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THE DIFFERENCES in the critical approaches to *The Book of Thel* have revolved around the interpretation of the ending in which Thel flees from her own "grave plot" (6;9) in "the land of clouds" (6;6) back to the "vales of Har" (6;2). Some feel this is a positive act, and view her interlocuters in the poem as negative creatures, seducing Thel into their evil state. The Yeats school (including Frye and Foster Damon), Bloom, Raine, and Bogen agree that it is the moral and physical limitations of these speakers that Thel flees. The alternate school posits that the society of the valley is self-sacrificing, and Thel is vain and self-deceiving. Her flight would not be from Plato's material forms, but from the communality of the society with which she is confronted. Critics like Robert Gleckner and H. M. Margoliouth have found Thel an anti-heroine and her flight regressive and "synthetic" (Gleckner 163).

Blake's interest in the Swedenborgian movement and participation in the New Church has been well detailed by David Erdman (142), G. E. Bentley, Jr. (34–38), and others. The influence of the Swedish ideologue's philosophy on the *Songs of Innocence* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has been demonstrated (Erdman, Howard). As these two works frame the writing and engraving of *The Book of Thel*, it would seem natural to examine the work in light of Swedenborg's theology. Yet there has not been a close reading of *Thel* in this context.

In his various writings, Swedenborg envisions a moral and spiritual system that may act as a signifying context in which we can judge Thel's acts. Specifically, it gives meaning to the vision of cyclic progression taught by the Cloud and hence to Thel's attitude towards the cycle and her flight from it. The tension between opposing forces, omnipresent in Swedenborg's theology, finds expression both in the society of the valley and within Thel herself.

The poem begins with a separation as, literally, Thel leaves her sisters and their "sunny flocks" (1;1). But this separation has ominous overtones. Implicit in the wording is a differentiation between the idyll of the shepherdesses and Thel's egocentric search for the "secret air" with its suggestions of death:

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,

> All but the youngest: she in paleness sought the secret air,
> To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day: (1;1–3)

Thel's departure is a turning away ("she . . . sought the secret air"). Where her sisters are a part of the idyll as nurturing idyll, Thel's thoughts turn from the elements towards her death and she describes herself in similes that suggest extreme self-involvement. "Thel is like . . . a parting cloud," she says, "like shadows in the water; / Like dreams of infants" (1;8, 9–10). In each of these similes, Thel evokes the idyllic elements solely as a means of self-description. Her language focuses on her own despair, using other elements as a filter for her own particular fear of death rather than expressing the generalized lamentation for the "children of the spring" (1;7) she alludes to at the beginning of her speech. There is in this subtle distinction the mark of a trend that becomes progressively more blatant: Thel repeatedly grapples with the significance of distinctions between herself as an individual and as part of the society of the valley that occur in the poem. In the end, Thel chooses Self over Other metaphysically just as she makes the choice linguistically here.

My contention is that at this point in the narrative the potential for both salvation and damnation lies within Thel, and it is to the latter potential that she succumbs in the poem's final plate. This dual potential is reflected in the antithetical Swedenborgian concepts of conjugal and conjugial love. Conjugial love is defined as "the conjunction of love and wisdom" which "is implanted in every woman from creation" (Con. Love 65, 400). Conjugal love is defined as "the connubial principle of evil and the false" (Con. Love 203) and is closely related to the definition of proprium, which is self-love and the love of the world (Arc. Coe. 220). Conjugial love is essentially an expansion ("[here the] conjunction of minds increases and therewith friendship") and a sublime union ("they . . . are continually desirous to be one") (Con. Love 214–15) as will be exemplified by the Cloud and dew. Correspondingly, conjugal love is essentially a contraction and the desire to be separate and distinct (Con. Love. 214–15). Thel contains both these possibilities, the former from divine influx and the latter from her "proprium," which is exemplified in her responses and her turning away.

Thel's lamentations are answered by the Lilly, who tells of a "he" that visits "from heaven" (1;9). This divine presence informs her of a happy transformation:

> 'Rejoice, thou humble grass, thou new-born Lilly flower,
> 'Thou gentle maid of silent valleys and of modest brooks;
> 'For thou shalt be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna,
> 'Till summer's heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs
> 'To flourish in eternal vales.' (1;21–25)

This suggests a progression of some importance, as it establishes an existence of three stages that appear repeatedly in the poem. First there is

birth and innocence ("new-born Lilly flower"), then melting by heat associated with light and/or water ("clothed in light . . . till summer's heat melts"), and then regeneration in eternity ("flourishing in eternity"). There are marked characteristics in all three stages. The first stage has overtones of infancy through appellations like "new-born" and "maid" and the idea that the Lilly will be "clothed" and "fed" like an infant. The light in which she is clothed is linked to the process of transformation from the first stage to the last. That water is associated with this stage also suggests a purification. Inherent in this speech is the message that though Thel will "pass away" the cycle leads not to death but to a unity with the Creator.

The cyclic generation that the Lilly discusses is given significance by Swedenborg's idea of "use" and his implicit view of terrestrial life as a progression to the spiritual. One of Swedenborg's proclamations is that to follow the precepts of Love, Wisdom, and Use is to unite with the Creator (Div. Love 170). In fact he defines the divine presence as manifest in the world through Divine Love, Divine Wisdom, and Divine Use (Div. Love 296). "Love and Wisdom are one," he proclaims, and heat and light "are similarly united" (Div. Love 99). For Swedenborg sees the sun as a correspondence to God's love and wisdom, its light being God's wisdom, its heat his love. In his own complicated manner he elaborates on the way they are united when he characterizes a parallel between Wisdom-light, Love-heat, and "Use" to "first, middle, and ultimate end" and to "end, cause, and effect":

> There are three things existing in an orderly sequence, called the first, middle, and ultimate end; they are also called the end, cause, and effect. These three must coexist in everything as a condition of its existence. For there can be no first end without a middle end and an ultimate end, that is, without a cause and an effect. . . . [The] end is the source of everything that exists in the effect. . . . For the end cannot exist in itself alone, but must be in something derived from itself, in which it may be wholly present as a sole agent and, by actuating it, render it efficient until it is carried to completion. (Div. Love 167–68)

This characterization, redundant as it is, sets up the inevitability of a cyclic link between the particular and the universal, a link Swedenborg defines outright. "The universal end of all created things is that there may be an eternal union of the Creator with the created universe" (Div. Love 170), he writes. We will see that the elements and speeches of Thel's interlocuters expose different facets of this grand progression that is ultimately generative and cyclic.

All of the elements in Thel's world espouse a philosophy in which they nurture, can see the purpose (if not the reason) behind their nurturing, and understand this nurturing as their "use," their function in a unified world of living things. But they go about their existence under the nurturing of the Creator, as we can gather from the facts we are given about the "he" of the garden: "he" comforts the Lilly with a revelation that is both specific and universal. "He" embodies all the nurturing and genera-

tive qualities on a scale that is expressly beyond their understanding. Throughout the poem as well he is referred to in terms reminiscent of biblical references to Christ and pre-Fall Jehovah: "he that loves the lowly" (5;1) and "him that walketh in the garden in the evening time" (1;14). The "he" is clearly the divine progenitor.

Furthermore, the Swedenborgian association of light and heat in the progression to "Him" have found their way into the Lilly's description of the cycle. She characterizes the middle passage of the cycle as light, then heat: the Lilly is "clothed in light . . . / Till summer's heat melts" her, and the Cloud and dew retire to the shining tent before they arise fused "in a golden band." Heat and light thus combined, they find their "use" in their nurturing relationships, the Lilly with her "numerous charge," Cloud and dew with their "tender flowers," and so on.

Thel, however, appears so caught up in her own existence that she misses the message of cyclic promise. The Lilly has a nurturing and purifying role in the valley (2;3–10), says Thel, while she does not, and this is her dilemma. Her attitude is curious given the fact that she rejects the role of nurturer when she turns away from her shepherdess sisters. The line "I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place" (2;12) suggests that, though she complains that she wants to have a "use," she is equally concerned for her current status. The question that she poses would seem to indicate that she is held in her present state of mind because she harbors a desire to remain in an unchanging physical state. Her need is not for a justification through process, but a justification of "place." This stasis stems from her desire to remain in innocence, to choose the world in which she currently exists over the sublime alternative of the cycle suggested by the Lilly. The conflict that arises in her and separates her from her sisters, thus beginning the action of the poem, is essentially a conflict between the selflessness of conjugial love and the self-involvement of conjugal love. Her self-reflexive language anticipates her final choice of Self (individual) over Other (communal).

The gestures of Thel's self-centered behavior that emerge as the poem progresses take further meaning from Swedenborg. When Thel first addresses the Cloud, for example, she commands him with "I charge thee tell to me / Why thou complainest not" (2;1–2). The imperative mode strengthens the diction: "I *charge thee tell*." Repeatedly in the poem Thel displays this kind of egocentricity, where she both distances and subjects the other elements. From a Swedenborgian perspective, Thel is breaking from that from which she is derived because of her "proprium" and her desire for stasis. Her denial is a denial of the "cause" (wisdom) and the effect (use). The Love (end) that is left, severed from the cycle, is perverted into self-love, and a self-love by her "proprium" and love of ruling. "Those who love the Lord are eager to be led by Him, desiring that He alone may rule," writes Swedenborg, "while those whose love of ruling comes from self-love, are eager to lead themselvesle, desiring that they

alone may rule" (Div. Love 142). It is a "love of dominion arising from the love of self" characteristic of those who turn away (Div. Love 141).

When the Cloud is thus ordered to tell the secret, he responds in terms similar to the Lilly. But his speech becomes more sexual as he describes in great detail the act of transformation and the generation that ensues. Swedenborg's discussion of conjugial love is replete with sexual metaphors and distinctions as, for example, where he writes "conjugial love dwells in the supreme region, in the midst of mutual love, in the marriage chamber of the will; and also in the midst of the perceptions of wisdom in the marriage chamber of the understanding" (Con. Love 270). Blake links sexuality to the divinity by the phrase "raptures holy" (3;11) as well as by the act of caressing the flowers and the continuing association of divine generative force with light and heat:

> Unseen descending, weigh my light wings upon balmy flowers,
> And court the fair-eyed dew to take me to her shining tent:
> The weeping virgin, trembling kneels before the risen sun,
> Till we arise link'd in a golden band and never part,
> But walk united, bearing food to all our tender flowers. (3;12–16)

The Cloud is thus urging a selfless "conjugial" love that is certainly not sexless, and thereby implies that Thel should enter the cycle of sexual generation in order to be of "use." But we might also notice that the sexual transformation is associated with light: the union takes place in the dew's "shining tent." The "weeping virgin" before the "risen sun" is both sexual and religious in this context: for the risen sun can be seen as a masculine sexual image that is paired with the feminine image of the virgin. At the same time, the sun is associated with divine power. The heat and light described by the Lilly, here present in the "shining tent," find their source in the Swedenborgian image of the sun as a symbol of divine love and divine wisdom (wisdom-light; love-heat) (Div. Love 99). Swedenborg's link between the sun, light, and heat, and Blake's use of it as signification of melting and fusing finds its use in the Cloud and dew arising "link'd in a golden band." The word "arise" suggests the rebirth mentioned by the Lilly, and its utility is exemplified when the couple bear food. The nurturing relationship is also invoked by the use of the word "our," suggesting that they are the parental aspect to the Lilly as infant.

Two things are thus clear. First, and most important, these elements are in a cycle of existence that is birth, a melting-binding death associated with light, and then a fertile regeneration. That it is a cycle is clear from the Cloud's description of the middle stage, the "passing away" that Thel laments as death. Moreover, were it not a repeating process, Blake could easily have written the line in the past perfect or future tense. Thus

> when I pass away
> It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and raptures holy

could easily become

when I pass'd away
It was to tenfold life. . .

or

when I pass away
Twill be to tenfold life

without altering the rhythm or the syntax. It is clear then that the use of the present imperfect tense signals an ongoing, repeated action, a time cycle rather than a time line. (The cycle's existence will be confirmed in the Clod's speech, though here again to be expanded.)

The second important point is that all of the elements are engaged in a nurturing relationship. The "he" of the garden nurtures the Lilly, the sisters watch the flock, the Cloud and dew feed the flowers, and even the Lilly has her own "numerous charge" (2;18). The Cloud defines this philosophy to Thel as "everything that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself" (3;26–27), which is a perfect proverbial condensation for Swedenborg's idea of "use," and indeed Thel herself later signifies this universal and harmonious interaction with the word "use."

But Thel still resists the cycle that is described for her. She counters the Cloud by refuting the particulars once again.

> For I . . . smell the sweetest flowers,
> But I feed not the little flowers; I hear the warbling birds,
> But I feed not the warbling birds; they fly and seek their food:
> But Thel delights in these no more, because I fade away;
> And all shall say, 'Without a use this shining woman liv'd,
> Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms?' (3;18–23)

She remains firmly fixed physically and psychologically: she is concerned with finding her function, but once more her desire to participate is in conflict with her pride. In fact her speech reveals her ego-blinded perception. In it, she complains that she does not feed the flowers or birds, but her definition of an ignominious end is to be the "food of worms." Her complaint is thus illogical, and the Cloud points this out to her when he responds "if thou art the food of worms . . . how great thy use" (25–26).

Confronted with a Worm, Thel reacts with great empathy, though in language that is self-reflexive and with a focus that is ultimately egocentric. She responds in terms reminiscent of her earlier description of herself: "I pass away: yet I complain and no one hears my voice" (3;4). She sees the Worm as an "infant" like herself (4;3), but this is another instance of Thel refusing to accept change for fear of leaving her first stage of the cycle. Thel's pull towards her "use," her intimation of a "death" where she can hear the voice of the divine presence (1;13–14), suggests that she is feeling intimations of the melting-binding of the cycle. The "use" she seeks would be possible only if she should pass through the second stage of the cycle into generation, only if she were to become the trembling virgin.

The Clod of Clay begins her speech with a reiteration of the philosophy "we live not for ourselves" (4;10). But what follows is an expansive analogy of the middle stage of the cycle to the macrocosmic level, much in the way Swedenborg saw the material world as "correspondence" for the spiritual world.

> My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark;
> But he, that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head,
> And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast,
> And says: 'Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee
> 'And I have given thee a crown that none can take away.' (4;11–5;4)

The phrase "of itself" countered by "but," as here, implies that not clay but some masculine generative force brings light to the union. The melting-binding of the middle phase of the cycle appears as "nuptial bands" around the breast of the earth, and the flourishing and generation that results is now "a crown." The divine force "pouring his oil" is at once a sexual act, a purification, and an annointment.

Thus the union here is between the divine masculine generative force and the earth itself as feminine generative principle. The Clod is a figure at once naive and maternal: she, like the Lilly, is part of the cycle though she does not understand its significance. She is also the "matron" (5;14) to the Lilly's "newborn" (1;21). (The other feminine generative force is the dew, but little can be said of her as the Cloud relates that section of the poem.) The Cloud, who is active in the union (unlike the Lilly and Clod), has the most complex understanding of the cycle. He alone speaks to Thel with authority, and this while leaning back in his "airy throne" (2;4). Like the "he" of the garden, who is also the active member of the union and who has a greater understanding of the cycle, he functions as a masculine generative force that provides food. Where the Cloud, we can assume, provides a physical food in the form of rain, the "he" of the garden can be said to provide a spiritual food: for both the Lilly and Clod he brings comfort and assurance. The response of the feminine elements is generative and nurturing. The result is a philosophical and ecological balance of opposites that produces harmony.

Thel is again outside this, more concerned with the details and herself, ignoring the greater message. The symbolic significance of the milk and oil as infant-innocence that later becomes generative fluid seems to escape her.

> Alas! I knew not this, and therefore did I weep.
> That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
> That wilful bruis'd its helpless form; but that he cherish'd it
> With milk and oil I never knew, and therefore did I weep;
> And I complained in the mild air, because I fade away,
> And lay me down in thy cold bed, and leave my shining lot. (5;8–13)

Though her very language promises the passage from innocence to expe-

rience, she remains consistent in her stasis by ignoring the language's import.

The Clod responds by inviting Thel to enter her "house" where Thel's "moans" have been called down (5;16,15). The term "moans" is significant as it carries strong sexual overtones. This is consistent with Thel's dilemma of conjugial over conjugal love. For as Thel feels the intimations of the melting-binding, she is in fact feeling the intimations of a sexual awakening. Her laments are the signals of this awakening as she senses the significance of the fertility around her. The "moans" that she encounters in the Clod's house are the sounds of a powerful sexuality that embrace both macrocosmic and microcosmic generation.

That sexuality is an issue here can be supported by the beginning illuminations of the book, which both confirm and delineate her situation as it is given in the text itself. Thus the image on the title page in which a man grabs a woman while Thel looks on reflects the situation the language details: Thel is looking at elements of the cycle engaged in what appears to be the conclusion of a courtship. The woman's hands are thrown straight up with palms open in a very submissive response to the male figure's seizing her around the waist with what seems to be both hands. The sexuality of the scene is reinforced by the fact that he, the aggressor, is unclothed, while she is not. There is such similarity in the hair, dress, and lines of Thel and the woman as to suggest that this may be Thel confronting her own impending change as she does in the narrative of Plate 6 of the poem. Thus pictorially Thel has a choice to make, and in the narrative the choice is dramatized by her choice between sexual (therefore communal, therefore Other) and self-centered acts.

Thel's failure to become "conjugial" is the meaning related in the following illustrations. In each of the succeeding illuminations, there is an infant figure and a nurturing figure. Where Thel is clearly identifiable she is an onlooker, physically as well as temperamentally removed from the elements she surveys, a position which reflects her pride and separateness.

Plate 1 shows familial bliss, with various inhabitants of the valley engaged in a society of mutual love. In Plate 2 the leaves of the tree fall protectively over the Lilly while she responds to Thel. Thel is visually separated from both the Lilly and the nurturing tree with her arms close against her sides. In Plate 3 the dynamic of the leaves is circular, as the language describes the union of the Cloud and dew.

On the pivotal Plate 4, however, a scene is set of masculine, feminine, and infant figures in a triangular configuration. But here one notices that it is the reappearance of a secondary configuration present in Plate 1 where the masculine figure reclines and the feminine figure holds the infant in an image of eighteenth-century familial bliss. On Plate 4 Thel acts as nurturing element to a figure she responds to solely as an image of herself, the circularity thereby preventing the fulfillment of any of the potential of the family unit. The posture of the Cloud (to follow Bogen 44) is

correspondingly associated with freedom (as in the Argument of the *Visions* and Plate 3 of *Urizen*). Sexual freedom seems particularly alluded to here in the way that the figure's thighs are parted towards Thel, with only a very free flowing drape covering his genitals. Thel's hands are in a position of surprise in concord with her reaction in the language. (This posture is again associated with surprise in Plate 11 of *Milton*.) The image is particularly important as it marks a turning point in the progression of the images which show Thel's fall into her "proprium." The pictorial association of Thel with self-reflexive attitudes is the subject in plates 5 and 6. Her position in Plate 5 is as observer only, removed from the scene of nurturing beneath her. Hers is also a posture Blake used repeatedly to signify a self-reflexive attitude (for example in the title page of *Urizen*, the frontispiece of *America*, and plates 4 and 7 of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*). In Plate 6 there is the image of a young girl and two children riding on the back of the Serpent. This proves to be an image of fulfilled self-reflexiveness that stands in opposition to the image of bliss in Plate 1. To see why we must again turn to Blake's narrative.

The drama of the poem stems from Thel's growing egocentricity and the fact that she has had two possibilities of action from the beginning of her story. She could have embraced either conjugial selflessness or conjugal self-love. But the dominance of self has shown repeatedly in her words and particularly in the way she fails to perceive the cyclic vision presented to her. Thus her ability to perceive has depended on her recognition of the dichotomies of Self and Other, individual and societal, conjugial and conjugal love. Her inability to embrace the societal Other finally entraps her and leaves her unable to escape her proprium. When she enters the world of the Clod, though she is actually seeing the promise of the cycle, she sees that cycle as a terrifying and confusing condition (because of the self-involvement she brings with her). She perceives the world she enters as strongly associated with death. The gates are "eternal" and the porter "terrific" (6;1). She sees the "couches of the dead" (6;3). But it is also "the land of clouds" and "valleys dark" (6;6). We may be aware that what appears horrendous to her is the balance of opposites of the Clod's speech, as is only appropriate in the Clod's house. Thel comes to her own grave plot, and hears her voice:

> Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
> Or the glist'ning Eye to the poison of a smile?
> Why are Eyelids stor'd with arrows ready drawn,
> Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
> Or an Eye of gifts & graces show'ring fruits & coined gold
> Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
> Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
> Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror, trembling, & affright?
> Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
> Why a little curtain of flesh upon the bed of our desire? (6;11–20)

The details given by this voice are again the balanced opposites. The Eye,

for example, as a conduit for both "the poison of a smile" and "fruits & coined gold" is here an image of both destruction and creation. Thus, as the images of line 6 confirm, it is a land of death only for innocence. It is the house of generation, of destruction and creation, and the graves are the graves of innocence and the birthing ground of experience. (Note that the still innocent Thel's grave is "hollow" [6;10].)

It is also, again appropriately, the house of both macrocosmic and microcosmic generation, where "honey from every wind" coexists with "a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in," and "a Nostril wide inhaling terror, trembling, & affright" coexists with "an Eye of gifts & graces." From the cosmic generation of "creations" and "every wind," the details dovetail into the specifics of Thel and the "burning boy." It is at this moment, when she confronts her own destiny, that she shrieks and returns to the valley.

Her choice is ultimately a rejection of her sexuality: it is not until the "little curtain" on the "bed of desire" is mentioned that she flees. The little curtain of flesh is a clear reference to her hymen: what is a curtain if not a veil before an opening. Thel's flight is a denial, a "Negotiation" of the power of the "burning" and the "whirlpool fierce"; it is the refusal to allow the existence of the Passions her imagination (Blake's "Intellect") naturally lead her to.

Her choice is innocence and the virginity that accompanies it, as well as a rejection of the opposing states of experience and generation. In Blake's private *Note-book*, he writes:

> Men are not admitted into Heaven because they have curbed & governed their Passions or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings. The treasures of Heaven are not Negotiations of Passion, but Realities of Intellect, from which all Passions Emanate uncurbed in their Eternal Glory. (132)

Thel's rejection of the generation is thus an act of self-condemnation, and her departure on the back of the Serpent underlines this. She is a Soul who has fallen in the "deadly dreams," where division of the world into Self and Other, rather than embraced as a whole, becomes an elected reality. Thel's flight is thus not to innocence but Selfhood, the rejection of the Clod's assertion "we live not for ourselves" (5;10).

The poem, then, establishes a unified theology. This theology sees man's happy life as a progression from infancy to experience. It is a cycle in which the elements move through a crucial middle stage, where they are transformed in their association with light and heat. Having passed through this stage, they achieve a state of mutual love, where each element has its use; everything lives for a harmonious societal end. Thel is set apart from this cyclic pattern, in temperament for the first five plates, and then by choice in Plate 6. Her departure is in keeping with her egocentricity throughout the poem. She rejects the middle stage of the cycle and leaves on the back of the Serpent in an act of self-damnation.

Though Thel cannot understand it, the voice on Plate 6 is, to use Swe-

denborg's words, an account of "an eternal union of the Creator with the created universe" which is the "universal end of all created things" (Div. Love 170), the "ultimate end," the "effect" (Div. Love 167), the "use" that contains "everything concordant with love and wisdom" (Div. Love 213). To flee on the back of the Serpent from the promise of that voice is, in effect, to reject all that is the emanation of the Creator.

The opposition between Self and Other, Individual and Community, is reflected in Swedenborgian theology as "love of rule springing from love of self" and "love to the Lord" (Div. Love 141). "All who love the Lord are eager to be led by Him, desiring that He alone may rule; but all whose love of ruling comes from self-love turn their backs to the Lord" (Div. Love 142). This clarifies and reinforces three important points regarding Thel. First, it gives further explanation for Thel's question "I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place" (2;12). The proprium exemplified by her attitude is here put in its larger theological context. Second, this formulation explains Thel's consistent inability to understand the cycle. "Every spirit takes the road which leads to the community where his own love reigns, and he does not see the roads which lead elsewhere" (Div. Love 145). Thus Thel's insistence on her lack of use stems from an inability to see the road offered by communal society as represented by Lilly, Cloud, and Clod. Her proprium prevents any true understanding of the nature of the cycle. Third, it therefore predicts the poem's conclusion: as a soul who clings to her place and her proprium, her condemnation is inevitable since "every spirit, as he turns towards his ruling love, also moves onwards in the same direction" (Div. Love 145). Her proprium, then, leads her inevitably to the Serpent and her damnation.

Thus this Serpent, who leads the sleeping soul out of Paradise, is a powerful negating symbol. According to Swedenborg, the Serpent signifies one "who turns from the Lord to himself, and from heaven to the world" (A.R. 550). This is overtly what Thel has done: she rejects the divine cycle. In terms of the poem's philosophical stance, Thel's return thus represents a violent rejection of all that has been stated as both good and natural.

The rejection is also an act of selfhood. This is the legacy of the Serpent: "its 'head' is love of self," writes Swedenborg (Div. Prov. 211). "The 'enmity,' that is put, is between the love of man's own [proprium] and the Lord" (Div. Prov. 211). To the degree that the cycle symbolizes salvation, man's proprium is damnation. It is synonymous with selfhood, and is defined as "all the evil and falsity that springs from the love of self and of the world" (Arc. Coe. 210). "Love of self and the love of the world," he says simply, "make the life of hell" (Arc. Coe. 10741).

This is reflected in Thel's rejection of the philosophy, "everything that lives lives not for itself," and its elements of peace and love. She has supplanted mutual love with self-love, which forms the only hindrance to the continuous flow of "celestial love" that is embodied by the cycle and leads

to salvation. But any "peace" that Thel may hope to attain is subverted because peace is only possible when "the cupidities arising from the love of self and the love of the world are taken away" (Arc. Coe. 5662).

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