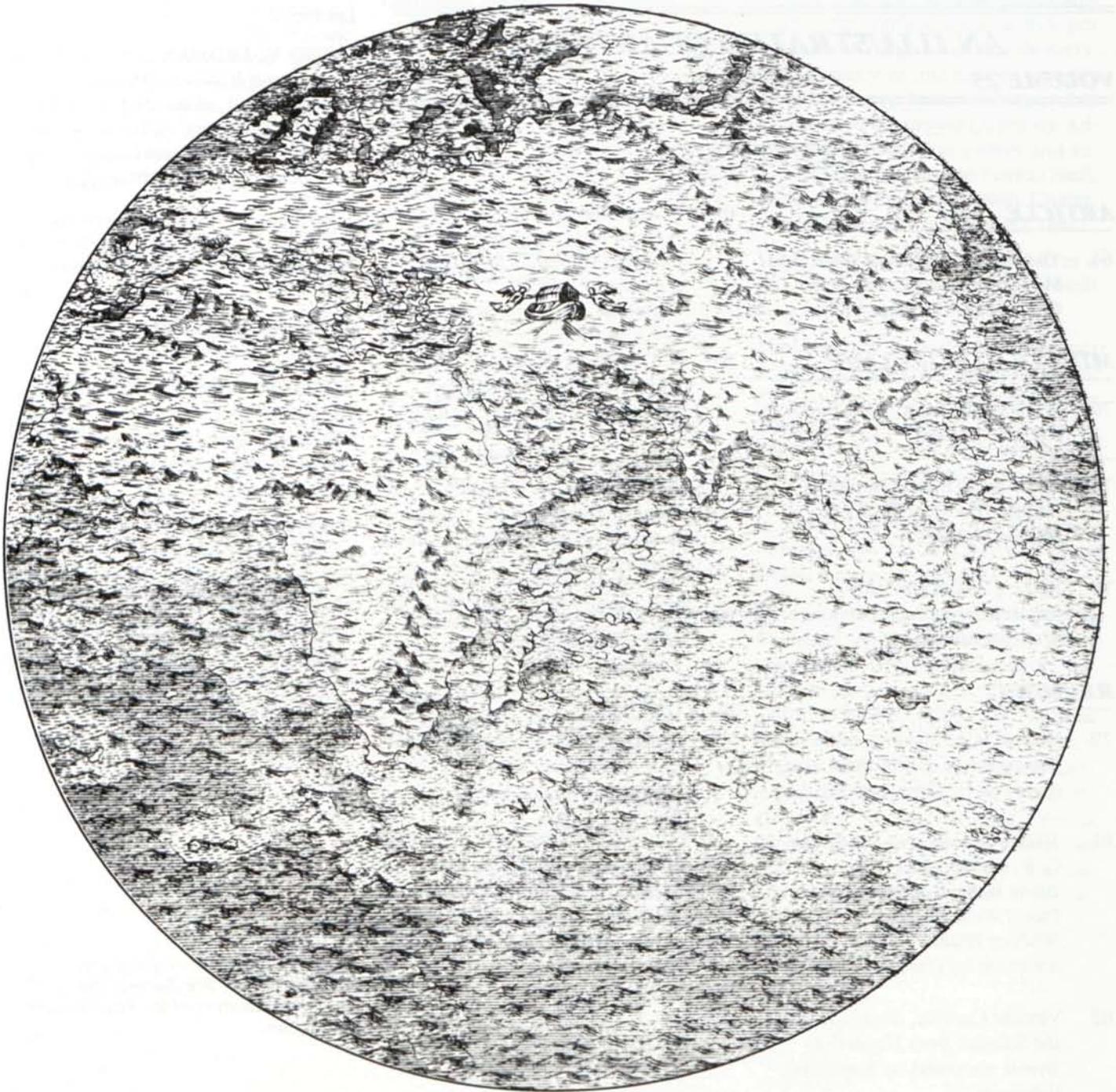


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Cover: Anonymous, engraving for Thomas Burnet, *The [Sacred] Theory of the Earth*. Courtesy of the Royal Library, Stockholm.

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The Good (In Spite of What You May Have Heard) Samaritan

by Christopher Heppner

Commentators on Blake's illustrations insist that through them Blake modifies and criticizes the poets he illustrates, and it is often clear that they are right. But sometimes the expectation of finding such criticism can be a cause of error—the antithetical meaning is given a premature welcome before an adequate search has been made for a more fully articulated reading of the design. I think I have such a fuller reading of one of Blake's illustrations for Young's *Night Thoughts*, which has recently received renewed critical attention. In this essay, I shall maintain that the design is indeed critical of Young, but in a way quite different from that described by previous commentary. My interpretation of the relationship between Blake's design and Young's text is based first on a close reading of the design itself in relation to the biblical text from which it originates, and then on a consideration of the relationship between the completed design and the particular portion of the text of Young's poem which it illustrates.

In their very useful edition of *Night Thoughts*, Robert Essick and Jenijoy La Belle give both the "Explanation of the Engravings" bound into some copies of Edward's edition and a commentary of their own. The "Explanation" of the design on p. 37 (illus. 1) reads as follows: "The story of the good Samaritan, introduced by the artist as an illustration of the poet's sentiment, that love alone and kind offices can purchase love."¹ The explicator, whom Gilchrist identified as Fuseli, though that attribution has often been questioned, reads the design as illustrating the text quite straightforwardly, paraphrasing the very line starred by Blake in the text that he used for his original water color

drawing, which reads: "Love, and love only, is the loan for love."² The star was retained in the etched version, as is the case in most of the designs, so we cannot draw any conclusions about the identity of the explicator from that fact—he may or may not have had access to Blake's original water color design.

The editorial commentary by Essick and La Belle that follows focuses on the difficulty of interpreting the cup offered by the Samaritan, which bears a serpent motif on its side. The editors write:

Not only does the serpent represent mortality throughout Blake's *Night Thoughts* designs, but the cup and serpent motif is also a traditional emblem for St. John the Evangelist. The Emperor Domitian once tried to kill St. John with a cup of poisoned wine, but a serpent sprang from the cup as a miraculous warning to the intended victim. Thus the prone figure in this illustration would be quite justified in shunning, as he seems to do with his hand gesture, the offer of an ostensibly poisonous gift. The difficulties in reconciling the disparate allusions in the design are almost as great as recognizing true friendship.

This offers an explanation, but with a full recognition of the interpretive difficulties. It also identifies two key images of uncertain meaning, the serpent on the vessel, and the victim's gesture of apparent rejection.

Discussion of this image resumes with the recent publication of John E. Grant's essay "Jesus and the Powers That Be in Blake's Designs for Young's *Night Thoughts*."³ His comments are framed within an argument about Blake's overall response to Young's text, which he sees—and I am in full agreement here—as including "a wide range of sympathies and dissymphathies" (73). Grant holds that Blake

refocuses Young's God the father as Jesus the brother of man, and that Blake, in the course of "ingeniously" (77) finding ways of introducing the figure of Jesus where it is not explicitly demanded by Young's text, shows Jesus as a figure who gathers power as the illustrations to the poem progress (83-84).

After the frontispiece to Volume One, which does not illustrate any specific text, the first "indubitable depiction of Jesus" (77) is as the Good Samaritan of NT 68, which was then etched as p. 37 of Edward's edition. Grant notes that traditional interpretation allowed for an identification of the Good Samaritan as a form or image of Jesus himself, which can be confirmed by turning to a variety of commentators. Matthew Henry, for instance, the most popular of English commentators,⁴ writes: "We were like this poor distressed traveller. The law of Moses passes by on the other side, as having neither pity nor power to help us; but then comes the blessed Jesus, that good Samaritan; he has compassion on us."⁵ John Gill, in referring to the Samaritan, says succinctly "By whom Christ may be meant. . . ."⁶ The interpretation was evidently commonplace, though one should note that the identification of the Good Samaritan as Jesus adds to it without in any way undoing his continuing identity as the Good Samaritan.

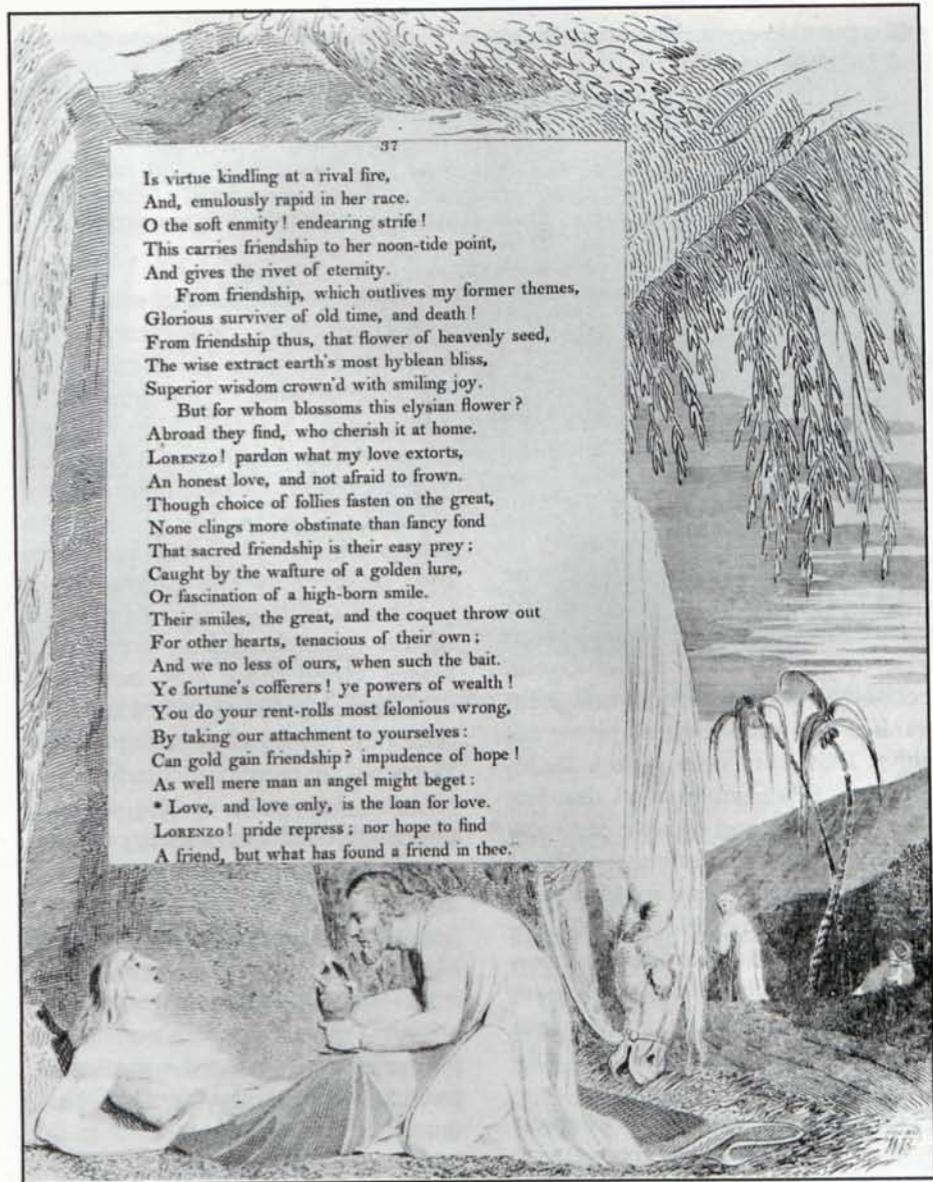
In spite of his acceptance of this identification, however, Grant goes on to build a case for a rather negative view of the action depicted in the design, pointing to some of the features that troubled Essick and La Belle, and questioning whether the scene can represent "an unmixed blessing."

He refers to the disturbing snake, and also to the horse on which the Samaritan has arrived, suggesting that the latter is derived from the "donkey included among the ominous familiars of the subterranean goddess 'Hecate' . . ." (77). Grant then looks at the interaction between the two human figures in the drama, and finds disturbing implications there too:

The startled appearance of Jesus in the watercolor version constitutes a clear sign that he had been unprepared for rejection by the Jewish victim. . . . Such details indicate that Blake wished to introduce doubts as to whether this Good Samaritan could have succeeded as a benefactor or 'Friend of All Mankind.' (E 524)

Grant's comments on the etched version modify this view just a little, suggesting that the signs of consternation have been removed from the face of Jesus: "now Jesus is represented as being masterfully composed and earnest as he proffers his cure" (79). But his view of the general sense of the scene is unchanged, and is still focused on the serpent, "the ominous but still perfectly apparent presence depicted on the cup" (79).⁷ Grant's overall view is summed up in this passage: ". . . the posture of Jesus crouched beneath the text panel, holding unopened the sinister decorated cup, repelled by the victim he wishes to help, marks (at this stage) his inability to accomplish his mission" (83-84).

Grant has taken the doubts expressed by Essick and La Belle and has turned them into assertions that aim to show Blake separating his perspective from Young's by a progressive revelation of the power of Jesus, which at this early stage of Blake's visual commentary has not yet achieved a full statement. Grant's point would seem to be that this version of the Good Samaritan shows a kind of embryonic Jesus, not yet capable of powerful action against resistance, and offering possibly poisonous gifts (the contents of the chalice are called "a dubious potion" in the text below his Figure 1).



1. *Night Thoughts* 37. Courtesy of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries.

The interpretive strategies proposed by Essick and La Belle, and developed by Grant, are based initially on a negative reading of the image of the serpent. But any reading of the serpent must first consider the nature of the representation of that serpent; the negative interpretations of it seem based on assumptions about what would be appropriate responses to the representation of a real, living animal. Terror and horror are therefore read as the responses of the victim. But we are actually dealing with the represen-

tation of a representation of a serpent; in both the original drawing and the etching there is a clearly visible line separating the body of the flask or chalice from what appears to be the cover, which has a different texture. The serpent is incised or enamelled on the main body of the vessel. Terror and horror would be merely misplaced superstition; we, and the victim, are dealing with an image, not an animal, and that image must therefore be interpreted symbolically, as the representation of a meaning.

The point deserves elaboration. Essick and La Belle refer to the story of St. John the Evangelist. This is without much doubt the foundation of the description of Fidelia in the house of Holiness in Book 1 of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which at first sight might appear to offer a good analogy with the design under consideration:

She was araied all in lilly white,
And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,
With wine and water fild vp to the hight,
In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold,
That horroure made to all, that did
behold....⁸

Hamilton's note on this passage tells us that "St. John the Evangelist is usually represented with a chalice out of which issues a serpent. . . . The *Golden Legend* records the familiar story of how John drank a cup of poison to prove his faith." That story only makes sense, however, if we understand this serpent to be alive and capable of a mortal bite, so that to overcome the fear of such a death is a true indication of faith. The reflexive "did himselfe enfold" makes clear that Spenser's serpent is very much alive. The apparent analogy between the story of St. John and Blake's design is not in fact substantial or useful.

There is another traditional interpretation of the image of the serpent, however, of which Hamilton reminds us. His note identifies it as also "the emblem of Aesculapius, the symbol of healing; also of the crucified Christ, the symbol of redemption. The serpent lifted up by Moses (Num. 21.9) is interpreted typologically as Christ lifted up on the cross (John 3.14)." This can be put more forcefully by suggesting that the story of Aesculapius can easily be read as a type of the story of Jesus, as is strongly suggested by Sandys' version of Ocyroë's prophecy over the infant Aesculapius:

Health-giver to the World, grow infant,
grow;
To whom mortalitie so much shall owe.

Fled Soules thou shalt restore to their
aboads:

And once again the pleasure of the Gods.
To doe the like, thy Grand-sires [Jupiter]
flames denie:

And thou, begotten by a God, must die.
Thou, of a bloodless corps, a God shalt be;
And Nature twice shall be renew'd in thee.⁹

For some reason, Sandys misses this opportunity in his commentary, but he redeems himself in his comment on the long account of the removal of Aesculapius to Rome in the fifteenth book: "For the Serpent was sacred unto him; not only . . . for the quicknesse of his sight. . . . But because so restorative and soveraigne in Physicke; and therefore deservedly the Character of health. So the Brasen Serpent, the type of our aeternall health, erected by Moses, cured those who beheld it" (714). In a more straightforward vein, Lemprière writes of Aesculapius that "Serpents are more particularly sacred to him, not only as the ancient physicians used them in their prescriptions; but because they were the symbols of prudence and foresight, so necessary in the medical profession."¹⁰ These mythographical comments, from sources that Blake almost certainly knew,¹¹ provide us with a reading of the serpent image on the chalice offered by the Samaritan which is much more relevant and appropriate to the present context, and lead us to consider further the implications of identifying the Samaritan as both Jesus and Aesculapius.

The explicitly medical nature of the Samaritan's intervention is sometimes overlooked, but not by eighteenth-century commentators. Henry notes that the Samaritan "did the surgeon's part, for want of a better." Gill gives a more heavily allegorized interpretation: the wounds of the victim represent "the morbid and diseased condition that sin has brought man into," which are "incurable by any, but the great physician of souls, the Lord Jesus Christ."¹² In the context of this offering of medical help by a figure whose face is clearly modeled on that

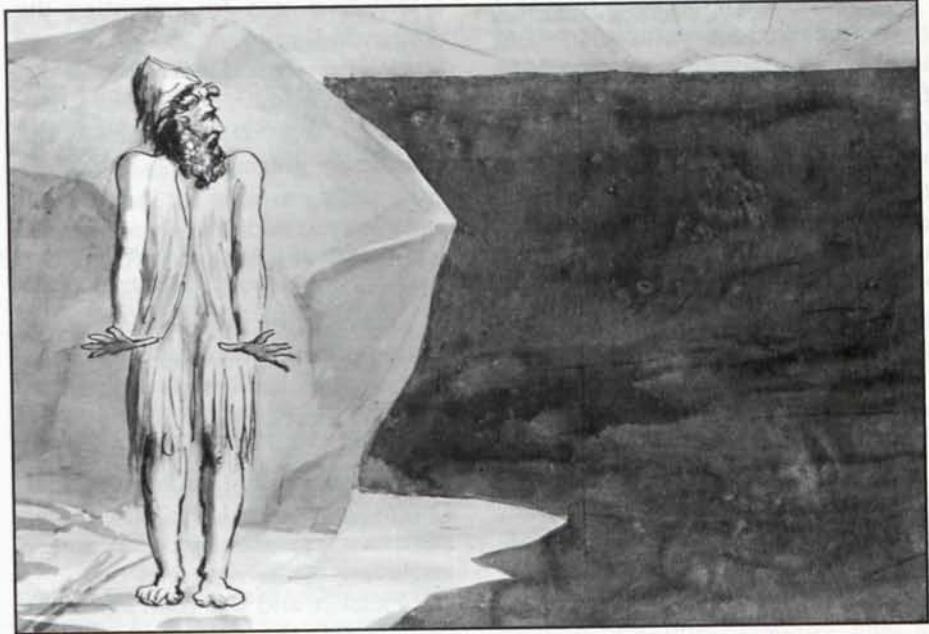
of Jesus, it would seem reasonable to interpret the serpent-decorated chalice as an emblem of both Aesculapius, the god of healing and medicine whose conventional attribute was the serpent or the caduceus, and of Jesus, the true healer whom Blake has made visible within the body of the Samaritan, who is also associated with the symbol of the serpent, and with a chalice filled with healing liquids. Blake is implying that any act of helping and healing would be the act of a true Christian. Aesculapius is, in effect, one of the incarnations of Jesus, as is the Good Samaritan himself, or, to put it a little differently, the Good Samaritan is an incarnation of Jesus as Aesculapius, the power to heal.

There is evidence in Blake's writing to support this reading of the figure. In *A Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake describes the Doctor of Physic as "the first of his profession; perfect, learned, completely Master and Doctor in his art," and then identifies him as "the Esculapius," one of the "eternal Principles that exist in all ages" (E 536). One might remember also that "Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists," and that "A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man / Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian" ("The Laocoön," E 274). As *Milton* explains, these archetypal arts become "apparent in Time & Space, in the Three Professions / Poetry in Religion: Music, Law: Painting, in Physic & Surgery" (M 27: 59-60, E 125). The true physician is both artist and Christian. I wish to emphasize, however, that Blake is not directly illustrating his own myth, but rather that his myth and the basis of the design under consideration are both derived by a process of transformation from public materials, and that any interpretation of the design must proceed by working through those materials in the forms in which they were available to Blake.

We need now to consider further the contents that we are to assume fill the flask or chalice. The right hand of the

Samaritan appears to be about to lift the lid of the vessel; presumably it contains the "oil and wine" referred to in the Gospel account, which the Samaritan poured in as he "bound up his [the victim's] wounds." The two liquids were conventionally understood as antiseptic (wine) and healing balm (oil),¹³ which, as John Wesley explains, "when well beaten together, are one of the best balsams that can be applied to a fresh wound."¹⁴ Gill gives more detailed evidence from Jewish commentary, together with a more typologically oriented explanation that bridges the gap between Aesculapius and Jesus: "by *oil* may be meant, the grace of the Spirit of God . . . and by *wine*, the doctrines of the Gospel. . . ."¹⁵ The invisible but strongly implied contents of the vessel in Blake's design can thus be read as a conventional healing mixture, which in its literal form is as appropriate to Aesculapius as it is appropriate to Jesus when typologically understood. Both the serpent and the oil and wine presumed to fill the flask function to identify the Samaritan as simultaneously Jesus and Aesculapius.

The expression on the victim's face, and the gesture performed by his hands, can now be more easily interpreted. Henry's commentary is again useful in focusing for us a sometimes neglected aspect of the story: the victim "was *succoured* and *relieved* by a *stranger*, a *certain Samaritan*, of that nation which of all others the Jews most despised and detested and would have no dealings with."¹⁶ Henry's statement is based on such texts as Matthew 10.5, which has Jesus instructing his disciples "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" and John 8.48, which has the Jews say to Jesus "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" The victim is presumably a Jew, since he is described as on a journey from "Jerusalem to Jericho," and the story registers disappointment if not surprise that he



2. William Blake, *Robinson Crusoe*. Courtesy of the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

is ignored by "a certain priest" and a "Levite" (Luke 10.30-32). The victim feels and shows astonishment and dismay because help is coming from a despised and most unlikely source, after two likely sources have failed him. He is not rejecting that aid.

The gesture made by the victim needs more detailed consideration in the light of this understanding of its context. The manual gesture is essentially identical with that made by Robinson Crusoe as he discovers the footprints in the sand (illus. 2).¹⁷ Here is the text which Blake was illustrating on that occasion: "It happen'd one Day about Noon going towards my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz'd with the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand: I stood like one Thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an Apparition. . . ." ¹⁸ Defoe's text makes plainer than could my own words that Crusoe's gesture is understood by Blake as a sign for surprise. This gesture in turn corresponds closely to, and was doubtless derived from, Le Brun's description of "Admiration": "this first and principal

Emotion or Passion may be expressed by a person standing bolt upright, with both Hands open and lifted up, his Arms drawn near his Body, and his Feet standing together in the same situation."¹⁹

The fact that the victim in Blake's portrayal of the Good Samaritan is lying down and not standing makes a difference, but not a crucial one, for Bulwer's *Chirologia* contains a plate, reproduced by Janet Warner, which represents simply two hands raised from the wrist with the identification "Admiror."²⁰ Bulwer's commentary on this gesture is as follows: "To throw up the Hands to heaven is an expression of *admiration*, *amazement*, and *astonishment*, used also by those who *flatter* and *wonderfully praise*; and *have others in high regard*, or *extoll* another's speech or action."²¹ Bulwer's text appears to describe a gesture involving arms raised above the head, but the fact that his illustration shows only the hands suggests that the core signifying element in the gesture is the upraising of the hands at the wrist, as is clear in Le Brun.

A gesture which has been read as if it were a natural sign easily interpreted intuitively as meaning rejection, is in fact a highly conventional, explicitly coded sign meaning surprise and wonder. As in the case of the serpent, the semiotic status of a sign must be determined before it can be usefully interpreted. As the concept of the hermeneutic circle suggests, detail and general context can work together to produce a persuasive reading.

Having now focused this gesture, we can see that it is in fact very common in Blake's work, and occurs frequently in the *Night Thoughts* illustrations. Its meaning there seems to range from joyful surprise at the resurrection (NT 318), through awed shock at apocalypse (NT 429), to fearful recognition of guilt, condemnation, and disaster (NT 18, 53). But through all these changes there remains the root sense of surprise, astonishment. The gesture seems never to mean simply rejection, though obviously there can be an element of rejection in the shocked recognition of unwelcome news.

This interpretation of the victim's gesture as representing not rejection but profound surprise at the unexpected source of the offered help can be confirmed from another perspective. The victim's eyes fix not the allegedly threatening serpent but the Samaritan's eyes; it is the human source of the help that is the focus of the victim's response, and not the medical apparatus involved. The victim's response is not to be read as a rejection; he is simply very, very surprised. And the look on the face of the Samaritan is one of concern and compassion; nothing more complex or questionable than that.

The horse seems equally innocent of ethical ambiguity or menace. Grant's attempt to blacken him by association with the allegedly sinister donkey that is "included among the ominous familiars" of Hecate in the color print of that name is an unnecessary hypothesis. I have in a previous essay made

a tentative case for regarding the donkey in Hecate as merely a beast of burden;²² I can add here that it is distinguished from the "ominous familiars" by the fact that it is harmlessly and realistically grazing. Satan's familiars are usually provided for in less mundane ways; traditionally, a witch's familiar drank from the third teat which was one of the defining features of witches in the post-classical era. In addition, the donkey is the only animal in the print that is not depicted as gazing at something or somebody; it is simply minding its own business in a most unthreatening fashion. As C. H. Collins Baker noted, the basic design of this ass was taken by Blake from an engraving of the *Rest* in Browne's *Ars Pictoria*, and was used again in a painting of *The Rest of the Holy Family in Egypt*.²³ All of the other associations of this animal are innocent and even benign; I see no reason to assume any change in Blake's version of it in the Good Samaritan.

The difficulties encountered up to now in interpreting this design stem from the initial critical decision on how to approach it. Let us look at the design again in its full context. As the asterisk beside the text in both the original water color and the later engraving indicates, Blake began with the line "Love, and love only, is the loan for love." This line is set in the broader context of a musing on the theme of friendship, which blooms "abroad" for those "who cherish it at home," but resists the blandishments of power and money: "Can gold gain friendship?" Blake, looking for a story with which to illustrate the subject, decided upon the story of the Good Samaritan.

But the story does not exactly illustrate Young's point. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an illustration of the problem of defining just who is my neighbor, a problem opened by the lawyer's trick question to Jesus: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10.25). In response to Jesus's question about the status of the

law on this point, the lawyer interprets it as saying: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." In response to Jesus's approbation, the lawyer then asks "And who is my neighbour?" It is at this point that Jesus tells the story, which he concludes by asking: "Which now of these three [priest, Levite, Samaritan], thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" and the obvious answer comes "He that showed mercy on him." To which Jesus replies "Go, and do thou likewise."

True neighborly love does not consist in simply returning love for love, or even in buying love by lending or giving love, but in freely giving love to those most culturally remote from us when they are in need, even if they have shown nothing but scorn towards us in the past, and are not likely to change in the future, or ever have occasion to return that love. The critique of Young, in other words, takes place at the level of the choice of the illustrative story; Young has been implicitly corrected for the legalistic and monetary mere equivalence of his "Love . . . is the loan for love." As Young goes on to say, "nor hope to find / A friend, but what has found a friend in thee." The story of the Good Samaritan is a rejection of that impoverished doctrine; the victim has just found a true friend in one towards whom he had always expressed contempt. Jesus as the Samaritan represents precisely the possibility of advancing beyond the position outlined by Young.

The critical problems with this design have been rooted in a reluctance to spend enough time and thought on the relationship between the text of the story being illustrated (that of the Good Samaritan) and Blake's design, and on the details of that design in relation to the traditions of pictorial meaning as Blake knew and understood them. In the place of that process of working through to the meaning of

Blake's design there has been premature haste to move to a consideration of the relationship between Blake and the poet he is commenting on, a consideration largely controlled by an understanding of Blake's overall position as laid out in his major poetic texts. As I have tried to show, Blake's designs can bear Blakean meanings without being in any way direct illustrations of his own poetic texts. The commentators have been right to feel a critical space between Blake's design and Young's text, but have looked in the wrong place for the evidence. It does not lie in Blake's version of the story of the Good Samaritan, which he has handled with his usual close attention to the details of the biblical story, assisted by the addition of some traditionally based iconographic details. It lies rather in his choice of that particular story with which to illustrate this portion of Young's text, a story whose relevance is by no means immediately obvious, and which holds a powerful critique of Young's economy of love as exposed at this moment of the poem.

¹ Robert Essick and Jenijoy La Belle, eds., *Night Thoughts or The Complaint and The Consolation*, illustrated by William Blake (New York: Dover, 1975) xi.

² Essick and La Belle, *Night Thoughts* 37.

³ John E. Grant, "Jesus and the Powers That Be in Blake's Designs for Young's *Night Thoughts*" in *Blake and His Bibles*, ed. David V. Erdman (West Cornwall, CT.: Locust Hill Press, 1990) 77-79. The numbers in Grant's text and my own refer to the numbers assigned to the water color designs in *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's "Night Thoughts,"* ed. John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose, and Michael Tolley, with the assistance of David V. Erdman (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980), 2 vols.

⁴ T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, revised A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of The English Bible 1525-1961* (London: British

and Foreign Bible Society, 1968) 241. Henry's work went through many editions.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Rev. Leslie F. Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971) 1449 (commentary on Luke 10.25-37).

⁶ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, new ed., 5 vols. (London, 1774) 2: 143. Gill is not recorded by Darlow and Moule, presumably because he does not provide a complete text to accompany his commentary, but *DNB* records that the first edition was published in 1746-48, so the work was evidently popular enough to justify the new edition, and adds that he used "his extensive rabbinical learning," as will appear in later references to his commentary. I confess an arbitrary element in my choice of commentators—I have made no attempt to canvas the whole vast field. But both Henry and Gill are interesting, both were evidently quite widely read, the two argue from somewhat different positions, and so separately and together they provide useful evidence about widely received interpretation at the time.

⁷ Because Grant's view of the basic thrust of the design does not change when he turns to the etched version, I have illustrated only the etched version, which reproduces better than the water color. The differences are very small, and neither Grant's overall interpretation of the design nor my own depends on an exact reading of the expression on the face of Jesus.

⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977) 1.10.13.

⁹ George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1970) 97.

¹⁰ Lemprière, *Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. [1797] ed. F. A. Wright (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 19.

¹¹ It is evident that Blake knew his Ovid, but I do not remember seeing it remarked before that his spelling "Ovids Metamorphosis" (E 556) points, though not definitively, to Sandys, who seems to have been the last to spell the title in that way. It seems that Keats was not the only major romantic poet to appreciate Sandys. Many other sources comment on the serpent as the

attribute of Aesculapius—e.g. Joseph Spence, *Polymetts* (London 1747) 132.

¹² Henry, *Commentary* 1448; Gill, *Exposition* 2: 142.

¹³ Henry, *Commentary* 1448. The distinction of functions is based on the text of the Bible: Cruden notes the frequency with which wine is used as a metaphor for the anger of God, and the ways in which oil is associated with "comfort and refreshment."

¹⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon The New Testament* (London: Charles H. Kelly, n.d.) 241.

¹⁵ Gill, *Exposition* 2: 144.

¹⁶ Henry, *Commentary* 1448. Gill makes a very similar statement, *Exposition* 2: 143.

¹⁷ See Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) #140r.

¹⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. M. Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1975) 121. The drawing actually shows the time as either sunset or dawn, contrary to the indication of the text, but the visible footprint before Crusoe makes the moment illustrated quite definite. Rodney M. Baine is probably correct in suggesting that Blake chose a setting sun "To heighten Crusoe's isolation and terror. . . . For that night the fearful Crusoe slept not at all . . ."; "Blake and Defoe" *Blake* 6 (1972): 52.

¹⁹ Charles Le Brun, *A Method To learn to Design the Passions*, trans. John Williams, intro. Alan T. McKenzie (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1980) 47.

²⁰ Janet Warner, *Blake and the Language of Art* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1984) 51. Warner's book received a rather ungenerous review recently in *Blake* (24 [1990]: 65-67), but it would seem that some of the important things that she has to tell us have not yet been absorbed by Blake scholars.

²¹ [John Bulwer], *Chirologia: or the Naturall Language of the Hand* (London, 1644) 29.

²² Christopher Heppner, "Reading Blake's Designs: *Pity and Hecate*" *BRH* 84 (1981) 363.

²³ C. H. Collins Baker, "The Sources of Blake's Pictorial Expression" reprinted in Robert N. Essick, ed., *The Visionary Hand* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973) 116-19.

MINUTE PARTICULARS

William Blake and John Marsh

Robert N. Essick

The name Edward Garrard Marsh (1783-1862) has been associated with Blake since the 1880 edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*. As Gilchrist explains, "Edward the Bard of Oxford," to whom Blake alludes in his letter of 27 January 1804 to William Hayley, "was a certain Mr. Edward Marsh of Oriel College, who, when visiting Hayley while Blake was also his frequent guest and fellow-labourer, had been wont to read aloud to them the Hermit's [i.e., Hayley's] own compositions in a singularly melodious voice."¹ Thus it seems probable that "Oxford, immortal Bard!" who "with eloquence / Divine . . . wept over Albion" (E 188) on plate 41 of Blake's *Jerusalem* is also none other than Edward Marsh, even though his is hardly the first name to leap to mind when compiling a list of bards associated with the city or its university.² In a 1927 essay, Kenneth Povey provided more information about Marsh,³ but it was not until the discovery in 1984 of 64 letters from Marsh to Hayley that we learned of the extent of Marsh's involvement with the Hayley circle beginning only a few months after Blake's arrival at Felpham. The references to Blake in these letters provided new information about his life and work from 1800 to 1803.⁴

Povey notes that E. G. Marsh's father, John Marsh (1752-1828), was "a solicitor and famous amateur musician, who came into a fortune and eventually settled at Chichester in 1787,"

but no connection between Blake and John Marsh was then known.⁵ A new document has now come to light that provides information on John Marsh's friendship with Hayley and shows that the father, like the son, left us brief but tantalizing written references to Blake.

At its London auction of books and manuscripts on 28 November 1990, Christie's offered as lot 285 John Marsh's manuscript autobiography in 37 volumes bound in vellum, each containing approximately 90 leaves written on both sides, with the pages conveniently numbered. This enormous work was purchased for £28,600 by Maggs Bros., the venerable London bookshop, acting on behalf of the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The Library received the manuscript on 14 February 1991 and it is now designated as HM 54457.

Marsh began keeping a diary when only twelve years of age and in 1796 started his autobiography.⁶ After writing a retrospective narrative of his early years, Marsh added entries on a regular basis, apparently based on a daily diary, and thus the work has a structure and tone midway between that of a diary and an autobiography. Marsh continued this work until shortly before his death, with the last 14 pages of the manuscript in another hand (presumably written by a family member) recording his final days. A transcript of the autobiography, written (according to Christie's catalogue) in the same hand as the final 14 pages of the original, has been available for some time in the Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 7757. This much abridged version in only 16 volumes omits a great deal of material, including all entries for the period 1795-1802.⁷

The main interest in John Marsh's autobiography derives from its wealth of information about his musical compositions and performances and his attendance at concerts. We can also learn from Marsh a great deal about provincial life among the educated gentry in the environs of Chichester

from 1787 to the end of his life. There are many references to William Hayley and other members of the Hayley circle, including Marsh's own son Edward, Miss Harriet Poole, and Joseph Seagrave, who printed one of Marsh's works. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will skip over or merely summarize all this material on the margins of Blakean interest, but I will fully record and comment on all passages that relate directly to William Blake.⁸

John Marsh's first contact with the Hayley family occurred on 22 March 1782 while visiting Bath. There he met "M.^{rs} Hayley of Eartham near Chichester, Wife of the Poet" whose writings were already familiar to him (7: 158). On 5 February 1783, Marsh traveled to Eartham and "had the pleasure of seeing M.^{rs} Hayley very well, & of being introduc'd by her to y^e *Bard* whom [Marsh] found to be a Gent.^m of y^e most pleasing mannere—" (8: 69-70). Marsh purchased his Chichester home from Hayley on 1 February 1786 (10: 64). In the fall of 1800, Marsh was working on a literary composition, "The Excursion of a Spirit," for which Hayley provided the title and other assistance (5 Oct., 21: 26). The two men were on terms of intimacy sufficient to permit Marsh to call at Hayley's home for the purpose of introducing his son Edward to the famous author. This visit on 22 October 1800 led to a meeting with Blake less than a month after his own arrival in Felpham:

Wishing to introduce Edw.^d to M.^r Hayley, I on the next Morning (Wed^y 22.^d) drove him to Felpham where after having some Coffee with M.^r H: we went with him to M.^{rs} Miers's (who was then at the House just by in w.^{ch} y^e Copes had sometime before resided) where we heard one of y^e young Ladies play & sing; & from thence to M.^r Blake's an Engraver M.^r H. had lately brought down from London & settled in a Cottage at Felpham, in order to prepare some ornamental Engravings, Vignettes &c for his Works. Here M.^r Hayley gave me a Ballad he had written, called y^e little Sailor Boy which M.^r Blake had engraved & ornamented with a small Plate at y^e top & bottom, which Ballad as we drove home

I began setting to Music after w.^{ch} I harmoniz'd it for 3 Voices.⁹

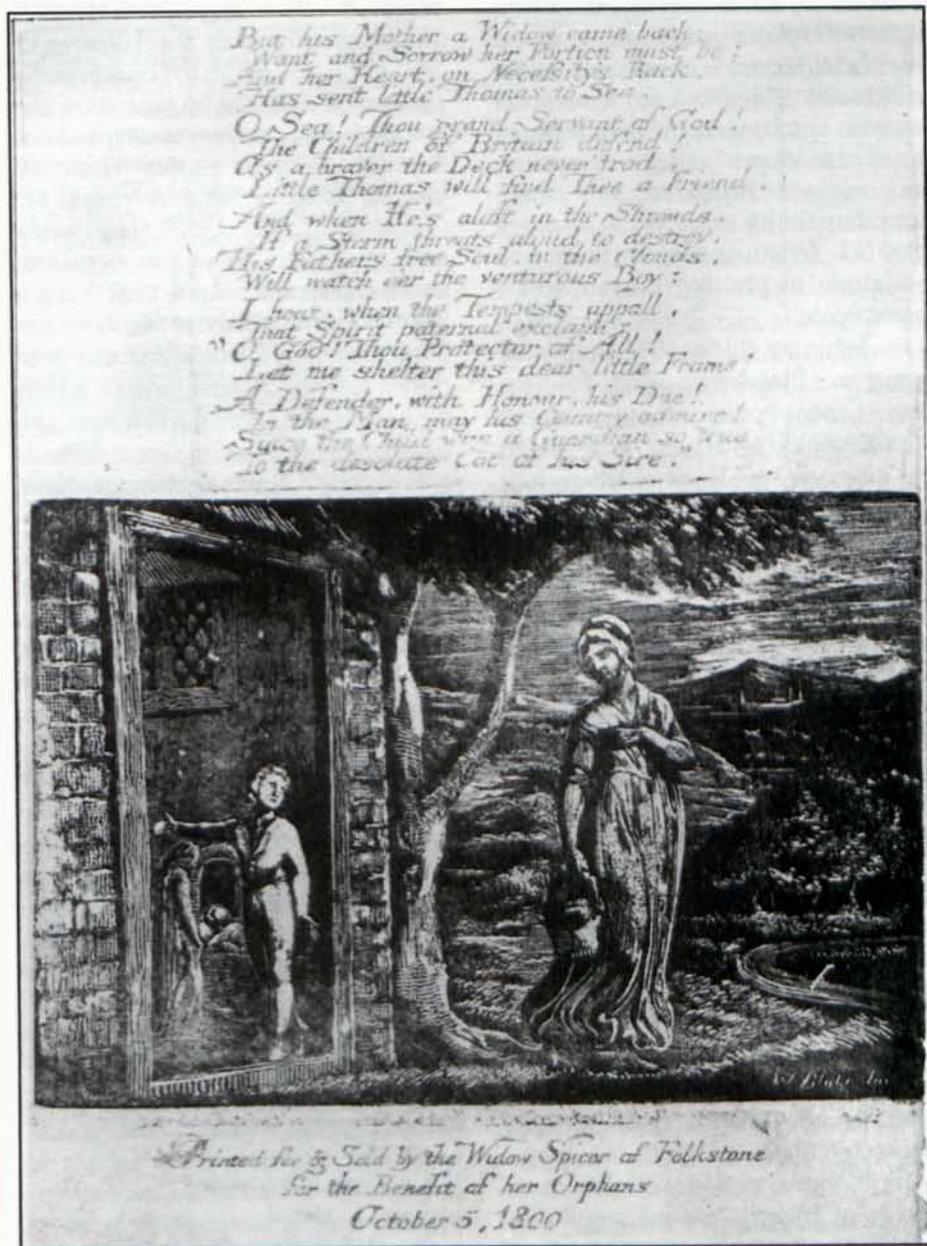
This first reference to Blake in Marsh's autobiography is revelatory in several ways, both factually and socially. Marsh very probably learned from Hayley that he had "brought" Blake to Felpham to prepare engravings for Hayley's publications. Thus it would seem, in the eyes of Hayley and his friends, that Blake's main role was a practical and subsidiary one having no direct connection with his abilities as an original artist, much less as a poet. The class distinctions are implicit: Marsh and Hayley are educated connoisseurs of independent means; Blake is a useful and respected craftsman, but not a gentleman of arts and letters. This social role accords with John Flaxman's professional recommendations that Blake should confine his activities to engraving and teaching drawing while in Felpham and avoid higher aspirations, such as "painting large pictures, for which he is not qualified."¹⁰ Blake would later complain that such advice and its attendant class consciousness confined him to "the mere drudgery of business"¹¹ and would force his return to London where he could hope to engage in more than producing "ornamental Engravings" for Hayley's writings.

The "Ballad" Hayley gave to John Marsh is of course *Little Tom the Sailor* (illus. 1), etched in relief by Blake, with headpiece and tailpiece designs in white-line etching/engraving and dated "October 5, 1800" in the imprint.¹² By setting the poem to music, Marsh provided an auditory complement to Blake's visual setting for what was quickly becoming a communal and multi-media endeavor lavished on a rather slender text. Marsh worked quickly, for by 5 November he was able to send Hayley "the Song of Little Tom the Sailor, as set by me, w.^{ch} I had promis'd to let him have" (21: 38). Marsh highlights his work on *Little Tom* by writing a marginal note on 21: 35 ("Set y^e Sailor Boy, Ballad to Music")

and including it as item "3" in his list of "Musical Compositions" for 1800: "M.^r Hayley's Ballad of y^e Sailor Boy, as a single Song, & for 3 Voices" (21: 57).

After his introduction to Hayley, Edward Marsh became a frequent caller at "the Hermit's" home in Felpham. John Marsh briefly records many such visits over several years, including entries for 10 January 1801 ("I drove

Edw.^d to Felpham & called on M.^r Hayley," 21: 60), 17 January 1802 (22: 57), 23 and 28 January ("Edw.^d took another Walk to M.^r Hayley's," 22: 58), 30 December 1802 (23: 33-34), 14 and 21 July 1803 (23: 151-52), and 30 July 1804 (24: 84). Both father and son also met Hayley at Harriet Poole's home on several occasions (e.g., 16 March 1802, 22: 72). Hayley's beloved child,



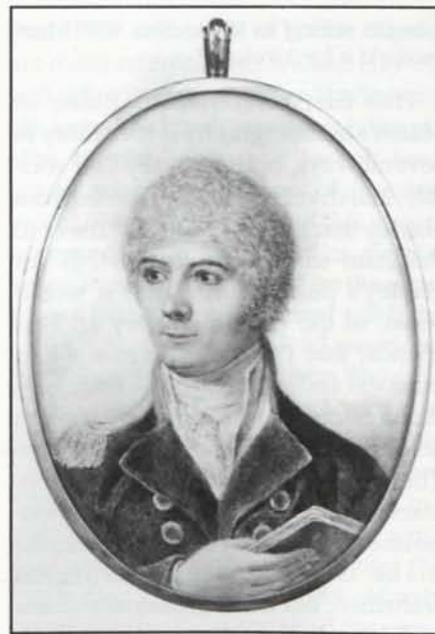
1. *Little Tom the Sailor*. Blake's broadside with Hayley's text etched in relief and the tailpiece in white-line etching/engraving, 1800. Lower half only, approx. 22 x 16 cm. Princeton University Library.

Thomas Alphonso, had died in 1800, and perhaps Edward Marsh, only three years younger than Thomas, became an occasional surrogate son for the bereaved father. Edward seems to have called on Hayley whenever the Oxford student was staying with his parents during university vacations. Thus the references to Blake in Edward's letters to Hayley may have been based on what he learned while in Felpham, either directly from Blake or from Hayley's conversation, rather than from Hayley's (untraced) letters to Edward. We also learn from John Marsh's autobiography that Edward "spoke his Verses" at a public reading and received "Blair's Lectures neatly bound up for his Prize" on 31 October 1800 (21: 37-38). Apparently Blake was not alone in praising Edward's eloquent voice.

On Saturday, 9 May 1801, the Marsh family met Blake once again: "... we drove to Miss Pooles, where we met y^c Miss Kempes, M^r Hayley & M^r Blake the Engraver, the latter of whom had drawn a striking Miniature of M^r Hayley w.^h we saw" (21: 116). This comment comes only three months after the first known reference to Blake's activities as a painter of miniatures. Hayley's statement in a letter to George Romney of 3 February 1801 that he "taught [Blake] he says to paint in Miniature, & in Truth he has made a very creditable copy from your admirable Portrait" of William Cowper.¹³ Blake's two miniatures of Cowper are still extant, as well as miniature portraits of Cowper's cousin, John Johnson, and of Thomas Butts (illus. 2) and his wife and son, and Blake may have also executed untraced miniatures of Mrs. Hayley and George Romney.¹⁴ However, there is no known miniature of William Hayley nor any other reference to it. Marsh's autobiography allows us to add such a work to the list of Blake's lost paintings. Although Marsh states that Blake had only "drawn" the portrait, water colors were regularly called drawings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

and are still thought of as a form of finished drawing, as distinct from painting, in Great Britain. Thus, the miniature of Hayley may very well have been similar in format, style, and degree of finish to the portrait of Butts reproduced here.

Blake was evidently on the periphery of John Marsh's interests and circle of acquaintances, for there are only two direct references to the engraver and miniaturist in Marsh's autobiography from the summer of 1801 to Blake's return to London in the autumn of 1803. On 26 June 1801, the Marsh family "drove to Felpham & drank tea with M^r Hayley where we met M^r Blake y^c artist & young M^r Chetwynd . . ." (21: 130).¹⁵ Marsh writes nothing further about this occasion, and it is not until 5 April 1802 that we again encounter Blake in Marsh's autobiography: "... our white Cat produced 4 white Kittens, one of which we saved for M^r Blake of Felpham, (M^r Hayley's Friend) but had great difficulty in rearing it, the Cat seeming to have very little Milk—" (22: 77-78). The marginal gloss also records this effort: "Bred a White Kitten for M^r Blake." Perhaps the intended gift was prompted by Marsh having learned that Blake liked cats—or at least favored them over dogs. As Mrs. John Linnell, the wife of Blake's great patron in the final decade of his life, wrote to her daughter Hannah in 1839, "Mr Blake . . . used to say how much he preferred a cat to a dog as a companion because she was so much more quiet in her expression of attachment. . . ."¹⁶ And we know from "The Tyger" of *Songs of Experience* (1794) that Blake had an intense interest in, if not exactly a fondness for, a feline showing a bold expression of sublimity. Marsh makes no further reference to giving a kitten to Blake; perhaps the problems in rearing it prevented the gift. But the mother apparently survived to produce more litters, or Marsh acquired another cat, for on 22 May 1805 he presented Hayley with a "little white kitten" (25: 10).



2. Blake's miniature portrait of Thomas Butts, c. 1801. Water color on ivory, 8.4 x 6.6 cm. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

One of Blake's major tasks for Hayley during his years in Felpham was the engraving and printing of the illustrations for *Hayley's Life, and Posthumous Writings, of William Cowper*. The project took considerable time and patience and was burdened with delays in the printing of the letterpress by Seagrave. The first two volumes were finished by 28 December 1802, for on that day the Marsh family visited "Miss Poole's," met Hayley there, and "saw the first Copy of M^r Hayley's Life of Cowper, now just printed by Seagrave of Chichester soon after which M^r Hayley was so good as to present Edw.^d with a Copy, who had in y^c Autumn frequently assisted him at Miss Poole's on Tuesday & Friday Mornings, in examining & correcting Proof Sheets of the Work—" (23: 62). Apparently the gift to Edward took place some weeks after 28 December, for in his letter to Hayley from Oxford on 11 January 1803, Edward was still enquiring about Blake's progress on "the little quintettes of Cowper's hares," no doubt a reference to the

engraving picturing Cowper's weather-house and three tame hares in the second volume of *The Life of Cowper*.¹⁷

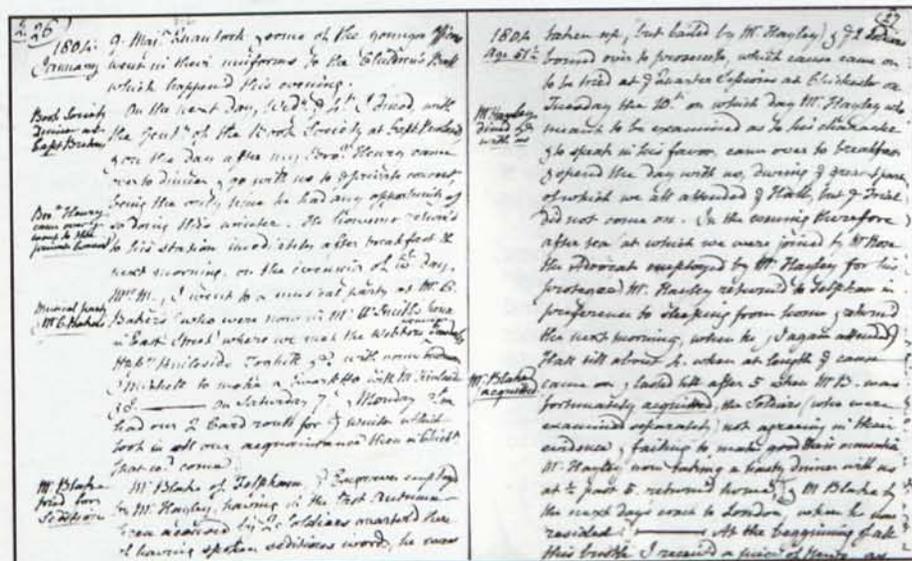
John Marsh paid little heed to Blake's artistic activities, but the latter's trial for sedition at the Chichester Quarter Sessions, 11 January 1804, was a sufficient *cause célèbre* to attract the notice of the assiduous autobiographer. Although Blake's trial and the actions leading to it are well documented, the importance of these matters to Blake's life warrants complete quotation of Marsh's rather rambling and repetitive description of the events of 10 and 11 January (see illus. 3).

M.^r Blake of Felpham, y^e Engraver employ'd by M.^r Hayley, having in the last Autumn been accused by 2 Soldiers [John Scolfield and his comrade John Cock] quarter'd there of having spoken seditious words, he was taken up (but bailed by M.^r Hayley) & y^e 2 Soldiers bound over to prosecute, which cause came on to be tried at y^e Quarter Sessions at Chichester on Tuesday the 10.^h on which day M.^r Hayley who meant to be examined as his character & to speak in his favor, came over to breakfast & spend the day with us, during y^e greatest part of which we all attended y^e Hall [the Guildhall where the trial was to take place], but y^e Trial did not come on. In the evening therefore after tea (at which we were joined by M.^r [Samuel] Rose the

Advocate employ'd by M.^r Hayley for his protégée [sic] M.^r Hayley return'd to Felpham in preference to sleeping from home & return'd the next morning, when he & I again attended y^e Hall till about 4. when at length y^e cause came on & lasted till after 5 when M.^r B. was fortunately acquitted, the Soldiers (who were examined separately) not agreeing in their evidence & failing to make good their accusation. M.^r Hayley now taking a hasty dinner with us at 1/2 past 5. returned home, & M[rs] Blake by the next day's coach to London, where he now resided. —At the beginning [sic] of all this bustle I receiv'd a piece of News, as afflicting as it was unexpected, viz.¹ an account of the death of my Bro^r in Law M.^r Williams of Nottingham, of whose previous illness we had not heard. The Letter arriv'd just as we had done breakfast [on the 10th] . . . [.] —As M.^r Hayley was to dine with us that day & his friend M.^r Rose the Counsellor, M.^r Dally y^e attorney were occasionally coming to y^e house, I thought if M.^{rs} M[arsh]. was made acquainted with this news, it wo.^d throw us all into confusion. I therefore having immediately on opening the Letter discover'd that it announc'd *bad news*, walk'd as if accidentally out of y^e room with y^e Letter in my hand & having read it walk'd into y^e Town; M.^{rs} M. being going with M.^r Hayley to the Townhall to hear M.^r Blake's trial, where I afterw.^{ds} join'd them & staid till 4. when however it not being likely to come on soon, we adjourn'd to dinner, after w.^h hearing it wo.^d not come on 'till y^e next day, M.^r Hayley after tea return'd home.¹⁸

Although Marsh's account offers no great revelations, his comments do offer a few new bits of information. We already knew from the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* for 16 January 1804 that the court session lasted two full days (BR 146-47), but Marsh's autobiography gives the first indication that anyone expected Blake's trial to begin on 10 January and was carried over to the next day. We also learn from Marsh that the trial began after 4 on the afternoon of the 11th, that it concluded after 5, and that Blake returned to London on the following day. This is very prompt justice, at least by modern standards. Bentley reasonably concludes that "Blake probably went to Felpham a few days before his trial, and he almost certainly stayed with Hayley" (BR 139). This latter point now seems less certain, at least for the 10th and 11th. If Blake was a guest of Hayley's during those two days, Blake would probably have traveled and dined with him; yet Marsh, in his several descriptions of Hayley's activities, makes no reference to Blake as Hayley's companion outside the Guildhall. Further, in his list of "The more prominent events of y^e year 1804," Marsh indicates that Hayley spent the crucial two days with him, not with Blake: "2. M.^r Blake the engraver tried at the Sessions for Sedition, & M.^r Hayleys spent 2 days w.th us" (24: 143). Such absences cannot be the basis for solid conclusions, but the engraver and his former patron may not have been on the friendliest of social terms even in the midst of Blake's trial.

On 19 July 1804, Edward brought "M.^r Iremonger," a "young Oxford friend," with him on a visit to Chichester (24: 82). On the 23rd Edward took "M.^r I— . . . to meet M.^r Hayley (to whom M.^r Iremonger had a great desire to be introduced) . . ." (24: 83). The two young men went again to see the poet a week later (24: 84-85). Perhaps Edward's Oxford colleague was a relative of the Elizabeth Iremonger who



3. John Marsh, manuscript autobiography, vol. 24, pages 26-27, containing the beginning of Marsh's description of Blake's trial, 10 and 11 January 1804. Text in ink, each leaf 19.5 x 15.5 cm. Huntington Library.

later owned a copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.¹⁹ Did Mr. Iremonger's friendship with Edward Marsh or his introduction to Hayley lead eventually to Blake and the purchase of one of his illuminated books? Speculation is tempting, but no conclusions can be drawn, particularly since Blake had long since left Felpham and the Marsh and Hayley circles seem to have drawn apart by the next year. Beginning in 1805, we find in John Marsh's autobiography ever fewer references to Hayley, although Harriet Poole is still to be met with from time to time. As for Hayley's friend, the engraver and miniature painter who lived for a few years in a Felpham cottage, there is not a word.

I am greatly indebted to the Huntington Library for permission to quote from Marsh's autobiography and to G. E. Bentley, Jr., for providing me with a copy of his transcript of the Blake references and other pertinent passages. Bentley was the first person to read parts of Marsh's manuscript the day after its arrival at the Huntington. All quotations from the autobiography given in this essay are based on my inspection of the original manuscript.

¹ Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1880) 1: 203. For Blake's letter to Hayley, see *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1982) 740-1 (hereafter cited as E followed by page number). Hayley notes (without reference to Blake) visits from Edward Marsh on 1 Sept. 1803 and early in 1806 in *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley*, ed. John Johnson (London: Colburn, Simpkin and Marshall, 1823) 2: 44, 58.

² S. Foster Damon, for example, suggests that the Bard of Oxford is Percy Bysshe Shelley—See Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, rev. ed. by Morris Eaves (Hanover: UP of New England, 1988) 314. The discovery of direct links between Edward Marsh and Blake (see note 4) makes Damon's identification less likely.

³ K. P. [Kenneth Povey], "Blake and 'The Bard of Oxford,'" *The Sussex County Magazine* 1 (1927): 391. There is also a brief discussion of Marsh in Morchard Bishop [pseudonym of Oliver Stoner], *Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley* (London: Gollancz, 1951) 290-91.

⁴ See Robert N. Essick, "Blake, Hayley, and Edward Garrard Marsh: 'An Insect of Parnassus,'" *Explorations: The Age of Enlightenment* 1 (1987): 58-84. The references to Blake are also printed in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 17-23, 25-27, 44, 60. Marsh's letters are now in my collection.

⁵ John Marsh receives brief notice in *The Dictionary of National Biography* 12: 1100-01. For considerably more information on his activities as an amateur composer and musician, see *A Dictionary of Musicians* (London: Sainsbury and Co., 1825) 2: 118-21, and *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., ed. Eric Blom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1955) 5: 588-89 (article signed by Richard Gorer).

⁶ Marsh's autobiography, 1: 143, 17: 87, 134, and 22: 170 (hereafter referred to in parentheses by volume and page number, with date when pertinent). The volumes are carefully numbered in roman numerals on their spines and front covers; most also contain the dates covered. Marsh regularly included marginal summaries of the most important events recorded on each page of his autobiography, and at the end of most years composed lists of major occurrences in his life, musical performances attended or given, and musical compositions.

⁷ According to Christie's auction catalogue. I have not inspected the Cambridge transcription and do not know if it contains any of the post-1802 references to Blake recorded here. This point, however, is of little consequence since the transcript would have independent authority only if in John Marsh's hand (which, according to Christie's catalogue, is not the case).

⁸ Just to complicate matters, Marsh knew at least three other Blakes: a "Widower" named "T. Blake" (21: 9, 30 Aug. 1800) and "the Blakes" who resided in Leominster (23: 25, 3 Sept. 1802; see also 23: 175, 16 Sept. 1803). Fortunately, the references to these other Blakes, excluded from further consideration here, are specific enough to distinguish them from our Blake.

⁹ 21: 34-35. "M.^{rs} Miers" was very probably a relative of Jeremiah Meyer the miniaturist; see G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 100n2 (hereafter cited as BR followed by page number). Marsh met "M^r Miers, the Miniature Painter of London" in February 1783 (8: 70).

¹⁰ Flaxman's letter to Hayley, 19 Aug. 1800 (BR 72).

¹¹ Letter to Thomas Butts, 10 Jan. 1803 (E 724).

¹² Marsh's copy is untraced. Indeed, none of the recorded copies has a provenance reaching back to the original owner.

¹³ BR 78; see also Hayley's letter of 13 May 1801 (BR 80). For Blake's own references to his activities as a miniaturist, see his letters to Butts of 10 May and 11 Sept. 1801 (E 715-16). Hayley very probably encouraged Blake to take up miniature portraiture, but it is doubtful that Hayley provided much in the way of instruction in the art.

¹⁴ See Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981) #346-48, 353-54, 376-78 and illus. 455, 459-60, 476-78.

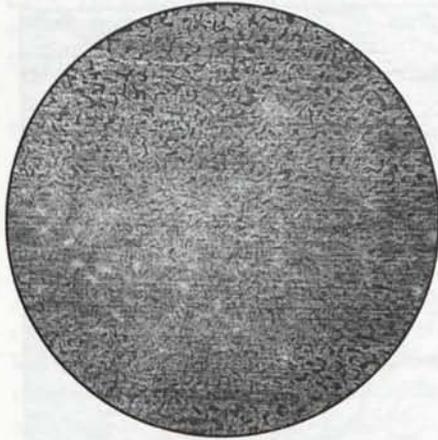
¹⁵ 21: 130. The last person named is no doubt the same "M.^r Chetwynd . . . a noble Youth" to whom John Carr refers in a letter to Hayley of 9 Sept. 1801 (BR 82). Carr jocularly claims that Hayley "& Blake have made a Coxcomb of a wretched untutored Artist," perhaps by complimenting Chetwynd's (equally wretched?) artistic efforts. Blake refers to "M^{rs} Chetwynd & her Brother. a Giant in body mild & polite in soul" in a letter to Hayley of 28 Sept. 1804 (E 755).

¹⁶ Bentley, *Blake Records Supplement* 81.

¹⁷ See Essick, "Blake, Hayley, and Edward Garrard Marsh" 70.

¹⁸ 24: 26-29. In the margin of p. 26 Marsh wrote "M.^r Blake tried for *Seditton*," and in the margin of p. 27 "M.^r Blake *acquitted*."

¹⁹ See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 413, provenance of copy D. For Henry Crabb Robinson's friendship with Elizabeth Iremonger in 1810, see BR 224.



1. Engraving showing the earth in Chaos. Thomas Burnet, *The [Sacred] Theory of the Earth*. 1: 36. Courtesy of the Royal Library, Stockholm.



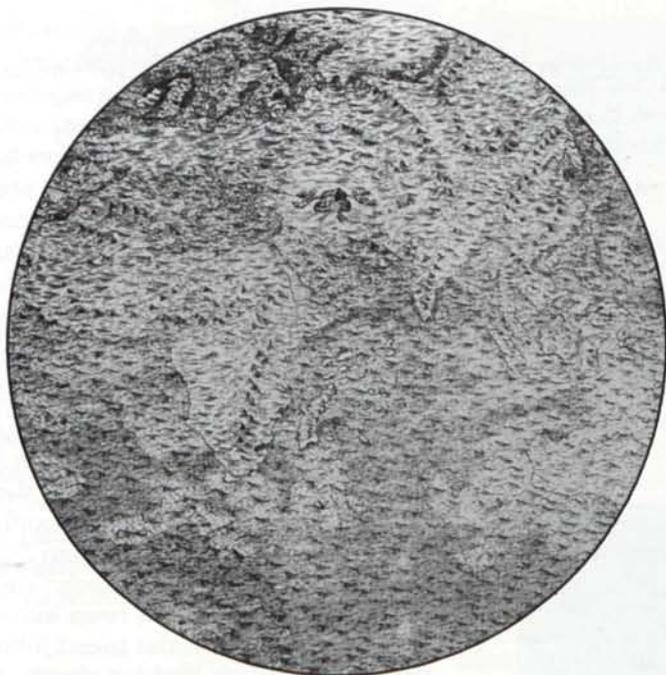
2. William Blake. *The Song of Los*. Copy E. Frontispiece (plate 1). Reproduced with the permission of the Huntington Library. RB 54043.

Blake And Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory Of The Earth*

Morton D. Paley

The importance of Thomas Burnet to some of William Blake's contemporaries is well recognized. One of Coleridge's unrealized projects was "Burnet's *theoria telluris* translated into blank verse, the originals at the bottom of the page."¹ Wordsworth wrote parts of Burnet's theory into *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Prelude*.² The young Shelley may have been introduced by his millennialist friend John Frank Newton to Burnet's ideas.³ There is much in Burnet that Blake too would have found of interest. In his recent major study of Blake and the sublime, Vincent Arthur De Luca convincingly suggests that Blake was influenced by Burnet in constructing his own myth of the origins of the present state of the earth, including the creation of Urizen's world in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and the third Night of Vala, and the situation of the Mundane Egg in *Milton*.⁴ De Luca's fine exposition is limited to the first two Books of Burnet's work, comprising his accounts of the Creation, the Deluge, and the original Paradise. The relevance to Blake of the third and fourth Books, concerning the Conflagration and the New Heavens and New Earth, remains to be discussed, as does another aspect of Burnet's book—its illustrations.

Early editions of *The [Sacred] Theory of the Earth*⁵ were illustrated with anonymous but well executed engravings that are likely to have interested Blake the engraver as well as Blake the cosmogonist. (A comparison of the first three editions in English shows no significant differences among the designs.) The first is a striking frontispiece depicting Jesus standing above seven disks that, counting clockwise, appear as follows:



1. A dark circle filled with jumbled marks, similar to the illustration of the earth in its chaos on page 34.

2. A light disk matching the representation of the "first earth" before its dissolution on page 67.

3. The earth under water with Noah's ark, accompanied by angels, floating on the waves, as engraved on page 101.

4. The earth with its continents formed, as in the foldout engraving following page 150.

5. The earth in flames. This is the subject matter of the third Book, "Concerning the Conflagration," in volume 2.

6. The restored first earth, virtually identical with the second disk, upon which the millennial world will be created.

7. A sun, illustrating Burnet's conviction "that the Earth, after the last day of Judgment, will be changed into the nature of a Sun, or of a fixt Star. . . ."⁶

The first and third disks are of special interest to us here. "There is a particular pleasure to see things in their Origins," writes Burnet, "and by what degrees and successive changes they ran into that order and state we see them afterwards, when completed" (1: 35). According to the *Sacred The-*

ory, the beginning of the earth was as a Chaos in which the elements of earth, air, and water were intermixed before their separation. This is pictured as the first disk of the frontispiece and, in larger scale, on page 36 as a mass of jumbled particles (illus. 1). This disk bears a striking resemblance to the one in the frontispiece of Blake's *Song of Los* (illus. 2), where the sun is either eclipsed by another heavenly body forming in front of it or is itself in the process of formation. In either case, Blake has seemingly borrowed his visual conception from Burnet's book.

Another such borrowing occurs with respect to the Deluge scene of the third disk in the frontispiece. After the formation of a perfectly smooth, egg-like earth, pictured as consisting of four concrete, flattened-out circles (illustrated on page 44), the waters were contained in the Abyss. When the crust of the earth dried, however, it cracked. "The whole fabrick brake, and the frame of the Earth was torn in pieces, as by an Earthquake" (1: 50). Portions of the crust fell into the Abyss and forced out the water, which then covered the land. On page 68 an engraving enlarges the third disk of the



3a. Engraving showing the earth after the Deluge, with the Ark and angels. Thomas Burnet, *The [Sacred] Theory of the Earth*. 1: 68. Courtesy of the Royal Library, Stockholm.

3b. Detail.

frontispiece, showing the earth covered by water and a houseboat-like Ark accompanied by two angels (illus. 3). If we compare this part of the illustration in Burnet to Blake's design in the upper part of *Jerusalem* 39[44] (illus. 4), the resemblance is remarkable. Although other sources for Blake's arks have been suggested,⁷ none is as close to this particular *Jerusalem* design as the one pictured in the *Sacred Theory*.

Our discussion so far has been about Burnet's first volume, comprising Books I and II, which concern the creation of the earth, the original Paradise, and the Deluge. Books III and IV, which treat of the end of the world and the millennium, also deserve some attention. A short sketch of Burnet's chief ideas about these events will suggest why Blake would have found them of interest, especially as regards the structure of time, the Conflagration that will end the earth as we know it, and the regeneration of all things in the Millennium.

Burnet cites the Jews' belief that the world will last 6,000 years, a tradition that he says derives from "*Elias the Rabbin, or Cabbalist*" (2: 23). In *M 24* (E 121), "Los is by mortals nam'd Time"

(67); "He is the Spirit of Prophecy the ever apparent Elias" (71). In 22: 15-7 (E 117) Los says:

I am that Shadowy Prophet who Six
Thousand Years ago
Fell from my station in the Eternal
Bosom. Six Thousand Years
Are finishd. I return!

According to the *Sacred Theory*, the six days of the world-week would be followed by the sabbath of the Millennium on the model of Moses' septenaries: six days of creation, then a sabbath, after six years a sabbath year, and after a sabbath of years a year of Jubilee. "All these lesser revolutions," writes Burnet, "seem to me to point at the grand Revolution, the great *Sabbath* or *Jubilee*, after six Millenaries . . ." (2: 102). Compare *Milton* 23: 55 (E 119):

Six Thousand years are passd away the
end approaches fast.]

Before the advent of this great Sabbath or Millennium, however, the world as we know it must be destroyed by fire.

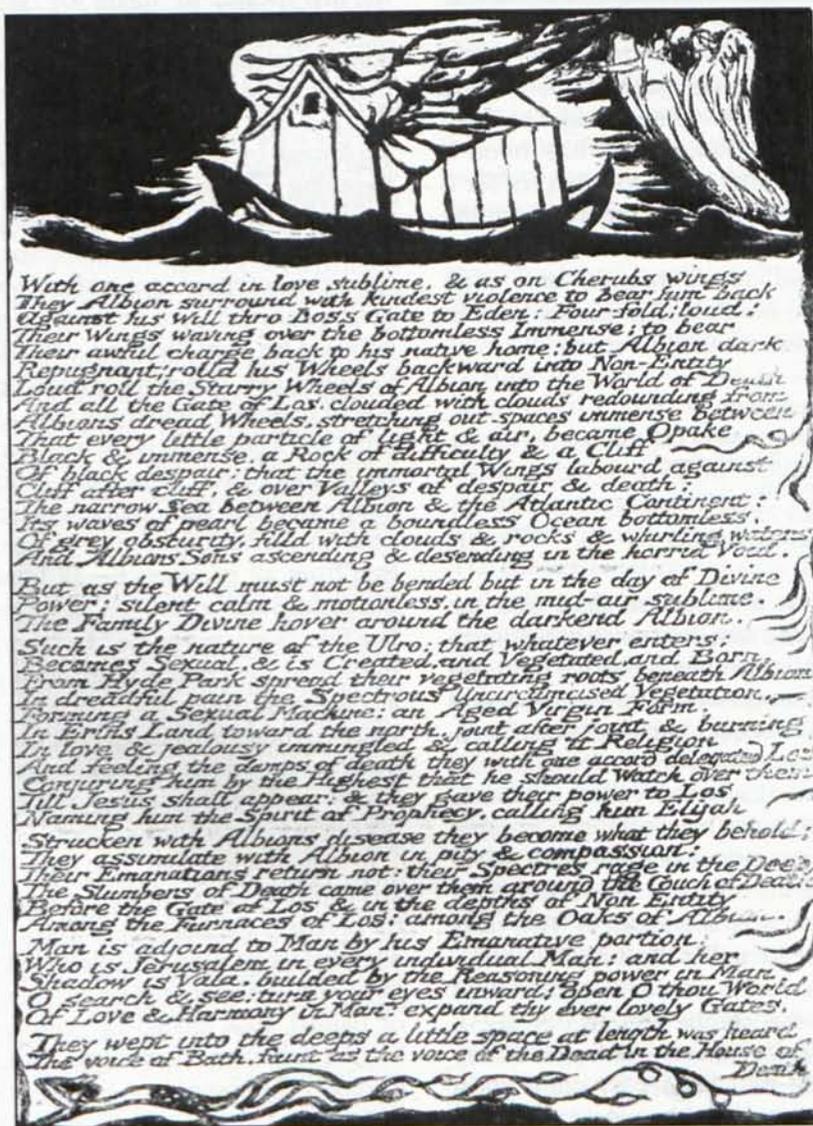
Burnet places great emphasis on a physical description of what the final Conflagration will be like (2: 73-74), citing 2 Thess. 7-9 and the "one general Fire" of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Such a conflagration occupies much of pages 118-20 of *Night the Ninth of The Four Zoas*, and in *Milton* Los tells his sons:

Wait till the Judgment is past, till the
Creation is consumed
And then rush forward with me into the
glorious spiritual
Vegetation; the Supper of the Lamb & his
Bride; and the
Awakening of Albion our friend and
ancient companion. [25: 59-62]

After the burning of the earth there will occur "the *Regeneration* or *Renovation*" of the world prophesied in Isaiah 65 and referred to by Jesus in Matt. 19:28 (Burnet 2: 112-13). Christ will return to usher in a millennial state in which humankind will live in "Indolency and Plenty" (2: 126) but will nevertheless enjoy the extension of

knowledge, especially of the sun (2: 142). The millennial state will be characterized by universal peace, righteousness, and the absence of pain (2: 126). The position of the axis of the earth will be set parallel to the axis of the Ecliptic, as it was in antediluvian Eden, creating a perpetual spring. Similarly, in Blake's regained paradise of *Night the Ninth of The Four Zoas*, where justice is executed upon the tyrants and warriors (123), the Regenerate Man presides over the feast of *Eternals* (132-33), and "the fresh Earth beams forth ten thousand thousand springs of

life" (139: 3). For both authors, the seeds of such a vision lie in a tradition of Christian eschatology that emphasized the concrete, physical aspects of the millennium, and it is not possible to say precisely where Blake is indebted to Burnet and where it is a matter of a common tradition. Nevertheless, the many similarities between their scenarios for the future of the earth, as well as the visual correspondences discussed earlier, strongly suggest that Blake was familiar with *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*.



4. William Blake, *Jerusalem*. Plate 39 [44]. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. PML 953.

¹ *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957) 1: no. 61.

² See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973 [1971]) 99-106.

³ See Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (New York: Collier Books, 1962 [1950]) 428n54.

⁴ *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 155-56, 157, 158, 162-63, 191.

⁵ What I refer to as Burnet's "book" was originally published in Latin in two parts, each of which was Englished by Burnet himself, as follows: Part I in Latin, 1681, in English 1684; Part II in Latin 1689, in English 1690. See M. C. Jacob and W. A. Lockwood, "Political Millennialism and Burnet's *Sacred Theory*," *Science Studies* 2 (1972): 265-79. The printed title pages of the first three editions omit the word "Sacred," which does, however, appear in the engraved frontispieces.

⁶ *The Theory of the Earth Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth and of all the General Changes Which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo Till the Consummation of all Things*. 3rd. ed. 2 vols. (London, 1697). Subsequent references are to this edition, cited by volume and page numbers.

⁷ See Nicolas O. Warner, "Blake's Moon-Ark Symbolism." *Blake* 14 (1980-81): 44-59.

Blake's "Infant Joy": An Explanation of Age

Walter S. Minot

Blake's "Infant Joy," in *The Songs of Innocence*, is not a major poem in the collection, but it has been a troublesome poem to interpret for a number of reasons, among them the significance of the infant's age as "two days old" rather than as some other specific number. The crucial lines in the poem are the first stanza:

I have no name
I am but two days old. —
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name, —
Sweet joy befall thee. (E 16)

The first and second lines and the fourth and fifth lines seem to belong to the infant speaker, while the third and sixth lines (as well as the whole second stanza) belong to another voice, a respondent. Since babies of two days old are realistically too young to speak, various critics have offered a number of interpretations of these lines. Wicksteed is the one critic who specifically explains why the infant is "two days old." He identifies the infant's joy with God's creation of heaven as described in Genesis on the second day (123). Wicksteed suggests that the infant may be only two days past conception rather than birth, thus making the joy the joy of generation (123; 124n). Margoliouth finds Wicksteed's explanation of the second day "far-fetched,"

but he suggests that the two days may be two days of joy for the parents since the pregnancy has been established (55).

I propose a simpler reading. When the first speaker in "Infant Joy" says it is "but two days old," there is no reason not to take that literally to mean that the child was born two days ago. The fact that "I have no name" can be explained by the ancient custom of baptising (or christening) children on the third day after birth. For example, the birthdate of William Shakespeare has been accepted (not without some doubts) as April 23rd because he was baptised on April 26th and, according to Sidney Lee, "it was a common practice to baptise a child three days after birth" (8), a point that is also confirmed by Adams (21n1). Thus, the child is happy because it is completely innocent (in the Blakean sense) since it is free from all experience—all human institutions and limitations. Nor should line five, "Joy is my name," be taken to mean that the child is a girl with the actual given name "Joy," for as F. W. Bateson reminds us in his note on the poem in his edition of Blake's works, "in the eighteenth century, girls were not often, in fact, called Joy then" (115).

In sum, the infant at "two days old" is completely innocent, free, and joyful for probably the last time in its life, for after that (according to Blake's view of the world) the infant will be christened, or named, thus limited by repressive human institutions such as the church. Certainly the companion piece to this poem, "Infant Sorrow" in *Songs of Experience* (E 28), shows the restraint of an infant "Striving against my swaddling bands," or the repressions of society.

But a look at the longer manuscript of "Infant Sorrow" suggests the connection with baptism even more strongly, for the speaker in the poem says (lines 19-21): "But a Priest with holy look / In his hand a holy book / Pronounced curses on his head" (E 797). If we accept the manuscript emendation of "my" for "his" (E 799), then the speaker in "Infant Sorrow" may be saying that baptism was an occasion on which the priest "Pronounced curses on my head," an ironic Blakean view of the Christian rite of baptism.

My reading of the opening stanza of "Infant Joy" seems to make ordinary sense of the opening two lines of the poem, and, while it may not identify the respondent to the speaker—who could be the mother, the piper mentioned in the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* (as suggested by Gleckner, 298-99n1) or some unnamed speaker—it seems to simplify the context as well.

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REVIEWS

Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley. *The Paintings of Benjamin West*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. xiii + 606 pp. \$85.00.

Reviewed by
Dennis M. Read

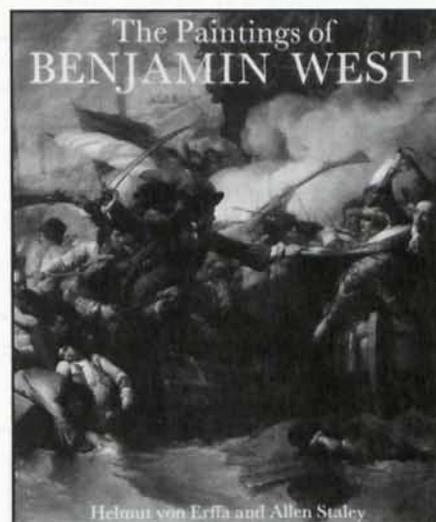
This volume is the product of a lifetime of research—in fact, more than one lifetime. Helmut von Erffa worked on this project for more than thirty years, and in the 1970s, when he realized that he would not live to finish it, he selected Allen Staley as his successor. Staley took over the project in 1976 and completed it after another decade of work, seven years after von Erffa's death in 1979. The result is a complete catalogue of West's paintings, from his *Landscape Composition* (c. 1746) to his *Bacchante Boys* (1819), a total of 739 works produced over more than seventy years.

The collaboration is, in every significant way, a successful one. Staley has taken the vast accumulation of von Erffa's research and shaped it into this volume. He also has written a short history of West's career (157 thoroughly illustrated pages), which precedes the catalogue. Throughout the volume Staley conducts discussions in the first person plural to indicate his agreement with von Erffa on matters of interpretation and opinion, with rare moments of individual dissent. One occurs in the discussion of *Chryseis Returned to Her Father* (no. 161). Staley writes that von Erffa did not think West painted the picture, but then argues

that its dimensions correspond to that of a painting on the same subject sold by West's sons in 1829, that details in the painting are of West's hand, and that three central figures are similar to those in West's drawing of the same subject. These items lead Staley to include the painting in the catalogue, although he concedes that the work "was largely painted, or repainted, by another hand" (248).

The catalogue is breathtakingly complete, including 255 works whose present location is unknown—35 percent of the total. It could be said, in fact, that the catalogue is *more* than complete, since von Erffa and Staley list works which West may have only intended to execute. The very first entry, in fact, *Sappho*, seems to have been no more than a twinkling in West's eye. It is listed with a group of paintings West offered for sale to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1809, of which about half had not been painted at the time. West sometimes sought assurance that a painting would be bought before actually producing it; the practice is a curious application of Blake's dictum that conception and execution are one. In this instance, since nothing more is known of the painting, it seems likely that West got no further than the title.

Other peculiarities in West's artistic habits also interfere with the goal of producing a totally coherent and conclusive catalogue. For example, West's five separate paintings of *Cupid Stung by a Bee* (nos. 131-35) provide various problems. The paintings were executed over a period of thirty-nine years, the first in 1774 and the last in 1813. The first and second versions differ significantly from each other, with the subsequent paintings following the second version. The third version involves the hand of another artist, Ann Jemima Provis, the daughter of Thomas Provis, with whom West was conducting experiments to learn the "Venetian Secret" of oil painting. Ann Jemima's contribution is known because her fa-



ther complained vigorously to the diarist Joseph Farington when West gave her no acknowledgment (or payment) after completing the work. How much of the painting is Ann Jemima's is impossible to determine. The fourth version was begun as early as 1796 but reworked and completed in 1813. What of the painting is old and what is new cannot be successfully sorted out. (During the last decades of his life, West often chose to rework earlier paintings, rather than undertaking new works.) This version, much larger than the others, occasioned Hazlitt's remark that West "is only great by the acre." The last version is known only through an auction catalogue of 1829; it is listed as an unfinished work and was sold to an unidentified buyer. Nothing more is known of it. Different paintings of *The First Interview of Telemachus with Calypso* (nos. 181-84) present similar problems, with "hopelessly confused" histories resulting in von Erffa and Staley's "tentative attempts, based on insufficient evidence, to sort them out" (259). Perhaps it is reassuring that even a work as thorough as this leaves scholarly tasks to be done.

For the most part, however, von Erffa and Staley have succeeded in what they have undertaken to do. The catalogue is arranged under nineteen different categories, beginning with historical

subjects, moving through biblical subjects and saints, genre subjects, landscapes and animals, and culminating with portraits. The arrangement has its defects. Each category dictates a different organization, only one of which is chronological (historical paintings). A reader therefore cannot form a sense of how West's artistic career developed from the entries, which skip all over his chronology. Each entry provides full information about the work: present ownership, medium, dimensions, provenance, exhibition history, engravings of the work, other catalogues and inventories which include it, and discussions in other literature. The greatest value, however, lies in the discussion of each work. One can gauge the relative importance of the work by measuring the length of discussion; a paragraph or less indicates an incidental work, whereas a page or more (in reduced type; a page runs over 2,500 words) indicates a major work. Dozens of paintings have such lengthy discussions. The volume is copiously illustrated with color and black-and-white photographs; virtually every work of significance is reproduced.

Some may presume that a volume such as this is strictly a reference tool and not a book to be read from cover to cover. While it certainly provides ready access to all available information about, for instance, West's eight versions of his *Death of General Wolfe*, reading it only to glean specific information deprives one of the book's greatest strength: its intelligent discussions not only of the paintings themselves but also of their genesis and stages of completion, of comparable or related works by other artists, of West's motivations and intentions, of all the scholarship published on the work, and, most valuable, of a judicious weighing of conflicting pieces of information. For instance, von Erffa and Staley escort the reader through the "considerable confusion" surrounding *Jacob and Rachel* (no. 247), which West painted in 1775 but never exhibited. Nor is the painting referred to

by West or any contemporary during his lifetime. This neglect can be explained if the painting is in fact a commissioned portrait of Mary Thompson, since a private commission might be omitted from an artist's list of works. But von Erffa and Staley point out that West did include his portrait of Lord Buckinghamshire's wife in his 1805 catalogue under the biblical title, *Isaac's Servant Tying the Bracelet on Rebecca's Arm* (no. 243), and, because they can find nothing to confirm that *Jacob and Rachel* indeed is a portrait of Mary Thompson, von Erffa and Staley conclude that the identification is "traditional." They confirm that the painting is of the biblical pair and by West. These discussions also present much information about West's patrons and purchasers and the history of his relationships with them, West's friends, relatives, and critics, the reception the paintings received; in sum, the vicissitudes of West's career.

Like Blake, West came from a humble background and received little formal education. Born in Springfield, Pennsylvania in 1738 to a working-class family, West showed artistic ability at an early age. Unlike Blake, however, West early in his life enjoyed the support of benefactors, who enabled him to travel to Italy in the 1760s, where he studied works of the Renaissance masters and practiced painting in their style. (West named his first son Raphael in homage to the master.) He settled in London in 1763 and by the end of that decade had become the leading historical painter in England, practicing a neoclassical style. His artistic position was assured through the patronage of George III, for whom West painted nearly sixty pictures during his career. For no clear reason, however, the King ended his patronage of West at the beginning of the nineteenth century. West was elected President of the Royal Academy in 1792 and, except for a single year (1805), retained the office until his death in 1820. West's major triumph was painting the figures of the *Death of Wolfe* (1771) in contemporary dress rather than classical robes, thus

moving the neoclassical style of historical painting to a more "natural" and less anachronistic mode, but later in his career he moved to a style akin to Fuseli and Blake with paintings of apocalyptic subjects employing dramatic effects of light and shade. An early example is his *Saul and the Witch of Endor* (1777).

West was the first American painter to be recognized as a successful artist. He followed conventional lines in achieving that success, carefully cultivating the fashions of public taste and developing connections with the nobility. When his career was in full flower, his paintings commanded huge prices: 1,000 guineas for *Christ Showing a Little Child as the Emblem of Heaven* (1810), 1,300 guineas each for *Edward III with the Black Prince after the Battle of Crecy* (1788), *The Institution of the Order of the Garter* (1787), and *Edward, the Black Prince, Receiving John, King of France, Prisoner, after the Battle of Poitiers* (1788) and 3,000 guineas for *Christ Healing the Sick* (1811), at that time a record price for a single commission. In what seems an uncharacteristic gesture, West refused the offer of knighthood; perhaps his allegiance to the United States never ended, even though he felt constrained from expressing it openly. Although he never returned to his native land, he always welcomed American painters who came to London and provided many of them with training. His advice to aspiring artists was succinct: "Study the masters but copy nature."

Farington records West as joining Ozias Humphry and Richard Cosway in praising Blake's *Night Thoughts* designs (19 February 1796; G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* 50). Frederick Tatham reports that West also "admired much the form of his [Blake's] limbs" (*Blake Records* 529). Blake, on the other hand, criticized West in his *Public Address* for believing "That Wolletts Prints were superior to Basires because they had more Labour & Care." Blake was of the opposite opinion. West, Blake reports, also "hesitated & equivocated with me"

over which was more essential in art, drawing or painting. Blake, of course, insisted on the precedence of drawing. It seems clear that Blake courted comparison with West through his *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* (c. 1805-09) and *Death on a Pale Horse* (1817), paintings which share subject matter with West's. But in fact the two artists shared very little, and Staley's suggestion that "there does seem to have been some common

ground between the two artists at a time when it would have been most useful to them" (108) strikes me as fanciful. The common ground was that shared by all English artists of the day, and Blake's interest in West was chiefly adversarial, while West's in Blake was, at best, mild.

As with any catalogue, corrections and additions begin to accumulate before the ink is dry. This inexorable process is evident in a footnote on

page 383 which introduces three West paintings noticed by the authors only in September 1985. No doubt other paintings have appeared and other new information has come to light since then. But in its vast outlines the catalogue will remain the definitive work on West; it is undeniably a monument of scholarship.

William Blake and His Circle: Papers delivered at a Huntington Symposium. San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1989. vi + 144 pp. illus. \$12.95 paper. (Reprinted from *HLQ* 52 [1989]); G. E. Bentley, Jr. *Blake Records Supplement: Being New Materials Relating to the Life of William Blake Discovered Since the Publication of Blake Records* (1969). Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988. xlvii + 152 pp. \$59.00; David Wells, *A Study of William Blake's Letters*. Tübingen, Stauffenburg Verlag, 1987. 132 pp.

Reviewed by
David V. Erdman

A valuable and elegantly illustrated collection of six essays (the first five from a symposium on 29 and 30 January, 1988 at the Huntington): Martin Butlin on "The Physicality of William Blake: The Large Color Prints of '1795'"; David W. Lindsay on "The Order of Blake's Large Color Prints"; D. W. Dörrecker on "The Song of Los:

The Munich Copy and a New Attempt to Understand Blake's Images"; Aileen Ward on "'S' Joshua and His Gang: William Blake and the Royal Academy"; Morton D. Paley on "The Art of 'The Ancients'"; Morris Eaves with an "Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England: The Comedy of the English School of Painting"; and a book review by Robert N. Essick of the 1987 facsimile of *An Island in the Moon*, published by Cambridge University Press in association with the Institute of Traditional Science, 1987.

Butlin examines the growth of Blake's books, first in size, "to accommodate the ever increasing weight of his content," and in the end, with the dramatic change in the proportion of illustration to text, a literal breaking free, in the "Small and Large Books of Designs" described by Blake as "a selection from the different Books of such as could be Printed without the writing, tho' to the loss of some of the best things."

Butlin scrutinizes such physical matters as the evolution of "the idea of multiple color printing," the second of two pulls from a single application of color to the plate, for example, having received a much lighter application of coloring. At the other extreme are certain pulls that were disfigured by later varnish. "David Bindman's somewhat wicked suggestion that any print bearing the date 1795 must have been executed ten years later" is found attractive.

Butlin sees this "reassessment" as only just beginning, the solution being found "in front of the object, not in the study."

WILLIAM BLAKE AND HIS CIRCLE



Papers delivered at a Huntington Symposium by
MARTIN BUTLIN • D. W. DÖRRBECKER
MORRIS EAVES • DAVID W. LINDSAY
MORTON D. PALEY • AILEEN WARD

Lindsay's essay on "The Order of Blake's Large Color Prints" (19-41) is of considerable interest but cannot be easily be summarized.

Dörrecker's extensive discussion of a little known copy of "The Song of Los" is particularly valuable in its details but difficult to summarize. (He also reports, in a note, that his M.A. thesis, "Blakes Illuminationen zu *Europe: a Prophecy*," will soon be available [he hopes] from the Insel Verlag, Frankfurt.

Aileen Ward's discussion of "'S' Joshua and His Gang" is—as is her custom—studded with significant particulars and corrective interpretations. Alas, she notes, "most scholars follow Blake's lead in decrying the Academy's influence while at the same time minimizing its importance in shaping his

career." She demonstrates, with a survey of his relationship to the Royal Academy, that "Blake's achievement would [hardly] have been greater if the Academy had recognized him sooner, and perhaps . . . would have been less."

Morton Paley's discussion of "The Art of 'The Ancients'" is a valuably detailed and critical survey. "Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, and George Richmond were, to be sure, followers of William Blake. But how far did they follow?"

Morris Eaves winds up the symposium with a commentary on the historians of English art as having shown "little inclination to come to a broad and sophisticated understanding of that discourse"—hence leaving "a lot of groundwork [that] still needs to be done," including the demonstration of how "profoundly indebted to this discourse" are Blake's ideas about art and about literature as well.

GE. Bentley's *Blake Records Supplement* includes: Fuseli on Blake's engraving of Anubis; Richter on his delight on receiving a copy of Blake's edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*; Marsh writing to Hayley about Blake as a musician [a tantalizing reference]; Charlotte Smith to Samuel Rose—and some new details of Blake's trial at Felpham (24-28); several documents with information about Cromek (42-71, 125); evidence that Blake "regularly dined with the Linnells on Sundays" and of their at-

tending a performance at the West London Theatre of Dryden's *Oedipus* (76-81); an appendix of "Linnell Manuscripts Rediscovered" (101-23); and a list of 51 books which "we may be confident" were in Blake's library (124-29); a bit of further evidence that Cunningham applied to friends of Blake for information for his biography (130-31); and two pages of "Addenda" (132-33). And much more.

In Wells's *Study of William Blake's Letters*, we find that "overall, Blake's letters attest to his remarkable consistency of thought. They also show that Blake was his own first critic." "More than half of Blake's surviving letters, and most of the ones important to art and literary critics, were written between 1799 and 1808 . . . Despite unfortunate gaps . . . students pursuing any one of the following subjects will inevitably encounter in Blake's letters: allegory, empiricism, execution, the Greeks, imagination, imitation, invention, levels of vision, mental states . . . and spiritual sensation" (122).

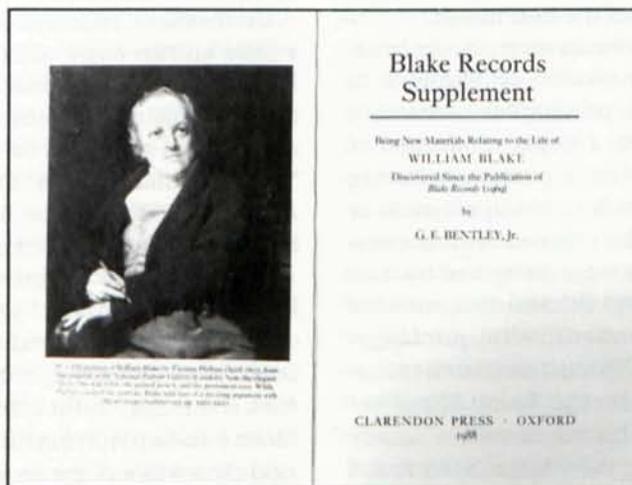
David Wells will not be the first reader of Blake's letters to notice these topics; this small booklet will have almost nothing to tell old-timers—but it can be a useful introduction of biographical information about Blake to students newly entering these precincts. Bentley's *Blake Records*, however, supplies very much more.

Vincent Carretta. *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990. xviii + 389 pp. 161 illus. \$40.00.

Reviewed by
Stephen C. Behrendt

This book addresses a very real need. Recent scholarship has increasingly revealed how fully attuned Blake was to all aspects of the culture of his times. An active radical in the tumultuous social, political, and intellectual milieu of Europe's largest city, Blake could scarcely have escaped the influence of the satiric tradition that found graphic expression in the flood of political caricatures that swelled as the eighteenth century progressed. Particularly during the reign of George III, this rich tradition of vigorous political and cultural commentary subjected both to investigation and to ridicule not only the royal and governmental institutions whose locus was the king but also the person of the king himself.

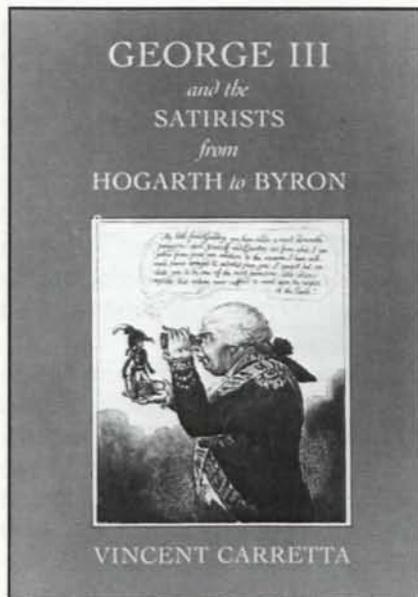
Partly because study of this vast storehouse of visual imagery was for a long time limited by physical access to repositories like the British Museum, and partly because that study was often the province of rather narrowly-defined specialists, and partly too because literary criticism has historically been slow to appreciate that literary artists lived in a world rich in *non-verbal* art and other public phenomena, Blake's relation to this vein of popular art has remained only minimally explored. David Erdman and others have pointed out some of Blake's debts to leading graphic artists like Gillray, but no one has to date undertaken the sort of definitive survey the subject requires. As the visual riches of the



British Museum Print Room become more and more accessible in this age of technology (the entire collection of the British Museum's caricature prints, keyed to their catalogue numbers, can now be had on microfilm from the BM, for instance), it is inevitable that someone will take up the challenge and begin systematically to survey Blake's relations specifically to that visual tradition. Even where relations can only be surmised, rather than definitively documented, the value of such a study—and of the visual archive it must necessarily constitute—for the further investigation of Blake's encyclopedic art goes without saying.

Vincent Carretta takes us a step in the right direction in *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron*, the first serious, extensive examination of the subject in over a century; Thomas Wright's *Caricature History of the Georges* goes all the way back to 1868 and is comparatively unsophisticated both in its methodology and its conclusions. More recent studies like M. Dorothy George's *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (1967) or Herbert Atherton's *Political Prints in the Age of Hogarth* (1974) survey the broad visual landscape, but without the sort of tight thematic focus we find in Carretta's carefully limited study. Despite the author's decision to keep his focus relatively narrow in a heroic effort to keep his material relatively manageable, the book still runs nearly 400 pages. While he is not writing strictly about Blake, Carretta nevertheless devotes a chapter of nearly 100 pages largely to Blake's place in the tradition of caricature and visual satire that centered on George III from his accession to the throne in 1760 until after his death—blind, mad, and curiously popular—in 1820. What Carretta has to say about Blake will of course be of particular interest to readers of *Blake*, and I will discuss that in detail shortly.

Carretta reminds us throughout his survey of his subject that the tradition of post-Restoration regal satire typically



rests upon two typically complementary views of the king: as monarch and as man. The king's is both a regal body and a mortal, physical one. Under the Hanoverian scheme of things legal and monarchical, as it is delineated for us particularly by Blackstone in his *Commentaries*, the king as monarch is by definition "perfect" and "immortal." He reigns and rules in a secular context, but his role as *king* resembles that of the pope, who is regarded as infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, from the seat of the Church and as its divinely appointed spokesman. The inherent patriarchalism of this arrangement (and the resistance to opposition, however mild, that goes with it) thus symbolically affiliates the two father-figures, England's vigorous anti-Catholicism notwithstanding.

As man, however—as mortal, fallible, gullible human being—the king is as vulnerable as any of us: he sits on his throne with a posterior quite as mundanely mortal as ours. The monarch's mortality is in fact the ostensible chink in his armor that admits alike the lance of lampoon and the arrow of discerning intellect. Indeed, the trigger mechanism in much of traditional satire, as Fielding pointed out in *Joseph Andrews*, is the ridiculous—in particular the pretentiousness of the mortal

who would be perfect and immortal. The plain humanness of George III figured increasingly in the history of his treatment by the satirists; so much so, in fact, that this seeming liability was gradually transformed by the age of Napoleon into both an asset and a strategy.

In the early years of the Hanoverian ascendancy satirists trod carefully. Civil war was still a troublingly recent chapter of English history and culture, so that even early satires on the first two Georges were comparatively mild, owing in part to the residual English conviction of both the inevitability and the naturalness of the monarchy and both its figureheads and its attendant figures. The remarkable growth of English self-assurance in the increasingly nationalistic eighteenth century—indeed the growth of a collective cultural swagger that permeated the culture generally and rendered it smugly self-satisfied—gave rise to greater public audacity on the part of visual satirists, many of whom were able in any event to hide behind the often transparent but nevertheless legally sufficient anonymity they could assume simply by not signing their prints. For his part, George III gave no little assistance to the satirists' cause by his inexperience and naiveté, as for instance in allowing the perception to persist that he was a mere puppet of the much-despised John Stuart, third Earl of Bute (the Scot pronunciation of whose name led naturally to the iconographic trope of the boot, variously accompanied by tartan or kilt, visible in countless prints).

Furthermore, the performance of the king and his various ministries during the wars with France and then the American colonies, and then with revolutionary France, together with the king's personal habits (frugality, for instance), interests (agriculture), and characteristics (his explosive, idiosyncratic speech), furnished a seemingly inexhaustible supply of ammunition for the satirists, be they Whig or Tory. During the French Revolutionary period George's stock rose, however, at

the same time that his image was gradually being melded by the caricaturists with that of John Bull, so that by the first decade of the new century even the idiosyncratic Farmer George came off visually superior to the caricatured generic Frenchman and, subsequently, the caricatured Napoleon. George's increasingly popular image (whether or not it corresponded to reality) as conservative traditionalist father, as frugal and long-suffering parent, was helped along of course by the increasingly scandalous behavior of his sons, and particularly the dissolute Prince of Wales who would become Prince Regent during his father's final decade and then King George IV upon his death. So complete was the turnaround in George III's reputation that even Byron found himself treating him more with relatively good-humored humanity than with withering satire in his remarkable send-up of Tory apologist pretension in *The Vision of Judgment*.

As Carretta properly reminds us, George's increasing popularity after the execution of Louis XVI in 1793 forced English radicals generally to accommodate their own agenda to loyalist defenses of monarchy and its figureheads. This meant, for instance, that the sort of attacks on the king's indecisiveness, naiveté, or compliance with (perceived) manipulation that characterized the first three decades of his reign had to be tempered so as not to generate among the reading and viewing public sympathy for the figure they aimed to undermine and ridicule. Backfires were increasingly likely, and the radical opposition had to tread carefully. Even the best-known caricaturists—like Gillray—revealed in their work an essentially conservative agenda that questioned not so much the embedded institution of monarchy as its surface trappings, procedures, and affectations. Increasingly, the combined figure of George III/John Bull was portrayed less as the perpetrator of offensive acts than as their victim. This phenomenon itself marks an interesting turnabout, for in the early years of

George III's reign (and particularly in the period just before and during the American conflict) one of the most common visual tropes of the Tory caricaturists was the tormenting of the emblematic Britannia by recognizable foreign types (including, after 1770 especially, the emblematic American Indian) or by equally recognizable members of English cabinets and political circles.

Perhaps the most profound contribution that *George III and the Satirists* makes to the field lies in its nature as a storehouse of visual materials. While Carretta quotes freely from a broad range of eighteenth-century poets (among whom Charles Churchill is particularly visible) in demonstrating the relation of the satirical print tradition to that of verbal satire, it is the selection of 161 illustrations that draws the reader deeper and deeper into the book, and into its immensely rich subject matter. Carretta traces the evolution of visual treatments of George III by first surveying the tradition of royal satire as it had developed throughout the century, so that we see more clearly how satirical treatments of George III developed logically from both a visual-arts tradition and a changing cultural-political environment that encouraged their proliferation. As usual with a book of this sort, there is some risk that the visual text will overshadow the verbal text, a phenomenon familiar enough to students of Blake's illuminated art. It does not happen here, but not surprisingly the alliance between the two components of the discussion is occasionally an uneasy one, in part because verbal and visual satire, for all their common themes and devices, nevertheless are executed in artistic media that are fundamentally different both in how they operate and in how we perceive and respond to their products. Partly because there is so much to account for in each print, and partly because for every print included in the volume the author refers to two or three others (appropriately documented with British Museum Print

Catalogue numbers, happily), much of the discussion is heavily descriptive. Nevertheless, in opening up for the literary scholar this trove of visual material, extensive descriptions of the nature and function both of iconography in particular and visual structures and strategies in general are probably inevitable. Better to err in that direction. In any event, even when rehearsing the seemingly obvious, Carretta's comments are seldom without useful and instructive insights.

Among the earlier prints discussed, some that should prove especially interesting to Blake scholars are efforts like "A Political Medley" (1740; fig. 2; BMC 2453) and "Bob's the Whole" (1740; fig. 11; BMC 2464). These elaborate prints contain verbal texts that employ the device of the rebus, substituting visual images for cognate words or syllables. The relationship to Blake's interlinear illuminations is striking, and perhaps the examples Carretta supplies here will encourage others to explore this phenomenon in greater detail, for it suggests another, more contemporary alternative to the medieval illuminated page as a possible visual source for some of the interlinear devices in Blake's illuminated poems.

It is probably unnecessary to remark on the strongly literary nature of English political caricature generally in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a point that emerges clearly from Carretta's discussion. The literary allusions employed by the caricaturists are extraordinarily wide-ranging, which suggests the extent to which the sort of multi-level allusiveness we associate with the "high art" genre of history painting was in fact also a standard feature of the "lower" art of the satirical caricature print, as it was too of other vehicles of popular art. Again, the relevance of this observation for our increasing appreciation of Blake's art—taken within the cultural context of its time—likely goes without saying.

Carretta devotes one long chapter primarily to Blake, where he focuses almost exclusively on *America* and



Europe (the latter of which he calls "Blake's revision of Pope's *Dunciad*" [220]). Carretta locates Blake in the radical opposition camp along with partisans like Paine, who regarded all kings as usurpers by birth and by inheritance. These radicals, whether they worked in verbal or visual media, sought to subvert the social, political, and religious establishment by turning its own words and images against it, appropriating royalist iconography, for instance, in an effort to alter the body politic. As an example, Carretta singles out for extended discussion plate 11 of *Europe* (the "Pope George" icon), relating Blake's visual procedure in this and related plates to the evolving delineation of the king's figure elsewhere in the graphic arts. In visually conflating George, the pope, and Satan, the author suggests, Blake identifies the King not as the figure of (perhaps grudging) affection who was emerging in the English consciousness, but rather as the epitome of Dulness placed in that most pernicious of positions: as dictator over a self-deluded and self-enslaved populace.

In some ways this chapter is in fact less strong than the others, partly be-



cause Carretta seems at times to be pushing too hard on claims about visual influences on Blake's illuminations, as he does for instance in his discussion of Blake's use of images of thistle and rose (200-19). The thistle, emblematic of Scotland, provided a bit of visual shorthand by means of which verbal and visual caricaturists could allude to what Charles Churchill and others called "Scotch politics"—alleged abuses of royal power and prerogative, particularly as influenced by the ubiquitous Bute. Certainly Blake's images must be seen within the context of a familiar and politically charged visual language, but tying each image, in all its occurrences, to minutely particularized signification (and therefore at times to too narrowly exclusive referentiality) may in fact serve more to limit and bind Blake's richly intertextual allusions than to liberate them.

Nor will all of Carretta's claims and categories about matters both general and particular necessarily set well with all students of Blake's work. For example, he locates the poems of the 1790s—the early Lambeth prophecies in particular—specifically within the

satirical tradition. Even granting that the three poems to which Carretta devotes the most attention (*America*, *Europe*, and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*) all possess strong links to the traditions of intellectual, political, and religious satire, their affinities extend significantly and meaningfully to other genres and traditions as well. To be sure, Carretta points out that Blake's sources "are in the satiric and non-satiric words and pictures, albeit transformed and transcended, of his radical predecessors on both sides of the Atlantic as well as in those of his radical contemporaries" (158). But in pressing these works into the parameters defined by the title of his book, Carretta inevitably strips them of some of their richness even as he strives to attribute that richness to them. It is a difficult tightrope, and only one of many faced by those who would write on Blake and artistic tradition.

Other readings of poems and details invite a certain amount of friendly opposition. Calling *Visions* "Blake's first revision of the American Revolution," for instance, may produce a few raised eyebrows, as may relating the image of the self-embracing hovering figure on

the title page to "the posture of a lunatic in a straitjacket" (169) and thereby to a whole series of caricatures of George in which the moon figures as a prominent allusion to his apparent madness (lunacy), the first onset of which occurred in June 1788. Indeed, particularly in his discussions of Blake's visual images one may occasionally feel uncomfortably that more is being claimed than can safely or certifiably be proven. On the issue of "the self-limitation of George III identified with Britain as a whole," for example, consider the following passage:

[on plate 7 of *Visions*] the upraised face of one of the daughters of Albion has George III's likeness. Compare her head to that of the king in the Gaetano Testolini engraving (ca. 1785) after the painting by Thomas Stothard, a friend of Blake, who also engraved many pictures after Stothard in 1780-86. (169)

Much of what we say about Blake's use of sources, both visual and verbal, has necessarily to be tentative, based as it frequently is on circumstantial evidence of various sorts. The danger lies in implying (or asserting) that the convergence of various bits of evidence, often linked chain-fashion by rhetorical device rather than by incontrovertible (or at least reliable) physical evidence, constitutes proof positive. In his discussion of *America*, for instance, Carretta outlines a reasonable, plausible reading of the interrelation of Albion's Angel and Orc within a framework of family conflict, basing his reading on his claim that "Blake chose to organize *America* by wit—an emphasis on the essential similarity between two apparently dissimilar objects" (174). But setting up the work in terms of this dualism, which turns out to be only an *apparent* dualism, leads the author to regard the figure on the final plate of that poem as Urizen, despite that figure's feminized features, its un-Urizen-like blue hair (in copies A, K and R), and its brownish (copy K) or gray-green garb (copy M). Granted, in his minute assessment of this image

in *The Illuminated Blake* David Erdman itemizes both masculine and feminine attributes. Nevertheless, this figure would seem to be, if anything, not Urizen/Albion's Angel/George but rather Britannia, the suffering female emblem of the English nation whose own history in eighteenth-century caricature prints is long and varied.

Similar grasping at definitive signification occurs in claims that the predatory eagle at the top of *America* 13 is "another dehumanized version of George III in his 'Dragon form'" (187), or that "the grave door on plate 12 of *America* takes the form of a bound volume on a bookshelf" (197). The suggestions are reasonable enough; it is the sense of definitiveness and exclusivity inherent in the rhetoric that makes one uneasy. There is always some danger in Blake scholarship of working so hard to discover what particular visual or verbal images *might* be, *could* be, or might possibly be *likened to* or *derived from*, that one may depreciate or even overlook entirely what they in fact *are*, really and actually. One gets a sense of such a tendency at times in the discussion of Blake's illuminated works and, less pronouncedly, in that about the separate satiric prints of others.

Two final points need making. First, some purists may find that the extent of the author's acknowledgments of the body of existing criticism does not always match the extent of his appropriations from that body; a single "See x," for instance, will sometimes be the only attribution in a discussion that draws freely for several pages on that original scholarship. This is in some respects, however, a stylistic and procedural choice, since the text makes clear that the author wishes to keep secondary citations out of the main text as much as possible rather than mixing them in with the abundant citations in that main text of primary authors and graphic works.

Second, although it is wonderful to have over 160 illustrations, the images

make one wish—as usual with illustrated books—that they could be more finely reproduced, especially since we are dealing with illustrations that reduce the images significantly from their original proportions. The illustrations are interspersed with the verbal text, so that we are spared both the glossy pages and the flipping back and forth that attends the usual procedure of subjoining a plates section. But the images are neither so sharp nor so clear on the printed page as one would like. Again, though, Carretta's thoughtful decision to include complete British Museum catalogue citations for the illustrations and for the prints that are *not* included will make it much easier for other scholars to follow up on images and prints that particularly interest them. And certainly the University of Georgia Press is to be complimented for its obvious effort to do justice to the material by including so many reproductions, a decision that may have left budget managers wringing their hands but which has to leave readers clapping theirs.

There is no question that *George III and the Satirists* adds importantly to our appreciation of Blake's art, even when its contributions are indirect rather than direct. This is an important source-book, as well as a graphic reminder of how much fertile ground remains yet to be cultivated in laboring the Minute Particulars of Blake's visual art. Studying the prints collected here, and musing on their relation to Blake's visual and verbal art, should remind us once again how much a man of his real, temporal, urban, and very public world Blake actually was. The more one sees of such material, the more one can recognize that for all his fierce independence of mind and vision Blake was far less the detached, idiosyncratic eccentric he used carelessly to be accounted. If it does nothing else, Carretta's book renders an important service by reminding us to look again—and again.

Warren Stevenson. *Poetic Friends: A Study of Literary Relations During the English Romantic Period*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990. xiv + 195 pp. \$35.95.

Reviewed by
Donald H. Reiman

This book is volume 97 in a relatively new monograph series, published by the Swiss-based publisher Peter Lang and entitled American University Studies, Series IV: English Language and Literature. Those of us who have published books with new or relatively unknown publishers are aware of the frustration of trying to reach the audience of our peers. Even today the books issued by Garland Publishing (which was a new, three-person operation when I began work on *The Romantics Reviewed*), are chiefly advertised among—and ordered by—librarians, sometimes disappearing into the bookstacks of large institutions, where the teachers and students to whom they may be relevant discover them years later. The hope of authors publishing under such circumstances (and more and more academics now do so, for one reason or another) is that their work will be reviewed in the periodicals that reach their most likely readers and that it will be accorded the same scrutiny and judged by the same standards as a volume bearing the imprint of Harvard, Oxford, or Johns Hopkins University Press. That is just the way I intend to review the volume before me.

Warren Stevenson, Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, has published both original poetry and at least two previous monographs on Blake and

Coleridge (1981 and 1983), both apparently published at Salzburg, and from each of which he has drawn for some material that is reused here. He is, then, no beginner, though his previous work has not, so far as I know, made much impact on romantic studies. *Poetic Friends* is intelligently organized and clearly written; Stevenson is certainly trying to communicate with *somebody*—not simply ruminating in public. His introduction begins: "This book is written out of the conviction that between the heaven of archetypal criticism and the hell of deconstruction there is room for a more modest, and possibly more human, study of the interrelation of the lives and works of a community of poets. The focus I have chosen for this study is the theme of intellectual friendship . . ." (1).

The body of the book, between the three-page Introduction and a two-page Conclusion, consists of three parts: "Blake and Hayley" (5-70); "Coleridge and Wordsworth" (71-120); and "Shelley, Byron, and Keats" (121-73); each part, in turn, consists of numbered subsections, which explore aspects of the relationships between the writers and explicate specific poems, using the interactions between poets as keys to the analysis. Part 1, for example, after an introductory biographical section on "Blake and Felpham Billy," follows with an extended treatment of "The Forming Image of Hayley in Blake's *Milton*," then with an account of Hayley's part in defending Blake from the charge of assault and sedition after his encounter with Schofield the dragoon ("Agony in the Garden"), and, finally, with an extended analysis of *Jerusalem* ("The Matter of Hyle in *Jerusalem*").

Inasmuch as Stevenson relies heavily on secondary sources—honestly footnoting his quotations from F. L. Jones's edition of *Mary Shelley's Journal*, for example, to Charles E. Robinson's *Shelley and Byron* (1976), his main source of information on the relationship between these two poets—he does not pretend to break new scholarly

Warren Stevenson

Poetic Friends

A Study of Literary Relations
During the English Romantic Period


PETER LANG
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ground. His critical judgments, though involving his own reading of the poetry (and, at some points, the letters) of the principals, openly derive, for the most part, from standard books. In the Blake-Hayley section, the main authorities—besides Blake's *Letters* (ed. Keynes, 1956), and Bentley's *Blake Records*—include Morchard Bishop's *Blake's Hayley*, editions of Blake by Erdman and Keynes, lives by Gilchrist and Mona Wilson, S. Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary*, and critical books by Northrop Frye, David V. Erdman, Hazard Adams, Susan Fox, and Morton Paley. The only out-of-the-way source that Stevenson seems to have consulted is a four-volume London edition of *The Works of Jacob Behmen* (1764-1781); other references to primary sources are quoted from one of the standard books mentioned. There are no citations of periodical literature (e.g., articles in *Blake*).

Without attributing to Stevenson an aversion to libraries, I suspect that he prefers to work at home—or, perhaps, at a rural summer retreat—with a shelf filled with paperbacks and select volumes checked out for the duration of his work on a chapter. With Blake, because of the intense activity of the past 40 years and the relative scarcity of earlier, obsolete editions and studies,

Stevenson's lack of scholarship may not be too damaging. (I hedge this judgment, not knowing all the traps in Blake scholarship; and I do note errors in his treatment of the relationship between Hayley and William Cowper). But when Stevenson quotes Shelley's letters from a 1965 reprint of Ingpen's and Peck's Julian Edition of the 1920s (Jones's edition, perhaps, being on reserve at the library), he opens his interpretations to basic errors. Certainly the Julian Edition's corrupt texts of Shelley's letters to Thomas Jefferson Hogg (deriving from Hogg's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, in which Hogg often reversed the pronouns from "I" to "you" so as to father instances of his own youthful foolishness on his dead friend) misled Stevenson into attributing "latent homosexuality" to Shelley rather than Hogg (see 191n9, and 192n3).

With my conditioned response in favor of scholarly accuracy—or, at least, in favor of some visible efforts in pursuit of it—I almost dismissed *Poetic Friends* as a waste of time. Eventually, however, I concluded that it has definite values, if not for the specialist, at least for students approaching romantic poetry for the first time. During an era of linguistic theorizing and sociological background studies, *Milton* or *Jerusalem*, when viewed from the perspective of flawed friendships, presents a human face that is familiar and approachable by undergraduates. While by no means a complete discussion of Blake's works, the 66 pages on Blake—filled with quotations from and paraphrases of his poems and letters—seem to me to provide a useful introduction to the larger prophetic books either for undergraduates writing term papers on these poems when they are not taught in class, or even for teachers wanting a human-interest angle from which to introduce students to Blake's somewhat abstract masterpieces.

After the students' interest is stimulated initially by encountering Blake's prophetic books as products of a personal relationship and artistic patronage gone sour, the teacher can then lead them into study of the larger symbolic and thematic issues in these poems that have been analyzed by more sophisticated scholar-critics. To remain at the level of anecdote, quotation, and paraphrase that characterizes much of *Poetic Friends* would mark teachers as having either too little intellectual enterprise themselves, or insufficient ability to stimulate intellectual curiosity in their students. But, equally, to avoid the human dimensions of the life and poetry of Blake or any of the other romantic poets—to pretend that texts write texts, that class differences produce great poetry, or that the reader's existential experience can be divorced from any art, especially from verbal constructs made with the very materials of daily communication—is to cut away the roots of literature. To expect that the blossoms can thereafter retain their attractiveness for long is a silly delusion. For this simple reason, more students of English and more English majors will be recruited by asking sophomores to read *Prophetic Friends* rather than two-thirds of the other academic studies of the romantics I've read in the past ten years. Such a quality is not to be despised in any academic book, especially by those who love and value literature and who teach because they wish to transmit that love and those values to their students. But even cynics who find the academic life congenial and wish to assure their future livelihoods may find *Poetic Friends* and books like it instrumental to their ends.

K. D. Sethna. *Blake's Tyger: A Christological Interpretation*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1989. viii + 275 pp. Rs. 60.00

Reviewed by
Michael J. Tolley

We should probably have welcomed this book in the 1960s, even if we remained unpersuaded by its thesis: that is when it should have appeared; that is when it was substantially written. Unfortunately, its publication has been so long delayed that it is impossible to review it in other than a mood of melancholy and with a feeling of pity for its author overwhelming the admiration it might earlier have commanded.

With the best will in the world, it is impossible to commend wholeheartedly a book that was written originally in 1961 and ignores totally any study of its subject published later than 1968 (the apparent exception in the slender bibliography records a reprint). That much of the recent work on "The Tyger" constitutes a massive argument against Sethna's affirmation that both beast and creator are figures of Christ is only icing on the cake. It must nevertheless be admitted that Sethna's readable and intelligent and, in some sections, unprecedentedly thorough discussions have still considerable value. I found it difficult to read the book with patience because Sethna so often seemed out of sheer perversity to be accumulating evidence against his own thesis, if only he could have been brought to see it that way. Consider, for instance, the rhetoric of this paragraph, which presents his basic reading clearly:

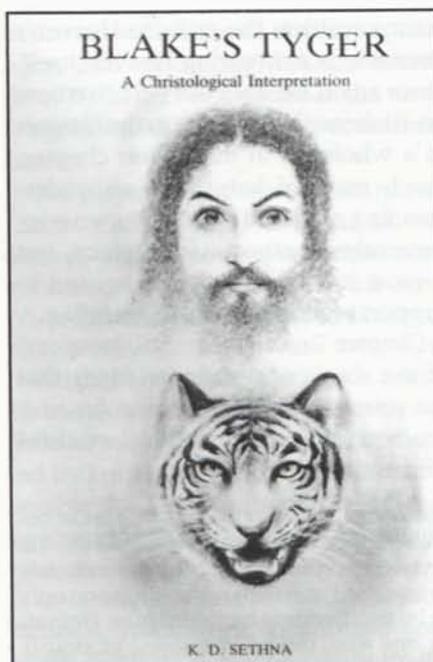
We have only to transpose the situation into an overtly Christian framework and turn the offensive into a direct Tyger-attack, to get our poem's action: Christ, the fashioner of the Lamb, fashioning the Tyger of his divine dreadfulness, keeping it afterwards chain-held for an offensive and then setting it upon Satan and his hosts within the forests of the night. (200)

Thus he assimilates the battle between Fuzon and Urizen in *The Book of Abania* to his thesis. His major coup, however, is to deploy the action of the War in Heaven as narrated in *Paradise Lost* on the side of his argument, as in this paragraph:

So *The Tyger's* drama may legitimately be pitched in Heaven and interpreted as the going forth of the Divine Fire in a destructive symbol-form expressive of Christ, the heavenly unity-in-multiplicity, to quell Satan-Urizen and his partners in revolt. Our essentially Miltonic reading of the poem gets certainly a general support in Blake's other writings. (162)

Much of the massive Miltonic source-material Sethna brings to bear upon "The Tyger" is indeed significantly relevant—but he reads black where I read white; he sees Christ in the tyger figure where I see falling Lucifer, fallen as a form of Satan.

Sethna's book is neatly arranged in seven chapters but has three prefatory texts and two appendices, much of which relates to correspondence with Kathleen Raine, who referred to Sethna's unpublished work in two footnotes to her *Blake and Tradition* (1968); Raine serves awkwardly both as Sethna's chief advocate and principal opponent. In the first chapter, a brief introductory one, D. W. Harding's 1957 essay is found wanting as doing "scant justice to the atmosphere of secret significances the poem conjures up" (3). In chapter 2, Sethna looks carefully at "The Internal Pattern of the Poem," enlisting syntactic and etymological evidence to discover "a godlike Tyger" which "attacks star-angels defecting from the true light and harmony." In order to manage this, Sethna has to emphasize the positive "brightness" of the Tyger over its evil associa-



tions (he has little to say about the bad reputation of tygers in the period and tends to lump tygers together with lions as equally noble beasts), and he particularly presses the point that the tyger's burning "In the forests of the night" must mean that the tyger is opposed to the forests and not that it finds its natural habitat there:

the forests of the night not only transcend jungles as of India after sunset: they also get charged with significances in contrast to those of the Tyger's burning and brightness. They loom up as cold and suppressive, callous and distorted, life-sapping and sinister. Hence the Tyger, instead of belonging to the forests and being a portion of the night, stands out as their opponent. (11)

This reading is unpersuasive and it is unfortunate that, in his desire to identify the "forests of the night" with transcendental dark forces and the Tyger with their supernal opponent, Sethna should come almost to lose sight of the beast with the glowing eyes which inhabits natural dark forests and is the ostensible subject of the poem. As the fifth stanza indicates, the poem is indeed about happenings in starry worlds beyond the natural one of our own experience, but it is so only in order to answer the questions

raised by the existence of the earthly predator we both admire and fear. Sethna also begs questions when he attempts to read "seize" as neutral, without the implication of theft, and "aspire" as godlike without a necessary Promethean or Luciferian reference. He finds no indignation in the shift from the "Could frame" of the first stanza to the "Dare frame" of the last.

Chapter 3, "The Internal Pattern and Christian Tradition," assembles some important source material, including Revelation 12 and Job 38:7 (though only to justify Blake's image of the stars as substitutes for angels), but appears to be using special pleading to argue for a Christ with wings in the pre-Blakean tradition, in order to justify his reading of the "aspiring" as a Christ-like activity. No one denies that the Christian deity might metaphorically be endowed with wings, whether for healing or as a vehicle of powerful motion: Jesus himself appropriates the homely image of the hen in Matthew 23:37. However, the reader sensitive to Christian tradition will not therefore be prepared to find a reference to Christ in "On what wings dare he aspire?" Sethna does not consider the strong evidence that the maker in the poem and his Tyger should be seen as stalking horses for an attack on Job's God, the Creator of Leviathan.

Chapter 4, "The Miltonic Basis of the Poem," has the great merit of assembling more Miltonic background for readers of "The Tyger" than I have seen anywhere else but, as I have indicated, it is excruciating to see how often he gathers material that would most naturally work against his reading only to persist in appropriating it as grist to his own mill.

Readers familiar with recent critical discussion will find the very brief chapter 5, "The Poem in Process and in Illustration" the most obviously unsatisfactory section in Sethna's book. Both the Notebook drafts and the graphic work are treated only as material for potential bases of objection to Sethna's thesis, not as valuable and, in the case of

the graphic part, indispensable contributors to any serious comprehensive reading. Thus we get embarrassing special pleading over the use of the term "cruel fire" in a draft version of the poem: though "coloured," the epithet "cruel"

is actually non-committal. Fierce strength, causing injury and pain, may be cruel but does not always on that account become evil: everything depends on the motive, the occasion, the result. . . . War also in a defensive noble cause cannot be condemned merely because of the cruelty it involves. (129)

Sethna does not realize how increasingly un-Blakean his reading becomes the more he seeks to defend it by such arguments. Clearly, the drafts are an inconvenience to Sethna, as is the illustration, which he justifies in the end only as being enigmatic, as a kind of refusal to illustrate.

The book's longest and most tedious chapter, the sixth, is headed "The Poem in the General Context of Blake's Work," in which Sethna sees his task essentially in the terms of one defending a thesis at all costs: "We have to support our identification of his beast of prey by whatever links up with our poem from outside it in the context of this work." The results are predictable. He begins, however, by quoting C. M. Bowra's discussion of the poem in *The Romantic Imagination* (1957), which he finds "excellent in several respects, but . . . quite astray at one place" and suffering from "an all-round shortcoming in that it pitches the Christ-significance of the Tyger too low." Bowra, like most of the rest of us, considered that the time "when the stars threw down their spears" was "in some enormous crisis when the universe turned round in its course and began to move from light to darkness";

Sethna restricts the crisis to Heaven's enemies, not involving Heaven itself. Once again, he does not perceive how un-Blakean this sounds. In the chapter as a whole, as in the Milton chapter, much material helpful to an understanding of "The Tyger" is drawn conveniently together in one place, but—most inconveniently—it is used to support a radical misunderstanding.

Chapter 7 offers a brief "Retrospect" of the thesis and acknowledges that the proposed reading is, insofar as it projects a terribly shining wrathful Christ, shocking:

The poet is profoundly shaken, almost bewildered, because, as Milton tells us, the revolted angels, after being mercilessly vanquished, were spared annihilation only to be everlastingly banished from Heaven by one who, though remaining gloriously divine, seems to out-Satan Satan in dreadful power—the deity who is no longer Christ the Lamb but Christ the Tyger.

For Sethna, we find, the poem is an affirmative not a subversive one, but then, he had not heard about the need to take into account "point of view and context": Blake's questioner is simply Blake for him. There is a certain complacency in this conclusion, as there is in Raine's letter of 1979, in which after listing her main points of difference with Sethna, she writes: "But that does not lessen the pleasure with which I read your thoughts on the poem you and I both love and have studied perhaps more carefully than anyone else living in the present world of generation." Even in 1979, I am happy to say, that was very far from being the case. I would be even happier if I could say that we also are entirely free these days from the arrogance of believing that our own more up-to-date studies are alone the adequate ones.

Opera on William Blake Destroyed by Its Own Radicalism

Bethlehem Hospital: William Blake in Hell, Opera by Huib Emmer and Ken Hollings, performed by Theatre Group 'Hollandia,' under the supervision of Johan Simons and Lucas Vis. Psychiatric Centre 'Vogelenzang' Benezbroek. Performances through 25th of October.

Reviewed by Frits van der Waa, trans. by Jules van Lieshout

The task that Huib Emmer and Ken Hollings have set themselves in their opera *Bethlehem Hospital* is not a small one. The starting-point was the work and character of the English visionary poet and graphic artist William Blake. The problem raised is ethical, and deals with the human soul as an intersection of lofty and crude instincts. The events take place in the madhouse where Blake, according to a fictitious story, is supposed to have spent the last thirty years of his life.

It was predictable that the result would stick in the throat. That it has turned so unpalatable is a disappointment, nevertheless.

The nicest thing one can say about *Bethlehem Hospital* is that the piece is destroyed by its own radicalism. The granite-like idiom of composer Emmer, the juxtaposition of speech and song, the decision to put the performance into the hands of a theatre group, and even the choice to perform the opera "on location"—in the chapel

of the Psychiatric Centre Vogelenzang—all this bespeaks a dislike of half-heartedness.

Bethlehem Hospital has little in common with a traditional opera, but for one thing. The piece ends with a death scene. That takes up the entire third act and is deadly in all respects. Until that moment Emmer's music is still fairly captivating. To be sure, this is due more to abstract variables like a diverse lay-out and delicately balanced sound contrasts, than to a profusion of ideas or theatrical drive. His two-part counterpoint is masterful, but that alone does not make an opera. In the final act—which, as opposed to the other two, has been entirely through-composed—his rigid, modular treatment of chords, rhythms, and tones runs aground completely.

It goes without saying that the librettist Hollings shares the guilt in this. It is asking a little too much to fill an

entire act with internal memories, images, and reflections that are taken from Blake and embedded in the text. Wagner could handle that, but Emmer cannot.

The players and musicians are not to blame. Charles van Tassel and David Barron, initially playing an insane surgeon and a pyromaniac, then the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah, and finally a split Blake, heroically work their way through their interminable lyrics. Anne Haenen, cast as Blake's wife, comes a little less into her own. And, conducted by Lucas Vis, the orchestra, an ensemble for the occasion, realize the percussory building block score with iron consistency.

It is a pity that director Johan Simons, stuck with this forbidding work, has not been able to capture its uncompromising spirit and has resorted to vehement movements and effects that are sometimes inventive

but just as often ludicrous. Actors box each other's ears with bouquets, the two prophets have false beards that reach the ground, and there is even a head that explodes. The performance would not have been saved by a drastic stylization, but it would have been made a lot more enjoyable.

The designers, on the other hand, have understood: they have put up a set dominated by straight lines, made from glass, metal, and stone. In front is a transparent square column with a half-naked man, a prisoner condemned to death, inside. He is the only figure with a personality, as appears when he opens his mouth halfway through the piece. This may be a slightly painful judgment for an opera that lasts over two hours, but its essence lies in that one oppressive scene—the only one, a ten-minute soliloquy.

(Originally published in *De Volkskrant*.)

More or Less Disturbed Mental Life

Reviewed by Jacqueline Oskamp, trans. by Jules van Lieshout

Homemade opera is a tricky problem and this genre is usually looked upon skeptically. However, Huib Emmer has now made an opera—albeit to an English text—that stands the test of criticism magnificently. Music and text are complementary and well-balanced, and the performance is captivating all through. The libretto to *Bethlehem Hospital*, written by Ken Hollings, is based on a legend of the English poet and painter William Blake (1757-1827): he is supposed to have spent the last twenty years of his life in the London mental institution Bethlehem Hospital. The opera is produced in co-operation with the theatre

group Hollandia and performed on location in the psychiatric ward at Vogelenzang. Unexpectedly, the room was not half filled with patients—after all, a nice break—they were given their own performance *in camera*.

Apart from the fact that Blake dies at the end of the opera, the narrative lacks a clear plot or dramatic development. How could it be different if all characters enjoy a more or less disturbed mental life? This is about associations and fantasy worlds. The company consists of disparate figures like the "surgeon" Dr. Tearguts, acted and sung brilliantly by Charles van Tassel; the famous pyromaniac Martin the Fireraiser, played by David Barron; and, of course, William Blake (Jeroen Willems) accompanied by his wife Catherine (Anne Haenen). She is the only normal person in the story, although that can be properly parenthesized in view of the masochistic manner in which she allows herself to be continuously rejected.

Everybody is agreed on one thing: Bethlehem Hospital is hell. The man who is condemned to death, and who fiercely stares at the audience throughout the entire performance, is the symbol of that. At the beginning of the second act he narrates how he has killed his mother in the hope of winning his father's love. In vain. In short, this is the hell of suppression.

There is disagreement about the possibilities for liberation: the surgeon, Dr. Tearguts, believes in science and wants to cut up one of his fellow patients on the spot. There is also a clergyman who expects salvation from God and who gets all ecstatic at the idea of God sawing open all chests and finding empty hearts. Blake, on the other hand, believes in the power of the imagination and in following emotions and urges *à-la-De Sade*. That is how he is portrayed: he is not mad, but he has abandoned all convention and devotes himself to his fantasy.

Huib Emmers has abandoned all convention, too: his music is a mixture of different styles and genres—rock, Stravinsky, a remote Verdi—but he adapts them so easily that it sounds attractive and good. Some instrumental progressions are loud and stiff, chords hammered on the pianos, whiplashes on the drums, and venomous motifs on the horns, and some vocal passages are brimming with warmth and lyricism. In general, the music is very bright, contrasting nicely with the lyrics which are often heavy and emotionally charged. The “energy” Blake talks about is in the music and creates space in the slightly suffocating atmosphere. Furthermore, the vocal parts—often accompanied in unison by one instrument (violin, cello, clarinet)—are brilliant.

The *ad hoc* ensemble, alternately directed by Ernst van Tiel and Lucas Vis, consists of excellent musicians, and all credit is due to the singers and actors, too. In short, a professional show. The location does not add much, however. Vogelenzang on a week night is nothing more than a desolate village, and all that remains are a few location-bound lighting effects. Nevertheless, it is worth the effort.

(Originally published in *De Groene Amsterdammer*.)

David Erdman, ed. *Blake and His Bibles*. West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1990. xvii + 237 pp. \$30.00.

Reviewed by Karen Shabetai

The oddities and disappointments of this collection begin on its title page, which includes the single appearance of its distinguished editor, David Erdman, who has contributed neither a preface, introduction, nor essay. The title is the second problem—it raises expectations that the collection's individual essays do not fulfill. One would expect *Blake and His Bibles* to have contributions from such Blakeans as Northrop Frye and Leslie Tannenbaum, who have written so wisely on this book's subject—the former shaping decades of Blake studies with the biblical orientation of his approach, the latter for his careful placement of Blake's early prophecies in the context of biblical traditions. Because of the collection's title, I also expected to find an essay by Jerome McGann, who has recently offered an historical account of Blake's bibles (the Geddes translation) in *The Book of Urizen*. The collection might have been enlivened had there been a contribution from Harold Bloom, who has caused such a stir with his depiction of a very Blakean sounding God, by the earliest author(ess) of the Hebrew Bible, called “J” by followers of the “documentary hypothesis.”

Still, most of the collection's authors, if they aren't as lively as Bloom might have been, are well worth reading, especially for their careful historical and textual analysis. If one wonders how the critical fashions of the last decade could have passed the contributors by seemingly without notice,

one must enjoy the clarity of expression in almost all of the essays. Certainly refreshing in a book appearing in 1990 (though there is nothing to indicate that any of the essays were written after 1987) is the absence of a politically correct agenda as well as the authors' clear respect for Blake.

Mark Trevor Smith, who provides both the introduction and an essay, takes as his subject Blake's enigmatic attitude towards systems. He concludes with the paradoxical position that Blake was simultaneously a system-builder and a system-smasher. When Florence Sandler takes up the compelling annotations to Watson's *Apolo-gy for the Bible*, she reveals, among other things, a nuanced attitude to deism, which is often ignored in the face of Blake's own less subtle articulations on the subject. The essays by J. M. Q. Davies, John Grant, and Mary Lynn Johnson are, characteristically, thoughtful and illuminating. With close attention to the rich subtlety of Blake's illustrations to Milton's “Nativity Ode,” Davies' “Apollo's Naked Human Form Divine”: The Dynamics of Meaning in Blake's Nativity Ode Designs” contrasts the two sets of illustrations (the Whitworth and Huntington versions) to reveal Blake's “post-enlightenment perspective” on Milton's theme. Grant takes up the question of Blake's Christianity by examining the representations of Jesus in the *Night Thoughts* illustrations. These illustrations show the “wide range of sympathies and dis-sympathies to Young's text” (73) as well as to Young himself. Grant describes “the antitheticalism of Blake's vision of Jesus,” which he locates in several works by Blake, as early as, he cautiously suggests, *All Religions Are One*. In an essay examining Blake's illustrations for the Book of Psalms, Johnson discovers “Blake's interpolation of Jesus into Psalms 18, 85, and 93” to be at once compatible with Christian and Jewish biblical traditions, and part of Blake's “lively, if subdued critical commentary on the Scriptures” (146). Her notes are especially complete and informative.

Perhaps the most valuable essay of the collection is Sheila A. Spector's "Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist," not so much for its conclusions as for its documentation of biblical traditions and the interesting questions her investigation implicitly invoke. Scholars who have claimed that Blake was not competent to participate in debates that require knowledge of the Hebrew language have typically based their arguments on the accuracy in Blake's use of the language in his works. But such arguments are anachronistic, because, says Spector, Hebrew was in a "state of linguistic anarchy" in the eighteenth century. While she illustrates the chaotic state of the Hebrew language during the eighteenth century in order to show the freedom with which Blake could use the language, she doesn't evaluate to what extent Blake was a critic of the specific set of beliefs and attitudes that she uncovers in her sources. While Spector convincingly refutes arguments that Blake knew little or no Hebrew and, by thoughtful historical analysis, she shows that in fact Blake participated, though perhaps surreptitiously, in eighteenth-century debates about Hebrew and the Jews in relation to Christianity, she never really addresses Blake's attitudes toward Jews. When examining Blake's use of eighteenth-century Christian Hebraism, Spector is content to stick to linguistic issues, though she herself demonstrates that in the eighteenth century "religion was not a study distinct from linguistics" (180).

But what Spector does do, she does to great effect. She examines four historical topics in order to characterize eighteenth-century Hebraism: "Anti-Semitism, Linguistics, Mythology, and Mysticism." The first of these, she claims, is the most important because linguistics was put in the service of religious arguments; it was the consensus of the time, oddly, that Jews were ignorant and that the text of their Bible was full of errors, "the only difference

Blake and His Bibles

Edited by
David V. Erdman

with an Introduction by
Mark Trevor Smith



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of opinion being whether or not they deliberately mutilated the text" (181). "Anti-Semitism seems to be a means of questioning the authority upon which more orthodox interpretations of the Bible are predicated while, at the same time, providing a ready scapegoat for Christian misinterpretations of the Bible" (182).

Spector examines Blake's knowledge of Hebrew in the context of eighteenth-century Christian Hebraism. She rules out the supposition that Blake's mistakes in Hebrew came from carelessness or error because the poet was "an extremely careful artist": "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place" ("To the Public"). She offers examples of Blake's accurate use of Hebrew words and phrases in the marginalia of his illustrations to demonstrate that "when he so desired, Blake could provide us with correct Hebrew lettering" (199). Spector attributes inaccuracies to technical errors, such as those that may occur in the etching process, and to deliberate and meaningful deviation. For example, she challenges Cheskin's conclusions in the pages of this journal (*Blake* 12 [1978-79]: 178-83) that Blake's errors in lettering were due to ignorance. When

Blake reverses an aleph when transcribing the seventh commandment—"Thou shalt not commit adultery"—it is, significantly, only the aleph in the negation that he gets wrong. Spector suggests that he wishes to render the commandment ambiguous, which would be consistent with his attitude toward chastity expressed elsewhere in his works. She offers several examples using similar logic to make sense of Blake's seeming errors in his Hebrew.

Spector is always cautious, more suggestive than certain in her conclusions. As she says, she wishes to facilitate further inquiry, a fertile approach missing in the closing off of further discussion with Cheskin's claim that "Blake knew little or no Hebrew." Her admirable caution, though, regrettably limits the conclusions she is willing to draw. Although she makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Blake's Hebrew, Spector could do more with the fascinating historical data she offers. She might, for instance, have speculated about Blake's position on anti-semitism. In reviewing the fascinating, if shocking, virulence of the anti-semitic sources she uncovers to document the importance of anti-semitism to biblical commentaries in Blake's day, one cannot help but wonder how Blake would have responded to this material. Did he passively accept the views of his contemporaries? What can we make of blatant anti-semitic statements that seem to be so much at odds with the egalitarian spirit of his entire project? (In his annotations to Watson's *Apolo-gy*, he refers to "Jewish Scriptures" as "only an Example of the wickedness & deceit of the Jews," whom he two pages later calls liars, "Murderers & Revengers.") Taking up these kinds of issues would have provided a currency as well as a vivacity that the collection of essays as a whole lack.

Martin Butlin and Ted Gott, *William Blake in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*. With an Introduction by Irena Zdanowicz. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1989. 196 pp. 104 color and 87 black & white illus. Hardbound \$49 Australian/paper \$39 Australian.

Reviewed by
Robert N. Essick

The National Gallery of Victoria has long been known to Blake enthusiasts as the home of 36 of Blake's water colors illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy*. These, along with two *Paradise Lost* designs, were purchased at the Linnell auction in 1918, a time when such a major investment in Blake was an adventurous undertaking for any institution. These treasures, along with some very recent acquisitions, prompted the Gallery to exhibit their Blake holdings in late summer 1989 and publish the full catalogue of the Blake collection reviewed here.

The first characteristic to attract Blakeans to the new catalogue is the number and quality of the color reproductions. The large (11 x 8 in.) format is roomy enough, although a good deal smaller than the Dante designs (approx. 14 1/2 x 20 3/4 in.), and the hard, semi-glossy paper takes an image with commendable precision. We can see the minute pencil lines in some of the Dante water colors and even sense the texture of their paper. In these respects, the illustrations compare favorably to the beautiful Dante reproductions in the August 1984 issue of that super-upscale magazine, *FMR*. I have not personally checked the color

fidelity of the catalogue's reproductions against the originals, but the tonal subtleties and range of hues inspire confidence. Even the reticulations of color printing, notoriously difficult to capture, are crisply reproduced from the Gallery's two little-known examples from *Europe* and *The Book of Urizen*, also acquired from the Linnell collection in 1918. Everything in the collection that is colored is reproduced in color, including all 14 plates from *Songs of Innocence* copy X and all the illustrations in the 1797 *Night Thoughts*. The latter is the first complete color reproduction of a hand-colored copy. All other Blakes in the Gallery are reproduced in monochrome, including reproductive engravings that rarely receive such attention. Oddly, the only clear descent from superior quality is in the black and white illustrations of the Job engravings. Some are flat and washed out, while others have the dark tones of the originals without loss of definition. But this minor lapse does not hinder this volume from being the handsomest catalogue of a Blake collection ever produced.

Does the text live up to the splendor of its visual companions? Yes—and in novel ways. Most catalogues devoted to a single collection offer a few brief comments on its formation, but in this instance we are given a full-dress essay on "The Melbourne Blakes—Their Acquisition and Critical Fortunes in Australia" (10-19) by Irena Zdanowicz, the Gallery's Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings. It is a fascinating tale of long-distance collecting that forced the Gallery to rely on advisors in London. The results were not always applauded by the locals; one reviewer referred to the recently-acquired Dante drawings as "glaring absurdities." Zdanowicz also provides detailed information on how the 102 Dante designs were in 1918 divided among the five museums participating in their purchase under a scheme managed by Britain's National Arts-Collections Fund. Future historians of Blake collecting in the twentieth

century will learn much from Zdanowicz's fine essay. For another study of the dispersal of the Dante water colors, see Krzysztof Z. Cieszkowski's article in *Blake* 23 (1989-90): 166-71.

The central section of the catalogue is devoted to Martin Butlin's "Innocence Regained: Blake's Late Illustrations to Milton and Dante" (20-87, including full-page color reproductions). With rhetoric clearly aimed at a non-specialist audience, Butlin begins with the claim that "in the case of most artists it is too facile to see direct links between the circumstances of the artist's life and the style and content of his or her works. . . . But Blake, the poet and painter, is one of the rare cases in which one can trace a close correlation between life and art" (20). From this shade of Gilchrist springs an example: "by the mid-1790s, both [Blake's] poetry and the illustrations with which he accompanied it had been completely transformed, from the innocence and optimism of the *Songs of Innocence* to the pessimism borne of experience of the *Songs of Experience*" (20). Having plucked that hoary chestnut from the antithetical fires of American Blake criticism, Butlin proceeds to more specific discussions of the works at issue. Matters improve quickly. The author of the great catalogue raisonné of Blake's paintings and drawings displays his considerable authority, expertise, and pictorial sensitivity in a thorough contextualist discussion of the composition, stylistic affinities, and general interpretive orientations of the two *Paradise Lost* water colors in the Gallery and its Dante holdings. This essay is followed by conventional catalogue entries on each drawing. I can find nothing strikingly new here in the way of basic facts or histories; if there are buried treasures, they are not easily mined. But to this material Butlin has added cogent summaries of the iconographic interpretations presented in A. S. Roe's *Blake's Illustrations to the Divine Comedy* (1953) and David Fuller's "Blake and Dante," *Art History* 11

(1988): 349-73. The latter disputes Roe's thesis that Blake is illustrating his own mythology more than Dante's. The argument has implications extending well beyond the Dante designs and should interest anyone working on Blake as an illustrator. Butlin's sympathies are clearly with Fuller—and in my view rightly so. As Yeats first suggested in 1896, Blake's "vision" operates through an extreme form of literalism, not through allegorical substitution.

Most collection and exhibition catalogues emphasize individual entries on specific works. Historical and critical narratives generally play subordinate roles and are reduced to brief summaries. Although Butlin's essay is more extensive than usual, his contribution remains within these broad generic norms. The last and longest major section of the Melbourne catalogue, Ted Gott's "Eternity in an Hour: The Prints of William Blake" (88-188), reverses these conventions. He offers a dozen short essays on Blake's works as a printmaker represented in the collection and relegates standard catalogue information to a terse appendix. This approach requires greater critical acumen than most curators can muster, but Gott carries off his innovative approach with considerable panache. Few readers will agree with all his observations, but all should be stimulated and informed. Gott's skepticism about received opinions is particularly refreshing in the context of a collection catalogue.

Gott devotes almost as much attention to Blake's reproductive prints as to his original graphics. As a result, we are given fine essays on Blake's engravings in Hunter's *Historical Journal*, Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline*, and Rees's *Cyclopaedia*. The contextualizing here is much broader than in most collection catalogues, for Gott not only considers these texts and how Blake may have reacted to them, but also how these projects exemplify general relationships between the craft and commerce of printmaking



that shaped Blake's life. For Blake's innovative work in relief etching and color printing, Gott carefully describes each graphic process and its visual consequences. Blake's relationships with artists in his circle, particularly Cumberland and Flaxman, are nicely summarized. Although Gott's essays stand on their own as independent replacements for conventional catalogue entries, they are strung together like chapters to constitute an overview of Blake's major graphic genres from the late 1780s to his death.

I hope that I have said enough to convince readers of *Blake* that the new Melbourne catalogue rewards both eye and mind. For those interested in minute particulars, I append a few comments on, or additions to, Gott's observations on Blake's prints.

90: Gott suggests that, for "A Family of New South Wales" in Hunter's *Narrative*, Blake may have worked from "an already idealized finished copy-drawing of King's sketch from another journeyman's hand" rather than directly from the original drawing attributed to Philip King. There may indeed have been such an intervening drawing, but it is more likely that Blake executed it

than anyone else. An analogous situation is provided by the "Anubis" plate in Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* and its two preliminary drawings in the British Museum—a rough pencil sketch by Fuseli and a finished monochrome wash drawing by Blake. Gott finds that the alterations in the landscape background and foliage in the Hunter plate have disturbed the "novel antipodean setting" in the drawing and takes this as evidence for the work of another hand. But Blake, hardly an expert in Australian shrubbery, was just as capable of these conventionalizing maneuvers as anyone else. For my eyes, the landscape in the plate is compositionally finer (even if less antipodean) than the rather vague patches in King's less than expert drawing.

97: Copy X of *Songs of Innocence*, acquired by the Gallery in 1988, has been disbound and the leaves "mounted separately for display." Gott points out that the previous binding (cream morocco by Gray of Cambridge) "will allow Copy X to be reformed as a book" (97-8), but does not explicitly indicate that this will be done after the exhibition. Copy X was probably printed in the same press run as copy I (Huntington Library), also in green ink on Edmeads & Pine paper. The two plates of "The Little Black Boy" in the Keynes Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum, were very probably once part of copy X—see Craig Hartley, "Songs of Innocence," *Print Quarterly* 6 (1989): 63. Both are reproduced in color by Gott. As he points out, we can also assume that the volume once contained the first plates of "The Little Girl Lost" and "Spring" since their second plates are present. These first plates could not have been printed on the same single leaf and properly precede their respective companions, and thus the recto/verso printing of copy X suggests that it contained two further plates. Another candidate for inclusion is "The Echoing Green" (both plates recto/verso in green ink on one leaf) at Harvard.

110-12: Pl. 21 of *The Book of Urizen*, once probably part of *A Large Book of Designs* (B), appears to be a maculature printed at high pressure, with the impression in *A Large Book of Designs* (A) as the first pull. For an interesting essay on the Melbourne print, see Gerald Bentley, Jr., "The Shadow of Los: Embossing in Blake's 'Book of Urizen,'" in *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 30 (1989): 18-23.

125: Schiavonetti's copperplates of Blake's *Grave* illustrations are in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, not the Library of Congress. The same is true of Blake's Dante copperplates (152).

126: The engraver who worked briefly on Stothard's "Pilgrimage to Canterbury" was Francis Engleheart (1775-1849), not "Eagleheart."

133-34: *Jerusalem* pl. 51. The color reproduction of this splendid hand-colored impression reminded me strongly of the palette used in copy E. A comparison between this illustration and pl. 51 in the Blake Trust facsimile of E not only confirmed this similarity but also brought to my attention the previously unrecorded fact that the plate in copy E is printed in black ink, whereas all others in the volume are in orange. The Melbourne impression is also in orange, with an orange framing line and plate number as in copy E. No other copy of *Jerusalem* has these features. Thus it seems likely that the Melbourne print was once part of—or at least printed, colored, and inscribed in preparation for—copy E. Perhaps Blake removed it to sell or give to Linnell, from whose collection it was acquired by the Gallery in 1918. Blake then took an impression in black ink already on hand and colored it in sympathy with

the other plates in copy E. For more on this theory, see Essick, "William Blake's *Jerusalem*, Plate 51, *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 31 (1990): 20-25.

136: "There is . . . not a single piece of evidence to indicate Thornton's reaction to Blake's wood engravings" illustrating the imitation of Virgil's Eclogue I by Ambrose Philips (not "Phillips," Gott 134). But we do have Thornton's comment, published in the book and quoted by Gott, that Blake's cuts "display less of art than genius." This dichotomy assumes the same distinction between execution ("art") and conception ("genius") against which Blake argued so vigorously. In spite of his proleptic objections, such views are altogether typical of later nineteenth-century (and some twentieth-century) reactions to Blake.

Gott's incisive comments on the rugged graphic style of the Virgil wood engravings implicitly disagree with Butlin's statement that a "softer form of neoclassicism...persists in the late illustrations to Thornton's *Virgil*" (23). Butlin's observation and his intriguing comparison of the Virgil designs to Stothard's work (43n24) ring true for Blake's preliminary drawings, but not for the prints. Their small size should not hinder a perception of their primitive power. Gott (136, 138) speculates that Blake may have cut down the blocks himself to fit Thornton's small volumes. This certainly could have been the case, but we cannot extrapolate from such an activity that Blake trimmed his work willingly.

141: Gott notes that the first printing of the Job engravings consisted "of 150 sets of 'Proof' impressions on laid India paper, 65 sets on French paper and 100 sets on 'Drawing paper.'" He also

refers to the French and drawing paper impressions as "plainer" than those on laid India. However, all impressions on what is presumably the "French" paper are in the first publication state with the word "Proof" lower right. The paper may be "plainer," but the impressions are in the same state as the laid India sets. Only the "drawing paper" sets are in a later state with the "Proof" inscription removed.

152: "In 1838 [Linnell] took the [Dante] plates to the printers Dixon and Ross, and had a total of 120 so-called 'proofs' editioned on a thin India paper laid for strength onto French Colombier paper." According to the Dixon and Ross daybook transcribed in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 545, 25 sets were printed on India laid on thick Colombier and 13 sets (plus four extra impressions), were printed on India laid on Colombier for a total of 38 4/7 sets. The often-cited "120" figure resulted from Geoffrey Keynes's misunderstanding of the Dixon and Ross entry for the second group. "Colombier" is a paper size, about 34 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches, not a specific manufacturer. There is no clear evidence that the Dante plates were pulled on "French" paper in 1838.

161: The reproduction of the hand-colored *Night Thoughts*, acquired by the Gallery in 1989, shows that the fly-title to *Night the Second* is in the rare first published state. The friend standing in Time's lap has female breasts and a pot belly; the friend on the right extends one finger on his left hand downwards. These odd features were removed in the state commonly found.

Eds. G. A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins, *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods*. Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990. 293 pp. \$45.00.

Reviewed by
David Simpson

For some readers and critics *history* is surely still a nightmare from which they are hoping that they, and the rest of us, may still awaken; for publishers, it remains a good bet, though not as good as gender studies; and for most of us it is probably something undecided in advance—good news when done well, and probably useful enough even when it isn't. After all, the historical approach has to offer something in the way of information. At its most doggedly empirical, it may offer nothing else. And as grand theory, we can always learn from its mistakes and omissions.

This volume contains various kinds of history, which the editors predictably and probably wisely do not attempt to cast into an organic whole. One thinks of Wordsworth's recourse to the image of the Gothic cathedral, where the side chapels and the very gargoyles are ornamental and appealing, even though they cannot be said to be holding the structure up or together. This book's three sections contain, respectively, essays attempting grand theory, essays on the formal-generic component of historical inquiry, and essays on politics and gender (separately and together). The late John

Kinnaird, to whom the volume is dedicated, might have been proud of it. Despite the previous publication of five of its twelve essays it works as a well-designed (redesigned) sampler of contemporary historical methods. Some of the samples are predictable: Marxism, for instance, is permitted to appear as grand theory but not as close reading, and deconstruction, in any of its arguably historical applications, does not appear at all. But there are always omissions and preferences. Enough said.

The first essay in the volume is the most unusual and, though previously published in *New German Critique*, the most in need of (re)reading by the audience that this book will likely appeal to. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy's "Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism" is the grand theory component of the book, and it makes some of the blunders that grand theory has to make in order to subsist, most of which are ably pointed out by Michael Ferber in his response. In the long romanticism for which they argue, the authors do not sufficiently discriminate the then from the now, and they confuse a quite invigorating concept of totality with an egregiously metaphysical vocabulary of "inner essence" and "essential principle" (86). But, for the right readers—that is, all of us reposing smugly in the postmodern consensus against all totalizing—there is more of virtue than of vice here. First, Sayre and Löwy offer an internationalist analysis, as befits their thesis that the core of romanticism is a shared resistance to capitalist values and practices in the name of pre-capitalist ideals (26). Second, the argument marginalizes the causal priority of 1789, which cannot but be therapeutic after the constant conjunction between professional self-interest and scholarly inquiry that marked 1989. Third, and best of all, the authors generate so many subsets from a beginning in a primary category, that of "revisionist" romanticism (40f), that they provide an indefinitely extendable

SPIRITS OF FIRE

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and Contemporary Historical Methods*

Edited by
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and combinable set of paradigms for the description of particular syndromes. The compulsion for nuance that affects all of us at the sight of grand theory is here largely accommodated. Disbelievers may find the five types (the last of which is subdivided into five further subtypes) an instance of a merely technocratic taxonomy; others may discover, as I do, a healthy determination to account for detail without giving up on the attempt to articulate a totality. The strong effect of the essay is to displace "Romanticism" as a narrow period definition (and along with it the debates about preromantic and postromantic) by an expanded and sophisticated concept of anti-capitalism. For most readers of literary criticism, this can only be fresh air.

The four essays in the second section are more conventional in ambition, but valuable and cogent both in themselves and in their juxtaposition here. David Sebberson argues that the guiding spirits of Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* are those of Enlightenment rhetoricians like Campbell and Priestley. He traces an empiricist rhetorical theory that reveals Wordsworth to be reproducing the very ideology he "wished to break" (98). Yes and no. It's hard to be sure

exactly what Wordsworth wished; and Sebberson takes one strand in the preface (already noted by W. J. B. Owen, among others) and makes it whole. Michael Scrivener follows with a fine essay on Thelwall, whose career is instanced as that of a committed Jacobin trying to make a living in the counter-revolutionary marketplace. As they are here described, Thelwall's efforts to speak to the "judicious" on behalf of the "uneducated" reader offer a valuable analogue to, again, Wordsworth's preface, as well as an analysis of the predicament of the radical professional intellectual in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Scrivener implicitly takes the point of the Sayre and Löwy's essay: that one has to be very specific about a writer's subcultural site if one is to say anything telling about the politics of writing. In demonstrating the marketability of the literature of "character" and of "feeling," Scrivener has produced a useful piece of literary sociology, as well as a good case for paying more attention to John Thelwall.

Daniel Cottom writes on Scott's blurring or avoidance of the received notions of genre in his negotiation of the relation between the novel and the romance, specifically evident in his uses of the motif of the supernatural (e.g., in *The Monastery*). Scott appears here neither as a conscious and in-control exploiter of available strategies, nor as a prisoner of prefigured discourses, but as something in between, the vehicle of a "troubled act" (149) of mediation. The general-theoretical payoff is, again, worth pondering, and should trouble any simple confidence in one or the other extreme assumption about the relation of writers to writing and to the reading public. The last essay in this section is Marilyn Butler's account of Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* as a critique as well as an in-

stance of romantic autobiography. The general case that there is as much criticism as affirmation of that genre in romantic writing itself is a convincing one, as is the placing of Hazlitt within a "collective enterprise" exploring the role of the "stereotypical intellectual" (167). Butler's use of "satire" as a description of this self-reflexive, critical imperative is, however, less than happy for its suggestion of a firm and inherited genre specification implying conscious control and precisely imagined responses. There must have been some of this, to be sure, but too much else is missed in this terminology. Butler ignores the considerable body of argument produced by others about the nature of indeterminate self-imaging in romantic writing, and projects herself into a position of (unsatirized) originality. No footnotes support the claim, which I at least find quite surprising, that it is "almost standard" to identify the narrator of "Alastor" with Wordsworth, or that the poem is "generally" deemed *not* to have a self-conscious ("satirical") dimension (but Norman Thurston wrote on exactly this in 1975, and he is not alone). Butler takes over McGann's "Romantic ideology" thesis, whereby all latterday readers are supposed to have missed the critical, satirical, intellectual strains in romantic writing. In her urge to be first, Butler goes a bit wild, accusing even the "deconstructionists" of such oversights (168). Among the many possible critiques of Paul de Man, failure of attention to the intellectual and critical strain is hardly one of them.

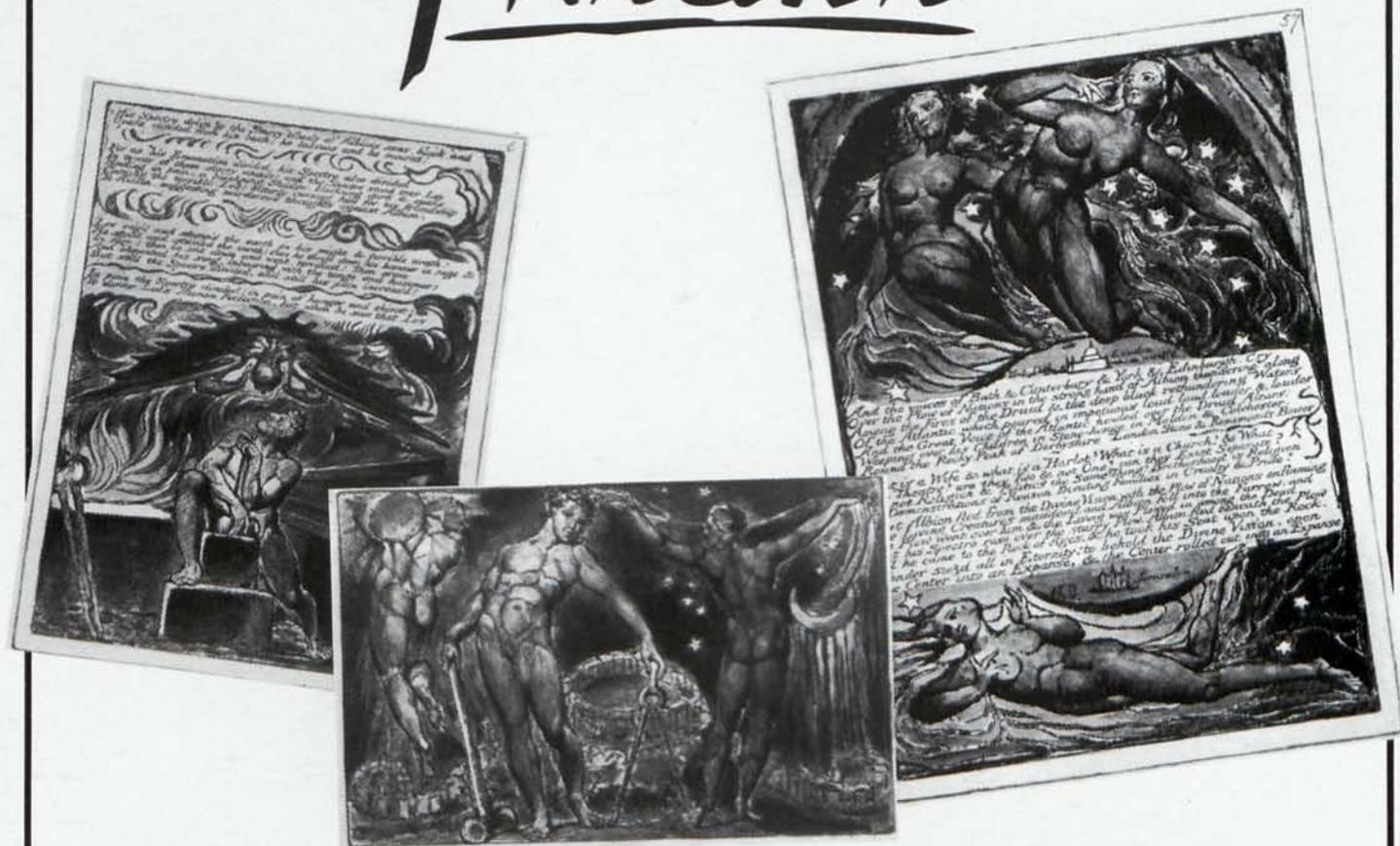
The final section contains five essays, two of which are already classics: Stuart Curran's "The Political Prometheus" is a model of its kind as it traces the microcosmic and general-historical determinations affecting the production of the image of Pro-

metheus; Jerome McGann's "The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner," first published in 1981, was a major precursor of *The Romantic Ideology*, published two years later. Here, as well as placing the poem in the field of biblical hermeneutics, McGann proposed Coleridge as the author of the tradition by which he has been subsequently read, and as one of the major architects of the core commitment of romanticism to Christian doctrine.

Daniel Watkins's essay on Keats's "Grecian Urn" ode is a reprint of a chapter in his *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination* (1989). The poem is read as the expression of an "acute historical anxiety" (255) with gender as its ideological blind spot. The most feminized poet in the canon turns out to be, for this reading, anything but a feminist and nothing of a collectivist. The remaining two essays are both on Blake. G. A. Rosso writes on *The Four Zoas* (especially on Nights 8 and 9) as Blake's effort to escape individualism and critique deism; and Catherine McClenahan reads the poems of the Pickering Ms. as exploring the possibilities of a feminized narrative position, finding specific and important references to the career and cultural notoriety of Mary Wollstonecraft.

So, we have here a useful series of identikit motifs for the construction of a history. That Blake dwells at the microscopic end of the spectrum that runs from close reading to grand theory may be merely coincidental, or it may suggest that we are still unable to emerge from our respect for minute particulars in our reading of the strangest major Romantic. The grand theoretical reconstructions of Blake by Frye and Erdman are still unmatched, not because they are "right" but because no one in the know would now dare to see so much, or live so long.

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