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CONTRIBUTORS

MARSHA KEITH SCHUCHARD (keithschuchard@hotmail.com) has recently published Why Mrs. Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision (London: Century-Random House, 2006). She is currently completing a sequel to Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture (Leiden: Brill, 2002), which will cover British and international Masonic developments and their political and cultural ramifications from 1689 to 1750.

KERI DAVIES (keri.davies@ntu.ac.uk) is secretary of the Blake Society. He is currently research fellow in the Department of English, Nottingham Trent University.

THOMAS R. FROSCH (tfrosch@nyc.rr.com) is professor of English at Queens College (CUNY) and is the author of a book on Blake, The Awakening of Albion (Cornell University Press, 1974) and a forthcoming book, Shelley and the Romantic Imagination: A Psychological Study (University of Delaware Press).

EDITORS

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BIBLIOGRAPHER: G. E. Bentley, Jr.
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PRODUCTION OFFICE: Department of English, Morey 410, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627-0451
MANAGING EDITOR: Sarah Jones - sarah.jones@rochester.edu
TELEPHONE: 585/275-3820 FAX: 585/442-5769

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Articles

Young William Blake and the Moravian Tradition of Visionary Art

By Marsha Keith Schuchard

The Scripture says that our entire work of the Gospel is to portray Jesus, to paint Him before the eyes, to take the spirit's stylus and etch—yes, engrave—the image of Jesus in the fleshy tablets of the heart ....

Zinzendorf, Nine Lectures 81

I would choose Fancy rather than Philosophy. Feeling is ascertained by Experience; Reasoning is hurtful, or makes us lose ourselves.

Zinzendorf in Rimius, Candid Narrative 48

Thank God I never was sent to school
To be Flogged into following the Style of a Fool

Blake (E 510)

In the months following the publication of Davies and Schuchard, "Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family," more material on Blake's mother and first husband was discovered in the Moravian Church Library, Muswell Hill, London. We learn that Catherine and Thomas Armitage had a child, Thomas, who died in March 1751; thus, William Blake is actually her fourth, not third, child. We also learn that the Armitages were intimately and practically involved in Moravian affairs and that Peter Boehler, the charismatic leader of the Congregation of the Lamb, made a special effort to help Catherine after her husband died on 19 November 1751. An intriguing note on 20 March 1753 urges Brother West, an Armitage-Blake family friend, to speak to "Sr. Arm." (Sister Armitage?) about some financial matter, thus suggesting that she continued her contacts with the Moravians even after she married James Blake in October 1752. Perhaps she withdrew only from the highly selective, time-consuming congregation and not from a less formal association with the Brothers and Sisters. If the John Blake who appealed to Boehler for membership in the congregation was indeed the brother of James Blake, Catherine's new husband, then William Muir's claim (made to Thomas Wright) that William Blake's "parents attended the Moravian Chapel in Fetter Lane" gains new plausibility, for they could have attended the services which were open to the public (Wright 1: 2, Lowery 14-15, 210n57). Wright's further assertion that "Blake's father had adopted the doctrines of Swedenborg, whose followers, however, did not separate from other religious bodies till later" gains a new historical context, for the Armitages and Blake could have known or heard about Swedenborg, who also attended services at Fetter Lane in the 1740s and, even after breaking with the Brethren, continued to have Moravian friends and to utilize Moravian publishers. While the Moravian-Swedenborgian milieu raises many questions and provokes many speculations concerning William Blake's spiritual and intellectual development, I will here focus on the possible Moravian influence—especially through his mother—on his early artistic development.

In 1828 John Thomas Smith recalled that Blake as a child showed "an early stretch of mind, and a strong talent for drawing," while also demonstrating the ability to compose and perform "singularly beautiful" songs, despite being "entirely unacquainted with the science of music" (Bentley, BR[2] 605-06). Two years later, Allan Cunningham wrote that "the love of art came early upon the boy," who "it seems, was privately encouraged by his mother." It was "his chief delight to retire to the solitude of his room, and there make drawings, and illustrate these with verses, to be hung up together in his mother's chamber" (Bentley, BR[2] 628, 631-32). From his earliest years, he also revealed his visionary tendency, reporting at age four that he saw God put his forehead to the window and, when he played outdoors, he saw a tree filled with angels and the prophet Ezekiel under a tree. Despite his mother's worries, he usually excelled at such excited claims, as he usually protected himself from "shrieking from his honest father" (Gillchrist, quoted in Bentley, Stranger 19-20). Unfortunately, nothing more emerged about this important maternal influence, leading Alexander Gilchrist to lament in 1863 that after the death of Blake's mother at age seventy in 1792, "She is a shade to us,


1. Moravian Archive, Moravian Church House, London; C/36/7/5, p. 10 (1 March 1751). I am grateful to Lorraine Parsons, archivist, for assisting me with research and for sharing the new findings with me.

2. Moravian Archive; C/36/14/2 (13 August 1750); C/36/11/6 (12 September, 20 November, 4, 11, and 19 December 1751).

3. Moravian Archive; C/36/11/6 (20 March 1753).

4. Keri Davies is currently investigating the many references to Blakes in the archives, which suggest—but do not yet prove—that some of James Blake's relatives were Moravians.

5. For Swedenborg's Moravian experiences in London in 1744-45, see Swedenborg, Dream Diary 12-17, 30-38, 54-58. He wrote more about the London Moravians in his Spiritual Diary (1746-65). Swedenborg used the Moravian publisher John Lewis and, after Lewis's death in 1758, his Moravian widow Mary Lewis continued to sell Swedenborg's works. Many of his readers (in England and Sweden) had Moravian parents (such as C. B. Wadström and the Nordenskjöld brothers), while Dr. Husband Mesiter, Jacob Duché, and Richard Cosway were interested in Zinzendorf's teachings.

alas! In all senses: for of her character, or even her person, no tidings survive" (Gilchrist 1: 95).

Fortunately, the new Moravian documents allow us to put some flesh on the shade of Catherine Armitage Blake and to recover the religious milieu that rendered her so sympathetic to her son's development as a visionary artist. In order to bring to the surface this submerged history, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the career of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, leader of the renewed Unitas Fratrum, and the spiritual-artistic ethos of the "Sifting Time" (c. 1743-53), a turbulent and creative period of spiritual, sexual, and artistic experimentation. That Catherine and Thomas Armitage, John Blake, and possibly James Blake were attracted to the Moravian Chapel during the most intense years of the Sifting Time would become relevant to William Blake's later radical and antinomian beliefs about eroticized spirituality. Through this association, they enjoyed unusual—even unique—access to an international network of ecumenical missionaries, an esoteric tradition of Christian Kabbalism, Hermetic alchemy, and Oriental theosophy, along with a European "high culture" of religious art, music, and poetry.

The beliefs and activities of Count Zinzendorf (1700-60) continue to provoke controversy among historians, with most praising him as an innovative theologian and pioneer of religious and racial toleration and some condemning him as a Gnostic heretic and sexual pervert. Born in Dresden, Saxony, to an aristocratic Lutheran family, he rejected his Pietist mentors' emphasis on ascetic self-denial and morbid spiritual struggle. In 1722 he welcomed to his estate a band of Moravian refugees, heirs to the Protestant reform movements stimulated by Jan Hus in the fifteenth century and Jan Amos Comenius in the seventeenth. Known as the Unitas Fratrum, the persecuted Moravians preserved "the Hidden Seed" of their irenic spiritual traditions, while they assimilated concepts and symbols developed by Boehmenist and Pietist writers. Under Zinzendorf's leadership at Herrnhut and other communities, the Moravians developed a passionate Herzensreligion (religion of the heart), which affirmed that Jesus’s Menschwerdung ("humanation") made him experience the full range of human pain and pleasure and that his self-sacrifice and intense suffering on the cross were sufficient to fully redeem fallen human beings. Thus, pious and self-righteous standards of behavior, which led to hypocrisy and joylessness, were not the proper expressions of Christian worship, for one should utilize one's Herz (heart) to sensate Jesus's love and to identify with his bloody wounds—from the first wound of circumcision to the final wound in his side.

Drawing on his Hebrew studies and discussions with mystical Jews, Zinzendorf identified the German Herz with the Hebrew Lev, the location of emotion and intellect: "In the Old Testament, heart [Lev] is the point of contact with God. 'Heart' is more visceral and affective than the Greek word for the personality [Psyche]" (Atwood, Community 32-33). Moreover,

Zinzendorf defined "Heart" as the inner person which had five senses as did the outer person. The "Heart," especially when it has been brought to life by the Holy Spirit, can perceive the Savior objectively and directly. In modern terms we might speak of this as "intuition" or "extrasensory perception." Zinzendorf's approach is very similar to Teresa of Avila's "intellectual vision." (Arthur Freeman 7)

In a typically irenic assimilation, Zinzendorf affirmed that the sensually perceptive Lev could be stimulated to "intellectual vision" by meditating upon great religious art, especially the Catholic art produced by Renaissance and Baroque painters. Thus, he argued against the Old Testament prohibition of "graven images," which influenced the intense iconoclasm of


7. Moravian historians differ on the length of the Sifting Time, but I date it generally from 1743, when Zinzendorf returned from Pennsylvania, to 1753, when a publishing campaign against him began in England. Though some Moravian officials attempted to suppress the radically eroticized spirituality from 1749 on, the themes continued to attract many members in London and elsewhere but were handled with much greater secrecy.

8. For an introductory biography, see Arthur Freeman. For the most accurate histories of the Sifting Time, see Podmore; Peucker, "Blut"; Atwood, Community.
most British Dissenters, and praised the Lutheran rejection of that commandment:

In the New Testament this commandment is at an end: we have seen. Therefore the Lutherans are right in leaving this commandment out of the catechism, for it no longer has any relation on earth to us. This makes the particular distinction between us and the Reformed, for they combine the ninth and tenth commandments to make room for the commandment forbidding images, which we Lutherans... leave out of the Decalogue. We do not hold that a person should make himself no picture or image in the New Testament; a person may make an image, no, he should. (Zinzendorf 81)

Zinzendorf preached this anti-iconoclastic sermon at Fetter Lane to counter the hostile attacks of Dissenting and Methodist critics, who claimed that Moravian artistic practices were crypto-Papist. Thus, he recounted his life-changing experience in which art first opened his heart (Herz-Lev). During his student travels, he visited a gallery in Düsseldorf, which featured Domenico Feti's Ecce Homo, a poignant painting of Jesus's suffering under the crown of thorns before his crucifixion. Under the wounded body scrolled a Latin caption: "All this I have suffered for you, but what have you done for me?" (Atwood, Community 97) (illus. 1). An emotional Zinzendorf recalled that "My blood rushed because I was not able to give much of an answer, and I prayed to my Saviour to make me ride in the comradeship of his suffering with force." The rushing blood, yearning for forced intimacy, comradeship in suffering—religious passions stimulated by a work of art—intensified the young nobleman's determination to serve Jesus and to identify with his fully humanized nature, which he came to believe included not only suffering but sexuality. An admirer of Catholic doctrines of confession and forgiveness of sins, he hoped to utilize Catholic artistic traditions to invigorate the ecumenical Herzensreligion.

What made his commitment to religious art so creative and controversial was his injection of Kabbalistic concepts of sacramental sexuality into his portrayal of the fully incarnated Jesus. He drew on Jewish mystical beliefs concerning the sexual dynamics of the male-female emanations (the Sephiroth) that bodied forth the Divinity, and transformed the Christian all-male Trinity into a male-female divine family. Thus, he argued that the Holy Spirit is female (a Christianized version of the Kabbalists' Shekhinah, or female potency within God), and described a hieros gamos in which the Holy Spirit is the wife of God and mother of Jesus, the God-Man (the Kabbalists' microcosmic Adam Kadmon) (illus. 2). Influenced by Kabbalistic and Jesuit meditation techniques, he urged the Moravians to focus intently on the bloody wounds of the crucified Jesus, which he interpreted in highly eroticized language—i.e., as the centurion's phallic spear penetrated the vaginal side-wound, new souls were birthed in the gushing blood from this mystical intercourse. Because all human souls are female (animas), both men and women can achieve a psychoerotic consummation with Jesus, the divine bridegroom, as they are enfolded into "the side-hole" (a figurative back-to-the-womb experience). Because Jesus was conceived in a female womb and was born with male genitals, these organs should be honored and utilized sacramentally within human marriage, which reenacts the divine marriage and the sexual reintegration of the God-Man.

9. For Jewish and Kabbalistic influences on Zinzendorf, see Deghaye, Dithmar. He implemented the Judenmission, which appealed to Jews in London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, New York, and other cities, and many Jews attended Moravian services.

10. For Moravian sexual theosophy, see Atwood, Community 185-94 and "Sleeping" 25-51; also Podmore 130-31.
In the process, Zinzendorf revived the Renaissance artistic tradition that linked the ostentatio vulnerum (showing forth of the wounds) with the ostentatio genitalium (showing forth of the genitals), a linkage which stressed the full "humanization" of Jesus (Steinberg 3, 16, 18, 57, 83, 373). In 1750 the count predicted that "one of these days" artists will portray the crucified Jesus in a new way, fully nude without a cloth covering his sexual organs; his genitals will again express "his honor and innocence," for "he is no fallen Adam" (Peucker, "Kreuzbilder" 137). Though no records of such portrayals survive, the portrayals may have been used more privately, within Zinzendorf's family and inner circle, for in 1748 his niece, Sophie Reuss, made a miniature drawing of a nude Christ on the cross, with no covering cloth and with blood flowing profusely from his five wounds. This religious-artistic belief perhaps found an echo in Blake's affirmation, "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion" (E 37).

As a highly educated and basically skeptical intellectual, Zinzendorf spoke about his own struggle to move beyond speculative abstraction to imaginative visualization. He granted that the capacity for vision—"that extraordinary state" when one is "in the Spirit"—was not equally shared by every Brother and Sister:

This may happen with more or less sense experience, with more or less distinctness, with more or less visibility, and with as many kinds of modifications as the different human temperaments and natural constitutions can allow in one combination or another. One person attains to it more incontestably and powerfully, the other more gently and mildly; but in one moment both attain to this, that in reality and truth one has the Creator of all things ... standing ... in the form of one atoning for the whole human race—this individual object stands before the vision of one's heart, before the eyes of one's spirit, before one's inward man. (Zinzendorf 82-83)

One should be able to say, "I see him as clearly as if he were here; I could paint him right now," for then "He remains engraved in one's heart. One has a copy of this deeply impressed there; one lives in it, is changed into the same image" (Zinzendorf 84-85). By focusing intensely and reverently on Jesus's body and the intercourse between phallic spear and vaginal wound, the Moravian devotee could achieve a state of trance, of psychosexual euphoria, in which he or she "shook with love's fever" and experienced the "mystical marriage" (Atwood, Community 219).

To increase the congregation's capacity to "see," "paint," and "engrave," Zinzendorf recruited and commissioned artists to create vivid portrayals of Christ's life and sufferings for the Brothers and Sisters to study while powerful hymns, guitars, violins, and trombones provided background music. At the chapel in Fetter Lane and at Lindsey House in Chelsea (the count's headquarters), the whitewashed walls were covered with paintings of biblical and allegorical scenes, as well as portrayals of Moravian history and international missionary work. Adding to the mystical atmosphere were watercolored transparencies, through which lanterns and candles projected luminous visions into the congregation rooms. Given the often bloody and sometimes sensual symbolism of the paintings and hymns, these scenes would provoke much controversy and hostile attacks from critics. However, the passionate letter of Catherine Armitage, which reveals her deep immersion in the spiritual-erotic themes of the Sifting Time, suggests that Blake's mother responded positively to the Moravians' stress on the role of art and music in the development of visionary spirituality. As she encouraged the artistic productions of her imaginative son, she was perhaps implementing Zinzendorf's peculiar but progressive notions of "infant education."

Zinzendorf admired the "panosophic" educational theories of Comenius, whose portrait was displayed at Lindsey House, and he implemented them in his voluminous sermons, songs, and lessons for children (Meyer 94-105). Comenius stressed the innocence of childhood, the importance of parental affection, the healthy effects of outdoor free play, and, most importantly, the use of pictorial images to inculcate religious sentiments. What was surprisingly modern or Freudian in the count's pedagogy was his belief that even embryos and infants were receptive to his sex, blood, and wounds theology and that "the process of religious education and socialization began in utero" (Atwood, Community 178-83; "Blood" 192-93). Within the "embryo choir," the pregnant mother was pampered and counselled; after birth, she and her infant became part of the "suckling choir," and joyous love feasts were held for them. In order to sensate the "assembled image" of the God-Man in one's heart, mother and child must "view, picture, and meditate about the saviour from head to foot." These injunctions were sung by the mother in the home and by the children in catechistical hymns. In a Moravian drawing from 1754, Zinzendorf's two-year-old daughter is shown meditating upon a painting of the crucified Jesus (Peucker, "Kreuzbilder" 170).

Zinzendorf was evidently familiar with sixteenth-century paintings that portrayed the infant Christ with an erect penis and giving a flirtatious "chin-chuck" to his adoring mother, and there were hints of such themes in his lyrics for children. When Blake wrote his provocative "Cradle Song," he seemed to draw on the Moravians' maternal and infant sexual psy-

11. I am grateful to Paul Peucker, Moravian archivist formerly at Herrnhut and now at Bethlehem, PA, for sending me this important article and for help with identifications.

12. Moravian Archive: C/36/2/159.

13. Because Elizabeth von Zinzendorf was born in 1740, the 1754 portrait probably had a pedagogical purpose for current infant education.

14. The occasional erection of the infant penis is a normal and natural phenomenon, but many Renaissance artists stressed it as proof of the full "humanation" of Jesus. Steinberg (3, 10, 76-79 and plates 83-88) gives examples such as Abise Vivarini's Madonna and Child with Saints (c. 1500), Perino del Vaga's Holy Family (c. 1520), Perugino's Madonna and Child (c. 1500), Correggio's Madonna of the Basket (c. 1523-25), etc.
chology. In Blake’s song, the mother strokes the soft limbs, the babe’s face and heart respond with smiles and peaceful beat, and she recognizes the erotic pleasure stimulated in the infant:

Sweet Babe in thy face
Soft desires I can trace
Secret joys & secret smiles
[Such as burning youth beguiles del.] (E 468, 852)

Though Blake deleted the last line, he went even further in his paean to free love, Visions of the Daughters of Albion, where Oothoon proclaims:

Take thy bliss O Man!
And sweet shall be thy taste & sweet thy infant joys renew!
Infancy, fearless, lustful, happy! nestling for delight
In laps of pleasure .... (E 49)

Blake’s “laps of pleasure” takes on a new connotation when placed in a context of Zinzendorf’s pedagogical instruction that the school of the female Holy Spirit was “a family school, that is, a school on the lap, in the arms of the eternal Mother.” In German, the same word (Schoss) is used for lap and womb, and the mother’s “school” for her infant took on a spiritual-erotic connotation, which was vividly expressed in hymns for the embryo and suckling choirs. Blake’s lustful, nestling infant recalls the sung injunction to each mother, “That your child lay naked and bare on your lap” (Atwood, Community 178-79). Following Comenius’s teaching, the Moravians advocated maternal breast feeding rather than farming infants out to wet nurses. Blake’s mother may well have heard Peter Boehler’s talks to the married Sisters, when he stressed that “suckling” must be done with “gracious ideas as a Divine Worship.”

Decades later, Blake would lament that so many selfish parents reject this beneficial practice: “The child springs from the womb ... / The young bosom is cold for lack of mother’s nourishment, & milk / Is cut off from the weeping mouth” (E 285).

Determined to make the sensating of Jesus a joyous experience, Zinzendorf advocated that parents and children—of every age, class, and background—should participate in a rich Renaissance-Baroque culture of painting, poetry, and music. Remembering his own unhappy childhood, when he was sent away to boarding school and instructed by puritanical pedants, he urged the Moravians to home-school their children. Preaching at Fetter Lane in 1753, he instructed the parents to build a home “for a Christian family life which will make possible the ideal church in the home with proper religious training of children”; moreover, “parental training is the natural method as compared with institutional training which is artificial” (Meyer 138, 142). Unusually for the time, he believed that an affectionate mother was the best teacher for a young child, and that she should inculcate a love of art and music to stir the visionary senses of the Herz-Lev.

From infancy on, a Moravian child was exposed to religious art and script, including the German artistic technique of Frakturschriften, the ornamental breaking or fracturing of letters, which Zinzendorf and Boehler had observed when they visited the Boehmenist-Rosicrucian community at Ephrata, Pennsylvania (Sachse 1: 354-64, 401-02). In the Ephratans’ mystical calligraphy, the scribe represented the breaking of the artist’s self-will and opening to union with Christ by breaking the letters and surrounding them with swirling ornamentation, which created the “sprouting of a florid paradise” (Bach 182-84). The “illuminations” were usually “drawn with pen and ink, and then embellished with vigorous colors.” The actual practice of Fraktur, with its intense concentration and visualization, could produce mystical states, for “each scribe has the birthing process in himself after rebirth.” In the magnificently illuminated Ephrata ABC book, Sisters Anastasia and Efiqenia drew capital letters constructed with a series of swinging, voluptuous curves, all interstices of the letters filled with additional scrollings and floral forms. A passionate devotion to the work caused the individual calligrapher to further elaborate all possible areas with minute stipplings and dottings, in the manner of steel engraving. Significant symbolistic motifs also entered into the enrichment of the capitals. (Frances Lichten, quoted in Alderfer 125-26)

Alderfer adds that some of them, such as the A and the O, make use of the human form to portray a provocative symbolism .... The O suggests Anastasia’s vision of Beissel [the community leader] being crowned with the Holy Spirit .... it may also reflect her sublimated love for him .... The borders are astonishing .... (126) (illus. 3)

Despite their opposition to the Ephratans’ policy of celibacy (they believed that earthly marriage would prevent divine marriage with Sophia), the Moravians borrowed liberally from the sect’s mystical art and symbolism (Stoudt 94-96). Like Conrad Beissel, Zinzendorf believed that “art, literature, and music were not [to be] regarded as separate disciplines; they united in one common spiritual experience” (Alderfer 125). Thus, a comment by the Pennsylvanian art historian John Stoudt becomes suggestive; referring to the Ephrata ABC book, he observes that the frontispiece “is a drawing much like those of William Blake” (Stoudt 138) (illus. 4 and 5). At this time in London, the walls at Fetter Lane and Lindsey House were hung with papers and canvases of Moravian poetry and hymns, ornamented with painted letters (often in elaborate German Gothic script), whose twisting and curving gave them “a florid quality” (Podmore 133, 151-52; Atwood,
“Blood” 171) (illus. 6). Paintings and drawings were often surrounded with Spruchbünder, sayings or aphorisms that illustrated the text (Peucker, “Kreuzbilder” 166). Catherine Armitage Blake would have seen these elaborate and charming “illuminations,” which also decorated private rooms. The Moravians' love of religious art provoked iconoclastic Dissenters to criticize “our innocent pictures and crucifixes in our Rooms” (Podmore 152). It was probably no coincidence that Catherine’s young son William loved to make drawings and illustrate them with verses to be “hung up together in his mother’s chamber.”

At Fetter Lane, Catherine Armitage was also exposed to the Jesuit emblem tradition of “iconomysticism.” Thomas Armitage had written his application letter to John Cennick, a

talented poet and composer, who often discussed Hermann Hugo's *Pia Desideria*, a seventeenth-century Jesuit emblem book, with the Brothers and Sisters (Cennick 24). Cennick and Zinzendorf agreed with Comenius's advocacy of emblem books, which can "explain the whole of pansophy" and which function like the "signatures" of Paracelsus and Boehme (Sadler 28, 42-43, 201, 282). From descriptions in the Congregation Diaries of "our little childlike Hieroglyphicks," "many childlike emblematical Doings, with Candles, Leaf-work," and "emblematical Pictures, suddenly shifting & successively presenting themselves to the Eye," it is clear that Cennick encouraged the implementation of Hugo's theories. According to Mario Praz, Jesuit emblematics follows "the tracks of hieroglyphics" and "aims at establishing a mode of expression which only a few may understand; in a word, an esoteric language"—and thus relevant to Zinzendorf's frequent use of an encoded secret language (Praz 1: 155). At the same time, emblematics "aims at being a way of making ethical and religious truths accessible to all, even to the illiterate and to children, through the lure of pictures." While Catherine Blake homeschooled her children, did she introduce them to Hugo's "little books of emblems," which offer to the eyes "charming Zimme-

poppen, or dolls for the spirit ... the toys of a bewitched kindergarten" (Praz 1: 136)?

Cennick, who greatly admired the Moravian paintings and engravings he observed in Germany and England, would have recognized the relevance of Jesuit emblematic techniques to Zinzendorf's artistic-pedagogic goals. As Praz observes, the "didactic properties" of emblems were "calculated to further the Ignatian technique of the application of the senses, to help the imagination to picture to itself in the minutest detail circumstances of religious import":

They made the supernatural accessible to all by materializing it. Rather than mortifying the senses in order to concentrate all energies in an ineffable tension of the spirit, according to the purgative way of the mystics, the Jesuits wanted every sense to be keyed up to the pitch of its capacity, so as to conspire together to create a psychological state pliant to the command of God. (Praz 1: 156)

Similarly, Moravian artists were instructed to arouse and utilize all the senses, so the viewer would move beyond mere understanding and would fully participate in, fully *sensare*, Jesus's experiences from crucifixion to resurrection (Peucker, "Kreuzbilder" 169).

The fine engravings in *Pia Desideria*, by Boëce van Bolsvert, drew on the Jesuits' spiritual-sensual interpretation of the techniques of engraving. As Praz observes,
The fixity of the emblematic picture was infinitely suggestive; the beholder little by little let his imagination be eaten into as a plate is by an acid. The picture eventually became animated with an intense, hallucinatory life, independent of the page. The eyes were not alone in perceiving it; the depicted objects were invested with body, scent, and sound .... (Praz 1: 156)

In Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he employed a similar engraving metaphor of acid eating into plate. He may also have drawn on the Moravians' iconomystical and antinomian sense of erotic visualization, which reversed the orthodox Christian denigration of the senses and sexuality:

... the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite, and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt. This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment. But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which is hid. If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite. (E 39)

Praz's description of iconomysticism reveals why it was such an effective vehicle for Moravian concepts of the mystical marriage, for this Jesuit "cult was wonderfully suited to a society accustomed to picture human love under the guise of the Alexandrian Eros" (1: 132). Hugo's great popularity arose from his use of the Song of Solomon and the Psalms, texts whose metaphors inevitably suggested emblems with the Oriental lusciousness of their appeal to the senses. Tears and sighs, ... voluptuous swoonings and sweet and subtle pains, what a part they play in the *Pia Desideria*. In a nocturnal garden, heavy with perfume, Anima feels her knees give way under her, ... while from her bared breast burning ejaculations *Ah! Utinam! Heul* shoot like arrows towards the ears of God .... Suddenly the garden is all a-bubble with springs .... Love darts from his mouth a quivering tongue of flame, and, caressed by that heat, Anima exudes huge drops from head to foot .... What wild races through that nocturnal garden heavy with perfumes! (Praz 1: 133-34)

Zinzendorf similarly compared the Moravians’ visualization of Christ to the bride's in the Song of Songs. Quoting the lines “This is my beloved,” he stressed that her lover is actually Christ, and “there He is painted piece by piece” (Zinzendorf 81). In May 1749 at Fetter Lane, his birthday was celebrated with "illuminated Pictures" which showed "Fountains springing" and the count “solacing himself in a Garden where the Fountains spouted Blood” (Stead 300).
Hugo's most famous illustration, "Anima Trying to Soar on Wings, but Held Back by a Weight Tied to Her Foot," perhaps finds an echo in Blake's tiny emblem book, *There is No Natural Religion* (Hugo 334) (illus. 7). On the plate designated V, Blake drew a figure soaring with hands raised, while the inscription reads, "More! More! Is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man" (E 31). On the plate headed VI, he drew a naked man chained and fettered by his ankles, with the text, "If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot" (E 31) (illus. 8). Hugo's Jesuit work had been expurgated and published in English translations by Protestant writers, such as Frances Quarles and Edmund Arwaker, who de-emphasized the pictorial "iconomysticism" and added more moralistic and puritanical literary comments (R. Freeman 114, 133, 140-42, 207). But for Cennick and Zinzendorf, it was the Jesuitic stress on intense visualization and the arousal of spiritual-erotic desire that was the most important aspect of Hugo's mystical emblems.

In 1806 Blake's friend Benjamin Heath Malkin reported that the artist, "very early in life, had the ordinary opportunities of seeing pictures in the houses of noblemen and gentlemen, and in the king's palaces," (Bentley, *BR* [2] 562) which perhaps included Lindsey House and other residences of Zinzendorf's aristocratic friends. Since these visits took place before his tenth birthday in 1767, Blake must have been taken by a parent, probably his mother, who would have been aware of the vivid paintings at Lindsey House and Fetter Lane, as well as their pedagogical role. When Catherine and Thomas Armitage raised their son Thomas, they would have known Brother Christopher Henry Müller, who had "much discourse with..."
Brother Boehler, Catherine’s protective friend. A German immigrant, who had earlier ministered to the black slaves in Georgia, Müller had “the Care of the Children’s Oeconomy” in London, in which charge “he acted with great Faithfulness.” Significantly, part of this care was instruction in art and engraving.

Having studied at Herrnhag, the most radical center of Sifting Time theosophy, Müller was familiar with the daring experiments in sexual, ritual, poetic, and artistic innovation which occurred there (and which led to the Moravians’ expulsion). When Zinzendorf moved to London in 1749, Müller took over “the economical Care of Bloomsbury-House,” while continuing his artistic and engraving work. According to his obituary, “The last Piece of Work he did in his own Art, (wherein he was very ingenious) was ingraving a small Picture of the Ordinary [Zinzendorf].” Having become sick with “a malignant fever,” Müller “was kissed home into the Sidehole” on 9 March 1751, apparently at the same time that “Thomas, the Child of Br + Sir Armitage” died. Their shared funeral notice reports that the Armitage child “was buried in the Ground near Bloomsbury,” while Müller was carried from Bloomsbury “and deposited in the Earth at Chelsea,” thus becoming the first interment in the new Moravian cemetery. According to the German church historian Kai Dose, who is researching Müller’s life, he was a talented artist whose surviving portraits and engravings are worth renewed interest.

Because of the sale of Lindsey House in 1774 and the Nazi bombing of the Fetter Lane Chapel in 1941, the great Zinzendorfian collection of paintings and engravings was dispersed or destroyed (Kroyer 50-63). However, from pre-1941 descriptions and surviving paintings at the Brethren’s other centers, we can learn more about the Moravian artists who moved in the Armitage-Blake milieu in the 1750s and 60s. More famous than Müller was Abraham Louis Brandt (1717-97), a talented Franco-Swiss engraver and painter (“Brandt”; “Lebenslauf”). He was the brother of Louise Hutton, who had earlier been a member of the “French Prophets” before marrying the English minister James Hutton and converting to Moravianism (Benham 95, 194-96, 375). She shared with her brother an interest in Boehmenist and mystical writers, and he expressed these themes in the religious paintings he produced for Zinzendorf in England, before moving on to a Moravian community in Russia in 1764. Less famous was John Cooke, a Catholic artist from Leghorn (called “the Italian”), who acted as ship’s mate on Moravian voyages to America, where his joyous temperament, violin playing, and artistic productions made him a beloved visitor (Hamilton 171-72, Nelson et al. 19, 48). After participating in the Fetter Lane Society in the 1740s, Cooke moved on to the “Pilgrim Congregation” in Germany. Even more intriguing—and more relevant to Blake—was the Dantzig-born Johan Valentin Haidt (1700-80), whose significant role in the London art world is receiving new attention from scholars (Nelson, Haidt). As we shall see, a Moravian art historian suggests that Blake was influenced by one of Haidt’s paintings.

Originally apprenticed as a goldsmith, the young Haidt determined to follow his real love, religious and historical painting. After traveling through Europe to study the Old Masters, he moved to London in 1724, married a Huguenot woman, and, while practising his craft, opened an “academy” in his home, where he and his students studied “live nudes.” His comment about the importance of the nude model “may be the earliest such reference in English art” (Nelson, Haidt’s Theory”). He eventually befriended George Michael Moser (1704-83), a Swiss-born gold-chaser, who shared his yearning to participate in higher art. The two men “seemed to have started a predecessor to the Royal Academy of Arts in Haidt’s house,” which influenced Moser’s later role as a founding member of the Royal Academy. When William Blake applied to study at the Royal Academy in 1779, it would be Moser, “the venerable Keeper,” who evaluated his work and oversaw his subsequent studies (Bentley, Stranger 49-51). However, it was Haidt’s role as a Moravian artist—known as “the painting Preacher”—which is most suggestive when exploring the Blake family’s attitudes towards art.

Attracted by the passionate preaching he heard at Fetter Lane in 1738-39, Haidt experienced a “heart-warming” similar to that of John Wesley, who was intensely attracted to the Moravians at that time. In 1740 Haidt traveled to Herrnhag, where he achieved “a mystical experience which he remembered all his life” (Nelson, Haidt 9-13). Though Wesley had been rejected by the Germans as a homo perturbatus, Haidt was eventually accepted into the congregation. Moving between Germany and England, he began the painting of large symbolic works with life-size figures, sometimes influenced by the Jews he observed at Moravian services. Deeply infused with the “blood and wounds” theosophy, Haidt’s emphasis on the role of art in the spiritual development of children inspired much of the creative and imaginative teaching in Moravian families. Catherine Armitage could have heard about Haidt’s impressive paintings from John Cennick, who studied and admired those exhibited in Moravian halls in Germany (Peucker, “Kreuzbilder” 138). In 1749, when Zinzendorf moved to London, he commissioned Haidt to paint dozens of portraits of events in Jesus’s life and in Moravian history, to be dis-

18. Moravian Archive: C/36/7/5 (1 March 1751). I am grateful to the Reverend Kai Dose for sending me the full account of Müller in the Congregation Diary.
19. On the “poetic world” of “spiritualized sexuality” at Herrnhag, see Erbe. The radical leader of the “youth movement” at Herrnhag was Zinzendorf’s charismatic son, Christian Renatus, who in 1749 moved to London, where he was revered by the Fetter Lane congregation, who considered his death in 1752 at age twenty-four a great tragedy.
20. Another Moravian artist, Johann Jakob Müller, spent a brief period in London in the 1740s, where he opposed “daubers of reason” and “naturalists”; he then moved to Herrnhut, where he became “director of the Wound and Nailhole Painting Academy” (Peucker, “Painter”).
21. Moravian Archive: Box A2, Pilgrim House Diary (1743-48), p. 8; C/36/2/1, p. 4.
played at Fetter Lane and Lindsey House. In 1754 Haidt emi­
grated to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he became known
as America’s “first religious painter,” but his artistic teachings
continued to influence parents and children in London.22

According to Haidt, young students should first master
drawing with a firm outline before attempting painting, and
they should study classical sculpture and copper engravings
of the Old Masters. Though Blake’s mother is credited as the
primary inspiration for his artistic interests, his father eventu­
ally supported William’s artistic bent: “The love of designing
and sketching grew upon him, and he desired anxiously to be
an artist” (Cunningham, in Bentley, BR[2] 628). James Blake
began to encourage William’s drawing, bought plaster casts of
classical sculpture, and funded his purchases of engravings of
Old Masters. Possibly more important for James, who initially
intended his son for the hosier’s shop, was Haidt’s insistence

22. Haidt took some of his London paintings with him to Pennsylva­
nia, and they provide a clue to the content and style of the pictures that
were destroyed by the 1941 bombing of Fetter Lane.

on the importance of an independent religious spirit in the
young artist, for talent “is a gift from God, and whoever is sure
of that and convinced of it, he can paint.” Moreover, “each
one knows best what his inclinations are, and he should fol­
low them.” Zinzendorf preached and Haidt taught that en­
graving was a form of “high art,” which required sophisticated
and erudite training in order to capture the soul and beauty
of drawings and paintings. It also had a spiritual resonance,
for the image of Jesus should be engraved in one’s HerzelLev.
When the adolescent Blake, with his parents’ blessing, decided
to apprentice himself as an engraver, he may have absorbed
such lofty ambitions for his craft.

Haidt shared Zinzendorf’s reverence for Mary Magdalene,
and they maintained the medieval tradition that she was a
prostitute and adulteress, until Jesus cast out the seven devils,
who plagued her with illicit erotic desires. They also seemed
familiar with a controversial theme in that tradition—i.e., “all
things that she had willingly done before in the service of the
flesh she now in sorrow turned to the service of her Lord”
(Phipps 139). At Fetter Lane, Zinzendorf preached that Christ
occupies himself “with the harlot who had seven devils,” for “He is the rightful Husband of ... even the most detestible [sic] prostitute” (Zinzendorf 4, 15). Moravian hymns included many references to the Magdalene, which stress her intense attraction to Jesus, sometimes with hints of Jewish sexual mysticism: for example, “Comes Mary, by Love’s Power drawn, With other two still weeping, To see where Rabbi lies” (Hutton 64). During the most radical period at Herrnhaag, Zinzendorf praised the high-spirited, eroticized youth culture as “So sündermassig spielerisch, so Maria Magdalenerlich (so moderately sinfully playful, so Mary Magdalenish)” (Erbe 121). Blake’s mother may have heard (and sung) an especially provocative hymn, in which Mary is called “The Lamb’s Sinner Bride,” who plants a “Thousand Magde’len kisses” on Jesus’s body: “Lamb and Saviour, / Take from me, from Head to Feet all over; / All thy Skin, each Pore and Hair, / Take of my Salutes to Share” (Collection of Hymns 2: 344). Such lines led Zinzendorf’s critics to charge that he implied a romantic relationship between Jesus and the Magdalene. Even worse, they claimed that his erotic descriptions of her were “intended to justify the Count’s strolling about with Anna Nitschman,” leader of the Sisters and his frequent traveling companion, whom they accused of having an adulterous relationship with him (Rimius, Supplement xxiv).

Given this context, Haidt’s painting The Crucifixion seems to express Zinzendorf’s version of the Jesus-Magdalene relationship, for he portrayed her sensuously with long yellow hair and emotionally attached to Jesus, Vernon Nelson, who was unaware of the Moravian association of Blake’s mother, observes that in Haidt’s painting “the pose of the soldiers gambling for Jesus’ cloak should be compared to that in Blake’s portrayal of the Crucifixion” (Nelson, Haidt 21; Butlin #495) (illas. 9 and 10). Nelson points out that in another Haidt painting, At the Foot of the Cross, the Magdalene kisses Jesus’s feet, thus revealing the artist’s immersion in the Sifting Time ethos, with its eroticization of spiritual relationships (Nelson, Haidt 21) (illas. 11). In Blake’s picture Mary Magdalene Washing Christ’s Feet, she is actually kissing his feet (Butlin #488) (illas. 12); Martin Butlin notes that in Blake’s painting, Christ the Mediator: Christ Pleading before the Father for St. Mary Magdalene, the subject is not biblical but possibly from John Bunyan; however, “the apparent application of the theme to the Magdalene is Blake’s own” (Butlin #429). It is suggestive that Blake produced these paintings during a period (c. 1800-07) of friendly contact with two liberal Moravians, the artist Jonathan Spilsbury and the poet James Montgomery, who both participated in services at Fetter Lane. Could they have taken Blake to his mother’s former church, where Haidt’s paintings were still exhibited?}

23. Unfortunately, the photo in Nelson’s Haidt is misnumbered, for the description of plate 35 should refer to a painting which includes the gambling soldiers (not reproduced in the catalogue), which is owned by the Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth, PA. I am grateful to the archivist, Mark Turdo, for sending me a photo of the correct picture.

24. For other Moravian paintings of Mary Magdalene kissing and embracing Jesus’s feet, see Peucker, “Kreuzbilder” 135, 142.

25. Blake possibly knew Spilsbury when both exhibited at the Royal Academy in the 1780s, and he described his conversation with the Moravian artist in 1804 (E 755). For Spilsbury’s career, see Young. On Blake’s association with Jonathan Spilsbury and its Moravian significance, see Keri Davies, “Jonathan Spilsbury and the Lost Moravian History of William Blake’s Family” [in this issue—Eds.]. Blake may have met Montgomery during the radical writer’s visits to the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s. Though we have no definite evidence for their acquaintance, Bentley notes that Robert Cromek’s letter to Montgomery in 1807 “suggests a connexion between Blake and James Montgomery” and “implies an easy and personal contact between the two men”; see BR(2) 234-35, 262, 277. For Montgomery’s career and Moravian association, see Montgomery, Memoirs and Everett. I provide more information on the Oriental interests of Spilsbury, Montgomery, and Blake in Why Mrs. Blake Cried 322-29.

26. The striking similarities between Blake’s “tempora series” of “the Life of Christ” for Thomas Butts and the surviving description of Haidt’s thirty-four paintings of the “sacramentlichen Handlungen des Heilandts” (Jesus’s life-story from conception to resurrection) is worth further study. Haidt’s series was discussed and commissioned at “a conference in Bloomsbury, 2 October 1749,” when Blake’s mother was a participant in Moravian affairs. After the sale of Lindsey House in 1774, many of these paintings were moved to the Fetter Lane Chapel, where they survived until the 1941 bombing. See Peucker, “Kreuzbilder” 172-73; Kroyer 52; Bindman 121-31.
Recent biographers of the engraver and caricaturist James Gillray (1756-1815), who was raised and educated as a Moravian, have inaccurately characterized the Unitas Fratrum as "an austere and unattractive religious sect," who "deplored all joy and pleasure" and who provided children with a "grim" upbringing (Godfrey and Hallett 12). However, Moravian notions of child rearing were actually and unusually benevolent. In 1766, when the Moravian minister James Hutton was questioned by Lord Shelburne—"Pray, how do your children go on? Do they take after their parents?"—he answered emphatically, "Yes, God be praised!" Hutton then described the Moravian pedagogical methods with children:

Ingenuous and affectionate treatment, without force and violence, we find has a blessed effect on their education. We once thought otherwise; but we succeeded better by gentleness. We do all we can to prevent that servile imitation and hypocrisy which severity always or, at least, is most likely, to produce. O! My Lord, could you but see the heartiness of our children, you would be touched. (Benham 417)

As she home-schooled her children, Blake's mother seems to have adopted this notion of educational "gentleness," for she was "a tender and sympathetic mother, more inclined to overlook faults than to punish them" (Bentley, Stranger 5). For Moravians, the "heartiness" of their children was a resonant, multileveled quality; Herzlichkeit meant passionate, enthusiastic, and imaginative visualization of and engagement with the body of the God-Man. Unaware of the erotic-artistic emphasis of Zinzendorf's pedagogy, the Gillray scholar Draper Hill lamented that "at the threshold of understanding," Moravian four-year-olds "were pushed to terrifying heights of introspection" (Hill 8). But it was more the terribilità of Michelangelo (who was revered by Zinzendorf and his artists); it was a transforming, energizing, imaginative passion to which the children were "pushed." When Isaac Disraeli later observed that "Blake often breaks into the 'terribil via' of Michael Angelo," he meant terribilità (Bentley, BR[2] 329fn).

The Moravian-educated poet and art critic, James Montgomery, attributed his own youthful "heartiness" to the vivid paint-
ings and powerful music he studied at the Moravian school in Fulneck, Yorkshire, in 1777-87, while his missionary parents served (and died) in the West Indies. The schoolboys assembled and stood for a few minutes in front of "a superb painting of a dead Christ," rendered more dramatic by the illuminating rays of a strategically placed lantern (Montgomery, Memoirs 1: 31, 59). In his dormitory, Montgomery meditated upon a "huge painting of the Entombment of Christ, by the old Moravian Brandt," as well as others which depicted striking events in the history of the Brotherhood. To heighten the children's passionate response, their concentration on the pictures was intensified by "the full-toned piano, accompanied by a French bugle," which broke the silence with profound music. As a young adult, Montgomery left the Moravians and pursued a career as a radical writer and publisher, but he later returned to them and remembered with some nostalgia his early schooling:

There is no system of religion, which I have yet seen, which, taking all in all, has half the charm for a young, a warm, and a feeling heart, as that professed by these people. I once believed; I once enjoyed its blessings; I once was happy! ... The hymns of the Moravians are full of ardent expressions, tender complaints, and animated prayers; these were my delight. As soon as I could write and spell, I imitated them, and before I was thirteen I had filled a little volume with sacred poems. (Montgomery, Memoirs 1: 46)

Was it a similar early influence that inspired the adolescent Blake to write poems of spiritual and romantic yearning? Bentley notes that in Blake's precocious love poems, the "sexual suggestiveness is astonishing" (BR[2] 260-61). The adult Montgomery was an early admirer of Blake's "wild & wonderful genius," especially in his illustrations to Blair's The Grave (1808), which critics scorned for their "libidinous" combination of carnality with spirituality (Bentley, BR[2] 260-61; Essick and Paley 23-25). Montgomery probably knew that Zinzendorf had also been criticized for expressing a "Fleischliche Spiritualität" (fleshly spirituality) (Deghaye 167n41). Blake, in turn, praised Montgomery's publication, The Wanderer of Switzerland, and Other Poems (1806), assuring him that it will command the applause of "all Lovers of the Higher Kinds of Poetry" (Bentley, BR[2] 236). In this volume, Montgomery praised the Moravians' renewed missionary and abolitionist efforts, and he made a provocatively Blakean allusion to the "Daughters of Albion," whom he exhorted to "Weep!" (in his autobiographical account of a frustrated, youthful love affair) (Montgomery, Wanderer 11, 167, 135, 147).

Fortunately, a new generation of Moravian scholars is lifting up the blanket of darkness that was thrown over the Sifting Time by conservative church historians after Zinzendorf's death in 1760.27 As they shed new light on the historical realities of that fascinating and controversial period, they make it possible to uncover the equally suppressed artistic history of the Sifting Time, whose painters, engravers, and poets may have influenced Catherine Armitage Blake and her visionary son William. Thus, it will be fitting to conclude with a tribute to Blake's mother by quoting lines from a Moravian hymn, the "Te Matrem," whose verses herald "the day of Intellectual Battle":

Thou didst inspire the Martyrs tongues, In the last Gasp to raise their songs, Thou dost impel the four Zoa, Who singing rest not night nor day ... Thou Mother of God's Children all, Thou Sapience archetypal! ... That thou the Prophets dost ordain, And gifts and wonders to them deign. (Collection of Hymns 2: 297-98)

In 1797 Blake gave the title Vala to his visionary, prophetic epic, which begins with the words, "The Song of the Aged Mother," whose verses herald "the day of Intellectual Battle":

Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity Cannot Exist, but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden The Universal Man. To Whom be Glory Evermore Amen (E 300)

Around 1807, at a time of friendly Moravian contacts, he changed the title to The Four Zoas, and "those Living Creatures" (Zoa, Greek plural) subsequently became "the Four Eternal Senses of Man"—senses contained within the earthly man and the God-Man (Albion) (Bentley, Stranger 198, 310). Did Blake remember the reference to "the four Zoa" in the Moravian hymn to the Divine Mother, while he revised his phantasmagoric tale of psychoerotic disintegration and reintegration within the human and divine worlds?29 This and similar questions, provoked by ongoing discoveries in the international archives of the Unitas Fratrum, suggest that new answers and new perspectives will emerge, as we continue to explore the esoteric, erotic, and artistic underworld of Moravian "heartiness" and terribilità.

27. Vernon Nelson began the recovery of Haidt's artistic career, while the revisionist works of Colin Podmore, Craig Atwood, and Paul Peucker shed new light on the theology and art of the Sifting Time. Christiane Dithmar contributes important new Jewish material relevant to the psychoerotic themes of the "mystical marriage."

28. For the once central but then censored role of the "Te Matrem" hymn, see Atwood, "Mother."

29. Justin Van Kleck points to the previously unnoticed apostrophe between the "a" and "s" of the "Zoa's" (i.e., "Zoa's") on Blake's title page (Van Kleck 39). This may reflect a mnemonic slip from the "four Zoa" of the Moravian hymn, or his uncertainty about how to anglicize the Greek plural.
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Jonathan Spilsbury and the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family

BY KERI DAVIES

The engraver, painter, and miniaturist Jonathan Spilsbury (1737-1812), who had strong links to the Moravian church, was most likely, as I shall demonstrate, an associate of William Blake. This casts a new light on Blake's possible involvement in the London Moravian community, with which he had connections through his mother's early adherence to that faith. The following discussion will take in the circumstances of Spilsbury's links to the African Chapel in Peter Street, Soho, resemblances to Moravian custom and culture in the reportage of Blake's death, and the parallels between Blake's and Spilsbury's lives in forging a living in the engraving trade.

Bentley's Blake Records contains three references to a person or persons surnamed "Spilsbury." On 28 June 1802, Charlotte Collins wrote to William Hayley at Felpham in Sussex about "a new Family settled at Midhurst by the name of Spilsbury—the Gentleman has devoted his Time to the study of animals, and he has lately made a drawing of Mrs Poyntz's Prize Bull." The following year, on 21 March 1803, John Flaxman wrote to Hayley: "I am sorry for Mr Spilsbury’s illness." And on 14 October 1806, Hayley's young friend E. G. Marsh wrote to him inquiring "I wonder, whether Mr Spilsbury has ever seen Warwick castle, because there is a painting of two lions there, which pleased me ... beyond anything of the kind I had ever seen."

Edgar Ashe Spilsbury (1780-1828?) was an animal painter who exhibited at the Royal Academy and the British Institution and, because of the nature of the references, it seems likely that he is the Spilsbury referred to. He was the son of the noted "chymist" Francis Spilsbury (1736-93) of Soho Square (author of the learned treatise Free Thoughts on Quacks), and the younger half-brother to Francis Brockhill

My research into the Moravian connections of William Blake's family was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I am most grateful to Lorraine Parsons, archivist, for permission to examine and publish documents in the Moravian Church Library and Archive, Muswell Hill, London. Colin Davies, Will Easton, Keith Schuchard, Angus Whitehead, David Worrall, and Charlotte Yeldham contributed helpfully to my thinking about Blake and Spilsbury.

2. BR(2) 150.
3. BR(2) 231.
Spilsbury (b. 1761), naval surgeon and amateur landscape painter. Edgar Ashe Spilsbury was a friend and sometime protégé of William Hayley.

Bentley notes, however, that the Midhurst Spilsbury “does not seem to be the professional artist to whom Blake refers familiarly in his letter to Hayley of 28 Sept 1804.” The relevant passage reads as follows:

I send Washingtons 2 Vol.— 5 Numbers of Fuseli's Shak­speare & two Vol's with a Letter from M' Spilsbury with whom I accidentally met in the Strand. he says that he re­linquished Painting as a Profession, for which I think he is to be applauded, but I conceive that he may be a much better Painter if he practises secretly & for amusement than he could ever be if employ'd in the drudgery of fashionable dawbling for a poor pittance of money in return for the sac­rifice of Art & Genius. he says he never will leave to Practise the Art because he loves it & This Alone will pay its labour by Success if not of money yet of True Art, which is All— (E 755)

The “M’ Spilsbury” of Blake’s letter is clearly not Edgar Ashe Spilsbury, who had not given up painting, but equally clearly he must be somebody who was well acquainted both with Blake and with Hayley. Our perception of Blake’s life, with Gikhrist (drawing on the testimony of Linnell and Palmer) and Tatham as our primary sources, tends to see Blake as a lonely and isolated figure until taken up in later life by Linnell, Varley, and the “Ancients.” This meeting in the Strand with Mr. Spilsbury is evidence, if any were needed, that Blake had a wide social acquaintanceship long before he met Linnell.

Spilsbury cousins included Jonathan Spilsbury (1737-1812), a portraitist and mezzotint engraver. Spilsbury is it­self an unusual surname, and there are few artists of that name. I therefore suggest that Jonathan was the Mr. Spils­bury whom Blake “accidentally met in the Strand,” and that, in view of the recent discovery of the involvement of William Blake’s mother with the Moravian church, it could prove of interest to consider the life and career of Jonathan Spilsbury, another engraver with a Moravian affiliation.

Jonathan Spilsbury came of a Worcestershire family; there were Spilsburys in the West Country in the fifteenth cen­tury. He was born at Worcester on 2 February 1737. His mother apprenticed him (9 September 1750) to a cousin, George Spilsbury, a noted “japanner” (manufacturer of lacquer ware) of Birmingham, to whom he was bound for seven years. When the seven years were ended, he found his way to London, where he entered Thomas Hudson’s studio soon after the young Joshua Reynolds had quarreled with Hudson. Jonathan Spilsbury entered the Royal Academy Schools on 25 March 1776, aged 39. He had exhibited three works at the Society of Artists between 1763 and 1771, and was to show thirteen paintings at the Royal Academy between 1776 and 1784. Academy students were then admitted for six years, so Spilsbury’s friendship with Blake (admitted 8 October 1779) probably dates from their overlapping time at the R.A. Schools.


Francis Brockhill Spilsbury was the author of A Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa: Performed by His Majesty’s Sloop Favourite, in the Year 1805: Being a Journal of the Events Which Happened to That Ves­sel, from the Time of Her Leaving England till Her Capture by the French, and the Return of the Author in a Cartel (London: Printed for Richard Phillips by J. G. Barnard, 1807); Advice to Those Who Are Afflicted with the Venerable Disease (London, 1789); The Art of Etching and Aqua Tint­ing, Strictly Laid Down by the Most Approved Masters: Sufficiently En­abling Amateurs in Drawing to Transmit Their Works to Posterity; or, as Amusements among Their Circle of Friends (London: Printed for J. Barker, 1794); Every Lady and Gentleman Their Own Dentist, As Far As The Op­erations Will Allow, Containing the Natural History of the Adult Teeth and Their Diseases with the Most Approved Methods of Prevention and Cure, etc. (London: Barker, 1791); and Picturesque Scenery in the Holy Land and Syria: Delineated during the Campaigns of 1799 and 1800 (London: Edward Orme, 1803).


7. BR(2) 150fin.

Although he worked in London, Jonathan did not cut himself off from the West Country. He lived a good deal in Bath and in Bristol, where he painted a portrait of Charles Wesley. And it was in Bristol that Spilsbury met Rebecca Chapman (b. 1748), whom he married after a ten years' courtship. Rebecca was the eldest daughter of the Rev. Dr. Walter Chapman (1711-91), once Wesley's colleague in Pembroke College, Oxford, and later prebendary of Bristol Cathedral, a well-known evangelical clergyman in the family home of Bath. Walter Chapman's mother, Mary, seems to have been a friend of Wesley's brother Samuel.

Even before his marriage, Spilsbury had sought membership in the Moravian church, and he was later to engrave portraits of the Moravian "Labourers" (as the church's fulltime workers were called) John Gambold (illus. 1) and Benjamin La Trobe, the latter after a drawing by Rebecca. In a letter of 116 closely written lines dated 2 October 1769, Spilsbury transcribed for Rebecca "a little discourse delivered at Bedford Oct. 5 N.S. 1751 by the Rt. Rev. late Ordinary of the Brethrens Churches." To this discourse, he added a postscript:

I have said nothing upon ye subject of marriage, and you know my reason for being silent on that head. However, I cannot forbear wishing that if ever you change your state, it may be with one who would receive you penniless with as much pleasure as with a million of money, and as to yourself that it may be an act of faith done in ye assurance of God's grace and favour.

They married in 1775, and in 1777 Mrs. Spilsbury bore her husband twins. The boy died immediately, but the girl, Rebecca Maria Ann, generally known as Maria, survived. The child's gifts as an artist were early recognized; indeed, the fame of Maria Spilsbury would surpass her father's. There was also a younger son, Jonathan Robert Henry, baptized 7 December 1779 at St. Marylebone.

It seems to have become evident to Spilsbury that he would not find success in the London art world, and 1789 saw him in Ireland, acting as art master to the daughters of Mrs. Tighe, Wesley's friend, on her estate, Rossana, County Wicklow. It was perhaps through the Wesleys or Mrs. Tighe that the Spilsburys became acquainted with Walter Taylor of Portswood Green, Southampton. Certainly, by 1798 Jonathan and his daughter were staying at Bevers Hill, Southampton, where they were in daily touch with the Taylor family. Walter Taylor of Portswood Green died in 1803, but the friendship formed between his family and the Spilsburys continued, and by 1807, his son, John Taylor, had become engaged to Maria. They were married in 1808; Maria was 31 and her husband 23.

Maria found some success as a portraitist in Southampton, and Hayley's friend Richard Vernon Sadleir, a local worthy, sat to her in 1798, responding to the portrait with a set of verses. The verses bear the title "Palamon's expostulations to his Looking Glass—inscribed to Miss Spilsbury which drew his Picture in the seventy six year of his age":

Cease, faithless Mirror, to persuade That I am old and coarsely made; Maria, if thy pencil thus can give Beyond this poor Existence to survive, Oh! Could my Verse thy Lovely Form shew forth, Thy Manners gentle and thy modest Worth, Melodious numbers should transmit thy Name To shine distinguished in the Rolls of Fame!

Thus we find the Spilsburys on the fringes of William Hayley's circle, just three years before Blake was induced to settle at Felpham under Hayley's patronage.


27. Young, *Father and Daughter* 19.
29. Young, *Father and Daughter* 25.
32. Quoted in Young, *Father and Daughter* 18-19. The poem so resembles Hayley's own occasional verse that one suspects he may have had a hand in it.
Mezzotint by Jonathan Spilsbury: "The Rev'd. John Gambold, M.A. Formerly Minister of Stanton Harcourt, late one of the Bishops of the Unitas Fratrum. Painted on the Act direct, Dec. 10, 1771, by J. West, N°. 10, Nevils Court, Fetter Lane." John Gambold, 1711-71, an Oxford Methodist, was ordained in 1733, becoming vicar of Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire, where John Wesley's sister Kezia was a member of his household for two years. In 1742 he resigned his living to join the Moravians, of whose community he was consecrated a bishop in 1754. Courtesy of the Moravian Church Archive and Library, Moravian Church House, Muswell Hill, London.
As early as 1761, Jonathan had been engraving in mezzotint, mostly copies of portraits by other hands.\(^3\) As his daughter’s fame grew, he seems to have given up painting entirely (like the Mr. Spilsbury that Blake met in 1804) and concentrated on mezzotint engraving while supporting his daughter’s career. Like Blake a decade later, by the 1770s Spilsbury was finding the London engraving market a more promising career move than chasing his luck exclusively in painting.

Jonathan Spilsbury and his brother John were the children of Thomas Spilsbury (1681-1741) of Worcester, whose second wife was Mary Wright (1718-73) of Broadwas.\(^2\) John (1739-69) during his short life kept a print shop in Covent Garden, where he sold the work of both his elder brother (chiefly mezzotint portraits) and himself (principally maps). The identities of the two brothers are often confused—both signing their work “J. Spilsbury.” Jonathan Spilsbury was the engraver of A Collection of Fifty Prints from Antique Gems, in the Collections of the Right Honourable Earl Percy, the Honourable C. F. Greville, and T. M. Slade, Esquire … (London: John Boydell, 1785), but Boydell mistakenly printed John’s name on the title page.\(^3\) Blake also worked for Boydell around this time, thus perhaps renewing his acquaintanceship with the Spilsbury family.\(^6\) John Spilsbury styled himself an “Engraver and Map Dissector in Wood, in Order to Facilitate the Teaching of Geography,” and is credited with the invention of “dissected maps”—hand-colored maps, mounted on thin sheets of wood and cut into pieces according to the political borders of the region being mapped.\(^7\) He is sometimes regarded as the inventor of the jigsaw puzzle. John’s widow Sarah married Harry Ashby, with whom James Gillray (himself from a Moravian family) served his apprenticeship.\(^8\)

34. Young, Father and Daughter 5.
35. Sloman, Oxford DNB entry. Jonathan was also responsible for an etching of the Moravian settlement at Bethelhem, Pennsylvania (illus. 2).
39. Confusingly, it seems that Jonathan Spilsbury had both an elder half-brother Thomas, born 1733, and a younger full brother Thomas, born about 1742.
41. Richard Payne Knight, An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus, Lately Existing at Isernia, in the Kingdom of Naples: In Two Letters; One from Sir William Hamilton ... to Sir Joseph Banks ... and the Other from a Person Residing at Isernia: To Which Is Added a Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, and Its Connexion with the Mystic Theology of the Ancients (London: T. Spilsbury, 1786).
42. Moravian Church Archive C/36/10/1 (Minute Book, 4 August 1781-31 December 1782), entry for 3 November 1781.
43. Moravian Church Archive C/36/5/1 (Church Book no. 1), p. 52. I cannot explain the incorrect year of birth other than as a simple arithmetic error.
44. Personal communication from Charlotte Yeldham, 19 July 2005.
45. Young, Father and Daughter 11-12.

An elder half-brother, Thomas Spilsbury (b. 1733; d. 1 December 1795), was a printer in Holborn.\(^9\) He was one of the first English printers to specialize in printing French books accurately, “even superior to Parisian printers.”\(^10\) He is best known, or maybe notorious, as the printer of Payne Knight’s Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus. \(^3\) His sons William and Charles succeeded their father at 37 Snow Hill, Holborn.

It seems that Jonathan and Rebecca Spilsbury made a joint application for reception into the Moravian congregation at Fetter Lane in August 1781: “The Candidates for Reception into the Congregation, still remaining on the List, Aug. 13. … are … Jonathan & Rebecca Spilsbury.”\(^42\) Rebecca’s candidature was refused, and Jonathan Spilsbury alone was received into the Moravian church in November 1781. The Fetter Lane Church Book notes as follows: “[Jonathan Spilsbury] M[arried] B[rother] Ch. of Eng. Portrait Painter | (born) Worcester Feb. 2. 1745. | (received) Nov: 11th 1781. | [first admitted to the Sacred] March 28 1782 | Departed this life Oct 31st 1812. Buried in Bunhill Fields.”\(^43\) In fact, Rebecca Spilsbury was refused admission to the Moravian congregation several times, and thus, although sympathizing with her husband, remained nominally Anglican. \(^44\) Their daughter Maria was confirmed a member of the Church of England at St. George’s, Hanover Square, on 30 April 1795.\(^45\)

The circumstances of Jonathan’s acceptance, and Rebecca’s refusal, as members to be received into the Moravian community are sufficient in themselves to remind us that spiritualities even within a marriage could remain friendly but diverse. Since Jonathan Spilsbury engaged in the same trade as Blake, it is not inconceivable that such arrangements would have been well known, even commonplace, amongst others in the late eighteenth-century engraving trade. One recalls from Blake’s reported deathbed conversation that during the course of discussing his last wishes, Mrs. Blake offered him a choice as to funeral arrangements; that
is, "whether he would have the Dissenting Minister, or the Clergyman of the Church of England, to read the service." It’s as though Catherine, his own wife, did not know where his preferences lay. Blake, in this account, chose the Church of England. I shall return to this conversation later.

The Moravian church had open preaching services that anyone could attend and other meetings that were intended just for church members. Spilsbury had been a "constant hearer" since at least 1769. When, in 1781, Spilsbury was "received" into the church, that meant he took part in the whole range of services (with some exceptions) and was allotted to a "band" (in his case the married Brethren) which had its own "quarter hour" in which members could discuss spiritual matters privately. In 1782, he was admitted to Holy Communion, which was a special privilege, marking him as part of a spiritual elite: "A Letter was read from the mar.


B’ Jonathan Spilsbury for admission to the holy Communion. Admission to Communion was taken extremely seriously. When partaking of the Blessed Sacrament was announced, communicating members were expected to look into their hearts to see if they considered themselves worthy of that privilege. On occasion, the elders would intervene to withhold the Sacrament. In 1738, John Wesley and Benjamin Ingham, the Yorkshire evangelist, visited the Moravian community at Marienborn. Ingham was invited to partake of the Sacrament; Wesley was conspicuously excluded. The grounds the Brethren gave for their action was that he was homo perturbatus—that is, a disturbed man.


47. Moravian Church Archive C/36/12/3 (Congregation Council Minutes 16 June 1778-21 November 1782) [loose sheets (C/36/12/3/12) for Wednesday 17 January 1782].

48. John R. Weinlick, Count Zinzendorf (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) 143. Not long after he was back in England Wesley became critical of Zinzendorf and his Moravian followers and began going his separate way.
In a curious parallel to Blake's career in Felpham, Spilsbury while in Southampton had sought employment as a miniature painter.49

I am preparing an Ivory for a Miniature Picture and I find (what I formerly did) that after all the care taken in preparing Gum or Paste, to paste paper at the back of it, the Ivory appears cloudy and not of a very good colour, perhaps Mr. Cosway would be so kind as to tell me how I should manage it, if I cou'd get the Ivory prepared to my wish my Miniatures would be much better than I can otherwise do them. After Maria has seen Lady de Lally, I think I shall write to Mr. Cosway on the subject ...50

This letter seems to imply that Spilsbury, like Blake, is a friend of Richard Cosway, the society painter and mystic. Cosway had been the young William Blake's instructor at Pars's Drawing School from 1767 to 1772, and became his lifelong friend. Cosway also had an enduring friendship with James Hutton, founder of the Fetter Lane Moravian church, and painted his portrait.51 The simian-featured Cosway, it seems generally to be agreed, is satirized as “Mr. Jacko” in Blake’s *An Island in the Moon*, where it is noted that he and his wife “have black servants lodge at their house” (E 457).52 One of these black servants was the writer and campaigner Ottobah Cugoano.

In 1787, Blake engraved “Venus Dissuades Adonis from Hunting,” after Richard Cosway.53 That year is also, I have suggested, the most plausible date for the writing of *An Island in the Moon*,54 and is, coincidentally, the date of publication of a campaigning book by Cugoano.

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, usually known by the shorter form Ottobah Cugoano, was born in present-day Ghana around 1757. Kidnapped and taken into slavery, he worked on plantations in Grenada before being brought to England, where he obtained his freedom. He was baptized as John Stuart—“a Black, aged 16 years”—at St. James’s Church, Piccadilly (the Blake’s parish church), on 20 August 1773.55 While working as manservant to Richard Cosway, he wrote his *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787). This work—part autobiography, part political treatise, and part Christian exegesis—has an enduring legacy as the first directly anti-slavery text written in English by an African.56

Spilsbury’s hopes of ordination as a Moravian minister were never realized.57 Such hopes indeed were perhaps impossible while his wife remained excluded from the congregation. He was, however, encouraged by the Moravian church as a preacher. Spilsbury’s obituary memoir in the Fetter Lane Congregation Diary refers to his involvement with the African Chapel in Peter Street, Soho. This seems to have been a special place of worship for African Christians in London.

His [Spilsbury’s] character among us was that of an humble, steady disciple of Jesus, whose heart was truly attached to him & his cause. It was his delight to invite sinners to Christ, & to testify unto them of his redeeming love. Thus in our Chapel here & in Chelsea, also at the Chapel of the African & Asiatic Society, in Peter Street, Soho, he has been engaged in labors of love of this kind, to edification. How much his heart was devoted to this employment may be gathered from the following in a Letter to B. Montgomery of date Sep’ 1st this year.

“Next Sunday it has been expected that I should preach to the Africans who assemble in Peter Street but this my present indisposition obliges me to decline. If You should on that day be at liberty to supply my place in inviting, at least, I suppose forty or fifty Africans & other persons who attend at the same time, to partake of redeeming love I should be extremely gratified, & I am persuaded You would enjoy a blessing in the opportunity if You can embrace it.—

“As we have Missionaries in Africa and You are well acquainted with the success attending their labors in that part of the World, You would have it in your power to communicate many things, which would afford pleasure & encouragement to the members of the African Society in London;—If You cannot preach to them, perhaps some one of our other Labourers, now in London, may be disposed to embrace this opportunity of publishing the Glad Tidings of the Gospel.”58

49. BR(2) 104-07 records Hayley’s encouragement of Blake in the painting of miniature portraits.

50. Spilsbury’s letter to his wife (28 August 1798), quoted in Young, *Mrs. Chapman’s Portrait* 114. (Could Lady de Lally have lent part of her name to “Tilly Lally” in *An Island in the Moon*? The suggestion, made by Morton Paley in a private email, is certainly a provoking one.)

51. Now in Moravian Church House, 5-7 Muswell Hill, London N10 3TJ. A mezzotint engraving of this portrait, by J. R. Smith after Cosway, was published in 1786. On Cosway (1742-1821) and the Moravians, see Sloman, *Moravian Church in London* 57.


58. Moravian Church Archive C/367/31 (Congregation Diary vol. 31: 10 September 1810-31 December 1816) [unnumbered pages for October 1812].
Could Spilsbury then have known Cugoano, perhaps through his involvement with this Chapel of the African and Asiatic Society? The African Chapel in Peter Street, Soho, seems to have been a former Church of Scotland building before it was used by the African congregation, and after 1820 or thereabouts it was used by the Methodists. This transfer of licensed dissenting meeting houses from one sect to another was not uncommon; the Moravians’ Fetter Lane church was previously used by Thomas Bradbury’s Independent congregation. Peter Street is connected to Broad Street (with the Blake family home at no. 28) by Hopkins Street, where the black ex-slave Robert Wedderburn had his Unitarian Chapel in a former hayloft. How many of the African churchgoers may have moved around the corner to form Wedderburn’s congregation?

It is worth noting here possible sources of Blake’s ideas of Africa and Africans. Blake would probably have known Ottobah Cugoano through his friendship with Cosway. Paul Edwards points out that Cugoano was “one of the leaders, with his friend Olaudah Equiano, of the London black abolitionists, an active radical group which corresponded with Granville Sharp and published letters to the press under the name ‘the Sons of Africa’, Cugoano signing with his ‘English’ name, John Stuart.” Other Blake scholars have drawn our attention to the so-called St. Giles’ blackbirds, poor loyalist African former naval servicemen from the American War, who were often seen in the streets of London; their poverty was a visible social problem. But the African Chapel in Soho, a specifically Christian context for Africans in London (and very near to Broad Street where James Blake had his hosier’s shop), sheds a new light on Blake’s antislavery views, and on the strong religious feeling of “The Little Black Boy”:

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove. (E 9)

Rebecca Spilsbury died in February 1812 and was buried in Bunhill Fields. The Gentleman’s Magazine records: “In Lon-

59. The African and Asiatic Society had been set up around 1805 with William Wilberforce as president and Zachary Macaulay as treasurer “for the benefit of the poor natives of Africa and Asia and their descendants residing in London and its vicinity, to relieve their ignorance as well as the accumulated distress of poverty, nakedness, hunger, and sickness” (Times 6 July 1819, page 2 column A [classified advertising]).


B' Montgomery, at his request, had prayed with him, a great number of his friends & Relations being present, he gave out the Verse "Praise God from whom all Blessings flow" & requested the whole company to join singing it, which was accordingly done.—About 9 O’Clock the same evening he fell asleep, and without waking again to the things of this vain world, his Soul passed over into the arms of its heavenly Bridegroom, about 5 O’Clock in the morning following. So the bitterness of death was taken away that he did not taste it. He was in the 76th year of his age.69

Compare Alexander Gilchrist’s account of Blake’s death:

The final leave-taking came he had so often seen in vision; so often, and with such child-like, simple faith, sung and designed. With the very same intense, high feeling he had depicted the Death of the Righteous Man, he enacted it—serenely, joyously. ... “On the day of his death,” writes Smith, who had his account from the widow, “he composed and uttered songs to his Maker, so sweetly to the ear of his Catherine, that when she stood to hear him, he, looking upon her most affectionately, said, ‘My beloved! they are not mine. No! they are not mine!’” ... To the pious Songs followed, about six in the summer evening, a calm and painless withdrawal of breath; the exact moment almost unperceived by his wife, who sat by his side. A humble female neighbour, her only other companion, said afterwards: “I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel.”

A letter written a few days later to a mutual friend by a now distinguished painter, one of the most fervent in that enthusiastic little band I have so often mentioned, expresses their feelings better than words less fresh or authentic can: ... "Lest you should not have heard of the death of Mr. Blake, I have written this to inform you. He died on Sunday night at six o’clock, in a most glorious manner. He said he was going to that country he had all his life wished to see, and expressed himself happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just before he died his countenance became fair, his eyes brightened, and he burst out into singing of the things he saw in heaven. In truth, he died like a saint, as a person who was standing by him observed. ..."67

There are striking similarities: Spilsbury and Blake both die joyously and to the sound of hymns. Gilchrist’s account of Blake’s death has recently been deemed unlikely on medical grounds by Aileen Ward, and by Lane Robson and Joseph Visconti.68 However, like the account given of Spilsbury’s death, it conforms closely to the customary Moravian trope of the good death, including the emphasis on singing at the point of death. Thus, when John Seniff, the German-born shoemaker who was Swedenborg’s friend in London, died on 2 May 1751, the Fetter Lane Congregation Diary reads:

His last Sickness was short, (being the Gravel) & not so threatening in appearance as some he had before: When any visited him, he always testified with a peaceful Heart & Countenance the Satisfaction he felt in the Sav’ Love, & in the Hopes of going to Him; & the last Words he uttered were the two concluding Verses of that German Hymn, “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,” which he began to sing of his own accord, & B’ Hintz (his old Acquaintance, who also happen’d to lodge in his House) accompanied it by gently touching the Guitar; & directly he expired.69

Perhaps the most striking parallel to Gilchrist’s account occurs not in the Congregation Diaries but in David Cranz’s 1767 history of the Moravian mission in Greenland:

But the full grain that was sown in the earth this year, nay the first and hitherto only European helper in this mission was Mrs. Drachart, the wife of the Danish missionary. Towards the end of last year she was seized with a violent burning fever, soon after she came to live at New-Herrnhut. The first day of this year she was delirious, but it was of a lovely kind; she incessantly sung verses of her own composing, and that in such a coherent manner, as if she had been one of the most excellent poets. Towards night she was quite still, and in a short time afterward fell gently and happily asleep in the Lord, in the thirty-sixth year of her age. Her corpse was deposited in a walled sepulchre in the burying-ground at New-Herrnhut.70

And when Maria (Spilsbury) Taylor died in Dublin on 1 June 1820, “with great self-control her husband sang a hymn beside her bed as she faded out of the world, for he remembered how she loved the United Brethren’s custom of singing whilst a spirit was passing.”71

The Congregation Diary also contains a note on Spilsbury’s burial in Bunhill Fields:

[November 1812, Saturday] 7th Agreeably to a request of our late B’ Spilsbury, that his Corpse might be laid in the same grave with that of his Wife in Bunhill fields, & that he might

71. Young, Father and Daughter 35.
be buried in the manner usual among the B\"', B' Montgom-
ery accompanied his remains from St. George's Row thither, &
kept the funeral—After a short address in reference to the sol-
emn occasion & during the Reading of our Burial Litany, his
mortal part was committed to the ground, to be quickened in
due time by the Spirit of Jesus which had dwelt in it.\textsuperscript{72}

As a Moravian, Spilsbury would in the normal course of
events have been laid to rest in the Moravian Burying Ground
at Chelsea. However, husband and wife could be laid together
apart from men, as was the Moravian custom.

Thus both Spilsbury and Blake are buried at Bunhill Fields,
not out of sectarian conviction (the "Dissent" that preoccu-
pies so many Blake scholars), but for simple family reasons:

A little before his death, Mrs. Blake asked where he would
be buried, and whether a dissenting minister or a clergyman
of the Church of England should read the service. To which
he answered, that as far as his own feelings were concerned,
he might bury him "where she pleased." But that as "father,
mother, aunt, and brother were buried in Bunhill Row, per-
haps it would be better to lie there. As to service, he should
wish for that of the Church of England."\textsuperscript{73}

Blake's deathbed reference to his beloved younger brother
reminds us of Gilchrist's account of Robert's own joyous end: "At the last solemn moment, the visionary eyes beheld
the released spirit ascend heavenward through the matter-
fact ceiling, 'clapping its hands for joy'—a truly Blake-
like detail.\textsuperscript{75} This finds a parallel in Draper Hill's citation of
an account of the death of James Gillray's elder brother John-
ny while at the Moravian school at Bedford: "'Pray don't keep
me. O let me go, I must go—' which were his last words."\textsuperscript{76}

There is one last parallel to draw. The "Br. Montgomery"
who attended Spilsbury's deathbed and officiated at his burial
in Bunhill Fields was the Rev. Ignatius Montgomery
(b. 1776), younger brother of the Sheffield poet, journalist,
hymn writer, and abolitionist James Montgomery (1771-
1854). Bentley, in \textit{Blake Records}, cites a letter of April 1807
from Robert Hartley Cromek to James Montgomery that
"suggests a connexion between Blake and James Montgomery
and Blake's admiration for Montgomery as a 'Man of Ge-
nius', of which we should not otherwise have known." The
letter "implies an easy and personal contact between the two
men."\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, "Mr. Montgomery, Sheffield" was one of the

72. Moravian Church Archive C/36/7/31 (Congregation Diary vol. 31:
10 September 1810-31 December 1816) [unnumbered pages for Novem-
ber 1812].
73. Young, \textit{Father and Daughter} 30.
74. Gilchrist 1:361. See also my note 46 for an alternative citation.
75. Gilchrist 1:59.
76. Draper Hill, \textit{Mr. Gillray the Caricaturist: A Biography} (London:
77. BR(2) 239. The letter is far too long to cite in its entirety and yet
resistant to selective quotation.

78. BR(2) 277fn. There are references to Blake's \textit{Grave} designs in Mont-
gomery's \textit{Memoirs}, vol. 1 (London, 1854)—see G. E. Bentley, Jr., \textit{Blake
Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" from \textit{Songs of Innocence} in his \textit{The Chin-
ney-Sweeper's Friend and Climbing-Boy's Album} (London: Longman,
Hurst, etc., 1824) 343-44.
79. A suggestion made by Marsha Keith Schuchard in her paper "Young
William Blake and the Moravian Tradition of Visionary Art" [in this is-
sue—Eds.].
80. BR(2) 33-34.
81. Moravian Church Archive C/36/7/3 (Diary of the Congregation at
London, for the Year 1749), p. 115 [November].
MINUTE PARTICULAR

An Analogue to the “Greatest Men” Passage in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

BY THOMAS R. FROSCH

In teaching The Marriage, I always found a stumbling block in the Devil’s speech on plates 22-23: “The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best, those who envied or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God.” If “every thing that lives is Holy” (pl. 27), if, as in The French Revolution, all men are the equals of the king (line 193), how can there be great men—not just great gifts or great works, not just the particular genius of every individual—that should be worshiped?

It was not until I visited the Panthéon in Paris that the passage appeared to me in a different light. The building that became the Panthéon had originally been conceived as a church dedicated to St. Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, but in April 1791, just before its completion, it was converted into a secular temple for the remains of great men, with Mirabeau and Voltaire the first to be interred. Emmet Kennedy points to the desanctification of the church and its rededication to honor great men as the “ultimate expression” of a revolutionary “religion of humanity” (xxv).

The question of what constituted greatness provoked considerable debate, and indeed that debate and the interest in, or cult of, “grands hommes” had predated the Revolution, with Diderot, Voltaire, and Rousseau among the contributors. In general, though, a great man, in what Jean-Claude Bonnet calls a “métamorphose de la gloire” (29), was no longer a military hero, much less a man of status and wealth, but a man who had superior inner powers and had contributed in a disinterested way to the common good.¹ For the French revolutionaries, patriots and martyrs of the Revolution were particularly qualified.

For some, the “depantheonized” were even divine. In the radical Révolutions de Paris, Jesus was a prophet, Marat a God (Kennedy 336). As for Jesus, Leonard Bourdon called him no more than a man but a great one, “a friend of the people,” Marat’s sobriquet, and “the first sansculotte” (Kennedy 336). The Marquis de Villette, who had first suggested the idea of a Panthéon, spoke of making a cross into a lyre (Bonnet 267), and Quatremère, the architect in charge of remodeling the Church of Sainte-Geneviève into the Panthéon, envisioned a new religion of arts and artists (Kennedy 333). Meanwhile, as E. P. Thompson has documented, English radical tradition had included such as John Reeve, who said that there was no other God but the man Jesus (157), and other partisans of a “humanist and antinomian Jesus Christ” (228). Blake of course was fond of citing the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of one’s own humanity: “Thou art a Man God is no more / Thy own humanity learn to adore” (The Everlasting Gospel, E 520).

Blake’s concept of greatness differed in basic ways from the greatness that figured in the Panthéon. His great man was not a patriot and, unlike the great men of the Panthéon, who had to be French, was not associated with the glory of a nation, nor was he incorporated into an institutionalized, ceremonial form of worship. Blake was not engaged with either revolt against or transformation of specifically Catholic traditions, and he was interested not in any reverence of the dead but in the potentiality within the living. Blake’s concept of greatness did include Jesus the sansculotte, as the passage in The Marriage goes on to make clear: “If Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree”; his Jesus broke several of the Ten Commandments and “was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules” (pls. 23-24). And The Marriage develops a concept of the prophetic artist as central man, who reveals “the infinite which was hid” (pl. 14) and brings about apocalyptic human change. Later, in the Laocoon engraving, “Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists” (E 274).

Mirabeau and Marat were soon “depantheonized.” The Panthéon became a church again, was later secularized and then once again resanctified. It then served as an arsenal for the Communards in the insurrection of 1871 before being established once and for all with the interment of Victor Hugo in 1885 as a secular temple of the great. Meanwhile, in England the debate on greatness took many famous literary forms, including Byron’s satire of heroes, Carlyle’s hero worship, and Wordsworth’s democratization of greatness.² Blake went on to give his concept of greatness epic elaboration in the figures of Los and Jesus.

This is the context in which the passage on the greatest men in The Marriage belongs, the context of a humanistic, and volatile, redefinition of greatness, a contemporary example of which was the reconceptualization of the Church of Sainte-Geneviève, with its implication of the replacement of God by humanity.

1. See Gaul! for a discussion of some of the attitudes towards the hero in the romantic period (145-72). Abrams (91) formulates succinctly the romantic tendency to diminish and at the extreme to eliminate the role of God, leaving as “the prime agents man and the world.”

2. See Gaul! for a discussion of some of the attitudes towards the hero in the romantic period (145-72). Abrams (91) formulates succinctly the romantic tendency to diminish and at the extreme to eliminate the role of God, leaving as “the prime agents man and the world.”

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**Works Cited**


All Blake quotations are from this edition, abbreviated “E”.


**NEWSLETTER**

The village of Felpham is celebrating the 250th anniversary of Blake’s birth by planning a festival of arts week in November 2007 and commissioning a Blake memorial stained glass window in the church. If you wish to donate money for the window or make suggestions for festival week, please contact Reverend Timothy Peskett (frtim@zoom.co.uk).

The Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of York, with the support of Nottingham Trent University and the Blake Society, is hosting a three-day Blake at 250 conference from 30 July to 1 August 2007. Further details are available at the conference web site [http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cecs/conf/Blakehome.htm].

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