

Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołodys

# The Written and the Visual

Representations of Women in English  
Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Art





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Monika Wolting und Paweł Piszczatowski

Małgorzata Łuczyńska-Hołodys

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With 19 figures

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## Introduction

“Looking is always a type of reading because it involves interpreting what is seen”  
(Julia Thomas, *Reading Images* 5)

Nineteenth-century poetry and art are to a large extent about women. Women become, variably, muses, *femmes fatales*, angels in the house, aesthetic icons, faithful lovers, madwomen, abandoned victims, prostitutes, or Madonnas. They are virtually central to the literature and painting of the period. Intimately tied with these various representations of women are different concepts of femininity and female roles; and the different reactions towards these concepts. The book *The Written and the Visual. Representations of Women in English Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Art* investigates the points of contact between literature, art, and feminist criticism by offering an in-depth literary analysis of selected Romantic and Victorian poems whose protagonists are female, and a discussion of their wide-ranging visual history – a subject which has not yet been undertaken in a book-length study.

W.J.T Mitchell, an authority on visual representation, tells us that “[i]mages are not just passive entities that coexist with their human hosts, any more than the microorganisms that dwell in our intestines. They change the way we think and see and dream. They refunction our memories and imaginations, bringing new criteria and new desires into the world” (Mitchell *What Do Pictures Want* 92). Mitchell is concerned with visual images, but this statement is equally true for literary representation. Nineteenth-century writers, as well as painters and illustrators from the nineteenth century onwards, openly show their pre-occupation with gender roles. They do so by writing about women and by painting them. This is hardly surprising since the periods of Romanticism and Victorianism saw formative changes in thinking about gender norms and definitions. In the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792), Romanticism witnessed the birth of modern feminist thought. Often described as a manifesto, her essay provided a solid platform for the feminist cause and stimulated heated debates about the education, position, roles and responsibilities of both women and men. As is the case with all groundbreaking statements, this text was met with mixed responses, but it paved the way for what was to follow. In the Victorian period we observe a virtual surfeit of texts

and treatises concerning the subject – from Sarah Stickney Ellis’s *The Women of England: Their Social Habits, and Domestic Duties* (1839), Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (1854), and John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) to John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Mona Caird’s *The Morality of Marriage* (1897). These voices resounded among writers and artists alike, who reacted by creating memorable, influential, and distinctive images of women – in poetry, painting, and book illustration. Some of these representations appeal primarily to aesthetic categories, but most of them voice some clearly defined perspective on women and femininity in general. In this way, these poems and their visual renderings respond to and participate in creating cultural, aesthetic, and social normative patterns. Likewise, when discussing the “*immanently* social character of the painterly sign”, Norman Bryson states that “*all the codes of recognition flow through the image just as they do throughout the social milieu; as part of the global structure of signifying practice they interact at every point with the economic and political domains*” (139).

All of the texts which are my preoccupation in this book are about female characters; all are narratives about women’s struggles in society and about their paths towards self-definition. All are well-known and well-loved. Yet, I believe that my revisionist readings offer a fresh look at those familiar poems whilst also engaging with the existing literary criticism. My interpretations are informed by carefully chosen critical approaches, ranging from corporeal feminism, literary and aesthetic perspectives on the grotesque, the theory of trauma, and extending to the gaze theory. The choice of such a theoretical framework facilitates my feminist critique of the poems and underscores the fact that their concerns have not lost their relevance and still resonate well in the twenty-first century. The readings of literary texts are followed by a rich overview and analysis of visual renderings of the poems in question. My chapters bring to light some previously unknown or undiscussed works and reappraise many well-known paintings and illustrations. The archival material was accessed in the extensive collections of the Rare Books section of the University Library in Cambridge; for my consideration of contemporary illustrations, I personally contacted the artists, many of whom kindly shared with me their insights and intentions. As a result, this work offers fresh perspectives on familiar poems and will undoubtedly encourage a debate about changing cultural conceptions relating to gender which surface in visual responses to these texts.

The five particular poems which form the backbone of my book have been selected for two reasons. First, they share the same concern at heart: easily yielding to feminist readings, they present the clash between individual desires and social expectations, the conflict which is conditioned by gender roles ascribed to women and men in the nineteenth-century society. Secondly, the number and diversity of their visual renderings that go well beyond the nine-

teenth century testify to the ongoing fascination with the poems' universal themes; they also invite questions about the mutual relationship between text and illustration. Thus, the chapter on William Blake discusses the complicated and frequently ambiguous interaction between text and design in two of his early prophetic books: *The Book of Thel* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. This chapter stands out in the fact that Blake is the only artist to produce illustrations for his own works, and his poetry has not been illustrated by anyone else in subsequent decades. In contrast, other chapters examine a rich visual history of three other nineteenth-century poems. Nevertheless, the chapter on Blake establishes the context for further discussion: while Blake's art problematizes the relations between poetry and illustration, his two poems herald the major theme of the book: stories about women and femininity told in verse and image. The next three chapters are devoted to "Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil" by John Keats, "The Lady of Shalott" by Alfred Tennyson, and "Goblin Market" by Christina Rossetti respectively. They follow the same pattern. First, I concentrate on close readings of the chosen poems; my interpretations are filtered through specific critical and theoretical lenses. The textual discussions are then followed by the exploration of the poems' artistic legacy – the latter part of each of the three chapters focuses on how the ideas emerging as crucial from my interpretations figure in the visual renderings of the poems. Delving into this visual history, I discuss both the original nineteenth-century illustrated editions and the paintings inspired by the poems, as well as their twentieth- and even early twenty-first-century renditions in art and popular culture (for instance, in comic and picture books, in ceramic art). Much of the material I include has not been a subject of academic analysis so far. Such a broad scope – in terms of both the timeline and artistic genres – not only facilitates interactions between verse and illustration but also allows for the diverse artistic perspectives to engage in a dialogue, showing both the continuity and new tendencies in cultural ideas revolving around femininity and its representations in art and culture.

In her book: *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books*, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra states that "[i]llustrations affect the reception and literary history of a text and cannot be ignored or dismissed as detachable additions to the original production" (4). She continues: "[e]xamination of a single text which has been illustrated over time tells us much about the history of its critical reception, and about the important role illustration plays in the production of meaning" (6). Crucially, the illustrator is first of all a reader of the text. Unlike painters, who frequently capitalised on common stock-motifs as subjects for their paintings but not necessarily had studied the source text itself (here the proliferation of almost uncountable Ladies of Shalott, Isabellas and Ophelias populating nineteenth-century canvases is an apt example), illustrators intimately familiarised themselves with a book they were supposed to embellish. As a

result, their decisions as to which moments to choose and how to portray them were dictated by their own readings of the poems. Hence, the interaction of word and image in illustrated volumes is both lively and diverse. What is more, “[w]hen a single poem is illustrated by a number of different illustrators, it is possible to follow a particularized history of responses to an unchanging set of words whose ‘meaning’ none the less is always in the process of production by new sets of collaborators and co-producers (readers, illustrators, publishers, critics) in changing circumstances” (Kooistra “Victorian Poetry and Illustration” 401). On the other hand, “literary” paintings produced by a significant number of artists proliferate from the nineteenth century onwards, also betraying different approaches and attitudes both to the texts they relate to and to the specific ideas these texts present. This stimulates several intriguing questions: how do these representations change with time? What new meanings do the poems acquire in their visual renditions? Does the “reading” of specific motifs depend on the gender of the artist – was the text “read” differently by male and female illustrators? To what purposes were Romantic and Victorian literary texts illustrated by the nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists? What themes did they choose as the most important, and what is their personal attitude to these themes? What can their choices tell us about the universality of certain ideas and their later relevance in the twenty-first century? These are the queries the present book endeavours to pursue.

While we can consider how visual interpretation changes when a text has many illustrators, illustrated books by a single artist/poet (which is the theme of my chapter on William Blake) exhibit a different dynamic. Blake’s aesthetically rich and intellectually challenging “double works” are a case in point, where the reader is presented with a sustained artistic idea that arises out of the – frequently troubled – relationship between text and design. In his *Picture Theory*, W.J.T. Mitchell explains that unlike volumes where the illustrator works separately from the author and where we can detect “more traditional formulas involving the clear subordination and suturing of one medium to the other, often with a straightforward division of labour”, in the “artist’s book” words and images “would tend to exhibit flexible, experimental, and ‘high tension’ relations [...]” (91). Blake’s composite art is far from monolithic. It is fascinating to observe how his illuminated texts open up to various readings, and frequently, their visual-verbal interaction involves a conflict that generates new meanings. Sometimes, the clash between word and image is so powerful that the effect is a seeming *disintegration* of artistic intent; yet, in the end, it provokes the reader to revisit and reconsider meanings previously taken as stable and conspicuous, and usually results in novel, thought-provoking interpretations. One way or another, “[t]he mutual independence, lively interaction and conflict between Blake’s poems and pictures is his way of enacting his vision of a liberated social and

psychological order [...]”, W.J.T Mitchell concludes in his now-classic position *Blake’s Composite Art* (75).

Finally, despite the famously heralded “pictorial turn” in the humanities,<sup>1</sup> even today illustration is still frequently left out of the scholarly discussion of literary texts. While many Pre-Raphaelite paintings have attained substantial scholarly attention, a more inclusive venture into the realm of illustrated poetry in its various guises (as an illustrated book, a picture book, a children book) still remains a road less travelled. Although there is a growing number of publications relating to the Victorian visual and print culture, it seems that most scholarly work in this domain concerns either particular authors and the way they were illustrated throughout the Victorian era, or a relationship of single picture-painting pairs, rather than particular texts and their visual histories.<sup>2</sup> What is more, the choice of “literary” paintings and illustrations that are discussed in the majority of academic articles is usually as canonical as it is predictable and repetitive: thus, for instance, Keats’s “Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil” is usually paired with Millais’s *Lorenzo and Isabella*, while Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” shares the stage with Hunt’s or Millais’s paintings under the same title. My book is a modest attempt to fill this gap and to pay tribute to the work of several less acclaimed artists and illustrators, whose visual renderings of the poems in question contribute to the rich history of these texts’ reception.

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1 I am referring here to W.J.T. Mitchell’s article “The Pictorial Turn”, published in *Artforum* in March 1992, which later appeared as the first chapter of his book *Picture Theory*.

2 See, for instance, Lynn Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text. Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1991), Barbara Lupack, *Illustrating Camelot* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), Sarah Wootton, *Consuming Keats: Nineteenth Century Representations in Art and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration. A Publishing History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).





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## Chapter One: Shaping subjectivity: the experience of female embodiment in William Blake's *The Book of Thel* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

### Essentialism, embodiment and gender

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir asked a provocative, yet crucial question: "If... we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?" (xlii). This point proved crucial for ensuing debates about feminism and generated arguments between the advocates of essentialism and the theorists of gender. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, essentialism

entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all times. It implies a limit of the variations and possibilities of change – it is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her essence. Her essence underlies all the apparent variations differentiating women from each other. Essentialism thus refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization (*Space, Time and Perversion* 47–48).

Conversely, from the perspective of gender theory and social constructivism, there exists no fixed essence of femininity, since "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 281). Thus, sex gets effectively divorced from gender, one seen as biological, factual and given, and the other as gradually acquired. It exposes femininity as a construction, underlying the fact that what it is to be a woman is taught from birth rather than determined by biological characteristics.

Western philosophical thought has been permeated by the mind-body dualism, which divides human experience into a corporeal and spiritual realm (Bordo 2–5). Invariably, as various feminist thinkers have shown, this dualism is gendered and hierarchical – it encodes the male/female binary, with the woman identified with the bodily, passive, sensual, emotional and thus more "natural" pole, and the man represented as a rational, spiritual, active and cultural being. This endless binary is strongly evaluative: nature in relation to culture is usually seen as representing "a lower order of existence" (Ortner 72). Such a mode of

thinking has frequently led to violence: if the (female) body is considered a “lower” realm of existence, then it can easily be possessed, controlled, used, abused and subordinated to the (masculine) “higher” rational faculty. De Beauvoir recognizes the primary importance of the bodily experience, at the same time objecting to the primordial mind/body dichotomy: “To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards this world” (7). There is no such thing as separately existing categories of mind and body, and consequently, the classification of women as more corporeal and men as more rational proves inoperative. The body is integral to all our perceptions and any understanding of the human experience. It is “the vehicle of being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty 82). Yet, the female experience of embodiment is frequently problematic. Kathy Davies, the author of *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, states that

[f]rom the sexualisation of the female body in advertising to the mass rape of women in wartime, women’s bodies have been subjected to processes of exploitation, inferiorization, exclusion, control and violence. The female body is symbolically deployed in discourses of power – discourses which justify social inequality and power hierarchies based on gender and other forms of bodily difference”(10).

Similarly, de Beauvoir noted that the experience of embodiment is essentially different for men and women. Woman has always been constructed as man’s Other (xIv) and perceived through the prism of her biological specificity. Because of her biological characteristics – the experience of the menstruation cycle, pregnancy and menopause – she has been labelled unstable, fickle, emotional, unpredictable and frequently disruptive, as well as told what, as a woman, she may or may not do. Thus, while actions and opportunities for women have been unfairly constrained by social norms regulating bodily comportment, man remains free of such limitations, because he “superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones” (xIiv).

In essentialist practice, certain attitudes and features have been perceived as inherent and determined by biological sex. Thus, women apparently are gentler, more patient, more passive, less ambitious and rational, more caring and selfless than men. As Iris Marion Young explains, these features predestine them to specific roles, accordingly seen as natural, and usually based on self-denial, servitude and sacrifice: they are to take care of elders and children, preside over their homes, and provide support and assistance to others while disregarding their own needs (Young 22–23). When their behaviour does not comply with these rules, women may expect recrimination and ridicule; they are criticised as unwomanly, pronounced mentally disturbed and unfit to live in society, and

frequently coerced into submission. “While not at all explained by biological distinctions between men and women, nevertheless there are deep social divisions of masculine and feminine gendered dispositions and experience which have implications for the psychic lives of men and women, their interactions with one another, their dispositions to care for children or exercise authority” (Young 14).

In the following chapter, I aim to show how William Blake presents the experience of embodiment and the shaping of subjectivity as gender-specific in his two relatively early poetic texts, *The Book of Thel* (1789) and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). The first of the two poems is a narrative about an adolescent girl’s lived experience of becoming a woman, shaped entirely by a specific situation. Thel is essentially defined by her body – the fact that she was born female preconditions her future. Trapped by cultural expectations centred on her biological productivity (her capacity for giving birth) and the social roles ascribed to women, she can only object to what is perceived as “natural” female behaviour if she wants to assert her individual needs and desires. What is equally crucial is that she first has to recognize and acknowledge what it is that she wants from life. In this poem we find Blake’s representation of motherhood, culturally perceived as central to femininity and inextricably associated with the notion of the female being-in-the-world.

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake describes the female experience of violation, rape, mutilation and subsequent recovery. *Visions* is an account of the lived experience of Oothoon, Thel’s successor, who bravely embraces the perspective of a relationship and a sexual union with a man she loves. Confident and affirmative of her sexuality, Oothoon soon faces the horror of violation, objectification, humiliation and rejection. Her being-in-the-world rapidly changes from joyous and blissful to utterly nightmarish and unspeakably painful. Yet, she still finds the power to resist and refuses to become a docile body, coerced into submission. In the second part of this chapter, I aim to investigate the representation of Oothoon’s experience of embodiment and the process of the shaping of her gendered subjectivity through the lens of corporeal feminism and Foucauldian power/knowledge theory, in order to show how Blake rejects the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, pronouncing it virtually impossible and psychologically detrimental.

## The dilemmas of adolescence: becoming a woman in *The Book of Thel*<sup>3</sup>

Blake critics most often see *The Book of Thel* (1789) as a thwarted attempt to pass from the state of Innocence to Experience.<sup>4</sup> Blake's heroine is usually perceived as a somewhat naive, indecisive young female afraid to "be born" into the world of adulthood and maturity, or as a soul that refuses to enter the body/the material world. Hence, there has been a tendency to pass judgment on Thel's decision, attribute it to weakness, immaturity, or fear, and see it in pejorative terms.<sup>5</sup> My claim is that Thel's refusal to enter the world of Generation and experience her corporeality as a mature woman has nothing to do with relapsing into childhood, or with weakness and indecisiveness. Instead, I see it as proof of her maturity and independent spirit. In what follows, I want to trace Thel's experience of becoming a woman as a rite of passage that has not been completed, not because of her immaturity, but because of her conscious decision to define herself. Although *born* a woman, Thel refuses to *become* a woman, to shape her life according to the social and cultural expectations invested in the concept of woman. The analysis is concerned with two main points. Firstly, I want to demonstrate how text and design in *The Book of Thel* enter a mutual semantic relationship of contradiction and/or redundancy rather than complementarity,<sup>6</sup> and how their interaction contributes to the understanding of the poem's meaning. Naturally, this claim is not new; W.J.T. Mitchell recognized this quality as early as 1978, writing that "the 'unity' of an illuminated book is a dynamic one, built upon the interaction of text and design as independent or contrary elements" (xviii). What I would like to

3 This analysis originally appeared in *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 46.3 (2013) as "Life exhal'd in milky fondness" – Becoming a Mother in William Blake's *The Book of Thel*".

4 See Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 49, Kathleen Raine *William Blake* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 52, Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 232–33, S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), p. 401, Robert F. Gleckner, *The Piper and the Bard* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), pp. 163–64, and Magnus Ankarsjö, *Blake and Gender*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), p. 62.

5 For example, Gleckner concludes that Thel is self-centred and sternly pronounces that she has to learn the life of self-sacrifice (163), while Stephen Behrendt asserts that, for Blake, Thel must have been an example of what he calls "the dead-end nature of narcissistic behavior" (*The Moment of Explosion: Blake and the Illustration of Milton* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983], p. 27). For Susan Matthews, Thel's flight means conforming to the stereotypes of femininity (*Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], p. 100).

6 For the various types of image-text relations, see A. Kibédi Varga, "Criteria for Describing Word-Image Relations", *Poetics Today* 10 (1989), pp. 31–53.

examine, however, is how this dynamic interaction reinforces a feminist reading of Blake's text.

Secondly, although there are critical texts that deal with Blake's attitude to women, the majority of Blake scholarship on *The Book of Thel* does not seem sufficiently feminist. While Blake did not manifest an unwaveringly feminist stance throughout his poetry, in texts such as *Thel* or *Visions* he dealt with women's issues in a way that may be deemed progressive. Consequently, I intend to focus on the problems of motherhood and childcare as rendered by Blake in his poem, since I perceive these notions to be essential for our understanding of Thel's decision. Also, part of my argument is that, contrary to several critical readings, the message delivered by Thel's three interlocutors (the Lilly, the Cloud, and the Clod of Clay) should not be seen as a positive statement that Blake wanted Thel to accept. Finally, the understanding of Thel's dilemma whether or not to become a mother can shed light on some actions taken by other female characters in Blake's later texts, Oothoon from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in particular.

Generally, it has been agreed that the issues of gender and sexuality provide a valid interpretative context for *The Book of Thel*, as "the consequence of the expression of sexual desire is the great theme of Blake's prophetic poems" (Hayes 144). Thus, David Worrall suggests that *The Book of Thel* is Blake's correction to Swedenborg's ideas of sexuality: Thel's escape "with a shriek" is "a specific refusal of Swedenborg's doctrine of conjugal love, a subject topical to contemporary Swedenborgians who were proposing to establish an African colony based on its principles" (17).<sup>7</sup> However, as Susan Matthews notices, the vales of Har (the place that Worrall sees as the realm of Swedenborgian sexual union) are the world to which, and not from which, Thel flees (100). Matthews, in turn, sees the flight of Thel at the end of the poem as an escape from conflict rather than from sexuality and interprets the vales of Har as a world where "benefit to the other is benefit to the self" and where, consequently, the self does not exist (99). Also, for her, the flight back is not the assertion of the self but a surrender of the self: "At the end of the poem, Thel flees to a female dream like that of *The Triumphs of Temper* which makes sexual desire safe but demands as the price the taking on of a female identity" (100). In a similar vein, Magnus Ankarsjö, in *William Blake and Gender*,

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7 Other important texts that discuss Blake's connections to Swedenborg's thought are Marsha Keith Schuchard *Why Mrs. Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London: Century, 2006), Joseph Viscomi's 1997, 1998, and 1999 essays on *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and Magnus Ankarsjö, *William Blake and Religion* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009). Also, in their introduction to *The Book of Thel* in *The Early Illuminated Books* (Princeton: Princeton University Press/William Blake Trust, 1993), Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi note echoes of Swedenborgian thought (particularly with reference to his doctrine of use) in Blake's poem (78).

notes that “although sometimes executing successful representations of the female, Blake in the early poems is at pains to find an appropriate expression of the positive interactivity of man and woman” (3). He locates Thel within the circle of “childlike innocent characters” (5) and concludes that she “utterly fails and relapses back to childhood” (62). In the course of this chapter I hope to demonstrate that it is possible to see Thel’s decision not as a failure or a surrender of the self, but as an act of self-assertion, a conscious decision to reject the perspective (however attractive at times) of both sexual relationship and child-bearing. Such a decision is not a product of an immature, wavering, childlike mind but testifies to the opposite. Last but not least, it also denotes her readiness to face the conflict that ensues from acting against the expectations of others.

Modern critical readings recognize the importance of dialogical structure in *The Book of Thel*.<sup>8</sup> Most of the poem is structured by question-answer exchanges, often summarized by Thel’s rephrasing of what she has heard. The common denominator of these conversations is Thel’s inquiry, which is followed by reassuring statements from other beings already familiar with the world that she contemplates entering. Then, the chief question is what it would mean for Thel to enter this world, Blake’s realm of Generation, or Experience. Entering it may be understood as a conscious decision to grow up and assume the social roles prescribed for a woman in the adult world – primarily the role of the mother.

Crucially, however, pregnancy and motherhood are preceded by courtship and/or marriage. This point has been noted and discussed from various perspectives by modern critics. Thus, Harriet Kramer Linkin identifies what frightens Thel off as the sexual nature of human relationships in the world of Generation. She suggests that Thel’s “horror at being food for worms actually displaces her deeper fear of the phallus” and that Thel wilfully chooses to ignore the sexual implications of the Cloud’s speech, focusing on the nurturing function voiced by the Clod of Clay instead (69). In the wake of feminist criticism, Helen Bruder, in an interpretation to which I am deeply indebted, sees *Thel* as a poem in which “the sceptical enquiries of a determined young woman thoroughly unmask patriarchal ideology, an ideology which promised women that heterosexual romantic and maternal roles equalled heavenly fulfilment, but which Thel discovers amount to nothing less than death” (44). Reading the key passage in which the Clod of Clay appears as the mother of the Worm, she concludes that “anyone who ‘her life exhal’d / In milky fondness’ (*Thel* 4:8–9) has been severely gulled if she believes that this amounts to having ‘a crown that none can take away’ (*Thel* 5:4)” (51). My discussion coincides with the above interpretations in that I also think

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8 See Marjorie Levinson, “‘The Book of Thel’ by William Blake: A Critical Reading”, *ELH* 47.2 (Summer 1980), pp. 287–303 and Harriet Kramer Linkin, “The Function of Dialogue in *The Book of Thel*”, *Colby Quarterly* 23.2 (June 1987), pp. 66–76.