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REVIEWS

The Complete Poetry and Prose of WILLIAM BLAKE

Edited by David V. Erdman
Commentary by Harold Bloom
Newly Revised Edition


Reviewed by the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group

The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, edited by David Erdman, arrives as a "Newly Revised Edition" to replace and "complete" (principally by the inclusion of all the letters) the editor's earlier effort, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, now out of print after selling over 38,000 copies. The old E, as it was usually cited, quickly became the generally recognized authoritative text for Blake's work. The new E, as it will be cited here, adds to this impressive mantle of approval two more layers of certification. First, thanks to a transfer of the hardcover rights by Anchor/Doubleday, a University Press now publishes the library copies. The new E's second nil obstat appears in the form of an actual "emblem" gracing the back of the dust jacket, signifying that this volume is approved and sanctioned by the Modern Language Association Committee on Scholarly Editions, known as the MLACSE (illus. 1). The distinction conferred by award of this emblem of approval raises a number of questions that make a review of this volume more than an ordinary enterprise.

Is this new revised standard edition now officially authorized as the one which should be purchased and read in the sizable academic market? Has the MLACSE presumed to make definitive the long-standing distinction between Blake's verbal and his visual artistic components? Does the MLACSE emblem of approval extend to the distinctly not "newly revised" commentary by Harold Bloom still included? In what follows we shall examine a few minute particulars of this edited version of Blake's "text" bound back-to-back with the "Commentary" in this volume. But our main concern shall be to raise some theoretical questions about the assumptions and presuppositions that inform the editorial enterprise which made the production and institutional approval of this volume possible.

I. MINUTE PARTICULARS

The Ancients entrusted their [ ] to their Editors

Now then, after four hundred years, the truth of the law comes forth to us; it has been bought for money in the synagogue. When the world is grown old and everything hastens to the end let us even put it on the tombs of our ancestors, so that it may be known to them too, that Jonah did not have the shadow of a gourd but of an ivy; and again, when it so pleases the legislator, not an ivy but some other bush. (Rufinus, Apologia contra Hieronymum)

Blake is no longer the prophet of écriture. Perhaps the single statement that some young critics of the new age found most compelling in Blake, his remark in the Preface to Jerusalem that "the Ancients entrusted their love to their Writing," has literally been obliterated. Or, leaving open a recuperative strategy, could these young critics say that Jerusalem's traces have achieved a new dissemination? The line now reads: "the Ancients acknowledge their love to their Deities" (illus. 2). The alteration may serve as a lesson for all of us who were — or become — wholly one with the Editor's text: CAVEAT LECTOR.

(Without concern for the accuracy of Erdman's recovered reading, we should note the effect of including in a reading "text" lines that were deleted by Blake: compare illustrations 2, 3, and 4.)

Comparing Erdman's "text" with examples of the productions by Blake that it re-presents, we realize again
with added force the absolute justice of the Editor's admission that "In print it is impossible to copy Blake exactly: his colons and shriekmarks [!] grade into each other; he compounds a comma with a question mark; his commas with unmistakable tails thin down to unmistakable periods." We realize as well the profound contradiction in the subsequent disclaimer that "In Blake the practical difference between comma and period, however, is almost unappreciable" (E 787). Contradictory, because the reader of this "complete" Blake is never "in" Blake, but is rather in the editing and altering "I" that has "been inclined ... to read commas or periods according to the contextual expectations." The Editor does offer the reader without access to originals or facsimiles one check on his calibration, for one of the book's illustrations (following p. 272) reproduces plate 10 of America (copy not specified) which has twelve lines of text. Lines 7-9 of the printed version (E 55) offer the following:

Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God

But the reader of even the reproduction included in The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake will probably perceive:

An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God

We cannot do too much with this one instance, however, because as Erdman notes, he has prepared a "collected" edition "as against transcripts of individual copies." The study of an individual copy of an illuminated work cannot call into question a collected transcript that has been produced as the fruit of the Editor's compositing art. But for those several works that exist in only one copy, the individual transcript is the basis of the collected edition. One such, The Book of Ahania, offers a kind of introductory exemplum, and has the further virtue of having been printed in intaglio, which gives to its text more clearly defined lines than the usual relief etching.

"Editing the works that Blake etched and printed himself," writes the Editor, requires first of all "precise transcription." The MLACSE has stated that it "signifies" to the copy-text introduced by the editors, "as against transcripts of individual copies, the possible complications suggested by letter configurations can be equally prolific. Consider illustration 6, showing lines that Erdman transcribes to report that Urizen "fixed / The sinew in its rest" (BA 3.32-33). This "sinew" was addressed six lines earlier in the poem: "O nerve of that lust form'd monster!" A comparison of "sinew" with the "sinews" of 3.21 (illus. 6, again) suggests that the second instance may be trying graphically to become—as it is conceptually—both "nerve" and "sinew" at once, a "sinerv." Certainly the eighteenth-century semantics of "nerve" allows us to think of a "nerve of sin," a new sin constituted with the advent of the Rock:

So saying, In torment of his wounds.
He bent the enormous ribs slowly;
A circle of darkness! then fixed
The sinerv in its rest: then the Rock
Poisonous source!

The Rock is, of course, "Mount Sinai, in Arabia." (Erdman reads "Mount Sinai," BA 3.46). The (material, graphic) nature of "Sin" is itself problematic. According to Erdman, in BA 2.34 Urizen names Ahania: "He groand anguish'd & called her Sin.",

Those who delight in dread terrors may see additional complexities in illustration 7. This first chapter of Ahania is much involved with "astronomical" cosmology—that is, with the "Globe of Wrath." The first stanza ends with a description of Fuzon and/or his wrath as "Son of Urizens silent burnings" (2.9), and the last stanza concludes with the picture of the fiery beam of Fuzon seized by Los and "beat in a mass / With the body of the sun." (2.47-48). The reader's "contextual expectations" must point to the multiple possibilities in calling anything, especially "his parted soul" (sol—"so wane his parted soul"), "S._n." The graphics of 2.34, through the novel "n" shape and the absent dot for the "i" bear out the possibilities. Perhaps what we see happening to Urizen, his sol[ular failing is, indeed, identified in almost all its forms as sui-sun-sin, seen one on top of the other rather than linearly. The reader's probable query here is our answer: you reason it out.

Lest this seem too much quibbling over trifles, we should reemphasize one of the basic rules of the game: that to change anything that physically appears in Blake's work to an editorial alternative is to "emend" the text in favor of an editorial line of interpretation. It is for this reason that the terms of the MLACSE approval state "explicit editorial principles" which include the recording of when her fruits were the feet of Urizen. The syntax then, the mere absence of the comma, complicates considerably our image of Urizen. Such proliferating complication, struggling against "contextual expectations," is at the core of our vision of Blake's work. To appeal to "contextual expectations" as a neutral and universal given is to avoid the possibility that the difference between a period and a comma, or between a comma and nothing at all, is "the difference we see—and, by seeing, make."
"all emendations to the copy-text introduced by the editors" (E VI). In his longest comment on any word or line in *Jerusalem* (J 21.44, E 809–10), Erdman explains why he did not emend his reading of "warshipped" to "worshipped" which would follow the common assumption that the "a" is a simple spelling mistake on Blake's part (this reading is discussed in greater detail below). Bentley, on the other hand, prints "worshipped" in his text without comment, leaving open the question of whether he saw an "a" and silently changed it or instead simply saw and recorded an "o." For *Urizen* 19.46 Bentley notes that "'Enitharmon' is spelt 'Enitharman'" (*William Blake's Writings*, I, 266) and presents what he assumes to be the correct spelling in his printed text. In his text Erdman prints "Enitharmon" at this point without comment. Did he see the "a" and silently correct it? If so, was it truly a "correction" or was it an unrecorded emendation to the copy text in violation of the MLACSE code? In his note to *Milton* 10.1, Erdman, having printed "Enitharmon" in his text, announces explicit disagreement with those who see an "a" at this point instead of an "o." ("Not misspelled 'Enitharman' despite Bentley, following Keynes" E 807.)

There are two levels of interpretation intertwined in these examples. One is the graphic at the level of physical perception ("Of course an 'a' can look something like an 'o,'" Erdman observes). The other level is the still more difficult one of authorial intention, which raises the issue of whether or not the letter in question may be a "mistake." These problems are compounded by the issue of editorial policy or principle with respect to the category of "mistakes," and the editorial prerogative—or presumption—to make a better "text" than the author/printer William Blake. We believe that the reader has the right to know that Blake made "mistakes," and the even more important right to weigh the possibility that what looks like a mistake may not be one—that "Enitharman" and "warshipped" and "sinerv" might be meaningful or provide clues to meaning. But first one must see the "a" in the place of the "o" and the "rv" in the place of the "w." Erdman does not give us the option of seeing the "a" in "Enitharman," and Bentley does not give us the option of seeing the "a" in "warshipped." Neither Editor gives us the synergetic possibilities of seeing "sinerv."

Another curiosity in the "precise transcription" of Blake's printing is the practice Erdman shares with other Blake Editors of disregarding Blake's original line shape. Presumably to suit the exigencies of typographic economics, Editors often permit short, hyphenated lines to be printed straight through, while they gratuitously double Blake's "long resounding" line to suit the dictates of their formats. This is inconsequential if the letters and lines are merely abstract linear vehicles of sense; but if this is not the case then the practice does violence to the visual semiotics of Blake's printed text. In Blake, perhaps more than most poets, the arrangement of words on the printed page has a graphic potential that should not be ignored. Words (and sub-units of words) can be meaningfully associated by a vertical contiguity and patterning as well as by the more obvious syntagmatic syntactic order exhibited by the text. Consider this minor instance from *Urizen* as printed in Erdman's text:

5. But no light from the fires, all was darkness
   In the flames of Eternal fury
6. In fierce anguish & quenchless flames (5.17–19, E 73)

In Blake's text — disregarding the diacritical figures and connection-lines which we grant to be outside the typographical concern — the reader will find a different experience:

5. But no light from the fires, all was darkness
   In the flames of Eternal fury
6. In fierce anguish & quenchless flames

The text reads up and down as well as across; vertical relationships imply a connection between "no light / darkness," "darkness / flames" and "fierce / flames" which is repeated five lines later:

In howlings & pangs & fierce madness
Long periods in burning fires labouring

The cumulative effect of such encoding asserts the existence of the "fires" as another presence, so that when "Los shrunk from his task":

His great hammer fell from his hand:
His fires beheld, and sickening,
Hide their strong limbs in smoke. (13.21–23)

Such connections lead to the core-text of 5.32–34:

. . . eternal fires . . .
. . . Eternity . . .
. . . sons . . .

So too the first appearance of that son of Eternity, Los, is more problematic if, rather than reading the line straight across, we encounter Blake's arrangement:

8. And Los round the dark globe of
   Urizen
   (5.38)

(round Los = the dark globe of Urizen? = like a black globe . . . like a human heart?) The differences seem even more telling when we compare the Editorial version of *Urizen* 4.24 with a version that follows what Blake printed:

6. Here alone I in books formd of metals
   6. Here alone I in books formd of me-
   -tals

It is appropriate enough, in this book so polysemously predicated of Urizen, for the protagonist, speaking of his books, to describe them and himself as "I in books formd of me." This mind forgery is one alloyed me-tell.

The transition to type also alters Blake's spacing, and so obliterates many significant effects. In Blake's *Urizen* 20.1–2 the exact correlation (and thus contrast) of:

. . . eternity:
   . . . Eternity.

becomes in Erdman's text:

Stretch'd for a work of eternity:
No more Los beheld Eternity.
For another example in this vein, we note that Blake's "Ah !SUN-FLOWER" (not Erdman's "Ah! SUN-FLOWER") begins "Ah Sun-flower! weary of time," rather than "Ah Sun-flower! weary of time," as in Erdman (and Bentley and Keynes). To conclude these issues regarding "precise transcription," consider the new rendering of Urizen 3.26: "The petrific abdominable chaos" (the MLACSE award assures us that the volume "has been scrupulously and repeatedly proofread to prevent unintentional alterations"—but note also the heading, p. 85. The editor, to be sure, knows that every "new printing will have its own fresh errors").

II. A DIGRESSION

ON FORM

AT MISE—EN—PAGE

Format: general plan of physical organization or arrangement.

No matter how unconscious we are of the effects on our mode and mood of perception, we are constantly influenced in our reading by how a poem looks on the page. Our first glance at a new poem can reveal a traditional form printed in metrically-regulated neat stanzas, suggesting among other things how the poem will sound or feel to our ears. A glance at a poem in free verse with a wide variety of line lengths will create quite different expectations of the nature of what we will be experiencing as we read the words. As John Hollander remarks in Vision and Resonance: "The very look of the received poem on the page jingles and tinkles today the way neat, accentual-syllabic rhyming once did" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 240). Part of the formal content and context of any poem, then, will be perceived in our encounter with the image made by the words as they are printed on the page which represents our field of vision. For the most part the effects these visual arrangements stimulate do not receive our direct attention. We only notice them in a printed book when they obtrude themselves upon our consciousness, disturbing the generally bland and neutral matrix of subordination that is supportive of the often desired effect of reading the poem through a transparent medium.

The normative tendency in letterpress or offset printing seems to be the disposition of words on the page in a way that is essentially arbitrary and meaningless in itself, with page breaks simply coming when the available space has run out. With printed prose, only paragraph indentations break the monotonous scanning motion of the eyes; with poetry a few more flexible and varied options are accommodated by the format, but financial expediency and typographical propieties tend to keep these at a minimum. The form of the book is extensively and efficiently coded by the nature of the processes involved in its production, and the finished result operates to structure the reading process in ways that are compatible with that code. Since reading involves the ability to distinguish functional units through visual identification, anything we perceive as surrounded by white space will be a semiotically significant unit. In conventional typography the units are almost exclusively semantic ones: words, lines, paragraphs or stanzas.

A growing body of research suggests that much of perception, even up to fairly high interpretive levels, is automatic and independent of conscious awareness. The effects of peripheral vision are especially powerful in this regard, and it has now often been shown that what we are unaware of seeing is nonetheless influencing what we see and how we feel about the content of our consciously focused vision.

Further understanding and appreciation of Blake's poetry calls for more attention to conceptual structures in his visual semiotic and to what might be called the visual syntax of his written work. "Vision" is a key term for Blake, and the visual form of his poetry, especially as it violates traditional linear forms, is an important functional element of his work—though even W.J.T. Mitchell, who has advanced our understanding of Blake's "composite art" more than anyone else, still accepts a primary distinction between the (non-visual) poetry and the illustrations. To explore the visual syntax of Blake's poetry and to grasp the visual statements he creates requires paying attention to a variety of features that are unavailable in the conventionally presented editions of his work.

Among these, perhaps the most fundamental to the emergence of visual form are figure-field relationships. Every semantic unit is seen with respect to its background, and it establishes its own particular visual presence in terms of its magnitude (both size and shape), position, and orientation perceived against this background. Some of the main factors which influence our reading of figure-field relationships, as pointed out by Arnheim, include texture, spatial proximity, the qualities of enclosed forms, vertical distinctions between bottom and top, horizontal vs. oblique positioning, convexity of forms, suggestions of overlap, and consistency or simplicity (or their opposites) in shape. Even if the visual stimulus is physically two-dimensional, it contains clues that influence the viewer's perception and evoke a reading of implied depth, making the figure-field relationship a distinctive aspect of the syntactic meaning.

Reading Blake's work in the original or in facsimile takes time, which leads most of us to try to "get" the poetry from a printed edition while studying the plates for purely visual information. Our ability to read has been conditioned by our familiarity with traditional linear text forms and the consistent and powerful appear-
inance they present, which stimulates and rewards certain conventions of reading, while affecting the dynamics of the reading experience. In this experience the poem presents itself to the reader as centered within or on a single abstract plane. We engage the visual composition at the upper left and scan line after line horizontally while picking up information and rhythmic impact visually from variations in line length and from variations in typographic forms (e.g., capital letters) and punctuation. The margins framing our encounter with the text are typically large, neutral, and relatively consistent. The figure-field relationship of the poem is one of neutrality, and the interior visual syntax of the poem is empty of significance, with maximum consistency in spacing between letters, words, and lines. Where variations in spacing are required to justify line-endings they are often made as subtle as possible in the attempt to keep them below our threshold of perception. Blake’s poetry, in contrast, persistently violates and challenges our assumptions about the proper orientation of visual symbols in a field, as well as about their shape, size, orientation, color, physical material and texture. There is crucial information of a visual-semiotic nature in Blake’s disposition of individual letters, words, sentences and other semantic units on his printed page, and in the visual boundaries that make such disposition possible. At least some of these effects can be hinted at even within the physical and economic constraints of the typographic medium, and Editors of Blake should be much more imaginative and insistent in their attempts to do so.

The format of individual pages in a book is of course only part of the impact made by the material form of the text on the reader. There are numerous intrinsic properties attendant upon the design and order of books and their component parts. The effects generated by the emblematic characteristics of the book will constitute a significant part of the terms on which the contents of the book are offered and received. In the conventional printed book the assignment of text to a given page is arbitrary or even accidental; yet the turning of a page is a vital act performed by the reader, one which is structured in relation to the poem’s form and meaning by where and how the text has been separated by the printer. To quibble over commas and periods, while randomly introducing “punctuation” on the magnitude of page division, is a bit like swallowing the camel and choking on a gnat, in terms of the impact on the visual and semantic structure of the work. Divisions that Blake made are not functionally present, while divisions he did not make are operative—and juxtapositions can be as significant as divisions. How are we to measure the impact of Erdman’s page 144, where the “Finis” of Milton is separated from the title Jerusalem by only ¾ of an inch and the intervening two-leaved tendril that he used at tops of pages in The Illuminated Blake (illus. 8)?

Blake’s constant attention to the overall form of his “books” and to minute formal nuance within them should pose a challenge to the Editor to try to achieve as many of Blake’s effects as the typographic medium will allow (as David Erdman does, for example, in his remarkable edition of The Notebook of William Blake), rather than disguising those effects and lulling the reader into believing that he is getting the “book” as well as the poetry in the book. This might lead to expensive decisions about blank space in some cases and non-blank space (e.g., narrow or minimal margins) in others. It might not be considered worth it to print Urizen on only one side as Blake did, but the possibility should be considered before going to press, along with the possibility of presenting the text in the original bicolumnar form which constitutes one of its most conspicuous and meaningful features. The Book of Urizen is an especially important case in point, because in it Blake was concerned not only with “writing” but also with the “bookishness” of the book, with the problem of the book as an object, a volume which offers its contents in terms of its physical and formal properties as an object. Blake’s Urizen is designed within a specific historical and contextual field of purposes, conventions and assumptions; yet while designed within them, it is also engaged with them in intellectual warfare. Blake’s books are addressed to the “Reader! of books!” Blake did not “write texts”—he made books which posed a critique of the book-making practices of his own era, and which challenge all future readers and editors to confront the nature of books as material embodiments of texts.

If we move from considerations of format at the level of mise-en-page to the organization of the volume as a whole, we encounter difficulties with Erdman’s text that are not necessarily limited to the typographic medium of reproduction. Erdman continues to reject the organizing principle of chronology that leads other Editors to attempt to present Blake’s works in the order of their composition. Instead, he conceives of four more or less parallel chronologies which are presented consecutively: works in illuminated printing; “prophetic works” never engraved; other works, mostly lyrical, never engraved; and miscellaneous “late prose treatises, marginalia and letters.” Within each of these categories “a rough chronology is observed, but only when thematic or generic relations fail to offer more meaningful groupings” (XXIII). The lines separating these categories are somewhat obscured by their numbering, with the first two each marked by its own Roman numeral, the third category marked by five Roman numerals (III-VII) and the fourth marked by eight Roman numerals (VIII-XV). Within these subdivisions a section like The Everlasting Gospel or the 1809 Descriptive Catalogue may occupy a specific moment in Blake’s career, while others—the letters for instance—encompass its whole range. The fun-
Let us return to the problem of Blake's punctuation, with the honest and grateful acknowledgement that David Erdman has done more than any previous editor to free us from our programed desire for conventional syntax. Erdman is, in places, not at all uncomfortable with Blake's short periods:

1. That Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul.
2. That Energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body.

(MHH 4, E 34)

Such periods break up completion, logical syntax, and invite the reader to a more active, participation in the production of text. Blake could use commas elegantly when he chose, as in the following quotation (where our reading of MHH copy D tallies exactly with that offered on E 39):

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

But still, there are more periods in Blake than in Erdman, and we need to accept them as such if we are truly to grapple with the at times discontinuous folds of Blake's syntax. "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd." (E reads "understood,."). "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (E reads "System,"). Periods can be banished completely, rather than be demoted to commas, if Erdman finds them "intrusive" (E 808), as he does the one after "dance" in Milton 26.3:

Thou seest the gorgeous clothed Flies that dance & sport in summer
Upon the sunny brooks & meadows: every one the dance.[

Knows in its intricate mazes of delight arful to weave: 

(E 123)

With the removal of this "intrusive" period vanishes the mazing possibility of weaving not only a dance of Flies, but also a dance of sunny brooks and meadows. So vanishes, perhaps, another "Period" in which "the Poets Work is Done", that startling stop in which, by which, "Events of Time start forth & are conciev'd in such a Period" (29.1–2). In Blake's "London" (E 27), we can instructively compare lines 5–8 as transcribed by Erdman with what appears in copy C:

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

In every cry of every Man.
In every Infants cry of fear.
In every voice: in every ban.
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

The next stanza of the poem, amplifying the unending line of the preceding one and the first line of the last, gives us an example of Blake's vertical ordering that does not elude the typographic medium:
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear  
How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sign  
Runs in blood down Palace walls  
But most thro' midnight streets I hear  

(E 27, emphasis added)

Another minute particular involves what Erdman calls "one kind of silent insertion"—the occasional addition of an apostrophe to the possessive of Los. Without the apostrophe, Erdman notes, we are "otherwise subject to confusion with 'Loss'" (E 787). So, for example, we have this Editor's Spectre "driven to desperation by Los's terrors & threatening fears" (J10.28, E 153) rather than by "Loss terrors & threatening fears". Yet the Spectre speaks precisely out of an intense sense of loss ("Where is my lovely Enitharmon," "Life lives on my / Consuming"). Blake knows as well as Milton or Lacan that our feeling of "loss" feeds ("unwearied labouring & weeping") our emotional and imaginative life. Los's possession is loss (to our profit); and these references can be connected to the solar aspect of Los's name as well, for when we can go inside out and see even our sun as a loss, then we have solace.

IV. PART

ICULAR MINUTENESSES: A DIGRESSI ON THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

I have a disease: I see language  (Barthes)

For the weak, merely to begin to think about the first letter of the alphabet might make them run mad forthwith.  (Rimbaud)

For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.  (Smart)

For that (the rapt one warns) is what papyr is meed of, made of, hides literal expression" (Af 42.13—14, E 143), and the literal let­
ter (Lat. littera) is the medium of the revelation, as doubly indicated by Blake's spelling. Earlier we mentioned that Mitchell, in his valuable book, has separated the poetic text from the visual text in his dialectical approach to Blake's composite art. We want to suggest that something like Mitchell's "dialectic" is going on within the poetry itself, and that more attention to and respect for that visual form is long overdue, to appreciate a different form of "composite" art which combines a heightened visual and acoustic attention to Blake's signifiers (i.e., not to his "text").

To "see" words can be considered a disease because it is non-normative. It may be typical, as Freud said, of the state of consciousness present in dreams, but it is a deviational mode of attention verging on epistemological error in our ordinary state, much as attention to particulars was an aesthetic error for Reynolds' aesthetic of the grand style. Linguistics tends to share this attitude through its definition of the mode of existence of language, with graphological forms as purely arbitrary indicators of phonological part of the complete poetry of the illuminated books is a visual-verbal semiotic in which form and meaning cannot be separated from material substance, or the adequate representation of the materiality of substance.

We wish to call attention to the visual aspects of linguistic communication in writing in general, but more particularly in Blake, as our concern moves from an awareness of graphic space as a structural agent on a large scale (page format and "book") to the minutiae; from an emphasis on the spatial-structural relationships of the linguistic materials to the actual materiality of the signifiers: their "concreteness" in a perhaps metaphorical sense, their "visibility" in a literal sense.

There seems to be a pervasive cultural and intellectual tendency to suppress the graphic element of writing, its graphology. For the general linguistic approach to the study of language, the primary function of writing systems (with the occasional exception of ideographic or hieroglyphic forms) is to give phonological information. But ink—like air disturbed into sound and patterned into words—can also be a linguistically patterned substance, a different medium, and one which by its very nature is not invisible or transparent. Yet the typographic production of books in the usual manner strives for invisibility or transparency of its signifiers in the service of the idealized "text." If we print or write the word "red" in red ink, there may be a non-arbitrary relationship between the graphic signifier and its signed; and this is only a simple and obvious instance. As soon as we come down with the Barthesian dis-ease of "seeing language" we enter a combined semantic and visual semiotic field in which an enormous range of meaningful effects becomes possible. For Blake this was not a neutral possibility, but a poetic necessity: "Writing / Is the Divine Revelation in the Literal expression" (M 42.13—14, E 143), and the literal letter—hieroglyphic forms) is to give phonological information. To "see" words can be considered a disease because it is non-normative. It may be typical, as Freud said, of the state of consciousness present in dreams, but it is a deviational mode of attention verging on epistemological error in our ordinary state, much as attention to particulars was an aesthetic error for Reynolds' aesthetic of the grand style. Linguistics tends to share this attitude through its definition of the mode of existence of language, with graphological forms as purely arbitrary indicators of phonological
acts. The historical theory and practice of typography are complicitous with the same set of assumptions and values. The fundamental aim of typography as a practical discipline is to achieve a state of invisibility, a type so "legible" that the reader looks through it not at it. How are we to understand this self-effacement? The goal in this practice is to make print a perfectly functional language medium, which is to ignore the difference between spoken and written utterance—to ignore the fact that the necessity of vision is built into the production of writing, the reproduction of writing, and the reception of writing in the literate mind.

It is one of the strongest conventions within the dominant mode of book production that the materiality of the printed sign-vehicle be ignored as non-iconic. It is not printing per se that is at issue, for Blake printed his own work from what he called "stereotypes," adopting the word from conventional printers' usage. It is rather the desire to make the medium transparent in the service of a disembodied "text" which negates Blake's persistent efforts to exploit the materiality of his mode of production as a significant part of the potential meaning of his work. The form of Blake's work signals a change of sign-function, with its marked departure from linear printing, and challenges the reader to a different mode of reading. We are arguing that it is neither a "service" to Blake nor to the reader of Blake to make the experience of reading him easy or convenient. It may at first seem fanciful to suggest that to "buy" meaning from Blake requires—in the sense of classical economics—an exchange of labor of comparable value. But Blake could easily have "written" his works for the typesetter and saved himself and us enormous labors—especially us, since his writings would very likely not have been published at all. How much of what he put into his "works" can we get out if we continue to make things as easy as possible?12

What we mean by the "iconic" dimension of Blake's writing is not a naive privileging of the authority of the author's own handwriting as authenticating "signature" of presence. It is more like the definition that Peirce gave of a motivated relationship between the iconic sign and its object, where the iconic sign is "like [something]thing and used as a sign of it."13 We would not limit our use of "iconic" as Peirce does, to cases where the qualities of the iconic sign must "resemble" those of its denotatum and "excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness" (p. 168), because resemblance is too narrow a limit to assign to the iconic-function potential. Resemblance is only the most obvious of the motivating connections that can exist between the shape of individual letters, their combination into words and larger units, their color, material substance and form, and what those letters mean, or stand for, or represent, or signify.

To maintain that Blake's writing is visible or iconic means that a signifying process is functioning which cuts through, disrupts, and challenges the ordinary reading process without necessarily destroying it or superseding it. Blake's signifying practice must be sensed through both auditory and visual means, and there is no reason why the same writing cannot give evidence of both operations simultaneously at work—or play. In this context we want to return to the instance of "warshipped" mentioned above, and the difficulty in determining whether it is, in Erdman's words, "an error for worshipped" or "possibly a punning coinage." What we have here is not simply a physical question of seeing, but a complex perceptual field which includes the possibility that a problem of seeing ("o" or "a") may relate to a mode of hearing. Tony Tanner has argued for a conceptual relationship between puns and adultery in the novel, suggesting that two meanings that don't belong together in the same word are like two people who don't belong together in the same bed.14 Tanner's is an important comparison, because there is in each case a "law" of propriety that is being broken. The overdetermination of a lexeme by multiple meanings that it does not carry in ordinary usage violates a cultural sense of textual and linguistic propriety. When this happens in Blake, the visual lexeme can be an important functional component of the auditory experience, and provide a simultaneous violation of the linearity and univocity of discourse (cf. illus. 9).

We want to emphasize that we are not dealing here with a trivial textual crux, which may or may not be resolved definitively by improved photographic techniques. We are dealing with an editorial practice (relaxed in this case by Erdman), with ontological notions of the "text" that call for a typographical transparency in the material manifestation of that text. When Byron yearned for words that are things, he was using a metaphor implying a non-human language, the unmediated generative speech of God, or at least a long-lost referentiality of language. But the Blake text insists on the materiality of its words as things in a literally literal sense, the sense in which Freud could say that "Words are a plastic material with which one can do all kinds of things," and the sense in which W. H. Stevenson is ironically not being literal when he changes Blake's "Litteral."15 Freud frequently uses metaphors of writing in his representation of the unconscious. In The Interpretation of Dreams he speaks of the symbolism of dreams in general as a cryptography or rebus, a hieroglyphic or pictographic script, but notes more specifically that "It is true . . . that words are treated in dreams as though they were concrete things, and for that reason they are apt to be combined in just the same way as presentations of concrete things. Dreams of this sort offer the most amusing and curious neologisms."16 For Freud words are presented in the unconscious in ways that must be distinguished from the perceptual mode of consciousness, which looks through the word only for its lexically coded signification. Something that is ordinarily
invisible to consciousness is ordinarily visible in the unconscious, and the interpreter must see language differently, must stop short before the accepted or expected conscious, and the interpreter must see language differences that are retained in the unconscious of adults, because it is for the most part corrected, as it were, in statu nascendi (p. 170). It may well be that a large part of the editor-work is operating over against something like Freud’s joke-work in the production of the idealized Blake “text.” Freud emphasizes that the “laugh” can function as a confirmation of the possibility that Witze has a profound relationship to instinctual drives already at work in infancy. Laughter can dismiss as “children’s silliness” that which the adult must reject and studiously avoid when he makes “serious use of words.” In this context the laughter advocated by a serious arbiter of the arts takes on a certain nervous resonancy: “One would laugh at a writer who would wish his text to be printed now in small unspaced type fonts, now in large spaced ones, or in ascending and descending lines, in inks of different colors, and other such things.”

What we can see and hear in Blake is influenced by what we expect to see and want to see; our desires for a purely phonological information and a “pure” lexical codification of that information make it difficult both to see and to accept the unexpected. To put a letter different from the expected one is a disruptive act, one which has the effect of engaging with other signifiers in the near vicinity. This engagement can be visual (we can see “ear” in “hear” or “orc” in “force” or “los” in “close”) and phonetic. The surrounding visual and phonemic area becomes charged and structured (or unstructured and skewed) in ways not immediately or ordinarily available to consciousness in conventional reading. Such disruptions hint at the force of a desire which is ordinarily censored, a desire for play, for unconfinedness, for regression, perhaps even for subversion. But to speculate on the identity of the force of desire requires a recognition of the effects of that desire, and an unconscious mode of censorship that screens out “what ought not to be” in the text, in language, in the psyche—with hints of an uncanny gap between the subject and his discourse in which “language” seems to be acting on its own, or where the unconscious usurps language as the servant of a subversive desire rather than the servant of well-mannered thought and the communication of sharable meaning. As Wordsworth observed, in commenting on how words can be “things”: “... they are powers either to kill or animate ... a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve.” At times editing can seem to a kind of toilet training of the text, or the work of a normalizing or idealizing airbrush removing all blemishes on its pure surface. Too often with the “blemishes” go a whole range of potential semiotic effects produced at the level of the letter, rather than the word or the sentence.

If we are right in our emphasis on the integral semiotic significance of the visible signifier in Blake, a number of consequences follow. For example, the question of “format” raised above becomes even more complex. If we load the individual letters with significant visibility, then the contextual field in which they appear will be changed also, with an even greater emphasis on the complete two-dimensional page over against the more limited linear path traced through the page by the normal itinerary of the printed text. Printing itself is not the problem, as we have said before. The main criterion for print is simply the existence of an “image carrier” that allows large numbers of nearly identical images to be produced from it. The image carrier can be anything from an engraved plate to a letterpress form to a photographic film or magnetic tape. The unique feature of Blake’s printing in the illuminated books is that he was printing traces or representations of marks he himself had made (“Grave the sentence deep”—and print it). Thus although he produced printed works, they retained—even before he did additional work on the prints—evidence of what Arnheim has called “writing behavior,” pointing out that “to the extent to which a reader perceives written material as the product of writing behavior, kinesthetic overtones will resonate in the visual experience of reading,” producing kinesthetic connotations that tend to transform our perception of the field from a vertical to a horizontal field of action. The implied motor behavior of writing thus emphasizes the surface of the page “as a microcosm of human activity, dominated by the symbolism of relations to the self: close and distant, far and near, outgoing and withholding, active and passive.” Blake’s writing behavior when he was engraving words on a plate was different from his manuscript activity when working on The Four Zoas,
which poses additional considerations of its own—some of which will be taken up in the next section. But his mode of production insisted on making that writing behavior visible, with the consequences that we have been trying to emphasize. It is unusual, more difficult to read, calls for a different mode of attention, and reminds us that the body was involved in the process of production. When Blake invokes his muses, he asks them to descend “down the Nerves of my right arm” (M 2.6, E 96).

V. FURTHER [INSOLUBLE?] PROBLEMS

The complexities of the ms. in short, continue to defy analysis and all assertions about meaningful physical groupings or chronologically definable layers of composition or inscription must be understood to rest on partial and ambiguous evidence. (Erdman on The Four Zoas)

What if we then accept this as the major edition, accept its inevitable errors or questionable readings, accept its concessions to print technology—is that all one need say? One’s belief in the necessity of such concessions is dependent on a sense of the necessity of print editions themselves; and if we read Erdman’s as if it were Blake's own text, even knowing that it is not, it will be in order to avoid a constant consideration of the concessions, or in order to induce one’s students into a more immediate, unmediated confrontation with the text. But this review continues to exercise lingering doubts about editing and typography themselves, about their very necessity.

A Shakespeare editor must be concerned that variations between the Folio and Quarto editions of King Lear represent different and perhaps irreconcilable notions of how the play was written or performed at different times. With differences in performances, print is resubmerged in subsequent productions; these productions tend not only to reinterpret but to re-edit the play as well. The problem is not simply one of editorial methodology but of fundamental differences between performance and print situations, differences obscured or obliterated by the phenomenology of print itself. In the case of Blake the problem is just as striking, for here we are obviously faced with different forms of print, materially different values of production. Blake’s production is itself a performance situation, a “scene of writing” which continually draws attention to itself as graphological production. The possible “sinev” of Ahania or Urizen’s “books formd of me- / -tals” are not only polysemous, they also rouse the reader to such a graphological awareness. Someone is/was actually writing. If print is so fixed and final and regular as to be virtually self-effacing, Blake’s writing is self-reflective or reflexive as material production and multifold in both meaning and form. It is now commonly believed that Blake’s methods of engraving and copperplate printing purposefully set themselves apart from industrially-determined print technologies; his practice may even have constituted an active critique or subversion of what Walter Benjamin has called the age of mechanical reproduction, anticipating Brecht’s combined aesthetic and ideological insistence on exhibiting—rather than hiding—the means of producing the artistic effect. The variety in the existing copies of the Songs may lead us to constitute, in part, a sense of a kind of metamorphic variance under a general controlling aegis or governing form which we call “the” Songs. But in another sense, those varieties undermine and contradict the very notion of such a generality. It is difficult to speak of the Songs entirely as if “it” were a single text, and such a difficulty can be very useful for Blake’s readers. The printed hybrid editions, however, rob the reader of that difficulty by presenting an editorial fiction based on the implicit assumption of the existence of an “ideal text” which they are representing in the most adequate fashion. If this is the case, then any print edition, no matter how “accurate” to the letter of the text, will necessarily represent a counter subversion, a recuperation of Blake’s text by the very forces it sought to oppose.

One of Erdman’s many virtues as an editor is that he has always tended to be hospitable to minute graphological particulars. If print forces the necessity of compromise, he makes fewer than most editors. Earlier editors were so accommodating to the standards of print and public taste that they often seemed like schoolteachers correcting a messy or overly-inventive child. Where Keynes, for instance, regularly normalized spelling and punctuation, one always feels a greater confidence in Erdman because he tends not to normalize, because his editions look more like the original texts, even though not as much like them as print technology might allow if fully exploited. If we have taken occasion in this review to indicate passages where Erdman is not fully consistent with this practice, where he does normalize, it should not be taken as a sign that we fail to appreciate his work as the considerable advance over previous editions which it often is. Indeed, if anything, we might express the fear that these virtues constitute a danger if they lull the reader into a false confidence that he now has the Blake “text” in his hands, lacking only the illustrations for a full encounter with the author.

Editorial sensibility and technological strictures weigh heavily on this new edition, and are perhaps nowhere so evident as in Erdman’s treatment of The Four Zoas—especially Night VII, which provides also the single most radical editorial change from the old E. The problems here are exceedingly complex, and in some ways might be considered exemplary: a history of editorial approaches to Night VII alone could provide a useful study of the ways in which Blake’s text has been processed and disseminated. There are too many approaches to describe them all in the space of this review, but readers who need a fuller sense of the issues involved should...
consult Blake 46 (Summer 1978), which contains studies of the Night VII problem by John Kilgore, Andrew Lincoln, Mark Lefebvre and Erdman, and which provides indispensable aid for a full understanding of what Erdman calls his “drastic rearrangement” of Night VII.

The problem, of course, is that Blake left two Nights titled “Night the Seventh,” and no fully reliable clues to their probable order or priority; the editor’s task is to find ways to present them in print. Erdman’s earlier solution had what was called VIIa (ms pp. 77-90) written “later than and presumably to replace” VIIb (ms pp. 91-98); VIIa was printed between VI and VIII, and VIIb left as a kind of appendix after IX. Erdman’s decision reflected a wide tendency in the past generation of Blake scholarship to treat VIIa and VIIb as units, a practice which made it impossible to fit either or both into the text in a narratively coherent way. Of course narrative coherence in The Four Zoas is generally problematic and, insofar as one understands coherence in anything like the terms of linear logic or “realist” novels, a false issue.

The textual studies of Kilgore, Lincoln and Lefebvre made it possible to redefine the problem: VIIa and VIIb were no longer described as units but as sets of two which could be reshuffled in at least three ways. Erdman’s textual note is a handy summary of the choices: And while Lincoln, arguing from an impressive hypothetical reconstruction of the evolution of the ms, would insert VIIa between the two portions of VIIb (as Blake rearranged them). Mark Lefebvre and John Kilgore, arguing mainly from fit, propose inserting all of VIIb between the two parts of VIIa (taking the first portion of VIIa as concluding with 85.22, originally followed by “End of the Seventh Night”). Kilgore would return the transposed parts of VIIb to their original order; Lefebvre would keep them in the order of Blake’s transposing. In the present edition I have decided to follow the latter course. (E 836)

Erdman does not fully explain here why he prefers Lefebvre’s theory, but from his article in Blake 46, with its fascinating system of notation, it would seem that he does so on the basis of best possible fit. But the concern with fit is itself problematic. As Erdman himself reminds us, when Ellis and Yeats first “discovered” the manuscript it was unbound, entirely a pile of loose leaves. In other words, to conceive VIIa and VIIb as either single or bipartite units is highly speculative. In The Four Zoas in general, unity is not a priori but the result of interpretive and/or editorial theory.

To call unity theoretical is not to say that it is wrong, but that it does require us to examine the theory more closely—a difficult task, since many decisions are not based on strict textual evidence but on inadequately articulated assumptions of, or desires for, a unity beyond the manuscript’s actual state. These assumptions and desires are frustrated by what appear to be conflicting notions of poetic unity in the poem itself. It is likely, and often suggested, that Blake’s difficulties in completing the Zoas arose from changes during its composition in his own sense of appropriate unity, that the poem represents a series of transformations leading from the never-ordinary narratives of the Lambeth books to the even more radical procedures of Jerusalem. The manuscript evidence of such transformations has led many readers to consign The Four Zoas to the category of brilliant failures.

The point is crucial, for what the manuscript exhibits in the most graphologically explicit fashion is an ongoing, unfinished process of self-editing, a process which print ordinarily shuts down. The process would be even more evident in the manuscript had not its keepers in London deemed it necessary to bind the leaves. This should be restated: the manuscript’s editor must be responsible to the phenomenological closures of print, but this is not to say that Blake’s editors always seek unity like that of the most ideally ordered classical epic. Rather, the editor seeks unity by attempting to extend the interrupted trajectory of Blake’s compositional process in such a way as to create a “Blakean” unity, in this case in order to salvage both Nights VII and approach a hypothetically Blakean conclusion of this infamously unfinished poem. One could describe this procedure as an editorial version of the intentional fallacy: a compositional fallacy, perhaps, or at least a compositional fiction. Passages like the following one from John Kilgore—who, as Erdman says, is concerned mostly with “fit”—are virtually standard in editorial commentaries:

We have selected this passage from Kilgore (p. 112) not because he is the worst offender, merely the handiest practitioner of the compositional fiction. In fact, with his rhetoric of “as if” and “may have decided,” Kirkgo’s speculations are a great deal more modest and palatable than the assertive certainties of several other commentators.

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of the text as manuscript, its writing of still-latent choices, its graphological, poetic uncertainties. If Erdman has produced a more accessible version — accessible in the double and related senses of wide availability and surface coherence — we must also ask what has been lost. Consider, for a minute particular, the following passage from Night the Seventh:

> the howling Melancholy
For far & wide she stretch'd thro all the worlds of Urizen's journey
And was Ajoind to Beulah as the Polypus to the Rock
Mourning the daughters of Beulah saw not could they have
sustained
The horrid sight of death & torment. But the Eternal Promise
They wrote on all their tombs & pillars

(94.55-95.5, E 367)

Like other editors, Erdman emends 95.3, but a consideration of what sense that alteration is designed to save offers tangible evidence of Blake's manner of expanding a line's reference. Do the daughters see "Mourning" rather than a more violent "howling Melancholy"? or "Mourning" rather than "death & torment"? If the daughters themselves, through inverted predication, are "Mourning," what did they see; and how are they able, a few lines later, to wait "with patience" and to sing "comfortable notes"? Perhaps the daughters see a morning that lightens the horrid sight of "black melancholy." If critics are correct in feeling that the passage calls for emendation, it seems more likely — since the text offers a situation "when Morn shall blood renew" (93.19) — that "Morning the daughters of Beulah saw [not?] nor could they have sustained /The horrid sight of death & torment."

Surely Blake must have wished to "finish" The Four Zoas, whatever that finishing might have turned out to mean, but at the same time the very strangeness of the manuscript fascinates us: its surface chaos, its false starts, its palimpsestuous revisions and deletions are invitations to a kind of labor which is itself deleted from the print edition. Erdman prevents his reader from enjoying the difficult pleasures he himself experienced; the reader's participation at certain graphological levels is itself edited out because the editor assumes, and must assume, that such participation is inessential to reading. To correct the graphic traces of a struggle for resurrection to unity is to assume that they are irrelevant to the reader's experience of the text as a struggle in writing, an energetic exertion of talent including a potential grammar of mistakes which might advance reading. And what if the manuscript's unfinished form is somehow appropriate to the unfinished world it explores? By resurrecting the manuscript to an editorial unity, the editor interferes with the reader's capacity for taking the manuscript as a call for and challenge to unity on other levels. Of course this disruption cannot be total, since most of the text's disruptions remain, so to speak, intact. If The Four Zoas as manuscript is not yet resurrected to unity, neither are the Zoas themselves; and it is perhaps a probing recogni-

We wish again to emphasize that we fully appreciate E as the best available printed edition,27 an accomplishment so remarkable that to object to it at all seems ungrateful. But we remain troubled by the hidden power to distort in the editorial praxis and the typographic medium; if print editions are necessary to accommodate a reading public, we must nonetheless question their efficacy, and point out that "reading" Blake in this edition is as far from experiencing "the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression" as the "performance" on a synthesizer would be from a symphonic rendition of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. And if E is the best available edition, we wish to question the notion of best edition. If E becomes, as it is likely to do, the major if not universally accepted edition, problems such as that of the two Nights VII will continue to demonstrate that for the serious reader the matter of editing must remain a conscious issue, that this is not Blake's text, that at the very least one must always attempt to triangulate, so to speak, Blake's text through as many editions and editorial theories as one can lay hands on. This edition is one more possible text, one more hypothetical unity to be placed in the field of all other possible unities in order to prevent oneself from ever assuming a single and final unity. The reader must never accept the authority of print at typeface value, never allow the editor and his medium to become invisible, but always raise the question of mediation, of how Blake's works are processed and disseminated, under what aegis, according to what ideologies and economic imperatives, what assumptions of unity, what interpretation, what Zoic impulse.

It may well be, as Randall McLeod has suggested, that traditions of editing are maintained by pedagogy "in which the teacher's role mediates the students' confrontation with art, and shapes it according to various intellectual and social paradigms, which impose ideal order on recalcitrant facts."28 There are of course even more profound philosophical and ideological factors at work, but for the moment, we wish rather to emphasize that — whatever the reasons — there has been too little concerted effort to exploit the syntax of concrete ideas offered by photography in bringing the world of Blake to the audience Blake deserves in a form closer to what the audience deserves. The Four Zoas is perhaps the least available of all Blake's major works and yet, except for size, it poses fewer problems of photographic reproduction than the engraved works. In an age of photographic transmission almost every reader of The Four Zoas must
still seek an encounter with Blake’s writing through the elaborate and expensive mediation of editorial and compositorial middlemen.29

Reproduction by print, even of a photographic image, may not be the best answer technology has for the multitude of problems posed by Blake’s work. Even the best photographic facsimile of the ms of The Four Zoas would not bring out the details and editorial clues that X-ray photography and related technologies may help uncover—but the unaided eye with the original ms would be almost as much at a loss for these traces as with a photograph of it. In addition to the possible solutions to textual problems offered by new technologies, there are also vistas of promise for the goal of providing “eye” access to Blake. We imagine future Blake students examining the illuminated books and the ms materials from video discs and high-resolution screens, comparing variants in split-screen images, isolating and magnifying cruces and details, jumping instantly from plate to plate and copy to copy, having access to images of all the works without having to travel to the various collections. Once the images were actually encoded on disc, the cost of reproducing multiple copies would be minimal. This is not a utopian proposal: if print editions necessarily involve formal compromises and the interference of a technology Blake’s project was designed to circumvent, then with such video reproductions we will no doubt be trading one set of compromises for another. But we could also provide ourselves with a much richer range of readings unmediated by editorial assumptions of unity, and untransformed by print.

VI. THE COMMENTARY: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Commentary: A systematic series of explanations or interpretations of the text of a writing. (Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, 3d ed.)

Reviewers, whether journalistic or academic, who chant malice while they proclaim their love for poems, trope also, and for defensive purposes all their own. What do we mean when we think we love poems, and what does that love defend, or defend against? (Bloom, Agon)

From the start all received readings of this poem, including my own, are wholly mistaken . . . . A copying-canonization fosters mistrading, of a peculiarly uninteresting, weak, and unproductive kind. A canonical reading, like a canonical copying, attempts to stop the mind by making a text identical with itself; so as to produce a total presence, an unalterable meaning. (Bloom, Poetry and Repression)

All canonizing of literary texts is a self-contradicting process, for by canonizing a text you are troping upon it, which means that you are misreading it. Canonization is the most extreme version of what Nietzsche called Interpretation, or the exercise of the Will-to-Power over texts. (Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism)

The dust jacket of the Newly Revised Edition announces this volume as containing “eighty-two pages of critical commentary by Harold Bloom.” Since there are only seventy-six pages of commentary by Bloom included in the volume, there may be more than one kind of puffery going on here. Of the seventy-six pages of commentary, fifty-four are devoted to the Big Three (Milton and The Four Zoas have nineteen pages each, Jerusalem has sixteen) leaving only twenty-two pages for the remainder of the oeuvre, and a substantial number of the works receive no commentary or critical annotation at all.30 As in Blake’s Apocalypse, where Bloom’s readings are offered as “justification” for his “experience that the poems are usually quite independent of their illustrations,” there is nothing in the commentary to suggest that the poems exist in any but their printed forms.31 There are a number of larger theoretical and practical concerns raised by the inclusion of any commentary at all with what seeks to present itself as “the text” of Blake’s work, but we shall defer consideration of these issues to the next section, limiting the present one to a consideration of the commentary on its most obvious level, examining it in terms of its own self-presentation.

If we do so, an immediate question arises: is the commentary “newly revised” after seventeen years of stable existence? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, since the minimal number of mechanical changes have been made to keep the order of the commentary congruent with the revisions in the order of the printed text, and the forty references to Erdman’s Prophet Against Empire have received supplementary page references to the latest edition of that work. Predictably, the introductory note to Night VIIa (E 876) stating the belief that VIIa is later in composition and an “imaginative advance” on VIIb is omitted; the note formerly to VIIb 96:19–27 (E 885), where the comment on Los’s evolution provided the occasion to claim it as “one of the many indications that VII[a] might be later in composition than VII[b],” is altered so that the same evidence is now “one of the good reasons for taking pages 85–90 to be the proper conclusion to this Night.” The remainder of the commentary on the two Nights is simply shifted to follow the new order of printing. In the process of shifting the notes around, Bloom’s observations on 94:37–95:14 (the concluding note to the separately-printed VIIb in 1965, [p. 886]) seem to have been lost in the shuffle; lest we think that this was a deliberate revision, the “c” indication remains in the printed text as a signifier of carelessness.

Even at this minimal level of change and correction, there are a number of things that could have improved the utility and accuracy of the Commentary that remain untried. The reader new to the edition will still have to hunt to find the list of works cited in the notes (E 788). Once it is found, he or she will look in vain for information about many citations in the Commentary that give authors’ names only (e.g. Murry, Percival, Schorer, C.S. Lewis, Sloss and Wallis). Although the order of the edition puts The Four Zoas later, many of the comments on Milton and Jerusalem presume a reading of it, constantly referring to points as “already familiar” from that
Jerusalem; but there have certainly been many new revision process is the frequent claim made in the commen-
tation that a subsequent text can repeat an of the Quixote,
phrases which imply much more than they deliver. There Blake. The notes resound with superlatives: "fullest com-
Zodiac, making us wonder whether this is a strong poem.
Libra still "follows Leo" (E 953) in Bloom's
of this sort fall through the gap between the textural notes and the commentary, leaving the edition less useful than it might be for pedagogical purposes.

One of the most embarrassing aspects of the non-
revision process is the frequent claim made in the commen-
tation that it is a comprehensive guide to other scholarship on Blake. The notes resound with superlatives: “fullest com-
"best elucidated by,” “best commentary” are phrases which imply much more than they deliver. There are ways, as Borges suggests in his Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote, that a subsequent text can repeat an earlier one verbatim and yet be totally different. The superlatives in the Newly Revised Edition may repeat ex-
actly the text of 1965, but words like “remains” and “still,” after eighteen years of proliferating Blake scholar-
ship, have quite a different resonance. In 1965 Bloom could speculate that the problems he experienced with the structure of Jerusalem “may be only that the poem
has not had enough accurate and close readers as yet” (E 928). No doubt we can still argue about whether we have enough (or too much?) in the way of close readings of Jerusalem; but there have certainly been many new observations and speculations since 1965, all of which would seem to be implicitly discounted by preserving this aspect of Bloom’s commentary. At times the anachronisms can be amusing, as when we find a moral lecture that doesn’t seem to have whatever urgency it might once have merited: “One must also warn against misunderstanding [Milton] 41:25. Blake is certainly not repudiating sexuality . . . . This would not be worth
dwelling upon, were it not that this misinterpretation of Blake is still a prevalent one.” (E 927, emphasis added)
The adequacy of Bloom’s coverage of Blake scholarship could be questioned even in 1965; but consider the following table, which lists the five (of a total of about fifteen) authors most frequently cited by Bloom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>AGE OF WORK</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CITATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erdman</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frye</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percival</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margoliouth</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average age of the works most frequently cited is thirty-eight years in 1982. Surely something must have been noticed by the Young Men and Women of the New Age that would be worth mentioning in a commentary appended to what presumes to be the basic text for students of Blake in the 1980s.

Other aspects of the commentary have changed by remaining the same. The description Bloom gave of Blake in 1965 was very much a self-description: “He was not an antiquarian, a mystic, an occultist or theosophist, and not much of a scholar of any writings beyond the Bible and other poetry insofar as it resembled the Bible. His references to esoteric traditions are few, and tend to be superficial when they are not mocking” (E 934–35). Misreading was still a crime back in those days, before Bloom had discovered the Kabbalah and Gnosticism and Freud, and the anonymous hordes of occultists are so con-
stantly denounced that one years for an Index Librorum
Prohibitorum in order to know who they were/are. The sins committed by these occultists seem to be twofold; first, to assume that Blake read such trash (though that category may not be so clear in Bloom now that he has found light in the darkness), and second to assume that he might have been influenced by it. Apparently we are to believe that “Blake rejects all occultism” (E 945) without having read it. This aspect of Bloom’s opinions seems not to have changed much, for in his recent essay “Catastrophe Creation: Gnosis, Kabbalah and Blake” he still maintains that “the Perpetual Philosophy gang of pseudo-Blakeans have failed to demonstrate that Blake knew anything much of his Gnostic and Kabbalistic precursors.” Apparently the correct view is still that Blake was able to get it all out of the Bible and “a kind of primal anxiety,” since “the elements of catastrophe are gathered all too readily from the innate puzzlements of the orthodox accounts” (Agon p. 77). Bloom’s attitude in 1965 may perhaps be understood as a reaction to Raine’s insistence that not one symbolic figure or theme in Blake was of his own invention, and that Blake was steeped in ancient traditions, particularly Neoplatonism. Paradoxically, Bloom would now seem to agree with Raine that Blake did not invent anything, even though he is still adamant about denying Blake any occult “sources” in the conventional sense. For Bloom the answer to the vexing question of how Blake could have been a Gnostic without having read any Gnostic writings must be based on a “truly enlightened Freudian perspective” (87) that agrees with the affirmation of Gnosis “that fantasy must be primary in our belated condition” (89) because of “the priority of anxiety over its stimuli” and the origins of human consciousness as a primal catastrophe of creative origins (97).

Although Bloom has done relatively little interpretation of Blake since his work in the 60s, what he has published shows radical changes from the views expressed in the Commentary. One example must suffice here. In 1965 The Book of Urizen was “primarily an intellectual satire” and Urizen was a bad guy. In 1982, Urizen is Blake’s prophetic version of the author of Beyond the Pleasure Principle. and “Blake’s wisdom” is to see Urizen’s creativity as “the sublime stance, the agonistic
glory of Milton and of Blake, the final truth of Freud's Psychological Man" (89). Freud was mentioned only once in 1965, to be dismissed in passing as only worth the bother “if an attempt to translate Blake's psychic cartography into Freud's seems worth the making” (E 955). The subjunctive sounds strange now that we have the “final truth” of a transccendent understanding based on a “truly enlightened Freudian perspective.”

To look back at the commentary after eighteen years, after Bloom's subsequent theorizing and the proliferation of other work on Blake, is to find a “reading” of Blake that is by now thoroughly familiar, if not “canonical.” The Blake of this commentary is the hero of the Imagination, original and creative, leading us towards imminent apocalypse: “It is Blake's work as a creative artist that will expunge the notion of dualism, and cleanse the doors of perception, the infinitely expandable senses of man” (E 898). Bloom's reading of Milton (the comments on The Four Zoas and Jerusalem are too patchy and tentative to constitute “readings”) leads us towards “the moment of salvation” and “the revelation that is to climax the poem” (E 923) with a final glimpse of “the poet prophet who has been tried severely, and has triumphed over his trials” (E 928). The tone of the Commentary is that of a purveyor of truth, who can speak authoritatively of “the proper understanding of the poem” (E 901) and “the central truth of the Marriage” (E 903) and who can unfailingly illuminate lines that are “most frequently misread in Blake” (E 901).

The trope that Bloom was most comfortable with in the 60s was irony, and his discriminations of nuance among the modes of irony, satire and paradox were prolific. Blake's irony could be plain “irony,” or it could be “pungent,” “cyclic,” “complex,” “final,” “palpable,” “highest,” “curious,” “fine,” “prophetic,” “outrageous,” “intellectual,” “central,” “ferocious,” “supreme,” “evident,” “bitter and effective,” “savage,” or “skillful.” In addition to the plain variety, Blake's “satire” could be “intellectual,” “desperate,” “complex,” “grim,” “oblique,” or “implied.” Bloom's inventiveness flags with “parody,” which is as often plain “parody” as it is “demonic parody.” A quick count finds combinations and selections of these phrases used thirty-three times in a twelve-page sample of the Commentary (E 896–907).

If these are to be practical considerations, we must eventually ask ourselves what—in spite of its idiosyncrasies and shortcomings—is the value of this Commentary that we will now continue to live with and have our students buy for perhaps another eighteen years? Here we think the numerous references to the Bible, and to Milton and Spenser, are still helpful and remain one of the strengths of the Commentary. Whatever our arguments about Blake and the occult may continue to be, we do know that Blake read these works and was profoundly influenced by them, and we know that our students are increasingly unfamiliar with them. The kind of study Leslie Tannenbaum has provided in his Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) is a much-needed tool in this area, especially with its emphasis on the context of biblical criticism in Blake's own time, in which Blake's strategies seem less idiosyncratic and more traditional than might otherwise be the case. Perhaps what we really need for Blake is some equivalent of the Gifford and Seidman Notes for Joyce, or of Ronald McHugh's Annotations to Finnegans Wake. Such a work would not simply mention the Nightingale's song in Milton as "perhaps honoring Milton" and give a reference to the invocation to Book III of Paradise Lost. It would also mention "II Penseroso" and provide the minimal classical references. And it would not overlook the even greater honor Blake does to Milton in his poem by shifting his emphasis from the Nightingale to the Lark, reminding us of Milton's Lark in Paradise Regained:

and now the Herald Lark
Left his ground-nest, high towring to descry
The morns approach, and greet her with his Song
As lightly from his grassy Couch up rose
Our Saviour, and found all was but a dream

VII. THE FUNCTIONS OF COMMENTARY

. . . the Commentary therefore aims at being a comprehensive and detailed guide to the reading of Blake's poetry. . . . The emphasis throughout . . . is on the resolution of apparent problems in continuity and poetic unity.

(E XXIV)

The Book of Nehemiah (8:1–8) gives us what may well be the earliest account of the essential collaboration between editing and commentary. As a redactor of the Pentateuch or Torah, Ezra had begun the awesome task of “putting back together” an ideal text which had never existed. The formal presentation of the text to those who would understand it requires translation and commentary. In this section we propose to look briefly at Bloom's Commentary in Erdman's edition, not as the practice of an individual critic or commentator—but as representative of an important function, the institutionalization of the reciprocal play of power between the text and its commentary. In this mutual reinforcement system, . . . criticism's self-separation from its object is a kind of feint—a mere prelude to reuniting with it more completely. Its analytic distan­tiation of its object is the parody of knowledge—a means of "possessing it more closely, dissolving itself into a oneness with it." The end of criticism is to efface itself before the text, viciously naturalising its own troubled "artifice" by its power to claim the "naturalness" of the text itself. In a spiral of mutual reenforcements, the literary text naturalizes experience, critical practice naturalises the text, and the theories of that practice legitimate the "naturalness" of criticism.34

Fredric Jameson has observed that critical commentary presents itself as answering the question “What does it mean?” and in answering the question performs an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically
rewritten in terms of some implicit fundamental code.\textsuperscript{35} In this view, the operative theoretical framework and presuppositions of a critical approach will reflect the ideology which that method seeks to perpetuate, and it is the congruence between the assumptions guiding the production of the text and those guiding the extraction of meaning from the fixed text which allows the system to work in all its fearful symmetry.\textsuperscript{36} Apart from whatever its particular qualities as interpretation may be, there is an important emblematic aspect to the inclusion of Commentary in a definitive edition. The Commentary "ends" the book as a form of closure and enclosure. After the conflict and disorder of the various materials that constitute Blake's work have given way to the editorial order, any residual problems of "interpretation" can be successfully negotiated by an interpretive process that shares and collaborates with the editorial assumption that Blake's meaning must be if not simple, at least univocal. The Commentary begins with the assumption of unity and coherence that guided the editorial creation of the text, and proceeds to "discover" that in a quite predictable fashion as the characteristic identifying mark of the text. As a reading of the "text," following it and doubling it, citing it and depending on it, the Commentary functions to confirm certain things about the text, including—for our concerns—the most important aspect of all, its textualty. The reinforcement of persistent citation, whether in a closing Commentary at the end, in running notes, or in those earlier modes of scriptural publication with the sacred scripture in the center of the page (surrounded on all sides by annotations, glosses and commentary, including even interlinear glosses), is an important formal part of the presentation of an edited text. The Commentator will respect the supposed stability and authenticity of the text, and will securely reproduce that stability in a critical commentary that—either literally or figuratively—stands alongside the text; the formalist practices of the Commentary will presuppose the desired formal characteristics to be "there" in the text to receive the formal doubling of meaning in the Commentary.

The citational doubling of the edited text is part of a larger doubling structure of citation which deserves a moment's attention. When we say that the editing process creates the text, we have in mind the way in which everyone knows that the printed book is clearly not Blake's text per se, but an elaborate citation of a set of events which presents itself, in the form of citation, as a representation of the absent text. The acceptance of this elaborate citational representation as "the text" is strengthened and reinforced by the citation of it as such that is found in the Commentary's relational structure, which confirms the textualty of the text by taking its "proper place" alongside or after. We might express this double relationship in the form of a ratio:

Commentary: Edited Text:: Edited Text: Ideal Text

This may seem so obvious and inevitable as to require no attention, but the obviousness is precisely why we persist in teasing out the assumptions implicit in the conventional text cum commentary format. From Plato on, the standard accounts of representation have assumed the existence of the categories of the "original" and the "copy" or representation, one prior in time and higher in value, the other later in time and lower in value—the first determining the second. The rationale for the practice of representation or copying is the absence of the original, for which the copy is a convenient or available substitute in the absence of the original.

Reengraved Time after Time
Ever in their youthful prime
My Designs unchanged remain
Time may rage but rage in vain
For above Times troubled Fountains
On the Great Atlantic Mountains
In my Golden House on high
There they Shine Eternally (E 480–81)

The representation or copy, being different from the original, is tainted or contaminated by that difference. It is one of the paradoxical strategies of the authoritative, edited "text" to present itself as less belated in the series of copy-representations of the ideal text than the particular version(s) of it produced by the author, less contaminated by difference from the original, which simply is itself.

We have suggested that the notion of the ideal text is both a component and symptom of that set of traditions in Western metaphysics which Derrida has analyzed in terms of its privileging of the spoken word over the written within the oppositional categories of presence and absence, of original and copy or supplement. If spoken language is what fundamentally constitutes all language, then the written word will be seen as secondary and derivative. If the ideal text is what constitutes the ontological axis of literature, then as writing is seen merely to redouble speech, to be an artificial or auxiliary reproduction, a pallid reproduction or representation of the spoken word—then so will the "writing" of the author be seen as a veil covering the sublimity of the ideal text. If there is a tradition that can be called "phonocentric" in language theory and metaphysics, there is also one that can be called "textocentric" in literary studies and the production of what we call "texts" of literary works.

Blake worked in a system in which the "inventor" of an image and the engraver of the image were often different people, with the inevitable implication that the engraving was a derivative and secondary category or mode of existence, as well as more "mechanical" and not truly of the "fine arts." William Ivins and Morris Eaves have spelled out some of the details and implications of this system, including the "reverse-contamination" of the original by the nature of the medium in which it was meant to be reproduced. Or is it a "contamination"? It is,
in effect, a reduction of the "difference" which enhances the value and adequacy of the "representation" by bringing it closer to the "original." A similar reduction of difference can be seen in a mode of writing that is intended for reproduction in conventional printed production in linear form; the "difference" in this case is not significant in a functional sense, and the printed version—if it is "accurate"—is considered fully adequate as a representation of the "text" of the work. We could say that Blake's printed "plates" are copies of his copper plates, and that those plates are copies or traces of the act of engraving itself, that energetic exertion of talent which is itself still only a trace of something else, perhaps some *Dasein* "unchanged . . . Far above Times troubled Fountains." But wherever that realm is, we are presumably not there, and we must still deal with tangible artifacts in our attempts to encounter the Designs. In the realm of tangible artifacts Blake had his own methods for reducing the series of "differences" between the imagination of a design, its initial rendering, its engraving (preparation for printing) and its printing—including final touches to the printed form that must be considered as "original" as any other stages in the production. Thus the notion of difference in this context is already contained as a problematic part of Blake's mode of production, in which his printed designs avoid, as much as possible, the whole concatenation of the implications of conventional production. In addition, the same problematic is thematized in the "meaning" of the works so produced.

What we are leading up to here is the point that, if the edited/printed text presents itself as *simply* different from the ideal text, different as all printed representations are, then the *problematic* differences that concerned Blake in both the invention and execution of his designs will be obscured, and we will be lulled into taking the edited text as a representation adequate to our interpretive needs, not being able to see what editing does to its "originals." When the edited text is presented in a formal context as fully adequate to serve as "original" for the copy-representation of a Commentary, then the Commentary will have as one of its most significant functions the bearing of testimony to the adequacy of the edited text to serve as a substitute for the absent "original," functioning as the original for the copy-function of the Commentary.

To look now at the situation we are describing from the vantage point of Erving Goffman, we can suggest that the conventionally edited text constitutes a "scene of editing," or a "scene of text production." A correctly staged and performed scene/edition leads the audience/reader to impute a "text" to the performance, and the imputation of "text" is the *product* of the scene that comes off successfully rather than the *cause* of it. When the Commentary gets out of hand, expanding to devour the text or manifesting "a stronger apparent presence," in Bloom's terms, then the conventional decorum of the textual performance has been violated and the carefully maintained illusions may be shattered. But if this happens what we have—as Bloom's recent theoretical arguments emphasize—is not a change in kind, but a change in degree; a different performance, no longer self-effacing Commentary in the service of an imputed text but Commentary upstaging the text. The decorous Commentary, such as we have in the now officially-sanctioned edition of Blake, is no less a "performance" for playing a different role or interpreting the same role in a different way.

To return to the scene of editing as performed in the Erdman edition in its initial "production" in the sixties, we find a number of elements characteristic of conventional academic canonization and text formation. The scholarly credentials of both Erdman and Bloom had been established to an impressive degree. Bloom had published (among other things) two books dealing directly with Blake, and in each had paid the obligatory obeisance to the appropriate doyens of Romantic and Blakean scholarship: "Of published criticism of the Romantic poets, I have been most deeply influenced by Northrop Frye's work on Blake. . . . In matters of critical theory, I have been guided by Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism,* and by Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp.*" My specific critical debts are to the Blake studies of S. Foster Damon, J. Middleton Murry, David Erdman, and especially Northrop Frye. . . . To Mr. Frye's work I have a more pervasive obligation, for by reading him I learned to read Blake" (*Blake's Apocalypse*, p. 10).

The Commentary does indeed frequently acknowledge specific indebtedness to Frye and others, but the more important "learning" manifested in the Commentary is of a general nature. Frye's Blake was and is a spectacular and powerful invention—a Blake who "seldom altered anything," whose works "were intended to form an exclusive and definitive canon," in which even *The Four Zoas*, though left abandoned, provides "an imaginatively coherent account of how we got from an original Golden Age to the world we are now in" (*Fearful Symmetry*, pp. 10, 309). Frye's Blake must be approached according to certain rules, which are for the most part those followed by Bloom's Commentary in 1965. "In the study of Blake it is the analogue that is important, not the source; and even essential sources such as the Bible and Milton are of value only as sources of analogues" (p. 12). Blake exhibits everywhere "the sanity of genius" and provides the consummate model of "the creative power of the artist," and of the "vision" which is "the goal of all freedom, energy and wisdom" (p. 25). Frye's concept of "freedom," however, did not extend to all readers of Blake:

I am not speaking now of merely vulgar misunderstandings. No one who has read three lines of our straightforward and outspoken poet can imagine that he wished to be pursued by a band of superstitious dilettantes into the refuge of a specialized cult. Whatever Blake's prophecies may be, they can hardly be code messages. They may need interpretation, but not deciphering: there can be no "key" and no
open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation. The amateur of cabalism who accepts obscure truisms for profound truths, and sentimental platitudes for esoteric mysteries, would do well to steer clear of Blake. No: I mean the tendency to describe Blake in terms of certain stereotypes which imply that he can be fully appreciated only by certain types of mind, and which tend to scare the ordinary reader away from him. (p. 7)

This is strong stuff, and strikes a posture echoed by Bloom throughout the Commentary and a position repeated in later works. Bloom has observed that "Any poem's initial problem is to make room for itself—it must force the previous poems to move over and so clear some space for it." In this Darwinian struggle, "Poems fight for survival in a state of poems, which by definition has been, is now, and is always going to be badly over-populated" (Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 121).

It does not seem unfair to us to view Frye's comments, quoted above, as exemplary of a comparable situation in the academic world. In a rhetoric of democratic egalitarianism, Frye was freeing Blake and the reader from the tyranny of rival modes of interpreting. But he was also clearing "professional" space for his reading, dismissing as "dilettantes" and "amateurs" those who would take a different view. We do not doubt that Frye—and Bloom in his Commentary—were speaking the truth as they saw it. But from our vantage point we can see that the Erdman edition in its present form with Commentary continues to reflect the institutional dominance of a definable set of views, now reinforced by the MLA/CSE seal of approval and the perhaps inevitable adoption of the new Erdman text as the text of reference for "reputable" Blake scholars. The very datedness of the Commentary is, in this context, of no small heuristic value, because it enables us to see more clearly what is often hidden under unexamined contemporary assumptions of truth and propriety. In this case, the power relationship is truly reciprocal, for as the Commentary helps to substantiate the "textuality" of the edited text, the institutionalized canonical authority of the text confers special status on the Commentary.

To return now to the first aspect of this reciprocal relationship, we note that the Commentary proceeds to elucidate the poetry by following and paralleling the edited text, failing its task to some degree by commenting selectively on only a part of the poetry, and conflicting with the editorial arrangement of texts by citing The Four Zoas frequently in the Commentary on Milton and Jerusalem, which Erdman has chosen to print before in his insistence on a non-chronological order. The Commentary is oblivious to the interpretive problems posed by the variations in existing copies of works like Urizen, or Milton, where the edited text is different from each of the four extant copies. Bloom acknowledges "problems of continuity" in Milton (E 909) but seems in the Commentary to have no trouble at all in following the "strictly narrative sequence" of the poem.

Jerusalem also is open to different readings, given the "variant" order of the plates in Chapter 2. It seems clear that the five copies of the poem can be arranged chronologically in the order A C D E F by means of watermark dating. The only variation of the order of the plates occurs in Chapter 2, where ACF have one order and DE have a different order. The editorial views on which ordering is best to follow in a printed text are divided, with Erdman choosing to follow the ACF order as base text, indicating the DE order in brackets, while acknowledging that in his view Blake "found both sequences attractive but considered neither definitive" (E 809). The editorial decision is made by Erdman without giving a reason, but Bloom, in Blake's Apocalypse, may provide a clue to the choice. In that earlier work Bloom had announced his preference for the ACF order, describing the structural principle of Chapter 2 as "thematic juxtaposition, of enforcing an opposition by a progressive sharpening of spiritual conflict" rather than "continuous narrative." Furthermore, he found this "sharpening . . . more skillfully rendered in the revised sequence." In spite of his disclaimers of narrative sequence for Chapter 2 in Blake's Apocalypse, Bloom can proceed in his Commentary with a narrativizing reading that asserts of plates 46:3-48:12 that "The general power of this sequence is founded to an unusual degree upon Blake's careful preparation for it. . . . The collapse of man's hope in the nightmare of history is the theme of this sequence, and the context Blake has developed allows him to make so large a statement with appropriate authority" (E 938).

Such claims are clearly contrary to Bloom's rejection of "continuous narrative" form for Chapter 2 in Blake's Apocalypse: but perhaps more to the point, since we all change our minds, is the fact that in the revised order of Jerusalem, copies D and E, there is no possibility of a "sequence" linking 46-48, since Blake had moved plate 46 to position 32, almost at the beginning of the chapter. Nor is there the possibility of finding "careful preparation" for the non-existent "sequence," since plates 43-45 were moved to positions 29-31 (the very first plate of the Chapter is 28 in both versions). Plate 43 does indeed begin with a "Then . . . ." but the when of the "then" is quite different for the two chapters if one is set on narrativizing them. Similarly the "now" of Bloom's "Vala now appears" (E 935, referring to plate 29 in ACF but to plate 33 in DE) is quite different—and other similar variations could be cited. Anyone who has actually tried to reconstitute and "read" the DE version out of Erdman's text knows that, although theoretically possible, doing so is as difficult as "reading" the other three versions of Milton from the edited version. Given this difficulty, and the reinforcing pressure of Bloom's narrativizing Commentary; given also the expectation announced on p. VI that this volume "can be expected to receive immediate acceptance . . . as a standard scholarly edition," do we
not have what amounts to a *de facto* canonization of the ACF Chapter 2 with no adequate reason brought forth to justify it?

The reciprocal reinforcement of text and Commentary is much more symbolic than practical in the nineteen pages of Commentary on *The Four Zoas*. Here is a case where the relationship between interpretation and establishing the "text" is so problematic as to be crucial, yet Bloom could shift his Commentary based on the "rival versions" of Night VII to conform to the new order without making more than the minimum perfunctory changes. Perhaps this is because the interpretation of the poem worked out in *The Visionary Company* and *Blake's Apocalypse* preceded the establishment of "the text" by Erdman, being "based" instead on "the standard edition of Sir Geoffrey Keynes" with Bloom's quotations departing silently from Keynes "sometimes [according to] a judgment of my own." At any rate, the frequent citations of Erdman throughout the Commentary on *The Four Zoas*, and the powerful play of a formalizing and narrativizing approach—shared with or derived from Frye—manage to order and domesticate the poem without mentioning a single textual crux. The effect of this reading, juxtaposed with Erdman's text, is to suggest both the adequacy of the reading to the text and the adequacy of the text to the reading.

To conclude, let us tune in to Bloom's Commentary as it nears the "end" of the poem. In his Commentary on Night VIII (perhaps written after the apocalyptic Night IX) Bloom detects "apocalyptic yearnings" manifested by Blake. He discovers a "great and climactic passage" which "testifies to a dramatically matured Los" and moves on to Night IX to find Blake's "most poetically successful section," apparently because it is "the simplest to follow as far as narrative continuity is concerned," and therefore best exhibits the desired "apocalyptic pattern." Night IX is followed through "deliberate crises" and "brilliant fantasies," through "restoration of Luvah and Vala" and "restoration of Tharmas and Enion" to the end where "Blake's vision . . . attains one of its triumphs." Along the way, "between the last 'Winter in the night of Time' in 138:19 and the new Sun of line 20, the world turns inside out and reality at last appears." Is what we have here Blake's apocalypse, or Bloom's apocrypha? Bloom lifts the veil of Blake's language for reality "at last" to appear. But the reader, confronting the Erdman text, may be reminded of Joyce's parodic "ending" of the Ithaca section in *Ulysses* and of the concluding interrogations:

In spite of Bloom's evocation of a "personal reference" in the conclusion of Night IX, and the post-apocalyptic bathos of his surprising and unexplained assertion that the poem "was never properly completed in the Blakean sense," readers are left to confront the presumed reciprocal adequation between the words of the printed text and the Commentary. If readers are puzzled in this situation, can we blame them if they turn towards alternative views of the text and of Commentary?

**CODA**

The collective Angelic voice of the Modern Language Association Committee on Scholarly Editions has announced the emergence of the new E as the consummation of a "wedding of scholarly and practical publishing." As such—like the nuptials of Los and Enitharmon—it is deserving of "enormous Revelry, Responding!" We applaud the new typefont for the *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*! We rejoice over the inclusion of running line totals for each night of *The Four Zoas*, which alleviates the necessity of the Keynes interface for locating citations in the Blake *Concordance*. We take pleasure in the deletion of the exclamation mark, "The Tyger" 1.6, and in the deletion of the question mark, *VDA* 1.7, as well as in a host of other improvements! But we hope that all who care about Blake will not rest too long in the "mild & pleasant Rest" of this textual Beulah, accepting it as "a pleasant lovely shadow/Where no dispute can come . . . Enraptured with affection sweet and mild benevolence" (E 129). Such an attitude would tend to leave Editor Erdman as the current Angel sitting at the tome of Blake's energetic exertion of talent, and to find that this edition is the linen clothes all folded up. For however improved, approved, or newly revised it may be, the straight and narrow edited road of typeset print neither brings forth the excess, surplus, or overflowing of Blake's text, nor leads to its palace of wisdom.

*Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius.*

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*Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius.*

*Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius.*

**When?**

Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roe's egg in the night of the bed of all the auk's of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brighdayler.

**Where?**

*Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are roads of Genius.*
Improvement makes strait roads: but the crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius.

Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius.

Improvement makes straight roads; but the crooked roads without improvement are roads of Genius.

Improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads without improvement are roads of Genius.

Improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius.

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"The Modern Language Association Committee on Scholarly Editions has voted to award this revised edition its emblem of approval. According to the CSL chairman, Don L. Cook of Indiana University, this is the first time that a volume that can be expected to receive immediate acceptance both as a standard scholarly edition and a classroom text has received the CSL emblem. 'We are particularly pleased to have been able to co-operate in this wedding of scholarly and practical publishing.'

"The advice and inspection by the committee have inspired the editor to reconsider and improve the exactness of the several kinds of editorial treatment required by the diversity of textual sources. By award of this emblem the CSL signifies that this volume is based on a thorough study of the variant forms, is prepared through consistent application of explicit editorial principles, records all emendations to the copy-text introduced by the editors, and has been scrupulously and repeatedly proofread to prevent unintentional alterations." (p. VI)


"Jerusalem to the Public"

[Plate 3]

SHEEP

To the Public

GOATS

[*] After my three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean, I again display my Giant forms to the Public: My former Giants & Fairies having receiv'd the highest reward possible; the 2 and 2 of those with whom to be connected is to be 1; I cannot doubt that this more consolidated & extended Work will be as kindly received—The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes

the Reader will be with me, wholly One in Jesus our Lord, who is the God 8 and Lord 9 to whom the Ancients look'd and saw his day ajar off, with trembling & amazement.

[**] The Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin; he who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body; will never enter there. I am perhaps the most sinful of men; I pretend not to holiness! yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with daily, as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore [Dear] Reader, [forgive] what you do not approve, & [love] me for this energetic exertion of my talent.

To the Public

After my three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean. I again display my Giant Forms to the Public: My former Giants & Fairies having received the highest reward possible, the end of those, with whom to be connected, is to be that thus more consolidated & extended Work, will be as hardly received as The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes.

I also hope the Reader will be with me wholly One in Jesus our Lord, who is the God, and Lord to whom the Ancients looked, and saw his day afar off, with trembling & amazement.

The Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin: he who waits to righteous before he enters into the Saviour's kingdom, the Divine Door will never enter there. I am perhaps the most sinful of men, pretend not to holiness, yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with God as man with man. & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore dear Reader, what you do not approve, & may be for this energetic exerion of my talent.

Reader, of books! of heaven,
And of that God from whom
We in mysterious Sinai's awful cave,
In Man the wondroues art of writing gave,
Again he speaks in thunder and in fire
Thunder of Thought, & flames of fierce desire:
Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear.
Within the unfathomed caverns of my Ear.
Therefore I print: nor vain my types shall be:
Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony.

"Of the Measure in which the following Poem is written.

Who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep.

When this Verse was first dictated to me, I consider a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator, such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences, & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its due place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts of the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts; all are necessary to each other. Poetry Letter'd, Letters, the Human Race. Nations are Destroy'd, or flourish, in proportion as their Poetry Painting and Music are Destroy'd or flourish. The Primeval State of Man was Wisdom, Art, and Science.

4. Jerusalem (copy F), pl. 3. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.
But I wander on the rocks
With hard necessity.

6. Where is my golden palace
Where my every bed
Where the joy of my morning hour
Where the sons of eternity singing

7. To awake bright Urijah my king;
To arise to the mountain sport
To the hills of eternal valleys.

8. To awake my king in the morn:
To embrace Ahania's joy
On the breast of his open bosom:
From my soft cloud of dew to fall
In showers of life on his harvests

9. When he gave my happy soul
To the sons of eternal joy
When he took the daughters of life
Into my chambers of love.

10. When I found, babes of bliss
And bosoms of milk in my chambers
Fulld with eternal seed
O eternal births, sung round Ahania
In interchange sweet of their joys.

11. Swelled with ripeness & fat with fatness
Bursting on minds my odors
My ripe figs and rich pomegranates
In infant joy at thy feet
O Urijah sported and sang:

12. Then thou with thy lap full of seed
With thy hand full of generous fire
Walked forth from the clouds of morning
On the verges of springing joy
On the human soul to cast
The seed of eternal science.

13. The sweat poured down thy temples
To Ahania returned in evening
The moisture, awake to birth
My mothers-joys, sleeping in bliss

14. But now alone over rocks, mountains
Grew out from thy lovely bosom:
Cruel jealousy, selfish fear;
Self-destroying: how can delight
Renew in these chains of darkness
Where bones of beasts are strown
On the bleak and snowy mountains
Where bones from the birth are buried
Before they see the light.

FINIS

5. The Book of Ahania, pl. 5. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.
Chap. II:

1. But the forehead of Urizen gathering.
   And his eyes pale with anguish, "his lips"
   Blue & changing: in tears and bitter
   Cenotaph he prepared his Bow.

2. Form'd of Rubs: that in his dark solitude
   When obscure in his forests fell monsters
   Arise. For his dire Contemplations
   Rush'd down like floods from his mountains
   In torrents of mud settling thick.
   With Eggs of unnatural production
   Forthwith hatching; some howld on his hills
   Some in vales, some aloft flew in air

3. Of these, an enormous dread Serpent
   Scaled and poisonous harned.
   Approach'd Urizen, even to his knees
   As he sat on his dark rooted Oak.

4. With his horns he prodded furious
   Great the conflict & great the jealousy
   In cold poisons: but Urizen smote him.

5. First he poison'd the rocks with his blood.
   Then polished his ribs, and his sinews
   Driv'd, laid them apart till winter;
   Then a Bow black prepar'd; on this Bow
   A poisoned rock placed in silence:
   He uttered these words to the Bow.

6. O Bow of the clouds, of secrecy
   O nerve of that lustform'd monster.
   Send this rock swift, invisible thro'
   The black clouds, on the bosom of Fuzon

7. So raging. In torment of his wounds,
   He bent the enormous ribs slowly:
   A circle of darknes; then fixed.
   The sinew in its rest; then the Rock
   Poisonous source, placed with art, lifting difficult
   Its weighty bulk: silent the rock lay.

8. While Fuzon his tygers unloosing

Thought Urizen stain by his wrath:
I am God, said he, eldest of things!

9. Sudden sung the rock, swift & invisible
   On Fuzon, flew, entered his bosom:
   His beautiful visage, his treles:
   That gave light to the mornings of heaven
   Were smitten with, darknes; deform'd
   And outstretched, on the edge of the fo-rest

10. But the rock fell upon the Earth.
   Mount Sinai in Arabia.

Chap. III:

1. The Globe shook: and Urizen seated
   In black clouds, his sore wound averted.
   The ointment flow'd, down on the void
   Mixed with blood: here the snake gets her poison.

2. With difficulty & great pain, Urizen
   Laid on high the dead curse:
   On his shoulders he bore it to where
   A tree hung over the Immensity

3. For when Urizen shrank away
   From Eternals, he sat on a rock
   Barren: a rock which himself
   From redounding fancies had petrified
   Many tears fell on the rock,
   Many sparks, of vegetation:
   Soon shot the painted root
   Of Mystery, under his heel:
   It grew a thick tree; he wrote
   In silence his book of iron:
   All the horrid plant bending its boughs
   Grew to roots when it felt the earth
   And again sprung to many a tree.

4. Amazed, started Urizen, when
   He beheld himself compassed round
   And high roosted over with trees
   He arose but the stems stood so thick
   With difficulty and great pain
   Brought his Books: all but the Book

AHANIA

Chap. I

1. Fuson, on a chariot iron-wing'd
   On spiked flames rose; his hot visage
   Flam'd furious, sparkles his hair & beard
   Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders
   On clouds of smoke rises his chariot
   And his right hand burn'd red in its cloud.
   Moulding into a vast globe, his wrath
   As the thunder-stone is moulded.
   "Son of Urizen! silent burnings

2. Shall we worship this Demon of smoke
   Said Fuson, this abstract non-entity
   Thus cloudy God seated on waters
   Now seen, now obscure; King of sorrow?

3. So he spoke in a fiery flame
   On Urizen frowning indignant.
   The Globe of wrath, shaking on high
   Roaring with fury, he threw
   The howling Globe: burning it flew
   Lengthening into a hungry beam, swiftly

4. Opposed to the exulting flam'd beam
   The broad Disk of Urizen upheav'd
   Across the Void many a mile.

5. It was forg'd in mills where the winter
   Beats incessant; ten winters the disk

Unremitting endur'd the cold hammer.

6. But the strong arm that sent it, remem-
   The sounding beam; laughing it tore through
   That beaten mass; keeping its direction
   The cold lawn of Urizen dividing.

7. Dire shriek'd his invisible Lust
   Deep ground Urizen! stretching his awful hand
   Ahania (so name his parted soul)
   He staid on his mountains of Jealousy.
   He ground, anguish'd & called her Sin.
   * Kissing her and weeping over her:
   * Then hid her in darkness in silence:
   Jealous tho' she was invisible.

8. She fell down a faint shadow wandering
   In chaos and circling dark Urizen.
   As the moon anguish'd circles the earth.
   Hopeless, abhor'd! a death-shadow.
   Unseen, unbodied, unknown.
   The mother of Pestilence.

9. But the fiery beam of Fuson
   Was a pillar of fire to Egypt
   Five hundred years wandering on earth
   Till Los seiz'd it and beat in the mols
   With the body of the sun.

To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations

Finis

JERUSALEM
The Emanation of The Giant Albion
1804. Printed by W. Blake Sth Molton St.

PLATE 1
[Frontispiece]


The hardcover edition was first published in 1965 and had sold 6,913 copies by 1972; the paperback was introduced in 1970, and in its most successful year (1974) it sold just under 4,000 copies. The Illuminated Blake, by contrast, has sold only about 15,000 copies in all, with fewer than 1,000 of these in hardcover, since it was published in 1974. We are grateful to Mr. David Gernet of Anchor Press, Double­
day & Co., for supplying these figures.

The initial University of California Press printing of 1,500 copies sold out within a year, leading to a second printing of 1,000 copies and a list price of $38.50. 2,800 additional copies were printed for the first run for a subscription book club. Out thanks to Ms. Anne Ebers, University of California Press, for this information.

In "Redefining the Texts of Blake (another temporary report)" David Erdman announces that "C has been chosen as symbol for the new edition (rather than, say, E) as more impersonal and in recognition of the committee of textual scholars who watched and assisted the labor. . . ." We prefer at least for the time being, for the purposes of this review/essay, to refer to the new E simply as E, specifying "old E" where necessary to avoid confusion. There are indeed pertinent consonantal alliterations that support the Choice of "C" as symbol. It is a Collective enterprise (though we note the Copyright is David V. Erdman, 1965, 1981). It claims to be the Complete Poetry and Prose, and it has been approved by the Committee on Scholarly Editions which is Chaired by Don Cook who announces that "We are particularly pleased to have been able to Co-operate in this wedding of scholarly and practical publishing" (E VI). There may also be suggestions of Correctness and Certainty and Canonical for "a volume that can be expected to receive immediate acceptance both as a standard scholarly edition and a Classroom text" (E VI). But whose Expectations are these? And is it not possible that "C" is a (small) part of the machinery that may enable those expectations to become self-fulfilling? It may be fanciful to imagine that adopting "C" too readily would have any Consequences at all; but the tactical effect of a new Edition with its powerful Claims are potentially vast, not the least of which may be drastically to alter the "value" of the many thousands of Copies of and citations to the old E still in use and circulation. Is the new E in fact so much changed and so much more authoritative that scholars who claim to be reputable will now have to make the switch and require their students to do the same? Has the "text" Changed, even where the wording is the same, by having been more authoritatively certified? How substantial are the changes? Will those readers who continue to use the old E be in Error? Will scholars who cite it be Errant? Must E go the way of K, and must B Continue to remain in left field? We prefer to keep the designation "E." suggesting not only Erdman, but Editing and Editor and Edition, which will be the focus of much of our discussion.

The new E, like the old E, has four illustrations and eight figures, along with the seventeen emblems for The Gates of Paradise (G. E. Bentley, Jr., William Blake's Writings [2 vols.; Oxford: Claren­don, 1978], by contrast, offers three hundred and eleven illustrations).

Stanley Fish, Is There A Text In This Class? (Cambridge: Har­vard University Press, 1980), 148. Two chapters in Fish's book are especially pertinent to our discussion here: "Interpreting the Variatorium," where what Erdman calls "contextual expectations" are discussed by Fish as the "hazarding" of what he calls "interpretive closure;" and "Structuralist Homiletics," where an extended analysis of a passage from Lancelot Andrews gives more detailed examples of how an unfolding verbal and semantic structure is answerable to and shaped by our expectations for its form and meaning.

Or, to invoke the French Blake might have known: "so name": son âme: "his parted soul."

Tony Marcel, "Unconscious Reading: Experiments on People Who Do Not Know That They Are Reading," in Visible Language, 12.4 (Autumn 1978). Julia Kristeva, among others, has emphasized the importance of visibility as a component in establishing the semiotic modality and meaning of a work: "The lines of a grapheme, dis­

position on the page, length of the lines, blank spaces, etc. . . . contribute to the building of a semiotic totality that can be interpreted along multiple paths, a substitute for ethic unity." La Revolution du langage poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p. 219.

See Blake's Composite Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). At the "Blake and Criticism" Conference held at Santa Cruz in May 1982, Mitchell remarked that while working on Blake's il­

luminated poetry he "had to have a printed version of the poetry in order to read it."


9 Or to the "Reader! [lover of books]!" or to the "Reader! [lover of books]!" (the first from E 145; the second from the Trianon Press typographic reprint included with its facsimile [1923]).


11 On this still much neglected pun, see also Aaron Fogel, "Pictures of Speech: On Blake’s Poetic," Studies in Romanticism, 21 (Summer 1982), 224.

12 Cf. the policy of the Longman Annotated English Poets Series, as written by F.W. Bateson: "the series concerns itself primarily with the meaning . . . whatever impedes the reader's sympathetic identi­fication with the poet . . . whether of spelling, punctuation or the use of initial capitals—must be regarded as undesirable" (The Poems of William Blake, ed. W.H. Stevenson [London: Longman, 1971], p. ix). Although this edition is described on the title page as having "text by David V. Erdman" (i.e. poems of Blake, text by Erdman), the policy of the series produces (and, of course, copyrights) a "text" out of the "text"—a "text" which asks us to identify syntagmatically with its text-destroying pretense that "writing/Is the divine revelation in the literal expression."


14 . . . we may say that puns and ambiguities are to common language what adultery and perversion are to 'chaste' (i.e., socially orthodox) sexual relations. They both bring together entities (mean­ings/people) that have 'conventionally' been differentiated and kept apart; and they bring them together in deviant ways, bypassing the orthodox rules governing communications and relationships. (A pun is like an adulterous bed in which two meanings that should be separated are coupled together). It is hardly an accident that Fin­negans Wake, which arguably demonstrates the dissolution of bourgeois society, is almost one continuous pun (the connection with sexual perversion being quite clear to Joyce)." Adultery in the Novel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 33.

15 Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), p. 34; on Stevenson, see note 12 above.


17 Freud, "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious," p. 120. Freud's formulation here suggests that the "habit" is not automatically outgrown. It must be rejected and studiously avoided, and "when we make serious use of words we are obliged to hold ourselves back with a certain effort from this comfortable procedure" (p. 119).


When such effects can't be censored in statu nascendi as Freud suggests, they can be laughed at as childish. If they can't be laughed at, the metaphors that become available for describing them are
revealing. Susanne Langer has argued against the possibility of a “marriage” between the visual and the verbal in art, asserting that there are “no happy marriages... only successful rape” (Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures [New York, 1957], p. 86, quoted in Mitchell, Blake’s Composite Art, p. 3). The metaphor of rape is even stronger than Tanner’s analogy between puns and adultery. Under the rubric of the “concealed offense,” Kenneth Burke discusses various puns and sound effects among “the many modes of criminality hidden beneath the surface of art” (see The Philosophy of Literary Form [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973], pp. 51-66).


22 The problems of editing Shakespeare in general, and Lear in particular, have led to a powerful interrogation of conventional editorial practices, and to the disturbing necessity of facing the existence of multiple substantive texts of Lear. The trailblazing essay on this topic is that of Michael J. Warren, “Quarto and Folio King Lear and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar,” in David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, eds., Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), pp. 95-107. The theatrical differentiation of the Quarto and Folio versions has been explored in great detail by Steven Urkowitz in Shakespeare’s Revision of King Lear (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). A volume of essays focusing on the two texts of Lear and on the editing tradition, edited by Gary Taylor and Michael J. Warren, is forthcoming from Oxford (to be called The Division of the Kingdom). The relationship between editing practice and typography has been extensively explored by Randall McLeod in a number of articles that are pertinent to our critique in a variety of ways, most recently in “UN Editing Shakspeare,” SubStance 33/34, 12.1 (1982), 26-55.

23 For an excellent discussion of Blake’s practice in the context of the commercial norms of the time, see Morris Eaves, “Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology,” PMLA 92.5 (October 1977), 903-927.

24 Kilgore, however, believes that previous editions were “undoubtedly correct in presenting each Night as a unit, rather than attempting to reintegrate VIIb into VIIa or VIIb or both, for such an attempt would be highly presumptuous, and would obscure a problem it could not solve” (p. 112, emphasis added). Our own argument, it will be seen, moves along somewhat similar lines.

25 In a similar light, the practical value of Erdman’s “Editorial Rearrangement” of “Auguries of Innocence,” retained in this edition, might be less in its treatment of the poem than as a vivid synecdochic reminder of a more general editorial presence.


27 Considering that the one possibly competing edition, Bentley’s William Blake’s Writings, retails at $185, the new E—especially in hardback—is a bargain as well (perhaps Oxford University Press will consider marketing a paperback version of Bentley’s edition, so that interested students might have the luxury of comparing the two editions without a trip to the library).

28 “UN Editing Shakspeare,” p. 38.

29 For a comparable case, how can we not regard the recent and expensive Oxford edition of Christopher Smart’s Jubilate Agno as a scandal? The editor claims that this work “has been given pride of place” in the proposed complete edition of Smart’s work; yet even the most cursory examination of the two pages of the holograph ms reproduced in that volume (greatly reduced) shows that the typographic edited version is a blatant composite editorial fabrication. Smart’s holograph ms consists of thirty-two pages in all (ten single and three double folio leaves, written on both sides). It is relatively easy to read, even in the reduced format of the Oxford edition (though the “Let” verses are unaccountably placed to the right, the “For” verses to the left). Thirty-two pages of photofacsimile, 12-1/2” X 8”, could have brought this remarkable work before the reader in its own concrete syntax and iconic forcefulness. Instead, we have another editorial curiosity and fiction (copyright, of course) with editorial punctuation supplied, omitted words supplied, emendations added, spelling “mistakes” corrected, ampersands and contractions “silently expanded” and apostrophes “silently supplied.” Katina Williamson, The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, 1, Jubilate Agno (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

30 Among these exclusions are the Songs, both versions of The Gates of Paradise, The Ghost of Abel, An Island in the Moon, the Songs and Ballads, including the Pickering Manuscript poems, and The Everlasting Gospel.

31 Blake’s Apocalypse (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 9. There is one possible exception to this observation in Bloom’s statement (E 898) that in plate 14 of MHH “Blake relates his apocalyptic vision to his work as poet and engraver.” How Blake does so is not explained.

32 Bloom’s tendency toward a linear, chronological notion of poetic “career” both compounds and points up the difficulties of E’s organizational model; the Commentary would have fit more easily into an edition like Keynes’s. E and its Commentary represent, therefore, intersecting and conflicting definitions of poetic career. In E the model is vertical, so to speak, a value hierarchy descending from illuminated works to marginalia and letters; in the Commentary the model is horizontal, following Erdman’s order but consistently implying more conventional, biographical lines of poetic development.


36 Some of the hermeneutic implications of this circularity are hinted at in Northrop Frye’s claim that Blake “is writing for enthusiasts of poetry who, like readers of mystery stories, enjoy sitting up nights trying to find out what the mystery is” (Fearful Symmetry: A Study of Blake’s Thought [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947], p. 7).


40 Though not without contradiction. In Kabbalah and Criticism Bloom announced that if a “reading is wholly a received one, then it will not produce other readings. An entire academy can convene to declare that reading the right one, but of course it will be wrong. It will also be weak” (p. 107). In his review of Martin Butlin’s The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake (New York Times Book Review, January 3, 1982, p. 4), Bloom adopts the authoritative voice of the Academy to rule that the “growing fashion” of studying Blake’s work in unedited form “has not proved intellectually sound.” He goes on to dismiss a variety of “followers,” including Marxists, and to praise the “generation of readers who have achieved a loving and accurate understanding of Blake’s poetry and prose within the traditions of Western literature.”

41 Apropos of the Erdman “text,” Erdman finds D “the latest and most nearly complete copy,” but fails to respect its omissions even though he speculates that Blake was working towards the goal of making Milton “an even 50” plates “as he saw Jerusalem shaping into 100 plates” (E 806). He claims that Blake, “though keeping to two Books, was proud to commemorate his original plan” by clearly printing the numeral 12 and using “careful stipple work to strengthen the shadow emphasizing each digit.” If this is the case, why does Erdman choose for his printed title “MILTON / a Poem in 2 Books” rather than “MILTON / a Poem in 12...
Reviewed by David Worrall

Stephen Cox's study of the way in which several late eighteenth-century writers perceived and portrayed personal identity contains tantalizing but often inconclusive or slenderly-based interpretations. The single chapter on Blake has, in any case, now been largely superseded by Leopold Damrosch Jr.'s Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980). However, "The Stranger Within Thee" (a resonant quotation from Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition) is not without suggestive and constructive ways of reading Blake. Cox's discussion, in an early chapter, of the eighteenth century's urge to find a social significance for the individual self led this reviewer to look with a different perspective at some of Blake's more perplexing passages. Unfortunately, although Cox recognizes that Blake's concept of the self was different from the mainstream one of his predecessors and contemporaries, he seems unsure and faltering in his readiness to discuss Blake's major works.

Cox begins his book with a brief commentary on the problems of solipsism (although the introductory chapter of Robert Langbaum's The Mysteries of Identity [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977] is better and fuller) and leads quickly to what is his central view of the philosophy of the self: that it was the idea of "sympathetic" sensibility that eighteenth-century philosophers found most useful when formulating their theories of a "feeling" self. The presence of sympathy and sensibility gives individuals moral approbation and social significance and accounts, as Cox persuasively notes, for the Ossianic vogue whose "feeling" heroes corresponded flatteringly closely with what the eighteenth century wished to think about its past. Not that they had a cozy view of man's identity, however: "eighteenth-century concepts of the self as a creature of feeling are highly ambiguous; they do not suggest an image of the self that is particularly assured or impressive." (p. 56). Cox's discussions of individual authors show how they were all ridden with doubts or contradictions about the identity of themselves.

The organization of the chapter on Samuel Richardson around Clarissa makes this part of the book the most persuasive. Apt and steadily supplied quotation is used to explore the insecurity and roleplaying of Lovelace and the contradictory desires of a Clarissa whose wish for independence is compromised by her desire for social recognition. Cox finds Clarissa's overlong death an abdication on Richardson's part. He "neglects the complex issues of personal integrity and motivation that he has pursued throughout the rest of the novel" and converts "the tragedy of personality into the tragedy of situation." Richardson, Cox argues, found Clarissa's struggle to hold on to a personal sense of her individual self a quality his fictionalizing could do little to embody, which is why he opts for the heightening of social and filial sympathy after her rape. It is that crisis which gives her individuality a social significance it had previously lacked and enables Richardson to obscure the problems of resolving Clarissa's internal struggles about the integrity of her own identity and her relationship with society.

It is wise of Cox to give some emphasis to this partial failure of Richardson, because novelists can sometimes appear to be remote and distant from the dramatic autonomy of the characters they create. This gulf, if it exists at all, is less apparent between poet and poem, and it is from poetry that Cox finds it most possible to pose judgments on writers' perceptions of themselves.

All is not well with some of these judgments, however. It is worrying to find Gray summed up as "at best, grandly pathetic; at worst, remote and sterile" (p. 98) on the basis of a discussion that does not last twenty pages.
and which relies heavily for its crucial conclusion that Gray was pessimistic about the significance of the self on a study of hardly more than four stanzas of the *Elegy*. Calling the gothic poems “galleries of the ideal states in which Gray imagined that the self could attain its greatest significance” (p. 97) is an illuminating remark. The Bard’s suicide is not an act of impotence but of stylized heroic passion, the Bard himself a gesture rather than a personality.

Although the conclusions here, and elsewhere, are often grander than the weight of evidence assembled might support, it is welcome to see any discussion of Thomas Chatterton—whose place in literary history (shelve under Cinderella Romantics?) now stands level with Blake’s reputation a hundred years ago. Cox argues fascinatingly but thinly that Rowley and Canynge are the personae of Chatterton’s self, heroes packaged (consciously or not) for eighteenth-century literary aesthetics. Chatterton can only write with barbarous sublimity of action and character if he first has Rowley act as the respectable “translator” of those works from a less sophisticated age, with Canynge standing as Rowley’s bourgeois guarantor. This three-cornered piece of fabrication seems an exquisitely apposite interpretation of Chatterton’s forgeries though further conclusions gathered from odd lines and episodes in the naïve *Aella* seem less secure.

Cox’s thesis on William Cowper (“The outside world provides him with a mirror of himself, but it is, after all, a mirror distorted by his own ideas” [p. 124]) is not new, as debts paid in the footnotes show.

The chapter on Blake, which forms the conclusion of the book, is not a definitive study of Blake’s concept of the self. The relevant passages (familiar to all Blake scholars) from *All Religions Are One* and *The Book of Urizen* are rehearsed quite straightforwardly. Blake’s special figure of the self’s “Spectre,” however, despite its visual and verbal appearances in *Jerusalem*, is not even mentioned, while even the early *Book of Thel*, which one had imagined to be more or less all about the self, is only referred to fleetingly. Cox can only conclude rather lamely that Blake’s “philosophy of the self will probably always elude definitive interpretation” (p. 151). It is a pity he makes only oblique use of *Milton* (“Self-annihilation” is quoted but not explicated) because his stress on the eighteenth-century concept of benevolent sensibility seems to be partially what Blake was reacting against in *Milton* as a result of his experiences with William Hayley. *Milton* is also a poem in which Blake makes unusually complicated distinctions between the states of the self. For example, Blake first distinguishes Milton’s “Shadow” from his “real and immortal Self” before passing on to an extraordinarily vivid description of his concept of the “vortex.” That these two ideas, the self and the vortex, should be placed together so closely (both on pl. 15) is a natural function of Blake’s narrative technique, which is usually more conventional than recent critical contrivance would allow. The vortex alters and controls the self’s perception of space and time. Once a vortex is “pass’d,” that vortex can become anything the eye sees or the mind perceives: a starry universe “Or like a human form, a friend with whom he livd benevolent.” This last is a curious line constructed with Blake’s usual compressed precision.

The “friend” with whom Blake “livd benevolent” before he wrote *Milton* was William Hayley. Passing the vortex of Hayley, who turned out to be a spiritual enemy, was essential for Blake’s voyage through eternity. The irony for Blake and Hayley’s relationship (as is silently implicit from a cumulative reading of Cox’s book) was that Hayley was doing exactly what the eighteenth century thought most conferred significance on the existence of the self, that is, acting benevolently. The problem for Blake was that he responded gratefully to that benevolence. Benevolence as a humane ideal is the product of a sophisticated society but can also be the expression of the self in search of its own significance, which is why corporeal friends can so easily become spiritual enemies. This must have been a lesson learned the hard way for Blake, who had criticized hypocritical sensibility as early as “The Human Abstract” of *Songs of Experience*. That Blake blamed himself as much as he did Hayley for such a mistaken experiment in patronage is clear from the way he buries this piece of autobiography in the midst of a passage concerning those things (eternity, infinity) dearest to his heart. Blake’s metaphor for eternity in *Milton* is of an onward-stepping traveler: Blake’s footsteps along his Felpham cottage path and through the world. However, eternity is also the vortex of that which comes next. The friend lived with benevolently is forgiven as that relationship recedes into the past. It is in the nature of whatever is behind Blake that it can be seen in its finite entirety, perhaps first a globe but then as a sun and, after, a universe. In the same way, benevolence viewed backwardly can be seen and forgiven as an act of the self and not a spiritual friendship. Blake explains, if not excuses, his own mistakes by reminding us in this passage that what is “apparent” to the “weak traveller confin’d beneath the moony shade” may be neither the entire picture nor the whole truth. Man may think that his “corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square” are everything that there is because that is what his eye and mind perceive. The earth from whose surface he views “the rising sun & setting moon” is really a paradox of the finite. The earth is actually “one infinite plane” because, despite the appearance of those neat “square” fields, the earth at ground level (which is where *Milton* finishes and Blake ends up) is a differently-perceived globe or sphere over which the weak traveler may hurry but never find a boundary or ending.

Perception, cosmology, geometry, and autobiography are all locked up together in Blake’s idea of the self and, while it has value as a general study, “The Stranger Within Thee” doesn’t go very far towards providing a key to Blake’s crystal cabinet.

Blake's Ancient of Days displays the paradox of creativity. The creator's tools inscribe form where there was once only chaos and void. But every decision made is a limit set. So with the writing of books, as Blake observed in his Memorable Fancy of the printing house in hell. Each choice a writer makes contributes form by removing possibilities. In Pamela Dunbar's study William Blake's Illustrations to the Poetry of Milton, two decisions and two consequent salient features of the book—its comprehensive nature and its plate-by-plate format—in large part account for both success and failure.

The author's attempt to compile all possibly relevant information in her commentary is advantageous to the reader using the book for reference. Introductory treatments for each of the series of illustrations include facts of provenance, discussion of dating, identification of themes, and preliminary suggestions about Blake's attitude toward Milton's text. The commentary for the individual plates provides, in addition, some precise physical description along with discussion of composition and design. Related works by Blake, his probable sources, and contemporary analogues are noted. The origins for the illustrations in Milton's text are cited. Relatively full mention is also made of passages in Blake's poetry that may touch upon Milton's concerns, echo his language, use similar imagery, or in some manner match the ambience of the designs. Since the compilation of information makes this book useful as a general first source, it is unfortunate that its select bibliography is so slim. Notably absent is any mention of significant interpretive pieces by John Karl Franson, Karl Kiralis, and, at the time of Dunbar's publication, five articles by Stephen Behrendt. Still, the book's broad sweep through its subject does bring together a rich potpourri, a wealth of detail, and more than a few provocative insights.

It picks up clutter as well. The attempt to be complete in the discussion of each separate plate produces redundancy and a great deal of internal inconsistency. The author painstakingly observes, for instance, each and every occurrence of the spread-armed Jupiter Pluvius motif as if it were a new discovery. If one illustration in some way resembles another, the reader may count on being told that, twice. Perhaps here the advantage of completeness to a reader looking up one design may outweigh the stylistic annoyance to another who is pursuing the entire text, but the author's habit of first adopting an interpretive stance for one series of illustrations and then changing the premises when she comes to discuss another series is less defensible.

For instance, Dunbar explains II Penseroso 3, The Spirit of Plato, as Blake's aspersion against the malign influence of Plato on Milton, but her reading of the Paradise Regained series depends upon Blake's holding an approbatory view of Milton's Platonism. In discussing Paradise Lost 1, Satan Rousing his Legions, Dunbar decides that Satan is given a negative characterization because of his association with the rocky landscape of hell. Her interpretation is based on connections between the design and the solidified, stony, constricted world of the fallen Urizen, Blake's poetry being taken as the proper reference point for the interpretation. In the Paradise Regained series it is Christ who is firmly planted in a rocky landscape. Here Dunbar ignores the deprecatory possibilities of the setting for Blake and reads the connection as a positive one. Christ is associated with the steadfastness of rock in Paradise Regained, and here the interpreter makes Milton's poetry, not Blake's, the reference point. Such inconsistencies occur not only between series but within them. For example, Dunbar claims that Christ's pointing heavenward in Paradise Regained 2, The Temptation of Bread, indicates simply his concern with spiritual values, ignoring any subversive implication in that the gesture is made with his left hand. However, she emphatically invokes left-right symbolism in Paradise Regained 7, The Temptation of the Kingdoms, when she interprets a similar gesture by Satan as indicative of his reversal of proper values.

The method of treating each separate design as a discrete entity results, then, in inconsistencies and uncertainties in understanding the whole of Blake's Milton criticism. The lack of a consistent interpretive stance is not simply a want of cohesiveness or finished juncture. It marks a failure of decision that one looks for in literary criticism, to which one turns, not just for creative possibilities, but for clarity.

Complementing Dunbar's decision to read each design independently is her decision to treat all variants of a design together. The method has again the advantage of comprehensiveness in that all versions of a design are touched upon during one primary discussion. The approach tends to emphasize similarities, while blurring distinctions between illustrations that exist in multiple series, often widely separated in time and varying significantly in tone—two series of illustrations for Comus
(c. 1801, and c. 1815), two for the Nativity Ode (1809, and c. 1815), and two full series and a partial third for *Paradise Lost* (1807, 1808, and 1822).

The disadvantages of the composite view are most apparent in Dunbar's discussion of the *Comus* designs, where one of her own best insights is obscured in the interest of explanations that are stretched to cover two highly differentiated visual interpretations. In her introductory commentary Dunbar observes that while the earlier, Huntington series emphasizes an account of adolescent sexuality, the Boston version highlights the theme of Neoplatonic incarnation in Milton's masque. The insight is clearly valid, an inference substantiated by reference to the changed characterizations of both the Lady and Comus. Comparing the Huntington and Boston versions of *Comus* 1, 5, and 6, one observes that the Lady's gestures change from fearful, distraught, and morbidly self-defensive to open, relaxed, and self-assured. Comparing the characterization of Comus in the same designs, one observes that the antagonist is transformed from a clumsy, flatfooted oaf into a lithe and energetic tempter. If left-right symbolism is observed, one may note that the malevolent clod with his left foot planted firmly forward in the first version of *Comus* 6 becomes an energetic devil springing forward with his right in the later version of the design. Such fundamental changes, along with the movement away from the ponderous, dark coloration to a lighthanded watercolor touch in the later series and the introduction of the redemptive rainbow in the revised version of *Comus* 7, clearly indicate that Blake's second interpretation of Milton's masque was a more approving view. Since it is the Neoplatonic myth rather than the parable of virginity preserved with which Blake would have found favor, it appears that his method in the second interpretation, as in other series with multiple versions, is to break through the encrustation of moralizing error, to delve deeper, and to display more clearly in a final vision the underlying truth in Milton's poetry. The insight is suppressed in Dunbar's interpretation by the confines of her approach, that blends both versions into a blurred composite reading.

In the preliminaries to her *Paradise Lost* chapter, Dunbar presents her strongest Blakean argument. She sees Blake's designs for Milton's epic as revisionary, as criticism wrenching free into creation. She proposes that the series be read in the manner S. Foster Damon has read the Job series—as an inner drama, with Satan as Adam's spectre and the serpent as a further objectification of the hardened, negative qualities of fallen man. The thesis is admirably introduced in the discussion of *Paradise Lost* 1, *Satan Rousing his Legions*, where a doleful Satan, embodying extreme self-centeredness and immense despair, is displayed in a gloomy setting that evokes in Blake's terms the rocky congealings of self-love and the livid, self-consuming fires of a mental hell of repression. Dunbar sees the image as a proleptic representation of man in the fallen world. The notion of an inner drama also provides Dunbar with an imaginative perspective upon *Paradise Lost* 4, *Satan Spying on Adam and Eve*. This design pictures Satan as a stripling cherub caught in the serpent's coils, hovering above the bower of Adam and Eve. Dunbar has devised for the scene an image of self-division, with the troubled cherub's countenance and the guileful serpent's glance suggesting that the devil is of two minds with regard to disturbing paradisal bliss—wrecked by remorse, but impelled by envy's sting. Dunbar's reading expands upon the theme of division by suggesting that Satan's sadness is explained by the fact that Adam is Satan's own fundamental self. From this perspective, the design as a whole becomes a symbolic representation of divisiveness and mental torment. The original androgynous man is already divided into the male and female. Further, Satan as Adam's alter ego is at odds with his serpent selfhood. Dunbar also employs the conception of *Paradise Lost* as psychodrama in her reading of the series' final plate. In describing Blake's version of *The Expulsion*, she observes that it is the serpent selfhood that leads Adam into the deadly sleep of the fallen world.

Unfortunately, however, the inner drama is lost sight of in Dunbar's commentaries for other designs of the series and is noticeably missing from what one might expect to be its central scene, the temptation. In discussing *Paradise Lost* 9, *The Fall of Eve*, and Blake's tempera painting *The Temptation of Eve*, Dunbar confines her commentary to remarks about Blake's notions of the sexual division of the primordial man and the depravity of female independence. The earlier thesis is dropped in favor of a new line of commentary. The temptation is interpreted as the appropriation of individuality by separated male and female entities. Dunbar's discussion of *Paradise Lost* 9 demonstrates her proclivity for mentioning analogues without specifying their significance. Citing *Vala*, she observes, "The ravishing of Enion by the Spectre of her principal, Tharmas, is described in terms that may remind us of the Eve-and-Serpent group of *Paradise Lost IX*" (p. 76). The vague connective "may remind us" is allowed to introduce an otherwise unexplained comparison. The surface affinities between the verbal and visual pictures of the ravishing of Enion and the fall of Eve are readily apparent. There may well be deeper connections as well, but Dunbar typically does not pursue such evidence to probe the way Milton influenced Blake's imagination or to discover the implications for understanding either Blake's own poetry or his interpretation of Milton's in the illustrations for his poetry. *William Blake's Illustrations to the Poetry of Milton* succeeds in being a compendium of creative possibilities, a montage of sometimes striking, but fragmented views. It fails to be a coherent piece of literary criticism.
Language is an intricate and elusive object of study, yet language increasingly offers many disciplines a privileged model for study. This is perhaps most obvious in structuralist and poststructuralist writings, which insistently return to, and revise, Saussurian linguistics as a seemingly inevitable movement of their inquiry. Such theories have fostered a renewed attention to the role of language in earlier works, in Freud and Wittgenstein, for example, whose complex discursive practices further their use of language as a means of questioning, modeling, and understanding their subjects. It is no surprise, then, given the impressive genealogy and current prestige of language as a system for critical study.

W. J. T. Mitchell recognizes—indeed emphasizes—the diversity of interests in *The Language of Images*, a collection of fourteen essays, most of which first appeared in a special issue of *Critical Inquiry*. Mitchell’s introduction identifies three meanings for its title: (1) “language about images” (how we describe and discuss images); (2) “images regarded as a language”; and (3) “verbal language as a system informed by images” (how pictorial and spatial images structure language). I suppose this generous definition of the project is in keeping with *Critical Inquiry*’s insistence on an “ideology of pluralism.” Yet it seems too generous, especially since the category of “language about images” seems to have included any piece reflecting slightly on critical practice. I do not see that the essays by Steinberg, Mast, Arnheim, Gombrich, Searle, and Morgan have much very directly to do with language. Several of them do challenge received critical concepts (e.g., Mast, Morgan) or clarify how a specific problem should be conceived (Searle’s “Las Meninas and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation” neatly lays out the issues raised by Velasquez’s painting). But none of them extends his analysis to the particularities of language, to the ways critical terms represent—or constitute—images in useful or misleading ways.

What is at stake here is not the “unity” of a collection of essays, which seems a trivial and fruitless complaint. In one sense, it would be unfair to charge contributors with not concentrating on what an editor (or reviewer) names as the unifying concern of the collection. But as I read and reread this volume, it became increasingly clear that what distinguished the best essays was their serious attention to language, especially to the complexity of the exchanges between verbal and visual systems. And what marked the less successful essays was lack of specific concern for language, or else a relatively uncritical or even mistaken notion of language. Quite apart from abstract questions of whether the title is appropriate, “the language of images” seems to have designate the close involvement with verbal-visual exchanges needed to develop further our understanding of images. Studies that shy away from considering the reciprocal interactions of language and images are ignoring what is crucial to either the production or interpretation of both verbal and visual art.

The difficulties arising when the complexity of such interactions is slighted are exemplified by Rudolph Arnheim’s “A Plea for Visual Thinking,” which claims that higher level thinking “is impossible without recourse to perceptual images” (176). Arnheim attacks the view of perception as a neutral gathering of data with no effect on the way we think, and argues that perception significantly mediates the information it makes available to thought. This may offer a useful if unremarkable corrective to some benighted psychologists. But Arnheim himself falls prey to a similar positivistic error by denying language’s role in perception or in the production or interpretation of images used in thought. He treats language as a simple “reflector” of thought, as a way of “codifying” its results, as “only a set of references to facts that must be given and handled in some other medium” (172, 173, 175). This scientistic reduction of language is necessary to isolate a purely visual thinking as a necessary component of information processing. Yet even the simple schematic diagrams Arnheim uses to illustrate his thesis always depend on linguistic operations for their conceptual value. One of Arnheim’s figures, for example, is derived from a
painting entitled “The Sensation of Flight”: it depicts several rectangles and a cross, all tilted so that they are oriented on the diagonal from lower left to upper right. Arnheim claims that “one can take cognizance of the picture by simply looking at it” (176). Yet the way we construe this image is never simply a matter of visual apprehension. Guided by the title, for example, I may “see” the figures as floating upwards and to the right. Given a different verbal cue, I would “see” it differently, as, say, a schematic aerial view of “buildings” in a landscape, or as an abstraction of a “hammer” falling on several surfaces, or even (curiouser and curiouser) as several “rectangles” and a “cross” oriented along an invisible “diagonal.” Language always supplements perception: altering the semiotic context will lead viewers to construe features of images differently. Since Arnheim ignores language, he oversimplifies how even simple diagrams come to signify, to say nothing of far richer and more problematic pictorial or phenomenological images.

Even as intriguing and at times brilliant an essay as Leo Steinberg’s “The Line of Fate in Michelangelo’s Painting” falters because it does not attend to the signifying process with the care that more concern for the “language of images” should entail. Steinberg discerns a descending diagonal in several of Michelangelo’s paintings, and he uses this “line of fate” as the geometric basis for speculative, yet richly detailed and suggestive readings of these images. What he does not explain, however, is how an abstract linear construction, especially one not strongly marked by compositional devices, can carry such a heavy burden of meaning. Steinberg takes for granted an audience familiar with the elaborate apparatus of modern art history and formalist aesthetics, and thus comfortable with interpretations based on abstract formal relationships. Armed with such formidable mechanisms for producing readings, clever critics may discover any number of significant configurations. But such interpretations, however ingenious, ignore the question of reading, of how images function as a language: instead, they reproduce quite standard disciplinary methods of constituting visual meaning, even if they present themselves (as this essay sometimes does) as extravagantly iconoclastic. This is too bad. Steinberg makes several acute comments on how art historical discourse seems to blind viewers to remarkable qualities of an image. Moreover, he develops an interesting critical technique by studying small variations among contemporaneous copies of Michelangelo’s images: the different visual qualities produced by these variants allow him to articulate the significance of minute details that ordinarily fall beneath the threshold of critical vision. Steinberg’s method should be especially interesting to students of Blake, who was a reproductive engraver and who also “copied” himself—with significant variations—in (re)producing his illuminated pages.

The three best essays in the volume carefully explore the verbal-visual exchanges that underlie the production and interpretation of images. Ernest B. Gilman’s “Word and Image in Quarles’ Emblemes” is an exemplary study of the problematic interactions between verbal and visual components in a genre too often dismissed as unsophisticated. Gilman challenges the traditional view that image and text in emblem books are “commensurate and reinforcing,” that they are “complementary codes” with “each holding the key to deciphering the other” (61). He argues instead that text and design interrogate their own inadequacies as representations of divine truths. Quarles’ use of Catholic images for a logocentric English Protestant culture distrustful of sight, moreover, transformed the emblem till it was “not a transparent sign pointing toward a spiritual meaning but an impediment to what [a viewer] would truly wish to see” (77). What Gilman demonstrates is the difficulty of reading emblems: the text does not simply articulate its image’s meaning nor does the design simply “illustrate” its accompanying poem. There are problems with this essay: Gilman discusses a rather arbitrary selection of emblems without explaining why these emblems are privileged or how they enter into and effect the dynamics of the whole book. But his emphasis on the illegibility of emblems and on the conflicting movements of text and design seems to me to open the issue of the “language of images” in a way that prevents a quick reduction of one medium into a reflection or repetition of the other. This historical study begins to provide a new general understanding of verbal-visual relations: it seems appropriate, therefore, that the essay should end with a reference to Blake, whose practice radically extends the movements Gilman discerns in Quarles’ emblems, and who thus forces a recognition that text and design need not be “commensurate and reinforcing.”

Probably the most innovative and far-reaching theoretical account of the “language of images” is Joel Snyder’s “Picturing Vision,” which demonstrates the need to replace resemblance theories of “natural” correspondences between image and world with historical analyses of the conventional relationships between images and language. Snyder shows that Gombrich’s influential critique of a “realistic” connection between an image and the object it represents merely displaces the question of “natural” resemblances to the visual experience of viewers, to the way certain images stimulate what Gombrich treats as the “automatic” or “programmed” (and hence “natural”) mechanisms of sight. Snyder argues instead that it is not some unchangeable fact of visual experience that paintings seek to emulate. Rather, emerging styles of pictorial representation provide models for describing visual experience with the result that our understanding of how (or even what) we see changes with different systems of making images. It is because we first “picture vision” (that is, define it in terms of the pictorial laws or methods of a culture) that we can then treat pictures as
accurate representations of vision.

Snyder substantiates this apparently paradoxical idea most impressively by showing that photography does not offer neutral evidence for the "realism" of Western pictorial conventions. He reminds us that "cameras represent the incorporation of those schemata into a tool designed and built, with great difficulty and over a long period of time, to aid painters and draughtsmen in the production of certain kinds of pictures" (231). It is because we first built cameras so they would duplicate pictorial conventions that we can then treat some paintings as "photographically" realistic. He makes a similar argument about the enduring "realistic" pictorial convention, perspectival representation. By examining Alberti's De Pictura, Snyder shows that this technique was not an inevitable discovery, but an artificial construction of sight. Contemporary pictorial styles enabled Alberti to redefine medieval theories of vision, and thus to develop a rational theory of sight that could then be used as the basis for a rationalized system of pictorial representation. As with photography, perspectival compositions seem "true" to visual experience because we have so insistently "pictured vision" in terms of pictorial perspectivism. Snyder concludes that "there are no end runs that get us out of language or depiction to the really real" (246). His essay suggests that images are never innocent records: even the most "natural" pictorial features can never simply be referred to some alleged fact of visual experience, but must be interpreted in terms of the discursive, technological, and metaphysical systems that almost literally make them visible. Not just emblematic or iconographic details but the style and formal properties and subject matter of paintings can only be adequately "seen" by being "read."

W. J. T. Mitchell's "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory" likewise has significant theoretical consequences for the study of relations among the arts. Mitchell shows the pervasiveness of spatiality not only in literary texts but also in critical terms (e.g., "form," "structure," "levels" of meaning) used to describe them. He thereby neatly collapses the dichotomy between literature as a "temporal" and painting as a "spatial" art that has been a commonplace since Lessing, not so much by arguing for some empirical presence of "spatial form" in certain texts (as Joseph Frank did about modern literature) as by reflecting on the uses of language that underlie and sustain that opposition. He shows how spatial metaphors tend to be effaced and forgotten when convenient, or else reified into abstract qualities of the object of study. Mitchell suggests that we accept these metaphoric "contaminations" as an inescapable part of literature and the languages of criticism and—what is more to the point—"work for a systematic understanding of the ways in which the infections are carried" (281). His own immediate concern is to develop a general theoretical and historical mapping of the multiple forms of spatiality associated with literary texts. But his consideration of this particular problem shows an exemplary attentiveness to the subtle and historically variable exchanges that occur reciprocally between language and images. Mitchell rightly criticizes claims about "universal" or "intrinsic" features of verbal or visual media, and argues for a methodologically rigorous understanding of the multiple possibilities of interart relations.

Mitchell's thoughtful reflections on language and images makes the inadequacies of other essays in the volume only too apparent. Howard Nemerov's thesis—that "painter and poet want to reach the silence behind the language, the silence within the language” (9)—may be an appropriately "poetic" conceit, but it is the kind of abstract, ahistorical generalization that Mitchell deftly reveals as an oversimplification. Nemerov has simply universalized a post modern cliché in disregard of the many divergent goals of the real historical men and women who wrote and painted. Elizabeth Abel studies a particular historical interaction between the arts, that of Baudelaire and Delacroix, but her conclusions—that "both manage to create a harmonious atmosphere" (51) and "to synthesize movement with form" (52)—are generalizations that reproduce the commonplaces of literary criticism. Despite its announced adaptation of "structuralist" methods to study underlying patterns in the artistic ordering of materials, this essay lacks the precision and detail that Mitchell shows to be necessary for systematic understandings of interart relations.

The essays by Gilman, Snyder, and Mitchell highlight the values of a self-reflexive critical stance toward theoretical suppositions about art and its interpretation. Without some such metacritical questioning, the subtle interpenetrations of language and images may be effaced, and we may continue to construe the "language of images" by means of the interpretive decisions and methods most congruent with received disciplinary self-understandings. Thus, when Guilio Carlo Argan defines iconology as a kind of "philological" study, he names Panofsky, the inventor of this field of study, as "the Saussure of art history" (17). The analogy is an unhappy one, for Saussure attacked the inadequacies of philology, and redefined linguistics in diametrically opposing ways to the diachronic study of language development. Like the confusions about spatial metaphors that Mitchell traces, this faulty comparison is not a trivial mistake, but underlies a basic problem of Argan's argument. If "iconology" is a kind of "philology," then why should it be exempt from the well-established critiques of that form of linguistic study? Can one construct a valid historical "series" of images? If so, do such series significantly determine the meaning or function of an image? It may be possible to answer these sceptical questions, or to define a synchronic aspect of iconology to supplement its historical concerns. But Argan seems unaware of the need to consider such issues. His ambitious proposal for
future study, therefore, seems on closer examination to be mainly an apology for the traditional historical discourse of art criticism.

The “language of images” announces what would be, in terms of contemporary academic institutions, an “interdisciplinary” project. But this volume often fails to live up to what its title promises. Some essays seem limited to a single medium: the studies of film by Gerald Mast and Christian Metz, for example, are competent essays, but do not even begin to address the general theoretical issues of the “language of images.” Other essays (e.g., those by Argan, Abel, and Steinberg) remain confined within the respective disciplinary boundaries of their writers even as they consider untraditional topics. Still others (Arnheim’s and Gombrich’s) are simply “crossdisciplinary”: they rewrite the problems of one discipline (art history) in the dominant codes of another (psychology), using its different terms and procedures to produce the effect of a novel “solution.” What these diverse efforts have in common is a fairly uncritical acceptance of received disciplinary methods of constituting meaning and value. As a result, exchanges between language and images are too quickly assimilated by conventional interpretive strategies, and the potential challenge to methods and categories developed for more singlemindedly homogeneous works in either verbal or visual media is substantially deflected. If an “ideology of pluralism” may occasionally engender the debates about critical assumptions that are its prime rationale and justification, like all “ideologies” it also serves established interests. And one interest of “pluralism” is the preservation of relatively stable institutional bases from which a continual array of competing perspectives may be safely generated. In the case of this collection, its potential “interdisciplinary” quality never emerges from the contention of alternative disciplinary claims to authority.

Both the successes and, in a more oblique manner, the failures of this collection underscore the importance of attending closely to the multiple ways language and images interact. Though Blake is mentioned in only a few brief asides, the volume may usefully serve as a stimulus and a caution for all those involved in understanding the verbal-visual dynamics of his works of illuminated printing. There have been relatively few recent attempts to develop a comprehensive theory of how text and design interrelate in Blake’s pages, Mitchell’s Blake’s Composite Art being the most notable exception. And in the absence of sustained theoretical reflection, it is too easy simply to hurry through the question of Blake’s verbal-visual exchanges, and to find refuge in some such trusty strategy as the discovery of a textual “referent” that can be used to identify the characters, action, and meaning of a design. The Language of Images identifies an area and a problem in need of much further historical and theoretical inquiry. Our understanding of Blake will benefit from all such investigation. But given the current state of this critical field, it may well be that the study of Blake’s illuminated printing offers an especially effective way of intervening in the general issue of the “language of images.”

1 See Mitchell’s “Critical Inquiry and the Ideology of Pluralism,” Critical Inquiry, 8 (1982), 609-18, for a revealing statement of the journal’s position. Though Mitchell is aware of the social and economic underpinnings of ideology, he tends to discuss it as a set of practices and beliefs that individuals can adopt or reject at will.

2 Snyder refers to Art and Illusion, but his critique also applies to Gombrich’s contribution to this volume, “Standards of Truth: The Arrested Image and the Moving Eye.” Gombrich asserts “there are certain classes of experience to which we are programmed to respond from birth, while others are readily assimilated to this initial stock” (212). He identifies the convention of the “eye-witness principle” (representing nothing that could not be seen by a single individual) as what best matches our visual “programming.”

3 The geometric theory of vision that underlies perspective has been so long dominant in Western culture that Snyder’s conclusion may still seem counter-intuitive. I refer sceptical readers to Colin Murray Turbayne’s neglected classic, The Myth of Metaphor, which challenges the hegemony of the geometric model by adopting Berkeley’s linguistic theory of vision and showing it to be equal or superior to geometric theories.

4 Robert Morgan’s “Musical Time/Musical Space” likewise demonstrates how spatial images permeate what is conventionally defined as the temporal art of music. For more discussion of these views, see Leon Surette’s challenge to the “spatiality” of form, “Rational Form in Literature,” and Mitchell’s defense, “Diagrammatology,” CI, 7 (1981), 612-21 and 622-33.
The announced goal of this new book is to read Blake’s *Songs* as “the expression of a single, carefully organized, and ultimately coherent vision,” which places it within what W.J.T. Mitchell has called the “third phase” of Blake criticism, in which critics work from “the assumption that ‘every word and every letter’ (and every graphic mark) ‘is in its fit place.’” Perhaps none of Blake’s “works” poses more obstacles to such an approach than the *Songs*, since there are thirty-four different arrangements of plates in *Songs of Innocence* (*SI*) and eighteen different arrangements in *Songs of Experience* (*SE*)—all but 2 of these in versions of *SE* combined with *SI*. These differences, together with the enormous range of variations in color and detail, make it difficult to speak meaningfully of the *Songs* as if it / they were a single text.

To those familiar with the editorial conventions and assumptions that govern the production of printed versions or hybrid facsimiles—based on the fiction of an “ideal text” being represented in the most adequate fashion—it will come as no surprise that Leader takes as “text” for his “reading” of the *Songs* the familiar copy Z.

David Erdman follows the order of copy Z in his hybrid facsimile “partly for convenience, since it is the order followed in standard editions, and partly because it is the order which Blake settled down to in later years.” Leader’s rationale for his choice of text is a curious blend of sophistication and naivete. He begins by acknowledging that “an eclectic interpretation based on a study of several copies tends to obscure the internal coherence and consistency of separate versions,” and that “each copy, in effect, constitutes a separate text.” He rejects the option of “reading” a hybrid version, in order to concentrate exclusively on copy Z as “an independent work of art,” asserting that “we may look to other copies for help in interpreting its designs, but only if we remember that each new coloring creates a new work.” This approach allows him to assert that the female figure on the first plate of “The Little Girl Lost” can be “confidently identified as Lyca” because “her hair and dress are similar in color [i.e. similar in copy Z] to those of the maiden on the second plate,” who is clearly Lyca.

But what this insistence on detail in copy Z means is that in other versions where the colors are different (e.g. FABY) the maidens must be different too. Thus Erdman, who argues for *difference* of color as confirming that the first maiden is Ona (from “A Little GIRL Lost”) may be right that the plates “are colored differently, to keep us from confusing them,” but he will be wrong for the poem as it exists in copy Z taken by Leader as “an independent work of art.” Given two “copies” of this poem, one in which the coloring is similar, one in which it is different, it is feasible according to Leader’s approach to argue that in one copy Blake was showing that the two figures were the same, and in the other he was showing that they were different. Thus in his discussion of “The Little Boy Found” Leader can cut through the notorious problem of gender in the adult figure by asserting that “no matter what its appearance in other copies, or how much it resembles Blake’s Christs elsewhere, in copy Z the little boy’s rescuer looks more like a masculine female than a feminine male.”

If Leader were consistent in his emphasis on the autonomy of each copy, we might look forward to more readings of Blake’s *Songs* in the combined form, and to twenty readings of *The Songs of Innocence* in their separate versions, each one showing its “single, carefully organized, and ultimately coherent vision.” Perhaps we could also have seventeen separate “readings” of the *Songs of Experience*, in those cases where Bentley has noted a separate production “as demonstrated by the
distinctly different sets of printing colours." Before panicking at this prospect, however, we should note that Leader is quite capable of fudging his principles when they prove inconvenient, as in his discussion of the “ivy” on the frontispiece to SE where the leaves are emphatically not green. His reading of it discovers a “final flash of redemptive self-knowledge,” the “inevitable outcome” in which “at the end, the Bard sees himself right.” Leader’s reading of “The Voice” endows it with a univocal meaning that subsumes all the other variant copies and preliminary versions; it turns out that copy Z is not separate and equal, it is separate and superior; it is not only “more carefully and thoughtfully produced than others,” and “more alive with visionary and artistic intelligence,” it is revelatory of Blake’s “ultimate purpose in writing Songs.” His reading of this poem is “ultimate” in a double sense, each of which is illustrative of common Blake interpretive practice. First, his reading is in large part based on what Paul Mann has aptly called the “compositional fiction,” that practice which overcomes interpretive difficulties by inventing a teleological narrative of maturing authorial intentions.4 In Leader’s approach the “pattern or story” which he finds in copy Z is “autobiographical,” which means that what Gleckner calls the “contextual peregrinations” of the “compositional chronology” are an “odyssey” (Gleckner’s term) in which Blake and the poem arrive home at the end. Thus even though this poem appears first in SI, and even though it appears there in extant copies (both individual and combined) more often than in SE (nineteen times in the twenty separate SI, fifteen times in combined copies; it appears only eight times in SE, seven of these in the final slot), this affects its rightful home no more than the fact that Homer spends most of his time getting Odysseus home and in place. Blake was “a life-long apostle of unity,” and “we can reconstruct Blake’s intentions,” knowing that he was not the sort to have us play a game with hedgehogs for balls and flamingos for mallets: “Of all homogeneous truths at least, of all truths respecting the same general end, in whatever series they may be produced, a concatenation by intermediate ideas may be formed such as, when it is once shown, shall appear natural; but if this order be reversed, another mode of connection equally specious may be found or made.”5

What Leader is in fact doing by adopting copy Z (what is it a “copy” of?) is merely shifting ground, seeming to reject “the assumption of a single unified canon” and poems with “only one possible meaning” while still preserving his notion of “Songs” as a single, carefully organized volume of verbal and visual art.” It’s as if he is willing to admit that we can’t step into the “same” river (i.e., “text” of the Songs) twice, but still wants to insist that we can do it once. Thus the spectre of a Derridean difference with an endless disseminating movement of play is safely brought under control.6

The second sense in which “The Voice” is the ultimate poem in the Songs is even more revealing in its exemplary conventionality. All ambiguities and local interpretive problems are safely brought under the univocal control of a narrative progression in which author, critic and reader march forward together like Bunyan’s Pilgrim, sharing “what we have been through and become,” to reach the appointed end in which “Ours have become the eyes of innocent wisdom. We have learned the lessons of vision, tested them, and put them into practice. In the process, we have also realized Blake’s ultimate purpose in writing Songs.” In spite of the familiar sound this conclusion will have for anyone who has read even a little Blake criticism, Leader claims that “my book is the first to uncover what I believe to be the full ‘story’ of Songs—the narrative or drama that runs through and links its groupings.” This book is yet another example of apocalyptic narcissism, in which the interpreter “uncovers” a meaning which consists of Blake “uncovering” the very “meaning” which the interpreter has brought with him to his critical task.

For Leader “getting this story right” involves tracing “the process through which the reader begins to learn how, as well as why, he should adopt child-like ways of seeing.” His basic approach is anticipated in the emphasis in his title on “reading.” Here method and interpretation are the same, since the poems are treated as a succession of actions on the reader who presumably comes to them with completely predictable expectations and reactions. The structure and “meaning” of the Songs emerge through an account of these reactions and the reader’s activity. The arbitrary fictionality of this method/meaning is particularly patent in this version, in which we pretend to be playing a game of follow-the-Reader, while in fact we are playing follow-the-Leader. The basic procedures of the game will be familiar to those who have followed Stanley Fish’s reading of Paradise Lost as “a poem concerned with the self-education of its readers.” But where Fish’s Milton seems to be at all times in control of the process, Leader’s Blake often shares the confusion and surprise of the reader.

There is an inevitable circularity in this process, where the method for reaching the goal and the goal to be reached are the same: “Like children at their books, we are to live out the themes of Innocence through the very act of reading.” As Jonathan Culler has pointed out, what is claimed in this appeal to the “experience” of the reader always “has this divided, duplicitous character: it has always already occurred and yet is still to be produced—an indispensible point of reference, yet never simply there.”7 In this process the critic must produce the very
responses he assumes and relies on in the course of his interpretation; if the act of reading were controlled by the text alone, the book would be completely unnecessary. The critic pretends to be a mirror for the reader, but in fact is offering her an aggrandized self-portrait which must be copied for a correct reading.

With Leader this circularity is thematized in both method and message. "Slowly, imperceptibly, from one plate to another, we discard our old, conventional ways of looking at the world, and replace them with the habits of vision." It may seem strange to think of "vision" as a habit, but Leader is a critical Pavlov, a Skinneterian who can criticize Keynes for telling the reader too soon that subsequent plates almost always confirm, Nor can we prevent our -

We worry again, we are made to move too quickly, as their more we look, tiny ripples of doubt disrupt the reassuring flow, We notice them before, our first impulse is, we are forced to retract, meanings subtly evolve, so too do our reading habits. Suggestive can criticize Keynes for telling the reader too soon that -

Fish is canny and candid enough to admit that in this kind of game the poem's "outer or physical form, so obtrusive, and, in one sense, so undeniably there, is, in another sense, incidental and even irrelevant" (341). Leader, however, constantly insists that we pay "careful attention to detail" and that we take "the poem exactly as it comes." The designs in particular "repay the closest possible attention" and "when discussing the designs, no seemingly 'Insignificant Blur or Mark' will go unexamined." A suitably close attention to the minute details of the designs will have "a larger and more general effect: by taking certain liberties with the text . . . they encourage a similar freedom in our own interpretations." The reader's covenant then promises that a commitment to the details of the designs will free us from a similar commitment to the details of the "text." What do these details and liberties produce? An abundant harvest of inconsistencies, improvisations, and rampant adhocery.

Sometimes "our first impulse" is determined by the designs because "we notice them before we turn to the text." For Leader "this is even more true in Experience, where the poems invariably undercut and overturn the expectations we bring to them from the designs." Apparently this is not the case with the "Introduction" to SI, since our encounter "ought to begin on a literal level" and we have four pages of comments on "the text" and "its narrative" before we turn to the design. With "The Tyger" we are instructed to read the poem first and then find an "obvious discrepancy between poem and design." Although "undercutting" is favorably discussed in some other poems, in "The Tyger" the "reader is much too abruptly wrenched out of the mood of the poem," which "is simply too powerful to be undercut so brutally." When it seems to serve his purpose (i.e. twice in the whole book) Leader pays attention to metrics. For example, in discussing "The Lamb" he says "we must pay especially close attention to the stylized child-likeness of the speaker's tone . . . The multiple repetitions of word and phrase, the sing-songy, jingle-like quality of three- and four-beat trochaic lines . . . all point to the child's way of seeing and speaking." If he had attended to metrics and repetitions in "The Tyger" (either before or after looking at the design), with its similarities to "Twinkle twinkle little star" or "Barber barber shave a pig," he might not have been so insistent that Blake "momentarily loses his sense of tact" in producing the design.

Leader notes that "the frequently minute scale in Songs, makes interpreting physiognomy (always a tricky business) especially difficult." He is able to overcome the difficulty quite often, however, claiming that the Black Boy's "sense of separateness" is mirrored in "the troubled expression on his face," finding faces that are "eerie calm and single-minded, as if charmed or spellbound," "faces vacant, abstracted," faces with "the impression of patient uninterest." He notes that "Blake has even taken the trouble to give him [the Ancient Bard] a smile in copy Z (in other copies he looks worried), in contrast to the blank impassivity of the child led." For the most part, however, he settles for "the oddly remote, generalized placidity of the faces of Blake's figures." In discussing the design to "Nurse's Song" he says, "We have seen this willow before. It appears on the second plate of 'The Little Black Boy,' where its melancholy presence . . . has disturbing implications." But his discussion of "The Little Black Boy" does not come "before" — it starts on the next page; when we get to take a close look at the second plate, seven pages later, we are told that "the drooping willow that bends Christ's back resembles no other tree in Innocence." Perhaps this is what Leader means by "teasing." He has an equally puzzling eye for "posture," noting that the "mother" on the titlepage to SI is excluded from Innocence because "we sense something a bit too rigid and proper about her. Despite her youth and pleasant face, she sits straight-backed, stiffly 'composed'" (my emphasis). This postural principle has apparently been forgotten when we get to the second plate of "The Little Black Boy" and find that Christ is sitting in a
“crouch” instead of “a healthy, upright and assertive posture.” “Crouched, bent or weary forms rarely represent divinity or nobility,” so we find the Piper “strong and erect” and the shepherd “attentive and upright.” We can recognize the child in the design for “LONDON” as one of “the divinely human innocents” because “he stands upright.”

Leader is quite assertive in his criticism of critics who are assertive in their criticisms. “We ought not to be bullied,” he says, by those who have been influenced by copies other than Z. He notes favorably the contrast between Blake’s poems and “their bullying counterparts in conventional literature,” and criticizes the Bard because he “decries authority, yet speaks from it.” But on the next page he is quite capable of a severely authoritative putdown of a rival critic: “To say, for instance, as does Gilham . . . . simply will not do.” Leader himself is assuming the “authority” to tell us where “a proper reading of the poem ought to begin,” and to tell us when all the other critics who have written on the Songs are right and when they’re wrong.

Leader has added a few more pages to the apparently endless gender disputes that trail after poems like “The Little Boy Found.” Here his keen attention to detail leads to the important discovery that the adult figure “looks more like a masculine female than a feminine male.” Why this distinction is important is not clear, since he settles for androgyny, but apparently it is. In looking at “The CLOD & the PEBBLE” the “starkness or sharpness of the alternatives [Blake] offers us” is emphasized because “sheep (ram as well as ewe) and lambs stand side by side with cattle.” Here I can see the difference between the sheep and the cattle, and the ram must be the sheep with the horns; but how does Leader know that there are two lambs and one ewe rather than the two ewes and a lamb that Keynes sees? At any rate, he seems to be on firm ground with the ram. But his attentiveness flags when he looks at Hogarth’s engraving of “Evening” (No. 3 of The Four Times of Day, included in the illustrations) and “sees” a bull. If Blake had taken as much trouble to indicate the secondary sex characteristic of his figures as Hogarth took with the ample udder of this cow, we would not have had all this trouble. Perhaps this is what Blake anticipated when he wrote: “Some find a Female Garment there / And some a Male . . . . Truly My Satan thou art but a Dunce / And dost not know the Garment from the Man.” In defending Fuseli’s painting of Ugolino, Blake wrote: “The child in his arms, whether boy or girl signifies not,” which would be of great help had he not gone on to add: “(but the critic must be a fool who has not read Dante, and who does not know a boy from a girl).” Blake’s Albion seems most often to be “masculine,” but his minstrel in “King Edward the Third” has the Trojans address her as feminine: “Be thou our mother, and our nurse,’ they said.” Perhaps they were fools; perhaps it signifies not.” At any rate, Leader has not earned the right to lead us in these matters.

Leader’s insistent dismissal of traditional symbolism and iconography in favor of “careful attention to detail” leads us back to a more theoretical level, where whether or not he is consistent is less important than the question of whether or not what he proposes can be done in fact instead of in fiction. He asks, “Do all twisting trees (or entwining vines, or vines twining around trees) give rise to the same impression,” and offers this as his answer:

Some vines remind us of serpents, others do not; the indentification depends upon context and careful attention to detail. If we allow so singularly unattractive a vine [titlepage to SI] to symbolize Christ, then all vines can be Christ symbols and all the trees around which they twine symbols of sinful life. We need only look ahead to the delicate beauty of the vine-entwined sapling on ‘The Lamb’ plate to see how wholly willful and inappropriate an approach of this sort can become.

For Leader, to “ignore the particular qualities of these trees and vines” is to content ourselves with a “symbolic significance . . . too broad to mean much of anything.” It is contrary to the principle of “taking the poem exactly as it comes.” The fact “that words and symbols are historically or culturally or socially determined . . . is right and necessary but, in the immediate context, may also be unhelpful.” Helpful or not, can readers any more than poets and artists simply dismiss determinants that are “right and necessary” in order to look with innocent eyes at “details” which communicate their meaning from within the isolation of the “immediate context”? And can the difficulties of this very real question be overcome by mere assertion? Can there be a universal, contextually reasonable, and culturally understandable visual semiosis that is natural and inevitable? Can a visually-perceived work of art form its own language which communicates directly by nonverbal rules of creation and perception, with a purely internal structural coherence? To answer yes to all these questions is to assume the major wager of what we call ‘Romanticism’ as a fait accompli.

It is particularly interesting that Leader takes the tree / vine topos as the main target for his insistence, and that it is one which occurs frequently in both SI and SE. One example from many finds him discussing “Nurse’s Song” from SI: “Nor can we prevent ourselves from associating the creeper-entwined tree at right with the several forms of constriction and encroachment to which the children will doubtless be subjected as they grow into experience. Like the nurse, we are forced to look beyond the graceful and energetic joy of the children at play.” Leader’s reading here is clearly determined or influenced by a whole range of cultural associations which he brings with him to Blake. He has a quite different reading of the same topos in “Night,” which illustrates how different affective impressions can be: “The soothing rhythms of the text find their complement in a tall, slender tree . . . gently arches its branches . . . curving up and back to
cradle the title . . . as loosely as the tree itself is encircled by a delicately spiralling vine. The soft flow of tree, branch and vine . . . The over-arching protective tree is a motif that reinforces our sense . . . that 'Night' is also a part of innocence." Can such an extreme range of differing affect really be generated by the "impression" made on us by the closely-observed details of a visual image?

Many have "seen" these tree/vine relationships quite differently, but none of us—Leader included—has ever seen them with unmediated eye. As far back as the invention of viniculture the union of grapevine and tree has evoked symbolic responses. For Vergil in the Georgics the union of vine and elm was synonymous with agriculture, with culture itself, and with civilization properly conducted. His often-repeated pleasure at contemplating this interrelationship (cf. Georgics I.2, II.221, II.357 ff.) was echoed centuries later by Goethe when he finally arrived in Italy: "There trees are planted in long rows upon which the vines are trained to their tops. Their gently swaying tendrils hung down under the weight of the grapes. . . . This is what a festoon ought to look like" (Italian Journey, Vicenza, Sept. 19).

For Catullus the relationship between the elm and vine was the most apt image for marriage and a proper sexual relationship between wife and husband, so that the vine without its elm is scorned by farmers and eligible bachelors alike (No. 62). In the more explicitly sexual Collis o Heliconiei (No. 61 the woman yearning for her man is bound to him by her sexual passion as tightly as the ivy—sacred to Bacchus—is bound to its tree. . . . The over-arching protective tree is a motif that reinforces our sense . . . that 'Night' is bound to its tree (ut tenax hedera bux et bux / arborem implicat errans).

Milton traces the image back to Eden, where Adam and Eve "led the Vine / To wed her Elm; she spous'd about him twines / Her marriageable arms, and with her brings / Her dow'r th'adopted Clusters, to adorn / His barren leaves" (V.215-19). Pope shared this sense of horticultural propriety and extended the figure to man's relationship to God: "Man, like the gen'rous vine, sup­ported lives; / The strength he gains is from th'embrace he gives" (Essay on Man III.311-12). George Herbert could not contemplate a grape vine climbing or "hanging" on its support and bearing fruit without reading the whole story of the gospel in it ("The Sacrifice," "The Bunch of flow'rs dispos'd / Sightly and in just order" knows that they can not contemplate a grape vine climbing or "hanging" on its support and bearing fruit without reading the whole story of the gospel in it."

In this practice he knowingly follows Milton's Eve who, ironically "herself, though fairest unsupported flow'r, / From her best prop so far," still "oft stooping to support, / Each Flow'r of slender stalk, whose head though gay / Carnation, Purple, Azure, or speckt with Gold, / Hung drooping unsustain'd, them she upstays / Gently with myrtle band" (IX.427-31). And at the end of Thackeray's Vanity Fair Amelia is urged: "Grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling!" So pervasive and durable is the potential for figuring the dynamics of a relationship in this topos that it can be playfully inverted, to describe a marriage between a strong woman and a weak man as a union of "the clinging oak and the sturdy vine" (Time, 13 June 1983, p. 73).

The same image has been adopted by both parties, so that Ovid could seize its metamorphic potential to describe the "marriage" of Salmacis:

She holds him fast though he strives against her, steals reluctant kisses, fondles him, touches his unwilling breast, clings to him on this side and that. At length, as he tries his best to break away from her, she wraps him round with her embrace, as a serpent, when the king of birds has caught her and is bearing her on high: which, hanging from his claws wraps her folds around his head and feet and entangles his flapping wings with her tail; or as the ivy oft-times embraces great trunks of trees . . .

(Metamorphoses IV.358-65)

Swift observed that creeping and climbing are acts performed in the same posture, giving a humorous political twist to the actions of Milton's Satan: "About the mossy Trunk I wound me soon" (IX.589). And Isaac Watts "saw" the same sinister significance in children, who

with their little hands
Hang closest to our souls.
Thoughtless they act th'old serpent's part;
What tempting things they be!
Lord, how they twine about our heart,
And draw it off from thee!
("On the Hazard of Loving the Creatures")

Hardy gives it an equally negative twist in "The Ivy Wife":

In new affection next I strove
To coll an ash I saw,
And he in trust received my love;
Till with my soft green claw
I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
Such was my love: ha-ha!

More recently, the sinister potential in the topos has been used to describe the relationship between the deconstructionist (parasite/vine) and a supportive host: "We cannot attack substantive centers . . . without ourselves relying on substantive centers . . . Thus every effort at original or 'free' interpretation is plainly and simply
parasitical on the work of people like Abrams, whose solidity... is relied upon in every act of deconstruction..."

The point of citing these few instances of a pervasive topos is to suggest that although as *topos* it seems inevitably to suggest its availability as an image of the dynamics of relationship between different (contrary?) forces or modes, there is no innate "meaning" in a vine—whether grape, flower or ivy—growing on a tree or stake; nor is there an unmediated "meaning" in a representation or image of tree and vine, no matter how detailed it may be. The appropriate semiotic code(s) cannot be read on the *surface* of the representation, pace Leader, and a truly innocent reader, if there is one, would be able to "read" only her own innocence in what she sees. Leader, in spite of his attempts, is a good example of the impossibility... "We have seen this willow before," he says. When he looks at a sheep he sees "the very symbols of innocence." An Englishman, contemporary with Blake—especially if he had read John Dyer's *The Fleece*—might have rather different "symbolic" perceptions since the sheep was a key element in British commerce, providing the high-quality wool that enabled Britain to dominate the textile trade internationally, and the meat that gave them the highest protein diet in Europe. "We are reminded of..." echoes throughout this book, and often these "reminders" are as personal and contingent as the connection for Leader between the girl with the wide-brimmed hat in "The Ecchoing Green" and the horns of the "bull" located directly behind the husband in Hogarth's "Evening." In addition to Hogarth, the book includes illustrations from Bellini, Leonardo, David, West, Blake, and anonymous artists, still further eroding whatever ability we might have brought with us to see Blake's designs as Leader would have us.

Thus he posits the study of signs as evidence for what he claims to know, attempting to read visual images in Blake as signs (having meaning or *signification*), without making any theoretical provision for symbolic images. Some definitions from Peirce will make the importance of this failure more clear. For Peirce a sign is that aspect of what is present to an interpretant which may be interpreted as evidence for something *more than itself*, its signatum. He defines three kinds of signs:

An *icon* is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence... An *index* is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign of a shot; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not. A *symbol* is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification...11

Leader's rudimentary theory of signs produces interpretations which move from image to affect ("impression") and from affect to concept. For example: "The embrace of old man and naked youth on 'The Little Vagabond' plate is... a kind of smothering. The outstretched arm and poised comb, with sharp-pointed teeth, of the nurse in 'Nurse's Song' suggests threat and restriction... The outstretched arms of the child in 'Infant Sorrow' and the female form of the rose at the bottom of 'The Sick Rose' signify fear and resistance rather than joy and communion." The theory claims that the signs being interpreted have the status of those signs which Peirce calls indices; but Leader's practice is in fact that of a mode of "symbolic" interpretation in Peirce's terms. The goal can be seen as the desire to get out of one semiotic system (adulthood, experience) into another, to *transcend* the semiotic condition of experience. But the method for reaching this goal already assumes the innocent semiosis, the ability for Blake to produce and the reader to understand a signification that does not depend on the interpretant. Leader's practice shows that for him the signs he reads are already encoded in a literary-iconographic system which determines his affective response more than the "signs" he claims to be reading as if they were indices. If he actually found a plate that did not "remind" him of something, what would he be able to say about it?

Leader tacitly acknowledges the situation for all of his discoveries of signification; while claiming to respond to the unmediated presence of the sign, he is enveloped in the mediation of other signs, his "revelation" merely the reproduction of yet another representation in a series that does not have the "origin" that he claims. Peirce again:

The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series.12

But by Leader's assertions, if his reader doesn't have the same affect/impressions that he does in looking (for example) at the frontispiece to *SI*, then he has failed to perceive its character as a collection of signs—like seeing a hole in the molding without having the sense to attribute it to a shot, in this case the single, originary "shot" of Blake's authorial intentions.

Thus the reader who can in fact read, who has served time in the prison house of language and takes up this book promising the good news of his release, will find that it's too late, that he must already be innocent in order to follow Leader's fable of reading. If she is too fallen to follow she will find herself shut out of the magic circle of Innocence, unable to participate in its power politics. For at bottom, or near it, this book is as much about politics as it is about poetry and art. The fact that
its political subtext is hidden beneath its surface is yet another typifying characteristic of the book and of the ideological dimension of much Blake criticism.

Leader's interpretations are built on the uncritical acceptance of his own bland and naive critical impulses, which operate safely within the mainstream of our all-too-familiar liberal humanism even while making the usual claims to be radical and daring. What he calls the "heroic exposure . . . to a world of pain and suffering," in *SE* turns out to be simply a "reader or workbook" which "tests" the "alphabet and guide to doctrine" which was taught to us in *St*. In order to pass, we must avoid the example of the Bard of *SE* with his "infection" and his "unwitting 'lapse'" from true doctrine. The Bard is bad because he *uses* the speaking personae of *SE*, and because he is concerned with the "larger 'truth' of social discontent." The Bard "reminds us" of "concerned politicians talking with ghetto children," and this is bad because it violates "the easy commerce between Piper and floating child in the innocent 'Introduction.'" The Bard is affected with "abstract sympathy" and has become an "activist poet," a "polemicist, a prophetic activist" who "substitutes an unreal and unrealizable vision for the more complex paradise of innocent songs."

No wonder then that we find constant reinforcement for "our doubts about the Bard's character," since we are being "taught" to see his "aims" and to "see them for what they are—passionately caring, but deeply flawed, and potentially dangerous." His most dangerous flaw is his desire "to communicate the evils of religious and social compulsion." Leader is also upset by the Little Vagabond because, although a child, he is not a true innocent. His "overt social concern" does not have "sympathy" for the "victimizers as well as the victims" and it is "explicit" rather than "muted" or "tentative and implicit" as it should be. Leader warns us of the duplicity of the little boy speaking in "The GARDEN of LOVE," who wrongly attempts to blame "external institutions" for the problems in his libidinal economy, trying "to mask or play down his responsibility." After all, "he must himself bear some responsibility . . . since the 'joys and desires' bound by the priests . . . are his own." And if the responsibility is indeed his own, then no "external institutions" can help him to recover. As Edmund Burke wrote, around the time Blake was finishing the *Songs*: "They brought themselves into all the calamities they suffer, not that through them they might obtain a British constitution; they plunged themselves headlong into those calamities, to prevent themselves from settling into that constitution, or into anything resembling it." And shortly thereafter: "Let government protect and encourage industry, secure property, repress violence, and discountenance fraud, it is all that they have to do. In other respects, the less they meddle in these affairs the better; the rest is in the hands of our Master and theirs." After a while one wonders if Leader is writing literary interpretation or a guide to correct social protest. His doctrine is that "individual identities" are "compromised" and "sacrificed" when any "causes or ideas" are "espoused." The nuptial force of "espousal" suggests the point: better not to marry ideas or to burn, either of which would sully the purity of an innocent "individual identity."

This does not mean that the world cannot be made a better place, however, or that we are discouraged from working for change. "An individual apocalyptic vision can transform the world. We . . . have it in our power to alter those conventional modes of perception and understanding which alone keep us from a life of vision." What we can do, in other words, is to change our own status in the world provided that our praxis is correct. Redemption for Leader is the reward for virtue in a meritocratic system, the prize for the "successful" reader for performing properly the mental labor of interpretation. The most vivid image of this reward comes in his reading of "Nurse's Song." There he sees the children collectively representing the state of "vision" and playing "their own game," prolonging it by the power of their innocence and the force of their desire. They represent what we should become; "if we can return to a perpetual present, vision will again be ours."

Fortunately this "life of vision" will include a servant class made up of those like the Nurse in the design, whose visionary powers "do not withstand the processes of time and custom," and who therefore are excluded from the class of innocents. "But is the nurse included in the circle?" The answer is no, and it is the Nurse's own fault. What relegates her to a secondary status is that after having attained "vision" for a moment (in stanza one), she suffers a "lapse into memory and reflection." Unlike the Bard, who can still save himself in spite of his more serious-sounding ("infected or corrupted") lapse, the Nurse has found her niche. She becomes not a social critic but "an exemplary guardian" who will "preserve and foster vision in others." As if this weren't already enough, Leader caps it with the perfect simile: she is "like one of Chekov's busy servants." Come the revolution, however, she will not be tempted to participate because she accepts with quiet dignity the fact that she will never again lead a life of vision."

My comments on the sociopolitical subtext of this book so far merely constitute what Frederic Jameson has characterized as an "essentially negative hermeneutic function." It is important to point beyond this somewhat simplistic stage, to suggest the instrumental function of this book as a cultural object which is projecting its utopian vision as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity, represented by the ring of dancing children whom we can either join by our individual mental labors, or serve with quiet dignity, acknowledging their superior status. On this level, Leader's fable of moral virtue and redemption by mental labor in the form of a "proper reading" comes
into focus as a protonarrative or class fantasy about those anonymous collective characters which constitute the classes in opposition.

What this book is, then, is a mixture of religion and politics masquerading as literary criticism. The Songs read as scripture are a holy writ that leads to Truth and Enlightenment. Moral virtue is embracing these wide-ranging values which are projected onto Blake's poems and labeled as "Innocence," ignoring the possible implications of "contrary states." It is the endorsement and practice of a form of what Lawrence Stone calls "affective individualism," with an academic twist that makes "interpretation" the functional equivalent of the mental labor that characterizes the values and dynamics of the middle class as it emerged in the eighteenth century. It is a praxis, in the Aristotelian sense of happiness as praxis, or mode of being. Leader's "Innocence" is what he is able to conceptualize as value and desire, and to read into Blake's poems as a message and meaning for the happy ones who are able to understand it.

The Nurse fails to rise, having had her chance and failed to pass the "test" of Experience. But how can she pass, when even Oothoon, who is "perhaps the most eloquent champion of vision in all of Blake's works," who has "learned that 'everything that lives is holy,'" cannot make the grade? In spite of Oothoon's eloquent championing, the world "remains one of disunity and suffering, and the reader is left with the impression that Oothoon is subject to forces beyond her control." What are these forces that exonerate Oothoon, while the plea of external causality is dismissed for the others? I doubt that any of the innumerable celebrators of Oothoon's rapture and rhetoric have ever joined her in any meaningful way; it is safer to use her as a mirror and speaker for our safely-controlled fantasies while we go about business as usual.

Leader's equivocation on Oothoon can be taken as a touchstone for the whole book. He doesn't want to be like the speaker in "Holy Thursday" (57) who "forces himself" down, "too weak to embrace true innocence—to join Oothoon in rejecting a limited, reason-bound vision . . . inadequate and harmful." But when Leader contemplates what happens to Oothoon, rather than what she says, the outcome must be determined by "forces beyond her control." Like the speaker at a graduation ceremony, addressing those who have presumably learned the lesson of Innocence and passed the test of Experience, Leader can celebrate the "eternal present" and chatter on about "what we have been through and the course of the previous fifty-one plates," assuring us that "the world of inevitable fading, of 'smile and fall' . . . is itself an illusion." But on the fact of it, he cannot even convince himself that he is "getting the story right."

This book did not really "begin life" as a Harvard doctoral dissertation in 1977, as is claimed in the Acknowledgments. Its main features had been clearly delineated long before Leader entered graduate school. Although his name appears on it as "author," with the joint implications of author-ity and "source," we are all to some degree implicated in its existence. It would be uncharitable and an error to attribute its foolishness to Mr. Leader alone, who is no doubt merely striving to achieve some degree of eminence in a field where there are predictable expectations and standards. The work was approved as a dissertation at a major university; it comes to us from a reputable press, which presumably sought expert guidance before undertaking to publish it; hundreds of libraries will buy it on automatic purchase plans and it will be "arranged" on their shelves according to "the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation" (MHH, pl. 15). Morris Eaves has argued that the "Blake Industry" is really "only a cottage industry" which produces "ghostly explanations" and can't "serve as the heavy father in a simple comedy of scholarly conspiracies." But a book like this is not the product of a cottage industry; it is a cultural artifact beyond the power of a solitary individual to produce. I think that we are part of a collectivity which, whether cottage industry or some other kind, has reached the time when it is necessary to retool. I suggest that as part of this retooling we declare a moratorium on publishing this kind of vaguely prophetic humanism, of which we already have more than enough examples.

6 The question of plurality of texts was addressed in a more consistent and useful way by Stephen Carr in a paper given at the Blake and Criticism conference at Santa Cruz in May 1982. It will be published as "Blake's Works of Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference" in a collection of essays edited by Nelson Hilton and myself, called Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality.
The udder is prominently placed in the center of the engraving, two of its teats being clearly milked into a pail. Hogarth's humor is in part the juxtaposition of the cow's two teats grasped by hands with the adjacent and equally conspicuous bosom of the wife.

Wayne C. Booth, "M.H. Abrams: Historian as Critic, Critic as Pluralist," Critical Inquiry, 2 (Spring 1976), 441. In the same issue Abrams replaces himself in the image as "substantive center" or host with "the most obvious or univocal reading" (458). J. Hillis Miller defends the "parasite" in "The Critic as Host," Critical Inquiry, 3 (Spring 1977), 439-48.


There are scholars who work on Blake—yet are not Blakeans. They may find Blake’s insights profound, but they do not embrace them as a personal creed. There are, however, those who study Blake because they believe in him. *Sparks of Fire* is primarily a product of this second type of relationship with the poet-prophet-painter. As one of the editors writes, Blake’s “urgency led me beyond the academic to this book and to a devotion to human wholeness in my writing, teaching, living, and loving” (p. [461]). Not surprisingly, such a book must be found wanting if evaluated by the standards of traditional historical scholarship. To be appreciated, *Sparks of Fire* has to be seen as an anthology by True Believers preaching to the already converted.

The editors, James Bogan and Fred Goss, stressing the etymology of the word, describe their “anthology” as “a gathering of blossoms” (p. [iv]). Over one hundred artists, writers, musicians, students, and dreamers contributed their eclectic creations. The collection includes songs, poems (both rhymed and free), book reviews, short stories, pictures, visions, cartoons, cantatas, “conversations” with Blake, mythological charts, astral projections, wish-fulfillment fantasies, mystical experiences, musical scores, explications, photographs of naked bodies in “The Golden Positions,” reproductions of Blake’s art, reprints of scholarly articles, brief selections from early critics (such as Gilchrist and Swinburne), and a checklist of useful books for beginning students of Blake. What this volume purports to do and what, in large measure, it does do is to open anthology publication to a variety of modes of expression by breaking down the customary distinctions between scholarship and creative art. Yet, it does have its own kinds of generic requirements. All the contributions are, in a sense, pro-Blakean. The Master’s Romantic ideology is never questioned.

Apparently, one of the ways of determining if a person is a true Blakean is by the extravagance of his initial response to Blake. These primal experiences often have the characteristics of religious conversion. One contributor, Howard McCord, who preaches “Brother Blake,” read *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* while he was flying up the Ganges in a DC-3: he reports that he “would never have landed if the plane hadn’t” (p. 59). Perhaps the most exorbitant example in *Sparks of Fire* is Paul Metcalf’s claim that when he suddenly “discovered” Blake’s paintings, he had “an unrelieved and unrelenting 90-day erection” (p. 168). The transpersonal significance of this response (to anyone other than Mrs. Metcalf) is questionable. In the face of such exaltations, the prudent reviewer hesitates to comment. The road of excess leads to the phallus of wisdom?

*Sparks of Fire* begins with “A Montage of Quotes [sic] from the Nooks and Crannies of William Blake’s Complete Works” (pp. 3-7). This selection sets a high standard of writing which unfortunately is not matched by most of the poetry and prose in the volume. Even Blake’s own words fall on hard times in some later sections. In Paul Piech’s “Graphic Manifesto,” accompanying a much reduced reproduction of his poster print of “The Tyger,” he writes that books go on shelves and are forgotten. But this is “not the case with posters; they go on to walls and are looked at. . . . They demand study. People stand and re-read them. They make an impact” (p. 11). Piech also points out that this particular “poem poster” is his press’s best seller. Unhappily, he retitles the poem, misquotes the third line of the first stanza, omits a word from the fourth line of the second stanza, and leaves out stanza four entirely. The next contribution in the anthology is Allen Ginsberg’s “To Young or Old Listeners: Notes on the Songs of Innocence and Experience [sic].” These are the liner notes to his 1969 phonograph record. (The notes were reprinted in the *Blake Newsletter*, 4, Winter 1971, p. 90.) Ginsberg, in his commentary
on "The Little Black Boy," quotes, "And we are put on earth a little space that we may bear the beams of love" (p. 19). But Blake writes that we are put on earth that "we may learn to bear the beams of love." I know that this is a minute particular and that the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life; yet it is as if textual inaccuracies are not just cheerfully accepted by some contributors to this book, but actively promoted by them. To pay close attention to the letter of the text is almost a sign of one's spiritual incapacity. One cannot charge the contributors or editors with mere oversight, for purposeful textual carelessness is part of the volume's implicit ideology. Eric Chaet speaks for more contributors than just himself when he begins his poem, "Report to Blake" (p. 93):

Blake, I won't read your work again right now.
Maybe never, or maybe sometime
when I don't know what else to do.

In all the genres of art, visual and verbal, the quality of the contributions is wildly uneven. Except for British artist Paul Piech's bold linocuts and Finnish artist Bo Ossian Lindberg's historical montages, the graphics are uninteresting and, in several cases, painfully amateurish. Sincerity cannot overcome a complete lack of talent. The poems range in length from Robert Creeley's pleasing "Blakean Haiku" ("I blake for animals. / Who / be you?" p. 331) to lengthy excerpts from sweeping epics. They vary in quality by an equal measure. In a passage from Swinburne's monograph on Blake (1868), reprinted in this volume, he criticizes Blake's poetry for being "at times noisy and barren and loose, rootless and fruitless and informal" (p. 189). Most readers of this journal would probably not assent to this typical nineteenth-century view of Blake. But it does seem to be the kind of verse perpetrated in many of the poems in the volume. There are several worthwhile poems, however, which do suggest a fruitful relationship between the modern poet and Blake. These include the sections from Robert Kelly's erotic epic The Book of Water, Clayton Eshleman's confessional "Niemonjima," Roger Zelazny's "The Burning," and Jared Carter's "The Man Who Taught Blake Painting in His Dreams." Least successful are the poems who imitate, rather than assimilate, Blake. One such example is Margaret Flanagan in "The Winter," beginning

Winter! Winter! freezing white
In the polar wastes of night.
Deaf to metrical accent, she questions, "Did He who
made summer make you?" (p. 247).

Some of the best scholarly essays, such as Albert S. Roe's "Blake's Symbolism" and Morris Eaves's "Teaching Blake's Relief Etching," are reprints. Since Roe's study was first published in 1953, Ginsberg's record-blurb in 1969, and Eshleman's poem in 1973, one begins to wonder about the accuracy of this volume's subtitle. Scattered references to cannabis, dope, Richard Nixon, Aldous Huxley, "the fuzz," the Beatles, and psychedelics would seem to place the New Age in the 60s, spiritually if not chronologically. One poem even concludes with the strikingly original phrase, "Far out" (p. 100).

Some of the tastiest reading in the book is in "Notes on the Contributors" (pp. 447-54), where we learn about the authors' previous incarnations and future plans. We wait with bated breath for Dr. Jo-Mo's "autobiographical science-fiction cartoon-novel," now more than ten years in the making. We discover which contributors live in caves or in canyons or on farms. One lives in bliss. Another "lives somewhere in New Jersey." Jonathan Greene "lives at the end of a road to nowhere which makes sitting naked with spouse in the garden possible." Joan Stone works "in a studio overlooking a Kansas wheatfield, combining gestures with words for video." (Gotta watch out for those wheatfields.) Paul Johnson has beaten Urizen at chess. Roger Easson is "warring on Blake's Polypus on the banks of the Mississippi." Several contributors claim direct communication with Blake, but the writing belies all such assertions. F. Adiele maintains that when she compared her short story, "The Fountain," to "some pieces of the Master's poetry that I had never read, I found direct parallels in concepts and even sentences." This may be the most derogatory comment on Blake to be found in the anthology.


The crowning multimedia dimension of this publication is the record Blake's Greatest Hits, sent at no extra charge with hardbound copies and available separately from North Atlantic Books for $2.50. The "hits" turn out to be Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and Gregory Corso repetitiously chanting their way through "Nurse's Song" from Songs of Innocence; a country blues version of "Ah! Sun-flower" by Tom Nichols; and Evan Tonsing's instrumental (toy piano and flute), inspired by The Book of Thel. Only the last bears listening to more than once.

At the beginning of the anthology, there is a one-page section entitled "What to Do with This Book." It concludes with a quotation from Jerusalem, plate 3: "Forgive what you do not approve." Perhaps the editors should have continued quoting from the plate: "& [love] me for this energetic exertion of my talent." In spite of a good deal of what we may not approve and in spite of too many half-Blaked ideas, there is no denying the sense of energy in the book, the sense that many different kinds of talents have exerted themselves in response to Blake. As Bogan and Goss write (p. [v]) in "To the Reader," "Blake is a fire-source but enjoins those who catch flame from him to shine according to their own genius."

Emblem literature, for those who are unfamiliar with the subject, is a curious mixed genre of illustration and poetry that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. An "emblem" was an engraving or woodcut with an allegorical or figurative meaning (sometimes originally conceived, sometimes taken from classical sources) which was elucidated by an aphoristic motto and some simple verses. The 1531 *editio princeps* of Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum Liber* was the first of many books of collected emblems published in almost every European country. Some collections had a common theme (love, piety, mythology), while others were eclectic; many were popular enough to go through several editions. A good deal of the emblem book's popularity was due to its usefulness. For the writer it was a ready source of topics and artificial arguments; for the moralist it was a didactic catechism with easy-to-remember lessons; for the artist it was a convenient design book containing stock depictions of common notions, motifs, and stories. The vogue of the emblem book waned in the eighteenth century, and one of the last was published in 1772, when Blake was a young boy.

One problem facing the critic who considers Blake's art in relation to emblem literature is that of determining to what degree he worked within emblematic traditions, and to what degree he transcended them. It is not an easy question to resolve, for several reasons. If we err in making Blake too dependent on the earlier emblematists, we run the risk of underestimating his unique genius and inspiration. But if we dismiss the emblematic parallels as essentially unimportant, then we may overlook possible keys to some of his more cryptic designs. In addition, the extent and complexity of Blake's canon, both poetic and pictorial, cannot be reduced to manipulable categories of comparison. Emblem literature, though perhaps more susceptible to such reduction, comprises a vast corpus of material spanning two centuries. Therefore the critic who wishes to study Blake's debt to the emblematists is faced with a formidable task of research and cross-referencing. Less palpable a difficulty, though perhaps a more subtly discouraging one, is the fact that whatever points of similarity may emerge from such a study are bound to trouble some of Blake's admirers, who will instinctively resist evidence that shows their hero to be less shatteringly original than they are accustomed to believe. For this reason most critics who discuss Blake and emblem literature take a conciliatory line—they balance every discovery of influence or relationship with a strong insistence on Blake's superiority to his sources.

Aquilino Sanchez Perez, the author of *Blake's Graphic Work and the Emblematic Tradition*, is not immune to these difficulties—in fact it was inevitable that his book should reflect them in a major way. A distinguished Spanish scholar in the field of emblem literature, Sanchez Perez has the advantage of also being a close and sympathetic student of Blake's work. He has given himself the job of analyzing all of Blake's graphics from an emblematic point of view, for the purpose of determining exactly in what sense the word "emblem" can be applied to Blake's art. It is no small task, but Sanchez Perez has undertaken it with considerable energy and skill. He has examined every design in Bindman's exhaustive catalogue of Blake's graphic work, searching for parallels, similarities, or anything at all suggestive of emblematic influence in either theme or composition. That he is somewhat hesitant in his conclusions is due to no lack of exertion or ability, but rather to the formidable nature of the problems mentioned above, and the necessarily tentative nature of a wideranging, comparative study.

Sanchez Perez rightly emphasizes the foremost point
of similarity between Blake's art and emblem literature—the interdependency and mutual illumination of picture and word. However, he is not content to point out that design and text are essentially inseparable in Blake's work and in emblems. He couples this observation with a subtler understanding of their connection when he distinguishes "emblematic structure" from "emblematic procedure." The structure of an emblem comprises its component parts (picture, motto, epigram), whereas emblematic procedure refers to "the internal relation between picture and text" (p. 20). Sanchez Perez describes this relation in the traditional emblem:

The picture is the visual substratum of the text, which first strikes us and appeals to our senses. The text represents a further, sometimes only supplementary, elucidation derived from a visual impression. In other words, the allegory or image which is potentially or silently present in the picture is further "revealed" and transformed into speech by means of the written word. (p. 20)

This formulation is useful not only for what it tells us about emblems, but also for the light it can cast on Blake's art. Whether or not Blake's designs have specific emblematic antecedents, and whether or not he produced genuine emblems of his own, his artistic procedure is emblematic in that it conjoins the visual and the verbal for the sake of an immediately vivid revelation. Although Sanchez Perez notes only one instance where Blake produces a traditionally structured emblem (Bindman, 5), he finds emblematic procedure so pervasive in the illustrated Book of Job, for example, that he calls the work "well within the mainstream of emblems" (p. 119).

However, if this admittedly vague similarity were all we had to go on, there would be little point in talking about Blake and the emblematists. The fact is that there are many emblematic antecedents for Blake's designs, and not just in the usually accepted places such as The Gates of Paradise and A Small Book of Designs. Sanchez Perez has demonstrated that emblems are important prototypes for designs in many of Blake's more ambitious works as well. The First Book of Urizen, Milton, America, Europe, the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, and Jerusalem all have plates that can be compared with earlier emblematic engravings or woodcuts. There is no longer any doubt that Blake knew and used Geoffrey Whitney's A Choice of Emblemes (1586), and in the case of other less popular emblem books there are places where a specific emblem coincides, in both design and thematic meaning, with a Blake plate. In such instances we must assume Blake's familiarity with the emblem in question, or else posit a Jungian collective unconscious into which he was plugged. Sanchez Perez has noted parallels not only in English writers such as Whitney, Peacham, Wither, Quarles, and Ayres, but in continental emblematists such as Alciati, Camerarius, and others. (To these I would add Petrièr's Le Théâtre des bons engins.) I am particularly impressed by his discussion of the emblematic parallels for human beings riding birds in flight, a motif much used by Blake. Urizen and his companions, circumscribing the bounds of the world, are purely emblematical, appearing in several early emblem books. Even "The Sick Rose" finds its original in Whitney's book.

Let me add here that Blake would be partial to emblem books for the simple reason that they were produced in woodcut or line engraving. Whatever their limitations as an art form, at least emblem books satisfied Blake's consistent demand for the clean, sharp line. "It is only fumble and Bungle which cannot draw a Line," he growls in his Notebook.

Sanchez Perez does recognize Blake's essential independence of the more rigid requirements of the emblematic genre. He points out that Blake's "artistic and poetical imagination would have found itself somewhat constrained in a tradition which is characterized by such narrow and austere formalism" (p. 53). Sanchez Perez prefers Blake the engraver to Blake the poet, and sees a stronger emblematic link in those works where Blake's graphic design overshadows his poetry. His analysis of The Gates of Paradise and the illustrated Book of Job is instructive, for he sees the latter work as emblematic because of its didactic purpose, and the former as such because of its deliberately enigmatic character. Here is a curious paradox that holds true for both Blake and the emblematists—a didactic impulse is veiled in figurative fiction. Blake and the emblem writers desired to teach, but they did so hieroglyphically, like the divine finger writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. A Daniel can read the hieroglyphs, for he is in touch with the numinous force that has made them. But unfortunately, a prophet's gift for illuminating the obscure is not given to all of us.

The point is an important one, for emblematic procedure in Blake is not limited to the simple juxtaposition of visual and verbal elements, nor the recasting of old emblems into new forms. Sanchez Perez is quite correct in pointing out that the complexity of Blake's art is similar to the studied obscurity of the emblem; both keep themselves aloof from a too-easy reading. He (mis-)quotes Blake's letter to Dr. Trusler: "I want to elucidate my ideas. But you ought to know that what is grand is necessarily obscure to weak men. That which can be explicit to the idiot is not worth my care." Quite so—the truly great artist does not dilute his work's strength for the sake of a wider audience. Odi profanum vulgus et arceo. Though Blake would not have been as explicit as Horace was in warning off the profane rabble, he knew and understood what Christ meant by the words "Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand" (Mark 4:10-12). All true wisdom belongs to the elect, simply because the ma-
majority of those to whom wisdom is offered either reject it unthinkingly or fail to comprehend it. Nevertheless, the fact that Blake was heir to this Biblical tradition of prophetic utterance (with its own built-in obscurity) makes for one important difference between his work and emblem literature. Whatever the ingenuity of their conceits, the emblematics were concerned with an extractable meaning, one which was more or less cryptically embedded in their text and pictures. But Blake's art derives much of its force from the controlled frenzy inherent in prophecy, and the energy of vatic possession. Its "obscurity" is a side-effect of its impetuous movement, and not the deliberately crafted crypticism of a symbolic collage.

In fact, it is this prophetic heritage that provides us with the historical connection between Blake and the emblematics. Sanchez Perez points out that long after emblem books ceased to be a part of the intellectual mainstream, they remained popular among the literate Puritan middle class from which Blake took his origin. This class of conscientious nonconformists—strong among the London artisans—was heir to the vaguely millenarian dissenters of the seventeenth century. Raised on a diet of Milton's sonorities, Bunyan's vision of the Celestial City, and topical, alarmist readings of the Book of Revelations, they were by nature predisposed to the allegorical, visionary discourse of emblem literature. For them allegory was second nature, trained as they were in relentless typological interpretation of the Old Testament, and continuous anticipation of "signs" of the Final Days. This is Blake's tradition too. He is a creature of the Bible, Milton, and apocalyptically-tinged Dissent. He represents a Puritan-allegorical tradition that stems ultimately from Spenser, and which was mediated through Bunyan and the emblematics.

Much of the foregoing paragraph is my interpretation, not necessarily that of Sanchez Perez. He is content to point out the strong connection that undoubtedly exists between some of Blake's graphic work and emblematic literature. The evidence that his book amasses is extensive and, to my mind, convincing. However, there are sure to be objections to his conclusions, precisely because of the theoretical possibility of coincidental similarities, and the impossibility of proving an artist has been decisively "influenced" by something. Sanchez Perez wraps up his discussion by saying that "the evidence in favour of influences from the emblematic tradition on the graphic work of Blake is sufficiently strong that it cannot be disregarded" (p. 169). But he is quick to add that "[t]here is no standard by which to measure that influence in a clear and precise manner" (p. 170). His book has over eighty illustrations, both from Blake and emblem literature, and some of the parallels are compelling. Yet he warns us that "we must bear in mind that some motifs, in fact, constitute commonplace topics of didactic literature" (p. 164). Prudence has dictated this politic hedging, and I would be the last to blame it.

So in the final analysis, Sanchez Perez steps back from the body of material he has gathered, as if unwilling to make too strong a connection between Blake and his putative sources. His caution is sensible, for the one thing that every student of Blake and the emblemats agrees upon is Blake's absolute transmutation of the earlier tradition. What had been in the hands of lesser men a mere device for didactic moralizing became in Blake's hands a powerful instrument for visionary statement. No one who looks upon the graphics of Blake can deny that they are of an entirely different order than the emblem books. But it is good to take note of the debt, however slight, that a great artist owes to his humbler predecessors. And as for those who dislike admitting that Blake was anything other than sui generis, they should recall that originality in itself has nothing to commend it, and an overly self-conscious individuality can be a positive hindrance to substantial achievement. What matters in any art is obedience to creative energy—the spirit of Los. Sanchez Perez has shown that, whatever debt Blake owed to the emblematics, he never disobeyed that spirit.


Reviewed by Alicia Ostriker

That man must have a heart of stone, says Oscar Wilde, who can read through the death of Little Nell without laughing. This has always been my sentiment about the death of Richardson's Clarissa; Clarissa as a whole has always struck me as the greatest, most sustained piece of soft-core pornographic soap opera in English. That such a fuss should be made over the deflowering of a not otherwise interesting bourgeois young lady; that Clarissa herself, her abductor, everyone else in the novel, and ap-
parently all of Europe from Dr. Johnson to Diderot and de Sade, should agree to apprehend the young woman's steady and humorless concentration on her own purity as the symbol not only of virtue but of Virtue, sensibility, nobility, sublimity, greatness of soul, angelic exaltedness and even sainthood, to me seems marvelous. I can imagine that the novel, and the feminization of culture it represents, would have deeply offended and irritated Blake; cf. the 'subtle modesty' passage in Visions of the Daughters of Albion, "My Spectre Around Me," and much else.

Far otherwise is it in Sex and Sensibility. Jean Hagstrum's monumental survey of love in the Restoration and the eighteenth century. Hagstrum's admiration for Richardson's "amazingly perspicuous and intense portrayal of love" extends to exclamations of his own about Richardson's heroine ("How profoundly inner and intuitive the Protestant Clarissa is!") and to the urgent insistence that she is no prude but "deeply a woman" who would have loved Lovelace had he been worthy of her. Clarissa "dreamed of a man who would combine virtue with physical charm. . . . One of the most poignant of the letter fragments that survive the rape shows that Clarissa really wanted marriage." Lovelace "is made to run the gamut of human evil" when he dreams of siring, by Clarissa and Anna, children who will intermarry. Yet he is an "appealing" being of "heterosexual exuberance" (Hagstrum defends his potency and masculinity against doubters), possessed of considerable though amoral "sensitiveness," a potential Man of Feeling capable of rising finally to a full appreciation of Clarissa's greatness; which, however, "cannot of course avail to salvation." Clarissa's death is "this great apotheosis."

That Hagstrum is not so much a theoretical analyst of the cult of sensibility as a member of it in good standing, is the chief defect and the chief strength of Sex and Sensibility. Literary issues of language, style, structure and genre scarcely concern him. Neither Freud nor De Rougemont, much less Foucault or Bataille, impinge, although the connection between love and death is one of his major topics. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century development of the "closed domesticated nuclear" family ideally based on personal choice and affection, documented by Lawrence Stone, is cited by Hagstrum as the social basis behind the cultural phenomena he investigates, but the relation between art and literature and social change is not his subject: the interpretation of characters and their feelings is.

To the post-Romantic reader, Hagstrum's inclination to moralize his song may seem excessive. Milton's ideal of wedded love and uxorial joy, love as an elevating and civilizing influence, the domestication of heroism, tender feeling in particular and heterosexuality in general, are approved of. Thus Dryden's works "often throb with a bold and hearty physicality." When the good Maria confesses her love for the criminal George Barnwell on the eve of his execution in Lillo's The London Merchant, "seldom has the theme [of love and death] been more movingly exploited." The love of Pamela and Mr. B. "elevates a spirited and determined girl to high station and gives to the noble husband . . . a marriage of true minds, hearts and bodies." Hagstrum is unmoved by the ideal of "angélim," the female too pure for physical passion, or by any sort of platonism. He admires passionate heroines, and feels that Dryden's portrayal of Dido as weak and licentious is "perhaps unforgivable." In his chapter on "The Abandoned and Passionate Mistress," he asserts that the period took to exotic deserted heroines like Dido, the Portugese Nun, and Eloise, "not because it wanted to escape reality" but because it needed "to fuel the domestic enterprise" by depictions of women who feel "intense devotion to a single man that is lifelong and irreversible and that lasts to the very edge of doom."

Antithetic to normative heterosexuality is what Hagstrum calls "morbid" or 'narcissistic' love, the locus classicus of which he finds again in Milton, both in the Satan-Sin relation and in Adam's antihierarchial attachment to Eve as "flesh of my flesh," i.e. his similitude. Innocent, threatened and actual, is a huge and fascinating motif in this period; both incest and love for one's likeness or mirror-self belong in the category of "the narcissistic sins." Thus Southerne's stage version of Behn's Oroonoko, which displaces the themes of "love of woman for disguised woman, love of woman for effeminate male" into a farcical subplot, may be a "healthy attempt to expunge a potential stain on the psyche and on society." Interestingly, Hagstrum does not disapprove the intense erotic friendships of Clarissa-Anna and of Julie-Claire in La Nouvelle Eloise, perhaps because they do not successfully challenge the primacy of heterosexual passion.

The primary advantage of Hagstrum's approach is that it enables him enthusiastically to consider an immense range of works, among byways as well as highways, more or less on their own terms. His investigations of Pope's, Swift's, and Sterne's quirky and poignant variations on the theme of sensibility are tolerant and tender. The subject of ungratified infantilized eroticism—the lover as son—in Goethe and Rousseau is finely handled. The sorts of questions he tends to ask—has the Portugese Nun really stopped loving her ravisher? Should Clarissa have married Lovelace? Why does Uncle Toby retreat from the Widow Wadman?—capture, one feels, the actual preoccupations of the authors and their original readers, far better than a cooler, theoretically-oriented reading could have done. So too, Hagstrum's inclination to moralize emotion places us squarely within the ethos he describes. A bonus, throughout Sex and Sensibility, is Hagstrum's discussion of sex and love in the parallel traditions of painting and music. The array of plates, reproducing a set of highly-charged erotic paintings from Barry and Correggio to Greuze, should convince anyone that the Age of Reason enjoyed its steamy side.

Reviewed by Andrew Wilton

The credentials of Robert Essick and Morton Paley as editors of Blair's and Blake's *Grave* need no examination or explanation in these pages. They have produced a learned and thoroughly detailed account of the work, which is presented in this volume with an elegance suited to the original. Their extensive commentary is printed in well laid out Baskerville which provides a sympathetic complement to the facsimile, the centerpiece of the volume. This does not enjoy, it is true, quite the full measure of surrounding margin found in the 1808 original, and modern photographic methods of reproduction cannot compete for texture and body with authentic paper and type, or with impressions of the engravings taken directly from the plates; but it is a measure of the high standard achieved by the Scolar Press that the comparison obtrudes itself at all. Perhaps it is only the black cloth boards of the binding which seem a trifle coarse when one thinks of the early nineteenth-century leather and marbled boards so vividly evoked by the contents.

The facsimile is preceded by a series of essays: on the tradition of graveyard poetry to which Blair's poem belongs; on the circumstances in which Blake collaborated with Robert Hartley Cromek in the publication; and on the designs that Blake made for it. There are detailed notes on the plates, and on the numerous drawings associated with *The Grave* but not published. By way of appendices Essick and Paley add full catalogues of all these designs, referring systematically to every watercolor and sketch in Blake's oeuvre that can by any possibility be considered relevant. All these images are reproduced in adequate (though sometimes rather grey) monochrome. There is a compendium of "early references to Blake's *Grave* designs," largely drawn from advertisements and correspondence, taking the survey of contemporary documentation up to 1813, but not including reviews, which are discussed at length in the main text. A facsimile of Cromek's advertisement for the *Canterbury Pilgrims* plate that Schiavonetti engraved after Stothard is also supplied, reminding us concretely of the work that caused Blake's bitter rupture with both publisher and painter. As a final indulgence to scholarship, a summary of the variations in Blair's early texts of the poem concludes the book.

This last appendix, coming full circle back to the source of the whole work, emphasizes the importance which the editors have attached to the literary significance of the poem, which indeed must be understood if we are to read Blake's illustrations intelligently. As Essick and Paley make clear, Blake as usual provided his own entirely personal glosses on the lines he chose to embellish, but there is a directness of reference in his designs which makes them exceptionally perspicuous as illustrations and helps to explain why they are, in the editors' words, "In some ways . . . the easiest to understand of all his major pictorial works." Schiavonetti's engravings after Blake's drawings for *The Grave* enjoyed a wider audience than almost anything else of Blake's and probably had a certain amount of influence on later artists: the interest of Bell Scott and of the Rossettis is well known, and, beyond them, one might draw attention to such apparent points of contact as the illustrations of Frederick Sandys (compare the girl in his *I* of 1866 with the head of the wife in Blake's *Death of the Strong Wicked Man*) to suggest the value of these designs for the nineteenth century. But of course the circumstances of their publication made it much more likely that they would be seen and appreciated by other artists than almost any other major work of Blake's.

The book was from the start taken seriously by the profession. Blake never received more concerted acclaim for his work than he did for *The Grave* designs. The
watercolors he finished for the project were admired by Fuseli, West, Flaxman, Opie, Lawrence, Stothard and other prominent Academicians; the volume was subscribed to by an impressive list of artists and amateurs, headed by the Queen herself, to whom Blake wrote a somewhat uncharacteristic dedicatory poem. The critical reception was by no means entirely favorable, but the book entered a sizable number of libraries and was the most accessible, physically as well as conceptually, of his published works. The plates were even issued in Latin America as early as 1826, illustrating José Joaquín de Mora's Meditaciones Poéticas.

Another factor in their accessibility was, no doubt, the intermediary agency of Luigi Schiavonetti. As the editors duly note, "the visual qualities of Blake's published designs are in large measure determined by Schiavonetti's reproductive techniques." The "fashionable" characteristics of "sinuosity of line and smoothness of surface texture" are contrasted with the "energetic outlines and rugged surfaces" which Blake would have achieved if he had been responsible, as was originally planned, for the plates. Essick and Paley conclude by saying that "Schiavonetti's plates are skillful and thoroughly professional renditions, but they substitute competence for genius and partially mask the intense conceptions of the artist beneath the engraver's conventional patterns. ..." This is a reasonable summary, but it seems to me that the traditional judgment does less than justice to Schiavonetti. Blake had apparently intended to produce his plates as white-line engravings—one survives, the design for Death's Door, in a unique impression in an American private collection; and in fairness to Cromek, whose behavior in the affair has earned him a very hostile press, it must be said that such a technique, with its reversal of the normal tone-values to create a "negative" effect, was hardly calculated to appeal to a general audience, or even to the Academy. The publisher's doubts are understandable. They were to be closely paralleled nearly twenty years later, when Blake illustrated another poem by someone else, Ambrose Philips's Pastoral in imitation of Virgil for Robert Thornton's Latin primer. For that work he used a similar light-on-dark idiom, this time in woodcut, and Thornton reacted rather as Cromek had done, by partially retracting his sponsorship in the famous declaration that the blocks "display less of art than genius." There can be no doubt that the set of illustrations to The Grave executed as Blake seems to have intended would have been a very powerful series of masterpieces, and we can only regret that they were never realized; but it should be pointed out that the solitary impression of a black-line Death's Door does not prove that Blake envisaged the final series in that form: this may have been an isolated experiment. Even if not, given the inevitable lessening of impact by the adoption of conventional line-engraving, Schiavonetti's plates are, in my opinion, extraordinary in the sensitivities with which they handle Blake's idiosyncratic language. Every one of the twelve illustrations (Blake had arranged to produce twenty) is vigorous, if not moving, and unmistakably Blakean in almost every detail. One might point to possible shortcomings, such as the over-illusionistic chiaroscuro in the (nevertheless ravishing) Descent of Man into the Vale of Death, which does not seem to reproduce Blake's handling of washes of tone; but in general the "elegant" and "fashionable" Italian has grasped and rendered the sense and spirituality of Blake's ideas with an insight for which he deserves greater credit. Nowhere, I believe, can he be accused of having "softened" or "improved" Blake: he persuades us (who know Blake's own work much better than his contemporaries did) that the elegance that is undeniably present in the designs is Blake's own, combining it, as he does repeatedly (for instance in the two figures of The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave), with an eccentric nervousness that is entirely convincing.

All speculation as to the adequacy of Schiavonetti's reproductions must, of course, remain uncertain because none of Blake's finished watercolors for the work have survived. This fact is noted by Essick and Paley, and indeed by other commentators on the enterprise, very much en passant; yet it is a matter for no little wonder that such a group of drawings should have vanished so completely. That they were highly wrought and very beautiful we cannot doubt; the approval of the Academicians confirms it. These facts only make the disappearance the stranger. It would have been interesting to know what Essick and Paley have to say on the matter. Did the designs, for instance, partake more of the character of, say, the rejected titlepage in the British Museum, The Resurrection of the Dead; or of the Yale Center's Prone on the Lowly Grave ..., another rejected idea? The British Museum drawing is one of Blake's most exquisitely iridescent visions of beatitude, executed in those hagings of rich color which he used throughout his life to evoke the shimmer of paradisal bliss. The Yale sheet is much more prosaic in its treatment, perhaps commensurate with its subject matter, but altogether a less beautiful object, and below the standard of intensity and inwardness that Schiavonetti suggests in the published compositions. The drawing of Death Pursuing the Soul through the Avenues of Life is another finished design, apparently rejected, for the book; it falls somewhere between these two extremes in technique, and though powerful is somewhat unresolved. It does suggest, though, that the finished drawings may have been similar in type to some of the finer of the biblical illustrations that Blake was making for Thomas Butts about this time; I am thinking particularly of such works as the Yale Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre and the Victoria and Albert Museum's The Angel Rolling away the Stone. These drawings, like the British Museum Resurrection, are of a
linear beauty that would have required no modification from the hand of a Schiavonetti if he had ever been asked to engrave them.

Such hypotheses are in a sense futile; but the character of Blake's watercolors for *The Grave* is surely an issue which should lie at the heart of any investigation into the publication, and it is one which Essick and Paley, like everyone before them, have neglected. Perhaps the solution is easy: we know very well what Blake's watercolors of this time looked like. But as I have indicated, they vary considerably in type and technique, and Schiavonetti's engravings imply inventions of truly exceptional magnificence and refinement. The contemplation of even imaginary drawings of this order is one of the pleasures afforded by any copy of Blake's *Grave*, and is stimulated especially by this rewarding new edition.

Monographs of elaborate commentary in recent years and *Jerusalem* could not avoid its turn. Minna Doskow's book is an attempt to answer an old question: What is the governing principle behind the poem's four-part structure? Her method is also familiar; it is a thematic paraphrase proceeding more or less consecutively plate by plate through the poem. The "Structure and Meaning" of her subtitle are one; *Jerusalem* 's structure is a structure of meanings, meanings of an abstract didactic sort. With a kind of relentless zeal Doskow now undertakes to reveal what she believes to be *Jerusalem* 's didactic structure.

She begins in a promising way, noting that "all the poem's parts fall into pieces of a kaleidoscopic whole complementing and reinforcing one another. Each chapter turns the kaleidoscope to view the theme in a new way. The pieces recompose themselves in new patterns and seem to reveal new appearances of the whole but are only actualizing those patterns potentially present all along" (p. 15). So far, so good; this is always the impression that repeated experience of the poem gives. But having correctly pointed out the contradictory results of previous critics' attempts to elicit a four-part thematic scheme out of *Jerusalem*, Doskow quixotically proceeds on precisely the same sort of attempt herself. She discovers her structure of meaning in the hypothesis that *Jerusalem* is an expose of Albion's errors. There are three chief errors. The first chapter surveys all three; as for the rest, "in chapter 2 Blake reveals all these distortions [of perception, understanding, feeling and action] growing from the soil of Albion's religious error. In chapter 3, on the other hand, he shows them sprouting from philosophical error, and in chapter 4 from affective error" (p. 71). These categories are derived from the three addresses "To the Jews" (patriarchal religion, Druidism, imputation of sin), "To the Deists" (rationalism, natural law), and "To the Christians" (repudiation of the affections, of imagination, of liberty-named-Jerusalem).

Now there is nothing inherently implausible about this categorical organization. If one were to speak of associative thematic clusters in these chapters, of gravitational drifts influenced by the introductory address, there would be no quarrel; but then there would also be no special originality in such an insight and no very long
book either. Doskow, however, proposes a more rigorous structure: the content of each chapter is to be explained exclusively and entirely in terms of its ruling “error.” Even Chapter I, the general survey of Albion’s error, is in fact parcelled out to the various particular errors; thus, pls. 6-10 give us religious error (the controversy of Los and his Spectre is a religious one), 11-15 is philosophic error, 16-25 affective. Blake, we learn, adopts an “orderly procedure of exposing one aspect of error after another in the poem” (p. 27). It is nearly as orderly as drill at a military academy and not very much like the Blake we thought we knew. Perhaps sensing this, Doskow clearly feels the necessity to justify her bold but narrow principles with every mode of argument at her disposal.

There is indeed something forensic about this book. Part of the effect comes from a prosecutorial tone, inevitable when the word “error” is repeated dozens of times and applied to dozens of contexts. Every passage and design in the poem either reveals redemption from error or error itself; thus even something ostensibly as neutral in moral terms as the correlation of Hebrew tribes and English counties on pl. 16 is a sign of Albion’s “religious errors” (p. 54). Moreover these errors must be proved, and a courtroom full of argumentative devices is deployed to do the job. Wherever the text itself gives Doskow what she needs she is content to quote; but where the text is more recalcitrant she relies on shiftier means—obiter dicta, selective quotation, close reading when that will tease out a lurking error, distanced, glancing reading to hurry through passages that cannot be so teased, circular reasoning, and self-contradiction.

In a limited space like this, a few examples will have to suffice to indicate what I mean. Take pl. 26, one of the full-page illuminations that are said to provide a “thematic frontispiece” (p. 20) to the chapters they precede. This design showing Hand and Jerusalem is supposed to announce visually a chapter on “religious error.” Yet it is here that we find the inscription “Jerusalem is named Liberty among the Sons of Albion.” But offenses against Jerusalem as a principle of liberty are, according to Doskow’s scheme, assigned to Chapter IV of the poem, affective error, not Chapter II. If the frontispiece is intended to present an unmistakable signal about the focus of the ensuing chapter, what is this plate doing in front of Chapter II? Doskow copes with this problem by arguing that Hand “symbolizes religious error” (p. 21), later ad- ducing some iconographical evidence to back up her point (p. 33). But why give preferential weight to Hand’s significance over Jerusalem’s significance, particularly since her significance is stressed by a motto etched on the design? Nor do Doskow’s problems end here. If Hand does in fact symbolize “religious error” (and this is itself disputable), why is it that elsewhere he “portrays Bacon, Newton, and Locke” (p. 53) in the “deist” portion of Chapter I and again in Chapter III? And why is he identi- fied as the beaked giant that presides over the opening of Chapter IV, an incarnation of affective error (p. 142)? If, however, Hand is an Individual passing through various States of error, can he be said to “symbolize” anything? In other words, can his presence be taken as a stable point of reference that gives determinate meaning to any context in which he appears? Unfortunately for Doskow, the meaning-controls in Jerusalem are all unstable, and the “errors” will not stay in their assigned places but slide together and fraternize.

When things get really difficult for her scheme, Doskow often simply decides to look the other way. This may happen when Blake himself is most explicit in the delineation of an error. Here are some very famous lines from Jerusalem:

Hence the Infernal Veil grows in the disobedient Female:
Which Jesus rends & the whole Druid Law removes away
From the Inner Sanctuary: a False Holiness hid within the Center,
For the Sanctuary of Eden: is in the Camp: in the Outline,
In the Circumference: & every Minute Particular is Holy:
Embraces are Cominglings from the Head even to the Feet;
And not a pompous High Priest entering by a Secret Place.

Everything in this passage points to a delineation of what Doskow defines as “religious error”: the imagery of Druid Law, High Priest, Veil, and Sanctuary embodying the worst aspects of the Jewish patriarchal religion that is presumably exposed on pl. 27, a religion that turns sexuality to pious hypocrisy. But famous as it is, Doskow neither quotes nor mentions this passage in her commentary. The lines appear, after all, on plate 69, deep within a chapter that is supposed to be devoted to rational, not religious error. Their presence in Chapter III is an embarrassment to her scheme and is therefore ignored. Such considerations may account for the neglect in Doskow’s commentary of other significant passages, most notably the description of the building of Golgonooza on pl. 12. Perfunctorily identified as redemptive (p. 56), it is otherwise passed over; its dazzling, exuberant imagery holds little allure for Doskow, contributing as it does next to nothing to the uncovering of “rational error,” the supposed topic of these particular plates in Chapter I. And so with many other negligences, large and small. Whenever Doskow is faced with the choice of fidelity to the contours of the text or the preservation of her scheme, she opts for the scheme and swerves from the text.

In the end all these strategies are in vain. I will offer two reasons. First, Doskow’s organizational model is almost certainly incorrect: Blake does not proceed in an “orderly” fashion, sorting out the nuanced variations of Albion’s primal error and depositing them in separate bins labeled as chapters; he proceeds on all fronts at once, showing the varieties of fallen thought together on nearly every plate, superimposed as in a transparent palimpsest or inextricably knotted. Doskow sometimes assumes this in practice but never admits it as an organizational prin-
ciple. The second reason is more fundamental. Like many other Blake studies before it, this book rests on the tacit assumption that the only way of finding coherence and unity in Blake is to find it in a ruling didactic intent; hence the emphasis on "errors" and thematic paraphrase. Blake himself offers the definitive word on this approach: "It is the same with the Moral of a whole Poem as with the Moral Goodness of its parts Unity and Morality, are secondary considerations and belong to Philosophy & not to Poetry, Exception and not to Rule, to Accident and not to Substance, the Ancients called it eating of the tree of good and evil ("On Homer's Poetry," E 269-70). Doskow is but one of many people who are attracted to Blake primarily as a master of moral certainty and who, as critics, tend to neglect other dimensions of his genius as a poet-artist. Thus Doskow shows no interest in the texture of Jerusalem's verse, the surface movement of its narrative, the organization of its episodes, the technique and placement of the designs. She does not consider the poem's bibliographical cruxes, its generic antecedents, or its literary-historical context, nor does she show any awareness that a study of these topics would yield a more capacious view of "structure and meaning" than the pursuit of didactic unity can afford.

This book, then, in its emphasis on moral unity is profoundly un-Blakean. Yet it would be improper to lay the entire onus for its limitations on its author, whose investment of labor and dedication, evident throughout, commands a certain admiration. Doskow has the sanction of a long tradition of Blakean interpretation in which certain abstract terms, most often not the poet's, are reified and then imposed on his creations to direct (or misdirect) our understanding of them. She also works within a context of academic institutional imperatives which stress finding a clearly demarcated topic and riding it as hard as one can—and, usually, as fast as one can. There are, in fact, certain earmarks of haste in the book. Such a circumstance might account for the frequent patches of clumsy writing, for the uncaut typos, and for a scattering of—the word is unavoidable—errors. Some are probably mistranscriptions such as the citation of pl. 15 where 14 is meant (p. 54) or the substitution of pl. 39 for 37 (p. 48, 3rd paragraph); others are factual. For the record, Reuben is the son of Jacob, not of Isaac (p. 76); the four unfallen cathedral cities are London, Verulam, York, and Edinburgh, not Canterbury, Verulam, and the other two (p. 83); the dome of St. Paul's is not Byzantine (p. 99) but Baroque or late Renaissance; the title of the address that precedes the first chapter of the poem is "To the Public," not "To the General Public" (pp. 21, 29).

But enough of errors, or too much. Despite its limitations and blemishes, this is a book that most students of Blake will want to have. One of its real contributions is a reading of nearly every design in Jerusalem. Informed readers of Blake may find Doskow's generalizing paraphrases of the text dispensable, since they do little that readers cannot do for themselves, but turning mute designs into meaning is another matter, demanding an attention to graphic detail and coloring. Here it is often painstakingly supplied. Many of her readings are of course disputable and one should always be wary of her special biases, but the interpretations as a whole offer an alternative to Erdman, her only rival in this area. Although nothing can supersede the special pleasures of The Illuminated Blake, it is sometimes good to have a second opinion. But the real treasure of this book is its reproduction of the entire Rinder facsimile (Copy C) of Jerusalem. Here between compact covers, not overly reduced and interrupted by commentary as in The Illuminated Blake, not unwieldy and costly as in Bindman's Complete Graphic Works, is a convenient clear reproduction of Jerusalem, an ideal reading text. Minna Doskow has performed a genuine service to students of Blake in making this text available as part of her work.

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DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

Blake/Hegel/Derrida: A response to Nelson Hilton's review of Blake, Hegel and Dialectic

By David Punter

I found Nelson Hilton's review of my Blake, Hegel and Dialectic quite a surprise, chiefly because it lifted the theoretical level of the discourse well beyond the book's own plane. Hilton did this, of course, by establishing and concentrating on a significant absence (one of many): the absence of Derrida. And in adopting this procedure, he therefore carried out precisely a Derridean maneuver: by...
focusing on my relatively unconceptualized term “writing” and unpacking the evasions and condensations which striated it. It should be said that with most of Hilton’s criticisms I have no quarrel, except for some specific points taken up below. But in the main, it seems to me less helpful to respond through a new detour through the book than by trying to take the argument on through the new context Hilton suggests. But for this, I must begin from the review.

The early allusion to “predictable references to Herbert Marcuse and N.O. Brown” does indeed point to the historical moment of Blake, Hegel and Dialectic, and clearly this is sharply counterposed to the moment referred to a little later under the sign of the “disappearance of man.” I take it that this latter reference is to the “modern Copernican revolution”²; to the supposition that the revelations of, roughly, Althusser, Lacan and Derrida have in effect produced a situation where, at least (and perhaps only) at the level of theory, the fictions of subjective centrality and original coherence have been dispelled. I shall take up the question of the “ghost of teleology” later; but it does seem to me that even here, in the heartland of deconstruction, the spectre is difficult to banish, even if it has to appear in the form of a poststructuralist paradise where material forms have dissolved away, leaving only the shadows of intricate relational structures presiding over a blank landscape.

In fact, Hilton conjures the “spectre of a theology, a teleology” as an implicit criticism of my attempt to distinguish between, approximately, cyclical apprehensions of historical process and historiographies which involve some concept of “progression.” I think that the major question this raises, however, is precisely one suggested by Derrida among others: namely, who is the writer of the text Blake, Hegel and Dialectic? I have no wish to descend into the coy dialectical gameplaying evident in so much deconstructionist criticism (notably, I would say, even in Spivak’s authoritative introduction to Of Grammatology³); nonetheless, there is a question of historical imagining involved, and I think the real problem Hilton points to, throughout my book, is one of historical distance and immersion in the object. In other words, the distinction I try to draw, which does indeed imply a teleology, is, or so I am claiming, intrinsic to the writing about (within) which I am writing, intrinsic, that is, to the fragments of the social text which we refer to as the works of Blake and Hegel; the danger of adopting a form of deconstruction which would dissolve away that particular shape of historical embeddedness is that at the same time it dissolves history, leaving the texts bare, naked of the baroque excesses which are the signifiers of history.

Thus also Hilton goes to some lengths to suggest that my view of Hegel is eccentric, and his evidence comes from modern studies which see Hegel as an “Absolute Idealist.” He cites, for instance, Sarlemijn: “Because of its theory of sublation of everything finite, Hegel’s philosophy is an absolute idealism. Every moment of the whole is denied separateness, independence, reality and finitude.”¹ I fully admit my text’s ignorance of Sarlemijn’s work, but that does not prevent me from feeling that this comment, at least, is precisely the kind of idealist recuperation of Hegel which Hilton elsewhere attributes to me. Consider, for instance, Hegel: “... each moment possesses its own specific nature as something unchallengeably valid and as a firm reality vis-à-vis the other... The soul of this fixed being, however, is the immediate transition into its opposite...”³ The discursive relation Hegel/Sarlemijn here appears to me to be neither interpretative nor deconstructionist, but dialogical: to Hegel’s writing, another writing is counterposed which enacts a stance —“you (Hegel) cannot feasibly have meant what you have written, because it is contradictory; therefore you must really have meant this.”

The important question which arises is therefore about the nature of the recuperation; and by “nature,” I mean the force within the political unconscious which produces this linguistic shape. What is the will which seeks to reduce Hegel to an “Absolute Idealist”? It is, I would suggest, the will which seeks a renunciation of the concrete, and as such it is manifested also in Hilton’s own writing (such a will, I take it, could also be connected to Thanatos, and it is at that point that the banishment of Marcuse and Brown by the power-effect of Hilton’s own text again becomes important):

Hegel’s choice of “Aufhebung” as the characterization of dialectic makes the point precisely: the synthesis or product or dynamic he wishes to name—the identity of apparently opposite effects—can happen only in language/writing; moreover, it can happen only thus because language/writing is ineluctably constituted (“always already”) through the play of differences or, to stretch the point, contraries.

That “because” is the crucial word; it does not actually guarantee a syntactically necessary relationship, for which Hilton would have to demonstrate that there is no other structure or effect which is “ineluctably constituted... through the play of differences.” In Derrida’s surprisingly unitary world, this would be difficult to do, since it would necessarily involve a move into the extratextual and this cannot be sanctioned by the canons of grammatology.

The banishing of the real is, of course, an activity which needs to be surrounded by ritual and ceremony, because it is precisely the field of magic (and I have, in my book, commented on the importance within the history of ideas of Giordano Bruno’s attempt to work on the fractured interface between magical and practical labor⁶); and it is this ritual and ceremony which we are made to experience in Derrida’s dazzling unpacking of the sign (the box of tricks). Yet magic has other implications, too: historically it has served as savior of a weakening hold on power, and I cannot help suspecting that this is what is happening within the magical process of deconstruction. Hilton, for instance, suggests that “if one wishes to argue that after the ‘real change,’ ‘social progress,’ revolution or
what not that we will write a new language (BASIC?), then obviously one can’t say any more." His main point, I take it, is to hold up terms like "real change" and "social progress" as examples of the teleological and therefore the inadmissible, but I would say that there is considerably more in this writing. There is, for instance, a magical banishing of the female; it would be a very partial view indeed of the social text which had not noticed that it is precisely a new language that the feminists are talking about, and that within this constellation BASIC figures not as novelty but as the reduction to a knotted strength of residual patriarchalism. Very basic indeed. But Hilton's sentence turns back on itself in other interesting ways: if we are to "write" a new language, then we shall not be able to "say" any more. But perhaps, indeed, that could be put another way round: in a social formation in which an intelligentsia is denied the means of "saying" (access to the media, societal credibility, reinforcements across the age and gender barriers), it is very likely indeed that such an intelligentsia will turn to the massive valorization of writing, of its own esoteric craft, as a last resort against the strategies of the state.8

And there can be little doubt that in Derrida it is the esoteric which is at stake; nobody has less use for the "vulgar" concept of writing, or makes such imperialist claims for its "sophisticated" conceptual counterpart. Derrida's recapture of/by Rousseau marks a precise circle: that circle has the security of a well-defended onanism, as though the unconscious posture Derrida represents is the withdrawal of the phallus (realization having dawned that penetration is no longer being received as painlessly as in the past) so that patriarchal power, by appearing to castrate itself, may be hidden safely from those who wish to do it real damage.

But of course, in my book there is little writing which addresses itself to these structures. Where Hilton engages more directly with the themes of the book, however, the underlying shape is symmetrical: "within the differential system," he claims, "to speak of 'social progress,' 'struggle,' 'progress,' and especially 'labour' and 'work' is only to engage in further idealization and semantization." There are, logically, two alternatives. We speak of these matters in some sense "outside" the differential system, but to a theory based on textual primacy this is a nonsense. Or, of course, we cease to speak of them at all.

It seems to me precisely this conclusion, the temptation not to speak of social progress, struggle or labor, which is to be resisted. I am aware that this is, if you like, a partisan statement; I am aware also, as I tried to mention above, that this partisanship is in a continuous relationship with my writing of Hegel and Blake. But the obverse is partisan too, and that is because the political unconscious, strung as it is between the poles of primary process, has no choice but to be partisan, and to discover itself from time to time enacting erotic or thanatic wishes.

It is a version of the writing of the erotic which Jameson describes as dialectical self-consciousness:

... dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness and may be described as the attempt to think about a given object on one level, and at the same time to observe our own thought processes as we do so: or to use a more scientific figure, to reckon the position of the observer into the experiment itself. ... dialectical thinking is doubly historical: not only are the phenomena with which it works historical in character, but it must unfreeze the very concepts with which they have been understood, and interpret the very phenomena in their own right.9

The wish enacted in deconstruction is the wish to render unnameable (which is, I would contend, precisely a theological wish); and of course the social desire, at the present time, to wish away the awkward categories of labor and struggle is very strong. We now have various elections to prove it.

Hilton, however, sees the retention of such categories as a vain attempt to cheer ourselves up, to try to forget the Copernican loss of integrated subjectivity (forgetting that, thus far, it is largely only intellectuals who have thus lost their souls, mainly because the state and financial exigencies of publishing luckily serve to protect the masses from this dread revelation). To Hilton they are fictions, and their purpose is to persuade us, wrongly, that "you get to remain you." A probably apocryphal story about Jack Lindsay relates that, on a visit to the U.S.S.R., he was moved to a disagreement with his hosts, and was as a consequence solemnly declared a non-person. Years later, he was surprised on a birthday by a visit from a Soviet official, who announced that he had come to tell him that he had at last been recognized as a person again. Upon which the irreverent thought comes, "Which person?"

What threatens me with not remaining me is not some internal dynamic within the history of ideas; if there are developments there which do indeed pose perplexities for the constitution of the subject, then these developments are closely related to the actual course of history and to the political unconscious which is manifesting itself in that course. Primarily, there is fear: fear, for the British, of winddown and decline, a fear which prevents revolt and instead forces people into an uneasy acquiescence in the depersonalizing processes of the late capitalist state. "'Difference,' we might say, is the name of dialectic without psychologizing, without idealizing, another name for a system that cannot, by its nature, enable us to see beyond self-annihilation," writes Hilton. Indeed it is; and the very terms of this argument force upon us the proximity of a theory (or an antitheory) which talks in terms of endless and pointless productivity and a social situation which speaks of imminent annihilation of life. It is not a concentration on the problems of labor and struggle which comes to cheer us up; far from it. It is, rather, the proffering of a fantasy world within which there is no prospect of ending (as there is, conveniently,
no memory of beginning and thus no initial trauma to "initiate" the process of painful remembrance), a world where each word, if unpacked sufficiently, can lead us down to eternity and save our souls while we forget our dying bodies, which performs a cheering-up function; lost in the mazes of Derrida, it is indeed true that the category of the concrete can be wished away.

Yet Hilton can also claim that "difference" is an inherent condition of human life, so the attempt to transcend it—for better or worse—is inhuman. Here, surely, we have Urizenic terror: the insistence on building nets and webs farther and farther back into the cave in case, otherwise, we should be tempted to look—or step—outside it. What is most bizarre, of course, is the ready acceptance that "difference," presumably merely because of its own oddity, is a word somehow exempted from the general process of "semantization" which appears, according to Hilton, to deflect all other terms—but particularly those terms which have to do with work. Hilton quotes me as saying that "the formation of Albion can be discussed in precise historical detail, as a past, present and future labour"10, and adds: "what we have here is an idealization and semantization of 'labour': just another literary/critical category, more material of/for writing: a pseudo-transcendental signified which is imagined to stand behind, beyond writing." Just, I would say, like "difference."

But this is mere bickering. The principal point I am trying to labor (sic) is that, within the recesses of Derrida's writing, there lies a hidden desire for an accommodation with power. It is as though that writing enacts a forestalling of the death of culture (whether by government fiat or by bomb) by proclaiming that, after all, we, the literati, can do our own hatchet job; we can sever our own slender lines of communication, if that will allow the authorities to permit us to carry on with our harmless and humble occupation. Blake and Hegel, I believe, did not say this. It is probable, of course, that in composing their own very different answers to the implicit censor they too invented fictions about present and future; but that is inevitable, since the future is shaped precisely by such fantasies on the surface of material constraint.

But I have as yet said very little about Blake; I would like to conclude by offering a reading, which I believe to be germane to the arguments above, of "The Tyger," which is, I take it, a poem about "writing"—or, as I would prefer, inscription. Where the lamb at one level represents unified symbolic interpretation, the fantasized state before rift, the tiger stands for shattered and discrete perception, the bounding and tangential details of an undescribed experience. The lamb produces us as readers in the guise of selves-as-comfort, selves at home, gambolling; the tiger produces us as selves yet to be achieved, and goes one step further than that, asking us whether indeed the production of a unified self should actually be considered to be the goal of human development. The questions which structure "The Tyger" are directed at the tiger itself; but they are also designed to interrogate the perceiving self, to challenge the reader with a receding vision of unity, and to invite us to question the nature of the thirst or desire which leads us farther and farther into the jungle.

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The flames of the first line, the stripes on the tiger, remind us that we are here in the fire-world, the world of constant transformation: "fire is process," says Hegel, meditating on Heraclitus; "fire is physical time, absolute unrest, absolute disintegration of existence, the passing away of the 'other,' but also of itself."11 Just so the tiger challenges the reader with the sloughing off of imposed unitary and originary meaning, and presents itself precisely as an object for human work, or interpretative endeavor, the endeavor of framing a "symmetry." Yet this symmetry is ambiguous: it is that quality of fixity or stasis which, so Blake believed, is always a function of our first efforts to apprehend, the effort to hold in place the shifting image on the retina; yet it is also that more complex symmetry formed by stripe and tree trunk. The tiger and the forest are inversions of each other, light in darkness, darkness in light, the word on the shadowed page; to frame that symmetry, verbally or visually ("hand or eye"), is, for this narrator of experience, an "immortal" task, one impossible of achievement because the flames of living energy will burn the edges of the inscribed page of canvas, will challenge the artist or the perceiver with the existence of "absolute unrest," and may thus lead him or her to the realization that that absolute unrest is also a function of the individual's own life, but one repressed into the distant and the dark. It is from this realm of the imagined depths that the tiger comes:

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

The tiger belongs, I would say, to a world before sublimation; he exists now as a haunting, flickering image of a dangerous world of instinct. It is only in these lines, which relate to the genesis of the tiger, that the beast itself is not blind, has "eyes"; only then that the urges which the tiger represents were aligned with the senses. Now we have exiled the beast, and our eyes are used to keep him at bay, to bind him within an aesthetic symmetry, a denial of difference; and if our efforts are not enough, we must invoke the "Immortals" as further protection against danger. And, by exiling the tiger, we enter ourselves into the pure but helpless state of the immortals: we endeavor to remove from ourselves the fear of "physical time," "absolute disintegration of existence," but in making this attempt we only frighten ourselves the more. Thus the abrupt change halfway through this stanza, a retreat from the threat of the repressed into an "exper-
ienced" vaunting of the power with which we supposedly tame the tiger, or build for ourselves gods which can do the job for us, can "sieze the fire" and thus draw together in a protecting hand the severed threads of our lives. There is matching of distances: as we perceive the shadow of the tiger, deep in the jungle, the rising to the surface of an unassimilable energy, the writing which has no beginning, so we invoke that other distance, and rise to the heavens, to escape, but also in the mistaken "experienced" belief that through globalization or overview we can make sense of the tiger, draw him into our scheme. Confronted with the fact of the tiger, we make him into a convenient participant in an eternal struggle—he is here being set up as a demonic figure in battle with an angel, with a hovering vanisher in which we irresistibly see the outlines of that part of ourselves which seeks to reduce all things to reason, and to "cope with" desire.

But this attempt to mobilize the power of reason against the threat of energy produces the effective shattering of the body.Already there is some ambiguity about the "wings" and the "hand"; in the next stanza, this ambiguity increases:

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

"Dread," of course, is the perfect word here for Blake's purposes, blurring as it does the boundary between active and passive, inscriber and inscribed; the tiger is "dread" in the simple sense of being feared, but the apparent owner of the "dread hand" and "dread feet" is both feared and fearful. There is a solemn terror here at the presumption of the artist or writer: but the controlling imagery is of physical fragments, the shoulder, the sinews and the heart, and what is revealed is a struggle in which the body itself is unable to resist the strain of this coming together of supernatural forces. For here, it seems, two quite different fantasized moments are being described simultaneously: the moment of the tiger's inception, considered as the work of a being who may or may not be an incarnation of the human imagination; and the moment of life-or-death battle, a battle not only of strength but also of "art," which supervenes immediately on that inception, creating a single palimpsest. Creation passes immediately into struggle between creator and created; the birth of the howling infant passes without break into a struggle for mastery.

The broken parts of the body are now paralleled by the fragments of a proto-industrial world: this tiger, this polymorphous babe, is not born afresh, not created like the "Little Lamb," but, himself a creature of fire, has been forged in fire, beaten into shape: even this image of the unconscious bears the marks of the conditions which produced him. The self which the tiger represents is not a pure invasion from the outside but, I would say, a product of labor, a transformation of base material. Thus we produce our own "terrors"; to put it another way, we are responsible for our own desires, for if, as Boehme puts it, "fire is the life of all principles," then fire is identical with desire in "the world of souls and spirits." Can we, therefore, find a way of conceiving of the human in a way that will allow us to own to "writings" which are otherwise repressed—can we find room in our dialectical conception of humanity, not only for the answerable questions of "The Lamb," but also for the continuous and unsatisfied interrogatives which come to us "In the forests of the night"?

The other question raised by this stanza concerns the acceptability or rejection of change. It would be all too easy to claim that only the lamb represents the "natural," that the world of hammers, chains and anvils is a different kind of thing altogether; but that way, according to Blake, lies the cessation of change, the acceptance of experience in its binding sense, as imposition. The fact that the tiger is born of labor does not solve our problems by enabling us to classify it as somehow supererogatory: but it does challenge us to recognize that labor is a primary means of transformation, and that we are all the products of a world more complicated than the lamb can or needs to know.

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:

It is the tiger, as the unacceptable face of desire, who threatens our smooth notions of a divine plan, an ordered universe, a fully present text, and thwarts our belief that, in the end, pain and terror can be put down to supernatural whim. The "stars" themselves, symbols of the overview, are unnerved by this making; they would like to believe that creation is not coterminous with destruction, that the gentle process of reproduction can proceed without the intervention of a humanity which is constantly evolving its own specialized forms of making.

What is scandalous about "The Tyger" becomes clear in that ironic "smile," for Blake has used the floating symbol of the tiger to couple worlds which are taboos apart: the world of the artist, the world of the instincts, but also the world of technical making. The writing and engraving of the Songs was of course, to Blake, a kind of work: not that this is in itself an improbable thought, but what scandalizes the stars and makes them throw in their rather elegant twowels is that for Blake this work, this apparatus of the writer and engraver is not a substructure, to be rejected or concealed in the name of ideal perfe-
tion of form, but is the architecture itself, the vital symmetry around which the flesh of the living beast forms. In the world of experience, everything is an operation on nature; but then, Blake implies, art has always been that, and we increase its dignity by making its structure visible. At another level, art is represented in this poem as a transformation of instinctual energy, but what is to be striven for is a nonrepressive mode of inscription or transformation, whereby the structure of the poem becomes an edifice from which the tiger may leap rather than a prison-like structure designed to keep the tiger in place. The tiger will not be kept in place anyway, any more than we can refuse the manmade gifts which the hammer and the anvil will inevitably offer us: thus the path of manifesting energy lies not away from or round but through the jungle of developing human powers.

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The only word which has changed here, of course, is “Dare,” which in the first stanza was “Could,” but the change is vital. From an indefinite tense, which might pertain to the past or the future, we have been moved to the present; and from a fear-ridden doubt about our ability to control the tiger, we have been moved to a challenge to produce the tiger. And the change of verb affects also the meaning we place on the word “immortal”: from a word descriptive of otherness, of an imaginary deity, it has become a word we ponder in relation to ourselves. It is not that we ask who “else” might we call on, but that we ask what force there might be to be found within ourselves to match the exiled tiger; and the answer, of course, is that the tiger is within us, and the challenge is about whether we have the strength to permit a disruptive incarnation, or the vision to see that this incarnation might be taking place all around us in the concrete development of human resources and powers.

Hilton mentions—and I entirely agree with him—that the “topic of Blake/Hegel—last poet/philosopher of the book and the first artist/thinker of writing—could sustain the labor (writing) of a generation,” and perhaps this kind of analysis might be a place from which to start. But it is precisely the attempt to banish the transcendental signified which must be seen as the continuous yet revolutionary labor of history, and we cut ourselves off from the text if we do not attempt to identify the boundaries which from time to time circumscribe that attempt. The myth is surely to believe that the “ghost of teleology” can ever be thoroughly exorcised; what is important is to continue to construct the catalogue of shapes which the ghost has manifested, so that we can come to sense the better his hovering presence within our experience and within writing.
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