



But He Talked of the Temple of Mans Body: Blakes Revelation Unlocked

By Eliza Borkowska

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The impetus to write this book was to come to terms with how William Blake uses language, mainly to answer the question why he twists words out of their ordinary significations, creates his own ones, gives those he creates a variety of referents. These are aspects of his poetry that put many readers off, while others still tend to treat this linguistic behaviour as a nuisance which must be put up with if one wants to get at Blake's thought. 'But He Talked of the Temple of Man's Body' builds a response to Blake's thought through an analysis of his linguistic practices. While attempting to comprehend what the poet says (about man, his potential, the world he lives in, the God he believes in), the book is at the same time an attempt to understand why Blake says what he says the way he says it. The starting point for such an analysis of Blake's poetry is not Derrida but Locke, not of Grammatology but *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, particularly its Book Three, *Of Words*, which is a quintessence of the rationalist philosophy of language. As Part I of 'But He Talked'...demonstrates, Locke turned words into bricks and used them to build a sophisticated system of science and morality, which Borkowska calls 'The Temple of Rationalism'. As the remaining two Parts (Part II: 'Destroying the Temple - Rending the Veil', and Part III: 'Rebuilding the Temple') show, Blake's linguistic practices were aimed to disentangle the English language from this system, to open Locke's words onto a new range of meanings and make them capable of carrying non-Lockean significations. The book's position is that reading Blake through deconstructive theories does not really capture the ultimate sense of his poetry. Blake freed language from Locke, not from man; he set it free not to enjoy its freeplay but to set man free. He did not demolish the rationalist Temple built of words in order to leave its dwellers on the debris, but he used these word-bricks to build an alternative Temple, which he constructs/reveals in his poetry. While being a conscientious study of Blake's poetics, the book is at the same time a poetic study, which never attempts to translate poetry into prose. It reads like a narrative, telling of an effort to build, an attempt to destroy, and then rebuild again. Primarily aimed at Blake readers, students, scholars, it will also interest those who are interested in Augustan poetry or Romanticism in general, as well as students of art, religion or philosophy, because it stands on the crossroads where literature meets all these disciplines. But, importantly, it is not just a book

for specialists. Locke helped to lay foundations to an epoch which is not yet entirely over. He helped to create a way of thinking which is still taught in schools and churches, even though his name is not mentioned. Blake's criticism of Locke is in fact Blake's criticism of the main assumptions of modernity. And to listen to this voice, which the book helps to understand, will be an exciting experience to all those who do not mind looking at the reality from some critical distance.

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Review

"... Written with sparkling critical acumen, Borkowska's book is a passionate plea for Blake's systematic search for the Living Ideal hidden behind the veil of human-made abstractions ..." -Malgorzata Grzegorzewska, Warsaw University "... A lucid and eloquent investigation at the end of which we obtain interesting, sometimes surprising results which take us beyond the standard opinions about Blake's straightforward rejection of Locke's ideas. Blake who emerges from this book is not merely anti-Locke but, the point which Borkowska demonstrates with zest and intellectual passion, un-Locke, not a figure of non-reading or anti-reading but one of critical mis- or un-reading ..." -Tadeusz Slawek, University of Silesia "Eliza Borkowska provides an erudite, lively discussion of the poetic strategies by which Blake disrupts and transforms Locke's "temple of rationalism." Borkowska's treatment of Locke is careful and respectful as she articulates precisely those aspects of his work that Blake felt compelled to reimagine. Well informed by Blake scholarship from all eras, and displaying a rare command of the full Blake oeuvre, Borkowska constructs a theoretical defense of the neologisms and other linguistic subversions that have made his work seem almost perversely difficult. The book will reward Blake scholars with fresh insights about familiar texts and images, but Borkowska's analyses-for all their nuance and complexity-are always clear enough to serve as an advanced introduction to the study of Blake and the intellectual paradigm against which he reacted." - Wayne Glausser, Professor of English, DePauw University

About the Author

Eliza Borkowska is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English Studies, SWPS (Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities) in Warsaw, and Vice-dean of SWPS's Faculty of Languages and Literatures. She also works as a translator and scriptwriter.

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