A R T I C L E

Prophet against Empire? William Blake in Australia

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1 SINCE the posthumous revival of William Blake (beginning in the 1860s, consolidated in the twentieth century), his identification with England, and more particularly with London, has been complicated by his appeal to cultural groups that are themselves ambivalent, at best, in their relationship to empire. While scholarship has increasingly attended to Blake's dialogues with and receptions outside the Anglosphere,[1] the radically countercultural artist and son of a hosier has simultaneously been assimilated into the iconography of mainstream Englishness. This has been nowhere more evident than in England itself, where he is quoted by politicians of all political persuasions and has been made the subject of blockbuster exhibitions in major institutional venues. For example, the trailer for the 2019–20 Tate exhibition projects Blakean imagery onto iconic scenes and sites of contemporary London, updating and appropriating Golgonooza for the age of the London Eye.[2] At the same time, and in ways somewhat truer to his own practices, Blake has been celebrated as a kind of patron saint by London-based small presses and outsider artists and writers. Beyond England, complex and sometimes inapposite ideological allegiances have been contracted on his behalf from the nineteenth century onwards. In this essay, we turn to the reception, reproduction, and revisioning of Blake in the settler colonies of Australia, and we find a Blake whose work, mediated through a range of editorial and curatorial lenses, proves unexpectedly amenable to conflicting Australian desires both to affirm cultural fealty to England and empire and to refuse it.

2 Blake's posthumous allegiances and mésalliances are complicated not only by his fluctuating reputation but also by what England and London themselves signify at any given moment. David Erdman's 1954 study positions him as a *prophet against empire*. Yet for Commonwealth (and before 1931, imperial) subjects outside of England, Blake was, among other things, cartographer of the empire's center, a status that problematizes his self-avowed anti-imperial stance. Many Commonwealth subjects, governed by Anglophone institutions working uphill to naturalize English culture in colonized places, know this revolutionary Romantic outsider-artist because of, and often in terms of, his Englishness. But though the colonies of Australia were under English rule, and its colonial institutions—such as its first universities—participated actively in an ideological program of Anglicization, these colonies were not populated solely by English-born subjects. Far from it: First Peoples outnumbered European colonists until the mid-nineteenth century, by which point forced transportees from Ireland became a substantial minority. They were joined by voluntary migrants from all continents, along with other coerced migrants, like the South Sea Islanders abducted for farm work from the 1860s. By the end of the nineteenth century the most vocal proponents against empire and for Australian nationhood were mostly not English identifying at all. For them, an anti-imperial Blake who could be by any means detached from his Englishness had significant appeal.

1. Significant attention to Blake and the non-English-speaking world is evident, for example, in the range of studies at the 2022 Global Blake conference, <https://globalblake.zoamorphosis.com>, but this attention has a long history (see, for instance, Malmqvist).
2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7EPXc5K7DA>.

3 The alignment of Blake both with and against empire plays out in the context of Australia's first (long) century as a nation. This is a period in which the entanglement of English and Australian identities was profoundly transformed. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, white inhabitants of the six British colonies in Australia, many of whom were now native born, intensified a movement for federation and nationhood. This movement coincided with the publication of the late-Victorian books that began to bring Blake to a wider audience: William Muir's facsimiles of 1884–90, the second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1880), and, crucially, Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats's *The Works of William Blake* (1893). It is merely a coincidence that the first positive signs of Blake's canonization took place just as a new nation was doing the initial work of curating its cultural identity, discussing republicanism, reckoning with (which meant largely disavowing) the existence of indigenous landowners, and renegotiating its relationship to empire. Blake was not yet Erdman's prophet against empire, but had been interpreted influentially by Yeats as the arch-symbolist, "content to express every beautiful feeling that came into his head without troubling about its utility or chaining it to any utility" (Yeats 113). Yet the coincidence of Blake's rehabilitation and Australian nation-building meant that the radical figure who also stood for England and "Englishness" became available to "Australians" (a word that only came to be widely used to refer to non-Aboriginal inhabitants in the period of heightened nationalism from the 1880s), and particularly to Australians meditating on their ambivalent feelings about empire and Englishness. Moreover, precisely because of Blake's implication in the very empire that he prophesied against, attempts to deploy him as a token of Englishness—in order to bring about changes in the arts, or to promote an imperial patriotism—tended to produce unexpected consequences.

Toward Federation (1901)

4 With English colonization came English books. Given the number of commercial commissions undertaken by Blake between the 1780s and 1820s, it is not surprising that among these English books were some to which he had contributed engravings. The first of these, indeed, began trickling into the colonies of Australia from as early as the 1830s. By the 1850s, Australia's first public libraries and universities were being established, and Blake's commercial illustrations were finding their way onto publicly accessible shelves. We know, for instance, that the Melbourne Public Library acquired the 1805 edition of John Flaxman's *Iliad of Homer*, including three prints by Blake, and the 1817 edition of Flaxman's *Compositions from the Works Days and Theogony of Hesiod*, with all thirty-seven engravings by Blake (see Gregory).

5 Blake does not seem to have become much recognized in Australia as an artist in his own right until later in the century, in a trend consistent with his revival in England. But once his reputation was in full bud, around the 1890s, he was conscripted into discussions underscored by anxiety about national identity. The motives behind these appropriations of Blake's name can be elusive. In May 1897, a review reprinted in the literature-focused "Red Page" of the *Bulletin*, then a highly influential nationalist journal, wended its way to the idea of Edward Gibbon as a visionary architect of history by throwing out this casual and apparently superfluous allusion to Blake: "Among the visionary persons who presented themselves to William Blake was the man who built the Pyramids" (Dowden). While it seems highly unlikely that any Australian reader would have seen *The Man Who Built the Pyramids*, one of the drawings from the Visionary Heads series, quite a number would have encountered the reproduction in Gilchrist's *Life* (300), the 1880 edition of which was by now lodged in public institutions including the library of the University of Sydney, the Public Library of New South Wales (now State Library of New South Wales), and the Melbourne Public Library (now State Library Victoria).

6 By 1897, the *Bulletin* had reached a particularly heady point in what was essentially a "debate about the nature of Australia and the role of literature in shaping a colonial society" (Nesbitt). On 27 February, storywriter and bush poet Henry Lawson had published an untitled column in the Red Page attacking other Australian writers for their failure to render realistically the hellscapes of the so-called "Out-Back," a failure that he felt retarded the development of a national identity. Lawson, who by March had given up on Australia and moved to New Zealand, had fired a shot that would see the Red Page overrun by responses for months. The aforementioned review by Edward Dowden of new editions of Gibbon's autobiography and letters, which begins with the reference to the English Blake, took up precious column inches in what seems at first a pointed diversion from the Red Page's all-dominating debate about the emerging nation and its homegrown literature. Readers about to divest themselves of British colonial government may well have perceived an allegorical edge to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Gibbon could be read—as Blake later would be—as a prophet, if not against empire, then certainly warning of its vulnerabilities. The review was perhaps not so entirely off topic for an avowedly nationalist periodical just four years before federation. Nor was its web of connections to countercultural English figures (with Blake foregrounded in the first sentence) irrelevant to the *Bulletin*'s advocacy of an Australianism at the center of which was a population of antiauthoritarian ex-Britons and Irish (see Moore).

7 Blake was a topic of considerable interest in post-federation Australia. Discussion of the artist and his works often accorded with trends in his reception elsewhere in the English-speaking world at that time. Texts from *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were reprinted frequently in Australian newspapers, journals, and magazines in the early twentieth century. His supposed madness was the subject of much debate in the papers, with the wonderfully named *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate* devoting a paragraph to the topic "Was Blake Eccentric?" in 1907. "The reasons put forward for considering William Blake, poet, painter, and engraver, a literary eccentric," it concludes, "do not appear to us so well founded." Commentators expounded upon William and Catherine Blake's happy relationship. The *Maitland Daily Mercury* followed the Victorian adoption of the Blakes as a paradigm of domestic harmony when it claimed that Catherine "was capable of so ardent a worship for her husband that all the longings of her warm nature seemed to become fused at once into a desire for his good." Public lectures on the poet also seem to have been popular. William Mitchell, for example, adopted a Yeatsian perspective in a lecture on Blake's "symbolic style which taxed the understanding of the keenest intellect" to a large (and, it seems, rather bemused) audience at Glen's Hall in Melbourne on 26 November 1908 ("The Mystical Blake"). A defrocked Church of England priest, Douglas Price, offered a lecture on "Blake and Other Visionaries" to the Modernist Society of Brisbane in 1916. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Blake was in the air and in the libraries of Australia, and in 1918 he would make his way to one of the wealthiest art galleries in the world, more than ten thousand miles from London.

The Felton Bequest

8 In 1989, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) acquired what might seem a rather obscure piece of Blakeana, a colored copy of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797).[3] According to Michael J. Tolley, these engravings were probably the first Blake work to be brought to the colony of New South Wales, when their owner, the jurist William à Beckett, arrived in 1837. à Beckett later became the chief justice of Victoria, and his copy of *Night Thoughts* accompanied him to Melbourne, where it remained when he returned to England. Its next recorded owner was Alfred Felton (1831–1904), from whose estate it was sold to another private interest (see Tolley for further details). Meanwhile, Felton had done something that would profoundly transform the relationship between Blake and the Melbourne public.

9 A pharmaceutical mogul, Felton left a will that dedicated £383,163 "to art and charity, with half of the interest earned to be used in perpetuity to buy works for the National Gallery of Victoria."[4] The Felton Bequest "transformed the NGV into one of the most lavishly endowed public galleries in the British Empire with greater funds at its disposal than London's National Gallery and the Tate combined" (Mangan). The immensely wealthy NGV was thus armed to make the first major attempt to bring Blake to Australia, in 1918.

10 Felton's bequest was motivated, allegedly, by his desire to bring culture to a rapidly growing British outpost: "He believed Australians had more than their share of material comforts; what they lacked, in his opinion, were the refining influences of the Old World. In his lifetime there was not one great masterpiece in the whole country" (Flowers 8). Much of the NGV's impressive collection of Australian and international art is a direct result of the generosity of the bequest; the Blake purchases in 1918 included thirty-six of 102 watercolors illustrating the *Divine Comedy*, two watercolors illustrating Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the set of twenty-two engravings to the book of Job, and three prints from Blake's prophetic books. The purchase in 1989 of *Night Thoughts*, and, the previous year, of a copy of *Songs of Innocence*, reaffirmed the commitment to Blake.

11 As detailed in a useful essay by Irena Zdanowicz, the NGV's first Blake purchase was a cooperative venture. The wartime economy meant that no British bidder could afford the entire Dante set, part of the Blake holdings being sold by Christie's on behalf of the Linnell family. Melbourne was considered to be an acceptable destination for some of the watercolors, at the expense of American bidders. It is striking that the collector Charles Ricketts equated the purchases for the Tate and the NGV when he wrote, shortly after the sale, that "it would have been a scandal and a disaster had the set left the country" (quoted in Zdanowicz 13). Krzysztof Cieszkowski's article on the dispersal of the illustrations emphasizes Herbert Linnell's anxiety about the loss of the Linnell collection to America, in particular (166). Yet Ricketts was also agitated about the possibility that some of the Dante series might make its way to Liverpool, which had, he wrote ambiguously, "behaved badly" (quoted in Cieszkowski 167). Hence the NGV was able to purchase twelve of the thirty shares in the set, and the Felton Bequest's agent, Robert Ross, had first pick of the drawings

3. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p. 273 (copy Y).

4. Fittingly, funds from the bequest contributed to the purchase eighty-five years later of the copy of *Night Thoughts* owned by à Beckett and Felton.

(most of the remainder went to the National Gallery of British Art—later the Tate—the British Museum, and galleries at Birmingham and Oxford), a total purchase of 7300 guineas. The division of the set indicates Melbourne's wealth (built up in the nineteenth-century gold rush) and its significance to the empire at the turn of the century; it was the capital of Australia until 1927. One Blake scholar congratulated Charles Aitken of the Tate on the outcome of the dispersal, which would benefit "the Nation—and Empire" (quoted in Cieszkowski 169). The Blake purchases heralded the NGV's entrance on the scene as a gallery of world-class significance, with Melburnians able to study the artist's illustrations in all of their deeply saturated beauty just as they might have done in London. No longer did you need to be at the center of the empire to have direct access to its treasures.

Blake's Twentieth-Century Acolytes

12 While the NGV's major purchases can be read as statements that asserted Melbourne's cultural significance on the international scene, Ann Galbally notes that they also served a domestic purpose: there was in Australia

> a general recognition that public museums, libraries and art galleries formed cornerstones of civic endeavour and were active conductors of sound civic values. No 19th-century city of reasonable size could be considered worthy of the name unless it had these institutions and through them was seen to be an active patron of science and the liberal arts. (10)

Felton's original intentions for the bequest accord with such a philosophy of cultural influence. Twentieth-century commentators explicitly identified the educative possibilities of the Blake collection with the propagation of a recognizably British form of art in Australia. In a 1941 essay, Daryl Lindsay (1889–1976)—then a curator at the NGV—emphasizes Blake's nationality as if it was his most important characteristic. "He [Blake] is essentially English," he writes, "and I doubt if any other country could have produced him" (44). The same year, the NGV loaned forty of its Blake works to the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, as it was then called, enabling the collection to exert an influence beyond Melbourne.

13 In her recent comments on Blake's European reception, Sibylle Erle introduces a discussion of the translations and of types of individual creative responses that occur when an aspect of the original work resonates with a foreign culture. From Lindsay's assessment of Blake's essential Englishness and the NGV's strategy as outlined by Galbally, one might infer that the NGV hoped that the Blake collection would perpetuate a particular kind of art in Australia. Felton himself, as noted, appears to have wanted a ventriloquism of English art to occur in Australian art. It is unclear how he supposed this influence would manifest itself: whether a set of Australian works would arise that encoded imperial identity, celebrated English themes, or perpetuated a recognizably English aesthetic; or whether he felt simply that a display of critically acclaimed art would inspire the production of more critically acclaimed art.

14 But the critical acclaim of Blake was not universal in the early twentieth century and—long prior to the NGV's acquisition of its first Blake holdings—some Australian commentators opined that he was ill suited to instrumentalist purposes. A 1902 essay in the *Bulletin* queries how he would have viewed the new century: "What [would Blake behold] in England and throughout the British Empire, but a recrudescence of all the throne-worship and consequent tyrannous suppression of human right and national spirit which bore him down, too, in his own time?" (F. M.) Implying that dissent is the true Blakean inheritance, the author discusses Walt Whitman as Blake's "soul son and heir [*sic*]." In a 1929 article, Ethel Anderson implies that any attempt to use Blake as a model for imitation—particularly with jingoistic undertones—is inevitably self-defeating because of his oblique relation to subject matter. She may have Felton in mind when she distinguishes between the minds of "an artist … able to give material being to the unconscious" and "an art-patron … without the creative faculty." If the patron is to influence Australian art, she writes, it cannot result in innovation, but can only "keep art in familiar and merely national grooves." Hence, Anderson complains that Australian art has become "*a dialect*" of English art rather than "*a language*" of its own. Response to Blake within the NGV was ambivalent too. As Zdanowicz notes, the gallery declined to purchase more of Blake's work when Sotheby's sold the Macgeorge collection in 1924. Amid the early mixed critical reception of the Blake collection, a contingent of NGV trustees regretted the freedom afforded to their agent, Ross, in London in 1918 (Zdanowicz 14-15). Coinciding with Lindsay's curatorship and then directorship of the NGV, opinion on the Blake collection became more consistently favorable during the 1940s, both in Australia generally and within the gallery itself.

15 Diverse kinds of Blakean influence are evident in Australian art, many examples of which appear to defy the hopes of the Felton Bequest to inculcate the conservative values of the Old World. Such artists often respond instead to Blake's spirituality and radicalism. For example, Margaret Preston (1875–1963) introduces her monotypes as influenced by Blake's printing procedure, but not by any other elements of his work: "The Monotypes … do not presume to have any relation to his work; it is the principle in the method that is the connection." She explains that she has used her Blakean

method to portray subjects derived from "a general study of Australian Aboriginal Art" (10). Perhaps inevitably, Blakean tropes occur in Preston's work, despite her suggestion to the contrary here. In *The Expulsion* (1952) (illus. 1), for example, a white angel clutching a scourge in one hand and a sword in the other oversees the dismissal of two Aboriginal figures, an image that alludes to the expulsion scene from *Paradise Lost*. Preston's "Adam" and "Eve" (smiling lovingly at her nursing baby) have been cast out of a padlocked enclosure. Interestingly, the image more closely resembles Blake's *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve* (illus. 2), one of the illustrations to *Paradise Lost* housed in the NGV's Blake collection, than it does his *Expulsion*, not part of the NGV's collection. Blake's presiding white-winged angel is the antinomian Satan, who inhabits a similar position of oversight in relation to Blake's Adam and Eve figures as Preston's authoritarian angel does to the two people driven from their traditional home.

16 Michael Griffith identifies Arthur Boyd (1920–99) as Blakean in "daring to connect religious themes to contemporary social realities" (81). Boyd, like Blake, frequently adopts Old Testament subjects in relation to his social critiques. His painting titled *The Expulsion* (1947–48) (illus. 3) portrays the disruption of domestic privacy under the tyranny of a looming authoritarian figure, with Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden typically read as an image of family life lost during World War II. Peter Otto identifies more specific dialogues with Blake in Boyd's series of Nebuchadnezzar illustrations. Here Boyd responds to portrayals of Nebuchadnezzar II (c. 642–562 BCE) in Blake's Notebook, the large color print, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *There is No Natural Religion*, and the *Night Thoughts* illustrations. As a Western presence on a recognizably Australian landscape, Boyd's Nebuchadnezzar evokes the intent—both of British colonialism and of America's war in Vietnam—to order the other. Otto reminds us that the conventional tropes of an enlightened Europe and a sensuous Orient could represent, respectively, the opposition of mind and body; he finds that, "for both Blake and Boyd, escape from the cycle that enslaves Nebuchadnezzar and that holds the West in agonistic struggle with its imagined others involves embrace rather than division" (270). Other Australian artists are comparably syncretic rather than singular in their responses to Blake.

17 Like Boyd's work, the William Ricketts Sanctuary exemplifies the assimilation of Blakean influence into an eclectic—and eccentric—vision. An appraisal from 1949 is appreciative of the sculpture garden that Ricketts (1898–1993) established in rural Victoria:

> He combines … mythical figures with reproductions of aborigines …, and displays them in their natural bushland settings. … All his works are in white clay and are kiln-dried in his own furnace. Although he is self-taught, Ricketts' art has obviously been strongly influenced by the English mystic and artist William Blake. There is poesy in his creations. ("Art Gallery" 22)

The writer portrays Ricketts as a crusader who wishes to save the environment and its indigenous peoples: "He thinks these fast-diminishing people could be induced to settle there and encouraged to perpetuate their native crafts and culture" (22). Later critiques intimate misdirected Blakean influences in Ricketts's derivation of a philosophy—one centered on Romantic preoccupations of nature, childhood, and the noble savage paradigm—that he projected onto a generalized vision of Aboriginal peoples. Marcia Langton and Bruno David argue that "Ricketts' vision of a world at peace and in balance with Nature is presented allegorically as an imagined world of variously, the Pitjantjatjara, Luritja and 'Arunta' [a term for the Arrernte peoples], conflating, appropriating and denying Aboriginality in the process." At heart, they write, his is a "highly personal religious statement" (153). Comparably, Mitchell Rolls, lamenting Ricketts's condescending attitudes and sense of heroism while acknowledging his well-intentioned advocacy for Aboriginal peoples, paints a picture of a Blakean persona who spent most of his life as a solitary artist, only tenuously connected to contemporary debate on art.

18 Such artists implicitly reject the imperial ideologies behind the NGV's Blake acquisitions; Englishness is objectionable in such works. It is clear that few artists were interested in Blake's national identity and more found interest in his social critiques, his spirituality, and his artistic method. This understanding of Blake as somehow transcending national identity seems to persist in the Blake Prize for Religious Art, founded in Sydney in 1949 by Richard Morley, a Jewish migrant, lawyer, artist, and art dealer, and Michael Scott, a Jesuit priest, theologian, and then principal of a preparatory school. In an Australia in which Catholicism was still associated with Irishness and Protestantism with Englishness, the founders' religious affiliations suggest a distinct lack of concern for Blake's connection with England, their ecumenicism perhaps invigorated by a reading of *All Religions are One*, which places Judaism and Christianity (apparently in all its guises) on an even footing. In offering an account of religion as poetic genius, *All Religions are One* supplies the rationale for a religious art revival. According to Rosemary Crumlin, the founding committee of the Blake Prize located their model for such a revival in the little church of Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce at Assy in the French Alps, where artists "disparate in style and religious allegiance" offered a welcome alternative to the kitsch,

1. Margaret Preston, *The Expulsion* (1952). Color stencil, gouache on thin black card with gouache hand coloring, 60.5 x 48.5 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Mr. W. G. Preston, 1967. Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales. DA64.1967. © Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2023.

2. William Blake, *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve* (1822). Pen and ink and watercolor over traces of black chalk, with gum and stippling and sponging, 52.8 × 39.0 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1920. 1025-3. Photo: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

3. Arthur Boyd, *The Expulsion* (1947–48). Oil on hardboard, 101.6 x 122.0 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1986. Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales. 38.1986. Arthur Boyd's work reproduced with the permission of Bundanon Trust, <https://www.bundanon.com.au>.

mass-produced "art of Saint Sulpice" that had come to dominate churches of all denominations in Australia (3).

19 Quite what constituted "religious art" proved a source of tension from the prize's first iteration, in 1951. Few of the entrants, as Crumlin notes, "created their entries to function either as adjuncts to liturgical worship or as devotional objects even in the years when they hoped for sales and commissions in the churches" (4). In 2009, the socially conservative Cardinal George Pell attacked the prize, describing individual entries as "kitsch," "anti-religious," "gross," and "only vestigially connected with religious understanding" (Schwartzkoff). Zoe Alderton notes that although Blake should be well known as a critic of religious institutions, "many outraged respondents to the Blake Prize's contentious entries complain that incendiary imagery is offensive to Blake and his legacy" (68n8). She quotes a commenter named "Marg" who weighed in on a Catholic news site's account of 2011's batch of "offensive" entries; Marg mourned that "Blake must be turning in his grave over and over again" at the association of his name with depictions of queer Christ figures.

The New Jerusalem

20 For many white Australians, as for many in England, the most common access point to Blake for the first half of the twentieth century was "Jerusalem," Hubert Parry's anthem of 1916, which transformed two little-known verses from Blake's *Milton a Poem* into a staple of hymnals. Regardless of Parry's intentions (he was, Jim Drury claims, both anti-war and "a left-leaning liberal humanist"), and certainly regardless of Blake's intentions, "Jerusalem" was rapidly co-opted to do ideological work for Englishness and English institutions—both politically progressive (after it was sung at a women's suffrage demonstration concert in 1918, Parry agreed that it could become the anthem of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; see Dibble 485) and less so (it keeps company at the BBC Proms, annually aired by ABC—the Australian national broadcaster—with "Rule, Britannia!," "Land of Hope and Glory," and the British national anthem). If Parry's version of Blake's verses was eventually reclaimed to its radical origins by Billy Bragg's immensely popular 1990 cover, its association with this Essex-born activist musician, with his distinctive, rough-around-the-edges London accent, does nothing to detach it from the idea of England and Englishness. Indeed, for Bragg, Blake is one of England's radical glories, standing alongside "Thomas Paine, George Orwell and the Sex Pistols" (quoted in Hargreaves 16). Jason Whittaker observes that, in the twenty-first century, "Jerusalem" is still being used for political purposes, whether these be "spectacular and liberal," as in the case of the London Olympics opening ceremony, or "private and reactionary," as in some of the responses "seen on social media following the EU referendum" (382).

21 Blake's demand that we not rest "till we have built Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land" might be heard as a call to arms against labor exploitation in the "dark Satanic Mills" of the Industrial Revolution, and it undoubtedly draws on the distinctive connotations of the "New Jerusalem" for Swedenborgians. But it is also, despite some of the uses to which Parry's hymn has been put, entirely apiece with Blake's anti-imperialism. The New Jerusalem was a recurring trope among English colonists. The Puritan figuring of "New England" as the New Jerusalem (see Richmann), from the seventeenth century on, gave a kind of theological imprimatur to English appropriation of Algonquin lands, an appropriation that would eventually lead to the production of slave-grown cotton to feed the mills of England. To build Jerusalem in England, on the other hand, meant sparing the existing Jerusalem, then under Ottoman rule. It also meant not taking charge of America (the British colonization of which Blake attacks repeatedly in his work), or indeed of the nascent colony of New South Wales.

22 The often violent dispossession of indigenous people in New South Wales does not figure in Blake's work (unlike the plight of enslaved and indigenous people in America). However, his engraving of four Aboriginal people—"A Family of New South Wales," based on a sketch by Philip Gidley King, the lieutenant-governor of Norfolk Island, and published in John Hunter's *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* (1793)—portrays them sympathetically. Cathy Leahy notes that Blake "introduced a number of changes in his engraving" of King's sketch, "altering the positioning and gait of the figures to create a more harmonious design and reworking the figural and facial features of the group, classicising them according to the eighteenth-century ideal of the 'noble savage'" (12-13).

23 White Australians' disavowal of Aboriginal sovereignty over the land they came to claim as their own was further entrenched in the early decades of federation. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (later the White Australia policy), coinciding with the year of federation, officially obtained until 1958. Aboriginal people were excluded from the national census until 1971, and not until 1984 were indigenous Australians required to enroll to vote and vote in elections, signifying full Australian citizenship (voting is mandatory in Australia). The White Australia policy was, as the name indicates, a system of institutional racism that denied citizenship to indigenous people and excluded migrants on the basis of race. It was strenuously supported by labor activists, partly in response to the use of low-wage (and often bonded) Pacific Islanders to undercut working conditions in Queensland.

24 By the middle of the twentieth century, this kind of white nationalism was increasingly irrelevant to the national agenda, and the Immigration Restriction Act was accordingly repealed. The *Bulletin* took a few years to catch up. Its banner, initially "Australia for Australians," had been changed in 1907 to "Australia for the White Man," and it would not be ditched until 1961. In 1957, the bicentenary of Blake's birth, the *Bulletin* published a poem by Noel Macainsh, "William Blake in Australia."[5] Macainsh was a young returned soldier and engineer, then en route to his doctorate in Germanic literature at the University of Melbourne. He had perhaps just seen the NGV's Blake collection, brought out of storage for the bicentennial exhibition (see Hoff); this would certainly account for his alertness to the visuality of Blake's work.

5. See the National Library of Australia's digitized version of the 27 November 1957 issue of the *Bulletin*, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-681770678/view?sectionId=nla.obj-697691711∂Id=nla.obj-681906743#page/n1/mode/1up>, for the poem in full.

25 The poem seems to gesture to the popular association of Blake—via "green & pleasant Land"—with a pastoral picturesque. Macainsh catalogues the riches of this colonized landscape—its "broad-hewn valley," hills, and "lakes / Of shade"—and effects a visionary sensibility in which he can perceive (as Blake would, he suggests) "the ranks of God on every hill," the "angels slowly moving" across the sky (casting what more prosaic minds would see as cloud shadows), the blazing light of the eastern sun as Uriel (the angel from book 3 of *Paradise Lost*), and, in all this, the transcendence of "Immense Albion, a world's vast glory." The vast glory of Albion, as manifested in Australia, is picked up again in the image of the "Prince of Glory / Hung upon His [Australian] bough." Those of "dull imagination" would see Christ's hair only as "the sad and sun-graced mistletoe," probably *Muellerina eucalyptoides*, a semiparasitic canopy dweller endemic to mainland southeastern Australia, and, confusingly for this poem's allegory, surprisingly adept at colonizing exotic trees as well as its traditional eucalypt hosts. The "nimble cherubim there [above the Christ-hair/ mistletoe] piping / Bird-sweet hosannahs" perhaps recall the many indigenous birds that take advantage of mistletoe's flowering in periods of nectar dearth. They are, surely, about to lose their food source as "the axeman" above whom they sing makes progress, "Bending his way in a nimb of Glory." The conflation of Albion, Christ, and axeman (all manifestations of a supposedly Blakean "glory") reveals a fairly blatant conscription of Blake for the cause of empire, Christianity, and extractive colonialism in the form of timber-getting. Macainsh's poem looks to England for its cultural reference points, a gesture remarkably of a piece with the local mood. The previous year, when Melbourne had been required to host an Olympic Arts Festival along with the Olympic Games, the governor of Victoria had stood in the NGV, which, as we have seen, housed one of the richest Blake collections in the world, and offered an embarrassed apology for Australian culture: "Australia is only a young country and we are very proud of our achievements. But we are also fully conscious of our shortcomings. So we hope you will find something to enjoy and admire in the exhibitions and we all look forward to learning something from your friendly criticism" (Dallas Brooks, quoted in Richardson).

Hippie Blake in the 1970s and 1980s

26 Australia shook off the shackles of some twenty-two years of Liberal-Country party coalition government in 1972 with the swearing-in of Labor leader Gough Whitlam as prime minister. The social revolutions of the 1960s did not reach Australia until the 1970s. In the shadow of the immensely unpopular Vietnam War, in which Australians were conscripted to fight alongside their American allies, and the rise of hippie youth culture all over the world, the time was ripe for a reengagement with the radical Blake. In 1971, John Edwards, writing in *Tharunka*, the student newspaper of the University of New South Wales, noted,

> The appeal of Blake to the young mind is couched in his revolutionary attitudes towards social tyrannies, in his championship of sex as a "gateway to paradise," in his impatience with legalism and strategies, but, most of all, in his most important trait—a red-blooded advocacy of the instinctual in life.

This is the same Blake celebrated by poets and musicians such as Jim Morrison, Allen Ginsberg, and Patti Smith as a radical, a revolutionary, a challenger of laws and conventions; pretty much the antithesis of the Blake celebrated in "William Blake in Australia." Around the same time (March 1971), the New Theatre in Sydney was celebrating radical thinkers with its production of *Tom Paine*, complete with quotations from Blake (see Zubrycki), and in March 1982 an education and English student, Grant Hehir, wrote and directed a biographical comedy, *Blake, a Play*, at the Adelaide Fringe Festival. The publicity characterized Blake as "poet, artist, rebel and dreamer," and as a contemporary of "Coleridge, Wordsworth, Wollstonecraft and George III." A fellow student, Bruce Stewart, composed an accompanying suite, mostly settings to poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*; the composer had intended the score to be performed by a string quartet, but the musicians couldn't be recruited and he was pressed into service on the Fender Rhodes electric piano instead. The fact that such a play flourished for an eleven-night run at the Fringe suggests that the radical Blake remained a popular topic well into the 1980s.

27 Much as Thomas Frank—in *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*—finds that countercultural impulses preceded the youth culture of 1960s America, Blake had been a source and influence for Australian writers since as early as the 1930s. A young James McAuley (1917–76), for one, declared in a University of Sydney student newspaper of 1937 that Blake was "'centuries ahead of his time,' anticipating Freud, Bertrand Russell, A. S. Neill, Aldous Huxley, and the Surrealists." Blake, he continued, "took as his subject the human soul and entered into regions which no man before him had explored" (quoted in Coleman 5). In 1943, McAuley co-authored what has been described as "*the* literary hoax of the twentieth century" (Hughes xvii) with Harold Stewart (1916–95). Stewart and McAuley penned sixteen poems (plus a prose preface) that they attributed to a fictitious mechanic, Ern Malley, who had purportedly died at the age of twenty-five. The poems were a tissue of misquotation and "false allusions," calculated to be "bad verse," as their authors later wrote, that would expose the inability of Aus-

tralia's avant-garde litterateurs to discriminate between "humorless nonsense" and "great poetry" (McAuley and Stewart 378). These surrealist poems are heavy with slant-wise references to canonical writers, Blake among them. "Sweet William," for instance, borrows vocabulary from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.[6] Its allusions are, characteristically, opaque, but the reader might find Theotormon's and Bromion's opposing incarnations of sexual violence in the description of how, "in a shuddering embrace / My toppling opposites commit / The obscene, the unforgivable rape." In the final lines, in which tearing cries give way to a "white swan of quietness" that "lies / Sanctified on my black swan's breast," a reader might see Oothoon's appeal to the eagles to "Rend away this defiled bosom."

28 McAuley's co-orchestration of the Ern Malley hoax positioned him as both the author of some of Australia's most experimental verse *and* as an arch-literary conservative. The conservatism would only become more entrenched, as he aligned himself with Australia's CIA-funded cultural affairs publication, *Quadrant*. By the 1960s, and now at the University of Tasmania, McAuley "equivocat[ed] over Blake," according to a former student (Pierce 23). In "Soundings" (1969), he dismisses the Blakean visionary impulse as childish: as a sixteen-year-old, he wondered, "Could I have visions, like William Blake?" He recalls how "At dusk I lingered in the yard," as the chickens went up to their roosts, "Pressing my five senses hard / For revelation self-induced"—*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in a prosaic suburban Sydney backyard (McAuley, *Surprises* 9).

29 While McAuley retreated from his undergraduate enthusiasm for Blake, for radical poets of the so-called "generation of '68," Blake was a crucial figure. John Tranter canonized this generation in *The New Australian Poetry* (1979) and produced a poetic genealogy that saw the Australian hippie poets inspired not only by the Americans—William Carlos Williams, Robert Duncan, Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Ginsberg, the Beats—but also by Blake and Percy Shelley, and finally by a trio of European *symbolistes*, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. The poems in *New Australian Poetry* evidence these influences. Bruce Beaver's "Letters to Live Poets (XII)," for instance, recalls "the day I walked on hands and knees / like Blake's Nebuchadnezzar, scenting the pit" (Tranter 5).

30 Robert Adamson (1943–2022) elegized poet Michael Dransfield, dead at the age of twenty-four in 1973 of a possible heroin overdose:

> Beautiful, ineffectual rebels of an imagined sky,
> We searched among the long dead for the living:
> Shelley, Blake: they were the harder stuff.
> That idea of ourselves as poets was an addiction
> more terminal than any opiate the chemists could refine.
> ("For Michael Dransfield")

Adamson's description of Shelley and Blake as "harder stuff" implies not only their heady addictiveness, but perhaps also their lawlessness: these were idols for an age of rebellion.

31 The extent of Blake's influence on the generation of '68 might be measured by his presence in the later writing of its key poets. In 2015, Adamson published "Poem Beginning with a Line from William Blake" (*Net Needle* 45). Beginning "I was in a Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation," the poem ventures into a series of nine tercets (Gig Ryan has suggested that these resemble the nine levels of Hell). Also in 2015, Joe Dolce (not one of Tranter's poets of '68, but a scion of a parallel American counterculture, migrating to Australia in 1978), who is famous for his paean to/parody of suburban multicultural identity, "Shaddap You Face," published "The Tyger." This rumination on the extinct marsupial thylacine, or "Tasmanian Tiger," references Blake's "The Tyger" in both its diction and its trochaic tetrameter.

Conclusion

32 In 1927, 100 years after Blake's death, Australian-born Leslie Holdsworth Allen gave a lecture on his "mind and myth" to the Australian English Association in Sydney. The English Association had been founded in 1923, primarily (as the editor of its magazine, *Southerly*, would declare) "to maintain the [English] language in Australia and encourage its right use," and it was therefore "the servant and assistant of all who speak the language and read or contribute to the literature" (Howarth 3). Although it professed to be free from "propaganda" and "politics," the group was part of a systematic project of cultural Anglicization that had been at work in the colonies of Australia—and now the nation of Australia—since at least the 1880s. Allen was a prominent member, a sometime war poet and lecturer in English at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. His lecture, published as a thirty-eight-page booklet, *William Blake: A Centenary Address*, was followed in 1928 by a similar lecture on "English qualities in Shakespeare." The appreciation of Blake and other English-born authors that Allen practiced and propagated had become one of the modes via which "cultural good relations between the mother and daughter countries" (as Howarth put it) could be maintained. But while Blake was being put to these ultimately

6. "Sweet William" and the other poems can be viewed in their entirety at <http://jacketmagazine.com/17/ern-poems.html>.

imperialist and fundamentally conservative purposes, he was also standing in the Australian imagination for political radicalism. For example, while Daryl Lindsay wrote that Blake "is essentially English," his nationality was an indifferent matter to Lindsay's nephew Jack Lindsay, who in 1927 published *William Blake: Creative Will and the Poetic Image* and contributed an essay to an edition of *Poetical Sketches*. For Jack Lindsay, Blake was attractive precisely because of his "political radicalism, his heretical antinomianism, his prophetical revolutionarism, his imaginative humanism, his pre-Marxian dialectics and the strong … materialistic element in his thought" (Lindberg 164). These profound differences in how Blake was received in Australia are not localizable to any particular moment in national history. As we have shown in this essay, for more than a century, Blake's work has prompted wildly conflicting responses and interpretations among Australian audiences. In part this is a result of Blake's own complex relation to English patriotism, but in larger part it reflects the complex lines of the artist and poet's transmission to a new setting in which feelings about England are anything but agreed upon.

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