A R T I C L E

Blake's Lawgiver, Newton's System, Reynolds's Justice

By Simon Schaffer

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1 THE figure of the Lawgiver plays a significant role in William Blake's carnivalesque early text, now known to scholarship as *An Island in the Moon*. Offered here are documentary and iconographic materials principally drawn from metropolitan sources of the 1780s that bear both on the identity of this character and, at more length, on the contemporary meanings of the epithet Blake chose: "Steelyard the Lawgiver." The initial section of this note presents some biographical information that might help reinforce what is now the common identification with John Flaxman, an artist then Blake's close friend and benevolent supporter, resident in Soho on Wardour Street near the Broad Street house Blake occupied in 1784–85. Following the influential proposal of David Erdman, circumstantial textual and iconographic evidence has often been used to bolster the decoding of Steelyard as Flaxman: the character's citations of currently modish texts of literature and philosophy; his errant study of works such as Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*; the songs he offers to the company; the "merry meeting" at Steelyard's own house in chapter 11. Something has been made, too, of the juxtaposition of the scenes from Joseph Addison's *Cato*, evoked in chapter 8 of *Island*, with Flaxman's 1779 self-portrait at his table, furnished with a pile of books and a human skull. Considerations are also offered here that tell against at least one alternative reading, which sees instead the character Inflammable Gass as a representation of Flaxman.[1]

2 However, it is certainly not to be assumed that each of the figures in Blake's satire corresponds exactly to a single encrypted, if playfully transfigured, individual. Some commentators have urged that the cast of *Island* should not best be seen as detailed portraits of particular members of Blake's coterie, but rather as subversive and playful conceits through which complex ethical and material roles could be explored. On this showing, the text is to be read as a precociously sophisticated satire, its ingenious plot development inhabited by composite moralized figures.[2] So the balance of this discussion reflects on the somewhat more telling issue of the symbolic meanings of the steelyard in 1780s London. The links between this literally and figuratively ambiguous device and law and lawgiving could have possessed an important set of contemporary connotations for Blake and his circle. Of special interest is the display of the steelyard as an emblem linked immediately to two of Blake's principal imaginative interlocutors and opponents, the supreme natural philosopher Isaac Newton and the dominant academician Joshua Reynolds.[3] These figurations of the device might not bear so directly on the identification of Steelyard as a specific individual, yet they do add to the significance to be attributed to Blake's use of the term in the aesthetic, religious, and political contexts of the period. That issue of the steelyard's resonances and its links with law occupies the latter and somewhat more substantial section here.

3 Consider first the key term "lawgiver." Erdman reckons that the artist and statuary Flaxman might well be seen as a lawgiver, concerned at one point with his "parish business," because, as the engraver and memoirist John Thomas Smith briefly recalls, Flaxman's fellow parishioners of St. Anne's, Soho, had elected him collector of the watch rate, the local contributory charge for street watchmen. In that Westminster parish, unusually, all ratepayers, male and female, were entitled to vote in an open vestry poll for parochial officers. The cost of the team of watchmen who patrolled the streets every night dressed in white coats and caps was substantial, prompting a new public subscription in 1791 to meet the charges. Eminent local residents, including Reynolds nearby at Leicester Square, were among these contributors.[4]

4 Like much of the material with which Blake experimented in *Island*, details of the political and social networks of 1780s London in the fraught conjuncture of postwar reform and urban crisis informed and may be illuminated by these jokey references. The role of the parish watchman was a focus of considerable legislative concern in this period. During the fiercely contested Westminster election of spring 1784, the opposition leader Charles James Fox was portrayed in graphic print as a parish watchman resistant

1. Erdman, *Prophet* 109-13; Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 10, 80; Castanedo 261-63. See Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 40-41 (ch. 8, line 1) and E 456.

2. Campbell; Rawlinson 104-07.

3. For London's geography and Newton and Reynolds as Blake's "great mental antagonists," see Michael 29.

4. Smith 2: 436-37; Rimbault 202-07.

to the regime's tyrannies. The following year, the government sought unsuccessfully to pass an act to overhaul metropolitan policing and centralize its surveillance, against which London lobbyists protested as an infringement of their freedoms. Blake himself would later turn in considerable force to such issues of metropolitan order, Satan's "Watch Fiends," and their relation to legal authority. Steelyard's opening line in *Island*—"It was a shameful thing that acts of parliament should be in a free state"—reflects on the relation between law and liberty.[5]

5 On the assumption that Steelyard the Lawgiver corresponds to a single known individual, and if the identification with Flaxman be accepted, there is a little more biographical evidence available to prompt connections between his affairs and those of the system of the law. In the 1784 Westminster election he voted for the government candidates, against Fox. In the election six years later, by contrast, Blake backed Fox. Erdman has noted how many radical artists, such as George Cumberland and James Barry, addressed their dedications to Fox and his cause. Flaxman did not. Named a "good and lawful man," an established Westminster resident of standing, Flaxman served on a coroner's inquest into a death by fire in St. Anne's parish in January 1784 and as a member of the Middlesex jury at the Old Bailey in December 1782 and again in January 1785, when he sat in no fewer than fifteen cases. Some of these details might have become a common reference about legal affairs in Blake's circle, especially in a milieu much concerned with the powers and authority of law in art, polity, and creation.[6]

6 A few scholars have, however, queried the identification of the Lawgiver with Flaxman.[7] In a study of Blake's intellectual milieux, Keri Davies denies that a parish rate collector could properly be labeled a lawgiver, and asserts instead that Flaxman is represented in *Island* under the figure of the antiquarian Etruscan Column, not least because of the sculptor's work for the preeminent merchant of so-called Etruscan designs, Josiah Wedgwood, whose London home and showroom were round the corner in Greek Street. It was Flaxman, too, who in 1784 convinced Wedgwood to launch his scheme to copy the celebrated Portland vase, and in the same year sought to aid Blake in winning a commission for allegorical ceiling paintings of "Etruscan" design for Wedgwood's Etruria Hall.[8] It has been pointed out that the reevaluation of the provenance of these antiquities informed the extensive burlesques of antiquarianism and patrician taste in *Island*.[9]

7 Even the fact that Flaxman held such a post as parish watch-rate collector has not always been accepted. G. E. Bentley, Jr., cited a passage from Flaxman's sister-in-law Maria Denman, who in 1835 annotated Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* with the cautionary note that "he scrupulously avoided all parish business throughout his life."[10] Bentley did later locate archival evidence in the Westminster rate books that Flaxman was indeed made collector of the watch rate for the King Square (Soho Square) division of the parish in May 1782. But this simply prompted Bentley to conjecture that Flaxman appears in *Island* under quite a different guise, Inflammable Gass the Windfinder, since this character, portrayed as natural philosopher and chaotic showman, has "a place of profit that forces [him] to go to church."[11]

8 These ingenious views can be countered. The claim that Inflammable Gass the Windfinder not be identified as Flaxman, but rather be matched with the chemist and entrepreneur William Nicholson, has attracted some scholarly attention. Wedgwood's business representative from 1777, Nicholson spent the years from 1782 at Warwick Street in Soho and then nearby on Oxford Street. It is known that Blake engraved the vignette for his successful natural philosophy textbook in 1782.[12] In late 1783 Nicholson became secretary of a Coffee House Philosophical Society based near St. Paul's, and subsequently on Chancery Lane, a group of chemists, natural philosophers, medics, and manufacturers, the records of whose discussions on current chemistry, electricity, steam engineering, and commerce he conscientiously kept. Furthermore, in 1785 he briefly gained profitable employment as secretary to Wedgwood's commercial lobby group, the General Chamber of Manufacturers of Great Britain. The minute books of the Philosophical Society and the biography composed by Nichol-

5. Beattie 154-59; Michael 31; Elliott 551, 556; E 451.
6. Westminster Pollbooks, 1784, www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=pollbook_265-26593&terms=Flaxman#highlight; Coroners' Inquests into Suspicious Deaths, 1784, www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?id=WACWIC65224_n20-3&div=WACWIC65224IC652240007#highlight; Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 4 Dec. 1782, www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/f17821204-1?text=flaxman; Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 12 Jan. 1785, www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/f17850112-1?text=flaxman. For dedications to Fox, see Erdman, *Prophet* 162n40.
7. Blackstone, for example, reckons that Steelyard must be the "humourless" radical philosopher William Godwin (23-24).
8. Davies 231; Irwin 22-23; Uglow 328; Bentley, *Stranger* 86.
9. Brylowe 96-97.
10. Peter Cunningham 60; Bentley, "Blake's Engravings" 162n5.
11. Bentley, *Stranger* 82 un. See Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 35 (ch. 4, line 10) and E 452.
12. Baine and Baine; Heppner. Heppner (196) cites the three rules of philosophizing that Nicholson prefaces to his *Introduction to Natural Philosophy* (1: 6), comparing them with the principles that Blake denies in *There Is No Natural Religion*. Nicholson's rules are in fact copied directly from the first three rules of reasoning at the start of book 3 of Newton's *Principia* (794-95).

son's son, both now published, confirm his interests in just the range of topics satirically associated with the activities of Inflammable Gass: pneumatic and chemical phenomena, optical and thermal experiments, and, in December 1784, complex theories about the cause and directions of the winds. It may also be telling that just as in the opening chapter of *Island*, immediately before Steelyard's appearance, Inflammable Gass defends Voltaire, who "found out a number of Queries in Philosophy" and "was the Glory of France," so it is possible that Nicholson translated Voltaire's writings on Newton at the suggestion of the radical bookseller Joseph Johnson.[13]

9 The concern here is rather less in matching exotic names to defined persons. Yet, Blake's choice of epithets throughout *Island* must be taken as deliberate and pointed. The scatological opportunities offered by the nickname Inflammable Gass were evidently plentiful. In his close reading of Blake's satirical text, Nick Rawlinson claims that "inflammable air" was a "common comic term."[14] This is so, but the different term "inflammable *gas*" was itself at that moment very new indeed. Contemporary chemists, including Nicholson, typically wrote of "airs." The chemical expression "gas" as reference to some of these airs, taken over in translation from French pneumatics, first appeared only during the later 1770s, and "inflammable gas" was then almost always used in the press solely for the artificial air (our hydrogen gas) with which from 1783 first the French, then the British, filled their aerostatic balloons.[15] It has often been remarked how signally the contemporary fashionable balloon craze is registered in *Island*.[16]

10 Reflection on the hardware and practices of natural philosophy in London in the period of *Island* also decisively aids interpretation of the comparably significant term "Steelyard," where resonances might seem at first less clear. Commentators have hazarded that Blake's term might suggest "not only strength but harshness and inflexibility"; or else that the name embodies the oxymoronic juxtaposition of law and theft.[17] In fact, expositions of Newtonian mechanics in successive eighteenth-century textbooks in metropolitan natural philosophy, certainly including that of Nicholson, give details of how steelyards worked and the principles that they were supposed to embody. Chemists also often used these instruments in their cabinets and laboratories.[18]

11 The design and use of steelyards arose from very ancient devices in both eastern Asia and the Mediterranean, of significantly broad and ambiguous functions. In the imperial Roman *statera*, the direct precedent for the more recent steelyard, the principle of the familiar two-armed balance was reversed, keeping the instrument's axis fixed and making the arms unequal. The object to be assayed was hung from the shorter beam. A standard counterweight was then moved along the graduated longer beam until balance was struck. The known and unknown were somehow brought into equilibrium by reading a scale. Thus, instead of the need to provide a set of standardized weights, as in one use of the common balance, here it was necessary to calibrate the instrument itself. Steelyards' reliability demanded extensive legally imposed collective regulation of their production and use. Whereas the common balance might indeed be taken to symbolize itself, a device representing equality of judgment through an instrument of decision, the uncertain inequalities on which the steelyard relied tended to complicate or even frustrate its symbolic use.[19]

12 Steelyards were notable because they deliberately relied on the indispensable agency of the human performing the act of weighing. This stress on ingenious deliberation seems to have been their symbolic sense throughout their history, during which equal-arm balances were, in contrast, often taken to embody the more inhuman and mechanical act of judgment.[20] Furthermore, steelyards of different designs were used in eighteenth-century Europe both for bulk commodities, such as grain or coal, and for the most exquisite judgments, such as coins or jewels. They belonged both to markets and to cabinets. Devices startlingly capable of correcting and of fomenting deceit, these tools were thus objects of major concern for commercial regulators.

13 When their accuracy was doubted, steelyards were subject to public trial in the marketplace, their values witnessed and testified. Newspaper readers were assured that the very best means to check the true metal value of a coin, often altered by clipping and forgery in the Georgian monetary system, was to use a steelyard.[21] In exact contrast, Ipswich surveyors declared that customers "who buy goods weighed by steel-

13. Levere and Turner 87; Nicholson, Jr., 45; Nicholson 2: 63-71. Many thanks to Sue Durrell for her expert help on this topic.
14. Rawlinson 107.
15. Robbins; Levere and Turner 92. The earliest use of the term "inflammable gas" in the press seems to be the reprint of Antoine Deparcieux's letter on balloon ascents in the *Morning Herald*, 17 Sept. 1783, 3. Compare the *Morning Herald*, 23 Feb. 1784, 1, on the display of Montgolfier's balloon at the Lyceum on the Strand: "This brilliant and most magnificent spectacle … contains about 2000 gallons of inflammable gas, … and the whole exhibits the appearance of a huge world, invisibly suspended by Omnipotence.…"
16. England 452-53; Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 14.
17. Webster 18-19; Rawlinson 133.
18. Whiston 2; Desaguliers 1: 92; Nicholson 1: 55; Beretta and Brenni 194-95.
19. Kisch 77; Büttner and Renn 767-70; Biagoli 301.
20. Leone 49-51; Vankeerberghen.
21. *Ipswich Journal*, 11 Aug. 1764, 4; *Kentish Gazette*, 13 Sept. 1774, 4.

yards may blame themselves" if they have been cheated, "that manner of weighing goods being not warranted by law," while in 1779 Birmingham bailiffs scoured the city confiscating steelyards, "they being an unlawful weight by which many frauds are committed."[22] Ambiguous in use and in design, steelyards were also highly valued objects of judgment and connoisseurship. Soon after the young monarch's accession, the eminent Fleet Street instrument maker George Adams provided George III with a well-made replica of a Roman steelyard for the royal apparatus collections (see illus. 1).

14 In 1782 the fashionable Hanover Square mechanic and designer John Joseph Merlin supplied a fine steelyard to Samuel Johnson to be used as a coin balance. Thomas Gainsborough's portrait of Merlin, exhibited at the Royal Academy the same year, shows the elegantly dressed instrument maker with the steelyard in his hands. Horace Walpole collected a Chinese steelyard for his Strawberry Hill cabinets, as documented in his published inventory of the house. The cunning merchants' device had become a commodity of polite taste.[23]

15 During the 1780s Blake would have known of at least two important symbolic uses of the steelyard on show in London, one eloquently associated with Newton and the other with Reynolds. Both figures are named in *Island*. Newton appears in the song of the "mathematician" Obtuse Angle in the ninth chapter, where he is wittily associated with other protagonists of philosophical and theological controversy in the epoch of the Glorious Revolution and its aftermath.[24] The president of the Royal Academy is briefly mentioned in the satire's seventh chapter—Blake's earliest reference to Reynolds—through Reynolds's peremptory advice to artistic tyros, in a passage inserted just before Steelyard's appearance "at his table." In Blake's cosmology

22. *Ipswich Journal*, 23 Jan. 1768, 2; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 15 Feb. 1779, 3, and 11 Oct. 1779, 3.

23. Adams pl. 9, fig. 42; Walpole 107; French et al. 43, 71-72.

24. Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 51 (ch. 9, line 108) and E 460; Rawlinson 146-47.

1. Steelyard at court. Model of a Roman *statera*: a steelyard made for George III by George Adams in 1762. Science Museum, London, object number 1927-1205. Image © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum.

Newton and Reynolds were unusually singled out as figures of tyrannic power. These were two of the most important protagonists of forms of lawgivers' rule against which he would rebel, a system of power inimical to antinomian principles. Blake ultimately reckoned the sources of the aesthetic program espoused by Reynolds sprang from Newton's philosophy.[25] In both the specific cases of the steelyard's symbolism described below, the monumental designs associated with Newton and with Reynolds, the figure of this instrument was authoritatively imposed as part of a commemoration of reason's virtues within a preexisting gothic structure—Westminster Abbey and an Oxford college chapel, respectively.

16 On Newton's death in 1727, his nephew and successor as head of the Royal Mint, John Conduitt, began preparing plans for a suitable memorial for a man he judged a saint worthy of canonization. Newton had in fact immodestly made erection of the memorial a condition of Conduitt's inheritance. The great man's heir corresponded with the Augustan arbiter of taste, Alexander Pope, about the choice of an epitaph, and convinced the authorities to erect a massive monument visible to all in Westminster Abbey, to be set in the choir screen then under reconstruction by the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor. Conduitt sketched the outlines of a complex allegorical structure, ornamented below with a dramatic bas-relief displaying a series of putti employing a range of instruments to evoke Newton's achievements in optics, chemistry, astronomy, and the minting of coin. "In the Mainground," Conduitt proposed be set "a boy weighing in a stillyard … the sun against all the other planets" (see illus. 2).[26]

17 It had become common in the decorative imagery of natural philosophical and mathematical works to represent such cherubic figures at play with the hardware of experiment and calculation. Part of the point was to link natural

25. Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 40 (ch. 7, line 10) and E 456. For Blake on Newton and Reynolds, see E 660; Postle, "'Sir Joshua and His Gang'" 113, 119; Thompson 113-14.

26. Conduitt; Haskell 2-3; Keynes 97.

2. Steelyard and the Newtonian system. Relief on the monument to Isaac Newton, Westminster Abbey. From right to left, putti manipulate a chemical furnace, molds for coins, an optical prism, a steelyard balancing the Sun against the planets, and a Newtonian reflecting telescope. Designed by John Conduitt 1727–28, carved by John Michael Rysbrack 1730–31. By kind permission of the dean and chapter of Westminster.

philosophy with domestic familiarity; part, more directly, was to draw attention to the equipment rather than the personnel of practical and experimental forms of knowledge. In 1711, for example, the crucial publication of a selection of Newton's writings on analysis was ornamented with images of putti at work on geometrical construction and a range of architectural and practical trades linked to Newton's own program.[27] In the case of the abbey monument, the reference of this specific use by the putto of the steelyard as balance between the Sun and its system was to the decisive proposition 8 of the third book of Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, on the infinite extent of the inverse square law of gravitation. This is the passage where Newton most powerfully seeks to demonstrate that his laws of weight and gravity govern all matter in the universe. In a remarkable corollary, he sets out to show that (as he puts it in the first edition of his work) "God placed the planets at different distances from the Sun so that each one might, according to the degree of its density, enjoy a greater or lesser amount of heat from the Sun." This is, significantly, the sole passage in the first edition of *Principia* that mentions God.[28]

18 The brief for monument and relief, which were funded by Conduitt himself, was given to the architect William Kent, then also occupied with the construction for the queen at Richmond of a gallery of worthies, including Newton. Association with the prince of philosophers was a commonplace in the commemorative and aggressive Georgian state. The abbey project was completed by the leading sculptor Michael Rysbrack. Kent's initial sketch for the memorial included the layout of the relief with the steelyard at its center, and while Rysbrack then altered some details of this scheme, he preserved this figure in pride of place beneath the reclining figure of Newton himself.[29] Unveiled in 1731, the Newton monument drew admiring comments from the London press: "Another boy is weighing the Sun and Planets with a Stilliard, the Sun being near the centre on one side, and the Planets on the other, alluding to a celebrated proposition in his *Principia*."[30]

19 The Newtonian relief, including its representation of steelyard and other apparatus, was likely copied at once for Conduitt's own residence, shown there above the fireplace and beneath Newton's bust in William Hogarth's celebrated 1732 conversation piece, a representation of a theatrical performance for visiting royalty at Conduitt's house. A further plaster copy of the relief survives above one of the doors of the fine Georgian entrance hall at Saltram House in Devon, where it was installed by the Parker family, close allies of Reynolds, as an emblem of the elementary powers of air. Indeed, the iconography was distributed well into the century. In 1792, as part of his vast Hogarth project to which he also recruited Blake, the London publisher and businessman John Boydell arranged the reproduction of the Conduitt family painting, with its image of putti at play with a steelyard.[31]

20 Guidebooks and prints kept these details of the Newtonian apotheosis in public view. A 1761 guide to the abbey, much plagiarized in subsequent decades, recorded that "the device of weighing the Sun by the Steelyard has been thought at once bold and striking."[32] Between 1774 and 1778, Blake worked in the abbey as apprentice to James Basire on the preparation of images for Richard Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* of the tombs in Edward the Confessor's chapel, with scaffolding put up in the space behind the altar so as to complete his drawings. Blake's way to his strenuous work passed the choir screen and its spectacular monument to Newton. There was a telling contrast between the gothic tombs that preoccupied the young apprentice and the classical idiom of that sepulchre erected in honor of the master of astronomical law.[33]

21 An even more direct link between figures of steelyard and lawgiver was evident in the work of Reynolds from exactly the same period. In summer 1777 New College, Oxford commissioned the successful glass painter Thomas Jervais to produce a new set of windows for its chapel. The designs were assigned to Reynolds, who by early 1778 had set out a scheme with the figures of Faith, Hope, and Charity and the four cardinal virtues laid out across the west window's lower divisions as "a proper rustic base of foundation for the support of the Christian religion." Just as in the monumental schemes at Westminster Abbey that involved considerable changes to the medieval structure, so in the New College project the scheme demanded the removal of much of the gothic tracery from the window and its replacement with modern painted glass. By October that year Reynolds had begun to compose the original figures of the virtues, Justice among them.[34]

22 It has often been remarked that Reynolds's image of Justice for New College was startling and original, a dramatic break with the canonical form set out in such handbooks as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a new version of which appeared with Reynolds as subscriber in 1779. Reynolds's Justice is,

27. Heilbron; Bellhouse 104-08.
28. Newton 219, 814; Whiteside 131.
29. Bryant 12-23.
30. *Grub-Street Journal* no. 68, 22 Apr. 1731, copied in *Gentleman's Magazine* 1, Apr. 1731, 159.
31. Craske; Asfour.
32. Henry 180, copied in Thornton 114, which is cited in Rawlinson 119.
33. Crosby; Brylowe 92.
34. Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds* 168-73.

3. Steelyard and the law. Figure of Justice for the west window of the chapel of New College, Oxford. Stipple engraving by Georg Siegmund Facius and Johann Facius after Josiah Boydell after Joshua Reynolds, June 1782. Credit: Artokoloro/SuperStock.

for example, not blindfolded, a marked departure from the emblem tradition that blinded Justice to represent impartiality. Much attention has been directed to his decision to show her instead as shading her eyes, a gesture matching that in which he portrayed himself in his remarkable self-portrait painted three decades earlier, and plausibly to be interpreted as a sign of vision's judgmental discrimination.[35]

23 It has also been noted that Reynolds decided to replace the conventional pair of balance scales in the figure's hand with a steelyard, the design of which closely matches that of the model Roman *statera* made by Adams for the monarch (see illus. 3). In the discourse Reynolds delivered to the Royal Academy students in December 1778, a text Blake would later annotate with fury, the president insists that "an artist is obliged for ever to hold a balance in his hand by which he must determine the value of different qualities."[36] Reynolds completed the depiction of Justice in 1779 and it was rapidly transferred to glass, along with images of the other virtues. In April 1780, Jervais opened an exhibition of his stained glass at the celebrated showroom in Cockspur Street run by the entrepreneurial clockmaker and engineer Christopher Pinchbeck, where floors were stocked with novel machines, curios, and instruments. Alongside "an extensive variety of agreeable subjects," featuring the effects of light and fire in dark galleries illuminated by concealed lamps, Reynolds's figures of Justice and Prudence, now transferred to glass, went on show "large as life." Journalists commented that these figures "go far beyond any thing ever attempted before by any artist whatever, far surpassing even the old glass painting in our Gothick cathedrals."[37]

35. Resnik and Curtis 98; Manderson and Martinez 250-52.

36. Reynolds 278.

37. *Morning Post*, 12 Apr. 1780, 1; *Morning Chronicle*, 1 June 1780, 2. For Pinchbeck's repository, see Pérez 31.

24 Immediately afterwards, on 1 May 1780, the annual exhibition at Reynolds's own Royal Academy in the newly rebuilt Somerset House also hosted his original painting of Justice as part of the display. The work attracted considerable comment in the metropolitan press. Some were admiring: "This is a most beautiful figure, elegantly composed, and finely described." More were hostile, and it is significant that the strange choice of steelyard seemed to attract particular attention. Even Reynolds's erstwhile supporters reckoned that the depiction of such an instrument as an attribute of Justice revealed "the taste of a Petit-Maître." His critics were harsher, claiming that the image "is emblematically repugnant to the antients' ideas of Justice, all of whom represent her holding scales equally poized; but Sir Joshua has, in violation of this, decked her hands with a pair of stilliards, in imitation no doubt of the wife of a Clare-market butcher weighing out a leg of mutton to her dainty customer!" Clare Market, just across the Strand from the Royal Academy, housed a major meat market, its surroundings unambiguously associated with plebeian commerce. The marks of class and judgment in Reynolds's image, in what might well be taken to be a lawgiver with her steelyard, were seemingly unmistakable.[38]

25 The glass painting of Justice was installed in its place in the New College chapel during August 1780. Reynolds's figure stayed in public notice: in June 1782, the German emigré engravers Georg and Johann Facius completed a fine published version on the basis of a drawing by Josiah Boydell. The print was then distributed by Josiah's uncle John Boydell as part of a 1785 collection of Reynolds's images for the west window of the chapel.[39] Observers commented on the apparent contradiction between the "Gothic taste" of the ancient chapel and what they judged the "half-dress'd languishing harlots" that Reynolds and Jervais had introduced into the building. Guidebooks to the city's monuments expressed what had become a characteristically ambivalent view: in the chapel visitors could see the figure of Justice holding "in her left hand the Steelyard, a kind of balance less cumbrous, if not less vulgar, than the scales which are usually given her."[40]

26 The steelyard carried by Reynolds's Justice evidently became a public topic of debate and wit, attending to its commercial and its moral value. Blake and his closest colleagues were part of the milieux in which these values were at stake. The link between justice and the steelyard could easily become a standing joke. Blake joined the Royal Academy schools in October 1779, and his first exhibit, *Death of Earl Goodwin*, was shown the following year, where it appeared in the very same display as Reynolds's figure. Also in the 1780 exhibition was Flaxman's extraordinary sketch for a gothicized monument to Thomas Chatterton, a work then judged as "of infinite merit."[41] The controversy about the authenticity of Chatterton's Rowley poems, which preoccupied the public press in the 1777–80 period, corresponded with Flaxman's production of this commemorative scheme, shown in the same rooms as Reynolds's painting of Justice with her steelyard. The Chatterton debate makes a crucial appearance in Blake's satire, and important connections have been detected between the respective visions of Blake and Flaxman of the death of the Bristol poet and its spiritual sense.[42]

27 As the text of *An Island in the Moon* begins to reveal, Blake's own sense of place at the academy was at least complex, and his hostility to Reynolds's judgment increasingly intense and unforgiving. Blake stopped display at the academy's exhibition from 1785 for fourteen years. This conjuncture has been described as a "creative moratorium," for which *Island* might be read as an experimental and jocular exploration.[43] The figure of the steelyard, with accompanying meanings linking monumental virtue and active judgment, played its role in this set of associations. Not the least of Blake's virtues was his precocious skill at balancing law and laughter.

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38. Mannings no. 2120; Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds* 180; *Morning Post*, 2 May 1780, 3.
39. *West Window*, print 6.
40. Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds* 183-84; *New Oxford Guide* 48.
41. Erdman, *Prophet* 45-46; Irwin 14; *Candid Review* 32.
42. England 534; Blake, *Island*, edited by Phillips, 5, 76, 79-81; Pressly 178-82.
43. Ward 81; Campbell 147.

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