

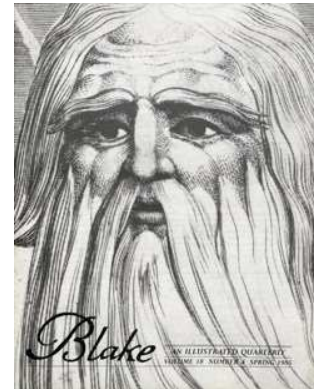
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The Final State of The Four Zoas

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The Final State of *The Four Zoas*

BY PAUL MANN

I

In what form did Blake intend to produce *The Four Zoas*? The question cannot finally be answered, since the surviving evidence is partial, ambiguous and at times contradictory, and Blake's material plans for the work could have passed through several phases. But despite these difficulties, a number of commentators have speculated on what *The Four Zoas* might have looked like had it reached production stage. Damon was perhaps the first critic to think that proof "that *The Four Zoas* was not intended to be given to the public is to be found in the fact that Blake later utilized long passages of it" in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.¹ This is a rather curious proposal: it implies that Blake intended to pirate *The Four Zoas* for quotations even as he was composing it, as if he had the later books in mind as early as 1797. Bentley states that the poem was eventually to be engraved, presumably in the manner of the illuminated books.² Erdman, occupying a sort of middle ground between manuscript and illuminated book, suggests a "unique Illuminated Manuscript."³

My primary purpose in this essay is to offer another alternative, perhaps a modified version of Bentley's: Blake might have been experimenting with a compromise between his customary copperplate methods and the strictures of commercial publishing, a more conventional means of production which could enable him to reach a wider audience than his copperplate method permitted. Briefly, the theory I will propose is as follows: the *Four Zoas* manuscript represents an experiment not only in a longer and more complex poetic-prophetic text, but also in a more accessible, reproducible, material format for the prophecy. Layers of revision, in other words, represent stages of both poetic and material intentions. Blake's main production model was the Edwards-Blake edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*, a letterpress text framed in places by engraved designs.⁴ This theory would partly justify Blake's use of *Night Thoughts* proof sheets in much of the manuscript: he was either testing the possibility of using the *Night Thoughts* designs directly to frame his own letterpress text, or using those designs as a general model while planning to replace them with new designs; or perhaps, at different stages of composition, he considered doing both. Finally, I will propose that Blake's

commercial plans for *The Four Zoas* were greatly influenced by his working association with Hayley during the period 1800–1803, and especially by their partnership on an edition of Hayley's *Ballads*.

My secondary purpose follows from the first. Our prevailing notion of Blake's "career" depicts a complete withdrawal from conventional printing and publication. After the suppression of *The French Revolution*, Blake is believed to have turned away from letterpress printing and toward the forms of illuminated printing with which we are familiar. If, therefore, *The Four Zoas* was at some stage intended for publication in a more conventional format and distribution to a mass audience, however small that mass might have turned out to be, we would have to revise our sense of Blake's project as an absolute rejection of normal publishing practice.

Blake's critique of publishing is familiar, and it is usually described as a radical version of Romantic notions of artistic integrity.⁵ The critique can be summarized along two main lines. First, Blake rejected the practice of division of labor. He chose—he was peculiarly suited to choose—to control almost all phases of his book production. By Blake's time, publishing had grown into a full-scale industry, albeit rather a small one by modern standards, and this growth involved an increasingly compartmentalized distribution of the labor required to produce a book.⁶ Materials were contracted from paper mills and type foundries; typesetters, pressmen, binders and miscellaneous laborers had to be employed; and markets had to be developed for the product. The artist was, in a sense, only one among many agents in the institution of book production. One might say that Blake seized the means of production in order to comprehend it on entirely artistic grounds. His rejection of this industrial system is a radical and characteristic claim for author's rights: the author has the right, even the responsibility, to determine all forms of his work, from first inspiration to final transaction with the reader. Second, Blake rejected the forms of printing which the industry developed. The industry's continuing search for cheaper and more efficient means of production meant that the product itself had to become simpler and more uniform. One instance of this is the fairly rapid acceptance of standardized roman typefaces in most of Europe⁷; in general, books grew to look more and more

the same. As Morris Eaves has shown, even methods of producing book illustrations became increasingly standardized in order to accommodate industrial progress and, especially, the machinery used to print engravings.⁸ Blake's countertechnology involved, as we all know, not only special printing techniques but also methods for individualizing each copy of a given title.

The problem is that this vigorous artistic integrity had serious repercussions. The growth of the publishing industry also involved the growth of an audience increasingly defined as a book-buying market, and Blake's rejection of publishing's technology clearly meant a tacit rejection, at least, of publishing's audience as well. In the eighteenth century, the industry had to supply—and, to some degree, create—the demands of an expanding literate populace eager to own books, and whose tastes and interests differed markedly from those of previous generations. Not only the means of production but what was produced had to change: Aristotle and Ovid had to make room for Mrs. Barbauld. The publishing industry grew with its audience; the development of simpler and cheaper formats and the growth of "popular" literature were inextricably interrelated. I do not, of course, mean that Blake was competing with popular literature, but I do wish to point out that it is impossible to understand Blake's critique of publishing purely on the grounds of production. His rejection of the industry's methods and standards necessarily prevented him from reaching much of its audience; he never had the chance to be judged, and probably rejected, by popular standards.

Surely this must have been problematic for a poet with prophetic ambitions, a poet whose work is shot through with addresses to his "readers." By the time of *Jerusalem* (extant in five copies printed by Blake), the irony of writing addresses "To the Public," "Jews," "Deists" and "Christians" could hardly have been lost on him.⁹ And could the author of *America: A Prophecy* have been immune to the fact that this work would not reach its proper prophetic audience? David James describes *America's* illuminated printing as a "reversion to an artisanal, precapitalist mode of production. . . . In effect Blake revived for himself the system of patronage whose evils he so bitterly condemned, and by limiting his patrons to the class who had least to gain by a republican revolution he essentially ensured his political ineffectiveness."¹⁰ It is perhaps unfair to blame Blake for the market limitations of the Lambeth books; it is also customary to praise an artist for economic indifference, or even ignorance. Blake probably did not so much reject audience as end up without one, but he might reasonably be expected to have toyed, from time to time, with ways to get one.

II

In 1795, Blake was commissioned by the bookseller and publisher Richard Edwards to produce a large number of designs for a kind of coffee-table edition of Edward Young's popular poem, *Night Thoughts*. Blake's task was to provide a series of illustrative frames for Young's text; he made some 537 watercolor studies from which forty-three were selected and engraved for the first volume, and the first four *Nights* were published in 1797.¹¹ Edwards surely planned a substantial press-run and sale—otherwise the production costs would have been unthinkable—but the project was abandoned after the first volume; the reason usually given is the financial crisis of the same year.¹² Blake was, however, left with a large number of clean sheets supplied by Edwards for the designs, and a number of text-free proofs of the illustrations, and it was on these that he began copying and composing drafts of *The Four Zoas*.

Although Blake's career as a professional engraver had certainly never made him rich and famous, the decade during which he was working on *The Four Zoas* was a particularly trying time.¹³ Blake's growing reputation as an eccentric and the current exigencies of British life combined to produce the situation of the famous complaint in his August 1799 letter to Cumberland: "For as to Engraving, in which art I cannot reproach myself with any neglect, yet I am laid by in a corner as if I did not Exist, & Since my Young's Night Thoughts have been publish'd, Even Johnson & Fuseli have discarded my Graver" (*Letters*, p. 32). For reasons such as these, Hayley's offer of work on his *Life of Cowper* must have seemed particularly timely.

We already know as much about Blake's "three years' Slumber" at Felpham as we will probably ever know, and there is no need to rehearse most of it here, but we do need to consider the relationship with Hayley. "As early as January 10th, 1802 Blake had complained to Butts of his situation, and by July 6th, 1803 he was 'determined to be no longer Pester'd with his [Hayley's] Genteel Ignorance & Polite Disapprobation'" (*Records*, p. 120).¹⁴ Hayley's patronage is known to have been particularly patronizing: the habitual reiteration of "our good," "enthusiastic," "zealous," "indefatigable" and similar epithets for Blake in Hayley's correspondence is a minute particular of his corporeal friendship. Hayley claims to have considered the *Ballads* project, which I shall describe shortly, as little more than a favor for his poor house-engraver who was laboring so diligently on the *Cowper Life* and other Hayley projects. Blake must have raged, secretly at least, at this enforced pastime.

Nevertheless, in January 1803, Blake could write to his brother James, in one of his most famous letters:

I am getting before hand in money matters. The Profits arising from Publications are immense, & I now have it in my power to

commence publication with many very formidable works, which I have finish'd & ready. A Book price half a guinea may be got out at the Expense of Ten pounds & its almost certain profits are 500 G. I am only sorry that I did not know the methods of publishing years ago, & this is one of the numerous benefits I have obtain'd by coming here, for I should never have known the nature of Publication unless I had known H. & his connexions & his method of managing. It now would be folly not to venture publishing. (*Letters*, p. 64)

What exactly does Blake mean by "publishing"? Given the fact that he had already spent the better part of two decades as a professional engraver and had associated with such booksellers as Edwards and Joseph Johnson, the letter's implication of a dawning knowledge is certainly curious. What were Hayley's connections and method of managing? A reference to the *Ballads*, shortly afterward in this letter, may offer a clue.

Hayley claims, in his preface to the original, 1802 edition of the *Ballads*:

To amuse the Artist in his [Blake's] patient labour, and to furnish his fancy with a few slight subjects for an inventive pencil, that might afford some variety to his incessant application, without too far interrupting his more serious business [Hayley means the *Life of Cowper*, not *The Four Zoas*], I chanced to compose, in hours of exercise and leisure, a few Ballads, upon anecdotes relating to animals, that happened to interest my fancy. They succeeded perfectly as an amusement to my Friend; and led him to execute a few rapid sketches, that several judges of his talent are desirous of converting to his honour and emolument. The favour that two or three Ballads obtained, in a private circle, inclined us to enlarge the number; and to try their success in the world as a periodical publication. (*Records*, p. 93)

The plan was to publish fifteen ballads, each with three engravings, to be printed in quarto by Seagrave and issued monthly at a price of one half-crown per installment. The work seems to have been intended primarily for subscription; Hayley relied, for example, on his friend and Cowper's cousin, Lady Hesketh, in Bath, to be a "Ballad Monger" (*Records*, p. 97) and distribute the work among her friends. Lady Hesketh was notably unsympathetic to Blake's work, which might qualify the wisdom of Hayley's connections and method of managing.¹⁵

The project was, as it turned out, a commercial failure. Only four of the proposed fifteen parts appeared. On 26 October 1803, Blake wrote to Hayley that:

I called on Mr. Evans, who gives small hopes of our ballads; he says he has sold but fifteen numbers at the most, and that going on would be a certain loss of almost all the expenses. I then proposed to him to take a part with me in publishing them on a smaller scale, which he declined on account of its being out of his line of business. . . . He advises that some publisher should be spoken to who would purchase the copyright: and, as far as I can judge of the nature of publication, no chance is left to one out of the trade. (*Letters*, p. 80)

Bentley estimates that, by the time of this letter, "Evans had sold less than £2 worth of Ballads, and the other booksellers presumably had even smaller sales to report" (*Records*, p. 117). Letters from Lady Hesketh and Samuel Greatheed in July 1802 further attest to the commercial

failure of the *Ballads* (*Records*, pp. 107–109). Moreover, Blake was responsible for at least part of the expenses of Seagrave's printing bill and the £30 owed for paper—this relative to an apparent total of £15.15s. earned by 1803 for 115 copies sold outside the booksellers. In December of 1804 these debts still weighed on Blake: a letter to Hayley mentions twelve guineas Hayley had lent him to pay Seagrave, and in another letter to Hayley of December 1805 Blake mentions the Seagrave bill again. Bentley concludes that the "Ballads must have been a clear loss to Blake, not even counting his wages for designing, engraving, and printing the engravings" (*Records*, p. 117). Blake was eventually to succeed in getting another publisher: in 1805 Richard Phillips issued a reduced-size version of five plates, two of which had not appeared in the first edition, but this new edition also failed commercially.

Could this have been the means of publication which Blake claimed to have learned from Hayley? Chronological coincidence and the proximity of "publishing" and mention of the *Ballads* project in the 1803 letter to James suggest the possibility, at least, that Blake was considering some mix of copperplate engraving and commercial printing, sold largely by subscription and perhaps also in serial format. The failure of the *Ballads* need not have dissuaded Blake—indeed, given his debts and his feelings about Hayley's poetic sensibility, that failure might have inspired him to gamble again on his own work; and, as Hayley himself wrote to Evans, about the same time as the James letter, Blake "is an excellent creature, but not very fit to manage pecuniary Concerns to his own advantage" (*Records*, p. 114). Hayley, in other words, did not believe Blake had learned the publishing business as well as Blake believed he had; and, in any case, the failure of one project in a given format does not necessarily imply that another project in the same format has to fail.

III

I have gathered evidence which could suggest that Blake working on Hayley's ballads and Blake working on *The Four Zoas* have more than chronological coincidence in common. I wish to insist, again, that this evidence is incomplete and might have nothing whatever to do with *The Four Zoas*. But before we dismiss the evidence out of hand, we should take a closer look at the nature of the *Four Zoas* manuscript, and review the main theories about Blake's plans for it.

Let me begin by reiterating the positions taken by Bentley and Erdman. Bentley writes that the "handwriting in the first three Nights is fair, clear, and beautiful, and was surely intended as the model to be copied when the poem was engraved. Blake was surely prepared to reduce the page size considerably in the engravings, for there are only about sixteen lines on each page, and

the more finished drawings are large and clear, with few small details."¹⁶ Bentley's attention here is rather selective. In the actual manuscript, in *Night I* alone, pages 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 21 have upwards of twenty-four lines; pages 14 and 16 have twenty-two each, and page 22 has forty. Bentley arrives at his totals by adding only those lines written in what he calls "Copperplate hand" (illus. 1) and/or "Modified Copperplate hand" (see Bentley's Table IV, "Handwriting," p. 210); in other words, he focuses on an assumed stage of composition and "deletes" revisions, rather as Margoliouth did in his hypothetical resurrection of the *Vala* ur-text from the manuscript. It is quite possible that Blake's revisions on these pages represent not only poetic decisions but revisions of his intentions for the poem's format. Shifts to what Bentley calls "Usual hand" later on in the manuscript and in revisions could also represent an increasing indifference to the visual appearance of the script, resulting from Blake's sense that the text might not be etched or engraved but printed. Even to call some of the calligraphy of the first three *Nights* "Copperplate hand" is problematic, in part because this hand lacks the floral flourishes and marginal figures which grace most of the Lambeth books and are still in evidence in the sparser *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Furthermore, when Blake began to use the *Night Thoughts* proofs and to write consistently in "Usual hand"—beginning on page 43, whatever stage of composition that represents (illus. 2)—line totals begin to correspond more closely to the customary thirty lines per illustrated page of *Night Thoughts*: page 49 has thirty-one lines, 51 has thirty-three, 53 has twenty-eight, 55 has thirty-two, 59 has twenty-eight (illus. 3) and so on.

Erdman replies to Bentley by demanding, "why assume the poem was to be engraved?":

These are the pages [the first three *Nights*] Blake began to write only after he was sure the *Night Thoughts* had failed commercially—whenever that was. He would have known to be absolutely beyond his means the great number and size of copper plates the format of these *Nights* would require. Perhaps sensing this objection, Bentley continues: "Blake was surely prepared to reduce the page size considerably in the engravings, for there are only about sixteen lines on each page. . . ." But how so? Photographically? The lettering is not designed for reduction by any means: the graphic body, minus upper and lower loops, is as small as the humbler styles of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, i.e., about 1.5 to 2 mm. high. To be prepared for engraving, all Blake needed was a fair copy, legibly mended: see the Songs of Experience in his Notebook. No, the objective of these carefully ruled and "ambitiously" illustrated pages was not to be a model for something else but to be themselves a unique Illuminated Manuscript. It was a sensible notion: he had the paper, could not afford the copper, had sold perhaps only single copies of his last economy-size works in Illuminated Printing (*Abania, Los*) anyway. Later, when he could afford copper for *Milton*, he used small plates; a decade later for *Jerusalem* he doubled the size, still modest by comparison with *Vala's* pages. Are we sure that he ever intended to etch *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*? May he not, even as late as 1805, have hoped to bring all his Uh pages and badly mended Cph pages up to the perfection of his model? Bentley finds that Blake may have had over 200 unused blank leaves on hand (p. 161,

n. 4). Why bother with anomalous leaves or even *Night Thoughts* proofs at all, unless a greater aim remained in view?¹⁷

Most of Erdman's objections are well-founded—though one should note that eighteenth-century engravers were capable of reducing images through semi-mechanical means¹⁸—and his own hypothesis is quite plausible. But how does the creation of a "unique Illuminated Manuscript" constitute a "greater aim"? It is hard to believe that Blake, who so strongly desired a wider audience for his work, would have willingly, indeed intentionally, consigned a major work on which he spent ten years to the privacy of a manuscript, a book which could have, at most, one reader at a time. The notion of a prophetic work addressed to a single reader, or to no readers at all, is somewhat ludicrous.

Even if Blake did not have enough unused copper to engrave the whole of *The Four Zoas*, there were forty-three plates of *Night Thoughts* already engraved. Bentley's *Records* lists no surviving accounts for transactions between Edwards and Blake, but Fuseli stated that Blake asked for one hundred guineas for the whole project and settled for the twenty Edwards claimed he could afford to pay (*Records*, p. 52)—an astonishingly paltry sum for the work involved. One might therefore wonder whether Blake and Edwards had another deal on the side. Blake would certainly have been grateful for the extra paper in tight times, but half a ream of even high-quality stock would hardly seem to make up the difference. Robert Essick has suggested to me that Edwards might have thrown some extra copper into the bargain; perhaps, after *Night Thoughts* failed, Edwards gave Blake the *Night Thoughts* plates themselves; we will probably never know for sure. And might Edwards not also have given Blake permission to reuse the *Night Thoughts* designs for his own poem, especially after the former project had failed?¹⁹ Here again we will probably never know. Erdman's theory would certainly remove any copyright considerations, but I do not think it necessarily precludes the possibility that Blake did plan to use the *Night Thoughts* designs in *The Four Zoas*, or at least experimented with the idea of doing so. The rest of the text could have been printed without illustration, as Edwards printed *Young*; or, given the large number of sketches on the proof-free sheets of *The Four Zoas*, Blake might have been trying to find a way to acquire enough copper for at least a few more designs.

In summary, my hypothesis is as follows:

(1) that *The Four Zoas* was at some stage considered as a "commercial" publication rather than as an illuminated book in the Lambeth mode or as an extraordinary manuscript;

(2) that Blake planned either to use the *Night Thoughts* designs more or less directly, or to clean and reuse the plates for more or less different designs;

(3) that he intended, at some stage, to have the text printed, like *Night Thoughts*, in letterpress;²⁰

(4) that the work was intended for sale by subscription, instead of or as well as through booksellers, and perhaps as a serial publication;

(5) that Blake's abandonment of *The Four Zoas*, usually rationalized on strictly poetic grounds, might also have been the result of complications in his material plans for the work: continuing debt and the successive commercial failures of the *Night Thoughts* and both editions of the *Ballads* could have dissuaded him from pursuing *The Four Zoas* in this format, and pushed him on toward *Milton* and *Jerusalem* and back to the techniques of illuminated printing.²¹

There are certainly objections to this hypothesis, doubtless many more than have occurred to me. Copyright control of the *Night Thoughts* designs is a fundamental and insoluble issue. The relative scope of the *Ballads* and *Four Zoas* projects could argue against any coincidence, but then ambition was never much of an obstacle for Blake. On the other hand, to have entertained for very long the hope of an extensive audience or subscription network for *such* a work, and in such difficult economic times, might well have been more than even Blake's optimism and economic naivety could surmount. Most crucially, perhaps, when Blake wrote to James of his growing knowledge of how to manage in the publishing business, he quite likely only meant managing as an engraver. Hayley's dubious tutelage was primarily on this front, and Blake's letters of this period speak often of his design work and very rarely of his writing.²² "Publishing" could therefore have meant, quite simply, reentering the field of design and engraving more actively and profitably. But my hypothesis does seem to address, if not exactly to resolve, a number of issues about Blake's plans for *The Four Zoas* which tend to be skirted by other theories; and perhaps too the mere possibility that Blake could have devoted a substantial portion of his years of labor on *The Four Zoas* attempting to develop a more public format for his work might revise our conception of the nature of his poetic isolation and his critique of the publishing industry.

IV

Having hazarded these speculations, it seems proper to offer, as a kind of postscript, or caveat, or metalogue, the following observations.

Could the preceding considerations affect editorial practice? If so, I wish to emphasize the fact that the "final state" of *The Four Zoas* is a manuscript. Any hypothetical reconstruction of what Bentley calls its "composition and growth" seems to me an entirely separate concern. My remarks are not intended to reflect on the work's status as a manuscript so much as on more general notions of a "career" or work-context in which that text or any of Blake's texts might be set; the hypothesis is

offered primarily as one means by which to treat the conflict in Blake's project between professed prophetic ambitions and a perceived withdrawal from certain possibilities in normative publishing practice, in respect to both the production of works and a potential audience for them.

Hypothetical portraits of Blake's career are often conscripted into editorial procedures. Bentley's commentary relies heavily on such notions, and the ongoing debate on the probable order of Nights VII would be impossible without them.²³ No matter how tentative and conditional the language of these compositional fictions (see above, *passim*), they regularly determine editorial decisions. Speculation becomes fact in the printed text, and at the same time compositional narratives are often a veil for the narrative of editing itself and its own narrativizing power over the text (no edition of *The Four Zoas* is as disruptive as the manuscript). Editorial practice is its own concealed "text," existing within a discourse governed by and governing through codes, conventions, ideologies and narrativizing expectations, the effects of which on actual editions have not yet received adequate critical attention either in their own right or as a significant cultural practice. If the critical mediation of texts is increasingly a critical concern—as ideology, as a power organizing the canon and so on—editorial mediation regularly slips through the cracks in our attention. In this light, even if some future consensus grants any validity to my hypothesis, I would hope that the text of *The Four Zoas* will remain immune to my speculations.

For it is *as manuscript* that *The Four Zoas* must be read, and manuscript not in some fiction of completion which one's reading continually tries to approximate: that is, neither as the trace of an interrupted compositional trajectory nor as something to be read *as if* it were finished. To describe in any detail the directions of this reading, let alone to perform it, falls outside the scope of the present essay. I am certainly not suggesting any reversion to "the poem itself"—*The Four Zoas* is not entirely a poem, not yet a poem; given its designs it is also more than a poem; and so widely allusive a writer as Blake must be placed within a considerable spectrum of historical and discursive contexts—but I am suggesting a reading which attends to the ontology of the manuscript as much as to its thematics.²⁴ If my speculations in this essay should be kept as separate as possible from editorial incursions into *The Four Zoas*, it is my hope that these remarks might be of some use in such a reading.

²¹ Cited by H.M. Margoliouth in *William Blake's Vala: Blake's Numbered Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. xxv.

²² G.E. Bentley, Jr., *William Blake: Vala, or the Four Zoas*:

A Facsimile of the Manuscript, a Transcript of the Poem, and a Study of Its Growth and Significance (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 158.

³ David V. Erdman, "The Binding (*et cetera*) of *Vala*," *The Library*, 5th series, 19 (1964), 125.

⁴ I first made this suggestion, in greatly abbreviated form, in "Editing *The Four Zoas*," *Pacific Coast Philology* 16 (June 1981), 51.

⁵ The best current portrait is by Morris Eaves in *William Blake's Theory of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁶ See for instance, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard, eds. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: New Left Books, 1976), pp. 128-66.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

⁸ See Morris Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology," *PMLA* (October 1977), 903-27.

⁹ Blake's professed faith that his sublime allegory would reach future generations of readers is not much of an answer to this situation. Did he foresee our generation poring over Erdman and Keynes? No doubt he would have rejected twentieth-century publishing technology as readily as he rejected that of the eighteenth century. It should, however, be noted that this rather quantitative definition of audience might well be a red herring. Eaves does not address this matter in precisely these terms, but the last chapter of *William Blake's Theory of Art*, "Audiences" (pp. 171-204), in describing audience in the intimate terms of "love and friendship," implies that one-on-one—one artist to even one reader—might in some sense be enough. I would agree that Blakean aesthetics privileges the quality over the quantity of reading, but at the same time a great deal of Blake's correspondence indicates that he did desire a much wider audience than he achieved in his lifetime.

¹⁰ David James, "Angels out of the Sun: Art, Religion and Politics in Blake's *America*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 18 (Summer 1979), 236. James's rhetoric here suggests an almost medieval, two-class society, with Blake's audience among the aristocracy. But Morton Paley has rightly pointed out, in comments on an earlier draft of my paper, that the middle class played key roles in both the American and French Revolutions, and that Blake's customers were not kings and dukes but members of the petite bourgeoisie. Still, I think that James's remark has some bearing: he is describing a system of patronage which itself looks back to pre-revolutionary modes, and a system in which, whatever their class affiliations, Blake's patrons were not likely to be active participants in revolution.

¹¹ Robert Essick and Jeni Joy La Belle, eds., *Night Thoughts or, The Complaint and Consolation*, illustrated by William Blake, text by Edward Young (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), p. iii.

¹² David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 287.

¹³ Bentley quotes a 1799 letter from Leigh Hunt's mother: "The engraving of Pictures is at present but a dull business. The war occasions a scarcity of cash, people in general find it difficult to obtain the necessary comforts of life, and have not surplus of money for elegancies." G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 61. Blake, however, writing to Cumberland in July of the following year, shortly before the move to Felpham, thought that conditions were improving:

I am still employ'd in making Designs & little Pictures with now & then an Engraving & find that in future to live will not be so difficult as it has been. It is very Extraordinary that London in so few years from a City of meer Necessaries or at l[e]ast a commerce of the lowest order of luxuries should have become a City of Elegance in some degree & that its once stupid inhabitants should enter into an Emulation of Grecian manners. There are now, I believe, as many Booksellers as there are Butchers & as many Printshops as of any other trade. We remember when a Print shop was a rare bird in London & I myself remember when I thought my pursuits of Art a kind of criminal dissipation & neglect of the main chance. . . .

Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *The Letters of William Blake* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 37.

¹⁴ since the publication of the *Records*, E.G. Murray has demonstrated conclusively that this letter was misdated by Blake and was in fact written in January 1803. See "A Suggested Reading of a Blake Letter to Thomas Butts" in *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 13 (1979-80), 148-51.

¹⁵ See *Records*, pp. 79, 101-102, 135. Everyone associated with the *Ballads* apparently considered it a Blake Charity, including Blake himself. When the *Ballads* were reissued by Phillips in 1805, Blake wrote to Hayley that "Mr. Phillips objects altogether to the insertion of my Advertisement, calling it an appeal to charity, and says it will hurt the sale of the work . . ." (*Letters*, p. 119).

¹⁶ Bentley, *Vala*, p. 158.

¹⁷ Erdman, "Binding," p. 125.

¹⁸ See Robert N. Essick, *William Blake, Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 13, for a description of some of these methods.

¹⁹ It occurs to me that *The Four Zoas* might be less of a commentary on *Night Thoughts* than is ordinarily suspected. Certainly the designs in *Night Thoughts* "comment" on Young's text, as Thomas H. Helmstadter, for one, has argued, but their context in Blake's text is radically altered. Perhaps the *Four Zoas* designs occupy a kind of catalytic midpoint which gives rise to a text meant not to revise Young, as Milton revises Milton, but entirely to supersede him. See Helmstadter, "Blake's *Night Thoughts*: Interpretations of Edward Young," in *The Visionary Hand: Essays for the Study of William Blake's Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Robert N. Essick (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973), pp. 381-418.

²⁰ In "The *Four Zoas*: Intention and Production," which follows this essay, Essick argues persuasively that the copperplate writing, at least, might represent plans for an intaglio text. In other words, *The Four Zoas* was either always intended for intaglio or intaglio and letterpress represent different and successive stages of Blake's production plans.

²¹ Other reasons could be added: the possibility that Edwards would not finally consent to the reuse of the *Night Thoughts* designs; the difficulty of making those designs work effectively in a different poetic context; the deeply unsettling Schofield incident of 1803 and the subsequent return to London; and, in 1805, the "turmoil in the London printing industry. By March 9th some 250 pressmen had left their jobs, 'thereby . . . leaving, on their part, all public and private Business nearly at a stand'" (*Records*, p. 160). Nor do I wish to exclude imaginative difficulties in and poetic progress "beyond" *The Four Zoas*.

²² It is worth noting, however, that Blake's closest extant letter after the James letter is one dated 25 April 1803, in which Blake tells Butts of his "three years' Slumber on the banks of the Ocean" and the "long Poem descriptive of those Acts. . . ." Keynes believes this is a reference to *Milton*, but *The Four Zoas* seems an equally likely candidate. See *Letters*, p. 67.

²³ See *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 12 (Fall 1978). Many of these concluding observations are anticipated in my article in *Pacific Coast Philology* (see above, n. 4), and they are sketched against a much fuller practical and theoretical background in a lengthy review article of Erdman's new *The Complete Poems and Prose of William Blake*, by the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group, in *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1984), 4-31.

²⁴ Bentley's facsimile has its limitations, not the least of which is that it is out of print, but Erdman and Cettina Magno have promised us a new facsimile from infrared photographs. These facsimile versions could greatly facilitate critical studies of the manuscript's ontology, and such studies could eventually do much to inform the reading of even print editions.