

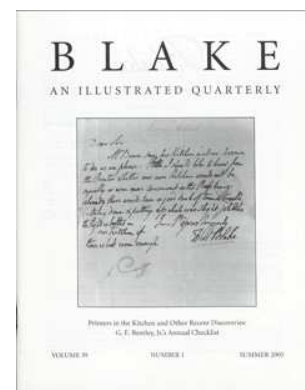
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M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

## Blake's Proverbs of Hell: St. Paul and the Nakedness of Woman

Howard Jacobson

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1807, or the watercolor which Blake completed at about the same time, and which was also commissioned by Cromek.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Cromek's reputation in Edinburgh continued to grow as a result of his lucrative researches into Scottish poetry. The December *Scots Magazine* announced that "An interesting literary discovery of unpublished works of the late Robert Burns, has been made by Mr Cromer [sic], in a late tour through Scotland." Many Scots readers would have been stirred by this glowing account of newfound poems and letters by Burns being "rescued from oblivion" by Cromek.<sup>5</sup> Coming so soon before the Blake-Blair volume, this advance publicity for Cromek's edition of *Reliques of Burns* probably contributed to the success of *The Grave*, with Blake's designs, in Edinburgh.

No mention of Blake appeared in the *Scots Magazine* between July 1807 and September 1808. But in that month, the magazine noted the actual publication of Blair's *Grave* and its engravings by Luigi Schiavonetti based on Blake's paintings. This briefer notice gives the size of the volume and its price of two pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence: "Illustrations of Blair's Grave, in 12 Etchings, executed by Louis Schiavonetti, from the Original Inventions of William Blake, 4to. 2l. 12s. 6d."<sup>6</sup> The long review of *The Grave*, praising Blake for his "genius" and "beautiful" though "eccentric" designs, followed quickly in November.<sup>7</sup>

There appear to be no further citations of Blake in the *Scots Magazine*.<sup>8</sup> But in December 1808, its readers were told that Cromek's long-awaited work on Burns was now in print: "Reliques of Robert Burns: consisting chiefly of original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs. Collected and published by R.H. Cromek. 8vo. 10s. 6d."<sup>9</sup> Long extracts from the *Reliques of Burns* followed in January 1809, and a laudatory review in March.<sup>10</sup> Then, in August 1809, the

same journal announced that "Mr Cromek is receiving subscriptions for an Historical Portrait of Mr Walter Scott, from the admired Picture by [Henry] Raeburn, which appeared at the last Exhibition [sic] of Scottish paintings."<sup>11</sup>

Around 1810, Cromek's reputation in Scottish circles began to wane. Perhaps this was due in part to Walter Scott's influence, for Scott told one publisher that "Cromek is a perfect Brain-sucker living upon the labours of others."<sup>12</sup> Cromek's two-volume *Select Scottish Songs*, published in 1810, received neither review nor notice of any kind in the *Scots Magazine*. When his final book, *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, came out in 1811, a polite but lukewarm review commended Cromek's "copious" notes and "good deal of valuable information" on the subjects of "witchcraft" and "fairies."<sup>13</sup> Cromek's death in 1812 passed unnoticed in the *Scots Magazine*.

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No critic has noted that Cromek was probably of Scots descent (though born in England). Each of his five volumes was Scottish in some way, and his unusual surname is remarkably close to the Scottish Gaelic words "crom," "cromack," or "cromag," which mean "anything twisted or bent, particularly fingers" (Blake would have enjoyed that!). "Cromack" is also a variant spelling of the Gaelic word "crummock," meaning "a cow with twisted horns" (see the *Scottish National Dictionary*, 1952 edition, III: 251-52 and 267).

11. Anon., "Scottish Literary Intelligence," *Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* 71 (1809): 605.

12. Letter to John Murray, 3 Dec. 1810, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-37) II: 409-10 (409).

13. Anon., "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song ... by R.W. [sic] Cromek, F.A.S. Ed., Editor of the Reliques of Robert Burns," *Scots Magazine* 73 (June 1811): 441-47 (444, 445). "F.A.S. Ed." identifies Cromek as a fellow of Edinburgh's Antiquarian Society. The *Nithsdale* volume has some relevance to Blake, because many of its supposed folk songs were in fact by Allan Cunningham, who later wrote the well-known chapter on Blake in his *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*. The imposture was detected by James Hogg, but Hogg was unable to find a publisher for his review on the subject; Hogg's review, alas, has never been traced, although he says he kept the manuscript until at least 1832 (see his "Memoir of the Author's Life" and "Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott," ed. Douglas Mack [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic P, 1972] 73).

4. For Stothard's and Blake's rival illustrations to Chaucer, see Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995) 271-72, and G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 209, 216-17. Blake exhibited his own painting for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in London in May 1809.

5. Anon., "Scottish Literary Intelligence," *Scots Magazine* 69 (1807): 925.

6. Anon., *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 683. The notice is the second of three paragraphs in the "New Works Published in Edinburgh" section for September 1808.

7. *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 839-40.

8. The *Scots* continued publishing until the end of 1826. One article of some interest (as it mentions a few of Blake's fellow engravers) is the anonymous "Account of a Society Formed for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving" (72 [August 1810]: 590-92).

9. Anon., "New Works Published in Edinburgh," *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 923. The identical notice (with a few changes in capitalization) appeared in the same column for January 1809 (71: 46).

10. Anon., "Cromek's Reliques of Burns," *Scots Magazine* 71 (1809): 30-33 and 198-203 (the title is taken from the table of contents for March). The appearance of these articles, coming so soon after the same journal's review of *The Grave*, would have given Cromek quite a high profile among Scottish readers.

## Blake's Proverbs of Hell:

### St. Paul and the Nakedness of Woman

BY HOWARD JACOBSON

Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* contains a section entitled Proverbs of Hell. This section, like the work as a whole, contains sharp satiric, even parodic, elements directed against the Bible, Blake's devotion to Scripture notwithstanding.

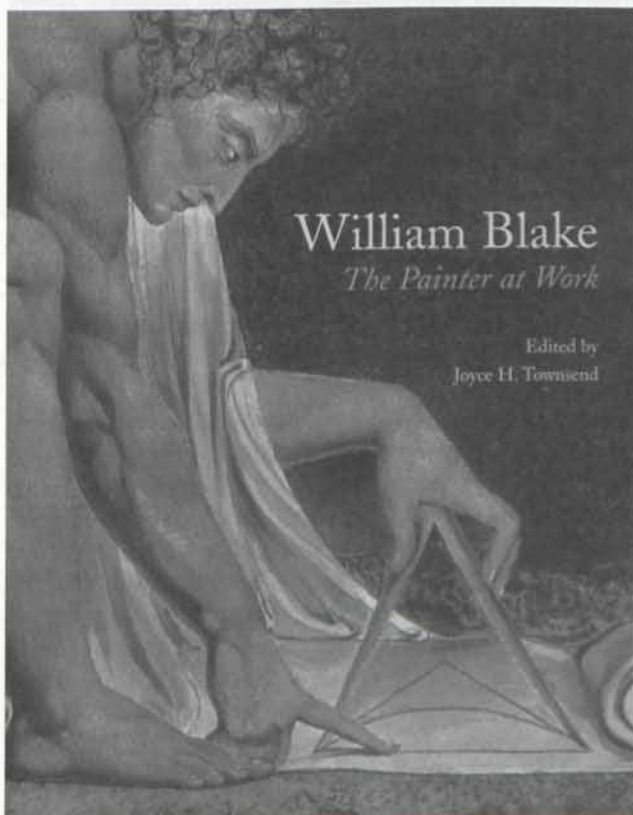
ing. One of the proverbs therein is "The nakedness of woman is the work of God."<sup>1</sup> Strangely, as far as I know, no one has noted the sharp—one might say polemical—relationship of this aphorism to a famous passage in Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians: "Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head; for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn; but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of god; but the woman is the glory of the man" (11:5-7).<sup>2</sup> "The woman is the glory of the man." Paul's aphoristic structure is kept by Blake: "The nakedness of woman is the work of God."<sup>3</sup> Paul's injunction that women need to keep their hair covered is countered by Blake's overriding praise of the naked woman. While Paul condemns the baring of a woman's head, Blake lauds her presence with no coverings at all. This rejection of Paul is another example of what Bloom calls "Blake's Proverbs exist[ing] to break down orthodox categories of thought and morality."<sup>4</sup>

1. Proverbs 25.

2. King James Version.

3. Verbal and structural (and perhaps satiric) echoes of Paul's passage are already present in Blake three lines earlier, "The pride of the peacock is the glory of God" (22).

4. Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1963) 85.



## R E V I E W

Joyce H. Townsend, ed., and Robin Hamlyn, consultant ed. *William Blake: The Painter at Work*. London: Tate Publishing, 2003; £19.99, paperback. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004; \$45.00, hardcover. 192 pp. 118 color, 28 b&w illus.

Reviewed by Alexander Gourlay

Joyce H. Townsend's handsome collection of colorfully illustrated studies and reports focuses on Blake's paintings and large color prints<sup>1</sup> as physical objects, with emphasis on identifying his methods and materials, establishing what the pictures originally looked like, and determining how they can now be preserved, restored and displayed. The technical information that dominates the book will be most directly useful to museum professionals, but the writers try to make the discussions accessible to Blakeans at large, whether art historians, literary scholars, artists, or interested amateurs. As one might expect, some of the essays exhibit the perturbations of voice and technical level that occur when multiple authors write collectively for a wide audience, but readers will have little trouble sorting out what is useful to them. All of the authors are affiliated in one way or another with the Tate, so the discussions concentrate on works in the incomparable Blake collection there, works recently exhibited there, and on pictures in or near London. As a result there are few definitive pronouncements here about what Blake always or never did—the contributors didn't examine everything, and it's clear from what they did study that his practices varied. All in all, the technical analyses are much more sophisticated than those that have previously been brought to bear on these questions, the results are more conclusive, the perspectives are refreshing and often startling, the discoveries are numerous, and the consequences are substantial for everyone who studies Blake's art.

Much of *The Painter at Work* is concerned with determining what the latest analytical, microscopic and imaging technologies can tell us about the procedures Blake used to create his watercolors, large color prints, and temperas, but among them the authors also bring to the discussion wide-ranging expertise in material culture, art history, and Blake studies, and in some cases they also have extensive personal experience with Blake works as physical objects: moving them, hanging

1. The large color prints are distinguished here from the color-printed pages in Blake's illuminated books and books of designs, for most of which Blake probably used similar materials but some different procedures. Robert N. Essick and the painter/printmaker Caroline Adams corrected many errors in drafts of this review.