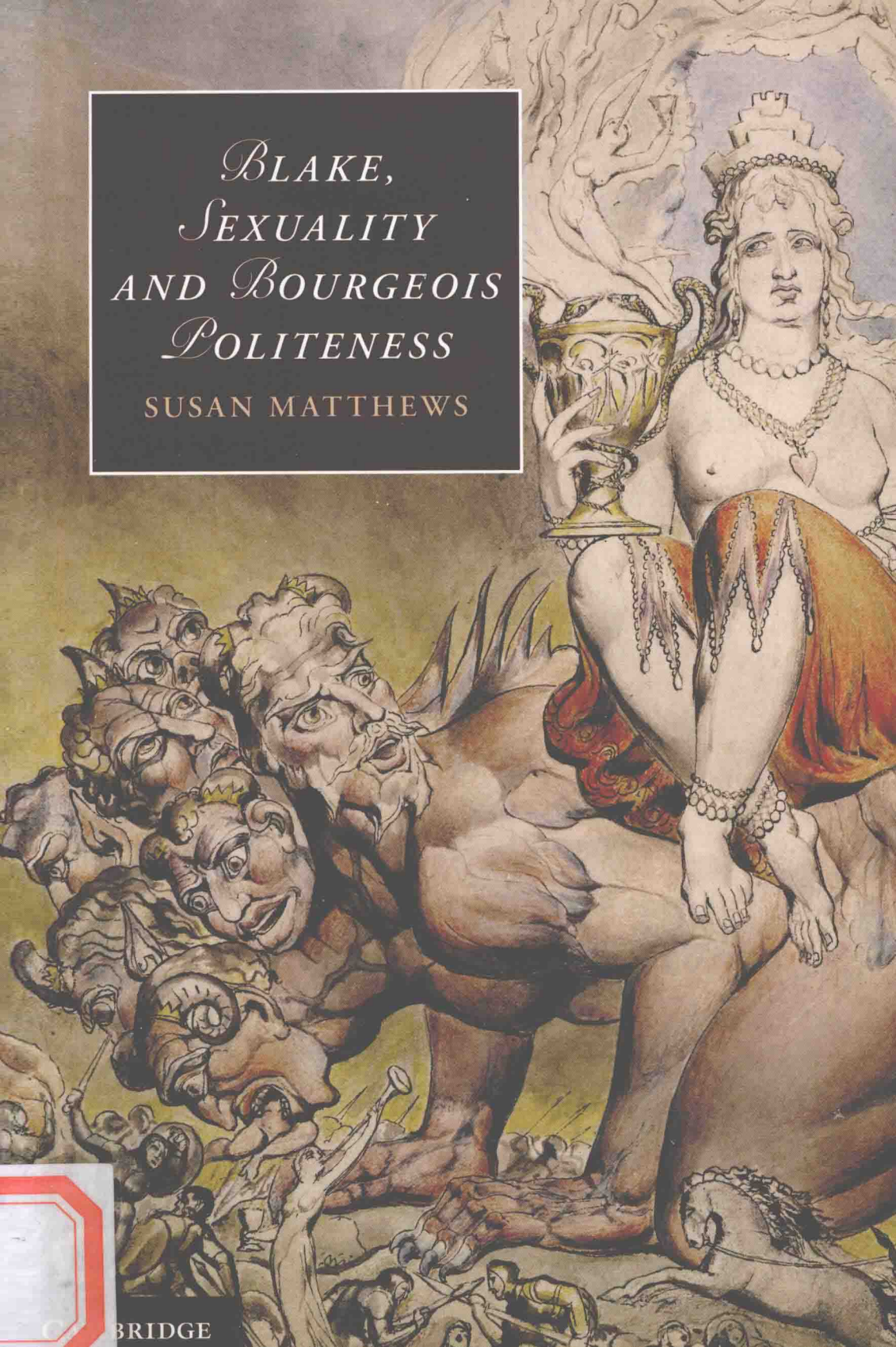


*BLAKE,  
SEXUALITY  
AND BOURGEOIS  
POLITENESS*

SUSAN MATTHEWS



CAMBRIDGE

BLAKE, COMMUNITY AND  
BOURGEOISNESS

SUSAN MATTHEWS



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521513579](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521513579)

© Susan Matthews 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Matthews, Susan, 1955–  
Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness / Susan Matthews.  
p. cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism)  
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-51357-9 (Hardback)

1. Blake, William, 1757–1827—History and criticism. 2. Sex in literature. 3. Sex role in literature. 4. Sentimentalism in literature. 5. Blake, William, 1757–1827—Contemporaries. 6. Art and literature—England—History—18th century. 7. Art and literature—England—History—19th century. 8. Literature and society—England—History—18th century. 9. Literature and society—England—History—19th century. I. Title. II. Series.

PR4148.S48M38 2011

821'.7—dc22

2010042531

ISBN 978-0-521-51357-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to  
in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such  
websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## BLAKE, SEXUALITY AND BOURGEOIS POLITENESS

Recent criticism has often overlooked William Blake's relationship to the bourgeois culture of sentimentalism, focusing instead on his association with the radical London underworld of revolutionaries, artisans and plebeian dissenters. By removing Blake from their company and reading him instead through the polite world he knew well, Susan Matthews sets out to give us a new Blake, as well as a new angle on the conflicted development of a bourgeois culture in the late eighteenth century which was in the process of redefining the role and meaning of sexuality. With imaginative use of personalities, texts and images taken from an original range of archival material, Matthews returns to the Age of Sensibility and finds within its changing landscape answers to some of the crucial questions that remain about an artist and writer whose work continues to challenge scholars and critics today.

SUSAN MATTHEWS is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Roehampton University.

# CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

*Founding Editor*

PROFESSOR MARILYN BUTLER, *University of Oxford*

*General Editor*

PROFESSOR JAMES CHANDLER, *University of Chicago*

*Editorial Board*

JOHN BARRELL, *University of York*

PAUL HAMILTON, *University of London*

MARY JACOBUS, *University of Cambridge*

CLAUDIA JOHNSON, *Princeton University*

ALAN LIU, *University of California, Santa Barbara*

JEROME MCGANN, *University of Virginia*

SUSAN MANNING, *University of Edinburgh*

DAVID SIMPSON, *University of California, Davis*

This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those 'great national events' that were 'almost daily taking place': the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanisation, industrialisation, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of comment or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of 'literature' and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

*For a complete list of titles published, see end of book.*

## *Acknowledgements*

This long project has incurred a long list of debts, far more than I could remember or list. I would like to thank my colleagues at Roehampton University for continuing support and encouragement. Mark Knight tipped me off about the book of Enoch; Cathy Wells Cole, Nicki Humble, Ian Haywood and Simon Edwards read and commented on early drafts; Martin Priestman made me feel that an interest in Darwin, Cowper and Hayley was not odd; John Seed offered invaluable leads on Malkin's dissenting background; Kate Teltscher and Zach Leader read my original proposal. Above all I am grateful for the enthusiasm and insights of my students particularly those on my Blake and the Twentieth Century course.

Outside Roehampton, an army of muses, gnomes and fairies have encouraged, supported, nagged, cajoled and inspired this book out into the world. John Whale commissioned my first essay on Blake a very long time ago (and even then did not think it old historicism). I am grateful to Steve Clark for demanding a series of essays and for inviting me to the 2000 Blake conference at the Tate without which I would never have thought of writing again. Jon Mee not only invited me to speak to the Oxford Romantic Realignments seminar but spotted a book in my overlong paper. Helen Bruder and Tristanne Connolly provoked, inspired and commissioned an essay for *Queer Blake* as well as organising a conference that propelled the last changes in my book. It was a pleasure to meet some names familiar from my footnotes. Luisa Calè read an early draft of my first chapter and her work on Blake and Fuseli has been as important as her friendship. I learnt a great deal from Sarah Haggarty's patient editing of my essay in *Blake and Conflict*. Thanks also to David Fallon, Mark Crosby and Angus Whitehead for help and advice. I am lucky to have found a friend and supporter in Anne Janowitz. Martin Myrone's restaging of Blake's 1809 exhibition shaped my thinking about the end of the book and Philippa Simpson supplied the best of my

pictures at the last moment: thank you to both. Perhaps my greatest debt is to those whose ideas I argue with and whose generosity and rigour is a model to follow. All Blake critics claim that 'opposition is true friendship' and I could not have formed my own argument without the work of those critics who have made Blake's visual and verbal texts a rich repository of enthusiasms and insights.

I am very grateful for the patience and continuing support of James Chandler, Linda Bree and Elizabeth Hanlon at Cambridge University Press and to the anonymous readers who helped me to firm up my argument.

Blake knew that 'Four Mighty Ones are in every Man' but did not realise that their names are Alfie, Frankie, George and Agnes. My Zoas understand intellectual war and have contributed to this project more than they know. My husband, the Lambeth writer and artist Matthew Meadows, has endured the presence of another Lambeth writer and artist for too long. Even if he has not enjoyed the process, I am glad that he has endured.

## *Abbreviations*

Unless otherwise indicated, Blake's text is cited from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David E. Erdman, revised edition (New York: Doubleday, 1988), indicated by the page number preceded by E. In some cases I also give plate and line number. Blake's *Milton* is identified by *M* and *Jerusalem* as J. G. E. Bentley, Jr, *Blake Records*, second edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) is identified as BR. W refers to D. H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli* (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 2000).



## *Contents*

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	x
Introduction: the birth of sexuality	i
1 'Happy copulation': visual enthusiasm and the sexual gaze	16
2 Fuseli and the 'female dream' of <i>Europe</i>	30
3 A history of softness: William Hayley and <i>The Triumphs of Temper</i>	56
4 The <i>Essay on Old Maids</i> and the learned lady	82
5 Cowper's fear: nature, population, apocalypse	110
6 Blake reads Richardson: anthologies, annotation and cultures of reading	141
7 A 'blank in Nature': Blake and cultures of mourning	169
8 Wollstonecraft and the adulterous woman	188
<i>Notes</i>	211
<i>Bibliography</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	265

## *Illustrations*

1	<i>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</i> , copy A, plate 9, 1793. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	page 22
2	William Hogarth, <i>Enthusiasm Delineated</i> , from John Ireland, <i>Hogarth Illustrated Vol III and last</i> , March 1798, John Boydell. © The British Library Board (131b7).	23
3	Henry Fuseli, <i>Titania and Bottom c. 1790</i> . © Tate, London, 2010.	43
4	<i>The Fertilization of Egypt</i> from Erasmus Darwin, <i>The Botanic Garden</i> , 1791. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	46
5	William Blake, <i>Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing</i> , c. 1786. © Tate, London, 2010.	48
6	Henry Fuseli, eng. William Blake, <i>Allegory of a Dream of Love c. 1790</i> . © The Trustees of the British Museum.	50
7	William Blake, <i>The Temple of Mirth</i> , after Thomas Stothard, 1784. © Tate, London, 2010 (first version).	68
8	Henry Fuseli, <i>The Mighty Mother Sails Through the Air</i> from <i>The Temple of Folly</i> , 1787. © The British Library Board (1346146).	70
9	William Blake, <i>As if an angel dropped down from the clouds</i> , 1809. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	76
10	William Blake, <i>The Whore of Babylon</i> , 1809. Pen and black ink and watercolour. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	94
11	William Blake, <i>The Poems of Thomas Gray</i> , design 22, <i>A Long Story</i> , 1797–1798. Watercolour with pen and black ink and graphite. © Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.	114
12	William Blake, <i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i> , copy H, plate 1. © Fitzwilliam Museum.	124
13	Anon, <i>The Tree of Life</i> . Published by Bowles and Carver, undated. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	126

- |    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 14 | William Blake, <i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i> , copy H, plate 3. © Fitzwilliam Museum.   | 127 |
| 15 | William Blake, <i>Winter</i> . © Tate, London, 2010.   | 130 |
| 16 | Henry Fuseli, <i>The Poet's Vision</i> (unused design), 1807. © The Trustees of the British Museum.  | 138 |
| 17 | Henry Fuseli, <i>The Poet's Vision</i> , engr. Abraham Raimbach, pub. J. Johnson, London, 1 March 1807. © The Trustees of the British Museum.  | 139 |
| 18 | William Blake, <i>Europe a Prophecy</i> , copy D, plate 5. © The Trustees of the British Museum.   | 159 |
| 19 | Edward Bysshe, <i>The Art of English Poetry</i> , 2 vols., 1762, vol. 1, pp. 194–5. © The British Library Board (11603cc18).   | 162 |
| 20 | William Blake, <i>The Meeting of a Family in Heaven</i> from Robert Blair, <i>The Grave</i> , 1808. © The British Library Board (c142e11).   | 177 |
| 21 | William Blake, <i>The Reunion of the Soul and the Body</i> from Robert Blair, <i>The Grave</i> , 1808. © The British Library Board (c142e11).  | 179 |
| 22 | James Barry, from A Series of Etchings by James Barry, Esq. from his Original and Justly Celebrated Paintings, in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, <i>Jupiter and Juno on Mount Ida</i> , c. 1804–5. © Tate, London, 2010. | 181 |
| 23 | William Blake, <i>The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan</i> . © Tate, London, 2010.   | 186 |
| 24 | William Blake, <i>The Penance of Jane Shore in St Paul's Church</i> , 1793. © Tate, London, 2010.  | 199 |
| 25 | James Barry, <i>The Thames, or the Triumph of Navigation</i> , etching, published 1792 (1 May 1791). © National Portrait Gallery, London.  | 200 |

## *Introduction: the birth of sexuality*

The aim of this book is to trace Blake's relationship to a pro-sex culture that seemed under threat at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Although I expect 'Blake and sexuality' to seem a familiar topic, 'Blake and bourgeois politeness' may appear to some readers to be either counter-intuitive or plain misguided. If this is so, it is the result of decades of powerful and convincing scholarship that have established both the extent to which Blake draws on antinomian, enthusiastic and other subcultural movements and the ways in which these cultures are fascinated by sexual freedom.

Yet while Blake has stood for a prophet of sexual freedom in popular culture in the latter part of the twentieth century (and for some before this), his verbal and (to a lesser extent) visual representations of both women and sexuality have long been seen as characterised by ambiguity at best, ambivalence, contradiction and even misogyny at worst. In the wake of a decade of feminist critique, the only consensus that Robert Essick could report was that 'Blake was deeply ambivalent about female sexuality'. Not only did 'attitudes that we now tend to label feminist and anti-feminist jostle together disconcertingly in his writings' but in the later work, Essick concluded, 'the evidence for misogyny increases'.<sup>1</sup> Blake is typically seen not only as turning against women but as moving towards a mythic system in which 'sexuality' must ultimately be discarded. Since Blake's invented land of 'Beulah', the 'married land' of Isaiah 52, is a place where the sexes are separate, S. Foster Damon assumed that this land was also the place of 'sexual pleasure'.<sup>2</sup> Eternity, where 'Humanity is far above sexual organization' (E236), is a place which transcends sex. Blake's underlying model is easily read as a version of epic myth in which a male world of energetic conflict, of 'War & Hunting' (E135), is ultimately superior to a feminine pastoral idyll that offers the hero not only a vacation but also the dangerous distraction of a slide into sensual pleasure (a version of the familiar story of Dido and Aeneas). 'In Eternity they

neither marry nor are given in marriage' (E176), Albion tells Vala in *Jerusalem*, and this is no surprise to readers familiar with an idea of an asexual Christian heaven. After all, this line, which Wollstonecraft also echoes, comes from the New Testament: in Matthew we are told 'For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.' Blake's eternity, we assume, is a place without sex, a place to which we must all (with whatever regrets) aspire as we give up the pleasures of the body.

Such a reading is a perfectly understandable extrapolation of the evidence. Blake's poem *Milton*, inspired and dictated by the 'Daughters of Beulah', records

the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms  
Of terror & mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions  
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose  
His burning thirst & freezing hunger! (E96)

Here is Milton the epic hero, travelling through a delusive sexual land. In the land of Beulah, 'the Three Classes of Men take their Sexual texture Woven/ The Sexual is Threefold: the Human is Fourfold' (E97). In the crucial confrontation at the end of the poem, Milton sternly warns the virgin Ololon of a fundamental change. In order that 'the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery' she/they/the nation/the world must cast off 'the Sexual Garments, the Abomination of Desolation/ Hiding the Human lineaments as with an Ark & Curtains' (E142). The stark choice is between the 'sexual' and the 'human', a choice that terrifies Ololon, who admits that 'Altho' our Human Power can sustain the severe contentions/ Of Friendship, our Sexual cannot' (E143). The apocalyptic change that ends the poem follows swiftly as the lark mounts and the smell of the wild thyme rises from Wimbledon's 'green & impurpled Hills' (E143). It is not coincidental that my short paragraph not only quotes every one of the five uses of the word 'sexual' in *Milton* but that it also constructs a brief narrative which leads the reader through one of Blake's most complex and rich poems.

If the rejection of the 'sexual' is the key to the transformation that Blake's prophecy urgently imagines, the difficulty of aligning Milton's clarion call with Oothoon's cry 'Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!' (E50) is a central problem for the reader of Blake's work, a problem that can be solved through chronology (Blake changes, Blake gets older) or the favourite devices of the academic critic, ambiguity (for the new critic), ambivalence (for those with psychoanalytic

preferences) or their more sophisticated children (aporia, multiplying meanings, complexity) to produce a playful, troubled or conflicted Blake. The production of such complexity is the professional expertise of the critic. My study will propose that such devices are themselves the tools of Beulah, the intellectual means to quiet conflict, to reduce art to a safe form of play. The complexity of Blake's work lies, I suggest, instead in the fierceness of its argument and the way it engages with hostile contexts. I aim to show that Blake's work presents a surprisingly consistent and coherent view of what we call sexuality, the 'quality of being sexual or possessing sex', a meaning that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) shows as being used for the first time in 1797 in a reference to the Linnaean system and the 'sexuality of plants'.

The key to my argument lies in the newness of the word 'sexuality' in Blake's time. This word occurs only once in Blake's writing and the fact that he uses the word in *Milton* is probably a product of his contact with circles for whom Erasmus Darwin and Cowper (one of the first to use the word 'sexuality') were the key writers of the period. In Blake's surviving writing, the word 'sexual' appears exclusively in *Milton*, *Jerusalem* and 'For The Sexes/ THE GATES OF PARADISE', a late reissue of the 1793 emblem book originally called 'For Children'. The change of title, according to Erdman, is certainly later than 1806.<sup>3</sup> It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that 'sexes', 'sexual' and 'sexuality' are words that Blake uses only after the three years from 1800 to 1803 he spent in Felpham, the small village in Sussex where he lived close to, and worked with, the popular poet William Hayley, a friend both of Erasmus Darwin and William Cowper. This period was the only one in which Blake lived outside London and it brought him into close and sustained contact with a significantly different culture from that which he is likely to have known in London.

At its appearance at the end of the eighteenth century, the word 'sexuality' is still strongly marked by an older meaning of 'sex' (closer to our modern sense of gender) to mean 'either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions', a sense which the OED dates from Wycliff and which continues to the present day. In the eighteenth century the 'sex' is also the female sex. The word 'sex' refers to a category (closer but not identical to our understanding of gender) rather than to bodily 'acts'. The first use of the word 'sex' to refer to 'Physical contact between individuals involving sexual stimulation; sexual activity or behaviour, spec. sexual intercourse, copulation' is listed by the

current OED in 1900. Typical of the shift in the meaning of 'sex' and cognate words is the difficulty that modern readers experience in understanding the title of Polwhele's 1798 poem, *The Unsex'd Females*. Attacking Wollstonecraft in the wake of the scandal caused by Godwin's memoir, Polwhele is of course not complaining that Wollstonecraft was insufficiently sexy, or even (in anticipation of Cora Kaplan's influential argument) that her writing produced a desexualised version of femininity. For Polwhele, to be 'Unsex'd' is for a woman (specifically) to fail to conform to the requirements of 'the sex', so to behave like a man and thus to demonstrate the kind of specifically masculine sexual drive that is inappropriate to a woman. Polwhele's poem is the product of a view of gender which assumes that women *should be* unsexual (a view on its way in at the end of the eighteenth century) but uses 'sex'd' in a way that would be more familiar in the earlier period to describe a gendered category. The sharpest discussion of this issue is Katherine Binhammer's 2002 essay, 'Thinking gender with sexuality in 1790s' feminist thought', which quotes Claudia Johnson to explicate Polwhele's title: 'For Polwhele, "unsexed" women are "oversexed."... What being an unsexed female entails ... is indulging in unbounded heterosexual activity without the heterosexual sentiment.'<sup>4</sup>

For Cowper too, the word 'sexuality' carries a sense of behaviour appropriate to the sexes. His use of the word in 1800 is in a reference to Erasmus Darwin for whom, whether or not one female flower dallies with four males, sexuality is necessarily driven by contact between the opposite sexes. 'Sexuality', for Darwin, is inextricably associated with 'the instinct to propagate the species'; it is inevitably heterosexual. Blake's characteristically negative use of the word 'sexual' and cognates derives both from Polwhele's (and Wollstonecraft's) assumption that the sexual is that which represents the proprieties of a particular (female) gender, and from Darwin's account of sexuality as the patterned behaviour that leads to generation. To be 'Mortal & Vegetable in Sexuality' (E135) is to be assigned to a fixed category.

An early twenty-first-century academic book with the word 'sexuality' in its title necessarily sets up a different set of assumptions in the reader. In 2000 Bruce R. Smith calculated that the Modern Language Association online bibliography contained over three thousand items containing the word 'sexuality' written since 1981, of which 'at least ten per cent' were 'concerned with texts written before 1800'.<sup>5</sup> The boom in titles containing the word 'sexuality' derives from Foucault's claim that sexuality has a history that begins in the early nineteenth century. But Darwin's (and

Cowper's) use of the word 'sexuality' is very different from our modern (post-Freudian) understanding that sexuality refers to a complex cluster of psychological and behavioural meanings. Writers now tend to distinguish between writing on sex and writing on sexuality. Thus Gail Bederman in 2008: "Sexuality" refers to the ways that acts, pleasures, beliefs, and moralities are constructed in particular times or places. "Sex" refers to specific bodily acts, regardless of culture or context.<sup>6</sup> Bederman's Foucauldian understanding of 'sexuality' is not Cowper's, or Darwin's, or Blake's.

The necessarily binary structure within the word 'sexuality' as used around 1800 rules out the possibility that 'sexuality' can describe homosexual desire. This is not to claim, as Foucault does, that same-sex desire or subjectivity could not exist in the early nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> It is to claim that the words 'sexual' and 'sexuality' for Blake exclude the possibility of same-sex desire. It is no accident that much of the finest recent writing on Blake and sexuality derives from critics who use ideas of camp and queer theory: Helen Bruder, Christopher Hobson and Andrew Elfenbein are among those who have demonstrated that Blake offers positive images of same-sex desire, particularly in writing after 1803.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hobson was also instrumental in making possible a reading of the end of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* which side-steps a generation of compulsory condemnation.<sup>9</sup> As Katherine Binhammer points out, queer studies has become 'the institutional and methodological location for both the history and theory of sexuality' reflecting 'the desire of some lesbian theorists to break away from a particular strain of Second Wave Feminism'.<sup>10</sup> In this study I hope to contribute to the project of reclaiming sexuality for feminism, a project with many important predecessors.

Criticism that derived from Second Wave feminism in Britain and America has often been critical of Blake's representations of gender and sexuality. In 1998 Anne Mellor attacked the tendency of Blake's readers to see him 'as he might have liked to be seen: as an artist deeply at odds with his culture and times', insisting on the recognition that he was 'complicit in the racist and sexist ideologies of his culture'.<sup>11</sup> Mellor's trajectory is indicative of Blake's changing reception among feminist readers: whereas her first academic book in 1974 was *Blake's Human Form Divine*, her major work of 2000, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1820*, celebrates the influence of the evangelical writer Hannah More. Whereas Blake's standing has slipped for many feminist scholars, work on bluestocking culture and other women writers has



reshaped our understanding of the Romantic period, demonstrating the cultural power of women within the public sphere.

My study argues that Blake's work demonstrates a remarkable consistency in its defence of female sexuality, a defence that draws on a specific pro-sex discourse within the bourgeois world with which he had most contact, deriving from Milton's view of Protestant sexuality.<sup>12</sup> (In order to accommodate the reader of an isolated chapter, I will use the words sex and sexuality in a modern sense unless clearly signalled.) In the view of friends and contacts like Cumberland, Fuseli and Hayley, female sexuality was under attack from an attempt to redraw public culture, and this attack on the sexualisation of culture was believed to threaten the vigour of culture and the arts. If the 'sexual' in Blake's use after 1800 derives both from the now obsolete sense of the 'sex' to mean 'feminine' and from a focus on that which is appropriate to each gender, it can carry a meaning almost diametrically opposed to the modern 'sexual'. The OED cites Wollstonecraft's claim from the 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that '[a] mistaken education, a narrow uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices, tend to make women more constant than men'. 'Sexual prejudices', in other words, limit women within a gendered idea of constancy.<sup>13</sup> Read in this sense, some crucial passages in Blake's work look different. If the 'soft sexual delusions' offered by the Daughters of Beulah in the opening of *Milton* use 'sexual' in the same way as Wollstonecraft to mean 'feminine', then Blake's Beulah becomes an account of contemporary constructions of gender rather than (what we call) sexuality. Rather than describing the delusive power of the erotic, 'sexual delusions' are 'soft' because they are the product of polite bourgeois codes of gender which use passivity manipulatively.

Second Wave feminism is in some ways a product of the new model of sexual difference that was the product of Blake's lifetime. The end of the eighteenth century witnessed the consolidation of a model of sexual difference in which women were no longer lesser or imperfect men but came instead to be seen as complementary to but essentially different from men. In the process, this two-sex model separated the word 'man' from the word 'human' turning it into a gender specific category. As Binhammer argues, it was this new idea of sexual difference that created the idea of 'Woman, in all her particularities and essential specificities ... as a separate and proper object of study'.<sup>14</sup> Plate 3 of *Milton* signals Blake's concern with the new two-sex model of gender difference in its image of two figures, male and female, splitting outwards from the same root; as a poem about Beulah, *Milton* is necessarily concerned with the separation of