

BLAKE

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

PROCLAMATION

TIRED OF THE SPECTACLE OF SHORT STORIES, NOVELS, POEMS AND PLAYS STILL UNDER THE HEGEMONY OF THE BANAL WORD, MONOTONOUS SYNTAX, STATIC PSYCHOLOGY, DESCRIPTIVE NATURALISM, AND DESIROUS OF CRYSTALLIZING A VIEWPOINT...

WE HEREBY DECLARE THAT :

1. THE REVOLUTION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.
2. THE IMAGINATION IN SEARCH OF A FABULOUS WORLD IS AUTONOMOUS AND UNCONFINED.
(Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity... Blake)
3. PURE POETRY IS A LYRICAL ABSOLUTE THAT SEEKS AN A PRIORI REALITY WITHIN OURSELVES ALONE.
(Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth... Blake)
4. NARRATIVE IS NOT MERE ANECDOTE, BUT THE PROJECTION OF A METAMORPHOSIS OF REALITY.
(Enough! Or Too Much!... Blake)
5. THE EXPRESSION OF THESE CONCEPTS CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY THROUGH THE RHYTHMIC " HALLUCINATION OF THE WORD ". (Rimbaud).
6. THE LITERARY CREATOR HAS THE RIGHT TO DISINTEGRATE THE PRIMAL MATTER OF WORDS IMPOSED ON HIM BY TEXT-BOOKS AND DICTIONARIES.
(The road of excess leads to the palace of Wisdom... Blake)
7. HE HAS THE RIGHT TO USE WORDS OF HIS OWN FASHIONING AND TO DISREGARD EXISTING GRAMMATICAL AND SYNTACTICAL LAWS.
(The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction... Blake)
8. THE " LITANY OF WORDS " IS ADMITTED AS AN INDEPENDENT UNIT.
9. WE ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH THE PROPAGATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL IDEAS, EXCEPT TO EMANCIPATE THE CREATIVE ELEMENTS FROM THE PRESENT IDEOLOGY.
10. TIME IS A TYRANNY TO BE ABOLISHED.
11. THE WRITER EXPRESSES. HE DOES NOT COMMUNICATE
12. THE PLAIN READER BE DAMNED.
(Damn braces! Bless relaxes!... Blake)

— Signed : KAY BOYLE, WHIT BURNETT, HART CRANE, CARESSE CROSBY, HARRY CROSBY, MARTHA FOLEY, STUART GILBERT, A. L. GILLESPIE, LEIGH HOFFMAN, EUGENE JOLAS, ELLIOT PAUL, DOUGLAS RIGBY, THEO RUTRA, ROBERT SAGE, HAROLD J. SALEMSON, LAURENCE VAIL.

Céline Mansanti on Blake in *transition*

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A D V I S O R Y B O A R D

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Martin Butlin, London
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Robert N. Essick, University of California, Riverside
Angela Esterhammer, University of Zürich

Nelson Hilton, University of Georgia
Anne K. Mellor, University of California, Los Angeles
Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
David Worrall, The Nottingham Trent University

C O N T R I B U T O R S E D I T O R S

CÉLINE MANSANTI (cmansanti@gmail.com) teaches American literature and history at the Université de Picardie Jules Verne (France). She is the author of *La revue transition (1927-1938), le modernisme historique en devenir* (2009).

GRANT F. SCOTT is professor of English at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania and author of *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (1994). He is also the editor of *Selected Letters of John Keats* (2002) and *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs* (2005). Last year he and his students curated *Wings of Fire: The Illuminated Books of William Blake* at the Martin Art Gallery at Muhlenberg, an exhibition which was reviewed in the winter 2008-09 issue of *Blake*.

ALEXANDER GOURLAY teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design.

BRENT E. KINSER is assistant professor of English at Western Carolina University, an editor of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, *Carlyle Letters Online* <<http://www.carlyleletters.org>>, and *Carlyle Studies Annual*. His (mis) spent youth, however, was devoted to music. At the age of thirteen, he was honored by the Society to Preserve Bluegrass Music in America as "the most promising banjo player," and later, until 1997, he pursued a career in Orlando, Florida.

STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT is George Holmes Distinguished University Professor of English at the University of Nebraska. His most recent book is *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (2009).

ANDREW LINCOLN teaches in the English Department at Queen Mary, University of London. He is currently working on the culture of war in eighteenth-century Britain.

WAYNE C. RIPLEY (wripley@winona.edu) is an assistant professor of English at Winona State University.

PAUL MINER (paulminer@cableone.net) has published more than twenty articles on William Blake, and is in the process of finishing his book-length study on the poet-artist, *The Bard's Prophetic Song*.

ANGUS WHITEHEAD (richard.whitehead@nie.edu.sg) is assistant professor of English literature at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is currently preparing a monograph exploring the later years (1803-31) of William and Catherine Blake.

JENNIFER GROTZ teaches at the University of Rochester and is the author of *Cusp* (2003).

EDITORS: Morris Eaves and Morton D. Paley
BIBLIOGRAPHER: G. E. Bentley, Jr.
REVIEW EDITOR: Alexander S. Gourlay
ASSOCIATE EDITOR FOR GREAT BRITAIN: David Worrall

PRODUCTION OFFICE: Department of English, Morey 410, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627-0451
MANAGING EDITOR: Sarah Jones sarah.jones@rochester.edu
TELEPHONE: 585/275-3820 FAX: 585/442-5769

Morris Eaves, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627-0451
Email: meav@mail.rochester.edu

Morton D. Paley, Department of English, University of California, Berkeley CA 94720-1030
Email: mpaley@berkeley.edu

G. E. Bentley, Jr., 246 MacPherson Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4V 1A2 Canada

Alexander S. Gourlay, Department of English, Rhode Island School of Design, 2 College Street, Providence RI 02903-2717
Email: agourlay@risd.edu

David Worrall, Faculty of Humanities, The Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham NG11 8NS UK
Email: david.worrall@ntu.ac.uk

I N F O R M A T I O N

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William Blake in *transition* Magazine
(Paris, 1927–38): The Modalities of a
Blake Revival in France during the
1920s and 1930s

BY CÉLINE MANSANTI

THE AMERICAN poet and journalist Eugene Jolas, who was born in 1894 to Franco-German parents, published the artistic and literary magazine *transition* predominantly in Paris between the years 1927 and 1938. The last great American-exile periodical printed in Europe before World War II, *transition* is also one of the most important magazines of its generation. In the wake of the avant-garde modernists from the 1910s and early 1920s, it created a lesser-known yet seminal modernist current that spawned a coherent yet wide-ranging Anglo-American surrealist avant-garde.¹

For eleven years—an unusual amount of time for a little magazine—*transition* reproduced the works of the major artists of the time and published the greatest international writers. James Joyce, whose *Finnegans Wake* appeared in installments as “Work in Progress,” became its main figure. The magazine also featured numerous pieces by Gertrude Stein, early texts by Samuel Beckett and Dylan Thomas, as well as parts of *The Bridge* by Hart Crane, and it introduced works by Franz Kafka (including the first English translation of *The Metamorphosis*), Saint-John Perse, Hugo Ball, Henri Michaux, Rafael Alberti, Alfred Döblin, C. G. Jung, Kurt Schwitters, and many others to an Anglophone audience. Such prestigious writers and artists as Hans Arp, Gottfried Benn, Kay Boyle, Constantin Brancusi, Georges Braque, André Breton, Robert Desnos, Marcel Duchamp, Carl Einstein, Paul Eluard, Alberto Giacometti, André Gide, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, Paul Klee, Valéry Larbaud, Michel Leiris, Henri Matisse, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Katherine Anne Porter, Raymond Queneau, Laura Riding, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky can be found among its contributors.

In this light, William Blake’s presence in *transition* is surprising on more than one count. First, *transition* was mainly concerned with the French, American, and German cultures, and published few British or even Irish writers. Second, this magazine, like many others of the period, promoted unknown or little-known contemporary artists and writers. Therefore,

1. See Céline Mansanti, *La revue transition (1927-1938), le modernisme historique en devenir* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

the publication of Novalis, Schelling, Jean Paul, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Teresa of Avila can be considered as exceptional. Blake appears in *transition* as the sole representative of the British literary past. The magazine quotes a fragment of his correspondence and also features him in an essay. Moreover, his Proverbs of Hell play a major role in the famous June 1929 “Revolution of the Word” manifesto; indeed, as we will see, the manifesto appears as a dialogue between its authors and the poet.

Therefore, the presence of Blake within the pages of *transition* and the emphasis placed on his work invite us to contemplate the reasons why the author of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* finds a particular place in the magazine as well as in the broader cultural context of 1920s and 1930s France. Interestingly, the Blake revival which takes place in France at the time is based on serious misconceptions of the poet that a close reading of *transition* reveals.

Although *transition* does not devote an inordinate number of pages to Blake (more or less 7 out of 5,600), the diversity of Blake’s texts and of the texts related to him over time (October 1927 to July 1935) suggest the editors’ strong interest. The first reference appears in an October 1927 editorial, “Enter the Imagination,” where Jolas sees in Lautréamont and his hymn to “evil” and “the satanic” a resurgence of Blake’s “Manichean” spirit:

The striking character of Lautréamont’s work is the conscious preoccupation with so-called “evil” functions of life. ... The “evil” has been neglected in poetry far too long. There are minds like Blake’s in whom the sense of the Manichean is supreme. In Lautréamont, who, with magnificent courage chose to hymn the satanic, we find the gnostic philosophy transmuted into pure poetry. (*transition* [hereafter *t*] 7: 159-60)

Two months later, Marcel Brion (1895-1984), the young French writer, critic, historian, and art expert, pays homage to the poet on the hundredth anniversary of his death. Brion’s article, simply entitled “William Blake Today,” is inspired by a larger study partially published in September 1925 in the magazine *Le Navire d’argent*. Other references to Blake will follow. After placing the poet at the center of the “Revolution of the Word” manifesto, *transition* publishes an excerpt from his famous letter of 1803 to Thomas Butts in its July 1935 issue:

I have written the poems from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense poem exists which seems to be the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study.²

2. Letter of 25 April 1803 (see David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly rev. ed. [New York: Anchor-Random House, 1988] 728-29). The extract is published without citation in *transition* 23 (July 1935): 44.

Placed at the head of a section entitled "Little Mantic Almageste," in which Jolas presents the reader with a "little selection of gnostic, mystic and romantic texts," this excerpt precedes a series of eclectic quotations from Saint John of the Cross to Bergson, with references to Lao Tzu, Søren Kierkegaard, Justinus Kerner, Jacob Boehme, Dionysius Areopagita, Emerson, Schelling, Pascal, Novalis, Plotinus, C. G. Jung, Saint Teresa of Avila, Swedenborg, and others.

Jolas's introductory note to the "Little Mantic Almageste" underscores for the reader the importance of the Blakean philosophy in *transition*. Casting a backward glance at the magazine's editorials since its creation in April 1927, Jolas writes:

As I rejected the estheticism and naturalism of my age, I came to the conclusion, which today is an inner conviction, that poetry is identical with the ecstatic way of thinking, that it is the expression of a cosmic sense, that it manifests itself in liturgy and mythos. It is the eternal way of thinking (which was temporarily buried beneath the positivistic débris [sic] during the last century), an inner, subjective-objective thinking, a visionary striving for identity, the struggle for a phantasmagoric reality. This mantic or esoteric way of looking at life and nature is the aim of vertigralism. (t 23: 44; italics in original)

Blake's testimony on his "immediate" writing practice in his letter to Butts contributes to *transition's* development of a conception of the world and of poetry which Jolas calls "vertigralism." Although "vertigralism" traces its roots back to the first issue of the magazine, it develops more specifically with issue 21 (March 1932), which contains a manifesto, "Poetry is Vertical." Poetry is defined as a vertical link between a dark, subliminal world (that of the Jungian collective unconscious) and a luminous, transcendental one. The object of "verticalism" (not yet called "vertigralism") is to encourage men to plunge into their unconscious and then rise up to the mystic heights. Or, to quote Léon-Paul Fargue as Jolas does at the beginning of the manifesto: "We have been too horizontal, I want to be vertical."³ From issue 22 on, "verticalism" becomes "vertigralism," a portmanteau word that combines the vertical dynamics of poetic creation ("verticalism") with the heroism of a sacred quest pursued by the romantics ("Gaal"). The new concept reshapes the content of the magazine through the creation of a column entitled "Vertigral" (issues 23-25), which includes a variety of authors such as romantics (Franz von Baader, Jean Paul, Blake, Novalis, Schelling), expressionists (Franz Werfel, Franz Kafka), a dadaist (Hugo Ball), mystics (Dionysius Areopagita, Saint John of the Cross, Madame Guyon, Saint Teresa of Avila), and neo-romantics (Georges Pelorson, Camille Schuwer). A few years later, in 1938, "vertigralism" leads to the publication of Jolas's small volume *Vertigralist Pamphlet*, which mentions Blake again:

3. "On a été trop horizontal, j'ai envie d'être vertical" (quoted without citation in "Poetry is Vertical," t 21: 148). A poet inspired by symbolism and a desire to escape the material world to reach the raptures of the cosmos, Fargue (1876-1947) develops an aesthetic close to the Jolassian quest.

The mystics used numerous geometrical or architectonic metaphors to express the will to "ascend," "elevation," "levitation," "angelic flight" etc.

In this connection let us recall:

The desert saint, Joannes Climacus (the name alone is a program!) and his book: *Scala Paradisi*.

The entire gnostic movement with its liturgy of the *celestial ladder*.

The Spanish mystics, especially St. John of the Cross, and his *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*.

Flemish and Rhenish mystics such as Ruysbroeck, Master Eckhart, Tauler, the *Strasbourg Friends of God*, etc.

Boehme, Swedenborg, Blake.⁴

Blake's work thus contributes to the creation of "vertigralism," but, more importantly, it inspires *transition's* entire neo-romantic focus. When he assesses "Ten Years [of] Transition" in the Franco-American art magazine *Plastique*, which was published in Paris in 1938 and 1939, Jolas states: "This *pan-romanticism* [the atmosphere in which the magazine was born] has remained the principal line followed by *Transition* during its decade of activity."⁵ Then he writes in his autobiography: "I wanted to encourage the creation of a modern romanticism, a pan-romantic movement in literature and the arts."⁶ Indeed, most of the literary texts published in *transition* reveal a neo-romantic aesthetic whose outline eventually proves to be rather vague (as Jolas's mysterious "pan-romanticism" suggests), but which is nonetheless characterized by a desire to express the "self" and to set the imagination free. As we have seen, *transition* pays homage to Blake, but also salutes German romanticism and pre-romanticism (Hölderlin, Novalis, Jean Paul, and von Baader are published, while a debate is devoted to Goethe on the hundredth anniversary of his death in 1932). Moreover, contemporary writers, who acknowledge their debt to Blake and other romantic predecessors, contribute to the magazine's neo-romanticism. Thus, as Jean-Michel Rabaté writes, Joyce develops an ambivalent relationship to romanticism and shows his interest and fascination with occultism, theosophy, and Blake's visionary powers.⁷ Blake is also a central reference for Hart Crane, another major contributor to *transition*, whose aesthetic principles are very close to those of the magazine; Crane's correspondence and poetry such as *White Buildings* and *The Bridge* often mention Blake.

The magazine's promotion of French surrealism, the major European avant-garde of the time and one that explicitly acknowledges its continuity with romanticism,⁸ also explains

4. *Vertigralist Pamphlet* (Paris: Transition Press, 1938) 8-9.

5. "Ten Years Transition," *Plastique* 3 (spring 1938): 23.

6. *Man from Babel*, ed. Andreas Kramer and Rainer Rumold (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 93.

7. *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 81.

8. "... this romanticism of which we agree, historically, to be considered today as the tail ..." ("... ce romantisme dont nous voulons bien, historiquement, passer aujourd'hui pour la queue ...") (André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* [1929], in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marguerite

why Blake features so prominently in *transition*. With about twenty-five surrealist writers, sixty literary and critical contributions, as well as numerous works of art, *transition* is the great Anglophone magazine of French surrealism. Of course, *transition* is not the first English-language magazine to publish surrealist productions. As early as 1921, the *Little Review*, based in Chicago and run by Margaret Anderson, offers poetry by Aragon and Soupault in French. But *transition* presents its readers with a quantity and a variety of surrealist texts that no other English-language magazine will be able to match until the beginning of the 1940s and the founding of *VVV* in New York. Moreover, unlike the selections in the *Little Review*, almost all the surrealist contributions in *transition* are translated into English. Surrealism thus holds an exceptional place in Jolas's magazine. This is evident in *transition*'s publication of surrealist literature and art as well as in its investigations of the unconscious, and, to a lesser extent, madness. Interestingly, Blake plays a role in the creation of this avant-garde. Even if Blake, unlike other British writers such as Horace Walpole or Ann Radcliffe, is never mentioned by Breton as one of the forerunners of surrealism, there is no question that the visionary, mystic, deeply imaginative, and original English poet does represent an important reference for British and French surrealists alike.⁹

These remarks invite us to look beyond *transition*'s specific framework and to examine the modalities of and reasons for what appears to be a wider Blake revival in 1920s and early 1930s France.

The general bibliography published at the end of the catalogue for the Blake exhibition in Paris in 1947 shows that out of twelve "French works" on Blake, five were published before 1920, two in the 1930s and 1940s, and no less than eight in the 1920s. As for the French translations of the poet's work, seven were available in 1947, six of which were issued between 1923 and 1934. As the bibliography indicates, Blake is little known in France before the 1920s, even among the French cultural and literary intelligentsia. Whereas Blake managed from the 1860s to attract the attention of British poets and critics such as Gilchrist, Rossetti, and Swinburne, it took him more time to find a place in the French literary landscape. Although Joseph Milsand devoted a long essay to him in the *Revue moderne* in 1868, Blake did not become the center of much attention before the turn of the twentieth century. In 1900, Charles Grolleau was the first to translate a work by Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Seven years later, two aca-

Bonnet, vol. 1 [Paris: Gallimard, 1988] 803). Two other major European avant-gardes discussed in *transition*, expressionism and dadaism, also show some continuity with romanticism.

9. Art critic Herbert Read mentions Blake in his seminal study, *Surrealism* (ed. Read; New York: Harcourt, 1936). Blake is also mentioned by Peter Quennell in a 1933 article for the *New Statesman* quoted by Paul C. Ray in *The Surrealist Movement in England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) 83.

dem publications presenting the poet and artist appeared: *Un maître de l'art: Blake le visionnaire*, by François Benoît, and above all Pierre Berger's doctoral thesis, *William Blake, mysticisme et poésie*, hailed by French and British critics alike as the best work on Blake ever published, and reprinted in 1936 as a consequence of its success outside the scholarly field. At the same time, a few critical articles started to come out in the literary and cultural magazines of the time. Among Blake's early French proponents, Henry-David Davray, who was in charge of the English literature column of the *Mercure de France*, mentioned the poet many times in the 1910s and 1920s.

However, Blake did not achieve wide recognition in France before the beginning of the 1920s, and undoubtedly André Gide was instrumental in this Blake revival. In a 1921 letter to Jacques Rivière, the director of *La NRF*, the main French literary magazine of the time, he wrote of Blake: "It is a shame that in France we still hardly know anything about him."¹⁰ Blake's editorial fortunes and misfortunes also caused much ink to flow in the United States, even though his poetry, if only because it was in English, was much better known there than in France. In 1917, John Gould Fletcher wondered in an article written in *Poetry* for the publication of Frederick E. Pierce's *Selections from the Symbolical Poems of William Blake*: "When will the lovers of poetry and the students of Blake be given an adequate and a cheap edition of *Vala*—Blake's masterpiece? It is a disgrace to England and to America that nothing of the sort has been attempted."¹¹ Gide did not stop at criticizing the situation of Blake's work in France; he also took action by publishing a complete translation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *La NRF* in August 1922 (Aveline reissued this translation the following year in volume form).¹² The translator's introduction is somewhat surprising; indeed, it suggests Gide's discriminating opinions of Blake's work. He describes *Marriage* as "the most significant and the least dense of the 'prophetic books' of the great English mystic, who was at the same time a painter and a poet."¹³ Then, he articulates his interest in Blake with great tact:

Swinburne was one of the first to point out its [*Marriage's*] importance. Nothing was easier than picking the few sentences for the love of which I decided to translate it. Those careful enough may be able to discover them under the luxuriant foliage that protects them.

10. "Il est honteux qu'en France on n'en connaisse encore à peu près rien" (letter of 6 January 1921, in Gide and Rivière, *Correspondance 1909-1925*, ed. Pierre de Gaulmyn and Alain Rivière [Paris: Gallimard, 1998] 629).

11. "Yale Discovers Blake," *Poetry* 9.6 (March 1917): 320 (the pagination is that of the reprint).

12. "*Le Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer*," *La NRF* 19, no. 107 (August 1922): 129-47. The magazine *Les Écrits nouveaux* simultaneously published in its August-September 1922 issue some *Songs of Innocence* in French, without indicating the name of the translator.

13. "Le plus significatif et le moins touffu des 'livres prophétiques' du grand mystique anglais, à la fois peintre et poète" (Gide, *William Blake, Le Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer* [Paris: Aveline, 1923] 9).

- But why give the entire book?
—Because I don't like stemless flowers.¹⁴

Gide does not reveal the circumstances of his encounter or re-encounter with Blake in the introduction to his translation, but he offers some indication in the 1947 Blake exhibition catalogue: "The Blake star twinkles in that remote region of the sky where the Lautréamont star also shines."¹⁵ Interestingly, like Jolas in his October 1927 editorial "Enter the Imagination," Gide seems to reach Blake via another *poète maudit* who then held a considerable place in France, Lautréamont. Lautréamont, who died unheralded in 1870 at the age of twenty-four, is the author of a single masterpiece, *The Lay of Maldoror* (*Les Chants de Maldoror*), published in 1869. Discovered in 1917 by Soupault, *The Lay of Maldoror* greatly influenced the surrealists, who were as attracted to the work's extraordinary violence and poetic originality as they were to the mystery surrounding Lautréamont's life and character. The parallel between Lautréamont and Blake that Gide suggests clarifies the reasons for renewed interest in the British poet in a literary milieu that is heavily marked by surrealism and, more generally, by a certain neo-romanticism. In fact, the predominant areas where the French Blake revival in the 1920s and 1930s took place were also the sites which promoted surrealism and a neo-romantic aesthetic.

One of Blake's most passionate defenders at the end of the 1920s in France is Soupault, the coauthor, with André Breton, of *The Magnetic Fields* (*Les Champs magnétiques*), the founding act of French surrealism in 1919. Soupault translated *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* with his wife, Marie-Louise, in 1927.¹⁶ A year later, he published *William Blake*, a biography distributed by the Parisian Rieder Press and reissued the same year in English by London publisher John Lane. The biography characterizes Blake as an exceptional being (he was not "a being of this world"¹⁷), an idealist and solitary genius whose life and work cannot be separated. It is striking that Soupault repeatedly makes reference to Blake's "simplicity," "purity," and "childishness": as he claims in his conclusion, the man who "preferred the company of children"¹⁸ and created "the

14. "Swinburne fut un des premiers à en signaler l'importance. Rien n'était plus aisé que d'y cueillir les quelques phrases pour l'amour desquelles je décidai de la traduire. Quelques attentifs sauront peut-être les découvrir sous l'abondante frondaison qui les protège.

—Mais pourquoi donner le livre en entier?

—Parce que je n'aime pas les fleurs sans tige" (Gide, *William Blake, Le Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer* 10).

15. "L'astre Blake étincelle dans cette reculée région du ciel où brille aussi l'astre Lautréamont" (*William Blake, 1757-1827* [catalogue of the exhibition organized by the British Council and the Galerie René Drouin] [Paris, 1947] n. pag.).

16. *Chants d'innocence et d'expérience* (Paris: Les Cahiers libres, 1927). An extract from this translation is published by *La NRF* 26, no. 152 (May 1926): 537-42.

17. Soupault, *William Blake*, trans. J. Lewis May (London: John Lane, 1928) 10. Soupault would also write an introduction to the catalogue of the 1947 Blake exhibition in Paris.

18. Soupault, *William Blake* 58.

stuff that dreams are made on, noble yet childlike"¹⁹ developed an art both "simple" and "pure." And, as he concludes, Blake's poetry is "all the more difficult because at first sight his work seems to suggest the quality of gentle, childlike simplicity."²⁰

Writers such as Gide or Soupault were not the only ones responsible for this renewed interest in Blake. A wide range of little magazines open to foreign literatures and willing to promote young contemporary writers as well as underestimated talents from past centuries played a prominent role. The "misunderstood messenger William Blake"²¹ thus found his place in *Le Navire d'argent*, the magazine that the famous bookseller of the rue de l'Odéon, Adrienne Monnier, distributed between June 1925 and May 1926. The fourth issue, published in September 1925, presented Blake in a larger literary landscape. Indeed, in its short life, the magazine drew several panoramas of foreign literature translated into French, starting with English literature in June 1925 and a solid bibliography, "From the Origins to the End of the Renaissance" ("Des origines à la fin de la Renaissance"). "Restoration and Classicism" ("La restauration et le classicisme," in the July issue), "The Survival of Classicism" ("La survivance du classicisme," in August), and "Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism 1770-1832" ("Le préromantisme et le romantisme," in the September issue devoted to Blake) follow. The magazine's coverage over time and the diversity of documents in each issue both contribute to the eclecticism of *Le Navire d'argent*. Thus, the Blake special issue combines a selection of poems, a portrait of the poet, a previously unreproduced drawing thought at the time to be by the artist, as well as several essays written by prestigious personalities: Arthur Symons, Swinburne, and Brion, who, according to the editors, is the author of "an important and previously unpublished study on William Blake" ("une importante étude inédite sur William Blake").²²

But a close look at French magazines of the 1920s and 1930s where Blake is given special attention reveals that such interest does not spring only from a common enthusiasm and curiosity that the little magazines' editors feel for the misunderstood genius. Indeed, Blake plays a particularly important role in the editorial policy of several neo-romantic magazines developing a specific interest in surrealism. *transition* is of course one, but we can also mention *Les Cahiers du Sud*, run from Marseilles by Jean Ballard, and *Le Grand Jeu*, created in Paris by Roger Gilbert-Lecomte. Although *Les Cahiers du Sud* was founded in 1921, the magazine only started gaining momentum four years later, when it published almost all the

19. Soupault, *William Blake* 58.

20. Soupault, *William Blake* 60.

21. "[le] messenger incompris que fut William Blake" (Charles Grolleau, "William Blake, Introduction," *William Blake, Le Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer*, tr. Grolleau [Paris: Lucien Chamuel, 1900] 25).

22. Symons is the author of "La Place de William Blake" ("William Blake's Place"); Swinburne, of "Le Génie et la foi de William Blake" ("William Blake's Genius and Faith"); Brion, of "Vie de William Blake" ("William Blake's Life").

surrealists (with the notable exception of Breton) as well as writers influenced by surrealism, such as Michaux and Artaud. Brion, the longtime editor of the foreign literature column, published in February 1926 "Les Livres prophétiques de William Blake" ("The Prophetic Books of William Blake"), a separate fragment from the larger study already partially printed in *Le Navire d'argent*. In the fragment in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, Brion discusses *Tiriel*, *The Book of Thel*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.²³ A few years later, in 1935, when the specialist in German romanticism, Albert Béguin, discussed the common origins of surrealism and romanticism in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, the magazine published several poems by Blake translated into French by Charles Grolleau: "À l'été," "À l'automne," "À l'hiver," "À l'étoile du soir," "Au matin," "Chanson," "Chanson," "Berceuse."²⁴

At the end of the first "Chanson" (which begins "Combien joyeux j'étais de plaine en plaine ..." ["How sweet I roamed from field to field ..."]), the editors added, in parentheses, "écrit à 14 ans" ("written at age 14"). This seemingly minor indication may not be insignificant if we consider it in the context of the issue; indeed, a text in prose by René Nelli, "L'Enfance et les esprits" ("Childhood and Spirits"), follows this series of poems. Thus, we may well find here an echo of the parallel that Soupault draws between Blake and the world of childhood dear to the surrealists eager to create a counterculture. Marc Dachy, a specialist on the European avant-gardes of the time, writes about dadaism: "There's no doubt that the discovery of primitive art as spontaneous creation, as well as the concern for childhood ... naturally partake in the creation of a counterculture uncompromised in the slaughter the western world is engaged in [World War I]."²⁵ What is true for the avant-gardes of the end of the 1910s is no less true for those of the end of the 1920s and of the 1930s: at that time, primitivism, childhood, the dream, madness, etc., still represent a way of escaping the memory of the massacre, and they also repel the specter of the new catastrophe to come. Blake's poetry and character partially correspond to the concerns of this counterculture, but they are also construed in the light of these concerns. Undoubtedly, the apocalyptic dimension of Blake's work also contributed to its revival. Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s, an apocalyptic discourse which had developed since the end of the 1910s—mainly in reaction to World War I—strongly influenced France and Europe and manifested itself in a variety of works, such as *The Decline of the West (Der Untergang des Abendlandes)* by Spengler, Kandinsky's aesthetic, Soupault's *Last Nights of Paris (Les Dernières*

23. "Les Livres prophétiques de William Blake," *Les Cahiers du Sud* 76 (February 1926): 108-32.

24. *Les Cahiers du Sud* 174 (July 1935): 521-29.

25. "Nul doute que la découverte de l'art primitif en tant que création spontanée, de même que l'attention portée à l'enfance ... s'inscrivent naturellement dans la constitution d'une contre-culture non compromise dans le carnage auquel se livre alors le monde occidental" (Dachy, *Journal du mouvement Dada, 1915-1923* [Geneva: Albert Skira Art Editions, 1989] 45).

Nuits de Paris), D. H. Lawrence's *Apocalypse*, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Nin's *House of Incest*, and the poetry of the British "New Apocalypse."

Le Grand Jeu, founded in the summer of 1928 by Gilbert-Lecomte, is another magazine which finds inspiration in surrealism and shares with *transition* many contributors and a certain lyrical and mystical conception of the world. In the first issue, as he reflects on "the nature and the form of the spirit's progress towards its liberation,"²⁶ Maurice Henry sees Blake as one of the leaders of "the rebellious spirit's progress towards its resorption in unity"²⁷: "William Blake saw in the primordial night the last of the gods, the creative Madmen, who breathed out the worlds. They had been vomited by the motionless eternity. Duration was not flowing yet. Endless, hopeless, sweating blood, screaming with fear, they hammered the void."²⁸ The magazine's metaphysical and even mystical quest is increasingly pronounced. Thus, the chief editor states in the third issue: "Clairvoyance is experimental metaphysics."²⁹ He clarifies this remark in a footnote: "What darkening of the thought has prevented man from taking into account the nature and universality of the mystical testimonies of Blake's 'Prophetic Visions,' Nerval's *Aurélia*, Poe's dialogues, and Rimbaud's 'Illuminations'?"³⁰ In the same issue, another surrealist writer, André Delons, refers to the master and eventually quotes a fragment from *The Book of Thel* (from "Pourquoi l'oreille ne peut-elle être fermée à sa propre destruction?" ["Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?"]) to "Pourquoi un petit rideau de chair sur le lit de nos désirs?" ["Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?"]):

As he awakens to self-awareness, the individual is terrified by the squawking and raucous aviary of his own senses, an innate obstacle between the world and himself, between his desires and his accomplishments. The first stage of a human evolution which, if it is conscious, will have to be painful, will be the practice of a real dedifferentiation of the senses in order first to abolish their diversity, and then to aim at suppressing their intermediary. No expression of this agony and of this experience is as primitive and as loaded with immediate symbols as that given by William Blake in the following fragment.³¹

26. "la nature et la forme de cette marche de l'esprit vers sa libération" (Henry, "La Force des renoncements," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 [summer 1928]: 12).

27. "de l'esprit en révolte vers sa résorption [sic] en l'unité" (Henry 14).

28. "William Blake a vu dans la nuit primordiale les derniers des dieux, les Fous créateurs, qui expiraient les mondes. L'éternité immobile les avait vomis. La durée ne coulait pas encore. Sans fin, sans espoir, suant du sang, hurlant d'angoisse, ils martelaient le vide" (Henry 13-14).

29. "La Voyance, c'est la métaphysique expérimentale" (Gilbert-Lecomte, "L'Horrible Révélation ... la seule," *Le Grand Jeu* 3 [fall 1930]: 16).

30. "Quel obscurcissement de la pensée a-t-il empêché l'homme de tenir compte de l'identité et de l'universalité des témoignages mystiques des 'Visions prophétiques' de Blake, de l'*Aurélia* de Nerval, des dialogues de Poe, des 'Illuminations' de Rimbaud?" (Gilbert-Lecomte 16n).

31. "L'individu, naissant à la conscience de soi, s'épouvante devant la volière crierde et rauque de ses propres sens, obstacle inné entre le monde

Interestingly, the admiration and even the worship that *transition*, *Les Cahiers du Sud*, and *Le Grand Jeu* show for Blake originate in a metaphysical quest that differentiates those magazines from Breton's official surrealism, which is characterized in the second half of the 1920s by a dialectic between matter and spirit. Nevertheless, this opposition between official and dissident surrealisms was about to blur. As Robert Kanters writes about *Le Grand Jeu*: "These unfaithful disciples are in a way forerunners, they are ahead of the master."³² Indeed, Breton's surrealism evolved. Although in 1928 Breton was mainly concerned with historical materialism in his magazine *La Révolution surréaliste*, in 1930 he started developing an interest in esoterism and occultism in his new magazine *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. But at the end of the 1920s, there was still a deep dividing line between the dissidents and the official surrealist group led by Breton. The fact that some of the surrealist writers showed great interest in Blake, whereas Breton never mentioned the poet, exemplifies this division. Indeed, the metaphysical quest of the dissidents clashed with the materialism of the official group. There were more grounds for conflict. The dissidents reproached the surrealist leader for his authoritarianism, especially after the publication in 1929 of the *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*. All three magazines also claimed, though to different degrees, a non-political and internationalist stand which separated them from communist sympathies and the predominantly national concerns of the official group.

The result both of individual concerns and of larger editorial policies, Blake's revival in the 1920s and 1930s in France echoes a zeitgeist, so much so that it tends to turn into a trend. A 1929 letter from Saint-Georges de Bouhélier to Léon-Paul Fargue offers evidence of this: "You are the great visionary of our time. William Blake alone can be compared to you. For Rimbaud is less deeply mystical, his hallucinations are of a different nature."³³ Jean Lescure's testimony on the history of his magazine *Messages*, published in Paris between 1939 and 1946, allows us better to assess the development of this trend.

et lui, entre ses désirs et ses prises. La première étape d'une évolution humaine qui, si elle est consciente, ne pourra être que douloureuse, sera la pratique d'une véritable dédifférenciation des sens afin d'abolir leur diversité d'abord, puis de tendre à supprimer leur intermédiaire. Nulle expression de ce tourment et de cette expérience n'est aussi primitive et chargée de symboles immédiats que celle qu'en donne William Blake dans le fragment qui suit" (Delons, "De certains soleils fixes," *Le Grand Jeu* 3 [fall 1930]: 36-37).

32. "Ces disciples infidèles sont en un sens des précurseurs, ils devancent le maître" (Kanters, "Ésotérisme et surréalisme," *Méluise* 2 ["Occulte-Occultation"] [1981]: 15). See also Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920-1950* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 26 (in reference to *transition*).

33. "Vous êtes le grand visionnaire de notre temps. William Blake seul peut vous être comparé. Car Rimbaud est moins profondément mystique, ses hallucinations sont d'un autre ordre" (letter of 25 February 1929, quoted in Louise Rypko Schub, *Léon-Paul Fargue* [Geneva: Droz, 1973] 169).

Reflecting on the history of the first issue of *Messages*, which was devoted to Blake, Lescure writes in a direct but somewhat exaggerated way:

We took great interest in the poets whose work could be regarded as presenting a philosophical dimension. William Blake was fashionable. He was mentioned in every single article published. So the operator proposed Walter Uhl to take more resolutely the still under-explored paths of his poetry and philosophical thought. And since William Blake was so much heard about while none of his books could be found in bookshops (where even Gide's translation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was rarely available), the operator was thrilled at the explorations he would have to engage in and at the minor miracles that the first issue, simply entitled *William Blake*, would require from him.³⁴

In spite of his determination to take advantage of Blake's success in order to launch his magazine, Lescure had to confront two seemingly paradoxical obstacles: first, Blake's poetry was still unavailable; second, he had trouble finding Blake scholars:

The operator had chosen the easy way out. Since everyone was talking about Blake, nothing should be simpler than putting together a nice issue. There was still another advantage in choosing Blake: since the operator hardly knew anyone from the Republic of Letters, Blake, who was known to everyone, would introduce him everywhere. I was soon disillusioned. While everyone was talking about Blake, almost no one had read him. Had we paid a little attention to the matter, we would have noticed that it was always the same half-dozen sentences that were quoted.³⁵

Despite these obstacles, Lescure did not shrink back: "We had no other choice but getting down to it, reading Blake, translating him and translating a few texts by British writers such as Geoffrey Keynes, Herbert Read and David Friedland-

34. "On s'intéressait beaucoup aux poètes dont l'œuvre pouvait passer pour présenter un aspect philosophique. William Blake était à la mode. Il ne paraissait pas d'article qui n'y fit référence.

L'opérateur proposa donc à Walter Uhl de s'engager plus délibérément dans les voies encore mal explorées de la poésie et de sa réflexion philosophique. Et puisqu'on parlait tant de William Blake alors qu'aucun ouvrage de lui ne se trouvait en librairie (où même la traduction de Gide du *Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer* était rare), l'opérateur se réjouit des explorations auxquelles il allait devoir se livrer, et l'outil des prouesses qu'allait réclamer de lui le premier numéro intitulé *William Blake*, simplement" (Lescure, *Poésie et liberté: Histoire de Messages 1939-1946* [Paris: IMEC, 1998] 26).

35. "Il y avait de la facilité dans le choix de l'opérateur. Puisque tout le monde parlait de William Blake, rien ne devait être plus simple que de constituer un beau sommaire. Autre avantage de ce choix, c'est que l'opérateur ne connaissant à peu près personne de la république des Lettres, Blake, connu de tous, l'introduirait partout.

Il fallut déchanter. Si tout le monde parlait de Blake, à peu près personne ne l'avait lu. Un peu d'attention aurait dû nous montrer que c'était toujours la même demi-douzaine de phrases qui en étaient citées" (Lescure 27).

et."³⁶ The issue eventually appeared with contributions from Lescuré, Jean Vagne, Jean Audard, Denis Saurat, Jean Wahl, Geoffrey Stutfield, and Herbert Read.

Gide's complete translation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *La NRF*, Lescuré's acknowledged use of Blake in *Messages*, as well as *transition's*, *Les Cahiers du Sud's* and *Le Grand Jeu's* enthusiasm for the poet all point to Blake's unprecedented fame in 1920s and 1930s France. This renewed interest in Blake is not the result of mere chance: his spiritual and romantic poetry, his metaphysical quest and mystical impulses, the apocalyptic tone of his writings, as well as his image as a visionary and forgotten *poète maudit* resonate with the programs of many intellectuals, whether French or based in France. Because these avant-gardes did not consider Blake's poetry and character per se, but in the light of their own aspirations, they reinterpreted the poet to the point that they sometimes misunderstood him, as was the case in *transition*.

The interest and enthusiasm for Blake in the pages of *transition* shows in Brion's "William Blake Today," printed in December 1927, and, of course, in the dialogue the magazine offers with the poet in its famous June 1929 "Revolution of the Word" manifesto. Interestingly, both documents reveal a misinterpretation of the poet that sheds light on the meaning of Blake's rediscovery in 1920s and 1930s France.

It is no surprise to find in "William Blake Today" the vision of the poet that already prevailed in Soupault's texts or in the minds of *Les Cahiers du Sud's* editors. Brion's article, translated into English by editor Robert Sage, invokes "William Blake's exquisite naïveté and his ingenuousness in the company of men" (*t* 9: 204), "the sincerity of his heart and the purity of his spirit," his "genuine poetry," and "his childish simplicity" (*t* 9: 205) as many characteristics that make of him a "marvelous child" (*t* 9: 207), as stated at the end of the excerpt. This analysis highlights purity and sincerity, two values associated with the world of children, natives, and madmen that the French avant-gardes and particularly the surrealists emphasized in their work. However, Brion goes beyond these laudatory remarks. He also proves to be very critical of Blake and more precisely of what he calls Blake's "awkward philosophy": "Let us not hesitate to abandon the mortal—and dead—part of the work, the useless emphasis, the prophetic pretensions, this mixture of simplistic evangelism and awkward philosophy" (*t* 9: 204). The reader soon realizes that Brion does not consider Blake's work as a whole, but on the contrary sees it as ambivalent, almost as if it had been produced by two different people. On one hand he sees "genuine poetry," on the other "the darkness of theories badly understood and insufficiently assimilated by a quite uncultured brain" (*t* 9: 205); on one hand he sees "simply a poet carried away by his desire . . .," on the other "a messiah, a philosopher, a prophet" (*t* 9: 205),

36. "Il ne nous restait plus qu'à nous y coller nous-mêmes, lire Blake, le traduire et traduire quelques textes d'auteurs anglais, Geoffrey Keynes, Herbert Read et David Friedlander" (Lescuré 28).

three categories to which Blake mistakenly thought he belonged ("His greatest error was to believe himself a messiah, a philosopher, a prophet . . ."). The use of the adverb "simply" is quite relevant: Blake is praised for his simplicity because the critic wants him to "simply" be "a poet carried away by his desire . . ." Everything in Blake's work that does not conform to the criteria of "simplicity" and "purity" by which Brion and others characterize him is discredited as useless, pretentious, awkward, and obscure.

Such a reading of Blake's work is not uncommon. At about the same time, in his review in the *Dial* of S. Foster Damon's *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, Robert Hillyer mocked the many critics who considered the poet a "half-mad dreamer":

It would seem, then, that although the legend of Blake the Madman has long since been done away with, Blake the shadowy, half-mad dreamer is still in vogue; and his finest work has served as a sort of mental thicket where visionaries may disport themselves according to their fancy, rather than an academe where a carefully built up and clear-cut system of philosophy is expounded.³⁷

As Hillyer shows, it is in the interest of Blake's critics to try to disseminate this stereotypical image of the poet, since it allows them the freedom to approximate Blake's views and to avoid producing a careful study of his aesthetics and philosophy. That is why Hillyer expresses unqualified admiration for Damon's work:

It is clear that Mr Damon has written a book which must serve as a foundation to all future study of William Blake. He has discovered to us a figure as unlike the madman of popular fancy as the vague occultist of injudicious enthusiasts. The system of philosophy unveiled in these pages is of that highest type of mysticism, which, however deliberately obscure in its expression, is wholly simple in its significance: the union of the human soul with that God dwelling in it who must be released in eventual perfection by a struggle through the imperfections of material existence.³⁸

Aware of the difficulty of Blake's philosophy and determined to clarify its principle, Damon, in Hillyer's interpretation, seems to anticipate Brion's criticism and to respond to the peculiar rediscovery of Blake as it occurs across the Atlantic.

While Brion's study revealed a common misunderstanding of Blake in France in the 1920s and 1930s, the famous "Revolution of the Word" manifesto added further evidence that his critics misread Blake. Probably written by Jolas,³⁹ the manifesto opened *transition's* issue 16-17 in June 1929.

37. Hillyer, "William Blake, the Philosopher," *Dial* 77 (September 1924): 258.

38. Hillyer 259.

39. This is what Dougald McMillan indicates in *transition: The History of a Literary Era 1927-38* (New York: George Braziller, 1976) 48.

As can be seen, sobriety characterizes the whole document: published as a small poster, delicately framed with a double black line and accurately centered, the manifesto appeals to the eye by respecting traditional codes. The text itself is also carefully laid out: divided into twelve neatly numbered points evoking the twelve commandments, it is preceded by a short introduction and ends with the list of signatories. The use

of bold characters emphasizes this ternary construction: the twelve points are separated from the introductory paragraph, the list of signatories, and the quotations which come with the statements. The form of this proclamation is thus characterized by a certain classicism which leads the reader to question its status: is this an avant-garde manifesto? Indeed, we are very far here from the typographic creativity of the dadaists

PROCLAMATION

TIRED OF THE SPECTACLE OF SHORT STORIES, NOVELS, POEMS AND PLAYS STILL UNDER THE HEGEMONY OF THE BANAL WORD, MONOTONOUS SYNTAX, STATIC PSYCHOLOGY, DESCRIPTIVE NATURALISM, AND DESIROUS OF CRYSTALLIZING A VIEWPOINT...

WE HEREBY DECLARE THAT :

1. THE REVOLUTION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.

2. THE IMAGINATION IN SEARCH OF A FABULOUS WORLD IS AUTONOMOUS AND UNCONFINED.

(Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity... Blake)

3. PURE POETRY IS A LYRICAL ABSOLUTE THAT SEEKS AN APRIORI REALITY WITHIN OURSELVES ALONE.

(Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth... Blake)

4. NARRATIVE IS NOT MERE ANECDOTE, BUT THE PROJECTION OF A METAMORPHOSIS OF REALITY.

(Enough! Or Too Much!... Blake)

5. THE EXPRESSION OF THESE CONCEPTS CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY THROUGH THE RHYTHMIC " HALLUCINATION OF THE WORD ". (Rimbaud).

6. THE LITERARY CREATOR HAS THE RIGHT TO DISINTEGRATE THE PRIMAL MATTER OF WORDS IMPOSED ON HIM BY TEXT-BOOKS AND DICTIONARIES.

(The road of excess leads to the palace of Wisdom... Blake)

7. HE HAS THE RIGHT TO USE WORDS OF HIS OWN FASHIONING AND TO DISREGARD EXISTING GRAMMATICAL AND SYNTACTICAL LAWS.

(The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction... Blake)

8. THE " LITANY OF WORDS " IS ADMITTED AS AN INDEPENDENT UNIT.

9. WE ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH THE PROPAGATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL IDEAS, EXCEPT TO EMANCIPATE THE CREATIVE ELEMENTS FROM THE PRESENT IDEOLOGY.

10. TIME IS A TYRANNY TO BE ABOLISHED.

11. THE WRITER EXPRESSES. HE DOES NOT COMMUNICATE

12. THE PLAIN READER BE DAMNED.

(Damn braces! Bless relaxes!... Blake)

— *Signed* : KAY BOYLE, WHIT BURNETT, HART CRANE, CARESSE CROSBY, HARRY CROSBY, MARTHA FOLEY, STUART GILBERT, A. L. GILLESPIE, LEIGH HOFFMAN, EUGENE JOLAS, ELLIOT PAUL, DOUGLAS RIGBY, THEO RUTRA, ROBERT SAGE, HAROLD J. SALEMSON, LAURENCE VAIL.

or vorticists who turned the manifesto into the privileged expression of avant-gardism's symbolical violence.⁴⁰

The contents of the proclamation add to this ambivalence. While the manifesto shows a certain continuity with surrealism (even though it also clearly breaks away from it, for example in statement two, or suggests further developments, in statements six and seven), it also builds strong links with literary movements of the past, in particular with romanticism. The third statement is relevant: "Pure poetry is a lyrical absolute that seeks an a priori reality within ourselves alone." The supremacy of subjectivity is also established in statement ten: "Time is a tyranny to be abolished." The eleventh statement follows the same line: "The writer expresses. He does not communicate." By asserting the primacy of the expressive function of language over its communicative one, *transition* places itself in a long literary and critical tradition, one marked by the work of German romantic Wilhelm von Humboldt and by the symbolist literary theories, of which strong echoes can be found in Valéry and more particularly in his 1928 "Propos sur la poésie," where he compares poetry with dancing and prose with walking.⁴¹

The contents of the manifesto thus reveal a certain propensity to continuity already suggested by the very form of the document. The first statement is a case in point: "The revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact." The authors include themselves in a tradition at the very moment that they proclaim a "revolution." Although it came as a great shock at the time, the last statement does not suffice to dispel this tension. By stating "the plain reader be damned," *transition* certainly uses provocative language, but the idea is not new. In 1914, Pound was already writing in the *Egoist*: "Damn the man in the street, once and for all"⁴² The manifesto's fundamental choice of continuity is revealed first and foremost by Blake's quotations, probably suggested by editor Stuart Gilbert⁴³ and scattered throughout the document. Indeed, six of the twelve statements are followed by a quotation from Blake. A sort of dialogue thus takes place between the text of the manifesto itself and the long-dead poet. Blake's omnipresence in this essential text is not, of course, the result of mere chance. First, Blake is a romantic. His interest in occultism and the apocalypse, his rejection of reason as well as his passion for the myth of Albion strongly link him to the magazine. Moreover, as we have seen, Blake is given special attention in France at the time when the manifesto is written.

40. See in particular Adrian Marino, "Le Manifeste," in *Les Avant-Gardes littéraires au 20e siècle*, ed. Jean Weisgerber, vol. 2 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986) 825-34.

41. See in particular Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Prussian Academy, 1907) 44, translated and quoted by Tzvetan Todorov, *Théories du symbole* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 206, and Paul Valéry, "Propos sur la poésie," *Variété* (1928), in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Hytier, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) 1371.

42. Pound, "Wyndham Lewis," *Egoist* 1.12 (15 June 1914): 233.

43. See McMillan 48.

All Blake quotations in the manifesto are taken from his Proverbs of Hell. As a genre, the proverb is a form of popular and cautious wisdom. But Blake's proverbs reverse this essential characteristic to advocate dissension: "The road of excess leads to the palace of Wisdom ...," "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction" Thus, the manifesto's ambivalence, between revolution and continuity, shows not only in the form and the text of the proclamation, but also in the Blakean subtext. However, the Proverbs of Hell do not coincide with the manifesto; on the contrary, they are its inverted image: whereas the "Revolution of the Word" uses a revolutionary genre (the manifesto) to advocate continuity, Blake uses a conservative form (the proverb) to champion revolution. While highlighting common interests in the power of imagination and contributing to Blake's institutionalization as an established poet, *transition's* use of Blake adds to the magazine's complex relationship to revolution and continuity and reveals a deep misunderstanding of the poet's radical spirit. Ultimately, Blake's ambivalent status as both an intellectual guarantee from the past and a recently discovered *poète maudit* contributes to the manifesto's main dialectic between revolution and continuity.

Blake's presence in *transition* magazine allows us better to understand the modalities of a wider Blake revival in the France of the 1920s and 1930s. The interest of contemporary intellectuals in the English poet mainly derives from the neo-romantic quest of the main European avant-gardes, among which surrealism plays a particular role. Blake's apocalyptic discourse, his interest in childhood, madness, and the dream, as well as his reputation as a solitary and misunderstood genius, which echoes that of another *poète maudit* "discovered" by the surrealists, Lautréamont, resonate with the expectations and concerns of a great part of the intelligentsia traumatized by the cataclysm of World War I and the prospect of a new carnage. Blake's rereading thus takes place in a highly sensitive historical and cultural context, which may account in part for the serious errors made in interpretations of his poetry. Brion's article in the December 1927 issue of *transition*, as well as the "dialogue" between the poet and the magazine's editors in the famous "Revolution of the Word" manifesto in June 1929, suggest the extent of the ignorance of Blake's work and shed light on the misunderstandings of his poetry. Blake's rediscovery in 1920s and 1930s France thus does not do justice to the poet; but maybe more importantly it does contribute to publicizing heretofore little-known work and celebrating, even though partially, a poet who had largely fallen into oblivion at the time.



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R E V I E W S

William Blake (1757–1827): The Visionary Genius of British Romanticism. Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, 2 April–28 June 2009. Guest curated by Michael Phillips with Daniel Marchesseau, Directeur du Musée de la Vie Romantique.

Exhibition reviewed by Grant F. Scott

THE FIRST to appear in France since 1947, this retrospective contains over 130 of Blake's works and, as the official web site states, "introduces William Blake as poet, painter and artist-printmaker." The exhibition spans Blake's career, offering work from his apprenticeship to his final engraved calling card for George Cumberland. A number of media are represented, from early pencil sketches and stipple engravings to relief etchings, illuminated prints, large color-printed drawings, and paintings. On display as well is the burnished copperplate

for plate 11 of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825 [1826]) alongside the resulting printed page, a pairing that reveals the fine marriage of metal and paper that is so difficult to visualize without the material fact of the plate itself. These two items alone are worth the price of admission, though the rarely seen color print *Newton* (1795) from the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the vividly colored second-state engraving of the *Canterbury Pilgrims* (c. 1810–20) offer equal delights. The exhibit concludes with several contemporary tributes to Blake, including a lithograph of Francis Bacon's *Study after the Life Mask of William Blake* (1955), Jean Cortot's *Hommage à William Blake* (1985), and a clip from Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* (1995). Many of the original works on display are drawn from the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, though a significant number are on loan from the British Museum, the British Library, Glasgow University, Manchester Art Gallery, the Victoria University Library (Toronto), the Louvre, and several private collectors.

Anyone looking for a synopsis of the variety and breadth of Blake's artwork would be hard pressed to find a more splendid visual introduction than the one guest curator Michael Phillips has assembled here. The great strength of this exhibit is that it succeeds admirably in making these works accessible to native French and English speakers alike—no small feat given Blake's visual-verbal designs and his often diminutive



Newton (Philadelphia Museum of Art) mounted next to its sketch (Fitzwilliam Museum). © [MAW]

calligraphy. In its straightforward chronological organization, its clear presentation of a variety of works, and its progressive movement through the stages of a revolutionary career, the exhibition offers a magnificent introduction to Blake's versatility and range, not to mention his evolution as an engraver and thinker. Deliberately, I think, it represents only two complete sequences of plates from, appropriately, *Europe a Prophecy* (1794) and the Virgil woodcuts. The rest of the works are grouped according to six periods of Blake's life, outlined in the exhibition's information sheet: "Blake's Apprenticeship," "First Visions/First Poems," "Blake as a Copy Engraver," "Relief Etching and Illuminated Books," "The Large Colour Prints," and "The Last Twenty Years." Each section is introduced by a helpful paragraph by the curators stenciled on the walls in French and English, and each is accompanied by a famous quotation from Blake's poetry: "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower," etc. This is a greatest-hits album which will not fail to please the specialist as well—the sheer amplitude and quality of the work on display are staggering, and richly reward close attention.

On the morning I visited (26 May), gallery traffic was light, so I was able to linger in front of the artworks and inspect details without the insistent pressure of fellow patrons to move me along. I drifted backwards through the space several times, pausing to revisit favorites like plates 8 (naked Orc) and 12 (Orc aflame) from the Fitzwilliam's *America a Prophecy*, and loitering before the three large sheets from *Vala* that were intelligently sheathed in vertical glass sections so as to display both recto and verso. Spending time before works like these made me think about the online Blake Archive, a miracle of technology which has now become essential for classroom

and conference use, but still no substitute for the original manuscripts and plates. While the screen may register an accurate palate of colors, it necessarily flattens the composition and texture of the paper, smoothing the rough geography of the page and bathing each work in a shimmering cyberglow. In the original plate 8, by contrast, I was able to spy fine flecks of gold dusting the pictured leaves and foliage, gold not apparent in the online version. I could also see more layers of applied watercolor and, lo and behold, even the wiry mesh of pubic hair sprouting luxuriantly around Orc's exposed groin (I had always thought Blake airbrushed his heroes' genitals!).

I had never seen the exhibited plate of "The Tyger," an early color-printed copy which belonged to the late Sir Geoffrey Keynes and is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum. The plate is not represented among the eleven versions in the Blake Archive, and is significantly different from most copies, which feature a marked contrast between the light shadings of the tree and the more brightly colored tiger. In this version the tiger is printed in the same mottled, earthy tones as the tree, its head splashed with what looks like patches of brown enamel. There are swirls of muted blue highlighting the legs and gesturing at stripes on the shoulders, but there are also hints of blue in several places on the tree, most noticeably on the branch opposite the "grasp/clasp" rhyme. The tiger's hind-quarters look like they're growing directly out of the tree, or almost as if they have fused with it (the back right leg is nearly impossible to distinguish), a decidedly organic effect that is echoed by the bending branches that separate the stanzas. So here tree and tiger are one and the tiger is even more rooted and static than usual. While the lightly printed text reaches for the stars, the image remains brown and heavy, earthbound. The terrifying textual beast prowls "the forests of the night," his visual counterpart fixed harmlessly below. Small discover-

ies like these make any visit to an exhibition of artworks or manuscripts worthwhile, especially to those of us weaned on print and screen facsimiles. It's refreshing to have the chinks of the cavern briefly widened. And the great wonder of Blake is that he never stops compelling you to see, to see further, finer.

The exhibit also affords the opportunity to compare the pencil sketch of the frontispiece for *The Book of Ahania* (1795) with the finished color version, each from different locations and thus usually impossible to see together. The same is true for the four distinct versions on display of the large color-printed drawing *Pity* (1795). Many are familiar with the Tate's superbly finished print, but few know the pencil sketches from the British Museum, both of which are shown here. I was happy to see, too, that some of the works in the exhibition are lightly foxed and faded—the frontispiece to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, for example—and that not all are in the pristine state of the *Newton* or *Joseph of Arimathea* (1773). These blemishes serve to pull the works out of the airless sanctity of the museum and trammel them with time. Some will disagree, but I think it's useful to find artworks humanized (and historicized) in this way, brought closer to the temporal experience of the viewer.

Other highlights of the exhibition include the life mask by J. S. Deville and portraits by John Linnell and Blake's wife, Catherine; one of only two known intaglio prints of *Laocoön* (c. 1826-27); several drawings and engravings based on the Book of Job; a number of Blake's watercolor illustrations to the Bible; and selected plates from the *Songs*, *The Book of Thel*, and *The Book of Urizen*. An edition of John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), for which Blake engraved the plates (here colored), is displayed open to several graphic scenes of punishment, and thoughtfully paired with the frontispiece and title page from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, which depict scenes of captivity and flight. Other sequences in the exhibition are more puzzling, however. Midway through we encounter a wall that features, from left to right: "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Innocence* and from *Experience*, "Holy Thursday" from *Innocence*, "Nurses Song" from *Experience*, "Nurse's Song" from *Innocence*, and finally "A Divine Image" from *Experience*. The first pairing allows us to compare the two versions and note Blake's keen psychological awareness of point of view. "Holy Thursday," however, lacks its companion piece, and the two plates of "Nurse's Song" are in the wrong order. "A Divine Image" is a small but powerful statement

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rooting man's inhumanity in "the Human Form Divine" rather than an abstract God. But lacking its counterpunch in "The Divine Image" from *Innocence*, the plate loses its qualifying irony as well as additional layers of meaning. I wonder also about the decision to stack the plates from *Europe* one above the other in a double line, a configuration that disrupts the linear sequence of the book. For those French visitors having trouble following the work because it is a difficult narrative and written in English, this presentation will be confusing. Wouldn't one want to adhere as closely as possible to Blake's intended visual order and thus mimic for the viewer the actual experience of reading the book?

Michael Phillips, who co-curated the major Blake exhibitions at Tate Britain and the Metropolitan Museum in 2000-01, deserves a lot of credit not only for assembling such a stunning array of artwork from so many different institutions and collections, but also for pulling it all together abroad. I suspect the negotiations were laborious and time-consuming. Difficult too must have been the logistics of organizing the details of the exhibition, from laying out the floor-plan to creating bilingual labels and publicity material. My one regret is that more of this energy wasn't expended on the installation and on imagining the overall structure and design of the space, which is rather orthodox, moving us back and forth through a series of rectangular blocks. As we enter the gallery, the initial "confrontation" consists of three massive Stonehenge-like walls which magnify a portion of a watercolor and wash it in a pastel blue that blurs the represented form of an angel. These walls serve to thwart our entrance rather than inviting us in, and do not clearly enough direct our path. Located on the basement level of the museum, the entire space seems too small and confining, as if Blake's work is once again contained in its volumes rather than being liberated from them. (I imagined figures like Orc and Urizen trying to jump off the walls.) Of course I realize that the fragility of these works on paper, many in watercolor, limits a curator's options, and that they must be displayed under reduced lighting conditions. But one can't help feeling the absence of an opening or vista, a circular passageway up or out as in the watercolor from Blake's Dante series exhibited here, *The Circle of the Lustful* (1824-27), with its upswelling river of bodies. Blake himself might have wished for a bit more irreverent pizzazz in the overall conception and design. Standard labels and fonts—why not more variety and color? Blocked rectangles and lines—where are the circles and vortexes, the irresistible sweep upwards? Bacon and Cortot at the end—why not Ginsberg, the Doors?

In view of the quantity and quality of the works presented, however, these are small complaints. This is an ambitious show of great scope and power, sure to mobilize an army of new Blake converts on the continent. Even as I was leaving the exhibit something was already brewing. The gallery began to fill with French visitors murmuring excitedly about the works. Unexpectedly, a single guard began shushing them. He shushed three times, each more loudly, but to no avail. The murmurs grew to a buzz and then to a glorious din.

Martin Myrone. *The Blake Book*. London: Tate Publishing, 2007. 224 pp., profusely illus., mostly color. £16.99/\$29.95, paperback.

Reviewed by Alexander S. Gourlay

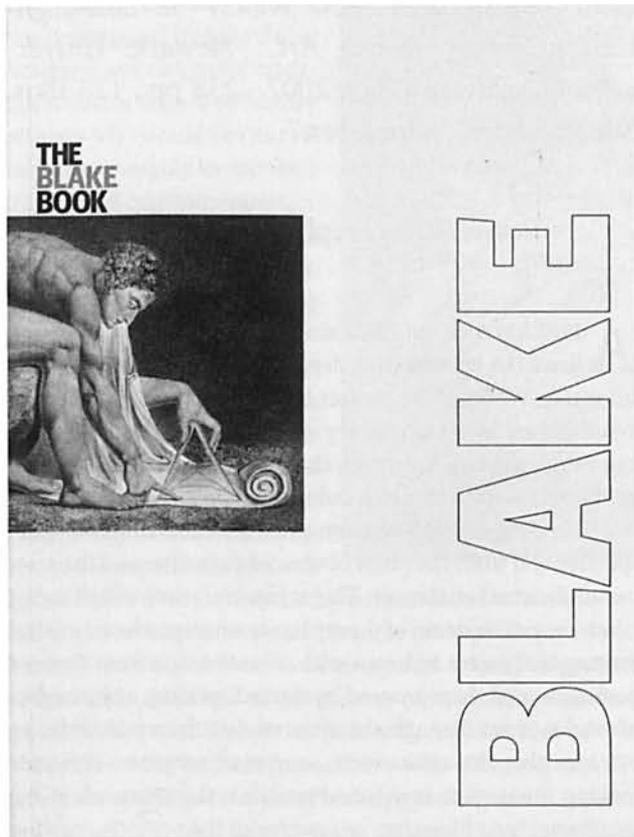
MARTIN Myrone's contribution to the Tate's series of guidebooks, *Essential Artists*, is a sensitive and impressive introduction to Blake's visual art. The series, which so far includes *The Rothko Book*, *The Duchamp Book*, and *The Turner Book*, is in hefty quarto paperback format, 10" x 7.5", a size that was more likely chosen for convenient portability than for optimal presentation of artworks. *The Blake Book* is not an academic text and would not suffice as the only textbook in a course focusing on Blake, but the presentation of Blake's art here is at once accessible to any interested person and yet sophisticated, intellectually rigorous, and up to date—it would be an excellent choice as a text to recommend to students or laypersons who want to learn more about Blake and his art on their own, or as adjunctive reading in a course devoted to Blake's writings.

Myrone, who is a curator at Tate Britain, often evinces impatience with and/or skepticism about particular trends in academic Blake scholarship in his commentary, but he has obviously done his homework. Museum professionals sometimes have an advantage over academics in grasping the original historical context of works of visual art, in that they are more likely to know well the other works, rarely displayed now, that constituted the canons and the contexts in which the artists worked. Myrone's take on Blake, informed by extensive reading in primary and secondary sources as well as daily access to both Blake's pictures and little-known works by his contemporaries, is fresh enough to startle a reader who is expecting the usual fare served in guidebooks for the general public; his broad introductory accounts of Blake's contexts are carefully framed and easily understood, his summaries of critical issues are both judicious and just, and his recommendations for further reading are cannily selected.

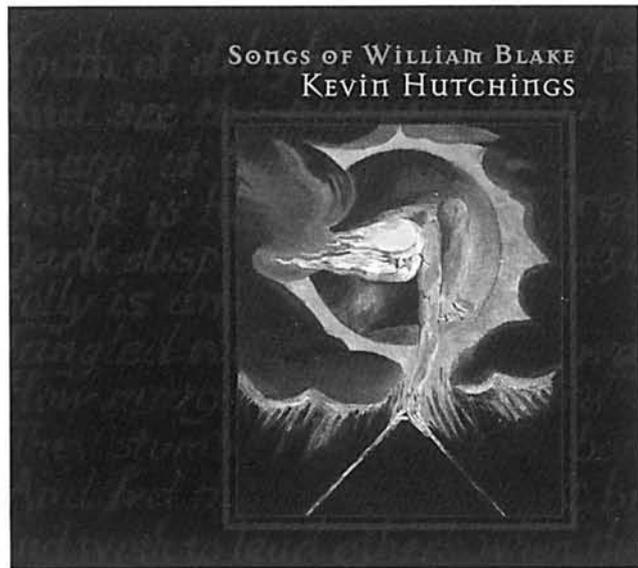
Although Tate Britain houses the greatest collection of Blake pictures in the world, *The Blake Book* is not unduly Tate-centric, either in its discussion or in its selection of works to reproduce. And although the focus is on visual art, Myrone includes substantial discussion of Blake's illuminated books and other texts, as well as a selection of prose and some poetry, and his grasp of Blake's literary contexts is impressive. The illustrations, over a hundred of which are printed in high-resolution color, come from a wide variety of collections around the world. Unfortunately, they are often disappointingly small, and though the color quality is at least good throughout, only a few of them successfully convey the effect that these works have when seen in person. Many of the largest illustrations are heavily cropped full-page "bleeds"

selected by the book's designer from pictures treated in the chapters they introduce; at the same time, several important images (such as the annotated *Laocoön*) are barely larger than postage stamps.

The book's focus is sometimes quirky, with breakout sections devoted to such outliers as a single *Tiriel* design or *The Fall of Rosamond*, an impressive stipple illustration after Thomas Stothard, but Myrone covers most of the essential works as well as a respectable number of unexpected ones. The usual elements of a gallery companion—chronology, bibliography, guide to collections—are present and competent, but a selection of reactions to Blake from “Creative Artists,” including R. H. Cromek, James Joyce, and Georges Bataille, is very uneven and seems perfunctory in comparison with the rest of the book. The organization and layout of the volume, probably dictated by the designer of the whole guidebook series, are vaguely postmodern, but the thorough index makes it possible to locate topics efficiently.



Kevin Hutchings. *Songs of William Blake*. [Self-published music CD with booklet <<http://www.kevinhutchings.ca/about>>] 2007. Canadian \$16.99 from <<http://www.indiepool.com>>.



Reviewed by Brent E. Kinser

FAIRNESS requires me to preface this review of Kevin Hutchings's *Songs of William Blake* with a significant caveat: I am no lover of academicized folk music, modern or otherwise, and although the production values and the musicianship on this CD are first-rate, the overall sound and feel of the disc remind one less of Blake's immortal poetry than of Christopher Guest's parodic *A Mighty Wind* (2003). Sahra Featherstone's production choices, her clear ability behind a mixing board, and the skill of the musicians she has assembled for the recording make it a musically sound, accomplished performance. Although Hutchings declares in the accompanying booklet that "the effort to set Blake's songs to music will always be audacious" and that "Blake's creative theory ... provides me with the poetical license necessary to make of his *Songs* something new and perhaps unforeseen" (9-10), it is hard to discern either audaciousness or newness on a CD that is best described as a conventionally polished, over-intellectualized folk recording, one that decidedly lacks, especially in the vocal performances, the raw energy and the soulful depth that give traditional folk music its penetrating, heartrending identity.

This lack is disappointing, for the intent behind the project is a sound one. Approaching the *Songs* as musical compositions, even in the absence of authentic Blakean arrangements, seems at least as legitimate as some of the other ways that critics have read Blake in terms of their constructed visions. We have, for instance, Cunningham's vision of Blake as madman,

Gilchrist's vision of Blake as hero, Swinburne's vision of Blake as rebel, Yeats's vision of Blake as symbolist, Visconti's vision of Blake as artist, and now Hutchings's vision of Blake as musician and composer. However valid these critical approaches are, they all reveal as much about the critic as they do about Blake or Blake's work. The value of this project, therefore, and there is value, rests in the attempt to understand Blake's songs in the context of the creative process. From inspiration to recording to postproduction, Hutchings has clearly struggled to understand the unity of invention and execution, just as Blake did and all musicians do. Thus, when he claims to have learned much in creating *Songs of William Blake*, I believe him and congratulate him for the insights he has gained from his investigations of Blake's creative process. How much this CD has to offer as a musical artifact, however, depends upon a shared sense of taste; those who like folk music will be more apt to enjoy this disc than those who do not.

On the question of what musical interpretations of Blake potentially can teach us about his compositional intentions, Hutchings makes a theoretical point with which I disagree. He suggests that Blake's lost melodies—the essential missing component in a creative triad of words, imagery, and music—if recovered, would help critics today better understand the complexities of Blake's paradoxical vision, just as "Blake's musical performances" may have "helped his contemporaries to navigate such ambiguities" (6-7). Here, in conjunction with the claim that "there can be no doubt that access to Blake's original melodies would provide us with important interpretive cues, cues that would help to guide and to shape our understanding of what his poems mean—or at least what they meant to the poet himself" (8), Hutchings goes one step too far. It would of course be wonderful to have access to Blake's original music, but the sphinx riddle of what meanings he intended will surely remain in the midst of whatever woes are influencing the Blakean explorer. If we had Blake's music, or even samples of his singing, we would not be any closer to a definitive interpretation of the ambiguities at the center of his works. There is, after all, no reason to believe that Blake's music would be any more explicit to idiots than his words or his images. Allowed to witness an actual Blakean performance, we would certainly know more, but the possible meanings engendered by such an experience would more likely expand the number of potential interpretations than it would reduce them—infinite particularity indeed.

In terms of the performance, the CD is never stronger than during the first song, "Introduction (Experience)." When the music begins, it has a wonderfully mysterious sense to it before the first lyrics rather jarringly declare academic folk as the genre. For me, the blow is fatal. But again, those readers who appreciate music of this variety will no doubt find much to like here. Further, the accompanying booklet is very fine in terms of conception and design. The CD and its packaging are beautiful things. Hutchings's introductory essay is accessible to those with little knowledge of Blake, and, again, he makes a good case for approaching Blake from the point of view of

music. So, although it may appear otherwise, I do recommend *Songs of William Blake*, if for no other reason than to support the attempt to draw out some of the nectar that is embedded within the silenced versions of these remarkable poems. But if the desire is for audacity and newness, a much better interpretive engagement with Blake might be Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* (1995). And if folk music is not your preferred musical genre, there are many other approaches, as Hutchings recognizes in his essay. Ultimately, Hutchings must be thanked, and one hopes that musicians will continue to turn to Blake and his works for inspiration, for it is in the processes associated with these creative turns that one finds the keys to the doors of perception. Hutchings has clearly opened them for himself in creating his *Songs of William Blake*, though I stubbornly and perhaps unreasonably refuse to walk through with him. I wait in hope for an interpretation of Blake with more of an edge, more of an attitude, more like Amy Winehouse on the brink of rehab, and less like folk on the brink of academia.

William L. Pressly. *The Artist as Original Genius: Shakespeare's "Fine Frenzy" in Late-Eighteenth-Century British Art*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007. 235 pp., 123 illus. \$80.00/£68.50, hardcover.

Reviewed by Stephen C. Behrendt

A HALLMARK of William Pressly's work has always been the breadth and depth of cultural awareness that inform it. Whether the project be an exhibition catalogue or a full-blown interdisciplinary study like this book, Pressly can be counted on to bring a thorough understanding of the primary materials and the cultural contexts that help us to read those materials, both from a modern, contemporary perspective and from the point of view of the artists and their actual and virtual audiences. This is especially important today, when the proliferation of theory has so often produced critical writing that seems to begin with an author's current favorite paradigm and then proceed backward, passing any number of works of art through the sieve of that theory in order to discover that the artists were—surprise, surprise—forward-looking theorists themselves. Pressly's is the approach of the traditional (art) historian: he starts with the artifacts, moving outward from what they reveal within their own spaces and toward widening concentric rings of culture and signification. At the same time, he crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries much in the fashion of the eighteenth century, when artists and critics alike—and not a few consumers as well—ranged

easily and confidently over multiple aesthetic and cultural categories. Expansive and flexible criticism of this sort has perceptibly eroded over the past two centuries, despite the insistently visual nature of contemporary technoculture and the seemingly endless inundation of multimedia stimuli to which we are all subjected.

I mention this as a sort of preamble to my discussion of *The Artist as Original Genius* because the artists who are Pressly's subjects were responding to an analogous swerve in the direction and emphasis of popular culture during the later eighteenth century, the period upon which Pressly focuses. The central event of the eighteenth-century British "art world" was probably, by consensus, the founding of the Royal Academy in December 1768. Shamed by the absence of national academies of arts like those that existed in continental Europe, and by the hierarchical cultural nationalism implicit in all such institutions, Britain finally responded with its own Royal Academy, joining to George III's patronage the oh-so-serious direction (and annual discourses) of its founding president, Sir Joshua Reynolds. From the first, it was understood that the Royal Academy was obliged to establish a native school of history painters who would not just rival but thoroughly trump their continental contemporaries.

Within the hierarchy of the arts in the eighteenth century, grand-style history painting occupied the position analogous to the exalted place held in literature by the epic. The highest and noblest of the genres, each was understood to possess unusual national cultural significance; each presented for popular emulation a heroic figure (and an attendant constellation of values and social mores) whose exploits and fate (or perhaps better, whose destiny) were understood to be more than usually important to the nation itself and to the abilities of its citizens to define themselves as members of that nation. Pressly reminds us that it was the fatally brilliant James Barry who observed that the execution and appreciation of history painting and sculpture constituted "the tests by which the national character will be tried in after ages, and by which it has been, as is now, tried by the natives of other countries" (15). William Blake would write in 1809 that "England expects that every man should do his duty, in Arts, as well as in Arms, or in the Senate" (*Descriptive Catalogue*, E 549). Blake's allusion to Admiral Nelson's fa-

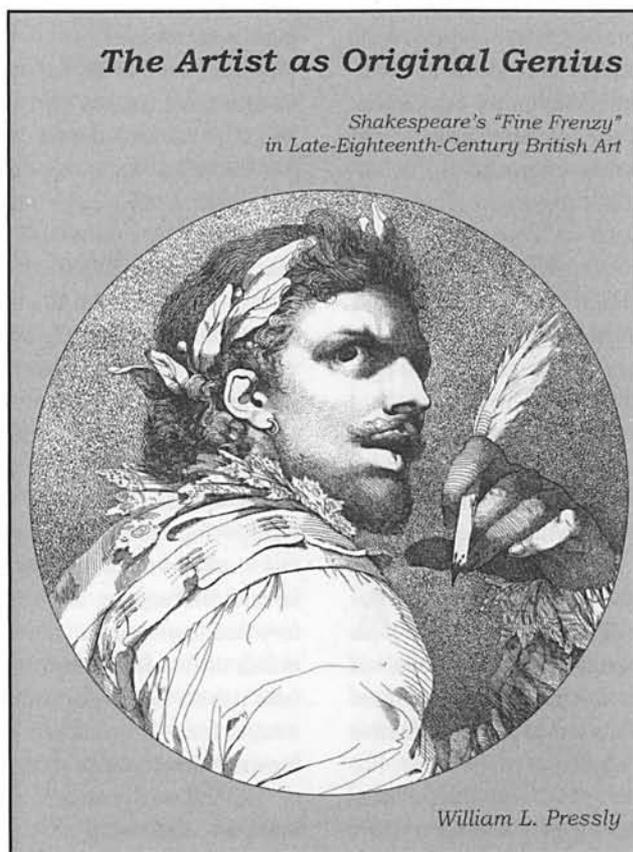
mous statement at Trafalgar was no coincidence, of course, but rather an indication of the extent to which he regarded the artist's exertions as a no less sacred *duty* to his nation and its citizens than those of the warrior and the lawmaker. Within this widely accepted rubric, the artist (for instance, the Benjamin West who created the iconic *Death of General Wolfe* [1770, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1771]) was necessarily almost as much a part of the heroic agenda of such works as the subject matter. One could reasonably expect to speak of a grand-style British history painter almost as one did of a "Homer," by which name the sophisticated audience understood both the epic poet himself and his great poems.

Despite Reynolds's exhortations to artists to dedicate themselves to grand-style painting, the market for such works seemed not to be there late in the century. Indeed, as Chris-

topher Rovee has recently demonstrated in *Imagining the Gallery: The Social Body of British Romanticism* (2006), the popular taste was increasingly infatuated with portraiture, which for many of Reynolds's mindset represented an unfortunate and indeed enervating capitulation to an emerging and degraded bourgeois taste. Working in Rome, classically trained artists like the American-born West, the Scot Gavin Hamilton, and the Englishman Nathaniel Dance aped the models of Raphael and his academic circle in works of varying success and repute. But it remained for the wild Swiss, Henry Fuseli, to graft to this academic heritage a disturbing and destabilizing supernatural element that marked something distinctively new in a national school of history painting that never-

theless remained both inferior to its foreign competitors and uninviting to its British consumers.

The challenge faced by British artists was what Pressly calls "tradition's crippling burden" (25), an accumulated weight and mass of inherited materials, protocols, and expectations that, during the eighteenth century, had tended increasingly to hamstring would-be history painters. In short, the burden of the past—of the tradition of grand-style *istoria*—left ever less space for genuine innovation, either in subject matter or in technique. To continue in the old way was to risk, at best, a descent into decadence and a hollow and hopelessly self-indulgent celebration of the outworn. The answer, it became clear, lay not in perpetuating that particular and highly



coded past but rather in striking out in a new direction. For eighteenth-century England this meant turning to what became known as original genius, a quality that the English located in the iconic figure of William Shakespeare. Indeed, much of Pressly's book has finally to do with why Shakespeare became iconic during this century. What turned an obscure and to all appearances relatively unlettered Elizabethan into the William Shakespeare? In large part, the answer is to be found in a cult of originality that was signaled early in the century by Dryden, promulgated in earnest by Edward Young at mid-century, and brought to fruition by a cadre of interdisciplinary artists and commentators toward the century's end. Both Young and Edmund Burke argued that the classical heritage had been accorded too much cultural capital, at the expense of indigenous genius. For them and others, Shakespeare became the ultimate measure of individual native genius, in part because his obscure origins and experiences rendered the customary trail of intellectual evidence (and classical enculturation) invisible, if not irrelevant. Shakespeare became the English exemplar *par excellence* of the "modern" artist whose success made him a rival and even a conqueror of the "ancient." He provided a model of artistic inspiration that could be—and was—reasonably presented as emerging without crippling debts to classical traditions, a spontaneous genius, a spark that set alight the dry tinder of his times and illuminated those of succeeding generations.

The Artist as Original Genius, then, traces this cultural propagandizing of Shakespeare—and through him of England and of English art—in the works of several major end-of-century artists. Transferring this Shakespeare to visual and sculptural art, moreover, became a growth industry that fueled a new, alternative artistic consumerism while simultaneously creating (crafting, in the word's full sense) a Shakespeare that was both more than and different from the historical playwright. Pressly's first and second chapters examine John Hamilton Mortimer's fiercely anticanonical art, which evolved from the artist's infatuation with the aesthetic extremism of Salvator Rosa, whom Pressly calls another representative of "an independent, spontaneous approach to art" (64). For Pressly, it is significant that all these artists who made Shakespeare (the man and the works) so major a subject of their art also indulged in what are essentially heroic self-portraits. With artists like Mortimer, who relished the extravagant and whose visual fantasies are radically destabilizing, it was probably inevitable that Shakespeare's ostensibly idiosyncratic genius would yield not just material for dramatic pictures but also the impetus for self-mythologizing self-portraiture. For Mortimer and others, the artist as original genius "has more in common with Satan, the archrebel, than with God, the archetypal creator" (83). It is worth noting that while Pressly's focus in this formulation is upon Shakespeare as the originary writer, the passage just quoted turns upon Milton, the other great "native genius" whose *Paradise Lost* provided so much material for many—if not most—of the visual and sculptural artists Pressly considers here.

After a brief chapter on John and Alexander Runciman's Shakespearean subjects, Pressly turns to longer assessments of Fuseli (whom he calls "Shakespeare's Painter" [95]) and the (justifiably) less well known James Jeffreys. Whereas Fuseli effectively apotheosizes Shakespeare (again, man and works alike) in highly dramatic, even melodramatic, compositions of unquestioned emotive impact, Jeffreys sets out to don Shakespeare's visionary mantle by challenging the entire host of his contemporaries. "In taking on Shakespeare's mantle," Pressly writes, "he was seeking not only to challenge himself to the highest standard but also to find assurance that such an exalted rank was possible for an English artist" (137-38; my emphasis). Wildly extravagant and stunningly inventive, Jeffreys's monumental figure studies and dynamic group scenes hint at the mental instability that characterized so many of the artists of this circle and that is so troublingly apparent in their many self-portraits.

If Fuseli and Jeffreys represent what Pressly calls "the Artist as Satanic Creator" (110), then the wild and self-destructive Irish history painter James Barry embodies the "Artist as Martyr" (139). In his sixth chapter Pressly explores that artist's remarkable large-scale Shakespearean subjects, demonstrating, for example, how Barry effectively revisits Annibale Carracci's *The Dead Christ Mourned* in his depictions of Lear and Cordelia. It is not just that Barry borrows from Carracci; rather, in doing so he daringly "attempt[s] to find a visual vocabulary that could adequately convey the wrenching emotions of Shakespeare's tragedy" (142). In the tradition of grand-style history painting, Barry both uses and uses up his source materials, investing their traditional intellectual and iconographic import with an entirely new coding and transposing upon those materials the Shakespearean content in a visual presentation that points at once in both directions, toward Shakespeare and toward the continuity of visual history and iconographic tradition. Not surprisingly, Pressly reminds us that Barry, too, devoted significant time and canvas (and paper) to self-portraiture, most of it decidedly heroic in nature. Indeed, in the self-portraits Barry frequently invests himself with the attributes and the iconography of the Son of God (especially as he is portrayed by Milton, whose works Barry also illustrated).

Succeeding chapters take up George Romney, John Flaxman, W. H. Ireland, Samuel Ireland, and, in passing, Richard and Maria Cosway, tracing the further intermingling of the Shakespearean, the self-dramatizing, and the self-portrayal in their works. Indeed, so widespread and so visible had this move toward fusing self-portraiture with Shakespearean self-dramatizing (the artist as the untutored, spontaneous genius) become that Richard Cosway's affected and feminized self-portrait of 1786 (fig. 117) was soon burlesqued in an anonymous print (fig. 118), as was his portrait of Maria Cosway (figs. 120, 121). These paired images, as Pressly observes, point up the ongoing and contentious debate among the art elite (and the visually literate public) concerning the uneasy relationship between smugly self-satisfied self-imaging and

unmediated personal creativity. If the genuinely creative artist is, as was often quoted, more inspired than calculating, more driven by an eye "in a fine frenzy rolling" than by an eye glued to the works of past masters, then the self-dramatizing works of the artists considered in *The Artist as Original Genius* force us to confront the inevitable and perhaps irreconcilable conflict between vision (unvitiating content) and execution, between art and craft. By 1786 the eighteenth-century Shakespeare craze had led to John Boydell's concept of the Shakespeare Gallery, the popular but unprofitable venture that went public during the 1790s. That it did prove largely unprofitable tells us much about the direction that the popular taste was taking by those years. History painting was widely admired but nothing more, rather in the manner of Dr. Johnson's famous remark about *Paradise Lost* being "one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again." To Keats's friend Benjamin Robert Haydon, perhaps the last of the grand-style history painters in Britain, this disregard for history painting was particularly galling. As Tom Taylor put it after Haydon's death, "he would paint large pictures with a high aim. The patrons did not want such pictures, the Academy did not favour them, the public could not buy them. They flocked to see them exhibited, but that was all."¹ What did sell—and the Shakespeare Gallery artists were quick to pick up on this—were genre pieces, sentimental renditions of moments of "sensibility" as the eighteenth century understood them, and fantastically "soft" portrait-impressions of Shakespeare's characters. All these could be—and were—reproduced in engraved form for the "popular" consumer who could afford them. Grand-scale history paintings could not be reduced in this fashion, either in size or in medium, without becoming fairly silly: without their grand scale, there was little to recommend them to the emerging bourgeois viewer and would-be connoisseur. And so while Shakespeare the native original genius continued to prosper as an image, a myth, and a capital industry, that variety of visual art that had sought at once to emulate and to popularize a (self-serving) vision of this sort of original artistic genius was, relatively unceremoniously, edged out of the market.

While Blake is mentioned in passing throughout *The Artist as Original Genius*, he is nowhere the focus of sustained commentary, in part because his extra-institutional status necessarily excludes him from a discussion that is so centrally grounded in the Royal Academy, its members, and its doings. The one exception to this rule is Pressly's fascinating suggestion, in a chapter called "Alienation, Persecution, and Liberation through Sacrificial Death," that the figure in Blake's famous *Albion Rose* (*The Dance of Albion*) "was originally conceived as an image of Blake as Chatterton in the same manner as Flaxman's conception of himself as Chat-

terton" (179; Flaxman's drawing is reproduced as fig. 112). Pressly makes a compelling argument, and the resemblance between the two drawings is striking, despite some obvious differences in subject and treatment. Moreover, Pressly's explanation of the image's relation to Blake's personal circumstances (including his dramatically altered estimate by 1808 of his former friend Flaxman) makes a good deal of sense. Indeed, within the context of Pressly's discussion of the cultural and mythological function of the suicidal Chatterton for all of these artists, there is much to think about here, even if Pressly himself admits that he does not have that proverbial smoking-gun proof for his claim. In any event, Blake is nevertheless present everywhere in the book, if only by implication, and the profusion of illustrations (none, alas, in color) will provide the viewer with many obvious contexts for Blake's visual works, putting Blake, his art, and its visionary singularity into productive dialogue with the artists and works that were his contemporaries during those volatile years.

Robert Rix. *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. x + 182 pp. £55.00/\$99.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by Andrew Lincoln

ANYONE who has tried to keep up with the developing field of Blake studies will find in this book much that seems familiar. But Robert Rix surveys the field of Swedenborgianism and related movements with a thoroughness that clarifies many issues. He demonstrates that in order to deal adequately with the question of how Blake was influenced by Swedenborg and other religious writers, we must take into account "the reading practices of late eighteenth-century interpretive communities" (1) and be alert to the intricate relations and rivalries among them. The complexities are expertly unraveled and lucidly explained here, which will make this book a helpful introduction for anyone new to the field and a useful point of reference for seasoned scholars. At the same time, though, the study exposes the difficulty of evaluating the relevance of historical "microcultures" to an understanding of Blake's works.

Rix has a deep and wide knowledge of the intriguing world of religious groups relatively little known beyond the realm of Blake studies. This usually allows him to avoid settling too easily on an individual strand or tendency as the key to Blake and to provide a gentle corrective for those who do. In the face of previous attempts to compare or associate Blake's ideas

1. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786–1846)*, ed. Tom Taylor, new ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926) 2: 825.

with those found within specific "antinomian" groups, he points out that antinomianism "was not a well-defined sectarian position, but a tendency that could be found with varying emphases across the board of the religious spectrum" (19). Blake's phrase "Everlasting Gospel" cannot be identified with a single tradition or set of ideas, since it was applied "loosely" within a "number of traditions, sermons and publications in England." "It was favoured by radical seventeenth-century dissenters. It was also habitually employed in Behmenist and other mystical circles" (16-17). Rix offers an alternative to the "unbroken tradition" model of antinomian influence proposed by A. L. Morton: "that Blake radicalized antinomian ideas inherited from Moravian or similar milieus" (28). In developing this view—which builds on the discovery by Marsha Keith Schuchard and Keri Davies that Blake's mother was a Moravian—Rix characteristically emphasizes the plurality of influence, outlining the connections between Moravianism and the traditions of continental mysticism and insisting that it makes little sense to identify Blake simply as a Behmenist or a Swedenborgian, since "each of these traditions meant several and often contradictory things at Blake's time" (2). He also shows that hostility does not preclude affinity, and that those with different aims can follow parallel routes. In his discussion of the "Visionary Marketplace," which reviews the commercial dimension of "vision and spirit communications" (135), he considers animal magnetism, a treatment sought by affluent Londoners and a favored pursuit among Swedenborgians. As Rix notes, Blake was critical of three contemporary magnetizers, but may nevertheless have been attracted to some aspects of the rhetoric of magnetism—which provided a kind of analogy with his own work (conceived as "a sort of faith healing" [139]).

One of the strengths of this book is Rix's willingness to concede that evidence of historical connection is not necessarily evidence of influence. So, for example, his brief historical overview of the Moravians carries the warning that there are no "definite signs of Moravian doctrine" (11) in Blake's writing. But this does not make the Moravian example irrelevant: the more progressive circles of Moravianism had an interest in prophetic and visionary culture that predates the spate of prophetic publications which appeared in the wake of the French revolution. And if there is no clinching evidence of specific Moravian ideas, Rix finds elements "characteristic of a certain kind of dissent" (22) that is compatible with Moravianism. In particular, he examines two relatively neglected works, "The Couch of Death" and "Samson," relating them to the doctrine of free grace, and comparing them with Charles Wesley's "Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin?" (said to have been written on a night of "decisive religious experience ... among Moravians") (22-24). The argument provides a good illustration of how a discussion of influence can be illuminating while remaining tentative in its claims.

Swedenborg emerges as the central focus in this study, a cultural presence that catalyzes Blake's thinking and an important interpretive context for individual works. Swedenborg is

seen not simply as a writer who can be accessed through his texts, but as a field upon which the opposing interests that constitute Swedenborgianism contend. Rix reminds us of the extent of the contemporary fascination with the Swedish writer, and of the hostile reactions his legacy provoked (often exaggerated and sensationalist). He offers brief accounts of the Swedenborgian discussion group, the Theosophical Society (attended by Philip James de Louthembourg, Richard Cosway, John Flaxman, and William Sharp), and of the First General Conference of the New Jerusalem Church (which Blake and his wife attended), and he carefully reviews the divisions within the London Swedenborgians—on the one hand, the move towards ridding the New Jerusalem Church of its radical associations (exemplified in, among other things, Robert Hindmarsh's criticisms of Thomas Paine), and on the other, the "widespread tendency among the London Swedenborgians to turn their prophet's teaching into a social gospel fitting a radical and anticlerical outlook" (74). Chapter 5 focuses on a group of radical believers who were active in the New Jerusalem Church around the time that Blake attended its conference, including Benedict Chastanier, Count Grabianka, "Count" Cagliostro, and the diplomat Carl Frederick Nordenskjöld (the translator of Paine's *Rights of Man* into Swedish).

This kind of study certainly helps to create an appropriate intellectual milieu for Blake. However, the relevance of the lovingly detailed exploration of microcultures to the interpretation of Blake's poems is sometimes, perhaps inevitably, unclear. The key issues of doctrine upon which interpretation appears to depend may be contained in isolated phrases, removed from their immediate context in Blake's writing; the relevant "vocabulary" may be represented by a relatively small number of favored symbols; the analogies with Blake may be fleeting. The historical context, on the other hand, can expand almost indefinitely, unimpeded by the requirements of specific interpretation, once some kind of parallel has been established with Blake's own career or beliefs. At one point Rix acknowledges that "there are no records of Blake using identifiable magnetic techniques ... when composing his poetry. But someone who did make use of such techniques was the diplomat and writer George Baldwin" (145). The non sequitur opens the door for a brief outline of Baldwin's career. This outline is interesting in itself and potentially illuminating (since Blake was certainly aware of Baldwin, and criticized him in a *Notebook* poem). But here, as the awkward handling suggests, the outline seems oddly inconsequential, as if Blake has become a peg upon which to hang information.

In terms of its interpretive value, the most secure part of this study is chapter 7, which discusses *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as a satire on Swedenborg. Rix claims with some justice that "the extent to which he [Blake] subverts the theosophist's conclusions through close parody has not been fully realized" (121). He suggests that the work targets a particular kind of reader, one familiar with Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion*, and that it satirizes those Swedenborgians who re-

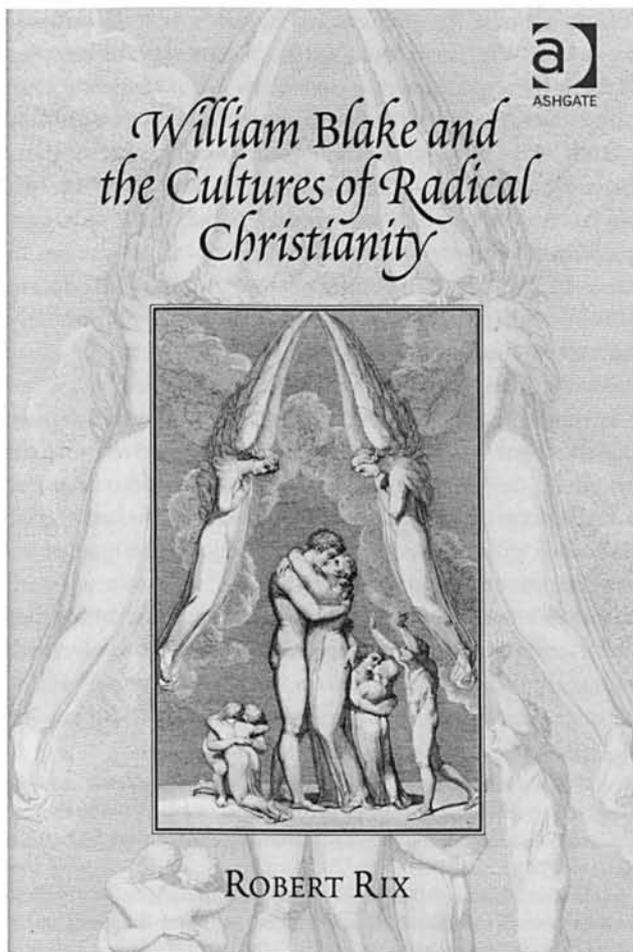
garded the theosophist's writing as the word of God. He shows how Blake appropriates Swedenborg's own terms as weapons (for example, Swedenborg's terms for false preachers: "religious" and "apes"), or parodies specific episodes (Swedenborg's imagined conversion of Luther from the doctrine of justification by faith alone, or his description of a house in hell with many apartments). Rix is well aware that Blake's criticism in *Marriage* is not limited to Swedenborg, but he shows convincingly how a knowledge of Swedenborg's texts, and of the assumptions of his followers, can help illuminate some of the obscurities of Blake's work.

In other areas, the interpretive payoff is more questionable. Rix tends to discount the literal in Blake in ways that recall Swedenborg's separation of the natural and the spiritual. He claims, for example, that the "theological vocabulary" of "The Little Black Boy" "points directly to Swedenborg's idea of God represented as a spiritual Sun," a sun, according to Swedenborg, "distinct from that of the Natural World" (114). One might with more justice see the poem as conspicuously refusing such a distinction. Oothoon's offer to catch girls for Theotormon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is seen, Urizenically, as "not about satisfying carnal lust" but as "a sort of parable of a spiritual principle: the utmost reach of unselfish love" (103). Rix argues that "when Blake wrote his late epic *Jerusalem*, he did not, like [Richard] Brothers, imagine

the Heavenly City to be built with bricks and mortar. It was the same London, but its inhabitants would be reformed to become a community of true Christianity" (106). This is to separate the resurrected community from its habitation, to ignore the importance Blake gives to poetic genius, to the arts and sciences (including the art of architecture), and to forget that Blake's figure for the eternal prophet, Los, is often seen with a hammer in his hand. A true Christian community would surely strive to rebuild London brick by brick. In such instances it seems (to this reader, at least) that the close encounter with Swedenborg has tended to obstruct, rather than to clarify, Rix's understanding of Blake's quarrel with the theosophist.

I have two other minor criticisms of this study. One is that, in the absence of concrete evidence, Rix allows reasonable inferences to harden into factual certainties, as when he assumes (as his argument demands) Blake's "extensive reading in the writings of contemporary radicals" (34), or asserts that "Blake was most certainly familiar with" Volney's *Ruines* (37) (I assume Blake did read Volney—but there is no certainty about this). Rix argues plausibly that, in the wake of Burke's attack on Richard Price's "enthusiasm," Blake's poem *The French Revolution* may have become "a casualty in the campaign for respectability of [the publisher] Johnson and his associates" (151). This interesting suggestion quickly solidifies into a factual premise: "Johnson's decision to cancel the publication of Blake's poem undoubtedly contributed to Blake's decision to set up as an independent bookseller of his own works" (153). This kind of unnecessary rhetorical coercion weakens, rather than strengthens, the authority of the argument. As my own proofreading is poor, I hesitate to mention the second criticism—but there are quite a few typographical errors here, some of which (random movements between font sizes, obviously malformed words) can be laid at the door of Ashgate (did they provide a copy editor?).

In his conclusion Rix claims that the cultures of radical Christianity "have inhabited only the fringes of scholarly interest," and their absence has "shaped the distorted image of Blake as either an isolated genius or as a poor madman" (155). But surely the efforts of several generations of scholars have made this area a familiar part of the mainstream of Blake studies, and only those needing to justify another contribution to this well-populated field have an interest in maintaining the idea of its marginality, or in resurrecting the obsolete image of Blake. Rix's own contribution can be justified on other grounds—his book is lucid and readable, and in its exceptional grasp of the complex interrelations between religious traditions and reading communities in Blake's age it sets an example that exposes the limitations of some earlier studies of influence, an example that others will be able to build on.



MINUTE PARTICULARS

Printed References to and Known Prices of Blake's *Night Thoughts*, 1796–1826

BY WAYNE C. RIPLEY

THERE are precious few contemporary printed references to Blake's illustrations and engravings of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. In November 1796 the *Monthly Magazine* was the first to anticipate the publication of the volume; it listed the price of the entire nine-night work at five guineas for subscribers and six for non-subscribers.¹ That December Blake's publisher, Richard Edwards, released an advertisement without prices, and in January 1797 the *Monthly Epitome and Catalogue of New Publications* announced that the first part would be published "in a few days" and repeated the price mentioned by the *Monthly Magazine* (BR(2) 77). These "few days," however, turned into months, and in the spring Edwards issued a prospectus, which promised publication in June and claimed that the first volume would have forty "very spirited engravings." It repeated the price of five guineas to subscribers, but emphasized that "the price will be considerably advanced to non-subscribers," without giving a specific figure (BR(2) 78-79). In November 1797 the first and only volume was finally published, and that month William Roscoe paid £1.1 for the first number and £1.1 as a down payment for the subscription (BR(2) 79).² Despite Edwards's threat to raise the price for non-subscribers, when the *Monthly Magazine* announced the published volume in June 1798, the price for the general public was the same as Roscoe had paid: "Young's *Night Thoughts*, decorated with appropriate Designs, by Mr. Blake, Part I. 11.1s." (BR(2) 82).

While Bentley notes that after the book was published "it was scarcely noticed" (BR(2) 76), I want to examine the known references in light of eleven recently discovered notices, which are not recorded in *Blake Records* and which were found using Google Books. I have coordinated these discoveries with the known references in table 1; the first four, from 1798 to 1801, are given below:

1. White, John. *A Catalogue of Rare, Splendid, and Valuable Books, in Every Branch of Polite Literature; Including the Entire*

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) [hereafter cited as BR(2)] 74. The *Monthly Magazine* announcement was reprinted in the *Edinburgh Magazine* (December 1796): 450.

2. Whether this money was ever returned to him or any of the other subscribers when the project failed is unknown.

Libraries of the Rev. Harvey Spragg ... also of the Rev. Henry Putman ...: Comprehending a Large Assortment of Learned Theological Books. ... The Sale Will Begin on February 19, 1798 London, 1798.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, a magnificent edition, with *Engravings* from Drawings by Blake, 5l 5s to subscribers, when completed, boards — — — 1797

2. Schubart, Ludwig. *Englische Blätter*. Erlangen, 1798.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, decorated with appropriate Designs, by Mr. Blake, Part. I.

3. Payne, Thomas. *Catalogue of Valuable Books, in Various Languages, and in Every Class of Literature: Which Are to Be Sold, at the Prices Affixed to Each Article* London, 1799.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, with engravings round each page from the designs of Blake, 2 numbers, boards, — 1797 & 98

4. White, John. *A Catalogue of Books, in Every Department of Literature, Now on Sale* London, March 1801.

Young's *Night Thoughts*, a magnificent edition, with *Engravings* from Drawings by Blake, boards, 5l 5s — 1797

As brief as these descriptions are, they do raise some interesting points. White's catalogue entries borrow their description of the volume as a "magnificent edition" from the spring 1797 prospectus. This echo makes the second mention of Blake's edition by the *Monthly Magazine* more notable, since the latter steps away from the laudatory language of the prospectus for the more tempered "appropriate." While Jon Mee has argued that Blake's designs employed many images current in the radical millenarian culture of the 1790s,³ the description of the designs as "appropriate" suggests that at least one early reader saw them as entirely suitable to Young's poem, a viewpoint that anticipated the opinion of readers in the 1820s.⁴ The reprinting of the *Monthly Magazine* entry in Schubart signals, to my knowledge, the first international reference to Blake's *Night Thoughts*, and in Germany the description of the designs as "appropriate" to Young would have had special resonance, given the popularity of Young and his impact on German romanticism.

Both White and Payne were involved in other projects that Blake worked on. Blake either knew the men or was familiar with them through his immediate circle. Both took subscriptions for *The Grave*, and late in Blake's life John Linnell bought

3. "As portentous as the written wall": Blake's Illustrations to *Night Thoughts*, *Prophetic Character: Essays on William Blake in Honor of John E. Grant*, ed. Alexander S. Gourlay (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2002) 171-203.

4. In 1824 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, who obviously admired the sublimity of Young over that of Blake, conceded, "At times, the pencil of the artist attains the sublimity of the poet ..." (BR(2) 398-99).

paper from White and used him to bind illustrations of the Book of Job (BR(2) 785).⁵ There is no doubt that Blake knew Payne by 1804; on 23 October, Blake wrote to William Hayley that he had given Payne the note Hayley had sent and had received cash from Payne.⁶ Through James Basire or John Flaxman, Blake's acquaintance with Payne may have come much earlier. Payne was one of the four publishers of Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-76), for which Blake likely provided an engraving. In 1799 Blake engraved Flaxman's designs for the *Letter to the Committee for Raising the Naval Pillar*, which was printed for T. Cadell, W. Davies, R. H. Evans, and Payne. In 1804, after Blake returned to London from Felpham, he engraved Flaxman's frontispiece for Hoare's *Academic Correspondence*, for which Payne was also a publisher. If Blake was not acquainted directly with Payne in the late 1790s, the latter did collaborate on several projects with James Edwards, brother of Richard Edwards, and Payne, C. Dilly, and Richard Edwards were listed as the only London sellers of Francis Wrangham's *The Restoration of the Jews* (1795).

Given Blake's possible connections to White and Payne, the descriptions in their catalogues of the book and its publication details are significant for what they say about the expected production schedule. Even though the first and only *Night Thoughts* number was published in November 1797, White's 1798 catalogue, which was likely printed in January or February, still references subscribers and uses the phrase "when completed." This phrase originates in neither the advertisement nor the prospectus, and White's description and price refer to the full four-volume set, which suggests that in early 1798 further volumes were expected. Payne's 1799 catalogue raises even larger issues, since it lists "2 numbers" with the dates of "1797 & 98." We know that Blake began to work on an engraving for *Night the Fifth*, which would have been included in a second volume.⁷ Was Payne, and perhaps Blake himself, still expecting a second volume as late as 1799? Or were both catalogues committing errors that resulted from the slow and uncertain production of the first volume and its aborted sequels? Unfortunately, Payne's catalogue makes no mention of a price for these two supposed volumes, even though most of the other books in the catalogue are priced. At what point Edwards and Blake finally abandoned the project is unclear, but because Payne's only reference to it comes more than a year after the publication of the volume, it is highly likely that the work may have been given up much later than we have recognized. For his part, White must have been attuned to the production of the book, since he omits the phrase "when completed" in his 1801 description.

5. Linnell's accounts refer only to "White," but Bentley includes this man under John White in his index.

6. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly rev. ed. (New York: Anchor-Random House, 1988) [hereafter cited as E] 756.

7. John Grant et al., eds., *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts: A Complete Edition*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 7.

White's 1801 price was either an oversight or an overestimation of the solitary volume's value, since in the English marketplace at least the book appears to have done little to help the fortunes of any booksellers lucky or unlucky enough to have a copy. The next mention of the book occurred in Germany, when Jean Paul Richter received a copy from Erbprinz Emil August von Gotha in November 1801 (BR(2) 113). Schubart's 1798 reference may explain how von Gotha came to know of the book's existence. Before giving it to Richter, he had it richly bound and included "a real gold [*chain*] ending with a huge pearl," which Richter was inclined to give to his wife as a necklace. Richter valued the book at fifteen guineas, declaring "Perhaps there is not a second [*copy of the book*] in Germany, [*a fact*] which may help me a good deal in selling it" (BR(2) 115, Bentley's emendations). We do not know if Richter did sell the volume, and if he did, whether he was able to obtain his price. He also recognized the beauty of Blake's designs, and in a book he published in 1804 described the figure peering over a bush in *Night the First*, p. 4, in terms Blake would have appreciated: "its seeing becomes vision for me" (BR(2) 186-87). In any case, Richter's estimation of both its visionary and market value far exceeded what anyone in England was willing to concede for years to come.

The next printed references to the book are found in three catalogues by William Gardiner; I have included the catalogue number before each entry:

5. *A List of Books, for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1808.

860 Young's *Night Thoughts, curious cuts, by Blake, boards, 1l 5s 1797*

6. *A Catalogue of Books ... for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1809.

860 Young's *Night Thoughts, curious cuts, by Blake, boards, 1l 5s 1797*

7. *A Catalogue of a Small Collection of Ancient and Modern Books ... for Sale at W. Gardiner's, 48, Pall-Mall, at the Ready Money Prices Affixed*. London: J. Barker, 1810.

691 Young's *Night Thoughts, curious cuts, by Blake, boards, £1 5s — 1796*

1213 Young's *Night Thoughts, with Engravings by Mr. Blake, fol. boards, £1 5s — 1797*

This is one of the most singular and eccentric works that ever appeared.

Presumably, the 1796 date for item 691 in the 1810 catalogue is an error. If so, it may be safe to assume that the four listings all refer to the same volume, which Gardiner classified in different ways. The 1808 and 1809 catalogues listed the book in the

category "Poetry, Plays, &c." By doing so, Gardiner chose not to list it with the other "Books of Prints" he offered, a decision that privileged Young's poetry over Blake's designs. Failing to attract a buyer that way, however, Gardiner may have been motivated to cross-list the book in 1810 in the new category of "English Poetry and Miscellanies" and in "Books of Prints."

After Gardiner, James Lackington listed it in his *General Catalogue* (1811) for £2.10 and *Catalogue of Books* (1815) for £2.2 (BR(2) 600fn).⁸ The 1811 catalogue gives two separate copies of the book, which are prefaced here with their lot number:

264 Young's Night Thoughts, *finely printed, with curious plates, designed and etched by Blake*, first 4 Books, bds. 21. 10s. 1797

6569 Young's Night Thoughts, (first four nights of) *finely printed, with marginal plates, from designs by Blake*, bds. 2l. 10s.

Both repeat Gardiner's description of the engraved plates as "curious," and it is interesting that Lackington describes the volume as "finely printed," when, in fact, it was very sloppily done. Perhaps this idea of the fine printing helped him raise the price more than a pound over Gardiner's copy, which itself was only four shillings more than the *Monthly Magazine* had announced for the book on the open market in 1798. Strikingly, Gardiner's catalogues appeared when Blake's edition of *The Grave* was being published and when Blake was receiving the most positive attention he would ever receive; this increased attention may have motivated Lackington to push up his prices in 1811. Given that he again offered two copies of the work in 1815, it is highly probable that he failed to sell his copies in 1811 and tried again at slightly lower prices. We do not know if they sold. In 1810, Henry Crabb Robinson bought his copy for £1.11.6, which was between the prices offered by Gardiner and Lackington. Despite the likelihood that Lackington failed to sell two copies in 1811, Robinson claimed in his German article on Blake that the *Night Thoughts* volume "is no longer to be bought, so excessively rare has it become." Either Robinson believed the book was rare, or he wanted, perhaps, like Richter, to push up the value of his copy (BR(2) 771, 600).

A bookseller with more direct connections to *The Grave* was William Ford of Manchester, who, as announced in the 7 November 1807 advertisement in the *Manchester Gazette*, had displayed Blake's original drawings for the project and taken subscriptions (BR(2) 248). Like Lackington, Ford had two copies of *Night Thoughts* for sale in 1811, which are found in both parts of a two-part catalogue:

8. Ford, W[illiam]. *A Catalogue of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, in Various Languages and Classes of Literature. ... Part the First for 1810*. Manchester, 1811.

8. Note that the price Bentley lists for the 1811 catalogue, £2.12, is an error. I have not been able to check the 1815 catalogue.

Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality, with the singular designs round the margins by BLAKE, calf cleg. ib.⁹

9. Ford, W[illiam]. *A Catalogue (Part the Second for 1810-11) of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, in Various Languages and Classes of Literature*. Manchester, 1811.

Young's Complaint, and the Consolation; or Night thoughts with Blake's singular designs round the text. ib. 1797.—*Blair's Grave*, with engravings from the designs of Blake. LARGE PAPER. eleg. bd. in blue mor. &c. 818s. ib. 1808

It was perhaps sometime during the interest in Blake following *The Grave* that the British Museum obtained its copy (now in the British Library), which is listed in an 1819 catalogue:

10. *Librorum Impressorum, Qui in Museo Britannico Adservantur, Catalogus*. Vol. 7. London, 1819.

The Complaint and the Consolation or Night Thoughts, with marginal Designs by Mr. Blake. fol. Lond. 1797.

The following year, another catalogue listed two copies at prices in the same range as Gardiner's. They are given below, prefaced by their catalogue number:

11. Evans, E. and A. *Bookseller's and Printseller's Catalogue*. London, 1820.

421 Blake (Wm.) Illustrations of Young's Night Thoughts, 4to. bds. 30s. — 1797

566 Young's Night Thoughts, with numerous fine plates by William Blake, fol. Bds. 1l. 1s. — — 1797

This Evans is likely Edward Evans (1789-1835), who on 19 April 1830 wrote to Linnell about selling copies of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (BR(2) 528). Their association dates from at least 23 November 1826, when Linnell listed Evans in his account book (BR(2) 789). The relationship may have begun earlier, since in the catalogue entry for another item by Blake, he is described as an "eminent genius."¹⁰

After the Evans' catalogue, Thomas Edwards, the brother of the original *Night Thoughts* publisher Richard, attempted to sell the original watercolor designs in 1821. He also offered an uncolored copy of the engraved edition, listed at £2.12.6.¹¹ Ed-

9. The first part of Ford's catalogue is not available for full viewing on Google Books. Both parts are held by Oxford, shelfmark 2593 e.51.

10. "422 — an additional plate to Young by this eminent genius, hitherto unpublished, engraved by Perry, 4to. 1s". Unfortunately, this is not the lost engraving for Night the Fifth first described in the 1927 catalogue of Francis Edwards (Grant et al. 1: 87n18), but Blake's wild, full-page engraving for Bürger's *Leonora*, which had an excerpt from Young beneath it. It was published in 1796, along with two other designs by Blake, all engraved by Perry. Item 423 is a copy of Blake's designs for *The Grave*.

11. G. E. Bentley, Jr., "The 1821 Edwards Catalogue," *Blake* 17.4 (spring 1984): 154-56.

wards was unsuccessful in selling the designs, and there is no indication if he disposed of the uncolored copy. The price of the book is not recorded again until the collection of Rebekah Bliss was sold in April 1826. She had both a colored and an uncolored copy, with the former selling for four guineas and the later for £1.19 (BR(2) 444). The price of this uncolored copy was only slightly higher than Gardiner's 1808-10 asking price of £1.5 and the Evans' £1.10 in 1820, which suggests that there still remained very little demand. Unless Lackington and Edwards successfully sold their copies, the obtainable market price for an uncolored copy had not risen more than eighteen shillings between 1798 and 1826. In 1824, Alexander

Akehurst found it very easy to find a copy after reading a biography of Hayley that mentioned Blake. He wrote to Philip Bliss, "I lately picked up a Copy of this Work, which is [*word del*] [thought] to be now reposing in the warehouses of some of the London Booksellers, as it is believed to have met with little encouragement" (BR(2) 388, Bentley's emendations). Akehurst's opinion, rather than Robinson's, must remain the consensus on how readily available Blake's *Night Thoughts* was to the reading public. But we at least know now that a few more people noted its publication and sale, even though these notices did nothing for Blake's (or anyone else's) fortune.

Table 1: Printed References to and Known Prices of Blake's *Night Thoughts* (1797), 1796-1826 (newly discovered references are shaded)

Date	Source	Price
November 1796	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers*
December 1796	<i>Edinburgh Magazine</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers* (reprint of <i>Monthly Magazine</i> announcement)
22 December 1796	Richard Edwards's advertisement	No price given
January 1797	<i>Monthly Epitome</i>	£5.5 for subscribers/£6.6 for non-subscribers*
Spring 1797	Richard Edwards's prospectus	£5.5 for subscribers/"considerably advanced" for non-subscribers*
November 1797	Likely publication	William Roscoe billed £1.1 for first number and £1.1 as down payment for subscription
January or February? 1798	White's catalogue	£5.5 for subscribers/no mention of non-subscriber price*
June 1798	<i>Monthly Magazine</i>	£1.1
1798, after June	<i>Englische Blätter</i>	No price given
1799	Payne's catalogue	Two numbers mentioned; no prices given
March 1801	White's catalogue	£5.5
November 1801	Richter's correspondence	£15.15 (his estimate of value)
1808	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1809	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1810	Gardiner's catalogue	£1.5
1810	Henry Crabb Robinson	Paid £1.11.6
1811	Ford's catalogue (part 1)	Not available
1811	Ford's catalogue (part 2)	£8.8 (with Blake's edition of <i>The Grave</i>)
1811	Lackington's catalogue	Two volumes: £2.10 each
1815	Lackington's catalogue	£2.2 each (perhaps same two volumes from 1811)
1819	Catalogue of books in the British Museum	Price paid not given
1820	E. and A. Evans' catalogue	Two volumes: 30s (£1.10) and £1.1
1821	Thomas Edwards's catalogue	£2.12.6
1824	Akehurst's correspondence	Price paid not given
1826	Collection of Rebekah Bliss	£4.4 paid for a colored copy; £1.19 paid for an uncolored copy

* These prices refer to the never completed four-volume set.

A Possible Sketch of Blake's Napoleon

BY PAUL MINER

THE *Spiritual Form of Napoleon*, an apotheosis in "fresco" by William Blake, disappeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Blake's design of Napoleon was exhibited in 1876 at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, and H. H. Statham briefly described it in *Macmillan's Magazine* (34 [1876]: 60-61). According to Statham, Napoleon was flanked by "less explicable" angels, whereas the French emperor was portrayed as a "strong energetic figure grasping at the sun and moon with his hands, yet chained to earth by one foot, and with a pavement of dead bodies before him in the foreground" Also on display at the Burlington Club was Blake's "*The Spiritual Form of W. Pitt guiding Behemoth*," a work depicting the English statesman, his head encompassed with an "extraordinary 'halo' effect" Although Statham concluded that the picture of Napoleon was "the most striking ... of the two" allegorical paintings, the "central figure" of Napoleon (who died in 1821) was "not the finest in execution," since the figure was "but loosely drawn."¹

Though nothing has come to light on the lost picture of Napoleon, attention should be called to a faint and loosely drawn sketch by Blake in which a giant allegorical figure in the heavens is abutted by two winged angels (as in Statham's description). One angel holds a key (to heaven?), while the other holds an open book (of judgment?). The sketch is reproduced in Martin Butlin's *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, where it is speculatively titled *Satan between Two Angels* (?), c. 1815-20 (?) (#592, plate 828). Each hand of the colossus holds a globe, the sun and moon respectively,² and these cosmic spheres are shackled as a ball and chain to his wrists.

1. In reference to Statham's comments, see also Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 182-83, and note Bo Lindberg's conjectural reconstruction of the Napoleon design, based upon Statham's description, in *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1973) 301-11, fig. 106.

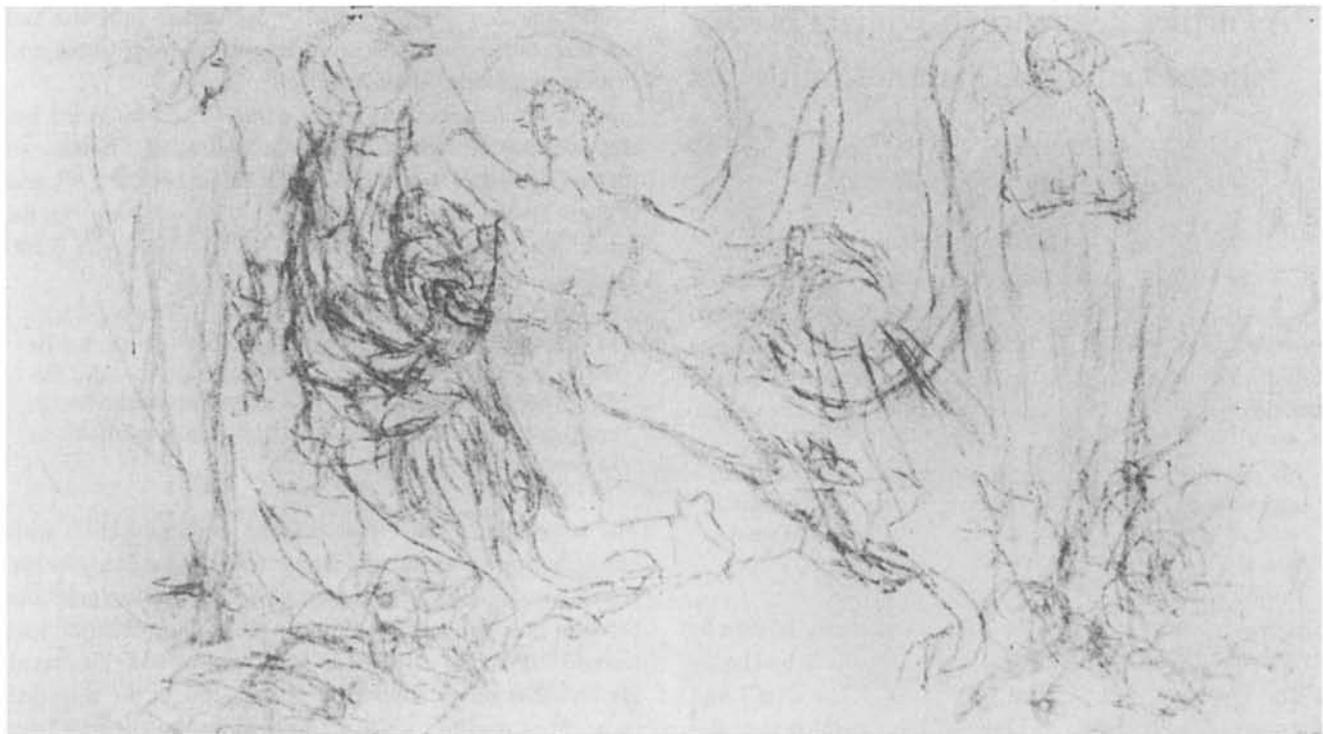
2. Compare *The Four Zoas* Night IX (117.6-9, E 386), where gigantic Los with "his right hand ... Siedz the Sun," while "His left hand ... coverd the Moon," for he "tore ... down" these turning spheres, "cracking the heavens across from immense to immense," as "judgment" is at hand. Blake's language is borrowed from Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, where fierce Mohamet refuses to alter his divine actions, even "Wert thou ... to come to me with the sun in thy right hand and the moon in thy left ..." (Paine's emphasis). See *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 1 (New York: Citadel Press, 1945) 533. Note also *Night Thoughts* 236, where a nude male plunges precipitously through the heavens, holding a cosmic globe in each hand, a scene attended by flaming comets or meteors.

One foot of Blake's giant male (aspiring to heaven) is chained to earth, possibly connoting Napoleon's imprisonment on Elba or St. Helena.³ He is nude (as in Blake's apotheosis of Lord Nelson) and has a huge triple aureole about his head (iconography utilized by Blake in his apotheosis of Pitt). The beak of a huge carnivorous bird(?) menaces the vitals of the shackled colossus,⁴ and to the right and left, at the bottom foreground of the page, two smaller birds also threaten the giant. Pertinently, the verso of the sketch portrays the same scene in reverse, although the large bird on the recto is not present. When Butlin catalogued the recto, it had been untraced since 1949, and he was unaware of the verso at that time. It seems probable that Blake's verso and recto sketches of "Satan" are preliminary designs for Blake's apotheosis of Napoleon.⁵

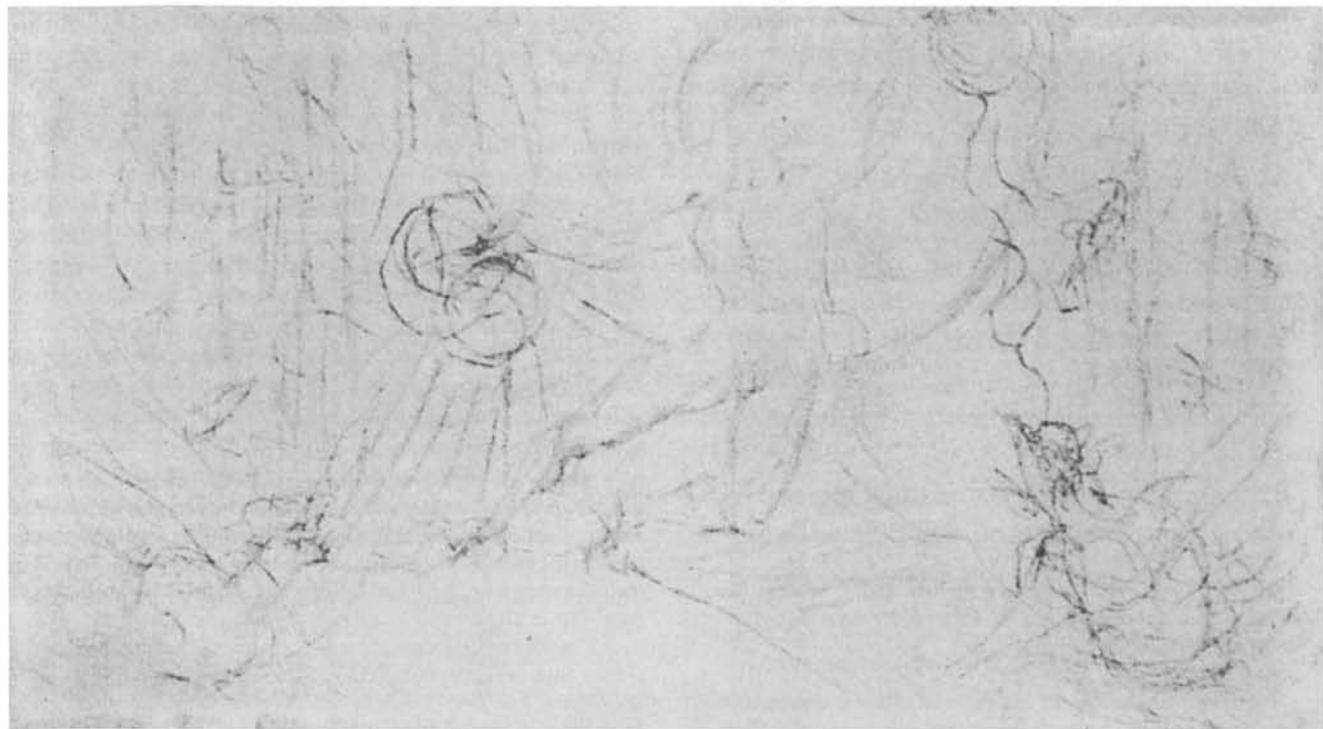
3. In a design probably intended for the Book of Enoch, a figure soars among the stars, though chained to earth (Butlin, *Paintings and Drawings*, plate 1052).

4. The giant bird may reflect (as well as revise) Revelation 19.17-18, where a giant "angel" appears, "standing in the sun," and "cried [out] ... to all the [ravenous] fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God," where "ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains." In *The Four Zoas* Night VIIb (88[96].19-27, E 361) "naked" Los "reard his mighty stature" into the heavens—"on Earth stood his feet"—and the moon "circled" his "furious forehead," while his "knees" were "Bathed in bloody clouds," a scene where flesh-hungry "Eagles cry & ... Vultures laugh," for "Now comes the night of Carnage now the flesh of Kings & Princes" serve as "our food," while "the blood of Captains" will serve as "our drink." Such language is reminiscent of chapter 19 of Revelation. The reader also should not miss Blake's subtle allusion to book 1 of *Paradise Lost* (221-24), where Satan "rears" his "mighty Stature" off the burning "Pool," phrasing that Blake in his *Notebook* (see E 801) planned as a motto for the emblem of fire in *The Gates of Paradise*, though the motto was not used in either of the engraved versions of this work.

5. Martin Butlin, in private correspondence, agrees with my suggestion that the recto/verso sketches are possibly preliminary designs related to Blake's *Napoleon*.



Recto (above) and verso (below) of Blake's sketch, reproduced by kind permission of Giuliano Ceseri. The recto is from Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), plate 828, and the verso from Butlin, "Two Blakes Reappear and Make Three," *Blake* 18.2 (fall 1984): 119, by permission of the author. The original is at the Georgia Museum of Art, which is currently closed for renovation and not accepting requests for photography.



A Further Reference to William Blake in the Letters of Charlotte Smith

BY ANGUS WHITEHEAD

G. E. BENTLEY, Jr.'s, *Blake Records* (2004) includes four references to William Blake in the letters of the poet, novelist, and former associate of William Hayley, Charlotte Smith.¹ The earliest allusion appears in a letter from Smith to the attorney Samuel Rose, dated 9 February 1803. She writes:

My present purpose is, to enquire, whether there is not an ingenious Engraver, who executed certain plates for a small work of M^r Hayley's relating to Animals—I know not what it is as I have never seen it.²

Smith is referring to *Designs to a Series of Ballads, Written by William Hayley*. The work comprises four ballads by Hayley ("The Elephant," "The Eagle," "The Lion," "The Dog") and fourteen plates engraved by Blake (twelve of which were designed by him), published in monthly installments between June and September 1802. According to Hayley, the ballads were "vehicles contrived to exhibit the diversified talents of my Friend [Blake] for original design, and delicate engraving."³ Commenting on the 1803 letter, Bentley observes that Smith "clearly knew little of Blake or of his *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802), but she had doubtless heard of the book at least from some of her old Sussex friends."⁴ As we shall see, she may have learned of the publication from a more intimate source.

Eighteen months later, on 10 September 1804, Smith refers to Blake and *Designs to a Series of Ballads* in a letter to Rose's wife, Sarah, part of which is quoted in *Blake Records*.⁵ She continues:

I wishd to have seen that number of his fables—or whatever they are calld which told some extraordinary feats perform'd by a certain Eagle who carried away a child & then served as Monture [mount] to the Mamma—because a remark of M^r Sargents amused me extremely; when having read this fable, she said, "Dear M^r Hayley, how could you think of telling such a thing—really you do love to put Women in the most extraordinary situations!"⁶

1. See BR(2) 149, 196, 224-25.

2. BR(2) 149.

3. Hayley, "Preface" ii, quoted in Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 82.

4. BR(2) 150.

5. BR(2) 196.

6. Judith Phillips Stanton, ed., *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 662.

Smith's anecdote indicates that by September 1804 she had not seen the second issue featuring Blake's frontispiece and two illustrations to "The Eagle."

Judith Phillips Stanton's recent edition of the collected letters of Smith contains a fifth, earlier, reference to Blake. At the end of a letter to her publishers, Thomas Cadell, Jr., and William Davies, dated 16 December 1802, almost two months before her letter to Samuel Rose, Smith wrote from Frant, Tunbridge Wells:

M^r Hayley informd my daughter some time since that he would order his last publication about animals (the title I forget) to be left at Y^r Shop for her perusal to be returnd for the profit of the person who made the drawings. If it is there, be so good as to let me know.⁷

The reference indicates that through communication with one of her three surviving daughters, Charlotte Mary Smith, Lucy Eleanor Newhouse, or Harriet Amelia Smith, sometime between June and mid-December 1802, Charlotte Smith had learned something of Blake as the engraver who illustrated Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* and as the intended recipient of royalties for that work.⁸ However, the four later references to Blake in Smith's letters of 1803-06 suggest that if her daughter did borrow a copy from Cadell and Davies about the end of 1802, Smith did not see it.⁹

7. Stanton 503. Smith's reference to "[Hayley's] last publication about animals" suggests that she is referring to all four ballads published by September 1802.

8. Smith's reference to Hayley's request that her daughter return the work to Cadell and Davies "for the profit of the person who made the drawings" appears to confirm Hayley's recollection included in the manuscript of his *Memoirs* that the ballads were "printed for the emolument of the interesting artist, who had settled in a Cottage, as the Poets Neighbour" (BR(2) 116).

9. If Smith ever did examine a copy of *Designs to a Series of Ballads*, she did not do so before September 1804. However, she may have seen copies of *Designs to a Series of Ballads* or *Ballads* (1805) sometime before March 1806, although Bentley thinks it unlikely. See BR(2) 224-25.

The Ladder

BY JENNIFER GROTZ

"I want! I want!" cries the figure climbing up the skinny ladder,
such a long climb to be filled with wanting, such a long

shadow cast onto the surface of the ground
while the ladder sips like a straw from the moon

it leads to, here as tiny as a rind of fingernail, suspended
in the night William Blake scratched and darkened

save for seven fuzzy stars. It looks like punishment:
you hook your leg on the third rung and look up,

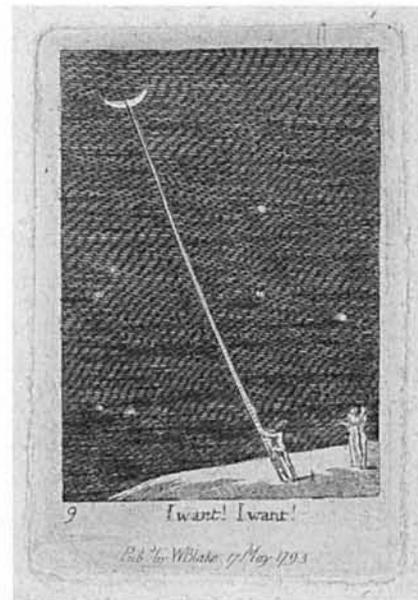
such a long climb for what you lack. It *must* be said twice
to show how saying does not in fact release it.

Perhaps, after climbing, you will reach the reclining crescent
and sleep upon it like a hammock before you realize that home

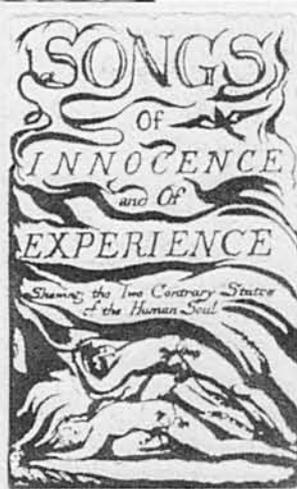
is the barren moon below: beautiful, light-reflecting,
but missing you. And if wanting is a ladder between

two moons, then the stars will hang neglected.
Surely Blake made the print no larger than a playing card

so that the ladder could lean without tearing
a paper sky gently pierced by stars.



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