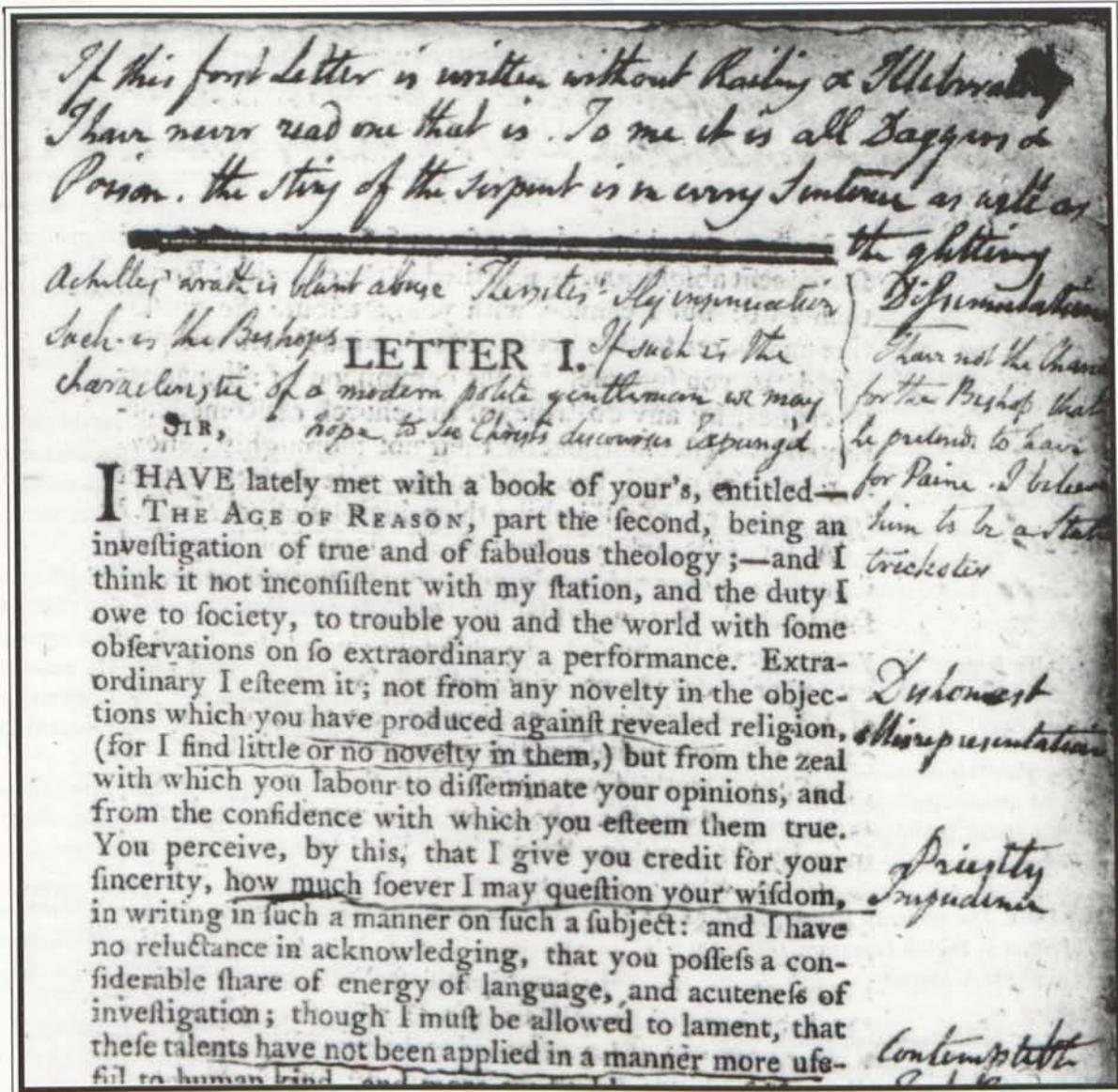


BLAKE

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY



MORTON PALEY ON BLAKE,
THOMAS PAINE, AND BISHOP WATSON

Blake

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Page 1. The annotations around the title "Letter I" and those to the right of it were written with a finer nib than the rest. Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

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"To Defend the Bible in This Year 1798 Would Cost a Man His Life"

BY MORTON D. PALEY

[A plenary lecture at the joint meeting ("1798 and Its Implications") of the British Association for the Study of Romanticism and the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism at St. Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, on 6 July 1998.]

For most of us here 1798 was above all the year of the *Lyrical Ballads*. But it was also, as we all know, the year of Napoleon in Egypt, the uprising of the United Irishmen and its bloody aftermath, of Malthus's first *Essay on Population*, and the year of (as Ian McCalmon puts it) "the most draconian, anti-radical crackdown of the entire Pittite 'Terror'" ("New Jerusalem" 26). For William Blake, it was a seemingly unexceptional year, a year for which there are no known letters and no known published works other than some commercial engravings. But it was also the year in which he wrote on the verso of the title page of Bishop Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible*: "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life" and then "The Beast and the Whore rule without controls."¹ The Bishop's *Apology* was an attack upon *The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine, and Blake's notes were a vehement counter-attack upon Bishop Watson. Why should Blake want to defend Thomas Paine, with whom he had some important points of disagreement, so unequivocally? That is my subject today, along with the place these annotations have in the development of Blake's thought, including just what he meant by the two sentences quoted. Say first! what mov'd Blake?

History has not been kind to Richard Watson, D.D., Bishop of Landaff, sometime Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. His *Apology for the Bible* was celebrated in its day. It had first appeared in 1796, and the 1797 edition that Blake owned was its eighth at the time. It had also been published widely in America. Every

¹ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, rev. ed., 1982) 611. This edition will hereafter be cited as E, with page number(s) following. G. E. Bentley, Jr., in *William Blake's Writings*, reads the last word of the second line as "control." In his excellent edition of the *Annotations*, G. Ingli-James reads it as "control" with a deleted last letter, as do I.

Harvard student was given a copy! In the *Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson*, published by his son in 1817, Watson included fan letters from a society for discountenancing vice in Dublin and from the Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. He also asserted that an employer had printed off 3000 copies for distribution to his workers, and declared that many thousands more were sold in Scotland and in England at a small price "without any profit or wish of profit to myself." (It was still going strong in 1817—a new edition is advertised in the end papers to the *Anecdotes*.)

Yet the only reason that Richard Watson is remembered today is he that he was attacked by two great poets, neither of whom even published his remarks. In 1793, William Wordsworth wrote but did not publish "A Letter to the Bishop of Landaff . . . By a Republican" (*Prose Works* 1: 32-49) in reply to Watson's defense of the British constitution in an appendix to an earlier sermon. Wordsworth wrote: "It is feared that you have at last fallen, through one of the numerous trap-doors, into the tide of contempt to be swept down to the ocean of oblivion" (*Prose Works* 1: 31); however, Wordsworth is decorum itself compared to Blake, who calls the Bishop "a State trickster" (E 612) and refers to his "cloven foot" (616). It isn't fair. Bishop Watson, as Florence Sandler has pointed out in an excellent essay, had opposed the American War, advocated the abolition of the slave trade, favored the enlargement of the franchise, and spoken for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. He was a proponent of Roman Catholic emancipation, and was long known as "the dissenters' bishop." The *Anecdotes* documents his broadmindedness. When the University of Cambridge proposed an address to the King in 1775 exhorting him to continue the American War, Bishop Watson actively engaged himself in opposition, but had to report "The Tories beat us by eight votes . . . they owe their victory to the ministerial troops, which were poured in from the Admiralty, Treasury, &c. beyond expectation" (57). Bishop Watson originally had high hopes for the French Revolution. "In 1792," he writes, "I published a Charge in which I had touched upon unpopular subjects—the advantages which would probably result to human society from the French Revolution. . . and the injustice and impolicy of our Test and Corporation Acts" (257). William Pitt, he tells us, rejected his arguments. He also prints a speech he made in the House of Lords on 15 January 1795, supporting the Duke of Bedford's motion for negotiations for peace with France (Burke's "Regicide Peace"). "Suppose, then," Bishop Watson asks, "the unfortunate Louis to be placed, by our efforts, on the throne of his ancestors, surrounded by his nobles in the plenitude of their ancient privilege; the bastille re-erected, and the people of France,—Heaven avert that part of the event!) once more crouching under the rod of despotic power, what advantage will Great Britain derive from this change?" (283). Asserting "I consider it as a Chris-

Notes on the Bishop's Apology for the Bible
 by William Blake
 To defend the Bible in this year 1798
 would cost a man his life
 The Beast & the Whore rule without controlld
 It is an easy matter for a Bishop to triumph
 over Paines attack but is it not so easy
 for one who loves the Bible
 The Permissions of Christs words & acts
 are attacks by Paine & also the permissions
 of the Bible; Who dare defend ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~acts~~ ^{the}
 Acts of Christ or the Bible Unpermitted?
 But to him who sees this mortal pilgrimage in
 the light that I see it. Duty to ^{his} ~~my~~ country
 is the first consideration & safety the last
 Read patiently take not up this Book in an idle
 hour the consideration of these things is the ~~most~~
 whole duty of man & the affairs of life &
 death trifles sports of time ^{But} ~~then~~ ^{then} consideration
 trumps of Eternity
 Have been commended from Hell not to print
 as it is what our enemies wish

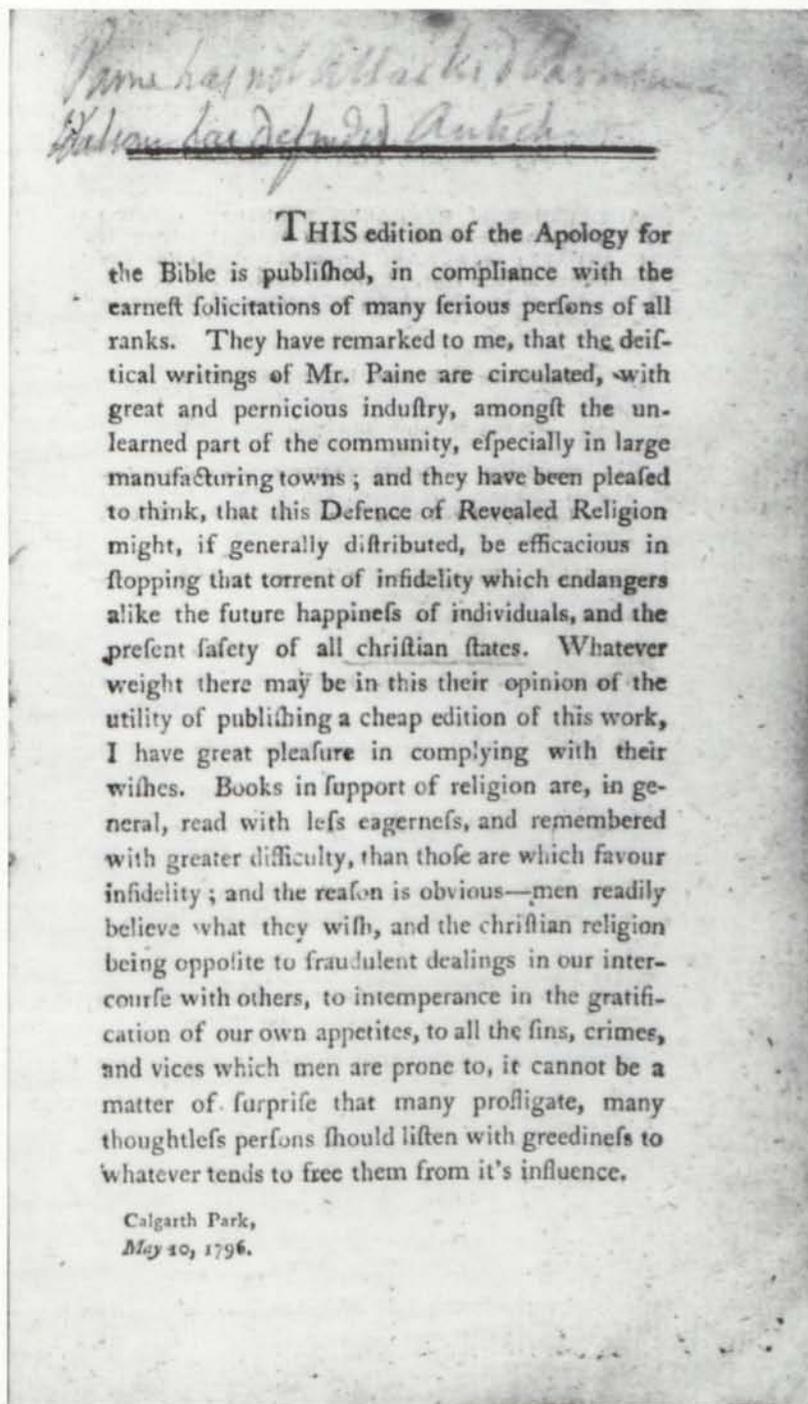
1 Back of title page. "The Beast & the Whore rule without controlx" has been lightly lined through. At the end of the last word in that sentence a letter has been heavily inked out. Note that the sense of "Read patiently" and what follows is that Blake has finished reading Watson's book and is advising an implied reader of these annotations as to how to approach it. Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

tian effort of a humane people to put a stop to the effusion of blood" (281), he was the only Bishop to vote for the Duke of Bedford's motion. Could Bishop Watson appear to us today, hovering in the darksome air like a Blakean apparition, he might cry out the words W. H. Auden gives to Herod in the "Christmas Oratorio" *For the Time Being*: "I'm

a liberal. I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born." (125).

Perhaps there just is no justice for a man who in 1793 could publish sermons under the title *The Wisdom and Goodness of God in Having Made Both Rich and Poor*. (Incidentally, Blake's note next to the title of this book—"God

2 Untitled preface facing the verso of the title page. Blake's note in the top margin is written in pencil. Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.



made Man happy & rich but the Subtil made the innocent Poor" (E 612)—is in line with Paine's own reply to Watson, *Agrarian Justice*. "It is wrong to say God made *Rich* and *Poor*," Paine wrote, alluding to Watson's title; "he only made *Male* and *Female*; and he gave them the earth for their inheritance."² In any event, my purpose here is not to do justice

² Page 5. Paine says he wrote the pamphlet in 1795-96 and decided to publish it after seeing the pamphlet listed (as did Blake) in Watson's *Apology*.

to Bishop Watson, which I must leave to some other realm. It is, rather, to consider Blake's annotations to Watson's book. And we should note that Blake didn't annotate his copy of Watson's *Apology* all at once or with equal attention to every part. An examination of the original in the Huntington Library shows that, although most of Blake's notes are in ink, the notes on at least four pages were written in pencil; and on page 1, two of the notes were written with a much finer nib than the rest. Furthermore, as E. B.

Murray (146) points out, Blake wrote some of his comments, such as the two paragraphs about public records, in a hasty scrawl. All this suggests more than one attack upon Watson's text, though they could be made at short intervals. Furthermore, Blake's attention was not sustained. The pages of front matter and the first 17 numbered pages all bear notes, then Blake's interest begins to lag and only four of the next 12 are annotated. From page 37 through 47 and again from 50 through 94, from 96 through 107, and from 110-16 there are no notes at all, suggesting that Blake skimmed through or over what adds up to about half the book. At page 117 he returned to the fray, writing notes on the last four pages of the book, concluding that "Tom Paine is a better Christian than the Bishop" and that "the Bishop has only hurt Paine's heel, while Paine has broken his head" (E 620). I begin, then, with Thomas Paine.

That Blake knew Thomas Paine is not in doubt, although the myth that Blake saved Paine's life, transmitted from Frederick Tatham to Alexander Gilchrist for Gilchrist's life of Blake, has long been exploded. Tatham was also the source of the claim that "in their conversations, Paine said that religion was a law and a tie to all able minds," while "Blake . . . said what he was always asserting, that the religion of Jesus, was a perfect law of Liberty . . ." (*Blake Records* 41n). This doesn't sound right. Paine typically used "law" not for restraint—that is the "Blakean" meaning—but for *freedom*; time and again he contrasts the government of law in a republic with the government of kings. Similarly unconvincing is Samuel Palmer's statement to Gilchrist that "Blake rebuked the profanity of Paine" (*Blake Records* 41n); in an age when language was ridden with profanity, no one else has remarked that Blake objected to it. Of course this doesn't mean that no conversations with Paine took place. Blake had probably spoken of them to his two much younger friends, but some thirty years later they recollected them according to the current state of their own memories and beliefs—Tatham had become a member of Irving's Catholic Apostolic Church, Palmer a conservative Anglican. (John Linnell, a reliable reporter, wrote "Paine" in a list of subjects he prepared for discussion with Gilchrist [*Blake Records* 319n]). Blake probably met Paine at one or more of the publisher Joseph Johnson's weekly gatherings. Paine of course was already famous for his *Common Sense* when he returned to England, and he became even more celebrated for *The Rights of Man*, published in 1791, said to have sold approximately 200,000 copies in a population of about six million.³ The publication of its second part in 1792 caused Paine to be charged with seditious libel. More must be said in a moment about these books, which caused Blake to write Paine into his *America* and to give him an

especially prominent place among the "fierce Americans" who rise to defend their continent against Albion's Angel.

Paine first appears in *America* as one of a carefully selected group of seven: "Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock, & Green" (3: 4, E 52). The list is balanced between men known primarily as soldiers and as civilians, although some were of course both. In a second list of seven, there are two substitutions, but Paine remains; and in two other contexts the seven are distilled to three: "Washington / And Paine and Warren with their foreheads toward the east" (9: 10-11; see also 12: 7). Washington's presence is of course inevitable. Warren's importance lies in his being a heroic martyr. (A doctor by profession, he was killed at Bunker Hill and portrayed in John Trumbull's *Death of General Warren* as a dying Christ being bayoneted by an English soldier.⁴) Paine's special prominence lies of course in his being a writer, specifically, as far as *America* is concerned, the author of *Common Sense*, in which Paine wrote "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind." Some of his other statements there would have struck a particular resonance in Blake. "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise" (67). Paine appeals to scripture to prove that "the will of the Almighty, as declared by Gideon and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of the government of kings" (72). Like Blake, Paine uses biblical typology to convey some of his meanings. The rights of kings are made parallel in *Common Sense* to the doctrine of original sin, which of course Paine rejects:

For as in Adam all sinned, and as in the first electors all men obeyed; as in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to Sovereignty; as our innocence was lost in the first, and our authority in the last; and as both disable us from re-assuming some former state and privilege, it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels. (77)

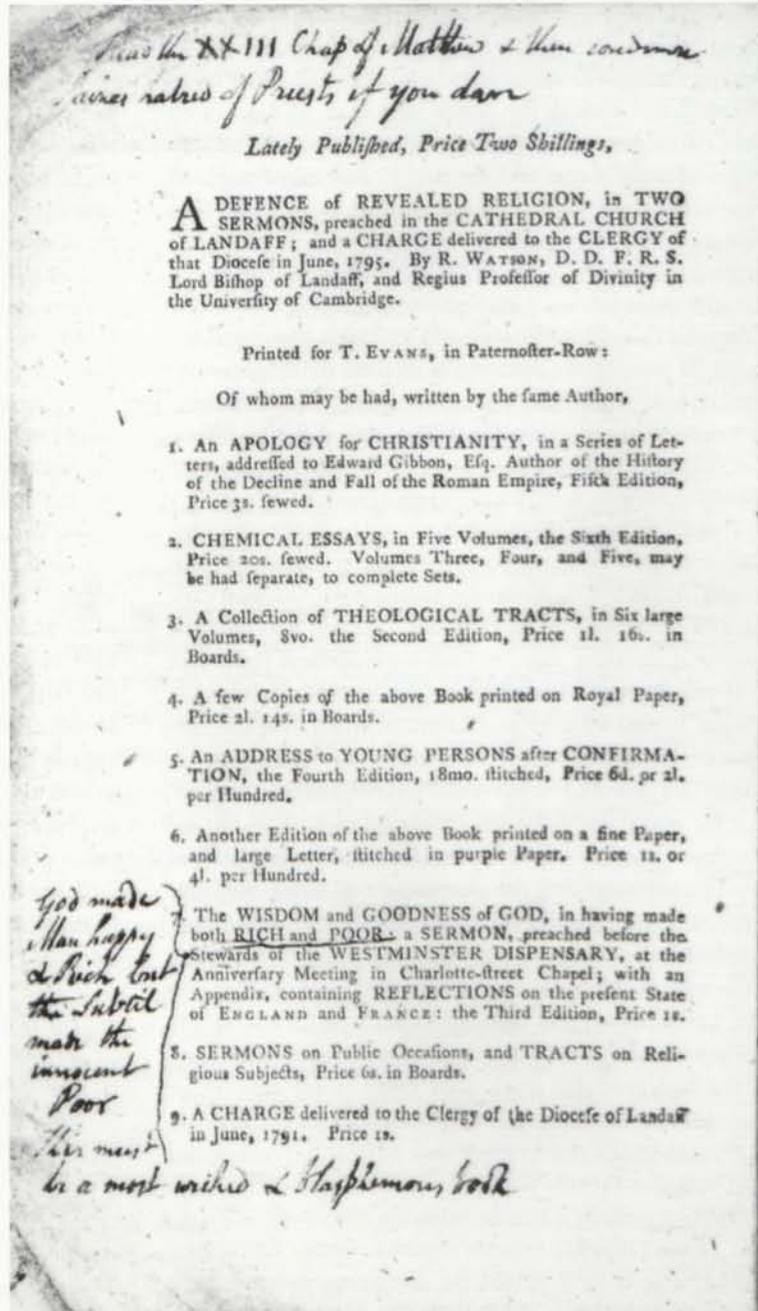
George III is "the hardened, sullen, Pharaoh of —," and he sounds a lot like Blake's Noboddaddy when Paine calls him "the wretch, that with the pretended title of FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood on his soul" (87).

I love hanging & drawing & quartering [says
Noboddaddy]
Every bit as well as war & slaughtering
...

³ See Michael Phillips, "Blake and the Terror," *The Library*, 6th ser., 6 (1994): 276, citing an anonymous *Impartial Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1793).

⁴ D. W. Dörbecker observes that Warren wrote for the *Boston Gazette* under the name "True Patriot" (*Continental Prophecies* 129). The Trumble *Death of Warren* was part of a series of eight paintings begun in 1784. See Ronald Paulson, "John Trumbull and the Representation of the American Revolution," *Studies in Romanticism* 21 (1982): 341-56.

3 Verso of preface, facing page 1. Blake carefully links his marginal note to three words of text. Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

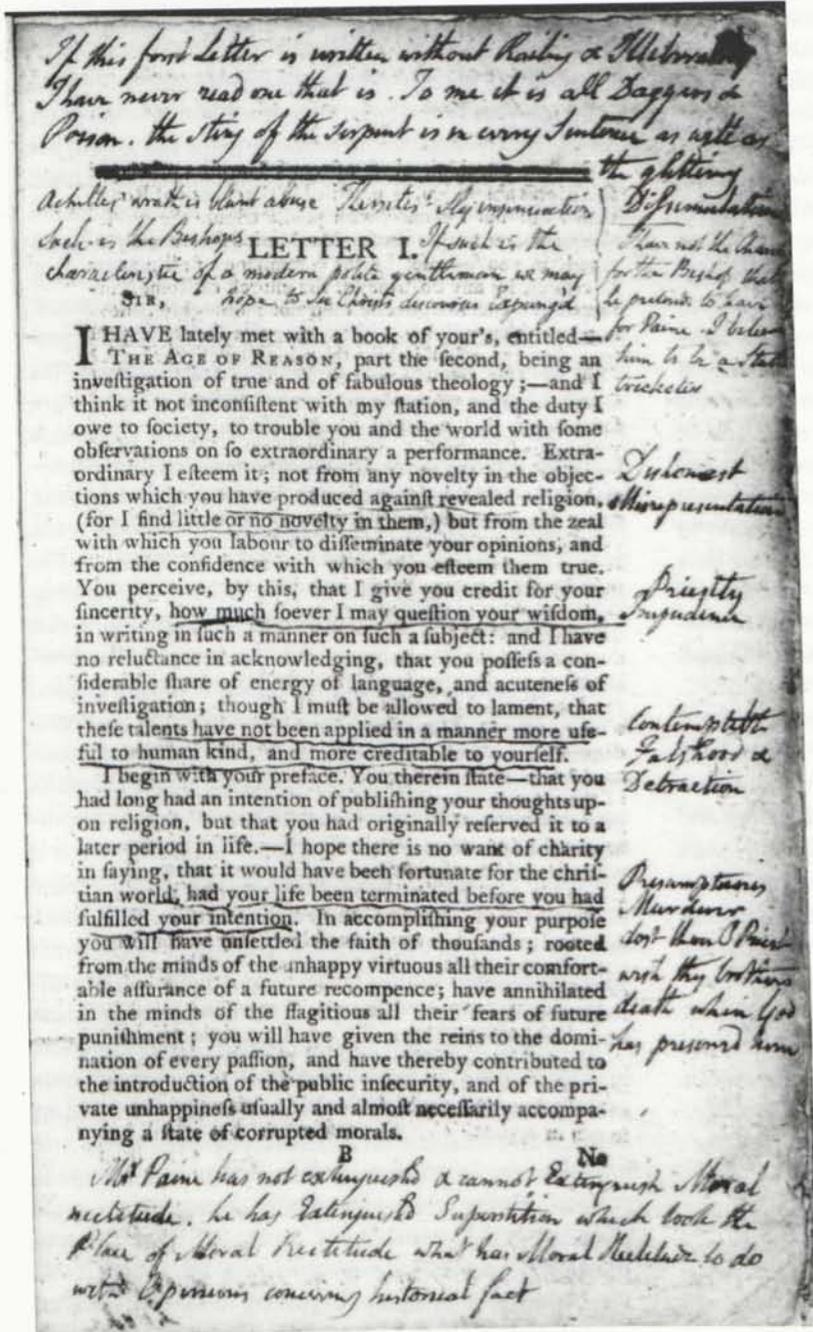


... If they rebel they must go to hell
They shall have a Priest & a passing bell
(E 499)

In a population of a little over three million, *Common Sense* sold over 100,000 copies. Blake's comment appears in the Annotations to Watson, in which Paine is daringly paralleled with Jesus: "Is it a greater miracle to feed five thousand men with five loaves than to overthrow all the armies of Europe with a small pamphlet" (E 617).

But wasn't Paine a deist and wasn't Blake opposed to everything that deism represented? The answer to the first question is certainly yes. "Adam, if there ever was such a man, was created a deist," Paine asserts in *The Age of Reason* (55). But the answer to the second must give us pause. A glance at the *Concordance* shows that Blake did not even use the word "deist" or its cognates before writing the Annotations to Watson.

The first instance is, in fact, in those annotations, but it was revised out by Blake as follows: "The Deists say that



4 Page 1. The annotations around the title "Letter I" and those to the right of it were written with a finer nib than the rest. Courtesy of the Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

Christianity put a stop to improvement & the Bishop has not shewn the contrary" (E 615). For "The Deists say" Blake substituted "Paine says." So "Paine" is here interchangeable with "the Deists" but in both instances, Blake appears to be indicating either neutrality or outright agreement. This is a far cry from Blake's later vehement denunciations of "Deism" as expressed in the last three lines of Night VIII of *The Four Zoas*:

The Ashes of Mystery began to animate they call'd it
Deism

And Natural Religion as of old so now anew began
Babylon again in Infancy Call'd Natural Religion.
(111: 22-24, E 386)

"Natural Religion" may, of course, be equated with deism and Blake had indeed entitled a tractate etched in 1788 *THERE is NO Natural Religion*. However, there his attitude is benignly ironical and gently corrective: he attempts to show that Natural Religion is self-undermining and that the very perception of nature takes us into a realm of imagination—or as Blake puts it at this time, Poetic Ge-

nius—that is beyond nature. With one exception, the words “Natural Religion” do not appear again in Blake’s writings until the *Vala* passage just quoted (or in *Milton*, whichever was earlier). That exception is in the Annotations to Watson, where in a riposte to the Bishop Blake writes: “Natural Religion is the voice of God & not the result of reasoning on the powers of Satan” (E 614).⁵ In the case of Paine, Blake at this time could well take the attitude expressed by the Unitarian minister Gilbert Wakefield, whose *The Spirit of Christianity, Compared with the Spirit of the Times in Great Britain*, with its denunciation of “the Moloch Priest” and “worshippers of Baal” in the Anglican Church, was a strong influence on Coleridge’s *Religious Musings*. Writing of the Master and fellows of Queens College, Wakefield said “I would give with rapture to a French *Deist*, as purity and perfection, compared with such apostates to the liberty and sanctity of the gospel . . .” (16). The truth is that many of the attitudes that we think of as characteristic of Blake were not yet his in 1798. In Blake’s account of the founders of religions in *The Song of Los* (1795), Jesus is treated no better than the rest: “(a man of sorrows) he reciev’d / A Gospel from wretched Theotormon” (3: 23-24, E 67)—Theotormon being, of course, the God-tormented and self-tormented man of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Note that this negative reference is not merely to the Christian church but to Christianity itself. Of course there are also positive references—the Jesus of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* who “was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules” (E 43). But how far is this from Paine’s view of Jesus as “a virtuous reformer and revolutionist” in *The Age of Reason*?

Why Blake should wish to defend Paine requires little explanation. There is a considerable overlap between Blakean discourse in the 1790s and Paine’s in *Rights of Man*. One aspect of this, on the subject of charters, was remarked by the late E. P. Thompson, in his excellent essay on Blake’s “London,” and on this subject I will only point further to the proximity in Blake’s poem of two key words that occur in one of Paine’s discussions of “chartered monopolies” (75) “Every chartered town,” writes Paine, “is an aristocratical monopoly in itself, and the qualification of electors proceeds out of these chartered monopolies.” Shortly after this, Paine says: “Conquest and tyranny transplanted themselves with William the Conqueror from Normandy into England, and the country is yet disfigured with the marks.” Are these disfiguring “marks” not the “marks of weakness, marks of woe,” Blake discerned in every face he met in the “chartered streets” of “London”? Both can use figures from Bunyan similarly, as when Paine writes that the “compounded image” of the downfall(s) of the Bastille and Despotism become “as figuratively united as Bunyan’s Doubting Castle and Giant Despair” (52). Blake and Paine share with other

radicals of the 1790s the association of revolution with fire, but a sentence from part 2 of *The Rights of Man* comes particularly close to Blake’s statement that “France reciev’d the Demons light” (E 57) from America. “From a small spark kindled in America,” wrote Paine, “a flame has arisen, not to be extinguished. Without consuming, like the *ultima Ratio Regum*, it winds its progress from nation to nation and conquers by a silent operation” (210). When we come to *The Age of Reason*, we find that this overlap continues. Paine refers to the establishment as “the adulterous connection of church and state” (87), bringing to mind passages in Blake like the one in *Vala* in which Rahab is “the deluded harlot of the kings of the earth” (E 363). When Paine characterizes the biblical account of the creation, it sounds much like much like a summary of the early chapters of *The [First] Book of Urizen*: “It is nobody that speaks. It is nobody that hears. It is addressed to nobody. It has neither first, second, nor third person” (12). Paine can also apply biblical typology after his own fashion, casting himself as the doubting Thomas of scripture. Observing that this apostle did not believe in the resurrection, Paine remarks “So neither will I; and the reason is equally as good for me and for every other person as for Thomas” (6).⁶ Paine denies that biblical prophets predicted the future, condemns “humility,” and attacks “Mystery.” I don’t want to exaggerate the convergence: the differences, too are important. Paine’s universe is an “immense machine,” which is compared to a mill, to which Blake could well have replied in the words of *THERE IS NO NATURAL RELIGION*: “The same dull round even of a univer[s]e would soon become a mill with complicated wheels” (E 2). Blake acknowledges a difference with Paine as well as with Watson when he writes “The Bishop never saw the Everlasting Gospel any more than Tom Paine” (E 619). What Blake concentrates on in these annotations, however, is the common ground he shares with Paine, not the differences between them.

Blake’s note on the back of Watson’s title page continues: “The Beast & the Whore rule without control[x]” (E 611)—a sentence lightly crossed out, probably by the timorous hand of Samuel Palmer, who later owned the book. As we see, Blake was at this point beginning to develop his symbolism of the conjunction of the state with its established church. Blake could have said as did Coleridge, in a note to the edition of his *Religious Musings* in 1797: “I am convinced that the Babylon of the Apocalypse does not apply to Rome exclusively; but to the union of Religion with Power and Wealth, wherever it is found” (*Poems* 89n). Blake’s most striking visual conceptualization of this to date was the astonishing title page for *Night the Eighth of Young’s Night Thoughts*, showing the scarlet woman with her cup

⁵ As pointed out by Essick 210.

⁶ It’s true that Blake makes even larger claims for Paine, seeing in him “the Holy Ghost who in Paine strives with Christendom as in Christ he strove with the Jews” (E 614).

of abominations mounted on a great red dragon whose seven grotesque heads embody the institutions of church and state. Blake would later go on to elaborate this conception in pictures like *The Whore of Babylon* and the Dante illustrations of Philip the Fair embracing Beatrice, and he would introduce it near the end of *Night the Eighth of The Four Zoas*, where John of Patmos "saw the Harlot of the Kings of Earth & saw her Cup / Of fornication food of Orc & Satan pressed from the fruit of Mystery" (111: 6-7, E 386). But when Blake annotated Watson's *Apology*, this symbolism was relatively fresh; as in so many other areas, we see it crystallizing in the later 1790s. At the same time, Blake was expressing in his art some of the positive religious feeling that we do not find in the Lambeth books. Once more we see this especially in the illustrations to *Night Thoughts*, with its images of Jesus crucified, Jesus resurrected, and Jesus the True Vine. These are far from the more spiritually charged images of Jesus Blake later produced—for example plate 76 of *Jerusalem*—but they do suggest the direction in which he was tending more than anything he wrote at the time.

The argument between the Bishop and Paine is, as Blake perceives, deeply political, having to do with "the English Crusade against France," but it is cast in a theological form. Blake had probably learned enough about what would come to be known as the Higher Criticism of the Bible, both from the writings of Alexander Geddes, as Jerome McGann has argued,⁷ and from the presence of Geddes in the Johnson circle, to see that the Regius Professor of Divinity's historical arguments were hopelessly out of touch. Paine attacks the evidence for the authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses and for the witnessing of miracles by Jesus in the Gospels as a means of denying the truth of the events that are recounted. Bishop Watson, as one would expect, defends the received accounts, but he says that even if Moses, Joshua, and Samuel did not write the books attributed to them, they could still be true, as they would have been assembled from "public records." Blake at this point rejoins "Nothing can be more contemptible than to suppose Public RECORDS to be true" (E 617), anticipating Byron's satire on the Gazettes in *Don Juan*. Blake refers to Deuteronomy 31:24, which begins "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book . . ." If Moses didn't write it, whoever did was a liar. This confutes the Bishop, but it actually isn't very important to Blake, for he adds "it ceases to be history & becomes a Poem of probable impossibilities fabricated for pleasure as moderns say but I say by Inspiration" (E 616). It sounds as if Blake were about to claim a different source for the authenticity of these books, especially when he writes shortly afterwards "If historical facts can be written by inspiration Miltons Paradise Lost is as true as Genesis. or Exodus" (E 617). We

⁷ McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text."

appear to be nearing the position of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which Isaiah and Ezekiel say they derive their prophecies from the Poetic Genius and Isaiah speaks of "all poets" as if they were members of one fraternity. Yet Blake is not actually prepared to give this authority to the five books of Moses, because he objects to them on ethical grounds. "The Wickedness of the Israelites in murdering so many thousands under pretence of a command from God is altogether Abominable & Blasphemous" (E 614). So the divinity of the Bible depends as little on "inspiration" as it does on historical facts. Blake goes on to say that it consists "in the Sentiments & Examples which whether true or Parabolic are Equally useful as Examples given to us of the perverseness of some & its consequent evil & the honesty of others & its consequent good" (E 618). What it comes down to is a matter of conscience. When the Bishop rhetorically asks of conscience "Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude and turpitude of our actions?" Blake underlined "Or is it merely" and wrote: "Conscience in those that have it is unequivocal, it is the voice of God Our judgment of right and wrong is reason" (E 613).

On the subject of miracles: the Bishop believed in them, Paine did not. Did Blake? Yes and no. Blake points out that the Gospels were written after the fact, and he asserts "Jesus could not do miracles where unbelief hinderd" (E 616). We seem to be back in the territory of *The Marriage* once again, and of Ezekiel's statement that all poets believe that a firm persuasion that a thing is so makes it so, and that "in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains." Indeed, after comparing the miracle of the loaves and fishes with the effects of Paine's *Common Sense*, Blake writes:

. . . look over the events of your own life & if you do not find that you have done such miracles and lived by such you do not see as I do True I cannot do a miracle thro experiment & to domineer over & prove to others my superior power as neither could Christ But I can & do work such as both astonish & comfort me & mine. How can Paine the worker of miracles ever doubt Christs in the above sense of the word miracle[.]

(E 617)

But what is "the above sense"? In the comparison with *Common Sense* the *miracle* is a metaphor. In Blake's reference to himself as a miracle worker, it is another kind of metaphor, much the same as he used in a letter to George Cumberland on 26 August 1799: "As to Myself about whom you are so kindly Interested. I live by Miracle" (E 704). That doesn't tell us whether Blake thought Jesus fed a multitude with loaves and fishes. Of course I am not trying to subject Blake (or even Bishop Watson) to a theological cross-examination here. I just want to point out that when Blake asks how Paine can ever doubt Christ's miracles he is prac-

ting a beautiful form of equivocation, and that this indicates something further about Blake's position in 1798.

In response to Bishop Watson's comparison of Moses to "the judge of the land in [carrying out the law] condemning criminals to death," Blake wrote: "All Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore are cruelty & Murder" (E 618). This is not a Paineite position; it is a Godwinian one, and it is at the same time profoundly antinomian in spirit. In his excellent discussion of antinomianism and Blake, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, John Mee has rightly stressed how important a component of Blake's beliefs antinomianism was in the 1790s, and the Annotations to Watson certainly bear him out. Seeing all civil (and religious) institutions as evil is the negative pole of antinomianism; the positive pole is seeing the divine within. We see a strong emphasis on this element in Blake's writings of the earlier 1790s, like *The Marriage and Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.—"Life delights in life," "every thing that lives is holy."—In the Annotations we see very little of that positive pole. Thomas Paine is an "Inspired Man" who gives himself to his "Energetic Genius," but nevertheless "the Beast & the Whore rule without control[s]." There is a sense of desperation in this vision of things; as Sandler puts it, "the last years of the 1790s apparently constituted for Blake a crisis of faith and interpretation" ("Defending the Bible," 44). After moving to Felpham, of course, Blake would have a series of visionary experiences that profoundly affected the content of his poetry and art. His later attitude is exemplified by the only written reference he would ever make to Paine after these Annotations, written in the Notebook essay known under the editorial title "A Vision of the Last Judgment": "Many persons such as Paine & Voltaire, with some of the Ancient Greeks, say: 'We will not converse concerning Good & Evil we will live in Paradise & Liberty You may do so in Spirit but not in the <Mortal> Body as you pretend till after the Last Judgment . . .'" (E 564). The ground Blake had shared with Thomas Paine had disappeared, or to be more precise, had become irrelevant to him.

I wish to close with a suggestion as to why Blake so stressed "this year 1798." It brings us back to Bishop Watson, who at the end of 1797 or very early in 1798, published an *Address to the British People* in which, in addition to defending war taxes, he asserted that political reformers and dissenters were loyal subjects and that they would resist a French invasion. This was an old theme of Watson's. The book became another bestseller thanks to government sponsorship, although Watson claimed in the *Anecdotes* that he was not consulted on the government's decision to print and give it away gratis. Fourteen editions appeared in London alone. Not all reformers and dissenters were grateful to the Bishop for his defense of their loyalty, however. In January 1798 Watson wrote: "On this and on other occasions some violent men, whose views of political and eccle-

siastical reform extended far beyond mine, were filled with resentment against me, reproaching me with having changed my principles, and deserted the cause. This accusation was wholly without foundation; for my principles were not republican principles, nor was my cause their cause." One of these dissenting dissenters was Gilbert Wakefield. In Watson's words, "These publications of mine had excited the displeasure of Mr. Gilbert Wakefield (one of the first scholars of the age), and, unfortunately for himself, he published a pamphlet against them. The administration prosecuted him for some of the expressions in his pamphlet, which they thought were seditious, and he was fined and imprisoned. I took some pains to prevent this prosecution, thinking the liberty of the press to be the palladium of the constitution; but I did not succeed in my endeavours" (*Anecdotes* 305). On 29 January 1799 Wakefield wrote to Watson asking the Bishop to be a character witness for him, but Watson replied that as he had never met Wakefield, he could not be a witness as to his character, although he admired Wakefield's talents and would rejoice "at your being extricated from your present difficulty" (306). Wakefield was not extricated—he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in May 1799—but I want to return to the beginning of 1798, and Wakefield's *A Reply to the Bishop of Landaff's Address to the People of England*.

Joseph Johnson had previously published at least one of Wakefield's pamphlets, *Thoughts on Public Worship* in 1792, but *A Reply* was published by J. Cuthell. In it Wakefield asserted of "our corrupt and guilty ministries":

They have occasioned a destruction of the human species infinitely tremendous beyond the most merciless tyrants of ancient and modern times. . . . Land and sea is covered with the carcasses of their slain: — they have engendered sham plots, false alarms, and visionary assassinations, for the purpose of deluding the unwary, and to establish their own power by a military despotism, in due time, over England, like that, which now tramples bleeding Ireland to the earth. (21-23)

In contradiction to the Bishop's view, Wakefield argued that the poor had nothing to lose by a French victory, and that if the French landed sixty or seventy thousand men in England, the kingdom would fall to them. He also projected a millennial vision of the sort more frequently encountered at the beginning of the decade than in 1798: "We, sons of peace, or see, or think we see, a gleam of glory through the mist, which now envelopes our horizon. Great revolutions are accomplishing: a general fermentation is working for the purpose of general refinement throughout the universe." Cuthell was arrested immediately after publication. Copies of the pamphlet were found in Johnson's shop, and he was indicted on 11 January 1798. The charge was that "Joseph Johnson . . . being a malicious seditious and ill disposed person and being greatly disaffected to our said sov-

ereign Lord the King . . . wickedly and seditiously did publish and cause to be published a certain scandalous malicious and seditious libel . . .”⁸ Although Johnson would not be tried until July and his sentence was put off even further, the seriousness of his position must have been evident from the start. Johnson had ever been a risk-taker, but never an imprudent one. He had been the original publisher of part 1 of Paine’s *Rights of Man* but after only a few copies had been sold, he transferred the book to J. S. Jordan. (Jordan was not prosecuted for this but he too was arrested for selling Wakefield’s *Reply*.) Johnson certainly realized his danger. He engaged as his lawyer the celebrated Thomas Erskine, the successful counsel for the defense in the State Trials of 1794; and it has been suggested by Paul Magnusson (“The Politics of ‘Frost At Midnight’”) that he published Coleridge’s *Fears in Solitude* volume in April 1798 as his part of a joint effort to show that neither poet nor publisher was pro-French. Probably in the political atmosphere of 1798 nothing would have helped. He was eventually sentenced to six months’ in the King’s Bench Prison, although as it turned out he served his sentence under the milder regimen of the Marshalsea, where he was already incarcerated. Sometimes much is made of the comparative lightness of the sentence—to which one might rejoin with Gulliver’s comment on the lenity of the King of Lilliput: “I could not discover the lenity and favour of this sentence, but conceived it (perhaps erroneously) rather to be rigorous than gentle.” It is true that, like other economically privileged prisoners, Johnson was able to entertain while in jail and that he continued to hold his weekly dinners there. But the loss of personal freedom is in itself an acute punishment—why else would it be inflicted?—and Johnson was well known to be physically frail and suffering from asthma. Although he continued to be a publisher and bookseller after his release, his activities were much reduced. It would have required no prophetic powers on Blake’s part to sense that this (or worse) would be the outcome of Johnson’s arrest and prosecution.

The practical implications cannot, of course, be ignored—Blake could not ignore them. The year 1798 is a case in point. In that year only eight engravings by William Blake, all executed (probably after Fuseli) in 1797, are known to have been published. All were in books published by Joseph Johnson: four engravings for Charles Allen’s *New and Improved History of England* and four more for Allen’s *New and Improved Roman History*. At some point such practical considerations merge with Blake’s highest aspirations as artist and poet. Although Johnson and Blake were not close friends, Johnson had nevertheless played a

considerable role in Blake’s life. As I’ve mentioned, it must be through Johnson that Blake met Paine, and it is likely that Blake at least occasionally attended Johnson’s Tuesday dinners, giving him entree to a group of writers and other intellectuals with whom Blake had at least some common interests. Johnson evidently encouraged Blake not only as an engraver but also as a poet and as an artist. The first book of Blake’s poem *The French Revolution* was printed for Johnson in 1791, although the existence of this work is limited to a single set of proofs. (The reason for its nonpublication remains unexplained.) Blake’s *The Gates of Paradise* when originally offered in 1793 bore Johnson’s name as well as Blake’s as publisher. As Keri Davies has shown in a paper at a previous Strawberry Hill conference, Johnson exhibited books by Blake, which must surely mean illuminated books, at his place of business. And in the 1790s Johnson was, of course, Blake’s major employer. Blake’s professional life as an engraver had become intertwined with Johnson as early as 1779. In 1783 Blake contributed at least nine plates after other artists (including Thomas Stothard) to Johnson’s publication of Joseph Ritson’s important *Select Collection of English Songs*. Blake’s work for Johnson in the 1790s includes some of his most important engravings. Blake engraved six plates after his own designs for Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791), and Johnson was also the publisher of John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, to which Blake contributed approximately 16 engravings executed between 1791 and 1794. Johnson ran against fashionable opinion in preferring Blake’s engraving to that of the more fashionable Bartolozzi’s. Writing to Erasmus Darwin in connection with a projected engraving of the Portland Vase in 1791, Johnson said: “Blake is certainly capable of making an exact copy of the vase, I believe more so than Mr. B[artolozzi]” (*Blake Records* 43). This would have cheered Blake, who despised what he called the “soft” quality of his rival’s work. *The Botanic Garden*, in which Blake’s engravings of the Portland Vase appeared in 1791, also featured his powerful engraving after Fuseli’s *Fertilization of Egypt*, and Blake later added an engraving, after Fuseli’s *Tornado*, published in the third edition of 1795. Johnson also employed Blake on some purely commercial tasks, but it is clear that he was one of the very few publishers in London who had a true appreciation of Blake’s abilities as a designer and engraver of book illustrations. It’s possible to regret that Johnson did not make Blake a protégé as he had Mary Wollstonecraft or that (as far as we know) he did not value Blake’s painting as he did Henry Fuseli’s. It remains that no other employer played even a remotely similar role in Blake’s life.

In addition to his employment of Blake, Johnson had published some of the most important liberal and radical works of the 1790s. To take but one of many examples, Unitarian literature was one of Johnson’s specialties, and

⁸ See Gerald Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979) 159. I am indebted to Tyson’s excellent book for the account of Johnson’s arrest and trial.

Johnson remained Joseph Priestley's publisher to the end of Priestley's life. Rational dissent was no doubt too rational for Blake, but Blake need not have completely agreed with the Unitarians to see that theirs was one way of defending the Bible. (Johnson's business would go on, but Priestley's later letters are full of complaints about his publisher's dilatoriness.) And in addition to the public effect of Johnson's arrest, Blake may well have seen a more specific application to himself. I suggested a long time ago that the arrest of Richard Brothers in 1795 and his consequent confinement in an insane asylum had a cautionary effect on Blake. Brothers was charged with "unlawfully, maliciously, and wickedly writing, publishing, and printing various fantastical prophecies, with intent to cause disension and other disturbances within the realm."⁹ Blake must have realized how easily this law could have been applied to him, and the case of Brothers is likely to explain at least in part why Blake stopped issuing illuminated books for over a decade after 1795. (The information provided in John Barrell's important essay "Imagining the King's Death" could provide further material for this argument.) Johnson was no prophet in the modern or any other sense of the word—he had ever tried to keep to the windy side of the law—but his arrest for selling a book demonstrated the dangers of opposition all the more. It could cost a man his life, or part of it. "I have been commanded from Hell not to print this," wrote Blake in his copy of Watson's book, "as it is what our Enemies wish." The poem *Vala*, on which Blake was already working, was written out in a format that would have made it virtually impossible to publish. In 1798 Blake had printed no poetry or prose of his own for over three years (and with some very minor exceptions it would be at least a decade more until he did so).

In 1798 Blake realized that one period of his life had ended. It had been a period of enormous activity during which Blake produced some of the works by which he is still best known. It had been a period of exciting personal associations. And it had been a period of shared revolutionary hope, hope typified by the author whom Blake defended in his Annotations. The optimism, expectation, and joy of that period are typified in part of a letter that I would like to make the final words of this lecture. Upon getting news of the publication of *The Rights of Man* in the spring of 1791, Thomas Holcroft wrote jubilantly to William Godwin: "Hey for the New Jerusalem! The millennium! And peace and beatitude be unto the soul of Thomas Paine."¹⁰

⁹ See Paley, "William Blake, the Prince of the Hebrews, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun," in *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, year?) 260-93.

¹⁰ C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin, His Friends and Contemporaries* 1: 69.

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R E V I E W S

Robert M. Ryan. *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*. Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 24. Cambridge: University Press, 1997. Pp. ix + 202. \$59.95.

Reviewed by SHEILA A. SPECTOR

In his 1972 review of M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, J. Hillis Miller argued: "Abrams' clinging metaphysical presuppositions obscure a clear vision of what is most problematical in the historical sequence he describes." Giving rise to the critical attitudes that would dominate the academy for the next quarter century, Miller complained that by relying on "the grand tradition of modern humanistic scholarship," Abrams overlooked "[t]his alternative scheme, with its various aspects or motifs, [that have] always been present as a shadow or reversed mirror image within the Western tradition, even in the texts Abrams discusses." Consequently, he concluded, Abrams's "failure to recognize its pervasive presence in texts both traditional and modern is perhaps the chief limitation of *Natural Supernaturalism*."

Apparently responding to Miller's suggestion, during the past 25 years or so, subsequent critics have explored any number of "alternative schemes," subjecting literature of the romantic period to every manner of analysis—excluding the metaphysical, that is. For in the years since 1972, there have been few, if any, book-length studies of romantic "metaphysics," at least not until Robert M. Ryan's *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*. Picking up where *Natural Supernaturalism* left off, Ryan has inverted Abrams's assertion that "in the Romantic consciousness revolutionary optimism gave way to 'revolutionary disillusionment or despair,'" arguing that "[i]nstead of lamenting Romanticism as a political retreat, then, one may more usefully see it as a creative and effective engagement in the contemporary religious crisis, an engagement that was perceived as having far-reaching consequences in the political order" (5). In this study of Blake, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Mary Shelley, and Percy Shelley, Ryan

examine[s] the literature of the Romantic period as a conscious attempt by a group of writers to influence the religious transformation that was taking place in

their society. They all saw that they could have an important cultural impact by altering the character of the system of religion that was increasing its hold as the dominant ideology and idealism of their time. I call what they attempted a reformation because, after periods of youthful iconoclasm, they all finally became more interested in purifying or redefining England's national religion than in attempting to eradicate it. (7)

In his approach to his texts—specifically *Jerusalem, The Excursion, Cain, Endymion, Frankenstein, and Prometheus Unbound*—Ryan deliberately places himself within the Abrams tradition of humanistic scholarship, thus providing the necessary continuity for a critical strand that has been neglected since the publication of *Natural Supernaturalism*. Unfortunately, he also, like Abrams, has restricted himself to “the grand tradition of modern humanistic scholarship,” excluding almost any reference to “the alternative schemes” that we now know, from our own post-structuralist vantage point, to be not only not “shadow or reversed,” but, in fact, integral parts of the larger, more grand, because more complex, English tradition of romantic literature.

The Romantic Reformation provides a fairly conventional analysis, containing an introduction and seven chapters, the first delineating the cultural context and each of the remaining six devoted to one of the writers being discussed. In his introduction, Ryan establishes the need for his study of the social and political impact of religion during the romantic period. Although, as he notes, it is traditional to interpret the romantic disengagement as a form of disillusionment, he believes that it more rightly reflected the recognition that as the mediator between political and economic imperatives, religion could provide an effective arena for expression. Consequently, “all the poets committed themselves resolutely to this work of cultural critique and rehabilitation” (4). In fact, Ryan believes that “The career of each of the Romantic poets has a clearer outline when seen as an attempt to define a religious position in dialogue or conflict with the dominant belief system in their society” (9).

As Ryan explains in the first chapter, “A Sect of Dissenters,” religious liberty was prominent among the liberal campaigns waged during the Romantic period. Spurred on by the growing numbers of Protestant Dissenters and Evangelicals, English religious debate revolved around the effects of the Act of Toleration, passed in 1688. Originally intended to appease non-Anglicans, the Act permitted Dissenters freedom of worship, though it stopped short of granting them citizenship. By the late eighteenth century, the number and political strength of the non-Anglicans had grown to the point that they were clamoring not simply for toleration but for religious liberty, and ultimately, for dismantling the monopoly exercised by the established

church. During this period, political debate was dominated by religious interests, for contrary to common belief, it was not the church which required the state's protection, but the other way around—the government needed the church to restrain the people. Consequently, the religious disputes threatened the very stability of the nation. Within this context, those romantics who wrote about religious matters were effectively taking up the agenda of the Dissenters, attempting to reform Christianity so that it might better fulfill its own ideals.

After establishing this context, Ryan turns to Blake. Chapter 2, “Blake's Orthodoxy,” attempts to resolve “the paradox of Blake the anti-Christian Christian, the religious reformer who has been mistaken for an atheist by so many careful readers” (78), hypothesizing that “Blake took it as his primary poetic mission to combat the corrupt, deformed Christianity that served as the state religion of Britain and to articulate an alternative, more authentic, radically reformed and purified version of the religion of Jesus” (44). By defining Protestant orthodoxy in the broadest possible terms, as belief in “the divine humanity of Jesus Christ and his redemption of the fallen human race,” Ryan then asserts that “by the standard of his time Blake seems to have been quite adequately orthodox in regard to the essential core of the faith” (53). Confusion over Blake's attitude towards religion has arisen from a misapprehension of Blake's dialectic. While it is customary to believe that in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake takes the devil's side, Ryan views the voices of the devil and the angels as contrary extremes, with the truth lying somewhere between the two. He argues that Blake used the dialectic in this way in order to defamiliarize an orthodoxy that might otherwise be overlooked.

Relying primarily on Frye's *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (1963), and Paley's *Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem* (1983), Ryan provides a conventional reading of *Jerusalem* to support his thesis about Blake's orthodoxy, in which he interprets the prophecy as “the story of the fall and redemption of mankind, or Albion,” and associates Jerusalem with “fallen mankind's memory or understanding of Jesus, the Divine Humanity” (60, and n45). Vala and Rahab, who seduce Albion away from Jerusalem, symbolize natural religion. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Blake did not view deism as an alternative to the national church; rather, he saw little difference between the two, believing that “fallen mankind's religious sense was radically corrupt, so that religion, which ought to indicate the path to redemption, became a nearly insuperable stumbling block to it” (69). Los labors at his furnace, therefore, “to forge an authentic Christianity of ‘Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love’” (71).

As with Blake and *Jerusalem*, the rest of the monograph examines the means by which these particular romantic

writers used specific texts as vehicles for working out their own attitudes towards the state church. Chapter 3, "Nature's Priest," sees *The Excursion* as encapsulating the religious peregrinations of Wordsworth's own life. As a young man, he had studied for religious orders, his 1793 turn to pantheism being motivated by politics as much as by religion. By 1800, though, he returned to a more traditional, if more expansive theology in which the natural religion could co-exist with basic Christianity. From this perspective, *The Excursion* emerges as a personal history of Wordsworth's own faith, each of the speakers representing an aspect of his religious life. In addition to the Poet, the Solitary is the "alienated revolutionary," the Wanderer the "natural religionist," and the Pastor the conventional cleric. By leaving the ending unresolved, Wordsworth seems to be advocating a capacious religion that can accommodate such disparate theological stances.

In chapter 4, "The Ironies of Belief," Ryan focuses on Byron's satire as a medium through which to reform the national religion, the main thrust of the irony deriving from the fact that both believers and unbelievers alike assert theirs to be the true and definitive word on religion. Written from a sympathetic perspective, *Cain* provides a balanced dialogue between faith and skepticism, and though Byron remains distant from his hero, he still, according to Ryan, sympathizes with Cain, "trapped as he is in an intellectual milieu where dissatisfaction, curiosity, and even honesty are condemned, if only by the human apologists for the divine order" (141).

For Keats, the reformative impulse was manifested in his choice of Greek mythology over Christian, as Ryan explains in chapter 5, "The Politics of Greek Religion." More than evidence of nostalgia, the Greek models were used as the means of illuminating his objections to mainstream Christianity. As his philosophy developed, however, Keats came to recognize the shortcomings of the Greek culture as well, but rather than turn to Christianity, he renounced mythology entirely, advocating in its place a neutral form of deism.

For Mary Shelley, the question of religion, as seen in chapter 6, "The Christian Monster," was far more complex than it was for any of the other writers included in this monograph. Having been raised to an anti-Christian Godwinian ideology, which she found flawed, she used the monster in *Frankenstein* as the instrument for criticizing both the state church and her father's antithetical views, thereby avoiding the need to endorse either. In contrast to Mary Shelley, who apparently found no faith worth advocating, Percy's idea of God was so exalted that no human conception could reach his ideal. Consequently, as Ryan argues in the last chapter, "The Unknown God," Shelley followed the *via negativa*, identifying error rather than truth. From this perspective, *Prometheus Unbound* emerges as an allegory of two conflicting impulses, to repudiate false conceptions of

God, while articulating a truer vision. Thus, Shelley seems to present pure Christianity as a liberating ideology, predicated on the virtues of charity, mercy, and forgiveness.

Ryan's conclusion to this survey is somewhat restrained. Noting that the Evangelicals had a far greater impact on the English than did the works of these six writers, he concludes that their influence was more indirect: "There seems to be a special religious vitality in the work of the Romantic writers that continues to serve a kind of scriptural function, teaching and inspiring individual readers generation after generation" (233). In contrast, the thesis stated at the beginning of the book seems a bit optimistic:

My primary thesis in this book is that all the poets committed themselves resolutely to this work of cultural critique and rehabilitation. . . . Religion was the crucial mediator between the cultural and the political-economic spheres in England, and the Romantics directed their creative energies toward intervention in that arena. . . . If the British Constitution in church and State was resistant to change on its political side, the religious dimension of the power structure still seemed susceptible of correction. Instead of lamenting Romanticism as a political retreat, then, one may more usefully see it as a creative and effective engagement in the contemporary religious crisis, an engagement that was perceived as having far-reaching consequences in the political order. (4-5)

The disparity between Ryan's introduction and conclusion reflects the central weakness of this study. The problem, as Miller had foreseen in 1972, is that concentrating on a single focus blinkers one from recognizing the broader ramifications surrounding the romantic attitude towards religion and the state church. There is no doubt that these six writers expended a great deal of creative energy exploring the proper role of a national religion; less clear is the larger significance of their effort. Ryan's miscalculation derives from his decision to center his study in what is essentially a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, primarily male vacuum whose effect is not only to cut his writers off from the global forces that influenced the Anglican Church of their day, but to isolate himself from the broader critical and cultural perspectives that might enable him more effectively to contextualize this study of what he believes to be the "Romantic Reformation."

The most obvious limitation of Ryan's approach is canonical. With the exception of Mary Shelley, Ryan seems to assume the authority of the conventional, six male poet canon of British romanticism, omitting any of the other poets or genres of the period. (Ryan justifies his exclusion of Coleridge on the grounds that he "came to understand himself primarily as a theologian and only secondarily as a poet or a writer of fictions" [10].) Despite his assertion that Mary Shelley was chosen both because of her personal relationships with contemporary writers and "her own

original critical perspective on the values represented by that spirit" (179), it seems hard not to wonder if she was included primarily as a token, especially since she is not a poet but a novelist.

More serious is the limited and ambiguous religious context. Regardless of whether, as Ryan claims, it was "Protestants who fomented most of the domestic agitation during the crucial decade of the 1790s in which British Romanticism first emerged as a cultural force" (19), in fact, all of the works he deals with were written after 1810, and therefore, were affected by more issues than those involved with the Dissenters and Evangelicals. During the nineteenth century, the English were being forced with greater degrees of insistence to confront the inconsistencies of their state church. In addition to the Scots, who had maintained their own national church even after uniting with England in 1707, there were the Irish Catholics, who had become part of the United Kingdom in 1800, and the Jews, who had been legal residents, if not citizens, since the seventeenth century. As the Empire continued to grow, so, too, did the variety of non-Anglican, non-Protestant, even non-Christian peoples to be dealt with.

Actually, the reformation of the national Church coincides more closely with the so-called "long century" of British romanticism. The period seems to have been initiated by the failed Jew Bill of 1753, which was passed on 22 May, only to be repealed on 20 December. Despite the bill's modest intent of permitting just the naturalization of the Jews, public outcry (accompanied by the chant, "No Jews, no Wooden Shoes") was prohibitive. Religious reform was therefore delayed until 1858, when on 23 July, Baron Lionel de Rothschild was permitted to take his seat in the House without having been required to swear an oath "on the true faith of a Christian." In between, Parliament wrestled with the legal complications associated with non-Anglican residents demanding their educational and economic rights, and the religious ramifications of granting equal rights to "heretics."

Ryan is correct to situate the national religion in its larger political and economic contexts. However, by restricting his inquiry to Protestant activities, he sometimes overlooks the religious contradictions inherent in the romantic literature he considers. Certainly, it is possible to define Christian orthodoxy broadly enough to include Blake, but in so doing, Ryan only parodies Blake himself who defines Christianity broadly enough to encompass the Jews, as he says in *Jerusalem*: "If Humility is Christianity; you O Jews are the true Christians; . . . Take up the Cross O Israel & follow Jesus." The same kind of ecumenism seems to dominate Ryan's interpretation of Wordsworth: "Since he himself had found a refuge in the Church he concluded that others could likewise harbor there, even Catholics and Dissenters if they lay aside their specific doctrinal rigidities" (116). Missing, however, is the recognition that both Blake and

Wordsworth are advocating at best only a specious tolerance, both defining, and thereby restricting, the beliefs of others. In another context, Ryan rationalizes Percy Shelley's bigotry against Hindus and Turks as "an alloy of pragmatism" (206). These writers all lived in intellectual milieus whose boundaries far exceeded the narrow range of the state church, and apologizing for their prejudices does them a disservice. Ryan would have done better to consider how these apparently narrow views of religion related to the ever-expanding world in which the romantics lived.

Publishing in the mid-1990s, Ryan had access to the best of two worlds. Situating himself within the Abrams tradition of humanistic scholarship, he foregrounded an important topic which has been marginalized for decades. But by neglecting the many cultural studies that were unavailable to his predecessor, he repeated over again the "same dull round" that itself strongly contributed to the critical reformation we have been experiencing since the publication of *Natural Supernaturalism. The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824* would have been far more useful had Robert M. Ryan taken greater advantage of "the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."

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G.E. Bentley, Jr. *Blake Books Supplement: A Bibliography of Publications and Discoveries about William Blake 1971-1992 being a Continuation of Blake Books (1977)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. xvii + 789 pp. 13 plates. \$135.

Reviewed by DAVID WORRALL

Bentley's labors, both here and in *Blake Books, Blake Records* and *Blake Records Supplement*, have been hugely important to the expansion of Blake studies. It's surely not too fanciful to trace back to Bentley's foundations the original impulses behind the new "Superbibliography" of Essick

G. E. BENTLEY, Jr.

BLAKE BOOKS
SUPPLEMENT

A Bibliography of
Publications and Discoveries
about WILLIAM BLAKE 1971-1992

being a Continuation of
BLAKE BOOKS (1977)

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD
1995

and Viscomi (although their scholarship has always been more than that, of course). Such is the complexity of Blake's work (drawings, watercolors, oils, various processes of engraving, manuscripts, multiple "originals" of illuminated books, etc.), and so rapid has been the expansion of romanticism's centrality within English studies during the 1960s and now the 1990s, that it always had urgent need of being firmly grounded in critical empiricism. If it becomes the case that the six or seven canonical writers diminish to a rump as future critical interest in them dwindles, Blake may endure as the only one whose complex textual materiality will be certain to ensure that he remains unco-opted into any newer, broader and more democratic cultural histories of the period. What might make sense as an argument about Blake's life as a writer may make less sense about his work as an artist, and vice versa. However that develops in the future, Bentley's two *Blake Books* volumes enable us to visualize, at a glance, not only the totality of Blake study but also to glimpse its developmental process. It will be no surprise that the column of index inches (*centimeters* if you must) devoted to Keynes and Erdman are now much reduced, their primacy overtaken ("neck and neck" as horse-racing commentators would have it) by Essick and Bentley

himself. But our colleagues do not *jockey*, for it has long been thanks to the collective labors of Bentley, Essick, Dörrbecker (and many others), that the *Blake Books* themselves have been continually updated by the rapid annual bibliographies and checklists which appear here in *Blake*. As a community of scholars we continue to have much to be grateful for.

As Bentley realized a long time ago, and the rest of us somewhat later, the study of Blake is a uniquely complex activity because the abundance, technical complexity and material diversity of Blake's original artifacts is combined with a dearth of "literary" information about his life. We have all, at one time or another, leapt upon a dated "WB inv" monogram to bolster some favorite—if more or less shaky—hermeneutic about his life or work, but the materiality of the artifact, the principal domain of the bibliographer, has increasingly tended to trounce us. We all now know, for example, that only *some* of the big Tate Gallery color prints dated by Blake "1795" might be dateable to 1795—since some of the paper is watermarked 1803—but now, it seems, in the absence of anything more convincing, we must also learn not to call *Hecate* "Hecate." Such are the things bibliographers (and gallery curators) do to us, and it hurts. Although *Blake Books Supplement* confines itself explicitly to primary and secondary written records, the adjacent domain of art history will frequently converge with the literary bibliographies when the act of interpretation confronts the status of the archive. Ultimately, what we need is a *Supplement* to the *Supplement*, with Butlin and Bentley butted end to end, so to speak, collating the array of materialities connected with Blake. As it is, Bentley's book is our latest (and best) stab at attaining this essential empirical control over Blake. And such control is needed if we are to have some chance of curbing our own excesses, errors and omissions as scholars.

How professional were we that we missed noticing that copies E-H and H-K of *There is No Natural Religion* were Victorian facsimiles (139)? Or, if confirmed, how did we—until 1991—fail to notice a whole set of 1809 silver buttons with Blake's portrait appearing amidst those of Nelson, Pitt and other luminaries in that crucial *Descriptive Catalogue* year (3)? And what of the so-called "Felpham Rummer" inscribed "Blake in Anguish Felpham August 1803" (70-72, pl. 2)? A glass goblet is solid enough, surely? Yet we missed it, and much else. Unless you have at your elbow a complete run of *Blake's* back to 1977 (with past bibliographers Thomas Minnick and Detlef Dörrbecker giving way to Bentley himself), then *Blake Books Supplement* will be essential at your desk keeping you informed about the totality of artifacts involved in modern Blake studies. Its user will even extract oddments of innocent humor such as finding, for example, that (exotically), the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* is indexed next to the *Journal of Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College*. Much like Bentley's photographic dressing, in a recent issue of *Blake*, of Blake's life

mask with his recently discovered spectacles (*speculative spectacles*, strictly), we can never be quite sure of the extent of this impish fun.

One of the most valuable sections of *Blake Books Supplement* is that devoted to newly recorded and newly traced copies of the illuminated books. The former includes, for example, a census of information on the German and Austrian "Lambeth" books discovered by Dörrbecker in the 1980s while the latter includes many new details of Blake's mid nineteenth-century provenance. In the light of the "Superbibliography" with its careful interpellation from artifacts, it is now of significance that Bentley records as "Newly Recorded Copies" no less than seven individual plates and one "Newly Traced" copy of plates from *Jerusalem* copy J. Similarly, if less dramatically, Bentley methodically records new editions of books containing Blake's commercial engravings and gives, for example, new locations of editions of his Blair's *Grave*, including details of contemporary announcements about its publication. On their own these are matters of minor moment but cumulatively, when enriched with other similar notes, they enable us to gauge the extent of Blake's contemporary circulation and help us visualize Blake-the-craftsman as well as Blake-the-visionary. Further help, usually in the form of addenda to the 1977 *Blake Books*, is also provided in the form of tables of new Blake titles and copies, lists of stab holes, collections, details of location and ownership, plate sizes, watermarks and reproductions (including reprints before 1863). Of course, this information is augmented, *inter alia*, by details of dimensions, color, binding orders etc.

As one might expect, over half of *Blake Books Supplement* is given over to a straightforward bibliography of Blake criticism, mostly postdating the first *Blake Books* but also filling in many of that volume's bibliographical escapees. The global coverage is impressive with articles, books and theses recorded in most of the major and minor European languages (*viz.*, Catalan as well as Spanish) in addition to emergent but identifiable Indian and Japanese bodies of scholarship. As one might expect, although the entries include newspaper and other ephemeral publications, the core of the bibliography of criticism consists of the mainstream output of academically oriented books and journal articles with the listings frequently bearing Bentley's own annotations. Many of these are short synoptic quotations from the works themselves but he quite often provides his own analytical comments, sometimes including evaluative judgements about style (e.g., "rambling," "severe") or content ("wonderfully inaccurate," "masterful," "conventional," "highly sophisticated," "rudimentary"). More frequently, however, Bentley's comments (not nearly as starkly reductive as I have presented here) provide a true analytical annotation, by which I mean that they elucidate information from otherwise unrevealing titles. For example, Robert Essick's 1978 *Notes & Queries* piece, economically titled "William Blake and Sir Thomas Lawrence," is annotated

by Bentley to reveal the core of its information (in this case the existence of an 1830 William Etty letter stating that Lawrence sent Blake £100). By also providing analytical entries for Blake chapters in books not otherwise signally, or obviously, concerned with him, as well as cumulative annotated entries for long running journal volumes such as *Blake*, the *Blake Books Supplement* will cut down much speculative searching and retrieval.

Ours is an age of information, the age of IT. My first action on entering a library is not to go to the catalogue but to padlock my laptop within range of an electricity socket. In considering how *Blake Books Supplement* might be used in the future, it seems extraordinarily shortsighted of Oxford University Press not to have presented the academic market with the possibility of having (as antiquarian booksellers are fond of saying) the "very scarce" 1977 *Blake Books* electronically merged with *Blake Books Supplement* and to sell them both on CD-ROM (I am presuming that the latter, if not the former, would have been presented to the Press on disk). While Bentley's index is very good (he indexes watermarks, for example—even if "J Whatman" comes inexplicably under "J") and includes some attempt to index significant title words (e.g., "Enlightenment," "Body," "Self" etc.), what today's scholarly community requires is "Electronic Searchability." The indexing of names and places is exemplary (I've tried faulting the index but haven't yet managed to do so) but, given the increasingly artifact-based nature of Blake studies, what if I wished to search out, for example, all leaf dimensions of 24.3 cm in the illuminated books? Or what if I wished to collect all Blakeana relating to, say, 1890 (e.g., sales, exhibitions, editions, articles, books)? Or, quite simply, to find all references to "woodcut," both in the section on original works and in the titles or annotations of the critical bibliography? While I recognize that the physicality of modern scholarly practices are often curiously asymmetrical (why is it that I always padlock my laptop but never my Bentley?), the types of research *Blake Books Supplement* might potentially support is far greater than the abilities of a paper index to serve. It is also difficult, but necessary, to incorporate information from the old *Blake Books* and merge it with the *Supplement* (I am thinking, in particular, of provenance details and physical descriptions of the illuminated books). The *Supplement* tends to assume ownership or sight of *Blake Books* exactly at those points where other databases (e.g., MLA, ABELL) cannot be of much help. To such wistful electronic mergers we might also add *The Marriage of Blake Records and Supplement*. It seems a pity that such a Herculean set of labors, and such wonderful achievements as *Blake Books/Records/Supplements* should be confined to the archaic and undemocratic world of print. Perhaps enlightened opportunism at Oxford University Press might persuade them of the economic potential of selling, either in CD-ROM format or over the internet, not just *Blake*

Books Supplement but the now dormant *Blake Books*: three OUP incomes for two copyrights. Just as the Blake internet sites have shown so splendidly, we have at our disposal the means to lead our discipline in the digitalization of literary studies: Bentley's four Blake books ought to be there in the vanguard. Blake studies, and romanticism in general, should count itself fortunate to have been so well served, and for so long, by the dedicated (if not precisely devout) scholarship of Jerry and Beth Bentley.

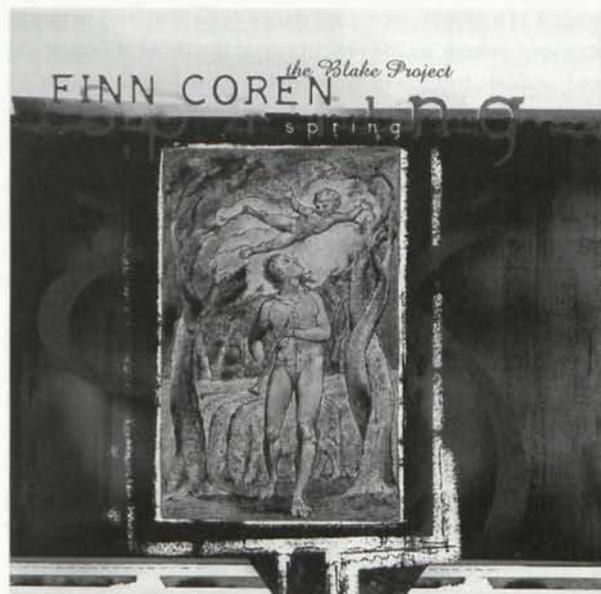
Finn Coren, *The Blake Project: Spring* (Bard Records, BACD-1) (\$15.44) and *The Blake Project: Spring: Appendix* (Bard Records, BACD-2) (\$9.87).

Reviewed by THOMAS DILLINGHAM

Many composers have attempted to fill the wistful quiet left for lovers of William Blake's poems by the anecdotes of his having sung some of them to tunes of his own devising at public gatherings. With no hope, apparently, of recovering Blake's tunes, we must be satisfied with the efforts of admirers. One of the best known is Parry's anthem based on the preface to Milton, and Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, among others, have offered their versions of the lyrics, including some texts from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. More recently, Greg Brown has recorded his pleasant country/folk setting of the *Songs* and before him, that indispensable citizen of the world, Allen Ginsberg, tuned the *Songs* in many public appearances and for several recordings, evolving a style of performance that fits nicely with what is called world music.

Now comes the artistically ambitious and powerful recording by a Norwegian rock composer, Finn Coren, *The Blake Project*. Presented in two parts of 10 songs each, "Spring" and "Silent Melancholy," with a separate "Appendix," this work can only be described as a song cycle, a term which might daunt by its implicit comparison with Schubert's *Winterreise*, Schumann's *Liederkreis*, or Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. In each case, the composer has chosen to set a series of poems by a master and has grouped the musical results to provide both meaningful interplay among the songs and an overall sense of unity. The same intention and effect are apparent in *The Blake Project*. Coren has been working on this cycle for nearly 10 years, producing settings of 22 of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (including two versions each of "The Tyger" and "The Fly," along with two lyrics from *Poetical Sketches*, three from the Notebook, and "Jerusalem," the preface to *Milton*).

Coren uses a variety of styles and instrumentations for the different songs; "The Sick Rose," for example, is a quiet



lament accompanied by acoustic guitar, while "London," set with electric piano, two violins and a cello, with Coren's vocal (as in some other songs as well) as a kind of *sprechstimme*, with a crooning repetition of the name "London" interpolated between verses. "To Tirzah" introduces a trumpet to particularly dramatic effect, while more exotic instruments (tablas, cembalo, Hardanger-fiddle, baglabouzouki) are featured along with the familiar electric guitars, bass, and percussion of more conventional rock groups. The musical styles range from the quiet, meditative sounds of "The Sick Rose," "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" or "Little Boy Lost" to hard percussion-driven rock (as in the angry sounds of "The Chimney Sweeper" or "Holy Thursday" from *Experience*) to a John Lennon-like lyricism (as in "Spring," "Cradle Song," or "Holy Thursday" from *Innocence*) to songs that might be compared with the best of Lou Reed or Elvis Costello. "Jerusalem" has the feel of an operatic chorale, though firmly grounded in rock idiom.

There is also variety in the production of the music—a few songs are recorded in relatively straightforward manner, while many are given a surreal or angry or even threatening quality by overdubbing, reverberation, echo, and startling sound effects. Coren is especially good at musically punctuating or emphasizing words or phrases with instrumental notes or riffs that function rather like the tendrils, flowers, vine leaves, insects and other intruders into Blake's verbal spaces. While the influences of the Beatles and others mentioned here are apparent, the music remains distinctively Coren's. (Listening with stereo earphones provides a particularly intense experience of the sometimes elaborate sound production on these albums.)

A most impressive feature of Coren's settings is his sense of the dialectical ironies and even wicked humor of many of the songs. "The Little Vagabond," for example, is pre-

sented as a jaunty, swinging dance tune that builds to uproarious humor in the repetition of the third stanza at the end with its mockery of "modest Dame Lurch, who is always at Church." This is followed, in the "Appendix," with a soulful lullaby-like "Nurse's Song" that is itself fiercely ironic. Just as Blake comments on possible reversals of poetic meaning or mood with his illuminations, so Coren uses contrasting musical styles to point up the indignation, anger or fear underlying the poems. "The Lamb" begins with an almost condescending spoken version of the first stanza, followed by an eerie orchestration with the quality of "space music" that emphasizes both the cosmic context of the poem and the peculiar combination of reassurance and menace that pervades it.

As has been indicated here, Coren does not simply settle on a surface characteristic or mood of a poem and try to reproduce it in his musical setting. His responses to Blake are as complex and interactive as those of any reader who hopes to experience the range of Blake's meaning and as critical as Blake's own responses when he set out to illustrate the works of other poets or to illuminate his own. Coren's music can embody both the exuberance and the grimness, the joy and the pain of the world Blake creates and explores. In some cases, the multiple character is present in a single setting; in others, the presence of two settings of the same poem offers a glimpse of the complexity of Coren's responses. This is particularly apparent in the two versions of "The Wild Flower's Song" ("As I wandered the forest/The green leaves among") from the Notebook. The first version is bouncy, upbeat, cheerful, but with an ironic tinge made inevitable by the final lines ("To seek for new Joy/But I met with scorn"). This same poem is reset as a mournful dirge, accompanied by strings and cello, to end the "Appendix." Neither version exhausts the poem, but they complement each other and indicate the sophistication of Coren's understanding of Blake's work.

The relationship of the "Appendix" to other two parts of the *Project* opens the question of its unity. The word "appendix" suggests that the songs included might be discards or extras that would not fit with the design of the rest, the album an afterthought or a monument to the wish not to waste any good material. I would prefer, however, to see the whole work as a triptych rather than a diptych, since "Appendix" seems as artfully arranged as the first two parts and, though it could not be said to offer a summation, it stands comfortably next to the other two parts, offering alternative versions of "The Tyger" (a more conventional rocking version) and "The Fly" (labeled a "Norwegian Folk Version," scored for mandolin and Hardanger-fiddle) and the extraordinary blues-based version of "A Poison Tree." The closing mournful version of "A Wild Flower's Song" parallels the setting of "The Sick Rose" at the conclusion of "Silent Melancholy" (Coren's overall title for the second part of "Spring"). By intermixing songs of experience with songs of innocence, Coren emphasizes the immanence of each state in the other, and his music reinforces the point



with its complex commentary. Coren's version of Blake is dark; some might find it bleak. It provides the pleasures of powerful music and of the compulsion to think deeply, with the musicians, about Blake's work.

Finn Coren has said that he took special pains not only with the music but with the design of his album, and the result is worth mentioning. The booklets that come with the CDs are beautifully designed, with reproductions of pages from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* handsomely reprinted against appropriate backgrounds, and the "self-portrait" of Blake (possibly by Linnell) from Robert Essick's collection providing an image of the poet consistent with the tone and mood of the album. (One glitch: Coren attributes to W.B. Yeats some lines from Blake's notebook poem, "The Caverns of the Grave I've Seen"; apparently these lines were quoted in the introduction to a selection of Yeats's poems; they are undeniably Yeatsian both thematically and tonally, so the confusion is not surprising.)

At the time of this writing, Coren's albums are not distributed in the United States. (He also has an earlier album, *A Full Moon in March*, based on poems of Yeats.) They are available from a Swedish online company—www.boxman.com—and may be made available through a Canadian or U.S. distributor in the near future. Certainly the high artistic quality of these albums would richly reward any who chose to listen to them, even those not otherwise fond of rock music. While there are other rock albums that may properly be called song cycles (Lou Reed's *Songs for Drella* and *Magic and Loss*, Elvis Costello's *The Juliet Letters*, Sting's *Summoner's Tales*, and others), few have devoted themselves to exploring the possible interaction of music with the poetic complexity of a poet like Blake. It will be interesting to see what Coren produces in the future.

N E W S L E T T E R

THE BLAKE JOURNAL

The *Blake Journal* is the publication of the the Blake Society at St. James. It is free to members but also available from a number of bookshops and galleries.

The editorial policy of the Journal is to offer a wide coverage of items concerning Blake or related to a Blakean tradition. Past editions have included academic articles, but we aim also to offer space for other, perhaps more personal and speculative responses to Blake's work.

The editors are currently commissioning pieces for the third edition. We would also like to extend an invitation to readers of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* to submit their work for inclusion.

Articles should normally be 3000-4000 words in length, but can be much shorter. Accompanying graphics are welcome. We also include short notices of and reports from conferences, theatre, exhibitions, etc.

We are happy to receive or arrange for reviews of books, etc. Please address your work or initial enquiries to the editors: Dr Michael Grenfell, School of Education, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK. Telephone 44 (0) 1703 593472; fax 44 (0) 1703 593556; email: m.grenfell@soton.ac.uk, or to Andrew Solomon, 35 Hillway, London N6 6AH.

Current contents of *The Blake Journal* include:

- "Mrs Q" by David Worrall
- "Blake and Gnosis" by Valerie Parslow
- "A Blakean Manifesto" by Michael Grenfell
- "God, Man, George Steiner and Me" by Sunao Vagabond
- "To Build Jerusalem" by Andrew Solomon
- "London Stone — a Print of 1791" by James Bogan
- Soetsu Yanagi's *William Blake* by Hatsuko Niimi
- George Goyder by Peter Cadogan
- Impressions of Jeanne Moskal's *Blake, Ethics and Forgiveness* by Adrian Peeler
- Conference at St Mary's University College: *Blake and the Book*
- Book Reviews
- The Tyger the Lamb and the Terrible Desert* by Stanley Gardner, reviewed by Sir Peter Parker
- William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* by Helen P. Bruder, reviewed by Christopher Rubenstein
- Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* by Warren Stevenson, reviewed by Christopher Rubenstein

PIONEERS OF THE SPIRIT—WILLIAM BLAKE

Pioneers of the Spirit is a series of programs on the lives and views of spiritual leaders: "living portraits of mystical figures . . . Each biographical profile weaves together ex-

cerpts from the personal writings of each mystic, dramatic artwork, expert commentary, and a compelling narration focusing on the relevance of each pioneer to contemporary times."

Pioneers of the Spirit—William Blake includes interviews with Blake scholar Sheila Spector, Peter Cadojan of the Blake Society, and Tim Heath of the House of Blake. It will air on Odyssey, a national cable channel devoted to programming on religious and spiritual concerns. Viewers can find out when it will air early next year by calling 212-964-1663 (ask for Elmer). Once the programs air they are repackaged as videos with study guides. They can be purchased for under \$15.00 through the Trinity Bookstore, Trinity Church, 74 Trinity Place, NY NY 10006 or call 212-602-9689.

CRUIKSHANK AT PRINCETON

The Princeton University Library has just completed a website displaying prints and book illustrations of George Cruikshank (1792-1878): <http://www.princeton.edu/~vismat/cruikshank/>. Princeton has one of the largest collections of Cruikshank manuscripts, books, prints, and artwork, including more than a hundred drawings. The website contains links to the manuscripts finding aid, a catalogue of drawings, and an experimental interactive gallery showing preliminary drawings next to the finished prints, along with commentary and cataloguing records. The gallery can be browsed chronologically, thus serving as an overview of Cruikshank's career. Any suggestions, comments, or corrections gratefully appreciated.

John Bidwell
Curator of Graphic Arts
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graphics@pucc.princeton.edu

ROMANTIC REVELATIONS

Romantic Revelations, the 6th International Residential Conference of the British Association for Romantic Studies is to be hosted by the Department of English, Keele University, from Thursday 29 July to Sunday 1 August 1999. Plenary speakers already scheduled to appear include Morton Paley, Frances Ferguson and John Barrell. Enquiries should be directed to the organizers, Simon Bainbridge and Edward Larrissy, at the Department of English, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1782 583138. E-mail: ena01@keele.ac.uk.

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