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# Blake's Letters and Global Exchange

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## Preamble

Much of my interest in William Blake's prophetic works over the years has been in his use of sententia and proverbs as a signature poetic device. This interest originally resulted in the book, *The Wisdom of Many, the Vision of One* (1994), which examined Blake's use of proverbs throughout the written text of his prophetic works.<sup>1</sup> More recently, it has manifested itself in a second book, nearing completion, focused on Blake's sustained use of proverbs involving the visual elements of his entire corpus, of which this essay is a part. Entitled *Blake's Visual Wisdom*, the new book examines the visionary poet/painter's sustained interest in wisdom, the proverb, and the performative in every aspect of his synaesthetic works, exploring how in many ways it is the very notion of the performative in Blake that specifically connects the visual and the verbal, in word made flesh fashion.<sup>2</sup> Both these sets of studies,

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1. Marvin Lansverk, *The Wisdom of Many, the Vision of One: The Proverbs of William Blake*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

2. Very briefly, I use the notion of the performative as first described by J. L. Austin, as words which *do* things, rather than simply *say* things, as in commands, decrees, and pronouncements of law, with varying gradations of illocutionary power, depending on the power of speaker and his or her invested authority, with God's "let there be's" in Genesis as a preeminent—and most powerful—example, since the speech of God leads to the creation of the material universe. (J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. Ed. J. O. Urmson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). Blake makes frequent use of performative phrasing in his prophetic works, self-investing his speech as the speech of God, in what I call theophatives. Moreover, Blake most often uses performative phrasing within and near his proverbs, thereby seemingly attempting

the completed one, and this current one, have shown a number of things:

- That Blake constantly has biblical wisdom books on his mind, throughout his career.
- That Blake consistently exploited proverbial speech acts in his illuminated works and beyond as verbal devices that result in visual manifestations.
- That even though they are often used by critics for their substantive content—as verbal keys to his complicated mythos, Blake’s proverbs and wisdom statements are better used as visual and verbal cues (not keys) that Blake used to create wisdom, on the spot, as it were. In the set of paired terms that I have framed and used throughout my discussions of Blake’s proverbs, they are not *affirmative utterances*, but *performative utterances*, often used in his text to signal, start, and ultimately enact apocalypse.
- Finally, while acknowledging that there are many debates over this in Blake studies over the years, my approach in important ways emphasizes the primacy of the word over the image in Blake’s oeuvre, though such a simple assertion obviously needs more complex explanation, an explanation that also highlights Blake’s important re-writing of the eighteenth-century textual relationship between word and image, emphasizing throughout his works that a radical and intimate connection could be sustained into the era of the book.

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to turn his proverbs into performatives, wisdom created *in situ*, rather than proverb’s typical origins as the repetition of traditional wisdom. Thus, many of the Proverbs of Hell are phrased as commands, from the divine “let” (“Let man wear the fell of the lion. Woman the fleece of the sheep,” to the more common—if less theopanatively powerful—definition proverbs (e.g. “Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.”) As performatives, his proverbs also enact the very thing they refer to, which is demonstrated in many ways. For example, in the Argument of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a proverb interrupts the narrative, “Roses are planted where thorns grow / And on the barren heath Sing the honey bees” (MHH 2; E 33). The narration resumes with the content of the proverb then having been enacted: the perilous path is suddenly “planted.” Blake’s performative language has been given various treatments, including: Gavin Edwards, “Mind-Forg’d Manacles: A Contribution to the Discussion of Blake’s ‘London,’” *Literature and History*, 5 (1979): 87–104; Robert Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Angela Esterhammer, *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); and Marvin Lansverk, *The Wisdom of Many, the Vision of One*, (1994).

All Blake's prophetic works manifest this radical connection, prototypically and significantly accompanied by proverbs, right up through *Jerusalem*. And not just the illuminated books, but Blake's other writing and images as well, including (as I discuss elsewhere in *Blake's Visual Wisdom*) his *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, his *Laocoon* design, his *A Descriptive Catalogue*, right up to his *Illustrations to Dante*, which he died while working on.

But what about Blake's personal letters? Though not crafted, drawn, or engraved with the same artistic intentions as his other creative output, can they nevertheless still be subjected to the types of scrutiny that I have been engaging in, examining them for a use of proverbs, sententia, and performatives, with visual manifestations? And if so, what might they additionally reveal about Blake's preoccupation with visual wisdom? Further, given Blake's constant rebellion against formal constraints, what might they reveal about Blake's creative treatment of the genre of the personal business letter itself? And might they be used as a test case of my arguments about Blake's proverb use in his other work? Thus, do Blake's letters have characteristics similar to techniques employed in his illuminated works? And if so, to what end, as further manifestations of his art, or perhaps simply as habit of mind, and style, a communication method in general—even when outside the realm of his more polished, and more public art? Or, if not there, does this reveal, perhaps, that Blake preserved these techniques more intentionally as part of his conception of public art?

Blake's letters, and letters in general, are obviously an important aspect of eighteenth-century exchange, economic and otherwise. We all know how central personal letters are to many of the stories of the eighteenth century, real and fictional, which move from personal to public, across a number of fault lines of the period. And we know that Blake used his letters both to discuss his art *and* to do business. And yet we know that Blake was an early critic of markets and exchange and the consequences of incipient capitalism. And Blakeans also know, as Hazard Adams has long argued, that at the heart of Blake's poetics is what can be called his synecdochic method (or to use one of the poet's own terms, Blake's Doctrine of Contraries, a modification to Swedenborg's Doctrine of Correspondences), where everything can and is demonstrated to be connected to everything else, part for the whole, in the manner that we associate with Blake's name as an

adjective. What we mean by *Blakean* is necessarily an identification of his radically synecdochic poetics.<sup>3</sup>

Given this Preamble—these introductory comments on Blake’s proverbs, letters, performatives, and synecdoche—what I would like to explore in this paper, then, is a set of related questions: does Blake think about these things, together, in his letters? Do his letters employ performative proverbs? Furthermore, are his letters synecdochic, applying his own radically connecting methods to the very act of letter writing: meaning, does he deploy his own infernal methods in and onto his personal letters, subjecting the genre to the pressures that he exerts on the other artistic modes he worked within, whether this be challenging standard letter-writing conventions of the day, the way, for example, he often disrupts eighteenth-century narrative conventions in his illuminated books? Or, does he in his letters make the kinds of expansive connections between his many spiritual and material interests that we see elsewhere in his art? Does he, for example, engage in critiques of markets and exchange while writing personal letters that extend his own marketing and exchange? Is Blake’s literal imagination at work in his letters? Does Blake employ his modification of the Doctrine of Correspondences in his correspondence? Or more plainly, does the visionary Blake ever just relax, at least in his personal correspondence? Or finally, most simply, how Blakean are Blake’s own letters?

Happily, there is a new book on the subject of Blake’s letters and exchange: Sarah Haggarty’s *Blake’s Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange* (2010), which examines both Blake’s place in eighteenth-century markets, art markets, and his attitudes towards them, as well as his own aesthetic/economic theories of exchange as explained in his works, and lived out in his life. In her contribution to longstanding discussions of Blake’s negative attitudes towards markets, using and critiquing Derrida, Mauss, and Bourdieu, Haggarty shows how “the idea of the gift, in contrast to concepts of commercial exchange or the exercise of self-interest at the expense of social ties, is integral to the

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3. See Hazard Adams, “Synecdoche and Method,” *Critical Paths: Blake and the Argument of Method*, ed. Dan Miller, Mark Bracher, and Donald Ault (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), 41–71. See also Hazard Adams, *William Blake: On His Poetry and Painting, A Study of A Descriptive Catalogue, Other Prose Writings and Jerusalem*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011), 51–52.

ways in which William Blake thought about his art, and the production and dissemination of his work" (i).<sup>4</sup>

But rather than examining Haggarty's interesting discussion here, focused, as it is, especially on contemporary literary theory on one side, and Blake's eighteenth-century cultural context on the other, I want to turn back to my own primary preoccupation, on Blake's sententious language in Blake's texts. My method is fairly straightforward, reading through Blake's works looking for specific types of speech acts that he calls *proverbs*, and which we can define, with the help of Jean Ricardou and Geoffrey Bennington, as sententious statements that interrupt the narrative descriptive complex, marked by the use of the universalizing present tense.<sup>5</sup> And not just proverbs, but proverbial questions, sententious passages, and other performatively phrased statements, which all often happen to occur together in Blake's works.

One word of caution at the outset: given Blake's narrative experiments in his prophetic works, it is sometimes difficult to tell just what is a proverb or not (which is always part of Blake's point). Furthermore, it is even more difficult in the letters, because (unlike the prophetic works) they do not typically establish a narrative descriptive complex to interrupt. Nevertheless, the markers of a universalizing present tense and sententiousness are still useful in identifying proverbs anywhere in Blake, though it is probably not possible to identify and catalogue them all exactly, in the letters or elsewhere. A useful touchstone, however, are the Proverbs of Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which since Blake specifically calls them "proverbs," can be used to compare to similarly phrased lines elsewhere to help identify them as proverbs.

## Article I: A Brief Introduction to Blake's letters

Blake's letters have long been useful for Blake scholars. As would be expected, they have been used to flesh out his biography, as a window into his state of mind, as a source of commentary about his art, as a

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4. Sarah Haggarty, *Blake's Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For an earlier discussion of Blake's letters, see also David Wells, *A Study of William Blake's Letters*, (Tubingen: Stauffenburg, 1987).

5. Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness and the Novel: Laying Down the Law in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Jean Ricardou, *Nouveaux Problèmes du Roman*, (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

picture of his economic transactions with his buyers, and as expressions of friendship. And because they are shorter than his complex illuminated works, and apparently more straightforward, they sometimes are used, like Blake's proverbs, to explain confusing aspects of his mythos.

Overall, the total extant letters are just shy of 100, to only a handful of correspondents. The earliest surviving letter, is from October 18, 1791, when Blake was 33; the last was written a month before he died. His correspondents were few: the artist, George Cumberland; the Church of England clergyman and writer, John Trusler; the writer and friend of Cowper, another poet, William Hayley; the government clerk and early collector of Blake, Thomas Butts; the sculptor, John Flaxman; Blake's brother, James Blake; the miniature painter, Ozias Humphrey (one letter to whom having had a recent interaction with markets, as it was on the auction market in 2011); the landscape painter, John Linnell, and finally the *Monthly Magazine* editor, Richard Phillips.

A read straight through the letters gives an interesting if incomplete view of Blake over 36 years of his life, until he died, at age 69. There are large gaps, and no doubt Blake wrote letters to many other people, now lost to time, who were less assiduous packrats than the named correspondents, who hung onto them in their files.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the ones that do survive present an image of an often happy, visionary, and hardworking Blake, right up until the end—even though increasingly economically challenged and ill.

Many of the details in the letters, as in other eighteenth-century letters, are simply expressions of friendship, inquiries about health, and often—the reason for their being written in the first place—negotiations involving business dealings. These business letters provide descriptions of his progress on agreed upon works, or negotiations about content when working for a patron, along with occasional commentary on Blake's visionary life and his art, some complaints about his obscurity and others' fame, but more often expressions of contented resignation that since the spiritual side of existence *was* life, that this spiritual support team, so to speak, ultimately was in control and must know what it was doing.

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6. To help fill in these gaps, of course, *Blake Records* has, over time, itemized the evidence for and references to other letters, now lost.

The letters also provide specific insight into Blake's three year sojourn out of London to the coast to Felpham, at the encouragement of his patron Hayley, ultimately leading to his experimentation with the painting of miniatures; with the frustrations and arguments, and eventual amicably-arranged return to London, following the traumatic episode in Blake's garden where after an altercation with the soldier Skofield, Blake was accused of and had to stand trial for sedition, reminding him, as if he needed it, of the dangers of political speech in his time. This episode, of course, was also then being given imaginative treatment in the writing of Blake's *Milton*.

Over the years, besides these details about the Skofield incident, the most often referenced material in the letters has been Blake's comments about his art. In fact, Hazard Adams' recent book, *William Blake: On His Poetry and Painting, A Study of A Descriptive Catalogue, Other Prose Writings and Jerusalem* (2011), contains a short chapter on these comments about art in the letters: the "other" writings part of the title.<sup>7</sup> But what about my subject, Blake's proverbs, performatives, sententia, synecdoche, and exchange? Do these receive Blakean treatment in the letters?

## Article II: Proverbs in Blake's Letters

As it turns out, there are proverbs and proverbially phrased elements do appear in the letters. And as in his other works—though cited, commonplace book fashion, for seeming additional authority and emphasis—the proverbs are mostly original, thus not affirmative utterances affirming the traditional wisdom from the past, but something else. To start with numbers and quantities, the letters do not strike readers as being overtly sententious. The percentage of sententious material, relative to other material, is about 3%: that is about 100 total lines of sententious material, to the appx 2610 lines.<sup>8</sup> Compare that with about 19% for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (depending on what exactly you count, that is 94 lines out of 500). Counting another way, only a

7. See Chapter 6: "On His Arts: In the Letters," 82–93.

8. Quotations and letter numbering of Blake's letters are taken from Erdman's edition: *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1982). In text citations take the following form (E 714) or (17; E 714), indicating the letter and then page number in Erdman's edition.



quarter of the total letters have at least one proverb. More important than numbers, obviously, is significance. Thus, can we profitably ask the questions that I frequently pose about Blake's artistic output: how important is the sententious material here, of what type is it, and what is its function?

One way to begin to answer this is to look for patterns across the time covered by the span of letters; yet when doing this, no overall pattern or trend emerges. Except for some remarkable clumping in several letters, proverbial language otherwise tends to be spread somewhat evenly. Towards the end, however, there is an increasing reference to money, lack of funds, and receipts, and prices, with fewer overall proverbs: the mundane world begins to encroach upon Blake's spiritual life. Additionally, while most letters have the occasional proverb, only a few can be said to be highly proverbial, which will receive special attention here, as a result. It should also be mentioned that there are about 210 lines of Blake's poetry embedded in the prose of the letters, appearing in eight poems, in seven different letters, including the "Dear Generous Cumberland" verses in the postscript to the letter mailed September 1, 1800, that surfaced in 1997, too late to make it into Erdman. This poetry in the letters is itself generally *not* sententious, though it is about visionary subjects, in contrast to, say, the *Auguries of Innocence*, a highly sententious poem.

The proverbs that do appear tend to treat a similar set of subjects and can be usefully classified into three types by subject and use: 1) Proverbs of Consolation, 2) Proverbs of Art, and 3) Proverbs of Vision. It should be noted that all three categories have quite a bit of overlap, and almost always occur together, but it is useful to keep them separate at the outset. Also, it should be remembered that the content of each type overlaps with these same themes which (among other themes) appear in the non-proverbial text of the letters. That is, it is not that Blake reserves his presentation of consolation, art, and vision for proverbs alone, but that he habitually punctuates these discussions in the letters—and these alone—with proverbs (i.e. there are no proverbs of business, price-setting, deal-making, or even friend-making, though these subjects also fill the letters). Neither are there proverbs engaging some of the additional subjects, forms, and biblical provenance of those in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, especially the Proverbs of

Hell's signature animal proverbs.<sup>9</sup> As for the Proverbs of Consolation (which might be alternatively called Proverbs of Self Consolation—though the proverbs appear in letters addressed to others, they chiefly are expressions of consolation to himself): these are characterized in the letters by Blake citing and writing proverbs that express contented resignation to his lot on earth, with its attendant sufferings as part of God's plan for him. These proverbs often express contentedness because of a resignation that material comfort and the material world is of less import than the spiritual world (obviously, as will be seen, this already begins to overlap with my third category of Vision). As for the Proverbs of Art: they are to be found embedded in a number of discussions of Blake's artistic method in the letters, its basis, his studies, its origins, in ways that critics have found extremely helpful, and clear. Significantly, these discussions are almost always accompanied by proverbs that additionally explain and present common Blakean views on art: on his works, on art in general, on the true artist, on proper execution, and on the proper viewing of art. Obviously, this too overlaps with Blake's Vision Proverbs, since Blake characterizes vision as the origin of his art and many of his Proverbs of Art invoke the act of seeing. And finally, as for the Proverbs of Vision: these are to be found sprinkled into his extended discussions of his visions and spiritual

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9. While these three categories do account for the proverb types occurring in the letters—and cover a great deal of Blake's proverbial output elsewhere—they do not fully cover the entirety of Blake's proverbs. Though various attempts have been made to categorize Blake's proverbs by type and form, no successful, comprehensive classification has been achieved. A central theme of the Proverbs of Hell, for example, is "species individuality" and "self determination," having much in common with elements of the Proverbs of Art and Vision from the letters, though not typically given the letter's specific focus on executing artistic output. Thus, in Letter 5, to Trusler, we get: "I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike" and "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way" (5; E 702), which has much in common with many of the Proverbs of Hell, including "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees" (E 35). Similarly, the letter's "This World is a World of Imagination & Vision" (E 702) is thematically akin to the illuminated book's opening proverbial question: "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" (E 35). But because of the context, many of the Proverbs of Hell are more about education than vision or art. And because of his particular polemic purposes in responding to the Bible's Book of Proverbs in *The Marriage*, most proverbs there can be traced in their binary form and diverse content to counterparts in the biblical text, as I discuss in *The Wisdom of Many, the Proverbs of One*.

methods, usually hand in hand with simultaneous discussions of his art. Notably, the relationship among these three types of proverbs might best be understood, Venn diagram fashion, as a series of three increasingly larger circles, each fully containing the smaller one, a diagram of synecdoches itself: since Blake is consoled by his art, and his art is a result of his vision. Thus, even these sets of proverbs might be said to display a synecdochic relationship.

Beginning with the Proverbs of Consolation in the letters, it is useful to remember that Blake's correspondents are for the most part also his patrons, or in case of Trusler, a potential patron-customer, people with whom Blake had artistic/business relationships, but who also became his friends. Haggarty talks about Blake as being somewhat of a throwback in this capacity, living in a time of transition away from patronage, but who himself survived mostly with the support of only three patrons.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when addressing these friends and patrons, in addition to conducting the business of business, and of friendship, Blake occasionally complains about his circumstances, but a more characteristic gesture is overtly *not* to complain, but instead, to console himself, and sometimes to console others. There are a number of examples of this. For example, in Letter 6, to George Cumberland, August 26, 1799, Blake writes in support of this fellow artist, identifying with his struggles in a letter with several elements of sententious interest. At one point, Blake says, as if quoting a proverb to himself: "But as I know that *He who Works & has his health cannot starve*" (E 704).<sup>11</sup> Blake goes on, giving Cumberland proverbial encouragement: "Pray let me intreat you to persevere in your *Designing it is the only source of Pleasure all your other pleasures depend upon It. It is the Tree Your Pleasures are the Fruit. Your Inventions of Intellectual Visions are the Stamina of every thing you value.*" Blake concludes the letter with another proverbial self consolation that also happens wittily to address commerce: "It is now Exactly Twenty years since I was upon the ocean of business & Tho I laugh at Fortune I am perswaded that *She Alone*

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10. Haggarty, 58. Haggarty, however, does not always successfully distinguish visual art patronage from literary patronage, which have very different eighteenth-century histories.

11. In these quotations I draw out material surrounding actual proverbs, itself often sententious, for additional context. Then, to aid the identification of the specifically proverbial, I italicize these parts. Thus, the italics are mine, not Blake's.

is the Governor of worldly Riches. & when it is fit She will call on me till then I wait with Patience in hopes that She is busied among my Friends" (E 704).

Similarly, in writing to his patron Hayley, from Felpham, in Letter 17, November 26, 1800, Blake writes of his attempts to stay busy (though laziness was never a Blakean trait): "We mean to begin printing again to-morrow. *Time flies very fast and very merrily*. I sometimes try to be miserable that I may do more work, but find it is a foolish experiment. *Happinesses have wings and wheels; miseries are leaden legged and their whole employment is to clip the wings and to take off the wheels of our chariot*" (E 714). This letter concludes with some allusions to Blake's mythos, very rare in the letters. Referring to the personified compass directions, which Blake employs in the mythic machinery of *The Four Zoas* and elsewhere, here Blake uses the technique to describe his seaside cottage: "our cottage Is surrounded by the same guardians you left with us; they keep off every wind. We hear the west howl at a distance, the south bounds on high over our thatch, and smiling on our cottage says: You lay too low for my anger to injure. As to the east and north I believe they cannot get past the turret" (E 714). The only other overt mythic intrusions are occasional allegorical references, such as to the "Gates of Death" and the "Delusive Goddess Nature" (Letter 91; E 783–84), or in Letter 23, to Butts, November 22, 1802, in the long fourfold vision poem, where Blake actually mentions Theotormon, Enitharmon, and Los. Apocalyptic imagery also appears in the previously mentioned "Dear Generous Cumberland" verses.

In Letter 31, also to Hayley, October 7, 1803, Blake continues writing Proverbs of Consolation, beginning by complaining a bit about his poverty, but the complaint does not last. Blake first cites one of Jesus' own proverbs (a rare affirmative), from Matthew 4:4, where Jesus is himself citing the same ancient proverb from Deuteronomy 8:8. Blake then applies it wittily to himself in what becomes an expression of gratitude for his spiritual gifts: "*Man liveth not by bread alone* I shall live although I should want bread—nothing is necessary to me but to do my Duty & to rejoice in the exceeding joy that is always poured out on my Spirit" (E 737). This letter concludes with an extension of Blake's consolation to Hayley's friend and neighbor Miss Poole, who had become ill. Blake writes: "Some say that *Happiness is not Good for Mortals* & they ought to be ans wrd that *Sorrow is not fit for Immortals*

☞ is utterly useless to any one a blight never does good to a tree ☞ if a blight kill not a tree but it still bear fruit let none say that the fruit was in consequence of the blight" (E 737).<sup>12</sup>

Turning to Blake's proverbs about his art: as I have said, these are among the most often cited elements of his letters, the parts often mined for insight into his views. My focus, thus, will be less on elucidating the content of these statements as it is highlighting the frequency with which these expressions are accompanied by proverbs. And proverbs appear right at the outset, in Letter 2, to George Cumberland, December 6, 1795. In the letter, Blake is congratulating his fellow artist on some recent work, and proverbs begin to flow immediately, very like ones Blake uses elsewhere in his work. Among the proverbs in the letter: first a false proverb, which Blake here calls a "pretended Philosophy" that "*Execution is the power of One ☞ Invention of Another.*" Instead, in the corrected wisdom, Blake says, "*It is the same faculty that Invents Judges,*" surprisingly citing Locke (whom he usually hates), as his authority. Additionally: "*Who can Invent can Execute*" (E 699).<sup>13</sup> And then later near the end of the short letter: "*Peace ☞ Plenty ☞ Domestic Happiness is the Source of Sublime Art.*" And finally "*Enjoyment ☞ not Abstinence is the food of Intellect*" (E 700). Sandwiched in between these proverbs, the rest of the letter is used to describe the practical details of Blake's method of copper plate engraving. Though also about his art, this next brief section is not proverbial; Blake seems to reserve his art proverbs to help express his *philosophy* of art, not descriptions of its physical details. Nevertheless, this immediate switching from philosophy to the business of art, is absolutely typical of Blake's methods in the illuminated books as well, where Blake often eschews transitions, making sudden shifts in tone, genre, subject matter, and narration, in the ways we associate with his intentional genre-busting methods. Because it is so widespread and unique, there is no single comprehensive literary or rhetorical term for it. If the sudden shifts were only at the level of plot and content, the term *perip-*

12. Blake's lines invoke the story of the blighted fig tree, from Matthew 21:17, which itself is in part a story of the power of Jesus' performative words, with his curse causing the withering of the fig.

13. The term *execution* is used frequently throughout *A Public Address* (and elsewhere), where it appears in several proverbs, including: "Unappropriate Execution is the most nauseous <of all> Affectation & Foppery" (E 576).

*eteia* might be adequate, but Blake extends his version of peripeteia to include sudden shifts in *form* as well: from prose to proverb, from letter to poem, from cosmological contemplation to discussing the pricing of his works. As such, this might better be understood as Blake's preference for the *juxtaposition* of disparate elements (the metaphysical conceit meets the Doctrine of Contraries!), including the juxtaposition of proverbs themselves, as do Blake's biblical analogues, where Blake simply piles up proverbs next to each other, often without punctuation, techniques which are manifested throughout the illuminated books and beyond, especially evident in the *Laocoon*, but also employed in Blake's letters. When describing Blake, sometimes Blakean terms themselves are most useful, which is why this technique might also simply be subsumed under his own term, the Doctrine of Contraries. My favorite term for this, however, is another one Blake invokes: *parable*. Blake certainly knew the etymology of the term *parable* as meaning "to throw beside," as in "making a comparison," as Jesus' parables do. As such, his multiple, multimodal, sudden shifts, including those in the letters, where he frequently shifts from expressing his visionary philosophy in proverbial form to doing business in plain style, might best be captured under the term *parabolic*. Blake's poetics of accretion certainly results in throwing many various elements, one next to another.

Another early example, Letter 5, to Trusler, August 23, 1799, is entirely about Blake's artistic methods, a defense of them, because Trusler had criticized Blake's work in response to Blake's initial exploration of acquiring Trusler's patronage. And the defense is replete with proverbs and other often cited sententious passages, with many echoes of material used throughout Blake's illuminated works. Much of the letter is a polemic, which in Blake's poetic works, and here, seems to always have sparked proverbial phrasing from him. Because the use here is so extensive, it is worth quoting them at length here. And to show how fast and furiously the proverbs come, I quote them in context, rather than singling them out into a list:

I had hoped your plan comprehended All Species of this Art & Especially that you would not reject that Species which gives Existence to Every other. Namely Visions of Eternity You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that *What is Grand is neces-*

*sarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act. I name Moses Solomon Esop Homer Plato*

*... Is not Merit in one a Cause of Envy in another & Serenity & Happiness & Beauty a Cause of Malevolence. But Want of Money & the Distress of A Thief can never be alledged as the Cause of his Thievery. ...*

*... Too much Fun is of all things the most loathsom. Mirth is better than Fun & Happiness is better than Mirth—I feel that a Man may be happy in This World. And I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination & I feel Flatterd when I am told So. What is it sets Homer Virgil & Milton in so high a rank of art. Why is the Bible more Entertaining and & Instructive than any other book. Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason Such is True Painting and such <was> alone valued by the Greeks & the best modern Artists. Consider what Lord Bacon says “Sense sends over to Imagination before Reason have judged & Reason sends over to Imagination before the Decree can be acted. ...”*

*... Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But there is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation*

*To Engrave after another Painter is infinitely more laborious than to Engrave ones own Inventions. And of the Size you require my price has been Thirty Guineas & I cannot afford to do it for less... (E 702–3).*

Depending on how you count, that is over twenty proverbs in one letter, inviting comparison to the seventy in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and to the proverbs in Blake's other works. Such a comparison tracing the many threads of connection to proverbial elements elsewhere in Blake would take an article of its own, but a few, in addition to those already mentioned, can be identified here. Most notable are

the shared words (that are elevated to common Blakean themes). Eternity, vision, wisdom, folly, imagination, reason, and incapacity: these familiar words and binaries extend from *The Marriage* right through this letter. Formal connections are there as well, with the comparison proverbs, "As a man is So he Sees" and "As the Eye is formed such are its Powers" not only recycling proverbial statements made throughout Blake's corpus (especially *Visions of the Daughter of Albion*, with its emphasis on seeing, including its epigraph, "The Eye Sees more than the Heart knows" E 45), but also matching the "as" form of a number of the Proverbs of Hell (including "As the plow..." "As the catterpillar..." and "As the air to a bird..." (E 37–38). Proverbial questions (with a provenance by way of the Book of Job) also appear in the letter, a form Blake introduced in the epigraph to the Proverbs of Hell and then used extensively through *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.

As above, even this letter, as polemic as it is, nevertheless also pauses to do business. Using the same interweaving parabolic method we saw earlier, Blake suddenly shifts back and forth, without transitions, from proverbially insulting Trusler to continuing to seek his business: in the shockingly sudden, non-proverbial final paragraph, Blake starts to discuss the price of his labor, implying his willingness to continue working for him, if they could come to an agreement.

Tuning finally to Blake's Proverbs of Vision, readers will notice that many of the Proverbs of Art above also bleed over into this final category. Blake's comments about his visionary process is so linked with all of Blake's thought, including his art, that vision really cannot be separated out from anything. Yet there are, nevertheless, many proverbial statements specifically about Blake's spiritual vision. Five letters deserve mention, to display the extent and variety of these proverbs.

In Letter 11, to Flaxman, September 12, 1800, Blake writes: "*The time is now arrivd when Men shall again converse in Heaven & walk with Angels.*" This is followed by a poem, addressed to "My Dearest Friend John Flaxman." Not itself proverbially phrased, the poem does contain an abbreviated prophetic autobiography, mixing the biblical past and personal present, the visionary and the political, mirroring some passages from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *America*. The lines praise the friendship of Flaxman, Fuseli, Hayley, Milton, Ezra, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Paracelsus, Behmen, and point to the



importance of the American War and the French Revolution. One proverbial line does appear, almost a beatitude: "*The blessed of Heaven are my friends upon Earth*" (E 707–8).

Then in the long Letter 24 to Butts, January 10, 1803, appear many sententious passages about Blake's spiritual orientation. From the batch of letters during his three years in Felpham (nearly a third of the letters are from this period), this letter begins with expressions of friendship and personal details about the recent move, followed by a brief discussion of "pecuniary assistance" and a reference to the fact that the move has allowed Blake both to calm his mind and return to working on his illuminated books. He also actually mentions the "consolation" of having time to collect his "scattered thoughts on Art," possibly a reference to material that would appear in his later prose statements about vision and art, including *A Descriptive Catalogue*, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, and his *Public Address* (1808–1810), all replete with proverbs of art and vision themselves, indicating again that Blake's thinking about these topics is nearly co-equal with the sententious form. In Letter 24, after the initial greetings, a notable series of sententious passages follow, with elements of all three proverb categories (Consolation, Art, and Vision), though dominated by Vision, including an initial one, directed in consolation towards himself: "*Patience! If Great things do not turn out it is because such things depend on the Spiritual & not the Natural World.*" This is soon followed by a clear statement of his divine inspiration:

I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven Daily & Nightly but the nature of such things is not as some suppose. Without trouble or care. *Temptations are on the right hand & left behind the sea of time & space roars & follows swiftly he who keeps not right onward is lost.... But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels & tremble at the Tasks set before us. If we refuse to do Spiritual Acts. Because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!—* I too well remember the Threats I hear! (E 724).

Blake subsequently refers to Jesus' Parable of the Talents, recounted in Matthew and Luke, a theme he had brought up earlier in the letter, here saying: "*If you who are organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual communion. Refuse & bury your Talent in the Earth even tho you should want Natural Bread. Sorry & Desperation pursues you thro life! & after death shame & confusion of face to eternity.*" Finally, in the last para-

graph, above a postscript which returns to the business of doing business, Blake says: "*Naked we came here naked of Natural things & naked we shall return. but while clothd with the Divine Mercy we are richly clothd in Spiritual & suffer all the rest gladly*" (note again that this also functions as a consolation proverb as well) (E 723–25).

While the themes of these proverbs are not specifically akin to those of the Proverbs of Hell, the forms have much in common, emphasizing that these are meant as proverbial statements. There are several phrases here taking the "if...then" (the *then* often implied in Blake, and proverbs in general), aligning with three of the Proverbs of Hell which also take this form: "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise"; "If others had not been foolish. We should be so." And "If the lion was advised by the fox. he would be cunning" (E 36–38). Additionally, one proverb here takes the common "he who" form, also employed in three Proverbs of Hell (including "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence." "He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star." And "He who has sufferd you to impose on him knows you").

Other letters contain vision proverbs, though not as many. In Letter 26, to Butts, April 25, 1803, Blake first alludes to Joel 2:28, in growing recognition that moving to Felpham has been a mistake, first saying non-proverbially that he is now looking forward to returning to London where he will be able to "converse with my friends in Eternity. See Visions, Dream Dreams, & prophecy & speak Parables." But then the proverbs begin: "*Doubts are always Pernicious ....There is no Medium or Middle state & if a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal. He is a Real Enemy—but the Man may be the friend of my Spiritual Life while he seems the Enemy of my Corporeal but Not Vice Versa*" (E 728). He is thinking of Hayley here, with whom his relationship had soured, then going on to describe his new illuminated work, *Milton*, though not naming it, which he says was written in the visionary fashion just prescribed by the proverbs, under "immediate Dictation."

In the often quoted Letter 27, also to Butts, July 6, 1803, and again referring to his new poem again, Blake calls it a "Sublime Allegory." He continues sententiously, "I may praise it since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity I consider it as the Grandest Poem that This World Contains. *Allegory addressd*

*to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most sublime Poetry*" (E 730).

Finally, in Letter 91, to Cumberland, April 12, 1827, we find Blake, near the end of his life, still talking about art and vision in proverbs, here also blended with additional sententiousness and commerce. He says, "I have been very near the Gates of Death & have returned very weak & an Old Man feeble & tottering, but not in Spirit & Life not in *The Real Man the Imagination which Liveth for Ever*." This is soon followed by sentiments Blake also expresses proverbially elsewhere: "*A Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance a Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not Inter-measurable with or by any Thing Else* Such is Job but since the French Revolution Englishmen are all Intermeasurable One by Another" (E 783). Blake then concludes this paragraph with one of his humorous, prototypical prayers, before shifting abruptly to doing business: "God keep me from the Divinity of Yes & No too The Yea Nay Creeping Jesus from supposing Up & Down to be the same Thing as all Experimentalists must suppose." The second half of the letter is yet another example of formal peripeteia, or Blake's parabolic method, for it is immediately followed by a shockingly abrupt change of tone where Blake moves to a description of his current project of printing the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, his doubts about finding a buyer for *Jerusalem*, and a list of prices for his other illuminated books (E 783–84).

After seeing this many sententious passages singled out as I have here, it is important to remember that these proverbial elements are actually a small percentage of the whole body of material in the letters. Much of the material in the letters (97%!) deals with the business of business, receipts, prices, discussing the job, establishing bonds of friendship, along with some personal news, material that is contiguous with, even intermixed with, the proverbial material but is itself decidedly non-proverbial. This becomes a central point: Blake seems to have intentionally reserved his proverbial speech for particular subjects, most notably, for discussing art and its origins. This is reinforced by a contrasting letter to his brother James, Letter 25, January 30, 1803, a long letter, which is all news and business, with nary a proverb or whiff of sententiousness. But the passages in the other letters that are proverbial are memorable, powerful, and very much in line with, even incubators for, material that we find in his prophetic works.

### Article III: Conclusions

What are we to make of all this? I hope it is clear from this discussion that answers to many of my initial set of questions can be provided. For one, Blake is certainly unmistakably Blakean in his letters: as he is in his prophetic works, he is sententious, and visionary, and preoccupied by discussions of art in his correspondence. And those three are intimately connected in his mind and expressions of it, especially the proverbial expression of it. And it is not just with the visionary aspects of his art, but Blake is also preoccupied with the business of his art, with commerce, and markets, which he writes about even more than the former, but in ways and places that are connected—especially by proximity. Thus, Blake continues in his letters to offer connections between art and everything, the quotidian and his quoted angels, which is certainly a manifestation of his synecdochic vision.

But Blake, perhaps not surprisingly, does not *employ* many of the synecdochic methods of his illuminated works as *devices* in his letters, including giving little or no overt attention to the performative. There is, in the letters, certainly not much if any performative phrasing and speech, in or surrounding the proverbs that we see everywhere in his illuminated works. For example, we see none of the language of strong performative commands that populate the Proverbs of Hell, with their commands to learn, drive, dip, let, think, eat, sleep, expect, damn, and bless. Nor does there seem to be an overt use or signaling that these proverbs in the letters are performatives in the way that we get in Blake's illuminated books. For example, there is nothing like the apocalypse scenes in his prophetic books that seem to be the consequence of and enactment of proverbial speech.<sup>14</sup> Nor is there overt play, or discussion, or artistic pressure on letters as letters in the same way that Blake does constantly think about his art as art (both in his artistic works, and here in the letters); there is no overt playing with letter writing, and the business of business, as another possible place to provide artistic comment on things we know to be Blakean preoccupations elsewhere. There is little overt play with the letters as a place of exchange, as manifestations of commerce and not just the vehicle for it; nor do the letters draw much linguistic or substantive attention to

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14. See my discussions of this effect in *The Vision of Many, The Wisdom of One*.

the ways that letters initiate some of the same moves from private to public that Blake's art does. Nor, finally, does Blake overtly seem to be re-imagining the genre of the personal business letter itself, the way he re-imagines almost every other genre in which he writes.

Thus, it might be said that while Blake cannot ever completely relax when he writes, he can remain chained to earth long enough to communicate more simply and in a more quotidian fashion in his letters than in any other manifestations of his written work. Obviously, private letters have a different audience than does Blake's public art—though in reality, the two were closer to the same thing than we might think, given that he actually sold so few works, essentially selling to the very same patrons to whom he writes letters. In spite of their actual small original audience, though, Blake considered the whole world to be his audience in his art while his letters were addressed primarily to individuals. Perhaps this reduced sense of audience for the letters accounts for one reason why there are not even more verbal textual fireworks in his letters, along with Blake's need for instrumental efficiency. He was, after all, trying to do business.

With Blake, however, there is always another side to things. Even if there is no strong performative phrasing in Blake's proverbs in the letters, we still get the softer command form also found in the Proverbs of Hell—that of definition proverbs—that do assert new, Blakean meanings for terms (thus, even if we get no “let” statements, as the “let there be's” from Genesis, we do get “is” statements). Further, with regards to rethinking exchange, it is important to remember Haggarty's argument that Blake's entire commercial method was carried out in the context of friendship and gift economies rather than those of individual gain, contract, and commercial exchange. Moreover, though Blake's letters at first do not seem to comment on the difference between private and public genres, it should be remembered that Blake did write several public letters, namely his published letter to the editor of the *Monthly Magazine* (62; E 768–69), an additional letter to Richard Phillips, the editor of the *Monthly Magazine* (63; E 769), and yet another to the *Monthly Magazine* that the poet re-copies into the “Dear Generous Cumberland” letter. Not to mention Blake's letter of description and explanation to Ozias Humphry, in several drafts, of *The Design of the Last Judgment* (E552–54), one copy of which was sent with to Petworth House along with the watercolor version of his apocalyptic image A

*Vision of the Last Judgment*. And fuzzying the boundary even more between his letters and art, remember that elements of what we are used to thinking about as Blake's illuminated books are themselves presented as extended letters: namely, the introductions to the four chapters of *Jerusalem*, each framed as four separate letters, "To the Public," "To the Jews," "To the Deists," and "To the Christians." Even if Blake doesn't exactly re-envision the genre of the business letter, the continuity of these elements across his oeuvre nevertheless should force us both to see the letters together as a body of work themselves, and to see fewer distinctions across what we think of as the separate genres of Blake's work in the first place. It certainly forces a rethinking of just what is private letter and what is public work.

Finally, let's return to the Blakean mind at work, *and* the intriguing glimpses of the Blakean synecdochic method, that sees and makes radical connections between everything: including the connection (especially via contiguity) between Visionary Art, his artistic practice, and commerce. Though Blake does not provide the performative parables and lessons and examples that he provides for his sententious passages in his prophetic works, it is intriguing to consider the likelihood that he may nevertheless still be using his proverbs here, and thinking of them, as performative utterances rather than affirmative utterances, still using them to create visionary wisdom in the articulation of it. After all, as I have shown, most of the proverbs in the letters continue to be new and original, certainly not functioning as affirmatives. What if Blake's use of proverbs, then, as a habit of mind reveals them to be more than just a stylistic habit, but a habit of prophecy that extends into his letters? What better method of cosmic self consolation than to know that what one says to oneself, in consolation, makes it true? Letters seen to contain world-making words of this type would certainly make them even more genre-bending than might first appear, for what exactly is a personal business letter if it is also enacting cosmological and global change, in addition to forwarding personal exchange? The notion of the performative itself certainly tends to do away with our typical rhetorical distinctions, between self and audience, and certainly between what is personal and what is public.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Blake's annotations offer further evidence of this obliteration of the difference between private commentary and public art, since they, too, make use of many of

By way of conclusion, one last example of the Blakean Blake that appears in his letters may be useful, occurring in Letter 15, to Butts, September 23, 1800, written in the initial enthusiasm just after his arrival in Felpham for his sojourn there. In a chance encounter outside his house garden, a meeting that becomes the front end of an eerie set of bookends to Blake's three years in Felpham, a kind of binary "good-encounter/bad encounter" (the other bad bookend being his terrifying meeting with the soldier Skofield in the same exact spot, after the whole scheme of leaving London had unraveled); here, about to start his own work, Blake enthusiastically describes seeing implements of harvest in the yard, which in his prophetic works are always also implements of redeeming apocalypse: a roller and harrow. Then he describes seeing real folk on their way to work, a Plowboy and Plowman, but also capable of immediate visionary re-interpretation, as well. And in the rustics' four word conversation that Blake records—nearly the title of one of Blake's works—Blake seems to hear the synecdochic truths of the universe being spoken around him, the fact that the *gates of paradise* are open for all and ready to walk through. In his letter Blake says that he hears the Plowboy say to the Plowman: "Father, the Gate is Open," referring to the actual garden gate there in front of them. Yet Blake no doubt also sees in the scene what we do—trained by his illuminated books to read in such fashion. Because then, with no textual comment or other indication that Blake is treating the incident allegorically or synecdochially, he simply follows this, linking it grammatically and physically in the letter, in another manifestation of his parabolic method, with "I have begun to Work." The garden gate *and* the celestial gate is open. And Blake has begun to work—work that is simultaneously mundane and divine, in Blake's panoramic view. Even in the letters, Blake's infernal method, linking everything he sees and writes, does come shining through.

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these same effects, including proverbial phrasing, and, often, explicit use of performative terms.

## Appendix

Because Blake embeds virtually all of these proverbs into the sentences of his letters—that is, not citing them as stand-alone proverbs, à la The Proverbs of Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—it is therefore somewhat of a critical act to extract them. It is not always possible to distinguish exactly when a proverb begins—or in a sententious passage to tell when a new proverb begins. The problem is, at times, not unlike reading the proverbs in the *Laocoon* plate, where multiple choices could be defended. Nevertheless, proverbs can typically be identified using methods discussed in the article above. For the sake of classification, I try to list each proverb separately, even when following one after another, retaining Blake's punctuation, except that I begin each proverb with a capital letter. As for the categories, at times, I refrain from assigning one when a proverb is anomalous. Additionally, I also highlight several of these anomalous ones as being expressions of Commerce and Economics—though it is not specifically one of my three chief categories. The exception to my listing proverbs separately is in longer sententious passages where the grammar inextricably ties the individual proverbs together. My practice then is not to separate these, if the stand alone proverb wouldn't retain its force without the preceding grammatical constructions. Moreover, my practice in identifying proverbs is also to take Blake's grammar and sentences as they stand. That is, while many additional passages are somewhat sententious, and often full of additional figurative phrasing, I typically do not extract them as proverbs if not phrased in the universalizing present tense, or if they employ personal pronouns that therefore also stray from universal phrasing. More lines could be “converted” into actual proverbs, by my definitions, with slight adjustments to Blake's phrasing, or by selective use of ellipses. I refrain from doing so, however. Instead, I try to follow Blake's own close attention to words and phrases, thereby highlighting here the specific proverbs, which is my focus.



Addressee	Date	Category	Notes
Letter 2: To Cumberland, December 6, 1795			
Execution is the power of One & Invention of Another		Art	
It i[s the] same faculty that Invents Judges		Art	Blake attributes to this proverb to Locke
He who can Invent can Execute		Art	
Peace & Plenty & Domestic Happiness is the Source of Sublime Art		Art	
Enjoyment & not Abstinence is the food of Intellect		Art	
Letter 5: To Trusler, August 23, 1799			
What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men		Art	
That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care		Art	
The wisest of the Ancients considered what Is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act		Art	
Is not Merit in one a Cause of Envy in another & Serenity & Happiness & Beauty a Cause of Malevolence		Proverbial question	
Want of Money & the Distress of A Thief can never be alledged as the Cause of his Thievery for many honest people endure greater hardships with Fortitude		Commerce	Rare proverbs about commerce/economics/value. Blake often addresses commerce in the letters, but not in proverbial form
Want of Money for that is the Misers passion, not the Thiefs		Commerce	
Too much Fun is of all things the most loathsom			
Mirth is better than Fun & Happiness is better than Mirth			
This World is a World of Imagination & Vision		Vision	
I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike		Vision/Art	

To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes	Vision/ Commerce	
The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way	Vision	
To the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself	Vision	
As a man is So he Sees	Vision	
As the Eye is formed such are its Powers	Vision	
Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World	Vision	False proverb
This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination	Vision	
Sense sends over to Imagination before Reason have judged & Reason sends over to Imagination before the Decree can be acted		Blake attributes to Bacon
Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity		Cf. "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity," from MHH
Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation	Vision	
To Engrave after another Painter is infinitely more laborious than to Engrave ones own Inventions	Art	
Letter 6: To Cumberland, August 26, 1799		
Designing it is the only source of Pleasure all your other pleasures depend upon It. It is the Tree Your Pleasures are the Fruit. Your Inventions of Intellectual Visions are the Stamina of every thing you value	Art/Vision	
He who Works & has his health cannot starve She [Fortune] Alone is the Governor of Worldly Riches	Consolation Consolation/ Commerce	

Letter 9: To Hayley, May 6, 1800

Our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part	Consolation	
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Every Mortal loss is an Immortal Gain	Consolation/ Commerce	
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The Ruins of Time builds Mansions in Eternity	Consolation	
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Letter 11: To Flaxman, Postmark September 12, 1800

The time is now arrivd when Men shall again converse in Heaven & walk with Angels	Vision	
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The blessed of Heaven are my friends upon Earth	Vision	Inside embedded poem
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Letter 16: To Butts, October 2, 1800

Religion & Humility the two bands of Society Each grain of Sand / Every Stone on the Land/ Each rock & each hill / Each fountain & rill / Each herb & tree/ Mountain hill Earth & Sea / Cloud Meteor & Star / Are Men Seen Afar	Vision	Inside embedded poem
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Letter 17: To Hayley, November 26, 1800

Time flies very fast and very merrily	Consolation	Version of Virgil's "tempus fugit," from the <i>Georgics</i>
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Happinesses have wings and wheels; miseries are leaden legged and their whole employment is to clip the wings and to take off the wheels of our chariots	Consolation	
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Letter 19: To Butts, September 11, 1801

Time flies faster (as seems to me), here than in London	Consolation	Reference again to Virgil's version, setting up series of originals that follow
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The faster I bind the better is the Ballast	Consolation	
None on Earth can give me Mental Distress	Consolation	
All Distress inflicted by Heaven is a Mercy	Consolation	

Without Nature before the painters Eye he can never produce any thing in the walks of Natural Painting	Art	
Historical Designing is one thing & Portrait Painting another & they are as Distinct as any two Arts can be, Happy would that Man be who could unite them	Art	
Letter 21: To Flaxman, October 19, 1801		
The Kingdoms of this World are now become the Kingdoms of God & his Christ	Vision	
The Reign of Literature & the Arts Commences	Vision/Art	Cf. prophetic pronouncements in MHH Beatitude proverb. Also cf. MHH: "He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star"
Blessed are those who are found studious of Literature & Humane & polite accomplishments. Such have their lamps burning & such shall shine as the stars	Art Art	
Letter 22: To Butts, November 22, 1802		
The Venetian finesse in Art can never be united with the Majesty of Colouring necessary to Historical beauty	Art	Citing Reynolds' <i>Discourses</i> in a letter full of many additional non proverbial statements about art as well
Variety of Tints & Forms is Picturesque ( <i>Uniformity of Colour &amp; a long continuation of lines</i> ) produces Grandeur	Art Art	Blake citing Reynolds' proverb
Portrait Painting is the direct contrary to Designing & Historical Painting in every respect	Art	
If you have not Nature before you for Every Touch you cannot Paint Portrait & If you have not Nature before you at all you cannot Paint History	Art	Blake citing Michelangelo

Letter 23: To Butts, November 22, 1802

Must the duties of life each other cross / Must  
every joy be dung & dross?

This Earth breeds not our happiness / Another  
Sun feeds our lifes streams / We are not  
warmed with thy beams / Thou  
measrest not the Time to me / Nor yet  
the Space that I do see

Consolation  
Consol./  
Vision

Proverbial  
questions soon  
followed by this  
series of other  
sententia, in this  
embedded  
fourfold vision  
poem

Letter 24: To Butts, January 10, 1803

Patience! If Great things do not turn out it is  
because such things depend on the  
Spiritual & not on the Natural World

Consol./  
Vision

This long set of  
proverbs follows  
an explanation  
that Blake is  
“under the  
direction of  
Messengers from  
Heaven Daily &  
Nightly”

Temptations are on the right hand & left  
behind the sea of time & space roars &  
follows swiftly

Vision

He who keeps not right onward is lost  
If our footsteps slide in clay how can we do  
otherwise than fear & tremble

Vision  
Consolation

Cf. conditional  
phrasing of this  
and the next with  
MHH: “If the  
fool would persist  
in his folly he  
would become  
wise”

If we fear to do the dictates of our Angels &  
tremble at the Tasks set before us. If we  
refuse to do Spiritual Acts. Because of  
Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who  
can describe the dismal torments of such  
a state!

Vision

If you who are organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual communion. Refuse & bury your Talent in the Earth even tho you should want Natural Bread. Sorrow & Desperation pursues you thro life! & after death shame & confusion of face to eternity	Vision	Allusion to Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25
Every one in Eternity will leave you aghast at the Man who was crown'd with glory & honour by his brethren & betray'd their cause to their enemies	Vision	
Naked we came here naked of Natural things & naked we shall return. but while cloth'd with the Divine Mercy we are richly cloth'd in Spiritual & suffer all the rest gladly	Consolation	Allusion to Job 1:21
Letter 26: To Butts, April 25, 1803		
Doubts are always pernicious Especially when we Doubt our Friends	Consolation	Follows reference to visions from Joel 2:28
"He who is Not With Me is Against Me" There is no Medium or Middle state		Quoting Jesus, Luke 11:23, Matthew 12:30, Acts 2:27
If a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal. He is a Real Enemy	Vision	
The Man may be the friend of my Spiritual Life while he seems the Enemy of my Corporeal but Not Vice Versa	Vision	
Letter 27: To Butts, July 6, 1803		
Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can Never be joined neither ought any one to attempt it for it is Idolatry & destroys the Soul	Art	
Allegory address'd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry	Art	Reference to work on <i>Milton</i> while at Felpham

## Letter 28: To Butts, August 16, 1803

All is come from the spiritual World for Good & not for Evil	Consol./ Vision	Proverbial conclusion to Blake's otherwise factual account in this letter of the Skofield incident
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## Letter 31: To Hayley, October 7, 1803

Man liveth not by bread alone	Consol./ Commerce	Use of Jesus' proverb when tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:4
Happiness is not Good for Mortals	Consolation	False proverb that Blake uses to set up Blake's that follow
Sorrow is not fit for Immortals & is utterly useless to any one	Consolation	
A blight never does good to a tree & if a blight kill not a tree but it still bear fruit let none say the fruit was in consequence of the blight	Consolation	

## Letter 34: To Hayley, January 14, 1804

The pang of affection & gratitude is the Gift of God	Consolation	
Good...draws the soul toward Eternal life & conjunction with Spirits of just men made perfect by love & gratitude the two angels who stand at heavens gate ever open ever inviting guests to the marriage	Consolation/ Vision	
Gratitude is Heaven itself there could be no heaven without Gratitude	Consolation	

## Letter 40: To Hayley, March 31, 1804

Engravers hurry which is the worst & most unprofitable of hurries	Art	Not quite in prover- bial form, but witty
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## Letter 45: To Hayley, May 28, 1804

We are not in a field of battle, but in a City of Assassinations.	Art/ Commerce	
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Letter 51: To Hayley, October 23, 1804

That spectrous Fiend... is the enemy of  
conjugal love and is the Jupiter of the  
Greeks, an iron-hearted tyrant, the ruiner  
of ancient Greece

Vision

Not quite in  
proverbial form,  
but long  
allegorical  
account of Blake's  
returned  
inspiration and  
"intellectual  
vision" after  
twenty years

Letter 53: To Hayley, December 18, 1804

Distance is nothing but a phantasy

Consol./  
Vision

In letter  
mentioning  
Bunyan's  
allegories

Letter 54: To Hayley, December 28, 1804

Consolations are alone to be found in Religion  
the Sun & the Moon of our Journey

Consolation

Letter 56: To Hayley, January 22, 1805

Money for live here

Commerce

An old saying  
that Blake cites in  
an anecdote  
about working for  
wages

Letter 57: To Hayley, March 22, 1805

As to Real Acting it is Like Historical Painting  
No Boys Work

Art

Speaking of the  
child prodigy  
actor, William  
Henry West Betty

Letter 61: To Hayley, December 11, 1805

Receiving a Prophet As a Prophet is a Duty  
which If omitted is more Severely  
Avenged than Every Sin & Wickedness  
beside

Art/Vision

It is the Greatest of Crimes to Depress True Art  
& Science

Art

The Mockers of Art is the Mockers of Jesus

Art



Letter 62: In the *Monthly Magazine*, July 1, 1806

O Englishmen! Know that every man ought to     Art  
     be a judge of pictures, and every man is  
     so who has not been connoisseured out of  
     his senses

Letter 63: To Phillips, October 14, 1807

The Man who can Read the Stars. Often is     Vision  
     oppressed by their Influence, no less than  
     the Newtonian who reads Not & cannot  
     Read is oppressed by his own Reasonings  
     & Experiments. We are all subject to  
     Error: Who shall say that we are not all  
     subject to Crime?

Letter 65: To Humphrey, Ca May 1809

Florentine & Venetian Art cannot exist     Art  
     together Till the Venetian & Flemish are  
     destroyed the Florentine & Roman  
     cannot Exist

Letter 71: To Linnell, June 7, 1825

Great Men die equally with the little     Consolation  
     Every Death is an improvement of the State of     Consolation  
     the Departed

Letter 74: To Linnell, February 1, 1826

Sr Francis Bacon is a Liar. No discipline will  
     turn one Man into another even in the  
     least particle It is Mental Rebellion  
     against the Holy Spirit & fit only for a  
     Soldier of Satan to perform

Letter 91: To Cumberland, April 12, 1827

Not in the Spirit & Life not in The Real Man     Vision  
     The Imagination which Liveth for Ever  
     A Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance     Art  
     A Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s]     Art  
     Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not  
     Intermeasurable with or by any Thing  
     Else Such is Job but since the French  
     Revolution Englishmen are all  
     Intermeasurable One by Another

Letter 92: To Linnell, April 25, 1827

Doubt & Fear that ruins Activity & are the     Art  
     greatest hurt to an Artist