

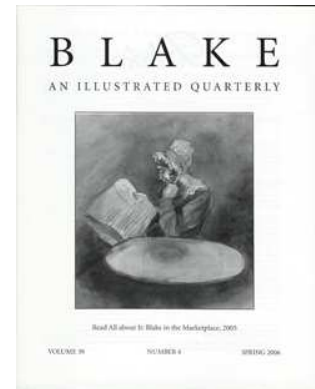
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D I S C U S S I O N

Blake's Four "Zoas"!

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mistakably, though often behind a Blakean mask, in *Fearful Symmetry*" (2). Blake was not so much a mask for Frye as a key source of everything he had to say. As Frye puts it in one of his notebooks, "My Christian position is that of Blake reinforced by Emily Dickinson" (qtd. Denham 262). That is not an ordinary Christian position. I would go so far as to say that Frye inherited from Blake, Dickinson, and other writers a productive tension between asserting and questioning one's deepest beliefs, or say between commitment and uncertainty, a tension that saved Frye from sterile aestheticism in his literary criticism and from mindless dogmatism in his religious views. Keeping that tension alive may be one of the best ways of carrying on his work.

### Works Cited

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## D I S C U S S I O N

*With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought*

### Blake's Four "Zoas"!

BY MAGNUS ANKARSJÖ

In one of the minute particulars of *Blake* 39.1, "Blake's Four ... 'Zoa's?'," Justin Van Kleeck discusses the title page of Blake's original manuscript of *The Four Zoas*. Here he more or less claims to be the first to notice the mark indicated in the name of his essay, the "apostrophe" in the word "Zoa's". Van Kleeck gives an informative outline of the history of the manuscript and its various editions. The outcome of his account is that no editor or critic has ever commented on the mysterious "symbol" in the title of Blake's epic poem.

This is all very well, and the discussion is quite useful, not only for this particular issue but for any other purpose regarding the unconventional history of the *Zoas* manuscript. But his examination also raises a few questions that are not given completely satisfactory answers, or, in a few cases, they are not analyzed emphatically enough.

Admittedly, the manuscript of *The Four Zoas*, and maybe most conspicuously its title page, are not easy issues, in any aspect. I know that very well since I wrote my dissertation, which was subsequently published as a book, *Bring Me My*

*Arrows of Desire* (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2004), on Blake's first epic. The immense difficulty can be easily apprehended by indicating my first reaction to Van Kleeck's article. Quite confidently I thought that if the mark is indeed an apostrophe, there is no doubt about the intention and the reference. Certainly, it is a possessive mark; that goes most excellently with the main theme of the poem, which I have outlined in my thesis. In my reading, *The Four Zoas* is a poem advocating a vision of a utopian existence with complete gender equality in which not only the male but also the female is active. But, as we know, it is a very long and complex poem, and the way to the utopia of Blake's Eden goes via the eternal battle of the sexes in a fallen world. Hence, quite logically, *The Four Zoas's Torments of Love and Jealousy*: a possessive. The only slight problem is that when looking closely once more at the title page one discovers that there is in fact one more word here: the definite article. So I reluctantly had to admit that my very pertinent explanation was no good.

But is what Van Kleeck labels "apostrophe" really a symbol proper, and not just something added by mistake? He hints at this possibility, but discards this alternative very easily in his discussion. Too easily, in my view. Bearing in mind the physical condition of the manuscript—many of its pages were after all written on top of the *Night Thoughts* drawings—and the handling of it over the years, it is a more than likely possibility that the mark actually is a blotch put there by mistake, either by Blake or one of the many people having set their hands on the manuscript during all the years until it was first presented to the public. Perhaps I was the one to do it when scrutinizing the original at the British Museum in 1997, since I cannot remember noticing such a mark? To be serious, this is of course impossible, since Sloss and Wallis's volume *The Prophetic Writings of William Blake* appeared already in 1926 and included the title of the poem for the first time transcribed as "The Four Zoas's", as Van Kleeck rightly points out (40). Or even more correctly, it was reproduced as early as 1913 in Sampson's edition, but then not commented on. But my extreme and egocentric example indicates the next to impossible task of determining this issue, which Van Kleeck also indicates in his concluding remarks: "There never may be a way to prove once and for all that Blake deliberately added this mark" (42).

However, in order to facilitate all kinds of close examination of *The Four Zoas* we need to emphasize that the final manuscript in fact consists of two poems: the early *Vala*, probably abandoned but then revised through many years to the "final" and retitled *The Four Zoas*. Therefore, we must keep the two titles clearly apart. The first title, written in 1797, is *VALA OR The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man a DREAM of Nine Nights*. The second, later, title is *The Four Zoas's The Torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man*. As has long been known, the subtitle of *The Four Zoas* is a late addition, something which has been pointed out recently both by myself and John B. Pierce in his useful study of the poem, *Flexible Design* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1998).

One might think a discussion of a tiny pencil line futile and petty, but it is a notoriously delicate matter. What Van Kleeck does not mention, and what I discovered by chance when separating and then puzzling together the various fragments of the two titles, is that if we look closely beside the mark discussed here there is one short word at the end of the second line of the later title: "in". As far as I can remember, the editors or commentators of the poem do not discuss or even include this word in their transcriptions. Neither does Van Kleeck mention it, even though he actually highlights exactly this bit by quoting Ellis and Yeats's rendition of Blake's second title of the poem (39). If we agree with Van Kleeck's argumentation, the second, and final, title of the poem should read: *The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man by William Blake 1797*. In that case, a reasonable and logical amendment according to modern punctuation and standards of the title would be: *The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man*. Whether the title makes good sense with the insertion of the original "in" is another matter.

However logical to our twenty-first century eyes this title is, we know that Blake in fact used the form "Zoa's" on his illuminated book plates. The next step, therefore, should be to take a very close look at these plates. Having scrutinized all the instances from *Milton* and *Jerusalem* mentioned by Van Kleeck, along with several other examples from the reproductions of the original manuscripts, I cannot detect much similarity between these marks and the one on the title page of *The Four Zoas*. While the title mark slants to the right, the top of the marks on the *J* and *M* plates nearly all of them bend the other way, slightly to the left, and the marks are generally thicker. If we use the handy calibration technique available in the *Blake Archive*, it becomes reasonably evident that none of the apostrophes indicated by Van Kleeck resembles the debated one in the *Zoas* title. Although the reproductions in the *Archive* do not provide us with the accuracy of the originals, I believe we can confidently claim that the *Zoas* mark was not put there by the same hand as the marks in *Jerusalem* and *Milton*. Hence, my contention must be that it is not likely that the mark was deliberately inserted by Blake.

Even so, the importance of Van Kleeck's short article should be positively appreciated by Blake scholars. It is a valuable contribution to bring the intricacies of the manuscript of *The Four Zoas* to the forefront of the debate. This will inspire us to examine the poem thoroughly again and make us recognize its true values and its crucial position in the Blake oeuvre: as the first locus where Blake uses his extended and refined mythology, which was to be developed into the magnificent splendor of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

## "mark ye the points"

(*Jerusalem* pl. 83)

BY JUSTIN VAN KLEECK

I would like to begin by thanking Magnus Ankarsjö for responding to my article. Such a discussion as he initiates here, albeit necessarily short in this public forum, is one of the results I hoped for when writing the original piece as a description of my own struggles with this compelling minute particular. Further, I think that Ankarsjö and I generally agree about my main point: no matter how editors interpret the mark or whether they include it in their title for Blake's work, they should provide some note on it because of its extreme ambiguity. However, I do feel the need to respond to several points that Ankarsjö raises vis-à-vis my discussion and the evidence I cited to support my own interpretation, that the mark likely could be a deliberate apostrophe by Blake.

First, as a relatively minor issue, Ankarsjö's attention to the "in" that appears after "Jealousy" in the added subtitle leads to an inaccurate statement. While Ellis and Yeats do exclude the "in" when they record Blake's added (but then abandoned, in their reading) title, all other editors of the full manuscript text who record the title in some form—Keynes, Sloss and Wallis, Bentley, Erdman, Stevenson, Ostriker, etc.—include the "in". This word is quite clearly contemporary with the rest of the added pencil text at this place, and I do not find it to be problematic in terms of the full title, including the original subtitle that Blake retained. (The final, full title reads especially well if we include the colon that Ankarsjö adds "according to modern punctuation and standards.")

Second, and much more importantly, the basis of Ankarsjö's observations of the difference between the mark on the manuscript's title page and apostrophes in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is highly questionable. However we view the *Four Zoas* manuscript as a work, and whichever editorial version of it we use for our own study, we always must remember that it is and will remain a *manuscript*. For us to compare the appearance of punctuation (?) marks on the manuscript pages with those in Blake's *etched*, and then *printed*, works offers little valuable or reliable evidence. In this case, Blake could have added the mark haphazardly, in a subsequent act of (perhaps hasty) revision, rather than with the deliberateness necessary when composing text on a copperplate. Or, as I will continue to acknowledge with joy at the uncertainty, someone else may have added the mark, deliberately or not. Either way, Blake's punctuation in the *Four Zoas* manuscript long has been one of the most seriously contested and commented-upon aspects of editorial work, a bugbear for the majority or the most liberating feature for a few. Indeed, my own impression was that determining what a specific point "is" turns into an endless game of pin the tail on the ink-dot—in many instances even when Blake is writing most carefully, in his "copperplate" script. As