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AN EMENDATION TO ERDMAN'S EDITION  
OF BLAKE'S 'AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE'

The text of one of William Blake's most iconic poems, 'Auguries of Innocence', as it appears in David Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose*, is in need of emendation; in the first of his texts of this work, Erdman reads:

We are led to Believe a Lie  
When we see not Thro the Eye (ll.125-6)<sup>1</sup>

This omits the key word 'With', essential to the line's meaning, as follows:

We are led to Believe a Lie  
When we see With not Thro the Eye<sup>2</sup>

Erdman apparently believed that Blake crossed out the word 'With'. Although the deletion is indicated by Erdman,<sup>3</sup> there is reason to suspect it was entered by a hand other than the author's, which in turn obliges editors to consider reinstatement of the word in edited versions of this poem. G. E. Bentley takes a step in that direction by inserting it in square brackets in his reading text.<sup>4</sup>

The sole textual source is Blake's fair copy in the small pamphlet known as the Pickering Manuscript, now retained at the Morgan Library in New York. As Bentley notes, the deletion appears in brown ink while the rest of the manuscript is in black. My own examination of the manuscript reveals another discrepancy: the deletion is entered in the form of a manic, light scribble across the word, unlike Blake's other emendations which are sedate strikethroughs or careful letter-alterings, as would be expected in a fair copy. Omission of 'With' also muddles the sense of the line; the famous conclusion to Blake's 'Vision of the Last Judgment' makes clear the philosophical import of the parallelism and contrast of 'with' and 'through': 'I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it and not with it'.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the omission botches the rhythm, making it into an awkward trochee by forcing stress on the first word 'When'. 'With' restored, the line becomes perfectly iambic, as one would expect in the second and resolving line of the couplet.

Without an appreciation for the parallelism and rhythmic emphasis on 'With' and 'Thro', the line is both awkward and puzzling, and this (one can speculate) may have led an early reader to 'correct' it in manuscript. In any case, its meaning, the physical evidence, and the scansion, argue that the word 'With' be restored to future readings of the poem.

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## NOTES

1 William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly revised edition, ed. David Erdman (New York, 1988), 492. This corresponds with lines 125– 126 in the ‘Editorial Arrangement’ of the poem, on p. 496 of Erdman’s edition.

2 *The Pickering Manuscript* (facsimile); introduction by Charles Ryskamp (New York, 1972), unpaginated. This is a black-and-white facsimile, but a colour image of the page in question can be found in the Blake Archive online at <<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid1/4bb126.1.ms.18&java1/4no>>. Although my interest here derives from an examination of the Morgan Library’s original, the online images are beautifully high- resolution and, as far as I can tell, accurate as to colour.

3 Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 860.

4 William Blake, *William Blake’s Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr., 2 vols (Oxford, 1978), II, 1315n.

5. Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 566.