

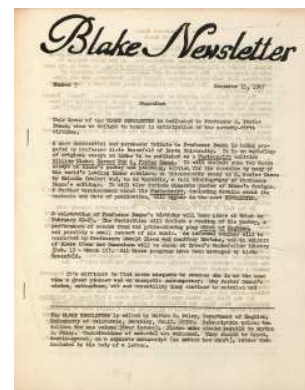
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N O T E

The Meaning of Los

E. J. Rose

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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 without 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

E. J. Rose
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

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.¹ 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."² 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 suggested 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 metaphorical 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,' 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.'³ 'Lo is the recurrent ejaculation of God and his

¹"Notes for a Commentary on Milton," The Divine Vision (London, 1957). pp. 100-101; cf Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, 1947), p. 445 n.2 and p. 417.

~~prophets 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 42: 11, 23-24.

³ "On the Suspension of the Ethical," in Eclipse of God (New York, 1957), p. 119.

3. Errata Emendata: Second Printing: Erdman-Bloom P&P of WB

David V. Erdman
State University of New York at Stony Brook

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 146 line 27 rovolve 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 final Thav. In Melekh Iehovah three incorrect letters appear, Daleth instead of Khaph sophith, Kheth instead of Heh, and Resh instead of Vav.

(P 277 TIRIEL: The substantive variants in the new edition by Bentley, "were" for "was" in 4: 2 and "vales" for "dales" in 4: 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 Cratelos 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... Sublime" (P 641: p 102), "The...Operations" (P 643: p 131), "To...Science" (P 644: p 135), "How...Species" (P 645: p 149), "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!"