

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

N O T E

Preface to the Revised Edition of Blake's
Notebook

David V. Erdman

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 11, Issue 1, Summer 1977, pp. 21-23



³ Bloom's "closer reading" is actually two readings: (1) a literal reading which takes the curse to be an oral imprecation moistening the baby's eyes, and (2) a symbolic reading dependent on this literal reading. In this paper we are directly questioning only the first.

⁴ David V. Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 278.

⁵ This interpretation is something of a straw man anyway; that the harlot's breath can literally scatter the baby's tear out of existence is contrary to ordinary language and the facts of experience.

A more common interpretation would reply that Bloom is demanding too technical a knowledge of his reader and of Blake when he points out that a newborn baby has no tear (at any rate, a "newborn" baby could be two days old, and have tears). Such a reading would also take "Infants tear" as a *synecdoche* meaning "infant's crying." This, however, leaves the reader suspecting that Blake used "tear" largely because it rhymed with "hear"; it shows a faulty craftsmanship in Blake which we do not feel is necessarily in the poem.

⁶ For a complete description and a photograph of an infected child see *Adler's Textbook of Ophthalmology*, 8th ed., ed. Harold G. Scheie and Daniel M. Albert (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1969), p. 147. Dr. Kent is responsible for the medical information given at this point in the article; we are also partly

indebted to Virginia Burpos of Bridgeport, Connecticut, for this reading of the poem.

⁷ *Adler's Textbook of Ophthalmology*, p. 147. Since *gonococcal conjunctivitis* is a form of gonorrhoea, it is not prenatal or congenital. A number of commentators have referred to the "curse" as "prenatal," thinking, no doubt, of the blindness resulting from congenital syphilis: see Bloom, p. 141; M. H. Abrams' comments in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams *et al.*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), II, 59; and Bloom's comments in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Frank Kermode and John Hollander, *et al.* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), II, 27. Since venereal diseases were not differentiated until late in the nineteenth century, Blake and others could easily have thought of any form of gonorrhoea as congenital and so a "curse" passed on in the blood. See Charles Clayton Dennis, *History of Syphilis* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1962), esp. p. 92f.

⁸ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 94 and 265.

⁹ See Abrams' comments in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, II, 59; and Bloom, p. 142.

¹⁰ Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 378.

Preface to the Revised Edition of Blake's Notebook

by David V. Erdman

Reviewers were generous in their praise of the first edition; their welcoming of this facsimile as "an essential guide"--"both stimulating and useful" and even "something of a landmark"--lulled my critical faculties, so that when the opportunity of a reissue arose my first inclination was merely to correct the manifest errors and occasional misprints, to put a proper note of identification near the finely sketched portrait of Blake's wife Catherine on Notebook page 82 (Geoffrey Keynes having pointed out that the sketch had been copied by Frederick Shields for the 1880 *Gilchrist Life* and there identified), and, with the necessary rearrangement of adjacent items, to correct my mistaken dating of Poem 78 in the Table on pages 56-58 and in the explanation on page 71. I intended also to cite briefly, in the note to page 27, a clear solution to the puzzle of Emblem 10 which was proposed by Robert N. Essick in his review in *Blake Newsletter* 32 (Spring 1975) pp. 132-36.

When I sat down to check through the reviews for specific criticisms and suggestions, however, I

was gradually drawn into a sober reappraisal of my "readings" of two of the emblem designs, one being that of the figure resting on a cloud in a star-studded sky used by Blake in his strategic "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*. "On pages 73 and N57, the figure in Emblem 36 must surely be identified not as the future Bard but as the future Earth," declared Jean H. Hagstrum in his review in *Philological Quarterly*, 53 (Fall 1974) 643-45. "Her position resembles that of a clear but unmistakable Blakean icon . . . the position of Earth, of the Clod of Clay or Nature in *Thel*, of the sleeping girl in *America*, and of *Vala* in *The Four Zoas*." Long uncertain about this figure, I had defined it as "the alerted Soul on her cloud" as late as the galley-proof stage of the first edition, then persuaded myself that it was, after all, "the Bard on his scroll." Sir Geoffrey Keynes had once agreed that it was the Bard but in his recent facsimile edition of the *Songs* (1967) had come round to seeing it as "Earth . . . a female figure reclining on a couch borne on a cloud among a night of stars." What finally convinced me were two pages of close

argument for the Earth/Soul interpretation in a copy John E. Grant sent me of his review scheduled for publication in the Autumn 1977 issue of *Modern Philology*. It is with relief and pleasure that I now belatedly join such a "strong" company of scholars as Keynes, Grant, and Hagstrum.

John Grant's review also questions my reading of Emblem 13, page 31, as did Robert Essick's. Where I saw a gowned "Saviour" descending through a doorway, they see a gowned woman ascending. The sketch is quite vague; what convinces me in this case is the early wash drawing, kindly supplied by Essick, of what is clearly a variant of the same scene (Fig. 43). William Rossetti had been substantially correct with his caption, "The Soul entering Eternity. Exhibits a maiden entering a door, guarded by two spiritual women" (Gilchrist *Life*, 1863, II, 248 no. 92). Another variant is Blake's design for Young's *Night Thoughts* (NT 510), in which the woman entering "at the door of Heaven" is welcomed by a bearded man who pushes the door open and represents "humble Love." (Another version, emblem size, is a slight sketch of a figure entering a door, inscribed "Frontispiece" above the drawing and "It is Deep Midnight" below it. Since this sketch is drawn on the verso of Blake's title page "For Children The Gates of HELL," the probability is, Martin Butlin suggests, that this and some of the other unpublished Notebook emblems were at one time intended for a separate, unpublished *Gates of Hell*.) As for Emblem 10, which I can now see as a variant of *A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle* (1784) or *War* (1805), Essick has kindly sent me an annotated tracing which helps to identify the edges of the broken wall, the three corpses before and within the break, a small figure seen in the distance through the break and walking to the left, and an eagle perched on the wall. I would hardly say that "the eagle's beak and left wing are particularly clear in the emblem," since I see only the neck, not the beak, but I do agree that "this arrangement at least seems more likely than Erdman's 'lightning strikes the neck of a woman whose slippered leg is extended at left.'" As comparison with the variant versions makes evident, what I saw as cloud and lightning are a clump of trees and the outlines of the eagle. What looks like a giant leg proves to be the space between the edge of the broken wall and a fallen body.

Revising the account of Emblem 10, which I had called "War," required little more than a refining of connotations. But my erroneous accounts of Emblems 13 and 36 had far-reaching effects. While I was wrestling with the necessary revisions *passim*, and discussing them on the telephone with John Grant, he gently urged me to examine and reconsider the sex of the figure I had identified as Satan in the picture on pages 110-11. The prominent rounded breasts ought perhaps to suggest Eve--or Satan's daughter and paramour, Sin. (But then Christ in the same picture looks rather like that Bard--I mean "lapsed Soul"--in Emblem 36, hair and gown: some suggestion of an androgynous Human Form Divine?)

Three females I had mistaken for males! I could take some comfort from recalling the first part of Blake's letter to the *Monthly Magazine* in 1806 in which he protested the criticism of a painting by

Fuseli. The critic had mistaken a boy in Count Ugolino's arms for a girl. "Whether a boy or girl," Blake wrote, "signifies not." Then he added: "but the critic must be a fool . . . who does not know a boy from a girl." Small comfort. I have omitted the first "who": "a fool who has not read Dante": Blake *knew*, from reading Dante, that the child was a boy. I had thought I *knew*, from reading Blake, that those figures were male. By this time a simple patching here and there and a note of errors would not do. I have now revised the descriptions of these three Emblems completely, put in a query about Eve or Sin, and revised my accounts of the sequences of emblems in Blake's various numberings. The changed readings of the three emblem pictures fortunately make no drastic change in the sequences of variation between images of fear and images of hope which constitute the dynamics of the series. Emblem 10 comes into sharper focus as death and mourning after battle, with permissible allusions to the English Civil War and the American War, while "the drift of hollow states" suggests contemporary prophecy. Emblem 13, whether representing Christ coming through a doorway toward us or a Soul going toward heaven, is an emblem of hope. And Emblem 36, whether the Bard watching for Earth to respond to "the Word" or the Earth awake to "the Word" but not yet arising, is critically ambivalent. It can make a positive thrust in the thematic series of the Notebook emblems; in the context of the "Introduction" poem and its sequel "Earth's Answer" it may lead the viewer and reader into a lapsed condition that puts the dawn of a future age far off. The fit of text to picture, however, is a compelling reality: it is the Earth *as globe* to whom "the starry floor," prominent in the picture, is given; the "watry shore" is given as boundary to the earth *as land* (the "slumberous mass"), and it is from that prison that her chained spirit answers in the second poem ("Earth's Answer").

Four emblem pictures which I have added at John Grant's suggestion, on pages 98-99, afford further possibilities--which I leave others to explore--for the reconstruction of Blake's numbered series of emblems. Figures 44 and 45 are sketches on a small sheet of paper which Grant calls to my attention as bearing alongside their captions revised and thrice revised numbers that seem to fit gaps in Table V (p. 64) of emblems in numbered series. In Fig. 45 a bee-winged girl hovers with folded arms under an archway, or possibly the branch of a tree. These drawings are not much like those in the Notebook, but the possibility that they may have been considered for the Notebook series cannot be ruled out. They are like the drawings of Figs. 46-47.

Figures 46 and 47 are less ambiguous and in a different category. Both were added to blank verso pages, within the areas framed by the plate printed on the rectos, in copy C of *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, a copy which Blake's old friend George Cumberland apparently purchased after his death. These added emblems, a flower-woman to match the fire-man of the emblem it faces, and a printer at work following "Death's Door," show Blake still the relentless emblem-maker. Perhaps they are restorations of earlier rejected designs; the first Fig. 46, bears a kind of sibling relation to Fig. 45.

But I have no ingenious speculations ready, nor has John Grant, who led me to these surprises.

Thanks, then, to Professors Essick, Grant, and Hagstrum, this new edition contains significant improvements that have involved minor revisions throughout, even in the index. And although I have found no way to make direct use of "'Blake's Gothicised Imagination and the History of England,' David Bindman's essay in *William Blake*, 1973 (the Keynes *Festschrift* edited by Morton Paley and Michael Phillips), my brief discussion of the historical sketches and of the list of topics from English history on page 116 would benefit from the wider context supplied by Bindman's survey "of Blake's interpretation of the whole panorama of English history from its mythological origins to the apocalyptic future."

Jean H. Hagstrum is to be thanked for a most interesting textual correction of "Public Address" sections 63 and 29 (N 20 and N 62). What has always been read as "Poco Pen" and "Poco Pend," but never made sense of, can now be confidently given as "Poco Piu" and "Poco Piud." Hagstrum observed that *n* was a misreading of *u*, and Geoffrey Keynes noted that what looks like *e* (though loopless) is indistinguishable from an undotted *i* (of which the text affords frequent examples) and that Blake is attacking the slang of the "Cunning Sures" (N 40); compare his scorn of their "je ne sais quoi" in Poem 124 (N 41). The only other error of transcription noted, and corrected, is "Accusation" corrected to "Accusations" in Appendix page 95.

The 1788 Publication Date of Lavater's Aphorisms on Man

by Richard J. Schroyer

William Blake's annotated copy of the first English edition of J. C. Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (tr. H. Fuseli, pub. J. Johnson)¹ is usually dated 1788 on the apparently firm evidence of the title page dated 1788 and the unsigned "Advertisement" (pp. v-vi) dated "May, 1788."² This date may be especially important for the chronology of Blake's earliest illuminated books, if, as S. Foster Damon first observed, *All Religions are One* and the two series of *There is No Natural Religion* are formally and materially indebted to Lavater's *Aphorisms*.³ In light of this, it is unsettling to find that David Erdman, in two very influential studies of Blake,⁴ re-dates *Aphorisms* 1789--and thereby pushes the *terminus a quo* of Blake's annotations forward by at least six months --on the authority of the following statement in John Knowles' *Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (1831):

In the beginning of the year (1789), Fuseli published, in a small duodecimo [*sic*, for octavo] volume, a translation of Lavater's "Aphorisms on Man;" which work, written in German, was dedicated to him by this early and esteemed friend. The dedication is dated October, 1787.⁵

Knowles' generally valuable biography is, I would suggest, almost certainly wrong on this particular point, the victim perhaps of a printer's slip.⁶

Although there is some reason to believe that the first edition of *Aphorisms* was not widely circulated until the spring of 1789, when Christopher Moody wrote that the volume was "now before us,"⁷ other evidence indicates that the book was in print, and therefore available to Blake, as early as perhaps May (the date of the "Advertisement"), and very probably by June or July 1788. The July 1788 issue of Joseph Johnson's recently founded *Analytical Review* carried two notices of the book. *Aphorisms* is listed as one of the "Books and Pamphlets Published during the first six months [i.e., by June] of 1788,"⁸ and a critic identified as "N" gives a fairly extensive account of the book, with a generous selection of aphorisms:

ART. III. APHORISMS ON MAN: *Translated from the original German MS. of John Caspar Lavater, Citizen of Zurich.* With a frontispiece. Pot. 8vo. P. 232. Price 3s. sewed. Johnson.

The author of these Aphorisms seems to have proceeded from the head to the heart, or rather the study of one enabled him to trace the different forms the passions wear, and to discriminate many of their almost endless combinations. We with pleasure read the only maxims extant written by a benevolent man; and perhaps it is necessary