

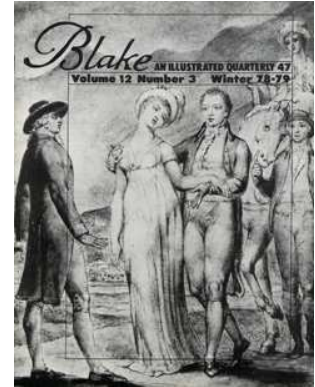
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**BLAKE**

M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

William Blake's Visions of the Daughters of  
Albion: A Poem Based on Doubt

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204



## A NOTE ON COWPER AND A POISON TREE

Nelson Hilton

Cowper's incidental poem, *On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton's Bullfinch* (1789, 1792) offers a likely source for a description in Blake's *A Poison Tree*, in the *Songs of Experience* (dated 1794). In Blake's poem the wrath of the speaker grows to bear "an apple bright"; this is beheld by the envious "foe" who--the last stanza relates--

. . . into my garden stole,  
When the night had veild the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

In Cowper's poem, "Bully" leads a peaceful existence in his well-latticed cage, since his "Dire foe" the cat is not permitted to live in the house. Unfortunately, on one occasion his foe was a rat:

Night veil'd the pole--all seem'd secure--  
When led by instinct sharp and sure,  
Subsistence to provide,  
A beast forth-sallied on the scout,  
Long-back'd, long-tail'd, with whisker'd snout,  
And badger-colour'd hide.

(31-36)

"Poor Bully's beak," like Orpheus' head, is all that "remain'd to tell / The cruel death he died."

Blake's adaption or unconscious echoing of this material is hardly central to his poem, but it does offer further evidence of his early attention to Cowper. The poem could have been seen by Blake on its first appearance in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1789; again in the *Speaker*, 1792; or possibly in the offices of Joseph Johnson, who published it in the 1794-95 edition of Cowper's *Poems* (see Cowper, *Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed., corr., add. Norma Russell, Oxford Standard Authors [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967], p. 383).

## WILLIAM BLAKE'S VISIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ALBION: A POEM BASED ON DOUBT

Dwight E. Weber

Among the unique features of William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* are the names. The names of all five major "characters" appear for the first time in this poem. Harold Bloom has stated that the "Father of Jealousy . . . whom we have met before in Blake as Winter, Tiriel, Restraint, the Devourer, and the Nobodaddy who successfully masquerades as God the Father in *Songs of Innocence*" is "first introduced in this poem

under his Blakean name of Urizen."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while Oothoon and Theotormon, the doubtful lovers, reappear in *Europe a Prophecy* and *The Song of Los* and, along with the Daughters of Albion and Bromion, in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, they all originate in the 1793 printing of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.<sup>2</sup> Blake may have selected the names for their derivative significance. For instance, Theotormon is nominally "the man tormented by his own idea of God."<sup>3</sup> The name of Urizen, likewise, may suggest "the horizon of thought,"<sup>4</sup> as he and his agent try to restrain Oothoon's imagination, or, quite possibly, it may play upon the words "your reason." However, another, more covert method of naming exists, antecedent to this search for derivatives.

Blake's names, all original with this poem, are functions of their first letters. That is, the poet started with the initial letters and then found apt names to complete each letter, or character. These characters form an anagram for "doubt" (Daughters, Oothoon, Urizen, Bromion, Theotormon). Indeed, the poem begins and ends with doubt. The Daughters of Albion watch Oothoon's progress and doubt their ability to seize a similar freedom from Leutha's vale. Bromion assaults the exultant Oothoon and casts doubt upon the validity of her so-called independence. Finally, Theotormon's conscience keeps him dubious of the love and sexual freedom to which Oothoon wishes him to awake. Blake, then, reveals his poetic theme anagrammatically through his names.

Certainly, doubt is a major theme in the poetry of William Blake. Plate 4, "Air," of *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* shows a miserable character "On Cloudy Doubts and Reasoning Cares";<sup>5</sup> moreover, in the accompanying poem, Blake attacks "Doubt which is Self contradiction" (E265). His "Auguries of Innocence" warns: "He who shall teach the Child to Doubt / The rotting Grave shall neer get out" (E483). One may think of the Daughters, the children, of Albion in this connection. Urizen, the source of all this doubt, may come to mind as well in Blake's satiric verse, "You dont believe I wont attempt to make ye" (E492). Here the word "Doubt" is placed in the mouth of Sir Isaac Newton, the scientist parodied by Blake in "The Ancient of Days," who, in the frontispiece to *Europe a Prophecy*, defines the "horizons of thought" with his compass.<sup>6</sup> Doubt limits a person, hinders him from becoming all he can be, and prevents him from drawing the "distinct, sharp, . . . and wirey . . . bounding line" (E540) by which he will live his own life. In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake places Urizen at the center of doubt, both in a thematic and anagrammatical way. In fact, Urizen and Bromion act in the poem and in the anagram to separate the Daughters and Oothoon, the females, from any consummation with Theotormon, the male.

This approach to the poem through anagram does not refute any of the previous speculations about the derivations of the characters' names. The names of Theotormon, Bromion, and Oothoon, as Northrop Frye claims, may well be Ossianic, in so oceanic a poem.<sup>7</sup> Yet the focus on the anagram places the horse back before the cart. Blake appears to have predetermined

his thematic anagram prior to his selection of suitable, properly lettered names from Ossian or elsewhere. Furthermore, the word play seems to indicate the presence of an eighteenth-century wit in Blake, even as he dealt with the most Romantic of themes.

<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> "Bromion," "Daughters of Albion," "Oothoon," "Theotormon," in Samuel Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Bloom, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> Bloom, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 259. Hereafter E.

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 238.

## "NEW" BLAKE ENGRAVINGS AFTER BLAKE'S DESIGNS, 1837, 1859, 1861

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Comparatively few printings of Blake's designs are known between his death in 1827 and the revival of interest in him by Gilchrist's biography in 1863, and it may therefore be worth recording several new printings here.

The first is:

B. Hamilton. *Gallery of British Artists, from the Days of Hogarth to the Present Time, or Series of 288 Engravings of their Most Approved Productions, Executed on Steel in the First Style of Outline, Selected, arranged, and accompanied with descriptive and explanatory Notices in English and French. In Four Volumes.* Paris, 1837.

A duplicate titlepage reads: *Galerie des Artistes Anglais, depuis Hogarth jusqu'a nos jours ou suite de 288 gravures de leurs productions les plus estimées, soigneusement gravées au trait sur acier, Choisie, mise en ordre et accompagnée de Notes descriptives et explicatives en Anglais et en Français. En quatre volumes.* Paris, 1837.

This is evidently just a re-issue of Hamilton's *English School* (1830-32), misleadingly retitled, without advertisement or explanatory matter other than for the designs, with the same number of plates (288) and the same Blake plates and descriptions of "Death's Door" "La Porte du Tombeau" (No. 181) and "Death of the Strong Wicked Man" "Mort d'un Réprouvé" (No. 271) and explanations as before, arranged in alphabetical order.

The second is:

*Thirty Pictures by Deceased British Artists Engraved Expressly for The Art-Union of London by W. J. Linton.* [London] 1860.

Plate X (12.1 x 20.8 cm) is "Death's-door" after W. Blake. There is no accompanying text. The same plate, with the inscription altered, appeared in John Jackson [& William A. Chatto], *A Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical* (1861), as the frontispiece (in the Bodley copy) or "at p. 632" (according to the text, p. 591\*), "inserted" "by the kindness of the Council" of the Art Union, in whose "Volume of 1859 [*sic*]" "It was [*first*] published". (I am sorry to say that *Blake Books* [1977] does not indicate that Jackson's book had a Blake plate.) Linton went on to make "Facsimile" illustrations "from Blake's Own Works" for Gilchrist's *Pictor Ignotus* of 1863 and to write and illuminate Blake-like poems himself after he had settled in North America.

