NOTE

The Meaning of Los

E. J. Rose

10-11
of the solar virtue accords more with a cock than with a lion.
This will be evident from considering that the cock, as it were,
with certain hymns, applauds and calls to the rising sun, when he
bends his course to us from the antipodes; and that solar angels
sometimes appear in forms of this kind, who, though they are with-
out shape, yet present themselves to us, who are connected with
shape, in some sensible form. Sometimes too, there are daemons
with a leonine front, who, when a cock is placed before them,
unless they are of a solar order, suddenly disappear; and this,
because those natures which have an inferior rank in the same
order, always reverence their superiors.

2. The Meaning of Los

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The traditional reading of 'Los', as an anagram for 'sol' has been long
established, though other sources have been suggested. Frye, for instance,
cites 'los or loos' from Chaucer's House of Fame as a possible analogue.
Though I do not discount the possibility that Blake may have had several
sources in mind at once, as with the names of many of his major figures, like
Orc and Vala, I think 'los' means literally and metaphorically something more
than 'sol.' I do not intend or even suggest that 'sol' be abandoned because
Los is too often associated with the sun in both the verse and the illustrations
for 'sol' to be ignored. Los is, of course, the 'more bright Sun of Imagination'
in the L'Allegro designs and not the fiery guinea-disk of economics and nature.
What I think 'los' means is 'look' or 'behold' in the traditionally shortened
form of the interjection, 'lo,' only in the third person singular of the verb -- perhaps, with all the same implications as Ferlinghetti's very Blakean
"fourth person singular." Los is aware, he watches, looks, sees, and beholds.
His is vision. He los all the time and all Time. Los is the word within
the word, a visionary verbal wheel within a wheeling verbal universe, a moving
vision or visionary (a seer) within the vision. Los is a perennial proclamation
in the present tense, the ever-present tense, a seeing word in an iconographical
drama. He is his own ejaculation, an infinite 'lo.' The 's' in Los should be
pronounced as a voiced sibilant in contrast with the voiceless sound uttered
by the serpent. 'The Song' or 'The Book' of Los, like all of Blake's work, is
a song or a book of los. We see through Los, not with him. Before this sugges-
ted interpretation of the meaning of Los is dismissed as fanciful, I only ask
that several of Blake's works be re-read with the ear attuned to the metaphor-
ical sound of Los pronounced as lo with a voiced sibilant. Such phrases as the
'Gate of Los' or 'head of Los' which appear repeatedly and other phrases, such
as 'Scribe of Los,' or building of Los, or power of Los, or they gave their
power to Los, Naming him the Spirit of Prophecy, I take on a new and important
dimension, which once entertained, is not easily ignored. No serious critic of
Blake or of the Bible can afford to ignore the aural metaphors or what Buber
calls 'A bold visual metaphor for an acoustical event,' when he discusses the
'voice of thin silence' from I Kings 19:21, which he says 'is a silence, but
not a thick and solid one, rather one that is of such veil-like thinness that
the Word shines through it.' Los is the recurrent ejaculation of God and his

Notes for a Commentary on Milton," The Divine Vision (London, 1957). pp. 100-
Throughout man's history. It is the sound of the visual herald when he reveals truth and an interjection which appears repeatedly in Blake's work. "Lo!" is a word which proclaims that men see with their minds, travel mentally, and wage "Mental War."

2 The phrase appears repeatedly in Her. Los is, of course, the fourth Zoa - he says so in J. 12:11, 23-24.


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P 14 Night line 44 Graze shd be Grase (The s is angular but not a z).

P 51 line 10 Hands deprest shd read Heads deprest (Depressing!)

P 61 line 5 Human shd be lower case human

P 62 line 26 enclos'd shd read inclos'd

P 116 line 27 revolve shd be revolve

P 181 line 29 tragic shd be spelled trajic

P 202 line 20 Universal Concave can be emended to Universal Conclave (as the context pretty much demands)

P 270 Several persons have collated the Hebrew of the Laocoön inscriptions with the engraved plate and kindly noted that the printers misspelled Lilith and King Jehovah, although Blake had them both right. In Lilith a Heh appears instead of the normal Thav. In Malekhi Jehovah three incorrect letters appear: Daleth instead of Khaph, Sophith instead of Heh, and Resh instead of Vav.

(P 277 TIRIEL: The substantive variants in the new edition by Bentley, "were" for "was" in l: 2 and "vales" for "dales" in l: 27, are simply misprints, as one can see from the facsimile).

P 287 line 101 loud (since it is an emendation) shd be [loud/]

Pp 287-8 William F. Halloran (who is writing about this in BNYPL) makes a convincing case for emending the dialogue by moving lines 105-9 to come after line 120.

P 493 From Cratetos shd be spelled from Cratetos (clear enough in N; now first observed by W. H. Stevenson).

REYNOLDS ANNOTATIONS. Marcia Allentuck, going through my xerox and elaborate transcript, noted the following slips in the Doubleday simplified report: Angle brackets shd enclose "Here...Circumstances" (P 639: p 87), "Broken...Sullime" (P 561: p 102), "The...Operations" (P 643: p 131), "To...Science" (P 644: p 135), "How...Species" (P 645: p 144), "Demonstration...Intuition" (P 648: p 200), and "These...Colour" (P 651: p 279). On P 645: p 152., no brackets shd be around the second "Never!"