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William Blake

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Subconscious Needs Turn to Conscious Desires

William Blake’s “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” demonstrates a struggle between a female’s virginity and sexual awakening. When Bromion rapes Oothoon, her prospective lover, Theotormon, condemns and embarrasses her as she transforms from an innocent girl into a self-reliant woman. However, Oothoon’s transformation stems from Bromion’s sexual assault, which she unknowingly initiates after plucking Leutha’s flower. Oothoon subconsciously desires sexual freedom, and consciously accepts her sexuality when Theotormon chastises her for Bromion raping her.

Blake initiates Oothoon’s sexual awakening through writing her love for Theotormon and virgin reluctance. “The Argument” initially reads as an apology, but the lines “I was not ashamed” and “I plucked Leutha’s flower, / And I rose up from the vale” indicate Oothoon’s acceptance of her sexuality (Blake 3, 5-6). In the past tense, Oothoon states, “I loved Theotormon” and “I trembled in my virgin fears,” because she is not apologizing for her rape or behavior, but rather arguing in favor of her freedom (Blake 1, 3). Oothoon understands that when she plucks Leutha’s flower and “put thee here to glow between my breasts,” she subconsciously desires a sexual transformation, and will not apologize for her natural desire (Blake plate 1, 11)\*.

One cannot excuse Bromion raping Oothoon as positive, but the atrocious act does transform her. Blake writes: “Bromion rent her with his thunders: on his stormy bed / Lay the faint maid, and soon her woes appalld his thunders hoarse” (Plate 1, 16-17). Oothoon immediately mourns her virginity, but does she regret plucking the flower and catching Bromion’s attention? At this moment, yes, but she does not realize Theotormon blames her for the rape. When Theotormon mourns Oothoon’s virginity, she attempts to gain his pity, but her body, now fully realized as a sexual being, does not apologize for her. Blake continues: “Oothoon weeps not, she cannot weep! her tears are locked up; / But she can howl incessant writhing her soft snowy limbs” (Plate 2, 11-12). While Oothoon does not subconsciously grieve, because her body does not cry, Blake describes her “writhing her soft snowy limbs,” which is very sexual (12). Oothoon’s body embraces this sexual awakening, and will not aid her conscious regret.

Theotormon and Bromion argue as to how the rape affects Oothoon, and without her able to defend herself. Theotormon says: “If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction / Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dews and honey and balm; / Or poison from the desart wilds, from the eyes of the envier” (Blake plate 4, 9-11). Theotormon believes Oothoon will “poison” his own innocence, and he cannot relish in love or take her virginity, so he condemns her (11). Bromion encourages Oothoon, and argues in favor of their sexual relationship. Bromion retorts: “Thou knowest that the ancient trees seen by thine eyes have fruit: / But knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth / to gratify senses unknown?” (Blake plate 4, 13-15). Blake makes a reference to the Tree of Knowledge, as if Theotormon represents Adam and Oothoon symbolizes Eve. While Oothoon accepts the fruit, though, like Eve, she does not understand what the fruit beholds or means, Theotormon pushes Oothoon and the fruit away, uncomfortable with his own sexuality. Bromion condemns Theotormon for his ignorant stance against Oothoon: “And there are other joys, beside the joys of riches and ease?” (Blake plate 4, 21). Theotormon believes in his material possessions rather than instinct, while Bromion knows sex does not require money or valuables. Because Oothoon cannot admit to her sexual desires yet, Bromion defends her right to pleasure without Theotormon’s belittlement.

As Theotormon derides Oothoon, she consciously realizes her desires. Blake writes: “They told me that the night & day were all that I could see; / They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up. / And they inclos’d my infinite brain into a narrow circle” (Plate 2, 30-32). *They* represent society and Theotormon denying Oothoon’s sexuality. Oothoon realizes that her prospective lover and society closed her eyes to sexual possibilities, which give her free thought. Blake writes: “That Theotormon hears me not! to him the night and morn / Are both alike: a night of sighs, a morning of fresh tears. / And none but Bromion can hear my lamentations” (Plate 2, 36-38). Though Oothoon does not immediately accept her sexuality, she realizes that Bromion understands her needs more than Theotormon. This realization leads Oothoon to rejecting Theotormon due to his contempt, and accepting herself as an individual.

The Daughters of Albion speak for Oothoon when she realizes her desire for sexual freedom. Blake writes: “The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin / That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys” (Plate 7, 3-4). When Oothoon plucks Leutha’s flower, she subconsciously desires intercourse while thinking of Theotormon, but Bromion rapes her instead. However, Oothoon receives her awakening, and after Theotormon chastises her, she realizes that she enjoys sex, and wants to open his eyes to this reality. Blake continues: “But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread / And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold; / I’ll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play / In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon” (Plate 7, 23-26). Oothoon still loves Theotormon, and wants to share her sexuality with him. Despite his irrational reproach, Oothoon can only appreciate her new found love with Theotormon: “Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e’er with jealous cloud / Come in the heaven of generous love” (Plate 7, 28-29). In order for Oothoon to appreciate her freedom and sexuality, she must convince Theotormon to do so as well. Therefore, Oothoon not only accepts her identity, but proves herself to Theotormon as an individual.

As Oothoon struggles with sex and personal identity, her subconscious desires fuel her actions, which cause Theotormon to belittle her, awakening her conscious realization. Though Bromion rapes her, Oothoon plucks the flower to accentuate her breasts, and he understands her hunger. If Oothoon does not accept her sexuality, then she could not reveal herself as an independent to Theotormon, who believes she wrongs him after the rape. In order to open his eyes to his own sexuality, Oothoon realizes her own through Theotormon’s anger.

Work Cited

Blake, William. “Visions of the Daughters of Albion.” *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*. Norton Critical ed. 57-65. Print.