

# Christian Inversion of Jewish Nationalist Monotheism



# Christian Inversion of Jewish Nationalist Monotheism:

*Clawing Our Way Back*

By

Patrick Madigan

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## INTRODUCTION

During my 16-year service as editor of the *Heythrop Journal*, I reviewed many books and wrote several articles. In retirement, I have had occasion to read through these again and been struck by how a selection could be arranged in a sequence such that the reviews would enter into a 'discussion' and mutually 'pollinate' one another in the reader's mind, such that the resulting experience would be educational, stimulating and satisfying. Beginning with contemporary biblical criticism, I uncover how the Jews, resenting being a 'small' nation, 'backed into' monotheism for primarily political reasons, as a way to argue that their god was distinct and different from the gods of other nations (who followed the 'family of the gods' model or pantheon). This 'one god' with whom they had a special relationship was only punishing them through military defeat for dallying with the other's religion. Thus, in spite of their small size and inglorious military history, they really were superior.

Later, when the Romans destroyed their temple and excluded them from Jerusalem, threatening to wipe them out entirely, some Jews sought comfort and psychological compensation through the postulate of a special 'gnosis' or 'knowledge' supplied them by a 'savior' behind their creator god, that 'lifted them up' and restored a basis for their exceptionalism and superior status. To a now 'converted' or Christian western society the Jews came across as stubbornly 'stiff-necked', defensively haughty and 'different'. They were tolerated because they performed an essential job that no one else could or would do—money lending - but often were treated as a scapegoat whenever tragedy or disaster struck. Jews were banished from England from 1290 to 1657, from France periodically after 1306, and from Spain for several hundred years after the unification of Aragon and Castile in 1492. The two-beat syncopation of rejection or exclusion, followed by psychological compensation, reappeared during the Renaissance in Jewish 'Kabbalah' in Mediterranean Europe in which powerful esoteric predictions were hinted, shortly thereafter by Spinoza with his scandalous 'atheistic'

doctrine of universal determinism, and later by Freud with his shocking prescription of infantile sexuality. The most powerful Jewish 'blasphemy' during modernity has been the Marxist criticism of Enlightenment self-centredness, and the adequacy of capitalism as a resulting complete, adult or mature social philosophy, able to construct and deliver a fittingly human, vibrant - and compassionate - social reality without deeper theological support. In a 'closed' world where they often had no rights or were made to move with only what they could carry, the Jews agreed to play the only 'role' on offer. They were perpetually available as everybody's 'victim', but they exacted the psychological compensation of awe and fear as possessing special knowledge or power, which went along with and flattered in a backhanded way their self-estimate. Both sides got what they could live with, if not all they wanted. This continued until the 'final solution', when the roles became exaggerated and the syncopation fell apart.

In the move from the classical to the modern period, three mutually succeeding 'arcs' can be discerned: from reason to scepticism (with Descartes), from freedom to determinism (with Spinoza and Newton) and from annihilation to divinization (with Hegel and Nietzsche). Each one feeds into the next. With the emergence of 'expressive individualism' as the default ethic of our time, we assist at an experiment to see whether long-term civil, cultural and political society is still possible.



## CHAPTER 1

# CHRISTIAN INVERSION OF JEWISH NATIONALIST MONOTHEISM, AND ITS ROMANTIC, REVOLUTIONARY AND NARCISSIST CORRUPTIONS

It is important to see Christianity as an internal reform of Judaism that surprisingly came to overtake its parent and attain independent existence. With the attack on all expressions of transcendence during the Enlightenment, this reform flipped into the enemy that, if it could not be expunged, at least should be flattened and institutionalized, along with its antiquated parent, if society is to free itself from unpredictable and scurrilous outbreaks of this nefarious if apparently inveterate tendency and tropism within human nature, to soar instead into the sunny uplands of a neutralized social reality liberated from superstition and a consequently calmer public space. It is therefore disappointing to discover that, when spurs to internal conflict emanating from rival religious world views or mythic traditions have been eliminated, the human psyche is not finally set free from internal turmoil and incitement to external violence, but depressingly discovers itself at the mercy of a heightened internal sensitivity to accusations of irremediable reproach and eternal inadequacy, an awareness of social barriers that appear impossible to cross, of “prizes” that cannot be captured, which replace the earlier confessional denunciations and expulsions. This heightened social sensitivity, highlighted by Rousseau and recently expanded and richly developed by René Girard, suggests that unless disciplined and corrected—that is, not “left alone”—the human psyche will not return to “psychic health” and attain “secular bliss”, but rather becomes vulnerable to lower sources of intimidation and inadequacy; it can even become traumatized, psychotic or bestial from awareness of ordinary social differences. Otherwise, such developments as “serial killing”—puzzling and yet distinctive of our era—become difficult to account for. The U.S. has ten times as many homicides

a year as Canada, and over one hundred times as many as the U.K. Also, the U.S. has more serial killings per year than the next six countries combined.

Beginning with contemporary biblical criticism, I uncover how the Jews, resenting being a “small” nation, “backed into” monotheism for primarily political reasons, as a way to argue that their god was distinct and different from the gods of other nations (who followed the “family of the gods” model or pantheon). This “one god” with whom they had a special relationship was only punishing them through military defeat and exile for dallying with the other’s religion. Thus, in spite of their small size and inglorious military history, they really were superior (Bonn, 2014).

After the Egyptians declined the monotheistic reform of their religion by the pharaoh Akhenaten, by some means the Jews next door managed to pick up the latter, put the same doctrines into the mouth of their national prophet Moses and imagine that this distinction and unique privilege compensated for their small size, unimpressive natural resources and nonexistent international reputation. Indeed, against all appearances, it lifted them up and constituted them as superior to all other peoples. It gave them a vocation and focus in the direction of political independence and the construction of a temple where the special relationship or covenant between the one deity and the Jewish people could expand into the legal separation, cultic elaboration and theological doctrines that constitute the glory of the Jewish nation and their special gift to less fortunate peoples.

Unfortunately, power politics and international relations proved deaf to this theological script. The Jews were condemned to stay a “buffer state” between nations that possessed superior natural resources such as the Nile River or the Tigris-Euphrates complex. The Jews’ awkward, ambiguous visit to Egypt and ignominious departure (despite their compensatory imaginary “victory” at the “Reed” sea) was followed by the loss of the northern kingdom to Assyria and eventually of the southern kingdom to Babylon. Alexander’s victory over the Near East changed everything—and he did not even visit—let alone “conquer” Jerusalem!

Actually, there is no explicit assertion of monotheism in the Jewish scriptures before *Second Isaiah*, as the Jews prepare to return to Israel from

Babylon. Once this author had propounded it, it was then 'read back into' the 'henotheism' that characterized the earlier scriptures (each people had its own god, as the Jews had their own, who properly received their worship and cared for them), but it had not originally been there. 'Earlier' books were thus written 'late'—at the end rather than at the beginning. *Genesis*, for example, was written no earlier than just before, and probably during, the Babylonian Exile. Indeed, much of the Old Testament was written in Babylon; it was written in Hebrew, but written *in* Babylon. The Hebrews felt they had to give an account of their origins and history that could compete with and rival that of the Babylonians, and later of the Greeks in Alexandria. Monotheism was thus a daring compensation mechanism employed to gain an upper hand over cultures that appeared more powerful or prestigious; it appears psychologically to have been, initially at least, a way to 'save face' before more established kingdoms, on the basis of which to argue their (implausible or counter-intuitive) superiority. The whole 'Moses sequence', for example, was composed to demonstrate the Jews' superiority over the Egyptians, reinforcing both the emerging monotheism and the exclusivity of the Jewish covenant.

This mechanism was not very successful, however. Rather than drawing other nations into their orbit, after their return from Babylon, Jews found themselves more a satellite of the Hellenistic kingdom centered in the “new” capital of Alexandria. The majority of the Jews in Babylonia had not come back, and now even in Jerusalem and Israel generally Jews found themselves speaking Greek! They commissioned a translation of their scriptures into Greek and realized they must now position themselves and make their way in an international, Greek-speaking world where they were not the center but rather an “upputy” protuberance that engaged in pathetic maneuverings to contest the supremacy of Hellenistic culture by whispering, for example, that Greek philosophers had derived their wisdom from Moses. Their “supremacy” and social separation was now leading to their ostracization, irrelevance and detestation by the international community.

The replacement of the Greeks by the Romans only made things worse. The Romans did not feel culturally equal to the Greeks; their skill was administration and discipline. Consequently the Romans did not found independent “Hellenistic kingdoms” around the Mediterranean, but only

“outposts” of the single Empire—and they took a dim view of local rebellion. The Romans also felt themselves as an inferior in a “catch-up” competition with Greek culture—the same position the Jews imagined themselves in. The two discovered themselves unpleasantly to be “mirror images” of one another, and they did not like what they saw. They became mortal enemies, both aspiring to the same crown; neither would give in. The Mediterranean stage was set for a tragedy of unprecedented proportions.

Jesus was indifferent to the Jewish-Roman rivalry, but his movement is significant in that it was seen as opening a bridge between Jew and Gentile, cutting off the separation, pretensions and snobbery of the former while opening a portal for Gentiles to share in the privileges and taste the intimacy of those admitted to the special relationship Jews claimed with the single God. Also, Jesus spoke Greek, and the Pauline letters and gospels were all written in Greek.

If anything, Jesus was an 'anti-messianic' figure, claiming that God would not send another David-like figure to establish by conquest another Jewish state on the order of Assyria, Egypt or Babylon; what God wanted was rather an a-political union based on internal conversion and reform. Jesus had not studied the 'Law'; he was not a student of Hillel or Gamaliel, as St. Paul was. He was a disciple only of John the Baptist, but in this radically reversed sense he could be called a 'messiah'. He had preached this new ideal and relationship with the 'Father', which he would invite and also communicate to others. His followers were to become a nation of priests, not of warriors. He had heroically lived the vocation of being the first to reveal this and accepted its consequences. In this striking sense, he could indeed be called the 'messiah', the culminating point, the foundation and goal not only of God's interaction with the Jews, but with all humanity.

Alarmed by the Christian response, the newly-coined rabbis, after the loss of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in the Jewish-Roman wars, gradually discouraged Greek translation and removed messianic and apocalyptic (Greek) additions to their scriptures. The “Law” became more prominent in the Gentile identification of the Jew, because after the Roman wars the Jews lost land, king and temple; Law was all they had left of their covenant with the single deity.

Actually, Jesus seems to have seen himself as the founding-prophet of a new (or final) form of Judaism that would be (following his mentor, John the Baptist) extra-temple and collecting or retrieving the “lost sheep of Israel”—especially those excluded from participation in temple-Judaism because of ritual-purity concerns (i.e., tax collectors and other professions). When challenged by pharisees on intricate questions of the law (a woman is married to seven brothers, all of whom die. Whose wife will she be in the next world?), Jesus showed impatience and exasperation. The heart of religion cannot be concerned with such things. When challenged with how one should behave in a potentially tense situation, again he would typically answer with a parable (the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, etc.), as if to say: “You don’t give a hard and fast rule; such would be juvenile and inappropriate. At the same time, the answer is no mystery. Open your heart, and see where the greatest need lies.” In other words, the exigency for responsible ethics is still there, but the authorities have misperceived it. The entire super-story of the law must be scrutinized, criticized and largely dismantled; it is a creation of man, not of God. It should be replaced with humility, simplicity and openness. Look at the story of the wealthy pharisee and the poor man who go into the temple together to pray. Only the prayer of the second, who beats his breast, asking for forgiveness, is heard. So what the Jews take pride in—the only thing remaining after the Roman wars, the law—Jesus suggests is a matter for shame. Again, a door is opened to the Gentiles. Later, when a pagan Roman emperor in some desperation began looking about for a new religion to unify his empire to counter the Zoroastrianism of the Persians, Julian “the Apostate” suggested Judaism and bringing back sacrifices; but Constantine had already chosen Christianity. It is difficult to criticize his choice.

Christianity thus came to place its emphasis on transformation of the individual, rather than on incorporation within a group. The distinction is somewhat artificial, as there is little individual transformation that does not take place, especially when we are young, apart from incorporation into a group, whose *mores* or customs we are encouraged to “put on” or adopt, but Christianity was distinctive in forming communities that did not stem from or were made up exclusively of one *ethnos*. It was thus perceived as a novel experiment in world religions, especially by its “parent”, Judaism. It provided

a way of combining freedom from obligatory compliance with local civic cults while also providing escape and protection from a charge of “atheism”, which was regarded as unpatriotic, ungrateful and dangerous.

After their defeat in the Jewish wars, the Romans destroyed their temple and excluded Jews from Jerusalem, threatening to wipe them out entirely. Some Jews sought comfort and psychological compensation through the postulate of a special “*gnosis*” or “knowledge” supplied them by a “savior” behind their creator god, that “lifted them up” and restored a basis for their exceptionalism and superior status. To a now “converted” or Christian western society the Jews came across as “stiff-necked”, exotic and defensively haughty. They were tolerated because they performed an essential job that no one else could or would do—money lending—but often were treated as a scapegoat whenever tragedy or disaster struck. The two-beat syncopation of rejection or exclusion, followed by psychological compensation, reappeared during the Renaissance in Jewish “Kabbalah” in Mediterranean Europe in which powerful esoteric predictions were hinted, shortly thereafter by Spinoza with his scandalous “atheistic” doctrine of universal determinism, and later by Freud with his shocking prescription of infantile sexuality. In a “closed” world where they often had no rights or were made to move with only what they could carry, the Jews agreed to play the only “role” on offer. They were perpetually available as everybody’s “victim”, but they exacted the psychological compensation of awe and fear as possessing special knowledge or power, which went along with and flattered in a back-handed way their self-estimate. Both sides got what they could live with, if not all they wanted. This continued until the “final solution”, when the roles became exaggerated and the syncopation fell apart.

Greek philosophers studied the connection between personal moral development and various types of political constitution. The individual was thought of as having an intellect or reason, which should use the will or “spirit” to guide and discipline his passions. The goal of stability for all states was thought of as being shaped by having “wise” people as rulers; with this requirement fulfilled, it was a matter of historical accident or local conditions whether one had one, several or universal suffrage (monarchy, aristocracy or polity). All three were acceptable, but all three could also be corrupted if an improperly formed person seized power (tyranny, oligarchy

or democracy). It was practically impossible for anyone to come to moral maturity in the latter states. In the wake of the competition between military generals and the consequent variety of emperors in the late Roman Empire (as well as the variety of leaders in the incoming barbarian tribes as they gradually converted to Christianity), dynasties emerged from noble families to establish monarchy as the most familiar or recognized form of government in the West throughout the Middle Ages, with the king's authority consecrated by the Church, and which reciprocally supported the Church with its cultic and educational institutions. Morality thereby supported politics, and politics reinforced morality.

During the modern period the citizenry has come to lose patience for a variety of reasons with the monarchical form of government. As an experiment, ethnic, social or political "unity" was considered less crucial for the viability of a state; also, monarchy was felt to impede, smother or oppress the unfolding development of its citizens rather than to advance or protect the latter. The "Romantic" movement held that there was a deeper or more important dimension to the individual that could not break to the surface or receive full expression under a monarchical or aristocratic regime. This departure encountered increased irritation in accepting, if only ceremonially, a monarch or aristocrat "over" them. Such negative reaction to their own histories propelled western states into and through a series of revolutions whereby suffrage was extended to all citizens, rendering "democracy" the inevitable, alone acceptable (or "least objectionable") form of restraint upon the interests, opinions and activities of citizens. The challenge was to combine this relaxed license with the order and stability that traditionally had been considered desirable in a state. This change broke the earlier connection between political science and moral development; the state was no longer viewed as the individual "writ large". His "passions" and enthusiasms were no longer necessary to be guided and disciplined by a "spirit" operating under the direction of reason. The active "revolutionary" impulse tolerated, and even encouraged, the liberation, expression and indulgence of tendencies beyond earlier practices. Inevitably concern came to be directed to the question whether this innovation or departure from traditional order between the parts of the psyche was compatible with stability in either the state or the individual. Politics became a tense

“juggling act”, a precarious and ongoing experiment to discover to what extent and for how long such relaxation could or should be tolerated.

In this last regard, a largely unforeseen experimental transformation took place through the democratic revolution, but it took place “underground”, beneath the surface and as a consequence took time to show itself. This was the development, behind the apparently successful, well-rounded, well-adjusted and ordinary or conventional individual, of the psychopathic narcissistic personality, a personality who feels deprived or cheated at some deep but invisible level of the “success” or satisfaction from which others have benefited, and consequently feels he has a “right” to compensation or “pay back” for the setbacks and deprivations he experiences. The “democratic” revolution has given him a hidden anger and concealed resentment at the exceptional “success” others have achieved at his expense; this differential result or shortfall in public acclaim, reward or remuneration, rather than inspiring him to work harder for comparable results, kindles a rageful fire at the embarrassing discrepancy. The indirect “coaching” of democracy, that all are in some fundamental sense “equal”, determines him to equalize the situation and obtain what he desires anyway, at all costs—by simply taking it from those who have it, if necessary. The “rights” of others no longer matter to him, he can no longer see himself in the “face” of the other; in fact, he can see no other face but his own. He begins to make an exception of himself—because others have proven themselves no longer able to see him. He feels justified in adopting alternative distractions and forbidden compensations because “society” has not fulfilled its contract with him—to give him adequate response and recognition, equal gratification and appropriate consolation. He is not embarrassed in key situations to covertly put himself first, bulldoze others out of the way and seize the “prize”. In cases involving secrecy such psychological reasoning can be used to justify forms of release, compensation, revenge and consolation like insult, vandalism or injury—at its limit, even serial killing. “This is something they have done to me, so I am justified in taking my satisfaction where I discover it.” Such behavior is amplified in societies where there is no one dominant group which must be feared or deferred to, so that the individual does not know who to strike out at, or who it is worthwhile to try to join. The individual feels alone. In the USA, the Federal



Bureau of Investigation estimates there are between 30 and 50 serial killers operating at any given time. Their victims are chosen randomly and anonymously; they are strangers. “This is an injury I inflict on ‘society’, because it is what I deserve.”<sup>1</sup> These casualties to extreme alienation are a consequence the democratic revolution did not anticipate and has not as yet developed the psychological resources to help or heal. They are a “flip-side” of the increased empowerment democracy supplies the individual, but also demonstrates that without concomitant education and therapies fostering psychological maturity, such empowerment by itself is dangerous for both the individual and the state.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> The scholarly discussion of serial killing is massive and growing. Useful background text is: Scott Bonn, *Why We Love Serial Killers: the Curious Appeal of the World's Savage Murderers*, Skyhorse Press, 2014.



## CHAPTER 2

### FROM FUSION TO DIVORCE: THE REVERSAL BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND MODERN OVERTURES TOWARDS THE DIVINE

Conventionally we believe that the attitudes of humans towards the divine have always been respectful and positive, but this is not the case. In the early modern period the attitude of some thinkers executed a novel and radical about-face, a hundred-and-eighty degree turn—and this not just towards other humans who continue to harbor warm feelings towards the divine, but towards the deity itself, or at least towards the idea of a single ‘monotheistic’ deity. They strongly urge a retraction and reversal of the bold and desperate move towards monotheism scholars now believe the Hebrews made late in their history, during the Babylonian captivity, primarily to stave off embarrassment and assimilation into the powerful and sophisticated Persian pantheon. At the time Second Isaiah was prophesying, the Jews quietly and unobtrusively elevated their patronal deity - under a cloud for having failed to protect them from military defeat and cultural humiliation - as not just equal to (or another name for) the Persian high god, but higher still, in fact the unique and only god, who (even more surprisingly) had elected the Hebrews out of all the peoples of the world with whom to contract a covenant of mutual fidelity and support.

In the early modern period it was suggested that this unprecedented, provocative act should be rescinded, recalled and allowed to sink into a dead letter as a disturbance with negative consequences unforeseen at the earlier period but which developed slowly in later history. This step should be retracted, broken off and repudiated, several modern thinkers counsel, not because of the failure of this tribal deity to fulfill his part of the military-political agreement, but rather because of the nefarious effects entertaining the idea of a single metaphysical god has had upon human culture and history, manifest not only in the confusing and conflicting variety of

characteristics attributed to him by opposing groups of his followers but primarily due to the stunting, inhibitory, infantilizing and disempowering effect such an allegiance exercises upon societal and individual development. Rather than aspiring towards fusion and participation with this theological fantasy, society should reverse direction, discourage, divorce and forswear this union, cutting away this unhealthy belief as an anchor and drag that has too long held us down and back, so that we can advance proudly to embrace the benefits of newly liberated and freely operating human ingenuity and insight, to carry us to the less dramatic or juvenile but better grounded adult satisfactions of this worldly science. This reconsideration and reversal is already apparent in the superficially devotional poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, published in 1667, but stands out more fully fifty years later in the poetic and artistic production of his enthusiastic follower, William Blake. These two announce a new *eschaton* or teleology to both individual and societal development that takes back, cancels and repudiates the previous *eschaton* as a misstep leading unawares to cultural slavery to poorly understood and disempowering dogmas and the abandonment of individual development - substituting a *grand guignol* interpretation and inverse parody of this traditionally proper ambition, and a blasphemous denial of the most basic assumptions upon which cultural advance in the West had been conceived and measured. Milton had to carefully limit the expression of his animus, to discipline and cover the depth of his critique, in order to get his poem past the censor; Blake was put down as an irascible, off-balance social misfit who received private, idiosyncratic revelations, but then dismissed with a shrug as harmless.

The influence and power of the first monotheistic paradigms is not difficult to point out. The repeated attempt by Greek thinkers to unify the contrasting approaches of Plato and Aristotle resulted in the Neo-Platonic ‘Great Chain of Being’, made famous by Arthur Lovejoy in his book of the same name, which illustrates the scope, malleability and increasing sophistication of this paradigm not only during the classical period (called by Leibniz the ‘perennial philosophy’), but reaching far into modernity in scientific and evolutionary circles. So powerful was its intellectual dominance that the latter could mask apparent exceptions to its basic postulates—for example, ‘Gnostic’ philosophy which began perhaps as a

religious heresy within Judaism after the latter's crushing defeats by Roman legions, which led some diaspora Jews to turn against and vilify their 'creator' God as an evil, angry and vengeful demon, to the benefit of a newly-conceived higher and more beneficent 'savior' deity who, through the gift of a 'knowledge' concerning how they had fallen under the power and control of this lower spirit, allowed them to be rescued, transported back and returned to their original condition as it was before the catastrophe of creation and fall (the two are equivalent). So powerful is the earlier paradigm, however, that it is questionable whether the Gnostic challenge, in spite of its shocking and violent opposition to the 'creator God', escaped being incorporated into a 'higher monotheism'. Gnosticism has a long future in the modern period, as new movements began to re-assess supposed 'high points' of their common past and reinterpret these as disastrous 'falls' into corruption, error and slavery, from which 'revelation' is meant to provide escape and return to a higher condition. What first complicates and threatens the descent of beneficent creation is subsequently presented as only a brief 'hitch' necessary as a condition within a larger developmental ascent. For Milton and Blake, however, the diagnosis of these nefarious consequences requires an almost unprecedented (except for Spinoza, who was avoided in horror as a notorious and scandalous 'great atheist') move away from the reverence, longing and fusion with the projected god of creation towards separation, departure and divorce. This pattern casts these latter thinkers as prophets imparting a liberating revelation with its accompanying uplift.

Unlike later naturalistic and reductive critics, Milton and Blake cast their criticism in theological or mythological terms and freely invoke the deity. Milton's grandfather Richard Milton had been an ardent Catholic. When his son John Milton senior became a Protestant, Richard disinherited him. John moved to London and made his living as a scrivener, an established and respected service in the pre-Gutenberg era. John prospered and was able to send his son to St. Paul's school, where young John distinguished himself in languages. After studies in Cambridge and travels in Italy, John became the chief theorist and propagandist for the Puritan cause. After the execution of Charles I and the interregnum, when Charles II returned to power in 1660, Milton was imprisoned and barely escaped execution. His blindness was

advanced, however, and he was placed under house arrest with his daughters, where he was able to write poetry under scrutiny. After seven years he produced *Paradise Lost*, which can be read as in part a commentary upon and *apologia* for the failed Puritan rebellion in which he played such a prominent part.

The opening stanzas depict the fallen angels arriving in Hell after their defeat by the forces of Heaven; what should they do - give up in despair or find some way to continue the rebellion? Any Englishman of the time reading this opening would think immediately of the condition of the Puritan leaders in 1660, cast down to their surprise from the highest ranks to torment or death and unsure which path to take. Through his poem, Milton takes on the role of Lucifer (now 'Satan') illustrating a new path that may continue the rebellion. Milton then invokes another event from English history that should encourage them in this same direction.

The elevation of Jesus to the highest creature had traditionally been argued by invoking the Council of Nicaea, which taught that he had a human nature as well as a divine nature. Jesus's human nature was uniquely privileged in that it was suited to be joined to divinity, lifting it above every other human nature. In Milton's poem, Lucifer ignores this theological argument, choosing instead to distract his audience with a rebel-rousing, chest-beating, jingoistic screed, appealing to an 'all or nothing' ideology of freedom, hoping his audience will not notice that Milton is conflating Lucifer's audience of angels with his readership of 'free-born Englishmen'—evidently confident that the former will react identically to the latter.

This rhetorical distraction is announced in book 1, which strongly asserts that it is 'better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven' (1.263). This 'all or nothing' ideology is expanded to full length in book 7:

Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers;  
 If these magnific titles yet remain  
 Not merely titular, since by decree  
 Another now hath to himself engrossed  
 All power, and us eclipsed under the name  
 Of King anointed, for whom all this haste  
 Of midnight-march, and hurried meeting here,

This only to consult how we may best,  
With what may be devised of honours new,  
Receive him coming to receive from us  
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile!  
Too much to one! but double how endured,  
To one, and to his image now proclaimed?  
But what if better counsels might erect  
Our minds, and teach us to cast off this yoke?  
Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend  
The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust  
To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves  
Natives and sons of Heaven possessed before  
By none; and if not equal all, yet free,  
Equally free; for orders and degrees  
Jar not with liberty, but well consist.  
Who can in reason then, or right, assume  
Monarchy over such as live by right  
His equals, if in power and splendour less,  
In freedom equal? or can introduce  
Law and edict on us, who without law  
Err not? much less for this to be our Lord,  
And look for adoration, to the abuse  
Of those imperial titles, which assert  
Our being ordained to govern, not to serve.  
supremacy.

Lucifer's attempt to keep his fellow angels from accepting subordination to Jesus has been mapped onto and transposed into the historical resistance of the English barons on the fields of Runnymede in 1215 rejecting King John's attempt to extract higher taxes from them to fight his wars. The angels should follow their example and force their own *Magna Carta* upon the Almighty, defending their 'absolute' freedom and maintaining a wary suspicion against further incursions of illegitimate abuse of power.

Milton changes the 'key' in which God's announcement of the Incarnation is made to the angels: Jesus is God's Son, as is Lucifer. But God has unjustly elevated and appointed Jesus ruler over *all* creation, so that the angels now have *two* political superiors (God the Father and his 'image', Jesus) to whom they owe fealty and must bend the knee. This is presented

as an intolerable affront to their status and injury to their liberty! The Incarnation is no longer a generous act of salvation on God's part to be celebrated with rejoicing, but a new set of manacles and chains the angels are asked to put on voluntarily without murmur. Milton/Lucifer claims that the Incarnation should be seen as a cause for grinding teeth, anger and rebellion.

This same opposition is present in more pointed or artistic fashion in the 'poetical and prophetic' works of William Blake, who wrote approximately fifty years later. Blake esteemed that he lived in a period when the human faculties, originally one, had become divided. He resurrected a form of the Platonic myth of the sexes as originally making together one 'giant' human being ('Albion') which had been split by the gods anxious at the strength of its powers and determined to keep it weak. Since the time of this separation the two sexes have been trying to get back together again, to regain their original strength.

Blake had been very independent as a child, to the point that his parents never required him to spend a single day in school; they foresaw that he would be rambunctious, incorrigible and disruptive. He was taught how to read at home, however, and henceforth became an autodidact. However, he was constitutionally averse to subordinating himself to any 'system'; his characteristic way of learning was to read a position, and then, in an independent second pulse-beat, use his imaginative and prophetic powers to improve or 'correct' the position he had taken in. For Blake this was the heartbeat of both human learning and history.

The goal, as always, was to re-achieve the original unity which had been lost. His views on empowerment did not extend as far as women, however. Although later he was in theoretical favor of woman's equality, he married an illiterate girl five years his junior whom he could instruct in his own views, and he regarded the first stage of the re-integration as involving woman's re-integration *within* man, not man's within woman, or man and woman together. Further, because Blake saw his era as arriving 'late in the game' after this splintering and alienation had proceeded for millennia, the separation of the original Albion into the 'Four Zoas' had already proceeded in an historical timeline that allowed Blake to produce his 'private



mythology' in which he gave names to the parts that had become separate, and thus opposed and diseased. The primary hostility was between 'Urizen' who represented conventional religion with its repressive morality, as the high point of human culture and endeavor, associated with the God of the Old Testament, or 'God the Father.' Countering this constraint and repression, oppositional forces have grown up, represented by Luvah, Orc and Los, who stood for the power and legitimate rights of love, inspiration, imagination—and rebellion.

Unfortunately, because of the class-based monarchical oppression imposed by the inhibitory and enslaving dominance of Urizen, the only form that 'progress' could take now was this two-beat syncopation of first constraint and then revolt. There is no other way for us to work our way back towards our original unity and a redemptive integration. While such a rebellion does intend an ultimate integration with Urizen, because there are so many unities to be repaired and alienations to be overcome, this final culmination or *eschaton* recedes into the distance and almost disappears. In the short run the attitude of Christ-like progress away from the monarchical tradition of the self-interested control and intransigent privilege of Urizen must be unflinching opposition leading to wary caution, distrust and suspicion. This involves for the dawning Enlightenment mentality a turning away from the earlier goal of reconciliation and union through the now 'poisoned apple' of Christian Neo-Platonism, the 'Great Chain of Being' or the 'perennial philosophy'. The only prudent ethic is to abandon participation or 'fusion' with the deity as a personal or social ideal, in favor of a 'divorce' into 'independent operators', until revolutionary activity has produced a real change, such that it can then serve as evidence that re-integration is again desirable.



## CHAPTER 3

### PROPORTIONATE LOVE AND LITERATURE: THE REVENGE OF THE BASTARD

The conviction that love should be proportionate to its object—that we get into trouble when we love an object either above or below its merits—was basic to Greek ethics and culture. Aristotle precipitated this conviction into a principle and analyzed moral virtue as the ability to discern a subjective mean between too much and too little in every area of conduct, together with the habitual exercise of hitting this mean. Excellence in this ability is a lifelong project, but as in all virtue, pleasure should kick in and reinforce our efforts as we begin to hit the target with regularity.

In a reverse mode, popular wisdom traced back social turmoil and political dysfunction to an absence of the proper love, esteem or sympathy that should characterize a relationship. René Girard has recently shown how competition leading to conflict is not an exceptional state of affairs in social organization, but rather is to be expected as the all-too-normal result of the natural dynamism of desire. In many traditional cultures, twins are left exposed to the elements to die. The ‘official’ reason is that the two improperly share one soul and thus cannot achieve normal fulfillment; the underlying reason is fear based on experience that the rivalry that normally characterizes siblings is exacerbated in the case of twins to break out in conflict, which not infrequently sweeps the family and wider social environment into a spiraling feud. Romulus and Remus, the mythological twins who founded Rome, were thrown into the Tiber at birth, but a she-wolf rescued and suckled them; after they matured, Romulus killed Remus in a dispute over where Rome should be located.

The historical books of the Old Testament are replete with perverted relationships which have devastating consequences for the family and wider community. Because polygamy is the norm, illegitimacy is not an issue, but

marginality and a sense of injured or unrecognized merit certainly are. Cain kills Abel because his sacrifice is not deemed as worthy as his brother's; the concubine Hagar becomes proud of her pregnancy, taunts the barren wife Sarai who so abuses her that she runs away. Joseph is the spoiled younger son whom his older brothers resent. Saul becomes darkly embittered at David's military success and consequent greater popularity. David loves Absalom, perhaps because Absalom is the man he should have been, but is not; Absalom detests David, rebuffs and rebels against him, perhaps for the same reason.

While Christianity did not favor viewing the traditional family as a conflictual state, by imposing monogamy, it opened the door to the artistic depiction of illegitimacy as a dangerous practice primarily because of the failed affection it insinuated and poisoned relationships it propagated. The illegitimate son legitimately *dis*-affects his father, who has forgotten him and typically fails to acknowledge him. Yet because a son's identity derives initially from the father, the link cannot be broken. The illegitimate son grieves for his lost relationship, sometimes giving in to recrimination and rancor against the person who has sired him and whom he has a right to love; at other times he will rebel or in some fashion seek revenge for the natural relationship to which he feels entitled but of which he has been cheated. This perverse inversion of proportionate love can result in an offspring who feels deprived, exacting revenge some years later. It is a hurt that is not assuaged and does not go away. The American abolitionist Frederick Douglass writes in his autobiography of his pain at seeing the man he took to be his father, the master of the plantation on which his mother worked as a slave, show no remorse for what he had done nor take any responsibility for the consequences.

Artists in the Christian West were not slow to tap the device of the smoldering bastard—or heir bypassed because he was born under the *bar sinistre* or wrong side of the bed—to explain ongoing complaint or a surprising eruption of violence after years of quiet and apparently torpid resignation. Shakespeare's plays—like aristocratic Renaissance society itself—are full of lesser sons and illegitimate heirs condemned to well-heeled social parasitism and political irrelevance because of the 'sin of the father'. Typically they bide their time, waiting for a chance to lead a

rebellion and seize by force the post they claim should be theirs by right. Dramatically, however, the pathos of impotence and unmerited injury are better perceived in those figures who have no chance of reversing the cruel destiny a self-indulgent and now absent paternity has dealt them. The latter show their condition as one of shame and teeth-grinding frustration.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, illegitimacy is compounded with miscegenation to produce our first portrait of a creature confused in his physical appearance, his social status and his deeper psychological condition. Prospero is the ruler of a mysterious island that seems a cross between Robinson Crusoe's cannibal habitat and the recently discovered Bermuda. He has a servant Caliban, whom he refers to as a brutal savage, and who is treated as a figure of fun and contempt by all the characters. He is described as a 'mooncalf', a 'freckled whelp', and is thought of as a wild man, a beast man or a fish-man. Everyone is confused about who he is—including himself. Although he was the only human inhabitant of the island, he is not native; according to Prospero he is the son of the witch Sycorax by a devil. Sycorax was banished from Australia, abandoned on the strange isle pregnant with Caliban and died before Prospero's arrival. Caliban is clearly in psychological pain and not at home with himself; two ways he seeks relief are by forcing acceptance from the more self-assured later arrivals, Prospero and his family, and overcoming his loneliness by producing others like himself. Prospero justifies his harsh treatment of Caliban by saying that after initially befriending him, Caliban tried to rape his daughter Miranda. Caliban gleefully confirms this, saying that if he hadn't been stopped, he would have peopled the island with a race of Calibans. He is thus essentially lonely—and never more so than when surrounded by these different people from across the sea. Unable to win acceptance, his mind swings to the opposite strategy. Referring to his mother's god as Setebos, he belies his surface good humor and shows his deeper resentment of Prospero. Stephano, one of the shipwrecked servants, has given Caliban some wine; Caliban takes Stephano as his god and new master. He urges Stephano to kill Prospero and become lord of the island. He dreams of dispelling his sense of discomfort and marginality; one day his time may come:

