

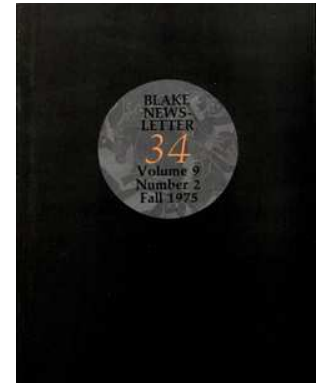
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A Possible Source for “Thel’s Motto”

Michael Ferber

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to have assumed that his audience was aware of it are, I believe, evidence in support of Wicksteed's reading of "The Blossom." Other less significant supporting details are the repetition of the word "pretty," the substitution of "blossom" for "rosy cheeks and dimpled chin," and the fact that "poor" Robin becomes the "sobbing" Robin of Blake's poem. Finally, the OED records a use of the phrase "merry-bout" in the *Newgate Calendar* of 1780 as slang for "an act of sexual intercourse." Hence the appropriateness of Blake's "merry, merry sparrow."

If this widely known street song was in fact in Blake's mind when he composed "The Blossom" and in the minds of Blake's readers as well, perhaps the poem is more complex and ironic than Stevenson is prepared to admit, even if it was destined to appear "in a book planned for children."

An Early Allusion to Blake

By G. P. Tyson

Among William Blake's first engravings for the booksellers was his head of Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), which was used as a frontispiece for Thomas Henry's *Memoirs of Albert de Haller, M.D.* (1783). Of Henry's extant letters there is one at the Bodleian to his bookseller, Joseph Johnson, containing a brief allusion to Blake; the letter (Ms. Engl. theol. C.50, f. 182) is dated 13 April 1783, making it one of the earliest known references to the engraver.

Manchester

Dear Sir

The Author of the Sermons which come to you with this letter is a very worthy Clergyman, and the particular Friend of all your Friends here. You will agree with me that the Discourse is an excellent one, and written in a good cause. It will be of some importance to him to have it more known, and you are desired to advertise it in some of the papers and, if you can, introduce it to the London [Unitarian] Association. You will oblige us all by attending to it, and forwarding the Sale.

I hope the Magnesia [Alba] arrived----There had been some accident to one of the Waggon's which delayed it-----

Pray hasten the Head of Haller---- The Book is finished, and very neat, and the Season is advancing rapidly. The heads might come in Clerk's parcel, or in Newton's. The One deals with Bew, the other with Rivington-----¹

I have got Memoires de P. Acad:
from the R[oyal] S[ociety] by Dr.
Simmons²----Yr's very truly
Tho^s Henry

It is conceivable that Henry was familiar with Blake. In 1780 he had engraved a plate for William Enfield's *The Speaker* which Johnson published. At this time Enfield was a tutor at the Warrington Academy, and along with the other teachers there, was certainly known to Henry through their mutual religious, scientific, and literary interests. Concerning the delay in sending the head to Henry, only inference can offer assistance. Johnson had a reputation for being dilatory, but only after about 1795 when his health began to fail. Earlier he enjoyed the confidence of authors and customers for being attentive and honest. Blake's work on the plate, though, falls between his marriage in 1782 and the setting up of his print shop in 1784. So possibly he had other matters on his mind than finishing a small engraving for a bookseller.

1 According to Pendred's *Directory* both Clerk or Clark and Newton were Manchester booksellers.

2 Simmons was Henry's collaborator on the *Memoirs*. The work referred to is Henry's English edition of Lavoisier's essays addressed to the Paris Academy.

A Possible Source for "Thel's Motto"

By Michael Ferber

Several Biblical sources have been offered for the second half of Thel's mysterious "motto:"

Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?

Northrop Frye (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 446, n. 55) connects the golden bowl with the golden cup of Babylon mentioned in Jeremiah 51.7 and Revelation 17.4. He also cites Ecclesiastes 12.6 as a source of both lines: "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken . . ." Though this verse is almost as cryptic as the "motto" itself, it is no doubt generally relevant to *Thel*, for in its context it seems to refer to the death of the body, which Thel shrinks from at the end of the poem. But the context has little about love or wisdom, and of course a cord is not a rod.

Robert Gleckner, in "Blake's *Thel* and the Bible," *BNYPL*, 64 (1960), 573-80, suggests Job 28.12-15:

But where shall wisdom be found? and
where is the place of understanding?
Man knoweth not the price thereof;
neither is it found in the land of the
living.

The depth saith, It is not in me: and
the sea saith, It is not with me.
It cannot be gotten for gold, neither
shall silver be weighed for the price
thereof.

The appropriateness of this passage to the themes of *TheL* hardly needs pointing out, but it is equally obvious that there is neither rod nor bowl here, and nothing about love.

I propose another candidate, somewhat better than these though far from perfect, Hebrews 9.3-4:

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.

The immediate context is a disparaging account of the "worldly sanctuary" of the old covenant. The Epistle as a whole stresses the great change that has come with Christ: as a new and greater high priest he has replaced the old material sanctuary with a new spiritual one, and whereas the old high priest entered the Holy of Holies alone and once a year, Christ has entered it once and for all and we enter it with Him.

The golden pot is described in Exodus 16.32-34, where Aaron the high priest at Moses' command puts an omer full of manna into a pot and lays it up "before the Testimony" (covenant) in the ark. The manna had been sent by God daily as a sign of His grace and love for the Israelites. It would spoil after one day (except on the Sabbath) so there was no point in hoarding it. A Blakean might say it is an error to try to gather up God's love and preserve it in a "holy" place. The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth like manna from heaven, and cannot be stored in pots.

The rod of Aaron is described in Numbers 17.1-11. Of the twelve rods representing the twelve tribes only Aaron's blossomed, thereby proving to dissenters that God had indeed chosen Aaron to be high priest with sole privilege of entering the Holy of Holies. Aaron's authority was thus based on supernatural power and privilege, and not, as one might argue such authority should be, on spiritual wisdom. And of course it was the Aaronic priesthood that Christ came to replace (see Hebrews 7.11-17).

Just as the ancient priests wrongly tried to consolidate and preserve spirit and selfishly restrict access to it, so *TheL* wrongly seeks to consolidate and preserve herself, as it were, and rejects love and generosity for their threat to her selfhood.

That the passage from Hebrews lies behind the "motto" gains support from the reference in *TheL* to the "morning manna" that the Lilly will receive in eternity. That in turn refers to the "hidden manna" of Revelation 2.17, the manna

hidden in the ark that Christ, the new high priest, will pass out to all who are faithful to Him.

A Significant New Blakean Fragment

By Donald H. Reiman

Though Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are familiar to all students above the age at which they first visit the zoo, his fragmentary *Songs of Education*--not yet found in the collected editions of Blake's works--are less well known. I have known respected Blake scholars, in fact, who were appallingly ignorant of this seminal work.

Originally intended for a volume in William and Mary Jane Godwin's Juvenile Library, *Songs of Education* was left unfinished when Blake became afflicted by extreme gastric indigestion while reading at the British Museum. His only comment on the work occurs in Barron Field's report of the conversation between Blake and Leigh Hunt at Horsemonger Lane Gaol. When asked by either Hunt or Thomas Massa Alsager (Field is uncertain which) what place *Songs of Education* would have occupied in his *oeuvre*, Blake replied: "I cannot tell how the whole might have developed; certain I am, however, that *Education*, while not consonant with *Experience*, destroys *Innocence*."

Heretofore scholars have been handicapped by having available only brief, disconnected fragments of *Songs of Education*--couplets and quatrains that Blake composed on the letter-covers of Godwin's appeals for money. Recently, however, there has come into my possession an extended passage from the work that incorporates some of the earlier fragments and suggests the tone and purpose, if not the full scope and shape, of the projected volume. While browsing in a bookshop near Exit 10 of the New York State Thruway, I was fortunate enough to discover (and purchase for thirty-five cents) a copy of Swedenborg's *Proverbs of Pisgah*, the excessively rare London edition of 1801 printed by W. E. Inzell for the New Church. Imagine my joy when I discovered that its title page bore the inscription, in a clearly identifiable hand, "W^m Blake/ Poet and Painter/ 1807" and that between the otherwise-unrecorded half-title and the title page was a leaf--artistically sewn in with pastel thread--containing the following lines from Blake's *Songs of Education*:¹

Then woke the spirit of bald William Blake--
Word-lover, foe of orthodoxies' kind;
He swept across two school-infested lands
To chastise all self-satisfied of mind.

Not one to FOSTER DAMONS for a fee,
With rusty KROE BER thumping their stout KEYNES
He drove them to the SHOR; ERE they could flee,
A voice boomed out, inflicting deeper pains: