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A R T I C L E

The House of Aumont and Blake's *French Revolution*

By Matthew M. Davis

Matthew M. Davis (mmd6w@virginia.edu) teaches English at the University of Virginia. He is currently at work on a play set during the French Revolution, which involves some of the historical figures treated in this article.

1 In William Blake's *French Revolution* (1791) there is a minor character who is identified only as "Aumont."[1] He makes his first appearance in lines 159-67, where he informs King Louis XVI and the nobles that the Abbé de Seyes has left the assembly hall and is making his way to the palace to speak to them.[2] Aumont is mentioned a second time in lines 198-201, when Seyes actually arrives. In W. H. Stevenson's annotated edition of Blake's poetry, a footnote identifies this character as "the Duke of Aumont, later a commander of the National Guard in Paris, and in charge of the troops leading Louis from Versailles to Paris on 5 October [1789]—which B[lake] probably saw as a pro-revolutionary act, contradicting Aumont's earlier membership in the Second Estate of Nobility."[3] Stevenson's notes have been of great use to me over the years, but I have doubts about the usefulness of this particular note. For starters, I am not convinced that Stevenson has identified the right member of the House of Aumont, and even if he has identified the right individual, I feel confident that he has not selected the most relevant episode from that person's life to highlight.

The Brothers Aumont

2 There were actually two members of the House of Aumont who were active in French political affairs during the early years of the revolution—Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont (1732–99) and Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont (1736–1814). These men were both sons of Louis Marie Augustin d'Aumont de Rochebaron, fifth Duke of Aumont (1709–82).[4] The elder son, Louis-Marie Guy, succeeded his father as Duke of Aumont, supported the revolution, commanded a unit of the national guard, and led soldiers loyal to the French Republic. The younger son, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste, succeeded his father as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi* (first gentleman of the king's bedchamber) and was given a ducal title of his own, Duke of Villequier Aumont; he opposed the revolution, remained unswervingly loyal to Louis XVI, and eventually served in the court in exile of Louis XVIII. The former is the person identified by Stevenson; the latter is a rival candidate I wish to bring forward for consideration in this essay.

3 These two men have confusingly similar names, and they held many of the same noble titles at different times in their lives. It is therefore difficult to write about them without causing confusion. I will attempt to minimize that confusion by using either their full names or the ducal titles that they held and chiefly used in 1789 and early 1790, when Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont was the Duke of Aumont and Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was the Duke of Villequier Aumont.

Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont (1732–99)

4 As the elder surviving son of a peer of the realm, Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont was raised in wealth and splendor.[5] He was married at the age of fifteen to a thirteen-year-old

For assistance with this paper, I am indebted to Blake scholars David Fallon and E. D. Hirsch, French historians William Doyle and Lynn Hunt, University of Virginia librarians Sherri Brown and Miguel Valladares-Llata, UVA-based (and UVA-funded) research assistants Kathryn Webb-Destefano and Caitlin Taphorn, undergraduates in a seminar I taught on Blake at UVA in the spring of 2019, and several readers at *Blake*.

1. *The French Revolution* may have been "a poem, in seven books," as the proofs state, but only the first book has survived. Book 1 was issued in page proofs, dated 1791, by the radical printer Joseph Johnson, but it was never published. It consists of 306 verses.

Except as noted, all citations of Blake's poetry are to the Erdman edition. I cite *The French Revolution* (pp. 285-300) by line number. For other works, I give plate and line numbers, as well as Erdman page numbers using the shorthand E.

2. Although the king and the assembly were based at Versailles in July 1789, Blake locates both in Paris. He refers to Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), the Abbé de Sieyès, using an alternative spelling, Seyes. In this article, I use Sieyès for the historical figure and Seyes for the character in Blake's poem.

3. See Blake, *Complete Poems*, ed. Stevenson, 140, note on line 159. Alicia Ostriker has a similar note in her edition (896). "5 October" in Stevenson's edition is an error: the king's forced journey from Versailles to Paris was actually undertaken the next day, 6 October 1789.

4. For substantial biographical accounts of the fifth duke, see Hamy 203-19; Woelmont de Brumagne 18-22; and Levantal 426-28. Although all members of the family used the name Aumont de Rochebaron, I have omitted de Rochebaron in subsequent mentions to avoid needless repetition.

5. Biographical information on the Duke of Aumont comes from various reference works listed in the works cited under "Aumont, Louis-Marie Guy" and "Aumont, Jacques," and also from Sellier 230-31;

cousin, Louise-Jeanne de Durfort de Duras, Duchess of Mazarin, and thus became the Duke of Mazarin. As a young man, he served in the army, frequented the theatre, and gained some notoriety for his extramarital liaisons with actresses and opera singers. He was also known for walking with a pronounced limp and for imitating the manners, speech, and dress of the "patriot king," Henri IV.[6]

5 Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont's first wife died in 1781, and his father passed away in 1782. He succeeded his father as Duke of Aumont, but not as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*. That honor, which would typically have passed to him as the elder son, went instead (along with some others) to his younger brother.[7] This led to a situation in which the elder son was the Duke of Aumont and titular head of the family, but the younger son was *premier gentilhomme*, with vastly superior access to the monarch. The unusual division of honors between the brothers seems to foreshadow—and may have contributed to—a subsequent division between the two on political issues.

6 In the late 1780s, the Duke of Aumont was a prominent member of a group of nobles who were at odds with Louis XVI and the royal court. The central figure in this group was the king's cousin, the Duke of Orléans. In the spring of 1789, the Duke of Aumont was one of a handful of peers who enthusiastically supported the unification of the three estates and the reforming initiatives of the newly formed National Constituent Assembly. During the summer of that year, while the assembly was still meeting at Versailles, he hosted a series of soirées for members at his country house in Viroflay, a mile or two away. Reform-minded representatives would gather there in the evenings to discuss the events of the day and make plans for the next day's session. Some of the regular attendees began referring to themselves as the Society of Viroflay, and this society eventually evolved into the Breton Club, which, in turn, became the Jacobin Club.[8]

7 In July 1789, Louis XVI dismissed his reform-minded prime minister Jacques Necker and began to mass troops on the outskirts of Paris. Many Parisians were convinced that the king was preparing to use force to disperse the assembly and declare martial law. Some decided to arm themselves in anticipation of an attack. They poured out onto the streets, seizing weapons and ammunition and capturing the Bastille. The Duke of Aumont supported the people in these actions and so became a favorite of the revolutionary party.[9] When the assembly called for the formation of a new, bourgeois militia—the national guard—the Duke of Aumont was offered the command. He hesitated and, as a result, was passed over in favor of the Marquis de Salle, who was himself soon replaced by the Marquis de Lafayette.[10]

8 Although the Duke of Aumont was not given supreme command of the national guard, he did lead the sixth division, a reserve unit that was called into service only in times of crisis.[11] He and the men who served under him played a role in several important events. For example, they supported the Parisian protestors during the women's march on Versailles in October 1789, accompanying the citizens on 5 October and escorting the king back to the capital the next day, in accordance with the will of the people.[12] Throughout 1789 and 1790, the Duke of Aumont consistently displayed loyalty to the people and the assembly.

9 On 4 August 1789, the assembly passed a set of laws known as the August Decrees, abolishing many traditional privileges of the nobility.[13] Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont supported the decrees and declared that he wished to be known simply as "citoyen Jacques Aumont."[14] When the assembly

Hamy 219; Woelmont de Brumagne 23-25; Levantal 428-29; and the website *Les premiers seigneurs d'Aumont*.

6. The *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* has this to say about his imitation of Henri IV: "Il était boiteux et contrefait, ce qui ne l'empêchait pas de pousser jusqu'au ridicule la prétention d'imiter, sinon la démarche, du moins les manières, les bons mots et le costume du roi Henri IV, avec lequel on lui avait persuadé qu'il avait quelque ressemblance" (54: 302). According to the *Biographie nouvelle des contemporains*, the Duke of Aumont was "[un] imitateur puéril de la démarche et des habitudes de Henri IV, telles que la tradition nous les a transmises, il répétait jusqu'à ses mots consacrés, qui accompagneront toujours la mémoire de ce prince" (1: 317). See also Sellier 231; *Biographie universelle et portative* 1: 171; *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* 1: 946; and Woelmont de Brumagne 24.

7. Hamy 7.

8. For an up-to-date general history of the French Revolution, revisionist in its intellectual orientation but reliable for dates and basic facts, see Simon Schama's *Citizens*. For the Duke of Orléans and the opposition to the court, see Ambrose. For the meetings at the Duke of Aumont's house and the Society of Viroflay, see Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary* 133; Wick 94-95; Espinchal 5, 230; Woelmont de Brumagne 24; and *Les premiers seigneurs d'Aumont*.

9. For an interesting report on the Duke of Aumont's response to the famous "Aux armes!" speech delivered by Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal on 12 July 1789, see La Marle 257-58.

10. Some reports indicate that the Duke of Aumont declined the position; others say that he merely requested twenty-four hours to consider and was then passed over, since the matter was felt to be extremely urgent. See *Annales Parisiennes* 23; Woelmont de Brumagne 24; Sellier 231; and *Révolutions de Paris* 18. Extracts from the last of these were translated and printed in British papers, including the *Weekly Entertainer* for 27 June 1791.

11. See *Biographie universelle et portative* 1: 170-71; *English Chronicle* for 12-15 September 1789.

12. For the Duke of Aumont's role in the events of 5-6 October 1789, see Gottschalk 1: 340-47; Lamartine 2: 453; Sellier 231; Montjoie 2: 9-10; Poisson 1: 136; Le Roi 2: 84; and *Pièces justificatives* 22-23.

13. For a discussion of legislation against the nobility, see Doyle 204-36.

14. On citoyen Jacques, see Mazas 4: 259n2; Woelmont de Brumagne 24.

went one step further on 19 June 1790, doing away with all titles and orders of hereditary nobility, he became a *ci-devant* (former) duke.[15] During the same year, the periodical *Lanterne magique nationale* published vignettes of some remarkable scenes in the progress of the revolution. In one, the *ci-devant* Duke of Aumont is described, walking with a limp and vowing "death to all aristocrats."[16]

10 In May 1791, Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont was appointed to a new position as a lieutenant general in the army (a separate entity from the national guard).[17] He happened to be in Paris on 21 June, preparing to report to his new commanding officer, when he was caught up in the riots provoked by the flight of the royal family and seized by an angry mob who believed that a unit of the national guard under his command had stood guard at the Tuileries Palace the previous night and allowed the royal family to escape. As an English paper reported, "The populace had got hold of him in his way to the Hotel de Ville [city hall], and had already prepared the fatal lanthorn [the lantern on which he would be hanged]; nor was he rescued till the greatest part of his hair was torn from his head, and he had received several wounds."[18] Saved by the timely arrival of a unit of the national guard with Lafayette at its head, he wrote a statement in his own defense,[19] in which he declared that he had not been guarding the king the previous night and had in fact been near the king's person on only two occasions in the past several months, on days when his division was called up for active service. He signed the statement on 21 June, Lafayette certified the truth of its contents the same day, and the next day it was presented to the mayor of Paris and the city council. Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont appeared before the assembly a few days later and swore an oath of loyalty to that body. His declarations were accepted, and he went on to serve in the army, retiring from military service in 1793. He was arrested during the terror and held in jail for a few weeks in 1794; he secured his release, however, in the early days of the Thermidorian reaction by representing himself as citoyen Jacques, a simple farmer.[20] In November 1794, he remarried, joining himself to a member of the third estate who is referred to in contemporary documents as "citoyenne Marie-Louise Klein,"[21] and he lived out his last few years in the country, playing no further role in military or political affairs.

Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont (1736–1814)

11 Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was the younger brother of Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont.[22] From 1774 until the death of his brother in 1799, he was known mainly as the Duke of Villequier, but also as the Duke of Villequier Aumont.[23] Villequier Aumont was the official form—and the one he used when signing documents—but Villequier was much more widely used, perhaps in part because it helped to distinguish him from his brother. In this paper I will refer to him, as his contemporaries did, mostly as the Duke of Villequier but occasionally as the Duke of Villequier Aumont.[24]

12 As a young man, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont served in the military, fighting in the American War of Independence and rising to the rank of lieutenant general.[25] During the first few years of the revolution, he was known as a courtier and one of the closest advisors of Louis XVI; as we have seen, he followed in his father's footsteps as one of the *premiers gentilshommes de la chambre du roi*.

15. A list of demoted nobles, with the Duke of Aumont second and the Duke of Villequier fifth, was printed in several London papers, including the *Public Advertiser* for 9 July 1790. Villequier's name is misspelled and the name of his paternal family is wrongly reported as Le Tellier (his wife's family name).

16. *Lanterne magique nationale* no. 3 (1790): 4. The Viscount de Mirabeau (1754–92), editor of this journal, was the brother of the revolutionary politician Honoré Mirabeau.

17. For his military career, see the *Dictionnaire … des généraux français* 1: 245-46; *Les premiers seigneurs d'Aumont*.

18. The account is from *Woodfall's Register* (London), 28 June 1791. See also the *Whitehall Evening Post* for 27 June 1791; Lenotre, *The Flight of Marie Antoinette* 108 and n1; Godechot 137; Lenotre, *Le drame de Varennes* 132-33; Hamilton 21; Compte 185; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 98 and n22; Vaissière 292; and *Les premiers seigneurs d'Aumont*.

19. *Déclaration de M. d'Aumont* 1-5; *Archives parlementaires* 27: 406.

20. His arrest was reported in English papers, including the *Sun* for 8 February 1794; for his release, see Woelmont de Brumagne 24; Gendron 8; Poisson 4: 6; and *Les premiers seigneurs d'Aumont*.

21. On this marriage, see Levantal 438; Woelmont de Brumagne 25; Turquan 1: 10; and the account in the *Dictionnaire de biographie française*.

22. Biographical information on the Duke of Villequier comes from various reference works listed in the works cited under "Aumont, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste" (with spelling variations, and with and without certain hyphens) and "Villequier"; see also Sellier 231-32; Woelmont de Brumagne 24-29; *Annuaire de la pairie* 93; Bouchet 15-16; and "Maison de Villequier-Aumont." His name is sometimes given as Louis-Marie Alexandre d'Aumont; I suspect that this is a result of confusion between him and his son, Louis-Marie Céleste d'Aumont (1762–1831), who was the Duke of Piennes during the period under examination in this article.

23. Although not the firstborn, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste appears to have been a favorite, both of his father—who arranged for him to succeed as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*—and of the Bourbon kings. Louis XV established a hereditary duchy for him in 1774, renaming the town of Genlis as Villequier Aumont and making him the Duke of Villequier Aumont.

24. After the death of Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont in 1799, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont succeeded his brother as Duke of Aumont. To minimize confusion, I do not connect him with this title at any other point in this essay.

25. For details of Villequier's military career, see the entry in the *Dictionnaire … des généraux français*.

13 In 1789, the Duke of Villequier accompanied Louis XVI on two occasions when the king believed that his life might be in danger. He rode in the coach with the king on 17 July, when Louis felt that it was his duty to leave Versailles and travel to Paris to try to calm the riotous mobs, and again on 6 October, when the women's march and storming of the palace at Versailles compelled the king and queen to abandon Versailles and take up permanent residence at the Tuileries in Paris.[26] The journey of 6 October is a moment of particular interest as far as this paper is concerned, since both brothers traveled from Versailles to Paris: the Duke of Villequier inside the coach with the nervous king, and the Duke of Aumont on horseback outside, in the company of the revolutionaries who had broken into the palace the night before. Some of the "escorts" who marched alongside were waving pikes decorated with the heads of royal guards who had been decapitated.

14 While these revolutionary events were occurring, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was also serving as a member of the assembly. He was elected to the Estates General in 1789 as a representative of the nobility of the Boulonnais region. As a legislator, he took a very different line from his brother, opposing the merging of the three estates and most of the initiatives of the constituent assembly after the merger. He resigned on 15 December 1789, nominally for health reasons, but perhaps mainly because he disagreed with the assembly's revolutionary reforms and wished to serve the king without distractions or conflicts of interest.[27]

15 During the last months of 1790 and the first few months of 1791, the Duke of Villequier was involved in a series of incidents that contributed to a deterioration of relations between the court and the people. In September 1790, Jean Sylvain Bailly, the mayor of Paris, received an anonymous letter from Rouen warning him of a plot to carry away the king from Paris to Rouen and launch a counterrevolution. The writer reported that the Duke of Villequier and his sister, the Duchess of Villeroy, were two of the main architects.[28] Villequier was said to have persuaded Marie-Antoinette that Louis XVI would be dethroned if he did not flee the capital. It was alleged that the conspirators had assembled a "flying camp" of 3000 royalists to defend the king and had made arrangements to hang Jacques Thouret, the president of the National Constituent Assembly, and display both Lafayette and Bailly in iron cages. This plot was known as the Villeroy conspiracy.[29]

16 On 28 February 1791, the Duke of Villequier played a leading role in a mysterious event that supporters of the revolution dubbed "La Journée des Poignards" (The Day of Daggers). He gave admission tickets to several hundred nobles who flooded into the Tuileries, armed with pistols and daggers. They claimed that they had come to the palace because the national guard had left the king unprotected, but many people speculated that they had mobilized to help the king escape and/or to launch some sort of counterrevolution. The episode ended when Lafayette and his unit of national guardsmen returned and, with the king's cooperation, persuaded the nobles to hand over their weapons. At the close of the day, Lafayette spoke sharply to Villequier and made it clear that he was suspicious of the duke's motives.[30] Villequier responded by writing an indignant open letter to Lafayette, which was printed and discussed in the papers.[31]

17 Less than two months later, on 18 April, Villequier was embroiled in another incident, when the royal family attempted to leave the Tuileries to celebrate Easter week at the Château de Saint Cloud. The king was eager to quit Paris because of religious scruples related to the newly implemented civil constitution of the clergy. If he stayed, he would be forced to recognize priests who had sworn an oath of loyalty to the government and were considered schismatics by the pope. By contrast, if he went to Saint Cloud, he would be able to attend holy week services performed by priests who had declined the oath and were acknowledged by the pope. His intentions were understood, however, and he and other members of the family were prevented from leaving by a mob. The ensuing standoff lasted for the better part of two hours and led to a physical altercation in which Villequier and another of the *premiers gentilshommes*, M. de Duras, were assaulted and nearly lynched

26. For Villequier's trip to Paris with the king on 17 July, see Hue 70; Hézecques 301; Lamartine 2: 110; and English press coverage in the *London Gazette*, 18-21 July 1789, and the *English Chronicle*, 23-25 July 1789. For his role on 6 October, see Montjoie 2: 31.

27. For Villequier's resignation, see *Archives parlementaires* 10: 574; Woelmont de Brumagne 27.

28. The Duchess of Villeroy (or Villeroi), Jeanne-Louise-Constance d'Aumont, was the elder sister of the Duke of Aumont and the Duke of Villequier. Some account of her is given in the *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, under "Villeroi (Jeanne-Louise-Constance d'Aumont de Villequier, duchesse de)." See also Oberkirch 1: 238-39.

29. *Extrait d'une lettre écrite de Rouen*, published in Paris in late September or early October 1790. The conspiracy was discussed in various French newspapers and at least four English papers. See, for example, "The French King's Intended Flight to Rouen," *Times*, 11 October 1790; *Public Advertiser*, 11 October 1790.

30. On the Day of Daggers, see Rossi; Charavay 228ff.; Imbert de Saint-Amand 93-98; Montjoie 2: 527-29; Hézecques 343ff.; Carlyle 2: 66-68; Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution* 94-95; and Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 42ff. For coverage in the British press, see the *General Evening Post*, 5-8 March 1791, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* 61.3 (March 1791): 269. Accounts of the events of this day differ on several important points.

31. *Lettre de Messieurs Alexandre d'Aumont, ci-devant duc de Villequier, et Amédée de Durfort, ci-devant marquis de Duras* (Paris, 1791).

by the crowd. The king was compelled to abandon his plan and came to understand that he was in fact a prisoner at the Tuileries.[32]

18 After the events of 18 April, Louis XVI seems to have committed himself wholeheartedly to escaping from the capital. He accepted the resignations of Villequier, Duras, and several other prominent courtiers. Outwardly this was done to comply with the wishes of the increasingly vocal citizens, many of whom believed that he was being led astray by his aristocratic advisors. In fact, the king seems to have urged his closest supporters to leave Paris (and perhaps also the country) because he was concerned about their safety.[33] Villequier moved out of his rooms at the Tuileries and paid a visit to England in late April and early May 1791.[34] His absence proved to be a material benefit to the king and queen, because it provided them with a new and unsuspected means of egress. On the night of 20 June, members of the royal family used the recently vacated chamber of Villequier to evade the national guard and slip out of the Tuileries unnoticed. Arrangements had been made for a series of carriages to convey them to an army outpost at Montmédy, but the fugitives made it only to the little town of Varennes, where they were apprehended. The flight of the royals and their subsequent apprehension proved to be an important turning point in the revolution; the debacle led to an uptick in radicalism and increased hostility toward the royal family and the monarchy as an institution.[35]

19 As noted, some angry Parisians imagined that the Duke of Aumont had helped the royal family to escape. The documentary record suggests that they were wrong, but there can be no doubt where the Duke of Villequier's sympathies lay. He had made it abundantly clear that he was the king's man, and, after the flight of the royals, he was denounced in the assembly. He emigrated and settled in Brussels, where he helped to organize the royalist community. In 1792, his holdings in France were sequestrated and sold. He went on to serve Louis XVIII, the king in exile, in offices civil and military for almost two decades, and did not return to France until shortly before his death in 1814.[36]

Aumont in Blake's *French Revolution*

20 If we turn from these historical figures to the fictional Aumont in Blake's semihistorical poem, one of the first things we notice is that Blake describes this character in a remarkably negative way: he is described as a "pale" figure with a "chaos-born soul / Eternally wand'ring" and he is compared to "a Comet"[37] and "swift-falling fire" (lines 159-60). A few lines later, we are told that "a cold orb of disdain revolv'd round him, and covered his soul with snows eternal" (line 199). It would be too strong to say that Aumont is the prototype or inspiration for Urizen, but it is undeniable that many of the negative terms that Blake would use to characterize Urizen in his poems of 1793 and later are brought together and used to describe Aumont in this 1791 poem.[38]

21 Perhaps the most startling aspect of the description of Aumont is the effect that he has on another character. When Seyes makes his way from the assembly hall to the palace, he is accompanied by "King Henry the Fourth" (lines 163-66)—or rather, by the spirit of Henri IV (1553–1610). Comparisons between Henri IV and Louis XVI were quite common in France from the inauguration of the latter in 1774 until the second half of 1791, when affection for the

32. On the aborted excursion to Saint Cloud, see Hue 188-91; Imbert de Saint-Amand 121-26; Charavay 230-32; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 44ff.; Doyle 252-53; Schama 549-50; Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution* 95; and Caiani, "Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette" 322. Some accounts say that Duras was assaulted; others say Villequier. For English press coverage, see (among others) the *St. James's Chronicle* and the *General Evening Post* for 23 April 1791.

33. On the dismissal of Villequier and Duras, see Hue 193-94; Bombelles 5: 108; Carlyle 2: 68n3; Woelmont de Brumagne 27. For the English press, see the *Whitehall Evening Post* for 23 April 1791.

34. For his trip to England, see Berry 1: 303; Vinot; *General Evening Post*, 26 April 1791; *Northampton Mercury*, 30 April 1791; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 6 May 1791; *Evening Mail*, 3-6 June 1791.

35. On the flight of the royal family, see Charavay 239-40; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 57ff.; Schama 550ff.; Dumas 28-29. For reports in the English papers, see the *General Evening Post*, *St. James's Chronicle*, and *Whitehall Evening Post* for 2-5 July 1791.

36. Villequier's post-1791 life is discussed in Vinot. For the seizure of his property, see "Maison de Villequier-Aumont."

37. For early modern ideas about meteors and comets, see Genuth 20-22, 99-114, et passim. Blake connects comets with disaster in his early poem "Gwin, King of Norway," where he describes the king's men as "like blazing comets, scattering death" (line 83, E 419).

38. Words and concepts used for both Aumont and Urizen are pale, ice, snow, orb, comet, meteor, chaos, and disdain.

For examples of Urizen's paleness, see *Urizen* 4.41 (E 72); *Ahania* 3.2 (E 85); and *The Four Zoas* p. 23, lines 11-15 (E 313).

For passages where he is associated with frigidity, ice, or snow, see *America* 16.2-11 (E 57); *Urizen* 3.27-33, 7.5, 10.19-24 (E 71, 74, 75); *The Four Zoas* p. 61, line 4, 69.1-6, 73.26-29, 75.25-26, 78.1-3 (E 341, 346, 350, 352, 353); and *Milton* 18.51 (E 112). The phrase "Snows eternal" occurs in *The Four Zoas* p. 74, line 20 (E 351), but it is not clear to me whether it refers to Urizen or Tharmas.

In Blake's works, orbs, caverns, and similar spaces are often related to the fallen state of man and the limits of fallen man's perception. Albion's angel, a reactionary ally of Urizen, is described as a "scale bound orb" (*America* c.11, E 59); Urizen's brain is gradually "inclos'd / In an orb" (*Urizen* 10.33-34, E 75; cf. *The Four Zoas* p. 54, lines 9-10, E 336); and the eye of fallen man is "a little narrow orb, closd up & dark, / Scarcely beholding the Great Light" (*Jerusalem* 49.34-35, E 198; cf. *Milton* 5.21-22, E 99).

Urizen sends forth comets in *The Four Zoas* p. 75, lines 28-30 (E 352); he glows "like a meteor" in *Europe* 3.11-12 (E 61); he is associated with chaos in *Urizen* 3.26 (E 71); and he is characterized as disdainful in *The Four Zoas* p. 106 (second portion), lines 35-40 (E 382).

monarch began to decline. During the early years of Louis's reign, it was widely hoped that he would show himself to be a patriot king, a kindhearted ruler who took an interest in the well-being of his people, as Henri IV had done. The two kings were often depicted in tandem in engravings, statues, and other works of art; for example, several engravers produced allegorical scenes in which the spirit of Henri IV appears to Louis XVI to offer guidance.[39] This historical and iconographic tradition would seem to explain Henri IV's presence in the poem, but it is interesting to note what precipitates his departure. When Seyes and the ghost of Henri reach the palace and catch sight of Aumont, the old king promptly leaves:

> Aumont went out and stood in the hollow porch, his ivory wand in his hand;
> A cold orb of disdain revolv'd round him, and covered his soul with snows eternal.
> Great Henry's soul shuddered, a whirlwind and fire tore furious from his angry bosom;
> He indignant departed on horses of heav'n.
> (lines 198-201)

S. Foster Damon writes that the spirit of Henri IV "sweeps into the council" (78). This is incorrect; the old king never actually enters the palace and never catches sight of the reigning king. In fact, he never comes face to face with any member of the court except Aumont, yet this encounter has dramatic consequences. The disdainfulness, coldness, and "snows eternal" of Aumont cause Henri to "shudder" and depart in indignation and disgust.[40]

22 Aumont is cold, disdainful, and "chaos-born." The mere sight of him is sufficient to make the old king "furious," "angry," and "indignant." This is strongly negative language, and we ought to ask ourselves what might account for all of the hostility. If we focus on what is in the poem, we won't find many clues. Aumont is clearly a courtier, but he doesn't speak out against the revolution or urge the king to take military action against the assembly, as the Duke of Burgundy and the Archbishop of Paris do. He doesn't take a position on any of the political questions debated. In fact, he hardly speaks at all. His only actions in the poem (at least in the part that has survived) are to announce that the Abbé de Seyes is coming to the palace, step out of the room to welcome Seyes, and escort the visitor inside. Why would Blake heap so much angry editorial judgment on a figure who seems to be nothing more than a royal chamberlain? Since the poem itself does not supply an answer, we should consider the possibility that there was an external impetus. Aumont may be a mostly historical character (like Necker, Lafayette, Sieyès, Orléans, and Louis XVI) rather than a mostly fictional character (like the Duke of Burgundy and the Archbishop of Paris), and Blake may have lashed out because there was an actual historical individual whose actions had irritated him greatly. As I have already noted, there are two candidates for this individual—the Duke of Aumont and the Duke of Villequier. In the next two sections, I will set out the case for the Duke of Villequier and then consider some objections that can be raised against this theory.

The Case for Villequier

23 As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, W. H. Stevenson concluded that Blake based his character Aumont on the Duke of Aumont. It is certainly understandable why Stevenson reached this conclusion, since this was the man who bore the ducal title Aumont in 1789. Nevertheless, there are some problems with this identification.

24 First and foremost, it is difficult to fathom why Blake, who supported the revolution in its early phases and even wore a *bonnet-rouge* on the streets of London (Gilchrist 1: 94), would have been angry at the Duke of Aumont. As we have seen, the Duke of Aumont was a champion of the revolution. He was never a courtier or an advisor to Louis XVI; on the contrary, he was a member of the opposition, a supporter of the assembly and the people of Paris, a leader of the national guard who served under Lafayette, and an ally of the Duke of Orléans. Thus he was closely associated with two of the heroes of Blake's poem.[41] In other words, the Duke of Aumont was on the same side as Blake, and it

39. On Louis XVI and Henri IV, see Schama 423; Chéry; and Reinhard. For examples of the parallel in the visual arts, see "Allégorie du compte rendu au roi, par M. Necker en 1781" (1781); "Apparition d'Henri IV à Louis XVI, ou la vérité découverte" (1789); "Projet d'un monument à ériger pour le roi" (1790); and "Époque de la liberté françoise" (1789). The last engraving is of particular interest, as it illustrates precisely the historical moment that Blake dramatizes in *The French Revolution*—the point when Louis XVI reinstated Necker and decided against using military force to break up the assembly. It is possible that Blake saw one or more of these prints when he was planning or writing his poem.

40. Of the critics who have written at some length on *The French Revolution* (including Butter, Damon, Erdman, Fallon, Halliburton, Halloran, Hobday, and Ritz), few have had much to say about Aumont. A notable exception is David Fallon, who argues that Aumont represents the forces of reaction that threaten Seyes and his revolutionary coadjutors. He also suggests that Aumont can be seen as an eighteenth-century parallel to François Ravaillac, the Catholic extremist who assassinated the benevolent, consensus-seeking Henri IV. See Fallon 78.

41. Seyes and Orléans are the main spokesmen for the revolutionary party in *The French Revolution*. Erdman goes so far as to describe the speech of Orléans in lines 179-94 as a speech by "Blake-Orléans" (*Prophet against Empire* 170).

therefore seems highly unlikely that this friend of the revolution could have been the inspiration for the courtly, reactionary, proto-Urizenic character that we find in the poem.[42]

25 That is why I believe we need to consider the Duke of Villequier as a rival candidate. Villequier was not just a courtier; he was one of the most powerful courtiers in the country, a *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*. He was a prominent and controversial supporter of the king who played an important role in the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, and the unsuccessful flight of the royal family. From Blake's point of view, Villequier was on the wrong side of all of these events: he was a man who sided with the king and the nobles against the people, a man who was trying to impede the inexorable advance of history. This is a man whom Blake would have disliked—someone who could have inspired the poem's very negative description of Aumont.

26 *The French Revolution* contains some details that might point directly at Villequier. Blake describes his Aumont as carrying an "ivory wand" (line 198), which is perhaps a way of identifying him as a royal chamberlain or gentleman of the bedchamber. It does not seem that a white wand or staff was a symbol of office for the *premiers gentilshommes* under the old regime in France, but it unquestionably was for the royal chamberlains of England. According to Kimber's *Peerage of England* (1766), the Lord Chamberlain of the royal household carries "a white staff in his hand, as a badge of his office, and wears a gold key," which declare that he has authority to admit visitors to the court—or turn them away. The Lord Chamberlain was (and still is) the second-ranking dignitary of the British royal court and the man responsible for all state ceremonies. "All invitations to court are sent out in his name by the command of the sovereign, and at drawing rooms and levees he stands next to the sovereign and announces the persons who are approaching the throne. It is also part of his duty to conduct the sovereign to and from his carriage."[43] Blake might have learned about the white staff of the Lord Chamberlain from his reading, or by perusing paintings or engravings. Godfrey Kneller's portrait of Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset (see illus. 1), shows a Lord Chamberlain with a white staff, but so do many other period portraits.[44] Although it is certainly possible that Blake gave Aumont a white staff by mistake because he had only limited knowledge of the French court, it is also possible that he did so deliberately in order to communicate with English readers, who would have been more likely to recognize and understand English symbols of office. If this is in fact the case, it would be a strong indication that Blake was thinking of the Duke of Villequier.

27 It is worth noting that the Aumont of Blake's poem not only carries the staff of a Lord Chamberlain, but also performs the duties of that office. When Seyes makes his way to the palace, it is Aumont who goes to the door to welcome him and escort him inside. It would not be plausible for a character based on the Duke of Aumont to announce visitors, for the Duke of Aumont had been unwelcome at the court of Louis XVI for several years, even before he agreed to serve in the national guard. On the other hand, it would be perfectly plausible for a character modeled on the Duke of Villequier Aumont to act in this way.

28 Furthermore, Blake's description of Aumont as a cold, disdainful man would not make much sense if he were trying to create a version of the Duke of Aumont, a passionate revolutionary and an ardent (if unlikely) democrat who cheerfully set aside his titles and wished to be known as citoyen Jacques. The word "disdain" would make a lot more sense in relation to citoyen Jacques's brother, the Duke of Villequier, who stood in unrepentant solidarity with his fellow nobles and viewed both the assembly and the new-fangled principles of equality with traditional aristocratic hauteur. Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was clearly proud of his ducal title and continued to use it even after such titles were officially abolished. Although he dutifully referred to himself as Alexandre d'Aumont, *ci-devant* Duke of Villequier, on several occasions in 1790 and 1791, he dropped the prefix and reverted to calling himself the Duke of Villequier

42. At this point, it may be worthwhile to present a summary of the differences between the two Aumont brothers given by Madame Campan, a friend of Marie-Antoinette and a committed royalist. She describes the Duke of Aumont as "a brother of the Duc de Villequier, who … joined the revolutionary party; a man of no weight or respectability, who desired he might be called *Jacques Aumont*; a far different man from his brave brother, who always proved himself entirely devoted to the cause of his King" (Fortescue 2: 57n3).

43. Details about the Lord Chamberlain and the symbols of his office come from Kimber 244-45 and the "Royal Household" entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

44. A *Google* image search will produce many examples of Lords Chamberlain with white staves. I will mention only a few here: Robert Bruce, first Earl of Ailesbury, who was Lord Chamberlain in 1685, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Smith after Sir Peter Lely (1687); Charles FitzRoy, second Duke of Grafton, Lord Chamberlain from 1724 to 1757, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Faber the Younger after Jean-Baptiste van Loo (1740); and George Montagu, fourth Duke of Manchester, Lord Chamberlain from 1782 to 1783, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Jones after Gilbert Stuart (1790). See also a 1795 political cartoon by James Gillray titled "Polonius."

White staves appear in several places in Blake's works. One is mentioned in *The French Revolution*, lines 144-45, where the Archbishop of Paris imagines (with horror) a future in which the "ivory staff / Of the ruler wither[s] among bones of death." The beadles in Blake's "Holy Thursday" poem (*Songs of Innocence*) also carry white staves, which seem to be badges of authority in general rather than symbols of royal authority in particular.

1. Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset, holding the staff of the Lord Chamberlain of Great Britain. He held the office from 1689 to 1697. Undated mezzotint by John Simon after Sir Godfrey Kneller, 35.7 × 25.4 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. B1977.14.9891.

when he visited London in April and May 1791, thus tacitly rejecting the authority of the assembly. He continued to use this abolished title (as well as others) throughout his years of exile, right up to his death.[45]

29 By way of summary, I would say that the case for the Duke of Villequier rests mainly on what statisticians call goodness of fit. The fit between this historical figure and the character in Blake's poem is certainly much better than the fit between the Duke of Aumont and the character.

Objections and Replies

30 Some readers may find the arguments in the previous section convincing; others may not. In this section, I would like to set out four objections that might be raised by the unconvinced, and then do my best to reply to those objections.

- Objection 1: If it was Villequier that Blake was reading about in the newspapers and it was Villequier who angered him, why, when he picked up his pen, did he complain about Aumont?

  Reply: To answer this question, it is necessary to say a few words about a massive change in naming and nomenclature that was taking place in France at this time, as a result of the revolution. The abolition of hereditary titles in June 1790 led to a new situation, in which the name Aumont could be applied to several persons as opposed to just one. Prior to the abolition of hereditary titles, there was really only one person in France who could appropriately be called Aumont—the Duke of Aumont. Subsequently, Aumont became what it is today—a name that can be shared and used simultaneously by many members of a family. Thus, a situation was created in which the Duke of Aumont was an Aumont, but so too was the Duke of Villequier.

  While Blake was working on and thinking about his poem, the people of France were transitioning between two systems of nomenclature. Some Frenchmen were eager to adopt the new system, while others dragged their feet and clung to the old system—though as the revolution gained momentum, it became increasingly dangerous for nobles to do so. Revolutionary journalists like Marat enjoyed calling out aristocrats, including the Duke of Villequier, who persisted in using their hereditary titles.[46] In March 1791, after his confrontation with Lafayette during the Day of Daggers, Villequier signed the letter in his own defense "Alexandre d'Aumont, ci-devant le Duc de Villequier," in the style of the new regime (although, I suspect, with little enthusiasm). Thus he was placing more emphasis on his family name, Aumont. The ducal title was yielding, under political pressure, to the family name at the very time that Blake was writing. In fact, for many people with revolutionary sympathies, the old title had already given way: the Duke of Villequier had ceased to exist and had been replaced by citoyen Alexandre d'Aumont.

  We know that Blake adopted the new, more democratic system of nomenclature in some of his writings. In both *The French Revolution* and his manuscript verses on Lafayette's defection (E 499, written late 1792 or early 1793), he refers to the general by the abbreviated form Fayette rather than the traditional La Fayette, as David Erdman has noted.[47] In short, it seems likely that Blake elected to call the *ci-devant* Duke of Villequier by his family name, Aumont, for the same political reason he chose to refer to the *ci-devant* Marquis de Lafayette as Fayette.

- Objection 2: If the Duke of Aumont was suspected of allowing the royal family to escape from the Tuileries in June 1791, couldn't Blake have been angry with him for that reason?

  Reply: Yes, Blake could certainly have been angry with him for that reason. The accusations against the Duke of Aumont were reprinted in several British papers and, although they were probably false, they were never (so far as I can see) corrected or retracted.[48] So this was one moment when an Englishman, following events in the papers, could have concluded that the Duke of Aumont was an enemy of the revolution. We should not forget, however, that the same reader would have had many more occasions—the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, the flight of the

45. British papers, including *Lloyd's Evening Post* for 6 May 1791, note the Duke of Villequier among visitors to court.

46. Marat complained about Villequier in particular in *L'Ami du peuple* no. 395 (10 March 1791).

47. Erdman (*Prophet against Empire* 172) describes Fayette as a "republican" form, but I think democratic is more appropriate. With the deletion of the definite article, the general is no longer the Fayette; he is only a Fayette. In the same way, after 1790, the Duke of Aumont was no longer the Aumont, only an Aumont.

48. Though the Duke of Aumont was quickly cleared in France of involvement in the flight of the royal family, he was evidently not as quickly exonerated in the English press, which reported that he had been suspected of collusion and roughly treated by the mob (see note 18). The *Public Advertiser* even divulged "on the best authority" that he had been hanged (28 June 1791). I have not discovered any vindications in the English papers. My searches of ProQuest's *British Periodicals* database and Gale's *Burney Newspapers Collection* turned up a flurry of mentions of the Duke of Aumont in late June 1791, but nothing relevant for the remainder of the year.

royal family—to reach the same conclusion about the Duke of Villequier. There is a scenario in which we can imagine Blake getting angry with the Duke of Aumont, but there are numerous scenarios in which we can imagine him getting angry at the Duke of Villequier.

- Objection 3: Since the Duke of Aumont imitated the speech and manners of Henri IV, doesn't the appearance of Henri IV in the poem suggest that Blake probably had the Duke of Aumont in mind?

  Reply: That would be one way of explaining why Henri IV is in the poem, but there is another—and I think a better—way of explaining this. As I mentioned earlier, Henri IV was frequently invoked as an exemplary king and a model for Louis XVI. This would seem to be a sufficient explanation for his appearance in the poem.

  The presence of "Good King Henry" and his indignant departure in lines 200-01 still make perfectly good sense if we imagine that Blake had Villequier in mind when he was writing his poem. Henri IV helped repair Catholic-Protestant divisions in France; in Blake's poem he stands for the spirit of peacefulness and non-polarization. He seems to have come to the Tuileries to advise Louis XVI because he thinks that Louis intends to follow his example in bringing peace and building consensus. Once he sees the reactionary Villequier controlling access to the monarch, however, Henri IV realizes that Louis XVI is not, in fact, going to be a patriot king and healer of national wounds—and so he departs in indignation.

  In interpreting this aspect of the poem, we are forced to choose between two situations that seem somewhat surprising. We may find it hard to believe that Blake knew about the connections that Frenchmen made between Louis XVI and Henri IV, but it would be even harder to believe that he knew about the Duke of Aumont's tendency to imitate Henri IV.

- Objection 4: Isn't it unlikely that Blake would have known so much about these French aristocrats? And, specifically, isn't it unlikely that he would have known that the Duke of Villequier was a member of the Aumont family?

  Reply: It is certainly rather surprising. We don't know how much French language ability Blake had at this time—perhaps very little. In addition, there is no evidence—at least none that I am aware of—that he read French newspapers. Given his non-noble upbringing, dissenting religious background, and democratic worldview, it seems very unlikely that he would have been interested in French noblemen. Nevertheless, he could have learned a fair amount about the main movers in the French Revolution by reading the English press; the London papers carried quite detailed accounts of events in Paris, which frequently refer to Villequier.[49] Blake was versed enough in French politics to mention in his poem not only major figures, like Necker, Orléans, Sieyès, Lafayette, and Mirabeau, but also less prominent individuals, like Bailly, Target, and Clermont-Tonnerre. Since he knew of these men, he might well have known of Villequier.

Summing Up the Possibilities

31 It seems to me quite likely that Stevenson identified the wrong man in his footnote. The evidence suggests that Blake was angered by some action of the Duke of Villequier and added Aumont to his poem as a result, choosing to criticize the *ci-devant* duke under his family name. I believe that this scenario meets the preponderance of evidence standard; whether it meets the more demanding beyond a reasonable doubt standard is a difficult question. By way of summation, I will set out three possibilities and the most important problems I see with each:

- It is possible that Blake was not thinking of anybody in particular when he created the character of Aumont; but, if so, why does he pile so many judgmental epithets and proto-Urizenic traits on this character? And why does he have the patriot king, Henri IV, turn and flee at the sight of Aumont?

- It is possible that Blake had Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont, the Duke of Aumont, in mind; but, if so, why would he have been angry with a man who was a supporter of the revolution? And why does he depict Aumont as a courtier and Lord Chamberlain, when the Duke of Aumont was neither?

- It is possible that Blake had Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont, the Duke of Villequier, in mind; but, if so, why does he refer to him as Aumont instead of Villequier? And how did he come to understand that a man usually referred to as the Duke of Villequier was in fact a member of the Aumont family?

49. References to Villequier-Aumont (with and without a hyphen) appear in numerous French sources, though Villequier alone is much more common. Instances of Villequier are fairly common in the British press for 1789 to 1791, but I have not discovered any examples of the combined Villequier-Aumont form, nor have I found any English writer explaining that the Duke of Villequier was a member of the Aumont family.

Some Thoughts on the Development of the Poem

32 Before closing, I would like to say a few words about chronology and the ways in which *The French Revolution* may have developed. It is generally recognized that Blake began working on the poem during the period of optimism that followed the unification of the three estates and the storming of the Bastille in the summer of 1789, when it seemed to many observers that the revolution was a fait accompli, which had secured permanent reform with minimal bloodshed. Many critics have also inferred that Blake eventually abandoned the poem, probably at some point in 1791, because he came to believe that the revolution was not going to be an unproblematic, almost unresisted, triumph of reform after all. In other words, most scholars accept a two-phase model that links both of Blake's decisions—to commence and to abandon the poem—to the political events in France.

33 I too accept this model, but I would like to propose an additional, intermediate stage. It seems to me that Blake started work during the initial phase of hopefulness, but became increasingly conscious of resistance to the revolution. The inclusion of Aumont may be an early attempt to respond to evolving events, and the abandonment of the poem at some later point a more drastic reaction to subsequent developments. It would then be possible to distinguish three rough phases in Blake's thinking, each based on the situation in France:

I. Period of unqualified optimism, inspired and sustained by:
Merging of the three estates (June 1789); storming of the Bastille (July 1789); women's march on Versailles (October 1789); abolition of hereditary titles (June 1790); Festival of the Federation (July 1790)

II. Period of more qualified optimism, leading to local modifications of the poem, provoked by:
Villeroy conspiracy (September 1790)? … Day of Daggers (February 1791)? … attempted excursion to Saint Cloud (April 1791)?

III. Loss of optimism and abandonment of the poem, provoked by:
Flight of the royal family (June 1791)? … massacre on the Champ de Mars (July 1791)?

I have placed question marks in the second and third phases to acknowledge that I am not certain which incidents Blake was responding to. I cannot point to textual evidence to prove that there was an intermediate stage, but I think that this hypothesis is consistent with (and grows out of) the evidence rehearsed in this essay.

34 Blake clearly conceived the poem during the stage of optimism, which began with the triumphs of 1789 and continued through much of 1790. In the early months of 1790, many observers, both in France and abroad, assumed that the revolution had more or less run its course; the king had recalled Necker and accepted the national assembly, the national guard, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and it looked like he was prepared to accept the role of constitutional monarch as well. It seemed that the main goals of the revolution had been achieved—and with only a little bloodshed. So it appeared to Richard Price when he wrote his famous sermon in November 1789 (Price, *Discourse*); to Helen Maria Williams when she attended the Festival of the Federation in July 1790 (Williams, *Letters*); and to Blake as well, I think, when he began and wrote much of *The French Revolution*.

35 Many passages reflect Blake's initial confidence: the defenders of the old order are shown to be anxious and dismayed, troubled by nightmares, while Seyes is all confidence. In his speech to the king and court (lines 206-40), he assumes that the revolution is going to happen, no matter what the king or the nobles might decide: a new France is sure to replace the old France, just as morning drives away the darkness of night. The victory is presented as inevitable, presumably because Blake believed that it had already been achieved.

36 As 1790 wore on and gave way to 1791, some of this optimism started to wear off. A series of events, including the

exposure of the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, and the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, made it clear that not everyone was enthusiastic about the revolution. There were nobles who disliked the new political arrangements, opposed the initiatives of the assembly, lamented the abolition of hereditary titles, and deplored the civil constitution of the clergy. It seems likely that Blake became aware of this opposition and added the character of Aumont during this period, probably because of something that the Duke of Villequier had done. It is impossible to say which incident was the trigger, but I believe that a strong case can be made for the Villeroy conspiracy.[50]

37 A few months later, something else happened—something even more serious—that made Blake realize that the revolution was facing not just minor but major resistance. It might have been the flight of the royals in June 1791, or the shooting of protesters on the Champ de Mars in July.[51] It could also have been the breakdown of agreement among the revolutionaries themselves that began to be visible about this time.[52] At any rate, Blake seems to have concluded that the French Revolution was not going to turn out as he had initially imagined, and, as a result, he decided not to print the poem.[53]

38 An alternative theory is that it was the printer, Joseph Johnson, who pulled the plug, but this seems unlikely. There was no reason for Johnson to panic at this point; Pitt did not crack down on seditious writing in earnest until mid-1792. Therefore, it was probably Blake himself who gave up on the poem, and he probably did so because he realized that, however the French Revolution evolved, it was not going to be the easy victory announced with such supreme confidence by Seyes.

50. At an earlier point in my research, I thought that the flight of the royals in June 1791 might have led Blake to add Aumont, but I now believe that event is more likely to have been one of the episodes that spurred him to abandon the poem. The exposure of the Villeroy conspiracy occurred earlier, at a time when most observers were still buoyant about the outcome of the revolution. The plot was described in the English press, so Blake might well have known about it, and it revealed Villequier to be (at least according to the anonymous informant) actively involved in conspiring against the revolution, as opposed to indirectly involved, as in the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, or ambiguously involved, as in the Day of Daggers.

51. In "Blake and Lafayette," Charles Hobday argues that Blake intended to make Lafayette his hero, but decided to abandon the poem after Lafayette ordered his national guardsmen to fire on republican protesters on the Champ de Mars. I find Hobday's claim quite plausible, but I take a slightly less Lafayette-o-centric view and think that the flight of the royals should also be considered as a possible cause for the abandonment of the poem.

52. By July 1791, the coalition of revolutionaries that Blake praises in *The French Revolution* was falling apart. Lafayette and Bailly were blamed by many for the Champ de Mars massacre. There was tension between Lafayette and Orléans. Clermont-Tonnerre had become a moderate and was already widely regarded as a traitor to the revolution. Sieyès had opposed an absolute veto for the king, which Honoré Mirabeau had supported—and Mirabeau had died in April.

53. See Ritz 374.

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A R T I C L E

Printing Imperfections in William Blake's Virgil Wood Engravings and What They Reveal

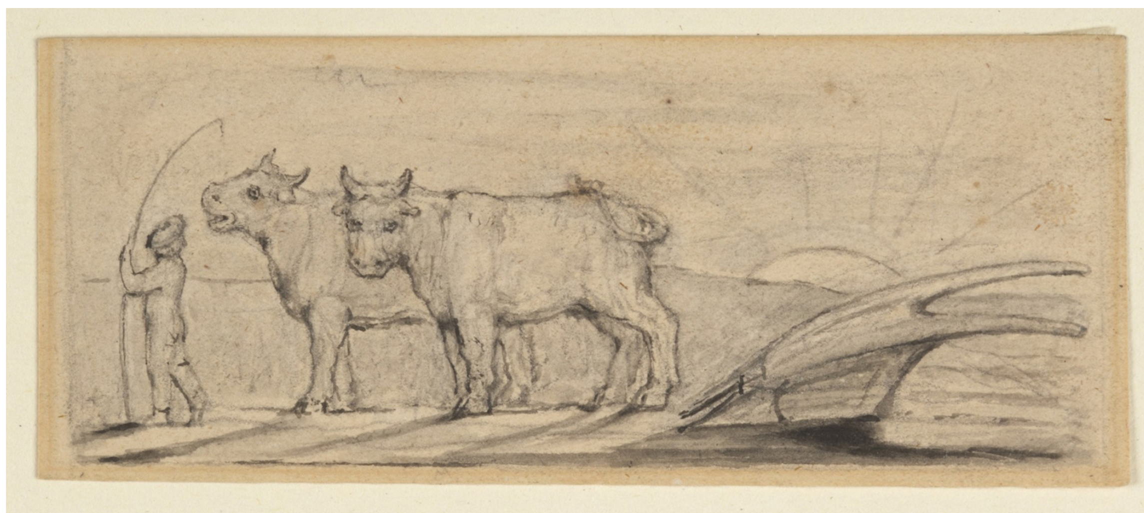
By Louise Wilson

Louise Wilson (louise.wilson@ngv.vic.gov.au) has been conservator of paper at the National Gallery of Victoria since 2008 and contributes to the care of the NGV's rich and diverse paper-based holdings. She has broad research interests and has published on a range of subjects, including the conservation of Middle Eastern manuscripts, conservation treatment of Indian papercuts, technical examination of eighteenth-century tapa cloth from the Pacific region, European watermark collections, and the materials and techniques of William Blake, Albrecht Dürer, and Francisco de Goya.

1 The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia, is perhaps best known to Blake scholars for its magnificent suite of watercolors illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which was purchased from the John Linnell sale at Christie's in London in 1918. The NGV also holds a composite group of fourteen wood engravings that Blake designed and engraved for Dr. Robert Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil*, which were purchased in London in 1959 and are believed to have formed part of Linnell's collection as well. At first glance, these wood engravings are underwhelming; four are quite poor impressions, and one is a unique hybrid between a print and an ink wash drawing. Nevertheless, extensive technical examination undertaken by the NGV's paper conservation studio has revealed a range of printing imperfections, attributable to material choice and studio practices, which provide a tangible commentary on the complex history of Blake's Virgil woodblocks and the various artists who printed from them.

2 Much has been written about the history of Blake's wood engravings, so only a brief overview will be provided here. At Linnell's suggestion, Thornton commissioned Blake to produce wood engravings for his third edition of *The Pastorals of Virgil* (1821), a schoolbook designed to teach young boys Latin. Blake's task was to illustrate Ambrose Philips's imitation of Virgil's first eclogue, which follows two shepherds—the old, sagacious Thenot and the young, brooding Colinet—in various rural settings. Working in a pocket sketchbook, he created preparatory drawings in pencil, pen and ink, and wash that he later copied with ink onto pieces of boxwood in readiness for engraving (illus. 1).[1]

1. Blake's uncut woodblock of the prophet Isaiah foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem (British Museum, 1939,0114.19) shows his technique of drawing lines with ink directly on the boxwood as a guide for cutting. I am indebted to Bethan Stevens for showing me this woodblock.



1. Illustration for Thornton's Virgil, *And Unyok'd Heifers, Loitering Homewards, Low*. Pen and black ink and gray wash over graphite, 3.7 x 9.1 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. x1944-531.

3 The boxwood preparer would have provided Blake with pieces of timber that had been cut across the growth rings. Known as the end grain, this feature (which enables more exacting, detailed cutting) distinguishes wood engravings from woodcuts, which are carved into timber cut longitudinally along the grain. Using familiar tools for engraving on metal, Blake cut away the compositional lines on the boxwood and printed proofs in black ink on China paper with his rolling press.[2] The growth rings of the end grain are sometimes visible as lines of reduced printing on wood engravings, as is the case with Blake's proof sheet now at the Fitzwilliam Museum (illus. 2).

4 When the woodblocks were prepared for publication, they were cut down, presumably to enable four images to fit on the chosen paper size with room for a title underneath each. The impressions in Thornton's schoolbook would have been printed on a hand press, which was ideally suited to relief processes like wood engraving. The printer would have positioned four of the small woodblocks, with a title in letterpress type under each one. The type and images were then wedged tightly together in a forme so that they didn't move during the printing process.[3] While bound copies of Thornton's Virgil are highly collectible and expensive today, at the time of publication it was a simple textbook, to be printed within a budget. To keep costs down, a variety of poor-quality papers (both machine- and handmade) were used.[4] Generally, impressions in the work are not fine quality, possibly because of the speed of production and the paper.

5 Shortly after the book was published, Linnell purchased the woodblocks for his collection, and he later commissioned fellow artist Edward Calvert to print sets.[5] Linnell had eight children, five of whom are known to have been artists.[6] The woodblocks remained in the Linnell family for over a century, with various family members undertaking printing sessions over this time.[7]

6 Four different paper types (indicating at least four different printing sessions) were used to produce the NGV's impressions: two subtly different China papers and two Western papers, one made on a laid mould and the other on a wove mould (illus. 3-6). Perhaps most striking is the range of printing imperfections, potentially showing different hands and studio practices at work. To better understand these faults and use them to identify printing sessions, I consulted eighteenth- and nineteenth-century printing treatises and sought other Virgil wood engravings for comparison. The NGV holds the only nineteenth-century impressions of these engravings in Australia. With no comparable material to examine locally, I traveled to the United Kingdom to study a variety of material related to the prints, including Blake's preparatory drawings, proofs, and original woodblocks; bound copies of *The Pastorals of Virgil*; over 150 impressions of the wood engravings; and documents pertaining to the woodblocks in the John Linnell Archive.[8] To gain insight into Calvert's printing technique and choice of materials, I examined numerous impressions of his own wood engravings.

7 Calvert is best known for his intricate wood engravings of pastoral idylls, which are heavily influenced by Blake's Virgil designs. He ceased producing his own meticulous prints around 1831 and is unlikely to have been printing from the Virgil woodblocks after this date (Butlin and Gott 138). An extraordinary album of prints and drawings assembled by Alexander Constantine Ionides (illus. 7) contains a complete set of the Virgil wood engravings and eleven of Calvert's fifteen pastoral compositions (Evans 540-41). Ionides became acquainted with Calvert around 1828, when the latter was producing Virgil impressions for Linnell; it has been suggested that the Virgil wood engravings in the album are from this printing session (Evans 544). The scrapbook is therefore the perfect starting point for comparing Calvert's materials and methods—in the impressions of both his own and the Virgil wood engravings—with Virgil impressions in other collections.

8 The contents of the Ionides album are adhered to the pages, limiting the scope for paper examination. Despite this impediment, it was possible to discern that most of the paper supports used to print the Virgil and Calvert wood engravings bear the hallmarks of China paper. This very

2. China paper is believed to have come to the United Kingdom as the lining of timber chests carrying tea. It is sometimes referred to as India paper, since the tea was imported by the British East India Company, but this is a misnomer (Jenkins 1).

3. The individual blocks and letterpress type would have been put in a frame-like structure called a chase, with any vacant space around the blocks packed out with small pieces of timber known as furniture. Quoins (expandable metal locks) would have been placed within the chase and opened with a key until the blocks were locked tight. This locked-up unit is referred to as a forme (see Marsh).

4. I noted the variety and quality of the paper while examining a copy (1863,1114.299) at the British Museum on 25 July 2019.

5. According to Linnell's diary for 8 September 1828, Calvert brought impressions printed from the original blocks (Lister, *Edward Calvert* 24).

6. His sons—John, James, William, and Thomas—are all recorded in census records as artists. He commissioned his daughter Hannah to copy pictures for him while she was in Italy with her new husband, Samuel Palmer (Lister, *Letters of Samuel Palmer* 94).

7. Personal communication with Robert N. Essick, 16 September 2016, and Nick Lott, 7 May 2016.

8. This travel opportunity was made possible through the generous support of Peter Clemenger, AO, and the late Joan Clemenger, AO.

2. Proof sheet, showing curved lines of reduced printing corresponding to the concentric growth rings of the boxwood. Wood engraving, 17.0 x 10.4 cm. (sheet). Photo © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. MS CFM 31 f.3r.

I am grateful to Amy Marquis, research assistant in the Department of Paintings, Drawings, and Prints at the Fitzwilliam Museum, for confirming the measurements.

3. (above) “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake.” Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5. Printed on Western laid paper; viewed by shining light through the sheet (transmitted light), showing the slightly transparent laid lines running vertically down the paper support.[9]

4. (below) “Colinet Resting at Cambridge by Night.” Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.3 cm. (image), 4.5 × 8.2 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1881-5. Printed on Western wove paper; viewed under transmitted light, showing the fine woven texture of the paper.

9. The titles assigned to the Virgil wood engravings vary from institution to institution. Those I use for the NGV impressions are from the most recent NGV Blake catalogue (Leahy).

5. (above) "With Songs the Jovial Hinds Return from Plow." Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.6 cm. (image), 5.6 × 9.1 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1885-5. Printed on China paper with transparent lines (known as *Su* lines) running horizontally across the sheet; viewed under transmitted light.

6. (below) "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in the Distance." Wood engraving, 3.7 × 7.4 cm. (image), 4.1 × 7.6 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1875-5. Printed on China paper without transparent *Su* lines; viewed under transmitted light.

thin support, which many of the Virgil impressions that I examined are printed on, is produced from bamboo fibre. The addition of clay filler gives it a beautiful opacity, and the lack of sizing agent makes the end product highly absorbent of ink and yielding to woodblocks (Schenck 33-34).[10] It is easily identified, even on very small works like the Virgil wood engravings, because it commonly contains the marks of its making, such as tiny spherical pits or inclusions resulting from the addition of clay. Under raking light (a light source shining across the paper), distinct linear indentations can be observed on one side. These surface imperfections are attributed to the way that Chinese papermakers attach newly formed sheets to a drying wall with a coarse brush, the hairs impressing lines on the surface of the wet sheet (illus. 8; Schenck 33-34).

9 While most prints in the Ionides album are on China paper, at first sight the impressions of "With Songs the Jovial Hinds Return from Plow," "Colinet's Fond Desire Strange Lands to Know," "Colinet Mocked by Two Boys," and Calvert's "The Ploughman" appear to be printed on Western laid paper. This finding is not entirely surprising, since there are Virgil impressions on Western laid paper, such as "Menalcas' Yearly Wake" at the NGV. Laid paper is made on a timber frame (a mould) with a sieve-like surface consisting of closely spaced brass wires running horizontally across the frame (the indentations these leave on the paper are called laid lines) and more widely spaced wires running vertically that are twisted around the laid wires to hold them in place (the indentations these leave are known as

10. The addition of clay, which is hygroscopic, renders China paper vulnerable to foxing, which is initiated by moisture. Many of the impressions examined (including those in the NGV collection) have undergone aqueous treatment to reduce foxing stains. This type of treatment causes subtle changes to the original character of the paper, such as altering the dimensions and thickness.

7. Alexander Constantine Ionides album, fol. 2r. Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. E.1349-2001.

8. “Colinet Departs in Sorrow, a Thunder-Scarred Tree on the Right.” Wood engraving, 3.6 × 7.4 cm. (image), 3.8 × 7.6 cm. irreg. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1876-5. Verso viewed under raking light, showing diagonal linear striations across the China paper support.

chain lines) (illus. 9-10).[11] When paper is formed, the wet pulp settles into the gaps, leaving thinner paper furrows in the areas corresponding to the placement of the laid and chain wires. Laid paper can be identified with transmitted light, which reveals the uneven thickness that results from the surface of the mould (see illus. 3). The side that the paper is formed on is referred to as the wire side. The laid lines, when viewed under raking light, form a texture on the wire side (like the surface of corduroy fabric) (illus. 11). The verso of the sheet, the felt side, is relatively smooth.

10 As I studied more Virgil impressions and Calvert wood engravings in other collections, I noted the appearance of laid lines on numerous prints. Some of these prints are not adhered to secondary supports, making it possible to examine them using transmitted light. When light was shone through them, the distinctive alternating density of laid lines was not visible, and it became clear that they are printed on China paper, not Western laid paper as their appearance suggests.[12] Under magnification, it was evident that the lines are areas of reduced printing seemingly related to the printing process, rather than the paper support (illus. 12). The spacing of the lines was found to be the same frequency as the laid lines of many Western papers,[13] which confirmed that laid paper was in close contact with the primary support during the printing process. For example, it could have been used as an interleaving to help freshly printed impressions to dry, though this is improbable because China paper, highly absorbent of ink, does not require humidification prior to printing. Moreover, examination did not reveal any signs that interleaving paper had been removed from the recto of the prints, such as deposition of fibres on inked areas. The more likely explanation is that laid paper was placed on top of the China paper during printing, per-

11. Although the laid wires are oriented horizontally on the papermaking mould, when the paper is used, the artist might turn the paper so that these lines are oriented vertically (see illus. 3 and 11).

12. In addition to the impressions in the Ionides album at the Victoria and Albert Museum, I found many examples at the Fitzwilliam Museum, British Museum, and National Gallery of Scotland. I thank Harry Metcalf, paper conservator, Fitzwilliam Museum, for carefully examining the proof first state of Calvert’s “The Ploughman” (P.605-1985) and confirming that it is printed on China paper.

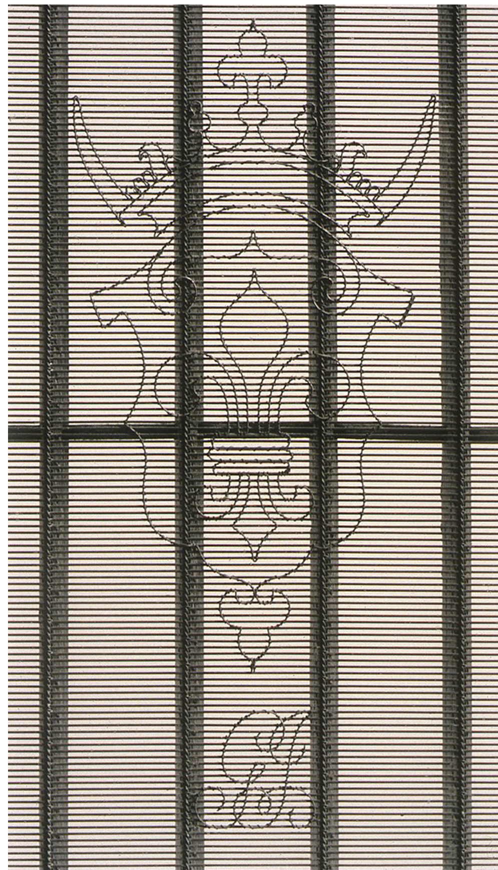
There will of course be cases where impressions, whether adhered to secondary supports or not, appear to be on laid paper and indeed are.

13. I am grateful to Yvonne (Bonnie) Hearn, former Sherman Fairchild Conservation Fellow, Thaw Conservation Center, Morgan Library & Museum, currently conservator of paper, NGV, for measuring lines of reduced printing on Calvert’s “The Ploughman” (1974.50:2) at the Morgan.

9. (above) Griffith Jones of Nash Mill, Hertfordshire, laid papermaking mould and deckle (1809). Oak, pine, copper, and brass, 42.6 x 107.2 cm. © Bower Collection, London.

The chain wires on this mould (which is designed for making two sheets at a time) are 3.2 cm. apart and there are eight laid wires per cm. (The wires are not clearly visible in this image; see the detail in illus. 10.) The watermark is a fleur-de-lys on a crowned shield with a GJ monogram below; the countermark is G JONES / 1809.

I am indebted to Peter Bower for this information.



10. (left) Detail of the mould in illus. 9, showing the horizontal laid wires. The twisted chain wires are just visible, sitting on top of the timber ribs of the mould. © Bower Collection, London.

11. “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake.” Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5. Viewed under raking light, showing the ridges between laid lines running vertically down the paper support.

12. Edward Calvert, “The Ploughman,” showing horizontal lines of reduced printing. Wood engraving, 23.2 x 37.9 cm. Photo © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. P.605-1985.

haps to add cushioning or assist with handling the thin primary support, resulting in slightly reduced contact between the inked block and the China paper in areas corresponding to the furrows of the laid lines.

11 In 1828, Calvert lent his press to Linnell, noting that "its great defects are in being too small and being altogether a *make-shift*" (Lister, *Edward Calvert* 24).[14] It is difficult to discern whether he is alluding to a type of hand press or a rolling press; potentially either could have produced impressions with the lines of reduced printing that I observed. In both scenarios, the inked matrix would have been placed face up on the bed of the press and covered first with the paper to be printed, followed by a piece of wastepaper. In the case of Calvert prints with lines of reduced printing, the wastepaper was probably laid paper, with the wire side in direct contact with the verso of the printing paper, and the impressions would have been pulled using moderate pressure.[15] Not all Calvert prints bear this printing imperfection, because when the wastepaper required replacement, either laid paper—with the felt side in contact with the printing paper—or wove paper could have been used.

12 Linnell is known for his landscape and portrait paintings and engravings. Like many artists, he regularly had his engravings printed professionally, negating the need for a printing press of his own (Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* 103).[16] At times, however, there was at least one printing press at his studio in Cirencester Place, Fitzroy Square. The year before Linnell borrowed Calvert's press, Catherine Blake had moved to Cirencester Place, bringing her late husband's rolling press with her (Bentley 468). The press remained there from August 1827 until spring 1828, when Catherine relocated to Charles Heathcote Tatham's office and studio (Viscomi, "Posthumous Blake").

13 The NGV's impressions of "Sabrina's Silvery Flood" and "Thenot and Colinet Sup Together" (illus. 13-14) both have imperfections indicating that they were produced on a rolling press: isolated areas of unintentional printing on their margins, referred to as foul ink. This error can occur if a rolling press is used to print thick woodblocks without the necessary adjustments being made. Blake's Virgil woodblocks are approximately 2 cm. thick, so the height of the rollers should have been raised and the printing blankets staggered to create a gradual incline for the rollers to travel along.[17] While there is no way of knowing if these impressions come from the press that belonged to Blake, the presence of foul ink shows that the precautions required for printing them on a rolling press were not taken; as a result, a small jolt occurred as the woodblocks passed under the rollers, shifting the paper slightly and accidentally transferring ink to the margins (Faithorne 57).

14 The unique and beautiful NGV impression of "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low" (illus. 15) has an unusual black square in the lower-left margin, signaling that it was printed at the same time as another block (as was the case when the woodblocks were printed for Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil*). Since formes are not commonly used with a rolling press and it would have been very difficult to print multiple blocks at the same time without one, I assume that this impression comes from a hand press.

15 I examined numerous impressions where the ink was too heavily applied in some passages, leading to loss of definition, and underapplied in others, creating a hazy, indistinct effect (illus. 16). There are several potential causes: inconsistent pressure when printing, because of the uneven height of the woodblock (unlikely, since the impressions that I studied did not exhibit reduced printing in the same location on each image);[18] uneven dampening of the paper prior to printing (improbable for impressions on China paper, as previously noted); or, the most likely cause in the case of the Virgil wood engravings, uneven application of ink.[19] In the nineteenth century, both daubers and composition rollers were tools for applying ink to a matrix, with daubers being the traditional implement.[20] It is probable that, like Blake, Calvert and the Linnell family used a dauber to apply ink to the Virgil woodblocks. Achieving an even application requires considerable skill, the ink needing to be built up with consistently thin sequential layers on the surface of the matrix.

14. A "make-shift" press for printing could refer to one designed for another purpose, such as a winepress.

15. Great pressure would have flattened the texture of the laid paper, resulting in more even contact between the woodblock and the China paper and thus more uniform printing.

16. He purchased a few copperplates from Hughes & Kimber, who supplied presses and materials for letterpress, lithographic, and intaglio printing. They were also copperplate printers, so it is possible that he utilized this service ("British Artists' Suppliers").

17. A printing blanket is made of felted wool. The slight pliability of the blanket helps to achieve good contact between the printing matrix and the paper to be printed on.

The inked matrix would have been placed face up on the bed of the press and covered first with the paper to be printed, followed by a piece of wastepaper, and a printing blanket would have been laid over the top of this sandwich.

18. This issue can be rectified by a process called making right, whereby the back of the woodblock is gradually built up by adhering fragments of paper, shaped identically, to the areas that are underprinting.

19. Personal communication with Michael Phillips, 2 August 2019.

20. Daubers are also called ink balls or dabbers. They are the shape of a muller and can be made by rolling wool or cloth into a ball and covering it tightly with linen or leather to form a round pad. A wooden handle is bound into the open end.

13. (above) "Sabrina's Silvery Flood," showing foul ink on the left side of the upper margin. Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.3 cm. (image), 3.5 × 7.5 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1879-5.

14. (below) "Thenot and Colinet Sup Together," showing foul ink on the lower margin. Wood engraving, 3.4 × 7.6 cm. (image), 6.0 × 8.9 cm. irreg. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1884-5.

15. (above) “Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low,” showing partial printing of another woodblock in the lower-left corner. Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.7 cm. (image), 4.7 × 9.4 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1886-5.

16. (below) “The Good Shepherd Chases Away the Wolf,” showing underinking on the lower-left corner and overinking in areas of the tree on the right. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 4.1 × 8.1 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1878-5.

17. “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake,” showing the mottled appearance of the image relating to the use of excess weak oil to make the ink. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5.

16 “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake” (NGV, illus. 17) and Tate’s impression of the same image, “For Him Our Yearly Feasts and Wakes We Hold” (Tate, A00123), were printed with ink that does not have a well-balanced ratio between pigment and oil, leaving an oily halo. This imperfection suggests the application of an ink that was not commercially produced. Printing treatises available during Blake’s time describe the making of ink at length and discuss the use of “weak” and “strong” oil combined with dry pigment to create black printing ink (Faithorne 62-64). Weak oil is not heated to the same extent as strong oil, resulting in differences in their flowing qualities—weak oil is more mobile and ideally suited to intaglio techniques, where it migrates into the incised lines, while strong oil is more viscous, producing an ink with a short tack that sits on the surface of the matrix and is ideally suited to relief techniques like wood engraving.[21] The appearance of the ink in these impressions reveals that weak rather than strong oil was added. Linnell produced intaglio prints and was probably more familiar with the type of ink required; Calvert was more focused on wood engraving and would have known the nuances of preparing ink for that technique. This suggests that these two prints are more likely to have been created by a member of the Linnell family.

21. Personal communication with Adrian Kellett, 11 October 2019.

17 “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake” also has marked blind embossing on its verso (illus. 18), indicating that the pressure exerted during printing was much greater than that used to pull Tate’s impression.[22] It was probably printed on a rolling press, where the pressure is easily controlled. Printers sometimes increase pressure to achieve a second pull, meaning that they do not reink the matrix and instead try to extract any residual ink.[23] The NGV’s print is on a medium-weight Western laid paper support, which is not ideally suited to

22. Tate’s impressions have undergone aqueous treatment, which could have reduced blind embossing, but is unlikely to have removed it completely.

I am grateful to Rosie Freemantle, former paper conservator, Tate, for sharing details of the treatment history of Tate’s prints.

23. Personal communication with Michael Phillips, 2 August 2019.

achieving a good impression from a woodblock. It was possibly created as the first stage of cleaning the block after a printing session, a process requiring great care to avoid compromising the clarity of the engraved lines. Pulling prints using scrap paper lying around the studio is a quick, easy, and common method of removing the bulk of the residual ink prior to gentle wiping with a soft cloth.[24] The resulting prints are referred to as maculature impressions.

18 Many of the impressions that I studied have tiny dots of ink within fine compositional lines. For example, the sky region of the NGV's "Colinet Mocked by Two Boys" (illus. 19) and Tate's impression of the same work, "Colinet with His Shepherd's Pipe, Mocked by Two Boys" (Tate, A00122), have numerous dots within identical lines. They may have been produced during the same printing session, or the blocks may not have been adequately cleaned between sessions, allowing minute nuggets of ink to dry.[25]

24. Personal communication with Ros Atkins, 27 October 2019.
25. Personal communication with Nick Lott, 7 May 2016.

19 The NGV's "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low" (illus. 15) is very lightly printed and extensively touched with bistre ink.[26] Like "Menalcas' Yearly Wake," it may well be a maculature impression, casually produced as a means of cleaning the block at the end of a session; rather than casting it away, somebody, perhaps Blake himself or one of the Linnells, applied delicate washes of ink in a manner similar to Blake's preparatory drawings (see illus. 1). Blake and his wife, Catherine, are known to have touched prints with ink in order to rectify a printing imperfection or enhance the composition, as are members of the Linnell family.[27] Linnell or his sons are credited with hand coloring

26. Infrared examination confirmed that the ink is bistre, a brown ink made from chimney soot.
27. The woodblocks of "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet," "Blasted Tree and Blighted Crops," and "Colinet Departs in Sorrow, a Thunder-Scarred Tree on the Right" were cut down roughly, leaving an upper corner angled. On an impression of "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet" (Fitzwilliam Museum, P.59-1950), pencil has been used to continue the composition into the margin, creating a right-angled corner. An impression of "Blasted Tree and Blighted Crops" in the collection

18. "Menalcas' Yearly Wake," viewed from the verso under raking light, showing blind embossing. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5.

19. "Colinet Mocked by Two Boys," showing tiny nuggets of dried ink trapped between engraved lines around the figure of the boy on the left. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.7 cm. (image), 3.9 × 8.2 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1882-5.

seven Virgil wood engravings; Hannah Palmer (née Linnell), who colored a set of Linnell's lithographs, could also have had a hand in them.[28] The artist responsible for the beautiful brushwork on "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low" is unlikely to have been Calvert, as he was strongly against touching wood engravings with ink (Lister, *The Letters of Samuel Palmer* 18).

20 Technical examination of the Virgil wood engravings in the NGV and comparison with examples in other collections have provided insights into how imperfections can help us to understand the method in which an impression was produced. The NGV's composite group includes impressions printed with different presses, papers, and inks. Several that were perhaps destined for the dustbin were retained, and one was extensively touched with ink and transformed into a work of great beauty. Examination of works in collections in the United Kingdom revealed a subtle quirk of Calvert's printing technique that can aid identification of Virgil impressions printed by him. It is now possible to appreciate the NGV's wood engravings in their broader context and to recognize that, while many of them may not be the finest impressions, they provide a valuable window into the history of Blake's Virgil woodblocks.

of Michael Phillips has been touched with ink on the upper-left corner to complete the composition (Phillips, *William Blake: Apprentice and Master* 193).

28. See Lister, *The Letters of Samuel Palmer* 94; *Catalogue of the John Linnell Collection* 10; and James. Linnell's set of lithographs after Michelangelo are described in the 1918 sale catalogue as being colored in Italy by Mrs. Samuel Palmer. I am indebted to Lauren Lott for showing me the catalogue and the hand-colored set of lithographs.

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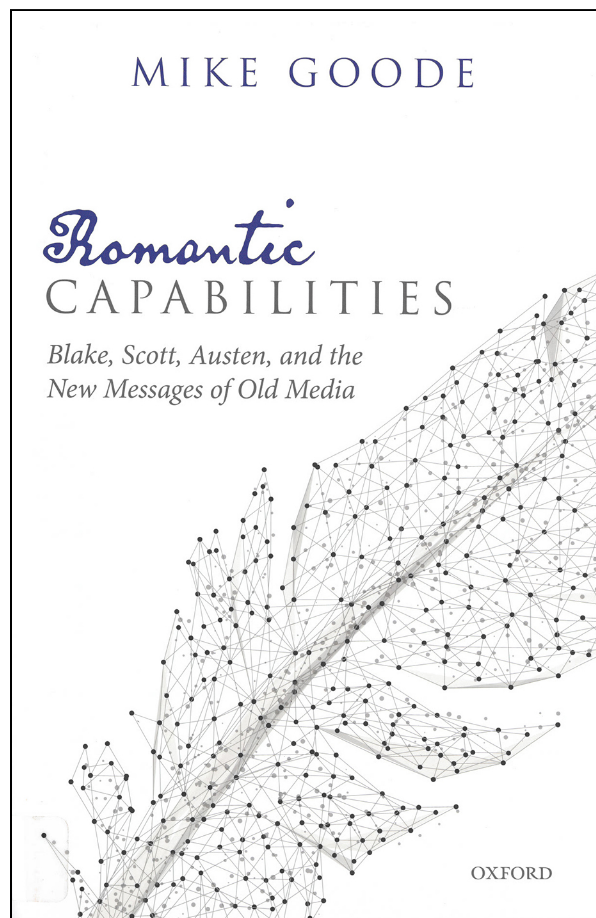
R E V I E W

Mike Goode. *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xvi + 302 pp. £77.00/$99.00, hardcover; also available as an e-book.

Reviewed by James Rovira

James Rovira (jamesrovira@gmail.com) teaches literature and writing at Keiser University and Valencia College and is the founder of the Anazoa Educational Project, a nonprofit. His most recent works include *Women in Rock, Women in Romanticism* (Routledge, 2022), *David Bowie and Romanticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), *Reading as Democracy in Crisis: Interpretation, Theory, History* (Lexington Books, 2019), the first-year writing text *Writing for College and Beyond* (Lulu Press, 2019), *Rock and Romanticism: Post-Punk, Goth, and Metal as Dark Romanticisms* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and *Rock and Romanticism: Blake, Wordsworth, and Rock from Dylan to U2* (Lexington Books, 2018). He is currently developing the collection *Heavy Metal and Romanticism* with Julian Knox.



1 Mike Goode's *Romantic Capabilities: Blake, Scott, Austen, and the New Messages of Old Media* is an engaging and sophisticated extension of "Blakespotting," his 2006 *PMLA* article in which he argues for texts' "latent meaningfulness," a latency that reveals their "potential energies in other times and places" ("Blakespotting" 771). *Romantic Capabilities* further theorizes that core idea by bringing together insights from media studies with insights from literary studies to discuss a text's "behavior" as it moves forward from its time and place of origin, interpreting its later behavior as a sign of its latent potentials at the time of composition. For this reason, Goode's analysis of a literary work's future behavior differs from a reception history: reception histories usually emphasize human agency, what people do with texts in their afterlives, while Goode emphasizes the agency of the text, which is why he frames his discussion in terms of the text's latency or potential energies. In other words, inherent features of the text present at the time of composition influence, at least to an extent, how the text behaves in the future, outside of its original context. *Romantic Capabilities* does not reduce literary studies to media studies, or media studies to literary studies, but "seeks to open Romantic studies and media studies out to one another in order to generate insights of interest to both fields" (5). This opening out includes a resistance to defining media behavior only in terms of the text's new medium, a resistance that takes the form of a commitment to close reading: "This book is committed to the idea that techniques of close-reading language and form matter to any discussion of how a text behaves and how much its behavior in a particular case has to do with what it says" (14).

2 Goode elaborates three propositions that serve as "central methodological premises" for his work in this book: "hypermediacy tends to be meta-mediacy," "media behaviors reopen archives," and "media behaviors were once virtual" (18, 19, 22). He believes that these propositions contribute to the development of "a new historicism that more closely joins together literary and media studies" (18). This new historicism shouldn't be understood as a continuation of, say, Greenblatt, but as another new historicism that differs from work identified as such in the past. "Hypermediacy tends to be meta-mediacy" describes a process by which media tend to reproduce themselves in other media (hypermediacy) that then leads to a consideration of the medi-

um itself as media (meta-mediacy). According to Goode, this process is important not only for understanding the behaviors of texts in different media, but also for understanding the text in its original context, which explains his view of his work as a new historicism. "Media behaviors reopen archives" emphasizes the "portability … of forms" (19)—in other words, once a work from the past is appropriated in the present, the formal nature of that work reactivates the features of that form in the present. A work's formal structure encodes its latencies for future use. "Media behaviors were once virtual" draws from "Deleuze's concept of the generative 'virtual' component that exists in and is a part of all that is real, including forms" (22). This concept eradicates the usual line between the "actual" and the "possible" by arguing that the possible must be in the realm of the real—otherwise it could never become actual. Rather than juxtaposing a nonexistent possible with an existent actual, Deleuze bridges the gap between existence and nonexistence with the "virtual," or a reality waiting to be actualized. For Goode's purposes, then, the key concept is that "things exist virtually for some period of time, or in isolated spots of time, before there is any actual historical manifestation of them" (24)—hence, a justification for the latencies of texts.

3 Goode works out these propositions through two chapters on Blake, one on Scott, and two on Austen. The two on Blake are divided between written texts, specifically the Proverbs of Hell (chapter 2, "Blakespotting"), and visual texts (chapter 3, "The Joy of Looking: What William Blake's Pictures Want"). Chapter 4, "History in Three Dimensions: Panorama, Stereoscopy, and Scott's Novel Perspective," elaborates on the way that the translation of Scott's visually oriented novels into panoramas and stereographs "offers insight into how Scott's writings formally generated, and lent themselves to, a sense of visual immersion" (102), so that the chapter examines how the new media provoke fertile examinations of their texts. Chapter 5, "Letters from Austenland: The Designs of Fanfiction" explores the "truth universally acknowledged that every single person with the good fortune to recognize this line must be in want of its perpetual rewriting" (171). Goode argues that Austen's fanfiction is different from other fanfiction because "these alternate universes are understood to have been actually present at some point, such that their cultural distance is historical rather than metaphysical or future-speculative" (176), in opposition to more common fanfiction about alternate universes that fans never believe existed. As a result, Austenian fanfiction "actualizes potentials latent within the medial forms of the novels themselves" (181), potentials that wouldn't be actualized until after the creation of Austenian fanfiction. The sixth and final chapter, "Capability Jane: The Ecological Designs of Austenian Realism," engages English landscape gardening as well as the relational ecosystems present in *Mansfield Park*, a culture that exists "not just *within* a discrete natural geography but as *integral to* that geography" (234, Goode's emphasis).

4 His reading of Blake's proverbs and visual images focuses on "Deleuzian 'lines of flight'" (45), a metaphor that emphasizes the departure or even escape of textual elements from the original text. He engages the ways that fragments of Blake's texts and images reappear in later media and are verbally and visually quoted outside of, and often without regard for, their original context. Chapter 2 begins with a correction of a claim of his from 2006 that Blake's proverbs appeared in Trump Tower. He had misread a *New Yorker* article describing these proverbs in a luxury penthouse in the Time Warner Building; since the article was reporting on a public relations feud between Trump Tower and the Time Warner Building, it mentioned both. Jennifer Davis Michael caught the mistake during the 2016 election cycle and pointed it out in "Blake, Trump, and the Road of Excess: An Urban Legend" (*The Millions*, 16 June 2016), which was then taken up in a discussion on NASSR-L on 18-19 June 2016. But Goode's larger point about the reinterpretation of the proverbs "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" and "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough" remains: whatever limitations they have in the Proverbs of Hell, in a Manhattan luxury condo they sound like a "hedonist manifesto" (37).

5 Goode is not interested in a historicist correction of misreadings of these Blake proverbs, but in how the proverbs function as "meaning engines seeking out end users," given their propensity to go viral in the current sense of the term (40). In this case, the new contexts don't activate new meanings in the proverbs; instead, the proverbs activate dormant potentials in new contexts. Goode argues that this behavior belongs to the nature of proverbs as proverbs: they are written to be quoted outside their original context. The existence of Blake's proverbs as proverbs is particularly important: by calling them proverbs, he's ascribing them to an unknown or anonymous source, as opposed to aphorisms, which are sayings by an individual author or speaker. Since he calls these sayings proverbs, then says that they were "collected" by a narrator traveling through hell, Blake subverts then-current legal systems dependent upon ascription to an author. In this way, he insulates himself from any charges of sedition in 1790s' England while still saying what he wants to say. Ultimately, Blake's proverbs function like "worms" in both the digital and earthly senses as they "circulate … more rhizomatically than can be mapped" (63). They are capable of "rewiring the thoughts and wants of the individual users who converge with them," making "suddenly visible certain complexities of the world, a world

made still-more-complex on account of their very passage through it" (63).

6 While Goode constructs his argument from a number of names familiar to Romanticists and Blake scholars, mentioning authors ranging from Frye, Erdman, Worrall, Raine, and Mitchell to Roger Whitson, Tilottama Rajan, Jason Whittaker, Andrew Burkett, Mark Lussier, Ron Broglio, and Marcel O'Gorman, his readings of Blake feel new and original. I feel like I'm learning a different way to read texts, almost backwards through the telescope, but the object is brought closer rather than pushed farther away. On the other hand, my inner literary historian is dying to have his say on two points. First, Goode insists that no reader existed at the time of the production of Blake's works who could ever have "encounter[ed] more than a portion of his [Blake's] poetic output over the course of a lifetime" (44). He asserts more than once that the works were unavailable "*as* an oeuvre to any reader or set of readers" until very recently (44, his emphasis). He is right, given how limited Blake's print runs were, until he applies his observation to any single reader—because he's excluding Blake himself as a reader of his own work. I don't mean to invoke the author here as an authoritative arbiter of meaning, but as the only reader to whom the various repetitions within visual and verbal texts would be accessible, so that Blake's oeuvre was an oeuvre to Blake himself while he was producing it. This point is worth making because Goode is careful to make plausible, historicized, and well-argued claims about Blake's possible intent for the proverb form later in the chapter, and because he intends his reading practice to reflect not only on the form in its present use, but also on how the form's present use sheds light on its potentials in its original context. According to Goode's own argument, Blake himself matters, and for that reason, the proverbs' lines of flight could be within Blake's corpus as well as an escape from it.

7 My second quibble is very likely the result of the first: I wanted, as part of Goode's many close readings of a variety of Blake's proverbs, at least a mention of the bigger picture in which they are set. He does provide the narrative frame of an unknown author walking through hell, like Dante, collecting the infernal wisdom of hell through its proverbs. But he ignores the larger conceptual frame that encompasses so many of Blake's works, a frame that Blake refers to as the "two contrary states of the human soul" on the title page of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and that appears in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as the juxtaposition of angelic with devilish subjectivity. One point that Blake makes from beginning to end is that of individual point of view: it is not just a matter of what the proverb says, but of who is saying it. In other words, he calls them proverbs "of hell" for a reason. When Goode reflects on the number of different ways that "The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship" can be interpreted (55), he focuses on unifying interpretations, as if the proverb were elucidating a single principle. But because it lacks a verb, it is open to a wide range of interpretations, all dependent not only upon the verb chosen but also on tense. Perhaps the point of this proverb, and many others, is not to articulate a single principle, but to emphasize how different kinds of subjectivities can perceive the same object very differently? Nests, webs, and friendships all enclose things, but a bird's nest nurtures her young while a spider's web catches victims. The difference is not necessarily in the object, but in the individual using it, so that when the proverb concludes "man friendship," we're encouraged to understand that friendship with some men can be like a nest, while with others it can be like a web. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, this commentary culminates in an argument between an angel and a devil that results in the marriage promised on the title page: the angel and devil merge into one. That fusion of points of view exists outside the text in the person reading it, whether that person is the author of the text or another one of its readers. In these cases, I wanted a little more close reading from Goode.

8 These quibbles do not detract in any way from the strength of Goode's argument throughout the book or in this chapter. The proverbs' various flights and ensuing behaviors outside the time and place of their composition still demand attention, as does his way of understanding them. I'm describing what I wish were added to the chapter, even if only in two or three qualifying sentences. I suspect that Scott and Austen scholars will find Goode's work on those figures similarly engaging and similarly challenging. Goode provokes argument in the best possible way and, in the process, opens up the field of literary studies to new possible readings.

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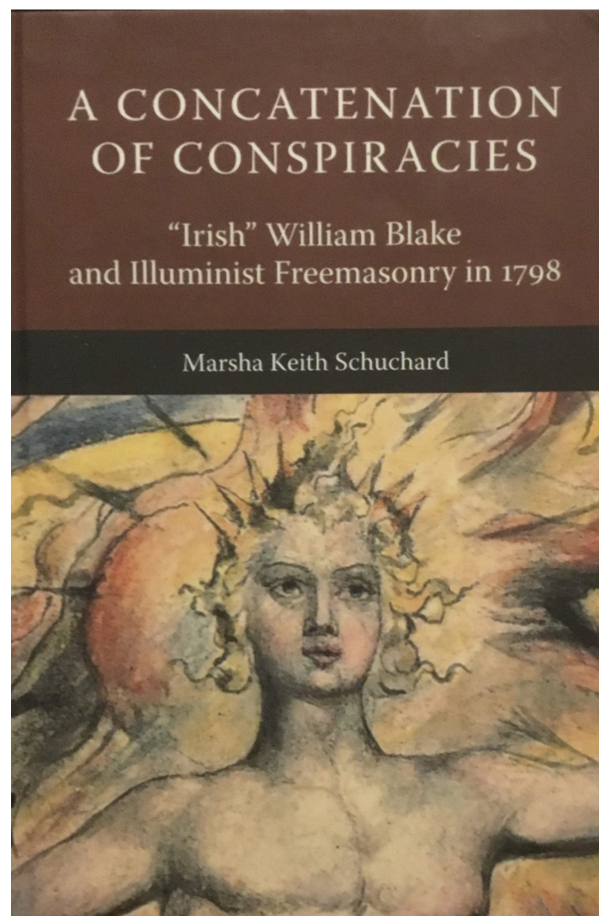
R E V I E W

Marsha Keith Schuchard. *A Concatenation of Conspiracies: "Irish" William Blake and Illuminist Freemasonry in 1798*. Alexandria, VA: Plumbstone Academic, 2021. x + 119 pp. $33.97, hardcover.

Reviewed by Josephine A. McQuail

Josephine A. McQuail's work has been published in *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, *Vala*, *The Human Divine* <thehumandivine.org>, *Modern Language Studies*, *Rupkatha Journal*, *European Romantic Review*, *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, and elsewhere. She edited and contributed to the collection *Janet Frame in Focus* (McFarland) and is co-editing *Blake's Manuscripts* with Mark Crosby (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2023). She is professor of English at Tennessee Technological University.



1 THIS readable and compelling study, focusing on the tempestuous 1790s in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Europe and the culmination of events in the Irish uprising of 1798, yields important new insights on Blake and his historical context. Schuchard's research in Moravian archives in 2001 (Davies, "William Blake in Contexts" 4) (with subsequent collaboration with Keri Davies) resulted in the announcement in 2004 in these pages of her startling discovery that Blake's mother had attended the Moravian Church, and that the church took a decided interest in—as it did with all church members—Catherine Wright's marriage to her first husband, Thomas Armitage. This, along with Schuchard's further research on Blake and Moravianism and other sects in *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision*, was sparked by the revelations in E. P. Thompson's *Witness against the Beast* (120-21) and subsequently in Davies's "William Blake's Mother: A New Identification" about that first marriage. *A Concatenation of Conspiracies* expands upon this groundbreaking work.

2 Schuchard's preface to *Concatenation* reveals that it began with the exhibition Up in Arms! The 1798 Rebellion in Ireland (Ulster Museum, Belfast, 1998) and resultant public comment on the role of Freemasonry (1-2). Thus, her interest in Blake and Moravian and Swedenborgian sexual and spiritual beliefs and practices was conjoined to her early work on Freemasons and other groups (her dissertation had been on "Freemasonry, Secret Societies, and the Continuity of the Occult Traditions in English Literature"). The book's focus on 1798 provides a brilliant basis for her exploration of how the historical context of events, movements, and actions, which involved various lodges of Freemasons as well as the Brotherhood of United Irishmen (BUI), led to the Irish rebellion and likely affected Blake in London. Her thesis is, basically, that acts of suppression—including the Unlawful Societies Act—under William Pitt's increasingly paranoid government also influenced Blake's artistic works and the course of his life. Separate publications in 1797 by the Abbé Augustin Barruel and John Robison convinced many of their contemporaries that Freemasons, Illuminati, and groups like the London Corresponding Society (LCS) fomented movements that led to the French Revolution, and that these societies were determined to bring a revolution to England. Inevitably, Barruel's and Robison's arguments only increased government paranoia. To establish her argument, Schuchard offers many details from Blake's writings, both prose—especially letters—and poetry; cites his movements; and suggests links between activities of members of such organizations as the LCS and BUI, who "often met in taverns in Lambeth" (*Concatenation* 39).

3 In her earlier monograph, Schuchard speculated as to why there is resistance to her contentions regarding Blake and the esoteric and erotic background of the more radical Swedenborgian and Moravian sects, and why so many have shied away from the ideas she examines: "Sensible academic critics have cautiously refrained from taking the plunge, for this kind of historical detective work must reject most academic conventional wisdom about the eighteenth century … and dig deep into the esoteric underground of the mystical counterculture" (*William Blake* 10). Also, because of attacks on such dissenting sects and secret societies by writers like Barruel and Robison, records were destroyed and connections denied and downplayed. Since secrecy and subterfuge were necessary, how does one uncover the truth behind historical figures and their relationship to ideas that could have compromised their liberty, safety, or indeed lives?

4 Despite this hurdle, Schuchard's arguments are convincing on many levels. The possibility that Blake's very possession of a printing press (or more accurately, a star-wheel rolling press) endangered him so much after the sedition acts that he was virtually forced to leave London for Felpham on the Sussex coast is intriguing (72-73). If, as she contends, he was in danger of being turned in by neighbors or passersby who could see his press through the windows of Hercules Buildings in Lambeth, clearly he might have had a compelling reason to leave. All the same, if Blake was so paranoid, couldn't he have hidden his activities behind a curtain, and what about the fact that he told John Flaxman in a letter of 21 September 1800 that all of his and Catherine's worldy goods were transported in "Seven Different Chaises … with Sixteen heavy boxes & portfolios full of prints" for the full day's move to Felpham, including, presumably, the disassembled press (E 710)? Also, in making this case, Schuchard describes him as "in September 1800 writing of his 'Nervous Fear'" (*Concatenation* 73). It is always tempting to read between the lines when it comes to the compromising radical ideologies that Blake clearly held and sympathized with, but this quotation (from a letter of 12 September to Flaxman) appears not in a discursive form but in a poem—perhaps deliberately set up this way to elude suspicion, but the context is different from that implied by Schuchard:

> The American War began   All its dark horrors passed before my face
> Across the Atlantic to France. Then the French Revolution commencd in thick clouds
> And My Angels have told me. that seeing such visions I could not subsist on the Earth
> But by my conjunction with Flaxman   who knows to forgive Nervous Fear
> (lines 9-12 of "To My Dearest Friend John Flaxman," E 708)

Blake's reference to the historical events that so threatened the sovereignty of the British nation does stand out, but is this enough to establish that fear for his life and freedom on account of Pitt's repressive legislation caused him to leave London? Earlier the same summer, he had explained to George Cumberland that he was only beginning "to Emerge from a Deep pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it" (E 706). Was it "Melancholy" for no reason, or "Nervous Fear," or both that made Blake quit London? Or was it simply opportunity?

5 David Erdman cites the very same letter to Flaxman to support the centrality of the American Revolution in Blake's intellectual development and core convictions, and contends that ignoring this crucial fact in his identity on the part of critics "comes … as much from a failure to enter imaginatively into Blake's times as it does from a failure to enter Blake's imagination" (*Prophet* 5). Martin Price, in an early review of *Prophet against Empire*, accused Erdman of a "'conversion downwards' that throughout the book seems in effect to invert Blake's figural method into political pamphleteering" (quoted in Rose 48). Schuchard's tendency to quote Blake's poems, then, as "political pamphleteering" (as Price would have it), or as statements of biographical fact, is also evident in Erdman's work and in Bentley's biography, *Stranger from Paradise*, and is perhaps unavoidable given the gaps in our knowledge of Blake.

6 Would it be fair to dub all these studies "visionary history," in which imagination is definitely and inevitably at play in the reconstruction of a milieu? Schuchard's ability to conjure up a vivid picture of Blake's physical surroundings and their influence on him—for instance, the area around the Royal Academy and Basire's studio, where Blake was apprenticed—is striking. Proximity to the Freemasons was made much of in her earlier work: "Young Blake now moved into the engraver's studio at 31 Great Queen Street, where for the next seven years he was situated in the heart of London's Masonic world" (*William Blake* 147). Sometimes, with as much detail as is provided by Schuchard, one can easily feel immersed in an approximation of the milieu that Blake inhabited, which indeed yields material for promising speculation. In quoting an entry from Joseph Farington's diary for 1797, in which he records a discussion about Blake with fellow Royal Academicians Thomas Stothard and John Hoppner, she notes that "the Academicians often met at Freemasons' Tavern on Great Queen Street, next door to Freemasons' Hall, where they had access to a great variety of initiates, both native and foreign" (*Concatenation* 9-10), and she explains that "Stothard was a Master Mason in a liberal 'Antient' lodge, while John Hoppner was an initiate of a conservative 'Modern' lodge" and that "the volatile Fuseli expressed radical notions and was in touch with illuminist Freemasons from Switzerland and

Germany" (10, 11). She contextualizes Blake's neighborhood by citing Masonic groups sympathetic to the BUI that met in Lambeth's Oakley Arms tavern (84) and pointing to his ties to the Lambeth Asylum for Female Orphans, asserting that he and his wife actually attended services at the chapel (*Concatenation* 14). This is puzzling, though, for she specifies two sources for this information, Erdman and Clarke Garrett. Erdman certainly mentions the orphanage and Blake's possible connections to it, but according to him it was William Hayley—not Blake—who in "January 1793" visited the asylum (*Prophet* 290n18). He does comment that a William Blake in 1779 "appears in a list of subscribers to *Discourses on Various Subjects*" by Jacob Duché,[1] but questions if this is "our" Blake (11-12n19). In *Respectable Folly*, Garrett says simply that "William Blake may have been one of the mystically inclined artists and engravers" who attended Duché's meetings (158). It may be quite probable, but there is no definite proof in these sources, at least.

7 Still, Schuchard shows that although Edwin Ellis and W. B. Yeats were wrong in their famously absurd and inaccurate assertion that Blake was Irish, he may have been an Irish sympathizer. Weaving her tapestry of clues from the historical record, she contends that the many and diffuse connections between Blake, Swedenborgianism and Moravianism, Masonry, and the BUI indicate that he did, at least in social discourse and in art, support the Irish rebellion of 1798, and subtly displayed his sympathy with the Irish cause by allusions to such charged symbols as the winged-maiden harp, a national emblem used by the BUI. She cites Catherine McClenahan's observation "that Blake referred to Ireland 'only once before 1797 (in *America*), but 17 times afterward, 14 in *Jerusalem*'" (*Concatenation* 90, see n234), and, by juxtaposing a reproduction of the title page of *Jerusalem* (80) with a spy report's mention of a Yorkshire "Society … under the title of New Jerusalemites" (*Second Report of the Committee of Secrecy* [1802], quoted in *Concatenation* 81), she implies that Blake's poem alludes to such groups. Furthermore, echoing McClenahan's contention that the female figure in the lower-right corner of the title page appears "in the form of an Irish harp" (87, caption) and citing other "minute particulars," Schuchard bolsters her point that Blake sympathized with the Irish cause—a dangerous opinion for him to hold.

8 Much careful and original archival work by Schuchard provides support for her arguments, though, as indicated here, conclusions are sometimes overstated. The significance of the word "concatenation" (from a phrase in Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, which serves as one of the epigraphs) as a controlling metaphor for her hypotheses becomes apparent; however, are all of the things she points out simply "occurring together," or are they "linked together" (from the Merriam-Webster definition of the word)? Each reader must ultimately decide, but perhaps we should remember, to quote Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that "what is now proved was once, only imagin'd" (E 36).

1. Duché was an Anglo-American minister who was chaplain of the asylum for several years and became a Swedenborgian (Erdman and Garrett give conflicting dates for Duché's tenure at the asylum).

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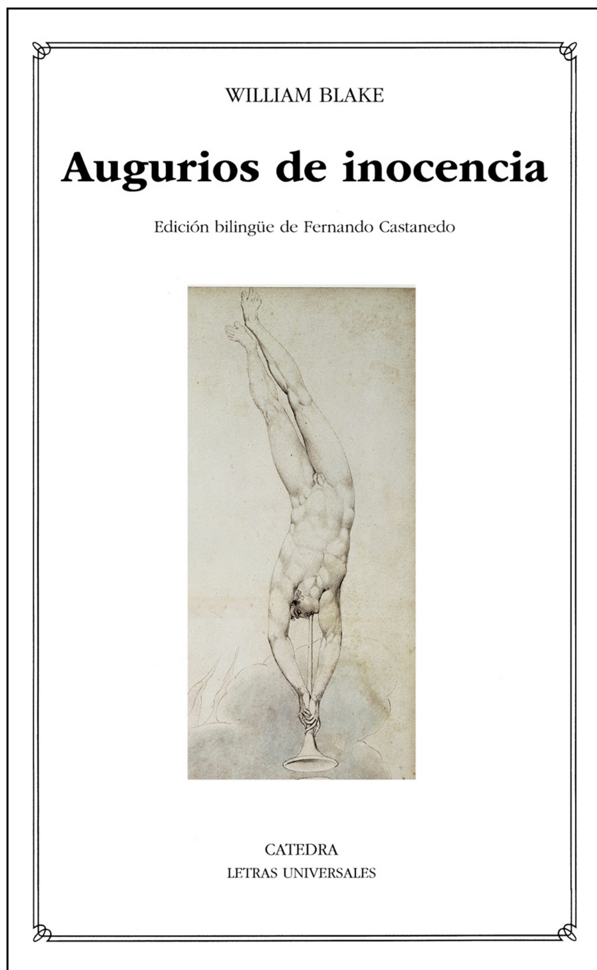

R E V I E W

Fernando Castanedo, ed. and trans. *William Blake, Augurios de inocencia*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2020. 178 pp. €13.50, softcover.

Reviewed by Alexander S. Gourlay

Alexander S. Gourlay (agourlay@risd.edu) teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design.

1 FERNANDO Castanedo's bilingual critical edition of the ten poems from the so-called Pickering Manuscript is impressive, a sensitive translation into Spanish combined with scholarly commentary and apparatus of very high quality. This book will win Blake Spanish-speaking friends wherever it goes, but there may be some confusion about what's in it. On the back cover Castanedo explains his title by referring to a tradition of naming a manuscript collection after its "most celebrated" poem. "Auguries" is the longest and most important poem in the group, and as a title it is an informative improvement on "The Pickering Manuscript," since Pickering was merely an early owner, but the Spanish equivalent of "Poems from the 'Auguries' Manuscript" might have been better.

2 In general this volume gets things just right. Castanedo writes clearly in both English and Spanish, and is a judicious, thorough, and painstaking scholar as well as a gifted translator. His renderings capture many of the subtleties of Blake's verse, ranging from sweetly fluid lyric to pounding incantation, and perhaps because rhymes are plentiful in Spanish, many are preserved without greatly compromising sense or sonority. At the same time, one rarely feels that poetics are determinative for Castanedo in his role as translator; in general, thought appears to have precedence over other considerations, and he seems to have consulted every available scholarly commentary in order to preserve as much as possible of the meaning of these disparate poems, many of them difficult.

3 Consider the opening stanzas of "El psiconauta," Castanedo's version of "The Mental Traveller":

Viajé por el país de unos hombres
de hombres y mujeres también
y escuché y vi tales horrores
que nadie pudiera creer

allí al nacer el niño ríe
aunque se engendra con dolor
igual que alegres cosechamos
lo sembrado con aflicción

My line-by-line prose retranslation indicates the extent of his success in capturing the wonderful strangeness of Blake's poem:

The Psychonaut

I traveled through a country of certain men
Of men and women too
And I heard and saw such horrors
As no one could believe

There at birth the boy laughs
Although engendered with pain
Just as we reap happily
What was sowed with sorrow

The retranslation is clumsy, but the Castanedo version is pretty good, especially the second stanza. I think it is better

than Pablo Neruda's version,[1] most of which is more literal and less lyrical, but I have a few quibbles. The laughter of the boy expressed in "ríe" does not include the parallel implication that instead of suffering in labor, the mother shares in the joy, the visionary alternative to bearing children in pain. Also, the translated title is ingenious, but unless Castanedo was trying to avoid Neruda's title, "El viajero mental," I am not sure what motivated it. A *psiconauta* might be either a seafarer whose vessel is the mind (like an Argonaut, who sails in the Argo) or one who sails the mind (as an astronaut sails among the stars); furthermore, the idea of sailing introduces an extraneous spatial element that obscures the idea of purely mental anthropological exploration. And finally, I miss the "cold Earth wanderers" passed by in line 4, but I am more impressed by Blake's suggestive efficiency than critical of Castanedo's translation when I try to imagine a line that could include the wanderers and everything else squeezed into the words "As cold Earth wanderers never knew."

4 In addition to the transcription in English and the translation—both annotated—on facing pages, this small volume contains fourteen more discrete editorial components, including a critical biography (with the Blakes as Adam and Eve in the garden), an exhaustive bibliography, the history of the manuscript, three textual appendices, and a full-color reduced reproduction. Castanedo cuts no corners; the work seems to have been conceived as a full scholarly edition that happens to be in Spanish, mostly, rather than a crib for literature students with weak English or a shallow popularization, though some of its features (the biography, for instance) might not appear in an English scholarly edition with such a narrow focus. Together these disparate adjunctive materials make it potentially useful as a pocket-size introduction to one corner of Blake for the general public, as a textbook for undergraduates, or as an aid to scholarship or pedagogy for a graduate student or beginning teacher.

1. Pablo Neruda, *Visiones de las hijas de Albión y El viajero mental* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Botella al Mar, 1947). These translations first appeared in the journal *Cruz y raya* in 1934.