

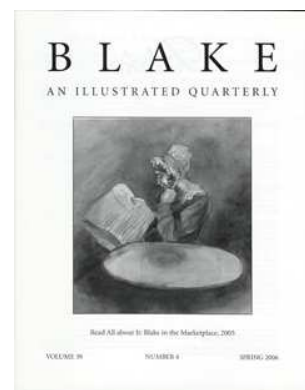
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

“mark ye the points” (Jerusalem pl. 83)

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One might think a discussion of a tiny pencil line futile and petty, but it is a notoriously delicate matter. What Van Kleeck does not mention, and what I discovered by chance when separating and then puzzling together the various fragments of the two titles, is that if we look closely beside the mark discussed here there is one short word at the end of the second line of the later title: "in". As far as I can remember, the editors or commentators of the poem do not discuss or even include this word in their transcriptions. Neither does Van Kleeck mention it, even though he actually highlights exactly this bit by quoting Ellis and Yeats's rendition of Blake's second title of the poem (39). If we agree with Van Kleeck's argumentation, the second, and final, title of the poem should read: *The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man by William Blake 1797*. In that case, a reasonable and logical amendment according to modern punctuation and standards of the title would be: *The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of the Ancient Man*. Whether the title makes good sense with the insertion of the original "in" is another matter.

However logical to our twenty-first century eyes this title is, we know that Blake in fact used the form "Zoa's" on his illuminated book plates. The next step, therefore, should be to take a very close look at these plates. Having scrutinized all the instances from *Milton* and *Jerusalem* mentioned by Van Kleeck, along with several other examples from the reproductions of the original manuscripts, I cannot detect much similarity between these marks and the one on the title page of *The Four Zoas*. While the title mark slants to the right, the top of the marks on the *J* and *M* plates nearly all of them bend the other way, slightly to the left, and the marks are generally thicker. If we use the handy calibration technique available in the *Blake Archive*, it becomes reasonably evident that none of the apostrophes indicated by Van Kleeck resembles the debated one in the *Zoas* title. Although the reproductions in the *Archive* do not provide us with the accuracy of the originals, I believe we can confidently claim that the *Zoas* mark was not put there by the same hand as the marks in *Jerusalem* and *Milton*. Hence, my contention must be that it is not likely that the mark was deliberately inserted by Blake.

Even so, the importance of Van Kleeck's short article should be positively appreciated by Blake scholars. It is a valuable contribution to bring the intricacies of the manuscript of *The Four Zoas* to the forefront of the debate. This will inspire us to examine the poem thoroughly again and make us recognize its true values and its crucial position in the Blake oeuvre: as the first locus where Blake uses his extended and refined mythology, which was to be developed into the magnificent splendor of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

"mark ye the points"

(Jerusalem pl. 83)

BY JUSTIN VAN KLEECK

I would like to begin by thanking Magnus Ankarsjö for responding to my article. Such a discussion as he initiates here, albeit necessarily short in this public forum, is one of the results I hoped for when writing the original piece as a description of my own struggles with this compelling minute particular. Further, I think that Ankarsjö and I generally agree about my main point: no matter how editors interpret the mark or whether they include it in their title for Blake's work, they should provide some note on it because of its extreme ambiguity. However, I do feel the need to respond to several points that Ankarsjö raises vis-à-vis my discussion and the evidence I cited to support my own interpretation, that the mark likely could be a deliberate apostrophe by Blake.

First, as a relatively minor issue, Ankarsjö's attention to the "in" that appears after "Jealousy" in the added subtitle leads to an inaccurate statement. While Ellis and Yeats do exclude the "in" when they record Blake's added (but then abandoned, in their reading) title, all other editors of the full manuscript text who record the title in some form—Keynes, Sloss and Wallis, Bentley, Erdman, Stevenson, Ostriker, etc.—include the "in". This word is quite clearly contemporary with the rest of the added pencil text at this place, and I do not find it to be problematic in terms of the full title, including the original subtitle that Blake retained. (The final, full title reads especially well if we include the colon that Ankarsjö adds "according to modern punctuation and standards.")

Second, and much more importantly, the basis of Ankarsjö's observations of the difference between the mark on the manuscript's title page and apostrophes in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is highly questionable. However we view the *Four Zoas* manuscript as a work, and whichever editorial version of it we use for our own study, we always must remember that it is and will remain a *manuscript*. For us to compare the appearance of punctuation (?) marks on the manuscript pages with those in Blake's *etched*, and then *printed*, works offers little valuable or reliable evidence. In this case, Blake could have added the mark haphazardly, in a subsequent act of (perhaps hasty) revision, rather than with the deliberateness necessary when composing text on a copperplate. Or, as I will continue to acknowledge with joy at the uncertainty, someone else may have added the mark, deliberately or not. Either way, Blake's punctuation in the *Four Zoas* manuscript long has been one of the most seriously contested and commented-upon aspects of editorial work, a bugbear for the majority or the most liberating feature for a few. Indeed, my own impression was that determining what a specific point "is" turns into an endless game of pin the tail on the ink-dot—in many instances even when Blake is writing most carefully, in his "copperplate" script. As

a result, some of the most obvious "dots" end up *looking* like something far different; this is true even in a number of exclamation points, question marks, and occasionally the tops of colons, which seem to include commas rather than dots per se!¹ This pervasive indeterminacy makes using mere appearances frustrating and complicated to say the least.

We experience something quite similar in nearly all of Blake's printed works, though in these cases the ambiguity results as much from the printing process as from Blake's methods of composition. His methods of composition for etched and printed works, in and of themselves, make Ankarsjö's use of visual comparisons even more problematic. After all, Blake composed the text on his copperplates *in reverse handwriting*—writing not with ink but with stop-out varnish—so that it would print in the normal, readable way. Of course, Blake certainly was skilled enough to write properly when not preparing his copperplates. Nevertheless, his use of reverse handwriting in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* only combines with the possible alterations to Blake's original marks resulting from the printing process (acid eating into copper, ink adhering to relief surfaces, inked surfaces contacting paper, ink adhering to and drying on paper, etc.) to make straightforward visual comparison an unreliable basis of argumentation.

Ankarsjö notes that "the title mark [in the *Four Zoas* manuscript] slants to the right, the top of the marks on the J and M plates ... bend the other way slightly to the left." Interestingly, Ankarsjö's (accurate) description might suggest a *reverse apostrophe* on the title page—though I would not try to argue this too far. Regardless, David Erdman observed long ago that the serifs on Blake's "g" undergo some interesting shifts over an identifiable period, all in clear relation to the act of writing in reverse; he also uses varying serifs to date portions of the *Four Zoas* manuscript, which extends the issue beyond etched texts.² This shifty serif only hints at how Blake's methods of composition, whether writing normally or in reverse on a plate, can present various kinds of "complexity" when it comes to how a text *looks*. While the mark in the *Four Zoas* title may not be (and probably is not) a reversed apostrophe, the difference in composition between this text and Blake's etched texts

again makes me question the reliability of visual appearance as a means of determination. I cannot agree with Ankarsjö's final assertion, that "we can confidently claim that the *Zoas* mark was not put there by the same hand as the marks in *Jerusalem* and *Milton*." Without any more compelling evidence than a comparison between two vastly different types of text, the strength of his conclusion seems unwarranted—especially when considered in light of Blake's tendency to use an apostrophe in the plural: "Zoa's".

Again, I appreciate Ankarsjö's response to my original article, which makes me feel that providing an abbreviated account of the title's editorial history, various bits of material evidence, and my own interpretation of the mark served its purpose of drawing attention to an easily overlooked manuscript minutia. Opening up another vortex of ambiguity may be the last thing many individuals want or need when it comes to the *Four Zoas* manuscript, but, personally, I find only value in pondering over whether Blake called it "The Four Zoas" or "The Four Zoa's"—after he called it "VALA" and in addition to calling it "VALA".

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1. See, for example, manuscript pp. 10 and 37 for exclamation points and question marks; a "reversed-comma" top dot in a colon appears on p. 16. G. E. Bentley, Jr.—with commendable precision—goes so far as to reproduce the first two types of "commas" in the transcription he provides in his facsimile edition.

2. Erdman presents his "g" hypothesis fully, including the different forms Blake used and their probable dates, in "Dating Blake's Script: The 'g' Hypothesis," though he had introduced this subject five years earlier in "Suppressed and Altered Passages in Blake's *Jerusalem*" (see especially 51-54). He addresses the serif in the *Four Zoas* manuscript in "The Binding (et cetera) of *Vala*" (1968) and in his textual notes to *The Four Zoas* in his edition (see especially *Complete Poetry and Prose* 817). For further discussion (and complication) of Erdman's hypothesis, see Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi's introduction to *The Early Illuminated Books* (vol. 3 of the Blake Trust facsimiles); Viscomi goes on to discuss likely reasons for the shifting serif in "The Evolution of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*."