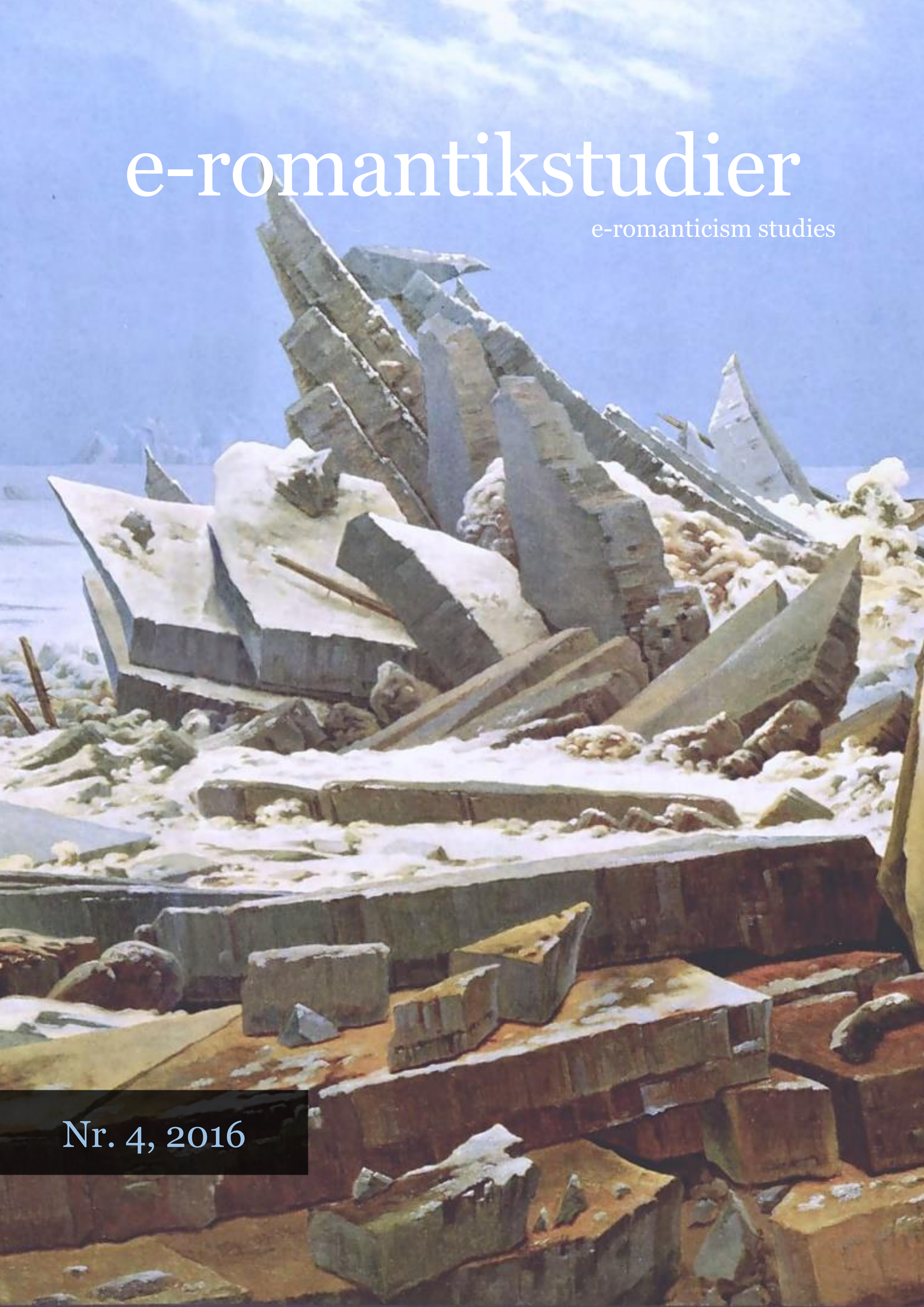

e-romantikstudier

e-romanticism studies

Nr. 4, 2016

e-romantikstudier / e-romanticism studies
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ISSN: 2445-7868
Redaktører / Editors:
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‘If she passes the flower of her age . . .’

From Corinthians to ‘The Sick Rose’:

The Emblematic Tradition, and Blake’s Epicurean Critique of the Pauline Code of Holiness

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Introduction

Although 'The Sick Rose' has been subjected to critical scrutiny so frequently, its theological implications have not yet emerged with any clarity. This is because its contexts are still not properly understood. Scholars are beginning, of course, to realize that Blake is just as allusive as his neoclassical precursors, but quite unlike them in the 'corrective' rather than concessive use he makes of the 'touchstone' passages he recalls to signal his contexts. The recognition of that tendency prompts Harold Bloom to place Blake foremost among the Romantics who turned Edward Young's campaign for 'original genius' into an Oedipal revolt against 'influence', by resorting to the tactic of radical 'misreading'.[1] On a less polemical note, relating to this poet's allusive technique, Joseph Wittreich has convincingly demonstrated the intertextually mediated nature of Blake's prophecies, with special reference to their Miltonic contexts.[2] Robert Gleckner, similarly, has shown that, even in his earliest work, Blake's 'poetry of contexts' quarries Spenser's masterpieces as heavily as it does those of Milton, and exploits 'intracanonical' allusions just as habitually as he does 'extracanonical' ones.[3]

Perceptive as they are, however, neither Wittreich nor Gleckner has anything specific to say on 'The Sick Rose', even incidentally, in the case they make for the role of contextual mediation in Blake's poetic argument. Nor do they bring out the anti-Pauline drift of his sallies on Spenser and Milton in allusions scattered throughout his work, where he signals his rejection of their puritanical stance on sexuality. Michael Srigley, to his credit, makes some amends for this oversight in an intertextually cognizant appraisal of 'The Sick Rose', construing it as a vatic critique of the sexual morality St Paul urged Christians to adopt.[4]

However, Srigley's reading, in the ultimate analysis, provides only a useful starting point, when it comes to the sourcing and significance of the demonology that gives Blake's 'invisible worm' its life and purpose in 'The Sick Rose'. His premise that the diabolism of this poem draws solely on Paracelsian sources is open to challenge, though he is persuasive enough on the anti-Pauline thrust of its author's recourse to infernal 'machinery' to reiterate his Renaissance precursor's warning on the 'demonic' consequences of unfulfilled desire.[5] Furthermore, the auto-allusive linkage Srigley claims to have found may also be questioned. Blake's 'invisible worm' aligns less readily with the vengefully libidinous 'shadow' Oothoon envisions in *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*,[6] which Srigley construes as an 'incubus', than with the fruit-sweetening 'worm' that Bromion has bestowed on her womb.[7]

The extracanonical contexts Srigley invokes, in his explanation of 'the sickness' that afflicts Blake's Rose, are even more suspect. The parallels he detects cannot, of course, be dismissed out of hand. The 'enormous joys' to which Oothoon alludes, in her sardonic aside on the pining virgin's lot, may indeed invoke, as he claims, the prurient sexuality of a thwarted lover's dream-double, as Spenser depicts it in *The Faerie Queene*, and Paracelsus, in his celebrated tracts on the aberrant effects of sexual denial.[8] However, the doctrinal differences between Spenser and Paracelsus on thwarted desire place them in opposite camps, even if the demonology they invoke in their depiction of the consequences of sexual repression makes them seem similar, as twin inheritors of a medieval lore of incubi and succubi awaiting poetic resuscitation. Spenser's Puritan-leaning vision cuts against the erotic grain of chivalric romance to vindicate the Pauline recipe for piety. The Red Crosse Knight resists the siren charms of Una's demonic 'shadow', as befits a 'saintly' hero dedicated to 'holiness', in conformity with the sermonic theme the author announces in his alternate title for Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* – "Of Holinesse". Paracelsus, in contrast, takes the anti-Pauline view that sexual repression leads to diabolical consequences, instead of celebrating the triumph of the spirit over the flesh.

Another and more serious oversight that detracts from the value of Srigley's reading of 'The Sick Rose' relates to the framing of his major premise itself. He makes no attempt to define the criteria that constitute 'the Pauline Christian attitude to sex', neglecting not only to bring out its textual basis in scripture, but also the role religious poets played in its dissemination, before and after Spenser.[9] Srigley fails, moreover, to recognize the Epicurean 'contrary' the poem asserts in its defense of carnal satiety, in the same breath as it laments the deadly predication of 'crimson joy' – a doctrinal anomaly rooted in St Paul's warning that 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23).[10] However, this rose seems to be in no position to resort to the sacramental remedy of marriage, proposed in the same passage. Nor can she expect to be 'saved' through 'child bearing, as the apostle reveals in Timothy 2:15 having fallen out of grace, and resigned herself to the fate of an unwed mother, as a 'dark secret love' ultimately predicates. And yet the '[seed-]bed of crimson joy' craves that very love, when connubial bliss is out of the cards, whatever the reason.

Read against the backdrop of earlier exponents of Blake's 'rose-lore', the counterpoint implicit in this poem, between the pleasure that accompanies the consummation of desire and its 'fatal' aftermath, points to a metaphysical anomaly that brings the Pauline doctrine of holiness seriously into question. Conceding this intracanonical dimension, the 'initiated' reader infers that the speaker is not a priestly figure lamenting the spiritual fate of a young parishioner who fell prey to an ‘uncomely’ lover. He is not just an ‘unreliable narrator’ in a dramatic monologue, whose sympathy is vitiated by the same sort of cant that Robert Burns sought to expose in *Holy Willie’s Prayer* (1789). The speaker in ‘The Sick Rose’ is a visionary persona, whose concern for his auditor gives no quarter to the dogma that would judge her for her ‘lapse. As for what ails this ‘rose’, the real culprit behind the Rose’s sickness is a being infinitely more powerful and malignant than a venereal ‘worm’ however deadly, though just as ‘invisible’, shrouded as it is in the darkness not of ‘night’ but of ‘mystery’ – like the God who hides behind his inscrutable laws in the *Notebook* poem ‘To Nobodaddy’ (*E* 471). The indeterminate gender of Blake’s ‘sick rose’ itself opens up exegetical possibilities that Srigley does not even concede. That oversight seems odd in view of his pointer on the ‘bricoleur’ dimension of the poem, with regard to the gender of the ‘invisible worm’. Srigley makes the point, in the introductory section of his paper, that it could be of either sex, since it is feminized in the *Notebook* version but returns as a masculine entity in the published form, as signified by the pronoun-shift from ‘her secret love’ to ‘his’. But what of the ‘sick rose’, itself, whose gender is left wholly ambiguous in both versions? From medieval times, as this study will show, Jesus figures as the rose of roses, otherwise invoked as the ‘Rose of Sharon’, whose gospel Blake views, with the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as stricken. In the light of that ‘messianic’ demonology, ‘The Sick Rose’ reads both as a lament for the plight of a young woman deflowered by a lover who keeps his love a ‘dark secret’, and as an expostulation that reveals the doctrinal cause of her predicament. She is, in the ultimate sense, the victim of a gospel despoiled by the Judaic ‘worm’ that Jesus unwittingly admitted, when he confided that he came ‘not to destroy the Law, . . . but to fulfil [it]’ (Matthew 5:17). That declaration gave St Paul the precedent he needed, as self-appointed ‘law giver’ to the Christians, in fealty to Moses.

The oversights noted in the foregoing section owe, in large part, to the fact that Srigley pays no heed to the typological resonances of ‘The Sick Rose’ in his search for the origins of the poem’s demonology. Floral *types*, most of them dedicated to the rose, one of the paradigmatic uses of which relates to Christology, emerge as early as the medieval era, and become entrenched thereafter. Vermicular *types* (vehicular allusions to ‘worms’ and serpentine entities perceived as ‘worm-like’) follow suit. In the ‘sacred’ tradition, these tropes, like their archetypes in the epistles of St Paul, serve to vindicate holiness. In the ‘profane’, they facilitate the Epicurean defense of carnality. Blake summons both traditions in his 'rose lore', signaling the 'contraries' through which he progresses, dialectically, to a visionary justification of 'gratified desire' – a motto he coined in a *Notebook* epigram entitled 'Some Questions Asked', celebrating the *honette* whore at the expense of her 'virtuous' counterpart (*E* 474–75). Each time Blake deploys these tropes in the texts antecedent to 'The Sick Rose', he recalls their archetypes in sacred poetry to denounce the 'code of holiness' they had served to propagate, as Pauline emblems. Simultaneously, he aligns with the Epicurean 'rose lore' of the Cavalier poets (and their libertine heirs), providing an evangelical defense of their permissive stance on appetite. To give this antinomian theology doctrinal standing, Blake affirms the providential role of the Devil, adapting the Epicurean 'gospel' Dryden attributes to Lucifer in *The State of Innocence*, as the first of the 'false apostles' Paul warns against in 2 Corinthians 11:13.

Blake's theodicy shows undeniable traces of the Epicurean demonology John Dryden constructed in *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, his operatic adaptation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. However, as a Romantic visionary, Blake chooses, antiphrastically, to justify the ways of the Devil instead of God. In plate 4 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*E* 34), where he reveals the mythic rationale for this contrary vision, a 'risen' Devil contends that body and soul being one, regeneration cannot come through the flesh-abasing 'spirituality' urged by erring apostles who still subscribe to the Law enshrined in the Ten Commandments. Having 'transformed' into the 'angel of light' he had once been, Blake's *daemon* gives the lie to St Paul's dismissal of such a possibility in 2 Corinthians 11:14, prophesying, in plate 14, that the Apocalypse will occur only when the Serpent's, or Lucifer's, infernal doctrine of satiety triumphs over that of holiness, ushering in an 'improvement in sensual enjoyment' (*E* 39).The regeneration of the body must occur before that of the soul – a twist on St Paul's vision of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44. In arriving at this conclusion, Blake 'corrects' not only the secular proponents of 'Epicurism', whose 'vanities' he exposes in *An Island in the Moon* (c. 1782–1784), but also those of its Christian apologist, Johan Caspar Lavater, who claims, in #366 of *Aphorisms on Man* (1788), that 'volupturism' is by no means incompatible with piety (*E* 591).[11] While endorsing this premise, and the general case Lavater makes for 'sensual enjoyment', Blake rejects this seemingly unorthodox theologian's Pauline qualifier against 'illicit' sexuality (*E* 584), revealing a visionary drift destined to culminate in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. There, Blake articulates the 'Luciferian' rationale for the crusade against Jehovah and His Law that he launches in his 'rose lore'.

The Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has Pauline precedent, ironically enough, for insisting that the Apocalypse cannot begin before the regeneration of the Body, purging it of the legacy of Original Sin. Paul himself concedes, in Romans 7:8, that 'without the law[,] sin was dead', meaning, presumably, that none can be held accountable for sinning before indoctrination on the Mosaic account of the Fall and the Ten Commandments. However, once they possess this 'revealed' knowledge, they become accountable for their 'sins', and can only hope for redemption if they heed the proscriptions of the Law, after embracing Christ. It is only at a later point (in Romans 7:23) that St Paul reveals the consequences of that doctrinal imperative, confessing to being in tormented subjection to the 'law of sin', trapped in a body whose appetitive urges he must continually repress to keep his 'spiritual' part from succumbing to his 'carnal' or 'sinful' part. The admission that Sin revived through the Word, gives Blake's Lucifer his cue for viewing Jehovah's Law as a Judaic fallacy Christians must cast out, if they wish to enjoy the fruits of Eden. The first stirrings of this messianic demonology are evident in Blake's marginalia on *Aphorisms on Man* (*E*, 583–601), where he praises Lavater for Christianizing the Epicurean pleasure-ethic, but censures him for the doctrinal limits he places on 'sensual enjoyment', in viewing it exclusively as a spousal privilege.

Blake applauds Lavater's evangelical initiative understandably enough. Epicurus had traditionally enjoyed a largely secular following, and his latter-day disciples were no different in that particular – his philosophy having served as grist for the hedonist mill of the Cavalier poets and their libertine heirs.[12] Nevertheless, while he endorses wholeheartedly the view that the 'most voluptuous' of men might also be 'the most religious' (*E* 591), Blake is obviously critical of the Pauline proviso with which Lavater prefaces his defense of 'Epicurism' – namely, that 'sin' and 'destruction of Order' being the same, 'sensual enjoyments' must never breach the Law (*E* 584). While he accepts this definition of sin, and approves of 'connubial bliss', Blake refuses to believe that virtue consists in mere restraint, or that acting 'sinfully' on an irresistible impulse, as Lavater himself concedes, in #63 of his *Aphorisms*, can turn one into a 'reprobate' (*E* 586).

If Blake's antipathy to Pauline theology is only implicit in his stand on Lavater's failure to break free of 'the Law of Sin' in the case he makes for Christian 'Epicurism', it is direct enough elsewhere. In *Jerusalem*, Los views the Church as the 'emanation' not of Jesus but of Paul, and blames him for the curse of the 'Female Will' (pl. 56), and the consequent rise of militant feminism, as a defiant reaction to this apostle's Eve-harking misogyny (*E.*

206). Moses's vision of the Fall may have provided a compelling rationale for viewing Woman as the more 'corruptible' of the sexes, liable to impose her will on a haplessly enamored male. However, it was St Paul who taught Christians never to forget the 'collusion' between the Serpent and Eve. Predictably, in view of his sin-centered, anti-feminist theology, this Christian 'law-giver' invests heavily in the doctrine of holiness forged by the Pentateuch, entrenching its gender myth with the praise he bestows on the virgin and the wife, at the expense of the third Mary. Jesus may have thought it less sinful to have 'loved much' than to have 'loved little' (Luke 7:47), but Paul has nothing to say in favor of Magdalene figures. Arguably, this is because of their flagrant disavowal of chastity and their power to 'corrupt' male 'virtue' through a love more 'fallen' than that of Eve herself – 'tainting' not one but many. In 1 Timothy 2:15, Paul hinges his objection to women presuming 'to teach', or 'to usurp authority over man', on the lapse of Eve, whom Adam followed to his doom, as a victim of love. Her 'daughters' are more likely to betray than to enlighten the men foolish enough to follow them The vengeful consequence of this misogynous theology is a persistent theme in Blake's major prophecies, surfacing most powerfully in Chapter 3 of *Jerusalem* (pl. 64), where Vala mocks the futility of St Paul's chauvinism with the pointer that men are 'Woman-born/And Woman-nourish[e]d & Woman-educated & Woman scorn[e]d' (*E* 215).

Another passage in *Jerusalem* (pl. 77), inserted as an epigraph to Chapter 4, laments Paul's 'apostasy' (*E* 231). In echoing Christ's reproach (Acts 9:4), 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?', Blake hints that Paul never lost his allegiance to Jehovah, though his fervent avowal of the redemptive efficacy of the Atonement may have won him converts even among the 'Epicurean philosophers' who came to mock his 'new doctrine', and the deity it hallows, according to Acts 17:18–34. It is just as evident that whenever Blake recalls a Pauline text, he adapts it. For instance, the 'illuminated' epigraph framing 'To Tirzah' (1800), recalls St Paul's vision of the chosen being 'raised a spiritual body' (*E* 30). This is a line Blake culls from 1 Corinthians (15:44), only to iterate his denial of the apostle's claim that the Resurrection is a gift reserved for the predestined few – none need to fear exclusion from this 'clay-shedding' rebirth. In that poem, a late production (like *Jerusalem*), Blake is quite explicit in his disavowal of Pauline theology. However, the poems he composed in his formative phase (prior to the publication of 'The Sick Rose' in 1794), rely wholly on the indirect, but no less powerful, technique of typological subversion, constructing a 'rose lore' that turns the emblematic tradition of sacred poetry on its head. This he does by privileging appetitive satiety at the expense of the repressive dogma embedded in

Corinthians, whose sexual morality draws, ultimately, on the 'holiness' imperative that Romans, Ephesians and 1 Timothy construct in the shadow of the Mosaic 'law of sin'.

If Milton and his disciples follow Pauline precedent in deploying floral and vermicular tropes to exalt the ascetic ideal, Blake re-signifies them to affirm its hedonist contrary, to bring them in line with his Epicurean demonology. Eight texts precede 'The Sick Rose' in the re-signification of those Pauline emblems. These key texts, to list them in roughly chronological order, are: 'Then She Bore Pale Desire', *Tiriel*, *The Book of Thel*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 'The Chapel All of Gold', 'To Nobodaddy', and *America*. The intertextual import of 'Tiriel', 'The Chapel All of Gold', and 'To Nobodaddy' is admittedly 'masonic', since, as 'closet-pieces', their readership would be confined to a coterie. However, the 'auto-allusive' relevance of the other six texts is less open to dispute, as published works that Blake would have expected his readers to recall for the exegetical 'cues' they need in the unraveling of the dense semiology of 'The Sick Rose'. Subsequent discussion will show that the pieces mentioned above for their intracanonical bearing on the sermonic burden of this masterpiece, all display the same subversive trait. In each instance, Blake re-signifies one or both of these tropes in his 'rose lore' to challenge the Pauline imperative of 'holiness' they had long served to propagate. Attacking this doctrinal tenet for its restitution of Judaic 'error', he privileges its Epicurean 'contrary' as a corrective. However, unlike the secular proponents who had preceded him (Restoration *literati* and their Augustan heirs), Blake makes a visionary case for Epicureanism. In the lead-up to 'The Sick Rose', he constructs a 'rose lore' that moves from attacks on the Law, and the deity it justifies, to an 'infernal' vindication of 'sensual enjoyment' and Liberty. It is through this tactic that Blake succeeds in transcending the limits not only of his secular precursor, but also of Lavater, who places Pauline constraints on the gratification of desire, in privileging 'Order' over 'Energy'.

Just as the extracanonical resonances of 'The Sick Rose' signal the doctrinal 'contraries' that place the poetic disciples of St Paul and Epicurus in rival camps (in line with the confrontation between the apostle and his Epicurean mockers recorded in Acts 17:18–34), the intracanonical ones serve to load the poem's vatic authority in the interests of theological 'progression' – an 'auto-allusive' tactic Gleckner traces as far back as the *Poetical Sketches*, in his book *Blake's Prelude*.[13] The dialectic that actuates the 'intellectual battle' between the poetic disciples of Epicurus and those of St Paul becomes internalized in the ‘contraries’ Blake re-constitutes in his ‘rose lore’, as the eternal contention between ‘Energy’ and ‘Order’, privileging the former over the latter.

The Cavalier poets and their post-Caroline heirs had themselves challenged the Pauline canon with an antithetical typology hailing the voluptuous enjoyment of the beautiful in defiance of the Puritan-led attack on Epicureanism. However, their argument for ‘sensual enjoyment’, as noted earlier, is merely a secular one. Their ‘rose’ has no ‘worm’ to elude but Time, no fate to dread but the prospect of withering unfulfilled, no ‘sickness’ to suffer but the ravages of chastity on an ineradicably carnal soul. Herrick, Waller, Rochester, Etherege, Prior, and Pope all contributed to this Neo-Epicurean recuperation of a Pauline trope. Their *honette* code renews itself in Blake’s ‘rose lore’, but integrates floral and vermicular emblems into a vision that provides doctrinal support for that counter-tradition, by revealing the ‘infernal’ origins of the Epicureanism that his secular precursors embraced, seizing on Dryden’s intimations, in the ‘operatic’ revision of the account of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*.

In Dryden’s *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, Milton’s neoclassical heir (whose ‘rakehell’ comedies are ‘left-hand’ exercises catering to the ‘decadent’ taste of his time) depicts Lucifer as the archetypal proponent of pleasure and liberty, in order to ‘demonize’ Epicurus and re-affirm St Paul’s code of holiness. Edward Young follows Dryden’s lead. When his priestly speaker exhorts Lorenzo to abandon the ‘black fellowship’ of St Evremond, and embrace St Paul, in *Night Thoughts* (7: 1219–20), he, too, views Epicurus as the Devil Incarnate, and his rakish disciple as a ‘false apostle’.[14] Blake, on the other hand, takes this twist on demonology to an apocalyptical conclusion, adapting Lavater’s case for an Epicurean antidote to asceticism, in the annotations to *Aphorisms on Man*. Blake’s revision of the Edenic myth exploits not only the direct method of ‘gnostic’ revisions of Moses’s version of the Fall, arguably the cornerstone of St Paul’s theology, but also the indirect one of typological ‘subversion’. Through polemical allusions to passages where they appear in crucial contexts, this rebellious ‘son’ of Milton re-signifies the floral and vermicular tropes ‘sacred’ poets had habitually deployed to sanctify ‘chastity’, turning them into vehicles that serve to exalt, instead, the Epicurean cause of ‘sensual enjoyment’.

Chapter 1

The Code of Holiness in the Epistles of St Paul

Blake could hardly have failed to intuit that the 'rose lore' of sacred poetry took its inspiration from St Paul's hymen-fixated floral conceit for nubile beauty and its bestowal. Having promoted celibacy as the state most conducive to holiness, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul makes marriage incumbent on any woman who 'passes the flower of her age' to a man who 'behaveth himself uncomely to his virgin' (7:36). She has 'not sinned' if she has been deflowered forcibly, but the sacramental remedy for this fall into carnality is marriage. Elsewhere in I Corinthians (7:2), Paul urges the 'carnally-inclined' to marry instead of descending to 'fornication', and to sate the sexual cravings of their spouses, thereafter, since 'incontinence' might otherwise follow.

Paul's concession to 'gratified desire' is begrudging, at best, and the procreative role of connubial sex becomes far more crucial in another of his epistles. In 1 Timothy 2:15, he proclaims that the married woman 'shall be saved in child-bearing'. In affirming the redemptive role of generation, Paul brings into Christian perspective the significance of Jehovah's curse on Eve, in Genesis 3:16: 'In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee'.

Blake himself disavows Paul's virginity-mystique, but endorses his faith in the redemptive role of 'child-bearing'. Nonetheless, his reservations over maternity as a blessed state, and irreverence for connubial sex, are evident in his pointed assertion, in plate 8 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that 'Joys impregnate' whereas 'sorrows bring forth' (*E* 36), and that it is love that hallows procreation, not wedlock. In plate 10, Blake's Devil contends that if chastity consists in 'nursing unacted desires', it is more repugnant than the murder of a child conceived in merely dutiful copulation, whose life would have been as loveless as its conception on a desecrated rather than 'hallowed' marriage-bed (*E* 38). Blake thus brings into serious question, the validity of Jehovah's injunction to Eve, in Genesis 3:16, affirming that a woman's desire is not always unto her husband, and cannot be regulated, since it springs from impulse – a spontaneous burst of 'energy' that resists subjection to any law.

Blake's advocacy of 'gratified desire' is obviously meant as an Epicurean corrective to the Pauline ideal. His refusal to concede either the notion that sex only loses its taint on the marriage-bed, or that the virgin takes the surer path to Grace is in the same key. In taking this antinomian stand, he dismisses St Paul's claim in 1 Corinthians 7:34 that, unlike her married counterpart, who devotes herself to her husband and to worldly matters, the virgin 'careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit'. The scribes may have credited Paul with striking a mighty blow against the Epicurean philosophers, in the sermon he preached at Areopagus (in Acts 17), but this skirmish was to prove indecisive, for the doctrinal 'contraries' in this confrontation were destined to remain in place, spurring the emblematic 'war of the roses' that poets were to fight through the ages: the disciples of St Paul hallowing the 'flower' preserved from mortal touch, and those of Epicurus hailing its desire-gratifying bestowal. Blake sides with the latter, but makes a religious rather than 'naturalistic' apology for 'sensual enjoyment'. Building on hints from Lavater, he defends desire in his marginalia to *Aphorisms on Man*, but rejects his erstwhile mentor's Pauline codicil that its gratification must never breach 'Order'. This antinomian defense of 'Energy' re-surfaces in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as the essence of the gospel of Blake's *daemon*.

The fact that Blake invests in a mystique of 'defloration' not only in erotic contexts but also in political ones is itself grounded in Pauline precedent, though, again, his drift is antinomian and hence subversive. Chastity, as Paul sees it, consists not merely in withstanding temptation but also of every other desire proscribed by divine law. In Romans 13:1, Paul declares, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God', as his doctrinal rationale for the view that even the most tyrannical 'ruler' deserves obedience because 'he is the minister of God'. In Ephesians, Paul returns to the theme of obedience, urging his flock to 'submit to one another in the fear of God'. Wives must submit to their husbands, 'as unto the Lord' (5:22), children to their parents (6:1), and servants to their masters, 'with fear and trembling' (6:5). Thus, the 'rule' of obedience applies as much to the domestic sphere as to the civic. Jesus may have urged his followers to 'render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's', according to Matthew 22:21, but it is St Paul who codifies the terms of this political quiescence, invoking Judaic Law to sanctify obedience.

Blake's 'rose lore' denounces the 'divinized' Toryism implicit in the Pauline epistles instanced above. In *Tiriel*, the sons of an *ur*-Jehovah, 'serpent-like' in his 'subtlety, spurn his Law and avenge themselves for the 'worm-like' state to which he has reduced them with his own fall into the nadir of patriarchal *hubris* (*E* 285). In the *Preludium* to *America* (pls.1, 8, 15–16), 'serpent-formed' Orc, rapes the 'dark virgin', Mystery, and 'stamps' Moses' stone-tablets 'to dust', ending the tyrannical regime of 'dragon-formed' King, Priest and Father (*E* 52). Blake targets, in that list, the 'patriarchal' figures St Paul calls 'ministers of God', in Romans 13. Like the erotic exponents of Blake's 'rose lore', his political pieces reveal the Law as a Judaic curse Christians must exorcise in the interests of pleasure, which can only coexist with liberty, itself an object of desire. Lavater, true to his Pauline bent, only refers, in *Aphorisms to Man*, to the 'energy of choice', or Will, renouncing promiscuity in favor of monogamy (*E* 584). However, 'energy' springs from 'desire', an appetitive urge Lavater defends, and which, as Blake's daemon in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* asserts, 'is of the Body' – Lucifer's domain (*E* 34). As for the Will, if its role is to focus Desire, it must free itself from 'Order', and the 'energy' of its own volitions will 'cast out the evil [impulses] by the good'– as Blake paraphrases Mark 12:26–29 (*E* 594).

Blake would also have seen the Worm of Christian poetry as a Pauline signifier. This lowly creature that creeps upon its belly, tainting whatever it preys upon, makes a singularly apt 'polluter'. The worm is to the flower what the Serpent was to Eve, apart from its phallic signification as the despoiler of a florally-signified virginity. In 2 Corinthians 11: 2–4, Paul envisions the Serpent of Genesis as a seducer of souls, whose triumphant assault on Eve's 'virgin' mind reveals it (or 'him') as the demonic archetype of the 'false apostles' who preach 'another gospel'. In the light of this parallel, the prophesy with which Romans closes (16:20) attests as much to the ultimate fate of the Serpent of Eden as it does of the devil this 'subtlest of beasts' had served. The 'bruising' of Satan by the Elect, beside the re-opened gates of Eden, brings Apocalyptic 'closure' to the curse Jehovah pronounced on the Serpent for betraying Eve: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between her seed and thy seed; it shall *bruise* thy head' (Genesis 3:15). As for the Serpent, or Satan, a linkage Paul implies and Milton avows, what other fate can await it but that of the 'worm [that] dies not', in Mark 9:44?

In another passage from Romans (9:20), though it, too, omits overtly vermicular reference, this atavistic 'law giver' builds on the Judaic notion that Fallen Man, sprung from a woman's Serpent-tainted womb, is a mere 'worm' in Jehovah's eyes. Taking his cue from Job, Paul confronts an impugner of Divine Justice with a question meant to discourage rather than solicit debate: 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?' This rebuke echoes that of Bildad, who resorts to the same inquisitorial tactic, in Job 25:4-6, when he chastises 'the Man of Uz' for challenging Jehovah: 'How … can man be justified with God? Or how can he can he be clean that is born of a woman? /Behold… [,] the stars are not pure in his sight, / How much less man, *that is* a worm?' St Paul's challenge, though it elides the worm-metaphor, is no less withering in its insinuation.

Chapter 2

The Flower and the Worm as Pauline Types in Sermonic Verse

The Pauline cult of the virgin, epitomized by the adoration of Mary, whom a medieval lyricist apostrophizes with the claim that 'Ther is no rose of swych vertu / As the Rose that bar Jesu',[15] was destined to become a staple of sacred poetry. Not surprisingly, medieval poets recognize the chaste wife as the other, if humbler, paragon of holiness, in the figure of the untainted 'rose' or 'flour', setting as irrevocable a precedent. Chaucer's Wyf of Bath invokes this tradition in her '*Prologue*', however casuistically. Entering the married state at the very onset of puberty,[16] she buries five husbands and unabashedly craves a sixth, defending herself with the plea that 'barley bread' as she was, unlike the 'whited flour' of those predestined for the nunnery, she has had to commit to the 'acts' and 'fruits' of marriage to remain in a state of Grace.

The premise that later poets followed the lead of their medieval precursors in embracing the same Pauline typology is indisputable. Shakespeare himself was no exception. In #35 of his *Sonnets*,[17] for instance, he attributes a lover's lapse to 'the loathsome canker [that] lies in sweetest bud'. However, he re-deploys the same trope in *Twelfth Night* (II. iv. 110–12), not to lament the impossibility of virtue in the face of temptation, but to affirm it, though he concedes the toll it takes, in alluding to thwarted desire as 'a worm [that] feeds' on the 'damask cheek' of a love-lorn maiden who remains steadfastly chaste.

The use of the same typology to entrench the Pauline code of holiness is predictably more marked in religious poetry, starting with the Metaphysical school, the prime exemplar of whom, insofar as Anglican piety is concerned, being George Herbert. This revered poet joined the priesthood at a critical time, in terms of the challenges the Church of England had come to face from would-be reformers, both from within and without. In 'Church Rents and Schisms',[18] Herbert invokes the rose as an ecclesiastical trope, in counterpoint with a vermicular assailant that he views in a Satanic light, for 'devouring' the doctrine of apostolic succession upon which the authority of the Church rested. Chastening the Puritans for their attack on vestments, and on the episcopacy itself, Herbert envisions their zealotry as a 'worm' devouring the petals of the Anglican Rose, vestment by vestment, and seating a presbyter in the 'anointed chair' reserved for the bishopric. The surplice is to

Anglican priests what the ephod was to the first 'ministers of God'. It is the symbolic power of this 'vestment' that gives them the same authority as their Jewish precursors to perform the liturgical rites that the 'chosen' need, to restore them to a 'holy' state, when they happen to sin.

In the anonymous medieval lyric instanced at the outset, apostrophizing Mary of Nazareth, the speaker hails her offspring as a 'rose' deserving even greater reverence for His transcendent 'virtu'. Herrick follows suit in addressing Jesus as 'the Rose of Sharon' in 'To My Saviour', again to pay awed tribute to His holiness.[19] In another pious moment, he elegizes a 'saintly' woman struck down in her prime as a 'rose' that sickens' and 'dies', smiling to the last,[20] though his Epicurean predilections as a Cavalier poet are just as clear in 'To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time', discussed later.

However ancient the precedent, the Pauline inspiration behind the floral and vermicular typology of sacred poetry reveals itself at its fullest only in Milton's re-visitation of the Fall. In *Paradise Lost*, he refers to Eve as the 'fairest . . . Flow'r' of Eden' (IX, 432).[21] Adam evidently views her in the same light. When Eve leaves his side, insistent in her claim that the power of her own virtue will protect her, he weaves a rose-garland to mark her triumphal return, only to drop it, aghast, as he surmises her 'fatal Trespass', espying the 'faded roses shed' that attest to her fallen state – 'defac't, deflower'd and now to Death devote' (IX, 888–901). At another point, Adam refers to the Serpent, Eve's 'deflowerer', as 'that false worm' (IX, 1068). In that passage, it is clear that Milton takes his inspiration from St Paul's likening of spiritual corruption to the loss of virginity, in 2 Corinthians 11:2–4. He continues in this Pauline vein with his vision not only on the prurient effects of the Serpent's infernal 'seduction' (IX, 996–1067), as Adam and Eve experience lust for the first time, but also on the mental discord they experience consequent to their fall into carnality. In his depiction of their embattled faculties (IX, 1119–31), Milton reveals the origins of the 'war-in-the members' that Paul laments in Romans 7:2, where he confesses to being a victim, himself, to the eternal conflict between the spiritual and fleshly urges that have raged since the Fall.

The Fall-attesting 'worm' stays just as firmly entrenched as the 'rose' it stalks, in the Pauline canon, down to the last decades of the eighteenth century. Predictably, both tropes lose ground to classical analogs during the Restoration era, when the Epicureans take possession of the 'garden'. The rose, when it appears in Restoration poetry, typically signifies physical beauty and invites its enjoyment. The worm, similarly, loses its mythic aura, and becomes just a morbid image.

Not that the legacy of St Paul disappeared even in the age that brought the libertine erotica of Rochester to the fore. Despite the secularizing impact of Neo-Epicurean thought, religious verse did not wither away altogether, during the reign of 'the merry monarch', whose court this libertine wit graced. Nor did the rose and the worm wholly lose their hold as Pauline signifiers. Dryden invokes the 'man-is-a-worm' motif in *Religio Laici* (1682),[22] in order to charge the Deists with an impiety worse than Job's own. If the 'man of Uz' needed to be reminded that not even he is 'holy' enough to judge Jehovah, these Neo-Epicurean upstarts deserve humbling for worse presumption. Man, as a 'poor worm' cannot dictate 'the terms of peace' or Grace (ll. 93–94). Who gives the Deist the right to appoint himself 'justice in the last appeal' (l. 95), dismissing the terrors of the Last Judgment, in rebellion against Jehovah? In the same passage, Dryden also recalls the aforementioned Pauline parallel to the vermicular conceit Bildad uses to humble Job, in Romans 9:20: 'Nay but, O Man, who art thou that repliest against God?'. Dryden's reiteration of Paul's Jobian rhetoric is prefaced by a critique of the Deist denial of 'election', based on the 'rational' premise that a 'perfect' God must dispense 'impartial' justice. He stops short, however, of equating the 'easy god' of the Deists (l. 96) with the easier gods of Epicurus. He is no less oblique, similarly, in his case against the proponents of Deism as Epicurean pretenders to religion – the latest of the 'false apostles' St Paul warns against in 2 Corinthians. Dryden's reductive allusion to the Epicurean skeptic as a mere 'worm', in the spirit of *Job* and *Romans*, was to set a lasting precedent. In *Night Thoughts*, Young invokes the same Jobian 'conceit' to humble the Neo-Epicureans of his own day. Man is but a 'poor, abject worm' (VII, l. 668). If 'erect in stature', he is 'prone in appetite' (VII, l. 1196). Consequently, he who panders to the 'Patrons of Pleasure . . . , / Lovers of Argument . . . , / Boasters of Liberty', courts damnation, as they do. This is the fate Lorenzo is doomed to suffer unless he heeds his mentor's plea: 'this black fellowship renounce . . . . / Renounce St. Evremont, and read St. Paul' (VII, ll. 1197–219).

Nor should it be forgotten that Dryden depicts Lucifer (whom he refuses to call 'Satan') as an Epicurean casuist, in his adaptation of Milton's vision of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*. In Act !V, scene ii of *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (1677),[23] featuring Eve's fateful encounter with Lucifer, the fallen archangel argues that even the 'gods' sprang from Nature, though, being more 'refined' in design than that of the lower orders of being, they began their existence in human form, and soon realized their divine potential. Eve's diabolical tutor clinches his argument with 'proof' of the 'virtue' of the Fruit, by instancing his own elevation from mere reptile to the comely human form she sees before her. He contends, further, that his unscathed state proves that the 'gods' (the sly plural supplanting Jehovah with the grandly indifferent deities of Epicurus) are not vengeful towards those who rise above their 'native lot' (IV, ii, 16). Heaven may, indeed, 'applaud the dauntless virtue' of the aspirant who quests for godhead.

Like *Religio Laici*, Dryden's vision of the Fall affirms the truth of revealed doctrine against the claims of the 'natural' theology the Deists uphold, viewing the religion of the latter as an Epicurean variation on the antinomian 'gospel' of the Devil. But *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* goes farther, unraveling the scriptural basis for this critique of Deism, which *Religio Laici* leaves undisclosed in its Horatian bid to reason the sceptic into faith. In adapting *Paradise Lost* for the Restoration stage, Dryden had to confront First Things in all their intractably 'marvelous' detail. Nonetheless, his account of the Fall deviates further from the Mosaic one than that of his Puritan compeer. Milton builds grandly on his Judaic *ur*-text, though he reveals Satan as the force behind the Serpent's powers of speech and reasoning. Dryden is less concessive to Moses on this point. As an Aristotelian poet, committed to 'probability', he denies the Serpent any agency beyond the powers of a reptile, and lays the blame for the 'beguiling' of Eve squarely on Lucifer. In this version of the story of the Fall, the 'arch fiend; disdains, unlike his Miltonic counterpart, to ventriloquize through the vocal cords of the lowly brute in whose coils he had been forced to conceal himself from the angelic sentries posted at the four corners of Eden.

Moreover, not content merely with 'naturalizing' the Serpent that Moses claims to be 'more subtil' than any beast of the field' (in Genesis 3:1), Dryden 'humanizes' the Devil, depicting him as the primordial 'libertine', both in the erotic and 'free thinking' senses of the term. Just before the temptation-scene in *The State of Innocence* (III, i, ll. 92–95), this passion-driven fiend confesses to being enamored of Eve. He regrets his inability, however, to 'enjoy and blast her in the act of love'. In that passage, Dryden hints at the demonic origins of Epicureanism, by drawing attention to Lucifer's libidinous energy. This demon harbors, as Blake would have read it, a 'dark secret love' for Eve.

It is also noteworthy that Dryden's neoclassical revision of the Edenic matter of *Paradise Lost*, reveal parallels between Lucifer's ontology and the Epicurean cosmology of Lucretius, embodied in *De Rerum Natura*. This was a work with which Dryden was evidently familiar long before he published his translation of a key excerpt from it in 1685.[24]This 'hint' of the diabolical origins of Epicureanism was destined to bear strange fruit, once it took root in the mythic imagination of Blake, who turns Dryden's 'metaphrase' into its antiphrastic or 'deconstructive' *alter*. Though, as a Christian, he rejects Epicurus's atomist cosmology, Blake endorses this pagan philosopher's hedonist doctrine, unraveling its essence in the teachings of Lucifer, whom he envisions as the apostle of gratified desire. Blake's Devil reveals his messianic role in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but the same Epicurean demonology manifests itself obliquely in every piece of 'rose lore' this poet composed, as an advocate of 'sensual improvement', at the expense of the Law.

The liberties Dryden takes with the story of the Fall are warranted in view of the fact that he uses them to vindicate faith against the claims of reason – as understood by a Neo-Epicurean age that preferred natural revelation to scriptural. In *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, building on Miltonic hints, he reveals that Eve falls because of a deist reliance on the senses and inference, ignoring revealed knowledge. Dryden's heroine reasons that if eating the Fruit can turn a mere reptile into a man, and the creature survives this theft, then the Tree might well hold the secret of Good, instead of Evil (IV, ii, 124–29). All she needs is the courage to partake of the 'meat' of the gods (as Lucifer calls it (IV, ii, 67) to become one of them. Besides, the very allure of the Fruit confirms its 'virtue'. What titillates the senses must be 'good', and invites enjoyment. What is natural cannot be sinful. What the gods enjoy, mortals may also, if they dare. But the Fall proves the antinomian 'dissenter' to be the Devil's dupe, and the theological claims of 'natural revelation' to be false.

Such a 'glossing' of the story of the Fall lends itself to a powerful indictment of the Epicurean reasoning that Deists espouse. Nonetheless, Dryden makes his case at the expense of the Serpent. He chooses to deny the nascent evil that Milton attributes to it, as a Calvinist obliged to harmonize Moses's depiction of its role with that of St Paul, who envisions the Serpent as the first of the 'false apostles'. The 'subtlest beast of the field' re-emerges in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, its demonic potential undiminished, its 'head well-stored with subtle wiles' (IX, 184). Dryden, in contrast, 'de-mystifies' the Serpent. He refuses to endow it with qualities that 'exceed the conceived possibility of nature' – as Hobbes defines the Aristotelian dictum of 'probability', in his *Answer to Davenant's Preface to Gondibert* (1650).[25] In *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, the Serpent is simply an enormous snake, no more 'nocent' than any other beast. It is hardly the 'false worm' Milton depicts it as. This naturalizing tactic, on Dryden's part, helps explain why there is no overt instance of vermicular imagery in his version. It is Lucifer himself, not some 'false Worm', who takes on the vengeful task of 'blast[ing] the flowers and fruits' of Paradise (IV, ii, 1–5), to spite Jehovah, and turn the progenitors of the human race into fellow-rebels, with the gender-disempowered Eve as his first disciple.

If vermicular imagery is notably absent, in Dryden's neoclassical dramatization of *Paradise Lost*, its floral counterpart is just as undeniably present. Still, its deployment stands in stark contrast to that of Milton's Pauline prudery. A festooning of roses marks the moment of Eve's deflowering, in *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*. This is an event Milton 'fudges', understandably, because he subscribes to the absurd doctrine of sex in the 'state of innocence' as being wholly free of lust – a sin he envisions as the first effect of the Fall. But Dryden is not so staunchly Pauline as to view sexuality as a necessary evil at best. He takes the covertly Epicurean view that sex becomes 'tainted' only when over-indulged, like any other appetite. His hero turns Devil's disciple not for wishing to gratify his desires, but for enslaving himself to them. Dryden's Adam errs in viewing sensual satiety as an end in itself, justifying his error with the witty quip: 'Where appetites are giv'n, what sin to taste?' (V, i, l. 78): He ends with the *carpe diem* codicil that if Death is indeed nigh, they must 'to joyes make hast[e]', and refuse to be 'seized' till their 'pleasure's past', having 'drain'd life' to the lees (V, i, l. 90).

The mortalist gospel Adam preaches, in Dryden's *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, hailing sensual satiety as the highest good, provides the mythic rationale for Hobbes's Neo-Epicurean vision of the State of Nature. Dryden hints that the 'natural revelation' upon which the Deists set so much store (instead of 'privileging' the Word), is the Devil's gospel, not God's. His revision of the Edenic myth confirms that, for all his differences with Milton, he, too, views the Fall through a Pauline 'lens'. Dryden's Lucifer crowns his triumph by proving his deadly 'breath' to be 'poys'nous' enough to 'blast' not just the 'immortal flowers and fruit' of Paradise, but the 'virgin' mind itself, in his 'seduction' of Eve, and through her, of Adam. Only Raphael can break this demon's Epicurean spell, and make the guilty pair recognize their fatal error of disobedience, misled by the 'testimony' of the senses. Dryden's re-visitation of the Fall suggests that Eve was as much 'beguiled' by the appetizing spectacle of the Forbidden Tree, and a secret desire for knowledge, with 'gender-equity' in mind, as by the Serpent's casuistry. Milton de-emphasizes this innate urge so as to magnify Satan's role as tempter, as the external agent who persuades her of the 'virtues' of the Forbidden Fruit. This is a doctrinal stance Dryden rejects, presumably because he found Moses' version psychologically more plausible. In Genesis 3:5, just after the brief exchange between the Serpent and Eve, Moses affirms that 'when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.' Here, Eve's transgression seems to owe as much to the appetizing spectacle of the Tree, and her desire for knowledge (subjective factors) as to the influence of the Serpent.

The demonology Dryden constructs in his revision of the Fall-myth, bringing out the Epicurean potential of both the Mosaic and Miltonic versions, manifestly inspired Blake, though his own Lucifer calls for an 'improvement in sensual enjoyment', in defiance of the flesh-abasing deity Genesis exalts and 'Nobodaddy' reviles. This Romantic apologist for 'infernal' wisdom may have denounced Nathaniel Lee for claiming that Dryden's 'poco pen' rhymes were an improvement on Milton's blank verse, in his *Public Address* (*E* 581). Nonetheless, he could not help paying homage to his Restoration forerunner for revealing Lucifer as the archetypal proponent of the Epicurean doctrine of pleasure, at the expense of the Law. In Epicurus's philosophy, the gods have no regulatory function, in the Devil's, as Blake conceives it, Jehovah should not have one, either!

Blake's debt to Dryden is evident not only in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* but also in the much earlier *Tiriel* (1789), though he turns it all to antiphrastic purpose – sanctifying the Devil and demonizing the 'jealous' god of the Jews whom Paul views with 'fear and trembling' as the controlling figure in the Trinity. In *Tiriel*, the 'immortal flowers and fruit' of Eden are 'blasted' by the 'poys'nous' breath not of Lucifer but of the 'fallen' deity of Judaism. In this revision of the story of the Fall, it is a masked Jehovah who turns 'subtle as a serpent in a paradise, / Consuming all[,] both flowers & fruit' (*E* 282).

The intertextually rationalized analysis, offered above, of the demonology of *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, shows whence Blake derived his own, subversive though his purpose may have been. *Tiriel* focuses not on Lucifer, whom it tacitly exonerates, but on Jehovah, depicting him as the sadistic spirit that takes possession of, or *becomes*, the Serpent, in order to contrive the predestined Fall. Having demonized the God of Moses, and of St Paul, whom Milton sought to 'justify', Blake follows up on this early re-visitation of the Fall with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where he depicts Lucifer as a 'co-messiah', through an antinomian demonology that re-envisions Dryden's 'Epicurean' fiend as the 'angel of light' St Paul cannot imagine Satan ever becoming again, in 2 Corinthians 11:14.

However, there were other champions of the 'code of holiness' closer to Blake's own time than Dryden, and less susceptible to deconstructive 'misreading' than *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*. The resurgence of the Pauline tradition, with the decline of the Neo-Epicurean movement after the Restoration, is evident enough. A noteworthy Augustan instance of Pauline 'rose lore' is the passage in Young's *Night Thoughts* (II, l. 240) that lashes out at the aging but still unrepentant rake 'for whom the winter-rose must blow' – a salubrious twist on the message of Rochester's 'The Disabled Debauchee' (1680).[26] At another point, Young echoes Dryden's *Religio Laici*, reaffirming his predecessor's Jobian notion that Man is a mere 'worm' from Jehovah's viewpoint (IX, l. 1741). A second passage that merits attention, occurring much earlier (VII, 1189–95), blames the Fall that reduced Man to a 'worm' on the 'Sorceries of Sense', which Young links to 'the Serpent', not just to explain how it duped Eve, but to unravel the demonic basis of the Epicurean philosophy that the sensual Lorenzo, as one of Albion's 'silken' sons has adopted, in joining the 'dark fellowship' of St Evremond – Satan's 'subtlest' apostle. This elliptical reminder of our 'baseness' as fallen creatures tainted with the mark of the Serpent, totally at the mercy of a God as capable of wrath as of pity, stands in stark contrast to the teleological optimism of *Night I* (125–34). There, the speaker envisions the human soul as a larval entity, which, like a cocooned caterpillar, is destined, after 'Strong Death . . . / This gross impediment of clay remove[s]', to burst the 'azure shell' of the 'Mundane Egg' that confines us to earthly existence, in a glorious rebirth. In envisioning the paradox of the 'life of gods' that awaits this feeble, tainted creature in the hereafter, Young predictably invokes the Pauline proviso that, other than the Elect, only the penitent will be redeemed as beneficiaries of the Atonement.

Among the other noteworthy instances of Pauline typology in the sermonic verse of the Augustans, three stand out – Isaac Watts's 'The Rose' (1715),[27] a soliloquy that exalts celibacy, invoking the mystique St Paul invested on the virgin (in 1 Corinthians 7: 1–35), the 'mad' poems in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748),[28] in one of which his 'soiled' heroine pictures herself as a worm-tainted rose, and William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1780),[29]which pays tribute to a 'rose' who renounces her lover, without protest, for the suitor her father favors. In each of these exponents of 'rose lore', the Pauline 'code of holiness' is reaffirmed at the expense of its Epicurean contrary, privileging the spirit against the body, divine law against natural impulse. What is chiefly of interest in Watts's piece, 'The Rose' is his idealization of a young maiden who takes on the Epicureans by turning their argument against them, with the sermonic pointer that if beauty must yield to age, and the body to death, it is wiser to heed the Pauline call to holiness than to commit to the transient pleasures of the flesh. She reasons that the 'scent' of a 'good name' will outlast the stench of a worm-infested grave, confident that her 'virtue' will be rewarded both in this world and the next. Thus does she renounce, like a true disciple of St Paul, the 'things of the world' for the 'things of the Lord', in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 8:34.

Richardson's heroine moralizes, naturally enough, in a different vein, since it is the loss of her 'flower' to an 'uncomely man' (to recall 1 Corinthians 7:23–26) that occasions the scripturally redolent lamentation she attaches to her letter in *Paper VII* of *Clarissa*.[30] Curiously, she adopts the image Shakespeare invoked, in *Twelfth Night* (II, iv, 112–14), to depict the bloom-sapping effects of unfulfilled desire, though with a different predication in mind. Richardson's heroine compares her plight to that of a 'damask rose' in the sear, like her Shakespearean counterpart, but blames her state on the spiritual effects of rape. Clarissa reduces her 'uncomely' lover, metonymically, to a 'greedy caterpillar' (a hairy, phallus-like creature) that preyed upon the 'fair leaf' of her 'virgin fame [/frame]' However unconsciously, her figure of speech recalls the predicament of her counterpart in 1 Corinthians, and she laments the despoiling as much of the 'flower of her age', as of her reputation. For she had kept both body and soul 'holy', till that fateful night, having taken to heart the urgings of St Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:34.

Not to be outdone by Richardson, who views his heroine as the victim of patriarchal tyranny, Hayley pays pointed homage to a 'rose' who shows up Richardson's 'wayward' heroine by jilting her lover for the suitor her father has chosen for her. This filial submission is not without its cost, with the author conceding that it takes the intervention of 'pitying angels' to drive the spleen-sprung 'worm' from her 'virgin mind', in Canto V (ll. 572–602) of *The Triumphs of Temper*. His inadvertent slip, in conceding the psychic consequences of obedience in matters of the heart notwithstanding, Hayley presents a sententiously Pauline rebuttal to the Epicurean drift and Milton-mocking 'machinery' of *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope's vestal heroine has prurient dreams, and cannot count on her sylphs to protect her from vengeful lovers, let alone the gnome that descends Satan-like into her Spleen to claim her. The fate of Hayley's 'rose' differs not only from that of the dubious virgin Pope chides, and the deflowered damsel Richardson mourns, but that of Eve, as well. The angels may have been unable to prevent the Fall, but they are quite equal to the task of routing the 'devil' that haunts the psyche of a pious virgin compelled to give up her lover at her father's behest. In this reappraisal of the 'war in the members' that St Paul laments in Romans 7:23, and Milton in *Paradise Lost*, Hayley depicts holiness as the virtuous soul's 'angelic' defense against the 'humours' that thwarted desire unleashes upon the mind, which like Eden before the Fall, as Milton put it, was 'calm region once' (*PL* IX, l. 1125). Moreover, in lauding this maiden's meek submission to her father's will, Hayley re-affirms the Judaic tenet of obedience enshrined in the epistles of St Paul – Ephesians and 1 Timothy in particular, singled out in the previous chapter for their role in the codification of the rules of moral conduct Christians must follow.

Chapter 3

Epicurus, and the Neoclassical Adaptation of his Doctrine of Pleasure

The foregoing discussion has shown how the poetic disciples of St Paul defend his code of holiness, and give fresh impetus to the battle he had begun against the Epicurean 'philosophers'– a battle, which figures so prominently in Acts 17. In that confrontation, the apostle takes such mockers of Jesus and the Resurrection to task for their 'superstitious' practices, and reveals their 'Unknown God' as none other than the deity Christians worship. The chronicler interjects that the Epicurean philosophers who 'took hold' of Paul and 'brought him to the Areopagus', far from being seekers after truth, 'spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new', and called him a 'babbler' because his 'doctrines' seem 'strange' to them. St Paul does not upbraid the Epicureans for their espousal of pleasure, though he obviously views them as 'sinners', who practiced idolatry and led dissipated lives, which they must now repent, since the time of 'ignorance' is at an end, and the day nigh when the world will be 'judge[d] … by that man [Jesus, whom Jehovah] hath raised … from the dead' (Acts 17:30–31). The same 'sinners' were soon to come under more direct fire. Church attacks, from the Middle Ages onwards, as Panichas points out, came to center on the hedonist element in Epicurus' philosophy, branding his followers as voluptuaries.[31]

The tendency to turn Epicurus' apology for sensual enjoyment into a defense of debauchery became all the more marked during the Restoration era, when libertine wits defiantly repudiated the body-debasing 'spirituality' of St Paul's Puritan legions under Calvin. Sneering at them for their saintly affectations, these 'new-age' Epicureans chose to flaunt their hedonist counter-claims, inspired by Hobbes's premise, in *Leviathan*,[32] that the soul, like the body, is a 'corporeal' entity. As apostates and scorners of 'divine' law, affirming a secular, or at best latitudinarian, 'world view', these agnostics chose even to ignore the Christian tenet Hobbes invokes to renovate this Epicurean notion, when he cites St Paul on the in-dwelling 'spiritual body' destined to 'rise up' with the Resurrection.[33] Restoration heirs of the Cavalier poets, in building on the case their forebears first made for turning Epicurus' apology for hedonism into a vindication of a life of sensual excess, naturally found Hobbes' view of the State of Nature congenial to their libertine philosophy, since he reduces 'natural' man, in *De Cive*,[34] to an egotistic creature whose appetite (whether for power, possession or pleasure) is insatiable. The cult of the *honette homme* that they espoused begins and ends with the notion that pleasure consists in the egotistic gratification of appetite, especially the sexual, and that the prohibitions that stand in the way of it are not only unnatural, but also hypocritical.

The basis of the puritan-mocking, libertine 'misreading' of Epicurus' minimalist apology for pleasure, instanced in the foregoing, might lie in three crucial passages that affirm gratification as the natural predicate of desire. The first, in a letter addressed to Menoeceus, promotes pleasure as the highest good, declaring that it is the 'beginning and end of the blessed life'.[35] The second claims, in defense of the appetites, that one must 'obey' Nature and not 'violate' her (109) .The third asserts that there is nothing wrong with indulging one's sexual appetite, as long as it causes no harm (115).

Restoration wits with libertine proclivities, endorsing Hobbes's view of 'natural' man as an egotistic creature in endless pursuit of 'glory' and 'sensual' pleasure, in Chapter 1 of *De Cive*,[36] understandably chose to forget that in the aforementioned letter to his disciple, the case Epicurus makes for pleasure ends on a cautionary note, warning that it is not 'continuous drinking and reveling, nor the satisfaction of lusts' that 'produce a pleasant life', but mental repose – a state that requires only the contingent relief of any appetite whose absolute denial could cause distress or 'pain'.[37] It was his defense of gratified desire against the appetite-denying rationalism of the Stoics that Epicurus's neo-classical heirs read as his motto, ignoring his proviso that the more one indulges any appetite the less pleasure it brings. Chernaik is insightful on the 'modified' form of Epicureanism that Rochester and his ilk came to favor, in justifying their libertine disregard for sexual taboos and religious proscription.[38] But, though he rightly emphasizes the primacy of appetite in Hobbes's philosophy, this critic disregards other classical influences in the transformation of Epicureanism by Restoration 'wits'.

Returning to the fray between the Cavalier poets and the Puritans, with an Epicurean defense of sexual license, Restoration readers appropriated the *Satyricon,* which, as Johanna Stuckey claims, 'every educated man' knew and found useful to cite. She attributes the popularity of this work chiefly to St Evremond, whose view of its author, Petronius, as the archetypal 'honette homme', his English disciples heartily endorsed.[39]In view of the paradigmatic status 'the Arbiter' enjoyed in an era little given to censorial discourse, his bawdy masterpiece soon became the rake's primer. Reba Willcoxon lends support to this surmise in instancing Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment', as a much-admired and often-imitated piece of erotica that draws on *The Satyricon* as a precedent for the libertinism of the Restoration era.[40] She neglects to note, however, that this poem tinctures its Neo-Epicurean candor with a wry admission of the inverse ratio between desire and its gratification, with age and disease taking their merciless toll on phallic prowess.

Chapter 4

Typology in the Epicurean Counter-Tradition

Blake's Epicurean forerunners may now be considered in more detail. In the Neo-Epicurean canon, the rose (or other floral trope) appearing in an erotic context comes to signify nubile beauty as the most delectable of Nature's gifts, to be plucked and enjoyed while it blooms. The poets who exemplify this 'counter-tradition' are candidly erotic, and invest in a 'rose lore' that dispenses with moral absolutes altogether in the celebration of gratified desire. In that sense, they are quite unlike their Neo-Platonic precursors, who follow de Lorris (the author of the celebrated *Roman de la Rose*) in promoting 'courtly love' as an idealized alternative to the conjugal norm, by paying lip-service to chastity while laying adulterous siege to it, as C. S. Lewis characterizes their case.[41]Two Cavalier exponents of Neo-Epicurean 'libertinage' are Waller's 'Go Lovely Rose', in which a pining lover begs his mistress not to 'waste' herself and him,[42]and Herrick's 'To the Virgins [,] To Make Much of Time', with its famous 'Gather ye rosebuds, while you may' opening, which makes an unabashed case for promiscuity as a natural state that gives way to chastity only after marriage.[43]

A Restoration exponent Blake would have admired is Rochester's 'Song' – a mock-pastoral that unmasks a self-proclaimed paragon of virtue called Chloris.[44] Her chaste airs prove to conceal the repressed libido of a maiden who keeps herself 'pure' not because she values 'the things of the Lord' (to recall St Paul's characterization of the virgin in 1 Corinthians 7:34) but to keep up her value in the marriage-market, covetous as she is for the 'things of the world' that elude a woman of her humble station. In this sardonic piece, the 'rose' gives way to a floral trope of classical origin. Rochester's handling of Chloris' erotic dream gives short shrift to Pauline mores. Unlike her counterpart in *The Rape of the Lock*, this coy maiden loses more than hair to one of her 'love-convicted swains', albeit in a dream. She awakens to find a pet-pig for bedfellow, as Bellinda her lapdog, after her own imaginary tryst, in Pope's more decorous sequel. In her dream-state, Chloris follows a lover to ‘Flora’s Cave’ to rescue the ‘bosom-pig’ that he alleges to have espied ‘hanging from its gate’, and pays dearly for her credulity. She awakens ‘frigging’, though gratified to find her hymen intact, her thumb having officiated for the organ she dreads but craves. Virginity is neither the cause nor the consequence of ‘holiness’, as Rochester shows – a premise Blake was to reiterate.

Of even greater interest, among the pieces of erotica attributed to Rochester, is ‘The Fall’,[45] which, though it does not resort overtly to floral or vermicular imagery, warrants attention for its Epicurean appropriation of the Eden-myth, putting into dialectical perspective ‘sensual enjoyment’ before and after the loss of Paradise. Blake would have viewed this polemical lyric as a ‘sublime’ revision of Genesis, since it blames Selfhood, rather than the Serpent, for the tainting of sex-relations. Indeed, he would probably have construed Rochester as implying that Satan was actually just a personification of Selfhood, which is the state into which Adam and Eve fell. He would, in any case, have endorsed Rochester’s view that the ‘Satanic’ awakening of the ego, the ‘false worm’ within, turned sex into the means not of mutual satiety but of ‘sexual politics’, with the descent into the ‘state of nature’ Hobbes envisioned.

Whatever their variations on the ‘defloration’ motif, Caroline and Restoration poets set a lasting precedent in their defense of gratified desire, spurning ‘holiness’. When the rose resurfaces as a trope in eighteenth-century poetry, its semantic affiliations remain just as decidedly Epicurean in ‘profane’ contexts as they are Pauline in ‘sacred’ ones. Predictably, this is also true of the worm. If Watts, Richardson, Young, and Hayley re-appropriate the rose and the worm as Pauline signifiers, Pope and Prior do so with the contrary aim of reviving the Epicurean counter-tradition. These Neo-Epicurean proselytes scorn the Pauline ‘call to holiness’, viewing the denial of lust as both hypocritical and unnatural, like their Cavalier forerunners. In *The Rape of the Lock* (IV, ll. 147–58), Belinda may reproach herself for not hiding her charms in a cloister instead of flaunting them in court, but the price she pays for her vanity can hardly compare with the toll chastity exacts from nuns, who languish like ‘roses that in deserts bloom and die’.[46]She is putting her ‘pathetic simile’ to histrionic use, unlike the speaker in Gray’s *Elegy*, who transfigures the same image to mourn the uncelebrated glory of the humbly born, doomed to ‘fade unseen’. Pope’s pretender to virtue soon divulges the true cause of her wrath (IV, ll. 175–76). She would have forgiven her assailant had he been ‘content to seize hairs/ Less in sight, or any hairs but these’ – pubic hairs included, presumably!

Pope's Belinda is at least in the literal sense a virgin, however questionable her 'virtue', but her bucolic counterpart, Rose, in Prior's 'The True Maid',[47] is a 'poseur' in an even more blatant sense. She rejects the advances of an importunate lover with the claim that she would 'surely die' if she lost her virginity before wedlock, in a cryptic reminder of St Paul's warning (in Romans 6:23) that 'the wages of sin is death'. However, the beau she hopes to entrap into marriage has espied the 'sick' fit she had had the 'night' before, and refuses to play Joseph, urging her, instead, to own up to her plight, and settle for being an *honette femme*, 'blown' as her bloom might be.

Chapter 5

Blake 'Contraries', and the Evolution of his Visionary Epicureanism

It should be obvious to any reader that each of the instances of Epicurean erotica cited in the previous chapter promotes the cause of gratified desire, taking a dim view not only of the cankered 'rose' that pretends to virtue, but also of her virginal counterpart – for being just as hypocritical. This urging of the *honette* acceptance of the carnal, often with the *carpe diem* codicil thrown in, typifies the Neo-Epicurean reaction to the vestal ideal of the Pauline faction. In confronting the two warring 'contraries'. Blake endorses the 'impious' Neo-Epicurean avowal of the carnal, but reinstates the soul. Thus, he makes evangelical capital of the case for gratified desire, in the wake of Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*. However, Blake takes out his precursor's Pauline stops, in making his own case for Christian 'Epicurism'. His 'corrections' were to provide the basis for a messianic demonology that reveals Lucifer as the originator of the Epicurean doctrine of appetitive satiety. This visionary intimation gets an explicit airing only in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but it is tacitly present as a *leitmotif* in every piece of 'rose lore' he composed subsequent to 1790 – the year he began engraving that 'manifesto' text.

There are no explicit remarks on Epicureanism in Blake's early prose. The marginalia to *The Advancement of Learning* are of interest for accusing Bacon of adopting and perpetuating the 'atheist' cosmology of Epicurus. But these remarks appear in a copy of an edition of Bacon's *Essays* published no earlier than 1798. By then, Blake had already come to terms with Epicureanism as a prophet committed to purging Christianity of Pauline 'error'. Though he may have denounced Epicurus' materialism, he seems to have found this pagan's stand on sensual enjoyment much to his taste. Blake's emergence as a Christian Epicurean is traceable to *An Island in the Moon* (c. 1784–1785), and his marginalia on Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (c. 1788). The first pokes fun at the 'stock' Epicurean and his equally uninspired host, 'Steelyard the Law-Giver' – the parodic counterpart of St Paul, the Christian 'law-giver'. The second hails Lavater for 'subliming' the Christian essence of 'Epicurism', with reservations on the Pauline limits he places on 'sensual enjoyments'.

An Island in the Moon is not just a piece of memorabilia making light-hearted fun of the circle Blake kept in London prior to his Felpham phase. It is also a work of developmental interest. Some of its lyrics were later incorporated in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and one of them, 'Hail Matrimony' (*E* 460), though never published, certainly merits a glance. Its cynical parody of the Hail Mary invocation, so central to Catholic piety, smacks of Rochester's influence – 'Against Marriage' coming especially to mind.[49] In his own similarly irreverent 'squib' on the theme, Blake suggests that marriage, sanctified by St Paul as the 'holy' alternative to 'fornication', can become a cloak for illicit love. 'Hail Matrimony' specifically targets Mary of Nazareth, for claiming that her pregnancy owed to 'no man' (Luke 1:34ff). It is hardly surprising that in *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake pointedly hails Mary's *honette* counterpart, Oothoon, as a corrective to the myth of the 'Immaculate Conception'.

Even more significant, for the purposes of this study, is the fact that in its own quaint way, *An Island in the Moon* reveals Blake taking critical stock both of Pauline prelates and their adversaries – the disciples of Epicurus who pride themselves on their apostasy. This text anatomizes the prevailing 'lunacies' of the era, assigning prominent roles both to Suction the Epicurean and Steelyard the Pauline 'Lawgiver'. The two men virtually ignore each other, as if mutual tolerance is the best they can manage, which is presumably just as true of the opposed schools of thought they represent. The first calls for rum (*E* 453), the second for the salutary effect of Young's Pauline sermonry at its most somber – the Doomsday vision of *Night Thoughts* (*E* 456).

Blake mentions Suction first among the 'three Philosophers' that 'dwell' 'in this Island' in the Moon, the other two being 'Quid the Cynic' and 'Sipsop the Pythagorean', referring to their 'sects' as being 'out of date' but entrenched nonetheless – 'the things still remain, and the vanities are the same' (*E* 449). Evidently, Blake views latter-day Epicureans as being no more enlightened than their Graeco-Roman precursors, though he concedes that this is just as true of the Cynics and the Pythagoreans. Suction comes across as an appetite-driven voluptuary, who boasts that he trusts only his 'feelings' (*E* 454). His hedonistic stance and contempt for reason dub him a disciple of Rochester. Suction has evidently taken to heart the Neo-Epicurean proselytizing of *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind*.[50] In this seminal tract, his misanthropic mentor claims that animals, led only by instinct and the need to satiate their appetites, are both wiser and nobler than Man – a depraved, Hobbesian creature that pretends to reason but defers to custom, and acts instinctively only out of spite. However, like the speaker in Rochester's 'To the Postboy',[51] Suction does have his pensive moments, and is just as purblind as the Epicureans of old. To view the soul merely as an appendage of the body, like other Neo-Epicurean apostates, taking their cue from Hobbes's *Leviathan*,[51] is to envision Man as little more than a sentient 'pump' designed to 'suck' life's pleasures dry before Death claims it. This is what Suction believes, like Dryden's Adam in his moment of despair, to recall a crucial passage in *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man* (V, i, ll. 78–90).

Nonetheless, those who believe only in the body, as Suction, in his apostasy does, are worse off than those who subscribe to St Paul's flesh-abasing spirituality. Neo-Epicureans are fools to reject the Gospel *in toto*. Blake may not share the Pauline distaste that Dryden displays for Epicureanism in *Religio Laici* and *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, or Young, for that matter, in *Night Thoughts*, but he obviously agrees with Lavater, that only the Christian Epicurean can hope to enjoy life's pleasures without anxiety. When Suction is not engaged in revelry or its vindication, he cannot help gazing at the dimming candle before him, drawn, moth like, to its dying flame (*E* 450). Having chosen to reject the afterlife, despite being privy to revealed doctrine that affirms it, he is just as susceptible to morbid fits as his pagan counterparts must have been, because their master considered the soul to be no less perishable than the body it animates. In Dryden's rendition of a crucial passage from *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius cannot help admitting that the fear of death refuses to be reasoned away, since every soul must perish, including that of Epicurus himself, turning him into insentient atoms, whose re-animation, if it occurred, would only bring a new soul into existence instead of re-incarnating him.[52]The thought of death as oblivion cannot console even the wretched, since they yearn to be rid not of life but of the afflictions that make it painful. Suction's uncritical enthusiasm for a pagan creed that even in the reconstituted form it took in the Neo-Epicureanism of Hobbes, and its endorsement in Rochester's *Satyr against Reason and Mankind*, shows that 'the old vanities' indeed remain (as Blake complains in the opening of *An Island in the Moon*). This apostate revival of a pagan creed can only make the pursuit of sensual enjoyment a manic and ultimately morbid one.

Steelyard the Law Giver has his own foibles, like Suction the Epicurean, and hardly qualifies as a formidable spokesman for Pauline values. He represents a clergy in retreat, more at ease hosting a *salon* for motley wits than in leading his 'besotted' parishioners in prayer. Genial as he is, however, he admits bitterly to apathy over the 'parish business', and sees the Double Elephant as a den of iniquity, tainting the souls in his charge (*E* 446–47). He also inflicts his taste for 'Graveyard Poetry' on his guests, and he alone warms to Miss Gittipin for putting the company 'in a serious humour' with her song, oblivious of the masochistic burden of its Pauline-inspired plea: 'Leave, O leave [me] to my sorrows, / Here I'll sit & fade away, / Till I fade away, / Till I'm nothing but a spirit, / And I lose this form of clay' (*E* 464). As a minister, however inadequately he fills the shoes of St Paul, he is naturally partial to a song that seems to 'privilege' the spirit over the flesh. Steelyard fails to see the irony in Miss Gittipin's song, making renunciation of worldly and carnal 'things' the choice of one bereft of love, deprived of the one thing that makes life worth living. His purblind response owes to his endorsement of Jerome's morbidly Pauline view that 'happiness is not for us crawling reptiles of the earth' (*E* 456).

The theological issues Blake treats impishly in *An Island in the Moon* assume urgency in his marginalia to *Aphorisms on Man* (*E* 583–601), where he defends 'sensual enjoyment' and liberty in less ambiguous terms. Blake is obviously enthusiastic about Lavater's hedonistic revision of 'Christian philosophy', based upon the claim that 'the most voluptuous of men' may also be 'the most religious' (*E* 584). Lavater deals only digressively with sexual fulfillment. Nonetheless, his attempt to place 'Epicurism' in Christian perspective manifestly stirred Blake as nothing else in the *Aphorisms* appears to have done. The evidence is palpable both in Blake's marginalia and his subsequent work – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, in particular. In those visionary productions, appetite and passion lose their taint; body and soul become partners in the quest for happiness, in the fallen world at the foot of the ruins of Paradise. Lavater's *opus* makes five points that are germane to Blake's visionary adaptation of the Epicurean ethic. The first and most crucial (broached in #366 of the *Aphorisms*) is that far from being inimical to Christian doctrine, pleasure is essential to its spirit – the 'purest religion' being but 'the most refined Epicurism' (*E* 591). The second is the case he makes, in #11 of his *Aphorisms*, for gratified desire, within the constraints of 'Order' (*E* 584). The third is Lavater's defense of 'passion', even in its 'stormy ebullitions' (in #63), which he is more ready to condone than any 'act of cool villainy' (*E* 586). Lavater is, impliedly, making the point that sins springing from an overwhelming impulse, testify to the same 'energy' that manifests itself as 'exuberance'. If, as he affirms, this 'excess' is the definitive trait of the glories of the Creation, the breaching of 'Order' under such circumstances cannot result in an utterly irredeemable act. The fourth point Lavater makes of seminal interest (coming up in #489 of his *Aphorisms*) is that neither Good nor Evil exists in an absolute sense, 'knaves' being as susceptible to virtue as the virtuous to 'knavish' lapses (*E* 594). The fifth is his premise (in #201) that Jesus commands our reverence for His humanity, and not His saintliness, following up on the assertion that honesty does a Christian more credit than 'the affectation of sanctity', which is a 'blotch on the face of piety' (*E* 588).

Blake concedes the five axiomatic notions mentioned above, but with important reservations. How can Lavater take the view, in #489 of his *Aphorisms*, that the human soul is a 'simple' entity, neither wholly Good, nor wholly Evil, but something between? In challenging his mentor thus, Blake pleads the scriptural precedent that Matthew 12:36 sets, for the premise that Man is a 'two-fold being' who attains redemption by 'casting out the evil by the good', meaning that we 'regenerate' through spontaneous acts of humanity, exorcising the Selfood within, that is the true Satan, to become like Jesus, and one with him (*E* 594). This duality, however differently he envisions its role, is a crucial facet also of the theology St Paul constructs around the 'law of sin'. Romans 7:23 laments the 'war' in the 'members' that began with the Fall, the spirit under the banner of Holiness, the flesh under that of Pleasure. Blake is content, at this point, only to refute Lavater's unitary and relativist view of the human soul, paralleling that of Pope, who places Man on the 'isthmus of a middle state', between the angels and the beasts, in his *Essay on Man* (II, ll. 3–18).[53] Blake's dualistic view of the soul was eventually to inspire a far more radical defense of carnal fulfillment than Lavater's. His annotations to *Aphorisms on Man* show that his disagreements are as important as his debts, neither of which can be discounted in the genesis of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In that work, Blake constructs the messianic demonology upon which his subsequent texts build, coming out of Swedenborg's shadow, while parting company, at the same time, with Lavater, who does not, after all, quite dislodge that 'angel of the apocalypse', in defending Energy without conceding its 'infernal' source. Lavater makes no case for the demonic impetus behind the 'ebullitions of passion' that make the gravest sins forgivable, unlike 'act[s] of 'cool villainy' (*E* 586). His 'revelations' fall short of vision for the same reason that Blake's Devil faults Swedenborg's in plate 21 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: he only 'conversed with Angels who are all religious [,] & conversed not with Devils [,] who all hate religion' (*E* 43).

Blake is equally critical of his erstwhile mentor's merely contingent, or 'angelic', defense of pleasure, as being permissible only within the bounds of 'Order', synonymous with, or attributive of, Divine Law. When he declares, in #8 of the *Aphorisms*, that one 'who pursues means of enjoyment contradictory, irreconcilable, and self-destructive is … a sinner', Lavater shows that he endorses the Pauline premise that the enjoyment of 'forbidden' pleasures is the ultimate folly. Blake agrees that 'Sin and destruction of order are the same' (*E* 584), but argues, at a later juncture, that 'Active Evil is better than Passive Good' (*E* 594). The same demurrer re-surfaces in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Jesus himself acted virtuously out of impulse, negating the proscriptive rationale of the Commandments. Like Lucifer, he was impelled by 'energy', though his own led to 'Active Good'– virtue consisting in humane impulses, and not in the denial of desire. Blake even discards Lavater's static notion of Order, calling it the 'outward circumference of Energy' – an elastic 'bound' giving 'the Law' only relative force (*E* 34).

Lavater makes two other points that are noteworthy, not because of their immediate doctrinal interest, but because they inspire digressions that show Blake's emergent preoccupation with the floral and vermicular entities that were to become pivotal to the Epicurean apologetics of his 'rose lore'. The first (articulated in #532 of the *Aphorisms*) concerns 'exuberance' as the defining trait of the more spectacular 'things of Nature', an axiom that sets Blake off into a peroration in which he makes exponential use of the rose and the lily to correct Lavater's aesthetic bias in refusing to call anything that partakes of 'excess' (or irregularity) 'beautiful', contending that it is this very 'defect' (the manifestation of Energy transcending Order), that renders these 'exuberant' portions of the Creation 'sublime' (*E* 595–96).

The second point on which Blake disagrees with Lavater relates to the latter's lapse in presuming that the same God he reveres for befriending all during his time on earth, 'humanizing' a society prone to self-righteous cruelty toward 'transgressors' (*E* 588), is now as remote as the deity Bildad takes Jehovah to be in The Book of Job. This is a premise Blake repudiates vehemently with the reminder that Jesus descended into mortality as a 'worm', to minister to our 'weakness', and continues to be our 'friend', quite unlike the distant and terrible God of Holiness Jesus acknowledges, however half-heartedly as his 'father in heaven' (*E* 599).

Chapter 6

The Antecedents of 'The Sick Rose' in Blake's Canon, and Their Intertextual Import

The preceding chapter brought to a close the discussion of the two 'contraries', Pauline and Epicurean, and of Blake's own initiation as a Christian apologist for 'Epicurism'. However, to understand what he makes of these 'contraries' in 'The Sick Rose', one must take into account not only its extracanonical contexts but also its intracanonical ones. Blake evidently realized that without the authority of his own canon, he could not bring the *signifieds* of the Flower and the Worm in line with his demonology. 'The Sick Rose' invokes its antecedents in rose lore through 'auto-allusive' parallels that increase the semantic load its signifiers carry as 'local effects'. These intracanonical nuances induce the reader to construe this text not as an endorsement of the Pauline axiom that 'the wages of sin is death', but as an Epicurean critique of holiness that affirms the Rose's 'crimson joy', in the ecstatic gratification of desire, as a Luciferian imperative. Simultaneously, Blake calls into question, or places in ironic counterpoint, the deadly curse she incurs for yielding to an 'uncomely' lover, whose 'dark secret love' is hardly likely to sanctify itself through marriage – the sacramental remedy St Paul proposes for such 'fornicatory' lapses, in 1 Corinthians: 1–15. On a deeper level, the 'valorization' of the Epicurean *signifieds* over the Pauline, in 'The Sick Rose', also suggests that, while lamenting the fate of a young woman who submits to, or is forcibly deflowered without the prospect of the 'saving grace' of marriage, Blake is also reproaching Jesus as being ultimately responsible for her predicament. In Chapter 2 of this study, devoted to noteworthy exponents of Pauline typology, evidence was presented not only to show that the rose often served as a masculine trope, but that it had long been the emblem of choice in Christology, as instanced in the medieval lyric apostrophizing Jesus as being even more transcendent in 'virtu' than the woman who 'bar' him, and in Herrick's similarly adulatory eulogy to 'the Rose of Sharon', in 'To my Saviour'. In his deliberately 'androgynous' invocation, Blake invites a second line of exegesis that makes his stricken Rose also a figural reference to Christ as himself a victim, in sacrificing himself to atone for the sins of all humankind. But he also censures Jesus for allowing his own gospel to become tainted by a Judaic 'specter', in upholding Jehovah's Law instead of destroying it. It is only when 'The Sick Rose' is read in the light of its antecedents in Blake's own 'rose lore', invoked through its polysemous resonances, that the expostulatory burden reveals itself, as in a 'palimsestic' text, concealed beneath the femino-centered 'opening' address, as to the identity of the 'auditor' invoked in that poem. Or, to take an analogy from the medieval lyric that began the discussion of the semiology of the Rose in the Pauline tradition, Blake's masterpiece invokes the rose within the rose, though in an Epicurean critique of the Pauline code of holiness the trope had been deployed to perpetuate, by the poetic disciples of the Christian Lawgiver, as Jehovah's foremost 'minister'

References have already been made to *Tiriel* as the first of Blake's poems to bring both floral and vermicular imagery together to 'correct' the Fall-myth. One need hardly labor the point that Tiriel is an alias for Jehovah, in view of the mythic parallels this poet constructs, in his re-visitation of Genesis. What is not quite as obvious is the fact that Blake identifies the God of Genesis with the Serpent (ll. 22–26), insisting that it was He who devolved into that shape, in a cruel fit of holiness, to bring Sin and Death into the world, 'consuming all [,] both flowers and fruits' in the bowers of' 'Har'. The diction and imagery of *Tiriel* may seem reminiscent of *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, but in re-appropriating the 'Matter of Eden', its author puts Dryden's Epicurean demonology to 'contrary' use. This prophetic idyll blames Jehovah for 'poisoning' the flowers and fruits of Paradise, demonizing the archetypal patriarch whose 'dark secret love' for his children made the Fall inevitable. When Tiriel turns 'subtil as a serpent in a paradise fallen' (8, ll. 10–26), Man, too, created in this deity's image, becomes a 'reptile form, / A worm of sixty winters', doomed to serve out his term as a mortal, 'bound beneath the heavens' (*E* 284). The children of Tiriel eventually avenge themselves, their decision to banish him serving only to hasten his 'death'. This is the ultimate killing of the father, but their rebellion and punishment owe also to their recognition that Jehovah was not only the 'demon-deity' who contrived the Fall, but also the law-mongering despoiler of 'true' religion, which is vision as opposed to dogma.

Blake carries the 'demonizing' of Jehovah even farther in 'To Nobodaddy' (*E* 471). There, he envisions this deity as a sadistic deity who wraps His 'words and laws' in such 'obscurity' that His children resort to 'eat[ing] the fruit … from the wily Serpent's jaws', which might as well have been Jehovah's own maw, in their quest for enlightenment.

'The Chapel All of Gold' (*E* 467–67) also foreshadows the visionary matter of his published 'rose lore', in revealing the Judaic origins of the Pauline code of holiness. This *Notebook* piece envisions the same Serpent disgorging its 'venom' on 'the bread and wine' of the Eucharist, to reveal that the Atonement cannot circumvent Jehovah's Will. Judaism, similarly, re-asserts its claim to being the supreme religion, in a foreshadowing of Ezekiel's lament, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*E* 39), over the fulfillment of David's prophecy that all nations would one day kneel to Jehovah. The spread of Christianity to the regions this Jewish crusader did not live to bring under Jehovah's subjection, served only to complete his mission, since the 'new' faith never quite broke with the old, and Jesus himself chose to revere his Father and his laws, instead of denouncing them both, to join Lucifer (his 'brother') in his rebellion against this God of Wrath. *Then She Bore Pale Desire* (*E* 446–49), incidentally, precedes 'The Chapel All of Gold', in the intimation of this Judaic carryover into Christianity through the doctrine of the Trinity, which the harmonistic 'conspiracy' spawned, with the connivance of St Paul.

In the three 'closet' pieces' explicated above, Blake records his first encounters, as visionary 'dragon-slayer', with the Judaic 'worm' that cankers the Christian 'rose'. The published examples quarry the Edenic themes of the unpublished ones before their convergence in the visionary argument of 'The Sick Rose', and epic consolidation in *Vala,* where he topples the Pauline theology of *Paradise Lost*, to justify the ways of the Devil at Jehovah's expense. Blake published five texts before issuing the finalized version of 'The Sick Rose' in the *Songs of Experience* (1794). The first was *Then She Bore Pale Desire*, a 'prose poem' he included in his conventionally-printed *Poetical Sketches* (1783). The other four, all engraved works, are *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), and *America* (1793). Each of these texts deploys floral and vermicular tropes to expose Judaism as an oppressive religion that retains a corruptive presence in Christian doctrine. Each of them, congruently, champions the cause of gratified desire, with the exception of *Then She Bore Pale Desire* – an early piece that is chiefly of interest for the blow it strikes against the 'tainting' legacy of Judaism.

In *Then She Bore Pale Desire*, Blake allegorizes the history of religion, targeting Judaism, to show how it degenerates from its innocent beginnings, in the 'pre-civilized' consciousness, to the depravity of empire, as Pride, thriving on 'Prophetic Saw' and 'Sacrifice done by Priest's hand', succeeds Inspiration, its final triumph being its anointing at Rome, as a 'goddess' (*E* 448). Having given birth to her 'serpent-headed' children, she bestows them on Christendom, rendering it as intolerant of other faiths as Judaism had been, and using her witch-like power to 'bind [all] to her law' (*E* 447). A demonic parody of the Trinity emerges after this 'birthing', as 'Envy' and 'Hate' join their mother, 'Pride', as Judaism makes its triumphal progress to Rome. Thereafter, bringing the rest of Christendom under the yoke of Jehovah is but a *fait accompli*. Here is the first instance of Blake's life-long endeavor to demonize 'the Law' as the mystical justification for Sin and Death, whose predestined role in the Fall Milton symbolizes through their reptilian traits, in *Paradise Lost*, to emphasize their connection to the Serpent. This early piece rejects the deist optimism of Hume's *Natural*

History of Religion (1757) in which this Enlightenment *savant* contends that the progress of religion, like human thought, rises 'gradually from the inferior to the superior'.[54] In stark contrast, his Romantic adversary, from his very inception as a visionary, in *Then She Bore Pale Desire*, insists that rationalism results, instead, in the displacement of Vision by the Law. Its proclaimer, Judah, the 'emanation' of Jehovah turned into the personification of Pride, of which she is accused, ironically enough, in Jeremiah 11:15– 12:9, becomes the 'goddess' that priests and kings invoke to justify subjection and tyranny in all their forms (*E* 543–44).

It is true that *Then She Bore Pale Desire* does not allude specifically to Hume, but Blake's familiarity with that philosopher's work, even during his 'prentice' period might be inferred from the fact that, in *An Island in the Moon* (1784), Blake makes an oblique reference to Hume through a witty pun on the adjective in the title of Locke's celebrated *Essay on Human Understanding*, which Scopprell slurs, so that 'Human' comes out as 'Huming', which borders on 'Humean'. Droll as this 'malapropism' might seem, in terms of comic theatre, Blake seems to imply that Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1740) is so deeply indebted to Locke's *Essay* that one can hardly tell them apart. He may also be implying, that as far as Hume's *Enquiry* is concerned, he might as well have 'replaced 'Human' with 'Humean', in his egotistic revision of Locke's epistemology. Scopprell also renders the name of the author in question as "John Lockeye", humorously suggesting that Locke lacked vision, as did Hume, from being so maniacally an empiricist. 'Essay' also becomes "Easy", as this seemingly sub-literate or just drunk, buffoon' renders it, though Blake capitalizes on the substitution, by implying that the work is facile, and undeserving of the praise heaped on it by generations of English readers.

Explicit references to Hume in the Blake canon surface a decade later. The first occurs in plate 40 of *Milton* (1804), where Blake accuses this philosopher of worshipping a 'Newtonian Phantasm' instead of the God of revealed knowledge, and proselytizing others to do the same (*E* 141). The second comes up in Chapter 3, plate 52 of *Jerusalem* (1804), where he addresses the Deists, holding Hume chiefly responsible for the pillorying of 'Religious Man' that has now become fashionable (*E* 201). The third and final instance is even more relevant on the crucial issue Blake raises in *Then She Bore Pale Desire*, namely that Vision has given way to the Law, which now passes for religion, In his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809), Blake takes Hume to task for being a 'reasoning historian', who, like Gibbon and Voltaire, is contemptuous of the religious notions of every ancient civilization other than those of the Jews, though they all draw on the same 'everlasting Gospel' (*E* 543). Roughly ten years after this reference, Blake began work on *The Everlasting Gospel* (c. 1818) but left it in fragments scattered throughout his *Notebook*. It should be noted, too, that two of his earliest engraved texts 'All Religions are One', and its companion piece, 'There is No Natural Religion' both etched in 1788 (*E* 1–2), are obviously aimed at Hume. However, quite apart from its interest as a corrective to Hume's account of the 'natural history' of Religion, *Then She Bore Pale Desire* deserves recognition as the text with which Blake launched his campaign against Jehovah and His Law. It is their cankering presence in the Gospel that he protests in every other exponent of 'rose lore' in his canon. This is true, also, of the prophetic works that he composed after the release of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Among them, *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (begun in 1797), *Milton* (1804) and *Jerusalem* (1804–20), deserve special mention. These visionary 'transcripts' bring out more clearly, the doctrinal linkages between Holiness and the Law that Blake unravels in such cryptic form in his 'rose lore'. The same prophecies also return to the sermonic theme of *Then She Bore Pale Desire* – namely, the 'devolution' of Religion from its visionary beginnings in the 'everlasting gospel' of Jesus to its Deist reification through a 'rational theology' that concedes scriptural authority only where it pertains to the Law. However, those texts lie beyond the scope of this study.

Scholarly consensus over Blake's antinomianism has been growing ever since the publication of A. L. Morton's pioneering work on *The Everlasting Gospel* (1958), though his view that its sources, as with the rest of the canon, lie in the dissenting discourses of the seventeenth century,[55] has been challenged, more recently, by scholars who point, instead, to the poet's contemporary influences. Among the more notable proponents of this claim is E. P. Thompson, who affiliates Blake's theological stand against Moral Law, exemplified in the repressive practices of both Church and State to the Muggletonism of his own time.[56]Similarly, Jon Mee sources Blake's antinomianism to the political radicalism of the era, with its tincture of millenarian optimism.[57]

However, apart from the fact that Thompson and Mee both try to pin down Blake's libertarian proclivities to a single source, a tendency Robert W. Jensen-Rix has wisely cautioned against,[58]they are unjustified in virtually ruling out the possibility of doctrinal influences from the earlier century, other than indirect ones. The connections Morton makes between the dissenting theologies of the Restoration period and Blake's own critique of the harmonist tradition, especially on the creed of Holiness and its hinging on the Law (both in its secular and ecclesiastical contexts) remain relevant. This is true, also, of the parallels Christopher Hill notes in *The World Turned Upside Down*,[59] where he shows that some Ranters went so far as to take a 'libertine' stand not only on dogma but also on sexuality, showing irreverence for the chastity norm, and even for the alleged sanctity of connubial sex (161, 186).

Hill, however, refrains from inferring a convergence between this dissenting strand with the libertinism of the Neo-Epicureans and the Deists. Presumably, his oversight owes to the fact that the first advocates of libertinism were court wits. Their monarchist sympathies and High Church affiliations, as nominal Anglicans of latitudinarian bent, put them in the opposite camp from their Puritan adversaries in the dissenting movement. One should not rule out the possibility that the same Calvinist impetus that led to the era of the 'Parliament of Saints' may eventually have triggered misgivings over personal autonomy in religious matters. Nor should one refuse to concede the possibility that the bourgeois victors in the Civil War became more receptive to the libertinism once associated only with the Epicurean predilections of a vanquished aristocracy. Perhaps the libertine strand Hill notes, as an interesting and hardly puritanical development in the dissenting movement, occurred through a 'gentrification' collateral with the political ascendancy of the middle class during and after the Interregnum. Nonetheless, Hill deserves credit for following up on Morton in the other linkages he finds between the dissenting doctrines of the seventeenth century and Blake's own brand of antinomianism.

It is just as probable that Blake would have been conversant with the radical Protestant discourses of the Caroline and Restoration eras because of his interest in Milton, whose 'errors' he felt compelled to correct, one bone of contention between them being his Puritan forbear's Pauline-cum-Calvinist misprision that Virtue, meaning the avoidance of Sin, as defined by Jehovah's laws, is as crucial as Faith in qualifying Christians for Redemption. Both the fall of Eve and, subsequently, that of Adam, for preferring mortality to an eternity without her by his side, in Milton's re-visitation of Genesis 1, clearly indicate his essentially Pauline stand, however 'unorthodox' his inadvertent concession to the claims of romantic love might be deemed.

Moreover, though he is otherwise insightful on the political allegory that Milton intertwines with his vision of the 'War in Heaven', in *Paradise Lost*, in placing the English Civil War in visionary perspective,[60] Christopher Hill is guilty of an omission that confirms his partisan stance. Nowhere, in *Milton and the English Revolution*, is there any admission that Milton's demonization of the Cavaliers, conceals subterfuge. When the poet envisions some of the more gifted among the King's defeated legions solacing themselves with vainglorious accounts of their exploits, he is justified in giving short shrift to their Royalist propaganda. But when he depicts the theologically-inclined among the vanquished ‘angels’ assembling in the audience-hall of Pandemonium to air their Deist confutations of Calvinist doctrine, Milton’s mockery is more evident than his visionary powers. These ‘libertines’ surely have a point in challenging Puritans on their doctrinal investment in ‘Providence, Foreknowledge, [Divine] Will, and Fate, / Fixt Fate’, when these principles are wholly incompatible not only with the doctrine of ‘Free Will,’ but also with the idea of a merciful God, free of partiality. But instead of answering these apostates, Milton dismisses them simply as heretics lost ‘in the ‘wand’ring mazes’ of free thinking (*PL* II, 561). He does, of course, have Pauline precedent, in refusing to answer these impugners of Divine Justice, to recall the Christian Law Giver’s rebuke to the doubters of his own day, in Romans 9:26, taking his cue from the passage in Job (25:4–6) contending that a man is but a ‘worm’, and cannot presume to accuse Jehovah of injustice.

Hill has nothing to say on the passage isolated above, in his explication of Milton’s perspective on the Civil War, in *Paradise Lost,* but Blake would have seized on it, as a stanza unworthy of a visionary poet, besides showing the limits of Puritan *gnosis*. He would have repudiated his literary progenitor’s Calvinist defense of the theological ‘absolutes’ the Deists reject, and censured him for his disdainful refusal to face up to the contradictions that they conceal. ‘Fate’ and ‘Providence’, manifesting the inexorable dictates of the Divine Will, nullify the agency of Free Will, and reveal a capricious God who dispenses his favors to the chosen few at the expense of the many. In his ‘rose lore’ Blake’s attacks on Jehovah, and His Law, show that he accepts that ‘free thinking’ verdict, agreeing with Milton only on his subtextual premise that the Deist persists in raising questions about doctrine but cannot find answers for them, because of the limits of his ‘rational’ theology. Blake, instead, takes a candle from Lucifer, the primordial Law Breaker and proselyte for’ Epicurism’, to find his own revelatory answers to the same perplexing questions.

The ‘Beast’ Blake confronts in the ‘wandering mazes’ of libertine thought is Jehovah, reinstated in the New Testament as the First Person of the Trinity, whose supreme authority St Paul never tires of asserting, as Law-Giver to the Christians. The ‘illuminated’ texts bring out the untapped potential of the case that *Tiriel* makes against this deity, whom St Paul invokes to justify the rule of obedience in Ephesians and 1 Timothy, instanced earlier as key-texts in the ‘codification’ of the doctrine of holiness. The political radicalism of *Then She Bore Pale Desire,* which attests to the journey of religion from its visionary beginnings to its fall into ‘priestcraft’, resurfaces in his subsequent ‘rose-lore’.

There, it is Jehovah's Law that is personified in feminine form. But in the other four exponents of 'rose-lore' preceding the publication of 'The Sick Rose', Blake proceeds apace in demonizing Jehovah Himself, together with that of His 'ministers'– conniving prophets, sacrifice-craving priests, 'draconian' kings, and patriarchal sires.

To attain that 'heretical' end, Blake deploys negatively-nuanced vermicular tropes to characterize Jehovah or his Law, just as he deploys their positively-nuanced counterparts as emblems that 'valorize' Lucifer, Jesus or Man at the expense of the First Person of the Trinity. In *America* , this adversarial relationship expresses itself in a serpent-dragon polarity, though in *Tiriel* and 'The Chapel All of Gold', as shown in the foregoing section on the 'closet' pieces', Blake deploys serpentine imagery in the same iconoclastic way as he does in *Then She Bore Pale Desire*. When linked to Lucifer or Orc (his revolutionary 'incarnation'), the Serpent reveals itself as a facilitator of 'sensual enjoyment' and liberty; when to Jehovah, as that of Sin and Death in Mosaic, or Pauline, vindication of His Law, where it turns dragon-like or 'draconian'.

The vermicular imagery in Blake's 'rose lore' also invokes the 'worm' of Job to signify not only the 'weakness' of Man but also the humanity of Jesus – the God who descended into mortality to undo the curse of Sin and Death (to recall Blake's rejoinder to #399 of Lavater's *Aphorisms*). It is this metaphysical variant, in Christian 'correction' of Bildad's fallen vision (manifested in The Book of Job), which becomes pivotal to the de-sanctifying' view of virginity, in *The Book of Thel*. There, Blake attacks 'virginolatry', as a doctrinal error dedicated to the promotion of 'holiness' at the expense of maternal fulfillment, whose redemptive power St Paul begrudgingly concedes, in 1 Corinthians 7:34.

But, even Thel falls short in construing the vision she receives. For, though she marvels over her premonition that 'God would love a mere worm', and shows an Epicurean distaste for the curbs on sensual enjoyment that make mortal existence repellent, Thel fails to grasp the role of generation and death in the apocalyptic cycle. The limitations of her vision, in renouncing her role in the perpetuation of mortality, are consistent with her *agnosis*. She is ignorant of, or willfully denies, revealed knowledge of Jesus' descent as a 'worm', assuming merely human form, to minister to our weakness – to recall Blake's rejoinder to Lavater's claim that God is too far removed in 'holiness' to befriend mere mortals (*E* 599). Blake obviously sees his predecessor's error as rooted in yet another endorsement of Bildad's view of Jehovah, misled by St Paul's own partiality to that false vision – an error that he underscores in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* As

Blake's infernal mystagogue bitterly remarks, in plate 6 of that seminal work, 'After Christ's death he became Jehovah' (*E* 35), or so his deluded followers choose to believe.

As for its typological interest, two vermicular images in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* stand out for their theological import. The first is the caterpillar that 'lays her eggs on the fairest leaves', in defiance of the priest who 'lays his curse on the fairest joys', as Jehovah's 'minister' (*E* 37). This hairy creature, also suggestive of the phallus, re-appears as a masculine entity in 'The Sick Rose'. There it becomes 'the invisible worm' that lays its seed, upon sprouting its wings at puberty, on the petal-draped 'bed' of the fairest flower, in an antithetically Epicurean parallel to the Pauline debasement of the 'caterpillar' in Clarissa's 'mad poem' (*Paper 7*), and the sense-bewitched, Serpent-beguiled 'worm' in Young's *Night Thoughts*, associated with 'the Sorceries of Sense' (7, ll. 1189–200) – passages reviewed earlier.

The second vermicular image in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is the 'dragon-form' Leviathan assumes, as it bears down on the visionary 'dreamer', in plate 18 (*E* 41). However, in the very next plate (*E* 41), 'the sublime' gives way to 'the beautiful'. No sooner does this monstrous portent open its jaws, than it disappears into a moonscape whose only 'vermicular' vestige is a sinuous river wending its way past the harpist on its bank (*E* 41). This fearsome apparition, reminiscent of Leviathan, apostrophized in *Job* as the symbol of Jehovah's power, appears not in the guise of a 'fire-breathing' whale but as a 'monstrous serpent', even more chimeral, since it has a head like a tiger's, gills like a fish's, and a mouth like a dragon's. It also streams blood and smoke, as if to signify that it is the 'familiar' of a demonic deity who thrives on sacrifice – like Pride in *Then She Bore Pale Desire* (*E* 446). Both the river that 'engulfs' this apparition at the estuary, like Moses's snake swallowing that of his Egyptian counterpart, and the harvest moon that illumines it, reproach the apostate harpist on the bank for emulating David in his praise of Jehovah, forgetting Jesus. This is a charge Blake lays against Isaac Watts, especially noted for *The Psalms of David* (1719), or against Christopher Smart, the author of *Song to David* (1763), for a discipleship to David that reveals their fealty to his God, as Christians who follow St Paul in privileging the Father over the Son.

The inference from Blake's reproach made above, is inescapable in view of Ezekiel's complaint, earlier in the work (plate 12), that David's dearest wish has come true, since 'all nations [now] worship the jews [*sic*] god, and . . . [no] greater subjection can be [than that]' (*E* 39). The river, in the 'memorable fancy' the Angel conjures up, is a male symbol, as is the 'worm' it claims, but it attests eternally to an all-forgiving God, rather than the wrathful deity that the purblind psalmist serves. Conversely, the harvest moon whose light illumines it, is a female symbol that affirms generation the natural predicate of 'gratified desire', and as a providential gift – Jesus having entered mortal history through the 'worm-ravished' womb of Mary, the loveliest of Eve's 'daughters'. David's heirs must renounce Jehovah in favor of His rebel sons, celebrating Lucifer's Epicurean avowal of carnality and Christ's promise of rebirth through faith – beginning with baptismal immersion. 'Dip him in the river who loves water', Blake's Devil counsels (pl. 7), in cryptic affirmation of this Christian rite (*E* 35). Jesus himself was baptized in the waters of the Jordan This river flows into the Sea of Galilee (on whose shore he began his ministry), before entering the 'black deep' of the Dead Sea. As the mighty Leviathan disappears into the river of eternal life, so does the wrathful deity of the Jews give way to the merciful God that Christians can embrace with unreserved joy, instead of the wrathful deity St Paul invokes in his epistles.

It is instructive to recall, moreover, that in the same 'manifesto-text', the Devil confronts Swedenborg on the doctrine of holiness he defends in *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, and *Divine Providence* – both of which works Blake had stigmatized in his marginalia (*E* 609–11) for their anti-feminist and 'predestinarian' errors. Dismissing Swedenborg's Pauline tenet that habitual law-breakers cannot hope for redemption, Blake's Devil points out, in plates 22–23, that Jesus not only broke the commandments himself, but pardoned others for doing so (*E* 43).

The fuller implications of Blake' dismissal of Swedenborg's vision of the Apocalypse have been analyzed by Robert W. Jensen-Rix, in his paper *In Infernal Love and Faith* (107–23), which was cited earlier for cautioning against the search for a single source for Blake's antinomian radicalism, in view of the mounting evidence on its heterodox derivation. However, what is worth noting, here, is Blake's visionary appropriation of Swift's Yahoo-Houyhnhm counterpoint for evangelical satire. The diabolically initiated dreamer's retort, in plate 21, that the Messiah revealed his true nature and mission in breaking the Law, drives home a truth so unsavory as to throw his Yahwist adversary into an apoplectic fit (*E* 43). Thus, by implication, this catechistic angel lapses into the abject state of the 'monkeys and baboons' that gibber in the purgatorial antechambers of Heaven, revealed on plate 20, where the dreamer recalls the scatological vista he encounters in 'the mill' of Error, in place of eschatological vision (*E*. 42). When he emerges from that bottomless pit, he finds himself in possession of the skeletal remains of 'Aristotle's '[Posteror]Anal[-]ytics'. The excremental pun on the name of that still-influential work, given the scatological context, is obvious. That is the text Blake identifies subsequently, in plates 20–21, as the ultimate source of the obsession with 'systematic reasoning' that prevents Swedenborg from transcending the visionary scope of Paracelsus and Boehm, from whom he derives his own doctrines (*E* 42–43). The purgatorial descent into a subhuman state similar to that of Swift's Yahoos, is the fate reserved for the Law-affirming, rationalistic 'horses of instruction', indoctrinated by angels, who dare to challenge the 'tygers of [prophetic] wrath', inspired by the Devil.

In *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake invokes Lucifer again as the 'dark' messiah who claimed not only Eve, inducing her to defy Jehovah's law, so as to liberate both her will and her sexual appetite, but also Mary of Nazareth, whose paramour he inspired to take his joy of her. Bromion displaces 'the Holy Ghost' as the 'demonic' ravisher of Oothoon, Blake's alias for Mary, who, though she 'passes the flower of her age' to this 'uncomely man' (in the language of 1 Corinthians 7:36) refuses to think of herself as tainted. Unlike Richardson's Clarissa, who retreats from life in morbid fixation with her violated body, comparing it to a worm-stricken rose, Blake's heroine insists that her 'spiritual virginity' remains intact despite her deflowered state. She invests in purity of heart, as the flower between her breasts signifies (pls. 1–2; *E* 45–46) instead of striving to keep her body and spirit 'holy' (as St Paul urges in 1 Corinthians 7:34). Moreover, far from ruing the worm-sweetened fruit of her womb, she welcomes this love-child Theotormon must raise as his own (pl. 3), in a parallel to Mary of Nazareth, whose own lapse led to the allegedly 'immaculate' conception, and the foisting of fatherhood on Joseph (*E* 47).

In the 'Preludium' to *America* (pl. 1), Orc takes on a role similar to that of Bromion, as a 'serpent-formed' law-breaker (*E* 51–52). This last and most radical of the 'dark messiahs' in the apostolic line of Lucifer initiates the revolutionary prelude to Apocalypse by deflowering the daughter of Urthona, the patriarchal personification of the *ancient regime*. Freeing himself from bondage, he descends into mortality as Washington, to lead the American rebels to victory against the legions that retain allegiance to Urthona's, and ultimately Jehovah's, champion, George III, envisioned as Albion's (fallen) angel. In plates 3 and 15 Blake depicts this oppressive ruler who conceals his 'dragon form' beneath an angelic exterior, as do the 'scaly' priests who collude with him in a vain attempt to perpetuate monarchic rule (*E* 52, 56–57). Orc's victory reverses the outcome of the 'war in heaven' Milton depicts in *Paradise Lost*. Against the backdrop of the 'Preludium', the 'action' of this epyllion reveals the parallel between illicit sex at puberty and the violent overthrow of tyrants who thwart the millenarian aspirations of humanity. Puberty becomes a political metaphor. A nation come of age must seize freedom; embrace the 'dark' spirit of History, making it 'speak', where it was 'silent' before; claim its 'womb', and make it bring forth

Revolution, the ‘illegitimate’ offspring destined to end dynastic rule, toppling the ‘ministers’ of Jehovah, in defiance of St Paul’s exhortation to Christians never to challenge the powers that be, in keeping with the Messiah’s behest ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ (Mark 12:17).

Chapter 7

The Sick Rose’, and the Culmination of Blake’s Epicurean Case against Holiness

The foregoing discussion has shown how the texts Blake composed prior to ‘The Sick Rose’ lend visionary support to the Neo-Epicurean defense of ‘gratified desire’ that his secular precursors launched, in countering the doctrine of ‘holiness’ religious poets had vindicated, as disciples of St Paul. What follows is an intertextual analysis of that masterpiece in the light of its antecedents in ‘rose lore’. The object of that exercise is to show how the ‘auto-allusive’ resonances Blake contrives serve to load the case he makes for a Christian Epicureanism at the expense of the Pauline ‘code of holiness’ through an appetite-promoting demonology that exposes the Judaic ‘errors’ upon which its sin-centered, Law-mongering recipe for redemption is based.

In ‘The Sick Rose’, the attributes of the ‘worm’, envisioned as a winged predator descending unseen and unheard upon the prey it seeks, make it seem dæmonic, although the ‘rose’ that it taints seems human enough. On the mundane or literal level, this nocturnal, storm-borne visitant (the vehicle of lust as a dark and irresistible form of ‘energy’) suggests an ‘impious’ rite of initiation into carnality. This transgression not only spawns the canker of guilt in this rose’s once-untroubled soul, but will eventually ‘destroy’ her ‘life’ in making a pariah of her. Whatever case ‘the Lilly’ might make for the gratification of desire, in *The Book of Thel* (*E* 3–4), Thel’s real-life counterpart, in ‘The Sick Rose’, will pay dearly for losing her virginity to an ‘uncomely’ lover. Christians continue to heed the sermonic drift of 1 Corinthians 7, which makes marriage the only remedy for such a fall into carnality. They have forgotten that Jesus himself declared his preference for a woman accused of ‘loving much’ to her ‘chaste’ counterparts who ‘loved little’ (Luke 9:47). Consequently, this ‘sick rose’ will have no ‘life’ to speak of once the effects of the ‘invisible worm’ that has assailed her womb become apparent. Nor can she expect marriage to save her, and her unborn love-child, from a fate worse than death – a ‘dark secret love’ being devoid of commitment. Her predicament, in that sense, is similar to that of Prior’s Rose in ‘A True Maid’, though the aftermath of her carnal initiation, in the visionary perspective, confirms the Devil’s sardonic view, in plate 8 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that ‘Joys impregnate’, but ‘Sorrows bring forth’ (*E* 36). Society remains obdurately Pauline, mistaking ‘righteousness’ for true piety. Once she is found out, she will be cast out. Her accusers will forget that Jesus himself forgave a woman accused of ‘loving much’ by viewing her ‘fault’ as her ‘saving grace’ (Luke 7:47). That passage tacitly endorses Lucifer’s Proto-Epicurean crusade against holiness, as the Judaic error at the heart of the myth of the Covering Cherub guarding the gates of Eden. However, as Blake seems to imply, society remains true to the Pauline code of Holiness at the expense of the sayings and acts of Jesus, especially on the matter of 'illicit' sexuality.

When St Paul warns that the 'wages of sin is death', he has the Day of Judgment in mind, and the fate of the damned, who will be denied immortal bliss in the hereafter, unlike the Elect and the Redeemed, who 'will be raised up in their spiritual body', having shed the one of clay (1 Corinthians 15:44). In 'The Sick Rose', however, the emphasis falls on the earthly hell that awaits the 'maid' who conceives in a fit of illicit passion. Her sexual initiation and its consequences make her seem like a kindred spirit to Oothoon, for whom the 'fruit' of a womb inseminated by a lover is 'sweeter' than that resulting merely from dutiful copulation on the marriage-bed.

However, unlike her mythic counterpart, Oothoon, who has only an aggrieved bethrothed to deal with, as was also true of Mary of Nazareth, their 'mute' counterpart in 'The Sick Rose', can turn to no Joseph, nor expect mercy from her father , let alone other 'ministers' of Jehovah who are strangers to her blood. 'Uncomely' as the lover has been 'to his virgin', it is possible that his 'victim' may hope to escape damnation, as even St Paul concedes for forcibly deflowered women (in 1 Corinthians, which came up for discussion in Chapter 1), but there can be no doubt that in the psychosocial sense, at least, the 'worm' *she* carries will destroy' her 'life' – cutting her off from family and community. Blake's 'Rose' (the upper-case 'R' making it a proper noun that signifies, normatively at least, a woman's name) will soon, like Prior's protagonist in 'A True Maid', lose the status she had enjoyed as a 'virgin', and have to fend for herself thereafter.

There is no 'fatted' calf awaiting the return of the prodigal daughter, since the father she has shamed is more likely to show her the door than to forgive her for her tryst, and to accept the illegitimate child she carries. Will she turn concubine or whore, with no Joseph to 'make an honest woman of her'? Will she follow Clarissa into oblivion, if, that is, she too happens to be a rape-victim who cannot go back to the father whose patriarchal tyranny she may have fled? Will she end up, as Srigley suggests,[61]like the 'infant harlot' of 'London', stricken by the same syphilitic 'worm', having succumbed to the 'dark secret love' of a brothel-haunting fugitive from a cold marriage-bed, itself doomed to turn into a plague-infested 'hearse'? Whatever the answers, if the malady of Blake's 'sick rose' is indeed physical (be it 'the French Pox' or pregnancy), she cannot hope for pity from a society too 'holy' to be Christian.

Ultimately, the problem at the heart of the predicament of Blake's Rose is that she is the victim of an undeclared love that makes the sacramental remedy of marriage, proposed by St Paul for such cases (1 Corinthians 7:2), impossible. The tryst either involves an encounter with a beau this belle's father would not accept as a suitor, or the reverse, especially if she is a 'commoner' and he a 'gentleman of quality' who despairs of his sire's consent; unless, of course he is already married, and can only make a mistress of her. Love may know no bounds, and passion will have its way, but marriage is quite another matter, especially when estate and lineage come into it. Lovelace, himself, in *Clarissa,* bore a 'dark secret love' for the 'rose' whose life *he* destroyed, proposing marriage only after drugging, raping, and dishonoring her, so that a 'saintly' retreat was the only choice she felt she had, to proclaim her innocence and redeem her 'fair fame'. Wooing never came into it, though the fact that she turned to him, for refuge from her father's patriarchal tyranny, might suggest unconfessed love on her own part. But, then, the Harlows are of bourgeois stock, however affluent and cultivated they might be, whereas Lovelace is of aristocratic descent, and the rake in him gets the better of the lover he failed unreservedly to be, turning a sanctuary into a house of shame. The same class-factor might explain 'the dark secret love' with which Blake's 'Rose' has to be content – quite apart from the problem of her 'maculate' conception with no 'Holy Ghost' to sanctify it!

On the archetypal level, however, the 'invisible worm' becomes a surrogate for Lucifer. The descent of the 'worm' that 'finds out' the rose's 'bed of crimson joy' recalls Satan's 'stormy' crossing from Hell to Eden in a night-shrouded descent, and the 'false worm' he becomes in the rose-bower where he finds 'the fairest flower' of Eden (IX, l. 901). Yet, the carnal initiation of Blake's Rose, like that of Milton's Eve, refutes the notion that Lucifer contrived the Fall only to engender Sin and Death. Tasting the Fruit initiates a sexual arousal our 'first parents' had never known, though Milton bemoans it, viewing 'carnal desire' as a debasement of the connubial intimacies they had enjoyed in the 'state of innocence' (IX. ll. 1012–45). Blake also invokes, through the image of the worm-ravished rose, the Epicurean undertones Dryden reads into Milton's diabolized view of the Serpent, revealing Lucifer as the proselyte of pleasure and liberty, with Eve as love-object as well as disciple.

In tune with Blake's diabolic perspective on Epicureanism, the worm's 'dark secret love' conflates the phallic nuances Dryden detects in the fawning postures of Milton's 'arch-fiend', and reveals in *The State of Innocence*, when Lucifer confides that he would have 'blasted' Eve had his human guise not been merely spectral (III, i, ll. 92ff.). In the light of that passage, Blake's 'invisible worm' becomes a phallic metonymy for a lover claiming a woman's 'first fruits' for Lucifer. So it was with Eve, and with Mary of Nazareth, the 'rose that bar Jesu' (to recall the medieval lyric instanced in the chapter on the Pauline tradition), the circumstances behind whose sexual initiation the poet allegorizes in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, through Oothoon's story. There, he corrects the account, in Luke, of her historical counterpart's allegedly 'immaculate conception', which Blake had had occasion to mock in *An Island in the Moon*, as noted in Chapter 4.

Alternatively, the vermicular entity in 'The Sick Rose' might be viewed as a divine, rather than diabolical, portent carrying a curse as terrible as the God who laid it. The 'invisible worm that flies in the night, / In the howling storm', would then unmask as a malignant efflux from the 'dark', whirlwind-straddling God in The Book of Job (38-41), to be feared but never questioned, whom Blake repudiates, as a 'Luciferian' accuser, for that very reason

The Book of Job has a contextual bearing in another sense. In this 'first book of martyrs', Satan becomes Job's tormentor, to test the limits of his piety with Jehovah's connivance (1:6–12). The Serpent may similarly, be seen as a 'watch-fiend', cursed for turning from mere observer to tempter. Eve finds nothing strange about the Serpent's powers of speech and reasoning, in Genesis, and Jehovah Himself seems to imply that it once had limbs, if not wings, too – an angel or a *pahad* ('eye of God') in dragon guise. It is only after Jehovah lays His curse on this precursor of the Satan of Job, for 'beguiling' Eve that 'he' must lose his privileged status as a creature 'more subtle than any beast of the field', to 'creep', thence, 'upon his 'belly', and to eat dust to the end of his days – reduced to a mere snake, whose progeny must suffer the same fate (Genesis 3:1–14).

Whatever one makes of the anomalies in the biblical account of the Fall instanced above, one cannot deny that the New Testament, like the Old, depicts Jehovah's 'love' for His 'fallen' children as a 'dark secret'. The Resurrection, in any case, according to Pauline dogma, is only for the chosen few, and God favors whom He pleases (Romans 9:11–15). His 'love' for His only 'begotten Son', as Milton himself cannot gainsay, is just as 'dark' and 'secret'. Jehovah exacts martyrdom as the price for redemption, and His Will, or 'Providence', is as inscrutable as it is inexorable. This deity, who sees all, but is Himself invisible, so begrudges His favors that His children must steal His most delectable 'fruit' from the sin-entrapping 'jaws' of the 'wily Serpent', as 'Nobodaddy' puts it (*E* 471). He is the deity that becomes 'as subtle as a serpent' in *Tiriel*. He is the 'serpent' of 'The Chapel

All of Gold' that poisons the bread and wine of the Eucharist with its 'vomit', making a mockery of the Atonement.

In other words, the 'worm' destroying the 'life' of the Gospel is the Judaic malefactor that 'preys' upon it, leaving the followers of the Rose of Sharon uncertain of their fate. Christians remain victims of Jehovah's 'dark secret love', eternally under His subjection, because His laws remain in force. Jesus may have been readier to forgive a woman who 'loved much', than one who had 'loved little' but he obviously expected her future conduct to be chaste (Luke 7:37–50), as when he exorcised Mary Magdalene, casting 'seven devils' from her (presumably the appetite-whetting demons behind 'the seven deadly sins', or, alternatively, the 'incubial' surrogates of the lovers she denied, who 'possess' her in her dreams) to restore her body and soul to virginal 'purity' (8:2). Moreover, he alludes repeatedly to Moses, and keeps urging his followers to obey the commandments, or to repent when they break them. Thus, Jesus reaffirms Jehovah's 'law of sin' (as Paul calls it, in Romans 7:23) in his sermons, though his acts show that he secretly believed in the continual forgiveness of all sins – as Blake's Devil insists in plates 23–24 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*E* 43).

It is, perhaps, Jesus's refusal to nullify the authority of the Old Testament and its God that prompts the 'diabolized' Ezekiel to mourn the fulfillment of David's dream, in plate 13 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – all nations kneel to Jehovah, including Christian ones (*E* 39). The triumph of Judaism becomes the ultimate theme of this poet's 'rose lore'. Blake first notes the 'taint' of Judaic doctrine in Catholicism, tracing its advance from the Holy Lands to Rome, in *Then She Bore Pale Desire*. However, his later pieces suggest that Protestant theology is just as atavistic as its Catholic counterpart. The reader recalling these antecedent texts in the trail of the intracanonical signals embedded in 'The Sick Rose', infers that, at its deepest level, this poem reveals the 'meta-pathology' of a religion stricken by the Judaic contaminant it inherited, festering within its hapless host from the time Jehovah, whom Jesus always acknowledged as his 'father', and never ceased to revere, was 'installed' as the First Person of the Trinity.

In more specific terms, Blake insists that the restitution of Jehovah's authority, owing chiefly to the epistles of St Paul, Moses's successor as Law-Giver, threatens the life of Christianity as surely as a worm the rose it assails. When Herbert invokes the stricken rose, in 'Church-Rents and Schisms', as an ecclesiastical trope, to recall the gist of the exegesis provided on that text in Chapter 2, it is to mourn the fate of the Anglican Church, the finest 'Rose' of the Reformation, having watched the 'worm' of Puritan zealotry devour the episcopacy, petal by petal. Blake's use of the same trope goes much farther, elegizing the fate of Christianity itself. The Gospel, despite its subliminal concessions to Lucifer's Epicurean stand against holiness, is being devoured from within by the legacy of Judaism, whose doctrine of Original Sin (which Jesus himself envisioned as 'the Worm that dieth not', condemning the damned to 'the fire that dieth not', in Mark 9:44) gave Paul his cue for his 'code of holiness', and for retaining his allegiance to Jehovah, despite his conversion.

Srigley deserves credit for his *bricoleur* pointer that the *Notebook* version of 'The Sick Rose' feminizes the 'invisible worm' (alluding to '*her* dark secret love'), implying that its victim is male.[62]` It is certainly possible to take this transversal of gender attributes to mean that a lovesick woman vents her unrequited passion in the same 'demonic' way that a man does. However, this 'gender-switching' cue can also be taken as collateral for the alternative reading proposed above. In the finalized version that Blake issued the poem to his public, the 'assailant' is unambiguously masculine, whereas the gender of his victim is indeterminate – as is true of the draft version. Srigley, however does not bring out the exegetical implications of that deliberate ambiguity.

The chapter on the Pauline tradition, initiating the discussion of the two 'contraries' that give Blake's 'rose lore' its dialectical tension, provides several instances of the rose as a male symbol, two of which are especially significant, because they allude to Christ. The reader will recall that the discussion devoted to that tradition, identifies a medieval lyric that apostrophizes 'Jesu' as the rose of roses, whose 'vertu' exceeds even that of the 'rose' that bore Him. The same discussion calls attention, also, to Herrick's endorsement of that claim, in his tribute to 'the Rose of Sharon', characterizing his 'Saviour' as the epitome of spiritual beauty, or 'holiness'. Since the rose had so long served as an emblem for Christ, one might reasonably surmise that Blake was not just lamenting the fate of a deflowered belle, but also of the New Testament, as the spiritual 'emanation', of 'the Rose of Sharon'. The Gospel became tainted from its very inception, having laid itself open to the 'worm' of Judaism, from the moment Jesus declared that he came 'not to destroy the law but to fulfill it' (Matthew 5:17).

It is surely significant that Blake chooses to clarify the gender of his 'worm', but not that of his 'rose'. This is true as much of the *Notebook* version as of its published counterpart. The speaker addresses the Rose in the vocative, and second-person pronouns, 'thou' and 'thy' in this instance, cannot possibly convey gender on their own. In the case of the 'worm', on the other hand, Blake chooses to invoke it indirectly in the third person singular, thus divulging its sex – '*her* dark secret love' in the manuscript version, and '*his*' in the engraved. Blake's Rose, then, is not necessarily a feminine entity. The ambiguity would seem to be deliberate, since it compels the reader to take both gender-possibilities into account, and look for convergences. In the *Notebook* version, Blake seems content with feminizing the 'worm', in a foreshadowing of the personification of the same entity in 'To Tirzah', castigated, there, for her sin-centered doctrine of holiness. This spectral entity traces its descent from the serpent-engendering 'deity' (Pride) that takes 'Rome' by storm in *Then She Bore Pale Desire*.

The 'invisible worm' also recalls, in its polluting effects, the pillar-clasping Serpent in 'The Chapel all of Gold' that envenoms the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist'. However, the gender-identity of the 'invisible worm' is ultimately less significant than that of its victim. The only difference between the female 'worm' and the male, rhetorically speaking, is that Blake seems to have chosen. at first to target Judaism, feminizing its spirit, as Jeremiah does Israel, the 'virgin' turned 'harlot', and her 'treacherous' sister, Judah (Jeremiah 3:6–7), but ends up attacking the God this sin-centered religion hallows, in the revised version of 'The Sick Rose' that he issued in engraved form, as the center-piece of *The Songs of Experience*. Blake may have done this not only because he wanted to 'expose' Jehovah as a cruel deity, but also to place Him in counterpoint first with Lucifer, in the revision of the Eve-myth, and then with Jesus – his 'brother'. The poet seems to accuse the Messiah of complicity or, at least, of a failure of nerve. Instead of renouncing his 'Father in heaven', Jesus chose to reinstate Him as over-god. Having paid with his life for winning salvation for his followers, he left his gospel of 'crimson joy' ('glad tidings' sealed with his 'crimson' blood) at the mercy of the polluting Worm of Judah. Thus, both Jehovah and the harmonistic tradition come simultaneously under fire. Such a reading is not merely contentious, since Blake invokes his subject in the gender-masking first person, reserving the third-person for the 'worm', masculinizing it in the finalized version in which he issued 'The Sick Rose', as an 'illuminated' text.

The ambiguity of the 'invisible worm', notwithstanding its determinate gender in either version, makes the identity of its 'prey' no less slippery. As a despoiler, this vermicular entity might stand not only for a variety of 'mundane' entities relating to sexuality and venereal disease, but also for 'mythic' and metaphysical ones. At the positive pole, the semantic spectrum (constructed by the intertextual contexts invoked in this study,) affiliates it to the Proto-Epicurean Devil of Dryden, who bore Eve (whom Milton calls the 'fairest flower of Eden') a 'dark secret love'. At the negative, the 'invisible worm', in its malignancy, might be construed as a portent of Jehovah – an exegetical premise whose corollary would be that the gospel the Rose of Sharon had vindicated with his martyrdom is itself dying, stricken by the very Law he had come to 'fulfil'. The Messiah may have forgiven a notoriously 'sinful' woman who 'loved much' but showed true faith and contrition (Luke 7:47), and may have claimed (according to Matthew 22: 37–39) that there were only two 'great' commandments – to love God with all one's might, and to love one's neighbors as oneself. But what he gives with one hand, he takes away with the other. For he makes incessant references to Moses, as a Law-Giver whose authority remains in force, warns sinners (as Mark and Matthew both attest) that they court damnation, and admits to an Elect, although he warns that even they, too, might fall from hearkening to 'false prophets' (Mark of 13:22). As Blake's Devil sees it, in plate 5 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*E* 34–35), such 'lapses' are contrary to Jesus's nature, though Milton fails to purge that misprision in his Pauline vision of the Messiah as Jehovah's 'governor' in *Paradise Lost* (*E* 34).

In 'The Sick Rose', Blake takes his 'rose lore' to its ultimate conclusion, privileging his Epicurean *signifieds* against their Pauline contraries, to reveal the Judaic derivation and tainting effects of the doctrine of holiness. Through the centripetal force of his allusions, he attains a vision congruent with the convoluted design of the flower he makes his sermonic vehicle. However, even though each of the contexts he invokes (whether extracanonical or intracanonical in import) sensitizes the reader to a fresh nuance, these semantic cues converge, like rose-petals, to suggest that every evil associated with gratified desire springs from the tainting presence of .Judaic doctrine, epitomized in its law-mongering, holiness-fixated deity. This belief, nascent in Blake's earlier pieces of 'rose lore', from *Then She Bore Pale Desire* to 'The Chapel All of Gold', inspires the representation, in 'The Sick Rose', of a deadly 'worm' hidden in the very calyx, or 'womb', of Christian doctrine. Jesus himself stands accused of giving this 'worm' refuge in his gospel, out of deference to his 'father in heaven', thus, inadvertently, giving Paul an excuse for his Yahwist reversion. This apostle, as Blake views him, made it his mission as a 'minister of God'' to forge a 'code of holiness' that sanctions Jehovah's 'dark secret love', evidenced not only in the orchestration of the Fall, but also, more horrifically, in the sacrificing of His 'only begotten Son' (as Milton views Jesus), in atonement for the sins of all His other 'children', from Adam and Eve to their last descendants on the ruins of Eden.

Moreover, as the Serpent in 'The Chapel All of Gold' attests, in poisoning the 'bread and the wine' of the Eucharist, participation in that rite, cannot save its celebrants from

Death, except for those among them that Jehovah himself favors. Jesus can only resurrect the pre-ordained few, and none can know where they stand among the three ‘classes’ that make up the spiritual taxonomy of an arbitrary God – the Elect, the Redeemed and the Reprobate. The Son may have defied the Father when he ‘broke’ the commandments and shielded transgressors, because he acted ‘on impulse: not from rules’, as Blake’s Devil claims, in plates 23–24, of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (*E* 43) – a passage discussed at some length in the preceding chapter. But his rebellion was a covert one, and he befriended sinners only to lead them back to Grace, rather than making light of their transgressions, at the expense of the Law.

Nonetheless, it was St Paul, as opposed to Jesus, who must take the blame for nurturing the Serpent-engendered Worm of Sin that Jehovah visited upon his children as a deadly curse. It is this erring apostle who proselytized Christians into investing in a Fall-centered theology that makes salvation hinge on ‘righteousness’. It is he who warned the converted that ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23), regardless of the force of energy, or desire, behind the breaching of any commandment. From St Paul’s viewpoint, the ‘worm’ that finds a rose’s ‘bed of crimson joy’ is tainted, and passes on its taint, unless the transgressors marry at the first opportunity, and become properly mindful, thereafter, of the procreative role of carnal indulgences. As Christian Law Giver, sworn to keep watch over the realms of doctrine, this apostle finds and stigmatizes Jesus’ concessions to Lucifer’s Epicurean creed, as doctrinal pitfalls to avoid.

Such a draconian theology, as Blake insists, is Judaic, not Christian, and cankers the legacy of the Rose of Sharon. If Jesus is indeed the rose of roses, then Jehovah must be the worm of worms. Reinstated as the First Person of the Trinity, this aboriginal’ deity, whose ‘dark secret love’ cost Jesus his life, now threatens to destroy the life of the ‘purest’ of religions. Jehovah scorns His Son’s ‘permissive’ view of carnal fulfillment – symbolized in the absolution of a much-loving harlot, whose ‘bed of crimson joy’ many have known, as one more deserving of Grace than her ‘God-fearing’ accusers, who ‘love little’ (Luke 7:47).

It is that ‘fallen’ deity that St Paul shows he really serves, rather than Jesus, when he extols the virgin (1 Corinthians 7:34), urges the lustful ‘to marry [rather] than … burn’ (1 Corinthians 7:9), warns women who abandon virginity that they will be saved only by child-bearing, and that, too, in the ‘holy’ state of wedlock (1 Timothy 2:15), and vindicates obedience (Romans 13: 1–7 and Ephesians 5:22–6:5), urging his flock to defer to the ‘ministers’ of Jehovah.

Not that St Paul dons the mantle of Moses as the Christian Law Giver by flaunting the teachings of Jesus to make his case for the 'code of holiness' he forged through his epistles. For, however sympathetic Jesus might have been to Lucifer's 'gospel', he failed to renounce his 'Father' ,and free his followers from the constraints Judaic Law imposed in privileging the Spirit at the expense of the Body – the falsely 'demonized' source of all Energy or Desire. Nonetheless, the fact that St Paul made appetitive restraint seem no less crucial than faith, convinced that 'holiness' is the surest path to Grace, only served to strengthen the power of the Judaic 'worm' that threatens the life of this 'purest' of religions, devouring everything in it except for its concessions to Sin, Death, and the Law.

As for Lavater, he may have affirmed the Epicurean spirit of the Gospel, as if to declare support for antinomianism, and opposition to a spirituality that denigrates 'the carnal way', justifying sex only as an instrument of procreation, on the marriage bed. But if he seems radical in championing the cause of 'sensual enjoyment', he proves to be conservative at the core, since he qualifies his stand with the Pauline proviso that the gratification of desire must never breach 'Order', meaning the Law. And even though he does not subscribe to Swedenborg's Pauline obsession with predestination, he is no less guilty of choosing to 'converse only with angels' (*E* 43). This is what prevents Lavater from recognizing Lucifer as a co-messiah, as the primal source of the 'energy' behind every desire, as the facilitator of 'sensual enjoyment', and as the inciter, with Eve as his first disciple, of the antinomian urge destined to stamp out Jehovah's laws–in a millennial prelude to the Apocalypse.

Lavater's Pauline indoctrination prevents him, similarly, from realizing that Jehovah is either an erring God or a Satanic figment of Moses' 'libido-phobic' imagination, and that 'woman's love', far from being 'sin', is redemptive, affirming, as it does, Lucifer's Epicurean creed. The collusion between the Devil and Woman, starting with the Fall, is essential to the fulfillment as much of divine purpose as of human.

The Worm to fear is not Lucifer, but the God of the Jews, reinstated by Christians as the First Person of the Trinity, who became as 'subtle as a serpent', or became one with it, to punish His disobedient children. It is He who despoiled the paradise He had Himself created, in the spirit of benevolence that once moved Him – the burden not only of *Tiriel* but of every subsequent piece of 'rose lore' in the Blake canon. It is not just Eve, or her 'fallen' daughters, whose plight Blake mourns for following the way of Lucifer in Jehovah's despite, in 'The Sick Rose'. His visionary elegy draws on each of his earlier exponents of 'rose lore', to reveal St Paul's doctrine of holiness as Judaic 'error', Jesus as more victim than martyr, Lucifer as co-messiah, and Jehovah as demon-deity. It is the poem's allusive richness that gives it both its semantic density and power. The typologically-mediated approach Blake adopts, in 'The Sick Rose', to convey this 'sacrilegious' message, as the first Romantic, and as the most radical of the Protestant prophets in the Miltonic succession, results in a feat of re-signification unparalleled in the history of English poetry.

Notes

[1] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1997), 28.

[2] Joseph Anthony Wittreich, *Angel of the Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 73.

[3] Robert F. Gleckner, *Blake's Prelude: Poetical Sketches* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 10

[4] Michael Srigley, 'The Sickness of Blake's Rose', *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1992): 5.

[5] Ibid., 6–8

[6] Ibid., 6.

[7] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 47. Subsequent references are to this edition, in parenthesis, marked as *E*, by plate, except for Blake's conventionally printed poems, 'Notebook' pieces, and marginalia, where page numbers are substituted.

[8] Srigley, op cit., 5–7.

[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version With Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). All references are to this (1611 based) edition, in parenthesis, by chapter and verse.

[11] Page numbers, in all instances, relate to the excerpted passages from Blake's copy of this text, together with his marginalia, included in the Erdman edition, cited above.

[12] George A. Panichas, *Epicurus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 139–45.

[13] Gleckner, *Blake's Prelude*, 10–11.

[14] *Edward Young: Night Thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 210 Subsequent references are to this edition, in parenthesis, by canto ('Night') and line-index

[15] *Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed. Douglas Grey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 162–63.

[16] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John. H. Fisher (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 107. Subsequent references are to this edition, in parenthesis, with a line-index in lieu of page numbers.

[17] *Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander et al. (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994), 1368. Subsequent references are to this edition, in parenthesis, with a line index in lieu of page-numbers, Roman numerals indicating Act and Scene in the instance of the dramatic works cited.

[18] *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: New York University Press., 1963), 314.

[19] Ibid, 469.

[20] *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 140.

[21] *Paradise Lost* in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merrit Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1975). All references to this edition, in parenthesis.

[22] *Religio Laici*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H.T. Swedenberg , vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Subsequent references are to this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

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