Pour Les Sexes: Les Grilles de Paradise

Les Nouvelles Littéraires, Claude-Marie Senninger

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(pls. 1, 3, 8, 10)--generally the compositions suffer from a non-integrated eclecticism.

Iconographically, Stewart borrows much from Yeats and the Christian mystical-magical symbolism of the Rosicrucians (pls. 1, 4, 7, 9). The rose and other emblems like the stag and horned goat have a prominence in these drawings that is foreign to Blake. But Blake is certainly the main source of Stewart's imagery and some of his drawings follow the text of The Marriage closely. Plate 8 is clearly the "Printing House in Hell," complete with Dragon-Man, viper, eagle, lion (shown as a cat) and books "arranged in libraries" (Blake and Stewart's books among them). Many of the other illustrations can be convincingly linked with a line from the text: plate 6 with the poet "sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight"; plate 5 with "man [who] has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" and plate 4 with "a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of a rock."

There are other drawings by Stewart that owe more to Blake's images than to his text. Plates 1 and 2 compare in theme with Blake's title-page for The Marriage and plate 3 seems to elaborate on the image of "The Sick Rose" from Songs of Experience. Although there is much of Blake in these drawings, Stewart has not attempted to illustrate The Marriage literally. Each of his plates contain fresh and intriguing combinations of old and new motifs and this is their greatest strength. Significantly, Stewart is most successful in the few designs in which he goes beyond the text. For example, plate 12 represents the "cherub with flaming sword" with an intense visionary grandeur comparable to Blake's own.

In a well-bound, signed and limited edition, Clark Stewart's illustrations for The Marriage should be of interest to any Blake admirer who has struggled with the poet-artist's complex visions in the past, knows the joys born of careful thought and close observation, and is willing to apply these techniques to the work of another. As with Blake's illustrations to the works of other poets, Stewart's drawings inevitably reveal more about the illustrator than about the subject being illustrated. Those who would seek only an echo of Blake's imagery should look elsewhere.