



# Blake

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 3 WINTER 1991/92

---



---

# Blake

---



---

**AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY**

**Volume 25**

**Number 3**

**Winter 1991/92**

---



---

## CONTENTS

### ARTICLES

---

- 104 "Sunclad Chastity" and Blake's "Maiden Queens": *Comus, The,*  
and "The Angel"  
by Eugenie R. Freed
- 117 A Relief Etching of Blake's Virgil Illustrations  
by Robert N. Essick
- 127 The Chamber of Prophecy: Blake's "A Vision" (Butlin #756) Interpreted  
by Christopher Heppner

### MINUTE PARTICULARS

---

- 133 Blake and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*—with a Note on  
Thomas De Quincey  
David Groves
- 135 Six Illustrations by Stothard  
Alexander S. Gourlay
- 136 A Reprinting of Blake's Portrait of Thomas Alphonso Hayley  
Jenijoy La Belle
- 137 Blake and Bonasone  
Alexander S. Gourlay

Cover: Illustrations to Thomson's  
Virgil, executed as a relief etching.  
Essick collection.

---



---

## CONTRIBUTORS

---

**ROBERT N. ESSICK**, Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, is now co-editing, with Morris Eaves and Joseph Viscomi, a volume in the new Blake Trust series of reproductions of Blake's illuminated books.

**EUGENIE R. FREED** is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. The present article emanated from a book-length project, recently completed, on Blake's "Miltonic vision" of women

**ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY** is an Assistant Professor of English at the Rhode Island School of Design.

**DAVID GROVES'** latest book is an edition of James Hogg's 1824 novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1991).

**CHRISTOPHER HEPPNER** teaches English at McGill University and writes about Blake's art, and, sometimes, other things.

**JENJOY LA BELLE** is Professor of Literature at California Institute of Technology.

---



---

## EDITORS

---

**Editors:** Morris Eaves, University of Rochester, and Morton D. Paley, University of California, Berkeley.

**Bibliographer:** Detlef W. Dörrbecker, Universität Trier, West Germany.

**Review Editor:** Nelson Hilton, University of Georgia, Athens.

**Associate Editor for Great Britain:** David Worrall, St. Mary's College.

**Production Office:** Morris Eaves, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627.

**Telephone:** 716/275-3820.

**Fax:** 716/442-5769.

Morton D. Paley, Department of English, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Detlef W. Dörrbecker, Universität Trier, FB III Kunstgeschichte, Postfach 3825, 5500 Trier, West Germany.

Nelson Hilton, Department of English, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

David Worrall, St. Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Waldegrave Road, Twickenham TW1 4SX, England.

---



---

## INFORMATION

---

**Managing Editor:** Patricia Neill

**Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly** is published under the sponsorship of the Department of English, University of Rochester.

**Subscriptions** are \$40 for institutions, \$20 for individuals. All subscriptions are by the volume (1 year, 4 issues) and begin with the summer issue. Subscription payments received after the summer issue will be applied to the 4 issues of the current volume. Foreign addresses (except Canada and Mexico) require a \$6 per volume postal surcharge for surface mail, a \$15 per volume surcharge for air mail delivery. U.S. currency or international money order necessary. Make checks payable to *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*. Address all subscription orders and related communications to Patricia Neill, *Blake*, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627.

Many **back issues** are available at a reduced price. Address Patricia Neill for a list of issues and prices.

**Manuscripts** are welcome. Send two copies, typed and documented according to the forms suggested in *The MLA Style Manual*, to either of the editors: Morris Eaves, Dept. of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627; Morton D. Paley, Dept. of English, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. Only one copy will be returned to authors.

**International Standard Serial Number:** 0160-628x. *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* is **indexed** in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography, the Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, *The Romantic Movement: A Selective and Critical Bibliography* (ed. David V. Erdman et al.), American Humanities Index, the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, and Current Contents.

## "Sun-Clad Chastity" and Blake's "Maiden Queens": *Comus, Thel, and "The Angel"*

by Eugenie R. Freed

... To him that dares  
Arm his profane tongue with  
contemptuous words  
Against the sun-clad power of chastity;  
Fain would I something say, yet to what  
end?  
(Milton, *A Masque Presented at Ludlow  
Castle, 1634* [Comus] 779-82)

In her discussion of Blake's illustrations to Milton's *Comus*, Pamela Dunbar comments:

Blake was a tireless critic of the "double standard" of sexual morality and of the repression of "natural desire." It is therefore not surprising that he should have transformed Milton's "sage/ And serious doctrine of virginity" (785-86) into a sterile and destructive dogma, and his virtuous Lady into a coy, deluded and self-denying miss. . . . (10)

The work in which this "sage / And serious doctrine" was mounted was the subject of the earliest of Blake's commissioned series of Milton illustrations. Blake executed them for the Reverend Joseph Thomas in c. 1801;<sup>1</sup> but he had long reflected on the theme of Milton's masque, with wit and subtlety arming his "profane [read: 'iconoclastic'] tongue with contemptuous words" against it in the poems I discuss in this essay (to mention only two), years before he made *Comus* the subject of a series of paintings.

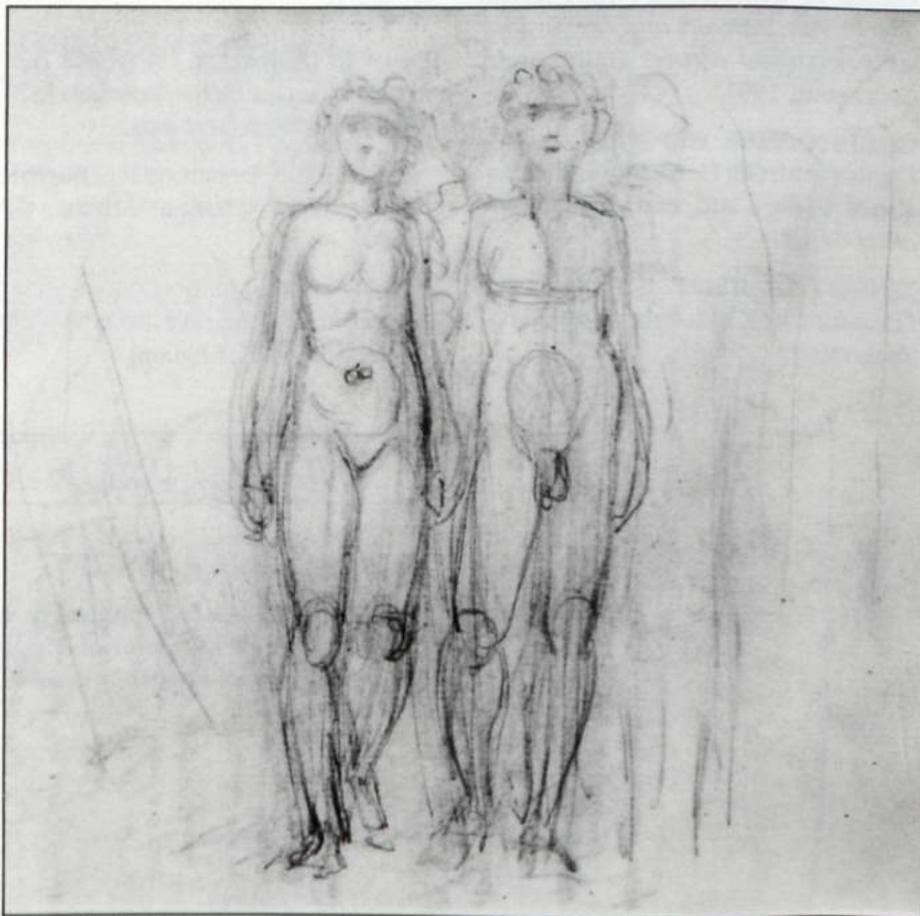
*Comus* was demonstrably one of the works on Blake's mind while he was sketching motifs for *The Gates of Paradise* in his Notebook during 1790-93, for he jotted down quotations from it on pages 30 and 36 of the Notebook.<sup>2</sup> Characteristically, it was Milton's virtuous Lady who came contrarily into his mind when, while copying and drafting poems into the Notebook at some time during this period,<sup>3</sup> Blake opened it at page 102, and paused to

contemplate a sketch of his own (illus. 1) which had been suggested by a passage from Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*:

... into their inmost bower  
Handed they went; and eased the  
putting off  
These troublesome disguises which we  
wear,  
Straight side by side were laid, nor  
turned I ween  
Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the  
rites  
Mysterious of connubial love refused. . . .  
(PL 4.738-43)

The pencil sketch shows two nude figures, seen full-frontal, walking hand in hand toward, and looking directly at, the viewer: a long-haired Eve, and a curly-haired Adam, much as they appear in Blake's earliest extant Milton illustrations.<sup>4</sup>

Blake covered the page facing this drawing (Notebook 103) with drafts of poems (illus. 2). Three poems that appear here were to be etched as *Songs of Experience*: "The Chimney Sweeper," "Holy Thursday," and "The Angel."



1. "Adam and Eve," from Blake's Notebook, page 102. By permission of the British Library.

The first two of these arise from "Songs of Innocence" having the same titles. The third, "The Angel," was inspired in part by the design that presented itself to his eye on the opposite page of the Notebook. Blake obviously recalled the context in *Paradise Lost* of the lines he had illustrated, and affirmed for himself Milton's indignant condemnation there of "hypocrites" who "austerely talk / Of purity . . . and innocence, / Defaming as impure what God declares / Pure . . ." (PL 4.744-47). However, in the spirit of his own dictum

that "Opposition is true Friendship,"<sup>5</sup> the principal Miltonic influence in this poem emanates not so much from the *vindication*—with which Blake concurred—of sexual love in *Paradise Lost*, as from the defence in *Comus* of chastity, which he opposed. Having deliberately enrolled himself in the Devil's party, Blake in effect seconds the urging of Comus: "List Lady be not coy, and be not cozened / With that same vaunted name virginity . . ." (*Comus* 736-37), and in "The Angel" ironically dramatizes such "cozening":

I dreamt a dream what can it mean  
And that I was a maiden queen  
Guarded by an angel mild  
Witless woe was ne'er beguiled

And I wept both night & day  
And he wiped my tears away  
And I wept both day & night  
And hid from him my hearts delight

So he took his wings & fled  
Then the morn blusht rosy red  
I dried my tears & armd my fears  
With ten thousand shields and spears

Soon my angel came again  
I was armd he came in vain  
[But *del.*] For the time of youth was fled  
And grey hairs were on my head

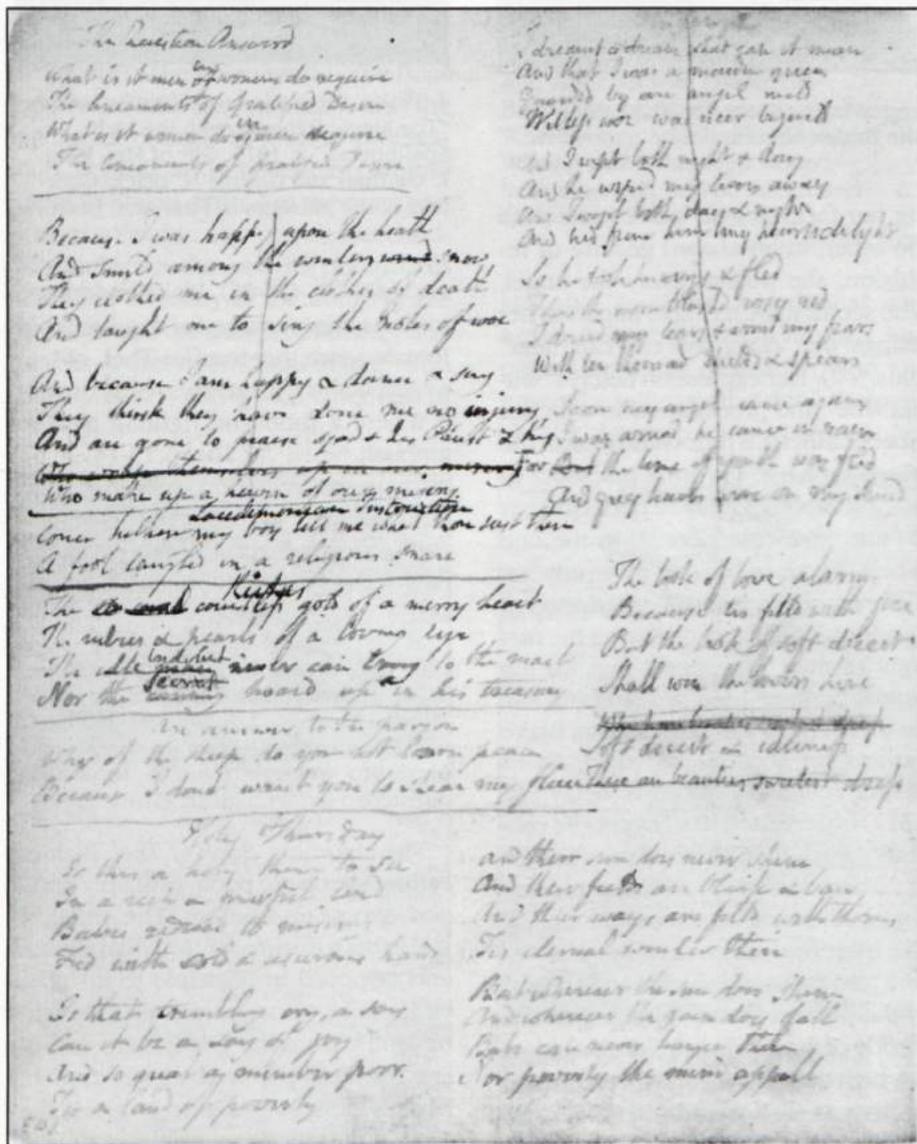
(Notebook 103. The version engraved for the *Songs of Experience* differs only in punctuation.)

The speaker of "The Angel," in her dream-life a "maiden queen," rebuffs her angel-lover because of her own fears and inhibitions, keeping him in a state of tantalized frustration both in her subconscious and her waking life. Soon it is too late to recant:

I was arm'd, he came in vain,  
For the time of youth was fled,  
And grey hairs were on my head.

(14-16, E 24)<sup>6</sup>

This petrified virgin inhabits a fallen and time-bound world in which her imagination, corrupted by the "defamation" of sexuality perpetrated by those Milton calls "hypocrites," creates a "horrible darkness . . . impressed with reflections of desire."<sup>7</sup> An engraving of 1790 attributed to Blake (illus. 3) shows a nude woman, revealingly draped, asleep in a sitting position on a couch. A winged Cupid aims an arrow at her *mons veneris*, while from beneath the couch emerges a small, terrifyingly monstrous creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull elephant, complete with sharp upcurved tusks and phallic proboscis. (Blake placed a similarly elephant-headed figure, less sinister but obviously having the same symbolic intention, among the monsters at the banqueting table in his second version of the banquet of *Comus* [illus. 4].<sup>8</sup>) The engraving casts an interesting light on Blake's specula-



2. Page of draft poems facing "Adam and Eve," from Blake's Notebook, page 103. By permission of the British Library.



3. *Falsa ad Coelum Mittunt Insomnia Manes*, engraving attributed to Blake (after Fuseli), 1790. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

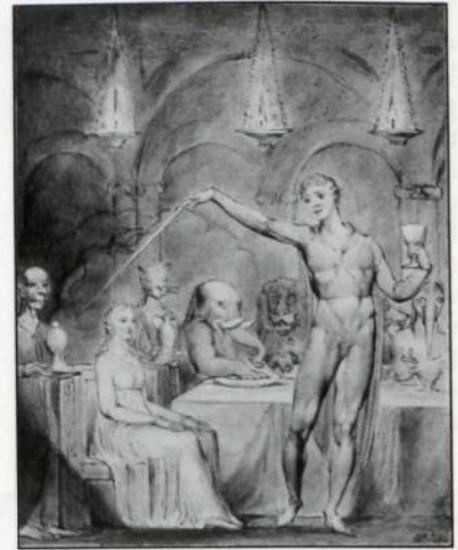
tions on the subject of female erotic fantasies and fears around the time of his composition of "The Angel" and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, as well as, possibly, *Thel*.<sup>9</sup>

The "maiden queen" of "The Angel" is evidently derived from the classical virgin goddess of the moon, Diana. Blake may have been influenced by Milton's description of the nocturnal scene as Adam and Eve enter their nuptial bower, when the moon "rising in clouded majesty, at length / Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light" (*PL* 4.607-08). But his image owes more to "Dian the huntress . . . fair silver-shafted Queen forever chaste" (440-41) from Milton's *Comus*.<sup>10</sup> The angel of Blake's poem also emerges, in an ironically modified form, from passages of *Comus*,<sup>11</sup> together with the maiden's dream:

So dear to heaven is saintly chastity,  
That when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,  
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
And in clear dream and solemn vision  
Tell her of things that no gross ear can  
hear. . . . (452-57)

The plate of "The Angel" in the *Songs of Experience*<sup>12</sup> shows the recumbent maiden, clothed in a long gown, lean-

ing her face on one hand while with the other, in an absurd gesture of repulsion, she pushes away the angel, who seems to be trying to impart to her "things that no gross ear can hear" (*illus.* 5-7). Her expression betrays "witless woe" and preoccupation with her inner conflict; his reflects distress at the rejection, while his arms reach out to her, attempting vainly to persuade her to "turn away no more."<sup>13</sup> In the line "Then the morn blush'd rosy red. . ." Blake recollects Adam's description of the maiden modesty of Eve on the first night of their marriage: ". . . To the nuptial bower / I led her blushing like the morn. . ." (*PL* 8. 510-11). But, Blake implies, in the fallen world, Eve's "sweet reluctant amorous delay" (*PL* 4.311) is perverted to a "hypocrite modesty," such that "When thou awakest . . . Then com'st thou forth a modest virgin, knowing to dissemble. . ." <sup>14</sup> The hysterical defence of her chastity with "ten thousand shields and spears" by the protagonist of "The Angel" is a parody of the simile in Milton's *Comus*, in which the chaste virgin is compared to "a quivered nymph with arrows keen," whose "virgin purity" encases her in "complete steel," proof against "savage fierce, bandit, or mountain-



4. Blake, illustration to Milton's *Comus*: "The Magic Banquet with the Lady Spellbound," c. 1815. Gift of Mrs. John L. Gardner and George N. Black. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

eer" (420-21, 425-26). Blake had turned to the same passage for the image of female scorn that terrifies Thel, of ". . . eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn, / Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie. . ." (*Thel* 6.13-14, E 6), perhaps intermingled in both poems with his satirical response to Edmund Burke's exclamation of horror at the fate of the beautiful Queen of France, Marie Antoinette:

Little did I dream that I should have lived  
to see disasters fallen upon her in a nation  
of gallant men. . . I thought ten thousand  
swords must have leaped from their scabbards  
to avenge even a look that threatened her  
with insult. (76)<sup>15</sup>

The charming *Book of Thel*, Blake's earliest prophetic book, probably composed some time before "The Angel,"<sup>16</sup> is also both inspired by Milton's *Comus* and opposed in principle to it.<sup>17</sup> The virgin Thel, whose name means "wish" or "will" (from the Greek verb meaning "to desire"), is the only one of Blake's personages who is given the option of accepting or rejecting the fallen condition of mortality. Thel avails herself of this privilege, choosing, when she has previewed this "land

of sorrows & of tears" (*Thel* 6.5, E 6), to flee "back . . . into the vales of Har" (6.22, E 6).<sup>18</sup> The poem makes it clear that the "daughter of beauty" will indeed, as she foresees, "fade away" (*Thel* 1.3, 3.21 and 5.12, E 3, 5, and 6). As Spenser put it in a passage that Blake certainly had in mind, ". . . that faire flowre of beauty fades away, / As doth the lilly fresh before the sunny ray."<sup>19</sup> She will leave behind no trace or useful legacy of her existence—"And all shall say, 'Without a use this shining woman liv'd . . .'" (*Thel* 3.22, E 5)—because she refuses to commit herself to earthly generation, fearing the pains of Experience that inevitably accompany sexuality in the fallen world. *The Book of Thel* affirms that sexuality, and the giving of oneself in love to procreation, is good, and a necessary commitment to life on earth. For the most part it does so within a gentle, almost child-like ambience that sets this poem apart from the intensity of the *Songs of Experience* and the later prophecies,<sup>20</sup> and places it between "Innocence" and "Experience," into which latter condi-

tion *Thel* enters only hesitantly, fearfully, and briefly.<sup>21</sup>

*The Book of Thel* shares its pastoral setting with both *Comus* and the *Songs of Innocence*.<sup>22</sup> "The secret air" *Thel* seeks out "down by the river of Adona" (1.2, 4, E 3) was inspired by the "regions mild of calm and serene air" (*Comus* 4) from which the Attendant Spirit descends, the "broad fields of the sky" (978) to which he returns again in the closing lines of *Comus*. Here Adonis appears:<sup>23</sup>

Iris there with humid bow,  
Waters the odorous banks that blow  
Flowers of more mingled hue  
Than her purpled scarf can shew,  
And drenches with Elysian dew . . .  
Beds of hyacinth and roses,  
Where young Adonis oft reposes,  
Waxing well of his deep wound  
In slumber soft, and on the ground  
Sadly sits the Assyrian queen. . . .  
(*Comus* 991-1001)

Milton's rainbow "drenches" and nourishes "beds of hyacinth and roses," symbolic of regeneration and love, where the youth Adonis, beloved of "the Assyrian queen" Venus, lies

recovering from the wound given him by a boar. Milton's passage—and the opening lines of *The Book of Thel* as well—stem at least partially from Spenser's account of Venus lovingly sustaining Adonis in the "Garden of Adonis" in *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>24</sup> Both Spenser and Milton associate Adonis with fertility in the fallen world<sup>25</sup>—the combating of death and decay by means of earthly generation. Time, in Spenser's Garden, "beats down both leaves and buds without regard" (*FQ* 3.6.39.8). Though Venus weeps for their loss, she has no remedy, for "All things decay in time, and to their end do draw" (40.9). Adonis embodies the principle of plenitude, which continually redresses the ravages of Time:

All be he subject to mortalitie  
Yet is eterne in mutabilitie  
And by succession made perpetuall. . . .  
(47.4-6)

*Thel*, lamenting by the river of Adona, compares herself to a "watry bow" (*Thel* 1.8)—Milton's "humid bow." Through a series of parallel similes ("shadows in the water," "a smile upon an infants



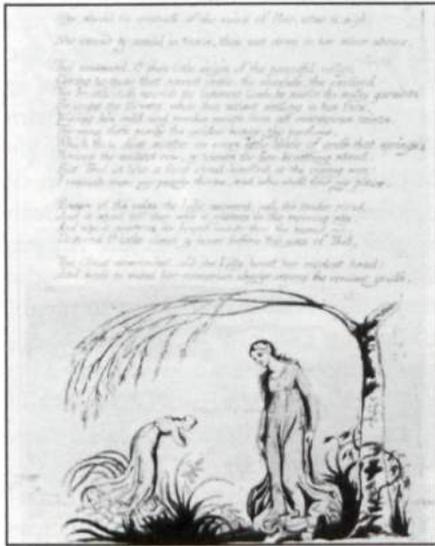
5. "The Angel," from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



6. Draft sketch of emblem, "I found him beneath a Tree," Blake's Notebook, page 63. By permission of the British Library.



7. Draft sketch of "The Angel," Blake's Notebook, page 65. By permission of the British Library.



8. *The Book of Thel*, plate 2. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



9. *The Book of Thel*, plate 4. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



10. "The Little Black Boy" (1) from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

face," "transient day" [1.9-11, E 3]) Thel emphasizes the *evanescence* of the rainbow, where Milton's passage stresses its functional *continuity* within the cycle of regeneration.

Thel encounters four symbolic figures. The first, the "Lilly of the valley," is a "gentle maid of silent valleys and of modest brooks" (1.16, 22) who retires after speaking with Thel to a "silver shrine" (2.2) (illus. 8). Blake's "Lilly" is primarily Spenser's "faire flowre of beauty [that] fades away," but this appealing little "watry weed" is also related—through the "twisted braids of lilies" knitted into the "loose train of [her] amber-dropping hair" (861-62)—to Milton's Sabrina, "a gentle nymph . . . that with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream" (*Comus* 823-24). Sabrina, sitting "under the glassy cool translucent wave" (860), is "Goddess of the silver lake" (864) and a patron of maidenhood. She is invoked by the Attendant Spirit to free the Lady held fast by Comus's magic spell. Blake's "Lilly," a self-effacing "little virgin of the peaceful valley" (*Thel* 2.3), contrasts with the regal Sabrina, whose narcissistic adorning of herself suggests an immature self-involvement rather like Thel's own.<sup>26</sup> The life of the

"Lilly" is one of self-sacrifice and selfless caring for other living creatures; she gives of her own material being to "nourish the innocent lamb" and "revive the milked cow" (2.5, 10), scatters her perfume "on every little blade of grass" (2.9) and goes, after speaking with Thel, "to mind her numerous charge among the verdant grass" (2.18).

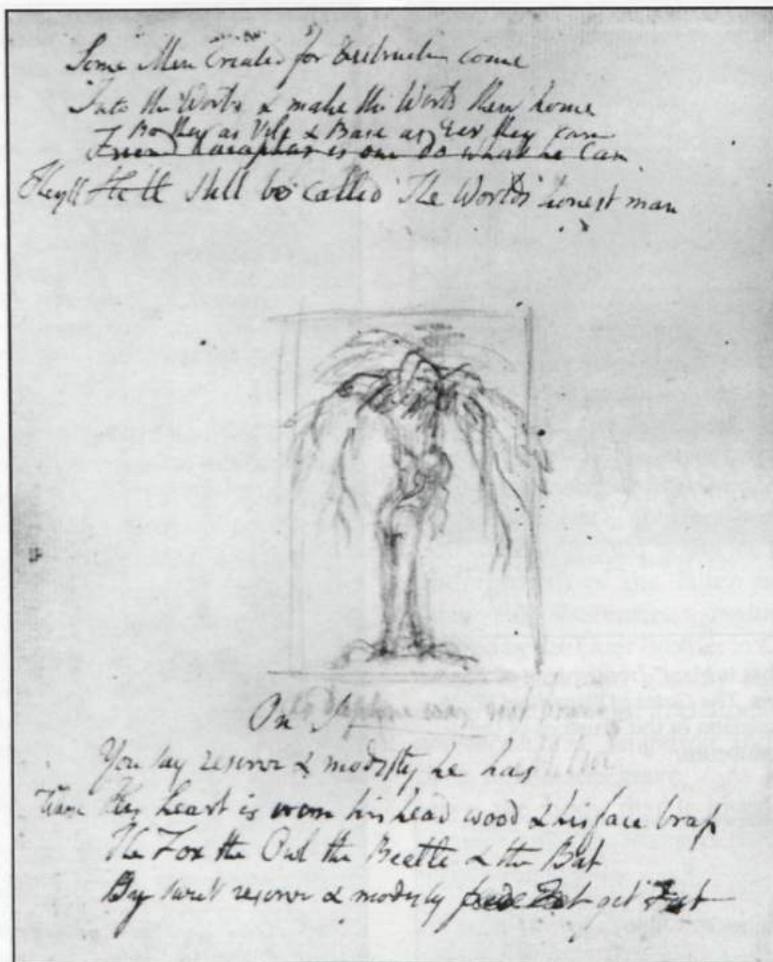
Thel's second dialogue is with a Cloud (illus. 9) which "shewd his golden head . . . / Hovering and glittering on the air . . ." (*Thel* 3.5-6, E 4). Blake's Cloud takes his "bright form" from the "hovering angel girl with golden wings" (*Comus* 213) who accompanies Faith, Hope, and Chastity in the Lady's soliloquy in *Comus* (and is there perhaps to be identified with Hope). He also resembles the "glistening guardian" whom the Lady trusts to keep her "life and honour unassailed" (218-19) (and whose semblance Blake was to borrow for the equivocal guardian of maidenhood in "The Angel"). The Cloud declares to Thel: "O virgin, know'st thou not. our steeds drink of the golden springs / Where Luvah doth renew his horses?" (3.7-8). "Our steeds," those upon which clouds are mounted in moving about the sky, "renew" their vitality at the same source as the "hor-

ses of Luvah," here virtually identified with the fiery horses of the classical sun-god Phoebus Apollo.<sup>27</sup> Luvah is a symbol of sexuality, wherever he appears in Blake's later work,<sup>28</sup> and the Cloud is likewise portrayed, both visually and in the text, as a figure of young and virile sexuality.<sup>29</sup> Blake may have associated the "golden springs / Where Luvah doth renew his horses" with the "orient liquor" which Comus, descendant of the Sun,<sup>30</sup> offers to weary travelers "to quench the drought of Phoebus" (*Comus* 64-66). That magic potion "flames, and dances in his crystal bounds" (672) as Comus presses it upon the obdurate Lady, urging

. . . see, here be all the pleasures  
That fancy can beget on youthful  
thoughts,  
When the fresh blood grows lively, and  
returns  
Brisk as the April buds in primrose  
season. . . . (667-70)

These wonderful images of the fires of lust, spring, morning, and regeneration are tinged in the Miltonic context

with the evil of Comus's nature, but Blake was obviously determined that the devil should not have the best tunes or the finest poetry. Blake chose to associate Milton's phrase from *Comus*, "the sun-clad power of chastity" (*Comus* 781), with the lines from *Paradise Lost* describing the "apostate" Satan "exalted as a god . . . in his sun-bright chariot . . . Idol of majesty divine" (*PL* 6.99-101). In Blake's reading of *Comus*, Chastity is the "apostate," the "idol of majesty divine," for the divinity Blake delineates in the *Book of Thel* is one who blesses earthly plenitude and sustains and encourages its increase: and *he* is embodied in the sun<sup>31</sup> (illus. 10). The Lady in *Comus* is transfixed by magic to Comus's enchanted chair, "as Daphne was / Root-bound, that fled Apollo" (660-61). Blake was sufficiently struck by this image to illustrate it in an emblem in his Notebook, inscribing beneath it "As Daphne was root-bound"<sup>32</sup> (illus. 11-12). Thel may be seen as an insubstantial analogue of the "Vegetated body" of Daphne,<sup>33</sup> for she too has "fled Apollo." In the opening lines of the poem she shuns the company of sisters who "led round their sunny flocks" (*Thel* 1.1, my emphasis).<sup>34</sup> Instead she has "sought the secret air, / To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day . . ." (1.2-3), becoming "like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun" (2.11). The Cloud, with his "golden head and . . . bright form" is indeed "kindled at the rising sun"—in common with all living beings—but he has *followed*, not fled, its beams. He rejoices not only in his materialization, "glitter[ing] in the morning sky," but also in his dissolution, "scatter[ing] [his] bright beauty thro' the humid air" (2.14-15). In his vaporous state he returns to water his "steeds" at the "golden springs / Where Luvah doth renew his horses" (3.7-8), a generative source where his life is renewed and he comes again into visible being.<sup>35</sup>



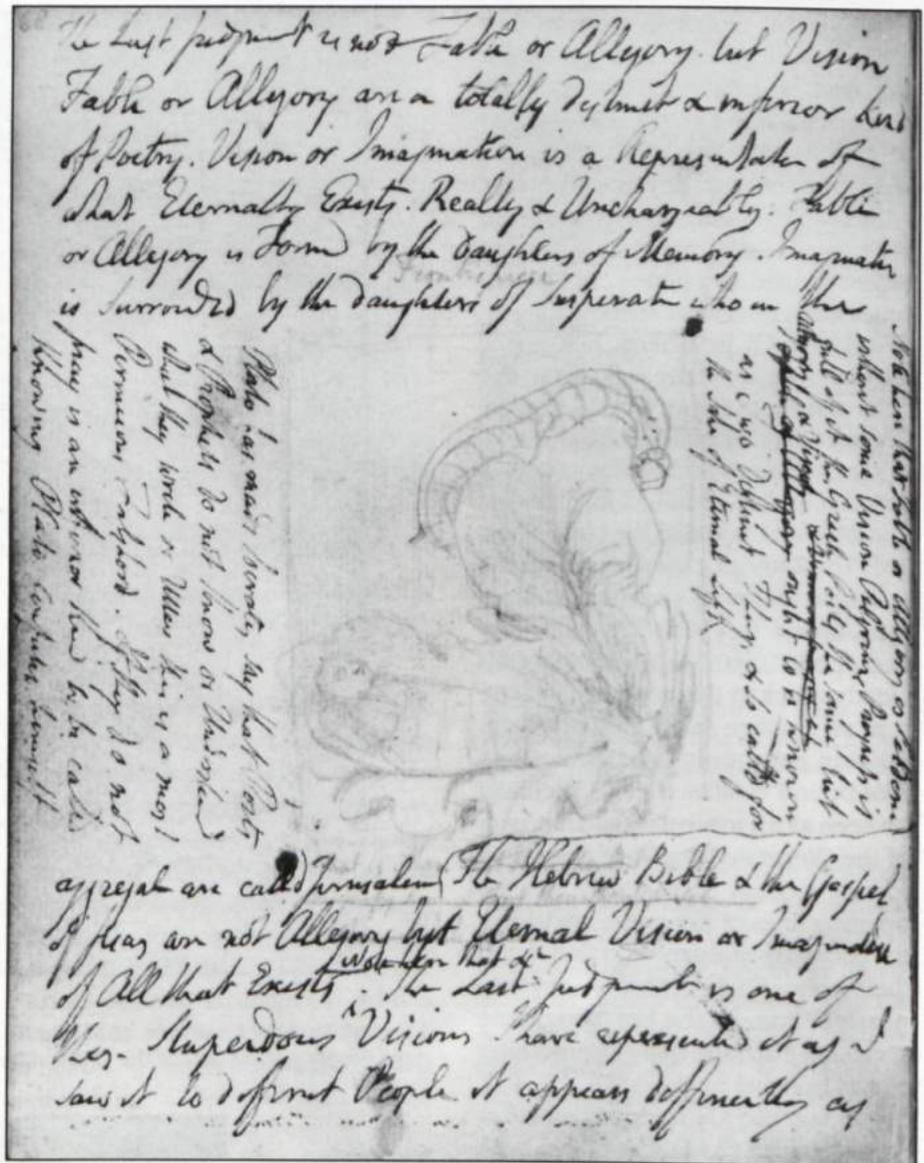
11. Draft sketch of emblem, "As Daphne was root-bound," from Blake's Notebook, page 36. By permission of the British Library.



12. Blake, illustration to Milton's *Comus*, "Comus with his Revellers," c. 1801. Courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.



13. "What is Man!" frontispiece of *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

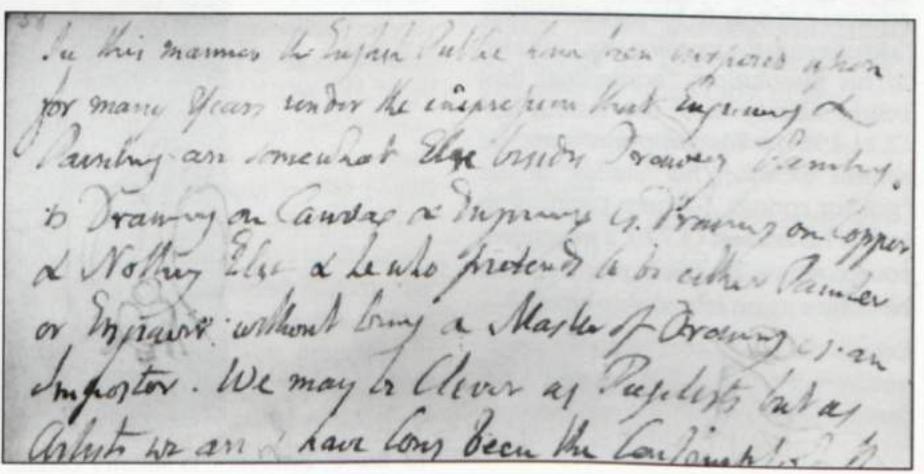


14. Draft sketch of emblem, "What is Man . . ." from Blake's Notebook, page 68. By permission of the British Library.



15. *The Book of Thel*, plate 5. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

16. (right) Detail. Sketch in Blake's Notebook, upper left corner of page 58. By permission of the British Library.



Like the "humid bow" of Milton's Iris, the Cloud is a vital link in the cycle of earthly generation. Comus describes to the Lady his first sight of her two young brothers as

... a faery vision,  
Of some gay creatures of the element  
That in the colours of the rainbow live  
And play i' the plighted clouds. . . .  
(297-300)<sup>36</sup>

Blake's Cloud is, like those of Milton in this passage, "plighted"—but with a shift of semantic emphasis.<sup>37</sup> The Cloud of the *Book of Thel* is "plighted" in being betrothed to his "partner in the vale" (3.31, E 5), whom he goes to join when he takes leave of Thel. The Cloud's "partner" is "the fair-eyed dew,"<sup>38</sup> who "kneels before the risen sun" (3.14), surrendering herself—like Spenser's "Morning dew" Chrysgone<sup>39</sup>—to that divine source of life just as obviously as Thel hides away from it when she seeks out "the secret air" (1.2, my emphasis). The "plighted" couple are "link'd in a golden band and never part, / But walk united bearing food to all our tender flowers" (3.12-16, E 5). Like the "Lilly of the valley," they give selflessly of themselves, both to one another and to others in the fulfillment of social responsibilities. Like her, also, they have an oblique, complex, and significant relationship with Milton's argument and imagery in *Comus*.

The Cloud brings to Thel the Worm, one of the "numerous charge" (2.18) of the "Lilly." The visual image of the Worm on plate 4 of the *Book of Thel*<sup>40</sup> (illus. 9) confirms that Blake either had in mind, or had already sketched, "What is Man!" the emblem-design he chose to place first in *The Gates of Paradise*<sup>41</sup> (illus. 13). Blake's introduction of the Worm confirms an association stemming from the caption he wrote in the Notebook beneath his rough sketch of the emblem (illus. 14)—the passage from the Book of Job from which he took its title,

What is Man that thou shouldst  
magnify him & that thou shouldst set  
thine heart upon him. (Job 7.17)<sup>42</sup>

Three of Thel's four visitants—the Cloud, the Worm, and the Clod of Clay—emerge from the context of this verse of Job:

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods  
of dust. . . . As the cloud is consumed and  
vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to  
the grave shall come up no more. (Job 7.5,  
9)

Thel knows that she too will be "consumed," to become "at death the food of worms" (3.23, 25). The Cloud offers Thel the wise counsel of acceptance. Though he will "vanish and [be] seen no more" he assures her that when he passes away he goes "to tenfold life." If worms should consume her flesh, the Cloud exclaims, "How great thy use, how great thy blessing!" (3.26). For, he tells her, "Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself" (3.26-27). The emblem "What is Man!" shows two worms (illus. 13): one realistic, crawling in an arc down an oak-leaf, the other with the face of a sleeping child, lying face upwards on an adjoining leaf, chrysalis-like in swaddling bands. In the *Book of Thel* the helpless Worm appears to Thel "like an infant wrapped in the Lilly's leaf" (4.3), and is shown in just this way on plate 4. It cannot speak, but cries like a baby. Thel expresses compassion at its helplessness—" [There is] none to cherish thee with mother's smiles" (4.6)—and indeed the cries of the infant do raise the "pitying head" of the motherly Clod of Clay (illus. 15).

The Clod of Clay "bow'd over the weeping infant and her life exhal'd / In milky fondness . . ." (4.8-9). This last personage of the poem attains the ultimate degree of selflessness, willingly giving her life as well as her substance for the Worm.<sup>43</sup> She echoes the Cloud's teaching: "O beauty of the vales of Har! we live not for ourselves" (4.10, E 5). In response to Thel's "pitying tears" (5.7) the "matron Clay" invites Thel to survey her subterranean "house," as-

suring her "'Tis given thee to enter / And to return: fear nothing . . ." (5.16-17). And Thel accepts the invitation.

What does she find in the underground realm of Clay? "Couches of the dead" (6.3); tombs such as the grand monuments Blake had sketched fifteen years earlier, as a young apprentice, in Westminster Abbey.<sup>44</sup> In this "land of sorrows & of tears" Thel sees "Vegetated bodies" like that of Daphne, for there "the fibrous roots / Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists" (6.3-5). Like the Lady in *Comus*, who finds no shelter "from the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles" (*Comus* 351), Thel strays, unprotected and unguided, about the thorny undergrowth of the fallen world<sup>45</sup> (illus. 16). She enters a region (described by the Elder Brother in *Comus*) where "thick and gloomy shadows damp" are "oft seen in charnel-vaults, and sepulchres / Lingerin, and sitting by a new-made grave, / As loth to leave the body that it loved . . ." (*Comus* 469-72). Blake depicts Thel wandering

... in the land of clouds thro' valleys  
dark, list'ning  
Dolours and lamentations; waiting oft  
beside a dewy grave  
She stood in silence, list'ning to the  
voices of the ground. . . .  
(*Thel* 6.6-8, E 6)

At last she comes to her own grave-plot, where a "voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit" (6.10). The voice Thel hears is potentially her own, moaning from the depths of the grave after the ending of a life-in-possibility to which the maiden has not yet committed herself. This potential self laments the painful intensity of the experiences of each of the senses in earthly life:

Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready  
drawn,  
Where a thousand fighting men in  
ambush lie? . . .  
Why a Tongue impress'd with honey  
from every wind?  
Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw  
creations in?  
Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror  
trembling & affright? (*Thel* 6.13-18)

At its climax the agonized murmur articulates the anguish of the sexual sense of touch: the pangs of desire frustrated, the greater torment of desire satisfied—the agony of self-realization in earthly life that awaits the virgin whose name means “desire”:

Why a tender curb upon the youthful  
burning boy!  
Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of  
our desire? (Thel 6.19-20)

At this, Thel rushes “with a shriek” back to the “vales of Har.” She flees the precepts of teachers who affirm that commitment to earthly life demands a continual sacrifice of selfhood. Experiential existence in the fallen world is a course to inevitable destruction, marked by the fierce suffering and terror her own disembodied voice describes. Rather than face that, Thel—who prayed that she might live in “gentleness”—chooses not to enter into it at all.<sup>46</sup>

Thel’s “Motto,” in most copies a kind of postscript to the poem, suggests that Thel might have learned more from her brief sojourn in the “house of Clay” than she allowed herself to do:

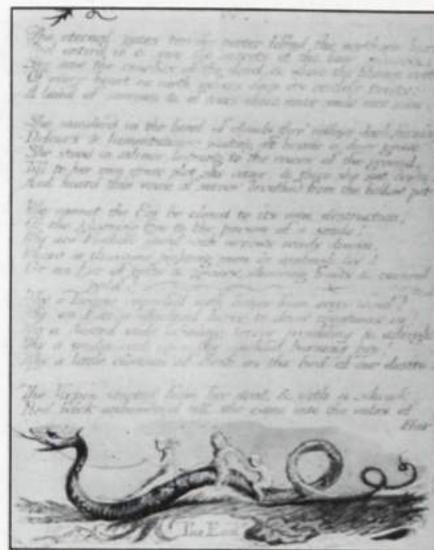
Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?  
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?  
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?  
Or Love in a golden bowl? (i.1-4, E 3)

The Mole, the earth-dweller, knows “what is in the pit,” and may also be a symbol of the regenerative potential within experience.<sup>47</sup> The Eagle, inhabiting the sky and aspiring always in Blake’s work to the visionary realm, knows nothing of the realm of Clay. The “rod” and “bowl” may at one level be reminders of the charming-rod and the cup of Comus (illus. 4); a rod may be a symbol of authority or of the phallus, a bowl may represent the Holy Grail or be a symbol of the womb. Blake obviously intends no simple answers to the four rhetorical questions in “Thel’s Motto.” All Thel can do is look in the direction these questions point. They direct her (and the reader) to the indisputable value of such experience of the skies and the earth as

may be gained respectively by the Eagle and the Mole from their diametrically opposed perspectives and “contrary” ways of life. And they question the *validity* of a distinction between Love and Wisdom: “. . . love indeed is Esse and wisdom is Existere for love has nothing except in wisdom, nor has wisdom anything except from love. Therefore when love is in wisdom, then it *exists*.”<sup>48</sup>

Blake commented on this passage of Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Wisdom*: “Thought without affection makes a distinction between Love & Wisdom, as it does between body & Spirit” (E 603). His annotation indicates that he regards the division between Love and Wisdom in the same light as he does that “between body & Spirit”—as a notion “to be expunged.”<sup>49</sup>

The illumination with which Blake concludes the *Book of Thel* depicts Thel’s choice quite clearly, and incidentally suggests the source of his inspiration in Milton’s work. Plate 6 shows three children—a girl and two younger boys—riding a dragon-headed serpent who coils across the width of the page over the legend “The End” (illus. 17). They cannot be identified from the text of *Thel* (or from that of *America*, where Blake was to use the same motif again [illus. 18]); and indeed, in their first appearance, on the final plate of *The Book of Thel*, they may represent the Lady and the Elder and Younger Brothers of Milton’s *Comus*, shown almost in babyhood. Perhaps, in one of the several possible meanings of the configuration, these figures embody the desire of both Thel and Milton’s Lady to retreat towards the security of infancy—reversing the natural process of growth through adolescent sexuality into maturity. With the girl astride and holding the reins, the three children ride the seemingly tractable serpent—symbol of man’s fall—without fear.<sup>50</sup> Back they gallop, in a leftward or “sinister” direction, to “the vales of Har,” where the phallic serpent has no *visible* sting, in a paradise *apparently*



17. *The Book of Thel*, plate 6. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

not yet lost—but only apparently, for the pastoral landscape of that country is a false Paradise of arrested development. As Blake clearly shows, the consequences of the fall of man are ineluctable.

In a fallen Paradise continually laid waste by the depredations of Time, Thel laments that she and every form of living beauty about her must yield to this “Great enemy.”<sup>51</sup> She longs to hear “the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time” (1.13-14), not in wrath, but “gently[ly].”<sup>52</sup> The “Lilly of the valley,” herself a “gentle maid,” assures Thel that, little and weak and ephemeral though she is, “Yet am I visited from heaven, and he that smiles on all. / Walks in the valley and each morn over me spreads his hand . . .” (1.19-20).

When her brief life in time is over the “Lilly” is blessed with the certainty that she will “flourish in eternal vales.” The Cloud directly addresses Thel’s fear that “like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun / I vanish from my pearly throne . . .” (2.11-12). Although, he says, “I vanish and am seen no more,” yet “when I pass away / It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and raptures holy . . .” (3.10-11). Thel knows that the Worm



18. *America, a Prophecy*, plate 11. By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

is loved by God, and that whoever injures it will be punished; but more than that, she learns, the Worm is "cherish'd . . . with milk and oil" (5.9-10)—for, as Blake repeatedly declares, "every thing that lives is Holy."<sup>53</sup> And the "matron Clay" assures Thel that though she herself is "the meanest thing," and though her bosom is cold and dark, "he, that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head, / And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast . . ." (4.11-12). The divine visitant who "spreads his hand" in benediction over the humble Lilly and "binds his nuptial bands" about the breast of the "matron Clay" is also the force who charges with life the "golden springs" where the Cloud's existence is renewed. Blake typically makes the female personages passive and acquiescent, and the male personage, the Cloud, an active agent—an inseminator, while the Lilly and the "matron Clay" are receptacles for seed.

Yet all are vehicles for the divine force of life emanating from "[him] that smiles on all" and "loves the lowly," who has linked them all, together with the Worm, in a "golden band" of earthly generation. Thel, inspired by Blake's complex response to Milton's treatment of obdurate chastity in *Comus*, deplors the loss of Paradise. And she rejects the only alternative offered to man: coming to terms with experience, which includes procreation and generation, in the fallen world. Thel—"desire"—is Blake's first embodiment of the "female Will," and Milton's *Comus* one of his primary sources for the concept.

#### Works Cited

- Bateson, F. W., ed. *Selected Poems of William Blake*. London: 1957.
- Bindman, David, comp. and annot. *The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Ed. David V. Erdman. New rev. ed. Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1982. (Cited throughout as E, followed by the page numbers.)
- . *The Notebook of William Blake: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile*. Ed. David V. Erdman with the assistance of Donald K. Moore. Oxford: Clarendon, 1973.
- . *Complete Writings*. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1929.
- Butlin, Martin. *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*. 2 vols., New Haven: Yale UP, 1981.
- Damon, S. Foster. "Blake and Milton." *The Divine Vision: Studies in the Poetry and Art of William Blake*. Ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto. London: Victor Gollancz, 1957.
- . *A Blake Dictionary*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1965.
- Dunbar, Pamela. *William Blake's Illustrations to the Poetry of Milton*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980.
- Erdman, David V. *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.
- Erdman, David V., annot. *The Illuminated Blake*. London: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Gleckner, Robert F. *Blake and Spenser*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.

*The Holy Bible*, Authorized Version (1611). New York, American Bible Society, 1967.

Keynes, Geoffrey, comp. and annot. *Engravings by William Blake: The Separate Plates*. Dublin: 1956.

—. *Drawings of William Blake*. New York: Dover, 1970.

Milton, John. *The Poems of John Milton*. Ed. John Carey and Alistair Fowler. London: Longmans, Green, 1968.

Pinto, Vivian de Sola, ed. *Studies in the Poetry and Art of William Blake*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1957.

Raine, Kathleen. *Blake and Tradition*. 2 vols. Bollingen Series Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968.

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works*. Ed. Peter Alexander. London: Collins, 1951.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. A. C. Hamilton. London: Longman Group, 1977.

Swedenborg, Emmanuel. *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Love and Wisdom*. Trans. Clifford and Doris H. Harley. London: Swedenborg Society, 1987.

Tarr, Rodger L. "The Eagle' versus 'The Mole': The Wisdom of Virginity in *Comus* and *The Book of Thel*." *Blake Studies* 3 (1971): 187-94.

Taylor, Irene. "Blake's *Comus* Designs." *Blake Studies* 4 (1972): 45-80.

Wagenknecht, David. *Blake's Night*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1973.

Werner, Bette Charlotte. *Blake's Vision of the Poetry of Milton*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1986.

<sup>1</sup> Butlin 1: 373-74. The "Thomas" set of *Comus* illustrations is now in the collection of the Huntington Library in San Marino, CA. Blake executed a second set for Thomas Butts c. 1815; this series is in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, MA.

<sup>2</sup> Butlin 1: 90-91.

<sup>3</sup> Erdman suggests "a beginning date of 1791 or later, for the inscribing of the Songs" and a terminal date of late October 1792. (*The Notebook of William Blake*, page 7 of the editorial preface).

<sup>4</sup> The sketch on page 102 of the Notebook was not used by Blake in this form in any other extant composition. It is part of a series of illustrations of *Paradise Lost* interspersed among designs for the emblem book *The Gates of Paradise*. Blake's so-called "Milton Gallery" is dated by F. W. Bateson (105) c. 1790-91. See Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (437-39). (Butlin 1: 104; compare with the earliest representation of Adam and Eve, 2: pl. 111, 1: 40). The drawing in the Notebook is reproduced as no. 14 in Keynes (1970).

<sup>5</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 20, E 42.

<sup>6</sup> The last two lines of "The Angel" were taken up by Blake from the ending he had devised to the long first draft of "Infant Sorrow," already written into the Notebook some pages earlier (E 794, 797-99). They there conclude a poem, intended to encompass human life from birth to old age, which also emphasizes the self-defeating consequences of society's hypocritically repressive attitudes towards sexuality.

<sup>7</sup> *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 7.11, E 50. Sketches for the designs finally etched with the text of this work appear in various parts of Blake's Notebook, suggesting that this illuminated book (dated 1793 on its title page) was in the making during the same period as the *Songs of Experience*. (See page 49 of Erdman's preface to the facsimile.)

<sup>8</sup> This engraving, executed after Fuseli's design entitled *Falsa ad Coelum mittunt Insomnia Manes*, is reproduced as pl. XXXV in Keynes (1956); and in Bindman as pl. 80. The banquet scene in the later *Comus* series is reproduced by Butlin in 2: pl. 628. (My reading of the significance of the elephant-headed figure in the *Comus* series does not preclude Pamela Dunbar's suggestion [24] that it represents the vice of Gluttony.)

<sup>9</sup> See note 16 below regarding the dating of *The Book of Thel*.

<sup>10</sup> Bette Charlotte Werner explains the presence of a mysterious female driving a team of serpents in the sky in Blake's

fourth *Comus* illustration (in both series, the Attendant Spirit addressing the Brothers) by identifying her with the moon-goddess Diana, "represented as a severe and uncompromising guardian of chastity" (31).

<sup>11</sup> Compare as well the Lady's soliloquy:

O welcome pure-eyed Faith,  
white-handed Hope,  
Thou hovering angel girl with golden  
wings,  
And thou unblemished form of Chastity

...  
... [I] now believe  
That he, the Supreme Good . . .  
Would send a glistening guardian if need  
were  
To keep my life and honour unassailed.

Comus 212-18

See my discussion below of the Cloud in *The Book of Thel*.

<sup>12</sup> Blake first sketched this design as one of his "Emblem" series, numbering it 42, on page 65 of the Notebook (illus. 7). In the original the "angel" has no wings and is obviously an importunate infant, possibly the same who is being lifted up by the hair from what looks like a cabbage-patch in the emblem-design on an earlier page of the Notebook (illus. 6). The latter eventually became pl. 1 of the 1793 series *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, entitled "I found him beneath a Tree" (E 32). Blake evidently perceived a different application for "Emblem 42," although the themes of the two Notebook designs are related. "I found him beneath a Tree" refers to the prudish fiction that mothers found their babies in cabbage-patches, an answer supplied to children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when they asked where babies came from. The "witless woe," frigidity and fear of the "maiden queen" of "The Angel" seem a likely development from an upbringing of this kind.

<sup>13</sup> "Introduction." *Songs of Experience* 1.16, E 18. (The plate of "The Angel" is reproduced in Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 83.)

<sup>14</sup> *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 6.8-10, 16, E 49.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Erdman points out that Blake's poem "Let the Brothels of Paris be opened . . ." started on page 99 of his Notebook, satirizes the same passage (*Prophet Against Empire* 184).

<sup>16</sup> Blake began to etch *The Book of Thel*, the earliest of his "prophetic books," in 1789 (according to the title page). Erdman

notes that pl. 6, carrying the final section of the poem, and the plate bearing "Thel's Motto," "are later than other plates of *Thel* in style of lettering . . . Hence [plate 6] may be a revised version of the poem's conclusion" (*Illuminated Blake* 40). Kathleen Raine (72-75) believes that there are "unmistakable allusions" in *The Book of Thel* to Porphyry's Neoplatonic symbolism in his treatise on Homer's *Cave of the Nymphs*, which Blake may have derived from Thomas Taylor's translation published in 1788; and also that Blake drew in the final section of the poem on Taylor's *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, published in 1790.

<sup>17</sup> S. Foster Damon was the first modern critic to recognize the link between *Comus* and *The Book of Thel*, in his 1957 article "Blake and Milton." Rodger L. Tarr perceives Thel as a kind of "negation" of Milton's doctrine concerning the wisdom of virginity.

<sup>18</sup> "The vales of Har" (from Blake's earlier poem *Trial* 2.4, E 277) offer scenes of pastoral serenity. Though apparently associated with primal innocence, they prove ultimately to be a setting for the condition of senility, or a form of arrested emotional development. However, see note 52 for a different critical view.

<sup>19</sup> *The Faerie Queene* 3.4.38.8-9. See the discussion below of the significance of the "sunny" flocks tended by Thel's sisters. Although my own reading of the poem takes a somewhat different line from hers, I do agree with Kathleen Raine's emphasis (1: 106) on this and other parallels between Blake's poem and Spenser's "Garden of Adonis," and with her assertion that "Mutability is *Thel's* theme, as it was Spenser's" (1: 100).

Further Spenserian sources for *The Book of Thel*, employed by Blake in a "contrary" spirit, are explored by Robert F. Gleckner (31-45 and 287-302). Gleckner demonstrates persuasively that in *Thel* Blake parodies Spenserian and Petrarchan "sublimations of the senses and desire" (32), both in the *Amoretti* and in the figure of Alma in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*. Gleckner also relates Thel's wish "to die because she is of no 'use'" (293) especially to the encounter between Spenser's Redcrosse Knight and Despaire in Book 1, showing that "*Thel* is a severe attack upon the underpinnings of Spenser's Book I and the language in which it is couched" (288).

<sup>20</sup> S. Foster Damon (1965), noting that Thel does not reappear in any other of Blake's writings, commented disarmingly that she is "far too nice a girl to fit in amongst Blake's furious elementals" (401). Damon speculated that Blake's account of

Thel may have been an allegorized narrative woven about a miscarriage, or the premature birth and death of an infant, perhaps Blake's own child.

<sup>21</sup> David Wagenknecht comments on Thel's flight back "unhindered till she came into the vales of Har" that "of course this last line of the poem represents a failure," but adds that Blake may mean by it "that Thel can return, at will, to however uninspired a condition . . . in short, that she is still a virgin ([though there are] indications that she will not remain one forever), but a wiser one than when she began" (162).

<sup>22</sup> Concerning Blake's "idea of pastoral," Wagenknecht writes that "in terms of the *Songs* [of *Innocence and Experience*] the idea of the pastoral had emerged as the vehicle for conveying Blake's ambiguous and agonized approach to the problem of 'Generation'" (5). This view is congenial to my own approach to *The Book of Thel*, about which Wagenknecht adds that its nature is best appreciated "via the pastoral ironies and ambiguities of the *Songs*" (148).

<sup>23</sup> Wagenknecht describes the story of Venus and Adonis as "a primary myth for pastoralists" (2). Raine points out an allusion to Adonis concealed in the title page emblem of *The Book of Thel*

The flowers, from whose centers spring little lovers in amorous pursuit and flight, are pasqueflowers, *anemonepulsatilla* . . . The anemone is the flower of Adonis, into which he was, according to tradition, metamorphosed. . . . (1: 105)

She describes these flowers on the title page as an allusion to the theme of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, adding that "the association of the flower with Easter (*pasque*) is itself significant" (1: 105).

<sup>24</sup> *The Faerie Queene* 3.6.43-49.

<sup>25</sup> In *Paradise Lost* 1.446-52, a river called "Adonis" is named with reference to the annual rites of the fertility god Thammuz. In a gesture appropriate to his conception of Thel, Blake has feminized the name to "Adona."

<sup>26</sup> Irene Tayler notes Blake's emphasis on the theme of "narcissicism" in his first series of *Comus* illustrations. See especially 71-78 of her essay. Bette Charlotte Werner differentiates between Milton's perception of Sabrina as an agent of grace, and Blake's reading of Milton's imagery in *Comus* 837-39. Blake, Werner says, perceives that "Sabrina's restoration, her sea-change, to immortality has been accomplished, not through the paralysis of virginity but through the opening of her senses" (35).

<sup>27</sup> This is the first appearance in Blake's writings of the Zoa of the passions called "Luvah" (the name is a version of "lover"); probably the earliest mention of any of the Zoas. Blake seems here to attribute to Luvah the properties of a sun-god, although in *The Four Zoas* Luvah's appropriation to himself of the "Steeds of Light" is treated as a usurpation of the rights of Urizen, Zoa of the Reason, who has charge of them in the Eternal condition of Man (*FZ* 5.65.5-8, E 344). Kathleen Raine derives this passage of *Thel* from the "aubade" of Act II of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*.

Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings  
And Phoebus 'gins arise  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chalic'd flow'rs that lies . . .

(Raine, 1: 169)

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, *The Four Zoas* 7.83.12-16, E 358.

<sup>29</sup> In Blake's illumination on pl. 4, the Cloud has the form of a young man, almost naked but with floating drapery flying from his body (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 38). Blake's figure of Antamon in *Europe* 14.15-20 (E 65-66) seems to be a development of Thel's Cloud.

<sup>30</sup> The mother of *Comus* is Circe, "daughter of the Sun" (*Comus* 46-57).

<sup>31</sup> Compare the teaching of the Mother in "The Little Black Boy" 9-12:

Look on the rising sun: there God does  
live,  
And gives his light and gives his heat  
away;  
And flowers and trees and beasts and  
men receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday  
. . . .  
(*Songs of Innocence*, E 9)

<sup>32</sup> Blake inscribed and illustrated these lines on page 36 of the Notebook, and experimented with another version of the same emblem on page 12. His water color illustrations to *Comus* actually show the Lady "root-bound," seated in the knotty root of an oak-tree, both at the time when *Comus* finds her (illus. 12) and after the incursion of her two brothers has set *Comus* and his train to flight. Butlin reproduces the relevant paintings in 2: pls. 616, 622, 624, 626, and 630. Tayler comments on the Lady's "rooty chair" on page 53 of her essay.

<sup>33</sup> "This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, c. 1810, E 555).

<sup>34</sup> See note 19 above for this reference to Spenser's "Garden of Adonis."

<sup>35</sup> Raine's interpretation of the theme of *Thel* as "a debate between the Neoplatonic and alchemical philosophies" (1: 99), of Plotinus and Porphyry on the one hand and Paracelsus on the other, dwells especially upon its "watry" imagery, which is "appropriate to the 'watery' world of generation of the naiads and their ever-flowing streams, to the 'moist' souls who attract to themselves the hylic envelope" (1: 108) ("... the moist envelope of the soul, the generated body, [which is] called a 'grave' because in it the soul is dead from eternity, or a 'bed,' as the place of the soul's sleep" [1: 109]).

<sup>36</sup> Blake wrote out the first three lines of this passage beneath a sketch of an emblem on page 30 of the Notebook. See Butlin 1: 90 ("Emblem 12"). (The design was used in a slightly modified form on the title page of his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.)

<sup>37</sup> Milton's primary sense was "folded," which gives the current English word "pleated." He also offers the undercurrent of meaning that relates the rainbow to the "plighting" of God's covenant with Noah.

<sup>38</sup> The "Antamon" of *Europe* is likewise "prince of the pearly dew" (*Europe* 14.15, E 65).

<sup>39</sup> Chrysogone (in *The Faerie Queene* 3.6.3ff) was the mother of Belphoebe and Amoret, twin daughters born "of the wombe of Morning dew" (3.6.3.1), miraculously begotten "through influence of th'heavens fruitfull ray" (6.2). Chrysogone is said to have conceived them while sleeping in the sun:

The sunne-beames bright vpon her body  
playd,  
Being through former bathing mollifide,  
And pierst into her wombe, where they  
embayd

With so sweet sence and secret power  
vnspide,  
That in her pregnant flesh they shortly  
fructifide. (3.6.7.5-9)

<sup>40</sup> Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 38.

<sup>41</sup> Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 268.

<sup>42</sup> This sketch appears on page 68 of the Notebook; see Butlin 1: 97.

<sup>43</sup> Compare "The Clod and the Pebble": "Love seeketh not Itself to please, / Nor for itself hath any care, / But for another gives its ease . . . So sang a little Clod of Clay / Trodden with the cattle's feet . . ." (*Songs of Experience*, E 19).

<sup>44</sup> The sketches of royal tombs done in Westminster Abbey during the period 1774-77 are among Blake's earliest extant drawings. Butlin 1: 1-14, 2: pls. 1-47.

<sup>45</sup> On page 58 of the Notebook, Blake made a sketch which may be an illustration to *Comus* 350-54.

<sup>46</sup> Wagenknecht relates Thel's concern about transiency to her "sexual anxiety," commenting that "She wants to sleep 'the sleep of death' (so long as it comes gently), and her sexual misgivings are deflected into concern for the fading of other innocents and into the imagery of God walking in his Garden in the evening time" (155).

<sup>47</sup> Rodger L. Tarr proposes this view (193).

<sup>48</sup> Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 14: 7.

<sup>49</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 14, E 49.

<sup>50</sup> Wagenknecht (121) discusses this motif as it appears in both the last plate of *Thel* and in pl. 11 of *America*, relating it to similar motifs in the "Lyca" poems of the *Songs*. He restates the questions it raises (158-59), but finds no final answers.

<sup>51</sup> *The Faerie Queene* 3.6.39.1.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Paradise Lost* 10.92-99:

Now was the sun in western cadence low  
From noon, and gentle airs due at their  
hour  
To fan the earth now waked, and usher in  
The evening cool when he from wrath  
more cool  
Came the mild judge and intercessor both  
To sentence man: the voice of God they  
heard  
Now walking in the garden, by soft  
winds  
Brought to their ears, while day  
declined. . . .

Wagenknecht, while citing the evidence from *Tiriel* for "the usual view that Thel unambiguously retreats from life at the end of her poem" (151), argues that "Thel's return to the 'vales of Har' from the grave which the matron Clay has shown her in a moment of vision cannot be construed as a return to an unreal Beulah, but only as a return to ordinary fallen existence, an ambiguous retreat, perhaps, from both the horror of the grave and from the passionate intensity of her response to that horror" (150). Wagenknecht's suggestion, which is consonant with his reading of *Thel*, implies that Thel's longing for "gentle" experience (1.12-14, E 3) may be a rejection of the commitment to romantic "intensity" urged, for instance, in Blake's poem "Day," in which the sun of creativity arises with "wrath increast . . . Crownd with warlike fires & raging desires" (3-5, E 473)—an obvious "contrary" to the "judge and intercessor" who comes as the sun sets, without wrath "to sentence man" to a life depleted of visionary experience in a fallen world.

<sup>53</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 27, E 45; *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 8.10, E 51; *The Four Zoas* 2.34.80, E 324.

## A Relief Etching of Blake's Virgil Illustrations

by Robert N. Essick

The discovery of what purports to be a previously unknown work by a major poet or artist provides a variety of pleasures. Something akin to the sublime can strike the devotee on first hearing or seeing—surprise, wonder, fascination. Pronouncements based on instinctual connoisseurship soon follow. Doubters take equal relish in a dismissive sneer and a Shakespearean comment on those taken in ("What fools these mortals be"). If the now controversial object is on the market—and particularly if it enters that last refuge of unabashed capitalism, the auction room—the true believers are challenged to put their money where their opinions are. Next the scholars, if allowed access, take command. Those who think they have convincing arguments for an attribution proceed rapidly into print, ever fearful that the debunkers will respond with even more compelling arguments. A recently discovered print (illus. 1), immediately identifiable as a version of four of Blake's illustrations to Ambrose Philips' "Imitation of Eclogue I" in Robert John Thornton's school Virgil of 1821, has already proceeded through much of the process outlined above. What follows is an attempt to carry the print into the penultimate stage and argue for its authenticity as a work designed, executed, printed, and hand-corrected by William Blake.

In the late summer or early fall of 1990, a member of a Venezuelan family brought to Sotheby's New York a copy of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, 1863. Although still in the original publisher's binding, the copy was extra-illustrated with the Virgil print and several of Blake's rarest graphic works, "The Chaining of Orc," "The Man Sweeping the Interpreter's Parlour," and well-printed impressions



1. Illustrations to Thornton's Virgil, designs 2-5, executed as a relief etching. Image 14.3 x 8.5 cm., plate mark 14.6 x 9 cm., printed on unwatermarked wove sheet 15.9 x 9.9 cm. Size of each vignette, top to bottom: 3.6 x 8.1 cm., 2.9 x 8.3 cm., 3.4 x 8.5 cm., 3.8 x 8.5 cm. Printed in black ink with hand tinting in black. Essick collection.

## ILLUSTRATIONS OF IMITATION OF ECLOGUE I.



COLINET.



THENOT.



COLINET and THENOT.



COLINET.

2. Illustrations to Thornton's Virgil, designs 2-5, as published in the 1821 edition. Wood engravings printed in black. Size of each vignette, top to bottom: 3.7 x 7.5 cm., 3.2 x 7.5 cm., 3.2 x 7.4 cm., 3.5 x 7.5 cm. Essick collection.

of ten plates from *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*.<sup>1</sup> The vendor indicated that the volumes had been acquired in their extra-illustrated state from a British diplomat after World War II, but the presence of "The Chaining of Orc" hints at an American origin. Previous to this recent discovery, there were only two recorded impressions of the "Orc" print, one now in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and an untraced impression exhibited at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1880 (no. 84 in the catalogue, from the collection of Mrs. Alexander Gilchrist) and again at the same institution in 1891 (no. 10 in the catalogue, from the collection of E. W. Hooper).<sup>2</sup> The suspicion that the new impression might be the same as the one exhibited in Boston is buttressed by the presence, in volume two of the extra-illustrated Gilchrist, of Horace E. Scudder's essay, "William Blake Painter and Poet," clipped from the New York magazine, *Scribner's Monthly* 20 (1880): 225-40. The article begins with a reference to the 1880 Boston exhibition and was apparently prompted by it. Yet even if these speculations on provenance are wrong, the very fact that the Virgil print was accompanied by genuine Blake prints of great rarity places it in good company. Whoever had access to what is now only the second extant impression of "The Chaining of Orc" to add to his copy of Gilchrist is more likely to have also acquired a unique work by Blake than someone without such demonstrated abilities as a collector. If the Virgil print had arrived singly, it would be a slightly more suspicious object.

Nancy Bialler of Sotheby's Print Department, an expert in the graphic arts in her own right, immediately sought out professional opinions concerning the authenticity of the Virgil print. One British Blake expert was sent a photograph of the work and quickly pronounced it a fake. Several others, including G. E. Bentley, Jr., Donald

Heald, Justin G. Schiller, Jenijoy La Belle, Thomas V. Lange, and myself, all tended to believe in the print's authenticity upon first inspection of the object itself. In her essay on the extra-illustrated Gilchrist, "William Blake Discoveries," *Sotheby's Preview* (April/May 1991): 16-17, Bialler reproduced the Virgil print, noted that "expert opinion is divided" as to its attribution, that "it is difficult to fit the . . . print into the sequence of other works related to the Virgil project," but that its "innovative technique [on which more later] strongly suggests the hand of Blake." To sell the prints, Sotheby's disbound all but the *Gates of Paradise* plates (plus an inconsequential impression of Blake's plate after Thomas Stothard illustrating Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, 1783) and offered them in four lots in their 9-11 May 1991 sale of "Old Master, 19th and 20th Century and Contemporary Prints." The Virgil appeared as lot 9, accompanied by a reproduction in the catalogue. Because of the differing views about the print's authenticity, Sotheby's found it prudent to describe the work as "Attributed to William Blake" and noted that, "although expert opinion is divided, we believe this print should be attributed to Blake." Fortunately, the "Attributed" label held down the bidding that sent its companions to record levels and I was able to acquire the print through the agency of Donald Heald.

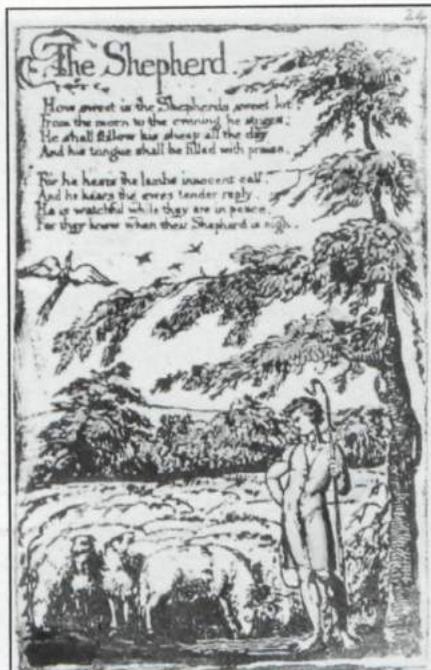
By comparing the newly-discovered print to the well-known wood engravings of the same basic Virgil illustrations (illus. 2), one can quickly perceive many small, and several large, differences in design. All the new vignettes show more image on their sides, much as in proofs of the wood blocks before they were cut down for publication in Thornton's volumes (illus. 3). Yet, the new print does not follow the proofs in every respect, for the latter show a bit more image on the left sides of all four vignettes and a bit less on the right side of the bottom vignette. Similarly, the width of each vignette in the new



3. Illustrations to Thornton's *Virgil*, designs 2-5, proof of the wood engravings before separation and trimming for publication. Size of each vignette, top to bottom: 4.1 x 8.6 cm., 3.5 x 8.6 cm., 3.5 x 8.6 cm., 3.8 x 8.6 cm. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



4. *Songs of Innocence* (1789), copy B, frontispiece. Relief etching with hand coloring, 11 x 7 cm. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.



5. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), copy BB, "The Shepherd." Relief etching, hand tinting in black and gray wash, 11.1 x 6.9 cm. European private collection; photo courtesy of Christie's New York.



6. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), copy Z, frontispiece to *Experience*. Relief etching with hand coloring, 11 x 7 cm. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.



7. *Songs of Innocence* (1789), copy B, "The Lamb." Relief etching with hand coloring, 11.9 x 7.7 cm. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.

print lies between those of published and proof impressions of the wood engravings (see measurements in captions for illus. 1-3). Other design variations are listed for each vignette below:

*Top vignette.* Left arm and hand position of the figure on the left (the older shepherd, Thenot) differs from the wood engraving. The younger shepherd, Colinet, wears a transparent body stocking, not the high waisted, knee-length gown of the wood engraving. Indeed, we might think him nude except for the lines indicating mid-calf cuffs and a sleeve on his left arm. There are a great many more rays of sunlight and more foliage on the tree in the new print; a vine (ivy?) wraps itself about the lower reaches of the tree trunk (no vine in the wood engraving). A wedge-shaped cloud extends from behind Colinet's head toward Thenot only in the new version. The left-most sheep is more clearly a ram in the new print, but the single sheep clearly pictured between Colinet and the tree in the wood engraving is not present, or at most only hinted at, in the new print. The background landscape is divided into two hills in both versions, but the right hill is forward of the left in the wood engraving and just the reverse in the new print. As in the other three vignettes, Thenot's gown is more diaphanous than in the wood engravings and we consequently see more of his lineaments.

*Second vignette from top.* The new print lacks the cottage roof in the background, center right, of the wood engraving. The lines that could be easily mistaken for part of the earthen bank, lower right in the wood engraving, clearly delineate a dog, curled up and apparently sleeping, as in the preliminary drawing (illus. 13, middle). Branches of the tree on the left extend over the sun in the new print, which again shows many minor differences in vegetation and the outline of the distant hills. Colinet wears his body stocking, as in the top design, but the most dramatic difference in the entire

group is in the posture of Thenot. In the wood engraving, we see the lower half of his body from the side; in the new print, his whole body is turned toward us with right knee raised to his waist and his unnaturally elongated left leg extended far to the right. His right hand is lower than in the wood engraving and his left arm reaches to the right rather than bending upward at the elbow. The sheep closest to Thenot has her head turned to the right (to the left in the wood engraving); the sheep seen in profile above Colinet's right leg is not present, or only hinted at, in the wood engraving. Both tree trunks are of much larger diameter in the new print (compare to the proof of the wood engraving, illus. 3).

*Second vignette from bottom.* Colinet again wears his body stocking and his crook rests against his left side and shoulder (more vertical, and separated from his body, in the wood engraving). The few, easily overlooked, lines below his left hand in the wood engraving clearly delineate his Panpipe in the new print. The sheep nearest Colinet holds his head higher and is more intently looking at the man than in the wood engraving. Thenot holds no crook and the tree against which he leans is more dramatically twisted in the new print. The sheep on the hill are less organized than the group marching along in almost military order in the wood engraving.

*Bottom vignette.* The outlines of clouds and diagonal dotted lines around the tree, perhaps representing rain, appear only in the new print. Both may be responses to the "low'ring sky" and "storms" mentioned in the passage illustrated. Colinet's jump-suit now sports a V neckline with a rolled collar, a fashion touch perhaps hinted at by a few lines in the previous design. He lacks the shepherd's crook, so prominently displayed in the wood engraving, thereby freeing his left hand for a pointing gesture with index finger extended. The blasted tree to which he points lacks the fissure ("thunder-scar"



8. *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826), pl. 1. Line engraving, 18.3 x 15 cm., pre-publication proof state 5. Essick collection.



10. *The Propbet Isaiah Foretelling the Crucifixion and the Ascension.* Verso pencil sketch, approx. 12.5 x 7.5 cm., c. 1821. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



9. *America* (1793), copy I, pl. 10. Relief and white-line etching, detail of top design, approx. 12 x 16 cm. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.



11. "Deaths Door." White-line etching with hand-tinting in black and gray washes, 18.6 x 11.7 cm. Etched in 1805 as an illustration to Robert Blair, *The Grave*. Essick collection.

in the text) of the wood engraving. The sheep sit rather than stand, with a ram on the right. In the text illustrated by the previous vignette, the lambs "require their absent dams." In the bottom wood engraving, they are rejoined, with one lamb on its knees to suckle from its mother. The new print lacks this sentimental motif, not called for by Colinet's speech illustrated by the bottom vignette.

The major design variants all have precedents in Blake's work of the same and earlier periods. Colinet's see-through body stocking was first worn by his fellow shepherd in the *Songs of Innocence* (illus. 4-5). In the *Experience* frontispiece (illus. 6), we find the V neckline and rolled collar of the bottom vignette, as well as an ivy-like vine similar to the one also climbing a tree trunk in the top vignette. Colinet's pointing arm and finger remind one of the same gesture used by the adult male in the second plate of "The Echoing Green." The sheep looking so

attentively at Colinet in the second vignette from the bottom is very similar to his predecessor responding to the child in "The Lamb" of *Songs of Innocence* (illus. 7). The variant disposition of the sheep in the bottom vignette resembles the flocks in the first (illus. 8) and last of the Job engravings, first executed as water colors c. 1805-06.<sup>3</sup> The powerful figure of Thenot in the second Virgil vignette from the top has a long and distinguished history in Blake's works. The basic arrangement of his legs, and in particular the prominent right knee, first appears in a small and crude form on pl. 3 of *All Religions are One* (c. 1788).<sup>4</sup> In 1793, this figure became the threatening but majestic Urizen on pl. 10 of *America* (illus. 9). The closest parallel with Thenot is contemporary with the Virgil illustrations, *The Prophet Isaiah Foretelling the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Butlin 773), designed for a wood engraving never executed. In a variant preliminary pencil sketch (Butlin 772, illus. 10), Blake presents virtually the same leg posture as in the newly discovered Virgil illustration. Although the arm and hand gestures differ, both figures express a sense of patriarchal wisdom and visionary capabilities barely suggested by the much weaker figure of Thenot in the wood-engraved Virgil design (illus. 2-3). The major design variants in the new Virgil print—Thenot in the second vignette from the top, the sheep in the bottom vignette, and the clothing of Colinet in all four designs—are more typically Blakean than their very different renderings in the wood engravings.

A skeptic might argue that the variants in the new print are the sign of a pastiche manufactured by a clever forger who has produced designs that look more like some of Blake's best known work than do the wood engravings. Yet I do not think that such an argument is persuasive. When given the commission to design illustrations for an "imitation" of Virgil's pastorals, Blake is likely to have returned to the pictorial repertoire developed years

earlier for the illustration of his own pastoral poems. Blake was probably printing copy V of *Songs of Innocence* for James Vine in 1820, and *America* copy O for John Linnell in this same period, and thus the precursor designs for the Virgil illustrations would have been recently before Blake's attention. We see much the same sort of borrowings—for instance, the old man entering a tomb from *America* pl. 14—in Blake's illustrations for Robert Blair's *The Grave* (illus. 11), executed quickly for a commercial project in 1805. None of the variant motifs in the Virgil print are copied mechanically from known Blake designs; rather, they show an evolution within basic compositional paradigms of the sort produced by an original artist. The many minor variants without clear iconographic significance also evince the spontaneous proliferation of difference within the work of an artist for whom every act of execution was a chance for re-conceptualization. It would take a very clever forger indeed to capture not only Blake's style, but also his sensibility and typical working habits, with such success.

The analysis of design variants leaves at least some lingering doubts. For me, these are stilled by a consideration of the newly-discovered print's material and technical features. Blank sheets of early nineteenth-century paper are still to be had, particularly if one is willing to cut the flyleaves from old books, but at least we should expect the right sort of paper in any impression from Blake's own hand. He very rarely used anything other than wove paper for his prints. As Sotheby's auction catalogue points out, the new Virgil print is on a "Whatman-type" wove paper very similar, perhaps even identical, to several of Blake's works of the early 1820s. Its texture—smooth and fairly hard—and thickness of 0.19 mm. match what we find in *The Ghost of Abel*, both copy C in the Huntington Library and the impression of pl. 1 in my collection, and the first title page to the Genesis illuminated manuscript, showing a

Whatman 1821 watermark, also in the Huntington. In contrast, Whatman papers of 1825 (the Job engravings), 1826 (the second Genesis title page), 1831, and 1832 (posthumous copy h of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*) are all slightly thicker, at 0.21 mm.

The technique used to create the new Virgil print is the most convincing single piece of evidence for its attribution to Blake. It is unmistakably a relief etching, executed with great skill.<sup>5</sup> Some of the smaller relief plateaus, when viewed under low-power magnification, are indented slightly into the paper—a sure sign of relief printing. The slight platemark, a shadow line of the outer edge of the relief etching border, wiped almost clean of ink in this impression, is typical of Blake's technique and also reveals that all four vignettes were etched on a single piece of metal—very probably copper, since a softer metal such as pewter would not be suitable for such delicate work. The necessity for this border in relief etching, created by the wall of wax containing the acid, may have forced the vignettes to present less image on their left sides than what we see in proofs of the wood engravings (illus. 3). The plate shows no evidence of white-line etching or engraving, for even the stipple-like effects on the sheep and landscape background were created through the positive, black-line process of relief etching alone. We see a similar refinement on Blake's basic technique in the concluding vignette to *The Ghost of Abel* (illus. 12)—compare, for example, the stippling on the lower figure's back with the sheep in the top vignette. This technique, combined with what are for a relief etching extremely thin lines, permitted the artist to create a work more delicate than the wood engravings and give to faces and gestures more detailed expressiveness. I know of no forgeries or facsimiles of Blake's relief etchings that even approach the artistry of this work. One can still prefer the wood engravings for their brooding intensity, but it is hard to conceive of anyone other than

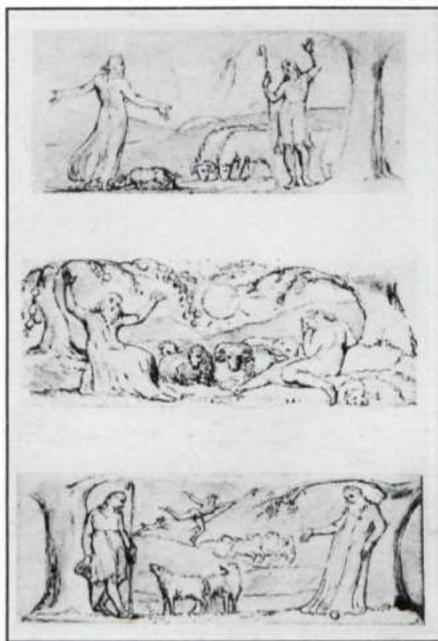
the inventor of relief etching handling the process with such consummate skill. If the new Virgil print is the work of a forger, he has surpassed all but a few of Blake's own relief etchings in technical excellence.

The characteristics of the specific impression at issue indicate that Blake was its printer. The thick and somewhat grainy ink with reticulated patches is typical of his work and distinguishes this print from Frederick Tatham's posthumous impressions of Blake's relief plates. Lithographs and zincographs, used to facsimile Blake's illuminated books in the nineteenth century, are more thinly inked and have smoother surfaces. Their slight reticulations visible under magnification are much more evenly distributed and consistent than what we find in the Virgil relief etching. The wiped etching border also suggests Blake's hand, for Tatham inked and printed the borders. But it is the subtle handwork on the new Virgil print that speaks most eloquently for an attribution to Blake. Several areas in the print have been touched with a black wash almost indistinguishable from the printed image and perhaps executed in the same pigment, suspended in diluted glue, used for the ink. All six trees bear slight touches, with a large patch just above Thenot's raised right hand in the second vignette from the top which might even be visible in the accompanying reproduction. We can find a similar use of hand-tinting in black to improve on the relief etchings in copy BB of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (see illus. 5) and on the unique impression of the white-line etching of "Deaths Door" (illus. 11). In the latter case, the handwork may have been added to compensate for slight weaknesses in the printed image and make it more acceptable to a commercial publisher. A similar motive may lie behind the tinting on the Virgil relief etching, so typical of Blake's own hand and not to be found in either posthumous impressions of the illuminated books or forgeries of them.



12. *The Ghost of Abel* (1822), copy A, pl. 2. Relief etching, 16.7 x 12.4 cm. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.

A necessary step in a successful argument for attribution is to fit the new discovery into the compositional sequence of the project to which it supposedly belongs. As Bialler points out, this would seem a difficult task in the case of the Virgil relief etching. The major stumbling block is that Blake's preliminary drawings (Butlin 769) for the series generally accord with the wood engravings, not the relief etching (see illus. 13).<sup>6</sup> There is no vine in the drawing for the top vignette and Colinet holds his crook away from his body in the drawing for the vignette second from the bottom. Colinet wears his knee-length gown, and Thenot his less revealing costume, in all three drawings. The older shepherd and the sheep in the drawing for the second vignette from the top are arranged as in the wood engraving (illus. 2-3). Two lines in the drawing hint at the cottage roof in the middle distance, as in the wood engraving. However, the position of Thenot's left arm and hand in the drawing for the top vignette is midway between the relief etching and the wood engraving, while the absence of Thenot's crook in the drawing for the second vignette from the bottom



13. Virgil preliminary drawings (Butlin 769.1-3). Top: *Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet*. Pencil, pen, and gray wash, 4 x 9 cm., for the second cut (top vignette in the relief etching). Keynes Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum. Middle: *Thenot and Colinet Converse Seated Beneath Two Trees*. Pencil, pen, and sepia wash, 3.5 x 9.5 cm., for the third cut (vignette second from the top in the relief etching). Untraced since 1939. Bottom: *Colinet and Thenot, with Shepherds' Crooks, Leaning against Trees*. Pencil, pen, and sepia wash, 3.6 x 9.3 cm., for the fourth cut (vignette second from the bottom in the relief etching). Collection of Arthur Vershbow.

matches the relief-etched version. A basic assumption in determining design sequences is that drawings precede all etched or engraved versions. Yet the extant Virgil drawings would appear to be transitional between the relief etching and the wood engravings, and in major design variants closer to the latter. How could the relief etching be the first composition in the series? The special properties of relief etching offer an explanation.

Conventional intaglio etching and engraving require the preparation of the design in a different medium, usually a drawing on paper. The image is then transferred, often by mechanical

or semi-mechanical means such as counterproofing or caulking, to the metal plate. Blake's method of relief etching allows for—indeed, promotes—initial composition directly on the metal. The drawing surface and the printing surface are one. All that is required is a loose pencil sketch like those for some of Blake's illuminated books in his Notebook (Butlin 201) or the alternative drawing for two pages from *The Book of Thel* (Butlin 218, now in the British Museum). The present absence of detailed preliminary drawings or mock-ups for the illuminated books cannot prove that Blake never made any, but surely he realized that one of the great advantages of relief etching was its direct and autographic nature, one that unites the early stages of composition and the final stages of graphic execution.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as odd as it may seem from the perspective of conventional graphics, the Virgil relief etching may very well be the first extant composition in the series, preceding both the carefully executed pen and wash drawings as well as the wood engravings. Blake probably did some pencil sketching on paper before turning to the relief etching, but no evidence of such first-steps has survived. This absence of rough preliminaries is also true of the vast majority of the relief-etched designs in the illuminated books.

Once one accepts the new Virgil print as authentic and places it first in the sequence of Virgil designs, other stages in the composing process and early accounts of responses to the designs can be seen in a new light. What follows is a retelling of the history of Blake's Virgil compositions that takes into account the existence of the relief etching.

Robert John Thornton was the physician to the family of John Linnell, Blake's great patron for his graphic works in the final nine years of his life. According to Linnell's journal, Thornton and Blake called at his home on the same day, 19 Sept. 1818, and the two men may have met on that oc-

casión.<sup>8</sup> We do not know when Thornton commissioned Blake to illustrate the 1821 edition of his Virgil, but Blake must have been well along on the project by 15 Sept. 1820 since on that day Thornton sent Linnell a proof of "Blake's Augustus" (Bentley, *Blake Records* 266), one of the intaglio prints of portrait busts Blake executed for the Virgil volumes. Whenever Blake was given the task of composing some new illustrations for Philips' version of the first eclogue, he was in a position to know the required format of his designs. The 1821 Virgil is the "Third Edition," as its title page announces. The first edition of 1812 was published without illustrations, but two years later Thornton produced a companion volume of designs, *Illustrations of the School-Virgil, in Copper-Plates, and Wood-cuts* (London: Rivington et al., 1814). These illustrations were repeated in the second edition of 1819. For the third edition, some of the earlier blocks were reprinted, including a group of four cuts (vol. I, facing p. 55, in the third edition) arranged one above the other just as in Blake's relief etching and wood engravings. The overall size of these four designs, 12.7 x 7.9 cm., is only a little smaller than Blake's relief etching. A group of five cuts in the 1814 volume, with an overall height of 15 cm., is slightly larger than Blake's work. Those involved in the production of the third edition probably knew well in advance its intended leaf size, for at 17.6 x 10.3 cm. the 1821 leaves are the same width as, and only half a centimeter taller than, the 1814 volume of illustrations.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Blake could easily have known the size and unusual format required of his illustrations well in advance of any composition and could have produced the relief etching straight away without prior use of a more conventional arrangement of his vignettes.

Blake may have thought that Thornton's commission offered a good opportunity to incorporate his innovative graphics into a commercial project, much as he had tried to do in 1805 with the white-line etching of "Deaths

Door" (illus. 11) for R. H. Cromek's letterpress edition of Blair's *Grave*. Like wood engravings, Blake's relief etchings were printed from their raised surfaces with pressure much lighter than that required of intaglio plates. It is technically possible—and Blake may have believed it was commercially viable—to lock a relief etching into a chase with type for letterpress printing, just as with a wood engraving. Blake may have also believed that Thornton was amenable to the use of innovative graphics in his book. Thornton experimented with lithography, still a new medium for book illustration in England, for some of the designs and included in volume 1 two maps "On Stone by J. Wyld" printed at "The Lithographic Press 6 Dartmouth St. West."<sup>10</sup> The title page of the 1821 Virgil indicates that it is a "Stereotyped" edition. If Blake had known this in advance, he may have thought it a likely context for his own "Stereotype," the word he uses to refer to his relief etchings on the second plate of *The Ghost of Abel* (illus. 12, lower right corner).

When Blake presented the white-line "Deaths Door" to Cromek, it was almost immediately rejected and the publisher turned to Louis Schiavonetti to execute Blake's designs as conventional intaglio etchings/engravings. The relief etching of the four Virgil vignettes—perhaps executed (again, like "Deaths Door") as a sample of Blake's intentions for the entire series of twenty designs—was probably met with a similar initial response from their intended publisher. According to Alexander Gilchrist, when the "publishers" saw Blake's prints they declared that "this man [Blake] must do no more" and that all the designs should be "re-cut by one of their regular hands. The very engravers received them with derision, crying out in the words of the critic, 'This will never do.'"<sup>11</sup> Gilchrist indicates that these opinions refer to the wood engravings, but he did not know of the existence of the relief etching

and thus may have taken responses to it as statements about the later cuts or conflated a sequence of two separate events into a single tale.<sup>12</sup> As was the case with Cromek, Thornton, his "agent" William Harrison,<sup>13</sup> or his publishers may have proclaimed that the relief etching "will never do." This was not literally and finally the case with the wood engravings, for they were indeed printed in the 1821 volume.

There were probably both technical and aesthetic reasons for the evident rejection of the Virgil relief etching. The copperplate would have to be cut into its four sections to accommodate the letterpress text printed below each wood-engraved vignette (illus. 2), a format established by the 1814 volume of designs. The resulting four plates would have to be mounted type-high for printing in a typographic press. Blake's shallow etching would have been difficult to ink rapidly without fouling the whites, a problem that may have motivated the conversion of some of Blake's *Innocence* and *Experience* copperplates into electrotypes with higher relief for printing in Gilchrist's 1863 *Life of Blake*. None of this would have been impossible, perhaps with the exception of acceptable printing quality, but it would have required journeymen printers to wrestle with an

unfamiliar medium. The aesthetic objections one can readily imagine—too crude, too unconventional—may have been accompanied by moral qualms centering on Colinet's near-nudity in all four vignettes and Thenot's buttocks in the top design. Such views are likely to have arisen since the book was intended for use by "Youtm [sic]" in "Schools" (title page). The re-costuming in the drawings and wood engravings may not have been Blake's decision, but Thornton's or his publishers'.

Unlike his precursor, Cromek, Thornton did not immediately turn to another craftsman to execute Blake's designs. One vignette present in the relief etching was re-cut in reverse on wood by a journeyman (illus. 14), but it follows Blake's drawing (illus. 13, middle) and wood engraving in the position of the sheep and the presence of the cottage while adding its own unique variants (e.g., the positions of Colinet's head and Thenot's arms). This anonymous cut was probably copied after Blake's own wood engraving, for the journeyman has left out the dog, clearly visible in the drawing but easily overlooked in Blake's cut. Blake was evidently given a second chance to participate in the project, probably after firm orders that he execute wood en-



14. Blake's Virgil illustrations, third vignette, re-cut by an anonymous journeyman. Wood engraving, 2.9 x 7.4 cm., executed c. 1820 and published by Henry Cole in *The Athenæum* (21 Jan. 1843): 65. Essick collection. Cole does not mention any other such re-engravings; but a woodblock of the second vignette, probably cut by the same hand that executed the example reproduced here, is in the Huntington Library.

gravings to match the medium of most of the other illustrations and clothe his characters in a more decorous fashion.

In contrast to relief etchings, wood engravings require reasonably detailed preliminary drawings, either on paper for subsequent transfer to the blocks or drawn directly on them. For the Virgil designs, Blake followed the first alternative, a decision that may have been prompted by the desire—or a request from Thornton—to have the drawings approved before investing all the time and labor required of wood engraving. The drawings are far less challenging to conventional sensibilities than either the relief etching or the wood engravings. One can well imagine a journeyman wood engraver turning these drawings into cuts not very different from others planned for the Virgil volumes, as was indeed the case with the re-cut design reproduced here (illus. 14) and three vignettes published in the book. As Geoffrey Keynes has pointed out, Blake's "preliminary designs gave no hint of what the final result would be."<sup>14</sup>

Blake's next step was to transfer the drawings to the wood. This he probably accomplished by making pencil tracings of the pen and wash drawings and counterproofing or caulking them from the back onto the face of the wood blocks. Both these processes will reverse the images so that impressions from the blocks will have right and left as in the drawings. Except for the first and largest design, given its own block, the vignettes were transferred four to a block, as we can see in proof impressions (illus. 3). If Thornton, his agent or publishers, had approved of the drawings, they were no doubt disappointed, perhaps even angered, by the engravings. Unlike the Virgil relief etching, in which the image is defined by black lines alone, the wood engravings are combinations of white and black lines. Other illustrations in Thornton's volumes are technically similar, but Blake's way of handling the medium is highly unconventional. The journeymen wood engravers were following

in the tradition of Thomas Bewick, whereas Blake's integrations of black and white lines grew from his own deployment of white lines in relief etchings and the technique of "Woodcut on Copper" Blake described in his Notebook and used for plates such as "Deaths Door" (illus. 11). Thornton must have found himself even worse off than he began, for Blake had presented him with prints even darker and more primitive than the relief etching. It must have been at this point that he turned to journeymen to re-cut Blake's designs, but was finally persuaded, according to Gilchrist's familiar story, by several distinguished artists to use seventeen of Blake's wood engravings. The vignettes were cut down on their sides so that they would fit the width of the book's leaves and cut apart so that letterpress text could be placed below each. Either Blake or someone else may have taken these final steps, but in either case the work was very probably done as a requirement of the publishers or printers.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of apparent impediments, the newly-discovered relief etching can be situated into the production process of the Virgil illustrations in a way that complicates, but does not contradict, the previously known record. This compatibility, combined with the design variants and the medium itself, comprises an excellent case for ascribing the work, including its printing and hand tinting, to Blake. This attribution forces some readjustments in our sense of the role of innovative graphics in Blake's career. The *Grave* project had heretofore been considered as Blake's last attempt to use his relief processes for a commercial project. We now know that Blake persisted in such efforts into the last decade of his life. Sadly, the publisher's evident reaction was much the same. Fortunately, Blake was given the chance to try his hand at wood engraving. Thanks to the remarkable survival of the relief etching, we can now enjoy four of the Virgil designs in two graphic media in which Blake's genius excelled.

I am grateful to Nancy Bialler, Martin Butlin, Thomas V. Lange, and Joseph Viscomi for their assistance with this essay.

<sup>1</sup> For details on these works and their sale, see Robert N. Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 1991," forthcoming in this journal.

<sup>2</sup> For descriptions of these impressions, see Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 90-92.

<sup>3</sup> See Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) #550.1 and 550.21 (pls. 697 and 717). Hereafter referred to as "Butlin" followed by catalogue entry number.

<sup>4</sup> Plate numbers and copy designations for Blake's illuminated books follow G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> "Relief etching" is the term generally used to name the graphic medium Blake used for most of his illuminated books. For descriptions of the basic process and the characteristics of the prints it produces, see Robert N. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 85-120, and Joseph Viscomi, *The Art of William Blake's Illuminated Prints* ([Manchester]: Manchester Etching Workshop, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> The drawing for the fifth cut (bottom vignette in the group at issue) is untraced and unrecorded.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the autographic nature of relief etching, see Viscomi, *The Art of William Blake's Illuminated Prints* 4-8.

<sup>8</sup> See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 258.

<sup>9</sup> The size given here for the 1821 leaves is based on three copies in original sheep, the binding in which the volumes appear to have been issued. I have never seen an uncut copy.

<sup>10</sup> For the documentary records indicating that Thornton planned to convert Blake's portrait busts into lithographs, see Bentley, *Blake Records* 266-67, and Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 112-13.

<sup>11</sup> Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1863) I: 273. At least parts of Gilchrist's account of the Virgil project may have been based on information supplied by Henry Cole, who wrote about Blake's wood engravings in a review of an edition of Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield, The Athenaeum* (21 Jan. 1843): 65. Cole quotes "this will never do," also cited by Gilchrist.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Gilchrist's possible ownership of the Virgil relief etching (see earlier speculations on provenance) is not incon-

sistent with her husband not knowing of the print. She continued to collect Blake after her husband's death in 1861.

<sup>13</sup> Harrison (active 1821-26) is named as Thornton's agent on the 1821 Virgil title page. The book was registered at Stationer's Hall on 12 Feb. 1821, the "Property of Willm. Harrison" (Bentley, *Blake Books* 628). Harrison may have played an important, but completely unrecorded, role in the initial rejection and eventual acceptance of Blake's Virgil illustrations.

<sup>14</sup> Keynes, introduction to *The Illustrations of William Blake for Thornton's Virgil with the First Eclogue and the Imitation by Ambrose Philips* (London: Nonesuch P, 1937) 9, rpt. in Keynes, *Blake Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 137.

<sup>15</sup> Michael J. Tolley has recently argued that Thornton welcomed Blake's wood engravings and included them in his book quite willingly; see Tolley, "Thornton's Blake Edition," *University of Adelaide Library News* 10 (1988): 4-11. Following Tolley's lead, Ted Gott has claimed that Blake trimmed the cuts himself to achieve their "further rusticizing" and make some of the vignettes "tighter and more dramatically charged." See Gott, "Eternity in an Hour: The Prints of William Blake," in Martin Butlin and Gott, *William Blake in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1989) 136. These are challenging and interesting views, but I do not find them convincing. As Joseph Viscomi has pointed out to me in correspondence, cutting an end-grain wood block is exacting work requiring a special saw. It is unlikely that a publisher would allow an amateur, such as Blake, to tackle the job since the blocks could be damaged by a single false move.

## The Chamber of Prophecy: Blake's "A Vision" (Butlin #756) Interpreted

by Christopher Heppner

Frederick Tatham has long been regarded as an unreliable witness to Blake's intentions, but his comments on the drawings that passed through his hands are difficult to ignore simply because they often represent the only information that we possess. Thus his inscriptions on the drawing known as *A Vision: The Inspiration of the Poet*<sup>1</sup> (illus. 1) have been taken as appropriate guides to its subject, and what little commentary there has been has focused on the odd spatial sense carried by the perspective of the drawing rather than on its subject.<sup>2</sup>

But Tatham's inscriptions need fuller consideration in the light of his known unreliability. In the case of this drawing they read "William Blake./ I suppose it to be a Vision/ Frederick Tatham" and "Indeed I remember a/ conversation with Mrs. Blake/ about it." I have taken the texts from Butlin's Tate Gallery catalogue, since this gives a useful indication of the fact, evident in the photograph, and noted by Butlin, that the two inscriptions are indeed separate. The note about the conversation with Mrs. Blake was obviously written in later as an afterthought, being placed under and to the side of the original inscription, which records simply the vaguest of guesses at the subject. The conversation may indeed have taken place, but it clearly did not help a great deal. We are pretty much on our own if we want to make an effort to understand the drawing.

The drawing is associated by Butlin with the Visionary Heads drawn by Blake for, and it seems usually in the presence of, John Varley.<sup>3</sup> The size of the paper used for the drawing (24.3 x

21 cm.) makes it impossible that it could have come from the now dismembered small sketchbook, which consisted of sheets of approximately 20.5 x 15.5 cm. There were also a good many drawings done on separate sheets of various sizes, and the present drawing could conceivably be one of them. As if to counter that possibility, however, Geoffrey Keynes notes that "most of the drawings remained in the collections of Varley and Linnell."<sup>4</sup> Butlin's catalogue confirms that statement by showing that in virtually every case the Visionary Heads either have a note by Varley, or come from the collections of Varley or Linnell; many demonstrate both forms of connection. The only exceptions noted by Butlin, other than the drawing under consideration here, are *Visionary Head of a Bearded Man, Perhaps Christ* (#758), which has a note by Tatham reading "one of the Heads Wm. Blake saw in Vision & drew this. attested Fred<sup>k</sup>. Tatham," and *A Visionary Head* (#759r), which has a note by Tatham that reads "one of the heads of Personages Blake used to call up & see & sketch. supposed rapidly drawn from his Vision. Frederick Tatham." Both of these came through the collections of Mrs. Blake and Tatham. In addition, there is the dubious case of #764, untraced since 1862, which Butlin suggests may in fact be identical with either #766 or #765, the former untraced since 1876, and the latter bearing an inscription that is probably by Varley. It seems that on the very rare occasions when Tatham got hold of one of the Visionary Heads, he was anxious to advertise the fact, doubtless in the belief that this

would raise the value of the drawing. His identification of the drawing discussed here with the simple statement "I suppose it to be a Vision" is a good deal less confident and specific than the notes added to the two drawings described above, and could well be read as implying considerable doubt on his part as to whether the drawing was in fact associated with the Varley series. In addition to the unusual vagueness of Tatham's note, the drawing comes from the collections of Mrs. Blake, and then Tatham, and these contain very few of the Visionary Heads.

The situation has now been complicated a little by the rediscovery of the larger Blake-Varley sketchbook, with leaves of 25.4 x 20.3 cm., bearing signs that several leaves were removed early in its history.<sup>5</sup> This is closer to the size of the present drawing, but several facts make it unlikely that the drawing comes from this sketchbook. One is that the paper size, though close, does not quite match: our drawing seems just a little too wide (21 cm.) to fit. Another is the evidence of the watermarks; Essick records that some of the leaves of the sketchbook bear an 1804 mark, while Butlin records that the drawing is on undated paper marked "RUSE & TURNERS," and gives evidence from G. E. Bentley, Jr., that paper made by that company bore dates of 1810, 1812, and 1815.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the drawing we are considering here bears no trace of the interest in physiognomy that was the starting point of the Blake-Varley sketchbook. In short, despite Butlin's association of *A Vision: The Inspiration of the Poet* with the Visionary Heads, the evidence, including that of his own meticulous catalogues, makes that association questionable.

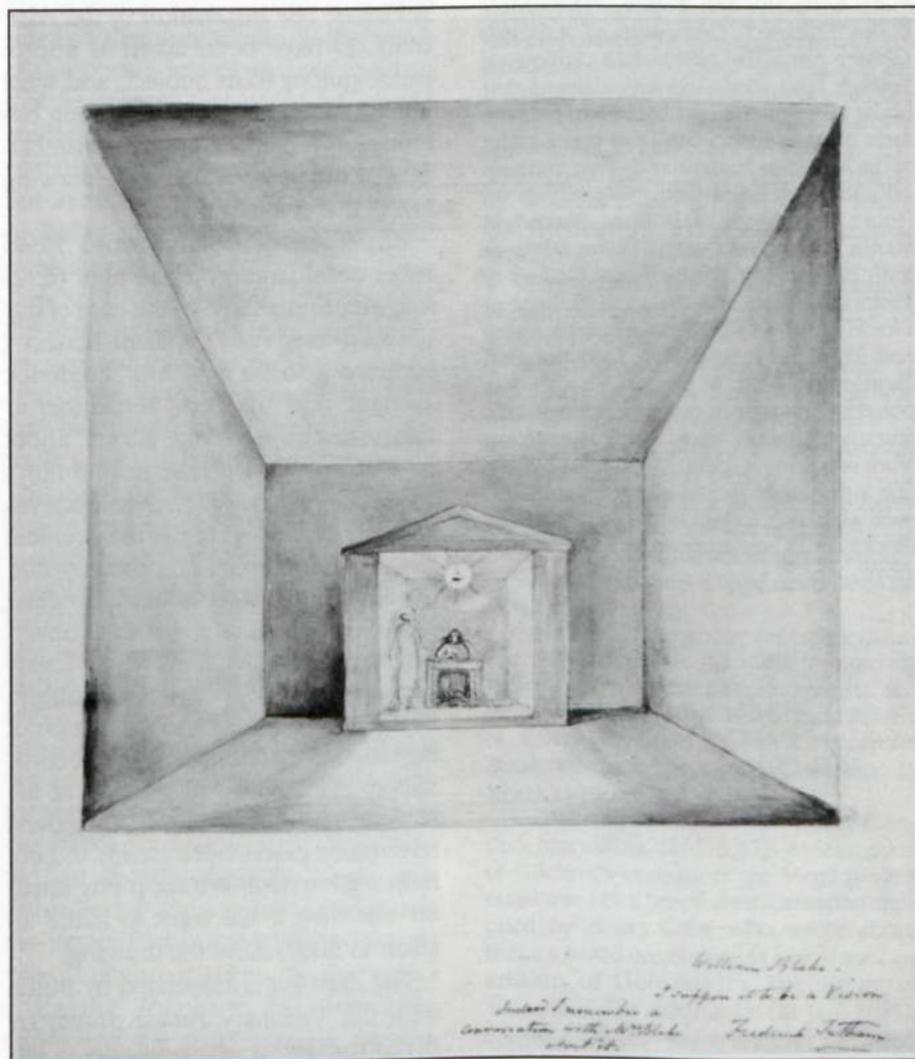
We need not, however, attempt a final answer to the question of the drawing's origin before venturing a hypothesis about its subject. As a perusal of Butlin's entries for the Visionary Heads will demonstrate, virtually all of even these apparently free-form designs were illustrations of particular

people, mostly from either British or biblical history, which means that the subjects were not very different from those of the rest of Blake's drawings, though obviously their physiognomic focus gives many of them a close-up quality not found to the same extent in Blake's other work. We can indeed find a very likely candidate for the subject of the present drawing in an appropriately Blakean source, the Bible.

In 2 Kings is an account of how the prophet Elisha used to be invited to eat bread at the house of a woman of Shunem. Perceiving that he was a man of God, she said to her husband: "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee,

on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither" (4.10). In return, Elisha, through his servant Gehazi, called the woman to him and promised her a son, in spite of the age of her husband (4.12-16). I think it highly probable that the drawing represents Elisha seated in his "chamber . . . on the wall"; the odd phrase "on the wall" expresses exactly the relationship between the two spaces in the drawing, making it immediately intelligible.

Butlin interprets the standing figure as representing "an angel . . . dictating



William Blake, *A Vision: The Inspiration of the Poet*, Tate Gallery, London.

to a seated figure writing," but the photograph suggests strongly that what Butlin has taken to be the wing of an angel is in fact the shadow cast by the standing figure, who comes between the overhead lamp and the wall. There is no trace of a wing on the other side of the figure, and angels with only one wing are fortunately rare.<sup>7</sup> If we look again at the drawing with this hypothesis in mind, we can see a right angled line on the floor to the right of the table, which seems to mark off a space that could be interpreted as the kind of sleeping mat Blake sometimes shows, often in biblical contexts.<sup>8</sup> The visual evidence is slender, but the line must represent something, and the interpretation I offer seems highly plausible. If this is accepted, we have all the elements mentioned in the woman's account—the little chamber, a bed, a table, a stool (Elisha has to be sitting on something), and the candlestick. The fit between story and picture is a good one.

The moment depicted in the drawing is most probably that described in 4.15-16, when the woman has been summoned and appears "in the door." Given the basic arrangement of the design, it would be impossible for Blake to have shown her actually "in the door," for that would have required a view into an interior space that would have been very difficult to convey without fine detail and an elaborate perspectival scheme, neither of which was a favorite device of Blake's. It would also have been a space at variance with the implications of the phrase "on the wall," to which Blake appears to have given priority. It seems likely that Blake would have chosen the key moment of the story, and that is clearly the announcement by Elisha to the woman that she will "embrace a son"; though this son dies, he is subsequently brought back to life by Elisha (2 Kings 4.32-37). Elisha is the inheritor of the mantle of Elijah, "the Spirit of Prophecy the ever present Elias" (*Milton* 24.71); the subject of the

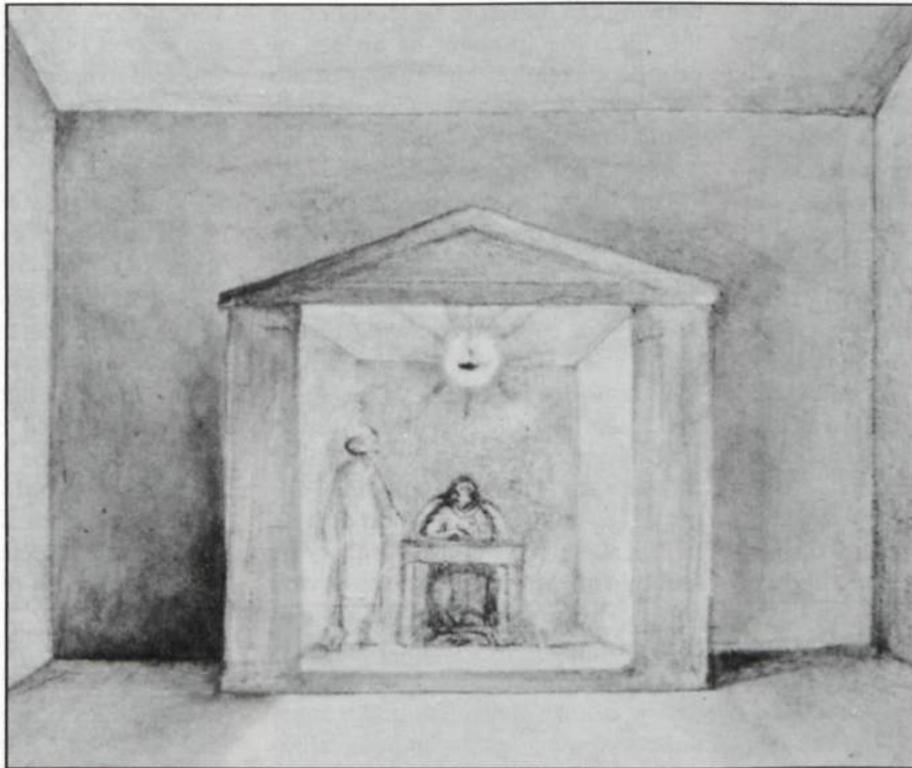
drawing can therefore be identified as the initiating moment of an act of prophetic creation, the calling of life into being. The hitherto accepted title of this drawing, *The Inspiration of the Poet*, was not entirely incorrect.

This newly focused interpretation of the subject of the drawing also makes possible at least a partial explanation of its curious spatial organization. Rosenblum cites the drawing in the context of a discussion of the radical "dissolution of postmedieval perspective traditions" that occurred around 1800 as part of the quest for "an artistic *tabula rasa*" (189). Rosenblum's approach to the whole question of style in the late eighteenth century is founded on the idea that the most vital currents in the changes taking place in the arts of the period "seem motivated by that late eighteenth century spirit of drastic reform which found its most radical culmination in the political revolutions of America and France" (146). This is described as leading to a variety of "regressions to what was imagined to be the pellucid dawn of pictorial art. . . ." (188), in an attempt to return to a kind of pre-Renaissance innocence. Since Rosenblum's influential book was written, several writers moving over from the field of literature to that of the visual arts have taken his ideas about the art of this period further, and two in particular have given close thought to the relationships between style and meaning. Both begin from Rosenblum's point that there are "many complementary and even contradictory currents" (146) available during this period, and develop from that perception the further idea that the choice of one style from the many potentially available is governed by the desire to communicate a particular kind of meaning.

One of these writers is W. J. T. Mitchell, who in an essay significantly titled "Style as Epistemology" uses Rosenblum's insights to develop the suggestion that romanticism should perhaps be defined as "simply that his-

torical movement which, in inventing the notion of a cultural history with discrete stylistic 'periods,' gathered *all* the possible artistic styles to its bosom in an eclectic *stylchaos*."<sup>9</sup> From this stance Mitchell, with the help of further insights from Meyer Schapiro and E. H. Gombrich, develops the idea that a style is a "cognitive structure" (149), and that Blake's particular forms of linear abstraction should be read as a kind of code, that style is indeed a part of the specific content or "statement" of a design (156), or, as Blake put it, "Ideas cannot be Given but in their minutely Appropriate Words nor Can a Design be made without its minutely Appropriate Execution . . . Execution is only the result of Invention" (*PA*, E 576).<sup>10</sup>

More recently Norman Bryson has suggested, in the course of a discussion of eighteenth-century French painting, that we need a history of painting as sign as well as the more conventional history of such painting as style. The reason he gives is that "in France the visual arts react not only towards and against specific visual styles, but towards and against the Académie and the high-discursive painting promoted by the Académie at different moments of its history."<sup>11</sup> I would suggest that this reason can be generalized; Blake, for instance, is in an analogous situation, seeing himself as one of the brave minority defending "high-discursive painting" against an environment that he interprets as supporting "bad (that is blotting and blurring) Art" (E 528). Bryson, like Mitchell, wants us to see style during the romantic period as governed by communicative desire, and chosen from among the "unprecedented array of styles" available to the painter at this time (240). Both critics, using Rosenblum's original insights as part of the ground of their argument, end by asking us to read style as part of the process of meaning production rather than as an independent factor operating within its own closed system of historical transformation.



Detail of *A Vision: The Inspiration of the Poet*, Tate Gallery, London.

I shall use a brief account of what Bryson means by "high-discursive" as the path through which to resume discussion of the handling of space in Blake's drawing, reading it this time as sign rather than style. Bryson begins his book by distinguishing what he calls the "discursive" elements of an image from the "figural" elements, defining the terms thus: "By the 'discursive' aspect of an image, I mean those features which show the influence over the image of language. . . . By the 'figural' aspect of an image, I mean those features which belong to the image as a visual experience independent of language—its 'being-as-image'" (6). Out of this discussion comes an account of perspective as a structure which greatly expands the figural aspect of an image, ensuring that "the image will always retain features which cannot be recuperated semantically" (12-13). In doing this, however, perspective and the semantically neutral excess of information that it encourages risks the division of the

image into two separable areas, "one which declares its loyalty to the text outside the image, and another which asserts the autonomy of the image. . . ." Under these conditions, "the image may risk appearing to be the disconnected base for a detachable superstructure" (13). In Blake's language, Execution separated from Invention is in danger of producing an image characterized by "unorganized Blots & Blurs" (*PA*, E 576).

Looking at the drawing again from this vantage point, we can try to find more than stylistic meaning in the odd handling of space that drew Rosenblum's attention. The key lies in remembering that it is this space—both the space that relates the small chamber to the surrounding room, and the apparent space that mediates between the chamber and the viewer—that visually determines the relationship between Elisha and the world around him, including ourselves. The handling of space in a design, in other words, is a form of visual rhetoric that shapes

and directs information towards us, modifying it in the process.

The first thing that needs explanation is the obvious anomaly in the perspectival structure of the drawing. Rosenblum comments:

At first glance, the convergent perspective lines of the outer and inner sanctum seem to create two Renaissance box spaces of rudimentary clarity; yet. . . this simplicity is more apparent than real. Thus, the shading of the web-like component planes obeys no natural laws, but is manipulated in such a way that the would-be effects of recession are constantly contradicted, producing instead a series of simultaneously convex and concave planes whose shifting locations are matched in the history of art only by the comparable spatial and luminary ambiguities of early Analytic Cubism. (190)

This offers a fascinating historical leap, and places the spatial handling of the drawing in a rich field of comment by isolating it from the other aspects of the work. But for the purposes of this essay I want to stay with the specific question of the handling of perspective a while longer, looking at it again

in the light of the now identified subject and basic meaning of the drawing.

The vanishing point implied by the junction lines between the side walls and ceiling of the small chamber is incommensurable with that implied by the corresponding junction of the enclosing room; even Blake, with his ability to be careless about such things, must have been aware of the discrepancy.<sup>12</sup> The angle formed by the junction in the outer rooms is so steep that it is unclear whether we are looking through a room with a deeply angled roof or at a strangely marked out planar surface; it is therefore also unclear whether the figures we see are small and close to us, or large and at some distance: our usual depth clues do not work properly under these conditions. The handling of perspective in the drawing contradicts the "would-be effects of recession," as Rosenblum points out, and thereby makes the apparent space virtually indecipherable as space. There is also a conspicuous lack of the expected excess of figural information associated with perspectival structures in post-Renaissance western painting. Blake seems deliberately to have subverted the conventional functions of perspective, and has thereby almost forced us to read the spaces of the drawing as discourse rather than figure, in Bryson's terms. Read in that way, the handling of space interprets and makes visible the relationship between the state of ordinary experience and that of prophetic inspiration; the two are closely related and in communication with each other, indeed one is in a sense inside the other, but they are also separated by the profound shift of gears necessary to move between them. That shift has been visually coded in the false perspective of the drawing.

The odd shading that Rosenblum comments on can also be read as discourse rather than figure. It suggests that while the light emanating from the little chamber cannot illuminate the wall that surrounds it, it has the power to project far into the room towards us,

the spectators of the drama, as if to create a path connecting Elisha and the viewer. The light brightens the side walls, though it fades towards the corners of the room, which are darkened as if to frame the whole design. But there is a curious but symmetrical imbalance in this darkening—if we let our eye travel round the frame in a counter-clockwise direction, we find that the leading edge of each surface is light toned, while each trailing edge is comparatively dark, as if the shading is designed to suggest a rotational effect, almost the beginning of a vortical movement. The result is a dynamic emphasis on the centrality and power of Elisha's chamber.

Rosenblum's analysis is a very interesting one, and his comments on the primitivist and anti- or unillusionist trends of Blake's art are well taken, as are those on Blake's "technical regression to the linear and planar origins of art" (154-56, 187-89). But such commentary leaves unanswered the question why such trends find their strongest exposition in just this drawing, and indeed the larger question of why Blake is so attracted to this particular style among the many open to him at this moment. The interpretation offered above grounds the stylistic peculiarities of this drawing in its specific content, as part of the meaning of the drawing as a whole. A style can be understood as not so much the central determinant of a picture as one of several possibilities waiting in the wings to be called into action by an appropriate subject, and used for the semantic possibilities inherent within it.

Any reading of a design by Blake which has no accompanying title or text deriving from Blake himself must nearly always have a status a little below that of total certainty. Nevertheless, the reading outlined above seems extremely probable to me, and I would like to propose "Elisha in the Chamber on the Wall" as a new and appropriate title for this interesting drawing, that is now happily accessible in the public space of the Tate Gallery.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) #756. The information found there must now be supplemented with that in Martin Butlin, *William Blake 1757-1827* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1990) 251. The Tate Gallery's purchase of the drawing was recorded in a note by Robyn Hamlyn in *Blake* 23 (1990): 213.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) 189-91.

<sup>3</sup> Butlin places the drawing among the Visionary Heads in *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, but is somewhat more cautious in his recent Tate Gallery catalogue, where he writes: "Although different in character from the other Visionary Heads this drawing probably dates from about the same time."

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 130.

<sup>5</sup> I take my information on this sketchbook from Robert N. Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 1989, Including a Report on the Recently Discovered Blake-Varley Sketchbook" *Blake* 24 (1990): 221-24.

<sup>6</sup> Butlin, *William Blake 1757-1827*, 251.

<sup>7</sup> I should make it clear that I have not seen the original drawing, but am working from a very good photograph sent by the Tate Gallery which is not very much smaller (12 x 12.3 cm.) than the original (17 x 18 cm.).

<sup>8</sup> For examples, see Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings* #259, 320, 498, 550.11.

<sup>9</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, "Style as Epistemology: Blake and the Movement toward Abstraction in Romantic Art" *SIR* 16 (1977): 146.

<sup>10</sup> On this whole issue in Blake, see Morris Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982) 79-169.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Bryson, *Word and Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 239.

<sup>12</sup> I appreciate the force of Butlin's remark that Blake was a "very uneven artist and many of his earlier works and scrapper drawings are almost totally lacking in technical merit," but the discrepancy here is very obvious, and Mitchell and Bryson give us a new way of conceptualizing such matters. Martin Butlin, "Cataloguing William Blake," in *Blake in his Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978) 81.

# Princeton



## The Illuminated Books of William Blake

David Bindman, General Editor

### Jerusalem

The Emanation of the Giant Albion

Edited with introduction and commentaries by Morton D. Paley

### Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Edited with introduction and commentaries by Andrew Lincoln

These two volumes are being published, at last, in finely crafted editions that provide the opportunity to experience fully the range and intricate interdependency of William Blake's visual and verbal art. The 100 color plates of *Jerusalem* have been meticulously photographed for this book from the unique original, elaborately hand-colored by Blake himself. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is now reproduced for the first time from the King's College, Cambridge copy—sometimes known as "Blake's own copy"—with 54 stunning color plates.

Published in association with the William Blake Trust

Jerusalem Cloth: \$75.00 ISBN 0-691-06935-2 Songs Cloth: \$59.50 ISBN 0-691-06936-0

Published by the Tate Gallery in the United Kingdom Available from Princeton only in the U.S. and Canada

## Princeton University Press

41 WILLIAM ST. • PRINCETON, NJ 08540 • (609) 258-4900

ORDERS: 800-PRS-ISBN (777-4726) • OR FROM YOUR LOCAL BOOKSTORE

---



---

MINUTE  
PARTICULARS

---

Blake and the  
*Edinburgh Literary  
Gazette*—with a  
Note on Thomas De  
Quincey

David Groves

The *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* of 1829-30 was "edited by the Rev. Andrew Crichton: and the literary department . . . principally entrusted to Mr [Thomas] De Quincey and myself," wrote the poet David Moir in 1838.<sup>1</sup> This weekly periodical has received virtually no attention from scholars. One cause of its neglect is probably the *Gazette's* policy of withholding the names of the authors of its articles. Some of its better-known contributors, including De Quincey (the "English Opium-Eater"), the Scottish novelist John Galt, and the poets Thomas Hood and Allan Cunningham, probably feared that they might jeopardize their positions with more lucrative journals such as *Blackwood's Magazine*, if their pieces in the fledgling *Gazette* appeared with their names attached.<sup>2</sup> Many of the *Gazette's* regular contributors may have read the remarks about William Blake in that journal in 1830. Although the authorship of this review remains a mystery, some evidence seems to suggest that Thomas De Quincey may have played a role in its publication. In any event, the article is interesting for its discussion of Blake as both poet and painter, and for bringing Blake's work to the attention of readers outside England.

The occasion of these remarks about William Blake was the publication of the second volume of Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*, in London. Cunning-

ham's work attracted much interest in Edinburgh, partly as a result of Cunningham's fame as a Scottish poet and essayist. The first volume of the *Lives* had received an anonymous critique (almost certainly written by Reverend Crichton) in the *Gazette* of July 1829.<sup>3</sup> Crichton quit the *Gazette* in anger in early December: he cannot have written the two succeeding reviews of Cunningham's *Lives*, which appeared in the *Gazette* in the following year.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the first notice of Cunningham's *Lives* (which had contained Scottish words, phrases, and place-names), the second review is almost entirely English (rather than Scottish), with its references to William Hazlitt, Henry Fuseli, and several other literary or artistic figures in contemporary London. The second review has never been reprinted, or mentioned in print, since it first appeared on 13 February 1830:

FAMILY LIBRARY, NO. X—  
CUNNINGHAM'S LIVES OF BRITISH  
PAINTERS.<sup>5</sup>

*The Family Library, No. X. The Lives of the most eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects.* By Allan Cunningham. Vol. II. London: J. Murray. 1830.

ALTHOUGH sufficiently alive to the merits of Lockhart's *Napoleon*, and Milman's *Jewish History*,<sup>6</sup> we are free to confess that none of the volumes of the Family Library have hitherto delighted us more than the *Lives of the Painters and Sculptors* by Allan Cunningham.

At first we had doubts as to whether Allan was exactly the best calculated person for the task, and we thought that a formidable competitor might be found in Hazlitt,<sup>7</sup> by any other periodical caterer, in monthly volumes, to the public taste. We have, however, been most agreeably disappointed. In the collection of facts and materials, the imagination of the poet has been kept in subjection. His biographies are well digested, and are written with that feeling which never fails to raise a corresponding interest in the heart of the reader.

In the former volume we were particularly pleased with the life of Gainsborough: although in Hogarth he had an ampler fund of materials to draw from. The volume before us takes in West, Opie, Bird, Morland, Fuseli, and Blake.<sup>8</sup> Of the latter, we confess, we were comparatively

ignorant: but from Mr. Cunningham's account it is evident that his mind was characterised as much by singularity as originality. It is a dangerous thing for a man in this matter-of-fact age of the world, "to see visions and dream dreams:"<sup>9</sup> especially as (if we take the case of Haydon for an instance) the public taste seems scarcely yet to have arisen from portrait to historical painting.<sup>10</sup>

We are thus induced to make a few extracts from the biography of Blake, not only as we regard it as the most singular in the volume, but as it is likely to be the newest to our readers. He appears to have been a poet as well as a painter.

Though Blake lost himself a little in the enchanted region of song, he seems not to have neglected to make himself master of the graver, or to have forgotten his love of designs and sketches . . . .<sup>11</sup>

The account of his drawing portraits from imagination, under the impression that they stood meantime visibly revealed, is very strange, and somewhat unaccountable: as also of his holding converse with the spirits of the departed great on the sea-shore at twilight.<sup>12</sup> There is something wildly impressive in this enthusiasm, awakening at once our pity and our admiration. As was to have been expected, this waywardness of disposition led to an old age of poverty and neglect, sweetened alone by the companionship of his admirable wife. We have given their courtship: let us conclude with Blake's death-bed:—

He had now reached his seventy-first year, and the strength of nature was fast yielding. . . .<sup>13</sup>

It is delightful to trace to progress of a man of true genius. No earthly impediments can resist his progress: on he goes, conquering and to conquer.<sup>14</sup> soaring and ascending over the clouds that at first hid him from sight, or obstructed his early aspirations. Such is Allan Cunningham, to whom we shortly intend dedicating a leading article.<sup>15</sup> He has written a multitude of good things: but, excepting his inimitable imitations of the old ballad,<sup>16</sup> his "Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects," is his best.

The reference to Cunningham by his first name alone, in the second sentence of this review, is very striking. Of all the known regular contributors to

the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* in 1830, only Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Hood knew Allan Cunningham: all three men had worked extensively for the *London Magazine* during 1821-23. On the surface, an article in the 1830 *Gazette* which refers to Cunningham simply as "Allan" might be suspected as having been written by either De Quincey or Hood. Yet the statements about Blake seem too matter-of-fact to be plausibly attributed to either of those authors. The article also contains more biblical allusions than would perhaps be expected in a short piece by Hood or De Quincey. Since the same review also refers to "Mr. Cunningham," it may have been the product of more than one pen. David Moir, who was the most frequent reviewer for the 1830 *Gazette*, makes no mention of the three notices of Cunningham's *Lives*, in his voluminous surviving papers.<sup>17</sup>

A third review, concerning the third volume of Cunningham's *Lives*, appeared in the *Gazette* of 12 June 1830. Although this final piece does not mention Blake, it seems to have been written by the same critic who wrote the second review.<sup>18</sup> The third review refers to Cunningham by his first name, and even as "our friend Allan." The evidence of a possible connection with De Quincey comes in the form of a private letter, from the owner of the *Gazette* to David Moir, dated five days before the publication of the third review: the letter simply states enigmatically (after discussing Moir's own work for the *Gazette*), "De Quincey is in town & at Wilson's as you will see from the inclosed."<sup>19</sup> Whether "the inclosed" was an article of De Quincey's, an article by someone else which De Quincey was merely conveying to the *Gazette*, a book intended for review, or something quite different, is unclear. Since De Quincey undoubtedly knew about William Blake,<sup>20</sup> and had a high opinion of Allan Cunningham,<sup>21</sup> it is conceivable that the two reviews of Cunningham's *Lives* in the 1830 *Gazette* might have been among the rapid pieces of journalism which De Quincey

was obliged to produce, for economic reasons, at about that time.<sup>22</sup> But in the absence of external evidence, the most that can safely be claimed is that De Quincey probably saw the article about Blake in the *Gazette*.

Whoever wrote the remarks on Blake in the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, it seems likely that the piece attracted some interest, not only among readers in Scotland, but more especially among those contributors to the *Gazette* who had been acquainted with Allan Cunningham. The *Gazette* enjoyed a relatively high reputation during its fourteen months of existence, with an appeal that was mainly "confined to the sound reasoner, and philosophical enquirer."<sup>23</sup> Although the *Gazette* seemed "eminently fitted to succeed,"<sup>24</sup> its circulation unfortunately never exceeded 300.<sup>25</sup>

A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for the purpose of researching Scottish periodicals, allowed me to live in Scotland while writing the present article.

<sup>1</sup> David M. Moir, "Life of Dr Macnish," in his edition of *The Modern Pythagorean: a Series of Tales, Essays and Sketches, by the late Robert Macnish, LL.D.*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1838) 1: 153. Moir (1798-1851) was a popular Scottish poet, known to readers of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* through his pseudonym "Delta" (or, "Δ"); he is mainly remembered today as the friend and biographer of John Galt.

<sup>2</sup> The *Gazette* promised to identify the contributors of its various articles, but was prevented from doing so by the sudden bankruptcy of its owner David Blackie in 1830, followed by his sudden death from cholera in 1832 (see Moir, "Life of Dr Macnish," [153n]). The *Gazette's* four "valued correspondents" in London were "Miss Landon" (known to readers as the poetess "L. E. L."), and "Messrs. T. Hood, Alaric Watts, and Allan Cunningham" (anon., "To Correspondents," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 1 [1829]: 192). By 1830, contributors included the poets Maria Jewsbury, William Howitt, and Thomas Pringle, and miscellaneous Scottish writers Andrew Laing, William MacGillivray, John Malcolm, Andrew Picken, Leitch Ritchie, and David Vedder (all of whom are named in the two special Anniversary Numbers of 15 May and 22 May 1830). Others who

were said to contribute included William Jerdan and James Fraser (the editors, respectively, of London's *Literary Gazette* and *Fraser's Magazine*). John Parker Lawson, and the Edinburgh drama critic Christopher Torrop (see anon., "Literature: *The Edinburgh Literary Gazette*," *Glasgow Courier* [newspaper] 5 Nov 1829 [21]). Robert Macnish (known to readers of *Blackwood's Magazine* as "The Modern Pythagorean") was also advertised as a contributor (see *Edinburgh Evening Post* [newspaper] 16 Jan. 1830 [23]). For further information on the *Gazette*, please see my articles "Thomas Hood, London, and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*" in *English Language Notes*, 27 (March 1990): 34-39, and "John Galt, the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, and 'The Black Ferry'" in *Scottia: American-Canadian Journal of Scottish Studies* 12 (1988): 44-54.

<sup>3</sup> Anon. rev., "Cunningham's *Lives of British Painters*," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette: Devoted Exclusively to Literature, Criticism, Science, and the Arts*. 1 (1829): 169-70. This initial review of Cunningham's work may reasonably be attributed to Andrew Crichton. (Crichton was born in Kirkmahoe, Scotland, where he knew Cunningham slightly as a youth: the reviewer claims Cunningham as "an early acquaintance," and refers fondly to "Kirkmahoe" [169]. For information on Crichton, see the *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

<sup>4</sup> Crichton "resigned the editorship" on 12 December 1829, and subsequently had "no further connexion" with the *Gazette* (see anon., "Literary Chit-Chat and Varieties," *Edinburgh Literary Journal* 3 [1830]: 28).

<sup>5</sup> Anon. rev. in *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* 2 (1830): 103-04. The only other mention of Blake was a brief announcement, in the "Literary Intelligence" column of 28 Nov. 1829, that "The next number of the Family Library" would be "the second volume of the *Lives of British Painters*, including West, Fuseli, Barry, Blake, Opie, and Morland" (*Gazette* 1 [1829]: 463).

<sup>6</sup> John Gibson Lockhart's *History of Napoleon Buonaparte*, and Henry H. Milman's *History of the Jews*, were both published in 1829, in the same "Family Library" series (published by the firm of John Murray) in which Cunningham's *Lives* appeared.

<sup>7</sup> The reference is perhaps to William Hazlitt's conversational portrait of the painter James Northcote, entitled *Boswell Redivivus* (1827).

<sup>8</sup> The quotation is from the New Testament: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see

visions and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2.17).

<sup>9</sup> The artists mentioned by the reviewer are Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), William Hogarth (1697-1764), Benjamin West (1738-1820), John Opie (1761-1807), Edward Bird (1772-1819), George Morland (1763-1804), Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), and Blake. The reviewer has neglected to mention James Barry (1741-1806), who also merits a chapter in Cunningham's second volume.

<sup>10</sup> The historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) was imprisoned for debt during 1822-23.

<sup>11</sup> The review quotes three paragraphs (beginning with this sentence), dealing with Blake's "intertwin[ing] of poetry and painting," and his relationship with his wife Catherine, from Cunningham's volume (147-49). The three paragraphs are printed as a single paragraph, and contain numerous other minor alterations, in the review.

<sup>12</sup> Cunningham describes Blake's "friendships with Homer and Moses: with Pindar and Virgil: with Dante and Milton," during his three years at Felpham, beginning in 1800: "These great men, [Blake] asserted, appeared to him in visions, and even entered into conversation" (*Lives* 2: 159).

<sup>13</sup> The review quotes three paragraphs (beginning with this sentence), dealing with Blake's last days and death, from Cunningham's volume (179-80). As with the preceding quotation, the three paragraphs appear as one, and contain several minor alterations, in the review.

<sup>14</sup> The reviewer alludes to the New Testament: "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Revelation 6.2).

<sup>15</sup> Although the *Gazette* carried many notices and reviews concerning Cunning-

ham, the promised "leading article" never materialized.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham wrote many "imitations of the old ballad" for R. H. Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (1810). Cromek (who also published the 1808 edition of Blair's *Grave*, with designs by Blake) would perhaps have been the best-known link between Cunningham and Blake, in Scotland in 1830, where Cromek was still renowned for his *Reliques of Burns* (1808). For further information on Cunningham's association with Cromek, see David Hogg, *The Life of Allan Cunningham* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875), and De Quincey, "London Reminiscences" (1840: rpt. *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. D. Masson, 14 vols. [Edinburgh: Black, 1889-90] 3: 146).

<sup>17</sup> None of the three reviews was mentioned by Moir, either in the formal list of his own contributions to the *Gazette* (which he left at the time of his death in his private papers), or in his almost weekly letters to William Blackwood (in which he regularly informed Blackwood of his latest publications). Moir's correspondence and private papers survive at the National Library of Scotland (see the Blackwood collection, and Accession 9856) and the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Room (University of Toronto Library).

<sup>18</sup> The reviewer displays a familiarity with the previous volumes, and recalls "[h]aving in our former notices had occasion to dwell on our friend Allan's qualifications for the office of an historian" (anon. rev., "Family Library," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* 2 [1830]: 374-76). The second and third reviews are similar in style and in their "English" perspective: but both are extremely unlike the initial review of the *Lives*, in spite of this reference to "our former notices," the second and third reviews were almost certainly written by someone other than the author of the first review.

<sup>19</sup> David Blackie, letter to Moir, 7 June 1830 (National Library of Scotland MS Acc. 9856, no. 37). By "Wilson's," Blackie refers to John Wilson, the editor of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, who was a close friend of De Quincey. Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland are quoted with the permission of its Trustees.

<sup>20</sup> De Quincey mentions "that fine mystic, Blake the artist," before quoting from Blake's poetic dedication to the 1808 edition of *The Grave*, in his "Society of the Lakes" (1840; rpt. *Collected Writings* 2: 400). Although this is the sole reference to Blake in De Quincey's known writings, it suggests a fair degree of interest and familiarity with some of Blake's work.

<sup>21</sup> De Quincey describes Cunningham as "a man of so much original genius" in his "London Reminiscences" (1840; rpt. *Collected Writings* 3: 146). It is perhaps significant that, in a letter of 7 July 1829, Cunningham wrote to an unknown correspondent, concerning De Quincey and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*: "I see you are united with my friend Mr De Quincey in this Critical undertaking of yours. . . . I beg you will name my name to him" (National Library of Scotland MS Acc. 15973, f. 32).

<sup>22</sup> For a listing of many of De Quincey's anonymous articles, "written with the left hand" from 1829 to 1846, see R. H. Byrns, "Some Unpublished Articles of De Quincey in *Blackwood's Magazine*" (*Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85 [1982]: 344-51).

<sup>23</sup> H., "Edinburgh Chit-Chat," *Kelso Mail* (newspaper), 15 Oct. 1829 (1).

<sup>24</sup> "Literature: *The Edinburgh Literary Gazette*," *Glasgow Courier* (cited in n2, above).

<sup>25</sup> David Blackie, letter to Moir, 14 July 1830 (NLS MS Acc 9856, no. 37).

## Six Illustrations by Stothard

Alexander S. Gourlay

In his thorough review of Shelley M. Bennett's *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England circa 1800* (Blake 23 [1989]: 205-09) G. E. Bentley, Jr. invited readers to send in any addenda to his addenda to

Bennett's list of Stothard illustrations. An edition of *The Tatler: with Illustrations and Notes* contains what are probably the six illustrations for an "unknown author and title . . . For Rivington" in Bennett's list under the year 1785 (67). The six plates, one in each of six volumes, are inscribed "Publish'd Decr. 1st 1785 by J Rivington & Son's St. Pauls Church Yard London. for the Proprietor's," and were engraved by Heath, Collyer, and Cook. The place of each in the text

is marked at the top of the plate. The book itself was published in London in 1786 by a long list of parties, beginning with "C. Bathurst" and including both Rivington and Joseph Johnson along with 23 others. Robert N. Essick notes in a private letter that the subjects of these plates are described in A. C. Coxhead's *Thomas Stothard, R. A.* (London: A. H. Bullen, [1906] 172-73); he suggests that Coxhead was working from extracted plates in the Balmanno Collection, British Museum.

## A Reprinting of Blake's Portrait of Thomas Alphonso Hayley

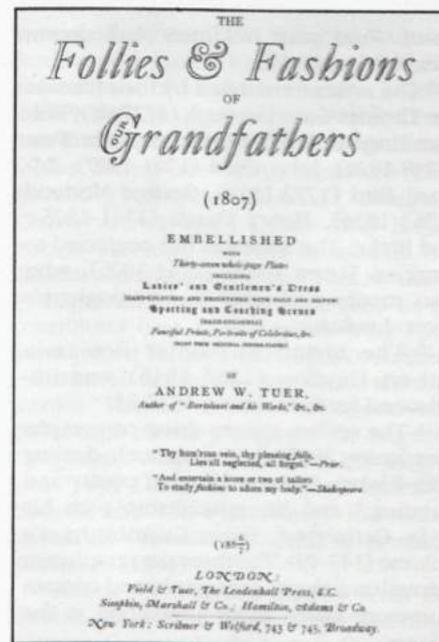
Jenijoy La Belle

We have long known that a few of Blake's copperplates for his commercial book illustrations were reprinted many years after his death. The Hesiod and *Iliad* outlines based on John Flaxman's compositions were republished by Bell and Daldy in 1870. Blake's large engraving of Hogarth's "Beggar's Opera" painting was reprinted by Bernard Quaritch Ltd. c. 1880 and by the university presses of Harvard and Yale in 1965.<sup>1</sup> To this modest list we can now add another of Blake's intaglio copy engravings.

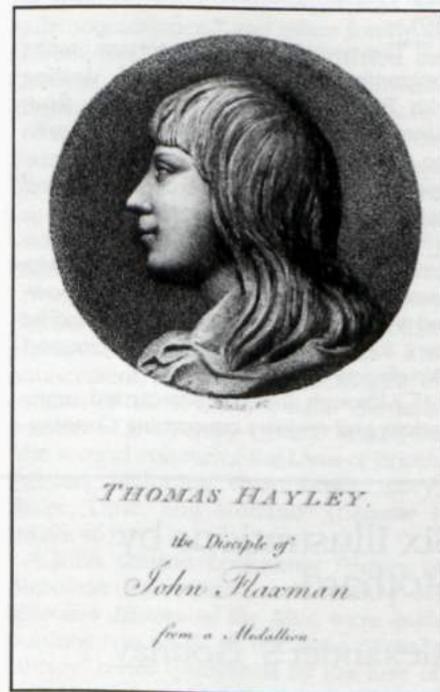
My interest in images of women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature led the San Francisco book dealer John Windle to offer me a copy of a self-consciously curious volume, Andrew White Tuer's *The Follies & Fashions of Our Grandfathers*, 1886-87. A bibliographic transcription of the title page might have challenged the skills even of the late Fredson Bowers, and thus I include here a photograph (illus. 1). Windle explained that the book contains reproductions of fashion plates from the early nineteenth century (many of women's dresses, in spite of "Grandfathers" and no grandmothers on the title page), various reprints of articles from British journals of 1807 (e.g., *Lady's Magazine*, *Lady's Monthly Museum*, and *La Belle Assemblée*), and one illustration signed "Blake. sc." Doubly intrigued, I purchased the book. Much to my surprise, the "Blake" plate turned out to be an impression, or a most convincing facsimile, in brick red ink, of Blake's portrait of Thomas Alphonso Hayley (illus. 2), based on a medallion designed by Flaxman and first published in William Hayley's *An Essay on Sculpture: In a Series of Epistles to John Flaxman* (London: T.

Cadell and W. Davies, 1800). In its original context, the plate illustrates Hayley's "Epistle VI" on his grief over the death of his natural son, a student of Flaxman's in the art of sculpture. In Tuer, the image faces p. [237], one of the prefatory descriptions of the "Embellishments" bound at the beginning of each chapter containing reprints of essays all from the same month in 1807.<sup>2</sup> These prefaces are not themselves reprints, but appear to have been written by Tuer as brief descriptions of his miscellaneous illustrations for each chapter. The paragraph on Blake's plate, p. [237]-38, headed "Mr. Hayley the Sculptor" in the "September" chapter, briefly outlines Thomas Hayley's accomplishments, his death at the age of 20, and the fact that, "as a gratuitous offering to the memory of so gifted and well beloved a scholar, Mr. Flaxman executed a beautiful marble monument, from which is copied our medallion portrait." Blake is not mentioned either in this description or in the "List of Embellishments" on the unnumbered fourth leaf at the start of the volume, where the plate is listed as "Portrait of Mr. Hayley, the Sculptor. Copper-plate."

As illus. 1 reveals, Tuer states on his title page that "many" of his illustrations are "from original copper-plates." The same claim appears on p. 2 of "Field & Tuer's List," an advertisement for their publications bound at the end of the volume. A slight ambiguity in the word "original" would permit Tuer to have re-engraved old plates on new coppers ("an original" copperplate as distinct from "the original" plate) without being liable to the charge of false advertising. This would seem to be the case with the plates facing pp. 238 and [269], entitled respectively "The Musical Group" and "The Lecture." These are based on William Hogarth's engravings but they are clearly not printed from his original copperplates. Further, the many fashion plates would appear to be hand-colored lithographs and most bear imprints of The Leadenhall Press dated 1886. However, in his general "Introduction" to the volume, Tuer



1. Andrew W. Tuer, *The Follies & Fashions of Our Grandfathers*, title page. Author's collection.



2. "Thomas Hayley," engraved by Blake after a medallion designed by Flaxman. Second state, printed in brick red in Tuer, *The Follies & Fashions of Our Grandfathers*, 1886-87, quarto issue. Circular image 6.4 cm. diameter, plate mark 14.5 x 11.3 cm. Author's collection.

notes that "in the major part" his illustrations "are printed direct from the original copperplates" (emphasis mine, p. ii). "Many" and "major" are exaggerations, but Tuer and his Leadenhall Press did specialize in acquiring old coppers and reprinting them. Several of the plates in the first edition of Tuer's *Bartolozzi and His Works* (1881) are indeed printed from Francesco Bartolozzi's own intaglio plates. The wood engravings in Tuer's *1,000 Quaint Cuts from Books of Other Days* (1886) and his *Pages and Pictures from Forgotten Children's Books* (1888-89) are printed from the original blocks. Is the portrait of Thomas Hayley another of Tuer's restrikes from the original plate?

Tuer's print is clearly an impression from an intaglio plate. The best evidence for this is not the prominent plate mark, which could have been made from a blank copper impressed over an image produced in a different medium, but the slight relief of the ink that can be felt with the finger. This effect is caused when the paper is forced into etched or engraved lines to draw up the ink residing in them. If the original plate was used, however, Tuer has converted it into a new state. The copper was cut down on all sides from a plate mark (in *An Essay on Sculpture*) of 22.5 x 16.3 cm. to 14.5 x 11.3 cm., thereby conveniently eliminating the facing page number for the 1800 volume and the original imprint (*Publish'd June 14. 1800 by Cadell & Davis Strand*). Careful comparison, using both low and high power magnification, has revealed no further differences in either the design or the remaining inscriptions that cannot be accounted for by slight differences in inking.<sup>3</sup> The delicate halo effect in the stippling along the top and sides of the medallion's background is exactly as in the impressions of 1800. Even the smallest features of Blake's engraved signature—for example, the gaps between the two strokes forming the "a"—and the ends of the hatching lines that extend slightly below the medallion are identical. One must allow for the slight possi-

bility that Blake's work was reproduced by some form of photogravure, but the context in which the print appears makes this improbable. There is no textual rationale for the inclusion of Hayley's portrait; the only references to it appear in what is in effect a caption written specifically for the print. Thus, the inclusion of the portrait seems to have been motivated by the availability of a useable copperplate that more or less suited Tuer's highly miscellaneous volume. No such opportunity would have presented itself if Tuer had to go to the trouble of making a photogravure plate from a print in an obscure book picturing a virtually unknown would-be sculptor. Thus, there is every reason to believe that the portrait of Thomas Hayley justifies Tuer's claims about using the original copperplates for some of his illustrations.

As the second leaf after the title page in *The Follies & Fashions* explains, the volume was published in three formats. Only three "Special copies, Large Paper, crown quarto, the text printed on Brown Paper" were issued. I have not seen a copy of this format, created by Tuer as a lark, priced at the ridiculous sum of "Ten Guineas." The next most sumptuous issue, represented by the copy now in my collection and one at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, is "Large Paper . . . , crown quarto [25.4 x 19.2 cm.], with earliest impressions of the plates; . . . two hundred and fifty only, signed and numbered, at Three Guineas." Last and least is "Demy octavo [22 x 14.2 cm.], . . . Twenty-five Shillings." A copy of this third format is in the Doheny Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Both quarto copies I have inspected and the single octavo copy are bound in the same decidedly unattractive quarter drab (a sort of dirty medium brown) felt over drab paper boards. The front cover and spine labels are drab canvas with the title (black) and decorations (gold) stitched in needlepoint. The most bizarre element, however, is the enormous attached

bookmark ribbon, also in drab canvas with the title again in needlepoint. Tuer's efforts to costume his production in a way compatible with the fashionable ladies in his illustrations have produced an amusing failure.

In all three copies inspected, Blake's plate is printed on a cream wove paper, 0.16 mm. thick. Essick, in his recent catalogue of Blake's commercial book illustrations (see n1), locates in his collection an impression on laid paper. This is in the same state as the plate in Tuer's book and printed in the same brick red. The paper is the same cream color and has chain lines the same distance apart (2.5 cm.) as the stock used for Tuer's letterpress, but at 0.22 mm. is slightly thicker than the text paper (0.12 mm.). Certainly the Essick impression is to be associated with Tuer's project and not, as Essick speculates, with "separate impressions" printed by William Hayley "as memorials of his son."<sup>4</sup> The sheet size of Essick's print, 21.4 x 13.5 cm., is smaller than either format of the book. It may be a proof of some sort, although it could have been issued in some copies in any format, including those few with the "text" (but not the plates?) "on Brown Paper." Bentley (see n1) lists a "proof printed in Red" of the plate from the *Essay on Sculpture* picturing "The Death of Demosthenes," then in the collection of "Mr. Walter Fancutt" (575), but Essick has "been unable to locate this impression" (81). It is of course possible that Bentley made an error, particularly if he had to rely on reported information or if he were recording only plate numbers in his notes and mislabeled an impression of pl. 3 (Thomas Hayley) as pl. 2 (Death of Demosthenes). If however Bentley is correct, then it appears that at least one more of the three plates by Blake in the *Essay on Sculpture* survived into the 1880s and was reprinted by Tuer.

It is tempting, although perhaps futile, to speculate on how Tuer managed to acquire Blake's plate of Tom Hayley. In most circumstances, the publisher (Cadell and Davies) or the printer (A.

Strahan) of the 1800 volume would have retained the copperplate. Perhaps, in his searches for plates by Bartolozzi or miscellaneous wood blocks for old children's books, Tuer simply came upon the portrait plate by accident and decided that it would contribute to the period charm he was assembling for his *Follies & Fashions*. If he noticed the "Blake" signature at all, it was probably of no consequence to him. By luck

and happenstance, Tuer created a minor addition to the bibliography of works containing Blake's engravings.

<sup>1</sup> For this and other basic information about Blake's copy engravings noted in this essay, see G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), and Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> The *National Union Catalogue* claims that Tuer's book was "published in month-

ly numbers," but that is simply a misunderstanding of Tuer's attempts to make it look as though each chapter is a journal issue with its own combination title page and table of contents.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Robert Essick and Thomas Lange for assistance with this inspection and technical details.

<sup>4</sup> *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* 81. Essick does allow for the possibility that his impression "could have been created many years later by someone else," as we now know to be the case.

## Blake and Bonasone

Alexander S. Gourlay

An intriguing instance of pictorial borrowing in a Blake design is his appropriation and modification of the central figures from an engraving (illus. 1) by Giulio Bonasone (1531-74), derived from a fresco by Polidoro (Caldara) da Caravaggio (1495?-1543). From Bonasone Blake drew inspiration for elements of his frontispiece picture depicting Leonora's dream in the third "New" edition in 1796 of the Stanley translation and revision of Bürger's *Leonora*. The Blake picture is known only through the published stipple engraving by "Perry," here shown in a unique proof from the collection of Robert N. Essick (illus. 2).

The Bonasone engraving (Bartsch No. 83) mirrors Polidoro's fresco with some elaboration (see Massari 1: 67-68; Marabottini 1: 78, 355-56). Polidoro and Bonasone's subject is "Cloelia Crossing the Tiber" and depicts the Roman heroine leading an escape of hostages from the camp of Porsenna. The primary verbal source was probably Plutarch's *Moralia (Mulierum Virtutes)* or a commentary upon it, for I believe that text to be the only one of the many possible sources that specifies that the escaping women wrapped their clothing on their heads; most others say little more than that Cloelia bravely swam the Tiber, with or without a horse, or received a horse later.

The women on the left in the engraving are presumably Cloelia's fellow hostages, those on the right may represent by prolepsis the Romans who sent the escapees back to Porsenna, and the unhappy-looking woman clinging to the horse's neck is probably Cloelia; the woman seeming to float along behind her may be the aristocratic Valeria.

Blake could have owned a copy of the engraving or seen it by some other means, but it seems most likely that he knew of it through his friend George Cumberland, who wrote a treatise and catalogue on Bonasone that includes a brief account of the print:

Two young Females, mounted on a horse, galloping across a river; in the back ground [sic], tents and trees; on the left side of the plate, seven other women loaded with children and baggage; on the right, six women and two children, with their arms extended, one of whom sits: 17 ¼ inches by 11 ¾. *Ju Bonaso imitando pinsit & celavit*. This is generally called Clelia escaping from the camp of Porsenna, but improperly. G. C. (83)

Cumberland's initials at the end of the entry signify that he owned a copy of the print.

In illustrating Bürger as translated by Stanley, Blake borrowed only the essential composition rather than the exact forms of Bonasone's horse and its riders. Blake's lost design was probably reversed when Perry copied it; its figures would have been oriented as in Bonasone. The stocky animal in the Italian print became an impossibly attenuated fire-breathing horse of the

imagination in Blake's hands, and he extensively adapted the riders to the context of Bürger's poem. Cloelia was replaced by the young masculine form of Death (in the guise of Leonora's lover William), who hails the approaching specters rather than clinging to the horse's neck, while the blithe young woman conducted by Cloelia became the frightened Leonora, her flowing drapery replaced by a modern nightgown. No other elements of Blake's complex design seem closely related to the Bonasone engraving, though certain stylistic features may have influenced Blake's works as late as the engraved Dante illustrations.<sup>1</sup>

Blake could have been borrowing without much thought, perhaps even unconsciously. But he might have believed that he was redeeming an ancient pictorial subject that, like the *Laocoön*, had been appropriated by classical culture and applied to "Natural Fact" (E 273). If he agreed with Cumberland that the subject was misnamed—and anyone who read Pliny's *Natural History* rather than the Plutarch text might well think so—Blake may have supposed that the subject called "the Cloelia," like Cloelia herself, was a hostage to the slaves of the sword. Certainly the Bürger design stands in a curious knot of adaptive, redemptive and transumptive activity, what with Stanley translating and transmuting Bürger's poem to save Leonora from the consequences of her impetuous wish to die, William/Death transporting Leonora beyond virginal obliviousness,



1. Giulio Bonasone after Polidoro da Caravaggio, *Cloelia Crossing the Tiber*. Engraving, second state. Courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund.



2. Perry after William Blake, frontispiece to *Leonora*. Proof engraving with pencil. Courtesy of Robert N. Essick.

Cloelia conducting the hostages over the Tiber, and somebody—probably Blake, but conceivably Stanley or someone else—cobbling together verses from five different passages in Young's *Night Thoughts* to supply eight apt-sounding but drastically "alter'd" engraved lines below the frontispiece.<sup>2</sup> It may not be a coincidence that a very similar leaping horse also figures in Blake's imaginative response to the description of Hal in *Henry IV, Part One*, the pictures of *A Spirit Vaulting from a Cloud to Turn and Wind a Fiery Pegasus* (also an altered quotation; see Butlin #547.6 and 658). There too a martial subject from someone else's work is re-envisioned as an allegory about the leap of the imagination.

#### WORKS CITED

- Bürger, Gottfried Augustus. *Leonora: A Tale*. Trans. J. T. Stanley. "A New Ed." London: William Miller, 1796.
- Butlin, Martin. *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1981.
- Cumberland, George. *Some Anecdotes of the Life of Julio Bonasone, A Bolognese Artist*. London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1793.
- Easson, Roger, and Robert N. Essick. *William Blake: Book Illustrator*. 2 vols. Normal IL and Memphis TN: American Blake Foundation, 1972-79.
- Emerson, Oliver Farrar. *The Earliest English Translations of Bürger's Lenore: A Study in English and German Romanticism*. Cleveland: Western Reserve UP, 1915.
- Erdman, David V., ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1982.
- Grant, John E., Edward J. Rose, and Michael J. Tolley, with David V. Erdman, eds. *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980.
- Marabottini, Alessandro. *Polidoro da Caravaggio*. 2 vols. Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1969.
- Massari, Stefania. *Giulio Bonasone*. 2 vols. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1983.
- Young, Edward. *Night Thoughts*. Ed. Stephen Cornford. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1989.

<sup>1</sup> Certain other details of Blake's picture may have been suggested by Chodowiecki's frontispiece for the German edition, which had been included in some copies of the first

(8 Feb. 1796) edition of Stanley's translation.

<sup>2</sup> The verses "Alter'd from Young" are not present in Essick's proof; see Easson and Essick (2:107):

O! how I dreamt of things impossible,  
Of Death affecting Forms least like  
himself;  
I've seen, or dreamt I saw the Tyrant  
dress,  
Lay by his Horrors, and put on his Smiles;  
Treachorous he came an unexpected  
guest,  
Nay, though invited by the loudest Calls  
Of blind Imprudence, unexpected still;  
And then, he dropt his Mask.

Here are the original lines, cited by Night and line from Cornford's edition (these also correspond to the text and lineation in Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations in Grant, et al.): "Souls . . . wander wild, through Things impossible!" (6.470-71); "He most affects the Forms least like himself" (5.827); "I've seen, or dreamt I saw, the Tyrant dress, / Lay by his Horrors, and put on his Smiles" (5.841-42); "(Come when he will) an unexpected Guest? / Nay, tho' invited by the loudest Calls / Of blind Imprudence, unexpected still?" (5.386-88); ". . . He drops his Mask" (5.877). Emerson's suggestion (19) that Blake was the adapter is more than plausible, given Blake's involvement in illustrating the *Night Thoughts* in 1795-96; who else would have been so steeped in Young as to be able to recall these far-flung lines, and would have had the nerve to create such a ransom note in verse?

# Princeton

## WORDS OF ETERNITY



*Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*

VINCENT ARTHUR DE LUCA

William Blake called himself a "sublime Artist" and acknowledged his own power to create "the Most Sublime Poetry." *Words of Eternity* reveals the fundamental importance of the term "sublime" in a defining of Blake's poetic achievement. This first full-length study of Blake and the sublime demonstrates that a sophisticated theory of sublimity permeates his writings, serving him as a personal poetics.

**"With the context that this book supplies, we take a quantum leap in the sense we can make of Blake's project. De Luca opens our eyes to a Blake, and a sublime, that will never again be the same for us."**—Nelson Hilton, *University of Georgia*

Cloth: \$32.50 ISBN 0-691-06874-7

### Princeton University Press

41 WILLIAM ST. • PRINCETON, NJ 08540 • (609) 258-4900  
ORDERS: 800-PRS-ISBN (777-4726) • OR FROM YOUR LOCAL BOOKSTORE