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News

We and every reader of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* are supremely grateful for the work and sheer endurance of Alexander Gourlay as our review editor since 2006. Sandy, without complaint, did the hard and usually thankless work, almost all of it behind the scenes, of deciding what needs reviewing for our highly specialized audience; acquiring the books (usually if not always books) from publishers, a harder and harder job these days; finding the right reviewers; and working with the editors and managing editor to get the reviews into shape for publication. Thanks so much for your wisdom, perseverance, and devotion, Sandy.

We welcome as our new book review editor Sibylle Erle, FRSA, FHEA, visiting scholar at the University of Lincoln and a researcher at the University of Lisbon. She is the author of *Blake, Lavater and Physiognomy* (2010) and she co-edited with Morton Paley the two-volume *Reception of William Blake in Europe* (2019). She also co-edited "Science, Technology and the Senses" (2008), *Panoramas, 1787–1900: Texts and Contexts* (2012), and "Monsters: Interdisciplinary Explorations in Monstrosity" (2019–20), and edited "Blake in Europe" (2022). Sibylle is chair of the Blake Society, and edits *VALA: The Journal of the Blake Society*. She is the editorial director of *Global Blake*. Apart from Blake and reception, her current research is on monsters and death in literature written for young readers.

Morris Eaves and Morton D. Paley, editors

Blake's Hervey, Thomas Butts, and Methodism

BY DENNIS M. READ

DENNIS M. READ (read@denison.edu) is associate professor emeritus at Denison University. His recent publications include "A Good Man for Structure: Autobiographical Dimensions in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Pat Hobby Stories" (*F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, 2020) and "Vladimir Nabokov's Enchanted Summer: Ashland, Oregon, 1953" (*Nabokov Online Journal*, 2023). He lives in Denver, Colorado.

1 WILLIAM Blake's painting *Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"* (illus. 1) is not an illustration of the work. In it he veers markedly from the dour tone and sensational emotions used by Hervey during his tour of graves, replacing the emphasis on the uncertainty of life and fear of death with a respectful treatment of Hervey himself. Blake doesn't take liberties with the text so much as he finds a prevailing message of love and forgiveness in Hervey's words. There is agreement in the life-beyond-life visions of Hervey and Blake, but Blake's spin is more mystical and ethereal.¹

2 This deviation from literal illustration is in accord with Blake's fundamental faith. It also suggests an affiliation of belief with his patron Thomas Butts. Whether Butts commissioned the painting or Blake painted it independently and then offered it to Butts, it is reasonable to assume that Hervey's *Meditations* was a work that Butts esteemed. It was also a work that Blake recast with special care—with an intricate design, numerous figures, and attention to minute particulars. A detailed study of the painting and the work that it illustrates provides a strong suggestion of a common religious belief between Blake and Butts, one that shows their bond of friendship and shared values, specifically allied with Hervey's Methodism, following George White-

field's belief in sanctification rather than John Wesley's doctrine of perfectionism.

- 3 Blake painted *Epitome* sometime between 1800 and 1820.² Executed in watercolor and pen, it is similar in size—43.1 x 29.2 cm.—to the many drawings and paintings that Blake did for Butts.³ It features numerous figures swirling along its left and right margins and, in its center, walking up and down a spiral staircase. Most of the figures are identified in gold-leaf writing. Jesus is at the center of the painting, with Moses next to him and God above him. Its intricate detail seems to cry out for a larger canvas.⁴
- 4 Little has been definitively determined about the painting beyond these several particulars. "WBLAKE inv" is written in its lower left-hand corner, establishing its artist. The Foster & Son sale of 29 June 1853, which includes lot 135, "One from Hervey's Meditations," was from the collection of Butts's son, thus establishing the provenance. The title given by William Michael Rossetti in Alexander Gilchrist's biography of Blake is "Hervey's Meditations—a practical epitome" (1880 ed., no. 229). Both descriptions are well after the fact, and the Foster's title teasingly suggests that there could have been more than one Blake rendering of Hervey's *Meditations*.

I

- 5 Thomas Butts was Blake's most devoted patron. Over more than twenty years, beginning toward the end of the eighteenth century, Butts purchased from Blake over 200 works, acting as his financial mainstay during his dark first decade of the nineteenth century. In all, he paid Blake more than 400 pounds during that decade.⁵
- 6 Butts was as much a friend as he was a partisan of Blake's art. Blake's letters to Butts during the first years of the nineteenth century, when Blake and his wife lived in Felpham, are filled with warmth and affection, and after the Blakes

2. Because no receipt from Butts is dated after 1810, a later date of composition is open to question. Blake may have inscribed the year along the lower border, below his name, but the work was unfortunately trimmed sometime in the nineteenth century.

3. Bentley states that Blake's fifty-odd fresco paintings from the Bible created for Butts typically measure 15 x 10 1/2 in. (38.1 x 26.7 cm.) (*Stranger from Paradise* 192).

4. David Bindman asserts that *Epitome* and *An Allegory of the Spiritual Condition of Man* are both illustrations of theological texts: "The text [of *Spiritual Condition*] is unrecorded, but may also be an eighteenth-century devotional work" (170). Blake painted *Spiritual Condition* for Butts and populated it with a number of figures in swirling columns, but on a much larger scale, 151.5 x 121.3 cm.

5. Bentley, *Blake Records* 222.

1. My approach is guided by S. Foster Damon's extensive entry on Hervey in his *Blake Dictionary* (183-85).

Portions of this essay draw on my article "Blake's 'Tender Stranger': *Thel* and Hervey's *Meditations*," *Colby Library Quarterly* 18 (1982): 160-67.



1. Blake, *Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs."* 43.1 × 29.2 cm. Tate, presented by George Thomas Saul, 1878. N02231. Photo: Tate.

See the *Blake Archive*, <<https://blakearchive.org/preview/but770?descId=but770.1.1.wc.01>>, for the ability to view the design in great detail.

returned to London they exchanged numerous visits with Butts and his wife, Betsy, for at least several years.

- 7 Hervey was born in 1714 and attended Lincoln College, Oxford, where, as a member of what came to be called the Holy Club, he was strongly influenced by the Oxford Methodists. One of his teachers was John Wesley. Later, however, his theological thinking was more aligned with George Whitefield, a fellow student at Oxford who became the other major figure in Methodism. Hervey remained an Anglican and served as curate of several small churches.⁶ Never in robust health, he died in 1758, aged forty-four.
- 8 *Meditations among the Tombs* was published in 1746 and quickly vied in popularity with Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45) and Blair's *Grave* (1743), the two works, in fact, to which it is most indebted.⁷ All three share the same elegiac tone, melancholy perspective, and macabre setting, and all three drew from a common storehouse of graveyard imagery. In 1748 Hervey published *Meditations and Contemplations*, comprising an expanded version of his *Meditations among the Tombs* and three more essays, *Reflections on a Flower-Garden*, *Contemplations on the Night*, and *Contemplations on the Starry Heavens*. In the third edition of *Meditations and Contemplations* (1748), he added *A Winter-Piece* and *A Descant on Creation*.
- 9 In 1755 he published *Theron and Aspasio*, consisting of seventeen dialogues between a rationalist (Theron) and an enthusiast (Aspasio) on central questions of Christian theology. The work was immensely popular and generated a great deal of published discussion. Foremost was Wesley's criticism in his pamphlet *A Preservative against Unsettled*

6. Mary Lynn Johnson points out that "in the 1740s, well before the Methodists broke from the Church of England in 1795, British members of Methodist societies retained membership in the established church" (139). Whitefield Methodists, however, retained membership in the Church of England even after 1795.

7. John W. Draper (*The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* [1929; New York: Octagon, 1967] 290) states that many "congratulatory poems" appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* following its initial publication, and that a prose imitation "By a Lady" appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* 20 (1750): 409. In "Nature and Science in the Works of James Hervey," *University of Texas Studies in English* 28 (1949): 124–38, Alan D. McKillop discusses how Hervey, unlike Young and Blair, uses such instruments as the telescope and microscope to show the imprint of God on all forms of life. Hervey's *Meditations*, therefore, in John Foster's words, "have contributed more, it is probable, than any other book, to the valuable object of prompting and guiding serious minds, of not the superior rank in point of taste, to draw materials of devotional thought from the scenery of nature" (*Fosteriana*, ed. H. G. Bohn [London, 1877] 169; quoted by McKillop 138). For a discussion of the backgrounds and contexts of Hervey's works, see Flora McLaughlin Kearney, *James Hervey and Eighteenth-Century Taste* (Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1969).

Notions in Religion (1758) and in his published letter *A Sufficient Answer, to Letters to the Author of "Theron and Aspasio"* (1757). Hervey had differed from Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfectionism, in which an individual is purified through divine deliverance to arrive at a perfect spiritual state. This deliverance, Wesley asserted, can occur by degrees or instantaneously, resulting in "perfect love." In this state, a Christian is exalted:

Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper. It has cleansed him from pride, whereof "only cometh contention;" and he hath now "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering." And indeed all possible ground for contention, on his part, is cut off. For none can take from him what he desires, seeing he "loves not the world, nor any of the things of the world;" but "all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name." (*A Plain Account* 372)

- 10 Hervey's view, however, was aligned with Whitefield's doctrine of sanctification, in which an individual is always less than spiritually pure and always susceptible of backsliding. Even the most faithful cannot conduct life without sin, and in *Theron and Aspasio* Hervey recognizes this impossibility. Following Whitefield's preachings, he acknowledges that everyone falls short of such perfection and declares that Christian belief consequently rests on unconditional faith. Aspasio states, "That a man is not justified by works, is a position most clearly demonstrated, and a doctrine most zealously inculcated, by St Paul. That faith is a work exerted by the human mind, is equally certain" (1: 310–11). "We are all naturally evil," he tells Theron. "Such we should for ever continue, did not a supernatural power intervene; making some to differ, both from their original selves, and from the generality of their neighbours" (1: 449). He cautions:

"If you expect salvation upon such legal terms [as Wesley's perfectionism], know, that your obedience must be nothing less, than a perfect conformity to the Divine law. Perform all its precepts, in their utmost extent, and with an unremitted perseverance, then."—But alas! such perfection is too high for fallen creatures; they cannot attain unto it. Necessarily, therefore, must they drop all pretensions, and have recourse to some other method of justification. (1: 199)

Hervey died before completing a defense of *Theron and Aspasio*, but a rebuttal was assembled and published posthumously as *Eleven Letters from the Late Rev. Mr. Hervey, to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (1765).⁸

8. In subsequent editions, it was titled *Aspasio Vindicated, and the Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness Defended, against the Objections and Animadversions of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*. For a particu-

- 11 While there are numerous engraved illustrations in the many editions of *Meditations and Contemplations*, Blake's painting seems to be unique; no other artist undertook a version of Hervey's work. Blake did not consider making an engraving of his *Epitome*, as he did with his painting of the Canterbury pilgrims; *Epitome* was a single work for a devoted patron. None of Hervey's works has been found among the books that Blake owned, but Michael Phillips notes that the figure on plate b10 of *There is No Natural Religion* (c. 1788) is similar to that on the frontispiece to volume 2 of *Meditations and Contemplations* (1748).⁹

II

- 12 Blake seems to have been well acquainted with Hervey's works, and, more importantly, seems to have regarded them favorably. His first explicit mention of them occurs in *An Island in the Moon* (c. 1784):

Steelyard the Lawgiver, sitting at his table taking extracts from Herveys Meditations among the tombs & Youngs Night thoughts. . . .

Obtuse Angle entered the Room. What news M^r Steelyard—I am reading Theron & Aspasio, said he. Obtuse Angle took up the books one by one I dont find it here said he. Oh no said the other it was the meditations. Obtuse Angle took up the book & read till the other was quite tir'd out (E 456)

Blake's satirical scene is quite at odds with the tedium of Hervey's works. The rollicking antics delightfully deflate the sententiousness of both Hervey and Steelyard.

- 13 While Hervey's lugubrious writing style may well tire out any reader, his theological stance meets with Blake's approval. Blake's other explicit mention of Hervey occurs in *Jerusalem*, in which he joins Hervey with Whitefield to guard the gate of that holy city that opens to Beulah (E 227). His spiritual kinship with Hervey is allied with his appreciation of Whitefield. In his prose introduction to chapter 3 of *Jerusalem*, "To the Deists," he defends Whitefield: "Foote in calling Whitefield, Hypocrite: was himself one: for Whitefield pretended not to be holier than others: but confessed his Sins before all the World" (E 201).¹⁰

lar aspect of the differences between Hervey and Wesley, see Jonathan Yeager, "John Wesley's Conflict with James Hervey and Its Effects in Scotland," *Journal of Religious History* 34.4 (2010): 398-413.

9. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed., *William Blake's Writings*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 1: 13n, referring to the 1971 Blake Trust/Trianon Press facsimile of *There is No Natural Religion*. Blake owned *Hymns for the National Fast*, Feb. 8, 1782 by John and Charles Wesley (*Blake Books* #750).

10. The reference is to Samuel Foote's play *The Minor* (1760), a comedy satirizing Whitefield as a theatrical performer impersonating a religious leader, thus a hypocrite. Foote says of Methodist preachers in the

- 14 Possible allusions to Hervey's works (or borrowings from them) in "The Tyger," *The French Revolution*, *The Four Zoas*, *The Book of Thel*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *The Book of Los*, and *Milton* have been noted by several scholars.¹¹ It would seem, if these allusions are compelling, that Blake absorbed Hervey's writings so thoroughly that their phrasing and imagery permeate his own works. The painting, however, is Blake's major visual involvement with Hervey. He seems to have done no more than two sketches related to it; at least no others survive.¹² He appears also to have had no interest in showing the work publicly.¹³ If anyone ever saw this work, it was in the Butts home.

- 15 Modern scholars have endeavored to uncover biographical information on Butts, starting with G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s groundbreaking study "Thomas Butts, White Collar Maecenas," published in 1956.¹⁴ Joseph Viscomi's three articles in *Blake*—"The Phoenix / to Mrs Butts' Redux"; "Blake in the Marketplace 1852"; and "A 'Green House' for Butts?"—provide much new information in granular detail, but they also indicate the vast amount that remains unknown about Butts and his relationship with Blake. They certainly substantiate Blake's words to Butts that "I look upon you as the Chief of my Friends, whom I would endeavour to please, because you, among all men, have enabled me to produce these things [Drawings & Pictures]"¹⁵ More relevant to this article, Mary Lynn Johnson has added a thoroughly re-

prelude, "I consider these gentlemen in the light of public performers, like myself; and whether we exhibit at Tottenham-court, or the Hay-market, our purpose is the same, and the place is immaterial." See Misty G. Anderson, "'Our Purpose is the Same': Whitefield, Foote, and the Theatricality of Methodism," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2005): 125-49.

11. See Rodney M. Baine, "Blake's 'Tyger': The Nature of the Beast," *Philological Quarterly* 46 (1967): 489; Read, "Blake's 'Tender Stranger'" (see note 1); Paul Miner, "James Hervey's Influence on Blake's 'Tyger' of *Experience*," *Notes and Queries* 55 (2008): 414-16; Miner, "New Implications: Blake and James Hervey's *Meditations*" and "Blake: The Birth of Los, Echoes from Hervey and Ovid," *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 523-26.

12. Butlin lists two joined sheets, with the watermark GATER 1805, containing spiraling figures on one side and a seated figure, possibly God, on the other (#771, plates 997 and 998).

13. Blake wrote to Butts on 10 January 1803, "But whatever becomes of my labours, I would rather that they should be preserv'd in your Green House (not, as you mistakenly call it, dung hill) than in the cold gallery of fashion" (Keynes 47-48). Blake's painting *Jacob's Dream* (c. 1805) was included in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1808 and in Blake's public exhibition of 1809, along with *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* (c. 1805-09), *The Soldiers Casting Lots for Christ's Garment* (1800), *Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels* (c. 1805), *Ruth the Dutiful Daughter-in-Law* (or *Ruth Departing from Naomi*) (1803), and *Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on Their Journey to Canterbury* (c. 1808), all from Butts's collection.

14. See also Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise* 185-95.

15. 22 November 1802 (Keynes 41).

searched study establishing the Wesleyan connections of Butts's family. Johnson points out that Butts's mother "came from a family well acquainted with John and Charles Wesley" and that her sister Sarah was married by Charles Wesley (138). Sarah's husband, Thomas Hardwick, had traveled with John Wesley during a preaching tour a year before their marriage, in 1747. Butts's grandfather, Thomas Witham, gave a deathbed confession of faith to Charles Wesley in 1743 (140-41). Based on these biographical details, Johnson offers a guarded speculation: "The family's Wesleyan connection was so pronounced in the 1740s that its residual effects may have reached Butts through his aunt Sarah Witham Hardwick (1728-87) and his uncle Thomas Witham (1724-1809)" (144).

- 16 That possibility offers a reason for Butts's wanting Blake to paint *Meditations*. A reading of *Meditations*, however, may make one wonder where its attraction lies.¹⁶ Addressed to an anonymous lady, it records Hervey's solitary afternoon reading the ledger stones in a Cornish country church and speculating about the deceased individuals. Later, he explores the catacombs of the church—"Yonder Entrance leads, I suppose, to the *Vault*":

Let me turn aside, and take one View of the Habitation, and its Tenants.—The sullen *Door* grates upon its Hinges: Not used to receive many Visitants, it admits me with Reluctance and Murmurs. ...

Good Heavens! what a solemn Scene!—How dismal the *Gloom*! Here is perpetual Darkness, and Night even at Noon-day.—How doleful the *Solitude*! Not one Trace of cheerful Society; but Sorrow and Terror seem to have made This their united Abode.—Hark! how the hollow Dome resounds at every Tread. The *Echoes*, that long have slept, are awakened, and whisper along the Walls. (1: 68-69)¹⁷

16. Samuel Johnson composed an impromptu parody, "Meditation on a Pudding," a collection of lumbering effusions (*Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964] 5: 351). Coleridge cited Hervey's *Meditations* in claiming that the popular reading public could not "distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine. The vulgar love the Bible and also Hervey's 'Meditations'" (*Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler [London: Macmillan, 1869] 1: 268n). Elsewhere Coleridge marked the "bloated style and peculiar rhythm" of the writing. He called the characteristics "Herveyisms" (*Biographia Literaria* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983] 2: 211). However, Hervey's *Meditations* is often cited among graveyard school works as a source of Gothic literature, particularly Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). See, for instance, Carol Margaret Davison, *Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009) 61-62.

17. All references to *Meditations among the Tombs* are to *Meditations and Contemplations*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: John and James Rivington, 1748). Italics are in the original.

- 17 This macabre description complements his pious pronouncements on death as a release from a troubled life.¹⁸ Although Hervey seems to relish his depictions of the horrors of dying, he states that his intention is didactic: "The Grave is the most *faithful Master*, and these Instances of Mortality the most *instructive Lessons*" (1: 11-12). The most important lesson concerns the imminence of death in life:

"O! ye Sons of Men, in the Midst of Life you are in Death. No State, no Circumstances, can ascertain your Preservation a single Moment. So *strong* is the Tyrant's Arm, that nothing can resist its Force; so *unerring* his Aim, that nothing can elude the Blow: *Sudden* as Lightning sometimes is his Arrow launched, and wounds and kills in the Twinkling of an Eye. Never promise yourselves Safety in any Expedient, but constant Preparation. The fatal Shafts fly so promiscuously, that none can guess the next Victim. Therefore, *be ye always ready; for in such an Hour as ye think not, the final Summons cometh.*" (1: 25-26)

- 18 Death is Hervey's constant teacher, and the relics of death, the tombstones and their inscriptions, the faded flowers, and especially the worm-eaten flesh and bleached bones of the dead, teach him that everything of this world is transitory; they "are the most invincible Proofs of the *Nothingness* of created Things." Thus he resolves "to *moderate* my *Expectations* from Mortals;—to stand *disengaged* from every *undue Attachment* to the little Interests of Time;—to get above the delusive *Amusements* of Honour, the gaudy *Tinsels* of Wealth, and all the empty *Shadows* of a perishing World" (1: 72).

- 19 All these aspects of the material world, according to Hervey, are not simply distractions from humanity's more permanent state; they are, in fact, persistent dangers to the soul, for they tempt the individual to leave off a proper conduct of life and take up the wages of sin. Each person must constantly be watchful, he warns, and must learn how to practice restraint and employ denial in order to keep his or her virtue intact. The reward for keeping one's soul pure is everlasting salvation in the afterlife; the punishment for allowing one's soul to become defiled is everlasting damnation. This doctrine, reduced to its simplest terms, becomes a paradox: the proper conduct of life is a denial of life itself. Conversely, a love of life suggests a love of sin and a consequent fear of death.

18. Eric Parisot points out that "the meditation does not merely rely on an imagined topography as a literary device to spur metaphysical contemplations of death and salvation, but is instead embedded within and inseparable from its physical surroundings" (124).

- 20 Eric Parisot identifies “three affective strategies central to *Meditations*: eliciting fear and trembling in response to a grave consideration of death; evoking grief and mourning as a way to direct the reader towards the consolations of heaven; and prompting love and compassion for living relations as a way both to encourage faith as an assurance for their ultimate spiritual wellbeing, and to circumvent the horrors of the tomb” (125-26). He asserts that the work “does not aim to promote self-pity” over the loss of loved ones, “but aims to provoke the reader to move beyond self-obsession and towards sociable religious action” (135). A general recognition of humanity’s common fate and final reward ought to provide strong faith in the redemption beyond life.
- 21 While Blake seems not to have been concerned with inducing fear and grief—the first two strategies that Parisot lists—his belief in unconditional love and forgiveness is in accord with the third. Elsewhere in “To the Deists” he states, “Friendship cannot exist without Forgiveness of Sins continually.” Indeed, for Blake, “The Glory of Christianity is, To Conquer by Forgiveness” (E 201). This resounding statement forms the basis for spiritual brotherhood between Blake and Hervey.

III

- 22 This spiritual brotherhood is forcefully expressed in *Epitome of James Hervey’s “Meditations among the Tombs.”* In the painting Hervey is an imaginatively transformed figure, not the melancholic writer of *Meditations and Contemplations*. Just as Blake removes the doctrinal shackles from Milton to make him a fully visionary poet in *Milton*, he eradicates Hervey’s emphasis on physical dissolution and mutability to clarify his elevated state of spirituality.¹⁹ While a rough-hewn chamber forms the setting, Blake has populated that setting with spiritual beings, not the remains of mortal bodies. The amount of detail in *Epitome* is remarkable, especially considering its relatively small size. It shows an attention to Hervey’s work and a considered enlargement of his musing. And it calls for the extensive attention of any viewer. The painting is, in fact, not as much an epitome of Hervey’s *Meditations* as it is Blake’s own vision of death and resurrection generously applied to Hervey. Like Blake’s Last Judgment designs, *Epitome* is a stupendous vision—albeit a more domestic version.²⁰

19. The frequent quotations of Milton in *Theron and Aspasio* indicate that the poet was also a favorite of Hervey’s.

20. In *A Blake Dictionary* (184), Damon points out that “Blake depicted no tombs” and that all the figures “ascend and unite in perfect bliss”; he concludes that “Hervey’s tragic anecdotes have become ecstasies.”

- 23 *Epitome* is also structurally similar to the Last Judgment, with figures ascending in sinuous patterns.²¹ In the central portion, they move along a spiral stair. Blake applies Gothic “Living Form” with a huge arch hewn out of stone and a series of arches in the railing before the altar. Within these structural elements, three figures are arranged along a central vertical axis. Hervey stands at the bottom, with his back to the viewer. Directly above him is Jesus, his head surrounded by a large nimbus. Above him, at the apex of the arch, is God, sitting in a circular shape somewhat larger than Jesus’s nimbus and reading the scroll he holds in his lap. Arranged on the spiral stairway on the central vertical axis between God and Jesus are: Adam, on his knees and looking upward, and Eve, sprawled across Adam’s lap with her head lowered; Noah, rising out of the waters, his ark and two doves behind him, the one on the left holding an olive branch in its beak; and Abraham, kneeling and looking up, his left arm enfolding his son Isaac, whom he has offered in sacrifice to God. Finally, between Jesus and Hervey on this axis are the bread and wine of the Eucharist on a table.
- 24 The names of these figures are written in gold next to them.²² Others in this thickly populated stream are also identified. An Angel of Providence and a Guardian Angel float on either side of Hervey. Jesus, in turn, is flanked by a pious Moses with hands clasped in prayer (rather than Moses the Urizenic lawgiver) and Elias, or Elijah, engulfed in the flames of prophecy. This tableau signifies Jesus at the moment of his transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3). In the upper left-hand and right-hand corners are two figures in clouds of smoke, with the words “MERCY” and “WRATH” written above them. Like “SHEEP” and “GOATS” inscribed on plate 3 of *Jerusalem*, the words suggest God’s Last Judgment and recall Los’s pronouncement that the Generations of the Giant Albion “have divided themselves by Wrath. they must be united by / Pity” (*Jerusalem* 7.57-58; E 150).
- 25 The other figures on the spiral stairway are, in descending order: Cain and Abel, depicted as babes; the prophet Enoch, who carries a scroll; the “Mother of Leah & Rachel” and the “Mother of Rebecca”; Aaron, wreathed with angels and carrying a censer; David with a harp and Solomon

21. Blake painted *A Vision of the Last Judgment* for Butts in 1806 (Butlin #639). At 49.5 x 39.0 cm., it is slightly larger than *Epitome*.

22. In his *Blake Dictionary*, Damon reproduces Blake’s *Epitome* (plate XI) with a key containing several inaccuracies: “Mother of Leah” (10) should be “Mother of Leah & Rachel”; “She Died on Her Wedding Day” (30) should be “She died on the Wedding Day”; “Sage” (39) should be “Old Age”; “Baby” (42) should be “Babe”; “The Lost Child” and “orphans” are omitted from the key. Erdman (E 691) also has inaccurately transcribed several of Blake’s inscriptions. There is no “Child” (third line) and “Orphans” should be between “Recording Angels” and “Protecting Angel” (the “O” should be lower case).

with a compass; an Angel of Death; and finally, at the bottom, a “Father.” Hervey mentions Adam, Solomon, and Abraham and Isaac only in passing; he does not mention these other biblical figures in his *Meditations*.

- 26 Of the streams of twenty-three figures along the left-hand and right-hand sides of the painting, only seven can be found in *Meditations*. While Hervey employs many proper names in his litany of the dead (among them Fidelio, Lucinda, and Florella), Blake uses only one, “Sophronia Died in Childbed,” a truncation of Hervey’s “The Marble, which graces yonder Pillar, informs me, that near it, are deposited the Remains of my valuable Friend *Sophronia*; who *died in Child-bed*” (1: 31-32). For the others Blake uses more general nouns, perhaps so that the figures would conform more closely to his concept of “States.” Two phrases sound like Hervey’s but are not: “She died on the Wedding Day” and “These died for Love.” The general names that Blake takes from Hervey are:

<i>Epitome</i>	<i>Meditations</i>
Infancy	“The peaceful <i>Infant</i> , without so much as knowing what Labour and Vexation mean, ‘lies still and is quiet; it sleeps and is at Rest’”
Father	“A <i>religious Father</i> ; snatched from his growing Offspring, before they were settled in the World, or so much as their Principles fixed by a thorough Education”
Husband	“There lies the affectionate Husband, the indulgent Parent, the faithful Friend, and the generous Master” “How happy the Husband, in such a Sharer of his Bed, and Partner of his Fortunes!”
Wife	“These separate Streams are all united in the distressed <i>Spouse</i> , and overwhelms her Breast with a Tide of Sorrows. In Her, the <i>Lover</i> weeps; the <i>Wife</i> mourns; and all the <i>Mother</i> years”
Orphan	“The <i>Sufferer</i> ... is ... pierced with an anxious Concern, ... for the Children, who will soon be <i>fatherless Orphans</i> ”
Old Age	“Some, I perceive, arrived at <i>Threescore Years and ten</i> , before they made their Exit; nay, some few resigned not their Breath, till they had numbered <i>Fourscore</i> revolving Harvests”

These figures indeed epitomize *Meditations*. Their bodies, however, are vitally muscular and their expressions are serene. Unlike Hervey’s descriptions, there is not a single skull or skeleton anywhere.

- 27 All the other figures in the painting are Blake’s own. Most, especially those along the left and right sides, are generally similar in appearance, posture, and arrangement to those in the Last Judgment designs. “Mother” (on the lower right-hand side), with a crown of stars above her head, also appears in his Last Judgments. In his Notebook essay known as “A Vision of the Last Judgment,” Blake allegorizes her as “the Church Universal” (E 559).²³ The phrase next to the figure of God, “God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire,”²⁴ recalls the opening sentence of the same essay: “When all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God turning all into a Consuming fire ... then the Last Judgment begins” (E 554). This “Consuming Fire,” a fire of mercy for the just and of wrath for the wicked (or, in Blake’s words, those “who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil”) elevates Hervey’s meditations to a vision of revelatory dimensions. Unlike Blake’s Last Judgments, however, this vision contains no wicked figures, for all those on the left and right are ascending to the realm of God, suggesting that Blake believed that Hervey’s “gentle Soul” (*Jerusalem* 72.51; E 227) could not conceive any such negative state.
- 28 The spiral arrangement of *Epitome* compares with the swirling stairs of Blake’s *Jacob’s Dream* (c. 1805) (illus. 2), a painting of similar size (39.8 x 30.6 cm.), also sold to Butts. The contrast between the two is striking: instead of Hervey’s standing on tiptoe and looking up in the dark, rough-hewn Gothic arch, Jacob lies sleeping on the ground and dreaming of paired mortal figures climbing into the starry sky and the bright rays of the sun. *Jacob’s Dream* is much less populous, and the diminishing size of the figures indicates considerable distance from the bottom to the top of the stairs, but the exalting effect of both works is similar. It is tempting to wonder if Blake intended them to be companion pieces.

23. His source for this figure is perhaps Revelation 12:1-2: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing birth, and pained to be delivered.”

24. Damon states that this phrase “used to be much quoted by Calvinists as a proof of the reality of Hell; but it is not to be found in the Bible, as they supposed” (*Philosophy and Symbols* 277n1).



2. Blake, *Jacob's Ladder*. 39.8 x 30.6 cm. British Museum. 1949,1112.2. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

- 29 Elsewhere in his *Meditations* Hervey writes, “Why do we not, in every Place, *reverence ourselves*; as Persons dedicated to the Divinity, as *living Temples* of the Godhead? For, if we are *real*, and not *merely nominal* Christians, the God of Glory, according to his own Promise, *dwells in us, and walks in us*” (1: 9). One can imagine Blake writing “pure gold” in the margin next to these words, as he did next to those aphorisms of Lavater that he liked. In fact, another of the Lavater marginalia fits well with Hervey’s declaration: “God who loves all honest men. will lead the poor enthusiast in the paths of holiness” (E 598). In his painting, Blake has taken this aspect of Hervey to produce an inspired vision of eternity. Hervey looks at tombstone inscriptions and sees spiritual life rising out of material dissolution; Blake reads Hervey’s words and imagines angels.

IV

- 30 Hervey gave the nuances of Methodist doctrines careful consideration in *Theron and Aspasio*, provoking a sharp and sustained response from Wesley. Blake was not one to parse theological differences; rather, he took the patina of love and forgiveness—major components of the Methodism of both Wesley and Whitefield—as a message. He called out for humility and understanding to fight against self-righteousness and pride. He did agree with Whitefield and Hervey, however, that what even the most devout can achieve is a diminished or less impure state and that backsliding is almost inevitable.
- 31 Christopher Z. Hobson argues convincingly that Blake valorized Whitefield over Wesley because “Blake’s sense of sin was close to Whitefield’s, though distinct, and also . . . he rejected claims of perfectibility, such as Wesley’s, on the basis of this sense and because they provided justification for self-appointed elites” (par. 1). Hobson suggests that Blake’s acquaintance with Hervey’s works made him aware of both Wesley’s perfectionism and Hervey’s rejection of it (par. 12). He also points out more references to Whitefield than to Wesley in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, noting that “Whitefield more than Wesley fires [Blake’s] imagination,” and concludes that Blake “is with Whitefield, Hervey, and the Calvinists against Wesley” in his belief that “the cooperative commonwealth can exist only through conscious love, awareness of our sinfulness, and forgiveness” (pars. 14, 42).
- 32 We do not know where Butts fell on the question of sanctification versus perfectionism, or even if he entertained a distinction. But it is not unreasonable to presume that there was a meeting of the minds between Butts and Blake about human waywardness and the need to practice love and forgiveness continually. That presumption is strengthened by a shared inclination toward Methodist thought, whether Wesley’s or Whitefield’s. In his letter of September 1800 to

Blake, the only surviving one, Butts included lines of verse that seem to complement Blake’s *Epitome*:

may your faithful Spirit upward bear
Your gentle Souls to Him whose care
Is ever sure and ever nigh
Those who on Providence rely,
And in his Paradise above
Where all is Beauty, Truth & Love,
O May ye be allowed to chuse
For your firm Friend a Heaven-born Muse,
From purest Fountains sip delight,
Be cloathed in Glory burning bright,
For ever blest, for ever free,
The loveliest Blossoms on Life’s Tree. (Keynes 26-27)

In these lines Butts is very much in accord with Hervey’s modulated Gothic visions: “gentle Souls” rising to a heaven “where all is Beauty, Truth & Love.” In his *Epitome*, Blake found a way to express his agreement and to share it meaningfully with his friend. In that signal gesture lies a feeling of personal communion unusual in Blake’s life.

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William Blake's Universe:
An Interview with David Bindman
and Esther Chadwick

BY LUISA CALÈ

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IN this interview, the curators David Bindman and Esther Chadwick discuss the upcoming exhibition *William Blake's Universe*, which opens at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (23 February–19 May) and then moves to the Hamburger Kunsthalle (14 June–8 September). The interview has been very lightly edited for style.

Can you tell us about the original idea for this exhibition?

DB: The exhibition began originally as a response to Hamburg's continuing interest in British art, which reached its high point in the 1970s with the Kunsthalle's legendary director Werner Hofmann, who put on a series of exhibi-

tions, *Kunst um 1800*, mainly on northern European art, in which he included Blake (1975), John Flaxman (1979), and Turner. At the time it was astonishingly prescient to include both Blake and Flaxman among the central artists of the Romantic era in Europe. As it happens, I was the curator of those two exhibitions, and it was an unforgettable experience. The Blake exhibition opened up the possibility of seeing Blake in a European context. Particularly intriguing was the comparison with Philipp Otto Runge, almost all of whose work is in the Kunsthalle.

EC: We felt that, by initiating a collaboration between the Fitzwilliam and the Hamburger Kunsthalle, there was an opportunity to pick up where *Kunst um 1800* had left off. We were particularly intrigued by the possibilities of bringing Runge's work to the UK, where Runge is not well known, and seeing what would happen when his work was placed in the same physical space as Blake's. The two have often been linked in scholarship on the Romantic period, but rarely—if at all—exhibited together.

Was there an element of cultural diplomacy?

DB: Not at all in the present exhibition, but in 1975, after the entry of Britain into the European Union, the British Council had ample funds to promote British culture. Though it was never stated, I feel the choice of British artists in the series may well have been influenced by that fact. It is also the case that the idea for the present exhibition (whose original working title was *Blake in Europe*) came about partly as a reaction against the decision in 2016 to leave Europe.

EC: Working in collaboration with a German museum in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum seemed to give the project added significance. One could see *Kunst um 1800* and *Blake's Universe* as bracketing the UK's membership of the EU, which is an interesting thought to ponder.

How is Blake redefined by the collaboration between the Hamburger Kunsthalle and the Fitzwilliam?

DB: The Fitzwilliam was the obvious partner, not only because of its superb Blake collection, but because it had only recently received the final tranche of the Geoffrey Keynes collection, including superb proof prints and the great Lacoön watercolour, which have very rarely been seen in public before. The Kunsthalle brings the definitive collection of Runge and works by Caspar David Friedrich, who are relatively little known in Britain. There is also the fascinating linkage between Blake and Runge through the journalist Henry Crabb Robinson, who essentially saw the former as possessed of the spirit of German Romanticism.

EC: Crabb Robinson's essay on Blake appeared in the patriotic journal *Vaterländisches Museum*, published by Runge's friend Friedrich Perthes, in 1811. Alas, this was too late for Runge, who had died the previous year. But what the essay shows is that contemporaries considered there to be an interest in and potential audience for Blake in Germany. This link helps us to draw out the ways in which themes of societal and spiritual regeneration, so central to Blake, were shared by other artists across Europe, and it enables Blake to be loosened from what has arguably been an overly monographic framework.

How is the exhibition structured?

DB & EC: The exhibition is divided into three parts, with an introductory section of portraits of the main artists involved. The first part is devoted to the past, Italy and antiquity, showing the common education in northern countries and Britain in the classical world; the second to the present, France and revolution, showing Blake and other artists reacting urgently to the political revolutions of their age; and the third to the future, the powerful spirituality and hope of redemption in England and Germany. This thematic presentation means we are not strictly chronological, but the final section, "The Future," is really concerned with Blake's work after 1800, at which point we highlight changes of emphases in his work and his varied connections to Jacob Böhme, Runge, Friedrich, and Samuel Palmer.

Does exposure to German material articulate a different kind of visionary art, compared to the millenarian public sphere discussed in Blake studies?

DB: There are obvious similarities and differences between Blake and Runge and other contemporaries. What Blake and Runge have in common is, firstly, an admiration of the seventeenth-century German mystic Jacob Böhme or Behmen, whose ideas were illustrated by the extraordinary interactive images of an eighteenth-century edition of his works, and, secondly, a deep desire to produce works that integrate all the arts in the service of Christian redemption. They are of slightly different generations (Runge died young in 1810), and they differ in their attitudes to nature; Runge was a pantheist and Blake was vocally opposed to pantheism. The ability to see the two artists side by side and in the company of Friedrich and Palmer should be a marvelous opportunity for reflection on their relationship.

EC: It's also possible, thanks in particular to Böhme, to consider overlaps between these two spheres. Garnet Terry, the millenarian engraver to the Bank of England whose hieroglyphic print of "Daniel's Great Image" (1793) will be on display in the central section of the exhibition, sold the works of Böhme from his bookshop in Paternoster Row,

London, for example. Despite his official position at the bank, Terry easily counts as a member of London's culture of "dangerous enthusiasm," to borrow Jon Mee's phrase. Runge and Friedrich have usually been framed in terms of the development of Romantic landscape painting. On the surface, that is where they most differ from Blake. Yet we're keen to bring out the deeper commonalities, stemming from similarities in their artistic training at the royal academies in London and Copenhagen and their shared experiences of a war-torn Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Tate Britain's William Blake exhibition in 2019–20 offered different modes of engagement with works in illuminated printing (bound books, unbound plates placed one beside the other along a wall, standing stations in the centre of the room to see both sides of pages printed recto-verso, book openings lying horizontally in glass vitrines). How will you present Blake's books in a gallery setting?

DB & EC: There is no one way of showing the illuminated books, because some of them have been separately mounted, like *America*, *Europe*, and *Jerusalem*, and so will be on a wall. Working with the London-based, Hamburg-raised German designer Gitta Gschwendtner, we have devised concertina-like walls that allow the separate plates to be mounted vertically, while still retaining echoes of the book format. The Fitzwilliam copies of the illuminated books are very strongly coloured, so will have a big presence in this exhibition. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is still bound, so will be shown in a case.

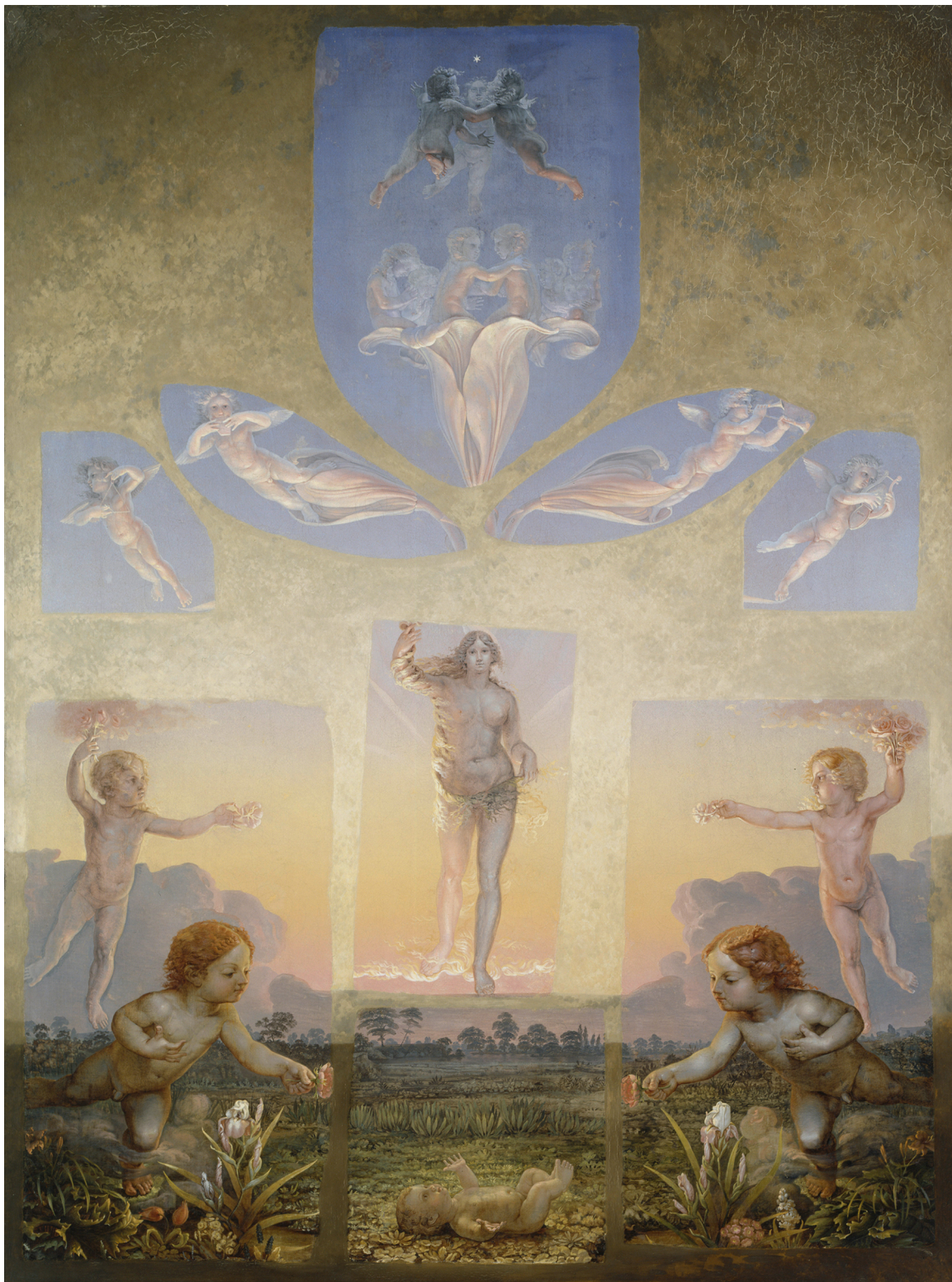
Walter Benjamin contrasts the vertical format of painting with the horizontal experience of sheets of paper, books, and the acts of reading and writing.¹ What considerations determine the choice to present works in horizontal or vertical displays? Is there an ethics of horizontality?

DB & EC: To be clear, curators do not necessarily have a choice, because of a museum's conditions. The most problematic exhibits are select plates from Stedman's *Surinam*, which is represented by one open volume, borrowed from Cambridge University Library, and framed illustrations of a racially offensive nature showing cruelty toward the enslaved, borrowed from the British Museum. These separate plates have to be framed (according to the rules of their

1. Walter Benjamin, "Painting and the Graphic Arts" (1917), trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008) 219.



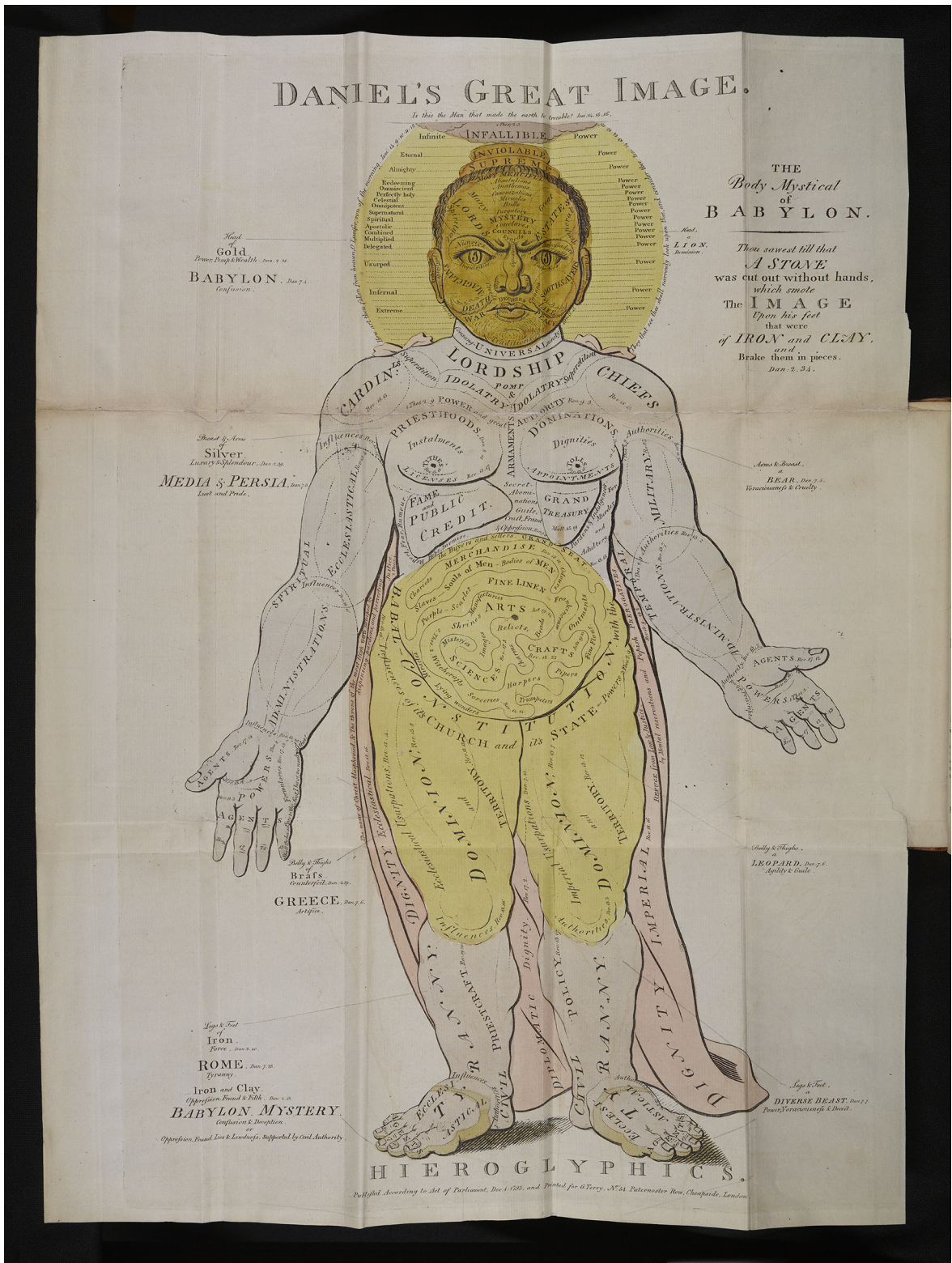
Blake, frontispiece to *Jerusalem*. Relief etching, 26 x 19.5 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. From the collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes; accepted in lieu of inheritance tax by HM Government from the estate of Anne Pinsent Keynes and allocated to the Fitzwilliam Museum, 2018. P.24-2018. Picture credit: © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810), *The Large Morning (Der Grosse Morgen)*, 1808–09. Oil on canvas, 152 x 113 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle. Gift of Conrad Meißner, 1894. HK-1022. Picture credit: © Hamburger Kunsthalle/bpk Photo: Elke Walford.



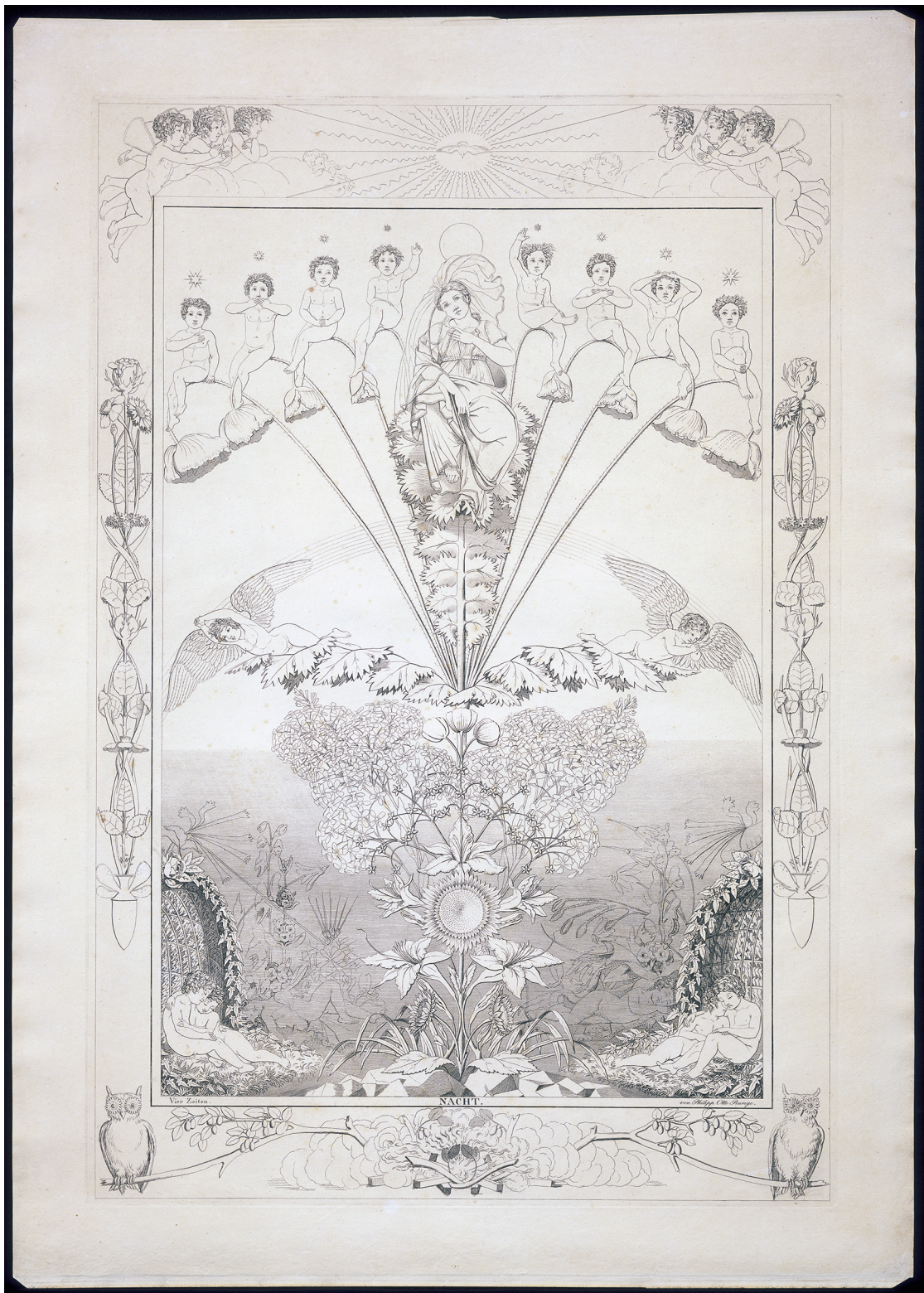
Blake, *Free Version of the Laocoön*, c. 1825. Graphite, pen and watercolor, 53.7 x 43.5 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. From the collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes; accepted in lieu of inheritance tax by HM Government from the estate of Stephen Keynes, OBE, and allocated to the Fitzwilliam Museum, 2020. PD.29-2020. Picture credit: © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Garnet Terry, "Prophetic Vision: Daniel's Great Image," 1793. Engraving with hand coloring on paper, 55 × 41 cm. Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. ESTC, T483535. Picture credit: Reproduced with the permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.



Blake, plate numbered 14, "When the Morning Stars," from *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, 1826. Engraving, 37.9 x 27.1 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. From the collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes; allocated by H.M. Treasury through the Minister of the Arts after acceptance in lieu of capital taxes, 1985. P.454-1985 (15). Picture credit: © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Philipp Otto Runge, "Night" ("Die Nacht"), 1807 (second printing). Etching and engraving on paper, 76.6 x 53.5 cm. Private collection, Devon. Picture credit: Booth-Clibborn Collection.

lender) but still we have insisted that these objects be placed flat in a case. There is certainly an ethics of horizontality in play here. In the history of art, the vertical is associated with the honorific, and by taking these works off the wall we hope to signal a difference of approach. Still, one could argue that placing them within a display case produces problems of another nature, by making them into specimens for examination, for example. There are no easy answers. Perhaps the best way to deal with these works, short of not exhibiting them at all, is to concentrate on framing them properly through interpretative texts. Elsewhere in the exhibition, another compromise is the display of two Flaxman plaster models for church monuments, which for conservation and design reasons have to be mounted at an angle rather than placed fully vertically on a wall, as they would have been intended within a church context.

The exhibition will feature the same copy of *Jerusalem* that was displayed in Hamburg in 1975; what does it gain from the dialogue with German works?

DB & EC: We are showing a selection from the same coloured copy of *Jerusalem* that was shown in 1975 (on long-term loan to the Fitzwilliam from a private collection), with the addition of proof impressions of the frontispiece and plate 51 (“Vala, Hyle, and Skofeld”) from the Keynes bequest. The latter will be reunited with a closely related drawing from Hamburg, showing Vala, Hyle, and Skofeld plus an additional figure who is probably Hand, standing in for war and brutality. These *Jerusalem* selections will appear in the same room as engravings, painted fragments, and select preparatory drawings for Runge’s major project, the *Times of Day*, which he undertook from 1802 to 1810, the same period when Blake was at work on *Jerusalem*. We highlight shared themes of spiritual regeneration in these works, which may both be seen as the culmination of their makers’ vision for the role of art in redeeming humanity. For all their apparent differences (in style and format), both works are underpinned by an apocalyptic understanding of the world. The selection highlights the idea of Romantic nationalism, through Albion, and this is implicitly compared with the attitudes of Runge on the one hand, but also Palmer and Friedrich, examining the sacramental nature of nationalism in both England and Germany in the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic period.

What are the implications of revisiting in 2024 the international field of art fleshed out in the *Kunst um 1800* series? How does Blake’s European context in 2024 differ from the German Blake of 1975?

DB: The political landscape after Brexit is very different, but British academics are frankly appalled by its potential ef-

fects, which have been without exception negative. But it is also true that many of those who voted for it are full of regret. In 1975 the *Kunst um 1800* exhibitions were not entirely unproblematic. One of Hofmann’s motives in setting up the exhibitions was to deal with Friedrich, who was then, thirty years after the end of the Second World War, still seriously tainted by his connections with German nationalism, so the range of the series was a way of taking him out of that context. This is no longer a problem, though Friedrich was undoubtedly an extreme nationalist. It will be really interesting to see the response in the UK to Runge’s art, which will be entirely new to almost everyone.

EC: There have been great strides in Blake scholarship since 1975, not least in understanding Blake in global as well as European contexts. But, as Jason Whittaker has discussed, Blake is still susceptible to comprehension in a narrowly nationalistic way, as the spokesperson for “Englands green & pleasant Land.” If *Kunst um 1800* was inflected by concerns local to German politics in 1975, there is no escaping the new political landscape that informs our interest, in 2024, in the wider context of Romantic nationalism in which Blake can, at least partially, be situated. What I hope we show is that Blake’s words and images cannot be confined to any one ideological reading. By inviting dialogue with works by his German contemporaries (and by emphasizing how deeply he was informed by European art-historical and intellectual trends more broadly), we hope to open fresh avenues for thinking about the meanings of his work, both in the past and now.

A Copy of Richard Bentley's Edition of *Paradise Lost* in William Hayley's Library c. 1802

BY MARK CROSBY

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1 IN “William Blake’s Annotations to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: New Evidence for Attribution,”¹ Lisa Sherlock refers to my unpublished research on William Hayley’s correspondence with Lady Harriet Hesketh that establishes the presence of a copy of Richard Bentley’s edition of *Paradise Lost* in Hayley’s upper library at Turret House in Felpham during part of Blake’s three-year residence on the Sussex coast. I offer this research as an addendum to my 2008 *Book Collector* article proposing that Blake consulted, and may have annotated, a copy of Bentley’s notorious edition.² While I was unable to identify the exact copy, I speculated that it may have been one containing numerous manuscript annotations in different hands, including two signed “WB.”

2 The evidence I offered in my 2008 article concerning the presence of a copy of Bentley can be summarized as follows. After the death of William Cowper in 1800, numerous items from his library at Weston Underwood in Buckinghamshire were transmitted to Hayley to serve two purposes: for Hayley to write a biography of Cowper and to edit Cowper’s commentaries on, and translations of, Milton’s Latin and Italian poems. The items included letters, various manuscripts relating to Cowper’s translations, numerous books—including an interleaved copy of Thomas Newton’s two-volume ninth edition of *Paradise Lost* (1790) containing Cowper’s incomplete manuscript commen-

tary—and a copy of Bentley’s edition of *Paradise Lost*. Shortly after Cowper’s death, William Barker catalogued the poet’s library at Weston Underwood; the catalogue includes a copy of Bentley.³ There is also a copy of Bentley’s *Paradise Lost* at Christ’s College, Cambridge, that contains marginal annotations by Cowper and his armorial bookplate.⁴ These annotations are generally confined to Bentley’s footnotes and include a satiric poem at the end of the preface attacking critics such as Bentley.⁵ In her article, Sherlock suggests that the copy of Bentley listed by Barker is the same copy now at Christ’s College. In what follows, I offer evidence that it was Ashley Cowper’s copy that was listed by Barker as being in William Cowper’s library in 1800.⁶

3 In the two editions of Cowper’s translations of Milton’s Latin and Italian poetry that Hayley edited, published in 1808 and 1810, he remarks that Cowper borrowed materials relating to Milton from friends, including a copy of Bentley’s edition:

When Cowper first thought of forming a commentary on Milton, he felt the want of a proper collection of books for that purpose: but he had several friends, who took a pleasure in the hope of supplying him with every thing he could require. One sent him that rarity of Italian literature, the Adamo of Andreini. Another a copy of Bentley’s Milton, containing many very severe censures, in manuscript, against the presumptuous editor, written probably when the book was published in 1732.⁷

3. Barker’s catalogue is reproduced in Geoffrey Keynes, “The Library of William Cowper,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 3.1 (1959): 47–69. Bentley’s edition of *Paradise Lost* is listed as no. 23. The catalogue also records the seventh edition of *Paradise Lost* published by Newton in 1770 and the Boydell three-volume folio edition of Milton’s works published between 1794 and 1797, which includes the first six books of *Paradise Lost* in the first volume, along with Hayley’s *Life of Milton*. See Keynes, especially pp. 53 and 61.

4. Christ’s College Library, shelfmark EE.2.8. This is probably the copy recorded in Joseph Mayer’s sale catalogue as “formerly belonging to Cowper.” See *Catalogue of Books, Manuscripts, Deeds and Autograph Letters, the Property of the Late Joseph Mayer, Esq. F.S.A of Liverpool* (Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, 19 July 1887), lot 275.

5. In a letter to the Revd. John Newton of 10 May 1780, Cowper satirizes Bentley’s editorial practices; see Hayley, *The Life, and Posthumous Writings, of William Cowper, Esqr.*, vol. 3 (Printed by J. Seagrave, Chichester, for J. Johnson, London, 1804) 24. For a discussion of Cowper’s attitude to Bentley, see also Hayley’s preface to *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton Translated into English Verse ... by the Late William Cowper* (Printed by J. Seagrave, Chichester, for J. Johnson and R. H. Evans, London, 1808) xix–xxi.

6. Ashley Cowper (1709–88) was William Cowper’s uncle and the father of Theodora Jane Cowper and Lady Harriet Hesketh.

7. Hayley’s comment appears on pp. xviii–xix of his preface to *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton* (1808), which is reprinted as an appendix to *Paradise Lost and Regained, with the Latin and Other Poems, of John Milton* (London: H. Washbourne, 1810) 4: 379–94 (on 387–88).

1. Lisa Sherlock, “William Blake’s Annotations to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: New Evidence for Attribution,” *Blake* 57.2 (fall 2023): 17 pars.

2. Mark Crosby, “William Blake’s Annotations to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*,” *Book Collector* 57.4 (winter 2008): 513–46.

Hayley's description of this copy as "containing many very severe censures, in manuscript, against the presumptuous editor" indicates familiarity with it and suggests that it was sent to Felpham along with Cowper's other Milton materials. His dating of the "severe censures" to 1732 also suggests that this is a different copy from the one with Cowper's marginal annotations and bookplate, now at Christ's College. As no copy of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* was listed in the sale of Hayley's library in 1821, I speculated in my 2008 article that the extensively annotated copy that Hayley had consulted after Cowper's death remained in Hayley's possession and later passed to Joseph Mayer.⁸

- 4 A hitherto unpublished letter from Hayley concerning his biography of Cowper, among other things, establishes that he had a copy of Bentley in his library during Blake's residence in Felpham. The letter is addressed to Cowper's cousin, Lady Harriet Hesketh, and is dated 10 January 1802. Hayley updates Hesketh on arrangements for printing the biography in Chichester, expresses his belief in the primacy of epigrams as the appropriate literary form for memorialization, and discusses their seemingly competing plans to memorialize Cowper. It appears that these plans at one stage consisted of a monument designed and sculpted by John Flaxman, bearing an epigram by Hayley. Toward the end of the letter Hayley alludes to Blake, who was working on the engravings to illustrate the biography, by comparing the patience required of a biographer to that of an engraver. There are also multiple references to a copy of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* that was previously in Cowper's library at Weston Underwood.
- 5 The letter is one of a series between Hayley and Lady Hesketh written between the end of 1801 and the beginning of 1802, for the most part concerned with Hayley's biography of Cowper and its illustrations. It contains references to Hesketh's older sister, Theodora Jane Cowper; their father and Cowper's uncle, the late Ashley Cowper; and Cowper's cousin, John Johnson (affectionately referred to by both Cowper and Hayley as Johnny). Hayley also refers to himself by his favored moniker, "Hermit."

As you lecture the good trembling Johnny, so unmercifully my dear Lady, you must be lectur'd yrself by the old Hermit, & I hope you have also the Grace to tremble in yr turn.

He did right to bring me the Milton, as I directed, for the commands of a Biographer at work ought to be paramount above all others, concerning M.S., that may, or may not be of use to Him. — I knew well, that the verse

8. In light of the evidence presented here, I now believe that the copy in the Mayer sale is the copy currently at Christ's College, Cambridge. See note 4.

& prose, inserted in that copy of Milton, were not written by our dear Bard, but by yr amiable Father; but having inserted the Epitaph on yr father, I wish'd to speak of him in a manner that might please his own gentle spirit, his nephew's, & his daughters. — I am sure the feeling Theodora will forgive me for thus ordering the Book to take a circuitous road to her, for I never meant to detain it from her for any considerable time, but herself to revise the copy I had of yr father's admirable epigram on the absurd & pedantic Editor of that Milton — a copy taken by my attendant at Weston, with the permission of the dear Bard!

Having begun to lecture you, Heaven only knows when I may cease lecturing you; so I hope to continue to tremble, with a becoming degree of awful submission.

Poets living & departed have acute Feelings — you would not allow me, & some true Friends of the dear deceased to raise such a monument to Him at Dereham, as we knew He would approve — NO! You insisted on doing this yrself — yet, my dear Lady — two years almost has this dear dol [*sic*] of ours rested in the Earth, — & all Norfolk (as Johnny tells me) is wondering, why no monument appears to Cowper — What, I think, you should have done (if you wish'd to stop us) was, to order immediately from the artist, that our dear Bard particularly esteem'd (^{Flaxman}) an uncostly but graceful little monument, for which I had provided you with an Epitaph, that I thought you once approv'd, & that I am sure the dear Bard Himself, could he speak from the stone, would not speak against, as a few of his most sympathetic friends have approv'd it highly. — But you strangely think of putting on his Tombstone not an epitaph, but rather a motto — for any passage taken from his works (exquisitely fit as his verses are for most purposes) must yet appear rather like a Motto for a Book, that [*sic*] a proper Inscription for a Tombstone, & spectators, who survey such a Motto, may naturally exclaim, "What! did Cowper leave no Friends attentive enough to his ashes, to supply them with an appropriate Epitaph?" — There! have I not follow'd yr example in lecturing the good Johnny? & lectur'd you also unmercifully? — In Truth, I have told you what I, & a few more of yr Friends (not so bold as the Hermit in uttering their Thoughts) really think, but having done so, my dear Lady, as you are a woman, & a dear one — dear, in expressibly dear, to our angelic friend, & not a little so to his affectionate Biographer, you shall have your own way in this little monumental affair, without further reproof: you shall raise any sort of tablet you like, & burn my Epitaph into the bargain, if you please, & on this Topic I will lecture you no more; so be as eccentric as you will, you have my plenary & affectionate Indulgence.

And now, my dear Lady, having been a little rough with you (not according to my custom) I will be all Gentleness & Good humour, & tell you several things, that I believe you will be pleas'd to hear.

First my reproof to the little man of St Paul's bought me a sort of penitential-submissive letter, as in truth all the persons, I take the trouble to reprove, ought to perceive, that my reproofs are dictated by a spirit of Justice & kind-

ness. — He allows, that I ought not to be oppos'd in regard to printing in the Country — — & my firmness in resolving to do so, will, I trust, render my ingenuous & intelligent country printer peculiarly alert to guard against all unnecessary delays as much as possible; — yet to print so extensive a work, must be a business of labour & time. — Thank Heaven! I may consider my own arduous office in great measure accomplish'd & if I should follow the dear Bard tomorrow to a better world, there is such a memorial of Him now ready for the press, as I am confident his own affectionate spirit would applaud me for having prepar'd. — To criticize me all the good or bad critics, that like the occupation, my Heart tells me, I have his angelic approbation; & so (to borrow & alter a little a verse from a certain beloved poet of yr acquaintance)

“Love shall be satisfied nor heed the Rest” —

Thanks for yr pleasant History of Mr Owen! — I hope he is a son or Grandson of a most worthy Dr. Owen,^{who} was (as I have heard my mother say) a favourite Friend of my Fathers; but of whom I know not even whether He was single or married, being myself only a chit of two years, when my Father died — To shew you how alert I have render'd the good Johnny in yr service, he is at this moment copying the poem you wish to see & coy as it is, will send it you completely transcrib'd by the post of this day. — I am very confident that when you & Mr Owen have read the poem together, you will think exactly as I do on the propriety of it being reprinted in the appendix to his Life. — but tell me soon if you think, as I must insert some mention of it in that case in an early part of the biography —

When you want to teach any of yr Friends Patience my dear Lady, persuade them to be either a biographer or an Engraver — & if they do not acquire the virtue in those two instructive occupations, you may safely tell them they have no talents for it—

Adieu! — I have a million of things to dispatch, before the good Johnny departs, & He is to depart on Tuesday, for He is eager to rejoin his Flock, like a good Pastor as He is, & I, like a considerate Hermit, as I am, have promis'd not to detain him here a single day beyond the Time, that I really require his assistance in imparting to me the particulars, that it is my duty to collect from his faithful lips. —

Adieu — love us both as we really deserve yr love! — accept our untied benedictions! & believe me ever cordially tho now very hastily

yr sincere
& affectionate
Hermit

Jan 10 1802⁹

9. The transcription is taken from Hayley's autograph copy of the letter in the Firestone Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University (Hannay Collection, box 5, f. 19). Hayley's comparison of life-writing and engraving not only suggests his admiration for Blake's skill and temperament, but also may have been a subtle attempt to assuage any concerns that Hesketh entertained about the illustrations. See also G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 109fn.

6 Hayley's letter tells us that the copy of Milton that he had asked Johnson to bring to Felpham was intended for Theodora Jane Cowper, to whom it would be sent on at some point.¹⁰ It further reveals that “the verse & prose, inserted in that copy . . . , were not written by our dear Bard, but by yr amiable Father”—that is, not written by William Cowper, but by his uncle, the late Ashley Cowper. Hayley's use of “inserted” could mean manuscript text written directly on the leaves of the book or on separate sheets of paper placed loosely or interleaved in the volume. He also uses “inserted” in connection with adding William Cowper's manuscript epigram on his uncle to the biography, which indicates that, for Hayley in this context, the verb denotes supplementing the main text with additional text. He explains that the presence of the epigram is one of the reasons that he needed to consult this copy, because he wanted to add a sentence in the biography “to speak of him [Ashley Cowper] in a manner that might please his own gentle spirit, his nephew's, & his daughters.”¹¹

7 He also states that he wants Theodora Jane Cowper to revise an epigram that her father, Ashley Cowper, had written on “the absurd & pedantic Editor of that Milton,” a transcript of which had been “taken by my attendant at Weston, with the permission of the dear Bard!” This makes clear that the copy of Milton that Hayley had requested and was consulting in early January 1802 was hitherto in the library of William Cowper (“the dear Bard”) at Weston Underwood and was the edition of *Paradise Lost* by Bentley (“the absurd & pedantic Editor”). As he observes, most of its annotations were written by Ashley Cowper, which indicates that this is not the copy containing William Cowper's marginal notes that is now at Christ's College. Rather, it is highly probable that it is the copy listed by William Barker shortly after Cowper's death as being part of the poet's library.¹² This copy, it appears, had originally belonged to Ashley Cowper before making its way to his nephew.

10. In her responses dated 17, 23, and 28 January 1802, Hesketh does not mention the edition of Milton that he had borrowed. Instead, she attempts to soothe his anxiety about the Dereham memorial (Princeton University Library, Hannay Collection, box 5, f. 59).

11. “Lines Composed for a Memorial of Ashley Cowper, Esqr. Immediately after His Death, by His Nephew William of Weston” appear in the second volume of Hayley's biography of Cowper, with the following description: “The person whom these Verses commemorate, was himself an elegant Poet, and Father of the Lady [Harriet Hesketh], to whom so many of Cowper's Letters are addressed in the preceding collection” (Hayley, *The Life, and Posthumous Writings, of William Cowper, Esqr.*, vol. 2 [1803] 228).

12. In his edition of Barker's catalogue, Keynes includes information regarding bookplates and signatures. The copy of Bentley is not described as having William Cowper's bookplate. On the other hand, the copy of Bentley at Christ's College does contain his armorial book-

- 8 Hayley's description of the copy as containing manuscript "verse & prose" by Ashley Cowper, including an "epigram on the absurd & pedantic Editor of that Milton," seems to anticipate his statement in the 1808 preface to the *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton* about the copy of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* "containing many very severe censures, in manuscript, against the presumptuous editor." Yet it is likely that Hayley is referring to a different copy in the 1808 preface. As we have seen, he planned to return the copy with Ashley Cowper's annotations to Theodora Jane Cowper. There is no record of a copy of Bentley in the sale of Hayley's library, which suggests that he kept his word and at some point after 10 January 1802 sent this copy to her, probably via Johnson. Furthermore, Ashley Cowper's single "epigram on the absurd & pedantic Editor" doesn't accord with Hayley's 1808 description of a copy with "many very severe censures."
- 9 The evidence may be summarized as follows: for his biography of William Cowper and to edit Cowper's translations of Milton's poems, Hayley borrowed two copies of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost*. One, with manuscript "verse & prose" by Ashley Cowper and an epigram on his uncle by William Cowper, was brought from Weston Underwood to Felpham by John Johnson and was present in Hayley's Turret House in early 1802, according to the previously unpublished letter to Lady Hesketh of 10 January. This is almost certainly the copy that was listed by William Barker as being in William Cowper's library in 1800; it is not the copy with William Cowper's annotations and bookplate at Christ's College, Cambridge. The other copy that Hayley consulted is described in his preface to the *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton* (1808) as "containing many very severe censures, in manuscript, against the presumptuous editor, written probably when the book was published in 1732." His description and speculative dating distinguish this copy from both Ashley Cowper's copy that was present in Hayley's library in January 1802 and the Christ's College copy with William Cowper's marginal annotations and bookplate. The copy of Bentley's edition with the two "WB" annotations also contains numerous annotations in another hand, many of which attack Bentley's editorial heavy-handedness, but none that corresponds with Ashley Cowper's hand.

plate. This further suggests that the copy recorded by Barker is not the same as the one at Christ's College. See Keynes, "The Library of William Cowper" 53.

The Backwell Bookplate

- 10 The identification of the William Backwell bookplate in the copy containing the "WB" annotations presents an opportunity to compare handwriting samples from the Backwell family with those two annotations.¹³ There are three William Backwells who should be considered. The first is a London banker, who had two relations of the same name. As summarized by Sherlock, William (and his brother Barnabus) were clerks in the banking firm of Messrs. Child and Co. around 1720 before being made partners in 1740. In 1756, the Backwell brothers established their own banking house, Devaynes and Co., and in 1765 William was appointed high sheriff of Buckinghamshire for a period of twelve months.¹⁴
- 11 In 1775, Barnabus Backwell's son Tyringham Backwell inherited Tyringham Manor in Buckinghamshire, but died two years later without an heir. The manor then passed to his sister—the niece of William Backwell the London banker—Elizabeth Tyringham Backwell, who married William Mackworth Praed in 1778. In a letter of 1 May 1786, William Cowper notes: "A Mr. Praed lives at a seat called Tyringham, which is also about five miles hence; but I never saw, save once, when I saw him jump over a rail at Weston."¹⁵ By 17 November 1787, he appears to have met "Mrs Praed ... and her sister, Miss Backwell."¹⁶ Writing to Lady Hesketh on 30 June 1793, Cowper refers to Praed as "our" neighbor and compliments his landscaping endeavors: "After there [*sic*] laudable example I too am working wonders here, but on a smaller scale."¹⁷ I have been unable to find any evidence directly connecting William Backwell, the London banker and one-time owner of the copy of Bentley containing the two "WB" annotations, to Cowper. But both Caldecot Manor (William Backwell's residence) and, as Cowper notes in his letter of May 1786, Tyringham Manor (Elizabeth and Jane Backwell's residence) were about five miles from Cowper's home in Weston Underwood.¹⁸ Were these Backwells among the "several friends, who took a pleasure in the hope of supplying" Cowper with

13. The bookplate is listed in *Ellis's Catalogue of British and American Book-Plates* (London, 1907) 11. It can also be consulted in the Luis Marino Pérez Collection, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

14. See Frederick George Hilton Price, *A Handbook of London Bankers* (London, 1876) 48 and the *London Gazette* (10-13 November 1764).

15. *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-86) 2: 533.

16. King and Ryskamp 3: 55. Miss Backwell is Jane Backwell (d. 1795).

17. King and Ryskamp 4: 361. Praed had commissioned the architect John Soane and the landscape gardener John Haverfield to refurbish his property at Tyringham.

18. See Sherlock pars. 2 and 3.

materials relating to Milton, including an extensively annotated copy of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost*?

- 12 As a previous owner of the copy with the two "WB" annotations, William Backwell appears the most immediate candidate for their authorship, but an analysis of his handwriting, including his signature, suggests a different hand to the hand responsible for the annotations.¹⁹ The angle of his hand is consistently the standard 55 degrees from horizontal for roundhand, whereas the annotator is about 45 degrees. Backwell is also a free capitalizer, and the annotator is an underliner. The "WB" who penned the annotations doesn't appear to be the William Backwell of the bookplate.
- 13 After Backwell's death in 1770, one of the junior bankers at Devaynes and Co., William Harwood, was granted the name and the coat of arms of Backwell by an act of parliament.²⁰ It is possible that Harwood was Backwell's illegitimate son. Harwood's hand, however, is very similar to Backwell senior's (perhaps a case of imitation). Harwood had a son, also called William. This William Backwell, a captain in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers, was born in 1772 and died in 1808, at the beginning of the British involvement in the Peninsular War. While Captain Backwell's signature slopes 45 degrees from the horizontal, just as the "WB" annotations do, the letter formations—such as the lowercase a, l, w, and k—differ, suggesting that he is also not responsible for the annotations.
- 14 The evidence put forward here, along with the identification of the Backwell bookplate by Anthony Pincott of the Bookplate Society, indicates that the copy of Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* with the two "WB" annotations is not the copy that Hayley, in his letter to Lady Hesketh of 10 January 1802, describes as formerly being in Cowper's library at Weston Underwood and presently in his library at Felpham. The copy with the "WB" annotations originally belonged to William Backwell, a London banker, whose Buckinghamshire home at Caldecot Manor was within five miles of Weston Underwood. Furthermore, Backwell's niece Elizabeth lived nearby and knew Cowper. The handwriting and signature samples of three generations of William Backwells do not correspond to the hand responsible for these annotations. According to Hayley, Cowper's borrowings from "several friends" included a copy of Bentley's edition "containing many very severe censures." Was Hayley describing the copy once owned by Cowper's

neighbor William Backwell, containing the two "WB" annotations and almost eighty annotations by a different hand critical of Bentley's editorial changes to Milton's verse?

19. For a comparison of the hand of this William Backwell, see Sherlock illus. 5.

20. 10 George III, c. 15. See the National Archives, HL/PO/PB/1/1770/10G3n35.

