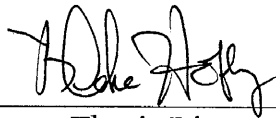


Sex and Sexuality in William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

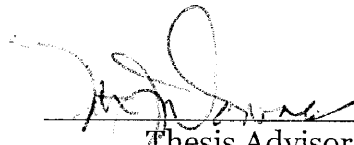
Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2009

By *KARA MACDOUGALL*



Thesis Director
Dr. Blake Hobby



Thesis Advisor
Dr. Margaret Downes

William Blake's rebellion against his society's traditional ideas concerning sex and sexuality are best seen in the intricate psychological conflicts that create his dramatic poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Blake weaves a pointed social commentary throughout the text, investigating social and religious restrictions as they affect both women and men. The main character's exploration of these causes, consequences and implications ultimately advocate for an open expression of emotions and sexuality and unity among all people.

Visions of the Daughters of Albion centers on the rape of the main character Othoon. Othoon, an innocent virgin deeply in love with her partner Theotormon, has a brutal encounter with Bromion on the way to visit her lover. While en route she is raped by Bromion. Theotormon, unable to cope with the situation, chains Othoon and Bromion together and laments over the loss of his lover. As Othoon sits in a cave, literally and figuratively locked to Bromion, she laments her situation and the three discuss the causes and consequences surrounding her rape. Through several long orations, Othoon discovers that all three characters are imprisoned by social, political, and religious ideals, all rooted in paradigms that predominated the second half of the 18th century.

The time in which Blake wrote was a time of turmoil, rebellion, and revolution. Many major events shaped the minds of all people of the day, including William Blake. When approaching Blake's writing it is important to understand these problems as much of his work is influenced by what he thought to be social and religious injustices. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is no exception, commenting on movements and events like neoclassicism, the industrial, American, and French revolutions, and enlightenment ideals. Blake uses Othoon's rape and subsequent reactions from the other

characters to comment on these movements and ideals to display the negative impact they have on people in general. These ideals greatly impacted 18th century thought. During this period, England experienced a revival of classical Greek ideals concerning art, including clarity, simplicity, reason, logic and a favoring of form over content. During his brief time at the Royal Academy, Blake was exposed to neoclassical ideals while studying under Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds heavily criticized Blake's engravings, recommending that Blake only derive inspiration from the Bible and, "work with less extravagance and more simplicity" (Paananen 18). Blake was highly disturbed by Reynolds' comments. For Blake inspiration came from within. He rejected neoclassicism's restriction of inspiration and creativity, a rejection which soon evolved into distaste for any type of restriction, whether of mind, body, soul, or spirit.

Even more so than this limiting power of neoclassic ideals, Blake found those ideals that emphasized reason and logic to be even more frustrating. In the 18th century, the Enlightenment ushered a change in thought in which reason was highly valued. John Locke and other 18th century philosophers strongly emphasized the use of reason, believing it to be the way to achieve salvation and truth (Grant 48). Although Blake recognized reason as an important facet, he found unbridled reason to be problematic. Michael Ferber critiques William Blake's distrust of rationality in *The Social Vision of William Blake*. Ferber focuses heavily on Blake's fierce opposition to theorists such as John Locke and David Hume, paying particular attention Blake's distaste of Lockean theory, in which all truths are evident to reason (Ferber 17), and Blake's frequent use of reason to deduce the inferiority of a specific race or gender (21). In a similar vein, Jean Hagstrum considers Blake's enemies to be Locke, Hume, Voltaire, and Newton for the same heavy emphasis on logic and reason. In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake

constantly denounces the faculty reason by presenting it a force imprisoning imagination and passion. The presentation of reason as an imprisoning force over emotion is best seen in Othoon's long oration as she questions the causes of her rape; "They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;/ They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up./ And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle" (Johnson 60. 29-31). Othoon's statement is a direct attack on unrestrained use of reason over emotion and passion. In this particular passage "they" is an extremely charged noun. The "they" she refers to are enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, who prescribe reason as a guide to behavior and divine thought (Gardiner 286). As Othoon mentions in her statement, attachment to one method of thought is dangerous and restricts the mind's possibilities into a "narrow circle."

Later in the poem Othoon openly denounces the faculty of reason again; "O Urizen: Creator of men! Mistaken Demon of heaven" (Johnson 62. 3). Othoon makes an important reference to Urizen, Blake's name for reason. She refers to Urizen as the creator of man. In doing so, she places the blame for the fall of man on Urizen, i.e. on unrestrained reason. Additionally, Blake's choice to call Urizen a "mistaken demon of heaven" can be linked to 18th century thought. As mentioned before, John Locke believed reason could serve as a personal guide to salvation. Clearly Othoon disagrees with this notion, stating that reason can be a mistaken guide.

Although *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* focuses heavily on enlightenment and neoclassical ideals as major restrictive forces, Blake also included the restriction of sexuality during that time as an extremely detrimental limitation. In the eighteenth century a woman's chastity was of utmost importance. The value of women maintaining their virginity in the West became highly emphasized with the birth of Christianity and

the proclamations of the four church fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome. The Fathers made a definite distinction between men and women, relating men to the spiritual and women with the physical realm. Since men were seen as purely spiritual and women as the opposite, Ambrose concluded that without women, there would be no temptation and men would be free to exist in the spiritual realm (Salisbury 23). Such conclusions fueled the desire for women to remain chaste, as promiscuous women were seen only as a temptation into the carnal world. The enlightenment witnessed a resurgence of such values as scientists of the time asserted that “erotic fulfillment was a biological necessity for women” (Davis 65). Blake refutes this notion in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* through the rape of Othoon. In the beginning of the poem, Othoon was an innocent virgin, excitedly awaiting a meeting with her lover Theotormon. In no way was Othoon a seductive temptress, yet she was brutally raped by Bromion. Thus Bromion’s illicit actions refute the conclusions of the fathers of the Western Christian Church, demonstrating that *men* are also infatuated with sexuality, whether or not women serve as a temptation.

In addition to limitations placed on sexuality, those unfortunate women who conceived during an adulterous encounter faced increased burden, regardless of whether or not participation was voluntary. Unfortunately, the mother and illicit child were the only ones affected by such norms, “For men, there seems to have been little social opprobrium for associated with paternity suits. For women, the consequences of an illicit affair were usually disastrous. Publically disgraced, discharged from their job, and in some cases, even sent to a house of correction, they would often be forced to choose between abandoning their child or turning to prostitution to support the two of them” (Davis79). Othoon is imprisoned by the aftermath of her rape and pregnancy.

After she is raped both Bromion and Theotormon reject her and, unlike Bromion, she will experience lifelong difficulties through the birth of an illegitimate child and ensuing consequences.

Even without the burden of an illegitimate pregnancy, the consequences a woman faced if she was involved in an affair or engaged in premarital sex shattered her image in society. In *Visions* this shattered image that women experienced is represented through Othoon's complete loss of identity in the minds of Theotormon and Bromion. Up until her rape, Othoon is referred to only as a maiden, but afterwards she is considered to be a harlot and is referred to in the possessive sense, "Behold this harlot here on Bromion's bed" (Johnson 58. 18). Replacing Othoon's name with "this harlot" emphasizes her loss of identity, which is further stressed when she is referred to as Bromion's harlot. The apostrophe implies ownership of Othoon, thus demonstrating her transformation from a person into a possession.

To further depict the negative impact sexual restrictions perpetuated by the Four Fathers of the Western Church, Blake presents Othoon as a virgin sacrifice, "And calling upon Theotormon's Eagle to prey upon her flesh, to "rend away her defiled bosom" (Johnson 59. 15). As stated before, and emphasized by the Church Fathers, traditional religious and societal restrictions advocated abstinence from passion (Davis 79). Since the emphasis for men to remain a virgin was not as strong, they were more free to actively pursue sexual relations. Frequent denials from women could likely frustrate them. It is no surprise then that rage could build and eventually culminate in rape. Women, like Othoon become an outlet, or sacrifice, for men's pent up sexual frustration.

Blake widens the notion of women carrying the burdens for adulterous affairs and illegitimate children to include women taking the blame for men's actions in

general. While Othoon's subjection to the eagles demonstrates women as a scapegoat for men's sexual frustration, it also makes an important reference to a character in Greek mythology, Prometheus. Known for his great intelligence, Prometheus was responsible for the creation of women. By stealing fire to give to mortals Zeus sentenced both Prometheus and all other mortals to severe punishments. Prometheus' punishment entailed being tied to a rock as eagles tore his liver out. It was an eternal sentence as each night his liver would regenerate. Even more interesting was Zeus' punishment for mortals. As a penalty for Prometheus' actions, Zeus created the first woman, Pandora. Eventually, Pandora opened a jar out of curiosity and released all the diseases and plagues of the world (Woodard 106). Blake specifically makes this reference to demonstrate and further develop the idea of women assuming the consequences of men's actions. Pandora's entire existence, and therefore releasing of diseases, is the direct result of Prometheus' actions. Regardless, Pandora is still blamed for opening the jar. Similarly, Eve is blamed for the fall from Eden, despite Adam's failure to watch over her. This idea is carried into Othoon's predicament as she too is forced to suffer the consequences of Bromion's actions through the birth of an illicit child.

In addition to Othoon's sacrificial subjection to the eagles, Blake continues to represent women as carrying the blame for society's repression of sexuality (McQuail 122). Blake frequently uses veil imagery to represent this idea. In the poem's opening argument Othoon makes a direct reference to a specific character from Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, "I trembled in my virgin fears/ And I hid in Leutha's vale" (Johnson 56. 3-4). In Milton's epic, Leutha descended into Satan's assembly and offered herself as payment for Satan's sin, carrying the guilt for his wrongdoings. Just as Leutha takes the brunt of Satan's sin, Othoon endures the penalties for Bromion's sins. To

emphasize the extent to which Othoon will be marked by her encounter with Bromion, Blake makes references to slavery in general. After Othoon is raped, Bromion makes the comment, “Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south:/ Stampt with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun” (Johnson 58. 20-21). Bromion specifically alludes to slavery and the branding of slaves in America to demonstrate the strength of Othoon’s attachment to him and the sexual act. Othoon is forever branded by this interaction. The modern reader is reminded of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, as Othoon, like Hester, will forever be marked by the sexual encounter. However, unlike Hester Prynne, Othoon’s participation in the act was not of her own will and, despite the fact, must face the same limitative consequences of being degraded by it.

To emphasize the effect of traditional values concerning womanhood and virginity, Blake frequently depicts Othoon as overwhelmed with grief, especially after her rape. He makes numerous allusions to grief and the act of grieving throughout the text. As Othoon wanders in search of comfort, she speaks to a marigold. The marigold, though currently representative of grief, is a flower traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary. They were originally called Mary’s gold, as the orange flower was offered in place of gold at the feet of the Virgin’s statues. The flower eventually became symbolic of grief (Mancoff 175). The evolution of the flower’s symbolism from its original attachment to virginity strongly emphasizes the harmful effect of traditional western religious values concerning chastity.

Blake further develops the extent of women’s grief as a result of sexual restrictions through Othoon’s call to the eagles, “The Eagles at her call descend & rend their bleeding prey” (Johnson 59. 17). Although the verb “rend” literally means to tear

apart by violence it can also refer to tearing apart as a sign of anger, grief or despair (rend def. 3b). Therefore, on a symbolical level, Othoon is ripped apart from grief.

While commenting on the negative impact of traditional values concerning sexuality as established by the Church Fathers, Blake also attacks the institution of slavery. The transatlantic slave trade and slavery in general was an issue of hot debate between activists and politicians in the 18th century. Activists such as Joseph Johnson, Joseph Priestly, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft protested against the political and social turmoil they felt in England; particularly slavery of African Americans (William 154). Although the text certainly refers to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, many literary critics believe the term, as used in *Visions*, includes the repression of women as well. In the article, "Sex Violence and Slavery," Anne Mellor explores Blake's meaning of "slavery." According to Mellor, Mary Wollstonecraft and other contemporary debates heavily influenced Blake's visionary ideas of the slave trade. She extends slavery, in accordance with Mary Wollstonecraft, to also include women (Mellor 347). The first line, "Enslav'd the daughters of Albion weep" (Johnson 56. 1) supports Mellor's thesis, extending the institution of slavery as affecting women as well. However, Blake is careful to remark that the women of this poem are the "daughters of Albion," or England, not Africa. The debate over slavery was heavily focused on the enslavement of African's and Blake's choice to specifically state English women highlights the far reaching breadth of enslavement and restriction.

The idea of the women of Albion being enslaved and isolated naturally leads one to question how and by whom or what is enslaving them. Although it is easy to blame the men of the poem for Othoon's predicament it is important to remember they too are enslaved by societal standards and expectations. Blake consistently holds this attitude

throughout his work, expanding slavery and restriction of women and sexuality to encompass men and any type of restriction in general whether it is physical, psychological, or emotional.

David Erdman explores these restrictions in “Blake’s Vision of Slavery: From Prophet Against an Empire,” placing blame on jealousy, misguided sexual energy, and possessiveness. Erdman focuses on Blake’s treatment of these matters, in that they create all the problems of our world, including all the problems in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (Erdman 58). As mentioned earlier, due to traditional expectations for women to remain chaste and the lack of that same emphasis on men, women often became the scapegoat for men’s pent up sexual energy. This phenomenon represents Erdman’s concept of misguided sexual energy being a major problem of the world. Indeed, it is likely that Bromion’s misguided feelings and rage are a result of the female’s need to retain their virginity, therefore being the driving force behind the rape.

In addition to blaming misguided sexual energy for the world’s problems, Erdman blames jealousy and possessiveness. Clearly Theotormon is possessive of Othoon and jealous of Bromion’s sexual encounter with her. Unfortunately, based on traditional gender expectations, Theotormon cannot outwardly express the emotional impact. Men are expected to withhold from any display of emotions with the exception of anger and rage (Jansz 173). Theotormon’s jealousy, therefore, is a result of his inability to deal with Othoon’s rape in a healthy manner. Blake best depicts the limitations on male emotions through Theotormon’s reaction to the rape, “At the entrance Theotormon sits wearing threshold hard/ With secret tears; beneath him sound like waves on a desert shore/ The voice of slaves beneath the sun, the children bought with money, That shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires/ Of lust.”

(Johnson 59. 6-9). His “secret tears” stresses the expectation in society for men to mask their feelings, while fulfilling gender expectations. The limitation placed on men’s emotions leaves Theotormon incapable of dealing with his emotions and unable to cope with the situation. Regardless of Othoon’s unyielding devotion, he can only respond through rage and isolation.

Although Theotrmon’s speech demonstrates the restrictions on masculine emotions, it also includes a direct reference to religious institutions as an imprisoning, oppressive force as Bromion and Othoon are described as “slaves.[...] That shiver in religious caves” (Johnson 59. 8) Blake developed a deep mistrust for the Evangelical church, which was likely due to changes in the late 18th century and 19th century. During this time the Evangelical Church experienced drastic changes. Centuries earlier the Church embarked on a notorious journey toward worship in which the individual had a personal and understandable relationship with God. Unfortunately these advancements quickly soured, with heightened importance on biblical literalism and priest guidance as necessary for salvation (Clark 295). The beginnings of the Evangelical movement and Swedenborgianism, another movement that rejected the need for priests in salvation, touched Blake deeply. He supported these beliefs, agreeing that God could be understood by every individual through a personal relationship with Christ. Unfortunately as time progressed the Evangelical and Swedenborgian message digressed to send a message similar to the Calvinist doctrine they had once bitterly rebelled against. The Church moved toward replacing faith with an invisible and incomprehensible God (Paananen 16). Similarly, Evangelicalism became excessively absorbed in biblical literalism and Christ’s death as the perfect atonement for human sin (Clark 295). To Blake, the church emphasis on atonement restricted the individual in

their relationship with God and salvation. Atonement took control over salvation out of the hands of Christian followers and into the hands of the Evangelical church. In *Visions*, this restrictive control over people is demonstrated by Othoon and Bromion being locked inside “religious caves.” The feelings of complete silence and isolation that are associated with caves emphasize the extent to which atonement biblical literalism enslaves and separates one from ultimate truth and salvation.

Along with Blake’s disdain for the traditional restrictions placed on sexuality and the Evangelical Church’s “control” over salvation, he had a huge problem with ideas that undermined unity and brotherhood. John Beer, author of *Blake’s Humanism*, explores the negative impact of disunity in *Visions*, while considering their social and political relevance, “the hindering of the brotherhood of man in the world at large was paralleled in the basic social organism, where the imposition of the moral law upon the love of individual men and women led to their love being stifled by jealousy and self-limiting enclosure” (14). Disunity of the common man and the movement away from emphasis on family and the community toward the individual was fostered by movements such as the Industrial Revolution as well as dominant pressures from the church.

Despite the positive changes in British lifestyle and economy, the industrial revolution was one such movement that produced disuniting changes in the Britain’s sense of community. During the 18th and 19th centuries Britain experienced drastic expansion of the workforce, industrial production, and technological advancements. The construction of more factories contributed to the usage of new energy sources and a particularly large increase in burning coal (Clark 410). Although the rise in factory work greatly increased job opportunities, it had its ugly side too. The move from village to city and the change in work and product produced a twofold change in mentality, altering

the relationship between the creator and his product. Before the Industrial Revolution, men worked in villages, largely in agriculture. Often times, the fruit of their labor is either bountiful or pitiful depending on forces outside of their control. Livelihood and productivity was seen as a gift from God who may choose to bless the worker with plenty one year or plague them with famine another (Bronowski 5). In this type of situation one's productivity is not the result of harder or less effort. One's success and "livelihood" is out of their control; much like the mindset of Christians who prescribed to Calvinist doctrine. Furthermore, the change in relationship between a worker and his product and the move from village to city also altered the idea of community that existed within rural life. The center of man's life shifted to from family and community to the self (Bronowski 7). Whereas in village and agricultural work was a team effort, each man worked independently, with little regard for anyone or anything else but the completion of one's individual duty, a great disunity when compared to agricultural societies.

For Blake the combination of the sense of disunity created by the industrial revolution and the push to use one's reason to interpret biblical text further disunites people in general. Whereas some biblical passages actually advocate unity among brethren, using reason to understand it can be faulty and lead to extraction of the wrong meaning. In her article, "Redeeming Scripture: My William Blake Revisited," Alicia Ostriker describes many points in Blake's career in which he depicts a contradiction between religion as a source of repression and at the same time, a form of liberation. According to Ostriker, this contradiction is extremely apparent in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (Ostriker 190). Blake consistently presents Religion as an oppressive force yet alludes to biblical passages that stress important "Blakean" ideals such as unity. One particular reference to such a biblical passage appears in

Theotormon's response to Othoon. It further demonstrates the limiting effect of religious traditions on the mind as he is unable to cope with the present situation and yearns for the past. He addresses his own thought process in an interesting request, "If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction/ Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dews and honey/ and balm;" (9-10). His specific request for dews and balm is a reference to psalm 133:

Behold, how good and how
 pleasant it is for brethren to dwell
 together in unity!
 It is like the precious ointment upon
 the head, that ran down upon the beard
 even Aaron's beard; that went down to
 the skirts of his garments;
 As the dew of Hermon, and as the
 dew that descended upon the mountain
 of Zion for there the LORD commanded
 the blessing even life evermore. (King James Bible Psalms. 133)

The psalm references Aaron, Moses' brother and priest of the Jews and his initiation into priesthood, which involves the anointing oil on the head and beard. According to Michael Ferber, Blake prescribed to the Old Testament's view of brotherhood in that we are all brothers in Christ. In his article, "Blake's Idea of Brotherhood," he examines Blake's disgust for church rituals, particularly for that of atonement, as it implied that forgiveness and salvation can only come from an external force (Ferber 441).

Theotormon's request not only serves as a testament to his adherence to church

traditions, but also emphasizes Blake's hatred of atonement. He has completely overlooked the main message of psalm 133, unity in all beings, and focused all attention on portions of the psalm that deal with church ritual. It also represents the far reaching and limiting effects of the Evangelical Movement's return to placing importance in atonement and priestly duties. Furthermore, Theotormon's misunderstanding of psalm 133 manifests itself into his actions as he does not seek to establish unity with other characters in the work. He sits completely isolated from Othoon and Bromion after he chains them together and leaves them in a cave.

Although the Evangelical Movement, Neoclassical ideals, and Enlightenment ideas heavily influenced Blake's opinion on the restriction of emotion and sexuality, the American and French revolution deeply changed his views on the effect of possessing power. These two revolutions reshaped history and people's mindsets in general, causing many people, including Blake to lose trust in political leaders and organizations. Blake represents his mistrust in political organizations in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. In a long oration, Othoon questions the problems of the world, "How different their eye and ear! How different the world to them!/ With what sense does the person claim the labour of he 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./ (Johnson 62. 17-20). On one level, Othoon clearly recognizes thought and reason as an abstract process through which people become entrapped. However, it is also clear the "they" Othoon refers to represents kings and other high standing political figures of the century. She sees the laborer as being tricked into hard work only for the advancement and strengthening of church and state establishments. King George III is one such political figure. During the

American Revolution, many British citizens disagreed with his treatment of the American colonies (Paananen 24). Othoon's statement, "With what sense does the person claim the labour of the farmer," demonstrates such unjust actions as King George III's over taxation and exploitation of the colonies without adequate representation. Just as Othoon wondered with what sense a person can claim another's work, many British and American's saw the king's taking advantage of the colonies as a repressive and unfair tactic to better the King's life, or "build him castles and high spires."

In addition to King George's misuse of power, Blake was influenced by factory owners who also abused the hard work of their employees. Productivity in the factory was dependent upon the laborer's effort, "the move to the factory put workers at a different place in the economy. [...] It was not God who stayed anymore but the economy" (Bronowski, 5). Factory owners seemed to not recognize or care that their factory's work output was determined solely by workers' efforts. Employees worked in dangerous, unsanitary conditions, received little pay and faced mistreatment on the job. Factory owner's treatment of workers and their abuse of power further demonstrated the ability of power to corrupt, further developing Blake's uneasy attitude towards having too much power and control.

Othoon's remark against politics in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is likely influenced by another event that demonstrated the corruptive force of holding power, the French Revolution. The early phase of the revolution was widely welcomed in Britain as French revolutionists initially set out on an honorable journey to reform the Catholic Church and the state. However, as time progressed French rebels slowly digressed from views of brotherhood and equality under a fair government, to using

radical and unjust means. Unfortunately, they quickly resorted to using the same unjust measures that they initially set out to destroy, ultimately becoming hypocrites.

Napoleon himself, a symbol of the war and a driving force in the movement, would fall victim to the corruptive strength of power, and crown himself emperor. The downward spiral of a once honorable undertaking and a respected leader heightened William Blake's mistrust of government and power.

Perhaps the most important aspect of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is Othoon's suggested remedy for transcending traditional restrictive values. Othoon's solution is to remain open and honest both emotionally and sexually. This idea is established early in the poem as Othoon converses with a marigold, "I was thee now a flower;/ Now a nymph" (Johnson 57. 6). To represent Othoon's proposed solution, the marigold, or the flower of grief, transforms into an empowered nymph open in her sexuality. The reference to marigolds in this instance can be related to another of Blake's poems, "The Sick Rose." In this short poem Blake describes an invisible worm that infects a bed of roses, "And his dark secret love/. Does thy life destroy" (Johnson 36. 7-8). The worm is a symbol for secretive affairs. Just as the worm slowly infects the bed of roses, affairs slowly infect and destroy relationships. The cure to such infection in relationships is open sexuality and honesty. Further emphasizing this point is the flower's response to Othoon, "Pluck thou my flower/ Othoon the mild/ Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight/ Can never pass away" (Johnson 58. 9-10). Giving into one's sexual desires repels the infestations that secretive affairs foster.

Though Blake hints at the solution early on in the poem through her conversation with the marigold, Othoon does not come to the realization until later,

after her encounter with the eagles. From this point on, she no longer feels guilt or shame over her rape. She urges Theotormon to see her newfound sense of purity as she makes numerous allusions to the idea of renewal, “I cry arise O Theotormon for the village dog/ Barks at the breaking day, the nightingale has done lamenting, [...] the Eagle returns/ From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure east; Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake/ The sun that sleeps too long (Johnson 60. 28-31). This passage is a pivotal moment in Othoon’s enlightenment. Although she is still locked up physically she experiences mental emancipation. The coming of a new day emphasizes this idea as the rising sun signifies enlightenment.

Additionally, Blake uses specific word choice to further emphasize Othoon’s enlightenment. In describing the eagle’s feathers, Blake is more specific, using the word “pinions.” The pinion is the outer edge of a bird’s wing that enables it to fly (“pinion” def. 1). If a bird is pinioned, its wings are clipped to prevent flight. The dust on the eagle’s pinions is representative of a hindrance in flight, which can be further related to the limitations placed on Othoon’s mind and thought process as discussed through traditional restrictive norms and values. Furthermore, referring to the feathers as “immortal pinions” suggests that this unhindered way of thinking is divine.

The last section of the text involves a long speech from Othoon in which she openly advocates unrestrained sexuality. To Othoon, despite pressures from the Evangelical Church, passion and emotion are the essence of biblical commands to be fruitful and multiply, “The virgin/ That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys/ In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth shut up from/ The lustful joy will forget to generate” (Johnson 64. 3-6). She presents the reader with two

contrasting lifestyles, that of the promiscuous who will receive the joys of motherhood and that of the imprisoned virgin who will not.

Also included in Othoon's solution, is a long, erotic description of a world in which Theotormon and herself are unrestricted by jealousy, "I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play/ In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon:/ Red as the rosy mornning, lustful as the firstborn beam,/ Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor c'en with jealous cloud/ Come in the heaven of generous love; nor selfish blighting bring."

Critic John Sutherland claimed that Blake presented sex as an act that kept people into the fallen world (Sutherland 426). Othoon's initial encounter with Bromion is an example of such a sexual act. However, Othoon's last suggestion demonstrates a realm in which sex can be an enlightening experience and serve to nudge people toward the final destination, four-fold vision. Blake did not just advocate free love in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, but free love with honesty and without jealousy. Otherwise, people are only perpetuating the cycle of the fallen world.

It may seem impossible to escape the restrictive influences of our time. Othoon's triumph demonstrates the possibility. We must be careful to follow Blake's suggestions to live erotically and passionately without getting caught in a "web of desire." For Blake, symbolic order in life has no existence apart from the subjects in it, and that order is structured around the "I." Therefore, changing the "I" changes the entire experience (Beal 81). Every person should strive to live passionately with opened senses not dependent on any empirical person or thing. Othoon comes to this realization when she advocates free love and a solution that does not just require a change in one person or group, but change and compromise from everyone. Both she and Theotormon

need to change their perspective with regards to the others sexuality, rejecting all thoughts of jealousy and finding genuine happiness in the other experiencing pleasure.

Works Cited

Beer, John. *Blake's Humanism*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1968. Print

Beal, Pamela. "Trembling before the Eternal Female: Blake's Call to a Transcendental Eros." *Modern Language Studies*. Vo 30 no 1 (Spring 2000): 75-91.

The Bible: Authorized King James Version. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1997. Print.

Clark, George. *The Oxford History of England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (1961-1965). Print.

Davis, Natalie, Farge, Arlette Ed. *A History of Women in the West: III. Renaissance to Enlightenment Paradoxes*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1993. Print.

Erdman, David. V. "Blake's Vision of Slavery: from Prophet Against an Empire." *Critical Essays on William Blake*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co. 1991, 57-66. Print.

Erdman, David. V. "The Infinite London." *Critics on Blake*. Ed. Judith O'niell. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970. 62-68. Print

Ferber, Michael. "Blake's Idea of Brotherhood." *PMLA*. Vo 93 No 3 (May 1978): 438-447.

Ferber, Michael. *The Social Vision of William Blake*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985. Print.

Frye, Northrop. "Poetry and Design in William Blake." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vo 10 No 1 (Sept. 1951): 35-42.

- Gardiner, Juliet, Wenborn Ed. *The Columbia Companion to British History*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1995. Print.
- Grant, Ruth W. *John Locke's Liberalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1987. Print.
- Hagstrum, Jean. H. "William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment." *Critical Essays on William Blake*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co. 1991. 67-78. Print.
- Holtzman, Deanna, Kulish, Nancy. *Nevermore: The hymen and the loss of virginity*. Northvale: Jason Asonson Inc. 1997. Print.
- Howard, Seymour. "William Blake: The Antique, Nudity, and Nakedness: A Study in Idealism and Regression." *Antibus et Historiae* Vo 3 No 6 (1982): 117-149.
- King, James. *William Blake: His Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1991. Print
- Mancoff, Debra N. *Flora Symbolica*. New York: Prestel, 2003. Print.
- McQuail, Josephene, A. "Passion and Mysticism in William Blake." *Modern Language Studies*. Vo 30 No 1 (Spring 2000): 121-134.
- Mellor, Anne. K. "Sex Violence and Slavery." *The Huntington Library Quarterly* Vo 58 no 3/4 (1995): 345-370.
- Jansz, Jeroen. "Masculine Identity and Restrictive Emotionality." *Gender and Emotion: Social Psychological Perspectives*. Ed. Agneta H. Fischer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000. Print.
- Johnson, Mary Lynn., Grant, John, Ed. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008. Print
- Ostriker, Alicia. "Desire Gratified and Ungratified: William Blake and Sexuality." *Critical Essays on William Blake*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co. 1991. 90-110. Print

- Ostriker, Alicia. Re-Deeming Scripture: My William Blake Revisited. *Women Reading William Blake*. Ed. Helen P. Bruder. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. 189-199. Print.
- Paananen, Victor. *William Blake*. Boston: Twayne Publishers. 1977. Print.
- Pinion*. The Oxford English Dictionary. Ed. Simpson, J. A. and E.S.C. Weiner. Vol 11. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Print.
- Reinhart, Charles. "William Blake." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Ed. John R. Greenfield. 93. Detroit: McKendree College. 1990. Print.
- Rend*. The Oxford English Dictionary. Ed. Simpson, J.A., and E.S.C. Weiner. Vol 13. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Print.
- Sutherland, John. "Blake: A Crisis of Love and Jealousy." *PMLA*. Vo 87 No 3 (May 1972):424-431.
- Woodland, Roger D. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.