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Managing Editor: Patricia Neill.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly is published under the sponsorship of the Department of English, University of Rochester.

Subscriptions are $18 for institutions, $15 for individuals. All subscriptions are by the volume (1 year, 4 issues) and begin with the summer issue. Subscription payments received after the summer issue will be applied to the 4 issues of the current volume. Foreign addresses (except Canada and Mexico) require a $3 per volume postal surcharge for surface mail, a $10 per volume surcharge for air mail delivery. U.S. currency or international money order necessary. Make checks payable to Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly. Address all subscription orders and related communications to Patricia Neill, Blake, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627, USA.

Many back issues are available at a reduced price. Address Patricia Neill for a list of issues and prices.

Manuscripts are welcome. Send two copies, typed and documented according to the forms suggested in the MLA Style Sheet, 2nd ed., to either of the editors: Morris Eaves, Dept. of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627; Morton D. Paley, Dept. of English, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

International Standard Serial Number: 0006-453x. Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly is indexed in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography, the Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, English Language Notes' annual Romantic Bibliography, American Humanities Index, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, and Current Contents.
Europe 6: Plundering the Treasury

STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT

In *The Illuminated Blake*, David V. Erdman suggests that plate 6 of *Europe: A Prophecy* (illus. 1) presents a case of incipient cannibalism, citing as evidence the gloss supplied by Blake's friend George Cumberland which labels the picture "Famine" and includes the notation, "Preparing to dress the Child," along with a quotation from Dryden: "...to prolong our breath We greedily devour our certain Death." Erdman observes that the picture demonstrates not only that the camp followers of War are Famine, Pestilence, and Fire, but also that "it is the rich and powerful who devour the children, the young who die of plague, women and children who perish in flames." Already in 1784 Blake had assembled these apocalyptic elements in his Royal Academy picture of *War unchained by an Angel, Fire, Pestilence, and Famine* following; by 1794 he had begun a related series of pictures that would culminate in the watercolors of *Pestilence, Fire, War, and Famine* — the latter, explicitly representing cannibalism — which he completed for Thomas Butts c. 1805. That Blake had already begun to associate cannibalism with famine by the time of *Europe* 6, however, is apparent from the relationship of Blake's designs to several images from the popular and widely-circulated work of James Gillray.

That Blake was familiar with Gillray's work is evident from numerous connections between Gillray's political prints and Blake's visual works from the early 1790s. Only a year Blake's senior, Gillray had entered the Royal Academy in 1778, the year before Blake, and had become an acquaintance and correspondent of Fuseli in the following years. Asserting flatly that Blake "must have been acquainted with Gillray," David Bindman observes that despite their later political differences the two artists "share a sense of the unremitting corruption of the world." Precisely this sense of unremitting corruption links *Europe* 6 with Gillray's work. Significantly, though, the background rather than the figures themselves establishes the tie.

The dark, arching stonework of the hearth in Blake's picture is unmistakably that of the Treasury, which appears frequently in Gillray's prints, occasionally bearing not the usual inscription, "Treasury" (which appears in prints of 21 April 1786, 29 May 1787, 14 August 1788, 3 June 1793, 24 February 1801, and 1 May 1804), but another such as "Excise-Office" (9 April 1790, where "Treasury" has been crossed out and the new words are being inscribed) or "Granary" (19 January 1803). The most immediately relevant occurrence (and one of the earliest) of the Treasury facade is in *Monstrous Craws, as a New Coalition Feast* (illus. 2), published 29 May 1787 and extant as both monochrome etching and hand-colored aquatint. The print takes as its point of departure the recent exhibition in London of two women and a man whose remarkable greatly distended necks had undoubtedly resulted from goiter affliction. Gillray appropriated this sensational topical image for his picture of Queen Charlotte, the Prince of Wales, and George III (whom Gillray dressed as a woman, to replicate the sexes of the unfortunate trio exhibited in London) devouring golden porridge from a great bowl bearing the inscription "John Bull's Blood" — the national wealth — in a variation of one of Gillray's favorite themes: the exorbitant public expense of maintaining the royal family. The Prince of Wales, his own nearly empty crag symbolic of his perennial want of ready money, glances enviously at his greedy mother. In his left hand he holds a spoon inscribed "£10000 p[ounds] An." and in his right another inscribed "£60000 p[ounds] An.," these being the sums allotted him by Parliament and the king.

Visible within the arch in *Monstrous Craws* and most of the other prints in which the Treasury appears are its spike-topped gates: here the spikes surmount a horizontal line that passes behind the king's right hand. The distinctive wall, rounded arch, and gate spikes all recur in *Europe* 6, the horizontal line (in nearly the same position where Gillray locates it) split to flank the hearth-grate, the spikes modified to wavy verticals at the kettles' right and crosshatched lines at its left. Even the wavy lines indicating the wall's texture recur in *Europe* 6, as they do in other plates in *Europe* and *America*.

Gillray often ironically juxtaposed the notorious public extravagance of the royal children — particularly the Prince of Wales, whose debts were both a public scandal and a public burden — with the purportedly modest private lifestyle of the king and queen, as in his famous print of royal belt-tightening, *Anti-Saccharites, or John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar* (published 27 March 1792; illus. 3). Since the extreme frugality of the king and queen in private life was well known, considerable discussion (and much political satire) centered upon the question of what became of the large sums for which the king, citing his considerable
debts, regularly petitioned Parliament. Knowing the royal couple’s stinting lifestyle, many attributed these petitions to pure greed. Hence the immediate relevance of Gillray’s daring double caricature, *Frying Sprats* and *Toasting Muffins* (published 28 November 1791; illus. 4), in the former of which the queen’s overflowing pockets emphasize the hypocrisy of economizing. Prominent in this double print is the bar-grated hearth at which queen and king prepare their plain fare. Eight months later, in *Temperance enjoying a Frugal Meal* (28 July 1792; illus. 5), the king and queen enjoy a thrifty meal of sauerkraut and boiled eggs while another ornate barred fireplace in the securely bolted royal apartments has fallen into such disuse that behind the bars appears not a fire but a floral arrangement whose three drooping white blooms (perhaps meant to suggest the fleur-de-lis) testify to its state of neglect. This print, too, appeared as both monochrome etching and aquatint, enjoying in both “the highest reputation.”

Blake’s fusion of the familiar images of barred hearth and Treasury facade produces in *Europe* 6 a harrowing image that goes well beyond the scope of Gillray’s prints and imbues the caricaturist’s elaborate play upon the act of eating, in *Monstrous Craws* and elsewhere, with distinctively cannibalistic overtones. As in *America*, what is cannibalized is the very basis of society, the family: humanity consumes itself. There are no men, for instance, in *Europe* 6, for they are presuma-
bly occupied elsewhere as the makers or the casualties of war. The roaring flames and billowing smoke of Europe 6 indicate that the national wealth—human and mone­
tary, as well as spiritual and ethical—is being boiled away and that neither rich nor poor (as denoted by the women’s garb) are spared. Blake’s conversion of the Treasury into cooking-hearth is doubly ironic, since it is the Treasury that funds the recurrent wars that consume England’s resources. Moreover, if the child here is male (as is particularly suggested by its placement on the train of the woman’s dress, a detail that occurs frequently in Renaissance Nativity scenes and that lends a doubly ironic note to this scene of child death), then Blake’s design echoes Monstrous Craws in its numbers of male and female figures. And in the great kettle Blake has worked a subtle variation upon Gillray’s bowl of “John Bull’s Blood,” for John Bull’s children constitute the real “blood” and wealth of England, sacrificed in a des­
perate “meal.” Blake was still too much an active radical at this point in his career to be either unaware of the specifically political dimension of his imagery or unwill­
ing to exploit that dimension to its utmost in America and Europe.

As in America, in which the family unit is consistently depicted as shattered by death or enforced separa­
tion, in Europe the only “whole” family occurs in the large illumination to the final plate (illus. 6), where a man carries an apparently unconscious woman while compelling a female child to climb the stair with him. Blake’s arresting image derives almost certainly from
Europe 13 and an indication of at least potential post-millenial survival. Given the apparent escape, intact, of this family unit, humanity seems yet to stand a chance of avoiding total self-immolation. On the other hand, considering the bloody turn the Terror-ridden French Revolution had taken by the time Blake completed Europe, these ominous, ambiguous flames may be those not of liberation and purification but of blind self-consumption, a possibility underscored by another particularly grisly Gillray print.

Un petit Souper, a la Parisienne; or, A Family of Sans-Culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day (illus. 8), published 20 September 1792, makes concrete and explicit the ravenous cannibalism of the Revolutionary France of the September massacres. Here a skewered child hangs before another of those horizontally-barred fire-grates, “dressed” for cooking and basted by a pistol-packing hag while other citoyens feast on a variety of body parts, including a heart. On the table in gruesome parody of the familiar subject of St. John the Baptist is a severed head on a platter, its right eye and ear hungrily devoured by a scrawny Frenchman. Interestingly, at the lower right another man sits on the naked torso of

Flaxman’s The Fury of Athamas (1790–94; illus. 7), but it bears thematic associations also with the escape of Lot and his family from Sodom and Gomorrah (a scene Blake had engraved c. 1781 for The Protestant’s Family Bible and which likewise includes in the figure of Lot’s wife a woman looking backward toward the flames), Raphael’s painting of the fire in the Borgo, the story of Aeneas rescuing his father and child, and the expulsion from Eden (eighteenth-century illustrations of which frequently involve stairs of one sort or another and allude to the flaming sword that bars the return of Adam and Eve). In America, plate 3, Blake had recently employed a related image (borrowed from John Singleton Copley’s Death of Major Peirson) of a backward-glancing family of three—the only complete family unit depicted in America—fleeing from surging flames.

That the family in Europe 15 is ascending the stairs past a broken classical column is a relatively positive sign, a visual hint of liberation from the dungeon of
a female figure whose posture, lying on her back with arms outstretched in cruciform fashion, appears frequently in Blake's visual art; e.g., the illumination to "A Poison Tree" (Songs of Experience) and both versions of Michael Foretells the Crucifixion, from Blake's illustrations to Paradise Lost. Europe 6 would seem to turn the violent anti-gallicism of Gillray's print against itself, universalizing the theme of cannibalism by stripping the image of its nationalist propaganda. Europe moves beyond America's attack on England's war with America (and, by analogy, with France) to expose the cannibalistic nature of war itself. In a very real sense, the flames from which the family group of Europe 15 flees are also those that heat the cauldron in Europe 6.

A final word about Gillray's many variations on the topos of eating is appropriate in conclusion. The act of consuming provided a singularly pertinent metaphor for the self-destructive state of affairs in England (and on the Continent) as caricatured by Gillray and his contemporaries. Popular art furnished abundant precedents for the sort of references to actual and metaphorical cannibalism we encounter both in Blake's visual art (e.g., the Famine of c. 1805, the background of which still echoes the Treasury facade) and in his illuminated poetry (e.g., Jerusalem, plates 25, 69, and 85). Gillray's well-known A Voluptuary under the Horrors of Digestion (2 July 1792; illus. 9), which immediately preceded Temperance enjoying a Frugal Meal and epitomized profligacy and gluttony, furnishes a stark contrast to the emaciated figures either depicted or described in America and Europe and represented in visual works like Pestilence, Famine, and War (A Breach in the City, the Morning after the Battle), all of which were evolving in the 1790s. Furthermore, the sharply anti-gallican double print of 21 December 1792, French Liberty [and] British Slavery (illus. 10) ironically contrasts the relative luxury and security of the fat Englishman (a John Bull type), who laments his high taxes while carving for him-
self a substantial portion of the roast beef of England, with the state of the scrawny, ragged, scallion-chewing Frenchman (whose clawed feet betray his demonic nature), who extols the virtues of liberty. There may be a connection with *Europe 6* here as well, grounded in the sort of ironic juxtapositioning of appearance and reality of which Gillray was fond and which Blake frequently employs in both his verbal and his visual art. Gillray's agitated Englishman, who claims that "this cursed Ministry" and "their damn'd Taxes" are "making Slaves of us all, & Starving us to Death," is clearly not starving, nor is the well-dressed, necklaced, and plumpish woman seated at the right in Blake's design.

Taken with the elaborate force-feeding depicted in *Sans-Culottes feeding Europe with the Bread of Liberty* (12 January 1793; illus. 11), this double print, along with a whole series of prints from 1787-1795, underscores the contemporary political cartoonist's preoccupation with the metaphor of eating. It was, then, entirely natural for Blake both to embed intimations of cannibalism within the familiar visual metaphor of *Europe 6* and to capitalize upon the rich texture of association invoked by the looming presence therein of the familiar Treasury facade, and he could have trusted his contemporaries to recognize and to credit the topical political significance of his reference.

I wish to thank the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, for the award of a Visiting Senior Fellowship during the Fall of 1986, of which this essay is one result.


3. Erdman's suggestion, for instance, that Blake's emblem "I want! I want!" (from *For Children*, 1793) is directly indebted for the detail of the ladder extending toward a crested moon to Gillray's *Slough of Despond* of 2 January 1793 provides what would seem to be indisputable evidence of the connection. See *The Notebook of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. ed. (New York: Readex,


*Wright 133.

*Erdman suggests that the two women and the child in Europe 6 may derive from emblems in Blake's notebook, numbers 73 and 83, the latter of which depicts a well-dressed woman holding on her lap a similarly stiff and presumably dead child. The position of the child in Europe 6 echoes that of the child in the wheatfield at the bottom of America 9—which child Erdman regards as, like the French Revolution, "new born"—and it recalls also the position of yet another recumbent child from page 77 of the notebook. See *The Illuminated Blake*, 164, 147, and *Notebook*, [N73], [N83], [N77].

*Although Flaxman did not return to England from Italy until 1794, he had periodically sent back to England both his own works and plaster casts after antique pieces. The Fury of Athamas is itself based upon *Gaul Killing His Wife* (c. 240–200 BC), which Flaxman had copied from all angles at the Villa Ludovisi. See Sarah Symons, Flaxman and Europe: The Outline Illustrations and Their Influence (New York and London: Garland, 1984) 83. Importantly, both these works center upon the disruption or destruction of the family unit.


*See Behrendt, "This Accursed Family," 43.

Blake's Comme-bined Cherubim:
A Note on Milton, Plate 32

Leslie Brisman

A few years ago, when I was acting as Education Chairman of a Hebrew Day School, a parent came to me with a complaint: The school's curriculum specified that children would be exposed to medieval biblical commentary as well as being encouraged to write their own. But his child was not being taught Rashi, and Rashi (the child's desks while she glowered from behind - kruvim had the face of babes.' What did this Rashi know? He regarded as inspired commentary, the commentary that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai to help him understand Mosaic law. I did not relish the prospect of confronting the teacher in question with this complaint. A woman of massive proportions, with a voice that could shake mountains, she had already laid the ground-rules for any conversations about her teaching. One had to meet her in her classroom and to crouch into one of the child's desks while she glowered from behind - and then, at a crucial moment, from on - her no less massive desk.

"Rashi?" she thundered. "And do you know who this Rashi is?" She closed her eyes and intoned Exodus 25:18, the description of the ark-work: "'Make two kruvim of gold, make them of beaten metal at the two corners of the ark-cover.' And what does your Rashi say? 'Kruvim: Dmut partzuf tinok labem. Cherubim: They had the face of babes.' What did this Rashi know? He had seen some cute little putti on the ceiling of the cathedral of Troyes, putti with their dimpled red cheeks, their soft round bellies, their chubby thighs half hiding their little penises, and that's what he thought kruvim were: darling little cherubs! NO WAY!" she bellowed, now mounting the desk top: "These kruvim are fearsome creatures, big-eyed, bushy browed, with [here pointing to her own brilliantly orange-dyed locks] flaming hair. They are creatures to overwhelm [pound], to threaten [pound], to ward off [grand pound on the desk]!"

"Why not present Rashi's interpretation as open to question?" I mumbled. "Why not suggest to the children both putto and monster? And how do you know yours is the interpretation?" "I know," she roared, "because I am inspired!"

Although Blake would have cared no more for this particular incarnation of the Covering Cherub than for the Rashi she thought she knew all too well, it is curious that the poet and the lady in question share a trope that the medieval commentator would not risk. His wisdom does not purport to come directly from a voice speaking from between the cherubim. The idea that "inspiration" means the power to interpret ancient texts is an idea perhaps always in the back of our minds as we read Blake or the Bible - but still deeper in the unconscious mind of the eleventh-century interpreter. Rashi is sometimes engagingly open about his uncertainty in interpreting a difficult passage; at other times he sounds sure of himself, but his surety is that of decorous, philological knowledge. Sometimes he is playful, but the playfulness is, I believe, almost always borrowed. This is surely the case with regard to the cherub. Because he lived in northeastern France and died in 1105, about a hundred years before the Cathedral of Troyes was even begun, we can feel reasonably certain that he never saw a putto there; nor would he have seen one there had he lived a little longer. He would have had to stretch the inner eye's prophetic vision some four hundred years to developments in Italian Renaissance painting. But though he had seen none of those fat-cheeked baby-faced cherubs (let alone their cute little penises), he had certainly seen - twice, in fact, in Talmud Sukkah and in Talmud Hagigah - passages about cherubim containing the playful etymology of Rabbi Abbahu, a Palestinian who said cherub means "like a youth" - the comparative letter kaf plus rava, Aramaic for "growing boy."

Had he had Akkadian and Assyrian at his command, Rashi would no doubt have been happy to derive kerv from roots meaning "to pray or bless, to be propitious to man." The desire to have the cherubs benignant rather than malicious forces indicates no belated, Satanic mildness (Hayley wisdom), but better philology - as well as better pedagogy - than Mme. Covering Cherub could imagine. There is an additional double irony, which both Rashi and Blake might have delighted to discover, in the fact that tinok in modern Hebrew means the power to interpret ancient texts is an idea perhaps always in the back of our minds as we read Blake or the Bible - but still deeper in the unconscious mind of the eleventh-century interpreter. Rashi is sometimes engagingly open about his uncertainty in interpreting a difficult passage; at other times he sounds sure of himself, but his surety is that of decorous, philological knowledge. Sometimes he is playful, but the playfulness is, I believe, almost always borrowed. This is surely the case with regard to the cherub. Because he lived in northeastern France and died in 1105, about a hundred years before the Cathedral of Troyes was even begun, we can feel reasonably certain that he never saw a putto there; nor would he have seen one there had he lived a little longer. He would have had to stretch the inner eye's prophetic vision some four hundred years to developments in Italian Renaissance painting. But though he had seen none of those fat-cheeked baby-faced cherubs (let alone their cute little penises), he had certainly seen - twice, in fact, in Talmud Sukkah and in Talmud Hagigah - passages about cherubim containing the playful etymology of Rabbi Abbahu, a Palestinian who said cherub means "like a youth" - the comparative letter kaf plus rava, Aramaic for "growing boy."

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Abbaahu's philology is hardly definitive hermeneutic wisdom on the question of cherubim. Although Exodus 25:20 pictures the cherubim as covering the ark with their outspread wings, these are decidedly not "covering cherubs" in the sense of figures that, like the teacher, deny, impede, frustrate, or ward off. They are literally constructed to be of a piece with the kapporet, the covering of the ark that is associated with kapparah, merciful covering up of sin. The biblical concept of atonement seems related to this matter of the furnishings of the ark insofar as what is done cannot be undone; it can only be "covered over," mercifully overlooked. God is where there is forgiveness—overlooking—of sins. If one emphasizes the copulative, or restates this as "God is forgiveness of sins," we already hear Blake, to whom we will turn shortly. Meanwhile, it is worth noting the architectural symbolism of cherubim that are of a piece with the kapporet, so that they appear to rise out of atonement as embodiments of lovingkindness. A second feature of the cherubim which might have engaged Blake's imagination is that their faces are described as towards each other and towards the kapporet: "Their faces are turned to one another, toward the cover shall the faces of the cherubim be" (25:20). They both face each other and regard the symbol of atonement that is spread out between them, "substantially expressed" from the pure (gold) substance of which they are made, and by which they are seamlessly drawn together. There is a Kabbalist notion that the cherubim are male and female and that they face each other in love; the space they define between them, the space where God says his presence will be manifest, is the space of love. Not original to the Zohar, however, the idea of the cherubim as creatures in love is already present in the Talmud:

Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the Cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another. And they would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.

To be true to the Talmud we must specify that the love of God for his people is tenor, represented by the vehicle of earthly love. My desire to say that God is the love of man and woman is not very Talmudic, though it is very Blake. Now the God Blake internalizes sometimes is the Old Testament God of wrath. As Isaiah tells Blake, "I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception...I was then perswaded & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God." But the voice of God is also the voice of the turtle heard in the land when the winter of indignation is past, and the God who for Blake has a human face, who is found in one human face turning in kindness to another, is represented by cherub facing cherub over the ark.

It is time to turn directly to Blake—plate 32[35] in copies C, D of Milton. The context is a discussion of the Divine Mercy, which for Blake is associated with kapparah or atonement precisely as kapparah is related to kapporet, the covering over the ark out of which the cherubim emerge. At several critical junctures in Blake's epics, perhaps most notably in the Cambel-Gwendolen story in Jerusalem, the forgiveness of sins is related to the root meaning of kapparah. In Parkhurst's Lexicon, Blake would have discovered that the verb "is frequently rendered, To atone, expiate, or appease; but in all these instances the attentive reader can scarcely help observing, that the radical idea of covering is preserved." It is an idea Blake transforms from dictionary to plot. Atonement in Blake is further related to an undoing, or at least an abstraction, of the Christian plot by which a state becomes an individual—Christ, "Whom God hath set forth as a propitiatory or mercy-seat." Forgiveness of sins depends on the ability to distinguish "states from individuals in those states. / States change; but individual identities never change nor cease" (E 131). On the personal level, this means that one has to learn to distinguish a state of mind from an individual in that state of mind. Two people who love each other may quarrel from time to time; to be able to perform their own gentle reconciliations, they must be able to recognize hostility or jealousy as states passed through, rather than true revelations of each other's identity. Although the mistakes of the past cannot be unwritten, they can be "covered over" when recognized as states of mind, separate from individual identities.

This much is lovely, soft-core Blake. Interwoven with it is a vision of history that we might call hard-core Blake. Though associated with a somewhat esoteric notion of ages of history, the idea of individuals representing stages of spiritual development is not difficult but familiar. To speak of Abraham is to speak of a certain stage in religious consciousness represented by the benignant tales of patriarch Abraham. To speak of Moses (when Blake wants to speak nicely of Moses) is to speak of a prophetic will to cast out idolatry; it is Moses the smasher of tablets whom Blake rewards with a place in his Vision of the Last Judgment:

It ought to be understood that the persons Moses & Abraham are not here meant but the States Signified by those Names the Individuals being representations or Visions of those States... as they are written in the Bible these various states I have seen in my Imagination when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations. (p. 79, E 556)

Though the figure of corporate personality is familiar enough, it takes on a characteristically Blakean tone when understood as a source of divine mercy. Mercy has a human face, and needs to be represented in the imaginative, compassionate, or loving gestures of single, strongly delineated human figures. The passage just quoted goes on, "Abraham hovers above his posterity which appear as Multitudes of Children ascending from
the Earth surrounded by stars." A symbolist could have had the stars themselves represent the children, to be numerous as stars; but that would lose the human vision that is the essence of Blake's Abraham, in whom multitudes will be blessed. Not all states or combinations of individuals are commendable combinations; alas, there are far more political states and organizations of individuals united "in the blood of War / And Sacrifice, & next, in Chains of imprisonment" (E 132). But if and when individuals are combined "in freedom and holy brotherhood," the Divine Humanity gives them a "human form." The poet or painter who recognizes the ideals of freedom and brotherhood in the interaction of individuals participates in the work of the Divine Humanity by representing these multitudes in narratives or pictures as noble, single, human forms.

Commenting on the passage of plate 32 that I have been citing, Harold Bloom notes that the speech about combination into states is introduced as the reply of "Hillel who is Lucifer." Bloom says, "We do not know how much Hebrew Blake had, yet it is clear that his Hillel here has nothing to do with the famous rabbi, but rather has some relation to the Helel or day-star of Isaiah 14:12, first translated in the Vulgate as Lucifer." I do not know how much Hebrew Blake had, but I am struck by the question of one or many that is embedded in the two lines introducing the speech about individuals and states: "Then Hillel who is Lucifer replied over the Couch of Death, / And thus the Seven Angels instructed him & thus they converse" (E 131). Since there are no words attributed to Hillel, followed by others attributed to the Seven Angels, we can say that the speech of the collective that follows is also the speech of Hillel. If we overrule Bloom's statement that this Hillel has nothing to do with the famous rabbi, we might explain the confusion of one or many by supposing that the House of Hillel replies in the form of the Seven Angels. Since the Talmudic pitting of the House of Hillel against the House of Shamai often emerges as a conflict of mercy vs. rigor, pliancy vs. what Blake calls "mathematic holiness," I do not think it is a mistake to associate Hillel with the speech about combinations and states. Bet Hillel (the House of Hillel) would itself mean those rabbis "combined in freedom and holy brotherhood," and the collective spirit of their views invigorates Milton, now dead on the couch from an overdose of Shamaitic orthodoxy.

But it is not about Blake's Hebrew as regards Hillel that I am concerned; it is with Blake's Hebrew in a curious marginalia on this plate. Beside the lines in which the House of Hillel describe themselves as "combined in freedom and holy brotherhood" is the notation

\[ \text{\textbullet as multitudes} \]
\[ \text{\textbullet 'ב י ל Vox Populi} \]

In his newly revised Complete Poetry and Prose, David Erdman more accurately represents Blake's plate by printing the letter kaf on a separate line. Although it is not acceptable Hebrew to hyphenate a word or to have the comparative prefix stand alone, Blake's notation emphasizes the etymological pun. Like Rabbi Abbahu, Blake takes the kaf as the particle of similitude; but the remainder of the word he reads as rabim, "many, multitudes." To be a cherub, to be an angel of the divine presence is to be "like many" in the sense of standing, synchronically, for many. In the hard-core reading this means that a representative man substitutes for an age, an era, a constituency. But in the soft-core prophecy, to stand "like many" means to stand in love, in relation to another, so that God is present "among you," within this circle of grace. Underneath his imaginative etymology Blake writes "Vox Populi," which in the hard-core reading stands for the familiar political maxim, "vox populi, vox dei"; the will of the multitude is to be taken as the will of heaven. Those combined in brotherhood worship—and create—the God of love; those combined "by Satan's tyranny" worship—and constitute—the God of possessiveness, of nationalism, of warfare. In the soft-core reading, the maxim takes us back to the cover of the ark in Exodus: "I will be witnessed [or "I will be met"] by you there—I will speak to you from above the forgiveness covering, from between the cherubim." Vox dei vox putti: The voice of God is the voice of man and woman facing each other in loving embrace.

In A Vision of the Last Judgment, Blake depicts the enthroned messiah over whose head there is a circle or moon embedded in a little temple, complete with candelabrum and showbread. Blake's prose description of the drawing explains that the circle is the ark, transformed now from a structure above which the cherubim hover to one coincident with the cherubim and their space: "The Holy Spirit like a Dove is surrounded by a blue Heaven in which are the two Cherubim that bowed over the Ark for here the Temple is open in Heaven & the Ark of the Covenant is as a Dove of Peace" (p. 85, E 562). Now the "moony ark" is the heavens, and the dove at its center replaces the old tablets of law. Although the drawing is filled with multitudes, the quintessential population is the arrangement of two semicircular cherubim between whom the Holy Spirit is revealed.

Blake's "moony ark" makes an appearance in the poetry as well as the drawings. At the end of Milton, Ololon, who is both man and maid, nation and emanation, appears in Blake's garden: "Ololon and all its mighty Hosts / Appeard: a Virgin of twelve years" (36: 16-17, E 137). Renouncing her all too Miltonic virginity for union with Milton, Ololon loses her dark double, who flies away in what becomes, miraculously, a sign of peace: "Away from Ololon she divided & fled into the
depths / Of Miltons Shadow as a Dove upon the stormy Sea. / Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended” (42:5-7, E 143). The dove going off reminds us of Noah’s ark resting on Ararat; but the “moony ark” here is also the ark of the covenant over which, or now in which, the cherubim face each other in a circle or arc of love.

Reading Blake’s so-called “prophetic works,” one confronts several statements of prophetic faith like that of the Bard. “Where hadst thou this terrible song?” he is asked. “The Bard replied. I am inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing / According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius / Who is the eternal all protective Divine Humanity” (13:51–14:2, E 107–08). Moved by compassion or wrath, Blake’s inspired characters are prophets in the truest sense. If their rhetoric of self-proclamation sounds nothing like the “call narrative” of the Biblical prophets, it nonetheless shares with its ancient prototypes a strong distinction from self-aggrandizement. As Los proclaims in Jerusalem, “I am inspired: I act not for myself: For Albions sake / I now am what I am” (8:17–18, E 102). He is pointing to the degradation, the state of “horror and astonishment” in which he finds himself. Yet we hear, in this grand rhetoric, not just “I am a horror!” but “I am that I am.” That is, we hear both the humility of man and the glory of God, the Eternal “I am.” To speak with imagination and strength, with all one’s heart and rhetorical power, is to be one of a multitude become the voice of God.

Kol kenafei hem kikol mayim rabim: The sound of the wings of the cherubim was like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 1:24). In Wordsworth, at a crucial junction, these waters are the voice of God precisely in that they roar prophetically, ke-rabim, as though they were many, but figured into one:

... the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!
Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,
For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens.9

This is a Wordsworthian moment of revelation, a roaring of the lion of inspiration. Such “timey utterance,” presented as a voice of nature, may not look much like a Blakean roar of self-proclaimed inspiration. Yet it too evokes from the responsive reader something like an “amen” or prayer for the continued knowledge of such power: May your voice be strong as the voice of many; but, “centering all in love,” may your vision be worthy of the mutual regard of the cherubim!

[I had no teacher, no helper in all this work—[I wrote] as dictated to me from heaven.] Yet this peculiar sentence is not present in some editions, and where it is, the sentence has dots over each word. I am indebted to Marc Brettler of Brandeis University for pointing to this as an interpolated passage.

Talmud Sukkah 5b; Hagigah 13b. The Aramaic translation of Onkelos on Genesis 37:2 has riya for na‘ar (youth).

The rabbis, for example, playfully deconstruct Yom Kippurim (the awesome Day of Atonement) into ki-Purim (like Purim, the holiday when the scriptural reading, the book of Esther, which never mentions God’s name, licenses all sorts of mockery and frolic). For an example of similarly improbable eighteenth-century use of the particle of similitude, consider the etymology of kibul as ki-bul, where bul is taken to be (but without any evidence) a word for “nothing.” See Julius Bate’s Reply to Dr. Sharp’s Review and Defence of his Dissertations on the Scripture Meaning of Aleim and Berith (London, 1755) and the rejoinder of John Parkhurst in An Hebrew and English Lexicon, without Points (London, 1762, 3rd ed., 1792). I am very much indebted to Sheila A. Spector for calling my attention to Bate’s work and for pointing out that Parkhurst uses a kaf of similitude in deriving keruv from ruiw, which he takes to be a form of rau, or greatness in “power, wisdom and glory, or whatever can be termed perfection.”

Talmud Yoma 5a (The Babylonian Talmud, vol. 11, trans. Leo Jung [London: Soncino Press, 1938], p. 557). Parkhurst’s Lexicon contains a foldout illustration with four-headed cherubim, as be­nign a version of zoas as four-headed monsters can be. Even the lion and bull faces appear to be smiling, but it is notable that the human heads do not face each other.

A rather conventional set of young male heads top the robed cherubim in the illustration to the annotated Bible of Nicolai de Lyra (1485). Nicolai did read and refer to Rashi, and evidently understood Rashi to mean youths, not putto-faced infants.


Romans 3:25 calls Christ “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation,” but Parkhurst, quoting this, changes propitiation to propitiatory (the thing, rather than the abstract noun) and adds “or mercy-seat.”

Commentary in Erdman, p. 924. The question of Blake’s Hebrew has been addressed by Arnold Cheek in Blake 12 (1978–79), 178–83, and by Sheila A. Spector in a forthcoming piece for the Bulletin of the New York Public Library. Spector’s remarkable piece, “Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist,” makes clear just how much of Blake’s Hebrew etymologies and calligraphy can be accounted for by recourse to available dictionaries and debates on the part of someone with no training in Hebrew per se.

The new textual note says that Blake wrote וסֶנֶס in place of וְסֶנֶס. The reproductions of C35 (both Erdman’s own, in The Illuminated Blake, and that of the Eassons in William Blake: Milton [Random House, 1978]) clearly show a kaf and a resh as they should be. Indeed, Blake exaggerates the difference between the kaf and the other letters, as well as placing the kaf on a separate line, which encourages one to regard the writing as suggestive of a pun: the prepositional kaf is written smaller and separate, to suggest that the remainder of the word, rabim, means something by itself—in this case, “multitudes; many.”

Blake’s “The Tyger” and Edward Young’s Book of Job

Robert F. Gleckner

Of all of Blake’s shorter poems “The Tyger” has received, by far, the most attention, an often confusing array of complementary (as well as contradictory) interpretations, source studies, and prosodic analyses. Of those, the seeking hither and yon for tigers of various sorts has produced especially little that is illuminating about Blake’s possible sources for the poem as distinct from sources for his choice of animal or for its (still uneasily received) portrait in the illustration. I should like, therefore, to suggest what is at least a contributory “source” that has nothing to do with tigers at all, but that does have a good deal to do with the idea of creation lying at the center of the poem.

As early as An Island in the Moon (1785) Blake mentions Edward Young prominently, along with Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Voltaire, Chatterton, Hervey, Johnson, and others—a kind of thumbnail account of his own reading. But our steady attention to Young in Blake studies has, understandably, focused sharply on Blake’s herculean project of illuminating Night Thoughts, little if any attention being paid to other of Young’s poems—including the relatively unknown “A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job,” first published in 1719. It is, to be sure, an unexceptional (if unexceptionable) work, predictably pious and rhetorically similar to other works by Young; but his footnote to the opening words of his paraphrase, “Thrice happy Job,” is of some immediate interest with respect to “The Tyger”:

Longinus has a chapter on interrogations, which shows that they contribute much to the sublime. This speech of the Almighty is made up of them. Interrogation seems, indeed, the proper style of majesty incensed. It differs from other manner of reproof, as bidding a person execute himself does from a common execution; for he that asks the guilty a proper question, makes him, in effect, pass sentence on himself.

Now, there is little doubt that Blake, well before writing “The Tyger,” had taken note of the interrogatives of Job 38 and, as well, of the various suggestive phrasings in God’s speech that, in themselves, doubtless informed the rhetorical contours of his own poem. As Morton Paley reminds us in his exhaustive documentation of the sublimity of “The Tyger,” “the single book of the Bible . . . considered most sublime in the eighteenth century . . . was Job.” Blake would have found there the “reproof” of questioners that the speaker of “The Tyger” seems not to have read himself: “Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it” (40:2). But the burden of God’s angry reproof of Job is the reaffirming of the latter’s littleness and incapacity, culminating in the advice to “abase” the proud “and bring him low.” In any discussion of Blake’s speaker, then, Young’s footnote is at least an intriguing gloss on the biblical passage. If sublime interrogation is a manifestation of “majesty incensed,” then the speaker of “The Tyger,” in his usurpation of this rhetorical mode, is presumptuous beyond words, asking “the guilty a proper question” so that the guilty will, “in effect, pass sentence on himself.” On the other hand, Blake may have found in Young’s idea of “bidding a person execute himself” the germinal principle of the structure of “The Tyger,” in which Blake, as creator, quite literally allows his speaker, by questioning, to convict himself before the reader’s eyes. God incensed becomes fallen man incensed, both equally “guilty.”

However characteristic such a splendid inversion is, I do not intend to press the point beyond suggestion here despite its potential impingement upon the Book of Job and Young’s redaction of “part” of it. What the former lacks for Blake’s purposes is not the sanction for the interrogatives but a language that could be construed as antecedent to that of “The Tyger.” If such passages as God’s description of Behemoth (40:18–19) and Leviathan (41:12) seem to resonate in the poem, the quietly modulated sublimity of God’s entire speech argues against its prominence in Blake’s creative memory. In Young’s paraphrase, on the other hand, once Job and his friends reach “the last extent of human thought” without settling the argument, “Heaven” interposes interrogatively and, translating the Bible’s passive “Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?” and the general “who laid the corner stone thereof” (Job 38:4–6), focuses rather sharply on the creative hand—a focus that parallels Blake’s frequently noted insistence throughout “The Tyger” on the fundamental equivalency of hand and eye. Here is Young: “What hand, declare, / Hung it on nought, and fastend’ it on air” (53–54). But if Blake’s echoic truncation, “What dread hand?” thus suggests the hand of God, “what dread feet?” ambiguously refers to the creation as well as the creator. The immortal eye “frames” but also perceives what is framed thereby: “Did he smile his work to see?” This merging of creator and creature has been extensively analyzed by John Grant, but the progressive diminution and severance of God’s eye/hand to (implicitly) Blake’s engraver-hand/readerly-eye and thence to the speaker’s stunned eye/impotent hand need further remarking, since this process is a dramatic re-forming of Young’s text and its originary biblicisms. Attributing the lesser perception to man as the Bible does, Young writes: “Earth’s numerous kingdom,—hast thou view’d them all . . . And can thy span of knowledge grasp the ball?” (59–60). Moreover, in Blake’s heroic manuscript
struggle with his poem, “What the anvil? what dread grasp” was originally “What the anvil what the arm”; then he crossed out “arm” only to replace it with “arm” once more, then “grasp,” “clasp,” and “dread grasp” apparently in that order. These linguistic affinities between Young and Blake, however, would clearly verge on the merely fortuitous (not to say factitious) were there no other evidence of Blake’s attention to Young’s otherwise obscure poem. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell provides such evidentiary confirmation. It has long been recognized, of course, that Blake’s tiger includes Behemoth and Leviathan, the penultimate “Memorable Fancy” of The Marriage establishing that relationship explicitly. But Young as well has a role in Blake’s composite imagining. For example, Blake writes, “a cloud and fire burst and rolled thro the deep blackning all beneath”; in Young, Leviathan’s “pastimes like a caldron boil the flood, / And blacken ocean with the rising mud” (387–388). Blake’s Leviathan “reeled like a ridge of golden rocks” while Young’s “rears him from the floods, / And, stretching forth his stature to the clouds, / Writhe in the sun aloft his scaly height, / And strikes the distant hills with transient light” (371–374). The forehead of Blake’s Leviathan, parting the waves (“from which the sea fled away”), is “divided into streaks of green & purple,” his mouth and gills hanging “just above the raging foam”; and in Young “His hoary footsteps shine along the sea; / The foam, high-wrought, with white divides the green” (390–91). None of Blake’s details appears in the Book of Job.

Blake’s analogizing in this “Memorable Fancy” (Leviathan advancing on the speaker and his Angel companion “with all the fury of a spiritual existence”) reflects the minimalist perception of the religiously orthodox, to whom the physical details of this creation are at best similitudinously relatable to “spiritual existences.” The hand is more powerful than the eye—which is to say the hand creates what the eye only sees, a subject-object dualism that is inherent in all Angels. “Spiritual existences” (E 41) are “framed” by the eye and hand and are perceivable only through the eye, to use Blake’s later location in Auguries of Innocence (E 496). Similarly, it is Blake’s hand and eye that creates “The Tyger” which the Angelic speaker perceives as a tiger and the creation of which (both “Tyger” and tiger) he conceives of in terms of either/or (“hand or eye”). It is not surprising, then, that in Jerusalem 91:38–40 (E 251) Blake attributes these prodigious creations to Los’s Spectre, not to Los: Leviathan is “War / By Land,” Behemoth “War by Sea”—both fallen perversions of their eternal spiritual existences. Such an allegorization betray the “rational demonstration” or “thought” by which the Spectre creates the beasts in the first place. As early as 1788 in his annotations to Swedenborg’s Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom Blake wrote, “Thought alone can make monsters” (E 603). Thought alone also makes but similitudes: “Demonstration Similitude & Harmony are Objects of Reasoning” (Annotations to Reynolds, E 659). Thus Los’s Spectre in Jerusalem, “Refusing to believe without demonstration” (91:35, E 251), “frames” the physical, outward counterparts, as he sees them, of “spiritual existences.” In the parable of The Marriage he imposes his “metaphysics” on everyone else precisely as the Angel of The Marriage’s Leviathan passage imposes his metaphysics (Leviathan itself) on the speaker, and as the speaker of “The Tyger” imposes his metaphysics on the reader. In “The Tyger,” then, the speaker is an Angel-Spectre, a surrogate Urizenic god who frames, and the tiger emblemizes his “metaphysics.”

Four other key words of Blake’s poem may now claim our attention. While Young repeats faithfully the biblical account of Leviathan’s appearance, his addition to the Job text of the word “terror” may well have claimed Blake’s attention in writing “What dread grasp, / Dare its deadly terrors grasp.” Such a speculation is lent additional credence by the collocation in “The Tyger” of “shoulders,” “sinews,” and “dread.” For Young “Strength . . . sits in state” on Leviathan’s “shoulder,” the word “dreadful” occurs thrice in the same context, and Behemoth is said to display “complicated sinews.” As Blake reminds us in a Proverb of Hell, “A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees” (E 35). One might well argue that where one fool sees a tiger, another sees Behemoth and Leviathan. Or, in the language of A Vision of the Last Judgment (E 566), what both see is “somewhat like” a tiger—perhaps a useful gloss on Blake’s puzzling graphic tiger at the bottom of the plate, which may well be yet another somewhat-likeness. Neither is “really” what is “there,” but only a “similitude,” one of those “ Portions of life” that Urizen takes to be the whole in his anti-apocalypse (Book of Urizen, E 81). Even Jesus made the same mistake when he was young, as The Everlasting Gospel rather startlingly tells us—until God (that is, Jesus’s own imagination, his true self) thumped him on the head to remind him that the God to whom he humbled himself was in his own breast, not “out there” as a framing hand or abstract power (E 520).

Assuming that I am correct about Blake’s cognizance of Young’s paraphrase one must still wonder what it was that led him to (as it were) “prefer” it to the Job chapters in the writing of “The Tyger.” While it is impossible to be certain about such matters, I do have a guess or two. One has to do with Young’s employment of the word “daring” to describe Job’s words to God (29). The word in any of its forms is rare in the Bible, all but one of its occurrences in the New Testament. Although this lone exception is in the Book of Job (“None is so fierce that dare stir him up”—41:10), where Blake would
have noted it, the context is God’s description of Leviathan’s power rather than the creator’s power in its production. Blake, perhaps taking his hint from (and reversing) Young, places his form of the word at the center of his speaker’s much-discussed charge “against” the creator of the tiger: “What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?” Young’s “version” of this is the Bible-sanctioned conventionality of God’s chastisement of man’s presumption: “And darest thou with the world’s great Father vie?” (347). Put somewhat crudely, that is precisely what Blake as poet does dare and does do, in contrast to his speaker who only dares the divine darer and doer by questioning. Young’s final vision of an unBlakean Job “O’erwhelm’d with shame,” abhorring himself and his “weakness,” and surrendering to God’s “might” (407, 409, 401) thus may have had something to do with Blake’s implicit criticism of his speaker.

That somewhat dubious point aside, my second guess as to the reason for Blake’s recollection of Young’s Job has to do less with conceptions than with language. Given the severe selectivity of Blake’s “borrowings” from the paraphrase, I think that he may have perceived in those isolated but crucial words the remnants of the “original genius” Young himself wrote about in Conjectures on Original Composition, a work Blake surely read along with everyone else in the later eighteenth century, and one that participates subliminally, at least, in Blake’s earliest conception of “the true man . . . the Poetic Genius” in All Religions Are One. In this light Young’s epiloguic line in the paraphrase, “Man was not made to question, but adore,” would have been to Blake more than casually memorable. He himself no doubt found that “lesson” in the Book of Job by reading it in its “infernal sense,” perceiving the sublime allegory hidden beneath its numbing “allegorical” surface. And he applies that lesson in his own sublime mode (fortified by Young’s footnote reference to Longinus) to “The Tyger” and its benighted speaker. Yet we should notice that Young’s grammar in that memorable line could not have rung quite right in Blake’s ear. The words are right, as The Everlasting Gospel and Auguries of Innocence seem to urge, for in the latter

The Questioner who sits so sly
Shall never know how to Reply
He who replies to words of Doubt
Doth put the Light of Knowledge out
(E 494)

Questions and answers are both equally pernicious to the Imagination. In Milton (41:12–13) “the idiot Questioner . . . is always questioning, / But never capable of answering”; when he does answer, he “publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair / Whose pretence to knowledge is Envy, whose whole Science is To destroy the wisdom of ages . . .” (41:15–17, E 142). It is not, then, as Young would have it, that “Man was not made to question” but rather, for Blake, that the man who is merely “made,” framed like the creatures (or perceives himself to be so made or framed), is the idiot questioner—and answerer. Eternal Man, the Human Form Divine, the Imagination is neither “made” nor a questioner-answerer. So with Young’s other addition to the Book of Job here, man being born to “adore.” Blake’s “reversal” of this apothegm is: “Thou art a Man God is no more / Thy own humanity learn to adore” (The Everlasting Gospel, E 520). If Blake concluded from his reading of the Job paraphrase that Young “read the Bible day & night,” he also saw that Young “readst black” where Blake reads “white.” And therein lies all the difference.

1Morton D. Paley, in Energy and the Imagination (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), does refer to one of Young’s footnotes but ignores the poem itself. In his splendid William Blake’s Illustrations to the Book of Job (Abo, Finland: Abo Akademi, 1973), Bo Lindberg mentions the paraphrase as something Blake read, perhaps even while reading Night Thoughts in the same 1796 edition, but says nothing further about Young’s Job.

2Energy and the Imagination, p. 47.

3I have taken this quotation out of its proper context in Job, but: God’s point here is the same as it is elsewhere, that Job has not the power to humble anyone.

4“The Art and Argument of ‘The Tyger,’” Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 2 (1960), 38–60. Grant’s conclusion that the speaker is “an average but also imaginative man who is almost overwhelmed by the mysterious prodigy he sees as a Tyger,” however, seems to me to underestimate Blake’s achievement as well as to confuse the issue of the speaker.


6The Notebook drafts interestingly show that Blake was undecided as to “or” or “&” in the line “What immortal hand or eye.”

7Jean Hagstrum is one of the few to pay particular attention to this Jerusalem passage in connection with Blake’s Job illustration #15; see his William Blake: Poet and Prophet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 134. See also Lindberg, William Blake’s Illustrations, p. 297. Grant makes an uncharacteristic error in identifying this creation in Jerusalem 91 as Los’s (“Art and Argument,” p. 53).

8Although the phrase “sieves of his stones” appears in the biblical Job, that text includes neither “shoulders” nor “dread.”

9Romans 5:7 and 15:18, 1 Corinthians 6:1, 2 Corinthians 10:12, all quite conventional and unsuggestive with respect to Blake’s poem. “Daring” does not appear in the Bible.

10The quotations are from the section of The Everlasting Gospel in which Blake also distinguishes sharply between the “Vision of Christ” which is “Thine” (the one that “is the Friend of All Man-kind”) and that which is “Mine,” the one who “speaks in parables to the Blind / Thine loves the same world that mine hates / Thy Heaven doors are my Hell Gates” (E 524).
A Swedenborgian Visionary and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
Michael Scrivener

Near the end of "An Audience for The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," John Howard writes that Blake's revolutionary manifesto was "calculated to amuse the Johnson circle and to make the members of the New Church turn 'blue.'"1 Howard argues that the angel/devil dichotomy expressed in Blake's work corresponds to the angelic Swedenborgians and the demonic Joseph Johnson circle to whom the work was principally addressed. Howard persuasively shows the ways in which Blake satirizes and criticizes the corruption of the New Jerusalem Church, and in a more recent article, Morton D. Paley uncovers even more relevant information on Blake and the Swedenborgians.2 There can be no doubt that The Marriage of Heaven and Hell was influenced to an important degree by Blake's dislike of the English Swedenborgians, their political, sexual, and religious conservatism. Moreover, the Johnson circle clearly did attack Swedenborgianism and its eponymous founder, and the 1791 Birmingham riot, during which the Swedenborgians placated the same Church and King mob that attacked Priestley and other Dissenters, exemplified the differences between the new religious group and the English "Jacobins." Nevertheless, I cannot accept one part of Howard's argument, that Blake's Marriage was intended to amuse the Joseph Johnson circle of radical intellectuals and thus to constitute a skirmish in the battle against the Swedenborgians. The Johnson circle would have found the Marriage as outrageous as the New Jerusalem Church would have found it blasphemous. The Marriage runs counter in essential ways to the Rational Dissent of the Johnson circle and the dominant radicalism of the 1790s embodied in groups like the Revolution Society, the Society for Constitutional Information, and Friends of the People, and expressed in publications like The Analytical Review and the Morning Chronicle. Furthermore, it seems implausible that Blake would have concentrated so much of the Marriage on Swedenborgian error simply to express solidarity with Priestley and the Johnson circle; rather, the New Jerusalem Church, with which Blake became disillusioned, was the only ideological association with which he could (at one time at least) identify. Although Blake never joined the Church, in 1789 he and his wife did indeed subscribe to the tenets of the Swedenborgians who ultimately and rather rapidly disappointed him. Despite the many political ideas that Blake shared with the Johnson circle and the radicalism of the 1790s, Rational Dissent's hostility to all varieties of "religious enthυ-
siasm" would have alienated Blake to such an extent that it is unlikely he would have written a satire in which the implied reader opposes Swedenborgian error from the assumptions of mainstream Jacobinism. Rather, the Marriage positions itself against both Swedenborg and Priestley, both the New Jerusalem Church and English Jacobinism.

In the 5 September 1791 issue of the London Morning Chronicle, there is a brief article entitled "A New Visionary" that is interesting in this context because it gives a revealing example of how the Swedenborgians were represented in one of the most important Foxite Whig publications. The Chronicle, of course, supported the French Revolution, defended Priestley (to whom it opened its pages on numerous occasions), and in general sustained an influential version of English Jacobinism.3 If one imagines William Blake reading this 1791 article, which is brief enough to quote in full, one can begin to understand why and how the Marriage is a critique also of the mainstream radicalism:

Where will things end? There is a person now in this city, at the head of the Swedenborgians, who, besides possessing their common faculty of seeing Angels, has the privilege of conversing with the Jewish Prophets and Apostles, whom he frequently meets in the streets of this metropolis; but very seldom if he is not in company with a third person. In this case, where the other cannot see any person near them, he frequently makes a full stop; and with an air of astonishment, either falls upon one knee, or makes the handsomest bow he can! To the natural expressions of surprise at this unaccountable conduct, he always retorts if he did not see any thing? "That," says he, "is Isaiah—this Apostle Paul!" He had a few days ago a very favourable vision of St. Paul, in St. Paul's Church-yard! and on that account detained two friends who were with him a considerable time. The Apostle, according to his account, was then listening to a song in favour of the French Revolution! He further says, that he can any time have a sight of Moses, and the other Jewish Prophets at a boxing match, or about Rag Fair!

One striking thing about the article is the number of parallels between the Swedenborgian's reported activities and words, and parts of Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: the visionary's conversations with Isaiah, Paul, and others is similar to the Marriage's narrator's conversations with Isaiah and Ezekiel in plates 12 and 13; the visionary's listening to "a song in favour of the French Revolution" is not unlike the Marriage's concluding "A Song of Liberty"; the visionary's seeing Moses and "the other Jewish prophets at a boxing match" could be construed as similar in some ways to the Marriage's doctrine of the contraries and Blake's idea of "Mental War." Another striking thing is the way the article constructs an implied reader who would, as a matter of course, dismiss the visionary as a religious fanatic who need not be taken seriously but who exists entirely for comic effect. It is difficult to imagine Blake conforming to the expected responses of condescension and ridicule for the visionary. The tone of the article is contemptuous, which is especially apparent in sentences like the
first one: “Where will things end?” That question assumes a shared perception of a particular kind of social disorder that is not so much dangerous and subversive as it is absurd. The italicized words in “their common faculty of seeing Angels” communicate a sneer at the presumption of Swedenborgians which is quite clearly homologous with social presumption (the word “common” has an unmistakable snobbish resonance). The observer-writer perceives the visionary entirely as an object, and one imagines him shaking his head, perhaps chuckling, and waiting for further evidence that the Swedenborgian is outside the category of rational human beings.

It is not difficult to imagine a Blakean response to the article: “If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise”; “Every thing possible to be believe’d is an image of truth”; “Listen to the fools reproach! it is a kingly title!”; “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern” (E 36–37, 39). In the dichotomy of the *Marriage*, the *Chronicle*’s author would be angelic, and the visionary a devil. The *Chronicle*’s article does not simply criticize the visionary; rather, it represents him in such a way that everything he says or does can be dismissed as preposterous. The article is rhetorically violent in that the person being represented is deprived of any qualities that might make the reader take him seriously, and for Blake the rhetorical violence would have been especially offensive because the article attacks the notion of visionary experience, of which the *Marriage* is an extensive defense. The *Marriage* surely portrays Swedenborg as insufficiently visionary, but the other emphasis is on the limitations and errors of his *vision*. In most Blakean respects, the *Chronicle* article is more error-ridden than Swedenborg’s writings because at least Swedenborg does not repudiate visionary experience, the Poetic Genius.

The article is interesting in another way because in 1791 the English Swedenborgians were explicitly antirevolutionary and dissociated themselves entirely from the French Revolution and English political radicalism, so that it is unlikely that the “head” of the sect would imply support for the French Revolution. It is also unlikely that a leader of the New Jerusalem Church would have behaved in public in the ways described in the *Chronicle* because the Swedenborgians were anxious to achieve a kind of respectability. There are a number of possible explanations. Given the *Chronicle* author’s obvious lack of sympathy for both the Swedenborgians and the individual visionary he is writing about, one cannot assume the author is especially reliable, so that possibly the visionary, far from being the “head” of the Swedenborgians, might have had only the most tenuous connection with the New Jerusalem Church. If this were the case, the visionary might have been one of the Swedenborgians who had been expelled from the Church during the “concubinage” controversy. A candidate for the visionary’s identity would have to be Augustus Nordenskjöld who not only found himself on the “wrong” side of the concubinage controversy but who was a champion of the French Revolution and was in England in 1791 to plan an interracial community to be established in Sierra Leone. Of course the visionary could have been someone else who found himself outside the Swedenborgian fold because of his radicalism. It is worth remembering that Blake himself fits the description of the visionary—not that Blake could have been the individual described in the article (he was never close enough to the inner circle of Swedenborgians to be mistaken for the “head” of the sect), but that he would have identified more closely with the visionary than with the implied reader of the *Chronicle* article. The *Chronicle* article quite clearly wants to dissociate itself from the “excesses” of democratic enthusiasm and to establish a perspective within which one could distinguish easily between legitimate and illegitimate kinds of oppositional politics. That Blake refused to accept this definition of illegitimate, excessive radicalism is obvious.

Blake might very well have read the *Chronicle* article, or if he did not, he would probably have known the visionary directly or indirectly (through his Swedenborgian friends). One can take for granted that Blake realized what the reception of the visionary’s words would be in the Johnson circle and mainstream English Jacobinism. He hardly would have been surprised or shocked by the tone and rhetoric of the *Chronicle* article. Plates 12 and 13 of the *Marriage*, which represent the narrator’s conversations with Isaiah and Ezekiel, are not necessarily influenced by the article or the visionary, but they are nevertheless an assault upon the assumptions of the *Chronicle* article which would dismiss visionary experience as absurd. The assumptions of mainstream radicalism, which Blake would call natural religion or deism, marginalized the religious radicalism Blake defended. One cannot find in Priestley, Paine, Thelwall, Godwin or Wollstonecraft anything even closely reminiscent of Blake’s bold assertions of visionary experience. The Johnson circle, then, would have enjoyed the *Marriage*’s attacks on Swedenborg, but it could not have accepted the overall logic of the work.

Blake seems to have shared a particular structure of feeling with the Swedenborgians that he did not share with the Johnson circle, even after he repudiated Swedenborg and the conservative New Jerusalem Church, even when he maintained a political radicalism similar to that of the Johnson circle. Blake could have conversed with the *Chronicle*’s visionary on terms of real respect, even if he disagreed with him; the Johnson circle would have perceived him as the *Chronicle*’s author did. Swe-
denborg’s errors are so central to the Marriage not because the Johnson circle also attacked Swedenborg but because Blake wanted to rescue a particular kind of religiously based radicalism from Swedenborg’s limitations and Jacobinism’s rationalism. Moreover, the New Jerusalem Church seems to have been for Blake the one institution which at one time seemed to represent his most passionate commitments. As a way of working through his disillusionment with Swedenborgianism, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell would have to have

New Blake Documents:
Job, Oedipus, and the Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Mark Ablen and G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Contemporary documents of William Blake’s life are widely scattered, in record offices, museums, churches, and libraries from London to San Marino and Melbourne. However, one of the richest collections of such materials is in a cottage called Apple Thatch in Hampshire among the voluminous papers of Blake’s last great patron, the artist John Linnell. This extraordinarily rich cache of manuscripts has wonderful materials not only for John Linnell and William Blake but for many others as well, such as Samuel Palmer and William Butler Yeats. Scholars with many goals have been welcomed, and often fed, housed, and entertained, by the splendidly generous custodian of these papers, John Linnell’s great granddaughter Joan Linnell Ivimy. The pages of Blake Records (1969), which attempted to gather all contemporary references to Blake, are thickly strewn with references to the Ivimy Manuscripts, particularly in the parts recording the last ten years of Blake’s life.

When I first went through the Ivimy mss. in 1959, it quickly became apparent that I could not possibly read the majority of them without devoting more years to the undertaking than I had weeks to spare. Consequently, I read with care everything I could find which related directly to Blake and to his known acquaintances during his lifetime (1757–1827); I read almost equally scrupulously everything for the period from his death in 1827 to that of his wife in 1831. For the period after 1863, I read much more casually and rarely did more than glance at letters unless they were to or from someone important to Blake, such as Anne Gilchrist or Samuel Palmer. I concluded my search, confident that I had found most of the Blake references there and that more were awaiting searchers with sharper eyes and more patience and time than I could muster.

But the collection kept growing, with the discovery of here a trunk of Linnell manuscripts which had lain unrecognized for decades in the vaults of a family lawyer and there the return of letters from other members of the family. In the past twenty-seven years, I have returned repeatedly to Apple Thatch and to the loving hospitality of Joan Linnell Ivimy, and I have often found more references to Blake.

1. John Linnell’s oil portrait (dated “1821”) of Edward Denny (then age 25) in the collection of Robyn Denny, and reproduced with permission of Robyn Denny.

Swedenborgian error as a principal point of departure.

1 Blake Studies, 3 (fall, 1970): 51.
4 Howard, 24–32; Paley, 70–74.
5 Paley, 83. In 1791, Joseph Proud or Robert Hindmarsh would have been viewed as leaders of the Swedenborgians.
In 1982 and 1983, Mark Abley, formerly a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and now a successful Canadian journalist, called by arrangement at Apple Thatch in search of letters of William Butler Yeats and documents relating to Samuel Palmer. He was welcomed with her customary generosity by Joan Linnell Ivimy, and indeed Mark Abley stayed for some time at Apple Thatch. During his stay, he found not only manuscripts relating to William Butler Yeats and Samuel Palmer, which were partly for the Oxford edition of Yeats's letters and partly for Mark Abley's own *Parting Light: Selected Writings of Samuel Palmer* (1985); he also found a number of references to William Blake which were not recorded in *Blake Records* (1969) or *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (1975). A number of these references to Blake I had myself seen in the years since *Blake Records* went to press, and, by the time I met Mark Abley in September 1986, these were already incorporated in the *Blake Records Supplement*, which is now in press. Some of them, however, were quite new to me, among them some of the most interesting references to Blake. When *The Parting Light* was published, I discovered in it some Blake references (not from the Ivimy mss.) which were new to me, and when I wrote to Mark Abley, and subsequently met him in Toronto, he generously offered me the notes he had made of his discoveries among the Ivimy mss. for the *Blake Records Supplement*. Because of the remarkable interest of these Blake materials not already incorporated in the *Blake Records Supplement*, I thought it desirable to make them into a separate article, to which Mark Abley generously agreed.

BLAKE AND OEDIPUS

John Linnell had deeply impressed a young man some four years younger than himself named Edward Denny (b. 1796), the son of a baronet and a man of substance, and Linnell had apparently made Denny acquainted with Blake and his works. From August through November 1821 Linnell was busy painting portraits of Edward Denny and five other members of his family; that of Edward Denny shows a dreamy young man with his finger marking his place in a little book—he looks strikingly like a Romantic poet such as Shelley (see illus. 1). On 30 October Linnell sent some of the portraits to Denny at his home at King's End House, Worcester, and on 2 November Denny wrote that the pictures had arrived. In passing he remarked:

when you see Mr. Blake be so kind as to tell him to keep the drawings he is making for me, when they are finished, till he either sees or hears from me—.

and Believe me, dear Sir,
your's truly obliged,
Edward Denny.—

This is the first known reference to a direct connection between Blake and Denny, but it is plain that already Denny was an admirer of Blake. Unfortunately, we do not know what drawings Blake was making for Denny in 1821, for Denny is not known to have owned any drawings by Blake. Apparently the drawings pleased Denny, for Denny purchased other Blake works in November 1826.

John Linnell scrawled a long draft reply to Denny on the letter itself, including a fascinating reference to a curious theatrical performance:

Mr Varley, Mr Blake & myself were much entertained Thursday Evening last by witnessing a representation of *Oedipus* at the West London Theatre—it much exceeded our expectations as to the effect of the Play & the performance of the Actors. I see it sneered at in one of the public[?] papers but you know what [a bad(? ) set de l?] petty motives govern all A most of A the Public criticism[.]

Linnell had taken his friends to a box at the West London Theatre in Tottenham Street where they saw *Oedipus* by John Dryden and Nat Lee, first acted in 1678. However, the play was advertised as being the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, and, not surprisingly, at least some in the audience reacted with indignation to the imposture. The anonymous reviewer in *The Times* for Friday 2 November 1821 wrote:

ROYAL WEST LONDON THEATER.

A numerous audience was attracted yesterday evening to this theatre, by as barfaced an imposition as was ever practised on a public audience since the days of the bottle-conjuror. It was ostentatiously announced in the play-bills, and also in some of the public prints, that the *Oedipus* of Sophocles would be acted last night at this theatre, "being its first appearance these 2440 years". Of course many persons, attracted by the accurate chronological knowledge of the supposed translator, went in the expectation of seeing the ancient tragedy stalking for once on modern boards . . . . In this expectation, which the numerous translations of the *Oedipus* of Sophocles into English prose and verse did not render altogether unfounded, they were most miserable disappointed; for instead of listening to the simple yet majestic strains of Sophocles, they were indulged with a cut-down edition of the bombastic yet powerful tragedy of Lee and Dryden upon the same subject. That piece, which must always affect an audience very strongly, certainly has made its appearance on the stage within the last 2440 years . . . . The tragedy, in spite of "being its first appearance for these last 2440 years", was given out for repetition amidst thunders of applause, which we expect the play-bills of today will inform us proceeded from an audience, distinguished no less for its numbers and its fashion, than for its intelligence and discrimination.

The reviewer's dire prediction was at least partly fulfilled, for in *The Times* for Wednesday 7 November appeared the following advertisement:

NEW ROYAL WEST LONDON THEATRE,

Tottenham-street, Charlotte-street, Fitzroy-square. *Oedipus Tyrannus*, by Sophocles, revived after a lapse of 2440 years, and received (as at Athens) with shouts of applause. It will be repeated till further notice. THIS and every EVENING, OEDIPUS. *Oedipus*, Mr. Huntley; Jocasta, Mrs. Glover. After which, THE WAGER LOST, in which Mrs. Glover will perform. Boxes 4s., pit 2s., gallery 1s. Private boxes for families may be had nightly.
At least the date in this advertisement is two centuries less preposterous than that in the review. Blake was certainly familiar with Sophocles, for his "Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos" (1812) was made nine years before from Sophocles' Philoctetes,6 and his intimate friends John Flaxman and John Linnell4 were admirers of Sophocles, and Flaxman had made designs from his plays. It is agreeable to find that Blake was 'much entertained' by the performance, even though the play he saw was some two thousand three hundred years younger than it was advertised to be.

BLAKE AND JOB

On 9 February 1826 Linnell wrote to his father from Cheltenham about a "scrape" relating to his painting of "The Burial of Saul," and as an afterthought he remarked: "I shall be glad to hear from Ed. Chance how the Job goes on & what has occurred." Edward Chance was Linnell's nephew, who was helping to supervise the printing of Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job at just this time. For instance, on this same day, 9 February 1826, Linnell's wife Mary wrote to him that "Edward... has been every day to Lahees & to [the Linnell's house in] Cirencester Place; from all I can learn the printing is going on well by a man of the name of Freeman."

The landscape painter Edward Price wrote to Linnell from Trentham on Monday 3 September 1826, three weeks after Blake's death, about Blake's Job engravings:

Lady Stafford will not be here for a month so I have not been able to put before her Ladyship Blake's Etchings, and I fear I shall not be able to get subscribers as many of my friends who have seen them, have only made the remark that they were striking but extravagant and not one has yet expressed a desire to buy, but I will omit no opportunity of shewing it whenever I meet with the One Man in a Thousand who understands Painting.

Elizabeth Lady Stafford, the wealthy Countess of Sutherland in her own right, was married to the even wealthier George Grenville Leveson-Gower, Marquis of Stafford, who was famous as a politician and an improver of their huge estates (including most of the County of Sutherland). Both Lord and Lady Stafford were keenly interested in the arts; he was President of the British Institution, she was a painter in watercolors, and both collected art eagerly. A purchase from the Staffords might have led to important commissions for Linnell and perhaps to purchases of other works by Blake. However, if Lady Stafford was shown the Job engravings on her return to their home in Trentham, she apparently showed little interest in them, for her name does not appear in Linnell's Job accounts.

There are numerous letters from Edward Price to Linnell among the Ivimy mss., but he is not known to have had any other connection than this one with Blake. Clearly he was simply one of many acquaintances through whom Linnell tried to sell copies of Blake's Job.

BLAKE AND THE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE

Blake sold an extraordinarily beautiful copy of Songs of Innocence and of Experience (copy AA) to Mrs. Charles Aders in July 1826 for £5 5.0.7 and Linnell apparently had it bound for her—indeed, probably the sale was made through him. Eight years later, when in somewhat narrower circumstances, Mrs. Aders wrote to Linnell:

24 Savage Gardens June 17th [1834]*

My dear Sir
I much hoped to have been able to see you before this, but as usual illness has prevented me. — The fact is, I wish to explain to you my feelings & wishes about Blake's songs of Innocence & I cannot re­ sist the desire to have Mr. Aders' portrait [painted by you], but am not now so well able to dispose of money as I was, (at any rate for my luxuries of fancies) and wish therefore that you would take that work in part payment, it cost me as you know £6 that is 5 5.0 to Mr Blake and 16 to you for the Book in which they are [bound?]. I have also another work of Blakes for which I gave to Mr. Tatham 5 5... perhaps you might like to have that also — What I have said above is in confidence to you, & I feel sure your delicacy will treat it as such — If you agree to my plan you will have the kindness to send for the Songs — and Michael Angelo's [designs engraved by Linnell] whenever you please;[.] perhaps some day it may please God that I may be rich enough to purchase the latter.

Yours very sincerely
Eliza Aders

Linnell evidently was not tempted by the Blake work which had come from Frederick Tatham—perhaps the drawings of "Los Walking on the Mountains of Albion" or "Christian with the Shield of Faith, Taking Leave of His Companions" from Pilgrim's Progress which Mrs. Aders kept in an album until her death9—but he did take the Songs. Next year he had an unfortunate misunderstanding with Mrs. Aders about the prices of these works, and on 8 August 1835 she wrote to him that she had understood the price of Linnell's portrait of Mr. Aders to have been £26 5.0; "when therefore you took Blakes Songs of Innocence &c at 6G I of course concluded I had only 20£ to pay." She declined to pay more but said that a friend might do so, "in which case when you receive the money you will send us the 6 G for Blakes work."10 Linnell did keep the Songs, and twenty-eight years later he inscribed it: "Given to James Tho Linnell by John Linnell sen', April 28 1863."

BLAKE AND JOB

Linnell had become a profound admirer of "the
dear kind and accomplished Lady Torrens,” and in 1820 he painted an admirable portrait of her with her six children. In April 1826 he sold a copy of Blake’s Job to her, and on 19 December 1832 her son A. W. Torrens, a captain in the Grenadier Guards, asked Linnell to send “by the bearer the ‘Book of Job,’ as you kindly promised to do.” He apparently admired but did not buy Blake’s Job, and three years later he wrote again to Linnell:

Windsor.
17. April 1835.

Dear Mr. Linnell,

I received the book of Job, & return you many thanks for the present, in the name of my wife. — The note you were so good as to send with it, is no mean part of the value of the gift, containing as it does from so eminent an artist such strong approbation of the copy which was inadvertently left in the book . . . .

Yr. very truly obliged.

Arthur W. Torrens.

Clearly the Denny and Torrens families were appreciative patrons of William Blake. If only we had records of the rest of their dealings with and opinions of him.

These are so far the last of the records of Blake’s life and works to be discovered among the Ivimy mss., but it seems likely that yet more will be found in that rich repository. Few discoveries, however, are likely to be so intriguing as the view given here of Blake sitting between his friends John Varley and John Linnell in a box in a little theatre in Westminster being “much entertained” by a performance of Oedipus advertised as having been written in 619 BC by Sophocles (496–406 BC) but in fact written by Dryden and Lee and first acted in 1678.

The materials exhibited here were discovered and recorded by Mark Abley in 1982 and 1983 and generously shared with G. E. Bentley, Jr., in September 1986; they have been organized and made into the present essay by GEB.

We should like to dedicate this essay to our friend Joan Linnell Ivimy in thanks for her friendship to each of us over many years. The manuscripts are quoted here by her permission.

Linnell’s portrait of Edward Denny (1821) was exhibited in Katharine Crouan, John Linnell: A Centennial Exhibition (Fitzwilliam Museum 5 Oct. –12 Dec. 1982; Yale Center for British Art, 26 Jan. –20 March 1983), #76.

According to the index to Martin Butlin’s magisterial Paintings and Drawings of William Blake (1981), through Linnell, Denny bought Blake’s Job engravings and Blair’s Grave with Blake’s designs (Blake Records [1969], 335–36, 593).

In his Journal, Linnell recorded that he went on “Thursday November 2 To see Oedipus,” but he said nothing about his companions, and in his Cash Account Book he noted under 8 November 1821 payment of four shillings “to Dr Thornton for Box Ticket — for Oedipus[?]”.

Linnell was clearly keenly interested in Greek plays, and the impulse to attend this production may have been his. On 8 May 1819 he paid £1.1.0 “for Greek Theatre 3 vol. 4th,” and on 24 April 1821 he paid four shillings for “Sophocles — Greek.”

For details of the theatre itself, see Raymond Mander & Joe Mitchenson, The Lost Theatres of London (1976), 202. It was not a patent theatre and was not therefore entitled to perform legitimate drama, but, “being of too humble pretensions to create jealousy, [it] is permitted to play tragedy, comedy, or farce, in as legitimate a manner as the company is capable of doing” (The Percy Anecdotes Original and Select [1822], 168, cited in Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama, 1660–1900, 4 [1955], 228).

Butlin (1981), #676.

The receipt of 29 July 1826 is given in Blake Records, 583, the source of the other Blake references quoted incidentally here.

The letter is postmarked “NIGHT / JU 17 / 1834” and addressed to “J. Linnell Esq. / Porchester Terrace / Bayswater.”

Butlin (1981), #784 and #829 (20).

Blake Records, 583, n 1, quoting the Ivimy mss.

It is reproduced in color in Katharine Crouan’s catalogue of John Linnell (1982), #75.

Blake Records, 590, 599.


Of course neither Arthur Torrens nor his wife appears in the records of payments for Job, since the copy they received was a gift.
REVIEWS

PROPHECY
AND THE
PHILOSOPHY
OF
MIND
TRADITIONS OF
BLAKE AND SHELLEY

TERENCE ALLAN HOAGWOOD

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS

Reviewed by Mark Bracher

Terence Hoagwood's Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind: Traditions of Blake and Shelley uses the prophetic tradition and (to a lesser extent) British empiricism as a basis for understanding Jerusalem and Prometheus Unbound. After an extended and very able explanation of important elements of the two traditions, Hoagwood demonstrates numerous ways in which the two poems embody the form and substance of prophecy as well as certain epistemological and ontological issues central to British empiricism. In doing so, he illuminates significant details of the poems and also makes some astute and valuable generalizations about the poems' meanings and purposes.

One such generalization, made at the outset, reminds us of a fact that is widely acknowledged in principle but too often ignored in the practice of Blake criticism. "An epistemology and a metaphysic are embodied in [Blake's and Shelley's] masterpieces," Hoagwood observes (p. ix). "The theater of Blake's intellectual war includes these traditions, philosophical and religious. Accordingly, to disparage 'outside readings' while trying to interpret Jerusalem is literary blind man's buff: Blake's art simply cannot be understood without reference to philosophical and religious tradition" (p. 1).

More specifically, Hoagwood maintains that the two traditions he focuses on will help us answer "four questions [that] still require attention from readers of Jerusalem and Prometheus Unbound: the question of their context, of their real subject, of their symbolic technique, and of their literary form" (p. 2). Concerning their context and subject, Hoagwood observes that "Jerusalem and Prometheus Unbound exploit three points of contact between prophecy and the philosophy of mind" (p. 5). First, both poems and both traditions involve "an idealist philosophy of being." Second, all exhibit a concern with mental activity, especially perception in general and vision in particular. And third, they are all concerned with "intellectual liberation" or "the overthrow of spiritual tyranny" (p. 5).

With an eye to these three themes, Hoagwood proceeds to an enlightening exposition of "philosophers of mind," by which he means Descartes and the British empiricists, primarily. This informative discussion does not constitute the strength of the book, however. For while the account provides a worthwhile explanation of the humanization of absolutes in philosophy, this element only fleshes out a thesis that has already been developed by others (most notably by Abrams in Natural Supernaturalism). And although it reveals some interesting similarities in, for instance, Blake and Berkeley, and Shelley and Hume, these glosses do not add appreciably to our understanding of either poet. One might expect the payoff to come in the subsequent analyses of Jerusalem and Prometheus Unbound, but that hope is not really fulfilled, for the specifics of these "philosophies of mind" are rarely used productively in the analyses of the poems. The only notion from these philosophies that is fruitfully employed in interpreting the poetry is the idea that the principle of mind unifies all things, a rather vague and ambiguous notion that, as we will see, produces as much confusion as illumination.

Happily, Hoagwood's account of the prophetic tradition produces a greater yield. Most significant for an understanding of Blake and Shelley is the purpose of prophecy. Hoagwood notes that
for some commentators, including Thomas Goodwin, prophecy supplies a mental model. John’s vision (in Revelation) was a modification of “his Faculties,” and the purpose of John’s book is to enable his readers to model their minds after it—“that is, to give up our Selves, our Powers and Faculties, to the Spirit’s Rule and Guidance” by submitting to the mental conformations displayed in Revelation; the prophecy portrays “the Form or Pattern... into which all Saints on Earth should be moulded.” (p. 38)

Prophecy’s “guiding purpose,” then, Hoagwood asserts, was “to cleanse the doors of perception, sweeping the clutter of binding fictions from before the mind’s eye and allowing it to perceive the infinite—the universal—which was hid” (p. 41). The connection with Blake and Shelley is obvious: for the poets, as for the biblical commentators, “prophecy effects a revolution of mind, of perception” (p. 45). More specifically, “in the case of Jerusalem Blake forces his reader to undergo an effort of cognitive unification... The plot of Jerusalem, [like that of Revelation, is the audience’s progress from darkness to light, gradually apprehending thematic significance amid narrative discontinuity” (p. 81).

In addition to purpose, the poetry of Blake and Shelley also shares particular doctrines with the prophetic tradition, Hoagwood finds. Most noteworthy is their common reliance upon an idealist ontology. This ontology is implicit first of all in the prophetic purpose, which is “to strip the veil of illusion—literality and materiality—from the intellectual tenor of art and human life” (p. 48). Hoagwood finds this idealism to be implicit in prophecy’s form and technique as well. Asserting that the generally figurative technique of biblical prophecy is implicitly idealist (p. 38), he explains that prophecy “requires readers to lift their minds, by the vehicle of vision, from the perception of sensible to intellectual forms” (p. 48). Readers are thus forced into an idealist perspective by prophecy, because “its palpable terms have spiritual tenors: the winepress in Revelation, for example, is interpreted as ‘pressure of conscience’” (p. 42). Here again, the connection with Blake and Shelley is clear, as it also is with regard to two specific techniques that Hoagwood comments on: synchronism and typology. Synchronism, the separate or sequential presentation of events that occur simultaneously, forces the interpreter to “rise above the distinctions of time” (p. 41): various visions “are distinguished spatially and symbolically” in the narrative, and to make sense of the prophecy, the audience must perceive the “essential unity” of these separate visions (p. 41). Biblical typology, the “allusive or allegorical use of imagery from the biblical past” (p. 53), also “transforms a concrete diversity (different places, or things) into an intellectual unity (a common idea or theme)” (p. 54).

To understand the prophetic poems of Blake and Shelley, one must thus recognize their prophetic nature:

As Blake and Shelley knew, visionary symbolism had been studied systematically for centuries before they wrote. This art and its aesthetic were known to them, and they employ its tradition.

Readers of Romantic prophecies who do not share the poets’ knowledge of tradition, nor acknowledge the existence of such a tradition, complain of the poets’ obscurity, treating their poems as solipsistic impromptus, originating “in the private emotions and imaginings of their authors.” Without reference to the tradition of visionary symbolism, a reader finds that such poems are not “immediately referable... to any extrinsic system of beliefs or truths,” and so loses patience. (p. 47)

Recognizing the prophetic nature of these poems also means, Hoagwood argues, that one must not try to reduce the visionary symbols to a single, historical meaning. He observes that some commentators (notably Isaac Newton) tried to do precisely that, and he notes and condemns a similar reductive tendency among some modern readers: “To the present, a class of readers blithely subsumes visionary art under the name of political prophecy, treating each visionary poem as if it were a willfully obscured news announcement” (p. 50). Hoagwood rejects such a reading of Blake for the same reasons that most biblical commentators repudiated Newton’s interpretive method: “first, the symbols of prophecy have multiple meanings, and no single perspective will suffice for understanding them. Second, terrestrial ‘Applications are too small and petty usually for these Prophecies,’ which are designed to address spiritual matters: ‘the Prophecies themselves, if they had no other meaning, might very well have been spared’” (pp. 49–50). The poetry of Blake and Shelley cannot be understood merely in relation to historical and physical reality, Hoagwood asserts, for to do so is to render much of the poetry incomprehensible and the rest trivial.

As well as illuminating the general purposes and techniques of Blake’s and Shelley’s poetry, Hoagwood also makes effective use of the prophetic tradition in explicating numerous details of the opening plates of Jerusalem. In the frontispiece, he carefully shows how the globe of fire, the door, the space beyond the door, and the wind coming from the space function as allusions to and reworkings of numerous prophetic themes and images. These elements, together with details assimilated from Blake’s own previously executed designs, constitute “a deliberately complex and disturbingly ambiguous picture” which “invokes and yet contradicts the salvation promised by the New Testament” (p. 65): “insofar as Los resembles John with his lights at the door of heaven, the frontispiece strikes an optimistic note as it conveys us into Blake’s vision. Insofar as he recalls Old Testament antecedents, of which Blake was equally aware, the frontispiece is a dark design of death” (p. 64).

Hoagwood discerns a similar message in the major symbols of the title page. Finding an allusion to both the biblical and the Newtonian rainbow in the dazzling colors of the plate’s later stage, he uncovers contraries of wrath and mercy, and materialism and spirituality, simultaneously present in the picture (pp. 66–68), thus demonstrating how “the theologies of vengeance and mercy, their respective biblical canons, and sacred and
profane models of mind all clash at the prophecy's outset" (pp. 69-70).

Although Hoagwood's use of the prophetic tradition provides valuable illumination of both the general purpose and numerous concrete details of *Jerusalem*, this tradition does not serve him as well when he attempts to articulate the poem's message. While sometimes incisive and even mildly innovative, Hoagwood's generalizations about the poem's message are often either truistic, or ambiguous, or reductive. The characterization of truism applies to his repeated emphasis on the contrast between Blake's valorization of redemption and the biblical concern with vengeance. To his credit, he at times tries to move beyond this truism, but when he does so, other problems arise. At one point, for instance, he states: "the absolute forgiveness that Blake celebrates arises from a philosophical principle: interiority" (p. 76). But his explanation of this point contributes more confusion than clarification:

Jesus—another name for human imagination—is "in" men because he is a mental faculty; in fact he is the origin of mental life. Converting theological unities into epistemological unities is exactly the process that enables Blake to purge the prophetic stance of its violence and wrath. (p. 76)

One key problem with this explanation lies in the ambiguity of terms like "interiority," "mental," "theological unities," and "epistemological unities." Underlying the imprecision of these terms is a fundamental ambiguity that plagues the entire book—namely, the meaning of "idealism" and "unity." Hoagwood uses "idealism," and its correlates "mind" and "mental," as though only one meaning were possible for each term. When, for instance, he speaks of "the philosophy of idealism" (p.41; emphasis added), he seems unaware of the important differences that exist among the various types of idealism. Plato, Berkeley, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel (to name some of the more prominent examples) each had a "philosophy of idealism," but idealism meant something rather different for each of them—and in fact, its precise nature in any one of these philosophers is itself subject to question. Hoagwood himself implicitly acknowledges this problem in relation to Berkeley, when he comments on the fact that Berkeley's idealism is often thought—wrongly, he argues—to be solipsistic. But after a very interesting and perceptive discussion of the nuances of Berkeley's idealism, Hoagwood reverts to an indiscriminate use of this term and of correlative phrases such as "philosophy of mind," using them to characterize the New Testament, biblical commentary, the philosophy of Berkeley and the British empiricists, and the poetry of Blake and Shelley. Such usage is at best unilluminating and at worst misleading, since it implies a fundamental coincidence of vision where differences may in fact be more significant than similarities.

The problem emerges at the beginning of the chap-
forgiveness, the thrust of his explanations of numerous details is to make the poem seem more like a pastiche of biblical elements than a revelatory vision in its own right. Such, too, is the suggestion of the concluding paragraph on the poem, where the following summary is given of the relation between Jerusalem and Revelation: “Jerusalem’s ending is precisely the same, symbolically, as Revelation’s. Blake’s poem thus begins and ends with signals of its visionary context, the Revelation of Saint John; but throughout, Blake’s poem brings this visionary light to bear on the new shapes of crisis in his age—war and the philosophy that separates mind from matter” (p. 99). The implication is that Blake’s poem, rather than creating its own system as its protagonist says one must do to avoid enslavement, is simply the application of the system of another man (John) to contemporary issues (“the new shapes of crisis in [Blake’s] age”). In this passage Hoagwood does go on to salvage some uniqueness for Blake by emphasizing that Blake’s apocalypse is an intellectual revolution rather than “an end to corporeal creation,” but in other places even this qualification is absent. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is an earlier passage where Hoagwood reduces the message of Jerusalem to a cabbalistic principle:

Gershom G. Scholem’s summary of a cabbalistic principle applies equally to Blake’s theology: “The Tree of Knowledge became the tree of restrictions, prohibitions, and delimitations, whereas the Tree of Life was the tree of freedom, symbolic of an age when the dualism of good and evil was not yet (or no longer) conceivable, and everything bore witness to the unity of divine life, as yet untouched by any restrictions, by the power of death, or any of the other negative aspects of life, which made their appearance only after the fall of man.” It is difficult to find a clearer summary of Jerusalem’s themes. (p. 71; emphasis added)

The danger of the historical contextualist method, then, is that one will come to see in the poetry only reflections of the tradition one happens to be investigating. Hoagwood could have guarded against this danger if he had taken to heart two points that he himself seems to be at least partially aware of. First is the recognition that no single philosophical or religious tradition can satisfactorily explain the message of Blake’s poetry. While Hoagwood seems to acknowledge this point in principle (pp. 188–90), in practice he virtually ignores all other traditions and perspectives. Kathleen Raine’s work, for instance, is never mentioned, nor, except for a few minor exceptions, is the Platonic-Neoplatonic-Hermetic tradition that Raine finds permeating Blake’s poetry and pictures. The writings of Boehme, Paracelsus, and (again, with minor exceptions) Swedenborg are passed over in silence, as are the translations of Thomas Taylor.

Even taking into account alternative traditions would not, of course, guarantee access to “the message” of Blake’s poetry, for as Hoagwood also acknowledges in principle—and this is the second point—Blake goes beyond his predecessors. Here again, Hoagwood’s practice fails to do justice to his principle. If the principle is sound—if Blake did in fact surpass his precursors—one might argue that the best access to Blake is not through his predecessors but through successors who had the same precursors as Blake—if, indeed, one must approach Blake through an intermediary at all. Thus instead of seeking access to Blake via the British empiricists (for whom he expressed little admiration), it might be more productive to approach him through, say, process philosophy, which is described by its primary exponent, Alfred North Whitehead, as largely an extension of and reaction against Descartes and the British empiricists. There is justification for such an approach in Blake’s own writings. One of the messages of Milton, for instance, is that if we want to understand the significance of Paradise Lost, we should read Milton’s successor Blake (rather than Milton’s predecessors). Likewise, if we want to understand the grounds for this claim of Blake’s, we might do better to read Heidegger or Gadamer than to seek clarification in Milton or Spencer.

Hoagwood’s analysis of Prometheus Unbound exhibits many of the same strengths and weaknesses as his investigation of Jerusalem, although the treatment of Shelley’s poem is more coherent and systematic. Like Blake, Shelley is seen to be concerned with humanizing Biblical prophecy, making the supernatural natural, and working to harmonize contending creeds and unify religion with other forms of thought (p. 136). Like Jerusalem, Prometheus Unbound employs major elements of prophecy: “an aesthetic based on multiple imagery, an ethos whose points of reference are vengeance and mercy, a mental ontology that informs both those elements, and, for a final purpose, creation of a new heaven and earth” (p. 138). These elements are connected by the fact that “poetry’s ideal forms, Shelley implies, subsume into apprehensible unity the previously discrete data of mental and natural life” (p. 132).

It is this idea of the unity of the mental and the natural, or thoughts and objects, that constitutes both the strength and the major weakness of Hoagwood’s analysis. On the positive side, the notion provides admirable explanatory power. With it Hoagwood is able to construct a coherent and illuminating reading of major characters and events of the poem which, in all its different characters and episodes, is seen to embody the central insight that all things—both mental and physical—are ultimately united in the mind.

But as in the discussion of Jerusalem, the nature of this unity is not adequately explained. As a result, Hoagwood repeatedly moves from the unobjectionable assertion that thoughts and things are related to each other to the very different and quite dubious contention that there is no real difference between them. We can observe this fudging of terms in Hoagwood’s discussion of metaphor, which he perceptively identifies as a formal en-
ament of the unity between thought and things. Noting that "the predominant kind of metaphor in act 1 converts thoughts to things," Hoagwood reflects that "this technique, a condition of all poetic art, implies a relation between internal and external things . . ." (p. 157). But, observing that in act 2 Shelley reverses the process and converts things to thought, he concludes that this technique implies that "the distinction between thoughts and things is nominal . . ., a matter of words" (p. 157). Having recognized that metaphor implies a sharing of ground or essence between the mental and the physical, Hoagwood equates this sharing with lack of any real difference between thoughts and things.

This same juggling occurs in Hoagwood's discussion of the significance of repeated patterns in the poem. He begins once again with an insightful and valuable observation:

This strategy of patterning, whereby multiple structures are assembled in order to reveal the unity that they share, enters the details of Shelley's poetry, just as his ontological theme of mental philosophy enters his particular metaphors. Just as act 2 is superimposed over act 1, to reveal differently the same vision, so too the function of the echoing spirits' song—which is symbolically identical with the prophetic spirits' song—assembles multiple images as analogies for a single idea. (p. 165)

In the very next sentence, however, the relation of sharing and analogy between multiple particulars and a single idea or unity is changed into a subsumption of particulars into a universal—an annihilation of all difference between particulars and between thoughts and things:

The sensible diversity of these images is designed to dissolve into the intellectual unity of their common tenor . . . Such a technique, like biblical synchronism, embodies intellectual philosophy. If thoughts are identical with things, as in Shelley's philosophy they are, and "all things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the peripient" (Pyes, 7:137), then the use of metaphor, multiple symbolism, and thematically parallel acts reproduces Shelley's philosophy in poetic form, by converting sensibles to intelligibles. (p. 165; emphasis added)

The problem of unity is complicated by the fact that in some instances Hoagwood does try to explain its nature. "The absolute unity that structures the entire poem" (p. 162), he comments at one point, is due to the fact that the natural world is just a projection of thought: "Shelley's subject is the exteriorization, attribution, and worship of that which arose from within" (p. 164). Instead of clarifying the issue, however, this explanation confuses it still further, for two reasons. First, it implies a solipsistic position, and Hoagwood insists that Shelley is not a solipsist (pp. 152-54). Second, this projective notion of unity results in an impoverishing and reductive reading of the poem. Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion of Asia's confrontation with Demogorgon.

According to Hoagwood, Demogorgon is a projection of Asia; "he does not exist, considered apart from the fruitful solitude in which Asia's mind unfolds itself" (p. 168). And to substantiate this claim, he finds it necessary to argue that Demogorgon is "utterly uninformative," that "he tells Asia nothing that she does not already know," and that, in fact, "all of his answers are meaningless" (p. 166). Hoagwood's reasoning runs as follows:

Asia asks, "Who made the living world?" and Demogorgon begs the question, saying only "God" (2.4.9). As Shelley had understood since at least 1811, that bare word is merely a device by which ignorance disguises itself as piety. . . . When Asia presses the question by rephrasing it, Demogorgon can only repeat himself (2.4.11). Her own language, however, is more informative: she lists "all / That it [the world] contains—thought, passion, reason, will, / Imagination" (2.4.9-11), defining a mental universe. As her questions grow gradually more complex and specific, Demogorgon repeats "Merciful God" (2.4.18). . . . (p. 166)

Hoagwood's reading is quite plausible. But an alternative reading is equally possible, and it has the added virtue of avoiding the solipsism that Hoagwood's implicit adherence to Asia. It is possible, that is, to see Demogorgon's responses as being extremely meaningful, providing the most important information of all—namely, the fact of unity that Hoagwood himself sees as the central theme of the poem. By rephrasing "God" to all Asia's questions, Demogorgon is indicating that the same fundamental power underlies all the myriad phenomena—mental as well as physical—that Asia mentions. This reading also provides a satisfactory explanation of the nature of the unity between mind and matter, something that is missing from Hoagwood's account. It implies that mind and matter (all things) are united not because they are identical or lack difference, but because of their common ground.

Hoagwood's insistence that Demogorgon is just a projection of Asia leads him to dismiss other meaningful responses of Demogorgon as being meaningless. "When Asia asks Demogorgon for a definition of God," Hoagwood declares, "he admits that 'I spoke but as ye speak' (2.4.112); that is, he has told her nothing that she did not already know. His famous declaration that 'the deep truth is imageless' (2.4.116) is merely a means of avoiding the necessity of answering the question" (p. 167). This reading overlooks two crucial points. First of all, Demogorgon says he speaks "as," not what, Asia speaks; he thus is not necessarily admitting that "he has told her nothing that she did not already know." Rather, he might simply mean that his use of (human) language inevitably fails to grasp the reality he is speaking of. Similarly, his declaration that "the deep truth is imageless" seems to be not a means of evading the question but an attempt to express the notion that the reality he is referring to (with the word "God") transcends linguistic and perceptual paradigms. This notion should certainly be familiar to one as well versed in biblical tradition as Hoagwood is.

It appears not to be, however, for Hoagwood is bewildered by a very similar notion advanced by Was-
serman with regard to Demogorgon. "It is . . . misleading," Hoagwood writes, "to identify [Demogorgon], as Wasserman has done, as 'the revealing powers that are outside the One Mind, outside Existence.'" Calling this characterization a "bewildering claim," Hoagwood declares that Wasserman "confuses the issue by insisting that 'we must also recognize [Demogorgon's] isolation and absolute difference from the world'" (p. 169). The bewilderment and confusion that Hoagwood finds here, however, are due not to Wasserman but to the inadequacy of Hoagwood's own interpretive paradigms (those of biblical prophecy and Britism empiricism). Had Hoagwood employed other contexts, he would not have found it necessary to reject such statements as mere confusion. Had he viewed these statements in light of Heidegger's thought, for instance, he might have recognized in Demogorgon's utterances and in Wasserman's characterization of Demogorgon the notion of what Heidegger called the ontological difference: the fact that Being, the ground of beings, is not itself a being, and thus cannot be spoken of accurately, since language is constructed around beings, not Being. This, in fact, seems to be the notion that Shelley was trying to embody in Demogorgon, for as Wasserman notes in a comment cited by Hoagwood, Shelley's manuscript characterized Demogorgon's realm as "beyond the world of being" (p. 169). Hoagwood attempts to dismiss this piece of evidence as a misguided notion on Shelley's part, declaring: "but Shelley certainly would have understood that that which is distinct from all that is, is not" (p. 169). Perhaps. But Shelley might also have understood that although it is not, yet in a certain sense it is, as Heidegger observed. Thus when Hoagwood criticizes Wasserman for speaking "in such a way as both to predicate a thing and simultaneously to claim that it is remote from existence" (p. 169), he is perhaps justified in the context of Aristotelian logic (which, however, is not a context that he explicitly invokes), but not in other philosophical contexts that might offer a richer understanding of the poem. The same is true of Hoagwood's assertion that "it is contradictory to imagine a primal power, an ultimate force, asleep," as Wasserman does of Demogorgon (p. 169). Contradictory in some philosophical contexts, perhaps, but meaningful in others, such as that of Heidegger. For Wasserman's statement expresses basically the same thought that Heidegger articulated in his notion that Being has withdrawn in the present age.

Hoagwood's projectivist interpretation of Asia's encounter with Demogorgon thus excludes ideas that could have provided enrichment and further substantiation for his own basic line of interpretation. Rather than categorizing Demogorgon as a merely intrapsychic reality, it might be more interesting to think of him in the context, for instance, of Hegel's Geist, which is at once the essence of the human mind and also the ultimate ground of everything, or in the context of Heidegger's notion of human being as the shepherd of Being. Such a context would also be more adequate to the concerns of the poem. For what is at issue in Prometheus Unbound is the relation between human beings and the ultimate powers or principles of the universe, and Asia's discovery that Demogorgon resides in herself is not merely the recovery of a projection but the recognition that the ultimate powers governing the universe are the same powers that constitute her own being. As noted above, such a reading is more coherent and more congruent with Hoagwood's own aims than is the projectivist view that he advances, for this alternative reading avoids the solipsist hypothesis which Hoagwood opposes yet implicitly embraces in offering his projectivist interpretation.

However, to arrive at a richer understanding of this episode—and of the poem as a whole—it is not necessary to invoke Hegelian, Heideggerian, or any other philosophical contexts. If an explicit context is required, one can employ a much more immediate one: that of Shelley's other poems. The opening lines of the final stanza of Shelley's "Hymn of Apollo," for instance, express quite clearly the notion that mind and matter have a common ground, and that everything the mind perceives is in a sense a perception of itself: "I am the eye with which the Universe / Beholds itself and knows itself divine." This poem is doubly significant because it also speaks of prophecy. The stanza continues: "All harmony or instrument or verse, / All prophecy, all medicine is mine, / All light of art or nature..." It is curious that in his discussion of Shelley's relation to the prophetic tradition and philosophies of mind, Hoagwood does not consider an explicit reference such as this. A more obvious oversight is the omission of any reference to "Ode to the West Wind," where the relation between the individual mind and a universal mind or spirit is treated explicitly—and, moreover, with reference to prophecy. "Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me...!" the poet cries. "Be through my lips to unawakened earth / The trumpet of a prophecy!" An even more valuable gloss on this relation is provided by "Mont Blanc," where "the everlasting universe of things / Flows through the mind," and "the secret Strength of things" also "governs thought" (emphasis added). Since Hoagwood frequently makes use of Shelley's prose and other poetry to elaborate on issues much less central than these, this omission is unjustified. One suspects that the omission may be due to the fact that these poems weigh heavily against the projectivist explanation of the unity of thought and things that Hoagwood insists on in Prometheus Unbound. Significantly, this neglect of the most immediate context—other poems of the poet's œuvre—is also present in the discussion of Blake: Hoagwood does not mention the two prophecies whose titles bear the name of Blake's "Eternal Prophet," nor does he
discuss such obvious documents of Blake's philosophy of mind as *The Book of Urizen* and "The Mental Traveller."

Thus while Hoagwood's reliance on two traditions does offer valuable insights, his historical contextualist perspective and the understanding derived from it need to be seen in the context of other contexts—including not only other historical contexts but the rest of the poet's *oeuvre* and anachronistic contexts as well. Had Hoagwood taken more notice of this larger context of his historical contextualism, his study could have gained considerable explanatory power without sacrificing any of its present virtues. Such an awareness of larger horizons might also have reduced some of the other apparent problems inherent in Hoagwood's book, which, some Blakeists might observe, is a rather priestly study of prophecy: a codifying, historicist study of a poet who scorned such devotion to generalization and memory and apotheosized their contraries, the particular and the imagination. Despite its shortcomings, however, *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind* makes a definite contribution to our understanding of Blake and Shelley, for in addition to numerous local insights, it gives us new understanding of the purposes of these two poets, and of the ways they attempted to realize these purposes.


Reviewed by G. E. Bentley, Jr.

The Huntington Library and Art Gallery has one of the great Blake collections in the world, including seventeen of his printed books (*All Religions Are One*, the "Exhibition of Paintings in Fresco," and *The French Revolution* in the only copies known); seventeen of about ninety-six known letters, some of his greatest series of designs including those for *Comus* (8), *Paradise Lost* (12), "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (6), Visionary Heads (6), the Illuminated Genesis Manuscript (12), color-prints (3), and eighty-two works with his commercial engravings. Only five other collections have anything like such Blake riches—the British Library and Museum, the Library of Congress plus the National Gallery, Harvard, Yale, and Cambridge University—and probably none of these has been so extensively described and exhibited as that in the Huntington. There is of course a special need for such exhibition and description of the Huntington collections, for they are not easily accessible to most Blake students, and they are never loaned to other institutions. To make up for this isolation, the Huntington is uniquely beautiful and wonderfully gracious and accommodating to students who do wend their way to the imaginary barony of San Marino in the avocado groves in the foothills of the mountains above Los Angeles.

tion of the Huntington has been splendidly generous in making known its Blake riches.

One might well wonder what this new catalogue can offer which has not been available before, since the ground has been so frequently traversed. The answer is rather surprising. Most of the Huntington exhibitions and all the catalogues before Essick's were concerned almost exclusively with Blake's drawings and paintings. The scope of this work is, therefore, vastly greater than those of its predecessors. Further, even the graphic works are described in considerably greater detail than was heretofore available. The edition of Baker's catalogue revised by Wark (1957) consists of only fifty-five pages, whereas the corresponding sections of Essick's work comprehend drawings and paintings (pp. 1–140), separate prints (pp. 193–204), works of questionable attribution (pp. 233–38), and portraits of Blake (pp. 239–40), and to what Baker and Wark surveyed Essick has added extensive sections on Blake's writings (pp. 141–91) and his commercial book illustrations (pp. 204–31).

The first great virtue of this admirable catalogue, then, is its comprehensiveness. For the first time we have an account of "all original Blake materials at the Huntington" (p. xi), not just the drawings and paintings.

The second great virtue of the new Huntington catalogue is its method: "[It] is based on a new examination of them [Blake's works] and all relevant documents I have been able to locate. My major goal has been to provide scholars and students with basic facts about the physical properties of the works recorded" (p. xi). With a first-class scholar such as Essick working with the primary materials of his field, the results are bound to be impressive.

With each drawing, he gives not only the physical details such as size and defects, but a meticulous and elaborate description, and usually a reproduction as well — there are fifty plates in all, including all those for Comus, Paradise Lost, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," and the Illuminated Genesis Manuscript. Further, there are careful comparisons with other versions of the same subjects, e.g., for the Paradise Lost designs. In future, critical accounts of these Huntington designs should begin with Essick's descriptions of them.

An incidental advantage of the 1985 catalogue is that it is more up-to-date than its predecessors. Essick reports that the Huntington copies of Innocence (I), Songs (N), and Visions (E) were disbound in 1983 and 1984 and that rare prints were acquired as late as August and December 1984 (pp. 146, 149, 163, 194, 203).

Most of the new profits from this catalogue are for literary scholars, for the Huntington copies of Blake's writings and of books with his commercial engravings have only been described in detail previously in comprehensive bibliographies such as Keynes' great Bibliography of William Blake (1921), the Keynes & Wolf Census (1953), and Blake Books (1977). One might have expected, or indeed hoped, that his predecessors had exhausted what is to be found in the Huntington books, but this is not the case. Though Essick builds confidently on the work of his predecessors, he has a good deal that is new to offer, and every copy has been described with a fresh eye. For instance, he reports (as no one else has) that the edges of All Religions Are One (A), No Natural Religion pl. a2, Song of Los (E), and The Ghost of Abel (C) are deckled (pp. 143, 145, 165, 175), indicating that they were the original outside edges of the sheets from which they were cut, and he can even deduce from these facts that the All Religions Are One plates "are quarter pieces [cut] from a sheet approx. 75.6 x 54 cm." (p. 143). He points out numerous small variants which Blake created in coloring his works in illuminated printing and which have not been remarked before. In Songs pl. 13–14 ("The Little Boy Lost [and Found]" in Innocence [I] and Songs [E]) the boy has been given a hat (pp. 146, 157), in pl. 19 (the innocent "Holy Thursday" in Songs [E]) the man at bottom left has a book in his hands (p. 157), and in pl. 46 ("London" in Songs [N]) a serpent has been added in the bottom margin (p. 163). In Song of Los (E) pl. 8, the etched butterfly visible beside 11.6–8 in other copies is not apparent (p. 166), and in Milton (B) pl. 4 there are "Eight stars drawn in [the] sky with pen and ink" (p. 169). All these variants should be recorded in the standards bibliographies of Blake. Essick has advanced our knowledge very considerably with his original observation and careful recording of these minute details.

Very occasionally the vagaries of institutional records or of proofreading have had small unfortunate consequences. Of the history of the Huntington's copy of Blake's great print of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims he can say no more than that it "has been in the Library's collection for many years" (p. 202); in recording the variants in Blake's transcription of Genesis in his Illuminated Genesis Manuscript (pp. 112–114) he corrects and supplements his predecessors very usefully but omits Blake's alteration in Genesis 2.4 of "the day that" to "the day when," and he mistranscribes Blake's 3.16 "in sorrow shalt thou" as "in sorrow shalt though"; watermarks such as J Whatman are regularly recorded in large capitals rather than in large and small capitals, thus creating unnecessary variants. But these eccentricities are very few and trifling.

This is a scholarly work of considerable importance, constituting a real advance in knowledge, thorough, accurate, intelligent, and illuminating. The Huntington Library Art Gallery and the community of Blake students are exceedingly fortunate that a scholar of Essick's eminence should have devoted himself to such an apparently thankless task and produced a work of such remarkable excellence. Semper honos nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt (Aenid 1.607).
The most important works in illuminating printing not to be found there are The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and Jerusalem.

No attempt is made to detail the Huntington's extensive holdings of reprints, criticism, and scholarship concerning Blake nor to describe the related materials such as the bill for Blake's funeral or drawings and manuscripts of contemporaries like Flaxman, Fuseli, Stothard, and Palmer.

These reproductions are serviceable, but they are only in black-and-white, and they are not so good as those in previous Huntington catalogues. A major catalogue deserves better plates than these. Doubtless the motive was to keep the price to the remarkably low level of $20.

Reviewed by Dan Miller

That Blake criticism has entered a transitional phase is now beyond doubt. We are witnessing far-reaching, possibly radical changes in the methods, concerns and purposes of Blake study. The motives for change stem, in part, from a realization that the previous critical project, shaped largely by Northrop Frye, has attained its exegetical goals and thereby reached its limits. But even more powerfully, it is the body of linguistic and critical speculation which has come to be known as "literary theory" that has forced a revaluation and a redefinition of Blake criticism. Auguries of innovation abound, and the rhetoric of passage—"major shift," "paradigm change," "new dispensation"—grows somewhat too familiar, even to the advocates of change. But neither hyperbolic diction nor the false starts and premature attempts that unavoidably plague any new critical enterprise should obscure the possibilities for substantial change. The transition is only barely underway, and since all transitions are periods of risk and uncertainty, the future of Blake studies is still very much up in the air. But we are clearly in transit, and the essays collected by Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler in Unnam'd Forms serve admirably to register the new movement and explore some of the terrain it opens.

According to its dust jacket, the book "initiates the encounter of Blake studies and contemporary literary-critical concepts of 'textuality,'" and a blurb from W. J. T. Mitchell asserts, "It will serve as the basic introduction to the application of advanced theory to Blake." These claims are accurate enough and well warranted by the essays within, but the undertaking of Unnam'd Forms is actually much more specific and consequential.

The subtitle "Blake and Textuality" might be translated "Blake and Derrida," for while Derrida is not the only contemporary theorist of language used to illuminate Blake (Lacan, Kristeva and Foucault also figure prominently), his is the name most insistently and forcefully invoked. Most of the essays work to bring Blake and Derrida into some sort of alignment, to discover some mode of rapprochement. Putting it perhaps too bluntly, we see here Blake, still the presiding prophet of Romanticism, and Derrida, now the tutelary genius of modern theory, put on the same stage and asked to define their common ground. Such a meeting was inevitable, however much it becomes here often a strange and, at times, strained encounter. But the venture itself is important. A coming-to-terms between Derrida and Blake seems natural—and urgent—in a way that a similar confrontation of Blake and, say, Heidegger or Nietzsche does not. If earlier critics felt compelled to connect Blake and Hegel or, more recently, Blake and Freud, the current agenda demands an encounter with Derrida. It would be easy to dismiss these arranged meetings as critical fad and fashion, and such dismissals are all too certain and predictable. But as the literary and philosophic landscape
undergoes the constant re-mapping that is one of the central functions of criticism, each site upon it must be located anew. Much is at stake in the encounter between Blake and Derrida, nothing less than the significance—the meaning that asserts import and consequence—of each figure.

Given these stakes and the difficulty of linking discourses as complex and finely articulated as Blake's and Derrida's, it should not be surprising that the meeting is not altogether happy. In some cases, Blake and Derrida do not meet at all, despite some repeated assertions that they do. Blake frequently encounters a theorist who is called Derrida but who bears only slight similarity to Derrida. This pseudo-Derrida, not an altogether naive thinker about language, will merit some attention. In other cases, Derrida and Blake do approach one another, but then some unease emerges in the critic who hosts the discussion, and that anxiety will also require some investigation. Finally, in some instances, a confrontation does take place, and when it does, sparks fly that light up the path ahead.

The collection had its origins in the 1982 "Blake and Criticism" conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz, but much separates that beginning from the end product. Of the nine essays contained here, three were written after the event, while many participants in the conference have not been included. David Simpson's opening piece and Geoffrey Hartman's concluding "Envoi" are expansions of verbal remarks made at the time, and all writers appear to have revised in light of responses made by others. As a result, some pointed debate takes place among the essays, though often the issues under debate become clear only on a second reading. Simpson responds to arguments made by Paul Mann and V. A. De Luca in the third and ninth essays, so that the cautionary tone of his essay makes sense only after the reader is well past it. Similarly, a long footnote in Stephen Leo Carr's essay engages Robert N. Essick in detailed argument concerning Blake's printmaking, but the target of that note, Essick's response to Carr, comes after Carr. Almost every essay refers, directly or indirectly, to its companion pieces, and the intramural discussion often becomes quite detailed. This debate makes the book much more than a collection of discrete pieces, but the effect is often that of a conversation struggling through time lags and confusing echoes.

For all the discord, however, the essays do make a collective statement. Hilton and Vogler's introduction isolates three unifying themes. First, the critics represented here tend to agree upon the displacement of the author and of authorial intention by "the power of social structures like language" (p. 5). Second, they focus on the special character of Blake's art that highlights the "inevitable materiality of all language-as-writing" (p. 6). And, finally, they insist upon the "plurality of meanings" and the dependence on meaning upon interpre-
mines the accepted reading of Visions to show that Oothoon, far from the wise heroine of the story, actually serves as the limited projection of a desiring eye—the narcissistic “I” of Thetottmon—yet also, by figuring the text itself, as a potentially stronger force imposing on the reader’s vision. The act of reading woven into the text itself also plays a role in Donald Ault’s “Re-Visioning The Four Zoas,” an account of Blake’s “radical poetic ontology” that fundamentally revises the meaning of ‘narrative,’ ‘of text,’ and ‘of reader’” (p. 105). Ault analyzes the small- and large-scale features of Blake’s text that subvert the mimetic assumptions and unifying tendencies of classical or, as he calls it, “Newtonian” narrative. Causal paradoxes within the narrative, the migration of details from character speeches to the action proper, manifest discrepancies within the order of events, plots embedded within plots embedded within plots—all these aspects of The Four Zoas create a narrative in which event, character, and setting have no identity except as continual transformations of one another and in which the real narrative is the succession of altered perceptions within the reader. With Vogler’s “Re: Naming MIL/TON” we arrive at the limits of language. Drawing on Jacques Lacan’s analysis of the Symbolic Order and Julia Kristeva’s account of the pre-symbolic, rhythmic and acoustic domain she calls “the semiotic,” Vogler reads Milton as Blake’s attempt to breach the Oedipal-Urizenic wall of words and enter “a place marked by the absence of figuration or representation, a physical and linguistic Beulah” (p. 156) where experience replaces interpretation and where desire exceeds all possible objects. Milton’s search for his emanation Ololon becomes, in Vogler’s hands, a quest for speech free of the tyranny of nomination, law, prohibition, and closure. Vogler argues, as others in the collection do, that Blake’s narrative attains resolution only in the act of reading, here a “participatory or writerly reading” that discovers “a textual as well as a textual Beulah” (p. 174).

The final three essays take us from the word to the letter, from language to inscription and icon. In “Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference,” Stephen Leo Carr shows how the “radical variability” resulting from Blake’s unique method of producing books, in which no one “copy” is ever absolutely identical with any other, “reveals the ultimate impossibility of determining some underlying authoritative structure” (p. 186), whether that structure is some hypothetical original state of the etched plate, a hypothetical composite of several copies, a controlling authorial intention, a “vision” or “myth” informing all Blake’s works, or any other articulation of what Carr calls the logic of identity. Carr explicitly links the material, variable character of Blake’s art and Derridean difference; he holds that Blake’s art reveals and enacts the movement of difference, thereby generating “an ongoing, open-ended production of meanings” (p. 190). In direct answer to Carr, Robert N. Essick’s “How Blake’s Body Means” points out that the value of difference is not unique to Blake’s art but, for the collector, inheres in the entire history of engraving and book production. Essick also argues that copy differences exist only in relation to some mode of identity, in this case the relatively stable etched copperplate. But Essick wants really to extend Carr’s logic of difference to include such variants as accidental spots, degrees of inking, and brush strokes that have little or no signifying value. Essick calls for a “media-oriented hermeneutics” (p. 216) that respects the pre-symbolic experience of the work (Kristeva again) and the extent to which all artistic intentions and signs are shaped by the medium. The final essay “A Wall of Words: The Sublime as Text,” focuses once more on the visual impact of Blake’s language, but V. A. De Luca turns our attention away from the unmediated materiality that Essick celebrates. Rather than the sheer matter of printing, De Luca argues, Blake asserts the iconicity of language by creating verbal “walls” that, in the manner of the Romantic sublime, first baffle, then block, and finally release the reader’s understanding into higher modes. While Blake’s sublime differs from other versions in its total rejection of nature and materiality, it still does not, according to De Luca, take us to some transcendent state or vision beyond words. Instead it gives us fully humanized, transparent forms that remain written language: “heaven is a form of text” (p. 238).

Geoffrey Hartman brings the book to a close in characteristically understated, richly suggestive Hartmanian style. “Envoi: ‘So Many Things’,” raises questions, many of which had been elided in the previous essays: with what authority does Blake utter his prophecies? how are we to judge his claims on us? does the Blakean mythic system retain any place or value? how do we account for or describe “the voice of Blake” and the peculiar “music” of his poetry (pp. 246–47)? In effect, Hartman suggests that if we are to heed the experience, rather than the meaning, of Blake’s works, we may need to return to very traditional critical concerns—to poetic diction and sound, to the matter of artistic value, even to the personal experience of reading.

Such is the trajectory of Unnam’d Forms (though paraphrase and summary can only do injustice to nuanced arguments), and its virtues are many. Phases in Blake criticism have tended to announce and define themselves by anthologies, and this collection will also mark a turning point. It successfully articulates a novel set of critical concerns and puts into practice a number of interpretive techniques relatively new to the field. As a group, these essays also make overwhelmingly clear the degree to which Blake’s poetry is shaped by its medium and plays off of its own typographical existence. Whether or not Blake does here become “the first poet of writing,” as he certainly emerges as “the first epic poet of ‘print consciousness’” (p. 4). By focusing attention on previ-
ously overlooked aspects of Blake's work, in particular those aspects that proved intractable for previous critical approaches, the book performs some much-needed clearing of space for other new studies of Blake. Unnam'd Forms also asserts the value of Blake for contemporary literary theory, and while it is far too early to expect that this field will again, as it did with Frye, serve as a source of new theoretical insight, at least the possibility is here established. The book as a whole makes a convincing case that Blake's art, with its combination of the verbal and the visual, as well as its foregrounding of the material signifier, offers critical theory a particularly fertile area for investigation. Above all, this collection reasserts the power of Blake's art; it demonstrates that Blake is as crucial a figure in Romanticism (and cultural history generally) for the present intellectual climate as he was in the rather different worlds of previous decades.

Save for Hilton's commentary on Visions of the Daughters of Albion, there is little here that could count as close reading. Mann examines The Book of Urizen, and Vogler takes up Milton in some detail, but both of them actually read from the text to certain principles and possibilities of language instead of undertaking detailed commentary. Donald Ault does elaborately chart Nights 1, 7 (a and b), and 9 of The Four Zoas, but he is primarily interested in the ways that the text structures reading, and the essay seems a prelude to his forthcoming book on that poem. Most all the contributors concern themselves less with particular texts than with general characteristics of Blake's discourse and the modes of reading mandated by it. This is appropriate for an anthology that sets out to explore new territory, but it also distinguishes Unnam'd Forms from the several collections of essays that preceded it. The moments when critics succeed in illuminating a text are rather few: Edwards' comments on Blake's aphorisms, Hilton's contextualization of Visions, and Ault's account of the Circle of Destiny in Night 1 of The Four Zoas are some of the notable instances.

Perhaps the most constant refrain in these essays is, put bluntly, the rejection of meaning—or, at least, of anything like a univocal, determinate meaning. Vogler begins his reading of Milton by denouncing "our interpretive urge for closure and univocal meaning" as an "inevitable Urizenic impulse" that the poem itself diagnoses and seeks to destroy (p. 141). Mann also sees archetypal, systematizing criticism as Urizenic (pp. 63–64). "Methods for containing variation within a hierarchy of meaning or value" are, for Carr, critical expressions of the logic of identity, and he claims less interest "in advancing a particular new interpretation" than "in exploring the general conditions of encountering works of illuminated printing" (pp. 182, 196). And De Luca asserts directly, "The Intellectual Powers do not address themselves to meaning as such" (p. 240). Here we encounter a difficulty in Unnam'd Forms. Meaning is extremely hard to elude; it inevitably reconstitutes itself in discourse, even in a critical discourse that seeks to talk about something prior to or beyond meaning. These essays tend to deny meaning but then assert something beyond meaning that, it turns out, is quite meaningful.

Essick offers one example of the return of meaning as he argues against the hegemony of verbal signification:

If such things as ink drops and brush strokes are signs, they signify only their material selves and their coming into being. This hypothetical sign offers some intriguing characteristics. It constitutes a semiotic phenomenon, but not a symbolic system. It resists translation from one medium to another—or, to put it another way, it is the nontranslatable part of any sign. It refuses identical iteration, for it exists only as a spatial/temporal performance. (p. 211)

It would not be difficult to show that, in many classical theories of meaning, the unique and untranslatable sign represents the apex of significance. For the connoisseur who values accidental variation of plate or page, the small mark that distinguishes this from all other copies has exactly that meaning: it is valued not as an accidental mark but as the pure sign of uniqueness. The ink drop does not signify itself or its own materiality; it signifies its own production and, beyond that, its producer. The ink that Blake dropped means Blake and so is valued as such; the ink I drop has no such significance or value. Singularity is the utopia of meaning, and it is exactly the iterability of the sign that complicates meaning.

In fact the unique graphic sign permits a return of meaning on the grandest scale. Essick wants to insist on the non-significative aspects of the sign, yet the graphic mark, filled with the presence of its own artistic coming-to-be, becomes an "incarnational" sign: "Like Blake's sense of the immanence of the spirit within the body, for which Christ is the paradigmatic type, such a sign contains the signified within the material presence and history of the signifier." (p. 212). In the name of asymbolic marks, Essick actually returns to one of the most traditional notions of absolute signification, an indwelling of meaning that is essentially symbolic. Of course, Essick's intent is to widen the domain of "meaning" to include all those "accidents" that, like the particularities of any musical performance, contribute to effect and impact, but his distinction between symbolic and semiotic phenomena keeps breaking down. In Essick's own discussion, the graphic mark always becomes sign and then symbol.

Similar unacknowledged recuperations of meaning pervade other essays. Gavin Edwards is perhaps least guilty of this, but even his claim that "inerradicably unstable and multiple significance" (p. 34) fills Blake's art eventually gives way to assertions of the value—and meaningfulness—of instability itself. In his proverbs, Blake "is questioning the finality of proverbs as such," and he thereby "rouse[s] the faculties to act" (p. 47). The action of roused faculties becomes itself a final end,
though the question of exactly what action those faculties take is elided. “Consider The Book of Urizen,” Mann writes, “as the sort of text Barthes calls scriptible” (p. 65). And De Luca describes Blake's sublime as “an affair of the text and the text alone” as it “presents a refractory iconicity, a wall or steep, that halts or dizzyes the Corporeal Understanding. At the same time it displays an exuberance in its own self-referential play that provides the leap of jouissance, as Barthes would say, for the Intellectual Powers” (p. 231). What the text means is textuality; what reading reads is the liberating play of textual pleasure. The text does not mean so much as act, and reading plays with it. But, once again, as Barthesian jouissance gets written into these essays, it serves as significance. And the fact that play consistently comes to play the role of meaning may not be accidental.

The significance of the indeterminate comes again into play as Vogler sketches the possibility, within Milton, of a Kristevaan Beulah characterized by pure vocalization and object-less (hence in-significant) desire:

The realm of the absence of the signified, as the realm of play, is the realm both of labor and of rest, the contraries that need each other for the full engagement in Mental Fight. As such the realm is a mediating space, like that of Barthes' pleasure of the text. If it is to be found and entered, it must be on the level of experience rather than of abstract thought, a textual as well as textual Beulah. What this means is that if Blake “found” it, it would be in the writing of his text: “The reader cannot know” this unless s/he too can experience Beulah in a participatory or writerly reading. . . . I am convinced that the main tendencies brought to the reading of Blake are among those tendencies in literature—and in his own artistic efforts—that he was struggling to overcome in the only way he could imagine overcoming them; not through a writing as allegoresis, . . . but as writing as mode of praxis, the writing of a full word rather than a univocal word. (pp. 174–75)

A critical reading again concludes with Barthesian text and reading. The fundamental openness of the text, the openness and freedom of reading that text, the pure experience of textuality, the purely “textual” character of that experience—these themes strain to move beyond the confines of poetry bounded by stable meaning, but they also risk resolving both text and reading into one significance, that of abstract indeterminacy, which may well be more even fixed, more stable than that which it ostensibly replaces. As Derrida has pointed out in his several debates with Lacan, the “full word” may function in no significantly different way than the “univocal word.” When the reader refuses to endure the delays and deferrals of allegorical meaning, s/he courts the illusion of unmediated knowledge.

In may be safer, in the long run, to acknowledge the inevitability of closure than to pretend it can be denied, for whenever one of the essays gestures toward a realm beyond fixed meaning, the gesture itself serves to fix a meaning. Carr speaks of “an ongoing, open-ended production of meanings rather than a re-presentation of an original meaning” (p. 190) and of “an interpretive will-

ingness to enter into the play of differences, to see the double inscription of illuminated printing as generating an open-ended proliferation of verbal-visual exchanges, and to join in the strenuous imaginative activity of producing and reproducing each page” (p. 196). Not only does the critic once again approach thematizing the non-thematic and fetishizing openness, but he blinks himself to his own assertions of identity and theme. In his fine discussion of variants in “Little Boy found,” Carr establishes that copy P shows a Christ leading the child, while copy F presents what must be a female, probably the boy’s mother. Carr is correct to conclude, “Variation thus invites alternative and even antithetical readings” (p. 195), but his reading of each individual copy is fully univocal and non-antithetical. To establish variation of meaning between copies, he has had to assert a self-identical meaning for each one. Further, there would be no interpretive problem in the fact of variation unless there were also some connection, some identity, between the copies. If P and F are absolutely different, if they are two different poems unrelated even by the identity of Blake as their author, there would be no variation and hence no “play of differences.” Not only does something-beyond-meaning almost inevitably become a meaning, but here the “beyond-meaning” seems to depend absolutely on meaning. To attempt to speak past meaningfulness is both to create a meaning and to obscure the meanings that make such speech possible—a double bind.

Many of the critics sense some version of that double bind, and none are quite as unaware of their own discourses as might be implied by the preceding discussion. Paul Mann knows that “the most deconstructive reading imaginable would still be merely obligatory” and that it becomes, as all other readings do, simply another interpretation, another Urizenic boundary from whose “perspective Vision must be equated absolutely with that which remains invisible” (p. 67). And Nelson Hilton knows that reading never actually contains multiplicity, for when we register contradictory possibilities, “The issue is not ‘ambiguity’ or logical contradiction but the experience of various levels, or ‘folds,’ of perception: contradictions in the logic of identity” (p. 101). We may read a meaning, and we may read its contrary, and we may read the fact that contrary meanings are implicated, but we cannot read both meanings at once except by conflating them. And Thomas Vogler knows that the attempt to name that which is nameless and which resists all naming is a very tricky maneuver, and even more so any venture at articulating the nameless in a language of names: “If we succumb to the temptation to name [Ololon] as the Feminine, the Spontaneous, the Body, the Mother, the Natural, and so on, we should do so only in the most self-conscious and evasive manner possible, recognizing the power of the Symbolic Order as it is manifested in its onomastic power” (p. 161). Vogler
knows the twin temptations of his interpretive double bind: "on the other hand, a nostalgic and simplistic Lacanisme that would appropriate and valorize a reductive notion of the Imaginary as the completely adequate answer to the ills of the Symbolic and, on the other, its counterpart in producing yet another disguised manifestation of the signifying chain of the Symbolic Order in which the woman . . . is always already represented" (p. 162). Invocations of the unnameable verge on nostalgia, for the ambition of naming is always unmediated representation, and at the same time they risk reasserting nomination, abstraction, and meaning. And, finally, V. A. De Luca knows, as David Simpson has already suggested, that while Blakean textuality obtrudes upon us, at the same time, for Blake, "Presence is available, and the transcendental subject exists" (pp. 240–41). The critic who maintains historical bearings is caught between the textual sublime and very specific Blakean beliefs (see also Mann’s closing acceptance of Blake’s “messages,” pp. 67–68). But these acknowledgements that criticism finds itself in a double bind, unable to perform what it asserts but compelled to assert what lies beyond its performance, usually come at the ends of essays, after the critic, with varying degrees of confidence, has named the nameless and has identified difference. One wonders what might have happened had reading begun, rather than ended, with such realizations. In what ways would these analyses be different had they started with the knowledge that all reading creates meaning, even when it works to escape signification?

For all the insistence on the multiplicity of meaning, there remains a curious unwillingness to allow contradictions within the text. A certain model of poetic text and critical interpretation maintains a strong hold on most of the essays, and that model assumes the classical norm of homogeneity. If, in these essays, Blake’s text asserts textuality, it does so consistently and coherently; it “knows” textuality and, in that sense, masters it. Only rarely do the readings here approximate a textuality that would be out of the control of either the text or its reading, a textuality that would be literally unreadable. Such illegibility would arise not from a domain of namelessness or the purity of experience, but from the fact that textuality forms the necessary precondition for all naming and experience. It would involve a “difference” that, in making any identity or meaning possible, is itself invisible and unavailable to experience.

The editors drew their title from plate 15 of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake’s description of “a Printing house in Hell” in one chamber of which “Unnam’d forms” take molten metals and “cast [them] into the expanse” to become books. The introduction calls these forms “unnamed signifiers” and asks us to see in them the yet unnamed forms that actually shape our reading of Blake (p. 5). The motif of the unnamed appears also in one of the two epigraphs, a quotation, in French, from Derrida’s essay “Différance” that reads, in Alan Bass’s translation:

This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect différence is itself enmeshed, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.

Much in Unnam’d Forms, in fact, is named, particularly “difference” and “writing,” so that it may be useful to back up a bit and read the sentences just before the epigraph. “There is no name for it”: a proposition to be read in its platitude. This unnameable is not an ineffable Being which no name could approach: God, for example” (p. 26). Derrida knows he skirts an old cliche; he knows that namelessness is part of a very old system of names and, in truth, one of the most prominent names in a well-known family. He also asks us to attend to the fact that it is difficult and, in some senses, impossible to name. The name “différence” itself "remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical” (p. 26). Namelessness takes its place in the system of names; it serves as “a false exit” that only appears to leave the orbit of nomination but in fact has been inscribed in the circle and only brings us back to the circuit. How then to name that which makes naming possible? How does the critic describe that which governs all the naming and all the thematic assertions that take place in the text? Obviously, the only words available are those which language offers, and the Derridean gambit involves strategically playing language against itself in order to speak about that which regulates, and thereby eludes, all speaking. Hence the neologism “différance” and all of Derrida’s other false nominatives. That tactic of using the conventional name of namelessness to designate the inevitability of names is what is most often missed in Unnam’d Forms.

Given all the naming in Unnam’d Forms, it may be useful to back up from the epigraph passage, which comes at the end of “Différance,” to see what the non-name “différence” actually does designate. Derrida states explicitly that différence pertains neither to sensibility nor to intelligibility—neither to the domain of the material and the experiential nor to the domain of ideality and meaning—for the sensible/intelligible distinction is itself “one of the founding oppositions of philosophy,” while différence will “refer to an order that resists the opposition” (Margins, p. 5). As the differentiation that governs the formation of all signifieds as well as all signifiers, différence can never be reduced to either a concept or any particular set of graphemes. The manifest differences that pertain either to experience or to abstractions from experience (“meaning” as it is usually defined in Unnam’d Forms) are themselves effects of dif-
ference. (It could easily be shown that difference structures both the Lacanian symbolic and the Kristevan semiotic, and the distinction between the two would lose its absoluteness.) The crucial point is that difference at once produces and transgresses all possible forms of experience and meaning: “Difference is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological—ontotheological—reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return” (p. 6). Difference can never be placed in simple opposition to meaning, for meaning itself is an articulation of difference. And neither can any visible or experiential mode of textuality be directly identified with difference. Differential textuality, or écriture in the Derridean sense of the word, governs and overruns any bounded text available to experience. Derrida opens the possibility that all texts are internally conflictual, governed simultaneously by an economy of meaning (whether experiential or symbolic) and by an economy of loss of meaning, and that these two economies are mutually necessary.

We have returned to the question of Blake and Derrida, their encounter or missed assignment. And we have arrived at the issue of the use and appropriation of Derrida. Simpson: “Of all the major writers I know Blake is, along with Smart . . . and Joyce . . . . the most open to analysis in terms set forth by Derrida.” (p. 13). Mann: “Perhaps we encounter here something like what Derrida encounters in Rousseau’s Confessions” (p. 53). Essick: “deconstruction and histoire du livre, Derrida and the collector, share a small patch of common ground even if they rarely speak each other’s language” (p. 203). De Luca: “The terminology of our present-day discourse on textuality easily lends itself to the discussion of Blake” (p. 240). Blake and Derrida converge, find connection, make common cause. Derrida tends to supply terms and themes that can be applied to and discovered within Blake. But, paradoxically, what such use of Derrida prohibits is deconstructive reading itself.

The swerve away from deconstruction is marked most clearly in Carr’s essay. After noting that his “formulation of this ‘logic of difference’ and its implications bears certain obvious similarities to the idioms and insights associated with deconstruction, most especially to what Derrida labels difference,” Carr quotes Derrida:

the movement of play that “produces” (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference. . . . Difference is the nonfull, nonsimple “origin”; it is the structured and differing origin of differences.

Carr’s comments after the quotation are significant:

The virtual or imaginary origin of meaning constituted by the double inscription of an illuminated page exemplifies the “nonfull, nonsimple ‘origin’” of difference. Of course, Derrida’s formulation leads us to explore the ways each of these double inscriptions also

differs inevitably from itself, from what we may imagine to be Blake’s intention at each stage in his printmaking process. But, rather than directly following this line of thought, I prefer to focus on the way difference is related to the contradictory impulses of reproduction, to the repetition necessary for representation, in ways that further clarify the import of the logic of difference embedded in Blake’s process of reproduction. (p. 187)

The path that Carr chooses not to take—the examination of difference within text and design separately—could have made considerable difference. The mere fact that a plate is divided between word and image does not, in itself, manifest either difference or difference. Neither an emblem with its subscription nor an illuminated manuscript necessarily abrogates the logic of identity. And the same holds true for variations across handprinted editions: the tree that appears in the margin of Jerusalem, plate 36, in copy F but not in copy A (Carr’s example) may well be only a further elaboration of verbal and visual themes already present on the plate. Of course, such differentiation may be symptomatic of the operation of difference, but to establish that it would be necessary to enter the area that Carr turns away from—the invisible and inaudible differentiation at work within each design, each theme, each word.

The issue is really not whether the Derridean argument has been understood or misunderstood. If the encounter between Blake and Derrida were simply a juxtaposing of cultural icons, the use of Derrida by Blake’s critics would be a matter of great indifference. The important issue, though, has to do with how Blake is read and with changes in our readings, and bringing Blake and Derrida together (or, in the case of this review, bringing Derrida to bear on Blake’s Derridean critics) is one way of articulating and gauging that change. The editors are well aware that clean breaks with the past are impossible: “While this volume presumes to represent the ‘new,’ it cannot pretend to have escaped social and material constraints any more than the generation [of earlier critics] we have been relativizing” (p. 4). Ideological constraints are equally intransigent. Several contributors make a point of denying absolute innovativeness, both to Blake’s poetics and to their own analyses. But when Derrida is as consistently misread as he is here, it betokens the persistence of very traditional critical assumptions. Critics here confidently overturn classical norms of authorial intention and univocal meaning, but they also leave untouched and unexamined classical oppositions within Blake’s text: the superiority of “Intellectual powers” to “Corporeal Understanding,” the difference between “vision” and “allegory,” the distinction between the eternal and the fallen, and even the simple contrasts between experience and signification, materiality and ideality, signifier and signified. When critics merely invert the order of value and priority within the material signifier/ideal signified hierarchy, the structure of hierarchy is preserved, as is the act of giving value and
priority. Derrida repeatedly warns that simple inversions represent no change at all. David Simpson implies that a "radical Blake" who is made roughly synonymous with self-referential linguistic play is finally as unitary and reductive a figure as the previous visionary Blake (p. 23). By the same token, when plurivocity simply replaces univocity, it becomes univocal itself.

What possibility, then, is there for effectively different readings of Blake? What could Derrida in fact offer to Blake critics? If we accept that Blake's texts need not be univocal, even in their plurivocity, and that certain strictly defined contradictions govern those texts, then we may be able to proceed on newer critical paths. For example, one of the most striking debates in Unnam'd Forms concerns Blake's eternity: for Paul Mann, the fall is a fall into bounded, representational books, while eternity is atextually "seamless and present" (p. 52), but De Luca finds that Blake equates "divinity and textuality" (p. 238). In a footnote, De Luca quotes Mann, "Eternity is bookless, a perspective from which the book is seen as a hole torn in the seamless fabric of Eternity," and then responds that "it is not so much a case of language doing violence to Eternity as of Urizen doing violence to language, by limiting its endless potentialities to reductive descriptiveness and prescriptive fiat. But the living Words of Eternity still form collectively Eternity's ideal, unremoved book" (p. 238, no. 7). Mann replies that "to indicate the ideality of some counter-Urizenic disruption is already to target it for destruction, . . . just as De Luca's representation of Edenic textuality, elsewhere in this volume, itself exiles Blake's text from the Eden it describes" (p. 67). There is clearly disagreement here, but it is altogether unnecessary disagreement. Only if Blake's text says or performs one theme or action, only if the text says exactly what it performs, only if, in short, the text is again univocal is there any contradiction.

But if we give up the assumption of textual coherence, the blunt contradiction disappears and is replaced by something much more interesting and powerful. Blake's eternity aspires to a condition of absolute ideality, self-presence, and unity, but, as in the great vision of apocalypse that concludes Jerusalem, language persists in spite of that aspiration. Blake's eternity is given by the tension between the transcendence of language and linguistic forms that will not finally disappear. Blake's vision of language at the close of Jerusalem attempts, but fails, to deprive words of all those features that make them linguistic. And here is the crux: the drive to transcend language and everything in language that mandates the fall (absence, representation, abstract meaning, boundaries) comes from nowhere else but the domain of language. Blake's eternity is neither textual nor atextual; Blake's eternity is, as it must be within an idealist vision, a transcendence of textuality that, as it must within a poetic text, shows the marks of textuality. Blake's poetry may speak of textuality and the end of textuality, but it does not speak of those two things at the same time or in the same way. This is not to suggest that somehow Blake could or should have known the truth of textuality, for textuality as differance contains no truth that could be known. The conflicts that structure Blake's poetic discourse are not between two orders of truth, but between an order of truth (or meaning, whether experiential or symbolic) and an order of écrître that both motivates and eludes truth. And if we allow the text to become truly non-univocal, we may also begin to recover literary history, a problem raised by De Luca, Simpson, Edwards, and others. In the kind of Derridean reading I have been trying to suggest, Blake's poetry remains what it obviously is: an important episode in the late-eighteenth, early-nineteenth century project of idealist poetics that we know as Romanticism. That Blake's poetry also manifests other, non- or anti-idealist tendencies in no way denies that historical placement. Of course, history itself offers yet another opportunity to make the text univocal, so that against Simpson's charge that "Derrida and many of his disciples seem to offer precious little in the way of incentives to move the analysis beyond the surface of the text, back into the historical powers that constitute its play" (pp. 23–24), we can offer as Derrida's reply, "If the word 'history' did not in and of itself convey the motif of a final repression of difference, one could say that only differences can be 'historical' from the outset and in each of their aspects" (Margins, p. 11). Differance historicizes.

I suggested at the outset that Blake and Derrida do meet at certain points in Unnam'd Forms, and in most of the cases when they do, Derrida is not named. Three brief examples will have to suffice. When Hilton demonstrates that, in Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Oothoon functions as both the projected object of Theotormon's narcissistic desire and a covert representation of the poetic text, "the other that lives in a desire not to master but to know" (p. 104), he suggests that all reading would be the imposition of our desires were it not for the fact that text, in its otherness, anticipates and reads our projections. The model of interpretation Hilton offers is one in which "We see, and we see our not seeing; we know and know that we know only in part" (p. 101), and here both text and reading truly escape univocality. Similarly, Ault envisions The Four Zoas as a text woven by the interplay of structured patterns and the working of "discrepancies, inconsistencies, gaps, and discontinuities" (p. 112), and this critic is canny enough to refuse to valorize either aspect. By paying heed to both economies at once, Ault can show, for example, that the "Fall" is less an actual event to which the narrative refers than an event within the reader's construction—or misconstruction—of the narrative. The most powerful moment in Ault's essay comes when he notes, "There is, however, strong evidence that the precipitating event (the 'Fall') finally materializes in the text itself
at the moment the apocalyptic reunion of Tharmas and Enion takes place” (p. 118). Ault thus opens the possibility that, even as the fall is a function of the reader's understanding, the difference between fall and apocalypse may be extremely uncertain. Like Hilton, Ault refuses to reduce the text to any idealized readerly experience and shows how the text anticipates and shapes its own reading. Ault may seem at times to celebrate instability for its own sake, but his reading finally takes its place in the area between stable form and destabilizing breaks, the discursive space that Blake criticism needs to explore. Finally, while Vogler often succumbs to nostalgia for unmediated, pre-symbolic linguistic experience, he also names that temptation and recognizes the possibility that pure semiosis may be yet another theological illusion. After quoting Peirce on the infinite regress of signification, Vogler asks whether Milton’s attempt to take off all false garments and put on the clothing of “Imagination” means returning to a condition of nakedness or whether it means exchanging one symbolic covering for another (pp. 169–70). Does Milton, Vogler asks, recover a body free of allegorical clothing or does he just put on another mythic garment? Vogler is very hesitant to provide a simple answer, and rightly so, for no simple answer is possible. Vogler multiplies questions:

At issue here is the question of whether language is an autonomous master structure, a psychological and cultural anticathexis [defense against instinct in the Freudian sense], that always precedes the human subject and preincribes its parole, or whether there “really” is a void or gap in language that makes possible a “Divine Revelation in the Litteral Expression.” And if so, can it be “represented” in a literary text that does not in the very process of literary mediation reveal its absence? Can we name an unnamed subjective state without engaging in that process whereby the state in receiving a name is transformed into nothing more than a representation of itself? (p. 169)

Vogler replies to these questions with tentative affirmations, but they are so tentative, and the questions often so outweigh the responses, that it begins to seem that the correct answer must be, somehow, yes and no. For the last time, we meet the problem of naming names. But now it begins to be clear that all names misrepresent and thereby violate the realities they designate even as they also bring those realities into existence. The meaning of the symbolic word and the force of asymbolic language may be ultimately not that different. Names create the desire that transgresses them. And immediacy is an effect of linguistic mediations, though no less a compelling force for that fact. And, finally, the “Litteral Expression” of “Divine Revelation” can exist nowhere else but in an allegorical language that also misrepresents it. Naming and namelessness exist only in relation to each other, and the word that names also creates unnamed forms.

While Derrida’s name appears repeatedly in Unnam’d Forms, the name most reckoned with is, of course, Blake’s. At the end, Hartman asks, “Where does Blake get his authority from?” (p. 244). While the essays often deny the authority of authorial intention, they tend to maintain the authority of the text. Some of the problems encountered here stem from the attempt to make the text master of its own textuality and, thus, the authority for its own interpretation. But, as David Simpson observes, “in our myth of Blake’s aesthetic wholeness there may be something we should suspect” (p. 23). It takes fine critical tact to strike the right balance between giving the text its due authority and maintaining the power of analysis. To give the text more than its due authority is to reduce reading to commentary, which will usually be reductive itself, while overpowering the text by analysis ends in an equal oversimplification as the text simply mirrors analytic categories. Unnam’d Forms represents an advance in the demythologizing of Blake that will have to take place before Blake can actually be read, but vestiges of the myth endure in the phantasy of a fully textual text. Rather than making Blake into Derrida’s precursor, we need to allow their differences and let Derrida guide a reading of Blake that, since Derrida offers few themes or meanings, would not finally be “Derrid­ean.” When and if that happens—when and if both Blake and Derrida cease being masters of significance—then perhaps the “Unnam’d forms” will be heard to speak their names in the silences and cacophonies of Blake’s language.

1Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 26–27. All subsequent citations will be incorporated in the text.
2When Mann links Urizen’s attempt to confine existence within the book and the Derridean “Il n’y a pas de hors-texte,” he misses the force of the maxim (p. 54). Ecriture will always overrun the boundaries of any given text. Carr rightly associates difference with the interability of the sign (p. 187), though he then reduces difference to differences between signs and between appearances of one sign, a reduc­tion Essick justly criticizes (p. 202, n. 9). But when Essick dis­cusses the non-iterable graphic mark, he speaks of “a dif­ference constituted only by the difference between the sign’s being in space and its becoming in time” (p. 212), and this difference is really no differ­ence at all, despite Essick’s assertion, in a footnote on the same page, that it is.
3In Mann’s essay, the sentence actually reads, “Eternity is a per­spective from which the book is seen as a hole torn in the seamless fabric of Eternity . . .” (p. 51). Perhaps the circulation of essays among contributors prior to publication led to some revision.
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