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William Blake and Mrs. Grundy: Suppression of Visions of the Daughters of Albion

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However, the tomb of Jesus was the place of Christ's resurrection and Blake notes that, although the Western Gate fourfold of Golgonooza is "clos'd up till the last day", yet then "the graves shall yield their dead" (13:11). A possible parallel to the burial of Ethinthus is that of Ahania "in a secret cave" in FZ 121:38, which Paul Miner has related to Sarah's burial (William Blake Essays for S. Foster Damon, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Providence, 1969, p. 266).

Ethinthus remains a shadowy figure, but perhaps someone will be able to take these suggestions further. It is noteworthy that Ethinthus immediately precedes Moab in the list of the daughters of Los and Enitharmon (FZ 115:8), so being neatly contemporary with Sarah, for Moab was a son [sic] of Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:37). (Moab is a daughter in Blake's list because of Numbers 25:1, as Damon has explained in William Blake, 1924 p. 388.)

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2. William Blake and Mrs. Grundy: Suppression of Visions of the Daughters of Albion¹

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The fact that William Blake found customers for his Visions of the Daughters of Albion caused its dispersion and prevented the certain destruction of this heterodox work at the hands of Frederick Tatham.² But with prudish publishers controlling Victorian presses it still took a full century for the complete text of the poem to be printed, and its slow release is closely related to the publication history of other Blake material. In fact, the public had to wait over sixty years after Blake's death to view a substantial portion of his work in one collection and nearly a hundred years for a reliable text of the Blake corpus. Most Blake editions, beginning with J. J. Garth Wilkinson's 1839 edition of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience drew material from these two works as well as from the Poetical Sketches, the Pickering Manuscript, the Rossetti Manuscript, and Thel. William Michael Rossetti went a step further with the addition of Tiriel in his 1874 edition for Bell's Aldine Poets, but not until the Yeats-Ellis three-volume work of 1893, with its lithographic reproductions of many of the Illuminated Books, in addition to the first printed version of The Four Zoas, was most Blake material available. Visions itself had appeared earlier in a faulty lithographic facsimile of 1876, and in 1885 the "Blake Press at Edmonton," under William Muir, issued fifty copies of a color facsimile done from an original copy owned by Thomas Butts.

The first actual printed text appeared in Yeats' single-volume edition of 1893.³

The hesitation on the part of editors and publishers to go beyond the lyrics may be attributed perhaps to both the stigma of insanity surrounding Blake and the seeming incomprehensibility of the prophecies. But another important factor, one especially germane to Visions, was the supposed immorality of the author's poetry. Thus a fragile Victorian sensibility combined with the natural predilection of the early editors for the more lucid lyrics to forestall Visions publication until the Yeats edition. Not that earlier attempts were not made to publish the work or at least provide sensible commentary on it. When Alexander Gilchrist died of scarlet fever in November of 1861, his wife Anne asked the Rossetti brothers to assist her in completing the unfinished Life of William Blake left by her husband. William Michael in turn requested from his friend Swinburne an account of the prophetic books for inclusion in the biography. However, on October 6, 1862, Swinburne wrote Michael that he and Dante Gabriel Rossetti agreed it was foolish to wedge an extensive essay into the present material; such an intrusion would make the entire work "incoherent and unshapely." Other considerations influenced Swinburne's decision:

Much more I think might have been done at starting without any handling of the hot cinder or treading on the quagmire which a virtuous editor seems so abjectly afraid of. As it is, it seems to me the best thing for the book and for those interested in it is to leave it alone, for fear of bursting the old bottles - a Scotch publisher would no doubt receive a reference to the sacred text as unanswerable. I should have been delighted to help in the work originally, and coming in as a free auxiliary to the best of my means of work; but I see no good possible to do at this point, even if one disliked less the notion of doing service for Blake under the eye of such a taskmaster as the chaste Macmillan.⁴

Swinburne then discloses that he has been at work on a "small commentary" of his own. This independent study would eliminate his being "jabbered at by Scotch tongue virtues and 'the harlot Modesty.'"⁵

From this letter and similar evidence Macmillan emerges as one who by not allowing extensive analysis of the more difficult books precluded any demand for their earlier publication; he helped make them unseen curiosities. Swinburne believed this⁶ and continued in other letters to attack Macmillan. In a letter of November 7, 1866, to M. D. Conway Swinburne mentions the affinity between Whitman and Blake discussed at the end of his William Blake: A Critical Essay (1868) and maintains that the "unpublished semimetrical 'Prophetic Books'" of Blake anticipated "in many points both of matter and manner--gospel and style--his Leaves of Grass". Swinburne continues: "This I have

proved in my forthcoming book on the suppressed works of that great artist and thinker, whose philosophy...has never yet been published because of the abject and faithless and blasphemous timidity of our wretched English literary society; a drunken clerical club dominated by the spurious spawn of the press."7 And he later commented on William Michael Rossetti's 1874 edition of Blake to suggest that if one poem of the prophetic order was meant to be in Rossetti's collection "surely the Visions of the Daughters of Albion would have been a better sample than little Thel; unless indeed the ultra-paradisaal morality expressed with hyper-Blakean frankness in the former poem should be an objection. It is certainly very much finer and more characteristic, and is quite as much as a regular poem."8 In this letter Swinburne again presses for a more comprehensive edition of Blake's works, even of the prose alone. He feels that Rossetti is the man for the job if a publisher can be found; but he also feels that a publisher like Bell or Macmillan would "turn shyder than the most timid hare at such a proposal."

Given the youthful impetuosity and artistic fervor of Swinburne, it is possible to see why he would strike out so fiercely and even exaggerate the case against Macmillan. Yet additional evidence corroborates Swinburne's charges. On January 5, 1863, Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote Mrs. Gilchrist: "Pray do make a stand for the passage from the 'Everlasting Gospel' about the Woman taken in Adultery. It is one of the finest things Blake ever wrote, and if there is any thing to shock ordinary readers, it is merely the opening, which could be omitted...."9 This letter refers to Rossetti's editing of the poem contained in the second volume of the Life. It is but another instance of the difficult position Mrs. Gilchrist assumed as intermediary between the watchful Macmillan as publisher and the more liberal Rossetti brothers as coeditors.

This problem became more acute with Visions. William Michael Rossetti wrote Anne Gilchrist that Visions depicts the "unnatural and terrible results" which arise when "ascetic doctrines in theology and morals have involved the relation of the sexes."10 Despite George Birkbeck Hill's suggestion that Rossetti's letter involved "the republication of Blake's Daughters of Albion,"11 Miss Dorfman is doubtless correct in stating the letter contained expository matter on Visions to be placed in the 1863 edition of the Gilchrist Life. Aware that such a vivid exposition of Blake's ideas on sexual freedom might strike Macmillan as pure lubricity, however, Mrs. Gilchrist censored it. The final commentary which appeared in the 1863 edition of the biography suggests that Visions raises "formidable moral questions." But, the passage concludes, "we will not enter on them here."12

It is ironic then that Visions of the Daughters of Albion survived Tatham's fires only to be confronted with the moral rigidities of an important Victorian publisher. But of course change did come. Yeats' cultivation of and assistance in the Blakean Renaissance toward the end of the nineteenth century helped to release Blake's work from the shackles of repression.

The spectre of moral and religious pressure yielded in the twentieth century to full commentary and publication, so that the poem now appears in most Blake collections, is widely discussed, and is the subject of two recent color facsimiles.

¹See Deborah Dorfman, "Blake in 1863 and 1880: The Gilchrist Life," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXXI (April 1967), 216-238; and the discussion in her Blake in the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, 1969), esp. pp. 148-149. Miss Dorfman touches on the Macmillan attitude, but in a wider context than my own study.

²Anne Gilchrist says: "He is the actual Tatham who knew Blake and enacted the holocaust of Blake manuscripts.... Tatham was at that time a zealous Irvingite and says he was instigated to it (the holocaust) by some very influential members of the Sect on the ground that Blake was inspired; but quite from a wrong quarter--by Satan himself--and was to be cast out as an 'unclean spirit.'" In Herbert H. Gilchrist, ed. Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings (London, 1887), p. 127.

³For basic information on early Blake editions see Geoffrey Keynes, A Bibliography of William Blake (New York, 1921), pp. 261-304.

⁴Cecil Y. Lang, ed. The Swinburne Letters, I (New Haven, 1959), 60. See Georges Lafourcade, La Jeunesse de Swinburne, II (London, 1928), 320. Writing of the Rossetti brothers' solicitation of Swinburne to compose an essay on the prophetic books, Lafourcade says: "L'aide précieuse de Swinburne fut enrôlée, et le poète dut songer sérieusement à terminer l'ouvrage en y ajoutant surtout quelques chapitres sur les livres prophétiques. Or ces livres avaient--comme plus tard certains poèmes de W. Whitman--une réputation d'immoralité, en somme injustifiée. Macmillan se montra hostile à toute analyse sérieuse de la partie prophétique de l'oeuvre."

⁵Lang, I, 60.

⁶In a letter to Seymour Kirkup in the summer of 1864 (Lang, I, 102) Swinburne said: "...the publisher of the biography (a very contemptible cur) took fright and would not forsooth allow them (the prophetic books) to be duly analysed."

⁷Lang, I, 208-209.

⁸Ibid., II, 285-286.

⁹Anne Gilchrist, p. 136. Rossetti knew Macmillans' attitudes.

See George Birkbeck Hill, Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham 1854-1870 (London, 1897), p. 256. There Rossetti writes Allingham about locating a potential publisher for his translations. He says he is not "very sanguine" about Macmillan's acceptance: "For one thing, I have been obliged to introduce, in order to give a full view of the epoch of poetry, some matter to which objections may probably be raised...."

¹⁰Anne Gilchrist, p. 127.

¹¹Hill, p. 259.

¹²Alexander Gilchrist, Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus, I (London, 1863), 108. In her article, Dorfman mentions that the resulting commentary in the 1863 edition was a "tepid adaptation of Rossetti's paragraph" which was eventually dropped in the 1880 edition because "the tone had become dated" (pp. 227-228).

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

1. Toward a More Accurate Description of the Tiriel Manuscript

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Professor Bentley's description of the Tiriel manuscript in his facsimile edition (Oxford, 1967) is confused. Although I have not examined the original manuscript, it is clear from a study of the facsimile that Professor Bentley mistakes Blake's sectional numberings for foliations: "The rectos of the leaves are foliated 1-7 in ink, in the top centre of the page, on pages 1, 3, 5, 7, 10 [N.B.] [Bentley's emphasis], 11, and 13" (p. 52). He cannot "explain the misnumbering on page 10, which is a verso instead of a recto like the other numbered pages. The '5' on page 10 implies that the order of the pages should be 1-8, 10, 9, 11-15, but the continuity of the narrative clearly demonstrates that the present order is the correct one" (p. 52).

The present order is indeed correct. The simple explanation for "the misnumbering on page 10" is that section 4 is considerably longer than the other sections. Instead of occupying just one leaf, recto and verso, as do the preceding three sections, it spills over to the next recto, page 9. The next section, 5, then begins atop the next page, 10. That this page