

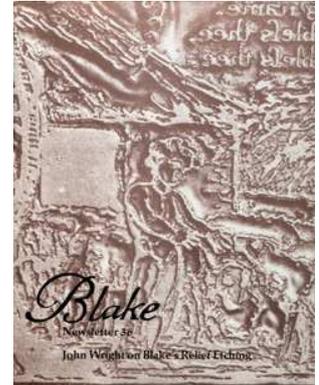
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Postscript: Blake's Abnormal Psychology

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Winslow, who was born in 1844 and died in 1913, was well qualified with degrees at both Oxford and Cambridge. He had also been lecturer in insanity at Charing Cross Hospital, London, Vice-President of the Medico-Legal Congress, New York, and Chairman of the Psychological Department, and he was founder of the British Hospital for Mental Disorders. In addition to the foregoing book he wrote several others, including *Handbook for Attendants of the Insane and Lunacy Law in England*, *Mad Humanity*, which is 451 pages long, is full of details of the medical and legal aspects of insanity, although many of the author's opinions and conclusions would doubtless carry little authority in the medical climate of our own times. There are also many intriguing anecdotes of madness, and, most arresting of all, a series of photographs illustrating various aspects of insanity, such as "Delusions of Persecution in Monomania", "Hallucinations of Seeing and Hearing" and "Suicidal Dementia." These photographs vary from the pitiful to the horrific, with, among the physiognomies shown, expressions of terror, cunning, bewilderment, mistrust, and even a species of sardonic humour.

The whole of Chapter XII--a long one--is devoted to what Winslow describes as "Madness of Genius." For the author believed that genius was so abnormal as to be a species of neurosis. "Genius," he wrote, "like every other disposition of the intellectual dynamism, has necessarily its material substratum. This substratum is a semi-morbid state of the brain, a true nervous erethism. . ." (p. 337).

The main part of the chapter consists of a series of studies of varying length of the alleged madness of certain men of genius, and a very strange collection they make, ranging from such undoubted examples of madness as William Cowper, John Clare and Christopher Smart, through such borderline cases as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey and Percy Bysshe Shelley, to intellectual giants like Shakespeare and Samuel Johnson. In this somewhat motley assortment, William Blake makes an appearance, but when the author's account of him is read, one's confidence begins to abate, for surely, even when Blake's reputation was at its lowest ebb, there can have been no more muddled account of his visionary experiences. Indeed, one is left with the impression that if this is how the author remembered a reading of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (from which most of the details presumably originated) he would have been a candidate for inclusion in his own book. But it is probably no more than an example of shoddy scholarship, repetition, perhaps, of loose chatter. Nevertheless, the passage was printed in a scholarly book and it probably did Blake's reputation a certain amount of harm at a time when it was beginning to emerge from the shadows. Here it is, in full:

Hallucinations of Demonomania and Strength

(William Blake, 1757-1827).--An artist of considerable fame, he was also a poet, and his compositions were innumerable, leaving behind him one hundred MSS. for publication. He was regarded

by his many admirers as the equal of Shelley or Byron. He suffered from hallucinations, and being invited to Brighton to illustrate his edition of Cowper, he was met on the Downs, in his own imagination, by the spirits of Dante, Virgil, and Homer, whom he describes as coloured shadows and with whom he held high converse, watching the fairies and their funerals, and all the milder and gentler forms of demonolatry. For some years he had sighed for an interview with Satan, whom he had considered to be a grand and splendid spiritual existence, and whom he ultimately alleges he saw as he was going up the stairs of his house, in his mind's eye, the fiend glaring upon him through the grating of a window, when his wife, conceiving that he was suffering from one of his poetical hallucinations, induced him to execute a portrait of his infernal visitant, and in consequence of this vision he conceived the idea that he had abnormal strength, and, whilst suffering from this delusion, he attacked a soldier, and was tried for high treason. Many of the critics of the time described him as eccentric, another as visionary, a third as an enthusiast, a fourth as a superstitious ghost-seer; but that he was mad they had not the slightest doubt. (pp. 371-72)

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Postscript: Blake's Abnormal Psychology

By Morris Eaves

Lest we drop off to sleep and dream that a few decades ago the subject of Blake's lunacy passed quietly into the innocent and nostalgic half-light of primitive psychology, it might not be a bad idea to add a short postscript to Raymond Lister's note. *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* is a hefty and up-to-date textbook widely used, for instance, in upper-level undergraduate courses, the early years of medical school, and the like. It was edited by a board of "contributing consultants" so long and so peevish-deed and em-deed that it would put the editorial pages of some scholarly journals to shame. It professes the radical tolerance for mental differences of Laing and like-minded thinkers: "To see the manifest problems and illnesses of our society is to question the concept of the 'well-adjusted person.' To know the effect on language, literature, and art of the work of 'mentally disturbed' individuals is to be hesitant in pressing the claims of the homogenous 'normal' society as the greatest good." "Acceptance means understanding." "Establishing standard norms of acceptable behavior and labeling so-called inappropriate acts 'abnormal' has important consequences in terms of sanctioning a form of social control. Only by recognizing the importance of diversity and change does a society foster individual freedom and growth."

Then, in the section on "Psychoses," a couple of pages after three of Van Gogh's paintings are reproduced with a caption remarking how his paintings "are a powerful representation of the blending of psychotic chaos and artistic genius," we come across a reproduction of Sin, Death, and Satan at the Gates of Hell, from Blake's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*, accompanying a caption that I suppose the *Paradise Lost* picture is intended to document.

An early-nineteenth-century writer referred to William Blake as "an unfortunate lunatic whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement." A retrospective diagnosis of Blake would probably label him a paranoid schizophrenic, for he made no secret of the fact that he was ". . . under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily and Nightly." Blake's first hallucination involving divine personages occurred at the age of four, and succeeding "visions" probably provided much of the material for his illustrations of works such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which includes *Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell*, shown above. This watercolor illustration depicts Satan advancing from the left, preparing to confront Death, right. In the center, thrusting them apart, is Sin. Flames writhe in the background, and to the right is Hell's latticed gate.

Curtis L. Barrett et al., contributing consultants, *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* (Del Mar, Calif.: CRM Books, 1972), p. 249, fig. 12.2.

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A Contemporary Reference to Blake

By Janet Warner

A reference to Blake which does not seem to have been previously noticed by scholars can be found in Ackermann's *Repository* for June 1810, in an article entitled "On Splendour of Colours &C" by Juninus, pp. 408-09. It reads as follows:

Flaxman's *Illustrations of Homer, Aeschylus and Dante* engraved by Piroli, of Rome, and Blake's plates from Blair's *Grave*, lately engraved, are excellent studies for a young artist. Blake has lately received much deserved commendation from Fuseli. Perhaps this engraver has more genius than any one in his profession in this country. If he would study the ornamental requisites more, he would probably attain much higher celebrity than he has already acquired.

Isn't it odd that this mentions Flaxman's engraver, Piroli, but not Schiavonetti, who engraved Blake's designs and who died 7 June 1810? It also mentions Blake as an engraver rather than an artist. Would 1808, when the Blair engravings were printed, be "lately engraved" in 1810? Interestingly enough, we know that Blake's own exhibition had opened in May 1810 and the "much deserved commendation from Fuseli" may refer to that, but it is odd that the exhibition is not mentioned if Juninus knew about it. We know that Crabb Robinson had seen the exhibition in April 1810 and that he took Charles and Mary Lamb to see it on 11 June (G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, p. 226).

In September, 1810, in the same continuing article, Juninus again refers to Blake. Two women are speaking of prints, and after a description of *The Fall of Rosamond*, one says:

This artist seems to have relinquished engraving and to have cultivated the higher departments of designing and painting with great success. His works show that he must have studied the antique with considerable attention.

The other replies:

If those ingenious men, the engravers, were to ask the man of genius why he abandoned his profession, he might with truth answer to most of those by whom it is followed, in the words of the poet:
 "I hear a voice you cannot hear
 That says I must not stay:
 I see a hand you cannot see
 That beckons me away."

This is interesting since we know very little of Blake's actions in the years 1810 to 1814. This suggests he gave up engraving for a while, and indeed he exhibited three paintings at the exhibition of the Water Colour Society in 1812, (*The Canterbury Pilgrims*, *The Spiritual Forms of Pitt and Nelson*) and "Detached Specimens of an original illuminated Poem, entitled Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion."

Who was Juninus? I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has ideas on his identity. Morton Paley has found in his researches on Ackermann that even *he* did not know the identity at first of this anonymous contributor, and when he did learn and sent him a gift of money, Juninus' contributions ceased. Whoever he was, it is significant that he retained a high opinion of Blake's work at a time following Hunt's attack in the *Examiner*, September 1809, when Blake's fortunes, as far as we can tell, were beginning to decline.

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 York University