

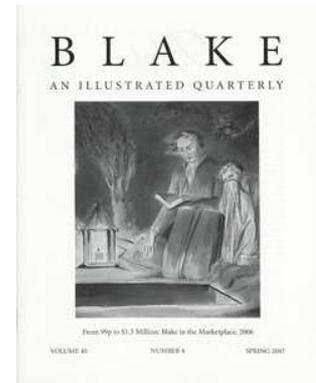
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

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

“Mr. J. Blake”

Morton D. Paley

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 40, Issue 4, Spring 2007, p. 151



ing *Chiefly of Translations from the German Hymnbook of the Moravian Brethren* (London: James Hutton, Bookseller in Fetter Lane, 1749) was "apparently owned by Catherine Armitage" (351n18), merely because she quotes the hymn. The evidence for all this is very slight.

There is proliferating "evidence" in *Why Mrs Blake Cried* of influence by association—Blake's friend Richard Cosway was a sexual free-thinker, John Augustus Tulk was an alchemist, George Cumberland met Cagliostro.

Among the welter of scholarship in *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, learned footnotes, and references to arcane archives, there are just two previously unrecorded pieces of evidence related to William Blake and his family. All the rest is context—very frequently a context in which Blake's role is invisible or incredible.

The two new pieces of evidence, complete with scholarly apparatus, are (1) Blake's mother was still active in the Moravian congregation in 1753, when the Moravian Brother West "was instructed to speak to 'Sis. Arm.' about some financial matter" (126) and (2) Blake was shown the priapic sculptures in Charles Townley's collection.

The Moravian reference is surprising for several reasons. First, it occurs two years after the death of Thomas Armitage in 1751, when, according to the Moravian records, Catherine Armitage "Became a Widow & left the Congregation."¹ Second, it refers to her as "Sis. Arm.", though no previous known record of her in the Moravian archives abbreviates her name thus. Third, it refers to her by the name of her first husband, though she had married James Blake in 1752.

In fact, the Moravian reference is not to Blake's mother at all. What it says is: "Bro. West will care that Sis. Orm is spoken to to know her Resolution abt. Lending Bro. Rob the money he wants."² Sister Orm was a member of the Fetter Lane Moravian Church at the time; Sister Blake (formerly Armitage) probably was not.

The other new biographical fact about William Blake is that "the Priapic collectors [Sir William] Hamilton, [Charles] Townley and [Richard Payne] Knight discreetly displayed their Indian [priapic] *objets d'art* to friends—including Blake, Cumberland, Flaxman, Hayley and [General Charles] Rainsford" (295). The evidence given for this statement is "British Museum, Townley Papers: MSS. TY 7/1802, 1803, 1985; TY 8/59" (396-97n7), with no indication of what the manuscripts represent.

This was so precise that I drafted a note incorporating the priapic information to be added to the *Blake Records* (2nd ed.) addenda. In the meanwhile I obtained reproductions of these Townley papers. They consist of:

1. Moravian Church Archives: Church Catalogue C/36/51/1, 36.

2. Moravian Archives: Helpers Conference Minutes (C/36/11/6) for 20 May 1753, generously transcribed for me by the Moravian archivist Lorraine Parsons. She tells me that Keri Davies agrees with her that the name is "Orm", not "Arm."

(1) a letter from S.[?] Stevenson to Roger Wilberforce, 8 Feb. (no year) asking if "My Friend Hayley" might see books on statues "in Townley's Collection" (TY 7/1802);

(2) a letter from W. Hayley to "Dear Sir" (?Townley), 31 May 1794, asking permission to borrow books on statues via "our Friend Stevenson" (TY 7/1803);

(3) a letter from Charles Rainsford to "— Townley Esq.", 5 July 1798, thanking him briefly "for a beautiful Print of your Sarcophagus" and chatting at length about military and naval matters (TY 7/1985); and

(4) a receipt from J. Flaxman to Mr. Townley, 3 Oct. 1785, for 18 medals (one of them representing George II and his queen) at £2.10.0. (TY 8/59).

There is no reference of any kind in these mss. to Sir William Hamilton, Richard Payne Knight, William Blake, George Cumberland, or priapic "Indian *objets d'art*." This kind of discontinuity between evidence and argument is common in the sections of *Why Mrs Blake Cried* relating to William Blake.

All serious readers of Blake will wish to read *Why Mrs Blake Cried*. If they pay close attention to the evidence, they will come away enlightened, puzzled, and frustrated.

MINUTE PARTICULAR

"Mr. J. Blake"

BY MORTON D. PALEY

A hitherto unrecorded reference to William Blake (although with the wrong first initial) appears in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1 January 1815 (vol. 2 [1814]: 537). Headed "Intelligence in Literature and the Arts and Sciences," it reads: "Mr. FLAXMAN has finished a series of compositions in outline from Hesiod's Works, which will be engraved by Mr. J. Blake, and printed in folio, to correspond with the outlines from Homer, by the same eminent professor."

The volume number and year appear anomalous because the first issue for 1815 was paginated as part of the volume for 1814. *The Theogony, Works and Days, and the Days of Hesiod*, with 37 plates engraved by William Blake after Flaxman's designs, was published in 1817 by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown. The *New Monthly's* mistake about Blake's first initial may be an indication of how obscure he was in what Gilchrist called his "years of deepening neglect."