

Binary Domination and Bondage: Blake's Representations of Race, Nationalism, and Gender

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Introduction

“Thy soft American plains are mine and mine thy north and south/ Stampd with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun.”¹ In William Blake’s *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, the rapist Bromion decries his victim Oothoon on the basis of three conflated identities: race, colonial status, and gender. With his seed already sown in her womb, he pledges that her “swarthy” offspring will bear not only his genetic signet but also labor in subservience to him, the colonial master. Bromion himself encompasses everything Oothoon is not—he is a white male in the act of colonization while she is a female lashed to the identity of America, which is ethnically and politically subservient. Written in an age of burgeoning political and social radicalism, *Visions* nonetheless fails to conclude with the triumphant victory of Oothoon, and the lower binaries remain shackled in the established hierarchy: “Thus every morning wails Oothoon, but Theotormon sits/ Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire./ The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs.”² With such an unsatisfactory ending in mind, why does Blake retain the reputation as a highly radical and revolutionary visionary? I argue that Blake does hold radical social and political opinions but rather than touting them in the more traditional political essay or narrative, he chooses to express his ideas more subtly through poetry and design. As Mary L. Johnson and John E. Grant most aptly state, “Blake created illuminated epics aimed at restoring to the rational mind its estranged faculties of intuition, imagination, and feeling, thus liberating humanity from illusory oppositions...In everything Blake wrote and etched, he strove to arouse in each of us our full capacity to perceive, think, and act as whole persons belonging to the whole human race.”³ Though defamiliarization and heterogeneity, Blake effectively shows rather than tells the various

interactions of unequal binary relationships, like those exemplified by Bromion and Oothoon, through verse and design.

In this essay, I will focus on three of Blake's "illusory oppositions" or binary relationships—white/non-white, colonizer/colonized, and male/female. Through a combination of close reading and visual analysis, I will argue that Blake presents a realistic portrayal of the functioning of the binaries but that his methodology defamiliarizes not only these social identities and also larger concepts of linear time, economic productivity, and the role of the individual. To achieve this end, Blake invokes many strategies, including designing a complex, representational mythological system, continually reiterating and recombining images and ideas, and describing binaries in language that is self-consciously literal. I am particularly interested in the rhetorical overlap between these three binary structures—Oothoon is degraded not only on the basis of her gender but also characterized by verbiage related to slavery and colonial domination. I posit that such overlap created a shared vocabulary of subservience that emphasizes similarities among these subjugated groups while reshaping the reader's perception of these institutions. I will analyze each of the three binaries in relation to three works by Blake: "The Little Black Boy" for race, *America a Prophecy* for colonialism, and conclude with a return to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* for gender. Before delving into these texts, however, I will introduce applicable literary theories and provide contextual information that will further elucidate my readings of Blake's poetry and designs.

¹ Blake, William. "Visions of the Daughters of Albion." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. 2nd edition. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008. 4.20-21.

² Blake, *Visions*, 11.11-13.

³ Johnson, Mary Lynn and John E. Grant. "Introduction." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. 2nd edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008. Xiv.

I. Blake's Theory and Technique

Mingling figures from Ossianic literature, Christian tradition, and his own imagination, Blake created a complex (and often convoluted) mythological system to populate his compositions and designs. The most important mythological character for my project is Urizen—the most prolific and consistent symbol of Reason. One of the four Zoas, Urizen is defined as “the limiter of Energy, the lawmaker, and the avenging conscious. He is a plowman, a builder, and driver of the sun-chariot.”⁴ In an auditory pun, Urizen's name has been translated as “Your Reason,” which emphasizes his ties to humanity and the earthly realm. Often associated with the implementation of logic and the use of tools, Urizen created this world with a compass and, as the plowman, sowed the human seed in the Garden of Eden. Damon notes that the grand outline of Urizen's career parallels that of Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, which underscores Blake's linkage of Reason with the Devil.⁵ In one of the most famous illustrations of Urizen on the frontispiece for *Europe a Prophecy*, Blake depicts Urizen positioned in front of a blazing red (or in some copies, yellow) sun—thus his title “the Prince of Light”—and he points an open golden compass down in the direction of the world. Centered in the composition, Urizen explodes from a black sky in an eruption of red, orange, and gold. His white hair and beard are often associated with depictions of God the Father in Christian art, though this mighty creator might more appropriately be called a “delimiter” because, as Johnson and Grant describe, he is attempting “to delineate or measure—with his left hand—the primal form of the material universe.”⁶

As the symbol of Reason, Urizen is central to my current project because he becomes the physical manifestation for the application of reason—even if distorted or faulty—and the continued existence of binary structures. The female victim in *Visions of the Daughters of*

Albion, Oothoon, cries out to Urizen by name: “O Urizen: Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven:/ Thy joys are tears! thy labour vain, to form men to thine image, How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys/ Holy, eternal, infinite!”⁷ Urizen fails to recognize the value of difference that Oothoon points out, underscoring that Reason nearly always favors the already dominant element of the binary because this faction controls the language and logic put forward to explain and perpetuate authority.



Europe, A Prophecy, Frontispiece, 1794.⁸

Though Blake's Urizen embodies the application of Reason to systemize the world, through what concrete means are such rationales communicated to (or indoctrinated in) the public? Because Urizen remains unnamed in my first poem of consideration, "The Little Black Boy," the reader can observe, without obstruction, the vehicles of Reason's propaganda, which in this case are primarily the Church and domestic education. Similarly, in *Visions*, when Oothoon cannot convince her fiancé Theotormon to take her back on the merit of love alone, she espouses the rhetoric of slavery herself: "But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,/ And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold."⁹ Whether consciously or unconsciously, both characters advance their own enchaining binary and doom future generations to suffer similar oppressed existences.

In his essay "Ideology and the State," Louis Althusser gives this repetitive cycle a title—"the reproduction of the conditions of production"—and connects it to the economic stability that relies on the continuation of all three binary structures under my consideration.¹⁰ When Blake was writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the perpetuation of a white-dominated racial structure ensured not only the continuation of chattel slavery (i.e., free labor) but also the relegation of non-white people to menial, often undesired jobs. This period was also an age of imperialism, during which colonizing Europeans claimed foreign land indiscriminately to capitalize financially on natural resources and inhabitants. Thirdly, any advancement in the education or incorporation of women in the labor force risked the disruption of another mode of production: the physical reproduction and care of children, who were destined to ensure the economic dominance of the English economy in future generations. For all three binaries, therefore, the established economic systems relied on the continuation of these hierarchical arrangements.

To describe the methodological system by which such pacifying rationales are communicated, Althusser posits the theory of Ideological State Apparatuses. In his Marxist model, Althusser explains that state power derives from its employment of one State Apparatus (SA) and a plethora of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), including the family and the Church, to ensure the continued dominance of the bourgeois agenda, which always equates to the more dominant faction within Blake's three binaries.¹¹ He argues that these institutions "teach 'know-how,' but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice.' All the agents of production, exploitation and repression...must in one way or another be 'steeped' in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously.'"¹²

But how exactly are individuals steeped in ideology, and can this process possibly be avoided? Althusser argues no, citing the theory of *interpellation*—the process by which individuals recognize themselves as subjects through ideology and thus become complicit in their domination. He explains:

Ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. Hence individuals are 'abstract' with respect to the subjects which they always-already are.¹³

This concept of the negation of the individual becomes important for Blake's concept of binary structures because each element of the binary inherently relies on the other to define itself, whether as the subjugator or subjugated, since neither can exist independently.

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience's* "London," Blake explains this phenomenon, decrying that though "I wander thro' each charter'd street/...In every cry of every Man/ In every

Infants cry of fear/ In every voice; in every ban;/ The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.”¹⁴ The modifier “charter'd” references the Magna Carta of 1215, which in theory granted Londoners certain inalienable rights, but Blake illustrates the true helplessness of the individual against the ideological power of controlling institution. To explain the significance of the “mind-forg'd manacles,” Johnson and Grant note: “In linking individuals and institutions, Blake’s compound adjective emphasizes confining mind-sets, primarily in the authorities of Church and State, perhaps also in the compliant victims.”¹⁵ The idea of “mind-forg'd manacles” appears repeatedly throughout Blake’s texts and images because it bespeaks the ideological enchainment of most people while highlighting individuals’ own culpability as *always-already* subjects. Blake illustrates the extent to which everyone is held captive by his or her own passive, yet rational, acceptance of indoctrinating pedagogies put forth by exacting institutions, such as the Church, State, and ideological social constructs.

Although one can never escape being a subject in the Althusserian sense, one can, however, acquire cognizance of the existence and prescribed roles of different subjects in society. Blake anticipates two forms of resistance to totalized ideological indoctrination: the first theorized by Spivak, whose theory of strategic essentialism I will discuss in relation to “The Little Black Boy” in Section Two, and the other by Shklovsky, whose general theory on the defamiliarizing power of art I will discuss here. Though pure objectivity remains impossible for a subjected individual, literature and art bridge some of the gap by portraying the mundane experiences of life in a new fashion. Literary critic Shklovsky explains this phenomenon: “After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception.”¹⁶

In a strategy antithetical to mindless memorization, Blake forces his viewers to reconsider routine activities and ideologies by presenting them in multiple, variable iterations—a technique described by Shklovsky and known as defamiliarization. Developed by the Russian Formalists in the early twentieth century, the theory of defamiliarization is defined by literary editors Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan as “literature that presents objects or experience from such an unusual perspective or in such unconventional and self-conscious language that our habitual, ordinary, rote perceptions of those things are disturbed. We are forced to see things that had become automatic and overly familiar in new ways.”¹⁷ Formalists focus on the technical elements of poetry, such as alliteration, rhyme, and repetition, that separate this genre from ordinary speech, whose primary role is to express practical information. Poetry, on the other hand, often sacrifices transparency and clarity of meaning in order to present a new literary contortion of an accepted concept—an idea theorist Roman Jakobson labels “organized violence.”¹⁸

One of Blake’s first characterizations of race in the poem “The Little Black Boy” provides an apt example of defamiliarization. Rather than merely stating that the child has black skin, Blake composes the line, “White as an angel is the English child:/ But I am black as if bereav’d of light.”¹⁹ The first line only not contains a simile and alliteration of the “a,” but it contrasts with the alliteration of the “b” in the second line (a possible alphabetic hierarchy), and Blake compounds the denotative definition of black by describing it as an absence of light, which exudes religious significance. I will discuss the extended importance of this passage in my close reading of the poem, but it illustrates the various ways in which poets sacrifice realism in favor of manipulated and formed language to insert a plethora of additional, often unexpected, strata of meaning.

One of the most innovative thinkers of the Russian Formalist group was the above-mentioned Viktor Shklovsky, who proposed that self-consciousness of literature is closely tied to the role of art. In “Art as Technique,” he explains: “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.”²⁰ Blake’s oeuvre then comprises the perfect case study for Shklovsky’s conception of defamiliarization because Blake consistently intertwines form and text, and in many of his works, designs of foliage and vines actually compose the letters themselves. Scholar Morris Eaves describes how this particular methodology actually precluded the literary study of Blake for many years: “Since many of those ‘poems’ were originally crafted as ‘illuminated books’ in ‘illuminated printing’—usually relief-etched and watercolored combinations of text and design—they were doomed to run afoul of the institutional standards for poetic legibility.”²¹ To create these works, Blake prepared templates on copper plates by inscribing a reverse image of his text-designs in an acid-resistant substance such as ink; he then applied an etching fluid to bite away the rest of the surface, leaving only the words and images raised in relief. These were then inked and printed on paper, the right way around.²²

Blake’s particular mode of production aligns with the theory of defamiliarization because he often reproduced his etchings with minor variations between versions, an effect that both enriches and complicates close readings. By producing a multitude of iterations on the same idea or character, Blake further distances the reader from his or her preconceived notions of the subject while adding unexpected elements complicating the formation of a simple resolution. Though often frustrating when constructing arguments about Blake’s work, these variations

prevent the encapsulation of Blake and his ideas into any self-contained theoretical construct. Shklovsky praises this tactic in literature: “It is obvious that the systematization will not work, for in reality the problem is not one of complicating the rhythm but of disordering the rhythm—a disordering which cannot be predicated.”²³

Shklovsky himself, however, focuses primarily on the advent of modernism in literature, which postdates Blake significantly. My decision to couple Shklovsky’s modern theory with Blake is not without precedent, however, and Eaves makes the following argument for Blake’s incorporation in this literary movement:

Blake’s system-making, his blending of psychology with religion, his exalted claims for the power of art...make him a potential artist-hero and guardian angel of a significant filament of modern poetry. Blake and modernism belong together, not necessarily on the strand that was spare and taut in its verbal standards, but on the mythopoeic strand that wanted to make poetry the cult-object for an elite society of initiates who would deal only in the deepest, most significant kinds of knowledge of which the world at large was unworthy.²⁴

Eaves reiterates the value in analyzing Blake’s works as art intended to present the known in new, often distorted forms. As Shklovsky notes in his essay, “the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of new perception—that is, to make a unique semantic modification.”²⁵ Not only does Blake use tactics of defamiliarization to render ordinary objects and binaries in a new literary light, but the complexities with which he imbeds these objects often require, as Eaves notes, readers who will abandon all previous conceptions of these binaries and throw themselves headlong into Blake’s complex, yet unique, world.

Whereas Shklovsky focuses on the ability of formulated, self-conscious language to create a new presentation and understanding of subjects, Rivkin and Ryan's earlier definition of defamiliarization also includes objects or experiences presented from an unusual perspective. Blake's complex and symbolic mythology certainly provides a completely new framework through which to examine binary relationships and social inequalities. In his introduction to *A Blake Dictionary*, S. Foster Damon prepares potential readers for an active struggle: "Blake's readers cannot accept passively what Blake writes, as he cannot understand it. He must dig, participate actively; thus Blake's thought is kept living and his ideas fresh...to rouse the Intellectual Powers while baffling the Corporeal Understanding, Blake deliberately confused his prophetic books."²⁶ By combining oppositional characteristics in a single figure or narrating "unnatural" circumstances, Blake utilizes various forms of heterogeneity, or difference, to undermine the establishment of any concrete systems. Instead of adhering to a fixed structure of rules, Blake creates his own, exemplified by his complex mythology and often deeply embedded symbolism. As mentioned earlier, the physical process of printmaking also introduces heterogeneous diversity into his oeuvre, and Blake frequently manipulated the designs and colorings of his plates between various versions. Due to this unsystematic manipulation, it becomes extremely difficult to predict patterns throughout his works or even reach definitive conclusions about Blake's intentions and overall trajectory.

To use Shklovsky's phrase, Blake effectively employs heterogeneity to "disorder the rhythm" of social practices and structures to which many in the population—even those enchained in such systems—had become desensitized. By investigating the technical prowess with which Blake defamiliarizes the binaries of white/non-white, colonizer/colonized, and male/female, I will illustrate that the only generalization one can make about Blake is his

continued persistence in destabilizing accepted social hierarchies, practices, and institutions, through his unique combination of language and image. In my subsequent analyses of “The Little Black Boy,” *America, a Prophecy*, and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, I will argue why Blake’s portrayals of the subservient binary groups illustrate with clarity the means of oppression through ideological apparatuses and reveal the contours of the enslaving contraries, prompting his reader to consider revolutionary options beyond such confines.

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- ⁴ Damon, S. Foster. *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*. Revised Edition. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988. 419.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 422.
- ⁶ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, color plate 9.
- ⁷ Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 8/3-6.
- ⁸ Blake, William. *Europe a Prophecy*. Copy G, 1794, Morgan Library and Museum. *The Blake Archive*. Eds. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. <http://www.blakearchive.org>. 28 January 2013.
- ⁹ Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 10/23-24.
- ¹⁰ Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and the State." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 133.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 176.
- ¹⁴ Blake, William. "London." *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Eds Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 41, 1, 5-8.
- ¹⁵ Johnson and Grant, "London," footnote 5, 41.
- ¹⁶ Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 16.
- ¹⁷ Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. "Introduction: Formalisms." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 3-4.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁹ Blake, William. "The Little Black Boy." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. 2nd edition. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008. 3-4.
- ²⁰ Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 16.
- ²¹ Eaves, Morris. "Blake as Conceived: Lessons in Endurance." Forward to *A Blake Dictionary. The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*. S. Foster Damon. Revised Edition. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988. XI.
- ²² Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, xiii.
- ²³ Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 20.
- ²⁴ Eaves, "Blake as Conceived," XIII.
- ²⁵ Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 19.
- ²⁶ Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, XXVI.

II. Revealing (and Contesting) the Racial Binary in Blake's "The Little Black Boy"

Published in Blake's early collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the short poem "The Little Black Boy" narrates a young black boy's perspective on his social position in the West. Breaching topics such as Christianity and domestic education, the short work highlights the racial and national discrepancies between the black lyrical voice and the "white as an angel" English child.²⁷ Although racial difference characterizes the work's central binary between white and black, Blake applies terminology associated with various subjugated entities to the black boy's situation, creating a common vocabulary of shared subservience. By first examining the boy's literal words and then delving into the political and social systems motivating—or to some degree *dictating*—his knowledge, I argue Blake presents a lyrical voice thoroughly indoctrinated by social institutions, from education to religion, which are designed to propagate the binary domination of the white race and its institutional manifestation: chattel slavery. Rather than retire his efforts after critiquing the white-black binary, however, Blake illustrates the ineffectiveness of seeking social change within the bounds of the inherited racial systems, using the strategy of defamiliarization. Applying this concept directly to Blake, Wright defines it as one that "alienates the percipient from the semiological systems that guarantee a homogenous society and so make possible the critique of that society and the contemplation of alternatives—it divides 'my system' from 'another Mans.'"²⁸ Comparing Blake's poem with the labors of another Romantic radical, Mary Wollstonecraft, and with competing theories of post-colonial nationalism, I propose that the rationalizations espoused by the little boy resemble, in many facets, the aims of compromising radicals to enact change through traditional channels and to challenge the hierarchy of the binary from within rather than overthrow it altogether.

“The Little Black Boy” articulates one boy’s naïve acceptance of his binding social role. Though cognizant of the inherent inequality of his situation, the black boy accepts his lot by regurgitating institutional rationalizations demoting the black race. Composed of seven four-line stanzas, the work’s diction and sentence structure attempt to mimic the speech of an actual young boy, reading easily due to the poet’s use of a simple rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter. Because of this strict regularity, however, any derivations from the pattern garner significance, such as the slant rhyme in stanza four between “beams of love” and “shady grove,” which intensifies the black boy’s distance from Christian love.²⁹ Devoid of superfluous or flowery poetic devices, the poem clearly articulates the boy’s rationales for accepting his inferior social role, but his dogged faith in the systems of education and religion beg the reader to inquire how the boy originally acquired such justifications.

To characterize the boy’s innocence, Blake illustrates the extent to which the speaker places absolute credence in certain inherited characteristics—the title alone defines the boy by race, gender, and physical stature. The first stanza also introduces determinants based on nationality and geography: “My mother bore me in the southern wild,/ And I am black, but O! my soul is white;/ White as an angel is the English child:/ But I am black as if bereav'd of light.”³⁰ Although these characteristics describe the speaker, they also clearly indicate what the boy is *not*, notably white and from a “civilized” English city. Constructed through parallel similes using “as,” the first stanza’s initial comparison likens whiteness to a celestial being—an angel—whereas blackness is characterized only as an absence, a supposition more dehumanizing than equating the darker race with evil or ignorance. According to scholars Johnson and Grant, the child fulfills the role of the “invincible innocent,” whose group, defined collectively, are individuals who “despite their circumstances, retain their spiritual resilience and fresh outlook;

with joy and contentment they love their enemies and dream of a better world.”³¹ The creation of these accepting innocents, however, facilitates the continuation of the systems enslaving them because neither anger nor the rational desire for equality—often impetuses to political action—enter the consciousness of the little boy.

To establish the contrary sides of the white/black racial dichotomy, Blake, through the boy, conflates whiteness with religious goodness (“White as an angel is the English child”), which implies that any non-white race, “bereav’d of light,” lacks the ability to attain elevated moral status. The author constructs the dark “other” through *essentialism*, which posits that shared intrinsic features unite group members. Understanding the self only through biological and social similarities, however, incites comparison between disparate groups, a phenomenon literary theorist Jonathon Culler explains, stating “the process of identity-formation not only foregrounds some differences and neglects others; it takes an internal difference or division and projects it as a difference between individuals or groups.”³² Later invoked as a strategy by anti-colonial nationalists, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, essentialist politics can laud the exemplary qualities of a particular race or ethnicity but often at the cost of perpetuating discourse about the inherent separateness and incompatibility between different populations. Though keenly interested in the representations of racial groups, both internally and externally, Blake never vocalized a concrete political stance on the issues of race and slavery; his defamiliarizing portrayal of such conflicts throughout his oeuvre, however, elucidates his skepticism in essentialist politics as well as his underlying radicalism.

Expanding his characterization of the white/black difference beyond printed word, Blake also created the designs and figures accompanying his works, including those in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Spanning two pages, Blake’s illustration for “The Little Black Boy”

represents two scenes of the child with influential adults. In the first, he sits beneath a tree with a dark woman, presumably his mother; on the following page, he stands alongside the English boy and a God-like figure in a pastoral setting. The second design provides a visualization of the poem's final stanza, which promises a heavenly reward for worldly passivity: "I'll shade him [the English child] from the heat till he can bear,/ To lean in joy upon our fathers knee./ And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,/ And be like him and he will then love me."³³



*The Little Black Boy, Object 8, 1795.*³⁴



*The Little Black Boy, Object 9, 1795.*³⁵

Although the plates' coloring varied between versions, in both examples the boy's blackness is emphasized, and the undifferentiated shade not only erases any individualization of facial features but also equates the boy with a shadow—a connotation strengthened by his placement directly behind the white child on the second page. Scholar Saree Makdisi cautions,

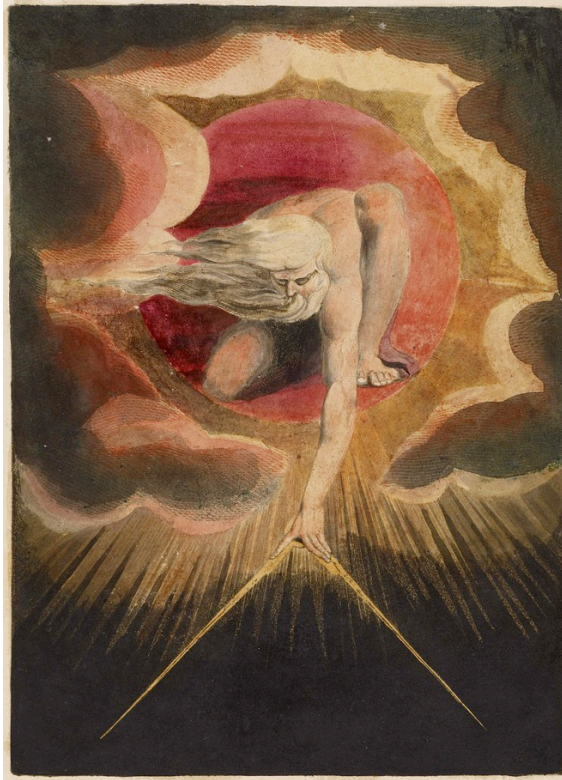
however, against drawing too many conclusions from a single plate: “The stable self-containment of a single illuminated book is superseded by the wide virtual network of traces among different plates, different copies, different illuminated books...not always activated in the same way.”³⁶ Makdisi’s point again highlights how Blake defamiliarizes and destabilizes any interpretations by providing many variable images, which together provide a wide range of possible readings. In each copy of this poem, however, there exist many traditional Christian signifiers: the central figure of the older man holds a shepherd’s staff, and the position of the sun directly behind his head creates the illusion of a halo, which further conflates the ideals of light and whiteness with Christianity.

Understood as an incarnation of God, the male figure does not, however, free the children from their races as promised by the black boy’s mother. God’s conflation with the sun, in fact, affirms his affinity with the previously painful “beams of love” that the black mother and son learned to endure, underscoring the deity’s intentional imposition of racial inequality on Earth. By allowing racial inequality to exist, does Blake’s deity violate the biblical avowal that God created man in his own image? Like the author’s previous characterization of the black race as a bereaved absence, this acceptance of inequality highlights the limitations of the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century definitions of “man,” which certainly did not incorporate difference, whether racial, sexual, or national. By selectively delineating the boundaries of humanity, powerful figures—both the actual leaders of the Church and the imagined deities they constructed—rationalized racial inequality by dehumanizing non-white groups, including the little black boy and his mother.

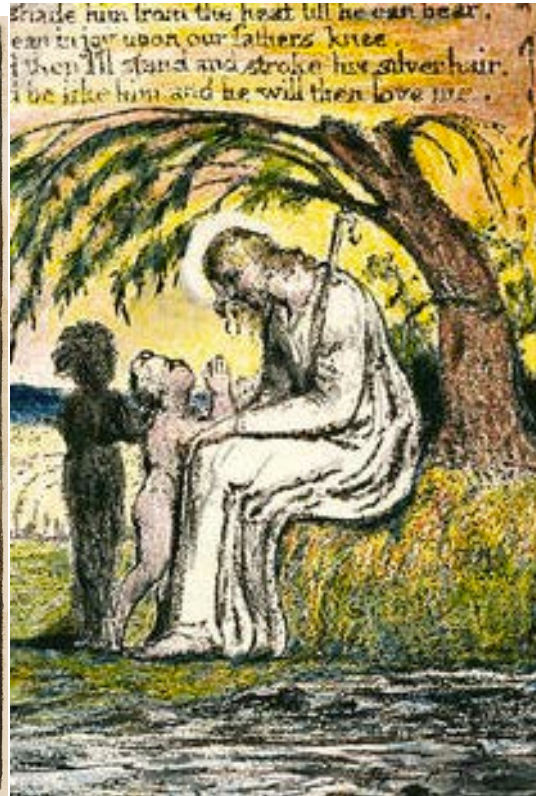
Illustrating the work’s critique of organized religion, the deity’s placement under the tree has extensive biblical significance: first, as the Tree of Good and Evil, this natural form

embodies the contraries, expressed in terms of light and dark, driving the child's reasoning throughout the poem. By illustrating the fallacies inherent in the little boy's dichotomous logic, Blake insinuates that the strict moral divide between good and evil espoused through Church doctrine is fallen and corrupted. Recognized also as the Tree of Knowledge, the connotations of this designation further highlight Blake's objection to the current educational systems. The tree and the aged man nearly form a single entity, implying the older figure owns knowledge not only concerning his position of social power but also of his complicit role in the little boy's deception. The branches of the Tree of Knowledge dangle directly above the black boy's head, but the child—still enslaved and innocent—does not equate their presence with the potential to gain additional, less-biased understanding.

By accepting (and even perpetuating) the hierarchical binary through Christian pedagogy, the God figure also embodies Blake's mythical character Urizen by desiring to continue the cyclical system of enslavement. Urizen represents intellect and, as Alexander S. Gourlay explains, "various forms of rationalism, literalism, and materialism."³⁷ As highlighted earlier, the figure slouches over the children, echoing the position of the overhanging tree, and he is also superimposed on the sun; both tree and sun have important connotations in Blake's complex mythology and shed additional light on the enslavement of the little black boy. Several similarities exist between the depiction of Urizen on the frontispiece of *Europe a Prophecy* and Blake's aged figure in "The Little Black Boy:" both men are white male adults, positioned in front of the sun, and they attempt to direct human action through reason. The explicit emanation of Urizen, however, appears more sinister and aggressive, a supposition strengthened by his use of a physical geometric tool—the compass—to incite a system of reason rather than the verbiage and social mores applied by the unnamed Urizenic figure.



Europe a Prophecy, 1794.³⁸



The Little Black Boy, Object 9, (detail), 1795.³⁹

Europe's aggressive rendering of the enslaving figure is in line with the augmentation of Urizen's control of the world in *The Four Zoas*, in which he institutes both Empire and the trafficking of slaves as an embodiment of Church-State ideology.⁴⁰ Makdisi reconciles the mythology of Urizen with the entrapment of the little black boy in the system of slavery and oppression: "In the illuminated books, the supposed freedom of the sovereign individual is shown to be compromised by the extent to which selves and others exist in a dispersed and mutually dependent network that is not really compatible with a discourse of identity and difference."⁴¹ Although the Urizenic figure lacks physical tools, the rationales proffered by Blake's speaker illustrate that Urizen's authority stems from the ideology imparted by education, both institutionally through the Church and domestically from the mother. By conflating religious and rational justifications for the continuation of racial inequality, the central man demonstrates the complexities of the systems enslaving the black boy.

With the stakes of the white/black binary clearly delineated not only through the boy's rationale for his own inferior position but also by Blake's visual rendering of the tainted heavenly reality, the question of "how" still remains. Through what channels can the white, hierarchically superior contingent convince the lower black group to accept (and labor within) an unequal binary? Blake answers this question through the words of the little boy, who traces the history of his own education to his mother; he then repeats her pacifying rationales to the English child, thus perpetuating false justifications. By exhibiting the effectiveness of the didactic strategies employed to preserve this racial binary, the poet defamiliarizes ideological education and its accompanying systems of reason by identifying them as the breeding grounds for continued racial enslavement.

First locating his education within the domestic sphere, the little boy presents his mother as the sole source of his knowledge, stating in the second stanza, "My mother taught me underneath a tree."⁴² A direct parallel to the poem's opening line, "My mother bore me in the southern wild," both lines give the mother agency over her son and place their interactions in an abstract locale far from the strict borders of the English state. Again, the Urizenic tree encompasses the figural pair, insinuating the mother's knowledge is, too, a product of ideological interpellation. Highlighting the impression of the maternal lessons, Blake composes stanzas three through five in her voice but abandons quotation marks, ensuring the reader understands this section not as a memory but as the son's recapitulation of his mother's reasoning.

In alignment with the Urizenic system of indoctrination, the rationales proposed by both the mother and the little boy intertwine reason and religious reward to understand their fate as slaves. Employing natural imagery, the mother conflates the sun with God, who she defines as the giver of light, which echoes Blake's visual transposition of the aged figure on the sun.

Similar to the equivalency of light with whiteness in lines 3-4, the mother instructs her child to “bear the beams of love” so he will no longer be “bereav’d of light” in the future, effectively portraying whiteness as a reward from God for obedient behavior during the temporary trial of inhabiting “black bodies and this sun-burnt face”.⁴³ Characterizing blackness as a cloud, she continues, “For when our souls have learn’d the heat to bear/ The cloud will vanish,” a promise rationalizing the boy’s earlier plea, “but O! my soul is white,” because he believes he has achieved the requirements for being filled with the light (and whiteness) given by God, though the Blake’s illustration of heaven still portrays the black boy in his darker hue.⁴⁴

Although the little boy does not learn under the auspices of a state-administered education system, the education he receives in the private sphere demonstrates Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses theory. As explained earlier, Althusser posits that state power emanates from one State Apparatus (SA) and many Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Repeating a rationale intended to pacify the enslaved, the mother accepts race-based slavery by focusing on its temporality and the prospect of a heavenly reward. Not only does this justification continue wage-less proletariat production, but it also ties in with doctrines associated with the most powerful ISA of Blake’s time: the Church.

Like the boy’s earlier characterization of his blackness as a temporary absence of whiteness, the mother describes the ascent to heaven as an escape from a dark cloud, stating, “The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice./ Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,/ And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.”⁴⁵ By learning to bear the burden of blackness while on Earth, the mother acknowledges the inferiority of her race and acts accordingly, constantly anticipating, however, the reward of a racial transformation after her bodily death. Althusser traces this mode of religious indoctrination via the family back to the

feudal mode of production in the Middle Ages, and Blake illustrates the continued propagation of this system in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁶ Following his repetition of the mother's words, the little boy states, "Thus did my mother say and kissed me,/ And thus I say to little English boy."⁴⁷ The direct passage of knowledge without individual rumination first attests to the proselytizing power of these state apparatuses and second to the characters' inescapable entrenchment in the system. Rather than seeking to ameliorate their situation or escape slavery, the mother only passes along coping rationales based on future religious hope.

The ideological model of mother-to-child education propagated in "The Little Black Boy" engages with didactic ideas proposed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, first published in 1792. Although Wollstonecraft addresses the inequality of the gender binary, she employs rhetoric from racial discourse to compare the confinement of women in the uneducated, domestic sphere to the practice of chattel slavery. Yoking together racial and sexual bondage through institutional learning in "The Little Black Boy," Blake offers a concrete visualization of the current methods of enslavement and false education lamented in the abstract by Wollstonecraft. Published two years before *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* launches its argument from fellow radical Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, which itself answers Edmund Burke's 1790 conservative treatise entitled *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.⁴⁸ Each derivation from Burke's original essay becomes increasingly radical, and Wollstonecraft's insertion of women into the argument breaches traditional standards for political discourse. Lamenting the lack of serious educational options for women, the author compares the immuration of women in the home to the transient beauty of flowers, proclaiming in her introduction, "for like the flowers planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty... I attribute [this] to a false system of education, gathered

from the books written on this subject by men...considering females rather as women than human creatures.”⁴⁹ Paralleling Blake’s speaker’s primary identification as a black laborer rather than an individual, Wollstonecraft charges that society values women only for their aesthetic appeal and reproductive functions, not as sentient individuals capable of contributing more than beauty and babies.

This acknowledgment of women’s degradation to a status beneath humanity again mirrors Blake’s description of the little boy’s blackness in line four—“bereav’d of light”—as an absence of humanity: both stem from the awareness of certain social standards privileging another population, whether white, male, or both. Arguing equal education has the potential to rectify the gender inequality, Wollstonecraft posits that teaching women to think independently and rationally comprises a mutually beneficial solution to all parties. First negating the legitimacy of current means of refining women, she boldly states, “My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.”⁵⁰ Although she associates women’s lack of rationality negatively with the state of childhood, Wollstonecraft lauds the actual time of childhood as an extremely malleable, but short, period in the Rousseauan sense: “A child very soon contracts a benumbing indolence of mind, which he has seldom sufficient vigour afterwards to shake off, when he only asks a question instead of seeking for information, and then relies implicitly on the answer he receives.”⁵¹ The child as a *tabula rasa* has endless positive possibilities for the instilment of knowledge and virtue at a young age, which underscores Wollstonecraft’s insistence on early education for boys and girls together. The prospect of inculcating false truths at an earlier age, however, would have devastating consequences since future correction is often hindered by what Wollstonecraft’s

labels the “benumbing indolence of mind.” Blake illustrates the outcome of this indoctrination—a state from which individuals must be defamiliarized—through the regurgitated rationales espoused by the little black boy.

Whereas Wollstonecraft imagines education to be the ultimate solution to gender inequality, Blake highlights the reality of education’s effects on the racial binary, which certainly do not attain Wollstonecraft’s expectations. In “The Little Black Boy,” Blake demonstrates such an educational failure by presenting the passage of knowledge as an activity in memorization versus critical interpretation. He illustrates the extent to which the boy is enslaved in the system—the child never thinks to question the authority of his mother and mimics her by repeating his understanding to the white child: “Thus did my mother say and kissed me./ And thus I say to the little English boy.”⁵² Whereas Wollstonecraft has an optimistic outlook for the reformation of English education, Blake remains wary, quite cognizant of the deeply embedded prejudices within the framework of the entire educational system, both public and domestic, and its role in preserving established ideologies.

The inconsistencies within Wollstonecraft’s essay, such as the problems of family education and her acknowledgement of male physical superiority, underscore the extent to which she tempers radicalism to present an educational alternative for women without transgressing the hierarchical gender order already governing English society. Scholar Helen P. Bruder explains Wollstonecraft’s moderation by first referencing the following passage from *Vindication*: “Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more reasonable mothers...”⁵³ Because Wollstonecraft remains acutely aware of her hostile male audience, she attempts to vindicate women within the bounds of the existing patriarchal system, which, through its binary

definition, necessitates female subordination. By appealing to the “understanding men who are at once models to be emulated,” Wollstonecraft undermines her more radical argument for the inescapable influence of the current education systems, producing a string of contraries in her conclusion.⁵⁴

Although highly interested in the tension between contrary states, such as innocence and experience, Blake viewed Wollstonecraft’s contradictions not as engaging but rather as limiting because she refuses to expand her ideas beyond the current system. In this way, Wollstonecraft becomes like the mother in “The Little Black Boy:” though cognizant of the direness of her situation, she offers unrealistic solutions to others and does not seek to change the intrinsic nature of the prevailing institutions. Textual evidence in the work indicates Blake agrees with Wollstonecraft’s identification of a serious inequality regarding the treatment and education of women in English society; however, the poem also manifests the shortcomings of both the current system and her proposed plan by demonstrating the ineffectiveness of seeking change within the bounds of an existing binary. By pursuing compromise with the hierarchically superior faction, the subservient group—whether non-male or non-white—must accept the continuation of some of the original rules defining the binary, such as Wollstonecraft’s assertion that men would find educated women “more observant daughters, more reasonable mothers.”

This correlation between education, enlightened advancement, and compromise characterizes another debate concerning a racially charged binary: the efforts of colonized intellectuals to create new post-colonial nations in the wake of European Imperialism. Though these theoretical propositions date much later than Blake and Wollstonecraft’s publications, the failures of native, educated intellectuals to enact change in the hierarchical systems of governance through conciliation and assimilation echo the abstract plans of Wollstonecraft’s

Vindication. Similar but in a converse strategy, the essentialist politics of Blake's black boy resemble the strategies of those like Senghor who themselves are colonized intellectuals and nationalist leaders attempting to combine political activism and intellectual production.⁵⁵ By attempting to glorify racial difference rather than downplay its significance, Senghor also works within the binary construction, striving merely to reverse the hierarchy instead of moving beyond its strictures.

In "The Little Black Boy," Blake not only highlights the essentialist, homogeneous politics fueling the speaker's primary identification with his race but also demonstrates the boy's perception of the white race through his interactions with the white child, who also bears the representative burden of his entire racial group. Blake's dichotomous portrayal of the race binary in the poem foreshadows later post-colonial discourse homogenizing the black race, such as Senghor's concept of *negritude*. Analyzing the tendency of all subaltern populations—nonelite or subordinated social groups—to homogenize, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains how the isolation of one particular consciousness can be employed as a political tool. Editors Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean explain:

The crux of her reading of the texts of Subaltern Studies is that in practice the group are more deconstructive than they might admit. Spivak sees their positing of a theoretically and historically possible, if finally irrevocable, subaltern consciousness as a form of "strategic essentialism." Particularly because the group write as if aware of their complicity with subaltern insurgency—they do not only work *on* it—Spivak praises their "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."⁵⁶

Demonstrating the application of the essentialist strategy as a political apparatus (albeit one struggling against Althusser's ISAs), Spivak underscores the constructed boundaries of "the group," which are still subject to the ideological assumptions of society and the State. Like Wollstonecraft's women, Spivak's subaltern groups put forth stereotypical characteristics as part of their argument for political equality, which only validates the characterization of them as intrinsically "different."

In addition to the espousal of inherent differences between groups, the goal of progress through education for marginalized groups verbalized by Wollstonecraft and Senghor (and theorized by Spivak) relies implicitly on linearity: a concept defined by a single dimension and dictated temporally by "sequential development."⁵⁷ Idealizing the realities of post-colonial nations, Senghor lauds Africa's temporal "progress" vis-à-vis international cooperation; he emphasizes what Africa has been able to contribute to the Western gamut of knowledge and culture. Both Senghor and Wollstonecraft underscore the benefits gained or to-be-gained from cooperative change in the binary for the already-superior party. Senghor also assumes a post-colonial world, and although the official institutions of colonialism have expired, historian Robert Young cautions against such conclusiveness, warning, "history has not yet arrived at the post-imperial era. That moment is an ultimate aim of post-colonial critique."⁵⁸ Simultaneously, Senghor highlights difference by positing essentialist values of African culture, and he diminishes opposition by emphasizing affinities in philosophical and scientific innovations. By pursuing two strategies concurrently, many critics, including his contemporary [theorist Frantz Fanon], argue that his essentialist strategies in fact mirror the racialization and continental dynamics of colonialism itself.⁵⁹

In “The Little Black Boy,” Blake lampoons such linearity, parodying the direct passage of knowledge first from mother to son and then from son to white English child. Blake defamiliarizes this repetitive practice by highlighting the irrationality of teaching without true understanding. Though he does not posit an alternative in this work, Blake illustrates the extent to which the boy remains shackled by rhetoric of progress and linear time, such as the poem’s comprehensive treatment of the boy’s life, ranging from his birth to his imagined death and ultimate ascent to heaven. Although this poem highlights the limitations of linear causality by demonstrating its negative, enchainning effects, many of Blake’s other works, such as *Laocoön* and *Jerusalem*, explore alternative, non-linear ways of negotiating established and hierarchical systems, exemplifying the heterogeneous alternatives to the homogenous march of time. To elucidate Blake’s disorganization of linearity, scholar Julia M. Wright analyzes his use of the poetic bard as a temporally displaced voice, explaining, “The atemporal and iterative framework in which the bard’s role is defined resonates with a pattern that is repeated throughout Blake’s writings: an instant operating outside of chronological time erupts to disrupt linearity, while iteration destabilizes sequence by establishing achronic connections.”⁶⁰ Later in *America, A Prophecy*, Blake explicitly inserts the Bard to disrupt the colonists’ linear conceptualization of revolution, which I will discuss further in Section Three.

Blake’s belief in the ineffectiveness of linear arguments for enacting social change has applications for the racial binary in the form of the post-colonial project. In opposition to the essentialism espoused by Senghor as the answer to the colonizer/colonized contrary, theorist Homi K. Bhabha argues nationalism requires that the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of national culture.”⁶¹ Unofficial and individualized, these signifiers of culture form the antithesis of the ideological methodology through which Blake’s

little black boy understands his relationship to the English child. Bhabha's notion of randomly generated culture and hybridity contrast with the social system displayed in "The Little Black Boy," which illustrates the collective culmination of essentialist politics into a homogeneous society. Like Althusser's model of Ideological State Apparatuses, interpellating individuals into the governing "rules of the game" via state, religious, and public education, perpetuates the enslaving system. Whereas Wollstonecraft and Senghor strive to restructure the relationships among defined populations, Blake, Bhabha, and others advocate for an evaluation and imaginative reconceptualization of the groups themselves.

By illustrating the shortcomings of linearity and the false ideologies rationalizing racial difference, Blake defamiliarizes inherited notions of the white/black binary in "The Little Black Boy," just as later theorists reconsider the most effective strategy of post-colonial nationalism in the wake of the colonizer/colonized binary. Instead of reiterating ideological knowledge like the little black boy, the works promote a re-visitation of foundational ideological assumptions, often juxtaposing typically oppositional themes and characteristics. The resulting "strangeness" characterizing much of Blake's later oeuvre enables readers to explore possibilities beyond mere binaries of race, gender, and nationality, and prompts them to re-imagine linearity and causality. By turning to individual, unique experiences rather than ideological constructions and representative characteristics, those seeking change can more effectively combat the intricate and efficient systems of hierarchical domination as illustrated by Blake and naively articulated by the enchained lyrical voice in "The Little Black Boy."

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- ²⁷ Blake, William. "The Little Black Boy." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. 2nd edition. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008. 3.
- ²⁸ Wright, Julia M. *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. 59.
- ²⁹ Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 14, 16.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-4.
- ³¹ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 9.
- ³² Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford University Press, 2000. 117.
- ³³ Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 25-28.
- ³⁴ Blake, William. "The Little Black Boy." *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Copy L, Object 8, 1795, Yale Center for British Art. *The Blake Archive*. Eds. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. <http://www.blakearchive.org>. 9 April 2013.
<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=songsie.l.illbk.08&java=no>.
- ³⁵ Blake, "The Little Black Boy," Object 9, 1795.
- ³⁶ Makdisi, Saree. *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. 166.
- ³⁷ Gourlay, Alexander S. "An Emergency Online Glossary of Terms, Names, and Concepts in Blake." *The Blake Archive*. Revised and expanded version of "A Glossary of Terms, Names, and Concepts in Blake" in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pages 272-87.
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- ⁴⁰ Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, 421.
- ⁴¹ Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, 6.
- ⁴² Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 5.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14, 4, 15.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-8, 2.
- ⁴⁵ Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 18-20.
- ⁴⁶ Althusser, "Ideology and the State," 150-151.
- ⁴⁷ Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 21-22.
- ⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft [electronic resource]*. Eds. Janet Todd and Marrison Butler. Charlottesville: IntelLex Corporation, 2005. 63.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 230.
- ⁵² Blake, "The Little Black Boy," 21-22.
- ⁵³ Bruder, Helen P. *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion*. London: Macmillan Press, 1997. 112.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

⁵⁵ Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman. Introduction to “Theorizing Colonised Cultures and Anti-Colonial Resistance” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, 23.

⁵⁶ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean. New York: Routledge, 1996. 204-5.

⁵⁷ "Linearity." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2011. Web. 1 December 2012.

⁵⁸ Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001. 27.

⁵⁹ Williams and Chrisman, Introduction, 24.

⁶⁰ Wright, Blake, *Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*, 35.

⁶¹ Bhabha, Homi K. “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.” *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 297.

III. Colonization, Revolution, and the Consequences in *America, A Prophecy*

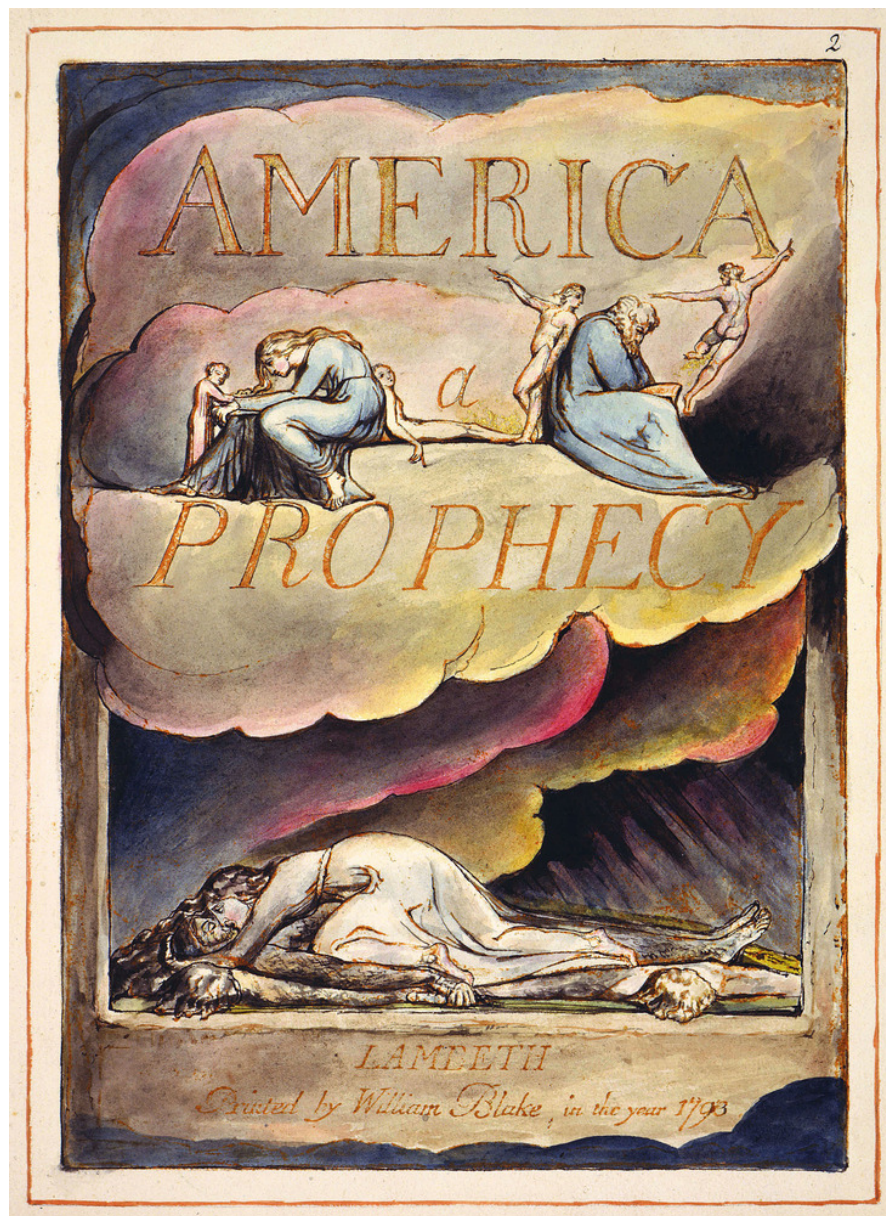
A visionary retelling of recent political events, Blake's illuminated book *America, A Prophecy* combines historical facts and figures with the poet's own mythological imaginings to trace the advent, unfolding, and international consequences of the American Revolution. Although the title proclaims to offer prophetic knowledge, scholars Johnson and Grant caution that "Prophecy of this sort makes connections between past and present, provides insight into underlying motives, raises alarms about likely consequences, and envisions fresh possibilities, but it does not predict an inevitable future."⁶² For Blake, prophets alert others to the implications of current actions, emphasizing that "If you go on So, the result is So;" thus, the revolution in *America* foreshadows the potential benefits (and drawbacks) of upending an established political system.⁶³ To ensure his readers grasp the allusions to tangible historical happenings, Blake references "America" in the title and explicitly mentions colonial revolutionaries such as Nathaniel Greene, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin—"warlike men, who rise in the silent night."⁶⁴ To defamiliarize and compound these factual references, however, Blake inserts his own mythological characters in the narrative to symbolize the main warring factions: England and her rebellious American colonies.

Whereas the figure of Urizen in "The Little Black Boy" recalls images of an aged Christian God imparting the Church's particular racial ideology, in *America*, Blake aligns Urizen with the English political state as "The Guardian Prince of Albion."⁶⁵ Still a manifestation of enslaving Reason, Urizen strives to crush America's revolutionary fervor and preserve England's colonial dominance. In keeping with historical fact, however, the American colonists do overthrow British rule, achieving their goal through the leadership of Orc—another Blakean

mythological figure who exudes rebellious energy as the binary antithesis to Urizen's restrictive rationality. Rendered in intricately intertwined text and images, the pair's brawl, which is physical, philosophical, and political, allows Blake to narrate the active clash and eventual turnover of the binary system of colonizer/colonized. Although Orc and Urizen initially represent mutually exclusive opposites, Blake characterizes each in interestingly overlapping ways, which forces the reader to question the diametrical distinction between anarchy and absolutism. By employing tactics of defamiliarization, Blake prompts the reader not only to consider anew the American Revolution but also to establish causal links between Orc's excess of revolutionary fury and the mounting problems plaguing post-revolutionary France.

First published for sale in October 1793, *America, A Prophecy* appeared less than a month after the onset of the French Reign of Terror during period of extreme political fear in Britain for the stability of its own monarchical government. The multitude of political subjects and references in Blake's earlier collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience* indicates his fascination with governmental structures and the ways in which they enact and maintain ideological control over their subjects; thus, the consecutive revolutions in America and France provided ample fodder for the poet's imagination. Before 1793, Blake penned the poetic narrative *The French Revolution* and designed the title page for a work to be called *The American War*, though neither was published.⁶⁶ With the completion of *America*, Blake produced a prophetic work that was both a concentrated inquiry into the specific events of the American Revolution and the first illuminated work in an interconnected series of continental prophecies. These include *Europe, A Prophecy* and the "Asia" and "Africa" sections of *The Song of Los*; each investigates the colonizer/colonized binary in a different geographical location. To produce each continental work, Blake used copperplates measuring nine by seven inches,

enlarging the page size from his previous designs.⁶⁷ *America* is also the first of Blake's "Lambeth books," a title that denotes the place of publication—an area of London south of the Thames where Blake resided from 1790-1800.⁶⁸ Coloring only four of the fifteen copies of *America*, Blake continually modified each version before its production, allowing slight pictorial discrepancies between editions to defamiliarize the readers further, preventing them from becoming too comfortable with any representative account of the American Revolution.



America, A Prophecy, Frontispiece, 1821.⁶⁹

Asserting the work's title in large, bold lettering against a backdrop of fluffy clouds, the frontispiece for *America, A Prophecy* illustrates several figures positioned in two general spaces: earth and sky. White clouds faintly outlined in red against a navy sky form the backdrop for the title's capitalized red lettering. Dressed in long, light blue robes, two figures—one male and one female—bend over books, focusing their attention intently on their reading materials, facing away from each other. Johnson and Grant posit that these figures are a sibyl and a prophet engrossed in earlier prophetic books; Blake, however, seeks to redirect their understanding of the revolutionary history through his own subsequent narrative. To divert their attention, smaller, nude figures surround them, touching their bodies and pointing toward the word “AMERICA” as well as the corner of the page, as if directing the larger figures toward the enclosed text. Below the clouds, a woman in a flowing white dress kisses a fallen soldier, who is himself lying on other slaughtered revolutionaries. These earthly figures are rendered only in gray scale with red details, a color choice insinuating the soldiers' freshly spilled blood, and Blake also tinges the lowest edges of the clouds with red as if they reflect this bloodshed. The smaller figures in the clouds are also colored with red details, as if they too are wounded revolutionaries attempting to capture the attention of the larger figures.

The overall color scheme—red and white with tinges of blue—certainly references the American flag, but it also foreshadows the French Revolution, famously symbolized by the *tricolore*. In addition to the political prophecy, the abundance of red coupled with the erotic posture of the dead soldier and woman references sexual intercourse, most likely of a violent nature. Such a reading both lauds sexual freedom as the means to overthrow oppression but also highlights the corporeal pain (to the extent of death) associated with the erotic act. Mimicking the physical closeness of the man and woman, some of the clouds partially descend to the earth,

which negates an absolute division between Urizen's sky and Orc's earth. As Blake emphasizes in multiple works, progress requires the continual intersection of contrary forces, and this frontispiece illustrates such clashes in the environmental elements, sexual position, and color mixtures.

The frontispiece's basic division of space, however, mimics the binary relationship between *America's* two main mythological figures—Orc, the champion of the colonial rebellion, and Urizen, the notorious enslaver laboring in this instance for England's continued political dominance. Introduced as “red Orc,” the figure breaks out of a fourteen-year bondage in the Preludium, inciting revolutionary zeal in the oppressed American colonists: “Fury! rage! madness! in a wind swept through America/ And the red flames of Orc that folded roaring fierce around/ the angry shores, and the fierce rushing of th'inhabitants together.”⁷⁰ Consistently associated with earthly citizens and elements, particularly fire, Orc occupies the lower half of the frontispiece as the spirit of revolt for which the dead soldiers have been martyred. Possibly derived from a number of sources, the name “Orc” can reference “orc” (a sea monster), “Orcus” (hell), “cor” (heart), “orchis” (testicle), or some combination; Johnson and Grant aptly characterize Orc as “the pent-up energy and desire in human nature and human history that, if held down too long, inevitably erupts in violent action.”⁷¹

Above Orc's violent physical reality, Urizen inhabits the upper half of the image, pursuing his colonial agenda through the agency of the “guardian Prince of Albion.” Blake initially identified this Urizenic agent as King George III, but he later censored those copies for his own political protection.⁷² Though not yet present in a figural form, Urizen is manifest through the studious prophet and sibyl, the reading material, and his associative clouds, which I discussed in Sections One and Two in relation to the frontispiece to *Europe, A Prophecy*.

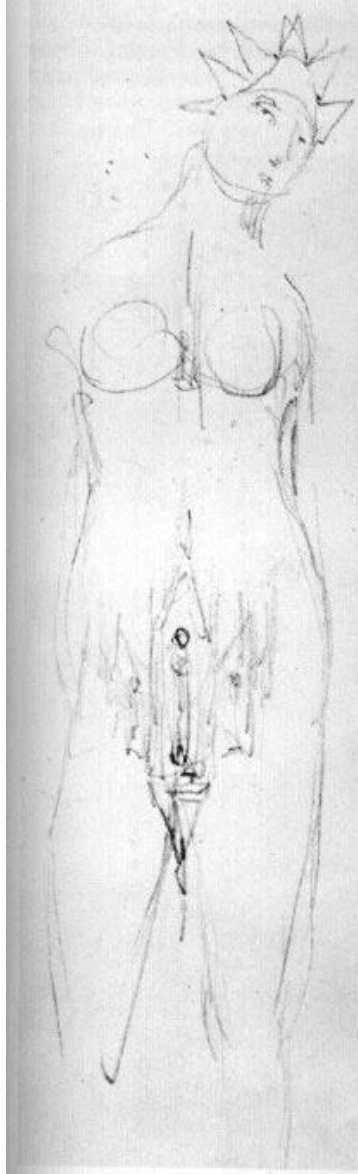
Though *America* contains the subtitle “A Prophecy,” Blake’s understanding of prophecy relies less on predicting the future than recasting the implications of the past and present, stating that “Prophets, in the modern sense of the word, never existed. Jonah was no prophet in the modern sense, for his prophecy of Nineveh failed.”⁷³ Because the larger figures are engrossed in previous prophecies, they are consumed in the very Urizenic system Blake attempts to defamiliarize and represent in his new, highly imaginative retelling.

The two figures on *America*’s frontispiece recall Michelangelo’s famed prophets and sibyls on the Sistine Ceiling, which also exhibit somewhat contorted positions, loom large in relation to their surrounding figures, and accompany prophetic texts. Michelangelo positioned his prophets and sibyls between didactic biblical scenes, and they became canonical archetypes praised for their hyper-realistic anatomy, dynamic twisting positions, and expressive individualized faces. As a student in Henry Paris’ drawing school, a young Blake had not only encountered Michelangelo’s art but had proffered praise for his classicizing style, writing in the catalogue for an exhibition of his own work in 1809, that artists “who endeavour to raise up a style against Rafael, Mich. Angelo, and the Antique” attempt to destroy art.⁷⁴ Scholar David Erdman recalls an encounter between Blake and his artistic adviser, who pressured him to study Lebrun and Rubens instead of the “stiff” and “unfinished” works of Raphael and Michelangelo, at which the young Blake balked: “These things that you call Finishd are not Even Begun...how can they then, be Finishd?”⁷⁵ By removing Michelangelo’s figural designs from the realm of Catholic ideology and redirecting their attention from the old, false pages of biblical prophecies, Blake emulates the great Renaissance artist’s formal style while invigorating his supposedly “stiff” figures with energy through multiple iterations—such as his multiple images of Orc—and a completely new historical and mythological prophecy of revolution.

The resemblance of *America's* frontal figures to Michelangelo's iconic ceiling highlights Blake's awareness of and keen interest in Christian iconography and tradition. In "The Little Black Boy," Blake inserts biblical imagery and critiques the ideological apparatuses employed by the Church, which prompts an investigation of Blake's personal religious beliefs. How does Blake understand the seemingly exclusive relationship among unrestricted sex, political revolution, and Christian tradition? Elements of the poet's biography elucidate his atypical portrayals of sex and religion, and Scholar Marsha Keith Schuchard expounds on this subject:

From the evidence of his drawings, notebooks, and illuminated prophecies, it is clear that Blake maintained a life-long commitment to radical theories of sexuality....Blake's own confidence in his sexual credo was possibly rooted in his early family life, for his father allegedly associated with Swedenborgians, Moravians, and other "irregular" Freemasons. From each of these societies, with overlapping memberships, young Blake could have imbibed the theosophy of desire that fueled his visionary art...⁷⁶

Blake and his parents were active during the controversial "Sifting period" of the Moravian Church, in which one of the leaders, Nicholas Ludwig Zinzendorf, injected Kabbalistic theories of earthly and heavenly copulation in the espoused theology. Encouraging adherents to venerate (and actively exercise) their sexual organs, Zinzendorf explained that God and the universe are composed of dynamic sexual potencies (the *sephiroth*) that interact with each other and produce orgasmic joy when in perfect equilibrium.⁷⁷ Procuring evidence of Moravianism's influence on Blake, scholar Peter Ackroyd cites a pencil sketch in which Blake depicts a "naked woman whose genitals have been transformed into an altar or chapel, with an erect penis forming a kind of holy statue at the center," providing a clear illustration of Zinzendorfan sexual religion.⁷⁸



Blake, William. From *Vala, or The Four Zoas*. “The Golden Chapel.” 1797.⁷⁹

Rather than elevating religion as an abstract idea, Blake physically inserts the Church into the female body. In this drawing, the superimposition of religion on the female’s genitalia is a definitively erotic action, and the union produces a hermaphroditic image of a figure with both gender’s sexual characteristics—highly emphasized breasts, a vagina, and an erect penis. By juxtaposing these features, Blake emphasizes the Zinzendorffian idea that the interaction of sexual organs produces the most orgasmic joy. Therefore, in this image, Blake not only

advocates for open and all-inclusive human sexuality but also asserts that the Church should participate in the path to sensual joy rather than function as a propagator of intangible, insensate reason.

Just as Blake evidently believed that art could never be finished, he posits that true revolution—both political and sexual—has no conclusion but is rather a continuous interchange between clashing contraries. Though *America* illustrates Orc and the colonists as victors, the text must be understood in the larger context of the continental works, especially its relationship with *Europe, A Prophecy*, which expounds on the excesses of revolutionary fervor afflicting France. Johnson and Grant explain: “In *America*, Orc’s gorgeous rhetoric of rebellion and new life overpowers the empty fulminations of Albion’s Angel, agent of Urizen. But in *Europe*, the sequel, Orc’s revolutionary spirit is subdued until the very end, when in ‘the vineyards of red France appear’d the light of his fury.’ ”⁸⁰ Paralleling Blake’s meticulous attention to detail and his willingness to alter text and images between versions, the poet refused to accept finality and constantly sought to elucidate causal relationships and connections between often distant subjects and events.

Beginning his narrative *in media res* with a Preludium, Blake introduces red Orc as a “hairy youth” who has been enchained for a period of “fourteen suns,” reliant on a “shadowy” virgin to provide sustenance.⁸¹ In the accompanying image, Orc sits before the mouth of a cave with knees drawn completely to his chest and arms wrapped around his legs. The majority of his anatomy remains concealed, likening his appearance to an inert natural boulder more than a man. Repeatedly associating the nameless virgin with iron implements, Blake states: “His food she brought in iron baskets, his drink in cups of iron/. . . silent she stood as night;/ For never from her iron tongue could voice or sound arise.”⁸² Although the use of iron tools marked an important

stage in the development of human civilization, iron as an element occurs naturally, and the female's association with this metal ties her to the earth, separating her from the more "advanced" segments of society. Barred from language by an "iron tongue," she also lacks the facility of speech, yet Blake curiously calls her "invulnerable, tho' naked, save where clouds roll around her loins."⁸³ Through the evocation of the clouds, Blake ties the nameless female to Urizen, asserting she, like the previously discussed little black boy, remains unaware of the ideological factions preventing her from comprehending her primitive situation and utilizing her own voice.



America, A Prophecy, Object 3, 1821.⁸⁴

Whereas the female endures her intellectual fetters, Orc remains physically shackled but still struggles to free them both from their confines, proclaiming, “For chaind beneath I rend these caverns; when thou bringest food/ I howl my joy: and my red eyes seek to behold thy face/ In vain! these clouds roll to & fro, & hide thee from my sight.”⁸⁵ An allusion to Plato’s famed Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic*, Orc, like the philosopher’s unenlightened masses, exists in a subterranean environment, incapable of perceiving the female’s true form due to Urizen’s obstructive ideological clouds. Unlike the ancient allegory, however, Orc recognizes the limitations of his station, comprehends the falsity of his current reality, and finally explodes out of bondage, using his “hairy shoulders [to] rend the links, free are the wrists of fire.”⁸⁶

Though Plato encourages the mentally liberated philosopher to attempt to educate others, Orc delivers the nameless female from her soundless state through a violent sexual union: “Round the terrific loins he seiz’d the panting struggling womb;/ It joy’d: she put aside her clouds & smiled her first-born smile;/ As when a black cloud shews its light’nings to the silent deep./ Soon as she saw the terrible boy then burst the virgin cry.”⁸⁷ Though the scene is brutally physical (“seized,” “burst,” “struggling”) and foreshadows Oothoon’s rape in *Visions*, the woman gains an active voice—*she* put aside Urizen’s clouds and smiled, seemingly enjoying the sexual pleasure. The modifier “first-born” strengthens the understanding that the female enters a new realm of comprehension, now born again newly cognizant of Urizen’s control and her status as a manipulatable resource. Such a moment of intellectual awakening references the biblical Fall of Adam and Eve, in which the pair consumed the forbidden fruit that introduced them to knowledge but also stripped them of innocence and immortality. Similarly, Blake’s woman loses her invulnerability but gains linguistic ability, though she proceeds to relate the harsh reality of the road leading to colonial revolution. She cries to Orc: “I know thee, I have found thee, & I

will not let thee go,/ Thou art the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa/ And thou are fall'n to give me life in regions of dark death./ On my American plains I feel the struggling afflictions/...This is eternal death; and this the torment long foretold.”⁸⁸

By explicitly tying the nameless female to the physical geography of America, Blake characterizes her as a manifestation of the young American republic itself—abundant with natural resources, such as arable plains and the aforementioned iron, but cognitively shackled by Urizenic (and European) systems of exploitation. Rescuing the female from utter indoctrination, Orc applies the antithesis of rationality—sexual passion—to enlighten the female to her own enslavement, thus initiating the long, arduous process of revolution. Though Orc is her liberator, she recognizes the ambiguity of his role: he contains characteristics both of the Christian God (“the image of God”) and of the Devil (“fall’n”), and though he is the harbinger of “life in regions of death,” the process itself “is eternal death.” By characterizing Orc as “terrible,” Blake strengthens the figure’s dualistic temperament. Defined first in the OED as “causing or fit to cause terror; inspiring great fear or dread,” “terrible” additionally means “awe-inspiring or awesome.”⁸⁹ This juxtaposition of terror and awe insinuates notions of the sublime—an aesthetic favored by Blake’s artistic contemporaries for its affective power. Although Orc’s fiery spirit is necessary for revolution, his libidinous personality and fury toward all forms of rational constraints, in addition to political oppression, hint at his later inability to control his carnal behavior. Orc’s violent passion captures the duality of the sublime, and his irrepressible nature foreshadows the revolutionary excesses afflicting France after its revolution. To conclude the Preludium, Blake inserts a second image of Orc, who now pushes upward from the cave, physical musculature completely exposed with curly hair extending out in a morphological mimicry of his characteristic flames. Although he stares skyward as if warning the Urizenic

clouds of his impending fury, his head is circled by the sun—a symbol traditionally associated with Urizen whose placement further blurs the distinction between the warring parties.



*America, A Prophecy. Object 4, 1821.*⁹⁰

Further impeding Orc's heroic role as the font of true revolution, in some versions of *America*, Blake ends the Preludium with a violent renunciation by the Bard: "The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song; enraged he swung/ His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against/ A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,/ And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings."⁹¹ As Damon notes, Blake considered himself "the Ancient Bard," a title associated with Celtic poet-prophets of great antiquity and authority.⁹² Even as Blake narrates *America*, he exhibits disgust for its characters' actions and their affinity for linear "progress." By describing the harp as "shining" and "glittering," Blake associates the instrument with fiery Orc as well as the biblical figure Sampson by mentioning the "ruin'd pillar." Like Orc, Sampson was imbued with incredible strength to

combat his oppressive enemies, the Philistines, but his fervent rage led not only to their deaths but to his as well. Chained to a pagan temple, “Sampson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it.”⁹³ The references to Sampson underscore the inseparability of political and religious revolution and also predict the extreme violence produced through the clash of oppositional contraries. The intrusions of the Bard and of the biblical allusion interrupt the linearity of Orc’s rise to power, but only temporarily—Blake’s Prophecy pushes forward, a warning of the consequences of such direct, structured cognition.

In the opening of the Prophecy portion of *America*, Blake introduces Urizen’s agent, who, like the revolutionary Orc he reacts against, is characterized by fire: “The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent/ Sullen fires across the Atlantic glow to America’s shore.”⁹⁴ Cognizant of Orc’s anarchic potential, “The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision./ Albion’s Angel stood beside the Stone of night, and saw/ The terror like a comet, or more like a planet red.”⁹⁵ Again represented as a “terror” and “red,” Orc imbues others with his revolutionary spirit, “Piercing the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night,/ Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green/ Meet on the coast glowing with blood from Albion’s fiery Prince.”⁹⁶ By inserting recognizable names of American revolutionaries, Blake yokes his imaginative mythology to the historical events of the war, emphasizing the reality of the blood shed by soldiers, such as the dead men illustrated on the frontispiece. Just as Orc illuminated the ideological chains binding the nameless female, Washington commands his fellow citizens to observe their own enslavement: “Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea:/ A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain/ Descends link by link from Albion’s cliffs across the sea to bind/ Brothers & sons of America.”⁹⁷

Although the relationship between colonizer and colonized does not rely on physical shackles, Blake applies of diction associated with chattel slavery to this political situation, emphasizing the inequality inherent in the binary. Blake presents America as a subservient location tethered to the more powerful Albion “link by link.” Orc and the American patriots recognize their enslaving system, calling attention to its injustices and flaws. Through repeated references to the Atlantic Ocean, the revolutionaries emphasize the lateral distance between the two countries and the vertical difference between Urizen’s atmospheric abode (and the high position of King George III’s throne) and the reality of life on American soil. Consistently associated with iron, the nameless female represents the natural resources and potential of America; Washington elucidates, however, that England already usurps these resources, retooling and redirecting them as the “heavy iron chain” that descends to propagate the colonies’ subservient position. In “The Little Black Boy,” Blake illustrates a similar tactic of continued indoctrination because the little black boy himself passes on to others the placating rationales instilled in him to rationalize the binary system. Strengthening this irony through an image, Blake depicts a nude woman, a young boy with curly hair, and an oversized ram sleeping in a pastoral locale beneath a tree whose overhanging branches form an arc over the trio. With eyes peacefully closed to the truths of their enslavement, the figures remain indoctrinated by the Tree of Knowledge, whose branches form a physical barrier between the humans’ earthly environment and the lofty realm from which Urizen wields his tools of reason.

While Orc attempts to rally Americans to enlightenment, Albion’s Angel lambasts his efforts, proclaiming: “Art thou not Orc.../ Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities;/ Lover of wild rebellion, and transgressor of God’s Law;/ Why dost thou come to Angels’ eyes in this terrific form?”⁹⁸ In this condemnation, Urizen’s agent vocalizes the characteristics

separating him from Orc in their binary relationship, highlighting in particular the rebel's rejection of religious doctrine. As noted in the previous chapter, Marxist theorist Louis Althusser identified the Church as one of the primary Ideological State Apparatuses through which socially dominant factions exert and maintain control. Orc not only rejects the subservience prescribed by Christian



America, A Prophecy. Object 9, 1821.⁹⁹

scripture but flagrantly passes on such knowledge through irreverent, passionate diction and sexual intercourse—both highly anathema to the established Church because of emotion's

triumph over reason. His actions reflect Blake's own religious convictions as illustrated earlier in "The Golden Chapel" in which he inserts the Church into the female's vagina to elicit carnal sexual pleasure. Because Orc's characteristics and actions often reference biblical passages (the Fall in the Garden of Eden, being "fall'n" like Lucifer, and being hairy like Jacob's duped brother Esau), Blake undermines his readers' familiarity with these Christian stories by re-imagining them outside the Church, forcing them to be considered in a new mythology of revolution. By destabilizing the expected moral outcome of these stories, Blake defamiliarizes the systems of religion that previously contributed to Althusser's model of ideological control and exposes the façade of Urizen's well-oiled religious rationales.

After the Prince of Albion questions Orc's identity and motives, the "terror" responds: "I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree:/...The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,/...That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad."¹⁰⁰ Attempting to rediscover the "fiery joy" of original religion before its corruption by systemic laws, Orc provides a portrait of such faith: "That pale religious lechery, seeking Virginitie,/ May find it in a harlot, and in course-clad honesty/ The undefil'd tho' ravish'd in her cradle night and mourn:/ For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life."¹⁰¹ Again invoking the allusion to the Tree of Knowledge, the rebel describes his subordinate state as "wreath'd," which the OED defines as "Formed by or as by wreathing, wrying, twisting, or twining; arranged or disposed in coils, curves, or twists; contorted, twisted."¹⁰² By emphasizing not only the intertwined nature of Orc and the tree but also the dynamism of their constant struggle, Blake characterizes revolution as a continuous fight against the enchaining element, whether physical shackles or ideological branches. In Orc's new imagined religion, the pedestal from which Virginitie previously reigned has been "stamp to dust," because revolutionaries recognize it as a false virtue, lauding sex as

the means to enlightenment. Orc then enacts his religious vision by liberating the voice of the nameless female through the loss of her physical and intellectual virginity.

Though Urizen labels Orc an “antichrist,” the fiery spirit’s espousals do not, in fact, deny religiosity altogether but rather seek to unencumber the notion that “For every thing that lives is holy” from the oppressive dictates of the organized Church. Before Orc consummates his relationship with the nameless female in *America*’s Preludium, Blake describes her womb as “panting struggling,” but during the sex act itself, “it [the womb] joy’d,” in a response akin to Zinzendorf’s explosion of orgasmic joy when the *sephiroth* achieve equilibrium. Although the woman loses her virginity, Blake nullifies the importance of physical virginity, proclaiming that “the soul of sweet delight can never be defil’d,” and he connects this sexual religion to Orc’s revolutionary spirit in the subsequent line: “Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumed.”¹⁰³ This fulfillment of sexual pleasure illustrates the falsity of Urizen’s perverted ten commands and fans Orc’s flames, allowing him to spread revolution across the globe’s geography.

Not only is Orc’s abstract, radical man not overcome by the flames, but he garners a suit of precious metals, which Blake carefully details: “Amidst the lustful fires he walks; his feet become like brass,/ His knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold.”¹⁰⁴ Significant for two reasons, the transformation of the revolutionary man into metal indicates his affirmation of ownership over the natural resources and valuable commodities present in America. Whereas the female manifestation of the colonies unknowingly allowed England to usurp her resources and then re-appropriate the “heavy iron chain[s]” to oppress her further, this man connects his very person with the essence and products of his environment, retooling them as armor against his previous enslaver. Secondly, the series of metals also references the

archeological system in which periods of history are named for their tool-making techniques: Stone, Bronze, and Iron, respectively. This reading elevates revolution as the climax of history; however, the progression is suspiciously sequential and linear, which are characteristics Blake traditionally associates with enchaining, Urizenic reason. If the Bard had been witness to this scene, I imagine he would again smash his harp in disgust at Orc's imposition of linear rationality on a supposedly emotional revolution.

Orc's specific armor also alludes to a dream had by King Nebuchadnezzar in which he saw "an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay."¹⁰⁵ In a text thus far filled with references to iron, why does Blake's figure now lack this metal present in Nebuchadnezzar's statue? In Daniel's interpretation of his king's dream, he prophesizes that each element represents a future kingdom, with Nebuchadnezzar being the current head of gold. The nation represented by iron will aptly embody the element's characteristics: "strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all others."¹⁰⁶ Absolutely and irrevocably dominant, iron as Daniel describes it would initially seem unfit for Blake's anatomy of the revolutionary man because the installation of such authority would merely initiate another Urizenic system of supremacy not in keeping with the poet's notion of revolution as a molten, constantly fluctuating process.

The absence of iron, however, is also problematic because the noun "irons" evokes the bonds clapped around the wrists of slaves—a population curiously nonexistent in the majority of *America's* narrative of revolution. Although Orc occasionally employs rhetoric associated with slavery to describe the enchained condition of white colonists ("rend the links, free are the wrists

of fire”¹⁰⁷), he takes no explicit stance on the issue of African slavery. Orc’s avoidance of the issue compromises his definition of true revolution because he only extends liberty to certain populations, which are defined not by biology but by manmade, ideological constructs. Humiliatingly acquiescent, Orc refuses to recognize the humanity of darker races, thus mimicking the actions of historical American revolutionaries. Rather than conclusively deciding the fate of slavery in America, constitutional drafters inserted Article V, which delayed the final decision on abolition for twenty years—a choice they considered essential to the new government’s initial success. During those twenty years, however, Southern planters imported tens of thousands of slaves, more than during any previous two decades in colonial history.¹⁰⁸ The later savagery of the Civil War highlights that choices based on reason that perpetuate ideological subservience, such as Article V, only lead to explosions of revolutionary fury, which, like Orc’s rampage, become violent and uncontrollable.

By insinuating that Orc’s revolutionary ideals are tinged with Urizenic methodology, Blake hypothesizes the red savior could, in fact, initiate another, equally enchaining system of reason after the overthrow of British control. This is not to say Blake does not support political revolution, but he critiques Orc and the American revolutionaries for attempting to enact change within the boundaries of the established system, which in this instance is a political state. Rather than obliterate the ideological apparatus of the State, Orc and his supporters pursue the establishment of a *new* State, which merely unseats one monarch in favor of a new government, imagined to be more liberating because of its organization as a republic. Blake’s parodying critique of tempered revolution in *America* is highly similar to his debasement of Wollstonecraft’s feminist efforts to improve education, as discussed earlier in relation to “The Little Black Boy.” Although Blake recognizes the inherent value of both political revolution and

social equality, he condemns the historical radicals for *not being radical enough* and seeking “reasonable” change only within the confines of their enchaining system. By presenting their battles in defamiliarized text and images, Blake attempts to alert them of their own ideological shackles, which would then permit true revolutionary action.

On the same page as Orc’s declaration about his religion and armor, Blake etches a small image of Albion’s defender in his traditional position among the clouds, with arms outstretched and eyes cast upward. Dressed in a flowing classical robe, Urizen crouches on the clouds and draws his knees to his chest in a position similar to Orc’s original hunched posture before his liberation from the cave, which again emphasizes the pair’s shared characteristics. The gratuitous folds of his antique garments obscure his anatomy, and his fingers wrap around the edges of the clouds, as if his suspension in the sky relies on their support. Long and wavy, his beard and hair also conceal much of his body, leading the viewer to question the extent of Urizen’s autonomous identity. If the beard and clouds represent his ties to Christian iconography and the heavenly realm, and the classical robes symbolize his affiliation with the rationality espoused by classical philosophers and politicians, what then is known about Urizen himself? Although seemingly the dictator of rational systems, is he too enslaved by the very systems he seeks to propagate? The lateral extension of his arms links him to imagery of the crucified Christ, forcing Blake’s readers to question if Urizen has in fact been sacrificed himself to the ideological apparatuses of organized religion, government, and education.

Not yet voiceless, however, Albion’s Angel seeks to rally the yet undecided citizens and political figureheads of America around his camp, yelling: “Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my Thirteen Angels!/. . .Children take shelter from the lightnings. . .I see thee in

thick clouds and darkness on America's shore/ Writhing in pangs of abhorred birth; red flames the crest rebellious/...Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm."¹⁰⁹ Still equating the



America, A Prophecy, Object 10, 1821.¹¹⁰

thirteen colonies with England as “Angels,” Urizen strives to preserve the dependence of the colonists, even referring to them as “children,” and portraying Orc as a “devourer of thy parent,” as if he were a disobedient, wild beast biting the hand that feeds him.¹¹¹ To debate the impending clash of colonizing oppressor and colonized oppressed, the spirits of the thirteen colonies gather on the “vast shady hills between America & Albion’s shore.”¹¹² They bear England’s pressure

from above—“For clouds from the Atlantic hover o’er the solemn roof”—but ultimately decide to side with Orc and defend his realm of the earth beneath their feet: “Fiery the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder roll’d/ Around their shores; indignant burning with the fires of Orc.”¹¹³

Blake cites Boston’s Angel, in particular, as the most verbose proponent for revolt, and in his speech, he cites the economic, religious, and political inequalities of colonialism:

“What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest,
What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs
What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself
In fat of lambs? no more I follow, no more obedience pay.”
So cried he, rending off his robe & throwing down his scepter
In sight of Albion’s Guardian, and all thirteen Angels
Rent off their robes to the hungry wind, & threw their golden scepters
Down on the land of America.¹¹⁴

True to historical fact, Johnson and Grant note that Bostonian cousins John and Samuel Adams took the lead in stripping off the gubernatorial robes that had signified their status as royal appointees at the onset of the rebellion.¹¹⁵ By rejecting their official roles in the colonial system enslaving America, the political leaders instead embrace nakedness and the physical terrain of their country, which they prepare to defend against the imminent onslaught of Urizenic troops “shaking their metal chains, [as] they rush in fury to the sea” to take back the rebellious territories.¹¹⁶

Like the demon-possessed swine rushing frenziedly toward their own drowning deaths in Mark’s gospel, the British soldiers clamor haphazardly (and patriotically) toward Orc’s fiery storm brewing across the Atlantic. In the biblical story, the host of demons, collectively named

Legion, begged Jesus to send them from the possessed man to the group of nearby pigs, and Christ obliged. Mark reports: “He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.”¹¹⁷ By equating the British troops with the swine, Blake demonstrates the ease with which the State employed ideology to indoctrinate its citizenry and mobilize them for its own gain, ignoring the individuals’ loss of life. Whereas Albion’s Angel previously indicted Orc as a “Blasphemous Demon” and “Antichrist,” in this passage, Blake imbues Urizenic England with explicitly demonic characteristics, underscoring the lack of an absolute division between the competing sides of the colonizer/colonized contrary. Blake’s earlier illustration of Urizen in the clouds hints that the enslaver himself wears the shackles of his systems, but the poet erases any ambiguity about the autonomy of the British soldiers, who are actively “shaking their metal chains.” Although these citizens should represent the more privileged segment of the binary as colonizers, they too remain fettered, not by the iron links enchaining Orc and America but by the ideologies imbued in them. This image recalls Blake’s idea of “mind forg’d manacles,” which expresses the extent to which the soldiers are taught by the state to accept (and live by) the pacifying rationales espoused by ideological apparatuses.

In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Blake foreshadows the English government’s abuse of their ideological power over their citizenry in time of war: “And the hapless Soldiers sigh:/ Runs in blood down Palace walls.”¹¹⁸ The colonizers’ cognizance of their gory fate comes too late in *America*, however, and Blake depicts an embarrassing scene of abandonment and agony: “The British soldiers thro’ the thirteen states sent up a howl/ Of anguish: threw their swords & muskets to the earth & ran/ From their encampments and dark castles seeking where to hide/ From the grim flames; and from the visions of Orc.”¹¹⁹ Though the poet had exaggerated

Britain's forces to "forty millions, must'ring in the eastern sky," their aggression proved no match for the revolutionary tenacity and economic competitiveness of the colonies: "The citizens of New-York close their books & lock their chests;/ The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;/ The scribe of Pennsylvania casts his pen upon the earth;/ The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear./...But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire./ The red fires rag'd! the plagus recoil'd! then rolld they back with fury."¹²⁰ By collectively amassing their economic specialties, the colonists bear the brunt not only of Britain's military assault but also of their parent country's economic embargos, and they successfully transfer the majority of the financial burden back to the European island itself.

Shifting his focus eastward, Blake narrates the disastrous effects of America's victory on the British: "then the Pestilence began in streaks of red/ Across the limbs of Albion's Guardian, the spotted plague smote Bristol's/ And the Leprosy London's Spirit, sickening all their bands:/ The millions sent up a howl of anguish and threw off their hammered mail,/ And cast their swords & spears to earth, & stood a naked multitude."¹²¹ Steeped in hellish and apocalyptic imagery, this section again conflates the consequences of political revolution with religion. Similar to the clarity proffered by the Book of Revelations, the English citizens can now see the faultiness of their imposed systems of Urizenic reason, though the time for repentance has passed. The most trade-dependent cities, Bristol and London, first feel the racking effects of colonial independence, and their citizens begin to recognize the fallibility of the State for which they had been laboring both as soldiers and laborers. Wright explains the consequences of the British's new awareness, stating: "Military failures and debilitating costs mitigated any sense of imperial security and further aroused domestic dissent among a population that was paying high taxes and losing sons to the military efforts."¹²²

Interestingly, Blake specifically notes the response of British women to the collapse of their country's colonizing power: "For the female spirits of the dead pining in bonds of religion/ Run from their fetters reddening, & in long drawn arches sitting:/ They feel the nerves of youth renew, and the desires of ancient times,/ Over their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grape appears."¹²³ Spurred to action by their dead male compatriots, the women now recognize the religious shackles enslaving them, and like Orc's triumphal exit from the cave, they, too, can feel their "fetters reddening" with an equivalent burning, radical spirit. As feminine parallels to Orc, the women regain not only their youthful physical vigor but also sexual desire, symbolized by the apparition of the "tender grape." Though the women do not yet consummate their desires, Blake illustrates that the American Revolution has allowed British women to view their own situation critically. They have been defamiliarized to their condition and will also ultimately rebel against the hierarchically superior faction in their binary—men. Importantly, Blake published *America* the year after Wollstonecraft published her 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; although Blake took issue with many of her political stances, Wollstonecraft's manifesto remained one of the earliest and most widely read feminist treatises of the period. Though I will discuss the male/female binary in great detail in relation to Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in Section Four, the changing role of women in *America* demonstrates the way in which Blake applied language associated with binary subjugation to a variety of contrary systems, including colonial status, gender, and, as noted earlier, race. By juxtaposing imagery of physical shackles with feminine fertility and "darken'd" visages, Blake inserts each of these subservient groups into the overall rhetoric proclaiming the revolutionary spirit and challenging the authority of traditionally dominant groups and ideological systems.

With the colonies now independent and British citizens of both sexes gaining awareness of their own systemic indoctrination, Blake leaves his readers with a final vision of Urizen, who sat “Above all heavens in thunders wrap’d, emerg’d his leprous head/ From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge piteous/...his jealous wings wav’d over the deep;/ Weeping in dismal howling woe he dark descended howling/ Around the smitten bands, clothed in tears & trembling shudd’ring cold.”¹²⁴ Now an antithetical absence of Orc’s fire and passion, Urizen, frigid and despairing, manages to pour snow over the Demon, obscuring the gates of sensory perception that Orc flung open from the populaces of mainland Europe for a twelve year period. Johnson and Grant assert the twelve year lapse could reference the time between America’s Declaration of Independence and the outbreak of the French Revolution or the interval between the 1781 revolutionary victory at Yorktown and the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, the year of *America*’s publishing.¹²⁵ In the final stanza, Blake explicitly mentions other European countries stirred to revolution by the American model: “France Spain & Italy/ In terror view’d the bands of Albion.”¹²⁶ The insertion of France expands the meaning of Orc’s alternative title—“terror”—to include connotations of the Reign of Terror, which for many best represented the uncontrollable excesses incited by revolutionary activity. Though a proponent of the rebellious spirit, Blake, too, recognized the problems plaguing France and traced them to Orc’s insatiable appetite for anarchy, concluding *America* with a seemingly prophetic (but, in reality, ex post facto) predication for France: “With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc;/ But the five gates were consum’d, & their bolts and hinges melted/ And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men.”¹²⁷

Through the leveling force of fire, Blake challenges the initial division between Urizen’s heaven and Orc’s earth, leaving the reader with a portrait of the binary relationship between

colonizer and colonized inherently altered yet far from resolved. Although America gains economic and political liberty, the loss of life for both parties is immense. Orc's seeds of rebellion lead many to recognize their shackles, but this knowledge merely ushers in the harsh reality of their actual enchainment. The nameless female encompasses this ironic mingling of enlightenment, revolutionary spirit, and despair about reality, crying, "O what limb rendering pains I feel, they fire & my frost/ Mingle in howling pains, in furrows by thy lightnings rent/ This is eternal death; and this the torment long foretold."¹²⁸ By combining historical fact, religious tradition, and his own mythology, Blake unsettles passively accepted "truths" through defamiliarization, forcing his readers to confront the American Revolution and its implications for European governmental structures in new, constantly shifting word and design.

- ⁶² Johnson, Mary Lynn and John E. Grant. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 83.
- ⁶³ Blake, William. From *Marginalia*, On Watson's *An Apology for the Bible*. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Eds Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 83. 458.
- ⁶⁴ Blake, William. *America, A Prophecy*. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Eds Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 5/3, 3.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5/3, 1.
- ⁶⁶ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 83.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.
- ⁶⁹ Blake, William. *America, A Prophecy*. Frontispiece. Copy O, 1821 (Fitzwilliam Museum). *The Blake Archive*. <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/textresults-new.xq>. 20 February 2013.
- ⁷⁰ Blake, *America*, 16/14, 10-12.
- ⁷¹ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 84.
- ⁷² Eaves, Morris, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, eds. "Introduction to *America, A Prophecy*." *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 18 February 2013. <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=america&java=no>.
- ⁷³ Blake, *Marginalia*, 458.
- ⁷⁴ Erdman, David V., ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 538.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 639.
- ⁷⁶ Schuchard, Marsha Keith. *Why Mrs. Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision*. Idaho: Century, 2006.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁷⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake: A Biography*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996. 281.
- ⁷⁹ Blake, William. From *Vala, or The Four Zoas*. "The Golden Chapel." 1797. Eds David Erdman and Cettina Magno (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1987), 158; description of sketch by Peter Ackroyd, *Blake: A Biography* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 281.
- ⁸⁰ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 84.
- ⁸¹ Blake, *America*, 3/1, 11, 1.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 3/1, 3-4, 8-9.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3/1, 7.
- ⁸⁴ Blake, *America, A Prophecy*, Object 3, 1821.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3/1, 18-20.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4/2, 2.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4/2, 3-6.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4/2, 7-10, 17.
- ⁸⁹ "terrible, adj., adv., and n.". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/Entry/199563?redirectedFrom=terrible> (accessed February 19, 2013).
- ⁹⁰ Blake, *America, A Prophecy*. Object 4, 1821.
- ⁹¹ Blake, *America*, 4/2, 18-21.
- ⁹² Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, 36.

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- ⁹³ Judges, 16:29-30, NIV.
- ⁹⁴ Blake, *America*, 5/3, 1-2.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6/4, 12; 7/5, 1-2.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5/3, 3-5.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5/3, 6-9.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9/7, 3, 5-7.
- ⁹⁹ Blake, *America, A Prophecy*, Object 9, 1821.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10/8, 1,3,5.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10/8, 10-13.
- ¹⁰² "wreathed, adj.". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/Entry/230584?redirectedFrom=wreathed>
(accessed February 20, 2013).
- ¹⁰³ Blake, *America*, 10/8, 14-15.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10/8, 16-17.
- ¹⁰⁵ Daniel 2:31-33, NIV.
- ¹⁰⁶ Daniel, 2:40, NIV.
- ¹⁰⁷ Blake, *America*, 4/2, 2.
- ¹⁰⁸ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619–1877*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994. 79.
- ¹⁰⁹ Blake, *America*, 11/9, 1, 10, 17; 12/10, 4.
- ¹¹⁰ Blake, *America, A Prophecy*. Object 10, 1821.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11/9, 20.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 12/10, 5.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 13/11, 1-2.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13/11, 12-19.
- ¹¹⁵ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, footnote 9, 92.
- ¹¹⁶ Blake, *America*, 15/13, 3.
- ¹¹⁷ Mark 1:13, NIV.
- ¹¹⁸ Blake, "London," 11-12.
- ¹¹⁹ Blake, *America*, 15/13, 6-9.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15/13, 16; 16/14, 13-16, 19-20.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 17/15, 1-5.
- ¹²² Wright, Julia M. *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. xxi.
- ¹²³ Blake, *America*, 17/15, 23-26.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18/16, 3-4, 6-8.
- ¹²⁵ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, footnote 2, 95.
- ¹²⁶ Blake, *America*, 18/16, 16-17.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18/16, 21-23.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4/2, 15-17.

IV. Gender and Rhetoric in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

Returning to the illuminated book first quoted in the introduction to this project, I focus on Blake's 1793 *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* as the capstone illustration for my argument of pervasive binary domination. Analyzing text, image, and overall rhetoric, I argue the narrative not only highlights the inequalities present between the sexes but also actively works to expose and defamiliarize the readers to such unjust social practices. Like the previously studied works, "The Little Black Boy" and *America, A Prophecy*, *Visions* comments on Blake's contemporary reality in Imperial Europe, engages with other purportedly "radical" texts published at the time, and investigates the binary most unavoidable in Blake's native England—the male/female contrary and its associated ideological apparatus, marriage. He explores contemporary gender relations through the interactions of three characters: Oothoon, her fiancé Theotormon, and a second male Bromion. Though the majority of the narrative emphasizes the limitations prescribed by the social gender divide, the pivotal moment is a physical negation of this separation—Bromion violently rapes the virginal Oothoon. By investigating the social consequences of the rape not only on Oothoon and her rapist Bromion but also on her fiancé Theotormon, Blake presents a picture of England's gender limitations at the turn of the nineteenth century, employing his own mythological characters and an overall rhetoric steeped in binary oppositions that reference other, supposedly, lower populations, including African slaves and colonial peoples.

Johnson and Grant's introduction to the work supports the argument for a shared vocabulary of subservience: "In successive stages of fear, daring, guilt, and moral independence, Oothoon comes to recognize as an interlocking system of the sort that the Chimney Sweeper of

[*Songs of Experience* identifies as “God & his Priest & King.”¹²⁹ Victimized and enchained by the ideologies of multiple state, religious, and social ideological apparatuses, Oothoon—like the determined revolutionaries in *America*—struggles against her shackles. Though she fails in her endeavors to escape, her dynamic mental efforts represent the evolving resistance to traditional notions of hierarchical subordination. Lamentably, she—like the little black boy and revolutionary Orc before her—ultimately employs Urizenic methodology in her pursuit of true liberty, illustrating the strength of her ideological shackles. Because she espouses a series of emotion and rational objections to her own objectification, however, Oothoon still successfully interrupts the process of ideological interpellation, alerting Blake’s readers to the variety of oppositions to binary enchainment.

Similar to *America, A Prophecy*, *Visions* has an elaborate color frontispiece depicting the illuminated book’s three characters. Employing recognizable motifs, Blake positions the figures beneath the overhanging branches of a massive tree and a large group of purple, ominous clouds. Both inclusions implicitly reference Urizen, who, though yet unnamed, perpetuates the enslavement of the depicted figures. In the center, Oothoon appears nude with a bowed head and pale skin setting her apart from the male figures. Her hands are tightly pulled behind her back and presumably shackled to Bromion, whose body is rendered much like the crouching figure of Orc in the Preludium to *America*. His feet are bound with thick iron links that also sink erotically into Oothoon’s right thigh, and his skin appears tinged with red. Most interestingly, his hair stands straight up on its ends, and his visage appears intently engaged with something outside the frame of the frontispiece, which recalls Blake’s second depiction of Orc in *America* as the revolutionary emerges from his oppressive cave. In contrast to Bromion’s emotive countenance,

Theotormon hides his face completely, contorting his limbs almost grotesquely on the right side of the frame.



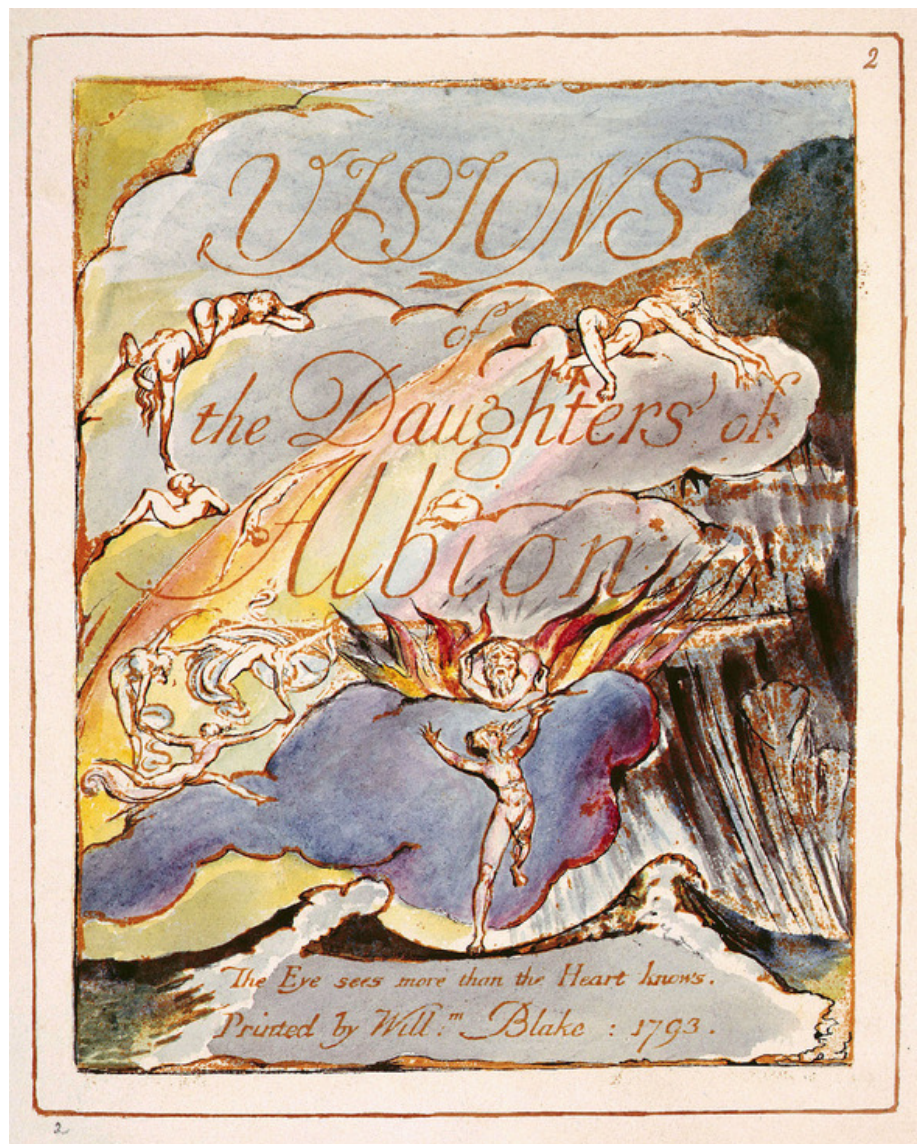
*Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Object 1, 1793.*¹³⁰

Johnson and Grant suggest that the triangular positioning of the figures in relation to one another resembles a Sartrean “No Exit” triangle in which they remained “forever locked.”¹³¹ Though Jean Paul Sartre’s play *No Exit* was written very much after Blake in 1944, the

narratives share certain key features: both have three characters (one female and two male), focus on the social consequences of sexual misconduct, and restrict the figures' movement to a single space. Sartre's characters oscillate between sexual and murderous desires, though they find the latter futile since they are, in fact, already dead and sequestered in hell. The torturous elements of their hell, however, are not linked causally to their environment but instead are consequences of the others' frustrating actions, prompting one of the men, Garcin, to conclude, "*l'enfer, c'est les autres*," or "hell is other people."¹³² By locating his characters in an abstract locale, Sartre negates the direct influence of ideological state apparatus—no Church espouses doctrine, no government levies judicial sentences. Instead, he highlights how ideological tenets of morality and sexuality become internalized and are then re-projected through individuals, which mirrors Blake's strategy in *Visions*. On the frontispiece, Blake does not cite a historic event or actual real geographic location, as in *America*, but renders the surrounding environment ambiguously. The green bank on which the trio sits blends into frothy water on both sides, indicating the figures are most likely marooned somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean between America and England. Whereas Sartre's characters are eternally confined in hell, the only bonds braiding together Oothoon, Bromion, and Theotormon are ideological; throughout the narrative, however, Blake underscores the tenacious nature of hierarchical ideology in dictating the relationships between the sexes.

Unlike the *America* frontispiece, *Visions*' frontispiece does not incorporate the text of the title into the design. Instead, Blake illustrates a second title page, also depicted in vibrant colors and with several twisted figures. Whereas the first image only includes the text's three figures, the title page depicts many small figures that sprawl across the clouds, dance in a circle, and launch into backflips. Surrounded by a bluish-gray cloud, Oothoon runs forward while looking

back at a male figure wrapped in his own arms and red, fiery clouds—presumably an emanation of Urizen. By illustrating Urizen as both a powerful force positioned above Oothoon and a figure constrained by his own systems of reason (thus his shackled arms), Blake continues to undermine the absolute authority of Urizenic rationales. Oothoon's wide body posture and active movement indicate that she is free from certain ideological bonds, if only in spirit. Below this orgy of action, Blake includes his signature, the year of publication 1793, and the phrase,



Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Object 2, 1793.¹³³

“The Eye sees more than the Heart knows.” The eye cited by Blake in this instance conjures two diametrically opposed functions: the eye as a rational tool to observe the world, and the eye as the portal for prophetic vision. Also invoking the homophonic “I,” the phrase indicates that Blake—the implicit speaker—has prophetic knowledge of the world unseen by those still blind to their social shackles. The phrase “Heart knows” also comes across as the clash of contraries because it violates the dichotomy between cold, intellectual knowledge (associated with Urizen) and impassioned emotion, signified by the heart. Like the self-enchained image of Urizen, these intermingled binaries prepare the reader for the narrative’s analysis and partial disassembly of traditional gender norms.

Blake begins the text with a prefacing Argument in two poetic stanzas of four lines each. By labeling the introduction an “Argument,” Blake highlights the probable bias of the speaker, who intends to relate a specific retelling of the events. The first stanza declares: “I loved Theotormon/ And I was not ashamed/ I trembled in my virgin fears/ And I hid in Leutha’s vale.”¹³⁴ Though yet unnamed, the speaker is clearly Oothoon, who fervently rationalizes her love for her fiancé as an appropriate reason to consummate their relationship. By asserting her claims with such directedness, however, Oothoon undermines her own argument—if she is truly unashamed of her desire, why must she present such a fervid defense? By positioning Oothoon in Leutha’s vale, Blake presents several angles on her budding sexuality. In *A Blake Dictionary*, Damon associates Leutha with a “sense of sin, or guilt,” stating she symbolizes “sex under law.”¹³⁵ His reading of Leutha complicates Oothoon’s verbal pronouncements because though she attempts to lay out her emotions openly, she remains hidden in the vale and shrouded in guilt. The physical image of the vale itself further implies the eroticism of the scene. Defined in the OED as a “more or less extensive tract of land lying between two ranges of hills, or stretches

of high ground, and usually traversed by a river or stream,” the vale calls up images of female genitalia—the fertile valley from which life emerges, buttressed on either side by a woman’s legs.¹³⁶ By remaining in this feminine, yet erotic, space, Oothoon asserts (and retains) agency over her sexual decisions throughout *The Argument*’s first stanza.

Though her articulated rationales and actual emotions seem misaligned initially, Oothoon’s first two actions in the second stanza make possible the pivotal moment of *Visions*—her rape. Still in the vale, Oothoon “plucked Leutha’s flower,” which signifies a concrete decision to move forward with her plans to have intercourse with Theotormon.¹³⁷ The image recalls the act of deflowering, or violating a woman’s virginity, but in this instance, Oothoon deflowers herself, illustrating an embracing of sexual desire typically foreign to contemporary literary heroines. Damon elucidates, however, that her imagined union with Theotormon was “an imperfect erotic dream,” and her plucking of the “fatal Marygold” initiated an unstoppable chain of events.¹³⁸ After picking the flower, Oothoon takes her second action and “rose up from the vale.”¹³⁹ By departing the feminine space of the vale, she renders herself sexually available to Theotormon but also loses autonomy over her own body. To mark this shift in Oothoon’s sovereignty, she changes from grammatical subject to object in the line, “But the terrible thunders tore,” which underscores her helplessness against the onset of Bromion’s violent sexual desire.¹⁴⁰

What about Oothoon’s action—seemingly performed under her own autonomy—leads to the systemic enchainment of her sexual desire? I argue Blake hints at her error through the specificity of the blossom’s name: Leutha’s flower. By choosing to pluck Leutha’s flower, Oothoon illustrates that although her sexual desire is pure, she does not understand how to achieve such pleasure outside the confines dictated by the State, whose ideological apparatuses,

in this instance, are marital laws. This reading also elucidates Blake's emphasis on Theotormon's explicit relationship to Oothoon as her fiancé, a title defined by the institution of marriage. By choosing Leutha's flower, Oothoon also exposes the guilt she feels about her erotic emotions (though she declares otherwise), and she seizes marriage as a way to justify her socially aberrant desires. Though Oothoon independently chooses to pluck Lethua's flower and pursue marriage to Theotormon, she cannot autonomously refute her decision, which immediately proves erroneous. Because Oothoon submits to the state apparatus of marriage, Blake then relates her oppressive reality throughout the remainder of *Visions* to illustrate the inherent, enchaining nature of the conjugal institution.

To conclude *The Argument*, Oothoon details the violent outcome of her erotic fantasy: "But the terrible thunders tore/ My virgin mantle in twain."¹⁴¹ Though she does not yet call Bromion by his name, Oothoon intertwines imagery of Urizenic clouds and alliteration—"the terrible thunders tore"—to describe her attacker as a force larger than a single male body. The rapist's physical enlargement emphasizes the sexual dimorphism separating the genders as well as the larger institutional ideologies contributing to men's augmented (yet unjust) authority over women. The viciousness of the adjective "terrible" and the verb "tore" indicates her first sexual union was indeed a rape, and the final image of the "virgin mantle in twain" viscerally recalls the physical destruction of a woman's hymen. Blake's choice of "mantle" to describe the hymen evokes several additional connotations. The OED defines it generally as "a protective garment or blanket," and its etymology reveals that "mantle" more specifically denotes the ring assumed by a widow or wife as a symbolic expression of her vow of perpetual chastity made before a bishop.¹⁴² By plucking Leutha's flower, Oothoon performed a symbolic act initiating her path to marriage, but Blake harshly critiques the institution by interrupting its idyllic progression with a

vicious rape. Additionally, a mantle can also signify a traditional plaid worn in Scotland and Ireland as well as a softened fur blanket used by Native Americans. By employing a word with connotations linked not only to the female body but also to Christian marriage and foreign traditions, Blake enlarges the scope of this particular rape to comment on the immense destruction possible in a moment of hierarchical dominance over a weaker group.

After *The Argument's* conclusion, Blake launches immediately into the section entitled "Visions," beginning with the word "Enslav'd" print in extremely large letters. The first two lines continue: "Enslav'd, the Daughters of Albion weep: a trembling lamentation/ Upon their mountains; in their valleys, sighs toward America."¹⁴³ Forcefully emphasizing the shackled condition of English women, Blake both links them to Oothoon through their mutual trembling but also separates them from her through their absolute association with England. In the following line, Blake identifies Oothoon as "the soft soul of America," which supports my earlier interpretation of her mantle as a gesture to foreign cultures, especially the indigenous Americans. Unlike Albion's daughters who are positioned in valleys and mountains, Oothoon in her virginal state only occupies Leutha's vale, which certainly resembles the primitive fecundity of the American soil—unspoiled and desirable. The resulting image of a land defiled, however, evokes biblical Eden after the Fall, a similar saga in which the pursuit of knowledge and experience produced irreparable consequences. Though powerless to speak (or even intervene), the Daughters of Albion, who are already disempowered in England, only weep as they watch the unfolding chronicle of American Oothoon's attempted independence and ultimate deflowering, now narrated by Blake in third-person prose.

Reinforcing her earlier declaration of love for Theotormon, Oothoon "pluck'd the flower saying, 'I pluck thee from thy bed/ Sweet flower, and put thee here to glow between my breasts/

And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks.’ ”¹⁴⁴ Because Blake has now identified Oothoon as a representative of America, this connects the idea of Leutha’s vale and femininity to the subordinate status of the colonial land, both of which are usurped by male colonizers.

Though her destination is unclear, Oothoon flies “over the waves...And over Theotormon’s reign,” leading one to assume her fiancé occupies neither America nor England but somewhere between the landmasses.¹⁴⁵ Before she could reach Theotormon, however, Bromion intervenes and “rent her with his thunders; on his stormy bed.”¹⁴⁶ Addressing both Oothoon and Theotomon, he vehemently declares his ownership over her body, womb, and future:

Bromion spoke. “Behold this harlot here on Bromion’s bed.

And let the jealous dolphins sport around the lovely maid:

Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south:

Stamp’t with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun

They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge:

Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent:

Now thou maist marry Bromion’s harlot, and protect the child

Of Bromion’s rage, that Oothoon shall put forth in nine moons’ time.”¹⁴⁷

A monologue proclaiming his own dominance, Bromion’s speech bespeaks not only his awareness of his sexual assault’s consequences, such as pregnancy and the classification of Oothoon as a “harlot,” but also illustrates his utter lack of remorse. Instead, he lauds her loveliness, taunting his unfairly begotten prize over the “jealous dolphins” associated with Theotormon’s watery reign. By physically inserting himself in Oothoon on her way to matrimony, Bromion interrupts the imagined progression of her union, both sexual and lawful, with Theotormon, and laughingly instructs the pair to continue with the rite. By emphasizing

Oothoon's new role as a harlot, Blake highlights the impact one action can have on the trajectory of marriage, which defamiliarizes the greater meaning of the institution for the reader. Even Blake's choice of the possessive form in "Bromion's harlot" underscores the authority Oothoon's rapist wields over her body, reputation, and marriageability.

Bromion's rhetoric greatly utilizes Oothoon's associations with the female gender, the colonial exploitation of America, and the objectification of slaves. His speech indicates that though Oothoon imagined the only path to sexual fulfillment to be marriage, Bromion—and the male sex more generally—can fulfill the role of oppressive husband without the lawful title of spouse. By declaring himself the owner and sower of Oothoon's fertile plains, Bromion also embodies the role of the European colonizer, a figure who unrightfully declared himself master of foreign land and promptly deposited his seed (both agricultural and sexual) into the geography and native population. Unsatisfied with verbal declarations of "mine, mine," Bromion also physically stamps his signet into the skin of "swarthy," or black, slaves, and he proclaims they are always dutiful to his orders when threatened with repercussive violence.

In the years preceding *Visions*' publication in 1793, Blake occasionally worked as a commercial engraver, and he completed a suite of illustrations for John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, which was later published in 1796. Chronicling the journey of Stedman, a Dutch military captain, to the colony of Surinam, the narrative dictates the hardships endured by slaves in a somewhat sympathetic light, which propelled the work to the status of abolitionist propaganda following its publication. In many instances of violence against native slaves, however, Stedman remains inert and merely records the horrific instances of corporeal abuse, which affected laboring men as well as women and children. After reading the manuscript, Blake completed the commissioned plates, but the

disquieting images remained with the author, who incorporated similar depictions and themes of colonial slavery in his later works, including *Visions*.

Although Blake does not insert an image of a branded slave to accompany Bromion's rant, he does illustrate such a figure in Stedman's *Narrative*. In this plate, the male slave bears



Blake, "Family of Negro Slaves from Loango," Stedman's *Narrative*, 1796.¹⁴⁸

Stedman's branded monogram—J.G.S.—on his chest, and this mark coupled with his directionless gaze out of the frame indicates his physical and mental enchainment. Transporting a

large basket and a fish, the slave is depicted as an active laborer, demonstrating acquiescence to his lowly status with an obedience Bromion also articulates. Speaking directly to Oothoon, the rapist alludes to daughters worshipping terrors immediately before he proclaims her pregnancy. Combined with Blake's earlier characterization of Bromion as "terrible," the concept of worshipping terrors and "obey[ing] the violent" intimates the sexual freedoms many masters assumed with their female slaves, which, for the masters, was both sexually pleasing and profitable through the production of new mulatto slaves. Similar to Bromion's announcement of Oothoon's pregnancy, Blake includes a female slave with her children in the same illustration for Stedman's *Narrative*. One young child rides on her back, further weighing down her onerous load, while an older boy clings to her leg, actively following her footsteps into a life of racially motivated oppression. Because the children's skin color is somewhat mixed, Blake leaves the question of their paternity unanswered—the father could be the male slave in the foreground or the invisible (yet ever-present) master signified by the monogram burned into his dark chest.

Disrupting the binary division between white and black races, mulatto people habitually interrupted the tidy colonial hierarchy promulgated by the West. One of the most important themes in Stedman's *Narrative*, the placement of mulatto individuals in the racial hierarchy held particular relevance for the captain himself because he became enamored with a native woman, Joanna, during his tenure in Surinam. Although laudatory in his description of her beauty, Stedman nevertheless tinges his account with unknowable assumptions steeped in racism and sexism: "her face was full of native modesty...eyes, as black as ebony, were large and full of expression, bespeaking the goodness of her heart; with cheeks through which glowed, in spite of the darkness of her complexion, a beautiful tinge of vermillion."¹⁴⁹ Just as Blake associates Oothoon with the unsown American plains, the captain is transfixed by Joanna's primitive

purity, even noting the beauty of her bare feet. Just as Oothoon's innocence is violently wrenched away by Bromion, the native women of Surinam were also forced into sexual subservience. Upon their arrival to the colony, Western men were presented with a temporary "wife"—enslaved girls exploited not only as laborers but also as sexual playthings.¹⁵⁰ A concrete example of the way in which colonizing Europeans conflated diction concerning slavery and marriage, Stedman's "love" for Joanna garnered her neither equality nor freedom, as he did not return to Europe wedded to his primitive beauty, who remained in the colony with their son. Certainly cognizant of Stedman's exotic "marriage," Blake inserts imagery associated with Joanna in his depictions of Oothoon, a figure equally oppressed by the façade of marital bliss.

In *Visions*, Bromion proudly asserts his paternity while commanding Oothoon's fiancé Theotormon both to marry and to protect his bastard child, who he characterizes as a thing "put forth" like an offering of worship. Although Oothoon stated she flew "over Theotormon's reign," the actual whereabouts of her fiancé are unclear until the final line of Bromion's pronouncement in which he offers his victim to the other man for marriage, and Theotormon's response is the reader's first introduction to his character. Uttering no words, Theotormon instead manipulates several natural elements, both his own and those around him, in his reaction. Blake narrates: "storms rent Theotormon's limbs; he rolld his waves around./ And folded his black jealous waters round the adulterate pair/ Bound back to back in Bromion's caves terror & meekness dwell."¹⁵¹ Theotormon's initial lack of a verbal response contrasts sharply with Bromion's lengthy tirade, and his passivity to the violence of the storms mirrors Oothoon's helplessness against the similar thunders of Bromion. Still in command of his watery reign, however, he actively rolls waves around the "adulterate pair," whose bonds Blake highlights through the alliterative phrase "Bound back to back in Bromion's caves." By using the modifier "black" to

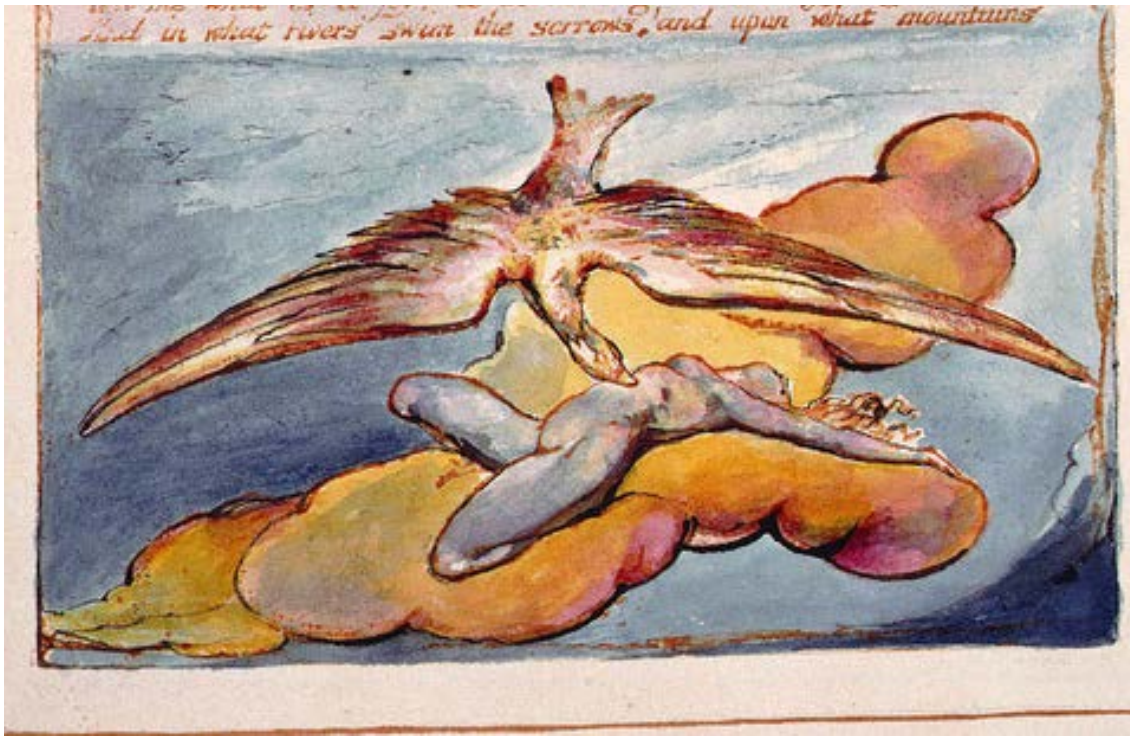
describe Theotormon's waves, Blake links the cuckolded figure to the slave in Stedman's *Narrative*, who is unable to protect fellow female slaves against the advances of white masters.

Beyond channeling his angst into the waves, Theotormon remains passively stationed at the threshold of Bromion's cave, unwilling to enter and save Oothoon yet incapable of abandoning his deflowered fiancé. "Theotormon sits wearing the threshold hard/ With secret tears; beneath him sound like waves on a desert shore/ The voices of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with money/ That shiver in religious caves."¹⁵² Theotormon's "secret tears" insinuate that though he is distraught by the defilement of his beloved Oothoon, he remains unwilling to ignore the established requirements predicating marriage, namely female virginity; thus, Theotormon must hide his actual emotions to adhere to reigning social norms. In his description of this environment, Blake yokes together several contrary images or places to illustrate Theotormon's conflicted mindset. The coming together of water and dry desert first indicates the clash of contrary natural states, and the creation of the shore also implies the union of these two disparate elements, much like the new product of a sexual union. Similarly, the image of slaves laboring beneath a sun recalls imagery from both "The Little Black Boy" and *America, A Prophecy* in which Urizen is associated with the sun, sky, and clouds from which he maintains his oppressive mastery over slaves and enlightened colonists. Finally, Blake references the Church's role in issuing religious propaganda rationalizing the institution of marriage and slavery (child slavery specifically, in this instance); such bondage indoctrinates them into ideological "caves" similar to the physical space currently inhabited by Bromion and Oothoon. Together, this jumbled compilation of opposites and binary states elucidates Theotormon's awareness of the complexities of the situation, illustrated here through various social, political, and religious expectations.

Whereas Blake emphasizes the mental and ideological elements of Theotormon's bonds, he conversely highlights the physicality of Oothoon's shackles, which even extend to her tears: "Oothoon weeps not, she cannot weep! her tears are locked up."¹⁵³ Recognizing the social stigmas condemning her now defiled body, Oothoon ironically attempts to erase Bromion's damage through further violence on her body, and she commands "Theotormon's Eagles to prey upon her flesh."¹⁵⁴ Recalling Althusser's concept of the always-already interpellated subject, Oothoon's actions make her complicit in her own subjugation—she attempts to repress (and thus free) herself via a reenactment of the earlier rape. Channeling Prometheus' punishment for defying Zeus and presenting humanity with fire, Oothoon's request utilizes mythological references as well as political and religious language ("holy voice;" "Kings of the sounding air") in an attempt to counteract the effects of the social dogmas already in place dictating her fate.¹⁵⁵

Blake, however, highlights the absurdity of the disorderly scene in restoring any trace of Oothoon's former purity. In an accompanying image, Blake places Oothoon sprawled on a bed of clouds with an eagle digging his beak into the soft flesh of her side in a dually erotic and violent scene of female subjugation. An undeniable reference to Prometheus, the image attempts to invoke an antique ideological system that has no real relevance to the contemporary social norms of early nineteenth-century England. The rationale that "the Gods oversaw my punishment" would be an ineffective route because the ideological authority of the Christian Church via the ideological assumptions concerning marriage would trump such dated references.

By illustrating Oothoon in the clouds (rather than her supposed position in Bromion's cave), Blake emphasizes her use of Urizenic reason in her attempt to sway Theotormon. Foreshadowing additional examples of Oothoon's application of other ideological systems in



William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 1818, copy P, object 6 (detail).¹⁵⁶

pursuit of freedom, this first example illustrates the lack of complete oppression between Bromion and Oothoon. Although she is undoubtedly a victim, Oothoon remains willing to manipulate and assert various ideologies to facilitate her own freedom from binary bondage, and thus she becomes an agent of interpellation and subjugation rather than a purely innocent victim. When the symbolic wrenching away of her bosom fails to convince her fiancé, Oothoon begins to bombard him with intellectual reason. She argues: “Arise my Theotormon I am pure./...Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on, & the soul prey’d on by woe/ The new wash’d lamb ting’d with the village smoke & the bright swan/ By the red earth of our immortal river: I bathe my wings,/ And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon’s breast.”¹⁵⁷ Rather than attempting to erase any trace of the rape, Oothoon now acknowledges and defends her culpability by positioning herself as a true victim of circumstances. By comparing her defilement

to such common occurrences and sights, Oothoon strives to decrease the singularity of the rape and importance. She even selects appealing, wholesome items for comparison to convince Theotormon of her pure intentions and new cleanliness, in attempts to entice him inward from the threshold of the cave.

Finally breaking his silence, Theotormon responds to Oothoon's concrete examples of her purity with a string of metaphysical questions that undermine the validity of propositions based solely on sensory perceptions. He answers: "Tell me what is a thought? & of what substances is it made?/ Tell me what is a joy? & in what gardens do joys grow?/ And in what rivers swim the sorrows? And upon what mountains/ Wave shadows of discontent?"¹⁵⁸ By speaking in absurdities, Theotormon devalues Oothoon's rationalizations of her situation and emphasizes the tangibility of his own current emotions, which mourn an irrecoverable past. Even his name illustrates a incompatible juxtaposition of "torment" with "theo," the etymological root of theology, which is the very abstraction driving his self-inflicted solitude. Like Oothoon, he is also complicit in his own subjection to the Church's suppositions about marriage. Whereas Oothoon highlights her lateral movement away from the rape, Theotormon remains shackled by the ever-present memory of the event, incapable of any directional movement. He imagines no future and wishes only to "traverse times & spaces far remote and bring/ Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain."¹⁵⁹ Bromion merely confirms the instability of sensory observations by highlighting the inherent unknowability of the world: "But knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth/ To gratify senses unknown? trees beasts and birds unknown:/ Unknown, not unperceived, spread in the infinite microscope,/ In places yet unvisited by the voyager."¹⁶⁰

Because the mortal men remain unaffected by her arguments based on rational, concrete examples, Oothoon redirects her anger to a more abstract enslaving entity—"O Urizen: Creator

of men! mistaken Demon of heaven.”¹⁶¹ In a tirade that comprises the remainder of the narrative, Oothoon bombards Urizen with rhetorical questions about the nature of things while simultaneously presenting her own theoretical plans for a later escape. In a segment articulating an extended metaphor of the parson and the farmer, Oothoon bemoans the inequality inherent in the binary relationship between men and women:

With what sense does the parson claim the labour of the farmer?
What are his nets & gins & traps, & how does he surround him
With cold floods of abstraction, and with forests of solitude,
To build him castles and high spires, where kings & priests may dwell.
Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot; is bound
In spells of law to one she loaths; and must she drag the chain
Of life, in weary lust! must chilling murderous thoughts, obscure
The clear heaven of her eternal spring! to bear the wintry rage
Of a harsh terror driv'n to madness, bound to hold a rod
Over her shrinking shoulders all the day; & all the night
To turn the wheel of false desire: and longings that wake her womb
To the abhorred birth of cherubs in the human form
That live a pestilence & die a meteor & are no more.¹⁶²

Demonstrating the extent to which Blake employs imagery of other subservient binaries in his characterization of the gender hierarchy, the passage weaves together references to racial, political, religious, and economic hierarchies that together comprise an entire rhetoric to verbalize the experience of being subservient.

Although the female Oothoon is speaking, the first line proposes a dichotomy between the parson and farmer, between a man of the Church and a man of the land. Associated with the “soft soul of America,” Oothoon imagines herself as the farmer, questioning what specific tools the parson employs to facilitate her obedience. Citing “nets & gins & traps,” Oothoon alludes not only to the physical practice of slave catching but also to concrete institutions, such as marriage and industrial factories, that restrain lower classes economically as well as ideological institutions, such as the religious doctrines, that manipulate mentally. Even the repeated ampersand yoking together the enslaving strategies resembles a knotted rope—another imaginable tool of oppression. In contrast to these physical tools, Oothoon posits the effectiveness of “cold floods of abstraction” and “forests of solitude” that are either incomprehensible for the majority of subservient populations or isolate groups from resources, such as education, which would enable a greater comprehension of their own position. To strengthen the similar function of political, state, and religious ideological apparatuses, Blake not only links “kings & priests” with an ampersand but also includes both “castles and high spires,” which foregrounds both churches and political building, in a single line.

Until this narrative moment, Oothoon had merely described the current state of the relationship between dominant and subservient groups, but in the fifth line of the section, she adds a gender element to the comparison, stating: “Till *she* who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot; is bound/ In spells of law to one she loaths.” Previously youthful and unencumbered, this figure represents aspects of the female sex, the pre-colonial land of America, and the unshackled darker races. Blake emphasizes her sexual vivaciousness and self-autonomy, invoking images of the virginal Oothoon plucking the marigold as well as the revolutionary Orc burning in his pursuit of freedom. These qualities, however, are immediately extinguished by

repressive chains of marital, colonial, and slave law, which obfuscate the “clear heaven of her eternal spring” through a cyclical life of turning “the wheel of false desire.” Inserting sexual imagery previously associated with Bromion, Oothoon narrates women’s role to “bear the wintry rage/ Of a harsh terror driv’n to madness;” the reference strongly resembles rationales provided by the little black boy’s mother: “we are put on earth a little space,/ That we may learn to bear the beams of love,/ And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face/ Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.”¹⁶³ Both scenes use the word “bear” as a response to love—whether sexual or religious—but the boy’s mother does not recognize the irony of her situation whereas the weathered female in *Visions* has cognizance yet remains incapable of change.

Portrayed as a resource maltreated and depleted over time, the female figure is “bound to hold a rod/ Over her shrinking shoulders all the day; & all the night,” and the rod functions as a physical representation of the weight from above pressing the woman into obedience. In relation to actual female bodies, the shrinking shoulders mimics the actual aging process, undoubtedly accelerated by heavy physical and ideological loads; in terms of colonial America, the wear can reference the exploitation of natural resources, perhaps even to produce the very rod shackling the figure. The rod is also highly phallic, and its placement over the female’s shoulders provides a definitive portrait of masculine sexual authority. Rather than lauding women’s ability to give birth, Oothoon casts reproduction as an evil since children come into a world plagued not only by social inequality but also disease, false religions, and “loveless love-making,” again a reference to the enchaining façade of marriage.¹⁶⁴ Illustrating the brevity and dirtiness of a child’s life, Oothoon concludes the segment with a spartan portrayal of life never free from the knotted confines of the ampersand—one will “live a pestilence & die a meteor & are no more.” A prime example of Blake’s conflation of language related to various forms of oppression,

Oothoon's contrasting depictions of various binary relationships in this section illustrates the extent to which Blake incorporated social commentary about exploited groups, from industrial laborers and English housewives to colonial rebels and enslaved Africans in his illuminated, prophetic books.

Although Oothoon presents a realistic portrayal of the subjugation of women by various ideological apparatuses, her own espousals, as posited earlier, do not always align with the negation or disuse of such institutions. She lambasts the Father of Jealousy for teaching Theotormon his accursed tenets and instead lauds "Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love!" as the harbinger of her fiancé's mental freedom.¹⁶⁵ Her demonstrated path to obtaining such love, however, utilizes the same entrapping strategies that first necessitated her own shackles. Playing the role of a slave catcher, Oothoon plans: "But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,/ And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold;/ I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play/ In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon."¹⁶⁶ Again illustrating her own adherence to Althusserian notions of self-interpellation, Oothoon assumes the colonial ideology by which she has been victimized. Not only does she offer to catch women for Theotormon's sexual pleasure to in some way "even the score," but she also refers to various women in relation to certain metals. These metals could either refer to the approximate races of various women or to the natural resources of their home country. Any interpretation has severe gender and colonial implications, and Oothoon's identity as a female indicates the disunity among her sex concerning their own exploitation.

Oothoon's idea to catch women of color for Theotormon's erotic enjoyment references another illustration Blake completed for Stedman's *Narrative*. In this image, Blake positions three nude women in a semicircle with a pale, blond figure in the middle supported by a black

woman on the left and a tan woman on the right. Both colored women wear gold shackles around their upper arms and stare out toward the viewer while the central figure leans in for support in a contrapposto posture reminiscent of Botticelli's canonical *Birth of Venus*. Blake's title, "Europe Supported by Africa & America," identifies the women as allegorical representations of countries, with Europe in the center flanked by Africa on the left and America to the right. All



Blake, "Europe Supported by Africa & America," *Stedman's Narrative*, 1796.¹⁶⁷

three women are depicted as sexualized objects, but Blake emphasizes the hierarchy within the gender, with Europe comfortable in her reliance on Africa and America, who conversely remain bound by the “nets and traps” of colonial exploitation. Unlike the earlier blank stare of the broken male slave earlier in Stedman’s *Narrative*, these personifications of Africa and America stare directly at the viewer, as if to incite action. Whereas the majority of the *Narrative* illustrated repeated oppression of such figures, this image—the last in the book—rejects this pattern to present a final, defamiliarized depiction of female, colonial slaves, insinuating a new cognizance of their own subjugated condition.

Though explicitly identified with America, Oothoon still offers to catch other racially different women for Theotormon, whose race is never specified. Is Oothoon willing to subject other women in her ethnic group to a similar sexual fate in order to reunite with Theotormon? Or, is she advocating for a liberated sexual environment in which social stigmatism truly have no consequence and she “shall view his dear delight, nor e’er with jealous cloud/ Come in heaven of generous love; nor selfish blightings bring”?¹⁶⁸ Taking evidence from her initial reliance on the institution of marriage for sexual fulfillment, I argue Oothoon has not yet conceived of any path to liberation outside the already dominant ideological apparatuses. She attempts to free herself by turning the tools of her own oppression against others, including other enslaved women, which merely facilitates the continued construction of a hierarchical social order. Her novelty as a heroine, however, stems from her awareness of the multiplicity of ideologies and the way in which individuals manipulate them for personal gain, a strategy she mimics. As Oothoon employs various ideological approaches, the reader also becomes cognizant of the gamut of rationales used to ensure the continued binary dominance of certain, privileged populations.

Because Blake does not align Oothoon with a single perspective concerning the sexual freedoms of women, he forces readers to consider multiple angles of the argument, which again highlights the importance of defamiliarization. Wright explains the phenomenon:

In *Visions*...the reader is placed in an alienated position, from which it can be seen that the assumptions that govern the homogeneous societies that are represented do not operate naturally or totalize the field; the reader is a spectator of mutually exclusive systems and, in being able to see the different systems that are fundamentally unable to recognize each other, is placed on the edges of them all.¹⁶⁹

Because Oothoon vocalizes a variety of doctrines, from antique mythology and intellectual reason to emotion-driven sentiments and controlling contraries, she becomes an apt vehicle for Blake to demonstrate the variety of possible (and often illogical) responses to questions of sexuality and binary subjugation and to explore ideologies of gender and femininity.

Rather than ending *Visions* with a concrete conclusion, Blake leaves his three characters in medias res with no resolution in sight: “Thus every morning wails Oothoon, but Theotormon sits/ Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire.”¹⁷⁰ Though their existence now resemble Oothoon’s cyclical wheel of false desire, their conversations do reach others’ ears—throughout the narrative Blake repeats the line, “The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs.”¹⁷¹ Uncharacteristically outspoken about (and against) her own rape, Oothoon comprises a new brand of female heroine, educated enough to comprehend the inequality of her situation and revolutionary enough to attempt actual change. Although her strategies are by no means rational, justified, or even effective, her attempts themselves foreshadow the imminent wave of feminist critiques of society and of women’s exploitation by ideological apparatuses, such as marriage. By presenting a multiplicity of perspectives not only

concerning gender and sexuality but also on race, slavery, colonialism and education, Oothoon becomes a manifestation of her own rhetoric steeped in binary relationships—a revolutionary figure striving erratically for her own liberty and proving that “Without Contraries is no progression.”¹⁷²

¹²⁹ Johnson, Mary Lynn and John E. Grant. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. New York: Norton & Company, 1979. 55.

¹³⁰ Blake, William. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy P, object 1, 1793. *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 15 April 2013.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³² Sartre, John-Paul. *No Exit: and Three Other Plays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

¹³³ Blake, William. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy P, object 2, 1793. *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 15 April 2013.

¹³⁴ Blake, William. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: Norton & Company, 1979. 3/iii, 1-4.

¹³⁵ Damon, S. Foster. “Leutha.” *A Blake Dictionary*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988. 238.

¹³⁶ “vale, n.1”. OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/Entry/221117?rskey=vMOSzN&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 27, 2013).

¹³⁷ Blake, *Visions*, 3/iii, 5.

¹³⁸ Damon, 238.

¹³⁹ Blake, *Visions*, 3/iii, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3/iii, 7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3/iii, 7-8.

¹⁴² “mantle, n.”. OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/Entry/113712?rskey=rqTkqE&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 27, 2013).

¹⁴³ Blake, *Visions*, 4/1, 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4/1, 11-13.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4/1, 14-15.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4/1, 16.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4/1, 18-23; 5/2, 1-2.

¹⁴⁸ Blake, William. “Family of Negro Slaves from Loango.” From John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. 1796. *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 9 April 2013.

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=bb499.1.comeng.13&java=no>.

¹⁴⁹ Stedman, John Gabriel. *Narrative of a five years' expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America, from the year 1772 to 1777* [electronic resource]. Volume 1. London, 1796. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Vanderbilt University. 25 Apr. 2012 <<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/>>. 8.

¹⁵⁰ Price, Richard. "Stedman, John Gabriel (1744–1797)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oct. 2006. 25 April 2012. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/article/26340>>. 1.

¹⁵¹ Blake, *Visions*, 5/2, 3-5.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 5/2, 6-9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5/2, 11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5/2, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Johnson and Grant. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 59-60.

¹⁵⁶ Blake, William. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy P, object 6 (detail), 1793. *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 9 April 2013.

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=vda.p.illbk.06&java=no>

¹⁵⁷ Blake, *Visions*, 5/2, 28; 6/3, 16-19.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6/3, 23-26.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7/4, 6-7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7/4, 14-17.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8/5, 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 8/5, 17-29.

¹⁶³ Blake, William. "The Little Black Boy." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: Norton & Company, 1979. 16, 13-16.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson and Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Blake, *Visions*, 10/7, 16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10/7, 23-26.

¹⁶⁷ Blake, William. "Europe Supported by Africa & America." From John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. 1796. *The William Blake Archive*. November 1996. Web. Accessed 9 April 2013.

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=bb499.1.comeng.16&java=no>.

¹⁶⁸ Blake, *Visions*, 10/7, 28-29.

¹⁶⁹ Wright, Julia M. "'How Different the World to Them': Revolutionary Heterogeneity and Alienation." *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. 85.

¹⁷⁰ Blake, *Visions*, 11/8, 11-12.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11/8, 13.

¹⁷² Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: Norton & Company, 1979. 69. 2.

Conclusion

Employing the strategies of defamiliarization a century before the Russian Formalists explicitly studied the theory's applications, Blake exposes and illustrates binary oppression in innovative, constantly shifting combinations of text and design. By transcending not only academic boundaries defining art and literature but also linear time, Blake's collective production exemplifies the idea of intertextuality—a theory that locates any given work as part of a larger fabric of literary discourse. By examining common features of various texts, one can better understand the textual precedents and social pressures that instigated an era's literary output. Because Blake never explicitly voiced his opinions on most political issues, intertextual studies clarify the man behind the etchings, elucidating his opinions of radical contemporaries, like Wollstonecraft, artistic predecessors, such as Michelangelo, and—most applicable to my project—ideological apparatuses, such as the Church and the State.

French critic Julia Kristeva, who is credited with coining intertextuality, encourages literature to be studied as “part of a continuum including the future as well as the past.”¹⁷³ By juxtaposing history with prophecy and fact with fiction, Blake not only draws from the extensive continuum of Western literature and religious history but also intersperses his texts with non-sequential events, mirroring his affinity to yoke together seemingly oppositional contraries. Viewed broadly, intertextuality can refer to the significant interconnectedness between literary texts and nonliterary discussions of issues represented in those texts.¹⁷⁴ This overlap allows me to connect theories from Althusser, Spivak, Senghor, and others to the literary ideas produced by Blake—a method that, in my opinion, best situates the poet as a conscientious observer, critic, and literary interpreter of the reigning issues affecting his English environment. Even my

argument in Section Four that Oothoon embodies multiple contraries necessitates that Blake combines various social and political issues into the amalgam of binaries represented by Oothoon. Just as Blake invoked intertextual methodologies to synthesize the various histories, mythologies, and literary forerunners contributing to his prophetic books at the turn of the nineteenth century, I, too, utilize this idea to bring together three of Blake's disparate works. Intertextuality, at its core, allows me to illustrate the ways in which the three selections operate on a common vocabulary of subservience, whether racial, national, sexual, or a new, composite form.

Through the lyrical voice in "The Little Black Boy," Blake demonstrates the ramifications of accepting religious ideologies taught by the Church and foreshadows the limitations of strategic essentialism to initiate political equality for various races. By illustrating the ways in which pacifying information is transmitted, Blake begins to alert his readers to the systems facilitating their daily (and likely still unrecognized) oppression. Analyzing one of the most influential historical events of the period in *America, A Prophecy*, Blake reimagines the chronology of the colonial revolution as the clash, and subsequent entanglement, of riotous Orc with the manifestation of Reason and oppression, Urizen. Refusing to lend absolute support to either faction, the poet inserts himself in the narrative as the Bard, who smashes the harp producing the false, overly linear, projection of revolution. Rather insidiously, Blake undermines (and defamiliarizes) America's triumph over absolutism by interrupting the narrative with disparate moments outside linear time, such as biblical allusions and gestures to France's future Reign of Terror.

The ultimate manifestation of binary bondage, Oothoon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* conflates several singular contraries, including race and nationality, into a single

corporeal entity. Through the verbal exchange and actions of the *Visions* trio, Blake highlights the processes by which dominant factions repress weaker populations on the basis of interrelated notions dictating racial, national, and sexual inferiority. Distinct from both the little black boy and Orc, however, Oothoon remains stationary in time and place, attempting to free herself through various snippets of ideological reason and erotic emotion. She continues to operate within the boundaries of established ideological systems, but her ability to recognize the existence and multiplicity of such apparatuses signifies a transition from the blind acceptance of Blake's earlier characters. Labeling Oothoon's difference an "enlightenment" or "progress" would only highlight my own inexorable adherence to linear advancement, but her self-recognition both as a subject and as a potential indoctrinator of ideology is new and monumentally radical—and she is not alone. Although the Daughters of Albion only "hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs" by the conclusion of the narrative, Blake continually emphasizes the power of art and literature to disturb rote sensory perception through continued, variable presentations. By *re-presenting* Oothoon's binary entrapment in an imaginative, prophetic work, Blake attempts to transcend rational justifications for oppression, to awaken his readers' minds to their own ideological subjugation, and to incite genuine radicalism bounded neither by Urizenic constructs nor the systems of any other man.

¹⁷³ Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. "Intertextuality." *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Third Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. 249.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

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