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"Virgin Harlot Mother of War": William Blake and the Cultural Image of Prostitution

Kang-Po Chen
Department of English
National Taipei University of Technology, Taiwan

Abstract

The representation of women in Blake's poetry and its role in his revisionist Christian system have drawn considerable critical attention in Romantic studies. In the existing studies on the Blakean woman, the frequent images of "harlot" and "whore" are interpreted as his criticism of sexual repression and plantation slavery as well as a device of biblical allusion. But even with his most allusive and metaphorical depictions of the harlot, Blake shows his engagement with the changing social perceptions of prostitution and the gender ideologies and institutions established around such perceptions. This paper proposes that Blake was aware of the significant transformation of how the prostitute was viewed in the eighteenth century: from a siren-like embodiment of boundless lust to an unfortunate victim of external circumstances. Moreover, he was aware of the social view that reformed prostitutes could redirect "wasted" sexual passion along the path of productivity. This transformation and its relation to social and political contexts can be discerned in Blake's juxtaposition of the harlot and her supposed antithesis, the mother, which demonstrates a poignant critique of the ideal motherhood of his time.

Keywords

William Blake, prostitution, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *The Song of Los*, *The Four Zoas*, *Jerusalem*

> She will become an Eternal Death, an Avenger of Sin
> A Self-righteousness: the proud Virgin-Harlot! Mother of War!
>
> What is a Wife & what is a Harlot? What is a Church? & What
> Is a Theatre? are they Two & not One? can they Exist Separate?
>
> Every Harlot was once a Virgin; every Criminal an Infant Love:
> Repose on me till the morning of the Grave, I am thy life.
>
> —William Blake
> *Jerusalem*

William Blake is known, paradoxically, for both his espousal and critique of antithesis. The dualism between the body and the mind, for instance, is resisted in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where he announces that “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul,” while in the final chapter of *Jerusalem*, he sharply contrasts mortality, “the things relating to the Body,” with immortality, “the things relating to the Spirit,” and he further asserts that “I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts but have only / Made enemies: I never made friends but by spiritual gifts” (Blake 34, 231, 251). Such Blakean ambivalence can also be observed in the characterization of women in the epigraph above. The images of virgin, wife, and mother suggest an eighteenth-century ideal of womanhood opposed to the cultural stigma of harlotry. Is the “Virgin-Harlot” in Erin’s speech that laments Albion’s death and the ensuing “War of Blood” oxymoronic? Or does it play a vital role in signaling a catastrophic disintegration of humanity? Can a woman be a virgin and a harlot simultaneously? Once condemned as a harlot, can she qualify as a mother? When Los is accusing Albion of creating “a Female Will” embodied by the bloody Druid human sacrifice, he asks if a wife and a harlot can be “One.” How do we evaluate such a speculation? While the third passage from Plate 61 evokes the forgiveness of sin—the ultimate theme of *Jerusalem*—with the reconciliation between Joseph and Mary, it also seems to embody the contemporary antithesis between the virtue of female chastity and sexual degeneration as well as a clear chronological division between primary innocence, fall, and restoration of innocence by forgiveness. The social roles of women in Blake’s work—the virgin, the wife, the mother, and the harlot—certainly present an area of contestation that teems with conflict between mutual identification and exclusion.

The representation of women in Blake's poetry and its role in his revisionist Christian system have drawn considerable critical attention in Romantic studies.[1] The frequent images of "harlot" and "whore" are often interpreted as his criticism of sexual repression by institutionalized Christianity—those who embrace sexual desire or are victimized by men are condemned as harlots (Persyn 64; Łuczyńska-Hołdys 27). Harold Bloom, in his reading of "London," bypasses the social identity and condition of the "youthful Harlot" to redefine her "curse" as "menstruation, the natural cycle in the human female" (57), in opposition to the consensus that the "curse" denotes venereal disease. According to Anne K. Mellor, the harlot also serves as a metaphor of sexually exploited plantation slaves ("Sex" 365). June Sturrock reads Blake's revision of Rahab as a manifestation of the "Female Will" in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, thereby degrading her positive image in the Book of Joshua (25-26). Paul Miner argues that the youthful Harlot in "London" echoes Elijah's prophecy of human corruption and disease, but at the same time she points to the future salvation revealed in the Gospel of Matthew (288-89). Also mainly focusing on "London," Susan Matthews proposes that the "Harlots curse" signifies a form of verbal rebellion—"the positive impurity of poetry"—against the poetic tradition of "cleansing" and "redemptive" language ("Impurity of Diction" 80). In *The Religion of Empire*, G. A. Rosso analyses Rahab's status and function in Blake's revised recapitulation of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection in *The Four Zoas*. According to Rosso's biblical excavation, Rahab's harlotry signifies "the monstrous union of religion and empire" and is identified ironically with "the concept of chastity and the sacrifice of women to patriarchal ideology" (55, 17).

To sum up, Blake's representation of prostitution has been treated predominantly on symbolic and metaphorical levels. However, Blakean harlots as real women who commodified their bodies have not yet received sufficient critical attention. Even in his most allusive and metaphorical depictions of the harlot, he still shows an engagement with the changing social perceptions of prostitution as well as the institutions and ideologies established around such perceptions. I propose that Blake was aware of the significant transformation of how the prostitute was viewed in the eighteenth century: from a siren-like embodiment of boundless lust to an unfortunate victim of external circumstance. Moreover, he was aware of the social view that reformed prostitutes could redirect "wasted" sexual passion along a path of productivity. This transformation and its relation to larger social and political contexts can be discerned in his molding of the harlot from the early *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *The Song of Los*, and *Jerusalem*.

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[1] Criticism of Blake's representation of women begins as early as Susan Fox's 1977 essay "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry" and Mellor's 1982 "Blake's Portrayal of Women." Countering the tendency in criticism to sublimate Blake's attitude towards sexuality into "sexless abstraction," Fox and Mellor foreground what they see as the poet's misogyny and sexism concealed in his ideals of "Poetic Genius" and "human form divine." Later, Helen P. Bruder's *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* and Saree Makdisi's *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* examine Blake's work in relation to the general condition of women in the late eighteenth century, showing the poet's awareness of the social repression of female sexual desire and the public discussion about it. The collection edited by Bruder, *Women Reading William Blake*, inherits both the feminist and historicist traditions. With a survey of contemporary scientific and biological studies, Richard Sha's *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750-1832* proposes that Blake regards female sexuality as a form of mutual affection that transcends the obligation of reproduction. Two collections edited by Bruder and Tristanne Connolly, *Queer Blake* and *Sexy Blake*, further excavate Blake's sexual multiplicity, including lesbianism, transsexuality, and sadomasochism.

As mentioned above, Blake's portrayal of women has been contested for decades. In her 1982 essay, Alicia Ostriker identifies "four Blakes" that demonstrate distinct or even contradictory understandings of women and their relationship with men, especially regarding the "female" influences on the male poet's artistic creation. The Blake who rebels against religious oppression and promotes a "free love" that encourages women's active sexual desire conflicts with the later Blake, who dismisses female sexuality as a vicious snare that hinders his prophetic vision. Ostriker notes that "as critics our business [is] not only to discover, but also to admire, a large poet's large inconsistencies" because humans are inevitably sexually ambivalent (571). Her conclusion suggests a middle ground between early scholars' homogeneous reading of Blake's work as subject to "a unified scheme" and "a permanent structure of ideas" (Frye 14) and feminist criticism that condemns Blake for casting women in inferior or even abject roles within his grand poetic enterprise

Certainly, Ostriker's neutral position did not bring an end to the dispute over gender issues in Blake studies. Critics continue to engage Blakean sexuality by focusing on subjects such as slavery and rape. Two representative essays attest to the consistent scholarly concern over Blake's problematic depiction of men's sexual domination over women. And it is not coincidental that both Mellor and Lucy Cogan take *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* as their primary text. Writing in 1995, Mellor points out that the "free love" voiced by Oothoon serves only men's interest and denies Mary Wollstonecraft's proposition of female emancipation from irrationality and dependency. Mellor sharply concludes that Blake fails to challenge "the racist or sexist dimensions of the Enlightenment discourse of Anglo-Africanism" ("Sex" 368). More recently, Cogan reevaluates the rape episodes in *Visions*, *America*, and *The Four Zoas*, arguing that "the heterosexual, penetrative sex that appears in his mythopoeic works is overwhelming non-consensual rather than pleasurable, the product of a frustrated masculine craving for sexual self-actualization" (377-78). Nevertheless, Cogan recognizes that Blake utilizes the motif of rape to criticize "penetrative, heteronormative sex," which cannot lead to "universal liberation" (394), along with the contemporary notion of liberty in a post-Revolutionary era permeated with violence.

My central argument regarding Blake's portrayal of prostitution continues this line of inquiry. His seemingly inconsistent characterization of the harlot evokes Ostriker's "four Blakes," but I postulate that such inconsistency subtly reflects the evolution of the eighteenth-century social perception of prostitution. Also, I read the harlot through Blake's understanding of the ideology that supported charity institutions for "fallen women," which sought to "reform" prostitutes and remodel them as ideal mothers. Such an interpretation engages a crucial concern in the scholarly discussion of slavery and rape in Blake's works: women's consent in sexual interactions. Both Mellor and Cogan observe in *Visions* a nonconsensual sex that degrades female subjectivity, denying their agency, rationality, and sensibility. But as my reading will show, Blake's latent critique of charity institutions problematizes the nature of consent within the context of ideological oppression. I will later explore how Blake's visual designs in *The Song of Los* and the 1809 watercolor *The Whore of Babylon* allude to the dire condition in which female individuality is subjugated through the internalization of religious and moral doctrines. And such self-discipline regarding female sexuality affirmed, in a Foucauldian sense, the value of the ideal mother as a means of procreation that would boost the population and sustain the British Empire's overseas military enterprise and imperialist expansion.

The correlation between Romanticism and British imperialism has been extensively discussed in Blake scholarship. For instance, in *Romantic Imperialism*, Saree Makdisi states that in "London," the youthful Harlot's curse represents "the machinic vehicle of institutionalized, commercialized, and commodified love" as part of a "Universal Empire" that assimilates America, Africa, and Asia through modernizing capitalism (157). More recently, Makdisi reaffirms Blake's poetic and visual designs as essentially anti-imperial (*Reading* 4-5). My interpretation of the harlot as an image constructed by imperialist ideology corresponds to this proposition. But I will further argue that such an ideology operated in concert with the established notion of ideal motherhood, and Blake's controversially negative representation of the mother does not exemplify the alleged misogyny highlighted by feminist critics. He is not targeting real mothers but subtly criticizing "the mother" as an archetype constructed by the oppressive gender ideology of his time.

Susan Matthews confirms that "Blake's work demonstrates a remarkable consistency in its defence of female sexuality, a defence that draws on a specific pro-sex discourse within the bourgeois world" (*Blake* 6). Although it would be difficult (or unnecessary) to entirely acquit Blake of the sexism and misogyny compellingly identified by Fox and Mellor, we can be certain that he consistently responded to current gender ideologies and diligently criticized the social institutions based upon them—for instance, Matthews accentuates his continuous urge to speak to the "Public" and address social reality (*Blake* 10). Adopting this critical stance, I demonstrate that Blake's apparently enigmatic and paradoxical cluster "Virgin Harlot Mother of War" offers a new understanding of his representation of prostitution as an acute observation of its evolving cultural image in the eighteenth century, especially in relation to the dominant notion of maternity that emerged within the larger context of British imperialism.

The Evolving Social Perception of the Prostitute

As scholars have demonstrated, the eighteenth century witnessed a drastic transformation of the cultural image of the prostitute. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the prostitute was deemed an agent of moral degeneration who embodied uncontrollable lust: she actively sought male costumers not only to profit from them, but also to satiate her own excessive desire. Furthermore, the prostitute in this period was positioned as the "other" of proper females in bourgeois domesticity. Called "Amazonian Man-Woman," "monster," and "savage," she was alienated from an ideal British identity (Nussbaum 100). Female monstrosity constituted by uncontrollable lust reflects the contemporary construal of women as intrinsically inferior to men in terms of morality and decency. Robert Gould's assertion in his 1682 poem *Love Given O'er* exemplifies this biased notion: "Woman! by Heav'ns the very Name's a Crime"; "When Eve was form'd / . . . with her, usher'd in / Plagues, Woes, and Death, and a new World of Sin" (61). He even laments that sex with women is the only way to continue the human race, aspiring to "Some other way to propagate our kind" (62). This all-corrupting female sexual potency was prominently manifested in the figure of the prostitute. Gould concludes the poem with a thundering line: "Thus if they durst, all Women wou'd be Whores" (64).

Moreover, the threat posed by the prostitute intricately pertained to what Ruth Perry calls "anxieties about a changing social order . . . in which the drive for profit and commodified social relations were replacing older kin and communal obligations" (283). The eighteenth century saw an unsettling concern over what could and could not be exchanged and commodified, including sex and love. According to Perry, the prostitute's ability to regard sex as "an industrial process" and put on deliberate performances with highly standardized acts devoid of genuine affection further intensified the abhorrence she invoked. The commodification of sex was also reflected by the "reinvigorated fetishization of virginity" that "inflated the value of intercourse with a virgin" in the eighteenth-century market of prostitution, along with the superstition that having sex with young virgins cured sexual impotence and venereal diseases (Perry 251).

However, even before the mid-eighteenth century, the stereotype of the prostitute was gradually shifting from this monstrously voluptuous creature, "an agent of destruction" (Henderson 166), to an unfortunate woman forced by circumstances into the sexual trade, as Roxana laments in Defoe's *The Fortunate Mistress*: "Necessity first debauch'd me and Poverty made me a Whore" (248). Legal documents relating to prostitutes' arrests and prosecutions indicate that most of them were born into poverty and employed to do work in which they were easily exploited and stigmatized, such as laboring in the clothing industries and fashion trades. Consequently, a considerable number of pamphlets that appealed for "charitable Compassion" toward prostitutes emerged after 1735 (Henderson 183). The economic predicament of fallen women had been taken into consideration. The prostitute began to be viewed in the context of labor and the marketplace; "faced with a choice between remunerated sexual activity and abject poverty," she was seen as a miserable worker who signaled "the disturbing intersection of the economic and the personal" (Rosenthal 4, 7). The prostitute, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, not only deserved pity and sympathy. More significantly, she was recuperable.

Following this transformation was the establishment of the Magdalen House in London in 1758. The apparent tenet of this asylum/hospital was sympathy for fallen women who were compelled by circumstances to resort to prostitution. In George Henry Glasse's 1788 sermon to the governors of Magdalen House, he sentimentally opines, "In many, if not in all their tragical stories, there are circumstances, which cannot but melt the feeling heart, till the voice of censure is stifled by the tears of pity" (8-9). Aside from such sympathy, Glasse emphasizes the benefit of reformed prostitutes to society: "By your admonitions they become useful and valuable members of that society, the law of which they once violated" (13).

The problem of prostitution was furthermore linked to a concern with the declining population in England. In his 1724 *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews*, Bernard Mandeville contends that prostitution would "dispeople the Country" and negatively impact "the Propagation of the Species" (4-5). This concern was amplified by the establishment of a charity concerned with the containment of prostitution and the reform of prostitutes themselves. In the preface to *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Charity*, "[t]he great decrease of our people" is attributed to "that abominable lust, and prevalent promiscuous commerce of the sexes" (qtd. in Jones, *Women* 43). In a sermon, William Dodd declares that the purpose of the institute is "to add to the number of useful and industrious members of the state." Reformed fallen women would be "made instrumental to the commerce, the defence, and the domestic necessities of the nation" (qtd. in Jones, *Women* 15, 88). As several scholars have observed, the very name of the Magdalen House signified a new method of control over sexual desire. With religious discipline and professional training rather than incrimination and punishment, the institution redirected stray women back to the path of productivity, epitomized by physical work and childbearing, "to improve the health and numbers of the labouring classes, and thereby increase national strength and prosperity" (Dabhoiwala 243).

The emergence of foundling houses also vitalized the activity of philanthropy, which became a social fashion for the propertied classes, a way of earning a good reputation and securing a place in heaven. Dodd congratulates contributors "who turn one soul to light and to righteousness, cause joy in heaven, and shall shine as the stars for ever and ever" (qtd. in Jones, *Women* 61). Indeed, the rewards of secular vanity and divine blessing had a strong appeal. Perry notes that the revenues of the Magdalen House averaged over six thousand pounds annually from 1759 to 1830 (273).

As this survey has demonstrated, the cultural images of prostitution in the eighteenth century were multifaceted and conflicting, ranging from she-monsters and, (pseudo-)innocent virgins to repentant fallen women. Such an evolution in social attitudes proceeded by engaging with shifting views regarding women and their sexuality, shifting views that were nevertheless anchored in social, religious, and political ideologies and institutions that supported the British nation.

"Lost in desart wild": Fallen Women and Charity Institutes

Blake's awareness of charities for fallen women might be attested by his geographical vicinity to the Lambeth Asylum, an institute founded in the same year as the Magdalen House and still in operation at the end of the eighteenth century. In a 1773 sermon given by Beilby Porteus at the Lambeth Asylum, he states that its purpose is to relieve female orphans, those "unhappy creatures, who, in a religious as well as a worldly sense, are WRETCHED AND MISERABLE AND POOR

AND BLIND AND NAKED" (4). But the charity, the sermon declares, would exclude "idle vagrants who infest our streets and houses in amazing numbers" and those who were not of "*meek and patient misery*" (6, 7). Such social outcasts could only be left in distress and endure "that correction which the laws of the land very justly inflict upon them, for throwing a needless and heavy burthen upon society" (7).

While writing poems such as "The Little Girl Lost," "The Little Girl Found," and "The Little Vagabond," Blake was probably aware of the hypocrisy concealed in these charity institutes. They only received those who had "*piety and good morals*" (Porteus 8), despite the Christian tenet of all-encompassing love upon which charity and philanthropy were allegedly based. In "The Little Girl Lost," Lyca, a girl "Seven summers old" who wanders away from her parents, is "Lost in desart wild" (Blake 20). The identity and origin of Lyca remain unclear, as this character does not appear in any other work. Critics have noted that the name might derive from Latin, meaning "wolf," or alternatively from Greek, meaning "harlot" (Effinger 102).[2] When viewed as a "wandering" (a word tightly connected to "streetwalker") female orphan who might fall into the sex trade, Lyca seems to reflect the longstanding representation of the prostitute as animal-like sexual predator or prey. Furthermore, the "desart wild" suggests the association between prostitution and sterility, a dominant notion that Blake acknowledges in *America*: "the harlot womb oft opened in vain" (54).

The poem does not inform the reader what precipitates Lyca's departure from her original family and her wandering in the "desart wild," but its visual design, which might appear irrelevant to the text (as often in Blake's composite art), in fact offers an alternative explanation.[3] In the image, Lyca and a naked young man hold each other and their lips form a kiss, indicating intense bodily intimacy (Fig. 1).

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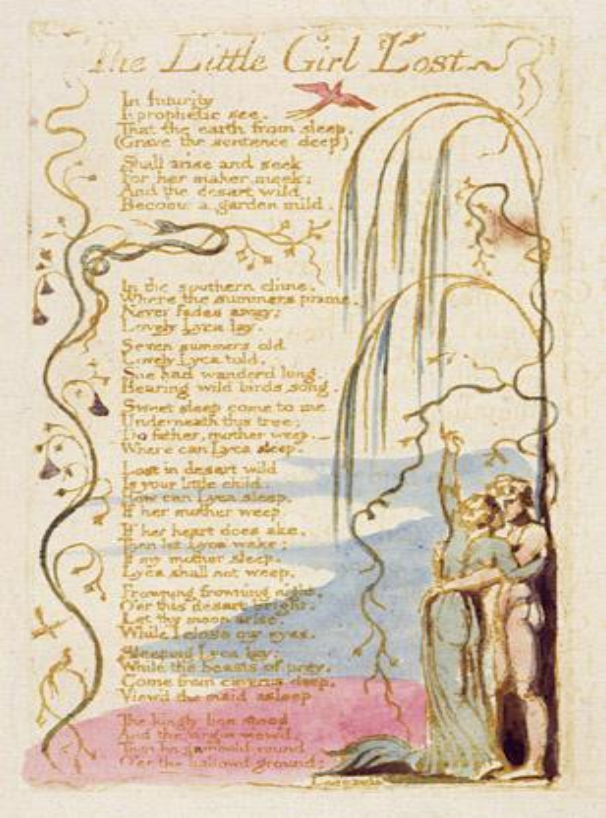
[2] While highlighting Lyca's beastly nature as a critique of the animal fable, Elizabeth Effinger also suggests that the etymology of harlot "demonstrates the way unusual women get labelled as harlots" (102).

[3] S. Foster Damon notes that this image is probably the illustration of another poem in *Songs of Experience*, "A Little Girl Lost" (258).



The Little Girl Lost

In futurity
I prophetic see.
That the earth from sleep.
(Grave the sentence deep)

Shall arise and seek
For her maker meek:
And the desart wild
Become a garden mild.

In the southern clime,
Where the summers prime.
Never fades away;
Lovely Lyca lay.

Seven summers old
Lovely Lyca told,
She had wanderd long.
Hearing wild birds song.

Sweet sleep come to me
Underneath this tree;
Do father, mother weep.—
Where can Lyca sleep.

Lost in desart wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep.
If her mother weep

If her heart does ake.
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep.
Lyca shall not weep.

Frowning frowning night.
O'er this desart bright.
Let thy moon arise.
While I close my eyes.

Sleeping Lyca lay;
While the beasts of prey.
Come from caverns deep.
View'd the maid asleep

The kingly lion stood
And the virgin view'd,
Then he gambold round
O'er the hallowd ground;

Fig. 1. “The Little Girl Lost,” *Songs of Innocence* (1789), Yale Center of British Art (in public domain).

If Lyca’s erotic encounter with a man initiates her wandering in the “desart wild,” Blake’s design corresponds to a social conception of the prostitute that became prevalent in the second half of the eighteenth century. That is, prostitutes were innocent girls seduced and debauched by men. In his sermon, Dodd pronounces that “men, for the most part, are the seducers.” The fallen women admitted into charity institutes “have been introduced to their misery by the complicated arts of seduction, and by every unjustifiable method, which cruel and brutish lust suggests to the crafty seducer” (87). Glasse holds the same view in his sermon: women “are continually overthrown by the stratagems and artifices of Man,” who, “having seduced her from her home—having cast a dark cloud over her fairest prospects . . . proceeds to reward a tenderness so misplaced, by base and cowardly desertion" (9, 10). The dishonored and deserted girl is then driven into the "world, like a vast wilderness" (Glasse 10), the "desart wild" in Blake's words. From this perspective, Blake's etymological and pictorial characterization of Lyca indicates two kinds of social perception of prostitutes in the long eighteenth century: the nonhuman creature and the innocent maiden. As a "little girl lost," Lyca is supposed to receive alms and shelter from charity institutes. Instead, she is taken care of by beasts of prey led by a benevolent "kingly lion" (20). This inverts the dehumanization often employed to denounce those who fail to comply with religious and moral conventions, especially the prostitute, who "hunts for the precious life" and whose "infamous conduct marks the diabolical depravity of her heart" (Henderson 166). True benevolence is to be found in a primal and nonhuman beastly realm rather than human social institutes founded upon exclusive religious tenets that expel those who violate them. Similarly, the speaker of "The Little Vagabond" cannot receive "some Ale" and "a pleasant fire" from the Church (45), a position that accords with the way vagrancy was condemned in Porteus's sermon at the Lambeth Asylum.

Sarah Haggarty also underlines Blake's critical attitude towards charity as a hypocritical display complicit in social inequality: "Charity was in many respects designed to reconcile 'the poor' to the inequality of their status" and "might even create that inequality" (94). In *America*, Orc's fiery lines from her home—having cast "Till pity becomes a trade, and generosity a science / That men get rich by . . . What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs / What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself / In fat of lambs" (pl. 11, lines 10-11, 13-15; Blake 55)—seem to target philanthropists and preachers at institutes like the Magdalen House and the Lambeth Asylum. In Blake's eyes, the sentiment of pity is actually a calculation of self-interest, echoing what Dodd preaches in his sermon. The latter speaks of a form of exchange, a "trade," for benefactors "to get rich by"—to gain a good name and secure a path to heaven. Pity in *America* becomes demonstrative. Those who bear it show their "tears" and "sighs"—images imbued with highly negative connotations in Blake—that represent a self-flattering display based on moral inconsistency.[4] As Faramerz Dabhoiwala points out, the motive behind philanthropy at that time could be remote from social amelioration: "[v]anity, fashion, and self-interest" (257). Operated through private networks of businessmen, clergymen, and public servants, the institutes were defamed by financial corruption and sexual scandals, despite the fact that reformed prostitutes were commanded to suppress their sexual vitality and had inculcated in them the virtue of chastity.

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[4] In her reading of *The Book of Urizen*, Sarah Eron similarly interprets Blakean pity as a critique of "the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century theories of sensibility" and "the moral and structural failings of sympathy" in the philosophies of Adam Smith and David Hume (3-4).

In *Songs of Experience*, the institutional failure to rescue social outcasts is exemplified by figures excluded from social charity. The Youthful Harlot in "London" seems to represent Lyca's ultimate fate. Recently taken to be a "real" prostitute in contrast to established interpretations that deem her an archetype of fallen female Nature, the "London" Harlot remains at the center of debate in Blake studies. Matthews accurately observes that her image "delimit[s] new structures of marriage, of commerce and of national identity" ("Impurity" 66). The question then lies in how to evaluate the Harlot's action in the final stanza. Is Blake condemning the prostitute as a source of social corruption and a threat to public hygiene? Or is he targeting the circumstances that compel her to do so? The former notion is aligned with the feminist approach taken by scholars such as Mellor, who warns the reader against revering Blake as a champion of liberation and equality because he "failed to develop an image of human perfection that was completely gender-free" ("Blake's Portrayal" 154) and is "complicit in the racist and sexist ideologies of his culture" ("Blake" 351). The latter is advanced by Nicholas M. Williams, who highlights a Blakean sympathy that aims to "assume universal proportions, to subsume first the position of the harlots and chimney sweepers" and ultimately showcases the "universal complicity between the victims and the unconscious perpetrators of social oppression" (19). Both readings are valid regarding Blake's observation of prostitution as a social problem, but I propose that we can further excavate Blake's view of the notion that prostitutes could be reformed and benefit the nation through charity institutions by examining his later works, including *The Song of Los*, *The Four Zoas*, and *Jerusalem*.

Inside the Magdalen House: "Secluded places" in *The Song of Los*

The actual lived condition of a reformed prostitute in a foundling hospital was unnaturally bleak and joyless, with "relentless religious indoctrination, through complete seclusion from the world, private reading and instruction, collective rituals, and a rigid daily routine" (Dabhoiwala 266). In another sermon to recipients at the Magdalen Hospital, Dodd urges them to humbly cherish the opportunity of rehabilitation, to "labour to shew yourselves sensible of the exquisite blessings vouchsafed you" and "in sincere contrition . . . lament your past misconduct" (89-90). Dabhoiwala observes a contradiction in the rhetoric of reform institutes:

while underscoring fallen women's primary innocence, "the practice of sexual charity was entirely focused on inculcating Magdalens with the deepest sense of their own guilt, in order that they might break down, repent, and be reborn as true Christians" (267). He further notes that such sexual philanthropy did not deal with the very "structural causes of prostitution" as openly stated by its founders, instead instilling great fear and shame in the penitents. The women were constantly reminded of their past enormities and future misery if they failed to comply with the regulations in the institute, with public peer humiliation used as a corrective (266-67).

All the moral and religious inculcation, with professional training in work such as domestic service and weaving, was meant to prepare reformed prostitutes for re-inclusion into family and society after their release from the institute. The promotional narratives of foundling houses and asylums contain a considerable number of accounts of women being forgiven and received happily by their family, especially parents, after rehabilitation. In the sermon quoted above, Dodd emphasizes "the tenderest of parental regard" and "the affectionate parent's heart" being injured by "the offence and ruin of a beloved and unhappy child" (91). He illustrates this with a highly sentimental narrative about an anonymous young woman's penitence in the Magdalen Hospital and her reconciliation with her father—how she was "[r]eceived home with joy" and "conducted herself in every manner suitable to her circumstances, and agreeable to her parent," who then "gained her an establishment in a family of worth and distinction" (92). Behind the sentimentalist prospect of restoring a fallen woman's position in a familial structure as a wife or mother lies the real purpose of charity for prostitutes: the desire to boost national production in terms of population and industry, which would then be channeled into the military and economic expansion of the empire.

Blake's critique of these charity institutes as part of the imperialist machine can be traced in *The Song of Los*. In this prophetic book, printed in Lambeth in 1795, he presents a bleak material world dominated by Urizen's Laws, where Orc is "chain'd down with the Chain of Jealousy" and Jesus sorrowfully hears the voice of Oothoon and "recievd / A Gospel from wreched Theotormon." In this fallen world clouded by sexual conservatism, "[t]he human race began to wither, for the healthy built / Secluded places, fearing the joys of Love." "Hospitals" are among the "Secluded places"—Churches, Castles, and Palaces—that are "[l]ike nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity / And all the rest a desart" (67). Hospitals, which not only received the sick and the injured but also the poor, should shelter destitute people with all-encompassing love, but in Blake's eyes such places are equivalent to other oppressive institutions: churches (religious indoctrination), castles (military expansion), and palaces (*ancien régime* tyranny). As "Secluded places," charity establishments, including hospitals, foundling houses, and asylums, had an equivalent oppressive power over humanity.

The full-page frontispiece to *The Song of Los* illustrates such oppression: a figure in a white robe kneels with his or her upper body bent over a gigantic book on an altar before a gold-black sun that glows in utter darkness (Fig. 2).

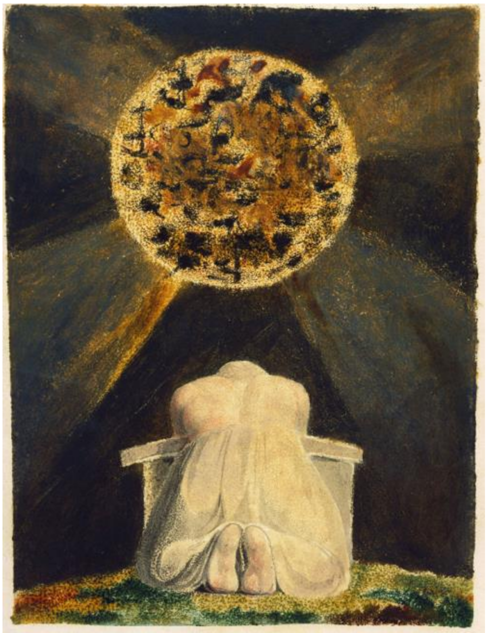

Fig. 2. Frontispiece to *The Song of Los*, Morgan Library and Museum, New York.

David V. Erdman identifies this figure as Urizen, who is "trapped in his own delusions and so bowed down over his own book . . . that nobody can read it" (181). D. W. Dörrbecker observes an explicit "relation of master and servant" in the construction of the design, a presentation of humanity surrendering to the material universe created by its own degeneration (47). In addition to these more symbolic readings, I suggest that the image can also be interpreted as the inmate of a charity institute. The figure's color tone and texture convey smoothness and docility, as well as a sense of femininity.[5] The kneeling posture and drooping head convey deep subservience to and immersion in the religious doctrines represented by the stony book on the altar. The profound darkness in the background stresses the place's total isolation, with all social connections severed from the figure. In other words, Blake's design shows a body utterly humbled and bent in one of the "Secluded places," submitting to its regulation and the instillation of her own shame and guilt—a "docile body" re-produced by discipline, to use Foucault's terminology. The glaring black sun serves as a threatening device of supervision, overseeing her internalized contrition. Indeed, the design corresponds to life inside the asylum, as inmates performed "compulsory private devotion and meditation, regular prayers, and service in chapel" with their conduct "monitored daily, judged, and recorded in a special book of censure" (Dabhoiwala 266). For Blake, charity institutes or "Hospitals," along with "Churches," "Castles," and "Palaces," are "Secluded places" that cannot bring salvation to their inmates because they, reduce individuals to what Makdisi terms "self-regulating units" subject to "the larger processes of state power" (*Reading* 91).

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[5] Copy B (Library of Congress) has a more masculine presentation, with lines rendering the muscles on the back clearer.

"[M]y Emanations are become harlots": Governing Female Sexuality in *The Four Zoas*

In *The Four Zoas*, Blake presents harlotry as one of the pathological signs of Universal Man's disintegration and the ensuing chaos through the patriarchal voice of Tharmas, one of the four Zoas alienated from his female "Emanation."[6] This designation exposes and denounces the code of sexual propriety based on what Matthews calls "gender essentialism." According to Matthews, Blake's resistance to such essentialism is reflected in his contentious engagement with William Hayley, whose poem *The Triumphs of Temper* is built upon the eighteenth-century gender division that promotes feminine "politeness" and "softness" as appropriate qualities. Blake explores this expected passivity in his designs of the Emanation and the harlot. *The Four Zoas* begins with Tharmas's separation from his Emanation, the female portion of human mentality that becomes malicious and power-hungry when isolated. As one of the four Zoas, Tharmas stands for bodily senses, and his Emanation, personified as Enion, represent the sexual drive (Damon 399). In his conversation with Enion, Tharmas laments that in this alienated condition, "[l]ost!

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[6] In Blake's system, the Emanation is "the feminine portion, or 'counterpart,' of the fundamentally bisexual male" (Damon 120). Blake uses the plural form of "Emanations," but they constitute a female entity with a proper name for each Zoa. Blake scholars tend to use "the Emanation" to refer to the Zoas' female counterparts.

Lost! Lost! are my Emanations"; he also remarks that "I have hidden Jerusalem in Silent Contrition" (p. 4, lines 7, 9; Blake 301). This resonates with *Jerusalem*: the eponymous spirit of Liberty and Emanation of Albion, the primary humanity, is cast out and called a harlot. In response to Tharmas, Enion says, "All Love is lost Terror succeeds & Hatred instead of Love / And stern demands of Right & Duty instead of Liberty" (p. 4, lines 18-19; 301). As genuine affection is usurped by hatred, and freedom by moral obligation, sexual desire and erotic love can only be pursued in secrecy. Thus, Enion "looked into the secret soul of him I lovd" (p. 3, line 26; 301). More severely, such an endeavor is futile and bound by fear and shame, for she "in Dark recesses found Sin & cannot return" (p. 4, lines 26-27; 301).

Although what Blake presents here is the internal disintegration of human mentality, a separation of its masculine and feminine portions, the conversation above reflects the social expectations imposed on women regarding proper conduct, especially in the context of sexual interaction. The cultural connotations of women's "Liberty" went beyond political and religious freedom. The word was also derogatorily associated with loose behavior and wantonness, which should be contained by "Right & Duty"—the domestic obligations of wives and mothers, who cannot articulate her own desires honestly and openly. Such is the female plight that Enion evokes. But from Tharmas's male perspective, "my Emanations are become harlots / I am already distracted at their deeds & if I look / Upon them more Despair will bring self murder on my soul" (p. 4, lines 36-38; 302). He deems Enion "a root growing in hell / Tho thus heavenly beautiful to draw me to destruction" (p. 4, lines 39-40; 302). If alienated from men and the familial context, women would become harlots. Tharmas's lines echo the earlier view of the prostitute as a devilish agent of destruction who diverts honorable men, corrupting their bodies and minds with what Blake often calls "delusive beauty" (p. 4, line 25; 301), a negative feminine feature that ensnares men with pretentious coyness and mildness.

Tharmas's perception of Enion as "a root growing in hell" is further developed in the ensuing lines: "Sometimes I think thou art a flower expanding / Sometimes I think thou art fruit breaking from its bud" (p. 4, lines 41-42; 302). The personification of plants as women and the use of botanical language to describe the female body were very common in eighteenth-century erotica, with its prevalence for Linnean classification. Blake's frequent employment of anthropomorphic plant images, such as the Lilly in *The Book of Thel* and the Marygold in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, was also influenced by the scientific poetics of Erasmus Darwin's highly erotic *The Botanic Garden* (1791).[7] As Karen Harvey insightfully observes, botanic metaphors of the female body “confirmed ‘a masculine position of mastery and possession,’ demonstrating how the female body was increasingly presented as ‘known’” (114). That is, the presentation of women as plants serves as a patriarchal countermeasure to overcome male anxiety over female sexual potency, which is felt to be mysterious, monstrous, and disturbingly alluring. It is a scientific approach to make the unknown known, to construct the “truth,” to contain the female other. Tharmas’s complaint here therefore reflects an unsettling encounter with his “Emanation” as “harlots,” women who exist independently of their male consorts. His perception oscillates between Enion’s “delusive beauty” as “a flower expanding” and her newborn innocence, with its potential for reproduction implied in “fruit breaking from its bud.” Here we see the period’s dualist understanding of female sexuality: the antithesis between an outward beauty of erotic attraction and an infantile virginity with the potential to be fertile—positions women as either disorderly or domestic.

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[7] For the connection between Blake and Darwin, see Erdman, *Blake*; King-Hele; and Wu.

With the dialogue between Tharmas and Enion, Blake warns against investigating humanity under an excessively scientific and anatomical lens. He suggests that men see women as vegetative beings of limited function—sexual appeal and propagation—and at the heart of such perception lies antithesis: “The infant joy is beautiful but its anatomy / Horrible Ghast & Deadly” (p. 4, lines 31-32; 302). It is from this restricted point of view that women who are divided—“emanated”—from men are labeled harlots. Their independent will and desire are interpreted as lechery. Despite their alienation, the fallen women’s bodily function of reproduction is still acknowledged and valued, thus indicating the social urge to reinsert them into the patriarchal familial structure. The parallel between emanation and harlotry shows how “degenerate” women were subject to various discourses regarding their sexuality, especially a scientific one that aims to resolve the paradoxical combination of monstrosity and enchantment and a social one that emphasizes propagation as a means to ensure national production.

Like Enion, Jerusalem, the Emanation of Albion, is another representation of the prostitute. In the beginning of *The Four Zoas*, she is confined in “Silent Contrition” by Tharmas, which points to her condemnation and punishment as a female embodiment of Liberty. In the following section, by exploring Blake’s later poetic and visual designs, I will examine how Blake develops Jerusalem and revises the biblical figure of the Great Whore of Babylon to mirror the cultural construal of prostitution, offering yet another critique of charity institutes.

"Virgin Harlot Mother of War": Jerusalem and the Great Whore of Babylon

In Book 1 of *Milton*, the fallen state that awaits redemption through Milton's reconciliation with his Emanations and Blake's poetic creation is delineated by Los's two sons, Rintrah and Palamabron: "And all the Daughters of Los prophetic wail: yet in deceit, / They weave a new Religion from new Jealousy of Theotormon" (pl. 22, lines 37-38; 117). This "new Religion" will accordingly "destroy Jerusalem as a Harlot & her Sons as Reprobates" and "raise up Mystery the Virgin Harlot Mother of War, Babylon the Great, the Abomination of Desolation!" (pl. 22, lines 47-49; 117). Blake shows that women who fail to conform to contemporary sexual propriety will be cast out, their illegitimate offspring suffering the same moral and religious stigma. But this labeling of the fallen woman is called "Mystery the Virgin Harlot Mother of War," a character based on the Great Whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. The heterogeneous combination of "virgin," "harlot," and "mother" in one character is "Blake's typically opaque word cluster" (Matthews, *Blake* 92). And this character is complicit in claiming "Self-righteousness," "cruel Virtue," and the "perpetuat[ion of] War & Glory," all indications of Blake's understanding of the sexual reformation imposed on prostitutes.

As Felicity A. Nussbaum demonstrates, the eighteenth-century "cult of domesticity" was allied with the "pursuit of empire" according to the ideology that "the nation needed to produce children to perform its labour and populate the empire" (27). The Magdalen Hospital and the Lambeth Asylum thus served to transform prostitutes into wives and mothers, thereby providing economic support and military manpower for Britain's imperialist campaigns. In this regard, the primary work that these women engaged in—producing soldiers' uniforms—emblematized the imperialist function of charity institutions (Perry 274). Moreover, the prostitute's supposed infertility was considered a national crisis that reduced the state power of the empire. Blake's identification of the Great Whore of Babylon with "the Virgin Harlot Mother of War" reflects this mechanism; the apparently oxymoronic juxtaposition of virgin, harlot, and mother compellingly elucidates the charitable institution's instillation of chastity and lost innocence, its constant emphasis on shame and guilt, and its final transformation of the harlot into a mother serving the empire's "War and Glory."

In *Jerusalem*, the Great Whore of Babylon is equated with Rahab, another mythical woman based on an Old Testament character. A prostitute in Jericho, Rahab helps Joshua's army conquer the city by protecting two Israelite spies. In both the biblical text and subsequent works of exegesis, she is hailed as a positive figure whose contribution to God's plan annuls her sexual offense as a prostitute, showing that divine devotion can redeem earthly sins. But scholars have convincingly argued that Blake's Rahab is stripped of her merits, becoming "the embodiment of Organized Religion" with "expressions not of faith but of opportunism" (Sturrock 25) and "the use of notions of moral virtue to justify political aggression" (Matthews, "Impurity" 78). In *The Religion of Empire*, Rosso shows that the biblical Rahab is not only a representation of the heathen imperialisms of Rome and Assyria but also a paradoxical combination of the arousal and negation of sexual desire. In line with Rosso's position, it can be noted that Blake's design of the Great Whore of Babylon/Rahab indicates how sexual ideology was intrinsically connected with British empire-building. This political enterprise was supported by social values that condemn, expel, and then reclaim fallen women from the streets:

> thou O Virgin Babylon Mother of Whoredoms
> Shalt bring Jerusalem in thine arms in the night watches; and
> No longer turning her a wandering Harlot in the streets
> Shalt give her into the arms of God your Lord & Husband (*Milton* pl. 33, lines 19-22; 133).

Even though a harlot can be rescued from the streets, admitted into an asylum, and relocated in marriage, her sexuality remains restricted to the functions of satiating men and contributing to the reproductive interests of the nation. This bleak condition is powerfully depicted in Chapter 2 of *Jerusalem*, after Jerusalem is cast out as a "harlot-daughter" by Vala:

> Here is the House of Albion, & here is thy secluded place
> And here we have found thy sins: & hence we turn thee forth,
> For all to avoid thee: to be astonished at thee for thy sins:
> Because thou art the impurity & the harlot: & thy children!
> Children of whoredoms: born for Sacrifice: for the meat & drink
> Offering: to sustain the glorious combat & the battle & war
> That Man may be purified by the death of thy delusions. (pl. 45, lines 60-66; 195)

The motif of Druidistic human sacrifice as presented here pervades Blake's later works. S. Foster Damon regards Druidism as a form of deism that promotes the falsified idea of atonement represented by human sacrifice (109). More recently, Rosso insightfully points out that Druidism represents "a religion of chastity" that "foregrounds the control of the female in the patriarchal system, a system Blake symbolizes as a hermaphrodite to critique the perverse nature of a kinship structure that depends on as it denies female sexuality" (*The Religion of Empire* 173). I propose that this passage also pictures the operation of a charity institution ("the House of Albion"), the isolation of its inmates ("thy secluded place"), the repeated moral preaching about sinfulness ("here we have found thy sins"), and ultimately its function of propagating imperialist military expansion ("glorious combat & the battle & war"). This parallel provides a connection between the more abstract interpretations and the real social conditions of fallen women in Blake's time. Thus, the Druidistic "Sacrifice" of "Children of whoredoms" not only connotes an attack on a theology of sin, atonement, and chastity, as rightfully perceived by Damon and Rosso, but also reflects how such a theology supported the social institutions that ensnared women's individuality and exploited their reproductivity for belligerent empire-building.

Blake's 1809 watercolor *The Whore of Babylon* is another compelling exemplification of this process of reforming prostitutes (Fig. 3). The design visualizes the following passage in the Book of Revelation:

> I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast full of names of blasphemy,
> having seven heads and ten horns . . . arrayed in purple and scarlet colour,
> and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in
> her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. (17. 3-4)

In his illustrations for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, Blake offers an earlier visual representation of the same subject: the cover of "Night the Eighth, Virtue's Apology: Or, The Man of the World Answer'd" (Fig. 4).

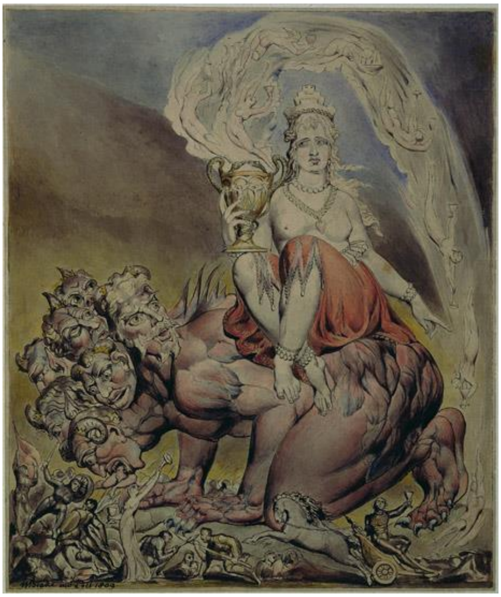
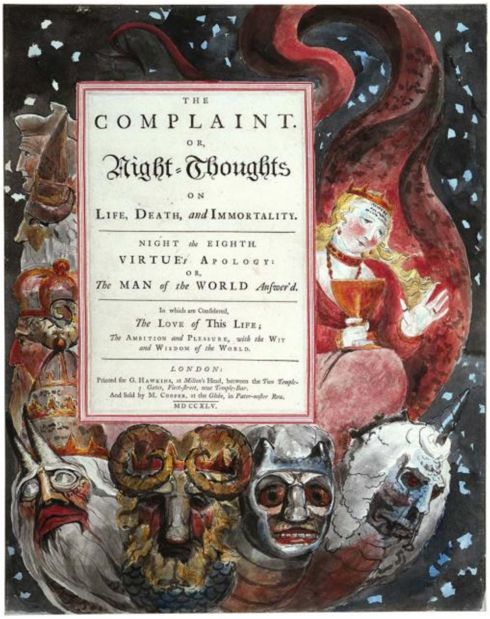


Fig. 3. *The Whore of Babylon*, 1809, The British Museum, London.



THE
COMPLAINT.
OR,
Night-Thoughts
ON
LIFE, DEATH, *and* IMMORTALITY.

NIGHT *the* EIGHTH.
VIRTUE*'s* APOLOGY:
OR,
The MAN *of the* WORLD *Anſwer'd.*

In which are Conſidered,
The LOVE *of* This LIFE;
The AMBITION *and* PLEASURE, *with the* WIT
and WISDOM *of the* WORLD.

LONDON:
Printed for G. HAWKINS, at *Milton's* Head, between the *Two Temple-Gates*, *Fleet-ſtreet*, near *Temple-Bar*.
And Sold by M. COOPER, at the *Globe*, in *Pater-noſter Row*.
MDCCXLV.

Fig. 4. Title page to "Night the Eighth, Virtue's Apology: Or, The Man of the World

Answer'd," 1795, The British Museum, London.

This design presents a typical image of a harlot, with the crimson blush on her cheeks and a suggestive smile combining conspicuous lechery with inviting coyness. In contrast, the 1809 watercolor demonstrates Blake's departure from Revelation, corresponding instead to the "Virgin Harlot Mother of War" in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Upon first look, the Whore seems to faithfully represent the biblical text with the elaborate decorations and red skirt on her body. However, Blake introduces several subtle innovations. First, the golden cup "full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" is releasing a gust of white smoke that soars upwards, curves above the Whore's head, and moves downwards on the right. In the smoke, a series of human bodies can be discerned. Both naked and clothed, they eventually become soldiers warring against each other at the bottom of the picture. The facial expression of the Whore, unlike her counterpart in the *Night Thoughts* illustration, shows a rather repressed placidness that lacks the harlot's supposed defiance and overt displays. In her posture, Matthews perceives "simultaneous arousal and rejection of sexual desire" (*Blake* 92). But her swollen bodily shape, along with her exposed, drooping breasts, evokes no sense of lust. In other words, this is Blake's representation of corrupted maternity in the form of a reformed prostitute relocated within a loveless marriage. Devoid of sexual pleasure and obliged to boost population, commerce, and industry, she provides laborers for the "War and Glory" of the British Empire: "This sinful Nation Created in our Furnaces & Looms is Albion" (*Jerusalem* pl. 92, line 6; Blake 252), where "[t]he suckling infant lives to die in battle; the weeping mother feeds him for the slaughter" (439). This interpretation enables further examination of Blake's construal of the archetype of the mother, which was placed opposite the prostitute in eighteenth-century sexual culture.

The archetype of the mother and its association with sexual desire persisted as one of Blake's major concerns. He frequently presents maternity as a malignant, earth-bound force that ensnares human spirituality. In "To Tirzah," for example, the speaker reiterates Jesus's words to Mary in the Gospel of John: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John 2.4). This harsh dismissal has been regarded as a clear example of his hostility to female sexuality (Ostriker 567).[8] The poem's visual design invokes the religious theme of the Pietà, accompanied by a line: "It is Raised a Spiritual Body." The sharp contrast between Christ's divine spirituality and what

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[8] For other commentaries on "To Tirzah," see George 99; Connolly 97-98; and Matthews, *Blake* 14-15.

Connolly calls "material practicalities" is brought up again in Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem*, when Jesus presents a vision of Joseph's forgiveness of Mary's "adultery" to the alienated Jerusalem, encouraging her to receive "Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion" (pl. 61, line 44; 212). The price of repentance is to show maternal care: "Jerusalem received / The Infant into her hands in the Visions of Jehovah" (pl. 61, lines 47-48; 212). But in subsequent lines, what Jerusalem sees in Jesus's maternal lineage is an earthly confinement, a vicious hindrance to redemption: "I see the Maternal Line, I behold the Seed of the Woman! / . . . / These are the Daughters of Vala, Mother of the Body of death" (pl. 62, lines 8, 13; 213). Jerusalem then utters a line that echoes the illustration of "To Tirzah": "But I thy Magdalen behold thy Spiritual Risen Body" (pl. 62, line 14; 213). As a "Magdalen," a repentant prostitute, Jerusalem reminds Jesus of his mortal condition, as depicted in "To Tirzah," and the necessity to be "risen" from it. What remains problematic is that the Joseph-Mary vision is conjured up by Jesus as a positive exemplification of forgiveness to "rescue" Jerusalem "from the street" and re-include her in a familial structure. There is a certain ambivalence in Blake's attitude towards maternity in this episode of *Jerusalem*. It lies in the contradiction between the valuation of female penitence through marriage and the denunciation of a maternal lineage sustained by the mother's obligation to reproduce.

Despite this ambivalence, we can discern Blake's awareness of the eighteenth-century notion that "becoming a mother" is a crucial qualification for reformed prostitutes. In "To Tirzah," we find a certain misogyny against individual mothers but also a criticism of the very gender ideology that constructs ideal motherhood and imposes it on fallen women, instilling the idea that fertility is the utmost value for their lives. Such ideal motherhood is extolled by Martha Mears in her renowned 1797 treatise on midwifery, *The Pupil of Nature; or Candid Advice to the Fair Sex*. Mears proposes that childbearing brings a woman "nearer to her perfection" and prepares her "for the great purpose of perpetuating the human species" (4). She also emphasizes the importance of breastfeeding, writing that "[t]he wives of the American savages extend this mark of solicitude even to infants who die upon the breast" and "press from the nipple a few drops of milk upon the grave of the departed suckling!" (140). Amanda Gilroy calls this the "colonialist" discourse of maternity: if a woman fails to produce milk for her child, she is more remote from ideal Englishness than savages are (23). The promotion of breastfeeding by Mears and others can be seen as a measure to domesticate women by desexualizing female breasts—a body part that combines erotic attraction and maternal care—and to discipline "the potentially revolutionary energy of the female body . . . in the interest of national consensus" (Gilroy 25).

In responding to this ideology of motherhood, Blake certainly does not underscore what Mears calls "[t]he joy of becoming a mother, the anticipated pleasure of presenting a fond husband with the dearest pledge of mutual love" (4). Instead, in "Infant Sorrow," "My mother groand! My father wept. / Into the dangerous world I leapt" (Blake 28). And in *The Book of Urizen*, he powerfully depicts the terror of pregnancy with Enitharmon's grotesque bearing of Fuzon: "All night within her womb / The worm lay till it grew to a serpent / With dolorous hissings & poisons / Round Entharmon's loins folding" (79). Moreover, in contrast to the promotion of breastfeeding in contemporary medical and moral discourses, he identifies its *abject* nature of issuing bodily fluid. In *Urizen*, when Los alienates his female portion, Enitharmon, milk is aligned with blood and tears, fluids that transgress somatic boundaries the body undergoes drastic and painful alteration: "Fibres of blood, milk and tears; / In pangs, eternity on eternity" (78). Enitharmon's breastfeeding of the newborn Orc shows anything but maternal bliss: "he grew / Fed with milk of Enitharmon / Los awoke her; O sorrow & pain!" (80). In *Tiriel*, one of Blake's earliest prophetic books written in 1789, as the mad king Tiriel angrily accuses his sons of being "worms of death feasting upon your parents flesh," their mother's breastfeeding is taken as evidence of filial ingratitude, again attesting to the Blakean conflict between parents and children: "Nourished with milk ye serpents. nourished with mothers tears & cares . . . The serpents sprung from her own bowels have drained her dry as this" (276, 277). The word "milk" frequently appears alongside a mother's "tears," "pangs," and "sorrow." In other words, Blake is heedful of what pregnancy inflicts on women both somatically and mentally, including the uncanniness of harboring a growing "other" inside the body and the emotional bondage that awaits its delivery. In Mears, the negative aspects of childbearing are sublimated by moralistic conceptualizations of ideal motherhood. But for Blake, such sanctification, especially as a mode of recuperating fallen women, only leads to the scene depicted in the Great Whore of Babylon watercolor, where a cup/womb of "abominations and filthiness" brings forth the seeds of bloody conflicts and wars. This ideal motherhood is yet another form of harlotry, one institutionalized by the state and the church. Blake's seemingly oxymoronic cluster of "the Virgin Harlot Mother of War" therefore subtly captures his understanding of an evolving image of prostitution.

Conclusion

As Laura J. Rosenthal observes, prostitution represents "the embodiments of some form of disturbing alterity" as it "evokes the failure of virtue, the absence of honour, and the violation of the private" (6). With his representations of the harlot and the mother, as well as his critique of charities for fallen women, Blake certainly recognizes the social otherness of the prostitute. But he also suggests that the abhorrent otherness of prostitution stems from a concept hidden behind the profession—the concept that sexual desire can be mobile, manipulated, dissimulated, quantified, and commodified. Other eighteenth-century thinkers, such as David Hume and Adam Smith, similarly highlight the fluidity of human passion and its movement from one person to another in the forms of giving, absorbing, exchanging, and consuming. In the case of the sexual trade, the prostitute materializes the potential economic dynamics in human passion: "the prostitute makes visible and commercial, sexual transactions which are hegemonically defined as private and affective" (Jones, "Eighteenth-Century Prostitution" 127). By situating sex in a pecuniary context, prostitution indicates a sort of pleasure that is purely somatic, alienated from reproductive obligation and genuine affection. Indeed, one of the accusations made against the prostitute was the insincerity and pretense of her passion, as John Armstrong, a Scottish physician and amateur poet, warns in his popular poem *The Oeconomy of Love*, written in 1744: "on the harlot's lip / No rapture hangs, however fair she seem, / However form'd for love and amorous play" (lines 577-79; Armstrong 25).[9] From a different perspective, Vivien Jones interprets the much-condemned deception of the prostitute as a "distinction between a moral self and the performing body" and "a split between work and 'self' in which her performance of sexualized femininity is seen as perfectly compatible with her hope of achieving a different feminine identity, defined as a 'better way of life'" ("Eighteenth-Century Prostitution" 138, 139). This positive evaluation of female autonomy in the prostitute, based upon her conscious division between the corrupted profession and her intact innocent self, seems missing from Blake's various designs of the harlot in Lyca, the youthful Harlot, Jerusalem, and Rahab/the Whore of Babylon. He does, however, utilize harlot imagery to denounce the social institutions of marriage and charity and the sexual ideologies behind them.

Apart from the critique of social institutions postulated in this essay, does Blake, on the psychosexual level, approve of the "soulless" sex represented by prostitution? Or does he share Armstrong's contempt for "the harlot's lip" on which

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[9] See Havens and Boehrer for discussions of Milton's influence on Armstrong. Though both focus on Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), it is interesting that the prostitute's "amorous play" in *The Oeconomy of Love* seems to derive from the same phrase in Book 4 and Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, where it is employed to depict Eve's innocent but titillating coyness before the Fall and the degenerate sex between Adam and Eve after the Fall. This allusion reinforces the cultural perception of the prostitute's pretension, deception, and affectless lust.

"[n]o rapture hangs"? On the one hand, the non-mutual pleasure offered by the prostitute suggests a separation of body and soul, a dualism Blake counters in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. On the other, such pleasure can be enjoyed without an emotional enthrallment—what Sarah Eron calls "sympathetic bondage and perverse pity" with regards to the marriage of Urizen and Ahania ("'Bound'")—that results in a morbid will to control the sexual other. In his *Notebook*, Blake admits that "[i]n a wife I would desire / What in whores is always found / The lineaments of Gratified desire" (Blake 474). But once monetary transaction is involved, can "Gratified desire" still be "the bounty of God"? As Haggarty suggests, Blake strenuously resisted the "intermeasurability" and commodification of his art, whose value lies in the spiritual gift and exchange of ideas: what Marcel Mauss terms "total phenomenon" (31). If sexual pleasure occupies an equally pivotal position as art in Blake's ideal human form divine, it is unlikely that he would approve of sex work as an instance of free love rebelling against religious repression. Whether sexual desire and affection can be (or should be) mutually exclusive remains problematic both in Blake and our contemporary culture, where the industry of pornography—representing a commercialized and autoerotic form of sex without mutual affection—continues to thrive. Intertextual/inter-visual dialogues between Blake and the sexual culture of our own time may uncover a disturbing continuity between past and present forms of gendered ideology and the economic imperialism of commodified sexual images.

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About the Author

Kang-Po Chen is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, National Taipei University of Technology, Taiwan. He holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Edinburgh. His primary research interest lies in English Romanticism, with a particular focus on religion, sexuality, and violence. He has published several articles in academic journals such as *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, and *Romantik: Journal for the Study of Romanticisms*. His current project, funded by Taiwan’s National Science and Technology Council, focuses on the motifs of cannibalism and human sacrifice in Romantic poetry.

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