

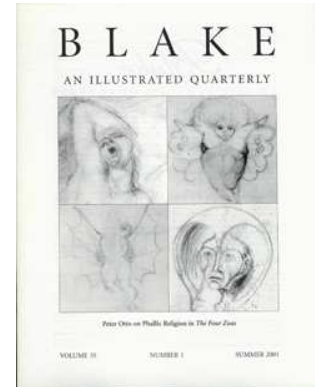
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M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

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

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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*

<sup>1</sup> 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).



have not been noted as a source for his interest in the medium, although the parallels between these two texts offer suggestive conceptual implications.

Blake's familiarity with the *Thoughts on Outline* and his enthusiasm for the author's imagery are evident from his letters to George Cumberland, who employed Blake as an engraver on the project from 1794 to 1796.<sup>2</sup> During this period, Blake completed six plates for Cumberland's book, and his letters emphasize his confidence in Cumberland's artistic sensibilities.<sup>3</sup> Blake writes in 1796, for example, that he sends his plates to Cumberland "to be transmuted, thou real Alchymist" (Erdman, 700). Again in 1799, upon receipt of the finished volume, he professes to "study [Cumberland's] outlines as usual just as if they were antiques" (Erdman, 704). This particular interest in Cumberland's outlines was to develop further when Blake came to write *Jerusalem*, and his engagement with the *Thoughts on Outline* stemmed, I propose, from Cumberland's unusual definition of sculpture as an essentially linear form.

In the *Thoughts on Outline*, Cumberland develops a complex and quite original definition of sculpture, which identifies the bounding line as the defining and potentially transformative feature of this medium. As a linear form, sculpture is characterized by outline, surface, and circumference and is reducible to two dimensions without any change in its essential quality. In fact, Cumberland writes that:

The Sculptor's art, by which is not meant merely finishing his compositions in marble, but forming, with correctness, figures in any material, is a truly rational and liberal employment....The statue is *all* outline; a creation, the bounds of whose surface require inconceivable knowledge, taste, and study, to circumscribe.  
(Cumberland, 8-9)

Here, Cumberland suggests that sculpture is independent of its traditional media and is a form characterized instead by its outline, boundary, and surface. The relationship among these elements is more clearly delineated later in his treatise, when Cumberland explains how these model outlines are produced—as projections cast from a limited num-

ber of antique originals. In his estimation "there are statues in the world which, if turned around on a pivot before a lamp, would produce, on a wall, some hundreds of fine outlines" (33). Thus, the bounding line of a sculptural form contains a multiplicity of outlines within it, and this is its rarest quality. Not only can sculpture transform itself, however, Cumberland also claims that its production is an act of artistic and intellectual alchemy. He writes:

form stamps a value on the meanest materials [and] when this nation shall have nursed a race of men, capable of creating finer forms than others, out of clay, stone, wood, and metals, we shall possess a better thing than the ideal stone of the philosopher. For that pretends only to the skill of compounding gold from mixed metals, but these men will transmute, by aid of the mind, and hand, the basest materials into solid bullion. (12)

Sculptural activity becomes both a national project and an act of alchemical restoration. And, while Blake echoes Cumberland's concept of sculpture throughout *Jerusalem*, it is this last passage—which proposes the delineation of form as the imaginative renovation of base existence—that particularly interested the poet.

Blake's subsequent interest in Cumberland's aesthetic principles and in this passage from the *Thoughts on Outline* in particular is suggested by several of his own critical statements. In the *Descriptive Catalogue*, for example, Blake indicates his abiding interest in both outline and sculpture, claiming that his own works have been shaped by an investment in the "bounding line" of form and in the richness of "Antique Statues" (Erdman, 550; 536). However, Blake's letters also indicate his particular interest in this alchemical passage in Cumberland's treatise. This metaphor of transmutation appears only once in Cumberland's text, and it is surely the source of Blake's invocation of Cumberland as "thou real Alchymist!" in the letter of 23 December 1796. More importantly, Blake also seems to have had this passage in mind when composing the final plates of *Jerusalem*, and the poem's apocalypse incorporates verbal echoes of Cumberland's treatise on outline and sculpture.

In the dramatic final lines of *Jerusalem*, Blake alludes specifically to the alchemical passage from *Thoughts on Outline*, narrating an apocalypse that evokes Cumberland's imaginative transmutation of "clay, stone, wood, and metals" (12). In the final visionary conversation, Blake describes "All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone" (99:1), repeating precisely Cumberland's sculptural elements. And, while this instance marks the only *precise* reference to the *Thoughts on Outline*, other passages in the final plates of the poem suggest that Blake may have had Cumberland's treatise in mind, most notably the celebration of "the Outline the Circumference & Form" of the human lineaments in Beulah (98:22). In light of these refer-

<sup>2</sup> All references are to George Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that Guided the Ancient Artists in Composing their Figures and Groupes: Accompanied with Free Remarks on the Practice of the Moderns, and Liberal Hints Cordially Intended for their Advantage: to which are Annexed Twenty-four Designs of Classical Subjects Invented on the Principles Recommended in the Essay by George Cumberland* (London, 1796). References to Blake's works refer to David V. Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> For further identification and discussion of the *Thoughts on Outline* plates, see G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 542-44; and Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Engravings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 67-70 and figs. 147-54.



ences, it seems clear that Blake was thinking of Cumberland's treatise as he composed *Jerusalem*.

The significance of Blake's verbal echoes and allusions, unfortunately, lies beyond the scope of a short note such as this; however, several conceptual similarities between Cumberland's essay and Blake's poem suggest themselves immediately, and they perhaps merit further consideration. After all, the thematic parallels with the *Thoughts on Outline* extend beyond the final plates of *Jerusalem*. Not only does Cumberland's description of statuary as a linear form offer a new way to read Blake's process of relief etching and his aesthetic sensibilities in the visual images of *Jerusalem*, but there is also a sense in which the base narrative of the poem—Los's journey with "red globe of fire in hand" around the "stonified" body of Albion—can be read as an enactment of Cumberland's process of casting outlines. Above all, there is this central similarity: Blake proposes, like Cumberland, a series of "stupendous originals," each described by and, in a sense, composed of the scattered images, outlines, and projections of its own form. While Cumberland's aesthetic project is to collect these outlines in a single didactic text, Blake's objective, though surely more complex and subtle, may ultimately be much the same.

## R E V I E W

Steve Clark and David Worrall, eds. *Blake in the Nineties*. London: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. xiv + 242 pp. \$49.95.

Reviewed by SHEILA A. SPECTOR

Generically, the published proceedings of a conference are greater than the sum of the individual papers presented during the course of the two- or three-day period in which scholars meet to exchange their views on a particular topic. *Blake in the Nineties* is the product of a conference organized by Steve Clark and David Worrall at St. Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill, in July 1994, to consider the deliberately ambiguous topic of "Blake in the Nineties." Referring, obviously, to the 1790s, the historical period when, politically, Great Britain formally entered into war with France, and, professionally, Blake confronted the limitations of his business prospects, the conference title also points to the 1990s, the critical period when the British-American academic community began to resist the control ideological criticism had exercised over the direction taken by Blake scholarship during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Implicitly rejecting the restrictions associated with what had degenerated into a fundamentally dualistic mode of thought, the participants—both individually and collectively—exposed the oversimplifications inherent in a

binary mode of thought, as they articulated a new kind of pluralistic criticism, one that would liberate Blake from the theoretical sectarianism that had dominated the academy for so long.

The impetus for this new mode of thought, according to Clark and Worrall's introduction, was the publication of the William Blake Trust facsimiles. In contrast to the bibliographical principles governing both Keynes and Erdman, the new Blake editors rejected the assumption of an ur-text, a hypothetical construct of which each of the extant illuminated books, by implication, could only be an incomplete, if not flawed, rendition. Rather, the new editors viewed each version of each text as an articulation of a particular expression, thus transforming the succession of printings into specific stages in the record of Blake's developing attitude towards a given work. As a result of this new bibliographical perspective, scholars began to recognize the deleterious effect the binary mode of thought had exercised over Blake criticism. Like the Sons of Albion who, as we learned in *Jerusalem*, in their strength

... take the Two Contraries which are calld Qualities,  
with which  
Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good &  
Evil  
From them they make an Abstract, which is a Nega-  
tion  
Not only of the Substance from which it is derived  
A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer  
Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power  
An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing  
(pl. 10:8-14, E 152-53)

deconstructive criticism had degenerated, according to Clark and Worrall, "into a fastidious bibliographical ultra-empiricism. . . [that] somewhat unexpectedly, resulted in interpretative curtailment rather than textual licence" (1). Collectively, the eleven essays comprising *Blake in the Nineties* help counter the negations dominating twentieth-century criticism by exposing the theoretical oversimplifications upon which they had been predicated, and then by providing historical justification for the new pluralism.

Fittingly, the paradigm for this new mode of inquiry can be inferred from the triad of essays found in the middle, beginning, and end of the anthology: Angela Esterhammer's "Calling into Existence: *The Book of Urizen*"; Robert N. Essick's "Blake and the Production of Meaning"; and Keri Davies's "Mrs. Bliss: a Blake Collector of 1794." As the sixth of eleven papers, Esterhammer's is a first-rate example of speech-act criticism, intended to analyze the degeneration of language from God's initial use of performatives in the creative process to their distortion by the tyrant who attempts to impose a restrictive political and social order. Using *The Book of Urizen* as her text, Esterhammer explores this dualistic manifestation of performatives: "That this