimony's Golden cage," and the "Crystal Cabinet," all images that suggest entrapment
and containment. Moreover, for the wife, wedlock is
generally associated with legal bondage and sexual coercion,
such as in Oothoon's apostrophe to the God of Law, Urizen,
the "Demon of Heaven":

she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is
bound in spells of law to one she loaths: and must she
drag the chain of life, in weary lust! must chilling
murderous thoughts.

obscure

The clear heaven of her eternal spring?

(VDA 5 21-24; E 49)

The husband's lot is not much better; Oothoon claims that
his role in the legally constituted marriage is to punish
his wife and to give her a passel of unwanted children. The
controlling metaphors of torture and disease characterize
the relationship in which the husband is

bound to hold a rod

Over her shrinking shoulders all the day; & all the
night
To turn the wheel of false desire: and longings that
wake her womb
To the abhorred birth of cherubs in the human form
That live a pestilence & die a meteor & are no more.

(VDA 5 25-29; E 49)

And finally, the unloved son of loveless parents is
condemned to repeat their mistake by prematurely locking
himself into a marriage of hate and giving the wheel of generation another turn:

Till the child dwell with one he hates, and do the deed he loaths
And the impure scourge force his seed into its unripe birth
E'er yet his eyelids can behold the arrows of the day.

(VDA 5 30-32; E 49)

For Blake, art was not a pastime, an occupation or a trade, it was not even a way of life; rather, it was a belief that transcended all natural and familial relationships, and it was the very heart and soul of the man and his country. On The Laocoön he engraved:

A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man
Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian
You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & Lands
if they stand in the way of ART

(Lac E 274)

As an artist and a philosopher, Blake translated the tradition of radical political and cultural dissent that dates from the antinomian divines of the Interregnum into a personal aesthetic that is inseparable from his radical interpretation of Christian doctrine, and virtually everything he wrote and is alleged to have said throughout his life attests to the strength of his philosophical
convictions. Blake's Annotations to The Works of Joshua Reynolds make it clear that he considered the artist's choice of subject and technique to be not only an aesthetic, but also a political, ideological, even a moral statement, and this was not a matter to be left to the judgment of "Liars" and "Fools" who painted and wrote in the service of patrons given over to the "Cultivated Life." He says that "The Arts & Sciences are the Destruction of Tyrannies and Bad Governments . . . [and] The Foundation of Empire is Art & Science Remove them or Degrade them & the Empire is No More" (Rey E 636).

It is a matter of record that Blake enlisted the talents of his wife Catherine in the preparation of his materials and in the printing and coloring of the illuminated plates, yet it is not clear to what degree he consulted her or discussed with her other poetic and artistic matters.\textsuperscript{23} It is, however, extremely unlikely that he could have held such strong convictions and not have shared them with one who was so close to him, and it seems absolutely certain that he would not have entrusted his art to anyone whose abilities he did not respect and admire. Indeed, Blake's objection to the patriarchal family was based on the institutionalization of love in the legally constituted marriage that so often deteriorated into the life-destroying emotions of possessiveness, jealousy and even hatred, not on his relationship to the woman who shared
his love, his life and his apocalyptic vision of a cosmic
rebirth. It seems inconsistent and a little out of line
with Blake's character to conclude, then, that he disdained
all forms of hegemony except the one based on gender.

Blake was an outspoken antinomian and he rejected all
claims to higher authority. His general attitude towards
government: "All Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore
are cruelty & Murder" (Wat 25; E 618) is as anti-
establishment in its rhetoric, its syntax, its passion and
in the boldness of its imagery as any denouncement of
orthodox society by a seventeenth-century Ranter, Digger or
Leveller. Like the spokesmen for the radical dissenting
sects, Blake wrote against the traditional patriarchal
institutions of Church and State, of "Priest and King," that
instituted and enforced the civil and ecclesiastical laws
that upheld the ideology of the privileged few at the
expense of the rest. In the voice of the Bard there is an
energy, a fierceness, sometimes an exulting defiance of
hegemony that harkens back to the proselytizers of the
radical churches, and in the metaphors, the symbols and the
unorthodox and frequently heretical narratives of his poetry
and designs we can recover the enthusiastic visions of those
long-silent oracles who preached Justification by Faith, the
power of Love and the imminence of a new spiritual day. By
the middle of the eighteenth-century, some part of the
antinomian tradition of dissent had likely been drawn off by
the democratic brotherhood of the Methodists, other parts no doubt evolved into new denominations, like the Hutchinsonians, the Moravians and the Sandemanians, still others went underground as gathered churches, like the Muggletonians and the Swedenborgians. But, as E. P. Thompson points out in *Witness Against the Beast*, there were enough independent tradespeople and middle-class artisans concentrated in particular areas of London who knew the vocabulary of dissent that Blake's voice as a young man would not have seemed remarkable or old-fashioned.24 However, by the end of the eighteenth-century the general move away from religious and political enthusiasm and towards a comprehensive, systematic view of nature and society based on moderation and the "self-evident" presuppositions of the rationalists had been so successful that those who warmed to the doctrine of "free love" and proclaimed that the State and the Church were the temples of Satan's Kingdom were dismissed, like Christopher Smart, Tom Paine and Joseph Priestly, as lunatics or political subversives.25 There were those who regarded Blake in his mature years as a madman, as a Gully Jimpson, but there were also those who regarded him as a charismatic prophet and, like Crabb Robinson and later Charles Swinburne, took his strangeness to be the eccentricity of genius.26 It is interesting that nearly two hundred years later he still provokes the same extreme reaction; the enormous depth and
scope of his work always seems to attract the finest
literary scholars, like Keynes, and Bentley, Erdman, Frye
and Bloom, but he also appeals to the counter-culture, and
many of the orthodox in the academy, while not dismissing
him, prefer to give him a wide berth.

Before the public's indifferent and sometimes hostile
response to Blake's ideas and art had dampened his
revolutionary spirit and driven him, at century's end, to
adopt more esoteric ways of "keeping the divine vision in
time of trouble," his antinomian enthusiasm struck out in
indignation at oppression wherever he found it. And he did
not have to look very far; he found it in the crowds of
wretched and dying children abandoned in the alleys and the
causeways of the city, he found it in the young beggars, and
harlots, and thieves and cripples and pickpockets that
crowded the chartered streets of London in the late
eighteenth-century, he found it in the child labor laws that
turned a blind eye to the open market in children for cheap
and precarious employment, in the charity school system that
profited the Overseers while providing young boys for
military service in his Majesty's army and young girls for
domestic service in the great homes of the wealthy, he found
it in the repressive and hypocritical codes of moral
conduct, and in the poverty, the filth and the suffering of
the working-class poor that supported the nation's delusion
of freedom and prosperity.27 And he saw it at home and
abroad in the corporations that ran the slave trade and capitalized on the traffic in human cargo, and in the imperialist governments that robbed and brutalized the native peoples of the Americas, India and the European colonies. These are the historical and political realities that Blake's early work confronts, and they are the social, political and historical contexts in which it must be read. The Book of Thel, the Songs of Innocence and of Experience, the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The Pickering Manuscript poems, and finally Europe and America are all allegories on human oppression and the need for physical and spiritual liberation. By selecting a number of poems and designs from these narratives that deal with the social construction of the female self in the patriarchal society of the eighteenth-century we may be able to put together a better picture of Blake's attitude towards the woman.
ENDNOTES


2. E. P. Thompson's valuable study, Witness Against the Beast, examines the history of radical dissent in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, and it traces the spirit of antinomianism and much of the symbolism and metaphorical architecture of these splinter churches to Blake's poetry and designs. Thompson also suggests that the composition of some three hundred hymns by the prolific Revd Joseph Proud for the congregation of the New Church in London may have been Blake's model for his Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Passim, but especially pp. 106-109, 151-153, 166-167 and 169-170.

3. See Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire, pp. 90-113, Toulmin, Cosmopolis, pp. 122-123, Thompson, Witness Against the Beast, pp.147-148, 167, 171. Inflammable Gas has also been identified by Rodney and Mary Baine in Newsletter number 38, 10 (1976), 51-52, as William Nicolson (1753-1815), the author of An Introduction to Natural Philosophy (1782), by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant eds., Blake's Poetry and Designs (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 376, n. 4, as Gustavus Katterfelto who put on scientific stage shows in London at the time Blake was writing the satire, or George Fordyce, the man
who supplied hydrogen to the balloon man, Vincent Lunardi, for his London ascent in 1784.

4. For a clear discussion of the move from the Renaissance humanism of Montaigne to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century rationalism of Descartes, Leibniz and Newton in the context of European history and culture, read the first chapter of Toulmin’s *Cosmopolis*, pp. 5-44.


8. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, p. 100. For a study of Leibniz’s interest in developing a perfect language, see Stephen K. Land’s *From Signs to Propositions: The Concept of Form in*

9. Thomas Spratt, History of the Royal-Academy of London (London: J. Martyn, 1667), p. 66. In order not to contradict the orthodox biblical position on Adam's "naming" of creation, these rational theorists simply dissolved the dichotomy by confusing the signifier with the signified and claiming that prelapsarian language had, as Spratt put it, a "primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words." (p. 113) Robert Essick points out how much this position had become standardized by quoting David Hartley's claim in Observation on Man (1791), p. 176, "that the language, which Adam and Eve were possessed of in paradise was very narrow, and confined in great measure to visible things" and was likely "monosyllabic in great measure." William Blake and the Language of Adam, p. 42 n. 45.


14. For a definition of the "incarnational sign" and its relation to these writers and traditions, see Essick's *Blake and the Language of Adam*, pp. 24, 46f.


17. Blake was aware of the publication of David Hartley's *Observations on Man* since he was employed by his publisher, Joseph Johnson, to engrave the frontpiece to the 1791, second edition of the work. However, Blake's lack of sympathy with Hartley's observations is apparent from his response to Bishop Watson's mention of the author's name in his *An Apology for the Bible*: "Hartley a Man of Judgment then Judgment was a Fool what Nonsense" (Wat IV 36; E 619).

18. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972), pp. 164, 167. Quoted also by Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 627. Compare Blake's comment about hell in his marginalia to Lavater: "mark that I do not believe there is such a thing litterally. (sic) but hell is the being shut up in the possession of corporeal desires which shortly weary
the man for all life is holy" (Marg 309; E 590, the emphasis is Blake's).


21. Mona Wilson, The Life of William Blake, (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1927), revised by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 72. See also Thompson's discussion in chapter eight in Witness Against the Beast, pp. 129-146, of the serious rift in the congregation of the nascent New Jerusalem Church at the 1789 annual conference. It seems that the dispute was over the degree to which the members were permitted a literal understanding and a strict application of Swedenborg's doctrines on natural and spiritual love as they were laid out in The Delights of Wisdom respecting Conjugal Love.

22. PM "The Golden Net" 19; E 483; PS "How sweet I roam'd" 11, 12; E 413; IsM "Hail Matrimony" 12 27; E 460; PM "The Crystal Cabinet" 23; E 488.

24. See Witness Against the Beast, pp. 52-64, 106-114.


26. See Swinburne's more enthusiastic than critical study William Blake: A Critical Essay (London: J. Hotten, 1868), one of the earliest books to celebrate Blake's genius. That Blake had a reputation in London as a madman can be determined from his perceived need to defend himself in the Advertisement to his Descriptive Catalogue for his 1809 Exhibition. After protesting his exclusion from showing his work at the Royal Academy and the British Institution, he invites "those Noblemen and Gentlm[e]n, who are its Subscribers, to inspect what they have excluded:" and says that "those who have been told that my Works are but an unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman's Scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide." (DC E 527-528)

27. For a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of abandoned children in London and other urban centers, the growth of crime among the young boys and prostitution among the young girls, the disfigurement of child beggars, the purchase of children for child labor, and the generally intolerable conditions under which so many thousands of young people were forced to exist, read Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 470-478.
II.

THE REALITY OF MYTH

Recontextualizing the Woman in Early Blake
CHAPTER THREE

The Book of Thel: Rejecting the Orthodox Construction of the Woman

An important theme in Blake’s work over the period 1789-94, in particular The Book of Thel, the Songs of Innocence and Experience, and the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, is the conflict between female sexuality and the late eighteenth-century ideal of feminine propriety, or more specifically, between a maturing girl’s awareness of her sexuality, and the social construction of the female self that valued the woman in terms of her physical beauty and her sexual virtue.¹ Blake’s long narrative poem Tiriel, usually dated around 1789, deals with patriarchal tyranny as a metaphor for the hierarchical order that fallen man has used to define his natural, domestic, political, and spiritual life. Realizing that his wife is dying and that his domestic and political rule are at an end, the aged and eyeless King Tiriel curses his descendants and retreats for shelter into an ironic Garden of Eden. Here, in a sort of second childhood, he meets both, Har and Heva, the ancient parents of humanity who live on in mental infancy, and the matriarchal Mnetha, whose name suggests that she cares for this old couple by protecting their memories of an earlier period of security. In his old age, Tiriel tries first to retaliate for his waning powers by cursing the generation that have inherited them from him, and then by escaping from
the painful world of adult experience into a lost paradise of remembered innocence. On the allegorical level, Tiriel is about an old patriarch who refuses to give up his outdated and oppressive habits of mind, and in self-defence regresses into a warm and sheltered childhood state. The Book of Thel reverses this movement; a young woman struggles to comprehend her purpose in the natural order of things so that she can leave the protected world of childhood innocence and enter the uncertain world of adult experience.²

In his "Textual Notes" to The Book of Thel Erdman points out that the young girl's name derives from the Greek word for "desire,"³ and it is the natural urges of Thel's body as she enters puberty that motivate her to search for some permanent meaning in an impermanent world. Poised on the threshold of her adult life, Thel struggles to find an answer to life's most elusive and enduring riddle: what is the point of a brief life of time and chance if death brings an end to everything? In growing desperation, Thel seeks the solution to her question by examining the life-giving processes in the natural world that surrounds her, but the young girl's selfish preoccupation with evaluating the quality of her own experience blinds her to the lesson that is revealed everywhere: simply, that all life is holy in the Eternal Now.⁴ In a final attempt to make the point that "we live not for ourselves" (T 4 10; E 5), her earth-mother
invites her to part the veil of death and see the fate that
awaits the natural body after it has suffered the inevitable
shocks of life's passage. However, even at the mouth of her
own grave, Thel fails to understand that lasting personal
fulfillment is not a reward that is paid to the virtuous
either in this life or in some promised life-after-death,
but is the eternal blessing that comes to the selfless who
commit themselves to the ongoing natural and spiritual
rhythms of life. As a result, the young girl sees only that
death and corruption are inescapable, and in despair she
concludes that human experience is nothing more than a
futile cycle of misery and death. The prospect of spending
her adult life answering to the self-serving and destructive
appetites of the Tiriels of Experience with no hope of
fulfilling a higher purpose horrifies the innocent young
girl, and when she is finally confronted with society's
hypocritical attitude towards her awakening sexuality, she
flees back into the idealized pastoral realm of unrealized
human potential, the "vales of Har" (T 6 22; E 6).

In the cryptic epigram to the longer poem, separately
titled "THEL'S Motto," Blake uses emblem or symbol
combined with Biblical allusion to create a metaphorical
context in which to pose the riddle that is the crux of the
young girl's existential dilemma, and therefore the key to
the allegorical sense of the poem. The riddle that Thel
must solve in the motto is epistemological, and it consists

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of two pairs of rhetorical questions. The answer to the first set of questions would seem to be self-evident since they simply ask Thel, and by association the poem's reader, to decide whether the Eagle or the Mole would be more likely to know the contents of the terrestrial pit.

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole:

(T i; E 3)

The answer is evident, and it has been evident for a long time since the question is a variation on the traditional mythical contrast between the keen-sighted Eagle as a symbol for imaginative or spiritual freedom, and the "subtle" serpent, in this case the blind, earth-bound Mole, as a symbol for the body's physical confinement in the cycles of the natural world. In shifting nexus of Blake's cosmology, this type of spacial distinction between sky and earth frequently implies the temporal one between eternity and the present moment. Also, the extremes of liberty and bondage to the earth suggest corresponding levels of human consciousness that extend from Divine vision to human sight, or from spiritual knowledge that is the knowledge of Eternity to corporeal knowledge that is the knowledge of the natural cycle of birth, life and death.

The second set of questions in Thel's motto seems to be a non sequitur, but it is actually connected to the first set by alternating rhyme and meter, and by the common
concern for Wisdom and Love. Blake borrows the "silver cord" and the "golden bowl" from the Book of Ecclesiastes, the heart of the wisdom literature of the Bible. These precious artifacts are paired with the "pitcher" and the "wheel" as symbolic articles of social life that have fallen into disuse and disrepair now that the living have departed the world. In the third line of the motto, Blake substitutes the word "rod" for the original "cord," and in this way updates the significance of the contrasting objects to the symbols for the authority of State and Church: the scepter as the staff of public office, the chalice as the sacred cup of the Eucharist.

Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a Golden Bowl?

(T i; E 3)

In the biblical text, the Preacher makes a distinction between the "silver cord" and the "golden bowl" as important sacred objects that still retain some inherent value even though they no longer serve a useful function for the community, and the "pitcher" and the "wheel" as their worthless secular counterparts. Blake turns this distinction between the sacred and the vulgar into the second part of the riddle that Thel must solve if she is to approach the world of experience with an awareness of all of the possibilities that are available to her. The question that Thel must ask herself is whether true Christian Wisdom
and Love are to be found in the traditional legal and moral
codes that constitute the authority of the ancient
institutions of State and Church, or whether life-giving
Love and life-affirming Wisdom can only exist in the absence
of rules of conduct and threats of temporal punishment and
eternal damnation. The "silver rod" is the emblem of the
authority of the State, the "golden bowl" of the authority
of the Church, but as complementary images they are also
suggestive of the organs of generation, and by association
with the legal and moral customs that have perpetuated the
hegemony of male gender. In patriarchal society, the
scepter represents man's political power and control, and in
the patriarchal family the phallus is the symbol that
guarantees man's domination of the domestic world. An
important part of Thel's question, then, is whether true
Love and Wisdom can be found in a political and social order
in which the woman's rights and roles are subordinate to the
man's, and where the moral codes that institutionalize
female sexuality and define the woman's proper conduct,
force her into selfishness and duplicity.

"THEL'S Motto" precedes the title page in all but two
copies of the work, and it seems most effective as an
epigraph because it raises in a provocative and playful way
many of the themes that are developed in the longer poem,
simply titled "THEL." However, it is not surprising that
Blake decided to use the "Motto" as an epilogue to the
poetic narrative in two late copies of the book since the motto is interrogative and Thel's various attempts to question personified aspects of her natural surroundings for an solution to life's ultimate question bring her no satisfaction. The presence of the motto at the end of the work would suggest that the girl's growing anxiety in failing to discover some point to her brief existence has not been relieved, and that society's ambiguous attitude towards her emerging sexuality will continue to trouble her despite her regression into primal innocence.11

In the longer poem, Blake allows the field of meaning which he has generated through the motto's metaphorical pairings to continue to grow in depth and complexity as their Biblical sources are recalled and integrated into the text, and as the relationship between idea and image triggers in his readers the shared social and cultural myths that can reinforce and expand the connotations of his own allegorical narrative. We have already noted that Blake has subtly altered metaphors from the Book of Ecclesiastes in order to raise questions that challenge the socio-political construct of the woman, but the connections between Thel's experiences and the metaphorical and existential materials that make up Biblical myth extend all the way from the beginning of the narrative to the end.

The Book of Thel is comprised of eight engraved plates; one bears "THEL'S Motto," another is a title page, and the
remaining six carry the story of Thel's quest in four numbered sections. The first section introduces the troubled Thel who laments the impermanence of natural life in her vanishing pastoral world. The personified "Lilly of the valley" (T 1 15; E 3) attempts to answer the young girl's complaint by offering her a vision of God's providence and his gift of eternal life. On the allegorical level, Thel's poetic metaphors for vanishing innocence recall God's sentence of Adam and Eve to the cycle of generation that ends in "the sleep of death" (T 1 13; E 3). The reply of the humble Lily, however, recognizes only the God of forgiveness and spiritual deliverance, and her speech is filled with the imagery of the harvest feast that celebrates the anticipated marriage of the bride in the Song of Songs.

The second and the third sections of the poem are engraved on plates three through five, and they chronicle the young girl's growing sense of alienation as she begins her search for some worthwhile purpose in life. Following the advice of the Lily, she first examines the brilliant Cloud of the morning sky, but receiving no satisfactory answers to her questions, she next turns her attention to the maternal Clod of clay. These two animations represent the extremes of the hierarchy of fallen nature, and they describe their existential functions in terms of their participation in the natural cycles that bring renewal to
the vegetable and animal life of the garden. Taken together, they recall the traditional mythical contrast raised in "THEL'S Motto" between sky and earth, spirit and body, Wisdom and Love, Eagle and Mole. The fourth and final section of the poem is engraved on the sixth plate, and it describes Thel's attempt to solve the first riddle of her motto by descending into the pit in search of the true meaning of physical death. The only answer that she receives comes from the mouth of her own "long home," and it is contained in a series of nine rhetorical questions that restate the second riddle of the motto in terms of the repressive social and political pressures that await the adolescent girl in the world of Experience.

At the beginning of the longer poem, Thel is identified as the youngest daughter of "Mne Seraphim," a fiery angel of incomparable beauty who guards the throne of the sky-God. In Blake's imagery, and in the traditional landscape imagery of the Bible, this is the seat of the burning sun. In the idealized pastoral imagery of the poem, the human inhabitants of the garden are young shepherdesses whose responsibility it is to lead their flocks to pasture. Their natural counterparts are the personified elements of the vegetative world whose job it is to complete their natural cycles so that they can deliver creation out of the shadow of nature and into the clear light of the Eternal Now. In this mythical garden of life, the maturity of the
daughters of Mne Seraphim is measured in terms of the progress of their solar day. However, while the older sisters have accepted the rising sun and ventured into the light with their "sunny flocks" (T 1 1; E 3), Thel shrinks from the approach of her "mortal day" and longs to preserve her "morning beauty" (T 1 3; E 3) by escaping the heat of the sun. She retreats down to the river Adona, the ever-living waters of the garden of life, to lament the natural process of birth and death. Thel's apostrophe to the "spring" (T 1 6; E 3) as the giver of life is likely a reference to the spring water of Adona as well as to the season of birth, and her request to know the reason for the impermanence of all forms of life concludes with her paradoxical desire to end her existence in the eternal garden of Eden rather than be driven by an unforgiving God out into the cycles of generation.

On the level of allegory, Thel's sisters are simply young women who have outgrown the thoughtless days of childhood innocence and now, through the conscious bond of gender or a common "sisterhood," share the maternal role in accepting the responsibilities of adult life. Thel, on the other hand, speaks with the voice of the troubled adolescent who has recently awakened to the transitory nature of the life that surrounds her. Although she has not yet arrived at an understanding of the role that her gender will play in determining her life experiences, she nonetheless objects on
general principle to the arbitrariness of temporal life and to the certainty of its passing. Thel's complaint is with the human experience of time and chance that ends metaphorically in the eternal night of physical death, a condition that she intuitively knows originated in the curse of mortality visited on man after his Fall in the garden of Eden. Sensing that her morning is nearing an end, and realizing that she is powerless to escape the impermanence of life in her solar day, Thel decides that it might be better to skip the indeterminate nature of adult experience and go directly into the

gentle sleep the sleep of death. and gentle hear the voice

Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time.

(T 1 13-14; E 3)

The answer to Thel's wish for an easeful death comes from the "Lilly of the valley" (T 1 15; E 3), a personified flower who shares her metaphorical name with the bride of Solomon in the Song of Songs. The lily of the Biblical text (Song of Songs 2: 1-2) is primarily a symbol for the physical beauty of the royal bride, and the reference may very well be to the flower known as the Annunciation or Madonna lily that is native to the Holy Land. Because of the long association of the virgin bride of the Songs with the virgin mother of the Gospels, the lily has come to symbolize purity, and it traditionally appears in pictorial
representations of the annunciation and the nativity as a symbol for the chastity of the Virgin. The Easter lily symbolizes the Resurrection, and therefore it is associated with both the death of the body and the liberation of the spirit, or with the delivery of the soul from the fallen order of nature into eternal life. Ironical, then, the young girl in the poem is invited by the Lily to draw a comparison between her superior human qualities and those of the humble flower who claims to be the most weak and unworthy of all the creatures in the garden. She points out that, despite her insignificance, the merciful God who visits her valley each morning with his benediction calls upon her to celebrate the gift of birth, life and death as a natural cycle that finally liberates the spirit to enter the garden of eternal life.

Thel's desire for a premature death is answered by the Lily's vision of the circle of her own life as an instance of the reality of Divine Providence, or as a revelation of the inner meaning of life as it really is. The Lily describes her experiences using the familiar pastoral images of valleys and fountains and springs that are linked with the progressive cycle of human experience through the growing and diminishing light and heat of the solar day. This idealized depiction of nature is the two leveled pastoral and paradisal landscape of Biblical myth; it is the outer and the inner life, or the natural world of time and
space and the spiritual world of eternity that are connected by the notion of revelation "as a vertical ascent from a world of death to a world of life." A benevolent God tells the Lily of the valley:

thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna:

Till summers heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs

To flourish in eternal vales:

(T 1 25; E 4)

The significance of the Lily of the valley's account of God's love for the inhabitants of his living garden extends to the Song of Songs as the selfless love of the bridegroom for his bride, a relationship that is represented in the pastoral imagery of the Bible as the love of the king for his country. Frye points out that, typologically, "it was not difficult for Christianity to read the poem as an expression of Christ's love for his Bride the Church," and that the "same figure of the land married to its ruler (that is, its true ruler or God) appears late in Isaiah (62:4)" where the restored "crown of glory" is Zion, and his bride is called "Beulah." In Blake's system, Beulah is the pastoral land of rest and renewal that lies between the world of Mental Warfare that is Eternity and the dead space and time of the material world that is Ulro. So, if Thel is a daughter of Mnemosyne or Memory who wishes to descend into
the mental sleep of Ulro, then metaphorically the Lily must be one of the daughters of inspiration who inhabit the hills and vales of Beulah until they are able to ascend into the true light of Eternity and rejoin their Maker.

Thel's reply to the flower betrays the anxiety she feels at hearing the "new-born lilly" (T 1 22; E 4) say that she welcomes her brief day in the sun as an opportunity to give thanks to her Creator for her daily bread or "morning manna" (T 1 23; E 4) and for the gift of eternal life. The young girl ignores the Lily of the valley's self-effacing description of herself as weak and undeserving of her beatification, but instead praises her compassion and her willingness to sacrifice her own life for the lives of those in the garden who need her. On the allegorical level, the Lily's selfless love reveals that she recognizes an identity between her own life and the life of the world that she perceives around her, and her willingness to die to her present life is an indication that she believes that it will be to enter a better one. Thel describes the virginal flower's gift of her self to the "innocent lamb" (T 2 5; E 4) as an act of compassion in which the Eucharistic identity of her body with the wine connects her act with the redemptive death of Jesus and with His promise of eternal life, both of which are symbolized by the Easter lily. Initially, the Lily's "milky garments" (T 2 5; E 4) symbolize her chastity, but after she is literally de-
flowered by the lamb, they are associated with the sacred "wine that doth purify the golden honey" (T 2 8; E 4) and become symbolic of her fertility and of the nourishing aspect of her emerging motherhood. 23

Thel’s milk and honey imagery recalls the paradisal landscape of the Promised Land or the kingdom of God that is the higher, spiritual aspect of the pastoral world of the Bible. Here, however, it is invested with the rich agricultural metaphors of the harvest banquet that the king in the Song of Songs uses to celebrate the beauty and fruitfulness of his bride. Addressing her as his enclosed garden, the king compares her love to a feast of wine, honey and milk. 24 In The Book of Thel, God’s covenant with the Lily is fulfilled when she is consumed by the lamb and rises to "flourish in eternal vales" (T 1 25; E 4), a spiritual union that suggests the marriage of a ruler to his land, where the ruler is God and his bride is the Lily of the land called "Beulah." Thel describes the fate of the chaste flower in the same figurative language used by the king in the Song of Songs, but here the underlying metaphor is both the marriage banquet and the virgin sacrifice. She says to the Lily that the innocent lamb

crops thy flowers. while thou sittest smiling in his face,

Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints.
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey, thy perfume,  
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass  
that springs  
Revives the milked cow, & tames the fire-breathing  
steed.  

(T 2 6-10; E 4)  
The Lily is mother and lover, and therefore the "smell" of  
her "garments" (Song of Songs 4:11) has the power both to  
nurture and to subdue the passions of her "numerous charge"  
(T 2 18; E 4). In her two aspects she unites the vegetable  
and the animal life in the garden, and through her  
participation in the endless cycles of nature she acquires  
hersymbolic identification with birth, death and  
resurrection.  

Thel understands that the Lily fulfills her purpose in  
life by reviving "the milked cow" and taming "the  
fire-breathing steed" (T 2 10; E 4), but she lacks the  
imagination and the compassion necessary to draw the obvious  
parallel between the flower's charitable existence and the  
way to live out her own life as a complete and fully  
realized woman. Using the royal metaphor, the Lily  
addresses Thel as the "Queen of the vales" (T 2 13; E 4),  
implying that there is a direct correspondence between her  
supporting role in the garden that prepares her for her  
reunion with her Lord in His heavenly kingdom, and the type
of experience that the maturing girl should be seeking as a means to her own spiritual fulfillment.

At the end of the first section of the book, Thel expresses her admiration for the Lily's loving sacrifice, but her protests indicate that she has learned nothing from it. Ironically, her selfish complaint echoes the bitter words of Job who, seeing no reason to keep on living, likens himself to a cloud that vanishes from the sky and leaves its "place" to be forgotten forever.26 In a final effort to help Thel, the Lily suggests that she ask the "tender cloud" (T 2 13; E 4) why it does not resent its brilliant but ephemeral appearance in the morning sky. In response to the Lily's summons, the Cloud takes human form and descends to "hover before the eyes of Thel" (T 2 16; E 4).

The second section of the poem opens with Thel's appeal to the Cloud to explain why it suffers its fate in silence while she feels compelled to cry out against the injustice of her circumstances into a universe that pays her no heed.27 The Cloud responds to Thel's question with a question of his own. He asks her if she has figured out the answer to what amounts to an allegorical riddle within the longer allegorical narrative:

O virgin know'st thou not. our steeds drink of the golden springs
Where Luvah doth renew his horses:

(T 3 7; E 4)
The solution to the Cloud's riddle lies not in the literal meaning of the passage—the meaning that would occur to Thel if she were a daughter of memory—but in an imaginative reading of the metaphors. If the "golden springs" are the waters of life in the Edenic garden, then the "steeds" that draw the clouds across the sky are the horses of the sun that drink and renew themselves at the same fountain as Luvah's horses. On the level of natural phenomena, the Cloud reveals that the source of its cyclic life as a visible body of water vapor suspended in the atmosphere is the operation of the heat of the sun on the stream below it. On the allegorical level, however, the sun's gift of life to the Cloud is a gift of love, and therefore the passionate horses of Luvah that are tamed by cropping the sacrificial Lily are renewed by drinking from the waters of the fountain of life, most likely the river Adona. Blake later makes Luvah the third of the four Zoas who is called the "prince of Love" (FZ 51: 25; E 334) in the major prophecies. Here, in his first appearance, he has already assumed his role as the lord of Love who guides the horses of the sun.

The Cloud and the Lily see the garden from very different perspectives, but their responses to Thel's complaint about the impermanence of life share a common thread. The Cloud joins the Lily in characterizing life as a loving sacrifice that ends in the death of the body and the liberation of the spirit from the fallen order of nature.
into "tenfold life, to love, to peace, and raptures holy" (T 3 11; E 5). More specifically, the Cloud describes the span of his emotional life as a natural cycle that begins with his descent as mist or condensation into the vegetative microcosm of the fertile valley where he locates, courts, and carries off the "fair eyed dew" to her "shining tent" (T 3 13; E 5). This natural cycle is completed when the couple is married before the "risen sun" and then ascends as water vapor linked in the sacred union of love that is symbolized by their "golden band," (T 3 14, 15; E 5) or their manifestation as the sun's corona. Here, like all living things that are joined in the natural cycles of cooperative becoming, they nurture the lives in their care out of their own substance; they sacrifice themselves to sustain the thirsting flowers of the garden, and are in turn reborn out of the world of death into the world of eternal life. 30

Thel is as baffled by the explanation of the Cloud as she was by the explanation of the Lily. In her preoccupation with her own circumstances she again misses the point that humanity shares a common life-energy with the world of natura naturans. Thel understands the Cloud's personal revelation simply on the literal level, and she tells him that, while she can sense the fullness of the vegetable and the animal life around her, she cannot actively nurture the flowers and the birds as he does.
She complains that she can no longer take joy in life's brief pageant as a disinterested spectator, and to live life only "to be at death the food of worms" (T 3 23; E 5) is to pass from a life of insignificance into corruption and nothingness.

In the Cloud's reply to Thel he addresses her as the "virgin of the skies" (T 3 25; E 5), an image that recalls her lineal descent from Mne Seraphim and the sun-god, and that shifts the focus from her mortality to her spirituality or from her body to her soul. The virgin of the skies in the Bible is the Virgin Mary whose conception of Jesus by the Holy Ghost is recorded in the first chapters of Matthew and Luke as the miraculous incarnation of the Divine Spirit. For Blake, however, Jesus is not the Son of an external God who was conceived in a virgin womb free of original sin, but the illegitimate child of an unmarried woman's impulsive act of love, and therefore the true expression of the divine creative genius within her. Joseph's forgiveness of Mary's indiscretion, and his acceptance of her son as his spiritual heir is the act of love and mercy that makes possible the renunciation of the body and the resurrection of the spirit. In order to receive God's "blessing," Thel must follow the example of the original virgin of the skies; she must accept that her sexual role in the cycle of mortality is the purpose of her life because only she can perform the act of love that will incarnate the Holy Spirit so that it can be
delivered from the body into eternal life. Through the woman "God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he / is" (NNR (b); E 3), and the importance of the maternal role in this archetypal cycle is revealed in the typology of the Bible. Mary's role as the mother of Jesus in the fallen world has an eternal aspect in Revelation where her counterpart is at once the queen of the heavens and the spiritual mother of God; she is both the bride and the mother.\(^{31}\)

By congratulating Thel on her "use" as "the food of worms" (T 2 25; E 5), the Cloud makes the same point as Thel made when she described the Lily's loving gift of her self to the "innocent lamb" (T 2 5; E 4). In both cases, spiritual fulfillment is available through the sacrifice of the self as food to be eaten, a symbolic act that Christ established at the Last Supper as the sacrament of the Eucharist, a rite that offers eternal life to those who are willing to share in the redemptive death and rebirth of Christ.\(^{32}\) The symbolic act of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood suggests that a person can only receive salvation by becoming spiritually one with the Savior. In an important sense, Holy Communion is a ritual of identity because it is an appropriation of the body of the Crucified and Risen One in order to share symbolically in His death and resurrection, a sacrifice intended to deliver all of humanity out of the fallen world of sin and death. This is
what the Cloud means when he explains to Thel that the highest form of personal gratification in life is not a matter of self-interest, but of self-sacrifice:

if thou art the food of worms. O virgin of the skies,

How great thy use. how great thy blessing; every thing that lives,

Lives not alone, nor for itself:

(T 3 25-27; E 5)

In the transition to the third section of the poem, the Cloud shifts the perspective from the sky to the earth by calling on the most lowly creature in the garden to reveal to the adolescent girl her future as the food of worms. In ancient mythologies, the figure of the worm or the serpent has both positive and negative aspects. It is phallic and therefore it has traditionally been associated with man's generative power, but in Christian doctrine it has come to symbolize the origin of sin and the curse of mortality. On the level of allegory, the "helpless worm" (T 3 30; E 5) that answers the Cloud's summons is the manifestation of "God descending" (AL 630; E 599) into the lowest form of life, into what Bildad tells Job is the human "worm" that is "born of a woman" (Job 25:4-6).34

Blake uses the worm to represent the bottom of the scale of conscious life and God to represent the top when he says that "God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes for he is become a worm that he may nourish
the weak" (Al 630; E 599). The incarnation of divinity in the body of man is the sacrifice of the all-powerful that will restore the powerless because it is the metaphor the contains all categories of being in an identity. One of the fundamental doctrines shared by Blake and the seventeenth-century nonconformist churches is that God is incarnate in man "and so is in everyone." According to Jacob Bauthumley, God manifests himself in all living things: "man and beast, fish and fowl, and every green thing from the highest cedar to the ivy on the wall," and "He does not exist outside the creatures."35 Thus, the Worm appears to Thel as "an infant wrapped in the Lilly's leaf" (T 4 3; E 5), a nativity scene that recalls the divine child "wrapped in swaddling clothes."36 The Worm's natural garment, the leaf of the lily, is the vegetative world that will restrain his spirit throughout his corporeal life, and that will supply the symbolic flower for his death and resurrection.

Thel's sympathy for the "helpless & naked" (T 4 5; E 5) Worm who weeps for the care of his mother is answered by the appropriate element in the order of nature, the personified Clod of Clay. In the allegory of the poem, the compassionate Clay is the earth-mother who is at once the cradle of all life and the grave into which all living matter descends at death. This matriarchal figure has a long and paradoxical mythological history, but through time she has not shared the contrary aspects of her being

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equally. The dominant aspect of the metaphor is of course maternal, and the earth-mother is the "body" of the world and the locus of man's nativity. However, in Old and New Testament typology, the Divine hands formed the first man out of the dust of the ground, and the Divine breath gave him life and spirit. In Romans 5:14 Christ is described by Paul as Adam's antitype, and therefore in Biblical metaphor all of the sons of Adam share a dual inheritance: they have their body from the earth-mother out of whom they were born, and their soul from their Spiritual Father who gave them life. To the fertile "Clod of Clay", then, the Worm is simultaneously the Father and the Son, God and Christ, to whom she is both bride and mother. She responds to "the weeping infant" (T 4 8; E 5) first as a mother would nurse her hungry child:

The Clod of Clay heard the Worms voice, & raisd her pitying head;
She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd In milky fondness

(T 3 7-9; E 5)

And then she describes how her king kisses her, anoints her head with oil and embraces her as his royal bride and the mother of his children.

The figurative context is the marriage ceremony, and the language is from the bride's celebration of the groom's love in the opening verses of the Song of Songs, but Blake
reverses the order of the events so that the woman's premarital love is a violation of the moral law. The Clod of Clay's children are illegitimate because they have been born out of wedlock, and the crown that she has been given by her betrothed is a direct reference to the enduring "crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4) that God gives to His faithful. Once again, Blake follows the heretical doctrines of the radical religious sects that can be traced back to the revolutionary years of the seventeenth-century. His Biblical type for the maternal Clay is the "adulterous" mother of Christ, and his point is that true love is the spontaneous expression of the pure of heart, and that "the consciences of believers may rise above the Law, and may forget the whole righteousness of the Law." 38 The Clod of Clay echoes the Ranters, the Levellers, and the Diggers in her claim that God is the spiritual king who "loves the lowly" (T 4 13; E 5), and his forgiveness is the act of mercy that allows humanity to transcend the maternal flesh and enter the eternal kingdom. Also, the "marriage" of the Supreme Spirit and "the meanest thing" (T 4 11; E 5) in the garden is the liberation of the subjective mind from the objective universe, and as we have seen this is awakening of the real consciousness in each of us that is the source of all life. 39 The Clod of Clay tells Thel that

he that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head.
And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my
And says; Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee.

And I have given thee a crown that none can take away

(T 4 13-16; E 5)

The Clod of Clay restates the selfless lesson of the Cloud: "we live not for ourselves" (T 4 10; E 5), but Thel misses the point and responds with disbelief and self-pity. She claims that she knows nothing of a loving God of forgiveness, and that her sense of life's futility comes from her fear of the misogynistic God of the Old Testament who rewards the sons of Adam by punishing the daughters of Eve. This false God is the vindictive Ruler of the fallen world who Blake calls "old Nobodaddy" ("nobody's daddy"), and Thel expresses her objection to his treatment of the woman in the ambiguous language with which he passed sentence on the serpent in Genesis 3:14: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Thel's version is:

That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
That wilful, bruis'd its helpless form: but that he cherish'd it
With milk and oil, I never knew;

(T 5 9-11; E 6)
Metaphorically, the serpent or worm represents lowest level of human consciousness; he is the corporeal man, and therefore God's judgement is that the fallen descendants of Adam will be locked with the daughters of Eve in cycles of mutual adversity, the man striving constantly to put off the sin of the maternal flesh. Thel's point is that God always takes the man's side in these rounds of domestic violence, and she claims that she was unaware that he cherishes the worm with "milk and oil," (T 5 11; E 6) the former presumably to sustain his temporal life, the latter his eternal one. From Thel's perspective, God's anointment of the worm as the earthly Messiah or Christ (Heb. mashiakh and Gr. christos, "the anointed") is also his acknowledgment that man is the heir to his kingdom, an act of entailment that awards the entire spiritual estate to the man and reduces the woman to dependency, a kind of negative definition "by relationship."42 In the state of Innocence, she is the chaste daughter, in Experience the wife and mother, and her primary existential function is to produce and raise male heirs, an activity that makes her role in the family progressively less important as she and her children grow older. This prospect of a short life of sexual service that dims into age and sexual impotence is what makes Thel complain to the Clod of Clay:
I fade away,

And lay me down in thy cold bed, and, and leave my shining lot.

(T 5 12-13; E 6)

At this point in the narrative, Thel is no closer to understanding that the common theme in the life-stories of these personified elements in the cycle of nature is that individual fulfillment comes from giving oneself to another, and that the annihilation of the self is the spiritual experience that takes the creative mind out of the lower pastoral garden and into a higher, paradisal one. In her concern for her mortality, Thel does not realize that the Divine Humanity within her breast is eternal and cannot fade away. She does not realize that the death of her body is simply the end of the physical stage of her life that is followed by the awakening of her spirit to its eternal form in the Bosom of God. The Biblical archetype for this cycle of deliverance is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus who "took on Sin in the Virgins Womb / And put it off on the Cross & Tomb" (EG [i] 55-56; E 524), and for Blake this is the necessary saving act that gives purpose and direction to all human experience. In order to pass from Innocence into the world of Experience, then, Thel must accept that her fulfillment as a woman will come through her love as a bride and mother since only through her can the child be born who
will abrogate the laws of Church and State, and bring an end to error.

Assuming that Thel is a daughter of Mnemosyne or Memory, she is the representative of eighteen hundred years of Christian dogma that has taught that humanity fell from timeless immortality in a perfect world into the cycles of generation that end in the death of all living things. In the Genesis account of this myth of the fall, God punishes the woman with conception or birth, and the man with mortality or death. The "subtle" serpent who is able to renew himself by shedding his skin is symbolic of the cyclical pattern of life in which sex and death are complementary sins. Thel has learned the moral creed of the Priest and King that says that woman’s love is sin, and that eternal life is a posthumous paradise for those who do not challenge the laws of Church and State. The Priest and King are identified in Europe a Prophecy as the sons of the Great Mother of humanity, Enitharmon, who, before she dreams the eighteen hundred years of Christian history, instructs her sons to spread the errors that become the laws of the Church and State:

Go! tell the human race that Woman’s love is Sin!
That an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters
In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come:

(Eur 5 5-7; E 62)
Thel cannot see the life-denying errors of Priest and King. She cannot accept that her fulfillment as a woman is only possible through her gift of love, and that her act of self-sacrifice as bride and mother will be rewarded with eternal life.

The matron Clay's final response to Thel's lament about the emptiness of a woman's brief life is to offer her a comparison between the days of her youth and that which awaits the death of the physical body in the grave. The Clay's proposal repeats the central contrast of Ecclesiastes, and it retains the Preacher's architectural image of the grave as the "long home" that is sought when "desire shall fail" and the "dust return to the earth as it was" (12:5,7). She tells Thel that she has called down into her shadowy habitation the frightened girl's "sighs" and "moans" that flew over her "roof", and she invites the child to enter the "house" (T 5 14-16; E 6) of death and seek the mysteries of the grave. She says:

I heard thy sighs.
And all thy moans flew o'er my roof. but I have call'd them down:
Wilt thou O Queen enter my house. 'tis given thee to enter,
And to return; fear nothing. enter with thy virgin feet.

(T 6 14-17; E 6)
The fourth and final section of the poem opens with a parody of the myths of descent and return in the Judeo-Christian and classical traditions. The "Queen of the vales" (T 5 14; E 6) is permitted to sink through the northern gates of death into a rather conventional underworld that has been envisioned in both traditions as an infernal realm into which the soul passes after the death of the body. Like the Angel who sees an orthodox Christian hell as a reflection of his own mental state in the fourth "Memorable Fancy" of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Thel sees the "couches of the dead" upon which the departed take their eternal rest, and the "fibrous roots" (T 6 3; E 6) of the tree of the first Garden that locks every human heart in the cycle of mortality. These images recall Thel's dual cultural heritage, and for the antinomian Blake, their representation of death as a nightmare of pain and despair is the illusion that the Church has used to coerce the weak and the tame into obeying its repressive moral codes. The real Hell is not a spiritual place into which the soul of the sinner is delivered after death, but an existing state of mind through which the individual must pass.

Thel's mental journey into the world of death takes her to her future "grave plot" where she hears a "voice of sorrow" (T 6 9-10; E 6) issuing from the empty pit. This voice is of course Thel's own, and it articulates her "sighs" and "moans" (T 6 14-15; E 6) into nine rhetorical
questions that express her concerns about the value of the life that she can expect from the world of Experience. Because of her inability to let go of her selfish fears and accept her higher spiritual purpose, she has learned nothing about the meaning of life from the personified forces of nature that she encountered in the garden. As a consequence, she will attempt to fulfill her physical and spiritual needs by following the dictates of Church and State, and they will make her adult life a hell of political tyranny and sexual repression.

The nine questions that rise out of the pit of death reveal that, if she enters Experience, she will be preoccupied with the life of the senses, and the socially depraved world that they open up to her is a frighteningly paranoid one, full of selfishness and duplicity. The first six questions focus on the rites of courtship described in the imagery of conspiracy and physical combat. Why, Thel's inner voice asks, is the young woman who seeks to be a bride and mother brought up to practice coyness, flattery, false modesty, and all the devious sexual intrigues that consolidate female power and advantage? The final three questions move from the contest to the ironic reward. They deal directly with the terror and confusion of the young virgin who is faced for the first time with the anatomical reality of sexual experience. The increasing stridency of the questions peaks with the contradictory longing and
loathing, the pleasure and pain of sexual initiation, and Thel’s inability to accept this brutal vision of her future gives her no choice but to flee in horror back into the emotionally static vales of Har. "THEL’S Motto" asks the question: can Love and Wisdom be found in a society in which the institutions that shape the woman’s life experiences deny her her true purpose in life and force her to be dishonest to herself and to those who would love her? Whether the motto appears at the beginning or the end of the poem, the answer is the same: a life that has been lived without the love that opens the mind and the heart to spiritual knowledge, or to the knowledge of Eternity, can only be described by the echoing refrain of Ecclesiastes: "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (1:14). All is vanity "under the sun," the Preacher says, but "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (3:1).

This is precisely the lesson that Thel should have learned from the personified elements in the natural world. But, to the weak and the insecure mind, the possibility that all experience is subject to "time and chance" (Ecclesiastes 9:11) is a frightening thought because it invalidates the structures that are supposed to supply design and purpose to life and collapses all meaning into the exigencies of the random moment. To the strong mind, however, the realization that living life is seizing the opportunity of the moment
does away with all of the external rules that determine how a productive life should be led; it does away with custom and policy and practice: social, cultural, political, moral, religious, and so on, and it frees up the creative energies to find joy and happiness in "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." (Ecclesiastes 9:10) This is the heady Wisdom of the antinomian Preacher of Ecclesiastes, and his message that a person's activities should be determined by impulse, not by rules, is the life-affirming answer to Thel's motto, whether that motto is meant to introduce the adolescent girl to the world of adult experience, or to keep her in mind of life's ongoing challenge in her withdrawal from it.
1. In his "Textual Notes" to The Book of Thel in The Complete Poems, p. 790, Erdman points out the difficulty in accurately dating these roughly contemporary works, not only because they overlap in dates of composition and engraving, but also because of later additions and emendations.

2. Blake linked this feminine world view to the "vales of Har" of Tiriel and The Song of Los (3:20 and 4:5) since Thel's dilemma is analogous to the one the aged but child-like couple, Har and Heva, faced long before the widowed king sought out their idle tranquility. In Hebrew, the word "Har" means mountain, and so the realm Blake calls "the vales of Har" is an inverted paradise in which God is the Mother, Mnetha, not the Father. Her children are the emotionally and imaginatively stunted who are sexless because they exist in a state in which the woman dominates while the man slumbers, the dreamy state of Beulah.


4. Blake shares this doctrine with many of dissenting churches, and he returns to it in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (25, E 45), the Visions of the Daughters of Albion (8: 10; E 51), America a Prophecy (8: 13; E 54), and in his Annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms on Man (309 E 590; 407 E 592).

5. This separately titled four line poem, bordered with a green grape vine with three leaves at its base, is printed on
a page by itself and appears as an epigraph in thirteen copies of the work, as a postscript in two, and is altogether absent from an additional one. The style of the lettering of the motto is consistent with the concluding part of the work (T 6; E 6) and suggests that they both may have been composed, engraved and added at the same time, perhaps as an afterthought. In *Prophet Against Empire*, n. 37, p. 131, Erdman suggests that they were included sometime after 1791. The central theme of the longer poem: the quest for permanent value in a life of finite experience, is strengthened and given clearer focus in these two additions through the direct references to the Book of Ecclesiastes. As an epigraph, the motto would serve to alert readers to the biblical parallels and encourage them to compare the observations and the conclusions of the young girl with those of the wise Preacher. As an epilogue, its function would be more didactic and would suggest that the girl's options are still open if she can find a satisfactory solution to her riddle.

6. In Medieval Christian symbolism, the mole was associated with the earth and with the sin of avarice, and as a burrowing animal that lives underground it was believed to be blind.

7. In explaining the doctrine of the Fall in terms of Biblical imagery and human consequence, Frye makes many of the same connections in *The Great Code*, pp. 109-10. He points out that the knowledge that man acquired with the Fall is a knowledge of sexual experience, and that while this knowledge "seems to
have been a genuine wisdom that put man, at least potentially, on the level of the true gods or angels," it is also a "self-consciousness" and therefore "founded on a consciousness of death, so that mortality is a part of it."


9. In his discussion of The Book of Thel in Blake's Heroic Argument (London: Croom Helm, 1988) p. 34-35, David Fuller also associates Blake's "silver rod" and "golden bowl" with the "sceptre" and the "chalice." However, by suggesting that they "symbolize the wisdom of the state and the love of the Christian religion," and that these are qualities that Thel can only learn from experience, he overlooks the irony of the motto's closing questions. I would agree with Fuller that Thel must come to understand that she should be "at one with the ultimate powers of this universe" through discovering the "spirit of self sacrifice," but I would argue that, as an antinomian, Blake would never suggest that she could learn this lesson by submitting to the laws of the Church and the State.

10. In discussing the "golden cup" of Revelation, Frye remarks on the "sexual image of the cup" in The Great Code, p. 155. Also, the traditional justification for patriarchy in the domestic world is the symbolic relationship between husband and wife suggested in "Christ's love for his Bride the Church," (p. 155) and in God’s sentence of Eve in Genesis 3:16: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule
11. In discussing the paradox of female modesty in The Proper Lady, pp. 21-22, Mary Poovey argues that it "perpetuates the paradoxical formulation of female sexuality. For a modest demeanor served not only to assure the world that a woman's appetites were under control; it also indicated that female sexuality was still assertive enough to require control. That is, even as modesty was proclaimed to be the most reliable guardian of a woman's chastity--and hence the external sign of her internal integrity--it was also declared to be an advertisement for--and hence an attraction to--her sexuality. This paradox appears in nearly every eighteenth-century discussion of modesty."

12. Various explanations have been offered for the name or title "Mne" in "Mne Seraphim." Erdman first cites Keynes who suggests that "the apparently meaningless syllable was certainly intentional, probably being a corruption of the mystical name, Bne Seraphim . . . " (E 790) Keynes refers to the work of Cornelius Agrippa, an early sixteenth-century occultist who used the term "Bne Seraphim" in Occult Philosophy to identify the Intelligences of the planet Venus as the sons of the seraphim. Agrippa also supplied Blake with the name Tiriel, a term that the philosopher originally used to designate the Intelligence of the planet Mercury. Blake might have found the word particularly suggestive because it sounds like a compound "teary" El, or "weeping god." Erdman
later argues that the nonsense syllable "Mne" was a mistake and that Blake probably meant to write "the Seraphim." He suggests that the poet "may first have intended her as a daughter of Mnetha, guardian of the vales of Har in Tiriel, and then simplified to 'the Seraphim'" (E 895). If Erdman is right and Blake's first impulse was to make Mne Seraphim a daughter of Mnetha, then perhaps Thel is connected through her maternal line to the Greek goddess of memory, Mnemosyne. Thel's descent from memory might be the reason why she is unable to accept the inspired counsel of the Lily and the Cloud who proclaim that it is through love that the vegetable body is put off so that the Spirit can "flourish in eternal vales": (T 1 25; E 4).

13. Blake followed Swedenborg in distinguishing between a natural and a spiritual sun; the former is the material sun of the world perceived by the rational mind and called Satan, the latter is God or Divine Vision and originates in the creative Imagination. Blake also made use of Swedenborg's distinction between the light of the sun which is Divine truth or Divine wisdom, and the heat of the sun which is Divine good or Divine love. See Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1962), Chap. XIV: "The Sun in Heaven" (n. 116-125) and Chap. XV: "Light and Heat in Heaven" (n. 126-140). In Frye's discussion of the relationship between the cycles of nature and the development of mythical thought, he alludes to the traditional contrast between "earth-mother" and "sky-
father," body and spirit, love and wisdom, a contrast that is common in Blake and that is central to *The Book of Thel*. See *The Great Code*, pp. 68-70.

14. Blake discusses the "World of Imagination" as the reality that underlies "the world of Generation or Vegetation" in *A Vision of The Last Judgment* (E 555).

15. Susan Fox, in her article "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry" in *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake*, 1970-1984 ed. Nelson Hilton (Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1986), p. 78, argues that the "female power which governs the Beulaic vales in *The Book of Thel* in not only restricted, but negative in implication. The daughters of the seraphim seem to be the only permanent human inhabitants of the vales, and they apparently run things there amiably enough." She goes on to say that because "only daughters inhabit the place, and because "the youngest of those daughters attempts to leave and cannot," Blake "identifies females with failure." Blake's point in writing *The Book of Thel* is to reinforce the positive natural role that the maturing woman must accept as her responsibility in a shared world, and at the same time to challenge the social, political and religious hegemonies that have made this role seem frightening and counterproductive. Also, the daughters of the seraphim are not permanent inhabitants of the vales of Har. They lead round "their sunny flocks." (T 1 1; E 3), which in the allegory of the poem means that they have left
Beulah and entered the maternal world of Generation. Female power in Beulah is only negative if it is insufficient, as in Thel's case, to motivate the young woman to leave her childhood and enter the world of adult experience.

16. The most frequently cited source for Blake's "river Adona" is the Lebanese river Adonis mentioned in Paradise Lost (I: 450-452) in connection with Ezekiel's vision of the idolatrous weeping of the daughters of Sion for the departed god, Adonis. In Greek mythology, this fertility god was loved by Aphrodite for his great beauty, and the annual remembrance of his sacrificial death became a nature cult in which his birth, life, death and rebirth were associated with the ever-renewing cycles of the vegetative world. Another possibility is Spenser's "Gardin of Adonis" mentioned in the Faerie Queene (III, vi, 261f) as a paradisal garden in which the God of generation endlessly reincarnates the seeds of the infinite forms of life. This latter paradise is suggestive of the Garden of Eden which in some respects is Blake's mythical analogue for the vales of Har.

17. Discussing the opening of The Book of Thel, Stephen C. Behrendt finds little intelligible pattern in Blake's pastoral imagery. He claims that the syntax in the narrative is confusing and that the meaning is contradictory. See Reading William Blake (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp.79-80.

18. See, for example, the "disguised symbolism" in the center panels of the Master of Flemalle's The Merode Altarpiece.
In comparing the concept of "time and space" with "eternity" in Biblical myth, Frye says that the distinction between these two levels "turns on the meaning of 'resurrection' in the New Testament as a vertical ascent from a world of death to a world of life. Resurrection is thus not renewal or rebirth or revival or restoration: all these words mean a new cycle of time, and are in the last analysis the opposite of resurrection." The Great Code, pp. 71-72.


22. Most editors, including Erdman, emend the last element in Blake's sequence of those who receive the Lily's gift from "o'erfired" to "o'ertired", but this does not necessarily constitute a better reading of the text. Blake's parallelism suggests that the Lily first gives herself to the creature "that cannot crave": i.e. the innocent lamb who does not know desire, then to "the voiceless" (T 2 4; E 4): i.e. the "milked cow" who cannot articulate her desire, and finally to "the fire-breathing steed" (T 2 10; E 4): who is the epitome of desire.

23. Thel's struggle in the poem is to understand what the transition from Innocence to Experience will mean in terms of the quality of her existence. However, because so much of the woman's definition in eighteenth-century patriarchal society
was based upon her gender, and therefore upon her sexuality, the primary contrast in Thel’s state is between her virginity and her potential to become a sexually active bride and mother. The traditional sign that the female adolescent has reached puberty and is herself capable of childbearing is her menarche, the beginning of her menstrual cycle, a natural transition from genderless childhood to fertile womanhood that involves the blood of initiation. In the Bible, blood is often associated with female sexuality and with the ritual of birth and rebirth. The woman’s sexuality is also suggested by the "golden bowl" of Ecclesiastes 12:6 that is broken when man must "go to his long home," and it appears in connection with wine and blood in its evil shape in Jeremiah 51:7 as the whore, Babylon, who is the cup of drunkenness, and again in the same form in Revelation as the cup that bears the blood of martyrdom. In its benevolent aspect, it shows up in I Corinthians 11:25 as the bowl carrying the blood and the wine of the Eucharist. Frye makes many of these same biblical connections in The Great Code, pp. 154-155.

24. See Song of Songs 4:1-16; 5:1. The parallels between Blake’s imagery and the imagery in the Biblical text are apparent in the latter passage, which reads: "I am come into my garden . . . I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat 0 friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, 0 beloved."
25. Frye explains the importance of the royal metaphor in the Bible as a symbolic focus for social and spiritual unity. The Great Code, passim, but especially pp. 87-91, 98-100.

26. See Job 7:9-10: "As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more." At the end of the poem, of course, Thel does descend into the grave and then return.

27. Blake continues the ironic comparison between Thel's confused self-pity and the anguish of Job who was able to hold onto his faith in God through the worst of calamities. Job was also an innocent who sought to understand the reason behind life's brevity and seeming arbitrariness, and he too was driven to speak out in protest: "I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11).

28. The king in the Song of Songs describes his bride as an enclosed garden that contains a "well of living waters" (4:15) from which he plans to renew himself. Also, one of the sources for Thel's garden is the garden of Eden, and Frye explains that the "fountain" in the garden of Eden "is not explicitly called the water of life in the Genesis account, but symbolically that is clearly what it is." The Great Code, pp. 144-45.
29. Blake associates horses with the rational intellect and therefore with Urizen. In The Four Zoas they are Urizen’s "immortal steeds of light" (FZ 39: 3; E 326) that he offers to Luvah to draw the "chariots of the morning . . . into the Zenith" (FZ 21: 26-27; E 311).

30. David Fuller makes a similar point in Blake's Heroic Argument (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p.35. He says that death can "be understood throughout the poem not only as literal fact but also as an image of the transition in physical life from spiritual sleep to spiritual awakening, the loss of the old self and the creation of the new which is the possibility ultimately offered to Thel." My only disagreement with Fuller on this point would be that this "transition" from a world of death into a world of life--what Frye calls "the gospel of metanoia"--is the option that is available to Thel from the beginning of the poem to the end, and it figures metaphorically here and in the Bible as "the reappearance in human life of the higher or transfigured nature." The Great Code, p. 131.

31. See Revelation 12. Frye discusses the symbolic importance of the imagery of the bride and the mother in the Bible, and he too makes the connection between the Virgin Mary and the chaste bride of the Song of Songs. See The Great Code, pp. 140-142, 154-157.

32. For the various accounts of the Lord's Supper see Matthew. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-22; John 6:35-59 and 1
Corinthians 11:24-28

33. A variation on this theme of love as the selfless participation in the community of life is the subject of the Clod of Clay's remarks to the Pebble of the brook in "The Clod & the Pebble" of the Songs of Experience (SE 32; E 19).

34. As Irene Tayler points out in "The Woman Scaly," Midwest Modern Language Association Vol. 6, Spring 1973, 75-76, Blake is not consistent in his use of the worm since it is a symbol for both male and female gender. She quotes the passage from For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise in which the persona finds the "Door of Death" open and identifies "the Worm Weaving in the Ground" as at once his "Mother . . . Wife, Sister, [and] Daughter" (GoP 45-48; E 269), all roles that define the woman in terms of her relationship to the man. She comments that the speaker is both a male and a "dark Hermaphrodite," and that the split of the former into separate male and female aspects is supported by a revision of the pronoun reference from "I" to "we." In this poem, Blake is again telling the story of the Eternal Man's sleep that brings with it the contraction of his creative consciousness into the material universe, and the division of his unified being into its antagonistic male and female aspects. As Frye points out in The Great Code, p. 110, the serpent, "with its ability to renew its vitality by shedding its skin, is the symbol of the cyclical world of objective nature that man entered with his 'fall.'" So, even though the phallic serpent can represent
mans' generative power, its symbolic connection with the body of the natural world in most creation myths makes its regenerative power female. For Blake, then, the worm in Generation can be both male and female, both the male sexual organ and the female caterpillar who weaves the material cocoon for the unborn embryo of the butterfly. It is the "invisible worm" of "The Sick Rose" in Songs of Experience, (SE E 23) and it is the "Catterpiller on the Leaf [who] / Reminds thee of thy Mothers Grief" in For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise (GoP 1-2; E 268).


37. Frye makes the same observation in his discussion of pagan nature gods in *The Great Code*, pp. 67-70. His larger point about the ancient mythological association of the rhythms of human life and the generative cycles of non-human nature that personalize the landscape has a good deal to do with both Blake’s visual art and the allegorical figures in his poetry.


40. Jesus uses his own relationship with his disciples as an example of how they must be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives for their friends. In predicting the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter, he issues this commandment a number of times, but he summarizes it in John 15:12-13: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Milton makes a similar statement when he tells his Spectre, Satan, that in the "Laws of Eternity . . . each shall mutually / Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee" (M 38 35-36; E 139).

41. The poems from Blake’s Notebook that allude to the jealous Old Testament God as Nobodaddy are "Let the Brothels of Paris be opened" ("after Oct. 25, 1792," Erdman: "Textual Notes" p. 861), "To Nobodaddy" (ca 1794) and "When Klopstock England defied" (ca 1797-99). All three lyrics belong to the same
period as The Book of Thel, the Songs of Innocence and of Experience and the Visions of the Daughters of Albion.

42. Mary Poovey makes the same point about the definition of the woman in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European culture in The Proper Lady, pp. ix-xv, 18-24, as does Catherine L. McClenahan in "No Face like the Human Divine" in Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods, eds. G. A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990) pp. 190-191.

43. In his discussion of the Genesis account of the fall of man, Frye makes many of the same connections between man's consciousness of sex and death as the primary symptoms of his fallen nature, and the externalization of this psychological or spiritual fall in the cyclical rhythm of an alienated nature symbolized by the revitalizing power of the serpent. The Great Code, pp. 109-111.

44. Many of the images Blake uses to describe the grave recall the "evil days" of Ecclesiastes "when the keepers of the house shall tremble" (12:3) "and the mourners go about the streets" (12:5) for then "shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (12:7). Blake also gives his image of the mysterious world of death some antiquity by drawing the symbols of the "eternal gates," the "terrific porter" and the "northern bar" from classical as well as contemporary sources. Certainly it is the Cave of the
Naiades which has a northern gate for the descent of the mortals in The Odyssey, Book XIII, l. 145f. Other possible analogues are the gates of death guarded by the allegorical porters, Sin and Death, in Paradise Lost II, l. 645f, and the double gates of the Garden of Adonis in Spenser’s Faerie Queene Book III, canto VI. In Harold Bloom’s Commentary on The Book of Thel in The Complete Poetry, p. 895, he argues that the "northern gate is the passage from lower innocence to experience, and so a gate for men, because this passage is necessary for human existence. The southern gate is the passage from experience to a higher, imaginatively organized innocence, and so more akin to the gate of the gods. Thel flees back through the northern gate, and so returns to the unorganized innocence or ignorance of the lower paradise."

45. In Blake’s Milton, the protagonist tells Satan that his false religion is based on the fear of death, and this observation is particularly appropriate to Thel’s attitude towards her own life and death. Milton says to his Spectre: "Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches / Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach / Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness" (M 38 37-39; E 139).
CHAPTER FOUR

_Songs of Innocence and of Experience:_
Exploring Society's Construct of the Woman

**Antecedents**

Around the time Blake was writing _The Book of Thel_, he was also composing and engraving a "song cycle," or a series of short pastoral poems which he issued in 1789 under the title _Songs of Innocence_.¹ In this collection of seemingly naive poems with accompanying illustrations, Blake follows a number of his predecessors who had employed the medium of tuneful verse to evoke the pastoral world of sheep and shepherd ostensibly for the entertainment and the instruction of children. While the tradition of the pastoral has its origins in the urban nostalgia for the simple country life that first inspired the _Idyls_ of Theocritus, and later the imitative political and religious _Eclogues_ of Virgil, Blake's interest in the genre is with its interpretation of the imaginary Golden age as the timeless Garden of Eden, a Christian adaptation of the form that can be traced back through Medieval pastoralism to the Messianic fourth Eclogue of Virgil. Like their classical counterparts, Blake's pastoral poems can be read as social, political and religious allegory, but the _Songs of Innocence_ are satirical statements only to the extent that the reader is able to supply the contrast between the idealized settings of childhood innocence that they present, and the

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actual human conditions that these settings imitate. The
detection of the ironic mode requires of the reader a level
of sophisticated moral interpretation that is unavailable to
the naive innocent who is therefore its unsuspecting victim.

A number of critics have examined Blake’s indebtedness
to the pastorals of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, others
have discussed his earlier experiments in the genre in
Poetical Sketches (1783), and still others have looked at
the original versions of some of the poems that were sung by
characters in his early prose satire known as An Island in
the Moon (c. 1784). The strongest, the most immediate and
the most satirically rich influence on both the Songs of
Innocence and the Songs of Experience was, however, the
contrasting traditions in the genre of children’s conduct
literature that began to emerge with the changing attitude
towards children at the beginning of the eighteenth-
century.² By mid-century, conservative parents and
guardians could still find gloomy didactic literature to
threaten their unruly children with eternal damnation for
their sins, but those parents who were interested in
promoting the spiritual health of their children without
terrorizing them discovered that new educational materials
were increasingly available at the booksellers in the form
of collections of illustrated parables and verses that
retold in a simple style many of the popular stories from
the Bible. Blake’s Songs of Innocence follows in this new
sentimental tradition of books written expressly for the
instruction of little girls and boys that use attractive
rhymes and illustrations suited to the young age of their
intended audience.

John Newbery was one of the earliest, the most prolific
and the most influential of the professional writers of
sentimental children's literature, but his books were not
entirely without precedent. Around the turn of the century
a small undated book by "T.W." entitled A Little Book for
Little Children used poetry and riddles to instruct its
young audience, and the enormously popular verses of Dr.
Isaac Watts, Divine Songs attempted in easy Language for the
Use of Children, would certainly have been known to both
Newbery and Blake since it was reissued for more than a
century and a half after its first publication in 1715.4
John Wright's Spiritual Songs for Children: Or, Poems on
several Subjects and Occasions (1727) also combined moral
instruction with meter, and the tiny "Gigantic Histories" of
Thomas Boreman (two inches high) that appeared in the 1740s
helped to set the style and prepare the language for the
steady production of children's literature after mid-
century. Another important forerunner of Blake's Songs of
Innocence was the work of Mary Cooper, particularly Tommy
Thumb's Song-Book (1744) which consisted of short tunes that
were to be sung to the "little Masters and Misses . . .
by their Nurses till they can sing them themselves," and
Nancy Cock's Song-Book which was advertised in the same year as "a Companion to Tommy Thumb's and the Second Volume of that great and learned work." Among the thousands of books written expressly for children in the eighteenth-century, the three collections that seem to be the closest in theme, form and tone to the Songs of Innocence are Charles Wesley's Hymns for Children (1763), Christopher Smart's Hymns for the Amusement of Children (1770), and especially Anna Letitia Barbauld's Hymns in Prose for Children (1781), no doubt because Blake was employed by her publisher, Joseph Johnson, to engrave appropriate designs for the text.

It is probable that the idea of a companion set of poems depicting the child's loss of innocence had occurred to Blake early on in the process of preparing the 1789 volume since this is the subject of some eighteen poems he was collecting in his Notebook over the period 1790-1792. Before the turn of the eighteenth century, many of the children's books that aimed at youthful improvement through religious and moral guidance were modelled on Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563). Rather than attempting to shape young minds through entertainment, the writers of these volumes took a very different approach to child-rearing and the education of the young; they assumed that it is the proper duty of children "to give full obedience to superiors, like parents, and that early socialization in the need for such obedience and deference is an essential preparation for life in a
strictly hierarchical society." Comenius' * Orbis Pictus* (1650), Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls; Or, Country Rhymes for Children* (1686), revised, renamed and reissued under the title *Divine Emblems; Or, Temporal Things Spiritualized*, James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1676), as well as the work of Abraham Chear, Thomas White and many others, threatened young unrepentant sinners with mutilation, violent death and eternal damnation. In her Introduction to a facsimile copy of John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, M. F. Thwaite notes that "William Sloane in his *Children’s Books in England and America in the Seventeenth Century* lists two hundred and sixty-one books published for children between 1557 and 1710, the great majority concerned with religious teaching and moral instruction." Most of these early children’s books were comprised of sermons, moralities and pious examples, and their authors took a serious approach to the education of what they regarded as impressionable and easily distracted minds. The social and domestic world that the writers of these books created as a mirror of the youthful readers’ own was deceptively simple for "good" Christian children to navigate, but at the same time it was full of young people who were disobedient, sinful and morally weak, and the lurid stories belabored the terrible natural and spiritual penalties levied against those who failed to steer the right course. Initially, and on the surface, the relationships
between the children and their mothers and fathers, or others in authority, seem openly trusting and affectionate, but the adults in these narratives inevitably turn out to be adversarial, self-righteous, judgmental and in many cases unforgiving.

Blake's second volume of poems entitled *Songs of Experience* recalls this earlier type of didactic literature written for children, and when these poems are combined with the earlier *Songs of Innocence*, they point up the ironic contrast between the older repressive mode of education that attempted to frighten children into behaving themselves with stories of gloom and doom, and the new permissive one that sentimentalized childhood as a carefree period in which loving parents allowed their children to learn about life through educational games and innocent play. Blake uses the naive simplicity of the *personae* in the *Songs of Innocence* to create a sustained "structural" irony that comes into clear focus only when these children's sentimental impressions of the world are subjected to the disillusioned scrutiny of their knowing counterparts in the *Songs of Experience*, especially the narrators of the identically titled companion poems: "The Chimney Sweeper," "Holy Thursday" and the "Nurse's Song." The corrective vision that comes from reviewing the first set of poems in terms of the second clarifies the moral and the intellectual assumptions that must be shared by the reader and the author.
if the *Songs of Innocence* are to function effectively as
social, cultural and psychological satire. It is the
powerful satiric undertow from this second volume of poems
that draws the first into high relief and sets the entire
work in opposition to conduct literature as serious social
criticism, a feature that is of course unique to Blake's
children's book.¹¹

The ironic contrast between Innocence and Experience is
both dynamic and a collaboration between the artist and his
adult audience, adult because the ironic thrust of the work
would presumably go over the heads of most young listeners
or novice readers. This is of course ironic in itself
because it means that Blake's "conduct book" was not
intended for the moral education of the child at its
parent's knee, but rather for the adult reader who could see
in the child's innocence a momentary reprieve from a harsher
reality that it would eventually come to know and to
live.¹² For the sensitive reader, the contrast between
Innocence and Experience would be that much more horrible
because it would begin in a sentimental nostalgia for the
lost Golden Age of childhood Innocence and end in the tragic
realization that those who live in a society that brutalizes
the innocent and the helpless are not themselves free of
blame. Also, since the plates in each of the books were
individually printed, painted, and assembled by a single
artist who was responsible for the entire process from
conception to distribution, each copy of the work was in a sense "custom made." This means that the subtle contrasts and qualifications that are necessary to effective verbal and visual irony were not fixed in the printing of Blake's volumes, as they would be in a conventionally produced book, but were latent within the unfinished composition until they were finally drawn out by the artist and his brush. Indeed, Blake was an antinomian artist. His rearrangement of the plates each time he printed a copy of the collection suggests that he was continually discovering new patterns and motifs in the work, and that he wanted the mature reader to pick up the resonances, the parallels and the tensions that he was developing not only between Innocence and Experience, but also in and among the poems themselves.

The world that the Songs of Innocence and Experience describe is, for the most part, the hard, working-class world of late eighteenth-century industrial London, and the poverty, the prejudice, the hatred, the exploitation, the danger and all the human grief and suffering that typified the life of the working poor in the 1780s are in these poems for children. In the Songs of Innocence, however, this dirty urban scene with its calloused people is largely obscured by the simple faith of the child speaker who sees the world as an Edenic garden populated with innocent sheep, kindly nurses, protective mothers and a spiritual Father who is waiting to welcome the tender souls of His children into
a storybook heaven. Few eighteenth-century Londoners would have had difficulty recognizing the ironic distance between this simple world as it is depicted in the Songs of Innocence and the complex world in which they actually lived, and in turning from the pastoral poems to the Songs of Experience they would have found evidence that the oversimplified ideals of the children were not the target of the dissenting satirist, but rather the devout, law-abiding citizens and the Church and the State that allow society to continue to victimize the weak and the innocent.

Blake’s purpose in writing poems that play off the Innocence of childhood against the strictures of a world that it must come to know is not to provide a dialectic that will lead to a reconciliation of contrary perspectives in some form of mental truce, although for those in the state of Experience this would probably be an acceptable solution. Innocence needs the protection of Experience, and one of the main themes that runs through the Songs of Innocence is the cycle of guardianship implied in the role of Christ as Redeemer and at once the Son of Man. Innocence does not need the kind of repressive and dictatorial supervision that Blake describes in the Songs of Experience and that he attributes to society’s institutionalization of Christ’s teachings. Innocence must interact with Experience, but the energies of youth must be balanced by the sympathetic care of Experience, not by a systematic attempt to suppress them.
The contrary to childhood Innocence is not adult oppression, and Blake uses the various forms of irony—verbal, dramatic and structural—to describe a social situation that clearly suggests the possibility of a better one.

To accept the actions of tyrants and hypocrites as the true contrary of Innocence is to miss the subtlety of Blake's irony and to mistake his satiric intent. Irony can never be the product of true opposition in Blake, only of the frustration of opposition. The cries of the reluctant children who do not wish to "leave off play" (SI 24 7; E 15) in the "Nurse's Song" of Innocence are not ironic when they are set in opposition to the legitimate concerns of their protective nurse, but the same dramatic scene in the companion poem from Experience is bitterly ironic since the inflexible will of the cynical and envious nurse allows the children no contrary response. This, then, is Blake's ironic version of the perspective on childhood shared by Watts, Smart and Barbauld. Like his predecessors, Blake wrote his Songs to amuse and to instruct, but it is not the antisocial behavior of children that his poems are meant to correct. Rather, it is precisely the attitude these earlier writers display in their presentation of childhood that he challenges, and his appropriation of the literary ballad for his own verses invites a direct comparison between the vision of Innocence he offers in his poems and the one available in these more orthodox collections.
Innocence and Experience: "these States we now Explore"

Blake accounted for the difference in perception between those who saw the world as an innocent place and those who experienced it as an ordeal by claiming in the subtitle to the combined volume that, taken together, the poems would be: "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" (SIE 1; E 7). Each of the songs, then, is a vision of the world as it is perceived by a person who has entered into one of two states of consciousness, or states of the "Human Soul," which Blake called Innocence and Experience. For Blake, "States" are unchanging stages of mental life that every person must pass through who desires to reach "truth" in the eternal life of the human Imagination. As Thel demonstrates by her retreat into the "vales of Har," these stages in the mental or spiritual evolution of the individual are not automatic or compulsory, but they are progressive and necessary for spiritual growth. In a tradition that can be traced back through the seventeenth-century antinomian divines, Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh, and Ebiezer Coppe, to the radical theology of Jacob Boemhe, and perhaps to the doctrines of the twelfth-century abbot, Joachim of Fiore, Blake divided history and human experience into successive Ages that he called States. Using Biblical metaphor, he described these states as Zechariah's seven Eyes of God, and they represent the states of mind that
humanity must pass through in its search for the ideal state of consciousness, called Jesus. Each stage in the process brings with it a particular set of "errors" that each individual must transcend before he can move on, and each requires an expanding level of commitment, a greater degree of love and forgiveness.

In the state of Innocence, the personae, mostly children, make no distinction between the divine, the human and the natural, or in the metaphorical identity of both the synoptic Gospels and the poems themselves, between the shepherd, the child and the lamb. The little boy's catechism of the lamb in the poem from the Songs of Innocence simply titled "The Lamb" turns on this point of oneness. He tells the lamb that God

is called by thy name,

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild,

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb,

We are called by his name.

(SI 13-18; E 9)

The natural world these innocent children see is a living pastoral garden the prototype of which is the personified Holy Land, the location of many of the events described in the Bible. When this idealized nature takes human form and meaning, as it does for example in "A Cradle
Song," it becomes the dreamy realm of Beulah, and its depiction and significance are maternal. The human or social aspect of the world of Innocence is organized around the ideal patriarchal family suggested by Jesus' address to God as his spiritual "father" and by the christological title that identifies him as the "Son of God." Many of the poems in the Innocence collection, such as "Night" and "On Another's Sorrow," celebrate the child's sense of paternal love that is expressed at the highest spiritual level as the identity of the child with the Son and the Father. For Blake, God's ultimate demonstration of his love for man was to create him in his own image, which in the Old Testament is the type of the incarnation of Divinity in the body of the infant Jesus, and the children in many of the verses take comfort in Christ's identification of himself with them: "Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me, and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me." (Luke 9:48) Although the children in Innocence do not see the darker side of the world of man and nature, the adult reader in Experience would likely recognize that Matthew's version of Jesus' equation of himself with the child is accompanied by an unambiguous caution to those who would denigrate the spiritual condition of the little ones:

... whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one
of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (18:5-6).

In the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus makes no mention of the gender of the children that he equates with himself and with his Father. One reason for this might be that in the Christian tradition the fall of man is a descent into sexual knowledge, and therefore the image of children as genderless is the external evidence of their sexual innocence and their spiritual purity, the prelapsarian qualities that make the identity with Divinity possible. Indeed, society still reserves its strongest contempt for those adults who perceive children as anything other than sexually naive innocents. However, as Thel eventually finds out from the voice of sexual experience that speaks to her from her empty grave, society reverses itself when the female child reaches adolescence, and from then on it defines her socially in terms of her relationship to the man, and physically in terms of her sexuality. A young lady's pre-marital value in any class in eighteenth-century English society was to a large extent measured in terms of her natural charms and her ability to preserve them intact. And, as Blake's "A Little Girl Lost" from the Songs of Experience and "Mary" from The Pickering Manuscript discover, the young woman who fails to recognize that her
chastity is the "greatest glory and ornament of [her] sex" will be reminded at every level of society that "this lost, every thing that is dear and valuable to a woman, is lost along with it; the peace of her own mind, the love of her friends, the esteem of the world, the enjoyment of present pleasure, and all hopes of future happiness." 25

Like Blake, Mary Wollstonecraft was a member of Joseph Johnson's circle of dissenters, and her unfinished novel, entitled Maria or The Wrongs of Woman (1798), is a realistic and a militant account of the wrongs done to women of different classes by their families and by an eighteenth-century patriarchal society that denied them their rights. It points out that a woman of good family can be married against her will to a husband who can abuse her with impunity, and who can even have her legally jailed or committed to an insane asylum if she opposes him. 26 In parallel narratives, Wollstonecraft has Maria, a woman of some means, recount her story of oppression in a male dominant family and in a loveless marriage, and then has the bastard Jemima tell the sad tale of her rape as a sixteen year old servant girl by her drunken master, her expulsion from the family as a "strumpet," and her rapid descent into poverty and prostitution. The common factor in both of these narratives is that the female characters, regardless of their station in life and the resources at their disposal, struggle heroically but futilely against a society
that values them only for their sexual innocence before marriage and their monogamy afterwards. The lesson that these women learn is that the woman’s defiance of male authority or her submission to it makes little difference to her fate, since the quality of her life is legally and morally dependant upon the inclinations of those men who "own" her.

The denial of the rights of the woman is the theme of Wollstonecraft’s late eighteenth-century novel, and historically this injustice has been built into the patriarchal social system of Europe as a necessary "double standard" to protect the property and the property inheritance of the middle and upper classes. Since the woman’s pre-marital chastity and her post-marital virtue were the only guarantees that the man had of the legitimacy of the heir to his family estate, the woman’s preservation of her virtue, or her "honour" as it was called well into the nineteenth-century, was fortified by all of the legal and moral force that society could bring to bear on the subject. The young woman "was expected to be a virgin on her wedding night," and throughout the remainder of her married life her husband was entitled to the "full monopoly rights" to her sexual favors. The historical belief that the woman had a greater physiological proclivity to be sexually active and inconstant was repeated in the anatomical as well as the theological literature of the
period, and the anxiety that this assumption produced was intensified by the social expectation that she be chaste before marriage and faithful after. Indeed, even the woman's reputation as a worthwhile person was defined in terms of her sexuality, and the preservation of her "virtue" was the principal concern and responsibility of her parents or her legal guardian before her wedding day, as it was her husband's duty after her father had "given her away."

The relative social acceptability of a man's sexual liaisons before marriage, and his unfaithfulness afterwards was to a large degree a legacy of the same social, economic and political system that up until the eighteenth-century arranged marriages on the basis of class and financial advantage, not love, and that viewed male pre-marital sex and adultery as minor diversions or indiscretions. The double standard that excused male promiscuity but made the woman's unchastity an unforgivable sin was also reflected in the meaning of the words "innocence" and "experience" when they were used to describe the state of mind or the physical status of the young man and the young woman. Applied to the man they connoted positive growth or successful physical achievement, but with the woman they were negative terms that were never free of the moral implication of sexual activity in which the male was the victor, the female the loser. Metaphorically, this distinction is carried in the language that society has traditionally used to describe
man's sexual acts as "conquests" in a physical game, while the experienced single woman is described as "fallen," or "ruined" when she has "lost" her "virtue" or her "innocence."

Blake combines this double standard in sexual behavior with the metaphorical association of the woman in Genesis with sexuality and subordination, and the man with labor and death. In the fallen world of Experience, death is the symbol for all evil and sex is the symbol for all passion. Thus, while the genderless children in Blake's *Songs of Innocence* are cheerfully oblivious to the dangers that surround them, the male children pass into the world of the *Songs of Experience* when they become aware of their mortality, the female children when they become aware of their sexuality.

Despite the naivety of the little chimney sweepers and the brightly uniformed charity school children in the *Songs of Innocence*, their honest perceptions of life are full of clues that they suffer deprivation and physical abuse at the hands of their mothers and their fathers, their masters and their guardians. There is also some indication that, like most children, they pretend or play at the household activities of their parents, such as the invitation in the "Laughing Song" to share a natural repast with Mary, Susan and Emily in their idealized domestic world:
When the painted birds laugh in the shade
Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread
Come live & be merry and join with me,
To sing the sweet chorus of Ha Ha He.

(81 15 9-12; E 11)

We can glimpse the "real" world of Experience in the powerful metaphors that Blake uses in the poem "Night" to describe the transition from the Edenic world of Innocence into the dark world of predation and death. Here, the natural and the human are so completely blended that the narrator is not separable from the pastoral creatures that he describes, and therefore the potential for violence against the sheep by the thirsty wolves and tigers could be interpreted as any social threat to the well-being of the children. The menacing presence of beasts of prey in the garden is offset by the proximity of gentle orthodox angels who hover protectively around the slumbering flock, and by the naive comfort the narrator, perhaps a young boy, draws from a three way identity between himself, the sacrificial lamb of God and the Good Shepherd who tends his sheep by night. In a weary acceptance of his need for the sleep of Experience, he says:

Wash'd in lifes river,
My bright mane for ever,
Shall shine like the gold,
As I guard over the fold.

(SI 21 45-48; E 14)

In the Songs of Innocence the reader sees the world through the eyes of the "innocent," and therefore cruelty, injustice, child labor, racial discrimination and all the human shapes that childhood exploitation can assume, is rationalized away with the moral clichés, the religious threats, the empty promises, and the weak excuses that the representatives of society have given the children to control and appease them.

The evidence that Blake attached a great deal of importance to the healthy love between young men and women is clear in the Songs of Experience from the large number of poems that are devoted to the subject of sexual initiation. But, that he was particularly troubled by the prevailing attitude towards the woman's sexuality is also apparent from the number of these poems that deal specifically with society's paradoxical response to the sexual awakening of the adolescent girl. The difference between the female children in the Innocence poems and those who have passed into the state of Experience is that the latter have undergone the physical and psychological transformation of the girl into the woman, the event in which the adolescent female comes to an awareness of her potential to be both lover (wife) and mother. At its most fulfilling, sexual love is the loss of the self in a spiritual identity or
"marriage" between two people, and in Blake's cosmology it is the easiest way to exit the static world of Beulah and enter the unified state of Eternity where sexual difference is lost in the Wars of Intellect.³³ Like his antinomian predecessors, Blake believed that "Love! free as the mountain wind!" (VDA 7 16; E 50) cannot be evil or immoral because "the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away" (VDA 1 9-10; E 46).³⁴ But the focus of these poems is not the act of love as the highest form of shared experience that a man and a woman can enjoy, but the repressive and unforgiving attitude of society towards the young woman's loss of her child-like simplicity where, in many cases, this loss involves her chastity.

The Flower Poems of Innocence and Experience

Among the poems that explore the physical, social and psychological aspects of the sexual initiation of the adolescent girl are a group that use the traditional metaphorical association of the woman's sexual condition with a particular flower, a comparison that runs all through Western literature and can be found in the Song of Songs where the bride describes herself as the "rose of Sharon" and "the lily of the valleys." The use of the image of the plucked or spoiled flower to suggest the virgin's violation or her loss of innocence can be traced in English to the Medieval deflouren or defloren, a word that probably derived
its figurative sense from the Latin deflorare, "to gather flowers," or defloresco (deflorui), meaning "to lose bloom or blossoms" or "to fade or wither." Of the five short lyrics that mention a flower in their titles, only "The Blossom" appears in the Songs of Innocence, while "The Sick Rose," "My Pretty Rose Tree," "Ah! Sun-Flower" and "The Lilly" are all poems of Experience.

"The Blossom" belongs in Innocence because the "happy" female plant who speaks in the poem has come into full flower, or has reached her full development, but as the repetition in the second stanza of the second, third and sixth lines of the first verse indicate, she is naive and unable to understand why the brightly colored Robin redbreast would be so upset that the Sparrow has had equal access to her bloom. The poem is a psychological study in sexual possessiveness, and the "Pretty Pretty Robin" (SI 117; E 10) who believes that his passionate appearance should have gained him exclusive rights to the flower is jealous that the dowdy but "Merry Merry Sparrow" (1) has been allowed "Under leaves so green" (2,8) to seek the "cradle" (5) of his life near her "Bosom" (6,12).

Jesus used the common sparrow as a symbol of God’s love for the lowly or the seemingly insignificant in pointing out His greater love for those who are worthy of His love, and the Robin’s consciousness of his superior merit gives
him pain because he feels that it has not been reflected in the Blossom’s treatment of him. In describing the Sparrow’s amorous response to the flower, Blake makes no distinction between the perception, the desire it arouses, and its gratification since the phallic shaft is visual, but it is also an "arrow" (4) that seeks and finds its mark. The Blossom is in the state of Innocence, and to Blake this means that she, like the Virgin Mary, is one of the "innocently gay and thoughtless" who should not be "Condemned" because they are "ignorant of crime in the midst of a corrupted Age" (VLJ E 559). But, those who are in the state of Experience are those who are responsible for preserving this "corrupted Age", and they will condemn her illicit love affair with all of the life destroying scorn that society can bring against the moral transgressor of the moral law.

The design pictures a striking flame-like flower that rises up the right margin of the plate and then breaks left across the top of the page. In the flames above the text of the poem are eight figures consisting of two couples in the center, one a mother with an infant at her bosom, three winged figures to the left, and one without wings to the right. The mother and child are the focus of the group, and she is distinguished from the other figures by her larger size and by the fact that she is clothed while the rest are naked. In a clockwise circle behind her back and above her
head are the personified five senses, beginning with sight who is busy reading, and ending with the embracing figures of touch and perhaps smell, since the female speaker is, after all, a flower. I would argue that the cycle of the awakened senses that ends in the woman with child is the generative process that is set in motion by the "Merry Sparrow" who finds his target in the first stanza of the poem.\textsuperscript{36} The mother at the center is dressed, indicating that her sexual awareness, symbolized by the new-born at her breast, will bring her into the more confining state of Experience, and the solitary, wingless figure to her right is the earth-bound Robin whose self-consuming jealousy leaves him no room for the freedom to love.

The monologue in the \textit{Songs of Experience} entitled "The Sick Rose" is society’s contemptuous response to the "innocently gay & thoughtless" (WLJ E 559) sexual act of the Blossom described in the \textit{Songs of Experience}.\textsuperscript{37} The rose is a traditional symbol for sexual experience, and here it represents a more specific description of the neutral Blossom who has now fallen from Innocence into the state of Experience.\textsuperscript{38} The speaker could be the jealous Robin because beneath the accusatory tone of the poem is a vindictive glee that is not quite suppressed and is typical of the slighted and resentful lover. In diagnosing the flower as "sick," the Robin acts as the spokesman for the
conservative forces in late eighteenth-century society that regarded any break in the rule of chastity by the woman as unnatural and spiritually destructive because it was seen as a potential threat to the health and the prosperity of the entire social order.

Behind the speaker’s pronouncement that the Rose’s sickness is terminal is the tradition in Christian doctrine that associates the loss of virginity with the original loss of sexual innocence in the Garden. With the woman, this fall into sexual awareness recalls the Divine sentence that condemned her to suffer in the cycles of conception. Thus, the Blossom’s fall into Experience transforms her into the Rose, and she becomes the source of new life. However, by allowing the phallic worm to find her "bed / Of crimson joy" (SE 39 5-6; E 23) before society has found her an acceptable husband; by becoming a mother before a bride, she will find that her act of spontaneous love will quite literally destroy her life. The vengeful, holier-than-thou tone of the poem reveals the Experienced speaker’s confidence in the power of society to punish the transgressor, and his description of the act of love as a "dark secret" (SE 39 7; E 23) that will cause pain and corruption repeats the Old Testament judgement of Eve in which "Womans Love is Sin." (Lav 226; E 601) The Lily in Thel’s garden of life demonstrates that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (T 3 26-27; E 5), and therefore the
Rose's "sickness" is perceived, not real. Indeed, it is through "sensual enjoyment" that the mind is released from the "finite & corrupt" (MHH 14; E 39) garden into the eternal one. To find blame in the Rose or the Worm is to beg the question, for sex is only sick when it is viewed from the frustrated perspective of the socialized Robin who "wishes but acts not!" (MHH 25; E 45).39

In the illustration to "The Sick Rose," a thorny vine climbs up the left margin of the plate, crosses above the title of the work, and then descends down the right-hand margin to drop a large red blossom directly beneath the second stanza of the poem. In the vines above the poem and directly opposite the rose itself two small female figures face each other in postures of sleep, the upper one draped across the thorns with her left leg drawn up and her head buried in her arms, the second one huddled up, her hair falling forward and concealing her face. The sleeping figures are surrounded by nine green leaves, two more branch out from the vine as it descends to the left, the final one on the right stretches towards the bloom and carries a caterpillar or cankerworm that has entered the blossom. Where the phallic-like worm invades the center of the flower a yellow-haired girl emerges, her hands outstretched, palms extended in a gesture that Blake used most frequently to suggest joy or deliverance. At the top of the vine on the left a second caterpillar extends its body from the stem to

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a leaf, presumably to feed, and in some copies a third is added to the stem between that leaf and the next. It is possible to interpret the attitudes of the two upper figures as suggestive of despair or sorrow, and the lower one leaving the bloom as reacting with horror to the invasion of the worm, but this would only make sense if the poem is read from the state of consciousness that regards sex as sinful, or if, as Bloom suggests, the rose "has an inner sickness that helps to bring on the outer destructiveness of the worm's 'dark secret love.'" However, to adopt the Experienced perspective of the accuser is to accept the body-hating mentality of orthodox Christian society, and there can be no irony in contrasting sexual naivety with social intolerance when the physical act of love is viewed with such horror and loathing.

The last three of the lyrics that use flower symbolism to provide insight into the woman's psychosexual condition, "My Pretty Rose Tree," "Ah! Sun-Flower" and "The Lilly," are engraved on a single plate, suggesting that Blake wanted them to be interpreted visually, as well as thematically and metaphorically in their original order. The first two poems use pairs of quatrains to describe the special circumstances under which eighteenth-century patriarchal society allowed the wife to withhold her sexual debt from her husband as a way of gaining control over him and influencing his conduct. "My Pretty Rose Tree" examines the concept of marriage as a
contract in which the infidelity of the husband is a violation of his partner's legal rights that is punishable by his loss of access to his private property. The second poem, "Ah! Sun-Flower," deals with the doctrine of the official church that regards human sexuality as an aspect of the Fall and encourages the woman to remain chaste in order to preserve the purity of her spirit for its delivery into eternal life. The final poem in the series entitled "The Lilly" uses a single quatrain to recall the two situations—the first legal, the second religious—that justify female domination. It then contrasts these circumstances with the selfless love of two people who are alike in power, and therefore free to share their love for each other.

The opening poem, "My Pretty Rose Tree," is not simply a semi-comic indictment of the stereotypical jealous wife who sees marriage as her legal entitlement to the exclusive sexual services of her partner, and whose wrongheaded suspicion that her mate is unfaithful causes her to retaliate predictably by denying him her bed. Rather, the poem assigns blame to neither party; it is an allegorical examination of the clichéd type of insecure marital relationship that came out of eighteenth-century society's paradoxical attitude towards sexuality. On the one hand, the sexual act had traditionally consummated the marriage and was considered as the sole legal means for male procreation of legitimate heirs to family title and
property. Many of the devout felt that sexual relations should be reserved for this purpose, not only on moral and medical grounds, but also because the laws of strict entailment were an important source of social, economic and domestic stability.

On the other hand, late eighteenth-century society continued to accept a double standard in the sexual behavior of its young men and women. This meant that the wife who aspired to an ideal marital relationship had to regard any private encounter of her husband with an attractive woman as a potential threat to her happiness, and to suspect any subsequent show of affection for her as the possible evidence of her husband’s guilt. The level of uncertainty that many women experienced as a result of their powerlessness to exert social or moral pressure on their husbands to remain loyal to their marriage vows manifested itself primarily in one of two ways: either as a show of indifference that often led the unhappy wife to seek surrogate affection from her children, or as a jealous possessiveness that made the wife constantly suspicious of her husband and always ready to seize control in the only way she could, and that is by denying him access to her person.42

In the allegory of the poem, the honest husbandman who, in loyalty to his "Pretty Rose-tree" (SE 43 3; E 25), turns down the offer of the virginal flower of the Spring, is
greeted on his return to his garden with the same "thorns" of bitterness and resentment as he would have received had he freely accepted the gift of the "sweet flower" (4). Despite the male speaker's willingness to honor his commitment and accept sole responsibility for the care of his "Rose-tree," or his consummated lover, he complains that she doubts his innocence and treats him as an adulterer:

I went to my Pretty Rose-tree
To tend her by day and by night.
But my Rose turned away with jealousy:
And her thorns were my only delight.

(5-8)

Blake is not arguing here that good husbands are often misunderstood by jealous wives. He is making the antinomian point that society's institutionalization of love in the form of the monogamous marriage is fundamentally an unworkable arrangement because it bases the success of the relationship on the sexual exclusiveness of the partners. For Blake, this type of restraint is a form of mutual oppression that is the opposite of love, and it turns the relations between the husband and the wife from an equal partnership into a intense emotional struggle, usually on the part of the economically and emotionally dependant wife, to seek out evidence, to confirm suspicions, and then to strike out at offenses, even where they do not exist.⁴³
Blake is not condemning the Rose-tree for her thorny response to her innocent lover since, in circumstances where the husbands' indiscretions are excused by society, the wife's not, suspicion, anger and jealousy are natural and understandable responses to perceived wrongdoing, and withholding is the only socially acceptable way in which the woman can assert her will. Rather, Blake's target is the repressive tradition that views marriage as a contract in which the partners are legally and morally bound to fulfill the terms of their nuptial agreement, and this means that his aim is directed as much at the warped mentality that finds value in self-denial as it is at the shallow thinking that finds emotional safety in protectionism. For Blake, the hapless gardener whose misplaced loyalty left him with nothing to tend should have enjoyed the "sweet flower" (4) that was offered to him, and the "Pretty Rose-tree," like Oothoon, should have celebrated "his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous cloud / Come in the haven of generous love; nor selfish blightings bring" (VDA 7 28-29; E 50).

The second lyric in the three-poem sequence, "Ah! Sun-Flower," turns the focus from marital infidelity to the opposite extreme of sexual asceticism, which in eighteenth-century society is the other legitimate reason for a woman to assert her will and voluntarily abstain from sexual relations. This poem confronts the attitude in the Pauline tradition that extols celibacy as superior to the married
state, and that regards mariolatry and the deification of
virginity as the woman's only legitimate alternative to a
subordinate position within a patriarchal union.44

In the opening stanza, the persona's interjection: "Ah
Sun-flower!" (SE 43 1; E 25) reveals his disdain for the
heliotropic plant that wastes its time following the course
of the sun. In the allegory of the poem, the flower longs
to escape time and the material world and enter the "sweet
golden clime" (3), the idyllic realm in the doctrine of
official Christianity of life-after-death.45 In Europe,
Blake calls this illusory heaven the doctrine of Enitharmon,
and those who believe her claim that "Womans love is sin"
and accept that female virginity is the preferable condition
are promised an "Eternal life . . . In an allegorical abode
where existence hath never come" (Eur 5 5-7; E 62). The
Sun-flower is a symbol for the orthodox believer who does
not want to wait the "sixty winters" (Eur 5 6; E 62) of
temporal life to be delivered from the flesh, but with his
face turned hopefully toward the sun aspires to be delivered
into the light of immortality. The metaphors in the poem
combine the image of the solar day as the cycle of human
life and the traditional association of the sun with
Divinity and with the eternal realm of heaven to describe
the Sun-worshiping flower's impatience with the temporal
world that keeps him from receiving his spiritual reward in
the sky. Allegorically, he is the weary traveller of life's
highway who longs for the restful sleep that will come with the onset of night, but in terms of human experience, his is a death-wish that is predicated on the Pauline doctrine that life is a struggle against the "sinful flesh," (Romans 8:3) a struggle in which he must die physically to win spiritually:

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun:
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the travellers journey is done.

(SE 43 1-4; E 25)

The second quatrain of the poem is linked to the first by anaphora, and the stanza itself is paralleled with the opening verse through thematic apposition and through the interchangeability of the final lines. In this way, Blake identifies the bright realm that the Sun-flower longs to enter as the same one that the frigid Virgin believes will be her reward once she has been released from her present life into her future hope, or from time into eternity.

In the conventional metaphors of the poem, the Sun is not only life's solar clock, it also symbolizes the pure love of God that the Virgin thinks will melt the shroud of "snow" that covers her grave and bring about her resurrection into the life of the Spirit. For Blake, however, the equality between the genders that occurs during the sex act is the easiest and the most direct way for the
man and the woman to transcend their divided state and enter Eternity. When it is mutually affirmative, then, sexual love is both holy and pure. The opposite of this is the doctrine of mariolatry which idealizes the virginal woman through the worship of Mary. According to Blake, this practice is an organized attempt by the Church to deflect humanity's love for the Divine man, Jesus, onto the woman, and it uses the psychic destructiveness of sexual suppression and denial to empower the female by giving her control over the male. This cult of chastity is the eighteen hundred year "night of Enitharmos joy!" during which the woman has "dominion," (Eur 5 1,3; E 62) and "pale religious lechery call[s] that virginity, that wishes but acts not!" (MHH 25; E 45).

Thel retreated from the world of shared experience into the vales of Har, but the Virgin's denial is even more egregious because it is unnatural and is based on her conviction that in remaining chaste she follows the example of the innocent Lamb of God, and that he will reward her in heaven for her present suffering. But, by refusing "the Youth" her love in the name of religion, the Virgin also tortures him with the guilt and the shame of his carnal desires, and so he too longs for a release from the physical and mental agony of frustrated sexuality. In keeping with the conventions of courtly love, the Youth's unrelieved desire, finding no healthy outlet, turns its appetite back
on the body of the disappointed lover who first languishes and then dies:"

the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:
Arise from their graves and aspire,
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

(SE 43 5-8; E 25)

The third and last in the series of poems engraved on the plate is simply titled "The Lilly." Like her counterpart in The Book of Thel, this personified flower is a traditional symbol for physical beauty and for the purity of the Virgin, and in its apocalyptic sense the Easter lily is representative of the resurrection of the soul into eternal life. Like his antinomian forerunners, Blake believed that "the things of the flesh" are not separable from "the things of the Spirit," (Romans 8:5) but are part of an integrated consciousness that constantly creates the world as it perceives it. Therefore, Paul's concept of virginity as a repudiation of the pleasures of the flesh, and his recommendation of a pure and celibate life in service to the Divine Spirit is bad doctrine not only because it leads to an unnecessary and arbitrary classification of experience, but also because it is totally counterproductive. For Blake, when sensual enjoyment is affirmative love that "seeketh not / Itself to please" (SE 32 1; E 19), it is the shortest and the most direct means to
a perception of the infinite. Blake shares with the Quakers, the Ranters, the Diggers, the Methodists, and with many of the other revolutionary sects, the belief that sexual intimacy must be a spontaneous and an equally gratifying activity for both the man and the woman, and he held the Ranters' doctrine of Coppe, Clarkson, and Coppin, that virginity is not chastity, but a pure state of mind that has nothing to do with the body. Oothoon, raped by Bromion and rejected by Theotorman, nevertheless declares herself "a virgin fill'd with virgin fancies / Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears" (VDA 6 21-22; E 50).

The "Lilly's" Biblical namesake is of course the lily of the valley of the Song of Songs, and the generous and unashamed celebration of the sensuality of love that comes through this association is Blake's final reply to the jealousy of the Rose Tree and the frigidity of the Virgin. In the opening line, Blake recalls the "modest Rose" (SE 43 1; E 25) of the first poem whose irrational suspicion is the "thorn" (1,4) that will punish her mate, and in the second line he refers to the "humble Sheep" (2), the meek self-image of the Virgin whose fear is that her physical purity will suffer the "stain" (4) of sexual dishonor. Unlike the hypocritical Rose whose sensual beauty cannot be enjoyed without emotional risk and pain, and the pure Lamb whose "threatening horn" (SE 43 2; E 25) is the potential for a
self-inflicted wound to her innocence, the "Lilly white" (3) knows with Oothoon that the joys of life are "Holy, eternal, infinite! and each joy is a Love" (VDA 5 6; E 48). She knows that Love does not diminish in its spending, it only increases, and it does not corrupt the spirit, it purifies it because the "soul of sweet delight. can never be defil'd" (MHH 9 53; E 37).

In engraving the plate, Blake divided the space horizontally into three sections of decreasing size. The area of the top section is twice as large as the bottom one, the middle one half again as large as the one bellow it. The titles of all three poems are of equal height and are incorporated into the vegetative landscape by spiralling tendrils that loop off the "M" and the "T" in "My Pretty Rose Tree," and off the "T" in "The Lilly." Adding to the integration of design and text are interconnecting vines, one that stretches from the leg of the "R" in "Ah! Sun Flower" almost to the right border, and then loops back, wave-like, across the top to cover the lettering in the center title. A second vine descends serpentine down the right margin of the middle section, crosses the line twice and then joins the border with the lower poem. At the bottom of the plate, still another vine grows out of the cap of the letter "T" in the opening word of the lily poem. Its right tendril ends with a leaf poised above the second word "modest," its left one extends down the left margin and then
stretches across the bottom of the plate. The distinctiveness of each of the poems in their size and design indicates that Blake regarded them as self-contained works that are complete unto themselves, but that he engraved them on a single plate with linking motifs suggests that he wanted the individual themes to be closely related in the reader’s experience of the verbal and visual art.

In the uppermost section of the plate, a barren oak tree encircled by a leafy grapevine establishes the right margin of the design for "My Pretty Rose Tree," one of its branches underscorcing the last two words in the title. A spiralling vine descends the left margin attaching itself to the opening and closing letters in each of the verses. Along the lower border is the feuding couple, she reclining beneath the tree, her head upon her elbow and her disinterested face turned away from her partner. He is huddled at her feet in front of a patch of grass, his face buried in his arms. Nine small birds fly in the background above the body of the woman, while a large one appears in the foreground beside the man’s drooping head. Above the text of the poem and just bellow the words "My Pretty," one large bird flies after two smaller ones that almost disappear in the distance.

The events described in the "My Pretty Rose Tree" have just been concluded and now the wife turns away from her distraught husband in jealous retaliation for his imagined
offence. The barren oak tree of Experience is suggestive of the bleak state of the couple's relationship, while the departing birds, usually symbols of mental freedom, indicate that their peace of mind and their trust in each other is already disappearing and will be replaced by suspicion and anxiety.

In the middle portion of the plate a spiralling vine, larger but similar to the one engraved in the design directly above it, climbs the left margin and then flattens out beside the title "Ah! Sun Flower" to provide a pedestal for a miniature human figure. This tiny woman appears to be climbing over the horizontal vine, her hair streaming behind her head and her hands clasped before her face in the attitude of prayer. In some copies, a sunburst provides a backdrop for the figure, in others the sun can be seen partially covered with clouds on the opposite side of the picture. On those copies in which the sun is apparent, the woman prays in its direction. This female figure is of course the devout Christian Virgin who prays that her chastity will keep her spirit uncontaminated so that after the death of her body her soul can be delivered into a conventional Christian heaven, a place that is figured in Biblical imagery, in the imagery of the poem and in some of the designs as the sun.

The lowest and smallest section titled "The Lilly" shares the vegetative motif with the other two flower poems.
and its vines and tendrils contribute to the integrated texture of the designs on the plate. To the right of the title and descending down the right margin is a stalk with five leaves and a single lily flower that reaches towards the final word in the poem "bright." (4) A vine (Erdman describes it as a ribbon) grows out of the lower border and nearly encircles the word "bright," separating it from the rest of the verse on a line of its own. The final two lines of this poem are the Lily's answer to the perverse sexual abstinence of the Rose Tree and the Sun-Flower, and Blake uses the blossom to call attention to the speaker's observation that delighting in "Love" (3) will not "stain" the purity of the white flower, but will leave its beauty shining "bright." (4)

Unorganized Innocence, An Impossibility

A number of poems in the Songs of Experience explore eighteenth-century society's perception of childhood sexuality, such as the "Nurses Song" and "The Garden of Love." Others, like "The Angel," join the flower poems in dealing with the danger of yielding to social pressure and repressing sexual desire. But, the three poems that focus most directly on the concerned attitude of parents towards their daughters' emerging sexuality are "The Little Girl Lost," "The Little Girl Found" and "A Little Girl Lost." These three poems share with "The Little Boy Lost" of the
Songs of Innocence the confused child's sense of geographical disorientation and physical helplessness. But, the word "lost" in the three titles that describe the experiences of young girls carries an especially disturbing connotation of lost innocence, or lost virtue, a sense that is totally lacking in the title and the experience of "The Little Boy Lost."

"The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" were among four poems which Blake first engraved for the Songs of Innocence, but later moved to the Songs of Experience where they remained in all subsequent editions of the work.\(^5\)

The apparent simplicity of these lyrics and the freshness of their contextual designs, supposedly for the entertainment and the instruction of children, would seem to suggest that their depiction of either the state of Innocence or the state of Experience would be, like the transparent moral lessons of the Newbery poems, unambiguous and easy for adults to discover. Yet, the relocation of poems and designs that were originally conceived, written and engraved as visions of childhood Innocence into a collection that purports to offer the contrary perspective suggests that Innocence and Experience are not clear contraries at all, and must be, at least to some extent, comparable states. But clearly this is not Blake's intention in grouping the poems in separate volumes, engraving two distinct title pages, and opening each collection with a unique
"Introduction." Innocence and Experience are not simple opposites; they are, as we have seen, "states" of human consciousness that the individual must pass through if he or she is to transcend error and embrace the truth of Eternity.

The Songs of Innocence are positive visions of the world by people, mostly children, who do not question the goodness of human nature, and who base their optimistic perceptions of life on an abiding faith in the benevolence of society and its supporting institutions. The Songs of Experience are views of the same world, but here the dramatis personae have been disillusioned by their discovery that the domestic and social setting that they had taken to be benevolent is actually cruel, self-serving and hypocritical, and that they are its victims. Since Blake transferred the plates containing "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" from Innocence into Experience without altering them, these poems must glimpse the past hope of Innocence while they reveal the pitiful state of Experience. Another possibility is that they suggest that the hostile world of Experience is not the final stage in the evolution of human consciousness, and that there is a way out of the seemingly endless cycles of suffering that make up human history. If this is the case, one reason why Blake shifted this two part narrative from Innocence to Experience might be that it not only describes the fall of
the innocent child into the world of the experienced woman, but also her delivery out of it.

An internal piece of evidence that supports this reading of both "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found," as well as "A Little Girl Lost," is that these ballads about lost girls begin with prophetic verses that are visually and thematically detached from the longer poems, and that seem to predict that the female Earth will answer the Bard's appeal in the "Introduction" and arise to welcome in a new spiritual day. The two quatrains that open the lost and found poems are separated from the rest of the text by a horizontal intervening vine, while the single stanza that introduces "A Little Girl Lost" is set apart from the rest of the poem by its position on the plate and by the slant of the engraved text.

The Prophet who speaks in each of these lyrics comprehends not only the "Present" state of Experience and the "Past" state of Innocence, but also the place where Eternity intersects the stream of time and dissolves all temporal modalities into the eternal moment. Innocence is limited by the conventions of the pastoral mode, and so it grasps only the significance of the present moment. Experience, on the other hand, is disillusioned by the ironic contrast between the optimistic expectations of past Innocence and the crushing reality of the present, and as it struggles with the pain of the moment, it despairs of any
relief in the future. However, the prophetic narrator of both of these introductory lyrics predicts that Earth's delivery into the paradisal garden is inevitable, and this means that the limits of the perceived universe, the "starry floor" and the "watry shore" (SE 30 18,19; E 18) of space and time, will vanish. In terms of Biblical metaphor, the prophetic Bard is not foretelling the eventual restoration of fallen nature into the timeless garden of Genesis. Eden is not Eternity, and the fallen consciousness cannot rise out of the mire of Experience simply by retreating back into childhood dependency; this was Thel's desperate strategy, and the lives of Har and Heva are testimony to its failure. Instead, the mind must seek the liberating experience of creative vision, or what Northrop Frye calls "the gospel of metanoia," a doctrine in which consciousness is raised such that "the original and now fallen order of nature becomes a mother bringing to birth a re-creation made through a union of God and man (Romans 8:21)."53 This is what Blake means in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell when he revises Ezekiel's prophecy (28:11-19) and has the "Covering Cherub" desert his post at "the tree of life" so that the fallen creation can be "consumed, and appear infinite. and holy", an event that "will come to pass" he says "by an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (MHH 14; E 39).

The pastoral metaphors in Blake's epigraph to "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" are reinforced
by the visual art. Two scantily clothed figures embrace in a garden beneath an arching willow tree, an anemone leaf at their feet. Importantly, it is the female who takes the initiative by attempting to direct the preoccupied male's attention to a bird "that cuts the airy way" (MHH 7; E 35) in the sunlight that illuminates the upper right hand corner of the plate. The garden appears to be recovering from a long sleep, the vines that had overrun the landscape and strangled the delicate tree--and continue to flourish in the shadows to the left of the text--wither and fall away in the light of the sun. The two prophetic verses are isolated from the remainder of the poem by an offshoot of the parent vine, and supported by the vegetation in the gap, a serpent recoils from the sunlight. A second bird perches on one of the tendrils, a third appears trapped behind the vines and flies downward in the semi-darkness of the lower left-hand corner of the plate.

The devoted adult couple are the parents of Lyca, the missing girl in the poem. The mother's raised left arm and pointing finger form a gesture similar to Adam's in an 1810 tempera called Adam Naming the Beasts by William Michael Rossetti, the first cataloguer of Blake's art. According to Robert Essick in Blake and the Language of Adam, Adam's symbolic gesture is a traditional sign of identity that links his power to name the creatures in the Garden with the power of God to create them, a union of Divinity and
mortality that makes "the world available to human consciousness," and allows it to gain imaginative possession of it. Here, the mother's gesture links her and her husband to the "futurity" of the prophetic verse, and to the imagery of the flight of the bird and the radiance of the sun. She is the enlightened mother at the end of the poem, and here she is reassuring Lyca's grieving father that they need not fear for their daughter's safety since the love of God, symbolized by the sun, will sustain her until she can escape the earth-bound world of Experience in which she sleeps. The child's eventual delivery from this fallen world, predicted in the opening prophetic stanzas, is symbolized by the soaring bird of paradise. To the opening spiritual eye of the mother, it is the "immense world of delight" (MHH 7; E 35) that will lead the lost girl out of the "desart wild" (7) and into the "garden mild"(8), and the serpent who is caught between the beginning of the text of the narrative and the introductory verses, between the dark and the light, the present and the future, will be compelled to withdraw from the re-created garden. The bird above the text moves in the opposite direction to the serpent and flies from the prophetic verses towards the subject phrase in the title: "Girl Lost", thereby emphasizing the connection between the little girl's present predicament and her bright future. Blake links the visual and the verbal symbols through Lyca whose future state is represented by
both the bird in the design and the awakening earth of the epigraph.  

To describe this global awakening, Blake's Bard draws upon one of his favorite sources of apocalyptic imagery, Isaiah's prediction of the delivery of Zion from the wilderness into the Promised Land. Blake follows the Prophet and describes the awakening of the consciousness of the liberated earth as the celebration of a flowering garden that had previously been barren. Through the pun in the parenthetical fourth line: [En]"(Grave the sentence deep)" (SE 34 3; E 20) Blake stresses both the enormous difference that this enlightenment will make to the earth when she chooses to accept her spiritual destiny and his own prophetic role in bringing it about. The Bard introduces "The Little Girl Lost" by announcing that the earth must make the initial effort to bring about her own spiritual recovery:

    In futurity
    I prophetic see,
    That the earth from sleep,
    (Grave the sentence deep)

    Shall arise and seek
    For her maker meek:
    And the desert wild
    Become a garden mild.

    (SE 34 1-8; E 20)  

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The terms of the Bard's prediction in the epigraph to "The Little Girl Lost" are found in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Experience*. In the poem that begins the *Songs of Experience*, however, the voice of the Bard is not that of a benevolent God appealing to his creation, metaphorically the Earth-mother, to wake and see light; to see that the fall of humanity into the cycles of generation is an illusion perpetuated by humanity's refusal to wake to its own creative potential. Blake leaves open this poetic invitation to his audience so that his readers will always have the option to reconsider the "Earth's Answer" while they are discovering world of Experience from the perspective of their children. Indeed, the two opening verses to "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" prepare for this change of heart because they are the Bard's vision of the future, and they announce that the earth will eventually reverse her earlier position and accept his invitation to rise out of the sleep of Experience and join him in the timeless garden.

Blake imagines this reunion of the earth and her maker not as reversal of the myth of the Fall in Genesis, but on a much more impressive philosophical and metaphorical scale. It is the daughters of Eve offering the gift of love to the sons of Adam, the act of compassion that will lead humanity out of its self-constructed prison of time and space and into Eternity, it is the recovery of Divine creativity from
the fallen cycles of nature and history, it is the birth of the New Age, the new Jerusalem, the delivery of Israel from bondage into the Promised Land, and more simply it is the dawning of a new day or the rousing of the mind from a bad dream. Most important for our discussion, it is the spiritual reunion of the interdependent genders that will transcend sexual difference and restore a single divine humanity. 

"The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" are sequential narratives, and they describe the descending part of the cycle of loss and recovery that comes full circle in the opening prophetic vision. Since this cyclical pattern is an archetype for human experience, Blake can cross reference from his readers' shared perceptions of life, such as the passage of the days, the seasons, the years, the movements of journeys and tides, the fall into sleep and the reawakening, and of course the cycle of animal and natural life that puzzled and terrified Thel. Also, since this is the basic pattern of Old and New Testament typology, he can draw upon any of the beginnings and endings that we have noted above as versions of the myth of deliverance that recurs throughout the Bible, and in this way he can add the higher dimension of man's final resurrection into a transfigured garden.

The first of these poems deals with the "loss" of the little girl, and Blake makes the primary perspective the
child's own. But the second poem concerns the parents' rediscovery of their sleeping daughter, and so the controlling point-of-view necessarily shifts from the child to the parents. This changing perspective raises questions about who is actually lost and who is found, and whether these terms have a physical, a social, a moral, or a psychological dimension to them. Since one of the answers at the end of the poem is that the parents have arrived at a new understanding and acceptance of their daughter's "state" in Experience, the final vision for the adults is the paradisal garden that is predicted by the Bard and supported visually by the design on the first plate. The subtle irony at work in Blake's use of these terms is sharpened by the title of "The little Girl Lost" poem that ostensibly describes a descent into Experience on a plate that appears to depict exactly the opposite, while the divided second plate that is headed by a reclining young woman in a dark and threatening night scene and closed out with the image of a predatory beast is titled "The Little Girl Found." Certainly this juxtaposition and rich paradoxical suggestiveness is another reason why Blake was able to transfer these poems and pictures from Innocence to Experience without modification.

Before beginning a commentary on these poems and designs, we might do well to outline Blake's perspective on parents and children, relationships that for him were
largely defined, at least in his work, on the basis of his radical interpretation of New Testament Scripture. His attitude towards the family may also be influenced by his reading of Swedenborg and by the rhetoric of the dissenting churches, as well as by the remnants of an early gnostic myth in "which an original Unity fell into division and ever since has sought to return to the One once more," a theme that E. P. Thompson ties in with Blake's concepts of brotherhood and universal love. Characteristically, Blake makes a distinction between the natural family and the spiritual family in God, the former a repressive institution based on social custom and moral law, the latter the Brotherhood of Man waiting for the fallen body of creation, figured significantly as a mother, to deliver the faithful from "corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." We have already mentioned that Blake's belief in the spiritual purity of children, a belief that comes through the Songs of Innocence and is apparent in his observation on their ability to "Elucidate" the "Visions of Eternity" (E 703) in his letter to the Reverend Dr. John Trusler, is based on a fairly literal reading of the many passages in the New Testament that describe the love of Jesus for his children.

Blake liked children, but as an antinomian he did not care for the patriarchal family as a social institution, and he viewed the conflict and division between the members of
the traditional household as a direct result of the struggle for power and control. In law and practice the father was the head of the home, and since he wielded the largest stick Blake regarded him as the prime mover in the care and protection of his wife and offspring. Natural fathers are not treated with a great deal of sympathy in the Songs of Experience, and no doubt this is because Blake saw the suffering of children as evidence that the traditional, legally constituted family was just a smaller version of the paternalistic, hegemonic and exploitive institutions of a corrupt culture.

Blake also attributed domestic disharmony to what he viewed as the fragmented and fallen nature of humanity, a belief that he shared with the gnostics, but one that, as E. P. Thompson points out, he did not necessarily receive directly from them. The myth of the fall of perfect beings from a golden age of bliss into a state of suffering and conflict is available in a many other legends, and the idea that the family is flawed and the love of its members is an unworthy reflection of what it once was and can be again receives considerable attention in the synoptic Gospels, such as Jesus': "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:35-
The distinction here is of course between the natural family that is defined by law and is entitled to the natural affection of its members, and the true spiritual family of Jesus, suggested in the christological title "Son of God," the members of which are bound together by the commandment to love thy Father "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," (Matthew 22:37) and to do his will. In the vocabulary of the doctrine, then, Lyca must die to her family in this world if she is eventually to be born a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17) in the family of Christ.

An important metaphor in Western literature that runs throughout Blake's work, both verbal and visual, and that is central to the text and the art of "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found," is the parallel between the natural life of the body illuminated by a material sun and the spiritual life of the creative mind that is lit by a spiritual one. In many of the poems in both Innocence and Experience Blake combines this metaphor with the traditional parallel between the cycle of human life and the solar day so that the fall from Innocence into Experience is the movement from day to night, and therefore the following dawn becomes figuratively the breaking of a higher consciousness. The meaning of many of the poems is to some degree dependent upon the elaboration of this simple metaphor, and for Lyca it is particularly significant because her decreasing
awareness and her dimming spiritual light is represented as the coming of sleep, an important event in her life that is directly related to her sexual initiation and the death of her Innocence.

A passage in Matthew that follows directly on the heels of the one on the spiritual responsibilities of the family quoted above describes the necessity of letting go of family ties so that each individual can follow the arduous path to spiritual enlightenment, and in both theme and image it is particularly appropriate counsel for Lyca and her parents. After telling his disciples that they must love him more than their mothers and fathers and sons and daughters, Jesus explains that "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he who loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth he that sent me" (Matthew 10:39-40). These scriptural paradoxes are cycles that promise real gain for apparent loss, and they also apply to Lyca and her parents; the mother and the father must lose the child to find the woman, and she in turn must lose her innocent childhood and enter the night of adult Experience in order to be worthy of the "reward" of a spiritual sunrise.

For Blake, sex is the most elevated and holy of the senses (one supposes because it is capable of "comingling" all five of them at once "from the Head even to the Feet" (69 43: E 223)), and sexual passion is the most direct route
out of a sensually perceived world into Eternity. This heretical stance can be found in some of the sectarian traditions of radical dissent that came out of the Commonwealth years, and it represents a direct challenge to the traditional Christian hegemony of the soul over the body. Indeed, it completely overturns the cult of Chastity by claiming that the easiest way to go "Where [the] Sunflower wishes to go" (SE 43; E 25) is not through cross-legged meditation and a rejection of the pleasures of the flesh, but through unrestrained sexual indulgence.

The Bard opens "The Little Girl Lost" with a description of the seven year old Lyca in the Edenic garden of her Innocence. In Blake’s reading of Genesis, God’s creation of a material universe and man’s fall into the cycles of nature are both stories about man’s alienation from his divine imaginative identity, and therefore from the world that he continually creates for himself. Lyca’s "Seven summers" (SE 34 13; E 20) represent the early period of her life during which her young mind conceived her childhood universe, but now Innocence is passing and she, like Thel, must prepare to leave this pastoral garden and venture into the realm of adult experience. In the symbolic system of the poem, the static world of Innocence is her Eden, and it is perceived by the child as a safe unchanging summer place located in the "southern clime" (9) because she is as yet unaware of, or subject to, the natural cycles of
life that will eventually define her existence in Generation.

At the beginning of the poem, Lyca has been listening to the song of the "wild bird" (SE 34 16; E 20) that heralds the approach of the contrary state of Experience, and therefore the landscape that she sees gradually changes into a dark and ominous "desart" (21) of the north, suggested visually by the night sky and the ancient oak trees on the upper half of the second plate. This dense forest setting is the maturing girl's mental landscape, and its encroaching margins suggest the closing horizons of her creative consciousness. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word midbar (meaning "that which is beyond") is used to describe both the "wilderness" and the "desert" since they were barren wastelands in which a traveller could easily become lost at night. Another type of wilderness that is described in the Old Testament is the forest (Hebrew ya'ar), and it was regarded by the Israelites as equally hostile since it was the home of wild animals which were a constant threat to the life of the herdsman and his sheep or cattle.

In the verbal and visual imagery of the Songs of Experience, Blake does not often make a clear distinction between the "desart wild" and the forest of Experience since they are both places that involve disorientation and danger, and they both must be passed through in order to reach the Promised Land that is on the other side. The array of
metaphors that Blake uses to describe the state of Experience is drawn from the Old Testament history and geography of the ancient Israelites who knew the danger of falling asleep in the wilderness, whether that wilderness was midbar or ya'ar. The descent from Innocence into Experience involves spiritual confusion and a loss of vision, and therefore Blake represents this state of consciousness both as a wild forest in which children lose their way, and as a dark night in which they fall asleep. But Experience need not be a permanent condition, and in answer to the fears of Lyca's parents Blake may have had in mind Ezekiel's promise to his people that they must keep faith because God the Shepherd will preserve His flock: "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods." (34:25)

Lyca's wish to sleep through the night of her Experience is natural and necessary to her spiritual progress, and it represents the completion of her descent into a world that is not imaginatively, but sensually determined. Experience is a "state" of fallen consciousness that men and women must move through in order to reach the point where they can transcend time and gender as the Divine humanity. As we have seen, the female children in the Songs of Innocence move into Experience when they become aware of their sexuality, and therefore Blake links Lyca's sleep
symbolically to the fall of Eve from spiritual innocence into the temporal world in which she must "conceive" in "sorrow" and submission. (Genesis 3:16) Lyca's spiritual descent from the timeless garden of Beulah into the world of change is, like Eve's before her, an integral stage in the evolution of human spirituality because the woman must put on the fallen body of creation in order that humanity may be delivered from "corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

Lyca seeks the sleep of Experience beneath an ancient tree in a garden that has grown wild. The tree is a powerful symbol in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Genesis, and, as Frye points out, it has a dual aspect as the tree of "mortal taste" and the tree of eternal life, or as the tree of man's damnation and of his deliverance. In Biblical typology, it is the tree of the knowledge of mortality that grows in Eden and it is the tree of spiritual faith on which Christ was crucified, but it has a specific symbolic significance for the woman as the source of her sexuality and her reproductive function. The tree under which Lyca wishes to sleep is the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, and for the young girl it is directly associated with her awakening sexuality and with the strict code of morality that society will impose on her sexual conduct. Blake introduces the remote and impersonal God who will enforce the Moral Law into the mental landscape by
personifying the desert night that overwhelms the sleeping girl; it is the dark, critical and unforgiving presence that will oversee and judge her behavior in Experience, and it does not wish her well.

Frowning frowning night,
O'er this desart bright,
Let thy moon arise,
While I close my eyes.

(SE 34 29-32; E 20)

The final observation that Lyca makes before she closes her eyes to the world of childhood Innocence involves an identity between the state of Experience that she is about to enter and the state that her mother already knows, but here there is an important difference. Lyca is naive to the profoundly disturbing social and moral implications of her entry into Experience; she does not yet understand the paradoxical attitude of traditional patriarchal society towards the woman's sexuality as at once the curse of humanity's physical and spiritual corruption, and the sole legitimate means to the preservation of man's wealth, land and lineage. From a society that has traditionally idealized female chastity while it portrayed the woman as naturally depraved, Lyca can expect a mixed reception of fear of her power to interrupt the line of succession of property and title, and a defensive paternalism that will impose on her the strictest standards of sexual conduct.
The young girl's typical child-like attempt to strike an emotional bargain with her mother so that she need not feel guilty about leaving her parents and entering the sleep of Experience is an indication that she is unaware that her awakening sexuality will bring cares and responsibilities that parents know too well, and that make mothers' grieve for their daughters' loss of innocence:

How can Lyca sleep,
If her mother weep.

If her heart does ake,
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.
(SE 34 23-28; E 20)

Before we move to a discussion of the metaphors that Blake uses to give concrete expression to the various physical and psychological aspects of a nubile girl's initiation into womanhood, it might be useful to briefly recontextualize the single woman's options in late eighteenth-century society so that we have some clear points of reference. First of all, the competition among the families of young women to gain wealth and status for their daughters through marriages of advantage was gradually losing ground in eighteenth-century English society to the growing popularity of the companionate marriage. Even though mutual affection was slowly replacing the profit
motive in these arrangements, the young woman was still at the mercy of her male suitors "because social custom dictated that the initiative in the courtship process should be with the male and not with the female . . . [and this] depended on the docility and adaptability of the woman, as it had always done in the past."68 The man's effective control of the courting process put the woman at a considerable disadvantage since modesty required that she remain passive until the male took the initiative. If she wished to encourage his advances, she was at liberty to let "herself be handled sufficiently to inflame the passions of her suitor, but never in any circumstance to allow him (or anyone else) full intercourse before marriage, or at least before formal and morally irrevocable betrothal."69 Generally, the man's greater privilege, his more extensive experience and his superior physical strength, combined with the sexually intimate, socially condoned pre-marital games that young people played, such as "bundling," frequently put the naive single woman at some risk of sexual abuse and violation since she could put up very little effective resistance to a determined seducer.70 Indeed, the reality of courtship and love for the young woman of any class in the late eighteenth century was that the double standard for male and female sexual behavior was built into the social system, and this inequality very often made her a victim of the man's predatory sexual appetite.

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Thus, as Lyca sleeps the sleep of Experience, Blake’s narrator describes the emergence of "beasts of prey" (34) from their dark caverns, perhaps the depths of his subconscious mind. Led by a "kingly lion," (SE 34 37; E 21) they proceed to a sensual exploration of the young girl’s virginal body; they caress her bosom and neck, remove her clothing, and then carry her naked form off to their den. In this allegory of Lyca’s seduction, Blake relies on his social context, but also upon the Biblical association of the predatory lion with the threat of physical violence and with the saving spiritual faith of his intended victim, here the defenseless girl. Also, in the figure of the "kingly lion" (37) Blake draws upon the New Testament notion of Christ as the King of the Jews and upon the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven as already present in the world in the person of Christ as the "anointed one" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:20-21) or as the Messiah of the spiritual kingdom. Since Blake regarded sex as an activity that has the potential to lift the conscious mind into Eternity, his association of the powerful lion with Jesus, and both with the love that can transport the believer into the kingdom of heaven is an appropriate one.

The equation of sexual love with spiritual love dates back in the Judeo-Christian tradition to the Song of Songs, and in this context the royal groom is an equal celebrant with his bride. Perhaps this is why Blake gives the lion
king some antiquity by describing him as "old," (43) and why he makes his female partner, the lioness, an equal participant in the ritualistic seduction. The lion's attention to Lyca is suggestive of the dual nature of the virgin's initiation into sexual experience; it is the violent sacrifice that is the consummation of physical love, but it is also the paradoxical freedom to surrender individual identity in the consciousness of the unity with another. Taken together, the passion and the pain, the joy and the sorrow, raise the sexual act to the level of a spiritual experience. Metaphorically, the heat of the lion's passion, represented by his "eyes of flame" (47), is balanced by his "ruby tears" (48) of compassion, at once the evidence of his love and of the violence of the female's sexual initiation.

the lion old,
Bow'd his mane of gold.

And her bosom lick,
And upon her neck,
From his eyes of flame,
Ruby tears there came.
(SE 35 43-48; E 21)

Again, the cooperation of the lioness in preparing Lyca and in helping to transport her to the caves of eros suggests that the girl's seduction is not exploitation by gender, but rather a shared experience in which the female has an equal
interest with the male. Also, her unselfish assistance is reminiscent of Oothoon's "generous love" in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (7 29; E 50), and it reveals that she is neither jealous nor prudish since she does not insist on exclusive title, nor set limits to her mate's pleasure.

The lioness,

Loos'd her slender dress,
And naked they convey'd
To caves the sleeping maid.

(49-52)

The second plate of "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" combines the closing three verses of the first poem with the title and the opening three and a half stanzas of the second. The completion of the cycle suggested by the second title is misleading since it emphasizes the delivery of the child from danger and implies that she will be physically returned to the custody of her parents when in fact their attempt to rescue her is thwarted by the lion whose assault on them and subsequent transfiguration is the sign of their own spiritual advancement. The second poem begins with Lyca's parents desperately searching for their daughter through a wasteland of their own making. Experience, like Innocence, is a state of human consciousness, and it creates the world that displaces Innocence by reinterpreting all experience in terms of a "thou shalt not" system of morality that is
grounded in the doctrine of original sin. The barren world that the grieving parents explore, appropriately in the seven days of cosmic creation, is personified as weeping because it reflects their fear for their daughter’s physical safety. On the allegorical level, their dreams of their lost child wandering, starving and crying through "pathless ways" (13) are the subconscious concerns of mothers and fathers whose knowledge of the uncertain ways of the world make them wonder about their daughter’s ability to maneuver them.

Our analysis of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience suggests that the hostile world that the female children must face is a sexual one. For Blake, this is the natural world of the body seen from the perspective of the cycles of generation that Eve set in motion in the Genesis story, and that the fallen woman must enter in order to complete. In the New Testament, the antitype of a male God who creates a perfect universe without the help of a Bona Dea is the virgin birth and the chaste life of the son of God, and the Pauline interpretation of both of these myths is that the independent, pure life of the spirit is masculine and the dependent, corrupt life of the body is feminine.74 Therefore, in the world of Experience created by Lyca’s parents, the worst nightmare they could imagine is to be confronted with the terrifying beast that they would see as the male counterpart to their daughter’s own sexual
desires. For the majority of parents of female children, this encounter is inevitable, and the beast in their jungle waits patiently for their arrival:

Till before their way,
A couching lion lay.

Turning back was vain,
Soon his heavy mane,
Bore them to the ground;
Then he stalk'd around,

Smelling to his prey.
But their fears allay,
When he licks their hands;
And silent by them stands.

(SE 36 23-32; E 22)

Most parents of an adolescent daughter are eventually able to come to terms with the child’s sexual awakening once they realize that their fears of her physical and moral ruin are more apparent than real. In the allegory of the poem, the gentle beast that seemed to menace the little girl and carry her away to its den is Lyca’s lover, and when her mother and father discover that what they took for a predatory animal obstructing their search for their daughter is actually compassionate and does not pose a threat to her, it is transformed in their sight into a spiritual ally. Indeed, the change is not with the object of perception
itself, but with the minds of the perceivers because "As the Eye--Such the Object" (Rey 34; E 645), and therefore the lion's transformation into a beautiful human figure is the evidence of the parents' higher, visionary state of consciousness. The threatening animal that the parents saw with their "Corporeal or Vegetative Eye" (VLJ E 565) becomes a protective spirit "arm'd in gold" when they see it with the inner eye of their empathetic imagination. The parents' Experience of a frightening desert world in which hungry beasts leave their dens in search of human prey is transformed into a spiritual kingdom in which a merciful Jesus figure shelters the maturing young woman in a heavenly palace until she herself can wake from the sleep of Experience. Lyca cannot see the "Truth" of her divine host or the reality of her existence, but her delighted parents look upon his eyes

Fill'd with deep surprise:
And wondering behold,
A spirit arm'd in gold.

On his head a crown
On his shoulders down,
Flow'd his golden hair.
Gone was all their care.

Follow me he said,
Weep not for the maid;
In my palace deep,
Lyca lies asleep.

(33-44)

The second plate (Songs 35) in the three part series that contains the "The little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" is divided horizontally into equal parts; the upper portion is dark in theme and pigment since it closes out the narrative describing the loss of the child and the anguish of the parents, while the lower half is light and bright reflecting the promise in the title that the little girl will be recovered. The design on the upper part of the plate depicts what appears to be a clothed young woman lying alone beside the trunk of an oak tree in a densely wooded forest. The boughs of the tree beneath which she reclines enclose the three concluding verses of the first poem, and they are set within a natural landscape of light and shadow that suggests a moon-lit night. The woman appears to be turning away from something that she has seen or heard in the dark shadows of the tree that dominates the right side of the picture, and her upraised arm suggests that she has been disturbed or frightened by some sort of an intrusion.

In contrast, the lower half of the plate depicts an open garden in which an apparently powerful but tranquil lion or lioness basks in the warmth of a bright sunrise. The relaxed posture of the animal indicates that it is not dangerous, and the upward turn of its head suggests that it
is content to enjoy the intensity of the new day. To the right of the opening stanzas of "The Little Girl Found," a delicate willow tree without foliage overarches the peaceful lion, its upper branches spreading horizontally in the bright sunlight underline the title of the poem. A solitary vine to the left of the verse spirals upwards in the morning sky, its upper tendril capping the first two words in the title.

The dense forest, the moonlit night, the frightened human figure in the upper design are contrasted with their opposites in the lower one: the open garden, the bright morning sunlight and the powerful and potentially energetic beast. Blake uses the symbols he develops in the narrative to give visual expression to the girl’s fall from Innocence into Experience. The young woman is the maturing Lyca reclining beneath the tree of knowledge that will teach her about her sexual function; she is momentarily distracted by the "frowning night" of Moral Law as she prepares to enter the sleep that will carry her through the dark night of Experience. The scene may also be the garden of Eden after Adam and Eve’s rebellion, and the personified night is the bad natured Old Testament God, old Nobodaddy, who will punish the woman by multiplying her sorrow and her conception.

Blake makes this Lyca considerably older than the "Seven summers" child of the first poem because her choice
to leave her "southern clime" and wander in the wilderness is a commitment to her sexuality that will last the better part of her adult life. She will become a lover, a wife and a mother, and she will leave her parents to "be as one flesh" with her husband. Later, she will conceive and bear children, and, while her body is bound down upon the stems of vegetation, she will be locked in the cycle of generation with her spiritual eye closed to her true imaginative potential. Only when she is able to turn her attention from the outward journey of the body to the inner one of the spirit will she be able to follow her parent's example and wake to a new spiritual life.

The breaking day in the lower half of the design is not Lyca's spiritual awakening and her deliverance from her gender determined circumstances, for at the end of the poem she continues to sleep in the kingly lion's "palace deep" (SE 36 43; E 22). Rather, the rising sun in the bright garden is the transforming consciousness of the parents that allows them to see a "spirit arm'd in gold" (36) where they had earlier seen only a wild beast. Blake makes this vision the climax of the narrative and the turning point for Lyca's mother and father since it rescues them from the dark wilderness of fear and grief that blocked their search for their lost child; it is their deliverance from a state of mind that had more to do with their own feelings of loss and
with their lack of faith in Divine Providence than with the safety of their daughter.

Blake drew much of the dramatic imagery for this sudden vision that literally overwhelms Lyca's parents from the Book of Revelation where Christ the King is described in various symbolic manifestations overpowering the forces of evil and establishing an eternal kingdom. In the apocalyptic visions of John of Patmos, Jesus is as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5) and "one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire." (1:13-14) Blake uses a complex of similar natural and human details to describe the metamorphosis of the lion king into the spirit king, and the parents' altered level of perception that lies behind this transformation is paralleled in Revelation by the victory of Christ over the dark powers of sin and death, and by His recreation of a paradisal garden in which His faithful servants "shall reign for ever and ever" (22:5).

Lyca cannot yet open her eyes to the spiritual world that the mother and the father see because she still slumbers in the night of Experience. Ironically, the end of their search for their daughter comes with their realization that she does not need to be found because she was never actually lost. In the concluding stanza of the poem, the
parents have arrived at the understanding that their Lyca has entered a new and necessary phase in her natural evolution, and this phase will take their little girl away from them forever. The absence of Lyca, however, is metaphorical not real; it is her loss of spiritual or imaginative freedom that comes when the child must leave the warm world of playing and being to put on the cares and responsibilities of the bride and mother. Blake characterizes this loss of childhood perception as a spiritual sleep that closes the mind to the highest and most sacred possibilities of life, and these possibilities are the creative powers that keep the mind from becoming claustrophobic. The Bible opens with the description in Genesis of the fall of the male aspect of humanity into the cycles of mortality, the female into the cycles generation; it closes in Revelation with the prediction that the old world will pass away and Jesus will bring about "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1). For Blake, this is the world that is available to the higher creative consciousness that transcends Experience, and it awaits Lyca whenever she is ready to open her eyes and see it.

Lyca's mother and father receive their revelation when they are able to accept that their daughter must descend into the dangerous world of Experience in order to be delivered from it. The cleansing of their vision is the event predicted by the Bard in the opening verses, and it
represents the delivery of their "earth" from the "desert wild" into a "garden mild" (SE 34 7-8; E 20). Lyca leaves the Edenic garden to enter the desert of temporal life; her parents find their way out of the desert and into a new garden, a turn of the cycle of life in which the child becomes an adult while the adults become "as little children" in order that they may "enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).76 Blake's image of the garden in which Lyca's parents need not fear the "wolvish howl" and the "lion's growl" (51-52) suggests that the design on the final plate in the series is a visual synthesis of the new earth of Revelation and the future time of the prophecy of Isaiah:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (11:6)

The third plate depicts a lion or lioness and a tiger patiently couching on the grass in a brightly lit garden. A young girl rides on the back of the lioness and an equally young boy kneels beside a tiger, his upper body leaning toward the animal as if he were attempting to embrace it. A female adult lies sleeping in front of the beasts, and a girl, somewhat older than her companions, is helped onto the back of the lioness by its rider. To the right of the text two immense entwining tree trunks disappear out of the top
of the picture, and to the left two vines, one straight the other spiraling, climb upward out of the lower corner.

The vision is the "garden mild" predicted by the Bard in the prophetic introduction; its little naked inhabitants are the parents who have been resurrected from Experience and have become as children in order to enter the new universe predicted by Paul in Revelation. The two enormous entwining trees are the trees of death and eternal life that are described in Genesis and again in Revelation. In Biblical myth, the first tree gave the woman the ability to know the duality of the temporal world, and so it brought about her descent out of the garden of unity into sexual difference. The second tree is the potential of the individual to be delivered into a new garden through the transcendence of the dualism of space and time, and of male and female. They are the Alpha and the Omega at opposite poles of human experience; the one is the source of physical being, the other of eternal life, and they are interdependent and entwined in every person.

Innocence and Experience are contrary states of consciousness that see the same world differently. Therefore, Lyca can sleep beneath the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, while her parents, who have recovered a unified vision of existence, are represented in the same landscape as innocent children enjoying life without fear of its opposite --without fear that it will be shortened by the
wolf and the lion. The older child being assisted onto the back of the lion is perhaps the future Lyca who will be welcomed by her parents into the timeless garden when she can complete her cycle in generation and be reborn to the child-like innocence of her spirituality.

Blake's decision to transfer "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" from the Songs of Innocence to the Songs of Experience does not invalidate his claim that these poems provide insights into contrary states of the human soul, nor does it suggest that he made a post facto revision of his original plan. "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" share with "A Little Girl Lost" the theme of the dangers attendant upon a girl's initiation into sexual knowledge in a patriarchal society, and it is probably this realization that motivated Blake to shift the first two poems into the same context as the third, the darker world of the Songs of Experience.

Innocence Dwells with Wisdom but never with Ignorance

Blake engraved another poem about a "lost" girl for the Songs of Experience, but in the title of this one he replaced the definite article "The" with the indefinite "A" in order to suggest that the narrative describes a particular example of the repressive attitude of eighteenth-century society towards the spontaneous premarital sexual experience of the female. The prophetic Bard introduces
this poem entitled "A Little Girl Lost" with an apostrophe to the unborn children of a future age, informing them that the love they presumably take for granted was earlier regarded by society as a violation of Moral Law, and therefore a "crime" (SE 51 4; E 29). As we discussed earlier, when the shadows from the Songs of Experience fall back over the Songs of Innocence the result is social satire, and therefore Blake's target audience is not some enlightened future readers of his "indignant page," (2) but his contemporaries who hold this narrow-minded attitude towards sex, and who he hopes he can shame into changing it. The Prophet's address to the children of the future about the crimes of the present makes the satirical contrast explicit by making the poem that it introduces an extrapolation backwards from conditions as they ought to be, to conditions as they are, or from an unavoidably bright future into a temporarily benighted present. In this way, Blake is able to follow his practice in "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" and complete the interlocking natural and human cycles that pervade the Songs of Innocence and Experience: Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring; birth, life, death, rebirth; morning, day, night, dawn; Innocence, Experience, higher Innocence; child, adult, child, and specifically in this poem, past, present and future.
The Bard's prophetic announcement identifies the subject of the poem as love, or rather as the distinction between the "sweet Love" of the future that will be enjoyed without fear and the prohibited love of the present that society condemns as a "crime" (4). This is the difference between Amor and Eros, the former the union of two beings who become one in their experience of a love that spiritually completes them, the latter the appetitus naturalis that is simply a biological drive. Historically, the Church and the State made themselves the legislators of this distinction; the Church through a repressive moral code enforced by the sacraments of marriage and baptism, the State through patriarchy and the laws of wealth and property inheritance. As we have seen, both institutions in eighteenth-century English society underwrote a double standard for morally proper conduct that privileged the man while it victimized the woman. Except among the poor where promiscuity was common and prenuptial pregnancy high, the young single male of the middle and upper-class family was expected, even encouraged to gain some sexual experience before his marriage, while his female counterpart, the young single female, was counselled at every turn by parents, by guardians, by officers of the church, and repeatedly in marriage manuals and conduct books, that her chastity was her most valuable asset, and the loss of it was her certain ruin.79
The notion of a "lost" virtue that is both moral and physical in its implications is as relevant to "A Little Girl Lost" as it is to "The Little Girl Lost." In this poem, however, Blake concentrates on the Moral Law as it filters down from the institutions of secular and spiritual government into the patriarchal family and determines the nature of the relationship between a father and his young unmarried daughter. Despite a widespread revolution in the European family system in the eighteenth-century, it was still the father's chief responsibility to his daughter to keep her chastity under close surveillance so that eventually she would be a saleable property in the marriage market, as it was the daughter's responsibility to her parents to keep her virtue intact so that she would not ruin her marital prospects and dishonor her family. The spiritual love represented by the Church, and the patriotic love of King and country come together in the model of the ideal Christian family that emerged in the eighteenth-century in the middle-class drama, and was promoted in the newspapers, the magazines, religious and secular tracts, and in much of the poetry and the popular didactic fiction.60 Ironically, there is good evidence that the ideal companionate marriage of the eighteenth-century was born out of middle-class nonconformist families of the late seventeenth-century, and while in some cases affective relations did prevail, for many of the independent artisans,
merchants shopkeepers and the like, marriage was still an important economic arrangement that had its foundation in Civil and Moral Law. Thus, the relaxation of patriarchal authority in the middle-class family did not extend to the chastity of the daughter or to the monogamy of the wife, and the violation of either of these "resources" in deed or reputation brought dishonor to the parents or to the husband and his house. In the final analysis, chastity was a pre-condition of the marriage contract, and love was an emotional relationship that was often left to develop after other, more important considerations had been taken care of.

The spontaneous love of the "Youth and maiden bright" (SE 7: E 29), however, has nothing to do with codes of morality or patriarchal authority; it is the highest form of love that is unselfconscious because, as the "little Clod of Clay" maintains, it transcends the cares and the pleasures of the self. The mutual dedication of the lovers to each other overrides their obligation to family and community, and because their actions fly in the face of the established lines of authority, their love must take place when "Parents [are] afar" and "Strangers [come] not near" (17-18). Unlike Thel who recoils in terror from her awakening sexuality, the "Naked" maiden in the timeless garden of the poem "soon forgot her fear" (19) and gave in to the desires of her companion.
Blake uses the same natural metaphors to describe the maiden's transition from innocence into sexual awareness as he did with Lyca in "The Little Girl Lost." Since he regards the moment in which sexual consciousness collides with social morality as the instant in Genesis in which humanity entered the cycles of Generation and Nature completed the human fall, he frequently uses metaphors that suggest the original couple's loss of the perfect Garden and their expulsion into an alienated Nature. The "sunny beams" of "holy light" that had illuminated the "Age of Gold" of the "Youth and maiden bright" (5-9) are succeeded by an oppressive dark and hostile world in which the spontaneous celebration of life is suspended in the "silent sleep" (22) of the winter's cold. The loss of the summer clime and the arrival of the season of death are complementary metaphors that parallel Nature's cycle with the young girl's loss of childhood freedom and her descent into the oppressive adult world of Moral Law and sexual intolerance. After the "youthful pair" (10) of "wanderers" (24) have exhausted themselves in sexual exploration and discovery they agree to resume their relationship in the adult world of Experience that Blake figures as a sleep in the silent waters of a the deluged world of time and space:

    Tired with kisses sweet
    They agree to meet,
    When the silent sleep

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Waves o’er heavens deep;  
And the weary tired wanderers weep.  

(20-24)  

The understanding and the acceptance of Lyca’s parents that elevates them to a higher state of consciousness is not shared by Ona’s righteous "father white" (25) who it seems is, like the Urizenic God of the Old Testament, a long-time dweller in the emotionally freezing world of Moral Law. 83 His version of a "loving look" is ironically described as "Like the holy book," (27-28) meaning that it is full of what Blake calls the "laws of the Jews" that are "the basest & most oppressive of human codes. & being like all other codes given under pretence of divine command were what Christ pronounced them The Abomination that maketh desolate. i.e. State Religion which is the Source of all Cruelty" (Wat 25; E 618). The fiery Devil of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell provoked the ironic "transfiguration" of the pompous Angel of religious orthodoxy by explaining to him that "no virtue can exit without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse not from rules" (MHH 23-24; E 43). Unfortunately, Ona’s father does not share these antinomian sentiments with Jesus and The Marriage’s Devil because the look that he turns on his naive daughter "All her tender limbs with terror shook." (29)  

Ona "forgot her fear," (19) and in a blatant violation of the rule of premarital chastity put love and desire
before the strict moral code of eighteenth-century English patriarchal society, and her father's unforgiving reaction is indicative of what she can expect. However, her hypocritical father, who wears the "blossoms" (34) of his own personal experience in the garden of love, shows more concern for himself, his reputation and the continuing burden that his ruined daughter will be to him than he does for her welfare. Combining accusation and self-pity, he appeals to his frightened daughter to explain why she has brought the heavy weight of public shame down on his august head:

Ona! pale and weak!
To thy father speak:
O the trembling fear!
O the dismal care!
That shakes the blossoms of my hoary hair
(SE 30-34; E 30)

Like many of the children in the Songs of Experience, Ona can have no response to her adult accuser because her father's suspicions about her conduct and about society's reaction to it are accurate. Yet, for Blake and the "Children of the future Age" (1) that he addresses at the beginning of the poem, it is not the adolescent girl's impulsive love that is shameful, but rather the degree to which her father's self-centered and hollier-than-thou judgement of his child is reflective of the attitude of the
society as a whole. Late eighteenth-century morality admitted no extenuating circumstances for what it regarded as a scandalous and unpardonable "crime," and the tragic irony of Ona's situation is that once her guilt has been established, no defence for her is possible.

Blake uses the design of "A Little Girl Lost" to once again reinforce the prophetic message of the Bard. In some respects, the design of "A Little Girl Lost" resembles the first plate of "The Little Girl Lost," but the differences are important. The sun has travelled from the upper right-hand corner to pass below the horizon in the lower left, the garden has been deserted by the young couple, and the birds have multiplied from two to a number in the twenties. The fragile willow tree has been replaced by a gnarly oak, and the vines, though fewer, seem more looped, more clinging and appear to have put out a few green leaves. A miniature human figure stands upon a vine wound round the top portion of the trunk of the barren tree, and what may be a squirrel perches in the fork of the lowest bough, although the form is indistinct enough to be merely part of the texture of the bark. The prophetic verse is separated from the remainder of the poem by the slant of the lettering, by its central position on the page, and finally by the highest branches of the tree which appear to underline the last five words in the epigraph: "Love! was thought a crime" (4).
The scene is not the "rising day" (15) in the "garden bright" enjoyed by the young lovers in the opening half of the poem. Rather, it is the sunset of the Edenic "Age of Gold" which the uppermost branch of the tree connects with its cause: the contemporary attitude that condemns premarital love as a sin. The landscape is again a metaphor for human consciousness. Here, it is the consciousness of the youthful pair who have tired of "kisses sweet" (20) and, following an arrangement to meet in the "silent sleep" (22) of Experience, have slipped out of the garden of innocent love. Since the Love of the adolescents is characterized by mutual "care," (11) a word that Blake uses in the Songs as a synonym for compassion or selfless love, the couple is illuminated by the "holy light" (8, 13) of their spiritual transfiguration. This type of authentic love is the love of Christ for "Man his child and care," (SI "The Divine Image" 8; E 12) and it is contrasted at the end of the poem with the "love" of the father for his daughter, a love that has more to do with the selfish emotions of guilt and jealousy than it does with care for another. The father condemns his daughter, Ona, for a "crime" in the garden of love that he is guilty of having committed himself; a crime that would have been regarded, because of his gender and eighteenth-century society's double standard, as a male prerogative if he were single or a venial sin if he were married.
"Woman, What Have I to do With Thee?"

Perhaps Blake's most ironic treatment of the construct of the woman in the state of Generation as it is embedded in Christian mythology and Western culture is the dedication poem from Experience entitled "To Tirzah." This poem was a late addition to the Songs, and its date of composition has been estimated as sometime between 1795 and 1803. Thus, Blake wrote "To Tirzah" around the time that he was working on The Four Zoas, and probably the major prophecies he titled Milton and Jerusalem. Since these poems are roughly contemporaneous, and since they all include the contrasting figures of Tirzah and Rahab in their dramatis personae, it might be instructive to take a look at the way in which this short sixteen line lyric leads from Blake's earlier treatment of the woman in the Songs into the enormously complex and comprehensive presentation of gender in his major prophetic works.

Our primary concern here is with how "To Tirzah" as a verbal and visual narrative complements those other narratives in the Songs of Experience that deal with the plight of the woman in eighteenth-century English society, and this requires that we first attempt to recover the mythological significance of these figures in the Biblical tradition that was their original context. Once we have a sense of the place Tirzah and Rahab hold in orthodox Christian thought, we can then examine how Blake reinvents
these women and radically reshapes the symbolic content of
the doctrine to carry his own mythological story about
humanity's fall into division and its struggle to recover
its divine unity. This myth of deliverance is the
apocalyptic vision that completes the metaphorical cycle in
the Bible, and it provides the prophetic backdrop for the
full range of Blake's creative work, including the Songs of
Innocence and of Experience. Since these poems deal with
humanity's fall from the unity of Innocence into a master-
slave dualism that pervades the patriarchal social,
political and cultural landscape of eighteenth-century
England, as well as the gender hegemony of the Early Modern
family, this myth of renewal is the ideal against which the
actual can be measured. Indeed, the extreme contrast
between the appalling social conditions depicted in the
Songs of Experience and the ever present dream of the
prophetic Bard for humanity's collective delivery into a new
heaven and a new earth is the satirical distinction between
what is and what ought to be that holds up the moral
looking-glass to the Philistines in the world of Experience
and bids them look closely.

One of Blake's important talents that stands out in his
illuminated art but is often taken for granted by his
critics is his sense of the power of context, and there is
good evidence that he never altered, rewrote, transferred or
rearranged any of his work without taking into consideration
the entire verbal and visual setting as an dynamic and interactive aesthetic environment.\textsuperscript{85} An easy explanation for the tiny size of Blake's tractates and for his continual reordering of the sequence of his \textit{Songs} is that copper was expensive in 1788 and that he was not satisfied with all of his previous arrangements of the plates. A better one, however, is that Blake the satirist recognized that there is visual understatement in taking on the entire Western philosophical tradition with a series of plates that can be held in the palm of your hand, and that Blake the artist was aware that there are endless aesthetic possibilities in the regrouping of artistic detail.

Ruskin found an arrogance in classicism because he felt that it sought perfection through unity, symmetry and predictability, and Blake would have agreed that this is a move away from the concreteness of minute particularity into the subjective abstraction that closes down the aesthetic enterprise. Blake answers Joshua Reynold's argument for an abstract, decontextualized art free from "all singular forms, local customs particularities, and details of every kind" with "Singular and Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime," (Rey 58; E 647) a position that Northrop Frye elaborates when he says: "Metaphors of unity and integration take us only so far, because they are derived from the finiteness of the human mind. If we are to expand our vision into the genuinely infinite, that vision becomes
Blake was both an artist and an antinomian, and perhaps this is why many find a concordance to his work more helpful than a dictionary. His use of symbolism is not random and formless as some suggest, nor is it readily codifiable or circumscribable as others insist. In an earlier reply to Reynolds' stated preference for "reason" over "enthusiasm" in an artist, Blake posed the rhetorical question: "What has Reasoning to do with the Art of Painting?" (Rey 56; E 647). The answer is of course nothing, because "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (MHH 4; E 34), and the circumscribing line strives to reach enclosure. Blake's symbolism is "decentralized," and its "allegorical" meaning and coherence are dis-closed by the dynamic interaction of detail within unique aesthetic contexts. With this in mind, we should not expect to discover unity, fixity and simple repetition in Blake's use of Rahab and Tirzah as symbolic contraries in the following poems or prophecies, but rather opportunities for a great many narratives, some Biblical, others historical, mythical, social, political and so on, that are infinitely richer for their difference.

In Biblical myth, Tirzah (meaning in Hebrew "pleasantness") is a woman, a family, a territory, and a city, and therefore she provides a wide range of metaphorical suggestiveness for Blake. In Numbers 26:33; 27:1-11 and 36:5-12, she is described as the youngest of the
five daughters of Zelophahad. After their father's untimely death in the wilderness, she, along with her sisters Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah and Milcah, negotiated with Moses for the legal right to inherit the family estate, and therefore she is traditionally associated with both generation and the rightful inheritance of the woman. Also, archeological evidence identifies Tirzah as one of five "sister" clans in the environs of Samaria, and a city by this name is celebrated in Song of Songs 6:4 as a beauty as "comely" as Jerusalem, presumably because it was the Northern capital of Israel for a brief period around 900 B.C. Rahab, on the other hand, is the God-fearing harlot of Jericho who defied the king by first hiding Joshua's spies in her house, and then by helping them to avoid capture and to escape the city before its destruction. (Joshua 2) In return for her aid, the two fugitives swore that when the city fell she and her family would be spared. Rahab is associated with the Whore of Babylon through her profession and through the scarlet color of the "thread" that she hung in the window to identify her house to the invading forces. In Biblical tradition, particularly the New Testament, she is celebrated as one of the faithful harlots whose sins were forgiven, and through her marriage to Salmon she became a direct ancestor of Jesus in Matthew's genealogy. (1:5-17)

Rahab, sometimes called leviathan, is also the name in the Old Testament for the mythical dragon that swims the
"raging" sea of chaos and that God had to kill before he could give shape to the "firmament." In Genesis, Eve restores life to the evil serpent of death and begins man's fall into the dualistic universe by eating of the tree that metaphorically Christ will have to die on in order to redeem humanity and win back eternal life for his children. As Frye points out in *The Great Code*, Rahab is a term that is frequently applied to Israel's enemies, the Egyptians and the Babylonians, and thus it is associated with oppression and with human bondage in a hostile environment. From the orthodox Christian standpoint, the serpent of death continues his campaign against man in the fallen world, and therefore Israel's delivery from her enemies in the Old Testament must be metaphorical, not historical. This means that divided humanity remains submerged in the vast sea of space and time until God chooses to defeat the dragon and annihilate the nature-woman, which in the Book of Revelation is the scarlet beast that carries on its back the woman identified as Mystery, "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (17:1-8). This prophecy of man's delivery from the body of fallen nature is the gospel of metanoia, and it claims that he will be transformed into a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17) so that he may "be Raised a Spiritual Body" ("To Tirzah" E 30, engraved on the male figure in the design).
In Blake’s radical symbolic cosmology, this woman of Mystery is the goddess Vala who was created by the Synagogue of Satan, or by false religion, to provide justification for the confinement of man inside his earthly prison. Vala’s fallen form is the harlot, Rahab, the "Delusive Beauty" of female Nature whose daughters, called Tirzah, bind the Human Form Divine down "upon the Stems of Generation" (FZ, 8 53; E 378) by enclosing his creative spirit within the five senses of the corporeal body. Rahab’s sexuality links her to the fallen Eve and to the Whore of Revelation as the beginning and the end of the cycles of Generation. She is the False Feminine Counterpart to the fallen Man (seen near she is Eve, seen remote she is the daughters of Eve) and through her female descendants she becomes Mary, the adulterous wife of Joseph and the mother of Jesus the transgressor. Originally, Rahab’s fallen state was the creation of "the Fruit of Urizens Tree" (FZ, 8 20; E 378), and it was the curse and the blessing of her sexuality that brought man out of the static "State called Satan" (FZ 8 18; E 378), which is eternal death, into the gender conscious, dualistic world of Generation. As Mary, the mother of the Holy Child, her role is to give preexistent divinity a "vegetated body" so that Christ can shed the inherited sins of the flesh and be resurrected into eternal life, an act of Divine forgiveness and love that allows mortal man "to put off Satan Eternally" (FZ 8 19; E 378).
In Jerusalem "The Twelve Daughters of Albion," the tribes of Israel, are "united in Rahab & Tirzah / A Double Female" (J 67 2-3; E 220) whose job it is to weave the "threads of Vala & Jerusalem," of man's natural and spiritual bodies, into the human forms that will clothe and restrain their spirits throughout their earthly lives. These prototypes of female sexuality are the "Two Seeds," the contrary states of female sexuality. Rahab is the Harlot, Tirzah the fifth born daughter, and therefore associated by Blake with sexuality as the "ideal woman." Down through the ages mother and daughter work together; they continually divide "into many lovely Daughters," (J 67 8; E 220) and carry on the bloody sexual torture of procreation that will preserve them in Generation. They are also identified with the daughters of the cursed and disinherited Amelikites, Canaanites and Moabites, neighboring tribes descended from Esau, Ham and Lot that were at various times and to various degrees hostile to Israel's culture and belief. Rahab is pure Eros, but her daughters are the hypocritical sexual temptresses of the rival tribes who Tirzah teaches to use their love charms to ensnare men and exercise control over them. Their love is love of self, and it brings not "pleasantness," but "the bitter pangs of love forsaken" (FZ 8 41; E 379).

In The Four Zoas, a "division" of Tirzah is identified as the "Females of Amalek," (FZ 8 30; E 378) the women of
the nomadic tribe that terrorized the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert following their exodus from Egypt. (Exodus 17: 8-16) These Druid-like priestesses bind their male victims on the altar stones of Generation and then torment them with their knives of flint while "singing with tears" (FZ 8 29; E 378) the songs of self-love. The siren "songs of Tirzah" describe the power of the perverted and self-serving "loves of Amalek" (FZ 8 54; E 379) to close the human consciousness within the physical skull and to block the human senses to the spiritual world that in happier times used "to wander in distant heavens" and expand "with delight in morning skies" (FZ 8 36; E 378).

The Four Zoas and Jerusalem contain similar versions of Tirzah's sacrifice of the Divine Man on the altar of Generation; in the latter work it is described as a bloody global conflict that leaves the man "bound upon the Stems of Vegetation" (J 68: 9; E 221) and his uninhibited persecutors "walking in pride & bringing forth under green trees / With pleasure, without pain, for their food is the blood of the Captive." (J 68: 36-37; E 222) In this account, the beautiful Daughters of Albion, Blake's personification of English womanhood, tempt the warring kings of the nations of the earth and of Israel with their cruel sexual intrigues, and then, like many of the parents of the children of the Songs of Experience, surrender their "first born of seven years old: be they Males or Females" (J 68: 31; E 222) to
the fiery devil of war, Molech. As we discovered in "A Little Boy Lost," Molech, the Ammonite, Moabite and Canaanite deity who demanded children as burnt offerings, is the God of the false Church of this world, and so Tirzah is linked to her mother, Rahab, who also offers "her own Children / Upon the bloody Alter" (FZ 8 3-4; E 385) of Natural Religion.

In The Four Zoas, the loss of Divine vision is the result of the violent sexual domination of the true Man, Israel, by the pagan daughters of Amalek, the descendants of Esau, the disinherited, who divide into the twelve tribes, the five senses, the five daughters of Zelophahad, and then join as Rahab, "the Mother of Harlots" (FZ 8 6; E 379). Here, they are also the "divisions" of Tirzah, and they first sacrifice and then alternately mock and worship "the Lamb of God" (FZ 8 1; E 379) as they struggle to close off his spiritual vision. In hypocritical mourning, they preserve themselves in Generation by binding his five senses down to the material world, a contraction of eternal life into the cycles of nature that was initiated by Eve's eating the fruit of Urizen's "tree of Mystery" (FZ 8: 2; E 379), the tree upon which Christ must be crucified in order to restore man's hope of eternal life. Thus, Tirzah's sacrifice of the Divine Man is Blake's version of the crucifixion of Christ; it is Jesus shedding the dark Satanic body of sin given to him by his adulterous mother, Mary, the
descendent of Rahab, so that in dying for all, he puts "off all mortality" (FZ 8 38; E 383) and becomes again the Universal Humanity.

Blake dedicates his poem "To Tirzah" to the cruel daughters called Tirzah, the descendants of the saving harlot of Jericho, Rahab. Through the leviathan of Genesis, Rehab is connected metaphorically with Eve and with her act of disobedience that revived the serpent and betrayed the Divine Man into the sea of time and space. For Blake, she also appears at the opposite end of space and time as the Whore of Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Revelation 17:5). Thus, she spans the cycles of Generation as the collective mothers and daughters of the fallen world who weave the natural bodies that confine the spirits of the sons of man to an earth-bound existence.

Tirzah is the many in the one, just as "Universal Humanity" is the "One Man blessed for Ever" (FZ 8 31; E 377) who contains all spiritual being in the Oneness of the Eternal Now.

This may be a good place to point out that "Universal Humanity" is perceived as the Divine Man, or as a masculine Godhead only because He is seen from below, or more accurately from outside of Eternity by those who are caught up in the dualistic, male-dominant systems of Generation. For Blake, the Bible is a metaphorical account of humanity's history in Generation; it begins with the fall into duality.
and ends with the recovery of a cosmic unity that transcends
gender. Because the institutions that have shaped this
history--principally the Church, the State, and the Family--
are patriarchal, and because: "As the Eye--such the Object"
(Rey 34; E 645), or: "As a man is So he Sees" (Let E 702),
this paradigm is projected into the spiritual realm in the
form of man is to God as woman is to man. Generation is a
male-dominant, disciplining order, and therefore the way to
the equilibrium of inner harmony is through Beulah, a
feminine subconscious dimension of dualistic bliss in which
all "Contraries are equally true" (J 48 14; E 196). This is
a dreamy realm of idyllic love "Where no dispute can come,"
and it provides the creative mind with relief from the
vigorous "sports of intellect" (J 48 15,20; E 197,198) that
rage on in Eternity. Beulah is also the pastoral garden of
selfless sexual pleasure, and therefore the lovers who unite
and become as "one flesh" can glimpse the Eternal Now in
which the ego is annihilated and the now and the here are
made real, "an actual present and an actual presence."90
For Blake, Eternity is the only reality, Beulah is a waking
dream of reality, and Ulro is the illusory vegetated world
outside of creative consciousness where "What seems to Be:
Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be, & is productive of
the most dreadful / Consequences to those to whom it seems
to Be: even of / Torments, Despair, Eternal Death" (J 32 51;
E 179). Ulro is the mind lost in a labyrinth of doubt; it
is nature without man, sex without love, science without art, reason without imagination, death without resurrection and Satan without Jesus.

Blake's poem "To Tirzah" exploits many of these symbolic connections. In the other prophetic contexts that we have explored, the woman Tirzah is the collective form of the daughters of Rahab, and therefore she embodies all of the generations of womanhood stretching from the beginning of time to the end of time, or from Eve to the Whore of Babylon. In Biblical tradition, she is the virginal fifth daughter of Zelophahad, and in her capacity as an advocate for women's inheritance rights, she is associated with both generation and the law of Moses. A pure woman of great beauty, she is the opposite of her mother, the harlot, and taken together their natures encompass the entire range of female sexual morality. In Matthew's genealogy, Rahab is a direct ancestor of Jesus, and therefore one of her daughters, Tirzah, is his mother, the Virgin Mary of official Christian doctrine, but in Blake's thought, an adulteress. It follows, then, that the person addressed by the poem is one of these "impossible signs" that takes in the individual woman reader and all of the mothers and daughters in the history of womankind who range from the social ideal of female chastity in the person of the Virgin Mary all the way to her physical and spiritual opposite in the Whore of Babylon.
Here again, Blake's reading of the tradition is unorthodox and comes close to the Ranters Coppe and Clarkson who rejected Moral Law in favor of a Gospel of spontaneous Love. For Blake the antinomian, Mary and Jesus are to be worshipped because they are the opposite of those spotless figures who are at the center of established Christian doctrine. Mary and Jesus are states of the soul not historical individuals, and metaphorically they did not come to sanction the law but to overturn it. In terms of traditional Moral Law, Mary's act of adultery and unlawful conception are the ultimate sins for a woman and therefore they are deserving of the ultimate forgiveness, and Jesus symbolically broke all of the laws in violating the ten commandments, and therefore his forgiveness by God extends to all sin.

The poem is addressed to Tirzah, who seen afar is all women, but the refrain that comes at the end of the first and the final quatrain is the question that Jesus put to his mother, Mary, while they were attending the marriage in Cana of Galilee: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2:4). In the figure of Jesus, the speaker of the poem, we have another of these "impossible signs" since he is metaphorically the identity that encloses "all categories of being" and so "presents us with a world in which there is only one knower, for whom there is nothing outside of or objective to that knower, hence nothing dead or
This is of course the doctrine of the indwelling God that Blake shares with the nonconformist tradition, and therefore the Jesus of the poem is the divinity within the "human breast" (MHH 11; E 38) of all mankind, including the male reader. So the poem is Jesus speaking to Mary, or universal man speaking to universal woman, and the subject of the one-sided conversation is the relationship between divinity and mortality, or between soul and body.

Blake’s notion that Jesus is a state of consciousness does not contradict the doctrine that God is eternal, but it does mean that his corporeal body is the fallen world that he received from his mortal mother, and therefore it is the world of sin and death that he must die for in order to recover Eternity: "He took on Sin in the Virgins Womb / And put it off on the Cross & Tomb" (EG i 57; E 524). The opening two quatrains describe the consequences of the Fall for man and for woman, which is respectively human mortality and human sexuality, but they also suggest indirectly that through God’s Merciful sacrifice the "Sexes" can transcend both of these aspects of Generation:

Whate’er is Born of Mortal Birth,  
Must be consumed with the Earth  
To rise from Generation free;  
Then what have I to do with thee?

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The Sexes sprung From Shame and Pride
Blow'd in the morn: in evening died
But Mercy changd Death into Sleep;
The Sexes rose to work & weep.

(SE 52 1-8; E 30)

The labor of subsistence is of course the man's punishment, while the weeping is the woman suffering her sentence in the cycles of conception.

The final two stanzas of the poem deal with the incarnation of divinity as the capture and imprisonment of the eternal Spirit within the temporal body, an act in which the "Rahab/Tirzah" mother, the paradoxical Mary, reaffirms her maternal function in Generation by conceiving the physical body of Jesus that must die in order for all men to receive eternal life. The role of the Mother of man's "Mortal part" is ambiguous because, like Rahab and Tirzah in The Four Zoas and Jerusalem, all mothers and daughters preserve themselves in Generation by creating bodies for the preexistent spirits, a function that betrays men into a temporal existence, but also sustains them for a rebirth into eternal life.

Mary and Jesus are the "impossible signs" that stand for all men and all women who must participate in the cycle of Generation in order to be delivered from it; the corporeal Jesus in every man must suffer death in order to release the spiritual one. Thus, the irony of Jesus' rebuke
of his mother: "what have I to do with thee?" is contained in the suggestive comment that follows the question: "mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). The primary purpose of Mary's life is to give mortal life to the Son of God so that he can die to all sin and save man from "the State called Satan," which is spiritual death. This is Paul's typological point when he says "For in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The answer to Jesus' rhetorical question is that Mary has fulfilled her maternal function and therefore she has nothing to do with her son until the resurrection of his Spirit returns his "dark Satanic body" (FZ 8 104 13; E 377) to the earth and his Spirit to his Father in Eternity. After his resurrection, however, Mary has everything to do with Jesus for it is only by being "planted together in the likeness of his death [that] we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Romans 5:5)96 The cycle for Jesus is the cycle for all men and women; it is the descent of the "cestial body" into the "terrestrial" one, into the body that is "sown in dishonor" to be "raised in glory," "sown in weakness" to be "raised in power," "sown a natural body" to be "raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:40-44). Thus, in the metaphorical context of the poem, Jesus speaks for mankind when he says:

Thou Mother of my Mortal part.

With cruelty didst mould my Heart.
And with false self-deceiving tears,
Didst bind my Nostrils Eyes & Ears.

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay
And me to Mortal Life betray:
The death of Jesus set me free,
Then what have I to do with thee?

(SE 52 9-16: E 30)

In our discussion of the poem "To Tirzah" we have identified two aspects of the woman in the figures of the youthful and chaste Tirzah and her mother the harlot of Jericho, and we have demonstrated how Blake connects these two figures with Eve at the beginning of time, and with the Whore of Babylon at the end of time. We can discover a similar moral contrast for the Virgin Mary of the poem in Mary Magdalene, the whore who Jesus exorcised and who was present at his Crucifixion and at his burial. In The Four Zoas, Blake associates this "fallen" woman with Vala, and therefore with Rahab, when he has Vala addressed as "O Melancholy Magdalen." (EZ 93 2; E 365) We have also identified two aspects of the man in the terrestrial and celestial bodies of Jesus; the former is the Satanic body that he received from his mother, and that he will return to her when his hour is come and he is "Raised a Spiritual Body" ("To Tirzah" E 30, engraved in the design).

Blake’s accompanying design pictures two women and two
men under a branch or vine in what appears to be a green garden or dale. The vine that grows from right to left stretches across the plate above the heads of the figures, and it bears seven apples, perhaps suggestive of Blake's identification of the creation myth with the Fall. In the center of the plate, beneath the text of the poem, one of the men lies naked and near death at the feet of the two women, the lower part of his body disappearing into the ground, his right hand in one copy already beginning to root. His upturned face gazes intently into the face of the nearest woman, clothed in red, who seems to be rubbing his body with oil, a part of the traditional Jewish religious ritual of burial. The second woman, clothed in yellow, helps the first, while in front of the group an ancient bearded man bends forward with a pitcher, no doubt poised to anoint the body once more in preparation for its interment. Anointing the body as part of a religious rite was regarded as an invocation to divine power, and perhaps the presence of the old man as a stereotypical image of God is an indication that in this instance it has been successful. Blake may have been thinking of Mark 16:1, the passage in which the Apostle describes the arrival of two Marys at the tomb of Christ: "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him."

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Engraved perpendicular to the text of the poem and down the white robe of the old man are Paul's words to the Corinthians in defence of the doctrine of the resurrection: "It is raised a spiritual body" (Corinthians 15:44). The woman clothed in red is associated with Rahab, the Whore of Babylon and Mary Magdalene through the traditional color of the "scarlet profession," and her companion would then represent in a single person those women we have identified as the harlot's moral opposites: Tirzah, and the Virgin Mary. Again, between these two figures, the mother and the daughter, the harlot and the virgin, is contained all of the categories that have been used traditionally to describe and value womankind. The two male figures are the contrasting aspects of incarnated divinity, the Son and Father, the dying Jesus whose mortal body is being reclaimed by the natural world, or by his mother, and the spiritual Father who helps to prepare his son for his homecoming. And again, between these contrasting aspects of Jesus, his mortal body and his eternal Spirit, Blake would have found the entire range of categories that had been used by many of the nonconformist churches to describe and value mankind within the doctrine of the indwelling Christ.

This poem, "To Tirzah," provides an effective terminal poem for the Songs of Experience because it asks in a comprehensive and ironic way the ultimate question of gender, and when this question is translated into
patriarchal Christian doctrine it takes the form of Jesus' unkind rebuff of his mother: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Rahab is leviathan; she is the sea of duality into which the spirit of man was betrayed, and her daughters, Tirzah, keep the cycles of Generation turning through the waters of time and space until the sea of death shall be no more (Revelation 21:1). In the metaphorical context of the poem, Jesus embodies in his physical and spiritual aspects the duality within all humanity according to the proverb: "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (NNR E 3). But becoming as God is requires that men and women transcend their gender division and become One in the Spirit through Christ, and this means that, like Jesus, we must die to our divided selves and rise in the eternal Now as the "one body" of "a new creature" (Colossians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Songs of Innocence and Experience describe the fall of children from the state of Innocence into the state of Experience, or from a genderless perception of the world as a pastoral garden of timeless play into the cycles of Generation. Once the children have tasted the fruit of Experience, they are driven out of their timeless gardens into a dualistic world in which they must work and weep. Most of the Songs of Experience are bitter, and often ironic monologues on the life of the "Sexes," and "To Tirzah" is one of the most subtle and effective of these satiric poems.

At the beginning of the Songs of Experience, the vatic
bard breaks the oppressive silence with the urgent voice of prophecy. He speaks from Eternity, and his subject is the original unfallen universe that the Poetic Genius creates endlessly, and that the Earth has allowed to collapse into the physical cosmos of finite time and space. His concern, then, is not with the relation of a factual history of events that have vanished forever into an irrecoverable past, but with the revelation of a spiritual dimension to human life that makes the here and the now real in the conscious mind, and thus renders past and future equally meaningless terms. Every thing is ever-present in Eternity, and Art is its ongoing inventory. And everything is independent of creation because the material world is simply the imperfect and impermanent reflection of an infinite spiritual existence. The Eternal world is the real world for Blake because it is inexhaustible and permanent, and the individual can live in this spiritual world to the extent that he is willing to use his imaginative powers to rouse himself from the deep sleep of his physical being and enter a universe of his own creation. The Bard's prophetic appeal is addressed to the inhabitants of a world who have collectively denied the primacy of the Poetic Genius and accepted that reality is a material universe external to and independent of human consciousness. His appeal is for the lapsed Soul to throw off the restraints that weaken and
destroy the creative imagination, and to waken to the dawn of a new spiritual day.

The intention of the Piper of Innocence was to celebrate the joys of the imagination with those who can become as little children and enter into their pastoral kingdom, but the apocalyptic vision of the Bard who "Present, Past & Future sees" (SE "Introduction" 30 2; E 18) is the Prophet's response to a society that has disregarded Christ's message and suffered its collective soul to lapse into a dark visionary paralysis. In order to rectify this situation and restore the dynamic opposition between the contrary states of the human soul, the voice of the Bard uses the patriarchal metaphors of Christian apocalyptic literature to call for a reunion of the masculine Spirit with the feminine Earth to awaken the cosmos to its visionary potential and bring on a new spiritual day.

For Blake, the creation of the universe in Genesis is also the Fall because it represents the collapse of divine vision into a mechanical universe, and the limitation of human experience to the sensual perception of matter in space and time. But if man's soul is Eternal and his prophetic voice divine, the formation of the natural world is his denial of his Spirit because it is the Word of God made flesh. At the beginning of the Introduction, then, the Bard is identified with the original man, Adam, whose loss of Paradise and his own prelapsarian state began when he
"heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the
cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). Blake intentionally
reproduces the faulty predication in his Biblical source to
indicate that the Holy Word which Adam heard walking in the
garden was the echo of his own voice, and that by dividing
his Spirit from his body he condemned himself to a fallen
world in which he would taste the fruit of death, but not
the fruit of eternal life. The Bard is the original
transgressor, Adam, and the voice of the Bard is the voice
of the Lord calling upon the lapsed Soul of humanity to
awaken to the Spiritual light that is within the human
breast. He knows that humanity’s loss of Eternity is not a
sentence imposed upon men and women by an angry and vengeful
God who does not wish them well, but a calculated strategy
by weak and tame minds to separate the Spirit from the Body
and assert the hegemony of Reason over Love. The opening
exhortation is enormously powerful in its simplicity and in
its ability to summon all of the authority of ancient
prophetic tradition:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees
Whose ears have heard,
The Holy Word,
That walk’d among the ancient trees.

(SE 30 1-5; E 18)
The Bard’s vision of a Biblical past reveals the source of man’s descent into a benighted present in which the dynamic opposition between the contrary states of the soul has been neutralized, and his cry is for man and woman to redeem the contraries and recover the spiritual control of the universe. But man must deliver himself, he must be his own salvation, and until he answers the call and arms himself for mental warfare the prophet will continue

Calling the lapsed Soul
And weeping in the evening dew:
That might controll
The starry pole:
And fallen fallen light renew!

(6-10)

The Earth is the physical body of creation; metaphorically she is the female counterpart to the masculine Spirit, and she must rise from the slumberous mass of a newtonian universe and embrace the maker of the new spiritual day. But for Earth to relinquish the couch of Generation, she needs to accept her loss of identity in the creative Spirit. This means an end to the natural process of Generation in which she plays the primary role, and the depreciation of her maternal function Earth is unwilling to accept. The Bard’s frustrated appeal indicates that Earth continues to reject his offer of a higher form of love:
Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away
The starry floor
The watry shore
Is giv’n thee till the break of day.

(16-20)

The design accompanying the poem depicts Earth as a naked female figure reclining on a couch perched on a cloud in a dark starry sky. Her reversed Venus pose suggests that Earth answers the Bard’s entreaty by turning her back on the voice of humanity and casually contemplating the dark material universe that she prefers to the break of day.

Earth’s response to the prophetic summons is both defensive and accusatory. She complains that she is the victim of a jealous and selfish tyrant who keeps her prisoner in a cold, dark physical universe, and she identifies her oppressor as the "Father of the ancient men," Adam, who is also the natural man in the material world of his fallen consciousness. In her defence, Earth argues that her reproductive function has been exploited in the secrecy of night, and she pleads for the freedom to love openly and to celebrate her fertility in the light of day and in the season of natural birth. She questions the Bard:

Does spring hide its joy
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower?
Sow by night?
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

(SE 31 16-20; E 19)

In response to her challenge, Earth desires her emancipation, but her captor's refusal to act, or even to deny her appeal, is met with all of the fury and indignation of sexual oppression:

Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around
Selfish vain!
Eternal bane
That free Love with bondage bound.

(21-25)

The state of the human soul that is set in opposition to the unbridled energy and the simple delight of childhood Innocence, then, is not a state of Experience that is characterized by Christian love, patience and forgiveness, but one that is torn endlessly by self-interest, fear and recrimination. The visual and verse frame for the Songs of Innocence establishes a perspective on childhood that is benevolent and non-judgmental, and that can never be ironic as long as it remains the single perspective of innocent perception. The frame that introduces the Songs of Experience, however, is antiphonal and reveals that Experience offers no unified opposition to Innocence, but rather a state of disorder and contention in which the body
is divided from the soul and confined within the prison of its own organic perceptions. Moreover, the lapsed Soul and the enslaved Earth cannot respond to the Bard's appeal for a new spiritual day through the awakening of the Spirit to the eternal Now because they are locked in a cycle of blame and repudiation: Earth sees herself as a prisoner whose body is tyrannized by the Spirit and whose fulfillment is hindered by his cruel jealousy, and the Spirit cannot act because Earth turns her back and denies the creative union that would redeem the light and release her from her physical bondage in Generation.

An easy solution to conflict is law, but any system of rules that claims to ensure the rights of all must assume the equality of all, and therefore work in the interest of conformity. However, this assumption is faulty, and since most people know that it is faulty, this type of legal system must draw its strength from absolute authority and universal jurisdiction, and it must treat any challenge to its right and power to govern with extreme severity. Thus the role of the Church and the State in the governance of the citizens' lives has been regarded historically as a divine sanction. Indeed, the vocabulary that society uses to acknowledge conformity (obedience and duty) and to condemn dissent (heresy and treason) are among the most evocative in the language, and are often accompanied by the highest honors, or by the treat of physical or spiritual
death. For the orthodox Christian, society's laws are a reflection of God's laws, and they are his guarantee of fair treatment in this life and eternal happiness in the next. However, for the creative man, law is a system that attempts to legislate passivity and to suppress Poetic Genius, and therefore it strikes at the very meaning of existence. The Songs of Experience are the ironic songs of the Bard who adopts the subtle personae of the Christian moralists in order to reveal that their hymns of youthful correction, when they are stripped of their sheep's clothing, are lies intended to undermine creativity and destroy childhood. There can be no single perspective here; every living child must break the laws that are intended to restrain his energies and to enforce his obedience, and every infraction of every rule is capable of as many narratives as there are doers and do-not-ers.

This is the irony in Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience. The loving guidance and the tender care that is taken for granted by the children in the Songs of Innocence, and that is implied repeatedly in the equation of Christ, shepherd, lamb, father and child, is not an unrealistic expectation of an enlightened society that takes pleasure in those who act from impulse and not from rules. Because Experience is the state of the human soul that naturally follows Innocence, does not mean that it needs to be a prolonged nightmare of pointless cruelty and suffering that
finds justification in moral hypocrisy, and irony in a child's failure to see that he is the victim. In a society that worshipped God by "Honouring his gifts in . . . men each according to his genius," Innocence would find its true contrary in a state of Experience that delights in the energy and honesty of youth, while it remains vigilant to the dangers attendant upon inexperience, and certain of the child's coming to know them for himself. The contrary state of the human soul that should oppose Innocence is not inhumanity, and Blake reserves his supreme irony for those who would think it so. The Songs of Experience are the visionary response of the Bard to Earth's Answer, and collectively they reveal the deplorable state into which Experience has sunk as a consequence of her refusal to heed his prophetic summons and rise out of the slumberous mass into a new beginning.
ENDNOTES

1. Approximately twenty-one copies of the Songs of Innocence were printed after their appearance as a single volume in 1789, and about twenty-eight copies of the combined Songs of Innocence and of Experience under a separate title page dated 1794.

2. Lawrence Stone discusses the "remarkable change in accepted child-rearing theory, in standard-child rearing practices, and in affective relations between parents and children" that occurs over the period 1660-1800 in The Family, Sex and Marriage. See particularly pp. 405-415.


4. Blake's Songs of Innocence were regarded by his contemporaries as very much a part of the tradition of religious literature written for children, and the comparisons between his work and other writers in the pastoral mode did

5. Lawrence Stone notes in The Family, Sex and Marriage that between "1750 and 1814 some twenty professional writers of children's books produced some 2,400 different titles." p. 411.

6. Erdman discusses the many echoes of Anna Barbauld's Hymns in Prose for Children in the satirical verses from An Island in the Moon, particularly the song of Mrs. Nannicantipot (perhaps, he suggests, a caricature of Barbauld herself) that became the "Nurse's Song" in the Songs of Innocence with the single alteration of "tongues" (IM 14; E 463) in the first line to "voices" (SI 24; E 15). He argues that, developing "from the root imagery of Hymns 2 and 5 are Blake's Night, The Echoing Green, and Laughing Song. Similarly related to other Hymns are The Shepherd (compare 'Behold the shepherd of the flock,' Hymn 3) and The Lamb (compare 'He made . . . I am but a little child,' Hymn 1). And there are many Blakean echoes of these questions of Hymn 12: 'Canst thou measure infinity with a line? canst thou grasp the circle of infinite space?',' echoes that also reverberate through Europe a Prophecy (13-15; E 61): "And who shall bind the infinite with an eternal band? / To compass it with swaddling bands?"
7. Erdman discusses the style of the lettering that Blake used in engraving the poems to suggest approximate dates for their composition. On this basis, he concludes that "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" (collected with the Songs of Innocence before it was moved to the Songs of Experience) was etched about the same time as the first five plates of The Book of Thel. The "Motto" and the sixth plate of Thel share a common script with all of the poems from Experience, except those that were transferred from Innocence into Experience in the later combined volumes. With respect to the poems that appear both in the Notebook and in the engraved Songs of Experience he says: "Of the 18 songs of Experience in Blake's Notebook (in entries made between 1790 and late 1792) 12 seem fair copies of earlier drafts (though subsequently revised or expanded) and only six were unmistakably begun and composed in the Notebook, ie., within these dates: "The Lily," "The Tyger," "The Human Abstract," "A Little Boy Lost," "The Chimney Sweeper," and "The Fly" (in that order)." Textual Notes to Songs of Innocence and of Experience in The Complete Poetry, p. 791.


10. Lawrence Stone points out in *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 411-12, that, in addition to the conduct books that were intended to teach children through amusement, "Educational games that combined instruction with fun were also introduced in the mid-eighteenth century, geographical jig-saws in 1762 and a geographical or travel game played with dice in 1759."

11. Frye makes the same point in *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 237, about the satirical juxtaposition of the pastoral world of the *Songs of Innocence* with the fallen world of the *Songs of Experience*. He says that the "*Songs of Experience* are satires, but one of the things that they satirize is the state of innocence. They show us the butcher's knife which is waiting for the unconscious lamb. Conversely, the *Songs of Innocence* satirize the state of Experience, as the contrast which they present to it makes its hypocrisies more obviously shameful. Hence the two sets of lyrics show two contrary states of the soul, and in their opposition there is a double-edged irony, cutting into both the tragedy and the reality of fallen existence."

13. Although it is generally accepted that John Thomas Smith's assertion in 1828 that Blake's wife, Catherine, was active in the printing, coloring and binding of some of the copies of the work, the extent of her participation in any particular volume cannot be determined with certainty. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 460, and for confirmation, Alexander Gilchrist's Life of William Blake, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1863), 1:70.

14. According to Erdman, Blake rearranged the poems in all copies of the single volume Songs of Innocence, and in all but seven of the last eight copies of the combined volume (Notes: E 790-91). In The Illuminated Blake, Erdman grouped the plates of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience in the usual order Blake used for the later copies of the work,
however his detailed commentary on the designs provides some useful information on the plate sequence and the coloring of each of the designs in all of the surviving copies.

15. In *A Vision of The Last Judgement* (1810), Blake says that "States Exist now Man Passes on but States remain for Ever he passes thro them like a traveller who may as well suppose that the places he has passed thro exist no more as a Man may suppose that the States he has passd thro exist no more Every Thing is Eternal . . . these various States I have seen in my Imagination when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations" ([LJ; E 556-57]). Even though *A Vision of The Last Judgment* was dated more than twenty years after the *Songs of Innocence*, Blake's observations in *The Four Zoas* (VIII: 115; E 380) dated 1797, *Milton* (32:10-14; E 131) dated 1804 and the final version of *Jerusalem* (49:69-71; E 199) probably completed after 1815, suggest that his idea of "States" as stages of mental life remained consistent throughout his creative career. Blake may owe some debt to Swedenborg for his concept of interior States that determine the appearance of things in the external world (See [Swed; XVII, 91-93]), as well as for his notion that "all the heavens with their societies reflect a single man, they call heaven the Greatest Man and the Divine Man" ([Swed; VIII, 35-39]). In *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 227, Northrop Frye identifies the states of Innocence and Experience respectively with Orc and Urizen, youth and age.
16. In discussing the passage of the child from the state of Innocence into the state of Experience, Frye comments that, for "Blake, nothing achieves reality without going through physical existence, the descent must be made." Fearful Symmetry, p. 232.


18. See in the Old Testament Isaiah 62:3-6 for the Prophet's metaphorical description of the restoration of Zion as a marriage of Hephzibah, the restored Israel, to Beulah, the Jewish homeland. See also Chapter 3, note 37, for the connection between mythology and the cycles of non-human nature that personify the geography of the Bible and the psychological landscapes of Blake's art. Frye discusses the connection between Blake's garden Paradise he calls Beulah and both the Biblical Eden and Spenser's "Gardens of Adonis" in Fearful Symmetry, pp. 228-235.

19. The Christian metaphor that represents God and Jesus as the Father and the Son in humanity's spiritual family both in heaven and on earth comes no doubt from Jesus' use of the patriarchal title (Heb. and Aram. abba) to describe his
relationship with God. Paul says in Ephesians 3:14-15: "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, / Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." See also Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; and Galatians 4:6. In the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, "Our Father" is the phrase that he said they should use to address God. See Luke 11:2 and Matthew 6:6,9.

20. See Genesis 1:26-27 and 9:6 for God's creation of Adam in his own image, and Genesis 1:27 for the evidence that Eve shares equally in this identity. God's commandment that the male and female be "fruitful and multiply . . . and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (1:28) is the indication that man imitates God in both form and function. In the New Testament, the physical and spiritual identity between God and man (1 Corinthians 11:7-12; James 3:9) is extended to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:13-15).

21. Romans 5:14: "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." In Frye's discussion of Biblical typology, he refers to "Adam as a *typos* of Christ" in the Old Testament, and he mentions this passage in Paul's letter to the Romans. *The Great Code*, p. 79.

acquires in the Fall is evidently sexual experience as we know it, and something called the knowledge of good and evil, obviously connected with sex but not otherwise explained."

23. Thomas R. Frosch makes a similar observation in "Art and Eden: The Sexes" in William Blake ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), p. 107, when he says that the "body of Innocence is pregenital, or perhaps prepubescent. But genitality is implicit in it, and in this sense the child's body is a seed, an infant desire eventually to be fulfilled in act."

24. This is precisely the point that Mary Poovey makes in The Proper Lady, p. x. She observes that the stereotypes of the woman that extended from the late seventeenth-century right through to the middle of the nineteenth-century "rigidly confined real women to prescribed roles; as a daughter, a wife, a mother, a widow, as a virgin or a whore, every woman was defined by relationship--explicitly to a man, implicitly to sex itself."


26. The tragic life of Sarah Pennington could have supplied the original for the fictional life of Wollstonecraft's Maria. This long suffering lady was accused of adultery by her cruel
husband and made to leave the marital home without the fortune she brought into the family, and without her young children. The intransigence of her husband and the lack of any other recourse, legal or otherwise, forced the unfortunate mother to communicate with her daughters through public letter. Whether she was attempting to appease her husband by pleading total subservience to his will, or whether it was the lesson she had learned from his harsh treatment of her, she counsels her daughters to mind their future husband’s "Repose," and to avoid subjects like their husband’s infidelities since the truth might upset their own peace of mind. Sarah Pennington, An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to Her Absent Daughters. In a Letter to Miss Pennington (London: S. Chandler, 1761), pp. 71-72. Quoted by Mary Poovey in The Proper Lady, p. 28.

27. Stone makes this observation in describing the attitude of the upper classes (The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 501), but in the same chapter he generalizes it to include the middle and the lower classes as well. He says that "the idea that female honor depended upon a reputation for pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity was one which was most effectively internalized in the middling ranks of society" (p. 504).

28. See Mary Poovey. The Proper Lady, pp. 5-6.

29. Lawrence Stone gives a detailed explanation for this "durable phenomenon of the double standard" in The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 501-507 and 636-638, as does Mary
Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (New York: Norton, 1967) *passim*, but especially in her chapters entitled "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Considered," pp. 49-73, and "Animadversions on Some of the Writers who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt," pp. 128-176. Stone also discusses the "concept of honour" as it was variously defined for the man and the woman in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-centuries, and he describes the growing anxiety about childhood sexuality that began to develop early in the seventeenth-century, and became repressive by the end of the eighteenth-century. See pp. 503, 512.

30. The immediate consequence of sin in Genesis 3:7 is Adam and Eve's sexual awareness and shame. In 3:16 God punishes the woman by making her sexual subservience to the man the momentum behind the cycles of generation. To punish the man, God curses the ground out of which Adam was made, which means, metaphorically, that the succeeding generations of man will have to till the soil of fallen nature to sustain themselves, and that they will complete the cycle of life by being returned to the earth at death (3:17-19).

31. It is possible to demonstrate that the male children move from Innocence to Experience when they become aware of their mortality by looking at the poems in which the personae are exclusively male, such as the chimney sweeper poems from *Innocence* and *Experience* and "A Little Boy Lost" from the
Songs of Experience. The little chimney sweeper in Innocence tells a story to a young recruit that rationalizes the dangers inherent in his occupation, and he passes on the comfort that he draws from the orthodox Christian doctrine of Providence. Naively, he assures his companions that if they do what is expected of them "they need not fear harm" (SI 12 24; E 10), but will be rescued by an angel from their deadly "coffins of black" (SI 12 12; E 10). His disillusioned counterpart in the companion poem, however, has entered the state of Experience and is perfectly aware of the hypocrisy of his parents who have dressed him in "the clothes of death" (SE 37 7; E 23), sold him to a master sweep, and then gone off to the church to pray for their sins. In "A Little Boy Lost," Blake has the Priest seize the unfilial child and offer him on the alter of Judeo-Christian morality as a fiery human sacrifice. The Bible makes frequent mention of this pagan rite in which children were "passed over" and then burned as a sacrificial offering to an angry god. Blake's point is that the zealous Priest who condemns the natural impulse of the child to love himself more than his family does not understand that divinity is within the human breast, and so he sacrifices the boy in the name of the "most holy Mystery" (SE 50 16; E 29), or God's love for man, ironically a human sacrifice in the name of love. In any case, the narrator knows the fatal consequence of challenging social and religious orthodoxy, and this awareness indicates that he or she has entered the state
of Experience.

32. Mary Poovey begins her section on "The Paradoxes of Propriety" in *The Proper Lady*, p. 15, by pointing out that the "definition of female nature that emerged by the end of the eighteenth century both reinforced and formalized the complex social role that actual women played during this period. But because bourgeois society simultaneously depended on and perpetuated a paradoxical formulation of female sexuality, the late eighteenth century equation of 'female' and 'feminine' is characterized at every level by paradoxes and contradictions." Poovey explores these paradoxes in the wealth of eighteenth-century conduct literature "directed primarily to the middle classes and intended to educate young girls (and their mothers) in the behavior considered 'proper,' then 'natural' for a 'lady.'" Ironically, Blake's two volumes are also intended to educate the young girls and their mothers, but on the hypocrisy of society's repressive definition of the woman's proper nature and position.

33. Blake paraphrases Matthew 22:30: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the Angels of God in heaven" in *Jerusalem*, 34 15: E 176: "In Eternity they neither marry nor are given in marriage". See also *Jerusalem*, 92:13: E 252: "Sexes must vanish & cease / To be, when Albion arises from his dread repose".


36. Wicksteed, in Blake’s Innocence and Experience: A Study of the Songs and Manuscripts "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1928), pp.122-129, claims that the winged figures are caught up in a "current of creation" that begins with the birth of the infant, moves through self-delight, attraction, and the loving embrace, to conclude with generation.


38. The traditional identification of the red rose with female sexuality unites the human with the vegetable world in a way that is characteristic of both Blake’s pastoralism and Biblical imagery. Also, the color of both the flower and the blood of generation raises innumerable Old and New Testament associations that contrast the "demonic" with the "apocalyptic," a contrast that includes the blood of the passover, the symbolic robe of Mary Magdalene, the Scarlet Beast of the Whore of Revelation as well as the wine of her fornication, and the sacramental blood and wine of the Eucharist. These positive and negative contrasts meet in the
traditional ambivalence of the woman's role in the world of
Generation; she is at once the source of mortality as Eve, and
the way out of it as the Virgin Mary, and this ambiguity is
resolved through the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God, the
crucifixion that is both an image of sacrifice and of
salvation. Frye makes many of these Biblical connections in
his discussion of "the demonic parody of the Bridegroom and

39. Among those critics who find blame in either the Rose or
the Worm are Harold Bloom in his Introduction to William
Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience (New York: Chelsea
House, 1987), p. 19, and E. D. Hirsch in his Introduction to
Blake, pp. 89-91). In Blake's Contrary States, pp. 165-166, D.
G. Gillham says the poem is unsuccessful as "a satirical
depiction of an unhealthy attitude to sexual love," but he
does claim that "'The Sick Rose' suggests the deep and
intricate emotions that the sexual act involves despite the
secrecy and the possessive taboos with which Experience
surrounds the passion."

40. Bloom argues this position in his Introduction to William
Blake's Songs, p. 19.

41. While there is no direct internal evidence to support the
interpretation that the narrator of the poem and his "Pretty
Rose-tree" are married, an allegorical reading of the dramatic
situation makes this inference a virtual necessity since any
less formal arrangement would seriously impair the
significance of the flower's jealous rebuttal.

42. The Marquess of Halifax counselled his daughter to adopt the former attitude and to ignore what she could not control. He told her that if her husband was unfaithful she should "not seem to look or hear that way . . . [since] such an indecent complaint makes a wife much more ridiculous than the injury that provoked her to it." K. V. Thomas, "The Double Standard" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XX (1959), p. 209. Just a few decades before the publication of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Dr Johnson made the same point when he argued that "wise married women don't trouble themselves about infidelity in their husbands," in James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* 6 vols., ed. George Birbeck (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), vol. 4, 209. Both passages are cited by Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 502.

43. Daniel Defoe, a religious nonconformist, made this point in the *Complete English Tradesman* (London 1726), p. 32, when he said: "I don't take the state of matrimony to be designed . . . that the wife is to be used as an upper servant in the house . . . Love knows no superior or inferior, no imperious command on the one hand, no reluctant subjection on the other." Quoted by Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 326.

44. In her article "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry" in *Essential Articles*, pp. 75-90, Susan Fox claims that Blake consistently represented the woman in his poetry
using stereotypical metaphors of femaleness that characterized her as either weak or power hungry, a problem that he discovered and tried unsuccessfully to correct in his later work. I would argue that Blake was an antinomian and a social critic who recognized that late eighteenth-century society was hegemonic and that it used these cultural stereotypes to define and control the woman. In order to expose these cliches and liberate the woman to a complete mutuality in the Eternal Now, Blake had to describe the woman’s roles in Generation accurately.

45. Again, there is no internal evidence in "Ah! Sun-Flower" to indicate the gender of the speaker, but it would be in the interest of consistency and contrast to extrapolate the masculine voice in the first poem to the remaining two in the three-poem sequence.

46. While this notion of the "languishing lover" is a legacy of the highly conventionalized code of conduct that was associated with the unregulated passions of ladies and their lovers in medieval courtly literature, eighteenth-century physiological theory claimed that there was an element of fact behind the fiction. In discussing masturbation as an expression of adolescent sexuality in the seventeenth century, Lawrence Stone writes in *The Family, Sex and Marriage* that "medical theory pointed indirectly in its favour, if used in moderation. Based on the idea of balancing the humors, the standard doctrine was that for good health the human body
needs occasional evacuation of superfluous fluids: blood by blood-letting; and semen by ejaculation. Both bachelors and widowers, therefore, were advised by doctors in the seventeenth-century to follow a regime of moderate sexual activity" (p. 512). Discussing the prevalent attitude toward this practice a century later, Stone describes the social climate in which Blake was writing these poems: "The late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century epidemic of hysteria on the subject is more easily explained, since it coincided with the rise of Evangelical doctrine and the growing sense of horror and shame about sex that was current at the time" (p. 515) For Blake, sexual fantasy and masturbation are the "self enjoyings of self denial" (VDA 7 9; E 50), and they are unhealthy only because they are the result of unrelieved sexual desire, a type of abuse through abstention that he believed was sanctioned by orthodox Christian morality and the cult of Chastity. Oothoon says that 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?" (VDA 7 3-8; E 50).

47. See Hill's chapters on "Seekers and Ranters" and "Ranters and Quakers" in The World Turned Upside Down, pp. 148-185, 186-207.
50. Misc 93: E 697.
51. The other two poems that were transferred from *Innocence* to *Experience* are "The School Boy" and "The Voice of the Ancient Bard."
52. The engraved plates themselves remained unchanged after they were transferred to the *Songs of Experience*, but Blake, or perhaps his wife Catherine, made some significant modifications in the coloring of the designs. For example, as Erdman points out in his commentary on the first plate of "The Little Girl Lost," the "young man is naked in early copies, more frequently clothed in copies printed after these plates were moved from Innocence to Experience." *The Illuminated Blake*, p. 76.
54. It is likely that Blake chose the willow tree for his pastoral garden of Innocence because it can be found in profusion along the banks of the Jordan and other streams in Galilee and the surrounding area. The dense tree associated with the world of Experience is the ancient oak, the sacred tree of pre-Christian Europe that Blake identified with the Tree of Good and Evil, and later with the secret places of the mysterious Druid sacrifices. In the *Songs of Innocence and of*
Experience, they shield those beneath them from the brightness of the sun, traditionally associated in Biblical metaphor and Western religious art with the love and the wisdom of God and the brilliance of his spiritual kingdom. One of the arcana revealed to Swedenborg is the difference between the natural sun that rises and sets and the "spiritual sun" that is "constantly in the east." He says that in "the spiritual world the Divine Love of the Lord appears as a sun, and from it proceed the spiritual heat and the spiritual light from which the angels derive love and wisdom." Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and Divine Wisdom (1763), (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1980) pp. 36, 4. Blake satirizes the orthodox association of God with the sun as a spiritual body external to man in "The Little Black Boy" in the Songs of Innocence, p. 9.

55. See Essick, Blake and the Language of Adam, pp. 11-12.

56. See Isaiah 35: 1-10, particularly the end of the opening verse, which reads: "and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

57. Northrop Frye points out that this is the rising segment of the "U shaped pattern" in the cycles of Biblical history in his chapter "Myth II: Narrative" in The Great Code. See especially pp. 169-173.

58. Thompson argues in Witness Against the Beast, pp. 222-229, that any symbol in Blake's work "can mean whatever he decides..."
it means at any moment" and that one "may be wrong to look for a coherent intellectual system" because his antinomianism is incompatible with rationalism. It is interesting to consider that the antinomian in Blake made him finally reject the hegemony of consistent and confined symbolic meaning or of a single definitive narrative. I would argue, however, that Blake's use of symbol is always coherent but not systematic or univocal, since his art generates an aesthetic order characterized by disclosure, not a logical one that seeks closure; the former is Art, the latter is Reason or mathematics. In my understanding, a critic cannot attempt a coherent exegesis of a piece of literature unless he assumes that it has boundaries to its insights because to mean anything is to mean nothing. Nevertheless, as Thompson points out, one interpretation does not preclude others or exhaust the meaning of the work.


60. The quotation is from Paul's epistle to the Romans 8:21. Frye uses the same reference in his discussion of the "gospel
of metanoia" in The Great Code, p. 131.

61. See especially Matthew 5:8,9; 11:16-17; 18:1-6; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48. In Witness Against the Beast, E. P. Thompson makes frequent mention that Blake read areas of the Bible literally and others in terms of the ideas and symbols (sometimes heretical) that he inherited from different radical traditions, particularly a number of the more than a century-old London sectaries.

62. See also Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."


64. The name Lyca may have been suggested to Blake by Lycaonia, a district in Asia Minor which Paul visited during his ministries. See Acts 14:6,11.

65. Frye mentions the importance of the number seven and the number twelve to the Book of Revelation (The Great Code, p. 75), but he does not mention that the number seven and the number three have symbolic significance in both the Old and the New Testaments, and that they likely carry the notion of completeness or perfection suggested by the Genesis creation story. At the beginning of time, seven is the number of days in which God created the universe, and it is the number of days of the week that ends in the day of rest, the sabbath
At the end of time, it is among other things the seven churches of Asia, the seven stars and the seven candlesticks of Revelation 1:11-20. Throughout the bible the number seven, and multiples of seven are used to describe everything from the planting cycle that stipulated that the land be left fallow every seventh year (Leviticus 25:2-7), to the seventy years of Jewish captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10; Daniel 9:2). Three combines with the number seven to represent the spatial and the temporal dimensions in Genesis; seven being the time for creation to be completed, and three being the number of the orders of creation: heaven, earth and the underworld. Three is also the trinity, and it figures into Christian doctrine as the number of days and nights from Christ's death to his resurrection. In terms of the Christian life, the number three recurs in designating meal times, feast days, as well as prayer intervals (Daniel 6:10; Psalms 55:17). Finally, the number four is also important: it provides the number for the primary directions and for the corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12) from which the four winds blow (Jeremiah 49:36) during the four seasons. The number forty as a multiple of four to designate days and nights and years is used too frequently to need specific comment. Blake was of course aware of the symbolic content of these numbers, and he used them frequently in contexts that allowed their Biblical and their metaphorical significance to contribute to the larger meaning of the work.
66. Frye sees the fall in Genesis 3 as man's discovery of sexual experience, and his reading of 2:24 is that the woman was created so "that in the sexual relation man should be not alone and yet 'one flesh' with his wife." The Great Code, p. 109. In Jesus' discussions of sex and marriage (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8) he cites this passage from Genesis, and so does Paul in a similar context. (I Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31) Blake knew this text well, and his association of the woman's acquisition of experience with her awareness of her sexuality, and the man's with his awareness of his mortality, divides human consciousness along the lines that patriarchy would use to value gender. This kind of gender distinction is what makes the Songs of Innocence and of Experience so effective as satire because it targets both the exploitation of the young and the patriarchal system that allows it to happen.


69. Stone The Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 637.

70. Stone describes the socially acceptable practice of "bundling" as a courting custom in The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 605-607, and it consists of virtually any sexual play, such as kissing and intimate body contact, that stops
short of intercourse.

71. Blake uses the cave in a similar sense in many other contexts, such as the "Printing house" (15; E 40) of the third Memorable Fancy of The Marriage, or the prophetic passage on the fourteenth plate (E 39) where he says that "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." In addition, there are the caves of Bromion's sexual guilt in Visions (2 5; E 46), the mind of the fallen man in Europe (iii; E 60) and Milton (25 20; E 121), and the source of erotic fantasy in Europe (12 26; E 64) and Milton (25 53; E 122). Blake's visual representation of the cavern as the eye of the reader in the frontpiece to Visions (Plate i) is discussed by David Erdman in The Illuminated Blake, pp. 125-26, Thomas A. Vogler in "In vain the Eloquent tongue": An Un-Reading of VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion," in Critical Paths, pp. 280-88, and Brian Wilkie in Blake's Thel and Oothoon (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1990), pp. 68-69. The painter strove for a similar effect in the view of the "ancient Poets animating all sensible objects" on Plate 11 of the G and I copies of The Marriage. See Erdman, The Illuminated Blake, p. 108.

72. Until the lions extinction in the fourteenth century, it was indigenous to the area surrounding Palestine, and a few remaining leopards still roam the hills of Israel and Jordan. In the pastoral world of the Bible, these animals, particularly the Asiatic lion, often appear as symbols of
great strength and as a constant threat to the shepherds and their sheep. In 2 Samuel 20-21 Benaiah’s ability to slay lions is evidence of his great physical strength, but this feat is also used metaphorically in the Bible to contrast physical strength with psychological weakness, such as in the juxtaposition of Samson’s easy defeat of the young lion with his fondness for women (Judges 14:5-7). The courage required to face this powerful animal without fear is used as a metaphor for the Israelite’s unquavering belief in the power of God to deliver the faithful in times of danger. In this sense, the lion appears in such texts as David’s reply to Saul about his worthiness to oppose Goliath (1 Samuel 17:34-37), Daniel’s miraculous escape from the lion’s den (Daniel 6:16-24), and in the New testament by Paul’s delivery from the Romans in 2 Timothy 4:17. Those who fall victim to lions are generally paying the price of their disobedience to God’s will, such as the man from Judah in 1 Kings 21-26, and the accusers of Daniel in Daniel 6:24.

73. For a discussion of the pervasive use of royalty and kingship as metaphors in the Bible, see Frye’s The Great Code, pp. 87-93. In the Synoptic Gospels, Christ is said to have taught that many who heard his teaching would see the Kingdom of God before they died. (Matthew 16:28; 24:23; Mark 9:1; 13:28-32; Luke 9:27; 21:29-33) According to the Apostles, particularly Paul, the Reign of God became a reality with Christ’s presence in the world, and they preached that through
Him man's spiritual life is guaranteed (2 Corinthians 1:19-22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:12-14). For Blake, of course, the kingdom of heaven is not a place but a state of consciousness that is accessible through the divinity that is within the human breast.

74. Rosemary Radford makes a similar observation in "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," and she attributes this historical misogynist attitude to the "dualistic psychology that was of the patristic doctrine of man" Women in Western Thought, ed. Martha Lee Osborne (New York: Random House, 1979) p. 64. For a discussion of the Biblical creation myth and the fall of humanity into gender and sexual knowledge, see Frye's The Great Code, pp. 106-114.

75. This is the creative eye of the artist that sees humanity in the world wherever it looks. Compare Blake's discussion of vision in A Vision of the Last Judgment (E 565-566): "Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not til then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me. What it will be Questioned When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I Question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any
more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it."


77. Misc 93; E 697.

78. The indefinite article "A" is used as a function word before most singular nouns, especially when the object or the individual is not specified or identified. The definite article "The" can be used as a function word to indicate that the noun that follows is clearly understood or is easily identifiable from the context. Ordinarily, the indefinite article, being "indefinite," would be employed to generalize the situation and suggest that the circumstances described are not unusual. The child in Blake's "The Little Girl Lost" is identified as Lyca in the first stanza, but the girl in "A Little Girl Lost" is not identified as Ona until the final stanza, suggesting that the circumstances of the latter poem are more general than those described in the former one. However, when the indefinite article is followed by a noun that is itself followed by a restrictive clause or other identifying modifier, it can also be used to specify a particular instance or an illustration of something. This, I would argue, is Blake's strategy in using the indefinite article in the second title. The narrative that describes the little girl lost and found gains its concreteness from its metaphorical complexity, while "A Little Girl Lost" is more specific in its description of the physical relationship
between the "youthful pair" (SE 51 10; E 29) and the unsympathetic response of the girl’s father to her sexual play.


80. See Beth Fowkes Tobin’s Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), passim, for a critical discussion of the woman as a model of generalized virtue and as an ideal of domestic superintendence in seventeenth and eighteenth-century fiction.


82. See Stone The Family, Sex and Marriage, pp. 503-504.

83. Moses repeatedly warns his audience in his long speech covering Deuteronomy 4-26 that the person who fails to keep the covenant with God hates God, and God "will repay him to his face" (7:9-10). Also, King Josiah’s response to "the book of the law," probably an earlier version of the book of Deuteronomy discovered during his repairs to the "house of the Lord," reveals not only the intensity of his own fear, but his concern for the entire society because of God’s anger kindled against those who forsook Him and who chose to break His laws (II Kings 22:8-20).

84. In his Textual Notes to the poem in The Complete Poetry, p. 800, Erdman points out that this song was not included in
copies A-D and F-H, and he bases his date of "later than 1803" on the style of the lettering. He indicates that the first copy that can be dated with any certainty is copy P which bears the watermark "BUTTANSHAW 1802." Keynes, however, gives the poem's date of composition as around 1795, (Census, 55, copies E and F), while Joseph Viscomi in Blake and the Idea of the Book, pp. 238-239 points out that "To Tirzah" was "printed with Experience in an edition of Songs ca. 1795, which indicates that the two styles [of lettering that Erdman used to date the poem] overlapped."

85. Perhaps the most notable exception to those critics who do not concern themselves with the "minute particulars" of Blake's art and the way in which context can affect meaning and coherence is Joseph Viscomi whose book Blake and the Idea of the Book deals with the interrelationship of technique in relief etching and the interpretation of verbal and visual texts.

86. The Great Code, p. 168.

87. See Isaiah 51:9; Psalms 89:9-10. Frye suggests in The Great Code, pp. 189-192, that Rahab the dragon of chaos must be killed by God before he can create life "because the dragon is death, and to kill death is to bring to life" (p. 188). He also traces the water and the sea monster imagery to the Bible's historical characterization of the enemies of Israel, Egypt and Babylon, (Isaiah 27:1; 30:7; 51:9-10; Psalms 87:4) and to the day of Judgement when God will again defeat Rahab.
and reclaim his chosen people (Revelation 17:18).

88. Frye mentions the "gospel of metanoia in The Great Code, p. 131, and he makes the same point about the Christian view of the human condition. He argues that in being born we are metaphorically swallowed by the monster that moves through the sea of time and space because "a monster in the sea is the sea; hence the landing of the leviathan is much the same thing as the abolition of the sea of death in Revelation 21:1 . . . .

All of us are born, and live out our natural lives within the leviathan’s belly. In the political aspect of the leviathan, we live in subjection to secular powers that may become at any time actively hostile to everything except their own aggressiveness, the leviathan being ‘king over all the children of pride’ (Job 41:34). Cosmologically, the leviathan is the element of chaos within creation: that is, it is creation as we see it now, the world of time and space that extends away from us indefinitely, the limitless expanse that is the most secure and impregnable of all prisons." p. 190.

89. Blake shares the notion of contraries as diametric poles that enclose all categories between two extremes (i.e. thesis/antithesis), a notion that figures very large, not only in Innocence and Experience, but also in the cosmic struggles of the later prophetic works, with the doctrines of many of the dissenting churches that continued to meet in the eighteenth-century. For example, the Muggletonians professed the doctrine of the "Double Seed" that divides humanity into
"two classes of men" (MHH 16; E 40), a radical cosmic dualism that came about as a result of a sexual version of the Fall. According to the founders of the sect, Reeve and Muggleton, Eve was first impregnated by the devil who entered her womb and was reborn as Cain, and then again by Adam to whom she bore a legitimate son and heir, Abel. Metaphorically, this divides the inhabitants of the earth into the sons of Eve who are damned because they are the Seed of the Devil, and the sons of Adam who are to be saved because they are the Seed of Adam, a dualism that extends to the rich and the poor, the oppressors and the oppressed, the restrainers and the restrained, the Devouring and the Prolific, the Angels and the Devils, and so on. For a more extensive discussion of Muggletonian doctrine see A. L. Morton’s The World of the Ranters, pp. 138-142, and for the possible influence of this nonconformist church on the ideas and symbols of Blake see E. P. Thompson’s Witness Against the Beast, passim, but particularly Chapters 7 and 8.

90. I am indebted to Frye for this articulation of the "eternal" and the "infinite." See The Great Code, p. 130.

91. Derrida calls an "impossible sign" that "which belongs neither to nature nor to convention . . . , a sign giving the signified, indeed the thing, in person" in Of Grammatology, p. 234.

92. This is precisely the point that Los makes when he tells Rahab: "There is a State named Satan learn distinct to know 0
Rahab / The Difference between States and Individuals of those States," (FZ 8 115 23-24; E 380) and the Seven Angels when they answer Satan: "Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States. / States Change: But Individual Identities never change nor cease: / You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die. / Satan & Adam are States Created into Twenty-seven Churches / And thou O Milton art a State about to be Created / Called Eternal Annihilation that none but the Living shall dare to enter: & they shall enter triumphant over Death / And Hell & the Grave!" (M 32 22-29; E 132).

93. This is the point that the Devil makes in the fifth Memorable Fancy of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (MHH 23; E 43) that so enrages the Angel that he is unable to restrain himself and in the fiery passion of "true opposition" is consumed and reborn a prophet of the new diabolical faith.


95. An ironic contrast to this cycle of delivery is the mythical one in which all men must leave the maternal care of the home and seek themselves in the larger world of their independent fathers.

96. See Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 2:9-15; and 3:1-17.

97. This is Erdman's observation on the figure in copy "V." See The Illuminated Blake p. 54.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Pickering Manuscript:
Critiquing Society's Construct of the Woman

Blake's collection of ten handwritten poems, editorially titled "The Pickering Manuscript," was probably composed before 1804, and then arranged and transcribed in fair copy for a friend or patron some three or four years later.¹ Taken together, these balladic poems use allegory to explore the psychology and the politics of important and often disturbing societal relationships as they are experienced or narrated by personae who demonstrate the level of their states of consciousness through the quality of their perceptions. Many of the stylistic features that the poems share are conventions of the British folk ballad, a literary genre that permitted Blake to use all of the resources of plain, formulaic language and regular meter to give intensity and immediacy to the events that form the individual narratives. The function of the ballad as a traditional vehicle for the important social, historical and cultural experiences of a community--most often involving a variation on the theme of tragic love or loss--allowed him to focus on, and give concrete expression to specific social/sexual concerns while maintaining an ironic detachment from his subject. Even though three of the poems are first person narratives, and most contain at least some dialogue, Blake's use of psychosexual allegory abstracts the
protagonists' observations and makes their opinions, their emotional conflicts, and their motives, both immediate and representative of the dialectics of gender, class or community. The similarity of these poems in terms of theme, form and image account for Blake's decision to treat them as a single interactive collection, and the directness of the allegorical treatment of gender provides the reader with a unique opportunity to explore the poet's understanding of sexual conflict within the individual consciousness and within the larger social/cultural context of late eighteenth-century England.

Of the ten poems, six are narratives that deal specifically with gender awareness and with the nature of sexual relations in a society that has traditionally regarded the woman's virginity as a state of physical perfection and as a sign of her spiritual purity. Because of the paradoxical way in which the woman was received by English society in the closing decades of the eighteenth-century--at once the man's moral superior and his temptress--Blake has a number of women in the poems use the lure of "Love & Beauty" to fire the passion of their male admirers, and then the pretense of fear and modesty to frustrate them.\(^2\) As we have seen, the hypocrisy of this form of sexual intrigue is insidious because it appears to empower the woman by giving her the freedom to accept or to reject the male's romantic advances. In practice, however, the
woman's apparent freedom of choice was an illusion since she exercised her power over the man only as long as she retained her image of moral superiority, and this meant that she had to be very careful to avoid anything that would compromise her appearance of "virtue."}

Since it was held that the woman's natural tendency was toward passion, as the man's inclination was towards reason, and since a young woman's ignorance of her sexuality was evidence of her enduring chastity, those who were unaware of their sexuality, or who pretended to be naive and easily embarrassed, gave the impression that they were emotionally and morally innocent. On the other hand, the woman who demonstrated an interest in, or a knowledge of sexual matters was not simply perceived by society as immodest and lacking in the proper social graces, she was seen as sexually promiscuous and as a dangerous example to impressionable youth of the power of the woman's sexual drive. Thus, while the chaste single woman was the prized object of the young man's desire, and her married counterpart the trustee of her husband's honor and fortune, the supposed vulnerability of the innocent virgin to her own sexual stirrings made her the focus of society's interest and concern, while the supposed wantonness of the sexually experienced woman made her a threat to conjugal harmony and social order. She was the victim and the victimizer, the prey and the predator, the virgin and the harlot.
Blake makes frequent use of the feminine name Mary in many of the Pickering Manuscript poems because of the powerful association of the name with the sexually contrasting Biblical figures—the Virgin Mary and the harlot Mary Magdalene—and because it allowed him to focus on patriarchal society's attitude toward the full range of the woman's sexuality as he explored the important gender stereotypes that restricted and regulated the intimate relationships between men and women.  

The object lesson behind society's cruel treatment of the adolescent girl in the poem "Mary" is that the young woman who ignores, or who fails to recognize the limits of proper conduct and who transgresses social mores by openly pursuing a sexual freedom of choice where none exists, loses her ideal moral standing as a type of the Virgin Mary and is characterized by society as a moral delinquent; she is a proud temptress, a harlot, at best a repentant Mary Magdalene. In the opening stanza, it is "Sweet Mary" who has her social debut and is welcomed to her first Ball by the "Fair"; by the children of fashionable society who have been educated in the rules of respectable conduct and who know how to keep up proper appearances. These entirely orthodox young people view Mary's innocent beauty in terms of the cliches of moral acceptability that society has taught them to apply to all social situations. As an innocent virgin, she is perceived by the "young Men &
Maidens" (PM "Mary" 3; E 487) as an embodiment of spiritual and physical perfection. She is an incarnation of the ideal of spiritual purity that the Christian Church has traditionally celebrated in the "angelic" figure of the Virgin Mary, and she is an instance of the physical perfection that Western culture has extolled in the mythical figures of the "Golden" age of the ancients. In their description of Mary’s youthful appearance, her companions use the stock metaphors for female beauty that draw their comparisons from the cycles of the natural world: her eyes out-shine the rays of the rising sun, her breath is the essence of the fragrant Spring. The young "Men and Maidens" announce Mary’s coming-out:

An Angel is here from the heavenly Climes
Or Again does return the Golden times
Her eyes outshine every brilliant ray
She opens her lips tis the month of May

(5-8)

Unlike her more experienced peers, Sweet Mary lacks the sophistication and the hypocrisy of polite society, and therefore she does not attempt to conceal her "conscious delight" (9) in her role in the amorous affairs of the evening. Rather than affecting the sexual ignorance and the false modesty that society expects from its young ladies as evidence of their chastity, Mary flaunts her charms and participates happily and without hesitation or shame in the
"joys of the Night" (10). By publicly acknowledging that "sweet Love & Beauty are worthy our care," (12) Mary asserts that true love for a woman is not a sacrifice of virginal innocence and beauty on the tree of sorrow and conception, as the orthodox Christian Church would have it, but that it is a reciprocal relationship in which each of the loving partners cares not for self, but only for the other’s ease and gratification. Both Mary’s freedom of behavior and her justification for it openly challenge the social and political character of the traditional chaperoned courtship and marriage that is grounded in the patriarchal ideology of Church and State, class and culture. Mary’s spontaneous actions express the individual will to life and to love, and they repudiate the hypocritical moral codes of society that victimize young women and men by making romance adversarial, and love self-serving and secret.

On the morning after the dance, the "joys of the night" (14) have become the subject of happy conversation throughout the village, and Mary rises with the expectation that the freedom she enjoyed the night before in choosing her friends and her partners will not be condemned by the society that had welcomed her debut, nor viewed by the townspeople as the gravest of sins. However, Mary made the socially fatal mistake of accepting the appearance of freedom of choice for the real thing. By publicly selecting her lover, and then offering her sexual favors as testimony
to her "care" for him, she compromised her appearance of chastity and usurped the traditional power of patriarchal society to determine the appropriate time and place for the woman's sexual initiation. From the perspective of the community, Mary's act of free love was not an affirmation of love as a shared experience, but a shameless violation of the political and the social order that protects family and property, and it cost her the sole irrecoverable symbol of her virtue and her social worth, her reputation.

At the end of the eighteenth-century, the single woman's proper role in society was paradoxically to affect ignorance of her sexuality while maximizing her physical appeal to the opposite sex, but at all times to submit to the rules for courtship and marriage established by patriarchal authority. These rules were primarily concerned with regulating the young woman's conduct, not the young man's, and society assumed that a girl with a proper upbringing would know automatically the boundaries that separated modest dalliance and innocent flirtation from conduct unbecoming a young lady. The unmarried girl who exercised her own volition and sought in open love the heat, the flowering, the fulfillment of her life, asserted her independence from the social order that set out the rules of socially organized love and marriage, and thus she violated public morality and invited public censure and ostracism. As Mary Poovey argues, silence and passivity were the signs
of modesty, and modesty was the public confirmation of the woman’s chastity, but passive ignorance in a romantic setting was also the woman’s way to avoid personal responsibility for her conduct. In the Pauline tradition, the woman’s chastity and her silent submission to the will of her man, both before marriage and after, is her proper place in the scheme of things. The woman who is sexually assertive, however, is a shameless whoremonger motivated by lust and pride, and she is among "the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11) which Paul says must be reproved by the righteous. The villagers agree:

Some said she was proud some calld her a whore
And some when she passed by shut to the door
A damp cold came oer her her blushes all fled
Her lillies & roses are blighted & shed

(17-20)

Since Mary’s innocent coming-out was publicly celebrated as the awakening of Spring, the persona characterizes her public disgrace in metaphors that suggest the decline of the natural world into Autumn. Her "lillies," symbolic of her physical beauty and her former sexual purity, and her "roses," symbolic of her recent sexual initiation, have been blasted by the "damp cold" and have lost their petals, indicating that the promise of Mary’s youth has withered and died in the icy atmosphere of public condemnation.
Mary's response to the animosity of the townspeople is to question why those qualities that are the bounty of Heaven and that make her the fitting object of love—her physical beauty and her generosity of spirit—are of value only as long as they are preserved inviolate behind the cloak of social and sexual modesty. She laments that the strength of character that allowed her to love openly and honestly the previous evening, and that distinguishes her from the rest of her "Race," has become the source of public resentment and reproof. In describing the orthodox "Christian Love" (26) of the villagers, Mary uses the "Lamb" and the "dove," the conventional Biblical symbols for innocence and love, forgiveness and peace, but here they have been ironically transvalued and represent the weakness of ungratified desire and the "smooth" humility of the morally self-righteous. Those who have the courage to act on their desires, and in so doing assert the importance of the individual experience of love over the prescriptions of the Moral Law, "plant" the seeds of jealousy and "spite in the weak & the tame" (28).

Mary realizes that the weak and the tame resent the strong and the energetic, and therefore she decides to redeem her honor and seek public approval by humbling herself and renouncing those socially unacceptable pleasures that had been her delight, but also her social undoing. She laments that her "Merits to blame" (27) for inciting envy in
the impotent, and therefore she concludes that she can
recover her reputation by dissociating herself from those
exceptional qualities that had been the source of such
jealousy and resentment in her peers. Mary reasons that
if self-promotion raises public envy, then self-deprecation
must generate public charity, and so she decides to reverse
her earlier disastrous approach and retire from the social
spotlight. She attempts to hide her celebrated beauty and
charm behind a stiff costume and a sober demeanor, and she
promises her rivals that she will avoid the envy and
resentment that comes with romantic conquest by rejecting
any suitor who stands committed to another. But, unlike her
namesake in "The Everlasting Gospel," Mary has not embraced
the mariolatry of the orthodox Christian Church, denied her
own sexual nature, made a "pretence to Chastity," and
thereby hidden in secret the "Naked Human form divine"
(EG f 65; E 522). Rather, she has trumpeted her sexuality
"to the rest of the Fair" (11). She has openly worshipped
at the shrine of "Loves Temple that God dwelleth in" (EG f
64; E 522), and she has accepted the free gift of love as a
spiritual experience that is holy and pure.

In a puritanical society that made a direct connection
between a woman's chastity and the legal principle that
determined the rightful succession of family property, the
single woman's frank admission to sexual experience was the
"Lawless thing" (EG f 67; E 522) from which her reputation

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and her desirability as a potential wife and mother could
never recover. Thus Mary, the sometime queen of the Ball
whose indiscreet conduct and ingenuous attitude made her a
scandal and earned her the name of whore, compounds her
offense by flouting public morality and then protesting her
innocence in the sexless weeds of the spinster. To the
townspeople, Mary’s earlier lack of propriety may have been
naive or motivated by pride, but her attempt to deny or to
disguise her guilt is a clear sign that she has lost her
senses. Indeed, even the simple "Child in the Street" (34)
can recognize the absurd contrast between her earlier public
behavior and her new public appearance. They conclude that,
even if her shameful disregard for public morality was not
an act of open defiance, her expectation that she will be
welcomed back into the community as a chaste woman is a
clear indication that she is either crazy or unrepentant,
and the best way to deal with both of these social misfits
is public ridicule:

She went out in the Morning attird Plain & neat
Proud Marys gone Mad said the Child in the Street
She went out in the Morning in plain neat attire
And came home in Evening bespatteredd with mire

(PM 33-36; E 488)

Mary knows intuitively that "The soul of sweet delight.
can never be defil’d" (MHH 9 53; E 37), and that it "Can
never pass away" (VDA, 1 10; E 46), and therefore she is
overwhelmed by the narrow-mindedness and the cruelty of her former friends and companions. Blake uses the same spiritually suggestive imagery to characterize the psychosexual condition of Mary as he does to define the state of Mary Magdalene in "The Everlasting Gospel" and Long John Brown and Little Mary Bell in the poem of that title. The body is "Loves Temple" and it is possessed by Jesus or "the Human Divine" (43) during healthy sexual activity, but it is possessed by "foul Fiends" (42) or Devils during what Blake regarded as frustrating sexual intrigues or alliances that were arranged as a matter of convenience rather than love. For Blake, those who pretend to love where it does not exist are "Blaspheming Love [and] Blaspheming" (EG f 72; E 522) God. God or Jesus is the manifestation of Love that cares not for self, and when this Love enters the human soul the person experiences an epiphany and sees a "Face like the Human Divine." (43) The Devils, or the "Fallen Fiends of Heav'nly Birth" (EG f 50; E 522), are the psychological manifestations of perverted and self-absorbing love and of the spiteful envy of the sexually incapable. Once they have gained entrance to the body they make their presence known through "Faces of Scorn & Eyes of disdain" (41), and they can effectively distort "All Mental Powers" (EG f 87; E 522). Mary's "foul Fiends," then, are the visual and emotional impressions of her false accusers that surface in her mind. In "The Everlasting Gospel," Blake identifies
these self-righteous character assassins with Satan (Hebrew: *satan*, "to accuse"), and thus he links the orthodox Christian concept of the Devil with the contrary to Christian forgiveness.¹⁰ For Blake, all accusers are the descendants of Caiaphas and Annas, and like the Jewish high priest they preserve the Moral Law by crucifying the living Christ in those who embrace His selfless love. Sweet Mary can expect no forgiveness from the townspeople whose vindictiveness floods her young mind and blots out the image of God’s care that had earlier expressed itself in the form of human love. The villagers envy her "different Face" (21) that had radiated God’s gift of "Love & Beauty" (12), and they terrorize her

> With Faces of Scorn & with eyes of disdain  
> Like foul Fiends inhabiting Marys mild Brain  
> She remembers no Face like the Human Divine  
> All Faces have Envy sweet Mary but thine

(41-44)

The envious villagers cannot afford to forget that the "free Love" of the woman must be "with bondage bound" *(SE "Earth’s Answer" 25; E 19)* since eighteenth-century English society held that, if a woman’s appetites were left unrestrained, her natural inclination to sexual license could easily lead her to compromise her virtue, and by extension the political, the social and the religious integrity of family and community. In English patriarchal
society, the strict rules of courtship and marriage that governed the woman's sexual behavior were the keys to male dominance and control, and on their preservation depended the strength of the traditional family unit as the cornerstone of the social order. According to many writers, the greatest threat to patriarchy came from the woman who, like Mary, indulged her sexual appetite and then attempted to conceal her guilt. This is the point that Dr. Johnson makes to Boswell in discussing the relationship between the woman's chastity and the man's entitlement to his inherited wealth and property:

I have much more reverence for a common prostitute than for a woman who conceals her guilt. The prostitute is known. She cannot deceive: she cannot bring a strumpet into the arms of an honest man, without his knowledge.\textsuperscript{11}

In the closing stanza of the poem, the persona addresses the disillusioned young Mary whose pained countenance now mirrors the emotional turmoil and the desperation of a social outcast who has discovered to her horror that she has been condemned to a life of ostracism. The girl is informed that the despair she feels in having sought the love and care of the Human Divine will not be of short duration but will plague her until the end of her days. Blake uses anaphora to stress the unchanging emotional tension that the young woman will have to suffer day after day and year after
year. She has seen in the faces of the villagers the envy and the scorn of the sexually impotent and the emotionally repressed, and she has seen in their eyes that her sin is a mortal one, and that they will not let her forget it. The persona tells Mary that her "soft Memory" (40) of the image of love and forgiveness will be replaced in her mind by the oppressive recollection of those who will never forgive her trespass:

thine is a Face of sweet Love in Despair
And thine is a Face of mild sorrow & care
And thine is a Face of terror & fear
That shall never be quiet till laid on its bier

In the ballad "Mary," Blake dramatizes the plight of the inexperienced single woman who is encouraged to participate in socially organized events that provide structured occasions for young people to meet, to socialize, to display their assets to advantage, and to seek agreeable partners. These occasions, however, stop short of allowing youth the healthy physical and emotional intimacy that this kind of interaction naturally leads to. The unsuspecting Mary finds out too late that these formal gatherings are designed to educate young people in the strict etiquette of polite society--the first step towards the established pattern of courtship and marriage--and that the strict code of modesty prohibits the proper young lady from revealing
her consciousness of "Love & Beauty" (12) of female sexuality and desire. To the guardians of female propriety who observe Mary's behavior, her easy movements, her confident smiles, and her "conscious delight" (9) in the pleasures of the evening are clear signs of her vanity and of her desire for public praise, and both of these departures from feminine modesty reveal that she has an appetite for male attention that can only end in her loss of virtue.\textsuperscript{12} Mary is naive to the contradictions that configure the social and psychological construction of the female self, and so she accepts society's invitation at face value. She acts on her desire to achieve personal satisfaction through an intimate relationship with her admirer, only to find in the clear light of the morning that she has misread the cultural signals and committed the disastrous \textit{faux pas} of first submitting to, and then confessing a delight in the sexual experience of love.

Mary's predicament is a consequence of her inability to recognize and to deal with the paradoxes inherent in the social construction of female sexuality in the late eighteenth-century. At the ballroom, her consciousness of her own worth and her unabashed assertion of her interest in the pleasures of romantic love contradict the stereotype of female modesty by openly inviting public attention. As Mary Poovey has pointed out, both women and men supported an ideology of gender that based a young woman's social value
on the degree to which she shared a masculine perception of her sexuality, and this value was determined by the role that she fulfilled with respect to the man's public or social needs, and to his private or sexual needs. In eighteenth-century English society, the woman whose reputation was compromised for whatever reason could expect to be excluded from polite society and denied those traditional women's roles that defined her in terms of her service to the man as his wife, his lover and the mother of his children. Ironically, the two principal roles that would be available to the fallen woman in this patriarchal society were the ones that denied her access to legitimate male companionship; she would either have to endure public shame as the village whore or public ridicule as the town spinster.

In two other Pickering Manuscript poems, "The Golden Net" and "The Crystal Cabinet," Blake uses the symbolic objects in the titles of the poems to give definiteness and particularity to the "dialectics of sexual conflict" that provide the dramatic situations for the narratives. In "The Golden Net," the adolescent persona relates his personal encounter with three beautiful virgins whose costumes identify them as psychosexual manifestations of the obstacles that the would-be lover sees as inhibiting the possession of his maiden. The poem begins with the appearance of the three virgins at the dawning of the young
man's sexual day. Their common address to the inexperienced youth is ambiguous since it can be read as a troubled appeal to know the purpose and the direction of his going, or, treating "Whither" homophonically, it could be their defensive injunction to the passionate young lover to "wither away," or to cause his rising sexual energy to dissipate:

Three Virgins at the break of day
Whither young Man Whither away
Alas for woe! alas for woe!
They cry & tears for ever flow

(PO 1-4; E 483)

These three virgins are distinct aspects of the young man's fear and fascination with the mystery of female sexuality, and the first appears to him clothed in "flames of fire" (5). To the inexperienced youth, the burning maiden represents the threat of his lover's sexual ardor (Latin: arder, "to burn") that could, according to the warnings of eighteenth-century moralists, overpower the woman's "feminine" virtue and engulf her admirer along with herself.14 But to the untried youth, she also represents the inexhaustible sexual energy that could ignite and gratify any romantic possibility that his imagination could conceive.

The second aspect of the young man's fascination with female sexuality appears to him in the form of a virgin
clothed in "iron wire," (6) and to the adolescent boy her appearance is a manifestation of the complex system of Moral Law and social restraint that binds the chaste woman and prevents her from satisfying his sexual passion. Ironically, the repressive social conditions that hinder the fulfillment of the young man's desire and cause him frustration also add the tantalizing force of anticipation to the sexual challenge and sweeten it with the prospect of tasting the forbidden fruit of carnal knowledge. In other words, society's attempt to preserve chastity by sheltering it within an elaborate system of regulations draws attention to the virgin's sexuality and publishes her seemingly unattainable innocence as a measure of her mystery and her value. Thus, the young woman's passivity and her quiet submission to the social codes governing correct behavior are strong attractions to the man since, according to the anonymous author of The Ladies Library, an "innocent Modesty, [and] a native Simplicity of Look, eclipse all the glaring Splendors of Art and Dress." 15

The last of the virgins seen by the young man is shrouded in "tears & sighs" (7). This show of fear and emotional confusion in the face of male sexual interest was supposedly the modest woman's natural expression of her inner self, and it was the most potent defence the virgin had against the improper advances of the young man. 16 A modest young lady was assumed to be ignorant of all sexual
matters, and her indifference to things worldly was the clear evidence that her interests transcended the pleasures of the senses. But, one way in which the young woman could advertise her chastity while arousing her lover's ardor was by lamenting the vulnerability of her innocence and making herself appear the potential victim of male sexual aggression.

As we have noted, silence and passivity were the signs of modesty and of the woman's chastity, but it was also "an advertisement for--and hence an attraction to--her sexuality." Thus, the chaste woman could acquire power in a romantic context by making her fear of sexual violation known to the man and then by playing on his sympathies, an ironic strategy in which the young man's sexual attraction to the woman because of her love and beauty became both the reason for her distress and the occasion for his guilt. If the man recognized that the woman's traditional role was determined by the requirements of patriarchal society, not by her own needs, and that the "woe / That Love & Beauty undergo" (11-12) was most likely a life "consumed" in service to a man in which her desires would remain ungratified, he might pity her and condemn his sexual drive as a selfish attempt to exploit innocence for his own pleasure. But pity and remorse are not useful responses when it comes to oppression. As Blake points out in the Songs of Experience, the sympathy of the advantaged has
often been used as an easy substitute for corrective action, and justice is not served by simply identifying and empowering the victim since the victim is empowered only as a victim and this does not alter the conditions that were originally the source of the inequity. The tearful virgins in the poem carry the Golden Net of compassion to hang upon the "Branches fine" (10) of the tree of sexual difference. When they discover that they have succeeded in winning the persona's sympathy their devious smile that promises the young man sexual bliss carries the net aloft to entangle him in a mesh of sexual frustration. He says that when they saw his

Tears a Smile
That did Heaven itself beguile
Bore the Golden Net aloft
As on downy Pinions soft
Over the morning of my day

(17-21)

The three virgins have been successful in arousing the persona's guilt and shame by lamenting the perils of sexual innocence in a patriarchal world, and they have been able to retain their chastity and their power of refusal by appealing to his conscience. Now, however, the young man is trapped beneath a web of self-reproach and grief that he has brought upon himself, and he can do nothing but appeal to the hypocritical victims of an oppressive system for the

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love and forgiveness that will bring about the dawning of a new day. Blake repeats the metaphors that he used to define the conditions of the chaste woman's social life to suggest that they remain unchanged, and he again uses anaphora, here beginning with the tensive locution "Now," to indicate that the ideology that oppresses the woman has claimed the young man as its latest victim:

Underneath the Net I stray
Now intreating Burning Fire
Now intreating Iron Wire
Now intreating Tears & Sighs
O when will the morning rise
(22-26)

Another poem in the Pickering Manuscript that explores gender and sexuality through allegory is "The Crystal Cabinet," and here again Blake employs a symbolic object on the metaphorical level to parallel and illustrate the conflict within the individual consciousness of the persona. In this ballad, the narrator tells the story of his capture in the wild by a maiden who locks him in her beautiful golden cabinet with a golden key. The Story is brought full circle when the speaker's growing passion for his captor leads him to attempt to possess her sexually, an act of physical violence that shatters the brittle cabinet and releases him back into the wild as an infant in the company of a grieving woman.
On the symbolic level, the narrative describes a young man's loss of freedom when he is captured and made the property of a maid who confines him in what Blake regarded as the unnatural institution of marriage. In the first stanza, Blake uses the metaphor of the hunt to describe the relationship between the boy whose glad animal movements are a spontaneous celebration of young life and the maiden whose pursuit of the untamed youth is her quest for a trophy that she can display to the world as a valued possession.

The Maiden caught me in the Wild
Where I was dancing merrily
She put me in her Cabinet
And lockd me up with a golden key

(PM 1-4; E 488)

Captured in the wild, the young man is imprisoned in a cabinet made of gold, pearl and crystal, a metaphor for the artificial and highly structured world of marriage that is romanticized through the traditional accessories that symbolize the permanence of love through their lasting worth and beauty.

The shimmering dreamy world of the cabinet that replaces the natural world, the forsaken, desolate world of Nature that Blake calls Ulro, is the moony realm of Beulah, the Promised Land that Isaiah says God will restore in marriage to his chosen people after their exile. In Blake's poem Milton, Beulah is the ideal "habitation" for
the Sexes which "the Eternal Great Humanity" (M II 30 15: E 129) created to encircle Eternity. This land is a pleasant "feminine" place of "dovelike softness" (31 3) and love, and it was originally formed by the creative mind to allow the lovely Emanations, the collective female principle in humanity, to retreat in sleep and dream from the exhausting intellectual Wars that rage in Eternity. But Beulah is the "Promised Land" of ideal marriage, and although it is a place "Where no dispute can come" (30 3), it cannot sustain its promise of unrestricted love, and when this ideal is challenged, it inevitably collapses into the love-destroying emotions of resentment and jealousy. This is the complaint of the Divine Man to the Female Will, who will eventually take the form of Vala in time and space as the figures of Rahab and Tirzah:

When I first Married you, I gave you all my whole Soul
I thought that you would love my loves & joy in my delights
Seeking for pleasures in my pleasures O Daughter of Babylon
Then thou wast lovely, mild & gentle. now thou art terrible
In jealousy & unlovely in my sight, because thou hast cruelly
Cut off my loves in fury till I have no love left for thee
(M 33 1-6; E 132)

The youth in "The Crystal Cabinet" enters this blissful realm of new love in the invisible confines of marriage, and the world that he perceived formerly as "the Wild" (1)
opens inwardly in his consciousness and is transformed into an idealized version of his London, complete with the still pure form of his bride who has herself become crystalline. In the cabinet, he says,

Another England there I saw
Another London with its Tower
Another Thames & other Hills
And another pleasant Surrey Bower
Another Maiden like herself
Translucent lovely shining clear

(9-14)

The youth embraces the ideal virginal form of his love whose transparent but fragile beauty is enclosed "threefold" inside her sexuality and her outer physical body, and her tentative "threefold Smile" (17) arouses his passion. His initial attempt to express his affection for his virginal bride is a gentle kiss, which is innocently returned by the maid, inflaming his sexual desire still further. The irony of the sexual act is that it is the most intimate, for Blake the most spiritual relationship that is possible between a man and a woman, but for him it is a meeting of the couple's "innermost Form" (21) only when the love is freely given, not simply taken. The male speaker admits

I strove to seize the innermost Form
With ardor fierce & hands of flame
But burst the Crystal Cabinet (21-23)
The result of force is usually the destruction of that which it desires, and the ideal bride in the ideal marriage are fragile entities that cannot stand the test of violence. The reward for the young man is not the pure spiritual love that he sought and that is the uniting of gender in the "one flesh," but the disintegration of love into the physical act of Generation that eventually transforms the affection of the wife for the husband into the care of the mother for her child. Thus, the reality of marriage for Blake is that it inevitably leads both parties into a rapid descent from the rarified air of Beulah into the physical Wild of Ulro where the woman’s cries of disillusionment and frustration are answered by her child’s weeping demands for maternal attention.

A weeping Babe upon the wild
And Weeping Woman pale reclind
And in the outward air again
I filld with woes the passing Wind

(PM 25-28; E 489)

In his poem "Long John Brown & Little Mary Bell," Blake explores the consequences of frustrated sexual desire more extensively. This ballad tells the story of the little virgin, "Mary Bell" (or "belle"), whose flirtatious games arouse the sexual desires of "Long John Brown" (obviously an image drawn from the male sexual organ), and then leave them ungratified. The trifling spirit of love which possesses
the young girl is described as an orthodox and thoroughly mischievous "fairy," suggesting, perhaps, that her true source is myth or folklore rather than inspired Christian doctrine. This cruel sprite torments the loving "Young Swain" (PM 9; E 496) with her sexual games, but instead of offering him the body of the virgin in an act of selfless love, she puts him off with the moral platitude that claims that physical love defiles the Spirit. Because "Love" is described by the fairy as a "Sin," and because sin only has meaning in a religious or a moral context as a "revolt" against God's Love, the orthodox Christian explanation for John Brown's lustful designs on Mary would be that he must be possessed by an angry Devil. The narrator says that Mary's

Fairy skipd out & her Fairy skipd in
He laughd at the devil saying Love is a Sin
The devil he raged & the devil he was wroth
And the devil enterd the Young Mans broth

(5-8)

Despite his voracious appetite, "poor John Brown" suffers the same fate as the youth of "Ah! Sun-Flower"; his body wastes away because it lacks the vital ingredient of human love to sustain it. Blake implies that the "pale Virgin" of the latter poem gets the pie-in-the-sky heaven she deserves for maintaining her spotless soul at the expense of her lover, and the final stanza of "Long John Brown & Little
Mary Bell" suggests that pretty Mary Bell's reward is equally a matter of poetic justice. The sexual games that entertained the young coquette and that took the life of her suitor, do not work for the aging spinster, and so when the virgin's idle fairy deserts her for want of work, she falls victim to Long John's now unemployed Demon, the human craving for sexual release.

In a society that still regarded a woman's fulfillment, especially in terms of her sexual needs, as possible only within the confines of the companionate marriage, and in a period that saw the number of marriageable women climb well beyond the number of available men, Miss Bell's prospects would be limited indeed. The mocking tone of the final quatrain of the poem is indicative of the social attitude towards the woman who never married that continued through the closing years of the eighteenth-century. But Blake's intention is not to make fun of "old maids." Rather, he is pointing out that many of the coy intrigues that pass for romantic love games are really cruel and counterproductive. Mary Bell's lot at the end of the poem is the same as the spinster in Richard Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) who laments: "... I was very cruel thirty years ago, and nobody asked me since. Yet, I assure you there were [then] a great many matches proposed to me." Blake's final line adds drama to the narrative by forcing the reader to adopt the perspective of the amused speaker as he views the old
maid passing by, and the broken rhyme pattern emphasizes the pathetic quality of the solitary life she has made for herself as the sour Miss Bell:

    the fairy skipd out of the old Nut shell
And woe & alack for Pretty Mary Bell
For the Devil crept in when the Fairy skipd out
And there goes Miss Bell with her fusty old Nut

(17-20)
1. Erdman suggests that they were probably copied for a friend or a patron in his Textual Notes to The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, p. 859. He assigns the Pickering Manuscript to "the late Felpham period" and mentions that Bentley (Blake Books, 341-342) dates their composition between 1800-1804.

2. In discussing the double standard that existed in the latter part of the eighteenth-century to encourage the woman to suppress her sexual desires in the interest of family spirituality, Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and The Woman Writer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 8, quotes Clara Reeve by way of J. M. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 154. Poovey writes: "By the second half of the eighteenth century, women, like men, were apt to interpret the double standard not as a sign of men's distrust but as proof of their own moral superiority. Every appearance of vice in a woman is sometimes (something?) more disgusting than in man, Clara Reeve cheerfully argued; 'Which I think is a presumption that a woman was intended to be a more perfect creature than man.'"

3. Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady, p. 29, writes that women, in circumstances in which they were "ultimately obedient to men's will," were "allowed to exercise considerable personal--if
indirect--power. Before she married a young girl possessed the power of what moralists called 'her Negative': the right to resist or even reject the proposal of a suitor."

4. See Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, pp. 20-26, for a discussion of the importance that eighteenth-century society assigned to a woman's modesty as the most reliable sign of her chastity before marriage, and of her fidelity after. She points out that "a proper young lady . . . is theoretically ignorant of sexuality . . . [and that she should] "not betray knowledge of sexuality (or even, in compromising circumstances, the absence of knowledge, which may be read as knowledge disguised) because knowledge denotes experience and hence potential, if not actual, corruption." Cited from p. 26.

5. Catherine McClenahan, in her article entitled "No Face like the Human Divine" in *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods*, eds. G. A. Rosso and David P. Watkins (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 189-207, proposes a direct connection between the experiences of the Mary figures in a number of the Pickering Manuscript poems and parallel events in the life of Mary Wollstonecraft. While it seems hard to believe that Blake could have used the name Mary at the time of the composition of these poems without thinking about his radical friend whose untimely death and controversial reputation would no doubt have affected him deeply, I would argue that, as an artist who was, as McClenahan says, interested in "keeping and
expanding a form of the Human Divine in time of trouble" (p. 198), his purpose in using the name would have been first and foremost to exploit the powerful Biblical resonances that it evokes in a Christian culture. The poems in the Pickering Manuscript that employ the name deal with the connection that orthodox society makes between a woman's sexuality and her virtue, a connection that Blake repudiates in these poems and in his own nonconformist reading of the annunciation and the immaculate conception of Jesus in "The Everlasting Gospel" and elsewhere. In Christian doctrine, Mary the Blessed Virgin and Mary the harlot are women who are defined in terms of their contrasting sexuality, and for the orthodox Christian they represent the opposite extremes of female virtue. For Blake, however, they are clear examples of the way in which patriarchal society and the orthodox Church have calculated the woman's virtue and value in terms of her sexual service to the man, and considering his interest in spiritual enlightenment through an improvement of sensual enjoyment, it seems most likely that his eye would have been on the Marys of myth rather than on the Mary of history.

6. Catherine McClenahan, in "No Face like the Human Divine" in Spirits of Fire, p. 190, points out that eighteenth-century society's belief that, because the woman's "indulgence of any appetite could lead to dangerous sexual desires, moralists and writers on women's propriety enjoined women to the complete suppression of any assertive 'self' at all."
7. The social worth of the young woman's chastity is a major theme in the cautionary advice of a mother to her daughter in *The Polite Lady: Or a Course of Female Education. In a Series of Letters, from a Mother to her Daughter*, 2d ed. (London: Newberry & Carnan, 1769), pp. 184, 186-187. The mother remarks that once a girl's chastity is "lost, every thing that is dear and valuable to a woman, is lost along with it; the peace of her own mind, the love of her friends, the esteem of the world, the enjoyment of present pleasure, and all hopes of future happiness." Cited by Poovey in *The Proper Lady*, p. 23.


9. Catherine McClenahan, in "No Face like the Human Divine" in *Spirits of Fire*, p. 194, suggests that Mary's response to the villagers' denunciation of her is to question why she was born "with a different Face" and with a "bountiful hand" (21-23). I would argue that the prepositional phrase in Mary's question: "Why did Heaven adorn me with bountiful hand" does not have adjectival value and specify an attribute of the object/speaker, but is adverbial and explains the generous manner in which the subject/Heaven acted on Mary before it set her down "in an envious Land." Thus, the mark of Divine favor that Mary recognizes in her gift of natural beauty seems incomprehensible to her since Heaven has chosen to display its bounty in a context that is so perverse that it has resulted
in her becoming the target of public resentment not admiration.

10. In his letter to Butts dated at Felpham 16 August 1803, Blake uses two lines from Mary's complaint almost verbatim to describe his mental state after being accused by John (Scholfield) Scofield, a private in Captain Leathe's troop of Royal Dragoons, of assault and sedition:

O why was I born with a different face
Why was I not born like the rest of my race
When I look each one starts! when I speak I offend
Then I'm silent and passive & lose every friend

(Let E 733)


14. In *The Proper Lady*, pp. 6-24, Mary Poovey discusses the pervasive assumption in the conduct literature of the latter part of the eighteenth-century that sexuality was the dominant characteristic of the woman's nature and that this drive put her in constant danger of losing her "feminine" virtue to the voracious demands of her repressed sexual appetite. According to Poovey, moralists arrived at this understanding of the woman from opposing directions. One camp considered female sensitivity to be the defining characteristic of the woman that made her successful in her social and familial roles, but regarded this aspect of her nature as at once the weakness that made her susceptible to the temptations of the flesh assaulting her virtue from all sides. The second camp simply reversed the woman's primary and secondary characteristics by transferring the ideal feminine qualities from the center to the periphery and making them vulnerable to the powerful impulses of her sexual drive. The author of *The Ladies Library, Written by a Lady*, 5th ed., 3 vols. (London: J & R Tonson, 1739), 1:162, makes the same point about the woman's sexual instability, but here the traditional metaphorical association of sexual passion with heat or fire has spread to engulf the civilizing institutions of the world. If the woman's passion is allowed to get out of control, it can become a grand Incendiary, which puts Kingdoms, Churches and Families in Combustion; a Contradiction, not only
to the Word, but to the Works of God; a kind of anticreative Power, which reduces things to the Chaos from whence God drew them . . . So especially the Female Sex, whose Passions being naturally the more impetuous, ought to be the more strictly guarded, and kept under the severe Discipline of Reason; for where 'tis otherwise, where a Woman has no Guide but her Will, and her Will is nothing but her Humour, the Event is sure to be fatal to herself; and often to others also.

Poovey points out that one sure defence the woman had against this latent desire was to suppress her self-identity and her individual will and accept the formulaic social construction of the modest woman as a timid, ignorant, apathetic and dependent creature who must rely upon the strength and the sympathy of her male counterpart for her definition and security.


19. Here, like in Thel's Motto, Blake uses the shape of the "rod" and the "bowl" to suggest the male and the female organs of generation.

20. In *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, Lawrence Stone offers some reasons for the remarkable growth in the number of spinsters in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He also observes that the fate of the woman depended upon her class and the resources of her family. A large number of spinster daughters from poor families had no alternative but to turn to prostitution since in the industrialized cities there was virtually no suitable employment for them. Their choice was, as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mrs Mary Ann Radcliffe remarked, "the great and shocking alternative between vice and death" (p. 383). See also pp. 380-386.

Conclusions (Deferred):
"Unity is the cloke of Folly"

In the twentieth-century, Blake scholars have brought us an increasingly wide range of methodological approaches to his poetry and designs, and the result is a rich array of critical perspectives that offers Blake's readers many alternate ways of understanding and appreciating his work, while at the same time revealing the depth and the complexity of his prophetic vision. Among these approaches are the traditional historical, biographical, and sociological ones, the formalistic analyses, the psychological, mythological and archetypal critiques, as well as the structuralist, deconstructionist, post-structuralist, and feminist strategies. My own sense of Blake's art, however, is that he was never unfaithful to his perception of the aesthetic process as an "intuitive" activity that is ultimately anathema to rational or analytical theorizing. He expresses this philosophical position in his response to Joshua Reynolds' claim that the same faculty is operative in the appreciation of mathematics as it is in the appreciation of fine art: "Demonstration Similitude & Harmony are Objects of Reasoning Invention Identity and Melody are Objects of Intuition" (Rev VII 200; E 659). Here, by "Demonstration" Blake means experimentation, by "Similitude" he means abstraction, and
by "Harmony" he means classical symmetry; their artistic contraries are "Invention" which is creative imagination, "Identity" which is minute particularity, and "Melody" which is contextual originality.

As we discovered in our discussions of Blake's early work in the second part of this study, the imaginative deployment of unique verbal and visual particulars in original contexts resists the critic's appeal to a single organizing theory or globalizing methodology. Perhaps a more profitable way to find coherent meaning in the detail of Blake's allegorical narratives is to allow for fluid rather than static metaphors that are able to exploit the openness and elasticity of paradox, and for multiple interpretive possibilities that can coexist and be consistent simultaneously on a number of different levels. The goal of theory (theoria) in the classical sense is to universalize interpretation and finalize understanding, to tell the right story. My approach, however, is a more modest undertaking and rests on the belief that Blake rejected logical analysis as inimical to art. Therefore, I have sought in his poetic texts more tentative and provisional narratives that favor process and particularity over causality. This does not mean that successful interpretations of Blake's art need to be soft and unfocused; on the contrary, as Blake says: "Distinct General Form Cannot Exist Distinctness is Particular Not General"

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My approach to Blake's art, then, has been informed by no single methodological theory, but to some degree by a number of them, and because of the importance of a radical revision of Biblical myth and symbol to Blake's cosmology and to his poetic representations of men and women, I have relied most heavily upon historical, mythological, and typological recontextualizations.

The first chapter of Part One of this dissertation begins as an historical source study that attempts to recover the symbolic and metaphorical patterns that were used to define and value the woman in seventeenth-century English society, particularly as they were manifest in a stubborn underground antinomian tradition that came out of the radical doctrines of the Civil War nonconformist churches. The second chapter traces the antinomianism of these cloaked sects to certain dissenting circles in Blake's London in the 1780s and 1790s and shows that his indebtedness to the unique vocabulary and symbolism of their frequently heretical doctrines is not superficial, but extends to the very way in which he conceives of himself as an artist in the tradition of Western religious art and as a Christian in the tradition of Biblical prophecy. The artistic and the prophetic personae merge in Blake's first Illuminated texts. On the base of the frontpiece to *All Religions are One* the artist-engraver is identified as a modern John the Baptist who is "crying in the Wilderness" (*ARO* E 1) about the
unheralded arrival in philistine society of a new divine voice. This voice is of course Blake's own, and the principles that it articulates in these blunt but unassuming tractates center on the heretical doctrine that God is the creative consciousness within all of us, and that as we awaken to our spiritual powers, we are able to make the world in our own image.

In the decade before the turn of the century, Blake grew frustrated with the indifference of all but a few of his countrymen to his art and to its revelatory message. Doubtless, he was also a little nervous about the powerful conservative forces that were marshalling to crush swiftly any sign of social and political agitation, and so, like the independent churches of the 1640s, he made a judicious retreat from the front lines of public dissent and redirected his energies into the production of much more obscure and complex psychosexual narratives that would appeal only to a small circle of the initiated rank and file. However, despite Blake's tactful revision of his earlier time-line for the apocalyptic reawakening of humanity, he never lost his antinomian hatred of authority as the degrader of art and the enemy of freedom, and he never contradicted his identification of art with Christianity, and the human creative imagination with God. Like Clarkson and Coppe, the Ranter leaders who found unconditional liberty in the doctrine of the indwelling
Spirit, Blake's rejection of the orthodox transcendent God of mainstream religion in favor of an immanent One who exists in the eternal present of the human Imagination is in itself a denial of all external authority and an identification of all hegemony with the errors of the dualistic world of Generation.

For Blake, vision or human consciousness is potentially fourfold, and it involves the opening of the mind inwards, into the Imagination, the bosom of God. To Clarkson and Coppe, God's immanence was simply the collapse of the transcendental into the corporeal, and so they sought the evidence of divine love in a sensual heaven of gluttony, drunkenness and unrestrained sexual gratification. Sexual intimacy is important in Blake's scheme as well, but for him selfless love is an act of mutual forgiveness that is the way out of the fallen cycles of "false and Generating Love" (J 1 25; E 161) and into the still moony night of Beulah, figured metaphorically as the perfect marriage in which husband and wife come together as equals. In much of Blake's early poetry, he represents the sexually divided world of Generation as uncompromisingly patriarchal and unrepentantly misogynistic because that is the society into which he believed that he had been born, but that does not mean that he liked it. Indeed, as a committed antinomian he abhorred patriarchy, and as a visionary artist he fought against it.
Those critics who see a sea change in Blake's sexual views after *Visions*, and those who detect the lineaments of a misogynist lurking behind his later work, are responding, I believe, and perhaps with justification, to his sense of prophecy as a cosmic psychic drama in which weak passive female figures struggle against strong active male ones until the female principle is absorbed back into the male in order to return Divine Humanity to its original androgynous state. Virtually all of Blake's narratives are concerned in some way with his allegorical revision of the great Biblical theme of humanity's fall into division and resurrection into unity, and many of the metaphors and myths that he appropriates from the Bible retain their original patriarchal slant. However, in Blake's Annotations to Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* and Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, in his *A Vision of the Last Judgement* and in many other contexts, Blake repeatedly makes the point that he does not regard the Bible as human history of any kind, but as inspired poetic tales that tell the story of the fragmentation of the single divine consciousness within each of us. This does not mean that the terms in which Blake's major allegorical epics are worked out are not sexist, but the minds in which these events supposedly occur are originally and finally pure intellect and do not share in the gender hegemony that the stories attempt to rectify. Indeed, to claim that Blake's
observation in *A Vision of the Last Judgement* that "In Eternity Woman is the Emanation of Man she has No Will of her own There is no such thing in Eternity as a Female Will" (*VLJ* 85; *E* 562) is an instance of his misogyny needs to be qualified by his earlier statement in his Annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*: "There can be no Good Will. Will is always Evil It is pernicious to others or selfish If God is any thing he is Understanding." (*Swed Flyleaf*; *E* 602)

Once we have outlined the identifying features of the radical Christian tradition within which Blake was working we can see that he invariably reinterpreted many of its distinctive and frequently heretical doctrines in terms of his personal philosophy and his revolutionary politics and then applied them to contemporary events and to current issues, like the numerous aspects of gender relations. The earlier allegorical narratives that precede *Visions* are forceful critiques of late eighteenth-century patriarchal society and of the cultural assumptions that it uses to define and manipulate people's lives, the later ones move inside the conscious mind and use elements of Christian mythology to retell the story of the fall and the resurrection of the creative Imagination, who is the God within all of us. In the orthodox Christian tradition, however, the Old Testament God and the New Testament Messiah are male, but again for Blake these are contrary states of
mind, not historical figures; the Fall of Divine Humanity is
the coming into consciousness of the visible universe and
the separation of the androgynous Being into the sexual
contraries of male and female. In the final apocalyptic
moment, Blake has the resurrection of the original Androgyne
occur through the reabsorption of the female principle into
the male, a process of containment and extinction that
appears to countenance the subjugation of the female, but in
terms of his source it is the simple reversal of Eve’s birth
from the rib of Adam’s side in Genesis 2:21-23. These are
apparently sexist episodes in Blake’s revision and
deployment of Biblical mythology, and it would not be
difficult to isolate many more in both his early and later
prophecies. On the other hand, one wonders if it is
possible to draw metaphors and myths from as familiar a
patriarchal source as the Bible without seeming to endorse
their sexual hegemony.

I have called my Conclusion “deferred” because I want
to counter the implication that my commentaries on Blake’s
shorter poems and designs are conclusive or determinative.
Rather, these narratives are meant to be anticipations of
alternate, contrasting and certainly more detailed readings
of the Blakean canon. In my exploration of the shorter
poems and designs that deal with aspects of eighteenth-
century English society’s construction of the female self I
have tried to be faithful to what I believe is Blake’s
aversion to the systematic and logical analysis of art, and to the abstraction of particular female figures from their aesthetic contexts. Rather, I have chosen to follow Blake's strategy in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, The Pickering Manuscript* and even the major prophecies: that is to juxtapose narratives that disclose connected and frequently overlapping aspects of the female as she was received in late eighteenth-century English society. It may be that those linear, analytical methodologies that have attempted to locate and discipline Blake within a particular interpretive tradition have given us a too narrow, less interesting, and more traditional Blake than we might find if we approach him and his representation of the woman on his own terms.
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