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BLAKE/AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
Blake’s Bald Nudes

by Jenijoy La Belle

Among William Blake’s illuminated books, *Europe a Prophecy* draws particular attention because of the power of its designs. Plate 2, for example, is enlivened with three bald and naked combatants, plus a fourth figure grasping his hair or wig with both hands (illus. 1). Perhaps we are to imagine that he is escaping from the melee below. The central wrestler is having the best of it, for he has a headlock on one victim and is choking the other. The scene itself gives no clear clue as to why one man is treating his companions so nastly. The background suggests clouds, and thus the group would appear to be suspended in, or falling through, the sky. The text offers little help. Nothing in the poem clearly presents itself as a description of these wrestlers, although they may be among the “howling terrors” mentioned in line 4 of the plate, and the headlock and choke hold may be a cryptic answer to the question in line 13: “And who shall bind the infinite with an eternal band?” In copy D of *Europe* (British Museum), George Cumberland added to plate 2 verses from Richard Blackmore’s *Prince Arthur: An Heroick Poem* (1695), hinting that the three men are personifications of Horror, Amazement, and Despair:

This orb’s wide frame with the convulsion shakes,
Oft opens in the storm and often cracks.
*Horror, Amazement*, and *Despair* appear
In all the hideous forms that Mortals fear.”

These apocalyptic suggestions, clearly in harmony with the general tone of *Europe*, are given a contemporary context in David V. Erdman’s political interpretation of the design: “Pitt [the middle figure] is stifling expressions of Horror and Amazement at his catastrophic policy but is unable to suppress the silent figure of Despair, which is ascending” top right. Erdman modifies this reading in *The Illuminated Blake* (the “strangler” may be Henry Dundas rather than Pitt; the escapee at the top may be Lord Chancellor Thurlow) and adds that “the [lower] scene recalls young Hercules strangling serpents in his cradle.” He further suggests that the baldness and nakedness of the lower figures might be explained as an indication of Hercules’ infancy (but that could account only for the strangler’s appearance) or as a pictorial literalization of Thurlow’s loss of his “judicial gown and wig” when “expelled from Pitt’s cabinet.” This last point does not easily accommodate the identification of Thurlow as the figure top right since he retains his hair or wig. Indeed, Erdman’s specific identifications of these figures seem farfetched, although the general thesis that the iconography has a political dimension is sound.

A few precedents for bald and naked figures in the pictorial arts can enrich our understanding of these motifs in Blake’s work. Perhaps the most famous example in European painting is Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* fresco, completed in 1541. At least one of the damned, a prominent figure in Charon’s boat, lower right, clutching his head in despair, is bald and nearly nude (illus. 2). Blake’s knowledge of Michelangelo’s painting through reproductive engravings is virtually certain. Blake’s own Last Judgment design illustrating Robert Blair’s *The Grave* includes one such figure just above the lower margin of the image (illus. 3). Michelangelo’s figure, although completely dissimilar in posture, may have provided a precedent for Blake’s doomed soul who, much like the central wrestler in *Europe* 2, holds down two companions.

Michelangelo’s bald nudes are not the first such Renaissance portrayals of the damned. Luca Signorelli’s frescoes of the Last Judgment, painted 1499-
1504 in the Cappella della Madonna di S. Brizio of Orvieto Cathedral, include supplementary roundels of naked and bald men (illus. 4). Unlike Michelangelo's figure but like Blake's group in *Europe*, Signorelli's nudes are fighting or torturing each other. In the context of the whole fresco program, these scenes are visions of hell, as well as the sort of worldly behavior imitating and leading to a state of damnation. Blake might have known Signorelli's work through engravings, although I have not been able to locate any prints of these specific roundels. There is, however, another avenue for Blake to have gained access to Signorelli's designs. During his extended stay in Italy, 1787-94, Blake's friend John Flaxman visited Orvieto and sketched one of the roundels. Flaxman later integrated these figure types into his own artistic idiom and sketched at least a few designs featuring bald and naked combatants. He retained, even intensified, Signorelli's identification of such figures with damnation, as for example in a sketch illustrating Romans 6:16 (illus. 5). The sinner in the center of the composition retains a few locks, although far fewer than the well-thatched or bewigged figure in *Europe*.

The unknown date of Flaxman's designs and his absence from London until the year Blake etched on the title page to *Europe* make direct influence less than certain. But no such difficulty, nor the distance from London to Orvieto, attends upon a more public precedent for Blake's bald nudes. From 1676 until 1814, Bethlehem (or "Bethlem" or "Bedlam") Hospital for the insane stood in Moorfields, along the north side of London Wall Street (the present cite of Finsbury Circus). Over its main gate reigned two near life-size figures sculpted in Portland stone, the one on the left representing melancholy madness, and his chained companion on the right raving madness (illus. 6). These statues, the work of Caius Gabriel Cibber (or "Cibert," 1630-1700), were placed above the gate c. 1680.
and were not removed until the hospital moved its quarters to Lambeth. In recent years they have been kept at the Bethlem Royal Hospital, Beckenham, and the Museum of London. Both figures are bald and, although draped with small loincloths, are basically conceived as nudes.

Cibber's madmen were among eighteenth-century London's most famous public statues. In his attack on the sculptor's son, Colley Cibber, in *The Dunciad*, Pope makes reference to "those walls where Folly holds her throne" and "Great Cibber's brazen, brainless brothers"—that is, his father's sculptural offspring. The description of the statues by Blake's acquaintance Allan Cunningham gives some indication of their fame and impact: "Those who see them for the first time are fixed to the spot with terror and awe; an impression is made on the heart never to be removed; nor is the impression of a vulgar kind. . . . I remember some eighteen or twenty years ago, when an utter stranger in London, I found myself, after much wandering, in the presence of those statues, then occupying the entrance to Moorfields."

It would have been difficult for Blake, an inveterate walker and, like Cunningham and the speaker of "London" in *Songs of Experience*, a fellow wanderer in London's streets, not to have known Cibber's statues. Blake was certainly aware of the building these statues decorated, or its successor in Lambeth, for on plate 45 [31] of *Jerusalem*, he refers simultaneously to the biblical town and to London's hospital for the insane: "Bethlehem where was builded / Dens of despair in the house of bread" (E 194). A further and earlier connection with Blake's circle of friends is established by the engraving reproduced here (illus. 6), for it is based on a drawing by Thomas Stothard of the statues and their pediment. The plate was published as the frontispiece to a sixteen-page pamphlet of 1783 by Thomas Bowen, *An Historical Account of the Origin, Progress, and Present State of Bethlem Hospital.*
Blake's figures in *Europe* do not repeat the postures of Cibber's, but their nakedness and baldness would have united suggestions of madness to the iconography of damnation for a London artist and his London audience. The caricature-like faces of Blake's three wrestlers add to the implications of insanity. Although Cibber's figures are heavily indebted to Michelangelo's Medici Tombs in posture, architectural placement, and musculature, it was widely believed that they were based on actual inmates of Bedlam. According to Horace Walpole, "one of the statues was the portrait of Oliver Cromwell's porter, then in Bedlam." Recent arrivals at the hospital may have already had their heads shaven, and their wigs taken from them, but patients may have been kept bald to control head lice and other pests. William Hogarth's final plate in "The Rake's Progress" series of 1735 (illus. 7) shows Tom Rakewell in Bedlam—bald (like several other inmates), wearing only breeches, insane, and being placed (like Cibber's raving madness) in irons. The rake, and the half-naked religious fanatic on the left, may have been influenced by Cibber's statues as much as by real patients; but Hogarth's engraving indicates the extent to which a paucity of clothing (the would-be monarch in the central cell is stark naked) and a bald pate undecorated by a wig were identified with madness in popular imagery.

The legend that Cibber's melancholic was modeled on Cromwell's porter carries us back to Erdman's political interpretation of the scene in *Europe*. Perhaps the fate of the servant signifies something about the politics of the master—or even the fate of all regicides. Yet if Erdman is correct about the pictorial allusion to Pitt and his circle, then *Europe* 2 shifts the butt of criticism from the revolutionary to the establishment: England's policies are not only damnable, but insane. Further political implications arise if we take the similarities between Blake's figures and Cibber's to be a reference by the later work to the earlier, and from this extrapolate an allusion to the whole edifice of Bedlam. The building, over 500 feet in length, had an impressive façade "adorned with Corinthian pilasters, entablatures, foliage, &c." and a "balustrade of stone." According to Bowen's pamphlet (5 note), "the design of the building was taken from the Chateau de Tuilleries [sic], at Versailles" (corrected by hand in ink to "in Paris" in the Huntington copy), and this borrowing was taken as an insult by Louis XIV. A link is thereby established between the patatial hospital and actual palaces, with the further implication that housing madmen in such a structure could be taken as a comment on the residents of similarly constructed buildings. By Blake's time, it was known that the foundation of Bedlam was weak and the building was slowly sinking—hence the move to new quarters in 1814. In 1794, the "foundations" of other palaces—their authority, their dignity, and the ethos they represented—were also crumbling—most spectacularly in France, but also in England in the eyes of many liberal artisans and intellectuals. The intertextual reflections between Blake's bald nude and Bedlam supplement and deepen the political iconography explored by Erdman.

The appearance of bald nudes in two of Blake's later designs continues the implications of insanity. In the year after *Europe*, Blake designed and first executed a group of color prints, including *The House of Death* based on *Paradise Lost*, bk. 11, lines 477-93 (illus. 8). Blake's interest in Milton's description of "A Lazar-house" may have been stimulated by the reformist efforts of John Howard, whose *Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe* appeared in 1789, with a second edition in 1791. Bedlam was among the hospitals Howard visited. Although he found some conditions to commend, he notes in passing that "there is no separation of the calm and quiet [inmates] from the noisy and turbulent, except those who are chained in their cells."

may have also known George Romney's series of drawings based on Howard's more horrifying descriptions of prisons and hospitals elsewhere in Europe. Two figures in Blake's *House of Death* embody the iconography of nakedness (or near nakedness) and baldness. Like the distinction between melancholy and raving madness in Cibber's statues, Blake's print would seem to include a personification of melancholy standing along the right margin contrasted with the more animated and anguished visage near the left margin. Martin Butlin identifies the figure on the right margin of the color print as "Skofeld" in white line beneath the lines from *Milton*, who is introduced as "bound in iron armour before Reubens Gate" (19.59; see also *Jerusalem* 11.21-22). This location makes the characteristics Skofeld's portrait shares with Cibber's raving madness (illus. 6) more prominent. In a separate impression of plate 51 (Keynes Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum), Blake cut the word "Skofeld" in white line beneath the man on the right, thereby identifying him with the character in Blake's late poetry based on John Scofield, the soldier who charged Blake with sedition in 1803. "Scofield" (the spelling changes frequently) first appears in *Milton*, where he is introduced as "daemoniac Frenzy, moping Melancholy/And Moonstruck madness." Like the patch on Rakewell's chest in Hogarth's print (illus. 7), the dagger held by Blake's despairing madman suggests the contemplation of suicide more than murder.

Blake's final rendering of a Cibberian madman slouches near the right margin of *Jerusalem* plate 51 (illus. 9). Although this figure is clearly developed from his predecessor in the color print (illus. 8), the absence of the knife and the addition of chains make his relationship to Cibber's raving madness (illus. 6) more prominent. In a separate impression of plate 51 (Keynes Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum), Blake cut the word "Skofeld" in white line beneath the man on the right, thereby identifying him with the character in Blake's late poetry based on John Scofield, the soldier who charged Blake with sedition in 1803. "Scofield" (the spelling changes frequently) first appears in *Milton*, where he is introduced as "bound in iron armour before Reubens Gate" (19.59; see also *Jerusalem* 11.21-22). This location makes the characteristics Skofeld's portrait shares with Cibber's statues above Bedlam's gates all the more appropriate. To portray his accuser and the powers he represented as insane, Blake once again used the bald and naked imagery linked to Bedlam's inhabitants, both sculptural and human.


2 All the lines Cumberland added in his copy of *Europe* are quoted, and their sources identified, in S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (London: Constable, 1924) 348-51. The substitution of "the convulsion" for "this convulsion" in the lines from Blackmore's poem indicates to Damon that Cumberland was quoting from the excerpt in Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry* (415 in the London 1708 ed., under the subject-heading "Storm"). It is possible, but far from certain, that Blake suggested or approved of these additions by his friend, but at the very least Cumberland seems to be working within the iconography of bald nudes discussed here.

3 Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire, rev. ed. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969) 220. Erdman's assumption that only two of the personifications in Blackmore's poem refer to the struggling group may be correct. However, since Cumberland wrote the lines from *Prince Arthur* below the plate and added a passage from Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* (1699) above it, the identification of Blackmore's three personifications with the three figures in the lower part of the plate seems more likely on the face of it.


5 The specific engravings Blake saw have never been identified. Possible candidates include the ten detail plates by Giorgio Ghisi (mid-1540s), the nine plates by Nicolas Beatrizet (1562), and the single engravings of the entire fresco by Giulio Bonasone (c. 1546), Giovanni Battista de' Cavalieri (1567), and Martinus Rota (1569). George Cumberland owned an impression of Bonasone's print—see his *Some Anecdotes of the Life of Julio Bonasone* (London: Robinson, 1793) 61, and An Essay on the Utility of Collecting the Best Works of the Ancient Engravers of the Italian School (London: Payne and Foss et al. 1827) 310-11. For reproductions of the engravings by Cavalieri, Rota, and Bonasone, see Charles De Tolnay, Michelangelo: The Final Period
John Flaxman 1755-1826

6 For reproductions of Flaxman's pencil drawing (15.2 x 36.2 cm., Victoria and Albert Museum, London) and Signorelli's gisaille, which it copies, see David Irwin, John Flaxman 1755-1826 (London: Studio Vista, 1979) 41. Blake and Flaxman were close friends from no later than the early 1780s—see G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1999) 18-19.

7 See Robert R. Wark, Drawings by John Flaxman in the Huntington Collection (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1970) 49: "The motif of tumbling figures, pulled downward, is common in Flaxman's art, especially the funerary monuments, where it becomes a symbol of the damned in opposition to the blessed." See for example But Deliver us from Evil, a wash drawing illustrating "The Lord's Prayer" (produced in David Bindman, ed., John Flaxman [London: Thames and Hudson, 1979] 123), and Inferno plate 32 (two wrestlers) and Purgatorio plate 16 (falling figures) among Flaxman's Dante illustrations (first engraved 1793). Bald heads in some preliminary sketches may simply reflect the unfinished state of the compositions, but this is unlikely in the finished wash drawings and published engravings cited here.

8 The identification of each figure is apparently traditional. The first printed description I have found is Colley Cibber, An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber (London: for the author, 1740) 5 (quoted in Bowen's pamphlet [5 note] discussed below). For photo reproductions of the statues removed from their pediment, see Howard Roberts, ed., Survey of London (London: London County Council, 1955) 25: plate 41.


10 Alexander Pope, The Dunciad, ed. James Sutherland, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1963) 271. "Brazen" is a comment on Colley Cibber, but also appropriate for his "brothers" since the stone statues were stained to simulate patinated bronze.


12 Blake knew Stothard well by no later than in 1780—see Bentley 19.

13 The last line of the inscribed verses is bound into the spine of the Huntington copy, reproduced here, but is fully revealed in a copy of the pamphlet offered by the London bookdealer C. R. Johnson, January 1990, catalogue 29, item 126, with the frontispiece reproduced. I am indebted to my colleague George Pignon for the following rough translation: "A double column raises itself at the gates of Bethlehem; the stone on the outside has an image of the people within. On the right (5 note) a man leans his bald head with a sad face; on the left, iron chains hardly hold another man. The madness in the statues differs, but each madness praises each work and the genius of the sculptor." These lines are quoted from Lusus Westmonasterienses (Westminster: A. Campbell, 1730) 78, a collection of Latin verses and epigrams.

14 Anecdotes of Painting in England, 3rd ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1782) 3: 146. Bowen notes that this "tradition" identified the porter with the "melancholy lunatic" on the left (5 note). Margaret Whittemore, Sculpture in Britain 1530 to 1850 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), reproduces the melancholic (pl. 36B) and comments that Cibber's "two powerful nude[s], horrify[ing] in their realism, must surely have been studied from the life..." (49).

15 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, in his comments on Hogarth's engravings first published in German, 1784-96, notes that "it is said that Hogarth took the idea for that remarkable head [the baldheaded man far right] and for the one opposite in No. 54 [the religious fanatic far left] from the excellent statues above the portal leading into the courtyard of Bedlam." (quoted from Lichtenberg's Commentaries on Hogarth's Engravings, trans. Innes and Gustav Herdan [London: Cresset P, 1966] 269n1).


17 The building's limitations may have been one of the motivations for Bowen's pamphlet. The problems with the weak foundation are described by Roberts 25: 76 and by Thompson and Goldin 68.

18 Howard, An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe (London: J. Johnson, C. Dilly, T. Cadell, 1791) 139.


21 See Sean Shesgreen, Engravings by Hogarth (New York: Dover, 1973) plate 35: "The patch under [the rake's] breast suggests he may have knifed himself."

22 Paley, The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1983) 217, comments that "Skofield is represented in Jerusalem pl. 51 as either a madman (cf. Hogarth's dying Rake) or a convict, which is what he had wanted to make Blake."
Blake and the Tradition of Lamentation

Sandra Kamusikiri

Recent scholarship has demonstrated without a doubt the multiplicity and importance of the biblical allusions in Blake’s Jerusalem. Scholars have also shown that Blake’s assumptions about sublimity have much in common with the ideas of such eighteenth-century poets and literary theorists as John Dennis, Edmund Burke, Edward Young, and Robert Lowth. These lines of scholarly investigation up to this point have yielded a wealth of insights into Blake’s thought and artistry, yet for the most part they remain separate areas of study. By linking the two, however, we can enrich our understanding of Blake’s prophecy.

One unnoticed outgrowth of this association is the comparison between Blake’s and the Bible’s version of Jerusalem’s lament and its relationship to eighteenth-century commentary on the sublimity of the Bible. Specifically we can compare Jerusalem’s lament in chapter four (pls. 78-80) of Blake’s prophecy with Jerusalem’s lament in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Robert Lowth serves as a late eighteenth-century guide to how Blake’s contemporaries understood this biblical passage and its sublimity. The thematic, imagistic, structural, and rhetorical parallels between Blake’s poetry and its biblical counterpart, and their correspondence with Lowth’s commentary on the sublimity of the lament reveal not only Blake’s skill as a visionary aesthetcian who both adopts and transforms the prophetic style of sublime Hebrew poetry, but suggest also the manifold meanings of his term “the Sublime of the Bible” (Milton 1).

Robert Lowth’s Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, written during his tenure as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, was heralded by his contemporaries as a milestone in the literary understanding of the Bible. In the Lectures Lowth “put aside the literary assumptions of his age,” and approached the Bible “without preconceived notions.” Lowth presented the biblical poems as visionaries and seers, a fact which attracted poets turning from the strictures of eighteenth-century poetry to new models. Among these may have been William Blake, who could have known about Lowth’s Lectures, given their immense popularity, his interest in the Bible, and struggle to create what he calls unfettered poetry (Jerusalem 3).

Lowth attributes a significant portion of the sublimity effect of the Lamentations of Jeremiah to the personification of the Holy City as a woman wracked by sorrow. Personification, in Lowth’s view, is “by far the boldest and most daring” of the various types of figures; it has “uncommon force and expression [and] in no hands whatever is more successful in this respect than in those of the Hebrew writers” (1: 281). Personification achieves its most powerfully sublime effect when objects are denominated as female, or more specifically when “nations, regions, peoples, are brought upon the stage as it were in a female character” (1: 285, 287). The greatest example of this can be found in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, believed by Lowth to be an “extraordinary production” and “the most remarkable legend extant” (2: 130-31). What can be more sublime, he argues, than “the description of that once flourishing city, lately chief among the nations, sitting in the character of a female, solitary, afflicted, in a state of widowhood, deserted by her friends, deserted by her dearest connections, imploring relief, and seeking consolation in vain” (2: 138)? The effect of Jeremiah’s presentation of Jerusalem as a suffering widow is “excessive, and predominates in the mind” (2: 138), and characteristic of the affective power of the sublime, the mind “becomes heated to fury and madness” (1: 381), until finally it is carried away “with irresistible violence” (2: 86).

What strikes us most immediately, perhaps, as the clearest and most obvious indications of an affinity between the Lamentations of Jeremiah and Blake’s poetry are the personification of the City of God as a woman cast into the depths of suffering, and the focus on her destruction. In the Lamentations the comparison is explicit: “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become” (1.1). Blake’s personification of Jerusalem is far less literal than that in the Bible and depends on the aggregate of our understanding of Blake’s prophecy, his mythopoetic symbols and the Bible as a pretext. The focus of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, according to Lowth, is “the destruction of the holy city and temple, the overthrow of the state, [and] the extermination of the people” (2: 137). Blake asserts a similar focus in the opening lines of Jerusalem’s lament:

Naked Jerusalem lay before the Gates upon Mount Zion
The Hill of Giants, all her foundations leveld with dust!

Her Twelve Gates thrown down: her children carried into captivity
Herself in chains

(78,21-24)

In the biblical lament Jerusalem declares that her “children are desolate for the enemy has prevailed” (1:16). Blake’s Jerusalem also laments the destruction of her children who have been “dashd / Upon Egysr iron floors, & the marble pavements of Assyria” (79,1-2, 78,31).

Although Jerusalem’s destruction evokes sublimity because it is horrifying and sad, this effect is heightened by the prophet’s description of the ruin of the Holy City “as actually accomplished, and not in the style of prediction merely” (Lowth 2: 137). In this way Jeremiah intensifies her misfor-
tunes and adds to the prevailing mood of solemnity and sorrow. This is also true of Blake’s Jerusalem. He presents her destruction not as portent, but as a completed fact. While this in and of itself suggests sublime sadness and horror, its narrative context heightens these feelings to an even greater degree in that the Holy City’s destruction marks the culmination of the triumph of evil, a time when the natural world seems to have fallen to the deepest point in Ulro and a return to Eternity seems impossible. Jerusalem’s destruction follows Albion’s descent into a death-like sleep, Rahab’s ascent to “power over the Earth” (78.16), and her conspiracy with her sons to destroy Jesus and “usurp the Throne of God” (78.19).

There are also a number of other striking parallels between the two laments. Besides parallels in subject matter, we can also identify similarities in imagery. Blake’s descriptions of the suffering and torments experienced by Jerusalem echo those in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. In the Lamentations, Jerusalem states that the Lord “spread a net for [her] feet” (1.13). Blake, employing similar images of entrapment, describes Jerusalem as “Encompassed by the frozen Net” (80.1), a phenomenon of the fallen world in Blake’s mythology, suggesting coldness, death, and fixity, in contrast to the warmth, flexibility, and energy associated with Eden.

Parallel images in Jerusalem and the Lamentations of Jeremiah suggest also the obfuscation of Jerusalem’s form, the loss of divine light, and her separation from the Lord. Jeremiah describes Jerusalem as having been “set . . . under a cloud” by the Lord, who in his anger “has cast down from heaven to earth the splendour of Israel” (2:1). Likewise, Blake’s imagery suggests the eclipsing of Jerusalem’s form and her separation from heaven. She appears “Disorganiz’d; an evanescent shade, scarce seen or heard” (78.28). Lost in darkness, she “seeks for light / In vain” (79.11-12), is closed “into a dark land of pitch and bitumen” (79.61), and lost in an “eternal night of pain” (80.5). And like her counterpart in the Lamentations, she finds that God has forsaken her and she has become “an outcast from the Divine Presence” (78.31, 33).

Finally, Blake, like Jeremiah, presents Jerusalem as having been separated from all that can provide her comfort and security. In the Lamentations, Jerusalem mourns that “among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, / they have become her enemies” (1.2). She grieves about the loss of her comforters:

my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my courage;

I called to my lovers but they deceived me; My priests and elders perished in the city (1.16, 19)

Blake’s Jerusalem also seeks for allies and finds that all have fled from her or have been destroyed:

I walk to Ephraim. I seek for Shiloh: I walk like a lost sheep Among precipices of despair: in Goshen I seek for light In vain: and in Gilead for a physician Gonen hath joined with Og! They are become narrow places in a little and dark land (79.10-14)

Whereas the biblical passage is literal in its description of Jerusalem’s isolation—her comforters, priests, and elders have abandoned her—Blake’s poetry resonates with multiple meanings. By imaging Jerusalem’s comforters as biblical locales, Blake intensifies her isolation, for she is cut off from not only individual people, but also from entire cities and lands. She is separated from Ephraim and Shiloh, which are associated with the sacred first site of the Tabernacle, divided from Goshen, the area inhabited by the Israelites and known as the “best of the land” in Egypt (Damon 166), and closed off from Gilead, known for its healing balm (Jeremiah 8.22). All of these locales, associated with comfort, priestliness, and healing, have become lost, shrunk, and darkened. Moreover, they have become spiritually corrupted in that Goshen and Gilead join with Og and Philistea, places associated with unholiness, Satan, and the Covering Cherub in Blake’s mythology (Damon 306, 326).

As is typical of Blake’s adaptation of traditional sources to fit the thematic demands of his prophecy, this corruption of the holy lands suggests that the distancing of Jerusalem and the natural world from the Divine Vision may be, in the context of Blake’s myth, an even greater cause for a feeling of sublimity than the image of Jerusalem as an isolated, grieving person. To put it another way, Jerusalem’s destruction necessarily affects the entire natural world, and in this respect the Blakean sublime is evoked not merely by a single object, but by the realization of the metaconnection of all things. As Paley rightly observes, Blake’s “appropriation of the language of the Bible in parts of Jerusalem goes far beyond mere imitation; it is the product of a remarkable assimilation of biblical texts that can then be recast into new forms of utterance” (Continuing City 50).

The structural parallels between the two laments can best be seen by discussing them in the context of Robert Lowth’s analysis of the design of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Lowth sees in it a tripartite structure consisting of its outward appearance, internal blocks of ideas (or what he calls the “grand divisions”), and the sentence arrangement (2.131, 134, 32). In its outward appearance the biblical passage seems spontaneous and unstructured. Bemoaning the destruction of his country, Jeremiah, in the character of a mourner, “pours forth in a kind of spontaneous effusion . . . whatever presented itself to his mind in the midst of desolation and
miserly, whatever struck him as particularly wretched and calamitous, whatever the instant sentiment of sorrow dictated" (2: 131-32). Similarly, Blake pours forth details about not only Jerusalem's destruction—"my tents are fall'n! my pillars are in ruins," she states—but also the annihilation of the world. The hills of Judea have fallen into the deepest hell, Mount Zion has become a desolate rock, Albion's hills and valleys are "no more," the fifty-two counties of England cast Jerusalem out, the Euphrates is red with blood, and Druid Temples "overspread all the Earth in patriarchal pomp and cruel pride" (79.15,20-21,66-67). Jerusalem's lament resembles a catalogue of destruction.

In his grief Jeremiah "frequently pauses and... ruminates upon the same object; frequently varies and illustrates the same thought with different imagery, and a different choice of languages; so that the whole bears rather the appearance of an accumulation of corresponding sentiments (2: 132). In a way that suggests the influence of biblical poetry on his work, Blake repeatedly describes Jerusalem's exiled state in corresponding images: she walks "like a lost sheep / Among precipices of despair" (79.10-11) and wanders "in the narrow passages / Of the valleys of destruction" (79.60-61); she is "an outcast from the Divine Presence" (78.33) and is closed out from the four-fold world (79.58-60); she "seek[s] for light" (79.11), and is "raised up in a night / To an eternal night of pain, lost! lost! lost! for ever!" (80.4-5).

Typical of his transformation of traditional sources, Blake produces the effusive quality of his lament by including in it a profusion of place names and rapid shifts from one place and time to the next, all packed tightly onto a single plate of illuminated text. Blake names biblical places (Shiloh, Philistea, Gad, and Goshen), modern countries such as Germany, Poland, Spain, and Italy, and counties and rivers in England, thus creating a continual movement from near to far and ancient to modern. Most of the lament appears on a plate containing very little illustration, so that it seems to be filled with script from top to bottom and margin to margin. In addition, the lettering on this plate differs from that on other plates filled with text, such as 48, 80 and 86, in that the script is smaller and more densely packed and contains none of the spacing between paragraphs that is typical of some of the other full text plates in Jerusalem. This textual density is reminiscent of what V. A. DeLuca calls Blake's "wall of words," a plate which contains "bris­ting ranks of capital letters, verse without syntax, nouns without predication, names without context," all of which combines to create in the reader a feeling of sorrow, like Kant's sublime of magnitude." In Jerusalem's lament, the temporal and spatial motility, combined with the crowding of the text and the lack of paragraph spacing, contribute to the sense of unrelieved destruction and grief—the sublimity—conveyed by the lament.

Although on one level the Lamentations of Jeremiah appears to be "an accumulation of corresponding sentiments," Lowth identifies in it also an ordered arrangement. It consists of five parts or grand divisions, each of which is in turn divided into twenty-two periods or stanzas, with the exception of part three which consists of sixty-six periods. While on one level Blake's version of Jerusalem's lament, like its biblical counterpart, appears to consist of an unstructured profusion of images that dramatize the depth and intensity of her sorrow, we can also identify in it some "grand divisions." Blake has organized the lament into three units, consisting of approximately thirty lines in each. The beginning and end sections feature the torment of the woman and the destruction of the Holy City (78.21-79.21 and 79.53-80.5, respectively), and the middle section offers a portrait of the ideal Jerusalem before her destruction (79.22-52).

The detailed portrait of the Holy City before its ruin marks Blake's divergence from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. His description of the unfallen Jerusalem contrasts sharply with Jeremiah's brief description. The biblical prophet's only references to the ideal Jerusalem are the allusion to her as a princess (1.1) and a single question: "Is this the city which was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?" (2.15). In contrast, Blake describes Jerusalem in a way that particularizes and makes concrete the vision of her "perfection of beauty." In the center section of the lament, Blake presents a clearer, more determinate vision of Jerusalem's human form, while in the other two sections images of the ruined city predominate. Whereas Jerusalem appears in the fallen world as a "Disorganized... evanescent shade" (78.28), in eternity all the world "discern[d] her countenance with joy!" (79.28). She is not isolated, but involved instead in joyous, loving, human activities: she "pour[s] Joy upon every mountain... teach[es] songs to the shepherd & plowman," and embraces the little children (79.37,25-26). In her Edenic state Jerusalem's world is expansive, not shrunken. Her pillars "reachd from sea to sea" (79.24), and Spain, with its golden hills, served as her "heavenly couch" (79.40). Germany and Poland "found / My gates in all their mountains & my curtains in all their vales," she declares (79.45-46).

This detailed portrait of the ideal Jerusalem suggests Blake's skilful revision of biblical sources to fit the narrative and thematic demands of his prophecy. It functions as a momentary opening of the center, a kind of visionary "stay" against the deepening of the Fall, and serves as a prelude to the apocalyptic vision of regeneration at the end of Jerusalem. It signals the end of what Erdman calls the "night of death" (E 357), and heralds the "building up of Jerusalem," the thematic focus of chapter four. Blake's vision of the ideal Jerusalem forms a cohesive core
which seems to bind together the parts of the lament and acts as a preview of the extended, minutely detailed portrait that Blake presents in Los' Song (85.14-86.32) later in chapter four. Consistent with Blake's mythology, the description of the unfallen Jerusalem is placed in the center of the lament—as Eden occupies the center (Milton 28.38)—and is associated with images of expansiveness and determinateness.

Lowth analyzes the form of the Lamentations according to three criteria: its outward form, the grand divisions, and the sentence arrangement. As we have seen, the first two criteria indicate clear parallels between the Lamentations and Jerusalem. An application of the third criterion to Blake's poetry demonstrates even more vividly his adoption of traditional sources and his complex treatment of them.

Parallelism is the name that Lowth gives to the particular arrangement of sentences which he believes is unique to biblical poetry. He defines parallelism, which depends not on meter, but on the correspondence and balance of sense units, as "the correspondence of one verse, or line, with another. . . . When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it, in sense, or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction" (2: 32n10). He classifies parallelism according to three types: synonymous, antithetic, and constructive parallelism. The following lines from Jeremiah's lament contain parallelism and remind us of the thematic concerns of Blake's poetry. For example, Jeremiah's descriptions of Jerusalem's sorrow contain synonymous and constructive parallelism:

Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress,  
my soul is in tumult,  
my heart is wrung within me (1.20)

My eyes are spent with weeping;  
my soul is in tumult;  
my heart is poured out in grief (2.11)

In six statements containing equivalent images, Jeremiah describes the suffering of Jerusalem. Constructive parallelism, the grouping of sentences with similar grammatical construction is evidenced by the repetition in each statement of the word "my" and verb structure "to be." A similar correspondence of sense units is clearly evident in Blake's description of Jerusalem's suffering and his repetition of the subject-verb structure "I walk" in the lines,

I walk weeping in pangs of a Mothers  
torment for her Children:  
I walk in affliction (80.2-3)

Blake imbues the entirety of Jerusalem's lament with prosodic cadences reminiscent of those in biblical poetry. Several scholars such as Paley in The Continuing City, Tannenbaum in Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies, and Roston in Prophet and Poet have discussed the connection between Blake's poetry, Hebrew verse, and Lowth's commentary on biblical poetry. However, no one, as yet, has analyzed Jerusalem's lament in the context of either Lowth's concept of parallelism or the sentence arrangement in the Lamentations. The following lines, in which Blake's Jerusalem describes her destruction, echo the thematic content of the Lamentations and suggest the influence of biblical parallelism (I have divided these and subsequent lines from Jerusalem to highlight the parallelism):

My tents are fall'n!  
my pillars are in ruins! (79.1)

My fires are corrupt!  
my incense is a cloudy pestilence  
of seven diseases! (79.56-57)

In statements containing parallel images and grammatical structures, Jerusalem mourns her separation from the Divine Vision:

Once a continual cloud of salvation  
rose from all my myriads;  
the Four-fold World rejoiced  
among/The pillars of Jerusalem (79.57-59)

Blake describes Jerusalem's isolation in a longer unit of parallelism:

[Albion's] hills & his valleys no more  
Receive the feet of Jerusalem:  
they have cast me quite away:  
And Albion is himself shrunk to a narrow  
rock in the midst of the sea!  
The plains of Sussex & Surrey, their hills  
of flocks & herds/No more seek to  
Jerusalem nor to the sound of my Holy-ones.  
The Fifty-two Counties of England are  
hardened against me/As if I was not  
their Mother,  
they despise me & cast me out (79.15-21)

In this passage, the repeated images of division and contraction which are central to Blake's myth of the Fall underscore the fragmentation of the natural world, and the distancing of it and Jerusalem from the Divine Vision. Isolated, Jerusalem is hated, cast out, and no longer sought. The various spiritual locales shrink and harden against her.

In contrast, in the middle section of the poem containing Blake's portrait of the ideal Jerusalem, the parallel sentences emphasize expansiveness and loving, cooperative human activities rather than contraction and isolation. For example, whereas in the fallen world Albion "is shrunk to a narrow rock in the midst of the sea" (79.17), in eternity Albion and his emanation, Jerusalem, overspread the earth:

My fires are corrupt!  
my incense is a cloudy pestilence  
of seven diseases! (79.56-57)

In statements containing parallel images and grammatical structures, Jerusalem mourns her separation from the Divine Vision:

London beheld me come/From my east  
& from my west (79.22-25)

Blame presents images of cooperative human activities in a series of parallel images and grammatical structures:
Turkey & Grecia saw my instr[ument]s of music, they arose
They seiz'd the harp: the flute: the mellow horn of Jerusalems joy
They sounded thanksgiving in my courts
(79.48-50)

Places that were divided by the fall are connected in Eternity:

Thames poured his waters into my basons and baths:
Medway mingled with Kishon:
Thames receivd the heavenly Jordan
(79.34-35)

By means of these parallel images, Blake is able to dramatize in the middle section of the lament the humanization and restoration of the universal society of nations, events which remind us of the grand vision of regeneration which takes place at the end of the prophecy.

Clearly then, the profusion of parallel lines in Jerusalem’s lament suggests an affinity with the Lamentations and highlights Blake’s rejection of eighteenth-century metrical patterns, the manifestations, he believed, of “the modern bondage of Rhyming” (Jerusalem 3). Whether or not Jerusalem’s lament is the result of his knowledge of Lowth’s ideas or simply his deep familiarity with the Bible and belief that the “Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art” (Laocoon, E 273), it is clear that the subject matter, structure, and cadences of the Lamentations of Jeremiah are present in Blake’s version of lament. As Roston explains in his study of the impact of the Bible on the romantic movement, “the Bible, including the Old Testament, was the noblest and most inspired literature in the world, and the spirit of Hebrew prophecy permeated not merely Blake’s verse but even his daily life” (160). Blake was able to transmute his understanding of biblical poetry into the uniquely Blakean thematic, imagistic, structural, and rhetorical features of his prophecy. And this, combined with his rejection of eighteenth-century aesthetics and his search for alternative poetics, enabled him to effect in Jerusalem’s lament the prophetic resonances of Hebrew poetry and the “sublime of the Bible” (Milton 1).

5 Roston 21.

A Swedenborgian Bible

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

A mong the articles of faith of the New Jerusalem Church was that “the Books of the Word are all those which have the internal Sense” as defined by Emanuel Swedenborg.1 The list of exclusions from the Swedenborgian Bible is formidable: Thirty-two books, about a fourth of the bulk of the Protestant canon, including Job, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Acts, and all the New Testament Epistles.

Presumably the followers of the New Jerusalem Church, such as William Blake, his friend John Flaxman, the New Church printer Robert Hindmarsh, and Blake’s friend C. A. Tulk acted on the basis of the Swedenborgian canon. We know that Blake did, for in his Jerusalem (1804-20) the Divine Lord builds a tomb for the dead Albion ornamented “with emblems & written verse, Spiritual Verse, order’d & measur’d” (48.6-7) which contains exactly the canon of the Bible established by Swedenborg and endorsed by Blake and others at the 1789 New Church meeting.

Since the canon of the New Church Bible is so different from that of all other Protestants, one might have expected Robert Hindmarsh, the Society’s printer, to print a Bible for their use. However, the only Bible text for Swedenborgians recorded in the standard bibliography of the Bible in English is for Genesis only, and it did not appear until 1912.2

However, there was a Swedenborgian Bible issued in Blake’s time, and it was available just when he was issuing his Milton and working on his Jerusalem. It is a bibliographically curious work entitled

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5 Roston 21.
THE WORD OF GOD:
BEING
DIVINE TRUTH ITSELF,
PROCEEDING FROM
The Lord's Divine Love;
AND CONTAINING

.............

DIVINE WISDOM AND DIVINE LIFE, / AS
REVEALED TO MAN IN THE / OLD AND
NEW TESTAMENTS, / AND RECEIVED AND
/ ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE NEW
CHURCH, / SIGNIFIED BY / THE NEW
JERUSALEM, / IN THE REVELATIONS, / =
/ LONDON: / PRINTED, FOR THE
SOCIETY OF IMMANUELITES, / OR THE
WORSHIPPERS OF THE LORD JESUS
CHRIST, AS THE ONLY GOD OF HEAVEN
AND EARTH, / BY GEORGE HAZARD,
BEECH-STREET, BARBICAN. / / 1809.

A section on "The Books of the Word" explains that "The Books of the Word are all they which have the internal Sense," and it lists the Books of the Word exactly as in the 1789 meeting, with cross-references to Swedenborg's Arcana Coelestia No. 10325 and Heavenly Doctrine No. 266.

However, only a small fragment of the work was actually printed by George Hazard whose name appears on the title page. A note to "The Books of the Word" explains:

N.B. The Title page, with the contents of this leaf—a page of the end of JUDGES—end of II. KINGS—beginning of PSALMS—end of PSALMS—and at the end of ST. JOHN only, were Printed by GEORGE HAZARD, Beech-street, Barbican, 1809. But the BIBLE itself was PRINTED FOR GEORGE EYRE AND ANDREW STRAHAN, PRINTERS TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY, 1806.

The passages printed by Hazard were bridges to replace gatherings removed when those parts of the Bible which "have not the internal Sense" were removed. The work is therefore the Bible as printed for Eyre & Strahan in 1806 as abridged by George Hazard in 1809 and 1813 to make it conform to the Swedenborgian canon of the New Jerusalem Church.

It seems likely that those deeply interested in Swedenborg, such as William Blake and John Flaxman, would have known of such a publication and might even have consulted or purchased it. At any rate, this Bible as abridged by George Hazard in 1809 and 1813, demonstrates that the Swedenborgian conception of the true Bible was actually printed twenty-some years after it was publicly affirmed at the meeting to establish the New Jerusalem Church in 1789.

1 Minutes of a General Conference of the Members of the New Church Signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelation (London, 1789) 1. The articles were signed by W. and C. Blake, almost certainly the engraver and his wife.


3 The only copy of which I have record is in the Glasgow University Library. Volume 2 is dated 1813.

Blake
Set to Music

A Bibliography of Musical Settings of the Poems and Prose of William Blake

DONALD FITCH

Volume 5, University of California Publications: Catalogs and Bibliographies
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This international bibliography of musical settings of the poems and prose of William Blake lists solo songs, choral works, chamber and orchestral works with vocal parts, and other works without voice but inspired by the works of Blake. Also included are indexes of Blake titles, performing combinations, translated texts, and names.

Reviewed by Robert F. Gleckner

As she indicates in her preface, Janet Warner has been studying for a number of years what she calls variously Blake's visual vocabulary, pictorial language, visual shorthand, visionary cliches—in short the language of art of her title. From 1970 through 1977 she published several essays that have become the heart of this book, most notably “Blake and the Language of Art” in the *Colby Library Quarterly* (1977). There she more firmly articulated, and elaborated, the thesis first essayed in her contributions to David Erdman and John Grant's 1970 *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* and to Morton Paley and Michael Phillips's 1973 festschrift *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* (chapters 3 and 6, respectively, of the present book). We have learned much from her about Blake's “formula-figures” as she calls them, their poses, postures, and gestural configurations which “carry a nucleus of meaning” that “often works in conjunction with his verbal text” (but not always), that constitute a language “sometimes ... complementary to the poetry” (sometimes not), but that always extend our understanding of “the important concepts of Humanity, Form, and Energy which all Blake readers must strive” to know if we are to know what Blake is all about (xviii)—not to say how, as we have learned to say, his composite art is to be experienced.

I shall come back to my two parenthetical remarks later on, for they raise important hermeneutic issues that are insufficiently addressed by Warner but are faced by all Blake interpreters. But first I go back to my opening sentence and its phrase “the heart of this book”—a generous phrase, in one sense, since the previously published articles actually constitute the bulk of the book's pages. If we exclude for a moment full-page illustrations, about 34 pages of text represent work previously published. Of the 186 pages of the book (excluding the preface, notes, and index), 71 are either full-page illustrations (53) or near-full-page illustrations (18), seven are blank, and one contains three brief paragraphs introducing part 2 of the volume. There remain the equivalent (counting the part-text part-illustration pages as well) of 73 pages of previously unpublished discussion. Needless to say, my arithmetic is not intended to suggest an oversupply of illustrations, especially for a book devoted to Blake's designs; indeed, while they are generally well chosen and of good quality, Warner refers us to a number of other books as well, Butlin's *Paintings and Drawings,* the Erdman et al. *Night Thoughts,* Roe's *Divine Comedy,* and Bentley's *Four Zoas,* occasioning thereby some awkward logistical reading problems (unavoidable in many cases, but annoying nevertheless). In any case, a book that has 106 illustrations, even one in which each illustration does not require major discussion, a little over one page of text per illustration in what purports to be more than a compendium or taxonomy simply cannot raise it much beyond that status. Yet Warner's claim is that she demonstrates how Blake's designs “can be the key which unlocks the treasure chest” of meanings (xvii), how they “underline” (and even help to define) major ideas and concepts in the work (xviii), how they often derive from an extraordinary array of artistic repositories of images, symbols, allegorical figures, emblems, and the like not only in the history of art but also in the theory and history of acting, pantomime, dance, oratory, commercial textile design, and physiognomy. The thoroughness and assiduousness of her research, then, paradoxically lead to a disappointing cursoriness of critical discussion, the impact of which is further diminished by an odd mixture of firm and shrewd interpretations, guesses (both provocative and unilluminating), and the non-disentangling of the obvious or commonplace from the learned or derivative.

What we have, then, is a book that is at best informative with respect to Blake's possible, sometimes probable, sources of a visual, gestural language that had been codified in a variety of ways, at least since Aristotle, Plutarch, Suetonius, Horace, Quintilian, and nearer Blake's own time, Charles LeBrun (*Expression des Passions,* 1698; translated into English in 1701), Gerard de Lairesse (*The Art of Painting in All Its Branches,* 1738 English translation of 1707 original), Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (English edition 1789, to which Blake contributed 4 plates), John Bulwer (*Chirologia* or the Natural Language of the Hand and Chirotonia: or the Art of Manual Rhetoric, 1644), Gilbert Austin (*Chirotonia,* 1806), and John Weaver (*The History of the Mimes and Pantomimes,* 1726)—among others, of course. It is an interesting history in its own right, a rather remarkable reflection, as Warner notes, of the eighteenth century's “obsession” with “the naming and categorizing of gesture and attitude in the arts,” an encoding of meanings that had become “the general lore” understood by performing and graphic artists of Blake's time (68), and clearly familiar to Blake himself if only through his early training in Pars's drawing school, where “Copy Forever” was not only the rule he enunciated for himself in his Annotations to Reynolds but the standard school rule as well. Along with what Blunt, Hagstrum,
Bindman, and a host of others have taught us about Blake's borrowings and thefts from classical artists through an amazing variety of others right up to his own day, and with what Bo Lindberg has revealed about Blake's use of pathos formulae in his Job designs, Warner's history obviously adds to our fund of visual linguistic lore, without which we could not appreciate what Stephen Behrendt in The Moment of Explosion calls the iconographical "flexibility and adaptability" of Blake's visual imagery. As he argues in careful detail with respect to Blake's Milton illustrations, those qualities force us out of the "intellectual automatism" of culturally conditioned responses to certain icons, gestures, postures, even colors, "into the sort of informed analysis and interpretation governed not by convention" (certainly not by convention alone) but by our entering into active engagement with living forms, at once unique and universal (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1983 [182-83]).

Part 2 of Warner's book, entitled "Blake's Visionary Forms," is intended to do precisely what Behrendt says we should do. And there are moments when Warner does it very well indeed. Yet overall, upon completing the four essays, I came away with a sense of something like déjà vu, of knowing much of this already, certainly in part from Warner's previous publications, but also from our own (however acquired) visual-linguistic lore. The three brief paragraphs introducing the essays give away the burden of the mystery, if indeed there was one:

figures with outstretched arms stand for creativity or, in their fallen state, power perverted to tyranny; huddled and head-clutching figures signify psychic energy; and dancing figures appear to be symbols of energy of the body, mortal impulses.

This hardly reassures us that she will pursue in detail her announced "central concern," the discovery of "to what extent their meanings are defined by the context in which they appear" (xviii) —presumably both graphic and verbal contexts. More often than not we get something like the odd sequencing of chapter 3 on the gesture of outstretched arms. The opening pages remind us of much that we know about cruciform positions, followed by a brief account of Blake's variations on the basic, standing form in hovering and "knee-raised" figures with arms outstretched. The latter position, we are told, "can perhaps be said to suggest at best God-as-Man, The Poetic Genius, and at worst, fallen man's idea of God as authority" (92, my emphasis). "At worst" and "at best" are hardly clear, but presumably they refer to the flat declarations that immediately follow: "Poetic genius is implied by the figure of an old man with raised knee in All Religions Are One . . . ; the similar figure of America 8 represents Urizen, man's perversion of this poetic genius into authority." C'est ça. We are back to the introductory paragraph quoted above. No comment on hand positions, despite all the pages spent on hands in part 1 of the book; nothing on faces despite similar analytic preparation; no real contextualization. Only a list of other figures in similar poses elsewhere in Blake which "appear to have similar connotations"—followed by the conclusion, (solidified somehow beyond the tentativeness of "can perhaps be said to suggest," "appear," and "simi-
lar"), that "we have seen already that this is the stance of the Poetic Genius" (my emphasis). It is not, alas, an isolated instance.

Four pages later (96) we are reminded that "there are details . . . which help to contextualize the forms so that the variations or additional facets of meaning become clear." Hand positions, for example, though "subtly differing . . . can modify the meanings of the outstretched arms like signals helping us to experience the designs with greater delicacy." There follows a descriptive list of different hand positions—upward, palms out; forward; downward; "sloping." No further comment—until page 102 where we are told what these several hand positions mean, more or less regardless of context. Again on page 120, in Warner's dealing with hunched-up figures of despair, Blake's variations on this basic form are described as "always subtle—a head bowed or unbowed, a gesture of arm or hand, knees open or ankles crossed—and yet they are always important clues to meaning." Fine; but it is precisely the elucidation, interpretation, and argument about this subtlety that Warner all too often sacrifices in favor of declarative namings, a kind of visual allegoresis that undercuts rather than highlights the very delicacy that she obviously sees (and that we see at her prompting) but for whatever reason all too rarely explores.

In her conclusion, Warner returns to her "central concerns" about context in two rather odd (at least to me) ways. Her first sentence of the "Conclusion" (185) asserts that her "principle concern" has been twofold: "to demonstrate that a visual language exists in Blake's designs" and that language can "reinforce our understanding" of the designs, "often" illuminating "the ideas of the texts they illustrate." As I indicated earlier, by now there are few of us who haven't discovered that visual language one way or the other—including our reading of Warner's own earlier work. Moreover "reinforce our understanding"
Robert N. Essick needs no introduction to readers of this journal, who, more than any other audience, best fulfill his vision of the “something very like a hermeneutic community generated by Blake’s works” (224) and who have already embraced Essick’s catalogues and his studies of Blake’s “materials and methods of production, the ways they determine the images they convey, and the historical and quotidian engagements their use entails” (1). This latest contribution sets out “to situate Blake within the history of language theory and to generate a hermeneutic on the basis of that history” (2). The result is vaguely reminiscent of Morton Paley’s Energy and the Imagination (Oxford, 1970) as Essick presents in Blake’s works a kind of paradigm shift from structuralism (and post-) to phenomenology; that is, from “dyadic signification (signifier/signified) to triadic interchanges among author, text, and reader” (223); or again (subsuming Paley), from signs to Logos and “power” (235, 5). All of this makes for provocative reading, and the seventy-five pages that selectively epitomize—with special regard to Blake’s interests—seventeenth and eighteenth-century speculations on the origin and nature of language will, in particular, prove useful and rewarding.

But where Paley could point into the text and the inverse fates of his chosen terms dramatized in pre- and post-Felman word-counts, Essick’s argument depends on our acceding to a host of words he brings to the feast. “Logos” is one, and a bit more than a minute particular, given that the book culminates in “The Return to Logos” (chapter 5). The index suggests that this Big Word (it’s always capitalized here) relates to “language, God’s”; one context identifies it as “God’s Word, which brings the universe into being” (11), others as an “ideal” form of semiosis with “the co-presence of conception and execution” (85) and “the power” to “create . . . objects or give them organic life” (26). Blake never uses the word, though he certainly knew the Greek of John 1:1, and perhaps the accusative form (logos) together with xooas, “living,” oozes in his good news of Golgonooza (that un-ideal place of organic life). Some accounts derive the noun logos “from the Greek verb lego, ‘to pick out, to gather,’ as seeds were gathered by the early food gatherers,” an etymology pertinent to Jesus’ gloss that “the seed is the word” (Luke 8:11). The spore, or sperm, or semen, is logos.

Essick’s book begins by bringing some words to an untitled painting of Blake’s, which, he agrees with Rossetti, should be called “Adam Naming the Beasts” and labels “a painting about language” (10). He proceeds to educe two “readings” of the design, one of which evokes “the dream of the motivated sign” and the “companionship
of phenomenologists like Humboldt and Heidegger, while the other, focusing on the serpent, privileges “absence and difference” and the evidently less congenial “company” of more structural thinkers like “Nietzsche, Sartre, and Derrida” (16). The picture thus becomes a signifier for “the double perspective on language” (27, 206) that the book proposes. Although he reports that he “can see no easy way of eliminating one of the two opposing interpretations” and does not “feel any great compulsion to do so” (16), an inherent logocentrism emerges in subsequent descriptions of the second reading as “my negative or ironic interpretation,” “my negative or Derridean interpretation” (41, 135-36). But returning to the design (see dust-cover, reproduced above), one wonders if there isn’t at least a third position, like the one triangulated by—and “shewing”—“the two contrary states of the human soul.” This position would incorporate the seed Adam’s finger points to, a curiously emphasized acorn which seems rather precisely to mirror the outline of Adam’s own head indicated by his thumb (one might fill in the curve joining the outer halves of Adam’s eyebrows to see, like a beginning artist, the seed for the sketch). Seed, head, and thumb-index joint are thus the corners of a triangle or triadic relationship which is itself “the seed of Contemplative Thought” by which “the Imaginative Image returns.”

“Adam Naming the Beasts,” as the history of that title illustrates, offers an example of Blakean dissemination: seeds—words, texts, designs—are planted “To spring up for Jerusalem” which “IS NAMED LIBERTY” (J 85.29; 26). “Blake’s way of producing texts,” writes Essick, “leads us to view language performance as the liberation of an inherently limited self” (190). But the liberation comes not in performance perse but rather “in a book [liber, Ll.] that all may read,” and the irrecoverable, scattering dissemination of writing-being read/reaped. For Essick, however, there is no loss in this process since we still have “[r]eading aloud from books—a literal return of the written back into speech” (172): the ideal is not dissemination in writing or “producing texts,” but in spoken conversation. “[S]poken language, more than any other semiotic medium, generates and almost seems to achieve that illusive and perhaps illusory ideal, the Adamic sign” (185), that is to say, “the ideal union of word and world, represented by the Adamic or motivated sign” (84). Union, communion, conversation, community, all figure as ways of circumventing those “negatives,” absence and difference, and establishing identity or self-presence. The difficulty of the task appears as Essick contends that “[i]n rapid or ecstatic speech, we enter self-consciously into the medium” and don’t sense “a gap” between thoughts and the words that seem “in a fully motivated union with our thoughts” (185) only to note, rushing on, that “[i]n rapid conversation, we all say things we don’t mean” (191).

The book’s “double perspective” on language can be correlated with the division between semiology and semiotics, Saussure and Peirce. Simplistically put, Saussure sees the sign as signifier and signified existing in synchronic and diachronic dimensions. The exponenation of these (and other) pairs to deal with change is easily forgotten, and Saussure’s binary predilections make him seem the epitome of “rationalist linguistics” (135). C. S. Peirce, by contrast, “gives us a definition of a sign that adds to the sign/object, signifier/signified relationship the interpretant, a sign in the mind, and he argues that his triadic relation is irreducible.” A crucial point—for it is where time and change enter—is that for Peirce the individual “interpretant” is, as he puts it, “nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as a representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series” (Sheriff 119). Both of these sign-systems are “open” in that they do not posit an ontology or teleology and accompanying value system—in every communication there is some slippage, some lurking quantum differential, some possibility of mutation. Since Saussurian semiology is to be discarded as negative and “fallen” (53), its openness poses no threat, but in order to save the alternative, Peirce’s semiotic must somehow be closed. This closure, with all that it entails, looms as a memorable and distinguishing mark of Essick’s book.

Discussing the painting, untitled by Blake, “Christ Blessing” (why not “Jesus Blessing?”), Essick focuses on the blessing hand as a “kerygmatic or ‘performative’ gesture” which “does what it signifies.” “The structure of this sign,” he explains, “is not dyadic (signifer/signified) but triadic, requiring for its completion the signifier (physical gesture or sound), the signified (blessing), and the recipient believer whose condition is changed by his inclusion within the signifying process” (25-26). And here a footnote explains, “My sense of the triadic nature of performative signification is based in part on C. S. Peirce’s analysis of all signs as triadic. His concept of the ‘interpretant’ fulfills the same function within signification as my ‘recipient,’ but the two cannot be equated in other respects. Peirce’s interpretant is another sign, whereas my recipient is a human response necessarily included within the performative sign to complete it as such” (25n). The ideal sign is to be completed: the message delivered; presence assured: no loss. For Essick’s Blake, “the chain of signs, arbitrary or motivated, must begin and end somewhere,” and “this point of origin and ultimate reference is the immutable truths of religious conviction” (99). Like Blake’s works and the “hermeneutic community” they have generated (224), “Christ’s kerygmatic signs avoid the solipsism of pure self-referentiality by extending incarnation to the community of faithful recipients” (26)—“[t]he process is circular,” in other words, “and avoids solipsism only
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the sublimity of Blake's allegory, then, "depends ultimately on what is signified (transcendental truths) and who is addressed (true believers)" and posits "a triadic structure (sign, referent, recipient) based in turn on the community of speaker, audience, and the medium joining them" (97). This medium is language ("the mediatory action of language" [234]), that is to say, Christ (with his "traditional mediat or role" [200]), or, finally, "Logos." Hence, in the "trajectory of linguistic recovery shaping the language of the Songs of Innocence" (112), "[i]ndividual words (child, lamb, meek, tender, voice, He, I, thou, and name) achieve their full meaning only [!] in relation to Christ, conceived either as a shared origin and referent or as a universalized form of C. S. Peirce's 'interpretant,' the companion sign providing the necessary context" (113). But for Peirce there cannot be any such "universalized form" since "a sign is a dynamic, triadic relation of representamen, object, and interpretant within a certain ground" or, (Wittgenstein's term) "language game" (Sheriff 92, 94).

What are Essick's grounds? He quotes with approval Schleiermacher's opinion that "[i]n interpretation it is essential that one be able to step out of one's own frame of mind into that of the author" (222) and states in the afterword that "[i]n the spirit of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic, I have frequently identified my interpretative orientation with what I take to be Blake's own linguistic suppositions" (238). What, then, is one to make of the capitalized pronominal references to God and Christ, not to mention the preference for "Christ" over "Jesus"? One of Blake's "models for language," argues Essick, is "Christ's body, the signer with a motivated relationship to a spiritual—not a fallen or utterly natural—signified. As Blake writes at the conclusion of There is No Natural Religion, Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (115). Yet seven pages on, we read that "the belief that God becomes as we are so that we may be as He is, so clearly enunciated on the concluding plate of There is No Natural Religion, offers ... more than stylistic implications" (122). Indeed: the $b$ altering altars all—as, in a quite different way, does Blake's lower case c for "christ" (PFZ 105.28).

Discussing "The Lamb"'s "language of innocence," Essick argues that the reflected symmetry of "He is called by thy name" and "We are called by his name" indicates the common derivation and interchangeability of "child," "Lamb," and Christ, immanent through the Songs whenever these names for Him are spoken. "Shepherd," "father," and all their attendant adjectives and named qualities also gather about, and derive their meanings from, this central point of origin. (113)

But perhaps this "reflected symmetry" is a bit more fearful than Essick's frame allows: Jesus in point of fact never "calls himself a lamb," which stresses for us the question of who is active behind the passive "He is called," "We are called." As this unspeaking voice of "The Lamb" makes clear, one cannot talk about naming without entering into power, the imposition of form, Althusser's "interpellation" (our being "called" by a discourse and in responding, acquiescing to its authority), Lacan's "Name/No [Nom/Non]-of-the-Father," and everything else that helps us understand the language instruction that is "education." In his Innocence, Essick accepts Christ "as the sign of the father/origin" (113), but I suggest that Blake knows as well as Lewis Carroll that the question in naming is "who is to be master," who is to say what's "immanent" or "innocent"; and what Essick sees as the "extra-linguistic, even ontological, origins" (113) of relationships among words in "The Lamb" can be located more materially in the child's verbatim repetition of snippets from Sunday-school catechism and hymnsinging (cf. James' lesson in The Pilgrim's Progress, part 2, which begins, "Canst thou tell who made thee?" and Charles Wesley's "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" in his Hymns for Children). This is merely to acknowledge, as Essick does elsewhere, "the simple yet necessary event of ... hearing the word ... before naming ... " (236). Given such implicit recognition that "By the act of speech the external world becomes converted into an internal one" (232), one regrets the absence of any psychological model for considering the interconstitutive relations between language and imagination, or kinds of motivation in a "motivated sign" (the Lacanian Symbolic and Imaginary would seem particularly apposite to such considerations). The child is, to be sure, naturally (i.e., genetically) motivated to exercise its limited degree of semiotic mastery, but that exercise is thoroughly coded and channeled by culture—as evident, for instance, in the different ostensibly onomatopoetic ("motivated") representations of animal sounds in different languages.

The "double perspective" of William Blake and the Language of Adam emerges in contrasting discussions of The [First] Book of Urizen and of Jerusalem, which contrast works to highlight the shift Essick sees in Blake's "ideas about language's essential character" (238). The contrasts between the grammatical and the phenomenological, the differential and the constitutive (239), not to mention (same difference?) the "rationalist and theological" (27) are of course not absolute but serve to illustrate "the different ways texts respond to different conceptions of language" (238). Urizen here thematicizes "the problem of difference and its presence in semiosis" (128), in keeping with Urizen's "fall" into "the language described by the rationalist tradition of sign theory from the seventeenth-century grammarians to Derrida" (149-50). Jerusalem directs us to "[t]he kind of semiosis, if any, Urizen falls away from" and, according with its grounding in the different linguistic tradition "nascent in Boehme, emergent in Humboldt, and continued by Heidegger" (149, 238) of-
fers as "an alternative to the self-defeating structuralisms of Urizen" the "three key semiotic concepts" of "articulation, conversation, and community" (203). The language presented in Urizen "constructed out of differential signs will, in its very attempts to bridge difference with reference, carry with itself the void, the absence, from which it sprung" (150—the possible analogy here with another "miraculous birth to a sign" [24] goes unremarked). But "[the desire of language to win existence in reality] carries Jerusalem "to a vision of language reclaiming its power as the Logos" (235). In the world of Urizen, the identification "It is Urizen," "[this simplest of all copular structures, asserting the unity of 'it' and 'Urizen,' presupposes their difference] and "unavoidably replicates" it (150), while in the universe of Jerusalem, "the medium is the origin" (161) and "Jesus is the 'Divine Revelation'" (202).

While Urizen suggests "difference as the fundamental ontological category" (149), the Blake Essick favors is primarily committed "to the shared ontological source of all form in spirit" (115). But "are they Two & not One"? (J 57.9). Does not Urizen "as origin of difference/dispersion" (151) dissemination ground "the possibilities for continual (re)conception Blake dispersed throughout the process of production" (192)? Consider the crucial moment Essick three times returns to, "when Urizen directly utters 'Words articulate'" (151; 153, 204). The passage, never cited, reads:

3. Shriv the trumpet: & myriads of Eternity,
   Muster around the bleak deserts
   Now fill'd with clouds, darkness & waters
   That roll'd perplex'd labring & utter'd Words articulate, bursting in thunders
   That roll'd on the tops of his mountains

4. From the depths of dark solitude . . .
   etc. (3.44-4.6)

It's not Urizen ostensibly speaking here, but "clouds, darkness & waters." In his usual thorough way, however, Essick supplies the key in reminding us, earlier on, that "als Alexander Geddes pointed out in 1790, 'in the language which Moses spake, the word rendered voice, signifies, in general, every kind of sound, and . . . particularly the awful sound of thunder" (105). The point, in view of "the primeval Priests assum'd power," isn't "the emergence of articulate speech out of natural utterance" (204), but the attribution, the projection of speech into nature (forgetting where All deities reside): in the imagined beginning was the word, which was what the thunder was heard to say ("not!" in thunder, no doubt). For this jump to occur there had to have been a complex interpretative and psychological structure "always already" in place. Urizen's "Words articulate" do not "lie at the heart of his taxonomic matrix" (204) so much as at the horizon of Blake's psycho-cultural vision.

"Words articulate, bursting in thunders" can exemplify what Essick very usefully discusses as Blake's "literalization of figuration." By this term he denotes how Blake "grants substantial being to what we would usually take to be only a figure of speech" (224). So, for instance, "Blake asks us to believe in the literal existence of his trope of the Last Judgment and to refuse its conversion into a trope" (99). In this case this means, I should think, that we must reconceive our notion of the Last Judgment (if "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" IE 562)—though the comedy shouldn't be overlooked: "a Last (act of) Judgment (until the next)!"). Such reconceptions would affect "Him" as well. For Essick, The Book of Urizen particularly evidences the "sinister uses of literalization" (225) and shows "a foolish mind reifying itself into a world" (229). Perhaps. But it strikes me that a great deal depends on how we take the speaking "I" of Urizen's "Preludium." If we hear him or her as other than Urizen (returning, with Essick, the written "primeval Priests" into a spoken singular possessive meaning "Urizen's" [155]), then the "objectivist, grammatical, and spatial" scene Essick constructs is convincing enough. But if, as in "The Argument" to Visions of the Daughters of Albion, this speaking "I" is the protagonist in propria persona, a slider and a wiser man, then Urizen, as much as Jerusalem, "asks its readers to abandon synchronic reductions and follow an apocalyptic quest through the diachronic activities of the linguistic mind" (238-39) and into Blake's you-aRe-I-zen of our rise in reason and vision.

Robert Essick has long established himself as a leading authority on Blake's material production; with this volume he marshals exemplary scholarship to suggest how, in the terms of older linguistic theories, Blake in effect finds his way from structuralism to phenomenology; and he breathes new life into "the full ontological potency" and "the conversational dynamic of language in eternity," as well as "divine Logos" (233).


Reviewed by Gary Harrison

In "History and Genre," Ralph Cohen argues, pace Derrida and Jameson, that by treating genre as a process and not as an essentialist configuration of common elements literary critics can use genre "to study literature as an interrelated system of texts and society." Grounding its analysis of diachronic continuities and discontinuities in romantic literature and criticism in a study of the social and psychological implications of generic transformations in the late eighteenth century, Clifford Siskin's The Historicity of Romantic Discourse puts Cohen's theory of a generic literary history into practice. By examining how certain generic features recur in romantic discourse from Hazlitt to Hartman, Siskin convincingly shows that criticism of romanticism inevitably replicates the discursive practices of the romantics themselves. Thus, the "visionary company" has engendered a revisionary company whose attempts to produce criticism of romanticism have resulted only in a proliferation of romantic criticism. Few critical texts manage to break free from the developmental tales of romanticism (see below), even those, like Jerome McGann's The Romantic Ideology, which remark how romanticism haunts the critical texts it generates.

Offering yet another "new literary history" to replace the old—Alan Liu and Jonathan Arac have recently offered other kinds of "new literary histories" of romanticism—Siskin cautiously avoids taking what he calls the "lyric turn" of the romantics and their critics. Instead he makes what might be called a generic turn that rejects the idea of developmental continuity between generic features and functions. In looking at differences, not developments, in the use of genre—what Siskin, using the eighteenth-century term for genre, calls distinctions of "kind"—Siskin hopes to discover in the discontinuity of function and form the features that constitute, and enable us to objectify, literary and social change. Like Foucault's archaeology, Siskin's inquiry treats genre as a dynamic set of formal procedures which function differently at certain historically specific junctures. By giving priority to genre (as process) Siskin's project purports to posit change "in terms of how the functions of shared features and procedures shift as the forms they constituted enter into different hierarchical relationships" (28). Thus, unlike the neo-Marxist and New Historical studies of romanticism (among which Siskin's book should nevertheless be placed in its attempt to shake Anglo-American critics of romanticism out of their romantic slumber), Siskin's book discards the language of ideology for a Foucauldian "vocabulary of change" (10) that locates the practices of power not in repressive state apparatuses nor in determined acts of historical displacement but in the discursive practices through which human beings produce knowledge.

In exploring the repetition of romantic discourse in romantic criticism, Siskin first describes what he calls the "lyric turn," the discursive strategy that results from an uncritical assimilation of the generic procedures constructed by romantic discourse: writing up difference in terms of degree rather than kind, depicting change in terms of development rather than succession, and psychologizing change in terms of expressions of imaginative genius rather than functions of form. The lyric turn attributes change in literary form to the progressive development of individual genius(es), fitting the individual products of that genius into an oeuvre whose sum transcends its constituent parts and which is marked by an expressive unity. That desired unity is the trap in which post-romantic criticism of romanticism finds itself endlessly revising the "developmental tales" that defer all questions of formal innovation to states of mind. Spousal verse, in other words, engenders a spousal criticism that begins with the priority of the subject and ends tautologically by tracing back through selected works (often of different genres) the developmental history of that subject. As Siskin puts it in his critique of Thomas McFarland's Originality and Imagination, "Since the early nineteenth century, the literary order of lyrical development has dominated the disciplinary interrelations of our educational institutions, producing scholarship that documents developmentally conceived truths by assembling facts and sources into developmental narratives" (45).

Such developmental narratives, as Siskin emphasizes, do not simply function to authorize the independent subject but also to legitimate the professional position of literary critics within the Anglo-American university system. The "rhetoric of imagination" has the institutional power "to delimit the range of literary studies and to write the politics of the profession" (46). Rather than repeat ourselves and the romantic poets whose discourse we speak, we should ask how our repetitions define our positions in the practice of criticism, how they privilege the concepts of originality and imagination, and especially how they naturalize the hierarchy they construct. The answer to the last question is that the developmental tales of the transcendental subject collapse differences of "kind into degree" (46). This distinction of degree naturalizes the "transformation of hierarchy from a structure based on inherited, unchanging distinctions to one that
proposes an initial equality subject to psychological and developmental difference" (46). Siskin shows this strategy at work in Wordsworth's evaluation of the poet as a man who differs only in degree from other men, Coleridge's distinction between the primary and secondary imagination, and Blake's collapsing of the difference in kind between the human and the divine. In each of these instances we see an articulation of a discursive feature that attempts to make sense of the changes in the structure of social relations at the beginning of the nineteenth century when horizontal affiliations of class displaced vertical affiliations to the landlord or to the familial centers of small-scale communities. In academia today, the distinction of degree perpetuates and legitimates our institutional practices: "As critics serving the creative, our sympathetic turn from kind has made us the arbiters of degree—the degrees of cultural literacy that naturalize the social hierarchy by psychologizing difference as a matter of developing minds" (63). Thus romantic discourse serves social and political as well as aesthetic interests.

If abolishing distinctions of kind naturalizes the priority of, and the hierarchy produced by, the romantic subject, what features construct that priority in the first place? One constitutive feature of the romantic turn to the transcendental subject is a particular kind of personification, the function and form of which differs from the familiar trope of eighteenth-century literature. Siskin convincingly demonstrates that in its eighteenth-century form, the authoritative voice of personification acts upon a passive self. For example, in Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" the speaker's identity is a consequence, not a source, of the personifications that subject him to their active power: "Fortune,' 'Fame,' and 'Science' ignore him, 'Melancholy' marks him, and 'Misery' takes from him 'all he had' (ll. 117-23)" (74). Thus, personification is an agency of collective truth that subordinates the writer's individual judgment to a general voice of authority. Moreover, in demanding a certain competence, personification excludes entire classes of readers from its purview. In substituting universal for individual judgment, personification functions "as a metonymic affirmation of community" (69) sustained by a hierarchy of kind. In its romantic form, on the other hand, these terms are transformed. Personification gives way to an active subject; the "I" of the romantic poem itself becomes a kind of personification that "casts nature in its mold" in order to "form an authoritative identity" that must construct—through a process of development or growth—its own links to community (79). Hence the need for the apostrophes to an implied reader in Wordsworth's or Cole- ridge's poetry—a Dorothy or a Sara—whose presence in the poems offers a family model of the relation between author and reader.

The shift from an objective to a subjective form of personification, as one might describe this formal transformation, inscribes a new relationship between poet and reader. Siskin suggests that the aporias and fragments we find in romantic poetry are formal devices that propose to hand over the completion of the poem to the reader. That is, romantic discourse interpellates the reader, too, as an autonomous subject who must enter into a sympathetic relationship with the writer in order to form a new kind of community. Writer and reader become co-producers of a community founded upon the communicative act itself. Because Wordsworth believed that the model of community posited by objective personification was artificial, Wordsworth rejected personification (of the eighteenth-century kind at least) and proposed instead a natural community, "a new poetic family" (81) elicited in the text by repetitive diction, negative transitions, and apostrophes to an implied reader. As Siskin summarizes the significance of this shift, "in the absence of personification, the individual self has been rewritten to occupy the center of power; replacing the myth of uniform selves tied to the old hierarchy of interests is a myth of individuality that masks the newly drawn inequities of class by emphasizing not what everyone has passively in common, but rather what each person can accomplish actively on his or her own" (78).

While Siskin links this need to construct a poetic family to the rise in literacy in the late eighteenth century, his argument would be more precise were he to further consider the problematic relationships between reader and writer, not only in Wordsworth's idealized poetic family but particularly in the case of Blake's vexed relationship to the poetic family his work envisions but never effectively produces or Shelley's apparently contradictory attempts to cultivate both an elite community "of the more select classes of poetical readers" and a mass readership among the proletariat. Readers of Blake may find interesting Siskin's suggestion that in the introduction to Jerusalem Blake fuses the language of sympathy and the language of family as an invitation to his readers to join his poetic community. Yet they will
also question, as Paul Mann has, whether or not that community is ever realized. By contrasting what romantic discourse intends and what it accomplishes, we might have a better idea of the actual social power and social effects of that discourse. One often gets the sense from Siskin’s book, contra Jon P. Klancher, that romantic writers actually succeeded in creating the audiences they imagined.4

As a result of the formal innovation upon eighteenth-century personification, romantic discourse constructs the subject as an autonomous entity in need of linking itself to others by continuously transcending its former self, by developing within a continuum from past to present and beyond. The self becomes, in Wordsworth’s phrase, “something ever more about to be.” Furthermore, with the formation of the developing self arise institutions based upon the naturalization of the subject as an inevitable unity whose place among others depends upon “the psychological conformity necessary for sympathetic identification,” which is itself dependent upon “the ability to communicate—literacy—as the means and measure of social power” (84).

Much of Siskin’s argument turns on how romantic discourse posits this subject as a center of feeling, which, as in Jane Austen or Wordsworth, may be taught to feel more deeply in the process of its development. This progress of feeling is possible because of the invention of depth. Literature, for this subject, intervenes in the depths of the self to effect a cure (vide John Stuart Mill on Wordsworth).

For romantic discourse, the deeper one feels, the greater degree of sympathetic identification with others is possible. Thus the distinction of degree reconfigures feeling for the romantic subject as a measure of the depths of personal development. Within these depths romantic discourse coverts inscribes the normative imperatives of the culture. Siskin makes a useful distinction between the novels of sensibility, which use personification as a means to make overt their moral purposes, and romantic novels in which that purpose persists but in a more subtle form: “We will find that long after the novel stopped lecturing us on sensibility and poetry ceased being elevated and didactic, both types of writing remained, and remain, conduct books of the most sophisticated kind” (93). Rather than wear the badge of their morality on the sleeve of the text, as it were, romantic novels (and poems) insert that badge in the deep pockets of the subjectivity the discourse enunciates. The agency of that pocketing is the lyric turn.

In attempting to summarize the broader outlines of Siskin’s book, I have necessarily overlooked many useful observations the book delivers. Siskin, for example, attributes to romantic discourse the very invention of Literature (with a capital L) as a restorative agency for the feeling self. In an important chapter, he shows that the practice of revision in the eighteenth century admits of gaps between past and present which undermine the conception of the writer’s œuvre as a continuous whole transcending the sum of its parts. The idea of a writer’s œuvre, as he points out, is the product of romantic discourse itself which rejects the eighteenth-century principle of revision as addition and replaces it with one founded on a theory of transcendence. Citing Young’s Conjectures on Original Composition (1750) and Burke’s Sublime and the Beautiful (1757), Siskin notes how each text uses the past to provide models for, not (as in romantic discourse) explanations of, the present. Whereas Burke and Young consider change as discontinuous succession, Wordsworth conceives of change as a utopic process of development that may eradicate hierarchy: “the wished-for end of development and of Romantic revision is a Unity that transcends difference” (108). If this sounds like something we’ve heard before, it is. But what is unique about Siskin’s re-telling of the desire for such unity is that he shows that the desire is formally constructed, not inevitable; that it is a change in kind, not in degree, from eighteenth-century conceptions of self and society. In many ways, the texts that Siskin’s argument most effectively liberates from the hegemony of romantic discourse are those mid- and late-eighteenth century novels and poems whose unique features have been obscured under the rubric of “Preromanticism.”

As much as this book gives us a way of seeing through the blinders of romantic discourse and a means to free certain texts (including our own) from the hold of the romantic developmental tale, it does raise many questions that it leaves unanswered. It’s never clear, for example, how epistemological differences grounded in discursive transformations outside of literary discourse are functions of generic difference. The text seems at times to place upon literary discourse the burden for the epistemic shifts Foucault has described as the consequence of the redistribution of multiple discursive formations across various cultural and social networks. In addition, although Siskin discusses a “politics of feeling” and shows that nominally aesthetic arguments translate into arguments over proper conduct in the new society of the early nineteenth century, the impact of that rhetoric of morality and its appropriation by certain interests are evidently not the concern of this book. The purpose of the final three chapters is to link the distinction of degree, the developmental tale, and the transcendental subject to specific social texts and practices: the debate over high wages, Malthus’s On Population, and the discourse on addiction. Yet even in demonstrating the “literary historical ‘fact’ that both the Essay[On Population] and the [developmental] tales can be shown to have been configured by the politics of developmental desire” (165), the emphasis is upon the literary rather than the historical nature of that fact.
Although questions of power here seem always to be resolved in questions of literary form, Siskin’s critique of the lyric turn’s pervasiveness certainly draws out the generic features constructed in the romantic discourse emergent from 1760 to 1825. The cost of such a new literary history is its tendency perhaps to blur the distinctions between Blake and Wordsworth, Abrams and Arac, McFarland and McGann. If Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, Malthus’s *On Population*, Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism*, De Man’s “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” and McGann’s *Romantic Ideology* all take the lyric turn of Literature with a capital L, as Siskin rather convincingly shows they do, certain historical differences in the institutional practices those generic functions serve over two centuries, or even within the present critical debate at our own historical juncture, are sometimes obscured.

To raise these questions is not to devalue what I think is an important new perspective on the question of a historical criticism of romanticism. Siskin, no doubt, would answer that a more historically particular study of these differences is one of the other kinds of work that a generic literary history enables. Indeed his work suggests that genre, conceived as process, may help us to see how certain writers make particular use of common generic features, to see how those features have been recombined, repositioned, and redeployed throughout their diachronic history. In so remarking the differences in function from 1789 to 1989 a generic history might put to use those persistent features to examine that historical change which, as Ralph Cohen claims, “can be seen only against continuity…”

At a time when both Marjorie Levinson and Alan Liu have recognized the need to include the analysis of formal innovations and the rhetoric of tropes among the procedures of a historical or cultural criticism, Siskin reaffirms the importance of examining the relations between genre and history. His work offers one way of combining an interest in genre as a constituent feature of a new kind of historical criticism that might engage the rhetorical turns of changing generic formations and functions. As Siskin hopes, the value of this kind of history and this kind of book lies in the possibility of its “setting the formal stage for more work that, in examining the transition to the Romantic norm, will help to construct the next one” (14). At the least, this book will help us be more aware of the kind of work we do and make us more self-critical as we question whether our own critical projects produce a criticism of romanticism or just another inflection of romantic criticism.

2 Jonathan Arac’s *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 1, announces as one of its two major goals “to contribute to a new practice of writing literary history.” Like Siskin, Arac notes that contemporary criticism “is still significantly determined by its romantic beginnings” (3), but Arac ignores the tenacity of generic features in that discourse in order to focus on the romantic turn away from history and society that he sees in need of correction. For a useful comparison of Siskin’s and Arac’s variant methods and purposes, see Don H. Bialostosky’s comparative review article in *The Wordsworth Circle* 19 (1988): 194-99. Similarly Alan Liu in “Wordsworth and Subversion, 1793-1804: Trying Cultural Criticism,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 (1989): 55-100, uses Wordsworth’s apparent indebtedness to Welsh colonial discourses to try his own inflection of the New Historicism. David Simpson’s entry into the formation of a new kind of literary history should be mentioned: see his “Literary Criticism and the Return to ‘History,’” in *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988): 721-47.
5 Cohen 3.
NEWSLETTER

BLAKE SOCIETY NEWS

The Blake Society's autumn program includes the following events:

23 October
Female Reason in Blake
A lecture by Steve Clark, British Academy Research Fellow at Queen Mary and Westfield College

28 November
Ninth William Blake Congregation
Readings on the Steps of Blake House

12 December
Blake Society's annual general meeting

In association with the Interfaith and Creation Centered Spirituality Projects at St. James's Church, the Blake Society is presenting a series on art, covering psychological, religious, and political approaches entitled "The Art of God Incarnate," Tuesdays, 30 October - 11 December at 6:30 pm in the Church Hall, St. James's Church.

THE LIMIT OF OPAKENESS

Blake announces a regular feature to be called "The Limit of Opakeness." It will consist of one or more brief articles that attempt to solve a Blakean crux.

With each issue we shall propose one or two difficult short passages and invite essays of no more than 750 words on one of them. What is a crux for one person, of course, may seem easy to another, and some of our passages will strike some readers as poor choices. For that reason we will welcome suggestions. We may even print a consensus list of opaque passages.

Many of us Blake scholars remember first reading some of the magisterial critics and wondering how they came to know everything so confidently (and why they passed over in silence just those passages that were bothering us); they were as intimidating as they were inspiring. Some of us still hate to admit we can't figure certain passages out. "The Limit of Opakeness" will encourage candor and collaboration, and it ought to be rewarding to diminish Satan's domain bit by bit, issue by issue.

We welcome any and all approaches and will judge them all by the same rough standard: do they seem to clear up the difficulty to any appreciable extent? We recognize that some schools of criticism might find this a retrograde enterprise, and offer to deconstruct the opposition between crux and "easy" passage. Let them do so, and if in the process they actually throw light on what we call a crux, we'll publish their essays, too. We ask only that the writing be clear and succinct: there is no Limit of Translucence.

This feature will run on a trial basis, and will last as long as good articles are submitted. We might set design cruxes as well (and welcome suggestions for them), but at first we will confine ourselves to the words.

For the first round, we invite essays on either of two passages from the "Bard's Song" of Milton:

5:39-41 (on Charles, Milton, Cromwell, and James)
8:11-12 (Los puts his left sandal on his head).

Please send essays to Michael Ferber, Department of English, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824, USA. He will give them a first reading and then confer with the editors over which of them will be published.

Michael Ferber

CORRECTION

Readers may have noticed that the last issue (summer, volume 24, #1) was a bibliographer's nightmare; that is, instead of starting the pagination at zero with the new volume number, we continued it from the last issue of volume 23. In fact, we blundered. Essick's "Blake in the Marketplace" should have started on page 4, "Blake's Tiger" by Pedley on page 22, "A Caricature Source" by Wood on page 31, and so on. See below for correct pagination.

The managing editor will be wearing sackcloth and ashes till further notice.