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The Sex Factor in Blake's Cosmology

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THE SEX FACTOR IN BLAKE'S COSMOLOGY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Were it not better to believe
> Vision
> With all our might & strength,
> tho' we are fallen & lost?
> -- Blake.[1]

Everybody rides his hobby-horse at Blake. Fortunately Blake had such comprehensive interests that nearly all of these assaults in some measure pierce his obscurity. It is only when the chargers claim to have returned with "The Real Blake," "The Total Blake" neatly impaled on their lances that they create confusion. The most penetrating study of Blake yet written takes this statement as its theme: "The key to everything Blake ever wrote or painted lies in his mysticism."[2] Now this is true so long as the his is emphasized. And when the sentence is properly inflected "Humanism," "Idealism," or innumerable other words could be substituted for mysticism without changing the validity of the statement. This paper makes no pretense of being all-embracing. Rather it follows a subsidiary factor in Blake's thought from its obscure origin to its unique fulfillment. It attempts to

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[1] William Blake, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake. (Geoffrey Keynes, editor, New York: Random House, 1939), p. 585. All quotations from Blake's writings are from this edition; hereinafter referred to as: Blake, op. cit.

[2] S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (New York: Peter Smith, 1947), p. 1.

uncover in Blake's personal life the causes of his attitude toward sex, to visualize the effect this attitude had on his thought, and to point out the important place that sex occupies in Blake's completed cosmology.

There is, however, good reason for the critics' attempts to explain the whole Blake in terms of a single concept. Blake is probably unique among artists for the close integration of his total artistic output. Every picture he drew, every poem he wrote is but a facet of a whole. Like his protagonist, Los, his motto was: "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's."[3] All his life he was consciously formulating a synthesis of his beliefs and all his work is an attempt to state this evolving synthesis. In most metaphysical systems there is a close relationship between epistemological, aesthetic, ethical, and cosmological elements, but Blake goes beyond this and identifies the elements. In Blake's system all things depend upon the level of epistemology. Beauty and Good depend upon the clarity of perception. The concept of abstract right and wrong belongs only to a very primitive level of vision. The sensuous world, for Blake, is a delusion and the road of salvation is a cleansing of vision--indeed, salvation is a perfect sensitiveness.

> 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

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[3] Blake, op. cit., p. 422.

> Torments, Despair, Eternal Death; but the Divine Mercy Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus. Amen. And Length, Bredth, Highth again Obey the Divine Vision.[4]

It is therefore impossible to investigate the sex factor in Blake's cosmology without involving all the other factors. Blake's doctrines of Intuition, of Forgiveness, and of the seemingly contradictory Apotheosis of Self, are at least as important as his doctrine of sex, but each one inextricably involves the others. In some ways, then, this paper also endeavors to give "the Total Blake," but the emphasis is on a single aspect--the sex factor--and a great deal of omission, even distortion, is inevitable. It should perhaps be added that this investigation does not proceed along Freudian lines. It is rather an investigation of a sexual theory that in many ways anticipates Freud and in an important way goes beyond him. A recent Blakean scholar points this out:

> "He who desires and acts not, breeds pestilence," said Blake in the "Proverbs of Hell," . . . He spoke here, as he does throughout, an axiom that we like to look upon as peculiar to the province of contemporary wisdom.[5]

Blake's philosophy is extracted with difficulty from its embodiment in poetic form. He must be read with imagination if he is to be read with understanding. Such reading makes for subjectivity, and it is worth while to examine

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[4] Blake, op. cit., p. 478.

[5] Mark Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision (New York: Henry Holt, 1946), p. 256.

the difficulties in Blake in order that the degree of objectivity possible to such a paper as this may be estimated. First, however, it might be well to state why a separate analysis of his philosophy is desirable. It would be futile to deny that a large part of Blake's writings are not particularly good poetry.

> The second state is Alla, & the third State Al-Ulro:
> But the Fourth State is dreadful, it is named Or-Ulro.
> The First State is in the Head, the Second is in the Heart,
> The Third in the Loins & Seminal Vessels, & the Fourth
> In the Stomach & Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable.[6]

Such a passage is not felicitous verse, but it is interesting and original philosophy--a mystical-humanism stated in terms of the occult microcosm. Poets like Shelley and Pope wrote philosophical poems, but their philosophy was second-hand. We read them for their verbal beauty or appositeness and for philosophical instruction turn to Henry St. John, Godwin, or Plotinus. It is perhaps unfortunate that Blake never embodied his philosophy in prose, but such was not his way, and we must extract his system of thought from his verse or do without. The latter course is one we can ill afford. Original philosophers in the occult tradition of Plato and Plotinus, but with an awareness of the problems of materialism and social degradation are too rare. From a purely literary standpoint, moreover, Blake's great lyrics improve as we

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[6] Blake, op. cit., p. 420.

learn that they are not empty effusions but emotional objectifications of profound thought. Few insist nowadays that a poem must have a message, but few will deny that much of the greatness of "The Tiger" lies in its eloquent voicing of the age-old problem of the existence of Evil. The adverse criticisms of Blake's songs that have been made rest on their shallowness and it is well that, thanks to the "Prophetic Books," we can insist that the shallowness is in the critics, not in Blake.

There are many reasons why Blake stated his philosophy so cryptically. S. Foster Damon points out that Blake belonged to a tradition of mystics and occultists:

> He saw a tradition of similar writings throughout the ages, written with precisely this purpose of speaking to the select and keeping silence before the uninitiate: such as the works of St. John, of Trismegistus, Dante, Paracelsus, Jakob Boehm, Milton, Swedenborg. He intended to continue this series . . .[7]

Unquestionably Blake was influenced by the obscure styles of these and other writers, by the intriguing mystery found in Rosicrucian and Cabbalistic dogma, but it is doubtful that he (or Milton for that matter) ever lost sight of the fact that it is the duty of the artist to communicate his conceptions. Mark Schorer suggests three causes for Blake's retreat into unintelligibility: his sense of prophetic self importance; the apparent inadequacy of

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[7] Damon, op. cit., p. 62.

language; and the practical need of disguising revolutionary utterances.[8] The second of these is to be met with frequently in the arts and is perhaps the most important in the case of Blake. Blake had something new to say, and in art the new must be stated in terms of the familiar. The idioms of the arts are based on tradition and universal experience. If the artist attempts to communicate a new concept with them, the concept is either betrayed into modification or the communication becomes unintelligible. Blake was aware of this and was unwilling to subject his insights to the dangers of metaphor in the usual manner of poets. He decided instead to employ an exact terminology--to create a pantheon whose members would illustrate his concepts, whose new names would indicate exactly his own ideas without the distortion of traditional associations.

> Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can Never be join'd. . . . Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal understanding, is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry; it is also somewhat in the same manner defin'd by Plato.[9]

Further, Blake had no audience to test his writings for him. Fuseli, Robert Blake, and Blake's wife Catherine were probably the only people he ever knew who were totally sympathetic with his artistic endeavors. The following comment

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[8] Schorer, op. cit., p. 176 f.

[9] Blake, op. cit., p. 868 f.

on James Joyce (who has a great deal in common with Blake) seems very revealing when applied to Blake's case.

> A long series of misunderstandings with the public inevitably reinforced the vows of silence, exile, and cunning. Inhibited from writing naturally of natural instincts, Joyce ended by inventing an artificial language of innuendo and mockery.[10]

The most obvious difficulty in understanding Blake's philosophy is that it is couched in this brand new terminology. Every context in which one of his allegorical personages appears must be examined in order to understand what factor in the makeup of man and the universe is represented. Of course every philosopher uses special terms, but few use as many new terms as Blake did. Moreover, these figures vary from work to work and take on new meanings. Blake was consistent, and his ideas change remarkably little, but they do mature, and this maturing militates against any attempt at static definitions. Then, too, there are a number of mythical beings whose names are mentioned too infrequently for any definition at all.

In addition to this basic difficulty, Blake raises problems with his narrative technique. His philosophy is relativistic. There is no fixed valuation placed on any element in his cosmology. The "state," or present level of existence, is the criterion of value, and it is necessary

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[10] Harry Levin, editor, The Portable James Joyce (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 12.

to note from what level of perception Blake's protagonists are speaking or being described. Thus "Ahania," a frequently appearing character, may be either satisfied desire and, hence, a vitalizing influence, or an inhibited desire and "mother of Pestilence."[11] In Milton we find the "sexual garments" called "the abominations of desolation Hiding the human lineaments as with an Ark & Curtains."[12] Yet in a prose passage we find, "The origin of this mistake [objective morality] in Lavater & his contemporaries is, They suppose that Woman's Love is Sin; in consequence all the Loves & Graces with them are sins."[13] It is apparently direct contradictions such as this that lead critics into confusion:

> It would be interesting to have Blake's explanation of the apparent conflict between his condemnation of the senses in his epistomology and his acknowledgement of their rights in his ethic, for it is difficult to see how the enjoyment of instinctive tendencies should be normally possible except through the senses.[14]

Blake does not "condemn" the senses; he only states that they belong to a low plane of existence, that the "inward eye" is superior to physical sight, and that creation will

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[11] D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis, editors, The Prophetic Writings of William Blake (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 127.

[12] Blake, op. cit., p. 430.

[13] Ibid., p. 735.

[14] Sloss and Wallis, op. cit., p. 18.

become "infinite and holy . . . by an improvement of sensual enjoyment."[15] Therefore to rely entirely on the physical senses is bad, but to obstruct the senses even further by false ethical codes is worse. When Blake compares the physical body to the ark and curtains, he has condensed his doctrine of levels into a fine compact metaphor. The curtains are put around the ark to protect it from the profane eyes of the children of Israel in their wanderings in desolation, and the present physical form hides the spiritual or human form in this degraded plane of existence. Similar to Blake's use of point of view is his addiction to irony, a literary embellishment of which he was fond but with which he had little skill. Usually he attaches a seemingly commendatory adjective to an object that he means to hold up to scorn and lets it go at that. This may well be an outgrowth of his custom of reading or singing his poetry to an audience so that the inflection would reveal the meaning, but it makes for obscurity in a poem like "The Lilly."

> The modest Rose puts forth a thorn,
> The humble Sheep a threat'ning horn,
> While the Lilly white shall in Love delight,
> Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty bright.[16]

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[15] Blake, op. cit., p. 187.

[16] Ibid., p. 74. Blake's spelling has been kept in all quotations and in the case of a symbolic word like "Lilly" has been carried over into the body of the paper.

Blake originally called the rose "envious" and "lustful" and the sheep "coward,"[17] but unless one knows this or is aware of Blake's general use of the Lilly and the Rose one finds the poem strangely contradictory.

Still another difficulty in understanding Blake is his use of illustrations and decorations to clarify or modify the written text. The effect his loneliness had on his verbal technique has already been noted and this same loneliness may well have driven Blake to his laborious method of printing and illustrating his work. One critic describes this reaction as follows:

> I have sometimes wondered whether the marvellous means by which Blake came to express himself was not due to the fact that he had no audience. If a poet can obtain no hearing, and if he happens also to be an artist, why should he not amuse himself by creating a chorus to his song--an echo to its sound--by peopling his manuscript with figures, animate and inanimate, which uphold the argument and take from it its lone reverberations? . . . Might not these words--otherwise apparently uncreative--find social satisfaction if they were wedded to lineal images?[18]

Blake was forced to give his work completeness by his own resources, and this is fortunate in that it resulted in some of the world's most beautiful books, but it is unfortunate in that no mere transcription of his text can convey his complete meaning. The Book of Thel seems to

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[17] Damon, op. cit., p. 282.

[18] Max Plowman, An Introduction to the Study of William Blake (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1937), p. 22.

end with a complete rejection of the grave garments of physical embodiment, but the last picture shows the serpent sex being guided by happy children, and by this Blake intends to convey the idea that Thel has only for a time rejected the true path to lasting happiness. Similarly the influence of the Cabbalists on Blake is best demonstrated not by quotations but by a comparison of his drawing of Albion, who "contained in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven and Earth,"[19] with the diagrams of the Adam-Kadmon which appear in medieval grimoires. This paper has necessarily been written with but little reference to Blake's drawings and illustrations and undoubtedly suffers thereby.

There is a school of Blakean critics which believes that the proper way to study Blake is without reference to secondary material; this is supposed to give a "pure" approach to his doctrine. Why such critics write secondary material on Blake since its use would obviously be "impure" is something of a mystery. Needless to say, in the face of the difficulties just enumerated, all available secondary opinion has been gladly consulted in composing this paper and the views set forth here have been carefully compared with other opinions. No critic of any degree of competence has ignored the sex factor in dealing with Blake.

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[19] Blake, op. cit., p. 463.

Mona Wilson, whose biography of Blake is a handy compilation of nearly all biographical material, states: "Blake's use of sex symbolism . . . will be stressed in its more literal sense or given a deeper meaning, ignored it cannot be, in accordance with the reader's frame of mind."[20] It is to be hoped that this paper has a slightly greater degree of objectivity, but the quotation at least serves as a warning. S. Foster Damon took Blake's mysticism as his central theme in his William Blake: His Philosophy and His Symbols, but his careful attention to Blake's kind of mysticism makes his interpretation of Blake's symbolism the most useful to be found. He points out that Blake differs from the standard European mystics in being "among the first to celebrate the decency--the holiness--of sex."[21] This paper says very little that is not to be found in germ in Damon's chapter, "The Fifth Window," and Damon's accounts of Blake's printed designs have been used as a supplement to the reprinted drawings available. D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis in their edition of Blake's "Prophetic Books" note that "The employment of the terms of sex is a notable feature of Blake's symbolism."[22] Their compilation of references to key

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[20] Mona Wilson, The Life of William Blake (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1927), p. 55.

[21] Damon, op. cit., p. 98.

[22] Sloss and Wallis, op. cit., p. 220.

symbols is extremely useful. Mark Schorer's studies of Blake are valuable for showing him in relation to his own time. Schorer says of Blake's view of the function of sex in society: "His doctrine of sex . . . has point because he derived it from experience and drove it to its logical conclusions."[23] Other indebtednesses are recorded in the footnotes and in the bibliography.

It may be well to clear up one other point before proceeding with the body of this paper. Blake for all his pugnacity, humor, and radicalism is often regarded as an other-world saint, a child who has stepped from the pages of his Songs of Innocence. It may be felt that the following treatment of him is too earthy, that it overemphasizes his Fescennine qualities. Coleridge's criticism of "A Little Girl Lost" is well known. "I would have omitted it, not from a want of innocence in Blake but from the too probable want of it in many readers."[24] Similarly S. Foster Damon says, "When Blake spoke out, none could be bolder than he . . . Even now we who recognize his purity hardly dare repeat some of his doctrines."[25] The purity and innocence these statements imply Blake would have heartily resented.

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[23] Mark Schorer, "Swedenborg and Blake," Modern Philology, 36:177-78, November, 1938.

[24] Quoted in: Damon, op. cit., p. 283.

[25] Ibid., p. x.

Blake had an active sense of humor that tended to be ribald. The nearest literary relative of his "An Island in the Moon" is Mark Twain's "Fireside Conversations in the Time of Queen Elizabeth." His "When Klopstock England Defied" was unique in English until Joyce decided to record his opinion of contemporary Irish writers and publishers. When Joyce wrote "Thus I relieve their timid arses,/ Perform my office of Katharsis,"[26] he may have been recalling how Blake under similar circumstances wrote:

> When Klopstock England Defied
> . . . . . .
> Blake was giving his body ease
> At Lambeth under the poplar trees.
> . . . . . .
> If Blake could do this when he rose
> up from a shite.
> What could he do if he sat down to write.[27]

Now it is true that all this is quite innocent, but Blake would not have us believe that it is innocent because he, or Twain, or Joyce, are pure and sincere artists but because only a morbid idiot quite shut-up in corporeal understanding could object to it. Laughter and ribaldry are very much a part of life and "Every thing that lives is Holy."[28]

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[26] Levin, op. cit., p. 658.

[27] Blake, op. cit., p. 103.

[28] Ibid., p. 193.

CHAPTER II

BLAKE'S MARITAL EXPERIENCE

Blake's life, especially the early years of his marriage, which are all important to the purpose of this paper, is but little known and is obscured by a number of legends that have little or no basis. The myth of the vine that Blake refused to prune because its untrammeled luxuriance meant more to him than its fruit has been interesting and apposite but unfortunately it is untrue.[1] The story that Blake wished to bring a concubine into his household is in all probability a distortion of Mary Wollstonecraft's attempt to invade the domesticity of Blake's friend Fuseli.[2] The touching and oft-cited, "Do you pity me? Then I love you," comes to his biographers at fourth hand and with little support.[3] Blake has not lacked biographers who with this slender information supplemented by a special insight into his poetry have produced his exact state of mind at periods that would seem forever obscured to less penetrating intellects. Mr. Ellis in his The Real Blake seizes upon the anecdote of Blake's supposed proposal and tells us that what

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[1] Harold Bruce, William Blake in this World (London: Jonathon Cape, 1925), p. 5.

[2] Wilson, op. cit., p. 59.

[3] Bruce, op. cit., p. 22.

Blake meant by the eight words he spoke was:

> I, who have so lately loved, have already seen that you love me; and you are so pretty and dear that I have been sorry to think that I could not love you for such qualities--Polly Woods was pretty and dear--and I have often wished that I could find something different to love you for. I find it now in your pity.[4]

Further Ellis knows the exact circumstances under which Catherine had a miscarriage--a miscarriage that other critics completely overlooked.

> Catherine learned that she had married a giant. The volcanic energy with which Blake did all that roused his enthusiasm was now shown in the fire of new-married life lived at its highest and fullest. . . . In bitter misery because she had been snubbed at a party she lost the power to find her whole world in her husband's arms. His confident demands of rapture revolted her. . . . Blake lay down on his bed, choked with the love that was flung back on him. . . . At this a deadly fear and horror came over poor Catherine . . . she fell down in a heap by the bed. In that cry and that heavy fall . . . we have the sad knowledge why this vigorous and unstained young couple lived childless all their lives.[5]

Ellis bases most of this brilliant re-creation on the poem "Mary," which it is generally agreed, has reference to Mary Wollstonecraft and not to the Blakes. Miss Hamblen, who "in order to reach absolutely unbiased opinions about Blake . . . avoided reading any of those recent writers who also

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[4] Edwin J. Ellis, The Real Blake (New York: McClure, Phillips, and Company, 1907), p. 39.

[5] Ibid., p. 89 f.

have attempted a complete inquiry,"[6] got equally detailed results which are charitably summarized in Damon's introduction to her findings:

> Maybe we men have sentimentalized too much about poor Mrs. Blake, and have been dazzled by the successful solution of the problem. But Miss Hamblen unhesitatingly pronounces the marriage a mistake. Blake (like Milton) had hastily married [actually the engagement lasted a year] somebody who was intellectually and perhaps temperamentally unsympathetic. For mental companionship he was obliged to rely on his brother. Mr. Wicksteed has traced independently in the Manuscript Book the course of Blake's bitter struggles; his discoveries are confirmed by Miss Hamblen's hypothesis. It was a time of revolution; freedom from priestly bonds was being preached and practised in Blake's own circle; and Miss Hamblen reasonably believes the rumour that he intended to introduce a third person into his household. (Who was she? The name "Mary" which runs so significantly throughout his works points to Mary Wollstonecraft.) . . . Mrs. Blake, intellectually over-persuaded and desperately humiliated with her own barrenness, at last agreed. But her submission suddenly opened the proud young man's eyes to the fact that Kate as well as he was a human being. Love, he discovered was giving, not taking; and he set to work to make his marriage a true one--with such success that Mrs. Blake's light shines before the world as another perfect wife.[7]

These fantasies are quoted here for two reasons. First they show the danger of pressing conclusions too far without objective evidence. Second, they both do point to a period of stress in the early years of Blake's marriage. This, for what it is worth, may underline the results of

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[6] Emily S. Hamblen, On the Minor Prophecies of William Blake (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1939), p. xi.

[7] Ibid., p. ix.

the present investigation.

It is possible to deduce from the poetry of almost any poet the predominant moods active in his life. Moreover, the correlation of Blake's letters with Jerusalem and Milton demonstrates that he wove a good deal of autobiography into his poems. He considered himself a microcosm mirroring the macrocosm of humanity and did not hesitate to use the incidents of his life juxtaposed to other events of cosmic scale in his poetry. There is, therefore, justification for attempting to discover the general atmosphere of Blake's marriage from his artistic output.

Blake uses the sorrows of love in his early literary works, the Ossianic "Then she bore pale desire . . ." and "Woe cried the Muse . . .," and it is the central theme of perhaps the greatest lyric in Poetical Sketches. In these contexts it seems merely part of a literary convention.

> How sweet I roam'd from field to field,
> And tasted all the summer's pride
> 'Till I the prince of love beheld,
> Who in the sunny beams did glide!
> . . . . . .
> He caught me in his silken net,
> And shut me in his golden cage.
> He loves to sit and hear me sing,
> Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
> Then stretches out my golden wing,
> And mocks my loss of liberty.[8]

Mona Wilson protests against taking the "golden cage" as a

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[8] Blake, op. cit., p. 9.

symbol of marriage because "this would mean the superfluous insertion of a second little bird sulking in a corner of the cage."[9] However, in "An Island in the Moon" the symbol is fully identified.

> Hail Matrimony, made of Love,
> To thy wide gates how great a drove
> On purpose to be yok'd do come!
> Widows & maids & youths also,
> That lightly trip on beauty's toe,
> Or sit on beauty's bum.
>
> Hail, finger-footed lovely creatures!
> The females of our human natures,
> Formed to suckle all Mankind.
> 'Tis you that come in time of need;
> Without you we shoud never Breed,
> Or any comfort find.
>
> For if a Damsel's blind or lame,
> Or Nature's hand has crooked her frame,
> Or if she's deaf, or is wall eyed,
> Yet if her heart is well inclined,
> Some tender lover she shall find
> That panteth for a Bride.
>
> The universal Poultice this,
> To cure whatever is amiss
> In damsel or in widow gay.
> It makes them smile, it makes them skip,
> Like Birds just cured of the pip,
> They chirp, & hop away.
>
> Then come ye maidens, come ye swains,
> Come & be cured of all your pains
> In Matrimony's Golden cage.[10]

Unquestionably this is no longer a mere literary conceit. Blake has begun his battle report on the war between the

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[9] Wilson, op. cit., p. 28.

[10] Blake, op. cit., p. 684 f.

sexes. Schorer has said that, "The bulk of the poems in Songs of Experience are against the conventional restraints imposed on sexuality."[11] Most of the poems in the Rossetti Ms. treat of the same theme; and The Book of Thel and The Vision of the Daughters of Albion give the problem a mythical form, while The Gates of Paradise is subtitled: For the Sexes. Blake was frequenting radical and bluestocking circles in the years immediately following his marriage, and while it seems that he was often dissatisfied with his companions, many of their ideas are also his. Damon states Blake's position as follows:

> Believing that everyman was entitled to the ideal union, and following his beloved Milton in condemning any marriage which might hinder such a union, Blake taught and wrote as emphatically as he could that couples should live together and separate at pleasure. Even a plurality of paramours was not to be condemned.[12]

Such a stand could certainly be defended from Blake's writings, but it would miss the real motivating influence behind Blake's poetry of this period. Damon, himself, was first to recognize that Blake's celebration of sex had a very personal meaning and that Blake was a psychologist rather than a sociologist. It is true that Blake protested against the restraint that church and state placed on sexual freedom.

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[11] Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, op. cit., p. 238.

[12] Damon, op. cit., p. 99.

Songs of Experience opens with the lament of Earth:

> Starry Jealousy does keep my den:
> . . . . . .
> Can delight,
> Chain'd in night,
> The virgins of youth and morning bear?
>
> Does spring hide its joy
> When buds and blossoms grow?
> Does the sower
> Sow by night,
> Or the plowman in darkness plow?
>
> Break this heavy chain
> That does freeze my bones around.
> Selfish! vain!
> Eternal bane!
> That free Love with bondage bound.[13]

Beneath this poem Blake has drawn the Eden Serpent; his symbol for conventional, or priestly, morality. In "A Little Girl Lost" Blake points out that such false morality is of recent origin and, he hopes, evanescent.

> Children of the future Age
> Reading this indignant page,
> Know that in a former time
> Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime.[14]

In one of his greatest lyrics he states the terrible effect that the false codes of behavior are having on society:

> How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
> Every black'ning Church appalls;
> And the hapless Soldier's sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls.

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[13] Blake, op. cit., p. 65.

[14] Ibid., p. 78.

> But most thro' midnight streets I hear
> How the youthful Harlot's curse
> Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
> And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.[15]

To Blake, the Harlot is the crime of hypocritical morality: "The Jealousies become Murderous, uniting together in Rahab / A Religion of Chastity, forming a Commerce to sell Loves, / With Moral Law."[16] Thus it is easy to see that Blake objected strongly to the inhibitions forced on society by current morality. It is, however, less obvious that his principal quarrel with this code of conduct was that it prevented indiscriminate coupling, or that he believed free love would be a universal panacea. It seems likely that this interpretation is based on lingerings of the Wollstonecraft myth, Blake's special use of the word "jealousy," and certain obscure passages in the prophetic books. The latter two reasons will be investigated as soon as a counter-proposal has been advanced. Of course, the above interpretation is not wrong. Blake was sympathetic to free love as he was to any ideal or idyl of increased freedom. The poem "Mary" and others demonstrate this beyond cavil. The point is that this was not his personal quarrel with contemporary mores and that an emphasis upon it leads to an obscuring of Blake's central problem and to such definite absurdities as:

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[15] Ibid., p. 75.

[16] Ibid., p. 526.

> In theory Blake believed in promiscuity. His biographers tell us that in practice he was prevented by his wife's tears from introducing even one handmaiden into the household. So he comforted himself with dreams of Beulah.[17]

Blake had a somewhat different reason for rebelling against the strictures that middle-class mores were placing on the sex act. He made his rebellion on personal and psychological grounds rather than on social and timely ones which in the long run have given it a more universal applicability. Blake was not as angered by the factors in society that strove to give marriage legal permanence as he was by the factors that militated against its being a legal success. It is here suggested that Blake found Catherine prudish and timid; inhibited by the conventions of their England "where a Man dare hardly to embrace / His own Wife for the terrors of Chastity that they call / By the name of Morality."[18] It is too bad that so little is known of the home-life and early training of Catherine Boucher. That the daughter of a Battersea market-gardener in the later-half of the eighteenth century would either be a prude or an out-and-out

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[17] Denis Saurat, Blake and Modern Thought (New York: Dial Press, 1929), p. 28. For his biographical authority he cites: Wilson, op. cit., p. 59. In reality Miss Wilson says, "The only breath of scandal touching his life comes from a story, based perhaps on some wild saying of his own or reference to Mary Wollstonecraft's passion for Fuseli, that he proposed to add a concubine to his household."

[18] Blake, op. cit., p. 478.

wanton is likely, but direct evidence is lacking. This interpretation agrees with the many critics who have glimpsed a turbulence in the early married life of the Blakes, and the nature of this dissonance allows for the quick reconcilement into a perfect marriage that all biographers allot to the Blakes' later years. A tendency to polygamy, in practice or theory, would make for lasting difficulties. Further, this interpretation explains a larger body of the early poems and can be more easily developed into the psychological-cosmology of the later books. Finally, it posits a highly credible situation common to a great many marriages.

A large number of the poems of this period show Blake's outright disgust with the situation and make his point very plainly. Thus:

> I fear'd the fury of my wind
> Would blight all blossoms fair & true;
> And my sun it shin'd & shin'd
> And my wind it never blew.
>
> But a blossom fair or true
> Was not found on any tree;
> For all blossoms grew & grew
> Fruitless, false, tho' fair to see.[19]

Because of its constant blushing appearance Blake uses the Rose to symbolize the hypocrisy of the female and the Lilly to represent forthright enjoyment. "The modest Rose puts forth a thorn, / . . . While the Lilly white shall in Love delight, / Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty

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[19] Ibid., p. 89.

bright."[20] When this is kept in mind, perhaps the most explicit poem of the period is "My Pretty Rose-Tree."

> A Flower was offer'd to me,
> Such a flower as May never bore;
> But I said "I've a Pretty Rose-tree,"
> And I passed the sweet flower o'er.
>
> Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree,
> To tend her by day and by night;
> But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy,
> And her thorns were my only delight.[21]

It is the deceit and hypocrisy in the situation that anger Blake. "Your spring & your day are wasted in play, / And Your winter and night in disguise."[22]

> The look of love alarms
> Because 'tis fill'd with fire;
> But the look of soft deceit
> Shall win the lover's hire.[23]

Both sexes really desire sexual satisfaction but false morality (the side of the angels during this period) has placed the forthright man at a disadvantage and only hypocrites can enjoy the spoils of the strife.

> I asked a thief to steal me a peach:
> He turned up his eyes.
> I ask'd a lithe lady to lie her down:
> Holy & meek she cries.
>
> As soon as I went an angel came:
> He wink'd at the thief

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[20] Ibid., p. 74.

[21] Ibid., p. 73.

[22] Ibid., p. 71.

[23] Ibid., p. 100.

And smil'd at the dame,
And without one word spoke
Had a peach from the tree,
And 'twixt earnest & joke
Enjoy'd the Lady.[24]

Blake makes the point that such repression takes a terrible toll; Freud never stated his point more clearly.

Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,
But Desire Gratified
Plants fruits of life & beauty there.[25]

Blake contrasts the frank behavior of the Harlot with the hypocritical prudishness of their conventional sisters.

In a wife I would desire
What in whores is always found--
The lineaments of Gratified desire.[26]

The comparison seems to spring frequently to his mind. Such women are the victims of a false code and are superior to the women living under the yoke of law.[27]

That stony law I stamp to dust; and scatter
religion abroad
To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall
gather the leaves; . . .
That pale religious letchery, seeking Virginity,
May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty
The undefil'd, tho' ravish'd in her cradle
night and morn;

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[24] Ibid., p. 88.

[25] Ibid., p. 99.

[26] Loc. cit.

[27] Sometimes "moral" women are called harlots and the term is then an anathema: "But an honest joy / Does itself destroy / For a harlot coy." Blake, op. cit., p. 92.

For everything that lives is holy, life delights
in life;
Because the soul of sweet delight can never be
defil'd.[28]

This idea is also found in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn no longer,
in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons
of joy. Nor his accepted brethren--whom, tyrant,
he calls free--lay the bound or build the roof.
Nor pale religious letchery call that virginity
that wishes but acts not!
For every thing that lives is Holy.[29]

Blake utters his most unrestrained blasphemies in defense of the Harlot. He compares her case to that of Mary.

Mary was found in Adulterous bed;
Earth groan'd beneath, & Heaven above
Trembled at discovery of Love.
. . . . . .
Was Jesus Born of a Virgin Pure
With narrow soul & looks demure?
If he intended to take on Sin
The Mother should an Harlot been.[30]

Actually from Blake's relativistic viewpoint the sins of the Harlot are non-existent--a delusion of this degraded level of existence.

To The Accuser who is
The God of This World

Truly, My Satan, thou art but a Dunce,
And dost not know the Garment from the Man.
Every Harlot was a Virgin once,
Nor can'st thou ever change Kate into Nan.[31]

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[28] Ibid., p. 203.

[29] Ibid., p. 193.

[30] Ibid., p. 139.

[31] Ibid., p. 579.

Damon observes quite justly, "There is absolutely no evidence of any sort (beyond his own theories) that he ever was unfaithful to his wife or she to him."[32] But if Blake ever was unfaithful his theories suggest that he was driven to be so by his failure to find sexual satisfaction at home, and that he searched for it in the usual places. This is in no way unfair to Blake, who made no distinction between theory and practice, thought and act.

Sometimes Blake's indignation seems largely selfish and concerned with his own situation. He is plainly a partisan in the war between the sexes. He resents his enforced suffering.

> Thou hast a lap full of seed,
> And this is a fine country.
> Why dost thou not cast thy seed
> And live in it merrily?
>
> Shall I cast it in the sand
> And turn it into fruitful land?
> For on no other ground
> Can I sow my seed
> Without tearing up
> Some stinking weed.[33]

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[32] Damon, op. cit., p. 100.

[33] Blake, op. cit., p. 92. The "stinking weed" is a moral law. Some critics see in this poem the plight of the non-traditional artist. Blake tended to identify the situation of the ignored artist and the repulsed lover but the significance of "seed" is primarily sexual. Blake, op. cit., p. 241.

> When I found babes of bliss on my beds
> And bosoms of milk in my chambers
> Fill'd with eternal seed.

Blake tends to place the blame entirely with women. This has an important effect on the shaping of his cosmology. In one of his earliest and simplest uses of mythical figures, "To Nobodaddy" (a punning antithesis of "Father of All"), the restrictive God of this world is allied with women. In the later works this God is called Urizen (your reason) and his female counterpart is called Ahania, whose dual role has already been considered.

> Why art thou silent & invisible,
> Father of Jealousy?
> . . . . . .
> Why darkness & obscurity
> In all thy words and laws,
> That none dare eat the fruit but from
> The wily serpent's jaws?
> Or is it because Secresy gains females'
> loud applause?[34]

But in some of Blake's most beautiful poetry he takes a broader view. Women are still the cause of the suffering, but they are also its worst victims.

The Sick Rose

> O Rose, thou art sick!
> The invisible worm
> . . . . . .
> Has found out thy bed
> Of crimson joy,
> And his dark secret love
> Does thy life destroy.[35]

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[34] Ibid., p. 93.

[35] Ibid., p. 71. In the margin of this poem Blake drew a human figure inside a rose and struggling with the worm of Eden-Serpent morality.

Blake's sympathy with the female gives rise to a lyrical proselytizing resembling Herrick's "To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time." Death, as an ending of life, rather than a degradation of the senses, appears only in this context.

The Angel

I dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?
And that I was a maiden queen,
Guarded by an Angel mild;
Witless woe was ne'er beguil'd!

And I wept both night and day,
And he wip'd my tears away,
And I wept both day and night,
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings and fled;
Then the morn blush'd rosy red;
I dried my tears, & arm'd my fears
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again:
I was arm'd, he came in vain;
For the time of youth was fled,
And grey hairs were on my head.[36]

It is difficult not to think that an occasion on which Catherine wept and threatened to return to her mother is behind this poem, though Blake has made it applicable to any refusal of the joys of youth. During this same period Blake was reading Lavater's Aphorisms and annotating the margins. Schorer makes this interesting observation:

> Lavater had written, "As the shadow follows the body, so restless subtleness the female knave";

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[36] Ibid., p. 72.

> but Blake, who was thinking of the effect of the punishment of "thorns," crossed out "subtleness" and wrote "sullenness" over it.[37]

Another poem similar in theme but with more of the Memento Mori motif is:

> I told my love, I told my love,
> I told her all my heart,
> Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears--
> Ah, she doth depart.
>
> Soon as she was gone from me
> A traveller came by
> Silently, invisibly--
> O, was no deny.[38]

In some of his verse Blake is more brutal:

> An old maid early--e'er I knew
> Ought but the love that on me grew;
> And now I'm covered o'er & o'er
> And wish that I had been a whore.[39]

"The love that on me grew" refers to the love of self that cannot surrender itself to the lover and will be treated at greater length in this paper. In "Long John Brown & Little Mary Bell" Blake states his position in full. Both man and woman have need of sex; without it the man perishes and the woman dries up. The poem also illustrates Blake's Rabelaisian qualities at their best or worst.

> Little Mary Bell had a Fairy in a Nut,
> Long John Brown had the Devil in his Gut;

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[37] Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, op. cit., p. 242.

[38] Blake, op. cit., p. 86.

[39] Ibid., p. 101.

Long John Brown lov'd Little Mary Bell,
And the Fairy drew the Devil into the Nut-shell.

Her Fairy Skip'd out & her Fairy Skip'd in;
He laugh'd at the devil saying "Love is a Sin."
The Devil he rag'd & the Devil he was wroth,
And the Devil enter'd into the Young Man's broth.

He was soon in the Gut of the loving Young Swain,
. . . . . .
The Fairy skip'd about in his Glory, Joy & Pride,
And he laugh'd at the Devil till poor John Brown died.

Then the Fairy skip'd out of the old Nut shell,
And woe & alack for Pretty Mary Bell!
For the Devil crept in when the Fairy skip'd out,
And there goes Miss Bell with her fusty old nut.[40]

The grotesque description of the sexual act that occupies the first six lines of the poem gives way to some interesting but difficult moralizing. Damon finds that "The Devil represents the puritan conscience, while the Fairy is the joy of life. In a strain of brutal contempt, Blake retells the old tale of Love denied, and kills off the man and withers the woman to point his moral."[41] This is in general correct, but Damon overlooks the ambiguous meaning of the fairies throughout his interpretation of Blake.[42] In order to make his explanation fit here he was forced to assume that "Blake undoubtedly meant the line to read:

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[40] Ibid., p. 121.

[41] Damon, op. cit., p. 300.

[42] Damon does note that the fairies are creatures of Urizen, who is the God of false Morality. Damon, op. cit., p. 433.

'He laugh'd at the Devil's saying, "Love is a Sin."'"[43]
The fairy, like almost every symbol in Blake, has good and bad aspects. Sometimes, as in the opening stanzas of Europe, the fairy does represent the beneficent aspects of woman's sex, but it should be noted that in this case he is in the control of a man. Oftener the fairy represents coyness and false modesty, as it does in this case. Sometimes these coquetries are harmless and even necessary:

> A Fairy leapt upon my knee
> Singing & dancing merrily;
> I said, "Thou thing of patches, rings,
> "Pins, Necklaces, & such like things,
> Disguiser of the Female Form,
> "Thou paltry, gilded, poisonous worm!"
> Weeping, he fell upon my thigh,
> And thus in tears did soft reply:
> "Knowest thou not, O Fairies' Lord!
> How much by us Contemn'd, Abhorr'd,
> Whatever hides the Female form
> That cannot bear the mental storm?
> Therefore in Pity still we give
> Our lives to make the Female live;
> And what would turn into disease
> We turn to what will joy and please.[44]

In the former poem, however, the coyness, masquerading as religious morality, is too prolonged and defeats itself. The devil, like the devils in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, represents forthright passion, but thwarted he turns into poison exactly as Freud would have it, for "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires."[45]

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[43] Ibid., p. 300.

[44] Blake, op. cit., p. 104.

[45] Ibid., p. 185.

The male passion destroyed, there is no further use for the fairy, and it is replaced by the bitter frustration that the male suffered.

Blake uses "jealousy" as a key word in his treatment of marital relations. For Blake the word has connotations rather different from the standard ones. Saurat points out: "One virtue against which Blake is most persistently is chastity; and consequently jealousy is to him an unbearable thing and the source of untold woe."[46] But Blake's jealousy is not the possessive attitude of one person toward another. It is rather a refusal to enter whole-heartedly into the sexual act; it is the sin of "Selfhood." In their discussion of Sex in Blake's symbolism Sloss and Wallis comment on "torments of love and jealousy" as follows:

> This . . . in relation to the intellectual content of the symbol clearly alludes to the sterility and painfulness of the divided spirit. And by a process of assimilation between the symbolic and the logical statements, "Sex" comes to have reference to the fear of passion for which Blake blames women many times, from the Visions and the lyrics to Jerusalem.[47]

Northrop Frye also suggests the meaning of "jealousy."

> The selfhood cannot love in the sense of establishing a kinship with the beloved; it can regard the latter only as a possession . . . Mastery over woman produces the same morbidity and imaginative

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[46] Saurat, op. cit., p. 20.

[47] Sloss and Wallis, op. cit., p. 222.

> idleness as mastery over man, and Blake uses the word "jealousy" to cover the selfhood's attitude to both.[48]

As a matter of fact Blake believed that the subordination of female to male is the proper state of affairs. The female's assertion of individual identity is one of the destructive forces covered by "jealousy." Frye makes this point: "The refusal of the beloved object to surrender this independence, which of course is really man's inability to make it do so, is the female will."[49] Connected with the idea of jealousy or rather with its opposite are the passages that speak of a man's female counterpart bringing "maidens to her husband." Critics usually consider this to be an advocacy of polygamy by Blake, and this is what Saurat means by saying that Blake "comforted himself with dreams of Beulah." Actually this is a part of Blake's doctrine of inspiration through sexuality, which will be further investigated in this paper. Here is a passage in point:

> When I first Married you, I gave you 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

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[48] Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 72.

[49] Ibid., p. 263.

In jealousy & unlovely in my sight, because thou hast
  cruelly
Cut off my loves in fury till I have no love left
  for thee.
Thy love depends on him thou lovest, & on his dear loves
Depend thy pleasure, which thou hast cut off by jealousy.
. . . . . .
She shall relent in fear of death; She shall begin
  to give
Her maidens to her husband, delighting in his delight,[50]
And then & then alone begins the happy Female joy. . .

There are moot points in Blake that must be left to individual interpretation, but Blake was hardly advocating that England be reconstructed after the Turkish pattern[51] so that the number-one wife will depend "on his dear loves" for her pleasure. This is simply a mythicized form of Blake's complaint that by repulsing her husband's love a woman causes him great suffering and brings herself near to "a vegetating death," while by really aligning herself with him and his interests she can do great good. The same concept appears in Jerusalem, where Beulah (an ideal state) is described as the place "where every woman delights to give her maiden to her husband. . . ," and in The Vision of the Daughters of Albion.[52]

Two of Blake's prophetic books are devoted exclusively

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[50] Blake, op. cit., p. 419.

[51] Blake did sometimes commend the "loose bible" of Mohammedanism as being less degrading to the senses than the harsh Christian ethic. Cf.: Damon, op. cit., p. 127.

[52] Blake, op. cit., p. 200.

to the problems of sex. His sympathy with woman's problems is manifested most plainly in Thel, which portrays the horror which the flesh and the acts of the flesh must hold for the innocent, and in The Vision of the Daughters of Albion, in which it is the man who is weighed down with false morality and the woman is eager to escape from this bondage into sexual bliss. Fortunately Blake uses in these books a pantheon of allegorical figures which are easily understood in their own context. These poems disclose their theme immediately and furnish a key to Blake's more complex writings.

Thel is a double allegory. Beneath the surface story, probably the most poetically told of all Blake's "Prophetic Books," is a metaphor in which the initiation into the sexual act is compared to the soul's initiation into mundane life and bodily habitation. Thel (anagram of Lethe?[53]) lives in a Platonic world of the unborn. To her come intimations of mortality. The Lilly,[54] symbol of sex in its freest and highest development presents itself to Thel. "I am a wat'ry weed, / And I am very small. . . / Yet I am

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[53] Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, op. cit., p. 235.

[54] Blake writes "Lilly of the valley." His capitalization indicates that this is not the flower of that name but that the Lilly is a dweller in the "Vales of Har."

visited from heaven."[55] Thel admires the beauty and dignity that the Lilly gains through self-sacrifice, "Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'ertired . . . / Thy wine doth purify the golden honey."[56] Yet Thel wonders what will happen to herself in the world of generation; she sees it but as a departure from reality. "I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place?"[57] The Lilly sends her to the cloud which, especially in Blake's drawings, represents the dividing area between a higher and lower sphere of existence. The cloud, too, shows her the glory of self-sacrifice, but she is not convinced that she is capable of it and seeks further information of the worm (not used here in the sense of a corrupting inhibition, but simply of life on a low plane) and finally of the clod of clay. The clod conducts her to the world of embodiment. This, of course, has reference to the Biblical story in which God fashions the body out of clay. Thel beholds her own grave-plot or body, for descent into our world is a degradation of the senses and a kind of death. As Plato said, "Perhaps we are now in reality dead. . . and the body is our sepulchre."[58] Mark Schorer notes

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[55] Blake, op. cit., p. 163.

[56] Loc. cit.

[57] Ibid., p. 164.

[58] Plato, "Gorgias," The Dialogues of Plato (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 415.

"a more mundane paradox, the Elizabethan connotations of sexual intercourse in the word 'dying.'"[59] Thel is repulsed by the prisoning of the senses that is entailed by this birth into death and by the cruelties connected with love:

> Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
> Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?[60]

The "curtain of flesh" is both the maiden-head and the entire body and Thel, unable to endure such an existence, flees. But in The Vision of the Daughters of Albion Oothoon, soul of America, and therefore a personification of freedom, plucks a Marygold and by this act, symbolic of the sexual, enters into the captivity of Puritan England. The Daughters of Albion, enslaved womanhood, add a choral lament for her tragedy. Social mores separate her from her beloved, Theotormon, and enchain her, while he sees her as a harlot and is miserable because he cannot forgive her. Oothoon condemns the kind of Love that exists in such a restricted society: "Such is self-love that envies all, that envies all, a creeping skeleton / With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed."[61] She tells of

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[59] Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, op. cit., p. 235.

[60] Blake, op. cit., p. 165.

[61] Ibid., p. 199.

the glorious and productive love she could bring to her beloved were she free of restraint:

> But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,
> And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold.
> I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
> In lovely copulation, bliss on bliss, with Theotormon:
> Red as the rosy morning, lustful as the first born beam,
> Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous cloud
> Come in the heaven of generous love, nor selfish blightings bring. . . .
> Arise, and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy![62]

But such a fruition is well nigh hopeless under the reign of law.

> Thus every morning wails Oothoon; but Theotormon sits
> Upon the margin'd ocean conversing with shadows dire.
> The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs.[63]

Blake states the evils attendant upon birth into this death, and he suggests why it must occur. Descent into embodiment and selfhood is always a degeneration of the senses and as near to "evil" as anything in Blake's system, but sometimes the lack of self-hood demands self-sacrifice. Christ puts on "robes of blood" and Milton descends to advise Blake how to tell man of regeneration. Thus the cloud tells Thel why it sacrifices itself to fructify the Earth: "When I pass away / It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and

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[62] Ibid., p. 200.

[63] Loc. cit.

raptures holy."[64] Moreover the descent into the body is not always bad; sometimes it is a part of the road to salvation.

> O holy Generation, Image of regeneration! . . .
> Birthplace of the Lamb of God Incomprehensible!
> The Dead despise & scorn thee & cast thee out as accursed,
> Seeing the Lamb of God in thy gardens & palaces
> Where they desire to place the Abomination of desolation.[65]

The end decoration to Thel shows winged loves guiding the dragon of the passions, and Thel's motto is significant:

> Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
> Or wilt thou ask the Mole?
> Can wisdom be put in a silver rod?
> Or love in a golden bowl.[66]

The first two lines answer the last two--degenerate as the sexual organs are, they can still open new and necessary vistas of experience and bring about their own improvement. This is one of Blake's most important doctrines and it has its roots in a far more significant phase of his marriage than that we have been discussing. Mona Wilson states the influence Catherine came to exercise on Blake's ideas:

> She was "My sweet Shadow of Delight," the complement, the manifestation of Blake's theory that sex is a part of the "division" from which the visible world has its being, and that the "Eternal Man"

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[64] Ibid., p. 164.

[65] Ibid., p. 439.

[66] Ibid., p. 163.

> unites in a single perfection the attributes of both sexes.[67]

If the early years of Blake's marriage showed him something of the inferiority of this world, the later years showed him the way to a better one.

Whether by his dialectic or by his sympathetic understanding Blake overcame Catherine's false modesty and together they formed a blissful and productive union.

> 'Tis the marriage ring
> Makes each fairy a king.
> So a fairy sung. . . .
> But in my hat caught
> He soon shall be taught.
> Let him laugh, let him cry.
> He's my butterfly;
> For I've pull'd out the sting
> Of the marriage ring.[68]

Indeed so successful was B lake that in a manuscript written around 1810 he wrote:

> Grown old in Love from seven till Seven times Seven,
> I oft have wish'd for Hell for Ease from Heaven.[69]

All Blake's biographers have noted the important part Blake's wife played in his life and work. He could hardly write unless she was beside him. There is ample evidence that theirs was a camaraderie based on unselfconscious sensuousness. If the possibly apocryphal story of Catherine

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[67] Wilson, op. cit., p. 16.

[68] Blake, op. cit., p. 98.

[69] Ibid., p. 125.

and William's enacting Milton's Paradise Lost in their summer-house be disregarded,[70] there remain sundry jottings of Blake's. There is for instance the picture, usually accepted as portraying the Blakes, in which a woman is disrobing on the edge of a bed occupied by a man resembling Blake. Blake has scribbled on it:

> When a Man has Married a Wife, he finds out whether
> Her knees & elbows are only glewed together.[71]

It gives rise to an amusing speculation that though Blake once wrote:

> If I e'er Grow to Man's Estate,
> O, Give to me a Woman's fate!
> May I govern all, both great & small,
> Have the last word & take the wall.[72]

the male figure is here pictured on the coveted inside of the bed. In a memo dated August 1, 1807, Blake wrote:

> My wife was told by a Spirit[73] to look for her fortune by opening by chance a book which she had in her hand: it was Bysshe's Art of Poetry. She open'd the following:
>
> I saw 'em kindle with desire
> While with soft sighs they blew the fire
> Saw the approaches of their joy,
> He growing more fierce & she less coy,
> Saw how they mingled melting rays,
> Exchanging Love a thousand ways.

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[70] Cf. Wilson, op. cit., p. 68.

[71] Reproduced in: Ibid., p. 16.

[72] Blake, op. cit., p. 659.

[73] When Blake speaks of the dictation of spirits he almost always means his own inclinations.

> Kind was the force on every side,
> Her new desire she could not hide,
> Nor would the shepherd be denied.
> The blessed minute he pursu'd
> Till she, transported in his arms,
> Yields to the conqueror all her charms. . . .
> Like charmers thrice they did invoke
> The God & thrice new Vigor took.
> BEHN.

> I was so pleased with her luck that I thought I would try my own. . . .[74]

"I've a wife I love & that loves me,"[75] wrote Blake and he allowed conventional frigidity to distort his love not one whit. In Lavater's Aphorisms he read: "He submits to be seen under a microscope, who suffers himself to be caught in a fit of passion." Beneath Blake added, "& such a one I dare love."[76]

Sex and the sexual act had a special significance for Blake--a meaning that fused it inextricably with his metaphysical doctrine that seeing is being. S. Foster Damon seems to have been the first critic to realize this factor:

> I believe that Blake was not emphasizing the sexual act entirely for its own sake. I think he found that it also induced the proper mental state in which to write poetry or imagine pictures. The ideal conditions for this are a perfectly relaxed

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[74] Blake, op. cit., p. 694. The poetess is Mrs. Aphra Behn. Blake seldom quoted unless it was to take objections, but he copied out even more of this poem than is re-quoted here. It is amazing how much of its calculated eroticism seems to refer to Blake's metaphysical theories.

[75] Ibid., p. 128.

[76] Ibid., p. 731.

> body and a stimulated mind. The trouble with drugs and alcohol is that they generally deaden the mind with the body. So I believe that Blake, in the dreamy post-coitional state, found an unusual effervescence of ideas; and this was what he meant by passing into the World of the Poetic Imagination by the Fifth window.
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> This seems to be the only possible explanation of the 38th plate of Milton . . . On the rocky shore just above the sea of Time and Space lie a man and woman. Her head is upon his bosom; he gazes upward at the descending Eagles of Genius, unseen by her.[77]

Eagles are unquestionably symbols of genius in Blake's writings. "When Thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head!"[78] he wrote in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. This might easily serve for the caption of the picture in Milton. When Oothoon fears she is unworthy of her lover Theotormon she calls upon his Eagles:

> Kings of the sounding air,
> Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect
> The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent
> breast.[79]

The fifth sense--touch--Blake identifies with sex and repeats again and again that it is the least degraded on this level of existence. Thus Tiriel (Moral Law) destroys four of his daughters (the senses) and only the fifth remains to lead him back to the realm of poetry. In the introduction to Europe a fairy sitting on a

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[77] Damon, op. cit., p. 102.

[78] Blake, op. cit., p. 184.

[79] Ibid., p. 195.

"streaked tulip" (the symbolism is obvious) sings of the senses:

> Five windows light the cavern'd Man: thro' one
> he breathes the air;
> Thro' one hears music of the spheres; thro' one
> the eternal vine
> Flourishes, that he may recieve the grapes; thro'
> one can look
> And see small portions of the eternal world that
> ever groweth;
> Thro' one himself pass out what time he please;
> but he will not. . . .[80]

As in the poem on the wedding ring already quoted, the fairy is caught and exclaims, "My master, I am yours! command me for I must obey." The poet asks for a glimpse of the eternal world and the fairy in return for "love thoughts . . . and sparkling poetic fancies" dictates verses to him. This passage is Blake's allegorical statement of the theory Damon suggests.

There is another facet in Blake's sexual epistemology that probably sprang from his relationship with Catherine. Just as Blake avoided the mistake of the psychologists who made much of sublimation,[81] he never confused the sex act and

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[80] Ibid., p. 212.

[81] Lionel Trilling, "Sex and Science: The Kinsey Report," Partisan Review, April, 1948, p. 464. The prudery of Victorian England went forward with scientific hygiene; and both in Europe and in America the sexual mind was haunted by the idea of degeneration, apparently by analogy with the second law of thermal dynamics--here is the enlightened liberal opinion in 1896. "The effects of venereal disease have been treated at length, but the amount of vitality burned out through lust has never been and, perhaps, never can be adequately measured." (Article: "Degeneration" in The Encyclopedia of Social Reform.)

its pleasures with the fact of reproduction. Like the modern biologist he realized that the connection between them was a coincidence,[82] fortunate for the propagation of species but without ethical significance. Blake believed that the world of reproduction was of lower order than the sexual act. He labeled the first, "generation"; the second, "regeneration." Therefore he says: "Joys impregnate, Sorrows bring forth."[83] Oothoon laments the lot of the woman in this world, forced

> All the night
> To turn the wheel of false desire, and longings
> that wake her womb
> To the abhorred birth of cherubs in human form,
> That live a pestilence & die a meteor, & are
> no more;
> 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
> Ere yet his eyelids can behold the arrows of
> the day.[84]

This is one of the least practical of Blake's doctrines, but it shows his logical mind. Many Romantics believed that the child came into this world from paradise, but B lake alone saw that it must be a crime to drag the innocent down. Even from a practical standpoint "unripe births" can lead to moral stigma or economical hardship, and Blake's

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[82] Animal organisms exist in which the sexual act takes place but is entirely divorced from reproduction.

[83] Blake, op. cit., p. 184.

[84] Ibid., p. 198.

doctrine is surely superior to that which would foist on humanity an ethical warrant wrung from a biological coincidence. Unquestionably this conception of Blake's is connected with the childlessness of Catherine, whether by an *a priori* or *post facto* linkage it is impossible to determine.

It may safely be concluded that Blake drew certain concepts from his marital experience, or that his experience expanded and brought into prominence certain germinating ideas. These ideas may be summarized as follows. First, Blake's rebellion against the mores of his time was given impetus. He became convinced that "The King & the Priest must be tied in a tether / Before two virgins can meet together."[85] If he had always believed that Good and Evil as such did not exist, but only expression and repression, his marital experience led him to see that sexual repression was the most prevalent and most damaging.

He became thoroughly aware that love misused was a bondage of the senses.

> Love seeketh only self to please
> To bind another to its delight
> Joys in another's loss of ease
> And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.[86]

Further, Blake identified this kind of selfish love with the female element in humanity. He believed that when a

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

woman strove to bend a man to her will both stagnated. "Time is a Man, space is a Woman, & her masculine portion is Death."[87] Especially was Blake prejudiced against the maternal aspect of womanhood.

> Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,
> With cruelty didst mould my Heart, . . .
> The Death of Jesus set me free:
> Then what have I to do with thee?[88]

In contrast to the cult of Mary, Blake emphasizes the scene in the temple in which Christ told his parents that he must be about his Father's business. He says of Christ: "His maternal humanity must be put off."[89]

On the positive side, Blake's belief in the right of the individual to mold his own rules of conduct and in the essential dignity of the physical were strengthened. From the physical and mental companionship he found in marriage he drew inspiration. Therefore he deduced that the sexual act cleansed the organs of vision.

> For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life; and when he does the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas now it appears finite & corrupt. This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.[90]

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[87] Ibid., p. 649.

[88] Ibid., p. 187.

[89] Ibid., p. 196.

[90] Ibid., p. 187.

Finally, and most important, Blake was convinced that only a complete merger of man and woman into an integrated organism could result in the salvation of either. Separated they wage a war of cruelty and oppression upon each other but united they could achieve paradise and on the mundane level the sexual act was the closest approach to this unity. For these reasons his most reiterated tenet was, "Take thy bliss, O Man . . . For everything that lives is Holy."[91]

It remains for this paper to show the roles these concepts played in Blake's completed cosmology. Before this is done, however, another important problem in Blake criticism, if not in Blake, must be treated.

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[91] Ibid., p. 196.

CHAPTER III

BLAKE'S MYSTICISM

To scholars Blake has always appeared to be something other than a poet--whether less or more depended on the individual. Critics have searched avidly for a pattern into which he could be fitted--for a label that could be slapped on him before filing him away in the peculiar limbo of scholarly endeavor where go all poets, good and bad, when they have served as the subject for a sufficient number of learned articles. The handy label "mad" was the first to be applied and it did not begin to come unstuck till the first years of the present century. As a label it at least had the value of preventing Blake from being carelessly shelved with a miscellaneous assortment of lesser Romantic poets. It did indicate the existence of important differences. The next handy label to be affixed was "mystic." This was progress of a sort, and reasoning from the standpoint that "The key to everything Blake ever wrote or painted lies in his mysticism,"[1] S. Foster Damon was able to make the most successful comprehensive interpretation of Blake to date. But scholarship made a supreme effort and defined the indefinable. Helen White examined the writings of a number of literate mystics and decided that

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[1] Damon, op. cit., p. 1.

Blake had again been mislabelled. She found that Blake's principal beliefs were in the fellowship of all life, the necessity for mutual forgiveness, the restrictiveness of moral law, the glory of passion. She noted quite correctly that "the source of active power in Blake's universe is distinctly and characteristically anthropocentric," and she concluded:

> Much as we want a prophet for this modern world . . . we must admit that William Blake is not the man . . . he is not a great mystic in any sense of the word that means anything; he is a prophet, interesting and suggestive, but very imperfect and incomplete.[2]

Later critics have tended to follow Miss White's lead but happily after the manner of Schorer: "Miss White seemed eager to separate the mystics from the dubious company of Blake, whereas I . . . am eager to separate Blake from the dubious company of the mystics."[3] These later critics have not been dogmatic but allow that in some ways Blake was mystical, while in most ways he was not. This is really very close to Damon's point of view. Schorer states that Blake was "Mystagogical" and sums up his stand:

> Expression is at best an unsatisfactory by-product of mysticism whereas poetry is expression itself.

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[2] Helen White, The Mysticism of William Blake. University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature. (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1927), p. 133.

[3] Mark Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, op. cit., p. 47.

> Poetical insights may be about some phase of mysticism . . . as they may be about anything else; however, they are not in any final sense mystical.[4]

Northrop Frye comes to much the same conclusion:

> "Mysticism," when the word is not simply an elegant variant of "misty" or "mysterious," means a certain kind of religious technique difficult to reconcile with anyone's poetry. . . . Most of the poets generally called mystics might better be called visionaries, which is not quite the same thing.[5]

But Blake's poetry concerns itself almost entirely with a "technique" very reminiscent of the mystic technique, and it is difficult to see why this technique would interest him or how he could give it such subjective feeling unless he had a great deal in common with the mystics.

The reason this difficult point must be discussed in this paper is that a certain school of mystic poetry exists. This school uses sexual metaphors or symbols for very definite reasons. If Blake is one of them, the use of sex in his poetry is due to the want of a better terminology, and when he uses the words of human love and emotion we are to understand them as substitutes for non-existent words of divine love and emotion. There is, of course, another interpretation that holds mysticism to be a perversion and

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[4] Mark Schorer, "Blake as a Religious Poet," Sewanee Review, 54:249, April, 1946.

[5] Frye, op. cit., p. 7.

such a vocabulary to be the unavoidable outbreak of psychopathic eroticism. A balanced view would be that there are mystics and mystics; John of the Cross belongs to the former group and perhaps Crashaw belongs to the latter. Blake belongs to neither. On the other hand, if Blake is denied all affiliation with the mystics, he becomes much harder to understand. It is therefore necessary to go into this problem more deeply.

Actually there is no possibility of defining mysticism. Only the mystic, granted his existence, could know what it is, and he could not even communicate it to a brother initiate, when embodied in "Self." Evelyn Underhill was greatly respected as an authority on the subject and is usually quoted in any discussion of Blake's mysticism, but Miss Underhill changed from a doctrine of personal interpretation to one of church authority, and her views on mysticism changed to fit. Mr. Damon succeeded admirably in explaining the kind of man Blake was, and if he chooses to call this kind of man a mystic he is irrefutable. The purpose here, however, is to view Blake's "mysticism" externally--to see it in relation to the work of other artists. The pragmatic approach of William James is best suited to this.

James treats of mysticism from a broad view-point and undoubtedly includes experiences of a very low mystical

order, but his conclusions demand respect. He ignores the narrow and pedantic thinking that has obscured the field:

> In the Christian Church there have always been mystics. Although many of them have been viewed with suspicion, some have gained favor in the eyes of authorities. The experiences of these have been treated as precedents, and a codified system of mystical theology has been based upon them in which everything legitimate finds its place . . . I confess that the subdivisions and names which we find in Catholic books seem to me to represent nothing objectively distinct. So many men, so many minds: I imagine that these experiences can be as infinitely varied as are the idiosyncrasies of individuals.[6]

James characterizes the mystic state as possessing two distinctive qualities and two less essential but frequently occurring ones.

First: Ineffability--The transcendence of description. Blake was forced to invent an entirely new synthetic vocabulary to convey his meanings which would certainly qualify them as ineffable. Moreover Blake wrote of the way to fulfillment, more than of the fulfillment itself. His writing is more akin to The Cloud of Unknowing than to the visions of St. Teresa.

Second: Noetic Quality. James says of the mystic states:

> They are states of insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance

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[6] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 397.

> and importance, all inarticulate though they remain. As a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority.[7]

This goes a long way toward explaining what Blake means by the superiority of "imagination" to "reason." "A firm conviction that a thing is so"[8] is Blake's only criterion for true prophecy.

Of James's further characteristics, the third--Transcience--is applicable to Blake:

> Now I a fourfold vision see,
> And a fourfold vision is given to me;
> 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And threefold in soft Beulah's night
> And twofold always. May God us keep
> From single vision & Newton's sleep.[9]

Of the fourth--passivity--James says:

> Although the oncoming of the mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations . . . as by fixing the attention, or going through other bodily performances, . . . yet when the characteristic consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels his own will in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.[10]

Blake used to stare into the fire in order to produce visions, but the emphasis on action and willing found in his writing would seem to exclude him here. Moreover, his practices were far from the mortifying or ascetic kind usually

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[7] Ibid., p. 371.

[8] Blake, op. cit., p. 186.

[9] Ibid., p. 861.

[10] James, op. cit., p. 372.

associated with mysticism. However, the following extract from one of his poems shows exactly the kind of reaction that James described and the whole poem would have to be included in the most rigid canon of mystical verse.

> My eyes more and more
> Like a sea without shore
> Continue Expanding
> The Heavens commanding
> Till the Jewels of Light,
> Heavenly men beaming bright,
> Appear'd as One Man,
> Who complacent began
> My limbs to infold
> In his beams of bright gold;
> Like dross purg'd away
> All my mire and clay.
> Soft consum'd in delight
> In his bosom Sun bright
> I remain'd.[11]

Perhaps the most convincing proof that Blake was closely akin to the mystics was his attitude toward death. To Blake death was only an illusion to which the embodied senses were subject. Death is an enormous and pervasive fact. Reason cannot circumvent it; philosophy can only give consolation; religion can only give hope; but the mystic experience, only the mystic experience, gives utter and joyous confidence in the eternal life.

Yet Blake differed from most mystics in two important ways. The goal he sought and the way he sought it are without parallel in Christian mysticism. Blake's goal is

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[11] Blake, op. cit., p. 847.

an elevated humanity that he himself expects to achieve. Damon said of this phase of Blake's mysticism, "His God is not some dim and awful principle; he is a friend who descends and raises Man till Man himself is God," or as Blake put it, "Thou art a man, God is no more, / Thine own Humanity learn to Adore."[12] Because of the nature of Blake's goal his seeking was never a rejecting. He did not mortify the body to purify the spirit. The physical was itself part of the way to fulfillment. For this reason sex as such is important in his system and can be taken at its face value rather than as metaphor in his writings.

The problem of his mysticism hinges on the degree of emotional empathy Blake felt for his seemingly abstract goal. Some of his writings, of which the poem just quoted is perhaps the most striking example indicate that the degree of emotional involvement was considerable. Though this may seem strange it should be remembered that the sexual approach to God is age-old. It is concealed in the "Sephiroth"--the mystic tree of the cabbalists. The diagram of Dante's cosmology repeats the age-old symbol of circle and triangle that Blake uses in his eighteenth engraving of Job. The nimbus with which the Christian pantheon is decked is a variation of these same symbols. The tradition of the

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[12] Blake, op. cit., p. 138.

physical attack on the celestial is as old as the rites of the Mother Goddess that formed perhaps the first religion of Europe. Perhaps Blake had penetrated to an old tradition of mysticism. Since mankind does not seek for God in time but in eternity, there is no assurance that the most recent religious conventions are the best. Perhaps Blake is in the true tradition, perhaps not. He must be given the benefit of the doubt because his way brought him true happiness, but his philosophical system must be evaluated on more objective grounds.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEX FACTOR IN BLAKE'S COSMOLOGY

Blake's complete cosmology is incredibly difficult to extract from its embodiment in the "Prophetic Books." On first reading, the poems seem a complex phantasmagoria of amorphous, shifting creatures almost devoid of any significance and certainly not capable of yielding a logical and coherent metaphysic. Almost the only comparable artistic creations are the fantastic demon-studded canvases of Hieronymus Bosch. Indeed this comparison is a revealing one. The following description of Bosch's work could serve equally well as a guide to Blake's:

> With Bosch, iconography and plastic sense are so intimately welded together that it is impossible to analyze them apart. His world is not a tangible one allowing of the reactions of sensibility: it is a world of symbols and allusions which sensibility embodies in shapes and appearances. While it is usual to judge an artist according to his realization of forms and space, in order to get at the deep structure of Bosch's work, we must follow his moral subjects bristling with symbols and allusions. With him, form and space are mere servants subservient to, and blended with, iconographic structure, in a unity of conception and execution which ever makes for masterpieces.[1]

By attempting to give primarily conceptual material an artistic form, Blake, like Bosch, achieved an art so idiosyncratic that it can scarcely be recognized as such and

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[1] Jaques Combe, Hieronimus Bosch (Paris: Pierre Tisne, 1946), p. 21.

thus disguised his concepts almost beyond recognition. Philosopher and art critic are inclined to abandon them as hopelessly outside the canon, but the obvious genius present in their work fascinates their severest critics. Though Blake, again like Bosch, chose his symbols from the obscure bypaths of Gnosticism, Alchemy, and the Caballa, they do at length surrender a definite and fairly consistent meaning. Viewed in the light of this meaning, Blake's aesthetic value is enhanced. By patient unraveling of individual symbols, critics have been able to discover the general outline of Blake's theory. To these critics[2] this chapter is largely indebted. Blake's cosmos is here treated in broad, and therefore not strictly accurate terms. The principal objective is to indicate the large part sex plays in it. A detailed examination of all Blake's sexual symbolism and imagery would be a rewarding but exhausting task. Suffice it to say that almost every member of his pantheon includes a sexual factor in its meaning.

Strikingly enough, both Blake and Bosch have superficially the same message. Bosch's "Temptations" are peopled with an unreal and distorted nightmare progeny, the work of the devil, centered around a meditating saint.

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[2] The principal indebtedness is to Damon and to Sloss and Wallis. Much of the interpretation in this chapter is original but it would have been impossible without their background.

This is a visual allegory meant to drive home the fact that the world is an evil distraction and that salvation lies in rising above it to the contemplation of reality. (It is interesting that Blake and Bosch concerned themselves primarily with depicting the unreal, and highly significant that this portion of their work is the most effective.) This is also a large part of Blake's message though he seemed to believe in an approach more active than contemplation. He, too, informs us that the senses are deceivers and that we must elevate our vision. But Blake does not use the paraphernalia of medieval Catholicism; his is not really an iconography but an anthropography. He would not disregard the senses, but purify them. Satan is not an active deceiver but a name for the lowest depths to which the senses can sink. "Opacity was named Satan, Contraction was named Adam."[3] The world is not a work of Evil, for the true seer beholds "All alive the world, where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy."[4]

Perhaps it is unfair to Blake to emphasize the ancient and esoteric in his writings. "The sun's light, when he unfolds it / Depends on the organ that beholds it,"[5] is

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[3] Blake, op. cit., p. 389.

[4] Ibid., p. 212.

[5] Ibid., p. 568.

This is a visual allegory which is drive home the fact that the world is an evil distraction, a vast salvation lies in rising above it to the contemplation of reality. It is interesting that Blake and Brook concerned themselves primarily with depicting the natural, and highly significant that this portion of their work is the most effective.)

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Perhaps it is unfair to Blake to emphasize the mystic and esoteric in his writings. "The sun's light, when he unfolds it / Doubts on the ocean that beholds it."[6] As

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[3] Blake, op. cit., p. 88.

[4] Ibid., p. 412.

[5] Ibid., p. 88.

strongly reminiscent of Berkeley. Blake's Beulah, a place "where Contrarieties are equally True,"[6] suggests Kant's reconcilement of the antinomies. Finally, Blake's basically epistemological cosmology has a great deal in common with the monads of Leibniz. Whatever the sources or analogues, the pervading humanism of Blake's cosmology makes it a highly original one. Blake's epistemology seems to admit of both a subjective and objective reality. Whatever a person senses is real for that person, yet there is an ultimate reality; the purer the organs of perception, the more real what they see. Therefore Blake's cosmogony postulates a fall of the senses and his cosmography is made up of the levels between the original perfection and the lowest degree of mundane sensation. Blake makes no attempt to explain the origin of the perfect world from which the fall began. Indeed, the fall and regeneration only figuratively take place at a definite point in time; actually both are continuous processes: man falls whenever his vision is obscured and rises as it is clarified. Blake's ultimate, as in all philosophic systems involving perfectibility, is vague. For the purposes of this paper it is nearly sufficient to state that it is both reached by, and is, a perfecting of the vision and is strongly anthropomorphic in character--

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[6] Ibid., p. 415.

is, in fact, the superman. It is a man; not a woman. On this highest level of existence the female is perfectly subordinated to the male and becomes a part of him. "In eternity there is no such thing as a female will."[7] This vanishing of the female element suggests another perplexing problem--how many super-men are there? Blake's use of the Hebrew's Adam-Kadman or of Boehm's androgynous man has led to a misunderstanding. Saurat says of Blake: "He believes only in the One Eternal Soul as a lasting entity, as a reality into which we are to awake from our fleeting individual dreams."[8] This reversal of Blake's strong belief in the individual, his insistence that "One law for the lion and the ox is oppression," results from mistaking the statement for the substance. Each individual man united with his female counterpart can become an "Eternal Soul"--a superman. Blake does say that all humanity living on the highest level is in complete harmony and beholds the essential unities behind diversity. This is a transcendental solution to the problem of Democracy--how extend the liberties of each individual without infringing on the liberty of the corporate group? Blake answers that human sympathy

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[7] Ibid., p. 648.

[8] Saurat, op. cit., p. 134.

[9] Blake, op. cit., p. 191.

infinitely expanded will lead the individual to see himself as part of the body of individuals. This is very close to the Utilitarian philosophy prevalent in Blake's period. When intervening in the lower levels of existence the supermen merge or, perhaps, appear to be merged to a more limited perception. Thus:

> Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God
> As one Man: for contracting their exalted Senses
> They behold multitude, or Expanding, they behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal family, and that One Man
> They call Jesus the Christ, & they in him & he in them
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the land of life,
> Consulting as One Man.[10]

Christ, for Blake, is the symbol of Forgiveness. This passage depicts how, in an ideal society, Forgiveness forges the bonds of brotherhood. It will be remembered that to Blake, himself, "Heavenly Men . . . / Appear'd as One Man."

Since the goal in Blake's system of salvation is apotheosized man, the way to salvation is through an apotheosis of the natural human faculties and not through a sublimation of them. It remains for this paper to examine Blake's motivation of the descent from, and return to, Eden. To do this it is necessary to sketch Blake's cosmography: the "states" that exist now and forever, though man "passes thro' them like a traveller, who may well suppose the places

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[10] Ibid., p. 264.

he has passed thro' exist no more."[11]

Sloss and Wallis define Blake's "State" as "An attitude of mind, phase of experience or a body of belief arising from the restricted vision of a man or class."[12] This, of course, does not include "Eden" the state of perfection; it holds good for "The Four states of Humanity in its Repose."[13] Actually it is hard to find five objectively distinct states in Blake. "Beulah" (Hebrew for "married") is the state closest to Eden. It is distinguished from Eden by the existence of gender, as it is the highest state in which male and female remain divided. Though divided, they are in harmony and both fulfill their functions. Therefore Beulah is the land of poetical inspiration and the "Daughters of Beulah" are the muses: "Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song, . . ."[14] It is in Beulah that Blake's doctrine of sexual inspiration culminates.

> Where every Female delights to give her maiden Beulah
> to her husband:
> The Female searches sea & land for gratifications
> to the
> Male Genius, who in return clothes her in gems &
> gold

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[11] Ibid., p. 648.

[12] Sloss and Wallis, op. cit., p. 234.

[13] Blake, op. cit., p. 420.

[14] Ibid., p. 376.

And feeds her with the food of Eden.[15]

Thus the female enables the male to achieve visions of Paradise which he shares with her. Below Beulah is our own existence, which is higher on the scale if our vision is dominated by Imagination, and lower, if dominated by Reason. Although these are not all Blake's states, this is sufficient differentiation for the purposes of this paper.

It is interesting to speculate on what position in this scheme Blake allocated to himself. From the poem quoted in the discussion of mystic transcience it would appear that his position was a fluctuating one. A statement he makes about himself in "A Descriptive Catalogue" is of interest on this point.

> All these things are written in Eden. The artist is an inhabitant of that happy country; and if everything goes on as it has begun, the world of vegetation and generation may expect to be opened again to Heaven, through Eden, as it was in the beginning.[16]

Blake has here modified his terminology for popular consumption; the description of this "happy country" as mediating between the mundane and the Heavenly identifies it as Beulah rather than Eden. We can assume, then, that Blake believed himself capable of sometimes reaching the highest order of vision, "Fourfold in my supreme Delight," though it could

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[15] Ibid., p. 525.

[16] Ibid., p. 609.

be closed from him "As by a door and by shutters."[17] Usually he dwelt in Beulah--a land of sexual content and inspiration.

This paper must now take up the creation of the inferior states, or, more correctly, Humanity's descent into them. Blake's myth of the Fall is complex and exists in many versions. This paper cannot enumerate them all but will deal with two that are most applicable to its purpose. Always, in Blake, the fall is caused by a loss of integration. Universal man has four predominating factors in his make-up: Reason, Passion, Instinct, and Intuition. When one of these "Four Zoas" seeks to dominate the others or separate from them and enter into "Selfhood," he falls and the others are dragged down with him. The Universal Man then falls into the sleep of death until they are reunited. The Fall results in the creation of sex--the "Hermaphroditic Form"--repugnant in the eyes of the remaining Immortals. Similar to the creation of sex is the separation out of the falling man of his "emanation" and "spectre." The emanation is his female element or inspiration, while the spectre is his newly acquired set of inhibitions. These elements in man's nature are no longer part of the essential psyche; they push and pull at it from outside. This is what Blake means when he

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[17] Ibid., p. 900.

be closed from this "the lyre door and by mystery."[17] Usually he dwelt in Bedlam--a land of eternal content and inspiration.

This paper must now take up the discussion of the interior states, or, more correctly, imaginative descent into them. Blake's myth of the Fall is complex and relate to various. This paper cannot answer to them all but will deal with two that are most applicable to its purpose. Always in Blake, the Fall is caused by a loss of interpretation. Universal man has four predominating factors in his make-up: Reason, Passion, Instinct, and Intuition. Each one of these "four Zoas" seeks to dominate the others or separate from them and enter into "Selfhood," he fail in and the others are dragged down with him. The Universal Man then falls into the sleep of death until they are reunited. The Fall results in the creation of sex--the "Hermaphroditic Form"--repugnant in the eyes of the resurrected immortals. Similar to the creation of sex is the separation out of the failing man of his "emanation" and "spectre." The emanation is his feminine element or inspiration, while the spectre is his imaginary material set of inhibitions. These elements in man's nature are no longer part of the universal pattern; they rise and pull at it from outside. This is what Blake means when he

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[17] Ibid., p. 640.

speaks of man on this level of existence as being under the control of daemonic powers. "We who dwell on this level can do nothing of ourselves; everything is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep."[18] As usual, Blake has stated a profound psychological fact. Since Freud has uncovered subconscious motivation, man has realized that many of his supposed free actions no more result from his decisions than do the functionings of his bodily organs; worst of all it is no longer possible for a man to have any clear conception of what he is, his consciousness is too divided and segmented. This is the state of fallen man according to Blake. The false conscience he has acquired makes life miserable for him, and his female inspiration, no longer a part of him wreaks further havoc by taking to flight. Thus goaded, he loses all sympathy and sense of oneness with her and takes her by force. This plunges them to the level of generation and the woman conceives a "terrible child."

A variant of this myth of particular interest here begins with the separation of the male and female elements. The female element exhibits a weakness and inability to enjoy ultimate reality:

> But the Emanations trembled exceedingly, nor could they

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[18] Ibid., p. 434.

> Live, because the life of Man was too exceedingly unbounded.
> His joy became terrible to them; they trembled & wept
> Crying with one voice: "Give us a habitation & a place
> In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings:
> For if we . . .
> Behold these wonders of Eternity we shall consume: . . .
> & there appear'd a pleasant
> Mild Shadow above, beneath, & on all sides round.[19]

Since the masculine element cannot remain alone in eternity without his inspiration, he too enters into Beulah. Seen from a lower level Beulah is close to heaven, but it is a great descent seen from above. It is a law in Blake's cosmology that once started downward the human pilgrim must touch bottom before he can journey upward again. From Eternity he beheld all the levels of being, but once he has lost this perspective he must regain it by bitter experience. "The nature of a Female space is . . . / It shrinks the Organs of Life."[20] Entering into Beulah starts man on the road of sensual degradation.

> In Beulah the Female lets down her beautiful Tabernacle
> Which the Male enters magnificent between her Cherubin
> And becomes One with her, mingling, condensing in Self-Love
> The Rocky Law of Condemnation & double Generation & Death.[21]

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[19] Ibid., p. 415.

[20] Ibid., p. 386.

[21] Ibid., p. 261.

Regeneration, in Blake's system, is simply the reverse of generation. The "Terrible Child"--revolt--destroys the inhibitions of moral law and the sexes are able to form a salutary union which increases their perceptive faculties. On this level the existence of two genders is necessary, "Lest the Sexual Garments sweet / Should grow a devouring Winding Sheet."[22] The union is further cemented by the putting off of generation. The Babe of Revolt consumes both the moral law and itself.

> Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth
> Must be consumed with the Earth
> To rise from Generation free. . . [23]

Properly used the constricting body points the way to freedom. "Head, Heart, and Loins, open on Beulah."[24] In the peace of satisfied desire and with the poetic inspiration gained from it the Universal Man unites the four elements of his being--reason, passion, instinct, and intuition--into an integrated whole. Then, with the uniting of this masculine whole with its equally perfected female counterpart, the Superman enters into Eden.

Sex has pointed the way to this apotheosis and the apotheosis itself is the sexual act infinitely expanded and

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[22] Ibid., p. 578.

[23] Ibid., p. 79.

[24] Ibid., p. 331.

Regeneration, Blake's system, is only the reverse of generation. The "Spectre of Urizen" destroys the limitations of moral law and he works to form a military order which increases their destructive faculties. On this level the existence of evil seems necessary, "Lest the Secret Garments sense / Should grow a devouring Winding Sheet."[22] The union is further prevented by the putting off of generation. The Zoas of Urizen represent both the moral law and itself.

> Whatever is born of mortal birth
> Must be consumed with the Earth
> To rise from Generation free.[23]

Properly used the counterfeiting body points the way to freedom. "Head, Heart, and loins, open on Eternal Worlds."[24] In the peace of satisfied desire and with the poetic imagination gained from it the Universal Man unites the four elements of his being--reason, passion, instinct, and imagination--into an integrated whole. Then, with the uniting of this masculine whole with its equally perfected female counterpart, the Emperess enters into Man.

Sex has polished the way to child's innocence and the apotheosis itself is the sexual act. Christianity, moral and

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[22] Idid., p. 67.

[23] Idid., p. 70.

[24] Idid., p. 97.

intensified. Sex in the sense of a division disappears in Eden, but as Frye points out, "It is the Father and Mother not the lover and beloved that disappear in paradise."[25] These two realize the dream of all mundane lovers: they become truly one.

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[25] Frye, op. cit., p. 388.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown how Blake drew from his marital experience certain fixed opinions. It is easy to see how these opinions motivated the development of his system of thought. Legality and morality hindered him as he strove to find himself, even delayed the fruition of his love. He forged an ethic that had no good or evil but only freedom and restriction, and saw this system at work throughout the cosmos. He found in women and in their function of child-bearing an ally, albeit an unwilling one, of the restrictive codes. He postulated a Fall in which femininity played a prominent part and agreed with the Hebrew Testament that the female was essentially only a servant of man. Yet in the fulfillment of his love Blake found his richest vision--therefore, he made forgiveness, understanding, and love necessary to man's salvation.

Spinoza, who was not a mystic, may be said to have been God-obsessed because he made God the main-spring of his cosmology. In the same sense, Blake, who was not a libertine, may be said to have been sex-obsessed.

It is difficult to decide to what extent Blake was a cosmologist and to what extent he was simply stating a psychological theory in the terms of cosmic allegory.

Certainly a good case could be made for the latter point of view. Blake states that if man could harmonize and integrate all his diverse elements, he would rise to a new order of experience. He recognized that such an integration could only be achieved by acceptance, not rejection; and especially by an acceptance of the fact of sex. Most of our modern thinkers seem to be in substantial agreement with him.

On the other hand, it is obvious that Blake's concepts were transcendental and all-embracing. The important part that the self-sacrifice of the eternals came to play in his cosmology shows that Blake was both a philosopher and a mystic, who expanded his peculiar epistemology into an explanation of all creation. Whether he is to be taken seriously on this level depends on the individual's own poetic-prophetic warrant.

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