

PARODY AND PLAY IN BLAKE'S COMPOSITE ART

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Parody is a form of imitation that to achieve its effect must rely upon the reader or viewer recognising the original that is being imitated. For example, in satire, parody is used to create burlesque, a form of extended simile, that David Worcester has described in *The Art of Satire*, as follows:

“Look here, upon this picture, and on this,” says the author. The reader looks first on one, then on the other, and decides for himself whether the mirrored image faithfully reproduces the object. Of course, in satire it does not do so, for the satirist secretly aims at exposing a discrepancy in the strongest possible light. Once he has exposed it, the fewer words the better, for his insistence on pointing the moral will rob the reader of his share in the game.

Worcester continues:

It is the reader's part to supply knowledge of the model. He must hold up the model, and the author will furnish him with a distorted reflection of it. Herein lies the strength of burlesque, and its weakness. (42)

Exactly. If the reader or viewer fails to recognize the model, there can be no game, and the point the author wished to make is lost. Worcester makes plain that in burlesque satire it is essential for the reader or viewer to recognize the model that is being distorted. Only then, to use Worcester's metaphor, can the game begin. The further we explore the relationship between the model and its imitation, the more difficult it becomes to avoid it. We can't stop ourselves from seeing the one work in relation to the other. Thus it may be said to create, and even to impose, rules by which we come to understand the work. When that happens we are fully engaged in playing the game that the author or artist has set for us.

In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga elaborates upon this heightened sense of participation, one that inherently establishes the rules that we are to play by:

All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. [...] The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged around, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the

performance of an act apart. Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, *is* order. (10)

Blake's composite art can offer just such an arena, or hallowed ground, within which special rules obtain when his verbal or visual prototype is recognized and the discrepancies begin to be noted. In particular, when his satiric instinct is engaged, Blake can make use of both verbal and visual parody to withering effect. As Worcester observed, this is all the more so, because we are left to discover for ourselves the image in the mirror, how it is being distorted, and therefore the implications for our understanding.

I

Let me begin with the title page of *Songs of Innocence*, from the collection of illustrated poems that Blake relief etched, printed, hand coloured and first published in 1789.

The scene depicted on the title page appears straightforward enough: two children stand at the knee of their nurse or mother reading from a book; the scene is out of doors. Complementing the scene, a young vine symbolically entwines itself for support around the trunk of a tree, that in turn is providing shade. Birds rise up through the lettering of the title, a piper in a broad-brimmed hat leans back against the capital letter *I* of *Innocence*, while higher up children can be seen at play in the capital letters O and G of SONGS, while an angel leans back against the letter N engaged in writing in a book. What imagery could be more appropriate, indeed innocent, to head such a collection? Who could be thinking in terms of satire or irony here?

But Blake wrote and designed these poems within and in response to a recognized and well-established eighteenth-century tradition, of literature addressed to children for the purpose of moral instruction. For those familiar with this tradition, the implicit comparison Blake intended would be recognized, the discrepancies would begin to be noted, and the game commence. The most prominent publisher of these books for children, that typically, like Blake's *Songs*, combine text and emblem, word and image, was John Newbery, at the sign of the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

A Little Pretty POCKET-BOOK, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly, published in 1767, is typical. It is the frontispiece engraving in particular, and others like it, that Blake invites us to recognize, as they are mirrored in the design of his own title page (Essick 138). So too, the more closely we look, the distortions or discrepancies become ever more distinct and telling.



Fig. 1. William Blake, Title page, *Songs of Innocence, Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1794, Copy B, Plate 3. BMPD Accession number 1932,1210.4. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

The scene of Newberry's frontispiece engraving is set indoors, in the drawing room of a comfortable middle or upper class home. The nurse or mother is reading from a book, at the same time she raises her hand in a gesture drawing attention to the point of her instruction. The two children are dressed like little adults, presumably representing what is to be gained by their instruction, moral uprightness commensurate with material success and station.

When we then return and compare Newberry's frontispiece with Blake's title page, the discrepancies are clear enough. Blake has set his scene out of doors. The relaxed and informal attire of both the nurse and the two children, together with the children at play amongst the letters of the title in the company of a piper and an angel, contrast sharply with the formality and comparative claustrophobia of the Newberry frontispiece. The implicit juxtaposition within the pastoral tradition, between city and country, becomes explicit. But it is not the juxtaposition between material circumstances that is the point here. In contrast with the Newberry title page, where the nurse or mother is holding the book from which she is reading and instructing the children, in Blake's title page, it is the children who hold the book, the children who are reading, to the adult.

As the poems of *Songs of Innocence* themselves are read and unfold, we discover that it is we who can learn from the children. It is from their point of view that we begin to question and gain insight. It then becomes a matter of acknowledging their innocence - their way of seeing and responding to the world - in the most profound sense, by taking it upon ourselves, by it *becoming* a part of ourselves. Responding to the poems in this way is to realise the promise made at the close of Milton's epic by the Archangel Michael to our first parents, the promise of the paradise within, that latent in each of us is to be regained.

In 1793, four years after issuing the *Songs of Innocence*, Blake completed and issued separately the first copies of *Songs of Experience* (four in all). In 1794, the two volumes were combined, with the addition of a general title page depicting Adam and Eve having been driven out of Paradise and reaching the subjected plain of this world (Phillips). In the general title page the relationship between the two volumes is made explicit: *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. The title is suggestive of an implicit dialogue, or conversation, that will take place between the two volumes; that is, if we are open to listening and, more important still, if we are open to taking part. I shall return later to the metaphor of conversation as a form of play.



Fig. 2. Frontispiece and title page, *A Pretty Little Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly* [...] London: Printed for J. Newberry, at the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1767. British Library Press Mark: Ch.760/50. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

II

Before doing so, it is 'London' from the *Songs of Experience* that I wish to consider next:



Fig. 3. William Blake, 'London', *Songs of Experience, Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1794, Copy A, Plate 47 (numbered "17"). BMPD Accession number 1924,0726.2. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

LONDON

I wander thro each charter'd street
 Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
 And mark in every face I meet
 Marks of weakness marks of woe

In every cry of every Man
 In every Infants cry of fear
 In every voice in every ban
 The mind-forgd manacles I hear

How the Chimney sweepers cry
 Every blackning Church appalls
 And the hapless Soldiers sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlots curse
 Blasts the new born Infants tear
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

Again, Blake is parodying an example from the moralizing literature addressed to children so popular in his time. In this case, the model we are invited to hold up to view, alongside 'London', is Song IV, 'Praise for Mercies Spiritual and Temporal,' from Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs, Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*, first published in 1715, and frequently reprinted throughout the eighteenth century (de Sola Pinto 67-87). It is the discrepancy, both in terms of point of view and tone of voice, between the narrator of Blake's 'London' and that of Watts's Song IV, that is immediately noticeable. So much so, that our response is one almost of embarrassment for Watts, if not revulsion:

Whene'er I take my walks abroad
 How many poor I see!
 What shall I render to my God
 For all his gifts to me?

Not more than others I deserve,
 Yet God hath giv'n me more;
 For I have food while others starve,
 Or beg from door to door.

How many children in the street
 Half naked I behold?
 While I am cloth'd from head to feet,
 And cover'd from the cold.

While some poor wretches scarce can tell
 Where they may lay their head,
 I have a home wherein to dwell,
 And rest upon my bed.

While others early learn to swear,
 And curse, and lie, and steal;
 Lord, I am taught thy name to fear,
 And do thy holy will.

Are these thy favours day by day
 To me above the rest?
 Then let me love thee more than they,
 And try to serve the best.

Watts's self-righteous distancing of himself from those less fortunate, contrasts, utterly, with the unflinching directness of Blake's narrator, as he bears witness to what he sees and hears. As he walks the streets of London, close by the Thames, observing and listening, the discrepancy between Watts's and Blake's narrator is unmistakable:

I wander thro each charter'd street
 Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
 And mark in every face I meet
 Marks of weakness marks of woe

The repetition of 'mark' alludes ironically to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where Locke describes how each instance of empirical experience makes its mark on the *tabula rasa* of the human mind, until sufficient experience is accumulated to provide our general ideas of the world. Unlike Watts's speaker, who remains aloof and superior, Blake's narrator, ironically, marks and is marked by the physical markings of human experience that he sees and hears as he makes his way through the streets of London. Nor do the closing lines offer relief from the sights and sounds that have been described. The poem ends in a curse, ringing through the darkness, beyond resolution, laying claim to us all:

But most thro midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

The vision of Blake's 'London' is unremitting - it may be said, even all-consuming, in its nihilism. Until, that is, we recognize a second model that is being parodied - this time visually. Once recognized, however, the force of the discrepancy between Blake's image and his original is sufficiently great that it virtually transforms the meaning of his text.

Hans Holbein's series of 42 woodcut emblems, *Les Simulachres & histories faces de la Mort*, first published in Lyon in 1538, and commonly referred to as the Dance of Death, were reprinted and variously copied throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1789, for example, the images were re-engraved on wood and published by Thomas Bewick as *Emblems of Mortality; Representing, in Upwards of Fifty Cuts, Death, seizing all Ranks and Degrees of People*. It is Holbein's figure of Death leading the Old Man to his grave pit that Blake is parodying in the headpiece to 'London'.

Significantly, in Blake's rendering, the figure of Death has been displaced by a child. The child leads the old man, not to his grave pit, but, taking him by the hand, leads him on, through the streets of London, in such a way as to imply care and guardianship. It could even be said that the child is leading the old man beyond the frame of the plate, taking him away, leaving behind the experience of what has been seen and heard and recorded in the text.

It may be useful to note that from 1794, until his death in 1827, Blake rarely if ever issued the *Songs of Experience* separately from *Songs of Innocence* (though he continued to issue copies of the *Songs of Innocence* on their own). The *Songs of Innocence*, therefore, are the ever-present 'contrary' or



Fig. 4. Hans Holbein the Younger, woodcut engraving, 'The Old Man', *Les Simulachres & Histories faces de la Mort*, Lyon, M. and G. Trechsel (for Jean and Francois Frellon), 1538. BMPD Accession number 1895,0122.822. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

counterpart to *Songs of Experience*. Being in the same volume, the poems are there to be referred back to. Pairs of 'contrary' poems, such as 'Holy Thursday', 'The Chimney Sweeper' and 'Nurses Song', and examples that are implicitly so, like 'The Divine Image' and 'The Human Abstract', and 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger', are reminders, if they are needed, of this interrelationship, indeed, interdependence between the two volumes. In evoking Holbein's emblem, and displacing the figure of Death with that of a child leading the personification of Experience away with care and concern, beyond the text of the poem, we are reminded graphically of the presence within the same volume of the *Songs of Innocence*, and of their abiding importance for what we ourselves are meant to be led back to and to take away from Blake's book.

III

These examples are representative of Blake's satiric strategies in the *Songs*. My next example has been chosen to illustrate the more complex and allusive parody and ironic interplay that characterises the satire of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

On Plate 24 of *The Marriage* the element of play is between an explicit image and an implicit text, between a specific visual rendering of the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, and its prototype as described in the Book of Daniel. Its complexity derives from the fact that the import of the representation, when recognized, plays to more than one audience, evoking a different response from each. The significance of this ironic interplay also alters over time, or so it would appear.

The nominal object of attack in *The Marriage* is the self-styled prophet and visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist and theologian who lived part of his later life in London, where he died in 1772. His writings were then taken up and translated by a small group of devotees, and in the 1780s the New Jerusalem Church was founded based upon his teachings. Blake became an enthusiast, a committed follower, reading and annotating Swedenborg's writings and attending meetings with like-minded friends and associates, that included a number of fellow artists, such as the sculptor John Flaxman and miniaturist, Richard Cosway. However, in 1790, apparently quite suddenly and totally, Blake came to see that Swedenborg was a false prophet, whose purported visionary travelogues, and conversations with angels, Biblical prophets and noted personalities recently deceased, such as Sir Isaac Newton, were a sham. For Blake, the New Jerusalem Church served only to epitomize the hypocrisy of organized religion, the imposition of orthodoxy, and more generally, all forms of tyranny of the mind, body and spirit. It will be helpful, very briefly, to sketch in the background to this sudden disillusionment and visceral – but supremely controlled – repudiation on Blake's part.



Fig. 5. William Blake, Plate 24, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, c. 1790-93. Copy B. Bodleian Library Accession number: Arch. G. d. 53. Reproduced with permission.

In the *The Apocalypse Revealed* (translated in 1791 from the *Apocalypsis Revelata*), Swedenborg announced:

It is to be observed, that after the last Judgment, which took place in the Spiritual World in the Year 1757, ... a new Heaven was formed out of the Christians, ... out of this Heaven doth and will descend the New Church upon Earth, which is the New Jerusalem.

In November 1787, one of the followers of Swedenborg, a printer and publisher of translations of Swedenborg's works, named Robert Hindmarsh, set up a chapel in London's Great East Cheap, near St Paul's Cathedral, publishing a liturgy, appointing a minister, forming a ritual around the Holy Supper, and instituting ordination and baptism. This threatened to divide the followers of Swedenborg from those who wished to remain discretely associated with the Church of England. On 7 December 1788, 'at a full Meeting of the Members of the New Jerusalem Church ... it was unanimously agreed, that a General CONFERENCE of all ... who are desirous of rejecting, and separating themselves from the Old Church' would convene on Easter Monday, 'when the following Propositions, containing the principal Doctrines of the New Church' would be deliberated. On 13 April 1789 the conference opened and those in attendance were asked to sign the following statement:

We whose Names are hereunto subscribed, do each of us approve of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, believing that the Doctrines contained therein are genuine Truths, revealed from Heaven, and that the New Jerusalem Church ought to be established, distinct and separate from the Old Church.

Both William and Catherine Blake were present and signed, proclaiming Swedenborg's revelations. For five days the sixty to seventy men and women considered the propositions, read and referred to Swedenborg's writings, and dined together, until, in 'the most cordial unanimity and brotherly affection', thirty-two Resolutions were adopted, the Old Church declared dead, the New Church established, and the commencement of the Second Coming in the year 1757 affirmed. This was the only occasion Blake would become associated with organized religion.

In his writings, Swedenborg had referred specifically to Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, as interpreted by Daniel, as foretelling the founding of the New Jerusalem Church. At the General Conference that Blake attended, the congregation was reminded of this and the passage from Daniel, Chapter 2, verse 44, was read out: '*the God of heaven hath begun to set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; a kingdom, which shall not be left to other people, but shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and shall stand for ever*'.

On Plate 24, Blake chooses to depict Nebuchadnezzar following the description, not of his first, but of his second dream, as described in Chapter 4, verses 20-26. The king of Babylon and conqueror of Jerusalem is shown crawling on his hands and knees, bearded and staring out at the reader, terrified. In the background is the stump of a huge entwined tree trunk, that Daniel interprets for Nebuchadnezzar as follows (4:20–27):

The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth;

It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness has grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth ... and let it be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him;

This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon the lord the king:

That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. (4:20-26)

The evolution of the design makes clear that it is the description in Daniel that Blake turned to and relied upon his reader to recognize. The figure on Plate 24 was copied from the second of two pencil drawings in Blake's Manuscript Notebook. The first drawing depicts Nebuchadnezzar crawling on all fours with a crown of leaves encircling his brow. The second, much larger, more finished and clearly defined drawing, shows in bold outline the stumps of the entwined tree trunk described in Daniel. This is the design that Blake copied onto the copper plate and that became reversed in printing.

Plate 24 brings to a dramatic climax the often wayward, episodic and even picaresque progress of the narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (there is no certainty that it is the same narrator throughout). *The Marriage* is introduced by a prologue, The Argument on Plate 2, followed by six chapters, and ends with an epilogue, 'A Song of Liberty', on plates 25-27. Each chapter is designated by a design at the head of the first plate, and another design at the bottom of the last plate.

The sixth and final chapter is made up of Plates 21 to 24. It opens with a naked youth seated on a human skeleton, symbolizing resurrection, the casting off of a former life. He looks heavenward in visionary contemplation, anticipating what is to follow. The chapter ends on Plate 24, with the figure of Nebuchadnezzar. Etched below it is the proverb, 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression'. 'A Song of Liberty' immediately follows, concluding *The Marriage* on a strident political note.

In this final chapter the narrator is in dialogue with an Angel. Having grown in confidence through the course of the work, the narrator is now able to reject Swedenborg and his writings, and in doing so unleashes the following diatribe.

Plate 22

Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not writ-
-ten one new truth : Now hear another : he has written
all the old falshoods .
And now hear the reason. He conversed with Angels
who are all religious . & conversed not with Devils who
all hate religion, for he was incapable thro' his conceited
notions.
Thus Swedenborgs writings are a recapitulation of
all superficial opinions [...]
Have now another plain fact: Any man of mechani-
-cal talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Ja-
-cob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal
value with Swedenborg's.

The angel is overwhelmed, and astonishingly joins the narrator in repudiating his former beliefs:

Plate 24:

When he had so spoken: I beheld the Angel who
stretched out his arms embracing the flame of fire
& he was consumed and arose as Elijah.
Note. This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is
my particular friend : we often read the Bible to-
-gether in its infernal or diabolical sense which
the world shall have if they behave well.

I have also: The Bible of Hell: which the world
shall have whether they will or no.

The last word from the narrator is his revelation of his having a Bible of Hell, that by implication will subvert and revolutionize the canon of orthodox Christianity. The image of Nebuchadnezzar follows, and below it the proverb, 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.' Blake expected his reader to recognize that his image was derived from the description in the Book of Daniel of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. As the sources that have been claimed to have inspired Blake's image suggest, this has not been fully realized, with the result that the full significance of the ironic interplay that is taking place has not been grasped.

In 1875, Fredrick York Powell was emphatic that the 'figure of Nebuchadnezzar in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is without doubt derived from Plate 146 of *The Bible Commentary* by Richard Blome in 1704' (66). Unfortunately, for the past 135 years no one could find a copy of the work that Powell cited, until 2010, when Paul Miner found that the plate in fact occurs in the English translation of Nicolas Fontaine, *The History of the Old and New Testament*, 3rd edition, published by C. Blome and others, in 1703, Plate 148 (Miner 75-78). Even so, the engraving only nominally compares with Blake's design. Absent is the clear emphasis upon the stump of the entwined tree trunk that is central to Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. The engraving also gives no suggestion of the crazed appearance of Nebuchadnezzar, staring out at the viewer.

In 1937, Edgar Wind described Blake's prototype as being derived from sixteenth-century engravings depicting the penance of St John Chrysostom, noting how the saint had vowed that 'he would live like a beast, crawling on his hands and feet, and eating nothing but grass, after the model of Nebuchadnezzar' (183). Wind illustrated his point with prints by Theodor de Bry, Hans Sebald Beham, Hans Baldung Grien, and Albrecht Durer. The most persuasive example being Durer's 'The Penance of St John Chrysostom'. Another example identified by Wind was Lucas Cranach the Elder's woodcut of a Werewolf of 1512. In 1943, citing Wind, Anthony Blunt made explicit the connection between these images and Blake's, remarking that the 'similarity is so close' that it would be difficult to believe that one of these engravings had not inspired Blake's design (190-212).

In 1950, Geoffrey Grigson pointed to John Hamilton Mortimer's 'Nebuchadnezzar Recovering His Reason', published in 1781, as a source historically closer to Blake. Four years later, David V. Erdman was in no doubt that Blake had looked to his 'admired' Mortimer:

Blake's identification of fallen Reason with Nebuchadnezzar is a striking instance of his creative and complexly ironic use of traditional material. The pictorial details, the body, the talon-nails, the impossibly hairy back and thighs, derive from his admired Mortimer's drawing of *Nebuchadnezzar recovering his reason*, the 1781 etching of which was doubtless in Blake's print collection. And the association of this bestial man with Reason is suggested by Mortimer's title. But Blake, shifting the subject to Nebuchadnezzar's fall, proceeds to draw the ironic emblem of Reason *losing* his reason. (193-194)

Blake would have been familiar with many of these examples, and certainly with those by Durer and Mortimer. But when the descriptions in Daniel are considered, it is clear that they are the original that Blake relied upon for his reader to recognize and hold up for comparison. Comparison, that is, with Daniel's interpretation of *both* Nebuchadnezzar's first, as well as the all but literal rendering of his description of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. It is reference to the second, set against the first, that is crucial.

As we have seen, Swedenborg had appropriated Nebuchadnezzar's first dream (Daniel 2:44) as foretelling the founding of the New Jerusalem Church. As we know, at the General Conference that Blake attended, the congregation was reminded of this and the passage read out. But Blake depicts Nebuchadnezzar *after* boasting of the might of his kingdom. Instead, he deliberately chooses to render the King of Babylon as Daniel describes following his second dream:

That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

The prophecy is fulfilled, as Nicholas Fontaine's Commentary makes plain:

GOD made it appear by this terrible Example, how severely he punisheth secret Pride, and elevation of the Heart, casting them down to the state of Beasts, who lift up themselves by their Arrogance above the condition of Men. *Nebuchadnezzar* (saith St S[aint] Bernard) is the Image of *Fallen Man*, who by lifting up himself in Pride, lost his Heavenly Estate and Kingdom, and became like unto the Beasts that perish. (196)

Depicting Nebuchadnezzar following his second dream, implies comparison with his first, that Swedenborg had appropriated to prophecy the founding of the New Jerusalem Church. This implicit juxtaposition would not have been lost on the members of the Chapel at Great East Cheap. For Blake's

part, what was once passionately believed had become, with even greater intensity, the target of a relentlessly ironic parody, hoisting Swedenborg and the New Jerusalem Church on the petard of their own making.

Blake is alluding to a relatively private circumstance that would only be recognized and understood by a select few, the 60 or 70 persons that were in attendance at the founding of the New Jerusalem Church, or those familiar with Swedenborg's writings, and in particular his pronouncements and prophecies regarding the coming of the New Jerusalem and the founding of the New Church by that name. However, anyone else seeing the image on Plate 24 would have recognized something very different.

Nebuchadnezzar is depicted wearing a crown. No crown is present in the drawing that Blake copied from the Manuscript Notebook, nor is Nebuchadnezzar seen wearing a crown in the Large Colour Print of 1795, otherwise copied from Plate 24, when again it was reversed in printing (Butlin Colour Plate 393). This detail is only present on Plate 24. Although implied in the descriptions in Daniel, a crown is not referred to. Clearly, it has been introduced for a purpose.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell was begun in 1790, but not published until October 1793, when for the first and only time it was listed for sale in a prospectus published from Blake's home and studio in London, at No. 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth. Unusually for Blake, there is no imprint on the title page of *The Marriage* that would normally be present and indicate the author, printer and date of publication, as a protection of copyright under Hogarth's Act for the protection of engravings. For this reason there is controversy as to exactly when, as well as how, Blake produced the work, with one group of scholars believing that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was completed by July 1790, and another, that although begun in 1790, the work was not finally completed until three years later, when it was listed for sale in the prospectus in the form we know it today.

If *The Marriage* had been completed and published by July 1790, Blake's image would have alluded to and signified an event that no one would have failed to recognize. Between October 1788 and February 1789 George III suffered from recurring bouts of dementia, causing a crisis in the monarchy. In 1790, the image of Nebuchadnezzar wearing a crown would have alluded to the King's recent illness, and, by inference here, to Swedenborg similarly suffering from delirium in proclaiming the advent of the New Jerusalem in the year 1757, and foretelling the founding of a church based upon his teachings that would displace all other churches and in righteousness prevail. However, a proof copy of Plates 21–24 exists, that is now in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum. On Plate 24 the figure of Nebuchadnezzar and the proverb below it, is not present. Both were added later. How much later we do not know.

As we know, by October 1793, when *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was listed for sale in the prospectus, Plate 24 had been reworked, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar added, and the proverb etched below it. The King had long since recovered. Following the execution in Paris of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, Britain was at war with France and anyone who threatened the established order was suspect and hunted down. Indeed, for William Godwin, writing the preface to *Political Justice* that February, 'terror was the order of the day'. The allusion that would have been recognized now on Plate 24 was the King as the embodiment of the nation, and monarchy in peril from the forces of republicanism.

The proverb etched below the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression', subverts the prophecy of Isaiah, Chap. 11, verses 6–7: 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.' It is apposite that this final proverb against the tyranny of the Law should be etched below the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, and that 'A Song of Liberty' should immediately follow and conclude *The Marriage*. The revolutionary politics of the author would have been clearly understood. In October 1793, such an overt declaration may well explain the absence of an imprint on the title page, that would have identified the author, printer, and date of publication, providing information that in such an openly iconoclastic work may well have led to prosecution (Blake).

IV

My final example is the frontispiece to *America a Prophecy*. Although I will begin by looking at the frontispiece, it is where it will take us that I wish to follow, as it will lead to Blake's last years, and to the group of young artists known as 'The Ancients' who became inspired by him, in particular Samuel Palmer, George Richmond and Edward Calvert.

The first copies of *America a Prophecy* were listed in the prospectus of October 1793 and first published that year. As we have seen, for those who had looked with hope to the French Revolution, and preceding it, to the revolt of the American colonies, here used typologically for the present crisis, such promise had been displaced by fear and repression. The frontispiece and facing title page symbolically reflect the times. But above all, it is the frontispiece that establishes the mood, with the hapless mother and child seated amongst ruins, and beside them the brooding, winged angel, head lowered, face down and hidden between its knees, shackled hand and foot to the stone plinth upon which he sits, amidst the broken implements of war of cannon barrel and broken sword.

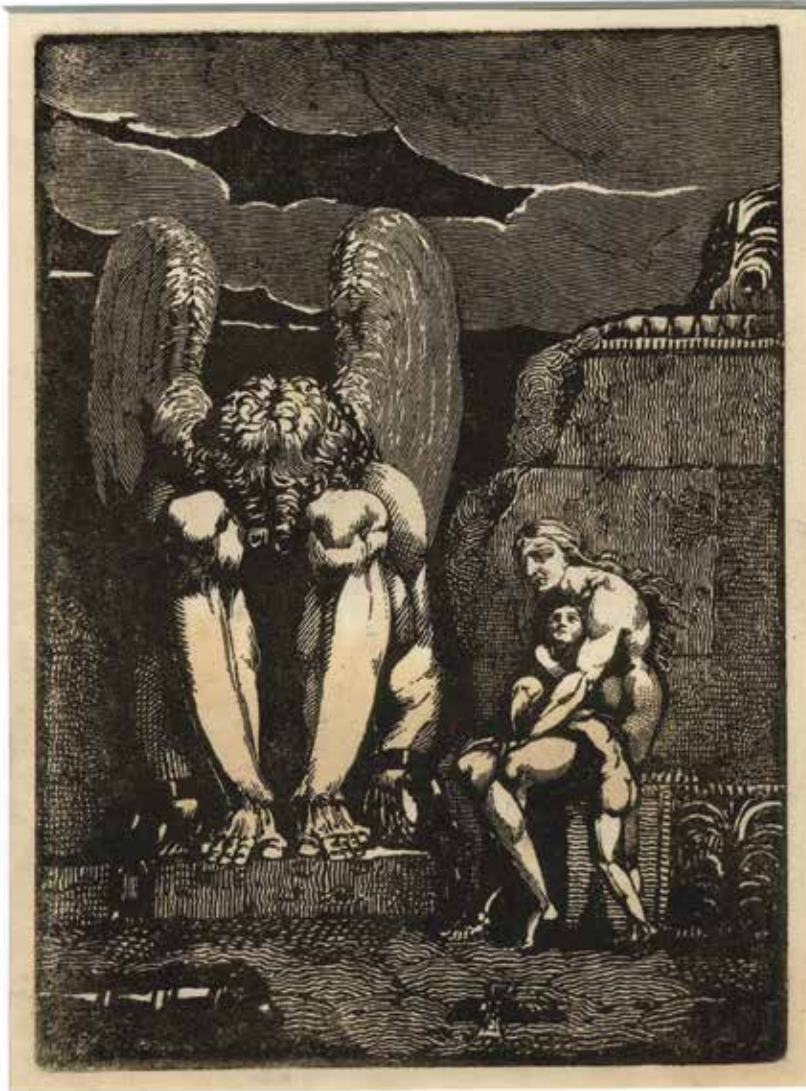


Fig. 6 William Blake,
Frontispiece, *America a
Prophecy*, 1793. Copy F,
Plate 1. BMPD Accession
number 1953,0101.1.1.
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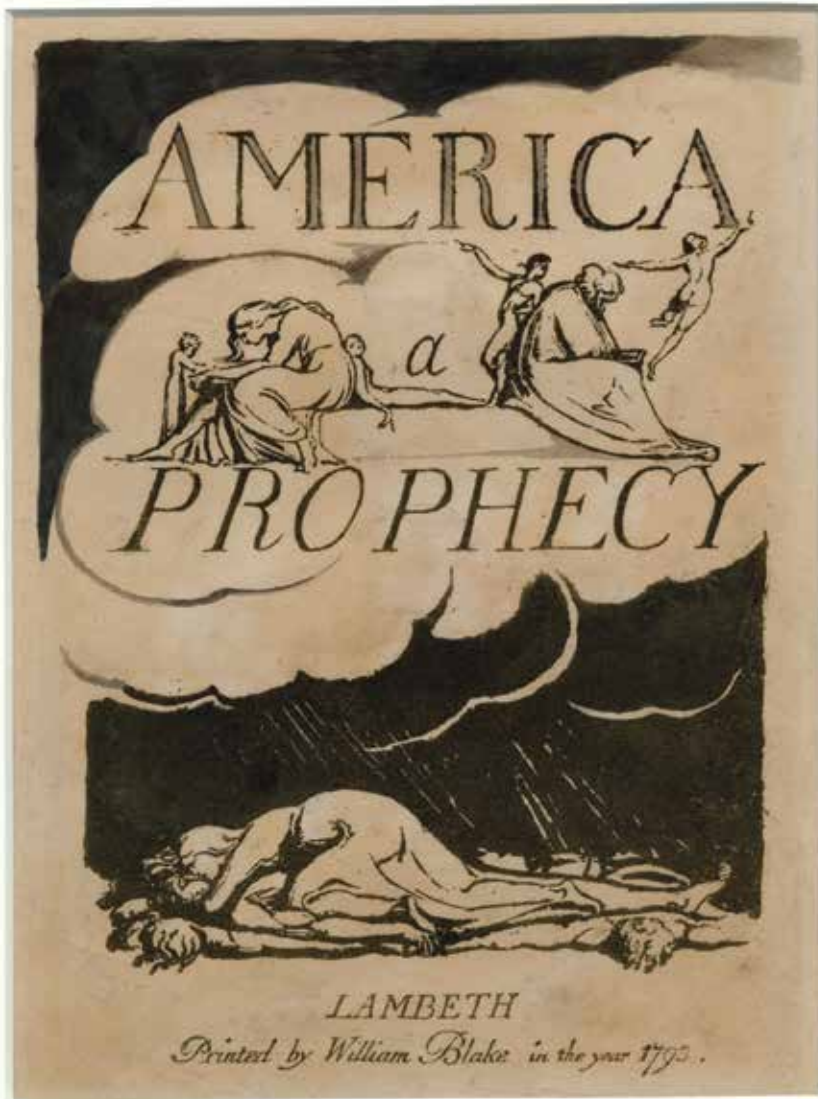


Fig.7 William Blake,
Title page, *America a
Prophecy*, 1793. Copy F,
Plate 2. BMPD Accession
number 1953,0101.1.2.
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For Blake's contemporaries, the winged angel and scene of desolation may have evoked Hogarth's *Tail Piece, or The Bathos*. Published in April 1764, it was said in the advertisements that it would 'serve as a Tailpiece to all the Author's engraved works, when bound up together'. It has been described as his farewell, and was, in fact, his last print. Ronald Paulson has described the *Tail Piece* in these terms:

Hogarth introduces into his print every thing which could denote the *end of all things*. Near the sign of 'The World's End' Time expires. He has collapsed against a broken column, with his scythe and hourglass broken, his pipe snapped, and his last whiff of breath labelled "FINIS". (185)

The winged angel appears next in James Barry's *The Phoenix, or The Resurrection of Freedom*, first published as an etching with aquatint in December 1776, and later reworked and reissued as a pure etching in 1790 (Pressly Fig. 57). Liberty, having progressed from Greece to Italy and then to England, where she had found a natural home, has now been driven out and progressed to her new haven, America. The mourners standing at her tomb include English Liberty's great champions, Andrew Marvell, Algernon Sidney, John Milton and John Locke, as well as Barry himself, in self-portrait behind the other figures at the far right. The figure standing in the foreground, before the tomb, is in shackles (like the angel of Blake's frontispiece), with a note sticking out from his pocket inscribed, '*Habeas Corpus*'. But Blake's frontispiece is evocative also of three earlier images, Salvatore Rosa's *Democritus in Meditation* (1662), Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's *Melancholia (La Melancolie)* (c.1645-46), and Albrecht Durer's *Melancholia I*. (1514).

The figure of Democritus is depicted with head down and face all but covered by his hand in which his head is held in contemplation. The same classic pose of melancholic contemplation is also seen in Castiglione's personification of Melancholy. The setting of both amidst architectural ruins is repeated in Blake's frontispiece, but, appositely, all else has been displaced by the implements of war and desolation (that is carried over in the facing title page of *America*), in the midst of which the giant form of the winged angel sits in chains, head buried in meditation.

But it is Durer's *Melancholia I* that is most powerfully evoked by Blake's frontispiece.

Erwin Panofsky has noted a personal aspect that is pertinent:

Durer's most perplexing engraving is, at the same time, the objective statement of a general philosophy and the subjective confession of an individual man. It fuses, and transforms, two great representational and literary traditions, that of Melancholy as one of the four humours



Fig. 8 Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia I*, 1602, engraving. BMPD Accession number E.4.118. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

and that of Geometry as one of the Seven Liberal Arts. It typifies the artist of the Renaissance who respects practical skill, but longs all the more fervently for mathematical theory – who feels “inspired” by celestial influences and eternal ideas, but suffers all the more deeply from his human frailty and intellectual finiteness. ... in doing all this it is in a sense a spiritual self-portrait of Albrecht Durer. (171)

It is this personal aspect as it pertains to Blake that I wish to explore. For his biography, Alexander Gilchrist asked Samuel Palmer to recall his impressions of Blake, whom he first met in the company of John Linnell in October 1824. ‘No man more admired Albert Durer’, remembered Palmer, adding: ‘and, close by his engraving table, [was] Albert Durer’s *Melancholy the Mother of Invention*, memorable as probably having been seen by Milton, and used in his *Penseroso*’ (qtd. in Gilchrist).

Durer’s image evidently had a special significance for Blake. Just how significant is suggested by Linnell recalling his first meeting Blake in a letter to Bernard Barton of 2 April 1830:

When I first became acquainted with Mr Blake he lived in a first floor in South Molton Street and upon his Landlord leaving off business & retiring to France, he moved to Fountain Court Strand ... it was here that he began to feel the want of employment and before I knew his distress he had sold all his collection of old prints to Mess Colnaghi & Co. (Bentley 526-527)

One print Blake refused to relinquish, or Palmer would not have seen it ‘close by’ his engraving table in 1824, where it must always have had a place.

Each time they visited Blake in his and Catherine’s two-room apartment in Fountain Court, located in a narrow courtyard off the Strand leading down to the Thames, the ‘Ancients’, as they were called, Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), George Richmond (1809-1896), Edward Calvert (1799-1883), and the others, were received in the small room at the rear where the Blakes lived; the larger front room was occupied with Blake’s rolling press, work benches, inks, papers and other materials used in his profession. It was in the small back room, beneath a single window that looked down a narrow passage to the Thames, where Blake’s engraving table stood. Palmer vividly remembered when age 19 he was first taken by Linnell to meet Blake and seeing on his engraving table the first plate of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*: ‘At my never-to-be-forgotten first interview the copper of the first plate – “thus did Job continually” – was lying on the table where he had been working on it. How lovely it looked by the lamp-light, strained through the tissue paper [of the light-diffuser]. Richmond, age 16, first ‘met Blake one day at the elder Tatham’s, and was allowed to walk home with him ... it was “as if he were walking with the prophet Isaiah” (Gilchrist).

During the last three years of his life Blake encouraged and indeed profoundly inspired this group of young artists. No work affected them more than the series of woodcut illustrations that Blake had created for Dr Robert John Thornton's school edition of the *Pastorals of Virgil*, published in 1821 [Fig. 9]. As Palmer wrote in 1824:

They are visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry. I thought of their light and shade, and looking upon them I found no word to describe it. Intense depth, solemnity, and vivid brilliancy only coldly and partially describe them. There is in such a mystic and glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. (15-16)

Palmer's luminous series of drawings in sepia, and tempera paintings with pen and watercolour, made between 1824 and 1831-32, are directly attributable to the affects these tiny woodcuts had upon him, and to Blake's abiding presence. So too with Edward Calvert and his extraordinary lithographs, wood and line engravings, many no larger than Blake's woodcuts, produced during this same brief period.²¹ In closing, there are two examples in



Fig. 9: William Blake, 4 proofs of illustrations to Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* (London, 1821), printed on one sheet. Wood engravings. BMPD Accession number: 1919,0528.3. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.



G. D. I II

Fig. 10: George Richmond,
The Shepherd, 1827.
Engraving. BMPD Accession
number: 1885,0711.58.
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permission.

particular that I wish to consider that were produced by this group of young followers of Blake in the months immediately before and following his death.

In April 1827, while Blake was ill and with only four months to live, George Richmond produced a line engraving entitled *The Shepherd* [Fig. 10].

The figure draws upon the figure of Colinet, the shepherd on the right in Blake's frontispiece to the illustrations to Virgil's *Pastorals* [Fig. 11].

The shepherd strikes the classic pose of the melancholic and may be suggestive of Durer's *Melancholia I*. But closer still is the image of a shepherd drawn by Samuel Palmer, and engraved by another of The Ancients, Welby Sherman, in 1827, during Blake's last illness or immediately following his death that August.

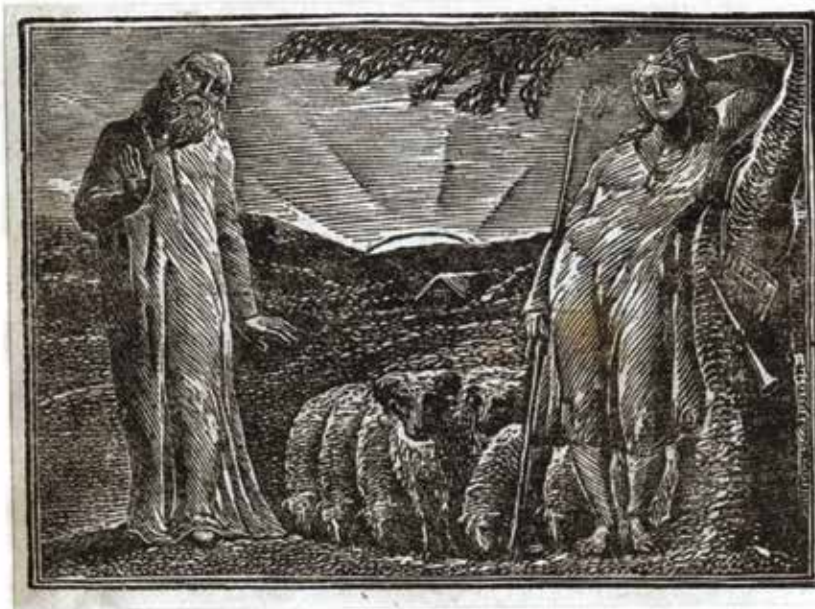


Fig. 11: William Blake, Frontispiece, Illustrations to Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* (London, 1821). Wood engraving. BMPD Accession number: 1940,0713.25. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.



Palmer's image engraved by Sherman is also entitled *The Shepherd* [Fig. 12].

In this case the allusion to the image seen 'close by' Blake's engraving table is unmistakable. The positioning of the figures in the two engravings, Figs. 12 and 8, when seen side by side, are the same, except, quite obviously, in Palmer's image the face of the shepherd is turned away. Otherwise, both adopt the same, classic pose. In Palmer's image a further allusion may be intended.

Fig. 12: Samuel Palmer, *The Shepherd*, engraved by Welby Sherman, 1827. BMPD Accession number: 1936.1022.1. © Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

Before meeting Blake, Palmer, Richmond and Calvert each drew from the antique marbles in the Elgin and Towneley galleries in the British Museum in preparation for entry into the Royal Academy schools, where they would study under the Professor of Painting, Henry Fuseli. Richmond and Calvert were both admitted, but for reasons unknown Palmer did not follow them, although, of the three, Palmer's admiration for Fuseli was almost certainly the greater.

Fuseli's *Lectures on Painting* were originally addressed to the students of the Royal Academy following his election as Professor of Painting in 1799 (and repeated following his re-election to the post in 1810). It was in the first lecture, on 'Ancient Art' (first published in 1801 and republished in 1820), that Fuseli famously challenged his predecessor, and former President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds. This was with regard to the painting by Timanthes of the immolation of Iphigenia in Aulis, regarded as the most celebrated painting of antiquity:

On this subject, which not only contains the gradations of affection from the most remote to the closest link of humanity, but appears to me to offer the fairest specimen of the limits which the theory of the ancients had prescribed to the expression of pathos, I think it my duty the more circumstantially to expatiate, as the censure passed on the method of Timanthes, has been sanctioned by the highest authority in the matters of art, that of your late President, in his eighth discourse at the delivery of the academic prize for the best picture painted from this very subject.

Fuseli reminded his students how Timanthes had treated his subject:

Iphigenia, the victim ordained by the oracle to be offered for the success of the Greek expedition against Troy, was represented standing ready for immolation at the altar, the priest, the instruments of death at her side; and around her, an assembly of the most important agents or witnesses of the terrible solemnity, from Ulysses, who had disengaged her from the embraces of her mother at Mycenae, to her nearest male relations, her uncle Menelaus, and her own father, Agamemnon. Timanthes, say Pliny and Quintilian with surprising similarity of phrase, when, in gradation he had consumed every image of grief within the reach of art, from the unhappy priest, to the deeper grief of Ulysses, and from that to the pangs of kindred sympathy in Menelaus, unable to express *with dignity* the father's woe, threw a veil, or if you will, a mantle over his face. -----This mantle, the pivot of objection, indiscriminately borrowed, as might easily be supposed, by all the concurrents for the prize, gave rise to the following series of criticisms:

The students were then reminded by Fuseli of Reynolds's criticism:

“Before I conclude, I cannot avoid making one observation on the pictures now before us. I have observed, that every candidate has copied the celebrated invention of Timanthes in hiding the face of Agamemnon in his mantle; [...] But it may be observed, that those who praise this circumstance were not painters. They use it as an illustration only of their art; [...] Mr. Falconet has observed, in a note on this passage in his translation of Pliny, that the circumstance of covering the face of Agamemnon was probably not in consequence of any fine imagination of the painter, ---which he considers as a discovery of the critics, ---but merely copied from the description of the sacrifice, as it is found in Euripides. The words from which the picture is supposed to be taken, are these: “*Agamemnon saw Iphigenia advance towards the fatal altar; he groaned, he turned aside his head, he shed tears, and covered his face with his robe.*” [...] To what Falconet has said, we may add, that supposing this method of leaving the expression of grief to the imagination, to be, as it was thought to be, the invention of the painter, and that it deserves all the praise that has been given it, still it is a trick that will serve but once; whoever does it a second time, will not only want novelty, but be justly suspected of using artifice to evade difficulties.”

To which Fuseli responded:

Neither the French nor the English critic appears to me to have comprehended the real motive of Timanthes, as contained in the words, ‘*decere, pro dignitate, and digne,*’ in the passages of Tully, Quintilian, and Pliny; they ascribe to impotence what was the forbearance of judgement; Timanthes felt like a father: he did not hide the face of Agamemnon, because it was beyond the power of his art, not because it was beyond the *possibility*, but because it was beyond the *dignity* of expression, because the inspiring feature of paternal affection at that moment, and the action which of necessity must have accompanied it, would either have destroyed the grandeur of the character and the solemnity of the scene, or subjected the painter with the majority of his judges to the imputation of insensibility.

Fuseli then addressed the question of precedent:

If it be a “trick”, it is certainly one that “has served more than once.” We find it adopted [...] by Michael Angelo in the figure of Abijam, to mark unutterable woe; Raphael, to show that he thought it the best possible mode of expressing remorse and the deepest sense of repentance, borrowed it in the expulsion from Paradise, without any alteration, from Masaccio; and like

him, turned Adam out with both his hands before his face. [...] we must conclude that Nature herself dictated to him this method as superior to all he could express by features; and that he recognized the same dictate in Masaccio, who can no more be supposed to have been acquainted with the precedent of Timanthes, than Shakespeare with that of Euripides, when he made Macduff draw his hat over his face. (44-58)

Fuseli's insight helps to explain the import of Palmer's extraordinary image. On the occasion of their visits to Fountain Court, 'The Ancients' had each seen Blake at work at his engraving table, and 'close by', as Palmer remembered, Durer's *Melancholia I*. Palmer's image of *The Shepherd* beckons to Durer's *Melancholia I*, yet significantly, distinguishes itself by having the figure turn his head away. As Palmer had learned from Fuseli, the shepherd's face is hidden, not because it was beyond the power of his art to express how he and the others felt, but because how they felt 'was beyond the dignity of expression'. The shepherd looks out to sea, to the crescent moon, and beyond. The ironic interplay is entirely personal, and prophetic. With Blake gone, the intense vision that inspired Palmer, Richmond, Calvert and the others to produce the most extraordinary visionary landscapes in English art, will rapidly fade, be utterly transformed, and lost forever.

V

Each of the examples that I have considered invites us to become engaged with the artist in a process of discovery, and in so doing to take an active and indeed creative part in the play between word and image in the work immediately before us and another or other works that are being parodied or alluded to in some way. Indeed, our active participation is essential, in supplying what is not present, making sense of what has been left out, of articulating what has been left unsaid. Laurence Sterne describes this creative relationship using the metaphor of conversation. With characteristic wit and delight, he perfectly summarizes what I have attempted to explore in these few examples:

Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all; - so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. (87)

Notes:

A short version of this paper was first given at the *International Word & Image Conference* held in Dijon 24-26 June 2010. Maurice Gérard then asked me to develop and present the full version given at the College of Holy Cross in March 2012. Subsequently, the paper has been translated into French by Jean-Francois Allain and published in *William Blake* Sous la direction de Yves Bonnefoy (Editions Hazan, Paris, 2013), pp. 78-120. I particularly wish to thank Maurice for encouraging the development of this paper and especially for his wonderful generosity and hospitality and to that of the many other friends that I have made at Holy Cross as a result of his invitations to visit in recent years.

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