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Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell holds a central position in the body of his works; his essential concept of contrariety, expressed here for the first time, appears over and over in his later poetry and prophetic books. My thesis focuses on the form of the Marriage as it relates to this major theme.

In the Marriage Blake makes a very definite statement about the "whole" man. It centers around the existence of contraries, antithetical beings or states of mind which on earth seek to destroy each other. Opposed to these earthly contraries Blake pictures the ideal, a state in which contraries exist together complementing and perfecting each other. Christ is the one example of the ideal; Blake feels, however, that it is not only possible for all men to achieve such perfection, but necessary if the earth is ever to be free from the cycle of suppression and revolt.

The focus of my first chapter is on the "Argument" and "A Song of Liberty" where Blake pictures the contraries at war. Chapter two focuses on the expansion and development of the contraries theme in the "Body" of the work. To explore this development fully I have subdivided the "Body" under three headings: the first examines all statements about the contraries; the second examines all sections exemplifying the contraries at war; the third encompasses all examples of the contraries in an ideal harmony. I conclude with an "Epilogue" outlining the organic unity given to the Marriage by Blake's theory of contraries.

He

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at
Greensboro.

WILLIAM BLAKE'S THE MARRIAGE

OF HEAVEN AND HELL:

A FORMAL ANALYSIS

by

Kathleen D. Hester

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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INTRODUCTION

Although many critics have written about Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell, very few have concerned themselves entirely with the work itself. They have discussed it in relation to his progression of ideas, philosophy and skill, but with the exception of Martin Nurmi¹ and Clark Emory² have not thoroughly examined this work as a whole and separate piece of art. Granted, all of Blake's works can, and to some extent must, be viewed in the continuum of his expressed philosophy, but as art or literature each work should have its merit as a unit too. It is on this premise that I present my paper; its object is to examine the Marriage closely with particular attention to the form of the work as it relates to the major theme of contraries.

On the question of form some critics, such as Robert Gleckner, have gone so far as to dismiss the Marriage as nothing more than a passionate and unartistic diatribe against Swedenborg. I feel this is not giving the work due consideration, for while Blake's disillusionment with Swedenborg may have been the immediate cause for its appearance,

¹His unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Blake's Doctrine of Contraries: A Study in Visionary Metaphysics" (University of Minnesota 1954), and a later condensation of Chapter 4, Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study, Research Series III, Kent State Univ. Bul., XLV, iv (Ohio, 1954), contain the most complete critical studies of this work.

²His "Introduction" to a 1963 edition of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, University of Miami Critical Studies, No. 1 (Miami, 1963), is an excellent and informative commentary combining biographical, historical and original criticism.

the Marriage is also the place where Blake puts down for the first time many of his essential ideas. What Blake says in this work appears over and over in his poetry and later prophetic books. It has even led Mark Schorer to write that the Marriage, "which is Blake's supreme effort at definition, is . . . the central document in his work."³

The form of the Marriage is confusing, especially at first glance, since the work is a mixture of poetry, aphorisms, parables and prose statements.⁴ There is, however, a definite statement centering on the clarification of his attitude toward the whole man as he exists in history. It begins with an "Argument" written as poetry in which there is an air of oppression and a premonition of some action about to break out. The promised event does not occur until the "Song of Liberty" at the very end of the work, but between these two sections Blake has created a structure which acquaints the reader with the details of history which support his theories and relate them to the present time. This part of the work includes the various prose statements, the "Proverbs of Hell," and the "Memorable Fancies." The form in its most elementary expression involves two poems picturing the cycles of existence on earth. These poems enclose the "Body" of the work, an imaginative rendering of ideal truth and the conditions of its earthly manifestations.

One major problem in the Marriage is Blake's stated theme: the "marriage" of heaven and hell. It is necessary to go beyond this apparently simple statement to clarify Blake's use of these terms and

³William Blake: The Politics of Vision (New York, 1946), p. 264.

⁴See Appendix I for an outline of the work's actual form.

many others he uses in setting up his all-important doctrine of contraries. In striking out at the division he sees in man, Blake uses the terminology of the traditional Church, to him the most ancient and dangerous restraining force of all time. He fights the bias of the Church's established language by showing how it has distorted "good" to mean all that is ordered, established and governed by law, while everything that deviates in the least from this is termed "bad." In the Marriage Blake attacks the narrowness of the terms and the concepts behind them. All rational and non-feeling beings who are afraid to think for themselves are designated as angels and inhabit a traditionally conceived heaven. All who are creative, original, feeling and artistic--the only qualities which Blake can admire or even admit in a human being--are called evil and are found in hell.

As Martin Nurmi expresses it, "Blake merely adopts the terms Heaven and Hell and uses them ironically to show that they are meaningless as the orthodox intend them He wants to free the real dialectical order of existence from the normative incrustations put upon it by the orthodox 'religious.'"⁵

Related to this theme is the problem of the apparent discrepancy between the stated theme and what Blake actually seems to point out imaginatively in his middle sections. Often he belies the title of his work by showing that the devils already possess the "marriage" of reason and imagination in their speech and actions.⁶ This would seem to make

⁵Dissertation, p. 158.

⁶Nurmi and Emory would disagree with this statement; I will offer my proof for it below.

either wrong or naive his statement that contraries, i.e., his devils and angels, must coexist in a world where any progress is to take place. The real problem here is a complex mixing of Blake's ideology and his attempt to reconcile his vision with the real world in which he lived. How the threads of these thoughts are interwoven and often apparently snarled is another aspect of Blake's work which this paper will attempt to clarify.

The focus of my first chapter is on an analysis of the initial and final parts of the work and the formal relationship between them. The action of these two poems represents the contraries at war, introducing Blake's major theme. Chapter two focuses on the expansion and development of this theme as it appears in the "Body" of the work. To explore Blake's development of this theme to the fullest I have subdivided the "Body" under three headings: the first examines those sections making an actual statement about the contraries; the second examines those exemplifying the contraries at war; the third encompasses all examples of the contraries in an ideal harmony.⁷ One final consideration is the unity of the whole work. In a brief "Epilogue" I relate the form and content of all three parts, showing how they are closely united by the theory of contraries.

⁷See Appendix II for a division of the work under these categories.

CHAPTER ONE

"THE ARGUMENT" AND "A SONG OF LIBERTY"

Anyone who would study Blake with insight must be at least familiar with Blake the man, who, according to Northrop Frye was a "product of eighteenth century middle-class, Nonconformist England, whose religious views were Christian, whose philosophical views were close to a large body of contemporary liberal opinion, and whose poetry and painting were strongly influenced by his own cultural environment."⁸ To divorce Blake from his age is to lose much of the real man and thus a very important aspect of his art, particularly in the Marriage. Critics such as David Erdman,⁹ Mark Schorer and Ruthven Todd¹⁰ have given valuable insight into Blake's thought through a study of his age, his background, and his reaction to contemporary England.

In all of his works the author is very much aware of the traditional thought. It is because of his concern with the particular and minute problems of his day and because of his intense study of the culture from which it originated (the Christian tradition of the Bible) that he is able to grapple with problems and themes that go far beyond his own time in history. The injustice he cries out against has plagued man from ancient

⁸"Introduction" to Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey, 1966), p. 5.

⁹Blake: Prophet Against Empire (New Jersey, 1954).

¹⁰"William Blake and the Eighteenth Century Mythologists" in Tracks on the Snow: Studies in English Science and Art (London, 1946), pp. 29-60.

times and will continue to restrain him as long as society exists. The view of time which he presents in the Marriage shows that he was aware of this, and that to him all time and history was a struggle between contraries.

Blake as an Englishman was very much caught up in the atmosphere of world politics. He saw from his reading of the Bible and from his observations of men that history seemed to run in cycles. The Jewish people obeyed the Covenant at first, then gradually slipped away from faith until they were punished, and finally re-established their relationship with God. In his own time he had seen the American colonies rebel under the tyranny of the English government, and fight until they had won independence for themselves. Thomas Paine was among his friends.

Another event of great interest to Blake according to Bernard Blackstone was "the outburst of the French Revolution and its progress. He was by nature a rebel, though his revolutionary principles went deeper than any mere idea of social or political change."¹¹ Blackstone continues saying that between 1791 and 1794 Blake

had found his way into a revolutionary clique. At Joseph Johnson's house over the bookshop in St. Paul's Churchyard there met week by week some of the most advanced thinkers of the day: Dr. Joseph Priestly, William Goodwin, Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dr. Price-- and Blake himself. These 'Liberty Boys' hailed the French Revolution with joy, but only Blake, we are told, went so far as to wear the 'bonnet rouge' in broad daylight in the streets of London. He abandoned this perilous practice only when the September massacres had disillusioned him of his high hopes in the millenium.¹²

In his involvement with these revolutionary persons Blake found intellectual stimulation and he developed the intense conviction that

¹¹English Blake (Cambridge, England, 1949), p. 43.

¹²Ibid., p. 47.

tyranny and oppression could be overcome. His own fervor for the American and French causes made him a suspect among more conservative Englishmen.

It is small wonder that Blake believed firmly in the power of men to overthrow oppression with such evidence all around him. He was also convinced that the time was ripe for a revolt of the spirit as well. If America and France could attempt such revolutions in the name of freedom and justice, then surely England could join them and unite the whole world in the struggle for ideals. This whole era was one of intense political excitement, and for Blake it was symbolic of even greater changes possible in man's attitudes. If man could throw off the burden of political tyranny then surely he could fight against the religious tyranny that smothered his spirit.¹³ History, philosophy, and his own theory of cycles all combined to convince Blake that the time was ripe for a change in the world.

The Marriage in the light of this background takes on greater meaning as a religious, philosophical and historic comment; it is not limited to any particular age or event. In fact, his theory is an extremely insightful conclusion to his study of man, and it is the very emphasis on man in each of these contexts that makes Blake's message universal and explains the excitement which the whole Marriage and especially the "Proverbs of Hell" can engender in his readers almost two hundred years after they were written.

¹³Harold Bloom in Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument (New York, 1963), pp. 73-74, notes that Swedenborg had dated the beginning of the actual last judgement in 1757, the year of Blake's birth, further reason for Blake's optimism and zeal in reform.

To Blake man is the center and controller of the universe, and his own role as poet is to awaken in every man the sense of that freedom belonging to him as a human being. In the Marriage two sections in particular embody these convictions, the "Argument" and the "Song of Liberty." Within these two poems Blake presents a full cycle, showing in the "Argument" the growing restlessness of the just man subdued by tyrants and in the "Song" the just man's successful rebellion. It is in this sense that the two poems are essentially related: events in the "Argument" cause those in the "Song"; the promise of the just men in the "Argument" is fulfilled in the "Song." After examining the two parts closely Blake's intentions become clear.

The "Argument" is Blake's introduction to the whole work, and a good example of how he writes about history. Even in these twenty lines he shows history's shifting patterns in the changing cycles of the just man's life. There is a definite progression as this man moves from the ritual of his meek existence to just anger. The opening and closing couplets of the poem are the same, conveying a mood of foreboding and seething unrest:

"Rintrah roars and shakes his fires in the burden'd air.
Hungry clouds swag on the deep."¹⁴

The closely controlled language produces a terse and ominous sense of something about to burst with relentless fury. There is also a sense of terror in the "hungry clouds" that "swag on the deep" and seem to threaten the world over which they hover.

¹⁴The Complete Writings of William Blake: With Variant Readings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966), pp. 148-149. All subsequent references to Blake's writings will be to this edition and page numbers will be inserted in the text.

Who is Rintrah? Robert Gleckner calls him either Blake or "genius,"¹⁵ while Harold Bloom says that he "is Blake's Angry Man, a John the Baptist or Elijah figure, the wrathful spirit of prophecy driven out into the wilderness."¹⁶ Clark Emory identifies him as the symbol of a well-balanced, creative society which once lived on earth.¹⁷ The important point to keep in mind, though, is that Rintrah "roars and shakes his fires" thus being akin to Blake's lion and his poet (who is also prophet and devil in this work). According to S. Foster Damon, Blake's lion is always identified with genius and spiritual wrath,¹⁸ while fire in Blake is the sign of energy, inspiration and creativity. It is perhaps misleading to posit an exact identity for Rintrah, because the "Argument" can be viewed as a representation of all history and its many cycles as well as the tale of any particular cycle. Rintrah can be called: any one or all justly angry men, Blake as a man of genius, all poet-prophets or men of genius; he can be compared to the Americans who raged at the tyranny of England, the French who are struggling against the monarchy, or the Englishmen like Blake himself who chafe at the hypocrisy of oppressive law and materialism in the Age of Reason.

Blake seems to have structured the whole "Argument" purposefully to avoid any particular application; the lack of specific detail makes it applicable to all similar situations. Any intensely particular

¹⁵The Piper and the Bard (Detroit, 1959), p. 3.

¹⁶Blake's Apocalypse, p. 74.

¹⁷The Marriage, p. 38.

¹⁸A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake (Providence, 1965), pp. 241-242.

interpretation is one-sided and only partially correct because Blake's purpose in the whole work is to include the recurring pattern of all history as well as the particular manifestation of his own age. He goes to the Bible for the "Argument's" pattern and in particular to Isaiah: xxxiv and xxxv, which he mentions specifically in the first prose statement. There is an evident biblical tone in the diction: "just" man, "vale of death," "perilous path," "barren heath," etc. There is also an important ambiguity in verb tenses which expands the meaning of the entire section.

Once meek, and in a perilous path,
 The just man kept his course along
 The vale of death.
 Roses are planted where thorns grow,
 And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.

Then the perilous path was planted,
 And a river and a spring
 On every cliff and tomb,
 And on the bleached bones
 Red clay brought forth;

Till the villain left the paths of ease,
 To walk in perilous paths, and drive
 The just man into barren climes.

Now the sneaking serpent walks
 In mild humility,
 And the just man rages in the wilds
 Where lions roam. (K. 148-149)

The underlined words point out the changes in tense which alternate from past to present, indicating perhaps the correspondence between past and present as the cycle repeats itself. The action illustrates that the cycle always follows the same sequence. It is of note that the last stanza is in the present tense; this may be Blake's way of characterizing the situation of the world at the time he is writing.

The pattern of the changing cycles, as Blake elucidates it in the "Argument" can be reduced quite simply to this: the just man follows his life on earth, but grows meek in its undisturbed pattern. Life becomes ritual instead of action; his domestication produces bees in barren places and roses in places where thorns naturally grow. His creativity finally "plants" the perilous path of life which becomes almost a paradise with its rivers and springs producing even the birth of life from what was red clay and bleached bones. Finally the villain seeing the ease and fertility of the path drives the just man out and inhabits the "garden" himself. Adopting the habits of the just man this usurping "serpent walks in mild humility," and the just man rages lion-like in the wilds. This interpretation depends partly on the qualifying words "meek," "just," "sneaking," and "mild." To Blake meekness was a living death, and his use of the word is a condemnation of the just man for allowing his individuality and his capacity to experience just anger to become submerged in the ritual of an uncomplicated life. In doing so he has succumbed to the worst peril of the path. The roses growing where thorns naturally grow are a sign that the natural order of life's conflicts has been perverted into a harmony which denies tension. Honey bees do not belong on barren heaths and man does not belong in a thoroughly domesticated world. One of Blake's most important concepts, the overriding theme of the Marriage, is illustrated here: both types of men, the just creative personality and the usurping, regulating hypocrite, are necessary. Without the injustice of the hypocrite to spur him to anger and the full use of his powers, the creative man may fall into a complacent, harmonious existence in which all conflicts are smoothed over and never faced. Most

critics agree that this is the theme of the Marriage but overlook its occurrence here in the introduction.¹⁹

As the "Argument" is Blake's illustration of the just man's subjugation and smouldering restlessness, the "Song of Liberty" shows the revolt which necessarily follows. In this sense events in the "Song" are caused by events in the "Argument." It is a continuation of Blake's comments on the conflicting contraries.

Many critics deny this connection, among them Damon, Nurmi and Erdman, contending that the "Song" is simply tacked on to the body of the work²⁰ or is added because the work's abstract nature needed some concrete action to explain it.²¹ The first critic to recognize the "Song" as an integral part of the Marriage was Max Plowman, who listed

¹⁹Although this is a general statement about all time, Blake implies he is referring very much to his own time as well by his use of transitional adverbs which occur here in this order: "once" (the just man walked in meekness), "then" (the perilous path was planted), "till" (the villain usurped his place), and "now" (the serpent is walking in humility and the just man rages). The unrest and chafing fits well into the world turmoil of his own time; the adverb "now" could easily refer to England, France, America or specifically to Blake's own revolt against oppression. Clark Emory notes this too, and in a discussion of the "Argument" writes "for Blake, the American and French revolutions gave evidence that the time for . . . cleansing had come. He welcomed both revolutions." The Marriage, p. 39.

²⁰S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (Mass., 1958), p. 197.

²¹Nurmi, The Marriage, p. 62. Erdman agrees with this also in Blake: Prophet, p. 176.

four textual reasons for his assertion in the TLS of October, 1925.²² Although many critics have ignored his arguments,²³ they are not only logical but also fit well the triumphant spirit of Blake's prophecy that man could reverse the cycle of tyranny.

If the "Song" is actually an early sketch for America there is no reason why it should not be an effective and integral part of the Marriage as well in this early form. The "Argument" and the "Song" studied together parallel the two chapters of Isaiah referring to the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the just which Blake mentions in the first prose statement of the "Body." The "Argument" parallels the tale of the unjust while the "Song" shows the final triumph of the just. In this way the two parts are related by the cycle of God's justice which in history allows injustice, then punishes the wicked and rewards the just. Without the "Song" the just man in this work would remain subdued, restless and unrewarded. As the words and images of Isaiah suggest warfare, so Blake uses war as the means of revolt and the key to the door of freedom and liberty in the "Song." He could very well have had America in mind as another particular example of the revolution

²²"The Incomplete Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Oct. 22, p. 698. His arguments are "(1.) The pagination is, apparently, continuous (2.) The lettering of all . . . pages is similar, being throughout larger than Blake's usual type. It has every appearance of having all been done at one time. (3.) The "Song" at the end gives balance to the "Argument" with which the "Marriage" opens. Both are highly symbolic. (4.) The title "A Song of Liberty," though perhaps written a little larger and with a little more exuberance than the other titles contained in the "Marriage," does not differ from them in character"

²³Clark Emory is one exception and S. Foster Damon seems to have changed his mind by the time of the writing of his Blake Dictionary where he admits the relationship and refers the reader to Plowman for details.

necessarily recurrent in the world's cycle. It would not lessen the "Song's" meaning here.

Further necessity for such a "paean of liberty" as Plowman calls the "Song"²⁴ is pointed out in a Master's thesis submitted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by David Passler. The paper is titled "Visual Meaning in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell"²⁵ and makes this point: if the "Song" is left out "the Marriage ends on a seemingly bleak note: at the bottom of plate Twenty-Four²⁶ is a picture of a naked man, terrified and crawling on all fours beneath the trunks of two twisted trees. The identification of the man is definitely Nebuchadnezzar because Blake made a larger print of the same design in 1795, in which the man is named." Passler goes on to say that for Blake this king is "an emblem not only of the primal man but also of the man who denies the validity of true vision and chooses to worship false gods."²⁷

The picture is described more fully in Daniel 4:33, the source for Blake's drawing: "he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." It is, as Passler points out, a terrifying picture of materialism.²⁸

²⁴TLS, p. 698.

²⁵Passler's thesis shows Blake's conscious use of color and detail to substantiate and at times expand the meaning of his prose text. He compares the drawings of an early and later edition to prove this.

²⁶This is the last plate in the "Body" of the Marriage and without the "Song" would represent a pessimistic and terrible end for man on earth. (My note.)

²⁷"Visual Meaning," unpubl. thesis (Chapel Hill, 1966), pp. 32-33.

²⁸Ibid., p. 34.

Such pessimism is not in line with Blake's view of man's future which can be found instead in the final chorus of the "Song":

Let the Priests of the Raven of dawn, no longer
in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of joy.
Nor his accepted brethren--whom, tyrant, he calls free--lay
the bound or build the roof. Nor pale religious lechery call
that virginity that wishes but acts not!
For every thing that lives is Holy. (K. 160)

The final line especially sums up all that Blake propounds in the "Body" of the Marriage itself and is the fit ending for the whole work.

Accepting the "Song" as a fit ending for the work, let us look at it in relation to the "Argument" again. Max Plowman hints at the role of the two when he writes that the "Song" is about liberty from the standpoint of eternity while the Marriage is about Blake's own personal liberation.²⁹ Although he does not mention the "Argument" in his statement, or seem to recognize its connection with the "Song," what he says can be applied to both, once the relationship is established. Both are general statements referring to all time and history, and yet applicable to the particular time in which Blake was writing. The "Argument" is left unfinished with a hint of something to come. The "Song" concludes the incident.

In the "Song" there is a continuation of the imagery introduced in the "Argument." The smoke of Rintrah has burst into actual flames. The child born of the "Eternal Female" (probably a symbol for the earth) is

²⁹Introduction to the Study of Blake (New York, 1927), p. 136.

called "the newborn fire." As the tyrant king hurls him through the night the description is of fire: "the fiery limbs, the flaming hair, show like the sinking sun into the western sea." Fire is also used to describe this child in other passages. Another image continued from the "Argument" is that of the just man unjustly subdued. Here it is found in the new hope of all nations paralyzed by some form of tyranny.

3. . . . France, rend down thy dungeon!
4. Golden Spain, burst the barriers of old Rome!
5. Cast thy keys, O Rome, into the deep down falling,
even to eternity down falling,
6. And weep. (K. 159)

The final victory of the newborn babe over law is a triumph for all just men, a fitting sequel to the "Argument." The message of the "Song" is about the birth and triumph of the spirit of liberty. All subjugated lands hear and wait; prophecies and hopes of liberation run through each. When the infant is brought before the king, the jealous ruler flings him through the night and into the western sea. The sea however flees from the child, and the king and his followers unable to stay in command fall into the wilderness left where the sea once was. In a last attempt to retain power the ruler "promulgates his ten commands" while the son of fire stamps all law to dust and frees the world from empire declaring "every thing that lives is Holy" (K. 160).

The most important theme in the "Song" is the revolt against all orthodox law. As its prototype Blake uses the "ten commands" or "stony law," representing all law and his particular condemnation of the Ten Commandments, the fierce, all-just laws of the Old Testament God.³⁰

³⁰This theme is repeated several times in the "Body" of the work.

Here the old laws are destroyed by the "new born terror," perhaps a symbol for Christ who replaced the original Commandments with his law of love and forgiveness in the New Testament. With its final triumph over law's tyranny the "Song" is Blake's answer to the just man of the "Argument." When tyranny has the upper hand in the cycle of history there will arise men alive with the spirit of liberty. These men will lead the way to a new order in which the "eternal horses" (Blake's symbol for reason³¹) will be freed from the binding ties of law to guide all men to new self-knowledge. While in the "Body" Blake uses horses to represent the kind of knowledge which accepts general and abstract laws as the basis of truth, he refers to the "eternal horses" loosed "from the dens of night." He is speaking about a knowledge, not bound by law, but free to use imagination along with reason in drawing its conclusions about the world. The birth of the "son of fire" thus opens the way to a world of ideal perfection; imagination, senses, reason and the emotions combine to give a true and non-exclusive insight into reality. It could refer to the American or French Revolution, but also to any revolt against tyranny and law. This is Blake's wish for an end to the ever-changing cycle and an ideal of eternal freedom and justice.

These two parts of the Marriage present Blake's theory of the contraries as they appear in the world. In them he elucidates the necessary conflicts and resolutions. The two poems are integrally related; they form together one whole cycle from repression to revolt and freedom.

³¹Damon, Dictionary, p. 189.

CHAPTER TWO

"THE BODY" OF THE MARRIAGE

In the "Body of the Marriage Blake develops in detail his theory of contraries. While it is concretely outlined in terms of subjugation and revolt in the "Argument" and the "Song," it is expanded greatly in its ideal as well as earthly manifestations in this part of the work. Before analyzing these sections it is helpful to examine some of the background from which Blake's theory arose.

Many of the ideas which he formalizes in the "Body" were stimulated by his intense reading. With his extremely critical mind Blake could not read without reacting strongly to content, and the annotations written in the margins of his books give valuable evidence of his reactions to contemporary thought. Four books in particular were of value in helping him clarify his ideas before writing the Marriage and, thus, are recognized as direct influences on it: Lavater's Aphorisms on Man, and three books by Swedenborg, Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom, The Last Judgement, and Divine Providence. Harold Bloom points out that the probable seed for the Marriage is found in one of Blake's annotations to a statement in the Wisdom of Angels.³²

Swedenborg:

Man is only a Recipient of Life. From this Cause it is, that Man, from his own hereditary Evil, reacts against God; but so far as he believes that all his Life is from God, and every Good of Life from the Action of God, and every Evil of Life from the Reactions of Man, Reaction thus becomes correspondent with Action, and Man acts with God as from himself.

³²Blake's Apocalypse, p. 73.

Blake's comment:

Good and Evil are here both Good and the two Contraries
Married. (K. 91)

The most important point, one which Blake uses over and over in the Marriage, is that action is the sign of a man who is alive and able to choose with judgement. Bloom comments on the importance of these readings when he states that it was "the flowering of Swedenborg's error into the dead fruit of the doctrine of Predestination" in the book Divine Providence that actually spurred Blake to write the Marriage.³³

Reacting to these works, commenting on the validity or lack of it in particular statements, rewriting some parts, and in some places writing his own complete thoughts in the margins, Blake reached a point where his own philosophy emerged: a combination of some of the thoughts of Swedenborg and Lavater, and fierce reaction against others. The philosophy which emerged was strongly against untried good or childlike innocence, very much for a total embracing of every experience life has to offer, not just those termed "good" by some authority. He states the necessity for all kinds of experience clearly in the theme of the Marriage: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (K. 149).

There is an important qualification to make here because this theme can be very confusing to the uninitiated reader of Blake. He uses the term "human existence" in two ways in this work. Harold Bloom writes that a state of human existence could occur in "Blake's lower or earthly

³³Ibid.

paradise."³⁴ This is the home of the ideally free or unfallen man in whom contraries can exist together as truths. On fallen earth though, as Blake sees it, human existence involves progress, a moving toward the ideal which can only occur through the tension of warring contraries (a warring not necessary in the ideal paradise). Blake can thus be referring to either of these worlds when he uses the term.

The major difference between the two states can be seen in Blake's description of his earthly paradise or Beulah Land in Milton, Book the Second:

There is a place where Contrarieties are equally True:
This place is called Beulah. (K. 518)

Here all contrarieties are true. Reason and Energy, Understanding and Imagination coexist in total harmony. Of this world Martin Nurmi says: "Blake's Human world, in which the contraries freely interact, is not one of becoming at all, for it is perfect; the only 'progression' . . . in it is that of continued creativeness."³⁵

In contrast to this ideal world is the earthly world of men where, to Blake, progress seems to come only from the tension of contraries at war with each other. It is this world that Blake pictures in the "Argument," and it is the triumph of one contrary over another that he pictures in the "Song," showing a concrete example of progress from opposition. The tragedy inherent here though, as Harold Bloom points out in "The Dialectic," is that because of man's inability to embrace

³⁴"Dialectic in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell," PMLA, LXXIII (December 1958), 501-504.

³⁵The Marriage, p. 20.

both contraries and create out of their tension without attempting to reconcile them, the earthly progressions are in the form of cycles which always end in death.³⁶

To Blake this subjugation is not only disastrous to man's development, but is evil in the larger order of values. He feels that man was created to explore all of creation and that he was made free to draw his own conclusions from the only valid evidence, his experiences. The fullest explanation of this idea in Blake's own words is found in the definitions of "vice," and "virtue" written in his last annotation to Lavater's

Aphorisms on Man:

As I understand Vice it is a Negative. It does not signify what the laws of Kings and Priests have call'd Vice; we who are philosophers ought not to call the Staminal Virtues of Humanity by the same name that we call the omissions of intellect springing from poverty.

Every man's leading propensity ought to be call'd his leading Virtue and his good Angel Accident is the omission of act in self and the hindering of act in another; This is Vice, but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act; it is the contrary; it is a restraint on action both in ourselves and in the person hinder'd, for he who hinders another omits his own duty at the same time.

Murder is Hindering Another.

Theft is Hindering Another (K. 88)

This definition, all for action, shows how easily Blake could condemn the passive or untried "good" who are content to abide unquestioningly by the restraining laws of another, and all forms of authority which also attempt to restrain men through laws. In a comment on another of Lavater's aphorisms Blake shows how intensely he accepted all action as virtuous by noting: "Active Evil is better than Passive Good" (K. 77).

³⁶p. 504.

It is from this philosophic basis, and in direct reaction to "what the laws of Kings and Priests have called Vice" that Blake defines the terms "Heaven" and "Hell" as they are used in the Marriage. Rather than referring to "virtue" and "vice" as they are commonly used he defines all action as "virtuous" and all accident as "vice." His quarrel then is not with good and evil, but with the laws and authorities that single-mindedly, with no thought of the individual man, define "good" and "evil" as set and unchangeable patterns.

The portable Blake, arranged and edited by Alfred Kazin, has included in its excerpts from Jerusalem a section parenthetically called "Blake's Motto":

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's.
I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create.

(Viking, p. 460)

Add to this the last line of the "Song of Liberty": "For every thing that lives is Holy," and you have the two most important truths which Blake tries to point out in the Marriage. It is his intense belief in the value of individual experience and his faith in the sacredness of all life as the manifestation of the Word of God in Creation, that lead to his fierce condemnation of the Church and Swedenborg as one-sided, prejudiced, and wrong.

His main theme, the marriage of heaven and hell, strikes out at the traditional religious belief which denies the necessity of contraries; "without them," as Robert Gleckner remarks, heaven to Blake "is reduced to the status of a protectorate governed by laws to prevent experience."³⁷

³⁷The Piper and the Bard (Detroit, 1959), p. 190.

Blake's main argument with the Church and with Swedenborg stems from the dualism he finds in their codes and writings. He spells it out clearly in the section of the Marriage titled "The Voice of the Devil":

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors:

1. That man has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body and a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; and that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul. (K. 149)

Harold Bloom puts his finger on what must be the worst threat of such codes to Blake when he writes that such one-sidedness would not only destroy existence, but would "inflict upon us the greatest poverty of not living in a physical world."³⁸ It is precisely this rejection of the body and energy which made Blake furious with the Church of his own time. He felt that it was a denial of all that Christ had preached and exemplified in his life, and that ultimately it was a denial of God's intention in creating men as both physical and mental creatures. To deny either aspect is, to Blake, to deny man's nature. He believed that man can discover his own divinity not through denying his nature, but through accepting it and learning everything he can through his senses, the organs of perception. The body itself is for him one of the most important factors in man's attempt to recover what he has lost in the Fall and regain his rightful divinity which is exemplified in Christ and still heard in the voice of the poets on earth.

In setting up what Harold Bloom calls his "reality within experience," Blake uses the division of Reason and Energy as the two main contraries

³⁸"Dialectic," p. 504.

which must exist if there is to be progress. His terms "Heaven" and "Hell," "Devil" and "Angel," are symbolic of the Church's error in dividing Body and Soul, Energy and Reason, and in emphasizing the latter in each pair as "good," the former "evil." Thus his Devils and Hell represent Energy, the Body, the physical, and all the traditional "evil" associated with them. His Angels stand for Reason, the Soul, and the spiritual or "higher" world in which they are supposed to dwell. His "marriage" of the two would be the balanced tension of the whole human being who combines Understanding with Imagination, Energy with Reason, and spirit or mind with his physical and sensual powers.

Within this context it is possible to break down most of the Marriage into three parts for a closer look at Blake's total statement about the necessity of the contraries in human life, whether on earth or in the ideal earthly paradise. The first division includes every direct prose statement made by Blake about the contraries themselves; the second includes his prose examples (factual and imaginative) of the actual tension or opposition of the contraries in earthly existence; the third division encompasses all of those statements showing the actual interaction of the contraries without opposition, the ideal coexistence of both. These divisions leave out two prose statements and the "Proverbs of Hell" which will be discussed separately.³⁹

Blake's direct statements about the contraries appear in four places: the first prose statement, the fifth prose statement, and in two aphorisms following the fourth and fifth "Memorable Fancies." These

³⁹See Appendix II for a listing of these subdivisions.

aphorisms are clearer in the context of the "Fancies" and will be discussed with them, but the other sections can be examined profitably alone. In them Blake uncovers several important ideas underlying his major theme: he states the necessity of warring contraries on earth; he hints at the harmonious coexistence possible in the ideal world; he shows the invalidity of allying Christ with the "Angelic" or religious party; and, finally, in support of the contraries he shows that the religious are wrong in trying to force peace and conformity on earth. These concepts are extremely important aspects of his theme, and are, in fact, important to the total body of his works. A closer look at the two sections will show how he develops these ideas.

In the first prose statement Blake announces his theme, and makes several general statements which clarify the work. It could very well be called an introduction because it is here that he tersely sets up the format for the whole work.

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent,⁴⁰ the Eternal Hell revives. And lo Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, and the return of Adam into Paradise. See Isaiah xxxiv and xxxv Chap.

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

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (K. 149)

The first set of contraries introduced points out that there is a "new heaven" but an "Eternal Hell." It is probably Blake's comment on the

⁴⁰The reference here is to Swedenborg's book The Last Judgement which declared that the final judgement had begun in 1757.

eternal struggle of religion and morality with sensuality and passion. Further on in the sixth prose statement Blake qualifies the "newness" of this heaven by saying that Swedenborg has only copied the old errors of all preceding attempts to define an exclusive and one-sided heaven. Hell's eternality seems then to consist of its natural and basic argument with all one-sided or repetitious heavens, while heaven's newness is merely another in a series of attempts to define a spiritual, non-earthly (to Blake non-human) state of perfection which is doomed to failure. Swedenborg as the Angel is a symbol for the totally rational and pure individual.⁴¹

The reference to the "dominion of Edom" and Adam's return to Paradise seems confusing at first. If it is viewed, however, with the chapters of Isaiah mentioned here and in the context of Blake's next statement, that there can be no progression without contraries, its meaning becomes clearer. These two chapters of Isaiah comprise a shift in the cycle of existence. The first, thirty-four, tells of the general judgement of the wicked in which the Lord takes vengeance upon his people by letting enemies conquer and lay waste their lands.

For it is the day of the vengeance of the Lord, the year of recompenses of the judgement of Sion. (v. 8)

And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the ground thereof into brimstone: and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. (v. 9)

In direct contrast, chapter thirty-five tells of the flourishing of Christ's kingdom and the holy, secure way of his Church.

⁴¹Martin Nurmi develops Blake's use of Swedenborg as the Angel here and in other parts of the Marriage in his dissertation. I will note his comments below.

The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad: and the wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the holy. (v. 1)

And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise: and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness: and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. (v. 10)

As in the "Argument" and the "Song" there is a shift from despair and sorrow to joy and triumph. Without the destruction of the wicked the faithful could not enjoy Sion. The direct implication is that the cycle of destruction was necessary to produce the cycle of triumph--the contrary cycles have helped man progress. Only within the tension of the contraries can man move from one position to the next. This is also exemplified in the "Argument," as my first chapter points out.

The last few sentences set up compactly the meaning of "Good," and "Evil," "Heaven" and "Hell" as Blake uses them in the rest of the work. His definitions are those of the religious only, what they "call Good and Evil," and his purpose in using them is to impress upon the reader the absurdity of the dichotomy, and perhaps to show that what are contraries to the religious mind are not contraries at all except in the tyranny of traditional religious language and thought.

The second direct statement made by Blake about the contraries is found in prose statement number five (K. 155), where he discusses the existence of the Prolific and the Devourers. Here he pictures the "Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence" in the chains of the "weak and tame minds." They are still the source of all activity and the cause of life in the world despite the chains that bind them. His reference

to the devilish proverb "The weak in courage is strong in cunning," can be read as a direct attack on the eighteenth century as an age of Reason, as well as a direct comment on every age that tries to hold back energy and desire for the progress of reason and its laws.⁴² The proverb is one of his strong statements on the passive majority which lets cunning substitute for creativity. Although he does go on to state the necessity of both these people and the giants in the world, it is clear that Blake himself wastes little confidence or respect on the Devourers. This can be confusing in the face of his stated theme.

Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring: to the Devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, received the excess of his delights.

This is the most complete explanation for the necessity of both contraries in the work, and it remains more of a statement than an actual explanation or proof on the literal level. It is Blake's rationalization for the existence of both contraries and he does not really explain why the Prolific would no longer be prolific without the Devourers. On another level, however, when looked at as a postulate to the definition of Reason given in the "Voice of the Devil" section: "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy," the idea of the Devourer "as a sea" surrounding the Prolific makes more sense. It is Blake's statement of what the free and creative reason can do working with the energy of creation. It is reason that gives form and context to the

⁴²The best sources for his background are the books by Blackstone, Nurmi (especially his dissertation) and Todd listed at the end of this paper.

creations of the imagination which would otherwise remain ambiguous and undefined. As Martin Nurmi expresses it "by reason here [Blake] intends an ideal reason which strives to supply the form and order which raw energy lacks."⁴³

There is evidence of the duality in Blake's vision. On earth tension between contraries causes progress. In the ideal world the tension causes harmonious creativity without actual opposition or subjugation. In his book The Piper and the Bard Robert Gleckner states that the difference between a marriage (possible in the ideal) and subjugation (which is the earthly reality) is that "the former unites reason and energy--or better wisdom and affection--in such a way that neither loses its basic quality, but dovetails that quality into its opposite. This process constitutes the imaginative recreation of the androgynous human form divine from which the warring contraries are torn."⁴⁴ Blake's vision is a fluid one. He sees earthly man making progress (through subjugation and revolution) toward the ideal world where harmonious coexistence of an ideal reason and energy produce continuous creativity. Martin Nurmi writes of the two worlds in this way: "To see the qualities of things as vital, necessary contraries is to love a Human world of vision and imagination, whereas to see them as negations is to live in the fallen world of materialism and repressive social, religious, and political laws, a world in which the contraries are distorted and given the crude normative designations 'good' and 'evil.'"⁴⁵

⁴³Blake's Marriage, p. 21.

⁴⁴p. 190. Parentheses mine.

⁴⁵Blake's Marriage, p. 21.

These two classes of men are always upon earth and they should be enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavor to reconcile the two.

Note: Jesus Christ did not wish to unite, but to separate them, as in the Parable of sheep and goats. And he says: "I came not to send Peace, but a Sword."

Messiah or Satan or Tempter was formerly thought to be one of the Antediluvians who are our Energies.

This section seems to describe the earth as Blake experienced and saw it. There is a real distinction drawn between the church and Christ, a distinction which is one of Blake's most common themes. The entire section is in support of the warring contraries on earth which the forces of religion are trying to reconcile. Successful reconciliation would mean the destruction of man's progress toward a better world. Blake has cleverly used the authority of the Bible to support his argument against tranquility and peace.

The final sentence identifies Satan, Tempter and the Messiah as one person, and the basis for the identity is the Desire, Energy and physical effort common to the three. Satan and the Tempter are well-known activists, while the Messiah too came to bring a revolution which, although it was to be in the hearts of men caused much actual strife in history. The interplay of the three will become clearer in the later discussion of prose statement number two.

Prose statement number five also makes one of Blake's most heretical and basic contentions: "God only Acts and Is in existing beings or Men." This by inference suggests that Evil or the Devil only acts and is in men too, and puts the total responsibility for the state of the world upon the very men who inhabit it.

This first division contains Blake's theory in a nutshell. He has outlined its components by classing men as Prolific or Devourer, Devil's Advocate or Churchman, and has shown what role each plays in the war of contraries. His attitude toward religion is defined, and Christ's role has been hinted at as devilish. It is in the next sections of the division that Blake points out clearly what happens when the contraries are at war.

Here fall those parts of the Marriage which exemplify the actual opposition of the contraries trapped within cycles on earth. They include in order: "The Voice of the Devil," the second prose statement, the first "Memorable Fancy" (excluding the "Proverbs"), the third prose statement, and the fourth "Memorable Fancy." Perhaps the most important idea developed in these sections is that the "Angelic" or rational contrary is one-sided and exclusive, while the "Devilish" or imaginative contrary usually encompasses both reason and imagination. There is a definite bias toward the Devil and his party. The overwhelming theme of these sections, however, is the frustration of earthly life which is trapped in the eternal cycles. Out of the contraries' opposition comes no union or finality. There is movement but only at a great cost. Tyrants fall under revolt, but eventually a new tyrant arises who uses reason to bleed the spirit of freedom from new ideas, making them laws and codes. It is this that Blake depicts as life's greatest tragedy. A close look at the individual sections illuminates his ideas and points to the frustrating consequences of such continual opposition.

"The Voice of the Devil"

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles:
Viz: a Body and a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; and that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight. (K. 149)

The main purpose of this section is to illustrate the contrary positions of the Angelic and Devilish parties as the religious see them, as well as to define what the Devil says is true. According to Martin Nurmi, it is Blake's intention that everything expressed by the Devil or his party is only half true because it teaches one side only--that of energy. They too ignore the contraries and are as guilty as the Angels in "the dialectical discussion which runs through the memorable fancies of The Marriage."⁴⁶ Nurmi is correct but only partially. This does hold true in certain parts of the work but not in all. Harold Bloom for example feels that part two of this section where the Devil defines his beliefs is where "Blake speaks straight for once,"⁴⁷ implying that this is Blake's statement of his own beliefs and a basic tenet of the work. I agree with him here, and feel that with one exception (the Devil in "Memorable Fancy" number four) the devils are not partisan, but represent

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁷"Dialectic," p. 503.

whole human beings capable of using both Reason and Energy. They exemplify the ideal interaction of contraries.

Perhaps the most significant factor in this section is that the basis of contrariety between the two statements is one of exclusion and inclusion. The Bibles and codes divide man and exclude one part of his humanity as lower and "evil." Their God will reward man for denying his energies. The Devil's party includes the spiritual and material sides of man and gives each a role in the totality of existence. The biblical code is thus one-sided, spiritually and mentally oriented, while the Devil's code calls for the expression of both sides of man, the mental and the physical.

It is probably this unity or wholeness which Bloom refers to in the "Dialectic," writing that "against the supernaturalists, Blake asserts the reality of the body as being all of the soul that the five senses can perceive. Against the naturalist, he asserts the unreality of the merely given body, as against the imaginative body, rising through an increase in sensual fulfillment into a realization of its unfallen potential." Bloom then sums up his theory stating that religion is aiming at "reality beyond existence," while Blake seeks a "reality within existence."⁴⁸ Blake sees the division as unhealthy and unnecessary.

His devil advocates an ideal here; he is not one-sided but inclusive, valuing energy more perhaps, but assigning an important place to reason. He seems to echo the statement about the Prolific and the Devourer by recognizing Energy and Reason as necessary and natural parts of each man.

⁴⁸p. 504.

Prose statement number two is one of the most difficult passages in the Marriage; in it Blake seems to contradict the tone of the work. When looked at, however, as an expression of the warring contraries as they exist on earth, and as the postulation of the ideal combination overlooked by the exponents of each contrary, it falls into context. Blake begins with the cause and history of reason's dominance in the world:

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in Paradise Lost, and the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel, or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan, and his children are call'd Sin and Death.

But in the Book of Job, Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan.

For this history has been adopted by both parties. (K. 149-150)

Here he writes of the tension between the "two parties," those who would call Reason the Messiah with Milton and those who would call Reason Satan. The allusion to the Book of Job is rather confusing, but S. Foster Damon in his introduction to Blake's Job⁴⁹ has helpfully analyzed Blake's interpretation of this biblical story. To sum up Damon's conclusions, Blake felt that Job was punished because he worshipped a false god, one created in his own mind, a god of reason and justice alone. His salvation is achieved only when he recognizes the false God and casting him out embraces the true God of love, mercy and forgiveness. To this extent the false God who punishes and demands obedience to the law is the prototype

⁴⁹(Providence, 1966).

of Reason, as is Milton's Messiah. As Clark Emory states it, "in Milton's Paradise Lost (according to Blake), Reason is the hero, Desire the villain. In the anti-Miltonic story, Desire is the hero, Reason the villain. In each story, the hero can be called Jesus and the villain Satan. This is what confuses the issue"50

The important point is that Blake illustrates the different viewpoints of each party and shows their opposition. In the rest of the section he moves from the Old Testament (Book of Job and Genesis, Milton's chief source for Paradise Lost) to the New Testament and Christ, ending up with a unity of Desire and Reason which postulates the ideal interaction of the contraries.

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out; but the Devil's account is, that the Messiah fell, and formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss.

This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter, or Desire, that Reason may have ideas to build on; the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he who dwells in flaming fire.

Know that after Christ's death, he became Jehovah.

But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son a Ratio of the five senses and the Holy Ghost Vacuum! (K. 150)

The first sentence may be read as containing a deliberate distinction between the "Devil's account" and that of the "both parties" mentioned above. This is not noted by any critic to date, but I feel that in line with Blake's presentation of the Devil as one who has achieved the ideal harmony of Reason and Imagination it is not only a possible but a probable interpretation.⁵¹ I feel there is a definite

⁵⁰The Marriage, p. 52.

⁵¹This is directly contrary to Martin Nurmi's assertion that both Angels and Devils are partisan.

distinction drawn between the two parties with their opposite viewpoints stemming from reversals of the same history, and the Devil who states the necessity of both Reason and Desire. The shift from the Old to the New Testament, with the concomitant shift in emphasis from duty and absolutes to love and forgiveness, also indicates a new viewpoint. The proof used by Blake's Devil is taken from the Gospel of John, as Emory points out in his commentary,⁵² and in it Christ calls out for the Spirit to come down into the world "that Reason may have Ideas to build on."

There is some confusion about what Christ actually represents in the Marriage. He is Reason here, but in the last "Memorable Fancy" he represents the whole man who combines spontaneity and instinct with law and reason. Blake's intentions become a little clearer when related to conventional theology where Christ is known as "the Word" or letter of God's law. In history too, as Blake was well aware, all Christian churches base much of their teaching on the words of Christ, rather than on his actions, making them the basis of their religious codes. In this sense Christ does represent Reason and the Law. The first concern of Blake in all of this, however, is how men ought to live, and in his attempts to prove that the Church has gone astray with too much emphasis on law and prescription, he has taken the Gospel itself (the word of the Word) as proof that the word alone is not enough. Unless it is revitalized and made pertinent to the lives of men it is dead law and dogma. Mankind has received then, not only the Word of God, but also the Spirit and Comforter to show him how to use it.

⁵²The Marriage, p. 52.

There is another significant and interesting implication here in the fact that Christ after his death "became Jehovah." This shows that it is impossible to effectively split the Word from the Spirit; since this identification is based on the idea of the Trinity, the ultimate implication is that God himself is composed of the contraries, Reason and Energy. Man then, who is made in the image and likeness of God, must also accept himself as a creature of contraries by nature.

The duality expressed here in the "Devil's account" is not a partisan one; it goes beyond the argument of the two parties by encompassing both heroes--Reason and Desire--in the message of the New Testament. Even if the distinction I have referred to is not purposeful but accidental and even if the "Devil's account" is a continuation of the history of the party opposed to Milton, it still indicates that the view of the Devil and his party is not partisan as Nurmi and Emory both feel. This could be Blake's attempt to replace the Old Testament God of law and obedience with the New Testament God of forgiveness and love. In any case the final account, that of the Devil, is comprehensive, combining both contraries in a workable relationship. The interaction of ideas and reason does in fact repeat the "Voice of the Devil" in calling reason "the bound or outward circumference of Energy." With imaginative ideas reason can build; without them it will imprison.

The final note in the section is a humorous and delightful proof of Blake's appreciation of Milton's great prowess as a poet. He is even able to make this talent add to his own argument that Desire is higher than Reason, by pointing out the often-noted fact that Milton

is much more at ease and a better poet where he is describing the Devil.

Note: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it. (K. 150)

Blake's next section under part two, the first "Memorable Fancy" (K. 150), serves chiefly as an introduction to the "Proverbs of Hell," but it also exemplifies the contraries in opposition. The first and most obvious proof of this is in the line "As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs." The delights of the devils are torment and insanity to the rational and reasonable man. The strength of opposition posited seems rather extreme, but Blake's historical position in the "Age of Reason" sheds some light on his outlook. As Blackstone says in his English Blake: "Blake had the misfortune to be born into a century with grossly inadequate views of man as a psychological, social or religious being."⁵³ In general background it was the time of Locke and Newton, all advocates of the idea that man is a purely rational being having no instincts or capacities at birth. His mind was considered a "tabula rasa," as Locke expressed it. The implication was that through proper use of reason any man could rise to any height because there were no inherent impediments to hold him back. The natural philosophers, according to Blackstone, felt that the key to

⁵³p. 110.

nature lay in acute observation and experimentation. They sought to know nature and have power over her through studying her intensely.⁵⁴ To Blake these ideas were anathema. They disregarded desire, the possibility of gaining any real knowledge from the senses, and denied the value of experience in favor of passive observation and rational judgement. To quote Martin Nurmi: Blake is against the philosophy of these three because "it led naturally to a synthetic image of existence which did not square with even an ordinary man's experience and certainly not with that of an imaginative man." Nurmi goes on to say that Blake saw these ideas leading to a mechanization which could be true "only if even ordinary human experience is ignored and philosophy is based on discrete, atomized sense data. This is the work of abstract minds. The ordinary man perceives with more than dissociated and discrete senses. He sees synoptically; he sees a rose and not a collection of sense data."⁵⁵

To Blake such philosophy was a part of the same system by which the Church could divide man into a composite of two natures, one higher, the other lower; added proof, to paraphrase Blackstone, that it continues to worship the crucifixion which is death rather than the resurrection which is life.⁵⁶ It is not really stretching a point to say that the advocates of such a system would find the devilish delights of energy, desire, passion and experience insane and torturous.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁵Dissertation, pp. 6, 7.

⁵⁶English Blake, p. 207.

The second section of this first "Fancy" is an example of similar opposition.

When I came home: on the abyss of the five senses, where
a flat sided steep frowns over the present world, I saw a
mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of
the rock: with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence
now perceived by the minds of men, and read by them on earth:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

The picture of the steep "frowning" over the "abyss of the five senses" is very stark. The devil himself is an ominous figure, but, significantly, he has the power to break through the rock with his corroding fires. He cannot force men to use their sense perception, but he can force the advocates of reason to cope with the possibility that the senses can lead to knowledge by putting in front of them his written question.

The term "abyss of the five senses" implies that the senses are empty pits or caverns rather than productive, operating organs of knowledge. They are not useless though; after the devil has cut his question into the steep, it is "perceived by the minds of men, and read by them on earth." The word "perceive" can mean either gaining knowledge through one of the senses or apprehending something with the mind. Blake seems to play on these two meanings to solidify the connection of the senses with the learning process. Only through the physical eye can this question raise ideas in the mind. Without physical sight there can be no knowledge of its content, no coping with the possibilities it raises. The very process by which it appears on the barren rock and is suddenly visible forces men to reconsider preconceived notions about learning. In this sense the

whole process as well as the question itself suggests a dimension of knowledge closed to those who deny the senses.

This whole fancy can be looked at, too, as the symbolic rendering of the artist's, or more particularly Blake's, role in the process of re-educating the rational man and freeing him from the tyranny of excessive reason. His walk "among the fires of hell" and his "enjoyments of Genius" can be interpreted as his own flights into the realm of imagination. The knowledge gained there is transferred by the poet into a form (the work itself) which can be seen and recognized by all men.

Significantly, Blake seems to have taken the whole image of revelation through the use of corrosives (commonly used in his work to describe the Devil's purification of material into recognizable form) from a process which he himself invented for his illuminated works. The process, which is described by Anthony Blount in The Art of William Blake, involves the submersion of his designs in acid. This results in the erosion of all extraneous material and a sharp delineation of the design itself. The outcome of this, according to Blount, was "that he fused color and line more completely than ever before and produced something of the brilliance of the painted pages in a medieval manuscript."⁵⁷ In the last chapter of William Blake Poet and Painter, Jean Hagstrum points out that Blake sought to reach the whole man in this way by making a strong attack on two senses at the same time, reinforcing the strength of his message through poetry (visual and mental) and art⁵⁸ (visual and

⁵⁷"The First Illuminated Books" in Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Northrop Frye, pp. 127-129.

⁵⁸(Chicago, 1964), p. 139. Parentheses mine.

impressionistic). The corrosive writings of the Devil may be Blake's attempt to show how devilish powers can attack the whole man (through his reason and his senses). As a poet/painter who also worked with corrosives he identifies himself with the Devil's party in a partisan fashion. Like the Devil his job as a poet is to alert all men to the truths which imagination has revealed to him. Martin Nurmi supports this idea when he writes, "It is as a visionary counter-system to materialism that Blake's thought must be viewed. Its purpose is at every point both critical and corrective. It is designed to reveal both the falseness and limitations of materialism and the truth and human adequacy of vision, to give form to both error and truth at once so that error may be known and rejected and truth embraced."⁵⁹ In attempting to prove that Devils represent whole men it is very significant that Blake allies poet and Devil as he does, since throughout all of his writings it is the artist who is closest to the divine, sharing in God's creativity.

The fourth example of actual contrariety occurs in prose statement number three which traces a cycle in the world of men; it shows how the Devourers have bound and formalized the creations of the Prolific to the point where they have become tyrannical.

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city and country, placing it under its mental deity;

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, and enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;

⁵⁹Dissertation, p. 5.

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
 And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd
 such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human
 breast. (K. 153)

The most obvious tension here is between the "animation" of the poets and the "abstraction" of mental deities from the same natural objects by the reasoners. This in concrete form is the essence of the Prolific and Devouring natures, animation and abstraction. The poets have bestowed upon Nature certain names signifying the energy and life they saw in each sensible object. The properties they named were natural ones obvious to them through their senses. They also studied cities and nations to see which aspect of life each group of people naturally gravitated toward and chose a mental deity to match this interest.⁶⁰ They have merely named what was already in existence, but as time progressed the process became systematized instead of flexible and natural. The system dictated to the nations, cities and objects of nature until some Devourers attempted to abstract the mental deity named from the object and pronounced that the name and qualities were dictated by the gods.

The irony here arises from the fact that these "gods" themselves were creations of the ancient poets, inspired by the objects alone as they naturally existed. They had no part in creating either the objects or the life and nature of men or forests. Thus, says Blake, priesthood was created. The ironic cycle has succeeded in enslaving man to deities

⁶⁰Blake himself uses somewhat the same method in "A Song of Liberty" when he identifies the different countries with tyrannous deities: France—the dungeon, Spain—the keys of religious tyranny, etc.

which exist only in his own breast, named by other men who saw and wondered at them. This cycle is repeated in Blake many times.

The poets here are not only men of imagination, but of reason as well. Evidence of this is their ability to give form to their awareness by naming the deities. This is a bounding or forming which fits Blake's definition of reason's role,⁶¹ but it also implies his condemnation of those later men who are enslaved totally by the letter of the law or the tyranny of a dead and non-essential word. To them the abstract or rational name becomes the ultimate god rather than the life and energy which the name has been chosen to represent. Man has denied the God "who only Acts and Is in existing beings or men," and reduced himself from a god-like being to the slave of an analytic system existing outside and above himself. To Blake this is the most injurious result of systematic and rational behavior.

The next section of the Marriage dealing with contraries in opposition is the fourth "Memorable Fancy" (K. 155-157). Reduced to its simplest components it shows why the Devil and the Angel must be enemies on earth. The short aphorism following it sums up its message: "Opposition is true friendship." One point to keep in mind is that Blake is describing the earthly world rather than the ideal. The two must be opposed to permit progression on earth—as Devourer and Prolific they can conflict individually and en masse, and the world will move forward through the tensions produced.

⁶¹Nurmi notes this too in his dissertation, p. 304.

Here Blake pictures the extremities of Devilish and Angelic thought on earth and the effect that they have on each other. The section is written in the first person and is presumably spoken by Blake in his devilish form as a poet and artist. He permits an Angel to show him his external lot, which is the traditional Christian Hell as Blake views it. Entering a stable and progressing through a church, the church vault, a mill, and a cave, they come to an endless void and view the "fiery" abyss. Blake's place "between the black and white spiders" is pointed out to him by the Angel. When Leviathan suddenly rushes toward them from Blake's place "with all the fury of a spiritual existence" the terrified Angel flees. Most critics concur that Leviathan is the spirit of revolution, a fitting image to arise from Blake's position in Hell, and such a sight would, of course, cause any conservative and traditional Angel to take to his heels in terror. Once he has left, however, the scene changes radically to a moonlit riverbank where a harper sings that "the man who never alters his opinion is like standing water and breeds reptiles of the mind."

Blake then goes after the Angel and tells him, "All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics, But now we have seen my eternal lot, shall I shew you yours?" He forces the unwilling Angel to follow him far into the sky⁶² and eventually down through space to the same stable and church which the Angel had led him to earlier. Their ultimate discovery is seven brick houses and in one they find:

⁶²Nurmi goes into great depths analyzing the philosophical background of the Angel's trip to the sky in his dissertation, pp. 207-211.

a number of monkeys, baboons, and all of that species, chain'd by the middle, grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains: however, I saw that they sometimes grew numerous, and then the weak were caught by the strong, and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with, and then devour'd, by plucking off first one limb and then another till the body was left a helpless trunk; this, after grinning and kissing it with seeming fondness, they devour'd too; and here and there I saw one savourily picking the flesh off his own tail; as the stench terribly annoy'd us both, we went into the mill, and I in my hand brought the skeleton of a body, which in the mill was Aristotle's Analytics. (K. 157)

After their return to earth the Angel accuses Blake: "Thy phantasy has imposed upon me and thou oughtest to be ashamed." His answer to the Angel is: "We impose on one another, and it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics."

The Devil pictures for the Angel the extreme Devourer, or as Nurmi says "devourers gone wild,"⁶³ thus counter-balancing the Angel's picture of Leviathan, the most extreme result of the Prolific creativity: revolt against the established systems. Both have seized upon the ultimate extremes of the other side, and, obviously, both are right to accuse the other of imposition. What Blake brings out clearly here is that neither as a one-sided extremist can accept the other; it is foolish to attempt it. "Opposition is true friendship" here on earth.

In this second division, then, Blake shows the results of contrariety and the lack of harmony between the two extremes. This is the tyranny and subjugation which the cycles impose on all men. First the Devourers rule, then the Prolific, but in every case there is lack of freedom. Extreme devourers cannot allow the prolific to create, and the extremely

⁶³Blake's Marriage, p. 53.

prolific cannot respect the achievements of the devourers. There is progress made in this way, and there is always hope because one cycle must give way to the next, but the overwhelming aspect of the process is one of despairing repetition. The eternal circle of the cycles is ultimately a prison. For Blake men on earth can only exist as enemies according to their affinity for energy or reason, creativity or form. They are enmeshed in the need to assert their own values as absolute truth.

What life would be like outside of this prison, what men free from eternal contrariety could accomplish, is the subject of the third division. Here Blake writes about situations in which there is evidence of peaceful coexistence between the two, usually within single individuals. It is significant that he treats this subject only in "Memorable Fancies," perhaps implying his own "fanciful" dreams of making this ideal a reality on earth.

There is a unity of theme in these three "Fancies" which points to an important aspect of Blake's ideal. All of them have to do with knowledge: the first with how knowledge can be gained either creatively or slavishly; the second with how knowledge is passed on from generation to generation in Hell; and the third with an exchange of knowledge between a Devil and an Angel leading to the conversion of the Angel and what is commonly held to be the actual marriage of heaven and hell. These are found in "Memorable Fancies" II, III and V.

The second "Memorable Fancy" (K. 153-154), echoes slightly the theme already discussed in prose statement number three, how man's creations can

ultimately enslave him if his reason declares what is as what must be; the emphasis here, however, is on the creators rather than what ultimately becomes of their creations, although that too is pointed out.

This "Fancy" is related by a narrator who seems to be uninitiated in the doctrine of Energy and serves chiefly as a device for directing the discussion. While having dinner with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekial he asks them many questions about their daring assertions that God has spoken directly to them. His questions echo traditional opinions which the prophets refute with devilish beliefs. They clearly belong to the ranks of the Prolific in contrast to the law makers who they feel have since formalized religion to the point of sterilizing it.

The narrator questions the prophets, and asks if "they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, and so be the cause of imposition." With the gusto typical of the devilish party the answer comes from Isaiah in strong anti-doctrinal terms. "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in everything, and as I was then perswaded, and remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote."

Isaiah's statements contain two important concepts: first, that the senses are man's only way to knowledge' and secondly, the idea mentioned before, that "God only Acts, and Is in existing beings or Men." In answer to the narrator's question "does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so?" Isaiah replies: "All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains, but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing." Here he thrusts

the responsibility for all action upon the individual man who can remove mountains if he is firmly persuaded. The persuasion has nothing to do with creeds or rationality, but rests entirely upon the person's response to his own sense perception. Blake reiterates here his theory that man has within him the power to work such miracles if he will only use and develop it through his imagination. Reason and society, however, have put such manacles upon the imagination that Blake must go far into the past to find examples of the free creative, imaginative man and can only prophesy his return at some future time. Isaiah's pessimistic statement that not "many are capable of a firm persuasion of any thing," illustrates Blake's despair at the state of his own world. It also recalls strongly the opening lines of prose statement number two, "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained."

Isaiah has mentioned poets in conjunction with firm persuasions and in the next paragraph, he develops the religion of the "Poetic Genius" (as Blake now calls it) pointing out in his description how the Devourers have imposed law and oppression upon the world through their misinterpretation of ideas discovered by the prolific Jewish peoples. (Again the eternal earthly cycle.) Israel was the first nation to teach the Poetic Principle; its people were on fire with its truths and sought to free all other nations with its concepts. In their belief that all other gods would prove to have originated in their God and be "the tributaries of the Poetic Genius," they despised the priests and philosophers of all other lands for their attempts to keep their followers from seeing the truth.

Significantly, the great King of the Jews mentioned here is David, a poet as well as ruler. In him can be seen the unity of a whole man:

his Poetic Genius has made him an active ruler and physical person, capable of expressing his religious beliefs in the beautiful and often sensual verses he wrote. It was the Poetic Genius which David desired and invoked "saying by this he conquers enemies and governs kingdoms." There is, however, a strongly pessimistic note in Isaiah's use of the adjective "pathetic'ly" in describing David. It is, he says, the Poetic Genius "that our great poet, King David desired so fervently and invokes so pathetic'ly, saying by this he conquers enemies and governs kingdoms"; he continues, "and we so loved our God that we curs'd in his name all the deities of surrounding nations; and asserted that they had rebelled: from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the Jews."

David the great king of the Jews, although an almost perfect man, had surrendered to the terrible temptation to impose his beliefs on others and in that way has ultimately entered the earthly cycle of subjugating opinions contrary to his own. As Isaiah continues, it is this intensity of the Jewish belief in the Poetic Principle and their contempt for other gods that led other nations to accept ultimate subjection to them. "This, said he [Isaiah], like all firm perswasions is come to pass; for all nations believe the Jews' code and worship the Jews' god, and what greater subjection can be?" Here Blake ironically points out the grave danger of the "Devourers'" lack of desire: once they became "firmly perswaded" rationally they caused their persuasion to be realized by subjecting themselves to it. They took the excess of the Jewish spirit and subjugated themselves to it as a confining code.

Isaiah and Ezekiel represent within themselves the coexistence of contraries. Unafraid of imposing upon other men, they sided with justice as they saw it, and accepted as total truth what their senses put before them. In response to the narrator's question of what made him go naked and barefoot for three years Isaiah answers, "the same that made our friend Diogenes, the Grecian." Ezekiel explains his strange behavior in similar words, "the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite: this the North American tribes practice, and is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?"

By coupling genius with conscience, Blake forcefully points out that man must obey the demands of genius or deny his conscience. Earlier Isaiah declares that for him "the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God"; and "indignation" by definition means displeasure at something deemed unworthy, unjust or base; righteous anger. This supports the moral tone lent by the word conscience, and seems to imply that anyone who allows his desire to be restrained and usurped by reason violates a moral code of righteousness. Blake's prophets had no choice but to speak and act as they did. It is ironic that in spite of their freedom in speech and action they are proclaimed as holy men and prophets by the very people they look down on. They take no pride in the honor, but label it as the greatest subjection possible.

The next section treating the theme of knowledge is "Memorable Fancy" number three, the subject of which is Hell's method of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next.

I was in a Printing house in Hell, and saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

In the first chamber was a Dragon-man, clearing away the rubbish from a cave's mouth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave.

In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock and the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones.

In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air: he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite; around were numbers of Eagle-like men who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire, raging around and melting the metals into living fluids.

In the fifth chamber were Unnam'd forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.

There they were reciev'd by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books and were arranged in libraries. (K. 154-155)

Martin Nurmi has explicated this passage thoroughly⁶⁴ and most relevant for this paper is his division of the section into two main parts; the first of which "shows the liberation of man, and hence that of the contraries, by the improvement of sense perception"; and the second which "shows the interaction of the contraries in the creation of works of genius."⁶⁵ It is the last part, emphasizing the ideal interaction of contraries, which points out that the devilish party is not one-sided or totally for energy to the exclusion of reason and form (although Nurmi himself states the opposite in his summary of Blake's form).⁶⁶

The actual transmission is through books assembled in libraries, but Blake has built up an elaborate system showing how the knowledge is brought imaginatively to book form. This system is revealed in the last

⁶⁴Blake's Marriage, pp. 45-48.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 26.

three chambers where metal (which is presumably mined in the cave of man's mind) is melted by "Lions of flaming fire . . . into living fluids."⁶⁷ This melting of metals (or thoughts) into "living fluids" appears to be a process for making what has been solidified by reason or conceptualization become vital again through exposure to righteous indignation. Once more there is a note of morality injected into the ideal process--one which perhaps explains the fury of energy in its pure form. Without relevance to actual life a concept is passive and easily restrained into a rationalized and objective form.

In the fifth chamber the metals are cast into the expanse by Unnam'd forms, implying as Nurmi says "not only that they are given shape but are given identity. Thus in this casting, which is rather like supplying genius with its vehicle, we see the interaction of the contraries."⁶⁸ There is a certain ambiguity in the word "cast" here which is obviously intentional. Applied to metals "cast" means to shape through pouring into a mold of some kind and the reception of the same metals by men in the sixth chamber seems to imply that they were literally flung into the expanse.

The metal is received by men and in the form of books is arranged in libraries. This indicates the orderly formalizing of ideas down to the arrangement of position and also shows the interaction of imagination and reason. It points out too, Blake's strong belief in the value of books which may seem a bit out of line with his strong emphasis on the value of experience and vitality; his own works, however, express familiarity

⁶⁷See note 18, p.5.

⁶⁸Blake's Marriage, p. 48.

with the ideas of many men through reading, and his use of the Bible in particular shows his respect for knowledge from the past. Much of his quarrel with the present is its failure to abide by the wisdom and example of Christ in the New Testament. He sees instruction as having an important place in man's life, but still believes that "the tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." He would have learning conjoined with initiative and action rather than with pure rationality and contemplation.

The final "Fancy" of the work shows another instance of Energy and Reason, Imagination and Logic joined in one person, significantly a Devil. It revolves around the meeting of two apparent contraries, a Devil in a flame of fire and an Angel sitting upon a cloud. When the Devil states that it is necessary to worship God's gifts in men and that the greatest men deserve the most love because of their genius "for there is no other God," the angelic mouthpiece of conventionality is appalled. To him this is heresy, and he falls back upon the traditional Christian doctrine: "Thou Idolater. Is not God One? And is not he visible in Jesus Christ? And has not Jesus Christ given his sanction to the law of ten commandments? And are not all other men fools, sinners and nothings?"

The Devil's reply is a clever and rational rebuttal, as he agrees that Christ, the greatest man, is worthy of the most love but then proves that in his lifetime Christ consciously broke almost all of the ten commandments.

If Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree; now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments: did he not mock at the sabbath,

and so mock the sabbath's God? murder those who were murder'd because of him? turn away the law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? covet when he pray'd for his disciples, and when he bid them shake off the dust of their feet against such as refused to lodge them? I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules. (K. 158)

The last sentence is the core of the whole section; in Christ Blake presents the image of the divine man--the androgynous perfection of humanity in divinity; of flesh and spirit; good and evil; energy and reason. Even the Angel must agree rationally that what the Devil says is true: he "stretched out his arms, embracing the flame of fire and he was consumed and arose as Elijah." The flame is the element which surrounds the Devil and in embracing it the Angel seems to embrace the heat of energy and the vital creative truth of Blake's Hell. His rebirth "as Elijah" is also significant because elsewhere Blake refers to Elijah as the voice of prophecy.⁶⁹

The "Fancy" has within it several indications of "marriage," and the greatest of these can be found in the Christ image. Combining virtue and lawbreaking in the traditional Christ, Blake indicates that the split delineated by traditional Christianity does not and can not exist in a whole or perfect man. This is also evident in the Devil's refutation of the Angel with reason, using the very text of the orthodox Bible to do it. The Devil burns with the flame of creativity and imagination while still retaining the ability to reason. Spirit/reason and body/instinct are married in him as they were in Christ. The Angel is converted through the reasonable argument of the creative mind, and accepts the truth

⁶⁹See "Elijah," p. 118 in Damon's Dictionary.

inherent in the Devil's statement. Contrariety here is not so much of opposed opposites as of the wholeness of the Devil against the one-sidedness of the Angel. In line with Blake's theme that contrariety must exist inevitably, the Angel does not become exactly like the Devil--he learns but does not create. The union of the two results in the birth of prophecy (Elijah); as the final "Note" indicates, though the prophecy is not about any change in the Angel's nature; it refers instead to a change in his ability to recognize and respect the other side--to exist with his contrary in peace. Remember the aphorism "Opposition is true Friendship."

Note: This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend; we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well."

True to form the Angel is studying and reading here--not creating, but he is reading with the narrator (Blake), a devil at heart; presumably they are both progressing in knowledge. There is an apparent irony here as Martin Nurmi points out, noting that everyone who embraces Energy becomes a Devil.⁷⁰ This is not really an irony though when looked at in context. Mr. Nurmi's conviction grows out of his theory that Blake intends both Devils and Angels to be one-sided, each containing one element necessary for wholeness. I find Nurmi's theory unacceptable because it disregards the encompassing acceptance which characterizes the devilish doctrine. The Angel in the last Fancy becomes a Devil in attitude rather than in form or affinity, and the attitude is expressed in his willingness to accept another point of view as equally real

⁷⁰Blake's Marriage, p. 61.

rather than in an essential change in his character. This does not seem ironic in the least but is rather quite in line with what Blake has done up to this point in the whole work. The ending of this "Fancy," however, does seem to point out that the acceptance of both contraries can only come outside the traditional religious structure which denies the "lower" or "bodily" part of man's nature. As Harold Bloom has pointed out, the statement in the "Voice of the Devil" that "'Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy Energy is Eternal Delight,' does not mean that Reason is Eternal Torment; it does mean that Reason's story would hold it that unbounded Energy is such torment. Hence the Marriage's curious double accent of fall and negative creation, whether of heaven or hell."⁷¹ The Angel has become a Devil, because he can now recognize the two sides of existence as valid. He has become more whole and inclusive to that extent. This is the marriage of heaven and hell.

The aphorism following the "Fancy" restates this by reminding us that "One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression." These two animals are very different by nature, and to judge them by the same standards would be to subjugate one to the other's nature. To make this point emphatically Blake chose two animals which to him were worlds apart in nature. To quote Damon's Dictionary, "the Lion is spiritual wrath, inspired by pity" while "the Ox is a castrated bull, who drags the plow . . . , and is slaughtered for meat He is docile and patient . . . [and] it would require an excess of cruelty to rouse the wrath of such

⁷¹"Dialectic", p. 503.

a gentle creature or his human equivalent."⁷² The last aphorism sums up the theme of the entire Marriage in capsule form: man must be free to follow the dictates of his own nature without punishment, and Blake applies this to every man whether Prolific or Devourer.

It is significant that Blake's final vision in the "Body" is of harmonious creativity. It answers sections one and two by showing the tolerance and harmony of the ideal which can encompass both types of men peacefully. To the Devil's party is given the role of converting the extreme contraries to tolerance and interaction. This expresses his strong belief that both types have a significant role to play in God's overall plan for men. In harmony they can achieve the ideal.

Now we come to the three sections of the Marriage which would not fit comfortably into the previous divisions. Each of these is an integral part of the whole, helping to develop Blake's main themes. The "Proverbs of Hell" are particularly concerned with the theme of contraries; prose statement four develops the theme of sense perception, and the role of the poet in helping man to see things as they are; the sixth prose statement contains Blake's condemnation of Swedenborg as a Devourer who

⁷²pp. 242, 313.

pretends to be among the Prolific. Each of these elaborates some part of the work already discussed.

The "Proverbs" are closest in relationship to the sections already subdivided since they deal with the harmony of contraries (K. 150-152). Martin Nurmi feels that they are the partisan development of the Devil's belief in energy as the only delight and the active as always superior to the passive.⁷³ This is not compatible however with the pattern evident in many of the proverbs. The first for example: "In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy," and a later one "Think in the morning. Act in the noon Eat in the evening. Sleep in the night.," do not advocate solely Prolific virtues. They indicate instead the need for a pattern in which mental and physical activities all have a place. Acting and enjoying do not outweigh learning and thinking, but fall into place beside them.

They also contain evidence of the cycles of contraries which are in all lives and in all times: "Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth"; "The crow wish'd everything was black, the owl that everything was white." These are stated as facts not as ideals and embrace both energy and passivity (in their ordinary meanings). In one proverb there is a statement apparently against action: "Improvement makes strait roads; but crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius." The use of the adjective strait with its archaic meaning of narrow or bounding indicates Blake's objection to an ordering that might restrain Genius rather than merely form it. The prose statements and fancies show many instances where Genius has been straitened through such law. There are

⁷³Blake's Marriage, p. 30.

other proverbs too, evidencing the very active results of what to Blake is passive restraint: "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity." There is warning here of limits that go too far.

There is great emphasis on the value of experience throughout the proverbs and of learning from the experience of another: "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise"; and "If others had not been foolish we would be so." There is implied here a growth through experiences, even from those which seem useless to the rational.

Above all, the "Proverbs" echo Blake's theme of contraries either as they oppose each other, coexist in an harmonious pattern echoing the ideal, or as they choke and stifle life when they are too stringent. The ideal coexistence of all as a part of the divine plan is pointed out here, often through the use of animals. The implication is that every thing has its own nature and must be allowed to be true to it, rather than forced to obey a general law which attempts to regulate all things. "The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit watch the roots; the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant watch the fruits." "The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow." Here a division of natures and activities is clearly stated to be natural; neither group of animals is condemned or exalted unless they act unnaturally as does the eagle. Both of these examples point to a wholeness and harmony in the Devil's wisdom rather than a partisanship.

There are four proverbs referring to God's creation which isolate those aspects of it strongly condemned by the religious: pride, lust, wrath, and nakedness. "The pride of the peacock is the glory of God;

"The lust of the goat is the bounty of God; "The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God; "The nakedness of woman is the work of God." Here the many facets of creation are stressed with emphasis placed on the need to accept all of these as good and meaningful. It is a definite contradiction of the one-sided code of the religious.

There are also many proverbs pointing out the experiential value of excess, and it may be to this that Nurmi refers when he speaks of the Devil's partisanship. "Dip him in the river who loves water"; "No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings"; "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough"; "Damn braces. Bless relaxes"; "Enough or too much."⁷⁴ Along a parallel line are the proverbs: "He who desires, but acts not, breeds pestilence"; "Expect poison from standing water"; "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." In all of these the Devils call out for the freedom to follow their nature instead of denying it. There is emphasis on action, but only when it is coupled with desire. It brings to mind Isaiah's claim of finding God in his humanity and being unable to resist the demands of genius for present comfort. The promulgation of such ideas would give to both Devourer and Prolific the freedom to act as their natures bid, another indication of Hell's democracy. As in the section entitled "The Voice of the Devil," the religious definition of man is incorporated and expanded in the "Proverbs" rather than excluded as the source of "Eternal

⁷⁴Nurmi feels that this last proverb is out of tune with the others because it is non-partisan. This is due to his insistence upon the partisanship of the Devilish party; he has missed one of Blake's major points.

Torment." The emphasis is on cycles where all sides of man are free and uninhibited. The "Proverbs," then, express the freedom which Blake demanded for men and found in the Devil's company.

Prose statement number four is the most complete statement of Blake's ideas on sense perception, and the role of the poet in the world.

The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell.

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life; and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (K. 154)

The most important point here is that Blake, as a poet and member of the Devil's party, can help to bring about the necessary improvement in man's sensual perception. His corrosive printing will melt the surface from all things and reveal to man the realities which lie hidden beneath. This is Blake's statement of the purpose of the Marriage, and also his attempt at defining the artist/poet as a divine agent working out man's salvation. By allying himself with the Devil's party he has pointed out the similar roles of devil and poet. One great example of this alliance is found in the ending of the last "Memorable Fancy" where the Devil points out the truth to the angel and they become true friends in

opposition and presumably progress together in an ideal coexistence. The second paragraph of this fourth statement is a strong indication that, to Blake, only through Hell's principle of allowing things to be seen as they are--infinite and holy--can man himself improve. To continue to deny that "woman's nakedness is the work of God" is to be blind forever.

It is interesting to note the parallel between Blake's method of clearing the doors of perception "by printing in the infernal method of corrosives," which melt "apparent surfaces away," and the divine cleansing through the cherub's sword of flame. In both cases the burning is a purifying rather than destructive agent to what is real and eternal. Only the corrupt, finite, and apparent will be destroyed by it. This parallels his own method of printing where acid destroys all but the true color. Here then Blake has pointed out his own role and the role of all poets in helping man win salvation. By implication he also reveals that his purpose in writing the work itself is to help its readers toward understanding the truth and being better able to see the errors around them.

The sixth prose statement presents Blake's case against Swedenborg, who is condemned by being linked with the Angels as a Devourer and formalizer of Genius rather than an innovative religious leader (K. 157-158). Swedenborg's failure was the result of conversing only "with Angels who are all religious, and . . . not with Devils who all hate religion." His writings are not complete or whole because they "are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime--but no further." There is no question that Blake has divided the Prolific and

Devourers here and finds the Devourers, including Swedenborg, lacking in genius:

Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare an infinite number.

But when he has done, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine.

The ironic twist to all of this is that Swedenborg himself wrote against the religious, but in criticizing their folly and exposing them as hypocrites he falls prey to the idea "that all are religious, and himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net." He has succumbed to the angelic vanity of believing himself the possessor of all wisdom "with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning." Again Blake thrusts away the exclusive viewpoint violently. Swedenborg's greatest sins are his one-sidedness and his false pride. In categorizing all other men as sinners under his systematic rationale, he ironically ranks himself with them forever in Blake's eyes. He has written "all the old falsehoods."

Although Blake thoroughly discredits Swedenborg here, I disagree with the critics who say it is done vituperatively, and that this one section of scornful refutation invalidates the whole work. In dividing men of genius and men "of mechanical talents" Blake has further explicated his theory of the Prolific and the Devourer. This statement fits well into the total work although its particularity may not be absolutely essential to it. Blake's plan in the Marriage seems to be to line up many different examples all contributing to the total message, but not

absolutely necessary to prove any one point. Blake is no more opposed to Swedenborg in language or style than he is to any other religious character.

There is no question that Swedenborg figured much more in the actual composition of the Marriage than is obvious to the reader. Martin Nurmi has gone into this influence in depth,⁷⁵ and while it is not my intention to reproduce Nurmi's work here I will record some particularly relevant statements from it. His research has shown that in many ways the whole Marriage is a philosophical satire of Swedenborg's writings and beliefs. He points out moreover that Blake does a creative and artful job of satirizing Swedenborg by out-philosophizing him rather than using the accepted satiric method of common sense to elucidate faulty philosophy.⁷⁶

Nurmi also states that Swedenborg is introduced in the first prose statement as one whose writings are left behind by the risen Christ, and this indicates to him that Blake has used Swedenborg throughout the work as the representative for all false religious prophets and reasoners who are outmoded by the Christ pictured in the last "Memorable Fancy."⁷⁷ To sum up Blake's feelings in Nurmi's terms: "However visionary Swedenborg may have seemed . . . he was in one fundamental respect at one with the reasoners: he proceeds from the assumption that the greatest values are order, repose and balance

⁷⁵I recommend this work as stuffy but necessary reading for any serious Blake scholar.

⁷⁶Dissertation, pp. 203-213.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 102.

His writings [therefore] are nothing but the remnants of divinity."⁷⁸
Swedenborg is thus a very good example of potential genius smothered
by orthodoxy.

It is this smothering that is the theme of the sixth prose statement,
and the method used by Swedenborg which was chiefly one-sided and
recapitulatory is an actual example of the method used by all rational
Devourers. The result, a mere restatement, is neither vital nor pertinent
to the world at large. To the reader of Blake's Marriage it is this theme
and the work itself that are of prime importance, and, whether it parodies
Swedenborg or not, its theme is clear and unified. It stands alone and
refutes critics like S. Foster Damon who call it a "scrapbook" of sorts.⁷⁹
The fact that beyond the unity of the whole, Blake's material is effective
satire merely adds another dimension to its merits.

Having looked at the Marriage under these divisions it becomes clear
to the reader that for Blake life would not be human without contrariety.
As Nurmi points out in his dissertation, it is man's imagination which
makes him human to Blake, with it he can synthesize and interrelate the
objects perceived by his senses into a meaningful and significant whole.⁸⁰
His biggest quarrel with the "Age of Reason" is its insistence upon
breaking things down into parts and qualities, isolating the objects

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 162, 166.

⁷⁹Blake's Philosophy, pp. 88, 96.

⁸⁰pp. 9-20.

of sense perception rather than observing them as all men with common sense do, as wholes. As Nurmi says: Blake was against Bacon, Newton, and Locke's philosophy because "it led naturally to a synthetic image of existence which did not square with even an ordinary man's experience of existence, and certainly not with that of an imaginative man."⁸¹

Although I disagree with Nurmi in his insistence that Blake intended his Devils and Hell to be as one-sided and partisan as the Angels and their Heaven, I do agree for the most part with his summary of the three main ideas in the body of the Marriage:

(1) that contraries of energy and restraint are necessary for human life; (2) that these contraries now exist and always have existed, but that they are obscured by the moral codes of the religious and are, as a result known only as good and evil; and (3) that these contraries will be recognized and allowed to form the basis of human life when mens' sense perceptions are improved.⁸²

I would add as a final phrase to (2) "on earth."

My division of the Marriage into three main sections showing first where Blake talks about the existence of the contraries, second where he shows their existence on earth, and third where he shows the real human life achieved by those free from one-sided orthodoxy, develops these three major ideas. Those sections which do not fall directly into these categories are still related to them. After examining the Marriage closely within this frame, new light is thrown upon Blake's craftmanship, some of the apparent incongruities in the text are clarified, and many of the already voiced critical comments on the work are strengthened. In the

⁸¹Ibid., p. 6.

⁸²Ibid., p. 216.

context of Blake's ideas about the contraries the work unfolds as a coherent and meaningful statement about man and his life. The prevailing optimism of the whole is a clear indication of the faith that Blake had in the whole man who could use both energy and reason to create an harmonious world. It is also a lucid doctrine, clarifying much of the intention behind his later "obscure" books. In his individual sections and in the whole Blake has produced a work of art as well as a concise philosophical statement.

EPILOGUE

In making a final statement on form it is helpful to review Blake's purpose in writing the Marriage. His twofold aim was to reveal the errors existing in the world and to offer a solution for them. He does this in the two poems which frame the "Body" of the work. The "Body" exemplifies the necessary contraries existing on earth in subjugation and in the ideal world in peaceful and creative coexistence thus revealing and offering a solution for the errors. It also explains the situation in the "Argument" and the "Song of Liberty."

It is the existence of contraries on earth that creates both the tyranny pictured in the "Argument" and the revolt pictured in the "Song." The subjugation of one contrary to another results in a cycle which becomes for Blake the pattern of all life on earth. The just man is subdued and mistreated by the hypocrite until his spirit of justice bursts into the flame of rebellion. Ironically, without the hypocrite to spur him into righteous anger he will grow meek and uncreative, an ox instead of a lion. The second part of the cycle is the outbreak of rebellion, the actual birth of freedom illustrated in the "Song." Subjugation cannot exist indefinitely. It must eventually explode into action.

The "Song" is particularly significant in the light of the "Body" too; if taken alone it can be viewed only as the second part of the interminable cycle of life on earth, while with the "Body" it can refer either to that or to the end of all subjugation and the final step into an ideal coexistence of both contraries. In either case, because of the

"Body" it lends itself to an optimistic interpretation. If it is the second part of a particular cycle it remains a testament to the eternal outburst of the spirit of liberty. It could perhaps be viewed as a parallel to King David's story and the environment of free expression and free thought that characterized his reign at first. It would also have in it, however, a tinge of foreboding; just as David's genius became the tyrant of a later era, so might the freedom eventually be formalized into laws of servitude as the cycle shifts. This pattern is one that Blake points out several times in the "Body" (prose statements three and five and "Memorable Fancy" II). In every case Devourers have in time perverted the accomplishments of the Prolific into sterile and binding laws opposed directly to the original spirit of the creators.

If, however, it is to represent the ending of cycles and subjugation, and the beginning of the ideal coexistence of Prolific and Devourer, it can be referred to as Blake's "Apocalypse" in the work and the "Song" would then be the initiation of the perfect human world. That Blake intended this is made evident in his reference to the freeing of the "eternal Horses." As such it would tie in closely with the last "Memorable Fancy" of the "Body" and its final aphorism stating the need for individual standards. The "Song" would represent the achievement of a similar "marriage" on earth. Like the Devil and Angel who read and work together, the "eternal horses" freed from "the dens of night," as the Angel was freed from the bounds of prejudice, could create cooperatively in the spirit of freedom.

The actual structure of the Marriage in this context consists of a general comment on the world, its cycles and possibilities, framed by

two poems which illustrate the generalities in specific terms of conflict and revolt. The poems gain much from the "Body," but they in turn make the "Body" concrete. The outcome is a provocative structure which frees Blake to comment on the world of his time as well as that of the past and future in the light of his own philosophy. What seems at first glance to be an unordered and disconnected potpourri of ideas and sketches unfolds as a coherent and meaningful pattern of statements, proofs and prophecies all united in Blake's theory of contraries.

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APPENDIX I

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

"The Argument"

Prose statement I ("As a new heaven is begun, . . .")

"The Voice of the Devil"

Prose statement II (Those who restrain desire, . . .")

"A Memorable Fancy" I ("As I was walking among the fires of hell,")

"Proverbs of Hell"

Prose statement III ("The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects
with Gods or Geniuses, . . .")

"A Memorable Fancy" II ("The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with
me, . . .")

Prose statement IV ("The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed
in fire at the end of 6,000 years is true, . . .")

"A Memorable Fancy" III ("I was in a Printing House in Hell, . . .")

Prose statement V ("The Giants who form'd this world into its sensual
existence, . . .")

"A Memorable Fancy" IV ("An Angel came to me and said: . . .")

"Opposition is true Friendship."

Prose statement VI ("I have always found that Angels have the vanity . . .")

"A Memorable Fancy" V ("Once I saw a Devil in a flame of fire, . . .")

"One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression."

"A Song of Liberty"

APPENDIX II

My Formal Division of the Marriage

I. Statements about the Contraries:

Prose statement I
Prose statement V
"Opposition is true Friendship."
"One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression."

II. Examples of Contraries in oppression:

"The Voice of the Devil"
Prose statement II
"A Memorable Fancy" I
Prose statement III
"A Memorable Fancy" IV

III. Examples of Contraries in harmony:

"A Memorable Fancy" II
"A Memorable Fancy" III
"A Memorable Fancy" V

IV. Sections falling outside these divisions:

"Proverbs of Hell"
Prose statement IV
Prose statement VI