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“A History of Art & Science”: William Blake’s *Last Judgment*

REBECCA MARKS^a

WILLIAM Blake’s final painting of the Last Judgment has received little scholarly attention, largely because it has been lost since his death in 1827. From fragmented anecdotal accounts, we know that the piece was a tempera with gold leaf, six to seven feet tall and five feet wide (Butlin #648), and so overworked by Blake that it was described by George and Sydney Cumberland as “nearly as black as your Hat” (*BR*[2] 320). Frederick Tatham wrote that it was “very much spoiled and darkened by over-work; and is one of those alluded to in [Blake’s] Catalogue as being spoiled by the spirits of departed artists, or ‘blotting and blurring demons’” (Gilchrist 258). When J. T. Smith saw the painting, however, he had a very different response. Awestruck by “the lights of this extraordinary performance,” he marveled at Blake’s manipulation of color, especially the treatment of “silver,” “gold,” and “gilding.” He writes:

[If Blake had] fortunately lived till the next year’s exhibition at Somerset-house, the public would then have been astonished at his exquisite finishing of a Fresco picture of the Last Judgment, containing upwards of one thousand figures, many of them wonderfully conceived and grandly drawn. (473)

These conflicting responses cumulatively describe a painting of immense, overreaching ambition.

It is difficult to date a lost painting, but we might reasonably assume that Blake began work on the final *Last Judgment* around 1809, when he was drafting in his Notebook the tractate that would retrospectively become known as *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. There, he lays out a “most discriminate & particular” plan for an apocalyptic painting based in part on the Book of Revelation and in part on his own mythological and political ideas (E 562). By 1809, Blake had already produced at least nine designs on that

apocalyptic theme, each exploring different aspects of the potential narrative symbolism and structure (Butlin #639–48). The prolonged, visionary exactitude of that process may help explain why his final painting was never publicly exhibited or sold. It is plausible that he had become so absorbed in the minutiae of the large picture that its collective effect was one of prolixity, darkness, and chaos. At the time of Blake’s death, “Nobody could be found to give twenty-five guineas for it,” as his biographer Gilchrist records (401).

This article argues that one of the later drawings of the Last Judgment that Blake produced, the “Rosenwald” drawing in Washington, DC ([illus. 1](#)), represents the most complete surviving expression of his visionary project, and that it should be read as a *cartone*—that is, as a preparatory drawing for a large-scale historical fresco, in imagined emulation of Italian masters. Blake’s *Last Judgment*, in its combination of biblical narrative with mythological and political themes, both participates in and redefines the features of the historical genre as it manifested in eighteenth-century British painting.

Blake and History Painting

There is a precedent for reading Blake as a history painter, in relation to both his youthful aspirations to exhibit his work at the Royal Academy (Bindman, “Blake as a Painter” 87–90) and his later independent exhibition at 28 Broad Street in 1809 to 1810 (Myrone and Brown). In recent years, Martin Myrone has led the charge in spotlighting Blake’s status as a history painter. In the Tate exhibition of 2019, he included a reconstruction of Blake’s exhibition as part of a wider scholarly goal to move “away to some degree from the more technical discussions of printmaking and symbolism” and toward Blake’s “ambitions to be a public artist” (Calè). In the wider realm of eighteenth-cen-

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1. William Blake, *The Last Judgment*, c. 1809. Pen and wash over pencil, 45.3 x 34.6 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.3.9017.

tury visual studies, William L. Pressly's 2014 study of James Barry's historical murals for the Society of Arts drew significant comparisons between Blake's and Barry's political theories about history painting (283-90). Pressly's argument was based on earlier research, conducted by John Barrell, into Blake's place within contemporary political theories of art (Barrell 253-57). But on Blake and history painting specifically, Morton D. Paley and David V. Erdman, in their respective studies *Energy and Imagination* and *Prophet against Empire*, originally situated Blake among the eighteenth-century milieu of Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, John Hamilton Mortimer, and Barry (Paley, *Energy* 173-78; Erdman 36-45, 66-68). In line with these scholars, I read Blake's visionary temperas as part of a tradition of historical painting in Britain. I believe that Blake is not marginal to this tradition, but in fact attempted to make serious contributions to it, not only by expanding the usual classical, mythological, or civic narrative scope into visionary subject matter, but also by freeing the genre from the realist limits of neoclassical grand style and returning to a more two-dimensional, symbolic, Gothic one.

Evidence for reading Blake's tempera of the Last Judgment as a history comes in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, where he describes the project in the following terms:

My Picture is a History of Art & Science [& its
<the Foundation of Society> Which is Human-
ity itself. What are all the Gifts of the Spirit but
Mental Gifts whenever any Individual Rejects
Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment pass-
es upon that Individual. (E 562)

As an artist operating in London at the end of the eighteenth century, Blake would certainly have known that

"history" was not a neutral term. Within the context of the newly established Royal Academy, the word referred to a political, grand, and stately form of fine art intended to instruct, edify, and represent moral truth. History painting was vehemently advocated by Barry, who was one of Blake's artistic heroes (Dunne and Pressly 1-9; Lenihan 145-59; Pressly 283-90). Reynolds also promoted history painting as a didactic art form in his *Discourses*, which Blake annotated. For both Barry and Reynolds, it was a genre capable of cultivating civic virtue and shaping national identity (Barrell 227-57).

The concept of history painting (a word deriving from *istoria*, meaning eyewitness account) originated in Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* (1435). The formal features of the genre were defined as visual narrative; sufficient figures to convey this narrative; dramatic interaction; mythological or biblical themes; and didactic content. Alberti declared that histories had to be of "significant scale" and intended for "public display" (Lingo). Blake's extant drawings and paintings of the Last Judgment possess all these qualities, though their Gothic, two-dimensional style and symbolism represent a radical intervention in the historical genre as it had developed in eighteenth-century English-school painting. There is a clear stylistic difference, for instance, between Blake's approach in the Rosenwald drawing and those of contemporary apocalyptic histories, Barry's *Elysium* and West's *Death on the Pale Horse* (illus. 2 and 3).

Through symbolic density, cyclical narrative, and antimimetic form, Blake's designs for the Last Judgment reimagine history painting not as a vehicle for institutional authority but instead as a mode of spiritual instruction (Barrell 69-162). In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, Blake describes a picture that signifies an epic reckoning between the contrary states of the human soul: truth and er-



2. James Barry, *Elysium; or, The State of Final Retribution* from *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture*, c. 1777–83. Oil on canvas, 360.0 x 1308.0 cm. RSA, London, RSA024. Image © Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce/Bridgeman Images.



3. Benjamin West, *Death on the Pale Horse*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 447.0 x 764.5 cm. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1836.1. Image © Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

ror, imagination and reason, society and the individual. The damned, in his schema, are not simply the wicked, but those who “were too weak to Reject Error” (E 563). They have rejected vision in favor of law, science, or moral convention. The elect are not saints, but rather lovers, children, prophets, and artists: those who are attuned to imagination as a vessel for divine truth. “Men,” he writes, “are admitted into Heaven not because they have <curbed &> governd their Passions or have No Passions but because they have Cultivated their Understandings” (E 564).

Through his experiments with the Last Judgment as a visual and textual subject, Blake intentionally invokes a pre-modern artistic tradition—which links back to Michelangelo, to Dürer, and even to much earlier Gothic artists—and adapts this tradition to accord with his visionary philosophy. It is worth reminding ourselves that, though he is now remembered primarily as a poet and printmaker, he actively pursued the status of a history painter throughout his life (Essick). Having trained as an engraver between 1772 and 1779 and thereafter briefly studied at the Royal Academy, Blake repeatedly submitted historical compositions to the summer exhibitions between 1780 and 1808. These works tended toward historical, literary, and biblical subjects, such as *The Last Supper* (1799) and *The Miracle*

of the Loaves and Fishes (1800). In them, he combined the graphic lines and theatrical qualities of neoclassical painting with a historic monumentality, drawing from the visual vocabularies of Michelangelo and Raphael, Barry and Mortimer.

Unfortunately, he found little success within this institutional structure. In 1809, he wrote that “[t]he execution of my Designs, being all in Water-colours, (that is in Fresco) are regularly refused to be exhibited by the *Royal Academy*” (E 527). Thus frustrated by the refusal of his works for the summer exhibition, he curated his own solo exhibition at his family home at 28 Broad Street, Soho. This decision aligned with the views that he contemporaneously expressed in an unpublished tractate, possibly written as a lecture to the Chalcographic Society, entitled *Public Address*. It decried the lack of public patronage for English painters and criticized the dominance of sculpture and portraiture in official commissions:

The Painters of England are unemployd in Public Works. while the Sculptors have continual & superabundant employment Our Churches & Abbeys are treasures of [*Spiritual riches*] their producing for ages back While Painting is ex-

cluded Painting the Principal Art has no place [in our] <among our almost> only public works. (E 581)

Blake's exhibition was, then, in part a reaction to what he saw as a lack of support for public painting in England. Though it was ultimately an unsuccessful project that sold no pictures, in ideological terms it was nevertheless a radical intervention to the established structure of public art. Blake wished to restore the arts to the "grand" and "real" status that he perceived they had enjoyed in the Renaissance: he sought to strip them of the critics and "Ignorances" of the Georgian age and instead imbue them with spiritual truth (E 528). This is why his exhibition featured examples of what he called "portable Fresco" (a medium of his own making, with the goal of creating removable, modular mural panels to decorate public spaces), which, in form, were intended to emulate and modernize the techniques of the old Italian masters (Paley, *Energy* 271-77). In *A Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake envisions painting works "one hundred feet in height" and enshrining them on the walls of public, civic, or religious buildings (E 531). His *Last Judgment* might be seen to lie at the center of this broader campaign.

Though the newly minted Royal Academy, which had been founded in 1768, had initial aspirations to the European model of academic history painting, by the turn of the nineteenth century it had become apparent that the British school remained, at least in the eyes of William Hazlitt, "without any painter of serious historical subjects ... who has made even a faint approach to the excellence of the great Italian painters" (176-77). In this context, Blake's historical efforts can be aligned with those of Barry, which went against the public taste for portraiture and landscape in favor of the more spiritually elevated genre.

The works that I categorize as Blake's history paintings are his large-scale temperas, including *The Ancient Britons*, *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* (1805-09), *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth* (c. 1805), and *An Allegory of the Spiritual Condition of Man* (1811-13). My application of the term "history" to these paintings involves a necessary expansion of the usual definition, particularly when we account for the fact that Blake's mythology frequently derives from his syncretic imagination, rather than solely from classical, biblical, or historical texts. There is also the question of how his style and medium diverge from historical tradition, which is denoted by an idealized yet naturalistic "grand style."

Blake's "histories" instead tend to combine neoclassical linear figures with two-dimensional perspective.

Compare, for instance, West's *The Death of Nelson* (1806) with Blake's contemporaneous painting *The Spiritual Form of Nelson*. West's *Nelson* fulfills all of the conventional requirements of eighteenth-century history. It is an oil on canvas, depicting a well-known story from cultural history, with a clear moral message. Blake's, on the other hand, is much more atypical of the genre. It is painted in a linear, iconographic style, in water-based tempera and gold leaf, with an abstract, morally ambiguous visual narrative.¹ Nonetheless, Blake's *Nelson* fits within the parameters of what he seems to think history painting is: allegorical, archetypal, mythological painting.

In these historical temperas, Blake intentionally eschews naturalistic style because he believes that the truth of the history lies in its visionary expression, not in clarity or realism of narrative. This is also why he rejects the use of oil paints. He writes: "Reasons and opinions concerning acts, are not history. Acts themselves alone are history.... [H]e who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all History and retain doubts only" (E 544). His histories, rather than manifesting a sense of reason or strict morality, instead seek to visualize the power of the imagination. With this in mind, I think that Blake's beliefs about history painting and visionary expression may have found their pinnacle in his final *Last Judgment*, not only because he interprets the subject as an eternal struggle between imagination and reason, but also because it was his most ambitious and epic tempera painting project.

Blake's Extant Last Judgment Designs

Recent scholarship on Blake's visual and textual engagements with the theme of the Last Judgment has primarily focused on the version currently on display at Petworth House, painted in 1808 for the countess of Egremont ([illus. 4](#)). This is the most finished and richly colored of Blake's extant designs, and it is accompanied by a detailed explanatory letter that he sent to Ozias Humphry, which provides a rare guide to the artist's visual schema (E 552-54). The emphasis on the Petworth *Last Judgment* in the academic literature has yielded valuable insights: on the picture's cyclical and sexual symbolism (Sklar; Rowland 224-29); on its iconographic dialogue with the Book of Revelation (Billingsley 150; Bindman, "Blake as a Painter" 103-04); and on Blake's relationship to the countess, his patron (Loukes 47-60). However, this emphasis has al-

1. On *The Spiritual Form of Nelson*, see Barlow; Ackroyd; Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* 155, 160-61; Erdman, *Prophet* 521-22; and Paley, "'Wonderful Originals'" 176.



4. William Blake, *The Vision of the Last Judgment*, 1808. Pencil, pen, and watercolor on paper, 50.3 x 40.0 cm. National Trust, Petworth House, Sussex, NT 486270. Image © National Trust Images/John Hammond.

so had the effect of narrowing scholarly focus. One avenue yet to be fully explored is the extent to which the Petworth painting fits within a broader visionary enterprise that culminated in Blake's final tempera. To explain why I will not focus on the Petworth version, but instead on the Rosenwald drawing as a locus for Blake's historical project, it is first necessary to trace in brief the chronology of the Last Judgment compositions.

Blake's Last Judgment designs began with an illustration for Robert Blair's *The Grave* in 1805 (illus. 5). In that watercolor, Blake worked within a recognizably traditional iconographic structure: Christ sits enthroned at the top of a symmetrical hierarchy, with the elect rising on his right

and the damned falling on his left, surrounded by clouds, trumpeting angels, and scriptural emblems, like the Book of Life. The composition, which has intense symmetry, flattened perspective, cyclical thrust, and crowds of muscular figures, bears visual affinities to the schematic reproductive prints after Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* that Blake would have encountered as an apprentice engraver and collector in the 1770s (Barnes 99-120). His next major exploration of the Last Judgment came in 1806, with *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (now in Pollok House, Glasgow), along with its companion piece *The Fall of Man* (1807; Victoria and Albert Museum). The Pollok House version develops a visual and narrative framework grounded in recognizable imagery from the Book of Revelation,



5. William Blake, *The Day of Judgment* (illustrations to Robert Blair's *The Grave*, no. 12), c. 1805. Pen and ink and watercolor, 27.0 x 22.2 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, 2019.139.

with trumpeting angels, the Books of Life and Death, and Christ enthroned.² It is almost twice the size of the Blair illustration and shows Blake experimenting with how best to depict apocalyptic subject matter, including changes to the angels' orientation and the addition of his own mythological figures, such as the "Church Universal," a woman crowned with stars and surrounded by infants. Thereafter came the 1808 *Last Judgment* for Petworth House, which, as noted, has been extensively studied. Following Petworth, Blake completed the Rosenwald drawing (Butlin #645), alongside a number of secondary sketches and a tracing of that design (Butlin #643, 644, 646). It was after these successive visual experiments that he began work on the large-scale tempera.

The Rosenwald drawing is the closest proxy for the lost painting; it fits the description that Blake wrote in his Notebook in 1809–10 more accurately than any other of his Last Judgment drawings. It is less symmetrically structured than the Petworth version, with a more ambitious distinction between the trajectories of the elect and the damned. This represents the idea of the Last Judgment as an eternal, cyclical vision rather than a one-off event, on which Blake notes: "The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory but Vision.... Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists" (E 554). Moreover, the Rosenwald drawing contains allegorical personifications described in the Notebook that are not present in the Petworth version: for example, on Christ's left are the figures of "Sin" (dragged down by a demon holding a key), "Death" (nailed to the cross), and "Time" (dragged down by a crowned demon); on his right, "three Persons represent Poetry Painting & Music" (holding a lyre, a scroll, and a palette). Below we see the Harlot being burned by "wreathed Torches"; the "book of Accusations" beneath the feet of the Great Red Dragon; and the prison guards Gog and Magog wielding their "Hammer" and "Tongs." Beneath the Dragon's cave "a Skeleton begins to Animate." These are all described in Blake's *Vision* and are exclusively present in the Rosenwald drawing and its sketches, but in none of the earlier ones.

A tracing of this version (Butlin #646), dating from approximately 1809, may have been created as part of an unrealized intention to engrave the design. If it is by Blake, it offers material evidence that he considered reproducing the composition for a wider public. While no engraving is known, the existence of the tracing points to his sustained investment in the work's future after 1809, and supports reading the Rosenwald drawing not simply as a private vi-

sion but as a working design for a monumental and distributable image.

The Rosenwald drawing has received comparatively little attention in studies of Blake and the Last Judgment, for manifold reasons. The most comprehensive interpretation of the schema comes in S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary*, which offers a general summary of Blake's eschatological vision. Contextually, Damon frames the Rosenwald design as an aid to *A Descriptive Catalogue* and potentially to Blake's broader theology. Damon's account is largely taxonomic rather than interpretive and does not explore the work's formal or historical implications as a preparatory drawing for the larger tempera piece. Perhaps the Rosenwald drawing has been less attractive to contemporary scholars of Blake because, unlike the Petworth version, it is uncolored and unfinished. It is also slightly less conventional in its application of the narrative theme than the preceding versions. Whereas Blake's earlier *Last Judgments* tend to exhibit a left-right orientation, clearly staging the rise of the elect and fall of the damned, the Rosenwald instead abandons perspectival space entirely. It offers a stacked, layered, geometric architecture, and the boundaries between cosmic spaces are much more ambiguous. There are "the elect" and there are "the damned," but the lines between them are more indistinct. Individual figures are maximally elongated and abstracted. The ethereal quality of these characters in the Rosenwald version may signify a rejection of naturalistic representation in favor of an increasingly abstract one. The meaning of figures lies not in proportion or perspective but instead in what Blake calls the "Lineaments of the Countenances"—the abstract archetypal expressiveness of their bodies and faces (E 560). Every figure and gesture in Blake's work encodes a moral or imaginative truth (Warner 123–49; Marks).

Renaissance and Gothic Influences

The structure, to a greater or lesser extent, of all of Blake's Last Judgment drawings, with the swelling vertical hierarchy, symmetry, and Apollo-like Christ, suggests that Blake was echoing Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. In 1784, Blake's friend John Hawkins proposed the idea of establishing an endowment fund to send him on a grand tour, but the trip never came to fruition (John Flaxman, quoted in *BR*[2] 31). Instead, Blake would have studied Michelangelo's design in the form of printed reproductions. Two kinds were available to him: either smaller, single-plate engravings, or larger, multiple-plate

2. Rev. 1.10–11 (KJV): "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, / Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book...."

engravings, such as those by Niccolò della Casa (Barnes 99-120). He probably also amassed some analytical understanding of the work from art-critical texts, including William Aglionby's essays, Reynolds's *Discourses*, Henry Fuseli's *Lectures*, and Richard Duppa's life of Michelangelo. In 1804 (coincidentally, one year before he first attempted to paint a Last Judgment), Blake may have seen a painted copy of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* at the Truchsessian Gallery in the New Road, opposite Portland Place (Paley, "Truchsessian"). Upon returning from the gallery, he wrote that the experience "enlightened [him] with the light [he] enjoyed in [his] youth" (E 756).

One way in which these decontextualized viewing experiences of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* might have influenced Blake relates to the characteristic density of his designs. This is a feature that has frequently been commented on: for instance, Ozias Humphry, in a letter to the earl of Buchan dated 9 February 1808, describes the Petworth version as full of "sublimely multitudinous masses, & groups" (quoted in BR[2] 250). J. T. Smith, similarly, was struck by the tempera's "one thousand figures" (473). Much later, Kathleen Raine found in Blake's crowds a representation of "[a]ll mankind" metaphorized as "cells flowing and circulating within the one life," like a Tibetan mandala (56).

It is possible that this crowded characteristic of Blake's expressions of the Last Judgment derives in part from the types of reproductions of Michelangelo's design that would have been circulating in eighteenth-century London. If Blake had habitually referred to Giulio Bonasone's "Last Judgment" (illus. 6) as a source, he would have experienced an intensely reduced version of the fresco.³ This is because the details of the original, which is approximately 1340 x 1200 cm. in size, are necessarily scaled down by a factor of hundreds, and the result is very crowded.

But crowding and figural density are also features of history painting. In 1685, the early British art critic William Aglionby had defined the history as "an Assembling of many Figures in one Piece, to Represent any Action of Life, whether True or Fabulous, accompanied with all its Ornaments of Land-skip and Perspective" (n. pag.). Later, Jonathan Richardson noted that the history ought not to contain "[s]upernumerary" figures extraneous to narrative; however, "[w]here the Story requires that there be a Crowd of People, there may be some Figures without any Par-

ticular Character, which are not Supernumerary, because the Story requires a Crowd" (*Essay* 62-63). As a historical subject, the Last Judgment is an excellent example of this, since the source texts, the Book of Revelation and Gospel of Matthew, describe "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7.9) and "great multitudes ... gathered together" before God (Matt. 13.2).

For Blake, the visual crowding of the Last Judgment as a narrative event is a key aspect of its spiritual character. "I have seen in my Imagination," he writes in his *Vision*, "when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations.... <I have seen when at a distance Multitudes of Men in Harmony appear like a single Infant ...>" (E 556-57). The concept of the individual as a synecdoche for the whole of humanity manifests in his Last Judgment designs in intelligent ways. These compositions, when viewed from far away, merge into amorphous, unified, symmetrical shapes, like a skull, hourglass, or uterus. When observed from up close, they instead reveal their individual details. For instance, the heavenly, elect, and profane bear distinguishing features that denote their spiritual status. The profane, across all Blake's versions, consistently display in the fleshy and masculine physicality of their bodies the "Despair & Horror" of damnation. Rather than subliming into the ethereal realm of heaven as the elect do, the forms of the damned are heavy, pulled into the gravity of the abyss. They "fall thro the air & some are scourged by Spirits with flames of fire into the Abyss of Hell" (E 553). Blake's elect, by contrast, are elongated and androgynous. They stretch upward. Their attitudes are loving. They consist of embracing couples, children, and maternal figures, a fact that may signify the heavenly and redeeming power of love. "Each figure," writes Susanne Sklar, "has a distinctive face and body; each has a distinctive character" (131). "[T]he Spectator," Blake instructs, "will attend to the Hands & Feet to the Lineaments of the Countenances they are all descriptive of Character & not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular" (E 560). However, he also believes that "all men are alike in outward form ... (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius" (E 1), and he does not find these perspectives to be mutually exclusive.

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, which contains its hundreds of idealized bodies, each expressing individual character whilst also contributing to an overall narrative, em-

3. This is an educated guess. Blake appears to have been reading *Anecdotes of the Life of Julio Bonasoni*, by George Cumberland, around 1800. In a letter dated 1 Sept. 1800, he notes that he had lent the book to John Hawkins. See William Blake, Letter to George Cumberland, 1 September 1800, object 3, *The William Blake Archive*, blakearchive.org/copy/letters?descId=lt1sept1800.1.tr.03, accessed July 2024.

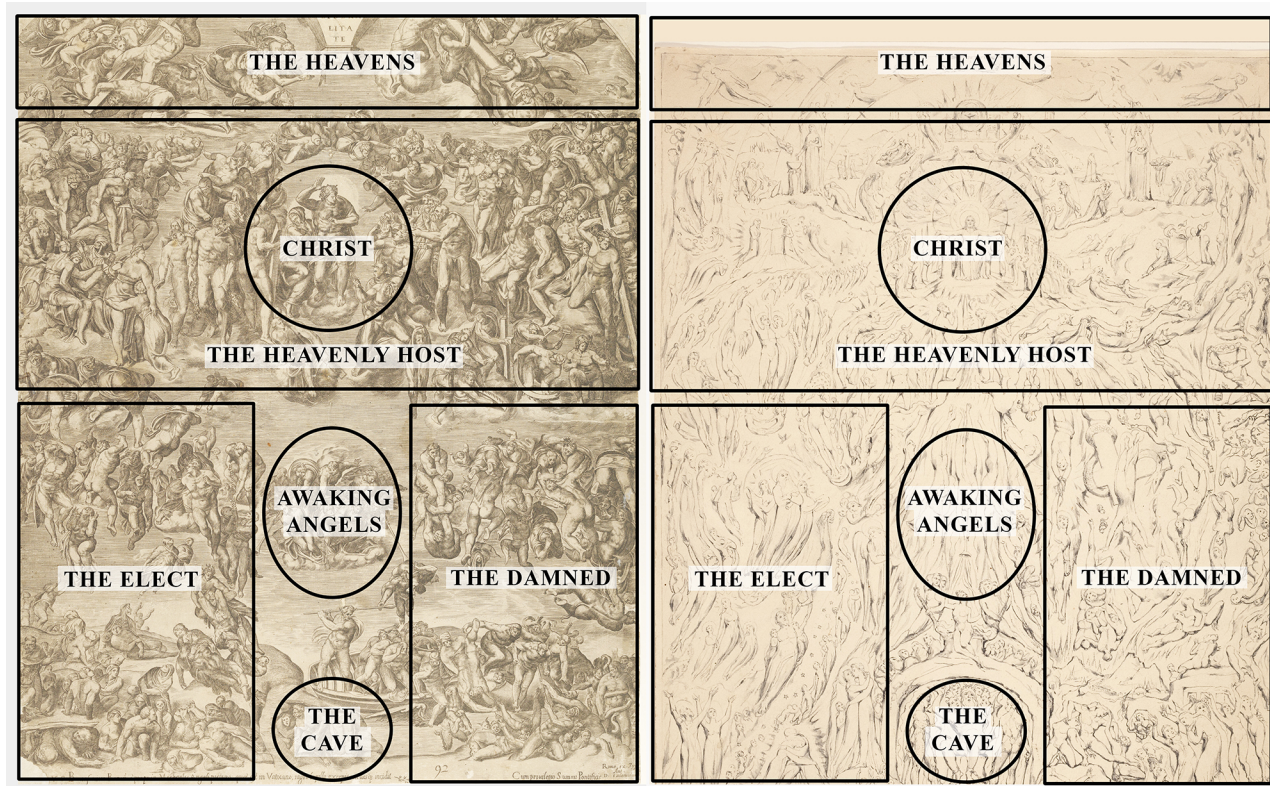


6. Giulio Bonasone after Michelangelo, “The Last Judgment from the Sistine Chapel,” 1546–50. Engraving, 58.0 x 44.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 17.50.19-151.

bodies the qualities of *varietà* and *terribilità* that British-school history painters like Fuseli and Barry were looking to revive. The contorted, foreshortened, and anatomically emphatic figures in Michelangelo's fresco have been interpreted in a variety of ways. They are foremost a display of artistic virtuosity: an opportunity for the master to explore the possibilities of foreshortening in an antigravitational plane, expressing the comprehensive variety of "human passions" (Lingo 32). Theologically, Michelangelo's nude crowds are also "an allegory for the Truth of spiritual salvation," and confront the viewer with the ideal, spiritual body of man (Moroncini 346). It is a painting upon which "all is concentrated upon the grouping of the masses," though there has been no unanimous critical consensus on its structuring (Steinberg 130).

When we compare Blake's schema to the basic structure of Michelangelo's design (mediated, as it would have been for Blake, via the hands of Renaissance reproductive engravers), similarities between them become evident (illus. 7). The elect are grouped on Christ's right-hand side, the profane on his left. The heavens occupy the top, with angels decorating the upper corners. Beneath Christ appear

"Four Angels" who are "descend[ing] headlong with four trumpets to awake the Dead" (E 558). There is a logical hierarchy and narrative progression to this framework. It begins in the bottom left, rises with the elect, circles around Christ and his saints, and falls back down again, on the right, into the pits of hell. The visual story is told not through interactions between figures but instead via an overall sense of trajectory. In Blake's designs, Christopher Rowland and Susanne Sklar have interpreted the cyclical structure as symbolic of Blake's belief in the Last Judgment as an eternal event: an infinite rebirth. Rowland's interpretation is theological. He argues that the clockwise movement of the figures signifies the eternal nature of Judgment, which is "always happening, with eternity always ready and available, which is in line with the eschatology of the Gospel of John" (228-29). Sklar's reading is also preoccupied with the depiction of time, arguing that Blake's "figures ... fall and rise in a clockwork swirl" (131). This geometric blueprint is most abstracted in the Rosenwald version, whose architectural lines emanate outward and upward from Christ the savior. In the colored versions, Blake also consistently lightens the figures closer in proximity to Christ, reflecting the metaphor of Christ



7. Sections of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (left, Giulio Bonasone after Michelangelo, 1546–50) compared with sections of Blake's "Rosenwald" drawing (right, c. 1809).

as the sun. For him, this solar metaphor may be related to the way in which Christ is visualized in the Book of Revelation: “[H]is countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Rev. 1.16). Blake subscribes to the idea that “[w]hen the Sun rises” it represents “an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty” (E 565-66).

Critics have long identified the Sistine Chapel *Last Judgment* with the cyclical passage of the sun, “a slow movement from left to right—in a circle, or ellipse” (Wilde 166). Charles de Tolnay related Michelangelo’s design to the Copernican solar system; Valerie Shrimplin recently revived this argument in *Michelangelo, Copernicus, and the Sistine Ceiling* (2013). These Copernican interpretations might be connected to a comment made by the Baroque French art theorist Charles du Fresnoy in *De arte graphica*, in which he argues that the protagonist of a history painting must always be akin to the “principal light” of a visual narrative, shining “like the sun in the Copernican System” (see Reynolds 2: 330). The eternal rising-and-falling of Michelangelo’s design is clearly echoed, both in structure and in meaning, in Blake’s cyclical, solar composition.

In art-critical terms, Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* (in fact, Michelangelo’s style in general) was understood by prolific commentators in the British-school scene, notably Reynolds and Fuseli, to visually embody the sublime (Duffy). Fuseli, for instance, argues that the Sistine Chapel signifies Michelangelo’s ambition “to unite magnificence of plan and endless variety of subordinate parts with the utmost simplicity and breadth” (84). “On the immense plain of the Last Judgment,” he writes, “Michael Angelo has wound up the destiny of man” (163). The same sublime themes are echoed by Blake in the plan that he wrote in his Notebook. For him, the Last Judgment also signifies the “destiny of man”: in his words, “<the Foundation of Society> Which is Humanity itself” (E 562).

It is from Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*, Christopher Heppner and Tristanne Connolly argue, that Blake derives his aerial figures, his flying figures, and any that seem to be “freed from gravitational bonds” (Heppner 35). Aerial figures certainly do populate the margins of Blake’s illuminated books, and the prints and illustrations frequently feature figures in pain and those endowed with the ability to fly. Much of what facilitates the narrative drama of Blake’s Last Judgment designs lies in the operations of their antigravitational world, wherein figures tumble, twist, and writhe in a dynamic theatre. Furthermore, Blake’s figures, like Michelangelo’s, are clearly aware of what is happening to them. The profane scream, ripping their hair and covering their mouths; the elect look upward

in wonderment, hands clasped together in prayer. Blake emphasizes these gestures by compressing and stretching parts of their faces and bodies. While the exact source is difficult to determine, it’s certainly true that Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* was associated, in eighteenth-century art criticism, with a specific kind of nongravitational, dramatic, affective gesture. Richardson, for instance, pithily describes Michelangelo’s fresco as “a good Character for a Drawing-Book,” though “a very Improper one for such a Subject as the Last Judgment” (*Account* 271).

Beyond Michelangelo’s influence on Blake’s designs, however, there is also a Gothic quality in Blake’s drawings that evoke the ornamentation and foliation of tracery. A key facet of his radical reinterpretation of history painting is its relatedness to antique modes of artistic expression. He rejects the theatrical naturalism of painters like West, Barry, and Mortimer in favor of the visual strategies of Gothic art. In this sense, Blake participates in a kind of “antique modernity”: a recovering of archaic forms in order to critique modern conventions. The two-dimensionality and foliate fluidity of his Last Judgment designs recall the style of medieval apocalyptic Doom paintings and Gothic tracery and architecture. Blake, in his revisionism, prefigures the Pre-Raphaelite philosophy that would similarly turn to the past to revitalize the moral and visionary potential of the arts.

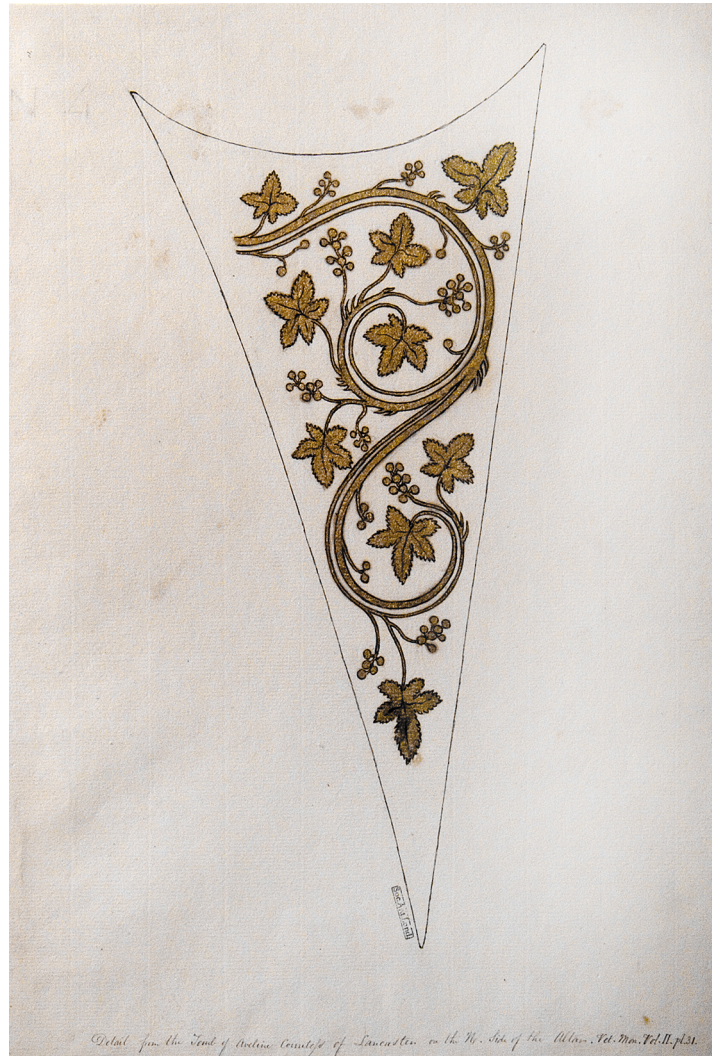
Although we now see Michelangelo as part of the Renaissance tradition that the Pre-Raphaelites later rejected, Blake instead aligns him with the “Gothic” artists. For Blake, “Michael Angelo” and “Rafael” are equivalent in artistry and imagination to “the finest specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting, and Architecture, Gothic, Grecian, Hindoo and Egyptian” (E 544). The inscription that Blake added to the second state of “Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion” (his earliest engraving, a copy of a figure from Michelangelo’s *Crucifixion of St. Peter*) further connects the Michelangelesque style with Gothic art. It reads: “This is One of the Gothic Artists who Built the Cathedrals in what we call the Dark Ages Wandering about in sheep skins & goat skins of whom the World was not worthy such were the Christians in all Ages” (E 671). This association between Michelangelo and the Gothic in Blake arises from the clear, linear, visionary quality of the reproductive prints that Blake would have studied, as well as Michelangelo’s historic reputation as a supreme draftsman.

By Blake’s logic, the Gothicism and the Michelangelism of his Last Judgment designs are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are one and the same. “Ages are All Equal,” he writes, “[b]ut Genius is Always Above The Age” (E 649). The designs suggest an earlier lineage based in both

medieval and Renaissance conceptions of sacred art. By returning to past traditions, he looks to emancipate eighteenth-century academic history painting from its institutional limitations of subject matter, perspective, and contemporary politics, and return it to a symbolic, visionary heritage.

Blake's figures in the Last Judgment compositions, and particularly in the Rosenwald drawing, are two-dimensional, vegetal, and fluid. Their bodies are flattened and

elongated. They invite comparisons with the Gothic architecture of Westminster Abbey, which Blake studied while he was an apprentice to James Basire (*illus. 8*). It is also possible that he saw some remnants of medieval wall paintings in English parish churches on his trips around Kent and Sussex with Thomas Stothard in the 1780s (though it is worth noting that many of these wall paintings were whitewashed during the Reformation and were not rediscovered or restored until the late nineteenth century).⁴ It is more likely, however, that the Gothic quality of



8. William Blake, *Countess Aveline, Detail from Her Tomb*, c. 1775. Pen and ink with shell gold, 38.1 x 26.6 cm. Image © Society of Antiquaries of London.

4. Anne Marshall, "Medieval Wall Painting: A Short Introduction," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, reeddesign.co.uk/paintedchurch/introduction.htm, accessed July 2024.



9. After Michael Wolgemut, "The Last Judgment" from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, c. 1493. Woodcut, 36.3 x 22.7 cm. Palmer Museum of Art, 2014.69. Image © Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.

his Last Judgment designs derives from a print source, such as the early woodcuts in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (illus. 9). Blake's emphasis on line work and intricate detailing, and his use of mystical symbols like stars, clouds, flames, wings, and trumpets, are certainly reminiscent of the aesthetics of medieval engraving.

The supersession of mimetic form by allegorical symbolism is yet another feature that gives us cause to consider Blake's *Last Judgment* as a radical intervention to history painting. The eighteenth-century neoclassical historical

style placed an emphasis on mimesis, though it did allow some degree of artistic license (Phillips 69):

Even the Historian takes great liberties with facts in order to interest his readers, and make his narration more delightful; much greater right has the Painter to do this, who, though his work is called History-Painting, gives in reality a poetical representation of events. (Reynolds 2: 221)

However, Blake stretches this “poetical” potential of the history to its utmost limit. He does not so much take “great liberties” with mimetic representation as create an entirely symbolic, stylized, visual narrative. There is no modeling, depth, or theatrical drama. Instead, there is a diagrammatic map of the human soul.

In this light, the Rosenwald drawing stands as a culmination of Blake’s ambition to restore the *istoria* to its original spiritual function. This function was, at least in Barry’s and Blake’s view, a form of universal, visual communication “much superior to language” (Barry 63). Blake entreats the viewer to “[e]nter into these Images in his Imagination” not simply to observe the Last Judgment as a cinematic tableau, but instead to internalize the truth at the heart of that image: the eternal, ongoing conflict between imagination and reason (E 560).

When considering the mystery of Blake’s lost painting from 1827, we are faced with a number of questions. If his *Last Judgment* had been shown at the Royal Academy’s exhibition of 1828, would it have provoked the kind of profound response that J. T. Smith anticipated? During Blake’s lifetime, few of his works received any kind of critical acclaim. Many of the paintings he had previously submitted to the academy had been disregarded as “unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman’s Scrawls” (E 528). Robert Hunt, in reviewing Blake’s exhibition, famously called him an “unfortunate lunatic” (BR[2] 283). There is no reason to think that a *Last Judgment* would have been received any differently. Moreover, we know that there was relatively low demand for complex historical paintings among British consumers of art in the eighteenth century (Solkin, “Crowds and Connoisseurs” 157; Vaughan). Unfortunately for Blake (as well as for Barry, Mortimer, and other history painters), English history painting was always “destined for a role on the sidelines,” eternally overshadowed by prevailing tastes for landscape, genre painting, and, above all, portraits of dogs and horses (Barringer 132).

This article has argued that taking Blake’s *Last Judgment* seriously as a history painting forces us to think about the historical genre in Britain as a contested, experimental, and spiritually potent space. Blake’s understanding of history painting is fundamentally related to two things: first, to the unmediated expression of original ideas (what he calls “vision”); and secondly, to the potential for art to impact the viewer. This kind of history painting is embodied for Blake by the large-scale frescoes of Michelangelo, Raphael, and his contemporaries Barry and Mortimer. In their work, he believes that the “Genius and Inspiration” of the painter are displayed for all to see. He argues that “Italy is enriched and made great” by historical paintings,

and in part it is this belief that motivated his exhibition, because he wished to “exhibit to the Public, in an Exhibition of my own, my Designs, Painted in Watercolours” to show his affinity with Renaissance masters (E 528).

Erdman has suggested that, although Blake’s solo exhibition did not include the *Last Judgment* described in his Notebook in 1809–10, Blake may have intended to display the painting in a never-realized second exhibition (E 881). The painter and antiquarian Seymour Stocker Kirkup, who had befriended Blake in 1809, later recalled witnessing Blake’s work on the *Last Judgment*:

[H]e was painting the master-piece at the time, the great fresco on canvass (an invention of his own) which made such an impression on my mind that I could draw it now, after a lapse of 55 years or more.... (Quoted in BR[2] 288)

It is possible that, after the failure of the exhibition, Blake had been planning to submit the *Last Judgment* as an example of his “portable Fresco” (E 527) to the Royal Academy. On the other hand, it might have been a personal project, intended purely as an expression to his patrons and coterie of his resolve to “make England What Italy is an Envid Storehouse of Intellectual Riches” (E 581). Conceivably, it may also have been a different sort of exercise altogether: ritual, spiritual, or meditative. Seen from this vantage point, the Rosenwald drawing might be understood not only as a proxy for Blake’s most ambitious work of history painting, but also as a vital precursor to the symbolic abstraction of twentieth-century spiritual art.

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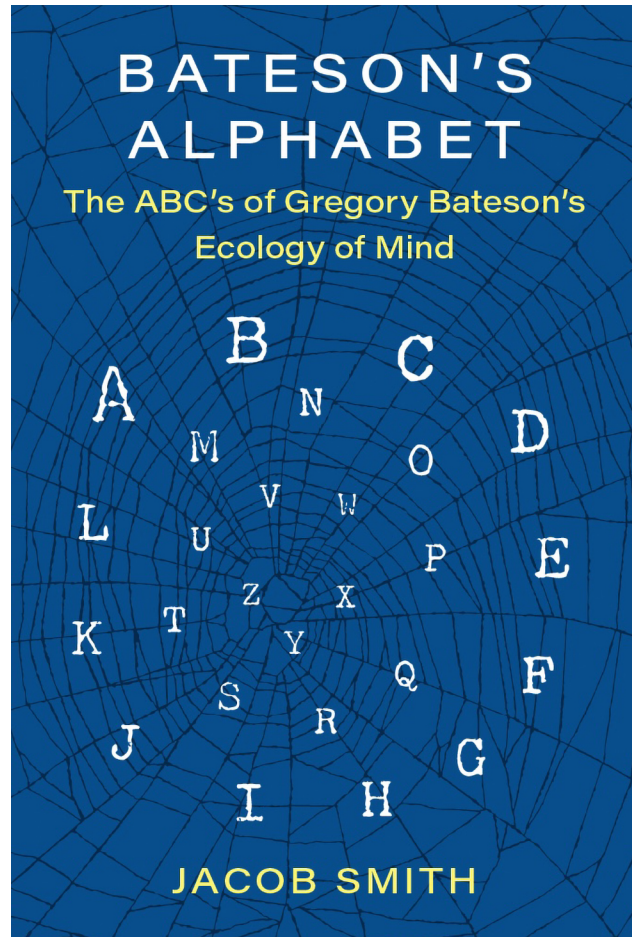
Jacob Smith, *Bateson's Alphabet: The ABCs of Gregory Bateson's Ecology of Mind*

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Jacob Smith. *Bateson's Alphabet: The ABCs of Gregory Bateson's Ecology of Mind*. U of Michigan P, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12805341> (open access).

Jacob Smith. "David Lynch Presents William Blake's *The Sea of Time and Space*." *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*, 10 Feb. 2025, zfm.wissenschaft.de/online/videography-blog/william-blake-nach-david-lynch. Video also at vimeo.com/1037133535.

WILLIAM Blake's legacy continues to inspire writers, poets, artists, and thinkers. His declaration that "[i]f the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite" is not only a poetic aphorism but also an epistemological proposition that rests upon the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate worlds. His artistic cosmology, built upon a fusion of contraries, anticipates many of the core ideas developed by Gregory Bateson, whose concept of an "ecology of mind" is based on similar foundations of interconnection, paradox, and aesthetic perception. Bateson's ideas and theories are revisited by Jacob Smith—a scholar in media studies, sound studies, and ecocriticism—in his hyperlinked book *Bateson's Alphabet: The ABCs of Gregory Bateson's Ecology of Mind*, which challenges media borders and connects words and ideas to voice and images. The progeny of this book is Smith's intermedial video essay that recontextualizes Blake's painting *The Sea of Time and Space* through the immersive soundscape of David Lynch. Smith's closely interwoven works—his open-access book and his video essay—are two sides of the same scholarly coin, with one deconstructing Blake through Bateson's ecology of mind and the other reconstructing the Blakean artistic legacy through Lynch's soundscape.



By fusing Blake's visionary Neoplatonism with Lynch's Gnostic-inflected sonic aesthetics, the video essay not only interprets Blake's cosmology but also reanimates it through spatial montage and audiovisual layering. Rather than relegating music to dramatic punctuation, the piece leverages the Sound Mountain Collection—the sound

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archive developed by Alan Splet and Ann Kroeber, long-time collaborators of Lynch—to an ontological medium, linking Blake’s Romantic cosmology with the industrial-modern soundscape of *Eraserhead*. Smith’s digital animation, spatial composition, and choreographed sonic rhythm reflect what Lars Elleström terms “intermedial transposition,” whereby one medium is restructured through another. Though the essay leans heavily on Kathleen Raine’s Neoplatonic reading of Blake, arguably limiting alternative interpretations, it nonetheless exemplifies Smith’s mastery of intermedial methodology. Crucially, this video essay is not an isolated experiment but rather an audiovisual companion to his larger multimodal project in *Bateson’s Alphabet*.

Emulating Bateson’s project in connecting networks, Smith intertextually and intermedially associates each entry in *Bateson’s Alphabet* with an anecdote, a poem, and a scene or image from a film. These various modalities open the space for deeper ecological reflections and highlight the idea that meaning in Bateson’s “ecology of mind” works through an interconnected web that cannot be fully grasped if each component is studied separately. This aligns Bateson with Blake, who believes that the barriers between different modes of expression should be melted away for a clearer and encapsulating vision.

Bateson’s belief that meaning does not emanate from inspecting different objects separately is the theme of Smith’s entries “Bagels” and “Wine Glass.” These entries shed light on Bateson’s idea of a spider’s web as a “resonating structure” (260) that clarifies the way that information is processed as an interconnected and highly dynamic operation. This notion is revisited in “Urchins” and “Crustaceans,” which illustrate Bateson’s view of ecological interdependence, echoing Barry Commoner’s maxim that “everything is connected to everything else” (231). In “Crustaceans,” references to a classroom demonstration involving a frozen crab and to Neruda’s poetry in the film *Mindwalk*, along with images combining flora, fauna, and urban forms on the cover of *Mind and Nature*, connect various media forms to better communicate Bateson’s ideas. This connectedness is also shown in “Empire State Building,” in which Smith successfully crosses media borders and integrates images from the real world to effectively present Bateson’s holistic vision that ties his ecological concerns to architecture, environmental consciousness, and cultural expression.

To elucidate the mechanisms used in Bateson’s hierarchical theories of learning, the entries “Dreams,” “Botany,” “Porpoise,” and “Recording” intermedially link Bateson’s abstract idea to lived experiences. “Dreams,” in which Smith frames dreams as liminal spaces between verbal

and nonverbal communication, illustrates the shift from Learning II to Learning III that marks a leap into reflexive self-awareness. “Botany” highlights Bateson’s three-level model of learning. In “Recording,” the shock of self-confrontation through recorded media is shown to enable a doubled perspective that marks Learning III. Linking animal behavior, psychology, and cinema, “Porpoise” illustrates the way that nonverbal communication and behavior reveal complex cognitive structures that melt the boundaries between Learning I and II and suggest the possibility of Learning III in nonhuman minds.

Bateson’s concepts of “double bind” and “double description” are duly presented and visually sustained in “Bread-and-Butterfly,” “Fabric,” and “Tiresias.” While “double bind” denotes the idea that paradoxes within human communication may create confusion, “double description” is the layered pattern of understanding meanings in “double bind” situations. These entries underscore Bateson’s belief that paradoxes are not just fanciful inventions but reflect real-world patterns of contradictory conditions.

The entries entitled “Grass,” along with others throughout the book, detail the multilayered paradigm of Bateson’s ecological critique. While “Grass¹” highlights his rejection of syllogism in favor of biosemiotic frameworks through the connectedness of mental, communicative, and ecological processes, “Grass²” communicates his ecological critique, with the lawn motif used as an artificial construct that mirrors a larger framework of cybernetic ecology. The multimodal perspective of “Grass³” shows the interplay of autobiographical memory, cinematographic imagery, and environmental critique to invoke his perspective of the way that humans contribute to ecological collapse. Bateson’s vision of the “Eco-god” (191) is dealt with in “Redwoods,” an entry that fuses science, philosophy, and environmental ethics to show his advocacy for “environmental education and action” (192) as prerequisites for ecological survival. Smith further highlights Bateson’s ecological concerns through the anecdote of the “boiled frog” (in “Frogs”) to denote society’s failure to perceive gradual ecological degradation. Similar messages run through “Garden,” which communicates Bateson’s concern with ecological collapse, and through “New College, Oxford,” which addresses long-term ecological foresight, aligning with Bateson’s cybernetic belief in “the larger gestalt; the longer time.” To transmit these perspectives, Smith opts for a multimodal layering of the narrative, the cinematic, the architectural, and the scientific.

Smith mirrors the way that Bateson’s theories can best be understood by crossing media borders between the literary, the musical, and the visual to emphasize Bateson’s belief in the multimodal nature of communication (through

entries such as “I Give Thee All, I Can No More” and “Insects”). As communication for Bateson is not confined to the verbal, Smith highlights the interest in nonverbal communication in “Vincent Van Gogh,” which conveys Bateson’s view of the capacity of art to move one’s feelings and communicate affectively across media and generations. Bateson’s focus on metacommunication is underscored through multimodal and intermedial perspectives in “Jackdaw” and “Zoo,” as they combine zoological observation, cybernetics, film, literature, and stop motion.

Bateson’s perspective on perception is presented as tightly connected to Blake’s. The exploration in “J. S. Bach” and “LSD” of his preoccupation with the states of perception that happen through LSD intermedially aligns sonic, visual, and narrative codes to elucidate his proposition that perception is not direct, but emerges through recursive systems of mediation. He often quoted Blake, particularly the words “I look through it [eye] and not with it” (148), to affirm that perception operates not through the eye as a passive receptor, but as a cognitive interface shaped by underlying patterns. This idea is equally explored in “Eyes,” which communicates Bateson’s insight that the eye goes beyond its function of observation to be a medium of emotional expression. Bateson’s theories of perception are masterfully tackled in “Outlines” too, where he is shown to be deeply influenced by Blake, especially the visionary *Head of the Ghost of a Flea*, which aligns with Bateson’s artistic vision in its negotiation between conscious intent and unconscious emergence. Asserting the connectedness between Bateson and Blake, “Hind” highlights the way that Bateson’s reading of the Book of Job through Blake’s visionary perspective is linked to his multimodal engagement with ecology and religion. Blake’s fusion of the literary, the theological, and the pictorial is shown to parallel Bateson’s call for an ecological gestalt. Bateson’s philosophy converges also with Blake’s dual vision of the world, and Smith’s entries “Bus” and “Tram” underscore Bateson’s interest in paradox and duality through the use of limerick and metaphor to explore the psychological and existential tensions between youth (tram) and age (bus), freedom and constraint.

Bateson is revealed to be a master of multimodal and intermedial products, as he deemed film studies to be a major component in decoding ideological structures and understanding cultural paradigms. This idea is communicated in Smith’s book through “Movie Houses” and revisited in “Yams,” where films are shown to function as critical extensions of Bateson’s epistemology; these entries position his work within a broader matrix of race, ecology, and media. While “Television” highlights his critical perspective of television as a medium of trivialized communication and addictive feedback loops, his cybernetic epistemology is depicted as having influenced early video art, where videos function as active participants in the co-constitution of perception. Likewise, “Tripod” reflects Bateson’s preference for mobile, embodied camerawork over static objectivity.

Influenced by Blake’s amalgamation of different media in delivering his messages, Smith’s *Bateson’s Alphabet* bridges the gap between theoretical paradigms and the real world. This work is particularly recommended for readers prepared to move beyond conventional modes of scholarly engagement and enter a rich terrain in which each alphabetical entry serves as a nexus connecting Bateson’s theories with visual art, literature, cinema, sound, and design. It will be of considerable interest to scholars in intermedial and multimodal studies, literature—especially those concerned with the visionary epistemologies of Blake—ecocriticism, cybernetics, and anthropology, as well as those working in the environmental humanities, film studies, education, and gender studies. In its accessible articulation of Bateson’s complex ideas, the book serves as an invaluable guide for readers who may find *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* abstruse or conceptually dense. For those who are already well versed in Bateson’s intellectual framework, certain entries may appear too concise, privileging creative intermedial experimentation over sustained critical analysis. Nonetheless, Smith’s project aligns powerfully with Blake’s insistence on the integration of sensory, intellectual, and spiritual faculties, offering a contemporary enactment of Blakean methodology, in which knowledge is apprehended not through analytic fragmentation but through a dynamic synthesis of perception, imagination, and form.

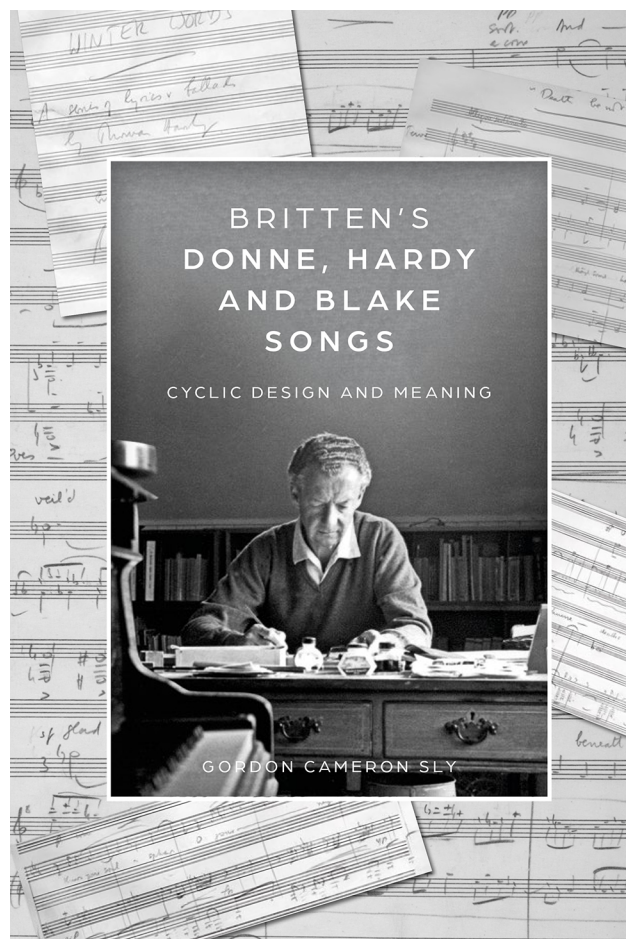
Gordon Cameron Sly, *Britten's Donne, Hardy, and Blake Songs*

CAMILA OLIVEIRA^a

Gordon Cameron Sly. *Britten's Donne, Hardy, and Blake Songs*. Boydell Press, 2023. xix + 177 pp. £85.00/\$120.00, hardcover; £19.00/\$24.00, e-book.

IN recent years, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between Blake and music, notably from the reception point of view. Between the 1960s and 1980s the focus was on musical and poetic works that had influenced Blake's own songs,¹ but since the publication of Donald Fitch's extensive catalogue *Blake Set to Music* (1990) and his supplement (*Blake*, vol. 35, no. 2, fall 2001), discussions have gradually shifted to the field of reception studies and concentrated on responses to his work by musicians and composers.

In the realm of classical music, a number of dissertations on the topic have been produced in this century. Most of them articulate poetry and music through a meticulous examination of the scores, such as A. D. Whitfield, *A Performer's Guide to Virgil Thomson's Five Songs from William Blake* (Louisiana State University, 2004); M. A. Cracchio, *A Comprehensive Case Study on the Ten Blake Songs by Ralph Vaughan Williams: From "Infant Joy" to "London"* (Florida State University, 2009); and J. Berkebile, *A Study in Songs: Comparative Analyses of Twentieth-Century Settings of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (West Virginia University, 2017). Taking a different path, Jason Whittaker's book *Jerusalem: Blake, Parry, and the Fight for Englishness* (2022) concentrates on the production of the hymn "Jerusalem" and offers a comprehensive history of its reception, including its appropriation (and misappropriation) by social and po-



litical groups throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.² While Parry raised Blake's famous stanzas to the status of anthem, some fifty years later the composer

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1. For example, George Sampson, "The Century of Divine Songs," 1943; Albert B. Friedman, *The Ballad Revival*, 1961; Martha Winburn England and John Sparrow, *Hymns Unbidden*, 1966; John Adlard, *The Sports of Cruelty*, 1972; Nick Shrimpton, "Hell's Hymnbook," 1976; and B. H. Fairchild, *Such Holy Song*, 1980.

2. See my review in *Blake*, vol. 58, no. 4, spring 2025, <https://doi.org/10.47761/biq.380>.

Benjamin Britten converted Blake's poetry into one of the greatest vocal works of the twentieth century. The time has come for a *tour de force* study of Britten's *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*.

Well known for his deep interest in and engagement with literature, Britten set 360 poems to music in the course of his career,³ making him one of the most prolific art-song composers in Britain. His settings are mostly of English-speaking poets, as one might expect, and range from Edmund Spenser to W. H. Auden, a close friend of his. However, Blake was the only poet who accompanied Britten throughout; he was a pervasive presence in the composer's catalogue. Britten's earliest version of "Nurse's Song" dates from 1930, when he was only sixteen. A few individual pieces followed, including a first version of "A Poison Tree" (c. 1935) and a setting of "The Sick Rose" for the song cycle *Serenade* (1943). In 1965, Britten again returned to Blake's poetry for the large-scale cycle *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*.

Britten's Donne, Hardy, and Blake Songs, by the music theorist Gordon Cameron Sly,⁴ examines three cycles inspired by the poetry of the respective authors. His main argument is that they constitute examples of "true" cycles out of fifteen poetry collections set to music by Britten. While *The Oxford Companion to Music* defines "cyclic form" simply as "a term to describe any such work in which the movements are connected by some musical theme or themes common to all,"⁵ for Sly, as obvious as it may sound, a cycle *must* be cyclical. It presupposes a well-defined architectural structure, or, more precisely, an overarching design. He believes that this structure imparts a sense of interconnectedness and interdependency to the poems or texts assembled. This cohesion is also explored by Sly on a more subjective level in his analysis of the themes and content of the cycles in relation to Britten's own philosophical and personal views over the years.

The opening chapter, "Britten's Clever Subconscious," references a previous study on Britten by Paul Hamburger, which identified cohesive principles found in some of his earlier works that play a crucial role in shaping the musical structure of his later cycles. Sly discusses some of these compositional techniques, such as "framing," "non-contiguous continuities," and "nested formal structures" (2-3), all of which impose an architectural form on a piece composed of several movements or units, and were extensively incorporated into Britten's cycles of Donne, Hardy, and

Blake. Moreover, Sly is clearly interested in the textual narrative(s) or "statements" implied in the selection, ordering, and arrangement of individual poems, as well as symmetrical relationships and sequenced and nonsequenced correspondences. He believes that any extramusical meaning that a cycle conveys is ultimately produced by the composer. To support his point, he turns to Schumann's cycles, which evince the role of the composer's subjectivity in the construction of the narrative on both textual and musical levels, and exerted an unquestionable influence on Britten's own experiments with the cyclic form.

For the preliminary analysis, Sly compares Schumann's *Eichendorff-Lieder* to Britten's *Serenade*, which contains six poems by six different poets, including Blake. He identifies in both cycles a number of musical and textual relationships within the ordering of the poems. Through the observation of an inversionally symmetrical relationship between the first half and the second half of the texts selected, he discerns an overarching design structure: a mirrored correspondence between the first and the last poem, the second and the penultimate, the third and the antepenultimate, and so on.

In the case of Britten's *Serenade*, Sly identifies the pairings in symmetrical positions linked by motivic connections on a musical level and commonalities in regard to themes/images and formal structure on a textual level. "The Sick Rose" stands at the center of the cycle, paired with the fifteenth-century "Lyke-Wake Dirge"; their position reflects Britten's tendency to place crepuscular poems in the middle, creating what Sly calls a "dark core" (15). In terms of formal structure, although the two are substantially disproportional in length (eight and thirty-six lines, respectively), Britten compensates by elongating "The Sick Rose" with horn soliloquies. Musically, they present an inversionally arrayed design, with reversed contrapuntal pairings, but a similar tonal plan, with a half-step key relationship. Sly argues that the reversed ascending structure of the "Lyke-Wake Dirge" redeems that of "The Sick Rose" and constitutes an indication of the composer's reading of the pairing, suggesting hopefulness and salvation. He associates his musical interpretation with Britten's sentiment at the time, when the composer returned to England after an unexpectedly long season in America.

In the next three chapters, Sly provides a forensic analysis of the architectural and narrative structures of the cycles *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945), *Winter Words*

3. See Boris Ford, editor, *Benjamin Britten's Poets: An Anthology of the Poems He Set to Music*, 1994.

4. Professor of Music Theory in the College of Music at Michigan State University.

5. Alison Latham, editor, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 2002, p. 331.

(1953), and *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* (1965). Although all three share a similar overarching structure, Sly draws attention in his chapter dedicated to *Songs and Proverbs* to some substantial differences between the Blake cycle and the other two. For a start, Blake's texts were not selected by Britten, as usual, but by his partner, the tenor Peter Pears.⁶ He took the poems and proverbs from *Songs of Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *Auguries of Innocence*. While Sly concedes that such a fact could easily drive a coach and horses through his defense of the intimate connection between the poems and Britten's subjectivity, he places emphasis on meaningfulness on the level of ordering and compositional strategy, assuming that Pears had no further role beyond selecting the poems.

Another dissimilarity concerns the tonal scheme. Compared to the other two cycles, the songs from *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* are less tonally related. In spite of that, Britten reinforces their commonalities and preserves their cohesion by resorting to a clever and inventive strategy: he interposes proverbs between the songs as declamatory excerpts, producing "'recitative-aria' pairings" (133). The proverbs contain a sequence of four-note progressions (tetrachords), generating a substantial degree of symmetry and creating a sense of stylistic unity. Similarly, Sly ascertains that the proverbs amplify the dramatic progression in the songs that follow, and shape a poetic narrative. Textually, the first group of proverbs and songs represents confinement and the second expresses struggle to break free of confinement. Musically, the proverbs in the first group expand on the qualities of proverb I and those in the second group expand on the qualities of proverb IV. Sly also observes a retrograde relationship, with mirrored gestures at the end of one proverb and the beginning of another "in dynamic, rhythm, gesture, and pitch" (144). This intimate interrelatedness between nonadjacent sections constitutes a successful example of "non-contiguous continuities."

Sly argues that the poems that follow the proverbs elucidate and expand on the dicta both textually and musical-

ly, although opposed musical strategies are applied to each half of the cycle. While in the first three songs there is an attempt to confine the structure, inversions and procedures and dissimilar intervals abound in the second group. Thus, the second group breaks free of the sense of repression that defines the opening group and, according to Sly, "enacts the freedom and spontaneous energy that Blake saw as essential to meaningful human experience" (156).

Sly never neglects the literary dimension when he discusses at length the minutest details of the scores. He skillfully explores the underlying and unifying themes of the poems and proverbs and is able to establish convincing correlations and parallels between the structure of Britten's music and Blake's poetry within a cyclic dynamic. The musical strategies that Britten uses in his Blake cycle are closely connected to the poems' motifs and interpretations, so that they mirror the texts: for this reason, he often resorts to an inversions relationship between opening and closing phrases. He clearly sees the indispensability of the affirmation of the opposite, of the element of subversion intrinsic to human nature. Sly closes the book with a reflection on the affinity of Britten's views and Blake's—their idealistic and universalist characters, their obdurate belief in human redemption through kindness and compassion—in an attempt to explain the composer's enduring fascination with one of England's most provocative artists.

The book may come across as too dense and inscrutable for an audience not particularly well versed in bars and quarter notes, which I imagine is the case for the vast majority of literature scholars. Although interdisciplinarity is considered a byword in academia today, it can be challenging to deal with material that requires fluency in a specific language or idiom. This book is richly illustrated with scores that demonstrate Sly's reasoning, but one can hardly grasp what he sees if one doesn't have a clue about the meaning of musical symbols on the staff. While *Britten's Donne, Hardy, and Blake Songs* represents an unquestionable contribution to reception studies of Blake in music, it is definitely a much more accessible book for a musician interested in literary studies than vice versa.

6. According to Britten's biographer Paul Francis Kildea, "Pears too had long admired the artist, poet and printmaker: in 1949 he bought Blake's *St. Paul and the Viper*, a gorgeous watercolour (c. 1803–5), which hung in pride of place over the fireplace ..." (*Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, 2013, p. 480). In regard to the selection by Pears, Kildea conjectures that Britten left the task to his partner as an attempt to make amends for the fact that he wrote the cycle for another singer, the German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

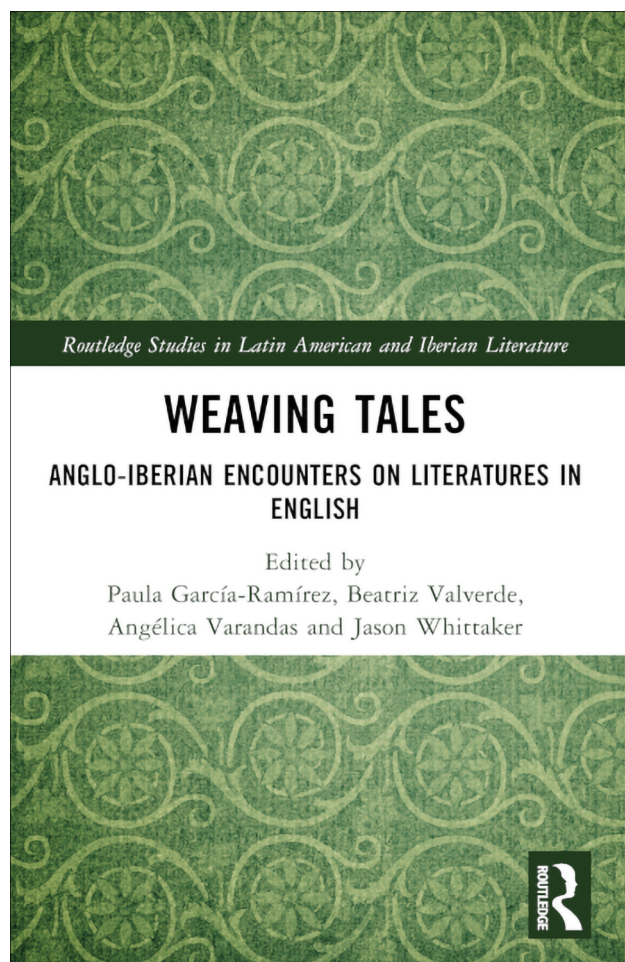
Paula García-Ramírez, Beatriz Valverde, Angélica Varandas,
and Jason Whittaker, editors, *Weaving Tales: Anglo-Iberian Encounters
on Literatures in English*

CRISTINA FLORES MORENO^a

Paula García-Ramírez, Beatriz Valverde, Angélica Varandas, and Jason Whittaker, editors. *Weaving Tales: Anglo-Iberian Encounters on Literatures in English*. Routledge, 2024. xxi + 237 pp. £160.00/\$210.00, hardcover; £38.99/\$52.99, paperback; £38.99/\$52.99, e-book.

DRAWING on the motif of Arachne's tapestry in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Weaving Tales* is a thought-provoking and well-curated volume that weaves together multiple interpretative strands to offer complex and unbiased perspectives on a variety of works and authors—William Blake among them—and, in doing so, interrogates fixed assumptions and establishes previously untraced connections between different texts. The subtitle, *Anglo-Iberian Encounters on Literatures in English*, bears witness to the remarkable international character of the book, as it gathers the work of editors and contributors based at various British, Spanish, and Portuguese universities. It is the result of a long and fruitful Anglo-Iberian collaboration initiated in the context of the project "English Literature the World: From Manuscript to Digital/New Pathways" (2018), developed at the University of Lisbon's Centre for English Studies (Portugal), with the collaboration of the University of Jaén (Spain) and the University of Lincoln (United Kingdom).

The volume is not divided into sections; instead, its fifteen chapters follow a coherent order in which works that rewrite texts and trace new connections are followed by those dealing with identity and gender. The first group starts off with two chapters on Blake. In the first, Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa and Jason Whittaker revisit traditional readings of Urizen and propose new ones from a transhistorical perspective, while in the second, M. Cecilia Mar-



chetto Santorun discusses Blake's impact on British and Spanish popular culture and literature, thus exploring his presence beyond national borders. Thereafter, a variety of authors and works are explored: Marta Villalba-Lázaro

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deals with Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* as a rereading of Euripides's *Medea*; Maria José Pires delves into the influence of Shakespeare in six novels by Angela Carter; Jesús M. Nieto García traces the similarities in terms of theme, structure, and style in P. D. James's *The Black Tower* and Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*; Nuno Ribeiro shows the parallels between John Keats and Fernando Pessoa in the genesis of Pessoa's poetics; and Angélica Varandas discusses Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* as the first attempt to create a sense of Englishness.

The second group, on identity and gender, takes up the rest of the volume. The issues of fragmentation and construction of female identity are addressed by Pilar Sánchez Calle, on Alice Munro; Ritu Mohan, on Mahasweta Devi's novel *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* and its film adaptation; and Yolanda Caballero-Aceituno, on eighteenth-century women's writing and the discursive construction of gender. The relationship between feminism and violence is tackled in Milagros López-Peláez Casellas's chapter, where she analyzes the use of violence in Louisa Honore Medina Hamblin's short fiction as a protofeminist tool in the hands of wronged women; Almudena Machado-Jiménez focuses on eating disorders as a form of violence in contemporary feminist dystopias. Some chapters in this group incorporate new technologies, social networks, and digital literature and culture into their discussions. Mairi Power analyzes two works by Jennifer Egan to show her experimentation with new technologies and digital materials as an important contribution to the current literary landscape. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen comments on Joanna Kavenna's representation of the impact of the Internet and artificial intelligence in the transformation of reality in her dystopic novel *Zed*. Finally, Alejandro Nadal-Ruiz delves into Nikita Gill's Instapoetry, in which she rewrites grand narratives from a transnational and feminist perspective, contributing to the global debate on feminist consciousness.

Within the context of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, special attention must be paid to the first two chapters in the volume, the aforementioned "Urizen Now: Reading Anew William Blake's Response to His Times," by Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker, and "William Blake in Spanish Popular Culture and Literature," by Marchetto Santorun. They approach the many complexities of Blake's figure and work from different but complementary angles, ultimately demonstrating the impossibility of a single set of interpretations across time and national borders.

Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker's chapter opens with a wide-ranging but concise overview of Blakean scholarship since the 1950s that traces its evolution, starting from the

first interpretations of Blake that aimed to render a precise picture of his system—which one must create to avoid being "enslav'd by another Mans." In their account, they omit the first attempts to decode Blake's symbolic system by Edwin J. Ellis and William B. Yeats in *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (1893) to focus on the interpretations of the Four Zoas, particularly Los and Urizen, at the core of the canonical works by Erdman (*Prophet against Empire*, 1954), Raine (*Blake and Tradition*, 1968), Mitchell (*Blake's Composite Art*, 1978), and Damrosch (*Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth*, 1980). Next, they address the new perspectives in Blakean studies that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s—works such as Paley (*The Apocalyptic Sublime*, 1986) and Viscomi (*Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 1993)—that paid attention to Blake's printing methods in his illuminated books. They also pinpoint the greater accessibility of the illuminated books afforded by the Blake Trust series, edited by Bindman. These publications allowed readers to fully appreciate Blake's work as he conceived it—that is, as a complete integration of image and text in the same piece of art. The overview concludes with a necessary reference to *The William Blake Archive* (1996–), instrumental in this scholarly turn, as it permits readers to approach the illuminated books as they were originally created.

Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker invite us "to engage in that common ground of the prolific" (13) in interpreting Blake. Blake himself, they argue, expected his readers to actively construct responses to his texts, not as an act of reinterpretation but rather one of co-creation. The discussion turns to the intrinsic transhistoricity of his works. While they can be read as a response to his times, new readings may be produced in the context of contemporary events—reference is made to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Moreover, Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker draw attention to the fact that Blake's peculiar type of art, in which text and image converge, and the different virtual Blakes created during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resulting from the reproduction of the illuminated books, complicate his reception. A case in point: the authors explore the different, even opposed, politically charged interpretations of "And did those feet" from the Preface to *Milton a Poem*, today known as "Jerusalem." They argue that although the words were meant to be an open rejection of violence in their original context, only a century later, in 1916, the musical version of Sir Hubert Parry was used as a propaganda tool to reinforce the necessity of continuing war against Germany. Only two years later, Parry made it a hymn in support of women's right to vote. All this was only possible, they claim, because in the nineteenth century "And did those feet" was decontextualized, republished without the Preface, "re-

moved from ... the illuminated image act" (16), and presented as a separate unit in anthologies.

In her chapter, Marchetto Santorun also tackles the issue of the many biased and politically charged interpretations of Blake and his works in English popular culture. She notes and gives examples of how at different moments Blake was seen as a solitary mystic; a poet of the devil's party; a conservative with patriotic, traditionalist, and monarchist values; and a subversive, anticolonialist, and seditionist. Following the thread initiated in Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker's chapter, Marchetto Santorun draws attention to the many and even opposed readings of "And did those feet." She resumes the account at the point where Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker left off—Parry's adaptation—and cites research by Whittaker on the hymn's appearance since the 1980s: its presence in *Chariots of Fire*, expressing nationalist values; the parodies by musical artists like Test Dept. and The Fall; its use as an English sporting symbol in the 1990s; the association with the far right as it was co-opted as a rousing tune by the British National Party in the 2000s; and, finally, its role in the representation of Blakean apotheosis, the idea of nation, and visionary art in Alan Moore's novel *Jerusalem* in 2016.

The second part of her chapter is devoted to Spain. Drawing on work by Flores, she first traces an overview of the reception of Blake by important literary figures such as José Joaquín de Mora, Pablo Neruda, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Luis Cernuda, and Leopoldo María Panero, as well as by the rock band Héroes del Silencio. However, Marchetto Santorun's greatest contribution to the study of Blake's reception in Spain is in the connections she establishes with certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gali-

cian writers and artists, who turned to the "nationalist" Blake to support their own nationalist ideals. She discusses Rosalía de Castro, who shared Blake's simplicity of language, folk musicality, and nature imagery. Plácido Castro, a literary critic and translator, claimed in his essays that Blake was an exponent of a "Celtic spirit." Castro had a clear preference for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and published Galician translations of "Ah! Sun-Flower," "Infant Joy," and "The Lamb" in the newspaper *El Faro de Vigo*. Marchetto Santorun establishes further connections between Castro, Luís Seoane, and Álvaro Cunqueiro, all of whom showed an interest in Blake and notably contributed to his reception in Galicia. Seoane illustrated Neruda's translations of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and "The Mental Traveller" (1947), and created "a construct of a Celtic Blake" (27), as Marchetto Santorun shows through a detailed analysis of his letters. Cunqueiro also translated some of Blake's poems into Galician—"I laid me down upon a bank," "Are not the joys of morning sweeter," and "Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau"—and commented on Blake's aesthetics. All of them, she concludes, contributed to create "the ambiguously patriotic but transcultural Bardic Blake" (28) in Galicia.

Grounded in a solid knowledge of Blake's works and Blakean scholarship, both chapters prove invaluable in showing that he resists a fixed and unique interpretation. They both convincingly open new paths in Blakean studies, unconstrained by either historical or national boundaries, which well deserve further exploration. I join Pinheiro de Sousa and Whittaker in their conviction that "Blake's works and Blake studies are in an ideal position to continue inviting all types of readers to that common ground of the prolific" (10).

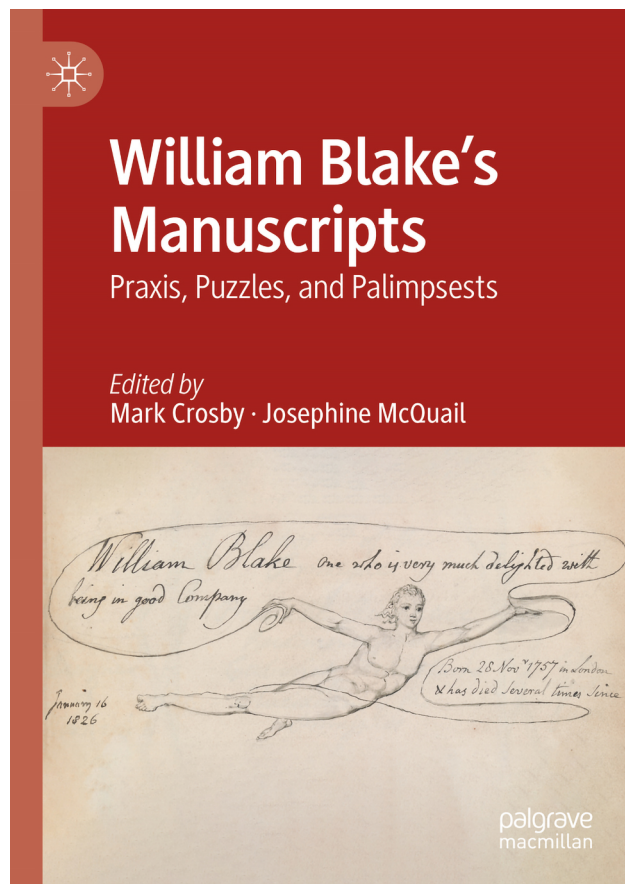
Mark Crosby and Josephine A. McQuail, editors, *William Blake's Manuscripts: Praxis, Puzzles, and Palimpsests*

MORTON D. PALEY^a

Mark Crosby and Josephine A. McQuail, editors. *William Blake's Manuscripts: Praxis, Puzzles, and Palimpsests*. Springer-Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. xxiii + 378 pp. £109.99/\$139.99, hardcover; £109.99/\$139.99, paperback; £104.49/\$109.00, e-book.

IN their introduction, “Writing Is the Divine Revelation,” Crosby and McQuail sketch out the subject matter to come. Their discussion includes the inscription in the lower right-hand corner of a preparatory drawing for plate 14 of the Job engravings (“When the Morning Stars Sang Together”). Blake wrote “done by” followed by five symbols: a straight line, a hand, a capital B, an eye, and a circle with large dotlike marks outside its two o’clock and seven o’clock positions. The authors pose a number of questions arising from this hieroglyphic signature and the possible reasons for Blake’s placing it there. Other manuscripts touched on in this introduction include *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, some of the poems drafted in Blake’s Notebook, selections from his marginalia, and his sole engraving on glass. Some pages of illuminated books are also manuscripts, Crosby and McQuail suggest, if we assume that they were composed directly on the plates. In conclusion, the authors explain the classification principles behind the three-part division of the fourteen papers that follow.

Manuscripts has the distinction of posthumously publishing a paper by G. E. Bentley, Jr., “Blake and ‘the Wondrous Art of Writing’: Letter Faces, Letter Formation, Capitalization.” In his 1963 edition of *Vala*, Bentley distinguished and defined four different scripts in the manuscript, which are summarized here: copperplate hand, modified copperplate hand, usual hand, and “reduced and hurried form of the usual hand.” Among numerous other observations, Bentley remarks that all the *Songs of Experience* are in slanting roman script, save for one in vertical



roman script: “Ah! Sun-Flower” (which is also the one *Experience* poem not drafted in Blake’s Notebook). Bentley advocates that editions in conventional typography represent the words “as faithfully as the words themselves” so that, for example, “The Tyger” would be “*The Tyger*.” An extensive tabulation of Blake’s different font styles and sizes is provided in an appendix.

a. Morton D. Paley recently completed a study of Blake’s Job engravings. His current research is on the history paintings of George Romney.

In his chapter on Blake's letters, Angus Whitehead remarks, "The quotidian and the visionary ... are not merely cheek by jowl in the letters: they constantly combine, cross-pollinating one another," and he goes on to say that "Blake, like [Philip] Larkin, seems to be putting on distinctly different faces, performances drawing on different lexicons for different correspondents." Three of Blake's correspondents can be identified as close personal friends—George Cumberland, John Flaxman, and his brother James—but Blake could equivocate even to those close to him. When he addresses Thomas Butts as "Dear Friend of My Angels" (E 711), he counts on Butts's not knowing what Blake's angels were really like. Blake's discourse was not the same in a letter written for publication in *The Monthly Magazine* as it was when he defended his art to a disappointed would-be client, the Rev. Dr. Trusler. The modulations in his correspondence with William Hayley could in themselves be the subject of a substantial chapter. There are no love letters because throughout his adult life "my sweet Shadow of Delight stood ... by my side" (*Milton*, E 143). While recognizing the enormous accomplishment of Geoffrey Keynes's edition, Whitehead argues that it's time for a "useful and finally definitive edition" of the letters.

As Elizabeth Potter maintains of Blake's marginalia, at least some were meant to be read by others, pointing out that the same was true of Coleridge, as H. J. Jackson has shown. The large, clear handwriting of some of Blake's annotations to the *Works* of Sir Joshua Reynolds shows that these were among them. Potter argues that both in editions and in criticism the quotations from the texts that Blake annotated should be considerably more extensive than they usually are, as context determines meaning. Distinguishing four different modes of Blake's manuscript annotations to volume 1 of Reynolds's *Works*, she concludes that "Blake revisited the volume at different times," that after reviewing his penciled inscriptions in the unbound volume he turned some of them into more permanent form with ink, that he wrote some of them in ink before the volume was bound, and that he incorporated some of their language in writing his *Descriptive Catalogue* and other prose works. By heightening our awareness of the physical interrelations of Blake's marginalia, Potter increases our knowledge of the development of his thought.

Jennifer Davis Michael's paper, "Behn, Bysshe, and the Blakes: Bibliomancy and the Joys of Unbinding," centers on the Blakes' one known experiment in what is defined as "a form of divination by randomly selecting a passage from an authoritative text." In the classical world this often involved consulting Virgil, and in the Christian world the Bible. Today a frequent source is the ancient Chinese *Y Ching*, or *Book of Changes*; for William and Catherine it

was Edward Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry*. It was Catherine who made the cut, and, as Michael points out, in the later eighteenth century bibliomancy was often associated with women. Catherine had this book on hand "by chance," so this may have been a one-off attempt.

Sexual intercourse in Blake's works frequently has symbolic or theoretical associations, so it's refreshing to find this middle-aged couple enjoying a "titillating passage" under the rubric "ENJOYMENT" simply for its licentious content. Bysshe omits the poem's title, prints only the author's last name, and excerpts only twenty-four lines of a poem 107 lines long. Michael rightly ignores the poem's publication history and the author's identity, of which the Blakes may have known nothing. Nor would they necessarily have known the poem's title—"On a Juniper-Tree, Cut Down to Make Busks"—or that the first-person speaker is the tree under which the action takes place. Michael discusses the episode not out of context, but in a context established by the two readers and their marital relationship.

Their presiding sign is fire. The excerpt in Blake's Notebook begins, "I saw 'em kindle with Desire / While with soft sighs they blew the fire," and continues in physical fury:

Her new desire she could not hide
Nor would the shepherd be denied
The blessed minute he pursud
Till she transported in his arms
Yields to the Conqueror all her charms
His panting breast to hers now joind
They feast on raptures unconfind
Vast & luxuriant such as prove
The immortality of Love[.]

After this the lovers pass to a second, harmonious phase of their intercourse, still under the fire sign:

Now like the Phoenix both expire
While from the ashes of their fire
Spring up a new & soft desire
Like charmers thrice they did invoke
The God & thrice new Vigor took[.]

Blake transcribes this text in order to preserve the moments of pleasure that it gave him and Catherine.

Crosby's own paper, "'minutely Appropriate Execution': Variation and *Pentimento* in Blake's Title Pages," is a thorough and convincing discussion of its subject. (*Pentimento*, a term borrowed from art history, is defined as "part of a picture or drawing which has been painted or

drawn over after the artist has changed his mind about a particular motif" [Clarke, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, 2001].) Remarking that "Blake's production methods for his illuminated books encourage variation," Crosby considers how "four variations of the title plate [of *Europe*] ... provide four separate visual commentaries on the Urizen and Los narrative." His examination of the title page of the *Four Zoas* manuscript considers how *pentimenti*, both verbal and visual, affect the meanings conveyed, and he also compares in detail the imagery of the two title pages of the Genesis manuscript.

Silvia Riccardi, in "The Page Embodied in *The Four Zoas*," suggests that for Blake the manuscript page can be a unit of expression, much as in illuminated books the plate is one. "[M]ost of the pages," she argues, "appear ... to be treated almost as copperplates." Yet, Riccardi says, the correspondence is not exact, for the physical natures of the tool (pencil) and of the support (paper) allow greater fluidity of expression, "pushing Blake's composing process beyond the possibilities afforded by the engraving tools." For example, referring to page 7 of the manuscript, the author discerningly observes that the initial letter of the last line, the W of "Wandering," "wanders in a dynamic pattern beyond the line of the script, enacting the movement of wandering," and that "this line is harmonically arranged with the appendix of the serpent-like figure which intrudes into Enion's body." This essay breaks new ground in discussing how Blake's imaginative processes found expression.

Co-editor Josephine McQuail's paper is entitled "Blake and the Antiquarians: The Manuscript of *The Four Zoas* and the 'Monumental Folios' of the Dilettanti and the Antiquarians." The Antiquarians here include James Stuart, co-author with Nicholas Revett of *The Antiquities of Athens*; Richard Gough of *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*; the Society of Antiquaries; and the Society of Dilettanti. Some images for their projects were executed by the young Blake's master James Basire, and some involved William himself as an apprentice engraver. Basire's emphasis on the line was assimilated by Blake both in practice and (later) in theory. The illustrations of Richard Payne Knight's *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, although not published in folio, are also discussed as models for some of the drawings in Blake's manuscript. McQuail's view of the manuscript is that it "should be considered finished, if not in the final form."

In "Catastrophe, Sublimity, and Digital Thinking in Blake's *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*," Peter Otto joins those scholars who think that in the forty-seven pages of manuscript written on the versos of discarded proofs of Blake's *Night Thoughts* engravings there are connections between

the engravings and *The Four Zoas*. This, and the fact that both Young's poem and Blake's comprise nine Nights, cause Otto to say that "Young's poem ... haunts *The Four Zoas* with a literary *ancien regime* that the poem is unable finally to exorcise." Among other issues addressed here are the two Nights VII, "the three primary creation stories," and "the descent of the sublime into history."

Otto typically pursues the transformation of images into narrative. In *The Four Zoas* page 32 Urizen's "golden Building" is created by slaves (generating associations for us of the work going on in Wagner's Nibelheim), followed by its collapse into the material world, which Otto, referring to manuscript page 44, calls the "process of excarnation" of Tharmas. This is paralleled by Enion's "floating in the air" in the drawing on the left side of page 44. Advancing to page 64, Otto calls the Enitharmon of that page a "material double" of Enion, and Urizen's following re-animation leads to his journey of exploration in Nights VI, VIIa, and VIIb. Such sequencing is just one example of how Otto interestingly tracks textual/pictorial elements in *The Four Zoas*.

"[G]lobal institutions [Trades & Commerce, Universal Empire, and Religion]," writes Otto, "enable Urizen to shape subjects by reshaping the world in which they exist."

Then left the Sons of Urizen the plow & harrow the loom
The hammer & the Chisel & the rule & compasses
They forged the sword the chariot of war the battle ax
The trumpet fitted to the battle & the flute of summer
And all the arts of life they changd into the arts of death
The hour glass contemnd because its simple workmanship
Was as the workmanship of the plowman & the water wheel
That raises water into Cisterns broken & burnd in fire
Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the Shepherd
And in their stead intricate wheels invented Wheel without wheel
To perplex youth in their outgoings & to bind to labours
Of day & night the myriads of Eternity. that they might file
And polish brass & iron hour after hour laborious workmanship

(*The Four Zoas* page 92, E 364)

Here Blake seems to anticipate Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Ode, Inscribed to William H. Channing":

'T is the day of the chattel
Web to weave, and corn to grind;
Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.

Otto's discussion is richly documented with critical sources. For example, he is one of only two authors (Riccardi is the other) to include a consideration of John E. Grant's seminal article of over sixty pages, "Visions in *Vala*."

Michael Fox, formerly an assistant editor at *The William Blake Archive*, presents "Graphing *VALA*, or *The Four Zoas*: Toward a Dynamic Edition." It's no fault of the author's that the word "dynamic" has become so debased by ad-speak that it's lost much of its meaning. After considering what the true title of the manuscript is or ought to be, the author considers the facsimile editions of Bentley and of David V. Erdman and Cettina Magno, as well as the printed *Vala* of H. M. Margoliouth, which goes curiously unmentioned elsewhere in this volume. His tracing of this history culminates in the *Blake Archive*'s online edition of 2017. In the latter part of this paper, Fox explains what a "dynamic edition" of *The Four Zoas* would be, and how it would be achieved. This section is illustrated with graphs and subgraphs that might be helpful if their texts, printed in tiny black type against a dark gray background, were not impossible to read.

As a postscript, a question and a correction. Is it true that *Vala* "in part . . . symbolizes a different faculty of the mind: passion"? Isn't *Luvah* the faculty of passion and *Vala* the object of his passion? And the version of Robert Blair's *The Grave* that appeared with Blake's illustrations in 1813 is hardly "an early edition," being the second edition of a book published in 1808 of a poem that first appeared in 1743.

"'All that we See is Vision': William Blake's *Four Zoas* Manuscript and Multispectral Imaging (MSI)" is the work of six scholars—Oishani Sengupta, Helen Davies, Alexander J. Zawacki, Christina Duffy, Eric Loy, and Samuel Allen. The creation of this paper was assisted by *The William Blake Archive*, the Lazarus Project at the University of Rochester, and the British Museum, a collaboration that reinforces our sense of group participation.

Multispectral imaging has been defined as "a collection of a few image layers of the same scene, each of them acquired at a particular wavelength band." Page 14 of the *Four Zoas* manuscript is discussed as an example of the

authors' application of this imaging technique to try to recover visual or textual data.

The authors confuse engraved proof sheets and watercolors when they say that "the later folios juxtapose the text of the poem with proof-sheets containing watercolors to accompany Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, for an edition Blake was preparing for John Linnell's library." The proof sheets of Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations that he used for his manuscript bear only engraved images.

Fernando Castanedo, the author of highly regarded Spanish editions of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *An Island in the Moon*, here contributes "'O what a scene is here': Visual References in Blake's *An Island in the Moon*." An interesting example concerns Blake's verses on Samuel Johnson. One of these references, John Hall's engraving after Reynolds of Johnson squinting at a newspaper held closely to him, may well have reinforced Blake's conception, although near-sighted Johnson's cognomen of "Blinking Sam" was well known, as was Johnson's dislike of it.

Lo the Bat with Leathern wing
Winking & blinking
Winking & blinking
Winking & blinking
Like Doctor Johnson

There could also have been, as suggested here, a pictorial stimulus for the further lines beginning "O ho Said Doctor Johnson" in two satirical prints of 1786 related to James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785): "Bossy Bounce Preparing for the Scotch Professors to Kiss" and "A Tom Tit Twittering on an Eagle's Back-Side." These images are compared to Blake's

Ah ha To Doctor Johnson
Said Scipio Africanus
Lift up my Roman Petticoat
And kiss my Roman Anus (E 458)

The author wittily remarks that these prints "are the only depictions of him [Johnson] engaging in any sphincteric activities with others." Blake did have a certain interest in sphincteric activities, as evidenced by Bowlahoola in his later works, and images such as these may well have engaged his visual imagination.

Two misused terms should be corrected. A passage in *Island* is referred to as "parodical ekphrasis," but here there is no ekphrasis (defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art"). And Valentine Green's striking mezzotint

of Joseph Wright of Derby's *Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* is not an "etching" but an engraving.

In "'Hang Philosophy': Blake's Metaphysical Forays in *An Island in the Moon*," Joseph Fletcher explores some philosophical issues in Blake's Menippean satire. One of these forays involves books by Emanuel Swedenborg. In addition to the three works by Swedenborg that he annotated, Blake appears to have known at least part of three others. Fletcher says that Swedenborg's *Theosophic Lubrication on the Nature of Influx* could have been known to Blake through being "read in translation at the Swedenborgian meetings Blake attended," but this hypothesis is unnecessary: the Blakes are known to have attended only one such meeting (the General Conference of 1789), while *Influx* had been published in an English translation as early as 1770. Blake also seems to have been familiar with *Earths in the Universe* (1787), to which he refers in a note to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (E 602), and he also read some part of the compendious *True Christian Religion* (1781), as in his *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809 one entry is "The spiritual Preceptor, an experiment Picture ... taken from the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg. Universal Theology [the alternative title of *True Christian Religion*]." In contrast, Blake is not known to have read Descartes, whom he never mentions, and whose works are cited here only in modern editions, but whose philosophy is introduced in several contexts. Of course, Blake may have read something about Descartes—or he may not have. Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage du monde de Descartes*, translated into English in 1692, alluded to several times, is an example of a book with which Blake seems to have been entirely unacquainted. In trying to understand Blake's mental universe we should consider whether or not an author is one whom he read or whom he knew only through a hypothetical secondary source. In general, Fletcher shows that *An Island in the Moon* is fraught with philosophical issues, and that "beneath Blake's satirical clowning lies a deep engagement."

In "'Composite Gender' as the Book of Oothoon," Tommy Mayberry argues for the "transsexual and transgender leanings of Oothoon's body" in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and later. The moment when Oothoon plucks the Marygold signifies not only, as is generally recognized, her initiation into sexual experience (or readiness for it), but, according to Mayberry, the moment "when male-Oothoon stops cross-dressing in the safe privacy of Leutha's vale ... and goes out into the world..." Mayberry continues our walk on the wild side, saying that Theotormon "is not regretful because she [Oothoon] is no longer a virgin; he is regretful because she no longer has her penis." This would presumably have interested the "drag/trans- community" that the author posits as a contemporary audience for the Book of Oothoon.

Jason Whittaker's essay, "'By the Voice of the Servant of the Lord': Blake's New Jerusalem and Swedenborgianism in the Work of Sheila Kaye-Smith," regards a manuscript not by but about Blake. Kaye-Smith (1887–1956) was a fairly popular twentieth-century English novelist, and her reading of Blake had great personal meaning for her. What is impressive about her essay is neither new information nor distinctive insights, but rather her fresh, sometimes breathless, response to Blake. "One can imagine," she writes, "the poet wandering from the streets of the systematised Symbol, lost & baffled, seeking in vain for the truth that does not creep step by step over end, cause & effect, but bounds freely & bridges widely—the infinite truth of the imagination." It would be hard to think of a better encapsulation of Blake's spiritual journey.

William Blake's Manuscripts rightly does not try to establish a unified approach to its subject. It is an admirably multi-pronged exposition, bringing together a variety of scholarly approaches in rich combination.

