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Why Is That Fairy in Europe?

by MARK ANDERSON

The fairy who is the fictive muse of Europe has never been an object of heated controversy among Blake scholars, but has always been something of a puzzle. He appears only on plate iii, and that plate appears in only two of the twelve existing copies of the work; to account for its frequent absence or its exceptional presence would be, one expects, to say something about Blake's understanding of his poem. Despite the fact that the two copies in which it occurs are among the very last printed by Blake himself, disputes over the plate have most often focused on dating: was it composed early, and deleted from most copies, or was it a late addition to the poem? Arguments for an early date have suggested that Blake removed the plate because he felt that it made the meaning of Europe too obvious, or that it was simply not a suitable preface for the poem; those who believe that the plate was composed after the rest of Europe have seen it as an explanation of the prophecy — or, as David V. Erdman does, as "a lyric afterthought" and a "deliberate Quiddism." After a few remarks about the poem as a whole, I will be arguing for another possibility: that plate iii was added to the late copies of Europe not to explain it, but to deepen its ambiguity.

Europe is a transitional work in Blake's canon, marking the passage from the politically oriented works of 1793 to the metaphysically oriented "Bible of Hell" and the epics. As such, it poses many problems: none of Blake's other prophetic works seems quite so ambivalent about his major characters and themes. It is intimately related to the earlier works, particularly America, and shares their themes of political oppression and revolution, but the revolution it prophesies ends as a "strife of blood" (15:11, C 66); no vision of a better order is provided. Los, who in later
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poems appears as the poetic imagination and the spirit of prophecy, seems to be something quite different in *Europe*, calling for the binding of "the spirits of life" and "the nourishing sweets of earth," and acquiescing in that of Orc (3:9-4:14, C 61-62); his emanation, Enitharmon, is given what is elsewhere Urizen's role as the originator of religious oppression. Meanwhile, the wrathful Orc, the revolutionary hero of *America*, is unable to do more than bring on the inconclusive bloodshed that closes the poem. The extensive restructuring of Blake's "mythology" that extends through *The Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania, The Book of Los*, and *The Four Zoas* has its beginning here.

Also connected to the later works is *Europe's* experiment with the distortion of narrative time. What ends in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* as the almost complete abandonment of linear narrative begins modestly here: two eternal moments—nativity and apocalypse, the descent of the "secret child" (3:2, C 61) and the beginning of revolution in Europe—occupy most of the text, while the intervening eighteen hundred years of European history are dismissed as unreal:

Enitharmon slept,
Eighteen hundred years: Man was a Dream!
The night of Nature and their harps unstrung:
She slept in middle of her nightly song,
Eighteen hundred years, a female dream! (9:1-5, C 63)

Enitharmon's problematic role in the poem will be addressed shortly; the point to be made for the moment is that *Europe* is deeply—even primarily—concerned with the relation between history and eternity. That is the reason for the extensive rhythmic and verbal echoes, in the opening lines of the prophecy and in Los's song (3:9-4:14, C 61-62), of Milton's ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, which looks, as *Europe* does, from nativity to apocalypse. Blake's insistence on the unreality of eighteen hundred years of history is a direct response to Milton's poem, which unifies creation, nativity, and apocalypse through the metaphor of the celestial music that accompanies each—"For if such holy Song / Enwrap our fancy long, / Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold"—only to reject the happy prospect:

But wisest Fate says no,
This must not yet be so,
The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss;
So both himself and us to glorifie.


6. The allusions to the *Nativity Ode* are too many to enumerate here; for a complete discussion see Tolley, pp. 115-45.

Milton's ode thus becomes a celebration of time, both cyclic (the annual Christmas observance) and linear (the progress from creation to apocalypse). Los's song, too, celebrates time: the night he sings of has come before—that is, it comes "again," like Christmas—and he and his sons rejoice "Because the days and nights of joy, in lucky hours renew" (4:9, C 62) in an indefinite progression. What Blake would have seen as error in the _Nativity Ode_ is its embracing of "wisest Fate" and consequent projection of apocalypse into the indefinite future; the same error is expressed by Los's desire to take his rest in the pastoral night of nativity and by his unthinking acceptance of the binding of Orc (which figures both the binding of the infant in swaddling bands and the crucifixion—although Orc is not to be identified with Christ; the connection is metaphorical only). It is the error that creates history and makes the crucifixion inevitable.

Los, of course, embodies Milton's error within an external context: the error is not just that of Milton, but of the prophetic imagination in the eighteen hundred years of the Christian era. As such, it readies the human race for the priestly oppression that Enitharmon promotes as she asserts her own power:

Now comes the night of Enitharmons joy!
Who shall I call? Who shall I send?
That Woman, lovely Woman! may have dominion?
Arise O Rintrah thee I call! & Palamabron thee!
Go! tell the human race that Womans love is Sin!
That an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters
In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come:
Forbid all Joy,
& from her childhood shall the little female
Spread nets in every secret path. (5:1-9, C 62)

Blake's presentation of Enitharmon as the controlling power of Christian history is perplexing, especially because it follows by only one year his analysis of patriarchal power in _Visions of the Daughters of Albion_. It would be a mistake to say that Blake was a feminist: the condition of women in the real world concerned him primarily as a revelation of the workings of Urizen. But he did consistently view women as an oppressed class. For Blake, though, the victims of oppression are rarely entirely innocent: they tend to adopt the perspective of their oppressors in order to gain power of their own. Enitharmon in _Europe_ falls into the trap of indirect power, of which Blake's acquaintance Mary Wollstonecraft had written:

Women . . . sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the weakness of men; and they may well glory in their illicit sway, for, like Turkish bashaws, they have more real power than their masters: but virtue is sacrificed to temporary gratifications, and the respectability of life to the triumph of an hour.

Women, as well as despots, have now, perhaps, more power than they would if the world, divided and subdivided into kingdoms and families, were governed by laws deduced from the exercise of reason; but in obtaining it, to carry on the comparison, their character is
degraded, and licentiousness spread through the whole aggregate of society. The many become pedestal to the few.8

The trouble with Enitharmon’s “dominion,” then, is not that it gives power to women who ought to stay in their place, but that it degrades character and spreads licentiousness. To declare that sexual love is Sin, to forbid all joy, may create possibilities for the cunning of the oppressed, but it does so at the expense of removing eternal life to an allegorical abode—an error analogous to the projection of apocalypse into the unreality of the future.9

If Los’s failure is to be understood as that of the Christian imagination, Enitharmon’s can usefully be seen as the failure of that imagination’s emanation—the Church as an institution.10 And that failure is, for Blake, the same degradation of the character of the oppressed that results from Enitharmon’s doctrine: it is the subversion of the virtues of Innocence—Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love—which are hypocritically transformed into instruments of oppression. Like Nietzsche, though for nearly antithetical reasons, Blake thought it of great importance that Christianity began as a religion of “the lower masses, the women, the slaves”11—and also believed that the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus had been turned inside out as its virtues were made over into forms of indirect power, or what Nietzsche derides as “little herd-animal virtues.”12

He who loves his Enemies betrays his Friends
This is surely not what Jesus intends
But the sneaking Pride of Heroic Schools
And the Scribes & Pharisees Virtuous Rules
For he acts with honest triumphant Pride
And this is the cause that Jesus died
He did not die with Christian Ease
Asking pardon of his Enemies
If he had Caiphas would forgive
Sneaking submission can always live
(The Everlasting Gospel, C 519)

The Everlasting Gospel addresses the Christian virtues in turn; this passage deals with humility, but can stand as a summary of Blake’s insistence that true Christianity is destroyed by “sneaking submission,” or the efforts of the oppressed to wield indirect power by exploiting the roles given them by their oppressors. Enitharmon has done just that, creating the “virtue” of Chastity and the cult of the Queen of Heaven; as Holy Virgin,

she gives birth to a secret child who turns out to be another patriarch—neither Christ nor Orc, but the bat-winged pope shown on plate 11.13

Still, Enitharmon’s aim is that Woman, not the Queen of Heaven, have dominion: it is not possible to defend Blake against charges of misogyny by treating her as an allegorical figure who has nothing to do with real, human women. The crucial point here is that her aim is dictated by Urizen’s version—or parody—of Christianity. Enitharmon knows—and so does Blake—that sneaking submission is her only means of contending on their own terms with the kings and priests who do have dominion under Urizen; and although her acceptance of those terms is a serious error, her cunningly aggressive use of sexuality can hardly be seen as any worse than the aggression of the male characters of Europe, who are constantly at war, except when their jobs as tyrants keep them too busy to fight. No character in the poem lacks the craving for dominant power; even Los wants to be envied, wants Orc bound, and the like. The identification of power with dominion is thus a crucial issue in the poem, and it is once again the misperception of time that allows such an identification to come about, as becomes clear when Enitharmon addresses Oothoon and Theotormon:

I hear the soft Oothoon in Enitharmon’s tents:
Why wilt thou give up secrecy my melancholy child?
Between two moments bliss is ripe:
O Theotormon robb’d of joy, I see thy salt tears flow
Down the steps of my crystal house. (14:21–25, C 66)

Now Theotormon is robbed of joy only because he believes what Enitharmon says: he expects Oothoon to fulfill the role Enitharmon has set for her (or at least he did in Visions of the Daughters of Albion), and she will not. She refuses to accept such a role, as she did in the earlier poem, because she knows that bliss is ripe in the moment, not between moments, whether it be the nativity, the apocalypse, or her own “moment of desire” (Visions of the Daughters of Albion 7:3, C 50). But precisely because the moment is the eruption of eternity into time, all those seeking the power of “dominion” (in this case, Enitharmon, Urizen, and Albion’s Angels) must seek to deny the present reality of such moments, displacing them into the historical past or the hypothetical future to be used as goads and lures with which the rest of us can be controlled. The only bliss ripe between moments is the bliss of the tyrant. In short, Enitharmon’s sexual form of sneaking submission is only superficially different from the open aggression of Urizen’s warring kings. It especially infuriates Blake not because it is specifically female aggression, but because it is indirect aggression, implicating the powerless in the Urizenic order of dominance and submission and encouraging them to perpetuate it in history instead of seeking its end in the apocalyptic moment of eternity.

13. For a reproduction, see The Illuminated Blake, annotated by David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), p. 169. As Erdman notes, Blake gives the pope the face of George III, thus uniting kingly and priestly oppression in this single image.
So why is the fairy in _Europe_? Perhaps the most persuasive evidence that plate iii was in fact a late addition to the poem is that, while the rest of _Europe_ was etched on the backs of plates from _America_, the prefatory lyric appears on the back of a plate from _The Book of Ahania_. Plate iii, then, must have been etched at some time after _Ahania_ was—and also after _The Book of Urizen_, since _Ahania_ continues the story that _Urizen_ begins. Now _The Book of Urizen_, like _Europe_, is said to have been "dictated," and the source of that dictation, an indeterminate number of putative "Eternals," is of at least questionable reliability—the Eternals oppose Urizen and cause his fall, but in doing so adopt the judgmental stance that he himself invented (_Urizen_ 4:44–5:18, C 72–73); they erect the "Tent" of "Science" in order to block the fallen world from their sight (19:2–9, C 78); and they seem unable to distinguish between Urizen and Los (on plate 7, for example, while the Eternals are describing the fall of Urizen, the illumination depicts that of Los). I believe that the reader of _Urizen_ is ultimately expected to read that poem against the perspective of the Eternals, making the distinction between Urizen and Los, noting the similarity between their Tent of Science and Urizen's Net of Religion. My suggestion here is that, after making such successful use of the Eternals as the "muses" of _Urizen_, Blake decided to add a similarly unreliable muse to _Europe_, casting doubt on the validity of its presentation of events and characters, and calling on its reader to come to terms with the consciousness of the fairy in order to guess at what he might misrepresent or conceal.

Plate iii contains ample hints about what the fairy's perspective may be, but many of them appear to contradict one another. The lyric opens with the fairy's song of the senses, a song that sounds Blakean enough to have appeared in _The Marriage of Heaven and Hell_ or _Visions of the Daughters of Albion_:

Five windows light the cavern'd Man; thro' one he breathes the air; Thro' one, hears music of the spheres; thro' one, the eternal vine Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes; thro' one can look. And see small portions of the eternal world that ever groweth; Thro' one, himself pass out what time he please, but he will not; For stolen joys are sweet, & bread eaten in secret pleasant.

15. See _The Illuminated Blake_, p. 188.
16. It is my belief—one that cannot be discussed within the scope of this essay, unfortunately—that the device of the unreliable muse is central to Blake's late work. Of the poems written after _Europe_, four are attributed to muses of at least questionable reliability: _The Book of Urizen_ to the Eternals; _The Book of Los_ and _The Four Zoas_ to Eno, the "aged Mother, / Who the chariot of Leutha guides" (_The Book of Los_ 3:1–2, C 90); and _Milton_ to the Daughters of Beulah. Three late poems—_The Song of Los_, _The Book of Ahania_, and _Jerusalem_—are not attributed to such muses; one could, however, make a good case that _Ahania_, as a continuation of _Urizen_, should also be read as the dictation of the Eternals. The best discussion of the unreliability of the Eternals in _Urizen_ is that of W. J. T. Mitchell, _Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry_ (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 115–21.
So sang a Fairy mocking as he sat on a streak'd Tulip,
Thinking none saw him: when he ceas'd I started from the trees!
And caught him in my hat as boys knock down a butterfly. (iii:1-9, C 60)

That the fairy should dispense such Blakean doctrine does much to establish a reader's confidence in him. On the other hand, he is "mocking," and while one cannot know whether he mocks the doctrine itself or those who disbelieve it, one should consider that Blake never attaches any positive value to mockers or mockery. Moreover, the fairy is perched on "a streak'd Tulip": this is of course an allusion to Rasselas, in which Imlac claims that

The business of a poet . . . is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He . . . must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

It is easy to imagine how Blake, devotee of minute particulars, must have fumed over Dr. Johnson's confinement of poetry to the perceptions of negligence and carelessness, and what pleasure he must have felt at the opportunity to take a jab at Imlac through the fairy. But whose side is the fairy on? Is his tulip Blakean, because it has streaks, or Johnsonian, because they are not numbered? And, if the latter, is the fairy or the fictive poet at fault?

The rest of the lyric does little to answer those questions. Once captured by the poet, the fairy shows himself to be just as caught up in the mentality of dominating power as is Enitharmon: "Seeing himself in my possession thus he answered me: / My master, I am yours. command me, for I must obey" (iii:11-12, C 60). As one dominated rather than dominating, he is also thoroughly familiar with the tactics of sneaking submission: asking for "a cup of sparkling poetic fancies" to make him "tipsie" (iii:16, C 60)—the word suggests more frivolity than exuberance in his view of the imagination—he promises to "shew you all alive / The world, when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy" (iii:17-18, C 60). The fulfillment of that promise is dubious at best. Does it come when, on the way home, the poet gathers wildflowers as the fairy shows him "each eternal flower" and laughs "to see them whimper because they were pluck'd" (iii:20-21, C 60)?

The lines are often compared to the passage in Visions of the Daughters of Albion in which the Marygold urges Oothoon to pluck its flower "because the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away" (Visions 1:9-10, C 46), but there is an obvious difference between a character who

17. The words mock, mocker, mocking, etc., are once in a while used neutrally by Blake, and very rarely with what appears to be approbation (but then, as nearly as I can determine, the use is always ironic). As to the not inconsiderable mockery in his own works, I think that he would have called it by a different name: virtually all of his uses of these words suggest that they signified to him something fundamentally malicious.
plucks a flower when it tells her to do so, and one who laughs at flowers
plucked against their will. Even if the fairy is not actually sadistic here—
even, that is, if he laughs not at the suffering of the flowers but at their
ignorance that they are in fact eternal—he still exhibits a disturbing lack
of compassion for the world "all alive" that he promised to show the poet.
Moreover, his laughter is open to a much more sinister interpretation, and
one that the themes of *Europe* would seem to encourage: it can be taken
to represent the use of the fantasy of eternal life in an allegorical abode
as a justification of present death and suffering, just as Enitharmon and
Urizen use it—and as, in Blake's view, Urizenic, institutional Christianity
had used it: thus the flowers hover around the poet "like a cloud of in-
cense" (iii:22, C 60). Finally, the fairy dictates *Europe*, which can in no
way be read as the celebration of life implicit in his promise to the poet.
He has done just what Enitharmon would have Woman do: he has ac-
quiesced in his role as submissive servant in order to exploit it for the pur-
pose of gaining control over his supposed "master"—who seems to remain
completely ignorant of what has happened.

At this point, it must be stressed that I have been emphasizing only one
aspect of the presentation of the fairy; I do not mean to imply, either in
the previous paragraph or in what follows, that he bears only one valid in-
terpretation. Most of Blake's fairies are, as S. Foster Damon describes
them, "spirits of sexual delight—'rulers of the vegetable world' like those
of Chaucer and Shakespeare"—although, as Damon notes, they are also
(at least in the later works) "Unforgiving & unalterable," constituent parts
of Satan and Rahab (*Milton* 31:18–21, C 130)19—and there is nothing to
prevent the reader of *Europe* from taking its fairy in such a way: limited
to the "vegetable" perspective, mischievous, perhaps even cruel, but a true
representative of the joys of the senses. In this view, the fairy's tulip is a
Blakean one, though the fictive poet is wrongheaded enough to fail to
number the streaks, and the poet—who becomes the fairy's oppressor by
capturing him—deserves no better treatment than he gets from the fairy;
perhaps the fairy even deserves his gratitude for shattering his Johnsonian
understanding of the senses with *Europe*'s critique of Enitharmon's sexual
politics. Such an approach produces a good reading of the poem; my only
aim here is to offer an alternative (really a complementary) reading that
begins with the fairy's own politics rather than with his sensuality. In this
reading, his tulip is Johnsonian, not because the fairy himself is a John-
sonian, but because—as a representative of the senses in a culture that
denies their value—he "mockingly" uses his intimacy with sense percep-
tion as a means to power, just as Enitharmon uses her sexuality, and that
means that he must use it deceptively. He must submit to the poet in order
to get his way with the poem, which he then transforms from a celebration
of the world "all alive" (and it does, deceptively, begin that way, invoking

Milton's celestial music) to an instrument of his own political purposes.

If the fairy is to be seen in these two different ways, one must raise some questions as to the validity of the apparent meaning of Europe. The possibility arises that it may sometimes be necessary to read against the surface direction of the poem if one wishes to approach it in the spirit in which Blake wrote, rather than that in which the fairy dictated. First of all, because his political aim is to promote the cause of the senses against Urizen's rationality, the fairy has an easy target in Enitharmon—much easier than Urizen himself would be, since her indirect power ceases to exist once exposed—and his portrait of her is therefore likely to be less than trustworthy. More important, though, is the fact that the fairy, so adept at the indirect exploitation of Urizenic power, has (as Enitharmon does) a stake in things as they are: it is to his advantage to see Los as ineffectual, Enitharmon as irreversibly at odds with Los and Orc, and revolution as only a brief episode in the power struggle between Orc and Urizen, because he knows how to get what he wants out of such a world. There is therefore some leeway in which the reader can project possibilities beyond the bleak vision of the poem, beyond the strife of blood which is the limit—self-imposed, if unconsciously so—of the fairy's imagination.

When the more sinister of these two versions of the fairy—a member of the oppressed whose sneaking submission makes him an unwitting accomplice in the Urizenic state of things—is taken as a second "implied author" of the poem, many of the ambiguities of Europe may be redefined as conflicts between his perspective and Blake's. For example, he might very well "intend" the characterization of Enitharmon to be straightforwardly antifeminist, as Blake almost certainly did not: it then becomes not only an analysis of how the lure of indirect power can lead the oppressed to support their oppressor's order, but also an example of how oppressed classes can be turned against one another in their competition for such power. Or take the casting of Newton as Gabriel, which Blake means ironically and which the fairy probably does not:

The red limb'd Angel siez'd, in horror and torment;
The Trump of the last doom; but he could not blow the iron tube!
Thrice he assay'd presumptuous to awake the dead to Judgment.

A mighty Spirit leap'd from the land of Albion,
Nam'd Newton; he siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!
Yellow as leaves of Autumn the myriads of Angelic hosts,
Fell thro' the wintry skies seeking their graves;
Rattling their hollow bones in howling and lamentation. (13:1–8, C 65)

Enough has been written about Blake's intention in this passage—about Newton's ironic destruction of Urizen's heaven by means of Urizen's own reasoning, and about the parallels with the casting out of the pagan deities in the Nativity Ode and the fall of the rebellious angels in Paradise Lost.²⁰

Nothing has been written about the fairy's intention, which is very different. He also sees Newton's achievement as the destruction of Urizen's heaven, but—and again I emphasize that I am speaking of only one of two alternative fairies—he is himself a creature of Urizen, at least metaphorically: he is unable to imagine any heaven other than Urizen's. If that has been shown by Newton to be an allegorical abode where existence hath never come, then there is no heaven; the world as it is is all that there is, and the fairy can truly present it just as he promised, as the best of all possible worlds, where "every particle of dust breathes forth its joy."21

Europe provides the reader with another possible response to Newton's Trump, though, and one that seems to me to be more Blakean—Enitharmon's:

Then Enitharmon woke, nor knew that she had slept
And eighteen hundred years were fled
As if they had not been
She call'd her sons & daughters
To the sports of night,
Within her crystal house;
And thus her song proceeds.

Arise Ethinthus! tho' the earth-worm call;
Let him call in vain;
Till the night of holy shadows
And human solitude is past! (13:9-19, C 65)

Most commentators are quick to point out Enitharmon's errors here: she believes that the night of her "dominion" is only beginning, it is said, and she mistakes the call of Newton the mighty Spirit for that of a worm of sixty winters.22 But the passage is more ambiguous than that. Her addresses to Manathu-Vorcyon and Leutha (14:6-14, C 65) show that she is still caught up in her previous view of sexual relations as a power struggle; yet her feelings about "the night of holy shadows / And human solitude" seem to be contradictory, since she does call on Orc to put an end to it, to "Arise . . . and give our mountains joy of thy red light" (14:31, C 66).23 And while Newton may be a mighty Spirit from the fairy's perspective, from another Enitharmon is clearly right: in so far as he prepares the way for a purely materialistic conception of the universe, his call is the call of the earthworm. Enitharmon's stake in the status quo is much less than the fairy's—it is for her only a dream, and she may be as innocent of that dream as Eve is of the one Satan gives her in Paradise Lost—so it should not come as a surprise that she is right about it at least this once.

21. It is surely not Blake's intention, in ridiculing the "allegorical abode," to discredit all visions of heaven and immortality (though it may well be the fairy's intention). Tolley points out that Blake always believed in an eternal life, as his communications with his dead brother Robert show (pp. 122-23). Enitharmon is not wrong in preaching the doctrine of a life after death—or beyond death, since for Blake death is an illusion anyway—but in opposing that life to this one.
22. See, for example, Tolley, pp. 142-43, and Erdman, Prophet against Empire, p. 269.
23. It is possible, of course, to account for Enitharmon's call to Orc by assuming that she knows not what she does. Tolley, p. 143; Erdman, Prophet against Empire, p. 269; and Bloom, Blake's Apocalypse, pp. 159-60, all argue that her command that Orc rise is either deluded or hypocritical, and that his actual appearance is not at all what she expected.
If the fairy misrepresents Enitharmon and Newton, is his prophecy of revolution a true one? He seems to agree with Blake about the aims of revolution, but I believe that he only seems to do so, just as he only seems to preach Blake's doctrine of the five senses. As a member of an oppressed class, he has little use for kings and priests; but in his more sinister incarnation he is just as Urizenic as they are, and in either of his incarnations his world is as spiritless as theirs. If Newton is his Gabriel, and the mechanistic Newtonian universe his new heaven and new earth, then his revolution must be the mere mechanical transfer of power from one class to another, and his five senses instruments of hedonism—not the revolution in spirit and the five doors of perception that Blake prophesies about. In short, Blake uses the fairy to illustrate what could become of his own philosophical and political positions if they were taken in the abstract, removed from their imaginative foundation: consequently, the fairy, as ruler of the vegetable world, gives us a philosophy of sensuality without spiritual expansion; as exemplar of the corruption of the oppressed, he gives us a mere inversion of the politics of dominance and submission, and a history which is a dream simply because it is meaningless, not because it is to eternity as a dream is to waking life.

As the fictive muse of the poem, though, this parody of Blake has a function more important than the illustrative: his logic is a temptation to the reader, just as Satan's logic is a temptation in Paradise Lost. His mocking song of the senses, his misogynistic presentation of Enitharmon, and his Newtonian apocalypse have all at one time or another been taken as straightforward representations of Blake's own views; that is not really surprising (the history of the Satanic readings of Paradise Lost shows how easily such things can happen), but it does suggest that our understanding of Blake's methods has yet to approach the subtlety of our understanding of Milton's. And it should be noted that Blake confronts his reader with a more difficult temptation than Milton does, for the fairy is not just a character in Europe. Milton is free to develop the character of Satan in such a way as to make any Satanic reading of his poem ultimately inconsistent; but because the fairy "dictates" Europe, there can be nothing in the text that will not respond to a reading from his perspective. The introductory lyric may give clues that he is unreliable (although, as I have said, those clues are purposely left open to multiple readings), and the ambiguities of his peculiar understanding of history and of Blake's characters may leave one uneasy. But the poem can very well be read as founded on the sort of materialistic determinism that I attribute to the "vegetable" fairy, and on the sort of historical and political determinism that I attribute to him in his role as cunning slave;24 nothing in the text

24. Few scholars have been willing to read the poem entirely from the fairy's perspective; such a reading contradicts almost everything Blake ever wrote, but it is consistent with itself. Most readings are partly from the fairy's perspective and partly from one constructed from Blake's other works. One reading that does adopt the fairy's perspective is that of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. in Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), p. 81. Because Hirsch believes that
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prevents it, and very little suggests how else Europe might be read. As always, Blake seeks a reader who will construct a perspective able to overcome the inadequacies of those perspectives offered within the text, not one who merely decodes the text through an authorially sanctioned perspective. But that reader is implied only in a negative way: one may know that the fairy's perspective is wrong—whether he is taken as ruler of the vegetable world, cunning slave, or both—without knowing how to right it. What will ultimately drive a reader to try to right it by approaching the poem from a new perspective is not so much a hint given in the text as it is the dissatisfaction most readers must feel with the fairy's representation of the world; in the end, the perspective a reader chooses—whether it is the fairy's, Enitharmon's, the Angel's, or a new construction—reveals more about that particular reader than it does about the poem or its author, and that is precisely the function that prophecy is designed to fulfill.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to speculate on why the fairy does not appear in more than two copies of Europe. Perhaps Blake changed his mind about some aspect of the poem, and used the unreliable muse to distance himself from it. Or—what seems more likely to me—perhaps he deliberately gave the poem a partial and limiting consciousness when he wrote it, as he had done as early as in Songs of Innocence, and then, after hitting on the idea of the unreliable muse in The Book of Urizen, decided to add one to Europe in order to delineate more clearly its partiality and limitation. In any case, the fairy makes the poem richer. His presence both deepens its ambiguities and increases the challenge to its reader to resolve them; it expands the opportunities for creative readings and misreadings, focusing the prophecy more pointedly on its individual reader. As the fictive muse of Europe, and as Blake's final comment on one of his most problematic poems, the fairy deserves more of our attention than he has yet received.

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Blake's career was a movement from immanental Christianity to "naturalism" and back again, he can read Europe through the eyes of the materialistic, deterministic fairy as a testament of Blake's naturalist period.