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Q U E R Y

Revising Blake: Prophet for a new edition

David V. Erdman

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QUERIES

1. David V. Erdman, revising Blake: Prophet for a new edition, writes:

Is the swimmer at the bottom of J.11 "a resplendent American Indian"? (p. 445)

Has anyone in the 20th century seen Paine's face in the "Spiritual form of Pitt"? Cp. 416)

Is "Tyburns Brook" the same as "Tyburns River"; and is it the Serpentine River; or is one that and the other not that? Damon's Dictionary under TYBURN has a brook flowing like a uroboros: crossing "Oxford Street a little to the east of the present Marble Arch," then flowing "through St. James's Park" (a mile away!) and "then plung[ing] underground at the intersection of Stratford Place and South Molton Street" (i.e. a little to the east of Marble Arch, said intersection being at or with Oxford Street): the brook's mouth then swallowing its tail. (pp. 429-430; 368)

On pp. 446-447, after saying that at the end of chapter three of Jerusalem "Blake sees 'the youthful form of Erin' arising, 'a Feminine Form . . . Beautiful but terrible struggling to take a form of beauty' (J.74)," I am tempted to add--for people (like myself) who like a hint of prophetic influence now and then--: "a century later Blake's son Yeats will see the terrible beauty born."

Is there any evidence that Blake was aware, when he lamented his friend Fuseli's being "hid" from/by the royal and noble patrons of art (p. 406), that the wealthiest banker in England, Thomas Coutts, had patronized Fuseli from the beginning, bought most of his works, and continued to encourage his elitism? (See Frederick Antal, Fuseli Studies, 1956, pp. 79-80 & notes) That "Fuseli certainly knew how to treat rich clients"?

An unverifiable hypothesis about THEL: In dates of etching (and presumably of composition) the last plate and the Motto are quite certainly of a later time than the rest of the poem. The last plate must have replaced an earlier plate or plates, something hardly to have been undertaken unless some important change was involved. Question: What was the original THEL like, i.e. how did it end? Mightn't it have been an "Innocence" version, the new ending producing an "Experience" version--and the Motto made for the latter? Obviously Blake felt that the patch worked, that the changed poem had its own unity, or sufficient to be worth saving the copper and labor of thorough revision. But doesn't this hypothesis account for the reader's difficulty--and help him over it by suggesting that when he reads the last page he must look back and alter his view of the preceding pages?

MHH: Is "Enough! or Too much" a final proverb by the Devil--or the poet's intrusion? Both?

In note 14, p. 407, I dismiss the John Sartain account of the Cromek-Sartain affair with the point that Sartain "has Henry Richter become Stothard's pupil about two decades later (1807) than he actually did." But Damon, in his recent Blake's Grave (p. [3] of introduction), treats Sartain's as the true

"inside story" and has it that Richter was refused as Stothard's pupil. Does anyone know how to untangle this?

(The New York Public Library
Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street
New York City, New York)

2. From Ruthven Todd, revising his edition of Gilchrist's Life:

For several months now I have been "Going to & Fro and Walking Up & Down" in the world of Gilchrist. I am astonished at the brashness of the twenty-eight year old who had the nerve to claim that the book had been edited and corrected. I am not indulging in false modesty but am stating a fact. I had assumed that because I had found Gilchrist accurate (or at least accurate in his following of an apparently accurate source, however wrong that might be) on matters concerning Blake, he would be equally punctillious about everything else.

I found out how wrong I was when I started looking up and writing in the margins the birth and death dates of each person mentioned. (These dates will become a part of the index, as I think it absurd to hope that the student should look them up, even if he could, as many of them are taking quite a bit of research). I will only quote one example here. On p. 25 (of the Everyman), writing of Michael Moser, Gilchrist says that his fellow artists "voluntarily testified their regard around his grave in the burial-ground of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, when the time came to be carried thither in January 1783." The "January" gives it such an authoritative air that, unless I had made this decision about the dated index, I would have let it pass. Mr. Moser would have been in an advanced state of disintegration by then as he died in 1779.

I also caught Blake out in a slip. In his letter to Hayley of April 25, 1805, he writes "Banks the Sculptor is Gone to his Eternal Home. . . he died at the Age of 75 of a Paralytic Stroke." As Banks, who died on February 2, 1805, was born in 1735, he was only seventy.

After coping with a considerable number of such dating shocks, I made up my mind that I had to check everything that was in any way checkable. Having led a rather varied life I am blessed with friends who are specialists in a great number of different fields. So, although my expenditure upon stamps becomes astronomical, every time I come to a point which I cannot verify from the books around me, I pull up a typewriter and send off a letter asking for help or guidance as to where I can get that help.

All this, I fear, has been a rather lengthy preamble to a few bits of information and some questions. I can assure readers of the Blake Newsletter that, having got rid of it, my future offerings of, or requests for, information will be less long-winded.

I had not yet acquired a copy of G.E. Bentley, Jr.'s "Thomas Butts, White Collar Maecenas" [PMLA, LXXI (1956)] but I knew that he had demoted Butts from his position as Muster Master General to that of a mere clerk. I wondered what other kinds of aggrandizement of his father "Tommy" Butts had indulged in. I knew both Mary and Tony Butts who were, let us say, somewhat frivolous about the family.