

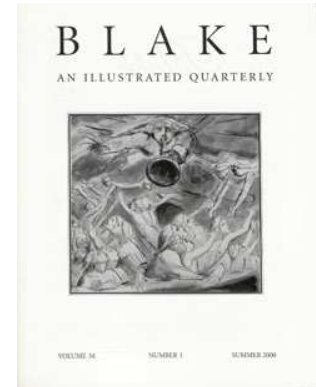
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A R T I C L E

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William Bryan, Another Anti-Swedenborgian Visionary Engraver of 1789

BY DAVID WORRALL

In my essay "Blake and 1790s Plebeian Radical Culture" published in *Blake in the Nineties* (Clark and Worrall, 1999), I referred to a letter written by one "WBrian" to which I attributed the date of 12 March 1789 and added that it was intercepted and discussed by the British Government's Privy Council on 13 December 1789.¹ The text of this letter in the Privy Council papers deposited in the Public Record Office, Kew, is now reproduced in full below (illus. 1). Around the time of *Blake in the Nineties*'s production, Dr. Jon Mee of the University of Oxford suggested to me that its author might be William Bryan of the Avignon Society, a group of European illuminists active in the late 1780s. Although I had missed the references, Bryan had already been discussed in Morton Paley's *The Continuing City* (1983 [130-31]), Clarke Garret's *Respectable Folly* (1975) and, much earlier, Robert Southey's *Letters from England* (1807)² With *Blake in the Nineties* already beyond the proof stage and, with no absolutely firm means of connecting "WBrian" with William Bryan, I decided to leave my comments as they stood. As an avid researcher of fairly obscure London radicals and artisans I knew that, in their particular culture, the spelling of names in contemporary manuscripts is a scholarly minefield. Fathers and sons frequently shared first names and sometimes transmitted political and theological beliefs, wholesale, down the generations to the confusion of modern scholarship.³ A variant spelling of the last name, plus only the evidence of an initial letter of the forename, left too many hostages to fortune. In the end, I did not feel inclined to commit myself in print and so *Blake in the Nineties* went to press with "WBrian" remaining unidentified. However, I now have information which corroborates Mee's identification and requires both a correction and expansion of details I gave in *Blake in the Nineties*.

The basis for calling Bryan's letter to the attention of readers of *BIQ* and *Blake in the Nineties* is that William Bryan, like William Blake, was an ex-Swedenborgian visionary engraver who lived in London during 1789 and who experienced a vision while working at his rolling press. In addition, the lodging of his letter among Privy Council papers

in 1789 is evidence of the significance attached to illuminist organizations some months before the appearance of the better known allegations laid out in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Finally, in the light of Joe Viscomi's hypothesis of a four-plate anti-Swedenborgian core for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Viscomi, 1997, 1998, 1999), the contents of Bryan's letter provide a remarkable social and theological context for Viscomi's conjectural *Ur-Marriage*, although I know of no empirical evidence to suggest Blake ever knew, read or met William Bryan.

There are two material corrections to the account given in my essay "Blake and 1790s Plebeian Radical Culture." The first is that the letter is dated "12 Month 13 1789," that is "13 December 1789," and not the date given in *Blake in the Nineties*. In other words, contrary to what I said in my essay, there is no particular significance to be attached to a connection between the date of Bryan's letter and William and Catherine Blake's signing of the Great East Cheap Swedenborgian conference register in April 1789. Inexplicably, I had noted the date as "12 March" having mis-read the manuscript and ignored the "13." I plead stupidity, but at that time I did not appreciate that both William Bryan, and Bryan's friend John Wright, habitually employed various circumlocutions in order to avoid the Gregorian calendar.

In summary, "WBrian" can now be identified with certainty as William Bryan, a copper plate printer and bookseller who worked from No. 51 Upper Mary-le-bone Street. Bryan's occupation as a copper plate printer meant that although his main work would routinely be in printing from plates already finished by another engraver, he would also have engraving skills himself. Indeed, in his account of this period Bryan specifically states that he was able to work at "writing, engraving, printing, &c." (Bryan 1795 [29]).⁴ If he was at all typical of other copper plate printers, Bryan would use these skills to produce items such as share certificates, invitations, trade cards and the general stationery business of London's commercial and artistic life. Paradoxically, although copper plate printers probably did not have a training in engraving of the rigour Blake experienced under Basire, they were outnumbered by engravers in the ratio of about five to one (Maxted 1977). In other words, in respect to their trades, Bryan was a much rarer London bird than Blake.

Upper Mary-le-bone Street near Cavendish Square to the north of Oxford Street was a minor center of contemporary progressive religious and political activity. Down the road, on the same side at No. 7, lived Thomas Clio Rickman, later a member of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), the

¹ Worrall (1999). The letter is located in the P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], Kew, P[ri]v[ate] C[ouncil] 1/18/19.

² Southey (1807), Letter LXVIII.

³ For an example of this happening, see Worrall (1997).

⁴ The production of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826) involved negotiations with two copper plate printers with Blake and John Linnell suddenly switching to the cheaper of the two as the project neared its conclusion (Lindberg 1973 [27n121]).

friend and biographer of Tom Paine and the publisher of Paine's controversial *Address to the Addressers* (1792). More remarkably, at least by late 1790, three doors down from Bryan at No. 45 lived the eminent Swedenborgian, Carl Bernhard Wadström.⁵ Pushing outwards Bryan's social circle a little further, his close friend the carpenter John Wright attended worship with the East Cheap Swedenborgians in 1788, a gathering place William and Catherine Blake also visited in April 1789 (Wright 1794 [4]). Both Wright and Bryan, following allegedly independent visions in early 1789, journeyed to Avignon, France, to meet up with the European illuminists who called themselves the Society of Avignon and stayed there until around September 1789 when they both returned to London. Later on, both men became followers of Richard Brothers and wrote pamphlet testimonies to him which recalled in some detail the events of 1789, John Wright in *A Revealed Knowledge Of Some Things That Will Speedily Be Fulfilled In The World, Communicated To A Number Of Christians, Brought Together At Avignon* (1794), and William Bryan in *A Testimony of the Spirit of Truth, Concerning Richard Brothers* (1795).

The empirical basis for identifying the "WBrian" of 1789 with William Bryan comes from textual evidence in Wright's book of 1794. As a part of his recollection of their time in Avignon, Wright printed extracts from journals and notes which he and Bryan had made there back in 1789, giving them the overall heading of "'Remarkable prophecies revealed to the spiritual society at Avignon'" (Wright 1794 [36]).⁶ Wright does not distinguish who-wrote-what but, rather, implies that keeping these journals was a venture which had their joint participation. Crucially, Wright's *Revealed Knowledge* of 1794 quotes almost word-for-word a passage which also occurs in Bryan's letter held by the Privy Council since late 1789:

[I am] ...the angel of the Eternal who am sent before the face of the Lamb to sound the trumpet on the mountains of Babylon to make known to the nations that the God of Heaven will soon come to the gates of the earth, to change the face of the world; & to manifest his power & glory. (PRO PC 1/18/19, 13 December 1789)

The ANGEL of the ETERNAL who stands before the face of the LAMB to sound the trumpet upon the mountains of BABYLON; to advertise the nations, that the GOD of Heaven will soon arise at the gates of the earth to change the face of the world, to manifest his power and his GLORY. (Wright 1794 [40])

⁵ Charles Bernard Wadström, *In the month of April, 1788 ...* (1790). On Wadström, see Paley (1979) and, more recently, Rubenstein and Townsend (1998).

⁶ Southey (1807) reprints parts of these journals, although not the extract reproduced here.

Bryan's letter was deposited in official government records for 1789. It therefore has an archaeological precision in terms of evidence for its dating: all Privy Council business for 1789 was simply gathered into one bundle of documents and tied up with string. The spelling of Bryan's name as "WBrian," with an "i" instead of a "y," is something of a mystery since Bryan appears to have been connected with a printing family of that name (and spelling) in Bristol.⁷ It may be the case that the letter deposited in the PRO is a copy made by a government scribe who mistook the spelling because he was writing it at the end of his task of copying. The document is not the folded, addressed, envelope into which many, if not most, contemporary letters were formed. Nevertheless, during Richard Brothers's interrogation by the Privy Council in 1795, Brothers was asked about his connection with Bryan and Wright. There are two copies of the interrogation, one in rough and one a finished, "clean" copy. The rough copy shows that the scribe attending the interrogation wrote Bryan's name the first time with a "y" and the next time with an "i."⁸ The "clean" copy gives "Bryan" correctly. Of course, in a fashion similar to some modern people, Bryan may simply have been as playful with the spelling of his own name as he was with the names of the month. I have not yet come across an authenticated example of Bryan's handwriting.

The letter's place in the Privy Council archive for 1789 is both more and less straightforward than the brief account I gave in *Blake in the Nineties*. The rest of the bundle of papers comprise an otherwise fairly hum-drum collection of reports on grain stores, American corn, notes on militia returns and, earlier in the year, drafts of thanksgiving proclamations for George III's recovery from "madness." Of course, the Privy Council in the late eighteenth-century was much more important than that body is now, approximating in stature and composition to today's Cabinet. During 1789 the King sometimes attended its meetings but by the early 1790s this appears to have become less common. In 1794 a group of 10 or so Privy Council members, including William Pitt, directly interrogated the LCS treason trial defendants, including Thomas Spence who was arrested under the Suspension of Habeas Corpus and freed without charge when the LCS trials collapsed. At the time of the Privy Council's interrogation of Richard Brothers in 1795, it appears to have combined its usual mixed judicial/political role with that of psychiatric medical board.

There is no record of a Privy Council meeting after the date of Bryan's letter in December 1789 when all documentation appertaining to that year's Privy Council business was filed. Also, contrary to what I may have implied in *Blake in*

⁷ Bryan's *A Testimony* gives several references to his connections with Bristol. See also the anonymous author of *Prophetic Passages*: "... Mr. W. Bryan, who is well known at Bristol, London, and other places" (1795) iv.

⁸ PRO PC 1/28/60, PC 1/28/61; 5th March 1795.

Respected Friend



London 12 Month 13 1789

By a part of thy letter to thy brother I am informed that it is thy desire, I should explain in writing wherein Emanuel Swedenborg has erred. I remember mentioning to thee, that he had erred in 6 points, which is certainly true, since it was revealed to our society by an immediate communication with Heaven, & will in its proper time be fully explained & made public, till then we dare not declare it. It has been revealed respecting Emanuel Swedenborg, & by those very beings who had communicated with him, that for a long time he was faithful in recording the revelations they gave, & which contained nothing but truths, but erring in his own ideas, not thoroughly understanding them, & wanting to explain them to others, he has swelled out to many volumes that, which unmixt with his own, would have made one volume only, & would have been (both for the present & approaching time) the most invaluable treasure ever published in the world except the Bible.

It pleased the Lord also to command a certain man to go to him, & tell him his error. though he knew that he (the man) had also the same communications with himself unfortunately for E.S. & all his readers he would not believe, because it did not please the Lord to communicate it to him by the medium of his Angels, which pride opened a door for the grand deceiver of mankind to deceive him also, & much of his latter writings are mixed with revelations from that source. For the satisfaction of those well inclined minds who find that in his writings there is much truth, with which they are much taken & delighted, I am permitted to say that a time will come, when they will be given pure & unmixt.

I was a lover of the truths I found in his writings & still I love them, but I could not help always seeing in them some manifest contradictions, & also that they did in some places oppose the Holy Scriptures every part of them in which the love of God & our neighbour is enforced as good, as also he may be believed in saying that there will be a new church though he hath not spoken truth in all that he has said on that subject.

The Lord.

The Lord is preparing those whom he chooses out of all Nations, kindred
all people on the face of the earth, to bring forward his new church
which he himself will guide direct & govern & which it is revealed to us
shall be in our days, to which purpose I am permitted to transcribe
the following words of the Angel Gabrielle.

good
to God

" I am / said Gabriel / the angel of the Eternal who am sent
before the face of the Lamb to sound the trumpet on the mountains of
Babylon to make known to the nations that the God of Heaven will
soon come to the gates of the earth, to change the face of the world, & to
manifest his power & glory. he has raised the standard against the
inhabitants of the earth, the ages have not much longer to linger, for
the accomplishment of his promises, & they will not carry to other
generations his justice. - I repeat it unto you O, O, O, Nations
the Eternal calls the times, & the time that walks in the shadow
over days of darkness, without light, & without strength is coming to
change the face of the world & to begin his new reign, the time is
near wherein the promises will be accomplished, the Human Blood will
flow in large streams, that the enemies of God may subsist no longer
& that the true religion may be known all over the world, prepare
yourselves; do not cease to pray and do not fear anything from the
calamities which are to happen for you will not experience them
provided you continue united & faithful.

My Friend has my permission to communicate the above to as
many as he chooses. it being the hearty prayer of my mind, that
all my fellow beings, may be warned of the near approach of that time
which is to fix their lot for light & life, to manifest on earth the
Lord of life & his glorious kingdom, or else death & darkness in the
manifestation of the Devil in the Hell.

May God grant, to all a lot & portion in him, is my ardent desire &
wish, & it will be so with all those who by giving their will to the

good & refusing the evil chose life & thereby become united & faithful
to God. - I am thy friend M Brian



the Nineties, there is no direct evidence that the letter was actually discussed by the Privy Council. However, because Privy Council minutes were irregularly kept and do not always provide either a full or systematic record of documentation received, or business evidently transacted, Privy Council consideration is not precluded although such discussion may have existed on a less formal basis. Letters are sometimes included in Privy Council records, but usually as solicited reports. Of course, the interception of private letters throughout the period 1790-1830 was completely routine: I have myself read hundreds of such examples. Some, but not all, of the intercepted or controversial documents sent up for perusal at Privy Council level would first have come through the body now known as the Home Office. However, my cursory search through Home Office documents for 1789 does not reveal any obvious context for Privy Council interest in ex-Swedenborgian visionaries.

There is one startling possibility which should be tentatively considered: that there was a Swedenborgian in the Privy Council. Marsha Keith Schuchard (1992) has already written about Benedict Chastanier's role in early 1780s London illuminist, freemason and Swedenborgian circles but there are further details to add. In February 1781 a letter and printed prospectus from Chastanier, trawling for support to publish Swedenborg's works, was received into—of all places—the War Office.⁹ In the context of this file, the most obvious recipient was Lord Amherst whose role as commander-in-chief extended over British naval forces as well as the army in India. By 1789 Amherst was a member of the Privy Council and attended its meeting on 4th November of that year.¹⁰ His motive for bringing forward any Swedenborg material he had in his possession would, I guess, be an over-riding loyalty to the King plus an urge to give full disclosure. Whoever bridged the link between War Office and Privy Council—if such a thing happened—the existence of these documents about Swedenborg in their respective government archives is a matter of fact.¹¹

In my essay I also suggested that the primary reason why the Privy Council bothered at all with Bryan's strange letter

was because of its reference to how "Human Blood will flow in large streams, that the enemies of God may subsist no longer & that the true religion may be known all over the world." I said that this combined veiled threats of religious violence, extremism and domestic unrest. While this conjecture is still valid, knowledge of Bryan's identity and his links with the Society of Avignon now highlights an apparently casual phrase in the text of his letter: "I remember mentioning to thee that he [Swedenborg] had erred in 6 points, which is certainly true, since it was revealed to our society by an immediate communication with Heaven" (my italics). Given the general anxieties about illuminism evident in Burke's *Reflections*, plus the French background of the Avignon Society in the Revolutionary year, the letter's interception is a considerable indicator of how seriously government viewed visionaries in general and international prophetic organizations in particular. More specifically, our knowledge of the length of Bryan's stay at Avignon (between February and September 1789) provides a remarkable coincidence about the date of his own disillusionment with Swedenborg (revealed to him at Avignon) and the probable date of Blake's similar disillusionment expressed in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* pls. 21-24, which I assume must have happened between April 1789 (when the Blakes' signed the Swedenborgian register) and the *Marriage* copy F date of 1790.¹²

However, perhaps the aspect of William Bryan's life providing the closest parallels with Blake are the circumstances of the vision which prompted him to go to Avignon in the first place. Bryan's account is fully detailed about the intimate relationship between his experience of prophetic vision and its incidence in the process of printing from copper plates:

The 23d of the month called January, 1789, in the morning, having made all things ready for my work, which was then copper-plate printing, I found a stop in my mind to go on with it. Waiting a little, I took some paper to wet for another plate, but found the same stop: then I perceived that it was of the Lord. (Bryan 1795 [21])

Bryan's description implies that he had been working on a copper plate—possibly etching, probably printing from it—before discarding it and turning to print from another plate which he already had ready. Bryan must then have positioned the plate in the rolling press, made ready his wetting trough, and prepared to begin printing off. It is at this point, with the wetted paper gripped in his fingers, that he had the vi-

⁹ PRO War Office 34/130.175, 176; letter 16 February 1781 from Benedict Chastanier; enclosure, B[enedict].C[hastanier]., *Prospectus pour La Publication de Quelques Traités Theologiques, ordinairement écrits en Latin, Par le feu, Emanuel Baron de Swedenborg Par seu Nicholas de La Pierre*.

¹⁰ PRO PC 1/18/19, minutes, 4th November 1789.

¹¹ A further possibility is the agency of the alchemist, freemason and soldier, General Charles Rainsford (Schuchard 1992). Although I have not examined the Rainsford papers in the British Library Department of Manuscripts, the catalogue indicates that (at least in the early 1780s), Rainsford's military duties meant that he sometimes corresponded with Lord Amherst and that he filed reports back to the War Office. On at least two occasions (but in 1797), Rainsford also corresponded with Privy Council member the Duke of Portland (drawing to Portland's attention suggested "Precautions in Case of an Alarm in London," Portland Correspondence, University of Nottingham Library, C 4/5, C 4/6, 28th February 1797).

¹² Blake inked "1790" onto plate 3 of copy F of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, reproduced in Eaves, Essick, Viscomi (1993). Viscomi (1997, 1998, 1999) rightly implies that this, in itself, is not sufficient to positively date the period of *The Marriage*'s composition although, on balance, a cut-off date of c. 1790 seems likely.

sion telling him to meet up with John Wright and for both of them to leave immediately for France. Like William Blake, Bryan's personal history of visionary experiences went back to when he was four years old (Bryan 1795 [15]) but, of course, it is the parallels with the emphasis on the engraving and printing processes found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in addition to Bryan's repudiation of Swedenborg in 1789, which will be of greatest interest to Blakeans.¹³

Like Blake, who exhibited paintings and sold illuminated books as well as doing commercial engraving, Bryan found it necessary to supplement his jobs in the engraving trade with an allied business he could run from his home. The augmentation and migration across a range of skills was typical of contemporary artisans.¹⁴ The necessity for flexibility and cultural mobility in Blake's working life was essentially no different from that of other artisans. In the mid 1780s, Bryan acted with two or three other vendors to sell Robert Hindmarsh's printings of Swedenborg's *A Summary View of the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church* (1785), *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Sacred Scripture* (1786) *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord* (1786), and *The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem* (1786). Bryan's bookselling of Swedenborg provides a firm foundation for his claim in his letter to have once been "a lover of the truths I found in his writings." Bryan's involvement with Hindmarsh's Swedenborg printing project also provides a possible context for *The Marriage's* "Printing house in Hell" (pl. 15, E 40) or, at least, it moves one London engraver—although not Blake—closer to the "Printing house" stage in the production of Swedenborg's writings.

Also suggestive of a possible immediate context for *The Marriage* is Bryan's enigmatic claim that the nature of Swedenborg's "6" errors "will in it's proper time be fully explained & made public, till then we dare not declare it." Bryan's coy timidity about going "public" on Swedenborg's doctrinal or visionary failings contrasts with Blake's vow in *The Marriage* that "the world shall have" "The Bible of Hell" "whether they will or no" (pl. 24, E 44). Reluctant or deferred revelations were also a characteristic of Richard Brothers's writings and so may not be unusual at this time although an exact understanding of the contemporary cultural significance of these spiritual registers remains elusive. Nevertheless, it seems right to conclude that Blake's differences from Bryan should be encountered within an expectation that there might also be proximities, at least in their employment of a common rhetorical lexicon.

¹³ For an extended discussion of engraving imagery in *The Marriage*, see Viscomi (1999).

¹⁴ The Spencean activist and pamphleteer Thomas Evans was, at various times, a print colourer, coffee house keeper, baker and braces maker (PRO Treasury Solicitor 11/689/2187, 12 and 14 March 1798; McCalman [1988]; Worrall [1997]).

On his return to London in September 1789, Bryan tried to resume trading as a copper plate printer but found employment hard to come by, even though he later claimed his work had been "approved . . . by the best engravers."¹⁵

Notwithstanding my abilities as a copper-plate printer had been approved of by the best engravers, and I had before been entrusted with the best work to do, I could not now even get the commonest. I passed almost two years in this way, sometimes a month, or two months, and had not any thing to do; sometimes a job of writing, engraving, printing, &c. would engage me a few weeks... (Bryan 1795 [29])

The "best" engraver most likely to have known Bryan was Blake's acquaintance the 1794 LCS treason trial witness, William Sharp, who was also a fastidious disciple of Richard Brothers around 1795, the time when Wright and Bryan were also devotees and writing their testimonies (Paley 1973 pl. 66). In a revealing transition which is typical of the piecemeal lives of contemporary artisans, finding no engraving work Bryan turned to what might best be described as "prophetic healing," opening "a shop as a druggist and vender[sic] of the patent medicines, at the same time dispensing as an apothecary, but on a different plan" (Bryan 1795 [29]).¹⁶ Bryan's "different plan" was to use his prophetic powers as an aid to diagnosis, a calling suggested to him by an earlier training in medicine as well as by the noticeably physiological nature of his visionary experiences:

By his Holy Spirit I have at times been favoured to feel so much of that love as to enter into a sympathy of feeling with my patient, so that I could describe every symptom of their disease from *feeling it in my own body*; and such has been the mercy of the Lord, that it has instantly been communicated to my mind what to give, and I have even been ordered to say to them, "*this medicine will certainly cure you, by such or such a time you will be well*;" and this has accordingly happened. (Bryan 1795 [30])

The social precedent amongst 1780s London visionaries was the painter Phillipe de Louthembourg whose cures by Swedenborgian "influxes" at his home in Hammersmith Terrace were witnessed and affirmed in print by his female follower, Mary Pratt (1789).¹⁷ Bryan's experiential relation-

¹⁵ The exact month of their return is given in Wright (1794 [20]).

¹⁶ I have not located the whereabouts of this shop which Bryan must have opened sometime around late 1791. Brothers, in March 1795, thought Bryan and Wright were both living at 48, Dorset Street, Manchester Square, Marylebone, which was Wright's home when he himself apparently turned from carpentry to bookselling, PRO PC 1/28/61; 5th March 1795.

¹⁷ Pratt (1789). For other contemporary networks of radicalism, religious enthusiasm and alternative medicine, see McCalman (1998).

ship between life in the engraving trade and in prophetic medicine provides a further context for *The Marriage's* "infernal" "corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal ... displaying the infinite which was hid" (pl. 14, E 39, my italics).

I am not attempting here to define a direct transmission route of influence between Blake and Bryan but merely trying to indicate how extensively their lives overlapped by virtue of their moment, occupation, location and spiritual life. Ultimately, the differences between the two men are as revealing as their similarities. Blake's reactions to his own visions or spiritual beliefs were not as extreme in their results or consequences as Bryan's. After his workplace vision, Bryan left London immediately, in the depths of winter, to make his way to Avignon, leaving behind him his wife Betty who, days before, had experienced the death of their infant (Bryan 1795 [20]). Also, before touching briefly (like Blake) on the Swedenborgians, Bryan had had a disjointed, unsatisfactory, spiritual life being by his own account barely tolerated and then "disowned" by the Quakers in late 1788 or early January 1789, very much on the eve of his "Avignon" vision (Bryan 1795 [19]). The physiological symptoms of Bryan's visions are also more noticeable than Blake's: "In my infancy, when I was only four years old, I was frequently favoured with a knowledge of the Divine Goodness in a sensible manner, having very near access in prayer, and feeling my whole body thrill with the enjoyment of God" (Bryan 1795 [15]). These experiences were evidently so vivid to Bryan that, as I have detailed above, he was confident enough to turn them into a career. With Blake, the physiological symptoms are noticeable but, by comparison, much less radical: "Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the rock of ages, / While I write of the building of Golgonooza" (*Jerusalem* 5: 23-24, E 147). Professionally, Blake was also much more successful than Bryan. Bryan's attempts to follow the career of copper plate printer and bookseller had to be abandoned and he does not appear to have returned to the book trade although it may very well be that attachment to the cause of Richard Brothers gave him a degree of self-validation.

Although I have suggested here and in *Blake in the Nineties* that the example of Bryan considerably widens our knowledge of the sort of spiritual communities within which he and Blake are likely to have co-existed, there is a further piece of evidence from this period which must be weighed as indicating a significant context for *The Marriage*. One of the implications of finding a part of Bryan's letter repeated in Wright's *Revealed Knowledge* of 1794 means that, remarkably, some of the prophetic journals and notes printed in Wright's book must indeed have been written—just as Wright claims—in 1789. Wright and Bryan appear to have colluded in recording the visionary experiences they had in Avignon. Chief amongst these "Avignon" writings are 10 pages of "Sentences. Moral Maxims. and Spiritual Instruc-

tions, extracted out of Answers from HEAVEN" published in *A Revealed Knowledge* (Wright 1794 [48-58]). Now that these "Answers from HEAVEN" can, on a good balance of documentary probability, be authenticated back to 1789, they make a remarkable list of aphorisms to set against Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" (pl. 7, E 35-38). I reprint some of them here:

Too much *confidence* blinds us, and *pride* leads us astray, and precipitates us into the abyss, because the truth flies from us.

One ray of light is not the entire light.

A wise man is silent when he ought to be so.

The night was before the day, the day is before the night. (48)

Preserve thyself from thyself, that the serpent of lies, may not stifle before thee the *Eagle* of truth and light. (49)

Time has its measure[:]; its measure is wisdom, and wisdom belongs to GOD.

The path of Glory, is the love of GOD; that of wisdom is simplicity. (50)

Confidence is the principal [*sic*] of life. (51)

He who does not sow in the field of the promises of the ETERNAL, will not *there* reap of his *gifts*.

To be just, become simple; to become a new man, become a child; the paths of obedience are those of simplicity.

The compass of wisdom is above the level of the world. Follow the bent, follow the desires to be the child of promise, and leave corruption to run into the *sepulchre of the old man*. (52)

He who gives all, wills all.

Confidence chases fear, for fear brings trouble with it, and troubles in their return bring disgust. (53)

Anxiety drives away wisdom.

Remember that in seeking thine own glory, GOD himself *wills* to be glorified.

Tread under thy feet the *prudence of men*. (54)

Heaven explains itself sufficiently when it *inspires*. (55)

Innocence and simplicity transform man into an angel of light.

Simplicity seeks no bye paths, and knows how to escape them. (57)

The just with confidence runs over the ground in simplicity without sifting the road. (58)¹⁸

¹⁸ A slightly different selection is provided by Southey in *Letters from England* (1807).

Scholars will wish to make their own minds up about the proximities, if any, between the rhetorical patterns of "Answers from HEAVEN" and "Proverbs of Hell." Both sets can now, with some confidence, be dated to 1789-90. Both claim to be of visionary extraction and were written by a visionary engraver, a visionary carpenter and a visionary copper plate printer/bookseller. Remarkably, by mid 1789, all three men had flirted with Swedenborgianism.

There is much else which might be said about John Wright and William Bryan, their relationship with Richard Brothers, the political implications of their collaborations and the history of radical prophetic culture in 1790s London. Wherever one looks, this culture was wider and more complex in its social organization than the example of Blake indicates when taken in isolation. Otherwise, who would have thought that there would be *two* ex-Swedenborgian visionaries intimately connected with the engraving trade who both lived in London in 1789 and shared the initials "W.B."?

Public Record Office, Kew, Privy Council 11/18/19.
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Respected Friend, London 12 Month 13 1789

By a part of thy letter to thy Brother I am informed that it is thy desire, I should explain in writing wherein Emanuel Swedenborg has erred. I remember mentioning to thee that he had erred in 6 points, which is certainly true, since it was revealed to our society by an immediate communication with Heaven, & will in it's proper time be fully explained & made public, till then we dare not declare it. It has been revealed respecting Emanuel Swedenborg & by those very beings who had communicated with him, that for a long time he was faithful in recording the revelations they gave, & which contained nothing but truth, but erring in his own ideas, not thoroughly understanding them, & wanting to explain them to others, he has swelled out to many volumes that, which unmixt with his own, would have made one volume only, & would have been (both for the present & approaching time) the most invaluable treasure ever published in the world except the Bible.

It pleased the Lord also to command a certain man to go to him & Tell him his error though he knew that he (the man) had also the same communications with himself unfortunately for E.S. & all his readers he would not believe, because it did not please the Lord to communicate it to him by the medium of his Angells, which pride opened a door for the grand deceiver of mankind to deceive[sic] him also, & much of his latter writings are mixed with revelations from that source. For the satisfaction of those well inclined minds who find that in his writings there is much truth, with which they are much taken & delighted, I am permitted to say that a time will come, when they will be given pure & unmixt.

I was a lover of the truths I found in his writings & still I love them, but I could not help always seeing in them some manifest contradictions & also that they did in some places oppose the Holy Scriptures every part of them in which the love of God & our neighbours is enforced is good, as also he may be believed in saying that there will be a new church though he hath not spoken truth in all that he has said on that subject
The Lord

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The Lord is preparing those whom he chuses and of all Nations, Kindred all people on the face of the earth. to bring forward his new church which he himself will guide direct & govern & which it is revealed to us shall be in our days, to which purpose I am permitted to transcribe the following words of the Angell Gabriell

"I am (said Gabriel) the angel of the Eternal who am sent before the face of the Lamb to sound the trumpet on the mountains of Babylon to make known to the nations that the God of Heaven will soon come to the gates of the earth, to change the face of the world; & to manifest his power & glory, he has raised the standard against the inhabitants of the earth, the ages have not much longer to linger, for the accomplishment of his promises, & they will not carry to other generations his justice—I repeat it unto you. O,O,O, Nations the Eternal calls the times, & the time that walks in the shadow over days of darkness, without light, & without strength is coming to change the face of the world & to begin his new reign, the time is near wherein the promises will be accomplished, the Human Blood will flow in large streams, that the enemies of God may subsist no longer & that the true religion may be known all over the world, prepare yourselves, do not cease to pray and do not fear any thing from the calamities which are to happen for you will not experience them provided you continue united & faithful

My Friend has my permission to communicate the above to as many as he chuses, it being the hearty prayer of my mind, that all my fellow beings, may be warned of the near approach of that time which is to fix their lot for light & life, to manifest on earth the Lord of life & his glorious kingdom, or else death & darkness in the manifestation of the Devills in the Hell

May God grant to all a lot & portion in him, is my ardent desire & wish, & it will be so with all those who by giving their will so to the

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good & refusing the evill chuse life & thereby become united & faithful to God. — I am thy friend WBrian

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

A Blake Drawing Rediscovered and Redated

BY MARTIN BUTLIN

William Michael Rossetti's "Annotated Lists of Blake's Paintings, Drawings and Engravings," added as an appendix to Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake*, 1863, and revised for the second edition of 1880, are invaluable in listing Blake's works when they were still in the hands of a relatively small number of owners, and in helping identify particular works through the almost naive specificity of some of his descriptions. However, unless the work is actually dated (and not even then in every case), Rossetti rarely gives any indication as to the period of a work, nor of its connection to any specific series of designs or set of illustrations. Remarks such as "A sketch for a design afterwards executed" is tantalizing to say the least (1863, p. 247, list 2, no. 78, and 1880, p. 266, list 2, no. 103; this drawing, listed as untraced in my catalogue, Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 1981, pp. 455-56, no. 610, has still not been identified). Hence it is not altogether unforgivable that the drawing entitled by Rossetti "The Last Trumpet" (illus. 1: see cover) should have been listed by me as a possible illustration to [Robert] Blair's *The Grave*, "c.