

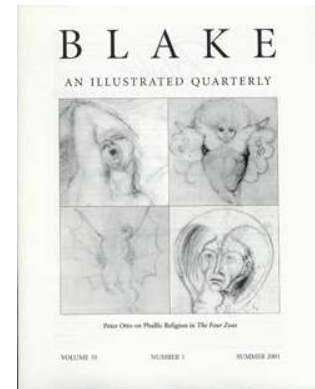
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Blake for Children

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The answer to her questions is "yes." The Urizenic belief that life can be found only in death has inspired humanity to "erect a lasting habitation in the mouldering Church yard" (112[108]: 11). As Ahania laments,

 alas that Man should come to this
His strong bones beat with snows & hid within the
caves of night
Marrowless bloodless falling into dust driven by the
winds
O how the horrors of Eternal Death take hold on Man
(112[108]: 32-5)

Ahania deplores the hold death has on humanity; yet against such a formidable foe, what can she do? In her account, humanity is the victim of horrors no human efforts could remove. The lesson to be drawn from her lamentation is that we can do not more than prepare ourselves for the advent of the Savior, who will take us from this world to heaven. The "phallic" congruence of passivity, fear, and death that this implies is nicely evoked by Enion, who replies to Ahania "from the Caverns of the Grave" (113[109]: 13):

A voice came in the night a midnight cry upon the
mountains
Awake the bridegroom cometh I awoke to sleep no
more
But an Eternal Consummation is dark Enion
The watry Grave. O thou Corn field O thou Vegetater
happy
More happy is the dark consumer hope drowns all my
torment
For I am now surrounded by a shadowy vortex draw
ing
The Spectre quite away from Enion that I die a death
Of bitter hope altho I consume in these raging waters
(113[109]: 20-7)

Ahania's despair and Enion's hope are responses to the devastating effect on the body of Urizen's phallic religion. Their responses, however, remain within the orbit of that religion.

As I have argued, the phallus rises as Urizen, confronted by death, confines the body within a form that, he hopes, will be judged worthy of salvation. His efforts, of course, exacerbate Albion's suffering and sense of powerlessness. This in turn intensifies humanity's desire for the advent of a Savior and so brings the cycle back to its beginning. As this suggests, the phallus stands at the centre of a labyrinth that includes its own exits within itself:⁶⁸ the desire for transcendence is both the product of and the precondition for the labyrinth of the fallen world.

With regard to this type of labyrinth, humanity is both lock and key. The possibility of exodus can be achieved only

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 129-60: 104.

by recognizing heaven and hell as the contingent products of human actions. In *The Four Zoas*, Blake writes as a prophet, patiently mapping the contours of Albion's prison, in the hope that the relations that constitute Urizen's primitive phallic religion can be recognized and then changed. As Blake writes in his Notebook:

If it is True What the Prophets write
That the heathen Gods are all stocks & stones
Shall we for the sake of being Polite
Feed them with the juice of our marrow bones[?]
(E 501)

MINUTE PARTICULARS

Blake for Children

BY MICHAEL FERBER

I was recently invited to edit a selection of Blake poems for children, as one of a series of books in a large format with plenty of room for new illustrations. My first reaction, of course, was that Blake had already done that, and had illustrated his poems pretty well by himself, thank you very much, though in a rather small format. After looking over several books already published in the series, however (Dickinson, Frost, Poe, Stevenson), I was won over to the project—provided I could include a few of Blake's own illustrations as enticements for children to find the readily available editions of the *Songs*. Well, my editor pointed out, the series format is rigid; she would try to convince the board to allow one Blake original at the end, but was not at all sure she would succeed even at that. The only opening was in the choice for a small black-and-white picture (perhaps a photograph!) of the author at the end of the introduction; that could be by Blake. And I could say in the introduction that Blake was a professional illustrator and almost always included his designs with his poems, and I could list some books in the bibliography.

I hesitated, loyal Blake purist that I am. But then I gave in. After all, I reasoned, for over a century Blake's designs were difficult and expensive to obtain while his poetry, set in ordinary type and its spelling normalized, gained many readers and admirers. Moreover I have long felt that some of his designs weren't very good, especially in the *Songs*. I could do a better tyger myself. (I know, there is a subtle case to be made that Blake drew the tyger to seem unfrighting as an ironic comment on the speaker's awestruck state of mind—but still!) Neil Waldman has painted a properly awesome tyger in his edition of the poem (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993), and Paul Howard has a good one in *Classic Poetry: An Illustrated Collection*, edited by Michael Rosen (Cam-

bridge, MA: Candlewick, 1998). Why shouldn't a new illustrator have a go? Would Blake himself have objected to someone else exercising his or her imagination over his texts? I didn't think so.

I won't deny that the fee was an incentive, too. For not terribly much work, and with the promised help of my eight-year-old daughter, who has long had Blake's "Tyger" plate hanging in her bedroom and can sing "Jerusalem" with great flair, I would earn as much as I made on my last Blake book, which took me over a year to write.

So I plunged in. I needed about twenty-five poems to fit the format. After I made about a dozen obvious choices from the *Songs*, and "Jerusalem," and a couple of excerpts from the long works, it began to come home to me how few poems Blake actually wrote that are suitable for children aside from the *Songs* themselves, and some of those seemed either too namby-pamby or too difficult. I considered "The Mental Traveller": I don't understand it, but children might really like it. Would they like *The!*? Probably not, but I might be mistaken. I wondered if anyone had ever actually tested Blake's poems (and designs) on children and published the results. I thought nonetheless that I could meet the quota with a list not entirely predictable but still well representative of Blake's shorter works.

My daughter helped, not by locating poems, since she didn't know Blake well and had other claims on her reading time such as Harry Potter, but by going over the ones I typed up and circling words she did not know, or that "other kids might not know," to guide me in the annotations. She rated some of them, following Coleridge's example; she wrote "exilent" over "The School Boy" (her school year had just ended). Her circlings were interesting and would have been useful had the project gone through.

But trouble lay ahead, and I should have seen it coming. I had paused over "London." For a number of years the whole poem lay chiseled into the Silver Jubilee Walkway on the South Bank of the Thames where every child might read it. Its rhythm and sound effects are attractive. But it's certainly grim, and especially in the last stanza rather dense. It would need a lot of notes. I ran it by my editor. Oh, no, out of the question: it has the word "harlot" in it! The board wouldn't allow it; Christian groups would picket the bookstores. It wasn't the scathing condemnation of church, state, and commerce that did it, but the presence of a word. My daughter knows what a harlot is, and when I explained why there were so many of them in London and how miserable a life they led, and that Blake sympathized with them, she accepted it all with her innocence intact. Never mind, no "harlot."

Since I had had my own doubts over "London" I swallowed my scorn and sent off my preliminary selection: ten from *Innocence*, six from *Experience*, and three others, with headnotes and annotations on words not every kid might know. My editor emailed some fulsome praise for the notes and then went on: "You made some excellent choices. There

are only three that I think would be a problem for us." Only three.

The Little Black Boy: Current day sensitivity is such that I think this is a no-win poem that could only cause problems for the book. White as good and black as a cloud can arouse a terrific amount of resentment and objection, and it would be a shame to open the door to this kind of hornets' nest.

Nightmares of the NAACP joining the Christians unhappy about harlots. Had her company published an edition of *Huckleberry Finn*?

The Divine Image: Seems a bit more religious and moralistic than is right for [us].

The Humanists and the ACLU will be unhappy?

The Little Vagabond: Ale-house. We must keep away from alcohol, beer, ale, even wine—any reference to drinking, especially any glorification of it. Actually, we try to avoid it altogether.

More Christians with picket signs. We were back to the Victorian editors of Blake, who omitted lines with "whore" in them or dropped "The Little Vagabond" altogether.

After a day or two letting off steam I decided I had to draw the line. I could kiss the vagabond good-bye. It's not all that great a poem anyway, though my daughter liked it and thought it funny. The headnote would have had to explain how everyone drank beer or ale then because no one drank water. And what about the wine at communion? Never mind. But my notions of suitability certainly conflicted with my editor's. I wrote back that

"Little Black Boy" must remain—it is one of the four or five greatest poems in the lot; and it is not racist. I think you've misunderstood it: both black skin and white skin are clouds; beneath them we are all alike. Of course the black boy is confused, and still sees white as superior in some way; of course: he lived in London in 1789. I can change the headnote if you like, but it must stay. "The Divine Image" is religious, to be sure—it appears in some hymnals today (along with "Jerusalem," which is no less religious)—but its sentiments are tolerant and humane. It must stay, too.

And to my editor's suggestion that we simply drop the last stanza of "London," I replied that printing the first three stanzas of "London" would be like performing the first three movements of Beethoven's Ninth.

I then rather preachily went on about how radical Blake was, how even "The Tyger" raises heretical religious notions, how Blake understood that children should not be fed uncontroversial and politically correct pabulum, and so on.

My editor then emailed her board, and passed on to me the most important reply, the one from her boss.

I am not an expert on Blake nor on the morals of America. However, I am fairly expert on what we are likely to get into trouble for publishing, and harlots and religion and race are certainly right at the top of the category. We will not use poems that include these themes or we are likely to get into a difficult situation. I appreciate his explanation of black and white, but I cannot be there to explain that to a reviewer, nor more likely, to a store owner or buyer or consumer. I would much rather take back the money and cancel this project.

I agreed with the last sentence.

Blake would not have been surprised to hear that certain "experts" govern the publishing industry, experts not in what they publish but in what might get them into a "difficult situation." The experts do the work of the self-appointed censors they fear and base their own morals on the bottom line. The Beast & the Whore rule without controls, and they are cowards to boot.

I got to write a self-righteous letter to one of the bosses as I returned my check:

The restrictions on content—no poem can refer to race, religion, sex, or alcohol—have strangled this project and I can no longer be a part of it. It would be an insult to Blake to continue with it, the Blake who despised the timidity and conformism of the book-publishing business of his own day and suffered from it. I recommend you drop Blake altogether from your projected list: he's too much for you.

The boss got to write an even more self-righteous reply:

The William Blake project will be better served by having an editor who understands the children's market, and who can appreciate the need for sensitive and responsible treatment of racial issues.

He must not have been the boss who appreciated my explanation of black and white, but he is probably right that I don't understand the children's market. I think I more or less understand children, however, and I understand the damage the market can inflict on them. A quick trip to the children's section of my local Barnes and Noble, moreover, has shown me that other publishers share my ignorance: there I found "The Little Black Boy" in Iona and Peter Opie's *Oxford Book of Children's Verse* (1973, paperback 1994), and both "The Little Black Boy" and "The Divine Image" in Elizabeth H. Sword, ed., *A Child's Anthology of Poetry* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1995).

I have since wondered if Blake would have agreed with my refusal to cooperate. Perhaps he would have wanted me to suppress my indignation and let the project go forward.

"The Tyger" would have remained, and might have generated some forehead-widening conversations: "Daddy, if God made lambs, why did he make tigers? Or could there be two Gods?" I might have slipped in a few more subtly subversive poems. If some kids liked my selection, they could easily have found paperbacks of the *Songs* at stores or libraries and read the poems I had to leave out. "Mommy, what's a harlot, and why would she blast a baby's tear?" Perhaps Blake had something like this in mind when he produced his *Songs* in the first place, in the form and manner of contemporary children's books but with something very unorthodox lurking within. I think Shelley did something like this when he gave his radical critique of God, monarchy, commerce, and meat-eating the absurdly misleading title *Queen Mab*.

Well, if I missed an opportunity someone else can take it on, someone more sensitive, or less sensitive, than I. If such a volume appears, however, and if it leaves out all the scary poems, wouldn't it be fun to form a Blakean Anti-Defamation League and picket the bookstores?

Verbal Echoes of Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that Guided the Ancients* (1796) in *Jerusalem*

BY TILAR JENON MAZZEO

Blake's references to sculpture develop one of the most persistent metaphors in *Jerusalem*, and the relationship between the poem and sculptural forms has received considerable critical attention in recent years. Studies by Vincent De Luca, W.J.T. Mitchell, Morton Paley, Molly Rothenberg, Jason Whittaker, and Joseph Viscomi have each suggested that Blake's investment in sculpture is reflected in the structural and thematic principles of the poem.¹ However, Blake's verbal echoes of George Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that Guided the Ancients in Composing Their Groupes and Figures* (1796) in *Jerusalem*

¹ Discussions of sculptural forms within *Jerusalem* typically focus on three predominant images—the bright sculptures of Los' halls in Golgonooza, the "unhewn" Druidical temples at Stonehenge and Avebury, and Blake's visual emphasis on the iconic arrangement of words. The most developed discussion of Blake's sculptural aesthetic is offered by De Luca's reading of the hieroglyph (literally "sacred statue") and the biblical sublime, in the *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (1991). Other approaches to this topic are offered in: Viscomi's *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (1993); Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art* (1978); Paley's "Wonderful Originals: Blake and Ancient Sculpture" in *Blake in His Time*, Eds. Essick and Pearce (1978); Rothenberg's *Rethinking Blake's Textuality* (1993), and Whittaker's *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (1999).