

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

The New Jerusalem Defended

Christopher Heppner

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 20, Issue 3, Winter 1986-87, pp. 102-104

10. Brown, David Blayney. "The Romantic Tradition: William Blake to Robin Tanner." *The Print in England, 1790-1930: A Private Collection*. Ed. Craig Hartley and Susan Ridyard. Cambridge, Cambs.: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1985. 40-69. [Works by Blake, Flaxman, and Palmer were included in this section (#53-108) an exhibition which drew on the holdings of the Robin Loder collection. See also #19, below.]

11. Burns, Bryan, Philip Dodd, and Vincent Newey. "The Nineteenth Century: Romantic Period." *The Year's Work in English Studies* 62 (1981). Ed. Laurin P. for the English Association, 1984. 277-30. See pp. 280-84 for a summary review of 1981. [Scholarship by Newey; additional references are listed in the index of authors treated.]

12. Burns, Bryan, Philip Dodd, and Vincent Newey. "The Nineteenth Century: Romantic Period." *The Year's Work in English Studies* 63 (1982). Ed. Laurin P. for the English Association, 1985. 277-30. See pp. 278-81 for Vincent Newey's summary review.

Blake
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
VOLUME 20, NUMBER 3, WINTER 1986-87

Bible 1525-1961, revised and expanded from the edition of T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule by A. S. Herbert, London and New York, 1968, p. 241. The preface to volume 6 gives credit to Henry for much of the substance of that volume (Epistles and Revelation). But why drag in Henry, when all one needs is a Bible with marginal references or a Cruden or "what every Sunday school girl knows"?

The New Jerusalem Defended

Christopher Heppner

It is clear that Michael Tolley finds my essay irritating. It is not so clear that he finds it as unpersuasive as he originally claims, since he is "prepared to go along with the identification of the male figure . . . as Gog," and accepts the claim that "Blake may be alluding to" the new Jerusalem in the female figure. That grants my argument a fair amount of what it claims, and I could simply thank Tolley for his grudging and discourteous support and leave it at that. But he raises enough interesting questions that I welcome the opportunity to both answer him and develop further aspects of my own argument.

Tolley's complaints about the reproduction have some justification. The original photograph is of good quality, and the reproduction is in most respects up to Blake's usual high standard, but there has been a little trimming along the edges. All I can do is confirm that the reading given in the essay of the letters on the scroll at bottom left, hypothetical though it be in some cases, is the best I can do, with one exception. Inadequate proofing on my part allowed the omission of an apostrophe between the capital "L" and "G" of the third line.

It is not clear whether Tolley doubts my reading of the word "GOG," or simply doubts whether it was Blake who wrote it. On the first question, I can only reiterate that it looks like "GOG" to me, and that hypothesis helps explain the hardware at the bottom of the design. On the second question, I was careful in the essay not to make a categorical assertion that Blake himself wrote the word. I believe that he did, but there remains the remote possibility that we are dealing with a case analogous to the informed interpretations of plates in copy D of *Europe*. In any case, the name seems genuinely explanatory, and I can think of no reason why anyone should write on the design a number that so carefully follows the outline of a figure. A glance ahead to the *Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"* will show that there too names have a strong tendency to follow the outlines of the bodies to which they refer. The

evidence available suggests that the inscription reads "GOG," and that Blake wrote it, though whether at the time of executing the drawing or at some later date I shall not attempt to decide.

Having rejected, in whichever mode, my reading of the brief inscription that is clearly visible, Tolley wishes to find one that is hidden in the slight lines below the right corner of the woman's hem. I cannot see such a text in the photograph, nor did I see one while looking at the original drawing. Perhaps another pair of eyes will have better luck.

Another point on which Tolley expresses doubts is the date of the design. Butlin writes simply "A typical wash drawing of the 1780s." On stylistic grounds that dating seems appropriate, and I see no reason to question it. Tolley refers to the possibility of finding "better information" about this drawing; that would be pleasant, but for the moment we must work with what we have.

Having objected to my use of obscure biblical commentary, Tolley finds fault with note 7 for potentially misleading readers, and for an inappropriate reference. He has part of a point here. The essential part of my note, that the commentary on Ezekiel quoted in the essay was published by 1710, is correct. But the note does imply that the completed commentary was first published in 1811 and that, as Tolley points out, is incorrect. My error originated in the ambiguity of the account of Henry in the *DNB*, which does not give the date of the first complete edition, and so permitted my misapprehension. However, Darlow and Moule also fail to give the date of the first complete edition, and do not list the edition of 1721 which Tolley owns. In fact, their account, which was very likely part of the original edition of 1903, reads like a brief synopsis of the *DNB* account, which was published not long before that. In addition, the "Preface to First Edition" of Darlow and Moule makes it clear that "Commentaries are omitted, unless they contain a continuous text," so that their work is not a reliable guide to the world of biblical commentary. So I apologize for the potential of my note to mislead, albeit in a direction irrelevant to the essay, and I probably should have consulted Darlow and Moule, though in this case they would not have helped very much. On another issue they were helpful; as if to counter the charge that I used overly obscure material (Mede? Pareus? Newton? Lowth?) Darlow and Moule call Henry's work the "most popular of English commentaries."

The question of the spiked crown is a real and interesting one which I neglected in the essay. As so often in art the meaning of a particular motif is largely determined by the context. Crowns in Blake's work frequently bear negative connotations; they are signs of kingship, or of a variety of often negative allegorical functions based on the notion of power. In the *Night Thoughts* draw-

ings, for instance, Young's Oppression, Life, Earth, Fortune, and Eternity are all figured as crowned women (NT 22, 105, 106, 185, 210, 435, 436), as is the Great Whore (NT 345). But a very different tradition is recorded in "To Spring" (E 408), where Spring is invited to put his "golden crown" upon the head of the "love-sick land" in token of celestial marriage. This tradition appears again in *The Book of Thel*, where "he that loves the lowly," and has bound his "nuptial bands" around her breast, has also given the Clod of Clay "a crown that none can take away" (E 5). I believe that the new Jerusalem's crown is a sign of her adornment as a bride, in accord with this Blakean symbolism of the 1780s.

It is time to turn to Tolley's central objection to my essay, which is to the "strange methodology" he intuitively behind my daftness. That methodology, though that is much too grand a term, simply accepts and articulates further Blake's own understanding of his procedure. This is not to claim that he consciously thought things through in exactly this way on each occasion.

Blake's several comments on the work of inventing a design (e.g., "All but Names of Persons & Places is Invention" [E 650], the note on *The Ancient Britons* [E 542-45], *A Vision of The Last Judgment* passim) point to the model of a two-stage process, which begins usually from a text, and then organizes and/or transforms that to produce a virtual or second-order text. Such a virtual text enables Blake both to distance himself in whatever direction he chooses from the values, implicit or explicit, embodied in the initial text, and to produce a structure which can articulate and control the interrelationships between figures in the completed design.

Perhaps the most significant text on this matter is Blake's statement that "what Critics call The Fable is Vision itself" (E 554). I believe that "Fable" is here Blake's term for what I have defined as the virtual or second-order text, and that "Vision" is his term for the total meaning of that Fable, which I would define as the product of both the pictorial realization of the second-order text and the relationships between that and the initiating text.

In the case of the present drawing, I reconstructed a typologically based second-order text which combined elements from Ezekiel with elements from Revelation to produce a narrative or Fable which brought Gog and the new Jerusalem into immediate relationship with each other. Tolley accuses me of jumping a "wide stretch of narrative" in going from Gog as described in Revelation 20 to the descent of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. A central purpose of the essay was to sketch in a background of typologically based exegesis which bridged that apparent gap by seeing an analogy with the sequence in Ezekiel which moves from Gog to the description of the temple of the Lord. Tolley seems to believe that "all one needs is a Bible with marginal references,"

and so protests that "Scripturally, there is no authority for having Jerusalem descending into a confused rabble . . ." But a typological reading of scripture can produce such a scene, and in fact did so in the sixteenth-century tapestry which I described briefly in the essay. Perhaps if Tolley had paid more attention to typology, which was the point of my use of the "obscure," he might not have been so scandalized by my exposition of the "obvious."

The kind of typologically based structure that I reconstruct has its roots in the Protestant tradition of commentary on the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, and I sketched in something of that commentary. I did not claim that Blake had read any specific portion of it, but he certainly might have, and I would claim that that way of thinking formed part of his intellectual weaponry.

Blake saw the Bible as "the Great Code of Art" (E 274) because it provided "every pathetic story possible to happen. . . / All that can happen to Man in his pilgrimage of seventy years" (E 161), and the defeat of Gog and the revelatory descent of the new Jerusalem are two such basic events. Such stories have a tendency to move into and shape Blake's imagery, just as they form the foundation for many of his designs. Among the texts that Tolley suggests might have been related to the drawing under discussion is "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" (E 31-32). There is indeed an analogy between the drawing and the poem, and it exists because Blake probably had the descent of the new Jerusalem in mind as the archetype behind the "opening morn" of the poem, and the defeat of Gog and his armies as the archetype behind the fallen and the "bones of the dead" (cf. Ezekiel 39:4-16). I do not think that the poem sheds much direct light on the drawing, but both seem structured out of the same basic images.

Tolley's suggestion that Blake "may be alluding to" the new Jerusalem, but "his real subject may well be Truth or Wisdom," raises several issues and problems. To bring Gog, a historically oriented figure from prophecy, into relation with figures from moral allegory is in itself fraught with difficulty, and is to substitute Allegory for "The Fable [that] is Vision itself." The notion of the "real subject" of a design is difficult in a way that can be illustrated by looking at Blake's description of Number IV of *A Descriptive Catalogue*: "A Spirit vaulting from a cloud to turn and wind a fiery Pegasus—Shakspeare. The Horse of Intellect is leaping from the cliffs of Memory and Reasoning; it is a barren Rock: it is also called the Barren Waste of Locke and Newton" (E 546). Specific meanings are here fitted into a structure of imaginative action derived from contemplation of a poetic text. But is the "real subject" to be described as "A Spirit vaulting from a cloud to turn and wind a fiery Pegasus," or as "The Horse of Intellect is leaping from the cliffs of Memory and Reasoning"?

I would argue that the confounding of Gog by the descent of the new Jerusalem is the visionary Fable that gives center to the meaning of the design. Having recognized that Fable, we can if we wish proceed to allegorize it into a variety of contexts, as Blake himself did when he wrote that "Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion" (E 203). In the essay I explored briefly the contemporary political context as one possible meaning that could be fitted into the structure; certainly others are possible, and if Tolley wishes, in effect, to call Jerusalem Truth or Wisdom, I am content, though I hope he would allow Liberty as another name. As Blake wrote in a different but related context, "Tell me the Acts, O historian, and leave me to reason upon them as I please" (E 544).

Tolley suggests several designs with which I might have compared the design I discussed. At some level such comparisons can be very helpful, but too often easy analogies between surface elements leave the underlying structure of a design in darkness, as I have argued elsewhere happened with the color print known as *Hecate*. I therefore resist what seem premature attempts to get at the Vision by seeing every motif in a design in terms of Blakean motifs from other works. Specifically, the suggestion that I should have related this design to the Resurrection designs (nos. 1, 264) in the *Night Thoughts* series I find unhelpful. Both show a male, Jesus; the first shows him ascending, the position of the legs making the upward, gravity-defying surge quite clear (see Janet Warner, *Blake and the Language of Art*, 122-49). In contrast, the new Jerusalem, though the position of her arms is similar to that of the arms of Jesus in NT 1, has her left leg bent underneath her at the knee; the figure has no upward moving energy at all. The position of Gog in the design, moving and leaning towards the left, strongly implies that the female figure is descending and displacing him from the center. *Night Thoughts* 264, the second of Tolley's suggested comparisons, shows how Blake handles a figure in process of "manifesting;" it represents Jesus' head, arms, and upper torso emerging out of darkness towards the viewer. It bears no similarity at all to the drawing I discuss. Comparison with the account of the descent of Jesus in the Clouds of Ololon would seem equally unhelpful.

I thank Tolley for his commentary, but for the time being I stand by both my method and my reading of this particular work. I look forward with interest to whatever interpretation Tolley may in the future offer of this "obscure drawing" — though it is a moot point whether that adjective remains appropriate.

Blake, Context and Ideology

Stewart Crehan

Stuart Peterfreund's review of my *Blake in Context*, *Blake*, 19 (winter 1985-86), shows, once again, that while the liberal text can be encompassed and "deconstructed" by the Marxist text, the Marxist text can only be ignored or misread by the liberal text. Peterfreund begins by stating that writers such as Bronowski, Schorer, "and above all, Erdman," have already dealt with the social and historical context of Blake's poetry and art, "but not, apparently, to Crehan's satisfaction." Although I do not say so in the book, I did not find Bronowski's pioneering study satisfactory, though it was one of my starting points. Erdman's work was an inspiration, as will be evident from the references, and the fact that I followed Erdman in foregrounding the phrase "Republican Art," used as the title for chapter 8. The tone of Peterfreund's comment implies, however, that Bronowski, Schorer and Erdman have closed the case on the context issue, a fear I myself began to harbor until I realized that some areas (especially that of ideology) still needed to be explored, and that new approaches were possible. But Peterfreund oversteps the bounds of academic propriety when he attributes to me the view that "the discussion of Blake's artistic form and practice has been dominated by 'formalists' such as Erdman and Anne K. Mellor (see pp. 240-45), who hold power in the academy and insist that the ideology in Blake's art be de-emphasized or ignored outright." In the pages cited, Anne K. Mellor is not even mentioned, and nowhere do I attach the label "formalist" to Erdman, or to Mellor. Indeed, my criticism of Mellor's approach (pp. 260-62) is that it is not formalist enough: "Such a loose, generalising approach, which interprets 'the bounding line or enclosed form' as the work of an oppressive reason," fails to appreciate the fact that meaning, execution and design in Blake are subtly and necessarily interwoven" (p. 261). As for David Erdman, in a personal letter to me dated 21 January 1985, he graciously said of my book that it would help others writing on Blake "to get a better sense of Blake's context," and that "All of us who study and teach Blake will benefit — and our students especially — from your book. Thank you for writing it!" Had I regarded Erdman as some kind of establishment enemy, as Peterfreund tries to insinuate, it is highly unlikely that he would have responded so favorably.