

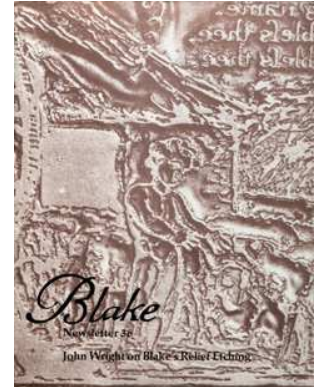
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

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

A Contemporary Reference to Blake

Janet Warner

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 9, Issue 4, Spring 1976, p. 122



Then, in the section on "Psychoses," a couple of pages after three of Van Gogh's paintings are reproduced with a caption remarking how his paintings "are a powerful representation of the blending of psychotic chaos and artistic genius," we come across a reproduction of Sin, Death, and Satan at the Gates of Hell, from Blake's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*, accompanying a caption that I suppose the *Paradise Lost* picture is intended to document.

An early-nineteenth-century writer referred to William Blake as "an unfortunate lunatic whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement." A retrospective diagnosis of Blake would probably label him a paranoid schizophrenic, for he made no secret of the fact that he was ". . . under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily and Nightly." Blake's first hallucination involving divine personages occurred at the age of four, and succeeding "visions" probably provided much of the material for his illustrations of works such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which includes *Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell*, shown above. This watercolor illustration depicts Satan advancing from the left, preparing to confront Death, right. In the center, thrusting them apart, is Sin. Flames writhe in the background, and to the right is Hell's latticed gate.

Curtis L. Barrett et al., contributing consultants, *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* (Del Mar, Calif.: CRM Books, 1972), p. 249, fig. 12.2.

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## A Contemporary Reference to Blake

By Janet Warner

A reference to Blake which does not seem to have been previously noticed by scholars can be found in Ackermann's *Repository* for June 1810, in an article entitled "On Splendour of Colours &C" by Juninus, pp. 408-09. It reads as follows:

Flaxman's *Illustrations of Homer, Aeschylus and Dante* engraved by Piroli, of Rome, and Blake's plates from Blair's *Grave*, lately engraved, are excellent studies for a young artist. Blake has lately received much deserved commendation from Fuseli. Perhaps this engraver has more genius than any one in his profession in this country. If he would study the ornamental requisites more, he would probably attain much higher celebrity than he has already acquired.

Isn't it odd that this mentions Flaxman's engraver, Piroli, but not Schiavonetti, who engraved Blake's designs and who died 7 June 1810? It also mentions Blake as an engraver rather than an artist. Would 1808, when the Blair engravings were printed, be "lately engraved" in 1810? Interestingly enough, we know that Blake's own exhibition had opened in May 1810 and the "much deserved commendation from Fuseli" may refer to that, but it is odd that the exhibition is not mentioned if Juninus knew about it. We know that Crabb Robinson had seen the exhibition in April 1810 and that he took Charles and Mary Lamb to see it on 11 June (G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, p. 226).

In September, 1810, in the same continuing article, Junius again refers to Blake. Two women are speaking of prints, and after a description of *The Fall of Rosamond*, one says:

This artist seems to have relinquished engraving and to have cultivated the higher departments of designing and painting with great success. His works show that he must have studied the antique with considerable attention.

The other replies:

If those ingenious men, the engravers, were to ask the man of genius why he abandoned his profession, he might with truth answer to most of those by whom it is followed, in the words of the poet:  
 "I hear a voice you cannot hear  
 That says I must not stay:  
 I see a hand you cannot see  
 That beckons me away."

This is interesting since we know very little of Blake's actions in the years 1810 to 1814. This suggests he gave up engraving for a while, and indeed he exhibited three paintings at the exhibition of the Water Colour Society in 1812, (*The Canterbury Pilgrims*, *The Spiritual Forms of Pitt and Nelson*) and "Detached Specimens of an original illuminated Poem, entitled Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion."

Who was Juninus? I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has ideas on his identity. Morton Paley has found in his researches on Ackermann that even *he* did not know the identity at first of this anonymous contributor, and when he did learn and sent him a gift of money, Juninus' contributions ceased. Whoever he was, it is significant that he retained a high opinion of Blake's work at a time following Hunt's attack in the *Examiner*, September 1809, when Blake's fortunes, as far as we can tell, were beginning to decline.

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 York University