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Pity and Anger in the Poetry of
William Blake from 'Poetical
Sketches' to 'Milton'

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Abstract

This thesis gives an account of the ideas about pity and anger in Blake's poetry from Poetical Sketches to Milton, placing them in their historical and intellectual contexts. Chapter 1 introduces the main themes, arguing that Blake saw himself as a counter-ideologist, working to change social and individual 'structures of feeling'. It suggests that his ideas were influenced by his class position, by the French Revolution, and by developments in eighteenth-century thinking. Chapter 2 shows that in the early work Blake engages with problems of male identity that will concern him throughout his career and provide another context for his thinking about anger and pity. Chapter 3 deals with the impasse of the late 1780s. The fourth Chapter claims that Songs of Innocence represents Blake's attempt to create a kind of compassion that will lead to and then characterise a redeemed society. The fifth Chapter locates The French Revolution in the Burke debate and points out that 'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened' shows important similarities in its treatment of pity to the speeches and articles of the Jacobin leaders. Chapter 6 contests the views of critics who have unproblematically presented anger as a virtue and pity as a vice in Songs of Experience. Chapter 7 suggests that the ideology of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is determined by an economic impossibility that creates a politics of feeling rather than of strategies and institutions. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the Prophetic Books as analyses of the psychology of revolutionary aspiration and failure. Chapter 10 argues that The Four Zoas depicts the reconstitution of a degraded anger and pity that are nevertheless doomed to social failure except in the 'imaginary' of the final apocalypse, while Chapter 11 contextualises the 'Sciences' of Wrath and Pity in Milton. The final Chapter is a short résumé and forward glance.

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All Blake quotations are from David V. Erdman, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, (commentary by Harold Bloom,), 1988.

Square brackets in quotations are mine, round brackets the author's or editor's.

If an eighteenth century text is quoted in a nineteenth or twentieth century edition the date of first publication is given, except in the case of a collected poems.

p. in a footnote indicates a page number in this thesis.

All italics in quotations are in the original unless otherwise stated.

Chapter One
Aims, Methodologies and Contexts

This thesis provides a detailed account of Blake's ideas about anger and pity¹ between 1783 and 1810, and an analysis of their intellectual and historical conditions of existence. Rom Harré claims that one of the reasons for recent comparative lack of philosophical interest in feeling² is:

the predominance, since the seventeenth century, of a philosophical conception of the emotions as simple, non-cognitive phenomena, among the bodily perturbations.³

My account, while different from that of the 'social constructionists', shares with theirs an emphasis on the complexity and intellectuality of emotions and on their creation in particular social contexts.⁴ In contrast to the belief that concepts of anger are constructed by a 'community',⁵ I shall present emotion as an important field of ideological struggle, and Blake as a conscious participant in this form of 'mental fight'. Emotions are 'institutionalised' responses but it is not 'society'⁶ that legitimates them; specific thinkers or groups in the interests of particular social sectors create forms of emotion.⁷ I shall argue that part of Blake's project was to change the nature of emotional experience,⁸ and using the idea of the construction of a counter-hegemonical ideology as one guide, I shall study the philosophical and literary roots of Blake's ideas on the emotions, their analogues, their possible sources and their antagonist theories, and try to

¹ Almost all books on Blake have something to say about his attitudes to these emotions: Heather Glen's Vision and Disenchantment - 1983 - has been the most helpful.

² The standard philosophical history is H. M. Gardiner et al., Feeling and Emotion: a History of Theories, 1970. I use 'feeling' and 'emotion', as synonyms; this is consistent with eighteenth century terminology: Josephine Miles, Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion, 1965, 16-17.

³ Rom Harré ed., The Social Construction of Emotions, 1988, 2.

⁴ In analysing the creation of Blake's ideas on the emotions I shall make use of the Marxist theories of ideology it is one purpose of this thesis to test.

⁵ C. T. Warner, in *ibid.*, 165. Brenda Webster, Blake's Prophetic Psychology, 1983 and W. P. Wittcutt, Blake: a Psychological Study, 1946 write from respectively Freudian and Jungian perspectives that I have largely ignored.

⁶ James R. Averill, in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty ed., Explaining Emotion, 1980, 38.

⁷ Insofar as emotions are created by ideas rather than by biology or material contingencies: for the first, v. Melvin Konner, The Tangled Wing, *passim*; the second, Barry M. Lester and T. Berry Brazelton, in Daniel A. Wagner and Harold W. Stevenson eds., Cultural Perspectives on Child Development, 1982, 34-35.

⁸ As far as possible, I focus on Blake's explicit statements about anger and pity, but I also give some attention to the way his poems embody or attempt to make us feel these two emotions.

show how, in particular historical circumstances, a set of ideas was generated. It would be wrong, however, to force all of Blake's thinking on anger and pity into the straitjacket of a single concept, and, as well as pursuing other themes (his gendering of emotion, for example), I endeavour to give an account of the specific contribution of each work to Blake's treatment of the two feelings.⁹

The idea of Blake as a counter-hegemonical ideologist¹⁰ implies that he was conscious of a social location different to those who ruled society materially and intellectually.¹¹ While there was no unified 'dominant ideology', and different ruling-class ideas were in competition, there were common themes and assumptions, and Blake, while finding much to agree with and build on in one tradition or another, found it necessary to move beyond the limits of such systems. By 'ruling-class ideas' I mean ideas that strengthen the ideological hold of this class, or whose horizons are restricted, in accordance with the world view of the rulers, to the existing mode of production.¹² The ideas of Songs of Innocence and of Experience challenge ruling class hegemony by encouraging disobedience on the part of the subordinated, and, in the case of Innocence, by postulating a society in which there is no exploitation of labour. Blake believed that the particular forms in which pity was structured benefitted the ruling-class and needed therefore to be probed and sometimes contested. In his most intense period of counter-ideological activity he attempts to form subjectivities *otherwise*, to contribute to the creation of individuals with new emotional structures,¹³ values and forms of behaviour. Hence his interest in writing for children and in the political implications of 'everyday' phenomena like the effects of compassion and one's mode of conduct when angry.

Ruling-class promotion of compassion (to avoid for the moment the more complex case of attitudes to anger) was not always unhelpful to the labouring classes. Charity was, on some occasions at least, of benefit to its recipients in the eighteenth century, so this ideological system, through which the unequal rewards of the market were in a small measure redistributed, might be said to have arisen from the nature of existing society, and not purely from the

⁹ I inevitably write as if the works are about anger and pity, but I am aware that this is not typically the case.

¹⁰ Henceforth, for euphony, counter-ideologist.

¹¹ The German Ideology, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in Collected Works, Vol. 5, 1976, 59.

¹² cf. Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, 1973, 177.

¹³ For culture and emotion, v. Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, 1961, 81.

interests of one class.¹⁴ Because ideology also stems from historical conditions, not just the interests of classes, Blake runs up against the question as to the nature of the society in which the forms of pity and anger he favours might flourish. It is here that the silences and failures that make up one of the most fruitful parts of his enterprise are forced to arise.

Göran Therborn argues that human beings have to be made into the kind of 'subjects' who will fit into particular places in structured sets of social conditions:

The amorphous libido and manifold potentialities of human infants are subjected to a particular order that allows or favours certain drives and capacities, and prohibits or disfavours others.¹⁵

Therborn regards infants as 'pre-subject' and meaningful ideological interpellation as possible only later.¹⁶ Blake's portrayal of the neonate in 'Infant Sorrow' shows that he thought subjecthood started at birth, if not before, and he analyses, in that poem, in Tiriell and elsewhere, the processes by which children are, from the beginning, made into 'subjects' of a particular social order.¹⁷ The French revolutionaries themselves were to show an awareness of the need to begin ideological formation early: the Deputy Grégoire declared at a 'concours' on elementary education in 1794:

...the detestable regime whose remnants we are shaking off keeps us still a great distance from nature...let us reconstitute human nature ...¹⁸

Forced to change society and the individual quickly,¹⁹ they put most of their efforts into reshaping adults²⁰ and 'mobilized enormous pedagogical energies and politicized every possible aspect of daily life'.²¹ The pressures on Blake were less urgent, but his project was the same. The Songs and the The Marriage represent part of his bid to substitute his own processes of subject-creation for

¹⁴ For definitions of ideology, v. Terry Eagleton, Ideology: an Introduction, 1991, 28-30.

¹⁵ Göran Therborn, The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology, 1980, 17.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 15; subjects are 'the makers or creators of something' - 17.

¹⁷ Both capable of action in and subordinated to social systems.

¹⁸ Cited Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution, 1984, 2.

¹⁹ Learning from Rousseau the need to reshape human nature in remoulding a polity: Jean Jacques Rousseau, A Treatise on the Social Compact, in The Works of J. J. Rousseau in Ten Vols., 1774, Vol. 10, 50.

²⁰ Hunt, 1984, 69.

²¹ *ibid.*, 73.

those current in late eighteenth century society, a bid that pre-dates the Revolution, but was intensified by it.

In whose interests were the ideologies that Blake countered working? Eighteenth-century Britain was ruled economically, politically and socially by the aristocracy and gentry:

Wealth, status and power...both formal power in the state and informal power over opinion and over the lives of ordinary men and women: on all these the grip of the titled and territorial élites was enormously strong.²²

The economic basis of the most important part of the ruling class was commodity farming and the extraction of surplus value from landless labourers;²³ the best definition of this élite has been debated,²⁴ but the essential point is that they were part of an uniformly capitalist ruling class,²⁵ which also included that sector of the 'middle classes' who were employers of labour. Characteristic ideologies were produced on the basis of the need to exploit workers in such a way as to rule out the possibility of the free development of human faculties: in farm labourers, 'domestic' workers, or the early factory proletariat the picture is one of long hours of mentally and physically destructive labour.²⁶ This economic system necessitated political and social disempowerment. The vast majority of people had little scope for the exercise of talents; such a formation produced ideologies designed to destroy, in the interests of social order, large amounts of unusable potential; Tiriél is to discover that this applies even to monarchs. It was one purpose of the systems that Blake contested to limit the free-flowing of emotions through the bodies of the dominated, and, to a significant extent, of the dominators as well. Repression was a necessary part of the process of disempowerment, and lust and anger were considered feelings in need of particular taming, and even pity

²² Linda Colley, Britons, 1992, 61; Lewis Namler, The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George 111, 1957, 4.

²³ E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, 1978, 254-255

²⁴ E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common, 1993, 84.

²⁵ There was some internal differentiation: as well as an agrarian there were also important financial and mercantile sectors and a nascent industrial one; for links, v. Colley, 1992, 64-66; Harold Perkins, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880, 1972, 73-78.

²⁶ Farm labourers: J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer, 1987, especially Chapter 6; factory workers: Richard L. Tames ed., Documents of the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850, 1971, 131-141; domestic workers: E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1980, Chapter 9.

was sometimes seen as dangerous to bourgeois aims.²⁷ Dominant ideologies of the feelings were not designed only to repress and destroy; they sought to create appropriate forms of emotional expression - safe ways of being angry and functional modes of compassion - so Blake's counter-ideological project involved a generalised opposition to repression and a particular contestation of dominant ideas about emotions like pity and anger.

Some characterisations of Blake's own class position use the vague term 'lower-middle-class' or some equivalent,²⁸ while most are happy to consider him an artisan;²⁹ but this, although a necessary term, confuses³⁰ the situation by combining workers with different relations to the means of production; this is true to the historical reality - in France masters and *compagnons* fought side by side politically as sans-culottes,³¹ but it hides the fact that Blake's own class position was unusually complex. He was both *freelance proletarian* and *petty commodity producer*.³² I shall argue that both his class position and the related political allegiances influenced his ideology of the emotions.

Blake's primary work was as an engraver;³³ some of the time he worked for commodity producers, who paid him less than the worth of his contribution.³⁴ He was, therefore, exploited as a proletarian, but as he laboured at home, he escaped direct work discipline. Because he had the possibility of engraving, printing and painting for himself, he never had purely proletarian horizons. The specific nature of aesthetic production was also significant; it brought him into more than purely economic contact with members of the middle class, and gave him many of the cultural elements out of which he constructed his ideology. As a maker of illuminated books, printmaker and painter he worked (alongside Catherine³⁵) as a petty commodity producer, not exploiting or exploited by anyone else, providing his

²⁷ v. p. 13.

²⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*, 1995, 41; Jack Lindsay, *William Blake*, 1978, so characterises Blake's father.

²⁹ Stewart Crehan, *Blake in Context*, 1984, 7.

³⁰ For the 'contradictions' involved, v. Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes*, 1968, 4.

³¹ *ibid.*, 20.

³² For the second, v. Henry Bernstein, 'petty commodity production', in Tom Bottomore et al., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 1991, 417-419, and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 1992, 32, who call it 'family enterprise'; *freelance* implies flexibility of employment and uncentralised domestic work. Blake was also *urban* and *skilled*; for the first factor, v. p. 25, for the second, p. 20, p. 131.

³³ Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 1993, 266.

³⁴ Publishers of his engravings are listed in G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Records*, 1969, 609-619.

³⁵ For Catherine's work, v. Viscomi, 1993, 133.

own production inputs and owning his means of production, perhaps even a copperplate press.³⁶ Viscomi has demonstrated that, in making illuminated books, Blake produced editions for stock without necessarily waiting for commissions, thus acting as a 'private publisher'.³⁷ As a petty commodity producer Blake was liable to find some aspects of bourgeois ideology attractive;³⁸ in spite of the small initial profit margins of the illuminated books, he might reasonably have hoped to be successful enough to make much more on them in the future and to become a completely independent producer.³⁹

Blake had an unusually wide experience of social forms and locations.⁴⁰ His early working life involved the 'pre-bourgeois' forms of apprenticeship⁴¹ and patronage, and the latter was to be a factor throughout his career. As a painter, he was both a petty producer and someone operating outside a purely economic market; Butts, for example, cannot be regarded as buying Blake's products in ordinary financial transactions.⁴² His father kept a shop, as he himself did for a short time, but not, it seems, as an employer of labour.⁴³ It is possible that Blake had family ties with the lowest social strata. If he was indeed related to the Battersea Blakes, he had kin who were born and died in the workhouse.⁴⁴ Fuseli claimed that Catherine had been a maid-servant and it is possible that her parents were buried as paupers.⁴⁵

The ambiguity of Blake's position is clear when we consider Cohen's definition of a proletarian:

He may own means of production, but he cannot use them to support himself save by contracting with a capitalist.⁴⁶

³⁶ Bentley, 1969, 29.

³⁷ Viscomi, 1993, 263.

³⁸ cf. Michael Ferber, The Social Vision of William Blake, 1985, 43, on 'the contamination of his system by the one he was fighting'.

³⁹ For low profits on illuminated books, v. Viscomi, 1993, 265-266.

⁴⁰ Susan Matthews, in Stephen Copley and John Whale eds., Beyond Romanticism, 1992, 89.

⁴¹ Marx, Vol. 5, 1976, 65-66.

⁴² Bentley, 1969, 67.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 6; Lindsay, 1978, 20

⁴⁶ G. A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defence, 1978, 72.

Blake owned means of production,⁴⁷ his contracts were sometimes but not always with capitalists, at most periods of his life he was producing prints, paintings or illuminated books on his own behalf, and at some periods he undoubtedly hoped for independence. Although he had far more in common with those 'below' than 'above' him, upward links existed too, making the creation of a complex set of 'authorial ideologies' almost inevitable, given his intellectual subtlety.

Blake lived his class at a particular historical conjuncture, one dominated by revolution, first in America and then in France. I shall give an account of the ideas about emotion thrown up by revolutionary events, but it is striking how much of Blake's emotional ideology was arrived at before 1789. I shall characterise the 1790s as a period when fundamental economic and social transformation was impossible, but, because of the French Revolution, a seizure of political power seemed on the agenda, and suggest that this accounts for important facts about Blake's ideas. One of the few critics to realise the importance of assumptions about such matters is David Worrall, who, discussing the Spencean project, claims:

Instead of an industrial economy, we could have had an agrarian society, even a 'green' one in the late-twentieth-century sense of the word. Instead of nineteenth-century imperialism, there might have been a self-sufficient and equable nation decentralized into parishes, perhaps even into a welfare state...⁴⁸

My own assumption will be the opposite: the defeat of industrialising capitalism at a time when it had hardly begun to develop its productive potential was impossible, and this impossibility affected the ideology of oppositionists, whether or not they were capable of sensing it.

Thirty years ago Jean H. Hagstrum published a suggestive essay on wrath and pity in Blake.⁴⁹ There are reasons, beyond the authority of Hagstrum, for linking pity and anger. They are frequently yoked by Blake himself and by other eighteenth-century writers;⁵⁰ if one sees a victim one can feel pity for

⁴⁷ Jacqui DiSalvo's 'Blake...a man of no property bound to labor for others for his survival' - *War of Titans*, 1983, 40 - is too simple.

⁴⁸ David Worrall, *Radical Culture*, 1992, 7.

⁴⁹ "'The Wrath of the Lamb': a Study of Blake's Conversions", in Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (eds.), *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, 1965, 311-330.

⁵⁰ e. g. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 1, 1956, 106; Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (1796), 1980, 44; Thomas Holcroft, *Hugh Trevor*, (1794-1797), 1978, 7.

the oppressed, or anger at the oppressor or the act of injustice. Many people would feel both, as Butler explained:

The sight of a man in misery raises our compassion towards him; and if this misery be inflicted on him by another, our indignation against the author of it.⁵¹

Hume claimed that cruelty caused by excessive anger led to pity and then to the strongest of all hatreds.⁵² In a Protestant culture, pity and anger represented God's two possible responses to the human soul at judgement: mercy and acceptance into heaven, or the eternal wrath that punishes the condemned in hell.⁵³ Those portrayed as divine representatives had the same options.⁵⁴ In the love convention that treated the mistress as a goddess, the same two emotions were the alternative ways in which she could respond to her devotee.⁵⁵ The strongest reason for this conjunction, though, is that to Blake both emotions were forms of life force - 'energy' - that could be shaped, blocked and re-routed in specific ways, and the shapes they assumed were of personal and political importance.

If Blake's class location and the political conjunctures in which his work was produced had their effect on his ideology of the emotions, neither was as directly important as the ideas that, consciously or unconsciously, he encountered.⁵⁶ His view of emotion was made possible by those developments generally known as 'Enlightenment' and 'Sensibility', the first one factor in producing the second, as the Philosophes attempted to produce more rational forms of feeling.⁵⁷ Eighteenth-century writers praised reason, in accordance with classical and Christian tradition, but their originality lay in a valuation of emotion that, in some of its forms, broke with ideas of reason as the God-like

⁵¹ Joseph Butler, Analogy of Religion, (1736), 1835, 273.

⁵² David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, (1739-40), 1978, 605-606.

⁵³ Romans, Chapter 9.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Inchbald, A Simple Story, (1791), 1987, 174.

⁵⁵ Holcroft, 1978, 327. To the twentieth century 'human ethologist', the two emotions are examples of bonding and aggressive mechanisms respectively. Iraneus Eibl-Eibesfeldt's Love and Hate, 1971, argues that these 'natural antagonists' are innate and necessary for survival.

⁵⁶ Ideas, of course, that he received mediated through class, gender and politics.

⁵⁷ R. F. Brissenden, Virtue In Distress, 1974, 54, 60; for Christian sources of Sensibility, v. R. S. Crane, 'Suggestions Towards A Genealogy Of The Man Of Feeling', Journal of English Literary History, December, 1934.

governor and with Stoic valorisation of repression;⁵⁸ Crane recognises that the values of sensibility were 'something new in the world'.⁵⁹ A huge range of phenomena forms part of the same shift; the growth in charity foundations, the campaign against slavery, the associationist method of much eighteenth century poetry, changing attitudes to children, new forms of the family, and so on.⁶⁰ This thesis attempts to contribute to answering general questions about the causes and nature of the eighteenth-century 'break' by subjecting a small sub-problem⁶¹ - the attitudes to two emotions of a male writer of a particular class and time - to detailed analysis.

The formula I adopt for Blake's relationship to Enlightenment is 'acceptance and transcendence'. His views on the emotions after 1790 either ignore or contest Christian teaching, and the work of Jon Mee and E. P. Thompson⁶² has shown that there were strong elements of rationalism and scepticism in his ideology generally. His clearest religious statements, the annotations to Watson's Apology for the Bible, have been seen as endorsing neither Watson's Christianity nor Paine's scepticism,⁶³ but in fact Blake agrees with Paine on all points of substance, thinking that 'the Bible is all a State Trick',⁶⁴ dating the New Testament as too late to be historically reliable,⁶⁵ rejecting miracles and prophecy as they were understood by Christians,⁶⁶ and accepting the Bible only as a 'Poem of probable impossibilities', a treasury of inspired writing.⁶⁷ On the evidence of the annotations, he read sceptical

⁵⁸ For reason and feeling, v. Brissenden, 1974, 50-4; 108-109; Norman Hampson, The Enlightenment, 1990, 186-187; for the importance of Hume in the shift, v. John Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability, 1990, 8.

⁵⁹ Crane, 1934, 206.

⁶⁰ Charity: Donna T. Andrew, Philanthropy and Police, 1989; slavery: Robin Blackburn, The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1988, 33-67; associationism: Yvor Winters, Forms of Discovery, 1967, 147-149; children: Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood, 1967, 37-51; family and childrearing: Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800, 1979, 149-285.

⁶¹ Nevertheless, so huge are the ramifications of this topic that much has had to be omitted - any extended consideration of the compassionate state of Beulah, for example; I have also been forced to leave out any discussion of Blake's art and to comment on the 'illustrations' in the illuminated books only when this is necessary to elucidate the meaning of the words or their ideological effect - v. p. 225 .

⁶² e. g. Jon Mee, Dangerous Enthusiasm, 1992, 121 and E. P. Thompson, Witness Against the Beast, 1993, 199-203; Thompson's account of Blake's 'affirmative' encounter with Volney, whom he yet seeks to 'reorganise' is similar to my own of his relationship to Enlightenment generally.

⁶³ David Bindman, in Alison Yarrington and Kelvin Everest eds., Reflections of Revolution, 1993, 112-134.

⁶⁴ E616; Bindman, *ibid.*, 125, wrongly claims that this is not Blake's own opinion.

⁶⁵ E618.

⁶⁶ E616-617.

⁶⁷ E616.

critiques of the historical accuracy of the Bible and the moral standing of Judaeo-Christianity, agreed with them, but found that this was not the end of the matter.⁶⁸ He went beyond Deism in rejecting any transcendent presence in the universe,⁶⁹ so as to re-incorporate for humanity powers that had been assigned to forces beyond it. My view is not, in practice, radically different from that of recent critics, and I demonstrate in Chapter 6 how much Blake had in common with some eighteenth-century Christians.

Enlightenment and Sensibility made possible an optimistic view of human nature that valued and trusted feelings. Blake also encountered particular ideas about anger and pity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide histories of previous attitudes to these emotions, but it is nevertheless necessary to indicate briefly the nature of the major discourses influential in the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ These short accounts focus on points that will be of significance in the discussion of Blake's theories.

'Pity'⁷¹ was seen in the eighteenth century as a form of 'sympathy', the capacity to identify with and to some extent share the emotions of another.⁷² This was so important in the eighteenth-century world view that some came to think of it as playing the same role in society as gravity did in Newton's universe.⁷³ Official eighteenth-century ideology saw the nation as unified not only by bonds of interest but by bonds of feeling.⁷⁴ Such emotional links were a necessary construction in a society already dominated by the cash nexus and in which universalising ideologies like Christianity made it impossible to deny a common humanity to victims of the market. The needs of the economy itself demanded a degree of benevolence:

⁶⁸ Florence Sandler, in Nelson Hilton ed., Essential Articles for The Study of William Blake, 1970-1984, 1986, 34.

⁶⁹ Mee, 1992, 141.

⁷⁰ Many ideas about emotion exist as 'folklore' before they reach written form - v. p. 14.

⁷¹ Max Scheler, The Nature of Sympathy, translated Peter Heath, 1954, 135, points out that most languages have more than one word to mark different modes and intensities of sympathy. I have not found an eighteenth-century text that attempts to distinguish between a good 'compassion' and a patronising 'pity', so I use the words as synonyms, as eighteenth-century writers frequently do. However, the germs of this distinction exist in that if the emotion is viewed critically, it is likely to be called 'pity'; for example, when writers wish to argue that this feeling is 'near contempt' the word chosen is always pity: Hume Enquiries, (1748), 1975, 248.

⁷² Sympathy: Hume, 1978, 575-576; Joseph Butler argues that compassion is much more significant than any positive 'rejoicing with', Fifteen Sermons, (1726), 1841, 47-48; Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, Vol. 1, (1750-1752), 1969, 133.

⁷³ v. Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, 1962, 110; Stephen Cox, Love and Logic, 1992, 79-80. 'Sympathy, the magnetic virtue, the hidden essence of our life' - William Godwin, Caleb Williams, (1794), 1982, 308.

⁷⁴ For 'the social feelings', v. Chris Jones, Radical Sensibility, 1993, 6-7 and passim.

...could a society of such creatures with no other bottom but self-love on which to maintain a commerce ever flourish?⁷⁵

'Mutual tenderness' was necessary to the 'concatenation of society', wrote Johnson⁷⁶ and discordant emotions like anger were treated with suspicion. Sympathy bound a nation together through mutual emotional understanding, while pity spurred human beings to offer 'succour and comfort [to] each other'.⁷⁷ Charity from the rich was expected to lead to gratitude and deferential feeling from the poor.⁷⁸

Seneca had attempted to demonstrate that pity was not an attribute of a good man or a just ruler, and could lead astray as surely as any other passion, arguing that a rational 'mercy' (clementia) had to be prevented from falling into an irrational 'pity' (misericordia).⁷⁹ Pity was a feeling, and therefore disturbing to the mind of a philosopher and a distraction from the good life.⁸⁰ In the eighteenth century, on the other hand, pity was usually treated as an orderly and safe emotion, to be distinguished from wild and disorderly ones like lust and some forms of anger - a 'feeling of the heart' rather than a 'passion of the body' - and therefore one that could usefully work with reason rather than needing to be segregated from it for fear of its corrupting influences. The Odyssey, regarded as one of the foundations of the European tradition, established it as an emotion characterising civilisation.⁸¹ The Cyclops represents an anarchic state of nature, prior to law and religion, and he is a stranger to compassion. Instead, he greets helpless strangers with 'inward fury blazing at his eyes'.⁸² He embodies instinct and uncontrolled passion, in opposition to Odysseus's prudential reason and inhibition. Such a vision was easily translated into class terms. Odysseus in The Iliad is himself a King; in dealing with Thersites he acts as ruler, reason and repressor at the same time. Chaucer had believed with Ovid that 'pitye renneth soone in gentil

⁷⁵ Henry Grove, in The Spectator, (1711-1714), Vol. 6, n.d., 235.

⁷⁶ Johnson, Vol. 1, 1969, 132.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 133.

⁷⁸ The Spectator, Vol. 6, n. d., 237. Glen, 1983, 236.

⁷⁹ Seneca, Moral Essays, Vol. 1, 1970, 437-439.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 439-440.

⁸¹ Alexander Pope, The Odyssey of Homer, in The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, Vol. 1X, 1967, 296, 627-8.

⁸² *ibid.*, 310-311, 119-132; 314, 202-206 and 319, 317-326.

herte'⁸³ and this definition of pity as a virtue of the higher classes, was both reproduced and challenged in the eighteenth century.⁸⁴

Praise of pity was after 1651 always potentially political, carrying the implication that the kind of authoritarianism advocated by Hobbes on the basis of the belief that human passions were selfish, and without strong external curbs would tend to turn life into a perpetual war of all against all, was unnecessary.⁸⁵ Altruism was enlisted to rescue religion as well as liberal government from Leviathan, and pity played an important role in pulpit moralism and theology. Latitudinarian Divines, seeking to assert against Puritanism God's goodness and the importance of works, affirmed that pity and charity were important Christian virtues.⁸⁶ The 'Life of Savage', an eulogy of compassion, illustrates the respect a lay Christian could have for pity.⁸⁷

Such high valuations were rooted in Christian tradition, which had always praised alms-giving as an expression of *caritas*; they evolved in tandem with the Enlightenment attempt to erect a secular or at least unrevealed ideal of human behaviour. Admiration for compassion penetrated almost all aspects of Enlightenment thinking. In its penology humanity was meant to replace angry vindictiveness as a principle regulating law and punishment.⁸⁸ Beccaria wanted laws with compassion for the criminal built into them to replace the cruelty he perceived in current practice, and thought that this would obviate the necessity for acts of individual pity, a view that matches Rousseau's idea that it was the job of Governments to create greater social and economic equality rather than to build hospitals for the poor.⁸⁹ Blake too felt that compassion should be built into society in such a way as to make 'charity' obsolete, although he was never able to be precise as to how this might be done.

Pity was sometimes seen as an emotion with a potentially radical thrust, something that can be obscured if the focus is solely on appeals to charity and on Christian moralising. If it tended to constitute the 'giver' as separate and superior, and helped keep the poor in their place through charitable relief, it

⁸³ The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 1966, 34, 1761.

⁸⁴ v. p. 40.

⁸⁵ Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, 1987, 9-10; Crane, 1934, 230.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 208-209.

⁸⁷ Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, Vol. 2, (1779-1781), 1925, 85-86, 135 etc.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish, 1977, 3-6, discusses Damien's execution.

⁸⁹ For Beccaria, v. Hampson, 1990, 156; for Rousseau, v. p. 100.

also created an experience of shared humanity, as Rousseau⁹⁰ whose view of pity was one of the most influential of the century, suggested. The Encyclopédie felt that a desire to right wrongs was an integral part of 'humanité', defined as:

...un sentiment de bienveillance pour tous les hommes, qui ne s'enflamme guère que dans une âme grande et sensible. Ce noble et sublime enthousiasme se tourmente des peines des autres et du besoin de les soulager; il voudrait parcourir l'univers pour abolir l'esclavage, la superstition le vice et le malheur...il arrache des mains du scélérat l'arme qui seroit funeste à l'homme de bien.⁹¹

Criticism of pity was rare, but not unknown. Wollstonecraft's Mr. Lofty is seduced by compassion to give away more than he can afford,⁹² and many writers stressed the need to direct charity towards deserving cases.⁹³ Goldsmith turned the charge that pity was near contempt into a broader critique of its ineffectiveness:

...pity, though it may often relieve, is but at best a short-lived passion, and seldom affords distress more than transitory assistance...at last, our sensations lose all mixture of sorrow, and degenerate into downright contempt.⁹⁴

Cowper's 'Pity For Poor Africans' mocks an emotion that will not stop the English people using sugar or sharing in the 'plunder' of the slave trade.⁹⁵ Eighteenth century writing about pity was varied, and Christian or Deist moralising only represents one strand of the thinking Blake would have been aware of when he came to treat this emotion.

Many biologists regard anger as a universal human potential,⁹⁶ but this does not mean that its actual manifestations are not socially determined: this is

⁹⁰ Rousseau, Vol. 7, 1774, 189.

⁹¹ Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert eds., Encyclopédie, Vol. XV11, 1779, 822. Henceforth Diderot, 1778-1780. Here and elsewhere accents as in original. v. also pp. 105-106.

⁹² Mary Wollstonecraft, Original Stories, in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Vol. 1V, 1989, 425.

⁹³ Andrew, 1989, 25.

⁹⁴ Oliver Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World and The Bee, (1762, 1759), 1934, 357.

⁹⁵ The Poems of William Cowper, 1834, 419-420.

⁹⁶ This is Charles Darwin's conclusion in The Expression of the Emotions in Man and the Animals, 1901; v. also John Crook, The Development of Human Consciousness, 1980, 176-178; a universal potential for anger does not necessarily imply the innateness of

clearest in the case of 'indignation' which is directed against different crimes at different times.⁹⁷ Anger has a structural role in revolutions, beyond the obvious fact that they are made by angry people. Writers in the 1790s frequently linked revolutions with 'excess'.⁹⁸ Moral systems, whatever else they might do, act to protect the established order, so a revolutionary overthrow always has to embody itself in what is morally 'excessive' in the eyes of those committed to the status quo. This means that revolutionaries must act in ways that they find, after years of ideological 'subjection' to the values of the old system, difficult: 'The alienated person must become angry before he engages in political violence'.⁹⁹ Anger or some other powerful emotion is a necessary energiser of such action; one of the reasons for the evolutionary selection of anger is that it promotes behaviour that would otherwise be inhibited but might on some occasions be necessary for survival.¹⁰⁰

Moralists can recommend the totally free expression of anger, its complete repression, or the construction of a 'Science' to guide its management. I know of no examples of the first position, and it is rare in the West to find writers recommending total repression; Seneca's complete rejection of anger did not find many followers.¹⁰¹ Aristotle explicitly tried to provide the principles of a 'Science' that would limit the disruptive effects of anger without removing it completely from social life, and almost everyone who wrote on the subject was forced to do the same. Plutarch, for example, would rather have seen anger completely repressed, but had to admit it might be useful for specific purposes in war and politics.¹⁰² His claim that angry words do not cleanse but degrade suggests that the ideas of 'A Poison Tree' already existed in oral discourse.¹⁰³

This Stoic combination of prudence and moralism was reinforced by Christian teaching, and eighteenth century writers, influenced by both traditions,¹⁰⁴ have much to say about the need for the repression of anger. Yet

aggression: for this debate v. the titles in the bibliography under Montagu, Lorenz and Konner.

⁹⁷ G. M. Stratton, Anger: its Religious and Moral Significance, 1925, 67.

⁹⁸ James Mackintosh, Vindiciae Gallicae, 1791, viii and 17.

⁹⁹ Ivo K. Feirabend et. al. Anger, Violence and Politics, 1972, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Novaco, Anger Control, 1975, 4; Robert Plutchik, Emotion: a Psychoevolutionary Synthesis, 1980, 9-12.

¹⁰¹ Seneca, Vol. 1, 1970, 177.

¹⁰² Plutarch, Moralia, Vol. 6, 1970, 131; v. also Vol. 15, 1969, 275.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, Vol. 6, 113.

¹⁰⁴ The Spectator article on the 'passionate' man- 438, Vol. 5, n. d., 141-145 - for example, stresses the disadvantages of anger, not its sinfulness.

few failed to acknowledge that it was sometimes permissible and occasionally obligatory to express it. Hume, who recognised no supernatural sources of morality, is clear:

Anger and hatred are passions inherent in our very frame and constitution. The want of them, on some occasions, may even be a proof of weakness and imbecility.¹⁰⁵

The Christian Johnson agreed, accommodating anger to his general doctrine that passions were to be 'regulated' rather than extinguished.¹⁰⁶ Rambler 11, on 'the passionate man', provides ample evidence of Johnson's suspicions of anger, but also implies that one should 'proportion...anger to the cause, or...regulate it by prudence, or by duty',¹⁰⁷ and Boswell quotes him as saying that a 'certain degree of resentment is necessary'.¹⁰⁸ To Adam Smith 'resentment' is an 'unsocial' and 'unamiable' passion, which should nevertheless not be totally repressed but 'less easily and more rarely communicated'.¹⁰⁹ By and large, the century approved of a degree of indignation at the wrongs done to oneself and others, reserving its condemnation for 'bestial' fury or unbridled or inappropriate wrath. In Chapter 7 I shall show how eighteenth century Christians sometimes came to accept naturalistic accounts of anger that were not easy to square with New Testament moralism.

Blake had much to build on in treating anger and pity, and what he proposed is far more grounded in eighteenth-century thought and conditions of life than many critics have acknowledged. Peter Otto portrays him thus:

Blake...is a prophetic visionary who attempts to reveal the relationships in which this world (of Bacon, Newton, Locke) is grounded, who tries to open the closed world of the self to others, and by these means hopes to open the possibility of transformation and regeneration.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Hume, 1978, 605.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, 1969, 49-50; Spectator, 438, Vol. 5, n.d., 142, rejects the idea that the 'passionate' man's wrath is acceptable because soon over - v. p. 91.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, 1969, 60.

¹⁰⁸ James Boswell, Life of Johnson, Vol. 2, (1791), 1949, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Smith, Theory Of Moral Sentiments (1759), 1976, 37.

¹¹⁰ Peter Otto, Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction, 1991, 19.

I shall present him as a counter-ideologist, rooted in particular social relations, engaging with major themes of the Enlightenment and of eighteenth-century culture in general, seeking ways of opening flows, whether of anger or pity, between individuals, but constantly thwarted by his own unarticulated but accurate sense that energies could only move freely in a society that could not, in his lifetime or that of his immediate audience, possibly exist. His hopes for the kind of voluntarist regeneration described by Otto are always wrecked, by his own best insights, on the shoals of economic and social reality.

Chapter Two

Lessons for Mr Femality: Poetical Sketches and An Island in the Moon

Blake's first volume is the production of a young man radicalised by the American Revolution,¹ and relatively clear about politics, but not so certain what to make of the male identities offered him by the culture of late Sensibility he inserted himself into when he came to write poetry. A number of poems in Poetical Sketches (1783) are concerned with questions of maleness and its appropriate emotional structures. The poems consider three possible masculine identities, which I shall call the Man of Feeling, the Champion of the Oppressed and the Amoral Vitalist. There is something in all of them to attract Blake, but this necessarily involves him in contradictions.

The first of these has the clearest roots in Sensibility,² which, in its most characteristic mode, promoted compassion and benevolence in both sexes, seeking to encourage in men a greater measure of 'feminine' feeling.³ Some of the pieces in Poetical Sketches treat pity in this approving way; the compassion of the family in 'The Couch of Death'⁴ is represented as a support which enables the youth to overcome his fear and die joyfully, while Blake's plea to Pallas to inspire his writing ends by seeming to accept and applaud a pitying version of the goddess.⁵ There is little direct praise of pity in the volume, though, and this makes it rather unusual in the early 1780s: Hannah More's contemporary Sacred Dramas,⁶ for example, is much concerned to instil respect for 'Pity's sacred touch',⁷ and the virtues of compassion were a common theme amongst writers of this and the previous decade.⁸ Some of the Poetical Sketches invoke the tradition of 'Melancholy', which Thomas Warton's influential 'The Pleasures Of Melancholy' (1747) had treated as sharpening compassion for the sufferings of others; the protagonist is quick to pour 'the manly torrent', and

¹ For the influence of the 'revolutionary democratic impulse' from America, v. Blackburn, 1988, 25; for London radicalism, dominated as Blake was reaching adolescence by 'Wilkes and Liberty', v. Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America, 1976, 10-11; David Erdman, Blake: Prophet against Empire, 1969, Parts 1 and 2, deals comprehensively with Blake's early political development.

² For Poetical Sketches and Sensibility, v. Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, 1963, 11.

³ For Sensibility and femininity, v. Jean H. Hagstrum, Sex and Sensibility, 1980, 196.

⁴ E441, 442.

⁵ E421, 44-53.

⁶ Hannah More, Sacred Dramas and Sensibility; a Poem, 1783.

⁷ *ibid.*, 31

⁸ For praise of pity in More, 1783, v. also 28-29, 34, 35: in other writers in the 1770s and 1780s: Charlotte Smith, Elegiac Sonnets, 1784, 32; Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, (1771), 1970, 94; The Poetical Works of William Lisle Bowles, Vol. 1, 1855, 24; Helen Maria Williams, Edwin and Eltruda, 1782, 9-10.

claims, 'at a brother's woe/My big heart melts in sympathizing tears'.⁹ With this in mind, it is striking how far Blake's melancholics are characterised by self-pity rather than by feeling for others.¹⁰ Even when Melancholics are outward looking this structure of feeling¹¹ is too passive for Blake to consider it of much personal or political use. The poet of Gray's 'Elegy'¹² is 'marked' by Melancholy as her own, and although he demonstrates his compassion for the villagers, he sees no hope of alleviating their condition, and for himself is content with social isolation, rural dreaming and literary oblivion. He is implicitly contrasted with Milton, whose willingness to involve himself in national affairs meant a share in Cromwell's guilt,¹³ and such passivity is a general danger of Sensibility's excessive compassion. Harley in The Man of Feeling reacts in purely symbolic fashion to an account of the violence of the press-gang, but even this is too much for Edwards, whose gesture echoes Christ's in Gethsemane.

...Harley started with a convulsive sort of motion, and grasping Edwards's sword, drew it half out of the scabbard, with a look of the most frantic wildness. Edwards gently replaced it in its sheath...¹⁴

Mackenzie denounces the devastation visited by English imperialism on India,¹⁵ but it is unclear how heroes like these will be able to challenge such violence. Blake is already thinking about the possibilities of social rebellion, and a structure of feeling tending towards pacifistic withdrawal is unlikely to satisfy him for long. In any case, he already has doubts about compassion, and the volume, as well as being grudging in praise of pity, contains the beginnings of a characteristic critique.

Blake's counter-ideology involves both attempts to create active and strong subjectivities and to reveal the truth about the emotions promoted by the ruling class. Throughout his works he is concerned to show that 'polite' pity, although not necessarily hypocritical or completely valueless, is not the

⁹ Thomas Warton, in The Works of the English Poets, Vol. 18, 1810, 97.

¹⁰ v. E415, 'Mad Song', and E416, 'Song'; 'Mad Song' is the sharpest critique of Melancholy's destructive self-absorption.

¹¹ Raymond Williams's phrase - The Long Revolution, 1965, 64-88.

¹² For Blake and Gray, v. Margaret Ruth Lowery, Windows of the Morning, 1970, 159-160. Lowery underplays Gray's influence, but Blake works out some of his attitudes to Sensibility in engagement with the themes of the 'Elegy'.

¹³ The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, 1969, 128.

¹⁴ Mackenzie, 1970, 91. For French writing, v. R. S. Ridgway, Voltaire and Sensibility, 1973, 91.

¹⁵ Mackenzie, 1970, 102-105.

unselfish emotion it was usually represented as being. This process begins in 'King Edward The Third'; Dagworthy has discouraged the tears of two of his men, as dangerous to their warlike spirit,¹⁶ but Sir Walter Manny thinks differently: '...I have been weeping/Over the men that are to die to-day.'¹⁷ There is room, in Manny's view, for pity in war, although it will not stop him from playing an enthusiastic role in the slaughter.¹⁸ Dagworthy seems won over: 'I'll fight and weep, 'tis in my country's cause;/I'll weep and shout for glorious liberty'.¹⁹ These tears are functional; they are meant to be just as motivating as his patriotic shouting. Dagworthy's emotionality is designed to raise others to greater heights of courage. Further, if officers have no compassion for their men persuading them to fight and die becomes harder, so public displays of this kind create a useful impression of the humaneness of the leaders. Such tears are the forerunners of those with which Urizen enforces his laws of reactionary humanitarianism.²⁰

Pity was not just recommended by the ruling class to its own members, but claimed as a universal virtue. Blake counters this in 'Samson' by illustrating the dangers of compassion to the would-be liberator:

For Dalila's fair arts have long been tried in vain; in vain she wept in many a treacherous tear.²¹

Dalila guilefully draws attention to these 'tears' of sacrifice to her 'God' Samson, while taunting him with, 'Pity forsook thee at thy birth!'.²² Weeping is part of Dalila's successful attempt to get her way by arousing Samson's compassion; this is Blake's first embodiment of the idea that through pity the weak render the strong impotent. Dalila turns her weakness into a strength that defeats her lover, and the fragment as a whole shows Blake's fear that women and the 'watery' emotions they are linked with will overcome male strength.²³ This process, which is to be given an explicitly political form when Blake deals with La Fayette's 'treachery' to the Revolution, is already generalised into one in which the oppressor uses compassion to weaken the will not just of an individual but of a national hero.²⁴ Blake's suspicion of pity

¹⁶ E431, Scene 3, 164-171.

¹⁷ E435, Scene 5, 1-2.

¹⁸ E437, Scene 5, 62-66.

¹⁹ E436, Scene 5, 51-52.

²⁰ v. p. 155-156.

²¹ E443.

²² E443.

²³ 'Samson, the strongest of the children of men...', E443.

²⁴ E445.

has its eighteenth-century precedents,²⁵ but, in view of the generally favourable portrayal of this emotion in the 1780s, his reservations are significant.

The Champion of the Oppressed is a model of male feeling also found in *Sensibility*; it is evoked by Rousseau as inspiration for *Émile* and by the *Encyclopédie* as part of 'humanité'.²⁶ If, in the worst cases of *Sensibility*, the most moving scenes were considered those where the situation was irremediable and *only* pity could be offered,²⁷ a commoner view was that action against abuses followed logically from compassion,²⁸ and most thinkers allowed that a fiercer emotion, usually labelled *indignation*, could usefully accompany it. It is in such terms that Helen Maria Williams portrays the Girondins, marked off from the Jacobins by their fine sensibilities, but fully committed to revolutionary action, and inspired not by bestial fury but noble resentment at the wrongs of the people. Hannah More's religious version of this figure also finds rage necessary, and this is especially significant as she is generally suspicious of anger. There is a strong tendency in 'David and Goliath' to link anger to the enemies of God: Goliath lives and dies 'furious' and the heathens 'rage' in war,²⁹ while David is told by Jesse that only God or country can 'sanctify resentment'.³⁰ Yet his movement from compassionate shepherd to warrior means that he too becomes 'enrag'd'.³¹ Anger supplements compassion to create an active structure of feeling, which Blake finds much more appealing than the Man of Feeling.

'Gwin'³² is the volume's most direct attempt to constitute the reader in this identity. Blake distances himself from *popular* fury :

Beneath them roll'd, like tempests black,
 The num'rous sons of blood;
 Like lions' whelps, roaring abroad,
 Seeking their nightly food.

Their wives and children, weeping loud,

²⁵ v. p. 13, and p. 101.

²⁶ v. p. 105, and p. 13.

²⁷ Brissenden, 1974, 6.

²⁸ Ridgway, 1973, 2, 51.

²⁹ More, 1783, 75, 116, 95.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 57.

³¹ *ibid.*, 91.

³² For Gwin as George and the poem as 'rejoicing in the American War of Independence', v. John Holloway, *Blake: the Lyric Poetry*, 1968, 55.

Follow in wild array,
Howling like ghosts, furious as wolves
In the bleak wintry day.³³

The rebels and their families have real grievances, but this is hardly an attractive picture, and nor is that of the husbandman leaving his plough 'To wade thro' fields of gore'³⁴ - the next poem refers to 'Envy and Hate, that thirst for human gore'. Revolutionary violence is necessary but unpleasant. These lupine humans can be compared to the raging wolf and glaring lion which threaten the peaceful flocks in 'To The Evening Star',³⁵ and the howling fury of the women and children is linked to the bleakness of the day: the barren cold symbolises the hardships of the old order, but their anger merges with the chill rather than melts it with living warmth.³⁶ There seems little difference between it and the pestilential counter-revolutionary wrath of the king.³⁷ Similarly, the wars of Patriot against Tyranny described in 'Prologue to King John' are no less terrible than the imperialist ventures of the preceding and following poems - 'the sucking infant lives to die in battle; the weeping mother feeds him for the slaughter!'.³⁸ This is the rhetoric of pity, not an attempt to provide martial inspiration for the battle against tyranny.

'Gwin' is, nonetheless, clear in its sympathies, and the suffering and death caused by the revolt are blamed squarely on the King.³⁹ Gordred, the rebel leader, is kept separate from the ugly anger of his followers, yet is still able to take energy from wrath: when he comes to fight, his brow is 'frowning'.⁴⁰ The narrator, in describing the conditions that lead to Gordred's awakening, balances anger and compassion:

The Nobles of the land did feed
Upon the hungry Poor;
They tear the poor man's lamb, and drive
The needy from their door!⁴¹

³³ E418, 17-20; 25-28.

³⁴ E418, 44-45.

³⁵ E410, 11-12.

³⁶ cf. the picture of Orc, E53, 4, 6-11.

³⁷ E419, 81-84.

³⁸ E439.

³⁹ E420, 97-100.

⁴⁰ E419, 63.

⁴¹ E417, 5-8.

The first two lines of this stanza demand an 'angry response, the last two invoke pity alongside continuing wrath. The poem is a counter-ideological attempt to promote a subjectivity in which both kinds of emotion combine to inspire rebelliousness. Gordred is not a symbol of the might of the people, but a champion separated from 'the hungry poor',⁴² and the reader constructed by the poem combines compassion with anger in a way that the poor themselves cannot do; pity in their case would be self-pity, and their 'bestial' anger is determined by the grim conditions of their lives. In spite of Blake's radical politics and plebeian identifications, he is pulled in the direction of 'middle class' suspicion of popular emotion and revolutionary violence; while going closer to accepting it than any other canonical writer, he will always be concerned to distance himself from uncomplicated fury at one's own wrongs.⁴³

Blake ends, in a manner that is to be typical of his counter-ideology, by problematising what he has just created. The strangely pessimistic ending, which has the North Sea flood 'The pleasant south country' in apparent reprisal for the successful northern revolt,⁴⁴ is the earliest indication of his desire to encourage doubts about the outcome of revolution in those he is also seeking to make revolutionaries.⁴⁵ 'Gwin' does not illustrate the 'Orc cycle' of the success and degeneration of rebellion,⁴⁶ as Gordred does not become a tyrant in his turn, but this makes the ending even more significant: Blake is convinced that revolt is necessary, but that anything more than flawed success is never possible, and he believed this even before the French Revolution had given him compelling examples of the forms failure could take. In his first engagement with the American Revolution he forecasts a depressing sequel.

The Champion of the Oppressed adds anger to his compassion for the sufferings of the people, but Blake is aware that wrath fuels other kinds of conflict as well. In 'King Edward The Third', it is in the service of the violence of imperialist war.⁴⁷ A link between war and wrath is traditional; texts since Homer had shown rage as a concomitant of battle, and the idea that *unrestrained* fury is not always useful in a warrior, and that 'the soul of war'

⁴² Erdman suggests that this might reflect Wilkism's rallying of badly organised 'masses' behind a 'champion' - Erdman, 1969, 28; cf. David Aers, in Dan Miller, Mark Bracher, Donald Ault eds., Critical Paths: Blake and the Argument of Method, 1987, 244-270.

⁴³ v. p. 131.

⁴⁴ E420, 115-116.

⁴⁵ These doubts exist, of course, in his own mind, and I shall suggest some of the reasons for them in later chapters - v. p. 52, and pp. 132-133.

⁴⁶ v. pp. 143-144.

⁴⁷ E437, Scene 6, stanza 1.

needed to be 'curb'd by the manliest reason'⁴⁸ is also to be found in The Iliad, Anger is necessary in promoting courage and military prowess; if 'fury' is removed 'nerveless shame' results.⁴⁹ Of the Concordance's sixteen listings of *ambition* and *ambitious* ten are in this play:

Prince

...strong nature

Will bend or break us; my blood, like a springtide,

Does rise so high, to overflow all bounds

Of moderation; while Reason, in his

Frail bark, can see no shore or bound for vast

Ambition⁵⁰

If the speaker were not confessing to a love of war, there would be no trouble in identifying the Blakean approval of excess, strength, and an emotional tide strong enough to sweep away reason. Hannah More had seen a connection between 'furious rage and violent ambition',⁵¹ and, although this is strongest in war, Blake treats ambition in other spheres as requiring the help of anger to sweep away obstacles.⁵² He is ambivalent about the ambition of the imperialist warrior; the early work values aspiration of all kinds, and, whatever his political reservations about particular wars, he was never able to take a consistently pacifistic attitude to battle.⁵³ The play condemns English imperialism, but the Prince's structure of feeling is similar to that of other 'active' models of masculinity towards which Blake is fundamentally sympathetic.

The Poetical Sketches hint at a third version of male identity. In Sensibility Hannah More turns Benevolence and Prudence into antagonists,⁵⁴ and encourages a friend worried about her son's fate in the American War to accept that 'energy of soul' which led him towards heroic deeds.⁵⁵ Yet she fears that 'this strong feeling' (Sensibility) could tend to evil as well as good, to 'wild irregular desires/Disorder'd passions, and illicit fires',⁵⁶ the downside of the heroic energy of warfare. Similarly, her David has to accept the dangerous

⁴⁸ E429, Scene 3, 85-86.

⁴⁹ E431, Scene 3, 177.

⁵⁰ E432, Scene 3, 233-238.

⁵¹ More, 1783, 139. cf. John Thelwall, Peaceful Discussion, 1795, 5.

⁵² v. p. 25.

⁵³ v. p. 125, and p. 210.

⁵⁴ More, 1783, 278.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 288.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 287-288.

energising of anger and ambition in order to become God's warrior.⁵⁷

Lovelace's claims to Sensibility suggest Richardson had also been worried by the possibilities unleashed by the acceptance of strong emotion, and Cox has good reason to treat 'the libertine' as a version of the sentimental man.⁵⁸ Blake is attracted towards the idea of a life of consummated energy. The Amoral Vitalist is driven by the 'fiery' emotions, and allows anger violent expression. In 'When early morn...' the lover casts off his melancholy pensiveness and cathartically tears an imagined sexual rival to pieces:

O should she e'er prove false, his limbs I'd tear,
And throw all pity on the burning air;
I'd curse bright fortune for my mixed lot,
And then I'd die in peace, and be forgot.⁵⁹

No criticism is offered of this jealous violence, and perhaps Blake feels that the miserable end is sufficient atonement. But these lines are the first step towards the diabolic provocation of 'Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires'.⁶⁰ By the end of the 1780s Blake had developed the critique of 'Christian Forbearance' made explicit in the draft of 'A Poison Tree'; the Lavater aphorisms (1788) praise stern judgement and recommend forgiveness of enemies only on condition of reformation.⁶¹ They represent a 'moment' in which Blake is still attached to some of the values of 'feminine' Sensibility,⁶² but the stronger pull is in the direction of the vigorously 'masculine' ideas of the Devils. He ends by identifying passivity with evil: 'all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act it is the contrary it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinderd'.⁶³ This was not accompanied by a belief in the totally free release of emotion, as Blake calls 'the choleric' who represses his passions and thus 'hinders' himself 'holy'.⁶⁴ He is to return frequently to problems of expressivity in the future; in the works of the early 1790s he crosses the two 'active' versions of masculinity, and develops a theory of emotion valorising strength and openness, while attempting to reverse the judgement that the energies of passion are evil; but the possibilities of the Man of Feeling remain, and he is forced to engage with the uses and misuses of the

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 72-73.

⁵⁸ In Syndy McMillen Conger ed., Sensibility in Transformation, 1990, 72. For Sensibility and violent heroes, v. *ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁹ E417, 17-20.

⁶⁰ E38, 9, 67.

⁶¹ E590; E592.

⁶² Cox, 1992, 51.

⁶³ E590, slightly simplified.

⁶⁴ E598.

compassionate emotions, which are also present in the Champion of the Oppressed, but explicitly rejected by the Amoral Vitalist.

The connection between ambition and rage is not accidental; a structure of feeling containing aspiration is likely to also contain anger, which, according to Gregory Nyssa, is 'the armour-bearer of desire'.⁶⁵ Anger is not just useful to warriors; in An Island In The Moon it fires the professional plans of artists thought to represent Blake and his brother:⁶⁶

If I dont knock them all up next year in the Exhibition Ill be hangd said
Suction. hang Philosophy I would not give a farthing for it do all by
your feelings and never think at all about it. Im hangd if I dont get up to
morrow morning by four o clock & work Sir Joshua - Before ten years
are at an end said Quid how I will work these poor milksop devils, an
ignorant pack of wretches ⁶⁷

This passage is neither wholly serious nor wholly satirical; it represents both Blake's plans and emotions and his ability to laugh at them. The structure of feeling is akin to that which in the ruling class, without self-mockery, powers aggressive war: anger, emotionality, ambition and arrogance. An Island sees Blake firmly ensconced in the city, linked with ambition since the late seventeenth century,⁶⁸ the only place where the plans of an artist to whom humility means nothing can be fulfilled. Anger has many uses, and, if it does not occur naturally, artfulness must step in:

now I think we should do as much good as we can when we are at Mr
Femality's do yo(u) snap & take me up - and I will fall into such a passion
Ill hollow and stamp & frighten all the People there & show them what
truth is...⁶⁹

It is significant that this display is to be at the house of 'Mr Femality'; Blake regards anger as distinctively masculine, and the feminised male suggested by the name is seen as someone who will benefit from seeing a masculine structure of feeling. Quid's⁷⁰ main intention is to stun those envious of his

⁶⁵ Because 'it attacks whatever would frustrate desire': Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1965, Vol. 21, 89.

⁶⁶ Erdman, 1969, 98.

⁶⁷ E455-56.

⁶⁸ Andrews, 1989, 31.

⁶⁹ E465.

⁷⁰ Probably Blake's - Erdman, 1969, 92.

talents into submission. His anger has genuine sources in frustration at lack of recognition, but his plan to use a calculated display of emotion to enforce his opinions indicates that anger, like any other manifestation of life force, can be perverted, moulded and administered; it also fuels the choice of career of Jack Tearguts, a class-conscious surgical sadist.⁷¹ Blake's portraits of the misuses of pity are frequently displayed by commentators; it needs emphasising that he does not always picture anger as the cleansing wrath of the first two lines of 'A Poison Tree'. Blake's aspirations in these passages are for success as an independent producer; this necessitates a structure of feeling that will motivate hard work and a competitive spirit; an angry demand for recognition and contempt for rivals is useful in such a status.

An Island in the Moon continues to probe ruling-class compassion, particularly in the form of charity. The philanthropist Jonas Hanway had seen pity as part of a system of 'police',⁷² necessary to bring order to social sectors as fierce and undisciplined as the master sweeps.⁷³ Blake resents the encroachments of rationalisation and repression, but he is unable to reject them completely.

Obtuse Angle's song⁷⁴ satirises thinkers (Enlightened and Christian) and, apparently, praises charitable 'doers' like the Founder of Charterhouse, Thomas Sutton. Erdman believes that Blake is mocking Obtuse Angle's blindness to the 'unpleasant and less mathematical aspects of charity' and that he regarded Sutton's work as the unimaginative imposition of a destructive pedagogy on unwilling children,⁷⁵ while Stanley Gardner argues that, although Blake *is* satirising Obtuse Angle's limitations, he fundamentally approves of Sutton's activity.⁷⁶ Such contrary interpretations are determined by Blake's uncertainties about pity and about its institutionalisation in charity. The rhythm and language make it impossible to take the praise of Sutton seriously:

He drew out of the Stocks
His money in a box
And sent his servant

⁷¹ E454-455; Webster, 1983, 10.

⁷² A frequent word: Jonas Hanway, A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers in London and Westminster, 1785: 17, 19, 45, 47, 97 etc. He was also the author of The Defects of Police the Cause of Immorality, 1775.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 51; Andrew, 1989, *passim*.

⁷⁴ E460-461.

⁷⁵ Erdman, 1969, 120.

⁷⁶ Stanley Gardner, Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraced, 1986, 25.

To Green the Bricklayer
 And to the Carpenter
 He was so fervent⁷⁷

Erdman avoids a difficulty when he claims:

The practical man, confident of his capacity to hinder pestilence with pavingstones, supposes that the children's happiness follows automatically.⁷⁸

But why should improvements hindering the spread of pestilence have no value in themselves, even if they contribute nothing towards a sound educational philosophy? *Something* good about Sutton is implied by his strong desire to improve the world and his determined execution of his plans. Blake's ambivalence is not just about an individual but about a way of approaching social problems. Institutions of any kind tend to fix and to limit, something well symbolised by the bricks and mortar of Sutton's Hospital; on the other hand, without such fixing nothing can ever be achieved.⁷⁹

Steelyard the Lawgiver's response is ostensibly in praise of Mayors and Aldermen, figures of traditional authority, who justify their power through the exercise of an older form of charity, the distribution of food to the poor:

Thus sitting at the table wide the Mayor & Aldermen
 Were fit to give law to the city each eat as much as ten
 The hungry poor enterd the hall to eat good beef & ale
 Good English hospitality O then it did not fail⁸⁰

Such a view was old-fashioned,⁸¹ and Blake is undoubtedly making fun of a pompous form of authority and its legitimating rituals. There is a contrast between traditional 'hospitality' and the 'rationalized monetary charity' of Sutton,⁸² but Blake is not preferring either form: if the Aldermen do have some 'recognition of [the] real, unabstracted existence' of those they help it is presented in a line consisting entirely of cliché, and, as Glen goes on to point

⁷⁷ E461, 13-18.

⁷⁸ Erdman, 1969, 120.

⁷⁹ Edward Larrissy, William Blake, 1986, 89.

⁸⁰ E461, 9-12.

⁸¹ 'Old English hospitality is long since deceased,' The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton, Vol.1, 1970, 409; Glen, 1983, 118.

⁸² *ibid.*, 120; but 'fervent', ironic as it is, suggests an enthusiasm that belies any description of his charity as exclusively rational.

out, their vision lacks the forward-looking aspirations of Sutton's activity. Blake regards both ideals as seriously flawed yet containing possibilities that make complete rejection the wrong response.⁸³ Pestilence is hindered, the poor are fed, and 'hospitality' keeps alive, albeit in an extremely attenuated form, an ideal which, in a different society, could become a manifestation of genuine community.

'Holy Thursday' (present in An Island in more or less its final form) ends with an admonition which seems to summarise the poem, but whose significance is unclear:

Then cherish pity lest you drive an angel from your door⁸⁴

Should this line be read with emphasis on 'you', making clear that this is what the guardians of the poor ('wise guardians' in the final version) have done? Or is Blake instructing us to follow their charitable example? E. D. Hirsch, Jr., considers that in the face of parental failure of love they exercise the 'Christological' emotions of Mercy and Pity.⁸⁵ Erdman, on the other hand, cites evidence that the condition of charity schools was a cause for concern in the early 1780s, and is sure that Blake never interpreted 'the annual regimented singing of London charity-school children as evidence that the flogged and uniformed boys and girls are angelically happy'.⁸⁶ Other critics are more hesitant, perhaps sensing that a univocal interpretation is not available.⁸⁷

The fact that this poem has been read so differently indicates that Blake took a complex view of the issues involved. The ambiguities begin in the first line, if not with 'holy' then at the latest with 'clean'. On the one hand, the well-scrubbed faces of the charity children contrast unfavourably with the dirty disorder of life of the boys in Tilly Lally's song.⁸⁸ Yet Blake would have known that the imposition of cleanliness on poor children had its advantages - An Island is much concerned with images of pestilence. The influential William Buchan argued for strict public and private adherence to the virtue of

⁸³ *ibid.*, 128-129.

⁸⁴ E463, 12.

⁸⁵ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Innocence and Experience, 1964, 44, 195. Gardner, 1986, 41, argues that they have nothing to do with the educational charities but are administrators of Gilbert's Act (1782) which had beneficial effects in St. James's. If he is right, the detail but not the substance of my argument would need to be modified.

⁸⁶ Erdman, 1969, 121-122.

⁸⁷ David Fuller, Blake's Heroic Argument, 1988, 77; Harold Bloom, Blake's Apocalypse, 1963, 134.

⁸⁸ E463-464.

cleanliness, including 'FREQUENT washing'.⁸⁹ Buchan was promoting not just medicine but social rationalisation; washing was not purely a matter of health, but a mark of reason, order and the imposition of power.⁹⁰

The cleanliness of the children's faces in 'Holy Thursday' is both an expression and a violation of their innocence, just as the ordering that binds pity into the form of a charitable institution is both valuable and destructive. The structuring and regimentation of the children's bodies protects them from disease and enables the order of art - the harmonious singing - to emerge; but, at the same time, it destroys spontaneous individuality ('walking two & two') and represses the dirt and untidiness of vitality. Blake is trying to go beyond the Enlightened attempt to literally and metaphorically sanitise society. Britain as it is needs the compassion of the rich to make life a little more tolerable for the poor, and it needs foundations to channel this emotion into useful forms, but Blake is not completely happy with either emotion or institution.

Pity is particularly susceptible to institutionalisation. It flows easily into Sutton's bricks and mortar, into the largesse of the overfed Aldermen, and into the educational charities represented in St. Paul's. It offers no necessary challenge to hierarchy and inequality, and, in the form it takes in these poems, actually depends on them, articulating comfortably with other ideologies of social control. 'Holy Thursday' celebrates the success of the children in maintaining, in spite of all 'binding', their ability to flow, like the river and like song. Nature survives civilisation, but, in a world of pestilence and violence, survives only at *the cost of civilisation* and its repressive charities.

The service in Saint Paul's was an ideologically legitimating and carefully orchestrated piece of ruling-class theatre.⁹¹ The pity it promotes can alleviate matters for the worst off, but cannot prefigure life in a redeemed society nor point to any strategy for changing things as they are. The poem that follows, a version of the Innocent 'Nurse's Song', portrays children who are as free and, in a different way, as creative as those in 'Holy Thursday', but nourished by an institution more sensitive and compassionate than that of the guardians; it will only be when Blake portrays pity as felt by children themselves ('The Chimney Sweeper') or springing up spontaneously in familial

⁸⁹ William Buchan, Domestic Medicine, 1772, 128. The whole of Chapter V111 is relevant.

⁹⁰ v. also Mary Wollstonecraft, The Elements of Morality in The Works Of Mary Wollstonecraft, Vol.2, 1989, 20, 37.

⁹¹ Glen, 1983, 125.

interaction ('A Cradle Song') that he sees it as affording more than just distant glimpses of how life might be.

Glen's privileging of this Innocent 'Holy Thursday' over the Experienced⁹² as more radical and comprehensive because it goes beyond the category of protest accepted by the latter⁹³ ignores the fact that neither poem offers hope of fundamental change. The children's freedom is created by their guardians' discipline - the poem progresses from the regimented order with which they move through the streets to the harmony of music. This discipline is a form of violence, and, however admirable the achievement of the children in transcending their situation, the final line takes us back, on any interpretation, to a kind of pity that will always be necessary in a radically unequal society. The furious vision of the Experienced 'Holy Thursday'⁹⁴ is therefore necessary, and, if Blake is never able to convincingly demonstrate that anger leads to liberation either, this is not because he is trapped in the categories of protest, but because no thoroughgoing liberation of the kind that he desired was available in the late eighteenth century. The final line embodies a strategy that Blake is to find politically essential. The irony destroys the ceremony's dishonest claims to embody compassion for the paraded children, yet the line also suggests the possibility of a completely different order, one in which compassion would not mean theatrical charity but the harmonious interaction suggested by the song. Blake works by ironic criticism of what is, avoiding having to stipulate how this new order might be organised. The radicalism of the rejection means that he does not have to compromise his vision by demanding achievable reforms, yet he has not gone so far as to claim that charity harms its victims, and that they would be better-off left to their own devices.⁹⁵

By 1788 the main elements of the ideology of the emotions that was to reach its most characteristic expression in the works of 1790-1794 were already in place: a critique of ruling-class pity, balanced by an acceptance of its continuing necessity, the praise of activity, the approval, not without reservations, of vigorous emotions like anger, and a fear of 'female' structures of emotion in men. Such a stress on strong and authentic feeling was developed in relation to a number of historical factors. The continuing impulses from the American success contributed not only to Blake's radicalism

⁹² *ibid.*, 127.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 127.

⁹⁴ Which Cook privileges over the Innocent version - in David Aers, Jonathan Cook and David Punter, *Romanticism and Ideology*, 1981, 49-50.

⁹⁵ Obtuse Angle's and Steelyard's Songs also work in this way.

but to his self-confidence; the 'manly' energy of the Americans had resulted in the overthrow of oppression. The art market in the late 1780s was buoyant, and Blake was not the only one involved to feel optimistic about personal success.⁹⁶ At the same time, the American war had given way to 'the peaceful eighties', and international quiet was matched by a period, after Pitt's 1784 election victory, of uncontroversial legislation and financial reconstruction.⁹⁷ The optimistic ideas developed in a period when, fortified by the memory of a rebel victory, Blake seemed to be left by events with the opportunity of pursuing his own successes, were eventually to be tested by a renewed outbreak of domestic and international conflict. But, in the peace that continued fundamentally undisturbed until summer 1792, Blake was still settling accounts with the Man of Feeling. Thel and Songs of Innocence are given over to probing compassion, while Tiriel denounces the child-rearing practices that produce a wrathful world.

⁹⁶ Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries, 1981, 40.

⁹⁷ J. Steven Watson, The Reign of George 111 1760-1815, 1960, 283-285.

Chapter Three

Impasse: Tiriell and The Book of Thel

Tiriell¹ unmasks the anger of the rulers and suggests some of the social contingencies that create it, while remaining pessimistic about the prospects of the rebellious counter-anger of the sons. A confrontation of rages has already been given political form in 'Gwin', and will be again in America; each side needs anger to provide the energy to achieve its goals, but in Tiriell both angers lead nowhere. The rebels' wrath might have been shown as resulting in social improvement, but, after temporary success, the children are overcome by the fury of Tiriell's curse; this itself is pointless, as it does not result in a restoration of what has been lost. The curse is anger partially expressed, some of its energy left inside to destroy the self, and the rest externalised to hurt others. Tiriell's curses signify both his loss of power and the power he has maintained, and cursing, like the sulking of the baby in 'Infant Sorrow',² is a way in which anger flows between those who live in relations of radical inequality; only in a society based on the equality of friendship can healing expression take place. Tiriell is not interested in resolving the dispute through the interchange of emotion, as this would be to place himself on the same level as his sons, but in using the power anger gives him to destroy those who defy his will.

Erdman identifies Tiriell with George 111³ and there is undoubtedly a contemporary dimension to the symbolism, but a deeper theme of the poem is the corruption of any society where the power 'gradient' is extreme. Frye's claim that Tiriell is a king 'as a king is the only man who gets a real chance to be a tyrant'⁴ obfuscates this point: in Blake's view societies like his own breed tyrants and victims at all levels, and he is as much concerned with the power of parents as that of monarchs.⁵ The anger of the father is an important agent of social control, leading to violence designed to break the spirit of the children and create obedient citizens or tyrannical monarchs. The strongest in such societies are weak; they are, as Tiriell's final speech recognises, driven by forces they hardly understand, their exercise of authority inevitably calls up resistance, and, once overthrown, they are forced to live out the logic of the life they have helped create by falling into the hands of the physically stronger.

¹ For dating, v. Viscomi, 1993, 188; 1788-1789 is most probable.

² v. p. 98.

³ Erdman, 1969, 135.

⁴ Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry, 1969, 243.

⁵ For relations between the two, v. Stone, 1979, 110.

In the world of the poem people continually struggle for dominion; slavery is a recurrent theme: Tiriël's children feel as if they were slaves before they rebelled, they accuse Tiriël of having 'enslav'd the sons of Zazel' and Ijim says that he will use Tiriël 'like a slave'.⁶ It is in this world of power struggle that the anger of the tyrant and the anger of his subjects emerges.⁷ In Innocence Blake is to imagine a world in which the power gradients are so gentle that children never need to get angry with their parents or nurses because they are never the victims of arbitrary imposition, and adults do not have to get angry to break their children's spirit so as to 'prepare' them for later social and economic subjugation. In Tiriël's society, wrath is functional for all parties: for the tyrant, it inspires fear and enables him to subdue his subjects, while for the subjects it can be the driving force of resistance. Pity is located largely in the weak, in those who have left the world of struggle for the Vales of Har - even here Mnetha 'waited on' Har and Heva, whose power is in weakness, and Tiriël kneels before them; theirs is a corrupted Innocence, reflecting in attenuated form the brutality they have fled.

Har and Heva are reduced to a senile second childhood, and a life parodying the values and interests of Sensibility, which, Blake implies, is not even serious about emotion. When Tiriël leaves:

...Har & Heva stood & watchd him till he enterd the wood
And then they went & wept to Mnetha. but they soon forgot their tears⁸

The lightly-rooted affections and cowering timorousness of this kind of Innocence provide no alternative to the violence and hypocrisy of the Experienced world Tiriël encounters. Yet the anger of his children, even though it is in some sense an image of the victorious wrath of the American rebels, does not lead to any significant improvements, even though it destroys Tiriël's power. They live in his palace until their father is brought back unknowingly by Ijim and curses them again, with results which are confused in detail but clear enough in general effect: all of his children, except Hela, are either killed or left to 'wither'.⁹

⁶ E276, 1, 16; E277, 1, 40; E280, 4, 24.

⁷ Tiriël as an irascible tyrant has many eighteenth century analogues in both the social and domestic spheres: Sir Anthony Absolute, Lady Booby, Montoni, and Vathek, for example. Lear and Herod stand somewhere behind him.

⁸ E279, 3, 35-36.

⁹ E282, 5, 29-34.

Blake never makes the reason for the failure of rebellion clear; his ideological pessimism is expressed in the invention of an outcome that has no direct historical referent. Blake is, unambiguously, on the side of the forces of rebellion, but he is unflinching in indicating the ways in which the old order will thwart their best endeavours; Tiriell's curse is an apt symbol of the continuing power of the defeated regime to blight what follows. The sons have offered Tiriell 'charity',¹⁰ so they are not guilty of acting from unalloyed anger, as Fuzon is to be; Blake between 1783 and 1810 is to imagine many different ways in which anger can fail to bring about its political aims. He identifies with the lowest social groups, so is unable to recommend a purely reformist politics, built on the benevolence and judicious indignation admired by 'sentimental radicals' like Helen Maria Williams, yet is equally unable to confidently proclaim that a transformed society is within reach. This sobriety was partly based on the knowledge of how thorough the old order had been in the ideological constitution of its subjects, partly on his intuitions about economic reality.¹¹

Conservatives claimed that the feelings which validated the status quo were the products of human nature.¹² Tiriell's final speech shows that the feelings which enabled the old order to continue were a deliberate creation of that order's childrearing practices.¹³ He claims that only sensually deprived and imaginatively broken subjects will accept the further restraints of religion, and such beings will be incapable of the direct openness of the undamaged. Poisonous berries, produced by the child's repressed pain and anger, in the same manner as the 'apple bright' in 'A Poison Tree', will appear to destroy self and other. By implication, the free flowing of emotion through an unrepressed system is the only way to avoid the passivity, despair and self-mutilation of Tiriell's dying days - a counter-ideological version of 'natural' feeling.

Stephen Cox believes that this speech reflects a concern, old-fashioned in the late 1780s, at the effects of upper-class education;¹⁴ but Blake's point is not *primarily* that ruling class upbringings are designed to destroy children so they can fit into roles that could not be tolerated by the healthy. Tiriell's speech goes beyond class confines not because of Blake's 'impulse to universalize',¹⁵

¹⁰ E277, 1, 36.

¹¹ v. pp. 132-134.

¹² v. p. 57.

¹³ E284-5, 8, 7-29.

¹⁴ Cox, 1992, 59.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 60.

but because he is describing the kind of operations carried out (in one form or another) on all classes in societies that need to produce 'subjects' who are unsensual, scared, and unimaginative.¹⁶ Christianity, with its emphasis on obedience and physical punishment, was the official ideology for all groups, and provided some of the theory of child-rearing, even after the decline of regimes based heavily on the idea of original sin.¹⁷ Cox claims that whipping was old-fashioned in the 1780s but does not point out that other forms of corporal punishment remained the norm in all classes.

Blake reaches an impasse when it comes to the positive 'moment' of his critique; Tiriél's dying fury has no useful outcome, except insofar as it is one of the agents of his insight. He ends with a useless and unforgiving curse on Har. Cleansing anger is no more possible in this world than genuine examples of the 'loving mercy' that Hela, without much justification, imputes to Har and Heva,¹⁸ whose rather unpleasant pity for Tiriél emerges only after their strongest reaction, fear, has subsided.¹⁹ Experience is full of barren anger, Innocence of impotent or parodic compassion. Here and in Songs of Innocence Blake is attempting to change the way in which children are brought up, but he is aware that transformation of child-rearing can only happen after or in concert with fundamental social change. Socialisation practices are produced in accordance with the needs of society for particular kinds of 'subject'.²⁰ The steep power gradients and brutal relationships of the world of the poem make such practices necessary; the mode of child-rearing, in turn, makes it hard to cast society into a new mould, and the failure of the sons' rebellion signals Blake's belief that no redemption of the conditions which destroyed Tiriél is possible.

Interpretations of The Book of Thel²¹ tend to founder on an apparent inconsistency. The structure of the poem seems clear: Thel lives in a world of mutual benevolence which she finds unsatisfying; she is taught that it is necessary for her to leave this constricting Innocence and brave the world of Experience. She is eventually ready to do so, but, when she finds out what actually awaits her, she retreats shrieking to the Vales of Har. Thel suggests

¹⁶ v. p. 3.

¹⁷ v. p. 41 For attitudes to punishment, v. Lloyd de Mause, The History of Childhood, 1974, 42-43; Alice Miller, For Your Own Good, 1983, 8-63.

¹⁸ E283, 6, 26.

¹⁹ E278, 2, 31-40.

²⁰ For modern theorisations, v. Therborn, 1980, *passim*, and the article by Lester and Brazelton cited in Chapter 1, footnote 7; Blake's awareness of this is shown in, for example, his making Urizen the 'Schoolmaster of souls great opposer of Change' - E389, 120, 21.

²¹ 1789-1790: Viscomi, 1993, 240.

'will' and the narrative seems to be about her failure to meet the challenges of maturity. Yet, on the evidence provided, Thel would be insane to swap her compassionate if limited rural world for the brutalities of Experience. Commentators react to this either by taking the structure of the narrative at face value, and criticising Thel,²² or by attending primarily to the content of the two worlds and defending her.²³ In fact, Blake is defining an impasse in which Thel, and therefore the reader, is faced with a situation in which there are no satisfactory choices.

Thel starts the poem lamenting her transience and pointlessness; she meets a lilly and a cloud who try to persuade her that she is, in fact, a part of the world of interflowing compassion. This finds its ultimate form in death; Thel fears she will become nothing but 'the food of worms',²⁴ while the cloud tries to persuade her that this intermingling is the 'use' she craves. Thel is shown an abandoned worm, 'like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf':

...thou cans't not speak. but thou cans't weep;
Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked: weeping,
And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worms voice & raisd her pitying head;
She bow'd over the weeping infant, and her life exhal'd
In milky fondness...²⁵

This generous pity necessitates self-sacrifice in a way that it never does in Songs of Innocence. In suckling the mother 'exhales' part of her being to enable her child to live. Schorer's claim that Thel learns that every item in the creation has 'its particular character and function in the universal harmony' and that 'the operation of that function *breaks down* the self in acts of altruism'

²² e.g. Bloom, 1963, 62; R. F. Gleckner, The Piper and the Bard: a Study of William Blake, 1959, 163. Elizabeth Langland, in Miller, Bracher and Ault, 1987, 233.

²³ e.g. Helen Bruder, in Stephen Clark and David Worrall eds., Historicizing Blake, 1994, 147-158; Tilottama Rajan, in J Douglas Kneale ed., The Mind in Creation, 1992, 90.

Lorraine Clark, Blake, Kierkegaard and the Spectre of Dialectic, 1991, 58, understands Thel's dilemma, but feels she should move through Experience to Organised Innocence; Blake nowhere defines such a state verbally - some critics have seen it in this book's final illustration (David V. Erdman, The Illuminated Blake, 1974, 40) - let alone suggests how it is to be achieved. If it is imaged in Night the Ninth of The Four Zoas then it is a social construction, unattainable by the individual will.

²⁴ E5, 3, 23.

²⁵ E5, 4, 7-9.

reveals the truth through the unintended implications of its vocabulary.²⁶ Pity, the virtue that the eighteenth century exalted in order to challenge the norms of a Hobbesian war of all against all, turns out to be a kind of secret agent of the weaker parties in the struggle, evening the odds by inducing the stronger to sacrifice part of themselves.²⁷

The image of a mother exhaling her life in breast-feeding is one of a number of representations, involving both males and females, of pity as an ambiguous response. What the Clod and Thel together experience is a feminised version of the conflicts faced by Los encountering a defeated and imprisoned Urizen.²⁸ The same struggle is seen when Los admits to the mistakes his tenderness for Satan has led him into: 'pity divides the soul/And man, unmans.'²⁹ Compassion is both self-diminishing and self-expanding; if the Clod of Clay loses her 'female' substance, just as Los loses his 'masculinity' in Milton, she is not facing some abstract choice about motherhood, but, symbolically, a living baby, and if she were to share Thel's unwillingness to offer even mother's smiles³⁰ the baby would die. Thel's lack of compassion is no way forward; in fact, although Beer believes that Thel escapes the 'negative character' of Tiriel,³¹ it conveys the same sense that nothing is likely to work. Blake offers a 'conclusion in which nothing is concluded' because he can suggest nothing better than the limitations of the Vales of Har.

Before entering the 'house' of 'the matron Clay' Thel wipes 'her pitying tears', because she has now learnt that God does more than just punish those who willfully harm worms: he actually 'cherishes' the worm with 'milk and oil.'³² Apparently Thel has discovered that an inferior 'pity' is unnecessary, because the world is underpinned by a deeper principle of loving relationship, and she has now learnt enough to make her ready for the next stage of her life. Experience, as it appears to her, is a world of sorrow, but one without any compassion, let alone any more fundamental unifying force. It is characterised by violent action and equally violent repression and is apparently based on the opposite principle to the Vales of Har, that of self-assertion checked only by the self-assertion of others; this choice between a

²⁶ Mark Schorer, William Blake: The Politics of Vision, 1959, 203 - italics mine.

²⁷ 'Helpless and naked' echo 'Infant Sorrow' - E28 - which handles the struggle between parents and child, but from the viewpoint of the child, with anger not the elicitation of pity as the weapon of the weaker party.

²⁸ v. p. 155.

²⁹ E102, 8, 19-20 - v. p. 192.

³⁰ E5, 4, 6.

³¹ John Beer, Blake's Visionary Universe, 1969, 67.

³² E6, 5, 10-11.

limiting and unfulfilling Innocence, in which compassion nourishes the other at the expense of the self, and the war of all against all, in which anger is essential if the self is to survive and dominate, is the one offered Thel by the poem. The impasse she faces is underlined by the fact that the 'knowledge' she gains is exactly the least helpful imaginable in facing the new world.

It is not surprising she retreats to the compassionate idyll. Thel's original dissatisfaction, her sense that a life without 'use' will end in a meaningless death, receives no resolution. The poem represents, conceptually if not chronologically, a later stage in Blake's thinking than Songs of Innocence; the pity that had seemed unproblematic now seems to contain elements of corruption.

Chapter Four
Heavenly Compassion: Songs of Innocence

There are two 'modes' of Innocence; in the first it is embodied in its own world, in the second it operates amidst the brutalities of Experience. In both it holds out hope of a kind, but a hope qualified, in the one case by its utopianism, in the other by its impotence. Nevertheless, the creation of these two forms is part of Blake's counter-ideological challenge to established structures of feeling, an attempt to construct both children¹ and adults differently. The first mode reflects the eighteenth century view of a nation united by sympathy,² but the continuing presence of Experience in the second demonstrates that the social feelings can only gesture towards a just society, and the claim that they characterise the divided one that actually exists is an ideological pretence. Blake creates a picture of the kind of pity that would characterise a redeemed society, and in so doing draws his readers in that direction; but he knows that social contingencies not ideological 'shapings' are primary in creating forms of feeling. His glimpses of the society he is prefiguring and trying to create are inevitably hazy.

The Innocent world (of, for example, 'A Dream', 'The Ecchoing Green' and 'Nurse's Song') embodies the vision of a society united by flows of positive feeling, but sympathy exists in an emotional context earlier theorists would have abhorred. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson envisaged universal benevolence as a discipline for the passions,³ and those who praised pity usually also praised the repression of the 'dangerous' emotions⁴ in *adults*, while Blake portrays unjudgingly sexual desire ('The Blossom') and vigorous self-assertion ('Introduction') in children.

Blake's association of childhood, innocence and compassion was not new. Hutcheson thought that the 'state of nature' was one of 'Good-will, humanity, compassion and mutual aid', and Rousseau directed the interest of the century towards childhood as the time when humanity most approximated to this state.⁵ He argued that, although pity was 'native to the human heart', it would remain quiescent unless activated by imagination. Childhood was important in this process, as those with narrow early experiences were deprived of the basis for

¹ Glen, 1983, 9-10. On moulding children's emotions, v. Norbert Elias, The Civilising Process, Vol. 1, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 1939, X111 and passim.

² v. p. 10.

³ Jones, 1993, 111.

⁴ Crane, 1934, 209. v. p. 50.

⁵ Coveney, 1967, 42; 48.

comparison and reflection that would bring about the development of this capacity for compassionate imagination.⁶ Songs of Innocence⁷ do not preach the virtues of pity to children but describe the kinds of experience that will lead compassion to flow spontaneously. Rousseau's views were posited against cynical pictures of human nature. So useful is pity, that it precedes all 'reflection' and can sometimes be seen in animals, and even Mandeville had to acknowledge its value:

...but he did not see that from this quality alone flowed all those social virtues of which he disputed man's being in possession. In fact, what is generosity, clemency, or humanity, but compassion applied to the weak, to the guilty, or to mankind in general? Nay even benevolence and friendship, if we judge rightly, will appear to be only the effects of compassion constantly exerted towards a particular object.⁸

Rousseau gives compassion a huge scope, while representing it not as an 'emotion that reason deepens', but one that the intellect can actually weaken. The identification on which pity depends is much stronger in the state of nature, and the acme of the process of repression has arrived when 'philosophy' is used to justify indifference to sufferings not one's own.⁹ Rousseau denies pity a privileged place in an Enlightened élite, and places it with 'the savage' and 'the people',¹⁰ just as Blake pictures it in Tom Dacre's fellow sweep. Rousseau's discussion was influential, but other writers had made the same points: Thomas Herring thought pity prior to 'Discipline of Reason, or the Precepts of Religion', William Claggett that the lower classes were most prone to it because it was located with 'Nature' not '*Breeding*', while a number of Anglican divines thought it so strong as to be almost irresistible.¹¹

Such thinking prepared Blake's picture of pity as a 'shape' of life energy, a *natural* response when faced with distress and therefore stronger in children than adults. This implies that children's natures are fundamentally healthy, and the major condition of existence of this ideology of compassion is the rejection of the doctrine of original sin. It is well known that one of the

⁶ Jean Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages', in Rousseau and Herder on the Origin of Language, trans. J. H. Moran and A. Gode, 1966, 32.

⁷ Written 1783-1803 approx.; collection dated 1789, but perhaps not issued that early - E791.

⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind, in Rousseau, Vol. 7, 1774, 188-189.

⁹ *ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 189-190.

¹¹ Crane 1934, 220-224.

aims of Songs of Innocence was to counter the attitudes to children embodied in Isaac Watts's Divine Songs.¹² For all their incipient Enlightenment,¹³ Watts's songs continue to assume that 'a corrupt nature is a rugged knotty piece to hew'¹⁴ and he aims to rescue children's emotions from the degradation caused by the Fall; his anxious pedagogy, moulded by the facts of infant mortality and the consequences of Christian eschatology,¹⁵ sees the child as constantly surrounded by moral danger. Watts's concern with morality as it relates to death and judgement rather than the hopes of a balanced and integrated life¹⁶ means he wishes to restrain emotion¹⁷ and to shape a particular form of pity. This emphasis on restraint spans the century, and is also found in Wollstonecraft's Original Stories,¹⁸ which presents children as having the potential for living to purposes other than those of salvation, but still regards them as naturally inclined to go wrong. Firm adult guidance is necessary, just as reason rules over feeling and imagination in the regime of hard work and self-denial she is encouraging. In translating Elements of Morality she chooses a book recommending a similar structure of feeling, emphasising emotional moderation¹⁹ and teaching that even pity should not be felt in excess: ideal is one who 'participates in the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, but at the sight of their misery does not instantly burst into tears'.²⁰

Wollstonecraft still assumes a fallen nature in which emotions need to be regulated. Blake accepts and transcends an Enlightened position: Songs work out what it would *really* mean to abandon the idea that children are born corrupted and therefore need to submit to adult rationality. Energy is no longer dangerous but a trustworthy guide, and pity is approved because it flows from this life force, not because it is separate from or contrary to it.²¹ Hence he does not condemn anger, even though it is not part of his conception of Innocence. He is not seeking to restrain children's emotions so they become

¹² For Watts and Blake v. Vivian de Sola Pinto, The Divine Vision, 1968, Chapter 2.

¹³ *ibid.*, 67-71.

¹⁴ James Janeway, A Token for Children, Part 11, 1676, 11; significantly, Janeway remained influential in the eighteenth century - John and Elizabeth Newson, in John Oates ed., Early Cognitive Development, 1969, 68

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 69

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 67.

¹⁷ *v.* pp. 81-82.

¹⁸ 'Calculated to Regulate the Affections' - Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989; Blake illustrated both this and her translation of C. G. Salzmann's Elements of Morality. Wollstonecraft sympathised with most of what she found in Salzmann and changed any details inappropriate to an English context - Vol. 2, 1989, 5 - so I use the work as evidence of her own attitudes.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Vol. 2, 1989, 31.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 12.

²¹ cf. Glen, 1983, 148, 160.

tractable employees and citizens, but to delineate structures of feeling that will lead towards and then typify an egalitarian society.

Blake's pity, then, must flow between equals, while Watts's is postulated on superiority:

How do I pity those that dwell
Where Ignorance and Darkness reigns.²²

While some poor Wretches scarce can tell
Where they may lay their Head,
I have a Home wherein to dwell
And rest upon my Bed.²³

The same is true of other moulders of children in the eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft's Original Stories assumes the continued existence of a society divided into givers and receivers of charity and attempts to promote an active and rational pity in children who will later have the wealth and power to influence the lives of the poor.²⁴ The idea that pity always flowed from higher to lower was embodied in the vocabulary: 'objects of compassion'²⁵ in one form or another is common throughout the century,²⁶ and such phrasing implies a superiority on the part of the 'giver' of charity or pity. At worst, this might mean an inability to see the 'object' as fully human,²⁷ the issue becoming in some cases not the need of the impoverished but the moral worth of the giver.²⁸ Typical recipients of such pity in eighteenth-century writing were paupers, both as poor and as outcast,²⁹ slaves,³⁰ widows,³¹ victims of the injustice of the wealthy,³² impoverished country dwellers³³ and exposed children.³⁴ All these are cases where the 'object' is in a structurally inferior position, practical help is required, and reciprocity is unlikely. Pity implies

²² Isaac Watts, Divine Songs, ed., J. H. P. Pafford, 1971, 8. Pafford includes a facsimile of the first edition of 1715.

²³ *ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, 420; 444-446.

²⁵ Phillip Dormer Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son, 1929, 241.

²⁶ Andrew, 1989, 9; Thomas Day, Sandford and Merton, (written 1783-1789), 1865, 84.

²⁷ This is a major theme of Glen, 1983, Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁸ Roger Sales, English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics, 1983, 32.

²⁹ Robert Southey, Poems, 1797, 47.

³⁰ v. pp. 43-44.

³¹ v. p. 102.

³² Watts, 1971, 270.

³³ Helen Maria Williams, Letters Written in France, 1989, 218.

³⁴ Anon., Private Virtue and Publick Spirit Display'd, 1751, 12-13.

social and economic separation, and Wollstonecraft, for example, believes pity is appropriate for the middle classes,³⁵ but feels that if middle class women need it they become dangerously close to contempt.³⁶ Mrs. Barbauld's Hymns in Prose for Children, (1781) for which Blake engraved illustrations, assumes the same hierarchical positioning:

Negro woman, who sittest pining in captivity, and weepst over thy sick child; though no-one seeth thee, God seeth thee; though no-one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee: raise thy voice, forlorn and abandoned one; call upon him from amidst thy bonds, for assuredly he will hear thee.³⁷

God's pity passes to the white woman poet and on to the black woman who pities her own child; it also flows through the poet to the white children she is instructing. There is no reciprocity in these chains; the children at the end of them are passive, the white child as pupil, the black as an ailing 'object'. Charitable gifts to the poor and comfort to the sad are recommended to children as things they will provide when they are adult;³⁸ the social feelings unite a peaceful hierarchical community of which the child is a future member. In 'The Little Black Boy',³⁹ by contrast, the black boy is an active agent; he begins by finding reasons for self-pity ('But I am black, as if bereav'd of light') but goes on to recuperate his colour through the memory of a story told by his mother. Blackness is a means to bear the heat of God's love, which will enable him to help the white boy when both are in heaven, reversing the 'normal' flow of pity. One of the troubles with pity is that outside the world of Innocence it operates as if still inside: if this response to racial oppression were the only one, Bromion would be able to carry on raping black women for ever. Inside Innocence the black boy's compassion is unquestioned,⁴⁰ but Blake is forced to locate the reconciliation it effects in a heaven that images a future community he cannot portray in human terms.⁴¹

Thomas Day's The Dying Negro sees slaves as objects of compassion,⁴² but also stresses the presence of pity in their lives in Africa before capture. The dying slave feels sorrow for his surviving fellows, and the warriors who

³⁵ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, Chapters X, XIV, XIX.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 381; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in Wollstonecraft, Vol. 5, 1989, 147.

³⁷ Anna Letitia Barbauld, 1787, 66-67.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 62.

³⁹ E9.

⁴⁰ But v. Zachary Leader, Reading Blake's Songs, 1981, 108-117.

⁴¹ v. p. 53, and p. 54.

⁴² Day, 1773, 5.

fight the slavers are men of Sensibility whose 'generous bosoms' inspire 'indignant' resistance, and are easily tricked into melting with pity when their enemy pretend to be in trouble.⁴³ Day's poem illustrates the structural role of pity in the anti-slavery movement,⁴⁴ and shows that the tactic of imputing compassion to those more usually seen as its recipients was not original to Blake;⁴⁵ but Day's commitment to the continuation of class society meant that he could not show compassion as typically flowing between equals.

Other differences follow from Blake's conception of pity as a form of life energy. Earlier writers thought that it needed to be taught to children, like any other aspect of their moral duties. Children are sometimes shown as the protagonists of acts of charity not directly incited by adults, but this is seen as a result of previous teaching, operating perhaps on a naturally generous disposition.⁴⁶ Day is clear about the need for formal training, referring, for example, to young gentlemen 'who, from a bad education, had been little taught to feel or pity the distress of others'.⁴⁷

Moralists also tried to prevent pity taking inappropriate forms. When Charles in The Elements pities a poor man with little to eat and drink, his father points out that he may nevertheless be contented; this is indeed the case, and the lesson is that one should not be precipitate in bestowing pity.⁴⁸ When Blake offers overt moral instruction about compassion it is in an ironic way, as in the last line of 'The Chimney Sweeper', which undercuts the authority of the pedagogy it mimics, and suggests that adults have no right to teach children pity, as they already carry out such duties instinctively, in the face of lives marred by adult brutality. In the first 'mode' of Innocence compassion is untaught, except in the sense that the mother of 'A Cradle Song' and the nurse of 'Nurse's Song' are 'teaching' compassion by providing the guardianship out of which it will spring. The speaker of 'A Dream' simply needs to know the situation to drop a compassionate tear. Such pity could never involve rational calculation, a sense that benefits might one day be returned. Day, on the other hand, stresses that virtue is well rewarded in this world.⁴⁹ Nor could it ever

⁴³ *ibid.*, 8-10.

⁴⁴ Other examples: Anna Letitia Barbauld, Epistle to William Wilberforce, 1791, 5-6; Hannah More, The Sorrows of Yamba, 1795, 3.

⁴⁵ cf. 'The Negro's Complaint', William Cowper, 1834, 422.

⁴⁶ Day, 1865, 201, 280.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 238.

⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 2, 1989, 21-22; also 42-43, where pity is offered on condition of social acquiescence.

⁴⁹ Day, 1865, 'The Story of the Grateful Turk', which begins on page 89.

become a duty, a habit or a matter of salvation. Sidney's graciousness at Zutphen enables Day to point the moral:

An ordinary person might have pitied the poor soldier, or even have assisted him, when he had first taken care of himself; but who, in such a dreadful extremity as the brave Sidney... would be capable of even forgetting his own sufferings to relieve another, who had not acquired the generous habit of always slighting his own gratifications for the sake of his fellow-creatures?⁵⁰

Innocent pity does not depend on previous acts of denial; it is an expression, not an abnegation, of self. Day's concern for good habits is at odds with the free-flowing spontaneity of Innocent life. Pity is a present response to particular situations, not a duty inculcated by past teaching.

All 'shaping' is of course restraint, and rules out other possibilities; the bounding line of form needs to be imposed to make any potentiality actual, and 'Innocence' and 'Experience' are such bounding lines, creating particular structures and predispositions out of energy. Blake is not the voluntarist and idealist he is sometimes made out to be;⁵¹ he does not recommend emotional forms in the abstract but portrays the world that makes one 'shape' or another likely. The Innocent society is one of reciprocity, guardianship, authenticity and love. Compassion strengthens into 'complete empathy' and 'merging of identities',⁵² suggesting that the social feelings are dim forerunners of what could be expected in a different order. Sympathy extends beyond humanity; the peace of the landscape matches the nurse's quiet heart, and echoes the joyous sounds of children assimilated to the sheep and birds they play amongst. 'A Cradle Song' celebrates the intermingling of mother and child:

Sweet moans, dovelike sighs,
Chase not slumber from thy eyes.
Sweet moans, sweeter smiles,
All the dovelike moans beguiles.⁵³

The uncertainty about the origin of the smiles, and to whom the moaning and sighing belong, the confusion in which moans seem to 'beguile' themselves, suggest that the maternal consciousness is as sleepy as the baby's. The

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 230-231.

⁵¹ *v.* pp. 15-16.

⁵² David W. Lindsay, Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience, 1989, 19.

⁵³ E12, 13-16.

mother's tears over the baby - both joy and sorrow - are matched by Jesus's tears over her, and when Christ and baby are identified in the last stanza the system is complete. Mother and baby guard each other, and Christ, the ultimate protector, depends on them for embodiment. The poem clearly deals with something like compassion, yet it uses no such word, for any abstraction would be too weak to express the particularity of the state. Blake is suggesting new forms of emotion, not nameable in any current vocabulary. 'Pity' is affirmed in the sense that it gestures towards this condition of reciprocity, yet it is transcended by a condition that does not depend on power and an emotion that flows in both directions and does not need distress to elicit it.

'On Another's Sorrow' creates the same circle of compassion, parents responding with sorrow to their children's tears, and, in turn, receiving the universal pity of the Christ who became an 'infant small'.⁵⁴ The image of God wiping away all tears⁵⁵ is transferred to a humanised Jesus, because redemption is prefigured in moments of compassionate love between humans. Christ's pity can on its own destroy our grief, but only because he himself first 'becomes a man of woe' and thus the potential recipient of our own compassion.⁵⁶ A verbal effect establishes the completeness of the speaker's sympathy with the sorrowing other:

Can I see anothers grief,
And not seek for kind relief.⁵⁷

'Seek' is ambiguous; it could mean that the speaker looks for aid for himself or for the other; it thus abolishes the possibility of such a distinction, removing the concept of an object of pity divorced from a pitying subject, whether Jesus or a more fortunate human. In such a world:

To Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
All pray in their distress:
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ E17, 26.

⁵⁵ Revelations 21, 4.

⁵⁶ E17, 27; in Experience to become a 'Man of Sorrows' is to deny the energies of life - E67, 3, 23-24.

⁵⁷ E17, 3-4.

⁵⁸ E12, 1-4.

'Delight' is a recurring word in *Innocence*, pointing to a free and joyous self-expression.⁵⁹ Here it removes pity from any element of duty, and defines the pleasure of compassion, a common eighteenth century theme,⁶⁰ as the self's delight in its own activity, not the smug contemplation of its own virtue. The starting point for this poem is a sense of human community⁶¹ that had both Christian and Enlightened origins. The familial situation of 'A Cradle Song' is universalised, and the human race united through an emotion which words like mercy, pity and love can only dimly image, but which cannot be imaged *without* these words and what they signify. Compassion is the property of the whole race, not of favoured groups,⁶² and humans pray to the pity they themselves embody.

The eighteenth-century concept of pity had always included some degree of transcendence of separateness, an acceptance of a shared human nature which enabled the pitier to respond to the pitied: for Rousseau we are moved to pity by 'getting outside ourselves and identifying with a being who suffers'.⁶³ In these poems the life force in 'the giver' responds to its own plight in a being whose separateness is an illusion. Innocent pity is not, as Behrendt claims, a matter of 'hollow abstractions', presented only to be rejected by the reader,⁶⁴ but a celebration of the best that is to be found in divided societies and a counter-ideological attempt to construct children and adults who will bring about and flourish in changed social conditions. The old pity stems from and recreates class society; Blake's pity looks forward to equality, and its 'practitioners' are all 'subjects', whether giving or receiving, as they always affirm the possibility of being in the other position. It was a common teaching that action to relieve suffering was necessary to make pity meaningful,⁶⁵ but the only remedy necessary in 'A Divine Image' is the pity itself - Jesus just gives the sufferers his tears and joy. The 'kind relief'⁶⁶ sought and offered by the speaker is no more than kindness itself, and the mother's inability to 'sit and hear' her infant's groans need result in no more than close physical sharing of its pain. Emotion is valuable in itself, a 'gift' greater than any charitable donation, and Blake is careful to portray a world in which financial help is unnecessary. *Innocence* operates on an alternative economy of

⁵⁹ v. 'The Lamb', 'Spring', and 'Night'.

⁶⁰ Crane, 1934, 227-229.

⁶¹ Smith, 1976, 90: '...general fellow-feeling which we have with every man merely because he is our fellow creature'; for Christian origins, v. Crane, 1934, 21; cf. Glen, 1983, 372.

⁶² *ibid.*, 151.

⁶³ Rousseau, 1966, 32; also Wollstonecraft, Vol. 2, 1989, 62.

⁶⁴ Stephen C. Behrendt, *Reading William Blake*, 1992, 60.

⁶⁵ v. e.g. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, 1912, 107, and Cowper, cited p. 13.

⁶⁶ 'Kind relief' in Watts means money - 1971, 271.

emotion, the real basis of which is unclear. In eighteenth-century England about one third of the inhabitants needed help from the poor law at some time in their lives - what changes in social organisation have abolished the need for charity?

'A Dream' portrays a situation in which more concrete assistance than emotion is needed, and some organisation is required to provide it. Blake is careful to separate the emotion from the instrumental response and to avoid precise stipulation of the nature of the helping institution. The poem starts with the same 'confusion' about who is pitying whom: the lost Emmet imagines her children weeping in compassion for their mother's sighs, and the speaker's response is to cry too: 'Pitying I drop'd a tear'.⁶⁷ This tear is in harmony with the way the universe manifests itself in *Innocence*, for, although no practical help is asked from the pitier, the 'wailing' brings immediate action, and the circle of compassion is matched by active response from without. Institution here does not mean militia, troops and spies or even the organisations of eighteenth-century charity, but forces that help in a purely temporary distress - the lost ant is guided home by a glow-worm, who tells her to follow the beetle's hum. We are not told who has decreed this to be the glow-worm's task, but she has been specifically 'set to light the ground'.⁶⁸ By placing the poem in the world of insects Blake avoids defining the nature of this society in which the muskets have dropped from the arms of the Parish Watch leaving only their lanterns, and the beadle, more used to separating families, has become the uniting beetle.⁶⁹ We are in a society of equals in which necessary functions are performed without constraint, tasks are not allocated by the market or by power, and in which institutions are almost indistinguishable from spontaneous activity; the glow-worm and the beetle rescue the ant by being themselves, shining and humming. Such a society could, in the late eighteenth century, only be visualised in these mysterious terms. In writing *pastoral* Blake is challenging 'the propaganda of the victors',⁷⁰ but his challenge is forced into crucial silences by the realities that gave them victory. His problem can be focussed by a comparison with John Thelwall, who called for:

...not a remedy of Charity, of Benevolence as it is called, but a remedy of political amelioration.⁷¹

⁶⁷ E16, 16.

⁶⁸ E16, 16; italics mine.

⁶⁹ Crehan, 1984, 102.

⁷⁰ Sales, 1983, 1.

⁷¹ John Thelwall, *The Tribune*, Vol. 1, 1795, 8.

Thelwall can reject charity in favour of reform because he advocates changes that he believes are possible, and clearly rules out those like economic equality that he believes to be unattainable. Blake is almost never willing to demand limited but achievable reforms, so is forced to adopt various stratagems, one of which is the creation in *Innocence* of a clear vision of interpersonal redemption⁷² underpinned by an unclear socio-economic substructure.

Stanley Gardner has argued that a precise institution is visible behind 'Nurse's Song': Blake's Parish Council, St. James, which cut the death rate amongst children in its care by sending them to the benign surroundings of Wimbledon Common and the charge of conscientious nurses.⁷³ But his belief that the Songs express 'Blake's exhilarating acclaim...of the work of enlightened charity in his exceptional parish'⁷⁴ ignores the poem's ambiguities. In stanza 2 the nurse urges the children to 'come' home, in accordance with the illustration, which shows her clearly responsible for them. However, in the final stanza she tells them to 'go' home once the light has faded, and in the first lines she talks about the 'voices of children', rather than 'my' children, and the whole stanza suggests someone listening without the cares of responsibility. These equivocations seem designed to avoid any too close commitment to the institution of nursing, whether that organised by St. James or any other. Blake offers a deliberately hazy pre-figurative picture of an institution which is democratic and guarding, powered by the sympathetic emotions and intensifying rather than destroying the spontaneous life of those it cares for, but he is careful not to suggest that any foundation in existing society could operate in this way.

In the Songs Blake follows Watts, Day, Barbauld and Wollstonecraft⁷⁵ in teaching children the virtues of sympathy, but rejects their attempts to restrain children's emotional lives, while neither repeating nor rebutting their advice on anger. These poems lack both moralizing sermons on the evil of childhood squabbles and valorising pictures of the honest wrath of children. Songs of Experience do have such pictures, but in Innocence Blake is defining a different structure of feeling, one in which the social order is not challenged directly but undermined by the implications of a world of joyous freedom. Condemnation of anger was part of an attempt to stifle the vitality of children in order to create tractable subjects and employees - anger is, of course, an

⁷² Glen, 1983, 23.

⁷³ Gardner, 1986, 28-29; 43.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁵ And others; v. e.g. The Poetical Works Of Christopher Smart, Vol. 2, 1983, 33, 327, 366.

especially troublesome emotion for those with an interest in obedience. Blake's abstention from such condemnation stands beside his vitalist conception of pity and his acceptance of childhood sexuality as a defining feature of Innocence. In the first 'mode' Blake has constructed a society in which anger is not needed; children are guarded by adults, not restrained by them, and, in the event of disagreement, are not frustrated by those who believe they know better. In 'Nurse's Song', for example, the nurse accepts the illogical argument of the children and allows them to play, reversing her earlier decision, rather than imposing her will through fiat or adult rationality. There is, however, a second 'mode' of Innocence, in which it forms an enclave in Experience, and here the situation of children invites rage. The Black Boy could just as well be angry at slavery and racism, and the fact that he responds with benevolence indicates that Blake conceptualises Innocence in such a way as to rule out anger. It is characterised by specific forms of the acting and desiring life energy that Watts, Wollstonecraft and most other eighteenth-century writers on childhood seek to destroy or restrain, and it is compassion not anger that dominates these forms.

We can clarify the nature of the world that would produce this structure of feeling by comparing it to those envisaged by Day and Wollstonecraft. Part of Day's project is to show that the gentry of his time are not 'gentlemen' in the normative sense, and hence their failure to display compassion like Sidney's. He champions a social sector from smallholder to petty capitalist farmer⁷⁶ and recommends a compassion that will operate in a world of continuing division. All classes in such a world will need to repress parts of the self in order to play roles pre-assigned by the division of labour; hence the emphasis on the need for self-control. Wollstonecraft too assumes a world in which children's emotions must be restrained in the interests of later social and economic discipline; she praises the conquest of tears at pain and warns against excessive indulgence.⁷⁷ She is 'preparing' middle-class children for a life in which significant achievements are possible, but only at the cost of denying parts of the self, of flattening and sublimating passion. This class lacks large inherited wealth and so must both discipline and develop the self in order to be able to flourish in the dangerous world of trade, and to survive even bankruptcy without sinking into dependence on charity - this is the message of the significantly named Mrs. Sandford.⁷⁸ Like Day, she portrays the aristocracy as

⁷⁶ v. e.g. the story of Chares, beginning on page 320; Sandford's father probably employs labour - 8.

⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, 437; Chapter 9 - 'The Inconveniences of Immoderate Indulgence'; also Chapter 10.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, Vol. 2, 96-99.

inclined to idleness, perhaps even in decay in spite of its wealth,⁷⁹ and her commitment is to commercial capitalism - Mr. Jones is a successful Bristol Merchant.⁸⁰

Both writers oppose the aristocracy and gentry in the interests of 'lower' groups, while assuming the continuation of social divisions; they prepare children for class work and class duties. Anger must be repressed, and a certain type of pity established, because the children they address will grow up to have powers and responsibilities that they must exercise so as to contribute to social cohesion: excessive anger would provoke inferiors (although to sometimes react 'a little angrily' might help in dealings with them⁸¹) while the absence of charity might lead to dangerous discontent. They are attempting to mould a class that lacks the traditions of aristocratic paternalism, one reason for the strong emphasis on benevolence.

Blake's type of pity, on the other hand, assumes children who will grow up to live in a democratic community. Pity does not flow consistently downwards from the powerful, and power itself is always in flux; the adult's temporary 'superiority' to the child is a fact of nature not of society, and, in any case, compassion always flows in both directions. There is no *structural* relationship of pity in the first 'mode' of Innocence, no frozen pattern of giver-receiver. Those in need of compassion are in temporary states, from which they can easily emerge to render help and sympathy to others; they are distressed, lost or grieving, not poor. Infants are in need of an emotion akin to compassion ('A Cradle Song'), but this is specifically represented as being given at a time of happiness.⁸² Children are being 'prepared' for a world in which the free development of the self in an ordered but unoppressive society will be possible, and in which calculations about the social usefulness of compassion will be irrelevant because unalterably separated groups will no longer exist. But in order to celebrate an 'integrated humanity'⁸³ Blake has to be silent as to the economic and institutional organisation of the new society. In the second 'mode' he portrays compassion flowing between the oppressed ('The Chimney Sweeper') or in the 'wrong' direction ('The Little Black Boy'), but he is forced to avoid the question as to how much good this compassion can actually do, and he is deliberately ambiguous as to how far 'polite' pity is useful,

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 22-24.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 17.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 99.

⁸² E12, 17-20.

⁸³ Lindsay, 1989, 23.

how far an insult to the oppressed or a part of their oppression ('Holy Thursday').

Innocence, in its first 'mode', is a world with very little work. There are the old, a piper, a few shepherds, who guard but do not ever sell, their⁸⁴ sheep, many children, and nurses to look after them. Experience exists amongst the brutalising trades of London, some of which Innocence transforms phenomenologically, but not economically or socially,⁸⁵ and, in its later versions, amidst industrialisation. Night the Ninth of The Four Zoas suggests that a post-revolutionary society will be based on democratic agrarianism,⁸⁶ and Lindsay,⁸⁷ argues that Innocence is based on a 'dream of peasant ownership'. Saint-Just too imagined a community of independent food-growers without rich or poor as the basis on which a return to 'la nature et l'innocence' would be possible,⁸⁸ and Spence's Land Plan represents a thoughtfully worked out English analogue.⁸⁹ Such ideals are legible in the Songs, but with a deficiency of detail, emphasis and clarity that indicates Blake found it impossible to imagine the economic basis for a world of free-flowing emotion and vitality in which pity towards whole groups of people would be replaced by pity towards individuals suffering temporary misfortune, and institutions would combine spontaneity and effectiveness.

'Night' reveals Blake's uncertainty as to whether such a world is really possible. After the pitying efforts of the angels have proved inadequate to save their charges from wolves and tigers, they welcome them into a visionary paradise:

And there the lions ruddy eyes,
 Shall flow with tears of gold:
 And pitying the tender cries,
 And walking round the fold:
 Saying: wrath by his meekness
 And by his health, sickness,
 Is driven away,
 From our immortal day.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ The owners, if not the shepherds, are off stage.

⁸⁵ v. p. 54.

⁸⁶ Worrall, 1992, 46-4.

⁸⁷ Lindsay, 1978, 47.

⁸⁸ Cited by Norman Hampson, in Colin Lucas, Rewriting the French Revolution, 1991, 67.

⁸⁹ Thomas Spence, The Meridian Sun of Liberty, 1796, 6.

⁹⁰ E14, 33-40.

Is this paradise before or after death? It is difficult to see what in worldly life is symbolised by the narrative of failure of protection, death and resurrection in a compassionate order. A supernatural figure, Christ, presides, but if this means that the new world is purely *post mortem* Blake has written off human life completely as the realm of unopposable violence. Once again, he is deliberately ambiguous. He wishes to suggest some kind of this-worldly transformation, but he can only do so by creating a paradise located after death, which, because it shares the values of the 'pitying' angels of stanza 4, somehow recuperates the compassion that has been shown to be impotent. Nowhere in the Songs are we given any indication as to what a transformation to a world of sympathy might concretely involve. For good reason; such a society could only have existed without the separations of capitalism, and there was no possibility that this would disappear at the start of its most vigorous stage - industrialisation and completion of the world market - to be replaced by a society of associated rural producers.

Blake runs up against related problems in the second 'mode' of Innocence. 'The Chimney Sweeper' takes representatives of a group previously portrayed as 'objects of pity' and shows that this response does not match the reality.⁹¹ This transforms perceptions that might limit the 'lower' classes to the status of recipients of pity, makes the reader aware of their emotional riches, and thus makes radical change seem more urgent and more possible. The first stanza presents an impoverished youth, with a mother dead, and a father who sold him into slavery. Sweeps had been constituted as 'objects' of compassion a few years earlier by Hanway's Sentimental History, but in the second stanza it is the sweep himself who is giving pity, albeit of a kind that invites us to patronise it for its limited understanding. Blake, having disappointed the reader's expectation of an invitation to compassion, tempts him into a judgemental response that indicates his own limitations; the counter-ideological aim is to remove the error not to humiliate the reader. The sweep's consolation of Tom is valid because it offers loving compassion, and its irrationality is irrelevant. The double-edged last line ('So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm'⁹²) transforms the trite moralism of official advice to poor children to trust in God and do their duty into the paradoxical truth that such children, if they follow the real duties of compassionate mutual care, cannot essentially be harmed by the material degradations of their condition.

⁹¹ As does Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy': The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Vol. 2, 1952, 67-80.

⁹² E10, 24.

This is one way in which the poem works, but the second 'mode' of Innocence is as problematic as the first. There is the straightforward danger that the concluding admonition might have the same pacifying effects as conventional reassurances, it might even be seen as advice to the sweeps to climb up chimneys voluntarily and avoid the 'harm' inflicted on the reluctant.⁹³ The counterbalancing anger of the young sweep in Experience will eventually remove this possibility, but the less obvious difficulty reveals itself in Tom's dream of liberation: thousands of sweepers locked in 'coffins of black', from which they are freed by an Angel. The 'coffins' are the chimneys they sweep,⁹⁴ their bodies, and real coffins, and the vision represents a liberation from work that, once again, can only be imaged as freedom after death. Compassion, even of the generous kind exemplified by the speaker, brings no prospect of real transformation, and all Blake can offer is a picture of temporary amelioration ('Tom was happy and warm') and a sleight-of-hand that suggests the possibility of a complete redemption, located after death but somehow seeming to share in the this-sidedness of Tom's short-lived improvement. Blake knows that the compassion of a child cannot change the conditions of life and work of the exploited, wishes to suggest it is still valuable, but once again runs up against his unwillingness to translate compassion into reformist demands and the impossibility of a genuine social revolution. If the poem was written 'during agitation for the passage of the bill' of 1788⁹⁵ the 'bright key' is specifically not anything that even the most effective legislation could bring about; Tom's vision is not one of temporary freedom followed by the return to improved conditions of labour (even Hanway's preference was that the work not be done by boys at all, although he recognised this was unlikely) which is why it has to be set ambiguously between life and death.

Blake rebuts the idea of 'the social feelings' by refusing to portray harmony in eighteenth-century conditions. He envisions a structure of feeling more perfect than anything currently imaginable, and by portraying it tries to bring it about. But he is also aware that it is the experiences a society provides, not the work of even the most non-moralistic of ideologists, that produce structures of feeling, and, in so far as the pity he constructs is prefigurative,⁹⁶ he does not know what kind of society it prefigures. The

⁹³ Martin K. Nurmi, in Northrop Frye ed., Blake: a Collection of Critical Essays, 1966, 21.

⁹⁴ Children sometimes suffocated in the curves - *ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁵ Erdman, 1969, 132.

⁹⁶ cf. Glen, 1983, 127.

French Revolution was eventually to produce an important shift in Blake's model of the good society.

Chapter Five
Pitying the Plumage: The French Revolution and
Let the Brothels of Paris be opened

The events of the Revolution precipitated debates about pity and anger that had, in some cases, immediate implications for French politics. They inaugurated an intense semiosis in which apparently neutral facets of 'the everyday' were construed ideologically.¹ Few matters that did not affect relations of power directly were as fiercely contested as emotion, and it is in this context that Blake returned continually between 1790 and 1810 to the uses and misuses of compassion, to the anger that could inspire *both* sides in revolutionary war, and to the need to construct a true rationality that would play its traditional role in guiding emotion, but without the repressiveness found necessary in the past. The debates spread to England, where they were not motivated to the same extent by the exigencies of practical politics; they did have potential non-discursive consequences, as the ability of the Government to fight the war and the ability of the English radicals to bring about reform or revolution were at stake, but these arguments were at one remove from the immediate consequences that appeals to anger or to pity could have in France. The main organising factor in England was not proposed action but a text, Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France,² and the only published work in which Blake deals explicitly and at length with the Revolution can be seen as amongst the replies to Burke, and to the oral culture of opposition to the revolution from which his book emerged. I shall begin with a brief account of the English debate³ between 1790 and 1792; this will serve as context for The French Revolution, demonstrate the importance of emotion in political discussion, and establish some of the things that were being said about anger and pity in the early 1790s, a matter relevant to this and the next two chapters. I shall also give an account here of some of the ideas about emotion arrived at by the Jacobins, as they responded to and sought to control events, to show how the contradictions of the manuscript 'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened...' reflect revolutionary experience.

Burke was writing before large-scale bloodshed, and his compassion was for the King's status as prisoner in the country he had once ruled, and for the indignities he and his wife had suffered. He precedes his account by establishing the 'inborn feelings of my nature' as guarantor of the correctness

¹ For political semiosis; v. Hunt, 1984, 81-82 and *passim*.

² Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), 1989.

³ The debate raged between 1789 and 1795: Marilyn Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy, Cambridge, 1984, 2.

of his reaction to these humiliations, contrasting this with the 'new-sprung modern light' of Enlightenment intellectualism.⁴ He proclaimed that 'the atrocious spectacle of the 6th of October, 1789' gave rise in him to feelings that were very different from those of radicals like Price, different because they were 'natural'.⁵ He declares that in such events our 'passions instruct our reason', something which he sees as a good thing, because, although he accuses his opponents of possessing 'cold hearts and muddy understandings', the main thrust of his rhetoric is to suggest that feelings have an intuitive rightness that reason can ratify but not safely contradict.⁶ Prominent among these is compassion:

I confess to you, Sir, that the exalted rank of the persons suffering, ...instead of being a subject of exultation, adds not a little to my sensibility on that most melancholy occasion.⁷

Burke charges that Price's 'universal benevolence'⁸ abstracts from the 'minute particulars' of compassionate response to create an unnatural and worthless emotion. He moves into a controversial peroration:

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, - glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendour, and joy. Oh! what a revolution! and what a heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall!⁹

He brands the present age as one of 'sophisters, oeconomists and calculators', who have overthrown the generous and humanising structure of feeling characteristic of the 'age of chivalry'.¹⁰ He returns to his pity for the King and Queen:

⁴ Burke, 1989, 125; v. James T. Boulton, The Language of Politics in the Age of Burke and Wilkes, 1963, 121.

⁵ Burke, 1989, 131.

⁶ *ibid.*, 131, 128.

⁷ *ibid.*, 125.

⁸ Richard Price, A Discourse on the Love of our Country, 1789, 5-6; 8.

⁹ Burke, 1989, 126.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 127.

...when kings are hurled from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama, and become objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good, we behold such disasters in the moral, as we should behold a miracle in the physical, order of things...our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity...¹¹

Emotion was important enough for both sides to wish to define the other as the unfeeling party. Burke suggests that the political principles of such as Price are based on their inability to feel naturally, and that such feelings as they do have are the corrupt products of an Enlightenment cosmopolitanism that replaces both affection for one's particular family and community and the Christian ideal of emotional control with an all-licensing universal benevolence.

But there is an alternative charge: that the Revolution was made by passion escaped from restraint.¹² The philosophes 'Render contemptible that class of virtues which restrain the appetite'.¹³ Burke aligns himself with the Angels of The Marriage, though the Devils replace moral restraint with liberated desire, not general compassion. Nevertheless, his fundamental charge against the Revolutionaries is not their expressivity, but what they express - destructive passions that should have been kept in check. The feelings he values need not be restrained, as they are both natural and socially desirable; such emotions include not just compassion for the Queen but the outraged feelings that should have drawn swords from scabbards in her defence, and the martial emotions of chivalry.

The most successful reply to Burke, Tom Paine's The Rights of Man, begins by establishing the opposition between the Revolution and its critics as one between benevolence and its absence: the dedication to Washington expresses the hope that 'the Rights of Man may become as universal as your Benevolence can wish',¹⁴ while the first sentence claims disappointment that he can no longer count Burke, the defender of the American Revolution, as 'a friend to mankind'.¹⁵ The first Revolutionary mentioned is characterised as 'a man of an enlarged and benevolent heart', while the French King is praised

¹¹ *ibid.*, 131-132.

¹² *ibid.*, 77, 90, 98.

¹³ Cited Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, 1919, 143.

¹⁴ Tom Paine, The Rights of Man, (1791-1792), 1969, 55.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 57.

for 'a good heart', something rare in a man of his 'general class'.¹⁶ Paine seeks to reinstate the imperatives of universal philanthropy, and he distinguishes between past revolutions based on 'rage' against the ruler and the French, based on 'rational contemplation of the rights of man.'¹⁷ But these attempts to figure the revolution as calm and compassionate do not stop him from celebrating Republican enthusiasm,¹⁸ and exculpating the killers of the Swiss Guard because they acted 'in the circumstances of the moment, not with...cold-blooded desire for revenge'.¹⁹ He implicitly compares this vengefulness to the unprovoked 'outrage' that consumed Burke while he was preparing his book.²⁰ He contrasts his 'weakness of sympathy' with true compassion, better bestowed on the real prisoner slowly dying in the dungeon:²¹

[Burke] is not affected by the reality of distress touching his heart, but by the showy resemblance of it striking his imagination. He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird.²²

Goldsmith had contrasted indifference to the sufferings of the poor with attempts to incite sorrow for the rich,²³ and when Spence reprinted this passage²⁴ it would have seemed to bear directly on the controversy over the Royal executions, the criticism of the 'power of eloquence' that engaged our 'sympathetic sorrow' for the problems of the rich pointing particularly at Burke. Paine's reference to the sufferings of prisoners may owe something to Sterne's famous meditation on the Captive in A Sentimental Journey (1768).²⁵ Sensibility provided a convenient structure of feeling for the supporters of the French Revolution between 1789 and the summer of 1792: those who prided themselves on their 'sympathy' could welcome social reform, and hope that it would be carried out peacefully, but could also understand that some violence might be involved in such an undertaking. Burke's attack disturbed this comfortable fit.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 203.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 72.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 79; Wollstonecraft too suggests "ire" was a source of Burke's attack - A Vindication of the Rights of Men, (1790), in Vol. 5, 1989, 49.

²¹ Paine, 1969, 72-73.

²² *ibid.*, 73.

²³ Goldsmith, 1934, 312-313.

²⁴ Thomas Spence, Pigs' Meat, Vol. 2, undated but probably 1795, 22-23.

²⁵ Lawrence Sterne, 1967, 97-98.

Wollstonecraft too, in the pre-revolutionary Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, (1788) had argued that the theatre should do more than encourage the young to pity distressed lovers; it should also make them compassionate towards 'the...misery of sickness and poverty' and weep for beggars as well as kings.²⁶ In A Vindication it almost seems that the main subject of the debate is emotion. The 'questionable' status of Burke's concept of 'natural feelings' is mentioned in her advertisement, and her first paragraph mocks the 'compassionate tears which you have elaborately laboured to excite'.²⁷ She accuses Burke of sacrificing his reason to 'unrestrained feelings' and, noting that 'Sensibility is the *manie* of the day', attempts to characterise her opponent as an 'unmanly' victim of his own 'pampered sensibility'.²⁸ For all this, she does not approve of 'the man with the clearer head and colder heart';²⁹ her concern is to contest Burke's display of reactionary emotionality with the vision of men and women inspired by 'the common feelings of humanity', but with reason as the controlling power. Crucially:

We ought to beware of confounding mechanical instinctive sensations with emotions that reason deepens, and justly terms the feelings of *humanity*. This word discriminates the active exertions of virtue from the vague declamations of sensibility.³⁰

This enables her to undercut his attempt to co-opt emotion for the anti-revolutionary cause by devaluing the feelings that inspire his politics, while establishing a realm of 'higher' emotion that he is unable to enter. This is exactly the way Burke had treated Price.

Wollstonecraft's assault was not an attack on sympathy; on some occasions at least she regarded Sensibility as fundamentally selfish and as not necessarily including the virtue of 'humanity'.³¹ The case of Burke was a particular example of the general separation between Sensibility and true compassion. Wollstonecraft has much to say about and in favour of pity. She accuses Burke of class selectivity in his compassion, and she uses the wives and children of the forcibly impressed to belabour Burke's inability to pity such 'vulgar sorrows', while being so susceptible to weeping the downfall of

²⁶ In Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, 47.

²⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. 5, 7.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 5-9.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 8.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 53.

³¹ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 6, 1989, 134-5; cf. "Sensibility is not Benevolence", The Watchman, in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 2, 1970, 139.

queens.³² Pity, though, is not enough ('Such misery demands more than tears') and Burke's 'infantine sensibility' falls far short of psychic maturity. 'Feminine' virtues of compassion and sensitivity must be supplemented by 'male' rationality to create the 'active sensibility' that transcends gender divisions and is the only structuration of the psyche worthy of an adult.³³ Compassion deepened and led into action by reason is an important part of her political ideal. She does not mention anger as a motive force of revolution; she found wrath a natural response to oppression, but believed it led to 'misery and vice' not to political transformation.³⁴ In this, as in her rationalism, she differs from Blake, but she too was impelled by the Revolution to grapple with questions of emotional politics, and to create structures of feeling in opposition to those recommended by counter-revolutionaries. Her project focuses the extent to which Blake's own psychic ideals remained gendered.

James Mackintosh opens Vindiciae Gallicae with a familiar attack on Burke's 'misguided and misplaced compassion':

[Burke's] eloquence is not at leisure to deplore the fate of beggared citizens, and famished peasants, the victims of suspended industry and languishing commerce. The sensibility which seems scared by the homely miseries of the vulgar, is attracted only by the splendid sorrows of royalty, and agonizes at the slenderest pang that assails the heart of sottishness or prostitution, if they are placed by fortune on a throne.³⁵

He too argued that Burke's position was irrational, stemming from 'a prolific imagination, goaded by the agonies of ardent and deluded sensibility'.³⁶ Just as the compassion that Burke bestows on the unworthy might have been given to deserving objects, his 'indignation' and 'rage' against the Revolution are implicitly counterposed to the justified 'fury of the people'.³⁷

With the possible exception of Godwin³⁸ none of the major English supporters of the Revolution was willing to give away the high ground of

³² Wollstonecraft, Vol. 5, 1989, 15-17.

³³ Cf. Jones, Copley and Whale, 1992, 193.

³⁴ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 5, 1989, 17.

³⁵ Mackintosh, 1791, v-vi.

³⁶ *ibid.*, v.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 111; 26.

³⁸ Jones - 1993, 89-91 - suggests that the first edition of Political Justice was not, as is usually claimed, strictly rationalist, pointing to those elements in accord with "universal benevolence".

emotion to the other party, no matter how provoked by Burke's claims. The importance of emotion in the debate needs to be borne in mind when considering Jonathan Mee's account, which focuses on Burke's opponents' refutation of the claim that support for the Revolution was a species of fanaticism, related to the religious enthusiasm of the seventeenth century.³⁹ Burke does not write as a rationalist criticising an excess of emotion, but as a champion of a more generous structure of feeling than the one exemplified in France, and this is what Wollstonecraft centrally and Paine incidentally are concerned to contest. Blake's project is the same.

Book One of The French Revolution was prepared for publication in 1791, but Viscomi believes Blake began work in the first half of 1790.⁴⁰ Helen Maria Williams's Letters suggest that even before Burke intervened in November there was widespread London opposition to the Revolution, and that the question of who deserved pity was already a political matter:

Must I be told that my mind is perverted, that I am dead to all sensations of sympathy, because I do not weep with those who have lost a part of their superfluities, rather than rejoice that the oppressed are protected, that the wronged are redressed, that the captive is set at liberty, and that the poor have bread? Did the universal parent of the human race, implant the feelings of pity in the heart, that they should be confined to the artificial wants of vanity, the ideal deprivations of greatness; that they should be fixed beneath the dome of the palace, or locked within the gate of the chateau; without extending one commiserating sigh to the hamlet...⁴¹

The need to contest such hostile opinions meant the poem would, from the start, have been conceived as a polemic. It took final shape in the intensified debate inspired by Reflections.

The old order is one of sorrow, and it disappears in tears; it summons wrath to its aid, but in the conflict of fire with fire, revolutionary desire is the winner. The old structure of feeling is one of jealousy, terror and sorrow,⁴² and it is to be replaced by a free exercise of human faculties, leading to joy.⁴³

³⁹ Mee, 1992, 223.

⁴⁰ Viscomi, 1993, 262.

⁴¹ Williams, 1989, 218; Jonathan Wordsworth's introduction points out that Williams's account of opinion in autumn 1790 challenges the view that Burke's book transformed British sympathies.

⁴² E288, 59-60.

⁴³ E294, 182-185.

The Archbishop of Paris reports a vision symbolising the passing of the ancien régime and its God, which contains an adumbration of the tearful Urizen of the prophecies.⁴⁴ The pervasive sorrow of the old order implies a critique of one aspect of sentimentalism: the actions of the National Convention bring hope to Paris, and 'visions of sorrow leave pensive streets'. The 'argument' between fiery and watery emotions is settled by revolution; the passivity and gloom of melancholy are cast aside,⁴⁵ and the poem has little explicitly to say about the role of compassion in bringing the new order. Nevertheless, the debate about pity is important in structuring the early sections. Burke had claimed that supporters of the Revolution showed their brutality and political unfitness by exulting over the tragic fate of the royal couple. Blake is careful to show himself alive to the pathos of the men of the old order, who are losing their positions and seeing all they had valued thrown aside. He begins by picturing the sick and unhappy Louis, facing the reality of what is happening; the King's sadness at the course of events includes a strong element of self-pity, but this is not portrayed as a matter for exultant mockery.⁴⁶ Blake portrays a man called to bear a 'scepter too heavy for mortal grasp',⁴⁷ but he prevents compassion for the King (later for the church and aristocracy) from unbalancing the poem politically by painting vignettes of the much severer sufferings of prisoners in the Bastille⁴⁸ and by reminding us of the responsibility of the nobles for the 'weeping' of children.⁴⁹ The message of the first hundred lines is that supporters of the Revolution do not gloat cruelly over the defeated, but that they exercise a mature and rational compassion, that can distinguish the greater from the lesser suffering - the point made by Paine, Wollstonecraft and Mackintosh.

At this stage in the Revolution, Blake seems to have been hoping for a peaceful victory, or at least felt forced to write in a public poem as if this were the case. The 'fire' of the revolutionaries might include anger, as fire often does in Blake, but it is primarily desire,⁵⁰ and the 'flames of red wrath burning' are associated with the aristocracy.⁵¹ The counter-revolutionary Burgundy is called 'fierce' and associated with two symbols of wrath, redness and lions; the 'plague and wrath and tempest'⁵² are properties of the Revolution only as

44 E291-292, 128-150.

45 E288, 58.

46 E286, 1-9.

47 E286, 4; as did Wordsworth - v. p. 70.

48 E287-288, 26-51.

49 E290, 87-88.

50 v. lines 143, 183, 189.

51 E289, 67, v. also lines 125, 139.

52 E289, 78.

in this respect, different from The Marriage, where the flames are wrathful⁶² and pity is irrelevant. The poem shares the optimism common amongst supporters of revolution in 1790-91, that a France in which people will be really united by 'the social feelings' is about to emerge. Many radicals hoped that the revolution would 'lead on inexorably to universal benevolence'.⁶³

Blake was interested in the emotions before 1790, so it is not surprising that, after the debates in England and France had made them politically salient he should write about politics partly in terms of structures of feeling. All parties in the Burke debate had tried to prove that an excess of the wrong kind of feeling drives out the right. This is also the burden of 'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened', Blake's most direct comment on the later development of the Revolution.⁶⁴ The question of compassion for the defeated functionaries of the old order was an urgent one in Paris in late 1792. Momentum towards the trial and execution of the King began to build soon after the attack on the Tuilleries on August 10th, and the Jacobins had not only to convince the Convention and the public of the legality of trying the king but also to counteract the effects of compassion for the defeated and incarcerated monarch and his family.⁶⁵ Blake's poem reflects both the critique of pity for the spuriously attractive which was being made by the revolutionaries and their English supporters, and the difficulty that this created for those who still needed to appeal to compassion to legitimate their actions.

Pity for the counter-revolutionaries, and for the King in particular, was regularly criticised as misplaced by the Jacobins, who claimed that it weakened the Revolution, while themselves pointing to more deserving objects of compassion. In a speech made at about the same time as Blake was writing this poem (November 5, 1792) Robespierre asserted that it was right to weep even for the 'criminal victims, who fell beneath the blade of popular justice', but that such grief should have its limits, and some tears should be reserved for 'tragedies that affect us more closely' - the hundred thousand victims of Bourbon tyranny.⁶⁶ On another occasion he wrote:

⁶² For the significance of fire imagery, v. E947.

⁶³ Bindman, Yarrington and Everest, 1993, 112.

⁶⁴ Reports of La Fayette's imprisonment reached London on October 25, 1792.

⁶⁵ F. Scott and Barry Rothaus, Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789-99, Vol. 2, 1985, 600-601.

⁶⁶ Cited Thompson, Robespierre, 1988, 289-290.

...comparez la sensibilité hypocrite qui verse des larmes sur sa tombe [that of an executed traitor], qui fait retentir l'univers du bruit de cet horrible attentat, à la froideur avec laquelle les mêmes hommes entendent le récit des crimes de la tyrannie et le massacre des plus généreux défenseurs de la liberté.⁶⁷

Giving his reasons for voting for the King's death, he explained that he must be pitiless to oppressors, because he felt pity for the oppressed.⁶⁸ He wrote of the role of French, English and German journalists in seeking 'à appitoyer les peuples sur le sort du roi des Français' and refused to believe that the English people were plunged into sadness by the King's death;⁶⁹ thanks to Burke, issues of emotion were matters of international politics.

Robespierre analysed pity in Rousseauvian terms as a 'sentiment impérieux'⁷⁰ that nature had placed second only to the desire to defend our lives, really, in fact, an emanation of this desire, as it warns us to fear 'le contre-coup de l'outrage fait à notre semblable'.⁷¹ Compassion itself demanded Louis' death, compassion for those he had already oppressed, and those he might oppress in the future.⁷² Saint-Just tried a different approach to overcoming the pathos of the fallen monarch. He argued that pity only arose naturally and legitimately for the poor, humble and good - as for the wicked, 'the pity they inspire is never very keen'. He counteracted the desire to show magnanimity by pitying the weak with the point that sympathy for the guilty was cruelty to the rest of society;⁷³ as so often, Rousseau is behind Jacobin rhetoric:

From reason, and from a regard to ourselves, our love to our species should over-balance that to our neighbour: there can be no greater cruelty to mankind than to indulge compassion for the wicked.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre par Laponneraye, Vol. 2, 1970, 96.

⁶⁸ Cited Thompson, 1988, 309; cf. his speech September 23rd., 1793: "It is weakness for traitors that is destroying us" - cited Georges Lefebvre, The French Revolution from 1793-1799, Vol. 2, 1964, 69.

⁶⁹ Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 342-343.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 219-236.

⁷¹ cf. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, (1651), 1914, 28.

⁷² Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 222.

⁷³ Carol Blum, Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue, 1986, 179.

⁷⁴ Rousseau, 1767, Vol. 2, 243.

Saint-Just attacked pity in this instance as aristocratic and weak, and claimed that counter-revolutionaries were trying to 'stir up pity, soon they will buy some tears, they will do anything to touch our sympathies to corrupt us'.⁷⁵ Blake, too, is to see the compassion of an erstwhile revolutionary as corrupt.

The Jacobin campaign against 'clemency' for the King and other political prisoners was pitched against the attempt by counter-revolutionaries to co-opt a pity that had been previously seen as a motive for radical rather than conservative politics. De Maistre, for example, claimed that in the event of a Restoration, 'kindness, clemency...all the gentle and peaceful virtues, would suddenly reappear'.⁷⁶ Other counter-revolutionaries attempted to mobilise feeling by painting grim pictures of the suffering of the victims of the guillotine, appealing with some success to both fear and pity.⁷⁷ To supporters of the Revolution, these appeals seemed selective, ignoring both pre-revolutionary suffering and the victims of White terrors,⁷⁸ but it is not surprising that, although the revolutionaries never abandoned the idea that their work was an expression of compassion,⁷⁹ they often found themselves speaking against pity and trying to control its political effects.⁸⁰

'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened' reflects this revolutionary dilemma. La Fayette's treachery to the Revolution is partly ascribed to the sexual allure of the Queen of France, partly (although this is not a completely separate point) to his capitulation to pity:

Fayette beheld the King & Queen
In curses & iron bound
But mute Fayette wept tear for tear
And guarded them around

Fayette protects the royal couple from the 'curses' of justified popular anger. He is a man of Sensibility, in tune emotionally with these new 'objects of pity'; 'mute' suggests that he is not cursing, but is choked by emotion, or silent because no longer able to express himself honestly.

⁷⁵ Blum, 1986, 178-179; cf. the speech, February, 1794; cited in D. G. Wright, Revolution and Terror in France 1789-1795, 1974, 12; the idea was not new in revolutionary thinking; Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium, 1970, 112.

⁷⁶ Joseph de Maistre, Considerations on the Revolution in France (1797), 1974, 42.

⁷⁷ Lefebvre, Vol. 2, 1964, 30.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 33-34.

⁷⁹ v. pp. 106-107.

⁸⁰ For their roots in Sensibility, v. Pierre Trahard, La Sensibilité Révolutionnaire (1789-1794), 1936, Chapter 2.

O who would smile on the wintry seas
 & Pity the stormy roar
 Or who will exchange his new born child
 For the dog at the wintry door⁸¹

The 'stormy roar' is the counter-revolution, and the newborn the Revolution.⁸² The imagery suggests that La Fayette has abandoned the latter, the worthy 'object' of his compassion, for pity for what is itself ruthless and has no need of compassion (the chilling force of counter-revolution) and for the outcast dog, which *does* deserve pity, but not to the same extent as the baby. The dog is a symbol of the Royal couple, and Blake's implication is the same as in the first hundred lines of The French Revolution - pity for the less deserving drives out pity for the more deserving; he is again addressing one of the fundamental issues of the Burke debate. In another image of the debilitating effects of compassion, Blake implies that the red blood of rebellion is no longer running through La Fayette's veins; instead it has been replaced by the hypocritical tears of the Queen, which he has taken into himself by pitying her: 'Who will exchange his own heart's blood/For the drops of a harlot's eye'. Pity leads Fayette to lose his masculinity, to become another feminised male, his vital fluids those of a woman. Erdman comments:

Pity for the Babylonian Whore could bring only sorrow to Fayette and to France. Edmund Burke in his Reflections had, in Paine's interpretation, expressed the same sort of mistaken pity for the plumage of a dying order, and Burke is never far from Blake's mind when he thinks of negative Pity as a reactionary social force.⁸³

The linking of sexuality and pity in La Fayette's response does bring this poem very close to Burke, whose description of Marie Antoinette had inspired Mackintosh's jibe about the agonies of 'prostitution'. In a parallel scene in The Book of Urizen, Los feels pity for Urizen when he is bound in chains, and this pity soon leads to sexual activity. Erdman's emphasis on Burke is valid for this passage, but the debate about pity was so widespread that it is unlikely Blake had only one figure in mind when considering the emotional structures of reaction, and much of the time he is criticising the misuse of compassion for the poor, not the misdirection of compassion towards the rich. The primary

⁸¹ E500.

⁸² Erdman, 1969, 189.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 184.

idea of the lines I have been discussing is the one expressed by Robespierre, Saint-Just, Wollstonecraft, Williams, Mackintosh and Paine: pity for the superficially attractive victims of the Revolution is dangerous.

But the drafts contain an alternative charge:

For well I see thy tears
Of Pity are exchanged for those
Of selfish slavish fears⁸⁴

In this version, La Fayette *abandons* the pity that led him to revolution in return for 'fears' either for the fate of France or for his own interests. The same implication is in 'Thou gavest the tears of Pity away/In exchange for the tears of sorrow', and in '...thou dost exchange thy pitying tears/For the links of a dungeon floor'.⁸⁵ Instead of reactionary pity for the Queen, La Fayette is credited with a 'progressive' pity for the people, that he later sacrifices for the pervasive 'sorrow' of the old régime. It is possible that if Blake had completed the poem he would have shown that La Fayette's original pity carried in itself the seeds of his later misplaced compassion, but there is no evidence for such a view in the existing versions. The drafts express the same kind of contradiction we have seen in the Jacobins: pity for aristocrats, in this case further corrupted by coy sexuality and disguised selfishness, is harmful, but pity for 'the people' and the victims of royal tyranny is a valuable revolutionary feeling. Yet the two emotions are close; there is no vocabulary for easily distinguishing between them, and Fayette is accused of both capitulating to and lacking 'pity'.

We do not know at what stage in the debate about the King's execution Blake wrote this poem. The English arguments provided the most immediate context, but my purpose in displaying some of the French evidence is to contextualise Blake's treatment of pity for the defeated not only for this poem but for the whole period that follows: the issue occurs covertly in The Book of Urizen and overtly in The Four Zoas. English radicals took this question as seriously as if they were about to bring about a revolution themselves. Wordsworth's first published poem was 'Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress',⁸⁶ an imagined response to her Poems of the previous year, portraying both writers as ever ready to help the 'wand'ring

⁸⁴ E862.

⁸⁵ E862-863.

⁸⁶ Wordsworth, Vol. 1, 1952, 269.

wretch' who has aroused their compassion. By 1793 he was rejecting 'modish lamentation' for the 'Royal Martyr',⁸⁷ authorising no more than a 'rational pity' for Louis, based on the excess of his punishment to his crimes (by implication, a rather small disproportion) and on the grounds that he had been called on to become a King, a task too great for any mortal. On the other hand, Wordsworth is concerned that 'the sweet emotions of compassion, evidently dangerous where traitors are to be punished, are too often altogether smothered'.⁸⁸ This unpublished pamphlet was written for a British audience, and its attempts to prevent pity from interfering with the tasks of the Revolution, without altogether being abandoned, are also attempts to create a structure of feeling suitable for a possible domestic repetition.

Southey's agonisings over compassion are even stronger evidence that British radicals considered these problems with the seriousness of those who might soon have to face them in practice. Joan of Arc (1793-1794) starts by seeming clear: Conrade claims that he would not be a man if he allowed 'one weak and pitiful feeling' to stop him killing his enemy.⁸⁹ Yet, when D'Orval claims that the French difficulties stem from Joan's keeping too many prisoners alive, making the Rousseauvian and Robespierrian point that this 'mercy' is 'cruelty' to the French themselves, Joan rejects such 'evil policy' angrily.⁹⁰ Although she is referred to as the 'minister of Wrath', she is the 'minister of mercy' too,⁹¹ and, once the English are defeated, the poem is full of praise of compassion.⁹² Wat Tyler (1794) portrays the same kind of dilemma. The radical priest John Ball, who has pitied his oppressors even while in prison, restrains the desires of such as Hob for vengeance when Tyler is stabbed,⁹³ but, in view of the disastrous outcome of the Revolt, begins to wonder if he has made a mistake:

...now, perhaps,
 The seemly voice of pity has deceiv'd me
 And all this mighty movement ends in ruin!
 I fear me, I have been like the weak leech,
 Who, sparing to cut deep, with cruel mercy,

⁸⁷ The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Vol., 1, 1974, 32; the mourning decreed by the English court was his particular target.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁹ Robert Southey, 1796, 29.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 287, 507.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 168, 295, 640.

⁹² e.g. 289, 530; 336, 431-432.

⁹³ Robert Southey, Wat Tyler, 1817, 26; 45.

Mangles his patient without curing him.⁹⁴

Ball's policy had been explicitly based on the idea that revenge is unchristian and the play suggests the possibility that he has been in unwitting complicity with the King, whose advice to the peasants on the murder of Tyler is, 'Quiet your angers'.⁹⁵ The play demonstrates that Blake was not the only radical at this time to have doubts about 'Christian Forbearance', and that such doubts are partly determined by the experience of revolution and the expectation of a domestic repetition; Ball's question paraphrases, consciously or unconsciously on Southey's part, the kind of thing that Robespierre and Saint-Just were saying about 'indulgence' towards defeated enemies, and the situation he is in suggests that they might have been correct. Yet, once again, ideas that might have seemed to come to Blake as he pondered the lessons of the Revolution already existed, albeit in a less developed form, in 1788 when he annotated Lavater. Revolution sharpened Blake's doubts about compassion and forgiveness; it seemed to demand a fiercer structure of feeling, one in which pity was still necessary but was also dangerous. Songs of Experience attempts to create such a structure.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 58; cf. "I chose the milder way:- perhaps I erred" - 57; Tyler himself had stated to the King that "*petitioning for pity is most weak*" and that the people should "*demand justice*" - 42.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 45.

Chapter Six

'Reading this indignant page': *Songs of Experience*

Songs of Experience¹ were never published separately from Songs of Innocence; nevertheless, they make up a distinct counter-ideological construction, and I shall treat them as such, while concluding with a consideration of their effect in the joint volume. Compassion is clearly important in Innocence, and some critics have seen anger as the presiding virtue of Experience:

...in Experience the Tiger of Wrath has swallowed up the little ewe-lamb.²

...wrath is a vice only in the unfallen world of Innocence...in the London or Paris of 1792, Mercy and the other virtues of Innocence are vices.³

All this is untrue; the Lamb is present, even in the poem called 'The Tyger', wrath is not a vice in Innocence, and Experience, while certainly valorising the possibilities of anger, also recounts its degeneration. In Blake's early work cities and war are the structural opposite of the pastoral world that is the origin of Innocence, and the dichotomy between the angry and the pitiful emotions is part of a contrast between two ways of life. In Songs of Experience London itself is the site of war, and Blake found the possibilities inherent in both emotions as complex as did the French revolutionaries in their intensified conflicts. To demonstrate this complexity I shall examine first the poems of prophetic wrath, showing how they relate to 'The Tyger', then discuss the poems that deal with anger in childhood, provide a detailed contextualisation and interpretation of Blake's most direct treatment of anger, 'A Poison Tree', followed by a consideration of other poems in which anger degenerates. Finally, I shall describe the fate of 'the social feelings' in Experience.

The prophets 'spoke forth' the anger of God, which they saw both as a punishment for the sins of his people, or of other peoples, and hence the bringer of desolation, and as the prelude to the destruction of these abuses and hence the bringer of salvation.⁴ Isaiah illustrates the first mode:

¹ First advertised October 1793.

² Hagstrum, Hilles and Bloom, 1965, 320.

³ Morton D. Paley, Energy and the Imagination, 1970, 51.

⁴ cf. *ibid.*, 1970, 41.

Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.⁵

The second is found in Ezekiel's vision of the return of God's glory to the temple:

...they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in my anger. Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever.⁶

Blake's prophetic rage combines denunciation and a call to return.⁷ He fulminates vigorously against the sins of oppressors, but he does not believe that rulers alone are responsible for social decay. In 'London' the chains of the citizens are forged by their own minds, and although this does not excuse the ruling institutions, it does provide an equivalent to the sins of the Israelites, blamed by Isaiah for the anger of the Lord. In 'The Garden of Love' and 'Holy Thursday', the wrath is poured out against particular groups, oppressors of the people as a whole, or of the weaker amongst them. But there is an important difference between Blake and the Biblical prophets; he believes that 'All deities reside in the human breast', so any salvation must come from human praxis, and he holds out no false hopes about the imminence of a redeemed England.

'Holy Thursday' is one of Blake's most angry poems, so much so that some critics have considered it to be the unbalanced outburst of a persona Blake wanted to be seen as of limited understanding.⁸ But this is not the case; the speaker is clear in his perception of charity:

Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand...⁹

'Cold' defines the hands as unemotional; any claim to pity is a pretence, and the calculated clumsiness of the phrasing reflects the calculations of this kind

⁵ Isaiah 13:9; also Jeremiah 4:26-27; Ezekiel 7:3-4.

⁶ Ezekiel 43:8-9.

⁷ cf. Jeremiah 3:12-14.

⁸ E. P. Thompson, in Michael Phillips ed., *Interpreting Blake*, 1978, 55-56 calls him locked in 'moralizing, abstracting indignation'; v. also D. C. Gillham, *Blake's Contrary States: the Songs of Innocence and Experience as Dramatic Poems*, 1966, 195.

⁹ E19, 3-4.

of charity. Wrath leads the way to imaginative truth: to 'single vision' there is no connection between the shining of the sun and the way a nation treats its poor children, but imaginative fury sees more deeply. Anger is part of the life force, and when the prophet allows it to course freely, he is allowing what is divine in him to work, so unexpected insights result. In Innocence it is the compassionate emotions through which this life force flows, and hence through which a 'supernatural' insight is obtainable; the compassion of the sweep for Tom Dacre leads to an irrational consolation that turns out to be in more than rational harmony with the way things are, as Tom's dream reveals. Both the Innocent and the Experienced speakers of the Holy Thursday poems grasp part of the truth, and, in a way, it would be accurate to say that both their visions are politically necessary. But even taken together no strategy for political progress results.

The Innocent 'Holy Thursday' ends with an ambivalent exhortation to limited action; this version gives us only a Utopian alternative emerging out of an unnuanced critique. Mode one of Innocence is committed by its nature to Utopianism, while in mode two compassion can only make intolerable realities marginally better; Experience should be the place to reveal the more far-reaching changes that some critics think can, in Blake's view, only be effected by revolutionary anger. This is just what the volume fails to do. 'Holy Thursday' gives us emotion and vision and no method of harnessing the one to bring the other into being. 'London'¹⁰ is equally unspecific about what might be done, but it does offer a more complete structure of feeling. E. P. Thompson argues that the apparent pessimism of the poem, with its final stanza seeming to inscribe life within a cycle of defeat, is counteracted by Blake's tone, a combination of indignation against the institutions of oppression and pity for their victims.¹¹ Thompson exaggerates the role pity plays in the poem as a counterbalance to wrath,¹² pointing only to the slow rhythm and heavy medial pause of the line 'marks of weakness, marks of woe,' and to the mere existence of the evils that Blake delineates.¹³ The illustration strengthens the presence of compassion; a young boy is leading an old man through the streets, while a similar boy warms his hands at a fire. Presumably both are London street children, and the first is himself in need of the pity he is manifesting. Nevertheless, the ascription of 'weakness' to the victims, and the implication that their chains are forged by their own minds, suggests a degree of blame

¹⁰ 'This poem of concentrated wrath' - S. Foster Damon, William Blake his Philosophy and Symbols, 1924, 283.

¹¹ Thompson, 1993, 192.

¹² *ibid.*, 193.

¹³ *ibid.*, 189; 180.

that does not rule out pity, but makes it a restrained and impersonal force. 'London' creates a complex state of feeling: a considered wrath regulated by awareness of the complicity of the victims in their own destruction, and tempered by an austere compassion that seems as objective as the anger.

In the final stanza, the Prophet's anger subsumes that of the harlot, the first victim to respond with more than sighs or groans. Yet this rage is either directed at, or most immediately experienced by, her baby, an innocent victim of the same conditions that have destroyed her. The poet extends her curse to the marriage bed of her clients, and thereby the heart of a repressive institution. But it does nothing there except destroy, and the clients are not the real villains either; it is stronger in its effects than Oothoon's curse, but no more fruitful. The poem and the volume as a whole are unable to generalise this anger and turn it against the oppressors in such a way that the hope of change might result. It is significant that what reaches the institutions of oppression are the sweep's cries - of trade and of pain - and the 'sigh' of the soldier; anger goes elsewhere, in a picture of emotional misdirection and consequent powerlessness. The effects on the families of clients (infection with venereal disease and the corruption this symbolises) are too strong because the effects on the Church and the Palace are too weak.

Thompson suggests that 'London' proposes that a possible alternative to existing society could be found in compassion and indignation.¹⁴ Blake once again faces the dilemma of the ultra-leftist, inspired by a time in which political revolution seems feasible and limited reforms inadequate, but in which economic revolution is impossible. 'London' presents a compelling vision of the degradation of late eighteenth-century England; to include in it a demand for stipulated reforms would be to destroy its emotional and poetic power, and, in any case, Blake does not wish to limit his vision in this way. Yet to call for the kind of fundamental transformation he would really like would be to reveal its impossibility. Hence the positive weight of the poem is taken by a structure of feeling, in the way that Thompson suggests.¹⁵ Similarly, 'A Little Girl Lost' starts with:

*Children of the future Age,
Reading this indignant page;
Know that in a former time.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 192

¹⁵ *cf.* pp. 131-134.

*Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime.*¹⁶

Anger is inevitable in a sexually repressive society. The gap between the destructive present and the redeemed future is bridged only by indignation and yearning. The poem ends with the confrontation of Ona's fear and her father's, with no indication of any way in which even the start of a movement towards the future Age could be made. The poems of prophetic wrath are also ones of impotence.

'A Little Boy Lost' assigns rationality to the boy, 'trembling zeal' to the priest, and helpless pity to the parents. Blake's frequent uses of the word 'little' and of 'tears' suggest an attempt at pathos, a pathos that turns into anger in the final stanza. The priest himself is beyond the reach of compassion, as are his fawning congregation, and this makes them legitimate targets of wrath. Rousseau derived 'the soft and affectionate passions' from self-love (*amour de soi*) and the 'hateful and irascible ones' from selfishness (*amour propre*);¹⁷ the little boy's love of his parents and of the bird gathering crumbs are the offshoots of the first, the priest's wrathful violence of the second - he is concerned only to defend the Mystery that gives him power. His 'trembling zeal' is the form that his tigerish energies take in a society that makes him an ideological agent of the ruling class,¹⁸ rewarded with money and power for destroying young selves; such things were *not* done literally in England, and the burning signifies violent removal of the power of the boy's own energies. Self-assertion threatens the old order, which to defend itself creates 'zeal', a particular 'shaping' of energy that includes righteous indignation, ambition and sadistic eagerness to inflict pain.

'The Tyger', unlike these poems, ends with a question, not an implicit confession of inability to change reality. The poem's subject is a symbol of violent energies that include anger, as many critics have claimed, even though the poem never uses the word, or any equivalent.¹⁹ Tigers have been synonymous with ferocity throughout English literature²⁰ and in the 1790s

¹⁶ E29, 1-4.

¹⁷ Rousseau, 1767, Vol. 2, 141, 130.

¹⁸ cf. DiSalvo, 1983, 39; E49, 5, 17-20.

¹⁹ 'Fury' is used in the draft - E794. Nelson Hilton sees wrath built into the poem in the shape of puns: *tIGER, fIRE* - *Literal Imagination*, 1983, 179; S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, 1973, 453, calls it the 'the blind, impersonal rage of revolution'.

²⁰ Tigers are figured as fierce by Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare; for eighteenth century examples, v. p. 127.

they were used as images of revolutionary violence by hostile writers.²¹ Blake's poem accepts such identifications, transvaluing the tiger's fierceness and its human equivalent, a kind of anger distrusted by the polite culture of the eighteenth century. In the process of creative struggle, the blacksmith-god²² is invested with the tiger's fury and the tiger with the god's shaping power.²³ Anger is part of an energy structure that can lead to creativity in art and revolution.

The tiger, like the anger of the Old Testament God, was sometimes seen in the eighteenth century as an example of the sublime.²⁴ Pity was the kind of emotion placed in the opposite category, 'the beautiful' in Burke's terminology, the pathetic in that of others.²⁵ Burke saw most passions as either preserving the self or fostering society, the first kind being the more powerful.²⁶ These passions are connected with pain and danger, and form the root of the response to the sublime. The other group have their origin in pleasure and relate to the society of the sexes and to society in general.²⁷ Pity arises from 'love and social affection'²⁸ and is therefore one of the emotions linked with the beautiful.²⁹ Significantly Burke does not classify anger as an emotion connected with the sublime, although his own taxonomy means that is where he would have placed it; his emphasis is on fear and terror as productive of the sublime 'astonishment',³⁰ and anger is an emotion that leads to a response, or at least to a desire to respond, so it militates against 'that state of soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror'.³¹

The Blakean sublime does not aim for such an effect; or if it does, only as a temporary 'moment' that will dialectically transform itself into its opposite, the rousing of the faculties to act.³² Paley cites other writers who postulate a

²¹ Erdman, 1969, 194-196; Paley, 1970, 52; Ronald Paulson, Representations of Revolution, 1983, 97-98; Crehan, 1984, 128-129. These links have been disputed by e.g. Michael Ferber, The Poetry of William Blake, 1991, 43.

²² Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats: the Contrary Vision, 1955, 238.

²³ cf. Larrissy, 1983, 58-59.

²⁴ Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, (1757), 1987, 66; Paley, 1970, 45-46.

²⁵ Larrissy, 1985, 20.

²⁶ Burke, 1987, 38.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 39-40.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 46.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 91.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 57.

³¹ *ibid.*, 57.

³² cf. Bloom, 1963, 35: 'The Tyger is Blake's Leviathan, and Blake does not want us to be frightened out of our imaginative wits by it'.

relation between the sublime and the displays of God's wrath in the Old Testament, and points out that some of Burke's own examples fall into this category.³³ The tiger and its wrath are sublime, but the poem wants us to share the anger, not be stunned by it. It proceeds by way of questions and the repetition of the first set in the final stanza is marked by the change from 'could' to 'dare'; this acts as a challenge to the reader to embody the Promethean creativity of the creator and the organised wrath of the creation. The tyger's 'fearful symmetry' aligns it to the realm of art as well as nature, and the precision of its body betokens an energy that takes exact forms of expression. It is Blake's version of an ideal revolutionary institution: always provisional, yet always precise, never totalisingly completed (some sentences are grammatically unfinished), yet perfect in the form it at any particular time has taken.³⁴

The opposition between the tiger and the lamb is the same as that in Day's story of the mild Sophron and the ferocious Tigranes.³⁵ Sophron, like most heroes of Sensibility, is capable of 'virtuous indignation', but his instincts are all for mercy, and his only violence is defensive.³⁶ Tigranes is a Blakean tyger seen from a hostile point of view:

His body was less strong than that of Sophron, but *excellently proportioned*...his countenance was full of *fire*, but displeased by an excess of confidence; and his eyes *sparkled* with sense and meaning, but bore too great an expression of *uncontrolled fierceness*.³⁷

He has the anger that is part of the motivational structure of the ambitious:

I would rather perish in the sky than enjoy an age of life, basely chained down and grovelling on the surface of the earth.³⁸

This Promethean imagery is another link with 'The Tyger', and he is associated with eagles and wolves, two creatures that embody violent energy in The Marriage. The point, however, is not to suggest a direct source, but to show the

³³ Paley, 1970, 46-47. In other words, although Burke did not see human anger as a response to the sublime, he might well have seen God's anger as an example of it.

³⁴ Crehan - 1984, 125 - describes it in similar terms.

³⁵ Day, 1865, 251-274.

³⁶ e.g. against the tigers that sometimes attack his flocks with 'irresistible fury' - *ibid.*, 261.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 251; italics mine.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 252.

distance that Blake has travelled from 'radical sensibility', and to suggest the ambiguity of the political vision embodied by the tyger. Sophron asserts:

...may I rather creep during life than mount to commit injustice and oppress the innocent.³⁹

Insofar as the tyger is revolution its fierceness is necessary to *protect* the innocent and the humble, or at least to move society to a state in which the co-existence of fury and mildness is possible.⁴⁰ The Revolutionaries often praised the 'énergie' of their cause,⁴¹ and the tyger represents this in the form of the rage that destroys all enemies that stand in the way of fulfilment. The Guardian shepherd of Innocence has become an anachronism.

But these forms of energy can become both politically and personally devouring. Morton Paley, in his discussion of this poem, claims that, 'Blake characteristically thought of anger in Boehme's sense, as a "*consuming Fire*",⁴² and that Boehme's Two Principles, Meekness and Wrath, are embodied in Innocence and Experience respectively. Boehme was certainly much more sympathetic politically to Blake than Swedenborg,⁴³ and his conception of a Wrath Principle arising in God and then dominating nature, whose Prince is the furious Satan,⁴⁴ did undoubtedly influence Blake. Yet, whatever Boehme's commitment to the dialectical necessity of both principles, he still writes of anger as a sin. He is fundamentally on the side of the 'holy angels' not of 'the fierce wrathful devils':⁴⁵

And here man should...recognise which world is lord in him. If he find that anger, wrath, envy, falsehood, lying and deceit is his desire; also pride, avarice and continual greed of honour and earthly pleasure...[then he is] in the dark world's fire.⁴⁶

If this is the case, he should 'by the imagination continually go out again into the light-world for which he was created'.⁴⁷ Although Boehme's picture of wrath as an essential energising power locked in struggle with the light

³⁹ *ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁰ Erdman, 1969, 196; Paley, 1970, 60.

⁴¹ v. e. g. Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 31, 52.

⁴² Paley, 1970, 44.

⁴³ Jacob Boehme, *Aurora* (1612, trans. John Sparrow, 1656), 1992, 20.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 11-13.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁶ Jacob Boehme, *Six Theosophic Points and other Writings*, 1958, 76.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 43.

provides Blake with an important source of imagery, it is necessary to stress the differences between the two writers. The Marriage rejects any possibility of considering 'staminal'⁴⁸ energies like anger a sin; wrath is a 'consuming fire' not because of Aurora or its Biblical sources,⁴⁹ but because Blake has seen that revolutionary anger, which is just as much an expression of violent self-assertiveness as capitalist enterprise, will inevitably become a 'devourer'.⁵⁰ If it is true in Fuzon's case that 'all is spoiled in the fierceness or wrath of the heat',⁵¹ this is because Blake has seen the collapse of the Revolution into a tyrannical terror; when in America he portrays Orc's flames as heat without light he may have Boehme's imagery in mind - 'Heat without light...is a perdition to the good, an evil source or spring'⁵² - but he is *not* suggesting that revolution is evil, and when he later refers to 'the Demons light' he is not trying to show that the rebellion has moved from a moment of metaphysical separation to one of metaphysical unity⁵³ but to signal complex attitudes towards it. The 'dark world' of fury in The Four Zoas arises from Urizen's class rule, and in The Book of Los reflects the grim political situation of the middle of the decade.⁵⁴

In the early 1790s wrath is self-preserving, and prevents the tiger from being altered into something other than its true self, in the way tamed horses have been.⁵⁵ However, if the narcissistic self-absorption that was one of the dangers of Sensibility,⁵⁶ turns its victims into devourers of self and other through absorption, to unleash the tyger risks creating a more dreadful kind of devourer. Anger, a fire energy, delights in its form, but fire turns other forms into itself, and the possibility of anger becoming a weapon of the self's desire to devour others, rather than to transform the world for the benefit of humanity, is always present. 'The Tyger' adds 'bestial' fury to the moralised indignation of the Prophetic poems; its ambiguities and interrogations suggest awareness of dangers about which The Marriage is to be⁵⁷ clearer still. Is it really possible to turn an Amoral Vitalist into a Champion of the Oppressed?

⁴⁸ 'The Staminal Virtues of Humanity' - E601.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 12:29, 'For our God is a consuming fire'; devouring fires also occur in e.g. Jeremiah 21:14 and Ezekiel 15:6-7;

⁵⁰ v. p. 133.

⁵¹ Boehme, 1992, 42.

⁵² *ibid.*, 42; E53, 4, 10.

⁵³ v. William Law, cited Paley, 1970, 44.

⁵⁴ v. p. 175 and p. 159.

⁵⁵ Fuller, 1988, 9.

⁵⁶ Hilton, 1983, 52-53.

⁵⁷ Or has already been - v. pp. 111-112.

I noted that Songs of Innocence conspicuously lacked warnings against childhood anger, but equally did not contain portraits of angry children. Experience represents a different possible approach to social evils, one which does involve anger. 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found'⁵⁸ construct children as capable of experiencing the full range of passions, which are represented by wild animals.⁵⁹ If the tigers have their usual association with wrath, the poems mean that the 'fierce' emotions are nurturing not destructive if the heart is innocent. The symbolism of Lyca's story establishes that the sexual and angry passions should be valued parts of the lives of all children, girls as well as boys. Blake tries to create children capable of giving themselves to their energetic genius. Isaac Watts tries to prevent children feeling anger, as part of a project of restraining emotion and producing subjects fearful and obedient towards God and their parents.⁶⁰ Song XV11, 'Love Between Brothers and Sisters', contains characteristic advice:

111

Hard Names at first and threatening Words,
That are but noisy Breath,
May grow to Clubs and naked Swords,
To Murder and to Death.

1V

The Devil tempts one Mother's Son
To rage against another:
So wicked *Cain* was hurried on
Till he had kill'd his Brother.

V

The Wise will make their Anger cool
At least before 'tis Night;
But in the Bosom of a Fool
It burns till Morning Light.⁶¹

Similar points are made in Song XV1 (Against Quarrelling and Fighting), Song XV111 (Against Scoffing and calling Names) and Song X1X (Against Swearing and Cursing, and taking God's Name in vain). The first of these tells

⁵⁸ E20-22.

⁵⁹ Paley, 1970, 32.

⁶⁰ Restraint of desire: Songs 1V and XX1; inculcation of fear: Songs V, 1X and X1; obedience: Song XX111.

⁶¹ Watts, 1971, 173.

children that, while it is wrong for them to fight, it is not wrong for dogs, bears and lions, as God and nature have forced them to act in this way. Children are seen as victims of God's anger (Song X111), sometimes for being angry themselves. Watts presumably warned children against anger so often because he felt it was a fault to which they were much inclined; such admonitions leave the child's psyche clear for 'the social feelings', helping create a harmonious and easily led society. Wollstonecraft, too, sees anger as a particularly dangerous passion, and warns children to avoid it: Chapter 1V of Original Stories tells of the downfall of an excessively irate girl, and Mrs. Mason 'was never in a passion, but her quiet steady displeasure' is all that is necessary to make the girls regret their misdeeds.⁶² Tilly Lally's song in An Island⁶³ describes children quarrelling in such a way as to suggest that Blake did not view this as unwholesome, but Experience goes further and shows children turning their fury against their parents and against society, something Watts seeks to avoid by cutting off anger while it is still confined to inter-child squabbling. Acceptance of such anger, although a radical break with such views, was not new. Henry Brooke's Fool of Quality (1765-1770) has a child reacting with justified indignation (and blows) to an affront on its nurse.⁶⁴ What is distinctive in Blake is the counter-ideological intention: such infantile anger is an expression of the life force that has the ability to challenge oppression of all kinds.

'The Chimney Sweeper'⁶⁵ starts by seeming to present its subject as conventionally pitiable, but the young sweep ends by responding to his situation with satirical anger. Hanway's Sentimental History devotes a whole letter to presenting as a suitable 'object of pity' a crippled sweep who is all gratitude and desire to work.⁶⁶ Hanway once allows 'resentment' to adults faced with evil,⁶⁷ but his obsession is with 'mercy'⁶⁸ and he never sees the children as having anything to contribute to their own liberation but extreme pitiableness. The activity of Blake's sweep is much greater, but it is limited to manifesting his life force through happy dancing and singing, and expressing a purely verbal bitterness against his parents and the established order. The relative powerlessness of children in Experience means that the natural thrust of anger towards full expression and consequent action to remove the

⁶² Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, 388.

⁶³ E463-464.

⁶⁴ Henry Brooke, 1906, 14.

⁶⁵ E22-23.

⁶⁶ Hanway, 1785, letter 14.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁸ e.g. *ibid.*, XV, 82, 93, 117.

frustrating conditions is denied. But this does not mean quiescence: there is the implication that it is the duty of adults to respond to the oppression of children by initiating the purposive action of which the young are incapable.

Even personal anger, however, is denied free expression and tends to degenerate; this blocks off the way to fruitful political indignation. Blake's basic counter-ideological move is to unmask the way in which this happens and to attempt to create an open form of wrath, which will lead to and then characterise a transformed society. The first two lines of 'A Poison Tree' imply an ideal of expressivity; the rest of the poem illustrates the dangers of falling short of this standard, which Blake would have encountered in earlier writers and in contemporaries as part of a wider call to openness and sincerity.⁶⁹ I shall describe the significance of this idea in radical thought in the 1790s and in eighteenth-century culture generally, and then give an account of its relationship to Christian thinking. These contextualisations will provide the basis for an interpretation of Blake's most direct poem about anger.

Authenticity - the honest statement of beliefs and emotions and a life lived according to one's own nature - had been politicised before the 1790s; opponents of aristocratic hegemony had argued that the hearts of the middle classes were purer and their actions more honest than those of the nobility. Courts had long been charged with encouraging 'feigning',⁷⁰ so here was a charge ready to hand for anyone who wanted to generalise the attack to the aristocracy as a whole.⁷¹ Rousseau had linked inauthenticity to the growth of inequality: 'To *be* and to *seem* became two things totally different'.⁷² The ideal of personal authenticity implied social reorganisation:

...a dream of an ideal community in which individuality [would] not be subsumed and sacrificed, but fully developed and expressed.⁷³

⁶⁹ e.g. The Confessions of J. J. Rousseau, 1783, 1-2; Marshall Bermann, The Politics of Authenticity, 1971, passim.

⁷⁰ With some justification: Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 1980, 163.

⁷¹ e.g. Choderlos Laclos in Les Liaisons Dangereuses. Laclos became a Jacobin.

⁷² Rousseau, Vol. 7, 1774, 217.

⁷³ Bermann, 1971, V111. More mundanely, Thomas Beddoes translated Tacitus on the front of his 1795 pamphlet against gagging bills: 'Stay, happy days! while, free from base controul, / The tongue may tell the dictates of the soul', cited Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Essays 1795 on Politics and Religion, in Collected Works, Vol. 1, 1971, 371.

Hence Godwin attacked the whole social order that produced inauthenticity, scorning 'prudence' and 'dissimulation' in the name of 'fortitude'.⁷⁴ He claimed that timid moralists had confined themselves to expounding 'what we shall conceal' not what we should 'tell',⁷⁵ and argued that:

Ambiguity would presently cease, if every man avowed his sentiments. It is here as in the intercourses of friendship: a timely explanation seldom fails to heal a broil; misunderstandings would not grow considerable, were we not in the habit of brooding over imaginary wrongs.⁷⁶

To Godwin 'sincerity' was one of the most important means by which the purposes of true benevolence were to be effected;⁷⁷ he lays little emphasis on the expression of passion: we are to tell others 'the reflections that occur to us', and 'all the truth' we know, and we are to speak this truth 'with kindness in [our] heart', and without 'malignity, acrimony, and envy', studying not to arouse 'resentment'.⁷⁸ This suggests a full communication of thoughts but not of emotions. Nevertheless, in later editions he included the duty of stating one's feelings:

If our emotions were not checked, we should be truly friends with each other. Our character would expand: the luxury of indulging our feelings, and the exercise of uttering them, would raise us to the stature of men.⁷⁹

In France the sans-culottes were developing similar ideas on the basis of revolutionary experience,⁸⁰ while the 'moderate' Benjamin Constant wrote

...l'homme se déprave dès qu'il a dans le coeur une seule pensée qu'il est constamment forcé de dissimuler...⁸¹

⁷⁴ William Godwin, Political Justice, Vol. 2, 1793, 649.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 648

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 647.

⁷⁷ Godwin, Vol. 1, 1793, 238-252.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 242.

⁷⁹ William Godwin, Political Justice, 1976, (This text is based on the third, 1798, edition) 317. He also added 'it is reason, and not anger, that will benefit mankind' - 406.

⁸⁰ For the sans-culotte obsession with openness, v. Soboul, 1964, 136-140.

⁸¹ Benjamin Constant, Adolphe, 1965, 155.

Under the influence of the Revolution, a holding back of the self came to seem a mark of reaction, and a form of the corruption of the old society. In a letter of 1794 Coleridge wrote:

I took the Liberty - Gracious God! pardon me for the aristocratic coldness of that expression - I indulged my Feelings by...⁸²

Nobles had been denounced for their coldness since at least the 1730s,⁸³ but Coleridge uses the word 'aristocratic' to mean an opponent of the French Revolution, whatever their class, and he refers in another letter to 'the unfeeling Remarks, which the lingering Remains of Aristocracy occasionally prompt. When the pure system of Pantocracy [sic] shall have aspheterized the Bounties of Nature, these things will not be so ..!'⁸⁴ - here it is a politico-economic system that is guilty of creating unfeeling hearts. In this context, 'A Poison Tree' can be seen as a demonstration of the virtues of revolutionary feeling, and a warning about the dangers of remaining in the emotional structures of the old order. If, as Rousseauvians believed, the ancien régime repressed the selves of its subjects, then to attempt the fullest possible expression of the self was a revolutionary act, almost irrespective of the political content of the resulting outburst.⁸⁵ Blake's poem describes the mechanisms by which selves can be strengthened or lost.

Expressivity was a way of avoiding a revolutionary danger, the degeneration of anger⁸⁶ into murderousness. Fuller points out that this poem is no Lawrentian celebration of the validity of the expression of wrath, whatever violence may be involved.⁸⁷ It is rather about the power of expression to *avoid* violence; the speaker 'tells' his wrath, he does not attack his friend physically. Spence, for all the overt violence of his oral discourse,⁸⁸ was also aware of this danger, and implied the same remedy as Blake:

The more men express of their hate and resentment, perhaps the less they retain; and sometimes they vent the whole that way; but these

⁸² Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 1, 1956, 143.

⁸³ Ridgway, 1973, 199.

⁸⁴ Coleridge, 1956, 84.

⁸⁵ Hence the 'exagérés' - Richard Cobb, The Police and the People, 1970, 181-182.

⁸⁶ Philip J. Gallagher's claim - 'The Word made Flesh: Blake's *A Poison Tree* and *The Book of Genesis*,' Studies in Romanticism, 1973, 239 - that 'wrath' implies a desire for revenge absent in 'angry' is not borne out by contemporary usage: v. Holcroft, 1978, 16-17; Barbauld, cited p. 103.

⁸⁷ Fuller, 1988, 80.

⁸⁸ Worrall, 1992, 9.

passions, where they are smothered will be apt to grow venomous, and to discharge themselves...by a more dangerous organ than the mouth; even by an armed and vindictive hand. Less dangerous is a railing mouth than an heart filled with bitterness and curses...⁸⁹

He goes on to argue that hate can be dissipated by speaking it out; if anger is to be an effective guide to revolutionary action it must not be of the half-felt, vindictive kind, but openly motivate whatever action needs to be taken. Thelwall expressed the same concern in a retrospective analysis of the fate of English reformism. Talking of himself in the third person and addressing his persecutors, he wrote:

'You will drive the Reasoners from the field,' he had said, repeatedly, in his lectures, and 'the assassins will rush into their places'. 'In the ferment of half-smothered indignation, feelings of a more gloomy complexion will be generated; and characters of a very different stamp will be called into action. Men who have neither genius nor benevolence, will succeed to those who had both; and with no other stimulus than fury, and no other talent than hypocrisy and intrigue, will embark in projects which every friend to humanity must abhor; and which, while the free, open and manly character of the species was yet uncrushed, never could have entered the imagination.' - (See, among innumerable other passages, THE TRIBUNE, Vol.1, p. 25; and Vol. 3, p. 140.)⁹⁰

Blake telescopes the process into the degeneration of one man, but his poem is analogous to Thelwall's account of repressed indignation giving place to unleashed fury. Thelwall's purpose is to warn reactionary politicians about the consequences of their own 'fury' against rational reformers; Blake makes the more general point that the old regime breeds repression that turns one kind of anger into another, and his aim is to warn against the dangers of a social order which can only survive if people are emotionally dishonest.

Thelwall's memoir shows that, whatever the contribution the experience of revolution might have made to the emphasis on authenticity in Blake and

⁸⁹ Thomas Spence, Figs' Meat, Vol. 1, undated, but probably 1793, 'The Advantages of Freedom of Speech' - From the Candid Philosopher, 67 - all quotations from the undated second edition.

⁹⁰ John Thelwall, Poems Chiefly Written in Retirement, (1801) 1989, xxxv. The Tribune passages are, in substance, quoted accurately. He makes the same point in Peaceful Discussions, 1795, 5.

Godwin the idea was potent before the start of the revolutionary decade.

Writing about the second half of the 1780s he insists:

Prone and habituated, upon every subject, to give unreserved utterance to the existing convictions of his heart, he (Thelwall) looked forward, with indignation, to the prospect of letting out his hand, or his voice, to venal pleading...⁹¹

The tone suggests he expects to be admired for his forthrightness, even though he does not think everyone will agree that this is the way to behave. He gives no indication as to how he arrived at the ideas embodied in his conduct, and it may be that both Blake's and Godwin's theories arose from a matrix of literary, philosophical, religious and 'everyday' thinking about sincerity.

Blake's poem assumes a naturalistic view of the operation of emotion⁹² transformation is the inevitable and healthy result of the free flow of energy, and anger expressed becomes the renewed possibility of friendship. Morbid symptoms are created by blockings, rigidities, and interferences, so providing outlets can cure, or prevent the rise of, pathologies. One traditional way of regarding anger was as a 'brief madness';⁹³ 'A Poison Tree' implies that it is anger repressed that is madness. *Open* anger is a brief, self-regulating natural process. This is a particular application of a general principle, found in many different fields: systems need 'vents' in order to purge diseased or superfluous elements. The idea of catharsis was one source of the theory that allowing emotions expression was necessary to psychic health. Johnson links medicine, emotions and Aristotle:

Why, Sir, you are to consider what is the meaning of purging in the original sense. It is to expel impurities from the human body... the passions are the great movers of human actions; but they are mixed with such impurities, that it is necessary they should be purged or refined by means of terrour and pity...⁹⁴

⁹¹ Thelwall, 'Prefatory Memoir', 1989, XV11.

⁹² For the naturalism of this phase of Blake's thinking, v. Hirsch, 1964, 86. Hirsch's ideas have been much disputed, but study of Blake's theory of anger lends them support, as they apply to this period at least.

⁹³ Horace's formula, - Epistles 2; still current in the eighteenth century: Swift, 1975, 199.

⁹⁴ Boswell, 1949, Vol. 2, 28.

Swearing was another means of expressing emotion - the dying Monk's rage is released in curses and blasphemy.⁹⁵ One of the most important of the emotional vents were tears; the failure of Emma Courtney's to provide relief testifies to the benefits expected:

A burst of tears relieved - no - *it did not relieve me*.⁹⁶

'Vent' is frequently used when the *necessity* of expressing an emotion is in question, and venting anger can prevent 'bursting'.⁹⁷ The theory that repressed emotions would return in a different shape was familiar in the eighteenth century; Fielding pictures love as like a disease, which, denied 'vent' in one part reveals itself in another.⁹⁸ Similarly, damming an emotion means it will emerge with redoubled power, as Hugh Trevor's master finds when he attempts to block his anger.⁹⁹ The idea that specifically 'telling' emotionally charged material was useful was implied by the practice of confession. Moll Flanders reflects on the imperative need to communicate a secret joy or sorrow 'even for the mere giving vent to themselves, and to unbend the Mind' and calls this a 'Necessity of Nature'.¹⁰⁰

The valorisation of outlet can be seen in diverse fields: agrarian drainage,¹⁰¹ the theory of poetry,¹⁰² justifications of charitable giving,¹⁰³ and medicine. The last stressed the need for bodily purgations;¹⁰⁴ Lind, for example, believed that scurvy was caused primarily by dietary impairment of the cleansing function of perspiration,¹⁰⁵ but doctors did not necessarily extend this thinking to the passions; William Buchan wrote:

⁹⁵ Lawrence Sterne, Tristram Shandy, (1760-67), 1912, 121; Lewis, 1980, 442.

⁹⁶ Mary Hays, Memoirs of Emma Courtney, (1796), 1987, 128. For tears as relief: v. John Beer, Wordsworth and the Human Heart, 1978, 263.

⁹⁷ Henry Fielding, Tom Jones, 1974, 778; also 254, 312; John Dryden, All for Love, (1678), 1972, 42, 282; 112,18.

⁹⁸ Fielding, 1974, 218-219; also Watts, 1971, 109. The story of Madame de la Pommeraye in Jacques le Fataliste makes the same point as 'A Poison Tree' - Denis Diderot, 1973, especially 160.

⁹⁹ Holcroft, 1978, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders, (1721), 1971, 325-326.

¹⁰¹ Day, 1865, 323.

¹⁰² M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, 1953, 138-148.

¹⁰³ Crane, 1934, 218.

¹⁰⁴ For the literary influence of medical theory, v. Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels, (1726), 1940, 270-271; A Tale of a Tub and other Satires, (1704), 1975, 66-67, lists potentially useful forms of emission, including perspiration and vomiting, while 117 adds laughter. For sighing, groaning and, most effectively, whistling, v. Coleridge, 1956, 138.

¹⁰⁵ James Lind, A Treatise of the Scurvy, 1753, especially 275. Blake knew of this idea - E455

The passion of *anger* ruffles the mind, distorts the countenance, hurries on the circulation of the blood, and disorders the whole vital and animal functions. It often occasions fevers, and other acute diseases; and sometimes even sudden death. This passion is peculiarly hurtful to the delicate, and those of weak nerves. I have known a hysteric woman lose her life by a violent fit of anger; all such ought to guard against the excess of this passion with the utmost care [We cannot avoid being angry but we must avoid harbouring resentment as this leads to] the most obstinate chronical disorders, which gradually waste the constitution.¹⁰⁶

Blake's poem revises this naturalism; it keeps the materialist assumptions (in the first draft pointing them explicitly against the 'spiritual' idea that anger needs to be checked), while transferring the medical wasting to a moral and emotional one, and reversing the remedy by replacing repression with expression. Buchan recommends forgiveness of injuries as a medical and social virtue, and suggests that violent anger should be avoided as carefully as one would a 'most deadly poison'.¹⁰⁷ The discourse of medical progressivism coincided with Christian moralism, mistaking, in Blake's view, the way in which poison was produced. Nevertheless, Blake's revision was in line with Buchan's own principles in other medical matters, as he believed that none of the main evacuations could be long obstructed without a resulting 'plethora' (excess) that was harmful to the health.¹⁰⁸

The original title of the poem, 'Christian Forbearance', places it in overt contestation with Christianity. I shall discuss this in the next section, but first I wish to establish that some Christian thinkers had already arrived at the kind of idea embodied in the poem, and to suggest the significance of this for the understanding of Blake's cultural location.

Pre-Enlightenment Christianity had already arrived at positions that could potentially conflict with Biblical injunctions against anger. Milton wrote

...no man [is] forced wholly to dissolve that groundwork of nature which God created in him, the sanguine to empty out all his sociable liveliness, the choleric to expel quite the unsinning predominance of his anger;

¹⁰⁶ Buchan, 1772, 139. The same attitude is taken by the Chevalier de Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie* article 'Colere, Médecine', Vol. V111, Diderot, 1778-80, 456-457 .

¹⁰⁷ Buchan, 1772, 139-140.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 151.

but that each radical humour and passion, wrought upon and corrected as it ought, might be made the proper mould and foundation of every man's peculiar gifts and virtues.¹⁰⁹

The idea that human nature is divinely ordained and man is therefore authorised to express its passions, and to build his achievements on his own particular emotional basis provides a theological justification for tolerance towards anger. Similarly, to claim that Christian zeal sometimes expresses itself in allowable wrath, easily become a justification for secular anger: Milton defends pouring 'indignation or scorn' upon theological opponents, pointing to Christ's use of 'ireful rebukes'.¹¹⁰ Elsewhere he states that 'anger thus freely vented spends itself ere it break out into action'.¹¹¹ Further:

[it is wrong] to stop every vent and cranny of permissive liberty, lest nature, wanting some needful pores and breathing-places which God hath not disbarred our weakness either suddenly break out into some wide rupture of open vice and frantic heresy, or else inwardly fester with repining and blasphemous thoughts, under an unreasonable and fruitless rigour of unwarranted law.¹¹²

Once it has been admitted that the expression of anger is not just theologically permissible but sometimes psychologically necessary, the question arises as to the grounds on which someone can be commanded to harm themselves through repression. The answer will tend to imply a cost-benefit analysis that gives weight to the interests of self, others and God. Such a loosening of theological ties in favour of an implicit naturalistic calculus took place in the eighteenth century.¹¹³ Christian writers before Blake tend to take both religious and pragmatic views of anger. Sterne can write as if the Bible had nothing to say about wrath:

Instantly I snatch'd off my wig, and threw it perpendicularly, with all imaginable violence, up to the top of the room - indeed I caught it as it fell - but there was an end of the matter; nor do I think anything else in *Nature* would have given such immediate ease: She, dear Goddess, by an

¹⁰⁹ 'Apology for Smectymnuus', in John Milton, Areopagitica and other Prose Works, 1927, 127.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 127.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 125.

¹¹² 'The Doctrine of Divorce', *ibid.*, 276.

¹¹³ Rivers describes the way in which some Anglican writers helped prepare the ground for naturalist developments to which they themselves were necessarily hostile - Isabel Rivers, Reason, Grace and Sentiment, 1991, 1.

instantaneous impulse, in all *provoking cases* determines us to a sally of this or that member - or else she thrusts into this or that place or posture of body, we know not why...¹¹⁴

This passage gives no hint of the possibility of moral judgement. Yet Sterne could still label anger a 'wild beast'¹¹⁵ and seems to show no awareness of any conflict of valuations.

Fielding shows the same duality. On the one hand, he expresses the basic idea of 'A Poison Tree':

Now this was done with so malicious a Sneer, that it totally unhinged...the Temper of the Philosopher, which the Bite of his Tongue had somewhat ruffled; and as he was disabled from venting his Wrath at his Lips, he had possibly found a more violent Method of revenging himself...¹¹⁶

The quarrel between Jones and Partridge illustrates the same idea; Jones openly assails his friend, laughs at his simplicity, and his anger ends. We are told Jones's wrath is never long-lasting, and the incident acts as a recommendation of such openness.¹¹⁷ Tom's easy expression of anger, like his ready sexuality, is associated with the strong and free-flowing animal spirits¹¹⁸ that make him such an object of authorial approval. He portrays rage as dehumanising,¹¹⁹ and Lady Bellaston's fury at Tom is seen as irrational and mean,¹²⁰ but character after character is described as angry, including Sophia and Allworthy,¹²¹ without overt moral comment, except where it is condemned as part of a general dissoluteness. Yet Fielding, in discussing his own experience, can still write of 'indignation' as something he would rather avoid, and disclaim 'personal resentment' even when obviously justified.¹²² Fielding's dilemma about anger is a less extreme version of his problem with sexuality: he wishes to valorise the strong animal spirits that express themselves in quick temper as

¹¹⁴ Sterne, 1912, 212; also 215 on the dangers of fuming inwardly for a pregnant woman.

¹¹⁵ Sterne, 1912, 303.

¹¹⁶ Fielding, 1974, 217.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 751-752.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 510.

¹¹⁹ Fielding, 1974, 356.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 747.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, 897, 924.

¹²² Henry Fielding, Jonathan Wild and The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, (1755), 1964, 202.

well as ready lust, but his classical and Christian traditions demand opposite valuations.

The purpose of this account has not been merely to cast an ironic sidelight on the title of the draft version by demonstrating how far some Christian writers had developed ideas that, when Blake expresses them, he sees as the antithesis of Christian 'forbearance'. 'A Poison Tree' does not treat anger as having any theological consequences, but as something whose mismanagement can lead to disaster. The implication is that it should be handled in the way suggested by the opening couplet. This position is close to the one assumed by many eighteenth century writers, Christian and sceptic.¹²³ Blake is nearer to the centre of European thought than to its occult or antinomian margins. This poem is an apparently unmoralised narrative, yet it is impossible not to read it as an admonition to be more open in expressing wrath. Blake longs for yet is wary about the genuinely antinomian fury of the tiger, while offering here the kind of advice on dealing with anger he will later call a 'Science of Wrath', advice that central figures in eighteenth-century culture would not have contradicted. In other words, the poem teaches an uncontroversial, but completely secular, Augustan moral.

Nevertheless, he had good reason to feel that his poem contested the ideas of some Christians. Forgiveness is frequently praised in the later work, but in the 1780s and early 1790s he took a different view. The Lavater annotations insist that forgiveness can only come after repentance and change,¹²⁴ and this poem implies that turning the other cheek allows anger to fester into hatred. Even after the developments I have been discussing, Christian writers remained strongly influenced by Biblical views. If God had an unquestioned right to his wrath as far as the Old and New Testament were concerned, human anger was another matter.¹²⁵ Ira was one of the seven deadly sins, and such teaching was based on Biblical injunctions; Paul listed 'wrath' among the 'works of the flesh', along with idolatry, hatred, witchcraft and fornication.¹²⁶ Colossians commands:

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice...¹²⁷

¹²³ For Diderot, v. p. 88; v. also 'Colere', Diderot, Vol. V111, 1778-80, 455.

¹²⁴ e.g. on 248, E589 and 309, E590.

¹²⁵ Jesus is called angry in Mark 3:5; for God's wrath, v. Exodus 4:14.

¹²⁶ Galatians 5:19-20.

¹²⁷ Colossians 3:8.

The Old Testament considers anger a route to destruction and Proverbs is full of advice about its repression.¹²⁸ Ephesians treats anger as not in itself sinful as long as quickly set aside:

Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath...¹²⁹

Yet the same chapter advises:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger...be put away from you.¹³⁰

The Sermon on the Mount denounces causeless anger, which might imply justified anger is permissible, but its expression is extremely limited:

...whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.¹³¹

It is not just vengeance that is forbidden Christians;¹³² the impression given by both Testaments is that unsanctified anger is dangerous, only permissible if expressed weakly and set quickly aside. When provoked, turning the other cheek¹³³ is safer, and it is only at the expense of contradiction that any leeway to wrath is allowed at all. Two examples nearer in time to Blake of this 'Christian Forbearance':

He (the curate) caught Mrs Jones's hand, and said, how noble it is when a man can moderate his anger! *How beautiful is forbearance!* A violent enemy has often been so touched by it, as to become ever after a firm friend...¹³⁴

The mild forbearance at another's fault,
The taunting word, suppress'd as soon as thought;
On these Heaven bade the bliss of life depend

¹²⁸ Job 5:2. For Proverbs, v. pp. 114-115.

¹²⁹ Ephesians 4:26. It was this passage that enabled Milton and other Christians to claim that anger was not always a sin. The advice to be 'slow to wrath' has similar implications - James 1:19.

¹³⁰ Ephesians 4:31.

¹³¹ Matthew 5:22.

¹³² Romans 12:19.

¹³³ Luke 6:29.

¹³⁴ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 2, 1989, 55.

And crush'd ill-fortune when he made a FRIEND.¹³⁵

To Blake friendship is impossible without the straightforward expression of resentment. 'A Poison Tree' rejects the anger of God and accepts the anger of human beings in an exact reversal of much Christian teaching. The fruit of the tree suggests the fruit that led to the Fall,¹³⁶ while the tree itself invokes the one that led to the downfall of Adam, which, in turn, brings associations of its anti-type, the cross of Christ. New as well as Old Testament values are therefore involved in the critique, and the arm position of the victim in the illustration clearly suggests crucifixion. Adam and Jesus, even the serpent, are victims of the anger of a Urizenic God, who tempts and then destroys. The Fall and the murder of Abel are merged and retold in a diabolic version, reversing the values of the original. There is no mention of anger in the Genesis story itself; indeed, God's reaction seems remarkably calm, aptly symbolised by the time of judgement, the cool of the evening.¹³⁷ However, in his cursing of the fallen humans and the serpent, he is the pattern for all irascible tyrants in Blake. The sin in 'A Poison Tree' is not disobedience to an external power but disobedience to the self and its passions. The primal failure is Adam's, and one result of his fall is that he takes on the Eve quality of feminine cunning,¹³⁸ and engages in serpentine 'wiles'. He also becomes the vengeful Nobodaddy God, rejoicing in the destruction he has brought about through his plot. In other words, the 'I' of the poem includes attributes of most of the characters of Genesis 1-3: God, Adam, Eve, the serpent, and Cain. This implied religious critique is part of the poem's political meaning; Blake is seeking to undermine the main ideological prop of the old order, a major producer of the inauthenticity on which it depends.

The first couplet presents human anger as a fact; no cause is given, preventing any possibility of judging the anger itself from a moral point of view:¹³⁹ Blake wishes us to focus on the consequences of repression not on the reasonableness or otherwise of what is repressed. Anger is energy, and will not be bound by moral judgements, but will follow its own laws. The speaker's actions in watering the apple indicate that an element of choice is still present for a time at least after the initial repression, so the deadly consequences of repressed anger are produced by a combination of conscious cultivation and

¹³⁵ More, 1783, 286.

¹³⁶ Gleckner, 1959, 258; similarly, Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition, Vol. 2, 1968, 39-40, who also links the tree to passages in Aurora.

¹³⁷ Genesis 3:8.

¹³⁸ v. p. 137.

¹³⁹ In this the poem is unAristotelean - v. pp. 202-203.

unconscious growth, a double origin symbolised in 'And it grew both day and night'. The speaker's self gradually dissolves; the 'I's of the first stanza changing to 'Ands' in the second and third, as his agency is replaced by the growing power of the process.¹⁴⁰ By the final stanza a man capable of friendship and honesty has been transformed into a malicious and cowardly gloater. If emotion is not expressed in the social arena, the result is the destruction of self and other. The poem, then, is about the construction of subjectivities, the process whereby repression and inauthenticity rob men of their subjecthood and leave them the slave of processes that destroy and recreate: at the end of the poem the 'I' returns in gladness, but it is a new 'I'. The alternative to radical self-fashioning is not a comfortable disengagement, but the creation of another kind of self. Such a withdrawal and contraction are the consequences of a social order that makes the free expression of emotion impossible, and whose structures of inequality determine the sycophancy of stanza 2.¹⁴¹

So far I have been discussing 'A Poison Tree' as if its meaning were clear. Few critics, indeed, have very much to say about how the poem actually achieves what seem to be straightforward significances, but Gallagher has pointed to the apparent absurdity of anger becoming a physical object. He avoids the difficulties of interpretation by claiming that the meaning is 'mythic rather than [merely] parabolic or allegoric',¹⁴² but he has drawn attention to hermeneutic difficulties that most critics ignore. One of the few writers willing to offer a precise interpretation of the allegory is Geoffrey Keynes. The first two stanzas are relatively straightforward and the problem posed by the allegory arises when we try to stipulate the 'real world' equivalent of the desirable but poisonous apple. There is no difficulty in imagining a product of repressed anger that is deadly, but it is not obvious how it might be attractive or stealable. Keynes's answer is:

[The poem] shows how the repression of anger can breed malevolence, so that an artist such as Blake could rejoice in the downfall of a former friend who has stolen his ideas.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Glen, 1983, 191.

¹⁴¹ cf. Gillham, 1966, 176-177; Schorer, 1946, 278.

¹⁴² Gallagher, 1977, 237; 245.

¹⁴³ In William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, 1967, Plate 49.

But there is no evidence that the foe was a former friend, and even if Blake had developed a theory of art's roots in repressed instinct,¹⁴⁴ this idea will not explain the allegory here. The process of nurturing the wrath and creating the apple is described in terms of female inauthenticity, very different from, even directly opposed to, other allegorical accounts of artistic creation in Blake: more usual is the masculine activity of Los's hammers. We would presumably have to consider the material embodied in Blake's art as not deadly in itself but only so to thieves, a concept completely at odds with the descriptions of the Upas tree he was drawing on; this would not be an insoluble problem on its own, as Blake has modified the tree to suit his intentions, but there is no indication that the one in the poem is beautiful and nurturing if respected, destructive only if robbed by a dishonest artist. Keynes's interpretation raises more problems than it solves, especially as in the Notebook draft the speaker actually gives the apple to the foe, removing the element of theft crucial to his reading.

Other critics who venture precise interpretations also phantasize legibility into the allegory: Adams, for example, writes:

The foe must naturally reciprocate by locking up his emotions and completing the state of suppressed desire... [he] eats from the speaker's own emotion.¹⁴⁵

We are not told that the foe represses his emotions (the veiling of the pole by night is better read as an eclipsing of the light of conscience) and the apples are represented as the products of repression, not the emotions themselves; and why should 'eating' someone else's repressed emotions (however this is done) be deadly? My purpose is not to disagree with particular readings but to suggest that it is impossible to translate the actions and symbols of the poem into a 'real world' narrative in *any* way. The allegory starts by figuring a process of repression and nurturing of anger that is easy to translate - the speaker is scared, hostile and upset; this nexus of mixed emotions hardens into a desire for revenge. The allegory then changes; the foe becomes complicit in guilt, as he is seduced by the apparently attractive products of hatred, and at this point the allegory becomes uninterpretable.

The belief of most critics that 'A Poison Tree' has an easily ascertained significance, alongside their inability to offer convincing interpretations of

¹⁴⁴ Christine Gallant, William Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos, 1978, 59.

¹⁴⁵ Hazard Adams, William Blake: a Reading of the Shorter Poems, 1963, 244.

the allegory is an indication of the way the poem works. The text *does* have a clear meaning: under some circumstances, the expression of anger is better than its repression. As we move through the poem, the illusion that this proposition is being demonstrated by a clear analysis of the consequences of emotional dishonesty is created, but careful re-readings do not allow this illusion to remain. A politically motivated double intentionality is at work; both the meaning and the undermining of meaning are part of Blake's attempt to mould radical subjectivities. The prevailing political order fails to provide a context in which personal expressivity is valued and is therefore a breeding ground of poisonous insincerity. The open expression of anger between friends has a value in itself, is a condition of united revolutionary action, and, if extended to foes, would prevent the acting out of personal animosity in revolutionary activity. On the other hand, Blake chose not to relate the poem directly to these political themes by making the foe a social superior,¹⁴⁶ and the contrast between the 'friend' and the 'foe' is a further element of the poem's indeterminacy: even the clear meanings of the first stanza vanish when we consider that what is described does not allow the construction of any general theory about expressivity at all, as it is not claimed that expressing our anger to a foe is going to have the same benign effects. When we encounter the 'illegible' allegory this uncertainty as to what we are being told increases.

Blake deliberately undercuts his own positivity. His desire to form radical subjectivities by meaningful and even clear statements, exists alongside an unwillingness to preform any human psyche. Positivity is therefore both offered (the straightforward meaning) and denied (the failure of the allegory to embody this meaning and the impossibility of generalisation). This does not make Blake a dehistoricised 'proto-deconstructionist'; *both* moments are positive in intention,¹⁴⁷ dedicated to the creation of people capable of the praxis of oppositional action, and of living in the challenging social order that will result. Blake is not dissolving meaning in unbounded indeterminacy; in the early 1790s this would be to effectively side with the old order at a time when it seemed vulnerable. Rather he is seeking to undermine two aspects of reactionary praxis: its repressiveness and the very fact of its emotional prestructurations.

The dangers of the degeneration of anger were on Blake's mind between 1792 and 1794. The rejected 'A Divine Image' associates inauthenticity with the

¹⁴⁶ v. p. 191.

¹⁴⁷ Although Blake's consistent attempt to undermine, for good political reasons, his own teaching is also determined by the impossibilities I discuss on e. g. pp. 131-134. In other words, behind the second kind of positivity lurk the negations of history.

perversion of wrath into cruelty and jealousy. When the 'Human Face' has become a 'Furnace seal'd', its emotional fires locked up, the flames devour self and other. In 'Infant Sorrow' the struggle of birth is followed by the struggle against the parents, and the exhaustion of constant battle and the extremity of the power gradient make straightforward resistance impossible. Sulking results from the exhaustion of the infant's life energies - signalled by the powerful 'leapt' - one form of which was the anger that enabled the struggles to take place at all. Gardner relates this poem to the attack on swaddling by Buchan and others,¹⁴⁸ but he makes the poem too precise in its field of reference; swaddling is a symbol of wider social repressions, and the child's anger, implied by both 'fiend' and 'struggling', begins before any swaddling clothes appear. The anger is at a world in which people are too weak to welcome energy, reacting to its appearance with tears and groans.

In the poem's drafts¹⁴⁹ the anger is turned against, in different versions, priest and father, and, although this is justified in the sense that these agents of oppressive ideologies are legitimate targets of rage, the life force that flows in anger has become corrupted and the result is murderous violence, of the kind Spence and Thelwall warned against, not revolutionary liberation. These drafts are gloomy in their political implications; the anger of the oppositionist has been deformed from the start. 'A Poison Tree' presents adults with a choice they might reasonably make about two ways of dealing with anger; 'Infant Sorrow' presents a choice in a situation where there are no good options, made at a time unamenable to discourse. The consequences are then lived out by victim and oppressors alike. The infant's choice is between submission or the waste of energy in unavailing struggle, and sulking is a way of keeping both options open. The dilemma for the adult speaker in the drafts is that the only kind of success possible is that of violent overthrow of the agents of oppression, without the ability to create non-oppressive contingencies. The old order has, unconsciously, protected itself by destroying the potential of its enemies, who, for all their oppositional rage, remain constituted in its emotional and intellectual ideologies. Once again, Blake reflects the impasse of his section of society in the 1790s; fundamental social transformation is not possible, but the seizure of power might be.

'The Angel' reverses the sequence of 'A Poison Tree' by showing that inauthenticity can lead to destructive and unclesing anger. In the 'dream' that is the female speaker's life, she is a 'maiden Queen:/Guarded by an Angel

¹⁴⁸ Gardner, 1986, 126-128.

¹⁴⁹ E797-799.

mild', who acts compassionately, wiping away the woman's tears. Such a relationship would be valued in Innocence, but in Experience it forms a context in which it is impossible for her to 'tell' her sexual desires. Consequently, the Angel flees, and now even the original tears of sadness are repressed. The disappearance of genuine emotion leads inevitably to fear and to bodily and behavioural armouring. The 'shields and spears' of defensive anger appear, and prevent any rewarding relationships. The failure to express a 'dangerous' emotion (here sexual desire) leads to the expression of inauthentic ones, to 'disguise'. Anger is distorted, the product of the repression of energy not its flow, a way of keeping people at a distance once love has been denied. Fear, cause and result of repression, leads to anger as a protection of the self, not from the imposition of, but from the possibilities opened up by, the Other. Blake conceptualises the 'named' emotions as predetermined shapes of energy, and part of his task as counter-ideologist is to provide alternatives to ruling class contours. But implicit in the way anger in 'A Dream' emerges out of the repression of some more fundamental flow and in 'A Poison Tree's' denial of what it seems to have offered, a general theory of the healthy management of wrath, is what we are to find in The Book of Urizen: the idea that any pre-shaping of emotion is the result of a fall.

All in all, the picture of anger given by Songs of Experience is more complex and gloomy than some critics have suggested. Blake consistently refuses to imagine fruitful outcomes for honest indignation and if anger is 'the appropriate virtue of Experience' it is one that is typically degraded. But the other aspect of the claims with which I began is that pity in Experience is a vice;¹⁵⁰ what of 'the social feelings' in 1790s London?

Blake's treatment of pity in 'The Human Abstract' needs to be inserted into an eighteenth-century debate¹⁵¹ that was intensified by the French Revolution. Scepticism about charity was one factor in the ideological make up of the revolutionaries:

You [the rich] who ask so much in return for the charity that is extorted from you by the importunity of the needy; you who are for ever complaining about the crowd of unfortunates that wearies your eyes...do you know why there are `so many poor? It is because you

¹⁵⁰ v. also Paulson, 1983, 88: 'Pity in the Songs of Experience was one of the chains binding Blake's downtrodden'.

¹⁵¹ Attitudes to charity are discussed in Andrew, 1989, passim.

grasp all the wealth in your greedy hands...your luxuries devour in a day as much as would feed a thousand men.¹⁵²

This builds on the Enlightenment idea, existing alongside much praise of charity, that benevolence failed to address social problems at a fundamental enough level:

Es wär' nicht Geckerei
Bei Hundert tausenden die Menschen drücken,
Ausmärgeln, plündern, martern, würgen; und
Ein Menschenfreund an Einzelnen scheinen wollen?

asks Lessing's Dervish.¹⁵³ Rousseau also felt that the structural causes of poverty needed to be addressed, rather than the worst aspects of the condition alleviated:

C'est donc une des plus importantes affaires du gouvernement, de prévenir *l'extrême inégalité* des fortunes, non en enlevant les trésors à leurs possesseurs, mais en otant à tous les moyens d'en accumeler...¹⁵⁴

Social guarantees, he continued, were more important than 'hospitals pour les pauvres'. The Revolution took this as far as seemed practical; Article 12 of the 'Declaration of the rights of men and citizens' declared:

The charity necessitated by the existence of poverty is a debt that the rich owe to the poor: it is the business of the law to settle the manner in which this debt shall be paid.¹⁵⁵

Mary Wollstonecraft argued that the rich had no reason to pride themselves on their charities:

If the poor are in distress, they will make some *benevolent* exertions to assist them; they will confer obligations, but not do justice. Benevolence is a very amiable specious quality; yet the aversion which men feel to accept a right as a favour, should rather be extolled as a

¹⁵² Cited Thompson, 1988, 26; from an essay of 1788, possibly by Robespierre.

¹⁵³ Nathan der Weise, in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Werke, Vol. 9, 1993, 501-502, 480-484.

¹⁵⁴ 'Économie Politique', Jean Jacques Rousseau, Diderot, Vol. X1, 1778-1780, 786.

¹⁵⁵ Cited Thompson, 1988, 355.

vestige of native dignity, than stigmatised as the odious offspring of ingratitude.¹⁵⁶

In Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark she made an even stronger attack:

...at present the accumulation of national wealth only increases the cares of the poor, and hardens the hearts of the rich, in spite of the highly extolled rage for alms-giving. You know that I have always been an enemy to what is termed charity, because timid bigots endeavouring thus to cover their *sins*, do violence to justice, till, acting the demi-god, they forget that they are men. And there are others who do not even think of laying up a treasure in heaven, whose benevolence is merely tyranny in disguise: they assist the most worthless, because the most servile, and term them helpless only in proportion to their fawning.¹⁵⁷

Redistribution through charity is only a partial undoing of the wrongs that have enabled the swollen wealth of the benevolent to be accumulated in the first place; this is also one of the implications of 'The Human Abstract'. Thomas Spence published this extract from Goldsmith:

Among many who have enforced the duty of Giving, I am surprised that there are none to inculcate the ignominy of Receiving, to show that by every favour we accept, we in some measure forfeit our native freedom, and that in a state of continual dependence on the generosity of others is a life of gradual debasement.¹⁵⁸

This passage indicates not only that doubts about the social effects of charity were present amongst radicals in the 1790s, but that they existed much earlier and at the heart of Sensibility.

Although none of the writers I have cited absolutely rejects charity, it is not surprising that conservatives accused radicals of opposing compassionate assistance of 'the poor'. The Anti-Jacobin attacked Southey in such a way as to

¹⁵⁶ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 5, 1989, 52.

Gratitude for charity was an important part of the Tory structure of feeling and the deferential society it attempted to preserve - Jones, 1993, 64.

¹⁵⁷ In Wollstonecraft, Vol. 6, 1989, 337.

¹⁵⁸ Spence, Vol. 1, 1793, 274. The passage is from Goldsmith, 1934, 269. I have restored it to its original form.

suggest that true compassion was not found amongst radicals, and to imply that 'traditional' charity embodied an ideal both more honest and more caring than their broad protestations of sympathy. In 'Sapphics: The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-grinder', a parody of Southey's 'The Widow', the Friend invites the Knife-grinder to attribute his poverty to oppression:

Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids,
Ready to fall, as soon as you have told your Pitiful story.¹⁵⁹

Instead he tells a tale of inebriation and petty criminality, and attempts to beg while disclaiming any interest in politics; the Friend replies:

*I give thee sixpence! I will see thee damned first -
Wretch! whom no sense of wrongs can rouse to vengeance!
Sordid, unfeeling, reprobate, degraded, Spiritless outcast!*
(Kicks the Knife-grinder, overturns his wheel, and exit in a transport of Republican enthusiasm and universal philanthropy.)¹⁶⁰

The introduction to the poem had claimed that the 'true jacobin' refrained from '*relieving* the object of his compassionate contemplation', believing that the force of his argument would be weakened by the diminution of human misery:

This principle is treated at large by many authors. It is versified in sonnets and elegies without end.¹⁶¹

But the poem chosen to exemplify this says nothing of the kind: Southey tells the story of a conventional 'object of pity', a cold, starving widow - presumably the husband of a war victim - who cries for pity to travellers in a coach and on horseback, is ignored, and dies. None of those she importunes says anything at all, let alone anything about politics, and the poem's point is that many of those well enough to travel in coaches and on horseback are deplorably callous. The Anti-Jacobin's eagerness to misread Southey stems from the desire to stigmatise a writer considered a major enemy as lacking in compassion. Its own politics of charity are clear in the bracket describing the Friend's exit - 'universal philanthropy' is a hypocritical cover for emotions which are anything but benevolent, and an excuse to ignore the distress of individuals. In one form or

¹⁵⁹ Charles Edmonds, ed., The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin, 1890, 24.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, 21. I have not been able to find any Jacobin pamphlet or poem which makes such claims.

another, the 'battle of passions' launched by Burke continued for the rest of the decade.

A writer as radical as Blake could have found good reason to suspect charitable compassion simply by examining the stated aims of its proponents. To Jonas Hanway charity was an aspect of 'police': the creation of an ordered and rationalised society in which peace between the classes could exist.¹⁶² Similarly, William Bowles applauded aristocratic philanthropists for rescuing the 'children of the most abject and criminal among the vagrant and profligate poor'¹⁶³ and lauded the tears of 'pure compassion' wept by such as the Duke of Leeds; without noble philanthropy:

Will not the indignant spirit then rebel
And the dark tide of passions fearful swell¹⁶⁴

Bowles feared that anger bred of aristocratic indifference might lead to crime, or worse. The structure of feeling of his poetry is reformist in its political implications and suspicious of powerful emotions. It marks a typical style of emotional politics; Barbauld feared that if the pitying 'senator' did not free the slaves, then they might free themselves: 'and angry eyes thro' dusky features glare'.¹⁶⁵ Compassionate charity as a form of social control was posited against the 'war of all against all', and against social conflicts launched by the oppressed. Blake as counter-ideologist seeks to unmask the reality behind this kind of pity by showing that underneath a society based on inequality mitigated by charity the Hobbesian nightmare persisted anyway.

In a poem praising John Howard Bowles links 'Mercy, Pity, Peace',¹⁶⁶ a poem from Blake's notebook begins with an Angel claiming that these virtues are 'the worlds release'. In reply:

I heard a Devil curse
Over the heath & the furze
Mercy could be no more
If there was nobody poor

¹⁶² v. p. 26.

¹⁶³ Bowles, Vol. 1, 1855, 52.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Barbauld, 1791, 11.

¹⁶⁶ Bowles, Vol. 1, 1855, 41.

And pity no more could be
 If all were as happy as we
 At his curse the sun went down
 And the heavens gave a frown

Down pourd the heavy rain
 Over the new reaped grain
 And Miseries increase
 Is Mercy Pity Peace¹⁶⁷

Most critics ignore the fact that diabolic anger is responsible for the destruction of the harvest, not pity, although it is the latter that benefits. But if Blake means this, then it is the rebels who do not accept conventional pieties who are responsible for disaster. It is possible that the curse triggers destruction by revealing the realities behind such pieties, or that the poem illustrates a clash of *negations*, the desire to see the world full of the social feelings in sinister collaboration with angry dismissal of them, but the simplest explanation, is that Blake realised he had said something he did not mean, so abandoned the poem, replacing it with 'The Human Abstract', which begins:

Pity would be no more
 If we did not make somebody Poor:
 And Mercy no more could be,
 If all were as happy as we;

And mutual fear brings peace;
 Till the selfish loves increase.¹⁶⁸

Blake changed the manuscript's 'If there was nobody poor' so as to stress active impoverishment of the 'objects' by the 'subjects' of pity.¹⁶⁹ These lines do not actually claim, though, that it is Pity that impoverishes people, only that without anyone to pity the emotion would not exist, and that those who are in a position to give charity also have the power to create the social contingencies that make people poor and unhappy. In view of other passages,¹⁷⁰ however the extrapolation is reasonable; the poem is an indictment of pity, not just a

¹⁶⁷ E470-471. An earlier draft ends 'And Mercy & Pity & Peace descended/The Farmers were ruind & harvest was ended' - E853.

¹⁶⁸ E27, 1-6.

¹⁶⁹ Glen, 1983, 72, 201.

¹⁷⁰ v. p. 146; p. 173.

statement of the obvious fact that, in the world of Experience, compassion implies misery.

Pity perpetuates the conditions it alleviates by distancing and objectifying the recipients of charity, and by binding giver and receiver into the existing social order.¹⁷¹ The first two couplets are parallel explanations of the genesis of 'the social feelings' in eighteenth-century society; the third suggests that fear is also a social feeling, in that it is the true binding emotion of a world based on selfishness, and the necessary condition of communal 'peace'. If the order of mercy, pity and peace that is broken in the sixth line seems superior to the one that follows, in which cruelty is the predominant quality, the one order evolves apparently inevitably into the other. A society in which the poor need to rely on pity for relief cannot improve; it will, unless emotional structures that open the way to transformation are also present, only deteriorate, as the truths of misery and Hobbesian violence that compassion tries to conceal become unmistakable. The selfishness underneath compassion becomes the 'Cruelty' of Religion. 'The social feelings' turn out to be another way in which society leads its members into poisonous inauthenticity. The creation of constructs like 'Pity' is a combined result of material contingencies such as inequality and ideological systems like Christianity. Such 'virtues' are now too firmly planted 'in the Human Brain' for Blake to hold out much hope of their uprooting.

Pity was praised endlessly in the eighteenth century, often by those who saw it as essential to social order. In Blake's view, the self-imaging of the ruling class as compassionate was designed to throw a veil over, while to a limited extent mitigating, its predatory nature. Yet Songs do not reject compassion completely, and with good reason. Pity was not only considered a support for the established order; it was praised by radicals too, for its power to contest the social arrangements that in other discourses it was invoked to protect. Pity was a double-edged weapon; attempts to limit it to acts of charity, binding the poor to their benefactors, could be undermined by participation in the life of the impoverished leading to an alternative response, defining them as oppressed rather than unfortunate, and seeking relief of their ills in change. Hence compassion could cease to be a 'social feeling' and become paradoxically divisive. Émile will not be confined to that 'fruitless, cruel, compassion, which contents itself with bewailing the evil, which it might remove';¹⁷² the sharing of the life of the poor that starts with sympathetic

¹⁷¹ Glen, 1983, 201-202.

¹⁷² Jean Jaques Rousseau, Emilius and Sophia, (4 Vols.), Vol. 2, 1767, 239.

identification will lead to a campaign of 'service' that will involve work, protection and demands for justice on their behalf.¹⁷³ Even 'polite' pity has the potential to unsettle political attitudes through its broadening of sympathies; compassion could generalise 'local' attachments until they were indistinguishable from universal justice:

To prevent compassion from degenerating into weakness it must extend to all mankind: we shall then carry it no farther than is consistent with justice; because, of all virtues, justice contributes most to man's happiness..¹⁷⁴

French revolutionaries, no matter how militant, no matter how committed to Jacobin energy, and no matter how many problems compassion for the defeated caused them, never abandoned it completely. It was deep in their Enlightenment traditions, in a way that linked it irrevocably to their project. The French people were displayed as the ultimate 'object of pity':

... ce pauvre peuple épuisé de misère, toujours vexé, toujours foulé, toujours opprimé..¹⁷⁵

'Impitoyable' was a word applied to the tyrants of the old order and to the rich, and this continued even after the revolutionaries had started to criticise the pity that stood in the way of the Royal executions.¹⁷⁶ The Revolution itself did not aim to abolish immediately all necessity for charity: Article 3 of the Decree on the Supreme Being stressed the need to 'assist the unfortunate, to respect the weak, to defend the oppressed'.¹⁷⁷ Even Jacques Roux, a 'leader' of the Enragés,¹⁷⁸ appealed to pity:

Deputies of the Mountain, had you but climbed from the third to the ninth floor of the houses of this revolutionary city you would have been touched by the tears and groans of a vast populace without bread and clothes...

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 212.

¹⁷⁴ Rousseau, 1767, Vol. 2, 243.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Paul Marat, *Textes Choisis*, 1963, 111; also 95.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 85; Robespierre, 1793, cited Thompson, 1988, 315.

¹⁷⁷ Cited *ibid.*, 494.

¹⁷⁸ Not a coherent grouping, and perhaps named for rabies rather than rage, although this is uncertain: v. *enragé* in *Trésor de la Langue Française*, Vol. 7, 1979, and *Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française*, 1985.

...the people, who has suffered for so long will see that you pity its lot and that you want seriously to cure its ills.¹⁷⁹

This is all the more telling, as the group were more obviously associated with anger;¹⁸⁰ their 'manifesto' congratulated the Convention on its killing of the pro-Royalists and called for sterner measures against all enemies of the Revolution,¹⁸¹ so even the most militant elements did not wish to rely on anger alone, and did not feel that pity was necessarily patronising, or that it inevitably led to the separation of the leadership from the people. Socially, the Enragés were far from the classes promoting 'polite' pity, but Roux at least felt that this was an emotion that could still benefit the people in revolutionary times.

The debate about anger and pity was never, of course, very much to do with their abstract ideological appropriateness, and factions were willing to appeal to either emotion as the course of events dictated. It was not only true of the Enragés that to appeal to pity did not mean to reject violence. Marat, for example, defended his 'chaleur' against 'hommes raisonnables':

Insensibles à la vue, des calamités publiques, ils contemplent d'un oeil sec les souffrances des opprimés, les convulsions des malheureux réduits au désespoir, l'agonie des pauvres épuisés par la modération. Le moyen d'imiter leur exemple, quand on a des entrailles?¹⁸²

Compassion legitimates opposition to 'moderation', and Marat goes on to defend the right of the people to take by violence what the absence of pity in the rich had denied them. In other words, the compassionate elements in Songs of Experience do not necessarily imply a different politics to the angry ones, although this is certainly a possibility.

The reason for the continuing importance of pity in the ideology of the revolutionaries is fundamentally the same as for its presence in Experience. The work of compassion did not come to an end in 1789; it had hardly started. In Britain, Sensibility, which Heather Glen has portrayed as the major mode of

¹⁷⁹ 'Manifesto' of the Enragés, 25 June, 1793, in John Hardman, ed., The French Revolution, The Fall of the Ancien Régime to the Thermidorean Reaction 1785-1795, 1981, 174; 175.

¹⁸⁰ Robespierre, *ibid.*, 176.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 171-172.

¹⁸² Marat, 1963, 103.

thinking and feeling of the 'dominant' middle classes,¹⁸³ prospered at the cost of having little effect on public policy. Thomas Day implied that 'generous sentiments' were belied by British involvement in slavery,¹⁸⁴ and humanitarian feeling was so far from dominant that the slave trade was not abolished until 1807 and slavery until 1833.¹⁸⁵ Jonas Hanway presented his campaign for child sweeps as one in which Mercy challenged the economic logic of the trade; he pointed to the 1767 Act regulating the treatment of parochial infants as a triumph of compassion over money, but was rightly cynical about the outcome in the later case.¹⁸⁶ James Taylor suggests that there were not enough boys involved to seem like a loss to more useful pursuits, and that the failure of the campaign was due to the absence of any economic or military motive for reform;¹⁸⁷ all that resulted was an ineffective Act in 1788, and the practice continued until 1875.¹⁸⁸ In other words, the situation Blake intervened in was one in which compassion was a weak social force. It would, in fact, have been Utopian to demand reforms that simply gave effect to the agenda of pity. Hence Blake's critique, which develops points already made by humanitarians, is balanced by acceptance of the continuing need for pity, and an attempt to promote it even in Experience.

Compassion is present in the tone and illustration of 'London', in the Lamb of the final stanza of 'The Tyger', in the pathos that exists alongside the anger in 'A Little Boy Lost', and there is one poem in Songs of Experience that has it as a primary theme. 'The Fly's' concern for other creatures has political resonances which would have been unmistakable in the 1790s. The Songs of Experience were first made available, with Innocence, in 1794, at a time when war had already lasted almost two years, and both White and Red terrors had claimed thousands of French lives. Amidst all this violence, Blake seems to be promoting a compassionate concern not to harm a fly. The significance of this will become clearer if we consider another poem in The Anti-Jacobin; 'The New Morality'¹⁸⁹ defines Sensibility as a product of Rousseau's self-indulgent communings with nature, and claims that he taught his followers to feel

¹⁸³ Heather Glen, in Phillips, 1978, 32. For Sensibility and the middle classes, v. Terry Eagleton, The Rape of Clarissa, 1982, 15 and Janet Todd's more circumspect account in Sensibility: an Introduction, 1986, 10-12.

¹⁸⁴ Day, 1773, advertisement.

¹⁸⁵ Blackburn, 1988, 157 stresses the limits of anti-slavery sentiment and its failure to influence the development of British slaving.

¹⁸⁶ Hanway, 1785, xviii-xix; 54.

¹⁸⁷ James Stephen Taylor, Jonas Hanway, 1985, 118-119.

¹⁸⁸ Nurmi, Frye, 1966, 22.

¹⁸⁹ Written by Canning et. al. - Brissenden, 1974, 63.

sorrow, 'For the crush'd beetle, *first*' , next for 'poor suff'ring *Guilt*' and 'last of all, /For parents, friends, a king and country's fall'.¹⁹⁰ Jacobins weep for animals, it claims, but not for the victims of the guillotine;¹⁹¹ this poem illustrates once again the long shadow cast by Reflections and the importance both sides placed on establishing themselves as the truly compassionate. 'The Fly' shows that a pity that does not stop at the sufferings of humanity is a necessary part of a revolutionary structure of feeling. It asserts a connection, like one of 'The New Morality's' targets, Coleridge's 'To a Young Ass',¹⁹² between the suffering of animals and of humans; beneath any compassion that might be felt for victims of human violence there is a deeper sympathy that unites all forms of life.

The choice of a fly is designed to suggest the extent of the necessary sympathetic feelings.¹⁹³ There is some debate as to how the poem works; Hagstrum regards the speaker as reliable, Grant as foolish, but both are agreed that the message is about the value of compassion.¹⁹⁴ Man and insect are linked through common possession of the life force, and it is only in respect for this life force that revolutionary politics can flourish. Nevertheless, the fact that there is only one poem strongly representing compassion in Experience, and that probably attributed to an extremely limited persona, indicates the much weaker presence of the sympathetic emotions in this work. This is reinforced by the illustrations; in Innocence the lines of the figures and the direction of gaze typically bring adults and children, humans and animals together;¹⁹⁵ the children in 'Nurse's Song' join their hands into a chain which opens to include the nurse in the visual circle.¹⁹⁶ In Experience, even if physically together they are emotionally apart.¹⁹⁷ The plates of Innocence figure a world in which 'pity' flows naturally out of deep underlying links, of Experience one in which it tries, without much efficacy, to breach a huge separateness. I pointed out in my discussion of the earlier collection that Blake is aware of the social basis for emotional structuration but is unable to specify the conditions that would produce the values and feelings

190 Edmonds, 1890, 275, 136-139.

191 Edmonds, 1890, 275-276. For the context of this attack, v. Butler, 1987, 8-9.

192 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works, 1912, 74-76.

193 For the low reputation of flies in the eighteenth century, v. Jean H. Hagstrum, in Alvin H. Rosenfeld ed., William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon, 1969, 372.

194 *ibid.*, 376-380; John E. Grant, in Frye, 1966, 43; Lindsay, 1989, 74-76.

195 'The Lamb', 'The Echoing Green', Plate 2.

196 Erdman, 1974, 65.

197 'Holy Thursday'.

of Innocence; the social basis of Experience is all too clear, but Blake is uncertain as to how far it can be transformed.

The 1794 volume does not suggest how either angry or compassionate feelings can bring about change. Speculation as to the counter-ideological effects of the combined Songs is difficult, as copies differ, even in such important matters as the assignment of poems and the ordering of plates; the most stable (but late) arrangement that ends with 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' provides a very pessimistic experience in which the reader leaves the volume on a note of bitter despair. The two sets taken together define a movement from a structure of feeling based on compassionate joy to one based on sorrow and anger at existing conditions. They might be expected to suggest a way in which revolutionary anger leads to a 'higher' Innocence, in which compassion is dominant and anger is brief and open and society based on peaceful and equal living. This, indeed, is where the volume points, but Innocent compassion can do little in the world of Experience, while anger is impotent to change the rigidities of oppression for the flows of Innocence. Blake 'shapes' compassion and anger (alongside desire, fear and other emotions), but he is unable to suggest a form in which the 'shapes' might be organised to challenge existing conditions. Even 'The Tyger' can move only in the most general sense from energy to institution.

'Passionate outcries and bursts of revolt': *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

The title of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* suggests a reconciliation between the two 'contraries' that concern this study:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.¹

But we are to hear little about the necessity for Love and much about the importance of Hate,² or at least of anger, and there is no doubt about the broadly diabolic nature of Blake's sympathies. The work, for all its liberatory enthusiasm, recognises a crucial impossibility for revolutionary politics, and consequently Blake is forced to arrange an unwanted marriage, and to substitute a politics of the psyche for a politics of institutions. One result of both the revolutionary conjuncture and the structural impasse is the important role he assigns to anger. Apocalyptic wrath replaces political strategy, and anger survives as a new kind of 'social feeling'.

It is in this work that Blake most clearly transcends that structure of feeling Jones has labelled 'radical sensibility' - 'indignation and pity'.³ Blake goes beyond - although without totally leaving behind - Sensibility in allowing value to forms of anger more uncontrolled than indignation, while almost completely ignoring pity. Nevertheless, Martin Price's claim that Blake's 'central distinction' at this period is between 'honest wrath' and 'stifled or corrupted energy' is invalid.⁴ The Lavater annotations suggest that it is free sexuality that is more important, and *The Marriage* attributes apocalyptic virtue to improved sensual enjoyment. Blake's politics are based primarily on the positive force of desire; anger arises from resistances to desire, and, after redemption, would become purely personal, a flow between individuals engaging in 'the severe contentions of friendship' from positions of equality.

Joseph Viscomi has challenged Erdman's '1790-1793' dating of *The Marriage*, arguing for completion in 1790, 'the date Blake gives it'.⁵ Viscomi's technical arguments are inconclusive, and he admits that Blake elsewhere

¹ E34, Plate 3.

² For the formal equality and real inequality of the contraries, v. Steven Shaviro, Hilton, 1986, 276-278.

³ Jones, 1993, 159.

⁴ Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom*, 1964, 398.

⁵ Viscomi, 1993, 237-239.

dates his works misleadingly.⁶ The Marriage's tone is very different from that of the relatively peaceful The French Revolution (1790-1791),⁷ and seems to reflect a stage of events in which it was no longer possible to believe the Revolution might triumph through generous feeling alone. Anger is needed as a spur to action, and the emotional tone suggests the influence of the events following Brunswick's counter-revolutionary manifesto of summer 1792.⁸ If parts of it were produced after the September massacres, Blake had good reason to date it earlier; the work, particularly in the aspects I am discussing, means different things before and after large-scale violence had begun. These considerations are no more conclusive than Viscomi's; Samuel Romilly justified revolutionary violence in 1790,⁹ and there is no reason why Blake too should not have anticipated the need for later violence implied by his praise of wrath. My discussion assumes the work took final shape after summer 1792, but nothing in my account absolutely depends on a date later than 1790.

From whatever stage of the Revolution the work emerged, the general effect of French events is clear; they marshalled Blake the way he was going - towards valorisation of desire, authenticity, and strong feeling, even when taken to 'excess'. The key to this nexus is desire. Before 1789 he had claimed that 'less than All cannot satisfy Man' and that the 'desire of Man [is] Infinite'.¹⁰ The Revolution encouraged Blake to believe the world might be remade by desire, aided by its 'armour-bearer' anger. While goal-directed fury is useful in any kind of conjuncture, it is of particular importance in revolution, when individual aims expand and more than individual aims are at stake. Indignation at oppression, not sympathy, enables an imaginative identification of self and other to take place, and political action results. The Marriage is Blake's most urgent attempt at the counter-ideological recreation of subjectivity, which is why it is so essentially concerned with emotion, the key to action in much eighteenth-century thought.¹¹

The major intellectual conditions of existence of The Marriage's ideology of the emotions were the overturning of the 'traditional' psychic hierarchy, the decline of the idea of original sin, and the associated rise of universes of energy. The Classical and Christian idea that reason is at the top of a hierarchy of human faculties, ruler over bodily passions, the disorderly enemies of the

⁶ *ibid.*, 315.

⁷ *ibid.*, 262, 237.

⁸ Ferber, 1985, 41.

⁹ Thoughts, 1790, 3-4; v. also A Letter From Earl Stanhope, 1790, 10-11.

¹⁰ E2-3.

¹¹ Rivers, 1991, 192; Hume, 1978, 415.

good life, had political implications from the start.¹² The need to control anger was one important justification for rational dictatorship, so it was inevitable that the erosion of reason's authority that took place in the eighteenth century would effect the way it was viewed. Immediately after declaring that, 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions' Hume went on to emancipate anger from intellectual judgement; as a passion is an 'original existence' not a claim about reality, to be angry is no more contestable than to be 'more than five foot high' and anger can never be 'oppos'd by' or 'contradictory to truth and reason'.¹³ Similarly, the loss of influence of the doctrine of original sin and corruption of the human heart opened the way to a more favourable valuation of passions, including anger.¹⁴ This process must not be exaggerated; even Rousseau, considered by many as the champion of new attitudes to feeling,¹⁵ could write of emotion as the enemy of virtue,¹⁶ and few thinkers failed to make at least formal obeisance to reason's supremacy. The defenders of tradition continued to see rational 'restraints' as preventing 'perturbation and confusion' in both society and the individual psyche.¹⁷ Blake subverts both psychic and social order when he reduces reason to the 'bound or outward limit of energy' and praises the wisdom of imagination, of animals and of the emotions at the expense of learning. This dethronement leaves energy as, ideally, in control of both psyche and society.¹⁸ Universes of energy were popular in the 1790s, often leading to radical ideas about social evolution, which was expected to come inevitably in a universe essentially involved in processes of dynamic change.¹⁹ The Jacobins made direct political use of such ideas, speaking frequently of the 'énergie' of the Revolution, the force that enabled them to overthrow the old order and defend their successes.²⁰ Coleridge suggestively links their 'wild energies', popular 'indignation' and a sustaining 'fury' with a Biblical image that Blake was to turn to later when he thought of anger; he is describing the situation after Brunswick's manifesto:

[the French people] felt the blended influence of terror and indignation
- by the first they were impelled to become voluntary slaves to the

¹² Joel Kovel, The Age of Desire, 1981, 57.

¹³ Hume, 1978, 415. For anger versus reason, v. Aquinas, Vol. 21, 1965, 133.

¹⁴ v. p. 41.

¹⁵ Hagstrum, 1980, 231.

¹⁶ J. J. Rousseau, A Dissertation on the Effects of the Arts and Sciences, in Rousseau, Vol. 7, 1774, 42.

¹⁷ Samuel Johnson, Rasselas and other Tales, (1759), 1967, 39.

¹⁸ E34, Plate 4.

¹⁹ H. W. Piper, The Active Universe, 1962, 6-7, 31.

²⁰ Georges Lefebvre, The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793, Vol. 1, 1962, 148.

bloody fanatics, whose wild energies seemed alone proportionate to the danger; by the latter their gentler feelings were suspended...In the truly Prophetic words of Isaiah - 'They have trod the wine-press alone...their own arm brought salvation to them, and their FURY, it upheld them.'²¹

To Blake emotions were forms of energy and therefore essentially political; shaped by a repressive social order, which dammed part of their vitality, simply by their attempt to be themselves they constantly pressed forward beyond the old society. The Marriage's theory of anger assumes a Godless universe of energy and is at almost every point hostile to Christian ideology, and to all attempts to trammel life force with supernatural sanctions. It valorises the anger and lust of animals because Blake would like to bring into being forms of these emotions untrammelled by language, beyond the repressive operations of any kind of power. If energy is blocked it will force its way through in ways that are always worse; the ideas of 'A Poison Tree' arise logically out of those of The Marriage.

The Marriage proclaims a 'new age' and Blake is concerned to create the emotional structures of the men who will bring it about and live in it, and to counteract those feelings that are preventing its arrival. Christian ideas are the major target; the 'Proverbs of Hell' are in part a riposte to the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. These have much to say about the evils of anger and the virtues of its repression:

A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.
He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly...
A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.
A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him,
yet thou must do it again. ²²

Anger is counterposed to prudence, as it can lead to the too frank expression of one's opinion, and thus to danger: as 29, 11 puts it, 'A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keeps it in till afterward'. The repression of anger is linked to the general control of the self:²³

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.²⁴

²¹ Coleridge, Vol.1, 1971, 72-73. The emphasis on fury is Coleridge's; v. pp. 126-127.

²² Respectively, Proverbs 12:16; 14:17; 15:1; 19:19; also, 6:34; 22:24; etc.

²³ But v. Proverbs 27:5.

²⁴ Proverbs 16:32.

The Authorised Version's top of the page summary of Chapters 10 to 24 is 'Moral virtues and their contrary vices'; virtue, Biblical religion, repression of emotion, control of the self, compassion²⁵ and prudence are a set that contrast with Blake's values of energy, free expression of the self and its emotions, particularly those of sexuality and anger, and risk-taking. A Devil crosses the character of the Amoral Vitalist with the Champion of the Oppressed, living a male identity based on the lust of the goat and the rage of the tiger, willing to kill an infant rather than nurse an ungratified desire, yet at the same time helping bring about the redeemed society celebrated in 'A Song of Liberty'.

The Bible lays the responsibility for the creation of unwrathful and repressed subjectivities on parents:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth
him betimes.

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his
crying.²⁶

In other passages the rod is the symbol of the anger of God; the father is enjoined to discipline his son in the way that adults are disciplined by Divine punishment and with the same purpose: the creation of obedient, humble individuals.²⁷ This is the kind of educational régime denounced at the end of Tiriél, and it should now be even clearer that Blake's target there was not the old-fashioned child-rearing practices of the upper classes, but a mode of subject creation that any Biblical Christian was committed to: the repression of anger, honest response and sexual desire by physical beating and the inculcation of 'moral virtue'. In a work as political as The Marriage, where the Angels are, on one level, supporters and the Devils opponents of the old regime, the implications are clear: the people created by such an upbringing will be obedient not just to God and father, but to lord and king as well. Free anger is a necessary part of a revolutionary consciousness.

It is also illuminating to consider the relationship of diabolic wisdom to that of English popular proverbs, which embody a 'common sense' that makes an obvious target for a counter-ideologist.²⁸ All of the sayings that deal with

²⁵ Proverbs 19:17; 28:8.

²⁶ Proverbs 13:24; 19:18.

²⁷ Proverbs 22:8 has the rod as symbol of human wrath; rod of God's anger: Isaiah 10:5.

²⁸ Proverbs as legitimators: Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, 1971, 112.

anger in Fuller's Gnomologia²⁹ (c1650) suggest its dangers. Typical are 792: 'Anger begins with Folly, and ends with Repentance' and 795: 'Anger is the Fever and Frenzy of the Soul'. We are told that anger punishes itself (799) and angry men are likened to drunks (800), the blind and the mad (1105). Relatively the most favourable is 798: 'Anger may glance into the Breast of a wise Man, but rests only in the Bosom of Fools'. Other sources show that the 'brief madness' formula had proverbial status.³⁰ Not all proverbs are as judgemental as Fuller's: 'After great wrath love is the more'³¹ acknowledges that anger promotes useful emotional flows, while a saying of 1639 proclaims that 'Anger edgeth valor', and the adage cited by Dekker 'He that cannot be angry is no man'³² suggests a positive view, stemming from ideas about emotions appropriate to masculinity that are still present in Blake.

English proverbs are less moralistic than Biblical ones, but still weighted in favour of repression; one reason for this is that they themselves are products of a Christian culture, in which New Testament teaching on wrath shaped ideas at all periods. The valorisation of anger has the counter-ideological aim of creating men capable of making a revolution and living a life of vigorous authenticity afterwards. Blake seeks to cast aside timid prudentialism, Enlightened, popular or Christian, in favour of free flows of energy and a wrath that is risky to the self and dangerous to others, but holds out the promise of personal and social transformation.

Much Christian thinking about anger was organised by the discourse of the Seven Deadly Sins.³³ Ira was a servant of the devil, associated with madness and murder, sometimes portrayed as the gate to all other sins.³⁴ Certain animals were regularly linked with it, including the wolf and lion.³⁵ Blake's dealings with such ideas involve two contradictory operations: on the one hand, an attempt to remove wrath from the grip of moral theorising altogether, on the other an attempt to praise it as a desirable manifestation of life force,

²⁹ Fuller, 1732.

³⁰ F. P. Wilson, The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs, 1970, 13-14.

³¹ Bartlett Jere Whiting and Helen Wescott Whiting, Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings mainly before 1500, 1968, 676 (W697).

³² G.L. Apperson, English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases: a Historical Dictionary, 1969, 10, 3.

³³ Janet Warner claims in Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips, William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes, 1973, 216 - that Blake regarded the cardinal sins as products of frustrated desire and not as evils in themselves. But Blake did not adopt a 'frustration-aggression' view of anger on all occasions - v. p. 221 - and he never really regarded anger as a sin - v. p. 153.

³⁴ Morton Bloomfield, Seven Deadly Sins, 1952, 131; 233; 193; 223.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 264-267.

and hence to set it up as a virtue in an alternative moral discourse. Standards of vitality tend to turn themselves into standards of morality;³⁶ it would be hard for someone who believes that free-flowing anger is an expression of life energy, not to urge people to live their wrath fully. Anger becomes an imperative for anyone who would learn true wisdom - proverbs carry the implication that you would be foolish to ignore them. His use of animal imagery in The Marriage is at the intersection of both projects; it implies that anger is a vital energy that exists at a level unamenable to moral judgement, while at the same time suggesting the moralised animals of the Seven Deadly Sins, the fabliaux, and other forms that teach virtue through animal examples.

To choose Hell, traditionally a place of fury, as a locus of preferred values was immediately to contest Christian repressiveness. The damned were suffering under the anger of God,³⁷ they were angry at God,³⁸ anger itself was a route to hell, and it was associated with sulphur³⁹ as well as fire. The virtuous, accordingly, repress it:

The Angel hearing this became almost blue but mastering himself he grew yellow, & at last white pink & smiling...⁴⁰

Nurmi comments that this Angel 'almost allows himself to indulge in infernal wrath' but masters himself to regain 'the vapid sweetness of his piety'.⁴¹ The Angel's final colouration and expression suggest that what could have been honest wrath has become hidden malice. This dislike of anger is part of an Angelic approach to the world that is either hypocritical or unaware: the Angel who debates with Blake begins by affecting to pity him, but the real basis of his approach is self-righteous indignation. After a battle of visions, the Angel is forced to admit 'thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed',⁴² implying a non-reciprocal right to attempt conversion. Blake's reply is that 'we impose on one another', and the Plate ends with the motto, 'Opposition is true Friendship'. The angry emotions of debate are valuable parts of social living; without 'imposition' no-one would ever progress intellectually, and, 'The man who never alters his opinion is like

³⁶ Price, 1964, 431.

³⁷ Revelations, 14:10.

³⁸ John Milton, Paradise Lost, 1, 666.

³⁹ Coleridge, 1956, 89. Hugh Trevor's brutal master is called a 'fiend' and his anger is his 'devil': Holcroft, 1978, 43, 40.

⁴⁰ E43, Plate 23.

⁴¹ Martin K. Nurmi, Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell : a Critical Study, 1957, 58.

⁴² E42, Plate 20.

standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind'.⁴³ Blake's own tactics have elements of slyness. The Angel is dismissed with the apparently angry, 'it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics',⁴⁴ yet he has just admitted that Blake has not been wasting his time, and the Motto acknowledges this; anger, presumably, is his final lesson.

Blake's preference for the tygers of wrath over the horses of instruction is also a break with characteristic Enlightenment values. The anonymous Encyclopédie article 'Philosophe' associates anger with 'le fanatisme et la superstition'.⁴⁵ Enlightened rationality enables Blake to reject all systems of religion that place deities outside the human breast, but is itself transcended. His discipline for the passions was neither direct repression nor the counterposition of approved emotions⁴⁶ but expression, enabling the 'bounding line' of form to be imposed, and fruitful conflict with the passions of others to take place. Enlightenment, with its relatively 'cool' and moralised forms of anger, cannot provide enough emotional power at a time of revolution, and its prudential rationalism holds men back just as surely as Christianity from the risky living necessary before and after revolution.

Revolutions need the specific help of anger in the context of a generally raised level of emotion. Such is the structure of feeling of The Marriage, which continually proclaims the virtues of excess and exuberance, and recommends that life be lived with 'all the fury of a spiritual existence':⁴⁷

To feel strongly was democratic, nor was it only a question of feeling strongly for the sufferings of the poor or of the blacks; strong sentiment of all kinds took a political colour.⁴⁸

Danton pointed clearly to the importance of anger and exultation:

S'il n'y avait pas eu des hommes ardents, si le peuple lui-même n'avait pas été violent, il n'y aurait pas eu de révolution...il faut de l'exultation pour fonder les Républiques.⁴⁹

⁴³ E42, Plate 19.

⁴⁴ E42, Plate 20.

⁴⁵ Diderot, Vol. XXV, 1778-1780, 633.

⁴⁶ v. Albert O. Hirschmann, The Passions and the Interests, 1977, 40-41.

⁴⁷ E41, 19.

⁴⁸ F. M. Todd, Politics and the Poet, 1957, 52.

⁴⁹ Cited Trahard, 1936, 9.

Even opponents of the new order thought that revolutionary democracy 'électrise le plus fortement et généralise le plus vite les passions'.⁵⁰ English sympathisers made similar points,⁵¹ and some of the praise of passion in contexts not overtly political is due to this association with the Revolution. 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom'⁵² supports not only an emotionalism that impatiently hurries beyond the mean, but those revolutionary 'excesses' that constituted one of its political results.⁵³ The need of revolutions for the excessive, and the role of anger in providing it, was understood at the time: Barras declared of the Revolution:

Les passions les plus furieuses l'ont, sans doute, trop animée et transportée au-delà de toutes les convenances sociales et des bornes connues de la politique.⁵⁴

He defends this transgression because it was necessary for its mission. The connection between revolution and anger is not surprising; war and wrath had, reflecting an obvious reality, been linked discursively since Homer, and revolutions are civil wars. The idea that anger was a natural response of the oppressed further strengthened the association. The emotions appealed to or claimed by revolutionaries were partly determined by the policies they were recommending at the time. There is no invariable connection between anger and insurrection or guillotinings on the one hand, and between pity, and clemency for the defeated on the other,⁵⁵ but a general correlation of this kind did exist.⁵⁶

The sans-culottes also valued strong feelings, especially anger. Their model patriot Père Duchesne 'expressed only the most simple and definite

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 9.

⁵¹ Wordsworth, Vol.1, 1971, 71; Paine, 1969, 79.

⁵² E35, 7, 3.

⁵³ If Viscomi's dating is correct, Blake like Romilly was justifying the blood already shed by the Revolution and anticipating the possibility of more violent times. 'Excesses': Mackintosh, 1791, V111 and 17; Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 369. Pre-revolutionary links between passion and extremes: Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, (1776-88), 1910, Vol. 1, 463; Swift, 1975, 85.

⁵⁴ cited Trahard, 1936, 47. For parliamentary emotionalism, in the first case masking fear and self-interest, v. Colin Jones, in Lucas, 1991, 76; C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, 1980, 140-141.

⁵⁵ v. pp. 65-67; 107.

⁵⁶ v. e.g. Fouché, cited Hunt, 1984, 101.

emotions, usually either "great joy" or "wrath".⁵⁷ Such emotions contributed both content and tone to their politics:

From the priests...Louis XVI learned the art of fooling men and hiding a gangrenous heart and a soul of clay under the mask of virtue...his wife and the little bugger are still alive, you will have no peace until they are destroyed.⁵⁸

To the sans-culottes character and politics went together,⁵⁹ and feelings were culpable or praiseworthy. Excess of emotion was a virtue and they cultivated an 'extremely sensitive and emotional' response to speakers, and 'a whole assembly might be swept by "republican ecstasies"'.⁶⁰ Helen Maria Williams discovered that those not violent enough in their enthusiasm exhibited the 'guilt of moderantism'.⁶¹

The role that anger played in the discourse of the middle class leaders of the Revolution was complex.⁶² Initially a man of Enlightenment and Sensibility, Robespierre valued 'reason and truth', rather than prejudice and passion.⁶³ The fact that revolutions are made by angry people provides a problem for any leader, as the wrathful are notoriously likely to make ill-advised decisions.⁶⁴ Hence Robespierre argues that vigorous measures advised by indignation must sometimes be set aside in the interests of public safety.⁶⁵ Yet his position as leader of a faction relying on popular support, made it inevitable that he would have to reflect - or create - 'la juste indignation' of the masses.⁶⁶ His theatrical and rather frigid anger seems more a rhetorical device than a real response; he even uses the literary vocabulary and appeals to 'le courroux patriotique',⁶⁷ and it is significant that 'fureur' is usually

⁵⁷ Hunt, 1984, 84.

⁵⁸ Cited Blum, 1986, 179.

⁵⁹ Soboul, 1964, 19.

⁶⁰ Soboul, 161; 203;

⁶¹ Helen Maria Williams, Letters containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, 1795, 13.

⁶² Robespierre was nicknamed 'l' enragé' or 'l' agneau enragé' even before 1789 - Thompson, 1988, 44-45.

⁶³ Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 18.

⁶⁴ 'Anger is a bad counselor', Leon Trotsky, The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-1925), 1975, 317.

⁶⁵ Robespierre, Vol. 2, 1970, 33.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 39, 204.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* 116.

attributed to elements of the old order.⁶⁸ Robespierre seeks to promote anger when extreme actions are necessary,⁶⁹ but he remains suspicious of it.

If anger was an opportunity and a dilemma to the French leaders, their English supporters, even in a situation simplified by the absence of mass action, did not find it easy. We have seen that sometimes English radicals write as if they will soon have to grapple with the practical difficulties already faced in France, and Blake's counter-ideological efforts aim at creating people capable of making an armed revolution. It is therefore essential that he define and promote a kind of anger that will motivate action and help bring it to a successful conclusion. Blake's praise of anger might go beyond that of middle class radicals with whom he is sometimes contrasted, but similar tendencies are visible in their work, as they too sought to prepare for a possible revolution.

Southey represents anger as a motive force for violent action; the peasant militant Hob says:

We have broke our chains - we will arise in anger -
The mighty multitude shall trample down
The handful that oppress them.⁷⁰

In 'Religious Musings' Coleridge wrote of the 'salutary wrath' with which the Revolutionaries were purging the ills of European society, arguing that it was more useful than 'What soft balm the weeping good man pours/Into the lone despoiled traveller's wounds'.⁷¹ Yet neither writer is completely happy about the role of anger. Hob demands 'Vengeance!' as well as 'Justice!', and although John Ball becomes 'indignant' at the sight of the wealth of the rich beside the poverty of the poor, he challenges the peasants to choose between Hob's two aims.⁷² Yet the outcome of his advice not to take revenge for the murder of Tyler casts grave doubts on his ethic of pity.⁷³ Ball argues that the nobles had degraded and oppressed the people:

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 10, 84, 196.

⁶⁹ Coleridge's 'cool ferocious Robespierre' - The Fall of Robespierre, 1794, 12 suggests a controlled rage was seen as characteristic by contemporaries; this may have become Blake's later view: '*the Cold fury of Robespierre*' - E705. The italics presumably indicate a quotation; this was in a letter to the Monthly Magazine, so may not fully reflect his private views.

⁷⁰ Southey, 1817, 18.

⁷¹ Coleridge, 1912, 112, 78-87.

⁷² Southey, 1817, 22; 32.

⁷³ *v.* pp. 70-71.

We must not wonder then, that like wild beasts,
When they have burst their chains, with brutal rage
They revenge them on their tyrants.⁷⁴

He is willing to forgive the 'momentary violence of anger', but not the 'cool deliberate murder' of revenge.⁷⁵ He is portrayed as bringing a higher morality to restrain without destroying popular anger, just as Robespierre sometimes represents himself as the bearer of an enlightened reason that guides the anger of the people in political action.

Coleridge, too, distances himself from 'salutary' anger; soon after the passage quoted he writes of the 'elect of heaven', who 'nor contempt embosom nor revenge' and in whom the 'dark Passions' are changed to innocence through purifying faith.⁷⁶ Later revisions weakened any identification of the poet with the wrathful by removing the claim that 'he shall know, his heart shall understand' their anger, and thus implied more strongly a place with the unvengeful elect.⁷⁷ Coleridge seems happier associating anger with counter-revolution and its hypocritical clerical supporters⁷⁸ and lines denouncing the cruelties of Britain's rulers and rejecting the solution of 'law-forced charity' for its wretched victims in favour of a forthcoming 'Day of Retribution',⁷⁹ are soon followed by praise of Priestley's ability to pity his enemies.⁸⁰

Blake is more committed to anger than Coleridge or Southey, and, in this work, he makes no attempt to provide a counterbalancing compassion. The limits on wrath, necessary in an effective revolutionary, are contained in the structure of the concept created by the particular references and by the work as a whole. The important words Blake uses to represent the emotion are *indignation*, *rage*, *fury*, and *wrath*. Implications in the vocabulary available to him contained the essence of his conceptualisation, but the effect of The Marriage is to readjust this semantic field⁸¹ so as to undermine the clear distinction between a moralised, civilised and acceptable anger and a

⁷⁴ Southey, 1817, 48.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁶ Coleridge, 1912, 112-113, 88-91.

⁷⁷ The poem, dated Christmas Eve, 1794, published in 1796, began to appear in revised versions in 1797; I have given a slightly simplified account of deliberately ambiguous lines.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 116, 185-191.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 119-121, 276-322.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 123, 375.

⁸¹ For vocabulary as legitimation, v. Berger and Luckmann, 1971, 112.

dangerous, primitive and irrational one he would have found in, for example, Boyd's comments on Homer:

...we can go along with the resentment of Ulysses, because it is just, but our feelings must tell us that Achilles carries his resentment to a savage length, a length where we cannot follow him.⁸²

Isaiah goes beyond the position that God commands indignation at abuses:

Isaiah answer'd. I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.⁸³

The anger of prophetic denunciation *is* God, the creative power that sees and responds to the infinite. Isaiah's anger leaps into existence from his encounter with this infinity because it is of the same energetic essence as the creative perception that melts 'apparent surfaces away...displaying the infinite which was hid'.⁸⁴ Yet this indignation is anger given a specific shape, one that contradicts Blake's apparent antinomianism.

The opposite poles of eighteenth century anger were, in a rough not a schematic way, *indignation* and *fury*. *Resentment* was akin to the former,⁸⁵ often implying anger at personal affronts, *rage* to the latter, and *anger* and *wrath* fell somewhere in between. *Indignation* usually implied moral judgement, and it was therefore a specifically human emotion and one that typically laid claim to some degree of justification:⁸⁶ 'wrath excited by a sense of wrong to oneself or, especially, to others'.⁸⁷ John Poole's diary politicises a common contrast:

⁸² E633.

⁸³ E38, Plate 12.

⁸⁴ E39, Plate 14.

⁸⁵ Blake couples both to describe his feelings about Reynolds - E636.

⁸⁶ Occasionally, however, it was used for anger spuriously claiming superiority: Gray, Collins and Goldsmith, 1969, 688, 282. Blake uses it for self-righteous anger - E106, 12, 44.

⁸⁷ OED, sense 2.

each of them [Coleridge and Southey] was shamefully hot with Democratic Rage...I was extremely indignant.⁸⁸

By implication, his 'indignation' - 'the wrath of a superior'⁸⁹ - is cool and reasonable. Southey's 'glow of indignation' at slave suffering makes the same heat an admirable quality of the humanitarian,⁹⁰ while Coleridge claimed that 'Indignation is the handsome brother of Anger and Hatred - Benevolence alone beseems the Philosopher'.⁹¹ Although Isaiah's anger is part of the 'hot' life force, which in humans potentially flows in discourse, it is still moralised⁹² and rational.⁹³ Without such a form of energy it would be impossible to turn desire fruitfully against its social impediments; but Blake still feels the need for wilder angers.

Rage and *fury* were more violent and less intellectual; and usage suggested they powerfully embodied life energy. They were often used in disapproving contexts. It is a fiend that darts a look of 'fury' at the would-be repentant Monk,⁹⁴ who dies 'venting his rage in blasphemy and curses',⁹⁵ and angry women were sometimes called *furies* to suggest an uncontrollable urge for revenge.⁹⁶ Helen Maria Williams sets up a typical contrast between pity and 'indignation' and hardheartedness and 'rage',⁹⁷ and speaks of the 'lanterne, at which... the first victims of popular fury were sacrificed',⁹⁸ keeping some distance from actions she does not explicitly condemn. Yet *fury* and *rage* also meant 'inspired frenzy', particularly poetic inspiration⁹⁹ and *rage* was often used to mean a dominating but dangerous life energy:

No wonder that the experienc'd Hebrew sage

⁸⁸ Cited Richard Holmes, Coleridge, Early Visions, 1989, 71. cf. Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, (1742) 1910: '..how accurately is the sedate, injured resentment of Achilles, distinguished from the hot insulting passion of Agamemnon!'

⁸⁹ OED, sense 2.

⁹⁰ Southey, 1797, 35.

⁹¹ Coleridge, Vol. 1, 1971, 18.

⁹² For moralised indignation, v. Williams, 1989, 194.

⁹³ I have not found any example of *indignation* or *resentment* attributed to an animal. Blake uses it of waves, by analogy with commoner uses of *rage* and *fury* - E170, 24, 62-63.

⁹⁴ Lewis, 1980, 441.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 442.

⁹⁶ Hays, 1987, 73.

⁹⁷ Williams, 1989, 163-171.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 80-81. cf. 'the enraged multitude' - 84; Hays, 1987, 149.

⁹⁹ *Fury*: OED sense 4; *rage*, sense 8. Also: The Poetical Works of Edward Young, Vol. 2, 1858, 43.

Of man pronounc'd it [jealousy] the extremest rage.¹⁰⁰

The importance of *rage* is established at the start of The Marriage. The meekness of the 'social' virtues, was once possible to the just man, as he was left unhindered to follow the paths of strenuous achievement.¹⁰¹ But times changed:

Now the sneaking serpent walks
In mild humility.
And the just man rages in the wilds
Where lions roam.¹⁰²

The rage of the just man in the wilderness takes up the anger of Rintrah in the first two lines, where the 'hungry clouds' suggest imminent vengeance. The rage that the just man learns in exile will return to overthrow the order resulting from the original usurpation. Yet there is a tension between 'just', which implies human standards of rectitude, and the associations created by the closeness of 'rages' and 'lions';¹⁰³ the implication emerges that the return will be in 'bestial' violence as much as in righteous anger.

Rage was used to refer to the violence of nature,¹⁰⁴ and when Blake uses it in this way he includes war as a manifestation of this ferocious energy:

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword. are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.¹⁰⁵

War is imaged as an expression of natural energy, not a social process, and there is no indication that this applies only to the French or to revolutionary armies. War rages and so does art:¹⁰⁶

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Anne Finch Winchelsea, in Minor Poets of the Eighteenth Century, 1930, 101,19-20.

¹⁰¹ E33, 2, 9-13.

¹⁰² E33, 2, 17-20.

¹⁰³ Proverbs 19, 12 joins lion and wrath in the simile, 'The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion'.

¹⁰⁴ *Rage*, OED, sense 4; *fury*, OED, sense 3.

¹⁰⁵ E36, 8, 27.

¹⁰⁶ v. pp. 23-25; 211.

¹⁰⁷ E40, 15.

The lion's raging ceases in 'A Song of Liberty',¹⁰⁸ where it stands for the predatory energies of British imperialism; the imagery sets up another tension, switching us to the pastoral world of Innocence, where compassionate shepherds guard their flocks from predators, and associating revolutionary and artistic rage with imperialist violence. Blake never claims that there is a 'good' and a 'bad' anger, one felt by rebels and one felt by their opponents, or one that fuels art and another that inspires imperialism. The imagery of The Marriage insists on the identity of an emotion that can lead in different political and personal directions. The work is notable in refusing to judge any forms of anger as per se bad. To do so was common for supporters of both political sides; for example, a poem in The Anti-Jacobin¹⁰⁹ associates France with 'rage' and 'fury', while Honour and Virtue, and by implication England, are called 'indignant', and the ocean, synonymous with British naval might, is 'angry'. 'Anthony Pasquin' compares the 'furious' Burke with the 'indignant storm' of French popular action,¹¹⁰ and Helen Maria Williams counterposes the 'rage' and 'ferocity' of the Jacobins with the 'honest indignation' of the Girondins.¹¹¹ Blake regards all forms of anger as part of life force, and necessary for political, artistic or military action of any kind.

The link between anger and fundamental life energy is clear in Blake's use of *fury*, which is reminiscent of the word's origins: in the Indo-European heroic vocabulary *furor* was one way of referring to an "'extreme heat" or "rage" which...characterize the incarnatikon of power'.¹¹² This sacred 'burning'¹¹³ is manifestation and source of power; Los's 'fury' is both his anger at the abuses he prophetically denounces and this hot and mysterious creativity.¹¹⁴ In The Marriage the word is associated with Leviathan:

...and now we saw it was the head of Leviathan, his forehead was divided into streaks of green & purple like those on a tygers forehead: soon we saw his mouth & red gills hang just above the raging foam tinging the black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward us with all the fury of a spiritual existence.¹¹⁵

108 E45, Plate 25.

109 Edmonds, 1890, 45-47; translation by Lord Morpeth of Latin by Lord Wellesley.

110 Legislative Biography, 1793, 54.

111 Williams, 1795, 25, 31, 76-77, 89-90 etc.

112 Mircea Eliade, Yoga, 1973, 107.

113 *ibid.*, 332.

114 v. p. 178.

115 E41, 18-19.

Leviathan and tiger are linked to the French Revolution by geographical origin.¹¹⁶ Art, revolution, anger and energetic creativity characterise the Angel's vision of Blake's 'eternal lot'; the 'most terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption', powers of creativity that depend on emotions unacceptable to the virtuous. Yet this vision dissolves into a pastoral idyll, and Blake claims that the tremendous picture of Leviathan's energy was due only to the Angel's 'metaphysics'. The 'beams of blood' produced by Leviathan imply acceptance of revolutionary murders, but Blake also claims that without Angelic opposition revolution would be a peaceful adjustment of opinion - the burden of the harper's song - so he treads a careful path, never quite committing himself to valorising 'fury' and its politics of violence unreservedly.¹¹⁷

It is *wrath* to which the 'Proverbs' attribute wisdom and origins in God's bounty. The association of this with the tiger needs explanation; eighteenth-century tigers were violent creatures, but other words were used for their ferocity.¹¹⁸ Michael J. Tolley claims that the anger of the tygers is of the kind that would lead to rebellion against the ways of the world, rather than the tame submission of the horses of instruction.¹¹⁹ But the choice of a tiger, here and in Songs, indicates a kind of anger that, unlike the 'righteous' indignation which Tolley considers the wrath of the 'Proverbs' amounts to, continually threatens to run out of control. That is its value; other energies are tractable, and have their uses, but certain kinds of political and personal achievement can only be gained by summoning up terrible forces; 'human tygers' in Godwin's picture, dominate a world 'dead to every manly sympathy',¹²⁰ and The Marriage's absence of compassion leads to strangled infants, cannibalised monkeys, and the energy of the 'devourers' - at one level, capitalists - mirrored in the ravenous energies of revolution.

But if the tygers' anger is more than righteous indignation, the proverb steps back from full identification with predatory violence. *Wrath* is 'the manifestation of anger or fury, esp. by way of retributive punishment', and the Oxford English Dictionary's examples of the wrathful are significant: the Deity,

¹¹⁶ E41, 18.

¹¹⁷ cf. Crehan, 1984, 124.

¹¹⁸ J. Buck, Blake Newsletter/Blake: an Illustrated Quarterly, 1977, 3, 40-41, cites eighteenth-century sources on their 'prodigious fierce and ravenous' natures; 'furious': Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (1721), 1983, 132; 'this enraged and ravenous beast' - Aphra Behn, Oroonoko, (1688), 1992, 117-118.

¹¹⁹ Blake Newsletter/Blake: an Illustrated Quarterly, 1968, 2, 10.

¹²⁰ Godwin, 1982, 252.

Achilles, Kings, the Law and unnamed but fearsome Avengers.¹²¹ The dominant sense was one of the justified anger of the powerful, although justification perhaps, only in their own opinion: Thelwall writes of Brutus's 'avenging wrath' against tyrants, and three pages later of 'a tyrant's wrath'.¹²² While *rage* has a section 'of animals' (2b) and *fury* 'of beasts' (1b), there is no such section for *wrath*, and no example in any sense for an animal is recorded after 1539. It is a strange word to apply to a beast of prey; its effect, like that of the notoriously docile tiger depicted in Songs,¹²³ is to create distance from the unthinking fury that is implied in the choice of animal. The anger of the tiger (and of the lion) is accepted only on condition of its transformation into a human quality definable as wise. 'Wrath' implies the vengeance of a mighty power, confident in its own righteousness; the tiger was seen as a murderous and amoral predator. This balancing implies both support for and distance from revolutionary violence.¹²⁴ In summary, The Marriage seeks to create men capable of armed revolution, combining moral indignation at abuses, elemental fury and avenging wrath, yet not so completely given over to anger that hasty decisions are taken and pointless violence perpetrated. But the anger it invokes continually threatens to become the antinomian murderousness of the strong, and Blake does not reject this as completely as many critics would like to believe.

The politics of Joseph Gerrald's 'On Moderation' are in many ways similar to The Marriage's, but differ in such a way as to throw into relief the specificity of Blake's attitude to anger.¹²⁵ Gerrald praises the 'bold terrific energy' checked by moderation, and criticises 'submissive peace' and 'calm endurance'. He associates Sensibility with a reformist politics that 'disorganize the will, and dislocate the soul', similar to the effects Blake sometimes assigned to pity. Such 'jargons' of 'benevolence' are linked with a politics 'abjuring force',¹²⁶ and the only thing that seems to separate Gerrald's emotional politics from Blake's is his determination to associate wrath only with the cruelties of tyranny and its unwitting accomplices, those moderates whose policies allow it to continue: 'The tyrants triumph with their wrath BENIGN./The MODERATE

¹²¹ These are all the OED examples of sense 4b between 1650 and 1850.

¹²² John Thelwall, Poems Written in Close Confinement, 1795, 17; 20.

¹²³ Paulson believes that the fierceness of the tyger of Revolution is a Urizenic illusion; this unthreatening beast is the Blakean reality - 1983, 98-99. In 1794 it would have been disingenuous to claim that revolution was peaceful, but this may have been Blake's intention - v. p. 183.

¹²⁴ Robert M. Maniquis's description of 'a poet of enthusiastic prophetic violence' - Studies in Romanticism, 28, 1989, 386 - is simplistic.

¹²⁵ 'On Moderation', c1792, cited Worrall, 1992, 16-17.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, 16.

wrath of boundless cruelty'. Gerrald's poem shows that a preference for energetic and 'manly' feeling, combined with a distrust of the 'mild discourse' of 'soft benevolence' could be associated with a politics that accepted the necessity for revolutionary 'force', but Blake goes beyond the 'bold tear of manhood' and chooses moderated fury as a more suitable inspiration for revolutionary violence.

Anger in The Marriage is bounded not by pity, but by a careful construction of the concept itself, designed to prevent it becoming 'boundless cruelty'. Those strands of Sensibility which praise passivity, tolerance, and refined feeling, are forgotten in a celebration of energy, and the possibility of an active benevolence is not considered, as anger is seen as the appropriate response of the strong to frustration. Irving Babbitt's claim that it is difficult to reconcile Blake's belief in the 'free expansion of energy' with his exultation of sympathy¹²⁷ misses the point that the work most committed to the former leaves out the latter. There is a reference to 'Pathos' in the 'Proverbs', but this relates it to the body, not to its social functions. Blake does not wish to call for pity for the oppressors when they are overthrown, and the successful action of the oppressed will, he hopes, bring about a society in which there are no longer poor people requiring charity. In the context of the celebration of anger and the assault on 'moral virtue', the absence of an *attack* on pity is notable. Blake is so intent on portraying the Devils, who represent, amongst other things, the groups who would usually be the 'objects of compassion', as strong, that there is nothing about them for the Angels to pity.

As far as the rebels go, the trouble with pity is, not only that it is liable to fix itself on the wrong objects or that it is open to ideological misuse, but that, in a revolutionary epoch, it sets up a contradiction between the motivation for action and some of the actions necessary. If one is fighting out of compassion for the oppressed, there is no *logical* reason why one should not be ruthless to the oppressor, but there is an emotional problem. The need to circumvent this accounts for Jacobin rhetoric claiming that pity for the powerful is cruelty towards the rest of the people, and this need may be one of the reasons why Blake does not attempt to bound anger with compassion.

Blake's hell is a place inhabited by the lower social classes,¹²⁸ and here, if anywhere, we would expect him to valorise the anger of the oppressed; significantly, he keeps the same distance from it as from tigerish rage.

¹²⁷ Babbitt, 1919, 197.

¹²⁸ Clark Emery in William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, 1963, 24.

Swedenborg, the ostensible target of the satire, was a mine and ironworks owner who mixed freely with the Swedish ruling class.¹²⁹ His experiences influenced his own pictures of hell,¹³⁰ which are striking for their materialistic emphasis on, for example, the 'ragged, squalid and filthy garments' of the devils.¹³¹ Blake accepts this identification, but reverses the associated valuations. Hell is a place where the lower classes live out their lustful, energetic and uninhibited lives, to the scandal of the primly repressed Angels. Hell also figures the unconscious mind, the locus of emotions repressed by the 'polite'.¹³² If reason's superiority over the instincts and emotions mirrored that of the ruling classes over the ruled, then the inability of the lower orders to achieve rational inhibition was a sign that they were fit only to be dominated. Some argued that the human inability to consistently conquer passion was proof that democracy was unworkable.¹³³ In 1795 Schiller wrote:

In den niedern und zahlreichen Klassen stellen sich uns rohe gesetzlose Triebe dar, die sich nach aufgelöstem Band der bürgerlichen Ordnung entfesseln, und mit unlenksamer Wuth zu ihrer thierischen Befriedigung eilen.¹³⁴

Schiller's imagery is similar to Blake's, but his valuations are reversed; he implies a connection between the political fury of the crowds which demanded 'the maximum', and the open displays of sexuality that shocked many opponents of the Revolution.¹³⁵ Class ascriptions of anger in the eighteenth century are a complex matter. On the one hand, it was sometimes regarded as a class privilege,¹³⁶ on the other, not only was it common to attribute anger to the lower class 'mob',¹³⁷ but a certain kind was considered specifically lower class - 'cross and churlish'.¹³⁸ Wollstonecraft makes the significant distinction

¹²⁹ G. R. Sabri-Tabrizi, The 'Heaven' and 'Hell' of William Blake, 1973, 14-18.

¹³⁰ *ibid*, 19.

¹³¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, 1911, 79-80. My claim is that Swedenborg's depictions of heaven and hell embody class ideology, and so do Blake's counter-renditions; this makes irrelevant critiques of Sabri-Tabrizi by Tolley and the TLS - Michael J. Tolley, Blake Newsletter/Blake: an Illustrated Quarterly, 1975, 4, 138; 'The Processes of William Blake', The Times Literary Supplement, 15 February, 1974.

¹³² Gallant, 1978, 51.

¹³³ Even Tom Paine sometimes took this view - Foner, 1976, 90-91.

¹³⁴ J. C. Friedrich von Schiller, Ueber die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in Werke, Vol. 20, 1962, 309-412.

¹³⁵ de Maistre, 1974, 74.

¹³⁶ The Spectator, Vol. 5, n. d., 144: 'passionate' men 'exert themselves most against those below them'.

¹³⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution, in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Vol. 6, 1989, 232.

¹³⁸ Anon., The School of Manners, (1701), 1983, 60.

between a properly restrained anger on behalf of others felt by the middle class Mrs. Mason and 'the passion I used to see nurse in when anything vexed her'.¹³⁹ This distinction takes on political resonances in Vindication of the Rights of Men, where she claims to 'glow with indignation'¹⁴⁰ when she attempts to follow Burke's irrational arguments, but is not willing to consider popular anger as the kind of rationally sanctioned emotion that can be counterposed to Burke's excesses of Sensibility.¹⁴¹ Wrath on one's own behalf is vulgar and dangerous, but middle class indignation at falsehoods that harm the weak is rhetorically acceptable. Narrow-minded 'lower' class anger becomes, in time of revolution, the 'ungovernable fury' that horrified Schiller. In 'Gwin' Blake portrays popular anger as necessary but unpleasant, in 'The Chimney Sweeper' (Experience) it is presented sympathetically, but in a child not an adult, and in The Marriage the issue is sidestepped by the use of animal imagery, and by the symbolism of devils, which merges the 'lower' classes with political radicals. The tiger's 'ungovernable rage' is entirely for its own purposes, but its 'animal satisfactions' figure human ones without being identifiable with them. The Devils have the uninhibited affect structure of the populace, but they have read Aristotle and Swedenborg as well. This theme is to be raised again by Blake's equivocations about violence in the conclusion to The Four Zoas, and these instances combine to show that Blake is never wholly happy about giving unqualified approval to mass anger embodied in political action. He goes further than middle class radicals like Wollstonecraft, but almost always draws back from complete identification.

Swift's Yahoos embody Schiller's fear of lower class 'animality': they are greedy, lustful, and extremely wrathful.¹⁴² The natural political state of such uninhibited creatures is anarchy,¹⁴³ and if The Marriage has a political philosophy it is anarchism,¹⁴⁴ but, in reality, Blake's valorisation of strong feeling is his real political programme. The official ideologies of the eighteenth century praised an internal peace based on 'the social feelings'; one possible vision of a post-revolutionary society is that adumbrated in some of Songs of Innocence: social peace in the absence of exploitation, with compassion flowing freely through a society with very gentle power gradients. The vision of liberation in The Marriage is completely different:

¹³⁹ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 4, 1989, 388.

¹⁴⁰ Wollstonecraft, Vol. 5, 1989, 10.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, 17

¹⁴² Swift, 1940, 277-285. The Yahoos are, unambiguously, labouring class - 284.

¹⁴³ Price, 1964, 73.

¹⁴⁴ Cox, 1992, 78.

the Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains; are in truth. the causes of its life & the sources of all activity...

but they have been imprisoned by the 'cunning' of 'weak and tame minds. which have the power to resist energy'.¹⁴⁵ The Giants are 'the Prolific' and their weak captors 'the Devouring':

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence. Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.¹⁴⁶

The Prolific and Devouring are, amongst other things, the labouring and exploiting classes - The Prolific are also called 'the producer'.¹⁴⁷ Lindsay notes this, and that Blake 'formulates the need for class struggle in a divided society',¹⁴⁸ but makes no comment on the fact that he decrees this struggle to be eternal, and does so in a work celebrating revolution. Blake makes conflict into a unifying social principle, and thereby elevates anger into a bond, implying, in contradiction to Innocence, that there will always be antagonisms and divisions.

What are the roots of this vision? It is impossible to imagine a strong and self-fulfilling Devil happily working for someone else; imposed labour discipline is one of the things the ideology of hell is designed to destroy. Blake extrapolates from his own relative economic independence in imagining a society in which each individual is free to maximise his own 'personal capital' in a human market place consisting of producers who 'impose on' each other from positions of equality. This kind of development was no more possible than the supersession of industrialisation by an extension of rural production, and what actually happened - a long period in which capital has continued to be accumulated on the basis of wage labour - was unavoidable. Blake, knowingly or unknowingly, acknowledges this by locating one vision of an alternative order in the pastoral utopia of Innocence, and building continued exploitation and conflict into the other. The process of capital accumulation had little to offer the classes he was most strongly identified with but more intense exploitation and misery. Obtainable reforms offered little to such strata, so Blake (no doubt also moved by temperamental extremism and other

¹⁴⁵ E40, Plate 16.

¹⁴⁶ E40, Plates 16-17.

¹⁴⁷ Lindsay, 1978, 62.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 62.

unquantifiable factors) feels impelled to call for a revolution. But the real situation of the economy means that he is unable to imagine a post-revolutionary society. He pictures Innocence as held together emotionally by compassion, the future society envisaged in The Marriage by anger, or some post-revolutionary equivalent, which inspires citizens to artistic creation and the conflicts of debate, but he is unable to specify the economic basis for either. He is forced to picture the eternal existence of the capitalist Devourer, and the accompanying exploitation of the Prolific, which is why the unwanted marriage of the title needs to be arranged, and is another reason for the continuing existence of anger *after* revolution. In any case, Blake, as independent producer, is excited by the possibilities of capitalist development.¹⁴⁹ Plate Twenty's picture of strong¹⁵⁰ monkeys tormenting and eating weak is both grisly and exuberant, a vision of predatory capitalism 'devouring' its victims, yet also of the ravenous energies of revolution. Blake takes from Boehme the idea of anger as devouring, identifies wrath and revolution and finds that capitalist enterprise and revolutionary endeavour are equally hungry. The Amoral Vitalist, unrestrained by pity, hovers uneasily between revolutionary, capitalist and simple sadist.

If one applies his own demand for the clarity of the 'bounding line' and the concern for 'minute particulars' to Blake's revolutionary strategies or post-revolutionary envisionings, a lack of both precision and detail are obvious. He was in a similar position to the sans-culottes, as described by Albert Soboul, who suggests that their interventionist social ideals were incompatible with the fastest development of the economic system and in many ways with their own interests. This led to a substitution of emotion for politics:

They expressed their feelings in passionate outcries and bursts of revolt, but never in a coherent programme. The same was true of the individuals and political groups which shared their outlook - Jacques Roux, Hébert, even Robespierre and Saint-Just.¹⁵¹

Blake's own impasse found its perfect expression in ambiguity, and in the stress on emotion in this, his most revolutionary work. He proposes new structures of feeling for everyday living, and for revolutionary agents postulates art, expanded sensory experience and 'an improvement of sensual enjoyment'. The modus operandi of this transformation is not specified. Nurmi

¹⁴⁹ For Blake's imbrication in capitalist ideology, v. Ferber, 1985, 24-25.

¹⁵⁰ For the strong as revolutionaries, v. E57, 16, 14.

¹⁵¹ Soboul, 1964, 52.

coins the phrase 'the tentative apocalypse of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell'¹⁵² to describe the result of Blake's reticences - yet the tone and the statements about emotion are anything but tentative. Blake, in rejecting the possibility of compensating for a failed social order by retreat to an inward paradise,¹⁵³ commits himself to a politics of institutions he is unable to generate.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Nurmi, 1957, 63, 61.

¹⁵³ Jerome McGann, in Marjorie Levinson et. al., Rethinking Historicism, 1989, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Cox, 1992, 77.

Chapter Eight

Heat without Light?: Visions, America and Europe

Blake's first three prophetic books continue the work of unveiling ruling-class forms of emotion and of constructing rebels. They were all composed in the period of heightened conflict beginning with Brunswick's manifesto of August 1792. Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793) welcomes the revolution and perhaps even reflects the victories the French armies began to win in September 1792,¹ but it is a strangely pessimistic celebration. The war between restraint and desire is in an important sense unreal. Oothoon's speeches, for all the power of their rhetoric, are presented so as to suggest they have no chance of influencing reality. The poem enacts the circularity of a cycle of despair not the linear progress of a revolutionary break, and Oothoon's calls to Theotormon to bring about sexual and social liberation are doomed from the start. The situation of the poem is one which immediately invokes 'the pathetic', exemplified in the eighteenth century by 'a beautiful, virtuous woman suffering',² but Oothoon's challenge to sexual and emotional repressiveness shows that there is no question of Blake reproducing any stereotype of female passivity. It is Oothoon's sexual openness that first attracts Bromion's thunderous wrath, 'as much a rage of moral vindictiveness as of sexual possession'.³ It is, indeed, more than personal hypocrisy: it is a technique of rule, a strategic emotion for a master in a slave society, and, as the poem links the sufferings of women in America with those in England, for rulers in other types of class society. A modern writer has claimed that:

...emotions are responses that have been institutionalised by society as a means of resolving conflicts which exist within the social system...⁴

Such functionalism implies that emotions are created for the good of all, while Bromion's anger is a weapon of class struggle, designed to prevent conflicts, but ones that might benefit the majority. He boasts that his slaves are '...obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge:/Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent'.⁵ Bromion's anger inflicts double chains on female slaves; it terrifies them and it excites them sexually. It has another social function: it is the force that drives the rape of Oothoon and produces the

¹ Valmy was followed by a two year period of general, although not unbroken, success for the Republic - Franklin L. Ford, Europe, 1780-1830, 148.

² Hagstrum, 1980, 198.

³ Price, 1964, 407.

⁴ Averill, Rorty, 1980, 37.

⁵ E46, 1, 22-23.

'child/Of Bromion's rage'.⁶ This rape was as much economic as libidinal, the desire to increase the market value of the slave,⁷ and it is paradoxically moral indignation that fuels the act that justifies moral outrage.

Theotormon's response is to consider them adulterers and to bind 'terror and meekness' back to back in 'Bromions caves'.⁸ He represents impotent British abolitionists, men of Sensibility and Christians, unable to come up with the vigorous emotional and political responses necessary to succeed in the struggle against slavery.⁹ Oothoon's reaction is to transform her emotion into a pathological sexuality: her tears are 'locked up' and she can only express her feelings in the dehumanised form of howls and 'incessant writhing',¹⁰ and the desire to be torn by 'Theotormon's Eagles'. This figures both the satisfaction of her conscience by torments that might lead to forgiveness and the satisfaction of her desires by sadistic love-making.¹¹

From the start Oothoon represents a 'feminine' structure of feeling, characterised as 'mild',¹² a word associated with the 'tender' emotions, sometimes specifically with compassion. Quasha calls her 'self-pitying' and in his view she plays the role in revolt later occupied by Orc, but fails to transcend a 'feminine self-enclosure in complaint' and arrive at a prophecy beyond pathos.¹³ This is to assume that Blake expected her to carry out all the tasks of the revolution herself. Once she has fallen victim to Bromion it is Theotormon who should provide the 'masculine' feelings that might lead to liberation. Instead, he responds with a 'feminine' set of emotions that fail to complement his lover's. Oothoon is willing to follow her sexual longings, she vindicates her purity against Christian moralism and her infinite potential against Enlightenment reductionism, denounces the oppression of women in marriage,¹⁴ and continually calls to Theotormon to join her in sensory, intellectual and emotional liberation. Such a vision challenges a widespread gendering of the rights to authenticity and to emotional expression. Women were encouraged to conceal their feelings,¹⁵ even to pretend to ignore their

⁶ E46, 2, 2.

⁷ Erdman, 1969, 233.

⁸ E46, 2, 3-5.

⁹ For the weaknesses of British abolitionism, v. Blackburn, 1988, 158.

¹⁰ E46, 2, 12.

¹¹ cf. David Punter, *The Romantic Unconscious*, 1989, 80.

¹² E46, 1, 8; at 2, 5, she personifies 'meekness'.

¹³ George Quasha, in Erdman and Grant, 1970, 271-272.

¹⁴ E47-49, Plates 2-5.

¹⁵ David Punter, in Aers, Cook and Punter, 1981, 115-116.

husbands' affairs.¹⁶ Chastity was their most important virtue,¹⁷ and this implied a sexual coyness, merging into generalised inauthenticity; Rousseau, an advocate of male straightforwardness, regarded the contemporary tendency to justify sexual openness in women as deplorable,¹⁸ believing they should 'conceal' their desires and only confess them reluctantly. He felt that women needed to look to their reputations not just to their inner promptings in all behaviour. It is clear from a number of passages¹⁹ that Blake too associated secrecy and deceitfulness with women, although this is not to say that only women are portrayed as deceitful in his poetry. Although Visions shows he was well aware of the social determinants of women's behaviour, he also seems to believe that there is something essentially female about 'disguise'. Europe and The Book of Urizen establish a picture of tyranny that combines Christianity, sexual repressiveness, secrecy, femininity and pity, all of which are illustrated by Pity/Enitharmon in The Book of Urizen. When approached by Los she refuses him in the perverse delight of the Female Will, yet submits, as she had intended all along.²⁰ What links these phenomena is that Blake considered them manifestations of *weakness*; it is the 'strong' of The Marriage and of America who are capable of open sexuality, free of religious restraint, live their emotions honestly and respond to oppression with anger rather than pity. Compassion was associated with women partly because they were seen as relatively powerless: Hannah More argued that they would be well advised to practise it as their weakness made it politic to do so in case they ever needed it themselves.²¹ Strength is 'male', but Blake wants to encourage women to participate in it, and to warn men against the dangers of falling into 'female' passivity and impotence. The revolutionary challenge in the next two Prophecies is to come from Orc, a very masculine spirit of revolt, whose first mature act is rape, who is incapable of dissimulation and is not at this stage ever associated with pity.

In Visions Blake shows that passivity is not inalterably feminine. Oothoon, who is active and self-confident, is betrayed by a male who is close to the helpless female stereotype. It is in this context that Oothoon's particular form of anger takes on its full significance. Blake establishes the possibility of a full experience and expression of female emotion, but the emotions involved

¹⁶ George Savile, in Vivien Jones, ed., Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity, 1990, 20.

¹⁷ Christopher Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, 1986, 367.

¹⁸ Rousseau, Vol. 4, 1767, 72-73.

¹⁹ E66, 14, 22; 'To Nobodaddy', E471; 'A Cradle Song' E468.

²⁰ E79, 19, 10-13.

²¹ More, 1783, 31.

are sexual desire and compassion; her anger is defeated from the start. Blake never portrays open and acceptable anger in a woman. When Enitharmon reddens with rage²² in The Four Zoas she is about to join Los in presiding over a feast of violence. The furious rebel women in 'Gwin' have his support, but are represented in an unattractive way. Even in Visions Blake draws back from showing a potent and unrepressed anger. Oothoon talks about women feeling the 'wintry rage/Of a harsh terror driv'n to madness', but this is not the liberating wrath of the tiger; in patriarchal marriage woman's rage is 'wintry' because it cannot be expressed. Hence it is associated with 'chilling murderous thoughts'²³ and contributes to the madness that is the outcome of repressed terror. Her own rage is allowed slightly stronger expression:

Father of Jealousy. be thou accursed from the earth!²⁴

This curse is anger expressed in despair; Oothoon accepts her defeated status as 'A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity'.²⁵ It seems as if Blake can only accept female anger with some kind of distancing:²⁶ here the certainty of impotence, in the case of Ona, the purely symbolic nature of its representation. 'Let man wear the fell of the lion. woman the fleece of the sheep',²⁷ implies men are at their best when angry, women when submissive and loving. 'A Poison Tree' genders the repression and nursing of anger as feminine: 'soft deceitful wiles' water the tree's deadly fruit, and other uses of this imagery²⁸ associate it with the female. Open, straightforward anger is a male prerogative.

In his attitude to female anger, Blake is typical of his century. Chesterfield, far enough from Blake ideologically to make the convergence significant, saw anger in women as inappropriate:

...[women's] soft voice was not meant for hard words nor their delicate features for the frowns of anger. When they loose [sic] their tempers they loose themselves.²⁹

²² E306, 11, 20.

²³ E49, 5, 23-25.

²⁴ E 50, 7, 12.

²⁵ E50, 7, 15.

²⁶ For Blake's anger at women, v. Brenda S. Webster in Miller, Bracher and Ault, 1987, 205.

²⁷ E36, 8, 30.

²⁸ v. note 19.

²⁹ Chesterfield, 1959, 334.

Burke showed his particular disapproval of militant French women by calling them 'furies'.³⁰ Coleridge illustrates another dismissive stereotype:

Our minister seems to have been animated by the spirit of an angry woman, who shuts the door with a fling against a rival, but first however eases her temper by a fit of scolding.³¹

Blake is constructing representations of gendered anger with the intention of influencing what is actually felt and expressed by each sex. Women are 'hailed'³² by an image of themselves that allows them sexual potency and political insight but is suspicious of their anger when openly and strongly expressed. Oothoon's denunciation of eighteenth-century society is delivered as a wail³³ of powerless lamentation, not an angry war cry.

Pity was a different matter; this was generally seen as female: appropriate to women, characteristic of women, and a 'soft' and feminine emotion in itself.³⁴ The typical eighteenth-century 'division of life' had men engaged in the activities of the world, some of which necessitated goal-directed anger, while women occupied a domestic sphere, in which caring for infants made feeling in general and pity in particular useful, and which fitted them for the wider task of aiding the helpless.³⁵ It is no accident that the female protagonist of Blake's poem sees pity as valuable, while her male counterpart is held back from effective action by his inability to move beyond it: Oothoon asks

...does his [the miser's] eye behold the beam that brings
Expansion to the eye of pity?³⁶

This associates compassion with an image complex in which generous emotions and ideas literally expand the body, leaving those who entertain them more complete and human.³⁷ The miser is representative of those in thrall to inhuman values; he has accumulated money at the expense of his self. For all

³⁰ Burke, 1989, 122.

³¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Essays on his Times, Vol. 2, 1978, 213.

³² Louis Althusser, Essays on Ideology, 1984, 47.

³³ 'Thus every morning wails Oothoon' - E51, 8, 11. The 'every morning' further undermines her denunciations and her celebrations.

³⁴ v. Jones, Copley and Whale, 1992, 193.

³⁵ Savile, Jones, 1990, 18.

³⁶ E50, 8, 2-3; for 'eye of pity', v. e.g. Chatterton, Vol. 1, 1971, 440.

³⁷ E38, 11; E44, 12.

Blake's suspicions of it, pity can still be a positive value in the brutal world of Experience.

Anger, though, is necessary in revolutionary times, and it is one of the failures of Theotormon that he does not provide it.³⁸ Unable to come to terms with Oothoon's loss of 'virginity', he is overwhelmed by his own sufferings and those of others, and lamentation³⁹ is indulged to the exclusion of more active responses, becoming the kind of useless pity that earlier writers had denounced.⁴⁰ Blake was not the only radical to think that the Man of Feeling needed to be dragged into the revolutionary present; John Thelwall, imprisoned and awaiting trial for treason, announced that he would not indulge in 'sentiment' - personal regret and elegiac tenderness - nor 'lament like Ovid but repel every enervating sensation' and cultivate only those thoughts that would 'increase the energy' of his mind and enable him to turn his sufferings to human benefit.⁴¹ 'Why does my Theotormon sit weeping upon the threshold'⁴² implies that it is time to leave behind sorrowful emotions, and embrace a liberated future that will make this kind of mourning unnecessary. Theotormon's lamentations are the sign of poverty of life force; his combination of self-pity, Weltschmerz and compassion is implicitly likened to masturbation.⁴³ Theotormon too turns his anger inwards,⁴⁴ producing a masochism that thwarts rebellion, and a moralistic sadism:

The Eagles at her call descend & rend their bleeding prey;
Theotormon severely smiles.⁴⁵

The self-righteous smile both hides and reveals sexual pleasure at the torment of a woman. Complete repression of any emotion is impossible, as the repressed always returns in a worse form. Theotormon sacrifices the possibility of personal satisfaction and systemic transformation for the pleasures of a prurient hypocrisy. The illustrations draw the 'reader' into a narrative not of revolution but of sexuality: the plates feature Oothoon fondling her breasts while kissing the spirit of the Marygold (iii), her thinly disguised rape by an eagle (3), her appearing chained above Theotormon (4), and Theotormon's self-

³⁸ Erdman, 1969, 228.

³⁹ For lamentation, v. Hilton, 1983, 28-55.

⁴⁰ v.p. 47.

⁴¹ Thelwall, 1795, 111.

⁴² E47, 2, 21.

⁴³ E50, 7, 3-11. Fuzon's excessively angry emotions are also linked to onanism - v. p. 156.

⁴⁴ Webster, 1983, 97.

⁴⁵ E46, 2, 17-18.

flagellation while a naked Oothoon hides her face (6).⁴⁶ Insofar as counter-ideological intention rather than personal pathology is involved, Blake seems to be making the 'reader' complicit in sexually motivated violence, a violence that helps to explain the failure to realise the ideals Oothoon celebrates in her speeches. Theotormon fails to get angry at Bromion, preferring to enjoy the transformation of wrath into sado-masochism. Oothoon has no better option than to join him, but the frontispiece shows a pornographic scene (Oothoon kneeling, head bent after Theotormon has bound her back to back with Bromion) in which the gaze of the voyeur is averted; it is established from the start that this sexuality is pointless.

Visions contests a gendering of emotion in which women are passive and inauthentic, constructing its own counter-gendering, in which they are seen as capable of sexual openness and a liberating compassion, but not of untrammelled anger. 'Male' aggression is seen as necessary if social advance is to be achieved. This aggression is to be provided by Orc, a figure anticipated in Blake's earlier work,⁴⁷ but making his first actual appearance in America. It is no accident that he arrives in a poem whose main political context is war and terror; as Robert Maniquis points out, the 'interpretation of violence was a dominant political and psychological topic' in the 1790s because of events in France.⁴⁸ Like the tyger, he is a symbol of anger and of much more: Frye calls him the 'power of human desire to achieve a better world', and links him with gods of the sun and of fertility.⁴⁹ Orc's existence in a world in which desire is frustrated makes it inevitable that he be a figure of wrath, and in the early 1790s it is equally inevitable that wrath should lead to revolutionary action. I have pointed to The Marriage's attempt to cross the Amoral Vitalist with the Champion of the Oppressed; the same union is effected in Orc, who begins his revolutionary career with rape.⁵⁰ The Shadowy Daughter of Urthona welcomes the enforced embrace; it is usually explained she 'stands for' nature, which is 'dumb' until humanity imposes its will on her. This may be true, but the image that Blake has chosen to express his hopes for the regeneration of nature (and of society⁵¹) reflects his imbrication in patriarchal ideology. Orc's male 'strength' takes what it desires and is vindicated by the female reaction; this is meant to act as both personal and political paradigm.⁵²

⁴⁶ Plate 1 is sexually explicit; Erdman, 1974, 127-136.

⁴⁷ E409, 'To Summer'.

⁴⁸ Maniquis, 1989, 391.

⁴⁹ Frye, 1969, 206-207.

⁵⁰ E51-52, Plates 1-2.

⁵¹ Erdman, 1974, 139.

⁵² It is possible that the Bard's shame at his song expressed immediately after the Preludium in two copies represents doubts about Orc's actions - E52, 18-21.

Orc as a figure of fury has a number of sources and analogues.⁵³ Milton's defiant Satan is one precursor, while anger was a major feature of the Antichrist: "...that madman, raging with implacable anger".⁵⁴ Like Satan, he embodied 'anarchic, destructive power',⁵⁵ and this is how Orc appears to the conservative and the respectable: Albion's Angel calls him 'Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities'.⁵⁶ The most important context for the creation of such a figure is the Book of Revelations. John's apocalypse is full of anger: the wrath of the Lamb in 6:6, the winepress of God's wrath in 14:19 and the vials of God's wrath in Chapters 15 and 16. The pouring out of these vials brings to earth the plagues and punishments that mark the last days, and forms part of the preparation for the destruction of 'Mystery Babylon The Great'.⁵⁷ These vials were much discussed in the early 1790s as both friends and opponents of the Revolution tried to prove that the prophecies applied to the defeat of the opposite party.⁵⁸ Orc represents all the fiery energies - lust, wrath and desire - that Blake saw as presenting a challenge to reaction. His flames, like those of Revelations purify by destruction, and his arrival on earth signals a Dies Irae on which the unrighteousness of the old order will be purged.⁵⁹ Yet, while holding out such a prospect, Blake maintains his characteristic distance from revolutionary wrath.

The reaction of the poem to the appearance of revolution is favourable,⁶⁰ and Orc's wrath has an important role to play in its development. There is, however, a major reservation:

Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood
And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea;
Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge
Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire
With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers

⁵³ He should also be compared to other passionate male characters in the literature of the last quarter of the century - Valmont, Montoni, Theodore, Robespierre (in The Fall of Robespierre) - and to the energetic libertines of earlier writing.

⁵⁴ Lactantius, cited Cohn, 1970, 28.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁶ E53, 7, 5.

⁵⁷ Revelations 17:5.

⁵⁸ Paley, Paley and Phillips, 1973, 260-293; Lindsay, 1978, 92-93.

⁵⁹ Cohn, 1970, 20-21.

⁶⁰ E53, Plate 6.

Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere⁶¹

Wrath may generate a challenge to the existing order, but it is incomplete without the 'light' of understanding.⁶² This probably owes something to Boehme,⁶³ but the idea that anger can generate the passion necessary to destroy the old but not the clarity necessary to build the new hardly depends on a metaphysics of the Divine for its cogency. Blake is dealing with the problems of revolution and Robespierre's invocations of an anger whose dangers he also warned against are closer analogues.⁶⁴ Some critics have argued that Blake's reservations about Orc and about anger go deeper than the belief that passion on its own is not enough to remake the world. Blake frequently images anger as circular and in America the fires of Orc and the revolutionary flames are both described as 'wreaths'.⁶⁵ In Europe Orc is 'surrounded with red stars of fire,/ Whirling about in furious circles' and there are 'Eddies of wrath ceaseless' rolling 'round & round' in The Book of Urizen, while Blake used the phrase 'whirlwind of fury' as early as Poetical Sketches.⁶⁶ Such an imaging suggests that wrath is all too literally revolutionary, doomed to do no more than reverse subject and object of an oppression it is unable to end. Orc, according to Frye, is similarly doomed to a cyclical process.⁶⁷

It is true that revolutionary anger is not able to proceed to its goals in a straight line.⁶⁸ Orc is a product of the ancien régime, in the sense that the seeds of all revolutionary phenomena grow in the order they will attempt to overthrow. His torsion is therefore to some extent determined by the nature of the old anger and the general pointless circularity of the life that produced it. This is clearest in a passage from Europe that images the creation of reactionary society as a fall from the sensory freedoms of eternity.⁶⁹ The circular images - the serpent, the 'mighty circle turning' of heaven and the royal crown - represent the forces that make revolutionary anger circular.

61 E53, 4, 6-11. Red is the colour 'of revolution, of blood, of rage and of sexual passion' - Frye, 1969, 209 - and of Boehme's 'Day-Spring'. However, the forces of reaction are associated with red too - E52, 3, 16.

62 But v p. 144.

63 v. p. 80.

64 v. pp. 120-121.

65 E57, 15, 20-21; E56, 12, 10-11.

66 E62, 4, 15-16; E75, 10, 20; E439. Hilton - 1983, 225-226 - discusses circular wrath images. A disapproving Southey called political violence 'a whirlwind's fury': Coleridge, 1956, 141.

67 Frye, 1969, 206ff.

68 When it does, there are also dangers - v. p. 158.

69 E63-64, 10.

However, the action develops differently in America to the Book of Ahanla; the Americans are successful in overthrowing British rule, and, if they are implicated in the reactionary restoration of Plate 16, then this is because Orc is hidden by Urizenic obfuscation, not because he degenerates on achieving power.⁷⁰ The gloomy and war-obsessed illustrations might counter the text's optimism, but Blake is clear that it is English fury that begins the conflict, so they do not work against the poem's support for the rebels. In any case, circular imagery is not wholly negative in connotation. In The Book of Job the whirlwind is a symbol of Divine power,⁷¹ and the twisting form that Orc and his anger sometimes take indicates the potency of an energy that has the potential to drive forward history.⁷² The 'twist' of the sinews of the tyger's heart is another example of this symbolism. In America defeat is temporary, a lull before 'France reciev'd the Demons *light*'.⁷³ This indicates both that a cyclic regression after the success of revolution is only one possibility and that Orc's flames are sometimes capable of generating more than just emotional heat; anger and desire have their own wisdom, as Blake stresses when he refers to the 'thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc'.⁷⁴ What the later appearance of an Orc cycle proves is that Blake's portrayal of anger is dependent, in part at least, on political and social developments. Fuzon is doomed to failure in a way that the Orc of this poem is not.

At its first appearance the colonial rebellion is not associated directly with wrath: although the acts of defiance might suggest such feelings, it is the old depression and submission that Washington stresses, not the new attitudes that are to replace them.⁷⁵ The original anger is English, and Albion's Angel (the English ruling class and its ideologues) is consistently associated with fury.⁷⁶ The imagery of such passages identifies the nature of English anger; thunder had long been associated with the wrath of God, and the Old Testament frequently portrays plagues as the consequence of divine displeasure.⁷⁷ Anger is not reactionary or progressive in itself; all depends on who is feeling it and the direction it is leading them in. The anger of the English is met by the counter-wrath of the Americans,⁷⁸ whose flames of revolution are also the flames of the open sexuality feared by the timid, but which really transform

⁷⁰ The Orc cycle is debated in Erdman and Grant, 1970, 80, 112-114, 161.

⁷¹ Job 38, 1.

⁷² Quasha, Erdman and Grant, 1970, 280.

⁷³ E57, 16, 15; italics mine.

⁷⁴ v. p. 163.

⁷⁵ E52, 3, 6-12.

⁷⁶ E53, 7, 1; E56, 13, 9-15.

⁷⁷ Alicia Ostriker, William Blake: the Complete Poems, 1977, 907.

⁷⁸ E56, 14, 10-13.

rather than consume.⁷⁹ This wrath is a saving factor, as it turns the destruction the British hoped to wreak on America back on the aggressor:

Then had America been lost...
 And Earth had lost another portion of the infinite,
 But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire
 The red fires rag'd! the plagues recoil'd then roll'd they back with fury
 On Albion's Angels...⁸⁰

Revolutions are times when 'tender' emotions are not sufficient to promote the fusion that the risks of opposition to established power make necessary; in such circumstances, rage, which in other times carries the dangers of separation, can bring people together by providing the energy they need to focus their discontent in united purposive action.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Blake's consistent tendency since 'Gwin' to portray wrath as characteristic of both sides in revolutionary war makes it clear he viewed anger as a form of energy that anyone needed to fulfil goals; it is essential to the revolution and it is essential, and just as available, to reactionaries as they seek to meet the challenge they face. Blake's work as counter-ideologist in this period is to unveil reactionary anger when it attempts to disguise itself as something else, to suggest that its vengeful nature is reflected in the fury of the Biblical God, who should act as a warning not as an example to radicals. He tries to demonstrate that the old order cannot be changed by compassion alone, and to construct oppositionists as capable of open, expressive rage.

At the same time, he develops 'The Human Abstract's' critique of ruling-class pity. Urizen reacts with 'tears in deluge piteous'⁸² to the defeat of the British and the consequent freeing of sexual desire. These tears form part of the cover of exhalations that hide Orc from the world for twelve years, until the outbreak of the French Revolution;⁸³ states like the British can only survive if pity masks the truth of their societies. It is with this kind of reactionary statecraft in mind that Blake puts into the mouth of Boston's Angel a denunciation of Christian pity as a shackle on the energies of the strong:

To keep the gen'rous from experience till the ungenerous
 Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature;

⁷⁹ E54, 8, 15-16.

⁸⁰ E56, 14: 17- 15: 1.

⁸¹ v. also E56, 14, 12.

⁸² E56, 16, 4-5.

⁸³ E57, 16, 12-15.

Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science,
 That men get rich by, & the sandy desart is given to the strong
 What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest
 What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs⁸⁴

As in the Preludium to The Marriage the domination of the values of the Sermon on the Mount - forbearance, humility and peace - is associated with the exile of the strong to the wilderness. Blake sees valorisation of the sympathetic virtues as creating a structure of emotions and ideas that restrains the energetic while providing hypocritical satisfactions for the personally weak but socially powerful. Pity welcomes misfortune in order to bask in the pleasures of charity, and, while the strong are honest about the cost of their desires, compassion substitutes its own inauthentic but equally cruel pleasures. To describe pity in terms of sexuality is to suggest that it is a powerful and unscrupulous motivating force. Sex was considered by many eighteenth-century writers as 'an act merely animal',⁸⁵ a bodily passion to be counterposed to the feelings of the heart. Blake suggests that compassion is more powerful, more selfish and less elevated than usually thought. The representation of pity as an angel by previous writers identified it as a Christian virtue, a selfless emotion that incited those in the higher social spheres to assist the needy. Blake represents this Angel as indeed socially 'superior', but violent, selfish and corporeal, a creature of lust, and, in Europe, of greed.⁸⁶

Many authors had pointed out that pleasure was to be gained from acts of charity⁸⁷ and Fielding makes Allworthy suggest that those who give only what they can afford have little merit and may even be considered 'Epicures' as they extract enjoyment from the food eaten by those they succour.⁸⁸ He portrays the 'mob' as wishing to see Jenny sent to the infamy of Bridewell 'in order to pity' her, but the genuinely benevolent Allworthy refuses to do this.⁸⁹ The charge had been made in France too: 'on feroit volontiers des malheureux pour gouter la douceur de les plaindre' wrote a correspondent to Garrick in 1769.⁹⁰

84 E55, 11, 8-13. In the last line Blake is probably implying that the rich make people poor so as to enjoy charity, although it is also possible that they simply welcome the misfortunes that, without their help, accrue to others. For the penultimate line p. 175.

85 Rousseau, 1774, Vol. 7, 201; for the contempt generally felt for bodily passions, v. Smith, 1976, 28.

86 For Pity or Mercy as angel, v. Smart, Vol. 2, 1983, 43, 76-77, 331. Collins, in Gray, Collins and Goldsmith, 1969, 439, has Mercy as 'sky-born'. Blake's pity is, surprisingly, a male angel.

87 v. Wollstonecraft, Vol. 2, 1989, 61-62; Andrew, 1989, 21.

88 Fielding, 1974, 96.

89 *ibid.*, 59.

90 Cited Brissenden, 1974, 83.

The accusation that pity had become a trade was not new either. Hanway reports that it was said at the start of 1758 that, as a result of the Foundling Hospital, people were making a 'trade' of conveying infants from the country to London:

...the word *trade* being used in the sense of *traffic in human life* implying a great inattention whether it was preserved or not.⁹¹

Hanway shows that Parish Officers used the hospital to make money, and some were prosecuted for these activities;⁹² Thelwall was to refer to the 'peculation' of the same officials.⁹³ These problems existed elsewhere; some charity school teachers, for example, half-starved their children to save money.⁹⁴ Blake might also have been pointing to the role of traders in eighteenth century charity provision, and the commercialised attitudes they brought to it.⁹⁵ But pity has *become* a trade, so it must once have been something better, a genuine response to social evils, now perverted by the imperatives of a commercial society so that to both 'traders' and to Urizen it is an ideological screen. This does not mean it is totally insincere; pity would be ineffective as a justification for ruling class power if the rich were obviously indifferent to those they felt obliged to help. Blake's point is that pity is a useful, almost a necessary, component of the make-up of classes that rule an unequal society in conditions of scarcity. The alternative would be to maintain social 'peace' by methods based on anger, and this naked violence would make counter-violence inevitable. As Hagstrum points out,⁹⁶ it is one of Blake's boldest strokes to make Urizen a god of pity.

Europe presents a unified scientific, religious, political and sexual tyranny challenged by revolutionary forces. The Christian centuries are 'a female dream'⁹⁷ dominated by the arts of Enitharmon, which ensure the victory of reactionary inauthenticity. For the first time two Blakean figures sometimes taken to symbolise wrath and pity are linked. Rintrah is called 'furious king',⁹⁸ and his bellicosity is clear both in this poem and in The Marriage, where he represents revolutionary anger. Here he has switched

⁹¹ Jonas Hanway, A Candid Historical Account, London, 1759, 37.

⁹² *ibid.*, 68, 85.

⁹³ Thelwall, Vol 1, 1795, 8.

⁹⁴ Erdman, 1969, 122-123.

⁹⁵ Colley, 1992, 59.

⁹⁶ Hilles and Bloom, 1965, 318.

⁹⁷ E63, 9, 15.

⁹⁸ E62, 8, 12.

sides and embodies counter-revolutionary wrath, perhaps specifically that of Pitt.⁹⁹ This is further indication that anger is not good or bad in itself; it is life force, and reactionary causes need to be driven by some kind of energy as much as progressive ones. Pity is also portrayed in the service of reaction, but not through the figure of Palamabron:¹⁰⁰

Thus was the howl through Europe!
 For Orc rejoic'd to hear the howling shadows
 But Palamabron shot his lightnings trenching down his wide back
 And Rintrah hung with all his legions in the nether deep¹⁰¹

Orc's joy is at the fall of a reactionary leader; Palamabron and Rintrah respond by attacking him - intensifying the military challenge to the Revolution. Rintrah's action is unambiguous, and strengthens the case for identification with Pitt, but it is difficult to see Palamabron's attack on Orc as having anything to do with pity.¹⁰² 'Lightnings' are not the kind of force Blake usually associates with pity; when Urizen, in The Book of Urizen, uses pity to quell the possibility of rebellion, the images are of a net and a web, suggesting mystification and ensnaring, not direct violence.¹⁰³ Palamabron does nothing elsewhere in the poem to suggest pity, and there is no real evidence, other than the later identifications, to see him as a figure of compassion in this poem.

Nevertheless Europe does see compassion as socially reactionary and personally indulgent:

For Urizen unclasped his Book: feeding his soul with pity¹⁰⁴

The association of pity with food continues America's undermining of claims for it as a divine virtue by representing it in terms of bodily functions. Compassion is imaged not as a refined emotion welling out of a benevolent and disinterested heart, but as a violent passion, which, like any other selfish drive, seeks to bring about its own fulfilment. These two passages produce an image of a greedy, lustful upper-class man devouring the 'objects' of his pity both

⁹⁹ Jacob Bronowski, William Blake and the Age of Revolution, 1972, 80.

¹⁰⁰ For Palamabron as pity, specifically Burke in Parliament, v. Erdman, 1969, 218.

¹⁰¹ E64, 12, 21-24.

¹⁰² Others have found the case for Palamabron as pity in this poem unconvincing - Stanley Gardner, Blake, 1968, 107 thinks he represents 'hypocritical priestly chastity', which is my own view.

¹⁰³ E82, 25, 10 and 22.

¹⁰⁴ E64, 12, 4.

genitally and orally. This brings an apparently pacific emotion, more obviously criticised for its ineffectuality than its violence, close to the fierce anger of The Marriage.

The critique of 'polite' pity is continued by suggesting the possibility of a very different form of the emotion. Plate 10 provides another account of the creation as Fall. The five senses become petrified, and then:

Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent; that which pitieth:
To a devouring flame; and man fled from its face and hid
In forests of night...¹⁰⁵

A process of reactionary consolidation that is being challenged in the seventeen nineties is a major part of this Fall:

and man became an Angel;
Heaven a mighty circle turning; God a tyrant crown'd.¹⁰⁶

Urizenic intellect ('Thought') is identified with a political system based on ideological intimidation and Royal power. Such an order limits sensory experience and rebels respond to their political and personal oppression with an anger that is the degenerate form of pity in eternity. One of the themes of Europe is that the practices of the revolutionaries have little autonomy from the old order; force can only be resisted by force, but the violence of the subjugated is still unpleasant, and the flames of Orc's wrath take their heat from the destructive selfhoods created in the past. The emotion that could be the generous pity praised in Songs of Innocence is forced to become devouring anger, necessary in the challenge to reaction, but dangerous too. The first passage quoted rewrites 'The Tyger' and changes the emphasis making desire and anger fearsome, and not only to counter-revolutionaries; in a happier state of society, the impulses that take the form of revolutionary violence would emerge as pity. The creation of the tyger is the fall of the lamb, but, in the Urizenic world, no progress is possible without these devouring flames. This passage prepares us for the conclusion, in which Enitharmon's pity, itself clearly a degenerate version of the Eternal emotion, is needed to act as a check on Los's revolutionary fury.

¹⁰⁵ E63, 10, 16-18.

¹⁰⁶ E63, 10, 21-22.

The poem ends with the preliminaries to battle; Newton blows the last trumpet, waking Enitharmon who attempts to establish a regime based on the 'soft delusions' of coy sexuality. She hopes to make Orc her accomplice,¹⁰⁷ but he refuses to co-operate and leaves Enitharmon's 'heights' to bring flames of 'fury' to the vineyards of France.¹⁰⁸ Los's response to the appearance of the French Revolution is to reject the 'groans and cries' of Enitharmon and to call 'all his sons' to 'the strife of blood' - the creative are summoned to international struggle.¹⁰⁹ This call is made clad in 'snaky thunders';¹¹⁰ serpents usually carry negative connotations in Blake,¹¹¹ and the image points to the necessary but deplorable violence that revolutionary wrath ('thunders') involves. Blake accumulates images of anger partly so as to be able to recuperate Enitharmon's pity:

The sun glow'd fiery red!
 The furious terrors flew around!
 On golden chariots raging, with red wheels dropping with blood;
 The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
 The tigers couch upon their prey & suck the ruddy tide:
 And Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay.¹¹²

Blake never condemned the terror unequivocally,¹¹³ and Bronowski believes that this passage condones it.¹¹⁴ The state of mind Blake is encouraging is one in which acceptance of political violence is not allowed to lead to its glorification; Enitharmon's compassion is transformed from a female ruse into a humanising counterforce by placing it next to unleashed male fury. Although her tears are partly for the loss of female power, they are also a genuine response to the bloodshed that is now inevitable. She begins the poem as a symbol of the frivolously cruel Female Will, but by the end she has become a figure of real if ambiguous compassion.¹¹⁵ Wrath and pity are separated, but both are necessary. The poem as a whole points to the need to make the best of 'fallen' emotions, while bearing in mind that they are fallen. It is gloomy but not completely pessimistic. In the next prophecies, all emotions lead nowhere.

107 E66, 14, 29-31.

108 E66, 15, 1-2.

109 E66, 15, 9-11.

110 E66, 15, 9.

111 Foster Damon, 1973, 365-366.

112 E66, 15, 3-8.

113 Larrissy, 1985, 57.

114 Bronowski, 1972, 80. v. p. 141; pp. 127-128.

115 cf. Hagstrum, Hilles and Bloom, 1965, 319.

Chapter Nine

'In the dark world's fire': the *Urizen* Trilogy

The Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania, and The Book of Los,¹ analyse the psychic structures that determined the failure of the French Revolution. Blake was pessimistic about revolutionary outcomes in Poetical Sketches, and the despair of these mid 1790s poems has, in a sense, been waiting for him from the start, and it enables him to articulate doubts about the ability of those emotionally constituted in the ideologies of the old order to create a new. This seems to have been a necessary step in the process that led to the relative optimism of the final Night of The Four Zoas, of Milton and of Jerusalem. In spite of the pervasive gloom, the work of unveiling reactionary pity continues, and earlier ideas are developed into the implication that emotions like 'anger' and 'pity' in any form represent unnecessary prestructurations of experience.

Urizen is quickly established as one of the 'unprolific' Angels of The Marriage,² and his fall into 'tormenting passions' is ironically accompanied by petrification against feeling.³ His original sin is to seek for freedom from the flux of energy, and he becomes the God of the Decalogue, of 'the Book of/Eternal Brass';⁴ but he is not a figure of 'Old Testament wrath', as he proclaims:

Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.⁵

These laws complement the overtly tyrannical elements that follow. The regime of 'One King, one God, one Law'⁶ legitimates itself through an ideology of pity that creates an artificial social peace, and enables the rulers to represent themselves to the ruled as the bearers of a universal morality of love. Scheler points out that Schopenhauer went beyond the primarily Rousseauvian ideas of his time in recognising an intentional quality in pity not fully explicable in causal terms;⁷ Blake goes further still and suggests that the intentionality of pity can become a factor in the struggle between social groups. Pity in such passages may start as a genuine response to distress or it

¹ These texts date from 1794-5.

² E70, 3, 2.

³ E71, 3, 19-26.

⁴ E72, 4, 32-33.

⁵ E72, 4, 34-35.

⁶ E72, 4, 40; W. J. T. Mitchell, Blake's Composite Art, 1978, 133.

⁷ Scheler, 1954, 51.

may be manufactured, but, whatever its origins, it is *used* by the ruling class; the point is not its authenticity, but the ideological functions it performs. Urizen promises his subjects the protection of the monarchy, the security of the rule of law, and charity if times are hard. Each of these systems, as well as having practical consequences, was offered as justification for class rule, and, in the case of charity, its propaganda role was probably greater than its practical one. Blake's counter-ideological attack is on a cornerstone of legitimation.⁸

The flattening and uniformalising of energy and of material life - 'one joy, one desire...one weight, one measure'⁹ - is matched by a generalised morality of compassion and forgiveness that destroys spontaneous response to the 'minute particulars' of a situation, which demand anger in some cases, pity in others. Blake implies that Christianity represses desire so as to keep the majority content with little, joy so as to keep the poor broken-spirited, and anger so as to cut off the most obvious source of resistance. It creates instead a 'pacified' structure of feeling based on the values of the Sermon on the Mount. The response of the 'strong' - the remaining eternal, the revolutionaries, the prolific - to Urizen's repressive self-assertion is extreme anger.¹⁰ This rage, because separated from intellect (the unfallen Urizen) can only produce heat without light,¹¹ but critics have differed as to whether this means that the Eternals' actions at this point are just as misguided as Urizen's.¹² Blake declares that his poem is being dictated by them, and the Preludium describes them in favourable terms,¹³ but there is little positive about the imagery of this passage. Anger is just as responsible for the creation of the moral law as pity:

Rage, fury, intense indignation
 In cataracts of fire blood & gall
 In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
 And enormous forms of energy;
 All the seven deadly sins of the soul

In living creations appear'd
 In the flames of eternal fury.¹⁴

⁸ Thompson, 1993, 23, 47.

⁹ E72, 4, 38-39.

¹⁰ E72, 4, 44.

¹¹ E73, 5, 17-18.

¹² Mitchell, 1978, 119-120.

¹³ E70, 2, 1-6.

¹⁴ E72, 4, 45-49.

The fierce anger of the Eternals releases enormous energies, including those that the religious call 'the seven deadly sins of the soul', and these energies complete the process of 'sund'ring' that Urizen's attempt to fix reality had begun. Now wrath and the other 'fierce' energies are divided from the 'gentle' ones of pity, and this division is also the moment of their creation as 'wrath' and 'pity'; an oppressive pity and an impotent anger will now confront each other throughout fallen history. Nevertheless, although the Eternals have been severely weakened by the loss of their rationality and are unable to respond appropriately,¹⁵ there is *something* valuable in their reaction; the seven deadly sins have a positive role to play in a world in which ideologies of restraint and of pity have already appeared.

However, the fundamental idea of these passages is one that has been developing since Songs of Innocence; 'anger' and 'pity' in their very existence are problematic. Unfallen life consists of 'intensities'¹⁶ at which such terms can only gesture; these free-flowing fluctuations of energy in unrepressed bodies can only be turned into fallen emotions by bonification and limitation. Hence both feelings arise as a result of Urizen's fall, anger as part of, pity as response to, the 'formless unmeasurable death' he becomes as a result of his attempt to fix the flux of life. He descends into a state of 'mad raging' in darkness and circularity,¹⁷ and Los, both angry and afraid, begins to bind the 'changes of Urizen', giving definite form to error so that it can be recognised as such, and creating the human body in order to prevent a fall into complete non-entity. This produces more circular wrath in Urizen,¹⁸ and such wrath is an accompaniment of almost every action in the poem. The description of the creation of the body emphasizes not the mercy of the process, but the hardening and confinement of the 'bones of solidness' and the torments of the organs and the senses; the life of the foetus is one of pain and accompanying rage, and Orc's 'howling' entrance into the world later in the poem suggests that this only intensifies during birth.¹⁹ We have seen little since the fall to give us grounds for any hope of restoration; anger is largely pointless, pity a reactionary tactic, and the 'intensities' we have glimpsed in Eternity of little use to any 'reader' who hopes for more than momentary individual pleasure. Such free flows of energy resist organisation into 'indignation' or any other emotion permanent enough to form the basis of revolutionary praxis.

¹⁵ Clark Emery ed., William Blake, The Book of Urizen, 1966, 28.

¹⁶ v. Jean-François Lyotard, Libidinal Economy, 1993, 256-257.

¹⁷ E74, 8, 4-5.

¹⁸ E75, 10, 20.

¹⁹ E76, 13, 12; E79, 19, 44-46. cf. Hilton, 1983, 22.

The same mixture of despair and residual hope characterises the birth of the 'tender' emotions. Los, who has been crying and shuddering during his task, eventually gives birth to pity:

He saw Urizen deadly black,
In his chains bound, & Pity began,

In anguish dividing & dividing
For pity divides the soul²⁰

Pity is not the origin of Los's weakness, as the consequences of Urizen's error have already degraded him,²¹ and this development is an ambiguous one. The dangers are clear: a divided Los is less able to resist the establishing of Urizenic rule. In the political allegory, Los, who still represents the revolutionary principle, parallels La Fayette: 'Fayette beheld the King & Queen/In curses & iron bound/But mute Fayette wept tear for tear/And guarded them around'.²² The pity felt for the functionaries of the defeated order hindered the efforts of the Revolution. On the other hand, Los's pity enables the redemptive process begun by his creation of the body to establish itself a little more strongly, and it is eventually to lead to the arrival of Orc and the stirring of life in a universe of death. Los eventually gives birth to it in the form of a Globe of Blood,²³ the 'embryonic form of Enitharmon'.²⁴ Sexuality emerges, in intimate connection with pity, because Blake sees both as ways in which the weak can dominate the strong. He seems to have regarded compassion as an almost inevitable response of the imaginative male to femininity or other forms of weakness, a response that women could exploit to overturn the advantages of male strength, and which the French aristocracy, already inauthentic in its emotional traditions and further feminised by defeat, had used to de-energise the revolution. Sexuality is both an attempt to heal the rift in maleness represented by the appearance of the 'tender' emotions, and a capitulation to them. Pity's birth from Los represents the creation of a dangerous but necessary emotion from the masculine creative force. It makes no sense in terms of conventional narrative, as Urizen was creating laws of pity on Plate 4, and names pity apparently for the first time on Plate 25: Blake is subverting the structuration of time, just as he is undermining the structuration of emotional experience

²⁰ E77, 13, 50-53.

²¹ E77, 13, 44-47.

²² E500.

²³ E78, Plate 18.

²⁴ Mitchell, 1978, 156.

implicit in the 'named'²⁵ emotions. The Eternals, horrified at the 'sight of the first separate female, seek to curtain her, along with Los and Urizen from sight. Los, however, pities Pity and copulates with her, 'begetting his likeness,/On his own divided image'.²⁶ The dangers of compassion are illustrated as Enitharmon's 'female' coyness leads Los further and further astray.²⁷ The illustration shows the man and woman turning their faces away from each other,²⁸ implying that pity separates rather than unites. Nevertheless, Los is unable to resist her, as the Prophetic and imaginative character finds it impossible to be indifferent to the sufferings of others. The child of their union is Orc - the offspring of pity and imagination is rebellion - but what immediately follows is not the challenge to oppression Orc provided in the earlier Prophecies, but an Oedipal drama, fuelled by the jealousy of the father not the desire of the son.²⁹ Even when bound by Los, Orc starts to bring life to the dead of the Urizenic universe;³⁰ the result is Fuzon's attempt to found a new order at the end of the poem.

Before this can happen the Urizenic system must be completed. Urizen's exploration of his dens symbolises the establishment of a scientific world view in the interests of tyranny. During his explorations he creates pity again, shedding tears at the rapacious nature of the fallen world his actions have brought into being:

For he saw that life liv'd upon death
The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintry door
And he wept, & he called it Pity
And his tears flowed down on the winds³¹

This is influenced by Sensibility's compassion for animals, but it rejects the fantasy that human beings, who are part of organic life, are innately benevolent, a fantasy that even some of its proposers doubted.³² If the suffering of the ox and the dog are dependent on particular social states, the need of life to incorporate other lives in order to continue is not. Urizen's conservative perspective rules out transformation of the conditions of life, but

²⁵ 'They call'd her Pity, and fled' - E78, 19, 1.

²⁶ E79, 19, 15-16.

²⁷ E79, 19, 10-14.

²⁸ Erdman, 1974, 201.

²⁹ E80, 20, 6-25.

³⁰ E80, 20, 26-29.

³¹ E81-82, 23: 27 - 25: 4.

³² Brissenden, 1974, 21.

any such change can only follow the compassionate recognition of existing suffering. Just as his laws of pity, for all the reservations recorded in 'The Human Abstract', at least mitigate slightly the anarchic violence of the Hobbesian order, his tears in this passage provide the bedrock recognition of the need for a redemption that he can never bring about himself, but which could never occur without this insight. At the same time, this naming is part of the degeneration of 'intensities' into emotions; a spontaneous response to suffering has become generalised, and it can now be demanded of children as another moral virtue, appealed to by the ruling class to justify their rule, and generally utilised as a prestructured 'shape' of emotion.

There is no textual hint that Urizen's pity is not genuine; to label it 'hypocritical'³³ is to miss the point. It is the uses that Urizen makes of this pity that are deceitful; joined with his other sorrows it creates the Web of Religion. Christianity uses pity to trap people in its spider's web,³⁴ and makes helpless victims of the exploited, fooled by the tears of the exploiters into believing they have their true interests at heart. The Web is so deadly because it structures the consciousness through which citizens view the world, 'subjecting' them in precise ways, so that they can act in a particular social order - as Christians who give or gratefully receive charity - while remaining subordinated to that order.³⁵ It is 'twisted like to the human brain', and Promethean 'wings of fire' are no use against this 'moist' exhalation of 'the sorrows of Urizens soul'. This passage once again brings femininity,³⁶ pity, Christianity and the 'watery' emotions into conflict with the 'fiery' virtues of the strong, although the latter are here reduced to impotent part-objects. When fire finds a human representative, the result is no happier.

At the end of The Book of Urizen Fuzon³⁷ leads the 'remaining children of Urizen' out of Egypt, a revolt that figures the French Revolution, whose fate is the main subject of The Book of Ahania. Fuzon is the 'Son of Urizens silent burnings', implying a genesis in unspoken anger and solitary lust. The Revolution no longer embodies the open wrath of the tiger, but repressed anger bred in the old regime. Oothoon's defiant sexuality has been replaced by the ineffectual masturbation of the solitary youth. Fuzon is a figure of little more than wrath, a wrath 'as the thunder-stone moulded', identifying it with

³³ Harold A. Kittel, Phillips, 1978, 141.

³⁴ E82, 25, 9-22.

³⁵ v. p. 3.

³⁶ 'And the Web is a Female in embryo' - E82, 25, 18.

³⁷ Who Erdman thinks is based on Robespierre - 1969, 314-315.

the vengefulness of sky gods.³⁸ It is imaged as a globe that, turned into a missile and hurled at Urizen, becomes a 'hungry beam' on its way:³⁹

So he spoke, in a fiery flame,
On Urizen frowning indignant,
The Globe of wrath shaking on high
Roaring with fury, he threw
The howling Globe: burning it flew
Lengthning into a hungry beam.⁴⁰

These five lines contain three synonyms for anger, an act of violence, and the associated imagery of frowning, roaring, howling and fire. Fuzon represents the Revolution seen almost entirely in its aspect of terror.⁴¹ The illustration of severed and unsevered heads on Plate 5 makes it clear that the 'hungry beam' is the guillotine; 'devouring' revolutionary anger has feasted on human bodies, to little or no purpose, and Erdman suggests that one of the heads is Fuzon's.⁴² If Orc's twisting anger risked circular pointlessness, Fuzon's straight line fury founders in violence that is unavailing even when apparently successful. Blake's view of anger at this stage is more pessimistic than Mee, who believes that Fuzon 'becomes a symbol of prophetic indignation corrupted into the authoritarianism of state religion',⁴³ suggests; his emotions are misconstituted from the start, and are part of the reason for his failure. Fuzon is forced to attach himself to his father in order to attack him, and the apparently progressive nature of revolutionary anger is belied by its dependence on the society that gave birth to it. The beam seems to be progressing endlessly, but never in fact arrives, as revolutionaries only win power at the cost of becoming the kind of people they overthrow. Blake has consistently seen anger created in the old regime as one impetus to revolution; without this anger, no challenge to power is possible, but because of its origins, revolution must fail - this is the real significance of making Fuzon the son of Urizen, not of Los and Enitharmon like Orc. The whole of Fuzon's attack on his father is presented in terms that suggest the inevitable failure of an excessive fury born dialectically from the rationalism and sexual and emotional repression of Urizenic society:

³⁸ E84, 2, 9.

³⁹ Adams, 1955, 77-78.

⁴⁰ E84, 2, 14-19.

⁴¹ The terror and wrath: Maniquis, 1989, 368.

⁴² Erdman, 1974, 213.

⁴³ Mee, 1992, 210.

Pour former nos institutions politiques, il nous faudrait les mœurs
qu'elles doivent nous donner un jour.⁴⁴

The counter-ideological project of 'A Poison Tree' is now seen to be doomed, in its political dimensions at least; anger at tyranny, even if as undisguised as Fuzon's, inevitably leads to excessive violence. The angry rebel is not committed to democratic openness but to using the power won by aggression to become tyrant in his turn. Fuzon's anger presents a challenge to the dictatorship of Urizen, and his religious, political and scientific ideologies, but it lacks support from the kind of force represented by the later Los; passion may rebel against reason, the anger of the people may find an embodiment in revolutionary political leadership, but such a rebellion, unilluminated by imaginative wisdom, cannot succeed. The pessimism about revolution that has existed from the earliest work reaches its apogee.

While Urizen is fighting monsters created by his own moral virtue,
Fuzon prematurely celebrates victory:

While Fuzon his tygers unloosing
Thought Urizen slain by his wrath.
I am God. said he, eldest of things!⁴⁵

Jacobin wrath could not destroy the old order because it was unable to free itself from its ideology; when temporarily triumphant, it was unable to think in a new, non-religious, way and move on to dismantle all structures of social, emotional and intellectual repression. Robespierre's desire for power turned him into another King, while the psyche ruled by passion is just as unbalanced and dangerous as that ruled by reason.

The Book of Ahania holds out little hope of a return to harmonious social and psychic interaction. Fuzon's usurpation of divinity enables Urizen to conquer him and nail him to the Tree of Mystery, an image of passion repressed and crucified, breeding 'the arrows of pestilence.'⁴⁶ The responses to this show both the impotence and the continuing uses of anger and pity in times of reactionary triumph: Los's rage is the fuel for his creation of the body; as in the previous Book this is an imprisoning process but one that holds out

⁴⁴ Robespierre, cited Hampson, Lucas, 1991, 56.

⁴⁵ E86, 3, 36-38.

⁴⁶ E87, 4, 9.

the possibility of future redemption, while Ahania's lamentation embodies a sorrow at what has happened to her and to Urizen that, in its recognition of the existence of better times, is just enough to keep her from falling into the non-entity of political and personal despair.⁴⁷

The Book of Los details the fate of artistic and political anger in a period in which the failures of the French Revolution and the repressiveness of the English Government make its expression in works that will be both valid and progressive almost impossible. The Jacobin dictatorship reflected in Ahania fell in July, 1794; there followed a period of relative liberalisation, ended by bread riots in spring 1795 consequent on the repealing of the *maximum* in late 1794. Brutality on both sides marked the suppression of the Chouans in July 1795, and soon after Bonaparte's defeat of a monarchist revolt in October the Convention dissolved itself to make way for the Directory.⁴⁸ There was little here to give Blake hope, and, although British developments were not uniformly depressing,⁴⁹ the main domestic context for The Book of Los is the fear inspired in radicals by intensifying repression. Imprisonments for 'seditious conversation' began on the outbreak of war, Habeas Corpus was suspended in 1794, and the Treasonable Practices Act (November, 1795) made it an offence punishable by seven years transportation to criticise the constitution.⁵⁰ The radical movement was strong in 1795, but involvement in it was risky, even before December when the act came into force:⁵¹ those on trial for treason in Scotland had not been acquitted, and there was even a death sentence.⁵² Los is filled with prophetic rage,⁵³ but expression is difficult. This situation continues into the early Nights of The Four Zoas.

The poem begins with a lament for the golden age, when nothing was deemed impure, including 'bristled wrath'.⁵⁴ Instead of the Christian reaction of condemnation and repression, wrath is dealt with through dialectical excess, fed 'lions gore' until it becomes its opposite, followed around by a 'little ewe

⁴⁷ E88-90, Chapter V.

⁴⁸ Ford, 1970, 128-129.

⁴⁹ The failure of the 1794 London treason trials strengthened and heartened the radicals, for example.

⁵⁰ Watson, 1960, 360.

⁵¹ Thompson, 1980, 159.

⁵² Watson, 1960, 359-360.

⁵³ The harvest was bad in 1794 and food was dear and trade dislocated in the summer of 1795, but not enough is known about the exact dates of composition of these poems - or of particular passages in The Four Zoas - to make precise connections. The evils foregrounded in 'London' continued unremitted and the oppressive system that produced them is always the main target for prophetic wrath.

⁵⁴ E90, 3, 12.

lamb'.⁵⁵ Wrath is undesirable if it is more than a temporary condition, but can only be transcended through intensification. This utopia is, of course, designed to draw attention to the actually existing state of affairs, in which anger is repressed and considered 'impure', and hence takes on deadly forms. This is continuous with earlier counter-ideological efforts to free wrath from repressive moralities, but what follows is a despairing passage, in which anger is no longer the armour-bearer of desire but a source of separation from it. The 'flames of desire...Intelligent, organiz'd' run through heaven and earth; although they are armed with 'destruction and plagues' they are the bearers of revolutionary hope, and Los's response to his distance from them - he is 'bound in a chain/Compell'd to watch Urizen's shadow' - is circular and counter-productive wrath, which drives the flames into hiding and leads to the triumph of the Urizenic principle in a world of 'Coldness, darkness, obstruction'.⁵⁶ The creative mind is cut off from the dangerous but fructifying forces of desire by a civilisation that compels it to base its work on what passes for reason. The result is that the artist falls into an endless rage that mimics the fires of desire - 'his feet which the nether abyss/Stamp'd in fury and hot indignation' - but really drives them further away, leaving the artist (and the revolutionary) stuck 'in the void between fire and fire'.⁵⁷ Both The Marriage earlier and Milton later imply that anger is an essential part of the artist's inspiration, but here fury is a blind alley. Blake seems to feel that his anger in response to political developments is unproductive, and, because the prospect is so gloomy, likely to have no immediate end. Anger and desire are divided not by metaphysical decree but by history. This break up is one of the factors conditioning the purposeless rage and impotent compassion of the early books of The Four Zoas.

The paradoxical result of extreme anger is the dark cold of repression; the fires of inspiration remain hidden from his wrath, which fails to provide even the comfort of heat.⁵⁸ Los loses patience with his bondage and breaks free from the vast solid in which he is imprisoned; the hard, repressed body allows anger to break through again, but the consequences seem to involve being overwhelmed by intolerable feeling:

The Prophetic wrath, strug'ling for vent
Hurls apart, stamping furious to dust

⁵⁵ E91, 3, 24-25.

⁵⁶ E91, 4, 4.

⁵⁷ E91, 3, 43-48.

⁵⁸ E91, 4, 1-3.

And crumbling with bursting sobs...⁵⁹

Stamping had been the act through which Orc expressed his fury in America,⁶⁰ but then he was destroying the Decalogue; this act of Los's has no such social purpose. It creates a 'horrible vacuum/Beneath him & on all sides round' and Los experiences a sense of endless falling. The solidities of repression had a protective function, but the dictatorship of the mid 1790s makes it almost impossible to give prophetic anger an outlet; it can only force its way through to expression at the price of destroying part of the artist, and of propelling him into a horrifying emotional situation. An outburst of feeling precipitated this new Fall, but the previous state was already intolerable, and now bounds can be set on previously boundless error. In the process of formation of the self in the womb (confusingly compared to birth), anger is given developmental priority over intellect:

The Immortal revolving; indignant
 First in wrath threw his limbs, like the babe
 New born into our world: wrath subsided
 And contemplative thoughts first arose⁶¹

Circular anger is temporarily allayed by expression of wrath, which is seen as the original source of movement, a crucial energising and organising power; this leads to a brief moment of peace in a tortured parody of creation. Stephen Vine argues that this passage represents the loss and recovery of poetic power, and that recovery involves a series of substitutions, including contemplation for wrath.⁶² This would suggest a theory of anger as an inspirer of poetry whose products needed to be eventually submitted to rational revision. In fact, the whole of The Book of Los constitutes a preparation for a birth that only ever happens in the image just cited. Los's body is constituted in the womb, and without ever leaving it, he creates a 'Human Illusion' out of Urizen's backbone. This process stands as symbol of others, including poetic recovery, but it is a recovery that does not proceed in an orderly way to success. Each gain is also a loss, and the final result is near total despair. The poem ends in Boehme's wrath-dominated nature; although light was created in the first line of Chapter 4 it soon vanishes, leaving the newly embodied Urizen in 'fierce torments', and

⁵⁹ E92, 4, 19 -21.

⁶⁰ E54, 8, 5.

⁶¹ E92, 4, 36-40.

⁶² Stephen Vine, Blake's Poetry: Spectral Visions, 1993, 77-78.

it is out of this tortured darkness that the 'Human Illusion' is created.⁶³ Blake¹⁶²
adds to the motives given in Genesis for the separation of the waters:

...then [Los] smote
The wild deep with his terrible wrath...⁶⁴

This suggests creativity corrupted by the pointless fury of Xerxes having the Hellespont whipped.⁶⁵ If the binding of error that resulted from Los's prophetic anger has given any grounds for hope they are in the future. To Blake the 'dark world's' fury is not metaphysical, but the force of class society unmitigated by either mercy or the counter-anger of the dominated.⁶⁶ In 1795 poetry, citizenship, emotion and intellectual activity are all subjects of this fury, capable of little more than illusory and pointless activity.

The Song of Los, written during the same period as The Book of Urizen and its two associated poems, does not share their pessimism. Blake returns to and completes the chronological-geographical myth of Europe and America, and, in doing so, seems to rediscover some optimism about the prospects for international revolution.

The first section, 'Africa', deals with the triumph of Urizenic philosophies. One aspect of this process is the restraint of passion: Orc howls in anger and pain, imprisoned on Mount Atlas by the chain of jealousy, Jesus hears Oothoon but receives his Gospel of sexual repression and pitying weakness from Theotormon, while Har and Heva are unable to bear the fierce contentions of eternity and flee into the shrunken state of purely natural existence.⁶⁷ The compassionate emotions are implicitly portrayed as weak, part of the restraining ideologies of the Urizenic system, while anger and desire are chained and reduced to impotent howling. In this de-energised world religion and charity trap humanity into accepting its degeneration:

These were the Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces:
Like nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity
And all the rest a desart...⁶⁸

⁶³ E94, 5, 48-57.

⁶⁴ E93, 5, 3-4.

⁶⁵ Herodotus, The Histories, 1954, 429.

⁶⁶ v. p. 175.

⁶⁷ E67, 3, 20-30.

⁶⁸ E67, 4, 1-3.

Hospitals are part of the institutionalisation of charity; like palaces and churches, they are ideological props that convince people that the ruling class have a right to rule.⁶⁹ This is much as in The Book of Urizen, but here such tricks are unsuccessful.

In 'Asia' Orc is unbound. The last line of 'Africa' is the first of America; this invocation of the American Revolution is immediately followed by an Orcan 'howl' that tells all tyrants that France has joined the rebellion against their power. The response of the old order to Orc's challenge is a mixture of social, intellectual and economic measures designed to break the spirit of the people.⁷⁰ Urizen attempts to spread despair through Europe and, as usual, he is 'weeping' compassionately. At the end of the poem Orc appears in the form of unstoppable revolutionary anger:

Orc raging in European darkness
Arose like a pillar of fire above the Alps
Like a serpent of fiery flamel
The sullen Earth
Shrunk!⁷¹

Wrath is fiery, and threatens the stolid and unambitious elements - 'Earth' - in the individual and society. Its triumph results in apocalyptic renewal in which the Grave (the most dead parts of the old order) swells with the flowings of desire and rises into joyful activity.⁷² On his first appearance Orc's flames were said to bring heat without light, but here they are 'the thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc',⁷³ a phrase which deliberately rules out America's suggestion that in revolution there is a gap between passion and reason; once again, counter-ideology works through apparent self-contradiction. Blake wants to mould complex subjectivities, capable of acting with Orc's firmness, but also able to consider matters from more than one perspective.

Revolutionary anger defeats reactionary mystification, including its ideology of compassion. The poem ends with a brief apocalypse that, when it appears in more complete form in The Four Zoas will be far more problematic. It is as if Blake is unwilling to abandon his 'positive' counter-ideological

⁶⁹ For an earlier critique of hospitals, v. Andrew, 1989, 27.

⁷⁰ E69, 7, 1-8.

⁷¹ E69, 7, 26-30.

⁷² E69-70, 7, 35-40.

⁷³ E68, 6, 6.

attempt to create revolutionary subjectivities even in the middle of a period when his main concern is to analyse the reasons for revolutionary failure. It is impossible to know if stubbornness, a temporary turn in events, personal happiness, or some other cause led to this recrudescence of political optimism. His next two major works are to seek to reconstitute a more lasting hope from the despair induced by political failure and repression at home, and the Terror, Directory, Consulate and seemingly endless war abroad.

Chapter Ten

'Both rage & mercy are alike to me': *The Four Zoas*

The early books of *The Four Zoas* reflect the events of 1797-1807 particularly the depressing developments in France, the suppression of English radicalism and the continuing European war, in a sequence of falls, quarrels, conspiracies and battles.¹ David Erdman has abandoned some of his earlier identifications between allegorical and historical events,² but it remains true that the psychomachia is historically determined. Janet Warner points out that, 'When the Zoas divided originally they divided in rage...fury creates the fallen world'.³ However, Blake never regards emotions as self-generating, and disintegrating rage is always a response to real events and conditions. The angry and despairing Spectre is not produced according to some metaphysical-religious view of selfishness or human violence:

...children are sold to trades

Of dire necessity still laboring day & night till all

Their life extinct they took the spectre form in dark despair⁴

In intolerable conditions the fury that grounds the Zoic struggles is produced. Part of Blake's counter-ideological enterprise will be to picture the redirection of this rage to the historical conditions that have produced it. In *Night the Ninth* the Zoas stop fighting each other and co-operate to bring about revolution, as European war is replaced by class war. In the early *Nights*, a degraded pity is seen as a weapon in conflict between the sexes, or as impotent to bring about change. As the work progresses, 'Divine' pity emerges as a crucial salvific force, and, in an alternative resolution, the wars between the Zoas are brought to an end by the conversion of Los and Enitharmon to an ethic of compassion. Blake left a complex and uncompleted manuscript, in which it is not possible to trace the development of any theme chronologically;⁵ I shall treat the poem as a unified, although thematically fissured, statement, and take as my guiding thread the way in which the anger and pity of the early books are slowly reconstituted and made to produce a contradictory resolution.

The poem begins:

¹ For the background of long and deepening industrial crisis, v. John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, 1977, 20.

² E818.

³ Warner, Paley and Phillips, 1973, 217.

⁴ E361, [95] (Second Portion), 26-28.

⁵ E818.

The Song of the Aged Mother which shook the heavens with wrath
 Hearing the march of long resounding strong heroic Verse
 Marshall'd in order for the day of Intellectual Battle.⁶

Some critics think the heavens are angry at the Song, but it is equally possible that the wrath is *in* the Song.⁷ In the first case, we have a work whose content infuriates those 'in high places' who are denounced in the poem's epigraph, in the second, one whose anger fills up the world, reaching to the heights of society. Either way the poem is to be one of political radicalism and intellectual war, and it soon emerges that its targets will include the fury of corporeal conflict, in which 'The Tyger fierce/Laughs at the Human form'.⁸ Humanity is torn apart by a wrath that has ceased to be self-preserving and become predatory violence. There is no possibility of revolutionary energy creating a society honouring the human form, a possibility held out by the tigers of The Marriage and Songs. This initial stress on 'Intellectual Battle' is designed to define the poem as an epic while distancing it from classical celebrations of corporeal war; it might lead us to expect a poem with a straightforward view of anger, but two complications are to emerge. Once again, Blake is unable to completely reject war, as its energies are too close to those of art and of energetic living for him to be unambiguous about their loss, and it turns out that the 'Intellectual Battle' is to become palpably physical.

But these complications are for later; the early Nights are relatively clear about the evils of violence. Just as the energy of revolution has been corrupted, personal anger is not honest indignation but deceitful aggression, part of a battle between the sexes in which the male is just as capable of inauthenticity as the female:

Then Los smote her upon the Earth twas long eer she revivd
 He answer'd, darkning more with indignation hid in smiles⁹

Anger is an emotion of a man's selfish spectre:

They said The Spectre is in every man insane & most

⁶ E300, 3, 1-3.

⁷ It is even possible that the wrath is the Aged Mother's at The Four Zoas; for the ambiguities of these lines, v. Donald Ault, Narrative Unbound: Revisioning William Blake's The Four Zoas, 1987, 13.

⁸ E309, 15, 1-2.

⁹ E306, 11, 3-4.

Those aspects of the self that are created by negativity and despair for social self-defence can easily become aggressive.¹¹ Tharmas's spectre as well as being 'rapturous in fury'¹² is associated with masculine strength and terrific pride. At a national level, this corrupted life force is responsible for moralistic religion, and imperialism, as well as war.

Anger fuels religious self-righteousness: 'I thought to weave a Covering... for my Sins from wrath of Tharmas'¹³ claims Enion, who has herself murdered her lover's 'Emanations' (artistic and sexual) because she thought them sinful. Consequently, the love man and woman should bear for each other has been reduced to mutual pity. It also seems that Tharmas is sheltering Jerusalem, but, he assures Enion, only out of pity, a convenient excuse for a male whose motives are lust, but who lacks the courage to admit it, and who feels he needs sympathy himself.¹⁴ Tharmas is an impotent whiner, and pity is an essential part of his passivity and despair - he calls on others to pity him as well as stressing his own compassion. The energies of a decaying body¹⁵ retreat into impotent sentimentality. The treatment of Tharmas is part of Blake's attempt to constitute males as 'the strong'. To call so frequently for pity is a sign of masculine failure, and it is as if Blake fears that he who gives pity will fall victim to the weakness he relates to and soon need it himself. Nevertheless, such an involvement with compassion is completely compatible with the excessive and misdirected 'spectrous' rage that is the other component of Tharmas's emotional structure in the early books. Tharmas is the radical writer denied honest expression by state persecution;¹⁶ neither his compassion nor his anger have any constructive outlets in writing or action, and the world of the early books is one in which both emotions are corrupted by the sheer volume of things to feel angry or pitiful about.

Blake's counter-ideology often works by instating and then quickly contradicting a principle, so it is not long before he introduces the theme of the humanising effects of parental compassion. Enion gives birth to two weeping children, and she feels 'drooping mother's pity drooping mother's

¹⁰ E303, 5, 38-39.

¹¹ cf. 'My spectre around me', E475

¹² E303, 6, 7.

¹³ E304, 6, 18.

¹⁴ E301, 4, 7-16; 'His key word is "pity"' - Mary Lynn Johnson and Brian Wilkie, in Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, 1973, 207.

¹⁵ For the symbolism of Tharmas, v. Bloom, 1963, 195; Frye, 1969, 281.

¹⁶ cf. Erdman, 1969, 298-299.

sorrow' for them,¹⁷ to which they respond by sulking on her breast. But Enion's maternal feelings are not devouring, constricting or otherwise threatening; they lead rather to the loss of her own energy:

Weaker & weaker, weeping woful, wearier and wearier
Faded & her bright Eyes decayd melted with pity & love¹⁸

As in The Book of Thel the 'tender' emotions are seen as weakening; Enion's compassion for her children does not enable her to help them, as they are born into a world in which intergenerational conflict is inevitable. Yet the impotent love she feels helps Enion herself and provides an 'image of regeneration',¹⁹ as it enables her to return from angry selfishness, a mode of energy that is passed on to her children:

Rehumanizing from the Spectre in pangs of maternal love
Ingrate they wanderd scorning her drawing her Spectrous life²⁰

Enitharmon, the female child, is as angry as Los,²¹ and their fury dominates the rest of the Night.

Pity may be impotent but by its very existence it threatens Urizen's order, which is based on conflict:

Pity not Vala for she pitied not the Eternal Man
Nor pity thou the cries of Luvah.²²

Los's immediate response is fury,²³ as he rightly sees this as an attempt by Urizen to maintain his newly-arrogated divine status by turning potential enemies against each other. His resistance implies that both anger and pity have some continuing value: anger helps him resist Urizen's blandishments, while pity is one mode in which he could relate, however imperfectly, to both Vala and Luvah. Urizen challenges Los with:

Art thou a visionary of Jesus the soft delusion of Eternity

17 E304, 8, 7.

18 E304, 8, 9-10.

19 Bloom, E950.

20 E300, 9, 3-4.

21 E306, 11, 19-20.

22 E307, 12, 15-16.

23 E307, 12, 18.

Lo I am God the terrible destroyer and not the Saviour²⁴

Urizen suggests that a Jesus identified with the 'soft' emotions is a delusion, and that the true God - himself - is wrathful and destructive. British militarism attempts to bully the creative imagination out of its compassionate mission, and to reduce the world to a scene in which it can exercise its own powers without ideological opposition.²⁵

Albion in *Night the Second* also hopes that forces which have not shown compassion in the past will do so in the future:

Thy brother Luvah hath smitten me but pity thou his youth
Tho thou hast not pitied my Age O Urizen Prince of Light²⁶

This is partly a call to the British not to take revenge on the French if they should win the war, but at this stage in the poem, hopes for the victory of compassion seem doomed. Violent anger dominates:

The tygers of wrath called the horses of instruction from their mangers
They unloos'd them & put on the harness of gold & silver & ivory
In human forms distinct they stood round Urizen prince of Light
Petrifying all the Human Imagination into rock & sand²⁷

There could hardly be a greater contrast between this passage and the celebration of wrath in *The Marriage*; the furious energies of war command learning and pervert the imagination. Nevertheless, compassion, although it cannot yet become a dominant force, is an important barrier between humanity and non-entity. In *Night the First* Los and Enitharmon preside over the wedding feast 'in discontent & scorn/Craving the more the more enjoying'.²⁸ Their angry desires doom them to permanent dissatisfaction and spread only desolation on their surroundings. As they feast, Enion's voice floats in on the wind, obsessed with suffering and tormented by the absence of pity in nature. Wrath and pity are separated, one violent and selfish, the other agonised and impotent. It seems as if part of the solution will be to bring them

²⁴ E307, 12, 25-26.

²⁵ Philip Cox, in Clark and Worrall, 1994, 96, identifies Urizen with the 'strong home government' needed by British commercial imperialism, represented by Tharmas. Urizen's grandiose ambitions suggest that he does not figure a purely insular regime.

²⁶ E313, 23, 7-8.

²⁷ E314, 25, 3-6.

²⁸ E310, 16, 18-19.

together, but here and in Milton Blake gives no clear idea as to how this might be done.²⁹ Enion's second lament moves from nature to humanity:

It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted
To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer³⁰

...the groan & the dolor are quite forgotten & the slave grinding at the
mill
And the captive in chains & the poor in the prison, & the soldier in the
field
When the shattered bone hath laid him groaning among the happier dead

It is an easy thing to rejoice in the tents of prosperity
Thus could I sing & thus rejoice, but it is not so with me!³¹

This lament has an immediate effect; Urizen's emanation, Ahania, vibrates in sympathy, and is drawn to view 'the Spectrous form of Enion', and consequently can never 'rest upon her pillow';³² Enion inspires the pity she cannot avoid feeling herself, but a world of mutual compassion is doomed, as it has no force to remove the evils lamented. Something must happen to this pity - and to her unavailing love for her children - before it can bring redemption. Nevertheless, such compassion makes things harder for the ruling class; the first lines look forward to Urizen's advice to his Daughters, and Enion is resisting the hardening of the heart he recommends as the basis for the practice of a disempowering charity, which her pity would paradoxically make impossible. Enion has her limitations (she is ineffectual and self-pitying, for example) but her compassionate disquiet is superior to indifference to the miseries of work, prison and battlefield; the response of the angry prophet to social evils depends on a prior empathy of the kind that keeps her from non-entity (here the smug indifference of the prosperous). In the absence of possibilities for effective action, sheer disquiet is valuable.

Yet in Night the Third pity is once more a weapon in the war between the sexes; Albion hears a voice crying 'Enion', and responds:

²⁹ v. pp. 186-187, and p. 210.

³⁰ E325, 35, 18-19.

³¹ E325, 36, 9-13.

³² E325-326, 36, 14-19.

O cruel pity! O dark deceit! can Love seek for dominion³³

A few lines later he instructs Luvah to sacrifice himself for Vala; he states his intention of confining him in a body, and sends him off with,

...Go take your fiery way
And learn what 'tis to absorb the Man you Spirits of Pity & Love³⁴

Here pity is not humanising but weakening, and this is one of the ways in which 'Many Eternal Men' later in the poem are to see women.³⁵ Blake's distrust of the 'tender' emotions is partly based on a fear of the feminine, a force seen as dividing, weakening and eventually incorporating male power, an idea that goes back to the portrayal of Dalila in Poetical Sketches; later in the poem this theme is to be developed in new and significant ways.

Masculinity fares no better; it is represented in this Night by the jealous fury of Urizen and, by the Spectrous fury of Tharmas,³⁶ who vacillates between an enraged attempt to preserve his own identity by violence³⁷ and the submission to 'watery' emotions of despair. Because he is so close to losing his sense of self in depression he feels that his identity must be preserved by being asserted over a woman. The negative portrayal of both emotions is summed up by Tharmas's cry at the end of the Night, 'both rage & mercy are alike to me'.³⁸ He feels condemned to a pointless wrath ('Rage Rage shall never from my bosom'³⁹) but he has also become a 'semblance' of the watery Enion, who is so locked into pitying tears that she has almost disappeared. Rage can preserve the self, but in a world where there is too much to be angry about and the possibilities of expression are limited anger becomes sterile and tormenting. Pity similarly holds the self from non-entity, but, because it is socially impotent and personally weakening, only at a minimum level of functioning: 'Substanceless. voiceless, weeping. vanishd. nothing but tears!'.⁴⁰ Blake has counter-ideological intentions in the early nights, but what is most striking in his treatment of pity and anger is his remorseless rendition of their debased and confusing actuality.

³³ E328, 41, 12.

³⁴ E328, 42, 5-6.

³⁵ E401, 133, 5-7; v. also, E306, 10, 25.

³⁶ E329-330, Pages 44-45.

³⁷ Cox, Clark and Worrall, 1994, 93.

³⁸ E330, 45, 29.

³⁹ E331, 46, 4.

⁴⁰ E331, 46, 2.

At the start of Night the Fourth, Tharmas witnesses the birth of Los and Enitharmon, children of his spectre, and feels for them the same 'love & pity' as had Enion.⁴¹ But then conflict begins, and Tharmas is unable to decide if compassion or fury is the best response:

... he reard his waves above the head of Los
 In wrath. but pitying back withdrew with many a sigh
 Now he resolvd to destroy Los & now his tears flowd down

In scorn stood Los red sparks of blighting from his furious head
 Flew over the waves of Tharmas. pitying Tharmas stayd his Waves

For Enitharmon shriekd amain crying O my sweet world
 Built by the Architect divine whose love to Los & Enitharmon
 Thou rash abhorred Demon in thy fury hast oerthrown⁴²

This world is the Mundane Shell, the site of the brutality and exploitation of the eighteenth century, created according to Urizen's reductively rationalist designs in Night the Second. It is not clear if Tharmas could destroy this, or what this destruction would mean, but it is clear that Los and Enitharmon are trying to use Tharmas's compassion to give them an advantage in their battles. It is natural that Tharmas's enemies should want to stigmatise his rage as it would make him easier to defeat if he abandoned it; the Spectre of Urthona, the fallen Los, says to him

Thou once the mildest son of heaven art now become a Rage
 A terror to all living things.⁴³

He claims that Tharmas's fall interrupted his creative and peaceful activity - 'the wedge/Of iron glowd furious prepar'd for spades & mattocks' - leading his sons to flee from (or to) war, while causing the birth of 'Love' (Enitharmon), 'the piteous form/Dividing & dividing from my loins'.⁴⁴ This passage parallels the birth of pity in The Book of Urizen; weakness, femininity and sexuality come into being at once. Urthona goes on to claim that out of pity he guarded Tharmas from Promethean vultures, and to demand the reasons for the latter's hostility. Tharmas's reply is revealing:

⁴¹ E331, 47, 7. 'His bowels yearnd over them': 47, 6.

⁴² E332, 48, 22-29.

⁴³ E333, 49, 29-30.

⁴⁴ E333, 50, 3-17.

Thou knowest not what Tharmas knows. O I could tell thee tales
That would enrage thee as it has Enraged me even
From Death in wrath & fury.⁴⁵

'From' where we might expect 'to' suggests rage saves Tharmas from the 'Death' of despair; at one level, he is the radical writer, who, with the gate of the tongue closed, is unable to communicate his vision. The problem, as in The Book of Los, is that there is too much to be furious about and too little constructive to do with the fury. The confused and endless wars we are now in the middle of, insofar as they represent the internal divisions of the psyche, are all phoney; the conflicts of the Zoas and their associated figures are all expressions, in forms determined by history, of their desire to co-operate. Rage needs to be redirected towards the historical circumstances that have given birth to it.

For now Tharmas's rage keeps him from acquiescence in defeat, but is degraded by its lack of purpose, and ends up turned against himself and against Enion. Pity, too, is deformed:

...absorbd in dire revenge [Los] drank with joy the cries
Of Enitharmon & the groans of Urizen fuel for his wrath
And for his pity secret feeding on thoughts of cruelty⁴⁶

Compassion has become Schadenfreude, anger is strengthened by the sufferings of the enemy, and both emotions are part of a sadistic sexuality. This passage is similar to part of the speech by Boston's Angel in America, but enjoyment here is extracted from the torments of equals, and related to personal revenge, while the context in the earlier passage suggested the violent pity of the socially elevated.

Compassion in Nights the Fifth and Sixth even when not corrupted, is still too weak to make much impact on society, but in the form of parental love, it changes individual hearts, the first stage in any wider reformation. Orc, as well as a symbol, is a son, and maternal compassion for the sufferings of youth is again a redemptive factor. Enitharmon's compassion at Orc's distress expands into a humanising sympathy with Los and her sister Emanations; although this has little immediate effect, in later nights it bears important fruit.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ E334, 50, 31-33.

⁴⁶ E336, 53, 12-14.

⁴⁷ Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, Blake's Four Zoas: The Design Of A Dream, 1978, 109-110, v. pp. 178-181.

Avaunt Cold hypocrite I am chaine'd or thou couldst not use me thus
 The Man shall rage bound with this Chain the worm in silence creep
 Thou wilt not cease from rage Grey Demon silence all thy storms
 Give me example of thy mildness King of furious hail storms⁵⁴

Fury is the reality behind ruling-class professions of mildness. Orc denounces deference and refuses to give up his anger until Urizen remits the violence of class domination; the everyday lives of the majority are lived in conditions created by the 'rage' of the rulers. Blake implies not just that the late eighteenth-century ruling class impose harsh conditions on those they exploit, but that they actually hate them.⁵⁵ This fury of the rulers necessarily determines the structure of feeling of the ruled. Yet Blake's counter-ideological confidence is low; he is no longer certain that angry people make useful rebels; fury, as Orc himself admits, binds him more tightly into the system's mental chains, and this is one cause of the devouring serpent of revolutionary degeneration; he despises and misuses Urizen's light - 'turning affection into fury & thought into abstraction/A Self consuming dark devourer rising into the heavens'.⁵⁶ Orc turns one of the 'gentle passions' into mindless wrath and commits the cardinal sin of abstract thinking, an example of Blake's tendency to find all he hated in covert conspiracy, as it is not theoretically or empirically obvious that a wrathful personality is linked to excessively abstract thought. Yet Orc's rage keeps him from becoming a defeated 'worm',⁵⁷ and it is to seem later that the real problem is that he is not allowed to rage enough. The repressed anger of rebellion is self-destructive 'rage on rage',⁵⁸ but if Orc gives up his wrath then he no longer exists.

Urizen's instruction to his daughters⁵⁹ includes the advice to 'flatter his [the poor man's] wife pity his children',⁶⁰ but Blake in this passage is attacking not pity but charity. Urizen begins by instructing his daughters to 'let Moral Duty tune your tongue/But be your hearts harder than the nether millstone'.⁶¹ This charity is based on calculation, not on the genuine but limited compassion

⁵⁴ E356, 80, 28-37.

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre makes the same point: Critique of Dialectical Reason, 1982, 764.

⁵⁶ E356, 80, 47-48.

⁵⁷ The imagery may also figure a situation in which fury is the only route to male sexual potency.

⁵⁸ E353, 78, 19-20. Urizen may be correct in regarding Orc's fires as wasting his 'vital substance', although it is possible that it is pain that wastes rather than rage - E354, 78, 21.

⁵⁹ E355, 80, 2-21.

⁶⁰ E355, 80, 20.

⁶¹ E355, 80, 3-4.

with which Urizen sometimes confronts the world and which he turns into reactionary obfuscation, nor the excessive emotionality of Blake's dangerously compassionate females. 'Pity his children' probably means 'affect to pity' them, therefore, but it is also possible that Blake is implying that pity in such cases is hardly an emotion at all, and in no way disturbing to a hardened heart. Urizen explains that deprivation is socially created and that charity can be used to help turn material poverty into poverty of spirit:

If you would make the poor live with temper
With pomp give every crust of bread you give with gracious cunning
Magnify small gifts reduce the man to want a gift & then give with
pomp⁶²

Blake's critique of attempts to mould deferential and cowed subjectivities in the dominated was not new. We have already seen that Spence had republished Goldsmith's passage on the humiliations of regular receipt of alms,⁶³ and in 1797 William Sabatier wrote:

When a man is forced to thank, and as it were, to bend the knee for his
daily bread, he feels like a slave, and is too apt to act the part of one.⁶⁴

Blake has placed this account just after Urizen's encounter with Orc, who has denounced in advance deference and the rage behind benevolence. Yet Orc is unable to resist Urizen's ideological assault:

So Orc rolld round his clouds upon the deeps of dark Urthona
Knowing the arts of Urizen were Pity and Meek affection
And that by these arts the Serpent form exuded from his limbs⁶⁵

The 'Serpent form' of Orc is the degeneration of the French Revolution; Blake is suggesting that ruling-class professions of affection for the poor played a crucial role in containing the forces of revolt, thereby leading to deformations like Napoleonic rule.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Los had made a wrathful call to revolution clad in 'snaky thunders' in 1794, and The Marriage showed

⁶² E355, 80, 14-16.

⁶³ v. this and other passages cited pp. 99-101.

⁶⁴ Cited Andrew, 1989, 3.

⁶⁵ E363, 91 (second portion), 10-12. The wording of line 11 suggests Hayley, whose 'Meek affection' for Blake becomes a paradigm of the way one class tries to delude another - v. pp. 206-207.

⁶⁶ Erdman, 1969, 316.

revolutionary fury as 'devouring';⁶⁷ this imagery implies that the anger of the rebellious, which charity is designed to quench, also contains the seeds of degeneration.

At its next appearance pity is no longer a hypocritical weapon but a force that breaks through selfishness and cruelty:

But then the Spectre enterd Los's bosom Every sigh & groan
Of Enitharmon bore Urthonas Spectre on its wings
Obdurate Los felt Pity Enitharmon told the tale
Of Urthona. Los embracd the Spectre first as a brother
Then as another Self; astonished humanizing & in tears
In Self abasement Giving up his Domineering lust⁶⁸

A turning point follows; the Spectre convinces Los that he is his 'real Self', and that unity and fulfilment depend on his recognising this and taking back what he has cast out. Los was forced to subdue him when he was a 'ravning hungry & thirsting cruel lust & murder',⁶⁹ but, in imprisoning basic drives, perverted though society has made them, he has locked away a part of himself he now has a chance to redeem:

Los furious answerd. Spectre horrible thy words astound my Ear
With irresistible conviction I feel I am not one of those
Who when convincd can still persist. tho furious. controllable
By Reasons power.⁷⁰

My lovely Enitharmon. I will quell my fury & teach
Peace to the Soul of dark revenge & repentance to Cruelty⁷¹

Blake's counter-ideology is in one sense 'traditional' here:

But there is one thing, which so generally belongs to and accompanies
all excess and abuse of [resentment]...a certain determination, and
resolute bent of mind, not to be convinced or set right...⁷²

⁶⁷ cf. E356, 80, 48.

⁶⁸ E367, 95, 26-31.

⁶⁹ E368, 95, 40.

⁷⁰ E368, 86, 4-7.

⁷¹ E368, 86, 11-12.

⁷² Butler, 1841, 84.

Butler is constituting eighteenth-century gentlemen, Blake their social opponents, but their views are the same. Whatever the appearances, Blake is always an advocate of principles that give a bounding line to wrath. He regards obstinate persistence in erroneous anger and self-hatred as harmful, and not just personally - this is an important moment in the poem's political development too. He is willing to call in 'true' reason (no doubt he would have dismissed Butler's as a Urizenic parody) to bring it to an end. Lorraine Clark has suggested that the unity between Los and his Spectre may be false.⁷³ It is true that all the poem's problems are not solved at this point, and that the relationship between these two figures remains conflictual, but Los's submission of his fury to reason is a necessary salvific act. Wrath is one of the things that the Spectre represents, and Los, paradoxically, by accepting his own anger becomes less furious and can move forward emotionally and politically. He is now able, for example, to share his work with Enitharmon,⁷⁴ and they become figures of compassion, working to console humanity and to keep them from total disaster:

...if thou my Los

Wilt in sweet moderated fury. fabricate forms sublime
Such as the piteous spectres may assimilate themselves into
They shall be ransoms for our Souls that we may live⁷⁵

'Fury' is an important and ambivalent concept in this section of the poem. 'Furor' is a force more fundamental than passion that creates not just art but the whole human world.⁷⁶ Los's 'fury' before the Spectre won him over was understandable but destructive anger; the new Los sets up compassion against the 'fury' of Urizen, his class rule and his war.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the fury of war is still inspired by the music of Los and Enitharmon,⁷⁸ who, as artistic imagination, are implicated in any kind of creativity, even when it is in the cause of destruction and when their own conscious activity works in the opposite direction. Los is persuaded to moderate 'fury' so as to create works of art that can give refuge to the unimaginative. The world is no longer ready for the kind of art adumbrated in 'The Tyger', because, a decade or so later, it is further from revolution than it was then. Politically this corresponds to the

⁷³ Clark, 1991, 71.

⁷⁴ This is pointed out by Wilkie and Johnson, 1978, 162, whose reading of this passage is similar to mine; Ault, 1987, 303-304, brings out the interpretive difficulties.

⁷⁵ E370, 98, 21-24.

⁷⁶ v. pp. 126-127; E376, 113 (First Portion), 3-8; Blake's only other use of 'furor' is E355, 53, 3, where it also refers to a fundamental energy.

⁷⁷ E375, 102, 19; E375, 103, 13; E376, 103, 30.

⁷⁸ E374, 102, 4.

idea that without understanding of oppression communicated through revolutionary leadership, 'mere insurrection would only consume itself in costly, bloody, and futile upheavals'.⁷⁹

Enitharmon meanwhile comforts the Spectres, guided by 'most merciful pity & compassion to the Spectrous dead'.⁸⁰ She and Los have a chance to show their commitment to these values when Rintrah and Palamabron are born (or reborn):

But Los loved them & refusd to Sacrifice their infant limbs
And Enitharmons smiles & tears prevaild over self protection
They rather chose to meet Eternal death than to destroy
The offspring of their Care and Pity⁸¹

It is no longer possible to link the Oedipal aggression of the son with political rebellion; Orc is firmly chained, and Los's rejection of generational struggle is actually a comfort to him.⁸² Maternal compassion has always been shown as a feature of the world of Innocence, but here Blake valorises the compassion of both parents and places it in Experience, where self-sacrifice is a necessary consequence of pity for offspring. It seems as if the poem is now to move towards a conclusion in which pity and anger, separated in The Book of Urizen, can come together under the aegis of the 'moderated fury' of Los's art.

But the final two Nights of The Four Zoas show an ideological complexity, in which Blake's attitude to violent revolution, the key political question at issue, is fundamentally ambivalent. As well as a valorisation of compassion, there are passages on its dangers and ones in which Blake rejects Christian forgiveness as decisively as anywhere in his work, while wrath is both murderous and the necessary agent of renewal. I shall give an account of each of these themes, and then attempt to explain the apparent confusion.

At the start of Night the Eighth the dead in Beulah descend into Ulro's night:

(through)...the Gate of Pity
The broken heart Gate of Enitharmon⁸³

⁷⁹ DiSalvo, 1983, 86.

⁸⁰ E373, 100, (First Portion), 25.

⁸¹ E371, 98, 50-53.

⁸² E371, 98, 46.

⁸³ E372, 99, 23-24

Enitharmon's pity has enabled Los to engage in the redemptive activity of art;⁸⁴ they share in the eternal compassionate support of Jesus:

O Lamb divin(e)...O pitying one
 Thy pity is from the foundation of the World & thy Redemption
 Begun Already in Eternity⁸⁵

Jerusalem begs Los and Urizen to take pity on her and begin the process of redemption; her own salvific activity is also linked with pity.⁸⁶ The compassionate imagination is fundamental to human life; without it redemption is impossible. Yet compassion remains potentially sinister, as in the operations of the Females of Amalek, most notably Tirzah, who bind humanity to the limitations of natural life. Tirzah's claim to be feeling love and pity while doing so is not hypocritical, as the plea, 'Weep not so sisters weep not so our life depends on this'⁸⁷ indicates. Tirzah fears the loss of her children's love and believes she is bound to restrict their senses to earthly things, for her sake and theirs. At one level, she is a mother imposing, because she can see no alternative, the crippling ideologies of eighteenth-century society, and it is her compassion for her children, her desire to save them from what she perceives as the dreadful fate of the visionary that traps her into this course. Compassion, although it partly motivates the binding, also makes it harder, as she has to override her sisters' sorrow at the damage they are causing with the 'rational' consideration that their lives depend on what they are doing. Tirzah's structure of feeling is one in which selfishness and cruelty are made more terrible by an unintelligent pity. Blake is suggesting that ideologies of limitation are imposed by females out of compassion; this is seen as positive when, for example, the body is created to prevent the fall into non-entity, but disastrous when 'the natural' is made into the only sphere a human being can inhabit. This passage develops the idea that feminine pity poses dangers to male potentiality; Tirzah and her sisters are imagined as female sadists, scared by male sexuality⁸⁸ as much as by imaginative vision, and it is striking that Blake believes this can be fuelled by pity as effectively as anger. By the mid 1790s a nexus existed in Blake's mind: compassion, femininity, sexuality, limitation and nature. As his major commitment moves from energy to the

⁸⁴ E372, 99, 25-27.

⁸⁵ E377, 104 (second portion), 14-16; also 31-32.

⁸⁶ E379, 110, 9; E381, 107, 41.

⁸⁷ E379, 109, 51.

⁸⁸ E379, 109, 45.

imagination, pity is defined as an emotion that, in some of its manifestations, destroys vision.

Night the Eighth includes a short account of the quarrel which is to form the subject of the first Book of Milton, and here too Rintrah defends Palamabron 'in fury & fire'.⁸⁹ Anger, though, can be deadly: Los, unlike the Pharasaical Tharmas, accepts responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus, and claims that it is 'pride and wrath'⁹⁰ that led him into guilt, while Shaddai is unable to carry out his mission of guardianship because of his anger.⁹¹ Urizen's pity for the Shadowy Female⁹² destroys the clear boundaries that are his limitation but also his strength; this begins his metamorphosis into a creature of 'fury' and 'wrath'.⁹³ As part of his battle with Urizen, Orc rises up as 'A King of wrath & fury a dark enraged horror',⁹⁴ while Tharmas becomes 'an animated Pillar rolling round and round in incessant rage'.⁹⁵ These rages are excessive and pointless; they have little value in themselves except to bring matters to a head. A simple solution to all these uncertainties presents itself; the real problem is the separation of pity and wrath:

And Satan not having the Science of Wrath but only of Pity
Was soon condemned & wrath was left to wrath & Pity to Pity⁹⁶

I shall discuss this idea in more detail in the next Chapter; its main purpose as it appears here is to suggest that the final Night will bring the two together. We are, indeed, invited to believe that this is what happens.

Night the Ninth is Blake's most developed vision of Apocalypse, but one which, in Mitchell's view, has little organic relation to the previous eight books.⁹⁷ In fact, many themes, including those of the uses of compassion and fury are brought to a conclusion in this Night, but Mitchell is right to point to a willed quality in the resolutions; there are no reasons why the historical nightmare should end in this way, except that Blake has chosen to represent it so. The traces of historical impossibilities remain clearly visible.

⁸⁹ E381, 107, 33.

⁹⁰ E380, 105, 52.

⁹¹ E381, 107, 48.

⁹² E381, 106, (Second Portion), 23-24.

⁹³ E382, 106, (Second Portion), 41-48.

⁹⁴ E382, 111, 15-16.

⁹⁵ E383, 111, 24.

⁹⁶ E381 107, 36-37. v. p. 195, and p.211.

⁹⁷ Mitchell, Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1978, 284.

That anger is crucial to the apocalypse of the final Night is clear from the following passage, almost a résumé of Blake's symbols of rage:

The books of Urizen unroll with dreadful noise the folding Serpent
Of Orc began to Consume in fierce raving fire his fierce flames
Issud on all sides gathring strength in animating volumes
Roaring abroad on all the winds raging intense reddening
Into resistless pillars of fire rolling round & round gathering
Strength from the Earths consumd & heavens & all hidden abysses
Wherever the Eagle has Explord or Lion or Tyger trod
Or where the Comets of the night or stars of (asterial) day
Have shot their arrows or long beamed spears in wrath & fury⁹⁸

We have here the noise and weapons of battle, devouring, pillars of fire, the redness of Orc, circularity, and the association with the ferocity of predators. The political anger of the uprising concentrates the pointless and misdirected rages that have wreaked havoc throughout the poem. In response to the unrolling of the books of Urizen, which signifies that the final struggle against repression and domination is at hand, Orc's fury enters its final phase. The pun 'animating volumes' suggests that one of its embodiments is in works of literature, including the one we are reading; this takes us back to the opening lines, where we were promised an angry epic; but now the claim is made that the poem will inspire us to join Orc in his salvific fury. The 'official' line is clear: as in Jerusalem, Albion has to become angry; this anger will lead to the end of war, and the burning out of the perverted energies of the French Revolution in the absence of English provocation. Albion has learnt the Science of Wrath, and his anger is greater against Urizen than Luvah, England than France, reason than passion, and it is the signal for the general reformation of the more condemned elements.⁹⁹ In the first, imperfect, stage of his repentance, Urizen himself accepts the need for unrestrained rage:

Rage Orc Rage Tharmas Urizen no longer curbs your rage¹⁰⁰

The anger of Orc is allowed to consume itself, and the result is the first step of the Regenerate man.¹⁰¹ Albion's recovery of his anger and of the knowledge of how to deal with it in himself and others has, it seems, enabled a non-violent resolution to take place, benevolence and wrath work together to purge the old

⁹⁸ E387, 118, 8-16.

⁹⁹ E390-E391, 120-121.

¹⁰⁰ E390, 121, 26.

¹⁰¹ E395, 126, 1-3.

order, leading to the reign of 'intellectual War' and true reason¹⁰² in a harmonious rural society.¹⁰³ Yet this apocalypse is in reality far more complex.

Blake attempts to disguise - or is uncertain about - the kind of revolution he is imaging.¹⁰⁴ On four occasions he describes the flames of apocalypse as 'mental fires';¹⁰⁵ nevertheless, what he describes is obviously *not* intellectual or spiritual revolution:

The thrones of Kings are shaken they have lost their robes & crowns
The poor smite their oppressors they awake up to the harvest¹⁰⁶

This does not suggest a purely ideological triumph, doughty blows against Malthusianism and Anglicanism. During an explosive and angry 'Eternal Birth'¹⁰⁷ the whole of time reconstitutes itself to be redeemed. Prominent in this recreation is the rage of the children who have died in infancy against the warriors and tyrants who are to blame for their wasted lives;¹⁰⁸ any thought of pity leading to mercy is explicitly rejected:¹⁰⁹

They beg they intreat in vain now they Listend not to intreaty
They view the flames red rolling on thro the wide universe

A judge hopes that Christian forgiveness will save him from his fate:

...trembling the Judge springs from his throne
Hiding his face in the dust beneath the prisoners feet & saying
Brother of Jesus what have I done intreat thy lord for me
Perhaps I may be forgiven¹¹⁰

But the Jesus who appears comes in 'power and great Glory', and the judge gets short shrift:

102 E407, 139, 9-10.

103 E393, Page 124.

104 Hence much critical disagreement: Wilkie and Johnson, 1978, 213; Webster, 1983, 244; Paley, 1970, 164.

105 E387, 118, 18; E388, 119, 22; E394, 125, 17; E395, 126, 1.

106 E387, 117, 18-19.

107 E392, 122, 30.

108 E392, 123, 6-11.

109 E392, 123, 12-13.

110 E392-393, 123, 23-26.

The Prisoner answers you scourgd my father to death before my face
 While I stood bound with cords & heavy chains, Your hipocrisy
 Shall now avail you nought. So speaking he dashd him with his foot¹¹¹

For all Blake's apparent condemnation of Urizen's earlier attempts to destroy compassion, and the suggestions that it should be extended even to those who have not shown it themselves, there is to be no pity for the pitiless. One would have to be an unusually determined believer in the Christian pacifism¹¹² of the later Blake to read these passages as an allegorical expression of the need for ruthlessness in intellectual war. Although this revolutionary violence is carried out under the sign of Christ, it is a clear rejection of the ethic of Christian pity also contained in the two final Nights. In the early years of the nineteenth century revolutionary anger is obviously not going to win a quick victory, and the limits of political revolutionism have, in any case, become clear. Yet pity, on which alternative strategies might be based, remains potentially weakening and holds out no hope of systemic change; Blake's solution is to produce a complex and contradictory emotional politics in which anger and pity both play a part,¹¹³ but clear definitions of the resulting political and emotional recommendations are impossible.

Orc's anger is given free rein, and succeeds in its revolutionary tasks, but only in a world where Urizen is redeemed, even to the point of vigorous participation in the process.¹¹⁴ At the same time, Blake portrays the execution - or at least condemnation - of members of the Urizenic classes like the pitiless judge, and of the soldiers who fought for him. Blake's psychomachia concludes with the ending of all conflicts between reason and emotion, imagination and sensation, and Urizen can become the leading Zoa (unfallen reason is the highest human faculty just as degraded reason is the lowest) but this allegorical resolution collapses at the level in which Urizen is the British ruling class. The continuing need for exploitation was accepted in The Marriage, but here Blake avoids the question as to the role of the old rulers in a redeemed world, one from which Urizen himself has collaborated with Orc to remove the 'Kings & Princes of the Earth'.¹¹⁵ Historical conditions did not allow Blake to solve this question, and not only is the narrative of angry

¹¹¹ E393, 123, 30-33.

¹¹² J. G. Davies, The Theology of William Blake, 1948, 2.

¹¹³ David Aers notices only the angry violence, and while rightly rejecting Blake's attempts to pass this off as 'mental', fails to take into account the narrative of compassion that is developing side by side - Miller, Bracher, Ault, 1978, 258-266.

¹¹⁴ E393-394, 124, 25-29.

¹¹⁵ E394, 125, 10.

violence a fissured one, but it exists alongside an equally shaky alternative resolution based on compassion.

This resolution is imaged by the frequent references to 'divine' pity in the final books, and two episodes which embody the apparent triumph of compassion. The first is the pastoral idyll in which Vala accepts Tharmas and Enion: 'The Children clung around her knees she embracd them & wept over them...She embracd them in tears'.¹¹⁶ This summates those passages in which adult compassion for children is seen as a salvific force, but Blake admits that such a transformation has little or no effect on reality - 'They are the shadows of Tharmas & of Enion in Valas world'¹¹⁷ - and does not provide an alternative to the violent transformation of Experience. Inspired by this regeneration and the conversion of Urizen, Enion casts off her despair; in response:

Joy thrilld thro all the Furious form of Tharmas humanizing
Mild he Embracd her...¹¹⁸

When Tharmas has cast off his rage, The Eternal Man arises and presides over a feast, at which an Eternal speaks:

...Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
We fall on one anothers necks more closely we embrace
Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy abound¹¹⁹

This seems like a straightforward statement of the value of Christian universalism, a sympathy based on the common fatherhood of God; in fact, not only have the Eternals just been horrified at the appearance of woman - 'born to drink up all [man's] powers' - making this vision indeed one of 'Brotherhood', but the unity of sympathy is postulated on prior division:

...we cover him & with walls
And hearths protect the Selfish terror till divided all
In families we see our shadows born...¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ E398, 130, 6-9.

¹¹⁷ E400, 131, 19.

¹¹⁸ E401, 132, 36-37.

¹¹⁹ E402, 133, 22-26.

¹²⁰ E401-402, 133, 19-21.

Sympathy is required, the Eternal admits, because humans are still really selfish, always inclined to put ego first, family second and others nowhere. Beautiful sentiments are necessary because of disturbing realities. This speech would be problematic (Ault calls it 'functionally schizophrenic'¹²¹) even if a violent revolution were not going on at the same time as universal Brotherhood is being proclaimed. Part of the problem in this final night is that, having portrayed European reality in such grim terms for most of the poem, and having shown the impotence of 'ordinary' compassion like Enion's, Blake is forced to invoke a 'Divine' pity, which he can suggest is adequate to the situation, if he is not to hand over the entire resolution to wrath. But the compassion which has defended humanity 'from the foundation of the World',¹²² is of such a totalising nature that it resists co-partnership in action with anger. Revolution based on a metaphysical pity for the whole of mankind cannot easily be part of the same strategy as revolution based on the physical annihilation of one part of humanity for the benefit of the rest.

I argued in Chapter Six that Blake seeks to create both pity and anger to motivate transformation; the short version of the story of Satan and Palamabron at the end of Night the Eighth is meant to suggest that in the final Night the two separated emotions will come fruitfully together. The last Book does seem to offer a resolution involving both emotions, in which pity humanises anger and anger gives compassion the force it needs to play a role in fundamental change. Yet the narratives are kept carefully apart, and pity no more intervenes in the violence than anger does in Vala's reconciliation with Tharmas and Enion or in the Eternal's vision of brotherhood. The narratives fail to deliver a convincing resolution, either separately or together. Through all the convolutions of the emotional politics of the final Night, one thing is clear: there is no strategy based on pity, anger or any combination of the two that can bring redemption. Blake is forming revolutionaries who have no hope of making a successful revolution.

¹²¹ Ault, 1987, 423.

¹²² E377, 104, 15.

Chapter Eleven
Apocalypse Deferred: Milton

Milton attempts to create a very different form of apocalypse, one based not on the violence of angry militancy but on the self-sacrifice of a poet's return to undo the harmful effects of his legacy. Milton casts off the mistakes of selfishness, sexism, moralism and religious literalism, and in doing so sets 'free/Orc from his Chain of Jealousy'¹ - rescues the spirit of revolutionism. Milton continues the use of Christian imagery that begins in parts of The Four Zoas, and many critics read it as a Christian poem, even those who accept the anti-religious nature of Blake's work in the early 1790s,² but Milton's ideas about emotion are incompatible with Christianity, and, far from marking a retreat from politics to 'spirituality',³ the poem takes Blake's situation in Felpham as the basis for the construction of a politicised ideology of the feelings. In the changed circumstances of the new century, the concerns of 'A Poison Tree' and 'The Human Abstract' return, enabling us to measure what has changed and what remained the same in Blake's thinking about emotion.

Milton is moved to return from eternity by the Bard's Song, an allegorical account of, among other things, Blake's relations with William Hayley, who brought him to a cottage in Felpham between 1800 and 1803. Hayley is accused of making Blake labour at mechanical work unworthy of his genius, while himself trying to write inspired poetry, a task beyond his prosaic talents. This situation also stands for the general perversion of the human faculties. Milton returns to redeem his 'Sixfold Emanation scatter'd thro' the deep/In torment!':⁴ This act of self sacrifice (he believes he will 'perish' in the enterprise) might be conventionally motivated by pity for his Emanation, in so far as she is thought of as a woman, or, as Blake usually genders pity as feminine, might seem to involve a recuperation of the pitying part of himself. However, the Song is about not the virtues but the dangers of pity, and the need for the expression of the anger that it both hides and provokes.

¹ E115, 20, 60-61.

² e.g. Cox, 1992, 262; cf. Harold Fisch in Rosenfeld, 1969, 44.

³ For this debate, v. Mitchell, Curran and Wittreich, 1973, 272-273.

⁴ E96, 2, 19-20.

In another myth in which creation is seen as a limitation necessary to prevent an infinite fall into non-entity, Satan (Hayley⁵) is born 'Refusing Form'.⁶ Los, the prophetic and poetic part of Blake, tells him:

If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and
Not to shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly.⁷

This early debate about the Science of Wrath comes without preparation, as the explanatory narrative has hardly begun. This eagerness establishes the idea that anger should be repressed as an important part of Satanic ideology, needing to be challenged from the start. As Susan Fox points out, Los's unannounced arrival in the Bard's speech establishes the two in a 'company of wrath' as angry poet-prophets,⁸ an identification strengthened when they both associate themselves with the wrathful ploughman Rintrah:⁹

The Ploughman prepares the ground for sowing by opening to the light what has been closed in darkness...Rintrah is therefore associated with an iconoclastic wrath that overthrows accepted boundaries.¹⁰

Otto's account brings out the necessity of anger in the movement from an old order to a new. This makes it an essential political emotion; all human orders are provisional, so wrath is essential if mankind is not to stagnate in an unnatural permanence. But these broader themes are cut across by concerns of gender, and by a related issue that, without meaning to suggest it had no social determinants, may be called personal: 'Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies'¹¹ and in such a world anger is a necessary mode of self-defence, but

⁵ At one level, all the characters are different parts of Blake's psyche, at another the personae at Felpham. Even a critic who denies the usefulness of biography to the interpretation of the poem accepts that such identifications are present - James Rieger, in Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 260-263. I believe that the poem needs to be interpreted with biography in mind because Blake is using his experience of patronage to construct a generalised critique of social relationships.

⁶ E97, 3, 41.

⁷ E98, 4, 6-7.

⁸ Susan Fox, Poetic Form in Blake's Milton, 1976, 38.

⁹ *ibid.*, 42-43.

¹⁰ Otto, 1991, 50.

¹¹ E98, 4, 26.

what if someone is too weak to express his anger honestly? Blake's old fear of being unmasculine has been strengthened by his bondage to Hayley.

Los orders Satan:

Get to thy Labours at the Mills & leave me to my wrath.
Satan was going to reply, but Los roll'd his loud thunders.
Anger me not! thou canst not drive the Harrow in pitys paths.
Thy Work is Eternal Death, with Mills & Ovens & Cauldrons.¹²

Wrath not compassion is the necessary inspiration for poetry in the first decade of the nineteenth century.¹³ The development of the poem will reveal this anger to be at Blake's personal situation, British society, the European war, and the condition of humanity. These infuriating realities demand change at a fundamental level and the appropriate kind of poetry is Bacchic, calling on the deep and sometimes violent energies of the psyche. Pity is too superficial to be an adequate response to social evils or a source of poetic power. But this is not how most people see things:

All pitied the piteous & was wrath with the wrathful & Los heard it.¹⁴

Prophetic anger creates anger in others, while the mistakenly pitying are the recipients of mistaken pity, and these responses influence Los, who, in spite of his initial commitment to anger, is unable to see a little later what Satan is up to.

Pity is a cause of war and of human failure. The Daughters of Albion 'prepare the Victims' for male cruelty, the brutalities of work, battle and confinement in the human condition, 'the dance of tears and pain'. Part of this 'preparation' is ideological, and the Daughters, like Tirzah and her sisters in The Four Zoas¹⁵ are mothers limiting the imaginations and ideas of children, as well as wives imprisoning husbands, and 'female' parts of the psyche

¹² E98, 4, 14-17.

¹³ Viscomi - 1993, 323 - claims work on the poem probably continued after 1808.

¹⁴ E98, 5, 4.

¹⁵ Most of what was said about that passage applies to this one too - v. p.180.

disempowering 'male' parts. Their pity is deadly, as it actually gives rise to the privations it laments:

Ah weak & wide astray! Ah shut up in narrow doleful form
Creeping in reptile flesh upon the bosom of the ground¹⁶

Compassion risks fixing pitier and pitied in a gorgon gaze of mutually constitutive helplessness; we become what we behold, and the weakness of the 'object' infects the 'subject', making action by either party impossible. Yet the compassionate emotions inspire Enitharmon as she creates human life;¹⁷ this is the same process as the binding described in the previous plate, but seen positively, not negatively. Blake attempts to define a valuable female form of pity, but his suspicion of the emotion prevents this from being very convincing: the Daughters' violence is described at much more length and with much more energy than Enitharmon's 'soft affections'.

Blake's main concern seems to be to warn men against women and against the 'feminine' side of themselves; pity for human weakness prevents the transcendence of limit and is to contribute to Palamabron's downfall, as compassion for the deluded and untalented Satan is one of the reasons for his acquiescence. However, although 'Palamabron mild & piteous' is contrasted with 'Rintrah fierce',¹⁸ it is important to define clearly the nature of this opposition.¹⁹ As an inspired artist his emotions are frequently Bacchic, and pity never dominates him in the way wrath does Rintrah; he falls short of 'male' fury and openness as much through fear as compassion. Blake is suggesting that both these emotions deviate from 'manly' rectitude, and are dangerous feminisations of the male psyche. Blake's counter-ideology does not only challenge bourgeois constructions of the feelings; it reproduces patriarchal genderings of emotion and male anxieties. Milton attempts to construct male artists as open, powerful and living in the strength drawn from their staminal 'fury', which sometimes must take the form of anger; it also

¹⁶ E99, 5, 19-20.

¹⁷ E100, 6, 27-29.

¹⁸ E119, 24, 11.

¹⁹ Palamabron and pity, v. Rieger, Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 263-265, and Otto, 1991, 51.

expresses Blake's fear of falling short of such an ideal. He is attempting to construct not just rebels, but 'the strong', as he has been since 'Samson'.

The real locus of pity in Book the First is Satan, and his 'incomparable mildness' is the most insidious part of his 'tyrannical' attempts to get Los to 'give to him Palamabrons station'.²⁰ When Los finally submits:

alas blamable

Palamabron. fear'd to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of
Ingratitude, & Los believe the accusation through Satans extreme
Mildness.²¹

At the level of personal allegory, Blake turns over his inspiration to the mechanical tasks set by Hayley, while fear of being thought ungrateful prevents him telling his wrath. The next morning, the horses of the Harrow are found to have been driven crazy, and the Gnomes (servants of the Harrow) accuse Satan 'with indignation fury and fire'.²² Palamabron's anger is shown by his 'reddening like the Moon in an eclipse'.²³ He claims that Satan imposed on him (having first imposed on himself) and managed to assume his place for a day 'under pretence of pity and love to me':²⁴

O foolish forbearance

Would I had told Los, all my heart!²⁵

'Forbearance' echoes the original title of 'A Poison Tree', but here the holding back is not out of religious principle but personal timidity. There is a curious fact about Blake's treatment of class in the poem: the identification of the Elect with those of high social status is clear,²⁶ but there is no hint that Palamabron experiences Satan as superior in their personal relationship. One reason for

²⁰ E100, 7, 4-6.

²¹ E100, 7, 10-13.

²² E100, 7, 19.

²³ E100, 7, 20.

²⁴ E101, 7, 26.

²⁵ E101, 7, 28-29.

²⁶ DisSalvo, 1983, 41. v. p. 198, and p. 206.

this elision of class issues is to emphasise the theme of personal weakness. Blake wishes to show that each individual must find the strength to express emotions honestly to others, whatever the relative statuses. Palamabron must confront Satan not primarily as a member of the dominant classes, but as a human being with whom he is in relationship.

Satan's self-imposition makes Los's task as judge hard, but he has learnt that 'pity false' and 'officious brotherhood'²⁷ can only lead to corrupt action. Meanwhile, it is the horses of the Harrow (inspiration) which react with the appropriate violence and fury, while Satan is accusing Palamabron and excusing himself, with mildness and tears.²⁸ Los's repentance is expressed in the maxim that 'pity divides the soul/ And man, unmans'.²⁹ Ironically, this pity is for Hayley, the dispenser of patronage, whose lack of significant human qualities renders him worthy of compassion rather than envy. Theotormon and Bromion are also misled by pity into siding with Satan, but Rintrah's anger leads to clear judgement and firm action:

But Rintrah who is of the reprobate: of those form'd to destruction
In indignation. for Satans soft dissimulation of friendship!
Flam'd above all the plowed furrows, angry red and furious...³⁰

Blake's anger defends him against Hayley's assaults; wrath is the defining emotion of the Reprobate because anger is necessary in the 'lower' classes, makes one liable to social penalties, and is considered a sin by the virtuous 'redeemed' who control society. Nevertheless, Satan's pity is not to be dismissed as either totally hypocritical or completely false as Rieger, for example, is keen it should be.³¹ Satan's 'most endearing love'³² is described unironically, and the immediate aftermath of the attempt to swap work stations is a scene of genuine tenderness between Satan and Palamabron:

²⁷ E101, 7, 42.

²⁸ E101, 7, 43-47 and 8, 1-3.

²⁹ E102, 8, 19-20.

³⁰ E102, 8, 34-36.

³¹ Rieger, Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 262-263.

³² E100, 7, 5.

[Satan] Embrac'd soft with a brothers tears Palamabron, who also wept³³

Rintrah's honest indignation brings about the crucial transformation; Satan is at last forced to reveal himself 'angry & red',³⁴ and he slays Thulloh, who may represent 'the natural affection between Blake and Hayley',³⁵ but the main point is that Satan should slay *someone*, so that his wrath is visible in an overt act. Enitharmon responds with the compassionate creation of 'a Space for Satan & Michael & for the poor infected',³⁶ an exercise of pity that is as important in the poem's scheme of salvation as Rintrah's anger, as unless Satan is protected from vengeance his guilt will mean an eternal condemnation that will destroy victim and judges alike. Now that Satan is visibly angry yet safe from punishment Palamabron can call an assembly to judge the whole matter. The verdict seems clear:

...and Lol it fell on Rintrah and his rage:

Which now flam'd high & furious in Satan against Palamabron
Till it became a proverb in Eden. Satan is among the Reprobate.³⁷

The Reprobate reject Christian orthodoxy and polite repression. Satan is one of the Elect, a member of the privileged classes, a benevolent gentleman, and an adherent of conventional religion, Deist or Christian. He joins the Reprobate in the sense that he is temporarily forced to accept the open expression of wrath.³⁸ Only when the truth of the emotions has been revealed can appropriate judgements be made. Milton is able to see that he is Satan because he knows what Satan is. The significance of the verdict is, nevertheless, deliberately unclear. How, in a quarrel between Satan and Palamabron, can the verdict go against a third party? Is Palamabron, who is protected by Rintrah, involved in the guilt? And what of Satan, usually the opposite of Rintrah in his emotional preferences, but at this moment actually embodying him? The only reasonably certain aspect of the judgement is that wrath is held

³³ E100, 7, 15.

³⁴ E102, 8, 38.

³⁵ Foster Damon, 1973, 403.

³⁶ E102, 8, 43.

³⁷ E103, 9, 10-13.

³⁸ For an alternative reading that denies true wrath to Satan, v. Fox, 1976, 45. But Palamabron had to wait until Satan had assumed Rintrah's wrath before accusing him, and this implies that there is something that is genuinely of Rintrah in him at this point.

responsible for any problems that have arisen. The real villains are pity and hypocrisy, but to recognise this would mean the Eternals had found Satan guilty, so their 'error' is essential to the poem's scheme of salvation.³⁹

Before Milton is enlightened enough to undertake his journey, more confusion must ensue. Los is furious when he hears the verdict (the reason for this wrath is also uncertain) and his frustration has world-shaking results.⁴⁰ In personal terms, Los is part of Blake, responding in fury to Hayley's hypocritical assault and at the way that the Eternals have been fooled. This wrath seems destructive - he is 'Standing on Albions rocks among high-reared Druid temples'⁴¹ - but his negating of the order that he himself had created is a necessary step in assuring the arrival of a higher one, however unpleasant this process is in its immediate effects. Like The Triumphs of Temper, this poem is much concerned with order, but, while Hayley's emphasis is always on wrath as a cause of discord, Blake sees anger as capable of both destroying and creating harmony, because he does not believe that the social order Hayley is committed to should be preserved at all costs.

There is an abrupt shift of narrative level, as the poem moves into an assault on Christianity; the 'moral virtue' which creates the Seven Deadly Sins is seen as anger disguised as mildness, just as Orc in The Four Zoas accuses Urizen of presiding over a regime of violence masked by pity. The structures of Christianity and Deism reflect the structure of capitalist reality. For Satan nothing has really changed, and the importance of what happens is in the insight it provides for others. The self-righteous rage of his moral virtue leads to opaqueness against the Divine Vision.⁴² He is further enraged by the protection of Palamabron by the Divine Mercy and by Rintrah:

And Satan not having the Science of Wrath, but only of Pity:
Rent them asunder, and wrath was left to wrath, & pity to pity.⁴³

³⁹ v. pp. 210-211.

⁴⁰ E103, 9, 13-18.

⁴¹ E103, 9, 14.

⁴² E103, 9, 30-31.

⁴³ E103, 9, 46-47. v. p. 211.

Rintrah's protection of Palamabron shows the true mercy that lies in honest anger. Satan is severed from his natural element of pity and given over to a wrath he is unable to deal with.⁴⁴ It is not wrath itself that he lacks, but its 'Science', knowledge of the most appropriate ways to express and repress it. Blake does not recommend pure expression, as this would require no science at all. Los's earlier denunciation of the belief that it is 'Wisdom' not to show your anger, suggests Satan's cardinal error. He is at the mercy of his anger because he does not understand the 'Science' of appropriate expression. When it breaks out, therefore, it is as the excessive violence that kills Thulloh. Blake expects him to live by a 'male' structure of feeling in which anger and the 'fiery' energies are dominant. Satan's split and his imbrication in 'feminine' emotion mean that his compassion is ironically driven by anger, not that it operates in a vacuum. He is not portrayed as excessively and naively benevolent, but as using compassion as a vehicle for the expression of unconscious fury. The division between wrath and pity means their unhealthy intertwining. This at a 'personal' level mirrors the fury disguised by benevolence with which the ruling class confronts the labouring class.

Blake found in his patron an excellent example of 'polite' emotion, and Milton draws not only on their personal relations but also on Hayley's best-known work. Some of the most important themes of Milton had been handled in Hayley's Triumphs in a manner interesting for both its similarities and differences. Blake was introduced to Hayley by Flaxman in 1800, at a time when most of his reputation rested on this poem, which had appeared nearly twenty years previously.⁴⁵ In 1800 Blake was presented with a copy that had belonged to Hayley's dead son, with these verses inscribed in it:

Accept, my gentle visionary, Blake,
Whose thoughts are fanciful and kindly mild;
Accept and fondly keep for friendship's sake,
This favour'd vision, my poetic child!

Rich in more grace than fancy ever won,

⁴⁴ Fox, 1976, 46-8.

⁴⁵ Alexander Gilchrist, Life of William Blake, (1863), 1942, 122; it ran through fourteen editions - Morchard Bishop, Blake's Hayley, 1951, 129. Hayley also wrote a life of Milton.

To thy most tender mind this book will be,
 For it belong'd to my departed son;
 So from an angel it descends to thee.⁴⁶

Blake is constructed as gentle and mild-mannered, just as his own Satan affects to be.⁴⁷ Vision is seen as belonging to the compassionate not the angry emotions, a judgement he challenges. In 1802 he was asked to engrave plates to illustrate a new edition of The Triumphs, a task which he bitterly resented: 'if it was fit for me I doubt not that I should be Employ'd in Greater things'.⁴⁸ The complaint is about the meniality of the work imposed on him at a time when he had hoped to be engaged in important projects of his own, but there is much in the poem itself that might have added to Blake's sense of grievance: it is composed in the uniformalising 'mill' of the heroic couplet, and preaches the Angelic wisdom of 'disciplin'd desires' he had long since rejected.

Milton is not an 'answer' to Hayley's poem, but in writing it Blake remembered some of the themes of his antagonist's most important work, and of the lines addressed to him in the edition he was presented with. The two poems share a number of features - both are allegories, and both seek to change the relations between the sexes, for example⁴⁹ - but Blake's handling of themes, as well as the very unAugustan nature of the poem's style, metrics and narrative mean a relationship primarily of opposition with the earlier poem. Hayley's preface claims that the age in which a poet might be thought to produce '*miraculous effects*' has gone and announces a poem designed to promote the 'good-humour' that the Bard unveils as the mask of aggression. He invokes a standard of order to stigmatise 'the discord of chagrin' which destroys 'harmony of soul' and social peace.⁵⁰ The realm of Spleen is a hell⁵¹ to which Serena reacts with 'compassion'.⁵² This pity may be 'ineffectual'⁵³ or

⁴⁶ Cited Bishop, 1951, 129.

⁴⁷ In another poem Hayley referred to Blake's 'liberal heart' - Lindsay, 1978, 134.

⁴⁸ E724.

⁴⁹ Hayley, 1807, 2-3, ix.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 47; Spleen is frequently linked with disorder, and it is anger that is the main disruptive element - 68. 'Spleen' was sometimes simply a synonym for anger- e.g. Sterne, 1967, 28 - but more often meant a state involving anger, depression and other emotions: v. Bishop, 1951, 64, 89.

⁵¹ Hayley, 1807, 3.

⁵² *ibid.*, 54.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 55.

misplaced, but it is clearly preferred to anger, which is ridiculed as 'Peevishness'⁵⁴ and caricatured in the form of Sir Walter's impotent rage.⁵⁵ The final scene is based around Spleen's attempts to arouse choler in various parties, and the happy ending is assured when Serena, although burning with 'Anger's honest flame'⁵⁶ achieves a triumph of temper. The poem is aimed primarily at women, advising them that good humour is the best way to win the husband they desire, but its picture of anger as dangerous and discordant is not limited to females: the Cave of Spleen contains 'male tergaments'(sic).⁵⁷

Hayley sometimes implies the need for a Science of Wrath for both men and women; the Cave also contains, 'all of each sex...who knew no use of anger but to rail',⁵⁸ and, while maintaining some gender differentiation, he does allow justified anger to both sexes. Serena feels 'tender indignation' at some of the sights in the realm of Spleen,⁵⁹ and Sir Walter, with apparent authorial approval, goes further than this. Penelope, Serena's priggish aunt, attempts to stir up trouble for her niece, and inspires a display of open 'wrath' from the 'indignant' Sir Walter.⁶⁰ But he is soon to become a victim of Spleen, brought on by a minor snub from his daughter, and this leads to a different kind of anger:

The more he eats, the more perverse he grows;
For as his hunger sunk his choler rose.⁶¹

Hayley seems to have accepted an ideal of largely repressed wrath for himself,⁶² and the sense of the poem is that anger is sometimes justified but is usually dangerous and disruptive, and both sexes would do well to indulge it as little as they can. Milton suggests a 'Science of Wrath' that starts from different premises and embodies different conclusions.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 95; Hayley himself was praised for his ability at 'moving compassion' - Bishop, 1951, 128. cf. also, 'the scorpion Anger's self-tormenting rage' - Hayley, 1807, 43.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 38-39.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 41.

⁶² Bishop, 1951, 193.

Hayley occupied a class position which gave him a stake in social order and much to be good-tempered about; he had a private income, which, although not huge, he decided, after considering a career in the upper professions, would support him while he devoted himself to poetry and patronage. Palamabron is unwilling to express his wrath because Satan was in a position to accuse him of ingratitude; there are no indications in their personal relations that Satan is socially superior to Palamabron, and it is in any case possible to be accused of ingratitude to an equal. Nevertheless, the idea of Palamabron's ingratitude is not well-motivated in the poem, as all Satan does for him is press him to take the easier task for one day, and the charge reflects in a way that is not accidental one factor that inevitably influences relations between patron and artist.⁶³ Satan is one of the Elect, the ruling class,⁶⁴ whose social dominance is made clear in a number of passages.⁶⁵ The Triumphs embodies a politics of feeling in which the true worth of men of Sensibility is counterposed to the glittering delusions of Earls and Nabobs;⁶⁶ nevertheless, Serena's father is a Knight and she marries suitably. In Milton because the benevolence of equal friendship is not a universal possibility, political, not merely personal, anger is also necessary. Blake's experiences serve as paradigm for the need of wrath as a defensive quality in men of lesser status as well as a warning against the personal weakness that makes it impossible to express anger or to decline an unwanted favour. Sir Walter's anger is directed at a poor relation over whom he has power, of the same kind that, to a more limited extent, Hayley had over Blake. Milton insists that Hayley's anger, motivated by artistic jealousy and perhaps frustrated sexual longing, must become apparent before the situation can be resolved. Socially, this means an end to the benevolence of the ruling class and the emergence of their hatred for those they exploit. Milton and the other Eternals can then see the value of Rintrah's 'reprobate' anger, the plebeian fury of those socially 'doomed to destruction'.

⁶³ For the heavy burden Blake felt in this respect, v. 'On H- the Pick thank', E506.

⁶⁴ Far more than this, of course; v. Otto, 1991, 41-54 for the complexities of the Three Classes. Otto regards the Elect as 'those powers...who preserve the status quo' - 50.

⁶⁵ 'Satan! Ah me! is gone to his own place, said Los! their God/I will not worship in their churches, nor King in their Theatres' - E104, 10, 12-13; also E104, 11, 11-12.

⁶⁶ Hayley, 1807, 9.

The struggle at Felpham that Blake identified in a letter to Butts was to protect himself from confinement to work in which self-expression was impossible,⁶⁷ and this is one reason for the emphasis on the virtues of wrath reminiscent of the early 1790s: the tiger's anger was valued as a self-preserving emotion that defended it from the constraints imposed on the tame. The limitations of patronage figure the limitations of the human condition, and the compassion that leads Hayley to help Blake is as ambivalent in its effects as compassion elsewhere in the poem; it preserves and destroys at the same time. Pity leads to the Daughters of Albion creating the human body as a locus of frustration, but it also moves Enitharmon to create the same body as protection from a fall into complete non-entity; in the same way, patronage saves Blake from the risks of extreme poverty he faced in London, yet keeps him from practicing the art he feels prophetically impelled towards.⁶⁸

Foster Damon was the first to suggest that Blake's perception of Hayley as unconsciously homosexual is relevant to Milton.⁶⁹ Satan's pity is an 'unmasculine' and dangerous emotion, and there is the implication that such pity reduces man to the status of woman⁷⁰ - 'man unmans'. The clarity of purpose of 'masculine' will should be expressed in clear action, and the bounding line in art; pity replaces this with uncertainty and wateriness, making those who feel it incapable of upright behaviour and inspired art. Los is infected by Satan's softness, and it is the 'male' fury of Rintrah that is cleansing. Leutha is not only the 'feminine' side of Hayley, his homosexuality, amongst other things,⁷¹ but his muse as well; she wishes to inspire Palamabron, but is repulsed by Elynittria. Blake refuses to be inspired by a muse who would drive 'the Harrow in Pitys paths'⁷² and reduce him to the rational versifying of The Triumphs. After the disasters of the swap, Elynittria attempts to instil Hayley with some Bacchic inspiration:

⁶⁷ E723-725. This letter makes clear the issues of power and money that lay underneath his relationship with Hayley; cf. Mee, 1992, 222.

⁶⁸ For Blake's personal risks on deciding to leave Felpham: v. Mitchell, Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 284; for the London bread riots he had earlier left behind, Worrall, 1992, 44-47.

⁶⁹ Foster Damon, 1975, 178; v. e.g. E105, 12, 4-6.

⁷⁰ John Beer, Blake's Humanism, 1968, refers to 'the failure of the male' in Hayley.

⁷¹ Damon, 1975, 238.

⁷² E106, 12, 28.

For Elynittria met Satan with all her singing women.
 Terrific in their joy & pouring wine of wildest power
 They gave Satan their wine: indignant at the burning wrath.
 Wild with prophetic fury his former life became like a dream
 Cloth'd in the Serpents folds, in selfish holiness demanding purity
 Being most impure, self-condemn'd to eternal tears...⁷³

Satan is unable to deal with the consequences of this tempestuous, intoxicating poetic inspiration, and it makes him worse, more hypocritical, more morally virtuous, and less able to achieve even the kind of poetry he had been writing before. 'Indignant at the burning wrath' suggests he was self-righteously incensed at the furiousness of his emotions when inspired by Elynittria.⁷⁴ Leutha is expelled, and, repentant, is supported by 'the Divine Pity', a sustaining compassion different from the pity of Satan.⁷⁵ Leutha deserves this pity, as she has shown a compassionate willingness to sacrifice herself for Satan: the earlier implication that pitying the piteous was unhelpful is reversed, as Blake shows once more that statements about emotion are most useful in forming subjectivities if the opposite statement is made as well.

Blake's counter-hegemonic strategy works here by making such contrary statements but not giving them equal weight, so a problematised truth is provisionally instated. In spite of the existence of this Divine mercy and of the importance given to acts of compassion in making salvation possible, the Bard's Song is, taken as a whole, critical of pity:

The Bard ceas'd. All consider'd and a loud resounding murmur
 Continu'd round the Halls; and much they question'd the immortal
 Loud voic'd Bard. and many condemn'd the high tone'd Song
 Saying Pity and Love are too venerable for the imputation
 Of Guilt.⁷⁶

⁷³ E106, 12, 42-47.

⁷⁴ For a virtuous denunciation of the effects of alcohol, v. Hayley, 1807, 71-72. The wine is partly inspired by the Book of Revelations, but it is also Bacchic - v. the Imagery of Plate 27.

⁷⁵ E106, 13, 6.

⁷⁶ E107, 13, 45-49.

This makes it clear that the Song is not implying that Satan's compassion and friendship are hypocritical, as there would be no problem about imputing guilt to dishonest simulacra. Blake postulates disagreement because he has been describing the dangers of the emotions themselves. The terrified Bard takes refuge 'in Miltons bosom', and this is immediately followed by the latter's decision to leave eternity for a self-sacrificing voyage to redeem his Emanation. The Bard's Song posits a relationship between the 'unmanly' compassion of Hayley, an excessive rationalism and formalism in poetry, and the social misery brought about by the Shadowy Female in her destructive pity.⁷⁷ The fury that is hidden beneath ruling class compassion is responsible for European war.⁷⁸ Milton intends to rescue Albion from 'pomp of warlike selfhood', and to do this he must recognise that 'I in my Selfhood am that Satan' and 'claim the Hells, my Furnaces'.⁷⁹ In other words, the pity of Satan is really selfishness and the creative poet must delve beneath such superficial emotions to the unconscious, a place of burning desire that is the source of true inspiration. This process involves the reclamation of the true femininity of the male, the Emanation, of which Hayley's coy homosexuality and undemanding benevolence are a parody.⁸⁰ The 'Eternal Death' that Milton chooses is the kind of compassionate 'self-annihilation' that is only possible to a man who knows his own Hells, and is capable of renouncing his Selfhood because he has first possessed it. Milton must depart genuinely believing he faces Eternal Death, but this is the opposite of suicide or asceticism; it involves a discovery of the real passions of the self and a coming into a new fullness of life.

At the level of political allegory, the lesson of the Bard's Song is that in the England of the early nineteenth century the self-deluding pity of those of superior status has to be met by the honest anger of the inferior, and forced to reveal the fury present underneath. If this is done, then enough of the Eternals, who stand for an audience which must take on itself the burden of action to change society, will come to appreciate the true situation.⁸¹ Part of this understanding will involve a realisation of the importance of the Science

⁷⁷ E111, 18, 5-25.

⁷⁸ E106, 13, 1-6.

⁷⁹ E108, 14, 30-32.

⁸⁰ E108-109, 14, 14-42.

⁸¹ Mitchell, Curran and Wittreich Jr., 1973, 285.

of Wrath. I have stressed throughout that the apparently extreme emotional ideologist of the 'Proverbs of Hell' is, in fact, firmly planted in important traditions of Western European thought. I shall strengthen the evidence for this location by showing that Blake's belief in 'Sciences' of Wrath and Pity is Aristotelean, not necessarily in the sense of being directly indebted to Aristotle's ideas, but of approaching issues of emotion in the same spirit and arriving at similar conclusions.

Aristotle regards emotions as happening to people, but not in such a way that they are allowed no freedom. Hence he is able to bring them into the moral realm, without claiming that they can be completely subject to choice. He treats anger as, like other moral qualities, manifesting a virtuous Mean and blameworthy deviations in either the direction of excess or inadequacy. Although he does occasionally write as if he accepts the idea that anger is a 'brief madness',⁸² the main emphasis is: 'It is right to feel anger at some things'.⁸³ He explains that finding the mean is difficult:

...it is not easy to define in what manner and with what people and on what sort of grounds and how long one ought to be angry; and in fact we sometimes praise men who err on the side of defect in this matter and call them gentle, sometimes those who are quick to anger and style them manly.⁸⁴

Although this too links anger and masculinity, it might seem that the moralism and rationalism of this approach distinguishes it from Blake's; 'A Poison Tree' is not about finding the right amount or the right duration of anger, but about expressing it. Nevertheless, the whole poem implies a 'Science of Wrath', a rational approach to anger management that steers a middle course between open violence and spiritless 'forbearance'. In Aristotle's discussion of the excess of anger, we find this striking passage:

There are then first the Irascible, who get angry quickly and with the wrong people and for the wrong things and too violently, but whose

⁸² Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, 1976, 123.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 127.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 113.

anger is soon over. This last is the best point in their character, and it is due to the fact that they do not keep their anger in, but being quick-tempered display it openly by retaliating, and then have done with it...the Bitter-tempered on the other hand are implacable, and remain angry a long time, because they keep their wrath in; whereas when a man retaliates there is an end of the matter...⁸⁵

Aristotle's moral psychology anticipates 'A Poison Tree', and he can pre-echo the 'Proverbs of Hell'. Milton places more stress on the importance of the expression of anger than the Ethics, but the idea of the need for a rationally directed approach to emotional issues, one in which reason is not the repressor but the guide, is common to both works. Milton is, in its approach to emotion, not a Christian poem; Palamabron regrets not expressing the anger he felt at Satan's usurpation because this led to a situation in which all, including Satan, were losers. Emotional expression is a matter for 'Scientific' calculation of consequences, not for religious teaching - it is not within the poem's horizon of possibility that Palamabron might comfort himself with the thought that he did right according to the precepts of the New Testament. 'Antinomian' is even less in accord with what we actually find in this poem, which, for all its denunciations of virtue, inculcates its own moral ideas. Blake does not encourage us to be neutral about Satan's behaviour, and in writing about Sciences of Wrath and Pity, he is teaching lessons, not providing information. The counter-ideological intention of the Bards Song is the construction of male subjectivities regulated by the idea that it is important to express anger, but aware that this must be done in a calculated not an uncontrolled way, and also of the need for an intelligent and forceful, but subsidiary, compassion. This is not too far from the intention of Songs of Experience, although it is a long way from the attempt to cross the Amoral Vitalist with the Champion of the Oppressed made by The Marriage and America. Finally, the call for 'Sciences' enables us to see that this is what Blake has always recommended - not a 'Romantic' expansion of the self and its emotions, unlimited by reason or restraint, but a particular use of rationality to create the 'bounding line' that gives emotions form and precision. That Blake should sound so like Aristotle, and about a subject on which we should least expect such agreement, opens the

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 233.

possibility of seeing him in a way radically different from those currently fashionable.

Book The Second focusses on Ololon's decision to follow Milton. The Bard's critique of pity is modified, and although the conclusion to the poem keeps the emotions divided in a gendered way, the effect of this book is to strengthen the elements of a redefined Man of Sensibility in the Blakean male. Milton needs to reform not destroy Urizen,⁸⁶ and anger can be a trap that leads to vegetation.⁸⁷ Yet the Sons of Los also complain about the deleterious effects of their father's compassion:

O mild Parent!

Cruel in thy mildness, pitying and permitting evil

Tho strong and mighty to destroy, O Los our beloved Father!⁸⁸

'Cruel in thy mildness' carries echoes of the Rousseavian critique of pity appealed to by the Jacobins to justify revolutionary executions; at one level, the Sons are revolutionaries wondering why their leader is not carrying out the revolution, but the loving conclusion marks an inability to decide the extent to which the dangers of compassion need to be accepted to avoid the greater dangers of violence. Los engages in what Blake seems to regard as an inevitable vacillation between the two approaches. At one moment, he is claiming 'O Sons we live not by wrath. by mercy alone we live!⁸⁹ at another descending 'in his fires of resistless fury'.⁹⁰ When he denounces Calvin and Luther for 'fury premature',⁹¹ he is both attacking the consequences of unwise anger and implying that there is a time when wrath is appropriate. His sons are angry at this uncertainty⁹² and they are right to the extent that this endless flux can hold out no hope of final resolution, but to impose one emotion at the expense of the other would be a premature closure: in the final Plate Los

⁸⁶ E134, 34, 43 - 'pitying & gentle to awaken Urizen'. Plate 45 - Milton supporting Urizen - seems designed to emphasise that power and compassion are not incompatible: Erdman, 1974, 261.

⁸⁷ E122, 25, 57-58.

⁸⁸ E118, 23, 18-20.

⁸⁹ E119, 23, 34.

⁹⁰ E121, 25, 2.

⁹¹ E119, 23, 47.

⁹² E120, 24, 44-47.

is able to devote himself to anger only because Oothoon has nothing but compassion for the 'human harvest'. Again, any suggestion that the unity of pity and anger in the individual psyche will be achieved turns out to be withdrawn. Both are present at the conclusion because both will be needed to inspire any imaginable political strategy, but they remain separate until such time as history enables them to merge in revolutionary praxis. For the moment, too strong an infusion of 'feminine' pity would 'divide' the angry prophet, while too much 'male' fury would prevent the female from carrying out her merciful tasks of preserving the guilty from the consequences of their guilt. It does not really matter much whether Los vacillates between emotions or commits himself to anger while Enitharmon embodies pity; what is important is that they remain present but separate.

Even in Book The Second pity is not seen as equal in value to anger. The Book begins with a description of Beulah, a land 'where Contraries are equally true' and a place of compassion:

But Beulah to its Inhabitants appears within each district
As the beloved infant in his mothers bosom round incircled
With arms of love & pity & sweet compassion. But to
The Sons of Eden the moony habitations of Beulah,
Are from great Eternity a mild & pleasant Rest.⁹³

Not surprisingly, the Songs of Beulah are in praise of pity and forgiveness and suspicious of 'fury and fire'.⁹⁴ Beulah is a feminised rest from the contentions of eternity, the war and hunting that are the forms the fiery energies take in an ideal state.⁹⁵ The attempt to create female subjectivities valuing compassion is continued, and pity in Beulah means both cherishing infants and nourishing males sexually, so as to enable them to return refreshed to eternity. Once more, women are shown as themselves needing pity because of their weakness; Blake tells Ololon that he is willing to plunge into 'deeper affliction' if that is part of his prophetic task, but asks her to 'pity...my Shadow of Delight', both Catherine and the 'feminine' side of himself.⁹⁶ When Ololon decides that

⁹³ E129, 30, 10-14.

⁹⁴ E133, 34, 3-7.

⁹⁵ E185, 38, 31.

⁹⁶ E137, 36, 29-32.

she too must sacrifice herself for others, this action is specifically ascribed by 'The Family divine' to 'Pity'.⁹⁷ Milton's sacrifice, although meant to be seen as expressing deep compassion, is inspired by an unmasking of pity. Blake's gendering of the emotions remains fundamentally the same throughout his career.

The most immediate effect of Milton's decision is to inspire The Shadowy Female to a lamentation⁹⁸ that once again creates the miseries it pities, but this time consciously, as she knows that she is taking 'the Image of God/Even Pity & Humanity' while really 'her Clothing [is] Cruelty'.⁹⁹ She is doing this, 'To defend me from thy terrors O Orc! my only beloved!'.¹⁰⁰ She fears the open sexuality, the unrestrained anger and the political rebellion that Orc continues to represent; pity is a woman's way of denying the violently male part of herself, a ruling-class attempt to prevent revolt, and part of an inauthentic emotional structure that makes impossible a full meeting between man and woman. Orc urges her to accept her true femininity and to 'put on the Female Form as in times of old/With a Garment of Pity & Compassion like the Garment of God'.¹⁰¹ He responds with wrath that 'Burns to the top of heaven against thee in Jealousy & Fear',¹⁰² but to no avail; pity condemns the psychic and social opposition to impotent anger. Orc is ready to welcome compassion in a way unthinkable in the works of the first half of the 1790s, but female wiles render him impotent.

Sensibility is seen as an obfuscating ideology promoted by the 'weak' individuals of the ruling class: 'under pretence to benevolence the Elect Subdued All'.¹⁰³ This makes clear the paradigmatic significance of the clash between Satan and Palamabron in Book 1; Hayley's temporary domination of Blake was possible because part of Blake himself was taken in by his pity, and this process is a microcosm of the domination of some social groups by others. Part of Milton's task is to redefine the values of Sensibility:

⁹⁷ E116, 21, 54.

⁹⁸ E111, 18, 5-25.

⁹⁹ E111, 18, 19-20.

¹⁰⁰ E111, 18, 25.

¹⁰¹ E112, 18, 34-35.

¹⁰² E112, 18, 32.

¹⁰³ E122, 25, 32.

He smiles with condescension; he talks of Benevolence & Virtue
 And those who act with Benevolence & Virtue, they murder time on
 time¹⁰⁴

The polite classes praise and even act up to a version of benevolence that, as Blake has argued from the early 1790s, helps to keep society more or less as it is. Milton counterposes a different kind of 'benevolence & Virtue' which, like the defiant energy of Jesus, leads to death at the hands of the authorities. This compassion looks very like anger, and its accompanying virtues seem immoral to the guardians of the status quo.¹⁰⁵ Yet the values of Sensibility, flawed as they are, do represent a prefiguration of what life would be like in a redeemed society: 'Or like a human form, a friend with whom he livd benevolent'.¹⁰⁶ The danger of such prefigurations is that they will deceive people into thinking that such a society has already arrived, a danger Blake has been guarding against since Songs of Innocence.

The degraded version of feminine compassion is religion (both Christian and Deist), and moral virtue; similarly, corrupted male anger becomes the violence of war, which both hides and is hidden by the female qualities.¹⁰⁷ Ololon takes responsibility for part of this heritage and as she does so, tears of true compassion for the victims fall.¹⁰⁸ Previously, separated pity has been represented by Satan-Hayley, the feminised male, whose homosexuality becomes a sign of the absence of masculine wrath and openness. Tayler's claim that anger is one of the products of Milton's raging Selfhood which must be cast off,¹⁰⁹ misses the point: the desire to take revenge is certainly seen as counter-productive, but wrath at social evils, which can never be wholly selfless because this would imply a complete separation between prophet and society, is evident from Milton's speech announcing his descent.¹¹⁰ It is possible to misinterpret the significance of the replacement of Orc by Los as

104 E142, 41, 19-20.

105 In 'The Everlasting Gospel' Jesus's miracles, more obviously associated with compassion, are said to burn in 'wrath' throughout the land: E519, 53-54.

106 E109, 15, 27.

107 E141, 40, 20.

108 E141, 40, 15.

109 Irene Tayler, in Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 253.

110 E108, 14, 14-16.

the hero of Blake's mythology.¹¹¹ It is true that this represents a shift from an emphasis on political revolution to one on visionary art; but this does not mean an abandonment of earlier positions, as Orc is still viewed favourably and Los is still in conflict with the social conditions that need revolution to change them.

Anger emerges again as a 'staminal' energy; the general tenor of the poem is one of opposition to the European war,¹¹² but the logic of Blake's emotional ideology sets up a counter-movement, in which war partakes of the fury of artistic creativity:

How red the sons & daughters of Luvah! here they tread the grapes.
 Laughing & shouting drunk with odours many fall oerwearied
 Drownd in the wine is many a youth & maiden: those around
 Lay them on skins of Tygers & of the spotted Leopard & the Wild Ass
 Till they revive, or bury them in cool grots, making lamentations.

This Wine-press is call'd War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press
 Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain
 As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel.¹¹³

This passage links Bacchic creativity with the violence of European conflict, Los's imaginative activity in creating language and its literary combinations with violence and tyranny. As in the Bard's Song, rage and Bacchic inspiration are associated, with the implication that art is produced by deep emotions of the kind that reason and benevolence subdue, but intoxicants can release.¹¹⁴ As pity is the kind of unthreatening emotion that reason is happy to allow, it has little artistic potential. Furor is an ambivalent phenomenon, but its energies cannot be completely repressed, and societies can only choose how far they make it likely they will be expressed in art, how far in war. The inspired artist is in the grip of a force that can be frightening but is, like anger in 'A Poison Tree', more destructive if denied:

¹¹¹ Clark, 1991, 28.

¹¹² 'Morning' a notebook poem of about the same period as Milton contains the opposition between wrathful war and 'Sweet Mercy' with straightforward approval of the latter that is sometimes presented as Blake's only view of the subject - E478.

¹¹³ E124, 27, 3-10.

¹¹⁴ 'Drunk with the Spirit' and 'wrathful, fill'd with rage!' are linked at E114, 20, +3-45.

Tw'as too late now to recede. Los had enterd into my soul:
His terrors now posses'd me whole! I arose in fury & strength.¹¹⁵

But 'fury' can also refer to an unjustified and destructive anger:

thou hast cruelly
Cut off my loves in fury till I have no love left for thee¹¹⁶

Here it is jealousy that is the shape of fury; staminal energies can take dark forms and to deny these is to cut off the possibilities of harnessing their creative powers. War is one product of the split between wrath and pity, but it is unavoidable in a world where energy in any form survives. The poem is ostensibly about salvation from such conditions, and so it moves towards a resolution in which, apparently, 'Milton and Ololon, masculine and feminine, wrath and pity, unite in Jesus, the 'One Man''.¹¹⁷ This is suggested by the imagery of the wine press, which comes from Isaiah¹¹⁸ and Revelations:

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.¹¹⁹

The Authorised Version's chapter heading claims the 'I' of Isaiah 63 is Christ, so both passages suggest Divine fury entering human history, and both go on to look forward to a redeemed world for the elect. The imagery suggests a violent but redemptive process; the crushing of the grapes represents the death of soldiers, but the blood of the slaughtered becomes wine, and Blake is again acknowledging the identity of the energies of war and art, and accepting that Milton is partly created by his response to the violence of the war he is

¹¹⁵ E117, 22, 13-14.

¹¹⁶ E132, 33, 5-6.

¹¹⁷ Kay Parkhurst and Roger R. Easson eds., Milton, a Poem by William Blake, 1978, 167.

¹¹⁸ Coleridge's version of Isaiah 63:3, is quoted on p. 114.

¹¹⁹ Revelations 14:19-20.

opposing. But he does not turn European war into an uprising of the oppressed of the kind that constitutes the apocalypse of The Four Zoas; resolution here is the triumph of inspiration in an urban pastoral:

Immediately the Lark mounted with a loud trill from Felphams Vale
 And the Wild Thyme from Wimbletons green & impurpled Hills
 And Los & Enitharmon rose over the Hills of Surrey
 Their clouds roll over London with a south wind, soft Oothoon
 Pants in the Vales of Lambeth weeping oer her Human harvest
 Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud
 Over London in volume terrific, low bended in anger.¹²⁰

Milton's and Ololon's descents have changed everything and nothing. The Blakes are back in London, Catherine as Oothoon pitying human suffering, William as Los crouching in prophetic wrath; this division is the reality behind any suggestion of unity in Christ. The final lines of the poem describe a situation in which human powers and passions are 'prepard' for an apocalyptic going forth that does not occur; everything is 'ready' but nothing happens. The later works do not abandon the belief that individual and social transformation are linked. As Lindsay points out, Blake stigmatises all previous revolutions as 'premature' and even his reference to Milton's power of releasing Orc turns into an emphasis on the need for patience, but he can never give up his commitment to prophetic anger and the political violence that this might inspire.¹²¹ The emphasis on the importance of not condemning the guilty stems from his desire to avoid bloodshed: Satan cannot be condemned because he deserves the punishment of Eternal Death (the ruling class deserve complete loss of power and perhaps execution). Blake is not able to countenance the violence of this process, so he arranges for Satan to avoid punishment; the verdict of the Eternals has to be obscure, because the culprit has to get away scot free, and Blake is not sure what this means in practical terms. Wrath is condemned, but as the verdict seems to be wrong, does this mean that anger is really accepted? The political consequences of agreeing or disagreeing with the Eternals would be clear, so Blake is at pains to make sure we can do neither. He could have called for a revolutionary struggle

¹²⁰ E143-144, 42, 29-35.

¹²¹ Lindsay, 1976, 184-185.

against the ruling class or he could have declared such a struggle 'premature', even permanently premature. He is unwilling to opt for either alternative, and the resolution of the poem is another sleight-of-hand to avoid both. Milton builds to an apocalypse which it fails to deliver. The ending has everything locked in potentiality,¹²² depending on the liberation of the poor man and the reaping of the human harvest in political revolution for its release. Equally, it suggests that a 'last judgement' that in no way relies on social conditions has already taken place. The Lark and Wild Thyme, symbols of visionary regeneration, have already risen, yet Los remains bent over his task, filled with the anger of the just at social abuses, listening to the cry of the poor as he has been since the early 1790s. Pity and anger, it is implied, remain in a world which, if it could only rise to awareness of what it had become, no longer needs them.

¹²² cf. Mitchell - Curran and Wittreich, Jr., 1973, 307 - who calls the poem 'a Divine Comedy whose ending has been glimpsed - but not yet realized'.

Chapter Twelve
Results and Prospects

In this chapter I shall provide short summarising accounts of Blake's treatment of anger and pity and suggest some provisional conclusions to the questions I have raised. I shall then look forward briefly to the role played by the two feelings in Jerusalem, indicate the continuing problems these emotions have created for radicals, and end by suggesting areas for future research.

Underneath the complexities of the developments I have traced, a comparatively straightforward narrative is visible. Radicals before 1789 frequently appealed to pity, and, although this may well have placed limits on their radicalism, compassion was unsettling enough to play a significant role in ideological justifications of the French Revolution. At the same time, pity was an important legitimating motif in the self-presentation of the ruling class. Blake is willing, in for example 'Gwin', to utilise pity alongside indignation in support of rebellion, but he is already suspicious of it, and 'Samson' shows how it can trick a champion of the people into weakness. In the early years of the Revolution desire and anger seem to him more powerful forces for political transformation than sympathy, but The French Revolution shows his wish to help 'win' compassion from counter-revolutionaries like Burke. Once the violence begins he is more concerned to create forms of anger appropriate to the needs of the revolution and the English repetition which he projected, and to unmask 'reactionary' pity. Nevertheless, like the Jacobins, he still sees the need for pity as a motivating force for any revolutionary project. All of these themes continue after it becomes clear the revolution will not live up to his hopes, but he adds to them a concern for the conditioning of weakness and limitation through a compassionate but misguided fear of the consequences of liberated living. His renditions of wrath tend to stress its pointlessness or the violence which transforms its success into failure. In Milton Blake emerges into a relative calm; he is more distant from the European war than in The Four Zoas and the excesses of Jacobin anger are in the past. Once again, he seeks to promote the open expression of anger, but now with more emphasis on the need for 'Scientific' appropriateness than in the 1790s. He has recovered the confidence in 'fury' as a source of poetic inspiration that he had lost in The Book of Los.

This trajectory was a response to historical developments, and it is important to remember the obvious fact that Blake's radical politics, which are a major factor in his representations of both anger and pity, stem partly from his class position and identifications. He was distanced from the labouring

class by his skill, by the nature of his work, and by his ability to produce on his own behalf; nevertheless, he spent long hours almost every day in what was often hard physical labour, he knew economic exploitation and the degradations of dependence on patrons, and his fundamental allegiances were to those 'below' him. This is the reason for the kind of oppositional thinking I have called counter-ideology, but which every writer on Blake has described in one way or another. Structurally the major fact about his period of history was that there was no contradiction between the forces and relations of production; the means of production were being developed on a scale new in human history by capitalist wage labour. One does not have to accept the full Marxist narrative in which revolution occurs when the relations of production begin to shackle the development of the forces of production to accept that in such a situation economic transformation is unlikely.¹ But, in an age of political revolution and huge aspirations, Blake is led to hope that a political victory is achievable. The possibility of a seizure of power and the impossibility of doing what Blake wished for afterwards² influences many aspects of his ideology of the emotions: the radicalism that rejects charity and encourages anger, the treatment of Fuzon, the clarity of emotional representations when compared to political ones, and so on.

I felt, though, that the evidence was telling me two contradictory stories. On the one hand, as I tried to understand Blake's ideas, I seemed to find historical determination at every point; on the other, when I stood back, the picture looked different: Blake did not reject 'Christian forbearance' because the French Revolution had taught him the need to be firm with enemies; he had effectively arrived at this position in 1788. I am not alone in seeing 'A Poison Tree' as a radical critique of an inauthentic society of the kind to be expected from a revolutionary in the third year of watching a nearby revolution, and I have provided evidence as to how well the ideas of the poem fitted the need of English radicals as the European situation became violent. Yet the poem says little or nothing that Sterne or Fielding would have challenged. It would be possible to write a 'history of ideas' account of Blake's

¹ Blake's most intense political engagement came before capitalism was threatened by the 'special case' of a proletariat embittered by the perceived worsening of its situation created by industrialisation and strong enough to threaten a still vigorously developing economic system - the period from roughly 1815 to 1850.

² My view of the projected English Revolution has been influenced by George C. Comninel's account of the French one in Rethinking the French Revolution, 1987; the fundamental factor, though, has been the view of the development of the British economy in the nineteenth century attainable from, say, Abstract of British Historical Statistics, (B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, 1962) or an account like David S. Landes': The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present, 1969.

views as a logical development of those of earlier eighteenth-century thinkers,³ and, while this development occurred in a particular class location and historical conjuncture, the fact that a Justice of the Peace and an Anglican clergyman were important precursors suggests that 'determination' is the wrong model in thinking about the production of ideas. E. P. Thompson insisted, contra Louis Althusser, that, in the case of law, 'the lonely hour of the last instance' - of direct class or economic determination - sometimes arrived.⁴ My sense of what I have found is that in sophisticated literary ideologies like Blake's this is never the case; texts are generated primarily out of other texts, although, in cases like the emotions, texts must be taken to include oral 'folklore'; class, economics, history itself, even in the compelling form of a revolution, only mediate the birth.

This model, which reverses that of much Marxism, in which 'superstructural' factors mediate economic determinants, seems to account for much of what happens in Blake. If, for example, his vision of the psyche as a potentially self-regulating system of energy was based on eighteenth-century intellectual developments, what he made of such thinking was determined partly by his anger at the more than psychic oppressions suffered by the groups he identified with. His engagement with anger, indeed, is strongly influenced by the fact that ruling classes always seek to create forms of anger that will not threaten their hegemony. At its simplest, this means directing the anger that inevitably arises in any society towards 'safe' targets. Industrial capitalism, for example, tried to kill right from the start, 'any idea of basic conflict between master and servant. If legitimate conflict existed, it was rather with monopolists and speculators who rigged food prices.'⁵ Other groups behave in the same way; Soboul has shown how the anger of the sans-culottes was shaped by many of them owning small businesses: 'their spokesmen were always careful to explain that their anger was directed simply against property-owning on a large scale'.⁶ At the same time, the ruling class tried to ensure that anger was cool and moralised, subject to rational scrutiny to make sure it was justified, as distant as possible from the 'bestial' rage that they feared in the labouring class. In other words, as they controlled the discourses that guided reason, they sought to ensure that anger was always under rational scrutiny. Christianity, and a still influential Stoicism,⁷ although in the former

³ Whose ideas had, of course, their own economic and historical determinants.

⁴ Thompson, 1978, 96.

⁵ Foster, 1977, 33-34.

⁶ Soboul, 1964, 33-34.

⁷ Johnson's 'Vanity of Human Wishes', for example, ends by arguing against apathy, while even a sentimentalist like Bowles incorporates Stoic elements in his emotional ideology - v. Bowles, Vol. 1, 1855, 11-12. v. also pp. 14-15.

case not without contradictions, acted to keep wrath as repressed as possible. Blake countered this by trying to create a form of anger that was energetic and open, that shared the moralised indignation of the prophets, but also the undiscoursed fury of the elements and of wild animals. He turned it against monopolists, parsons, kings, publishers, counter-revolutionaries, traitors, parents and dominant women, looking to a time when revolutionary rage would sweep away the entire system of oppression. Yet Blake was also aware that having the courage to express anger is not just a matter of class and politics, and his treatment is influenced by a fear of personal weakness. As someone who aspired to be an independent commodity producer, he was also pulled in the direction of the ambition that fuelled eighteenth-century capitalism and which needed anger as part of its supporting structure. Wrath could clear the way for desire of either a personal or a social kind.

Blake often portrays anger as a purposive response to frustration, but his appeals to moral indignation show that he did not stop at the frustration-aggression hypothesis,⁸ but regarded anger as a response that could arise on behalf of others. This, too might seem to stem from sympathy with their frustrated longings, but The Marriage also shows anger as a useful energiser of productive civil conflict. In situations where anger is completely thwarted, images of wrath as circular sometimes suggest a pointlessness which gives birth to more fury, eventually becoming despair, as it does with Tharmas in The Four Zoas. The case of Fuzon shows that if anger is the only guide to action, then the goals achieved are limited and temporary. 'Positive' counter-ideology, then, seeks to create subjectivities in which anger is based on the bedrock sympathy shown by Enion⁹ and which Fuzon lacks, in which it combines moral outrage and elemental fury and is guided by imagination and true rationality towards achievable goals. I have shown the impasses which this project encountered: the impossibility of imagining *how* anger would cleanse society and what kind of new order it might lead to, his unwillingness to confine himself to the achievable, or either to renounce or to give unqualified support to revolutionary violence, the main political outcome of anger in his time. In the 'negative' counter-ideological mode he attempts to unmask ruling-class anger as dishonest, hidden by mildness, denied open expression and therefore violent, creating the fundamental contingencies in which the lives and ideologies of the dominated are constructed.

⁸ 'All who desire something and cannot obtain it, are prone to rage,' - Aristotle, The Art of Rhetoric, 1975, 179.

⁹ Even sometimes by Urizen.

Blake's class location makes it easy for him to become aware of the degrading effects of charitable compassion. He has, however, precedent for such a critique in earlier writers, even those like Goldsmith strongly associated with the values of Sensibility, and other radicals in the 1790s are coming to similar conclusions. Once again, what could have emerged *purely* out of texts came from a reception of discourse mediated by class and political conjuncture. Blake never completely abandons the pity appealed to by much eighteenth-century radicalism, and which continued to inspire the revolutionaries even when they were justifying executing the King, but he was suspicious of it from the start, and after 1792 he develops a critique of the social functions of compassion, and of its disadvantages in a time of conflict. Even more than his treatment of anger, his handling of pity is influenced by what may be a personal fear of emotion, but is also a gendered anxiety about contamination by 'the feminine'.

It is important to distinguish at least six kinds of pity in Blake's writings: firstly, an expansive, radical pity of the kind praised by Oothoon and felt by La Fayette until he betrayed the revolution. This is directed towards the 'right' objects, but it is nevertheless dependent on an unequal society in which power relations are 'frozen' and La Fayette will always be in a position to pity 'the people'. Such a pity is necessary to guide political action, and, in a sense, is an 'institution', even if not embodied in administrative forms. The second kind, though, is as near as human praxis can achieve to the uninstitutionalised: the pity of Innocence which springs up spontaneously in eliciting situations, an 'intensity' rather than an emotion, a flow of energy through an unrepressed system, which typically goes out to the person pitied as feeling not material help and is returned in the same form. Thirdly, there is reactionary pity for the defeated but attractive functionaries of the old order; this first becomes an issue in late 1792, although it is anticipated in Dalila's entrapment of Samson. Few critics bother to clearly distinguish it from the fourth kind, reactionary pity for the oppressed; this may or not be hypocritical, but in any case, depends on large gradients of wealth and power, disguises the fury of class rule, and is used by Urizen to baffle people as to their true interests. It is this kind that Blake regarded Christianity as chiefly promoting. In the later work,¹⁰ Blake portrays a fifth kind, a sadistic pity felt by representatives of the female will for their victims; through this he expresses his belief that life as lived in unimaginative societies is made unnecessarily painful because of modes of perception like 'pity' that focus on weakness and limitation, thus creating what

¹⁰ The roots of this idea may be in 'The Human Abstract', whose first lines, Larrissy - 1985, 2 - suggests may mean 'to pity people is to impoverish and belittle them'.

they compassionate. This Blake associates with women, because he saw both their sexuality and their compassion as traps to make strong men weak. Nevertheless, the sixth type of pity is the positive mode of the fifth, felt by Enitharmon when she creates the human body or 'spaces' of refuge; this partakes of the nature of the 'divine' pity which underpins human existence, because Blake also believes that human weakness is not simply a matter of misperception. The sixth kind, a more complex version of the second, is a redemptive compassion - whether purely human or partaking of supernatural power is debatable - in which every limitation is also the creation of a possibility. In this spirit, the later Enitharmon creates the body. Hayley's pity partakes of both the fifth and sixth kinds, weakening Blake through taking him from his spiritual tasks in London, but also creating the space in which he is free from material worries and can envision Milton and Jerusalem.

Blake has his favourite images of anger but he occasionally seizes on a new image for a particular purpose. In The Book of Los he uses the Persians lashing the Hellespont as a picture of pointless wrath that can usefully undermine the positive associations of creativity in Genesis. But he returns again and again to a set of basic images: thunder, fire (sometimes in the form of pillars), tigers and other wild animals. Fire is one of the oldest images for anger in the Western tradition, and even the idea of a specifically consuming flame, prominent in Boehme, goes back at least to Plutarch.¹¹ There is ample precedent too for the association of fury and wild beasts, both in Christian tradition and Plutarch.¹² Blake, by and large, transvalues these images, suggesting the importance for humans of the 'fiery' energies and 'bestial' fury, just as he transvalues the idea that anger is a festering malevolence within¹³ by claiming that this is not because the 'sufferer' is too angry but because he is not angry enough.

Blake images pity as a lustful, sadistic, greedy, upper-class man, but he also associates it with expansion and with Christ, the Divine Imagination. It is primarily a female emotion, necessary in males, but feminising them, often weakening their energy and leading to self-division. The compassionate resting place of Beulah suggests that Blake linked it with the gentle light of the moon, anger with the fierce light of the sun.¹⁴ Suffering in the animal world seems to have had a particular pathos for Blake, at its strongest where nature meets the human world in the dog spurned from the door.

¹¹ Plutarch, Vol. 6, 1969, 103.

¹² Plutarch, Vol. 6, 1969, 149.

¹³ *ibid.*, 115.

¹⁴ v. the last two stanzas of the notebook poem 'William Bond', E497-498.

I have argued that, most typically, Blake's political view might be described as 'revolutionary pessimism'. If the origins of this lie in his insertion into an economic and social totality that could not yield what he was impelled to demand of it, one mediating factor is his vision of a human nature in which selfish violence and altruism are both contained, which demands both order and liberty, and which produces institutions that both nurture and deform it. In his early work, he is concerned with questions arising from the institutionalisation of pity in charity, and in Songs of Experience he attempts to balance form and energy in the 'fearful symmetry' of the tyger. Later he comes to suspect that emotions themselves may be institutions - the position taken by a modern philosopher like Averill - and to prefer the 'intensities' that Urizen flees. In Milton, though, he has come to accept not only the relative rigidity of 'wrath' and 'pity' but the need for Sciences to control their expression. I suggest that the closeness to Aristotle this implies is a further reason for placing Blake nearer the centre of European thinking than, for example, Thompson and Mee recently and Raine in the late 1960s, have done.¹⁵ As well as explicit argument, I attempt to suggest this by my choice of citations, showing Blake close to Sterne and Fielding and, in the 1790s, to 'middle class' radicals like Wollstonecraft.¹⁶ This is not to deny the other locations suggested by references to Boehme and Spence.

Blake was to continue to be engaged by the problems and potentials of these two emotions for the rest of his life. The Everlasting Gospel (1818) is straightforward in its valorisation of the energetic, angry Jesus who ejected the money lenders from the temple and performed miracles in wrath not compassion. Jerusalem, while seeming clear about the need for pity (one of its purposes is to persuade the English not to take revenge on the French), returns to the complexities we have seen in The Four Zoas, and we move from:

They have divided themselves by Wrath. they must be united by
Pity: let us therefore take example & warning O my Spectre,
O that I could abstain from wrath!¹⁷

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot's essay on Blake in The Sacred Wood has been influential in this respect - v. the preface to Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr.'s Angel of Apocalypse, 1975, which also argues that Blake builds on the 'central traditions of western culture' - xvi-xvii.

¹⁶ The varied nature of my citations is designed to suggest that genre is a relatively weak factor in the determination of ideologies.

¹⁷ E150, 7, 57-59.

to Los creating inspired art in 'fury & strength; in indignation & burning wrath',¹⁸ and the murderous compassion of sadistic females.¹⁹

Writers since Blake have rarely risen to his sense of the complexity of the issues raised by apparently simple emotions. The Utopian socialist Robert Owen sought to end working-class anger against capitalists, making its suppression the condition of proletarian power,²⁰ while the twentieth century socialist-anarchist Adrian Mitchell, partly formed by Blake and partly by the 1968 movement that spawned the new *enragés*, sought to substitute the anger of revolution for the 'fat pity' of charity.²¹ Most socialists, while not in power, have tried to encourage working-class anger and to cultivate 'deep and genuine feelings of indignation at the infamy of the existing order', while avoiding the 'violent fits of rage, vociferation and righteous wrath' Marx attributed to Proudhon.²²

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is characterised by an uneasy alliance between commitment to the oppressed and valorisation of the energies of the strong. Nietzsche, who had only the second concern, was to launch the most sustained critique in modern times of the pity that The Marriage ignores, seeing it as a virtue preached by Christianity to abet the weak and devitalise the strong.²³ From an opposed political perspective, Bertolt Brecht portrayed the dangerous seductiveness to a young revolutionary of pity for the sufferings of the oppressed.²⁴ Discussions, determined by political developments, will continue. I have attempted to show in this thesis that, in spite of the relative simplicity with which pity and anger are sometimes experienced, such debates need to be as subtle and complex as those about any other ideological questions.

This study of the structure, contexts, sources and antagonists of Blake's verbal renditions of pity and anger is preliminary to one of the full-scale *workings* of Blake's counter-ideology, a subject I have touched on occasionally, in, for example, my analysis of 'A Poison Tree'. This is a particularly difficult problem with regard to the illuminated books, where, if anywhere, Blake is not

¹⁸ E153, 10, 22.

¹⁹ 'Pitying & gratified drunk with pity' - E237, 80, 70 - which suggests, in contradiction to Milton, that compassion can be Bacchanalian.

²⁰ Robert Owen, A New View of Society and other Writings, 1927, 149.

²¹ Adrian Mitchell, Ride the Nightmare, 1971, 5.

²² Both phrases from letters published in Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, Foreign Languages Press, 1978, 214 (1865); 187 (1846).

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 1973, 177-178; 187-191.

²⁴ Die Massnahme, 1972.

just trying to tell us things about anger and pity but to make us feel angry or compassionate. Few critics have any developed theory as to how the words and images might work together;²⁵ on the one substantial piece of evidence available, the writings of these critics themselves, most people interpret the words and then 'read' the illustrations in this light,²⁶ or if, as in the case of 'The Tyger', there seems to be a big discrepancy between words and picture, make this discrepancy into an interpretative principle.²⁷ In general, where words meet pictures, it will be a rare case where the effects of the latter are not much weaker than and fundamentally determined by those of the former. Study of the illuminated books will take future critics to the brink of the ungraspable and unrepeatable event - the reader/viewer's response in time to texts of which every version is different. The problems of expounding the ideological effects of ever-shifting texts are not insurmountable, but it is not yet possible to say very much about the intentions behind the illuminated books as a totality when so little is known about the actual encounters of reader-viewers with them. It is possible that their effects on contemporaries are now beyond recovery, but there is a pressing need for more accounts of personal engagements of the kind provided by Mark Bracher for The Marriage.²⁸ This is an ironically fortunate situation; Blake's work, contrary to his intentions, had almost no effect in moulding the subjectivities of the men and women of his time; their main counter-ideological force lay in the future.

²⁵ For preliminary reflections, v. Mitchell, 1978, 3-14.

²⁶ cf. the interpretations of the 'Holy Thursday' (Innocence) illustrations by Gardner, 1986, 36; Eben Bass, Erdman and Grant, 1970, 206 and Geoffrey Keynes, Blake, 1967, Plate 19.

²⁷ For Ronald Paulson on 'The Tyger', v. p. 128.

²⁸ In Miller, Bracher and Ault, 1987.

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