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Blake's *Job*: Some Unrecorded Proofs and Their Inscriptions

BY ROBERT N. ESSICK

Over the last several years, I have been attempting to record all pre-publication proofs of William Blake's *Job* engravings. The resulting catalogue raisonné will soon be published (or perhaps by now has been published) by the William Blake Trust as a supplement to its long-awaited *Job* facsimiles. This catalogue includes a large number of previously unrecorded states, as well as several pre-publication sets of all 22 plates which have never been described. One such group of proofs merits individual notice in the journal of record for Blake scholarship because of the light it throws on Blake’s interpretation of the Book of Job. Further, two of the proofs bear inscribed aphorisms that deserve inclusion in the canon of Blake’s original writings.

On 9 December 1936, the American Art Association/Anderson Galleries Inc. of New York offered at auction as lot 62 a group of 21 pre-publication *Job* proofs. The catalogue includes a 4⅛-page description of this collection. The vendor is not named and the extensive sales pitch says nothing about provenance. The title page of the catalogue names eight sellers, but none is known to have been a Blake collector. The auction included "other properties," and thus the *Job* proofs may not have come from any of the eight. An annotated copy of the catalogue at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, records a price of $5000 for lot 62, but I have not been able to discover the purchaser or present whereabouts of the proofs. They clearly are not the same as any of the 9 sets of complete proofs I have located, nor can any of the individual proofs outside these major sets be identified as dispersed remnants of the group sold in 1936.

The auction catalogue notes that all leaves in this proof set measure 117/8 x 99/16 inches (30.2 x 24.3 cm.) and show a "single stab-hole." Plates 17 and 20 are on laid paper and the remainder are on wove, with plates 3, 9, 12, 16, and 21 showing a "J. WHATMAN 1823" watermark. The title page, printed on laid India paper, is the only plate not in a pre-publication proof state. It probably was not printed with the other plates and may have been added at a later date to complete the set. The plate by plate descriptions in the sale catalogue range from helpful comparisons between the proofs and finished states to vague generalities (e.g., on plate 8 "the general treatment of the finished work is more finished and pronounced"). These descriptions do not permit the precise determination of each print's position in the sequence of known proof states, but it would seem as though many, perhaps all, of these impressions represent the first states after the addition of border designs. All are described as lacking imprints and the "Proof" inscription. If indeed these are first pulls after the addition of borders, they record a crucial point in Blake’s development of the *Job* copperplates, perhaps the first time he could determine fully the success or failure of his combination of outline borders and highly-finished central designs. The rediscovery of these impressions could occasion some major adjustments in the known record of progress proofs.

Among the more intriguing features of these proofs—or, to be more exact, of the 1936 catalogue descriptions—is the absence of a few biblical inscriptions which appear on all previously recorded and traced impressions. Plate 5 is said to lack "And it grieved him at his heart / Who maketh his Angels Spirits & his Ministers a Flaming Fire." These words appear as the second and third lines of text beneath the central design on the earliest traced state of plate 5 with the border design (Riches set, Fitzwilliam Museum, and Linnell-Rosenwald set, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and in all subsequent states. Plate 16 is described as lacking "The Accuser of our Brethren is Cast down / which accused them before our God day & night. The first of these lines, but not the second, is present just left of the central design in the previously recorded first proof state with the borders (Linnell-Rosenwald set). The next state (Riches, Linnell-Rosenwald, and White-Rosenwald) also lacks the second line, but it appears in all later states. The 1936 auction catalogue also notes a variant in the second line of text beneath the design on plate 16: "Even the Devils are Subject to Us thro thy Name. And he said unto them, I saw Satan as lightning fall from Heaven." These words from Luke 10:17–18 are emended in the next proof state so that the beginning
of the second sentence reads “Jesus said unto them, . . .” Blake very probably made the change simply to identify the speaker.

By far the most significant variants, textual or pictorial, noted in the 1936 catalogue appear on plates 1 and 21. Fortunately, both are reproduced. The illustrations accompanying this essay were made from photographs of the 1936 reproductions. In the first plate (illus. 1), the ground below the altar in the lower border is inscribed “Prayer to God is the Study of Imaginative Art.” The final plate (illus. 2) bears an inscription parallel in its placement and syntax: “Praise to God is the Exercise of Imaginative Art.” The reproductions not only confirm the presence of these lines but strongly suggest

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that, like the other inscriptions on these two proofs, the letters were scratched into the copperplates in drypoint rather than written with pen or pencil on the individual impressions. The style of lettering is the same as that exemplified by the scratched inscriptions on the altars and found throughout the Job plates. There can be little doubt that the lines were written by Blake.

The inscriptions beneath the altars are unique to the untraced proofs. In the next known state of plate 1 (Essick collection [illus. 3] and Linnell, White, and Riches proof sets), the ground has been completely cleared of all letters and "The Letter Killeth / The Spirit giveth Life" added to the upper part of the altar. Ground and altar remain unchanged in all later states. The next
recorded state of plate 21 (White [illus. 4] and Riches proofs) shows that the ground has been cleared, additional tongues of flame have been added above the altar, and the lettering on the altar has been recut more clearly. These features remain unaltered in subsequent states.

The proof inscriptions in question are the only words (other than signatures and imprints) in the Job series not quoted from, or at least closely based on, the Bible. This might have been one reason for their removal. Both inscriptions are almost certainly Blake's own words. Their composition—or at least their inscription in copper—can be dated to c. 1824 on the

basis of the known chronology of the Job engravings. They are strikingly similar to two adjacent lines inscribed along the left margin of Blake's Laocoön engraving of c. 1820 (illus. 5): “Prayer is the Study of Art / Praise is the Practice of Art.” A further close parallel between late proof states of Job and the Laocoön is established by the presence on the latter of “The Angel of the Divine Presence” above “Angel of Jehovah” in Hebrew. Blake added the same arrangement of the same words (with a spelling change in the Hebrew) to the eighth and last pre-publication proof state of Job plate 2.

The marginal inscriptions throughout Job influence the "reading" of the central designs. The position of the unique lines on the untraced proofs of plates 1 and 21 recommends them as the grounds for interpretations of all that is pictured and written above. "Praise to God is the Exercise of Imaginative Art" contrasts with the words cut into the altar ("In burnt Offerings for Sin / thou hast had no Pleasure") and provides an appropriate caption for the central design on plate 21. Wicksteed's comment that Job and his family are "lifting to heaven the harmonies of redemption" fairly represents all modern commentary on the final design. Thus, the plate

21 proof inscription tends to confirm interpretations made without knowledge of its existence. However, the impact of the plate 1 proof inscription on the iconography of its central design is far more complex.

Charles Eliot Norton was the first to suggest that Blake pictures Job in a fallen state of consciousness at the beginning of the series. As Norton wrote in 1875, "Job's prayers and burnt-offerings, in the days of his prosperity, were, after all, but the propitiatory and selfish sacrifices of the law." Subsequent criticism has followed this crucial conception of Blake's vision of Job, one that places the first and last plates in opposition and thereby influences the shape of the entire visual narrative. This perspective is placed into doubt by the proof inscription which, when combined with the inscription ("It is Spiritually Discerned") on the altar immediately above, suggests that the books held by Job and his wife and the prayerful attitudes of the whole family represent a "Study of Imaginative Art" capable of achieving spiritual insight. The proof inscriptions together thwart the usual juxtaposition of the first and last plates and suggest instead underlying similarities between passive prayer and active praise. The latter may be superior to the former, but the difference is in means, not ends.

Before thoroughly revising our sense of the Job engravings on the basis of the proof inscriptions, we must consider several important details in the development of the first design. Its proof inscription certainly disrupts the conventional interpretation of the central design for the proof state on which it appears, and perhaps for all earlier versions including the water color executed for Thomas Butts c. 1805–1806, but the elimination of the line may also signal a shift in Blake's own conception of the Job series. The removal of the sentence from the ground in the next recorded proof state is accompanied by the addition of "The Letter Killeth / The Spirit giveth Life" on the altar above (see illus. 3). These words prompt a very different view of the books and family activities in the central design. The text lower on the altar from 1 Corinthians 2:14 tends to confirm the truth and importance of the new lines from 2 Corinthians 3:6 opposing letter and spirit. Norton, in his commentary noted above, begins by quoting these lines; later critics also stress their importance in establishing the donnée for the whole series.

In his writings on the arts, Blake stresses the unity of conception and execution. The textual revisions on the first Job engraving would seem to demonstrate the practical relevance of this ideal to Blake's habits as a visual/verbal artist. In light of the considerable change in interpretation warranted by this two-fold revision, we cannot assume that Blake's full conception of the meaning of the design preceded its execution in copper. Only as he slowly developed his images in the difficult medium of line engraving did Blake come to realize that the "perfect and upright" man of "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1) was not an archetype of the prayerful student of the arts but one who had already fallen in thrall to the dead letter of the law. The thematic shape of the entire series, particularly the errors which adumbrate Satan's entry into Job's life and the oppositions between letter and spirit visualized by the first and last scenes, came into being at a late stage in Blake's long history as an interpreter of the Book of Job.

1 I am grateful to Leslie A. Morris of the Rosenbach for this information.

The Riches set of proofs in the Fitzwilliam Museum, the White-Rosenwald set in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and some of the proofs in the Linnell-Rosenwald group (National Gallery of Art) are on laid papers of at least two varieties. One example from the last group, plus five impressions in the set of proofs owned by Philip Hofer, show the Whatman 1823 watermark.

The sale catalogue descriptions are not sufficient to permit the inclusion of the untraced proofs in the Blake Trust catalogue of states. It will, however, contain a separate list of exemplars from the 1936 auction catalogue and speculations about the state of each untraced proof.

Perhaps the line farthest from its Biblical source is "The Angel of the Divine Presence" on plate 2. S. Foster Damon, Blake's Job (Providence: Brown Univ. Press, 1966), p. 56, notes that "this phrase does not appear in the Bible." However, it is clearly based on Isaiah 63:9 ("and the angel of his presence saved them"), as was first pointed out in Joseph Wicksteed, Blake's Vision of the Book of Job (London: Dent, 1910), p. 45.

The "Memorandum of Agreement" between Blake and John Linnell to engrave the Job designs is dated 25 March 1823 (G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 277), but it is unlikely that Blake could have brought the plates to the state of finish represented by the untraced proofs until early in the next year. Indeed, in a letter to C. W. Dilke of 27 September 1844, Linnell noted that the border designs "were an after thought" (Blake Records, pp. 326–27). The first recorded printing of Job proofs is 3 March 1825 (Blake Records, pp. 588, 602), and these were probably pulled a state later than the untraced proofs, a state just prior to the addition of the 8 March 1825 imprints to all but plate 1 (mistakenly dated 1828).

An 1825 Linnell imprint was added to the fourth state, then changed to the Blake imprint in the fifth. Thus the lines in question would appear to be additions of late 1825 or even early 1826. See also note 4. On Blake's misspelling of "Angel" in Hebrew, thereby changing it to "King" on the Job plate, see David V. Erdman, "Redefining the Texts of Blake," Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly, 17 (1983), 14.


William Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1875), unnumbered page of comments on "Plate I."

See for example Wicksteed (1924), p. 90: "The written books, and the silent instruments above, represent the letter and the spirit, referred to on the altar below, and here we see Job dwelling on the letter that 'killeth,' while the Spirit that 'giveth life' is not yet waked."
Thomas Sivright and the Lost Designs for Blair’s Grave

BY G.E. BENTLEY, JR.

One of the minor mysteries of Blake studies is what became of the suite of designs which Blake made for Blair’s Grave. A recent discovery seems to give part of the answer.

On 18 October 1805 John Flaxman wrote to William Hayley: “M’ Cromek has employed Blake to make a set of 40 drawings from Blair’s poem of the Grave 20 of which he proposes [to] have engraved . . . . I have seen several compositions, the most Striking are, The Gambols of Ghosts according with their affections previous to the final Judgment—A widow embracing the turf which covers her husband’s grave—Wicked Strong man dying—the good old man’s Soul received by Angels—.” Of the designs named here, only the last two were engraved, and only the finished drawing for “A Widow Embracing the Turf” is known to have survived.

The total number of designs actually finished may be in some doubt, for Blake himself wrote to Hayley on 27 November 1805: “M’ Cromek the Engraver came to me desiring to have some of my Designs. He named his Price & wished me to Produce him Illustrations of The Grave A Poem by Robert Blair. In consequence of this I produced about twenty Designs which pleas’d so well that he with the same liberality with which he set me about the drawings, has now set me to Engrave them. . . .” This may imply either that Blake made forty designs (as Flaxman says), of which Cromek commissioned him to engrave twenty, or that he only made twenty designs altogether. In either case, the number of designs is larger than the twelve which Schiavonetti (not Blake) eventually etched for the volume which was published in 1808.

In the ordinary course of such arrangements, the drawings would become the property of the publisher, even though all he needed from them was the copyright. Cromek may thus have acquired forty designs (according to Flaxman), or twenty, as Blake’s letter implies, or perhaps the fifteen which were advertised in November 1805, or only the twelve which were eventually etched. At any rate, when the engravings had been made, Cromek had no more need for the Blair designs, and in May 1807 he wrote impertinently to Blake:

when I gave you the order for the drawings from the poem of ‘The Grave,’ I paid you for them more than I could then afford, more in proportion than you were in the habit of receiving, and what you were perfectly satisfied with, though I must do you the justice to confess much less than I think is their real value. Perhaps you have friends and admirers who can appreciate their merit and worth as much as I do. I am decidedly of opinion that the 12 for The Grave should sell at least for 60 guineas. If you can meet with any gentleman who will give you this sum for them, I will deliver them into his hands on the publication of the poem. I will deduct the 20 guineas I have paid you from that sum, and the remainder 40 d shall be at your disposal.”

By this method, Cromek would have secured the copyright for nothing—and Blake would have had only Cromek’s honor and good nature (which he had good reason to suspect) for the £42, even if by his own efforts he found a patron who would pay such a substantial sum for the designs. But there is no evidence that such an arrangement was ever made.

It seems likely that the drawings stayed together, at least for a time. When Cromek died at the age of 40 in 1812, his widow was left in some distress, and she sold the copyright of the Blair designs to Ackermann by 1813 for £120. And at this point we have lost sight of the collection of drawings. At some later date the collection was apparently broken up, for the few known finished Blair designs are now widely scattered, and new ones appear unexpectedly from time to time. Robert N. Essick acquired a previously unknown one called “Death Pursuing the Soul through the Avenues of Life” in 1971.

Recently, while pursuing a wild goose in another direction, I came across a reference in an old auction catalogue to a “Volume of Drawings by Blake, Illustrative of Blair’s Grave, entitled ‘Black Spirits and White, Blue Spirits and Grey.’” This sounds very much like the hypothetical volume of Blair drawings, though there is no record of it in Martin Butlin’s great catalogue raisonné of The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake (1981) or in the even more recent edition of Robert Blair, The Grave illustrated by William Blake: A study with facsimile by Robert N. Essick & Morton D. Paley (1982).
The reason it has not hitherto been noticed is doubtless partly because the auction was held not in London, where one might most plausibly look, but in Edinburgh. It was offered as lot 1835 in the

Catalogue of the Extensive and Valuable Collection of Books, Pictures, Drawings, Prints, and Painters' Etchings, Ancient Bronzes and Terracottas, Etruscan Vases, Marble Busts, Antique Carvings and Carriages in Wood and Metal, Coins, Minerals, Gems, and Precious Stones, Philosophical Instruments, Wines, Spirits, &c. of the late Thomas Sivright Esq. of Meggetland and Southhouse, Which Will Be Sold by Auction by Mr. C.B. Tait, in His Great Room, 11, Hanover Street, On Monday, February 1, and Sixteen following lawful days [i.e., 1–19 February 1836], at One O'Clock. (Edinburgh: Printed by Thomas Constable, M.DCCC.XXVI [1836].)

The price which the Blake volume fetched, £1.5.0, was not what Blake, Cromek, or the twentieth century would have valued it at, but it is sufficiently impressive to make one believe that there were a substantial number of drawings in the volume of a quality to strike someone's fancy forcibly. The previous lot, a collection of thirty Persian drawings, "very highly finished," fetched £4.4.0, and the next lot, a volume of thirty-three drawings "by eminent Painters" brought £1.10.0, four drawings by Albert Durer and Lucas of Leyden (lot 1902) went for three shillings, four by Rubens (lot 1904) went for five shillings, and four by Rembrandt, "Ferd. Bol, &c." (lot 1906) went for seven shillings.

The fact that the volume found its way to Scotland should not surprise us, for though Blake is not known to have had any patrons in Scotland, Cromek had many. He secured sixteen subscribers to The Grave in Edinburgh (though Thomas Sivright is not among them), he made a tour of Scotland with Thomas Stothard collecting materials for an illustrated edition of Burns, and he published Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song, ed. R.H. Cromek [and Allan Cunningham] (London: Cadell & Davies, 1810) and Select Scottish Songs, Ancient and Modern; with Critical Observations and Biographical Notices, By Robert Burns, 2 volumes (London: Cadell & Davies, 1810). Cromek clearly had close contacts with patrons in Scotland and particularly in Edinburgh, and he might well have sold the volume of Blair designs directly to Thomas Sivright on one of his trips to Edinburgh; alternatively, his wife might have contacted such a notable Edinburgh collector after her husband's death, knowing that he collected modern painters such as Barry and Gainsborough, as well as the ancients.

Ye more probably, the collection of Blair drawings may well have passed through the hands of his favorite sister Ann Cromek (b. 1773). Cromek willed his art collection to his otherwise-unprovided-for sister, believing that his young widow would be supported by her prosperous father—an act to which Mrs. Cromek reacted with some bitterness when her father proved unsympathetic. Ann Cromek had fallen in love with the tempestuous Scotsman John Black, who stayed with the Cromeks when he came from Edinburgh to London in 1810. Black married another woman disastrously in 1812 and tried to get a Scottish divorce in 1813. The account of Black in the Dictionary of National Biography reports discreetly, "Black, in full expectation of a divorce, had offered marriage to an old friend, who became his housekeeper and bore the name of Mrs. Black." The housekeeper is fairly clearly Ann Cromek, who in Thomas Hartley Cromek's manuscript account of his father, "Memorials of the life of R.H. Cromek, Engraver" (1865) [MS in the possession of Wilfred Warrington], p. 7, is said to have "married Mr. John Black, late Editor of 'The Morning Chronicle.'" ("My late mother's father was with difficulty prevailed upon to advance [to her] the money necessary to enable her to have the plate [of Stothard's Canterbury Pilgrims] completed by Heath; and she was obliged to pay back every farthing of it, with interest, to her own father.") When Ann Cromek died in the late 1820s or early 1830s, her art collections acquired from her brother may have been dispersed through Black's Edinburgh connections and thus have reached Thomas Sivright.

The title of the volume is curious, and it is not clear whether "Black Spirits and White, Blue Spirits and Grey" are Blake's words or those of some later owner. Blake does not ordinarily speak of spirits in such colorful terms, though in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell an indignant "Angel hearing this became almost blue but mastering himself he grew yellow, & at last white pink & smiling" (pl. 22), and in The Four Zoas the Spectre and Urthona are described as "A shadow blue obscure & dismal" (p. 49, l. 13, p. 50, l. 23). The closest Blake comes to such terms is in a letter to William Hayley of 11 December 1805 in which he mentions his three dark years at Felpham: "I speak of Spiritual Things, Not of natural, Of Things known only to Myself & to Spirits Good & Evil, but Not Known to Men on Earth." But he was apparently ready to joke on such subjects, for when he addressed his friend Thomas Butts in a letter of 22 September 1800 as "Dear Friend of My Angels," Butts replied:

I cannot immediately determine whether or no I am dignified by the Title you have graciously conferred on me—you cannot but recollect the difficulties that have unceasingly arisen to prevent my discerning clearly whether your Angels are black white or grey and that on the whole I have rather inclined to . . . consider . . . you more immediately under the protection of the black-guard[;] however at any rate I should thank you for an introduction to his Highness[']s Court, that when refused admittance into other Mansions I may not be received as a stranger in Hlst.)

With such contexts, it seems possible to me that the words "Black Spirits and White, Blue Spirits and Grey" were Blake's but rather more likely that they were someone else's, perhaps Cromek's. In Blake's surviving de-
signs for Blair’s Grave there are nothing much like black, white, blue or grey spirits to justify the title. In any case, the quotation is from Thomas Middleton’s The Witch, V, ii, appropriately interpolated into eighteenth-century performances of King Lear, IV, i.

Thomas Sivright of Meggetland was clearly a collector of formidable range and energy, but almost all my information about him derives from his posthumous catalogue. In the Notice to this, the auctioneer writes on 20 January 1836:

It is seldom that a Collection, so extensive and valuable in all its departments, as that contained in the following Catalogue, has been offered for sale in Scotland. It consists of Books, Pictures, Original Drawings and Etchings by Eminent Masters, Prints, Antiques in great variety, Coins, and Miscellaneous Articles of Vario, comprehending the acquisitions of the late Mr. Sivright of Meggetland, during a period of nearly thirty years. The whole has been selected with the taste and judgment, by which that gentleman was so eminently distinguished as a Collector and an Amateur.

The Library contains a large assortment of Books, ancient and modern, on general literature, but it is chiefly remarkable for a collection of works on Art, in all its various branches, of unexampled extent and value . . . brilliant impressions . . . of such works as Piranesi and the Florence Gallery.

Mr. Sivright’s Collection of Pictures has been long well known to the amateurs of Scotland, and, consequently, any account of its general character is here uncalculated. It exhibits, in its details, fine and undoubted specimens of the pencils of Paul Veronese, Rembrandt, Cuyp, and Wynants, with delicious Bits by Ruysdael, Vander Neer, Borh, and various other masters of lesser note. The Drawings and Etchings, forming a most suitable Pendant to the Pictures, are chiefly by the great masters of the Italian, Early German, Dutch, and Flemish Schools. In Prints, too, the collection is eminently rich, and exhibits the progress of the art from the earliest period, when the graver was rudely but powerfully handled by Mantegna and Albert Durer, to the most refined specimens of modern engraving . . . In short, there is not a department of taste or fancy, for the gratification of which the Collection . . . does not afford the richest and most ample materials. (pp. v–vi)

The 2959 lots in the sale are wonderfully miscellaneous, as the titlepage announces, and some of them are remarkably fine. Among the 1632 lots of books, most are of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as Stuart & Revett’s Antiquities of Athens, “very fine early impressions” (lot 399; £37.16.0), a collection of Piranesi’s works in twenty-two volumes, “most brilliant impressions of the plates” (lot 1632; £73.10.0), but most are priced only in shillings, such as Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound (1820) (lot 978; 3/-), and lots 1343–1358 are each described merely as “Lot of Books” and fetched 1/- to 5/6. There are a few remarkable old books, such as

1528 [Langland] The Vision of Piers Plowman, black letter, title and fifteen leaves in manuscript (1550) (5/6)
1529 Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1600), with the autograph of George Steevens (£2.10.0)
1530 Shakespeare, A Pleasant Conceited Comedy, called Love’s Labors Lost (1598), “title a fac-simile reprint, and one leaf wanting” (16/-)

Among the 577 lots of drawings and engravings, the largest single group is by the Edinburgh artist Alexander Runciman (1736–1785), the friend of Fuseli, but most of the artists named are old masters, and, very remarkably for catalogues at that time, the more notable pictures are reproduced in outline-engravings. The pictures which fetched more than £25 were

2798 Rembrandt, “The Night Guard” (reproduced; £30)
2857 Paul Veronese, “Venus Disarming Cupid” (reproduced; £57.15.0)
2860 John Wynnants, “A Magnificent Landscape” (reproduced; £47.5.0)
2907 Karel du Jardin, “Portrait of Himself” (reproduced; £26.5.0)
2917 Albert Cuyp, “A View on the Coast of Holland” (reproduced; £73.10.0)
2919 Canaletto, “View of the Grand Canal in Venice” (not reproduced; £26.5.0)

The miscellaneous works are wonderfully eclectic, including Japanese Candelabra, Figure of Bodda, Large Cake of China Ink, New Zealand Clothes, a Caffer Hoe, Etruscan Vases, “Varley’s Patent Graphic Telescope,” a violin, upwards of seven hundred casts from antique gems (lot 2372; £17.6.6), a diamond of 5 1/10 carats (£7), and specimens of minerals (lots 2518–2732). Among the more interesting, in Blake’s context, are “Ruthven’s Patent Copperplate Printing Press” (lot 2104; £2.10.0), and a number of volumes of blank paper (lots 2003–2111, 2023–2028). Apparently Thomas Sivright had some interest in printing from copperplates.

This brings me back to the wild-goose chase. George Cumberland said in a note to his son: “Tell Blake a Mr Sivwright of Edinburgh has just claimed in Home Philosophical Journal of Last Month As his own invention Blakes Method—and calls it Copper Blocks I think.” This seemed to point to a John Sivwright or Sivright who is listed variously in Edinburgh directories as an Engraver and a Teacher of Music, and W.H. Lizar acknowledges in the Edinburgh Philosophical Journal, 2 (1820), 23 that he “was much indebted” to Sivwright during his experiments to perfect a method of stereotype engraving which sounds much like Blake’s. However, the “Mr Sivwright of Edinburgh” in Cumberland’s letter could be the Thomas Sivright of Edinburgh, whose collecting activities covered the period 1806–1836 and who seems to have had the equipment to print engravings. At any rate, it was this hypothesis which led me to the 1836 auction and its entirely unexpected cache of drawings by Blake for Blair’s Grave. Whether or not Thomas Sivright was an experimenter with printing techniques, he was certainly a formidable collector—and one of the most remarkable of his acquisitions was the volume of Blake’s drawing which has apparently not been recorded since that date.

Reviewed by David Simpson

Steven Alford’s book is a comparative study of Blake and Friedrich Schlegel in which the German critic is read as providing the model of romantic irony necessary for the proper reading of Blake’s *Marriage*. The aims of the book, which is an unmodified doctoral dissertation, are modest. Schlegel’s early writings are expounded, and the essay *On Incomprehensibility* examined in some detail; Blake is represented in detail only by *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

After unpromising beginnings, in which the author appears to want to take seriously the accusation that Romantic poetry is “flowery” in order to reassert the counterclaim that its aims were “noble and beautiful” (pp. 1, 3, 4)—the probable irony of Keats’s “flowery tale” might have been usefully recalled here—the major argument comes clear: that the Romantics moved toward an emphasis on the “rhetorical” over the “logical” as the essence of meaning (p. 6). The substantial vehicle of this shift is a move away from “understanding” to “imagination” by means of irony (p. 7).

Unfortunately for Blake specialists, the discussion of Schlegel is considerably more adventurous than that of Blake. Schlegel is argued to be recommending and embodying a move from logic to poetry as the proper model of the philosophical enterprise, which then becomes “performative” rather than deductive (p. 42). Suggesting convincingly that Schlegel was unwilling to accept the potentially tragic Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal (p. 107)—an unwillingness shared by almost all of Kant’s self-styled followers—Alford demonstrates the case in Schlegel’s writings for a unification of the empirical and the absolute through the medium of romantic poetry (p. 55). In particular, romantic irony is the unity of the “cognitive and rhetorical” in which otherwise abstract philosophical problems are adjudicated in performance, in the actions and spiritual gestures of individual persons (pp. 64, 58).

As this model is carried over into a reading of the Marriage, it becomes somewhat platitudinous. Alford sees a parallel to Schlegelian irony in Blake’s “visionary form of language” (p. 123), whereby the irritable reaching after fact and reason (fixed allegories, stable speakers, simple ironies of inversion, etc.) is to be replaced by “the eternally active creative imagination” (p. 167). Alford is surely right to lead us away from simple readings of Blake—but even a moderately experienced reader is unlikely to perpetrate such readings in the terms he describes. He is right also to encourage the search for “functional analogy,” not simple definition, as the proper approach to Blake’s myth (p. 148). But I cannot see that anything that is not already habitual happens to our reading of the Marriage if we agree that “irony functions to suspend the understanding and to make way for an act of vision” (p. 13). If anything, such a conclusion is likely to contribute to the morass of relativism that surrounds the presence of Blake in print and in the classroom. Even if we accept that such readings are part of Blake’s purpose, at least two kinds of inquiry are called for: one into the composite identity of Blake’s art, ignored here, and a very specific incidence of “vision” and another (not unrelated) into the narrative identity of the Marriage, if any. Forms of coherence obtained by the privileging of luminous aphorisms are no longer enough, even as there is a great deal in Blake’s writing to encourage such an approach.

The book’s somewhat military style—the naming of parts that is all too standard as a dissertation format—and the fact that long and important passages in German are not translated, is not likely to assist the author in finding a wide audience for his book. But he does demonstrate, once again, that Friedrich Schlegel is an important figure for the understanding of Romantic theories of meaning and communication.

Reviewed by Mary Lynn Johnson

For twenty-five years the fullest investigation of a single figure or character in Blake has remained Henry Petter’s patient dissertation in the German manner, *Enitharmon: Stellung und Aufgabe eines Symboles in dichterischen Gesamtwerk William Blakes*, published in 1957 in the Swiss Studies in English monograph series and now rarely cited. Edward J. Rose, in a book-length series of articles spanning two decades, has conducted the most sustained and multifaceted investigation of Los, and Rose’s articles on Los and his family have been amplified or refined by several other essayists or dissertation writers who have been active since about 1970. As the pivotal figure in Blake’s mature work, as archetype of the artist, the artisan, and the prophet, as creator of systems and striver against systems, as the most psychologically complex and humanly understandable personality among the Zoas, and as an idealized self-portrait of the author himself, Los appeals strongly to the critical imagination. The time certainly appears ripe for a generously proportioned treatment of Blake’s most heroic character. A book that alludes to Los in its title ought to be warmly received.

The names of books can of course be misleading in a variety of ways; some are oddly revealing even when they are not especially informative. Leonard W. Deen’s awkwardly inclusive title, *Conversing in Paradise: Poetic Genius and Identity-as-Community in Blake’s Los*, attempts like the book itself to use Los as a precipitant for a diffuse mass of ideas and symbols. Although interesting local insights and fresh reformulations of familiar ideas appear frequently, the study suffers from a puzzling lack of vividness. It is difficult to keep the main line of argument in mind. Even the title character does not help much. Compelling though the figure of Los is in one’s experience of Blake’s poems, and useful though a single-figure study might seem to be at this stage of Blake criticism, Deen’s soft focus on “Poetic Genius” has the effect of dissolving Los’s distinctive lineaments.

Deen describes Los as “a character as ‘real’ as any in Shakespeare and Dickens,” considers him in *The Four Zoas* to be a “human—even novelistic—character,” and interprets the Los-Enitharmon plot as being on one level “the history of a marriage.” But *Conversing in Paradise* is really about “identity-as-community,” an ideal state toward which Los struggles. The phrase “identity-as-community” describes “the form of a body of poetry as well as an ideal of brotherhood” enacted by Los. Through Los, “Blake shows the position from which the poet in a fallen world must start,” for “the first form of reasserted identity in a fallen world is Mental Fight; the achieved form is the community of Eden.”

Deen works entirely within the critical framework devised by other scholars, notably Frye: “My approach to Blake is neither to analyze his problems nor to seek his sources or his tradition, but to stick closely to the terms and characters of his poetry in order to reveal the whole shape of his myth.” Deen’s few quotations and paraphrases of thinkers other than Blake—introduced from time to time as general background—are filtered through secondary sources, as with the synopsis of Enlightenment views of identity for purposes of contrast with Romantic and Blakean myths of identity. Most of his frequently-drawn parallels with literary and mythological figures seem intended merely as casual analogies. His modest purpose is to clarify “a form” of the received Blakean myth, “one around the figure of Los,
an ellipse whose two foci are identity and community.” But his critical method, as he describes it, almost guarantees vague results: “My effort is speculative and is an attempt to see Blake’s myth as he might have seen it—not as philosophy or psychology or criticism (though it contains these, largely in the form of Mental Fight), but as poetry.”

In the introductory chapter, “Identity and Community in English Romantic Poetry,” Deen advances his main theme: for Blake “Identity is community.” This manifesto means three things: the solitary individual has no true identity; the community acts in and recreates itself through the individual; and community in both its fallen and regenerated states is to be identified with a single person. Deen repeatedly emphasizes that his subject is not “personal identity,” a term that Blake would understand as appropriate only to a closed, self-absorbed state at the Limit of Contraction. Individuals realize their full identity only when warring inner elements are brought into harmony and when the private self joins others: “Community achieved as a conversing in paradise is Jesus; struggling to create itself, it is Los.” Albion regains his identity when hecommunes with universal humanity, Jesus, through his friend, Los, and Blake attains his own full identity as an artist and as a human being when he becomes one with—or “identified” with—his larger self in Los.

According to Deen, Blake shares with Wordsworth and other Romantics a conception of true identity as a return to a source, a deeper, fuller, more genuine self. This is one of two Romantic paradigms of identity: the other is a Keatsian process of individuation. Deen organizes major Romantic poems into an ascending continuum of dialogues that move toward community: soliloquy (self with self), soliloquy-address (self with self and another), mental fight (confrontation between visions), and conversation (self with another as an image of God). The first two stages of this hypothetical arrangement tend to be “replaced,” as Deen puts it, in Blake’s work by solitary struggle or solitary dramatic lament, while the last two stages are “more developed” in Blake than in the other Romantics. Indeed, Blake alone among the Romantics “fully imagines human identity as active conversing in paradise” among beings who are identified with one another and with God.

Deen tracks what might be called the Los principle throughout Blake’s literary work (but not in the designs). This complex of ideas drives inexorably toward the fulfillment of what seems, in retrospect, a preordained design: the “unfolding of the abstract Poetic Genius of 1788 into the character Los and into the brotherhood of the risen poem-man at the end of Jerusalem.” Deen accepts without reservation the doctrine, received from Frye, that Blake’s myth is a seamless whole—meaning that his mythic personages are at least implicitly present throughout his poetry, whether or not they are mentioned by name. Looking at Blake’s body of work chronologically—but selectively, and without mentioning troublesome overlaps in time of composition or revision—Deen can say that most of the early prophecies “begin in paganism” and that the later prophecies end in forgiveness of sin and redemption, so that Los’s “awakening as Christian poet-artist-prophet in Night VII of The Four Zoas” stands as the “decisive conversion, or turn toward redemption, in Blake’s poetry as a whole.”

To confirm his proposition, Deen looks for telltale signs of Los’s omnipresence, whether actual or potential, occluded or revealed. Two of his eight chapters are on works in which Los is not a character: one on All Religions are One, There is No Natural Religion, The French Revolution, and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell; the other—perhaps the best chapter in the book—on “The Mental Traveller.” Between them is a chapter on the Lambeth prophecies in which the two poems named after Los are considered in less detail than those in which he does not appear at all. But Los need not be present for a work to be fair game. The early tractates introduce the “idea of Los,” the Poetic Genius; The French Revolution introduces another of Los’s aspects, Mental Fight; and this attribute is fully developed in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (although Los “has still not appeared under his own name”). In America and Visions of the Daughters of Albion Los is “absent” or “inactive,” but other characters play parts of the role that Los later fills.

In “The Mental Traveller,” Los is “missing” or in “decline” before he reappears in his mature form in The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem. The poem itself, “in some ways the middle missing from the short prophecies of the 1790s,” presents an “evasion of Mental Fight,” the “negative-ironic form of Blake’s myth” or “the ‘shadow’ cast by it.” Deen has some valuable and interesting things to say about the cycle of male-female relationships, and he enlarges his frame of reference by developing carefully drawn parallels with classical mythology and with Marvell’s “The Definition of Love” and Shakespeare’s “Venus and Adonis.” The chapter on “The Mental Traveller,” which has little to do with Deen’s thesis, works very well as a free-standing unit; it is closely engaged with the poem and, broadly yet discriminately, with its entire body of commentary.

The chapter on the Lambeth books, more than fifty pages into the book, discusses works in which Los has at least a “minimal” role—an evident or implied presence that Deen expands to ubiquitousness. In Europe “Los-Albion dreams as Enitharmon and awakens in Orc, but the whole of Europe divided and at war is nevertheless moved by a single impulse, and this movement—a fall—Blake calls Los.” And in The Book of Urizen, where Los is “source” of the other characters, Deen claims that “we ought to speak of Los-as-Urizen, Los-as-Enitharmon,
Los-as-Orc.

The teleological fallacy generates false problems, such as "why it takes Los so long to emerge as a figure from his idea in the Tractates," and why, even when the character named Los does at last appear, he lacks so many of the attributes that Blake later gives him. One explanation is that Blake "seems to have been diverted by the French Revolution into concentrating on Orc and Urizen" or two-party conflict. Another is that "Blake does not know what to put in place" of what he clears away in the early prophecies. A third is that Blake only gradually separated Los's role from that of Orc as redemptive energy and that of Albion as universal man. Most importantly, Los is not fully himself until he has been converted to Christianity.

Deen rightly insists that Blake's characters cannot be neatly allegorized. But instead of making a fresh start with a more productive approach, he partially accepts and then rejects a plethora of allegorical possibilities—for example in his comments on Visions, never clearly related to the central ideas of the book. Deen begins with the proposition that *Visions, America*, and *Urizen* are revolutionary prophecies "dominated by roughly the same three figures," one female and two male characters who are "parts of Los": "a mother or object of desire; a youthful and desirous rebel; and an old figure of authority." So he sets about finding this pattern in *Visions*. On the grounds that all the letters in Oothoon's name and most in Bromion's may be found in "Theotormon," Deen suggests that Theotormon is a "containing figure," with Bromion and Oothoon as "his conflicting psychic elements," even though Oothoon is the one who "seems more complete"—not, as one might think, because of her fuller humanity but "because she is in touch with all four elements." He consistently holds that Oothoon plays her part as the "object of desire" who gradually awakens into "desire irresistible," but he wavers among contradictory and irreconcilable interpretations of the other two characters. Is Bromion "a figure of usurping reason" and Theotormon "desire so self-restrained that it has become the shadow of desire"? Or should Theotormon be thought of as "reason, Bromion as the desire which (after an outburst) he has bound"? Or—if Bromion is reason and Oothoon is desire—is Theotormon "the torment generated by their conflict"? Or are both Bromion and Theotormon "images of reason tormented by desire"? The indiscriminate entertainment of so many permutations of possible meanings suggests not so much that the text is "multivalent" as that the reason-desire-object scheme is unsuitable and perhaps that the critic may be wishy-washy.

Phrases like "so to speak," "almost like," "seems," and "as if" bring in tenuous suggestions by the side door that could not bear the strain of straightforward exposition. Particularly in casually suggesting numerous mythological parallels Deen carries to extremes his tendency to systematize what he deems undistilled and fill in what he considers to be gaps. He muses, for example, that Bromion looks as if he should be Dionysus ("Bromios" or "Bromius"). But he seems more like Zeus—thunderer—and Oothoon seems a Semele burnt by Zeus's thunderbolt, so the child that Bromion expects Oothoon to produce ought to be Dionysus. . . . Even though Oothoon has no child, the effect of the tape-in-thunder and of the attack by Theotormon's eagles that she invites in *Visions* is an eschaty that might be described as Dionysian. . . .—as if Oothoon-Semele had become a maenad follower of her son Dionysus (not yet born) in one of Blake's extreme condensations of pagan myth. Or perhaps the child she brings forth is Dionysian vision. . . . [Blake] seems to have led up to and stopped short of (or skipped) the birth of Dionysus.

Or again, Deen speculates that Los's labyrinth in *The Four Zoas* suggests the brain of jealousy become a secret and hidden labyrinth, or the labyrinthine serpent form of the umbilical cord in the womb, as if Los had put mother Enitharmon into a womb of his own. (Since Orc is like a bull and the bulls of Luvah are mentioned in Night VII, . . . the labyrinth suggests that Los is both Minos and Delalus, and that hiding Enitharmon-Paphia in the labyrinth is designed to prevent her coupling with the bull Luvah-Orc and conceiving and bearing the Minotaur—as if Los half-remembered and meant to prevent Minos's fate.)

As one would expect, Deen's theories work best in the main chapters of the book, on *The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem*, the poems in which Los comes into his own. Deen sees Los and the other major characters as entering *The Four Zoas* with the experiences they have acquired in earlier poems, after they have generated enough sons and daughters and developed sufficiently complex relationships to form a community. Los's change of heart in Night VII, his forgiveness of his Spectre (which Deen describes as a conversion to Christianity) is also his liberation from reason as internalized tyrant, paralleling Blake's experience at Felpham that he describes in his well-known letter to Hayley of 25 October 1804. Deen develops this parallel in some detail, and he provides a well-considered commentary on the two poems about Los that appear in Blake's letters to Butts. He also attempts to "put the fall-and-recovery in terms of speech"—running from self-obsession through various levels of expression and response to the ideal of conversing. But in this enterprise the poem refuses to cooperate. When Deen claims, for example, that "as *The Four Zoas* progresses, lament or speech or song begins to evoke more response and moves toward dialogue or responsive song," he cites Enion's response to Ahania in Night VIII but passes over their antiphonal laments that conclude Nights II and III. Near the end of Night IX, when the "conversing" finally takes place, it is with "animal forms of wisdom," only "midway to the ideal state.
And Poetic enius 'is the source and creator of our world from solidifying, so that unique individual to Mental forms of a human has human, the seed that makes us both Homo sapiens and unique human persons, and at the same time the cultural ground that fosters this development. A further difficulty is that conversing in paradise is "cut short" at the end of Blake's work and "remains mysterious"; it is from our perspective "a vanishing point in which we know what we know through having watched its coming into existence. . . ." Because all these concepts are so slippery, so tentenously related to one another, Los's concretizing role is crucial to Deen's argument. Los is "the generating force in the growth of Blake's systematic myth, the advancing edge of Blake's imagination projected into the poem, the embodiment of the principle of change through imagination as work." Deen is convinced that "wherever we turn in Blake's poetry, we are confronted by Los." Allowing for some exaggeration, this claim may be true. But I am not persuaded that all the ideas that Deen discusses in Conversing in Paradise take meaningful shape around the figure of Los.


Reviewed by Max Byrd

Sooner or later every reader must yearn to grasp one of Richard B. Schwartz's sentences at each end and wring it dry, like a wet towel. For twenty-five of the first thirty verbs in chapter one of Daily Life in Johnson's London he chooses either the passive voice or a form of "to be": "Traffic upon the Thames was slow. . . . The smell of sewage was apparent. . . ." The city's streets were covered. . . . "And throughout the book his verbs continue to lie motionless in this way, on their backs and silent, their legs wriggling feebly in the air. Such passivity of style dejects us all the more because Schwartz employs it upon a subject matter that has become almost proverbial for its vitality: the great thrashing, bustling, unceasingly noisy London that Johnson made synonymous with life itself.

Schwartz has intended his book as an introduction "to certain aspects of eighteenth-century social history"
and also as a companion for students struggling to understand the details of daily life that lie behind the major works of eighteenth-century English literature, particularly behind Boswell's Life of Johnson. Accordingly, he organizes his chapters around topics such as "Work and Money," "Pastimes and Pleasures," "Health and Hygiene"—a familiar and serviceable scheme also used in books like Dorothy Marshall's Dr. Johnson's London and Roy Porter's English Society in the Eighteenth Century (neither listed in Schwartz's bibliography). To focus his discussions more sharply, Schwartz takes the figure of Samuel Johnson as a recurrent point of reference, not only because we so closely identify Johnson with the city he loved, but also because, as Schwartz rightly observes, Johnson's moral thought takes so seriously what he called in Idler 84 "the general surface of life."

For the second of his goals, the development of a "background" to major texts, this approach works very well. From time to time in the book we do seem to peer over Johnson's shoulder and to register, as he must have done, the presence of "pools of urine and stagnant water" on London streets, the stench of sewage and nightsoil permeating every street and house, the universal coal smoke, from domestic fires and factories, settling like a cloud over the city all year long. Schwartz has an excellent eye for such details, shrinks from no subject (e.g., his account of chamberpots in the sideboards of elegant dining rooms), and clearly revels, like most students of the period, in its vicarious and bracing low-life. Hence, he covers thoroughly such questions as false bosomes made of wirework—and the false buttrocks made of cork—that ornamented fashionable Englishwomen for a time. He explains the "growing dominance of the Norwegian, or brown, rat over the English black rat." He lists the prevalent venereal diseases of the period, the locations and specialties of prostitutes (a floating brothel, called the Folly, lay anchored opposite Somerset House), and goes enthusiastically into the distinction between ordinary and "deep" gaming. And no one, perhaps, in all the vast literature about eighteenth-century London, has crammed more information on domestic manners and routines into shorter space, from the usual ingredients and dressings used in salads to the fact that dogs were sometimes harnessed to butter churns. "It must be remembered," Schwartz aptly quotes Johnson as saying, "that life consists not of a series of illustrious actions, or elegant enjoyments; the greater part of our time passes in compliance with necessities, in the performance of daily duties, in the removal of small inconveniences, in the procurement of petty pleasures. . . . The true state of every nation is the state of common life."

But as an introduction to aspects of eighteenth-century social history, Daily Life in Johnson's London suffers from its remarkable, nearly complete absorption in such detail: no idea interrupts the unending flow of information. For generalizations Schwartz never rises much above "The period was one of great hoaxes." And for analysis he never reaches past the simple categories of his chapter titles. Thus the information he so generously sets down usually remains shapeless, following no particular order, leading to no particular conclusion. He gives us, for example, nothing comparable to Dorothy George's moving account of the ravages of gin-drinking in the opening chapter of London Life in the Eighteenth Century, where she controls and justifies her narrative by asserting in the very first sentence that "The key to the social history of London is to be found in its changes in population—its growth, and the ratio between births and deaths." Nor can he sum up and transfer his information to a new context, as George brilliantly does, connecting the "uncertainties of life and trade" to that "sense of instability, of liability to sudden ruin, which runs through so much eighteenth-century literature." Likewise, Schwartz conveys little sense of the dynamics of class that figures prominently in most contemporary social history, as for instance in Roy Porter's discussions of the simultaneous resilience and porousness of the English social hierarchy. In part these failings derive from the brevity of Schwartz's book—he simply gives himself too little space in which to develop ideas—and in part they derive from the essentially static picture he paints of social institutions: he has nothing like George's thesis of gradual humanitarian progress in the Hanoverian years or Porter's continual awareness that Johnson's London stands at the threshold of the Industrial Revolution. Students who come to Schwartz's book expecting to learn what it is that social historians do—and why it is so exciting—will return unenlightened, ill equipped to apply historical techniques to literary issues. Students who expect to see how social history illuminates literature—how, to take one instance, the enormous size and consequent anonymity of life in London lead to new themes of alienation, masquerade, and self-consciousness—will find that the concept of literature at work here rarely goes beyond the anecdotal. His book, in other words, interesting though it is, belongs to the honorable but quite limited genre of antiquarianism.

I should add that the bibliography includes many items having nothing directly to do with London—Johnson's Poems in the Yale edition—and omits a great many items (e.g., James Sutherland's Background for Queen Anne) that most students of the period would want to know; readers will do better to consult the still useful bibliography at the end of George Rudé's Hanoverian London. The University of Wisconsin Press has printed an unusually handsome volume; both they and Schwartz deserve credit for the beautifully reproduced and exceedingly well-selected illustrations.
The nine essays in this festschrift for Jean H. Hagstrum both document the enormous impact Hagstrum has had on the study of the sister arts tradition and also achieve to a remarkably consistent degree that learned elegance we have come to expect of Hagstrum’s own work. The ideal introduction both to this volume and to the significance of Hagstrum’s work is provided by Lawrence Lipking in his essay “Quick Poetic Eyes: Another Look at Literary Pictorialism,” in which he restates Hagstrum’s thesis on eighteenth-century pictorialism in a simpler and more controversial way. He suggests that we must train ourselves to visualize all the elements described in an eighteenth-century poem, that we must be able to see them, because the very definition of poetic genius in that century was the capacity to create mental pictures. Eighteenth-century poetry calculatedly explored the various dimensions of this pictorialist project: the depiction of darkness as well as light, the difficulty of seeing, the search for an adequate point of view, and finally the pain of eyestrain or fear of seeing. Lipking provides illuminating discussions of poems by Pope, Smart, Collins and Gray to illustrate both his summary of the modes of eighteenth-century pictorialism and his argument that it broke down as people gradually came to think primarily in terms of words or photographic images rather than created mental pictures.

Robert Wark, writing from the perspective of the art historian and connoisseur, very sensibly reminds us of the difficulties faced by any student of literature who attempts to use pictorial evidence: that the assignment of any given art work to a particular artist is often problematic (as we have seen most recently in The Discovery of Constable, the magisterial study by Ian Fleming-Williams and Leslie Parris of Constable forgeries and misattributions); that the artist’s choice of media plays a large role in determining the effects that can be created; and most important, that the interpretation of the meaning of visual images depends to a far greater degree than in literature on a traditional iconology and on inherited pictorial conventions.

As background to the essays which deal with specific comparisons between the sister arts, Larry Silver contributes a helpful survey of the development of the paragone, the debate between the relative merits of poetry and painting, from Alberti through the eighteenth century, with particular emphasis on how painting justified its claim to equality by its focus on moral exempa, its appeal to the higher sense of sight, and its greater capacity for inventio as demonstrated by ekphrastic works. Earl Miner shows us how limiting our western, classical assumptions concerning the relationship between art and nature can be by examining a Japanese text, Kyoden/Masanobu’s illuminated Edo Mumaire, which defies western conceptions of the artist as a single “self” and of the art-work as mimetic. Instead, Miner’s fascinating discussion emphasizes, Japanese aesthetics are “relational,” with meaning generated entirely out of the play of one signifier with another in a field where there is constant “leakage” between written word and visual image. Richard Wendorf’s competent examination of biography and portrait painting as sister arts rightly stresses the difference that the medium makes: biography can encompass the passage of time while portraiture can capture only a single, albeit more self-conscious, moment in the sitter’s life. And Karl Kroeber fittingly closes the volume with a detailed examination of four texts, Millais’ “The
Blind Girl," Constable's "Salisbury Cathedral, From the Meadows," Wordsworth's "Michael" and Tennyson's "Enoch Arden," that persuasively develops into the provocative suggestion that Victorian art asks us to stand back and see clearly one meaning, while Romantic art engages us in that very flux of experienced sensation that denies clarity of meaning. He further suggests that Victorian art, in its emphasis on making the reader see, is closer to Modern art than is Romantic art and also, he might have added, looking back at Lipking's essay, to eighteenth-century pictorial art.

The three essays on Blake's "composite art" (Hagstrum's term, of course) will be of special interest to readers of Blake. Ronald Paulson's discussion of "Blake's Revolutionary Tiger" usefully situates the poem within the context of an anti-jacobin rhetoric that frequently identified the bestial French revolutionaries as tigers but falls into that strong mis-reading heralded by Harold Bloom and represents the voice of the poem as that of the outraged Burke. While Paulson's essay contains several scattered insights, it too closely resembles a patchwork quilt of pieces stitched together haphazardly from other essays and fails to develop a cogent argument of its own.

Morton Paley's study of Blake's use of architecture, both as visual structure and as symbol, masterfully documents an important and unjustifiably neglected dimension of Blake's thought and practice. He first surveys the seven periods of architectural styles that appear in Blake's works, Egyptian, Eastern, Classical, Druid, Gothic, Baroque and contemporary, and carefully defines the meaning each style had for Blake, usefully adding the caveat that in many cases, the meaning of a given style depends on its pictorial context—this is particularly true of Blake's use of neoclassical motifs. Paley then examines the significance of particular architectural types, such as altars, walls, stairways (spiritually spiral or oppressively slab), doorways, superstructures, and cottages, and concludes with an insightful discussion of Golgonooza and the city of Jerusalem as the perpetually rebuilding Temple and Tabernacle of Christ.

W.J.T. Mitchell's analysis of the vortex as both iconic image and structuring form in the work of Hogarth, Turner and Blake brilliantly traces the transformation of the vortex from Hogarth's S-line of beauty, carefully contained within a stable neoclassical form, through Turner's identification of the vortex with the very flux of chaotic nature, showing that the vortex functions in Turner's art simultaneously as structural pattern and as a signifier of perpetual death and renewal, most notably in his great late paintings of the Deluge and the Apocalypse. Mitchell then discusses Blake's all-encompassing vortex as both the contrary and the instrument of vision, manifested most seminally in "Newton" and the text of Milton. After commenting on the Vorticists' transformation of the vortex as a kind of image into every image as a kind of vortex, Mitchell reminds us that "image-magic operates not just at the explicit level of iconographic representation, but in those structures or spaces that organize the way we think about history, logic, or the human condition itself. The demystification of these subliminal idolatries will be the goal of a truly historical iconology." The essays in this handsomely illustrated volume have made some notable progress toward this goal, a goal that Jean Hagstrum himself, albeit in different terms, established for us. For the sister arts, this process of demystification is doubly complex, since it requires that we bring to consciousness not only what has been thought but the very shapes—both aural and visual—in which that thinking has occurred.


Reviewed by Stuart Peterfreund

The context to which Stewart Crehan's title refers is specified in the introduction to his study, which has as its "main concern... the social and historical context within which an artist such as Blake emerges, and how this context makes necessary a revolution in artistic form and practice" (p. 13). Writers such as Bronowski, Schorer, and above all, Erdman, have dealt with precisely this context, but not, apparently, to Crehan's satisfaction. In his view, the discussion of Blake's artistic form and practice has been dominated by "formalists" such as Erdman and Anne K. Mellor (see pp. 240–45), who hold power in the academy and insist that the ideology in Blake's art be de-emphasized or ignored outright. Crehan's conception of his mission, then, much like Edward Said's conception of the deconstructionist enterprise (see "The Problem of Textuality," *Critical Inquiry,* 4 [1978], 673–714), is that of a rescue, a recapturing of scholarly territory held by hostile colonialist forces. In Crehan's own words, "As long as the formalists continue to hold sway in all discussions of art and literature, the historical materialist approach will repeatedly stress art's historical and class content, guided by an understanding of the primacy of social laws over artistic ones" (p. 13).

The preceding quotation suggests what Crehan elsewhere states forthrightly: the basis of his approach to Blake is Marxist, carried out with the intent of study-
ing Blake as a case in point "in order to explore certain problems and develop a method of analysis" (p. 12). Though historical, Crehan's approach is not, strictly speaking, chronological, either in the sense of being narrative or developmental in any larger sense. Crehan defends his choice of historical focus with the same sort of proleptic pugnacity he exhibits in his animadversions against the "formalists." Responding to the charge, not leveled by anyone but himself, that the chapters of the book, lacking broad focus or narrative continuity, may lend themselves to being read as discrete essays, Crehan states that the synchonic is as valid an approach to historical issues as the diachronic, which is apparently the approach of choice for the Blake establishment.

I am not a "Blakean" and do not subscribe to any cultist appreciation of his work. I have tried to explain Blake's famed "uniqueness" in historical terms—taking the poetry and the visual art together—rather than leaving it an inexplicable mystery. If I am consequently accused of reductivism, of over stressing art's "subsidiary role in social process" (quoting Leon Trotsky in Literature and Revolution) and hence of neglecting art's inherent laws, then this is because there are too many books on Blake that analyse the art, poetry and ideas (especially the ideas) and forget the social process. (pp. 12-13)

Tellingly enough, neither at this juncture nor at any other point subsequent to it does Crehan undertake the sort of systematic critique that his introductory comments virtually beg for.

Ten chapters follow the introductory comments. The first of these, "The Romantic Artist," attempts to situate Blake as a case in point of "the Romantic artist" who "begins to appear at the moment when feudal social relations are decisively challenged," Blake's particular "moment" lasting three quarters of a century during "the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolution (1776-1848)" (p. 16). Crehan argues that the result of such revolution is freedom, especially in the realm of art, where Blake "pushed the freedom principle further than any other English Romantic poet, even to the extent of writing a free verse poem—the first of its kind in English" (p. 30). The poem Crehan has in mind is Jerusalem, which supposedly makes good Blake's intention to move away from the decasyllabic line and thus avoid "any 'Augustan' relapse into some easy, confident expectation or passive observation" (p. 31). As the basis for his claim that Jerusalem both attains a new level of formal freedom and apotheosizes "the Romantic revolt against metrical restrictions" (p. 34), Crehan cites much of the concluding paragraph of the prefatory third plate of Jerusalem, entitled "To the Public." On the basis of Blake's statement, Crehan concludes that "the revolt against 'fettered' verse and the ordered, rational world-view, begins, if it begins anywhere, with Blake" (p. 35). What Crehan does not seem to realize is that most of what Blake has to say in the paragraph under discussion refers, in a highly self-conscious manner, to the statement entitled "The Verse" which prefaces Paradise Lost. If Blake really intends to repudiate the poetic past, including the Miltonic source of his very words of repudiation, Blake does so more in the service of convention than in the service of freedom, authenticating his vision in relation to his poetic precursors just as Milton had authenticated his vision in relation to his precursors. For example, Blake's repudiation of "a Monotonous Cadence, like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming," as "a necessary and indispensable part of verse," echoes Milton's repudiation of rhyme itself. "This neglect then of Rime so little is to be taken as a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar Readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Riming."

The direction in which Milton seeks freedom from modern constraints is toward the past—the classical past in Paradise Lost and, ultimately, the hebraic past in Paradise Regained, in which Milton redeems himself in Blake's eyes from any imputation of succumbing to the idolatry of classicism. The point of Blake's comments is likewise to indicate that he is seeking freedom from modern constraints in the past, and avoiding the enticements of classicism that temporarily seduced Milton by going directly to the hebraic source. Specifically, Blake in his comments embraces perhaps the most ancient of poetic conceptions, that of Mashal, defined by Robert Lowth in his Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (tr. 1787): "The word Mashal . . . denotes resemblance, and is therefore directly expressive of the figurative style, as far as the nature of figures consists in the substitution of words, or rather of ideas, for those which they resemble . . . ." As with style, so with substance: it may well be, as Crehan argues, that Blake's formal revolt can be linked to his revolt against Enlightenment rationalism; but Blake's revolt, though "not . . . simply against rational analysis and the general laws of science per se, but against their social consequences" (p. 46; Crehan's emphasis), is a backward-looking action rather than a forward-looking one. As a notebook poem like "Mock On Mock On Voltaire Rousseau" makes clear, the cure for such rationalism is hebraic vision, not bourgeois or popular revolution. Indeed, one could make a similar argument for the very marxist program with which Crehan attempts to understand Blake. The final stage of the socialist revolution, with its harmonization of abilities and needs, is a lot closer to the situation Blake describes as the "sands along the Red sea shore/Where Israel's tents do shine so bright" than it is to the situation of the French Republic, either before or after the rise of the Jacobins.

I have devoted a perhaps inordinate amount of space to a discussion of Crehan's first chapter because that
chapter both illustrates his strategy of argument throughout the book and illustrates the rather severe limitations of the strategy. In virtually every case, Crehan meditates on one or more texts that, for him, identify the social issues informing Blake's artistic milieu and practice alike. Crehan then moves rapidly from the text to the sociohistorical context—the French Revolution in particular and the age of revolution in general, in the case of the first chapter. When he has moved to the sociohistorical context, which is finally what he wants to talk about, Crehan glosses that context (and less often than not, the text with which he began) with some broadly marxist truism that is based on a less broad but universally applicable marxist truth. For example, in a discussion of Jerusalem 91.18–30, Crehan brings two passages from Capital to bear on 11.26–27 ("You accumulate Particulars, & murder by analyzing, that you / May take the aggregate; & you call the aggregate Moral Law") and explains that the lines have to do with "the creative 'soul' of the worker himself... Only through accumulating particular individuals within factories, where 'one man's business' has been reduced to "one simple question,' can modern capitalist accumulation take place" (p. 50). What Blake is actually talking about is the effect of pharisaical codification on one's perception of divinity in the world, the sort of codification that Jesus fought against and in doing so presented the example that Albion ultimately follows in Jerusalem. Blake's dark mill-wheels, having more to do with Aristotle's Analytics than Arkwright's looms, are nowhere to be found in the passage Crehan discusses. There is nothing to say that a marxist homily cannot be as good as a Jewish or Christian one, but good homiletics demands first and foremost the selection of a good anecdote or text: Crehan's text has nothing to do with his point, which here and elsewhere overwhelms the particular Blakean text of choice.

Thus the second chapter, "The Artist in the City," seeks to bring into some correlation Blake's reaction to the capitalist and geopolitical expansion of London in his lifetime and Engels' subsequent reaction to London, the point being to illustrate that what is for Blake "the possibility of imaginatively breaking out of the system" (p. 84; Crehan's emphasis) is for Engels the possibility of analytically and politically breaking out of the system. "London" is the text of choice. The same sort of procedure characterizes subsequent chapters. The third chapter, "Radical Innocence," uses Songs of Innocence to demonstrate that even in these apparently sweet and innocent poems, Blake is radicalizing his readers against the likes of Isaac Watts and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who would, in their own children's literature, turn their young readers into well-behaved homunculi and capitalistic dupes. The fourth chapter, "The Politics of Experience," uses the title of R.D. Laing's book, cited elsewhere with approval by Crehan (see pp. 305, 307), to suggest that Blake, in Songs of Experience, accomplishes something of the same kind of breakthrough that Laing reports of the inmates of his Tavistock Clinic. Blake moves from innocence and illusion to experience and a sense of play rather than disillusion: "... the songs express not 'disillusionment' or a cynical awareness of social and psychological realities, but a new dialectical awareness" (p. 122; Crehan's emphasis).

Crehan's fifth chapter, "Blake's Tyger and the Tygerish Multitude," is probably the best of the book. Here Crehan has a genuine context—that of anti-Jacobin discourse, contemporaneous with and accessible to Blake—in which to situate Blake's poem. Despite a broad context of anti-Jacobin discourse equating the revolutionary masses of France with tigers and tigerish multitudes, Crehan remains sensitive to the nuances and ambiguities of the poem, not trying to reduce it to the sum of its allusions or sources, while at the same time suggesting how they do inform a reading of "The Tyger." In addition to its contribution to our historical perspective on Blake's "Tyger," the chapter is notable for its brevity and the virtual absence of dialectical wrangling.

Not so with the next four chapters, which attempt to view Blake's art both as social document and in the context of a theory of artistic production: moreover, in undertaking their attempt, these chapters make good on Crehan's introductory threat to "stress art's historical and class content, guided by an understanding of the primacy of social laws over artistic ones" (p. 13). At its best and brightest, this approach gives us a document like Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being, which explains John Davies and Herbert of Cherbury, but not Donne or Shakespeare as artists. Used by Crehan, the approach gives us an analysis of how Blake attained artistic autonomy that depends for its point on a comparison of Blake to William Sharp, "a friend... and a follower of the millenarian Richard Brothers and later of Joanna Southcott... whose struggle for independence (not wholly achieved in terms of an original art, however) closely parallels that of Blake, and tells us something about the conflict between 'producers' and 'devourers' within the print trade itself" (p. 150). Although Crehan's book probably went to press before he could frame and incorporate a rebuttal of Morris Eaves' William Blake's Theory of Art (1982) in his own arguments, he seems completely oblivious (or willfully impervious) to earlier statements by Eaves that seek at once to understand how Blake's situation motivated him to attain artistic autonomy and the uniqueness of that attainment. In "What Is the 'History of Publishing?'" (Publishing History, 2 [1977], 57–77), Eaves declares 'Blake's artistic decision to become an independent publisher... a landmark in the history of publishing, not because he was the first or last to make that decision, but because he was far
more aware than most others of why he was doing it” (p. 76). From this insight it is possible to develop a coherent and consistent theory of artistic production, which is at the same time sensitive to nuances of context and faithful to Blake as an individual. Eaves succeeds in his book, while Crehan fails in his.

The reasons for Crehan’s failure, suggested from virtually his first paragraph, are clearly evident in his book’s tenth and final chapter “Jerusalem and Albion.” Here Crehan seeks to show that the aptness of his social and artistic analysis rests on a hitherto undiscovered tradition of working-class English radical protestantism that exults its followers to a life of inspired artisanship for the spiritual redemption of the world. To paraphrase Voltaire (in the infernal sense, of course), if radical protestantism had not existed, Blake, Marx (perhaps), and Crehan (certainly) would have found it necessary to invent in order to promulgate a dialectical changing of the -isms. In his psgah-vision, Crehan sees context as Adam saw history in Book XII of Paradise Lost: “The context of Blake’s utopian vision is a transition from millenarism and communistarianism to the utopian socialist experiments of the St-Simonians and Owenites” (p. 330). Notably absent in Crehan’s discussion is any reference to Harold Fisch’s Jerusalem and Albion (1964), which would have forced Crehan to address spiritual as well as social issues. Nor is there, despite the bandying about of the idea of millenarianism, any reference to Norman Cohn’s The Pursuit of the Millennium (1957; 1961). Nor is there even a passing reference to the analysis of the same transformation that Crehan argues for that is found in M.H. Abrams’ Natural Supernaturalism (1971).

And these are hardly the only oversights: if not Eaves, then why not include the work of marxists such as Lucien Lefeuvre and Pierre Macherey who have already come to grips with the issue of how to articulate a marxist theory of artistic production? Why not include a broader sampling of those formalist critics sent up from the start, if only to rebut them on matters of substance? In the final analysis, as the appended bibliography shows, Crehan’s book is either a thinly researched dissertation, a badly updated one, or some combination of these. It may not be possible to gain access to eighteenth-century rare books at the University of Zambia, where he teaches, but Crehan surely could have taken the trouble to buttress his arguments with more evidence of careful and reputable research. To do so would not have mitigated the sting of the gratuitous nastiness that abounds in the book. My special selection in this regard is taken from Crehan’s analysis of Blake’s color-printed monotype Newton: “the whole body curves in upon itself, hunching itself into an embryo-like ball (the characteristic position of all intellectuals) . . .” (p. 165). Come the revolution, I trust the bureaucracy of the proletariat will help me and my fellow sufferers to shake off the chains of our scholarship—and scoliosis.

One finally wonders why someone in the academy would do everything in his power to épater his version of let bourgeois—even to ridicule them—without doing his level best to make sure that in the aftermath he edified them by edifying himself to the greatest possible extent. Crehan’s is an angry, inept, and ultimately saddening effort. Marxist approaches to Blake do not have to be so—David Punter’s Blake, Hegel, and Dialectic (1982) is a case in point. And a marxist approach to Blake’s theory and practice of artistic production could be richly edifying. But such an approach has not yet been tried successfully, Crehan’s Blake in Context notwithstanding.


Reviewed by Nicholas O. Warner

Among the most striking and eloquent of his annotations to other writers are Blake’s comments on Bishop Watson’s An Apology for the Bible, itself a reply to the second part of Tom Paine’s The Age of Reason. Many Blake scholars have found it useful to cite portions of these vivid, often angry annotations, resounding as they do with the voice of honest indignation, and frequently anticipating issues present in Blake’s later prophetic books. These annotations have, of course, been available in the great editions of Keynes, Bentley, and Erdman, but G. Ingl James’s new edition of the annotations presents them for the first time in facsimile, and with a typographic transcription that follows the actual disposition of Blake’s words.

James’s edition, published in the Regency Reprint series by University College Cardiff Press, begins with a learned, lucid, engagingly written introduction, in which James points out that a facsimile of the annotations “makes visually evident the expressive vigour of Blake’s comments.” James goes on to give us some background information about Watson and his career as Bishop of Llandaff, and about Blake’s intellectual relationship to both Watson and Paine; James also distinguishes carefully not only between Watson’s “Whiggish liber-
alism” and the radicalism of Blake and Paine, but also between the views of Blake and Paine themselves. The only drawback to the introduction is its terseness—it takes up a mere seven pages, including footnotes. One would welcome fuller elaboration on a number of James’s observations about the historical and religious context of Watson’s book and Blake’s annotations to it.

The facsimile itself reproduces Watson’s book in its entirety, including unannotated pages. Both Watson’s text and Blake’s comments are clear, though more along the lines of a good photocopy than of a photograph. It is only fair to say, however, that examination of the original in the Huntington Library makes one sympathize with the photographer, for the pages, made of poor quality paper, are dirty and splotched, and Blake’s ink has faded considerably. The clarity of some of Blake’s pencil annotations, probably faint to begin with, has not been enhanced by the passage of nearly two centuries. It is therefore understandable that the pencil jottings are sometimes harder to read than the writing in ink, but even so, a surprising number of the pencil annotations are quite legible. Still, the slight thickening of lines in the facsimile results in some letters, particularly Blake’s “c,” being much harder to recognize than they are in the original. Similarly, it is more difficult to make out deleted words in the facsimile, thus calling into question the ability of the photographic reproduction truly to allow, in James’s words, “readers to decide for themselves about problematic punctuation marks, capitals, deletions and so on . . . .” In many instances, this might be possible, but for the most problematic words, one must still turn to the original.

James’s transcription of the annotations, which follows the facsimile, avoids any “improvement” on Blake’s punctuation, and observes the exact arrangement of Blake’s own writing on the page. The transcription is extremely helpful whenever Blake’s hand, or the effects of time and dirt, pose difficulties. Moreover, like the facsimile, the transcription enables us to see exactly where Blake’s comments begin and end, thus avoiding the specious links between annotation and text that can result from placing the annotations directly beneath excerpts from Watson, as is commonly done.

My only complaint about the layout of the transcription is the presence of large white spaces, instead of Watson’s printed words, in the central area of the transcription pages, so that the annotations seem to hover about a phantom text. A more convenient arrangement would include relevant pages of Watson’s text, thus preventing the constant back-and-forth flipping through pages that readers must engage in so as to connect the transcriptions with specific passages in Watson. It would also help if James marked insertions as well as deletions; on p. 9 of the original, for instance, Blake adds the word “peculiar,” with a distinct caret beneath it, to the space between two other words, yet the transcription includes the word with no indication of its being an insertion.

The main strength of the entire edition lies in the notes accompanying the transcription. James’s sixty-seven footnotes constitute a kind of running commentary that clarifies obscure allusions, draws parallels between the annotations and passages elsewhere in Blake, and demonstrates a thorough grasp of Blake criticism, which James skilfully applies to a number of issues raised in Blake’s comments. James scrupulously explains his reasoning in those instances where his transcriptions differ from those of Keynes, Bentley or Erdman, and he meticulously refers us to previous scholarship on the annotations. James briefly sets forth his own interpretations, and draws our attention to such noteworthy things as the extent to which Blake, in his eagerness to defend Paine, comes uncharacteristically close to religious orthodoxy in the annotations. No less admirable are the light touches of ironic wit that enliven James’s footnotes.

The edition’s final pages present us with a reproduction of the conclusion to the second part of Paine’s The Age of Reason.

All in all, the Blake scholar, for whom the facsimile is plainly intended, will find here a helpful tool and an editorial treatment that reflects good judgment and good taste. Introduction, facsimile, transcription and footnotes alike can help us achieve a more accurate, intimate understanding of Blake’s mental fight with the Bishop of Llandaff.


Reviewed by David Wagenknecht.

A more accurate subtitle for Nelson Hilton’s new book might have been “Blake’s Vision IN Words.” Blake interpretation in general, it is quite true, has tended to such a preoccupation with the prophetic mise en scene that the “minute particulars” of his vision, at least the lexical nuts and bolts, are overlooked. They are “a Void, outside of Existence,” but Nelson Hilton in these pages enthusiastically enters in, showing us convincingly that Blake’s genius, delicate but determinedly prehensile, could wrap itself around a vocable as easily as it could draw down Prometheus. One horizon of Hilton’s approach is some-
thing as old-fashioned as image-clusters: he picks out boss words (engraving and interring, mourning and morning, chains, spinning and weaving, veil, vale and Vasa, spectres, stars, vortex, polypus) and tries to encounter each "in its force-field of sound, etymology, graphic shape, contemporary applications, and varied associations," thereby exposing the "warp and woof" of Blake's thought (p. 7). But whereas old-fashioned pursuit of image-clusters tended to limit itself to the conceptual, and therefore to recapitulate in its discoveries the author's narrative idea (or sometimes to replace the apparent narrative with the true one), Hilton claims to be doing here something more narrowly lexical, to be uncovering the poet's fundamental ideas only in his words. He as it were refuses to come out of Blake's rough basement, but just as Frye (whose fictional approach overhead on the first floor Hilton would avoid) liked to pretend that Blake's mythological method was only the method of all poetry in a somewhat eccentric form (which made Blake begar archetypal criticism on the Anatomy of Spenser), Hilton is fond of claiming similarly that his method too is Jungian-universal, and not at all limited to the special genius of Blake: "I do not suggest that Blake was conscious of all these factors; I do argue that all are present in 'the source . . . the Poetic Genius'" (p. 2).

This idea (and its analogue in Frye) seems to me highly questionable, but it is undeniable, in the midst of all the special Blakean delights Hilton discovers, that many are convertible to delight in poetry generally, and of a sort to inspire us to look for their brothers and sisters in other poets. For example, next to the Four Zoas lines, "But the bright Sun was not as yet; he filling all the expanse / Slept as a bird in the blue shell that soon shall burst away," Hilton notes, "Here again we note Blake's delight in 'literal' transformation as 'Sun . . . bird . . . shell' becomes 'soon shall burst'" (p. 181). Blake is beyond the need for our praises, but if I had been clever enough to notice this effect I'd have been more reluctant than Hilton is to turn the responsibility over to anything collective: "While this relational process occurs initially in the mind of the perceiver, it can develop through and toward structures in the 'mind,' or episteme, of English, and collective imagination" (p. 3). As everyone knows, the trouble with arguments appealing to collectivity is their neglect of agency and intention, and Blake's agent Hilton here deserves full credit, even if at times he is an agent provocateur. Blake has a way of inspiring in his specialists fits of demotic self-consciousness, and Hilton's interest in the genius of the language (even at the expense of his own) may be traceable to some such.

It must also, however, have something to do with the opposite "horizon" of his methods, which is punning. Hilton's fancy argument is that he is eschewing "symbols, metaphors, or figurative language in general" (which I doubt) to "enter the space of the sign" (which I do not understand, especially if I am eschewing metaphors) until the sign "becomes a sensuous idea"—which is something like an expanded pun (p. 11). Whether we think of them as irresponsible play or as spontaneous statements by the unconscious, puns are in such bad odor that we can well understand their subversive appeal to a (theoretically) very demotic critic, committed to denying conscious control of them to their author. But puns tend to go too far, and while we are not surprised to find them in the poet of "Enough! or Too much," Blake's remark may ominously seem to constitute the only possible critical control on their suggestiveness. Hilton reminds us of Johnson's animadversions against punning, but then—perhaps because they were directed at Shakespeare—fails to take them seriously, and in the midst of what I assume will stand as the definitive explication of the "stars" who "throw down their spears" in "The Tyger"—a characteristically rich soup of scholarship, association and interpretation—the reader of Hilton, if he is to enjoy these pages, must occasionally enjoy "Too much" (e.g., "turn in a gyre: tyger"—p. 179—or "spherenful symmetry"—p. 180) together with all the "enoughs" and "just rights."

It would be nice, however, to have some sort of principle other than a quantitave one for distinguishing "too much" from "enough," even if both (from a fourfold perspective) are delightful. Here Hilton's totallizing or Jungian tendencies are unhelpful, and one can't help noticing that his own genius is more a sharp noticing one than a theorizing one. His tendency when faced by a theoretical challenge is to bull it through rather than think it through (e.g., "The poem's self-unching does not, of course, usher the delighting reader into any realm of absolute free-play, that 'alegorical abode where existence hath never come'" [p. 66]—which leaves the reader wondering whether it is Freud or Derrida being brushed out of the way), and the challenge of punning produces impressionism more than actual instruction: "In this dungeon of London," we are told, "Blake's strategy for unlocking the reader is the multiplication of significance, breaking the vocal chain at its weakest link, the univocal sign. This deconstruction involves reorienting logic according to syn-aesthetic relations of eye and ear" (p. 64). One may assent in general to the spirit of this, and enjoy as well the exuberant readings of the "Marriage hearse" (in London) which ensues ("These words, hear-curse-tear, bring to bear the contradictions of sight and sound as we hear/ see them coalesce in the final word 'hearse.' The oxymoronic image of the 'marriage hearse' points to the impossibility of imagining that sight and sound, signified and signifier can be eternally 'linked in a marriage chain [FZ 58.13, E339], wedlocked'—pp. 64-65), and still find oneself more pedantically wondering whether
These effects are as integral to Blake’s more mythic meaning (as it were “causes” rather than “effects” of it) as Hilton seems anxious to imply.

The problem is that Hilton’s discussion never evolves theoretically to the point where questions like this (and others) can even adequately be raised. Leaving an “eternity” of wedding out of the question for the moment, some “marriage of convenience” would seem minimally to be necessary if even the distinction between “litteral” polysemy and “metaphorical” univocity be recognized, and it does not help matters either that Hilton’s revision of the more usual connotations of his terminology seems to encourage his hospitality to blank contradiction. On the one hand, “refusing to read in symbols” and so on, the literal word is a “sensuous idea”: “if we encounter something ‘burning bright,’” he remarks, “we should at least admit its fiery body” (p. 11). But six pages earlier he is remarking (via the last line of Jerusalem), “If the Spirit has been incarnated in language, then it should be possible to move through the corporeality of the word back to the Spirit, to recognize—to name—the Word in the word” (p. 4). If that’s not univocity, I don’t know what is. Hilton illustrates it with one of his best puns, drawing this time on the conclusion to Milton, where “Jesus is seen coming in ‘The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment (a garment) dipped in blood’ (42.12), a description returning us to the Revelation of John, where one who is ‘called Faithful and True’—the Amen—comes ‘clothed in a vesture dipped in blood: And his name is called the word of God’ (19.11, 13). This name is the process, the idea, the being of naming with ‘a name written (inscribed), that no man knew’: . . .” (p. 4). But the helpfulness of this explanation is not borne out by the stuttering theoretical application: “the process, the idea, the being.”

It is of course to Hilton’s credit that Blake himself makes rather heavy weather of the theoretical issue with which he is preoccupied here, as anyone can attest who has wrestled with the terms “identified,” “likeness and similitude” or “individual” in the last pages of Jerusalem (e.g., 90.28–29 or 96.5–7), but it is not especially to Hilton’s credit that he never broaches the issue, so integral to his own argument, as expressed by Blake himself. And this is rather typical of Hilton’s way with difficulty. A footnote tells us he is “obviously completely unsympathetic” to critics who argue that words are roughly analogous to embodiments in Generation and therefore ideally dispensable, and he cites Leopold Damrosch and Robert Gleckner by name (p. 263), but since sympathy is hardly the issue, rather the enormous question of embodiment (including the referentiality of language), more direct encounter than a footnote might have been helpful.

All reviewers’ objections and obiter dicta emanate, of course, from the Reasoning Negative, and I do not mean to indulge my spectre here, but to suggest that Hilton’s theoretical limitations sometimes contribute to certain misgivings one has about the special genius of his readings even while they encourage him to make the readings in the first place. For example, I want to cite Hilton’s interesting commentary on

Then Los took off his left sandal placing it on his head,
Signal of solemn mourning
(M 8.10–12)

The commentary is a characteristic melange of Too Much and Poetic Genius. First we are told (p. 236), “The sandal is the signal the servants behold, and its rising initiates the mourning, the awareness of Loss. The sandal would be the sun if we could only step into it”—which led me to want to break someone’s harp. But as he persists, Hilton achieves some remarkable effects:

Through its “aggressive strangeness,” the passage discloses a level of organization distinct from the odd picture offered by the narrative; indeed, the description seems to be intentionally “unfortunate” in order to draw attention to the process of literal transformation at work. Thus in this passage sun becomes Los, or sol anagrammatically, and then becomes sandal becomes signal becomes sol/emm—and all ending with morning. The underlying theme, literally, is the Sun (p. 236).

In the nature of things there are going to be readers who feel that such a reading strains credibility, but Hilton’s flights of like mind are sustained enough that if the reader will stay with his explications they will earn at least grudging assent. For me they are exercises of the imagination, or at least Divine Improvisation, and I have no systematic quarrel with them as readings. (Their model, incidentally, would seem to be the inspired fancifulness of Erdman’s readings of the illuminations in The Illuminated Blake, and therefore part of the significance of Hilton’s book may be that it is the first extended study to apply illumination-reading to the text rather than vice versa.) But there is in them, again, a determined subsumption of quite distinct linguistic and imaginative categories, which subsumption, in my view, is mistakenly identified by Hilton as something platonically more general: “While the idea of such an arbitrary (and never attested) principle of composition is almost incredible, it does seem that in the passage at hand the Poetic Genius (not to be identified with the conscious poet) elaborates a pre-text concerning the Sun” (p. 236).

The principle evoked here is parallel to Earl Wasserman’s lovely idea in his Shelley book that Shelley was aiming by means of de-localized allusions at a kind of Ur-Text, or Source for the specific contexts from which a less completely idealized poetics had historically drawn. This theory founders on contradiction, for unless the unideal localized text is recognized, in the form of allusion, the transcendence of allusion is not something the reader will notice either—but at least Wasserman
retained the idea of authorial responsibility. Hilton, I would guess partly because of the strain on credibility exacted by punning, would make his pretext the word of the Muse speaking through Blake's unconscious. Evidently this escape from censorship is liberating for Hilton, and he feels free to goose-chase chains of association through Blake's texts in a wonderfully uninhibited fashion. But he is encouraged as well into theoretical hypocrisies with respect to the "other tradition" of commentary. "Rather than add to the infinitely proliferating possibilities of symbolic commentary, we might strive instead to study how Blake's polysemous words and contexts support each other" (p. 11). Obviously Hilton earns the right to his own emphasis, but where does our knowledge of context come from if not from the proliferating commentaries? And what makes Hilton think his is not one of them?

In other words, the idea that word leads to word in Blake's texts without any mediation by "symbolic" commentary seems to me untenable. The mediation, finally, has to be the myth Blake produced, and since Hilton seems delighted by polysemy in words I can't for the life of me figure out why he is disturbed by "proliferation" in commentary. Moreover, this error (as I see it) terribly and unnecessarily limits what he could have done with his talents as a reader. "These constructions," he writes (p. 4) "do not disclose anything about the narrative, but they do create aspects of the background and frame. . . ." But after all, since so many of Blake's primary mythological names are themselves puns, it is no very great leap to the notion that the myth itself may be only an "extension"—as it were shorthand—for the linguistic activity studied here. Of course it is one thing to ignore the leap for reasons of economy or space, but Hilton's attempt to make a theoretical virtue out of ignoring it seems to me a grievous self-imposition. To pursue words as if they told us nothing about Blake's narrative is to be only half-Blaked.

To carry on as if this were not the case, and if his own commentaries weren't led at every point by a specialist's awareness of symbolic commentary, commits Hilton to a mode of disclosure which, since it traces term-associations at the expense of narrative-associations, fails to discover a critical narrative worthy of his discoveries. For example, the chapter on "Stars and Other Bright Words" moves from the extraordinary reading of "The Tyger" with which it begins to an elaborate discussion of the conceptual associations between stars and reason, taking us from the Night Thoughts illustrations through The Book of Urizen to Milton and beyond. I learned something for which I am grateful every step of the way, but in the absence of any critical narrative except association I found the process of argument tedious and arbitrary. In this book it is as if the usual relationship between argument and footnote had been reversed, and the reader left to make what he will of the notes. Given the talents of the reader, I found myself wishing for more. There is no desirable conflict between fiction-readers and word-readers of Blake, or at least none that couldn't be made into a Blakean war in heaven. Lacking this, however, it is not so terrible to find oneself where "Contrarieties are equally True," and we should be grateful to Nelson Hilton for giving us Beulah.

From September to November 1983 the San Antonio Museum of Art presented a small but distinguished exhibition of sketches by Benjamin West for three ambitious cycles of paintings and stained glass windows depicting biblical subjects. The organizer of the exhibition and author of its extremely informative catalogue was Nancy Pressly, the museum's chief curator, who previously had organized the exhibition of The Fuseli Circle in Rome at the Yale Center for British Art in 1979. The three series for which the exhibited sketches were preparatory studies were intended for the Royal Chapel in Windsor Castle, St. George's Chapel also at Windsor Castle, and Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire. The two Windsor undertakings occupied West on and off for over two decades. The Fonthill commissions came only in 1796, when William Beckford started to build the Abbey, and West's work for Beckford all seems to have been done by 1801. West did complete eighteen very large pictures for the Royal Chapel, all of which he exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1781 and 1801, but they were never installed in the Castle. For St. George's Chapel he painted an altarpiece and made designs for five windows, of which four were installed. These were on a vast scale (the tripychal east window depicting the Resurrection measured some thirty-six feet high by twenty-eight across) and, as they were in the fully late-Baroque style that West used consistently for the biblical subjects he painted in the 1780s and 1790s, they conflicted dramatically with the Perpendicular Gothic style of their architectural setting. They were removed and destroyed in mid-nineteenth-century restorations of the Chapel. For Fonthill Abbey, West's chief religious subjects were intended for a Revelation Chamber planned.


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to house his patron's tomb. The Chamber was never built, and the compositions intended for it never proceeded beyond painted sketches, but four of those sketches were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1798. Three of the four, plus a drawing of The Angel in the Sun and two paintings of St. Michael and St. Thomas à Becket undertaken for windows in the Abbey, were shown at San Antonio, providing the visual climax of the exhibition, as well as a focused look at a hitherto all but unknown aspect of West's multi-faceted œuvre.

Pressly's catalogue comprises not only lucid historical accounts of the three projects, but also important analyses of their positions in the art of the period. She is particularly interesting in her discussion of the Apocalyptic subjects for Beckford, which she relates to the millenarian ideas current in England following the French Revolution, specifically to the exhortations of Richard Brothers, the self-proclaimed prophet of a revolutionary millennium.

When one looks at a painting like The Beast Rising from the Sea (collection of Thomas and Margaret McCormick; no. 40), it is difficult, in the light of the millenarian spirit of the times, not to see some radical political commentary underlying its religious imagery. The prominent lion head of the beast could easily be interpreted as an only slightly veiled reference to England whose emblem was the lion, particularly when one remembers that Brothers explicitly identifies the Beast with the British Monarchy. (p. 64)

When one looks at West's Beast Rising from the Sea, it is also difficult not to see some foretaste of the multi-headed monsters in William Blake's Great Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea (National Gallery of Art, Washington; Butlin no. 521), particularly when we read in Joseph Farington's diary that Blake's friend Ozias Humphry called West's sketch the "finest conception ever come from mind of man." Due to the rarity of illustrations of Revelation in post-Medieval art, West's paintings exhibited in the 1790s must have provided useful guide posts for Blake when he turned to Apocalyptic subjects in the next decade, and every one of West's subjects did find an echo in a drawing done by the younger artist a few years later. On the other hand, we should note that on 19 February 1796, well before West had begun to work for Beckford, Farington recorded a conversation in which West, Humphry, and Richard Cosway "spoke warmly in favour of the designs of Blake the Engraver, as works of extraordinary genius and imagination." At that date, West may well have been at work on the version of his Death on the Pale Horse, composed for the Royal Chapel at Windsor, which he exhibited the following May (Detroit Institute of Arts). By 1796 he probably had seen some of Blake's large color prints of 1795, and Blake is said to have given him a copy of America, A Prophecy of 1793. Although West first composed Death on the Pale Horse between 1779 and 1783 and exhibited a version of it in 1784 (Royal Academy of Arts, London), it is possible that his awareness of Blake prompted him in 1796 to return to what had been an isolated venture into a visionary mode, and, at the least, we must acknowledge that he was not unaware of Blake when he began to paint his Apocalyptic sketches for Beckford in the following year. Despite vast differences in temperament and in their positions in English artistic life, there was some common ground between the two artists at a time when it could have been of use to them.
THE [FIRST] BOOK OF BLAKE

KATMANDU. Typed by Gypsy 1983.

PRELUDIUM TO THE [FIRST] BOOK OF BLAKE

Of the fried brains of primal existence,
When Eternals are out of golden bricks and bottles
And gave Blake a place in our mouths,
Loud, audacious, out of order and solitary.

Gadzooks, I hear your call gladly,
Dictate your lunacies to me so that even Joan can’t hear them
And leave me to the task of relation.

Chap: I

1. Lo, a shade of melancholy is risen
In London! Dark, snappy to the touch
Is this demon of the mind who rasps
Throats in the courses of time.
It could be Blake, say some thoughtless fools
But we all know it is Sir Joshua.

2. Lots of times he figured, & moon’d
Word by word in his attic room,
Unseen, unknown! changes appeared
Like Bad Art, twisted into horror
By the Multi-colored demons of Blot and Blur.

3. For he strove in battles dire,
In unseen conflicts with shapes
Bred of his comely mistresses
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element,
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark, like the children of the chimneys,
He hid in his private coffin,
With activity unknown and horrible;
A Poet without a poem,
In a huge jar of ink.

5. But Tygers beheld his vast possibilities;
Ages on ages they lay, waiting to win him over,
Till finally they smelled his time
And burned an idea bright into his mind.

6. His trusty pen now ready, weird Blake
Prepar’d: his ten thousands of blunders
Rang’d in prolific array, stretch from London into America
And the rolling of his wheels can be heard for miles.
Like twisting wrestlers his groans can be heard
In the Alps, in Greece, in the heart of Venice,
And even in your own mind.
Is nothing sacred to this mixer of sorrows
But guinea-like suns and innocent lambs?

Chap: II

1. Art was nor: nor truth of perception
The will of Blake was not yet born,
He twitched and turned in
Eternal life, before his death arrived.

2. The sound of a baby, the people
Awoke, & vast clouds of tears roll’d
Down the dull eyes of the world, so called
It by Blake, the new born.

3. Loud the crying, like that of an error.
Now was the earth prepared to accept its new christ,
The carpers rolled out and minds split open
Words passed lips like Robert’s and Graham?
Crying was heard in Santa Fe
And rumors had it that He was only a copy.

4. But he spoke like a man, with
A man’s empty eyes, and seemed to
Look through you rather than at you.
“Here alone I, in place of yourself,
‘Know what you are and what you desire,
‘I know what is cold and I know what is fire.
‘I’ve written a book, it’s a must for you all
‘Read it and praise it as lackeys you must.

5. “Lo! Am I Divine as I search with your souls,
‘For Innocence, Experience, Los and
‘Of course, Luvah. Give me a handle
‘So we can all be friends.
‘Under one Heaven, One God
‘One King, one Law, one society
‘One curse, one rule, why of course, it’s me.”

Chap: III

1. The voice ended: they saw his waxed moustache
Emerge from his changing lip; his hand
On the empty bottle grasping for a
Look at eternity. Inspiration seized the weak,

2. Spasms of desire, intense need
In epileptic dromions of rye and barley
In whirlwinds of yeast and molasses
And enormous forms of energy,
All the seven heavy ingredients of sin.
In gallon form appear’d,
In the flames of Blake’s vast still.

3. Thunder and lightning, and Southern
Comfort too, then fire burst out in the north end
Of town, where Blake’s fine army had bedded down
And angry yelps could be heard from above
Where his wife lay waiting for her imprisoned Orc.

4. But no fire came from the fire, and
No light from the light because it wasn’t there.

5. Then Blake raised his arm and up
Came Urizen; like an elevator boy he
Danced at his command, and the only one
Gone was Los, who had hidden in the valley
Between UBlake and Mars and ate fruit in the
Faces of the Eternals.

6. Los didn't like the leechy Urizen
As Blake gave him plenty of Hell.
And Blake didn't like the bellowing Los
As Orc wouldn't let him leave his side.

Chap: IV
1. At los was the world as they
Watched the Blake grow.
2. He whimpered and cursed
And drove himself wild.
3. They soon grew to rue the day of the
Tears
4. And asked Willy Boy would he give
Them a break.

Chap: V
1. Ages on ages roll'd over him
As he sought for a world winning stance.
Till finally he found that the right
Recipe was christ with a little romance.
2. He pleaded his case in darkness at first
Beating his head on his desk,
But every desk he finally marred
Was replaced with a new point of view.
So he turned his restless eyes
To the sun and winced with pain when
He saw an eclipse formed an image of
Dancing men as carollers chimed at his door.
3. Lo! I have it indeed, in
Darkness I no longer dwell, I
Smell the green of a wonderful faith
And the aroma of my own dirty socks.
4. And the world shook with his might
As the demons were gassed and burned,
Painters were sent to Sigh beereeya for
Their blasphemous errors of sight.
The truth was clear to his tuned ear
The truth was right and that was he.

5. He carved a man out of the sky,
In spiraling descent, he reached
The ground, as Urizen, the evil,
With the world as a hoax, and the freedom
To twist his own imagination to
Terrible deeds of the senses.

Chap: VI
1. Yes, Blake ate at diners, and
Sampled the human art, he drew fine
Portraits of human acts and painted on their
Elmsy canvas. But he finally decided
To deform the human art.
No more could they draw at will
Fine pieces of life, but bound to
Blake by the majesty of truth
They cowered in awe of eternity.
2. Their children wept, & built
Temples to his faces,
And followed his wise advice
And called him God.
3. And his mystery remains
Surrounded by laughter, now caus'd
By demons of satire and cynic.
4. The remaining songs of UBlake
Beheld their scorn and shrunk together
Beneath the Net of Bell.
Persuasion was in vain;
For the ears of the satrist
Were ringing with laughter and scold,
And his eyes were aglow with the humor of souls
Which whisper and ever remain.
5. So Bell called together a smattering
Of the remaining children of memory
And used them to toy with the idea of Blake
Hoping it not the same when he leaves it.
6. And the kicks seemed to be worth the time.

1 This word afterwards inebriated.
2 This line stained by a drink in one copy.