

6. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

London: The Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust, 1959

*Visions of the Daughters of Albion* stands as Blake's first attempt to address fully the condition of slavery and the sexual oppression of women. Etched in 1793 amid outcries against slavery in America and during some of the most violent years of the French Revolution, *Visions* concentrates on a love triangle formed between the heroine, Oothoon, her boyfriend, Theotormon, and her rapist, Bromion. Like *The Book of Thel*, *Visions* focuses on female sexuality. But where *Thel* is a song of innocence, *Visions* is more a song of experience. Thel is allowed to flee the threat of losing her virginity while Oothoon must deal with the loss and search for some comfort beyond it.

Oothoon's sexual freedom is destroyed when Bromion, a slave master, rapes her and dashes her hopes of a life of happy love with Theotormon. The title page may show Oothoon racing "over the waves. . . in wing'd exulting swift delight" before Bromion "rents her with his thunders" or Urizen, the god of the material world and a sensibility related to Bromion, chasing Oothoon for her sins. Either way, Oothoon, the "soft soul of America," becomes shackled to a life of psychological and social slavery that the Daughters of Albion have no power or will to release her from. Although in a different way and for a different reason, they are also oppressed, which Blake emphasizes by the refrain: "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes & echo back her sighs."

The challenging line at the bottom of the title page, "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows," seems to convey a sense of both desperation and hope. Pictured is a Rainbow of Hope with three joyful dancers at its base to contrast with the dark details and tones in the rest of the plate. Perhaps it is this hope which inspires Oothoon and the Daughters to seek relief from their exploitation in this dark universe controlled by male forces.

--- J. Brian Colantropo