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Let The Devil Speak:

Free Love and Sexuality in William Blake's poetry

(bakalářská práce)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis .....

Děkuji Mgr. Davidu Livingstoneovi, Ph.D., za odborné vedení práce, poskytování rad a materiálových podkladů k práci.

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## 1. Introduction

Suppression of sexuality was a common practice among citizens of England at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Regardless of age or sex, all people were in a way forced into a twisted understanding of the urges their body naturally had. Needless to say questioning the presented rules was absolutely inadmissible. Thanks to his visionary mind and modern ideas, however, William Blake was able to record the evils and oppressions instilled in people's mind. His work not only shows the reader the woeful situation but also presents certain notions of revolt against the established system.

The aim of this thesis is to map William Blake's notion of sexuality, what shaped it and how he, in his poetry, reacted to the oppression that made love and sex a powerful weapon in the hands of religion. It will also try to show the reasons for Blake's influence on the 1960s. The initial part describes the sexual mores in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, primarily the ways of oppression through various doctrines, resulting in rampant prostitution. The following chapter illustrates the important points of the author's life as well as the possible influences that shaped his views of sexuality and helped him in creation of the analysed work.

The major part of the thesis introduces the ideas regarding the sexuality, love, condemnation of these two notions and the consequent revolution of sensuality, represented in William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Songs of Experience*, and *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. It will analyse the works one by one and try to point out the main message that is behind each of them.

Finally, the last part will examine Blake's legacy, mainly in the nineteen-sixties on the counter-culture.

## 2. Sexual mores in the late 18th century

First, before examining Blake's own views of sexuality, I would like to describe the way society at the turn of the eighteenth century, perceived it and what were the basic standards of oppression towards the urges that people had.

The most basic kind of oppression was without a doubt, the prohibition against exploring one's body. The population was forced to view masturbation as a sin that would undoubtedly be followed by corporal punishment. These, 'Guilt-ridden attitudes towards the body' (Boucé 2), were of course the starting point for the oppression of sex as a whole. As Boucé mentions, 'Folk wisdom and proverbs predicted that those who wallowed in the lust of flesh paid for their pleasures: venereal diseases and bastards were the wages of sin' (2).

Everyone, apart from married couples, was forced into suppressing the urges that the body brought about. In fact, there were special groups of people and activities that were under constant surveillance. Michel Foucault, in his *The History of Sexuality*, refers for example to, 'children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias' (38). Basically, the only acceptable way of expressing sexuality was in marriage. However, not even the married status granted perfectly free will while considering sex. Similarly as the unmarried being controlled, there were also special 'codes', as Foucault says, that 'governed sexual practices' (37), on the matrimonial level. There was 'the canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law' (Foucault 37). In a perfectly balanced relationship, these three regulations, each in its own way, circumscribed the boundaries of the acceptable and unacceptable. Acts considered as sins within marriage were according to Foucault, 'adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest, but also sodomy, or the mutual "caress"' (38).

Nevertheless, in many cases these prescriptions failed and the bond of marriage was defiled, most often, by the sin of adultery. When considering this particular sin, a double standard of condemnation arose in the mind of the people. Unfaithfulness on the part of a husband did not make much of a stir in society. On the other hand, when a wife was unfaithful to her husband, she 'could expect little sympathy in a society that considered her body the property of her husband' (Olsen 48). However, an even more surprising fact is, as Olsen describes it that in the eyes of the others, a woman was always

considered a culprit, although it was her husband who did not keep his vow of faithfulness (48). The easiest way for adulterers to commit their sin was of course to find a prostitute. Indeed, this task could not have been easier, since there were ‘more than 10,000 prostitutes in London, most of them in their teens’ (Olsen 49). Through prostitution, venereal diseases spread among the clients, who consequently infected their wives. The method of contraception, such as condoms, ‘made of sheep’s intestines [...] tied down at one end with ribbon’ (Olsen 50), did not provide good enough protection from either disease or from conception. This leads to the question of how women, since men as owners of the opposite sex obviously did not worry, took care of the unwanted babies. There were several abortion methods which women resorted to. Olsen mentions, for example, using ‘chemicals and plant extracts’ (51) as a way-out for some of them. Others ‘believed that drinking heavily or bled in the feet would do the trick’ (51). However, the last and mentally the hardest possible way of dealing with this problem was killing the new-born.

Such attitudes toward sexuality and of course their consequences, circulating among people of eighteenth century England, certainly deeply touched William Blake. The next part of the thesis will look into other influences he had been exposed to in his lifetime.

### **3. William Blake’s inspiration**

In this chapter, I would like to illustrate the possible key points of William Blake’s life. I will pay attention, not only to the visions forming his prophetic mind, but also to the moments shaping his views of sex and sexuality. Equally important, however, are also works by other writers and thinkers that Blake had read, from an early age, throughout his entire life. These resulted in either respectful admiration or uncompromising irony and left a considerable mark on his personality, helping him create his wonderful lyrics.

The first significant point of his life is generally considered the vision of a tree filled with angels on Peckham Rye. Seeing this, ‘while still quite a child’, and also the second vision of angels, ‘walking amid the haymakers’ (Damon 586), Blake opened his mind to all the possible ways his imagination intended to take him. At the age of ten he began to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. Having left the school he was

attended, he joined a drawing school. One could think that this change might have affected his education. As Keynes observes, 'he might be supposed to have neglected all further general education and reading, but his intellect developed early. He became a voracious reader and by the age of twelve was writing his own poetry' (7). This sheer enthusiasm allowed his mind to absorb an uncommon attitude towards the conventions and orthodoxy. Its 'rebellious quality, acutely conscious of any falsity and in others' (Keynes 9), proved to be a paramount ability for composing his poems. Due to this lifelong attitude, he was able to see the things others were unable or maybe afraid to perceive and recreate them in original work of art and poetry. Nevertheless, one person that shared with Blake this artistic aptitude was his younger brother, Robert. As Keynes notes, 'Robert was of great significance in William's life' (7). It therefore comes as no surprise that after his brother's death in 1787, Blake claimed he has the ability to communicate with the spirit of the deceased and 'gain strength from his advice' (Keynes 10). Moreover, this ability proved to be of the utmost importance because it was Robert, who while visiting William's dream, showed him the art of illuminated printing, as well as, 'some crucial secret of the process' (Erdman 100). This is the process that enabled Blake to create wonderful works of art.

Another important person in poet's life was his wife, Catherine. Although illiterate when they met, thanks to Blake's schooling, she became a strongly devoted supporter and helper to him (Phillips 4). Yet another important fact, considering her position in William's life, is that she was the one, whom he communicated his desires and views of sexuality which later found their way into his lyrics. Some of these desires must have been hard to accept. As his works suggest, for the eighteenth century, he had unusual attitudes towards sex. No one would without a doubt expect a man who communicates with angels, devils and spirits, who constantly refuses to subordinate to a common knowledge and opinions, to have an uninspired ways of projecting his sexuality. As Marsha Keith Schuchard explains in her book, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, 'From the evidence of his drawings, notebooks, and illuminated prophecies, it is clear that Blake maintained a life-long commitment to radical theories of sexuality' (48). To him, sex was a holy and liberating act. Thanks to this belief, many of his works are 'preaching the right of free love' (Damon 638). On the other hand, what is also visible in his writings, is the condemnation of sexual repressions imposed on eighteenth century people. Chastity is taken as one of the greatest problems that society forces on

itself. Unsurprisingly, Blake did not live this suffocating existence himself. One of the radical theories he wanted to put in practice, which by the way must have been particularly hard for Mrs. Blake to comprehend, was without a doubt her husband's proposal to bring a concubine into their household. Although this idea was 'dissuaded by Catherine's tears' (Damon 484), it clearly shows that William Blake was strong in his attitudes. Especially this one, coming from a doctrine of the New Jerusalem Church that was 'permitting concubinage to members whose marriages are "disharmonious" because their wives reject the New Doctrine: such men may be "driven so strongly by the inborn amor sexus that they cannot contain themselves" (Erdman 176). One reason why Catherine was not willing to support her husband in this step, was perhaps the religious fear and chastity, described by William in the *Songs of Experience*. The New Jerusalem Church played a significant part in Blake's life. It was based upon the work of Emanuel Swedenborg, Swedish scientist and philosopher. Some works, for example Mark Schorer's, *Swedenborg and Blake*, argue that William Blake was born into the family following Swedenborg's teaching and that he had adopted his ideas from an early childhood. Nevertheless, this finding proved to be false because, Swedenborg's writings were translated into English much later. Damon delivers a strong opinion regarding this, as he calls it, 'legend'. He says, 'Blake could scarcely have known his writings until they were translated into English; and the first of these was *Heaven and Hell*, published in 1778 when the poet was twenty-one' (681). While reading the publications, as Schuchard notes, he for example 'responded positively to Swedenborg's hint at the influx of spirit which produces the erotic trance' (66). There was also another significant influence on Blake, however, concerning the perception of matrimonial sexuality.

One of the reason he believed in the New Jerusalem Church was the connection between his birth and the Last Judgement proclaimed by Swedenborg for the same year, 1757. It was not until 1790, when he began to understand that the Church did not bring anything new at all. In fact, 'he realized that much of what Swedenborg had written was a sham [...] simply reinstating all that Blake abhorred in established religion' (Phillips 10). This was a significant step towards the creation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Having his mind, 'acutely conscious of any falsity and pomposity' (Keynes 9), prevented him from becoming a blind follower and helped him pick certain parts of Swedenborg's writings, in order to recreate them in an ironic interpretation of his own.

As Phillips notes, ‘Blake must have cast a wry smile as Swedenborg’s po-faced account of when devils ascend from Hell’ (11). Not to mention the ‘greatest error according to Blake’ (Damon 684), which is the evaluation of good and evil. For Swedenborg, the nature of the two, as he describes it in his *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, does not differ at all from the nature preached by established orthodoxy. It is the same ‘dreadful dichotomy of official Christianity’ (Damon 684). Therefore, the New Jerusalem Church did not deliver the goods, Blake had hoped for. Accordingly, he gives vent to his regret in following it, although only for a short while. This experience left its mark on Blake for the rest of his life because he ‘would never again become associated with organized religion’ (Phillips 9).

Nevertheless, it was not only the ironic view of Swedenborg that helped Blake in writing. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he, for example, appreciates the work of the German philosopher Jacob Behmen as well as Paracelsus, a Swiss-German physician. He had learned from Paracelsus the profound significance of imagination and therefore also the oppressive powers of reason. Blake’s idea that sexuality ‘is the door through which most of us enter the imaginative world’ (Frye 73), comes from Paracelsus’s evaluation of the imagination as ‘the central function of man and the source of all his activities. As a physician, Paracelsus had noted its influence on disease and sex’ (Damon 563). Behmen’s writing, which had been influenced by Paracelsus as well, were endearing for Blake because of its interest in the analysis of human psychology, an essential part of *The Marriage*. Behmen discovered the three worlds, each of them representing a different part of the human psyche. The first comes a ‘Dark Fire-World, which he called Hell [...] It contains all the basic impulses—all the deadly sins [...] Above is the Light World (Heaven) [...] Hell and Heaven, are essential to each other; they exist simultaneously in God [...] The third World is the Outer World of Nature. This is a mere “outbirth” of the others, a projection of Man’ (Damon 103). Such an analysis helped Blake shape his own idea that the subconscious, with the desires dwelling there, cannot be evil in nature since they relate to each other in God. Moreover, the Outer World, was with Blake associated with constraints responsible for denial of pleasures, which he called ‘Reason’. In addition, Behmen similarly as Blake, did not believe in the institution of marriage. He considered it an instrument designed to shackle people. ‘Though happily married’, as Damon notes, he assumed that ‘man is basically bisexual; therefore in heaven there can be no marriage’ (104).

Another important aspect of Blake's life that eventually led him to compose *Songs of Experience* was his sustained focus on the evils and injustice of his time. However, it is important to note that the author did not come up with this contrary collection on the spur of the moment after finishing the *Songs of Innocence*. They were, as Keynes mentions 'products of a mind [...] and of an imagination unspoiled by stains of worldliness' (12). The *Songs of Experience* were created out of a period of time involving a day to day view of the sufferings of his fellow man. Nevertheless, there is no reason to think that Blake was completely unaware of that opposite. There must have been a spark of that idea in the back of his mind. According to Erdman, it would be 'misleading to reason that when he etched the *Songs of Innocence* there was no contrary in his mind' (115). Children were forced to work in inhuman conditions, joy was being constantly suppressed in order to increase the production and machines of the Industrial Revolution dictated an unhealthy rhythm of life for the working class. All this according to Keynes, 'directed his thoughts to the composition of a series of lyrical poems' (12), in which Blake offers undistorted insight into the strange times of hardship that eighteenth century England certainly experienced. Moreover, his series not only criticises the social impact of the Industrial Revolution but also a factor that comes hand in hand with it, the suppression of sexuality. As McQuail says, 'many of the poems of *Songs of Experience* condemn sexual repression seems a notion that hardly needs explaining' (122).

While considering the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, probably the strongest source of inspiration for Blake to write this poem was the English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Her work, promoting equality between sexes, influenced Blake in such a way that some of the lines, as Erdman notes, 'have been traced, on the subject of sexual freedom and restraint, to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*' (243). Nevertheless, not only Wollstonecraft's work had been a spark, igniting Blake's fire of inspiration. It is also necessary to mention, Ossian, 'a semi-mythical bard of the third century' (Damon 546). Blake was one of his many admirers. Among others, Damon mentions for example Goethe, Napoleon, Whitman or Melville (546). Unambiguously, what influenced Blake the most, while composing the *Visions*, were the sounds of the names that Ossian's characters possessed. He liked the 'primitive flavor' (Damon 546) of the sounds and tried to use similar ones for the names of his own characters participating in the plot of the poem. "U-thorna' and 'Lutha' sound like 'Urthona' and 'Leutha,' but the former are only place names, with no significance

beyond the geographical. Theotormon's name resembles that of Tonthormod, king of Sardronlo, who fell in love with Ossian's daughter Oina-morul' (Damon 547). This proves that Blake used only the sounds and not the meaning behind them, as will the analysis, further in the thesis, show. However, one character is similar to not only the sound of a name. Oothoon's faith is close to the one of Oithona, who is also raped while her lover is away. Nevertheless, this similarity vanishes from the rest of the plot because, 'the lover returning does what obviously Theotormon ought to do, considers her still faithful and goes to the battle at once in her defence , against great odds' (Erdman 236).

One can see that there were number of aspects in Blake's life which projected into his work. If it were not for the sheer enthusiasm for art, his visions would never have seen the light of day. Nevertheless, if it were not for his visions, the enthusiasm for art would never have been born in his mind. This was a mind that was able not only to pay homage to the ideas of great thinkers and artists but also, with a powerful irony, mock and dismantle the lies presented even by people whom he deeply admired. Also without a keen interest in literature and art as a whole from an early childhood, his original view of human psychology and for his day and age unusual notion of sexuality, would never have developed. Therefore, it is now worth it, to plunge into his poetry and see the ideas connected together in an interesting and inspirational way.

#### **4. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell**

The first work by William Blake which I would like to analyse is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The revolutionary thought, roaring within the text, is one of the most powerful throughout his verse. Disgust over the omnipresent subjection of the eighteenth century human mind, manifests in a thought-provoking book that even today challenges the reader to question his or her own ways of thinking. It mainly stimulates the ability to think about, as well as take into account, the other side of one's personal convictions. 'Opposition is True Friendship' (MHH 20), the author says. However, it is important to note that he does not present his ideas as the ultimate truth. Instead, he questions the thoughts of the Age of Reason, not to mention the religious doctrine, presented as the only just source of explanation for all human affairs. Needless to say,

sexuality plays an important part in that aspect. Its demonization, carried out by the Church and subjection to reason, persuaded Blake's visionary mind to communicate with angels and most importantly with devils. By writing down their evil voices, proclaiming a sexual revolution of energy and desire, Blake suggests that not all good is good and correspondingly not all evil is as evil as it may seem.

The title itself is a little puzzle of its own. For Blake, according to Damon, did not mean Hell as an actual place where people are chained and tortured for their earthly sins (332). The same applies to Heaven in the title. Throughout the book, one can see that they are rather psychological states of mind, married inside every person. Being in a constant interaction, one cannot exist without the other. Nevertheless during the eighteenth century, it was Heaven that had the upper hand. As Damon's analysis shows, 'the subconscious (hell) is restricted by Reason (good), the product of the superego (heaven)' (333). If Heaven has as its product Reason than Hell has its own product as well. Blake called it Energy. Energy or 'evil' is desire, sexuality, inner human joys, or as Damon notes in *A Blake Dictionary*, 'the libido' (103).

The restriction or subjection of Hell to Reason is presented in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as one of the major errors of society. In other words, it means that people blindly follow what is presented to them as good, without questioning it, without the true friendship of opposition. 'Good is the passive that obeys Reason' (MHH 3). Blake's verse, vibrating with an urge to bring a change, advise people to follow the inner part, the desire, the active evil. Otherwise the situation will never change. Desire will fade away and sexuality will be transformed into war. 'And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive / till it is only the shadow of desire' (MHH 5). The author's choice of a word 'degrees', meaning the stages in a scale, corresponds to the critique of a restricting 'Ration of five senses'. 'A limited system founded on what facts are available' (Damon 595). Such a dissection of human existence by the five senses represented the greatest setback for Blake's visionary mind. His vision was that people should approximate their perception of experience to 'The ancient poets', who used 'their enlarged and numerous senses' (MHH 11). He did not believe that senses were so limited. According to him, 'man has closed himself up, till he sees / all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern' (MHH14). Consequently, society where every sensation and experience is precisely measured and perceived only by those five senses, is described as the abyss, 'where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world' (MHH 6).

Blake expands the idea of subjection of desire again while describing, ‘The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it / in chains, are in truth the causes of its life / & the sources of all activity’ (MHH 16). Within these lines, the author implies that the desires and joys, which people try to tame and suppress, are in fact what made them. Their inseparable part. According to Erdman, it is ‘a play upon Rousseau’s pronouncement that man is born free but is everywhere in chains’ (179). By bringing that inner part down, wrapping it slowly with a chain, people inevitably destroy themselves. This is illustrated in the fourth *Memorable Fancy*, where the weak are ‘devoured, 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 devoured too’ (MHH 20). The superficial kindness of the doctrines that at first glance promised salvation, was in a true sense an oppressive torture for the subconsciousness. As a matter of fact the vision depicting devouring is one of the Angel that Blake communicated with. Before seeing the vision, he took Blake through several places, each of them representing a different type of subjection. Walking through ‘a stable (where the horses of instruction are tethered), through a church (established dogma), into a church vault (the emphasis on death)’ (Damon 482), he leads Blake to the mill of Reason, the bastion of oppression. Needless to say, the Angel, the envoy of Heaven, fits perfectly in all these places for he represents the ‘good’ oppressor, the Church.

Blake rejected the Church and all its teaching. He believed that it prevents people from a life of pure, natural order and joy. The fire, in the midst of which he walks, in the first *Memorable Fancy* is as Damon remarks, ‘identified with the forces of the subconscious, the sources of inspiration’ (264). Nevertheless, the next line says ‘which to Angels / look like torment and insanity’ (MHH 6). What Blake implies here is that a thinking being, ready to fulfil any of its desires is actually undesirable for the Church as well as any organised Religion. It wants to have people under control, in order to exploit them, as the author illustrated in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Moreover, the third *Memorable Fancy* clearly states, ‘two classes of men are always upon / earth and they should be enemies’ (MHH 16). It is a predator and its prey. The two ought to live in an untwisted relationship of natural harmony. Instead, restrictions springing from conservative religious doctrines lead to a numb existence, deprived of any joy and sensation. ‘Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two’ and ‘whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence’ (MHH 16-17). According to Erdman, these lines are ‘condemning the conservatism which seeks to confine the oppressed to

a passive acceptance of tyranny' (180). This is the best possible state for those who intend to rule the others. Nevertheless, what Blake observed is that in many cases, priests who oppressed their yearnings were much more weak-willed. They were the first who let their mind and natural feeling become corrupted. The 'restrainer', never fighting the poison beclouding his mind, instead 'governs the unwilling' (MHH 5). On the other hand, it is important to note that even though arising from a weakness, this government proved to have a powerful influence. Secretly whispering the demands to king's years, 'the sneaking serpent' of priesthood, forced 'the just man into barren climes' (MHH 2). Without a doubt, as Erdman mentions, 'the priests were inciting kings to take the path of war' (191). There is no doubt that one of the most powerful ways to force society to the path of war is, according to Blake, repression of sexuality. By constant oppression, the strength of creation dwelling inside this sensual act turns upside down and breeds destruction. This idea is represented by the same line appearing at the beginning and ending of *The Argument*. 'Rintrah roars and shakes his fires in the burdend air; / Hungry clouds swag on the deep' (MHH 2). These clouds, as Erdman notes, 'are doubtless war clouds hungry for blood' (190), resulting from the already mentioned repression of sexuality.

Priesthood used a coherent strategy in order to achieve their goals. Their condemnation of sexuality Blake likened to a 'catterpillar' who 'chooses the fairest leaves to lay / her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on / the fairest joys.' (MHH 9). The basic principles of that oppressive strategy are described in *The voice of the Devil*. They are articulated by the Devil as errors, because he knows the true contraries to them. Unlike the Angel, whose dogmatism allows him to see them as the one and only ultimate truth, encrypted in 'all Bibles or sacred codes' (MHH 4). The first one says 'Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body and a Soul' (MHH 4). This error is the cornerstone of sexual repression. It separates a human being into the two contradictory parts, making a way for a second error that declares one of the parts superior to the other. 'Energy calld Evil is alone from the / Body and that Reason called Good is alone from the Soul' (MHH 4). By calling sexual energy 'Evil' and connecting in to the 'Body', religious doctrine makes a crystal clear suggestion as to which part of one's personality ought to be put down. Moreover, in order to make this message even more powerful, a third comes the menace of the eternal torture. 'God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies' (MHH 4).

Having a solid basis for all these restrictions and limitations William Blake comes up with a powerful idea of a revolution of sex, joy, imagination, libido, simply the Energy of every individual. First of all, following the idea of ‘Opposition is True Friendship’ (MHH 20), he lets the Devil speak his contraries to the Angelic truth of the Bible. ‘Man has no Body distinct from his Soul / for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discern’d / by the five Senses. The chief inlets of Soul in this / age / Energy is the only life and is from the Body / and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy / Energy is Eternal Delight’ (MHH 4). If the previous ones were the cornerstones of oppression, than these three points are the cornerstones of untangled sexuality, correcting the Angelic errors. Although they should be uncorrupted, under the pressure of eighteenth century Reason, the devil’s voice whispering them inside every individual is forcefully muted. However, starting in *Proverbs of Hell*, William Blake begins slowly unlocking the chambers of human unconsciousness to allow the devil’s voice to sound loud and clear.

One of the first proverbs says ‘Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead’ (MHH 7). This suggests that in order to bring the long awaited revolution, people should focus only on the present, leading the way to a better future. The woeful past, as Damon states, ‘is not to be respected if it hinders your work’ (575). The time people spent under a vicious circle of oppression, taking it for a tender care on the way to the salvation must have been deeply frustrating for Blake’s visionary mind. It was so frustrating that it made him write, ‘Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unact- / -ed desires’ (MHH 10). For such desires keep rotting, making one a hypocrite ‘who never alters his / opinion [...] and breeds reptiles / of the mind’ (MHH 19). Fulfilling one’s desires, on the other hand, brings not only ephemeral joy and satisfaction as it may seem. By opening their minds to the new ideas, opposed to the old ones, opening ‘the doors of perception’, people would gradually perceive sexuality as a natural part of themselves. Coupled with Damon’s analysis that ‘sex according to Blake, is our most immediate and all-pervading problem’ (638), causing war when suppressed, social issues would little by little reach their solution. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that Blake did not think the liberation of sexuality was the one and only solution to everything. This is of course notable from his lyrics. Free sexuality was in his mind deeply intertwined with a notion of a thinking individual, running away from the reach of oppressive doctrines. One that has ‘a passionate desire to think and an intense joy in

thinking' (Frye 21). Only then will the revolution of Energy have a positive effect, for as Frye notes 'The sex act without the play of intellect and emotion is mere rutting' (21).

One of the important parts of the book is when Blake denounces the lying guard defending the tree of life, who by doing so prevents people from natural. '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' (MHH 14). His teaching sent the people astray in various ways, as Blake shows for example in *A Little Girl Lost* of the *Songs of Experience*. The revolution of Energy and fire of imagination, taking away all the errors and manacles 'will come to pass by an improvement of / sensual enjoyment' (MHH 14). Following this improvement, the author celebrates joy and pleasure accompanying free sexuality. One of them is nudity which to him was not a blushing subject, for as Damon says, he 'practised what he preached, at least to the extent of sunbathing in his garden' (531). He believed that we were all created in God's image and nudity was nothing to be ashamed for. 'The nakedness of women is the work of God [...] the genitals Beauty' (MHH 8-10). Coupled with the unsuppressed desires, people would not be twisted either in thought or in act because, 'The soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd [...] Exuberance is beauty' (MHH 9-10). Moreover, with a knowledge that revolutionary ideas are never put into practice with ease because of the fear of the new, Blake mentions to the reader that 'What is now proved was once only imagined' (MHH 8). Making a point that some time, for the future generations, all this may be as natural as the subjection and tyranny was for his. He encouraged people to set the right course for their actions because, 'You never know what is enough unless you know what is / more than enough' (MHH 9).

The final part, *A Song of Liberty*, describes the birth of 'revolution in the material world' (Damon 541), Orc. He represents the greatest threat to the 'starry king', Urizen. Who, in fear of losing control over the world, hurls him into the 'starry night' to extinguish the fires of revolution. Moreover, Urizen himself falls into Urthona's dens, the subconsciousness, where he dwells (Damon 740) and 'promulgates his ten commands' (MHH 27). This was one of the ways to achieve the oppressive power. They were the basis of conservatism, denounced by Blake. 'I tell you, no virtue / can exist without breaking these ten command- / -ments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from im- / -pulse. Not from rules' (MHH 24). To the author, the Ten Commandments represent the same law that reconciles a predator and a prey, as mentioned above. They do not

take into account the most important aspect of every being, its individuality. 'For everything that lives is Holy' (MHH 27).

## 5. Songs of Experience

As a matter of fact, Urizen's oppressive power of his commandments reappears in another Blake's work I would like to analyse. It emerges as a chain that locks the earth in a dark night of suppressed sexuality. First of all, however, in the *Introduction to the Songs of Experience*, the Bard, more precisely, 'Blake himself' (Damon 97), calls on the Earth to break free and 'Rise from the slumberous mass' (SOE 2). It should break free from the state where love as well as sexuality and imagination are held under the cover of sinful darkness. *Earth's Answer*, being rather a plea, asks all the people to help her 'Break this heavy chain, That does freeze my bones around' (SOE 3). The reason is that only people themselves are able to untangle the chain locked by *Starry Jealousy*. Which is, as has already been mentioned, 'the limiter of Energy, the lawmaker, and the avenging conscience', Urizen (Damon 726). He holds energy, love and sexuality, in other words the free expression of joy and desire 'with bondage bound' (SOE 3). As an illustration, the sexual symbols of spring hiding its joy of blooming buds, sower and plowman working in darkness, point to the fact that the Earth can only be restored when love on the physical level will not be forced by reason to shun the daylight. In addition, Urizen and his doctrine can be found in several other poems in *Songs of Experience*. Despite never being mentioned, he is the one that 'creates the *Tyger*; his Tree springs up in *The Human Abstract*; and his psychology is described in *A Divine Image*' (Damon 733). Urizen's Tree of mystery, growing only in the 'Human Brain' (SOE 19), symbolises 'the false religion' (Damon 513). This is a religion that teaches people to suffer through their lives, in order to find happiness and joy in Heaven.

Equally important as the redemption of the Earth are the two aspects of love compared in *The Clod and the Pebble*. Frye calls them 'irreconcilable attitudes to love' (73). On the one side is the clay, singing of compassion and not selfishness, innocent love that 'for another gives its ease / And builds a Heaven in Hells despair' (SOE 4). Its counterpart is depicted as the pebble that sings of selfish, experienced love, which 'Joys in another's loss of ease / And Builds a Hell in Heavens Despite' (SOE 4). However, the author does not suggest which of the two is better. In the same way people have to light up their inner desires, without Earth's help, the reader has to find the perfect balance

between the clod and pebble on his own. In this fashion of love illumination, Lyca of *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found*, follows the songs of wild birds to the ‘desart wild’ (SOE 6), for her own sexual awakening. There, among the leopards, lions and tigers at play, she finds her dawning sexuality. According to Damon, the lion ‘is the Angel of Death’ (431). Nevertheless, at the same time it could be Lyca’s, or any innocent human soul’s, own sexual desire, driving her towards a loss of virginity. ‘From his yes of flame, Ruby tears there came’ (SOE 7). The wild beasts do not represent death but the untangled state of experience and imagination, bursting with joy and happiness, over the fulfilled desires. Erdman, in his book *Prophet Against Empire*, comments on the wild behaviour of the beasts in a similar way. He notes that ‘wolvish howl and lion’s growl and tygers wild are not to be feared’ (196).

Another key point in achieving experience are without a doubt one’s parents. In *The Little Girl Found*, Lyca’s parents follow and watch her footsteps. Nevertheless, the fact that they do not interfere with their daughter’s personal journey is of the utmost importance. ‘Arm in arm seven days, / They trac’d the desart ways’ (SOE 7). For seven days they followed the creation of Lyca’s adolescence. They were fearful and anxious, of course, as every parent becomes when a child enters adolescence, explores sexuality, in other words, gradually moves out of their direct influence. Such a fright is described in the third stanza, ‘And dream they see their child / Starv’d in desart wild’ (SOE 7). On the other hand, they were open-minded enough and consequently, ‘saw their sleeping child, among tygers wild’ (SOE 8). This kind of upbringing, based on mutual trust eventually allowed them not to ‘fear the wolvish howl, Nor the lions growl’ (SOE 8), of the cruel world of experience. The very opposite happens in a poem *A Little Girl Lost*. In this piece of poetry, one can see what fatal consequences a possessive love can prepare. In the first stanza, the author introduces a topic that resonates throughout the entire lyric. The important aspect of that introduction is as Trowbridge says that Blake does not stand outside of the poem but instead ‘Projects his own passionate voice’ (1). It is a voice that articulates a strong message, ‘Know that in a former time, / Love! Sweet Love! Was thought a crime’ (SOE 23). Such a call to the ‘Children of the future Age’ (SOE 23), similar as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, assumes a free will for future generations, as well as access to the forbidden joys of the past. The first stanza is, as Trowbridge argues, ‘Foretelling that one day people will cleanse their defiled civilization by recovering a childlike purity of spirit’ (1), precisely Blake’s wish

expressed in the poems. The rest of the poem, contrasts the author's views of young, sweet love with the constraints of society. This is, more precisely, a father's fierce control over his daughter. Meeting in a garden, two young lovers openly express their desires toward one another. In a like manner, as the *Introduction* suggested that sexuality and love should be brought into the daylight of everyday lives, the garden they met in was the one, 'Where the holy light, / Had just removed the curtains of the night' (SOE 23). Therefore, for a while, the undisturbed sexuality of the two lovers was completely free and untangled, connecting their pure energies. Unfortunately, all this was only possible because 'Parents were afar' and 'Strangers came not near' (SOE 23). In the same fashion, Trowbridge notes that 'as the poem progresses [...] the author reveals the superficiality of the young couple's freedom.' (1). The lovers agree on meeting again at night. Accordingly with the change of the light, the tone of the poem changes as well. The parental figure of the father interferes in the journey of experience, projecting his 'loving look'. The look, representing what Frye describes as 'The notion that a child is a possession of its parents [...] and this kind of parental love is denounced by Blake as a vicious appetite' (Frye 73), similarly as for example jealous love is denounced in the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Being deeply intertwined with the human psyche, this kind of thinking is likened by Blake to the 'holy book' that 'the clergy use to condemn humanity's inherent sexuality. Thus, by mortifying mankind, the church maintains tyrannical control over people's thoughts and actions' (Trowbridge 2). It is the same kind of connection between the superficial care and deep tyranny as in the fourth *Memorable Fancy* of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Such a strong belief, forces the maiden to fearfully suppress her sexuality, making her 'pale and weak' not to mention the 'instilled guilt and self-denial destroy her virtue' (Trowbridge 1).

On the other hand, the nurse of *Nurse's Song* met with a somewhat different faith. Her deeply religious life, unaffected by any outburst of energy, causes a bitter envy towards the children, who are on the verge of experience. 'Your spring and your day, are wasted in play' (SOE 10), she cries, with her face, 'green and pale' (SOE 10). She reminds the reader of those weak-willed priests, oppressing the joys of others in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Nevertheless, the jealous ego allows her to only remember her own youth, wasted on the oppression of a budding sexuality. Still in regret of a chastity she had subjected to, her face turns 'the colour of the sex-starved spinster, sick with longings for experiences which will never be hers' (Keynes 146).

The deep-rooted chastity of Blake's time appears again in his short, yet powerful poem, *Ah! Sun-Flower*. As a matter of fact, floral symbols are used quite frequently in the *Songs of Experience*. *The Lilly*, as a symbol of purity, refers to the liberation that the joy of unspoiled love brings. Its counterpart the Rose 'with the modest (originally lustful) thorn (Damon 429), shows the false face of selfish love. Whereas the sunflower, all day following the glare of the sun, represents as Damon says, 'man's spiritual aspirations, which cannot be attained while he is still rooted in the flesh' (678). Frye calls it 'a perfect symbol of a 'vegetable' life rooted in this world and longing to be free' (Frye 74). What they mean is a yearning to satisfy every aspect of natural desire. These desires, as it has been already mentioned, want and unsurprisingly need to be brought to the daylight. Nevertheless, similarly as the sunflower, firmly grasping the ground, merely tracks and under no circumstances reaches the sun, also people never attain what is natural. Instead, they settle down to what is presented to them as normal. When the Sun is down, up comes the night preached by the church. Everything which seems natural to man, reshapes into suppression or death. Those, leading a pure and ascetic life are promised a 'Sweet golden clime', the after-life reward full of joy and fulfilment. Therefore, 'Youth and Virgin following the myth of a higher soul and a lower body' (Frye 74), deny themselves of their inner pleasures. According to Frye, it is important to note that 'the body is the soul seen from the perspective of this world, it is easy to see how murderous this denial of those simple desires which are imaginative needs must be' (Frye 74). As a matter of fact, Blake goes even further in describing his disgust over the situation. In *London* which is, 'a record of his depression' (Damon 435), the idea of asceticism and purity is not embodied in a single flower. It could actually be seen and heard in the crowded streets of London. There is no escape from a mental bondage that 'manifests in the lives of children and youth forced into harlotry' (Erdman 272). Every face, the author sees is marked by weakness and woe. In every cry, in every voice, in every ban he hears 'The mind-forged manacles' (SOE 18). Most importantly, as a comment on the last stanza, Damon notes that 'worst of all was the condition of the youthful harlots, who killed married love and infected mother and child with diseases (notably gonorrhoea) which blinded the new-born babies' (435). Here Blake unmistakably also criticizes the concept of marriage, the church's condemnation of sexuality and locking it inside the matrimonial act. It is done 'by the bone-bending, mind-changing oppression' (Erdman 272), which is the only reason why harlotry 'blights with plagues the Marriage hearse' (SOE 18). Yet, what is important to note, is

the message behind Blake's lyrics is 'not directed against marriage but against the 'soft Family-Love' which is one of the most formidable bulwarks of social conservatism' (Frye 73). This is love that shows no signs of passion and energy whatsoever and just binds people together, in a fruitless relationship, preached by the religious doctrine.

To the Church, sexuality was something that could break the established order. To Blake, the Church was something that had broken the natural order. To him, 'the priest and the king, are the two evil powers which rule society' (Damon 170). Inevitably, they found their way into Blake's lyrics and one can clearly see the Church as the mightiest destroyer of joy and pleasure. *The Garden of Love*, once a place where love, joy and untangled desire flew freely in the youth and certainly should in the age of experience, is as the speaker approaches, irrecoverably destroyed by a chapel 'built in the midst' (SOE 16). 'Sweet flowers', symbolizing the early experience with sexuality should never be plucked any more. The clear message, 'Thou shalt not, writ over the door' (SOE 16), represents the repressions imposed on people. Moreover, the poem also shows Blake's frustration over organized religion. The 'priests in black gowns, ... walking their rounds' (SOE 16) and 'the invisible worm' (SOE 12), draining life out of *The Sick Rose*, do the same thing and that is they deny the natural pleasures of man. As Erdman writes, 'the church remains a cold barn, over which *The Little Vagabond* rightly prefers the warm tavern' (Erdman 274). If it were not for the oppression, people would be 'happy as birds in the spring' (SOE 17), floating in the air full of pleasure, with 'parson and a schoolmistress transformed into figures of benevolence' (Keynes 150). Although, the Vagabond's prayers may be heard, nothing is done on the part of the Church. In contrast, when *A Little Boy Lost* addresses God, with a statement that is considered corrupting, the reaction is immediate. Even though not being addressed, the priest is ready to act. The boy's innocent prayer of equal love is whispered in the humblest way possible, 'as the little bird that picks up crumbs' (SOE 22). Nevertheless, the instinctive idea to put God and all 'my brothers' (SOE 22) on the same level is taken as a heresy. Contrasting with no reaction to *The Little Vagabond*, here 'In trembling zeal he siez'd his hair' (SOE 22), the priest prepares a fatal punishment for the sinner. The oppressive power over the people is manifested in the line, 'all amir'd the priestly care' (SOE 22), suggesting the passivity and blind acceptance of injustice, like the 'horses of instruction' (MHH 9). Moreover, the power gradually rises as the priest does. 'Standing on the altar high' above the mob, he sentences the child, 'Lo what a fiend is here!' (SOE

22). This kind of rampant 'Priestly care' is denounced by Blake in the last stanza. As a matter of fact, killing the boy in a place 'where many had been burn'd before' (SOE 22), serves as a lamentation not only over the death of an innocent child, which is the worst possible one in any case. It also represents a regret over the senseless deaths and 'burnt naturalism' (Keynes 153) of other martyrs 'on Albions shore' (SOE 22), as well.

The *Songs of Experience* conclude with *The Voice of the Ancient Bard*. In this poem, Blake invites the reader, 'to see the opening morn' (SOE 26) of the times when everybody and of course everybody's sexuality will be free, needless to say, untangled by the social conventions or teachings of those that 'wish to lead others when they should be led' (SOE 26). It is the wish for a dawn of a new age or Brotherhood that is crying out of Blake's lyrics. The same one that the Bard from the introduction, encouraged the Earth, consequently all the people, to bring. As Damon writes, 'Brotherhood unifies Mankind' and for this Brotherhood to come, 'the dark religions of vengeance for sin must be replaced by their contrary' (138). The contrary is nothing else than people, willing to escape from under the thumb of the oppressors. As William Blake's poems in the book suggest, only in this new society would innocent children be able to explore sexuality and enter experience with no fear of stooping to the prohibited. Consequently, young lovers would freely express what is natural to them and would not be forced to enter the trap of love-ruining marriage.

## **6. Visions of the Daughters of Albion**

William Blake's ideas concerning love, sexuality, as well as marriage manifest themselves in a similarly powerful way in the psychological strife in the poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Condemnation, affecting women and men in various ways comes under a heavy and carefully pointed criticism. In concluding the *Songs of Experience*, Blake broached the subject of escaping oppression, suggesting the emergence of a new community, not based on the power relationship. In a like manner, he continues in the *Visions*. As Erdman pointed out, 'the true feelings which the Heart must know before there can be human freedom are discussed by Oothoon, Bromion, and Theotormon' (Erdman 229). Using the voice of these characters, the author advocates an unspoiled view on open expressions connected with suppressed natural desires. The poem itself tells a story of a brutal rape committed by Bromion on the young maiden Oothoon. While on the way to her lover Theotormon, 'Bromion rent her with his

thunders' (VDA 1). Theotormon, unable to cope with the situation, binds the 'adulterate pair' (VDA 2) back to back in Bromion's cavern. One by one, they lament over the situation, unveiling along with his or her views of freedom, love and sexuality also a different stage of the influence by a conventional wisdom.

The main character Oothoon, a young virgin who is about to experiment with sex for the first time, is the only one without cloudy views of the matter. Being also called, 'the soft soul of America' (VDA 1), the land of freedom in Blake's mythology, Oothoon is in the first place not ashamed of her love and therefore wants to give a free flow to the desire streaming in her body. As Damon implies, 'she is the ideal of physical freedom' (Damon 540). This is the ideal that Blake saw sleeping deep inside people's subconsciousness. Her speaking to the 'Marigold of Leutha's vale' (VDA 1), which represents, 'the first experiment with sex' (Damon 469), could be understood as an interior monologue of her spotless consciousness, unspoilt by conventions. Indeed, she is the only being, whose mind is neither poisoned by the power relationships discussed by Bromion, nor by the ideological teaching paralysing Theotormon. In Oothoon, Blake created a character completely unaffected and isolated from these conventions. One could consider her purity to a little extent exaggerated. It comes as no surprise that in his commentary, Aers points out, 'it does seem that in VDA he may have slipped towards an optimistic, idealist illusion in his handling of Oothoon's consciousness. The illusion lies in assuming that revolutionary consciousness can ever be as uncontaminated by dominant structures and ideologies as Oothoon's appears to be' (Aers 505). On the other hand, it may seem that in a line, 'Rend away this defiled bosom' (VDA 2), Oothoon is subjected to the ideology and wants to punish herself for her sin of being raped. Nevertheless, Aers adds that this would be an over-analysis, since such a mark of repentance does not reappear anywhere in the rest of her lamentations (506).

Instead, after the dark and loathsome experience of rape, she articulates her innermost convictions of the purest kind. Blake again used a symbol of day and night, as in the *Songs of Experience*, to contrast a spirit of free sexuality with a submission of the mind to contemporary teaching. Oothoon knows that inside her, 'the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black' (VDA 3). Her mind is dawning in a similar way as Lyca's in *The Little Girls Lost*. Taking sexuality and desires to the daylight where they naturally belong, she wants her bright soul to shine on. This comes without a doubt hand in hand with 'the sanctity of the individual and his various joys' (Damon 762).

This notion, pointed out in the last line of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, also marks Oothoon's revolutionary mind. Nevertheless to Theotormon, as to all people in eighteenth century England, 'Night and morn / Are both alike' (VDA 3). The doctrine of sexual suppression was indelibly etched inside a human mind. More importantly this was not only suppression of sexuality but of all aspects concerning knowledge and understanding. William Blake, of course, did not turn a blind eye to this problem. To illustrate this Frye mentions that 'Blake had carefully read and annotated *Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding* [...] Locke [...] is constantly in Blake's poetry a symbol of every kind of evil, superstition and tyranny' (14). In a like manner as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he pointed his criticism directly against Locke's theory of five senses in the *Visions*. 'They told me that I had five senses to enclose me up / And they enlos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle' (VDA 3), cries Oothoon and in the next stanza asks how is it possible, as Damon puts it, 'if not by instinct, the various animals live such different lives' (Damon 634). In addition, Oothoon's criticism of the limiting faculty of reason appears one more time when she denounces Urizen. 'O Urizen! Creator of men! Mistaken Demon of heaven!' (VDA 5). He restricts the joys that are 'Holy, eternal, infinite' (VDA 5). Therefore in Oothoon's point of view, it is him, the reason, who is to blame for the pitiful situation.

Consequently, what Oothoon's lamentation imply is that there could be or must be more than five senses, shaping the mind and desires of all living creatures. This was the notion that Blake deeply believed in, as mentioned in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Therefore, locking up people into the prison of their mind, below its actual limits, is a crime that serves only for exploitation. To illustrate this, Oothoon mentions 'the parson', who with his 'cold floods of abstractions' claims the belongings of the ordinary people, 'To build him castle and high spires, where kings and priests may dwell' (VDA 5). However, as Blake's poems clearly suggest, such an exploitation inevitably twists human understanding and expression of love and sexuality. He shows it again in the lines, 'Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is bound / In spell of law to tone she loathes And must she drag the chain / Of life in weary lust!' (VDA 5). Aers describes the connection between the two as 'presenting the sexual situation as an integral aspect and product of a society structured on principles of division and domination' (502). To put it differently, in such a society, there is no place for the free expression of sexuality that destroys the dominant-submissive relationship. It represents

the greatest threat to those self-acknowledged leaders or as Aers says ‘a threat to all fixed boundaries and conventional order’ (502), created by them. The only possibility is to lock those undesirable emotions and energies within the ‘spell of law’, marriage, thus reducing every man, woman and child ‘to an instrument of labour’ (Aers 203), unable to express the true and innermost joys and forced ‘To turn the wheel of false desire’ (VDA 5).

Towards the end of the poem, Blake raises the subject of asceticism. By the same token as in *Ah! Sun-Flower*, he blames the religious doctrine of diminishing human will and asks why do people themselves, subject to the joyless self-denial of love and sexuality. ‘Are not these the places of religion? the rewards of continence? / The self-enjoyings of self-denial? Why dost thou seek religion?’ (VDA 7). Unlike *Ah! Sun-Flower*, in *Visions*, he offers an alternative, revolutionary view of love. Through Oothoon’s voice, he speaks against ‘Father of Jealousy’, who taught Theotormon ‘this accursed thing’ (VDA 7). Jealousy or selfhood is the exact opposite of true love for which Oothoon yearns so much. According to Frye, ‘The Selfhood cannot love in the sense of establishing a kinship with the beloved: it can regard the latter only as a possession’ (72). This is the case with Theotormon’s relationship towards Oothoon. In other words, it is a relationship between every man and woman, who do not follow the wished-for, revolutionary free-love style of life as presented by Oothoon. She offers to Theotormon the unselfish love, free of any sexual restraints that are ‘a creeping skeleton / With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed’ (VDA 7). Her love is bursting with sexual desires and joys that the doctrines of reason and religion try to quench so much, not allowing people to even realize they are naturally part of their consciousness. ‘But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread, / And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold. / I’ll lie beside thee on a bank, and view their wanton play / In lovely copulation, bliss on bliss, with Theotormon’ (VDA 7). In such a relationship, both partners like Oothoon to Theotormon will never, ‘with jealous cloud / Come in heaven of generous love’ (VDA 7). Yet, it is important to note that such a view on love has to be shared by all the people. If this was the case that only a few follow the revolution, they would become just another possessors and oppressive preachers. Albion’s daughters, echoing back Oothoons lamentations, ‘enslaved in the social mores of their time’ (Damon 60), in contrast signify that deep inside, every person longs to be free and yearns to express whatever dwells in the heart.

Nevertheless, apart from the echoes, all this is only Oothoon's revolutionary vision. None of it actually comes true because the fire of revolution never ignites and 'Theotormon sits / Upon the morgin'd ocean conversing with the shadows dire' (VDA 8). He represents a kind of love that is deeply influenced by the contemporary eighteenth century teaching and doctrines that Oothoon, throughout the poem denounces. According to Damon, the name Theotormon is 'a combination of theo (god) and torah (law), signifying the divine in man under the law' (696). As a matter of fact, not only under the law but also under the influence of the possessive selfhood and jealousy, as mentioned above. This selfish view of love prevents him from showing any strong emotion, not to mention his inability to act in the situation. He just sits 'With secret tears' (VDA 2) and most importantly does not hear any of his lover's lamentations and cries of love. Even though she presents herself to him as pure and loving, he 'cannot act because he accepts Bromion's definition of her as a sinner' (Erdman 236). This signifies the acceptance of the tyranny that Blake denounced in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, rejection of free and true love, just 'conversing with shadows dire' (VDA 8).

It is therefore selfhood or jealousy that above all in the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, proves to be the stumbling block of society. What Blake, through the character Oothoon advocated was free love, undefiled by that aspect of human personality. This is the aspect that Bromion, the reason, advocated and Theotormon, the suppressed desire (Damon 697), nurtured on the inside. Oothoon's virtues that put energy, sex and desire in the first place, along with her denouncement of oppressive religious doctrine and selfish jealousy, prove to be the virtues that the society of a new age will adopt.

## **7. William Blake's influence on the 1960s**

During his lifetime William Blake did not actually see the coming of that new society, living a life of love and understanding. His art did not even meet with much popularity. His radical thinking which was soaked into the poetry he wrote, was without a doubt hard to accept for his fellow men. Keynes notes that he was in fact, 'too adventurous and unconventional to be easily accepted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (8). For that reason, the unorthodox ideas dwelling inside the

pages had to wait for the right time to be discovered. Consequently, 'his remarkable modernity and his imaginative force, both as a poet and artist, were recognized in the twentieth century' (Keynes 8).

This was especially the case in the nineteen-sixties, the period of revolt against the establishment, anti-materialism, drug use, radical changes in views of sexuality, in other words, counter-culture. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines counter-culture as, 'a culture with values and customs very different from and usually opposed to those accepted by most of society'. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that such a group of 'Tygers of Wrath' (MHH 9), has chosen this extraordinary poet, who avoided the subjection and blind obedience throughout his whole life, to be their inner voice, whispering his lyrics of freedom and liberated sexuality. As has been mentioned, Blake's poetry had to wait for the right generation to discover it. Similarly, Haggarty and Mee note that 'Blake's place as a canonical figure in Romanticism was confirmed by the 1960s' (124).

One of the reasons that Blake became a popular and major figure of the counter-culture was without a doubt his unconventional view of sexuality. For the generation, openly exploring the forbidden fruit of pre-marital sex, homosexuality and free love, Blake's poems represented a promise, 'that after the apocalypse, young men will regain their polymorphous perverse sexuality and live in a state of eternal bliss' (Hayes 141). From the *Songs of Experience*, it was for example the power hidden within *The Garden of Love* that people related to. As Haggarty and Mee mention, 'the roles of repression and liberation in shaping consciousness, especially in relation to sexuality, were taken to be crucial' (125), in this and other poems by Blake. Furthermore, for generation that wanted to be separated from the old orders, was of great significance also the idea of a thinking individual. They saw themselves as the 'Tigers of wrath ... wiser than the horses of instruction' (MHH 9). It is no coincidence that this line, proclaiming the importance of free will and decision, 'became a mantra for the counter-culture suspicious of the covert perpetuation of traditional values through educational institutions' (Haggarty Mee 125). *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* helped people look for the hidden corruption of their times and cross the borders built by the previous generation. According to Phillips, the book teaches the reader 'of being able to see and to distinguish between the true and the false, of being honest with oneself and about the

world of which one is part, and of learning to speak forthrightly about it' (5). These are of course the virtues the counter-culture was built on.

Furthermore, these readings of Blake's poems was not the only way of spreading his message during these turbulent times. The mightiest weapon of the counter-culture was without a doubt rock music. Thanks to the musicians and lyricists, adopting Blake's lyrics for their own artistic visions, his poems lived on. One of his best known followers was Jim Morrison, the singer of the band The Doors. Its title, referring to Blake's 'doors of perception' (MHH 14) that need to be cleansed and 'everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite' (MHH 14), establishes the band as well as the band's music as a gateway, helping people break down the boundaries of the oppressive government. Nevertheless, Morrison was not the first artist inspired by Blake's poetry. William Blake had also been highly influential for the Beats, especially for Allen Ginsberg, whose works, similarly as Blake's, 'fall in radical opposition to conventional, religious, political, and social institutions, as well as defying literary decorum' (Bertholf, Levitt 113). The connection was strong to the extent that 'Ginsberg experienced a series of visions precipitated by reading William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience' (Bertholf, Levitt 111). Another writer who admired Blake's work and experienced visions as well was Aldous Huxley. The visions he experienced, however, were not caused by reading William Blake but by taking mescaline. This drug helped him reach the hallucinogenic states of mind. These experiments were later published under the title, *The Doors of Perception* and as Davis mentions, it was 'the first book by an author of Huxley's stature to explore previously unmapped areas of human consciousness' (46). By taking drugs, Huxley succeeded in entering the doors described by Blake, thus seeing the world unaffected by a framework presented by the society.

As shown above, the unacceptability of William Blake's art during his lifetime had been caused mainly by its modernity and shocking unorthodoxy. As a result, the generation whose main goal was to shock and rebuild the old order could not choose a more convenient 'guru'. Liberated sexuality, a free way of life, love, all of this could be found in Blake's lyrics. The consequent inspiration that soaked into the newly created art only highlights the aura of modernity surrounding all of Blake's works.

## 8. Conclusion

The topic of sexuality without a doubt played a powerful part in William Blake's poetry. The oppression, organised religion imposed on people and that in many cases fatally influenced their lives had an impact on Blake as well. However, he never accepted the twisted understanding of the notion. Throughout his whole life, he kept a distinctive attitude that helped him become a wildly influential author, even today. Reading through these three works offers an interesting journey, depicting not only William Blake's understanding of sexuality and its condemnation but also the way future generations should in his view go.

From an early age, he showed a strong devotion to art as well as literature. This passion, along with his prophetic visions, helped him in creating original notions of the people and the world around him. The interest in works by Paracelsus and Behmen established his understanding of human psychology and the true nature of evil, condemned by the Church. In a like manner, Emanuel Swedenborg and his teaching from which eventually sprung the New Jerusalem Church, preaching doctrines of a new age, convinced Blake to think through the notions of good and evil once again. Thanks to Swedenborg, he also obtained, in his day and age unusual attitudes towards marriage and sex. All this, in a certain way, stands behind the creation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a work in which Blake preaches the importance of free will, in relationship to sexuality. He focused mainly on the human psyche and tried to define what aspect of the human being was suppressed during the eighteenth century. In his view, the impaired balance between Energy and Reason has its main offender in organised religion. In order to restore the lost equilibrium, people need to realize the falsity of oppressive rules that are presented to them as the road to salvation. Having this in mind, they need to follow their inner desires and most importantly, always bear in mind the freedom hidden inside opposition. The final idea of revolution of sensuality and opposition lays a theoretical groundwork of the revolution that Blake as a prophet attributed to the future generations.

Consequently, using a concrete images of suffering and injustice, in the *Songs of Experience*, the author tried to show what the dominion of Reason over Energy looks like. The Earth is in manacles and the insights of the tragic lives of ordinary people live, point once again to the offender of organised religion. Its condemnation of sexuality, impacting without any exceptions to all people, has terrible consequences. Starting from

the simple threat that exploration of one's body, in other words, masturbation is a sin, corrupting the mind from early adolescence. To this, Blake replied by a celebration of one's journey into experience. Not even married couples were spared from the oppression. In fact, as has been shown in the second part of the thesis, matrimonial relations were the most oppressed. As a result of these loveless connections, prostitution flourished. Consequently, venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancy led to tragic deaths. Blake, as a bard who carefully observed all the evil, calling for the coming of a new society. This would be a community of people, whose relations would not be based on domination but on love intertwined with equality and to which, the times when love and sexuality were condemned in such a cruel way, would seem unthinkable.

Finally, using a simple story of rape, Blake described the complex ways of influence that oppression has on one's personality and decisions. Drawing inspiration from Ossian and Wollstonecraft, he tried to outline the road society should take in order to give space for the new age to flourish. Love, free of selfishness, should be the real salvation of mankind. In the pure wish that his character utters, Blake sadly did not appeal to his generation but dazzled those that came one hundred and seventy years later.

This enchantment is described in the fourth part of the thesis. It shows that William Blake, thanks to the notions of free will and sexuality, became one of the major figures of the nineteen sixties counter-culture. He also influenced many of the artists of that time, for example, Jim Morrison. However, his poetry also impacted writers a decade earlier. The most famous ones were Allen Ginsberg and Aldous Huxley.

## 9. Resumé

Sexualita a její násilné potlačování, jenž bylo v Anglii na přelomu 18. a 19. století běžným jevem, hrála bez jakýchkoli pochyb v díle Williama Blakea velkou roli. Všichni lidé, bez rozdílu věku či pohlaví, byli zejména díky náboženskému útisku nuceni vnímat své tělo jako zdroj hříchu. Toto pokřivené vnímání tělesných vjemů mělo v mnoha případech fatální důsledky a jistým způsobem ovlivnilo i samotného autora. Nicméně on sám se tomuto způsobu chápání sexuality nikdy nepoddal. Po celý život si zachoval svůj jedinečný pohled, jenž mu následně umožnil zapsat všechno zlo, které ostatní lidé vnímali jako ochrannou ruku náboženství. Jeho dílo nabízí nejen pohled na tuto žalostnou situaci, ale také zajímavým způsobem popisuje cestu, kterou by se dle něj měli vydat budoucí generace.

První část bakalářské práce nabízí pohled na sexuální normy pozdního 18. století. Během tohoto období byla sexualita jednotlivce potlačována různými způsoby. Již zmiňovaný zákaz zkoumání vlastního těla patřil mezi ty nejzákladnější formy útisku. Pod drobnohledem církve byly zejména děti, mentálně postižení, zločinci a lidé s neobvyklými sexuálními touhami. Nicméně ani sezdaní neměli v tomto ohledu příliš volnosti. Jejich projevy sexuality byly oklešťovány z mnoha stran zejména díky křesťanskému a civilnímu právu, které mezi hříchy manželství řadilo například znásilnění, nevěru, sodomii, či tělesný nebo duchovní incest. Všechny tyto zákazy a omezení přinesly mimo jiné hlavně prostituci. Ta kvetla zejména v Londýně, kde se tímto způsobem živilo okolo 10 000 žen a dívek. Pohlavní nemoci se nekontrolovatelně šířily městem a mnoho prostitutek se uchylovalo k nejrůznějším způsobům zabránění početí, v nejhorším případě k zabití novorozeně.

Tomuto byl Blake očitým svědkem. Avšak jeho dílo ovlivnil silným způsobem také neutuchající zájem o umění a literaturu. Tím se zabývá kapitola následující. Blake směřoval cestou představivosti již od útlého věku. Tato vášeň ho následně přivedla k osobnostem Paracelsa a Behmena. Zájem o jejich práce mu umožnil utvořit si celistvý obraz lidské duše a mimo jiné najít podstatu rozdílu mezi dobrem a zlem. Rozdíl mezi těmito dvěma vzájemně se ovlivňujícími pojmy se pro Blakea ukázal být velmi důležitý, zatímco pročetl dílo Emanuela Swedenborga, na jehož základech byla později založena Církev Nového Jeruzaléma. Názory Swedenborga a učení jeho církve byly jedním z hlavních zdrojů inspirace pro napsání *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Díla, v němž Blake provolává důležitost svobodné vůle jednotlivce ve vztahu k sexualitě.

Ohniskem zájmu této knihy je především lidská duše, zvláště její potlačovaná část. Viníkem nerovnováhy mezi Energií a Rozumem je dle autora jednoznačně Církev. Je tedy v zájmu lidí, aby se oni sami vymanili z onoho útlaku, který je prezentován jako cesta ke spáse a znovu nastolili ztracenou rovnováhu. Jedinou podmínkou je fakt, že lidé musí začít následovat své vnitřní touhy a co víc, mít vždy na paměti svobodu skrytou v opozici. Závěrečná myšlenka díla, revoluce smyslnosti a opozice, je považována ze teoretický základ revoluce, kterou autor přisoudil budoucím generacím.

Následující část práce se zabývá analýzou sbírky, *Songs of Experience*. Tato analýza podává obraz o utrpení a nespravedlnosti, kterou dle autora přináší nadvláda Rozumu nad Energií. Vina je znovu na straně Církve a to hlavně díky jejímu neúprosnému odsuzování sexuality, což má pro většinu lidí nepříjemné následky. Na prohlášení masturbace hříchem, Blake odpověděl oslavou dospívání. Při pohledu na manželství, která dávno nejsou radostným spojením lásky a touhy, ale rodí pouze nevěru a prostituci vyslovil touhu po příchodu nového společenství lidí. Takové společnosti, pro níž vzájemné vztahy nebudou postaveny na dominanci, ale na lásce a rovnosti a pro níž bude doba, kdy lidská sexualita byla považována za tabu naprosto nepředstavitelná.

Poslední část analýzy se zabývá básní, *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Zdánlivě jednoduchý příběh o znásilnění je propleten třemi různými pohledy na útlak lidské vůle a sexuality. Autor se v básni také zaměřil na to, jaký vliv má toto omezování na osobnost a schopnost člověka činit složitá rozhodnutí. Inspiraci čerpal zejména z díla Ossiana a Mary Wollstonecraft. Bohužel jeho postoj k volné lásce a sexualitě, tak jak jej prezentoval v této básni a předešlých analyzovaných dílech, se nedočkal velkého obdivu. Lidé nebyli připraveni ztotožnit se s myšlenkou, že nesobecká láska by mohla být cestou ke spáse.

Dílo Williama Blakea tedy muselo počkat, až jej objevila generace, kterou on sám ve svých básních oslovoval. Ty se, pro generaci, žijící v 60. letech 20. století, staly poselstvím nového světa. Bylo to zejména díky autorovým, na svou dobu neortodoxním, názorům na sexualitu. Jeho dílo žilo dále nejenom samo o sobě, ale velmi často sloužilo jako zdroj inspirace mnoha umělcům. Práce zmiňuje například Jima Morrisona nebo autory Ginsberga a Huxleyho.

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## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá pohled Williama Blakea na sexualitu. První kapitola popisuje sexuální normy pozdního osmnáctého století a věnuje pozornost zejména útlaku volného projevu sexuality. Další část práce se zabývá důležitými událostmi v životě autora, jenž ovlivnily jeho tvorbu stejně jako jeho pohled na sexualitu. Hlavní část práce zahrnuje analýzu knih, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Songs of Experience* a básně *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Hlavním cílem této analýzy je zmapovat názory Williama Blakea na sexualitu, co tyto názory formovalo a jak ve svém díle reagoval na zmiňovaný útisk. Práce se také uvádí důvody silného Blakeova vlivu na 60. léta 20. století.

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## **Annotation**

The bachelor thesis explores William Blake's views of sexuality. The initial part describes the sexual mores in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially the oppression of its free expression. The next part deals with the important points in Blake's life which influenced the creation of the analysed work as well as his views of sexuality. The major part of the thesis contains the analysis of two books, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Songs of Experience* and a poem *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. The aim of analysis is to illustrate William Blake's notion of sexuality, what shaped it and how he, in his work, reacted to the oppression. It will also try to show the reasons for Blake's influence on the 1960s.

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