

Title	Imprisoned Femininity : Wollstonecraft, Ossian and Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion
Author(s)	Hibino, Mami
Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 35 P.61-P.79
Issue Date	1997-02-10
Text Version	publisher
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/25428">https://doi.org/10.18910/25428</a>
DOI	10.18910/25428
rights	
Note	

*Osaka University Knowledge Archive : OUKA*

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

Osaka University

**Imprisoned Femininity:  
Wollstonecraft, *Ossian* and Blake's *Visions of  
the Daughters of Albion***

**Mami Hibino**

"Was not the world a vast prison,  
and women born slaves?"

(Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria*)<sup>1</sup>

Blake begins the poem as follows:

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

(VDA, pl. 1: 1-2)

The poet suggests here that English women feel deprived of their freedom, which America attained from Britain in the revolution. The poem insinuates that women have been prisoners, who can be also latent revolutionaries.

Blake wrote *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in 1791-92. The narrative of a female protagonist reflects the atmosphere of the time when people had begun to feel ashamed of human dignity degraded by slave trading and by sex discrimination. Blake was among the first group of people who stated their belief that "slavery" was not only a word for Black Africans but that it had also existed for a long time in a most familiar arena: womanhood.

The word "Feminism" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as advocacy of women's rights and sexual equality. It came from French in the 1890s, since the rights of women were one of the urgent issues to be

discussed at the end of the nineteenth century. Negligence of women's rights, however, was not a phenomenon peculiar to this century. Through much of English history women had been considered inferior and their liberty had been ignored. It is during the Romantic period when people were beginning to realize how unfairly women had been deprived of their humanity. This stems from a new sensitivity to the notion of equality in this era of humanistic and political movements such as the revolutions in America and France, the bill for the abolition of slave trade and prison reforms.

Blake was greatly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft, with whom he became acquainted at the house of Joseph Johnson. There were several female activists who protested against the ill-treatment of women in society, and Wollstonecraft was one of the most famous precursors of the feminist movement at the time. She was born in 1759 as the eldest daughter in a family of seven children. Her father, who was at first a gentleman farmer, became a drunkard and often treated her mother contemptuously. Mary hated her family and found friendship with Fanny Blood, who also came from an impoverished family. She began to help Fanny earn a living for her family. Wollstonecraft's will to save her fellow sex from miserable situations was based on this early friendship with Fanny. Wollstonecraft, with her two sisters and Fanny, planned to start a school to support themselves. When the school was in danger of closure, she wrote a book on how to bring up daughters. Her philosophy of female education probably influenced Blake's notion of female friendship, particularly the point in which the enslaved daughters of Albion (English women) perceive the appalling state of the protagonist and transmit her plea generation after generation.

Wollstonecraft was a brave herald of feminism, who urged women's deliverance from every oppression that inflicted upon women a poor status in society. Her female characters in the novels *Mary* and *Maria* struggled to deliver themselves from enslavement by the stereotypes of womanhood and especially by undesirable matrimony. "Matrimonial despotism of heart and conduct", the author of *Maria* mentions in the preface, is one of the "peculiar Wrongs of Woman, because they degrade the mind".<sup>2</sup>

In Blake's poem the protagonist Oothoon denounces both the "self-love" (VDA, pl. 7: 196) of a male-oriented society and the marriage system that lawfully enchain women to a "frozen marriage bed" (VDA, pl. 7: 197). While the women in Wollstonecraft's works could not attain their end and finally chose to die, Oothoon tries to preach the holiness of every living thing. Blake, inheriting the spirit of the age as represented by Wollstonecraft, tried to enlighten the reader by the speech of the prisoner herself. The female slave in Blake's poem is perhaps a revision of Wollstonecraft's idea that women had always been imprisoned within society. Oothoon is certainly a representation of the "weak sex" but her strength is detectable in her spirit.

Blake surpasses Wollstonecraft by adding heroic potency to the character, borrowing heroic materials from another source. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is in fact the product of a combination of contemporary feminism and (supposedly) ancient tales from epic tradition. The next section aims to compare Blake's poem with a Scottish epic which was influential at the time, and to clarify how Blake intensified Wollstonecraft's feminist point of view by adopting epic material.

### Oothoon and James Macpherson's Oithona

"I own myself an admirer of Ossian equally with any other poet whatever,"<sup>3</sup> declared Blake. This enthusiasm manifests itself in a certain poetic style and in some of strange names he employed in his poems. James Macpherson's work, *The Poems of Ossian*, however, were the subject of controversy during the author's lifetime and long afterwards.<sup>4</sup> Although they were said to be restored from ancient Gaelic language, both their authenticity and their adherence to the original, if actually genuine, were questioned. Macpherson's "translations" were, however, read by an unexpectedly large number of people including Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Byron.

The fact that so many people, albeit often sceptical, were attracted by this "restored Scottish verse" testifies to the popularity of this form of mock antiquity. Blake's admiration for them may well have influenced him to incorporate the story of the ravished virgin from *The Poems of Ossian* into *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.<sup>5</sup> Blake's female protagonist, Oothoon finds her counterpart in Macpherson's *Oithona*, only Blake revises an Ossianic woman into a feminist character.

In *Ossian*, Oithona is violated and imprisoned by a lord of Orkney, who in her lover's absence has carried her off into a cave on a desert island. Gaul, her lover, finds this out and revenges her by killing the ravisher. However, Oithona chooses to die rather than to live dishonored, particularly as this dishonour affects her Clan:

O had I dwelt at Duvranna, in the bright beam of my fame! then had my years come on with joy; the virgins would then bless my steps. But I fall in youth, son of Morni; my father shall blush in his hall!<sup>6</sup>

The loss of her virginity affects not only herself but also her fellow sex, her father, and finally to the whole Clan.

It is not exclusively her lover with whom she wishes to recover relationship. While she is still "the beam of the east"<sup>7</sup> to him even after the rape, her mind dwells on her honour and that of her society:

Thou wilt be sad, son of Morni, for the departed fame of Oithona. But she shall sleep in the narrow tomb, far from the voice of the mourner.<sup>8</sup>

Oithona can no longer recognize herself as worthy of love: she believes that her lover would avenge her disgrace rather than her own physical and spiritual injuries. The poem gives no insight into the truth of this, but certainly her reputation seems to be of more importance to Oithona than her assaulted sexuality. Her wish to "sleep in the narrow tomb" is the expression of her will to be reintegrated by death to her Clan and to join the ancestors in the grave, since she considers that only death can compensate for dishonour.

There is bravery in her chosen form of suicide. By electing to destroy herself in battle by disguising herself as a warrior, even though she herself says "my arm was weak, I could not lift the spear,"<sup>9</sup> she effectively opts for martyrdom for her Clan in order to recover the honour of society. She needs to die in a heroic manner, so that the episode is worthy of being told: "Ossian took his harp in the praise of Oithona."<sup>10</sup>

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, however, Oothoon contrasts strongly with Oithona in character though they are both raped and kept in custody by violent men. Oothoon is ravished by Bromion, and her lover, Theotormon, does not avenge her but laments instead for

her lost virginity. In *Ossian*, Oithona resolves to die for the honour of her Clan, while Oothoon, who has feminist ardour and the strength to live in modern society, tries to be independent of traditional views by insisting to her lover that she still retains her spiritual virginity.

The difference between the flower metaphor in each poems reveals the division between the two poets' views on virginity. Oothoon's love towards Theotormon is compared to a flower blooming in the vales of Leutha, which represents adolescent virginity. The spirit of the marigold asks her to pluck the flower, for "Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away" (*VDA*, pl. 1: 9-10). Oothoon duly plucks it and grows it between her breasts, turning her face to what her whole soul seeks. The act of plucking the flower is a metaphor for defloration, but Oothoon's "flower" does not perish: it continues to grow metaphorically in her bosom.

The flower metaphor in *Oithona* differs. Deflowered by Dunrommath and discovered by Gaul, Oithona wails: "Why did I not pass away in secret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strews its withered leaves on the blast?"<sup>11</sup> Her flower can only fade away once bloomed and she too dies with her lost virginity.

Rape has often proved fatal and irredeemable for women in literature. P. B. Shelley's *The Cenci* also has a rape victim, Beatrice Cenci, who is sexually assaulted by her tyrannical father. Destroying her ravisher father by herself, she has to atone for her murder by being executed. Neither Oithona nor Beatrice is allowed to live. Although strong enough to die in a heroic manner, they are both, in fact, defeated by authority.

Oithona is spiritually tamed by her society to take responsibility for her dishonour. There is no clear message

that Oithona is imprisoned by society, perhaps because Macpherson idealised the Clan as a familial society, but Blake reveals women's moral and spiritual bondage in traditional society. Blake's adaptation of Ossian is significant. In the Gaelic language, "Oi" means "a virgin," and "thona" means "waves" so that both Oothoon and Oithona are "virgins of the waves." However, whereas Oithona is a woman who is carried away over the waves and imprisoned on an island surrounded by waves, Blake's engraved plate shows Oothoon (as literally) fettered by a wave. She is a woman imprisoned.

There are other clear differences between their relationship with the waves. In *Ossian*, Oithona's relationship to them is passive; she is neither empowered by it, "nor my soul careless as that sea; which lifts its blue waves to every wind, and rolls beneath the storm."<sup>12</sup> Oithona cannot cope with the waves and is both aware of her powerlessness and defeatism about it. Only the water in her eyes connects her with the water in the sea: "She looked on the rolling waters, and her tears came down."<sup>13</sup> Thus, her name signifies "tragic virgin" and it is to be told as such: "I vanish in my youth; my name shall not be heard. Or it will be heard with grief; the tears of Nuath must fall".<sup>14</sup>

Oothoon's association with the waves, on the other hand, is an active one: "Over the waves she went in winged exulting swift delight" (*VDA*, pl. 1: 14). Although connected to the waves by the chain, her fetter is almost part of her strength. In Blake's engraved plate, she is not engulfed into the waves but actually she appears surging from the waves. Oothoon has what Oithona lacks: carelessness to difficulties. She is even careless to the emotional turbulence of her lover:



Then storms rent Theotormon's limbs; he rolled his waves around  
And folded his black jealous waters round the adulterate pair.

(VDA, pl. 2: 26-7)

She cannot be engulfed by his jealousy, for she is hovering over the waves. These "black jealous waters" have another significance:

Beneath him sound like waves on a desert shore  
The voice of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with  
money. (VDA, pl. 2: 30-1)

Here Blake connects Theotormon's jealousy over the rape with slavery. He is shocked by the fact that his lover Oothoon was ravished by Bromion, but what torments him more is the violation of one of his possessions. Blake suggests that if human relationships are constructed with possessiveness instead of love, the result is slavery. Associating jealousy with slavery, Blake depicts the woman as suffering from male possessiveness. The fetter connecting her to the waves of jealousy and slavery is a symbol of the deprivation of freedom against which she is fighting.

Accordingly Blake's "virgin of the waves" does not end totally tragically. The author of *Oithona* makes an effort to evoke compassion in the reader from the start; "The daughter of night [the moon] turns her eyes away; she beholds the approaching grief."<sup>15</sup> Blake, on the other hand, renders the tragedy into a discussion of more general social ills. Although the refrain in Blake's poem, "The daughters of Albion hear her [Oothoon's] woes, and echo back her sighs" (VDA, pl. 2: 43, pl. 5: 113, pl. 8: 218) presents no optimistic solution to the problem, Oothoon's personality casts light on the problems of imprisonment within society. Compared to earlier literary rape victims, Oothoon is a new type of woman who serves both to illuminate

the problems of women and to act as an exemplar.

Modernizing the epic, Blake also brings to the poem complex contemporary issues other than feminism. The rapist, Bromion, addresses Oothoon and Theotormon after ravishing the woman:

Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north and south.  
 Stamped with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun;

.....  
 Now thou maist marry Bromion's harlot and protect the child  
 Of Bromion's rage that Oothoon shall put forth in nine moons  
 time. (VDA, pl. 1: 20-pl. 2: 25)

Bromion declares his possession of the woman in three ways: Oothoon is his territory; he has impregnated her and he can trade the woman and her child. These allusions can be interpreted in more than one way: either Bromion is a slaver who owns land, perhaps in America, to be cultivated by slaves branded with his own mark and any pregnant slave only implements his labour force or provides an item of trade; or he is whoremonger who possesses the woman's body and can sell her to Theotormon. Blake relates prostitution to slavery. Both treat human beings as if they are commodities: prostitution puts a commercial value on female sexuality whereas slavery evaluates people only by the quality of their labour.

David Erdman argues that *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* provides "poetic counterparts of the parliamentary and editorial debates of 1789-1793 on a bill for abolition of the British slave trade."<sup>16</sup> The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was established in 1789 to investigate the situation and to encourage artists and writers to criticize slave trading. The British parliament began to debate a bill for the abolition of the British slave trade in 1789 and the discussion reached its height in 1792-1793. However, the

bill was defeated in parliament because Anti-Jacobins such as Burke, Lord Abington and some slave-traders were opposed to it. "Little Black Boy", and *Visions* are both poetical reflections of the situation at this period. According to Erdman, the controversy over slave trading is expressed in the conflict between Theotormon—who is a representation of the frustrated abolitionists—and Bromion, who represents the supporters of slavery.

Erdman, however, overlooks the way Blake relates a landholding slaver to a sexist. To treat a woman as land was common even in Greek myth: Gaea was the goddess of land from which posterity springs. Women's fertility and productivity makes the allusion possible. The land produces crops and nourishes people. There are also those who sow the seeds and gather crops. The sower is often metaphorically alluded to a man. Primitive society simply gained their maintenance from land, while modern society came to attain agricultural surpluses from the land to start economic activity. Possession of land promises profit, which introduces a system of competition. On the way to modernization, thus, people's reverence for the goddess of land and for her fertility had died away. Possessiveness of the capital and the benefit from the products did not only make human beings forget the pure pleasure of the land's benevolence, but in a need for cheap labour it created the exploited classes, thus slavery began.

As the land came to be exploited and enslaved, so too did women. Bromion forces Oothoon to submit to sexual intercourse against her will, and impregnates her. He then humiliates her lover, Theotormon by trading her off. Bromion has no respect for womanhood, for he possesses the woman as a pimp apparently defining her as a harlot. He even takes advantage of her fertility by valuing

pregnancy. Prostitution is the selling of women's sexuality for money, and even motherhood has a profit-element for Bromion. To estimate sexuality by economical value is to ignore the most important element in human relationships: that is love:

"I cry, Love! Love! Love! Happy, happy love, free as the mountain  
wind!" (VDA, pl. 7: 191)

This is the sorrowful cry of Oothoon, desiring love in her relationship with her man. There is no love in the relationship between Bromion and Oothoon, who are the rapist and the raped. Oothoon's true lover, Theotormon is so much obsessed with the notion of possession that he forgets love for Oothoon. The only love among the three figures is the unreciprocated love of Oothoon for Theotormon. However, love should not be one-sided: "Can that be love that drinks another as a sponge drinks water?" (VDA, pl. 7: 192). As Oothoon says, love should be exchanged freely as the wind, one-sided love is not love and love should not be exploited. Oothoon requires pure love instead of economic exchange: her role is to warn modern society not to forget the primitive pleasure of a loving communion because of mercantile values as it has forgotten the earth's benevolence in the process of possessing the land as capital.

Contemporizing *Ossian* in his poem, Blake raises some of the problems of modern society. Being an admirer of *Ossian*, Blake hoped to regain the lost paradise of *Ossian*, where people were related in familial love and there were no exploiting and exploited classes. The fashion for Ossianic poetry lies in the desire for the utopian society which people had long ago lost in the process of modernization. The poet focuses on woman who is all too frequently

regarded as a possession and is vulnerable to enslavement. Blake here transfigures Oithona into Oothoon to be a herald. She is the forerunner of the activist who can "acquire sufficient fortitude to pursue [her] own happiness" as Mary Wollstonecraft puts it.<sup>17</sup>

### The heroic woman in the Romantic epic

It is necessary now to scrutinize the nature of the hero in Blake's poem. In *Ossian*, Gaul is told in a dream that Oithona is imprisoned on an island, and he finds her out to avenge her in battle. While Gaul has heroic eminence in his actions, Theotormon in Blake's poem is distinctive for his inaction. At the beginning of the poem Theotormon, knowing that Oothoon has been raped by Bromion, is motionless:

At entrance Theotormon sits, wearing the threshold hard  
With secret tears. (VDA, pl. 2: 29-30)

And still at the end of the poem:

But Theotormon sits  
Upon the margined ocean, conversing with shadows dire.  
(VDA, pl. 8: 216-17)

Theotormon does not fall under the category of hero, for traditionally the hero exalts himself by his deeds. Action is the hallmark of heroic poetry.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to the tradition, Theotormon takes the same squatting position from the beginning till the end of the poem.

His inaction is caused by a psychological paralysis, which Oothoon calls "hypocrite modesty" (VDA, pl. 6: 168). Theotormon cannot love Oothoon because she has lost her virginity, which religion respects. As his name Theo (God)

+ tormon (torment) suggests, he is afflicted by dogma. Oothoon divines this:

Religious dreams and holy vespers light thy smoky fire—  
 Once were thy fires lighted by the eyes of honest morn.  
 And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty,  
 This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite?  
 Then is Oothoon a whore indeed, and all the virgin joys  
 Of life are harlots, and Theotormon is a sick man's dream,  
 And Oothoon is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.

(VDA, pl. 6: 166-172)

Religion makes the fire of desire smolder with frustration, but the fires used to be lighted by "the vigorous joys of morning light, open to virgin bliss" (VDA, pl. 6: 158). The desires of virgins are innocent to Oothoon, and such pure desires should not be restrained by religion. However, to Theotormon's "hypocrite modesty" virginity is abstinence, and the desires of virgins are regarded as transgression, making virgins harlots. Because of this doctrine, which Oothoon calls "selfish holiness," Theotormon is deterred from loving her and from any movement at all.

Obsessed with religious principles, Theotormon is governed only by a search for the substantial aspects of the things which can never be tangible:

Tell me what is a thought, and of what substance it is made?  
 Tell me what is a joy and in what gardens do joys grow.

(VDA, pl. 3: 84-85)

He is interested in the concreteness of the abstract without believing in "thought" and "joy" as themselves. To Theotormon, who cannot imagine pure joy and spiritual holiness, Oothoon is merely a damaged object which cannot be recoverable. Thus his inaction is caused by his religious intolerance and by earthly-mindedness.

In contrast to Theotormon's immobility, Oothoon is

energetic in her action and in her thought. While traditionally it is the hero who travels to fulfil his mission, in Blake's poem it is the female protagonist who sets out to see her lover. Her activity is highlighted from the beginning of the poem:

"And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks."  
Over the waves she went in winged exulting swift delight,  
And over Theotormon's reign took her impetuous course.

(VDA, pl. 1: 13-15)

Her love for Theotormon enables her to brave the difficulties represented by the "waves." She has the strength to alter her obstacles into delight by the power of her love. Firmness in direction and purposefulness in movement equate her to the hero of traditional epic. Her action is comparable to that of Gaul in *Ossian*, when he sets out to the sea, seeking for Oithona:

At length, the morning came forth. The hero lifted up the sail.  
The winds came rustling from the hill; he bounded on the waves  
of the deep.<sup>19</sup>

Oothoon's character is parallel to that of Gaul, for both go over the waves to find their lovers. In traditional epic, it is the hero who travels to fulfill his mission, while the heroine, usually his lover, waits. Although this paper has been comparing Oothoon with Oithona, they actually differ.

Significantly, Blake reverses roles in his "rewriting" of the earlier epic. He exchanges the roles of man and woman. Theotormon is far from being a hero and Oothoon is too strong to be called a tragic heroine: Oothoon is in fact the hero. Weeping Theotormon is similar to tearful Oithona in the sense that they both consider the rape is irremediable. Oithona leaves her lover by death, in the name of

the honour of the Clan; Theotormon rejects his lover because of his blind respect for physical virginity.

Both Oithona and Theotormon are also referred to by similar metaphors by their lovers. They are regarded as "light" by their admirers. Gaul consoles Oithona that she is still to him "the beam of the east, rising in a land unknown";<sup>20</sup> Oothoon alludes to Theotormon as "Red as the rosy morning" (VDA, pl. 7: 202). In spite of the rape, Oothoon and Gaul are both generous in attempting to regain their relationships with their lovers. The metaphor of light suggests that love is as imperishable as the light of the morning. Thus, Oothoon addresses Theotormon:

"Arise, my Theotormon, I am pure!

Because the night is gone that closed me in its deadly black."

(VDA, pl. 2: 51-52)

Physically Oothoon might have lost her virginity, but she believes that her virginity survives spiritually. Theotormon cannot believe in spiritual virginity, because he can only imagine virginity as dogma has it, in its material sense. Oothoon considers that virginity is not a physical state and that, regardless of being raped by Bromion, she is still a virgin as long as she retains her pure love for Theotormon. Accordingly she says: "How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?" (VDA, pl. 3: 77). Thus, Oothoon's sublimity of spirit is heroic.

If the hero in *Oithona* is the warrior Gaul, who contends with the opposing Clan, then against whom does Oothoon fight? She recognizes who is to be blamed for threatening spirituality:

"O Urizen, creator of men, mistaken demon of heaven

Thy joys are tears, thy labour vain, to form men to thine image."

(VDA, pl. 5: 114-115)



Her accusation is directed at the creator of reason, and at his responsibility for turning pure joy into guilt by confining the individual within a stereotype. His power is embodied in religious authority, especially in the clergyman who "surrounds him / With cold floods of abstraction and with forests of solitude, to build him castles and high spires" (*VDA*, pl. 5: 129-131). Oothoon believes that the Christianity had become a collection of abstract ideas isolated from ordinary people and that the priest has forgotten the pure delights of living under the pretext of continence. How can one who lives in religious seclusion feel human pleasure and control sexual morality? The marriage system, which is in fact sexuality regulated by religious authority, degrades the married woman:

Till she who burns with youth and knows no fixed lot, is bound  
In spells of law to one she loathes. And must she drag the chain  
Of life in weary lust? (*VDA*, pl. 5: 132-134)

Here Oothoon extends her relationship with Bromion to that of a couple bounded by lawful marriage. Marriage sanctioned by authority might be a concrete form of love, but a judicial system is not always perfect: it sometimes ignores individual cases. Urizen's role in Blake's poetry is to create the definite law and naturalize the lawful world. "Is there not one law for both the lion and the ox?" (*VDA*, pl. 4:108), asks Bromion, but the poet has his answer: "One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression" (*MHH*, pl. 24). The heroine in the poem, Oothoon, realizes the imperfectness of this "law" and points it out:

Are not different joys  
Holy, eternal, infinite? And each joy is a love.  
(*VDA*, pl. 5: 116-117)

Oothoon abhors the self-denial in Theotormon, who is

losing himself in religious doctrines. She exhorts him to be himself, and not to be deluded by religious theory. Her belief in spiritual holiness in each individual is not compatible with a judicial system that controls the individual and teaches it to respect the substantial rather than the spiritual. Her message is clear in her last speech in the poem: "For everything that lives is holy" (VDA, pl. 8: 215). This means that as long as we live in the world, pleasure and desires are holy and they should not be governed by authority.

Oothoon's spiritual freedom and her protest against the lawful enslavement of women on the "frozen marriage bed" (VDA, pl. 7: 197) are perhaps influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft. In her novels, *Mary* (1788) and *Maria* (1798), the female protagonists discover that their marriage has only made them social prisoners, and they attempt to find happiness or true love outside marriage. But their society does not understand their free spirits and they are compelled to lead hard lives. These spiritually expansive, struggling women can be prototypes for Oothoon, only Blake converts her into a heroic figure.

As this paper has discussed, Blake revised both *Ossian* and Wollstonecraft to create a new type of female hero(ine). Overlapping Oothoon with Oithona, Blake depicts women's weak position in society; but, at the same time, by identifying Oothoon with Gaul he invents a heroic woman. In traditional epic, the hero must have a mission in battle. Heroic poetry in the eighteenth century had lost its interest in battle and instead had begun to focus on the political, metaphysical aspects of human activities. Oothoon's is an "intellectual battle" (FZ, 1:3) and her mission is to propagate spiritual liberation in order to deliver people from enslavement within sexuality and within society.

## Abbreviations

FZ	<i>The Four Zoas</i>
MHH	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
VDA	<i>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</i>

## Notes

All quotations from Blake's poetry refer to *Blake: The Complete Poems*, edited by W.H. Stevenson (London and New York: Longman, 1971), and their line numbers are marked in the parenthesis in the text.

- 1 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria* in *Mary / Maria / Matilda* ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 64.
- 2 Wollstonecraft, p.58.
- 3 William Blake, 'Annotation to "Poems" by William Wordsworth.'
- 4 For a discussion of the credibility of *Ossian*, see Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988) and *The Poems of Ossian*.
- 5 James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*, intro. John Macqueen (Edinburgh: James Thin 1971) 2 vols.
- 6 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 530.
- 7 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 522.
- 8 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 524.
- 9 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 526.
- 10 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 531.
- 11 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 523.
- 12 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 525.
- 13 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 522.
- 14 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 524.
- 15 *Ossian*, vol. 2, p. 519.
- 16 David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire. A Poet's Interpretation of the History of his own Times*, 3rd rev. edn.. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) p.228.
- 17 Wollstonecraft, p. 95.
- 18 Peter Hägin, *The Epic Hero and the Decline of Heroic Poetry: A Study of the Neoclassical English Epic with Special Reference to*

*Milton's Paradise Lost* (Solothurn: A. Francke AG Verlag Bern, 1964) p. 132.

19 *Ossian*, p. 522.

20 *Ossian*, p. 522-3.