

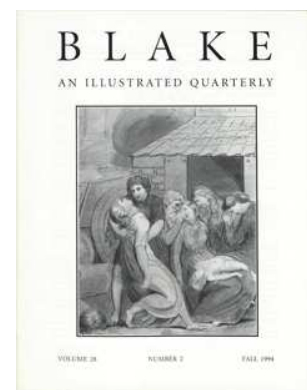
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Michael Ferber, *The Poetry of William Blake*

John E. Grant

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 28, Issue 2, Fall 1994, pp. 71-77



Mina. ([London?]: T. Cadell, 1788). Heath reports, apparently on the basis of an unbound impression in the British Museum, that this book contains 1 pl. by James Heath after Stothard. No author recorded; no copy seen; not found in ESTC.

Richardson, Samuel. *Sir Charles Grandison* ([London?]: J. F. Dove, nd). According to Heath, published c. 1824 with 1 pl. by Charles Heath after Stothard. Heath's information based on an unbound impression in the Royal Academy; no copy seen.

Scott, Walter. *The Vision of Don Roderick* ([London?]: White and Co., 1812). At least 1 pl. by Charles Heath after Stothard. No copy listed in NUC or BM cat.; information based on unbound impressions (British Museum and Essick collection). Perhaps published in some collected ed. of Scott.

Tatler, *The*. 6 vols. (London: C. and J. Rivington, C. Bathurst, 1786). According to Heath, at least 3 pls. by James Heath after Stothard. NUC locates a copy in the Huntington Library, but I have not been able to find it. Perhaps the same as the following work recorded in ESTC: [*The Tatler*]. *The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff*. 6 vols. (London: C. Bathurst, J. Buckland, J. Rivington and Sons, W. Owen, R. Horsfield [and 21 others in London], 1786).

Michael Ferber, *The Poetry of William Blake*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991. xiv + 120 pp. \$4.95.

Reviewed by JOHN E. GRANT

This affordable volume is the only answer to the question: what is the best book-length introduction to Blake the writer for undergraduates and other common readers? It is short, readable, and reliable, and engages in a fresh, engaging, and verifiable manner *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and key poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* that every reader enjoys rereading. Particularly admirable is Ferber's plain style and unperplexed account of what Blake was about. Seldom are the interpretations original, which is right, for an introduction, but hardly anything here sounds like a committee opinion. Whereas some other recent accounts are indifferent to the satire in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Ferber starts with the premise that Blake's work is one and shows clearly how Blake is able to blend into this medley-genre so much that is affirmative, not to be understood as subject to satirical discount. I have a few differences with Ferber's account of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* but believe it to be the best 22 page exposition that has been written.

Readers of this journal would have little use for a list of topics that seem to me right or nearly so in Ferber's easily

accessible (though unindexed) book. What I shall discuss instead are some neglected considerations that tend to support or occasionally to modify positions on key matters taken up by Ferber. Ferber's skillful exposition (20-24) of the opening poems of *Experience*, "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer," marks an advance in the literature on these *Songs*; see the writings listed at the end of this piece. Save for the essay of Frye and the books of Gillham, it seems as though the Covering Cherub must often have been guiding the expositors both in what they have noted and especially in what they have overlooked. For example, Leader, though many of his readings of later *Songs* are quite good, starts in incoherence. He controverts Hirsch's myth of "The Two Blakes," but then becomes absorbed by the interpretive discrepancies among Leavis, Bloom, Gleckner, Erdman, et al.; consequently, the reader can hardly guess where Blake was supposed to have been coming from. Quite a lot of this kind of criticism predates more recent theoretical engagements in antithetical criticism.

It would seem axiomatic that an introduction to Blake ought to be based on a thorough grasp of a key poem Blake entitled "Introduction" but indeed such accounts have been rare and sometimes so blurred by contradictory interpretations that the common reader might gather that Blake himself didn't understand what he was driving at. After considering some of the ways in which Gleckner's solution for the "two voices" in "Introduction" doesn't quite work, Larrissy (68) settles on the postmodern solution: "Better to say that the poem is completely ambiguous from beginning to end." In a future age, Blake had hoped that Earth would arise and better understanding would prevail.

Except for Gillham, no one has defined the keynote of failed relationships with which *Experience* begins as well as Ferber: "the Bard's poem has a reply, 'Earth's Answer,' which nullifies the Bard's appeal, or at least reveals the stony ground on which his appeal falls. . . . In *Innocence*, people communicate, they listen and understand; in *Experience*, they give monologues, and they misconstrue each other if they listen at all (20). "What we have in the end is a stalemate between the Bard who commands Earth to arise and the Earth who commands the Bard-as-father to set her free" (24). Though the word "command," which Ferber employs several times, does not precisely describe the rhetorical posture of either the Bard or Earth, the basic idea that it is the failure of communication between them that is, in effect, the essence of *Experience* is made abundantly clear.

The Bard's call to Earth, in the vocative: "O Earth O Earth return!" is *not* a "command"; Ferber's alternative formulation, "an appeal," is closer, but rather too depersonalized for the personification allegory in which Earth is about to respond. The Bard's call is an *exhortation* that has nothing essentially or oppressively patriarchal about it, though the authorial introduction within the poem employs a unit of vocabulary the echoes of which may have served to mis-

lead Earth and also the interpreters who have supposed she speaks gospel. The Holy Word, as seen and rearticulated by the Bard, includes in lines 8-9 the very rhyme words employed by Pope's Jupiter in the translation of Homer's *Iliad* where (VIII, 452-79) the father of gods and men sets forth the most authoritative account of ultimate power:

Who shall the sovereign of the skies control?
Not all the gods that crown the starry pole. (472-73)

Those who recognize this allusion at all are, however, expected to appreciate that the sense of the lines in Blake's poem is precisely the opposite. Jupiter's notorious pronouncement is that he won't concede an iota of control—especially to those presumptuous goddesses, Juno and Athena. The message of the Holy Word, on the contrary, is that Earth could, if she would, undo the Fall by taking charge of her own destiny. The objective conditions of the natural world should not be allowed to preclude regeneration; rightly seen, these patterns sustain life and offer promise of the fulfillment of desire.

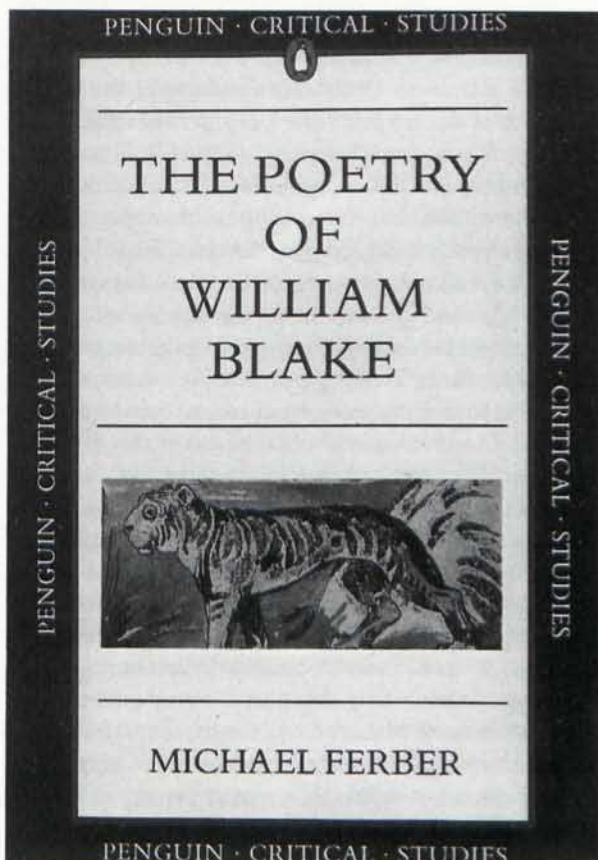
Most accounts of Earth accept her claim that she has been victimized by "the Father of the Ancient Men" but take little notice of her condition and state of mind. Ferber points out that "Earth manages only to raise up her head which is too filled with dread and despair to imagine she can do anything unaided" and in the end "commands the Bard-as-father to set her free" (24). Later Ferber contrasts Innocence with Experience, which "is marked by despair and a withdrawal into one's private self." In this context, I would again object that "commands" is not the exact word; what Earth does is to make (non-negotiable) *demands* of the sort issued by those alienated and powerless to enforce their wishes. But Ferber does well to bring out the motive of despair both in "Earth's Answer" and in Experience as a whole—though, in fact, "despair" is only literally identified (by the narrator) in one other poem, "The Clod & the Pebble," the usual sequel to "Earth's Answer."

For an evaluation of what Earth answers, the force of the allegory of "despair" as a head of grey hair can hardly be exaggerated. Blake's range of usage of "despair" shows that the term is rarely equivalent to such secular near-synonyms as dejection or depression. Despair is the condition of those in hell: Abandon all hope, ye who enter. Blake would have objected to despair as a motive for the same reason Shelley did in *Prometheus Unbound*: "Despair smothers / The struggling World, which slaves and tyrants win." (I, 576-77). For those who suppose that English Blake could never have entertained Dante's Roman Catholic conviction that those in hell have lost the good of the intellect, or that Blake was bound to give a fair hearing even to others who were in a state of despair, there is an additional consideration, an inscription on page 4 of Blake's Notebook, dated 20 January 1807 "between Two and Seven in the Evening—Despair"

(E694). In such a state, Blake's own judgment was unlikely to have been equal to his genius.

Despair has an imposing presence in some of Blake's most complex pictures, particularly *The House of Death* (Butlin no. 320, pl. 397; no. 321, pl. 398; no. 322, pl. 399), the color print derived from *Paradise Lost* XI, 477-93. The (varied) figure of Despair who stands at the right, as the minion of Death, above tripartite fallen man, was equipped by Blake with a dagger unmentioned by Milton, but perhaps derived from the Cave of Despair in *The Faerie Queene* I, ix, which appears to have an arsenal of pointed instruments (see Butlin no. 811, pl. 879 and *Blake* 8 [1974-75]: esp. 8—inaccurate in some particulars). Blake re-enlisted the figure of Despair from the color print to represent the enslaved soldier in the white line-relief etching called 'Jerusalem,' Plate 51; *Vala, Hyle and Skofeld* (Butlin no. 578, pl. 812), the frontispiece to the third chapter of *Jerusalem*. As Skofeld the figure of Despair is divested of his dagger and is manacled, shackled, and aflame—turned away from his companions in despair. No doubt it is not accidental that the fallen company of royalty, worker, and soldier presented in *Jerusalem* 51 is sandwiched between two of Blake's chief disquisitions on "Sin," in verse on plate 50, and in prose on plate 52. It should also be considered that on an earlier occasion Blake was at pains to depict the Cave of Despair episode in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. It was selected to represent one of two defining episodes for showing what Spenser himself could do in the tenth design for Gray's *The Bard* (Butlin no. 335.64). Remarkably, Spenser's large gesture of admonishment and exhortation in this picture has not been taken into account by commentators.

Because Ferber's purpose was to write briefly about Blake's poetry, he could not be expected to add to the small amount of criticism that has attempted to discuss the interaction between poetry and design in the introductory plates for *Songs of Experience*. Let us consider how the two poems are illustrated in their accompanying designs: "Introduction" presents a good match between poem and picture, whereas "Earth's Answer" presents practically no match at all. In the "Introduction," a human figure of Earth (turned away from the viewer) floats in the cosmos, awaiting the dawn that in some copies has begun to color Earth's cloud-couch. For "Earth's Answer" nothing in the poetic imagery even faintly suggests the depicted serpent or the (usual) bunch of grapes. That the (doubtless) female figure in the former design is supposed to be Blake's figure of Earth has been recognized by (*inter alia*) Wicksteed, Wellek, Hirsch, and Keynes and proven (as it were) to be Earth by Chayes. To Chayes's evidence may be added the front view of the woman on a cloud in the watercolor drawing *As If an Angel Dropped Down* (Butlin no. 547.6, pl. 595). It is even likely that, as an unnam'd form, the same woman witnessed the spiritual deed featured in the lost tempera Number VI, *A Spirit Vaulting from a Cloud* (E546) that "was done many



years ago" and was featured in Blake's exhibition. "Well said Suction that is not any proof" (E454), so let's return to matters more demonstrable.

Since the most distinguished Bard-bashers, Leavis and Bloom, were not, according to their principles of criticism, obligated to acknowledge the presence of the female Earth in the picture that is inseparable from the "Introduction" poem as Blake invariably presented it, their accounts that represent the poem as being chiefly about the Bard and his illusions are too slanted to constitute renditions of Blake's "Introduction" to Experience. But such thinking continues to influence criticism that wishes to differ from the Leavis-Bloom line. It is, for example, implicit in the words of Andrew Lincoln's editorial commentary for the new Blake Trust facsimile of the Kings College copy W of *Songs*. Lincoln can see that the personage on the sky-sofa must be Earth (and pace Erdman, a woman, not a man) but rather regrets that, situated in her place among the stars, Earth lacks the pastoral amenities once available in the Garden of Eden. Even when, as in Copy W—and actually much earlier, as in Copy E—Blake brightens the cloud and couch with yellow and in late copies awards the Earth a yellow halo, all suggestive of the dawn promised by the Bard, Lincoln feels that the space represented is too chilly and that Earth must have a right to expect and ask for more. After all, Leavis

taught that "the Holy Word" is God the Tyrant and Earth will, in the following poem, declare that she is pent up in a "den" by "Starry Jealousy." By implication: reader, don't believe your eyes; the Bard is guilty as charged: case closed.

Commentators have not attempted an unperplexed explanation for the presence of the open-mouthed serpent, the only creature depicted in "Earth's Answer," in the pictorial space at the bottom of the plate where one would expect Earth herself to appear. In late copies such as W, the serpent is awarded a halo to match that given Earth in "Introduction"; in Z Earth gets a big golden transparent halo (to see through to those dubious stars) while the front third of the serpent is bathed in sunrise (possibly to compensate for the bunch of grapes, which are lacking in this copy only.) But in every copy this design shows that "Earth's Answer" is articulated by the serpent. Damon was sure that this is the Serpent of Eden, which seems probable enough, but further assumed that it represents "the priesthood," an allegory it would require vast ingenuity to sustain in this context. Earth might indeed be giving expression to some counter-cultural ideology, but Blake never made out Rousseau to be a priest. Still the words of alienated Earth may seem to conjure up something like the following suspicion: The jealous star-god, "the father of the ancient men," must be behind the voice of the Bard. Who is he to command the wretched of the earth to return! Those grapes of joy which are (usually) held out up there out of reach will probably become the grapes of wrath.

As though to clarify the distinction, Blake designed a reprise of the issues in chapter 3 of *Jerusalem*. In plate 72, the call of "Introduction" to *Experience* is reissued: "Return, Jerusalem . . . Return / Return . . . O Albion . . . O Albion awake!" (72: 34-36, E227-28). Earlier in plate 57, we are shown "Jerusalem" entangled in a fiery net and in plate 63, Earth herself appears pathetically immobilized in a vermiculate vortex in a design also recalling the large color prints of *Satan Exulting over Eve* (Butlin nos. 291, 292, pls. 384, 389). In the following plate, *Jerusalem* 64, we see the dream of an emanation playing a game of (interpretive) liberation, but in *Jerusalem* 71 she is downcast again between the entanglements of Love and Jealousy. At the bottom of plate 72, captioned with a motto of sexual politics in reversed writing, the tail of the vermiculate serpent of "Earth's Answer" tries to grasp the "Gate" of Love. The reader is expected to recall this serpent when shown on plate 98, at the top, the identical serpent casting off its skin and thus becoming ready for the regeneration of Jerusalem in plate 99.

These late published designs review the issues as sketched much earlier in the Notebook, page 111, where "The Earth's Answer" was drafted. There the human form as Satan enacts the defiance of the serpent that is shown in "Earth's Answer" while bewhiskered God is revealed occupying the Judgment Seat, seemingly unmoved by Jesus as suppliant.

Blake reused these figures again in the *Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"* (Butlin no. 770, pl. 967) where at the top of the spiral of history, the old God lords it over Adam, Eve, and the Serpent while Jesus has descended to the Mount of Transfiguration, where he appears not only to Moses and Elias, but also to Hervey, who is prompted to visionary capacity by the two angels who seemed able only to weep in *Jerusalem* 72 (where Hervey is named, l. 52, in a most favorable context). Such a review of the ups and downs of the serpent indicates how Blake kept working the same symbolism in implied narratives while refusing to issue the premature reassurance, "That's all right," when it isn't. In the end, it may be believed, the unregenerate will be regenerated, but as far as we are shown in the words and pictures at the outset of *Experience*, the Earth still continues to turn away toward darkness.

When driven by a social agenda the interpreter may wish to argue against the pictorial and verbal evidence provided by Blake that the condition of a victim was or is or ought to be much worse than it seems in a particular representation. It should be acknowledged, however, that the condition of Earth as shown in the "Introduction", even if perhaps chilly and with no dawn actually in sight, shows no sign of actual suffering. This crucial point for a right reading of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* can be made clear by comparison with the titlepage design, which presents the most horrific Expulsion scene to be found in Blake or, indeed, anywhere in art. In early copies, both Adam and Eve hide their faces from the fire which floods the design, a holocaust leaving no room to represent the angel or his sword, to say nothing of the God behind the necessary angel. That was oppression! In the several copies of the titlepage, (eg., T, U, W) where Eve's face is shown and her mouth is open, she is undoubtedly to be supposed to be protesting her divine oppressor, more discerningly than the serpent ever does in "Earth's Answer."

There is another post-Miltonic formulation of "the starry pole" that was probably familiar enough for Blake and some of his original audience to have been conscious of it as an echo in the introductory stanzas to the Bard's call to Earth. It involves the apotheosis of the Muse of Edward Young in his 1717 poem *The Last Day*, III, 7-12; refusing to lie forever "in inglorious shades," the Muse "gains upon the starry pole." For those who recognize the allusion, the imaginative inability of Earth to arise from her "den" seems the more deplorable or pathetic. There were perhaps other Blake readers for whom "the starry pole" did not register as an echo from Milton or Pope or Young but who could recall other recent writing by Blake himself in which another woman, also a victim, suddenly raises her voice from a denunciation of her human oppressor to a defiance of a self-proclaimed sky god: "O Urizen! Creator of men, mistaken Demon of heaven" (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 5.3, E48).

What is crucially at issue in these comparable situations is authenticity of vision: Oothoon's is validated, Earth's is not. The lead-in to Oothoon's epiphany is the second occurrence of the refrain: "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & echo back her sighs" (5:2; cf. 2:20 and 8:13, end). Nothing like this supports Earth's complaint. While the reader of Blake must have all possible respect for any minority of one, particularly for one who suffers, *Visions* in particular corrects the supposition that the other two isolators, Bromion and Theotormon, have much of truth on their sides. Thus Oothoon appears intrepid in the one situation while Earth in the other appears dispirited because the former has something more significant to convey than her own pain. And this is shown in the last plate of *Visions*, where fiery Oothoon looks right at the reader as she speaks words of truth. Having achieved the voice of the prophecy, Oothoon is empowered to speak out, whereas Earth keeps turning away.

On "London," Ferber's essay "London and its politics" (*ELH* 48 [1981]: 45-56) remains the best concise account. This is in no small measure because Ferber is not drawn into the game of faulting the speaker rather than concentrating on the truth of the dreadful things seen. The six pages in Ferber's recent book are also good at explaining, along with much else, why the interpretive project of finding Blake's speaker implicated in or discredited by this intense critique of urban oppression is profoundly mistaken. A reader such as Larrissy, who maintains (esp. 42-55) that what the speaker of "London" perceives is mostly in his head cannot appreciate that Blake's speaker does *not* pretend to "mark" i.e., to make marks—as in Ezekiel (according to Bloom) or St. John (according to E. P. Thompson). The "marks" observed by the walker in "London" were doubtless inscribed by invisible authority. As even the little chimney sweeper can tell, "God & his Priest & King" are to blame. But in "London," the speaker comes to see "how" the dreadful things really do keep happening all around us.

There are, however, a couple of lacunae in Ferber's new account of "London," the poem and design: "We might imagine [the harlot] screaming 'A plague on you!' as the wedding party drives by . . ." (50). "We" might, but for the "I" of the poem what counts is the god-forsaken cry of the harlot as envisioned in "midnight streets," when, for better or for worse, there will never be a wedding party or funeral to be seen. The point of "London" that Blake the poet came to discover only in writing the belated last stanza is that, though the signs of rot are everywhere in *Experience*, even the visionary may not recognize the root of evil while jostling in the street by day. To employ a heavy term invented by Northrop Frye, midnight serves as the point of demonic epiphany. At that time the absent spectacle of abomination is desolation; "how" the evil is spread cannot fully appear at the stroke of any midnight, but it can be understood best when the visionary is not jostled by its consequences. A

thoroughly modern reader ought to be able to step outside Blake's poem and listen to the argument, for what it is worth, that sex workers may be as happy as we. But not in the poem "London."

A second distraction in Ferber's new account of "London" occurs in the description of the main picture: "a boy leads an old man on crutches, perhaps blind, toward a doorway. . . ." On the contrary, Blake's point is that (unlike the comparable scenes in *America* 12, *Gates* 15, or *Blair's Grave*) the old man is accompanied and being led *past* the door. He needs no help to find Death's Door. And the reader must be trusted to imagine that the boy in the design is an altruist whose deed brightens darkest "London." As reassurance (as it were), in *Night Thoughts* 243 (VI, 22), Blake shows the sequel: the same pair has continued on into the fields and left behind the city of destruction on the other side of the river. Still the aged blind man wishes to climb down into the earth. Still the boy who takes the part of the helpful Samaritan urges him to endure his exodus onward.

It could, of course, be played ironically by the same kind of suspicious reader who knows better than to trust the voice of the poem. Deconstruct either of the two principals or infer an ambush. Either presume that the halt and blind bearded old man is the detestable Urizen who is really in charge in spite of his patent disabilities or suspect that the boy is a decoy for some unseen street gang waiting round the next corner to waylay the old man. Look at that boy's face, as it appears in the printed form in most versions: not very appealing.

The exaggerated deconstructive scenario of the child as villain hasn't been seriously proposed yet, but there are plenty of commentators who have no sympathy for anyone looking like that old devil "Urizen." It only makes matters worse if criticism allows his image to be critically generalized; a bearded old man may have nothing but the night to look forward to, but need not be presumed a villain.

Because of the special character of Blake's writings in illuminated printing, however, understanding may be retarded by inexact notions of how the words of pictures are actually arranged and inferred from them as to what Blake is getting at. In spite of Ferber's attempt to take into account the force of some of the designs in *Visions*, he pays less attention to their deployment than he should. He expresses reservations about the inconclusiveness of the work without quite realizing that what he is judging is a text rather than a work of illuminated printing: "Oothoon keeps up her wonderful, inexhaustible talk, but it seems to bring her and her sisters no closer to freedom" (69). Theotormon "need only arise and embrace her, making her spirit his own. He does not, and the poem ends unhappily. Or rather the poem simply stops without really ending, for we are told that 'Thus every morning wails Oothoon,' while Theotormon sits 'conversing with shadows dire'" (73). Ferber presents some mitigating considerations to these pessimistic conclusions, but the final picture ought not to be understood as indicating

progress in vision beyond that described in the last line of text: "The Daughters of Albion hear her woes and echo back her sighs." A modern reader may be dissatisfied that the Daughters of Albion don't do something practical such as demand the vote or reform of the divorce laws, but nothing adequate could be imagined within the social horizons existing in 1793. Wilkie (64 and *passim*) reads in the right spirit by defining the issue at the end of *Visions* as a matter of "consciousness-raising": the Daughters really do "hear" and respond to the suffering of Oothoon as their own. Moreover, the concluding sequence of pictures (as Wilkie, 69, explains) show a female audience increasingly ready for "vision": in plate 5, a woman buries her face in her pillow, in 6 her hands, in 7 one of perhaps five women looks up, and finally, in 8, two of three look up unscared, though they do have one companion who still hides her face from the truth being articulated by Oothoon as she hovers above them. As in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," the viewer is not informed either in words or pictures what the eventual consequences will be. But we are shown enough to realize what they ought to be. In other words, *Visions* would not be more timely if it were expected to deliver in the shape of things to come.

Neither Ferber, nor Goslee, nor Wilkie considers what should be made of the fact that Thel is never mentioned again in Blake's work, but that Oothoon is heard of again in five other works from *Europe* 14 to *Jerusalem* 83. It is not necessary to assume the "Oothoon" always stands for the same thing, but if Blake had any system at all, "Oothoon" must have continued to be a crucial part of it, appearing as she does in the penultimate plate of *Milton* in a way that recalls what she was at the end of *Visions*. That her best efforts are not shown to be efficacious for all women, or perhaps even for one man, is no grounds for despair: "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" was the best that Moses could hope for, in a time when there was hardly any response. This hypothetical exhortation was repeated by Milton when Albion seemed closer to arising and again by Blake in the wonderful "Preface" to *Milton a Poem*. Anyone who reads Blake in the spirit knows that the time is at hand and becomes persuaded to the program of the "Jerusalem" hymn, which appears in the "Preface" to *Milton* and only there. But, unlike other committed readers, Ferber "so loved" the idea that he made one of the few factual errors in this fine book, declaring in his second sentence that the hymn "has survived in" only "four engraved copies" (vii) whereas, alas, it is contained in only the first two of the four [etched] copies. I don't recall that anyone has given an adequate account of Blake's motives for having suppressed the "Preface" to *Milton*; certainly no one could do so briefly, least of all in the exordium to a brief introduction of Blake's writings. Such a question would seem impossibly textual to anyone who had not grasped the realities of illuminated printing as an instrument of vision. But it should be on the agenda for Blake studies.

Having quite often complained of the results when other critics wrestled with "The Tyger" I am glad to say that Ferber succeeds very well with the poem even though he is apparently unsatisfied with my efforts on its behalf. He even manages to engage "The Sick Rose" more closely with the world of "The Tyger" than it ever occurred to me to do. As for the picture, he mentions that "some readers have seen, a certain smile on the drawn tiger" (43), a notion recently reaffirmed in Robert N. Essick's Huntington guide. Though it is not within the scope of *The Poetry of William Blake* to present pictures, an exception was made for the cover (here-with reproduced) to include a detail picture of the Tyger blown up two centimeters and in color; we are not told which copy in the British Museum this may be: probably B rather than A, not dreadful T. Let us look at this Tyger: is it smiling or not? Compare it with copy Y, likewise reproduced as a detail (actual size, monochrome) on page 50 of the Norton Critical Edition of *Blake's Poems*. This copy is the *only* one that illustrates the limerick about "the smile on the face of the tiger." In the (probable) copy B on the cover of Ferber's book anyone can see that the Tyger is *not* smiling, though both Tyger-faces are disfigured by that same big stuffed-tyger innocent eye. Even when you see the most formidable Tyger, as depicted in Princeton copy U, where the eye is diminished and intensified, and the mouth is certainly not smiling, the beast as shown is not quite up to the sublime beast imagined in the poem. As for the "dread feet," though, they should not be considered expendable by the designer of any cover. But woe, alas, the Penguin designer cropped them. This is one of the very few introductory things indisputably wrong with Ferber's outstanding book.

Update

In October 1993, E. P. Thompson's long-awaited last book was published: *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*. Readers may doubt whether Blake's mother was indeed a Muggletonian but will believe that she must have been something as far out as that. Thompson's dedication and epigraph are evidence enough: "To David Erdman" and "Christ Died as an Unbeliever."

In his spirited review entitled "The Making of William Blake," (*The Nation*, 15 November 1993 [594-600]), Michael Ferber recalls Thompson as saying at Yale in 1981, "... I talked to Blake last year. He told me to try to stop the bloody Cruises and Pershings before it's too late." Surely he did. It seems, though, that Ferber doesn't recognize how far, in the end, Thompson came toward escaping from the gins of the depressors of "London": the low "marks" bestowed by Ezekiel are burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold them. Those of John could not have held out much longer.

I wish, however, that Blake had told Thompson that when he finally appeared as *Witness Against the Beast* he should

repeat what he had said in the *London Review of Books* in January 1993 about Blake's sense of humor. Blake dedicated his last book to Lord Byron because he told the truth about the first murder. But no less because that just man in the wilderness dared to be amused at the Vision of Judgment of that man of blood. Maybe in the end, like the witness John Wilkes, Thompson thought it best not to reiterate above the sun the imaginative deficiencies he had remarked beneath it.

Recent Discussion of "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer" (loc. cit.) and Other Writings Mentioned

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D I S C U S S I O N

Which Newton for the British Library?

BY DAVID SIMPSON

I was very interested to read, in a recent issue of *Blake*, Martin Butlin's account of the recent controversy over Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptural adaptation of Blake's *Newton* projected for the British Library. Butlin ends by advising us against imposing "too strictly a Blakean interpretation on Paolozzi's sculpture."¹ I have often wondered whether there is any "strict" Blakean interpretation of Newton, especially of the famous print on which the controversial sculpture is based.² Colin St. John Wilson, as reported by Butlin, notes the ambivalence of the portrait of Sir Isaac, at once narrowly obsessed with a geometrical problem and beautifully delineated in its naked energy, like a coiled spring, or a revolution waiting to happen. Other commentators, among them Robert Essick, have noted similar ambiguities in the print.³ And we should not forget that Edmund Burke himself made much of the connection between the geometrical spirit and the French Revolution, with its "geometrical and arithmetical constitution" threatening to "uncover our nakedness" and banish the "Christian religion" in favor of some "degrading superstition."⁴ By 1795, the year of Blake's print, many in Britain had come to share Burke's contempt for France. And if Blake himself might also have come to endorse some of the regnant emotionalist distrust of scientific and mathematical method as applied to political and social reorganization, we may yet see in the taut body and tight curls of the Newton figure the signature of an alternative reading.

So far, I have said nothing new. But my question is this: is the figure in the print Sir Isaac, or only Sir Isaac? It certainly bears a facial resemblance to the famous images of the aquiline, slightly petulant and even neurotic genius known as Isaac Newton, so that it seems hard to imagine that that this is not the distinguished Fellow of Trinity and

¹ Martin Butlin, "Paolozzi's Newton," *Blake* 27 (1993): 45.

² The standard listing of the sources for and discussions of the print is ed. Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981) 1: 166-67. Butlin notes both negative and positive components of Blake's attitude to Newton, along with graphic precursors in Michelangelo and elsewhere.

³ Robert N. Essick, "Blake's Newton," *Blake Studies* 3 (1971): 149-62. The major account of Blake's relation to Newton is, of course, Donald D. Ault's *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1974), which has a very full sense of the complexities of the relationship.

⁴ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) 144, 187-88.