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D I S C U S S I O N

## The Allegorical Female Figure: She Cometh With Clouds

Michael J. Tolley

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IV. AMSP, 1983. [For Blake entries see pp. 992-993 in this issue.] The more extensive reviews in this annotated bibliography are cited separately in part IV, where this volume is referred to in abbreviated form as "ECCB" (1981).<sup>10</sup>

10. Brown, David Blayney. "The Romantic Tradition: William Blake to Robin Tanner." *The Prints of England, 1790-1930: A Private Collection*. Ed. Cris Bartley and Susan Ridyard. Cambridge, Cambs.: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1985. 40-69. [Works by Blake, Flaxman, and Palmer were included in this section (753-108). An exhibition which drew on the holdings of the Robin Luder 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. Laura Rabe. London: Murray, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P. for the English Association, 1984. 277-307. See pp. 280-84 for a summary review of 1981 Blake 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. Laura Rabe. London: Murray, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P. for the English Association, 1985. 277-307. See pp. 278-81 for Vincent Newey's summary review.

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## DISCUSSION

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*with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought*

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### The Allegorical Female Figure: She Cometh With Clouds

Michael J. Tolley

Christopher Heppner's article on an obscure drawing, in *Blake*, 20 (summer 1986), is given an over-confident title: "Blake's 'The New Jerusalem Descending': A Drawing (Butlin #92) Identified." After reading it, I find myself unpersuaded about almost every submission of importance that he makes, even the new reading "GOG" for what was formerly read as "525." I am, however, prepared to go along with the identification of the male figure at the lower left of the design as Gog, because there is nothing inherently implausible about it. Whether Blake wrote the inscription seems still doubtful; the proposed analogy, capital letters in *The Making of Magna Charta*, is suggestive but unpersuasive, both because of their relative thinness of line and because there the lettering is deliberately archaic. What I cannot accept is Heppner's strange methodology. He explains the obvious (Gog in Ezekiel is to be related to Gog in Revelation and might have contemporary political implications for an artist in the late eighteenth century) by the obscure (eighteenth-century biblical commentary), ignores obvious difficulties, blinds us with irrelevant light (Dürer's and Duver's treatments of the New Jerusalem), and fails to present or consider adequately the necessary evidence.

What is first required in an exercise of this kind is a clear description of the design. Heppner's description is perfunctory and cannot be checked thoroughly against the reproduction, which is itself obscure and has even been trimmed. This unfortunate fact is crucial, because one simply has to be able to see all the lettering on the book in the bottom left corner of the page before one may propose a new reading. What one can see does not tally very happily with what Heppner claims to have seen after a "close look at the original drawing." Until I can take such a close look myself, or see reliable photographs, I am not about to propose a new reading. Unfortunately, the reproduction in Butlin (plate 102 of *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, Yale UP, 1981) is far too small to be of help; all one can say about this photograph and the one which accompanies the article is that they make one wonder why so early a date is given for the drawing. However, apart from this inscrip-

tion, one would like to know exactly what objects are in the lower part of the design, and whether there is an inscription, perhaps a monogram, just below the corner of the woman's hem, at right.

A thesis should be tested against objections. Heppner grants that the New Jerusalem does not descend in Revelation 20, when Gog is described, but can claim only that this narrative "leads directly to the Last Judgment and the descent in chapter 21 of 'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'" This is to jump a wide stretch of narrative. Scripturally, there is no authority for having Jerusalem descending into a confused rabble and so Heppner argues that "Blake is not illustrating Revelation and Ezekiel directly, but is rather illustrating—or creating—a prophetic text of his own, based on, but not limited by, the language of those earlier prophets." This proposition may not be as daft as it sounds, but one needs a much stronger reason for advancing it than any of those adduced by Heppner; it has an air of desperation. Is Blake really, to quote Heppner again, "creating a new but implicit text, founded on the prophets but constituting a new virtual text of his own invention?" The question is begged but not answered.

"New Jerusalem" seems too narrow an identification: Blake may be alluding to her, but his real subject may well be Truth or Wisdom; the spiked crown suits such a figure better than it might Jerusalem as a bride. The design seems very close in spirit to "The Voice of the Ancient Bard." I am surprised that Heppner did not relate it to two Resurrection designs in the *Night Thoughts* series, 1 (31E, The 1797 Night IV Title Page) and 264; supposing that we can find better information about this drawing, it should be possible to read it (not necessarily as a resurrection subject, of course) in a thoroughly Blakean manner; it has some affinities, also, with the account of the descent of Jesus in the Clouds of Ololon at the end of *Milton*. This is an interesting question, because one is bound to wonder whether the woman is "coming in the clouds" (in which case, why is she a woman?) or simply dispelling them (in which case, why is she to be seen as "descending," rather than, say, "manifesting herself"?).

In note 7, Heppner's remarks on the Matthew Henry commentary may be misleading to *Blake* readers. He implies that the "completed commentary" was not available until 1811. My own complete edition is dated 1721. What happened, as Darlow and Moule explain, is that "Before his death he had reached the end of Acts, and the New Testament was afterwards finished by a number of Nonconformist divines. . . . The edition of 1811 contains additional matter from Henry's manuscripts." Darlow and Moule, incidentally, is usually the place to go for this kind of information, not *DNB*. See *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English*



*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-