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A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle: Lost or Found?

BY JOSEPH VISCOMI

In 1784, William Blake exhibited works at the Royal Academy entitled A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle and War Unchained by an Angel, Fire, Pestilence, and Famine Following (Butlin, The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake 187, hereafter referred to as Butlin; numbers are catalogue entries). The latter work, which may have been paired causally with A Breach, is lost, and the identity of the former is a matter of debate. Some critics assume that the version exhibited is either the one now in the Ackland Museum of Art (Robertson 175; Blunt 11n27) or the one in the Carnegie Museum of Art (Cummings 160, Rosenblum 154n27), while others believe that it too is lost and that the Carnegie and Ackland versions are c. 1790-95 and c. 1795-1800 respectively (Pressly 138-39; Butlin 188). In this study, I argue that there are strong technical and aesthetic reasons to believe that the drawing in the Ackland Museum is both the second version and the one exhibited in 1784, and that the first two versions of Pestilence are also incorrectly dated. My intention, though, is not only to argue that Robertson and Blunt were correct about the Ackland version of A Breach, but also to examine why and how the same artifact can appear to one art historian to have been produced c. 1784 and to another as late as 1800. While disagreement about dates is not unprecedented in Blake studies, this one is unusually pronounced and raises serious questions about the assumptions and kinds of evidence (e.g., historical documents, techniques, materials, styles, and themes) used to date these and other Blake designs. Indeed, by redating versions of A Breach, I am not only redating versions of Pestilence but am also challenging currently accepted ideas of Blake’s pictorial style and development in the 1780s and 1790s. Furthermore, the inconsistencies in the hypotheses used to date and sequence the versions of A Breach and Pestilence require us to rethink the dating and place of a particular sketch (illus. 12) in the evolution of Pestilence—which, in turn, questions Blake’s use and understanding of sketching in general.

The Production and Evolution of A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle

The extant versions of Blake’s A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle are in the Carnegie Museum (illus. 1), the Ackland Museum (illus. 2), and the Fogg Art Museum (illus. 3), though we know this last version as War. These three watercolors are dated c. 1790-95, c. 1795-1800, and 1805, respectively (Butlin 189, 191, 195). They appear to have been executed or at least paired with versions of Pestilence, which are in the collections of the late Gregory Bateson (on loan to the Ackland Museum) (illus. 13), the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (illus. 14), and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (illus. 15; Butlin 190, 192, 193).

A Breach and Pestilence were first described in Alexander Gilchrist’s Life of Blake (1863), but the descriptions are the source of much subsequent confusion. Gilchrist was unaware that there was more than one version of A Breach. From the 1784 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue, he knew of the exhibited version and of War Unchained, but he had seen neither work (1: 54). He identifies the theme of both as “the supreme despicableness of War” and claims that they “gave birth about twenty years later to four very fine water-colour drawings, … Fire, Plague, Pestilence, and Famine” (1: 54). By “Pestilence” Gilchrist apparently means Pestilence: The Death of the First Born (Butlin 442), because he had titled the c. 1805 version of Pestilence (illus. 15) as “Plague” and had it reproduced as a wood-engraving by W. J. Linton and inserted to face page 54.1 Gilchrist’s mistitling suggests that he was also unaware that there was more than this one version of Pestilence, since both early versions were so titled by Blake (illus. 13, 14).

In 1862, a year after Gilchrist died and a year before the Life of Blake was published, William Michael Rossetti, using Gilchrist’s lists and those of William Haines, began to compile for the Life the first catalogue raisonné of Blake’s drawings and paintings.2 Like Gilchrist, Rossetti had seen neither War Unchained nor the two early versions of Pestilence, though he had examined the sketch (241, #18).3 Unlike Gilchrist, he had also examined the Carnegie version of A Breach, which had sold in “Mr. [Elhanan] Bicknell’s Sale, [May] 1863” as “The Plague,” a title that Rossetti recognized was “decidedly a mistake,” since that was what Gilchrist and he called the c. 1805 version of Pestilence (207, #55). Rossetti apparently identified the Bicknell/Carnegie drawing as A Breach, the work exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1784 (201, #5), on the basis of its subject—a breached city wall filled with dead soldiers and mourners—since the work itself was not inscribed or titled or in any other way identified by Blake.

I am grateful to Martin Butlin and Robert N. Essick for reading early drafts of this article and for their many helpful suggestions.

1 The c. 1805 version of Pestilence was acquired by J. C. Strange from Thomas Butts, Jr. at Foster’s on 29 June 1853 (lot #131). Gilchrist apparently borrowed the work from Strange for W. J. Linton to reproduce.

2 The catalogue is included in the second volume of the Life (199-268) and is here referred to as Rossetti, followed by page and catalogue numbers.

3 Rossetti was thought to have examined the Bristol version of Pestilence, but Butlin’s provenance (192) is actually that of the sketch (see Essick, Works 118; Bennett 136, 138), while the Bristol version itself “remains without a provenance until the sale of works from the collection of Henry Willet at Christie’s on 10 April 1904” (Butlin “Footnotes” 17). Rossetti’s unawareness of the Bateson version of Pestilence is trou-
Like Gilchrist, Rossetti was unaware that there was more than one version of A Breach, Bicknell's version being the only one that he actually examined. He knew of the Fogg version, but he knew it as War and appears not to have realized that it was a version of A Breach. He knew of War because it was “mentioned” by that title “in the account” (209, #68), by which he means Thomas Butts's account of 12 May 1805 (Life 2: 256; see Bentley, Blake Records 572).

But Rossetti lists War twice, implying that there were two works so titled. The second he records as belonging to a “Mr. Fuller” (238, #227), whose Blake collection of nine watercolors he knew only through an 1852 Sotheby's sale catalogue. By 1876, War belonged to J. F. Hall, who lent it to the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition. One assumes that Rossetti saw it at that time, since he reviewed the exhibition for Academy (9 [1876]: 364-65). In his revised 1880 lists, he continues to record it as War, the work “mentioned in the account” (216, #75), but deletes the second reference because he comes to believe that Fuller’s War is War Unchained of 1784.

More confusing still, Rossetti fails to mention the connection of Hall’s War to A Breach, despite that connection having been explicitly made in the 1876 exhibition catalogue. War is listed there as “Breach in the City Wall: Morning After the Battle. Water colour. No. 5 in Catalogue, ‘Gilchrist’s Life.’ Exhibited at the Royal Exhibition, 1784” (entry 185).

In 1863, Rossetti was unaware of the Ackland Breach altogether. This version, the only one titled by Blake, was then owned by Alfred Aspland, whose extensive collection of Blake watercolors and drawings was then unknown to Rossetti. Aspland lent his version to the 1876 Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition, where it was described as “A Breach in the City: The Morning After the Battle. Water colour. This title is written on it by Blake, with the date apparently of 1780. This drawing, or another with the same title, was exhibited in 1784. See No. 5 in Catalogue, ‘Gilchrist’s Life’” (entry 157). The Burlington title differs slightly from the inscription on the watercolor itself, which reads, “A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle / W Blake inv & d.” The supposed date of “1780” is a misreading of “inv & d,” one recorded by Rossetti in 1880 (208, #5). The ampersand—if that is what it is—is completely indistinct (illus. 8). Nor are there periods after it, “inv,” and “W” (pace Robertson 175), or after “inv” and “&” (pace Butlin 191, Pressley 138). In his revised 1880 lists, Rossetti records the Aspland/Ackland version at the end of the entry for the Carnegie version (208, #5), but he fails to indicate which version was exhibited in 1784.

Aspland’s version was acquired in 1904 by W. Graham Robertson, who reproduced it in his 1907 edition of Gilchrist’s Life as the one exhibited (1: 54). It is so identified in his Blake Catalogue (175-77, pl. 56), and his view was apparently shared by Kerrison Preston—who edited the catalogue and acquired the work in 1961, a year before it went to the Ackland Museum—and shared by Anthony Blunt as well (11n27, pl. 8b). These owners and critics do not sequence the early versions of A Breach or pair them with versions of Pestilence, nor do they explain their reasons for choosing the Ackland Breach as the one exhibited. Apparently, they believe their choice is self-evident, probably because the inscription suggests as much, since it is the title by which the work is identified in the Royal Academy catalogue. At any rate, they clearly do not find the style of the Ackland Breach to be inconsistent with Blake’s pen and wash style of the mid-1780s.

Frederick Cummings and Robert Rosenblum believe that Blake exhibited the Carnegie version and that the Ackland version followed, though how long afterwards they do not say. This position, articulated in Cummings’s 1968 exhibition catalogue, maintains that the “care, detail, and emotional conviction” of the Carnegie version suggest that it was the version exhibited, whereas the Ackland version, because it “is less detailed, [and] has less conviction,” is but “a simpler reworking” of the Carnegie (160). Placing the
Carnegie version before the Ackland is certainly correct, but not because the Carnegie is more detailed and carefully executed than the subsequent version. The same stylistic features characterize revisions or second versions of other works, while relaxed handling may reflect an artist's first thoughts on a subject. Indeed, the Carnegie's companion piece, the Bateson version of Pestilence (illus. 13), is sketchier and was shown less care than the subsequent Bristol version (illus. 14).

While an increase or decrease in detail does not reliably mark sequence, changes between versions that are also corrections do. For example, in the bottom left corner of the Carnegie version (illus. 1), the right foot of the soldier crosses the line forming the arm of another soldier, rendering the foot transparent. In the Ackland version (illus. 2), Blake corrected this mistake by repositioning the arm. The hand retains its original gesture, but instead of grasping a strap that appears connected to a shield, contrary to the manner in which the bottom shield is held, it now grasps either the hilt of a sword or the top (and wrong end) of a banner. The figure to the right, outstretched in the breached wall, is solidly on top of bodies in the Ackland version, whereas in the Carnegie version this figure is tentatively drawn over and through a curved line that apparently was meant to suggest a shield rather than the figure's chest or robe. The high-arching back of the mourning woman was repeated in the Ackland version but then erased and lowered, while her long neck was shortened, making her proportions more realistic. Perhaps the most significant alteration was the addition of the old man's crutches in the Ackland version, though traces of them are visible in the Carnegie, where the right one goes only as high as the sash and the left one seems to have been made of glass, passing through a hand (illus. 1). Blake apparently added the crutches after he had drawn the hand—that is, he decided to add them only after the composition had been designed and drawn in ink. Initially, the hand may have grasped the hilt of a sword, pole, or spear, which in turn may have suggested the idea of crutches, an idea developed in the second version.

The fingers and toes of the figures in the Carnegie version are generally more detailed and carefully drawn than those in the Ackland, but the assumption that the Carnegie version in its entirety was shown more "care" ignores the many drawing mistakes Blake had made, as well as the fact

A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle, c. 1784. Pen and watercolor (29.7 x 46.3 cm.). Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

1. A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle, c. 1784. Pen and watercolor (29.7 x 46.3 cm.). Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

re-worked it later." Adding to the confusion, Bindman reproduces the Ackland version but identifies it as the version in the Fogg (plate 59), and believes that both the Ackland and Fogg versions "may be post-1800" (231n19). The Fogg, of course, is dated by Blake 1805, but a post-1800 date for the Ackland is even later than the one suggested by Butlin, which, as we shall see, is inferred from a misreading of the signature's form.
that the Carnegie version is unfinished. Not only are the crutches incomplete, but the old man's robe, painted blue above the sash, was left uncolored below and to the left of the sash. Such an assumption also ignores the very weak blocking of the Carnegie design. For example, the breach is so crowded with bodies and armor that it lacks visual and thematic focus, expressing the effect of war on a city's defenses, instead of the horrors of war per se. By removing the shield at the far left and the soldier left of the casket, Blake shows more of the wall and, more significantly, more of the soldier outside the wall. This soldier, lost among bodies in the Carnegie version, is now distinct with highlighted chest and face, representing the numerous but featureless dead behind him and the wall. By simplifying the configuration of bodies at the breach and giving the distant dead a face, Blake expresses more clearly the theme that "War" is the fountain of "bitter Death & of corroding Hell / Till Brotherhood is changed into a Curse" (Milton 35: 3-4).

This theme is far more overt in the 1805 version (illus. 3), where the "enemy" dead, rather than being dehumanized, are delineated as carefully as those lying inside the walls. The top figure appears collapsed in despair over his comrades rather than one of the dead; embracing two of them, he is analogous to the woman mourning her lover. In the Ackland version, the two camps are not yet so neatly parallel, but they are moving in that direction, as is suggested by the woman in the killing fields. Like the figures standing beside the wall, she witnesses the carnage, but the sympathy she elicits is due more to her moving cautiously and looking apprehensively, gestures of fear suggested by her dramatically outstretched hands and, most significantly, her wide open eye. Both gestures are missing in the Carnegie version, where she is drawn less expressively and has no eye at all. The removal of the soldier left of the casket also reveals that the Ackland version is moving toward paralleling the warring camps. This middle soldier, with the awkwardly formed armor, is replaced by even clearer symbols of war: a spear—enlarged dramatically, relative to the Carnegie version—and a banner. Implements that are thrust upward in military gallantry lie fallen and futile. The addition of the infant and crutches in the Ackland version also infuse the overall situation, rather than the breached wall, with horror, implying that everyone, from newborns to mothers, soldiers, and aged, is equally affected by war. The Ackland version is simpler, but it is not simplistic. Blake's changes, generated by aesthetic and technical needs, resulted in a more focused, powerful, and expressive work.

The inference, then, that the Carnegie was the version...
exhibited, based entirely on the premises that it is more care-
fully executed than the Ackland version and that care re-
fers Blake’s intention to exhibit, is unconvincing. I sus-
pect that Blake executed the Carnegie version first, recog-
nized his various mistakes while washing the design, and
proceeded immediately to produce a second, revised ver-
sion, which he inscribed most likely with an eye to exhibi-
tion. Blake chose to repeat the composition on wove paper
instead of laid—the support he used for the Carnegie ver-
sion—which also suggests that he intended to exhibit the
new and corrected version of his design, since the wove,
the heavier and more expensive paper, took dark washes
better, and since the three extant watercolors Blake exhib-
ited at the Royal Academy in 1785 were also executed on
wove paper.  

This scenario, however, differs completely from the one
Martin Butlin proposes. Butlin believes Cummings’s se-
quence but believes also that both versions of A Breach are
too “accomplished” for 1784, that both were produced in
the 1790s, possibly five to 10 years apart, and that the ex-
hibited version is lost. The Carnegie version, he argues,
“seems rather too advanced for the work exhibited in 1784,
being somewhat freer and more accomplished than that of
the illustrations to Tiriel of c. 1789, to which it is otherwise
fairly close. It is probably the companion to the Bateson
collection Pestilence of the early 1790s” (189). Butlin dates
the Carnegie and Bateson works c. 1790-95. He concedes
that the Ackland Breach “has sometimes been confused with
that exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784,” but he notes
that its “style is somewhat more relaxed: for instance the
head of the standing woman on the right is no longer in
strict, classical profile” (193). He dates the Ackland version
c. 1795-1800.

If the Carnegie and Ackland versions appear more ac-
complished than the Tiriel illustrations—which neither
does to me—it may be because they are nearly twice their
size (which accounts for their handling “being somewhat
freer”) and were executed as autonomous works, whereas
the illustrations have some of the stiffness characteristic of
designs executed to be engraved, in which washes are laid
precisely to facilitate the engraver’s effort to translate
them into linear codes. The “early 1790s” date for the
Bateson Pestilence, with which the Carnegie Breach is
linked, is itself suspect. It is based on two premises: first,
that the Bateson version stylistically resembles the pen and wash drawing, *The House of Death*, and second, that this drawing is c. 1790 (Butlin 190, 259). But the second premise is based on its style appearing to be "a later development of the style and technique of the pen and wash drawings of the 1780s," a set of drawings that excludes all versions of *A Breach* and *Pestilence* (Butlin 259). The logic, in other words, is circular. Moreover, the c. 1790 date of *The House of Death* is relative to that of *The Good and Evil Angels*, a watercolor dated c. 1793-94 because it follows plate 4 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is supposedly 1790-93 (Butlin 257; Bentley, *Blake Books* 285). *House* is clearly before *Angels*, and *Angels* seems easy enough to date; the problem is that *Angels* could be as early as 1790, because that is most likely the end date for Marriage (Viscomi, *Idea* chap. 26). If the sequence and spacing hold—and I believe they do—then *House* dates from the mid-1780s.

The dates for the Carnegie and Ackland versions of *A Breach* are in part derived from those of their pendants, the Bateson and Bristol versions of *Pestilence* (illus. 13, 14). It is probably true that the paired works share the same date. However, if one version of *Pestilence* was executed before 1790 then both were, for they were executed very close to one another, and not five to 10 years apart. The Bateson version, which is certainly not as accomplished as the Tiriel illustrations, is sketchier than the Bristol version, with the gravedigger's face redrawn so that the chin rests on the chest, an alteration retained in the Bristol. Other than this difference, they are exceedingly close compositionally and stylistically. In both versions, the hair color of the two women is yellow, the hair on three of the men is orangish-brown, the skirts of the front pallbearer and gravedigger are orange and yellow respectively, and the background wash is a yellowish grey. Given that both versions are essentially monochromatic wash drawings with touches of color, the same palette and placing of colors strongly suggest that the first and second versions were executed and finished very near to one other. Had there been years between versions, one would expect differences as pronounced as those between the second and third versions. Indeed, such differences in coloring and/or design mark all versions of works reproduced a year or more after the first, even when the new versions were modeled closely on the original composition. Compare, for example, the second versions of *Paradise Lost*, *Comus*, *House of Death*, *God Judging Adam*, and *Good and Evil Angels* (Butlin 536, 528, 320, 294, 323) with their models (Butlin 529, 527, 259, 257, 258). Copies of illuminated books from different editions also show pronounced differences, whereas copies from the same edition—say,

*Songs of Innocence* copies B and E—are exceedingly similar, sharing the same palette and coloring style and differing only in the placement of some colors (see Viscomi, *Idea* chap. 14).  

Nothing in the production of the second versions of *A Breach* and *Pestilence* suggests that they were not done the same week or month as the first. Both were developed from tracings of the first versions. The tracings can be inferred from the fact that the sizes of the figures and the relations among them are the same in the two versions, despite slight differences in paper size. The Bristol version of *Pestilence* even repeats exactly the anatomically incorrect positioning of the back pallbearer's foot beneath the woman. Such similitude is neither accidental nor the result of redrawing freehand. It results from either graticulating or "calking" the original. The first method requires drawing a grid over the original and redrawing the design on a support similarly squared, keeping the same coordinates between design and grid as in the original. But this method was used to enlarge or reduce copy. The method usually used to transfer outlines onto clean sheets of paper (or copper plates covered with etching ground) was "calking." A tracing of the original outline is made on transparent paper (or thin post paper) and placed over a clean sheet of paper. Transference required either that the verso of the tracing be covered with black or red chalk, or that a thin sheet so treated be inserted between the tracing and new sheet of paper. The outline is then retraced with a stylus and thereby transferred to the new support. An alternative method was to work from the original itself and not from a tracing, by inserting a calking sheet between the original and the new

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19 The works commissioned by Linnell, like the *Wise and Foolish Virgins*, c. 1822, the three *Paradise Lost* designs, and *The Book of Job* (Butlin 479, 537, 551), may seem like exceptions because they repeat the original (or previously executed) compositions so exactly (Butlin 478, 536, 550). The repetition results from Blake's working from tracings of the originals and reflects the purpose of the commissions, which presumably was to keep as close as possible to the works that generated the commissions in the first place. Even when the composition remained the same, however, the coloring and highlights differed, sometimes radically, as they did in the Linnell versions. The subtle and not-so-subtle changes made among versions of the same work, even from tracings and from impressions from the same illuminated plate, reflect what Essick calls Blake's "creative revisionism" (Language of Adam 116).

20 Ordinary writing or printing paper is made transparent when washed with a 50-50 solution of linseed oil and turpentine. Such paper becomes yellow and brittle over time and has a very short life span. Thin post paper or regular sheets of writing paper are made more transparent and effective when the model is placed over a light source, like a window. Transferring outlines to copper from tracings was standard procedure in graphic art; Blake's use of the method is evinced by the pinholes and wax marks on designs he reproduced (see, for example, the glue marks on the emblem drawings for *Gates of Paradise* in Blake's Notebook). It is also evinced by his borrowing Butts's *Book of Job* watercolors for Linnell to trace for the new series (Bentley, *Blake Records* 273-74). The only Blake tracings extant are of *Vision of the Last Judgment* and of *The Virgin Hushing the Young Baptist* (Butlin 646 and 645, 408 and 406; see also 831).
sheet of paper and tracing the original's outline with a stylus. In this latter method, though, the artist needs to press harder over the outline to transfer lines and thus subjects the original to possible defacement. When it is used, as it was to transfer a few of Blake's designs for Wollstonecraft's Original Stories (e.g., "Oeconomy & Self-denial") to copper plates, the verso of the paper shows the indention of the stylus (see also Butlin 340). Such markings are absent from the second versions of Pestilence and A Breach, though the latter has a few indentions of a stylus on its face (along the eagle, wall, and reclining figures). These indentions are presumably from the pencil or stylus used to calk the outline from the tracing. The pinholes in the top right and left corners of the Ackland Breach support this hypothesis, for tracings were often fastened to the new sheet by pins.

The only marked difference between the two versions of Pestilence is that the faces of two figures were changed from profile to three-quarter view; the same repositioning of heads also differentiates the two versions of A Breach and partly accounts for why this design's first and second versions are paired with those of Pestilence. But three-quarter views are not why the second versions are second. In both designs, Blake appears to have repositioned heads and gazes for dramatic effect and to diversify the pictorial plane. Technically and aesthetically, he did nothing he hadn't done earlier and as well. Indeed, in The Witch of Endor Raising the Spirit of Samuel (illus. 4; Butlin 144), which Blake signed and dated 1783, the faces alternate between profile and three-quarter, much as they do in the Bristol Pestilence. Joseph

12 I discovered the stylus marks with the aid of a strong magnifying glass, but I found independent confirmation in The Ackland Art Museum Newsletter 16 (1984), which described A Breach as "pen and black ink, gray wash and watercolor, with traces of stylus(?), underdrawing on off-white wove paper" (2).
Ordering Simeon to Be Bound (Butlin 156), which Blake exhibited in 1785, also shows a deliberately diverse range of facial positions. This latter work is especially telling, for it is based on a sketch (Butlin 158) in which two of the three-quarter faces are profiles and one of the profiles is three-quarter. The sketch and finished drawing were executed near one another in time, and the changes between them are analogous to those found in the first and second versions of A Breach and Pestilence. Three-quarter views signify neither special accomplishment nor an advanced drawing style, nor do repositioned heads signify years between versions.

The Ackland Breach is, indeed, more "relaxed" and even sketchier than it appears in Butlin's atrocious color reproduction, probably the worst in his magnificent catalogue. The original in Chapel Hill is not muddy, as it is in the reproduction, nor is it as dark and pinkish. The bodies in the killing fields beyond the breached wall, for example, are mere circles and arched lines (illus. 5), but so are those in the Carnegie version. Technically, the Ackland version lies somewhere between a pen and wash and a watercolor drawing; it is monochromatic except for traces of pink in the old man's robe, the dead woman's wrap, the arm of the soldier at the far left, and yellowish-brown hair in the three right figures. It is more relaxed and less advanced than the Tiriel drawings and even the illustrations of Joseph (Butlin 155-57), and certainly less sophisticatedly painted or "accomplished" than color-print drawings and the illustrations to Night Thoughts and Gray's "Poems," with which its c. 1795-1800 date associates it. Indeed, its coloring is less sophisticated than that of the large-paper copies of illuminated books or Songs copies I, J, L, N, and O, all of which were produced and colored c. 1794-95—before the illustrations to the Night Thoughts and Gray's "Poems." Because many of the large-paper copies of illuminated books and copies of Songs had been misdated post-1800, Blake's development as a colorist seemed erratic and his work as a painter and printmaker appeared disconnected. Hence, his period styles seemed either indeterminate or inconsistent. When these copies of illuminated books are perceived as the work of the mid-1790s, however, they reveal that Blake's coloring style for drawings and relief prints was consistent. They also reveal that the Ackland Breach was executed in an earlier period, more in the style of works like The Witch of Endor (illus. 4) and The Spirit of a Just Man Newly Departed Appearing to His Mourning Family (Butlin 135), works executed by the mid-1780s.

The second versions of both A Breach and Pestilence are tied technically to the first versions and resemble them stylistically. There are no good reasons to believe that they were executed five to 10 years after the first. What would have motivated Blake to return to these works at that time? Why work from a tracing instead of freehand, which provides far greater freedom to rethink the design, as evinced in the third versions of both Pestilence and A Breach? More importantly, why would he duplicate the minimalist coloring in or after 1795, when he employed an enriched palette and coloring style in his other works? Returning years later to an earlier style of execution seems implausible; conversely, the similarity in style suggests that Blake returned to the works while they were still fresh in mind. The aesthetic quality of the first version of A Breach may have provided the motivation to revise the composition. The incompletely colored robe in the Carnegie Breach suggests that Blake stopped before finishing, presumably having already decided to redraw it instead of erasing lines and figures. This decision probably influenced the one to redraw Pestilence as well, creating the second pair. As noted, Blunt and Robertson believe that the Ackland Breach is 1784, while Cummings and Rosenblum believe that the Carnegie version is 1784. All four were probably correct.
Why then does Butlin date these works so late? The idea that they are too advanced or accomplished for mid-1780s seems predicated on their size and their having figures with three-quarter views, as though such gazes are technically and psychologically more complex and advanced. These reasons, however, are secondary in Butlin’s overall argument, which is actually anchored by a solid hypothesis misapplied: that the forms of Blake’s signature are dateable. Of the Ackland Breach, he states: “its style, size and form of signature show it to be a companion to the version of Pesti­lence at Bristol and to date probably from the later 1790s” (193). The Ackland and Bristol drawings are signed “W Blake inv & d” and “WBlake inv d” respectively. More-
1795 and 1805. The questions to ask of both works, then, are these: are the signatures really like the monogram? Were the works signed when produced, or were they signed afterward?

Blake's monogram was formed by a stylized italic W and B. The top and bottom loops of the B were formed by round strokes. The swash tail circles over both initials to connect to the left serif of the W, and "inv" was placed inside the loop (illus. 6). Starting with the serif on the W, the two initials were written in one continuous gesture of up and down strokes, with the tips of the W's right leg and the B's stem connected. In the signature of the Ackland version, the B of "Battle" and "Blake" were formed alike but different from the monogram's B; the top loop is much smaller than the bottom and is formed by a downward rather than curved stroke. The same style of B is present in the signature of The Witch of Endor (illus. 4b), dated by Blake 1783, and throughout The Island in the Moon c. 1784 manuscript (illus. 7; see "Beneath" in line 3). Furthermore, the Ackland's W differs from the monogram's in that it has no left upward serif and is separate from the B. The form of just one part of the Ackland signature resembles the monogram, and then only superficially and inadvertently. The stem of the "d" loops over the "inv &" (illus. 8), creating a monogram-like feature, which in fact supports a 1780s date—or at least does not rule it out—because it is simply the style that Blake used to write his "d"s at this time, as is evinced by nearly all the "d"s in An Island in the Moon. Note that "wind" and "mind" create similar monogram-like forms (illus. 7, lines 1 and 6).
The resemblance to the monogram was formed inadvertently, by an ornamental flourish characteristic of Blake's calligraphic hand. But the situation may be more complicated than that, because the loop may have been extended after the fact, as is suggested by the break in the line just above the “v” of “inv” and to the left of the dot for the “i” (illus. 8). Moreover, the ink of the indistinct ampersand and “d” is a lighter hue, and the flag-like serif of the “v” crosses instead of extends the right leg of the “v” and crosses the stem of the “d,” raising the possibility that all three forms, and not just the extension of the “d”’s loop, were added later. While the similarity of the strokes of the letters and their extensions argues against this, the possibility cannot be ruled out entirely, because Blake did alter the inscription, changing four lower-case letters to capitals. Initially, “A,” “Breach,” “A,” and “City” were not capitalized (illus. 8). If they were capitalized after 1784, then the original inscription was closer to the 1784 Royal Academy catalogue entry (#400): “A breach in a city, the morning after a battle W. Blake” (Bentley, Blake Records 28). Whether these changes were made the following day or years later may be impossible to tell, but the inscription and signature are clearly in the same ink and made by the same pen or brush, and their letter forms are perfectly consistent with those used in the 1780s and differ considerably from the signature Blake designed c. 1795.

The Ackland version appears to have been signed when produced, though parts of the inscription and possibly a part of the signature may have been altered afterwards. The Bristol version of Pestilence, however, appears to have been signed after it was produced. The ink of the signature is darker and the letter strokes wider than those of the inscription (“Pestilence”) and the design itself.26 The letter forms of this signature (illus. 9) are closer to those in the monogram than are those in the Ackland version, but they still vary. The W lacks its upward left serif but connects with the B. The “d”’s stem is not as extended, and the “inv” is formed very differently from that of the Ackland version and monogram (illus. 6). The “v” has a long winding serif like the one in the Ackland signature and, though illus. 4 does not show it, like the one in The Witch of Endor, but the “n” is misshapen or redrawn. The feature of the Pestilence signature that most resembles the monogram is the B’s swash tail, but this feature also makes the signature unique.25 It is the only signature in which the surname begins with a monogram-styled B; elsewhere, this style of B was used only for the initial. The assumption seems reasonable, then, that the form Blake either develops into the monogram or was influenced by it. In either case, it seems that Blake signed the work after it was produced, deliberately to match the form and text of the signature of its companion.

Because Blake sometimes signed and dated works years after they were produced, the possibility that the Ackland alterations and the Bristol signature itself occurred long after production cannot be ruled out.22 Dating these works by the form of their signatures must remain suspect—especially when the signatures’ texts are excluded from the dating rationale. As Butlin has demonstrated, the signatures with Blake’s surname, “W Blake” 1795” and “Fresco W Blake inv” (Butlin 292, 303, 321; 295, 299, 307, 317, 326), are on color prints possibly pulled in 1795 but probably added after 1805 (Butlin, “Physicality” 8-9). These two forms of signatures are dated after 1805 precisely because they are inconsistent with the monogram in form and text, and because they appear to be variants of “W Blake inv,” which Blake began to use after 1805 (Butlin, “Physicality” 8). By the same logic, the texts of the Ackland and Bristol signatures, “W Blake inv & d” and “W Blake inv d,” place the works either before 1795 or after 1805, as does the placement of “inv” beside the surname instead of above Blake’s initials. The third version of A Breach is dated by Blake 1805 and is clearly in a later drawing and coloring style (illus. 3). A pre-1795 date is left, but this terminal date can be pushed further back.

The watercolors Los and Orc and God Judging Adam, dated c. 1792-93 and 1790-93 respectively (Butlin 255, 258), are both signed “W Blake,” without “inv & d.” These, the only signed watercolors between c. 1790 and 1795, are also among the very few watercolors Blake appears to have produced during this period, which was dominated by illuminated printing and commercial engravings—and even these may be earlier than supposed. Like House of Death, they are dated relative to The Good and Bad Angels, which, as noted, is possibly as early as 1790 and not as late as 1794. In any event, their “W Blake” resembles Blake’s signature on the illuminated books from 1788 to 1795: “The Author & Printer W [or Will] Blake,” as well as his signature in the 1780s. The terminal date, then, for the signature on the Ackland Breach appears no later than 1790, but this earlier date need not be accepted by process of elimination. It is actually suggested by the inclusion and placement of “inv” in The Witch of Endor, signed “1783 W Blake inv” (illus. 4b). As noted, this work’s lower right corner is slightly damaged, and its right margin appears to have been trimmed.

20 I am grateful to Francis Greenacre, the curator at the Bristol Museum, for this information.

21 The signature appears consistent with itself, yet the B and “I” of “Blake” also appear initially to have been joined, and the circling tail appears possibly to have been inserted just outside the B’s bottom loop. A line was drawn from the top of the “I” through the “k” to near the “i” of “inv.” Traces of a letter or number seem to be under the top loop, or possibly from a differently formed B, one like the B of “Battle” and “Blake” in the Ackland Breach, with a higher but smaller top loop and a stem to the right of the present stem. Again, whether these marks and lines signify changes or false starts, made when the signature was written or later, may be impossible to discern.

22 The Tate impression of the color-print drawing Newton is on 1804 paper but is signed “1795 WB inv” in monogram. For an overview of Blake’s habit of signing works after production, and a bibliography, see Butlin’s “Physicality.”
after "inv," through the "v"'s long serif (see n18). A brush or pen mark from the edge of the sheet curves over the "v" of "inv," possibly a fragment of a looping "d" trimmed off, in which case the signature may have originally read "1783 W Blake inv [8] d," like the Ackland and Bristol works (see n16 for a work similarly trimmed).

For the Ackland Breach to have been signed when executed and the Bristol Pestilence signed afterwards would not be so strange, for it is not the signatures that make them companions. Indeed, the last version of Breach is signed and dated, but its companion, the Boston version of Pestilence, is neither signed nor dated. Moreover, Blake consistently signed finished drawings after 1795 and in forms consistent enough to discern dateable patterns, but not before. Of the 140 known drawings and sketches produced in the 1770s and 1780s (Butlin 49-190), only eight—including the Ackland Breach and Bristol Pestilence—are signed. Of these, Moses with the Tables of Stone is untraced but is reported to have been signed "W Blake 1774 [?]") and "WB [in monogram] 1774" (Butlin 49).22 The presence of a signature on another is dubious (Butlin 184), and the signatures on three appear to me as possibly in a hand other than Blake’s (Butlin 119, 126, 179A).23 But two of the latter, Saul and David, c. 1780-85, and A Medieval Battle Scene, c. 1780, are signed "W Blake inven"; if these are Blake’s signatures, then the likelihood that A Breach and Pestilence were signed mid-1780s is further strengthened. While admittedly there are too few signed works from the 1770s and 1780s to indicate conclusively the evolution of Blake’s signature during this 20-year period, it is clear that the texts resemble one another, that all eight are variations on "W Blake inv," and that the "d" is more likely to have been included in the signature during this period than the period in which the surname is dropped altogether and "inv" is newly positioned. In fact, no drawings signed during the period in which the monogram was regularly used (1795-1805) include both "inv" and "d" or have "inv" beside the B. It seems very unlikely, then, that Blake signed these works while using the true monogram (see n16).

We can only speculate why Blake signed some works and not others, or some long after production. Probably, as Butlin suggests, sales prompted signatures ("Physicality" 8). The earliest provenances of the Ackland Breach and the Bristol Pestilence are unknown, and so the idea that the latter’s signature and its presumably deliberate echoing of the Ackland’s were instigated by sale of the two as a pair cannot be proven or disproven.

While the form of the signature has been misread to indicate a c. 1795-1800 date, the very presence of an inscription on A Breach, a clearer indicator of date, has been given little attention. The few works whose titles are inscribed on the picture surface itself are all from the 1780s.24 These include Samuel Presenting Saul to the People c. 1780-85, inscribed "Behold your King," The Spirit of a Just Man Newly Departed Appearing to His Mourning Family c. 1780-85, so inscribed, The Witch of Endor Raising the Spirit of Samuel, 1783, so inscribed, The King of Babylon in Hell c. 1780-85, inscribed “Hill beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming.—Isaiah," Pestilence, Probably the Great Plague of London c. 1780 (illus. 10), inscribed "Lord have m" on us," and both versions of Pestilence (illus. 13, 14), so inscribed (Butlin 117, 135, 144, 145, 184, 190, 192). Works finished after 1790, including the Wollstonecraft designs, the color-print drawings, and the designs in the Small Book of Designs copy B, have inscriptions written below rather than on the design.25

Severing the Ackland Breach from its c. 1795-1800 date forces us to reconsider the opinions of those who believe that the exhibited version is not lost. Their position is supported rather than refuted by the Ackland’s signature, which is textually closer to the signatures of the 1780s than to those in the 1790s. The visual similarity between it and the c. 1795 monogram is based on the looping stem of the "d," an ornamental flourish characteristic of Blake’s hand in the 1780s. The differences between the signature and monogram are more substantial and troubling. If the Ackland version of A Breach was executed in 1795 or later, then it is not only a return to an earlier style of drawing and coloring, but it is also the only known pen and wash or watercolor c. 1795-1800 inscribed on the design’s surface, and, with the partial exception of Pestilence, probably the only one signed with "inv" beside the surname and W and B unconnected. Rather than suppose that Blake returned haphazardly to a signing style abandoned years earlier, it seems more rea-

22 Butlin infers the possible signatures on Moses from information supplied by the 6 April 1925 Sotheby sale catalogue (lot 153), which states that the work is "signed and dated W.B. 1774." There is no mention of a monogram, but a near monogram in the mid-1770s is not impossible. Blake’s teacher signed his works “Basire del & sc" and “J Basire del & sc," often combining his initials into a monogram.

23 The signatures are "W. Blake" (179A) and "W Blake inven" (119, 126). The bowed legs of the former’s W are especially un-Blakean, and none of the Bs matches the style used throughout The Island in the Moon manuscript.

24 Inscriptions below the image became Blake’s standard mode of presenting the biblical watercolors executed for Butts. These works were signed usually in the bottom right corner, with a biblical reference in ink just under the signature and image (Butlin 499, 500), and possibly a title centered below the image. However, there are very few works in this original condition, because most were trimmed to the image when inserted into mounts. These were pasted down in windows cut in thick matboard. The information trimmed away was replaced in pencil on the mount in copperplate hand. The titles on these mounts may be repeating what was cut away or, more likely, were created by Butts, who derived them from the biblical reference. For further description of this style of re-presenting Blake’s works, see my "Blake and the Marketplace 1852.”
sonable to assume that he signed the Ackland version at the time of production, c. 1784. It is also reasonable to assume that the work exhibited was inscribed, for the title in the exhibition catalogue quotes nearly verbatim that inscription rather than referring to the work by subject—say War, or simply A Breach in a City Wall. Why "the morning after the battle"? Nothing in the Ackland version suggests morning or, for that matter, twilight; there is no rose or yellow in the sky. In other words, the drawing is not titled generically or by subject, as were the Joseph watercolors exhibited in 1785 (e.g., "Joseph making himself known to his brethren," cat. no. 449; see Bentley, Blake Records 30). If the exhibited version was inscribed but is now lost, then why would the Carnegie, the subsequent version, have compositional errors but no inscription, while the Ackland, the next version, corrects these errors but has the inscription? It makes little sense to assume that the Carnegie version was modeled on an earlier version but included drawing errors and excluded its title, or that the Ackland version was executed 10 or more years later only to return to the original model's title, despite the title's absence in the supposed intermediate (Carnegie) version.

**The Pestilence Sketch**

The corrections made in the composition of the Ackland Breach indicates that it follows the Carnegie version. Inferred from the fact that heads were changed from "strict, classical profile" (Butlin 191) to three-quarter view is the hypothesis that there is a "progression" from one to the other (Essick, Works 118). Using this hypothesis, Essick places the recently discovered sketch of Pestilence (illus. 12) after instead of before the Bateson version, interpreting it as an intermediate study between the Bateson and Bristol versions (illus. 13, 14) instead of as a preliminary study for the composition itself. According to Essick, "the unfinished character of the Huntington sketch, and the hesitant and studied nature of its lines, suggest that it is Blake's first experiment at changing some figures to three-quarter view to develop the expressive potential of their faces" (Works 118).

This hypothesis lies at the heart of Shelley Bennett's analysis of the sketch. At first, Bennett suspected that the sketch might have been a preliminary study for Pestilence, between it and the earliest versions of the subject (illus. 10, 11), which appear to have evolved from Blake's English history series (Butlin 184, 185). In attempting to place the sketch, she notes the shape of the doorway behind the pallbearer—curved in the sketch, square in the three finished designs—and suggests that the sketch may have preceded the designs, as its medium suggests. She reasons that "the pencil drawing may represent an earlier idea that was modified in the three later variations. The fact that this work is executed in pencil, a medium which Blake, [like] his contemporaries, used for preliminary studies, also reinforces this arrangement in sequence. It seems likely that Blake would begin his complete reworking of the earlier composition with a pencil study before proceeding to watercolor" (134). This is exactly right, but instead of trusting the purpose of sketching and the material facts of production, Bennett proceeds

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27 These works are now referred to as Pestilence, Probably the Great Plague of London and Pestilence (Butlin 184, 185). Both were referred to as The Plague in various nineteenth-century auction catalogues.
to argue that "the three-quarter turn of the female's head in the Huntington drawing and Bristol and Boston watercolors links these works and suggests that they, in turn, follow the Bateson watercolor" (135). And, of course, the supposed c. 1790-95 date for the Bateson Pestilence (Butlin 190) implies that the sketch is mid-1790s.

Precedent exists for placing a sketch between two finished versions of the same subject. The six designs of the second series of On The Morning of Christ's Nativity, c. 1815, were radically reworked after the first series of 1809. Preliminary sketches for Descent of Peace and The Flight of Moloch are extant (Butlin 539, 541). But the material and aesthetic circumstances are completely different from those surrounding the first and second (Bateson and Bristol) versions of Pestilence. The second series of Nativity is considerably smaller, which means that the original series was not traced or calked. Technically, Blake could have squared up tracings to reduce the original images, but apparently he used the new series as an opportunity to reconceive the designs, a process which in turn required visual rethinking or sketching. These new Nativity sketches are to their first versions of the subject what the Pestilence sketch is to the earliest versions of Plague/Pestilence (illus. 10, 11)—i.e., "a complete reworking of the earlier composition" (Bennett 134). However, if the Pestilence sketch follows the Bateson version, then the situation is not analogous, for the sketch differs as slightly from the Bateson as from the Bristol version, from the design it supposedly reworks as from the design it supposedly prepares.

Placing such a sketch between two finished designs that vary so insignificantly ignores the primary purpose of sketching: to develop ideas and block out compositions. It supposes that Blake needed to sketch in order to solve such minor technical problems as repositioning a figure or a head. That supposition ignores Blake's virtuosity as well as his watercolor technique, which encouraged continuous invention. Indeed, Blake's watercolor technique—drawing lightly in pencil and finding ("invenire") the subject in the resulting marks, erasing excess pencil lines and firmly determining the subject decided upon through washes, colors, and pen outlining—discouraged producing preliminary sketches in any great detail or to size. In other words, his technique encouraged sketches to be "unfinished" (Essick, Works 118). Assuming that Blake needed to sketch in this instance, after completing the Bateson version and in preparation for the Bristol version, also ignores what profiles and three-quarter views are to artists: mere technical tricks performed as easily as any other from well-rehearsed visual repertories. The position of a head does not signify evolved technical mastery, but rather an aesthetic choice made during the composing or recomposing process, a choice predicated upon the schemata that enables artists to draw in the first place, to delineate faces, hands, bodies, and the like in diverse forms with facility, almost automatically. Examples of the non-progressive implication of turning heads are the

As Bennett correctly points out, the sketch "bears all the earmarks of Blake's distinctive calligraphic style. In particular, it displays the rather crude, often hesitant line which is associated with his preparatory pencil studies,... from such gauche beginnings Blake would develop the flowing, expressive contour lines characteristic of his finished designs" (132). This refinement and development, it must be understood, usually occurred in the watercolors themselves, due to Blake's two-stage process of sketching out designs, erasing unneeded lines, and adding washes and pen and ink outlining.
faces of Michael, Satan, and the other angels in the three sketches for Warring Angels: Michael Contending with Satan, c. 1780; they are variously formed in each subsequent version (Butlin 114, 115, 116). And, as noted, the sketch and watercolor of Joseph Ordering Simon to Be Bound (Butlin 158, 156) exemplify the same facility.

The sketch appears to be derived from rather than leading to the Bateson version because it shares features with both the Bateson and Bristol versions. But placing the sketch between two finished designs is troubling, not only because the latter design was developed from a tracing of the former, but also because it asks us to believe the following: the mourning man's profile is copied exactly in the sketch (illus. 12) as it is delineated in the Bateson version (illus. 13), only to be independently changed to three-quarter view in the Bristol version (illus. 14); the rear pallbearer and the mourning woman were moved to the left, relative to the Bateson version, a new position only to be ignored in the Bristol version, which repeats that of the Bateson; and the gravedigger was also repositioned, moved closer to the front pallbearer, a position ignored in the Bristol, which repeats that of the Bateson. These changes and repetitions are troubling because they indicate that Blake ignored most of his own recommendations and was able to make changes in the new version as it was being worked up and without recourse to a sketch. Why, then, would he execute a sketch?

The question is not whether Blake used sketches to rethink whole designs, but whether he used them to try out minute changes in pre-existing designs. If he intended to change a few faces—or to see if a turned face would work—he did not need to redraw the entire design. Indeed, Blake's mode of production, in both the first and second versions, encouraged revision and eliminated the need to sketch revisions on a separate sheet of paper. The first version differs from the sketch because it was redrawn freehand, a process in which the original invention continues to evolve through execution. The second version of Pestilence differs from the first, despite its development from a tracing, because the changes, like turned heads, raised arms, added or deleted figures, were made on the tracing itself, or on the new sheet of paper as the calked outline was being worked up in pencil. By transferring just the outline and not the details, artists (or engravers) leave room for revision; thus, they prevent execution from being merely an act of reproduction.

Redrawing the composition freehand on a larger sheet of paper accounts for the differences between the Bateson version and the sketch. The differences between the Bristol and Bateson versions were created either on the tracing paper or on the new support when the outline was calked. The Boston version (illus. 15), executed in 1805, differs from the Bristol (illus. 14) but repeats features from both the sketch and the Bateson (illus. 10, 11). Rossetti knew the sketch and the last version, but not the first two versions, so he logically assumed that the sketch was "an expressive and reasonably careful sketch for the grand water-colour" (241, #18). Hence, Rossetti misdated the sketch 1805, but he may have been correct about the relation. The provenance of the Bristol version is now believed to be that of the sketch, which means that the sketch was probably acquired by Harvey from the 29 April 1862 auction at Sotheby's. The

12. The Plague/Pestilence, c. 1784. Pencil (24.2 x 29.8 cm.). Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.
13. Pestilence, c. 1784. Pen and watercolor (31.6 x 48.1 cm.). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; loan of Lois Bateson.

14. Pestilence, c. 1784. Pen and watercolor (32.2 x 48.4 cm.). City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.
Bateson version of *Pestilence* sold in the same auction to Toovey (Butlin 190), a dealer with whom Rossetti apparently had no contact. As I mentioned, the sale may or may not have been Tatham's, but the works sold were the kind that would have remained in Blake's studio and possibly have been sold by his widow between 1827 and 1831 (see n3). The sketch and the Bateson version, then, were most likely in the studio when Blake executed the 1805 version and probably remained till his death.

The third version repeats features from the sketch and the Bateson version but hardly any from the Bristol. The face of the rear pallbearer (illus. 15) is that of the Bateson (illus. 13), but his position is that of the sketch (illus. 12); he, and the doorway behind him, have been moved from behind the man's shoulders to behind his head, which eliminated the awkward foot beneath the woman; the mourning woman's face is that of the sketch, but her position is that of the Bateson version; the digger returns to the position occupied in the sketch, close beside the pallbearer; the bodies being buried are again closer to the digger's feet than to his hands and the shovel's handle; the mourning man's hand is again spiky, and the mourning woman is again in three-quarter view, as in the sketch. The last version contains differences as well: the digger holds the shovel with his left hand instead of his right, and the spade is in front of instead of behind his feet; the infant's right leg is lifted, and its right arm extends along its mother's right leg.29 Only the three-quarter view of the mourning man is possibly drawn from the Bristol version, but this change, like the others, could have been drawn without reference to the Bristol, if the three-quarter view of the rear pallbearer in the sketch was once again transferred to the mourning man.

To believe that the Bristol version of *Pestilence* (illus. 14) was executed after the Bateson (illus. 13) version is not difficult, but the reason is not that its figures are drawn in three-quarter views. To assume so requires focusing completely on parts instead of the composition as a whole. More significantly, such an assumption ignores Blake's mode of production and the techniques that enabled him both to repeat himself and to vary his own designs while doing so.

Authenticating and dating art works, long at the heart of art historical analysis, cannot be dismissed as merely the concerns of connoisseurs, beneath the notice of scholars and critics, for they are essential in establishing the visual texts studied and the chronologies that define periods. When a work is redated, our ideas of period style, technique, and media—the features that assist in dating and identifying works—are called into question. When one work is redated, nearly always others require redating as well, and even the parameters or defining features of a period or style can be altered. The earliest extant versions of *A Breach* and of *Pestilence* are a case in point. They were probably produced by 1784 and not in the 1790s. The Carnegie and Bateson versions of these works were the first executed within their groups, followed closely by the Ackland and Bristol ver-
sions. Both second versions are signed, and they have been dated post-1795 because the form of one part of their signatures resembles the monogram Blake began using that year. Butlin’s hypothesis that the form of Blake’s signature is dateable is probably sound, but it is helpful only in dating works produced in and after 1795, when Blake began to sign works consistently and uniformly, and not before. Moreover, in the Ackland version, the monogram-like features were inadvertently produced, while in the Bristol version they were probably made after production, though how long afterwards is probably impossible to determine. Furthermore, the texts of these signatures differ significantly from those of the mid- and latter-1790s but are similar to those of the 1780s. The new dates for the Carnegie and Ackland versions of A Breach raise the possibility that the latter version was the work exhibited in 1784. Its inscription and monochromatic wash style support this supposition and date. If the Ackland version is the supposedly untraced A Breach in a City the Morning after the Battle (Butlin 188), then the three extant versions of the composition were probably the only ones executed, in which case no version of A Breach is lost, and our ideas about Blake’s drawing style in the 1780s require rethinking.

The second versions of both A Breach and Pestilence differ from the first by the presence of three-quarter views in place of profiles. Mistakenly inferred from this stylistic feature is a hypothesis about development in Blake’s style. This hypothesis, combined with a tendency to overlook the material facts of production, Blake’s technique of watercolor drawing, and the purpose of sketching, has led to misdating and misplacing a sketch in the evolution of Pestilence. The sketch is exactly what it looks like: a preliminary study for the composition in general and for the Bateson version in particular, executed by c. 1784 and not the mid-1790s.

I am not questioning the assumption that Blake’s pictorial compositions move towards greater technical and emotional complexity as they were reworked. Three-quarter views may indeed be more prevalent in later works than in earlier, more neoclassical works, but, in and of themselves, such views do not signify later production. I am questioning the tendency to assign higher evidentiary status to particular facial gestures than to a composition’s overall style, to selected visual details than to technique and production.

WORKS CITED


REVIEWS


Reviewed by Nelson Hilton

These two books, each brilliant and deeply rewarding in its own way, make for an enlightening comparison-and-contrast study of that era which Northrop Frye once proposed we label "the Age of Blake" (*Fearful Symmetry* [Princeton 1947] 167). However that may be, Blake in these books remains *hors de concours*, as the historian Barker-Benfield never mentions him, and the literary critic's most sustained comment on the poet trails away in clouds of his preferred writer:

It is worth remembering that one great outsider, William Blake, resolutely continued the vein of sensibility. He rejected exchange and use and struggled to correct and convert the psychic economy of sensibility directly into a blinding vision of universal truth. . . . plainly Blake's "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" (to borrow some phrases from "Tintern Abbey") were not of their time; they belong to that more adolescent state of universal feeling when "nature . . . / To me was all in all." (103)

As "a history of the origins of literary Romanticism in Britain" (362), Brown's exercise in new formalism focuses on "the factors that promoted literary change and the processes that guided the course of development specifically toward romanticism as we know it" (178)—even as it aims to correct "the pseudoteleology of the old preromanticism" (360). A reading of the materialist Barker-Benfield, though, recalls Blake's argument that "the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more" (E 2). His book never forgets either the ubiquitous interpellative insistence of strengthening British commercial capitalism or the figure of his chosen cultural hero, Mary Wollstonecraft: "It was her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that first suggested to me that sensibility was a culture, and a culture of women. . . . Because Wollstonecraft made sex the conscious and central subject of her study, I have woven her analysis through my text" (xxviii). Wollstonecraft, however, is absent entirely from Brown's account. For Brown, Burns is "the original genius of romanticism" (363), but Barker-Benfield mentions him not at all; for Brown, "[i]f sensibility is regarded as the cult of feelings, then Boswell is its hero" (113), but no reference to his journals appears in the other book. Brown devotes more pages to Goldsmith than to any other, a chapter to Cowper (*The Task*), another to Sheridan (*The School for Scandal*), a long chapter to Wordsworth, and he discourses elegantly on the "urbane sublime" and "transcendental aesthetics" of Gray and Collins—Barker-Benfield mentions Goldsmith twice, Gray once, Collins, Sheridan, Cowper, and Wordsworth never. But other names which recur regularly through *The Culture of Sensibility* are not to be found in *Preromanticism*: Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Hays, Hannah More, Ann Radcliffe, John Wesley (each with more than 10 citations).

Brown, then, concerns himself with a selection of literary masterpieces or "touchstones" which collectively articulate problems and terms "that shaped discourses in the period: self-consciousness, pure space and time, feeling, closure, the aesthetic, story, synthesis, sign, action, experienced time, and finally, in Wordsworth, the fusion of all such concerns under the rubric of simplicity" (376). Barker-Benfield's more social text is the "continuous struggle" over the meanings and values of a word—"sensibility"—which "signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion, and became convention," which "denoted the receptivity of the senses and referred to the psychoperceptual scheme explained and systematized by Newton and Locke," and which "connoted the operation of the nervous system, the material basis of consciousness" (xvii). The drama of this text is in how, "[s]elected by people in accordance with the changing social circumstances of both sexes, elements of the nerve paradigm, of political thought, the campaign for the reformation of manners, the evangelical challenge to orthodoxy, of literacy and the commercialization of publishing—each integrally connected with the other and all to the establishment of a consumer society—sensibility became a culture" (215).
The different concerns of each book can be seen in their respective discussions of “delicacy.” For Brown, the word—as in the title of Hugh Kelly’s 1768 play False Delicacy—“refers to the negative functioning of language” since “the delicate person refrains from uttering desires” (231). It is “an overrefined moral sense” which “internalizes inherited, partly unspoken social codes” (231). Barker-Benfield begins by noting how “delicacy” was “virtually synonymous with sensibility” and connoted “the nerve structure assumed by the latter term,” but he emphasizes its role in sexual politics: “Traditional, patriarchal male control of female sexuality seems to have been basic to shaping the code of delicacy” (299-300). He quotes John Bennett, who wrote in 1789 that “Delicacy was [sic; ‘has’?] a very general and comprehensive quality. It extends to everything where woman is concerned. Conversation, books, attitude, gesture, pronunciation should all come under its salutary restraints” (207). “Delicacy” is thus revealed as a cornerstone of sensibility’s support of gender distinctions under the commonplace, “man was made to reason, woman to feel” (302). For Wollstonecraft, the code of delicacy “was symptomatic of the danger posed by women’s acculturation to the civilizing process” (303).

For Brown, preromanticism concerns the lurching movement toward the separation of consciousness from experience: “when the separation is completed by the joining of the pure forms of space and of time, consciousness becomes generalized”—as “romantic sensibility”—“into an abstracted reverie, disembodied and out of touch with the world of sensation” (58). Cowper’s The Task is an important staging-ground for this march from Young’s Night Thoughts and Gray’s Elegy to The Prelude, and Brown offers some fascinating pages relating the changed views of consciousness represented by Cowper and Kant. Those who struggle with the meaning of “polypus,” “vortex,” and “emanation” might sense a curious sympathy when Brown writes of Kant:

One need only observe the terminological welter—with its “idea” and “ideal,” its “transcendent” and “transcendental,” its “axioms,” “anticipations,” analogies, and “postulates,” its “syntheses” of “apprehension,” “reproduction,” and “recognition” (none of these is an ordinary German word), its “amphibole,” “paralogisms,” and “antinomies,” not to speak of its “dialec” or “dialysis” (the text is uncertain), its “subversion of hypostatized consciousness,” and its “euthanasia of pure reason”—one need only pass these terms in review to recognize an eighteenth-century trait gone mad. Such extravagances differ from the personified abstractions of the urbanc sublme in that they reify states of consciousness rather than emotions and moral sentiments, but their function is comparable. . . . (72)

To support the argument that “self-definition, self-regulation, and closure” (113) were sensibility’s central problems, Brown makes Goldsmith a prominent indicator of the period’s literary anxieties. His discussion of The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society, has Goldsmith seeming to anticipate Blake’s mental traveler: “Governed by a visionary consciousness, the poem tends toward making all consciousness visionary (and thus a covert projection of the traveler)—though “the poem contains signs intimating a covert recognition that its truth is at odds with its manifest content” (120, 123). The chapter on The Vicar of Wakefield is quite simply the best discussion I’ve ever read of that apparently “simplest and most naïve” of “influential masterworks,” that “paradigm of literary beauty,” “carnival text” and “prototype for romantic organic form,” that nearly “encyclopedic novel” and “revolutionary book” (166, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178). Brown is clearly taken with “Goldsmith’s intense formalism” (179), and gives some insight into the psychodynamics of formalist concerns when he admits to being “fonder of the page that discusses Goldsmith’s vowel harmony than of anything else in the present study, for no better reason than that I was unable to enjoy reading his poetry until I chanced to imagine that I could now hear his voice” (21).

From Goldsmith, Brown turns to “the semiotic crisis” in Sheridan’s The School for Scandal, the scandal being “the nonconformity of sign and significance” (222), and to the further rethinking of the relationship between body and spirit in Le Mariage de Figaro of Beaumarchais. That relationship is precisely the focus of Tristram Shandy, the “most sensational and influential literary text of the period” (260—Barker-Benfield mentions the novel once), and the subject of Preromanticism’s chapter on Sterne’s trajectory “beyond reason and fact, and toward story” (262). Frye identifies Sterne as the “chief prose writer” of “the Age of Blake,” and surely the student of The Book of Urizen will see some possible connections through Brown’s remarks that “Consciousness in Sterne is . . . the antithesis of reason. Reason is order, logic, logos. Nothing is so irritating as an interruption, for that calls attention to the horizon limiting the power of reason. . . . Sterne regularly turns his ridicule on immortal essences, bodiless minds, idealized emotions. ‘If you will turn your eyes inwards upon your mind,’ Walter Shandy pontificates in a pseudosophical discourse upon time . . . )” (270 [Tristram Shandy 3.18], emphasis added). And Blake’s comment on the wide and unpassable gulf between simplicity and insipidity (M 30) takes new resonance after Brown’s subchapter on “Simplicity After Sterne” and the claim that “simplicity was the central literary problem in the last decades of the century” (296)—a problem highlighted as much by the “fragmentation of perspectives” in the epistolary novel with multiple correspondents (296) as by Sterne’s “chaotic overlay of incidents and chronologies” (299).
Brown's book ends, then, with the complex simplicity of Wordsworth, whose mastery of "the multiple modalities of time" correlates with "the unity of his consciousness with respect to the scene" (349). In the author's words, *Preromanticism*

narrates the rites of passage that chasten and subdue sensibility into romantic humanism. The conception of a transcendental time and space and of a transcendental ego, the birth of an aesthetic imagination, the mastery of plot and character development, the assemblage of an order of the organic, the emergence of will and of action as the primary categories of selfhood, the disposition of the multiple temporality of the event.

All this is finely done, though one can't help agreeing with the author in his conclusion, as he hopes that his book "will affect the way readers think, but knows it will not so affect many, nor much, nor long ... " (382).

Barker-Benfield's book, on the other hand, should find a wide, receptive, and appreciative audience, not least among Blakeans, who will find themselves already quite at home with *The Culture of Sensibility*. Here we learn how "Newton emphasized that the vibrations of the ether could be 'excited in the brain by the power of the will and propagated from thence' [cf. 'he his Emanations propagated' FZ 4.2] through 'the Nerves into the Muscles'" (5; cf. "Come into my hand /... descending down the Nerves" M 2.5-6); how other writers, like Richardson and Burke, "used 'fibres' and 'nerves' interchangeably" (17); how "Spirits was a more specific psychological and physiological referent" (18—cf. "every thing is conducted by Spirits" J 3); how "Vibration' was yet another sign of the nerve paradigm" (20); and, in sum, why and how Albinon created "the female will," and how Wollstonecraft resisted. The seemingly self-evident juxtaposition of "the Church" and "the Ale-house" in "The Little Vagabond" assumes new depth as we see how taverns, having assumed recreational activities driven out of the churchyard (57), became the object of a fierce campaign of regulation in the 1770s and 1780s: "Along with the triumph of evangelism, strict 'alehouse regulation became a cornerstone of local administrative policy" (93).

Bernard Mandeville emerges as a figure worth considering with regard to Blake: he "stated unequivocally and repeatedly that women 'lust' as men do. Sexual appetite is 'innate both in Men and Women'" (128). With the examples Barker-Benfield supplies, we see how Mandeville "rejoiced in physiological directness, puns, and other form [sic] of free and playful sexual speech" (126); for Mandeville, "[w]omen were 'educated' into their 'Weakness of frame and Softness,' ''pity was as much 'a frailty of our nature as Anger, Pride, or Fear,'" and denial a pervasive aspect of human psychology: "we hide even from our selves the vast Extent of Self-Love, and all its different Branches" (127, 125, 121). The discussion of "Sensibility's Method: Conversion" (250-58) enriches the context of Milton's concern with what (if anything) changes when Saul becomes Paul, or Milton, Blake—the poem's occasion, in any event, certainly reflects an age in which "[w]riters made the effects of reading a subject for their readers" (259).

The *Culture of Sensibility* includes 11 well-chosen illustrations, including Francesco Bartolozzi's *London Merchants in the Royal Exchange*, which supplies one physical referent for *Jerusalem* 24.42 ("In the Exchanges of London every Nation walk'd"). Perhaps the most interesting, however—for its version of the popular "scene of instruction" motif which appears on the title page of *Songs of Innocence*—is the reproduction of Phillippe Mercier's 1743 painting, *Bible Lesson* (fig. 1 ["Collection, Myles Hildyard, Photograph, Courtesy of the Paul Mellon Center for Studies in British Art, London"]). The image aptly illustrates Barker-Benfield's discussion of how the early ideology of sensibility's "culture of reform" centered on "the progenitrix of social affections, a woman and usually a mother, in Richardson's 1740 words, serving the 'cause of Virtue and Religion'" (217). On the other hand, anticipating the "female will" that resisted such positioning and which was to culminate in the anti-Jacobin bogy of the Wollstonecraftian amazon at the end of the century, Barker-Benfield quotes from "Mrs. C's Complaint for the Loss of the Ace of Hearts" in a 1741 number of the *Bath Miscellany*:

Men oft-times sued in vain, with various arts, To seduce me from my charming ace of hearts, To no effect, I baffled all their skill, I scorned their offers, and pursued my will. (199)

"Conflict over the possibilities for women's selfhood in the culture of sensibility and over the directions their wishes should take" (xxvii) is thus a major theme, and the concluding chapter, "Wollstonecraft and the Crisis over Sensibility in the 1790s" takes us straight into Blake's valley of vision with a new and vital appreciation of how, because "the definition of gender was seen to be fundamental both to the Jacobin prospects for reform and to the Anti-Jacobin attempt to maintain the natural order, the debate over sensibility became a key issue in British politics" (360).

While neither book is without human failing, each makes a rewarding contribution to our sense of the literary and cultural context of Blake's work, a context whose daunting complexity they together reiterate.
Many of us can remember when the antinomian tradition was treated with undisguised scorn by literary historians. Even students of Blake were slow to come to terms with the extent to which he shared his vision of the abolition of moral law with predecessors and contemporaries. A. L. Morton's _The Everlasting Gospel_ tried to remedy this by placing passages from Blake into relationship with Ranter texts, but these juxtapositions were largely unconvincing—"the everlasting gospel" is itself, after all, a term from the Book of Revelation. More indicative of what might be done on the subjects were historical studies whose focus was not Blake: particularly those of Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson himself. _The World Turned Upside Down_ and _The Making of the English Working Class_ treated antinomianism and the frequently allied phenomenon of millenarianism seriously as part of a social fabric. This pointed the way for some later essays, but it was left for Thompson himself to produce a full scale study on the subject as related to William Blake.

Thompson divides his subject matter into antinomian, Swedenborgian, and "Jacobinical," and his discussion of each is richly configured. The opening chapters are of great interest not only for their clear expositions of the varieties of antinomian doctrine but also in their delineations of how these could have been transmitted to Blake through printed texts. Some of Thompson's research reveals new connections among figures other than Blake. It is worth knowing, for example, that the Swedenborgian doctor Benedict Chastanier and the artist Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg were well versed in the writings of the Philadelphian mystic Jane Lead (documentation is provided for this but not for the interesting statement [43] that Loutherbourg was a disciple of Richard Brothers in the 1790s). There is also some valuable information about private libraries, though not about Richard Cosway's, to which Blake is thought to have had access. The whole of this material is greater than the sum of its parts—we get a picture of the confluence of many streams in the later eighteenth century.

The same may be said of Thompson's exploration of radical dissent. To the older movements of sects are added Moravians, Sandemanians, Hutchinsonians, and "irregular" Methodists. One would especially like to know more about the Sandemanians: William Godwin was educated in a Sandemanian academy and for a short time was a Sandemanian minister, as was William Hazlitt's father. Later comes the Unitarians, also offer interesting analogies to Blake. However, the single group that most interests Thompson is the group known as Muggletonians. Founded by John Reeve (d. 1658) and Ludowick Muggleton (d. 1698), the Muggletonian sect had an astonishing longevity, especially considering the very low profile it kept: there were still 100 male believers in 1803; in 1975 there was one left. Thompson's extraordinary account of his meeting with the last Muggletonian and the consequent transfer of the 89 volumes of the Muggletonian archive to the British Library is a fascinating one, but the main thrust of his argument here is Blake's possible knowledge of and sympathy with Muggletonian beliefs. The three Muggletonian doctrines that Thompson finds especially pertinent are "the specifically antinomian tradition, with its repudiation of the Moral Law" (91), "the explicit and repetitive identification of 'Reason' as the Satanic principle" (94), and "the unusual symbolism of the Fall, and of the Serpent-Angel's actual copulation with Eve and transmutation into flesh and blood in her womb" (96). While stating his own conviction that there is a connection with Blake, Thompson avoids special pleading and even notes that Blake would have abhorred some of the Muggletonian teachings, such as the predestinarian doctrine of the two Seeds. In the absence of any documentary evidence linking Blake with the Muggletonians, each reader must judge whether an examination of these doctrinal matters and a comparison of passages establishes any link between Blake and the Muggletonians. I am myself unpersuaded that there is a particular link, for the very reason that makes _Witness Against The Beast_ a work of such interest: and that is the impact on Blake of the antinomian/millenarian/radical subculture in its many forms, with some of which Blake did have demonstrable contact.

Although I have said that documentary evidence does not link Blake and the Muggletonian teachings, there is one documentary matter here of considerable interest to Blake scholarship. Blake's mother has been known as Catherine Harmitage, but Thompson reads the entry in the register of St. George's Chapel, Hanover Square, as "Hermitage." He argues that she was the widow of Thomas Hermitage, hosier, of 28 Broad Street and that she afterwards married James Blake, hosier, of Glasshouse Street, and brought the two businesses together at the Broad Street address. This in itself, with some ancillary facts (120-21), constitutes an important discovery. Thompson draws on it to suggest that a George Hermitage who wrote Muggletonian songs in the mid-century could have been related to Blake's mother through her first marriage. This of course does not prove that Blake even saw these songs—Thompson handles this material with his customary tact and engages in no special pleading.

Moving from the sects already mentioned to one with which Blake is known to have had contacts brings another dimension to the discussion. Thompson has deeply investigated the rise and progress of the New Jerusalem Church and rightly warns us that Richard Hindmarsh's book of that name merits "as much and as little respect as Stalin's _Short History of the CPSU(B)"_ (135). As a participant in the events he documents, Hindmarsh is both a valuable and a suspect

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Reviewed by Morton D. Paley
source. Thompson’s three chapters on Blake and Swedenborgianism are at the same time comprehensive and incisive, as this fine summary passage indicates:

The first year or two of the [New Jerusalem] Church were clouded with dissenion. For the Blakes the entire Swedenborg movement was fraught with conflict, but was nevertheless of profound significance. We cannot clearly identify Blake with any of the conflicting groups, but again and again we seem to see his face, obliquely situated to a particular argument. There is his recognition of a body of visionary writing undoubtedly carrying some of the old Behmenist imagery. There is identification not only with certain beliefs (Christ is man) but also with the very notion of a New Church of regenerated humankind. There is also some shared jargon of correspondences (chariot for doctrine, Edom for what is natural, dragon for the ‘falses’ of religion). The influence was deep, and with The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, productive of polemic. It would also seem that Blake’s antimetabole texts were resisted from the start by the orthodox within the Church. (168-69)

Thompson discusses “The Divine Image,” “To Tirzah,” and “I saw a chapel all of gold” in the light of Blake’s changing relations with Swedenborgian thought. He interestingly associates the chapel in “I saw a chapel all of gold” with the Swedenborgians’ Great Eastcheap meeting house and ingeniously suggests that the “sty” of the last line “was that of advanced radicalism,” the “swine” being associated with the satirical variations on Burke’s “swinish multitude” made by radicals such as Daniel Isaac Eaton and Thomas Spence. One of the important elements of this part of Witness Against the Beast is Thompson’s sense that the books Blake read were not merely “sources” or even negative sources but the productions of a culture comprising various overlapping constituencies.

With Thompson’s brilliant exposition of “London” we leave the discourse of Swedenborgianism and approach that of Paineite radicalism. The well-known revision of “dirty” to “charter’d” acquires a new context in Paine’s rejection of the freeborn Briton’s pride in his chartered rights. “Every chartered town,” Paine wrote, “is an aristocratical monopoly in itself, and the qualifications of electors proceeds out of those chartered monopolies.” In citing such examples Thompson is not engaging in mere source-hunting but is, as he later puts it in comparing Blake’s use of the verb “ap­pall” with that of William Frend, “finding a vocabulary and stock of images common to a particular group or a par­ticular intellectual tradition, in this case that of radical Dissent” (185n21). Yet, as Thompson argues, the poem is not only a political vehicle, for Blake’s vision is wider, combining in the last stanza of “London” the image of the exploited girl sold for a bit of bread with the archetypal whore of Babylon. The relationship of discourses is, as the author puts it “fraternal but transformed.”

In “Human Images,” the penultimate chapter of Witness Against the Beast, the authors juxtaposed with Blake are Gibbon (especially chapters 20 and 49 of Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire) and Constantin de Volney. Although Blake, unlike Byron, did not sympathize with Gibbon’s sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer, he did read the Decline and Fall, or at least parts of it. David Erdman has demonstrated the relevance of chapter 1 to Jerusalem, and Thompson shows convincingly how Constantine and Charlemagne are linked through the intermediacy of Gibbon. Volney’s Ruins is never mentioned by Blake but it is hard to believe that this radical’s Bible was unknown to him, and Volney’s vision of human history culminating in a revolutionary society may have seemed to Blake for a time compatible with his own. As Thompson remarks, “He was happy, at least until 1795, to co-exist with atheists and de­ists,” though I am not sure why Godwin is specifically excluded from the list (215). Godwin, on the contrary, may be responsible for much of Blake’s anti-institutionalism as well as for what appears to be a consistent indifference to the extension of the vote. The crucial difference between the Blake of the 1790s and the radicals with whom he fellow-travelled was that, as Thompson puts it, “Blake, while ap­propriating some of their arguments, placed a full emphasis upon affective and imaginative ‘culture’” (215). Witness Against the Beast is consistently true to Blake’s commitment to such culture (to dispense with inverted commas), broadening our understanding of Blake’s political and religious interests by viewing them as components of his creative work.

Some time in the 1980s I visited a William Morris exhibition at the ICA Gallery in London. The installation concentrated less upon the display of objects, though there were plenty of those, than upon the re-creation of both Morris’s historical ambiance and his imaginative world. The last item in the show was not by Morris, though it featured someone who had written a book about him. It was a black-and-white photograph of a large crowd standing in the rain. Rising above a sea of umbrellas was the white-maned head of Edward Thompson, addressing a nuclear disarmament rally. It was a fitting emblem of the subject of the exhibition and, one might now add, of the subject of Witness Against the Beast.

1 No footnote is given for this quotation, which is from Part 1 of Rights of Man (page 75 in the Penguin edition), and it should be noted that while Thompson’s posthumous manuscript has generally been well edited there are occasional omissions such as this one and the absence of the name Hermitage from the index. One would also like to know the identity of the Sieglek (first name not given) who wrote a posthumous work called The Everlasting Gospel (226-27). There are also a few typographi­cal errors, the most important of which is the misprinting (twice) of the title of an important source for the history of Swedenborgianism: P. F. Gosse’s Portfeuille d’un ancien Typographe.

Reviewed by ROBERT N. ESSICK

**Query:** Identify the English line engraver who was born in 1757, established his early reputation by engraving Thomas Stothard’s illustrations for *The Novelist’s Magazine,* published his own separate prints and illustrated books, signed a testimonial for Alexander Tilloch’s method to prevent banknote forgeries, used several innovative graphic techniques including a relief-etching process, and engraved a large panorama of Chaucer’s pilgrims on their way to Canterbury?

**Choose one:**

a. William Blake  
b. James Heath  
c. both of the above

As any good test-taker can guess, the answer is c. A few of these parallels in the lives of Blake and Heath are historical accidents, yet several indicate that some of the more striking features of Blake’s career are not singular eccentricities but responses to imperatives felt by others in his profession. To publish one’s own prints, or books of prints, made sense to both men as a way of eliminating distributors standing between the engraver and the consumer. Self-publication allowed the artist to exercise more control over the product and to either lower prices or capture the profits that would normally accrue to another party. Blake began to publish his own prints no later than 1784 during his partnership with James Parker. Heath, somewhat slower off the mark (because more successful as a journeyman?), began to co-publish his prints with J. P. Thompson in 1796 (1:21).¹ Blake’s plunge into book publishing began with his illuminated books, first produced c. 1788 but not known to have been advertised to the public until 1793. Heath published his edition of Shakespeare, with letterpress text and illustrations by Stothard and Henry Fuseli engraved by Heath, in 1802 (1:23). Besides these attempts to alter the normal patterns of print distribution, both engravers tried to keep up with, or leap ahead of, innovations in print production. Heath never indulged in anything as radical or unfashionable as relief or white-line etching, but he did develop new techniques for stipple engraving (1:10) and co-published the first British lithographs in 1803 (1:24).² Both men sought a commercial success with their Chaucer engravings—Blake’s after his own design, Heath’s after Stothard (illus. 1). As in so many of their other endeavors, Heath was the better businessman, although he too fell upon hard times late in life.

The preceding excursion into career comparisons and what they tell us about the economics of engraving is made possible by the publication of *The Heath Family Engravers* by John Heath, a retired British diplomat and the great-great-grandson of James. The book is no mere family memoir, but a work of dedicated historical scholarship. Like his artisan forefathers, the author is all business—in at least two senses. Facts spill from page after page; indeed, a few family anecdotes, true or not, would have enlivened matters. And most of these facts deal with the business of engraving and publishing. As John Heath is quick to point out, he saw his task as “not so much to assess the claims of the Heath family engravers as artists in their own right as to set them and their activities against the literary, artistic and cultural background of their time, especially as seen through the eyes of their contemporaries” (1:9-10). The result might be called *Heath Records,* in imitation of Bentley’s *Blake Records.* John Heath is a very reticent author/editor who allows documents to speak for themselves. Even the first two pages of the “Introduction” to volume 1 are a string of quotations with a minimum of editorial glue to hold them together. Such an approach, when applied to an artist about whom (unlike Blake) so little has been published, has both virtues and limitations. *The Heath Family Engravers* offers no rationale for its demands on our attention or a point of view from which undigested facts can be made meaningful. Yet, these two volumes can serve for years to come as a source of information and provide the foundation for studies more dedicated to interpretation.

John Heath has been an assiduous researcher and collector of engravings by the Heath family. Much of his information is based on manuscripts or fairly obscure publications, but in a few instances, one wishes for more thorough documentation. Heath claims, for example, that “by long established custom . . . an engraver was entitled to keep twelve copies of first proofs, or buy in others from the publisher at a discount, and then sell them if he wished to collectors at much higher prices than mere ‘common’ impressions” (1:42). If this practice was as widespread as Heath implies, then it might explain why some plates, such as Blake’s “Beggar’s Opera” after Hogarth and his “Tornado” 

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¹ Parenthetical references (by volume and page) are to the book under review.

² In its earliest years, lithography (or “polyautography,” as it was then called) included etching the stone to leave the image in shallow relief. The signature “I Heath se” appears on the lithographed title page to the 1803 *Specimens of Polyautography* (1:24), and thus Heath was one of the first English artists to use the new process invented by Alois Senefelder in Germany (1:24).
after Fuseli, exist even today in several impressions of what look like working-proof states.

The two volumes are similarly organized into a cluster of short chapters (such as "The Engraver and His Trade," "James Heath's Techniques and Relationships," and "Charles Heath's Contribution to Steel Engraving") followed by a catalogue of engravings by James (vol. 1) and Charles Heath (vol. 2). Unfortunately, there is no "Preface" to explain the organization of the book or the methods of citation used. Odder still is the absence of number or letter designations for the 40 interesting, if rather murky, illustrations. These float in two clusters in the midst of each volume without coordination—indeed, without the means for coordination—between picture and word, even though several of the engravings reproduced are mentioned in the text.

The bulk of both volumes is comprised of the two main catalogues, with much briefer listings for Charles's sons, Frederick and Alfred, in volume 2. This was clearly a labor of love for the author and is based in large part on his own collection. Information is arranged chronologically in tables, a format that is easy to use but which creates large, unprinted stretches of paper. Could a more economical arrangement have reduced the high cost of the book? Although a good many separate plates are listed, the catalogues are dominated by book illustrations. Only a minimal amount of information is recorded: title, author, publisher, and the artist(s) who designed the illustrations; number, subject (very brief), and binding location of the plates engraved by a member of the Heath family. Measurements are rounded to the nearest centimeter—a rather generous tolerance for small plates. The states of the plates and their inscriptions are not recorded. Each set of tables is designated as a "Catalogue Raisonné." "Handlist" would be a more appropriate title.

While Blake enthusiasts will find the career of James Heath of primary interest, the life of his son Charles should not be neglected. He too had a taste for innovative graphic techniques, as indicated by his execution, in 1820, of the first book illustration engraved on steel (2: 21). Five years later he combined this high-finish medium with the new and popular genre of the annual gift book to produce the first number of The Keepsake. Although the rage for such prettily bound and embellished volumes soon died down, Charles Heath continued to publish his until 1848. While the stylistic distance between The Book of Urizen and The Keepsake could hardly be greater, Blake's illuminated books and Heath's annual emerged from a shared economic dynamic that led both engravers to become book publishers. Near the end of his career, Blake contributed a fine engraving of his design, "Hiding of Moses," to the short-lived annual Remember Me! (1825-26).

The careers of Charles Heath's two sons, Frederick and Alfred, are dealt with in a single chapter of six pages. They attempted to continue the family profession well beyond its heyday as a major technology for the reproduction of pictorial images. The traditional art of line engraving on metal plates clung to an aestheticized afterlife well into the second half of the nineteenth-century. Yet its demise as a reproductive craft may have been the necessary prelude to the so-called "Etching Revival," the return to traditional graphic processes as a means of original artistic expression—as it had been for Durer, Rembrandt, and Blake.

I must confess to a predisposition to like any book written by a fellow collector of British prints. I am quick to forgive errors committed by writers of print catalogues in the hope of receiving similar treatment when my own efforts in that genre are scrutinized. I admire from afar the noble tradition of British amateur—in the best sense of the
word—scholars, a group that includes my friends Raymond Lister and the late Sir Geoffrey Keynes. Yet, in a book so dedicated to the recording of fact, we can reasonably demand a higher level of accuracy and consistency than what I have found in John Heath’s work. Everything in the book about California and its citizens is wrong: the Huntington Library is in San Marino, not “Pasadena” (1: 67); the Getty Museum Library is in Santa Monica, not “San Marino” (1: 67); R. N. Essick is the author of William Blake Printmaker, not “Essick, G. N.” (1: 58); London Bridge now spans a ditch dug next to the Colorado River in Arizona, not “Lake Tahoe [10 miles wide, 1645 feet deep] in California” (2: 18). Less amusingly but more dangerously, Heath lists two books by A. C. Coxhead, “Thomas Stothard, R.A., An illustrated monograph (A. H. Bullen, London, 1906)” (1: 57), and “Life of Stothard (1919)” (1: 58). The former is well known to those who study Thomas Stothard; the latter is either a work unknown to any other bibliography I have consulted or a misleading reference to Coxhead’s Thomas Stothard: His Life and Work (London: Sidgwick, 1909). These two entries also indicate Heath’s inconsistency in the amount of information he provides, both in his bibliographies of works consulted and in the catalogues of books with plates by the Heath family. Such habits can create confusion or at least force the reader to guess at what is actually meant. The sixth footnote to chapter 3 in volume 1 refers to “Graves: Boydell, p. 178” (1: 54). There is nothing in the “Bibliography” (1: 57-59) listed under either “Graves” or “Boydell.” Celina Fox, “The Engravers’ Battle for Professional Recognition in Early Nineteenth Century London,” London Journal 2 (May 1976): 3-31, is recorded as though it were a book without date, place of publication, or publisher: “Fox, Celina. The Engraver’s Battle for Professional Recognition in Early Nineteenth Century London” (2: 74). “Shenstone’s Poems” (1: 140), without further indication of author or title, is apparently a reference to William Shenstone, The Poetical Works (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798). Need I point out that it is not nice to change the titles of books listed in what purports to be a catalogue raisonné? I remain mystified by a book published by “T. Cadell” in 1788 recorded as having the title “Mina.” (1: 106, no author given).

The introductory essays contain some minor errors (e.g., the small Boydell Shakespeare plates are not “identical” in subject to the larger plates [1: 19]) and what would seem to be either a very large mistake or a major Blake discovery. The passage (1: 31) is worth quoting in full:

As for his [James Heath’s] style, he was essentially a realist engraver, who would probably have disagreed with Blake’s assertion as it stands that ‘Engraving varies so much in the means of expressing the same objects that lines become the language of colours (which is the great object of the engraver’s study)’.

Since no other “Blake” is referred to in John Heath’s book, I took this to mean William Blake. I was immediately startled by Blake’s quoted comment; it was not familiar to me and seemed, on the face of it, most unBlakean. A claim that lines should be used to create a “language of colours” goes against the grain of Blake’s ringing statements, in his Public Address and elsewhere, about the superiority of line to color. When and in what context did Blake write a line that might force a major revision in my sense of his aesthetics? A superscript “12” follows the sentence quoted above; this refers us to “Godfrey, p. 47” (1: 53). The only work listed under “Godfrey” in the Bibliography (1: 58) is Richard T. Godfrey’s well-known study, Printmaking in Britain: A General History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978). I can find no such quotation attributed to Blake anywhere in Godfrey’s book. Nor can I find this statement in the Blake Concordance. Another ghost in the making?

Just before reading The Heath Family Engravers I finished another study of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century engraving, Morris Eaves’s The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992). The contrasts between these two books could not be bolder: English/American, ama-
teur/professional, critical reticence/critical self-consciousness, praxis/lexis, fact/meaning (the intellectual equivalent of the raw and the cooked?). Unfortunately, there is all too frequently another split, one between inaccuracy/accuracy in the recording of facts. Yet John Heath's book will be of lasting benefit, even if we can't believe (or quite figure out) everything he says. Those who read both books can put into practice the lessons in creative contrariety we have learned from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

Appendix: Unrecorded Book Illustrations by Thomas Stothard

_The Heath Family Engravers_ includes, in its catalogues of prints by James and Charles, several books with illustrations by Stothard that have not been noted in previous accounts of that artist's work.3 These new titles are listed below. Whenever possible, I have supplemented John Heath's entries with information garnered from other bibliographies or inspection of the volumes. I am grateful to James Stanger for his assistance in searching the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC).


_The Bioscope, or Dial of Life_ (London: John Murray, 1814). According to Heath, the title page (or a vignette on it?) is engraved by Charles Heath after Stothard. No copy seen; Heath's information based on an unbound impression in the Royal Academy.


_Brighton, A Poem._ A "Frontispiece" (so inscribed) by James Heath after Stothard, known only from a separate impression (Boddington Collection, Huntington Library) with a 6 March 1780 imprint. The title recorded by John Heath is written in pencil ("Brighton a Poem") beneath the image, with the second and third words lined through in pencil. This is a rather shaky foundation on which to propose the existence of a book of this title. Not in ESTC.

Bruce, James. _Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, 2nd ed._ ([London?]: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1804). According to Heath, 8 pls. by James Heath after Stothard. No copy seen; no Longman ed. listed in NUC or BM cat.


Lamb, Charles. _Adventures of Telemachus_ ([London?]: J. Coxhead, 1817). Heath describes 1 pl. by Charles Heath after Stothard as "Shipwreck of Telemachus [sic?]". I can find no such work by Lamb; perhaps an error for his _Adventures of Ulysses_, first published in 1808 with frontispiece and title-page vignette designed by Henry Corbauld.


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Reviewed by John E. Grant

This affordable volume is the only answer to the question: what is the best book-length introduction to Blake the writer for undergraduates and other common readers? It is short, readable, and reliable, and engages in a fresh, engaging, and verifiable manner *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and key poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* that every reader enjoys rereading. Particularly admirable is Ferber's plain style and unperplexed account of what Blake was about. Seldom are the interpretations original, which is right, for an introduction, but hardly anything here sounds like a committee opinion. Whereas some other recent accounts are indifferent to the satire in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Ferber starts with the premise that Blake's work is one and shows clearly how Blake is able to blend into this medley-genre so much that is affirmative, not to be understood as subject to satirical discount. I have a few differences with Ferber's account of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* but believe it to be the best 22 page exposition that has been written.

Readers of this journal would have little use for a list of topics that seem to me right or nearly so in Ferber's easily accessible (though unindexed) book. What I shall discuss instead are some neglected considerations that tend to support or occasionally to modify positions on key matters taken up by Ferber. Ferber's skillful exposition (20-24) of the opening poems of *Experience*, "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer," marks an advance in the literature on these *Songs*; see the writings listed at the end of this piece. Save for the essay of Frye and the books of Gillham, it seems as though the Covering Cherub must often have been guiding the expositors both in what they have noted and especially in what they have overlooked. For example, Leader, though many of his readings of later *Songs* are quite good, starts in incoherence. He controverts Hirsch's myth of "The Two Blakes," but then becomes absorbed by the interpretive discrepancies among Leavis, Bloom, Gleckner, Erdman, et al.; consequently, the reader can hardly guess where Blake was supposed to have been coming from. Quite a lot of this kind of criticism predates more recent theoretical engagements in antithetical criticism.

It would seem axiomatic that an introduction to Blake ought to be based on a thorough grasp of a key poem Blake entitled "Introduction" but indeed such accounts have been rare and sometimes so blurred by contradictory interpretations that the common reader might gather that Blake himself didn't understand what he was driving at. After considering some of the ways in which Gleckner's solution for the "two voices" in "Introduction" doesn't quite work, Larrissy (68) settles on the postmodern solution: "Better to say that the poem is completely ambiguous from beginning to end." In a future age, Blake had hoped that Earth would arise and better understanding would prevail.

Except for Gillham, no one has defined the keynote of failed relationships with which Experience begins as well as Ferber: "the Bard's poem has a reply, 'Earth's Answer,' which nullifies the Bard's appeal, or at least reveals the stony ground on which his appeal falls. . . . In *Innocence*, people communicate, they listen and understand; in *Experience*, they give monologues, and they misconstrue each other if they listen at all (20). "What we have in the end is a stalemate between the Bard who commands Earth to arise and the Earth who commands the Bard-as-father to set her free" (24). Though the word "command," which Ferber employs several times, does not precisely describe the rhetorical posture of either the Bard or Earth, the basic idea that it is the failure of communication between them that is, in effect, the essence of Experience is made abundantly clear.

The Bard's call to Earth, in the vocative: "O Earth O Earth return!" is not a "command"; Ferber's alternative formulation, "an appeal," is closer, but rather too depersonalized for the personification allegory in which Earth is about to respond. The Bard's call is an *exhortation* that has nothing essentially or oppressively patriarchal about it, though the authorial introduction within the poem employs a unit of vocabulary the echoes of which may have served to mis-
lead Earth and also the interpreters who have supposed she
speaks gospel. The Holy Word, as seen and rearticulated by
the Bard, includes in lines 8-9 the very rhyme words em-
ployed by Pope's Jupiter in the translation of Homer's
Iliad where (VIII, 452-79) the father of gods and men sets forth
the most authoritative account of ultimate power:

Who shall the sovereign of the skies control?
Not all the gods that crown the starry pole. (472-73)

Those who recognize this allusion at all are, however,
expected to appreciate that the sense of the lines in Blake's
poem is precisely the opposite. Jupiter's notorious pro-
nouncement is that he won't concede an iota of control—
especially to those presumptuous goddesses, Juno and
Athena. The message of the Holy Word, on the contrary, is
that Earth could, if she would, undo the Fall by taking charge
of her own destiny. The objective conditions of the natural
world should not be allowed to preclude regeneration; rightly
seen, these patterns sustain life and offer promise of the
fulfillment of desire.

Most accounts of Earth accept her claim that she has been
victimized by "the Father of the Ancient Men" but take little
notice of her condition and state of mind. Ferber points out
that "Earth manages only to raise up her head which is too
filled with dread and despair to imagine she can do any­
thing unaided" and in the end "commands the Bard-as-fa-
ther to set her free" (24). Later Ferber contrasts Innocence
with Experience, which "is marked by despair and a with­
drawal into one's private self." In this context, I would again
object that "commands" is not the exact word; what Earth
does is to make (non-negotiable) demands of the sort is­
sued by those alienated and powerless to enforce their
wishes. But Ferber does well to bring out the motive of
despair both in "Earth's Answer" and in Experience as a
whole—though, in fact, "despair" is only literally identi­
fied (by the narrator) in one other poem, "The Clod & the
Pebble," the usual sequel to "Earth's Answer."

For an evaluation of what Earth answers, the force of the
allegory of "despair" as a head of grey hair can hardly be
exaggerated. Blake's range of usage of "despair" shows that
the term is rarely equivalent to such secular near-synonyms
as dejection or depression. Despair is the condition of those
in hell: Abandon all hope, ye who enter. Blake would have
objected to despair as a motive for the same reason Shelley
did in Prometheus Unbound: "Despair smothered / The strug­
gling World, which slaves and tyrants win." (1, 576-77).
For those who suppose that English Blake could never have
entertained Dante's Roman Catholic conviction that those
in hell have lost the good of the intellect, or that Blake was
bound to give a fair hearing even to others who were in a
state of despair, there is an additional consideration, an in­
scription on page 4 of Blake's Notebook, dated 20 January
1807 "between Two and Seven in the Evening—Despair"
(E694). In such a state, Blake's own judgment was unlikely
to have been equal to his genius.

Despair has an imposing presence in some of Blake's most
complex pictures, particularly The House of Death (Butlin
no. 320, pl. 397; no. 321, pl. 398; no. 322, pl. 399), the
color print derived from Paradise Lost XI, 477-93. The (var­
ed) figure of Despair who stands at the right, as the minion
of Death, above tripartite fallen man, was equipped by Blake
with a dagger unmentioned by Milton, but perhaps derived
from the Cave of Despair in The Faerie Queene I, ix, which
appears to have an arsenal of pointed instruments (see Butlin
no. 811, pl. 879 and Blake 8 [1974-75]: esp. 8—inaccurate
in some particulars). Blake re-enlisted the figure of Despair
from the color print to represent the enslaved soldier in the
white line-relief etching called Jerusalem, Plate 51; Vala,
Hyle and Skofeld (Butlin no. 578, pl. 812), the frontispiece
to the third chapter of Jerusalem. As Skofeld the figure of
Despair is divested of his dagger and is manacled, shack­
led, and aflame—turned away from his companions in des­
pair. No doubt it is not accidental that the fallen company
of royalty, worker, and soldier presented in Jerusalem 51 is
sandwiched between two of Blake's chief disquisitions on
"Sin," in verse on plate 50, and in prose on plate 52. It
should also be considered that on an earlier occasion Blake
was at pains to depict the Cave of Despair episode in
Spenser's Faerie Queene. It was selected to represent one
of two defining episodes for showing what Spenser himself
could do in the tenth design for Gray's The Bard (Butlin no.
335.64). Remarkably, Spenser's large gesture of admon­
ishment and exhortation in this picture has not been taken
into account by commentators.

Because Ferber's purpose was to write briefly about
Blake's poetry, he could not be expected to add to the small
amount of criticism that has attempted to discuss the inter­
action between poetry and design in the introductory plates
for Songs of Experience. Let us consider how the
two poems are illustrated in their accompanying designs:
"Introduction" presents a good match between poem and
picture, whereas "Earth's Answer" presents practically no
match at all. In the "Introduction," a human figure of Earth
(turned away from the viewer) floats in the cosmos, await­
ing the dawn that in some copies has begun to color Earth's
cloud-couch. For "Earth's Answer" nothing in the poetic
imagery even faintly suggests the depicted serpent or the
usual bunch of grapes. That the (doubtless) female figure in
the former design is supposed to be Blake's figure of Earth
has been recognized by (inter alia) Wicksteed, Wellek,
Hirsch, and Keynes and proven (as it were) to be Earth by
Chayes. To Chayes's evidence may be added the front view
of the woman on a cloud in the watercolor drawing As If an
Angel Dropped Down (Butlin no. 547.6, pl. 595). It is even
likely that, as an unnam'd form, the same woman witnessed
the spiritual deed featured in the lost tempera Number VI,
A Spirit Vaulting from a Cloud (E546) that "was done many
taught that “the Holy Word” is God the Tyrant and Earth will, in the following poem, declare that she is pent up in a “den” by “Starry Jealousy.” By implication: reader, don’t believe your eyes; the Bard is guilty as charged: case closed.

Commentators have not attempted an unperplexed explanation for the presence of the open-mouthed serpent, the only creature depicted in “Earth’s Answer,” in the pictorial space at the bottom of the plate where one would expect Earth herself to appear. In late copies such as W, the serpent is awarded a halo to match that given Earth in “Introduction”; in Z Earth gets a big golden transparent halo (to see through to those dubious stars) while the front third of the serpent is bathed in sunrise (possibly to compensate for the bunch of grapes, which are lacking in this copy only.) But in every copy this design shows that “Earth’s Answer” is articulated by the serpent. Damon was sure that this is the Serpent of Eden, which seems probable enough, but further assumed that it represents “the priesthood,” an allegory it would require vast ingenuity to sustain in this context. Earth might indeed be giving expression to some counter-cultural ideology, but Blake never made out Rousseau to be a priest. Still the words of alienated Earth may seem to conjure up something like the following suspicion: The jealous star-god, “the father of the ancient men,” must be behind the voice of the Bard. Who is he to command the wretched of the earth to return! Those grapes of joy which are (usually) held out up there out of reach will probably become the grapes of wrath.

As though to clarify the distinction, Blake designed a reprise of the issues in chapter 3 of Jerusalem. In plate 72, the call of “Introduction” to Experience is reissued: “Return, Jerusalem . . . Return / Return . . . O Albion . . . O Albion awake!” (72: 34-36, E227-28). Earlier in plate 57, we are shown “Jerusalem” entangled in a fiery net and in plate 63, Earth herself appears pathetically immobilized in a vermicate vortex in a design also recalling the large color prints of Satan Exulting over Eve (Butlin nos. 291, 292, pls. 384, 389). In the following plate, Jerusalem 64, we see the dream of an emanation playing a game of (interpretive) liberation, but in Jerusalem 71 she is downcast again between the entanglements of Love and Jealousy. At the bottom of plate 72, captioned with a motto of sexual politics in reversed writing, the tail of the vermicate serpent of “Earth’s Answer” tries to grasp the “Gate” of Love. The reader is expected to recall this serpent when shown on plate 98, at the top, the identical serpent casting off its skin and thus becoming ready for the regeneration of Jerusalem in plate 99.

These late published designs review the issues as sketched much earlier in the Notebook, page 111, where “The Earth’s Answer” was drafted. There the human form as Satan enacts the defiance of the serpent that is shown in “Earth’s Answer” while bewhiskered God is revealed occupying the Judgment Seat, seemingly unmoved by Jesus as supplicant.
Blake reused these figures again in the *Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"* (Butlin no. 770, pl. 967) where at the top of the spiral of history, the old God lords it over Adam, Eve, and the Serpent while Jesus has descended to the Mount of Transfiguration, where he appears not only to Moses and Elias, but also to Hervey, who is prompted to visionary capacity by the two angels who seemed able only to weep in *Jerusalem* 72 (where Hervey is named, 1. 52, in a most favorable context). Such a review of the ups and downs of the serpent indicates how Blake kept working the same symbolism in implied narratives while refusing to issue the premature reassurance, "That's all right," when it isn't. In the end, it may be believed, the unregenerate will be regenerated, but as far as we are shown in the words and pictures at the outset of Experience, the Earth still continues to turn away toward darkness.

When driven by a social agenda the interpreter may wish to argue against the pictorial and verbal evidence provided by Blake that the condition of a victim was or is or ought to be much worse than it seems in a particular representation. It should be acknowledged, however, that the condition of Earth as shown in the "Introduction", even if perhaps chilly and with no dawn actually in sight, shows no sign of actual suffering. This crucial point for a right reading of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* can be made clear by comparison with the titlepage design, which presents the most horrific Expulsion scene to be found in Blake or, indeed, anywhere in art. In early copies, both Adam and Eve hide their faces from the fire which floods the design, a holocaust leaving no room to represent the angel or his sword, to say nothing of the God behind the necessary angel. That was oppression! In the several copies of the titlepage, (eg., T, U, W) where Eve's face is shown and her mouth is open, she is undoubtedly to be supposed to be protesting her divine oppressor, more discerningly than the serpent ever does in "Earth's Answer."

There is another post-Miltonic formulation of "the starry pole" that was probably familiar enough for Blake and some of his original audience to have been conscious of it as an echo in the introductory stanzas to the Bard's call to Earth. It involves the apothecary of the Muse of Edward Young in his 1717 poem *The Last Day,* III, 7-12: refusing to lie forever "in inglorious shades," the Muse "gains upon the starry pole." For those who recognize the allusion, the imaginative inability of Earth to arise from her "den" seems the more deplorable or pathetic. There were perhaps other Blake readers for whom "the starry pole" did not register as an echo from Milton or Pope or Young but who could recall other recent writing by Blake himself in which another woman, also a victim, suddenly raises her voice from a denunciation of her human oppressor to a defiance of a self-proclaimed sky god: "O Urizen! Creator of men, mistaken Demon of heaven" (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 5.3, E48).

What is crucially at issue in these comparable situations is authenticity of vision: Oothoon’s is validated, Earth’s is not. The lead-in to Oothoon’s epiphany is the second occurrence of the refrain: "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & echo back her sighs" (5:2; cf. 2:20 and 8:13, end). Nothing like this supports Earth’s complaint. While the reader of Blake must have all possible respect for any minority of one, particularly for one who suffers, *Visions* in particular corrects the supposition that the other two isolators, Bromion and Theotormon, have much of truth on their sides. Thus Oothoon appears intrepid in the one situation while Earth in the other appears dispirited because the former has something more significant to convey than her own pain. And this is shown in the last plate of *Visions,* where fiery Oothoon looks right at the reader as she speaks words of truth. Having achieved the voice of the prophecy, Oothoon is empowered to speak out, whereas Earth keeps turning away.

On "London," Ferber’s essay "London and its politics" (*ELH* 48 [1981]: 45-56) remains the best concise account. This is in no small measure because Ferber is not drawn into the game of faulting the speaker rather than concentrating on the truth of the dreadful things seen. The six pages in Ferber’s recent book are also good at explaining, along with much else, why the interpretive project of finding Blake’s speaker implicated in or discredited by this intense critique of urban oppression is profoundly mistaken. A reader such as Larrissy, who maintains (esp. 42-55) that what the speaker of “London” perceives is mostly in his head cannot appreciate that Blake’s speaker does not pretend to “mark” i.e., to make marks—as in Ezekiel (according to Bloom) or St. John (according to E. P. Thompson). The “marks” observed by the walker in “London” were doubtless inscribed by invisible authority. As even the little chimney sweeper can tell, “God & his Priest & King” are to blame. But in “London,” the speaker comes to see “how” the dreadful things really do keep happening all around us.

There are, however, a couple of lacunae in Ferber’s new account of “London,” the poem and design: "We might imagine [the harlot] screaming 'A plague on you!' as the wedding party drives by..." (50). "We" might, but for the "I" of the poem what counts is the god-forsaken cry of the harlot as envisioned in “midnight streets,” when, for better or for worse, there will never be a wedding party or funeral to be seen. The point of “London” that Blake the poet came to discover only in writing the belated last stanza is that, though the signs of rot are everywhere in Experience, even the visionary may not recognize the root of evil while jostling in the street by day. To employ a heavy term invented by Northrop Frye, midnight serves as the point of demonic epiphany. At that time the absent spectacle of abomination is desolation; “how” the evil is spread cannot fully appear at the stroke of any midnight, but it can be understood best when the visionary is not jostled by its consequences. A
thoroughly modern reader ought to be able to step outside Blake's poem and listen to the argument, for what it is worth, that sex workers may be as happy as we. But not in the poem "London."

A second distraction in Ferber's new account of "London" occurs in the description of the main picture: "a boy leads an old man on crutches, perhaps blind, toward a doorway..." On the contrary, Blake's point is that (unlike the comparable scenes in America 12, Gates 15, or Blair's Grave) the old man is accompanied and being led past the door. He needs no help to find Death's Door. And the reader must be trusted to imagine that the boy in the design is an altruist whose deed brightens darkest "London." As reassurance (as it were), in Night Thoughts 243 (VI, 22), Blake shows the sequel: the same pair has continued on into the fields and left behind the city of destruction on the other side of the river. Still the aged blind man wishes to climb down into the earth. Still the boy who takes the part of the helpful Samaritan urges him to endure his exodus onward.

It could, of course, be played ironically by the same kind of suspicious reader who knows better than to trust the voice of the poem. Deconstruct either of the two principals or infer an ambush. Either presume that the halt and blind bearded old man is the detestable Urizen who is really in charge in spite of his patent disabilities or suspect that the boy is a decoy for some unseen street gang waiting round the next corner to waylay the old man. Look at that boy's face, as it appears in the printed form in most versions: not very appealing.

The exaggerated deconstructive scenario of the child as villain hasn't been seriously proposed yet, but there are plenty of commentators who have no sympathy for anyone looking like that old devil "Urizen." It only makes matters worse if criticism allows his image to be critically generalized; a bearded old man may have nothing but the night to look forward to, but need not be presumed a villain.

Because of the special character of Blake's writings in illuminated printing, however, understanding may be retarded by inexact notions of how the words of pictures are actually arranged and inferred from them as to what Blake is getting at. In spite of Ferber's attempt to take into account the force of some of the designs in Visions, he pays less attention to their deployment than he should. He expresses reservations about the inconclusiveness of the work without quite realizing that what he is judging is a text rather than a work of illuminated printing: "Oothoon keeps up her wonderful, inexhaustible talk, but it seems to bring her and her sisters no closer to freedom" (69). Theotormon "need only arise and embrace her, making her spirit his own. He does not, and the poem ends unhappily. Or rather the poem simply stops without really ending, for we are told that 'Thus every morning wails Oothoon,' while Theotormon sits 'conversing with shadows dire'" (73). Ferber presents some mitigating considerations to these pessimistic conclusions, but the final picture ought not to be understood as indicating progress in vision beyond that described in the last line of text: "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes and echo back her sighs." A modern reader may be dissatisfied that the Daughters of Albion don't do something practical such as demand the vote or reform of the divorce laws, but nothing adequate could be imagined within the social horizons existing in 1793. Wilkie (64 and passim) reads in the right spirit by defining the issue at the end of Visions as a matter of "consciousness-raising": the Daughters really do "hear" and respond to the suffering of Oothoon as their own. Moreover, the concluding sequence of pictures (as Wilkie, 69, explains) show a female audience increasingly ready for "vision": in plate 5, a woman buries her face in her pillow, in 6 her hands, in 7 one of perhaps five women looks up, and finally, in 8, two of three look up unscaed, though they do have one companion who still hides her face from the truth being articulated by Oothoon as she hovers above them. As in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," the viewer is not informed either in words or pictures what the eventual consequences will be. But we are shown enough to realize what they ought to be. In other words, Visions would not be more timely if it were expected to deliver in the shape of things to come.

Neither Ferber, nor Goslee, nor Wilkie considers what should be made of the fact that Thel is never mentioned again in Blake's work, but that Oothoon is heard of again in five other works from Europe 14 to Jerusalem 83. It is not necessary to assume the "Oothoon" always stands for the same thing, but if Blake had any system at all, "Oothoon" must have continued to be a crucial part of it, appearing as she does in the penultimate plate of Milton in a way that recalls what she was at the end of Visions. That her best efforts are not shown to be efficacious for all women, or perhaps even for one man, is no grounds for despair: "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" was the best that Moses could hope for, in a time when there was hardly any response. This hypothetical exhortation was repeated by Milton when Albion seemed closer to arising and again by Blake in the wonderful "Preface" to Milton a Poem. Anyone who reads Blake in the spirit knows that the time is at hand and becomes persuaded to the program of the "Jerusalem" hymn, which appears in the "Preface" to Milton and only there. But, unlike other committed readers, Ferber "so loved" the idea that he made one of the few factual errors in this fine book, declaring in his second sentence that the hymn "has survived in" only "four engraved copies" (vii) whereas, alas, it is contained in only the first two of the four [etched] copies. I don't recall that anyone has given an adequate account of Blake's motives for having suppressed the "Preface" to Milton; certainly no one could do so briefly, least of all in the exordium to a brief introduction of Blake's writings. Such a question would seem impossible textual to anyone who had not grasped the realities of illuminated printing as an instrument of vision. But it should be on the agenda for Blake studies.

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Having quite often complained of the results when other critics wrestled with "The Tyger," I am glad to say that Ferber succeeds very well with the poem even though he is apparently unsatisfied with my efforts on its behalf. He even manages to engage "The Sick Rose" more closely with the world of "The Tyger" than it ever occurred to me to do. As for the picture, he mentions that "some readers have seen, a certain smile on the drawn tiger" (43), a notion recently reaffirmed in Robert N. Essick's Huntington guide. Though it is not within the scope of The Poetry of William Blake to present pictures, an exception was made for the cover (here-with reproduced) to include a detail picture of the Tyger blown up two centimeters and in color; we are not told which copy in the British Museum this may be: probably B rather than A, not dreadful T. Let us look at this Tyger: is it smiling or not? Compare it with copy Y, likewise reproduced as a detail (actual size, monochrome) on page 50 of the Norton Critical Edition of Blake's Poems. This copy is the only one that illustrates the limerick about "the smile on the face of the tiger." In the (probable) copy B on the cover of Ferber's book anyone can see that the Tyger is not smiling, though both Tyger-faces are disfeatured by that same big stuffed-tiger innocent eye. Even when you see the most formidable Tyger, as depicted in Princeton copy U, where the eye is diminished and intensified, and the mouth is certainly not smiling, the beast as shown is not quite up to the sublime beast imagined in the poem. As for the "dread feet," though, they should not be considered expendable by the designer of any cover. But woe, alas, the Penguin designer cropped the tiger. This is one of the very few introductory things indisputably wrong with Ferber's outstanding book.

Update

In October 1993, E. P. Thompson's long-awaited last book was published: Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law. Readers may doubt whether Blake's mother was indeed a Muggletonian but will believe that she must have been something as far out as that. Thompson's dedication and epigraph are evidence enough: "To David Erdman and "Christ Died as an Unbeliever."

In his spirited review entitled "The Making of William Blake," (The Nation, 15 November 1993 [594-600]), Michael Ferber recalls Thompson as saying at Yale in 1981, ". . . I talked to Blake last year. He told me to try to stop the bloody Cruises and Pershings before it's too late." Surely he did. It seems, though, that Ferber doesn't recognize how far, in the end, Thompson came toward escaping from the gins of the depressors of "London": the low "marks" bestowed by Ezekiel are Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold them. Those of John could not have held out much longer.

I wish, however, that Blake had told Thompson that when he finally appeared as Witness Against the Beast he should repeat what he had said in the London Review of Books in January 1993 about Blake's sense of humor. Blake dedicated his last book to Lord Byron because he told the truth about the first murder. But no less because that just man in the wilderness dared to be amused at the Vision of Judgment of that man of blood. Maybe in the end, like the witness John Wilkes, Thompson thought it best not to reiterate above the sun the imaginative deficiencies he had remarked beneath it.

Recent Discussion of "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer" (loc. cit.) and Other Writings Mentioned


Association of America, 1985, 213, refers to it as "the best introduction to all the Songs..." and then mentions half a dozen critics who had sought to discredit the Bard.


Grant, John E. "This is Not Blake's 'The Tyger' (With apologies to René Magritte)." The Iowa Review 19(1969): 112-55.


Lucasian Professor depicted here in naked glory. But the Newton more familiar to Blake's generation was another, the Rev. John Newton, adventurer, author and divine. John Newton had an extraordinary life, and he wrote about it at some length and on various occasions. An enthusiastic disciple of Whitefield and friend of Wesley, John Newton became rector of Olney, where he knew and worked with William Cowper, with whom he coauthored the Olney Hymns (1779). In 1780 he moved to the benifice of St. Mary Woolnoth with St. Mary Woolchurch, Lombard St., London. Here, in Blake's London, he preached to large congregations and published against the slave trade in support of Wilberforce. In his last years he went blind, and he died in London in 1807.

Blake's figure bears no resemblance to the fleshy, rather commonplace portrait of the Rev. John prefaced to The Works of the Rev. John Newton in 12 volumes (London, 1821). But it is Newton's early life that may be relevant to that figure. In the 1740s he had served on a slave ship and found himself stranded on an island off the coast of Africa. His Authentic Narrative, first published in 1764 and something of a classic in evangelical circles, offers the following:

Though destitute of food and clothing, depressed to a degree beyond common wretchedness, I could sometimes collect my mind to mathematical studies. I had bought Barrow's Euclid at Portsmouth; it was the only volume I brought on shore; it was always with me, and I used to take it to remote corners of the island by the sea side, and draw my diagrams with a long stick upon the sand. Thus I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feeling:—and thus, without any other assistance, I made myself, in a good measure, master of the first six books of Euclid.

This was a famous anecdote: Wordsworth transcribes it faithfully in The Prelude (1805, 6: 160ff; 1850, 6: 142ff.). And it describes something very close, of course, to the posture of Blake's Newton, bending over the sand or sea floor with his scroll and compasses. For John Newton, this was a stage upon life's way, a habit to be discontinued after his conversion, when he "laid aside the mathematics. I found they not only cost me much time, but engrossed my thoughts too far: my head was literally full of schemes. I was weary of cold contemplative truth, which can neither warm nor amend the heart, but rather tends to aggrandize self" (1: lxxxviii). Essick has noted an iconographic connection in Dürer between geometry and melancholy; John Newton found it out for himself on a tropical beach and wrote it into the narrative of his Christian awakening.

And is it part of Blake's print? More would have to be done to convert this possibility from hunch or hypothesis to firm persuasion. But it does explain the posture and one of the possible locations for Blake's figure. Blake liked complex allusions, and this one adds another temporal dimension to the moment of Newton. John Newton gave up geometry in order to find God; Isaac Newton perhaps represents a God found by way of mathematics. If Sir Isaac himself was a manifold figure, conjuring up energy and repression, orthodoxy and revolution—and we might recall that Sir Isaac was a theological oddball as well—then the copresence of another Newton, John Newton, imaged in the most famous event of his life, pictures another and companionate history in the pulse of this particular graphic artery, a history of error preliminary to truth, or mathematical truth preliminary to spiritual truth. If Blake is joining faith with rational science in an image of two Newtons, and playfully implying the precarious presence of Sir Isaac in the Reverend John, then the synthetic energy of Paolozzi's sculpture is greater than we have yet realized, and its potential to represent the bringing together of the sciences and humanities, as intended by Michael Saunders Watson (as reported by Martin Butlin), is all the greater. As for revolution . . . of that we had best be silent.

**NEWSLETTER**

**CORRECTION**

In n5 of "Cromek's Lost Letter about Blake's Grave Designs" (Blake 27 [1993]: 160) G. E. Bentley, Jr. directs readers to my article "S' Joshua and His Gang': William Blake and the Royal Academy," Huntington Library Quarterly 52 (1989): 75-95. However, in that article I hardly mentioned Cromek at all. What Bentley really meant was my article "Canterbury Revisited: The Blake-Cromek Controversy" (Blake 23 [1988/89]: 80-92). (Aileen Ward)

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