

## Visions of the Daughters of Albion—William Blake

(Engraved 1793)

### The Argument

I lovèd Theotormon,  
And I was not ashamed;  
I trembled in my virgin fears,  
And I hid in Leutha's vale!

I pluckèd Leutha's flower,  
And I rose up from the vale;  
But the terrible thunders tore  
My virgin mantle in twain.

### Visions

ENSLAV'D, the Daughters of Albion weep; a trembling lamentation  
Upon their mountains; in their valleys, sighs toward America.

For the soft soul of America, Oothoon, wander'd in woe  
Along the vales of Leutha, seeking flowers to comfort her;  
And thus she spoke to the bright Marigold of Leutha's vale:—

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'Art thou a flower? art thou a nymph? I see thee now a flower,  
Now a nymph! I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!'

The Golden nymph replied: 'Pluck thou my flower, Oothoon the mild!  
Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight  
Can never pass away.' She ceas'd, and clos'd her golden shrine.

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Then Oothoon pluck'd the flower, saying: 'I pluck thee from thy bed,  
Sweet flower, and put thee here to glow between my breasts;  
And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks.'

Over the waves she went in wing'd exulting swift delight,  
And over Theotormon's reign took her impetuous course.

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Bromion rent her with his thunders; on his stormy bed  
Lay the faint maid, and soon her woes appall'd his thunders hoarse.

Bromion spoke: 'Behold this harlot here on Bromion's bed,

And let the jealous dolphins sport around the lovely maid!  
Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north and south: 20  
Stamp'd with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun;  
They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge;  
Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent.  
Now thou may'st marry Bromion's harlot, and protect the child  
Of Bromion's rage, that Oothoon shall put forth in nine moons' time.' 25

Then storms rent Theotormon's limbs: he roll'd his waves around,  
And folded his black jealous waters round the adulterate pair.  
Bound back to back in Bromion's caves, terror and meekness dwell:

At entrance Theotormon sits, wearing the threshold hard  
With secret tears; beneath him sound like waves on a desert shore 30  
The voice of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with money,  
That shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires  
Of lust, that belch incessant from the summits of the earth.

Oothoon weeps not; she cannot weep, her tears are lockèd up;  
But she can howl incessant, writhing her soft snowy limbs, 35  
And calling Theotormon's Eagles to prey upon her flesh.

'I call with holy voice! Kings of the sounding air,  
Rend away this defilèd bosom that I may reflect  
The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent breast.'

The Eagles at her call descend and rend their bleeding prey: 40  
Theotormon severely smiles; her soul reflects the smile,  
As the clear spring, muddied with feet of beasts, grows pure and smiles.

The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, and echo back her sighs.

'Why does my Theotormon sit weeping upon the threshold,  
And Oothoon hovers by his side, persuading him in vain? 45  
I cry: Arise, O Theotormon! for the village dog  
Barks at the breaking day; the nightingale has done lamenting;  
The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the eagle returns  
From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure east,  
Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake 50  
The sun that sleeps too long. Arise, my Theotormon! I am pure,  
Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black.  
They told me that the night and day were all that I could see;  
They told me that I had five senses to enclose me up; 55  
And they enclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,  
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red, round globe, hot burning,  
Till all from life I was obliterated and erasèd.

Instead of morn arises a bright shadow, like an eye  
In the eastern cloud; instead of night a sickly charnel-house,  
That Theotormon hears me not. To him the night and morn  
Are both alike; a night of sighs, a morning of fresh tears;  
And none but Bromion can hear my lamentations. 60

‘With what sense is it that the chicken shuns the ravenous hawk?  
With what sense does the tame pigeon measure out the expanse?  
With what sense does the bee form cells? Have not the mouse and frog 65  
Eyes and ears and sense of touch? Yet are their habitations  
And their pursuits as different as their forms and as their joys.  
Ask the wild ass why he refuses burdens, and the meek camel  
Why he loves man. Is it because of eye, ear, mouth, or skin,  
Or breathing nostrils? No! for these the wolf and tiger have. 70  
Ask the blind worm the secrets of the grave, and why her spires  
Love to curl round the bones of death; and ask the rav’nous snake  
Where she gets poison, and the wing’d eagle why he loves the sun;  
And then tell me the thoughts of man, that have been hid of old.

‘Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent, 75  
If Theotormon once would turn his lovèd eyes upon me.  
How can I be defil’d when I reflect thy image pure?  
Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on, and the soul prey’d on by woe,  
The new-wash’d lamb ting’d with the village smoke, and the bright swan  
By the red earth of our immortal river. I bathe my wings, 80  
And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon’s breast.’

Then Theotormon broke his silence, and he answerèd:—

‘Tell me what is the night or day to one o’erflow’d with woe?  
Tell me what is a thought, and of what substance is it made?  
Tell me what is a joy, and in what gardens do joys grow? 85  
And in what rivers swim the sorrows? And upon what mountains  
Wave shadows of discontent? And in what houses dwell the wretched,  
Drunken with woe, forgotten, and shut up from cold despair?

‘Tell me where dwell the thoughts, forgotten till thou call them forth?  
Tell me where dwell the joys of old, and where the ancient loves, 90  
And when will they renew again, and the night of oblivion past,  
That I might traverse times and spaces far remote, and bring  
Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain?  
Where goest thou, O thought? to what remote land is thy flight?  
If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction, 95  
Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dews and honey and balm,  
Or poison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the envier?’

Then Bromion said, and shook the cavern with his lamentation:—

‘Thou knowest that the ancient trees seen by thine eyes have fruit;  
But knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth 100  
To gratify senses unknown—trees, beasts, and birds unknown;  
Unknown, not unperceiv’d, spread in the infinite microscope,  
In places yet unvisited by the voyager, and in worlds  
Over another kind of seas, and in atmospheres unknown?  
Ah! are there other wars, beside the wars of sword and fire? 105  
And are there other sorrows beside the sorrows of poverty?  
And are there other joys beside the joys of riches and ease?  
And is there not one law for both the lion and the ox?  
And is there not eternal fire, and eternal chains  
To bind the phantoms of existence from eternal life?’ 110

Then Oothoon waited silent all the day and all the night;  
But when the morn arose, her lamentation renew’d:  
The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, and echo back her sighs.

‘O Urizen! Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven!  
Thy joys are tears, thy labour vain to form men to thine image. 115  
How can one joy absorb another? Are not different joys  
Holy, eternal, infinite? and each joy is a Love.

‘Does not the great mouth laugh at a gift, and the narrow eyelids mock  
At the labour that is above payment? And wilt thou take the ape 120  
For thy counsellor, or the dog for a schoolmaster to thy children?  
Does he who contemns poverty, and he who turns with abhorrence  
From usury feel the same passion, or are they movèd alike?  
How can the giver of gifts experience the delights of the merchant?  
How the industrious citizen the pains of the husbandman?  
How different far the fat fed hireling with hollow drum, 125  
Who buys whole corn-fields into wastes, and sings upon the heath!  
How different their eye and ear! How different the world to them!  
With what sense does the parson claim the labour of the farmer?  
What are his nets and gins and traps; and how does he surround him 130  
With cold floods of abstraction, and with forests of solitude,  
To build him castle and high spires, where kings and priests may dwell;  
Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixèd lot, is bound  
In spell of law to one she loathes? And must she drag the chain  
Of life in weary lust? Must chilling, murderous thoughts obscure 135  
The clear heaven of her eternal spring; to bear the wintry rage  
Of a harsh terror, driv’n to madness, bound to hold a rod  
Over her shrinking shoulders all the day, and all the night  
To turn the wheel of false desire, and longings that wake her womb  
To the abhorrèd birth of cherubs in the human form,

That live a pestilence and die a meteor, and are no more; 140  
Till the child dwell with one he hates, and do the deed he loathes,  
And the impure scourge force his seed into its unripe birth,  
Ere yet his eyelids can behold the arrows of the day?

‘Does the whale worship at thy footsteps as the hungry dog;  
Or does he scent the mountain prey because his nostrils wide 145  
Draw in the ocean? Does his eye discern the flying cloud  
As the raven’s eye; or does he measures the expanse like the vulture?  
Does the still spider view the cliffs where eagles hide their young;  
Or does the fly rejoice because the harvest is brought in?  
Does not the eagle scorn the earth, and despite the treasures beneath? 150  
But the mole knoweth what is there, and the worm shall tell it thee.  
Does not the worm erect a pillar in the mouldering churchyard  
Over his porch these words are written: “Take thy bliss, O Man!  
And sweet shall be thy taste, and sweet thy infant joys renew!”

‘Infancy! fearless, lustful, happy, nestling for delight 155  
In laps of pleasures: Innocence! honest, open, seeking  
The vigorous joys of morning light, open to virgin bliss,  
Who taught thee modesty, subtil modesty, child of night and sleep?  
When thou awakest wilt thou dissemble thy secret joys,  
Or wert thou awake when all this mystery was disclos’d? 160

Then com’st thou forth a modest virgin knowing to dissemble,  
With nets found under thy night pillow, to catch virgin joy  
And brand it with the name of whore, and sell it in the night  
In silence, ev’n without a whisper, and in seeming sleep. 165  
Religious dreams and holy vespers light thy smoky fires:  
Once were thy fires lighted by the eyes of honest morn.  
And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty,  
This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite?  
Then is Oothoon a whore indeed! and all the virgin joys  
Of life are harlots; and Theotormon is a sick man’s dream; 170  
And Oothoon is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.

‘But Oothoon is not so, a virgin fill’d with virgin fancies,  
Open to joy and to delight wherever beauty appears:  
If in the morning sun I find it, there my eyes are fix’d 175  
In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied with work,  
Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this free-born joy.

‘The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin  
That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys  
In the secret shadows of her chamber: the youth shut up from,  
The lustful joy shall forget to generate, and create an amorous image 180

In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow.  
Are not these the places of religion, the rewards of continence,  
The self-enjoyings of self-denial? Why dost thou seek religion?  
Is it because acts are not lovely that thou seekest solitude,  
Where the horrible darkness is impressèd with reflections of desire? 185

‘Father of Jealousy, be thou accursèd from the earth!  
Why hast thou taught my Theotormon this accursèd thing,  
Till beauty fades from off my shoulders, darken’d and cast out,  
A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of nonentity?

‘I cry: Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind! 190  
Can that be Love, that drinks another as a sponge drinks water,  
That clouds with jealousy his nights, with weepings all the day,  
To spin a web of age around him, grey and hoary, dark;  
Till his eyes sicken at the fruits that hangs before his sight?  
Such is self-love that enwise all, a creeping skeleton, 195  
With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed!

‘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: 200  
Red as the rosy morning, lustful as the first-born beam,  
Oothoon shall view his dear delight; nor e’er with jealous cloud  
Come in the heaven of generous love, nor selfish blightings bring.

‘Does the sun walk, in glorious raiment, on the secret floor  
Where the cold miser spreads his gold; or does the bright cloud drop 205  
On his stone threshold? Does his eye behold the beam that brings  
Expansion to the eye of pity; or will he bind himself  
Beside the ox to thy hard furrow? Does not that mild beam blot  
The bat, the owl, the glowing tiger, and the king of night?  
The sea-fowl takes the wintry blast for a cov’ring to her limbs, 210  
And the wild snake the pestilence to adorn him with gems and gold;  
And trees, and birds, and men behold their eternal joy.  
Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!  
Arise, and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy!’

Thus every morning wails Oothoon; but Theotormon sits 215  
Upon the morgin’d ocean conversing with shadows dire.

The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, and echo back her sighs.