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Breaking the Narrow Circle: A Contextual Approach to William Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion"

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William Blake was deeply and personally invested in the social and political turmoil of his day. He wrote poems and proclamations that are—and always have been—difficult to comprehend. As a result, it appears clear that scholars who interpret Blake's ideas tend to do so backgrounded by their own cultures' milieus. When dealing with Blake, one is inclined to keep one foot in the familiar. As Blake himself believed, however, it's preferable to incorporate a broader interpretive scope. "The resolution of contraries" is central to Blake's thought, he may well, then, propose apparently opposite truths in one poem and his critics may well, then, find themselves viewing not both, but just one of these points of view. His poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* presents us with an excellent example where different critics have presented opposing or completely unrelated ideas when these ideas can and should be synthesized. Blake was "multi-focal" in his writing and so critical approaches to his work must be multi-focal as well.

A considerable amount of explanation is necessary to better understand the scope of Blake's mythology. The basic plot points of the poem are these: Oothoon, one of the daughters of Albion, searches for the attention of her love, Theotormon, and while she vies for his affection, she is violently raped by Bromion, another of Blake's characters who then discards Oothoon to lament her own newly "defiled" state. Oothoon does lament, crying out for her own bodily destruction before attempting once again to gain Theotormon's love, only to find that he is even less interested now that she has been tainted by Bromion's assault. Instead, Oothoon must carry forward on her own. She rages at Urizen, Blake's symbolic embodiment of human reason and father to both Bromion and Theotormon, and carries on at length criticizing the ideology that has led the other two men to be so destructive and withdrawn from spiritual love. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* ends in melancholy, without resolution: "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.” (Plate 11 11-13).

Early twentieth century interpretations of *Visions*, including those of Northrop Frye or S. Foster Damon dismiss the poem as a continuation of early poems. Frye, a highly regarded and frequently cited mid-twentieth-century Blake scholar, distills the messages in the poem to an illustration of “the failure to unite the state of experience with that of innocence” (Frye 238). But more than a half-century later, under a different interpretive lens, writers like Helen Bruder and James Swearingen examine Oothoon’s role as a statement of Blake’s thoughts on the roles of women in English society. Bruder puts *Visions* in a more historical context, showing how Blake resists the societal constraints placed on the women of his time by showing a woman who is sexually autonomous and pleading for Theotormon to fulfill her sexual desires in a more liberated, open way than was generally accepted in the late eighteenth century, while Swearingen argues the opposite: that Blake wanted to put women in their place as subordinate and subservient to their male counterparts. Other scholars have come to separate and unrelated conclusions using the same text as is the case with Jonathan Kerr, who discusses *Visions* from a natural science perspective and comes to conclusions centered around Newtonian ideas of the infinite.

Many of these earlier analyses tend to leave out important pieces of historical and biographical context that complicate their authors’ arguments. But when *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is examined under a broader and deeper scope, layers of nuance and texture push back against Bruder’s arguments and outright refute Swearingen’s claims about Blake. Blake was tackling a variety of issues in *Visions*. But he was primarily concerned with extolling the ideals of liberty and in resisting his culture’s predominant emphasis on empiricism and

experience. Such cultural emphasis relied entirely on a rational interpretation of sensory perception which dominated the political and scientific discussion of the 1790s. For Blake, a person's essence, or their "imaginative spirit" was more important than their gender, their race, or their social standing, and Blake wanted people to live freely, to enjoy the selfless spiritual love between all people (Welch 129). *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* discusses the political climate of Blake's time, in England, America, and the European continent, along with John Locke's empirical and logical propositions that were increasing in popularity while Blake wrote *Visions*. Disregarding such essential context of this piece in favor of a narrower critique is to disregard many of the layers and complexities of Blake himself. When we place *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* within its contemporary intellectual, political, and historical contexts what becomes clear is that Blake was interweaving multiple messages to illuminate his views of the "imaginative spirit" and the selfless, passionate love that he believes will bring people closer to the Divinity that resides in the fully redeemed Human Self and this reading posits that these contexts are crucial to understanding Blake's intentions.

Stephen Behrendt says the "for Blake the American Revolution was both a paradigmatic event and a symbol for liberation from tyranny" (Behrendt 26). It seems clear, then, that we might draw connections between Oothoon, who Blake blatantly calls the "Spirit of America", and the fledgling American nation. In 1793, when *Visions* was written, England was embroiled in political and social disturbances. The American Revolution had recently ended but England was not finished with their antagonism of the new American nation. The French Revolution was raging nearby, and English politicians felt threatened by the French animosity toward the aristocracy and the monarchy. In response England sent troops into France as part of the First Coalition forces to help bolster the forces of the monarchy in order to hold back French

revolutionary republican forces. Considering the recent loss of the American colonies under similar circumstances, a large and growing portion of the English populace did not support interfering in French affairs. Blake saw this invasion as well as the continuing conflict with the American colonies as the support of tyranny over people that can and should be free to work with England in a harmonious relationship. When this is paired with the knowledge that Blake wrote *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* at the same time that British forces were invading French lands to uphold yet another tyrannical monarchy it is hard *not* to draw parallels between Bromion's tyrannical actions against Oothoon and the politics of Blake's contemporary life.

During the same year Blake wrote another poem more obviously titled *America* in which Albion (an ancient name for Britain and a deity at the peak of Blakean mythology) rages against his disobedient children as they grow more mature and begin to think and act independently. Rather than embracing the independent spirit of his children, Albion struggles against them, spoiling an opportunity to work with them for mutual gains. Blake begins his use of the metaphorical British "family" as England, the "mother country" with a "father" monarch that rule (or attempt to rule) over their "children" or colonies in *America* and carries that metaphor through to many of his later poems, including *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (Behrendt 31). As Behrendt puts it, "within the framework of this metaphor Blake examines the spiral of self-destruction as England wages retributive war against what it chooses to regard as errant children" (Behrendt 28). When we lay this metaphorical interpretation over *Visions*, which of course is literally titled to emphasize the children of Blake's metaphorical character for Britain, there is an echo of the themes examined in *America*.

Though *Visions* does not deal directly with Albion, Bromion, Theotormon, and Urizen are all manifestations of Albion. In the Blakean mythos, these characters are parts of the infinite

eternal spirit and they come together to create the whole divine spirit. They can be seen as the varying ideals that were circulating throughout British social and political life. In the case of *Visions*, we have Bromion which represents the impulsive, passionate spirit, concerned with personal gratification and material gain, and then Theotormon, the introspective spirit consumed by discussions of the abstract and philosophy while denying himself any true fulfilling interaction on the grounds of moral righteousness. There are personal philosophical implications in the actions of each of these characters which will be examined shortly, but in the broader political context we see the “spirit of America” reaching out for a loving prosperous relationship with the distillation of the fatherly spirit responsible for spiritual devotion and moral philosophy but she is overtaken by the rage-driven spirit led by greed and lust for conquest over her material value. When Bromion assaults Oothoon he states emphatically “Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north south,” which obviously draws parallels between their relationship and the relationship between America and England (Plate 4 20). Earlier in the poem, Blake even more explicitly refers to Oothoon as “the soft soul of America,” emphasizing her place as a metaphor for the new American nation. Additionally, Oothoon must travel “over the waves” in order to reach Theotormon’s land so she can express her love for him (Plate 4 14). With that in mind, Oothoon’s rape has clear political implications. As Welch says, “Like a colonialist ‘justified’ by [John] Locke’s rationale for appropriating and exploiting ‘waste land,’ Bromion lays claim to [Oothoon] as his possession, as the fair game of undeveloped land (America), appropriated and enhanced in cash value by his own energy and effort” (Welch 115). Bromion says that he has “stamp’d with [his] signet” Oothoon’s “American plains” and her “swarthy children of the sun”, and only after he has impregnated her does he say that she is worthy of Theotormon’s love. When Bromion takes what he wants from Oothoon, the morally righteous

Theotormon can not look past what Bromion has done and so she is denied and left to lament alone.

Just as important as current politics to Blake was the popularity of “British empiricism that valorize the external and accidental over the internal and essential” (Welch 107). That is, the concentration of British education and philosophy on empirical evidence which can only be perceived through the five external senses and the evaluative measures that come along with that. For many Enlightenment philosophers, such as John Locke, much of a person’s evaluative capacity comes from this sensory perception and as a result, a majority of that evaluation would come from external characteristics. For Locke, it was perfectly reasonable to judge a person based on their race, gender, social standing, or property holdings (Welch 109). In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke asserts that people with darker skin color are inherently lesser, using the “lack of civilized nations throughout history” as justification for his racism (Welch 110-11). Blake responded to this essay in a journal entry with “contempt and abhorrence” (Welch 111).

Blake was an essentialist, which meant according to Dennis Welch, that “the essential properties of humanity and of individuals reside [in the soul]. Size, skin color, sensory capacities, gender, and so forth are, strictly speaking, accidentals” (Welch 110). For Blake, the spiritual substance of a person, or their essence, was far more important than these “accidentals”. He says, “it is the inner substances that defines accidents of infinite variety, not accidents themselves that define a substance” which stands in direct opposition to Locke’s theories. According to Welch, “the Lockean person presents and unprecedentedly radical form of self-objectification, it is a ‘conscious thinking thing’ that instrumentalizes and even commodifies both the self and the Other.”. These would have been significantly anti-Blakean ideals because they put too much

emphasis on the “mind and consciousness as if it were disengaged or detachable from the body” (Welch 114).

When examining *Visions* with these theories in mind it is easy to see parallels between Locke’s ideology and Bromion. He is “a slave trader, explorer, and exploiter, who acknowledges no essential or intrinsic value in anything—except that which he can see, taste, touch, buy or sell” (Welch 115). Bromion states his stance clearly in his response to Oothoon after her assault, “But knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth / To gratify senses unknown?...And are there other sorrows beyond the sorrows of poverty? / And are there other joys, beside the joys of riches and ease?” (Plate 7, 14-15, 17-18). Bromion is incapable of understanding anything beyond his sensory perception and cannot see value in anything that is intangible or lacks proprietary value, all emphasis must look inward to personal gratification which is why Bromion has no issues in taking what he wants from Oothoon despite her lack of consent.

Interestingly, despite the rather blatant references to English politics, many readings of *Visions* leave out these details. Helen Bruder, who wrote volumes on Blake in regards to gender and is frequently cited in similar scholarly discussions on Blake’s work, gives a lengthy discussion of English sexual expectations and apprehensions of the time and presents Blake as a more liberating force to women than any of his contemporaries based on his resistance to societal constraints placed on eighteenth century English women, but never mentions the American nation or discusses Blake’s clear link between Oothoon and America. The later wave of Blakean scholarship which resists Bruder and other feminist writers on Blake like James Swearingen also leaves out any mention of these significant allusions. Of course, when examining a text through a particular interpretive lens it is necessary to concentrate on the specifics of that interpretation,

but these omissions remove a significant layer of what Blake was engaging with while writing *Visions*. The arguments of both sides of this discussion will be elaborated on in later pages but first it is necessary to explore the additional layers of context adding depth to the meaning behind Blake's work. For now, suffice it to say that *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* cannot simply be described as a poem about the roles of women in Blake's time.

Carrying on with the discussion of essentialist philosophy, Oothoon and Theotormon must be examined as well. Oothoon "embodies desires that are intrinsically worth fulfilling" which contrasts directly with Theotormon's determination to deny himself any pleasures beyond abstractions and the philosophical. In her pleading to Theotormon, Oothoon says "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," (Plate 5 30-32). Oothoon is resisting the Lockean ideals of English empiricism for its clear limitations to the imaginative spirit, she asks:

With what sense is it that the chicken shuns the ravenous hawk?

With what sense does the tame pigeon measure out the expanse?

With what sense does the bee form cells? have not the mouse frog

Eyes and ears and sense of touch? yet are their habitations

And their pursuits as different as their form and as their joys. (Plate 6 2-6)

Oothoon listens to the desires and passions of her inner essence and, more importantly, she is willing to act on those desires. In contrast, Theotormon denies those passions and restrains his desire, "Tell me what is the night or day to one o'erflowd with woe? / Tell me what is a thought? of what substance is it made? / Tell me what is a joy? In what gardens do joys grow? / And in

what rivers swim the sorrows?" (Plate 6 22-25) Like Bromion, he can only understand the tangible but unlike his brother, Theotormon is consumed with denial of his physical desire.

Henry Summerfield defines Theotormon as the "patron of repressive religion that blocks the expression of sexual energy, and equates this tyranny with the oppression of slaves," and with that in mind we can extend that metaphor to encompass tyranny more broadly (Summerfield 84). Theotormon is a self-righteous repressive force that holds himself back from joyful love in the name of purity. He is placed in contrast with the more aggressive Bromion but he is still caught up in a materialistic, sensory-driven view of the world. He will not see past what has happened to Oothoon physically to recognize that her spirit, and her love for him have not changed. In plate six Oothoon laments, "If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me. / How can I be defild when I reflect thy image pure?" (Plate 6 15-16). She is asking for Theotormon to look into her spirit and recognize that she is still spiritually pure but Theotormon's materialism prevents him from recognizing her. Eventually, both Bromion and Theotormon stop responding to her entirely. They have run out of things to say, and cannot refute her resistance to materialism any longer.

Interestingly, many of the narrower approaches to *Visions* leave out these references to the senses, or to Blake's contemporary politics. In her book *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion*, Helen Bruder claims *Visions* is "part of a historically specific sexual dialogue," discussing at length how Oothoon resists the ideals of chastity and repressing sexual desires that were dominant during Blake's time (Bruder 57). While these themes are certainly there, Bruder disregards the political climate from 1793 or any of Blake's discussion of the senses or the imaginative spirit. Thus, we are left with an incomplete version of *Visions*.

Bruder begins with the opening lines of the poem where Oothoon plucks the nymph Leutha's flower, saying the act is Oothoon "deflowering herself" in protest saying "Oothoon rejects the idea that she should be the passive object of male desire and instead claims the right to be the subject of her own libidinous inclination," which not only disregards that Oothoon was plucking the flower in order to catch the eye of Theotormon, but more importantly leaves out the lines immediately preceding this act where Blake calls Oothoon the "soft soul of America" and says that the daughters of Albion are weeping with sighs towards America. The political implications here are blunt but have been omitted from Bruder's discussion entirely. She goes on to say that Leutha's flower is a symbol for Oothoon's sexual agency and with it she realizes "her potential for multiple and recurrent orgasms," and that this realization is the catalyst that causes Bromion to assault her (Bruder, 75). Again, Bruder does not mention the line where Bromion says "thy soft American plains are mine," or that Oothoon must fly over the waves from her home to the land of Theotormon's reign, both of which suggest that Blake is building American symbolism in these first stanzas.

Bruder asserts that Blake "places the liberation of women's sexuality at the top of his 'feminist' agenda," when in reality, Blake is calling for a much broader liberation from tyranny (Bruder 57). His references to "swarthy, children of the sun" by Bromion seems a clear reference to Native Americans and African slaves, and since Bromion sees them as objects that can he can simply have we see that his tyranny stretches beyond lines of gender. Theotormon is struggling with religious tyranny, as mentioned already, and both men cannot look past the tyranny of the senses over the imaginative spirit. Place all of this in conversation with Blake's apprehension about English involvement in the French Revolution and English aggression towards America and it becomes clear that *Visions* is much more than a discussion about sexual liberation.

Bruder's analysis become skewed because she interprets Blake through a narrowly-focused lens, and is consequently troubled by inconsistencies in the poem. She discusses the "paradox of Oothoon's situation," who is enslaved and raped in the poem but who also spends much of her time counterintuitively praising sexuality by "delivering exuberant sexual rhetoric," but this paradox only surfaces because Bruder is not accounting for historical and political context in her analysis. Oothoon is pleading for Bromion, Theotormon, and Urizen to understand a world beyond the materialistic, tyrannical, and the repressed. Given what has already been shown of Blake's connection between Oothoon and America, as well as Blake's resistance to religious repression and Enlightenment philosophy, Oothoon's stance becomes less paradoxical. She, as well as the American nation she represents, have been wronged by the British empire's greed but many of the English and Americans still wanted to build a working relationship with America. The United States was free from British rule but still allowed slavery, enacting its own tyranny. Finally, the predominant philosophy of the time left no room for anything beyond the material, a tyranny of the senses over the imagination. Oothoon reflects the paradoxical thinking of Blake's time, when discussions of liberty and individual freedom were paired with slavery and institutional repression.

It would be unfair, however, to claim that Bruder is entirely off-base in her assessments of Blake's work. *Visions* is progressive in the way it discusses women's sexuality given its publication date. Oothoon's passionate appeals to Theotormon reflect Blake's belief that love should be shared and exalted, instead of restrained and subdued. The religious ideals of chastity and virginal virtue that were held in high esteem by Blake's contemporaries were considered stifling and counterproductive by Blake himself. So there is some merit to Bruder's claims of Blake's liberating views, but Blake is wrestling with many different ideas in *Visions*. In limiting

her criticism to discussion of sexual roles, Bruder overlooks the many facets of tyranny Blake was opposing, giving a weak and contradictory view of Blake and ultimately missing some of the point.

When compared with Bruder, another critic, James Swearingen makes much more critical claims about Blake's thoughts on women with even less argumentative context. In his essay "The Enigma of Identity in Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion,'" Swearingen claims that Blake "raises the question of sexual difference in a dramatic, even inflammatory way," and goes on to say that *Visions* "considers the regime of sexual dominion according to three distinct ways in which Oothoon might relate to her past: identity as an accumulation of past events, identity as pure immediacy unrelated to a past, and identity constituted by a past understood as possibility." (Swearingen 203-4). Like Bruder, Swearingen leaves out the political events of 1793 and makes no mention of the philosophical debates Blake and his contemporaries discuss. He instead concentrates on the poem's "socialization of gender in a way that reveals the social and moral origins of sexual violation" (Swearingen 206). His argument becomes consistently more complicated as he explains away Oothoon's discussion of the senses as a way of separating herself from her assault by claiming she is more than just "a mere accumulation of sensory experience without capacity for renewal" (Swearingen 208). Instead of a broad discussion of the limitations of the senses, and how that relates to the rest of the constricting, tyrannical views and actions in the poem Swearingen must perform some rhetorical acrobatics, dismissing significant sections of the poem in an effort to show that Oothoon is simply contemplating whether or not she can be defined by the events of her past.

In his efforts to contain *Visions* within such a limited view, Swearingen disregards the language of the poem itself. Oothoon is not discussing the senses in terms of her past or even in

relation to Bromion's attack. She speaks broadly, asking Theotormon to recognize how their views are missing something saying:

“Arise my Theotormon, I am pure;
 Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black.
 They told me that the night and the 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,
 And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning,
 Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.” (Plate 5 28-35).

These lines are more than Oothoon attempting to redefine herself. She is asking Theotormon to join her in redefining the way the world can be seen. She sees that there is more to experience beyond the senses, and that relying on the senses too strongly creates a prison for the mind, a destructive force that kills human imagination. Through Oothoon, Blake is resisting the devotion to the senses without the presence of the imaginative spirit which dominated the philosophy of his peers.

Without contextual consideration, Swearingen examines the poem based on the relationships presented in the poem without any regard for the possibility that these characters carry political and historical meanings as well. Therefore, his criticism becomes centered around each character's sense of identity and their relationship to each other. Ironically, Swearingen's argument seems to mimic the introspective, short-sighted, and ultimately constricted views of Theotormon. He spends his time staring inward, concentrating on moral philosophy and the abstract so much that he misses opportunities to experience the passionate joys of Oothoon's love, and Swearingen spends so much time picking apart the minutiae of the language of identity

in the poem that he overlooks large swaths of what the poem is discussing. He understands Oothoon's arguments against sensory perception separated from the human spirit but misses her connection with America. He follows Bromion's view of Oothoon as property but leaves out the implications about slavery. These discussions cannot be separated from the rest of the poem because Blake wanted them all to be intertwined. Limiting one's criticism so Blake's work can fit neatly into a compartmentalized argument works against the very point Blake is trying to make in *Visions* and in many of his other works.

Unlike Bruder and Swearingen, Blake scholar Jonathan Kerr considers far more context in his approach but neglects the gender politics of the poem, which gives a better but still too narrow discussion of the poem. Kerr discusses how Newton's ideas of the infinite influenced Blake and laid the groundwork for Blake's discussions of the imaginative spirit. Kerr contends that Newton's work also helped Blake reconcile the spiritual and the physical yet also served as a source of disagreement between Blake and philosophers like Locke. According to Kerr, Locke believed that the infinite nature of the universe meant that all the matter in the universe was beyond the abilities of human comprehension which limits humanity in their ability to understand the natural universe. For Blake, however, the infinite was a liberating idea that opened the possibilities for a person's spiritual life. Kerr says that to Blake "the infinite can represent transformative possibilities in the self's experience...infinity illustrates a force that productively opens the world of the self to the worlds of others" (Kerr 56). While Kerr's argument gets close to covering the multitudinous nature of Blake's goals with *Visions*, he still focuses too narrowly on a scientific approach. He gestures at the tyrannical forces at work in the poem but relates them all to a closed Lockean system of thinking about the natural world, and so he encloses his argument within a "narrow circle" of its own. Kerr leaves out any discussion of

gender politics or the many times Oothoon pleads for Theotormon to acknowledge his desire and act on his passionate love for her.

Kerr, out of all of the scholars mentioned thus far, gets the closest to a broad look at *Visions*. He relates the scientific infinite to the infinite human spirit in Blake's writing and then shows how that translates beyond spiritual life into the political. When discussing Bromion and his selfish acts against Oothoon he asserts "Bromion gives further shape to the philosophic and experimental thinker's fatal misidentification of worlds and its consequences for Albion's political, imperial, and gendered relationships" (Kerr 65). At once Kerr gives a more contextual analysis than either of the previously mentioned critics and as a result he uncovers more of the scope of Blake's message yet, in contrast to the others, he makes no mention of the sexual implications of *Visions*. Where the previous critics concentrated too much on Blake's message about the role of women and sexual morality, Kerr leaves that out of the discussion, ultimately giving a more substantial argument that still fails to address the layered complexity of the poem.

No discussion of Blake would be complete without incorporating his paintings and illustrations. Blake believed he was much more a visual artist than a poet and the illustrations that accompany his poetry illuminate the meaning embedded in the poetry itself. Two paintings in particular help to illustrate the argument made in this thesis as well as Blake's intentions. The image shown below on the left is a depiction of Albion called "Glad Day" and beside it on the right there is an illustration of Urizen.



Albion stands open, ready to accept the illuminating light of the sun with open arms and gladness. He is the culmination of the senses and the imaginative spirit, working together to create a complete human spirit. Because he stands open, ready to accept whatever comes his way, he is bathed in sunlight and is free to enjoy the world around him. Albion, according to Blake, was the pinnacle of human potential. Blake thought that, like Albion, humanity should strive for open acceptance and joyful love without constraint and that people should not work to limit themselves with false morality or oppressive institutions. Such constraints only lead to being kept away from the pleasant, illuminating light.

In contrast, Urizen is bound by his own devotion to logic, the senses, and the rule of law. He is held down by rocks and kept in darkness. Urizen is stuck in a prison of his own design, limited by his restricted view of the world around him. His face is old and pained as he looks out directly at the audience of the painting as if to plead to them for help. But only Urizen can stand up and cast the stones off his back. Blake used Urizen as a representation of the self-imposed

restrictions that hold humanity back from the fulfilling light of the redeemed human spirit. Blake believed people placed stones on their own backs in the form of tyrannical systems that limited themselves and the people around them. Tyranny of the senses over the imagination, tyranny of the church over its people, tyranny of one government over another, and tyranny of men over women each are stones placed on the backs of humanity.

If one were to compare the scholars mentioned earlier to either of the above paintings, Urizen's constricted form would seem to fit them best. In each case, the narrow scope of their arguments compresses and restricts their ability to fully understand the complexity of Blake's meaning. Like Urizen, they hold themselves back, weighing themselves down with arguments which are too focused on their own interpretive readings to acknowledge other layers of meaning. The ideas in Blake's poetry conflict with one another, as they are supposed to. Blake believed that reason and imagination conflicted but when they merge and work together the human spirit ascends to a higher form. Criticism and analysis of Blake's work must operate in a similar way. Conflicting ideas must come together to show a broader, richer point. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is no different. It is talking about gender politics, global politics, science, and philosophy all at once and disregarding any portion of the poems meaning removes a portion of the message behind Blake's work.

Naturally, an all-encompassing view of Blake's work would make scholarly analysis difficult, especially if the interpretive goal is coming from a specific angle like gender politics. Scholars should examine Blake's work through these lenses in order to dig deeply into Blake and his time. But these focused interpretations should not come at the expense of the poem's overall meaning. The other angles must at least be acknowledged, otherwise we have interpretations that conflict and give skewed versions of Blake's meaning like the ones mentioned above. It is

impossible to have an informed discussion of Blake's treatment of his female characters without acknowledging what those characters represent on a political scale, and discussing the scientific philosophies in a poem like *Visions* without understanding that Blake was also wrestling with the religious and sexual repression gives an incomplete picture of the poem's meaning.

Visions of the Daughters of Albion is one of Blake's shorter poems, but the interpretive rigor necessary to analyze it is even more necessary in his larger works. The political and social community of Blake's lifetime was tumultuous. Long-standing systems were being questioned and overthrown. British imperialism was beginning to be pushed back slowly, independence and liberty were at the forefront of political discussions around the globe, and the natural sciences were fundamentally changing the way people thought about the world and the cosmos. Blake lived during a time defined by contrary notions and his poetry attempts to bring those contraries together. For Blake, the "resolution of contraries" relied on a person's ability to accept multiple viewpoints and ideas at once without restricting or privileging one idea over the other. This philosophy carried into his personal, religious, and political life. When scholars read Blake's work they must take this multi-focal view into account or they risk limiting themselves to a skewed and incomplete understanding of Blake and his poems. Like Albion in "Glad Day," scholars must open their interpretations up to many possibilities and in doing so they may be illuminated by the joyful light of Blake's complete meaning.

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