

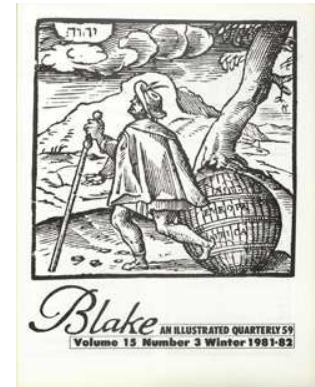
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

Blake's Maiden Queen in "The Angel"

Greg Crossan

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 15, Issue 3, Winter 1981/1982, pp.  
133-134



## BLAKE'S MAIDEN QUEEN IN "THE ANGEL"

Greg Crossan



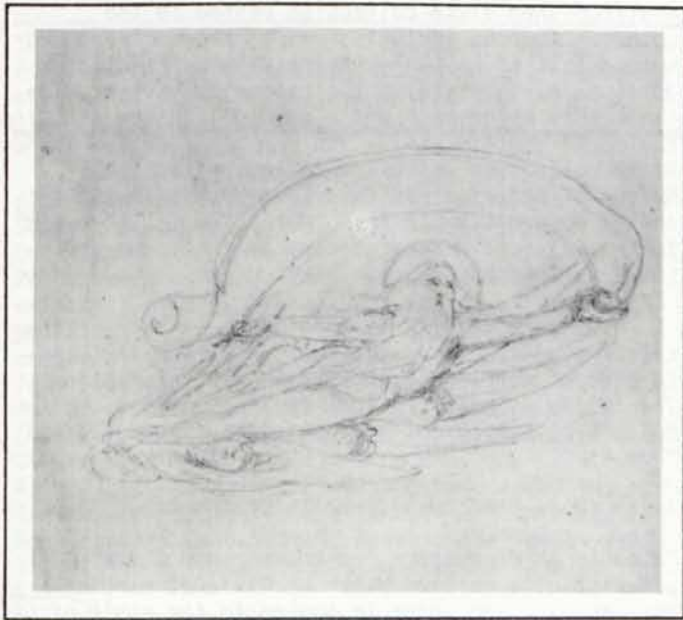
I dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?  
 And that I was a maiden Queen:  
 Guarded by an Angel mild:  
 Witless woe was neer beguil'd!

And I wept both night and day  
 And he wip'd my tears away  
 And I wept both day and night  
 And hid from him my hearts delight

So he took his wings and fled:  
 Then the morn blush'd rosy red:  
 I dried my tears and armd my fears  
 With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again;  
 I was arm'd, he came in vain:  
 For the time of youth was fled  
 And grey hairs were on my head.

"The Angel": *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), I, 184.



On the interpretation of "The Angel" from Blake's *Songs of Experience* there is substantial agreement amongst commentators (notably Wicksteed, Damon, Hirsch, Adams, Keynes, Bateson, Gleckner, Gillham, Stevenson). The poem is appropriately grouped with "An old maid early" and "The Golden Net" as an illustration of the theme of "ungratified desires." The dreamer enjoys the angel's affections but hides from him her "hearts delight" and plays upon his sympathy by weeping. When he eventually flies away she resorts to coquetry to entice him back, but by the time he returns it is too late. Some such paraphrase, and a footnote or two (to lines 4 and 12), will satisfy most readers, but some may still want to linger over the second line and ask: why a "maiden Queen"?

So far as I am aware, two rather different explanations have been offered: Joseph Wicksteed (*Blake's Innocence and Experience*, 1928, p. 158) describes the dreamer as a "petted child always being made a queen of," which suggests a degree of vanity and assertiveness, while Robert Gleckner (*The Piper and the Bard*, 1959, p. 263) likens her to Thel, who is both a virgin and, in the words of the lily and the matron clay, "Queen of the Vales," and this comparison suggests a character rather more timid and fragile.

I would like to add a third perspective on the phrase, one which I believe reinforces the poem's theme of hidden love. There are two famous "maiden

1 "Every Man also gave him a Piece of Money," c. 1821-3. Pencil, pen, and watercolor, 22.8 x 17.8 cm. Tate Gallery.

2 "God the Father with Attendant Angels," verso of "Every Man also gave him a Piece of Money," c. 1821-3. Pencil, approx. 9.5 x 15 cm. Tate Gallery.

Queens" in history, Elizabeth I of England and Christina of Sweden, both of whom withstood much pressure and some inclination to marry. The remarkable life of Queen Christina was the inspiration of Mme. de Scudéry's romance *The History of Cleobuline, Queen of Corinth* in volume II of *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649-53), which in turn became the basis of Dryden's play *Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen* (1668). The nameless Sicilian Queen of this play is secretly in love with Philocles, whom she affects to rebuff one moment and entices the next. Inflamed by jealousy of Philocles' love for Candiope, and unwilling to reveal her own love, she so completely baffles Philocles with her erratic moods that he decides to flee, but a series of twists in the plot sees him return to court, by now aware of her true feelings and half-inclined to woo her. Honor, however, and the conventions of comedy, determine otherwise, and at the end of the play the Queen resigns herself to remaining a maid.

The parallels between poem and play are naturally limited, yet Dryden's maiden Queen and Blake's share the same basic predicament:

And I wept both day and night,  
And hid from him my hearts delight . . .

("The Angel," 7-8)

. . . I have conceal'd my passion  
With such care from him, that he knows not yet  
I love . . .

(*Secret Love*, III, i,  
48-50, in Beaurline and  
Bowers, eds., *John Dryden:  
Four Comedies*, 1967)

Philocles is not exactly an "Angel mild," yet when he contemplates union with the maiden Queen he is moved to remark:

Sure I had one of the fallen Angels Dreams;  
All Heav'n within this hour was mine!

(V, i, 448-49)

But the lines from Dryden's play which might provide the most enlightening gloss on Blake's poem are the words of the maiden Queen's song in IV, ii, of which I quote here the opening stanza:

I feed a flame within which so torments me  
That it both pains my heart, and yet contents  
me:  
'Tis such a pleasing smart, and I so love it,  
That I had rather die, than once remove it.

(IV, ii, 23-26)

Witless woe, if you like, but not without beguilement! The "hearts delight" that causes Blake's dreamer to weep is clearly akin to the "pleasing smart" of this little song of secret love, and Blake's one and only use of the phrase "maiden Queen," I suggest, is a deliberate nod in this direction.

## A REDISCOVERED COLORED COPY OF YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

Thomas V. Lange

In their exhaustive research, the editors of *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts* (1980)<sup>1</sup> were able to add four "new" copies to the two earlier censuses of colored copies of the engraved work,<sup>2</sup> and they state, "At present twenty-three coloured copies are believed to exist, all but one of which have recently been studied by one or more of the editors of the present edition." Somewhat later in their commentary they continue, "Still untraced is the well-attested Gaisford-Macgeorge copy, called G in the Bentley census and last located in 1926." The editors obscure this "well-attested" copy, since they choose to omit all mention of it from their census of colored copies. The only physical description appears in footnote 81, some forty pages after the census.

While engaged in research quite unrelated to Blake for the Lutheran Church in America, I discovered this untraced colored copy of *Night Thoughts* in a disused closet, among the books bequeathed to the Church by Mrs. William T. Tonner in 1971. Upon her death, a portion of Mrs. Tonner's distinguished Blake collection passed to the Lutheran Church, including one of the two recorded impressions of the color-print "Newton" (Butlin 307), an early state of the copper engraving, "The Canterbury Pilgrims," and a drawing, "Moses striking the rock" (Butlin 445). The remainder of the Tonner Blake collection was given to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and was described by Martin Butlin in the Museum's *Bulletin*.<sup>3</sup> Hereafter I will refer to the Gaisford-Macgeorge copy as the Tonner-Lutheran Church copy.

The purpose of this brief note is to describe this newly discovered copy of *Night Thoughts*, and to correct and update the provenance information. The following entry follows the format used by the editors of the recently published edition of *Night Thoughts*:

I-12A (Moss-Bentley G). White Death.

Bound in three-quarter red-brown morocco over greenish-blue marbled paper by Riviere, marbled end-papers. The spine is tooled in the style of Roger Payne. Top edge gilt, others uncut. Lacks the Explanation of the Engravings, which is, however, supplied in 19th century type-facsimile. Watermarks on twelve leaves. 16-3/4 x 12-3/4 inches. (42.5 x 32.8 cm.). Grotesque color on p. 10 (6E), p. 31 (18E), p. 35 (20E). No JC monogram.

1) Acquired by Thomas Gaisford (1779-1855) of Offington, Worthing. He added his engraved book-