

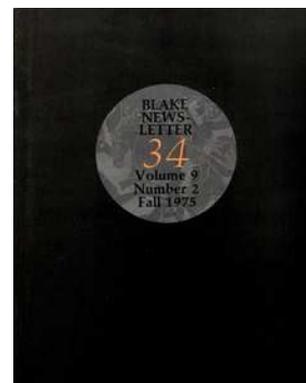
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

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

The Catalogue of Blake's Designs Completed, and
a Last-Minute Inclusion

Martin Butlin

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 9, Issue 2, Fall 1975, pp. 48-49



principle, but set on work by and received from some external agent or cause, and working by insensible ways which we perceive not, we call "generation". . . . Thus, a man is generated. . . .³

Both the language and the concepts in this passage would indeed have been totally abhorrent to Blake, for Locke presents the generative principle in man as consisting of an "agent" working "insensibly" and uncomprehendingly on another "internal principle" and resulting in a unique configuration of "pre-existing particles." There is no better description of the Blakean state of generation than this sterile meeting of two forces seemingly without communication, without emotion and even without a conscious purpose, but merely following the "ordinary course of nature." It is, in fact, man's existence reduced to its absolute natural limits in which he is seen as a combination of "simple ideas," to use a Lockean term. Now, we know that Locke intended the passage as a neutral, objective description of simple cause and effect: sexual desire results in coitus which produces a human being made up of the atoms of the mother and father. But when Blake read it, it surely seemed to him to epitomize everything that is the exact opposite of man's unified Edenic existence in pure imaginative perception. He found a ready-made image with a ready-made title to describe "the Barren waste of Locke and Newton," the "philosophy of five senses" into which the eighteenth century was securely "locked" (Blake himself makes this pun in *An Island in the Moon*). So, the two words, Locke and generation, become closely associated in Blake's poetry, and both appear in conjunction with the image of looms, a mechanical form of creation which produces the veil of nature that must be rent at the apocalyptic moment. Locke, whose way of perceiving the world continually creates and sustains such generation, becomes synonymous with that state. In using the term generation, Blake gathers up the Lockean methodology in its own epitome, imbues it with his own symbolic meaning and turns it with the deftness of irony against its own source.

Nor is this the only instance of Blake ironically borrowing from Locke to illustrate the primary Lockean error. Quite obviously, the lines from "Auguries of Innocence," "We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see not Thro' the Eye," are at the heart of Blake's rebellion against the whole physical basis of eighteenth century science and philosophy. But a point generally missed is that Blake is ironically countering Locke's statement of faith in reason by quoting a phrase from that statement. Toward the end of his *Essay*, Locke enumerates various kinds of errors that have crept into philosophy and rounds the discussion off by prescribing the only guard against such error.

Light, true light in the mind, is or can be nothing else but the evidence of the truth of any proposition; and if it be not a self-evident proposition, all the light it has, or can have, is from the clearness and validity of those proofs

upon which it is received. To talk of any other light in the understanding, is to put ourselves in the dark, or in the power of the prince of darkness, and, by our own consent, to give ourselves up to delusion, to believe a lie.⁴

Not only does Blake use the phrase "to believe a lie" in correcting Locke's premise that all we really know is sense data, but he follows this with Locke's own dark-light imagery: "God appears & God is Light / To Those poor Souls who dwell in Night, / But does a Human Form Display / To those who dwell in Realms of day" (ll. 129-32). As with "generation," the trouble lies in Locke's perspective. In saying that we must use reason to determine "whether [a revelation] be from God or no," Locke is placing a non-existent barrier between human and divine and binding himself to a severely limited view of the world. He fails to realize that "God is man & exists in us & we in Him." Again, Locke's definition of generation both epitomizes such a narrow, physical, totally rational concept of man and perfectly describes the mental state of those who dwell in so circumscribed a world. This is the dual role which made Locke's work so inviting a quarry from which Blake could build his image of the fallen world.

1 See, for example, George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 154; Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), I, 100-05.

2 William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 476-77.

3 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 14th ed., (London: S. Birt et al., 1753), I, 27.

4 Locke, *Essay*, II, 323. In this passage, Locke goes on to remark of divine revelation, "When he [God] illuminates the Mind with supernatural Light, he does not extinguish that which is natural. . . . Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in every Thing. . . . Consult it we must and by it examine whether it be a Revelation from God or no. . . ." (pp. 323-24). Surely Blake would have thought this the most pernicious of all lies.

The Catalogue of Blake's Designs Completed, & A Last-Minute Inclusion

By Martin Butlin

The typescript of the forthcoming catalogue of Blake's works in the visual arts has now been handed in to the Trianon Press, who are to publish it for the William Blake Trust, though it has not yet gone to the printer. Its scope is defined as the paintings, drawings and separate hand-colored designs of William Blake. Monochrome engravings and the illuminated books are not included, though the Small and Large Books of Designs from the books are. It has been difficult to draw absolutely precise lines of demarcation. Separate colored copies of engravings and plates from the illuminated books have been included when it seems likely that Blake himself disposed of them as individual works in their own right, but colored proofs of pages

still bearing lines of text, and hand-colored monochrome engravings issued in book form (e.g. the *Job* designs, the illustrations to Hayley's *Ballads* and *Triumph of Temper*, and those to Young's *Night Thoughts*) have been omitted. Proofs on which a considerable amount of work has been done in pencil or watercolor, such as three versions of the *Europe* title-page and the *Job* proofs with sketches for the designs in the margins, have been catalogued. Even within these somewhat arbitrary distinctions it is feared that some inconsistencies remain.

The catalogue numbers run to 886, plus eleven works attributed to Robert Blake and three to Catherine. This is not the full story, however, as sketchbooks and single projects like the watercolor illustrations to Young's *Night Thoughts* are catalogued under a single number but are divided into sub-entries each with its own subsidiary number: 116, for instance, for Blake's Notebook, and 537 for the *Night Thoughts*. In addition a number of individual drawings are drawn on both recto and verso. In all, therefore, over 2250 designs are catalogued. The arrangement is in roughly chronological groups, some fairly broadly defined, such as early drawings, some more unified, such as the Bible illustrations for Thomas Butts and the Dante illustrations for Linnell. Lost works recorded in such sources as William Rossetti's lists in the 1863 and 1880 editions of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* have been included in the hope that further examples may come to light; the tempera of "The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes," recently sold from the Kerrison Preston collection, is an example of a work known only from Rossetti's

description until its reappearance at Sotheby's in 1966.

Hitherto unrecorded works also continue to appear, and no doubt will continue to do so after it is too late to include them in the catalogue. The latest (illus. 1) is a typical early pen and wash drawing of c. 1780 of a battle scene, acquired last year by Thos. Agnew & Sons Ltd., in an album of mixed 18th and 19th-century drawings mainly British. The weapons, particularly the mace, and the helmets of some of the warriors suggest the Middle Ages. Both sides include horsemen as well as foot-soldiers; there is a mounted trumpeter on the left and a standard-bearer on the right. It has not been possible to identify the battle. Perhaps indeed it is a general representation of "War," the subject of a number of works between 1784, when Blake exhibited "War unchained by an Angel, Fire, Pestilence, and Famine following" at the Royal Academy (see *Blake Newsletter* 25 [Summer 1973], pp. 4-8) and 1805, when Blake signed and dated the Boston Museum's watercolor of "War," a later version of "A Breach in the City, the Morning after the Battle," another work exhibited in 1784; the new drawing is not, however, related in composition to any of these works. On the other hand it also has affinities with the series of illustrations to English history, most of which date from c. 1779 but of which Blake drew up a list of subjects in his Notebook as late as 1793.

Below: "A Medieval Battle Scene," c. 1780. Pen and grey wash 10 5/16 x 14 3/4 in. (26.1 x 37.5 cm.). Thos. Agnew and Sons, Ltd.

