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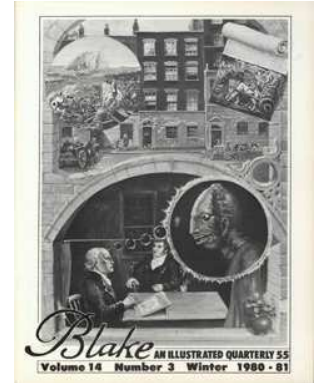
# BLAKE

R E V I E W

S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, with a new index by Morris Eaves

John E. Grant

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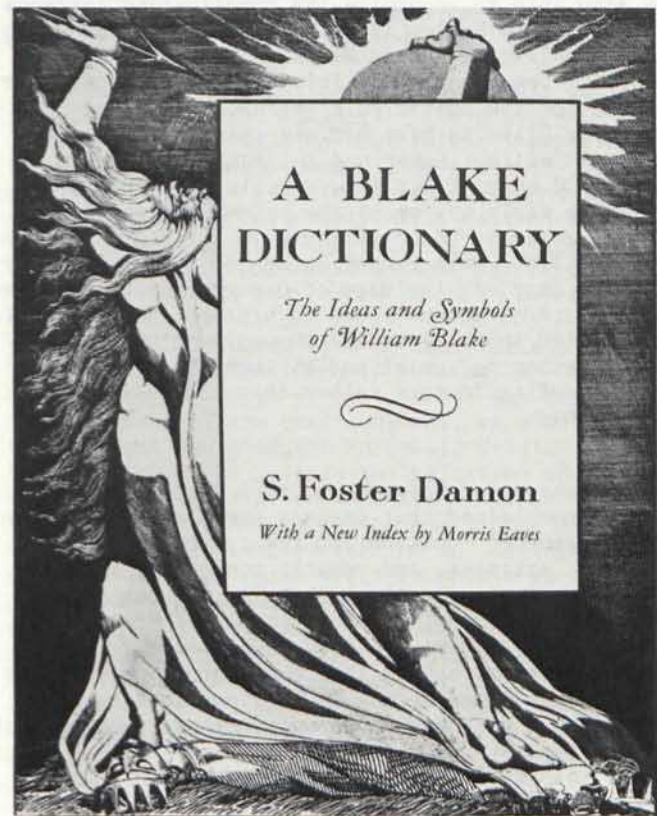


The headnotes to individual selections in this volume place them in the context of their genres, and the selections themselves are ample, illustrating the variety of the writer's styles and concerns. I personally would have enjoyed seeing fewer of the not-immensely-original "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters" and the uniformly disdainful reviews of novels by women Wollstonecraft thought were

idiots. I would have liked more of *The Wrongs of Woman* and some of the early letters to friends and family as well as the letters to Imlay and Godwin, and perhaps one of the *Vindications* in full. On the other hand, the decision to give a large sampling of hard-to-find material makes sense. All in all, this will be a highly useful book.

**S. Foster Damon. *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, with a new index by Morris Eaves.**  
Boulder: Shambhala, 1979. xii + 532 pp.  
\$9.95.

**Reviewed by John E. Grant.**



**W**hen Damon's *Dictionary* was published in 1965 almost all scholars recognized it as an indispensable companion to Blake studies. It was handsomely printed in large clear type and thus quite expensive. Not many who acquired the first printing also got the slightly revised and amplified second printing in 1967, which Brown University Press has commendably kept in print. In 1971 Dutton brought out a small paperback edition of the 1965 printing with severely reduced print and narrowed margins--presumably because Brown University Press wished to reserve the small improvements of the 1967 printing (chiefly articles on EVERLASTING GOSPEL, INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE, and LAVATER). The Dutton edition went out of print some years ago. Now Shambhala has reissued the 1965 version in the same small print as the Dutton reprint but with more generous margins and also an excellent index (pp. 463-532) by Morris Eaves. May Damon's great work of scholarship, thus helpfully embellished, long remain available at a moderate price.

It may not be obvious why a "dictionary" should need an index, especially since the interconnected

entries are usually cross-referenced. But Damon's *Dictionary* is practically an encyclopedia of the subjects indicated in the subtitle, and anyone who consults the *Dictionary* needs to be able to skim over its entries without turning every page, for one symbol leads into another beyond the cross-references given under any one entry. Only after running through Eaves's index can one answer the elementary pre-publication question: "Have you checked Damon's *Dictionary*?" (I did notice an important unindexed mention of Joseph of Arimathea on p. 136; this is fair warning that one must also consult Erdman's *Concordance*.)

Damon was a great scholar because he had read deeply in all the authors Blake himself read and also in more recent authors like Melville and Joyce that Blake would have cared for had he lived long enough. Gossip used to represent Damon as a mystagogue, but nobody who conversed with him thought of him as a crank, even though some of his students admitted they couldn't work up an interest in subjects he knew deeply. During the meetings I had with him late in his life, Damon was a wonderful

guide and companion, speaking clearly on abstruse subjects and exhibiting a love of life such as many are not capable of, at least in this culture. To be sure, it was not easy to argue a point with him, but this was evidently due to his having become hard of hearing, rather than to a dogmatic or authoritative cast of mind. It must be admitted that nobody could persuade Damon that the evidence for Shelley's being THE BARD OF OXFORD (*Dictionary*, pp. 314-15; also eight other references in the index) is weak, but he was also able to recognize the complicating evidence of a letter to Hayley in which Blake had referred to the insignificant Edward Marsh as "the Bard of Oxford." Damon correctly felt that Marsh lacked the stature for the poetic role in *Jerusalem*. But in order for Blake to have had any chance of being aware of Shelley, Damon had to imagine *Jerusalem* 45 [40]:30 being first issued as late as 1822. Meanwhile early copies of *Jerusalem* required a Bard of Oxford fit to be entrusted with the leaves of the Tree of Life. What cannot be denied by any lover of Blake is that, if the Bard of Oxford must be imagined as some actual person known to history, Shelley would have fitted the bill and Marsh would not. This is Damon's essential point and as such the proposed identification fosters rather than contradicts true scholarship.

The hostile reviewer in *TLS* 2 September 1965, p. 756, complained that Damon's Freudian views "seem old-fashioned." Considering the current flood tide of books, articles, and remarks concerning Blake and Freud, Damon's outlook, has, on the contrary, proven to be prophetic. Neither Blake, Freud, nor Damon can, of course, be held responsible for the sexual politics causing this overproduction. A more specific challenge by the *TLS* reviewer better identifies a weakness in Damon's method. Noting that Damon's expository manner is simply affirmative rather than suggestive, she pointed out that in the awesome picture on *Jerusalem* 41[46] the formidable flaming chariot--composed of coiled serpents in which are seated an aged couple drawn by humanized leonine bulls against a background of flames--is too flatly identified as a version of Elijah's fiery chariot (art. ELIJAH, p. 118--thanks to Eaves's index). Indeed, she declared, without counter-evidence, that there is no connection whatever with Elijah's chariot. She must have persuaded Erdman, who does not mention Elijah's chariot in *The Illuminated Blake*, pp. 320-21. In this case the redesignation of the color print now called *God Judging Adam* (formerly *Elijah in the Fiery Chariot*) has complicated the problem of identifying all the meaningful elements in *Jerusalem* 41[46]. Briefly, the chariot remains either that of Elijah or of "God" even when its vehicular power is supplied by Assyrian-descended bulls and great serpents related to the ones ridden by children in *The* 6 and *America* 11. But in *Jerusalem* 41[46] the context has become pessimistic and parodistic so that the aged couple are carried along whither the supervising eagle-spirits (related to Los) would have them go. Though Blake's images change somewhat in the last chapter of *Jerusalem*, the reader approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought will recognize that the aged couple must take control again to be transported and transfigured.

What Damon actually tells us leaves out too many of the refinements and conditionals in this picture. But it is surprising how often he was able to justify the concision of his confident expository manner. Because Blake is normally not mystifying and only complicated according to principles mostly made clear in Damon's first book, Blake's ideas and symbols can usually be coherently explained. Damon did not pretend to say the last word about any subject, and few readers will have the impression that he was condescending to them or attempting to lead them around by the nose.

The best way to assess the continued usefulness of Damon's *Dictionary* is to follow it in action. As a research tool, it seems never to lose its freshness. Recently I noticed that Bentley, *William Blake's Writings* I, 14, glossed the concluding aphorism of *There is No Natural Religion*, "God becomes as we are that we may be as he is," with a remarkably apposite quotation from Irenaeus's *Five Books Against Heresies*, which Bo Lindberg, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1973), p. 38, also cited in Latin only. In checking the *Dictionary* (p. 402), I found that Damon had chosen to quote Athanasius: "He indeed assumed humanity that we might become God," though he also gives references to Irenaeus (Book III, not Book V, which was preferred by Lindberg and Bentley) and Calvin. Damon's conclusion, however, concentrates on the difference that keeps Blake's use of traditional ideas from ever seeming commonplace: "Whereas the theologians all use the past tense, as of an historical event, Blake uses the present tense, for the act is eternal and is always going on." Often the real force of Blake's ideas can be recognized neither by those of Eliot's persuasion who suppose that Blake had no tradition nor by those of Raine's persuasion who suppose that all Blake's ideas were already in the Perennial Philosophy. Damon is usually right in spirit because he could see the element of truth in both these schools.

Damon used to insist on the spelling "Tyger" whenever one referred to Blake's creation: I remember his checking my convictions about this matter before he could relax and speak joyfully about Blake and the other visionaries such as Dante and Dostoevsky (cf. p. 410 re. THE TREE). Curiously, Damon was less scrupulous in referring to design 10 for Dante's *Comedy* by the Victorian title, "The Circle of the Lustful" (p. 97)--a traditional solecism that negates Blake's own (reversed) inscription. The only appropriate title for the greatest of pictorial ideas ever related to this wonderful episode is "The Whirlwind of Lovers." One can be confident that Damon would have immediately corrected this anti-Blakean error if it had been called to his attention, perhaps even troubling to explain why it is misleading, as he did in the case of "Glad Day" (p. 14). Since the old customarily wrong title falsifies Blake's vision it is an error in the usages of Blake scholarship that must forthwith be corrected.

Let us suppose that we wanted to look up Blake's idea of The Covering Cherub. The long way would be to start with Erdman's *Concordance*, but Damon's *Dictionary*, pp. 93-94, COVERING CHERUB, gives a good

account of the essence of this basic symbol, which has also been well discussed by Frye, but few others. Unfortunately Damon neglected to cross-reference CHERUBIM (p. 80) where the crucial early reference in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 14 is correctly identified so that one can understand that this Cherub has a key place in all Blake's subsequent symbolism. If one had started at CHERUBIM Damon's own cross-reference to COVERING CHERUB would have sufficed, but no student would ever hunt to find the fourteen other references given in the Eaves index. (One of these, a reference to IEREUS (p. 194--i.e. *priest*--is incorrectly spelled "lereus" in the index, p. 478). The Covering Cherub is two-faced and many-faceted. Naturally the Covering Cherub flourishes in an age obsessed with problematics, ambiguities, and anxieties. The most learned of Blake scholars, Sir Geoffrey Keynes, to whom the *Dictionary* was dedicated, even professed to see the Covering Cherub where he is not, on the frontispiece of *Songs of Experience*. Damon was a great critic because he recognized the face of error and could uncover the difference between what Blake was driving at and much else that can be thought and said about the same thing.

Damon's method with pictures is simple and productive: his thoroughness in matching the figures with words had rarely been equaled except by Wicksteed and Roe. As a rule Damon refrained from translating Blake's pictorial symbolism into terms of Blake's "system"--the finding of Zoas and Emanations wherever men and women were gathered together--at least when there is no call to do so. For this reason, one can readily sort out truth from error in Damon's interpretations, whereas the cloudy equivocations of another sort of critic are built on presumed ambiguities and thus are neither hot nor cold.

In my earlier review in *Philological Quarterly*, XLV(1966), 533-35 I praised Damon's precision and also called attention to some errors in the exegesis of major pictures, which are an important part of the *Dictionary*. Damon reproduces and discusses ten major pictures, starting with the greatest, as represented by the Rosenwald drawing of the *Last Judgment*. For this picture he also provides a shadow picture in which most of the figures are numbered and keyed, usually with appropriate passages from "A Vision of the Last Judgment" as given in the Keynes text. Among the errors to be noted are that Damon called group 71 Hagar and Ishmael, but they are certainly Sarah and Isaac; the other pair are an unnumbered group between 64, The Church Universal, and 70, Abraham. This error and part of Blake's description of the lost tempera, which must have differed from the drawing, led Damon to identify the winged and bearded record keeper below them as Mohammed. This is a major error, for the figure accords clearly with Blake's own description (which follows directly after that for 64, the Church Universal): "The Aged Figure with Wings, having a writing tablet and taking account of the numbers who arise, is That Angel of the Divine Presence mentioned in Exodus XIVc., 19 v. and in other Places; this Angel is frequently called by the Name of Jehovah Elohim, The 'I am' of the Oaks of Albion" (*N* pp. 80-81, K 610). Damon must have realized that the Angel of

the Divine Presence had to be somewhere so he put him in at the upper right as number 12; unfortunately this is a *pair* of kneeling figures associated with the Communion above the clouds where damnation begins to operate. I am sorry to say that this severe dislocation of Blake's master design went unremarked at the MLA meeting devoted to the *Last Judgment* some years ago. All of us who were there seem to have had our minds on other matters that Damon had handled with ease. I must add, however, that Damon's article on THE ANGEL OF DIVINE PRESENCE, p. 23, is concise and suggestive.

A word of caution for anyone who sets out to correct Damon's *Last Judgment*: the picture in the *Dictionary* is fairly clear but in the Shambhala format it is so much reduced that one must use a magnifying glass. Even in the more elegant treatment of the Brown University Press edition where the shadow picture and key fold out and face the reproduction, not enough is visible for certainty. Much preferable is the reproduction in Keynes' *Pencil Drawings: Second Series* (1956), pl. 27, or Keynes's 1970 Dover edition of the *Drawings*, illus. 51; both, though considerably reduced, are a good deal clearer. Though we must lament the loss of the great tempera of the Last Judgment, we ought to realize just how good the Rosenwald drawing is in its own right, not just as an indication of what is lost. Roe's description is entirely justified: "A great masterpiece of design and linear draftsmanship, with an amazing feeling for delicate and swift movement which weaves through the wonderfully organized multitude of figures, preserving complete clarity amidst complexity, this drawing ranks as one of the outstanding achievements of Blake's life" (A. S. Roe, "A Drawing of the Last Judgment," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 21 [1957], 40; reprinted in R. N. Essick, ed., *The Visionary Hand*, 1973, p. 205).

Elsewhere, often in this journal, I have written at some length on five other pictures reproduced in the *Dictionary*. In every case I have profited from Damon's observations, yet I have usually had to disagree with or refine some aspect of his basic interpretations. As regards the central figure in the Spenser cavalcade, for example, I show that she is undoubtedly Britomart, not Amoret, as Damon had proposed (see *Dictionary*, illus. VIII and p. 384, vs. Grant-Brown in *Blake Newsletter* 31, 8 [Winter 1974-75], 66-67). And in the Arlington Court Picture, referred to by Damon as "The Circle of Life," I have argued that the figures at the center must be Los and Jerusalem, not Luvah and Vala (see *Dictionary*, illus. IV and p. 87, vs. Grant in *Blake Newsletter* 11, 3 [May 1970], 98 and 13, 4 [August 1970], 17-18; also *Studies in Romanticism* 10 [1971], 21-26--repr. *The Visionary Hand*, pp. 483-91). As for my discussions of the designs for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, two of which Damon reproduces, which appeared in *Blake Newsletter* 16, 4 [1971], 117-34, repr. *The Visionary Hand*, pp. 418-48, and *Blake Newsletter* 19, 5 [1971-72], 190-202--Eaves's index shows me that my note references to passages in the *Dictionary* were incomplete, but that luckily what I had overlooked does not affect my understanding of Damon's position. In his article on PLATO Damon saw well enough that in *Il Penseroso* 9, "Milton and the Spirit

of Plato" (illus. IX and pp. 327-28), Blake was attacking Plato, not defending him, as Raine had wished to suppose. Yet Damon remained enough affected by the Platonizers to declare that Plato was Blake's "former idol," whereas he should have said Blake had never been a Platonist.

In my *Philological Quarterly* review of the *Dictionary* I complained of Damon's identification of the male figure who stands on the curve of the earth and receives a schroll from Jesus in the second version of the Genesis title page as the Holy Ghost. As a caption for the picture, illustration II, Damon refers to the article ZOA, p. 459, but the discussion in the article GENESIS, p. 151, is more informative, indicating also that Damon had confused the first and second versions of the title page. The additional five references identified in Eaves's index do not make the theory more persuasive that the receiver of the scroll should be identified as the Holy Spirit.

Curiously, Damon neglected to mention the third divine figure in the heavenly regions who is represented as rushing with outspread wings above the top of the picture, thus appearing in a position of superiority both to the Son on the left and the Father on the right. While the body of this superior figure is quite distinct, his actions and circumstances are only sketchily indicated. First we must recognize that the Father (with his compasses--not a bow, as I had asserted--held at his side) who stands in a mandorla above the Tree of Life, is dividing the waters above the firmament from those below. It is an extension of the supernal waters that the superior spirit is rushing across as, with outstretched arms, he wields a gigantic bow-shaped object that arcs around him and even over the horizontal line sketched across the top to indicate the planned limit of the picture.

The figure himself is a direct quotation (reversed) from *Marriage 3* and *Urizen 3*--as noted in Erdman's *The Illuminated Blake*--but in the final context he is freed from the flames that variously crippled the attempts of both Orc and Los to resist the devastating hegemony of Urizen. The sketched bow-shaped object he deploys is perhaps best understood as a more regular version of the involved scroll that curves around the genial self-image Blake drew in the Upcott autograph book on 26 January 1826. From the directing right wing of the Holy Spirit descend two continuations of this scroll: they blend into the second letter of the "Genesis" title and thence pervade the whole word, being also passed on below in the smaller scroll from Jesus to regenerate man who has arisen above the curve of the Earth and even the sphere of air to receive it. The wings and position of the originating figure alone show that in the end (on paper watermarked 1826) Blake wanted to depict the Holy Spirit not as a bird (as he had done as recently as the *Last Judgment*, and elsewhere)--and certainly not as a vacuum--but as a virile man with the power to disseminate the spirit of prophecy.

Damon tried to draw some of these implications out of the fourth figure who stands on the curve of the earth wearing as a loincloth the phallic letter "I" of the title, but his position as the receptor

of a scroll from Jesus shows that he is human, not a Spirit. He is, to be sure, a glorified human who wears a large plate halo, which is perhaps the Sun itself, as he reaches up to receive the scroll from the Son while drawing sustenance with his outspread left hand from the mandorla of the Father. I am convinced, though I cannot prove it, that the scroll must contain the Everlasting Gospel, which was promised to regenerate man in the Book of Revelation and partly written out in Blake's own Notebook. The new Adam who receives it is the energetic embodiment of Albion who has arisen and, after his dance, is fit to return to paradise, to make a human fourth with the three persons of the Trinity. His posture is nearly identical with that of the giant man who reaches up in *The Angel of Revelation* and declares "that there should be time no longer."

In the first version of the Genesis title page (watermarked 1821) there are many different ideas and symbols which Blake refined and also altered in the second version. Here three of the Four Zoas at the bottom also raise their arms, thus echoing the gesture of the central man, while the fourth, though bound, looks inward to witness the transfer of wisdom. But in the final version the Four Zoas appear in animal forms and only one, a dishumanized serpentine man, raises his (left) arm toward the Tree of Death, which is added in this later version. Here it appears that even Los as the Eagle can sight with only one eye the redemptive transmission of the Everlasting Gospel, which in the last day can tell unobfuscated truth. These bestial Four Zoas appear still bathing their feet in the waters outside of Eden, but the flames that play over their figures in the earlier version of the title page are no longer shown. The spectator is to infer that until after all the Zoas have bathed in the other waters, the waters of life evident above the firmament, the Zoas constitute bestial impersonations of the Covering Cherub, as yet unable to find their places within the bosom of Albion.

Still, the story of "Genesis" that Blake wished at last to show correctly must have been that of paradise regained rather than of paradise still lost. It will be interesting to see whether the edition of the Genesis manuscript that has been promised for some time by the American Blake Foundation has been conceived so as to reveal the extent of Blake's purposes in this project of the wonderful last year of his life. If so, correct understanding will have grown out of the leads Damon left us by calling attention to what is important and, what is even rarer, in communicating the right spirit of interpretation even when details, even major details, of the interpretation offered were inaccurate. Because Damon's imagination was always in the right place, the need for his *Dictionary* will continue to be felt by every Blake scholar. With Eaves's assistance in locating all Damon had to say, we cannot envision a time when it will be possible to get along without the *Dictionary*.\*

\* Evidently my concluding and opening exhortations do not quite express a consensus. Michael J. Tolley, for one, does not agree. He calls my attention to his review of Damon's *Dictionary* in *Southern Review*

(Australia) 2 (1967), esp. 271-74, which showed in detail that Damon was often wrong about Blake's understanding of the Bible. Perhaps the number of scholars who, like Tolley, can forego use of the *Dictionary* is larger than I have supposed. Still,

I can think of few books or articles published during the last fifteen years that would not have been better if the elementary pre-publication question I ask in my second paragraph could really be answered "yes."

# The Language of Allegory

Defining the Genre

by

Maureen Quilligan

Maureen Quilligan. **The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre.** Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979. 305 pp. \$15.00.

**Reviewed by Nelson Hilton.**

**M**aureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory* nowhere mentions Blake, yet it should prove highly rewarding to those students interested in Blake's verbal art, and particularly to those pursuing his murky distinction between "vision" and "allegory" (*VLIJ*, E 544).

Quilligan's thesis is that the defining characteristic of non-mechanical allegories--what links them into a genre--is "their very particular emphasis on language as their first focus and ultimate subject" (p. 15), and her book unfolds the consequences and operations of that focus through a theoretical framework (the book moves from sections on "The Text" to "The Pretext," "The Context," and "The Reader") larded with discussions of "allegories" as diverse as *Piers Plowman*, Melville's *The Confidence Man*, and *The Cry of Lot 49*. For Quilligan, the kind of language which is the subject (and object) of allegory displays three interrelated features: it is polysemous, non-arbitrary, and--striking to read in a work of contemporary literary criticism--it asks for a reader "willing to entertain the possibility of making a religious response to the ineffability invoked by [allegory's] polysemous language" (p. 223).

Emphasizing "the possibility of an otherness, a polysemy, inherent in the very words of the page,"

Quilligan proposes to reorient the idea of allegory "away from out traditional insistence on allegory's distinction between word said and meaning meant, to the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning" (p. 26). The allegory can then be seen as a kind of extended pun, generating its narrative out of wordplay, unfolding "as a series of punning commentaries, related to one another on the most literal of verbal levels--the sounds of words" (p. 22; though here one must query, why not the graphic shapes of words as well? sound is not the most literally *literal* of verbal levels). A Blakean example might be "Of the primeval Priests assum'd power" (*BU* 2.1), where you must wonder about prim and proper evil priests and then the power they assumed or that you assume they have--fit questions to open the book of your reason (among other possibilities). Such a text--manifesting Quilligan's suggestion regarding the function of wordplay in allegory--addresses the reader's production of meaning and forces him "to become self-conscious of his own reading" (pp. 21, 41). The end result of this dynamic is to make the reader aware of his or her own interpretative acts, to force the reader to reflect on how the text has been read, and in reflecting on this operation to realize the choices he or she has made about the text and, finally, the kinds of choices the reader makes in life (p. 253). The effect of the confused "Argument" (which means,