

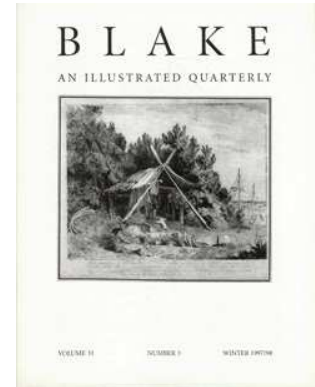
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R E V I E W

Marvin D. L. Lansverk, *The Wisdom of Many, The Vision of One: The Proverbs of William Blake*

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Academy Schools, it would have been natural for the story to be confirmed from the Royal Academy itself. And indeed the military may have wondered why the Royal Academy was sending its students to represent military installations.

Of course the Academy had not done anything of the kind. But the unworldliness of these young men, blithely making careful sketches (like that in Stothard's etching) of military fortifications of the greatest naval base in the world in time of war, almost surpasses comprehension. At least it might appear so to naval intelligence, if that is not an oxymoron.

Blake's Meheux?

BY VINCENT CARRETTA

Among the plates executed by Blake after designs by other artists is Robin Hood & Clorinda, "J. Meheux delint.," published by T. Macklin in London on 30 March 1783. Robert N. Essick, in *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 133, observes that "[n]othing is known of 'J. Meheux, other than his designing 'Robin Hood and Clorinda,'" and notes that "Samuel Redgrave, *A Dictionary of Artists of the English School*, 2nd ed., London, 1878, p. 292, gives the artist's name as 'John Meheux.'" The John Meheux in question was probably the John Meheux (1749?-1839) who corresponded during the 1770s with Ignatius Sancho (1729-80), the black Westminster grocer whose posthumously published *Letters* (London, 1782) I have edited: *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (Penguin Putnam Inc, 1998).

Meheux's obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (December 1839) 662, says, "In his 90th year, John Meheux, esq. of Hans Place, formerly many years Secretary to Board of Control. He has bequeathed 5000£. to Indigent Blind School, 200£. to Deaf and Dumb Institution, and 100£. each to St. George's Hospital, Westminster Lying-in Hospital, and Society of Arts, all duty free." During the 1770s, Meheux was an amateur writer and artist, submitting essays to the newspapers and designs to print sellers through Sancho. Sancho had many contacts in the art world. His portrait had been painted in 1768 by Thomas Gainsborough, and his friends included the artists John James Barralet, William Henry Bunbury, Matthew and Mary Darly, Daniel Gardner, John Hamilton Mortimer, Joseph Nollekens, and William Stevenson. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Darly, who frequently etched and published prints after the designs of amateurs, Sancho also knew the print and booksellers John Ireland and John Wingrave.

In a letter misdated 21 March 1770 but written in 1776, Sancho sends Meheux "a proof print"; in one of 4 January 1776, Sancho asks about Meheux's sketches; and on 3 September 1777, Sancho asks Meheux,

How do you like the print?—Mr. D[arly] says, and his wife says the same, that you are exceedingly clever—and they shall be happy to do any thing which is produced by the same hand which did the original—and if Mr. D[arly] can be of any service to you in the etching, you may command him when you please.

Given the history of Sancho's John Meheux as an amateur artist providing designs for prints executed and published by others during the late 1770s, he is probably Blake's "J. Meheux" of 1783 as well.

R E V I E W S

Marvin D. L. Lansverk, *The Wisdom of Many, The Vision of One: The Proverbs of William Blake*. American University Studies, Series IV, vol. 142. New York: Peter Lang, 1994. 215 pp. \$38.95.

Reviewed by NELSON HILTON

Unknown gnomes mine. pro-verbal proverbs. but, ah! men, Wisdom's awful theopanatives love her. language bombs

Or so one might imagine from recent, stimulating work by Marvin D. L. Lansverk. Beginning with "the puzzle that Blake would use proverbs at all" (2), given the oppressing conformity often found in such "wisdom of the many," Lansverk traces a path to Blake's invention of "a new type of proverb" (3) or prophetic performative in which speech acts. Along the way he revives for us an image with profound implications for Blake's emanations, the figure of the divine female consort in the "Wisdom Books" of Hebrew scripture.

The first part of his book, a literary history of Blake's relations to proverb literature, opens with a comparison of the themes, forms, and functions of the Book of Proverbs and of Blake's "Proverbs of Hell." Timely criticism this, for "the only major English writer himself to have composed a

whole collection of proverbs"—as John Holloway observed over 28 years ago (*Blake: The Lyric Poetry* [London: Edward Arnold, 1968]). Lansverk shows that while Blake "rejects the Book of Proverbs' external law of distributive justice" (188) with satire and transformation, he adapts its binary forms which "draw together two phrases or versets into a parallelism" (15)—e.g., "Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth." So, the thesis being driven hard, we are asked to see that "Blake converts the biblical 'A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them' (20:26) into a command as well: 'Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead'" (23).

Lansverk notes also how the introductory chapters of the Book of Proverbs, 8 and 9 in particular, would have attracted Blake, "with their sustained mythic personification of the virtues of Lady Wisdom." This figure "is most commonly imaged as a superior goddess who is both a possession of God and a childhood companion with him. As she says in an early poetic exposition of the myth,"

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,
before his works of old . . .
When [God] appointed the foundation of the earth:
Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was
daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.
(8:22, 29-30) (18)

Remarking Blake's "attention to and exploitation of . . . typographic details' ability to carry additional meaning," Lansverk appropriately retains the use of italics in the King James Version for "words merely implied in the original Hebrew" (34). Attention to the original Hebrew would have been appropriate as well, as the AV translation of "one brought up" for the Hebrew (*'amon*) can be challenged by readings of "*'amôn* as 'master architect' or else 'little child'" or both at once (Judith M. Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, eds. John Day et al. [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995] 238). These references can begin to suggest that a Bible-reader like Blake could have pondered, with the most recent scholarship, how, "from a literary-theological point of view, personified Wisdom is simply unequalled in the entire Old Testament" (Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in Day et al. eds. 232).

The second chapter, on "Blake and Bunyan's Allegorical Proverbs" argues that "[t]he pervasive use of proverbs by Bunyan cannot have escaped Blake's attention, nor the fact that Bunyan adopts and extends the very aspects of biblical proverbs that Blake despised" (38). This, then, is an "allegorical use of proverbs" which Blake rejects, "yet also a model for the variety and power of proverbs in imaginative literature" (188). While Swedenborg's works do not offer many proverbs, they supply Blake with a vocabulary and a "symbolic theory in the doctrine of correspondences" to be transformed "from a divinely revealed, fixed

hermeneutic into a heuristic for the creation of [Blake's] own wisdom" (188). "Almost every term used in the Proverbs of Hell," from the many animals to the abstract nouns, "is given discussion in Swedenborg's dictionary of correspondences," Lansverk reports (65).

The book's first part concludes with a study of "Blake's and Milton's Paradoxical Proverbs," the title pointing to the poets' co-creation of "a radically new type of proverb" (5) which exhorts rejection of the tradition of law, Milton's "custom," as grounds of authority and affirms instead liberty and "the tradition of prophecy." For Lansverk, "[t]he importance of Milton as an analogue of Blake's proverbs cannot be overestimated. In fact, this link is so close that if it were not for Blake's subsequent transformations, Milton might be said to cross the boundary between analogue and actual source. . . . Blake's readers should recognize that the late eighteenth century poet does not create his paradoxical proverbs *ex nihilo*" (84).

Milton's crucial contribution, according to this argument, can be exemplified through a passage in *The Reason of Church Government*, where Milton combines several verses from the Book of Proverbs which "emphasize the function of proverbs as exhortations. Quoting Solomon's personification of wisdom as a woman, Milton writes: 'as Salomon saith, "She crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, in the top of high places, in the chief concourses, and in the openings of the Gates"' (79). This emphasis on "exhortation" takes Lansverk to Stanley Fish's familiar argument that "the purpose of Milton's prose is to get his readers to 'exchange one way of knowing for another,' to exchange their reliance on reason for a reliance on vision" (81); "an example of how to do things with proverbs" (89), in other words.

The second part of the book turns to textual interpretation of five of Blake's productions, focusing both on his use of proverbs as performative rather than affirmative utterances and on his "systematic revision" of Hebrew Wisdom literature. It is worth recalling that these texts include not only Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Wisdom, but also that work whose importance for Blake requires no rehearsal, Job. The discussion of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as "Blake's Performative Book of Proverbs" hinges on those verbal utterances named (or, performed) by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, in which to say is to perform and so engender a new psychological or social reality. This function of occasioning "a change in reality in the act of speaking . . . lies at the heart of Blake's use of proverbs" (98). As this effect gives performatives "the force of utterances of God," Lansverk coins for them the name "*theopanatives*," drawing on "the Greek root of our word prophecy—*phanai*, or to speak—and . . . related to the term *theopany*—or the visible manifestation of God" (102). They are used, he writes elsewhere, "as textual language bombs to create the reality they refer to" (*Northwest Society for Eigh-*

teenth-Century Studies 19 [1991-94] 182). The neologism serves to emphasize the oddity that "Blake even uses the term *proverb* rather than the many alternatives available"—gnome, dictate, maxim, apothegm—"given that his aphorisms are not the restatement of general, popular wisdom" (113; these would be *theopallatives*, perhaps). Lansverk's intriguing suggestion is that Blake's act of "naming his sententia *proverbs* . . . in opposition to the social conventions of language which serve to define the term, is itself a performative," and that, more importantly, the etymology allows an author fixated on naming to denominate an attempt at meaning both "before" and "on behalf of" (*pro*) words (*verbum*) (113).

Chapter 6 presents *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, with its memorable proverbial epigraph, as "Blake's Book of Job," "a parable of proper sententious utterance" (117). The influence of biblical story appears in the poem's "dialogue format, in its presentation of a battle between two types of wisdom" (120-21)—and "two ways of expressing it" (122)—and foremost "in its use of proverbial questions" (121). Bromion's and Theotormon's repeated questions, like those of Job and his comforters, embody "panicked efforts to maintain a semblance of order in a world on the brink of confusion" (120) (owing to loss of faith, for the Hebrew story, in the actuality of "distributive justice"), and their questions represent futile attempts "to gain rhetorical ascendancy" (120). Lansverk notes how Theotormon's concluding outcry, "Tell me what is the night or day to one o'erflowd with woe," doubles Job's "most characteristic lament of woe" (125). To Oothoon, however, is reserved the use of "the proverbial questions from Job" to express the "theopanative wisdom" of her understanding of an imaginative wisdom unknown to her antagonists. The tight, steady focus of the discussion here shows one of the limitations of the author's method, as when he writes that "to emphasize that her learning is not the rote following of a commandment but the generation of her own theopanatives—Oothoon maintains that her soul is 'pure transparent' and not 'defiled'" (122). But any construction of Oothoon's supposed intention is complicated by the full context:

Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect.
The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent
breast.

(2.15-16)

Not only is the implication of defilement not rejected here, but the notion of pure transparency's reflecting raises questions about the speaker's (psycho-)logic. Oothoon here plucks, again, a "flower" of rhetoric (*OED* "flower," 6d), but in its seeming entire neglect of the wisdom of many who have written specifically on *Visions* (not to mention Blake and performatives, like Robert Essick in *William Blake and the Language of Adam* [1989, 25-26]), Lansverk's vi-

sion misses opportunities to ground itself more substantially. It misses, as well, occasions to express itself with greater felicity—things seem recurrently "more" or "most" important, or "actually" so (117); Blake has "finely tuned proverbial hands" (117).

The Four Zoas appears in this book as "Blake's Vision of Ecclesiastes," and with his concern, Lansverk can build on Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson's puzzled observation that "[t]he kind of paradoxical epigram, reminiscent of Blake's Proverbs of Hell, occurs more often in *The Four Zoas* than one might expect in a work so grand in scale" (131). For a Blake involved in "continued experiments with reforming biblical Wisdom books" (132), however, a full blown dramatization and transformation of "Ecclesiastes's cyclical world view, its structure, and its proverbs" seems par for the course. Apropos of that "structure," however, Lansverk reports that "[b]iblical scholars have not been able to find much identifiable progression of ideas" (140). (The book here has structural difficulties of its own, as a doubling of footnote 17 throws the remaining 10 out of sync.) Donald Ault's work on embedded structure in *Narrative Unbound* (1987) could usefully be linked here (and to the discussion of "Blake's Narrative Bound Proverbs" [173]). Lansverk argues that the two passages from John with which Blake glosses *The Four Zoas's* opening "proverbs"—

Four Mighty Ones are in every man; a Perfect Unity
Cannot Exist. but from the Universal Brotherhood of
Eden,
The Universal Man, to Whom be Glory Evermore. Amen.

—together "comprise the central Gospel reference, the *locus classicus* . . . to the power of performatives, and thus they can be seen to serve as a 'functional key' if not a 'content key' to Blake's work" (151). John 17:21-23 and 1:14 read:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I
in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world
may believe that thou hast sent me.
And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;
that they may be one, even as we are one.
I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect
in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent
me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.
And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

I note here that Blake writes out the last phrase in the Greek, without accents or breathings, "καὶ ἐσκηώζεν ἐν, ἡμῖν" which sets up a multi-lingual clinch with the nearest word of the poem proper, "Amen" (ἡμῖν["us"] could be transliterated "amin"): Hebrew 'amēn, cognate with Wisdom as the "master architect"/"little child," 'amon. Being "just & true to our own Imaginations" (*Milton Preface*), we become like unto "the Amen, the faithful and true wit-

ness" (Rev. 3:14) with a name "that no man knew" but which "name is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:12, 13). The Johannine texts, writes Lansverk, "outline how Blake can lay claim to the performative power of God demonstrated in Genesis," and indicate "the importance of speech act to Blake's use of proverbs" (151). I will add that the pertinence of Wisdom's *emanative* name Amen for this argument can be illustrated by Gustaf Dalman's comment that, "Amen is affirmation, Amen is curse, Amen is making something one's own" (in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974] 322).

So, in *MIL/TON*, "Blake's Book of Infernal Wisdom," such textual fiats express the polymorphously erotic "sports of Wisdom in the Human Imagination" (3.3):

And it is thus Created. Lo the Eternal Great
Humanity
To whom be Glory & Dominion Evermore Amen
Walks among all his awful Family seen in every face
As the breath of the Almighty, such are the words of
man to man
In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspi-
ration
To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Cre-
ating

(30[33]. 15-20)

This is only one of many passages which allow Lansverk to characterize *MIL/TON* as "a freestanding collection of proverbs, with the narrative parts simply providing a frame for the wisdom statements as in the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes" (173). Such statements are themselves thematized in the poem's references to "Dictates," "a proverb in Eden," "a prophecy in Eden," and perhaps most curiously, "gnomes." In a provocative paper presented to the 1995 meeting of the Northwest Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Lansverk notes S. Foster Damon's suggestion that "Blake may have known that a gnome also means a wise but cryptic saying," and argues that Blake surely knew the dominant reference of "gnome" in his age. Indeed, in marking well *MIL/TON*'s words about the "servants of the Harrow, / The Gnomes" (7.18-19), it is striking to discover that subterranean gnomes only appear in English with Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, while the older reference flourishes in "gnomic," "gnomical," "gnomographer," "gnomologic," and "gnomology"—as in Milton's *Tetrachordon*: "Which art of powerful reclaiming, wisest men have also taught in their ethical precepts and gnomologies" (*OED*, s.v.). *MIL/TON*'s depiction of Palamabron

Curbing his living creatures; many of the strongest
Gnomes
They bit in their wild fury, who also madden'd like wild-
est beasts

(7.46-47)

echoes strongly the language of the speaker of the deuterocanonical "Book of Wisdom" or "Wisdom of Solomon," who claims to be taught by wisdom and to know "[t]he natures of the living creatures, and the furies of wild beasts" (7:20, AV version). (One would have thought that this quotation would also find some bearing on Lansverk's discussion [144] of "the Natures of those Living Creatures" at the opening of *The Four Zoas*.) In my *Literal Imagination* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983), I posited a Blakean "ear/earth," and it would seem that it is in such ground, "in the Auricular Nerves of Human life / Which is the Earth of Eden" (FZ 4.1-2), that the Gnomes labour to bring forth, like Zen koans, the performative nature of wisdom.¹

Lansverk writes that "*Milton* is the study of how Blake's central character Milton learns to leave behind the affirmative utterances too characteristic of his Puritan works for the more powerful and visionary performative utterances" (164) which he voices at the poem's conclusion and which, Lansverk feels, "comprise the climactic moment of the work: 'Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man . . .'" (172). As if Satan, "To pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth" (9.23), hadn't been spouting "obey my principles" (9.26) from the beginning. Lansverk should be more wary of so-called "climax": Milton talks the talk, but the walk he forces still, again, on Ololon. To apply the "moral" which Lansverk finds earlier in *The Marriage*, we must attend to "what [the] prophets do and not what [they] say, even though what [they] say is correct" (103). It's not *Ololon*, as Lansverk argues, who must "realize that she is Lady Wisdom" (170), but Milton and ourselves who read her, as a result of his lack of recognition, in the "Double Six-fold Wonder" (42[49].4) of *MIL/TON a Poem in 12*

¹ The word "koan," from Japanese *ko*, "public" and *an*, "matter, material for thought," denotes "a paradox put to a student" to stimulate the mind (*OED Supplement*)—like the image of Los's response to the wild Gnomes, when he "took off his left sandal placing it on his head, / Signal of solemn mourning" (M 8.11-12). In which context, the following koan, from the famous thirteenth-century Chinese collection, *Wumenguan* or "The Bolt on a Nonexistent Door," may not be amiss:

Because the monks of the eastern and western halls were fighting over a cat, Master Nanquan picked it up and said, "If you can speak, I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it."

No one replied, so Nanquan killed it.

That evening Zhaozhou came back from somewhere else and Nanquan told him what had happened. Zhaozhou then took off his sandals, put them on his head, and walked out. Nanquan said, "Had you been here, you could have saved the cat."

In the course of his commentary on this koan, Thomas Cleary observes, "Zhaozhou's farcical act silently remarks that to be enslaved by something that originally was supposed to foster liberation is like being worn by a pair of shoes instead of wearing them" (Thomas Cleary, trans., comm., *No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan: A New Translation of the Zen Classic Wumenguan* [New York: Bantam Books, 1993] 66, 68).

Books. These objections can serve to exemplify Lansverk's contention that "[t]he only doctrine which . . . can fruitfully be said to underlie [MIL/TON] . . . is the doctrine of contraries . . . here both as the opposition between . . . two ways of reading and in the very form of the performative proverb, which ultimately amount to the same thing" (182-83).

The Book of Wisdom says that "she is the breath of the power of God [cf. M 30[33].18, above], and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall unto her" (7:25; Lansverk fumbles this crucial quotation through misattribution and omission of the central phrase [194])—that is, as the New Jerusalem Bible has it, "she is a breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (and, for Blake, "all bionic" existence). The Greek of the Septuagint has "aporroia" also as common in the neo-Platonists and translated, literally, as "outflow," "emanation." Lansverk sees the plot of *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion* as "the story of Albion's learning to treat Jerusalem as Lady Wisdom, his consort from the very beginning, and not as the harlot she becomes when externalized from him as a sexual object" (193). This entails the reader's learning that "the Treasures of Heaven" are none other than "Mental Studies & Performances" (J 77). Lansverk comments that, "[t]hough the speech act theory to identify Blake's use of language would not be created for a hundred and fifty years, Blake could still point the way, whether coincidentally or not . . . that to perform is 'to do something,' 'to fulfill a command,' and most importantly 'to present a literary work of art'" (196-97).

Students and lovers of Blake can be grateful to Marvin Lansverk for this awakening call to the rich fields of the poet's sport with Wisdom and performative language.

Unknown gnomes mine. pro-verbal proverbs. but, ah! men, Wisdom's awful theopanies love her. language bombs

Christopher Heppner, *Reading Blake's Designs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi + 302; 72 illus., 14 color plates. \$69.95.

Reviewed by FRANK A. VAUGHAN

In the commentaries published by poets and critics through the 1960s, Blake studies began the process of discovering what Blake believed, of finding out how Blake's ideas "meant," and of applying this meaning, or myth, to his poetry, prose and, to a lesser degree, to his art. Part of the joy in Blake's quirky brilliance is that his ambiguity leaves so much room for critical invention. For the critic

Blake was the America of the seventeenth century, the Africa of the nineteenth century, or the Tahiti of the early twentieth century. However, in the latter portion of the twentieth century Blakean explorers have become less comfortable with general, programmatic speculations and tend to see the need to specialize in Blake's various efforts. Increasingly he is fragmented into a poet, a linguist, a critic of scientific perception, a social critic, a radical theologian, a myth-maker, a literary critic, a satirist, an art critic, a commercial engraver, an illustrator of his own work, and an illustrator of the works of others.

Christopher Heppner's *Reading Blake's Designs* focuses on Blake as an illustrator of the works of others. Within this still-large area, *Reading Blake's Designs* calls for commentators to read Blake's designs more moderately, accurately, and individually. Too much exploration of Blake's illustrations relates the illustrations not to the immediate text but, by association and analogy, to similarities in Blake's myth, or his own designs as interpreted through his poetry.

Rather than deal with Blake as a pragmatic, technical, or creative artist, Heppner's book "reads" the meaning of the designs through the analogy that art is "like language," a design like a sentence, composition like syntax, and a figure like a word in context. Using this analogy, Heppner reminds the reader that Blake is a history painter and that in the eighteenth century this genre had a concrete set of purposes and devices. For instance, as a history painter Blake would use both a natural and a codified language of gesture and expression which he would expect the reader to recognize and interpret. Thus, Blake uses what Heppner calls the codified *pathos formula* (7-9), and his vocabulary of figures is "disturbingly all-purpose" (11). In the 1790s Blake's language of figure, gesture, expression, and movement becomes dependent on a "codified system." For the critic this can lead to the danger of assuming that Blake's figures are "univocal" (9), single in meaning beyond a specific context. Yet, akin to words, figures have a complex relationship to their context, partially creating it and partially being created by it. Equally, and this is a point Heppner also develops (52-56), Blake's art is an art dependent on words, titles, names, verbal hints, an art increasingly dependent on allusion to verbal texts in order to give particular meaning and therefore an art fleeing from the visual to the verbal.

In the 1790s Blake became increasingly influenced by Michelangelo, but it is not the Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel's panoramic view. Most people in the eighteenth century knew Michelangelo only through the print makers' and sellers' vision of him. Therefore Blake probably accepted him as a creator of great figures, not as a creator of contexts by which these figures were given meaning. Commentators try "too hard to interpret Blake's figures as if they were a response to the program behind Michelangelo's art" (38). Michelangelo's impact on Blake