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Blake's Babe in the Woods

Thomas R. Dilworth

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"the Diversion of beholding various Representations produced by the petrifying Water continually dropping from the Roof and Sides of the Rock" (Bk. 3, p. 43). The shapes produced are stalactites and stalagmites plus the strong visual fancy of the beholder. Leigh explains their popular interpretations as (E) a lion; (F) the "Queen of Scots Pillar"; (H) and (I) as globes of "Alabaster Sparr" called "the Font" and "Mr. Cotton's Haycocks"; (K) "the Flitch of Bacon" and (L) "the Chairs" (Bk. i, pp. 189-90).

The most interesting figure from the Blakean point of view, however, is that of (G) "the Figure of a Human Corps, formed likewise by the Dropping of the Water from the Top of the Arch and the Sides." It is probable that B. knew of this figure in Leigh's plate² and associated its identification by the local people as a memorial or "fable" of Albion who, in *Jerusalem*, is also "petrified" (J 34[38]:1, 7, E 177-78: J 46[32]:5, E 193) but awaiting revival: "Albion mov'd. . . / His stony members" (J 95:2-4, E 252). With this interpretation the solitary pillar now standing beside the human figure can be recognized as a remnant of the sixteen pillars erected when:

the merciful Saviour in his arms
 Receiv'd him, in the arms of tender mercy and
 repos'd
 The pale limbs of his Eternal Individuality
 Upon the Rock of Ages. Then, surrounded with
 a Cloud:
 In silence the Divine Lord builded with immortal
 labour,
 Of gold & jewels a sublime Ornament, a Couch of
 repose,
 With Sixteen pillars: canopied with emblems &
 written verse. (J 48:1-7, E 194)

These crucial differences between vision and mere degenerate fancy make it clear why the eighteenth century visitor to Pooles Hole saw a similarity between the cave's interior and the interior of a church. Instead of the "Spiritual Verse" of the Decalogue, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels and Revelation (J 48:8-11, E 194) which surrounds Albion's sleeping form, they only saw the rock shapes as an "Organ and Choir-work" and Font (Bk. 3, p. 43).

Albion's movements in *Jerusalem* imply that his resting place is a variant of Pooles Hole. After a temporary manifestation of rebellion when his "Great Voice of the Atlantic howled over Druid Altars" and "Round the Rocky Peak of Derbyshire London Stone & Rosamonds Bower" (J 57:5,7, E 205), Albion "fled beneath the Plow / Till he came to the Rock of Ages. & he took his Seat upon the Rock" (J 57:15-16, E 205). The Peak's prophetic elevation (but capable of druid cruelty if reason usurps, J 21:34, E 165) has as its contrary the "horrid Chasm" beneath ("the most terrible Chasm that I ever yet beheld" Leigh on Pooles Hole, Bk. 1, p. 187), where a more deadly liquid drips:

Derby Peak yawnd a horrid Chasm at the Cries of
 Gwendolen, & at
 The stamping feet of Ragan upon the flaming
 Treddles of her Loom
 That drop with crimson gore with the Loves of

Albion & Canaan
 Opening along the Valley of Rephaim, weaving over
 the Caves of Machpelah. (J 64:35-38, E 213)

An intermediate, earthly plain of existence is indicated as East Moor in Derbyshire, a level state with the potential for either reasoning slavery or prophetic independence:

Hyle on East Moor in rocky Derbyshire, rav'd
 to the Moon
 For Gwendolen: she took up in bitter tears
 his anguished heart
 That apparent to all in Eternity, glows like
 the Sun in the breast:
 She hid it in his ribs & back . . .
 . . . raving he ran among the rocks,
 Compell'd into a shape of Moral Virtue against
 the Lamb. (J 80:66-69, 76-77, E 235)

The Mothers love of obedience is forgotten
 & you seek a Love
 Of the pride of dominion, that will Divorce
 Ocalythron & Elynittria
 Upon the East Moor in Derbyshire & along the
 Valleys of Cheviot. (J 93:4-6, E 251)

Enitharmon's words in the latter passage unconsciously reflect how the moor of the surface of the physical land of Albion is the level on which the battle for vision is fought.

Blake's use of the three levels of Derbyshire, peak, moor and cavern, illustrates how neatly geographical locale can be adapted for an imaginative purpose.

¹ See James Pilkington, *A View Of The Present State Of Derbyshire*, (Derby 1789), I, 63-68. J. Johnson is given on the titlepage as one of a pair of London Booksellers.

² Another oddly Blakean part of Leigh's plate is (B) "The Child that was born of a Lancashire Gentlewoman with the Representation of a Flame upon its Body, the Mother being affrighted with that terrible Flame when the City of London was burned" (Bk. 1, p. 188).

Blake's Babe in the Woods

by Thomas R. Dilworth

Blake's longest lyric fable, "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found," appears to be influenced, in its plot and illustration, by the English ballad called "Babes in the Wood" or "Children in the Wood."¹ The sixteenth century ballad Blake would have known from the copy he owned of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The ballad, moreover, was popular in contemporary chapbooks. Not many of these survive from the eighteenth century, and few of those that do are illustrated. But we have some chapbooks from the early nineteenth century which contain the ballad "Babes in the Wood" and illustrate it in a manner indicating that Blake's illustration of "The Little

"Girl Lost" may be based on illustrations of the ballad in the chapbooks of his time. In fact, the picture on Blake's first page of the song can hardly be called an illustration, since nowhere in the song's lyrics does a young man embrace Lyca. Rather, Blake's human figures embracing beneath a tree seem to be a pictorial allusion to the ballad as it would have been illustrated in Blake's time.

The climax of the ballad, which is the episode most conducive to illustration, occurs after a boy and his sister have failed to find their way out of a forest in which they have been abandoned by their wicked uncle. They lie down and die for lack of nourishment. As Thomas Percy records the ballad,

Thus wandered these poor innocents
Till death did end their grief,
In one another's arms they dyed,
As wanting due relief:
No burial 'this' pretty 'pair'
Of any man received,
Till Robin-red-breast piously
Did cover them with leaves. (III, p. 176)

This is the passage illustrated in a Banbury chapbook published by J. G. Rusher in about 1815 (illus. 1), and in a chapbook published by Benjamin Tabart in 1804 (illus. 2), reprinted by William Godwin in *Tabart's Collection of Popular Stories* in 1809.² The illustration on the first page of "The



Children in the Wood.
London: Published by Tabart, 21, Sep. 1804.



These pretty babes thus wander'd long,
Without the least relief,
The woods, the briers, and thorns among,
Till death did end their grief.

These pretty babes from any man,
No funeral rite receives;
But Robin Redbreast forms the plan,
To cover them with leaves.



Little Girl Lost" is remarkably similar in composition to the ballad illustrations. Blake's Lyca and her companion embrace beneath a tree that grows out of the picture's left-hand side. Above them flies a bird corresponding to the robin in the Banbury chapbook illustration. In fact, Lyca appears to be pointing to the bird directly overhead.

The similarity between the ballad and Blake's songs extends further. Lyca, lost in a forest, sleeps in a protracted manner that suggests death. Moreover, lions befriend her, and in "Night" lions are shown to be amiable only after death. (The Lyca songs were originally grouped along with "Night" in the *Songs of Innocence*.) Her transfer to a cave by beasts seems a sort of funeral and recalls the kindness of the ballad's robin. The children in the ballad die of starvation. In "The Little Girl Found," Lyca's searching parents dream she has starved. In the ballad, seven years elapse before their bodies are discovered by humans. This period may have a numerical echo in the seven days that pass before Lyca is found. The seven years of the ballad may also be reflected in the age given to Lyca who, though she is obviously post-pubescent in the illustrations to the songs, is said to be "Seven summers old."

The focus of the relationship between the ballad and Blake's songs is death's double meaning. Blake's illustrations indicate that nubile Lyca's dying is sexual and takes place in her lover's arms. If Blake did have the ballad in mind as he wrote his two songs about Lyca, his sexual theme may have been suggested to him by two lines already quoted from Percy that seem especially charged with sexual connotations: "In one another's arms they dyed, / As wanting due relief."

¹ The ballad is suggested as "source of analogy" for Blake's lyrics by Irene H. Chayes in "Blake and Traditon: 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found,'" *Blake Newsletter* 13 (August 1970), p. 25.

² The reproductions of the chapbook illustrations appear by courtesy of The Osborne Collection of English Children's Books, Toronto Public Library.

Errors in the Signet Classic Edition of

The Selected Poetry of Blake

by David V. Erdman

In the "Selected Bibliography" on page xvii the Keynes edition of *Complete Writings* should be said to contain "Modernized punctuation" but *not* spelling. The Erdman-Stevenson edition of 1971 should be described as containing "Modernized spelling and punctuation."

Page 133, note 16:14 should read: ". . . the year of this Prophecy (1793) . . ."

Page 199, note 11:32 should read: "Sin, daughter of Satan and mother of Death."

I deny any responsibility for--or any awareness of, before they were *faits accomplis*--the weird montage on the front cover and the deathly prose on the back ("richly representative . . . extraordinary blending . . . vividly immediate and tantalizingly ambiguous" and so on).

George Frederick Cooke:

Another Grave Subscriber Heard From

By Dennis Read

In *Memoirs of George Frederick Cooke*, 2 vols., ed. William Dunlap (London: Henry Colburn, 1813), is a reference to Blake which has not been previously noted. Cooke (1756-1811), a well-known actor, was a subscriber to *The Grave*, and among his diary entries (recorded in his *Memoirs*, II, 65-70) are several dealing with the arrival of his copy:

Thursday, Jan. 5th [1809]

Received a note from a Mr. Cromek, informing me that a work I subscribed two guineas for, at Liverpool, above two years ago,¹ and which I had entirely forgotten, is published, and requesting my address, that my copy might be sent.²

Friday, Jan. 6th

Wrote an answer to Mr. Cromek's note, . . .

Thursday, Jan. 12th.

Received and looked over "Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Poem of The Grave."³ The etchings seem finely executed, and the printing, the letter press I mean, done in the fine style.⁴

Cooke's diary shows that Cromek was in Liverpool for at least part of the time that Cooke was there during the latter part of August and first weeks of September, 1806. Cromek's stay was apparently worthwhile, for the "List of Subscribers" in *The Grave* includes fifty-one Liverpool residents. Cromek probably had come to Liverpool from Birmingham, where he ran nearly identical advertisements for *The Grave* in the 28 July 1806 *Birmingham Gazette* and *Commercial Herald*;⁵ he then left Liverpool probably for his native Yorkshire, where he gathered *Grave* subscriptions in Halifax, Pontefract, Leeds, and, finally, Wakefield, where he married Mrs. Elizabeth Charge in the parish church on 24 October 1806.

Cooke clearly is no intimate of either Cromek or Blake, and while he does not seem to regard his two guineas as ill-spent, his interest in his new acquisition is less than consuming. One wonders, in fact, if he ever opened his copy of *The Grave* again.

¹ Advertisements in the *Liverpool Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser* show that Cook performed at the Theatre-Royal between 19 August and 11 September 1806. A short letter of introduction written for Cromek by Henry Fuseli to his patron, the Liverpool benefactor William Roscoe, is dated 16 July 1806. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 179.