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D I S C U S S I O N

Finishing Blake

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conversation of antiquaries, booksellers, and engravers. What can hardly be doubted is that Blake's identification of Maldon as a center of sacrificial religion was encouraged by a report that the name of this ancient town alluded to a cross on a hill. Blake had found many passages in the Old Testament which allowed him to equate other biblical mountains with Calvary, and Blake scholarship is familiar with the many variants of that hilltop crucifixion in which Orc howls "time after time" on Mount Atlas. As he moved from biblical to British names, Blake saw analogues to Calvary in the Tyburn execution-place and the Snowdon of Gray's "The Bard"; and he enlisted other British mountains, from Penmaenmawr to "the Rocky Peak of Derbyshire," as equivalents for such places as the mountain-top of Genesis 22 and the Ebal of Deuteronomy 27. It was altogether natural, in this context, that he should attach some importance to a town with druidical and Roman connections whose name was translated by one authority as "Marshill" and by another as "Crosshill." When one adds to this the fact that Sammes gave "Hesus" as an alternative name for the war-god to whom sacrifices were made at Maldon,[21] it becomes clear that the little port on the Essex coast would have for Blake a range of associations which made it a symbol of manifold significance. Maldon took its place, therefore, in Blake's apocalyptic vision of that primeval catastrophe which divided Jerusalem from Albion and released Satan "in all the pomp of War." In the age which "began to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command," the "Oak Groves of Maldon" had been "the Habitations of the Druids, and their places of religious worship." Although the "reasoning historian" might doubt their existence, the stone circles beside "Maldens Cove" had been the "Temples and Altars" where "the Druids golden Knife / Rioted in human gore."[22]

[1]Ruthven Todd, "William Blake and the Eighteenth-Century Mythologists," in *Tracks in the Snow: Studies in English Science and Art* (London: Grey Walls Press, 1946); Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1947) 129–32, 397–99; David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1954) 196–97; Peter F. Fisher, "Blake and the Druids," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 58 (1959): 589–612; A. L. Owen, *The Famous Druids* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) 224–36; S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence RI: Brown UP, 1965) 108–10; Glenda Carr, *William Owen Pugh* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1983) 183–91; Morton D. Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake's* Jerusalem (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 160–61, 196–97; Dena Taylor, "A Note on William Blake and the Druids of Primrose Hill," *Blake* 17 (1983–84): 104–05.

[2]See plate *c* of *America*, line 1, and plate 66 of *Jerusalem*, lines 13 and 57.

[3]Damon 260.

[4]William Blake, *The Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971) 679, 826–27.

[5]Paley 76, 198.

[6]Thomas Hearne, *Johannis Confratris et Monachi Glastoniensis Chronica sive Historia de Rebus Glastoniensibus*, 2 vols. (Oxonii: e Theatro Sheldoniano, 1726) 2: 570–77; J. J. Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Harding and Lepard, 1826) lxxvii–xcvi.

[7]John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, part 1 (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1971) 334–35.

[8]Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, *The History of England*, trans. and continued to the accession of George II, by N. Tindal, with the reign of George II by T. Smollett, 5 vols. (London: John Harrison, 1789) 1: 104.

[9]David Worrall, "Blake's *Jerusalem* and the Visionary History of Britain," *Studies in Romanticism* 16 (1977): 189–216.

[10]John Beer, *Blake's Humanism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1968) 255.

[11]Aylett Sammes, *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata: or, the Antiquities of Ancient Britain* (London: Tho. Rycroft, 1676).

[12]Erdman 30.

[13]Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex*, 2 vols. (London: J. Osborne and others, 1768), rpt. with an introduction by G. H. Martin (Wakefield, West Yorkshire: E. P. Publishing, 1978) 1: v–xviii.

[14]Morant 1, 1978 intro, ii.

[15]Morant 1, History and Antiquities of Colchester, 11–12.

[16]Morant 1, History and Antiquities of Colchester, 13–15.

[17]Morant 1, History and Antiquities of Colchester, 28, 34.

[18]Morant 1, History and Antiquities of Colchester, 44.

[19]Morant 1, The Hundred of Dengey, 327–28.

[20]Paley 1–7.

[21]Worrall 207.

[22]William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 246, 279, 281, 484, 578–79, 650, 689, 706, 742; Morant 1: 12.

DISCUSSIONS

Finishing Blake

Paul Mann

Since Peter Otto's response to the tandem articles written by Robert Essick and myself about Blake's possible production plans for *The Four Zoas* is not precisely an attack, this will not be precisely a defense.[1] I had proposed that at some stage of his work on *The Four Zoas*, Blake toyed more or less seriously with the idea of publishing the poem in letterpress, in a format rather like the *Night Thoughts* edition he did with Edwards. Essick nicely modified this hypothesis by proposing that at some earlier stage Blake seems to have experimented with producing the entire work in intaglio, then directed the project toward letterpress with intaglio etched and/or engraved illustrations, then finally suspended publication plans, though without abandoning work on the

manuscript for some time. Otto has no objection to the first two hypothetical working stages; indeed, they seem hardly to interest him. It is our rather plain and hardly more than descriptive claim that *The Four Zoas* became for Blake "a working manuscript unrelated to any specific production intentions" (Essick 18:219; see also Mann 18:208) that inspires Otto's response, or rather his *swerve*, his shift of the discussion to an entirely different level. The course of this swerve seems to me to exemplify one of the most characteristic moves in Blake studies: the dematerialization of Blake's work.

I should not speak for Essick here, but I will suggest that his extensive studies of Blake's production methods and the conditions of Blake's works provide us with a wealth of materials for a kind of interpretation that still remains largely unexplored, perhaps even by Essick himself: an interpretation in which Blake is no longer primarily a poet(-prophet) or inspired illustrator, nor even precisely a composite artist, as the current compromise has it, but first and foremost someone as committed to working *in* his materials as any sculptor or painter, someone whose work was absolutely identified with his *work*. (The analogy here would be with Rodin, were it not otherwise so imprecise.) For me, the process of seeing *The Four Zoas* as a manuscript in which Blake was not only investigating poetic and graphic possibilities but also his commitments to different material forms and modes of publication, was a process of learning to see the work in the work. I have elsewhere called this double work, this work whose first goal is to manifest and epitomize a kind of work, Blake's "production-aesthetic," a rather clumsy phrase meant to do nothing more than mark his deliberate insistence on the in-sistence of imaginative labor in concrete materials and methods.[2] But one need hardly take any of this into consideration to see the point of our articles: they are quite straightforward attempts to examine the manuscript's material conditions and to explore the possibilities for publication that those conditions imply; that is, to grasp the manuscript precisely *as* manuscript, as I emphasized at the end of my article.

But the situation of the manuscript, of any manuscript, is a loaded critical issue. We inhabit an age when theories of displacement and supplementarity, for instance, lend a certain cachet to the romantic fragment or unfinished work. They need no longer be dismissed as failures, as an earlier (by implication: benighted) age would have done. Our notions of poetic unity are less rigorous, more liberal, if they survive at all: now we tend to grant a strange integrity to the fragment and distrust the unity of the masterpiece. It is in this discursive environment that Otto's defense of *The Four Zoas* takes place. His task is to rescue the manuscript from those mechanistic critics (he rounds up the usual suspects, Frye and Bentley) for whom the manuscript was the mark of a magnificent, even a tragic failure. So much the better that *The Four Zoas* is a work *about* unfinishedness, that there is a nice analogy or perhaps even homology between unfinished work and unfinished world. The work's unfinished state is—what other word is more fitting than this piece of romantic tradecraft?—*organic* to its matter, its theme, its narrative order, its purpose. Otto suspends this argument from a distinction borrowed from Balachandra Rajan:

> Incomplete poems are poems which ought to be completed. Unfinished poems are poems which ask not to be finished, which carry within themselves the reasons for arresting or effacing themselves as they do. If an unfinished poem were to be finished it would ideally erase its own significance.[3]

This, for Otto, is the key to the scriptures. *The Four Zoas* is no longer a failure, an unsightly blemish on the beautiful body of Blake's *oeuvre*; it is no longer unfinished but, so to speak (here writing begins to generate properly Janus-like neologisms:) un/finished. ". . . Blake left his creation myth in an unfinished condition because this was the only form which is appropriate for the effort of a fallen self to recount the origins, history, and regeneration of the world" (146).

We are now in a position to chart the swerve. It tends to occur in the spaces between Otto's paragraphs. Here he is just finishing his surveillance of Essick's three-phase hypothesis:

> . . . It is with the status that we ascribe to *The Four Zoas* in the third and final stage of its development that I am concerned.
>
> Discussion of *The Four Zoas* has been dominated by a strong desire to retrieve the outlines of a poem (*Vala*), or potential poem, that lies somewhere behind its pages. This approach assumes that the present poem represents a "major cultural disaster," "a tantalizing and tragic failure," and that it would be irresponsible to suggest "a reversion to 'the poem itself.'" This position is supported by the belief that poems should be unified, coherent, and formally complete. It also draws on the trope that couples incompletion in the present with completion in some other realm. As a result, the wealth of hypotheses about the possible form of *The Four Zoas* in the "first" and "second" stages of the poem's development is coupled with a relative unanimity of response to the third.
>
> It seems to me that there are cogent thematic and contextual reasons to entertain the possibility at least that when Blake finally stopped working on the manuscript he believed that the form taken by the work was the only one that the subject matter could assume. Or, to phrase this in a less intentionalist idiom: the (unfinished) form of the work embodies the poem's insights about the nature of the fallen world and of fallen perceptions (144).

And he then goes on to explain why it must stay that way.

The swerve is actually rather subtle, at least partly because it is entirely tacit. A metaphysics or poetics of unfinishedness may seem appropriate (in the case of *Four Zoas* criticism, it is certainly an improvement), but it also marks an appropriation of the work as "text." In Otto's argument the movement from work to text, from

material manuscript to dematerialized "poem" is plotted something like this: consideration of the manuscript's material conditions and production "intentions"[4] are dangerous: they can lead one to confound the unfinished with the failed. (We did nothing of the kind.) Hence these material considerations must be marginalized or left behind: the unfinishedness of the manuscript must become the sign of some greater purpose, some deeper (non-)structure, some truer meaning that can be grasped interpretively. Or rather, first of all, theoretically. Issues of production must always be read into this theory of unfinishedness; *any* attention to the material condition of the manuscript must be contained by the poetics of the unfinished. Now it is unfinishedness that is the "end of the art"; now the manuscript is complete in its incompleteness. Its material chaos is rendered quite literally *ideal*. The urgency with which Otto frames descriptions and speculations about the material work is exemplary of the persistently text-centered orientation of Blake studies.

What this swerve really entails is a movement from the production of a finally unfinished manuscript to the production of a *finished discourse* of unfinishedness. In Otto's argument completion must occur *at some level*—"in some other realm," as he puts it: a realm that turns out to be that of criticism. The critical recounting, the representation of unfinishedness as ideal is meant to rescue the poem-cum-text from its insufficiency, its embarrassing failure. We witness a movement from interpretation to interpretation, from a narrative of failure to a narrative of success, all taking place strictly at the level of discourse *about* the "poem." What is more, the movement from failed manuscript to ideally unfinished text must pass through the dematerialization of the manuscript because there is, in fact, *no inherent reason* why, if the poem was *essentially* unfinished, Blake could not have devised a form for its publication as such. We are faced here with the crudest instance of the fallacy of imitative form—the sort of instance that makes it a fallacy. There is no *necessary* relation, no true marriage between the unfinished text and the unfinished world in the text: for Otto, the condition of the manuscript is merely an image, an ornament, a suggestion, a formal hint for a reading that is, at bottom, in no way dependent upon it. In the end, then, the discourse of unfinishedness *replaces* the unfinished work: it becomes the ideal form of the poem's publication, a solid critical framework on which to hang the manuscript's rags.

The transubstantiation of work into text is most evident in the movement from a notion of Blake working on the manuscript to what Otto calls the "curious fact that the *narrator* is himself an 'effect' of the *story* that he recounts" (144, my emphases). Once Otto replaces artist with narrator and manuscript with story his work is in a sense complete (so is Blake's); and the machinery of interpretation can take over. Now "the narrator is . . . contained within his own [unfinished] poem," which is contained within a finished and finishing reading of the poem. Otto's point is, in one sense, well taken. In order to complete the narration of the fallen world the fallen narrator would have had to stand outside it, and that is impossible. But what we must mark here is that the "real" narrator of this ideally unfinished text is the critic. Not Blake but Otto. The issue is one of mediation: in order for the poem to enter discourse, for there to be any commentary on it at all, *someone* must stand "outside" it; an outside must somehow be established, an archimedean fulcrum for levering the manuscript into Blake studies must be found. There must be some (tacit; or not so tacit: editorial) means for reproducing the manuscript as text, and critical structures for determining a discourse of unfinishedness. Someone, in short, must finish it. If the "narrator" cannot ethically or logically or epistemologically stand outside then the critic will (tacitly) do it for him. Otto's narrative is generated precisely outside the fallen textual world which, he argues, one cannot rightly stand outside, in relations that must be the products of critical discourse itself but must always conceal this mediating agency behind a rhetoric of unmediated internalization.

So the "story" of unfinishedness is also the story of dematerialization, which is also the story of the manuscript's rematerialization as a narrated narration, a completely unmediated internal world completely mediated by an external observer. We have read this story before: Blake himself tells it in the parable of the Ancient Poets, which today we must come to read as one of many Blakean parables of Blake criticism:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could percieve.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under its mental deity.
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood.
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had orderd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (E 38)[5]

Like Goliath championing David against Goliath.

It is certainly true that calling *The Four Zoas* a failure was once a trope of dismissal, but the trope of un/finishedness is hardly a solution to the strange and irreducible inaccessibility of the manuscript. Indeed, it amounts to about the same thing. Just as earlier readers of *The Four Zoas* tried "to retrieve a . . . potential poem

that lies somewhere behind its pages," so Otto tries to retrieve an ideally unfinished poem from somewhere behind the manuscript; the difference is that the unfinishedness of earlier critics was "bad" while his is "good." There is a certain identity between these earlier critics and Otto: in either case we end up without the manuscript. But it is precisely the manuscript that is at issue, precisely the manuscript that is least recuperable by either a metaphysics of unity or a metaphysics of incompletion; it is precisely the manuscript that *has never been read*. If the only way to get rid of the notion of failure is by abandoning the manuscript or recuperating it into some ideal state, then perhaps we must learn to live with the idea of failure. In fact, at the level of (the) work itself, the failure of *The Four Zoas* might be a lot less troubling than it is out here in critical discourse. Perhaps, for Blake, failure might not have been so unthinkable a judgment on a work that at one or more stages of development was clearly intended for publication but never published. What's so terrible about failure? It might be less of a problem for a working artist, for whom in a sense nothing can ever be wasted, than it is for a discourse whose responsibility is always in some part the determination and maintenance of canons. What we have in Otto is one instance of the general attempt to recuperate that failure so that the poem can exhibit a distinctly literary *value*. What we do not yet have is a way to read *The Four Zoas*.

But whose will be the final state-ment?

[1]Paul Mann, "The Final State of *The Four Zoas*," *Blake* 18 (1985): Robert N. Essick, *The Four Zoas*: Intention and Method," *Blake* 18 (1985): 204–200; Peter Otto, "Final States, Finished Forms, and *The Four Zoas*," *Blake* 20 (1987): 144–47.

[2]It is easy to dislike writers who use footnotes to advertise their other works, but I promised to be brief here and can only do so by glossing this article thus: See my "Apocalypse and Recuperation: Blake and the Maw of Commerce," *ELH* (Spring 1985):1–32; and my "Editing *The Four Zoas*," *Pacific Coast Philology* XVI.1 (1981), which may in fact anticipate Otto's argument.

[3]Otto 144, citing Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1985) 14.

[4]Essick defines this word more precisely than Otto: "Given the practical exigencies of image production, as well as Blake's insistence on the radical unity of conception and execution, it is reasonable to assume that the preliminary stages in the development of an image *may* reveal the medium in which Blake intended to produce the final form of that image" (216).

[5]*The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly revised edition (Garden City NY: Anchor Books, 1982).

Is There A Poem in This Manuscript?

Peter Otto

As I happen to agree with the devils that "Opposition is True Friendship," it was with some pleasure that I sat down to read Paul Mann's response to my own response to articles by himself and Robert Essick. One of the pleasures of argument is the transformative force that can sometimes transform devils into angels, Leviathans into Pipers and what is down into what is up. I was fascinated by my own transformation from an Antipodean Blake scholar (one who comes from "down under," as popular geography would have it) to a figure who had somehow attained a prominence from which he was able to keep the "key to the scriptures," undertake the "surveillance" of Essick's hypothesis, assert that what is "must stay that way," and at the same time represent "the central movement of Blake criticism." A metamorphosis indeed!

As these preliminary remarks might suggest, the terms of Mann's response are broadly homologous with those used by Blake in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The high ground of authority and the dematerialized world of the spirit are claimed by the angels, while the nether world, the world of fact and action, is claimed by the devils. Mann believes that he occupies the world of material fact (he deals with the physical manuscript), while I along with Blake criticism as a whole have imposed my "phantasy" on the poem. It is, however, not the "phantasy," at least not in the first instance, that Mann is concerned about. (In fact, he is ready to affirm that my hypothesis is "in the case of *Four Zoas* criticism . . . certainly an improvement.") What bothers Mann is the swerve that he detects in my reply and in Blake studies as a whole away from the physical material manuscript towards some form of "ideal" text. His later and contradictory assertion that my hypothesis regarding the form of *The Four Zoas* does not assist with the reading of the poem is a conclusion derived from his analysis of that swerve.

In responding to Mann and Essick's illuminating hypothesis regarding Blake's production intentions for *The Four Zoas*, I proposed that we consider *The Four Zoas* in its final state as an unfinished rather than an incomplete poem. In contradistinction to views of the poem that maintain, for example, that Blake abandoned the manuscript because he did not foresee the Peace of Amiens (Erdman) or because of some personal failing (Bentley), I argued that the poem is arrested by forces which are intrinsic to its subject matter. Mann begins his critique of this position by detailing a logical paradox or conundrum.