

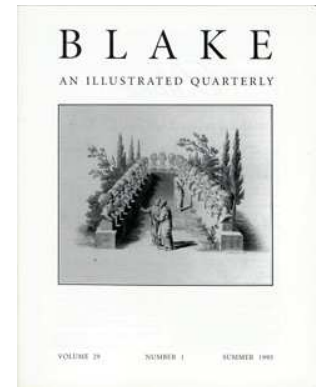
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D I S C U S S I O N

David Simpson on Paolozzi's Newton

Warren Stevenson

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MINUTE PARTICULAR

The Arlington Court Picture by Jacqueline E. M. Latham

David Bindman, discussing Blake's *Arlington Court Picture* (Butlin no. 803) of 1821, found by chance in 1947 at Arlington Court, North Devon (Keynes 196-99), wrote that there was "no record of any association, however remote, between Blake and the Chichesters" (Bindman 207). There is, however, a possible association through Colonel Chichester's third wife.

In 1822, Colonel John Palmer Chichester, owner of Arlington Court, which he was rebuilding, married in London by special license Sophia Catherine Ford, who was half his age. He had commanded the Cardiganshire Militia and had printed a small volume of "Rules and Regulations" with a short preface (Chichester 101). He died in November 1823 and, having in his will left his widow the jewels and trinkets he had given her during his life, he revoked the gift in a codicil, made three days before his death, leaving the jewels and trinkets to his daughter and £300 in lieu to his widow; there are no expressions of affection. Certainly, there seems little likelihood of any association with Blake.

The case for Sophia Chichester, however, is persuasive. She was born in 1795, the daughter of a Barbados plantation owner, Sir Francis Ford, Bart., and niece of Thomas Anson, the first Viscount and rising Whig grandee. In spite of the conventional upper class background, in the 1830s while she was living at Ebworth Park, her sister Georgiana's country house in Gloucestershire, she supported by correspondence and with large sums of money many of the ultra-radical preachers and prophets who were trying to build a new society on the basis of counter-enlightenment modes of thinking and feeling. She is best known as the friend and patron of James Pierrepont Greaves, the mystic and "sacred socialist," founder of the community and school at Alcott House, Ham Common, 1838-48, but she also, more controversially, supported and sought spiritual guidance from John "Zion" Ward, who had declared himself to be the redeemer Shiloh whom Joanna Southcott had expected to bear before her death in 1814. Ward died in 1837, corresponding with Sophia Chichester to the last, and at about the same time she was funding both James "Shepherd" Smith, who was preaching his new religion "Universalism," and Richard Carlile, who had turned from Paineite freethought to a form of symbolic Christianity. (Greaves, Ward, Smith and Carlile are all to be found with their individual beliefs and anti-establishment views in the *DNB*.) In 1841, Sophia Chichester made her political position clear by translating from the French the socialist work of the Fourierist Madame Gatti de Gamond, *The Phalanstery*. In 1844, only three years before her death, she was diagnosing the breakdown of Henry James

Senior, on a visit to England with his family, as a Swedenborgian "vastation" (Latham).

Sophia Chichester was clearly a woman searching for spiritual guidance, dissatisfied with the established church and its alliance with an oppressive state. Though nothing is known about her beliefs and attitudes in 1823, when the Blake painting is believed to have come into the Chichester family, judging by the evidence of her later activities, she shared with Blake an alienation from formal church structures and a need to embrace a more mystical and less conventional vision of reality, whether expressed in the varied tradition of dissent or the personal symbolism of Swedenborg. Like Blake, Sophia Chichester was excluded from the privileged classical education of the universities and never seems to have found a political or religious organization which fully met her inner needs. Unlike the genius Blake, however, she was not able to gain the satisfaction of creating and expressing her own symbolic truths.

We cannot know why *The Arlington Court Picture* was bought by the Chichesters. But it is possible to see that its much disputed subject, a choice involving spiritual revelation, as least finds an echo in what we know of Sophia Chichester's later years. Whether she lived at Arlington Court after her husband's 1823 death in Weymouth is not known, but if my hypothesis is correct, that the painting came into the family through Sophia Chichester, then it is surprising that she did not take it with her when she joined her sister at Ebworth Park. Perhaps the coldness of Colonel Chichester's will suggests an explanation.

Works Cited

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D I S C U S S I O N

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

David Simpson's suggestion that the bending figure in Blake's color print *Newton* may be a conflation of Sir Isaac Newton and the Rev. John Newton, the reformed slave-trader, is indeed interesting. It leads by an almost irresistible imaginative progression to the further surmise that the "mighty Spirit ... Nam'd Newton" who "leap'd from the land of Albion" and seized from Orc the "Trump of the last doom"

in *Europe: a Prophecy* (13:1-5) may likewise be a conflation of those two (in many ways) seeming opposites. I have always been uneasy with Northrop Frye's explanation of what he refers to as "that curious passage in *Europe*" as representing Blake's doctrine that "the mental attitude represented by [Isaac] Newton moves toward a consolidation of error which could provoke an apocalypse" (*Fearful Symmetry* 254) and have felt that there must be still another way of interpreting the allusion. The passage seems to have a contemporaneous quality, with the preceding plate (which also mentions "the trump of the last doom") referring to Albion's Angel, "Great George street," Enitharmon's triumph, and so on. And of course the impromptu trumpet lesson the "mighty Spirit ... Nam'd Newton" gives the feckless Orc is followed by Enitharmon's awakening and the information that "eighteen hundred years were fled" (12:12-13:10), which sounds fairly specific.

If Blake is referring, at least in part, to the Rev. John Newton here, he would seem to be anticipating the shift of emphasis in his evolving myth from Orc to Los, writ large in *The Book of Los* and *The Song of Los*, of which John Newton's famous conversion, evangelical fervor and anti-slavery work would be suitable, if partial, symbols, all of which find counterparts elsewhere in Blake's poetry.

As for Professor Simpson's reference to Martin Butlin's account of the recent controversy over Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's sculpture adapted from Blake's *Newton* intended for the British Library, no doubt Butlin is right to warn us against imposing "too strictly a Blakean interpretation" on a different work of art; but judging from his description and the accompanying photograph (admittedly a risky business), I would have to say that Paolozzi's *Newton* looks very nearly the antithesis of Blake's, wherein the lightness and delicacy of the medium is artfully contrasted to the heaviness of the design, enhancing the satirical effect. To my bad eye, Paolozzi's *Newton* resembles nothing so much as a defecating armadillo. Cast in bronze twelve feet high, and mounted on a podium of similar height, it could only represent (if taken in the way Butlin warns us against) a perversion of Blake's design into a travesty of unutterable ugliness and monumental stupidity. One can only hope that it isn't as bad as it looks.

Warren Stevenson

R E V I E W S

Gerda S. Norvig, *Dark Figures in the Desired Country: Blake's Illustrations to The Pilgrim's Progress*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 327 pp. \$68.00.

Reviewed by STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT

We have all seen them: those late-night television commercials for knives that cut through lead pipes, pennies, wooden beams, and cement blocks—when all we want to do is slice a tomato. There is something of that quality about Gerda Norvig's impressive study of Blake's much-neglected watercolor designs for Bunyan's most famous allegorical tale. This is a learned and meticulous book, as evidenced in part by the fact that the 213 pages of primary text discussion are followed by 68 pages of notes and 14 of "Works Cited." Moreover, the book is splendidly illustrated. We are treated to all 28 of Blake's designs (about which number, more later), well reproduced in reasonably faithful color in a gathering of plates bound in the middle of the book, plus another 42 related pictures and diagrams in black and white. In addition, the several appendices provide 58 additional reproductions of previous *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations up through the trend-altering designs of Blake's erstwhile friend and colleague Thomas Stothard, whose elliptical designs of 1788 brought to the illustration of Bunyan's tale a wholly different visual sensibility steeped in the visual conventions and mechanical devices of the sentimental in art. This book is, in short, a trove of valuable visual information, and it cannot but help facilitate still further exploration of Blake's remarkable designs. That fact alone makes its publication both timely and important.

Why then the analogy of the knife-cum-everything? It's partly a matter of the actual experience of reading the book. For one thing, in working through the text a reader may become uncomfortably aware of the inherent difficulty an author faces in structuring a book in which the reader is continually reminded of how much preliminary ground ostensibly needs to be surveyed before the discussion can get to "the main event." This is especially so in that the author undertakes several complex tasks, several of which seem always to be going forward at the same moment. By her own account she offers "a thorough case study of Blake's *Progress* illustrations along with an analysis of his changing relationship to Bunyan's persona, Bunyan's ideology, and Bunyan's poetics [sic] over a period of more than thirty years" (4). At the same time, she sets out to codify a way of reading Blake's Bunyan designs (and presumably his designs to other authors like Milton and Dante, though Norvig does not say so) in terms of a process of "visionary hermeneutics," a process based less in simply undermining or reinforcing the