

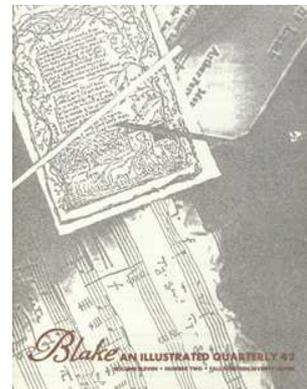
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Clark Stewart, illus., *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Judith Ott

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 11, Issue 2, Fall 1977, pp. 117-119



. . . so contrived that the other Prophets are not necessary for the understanding of it; but it is rather necessary for the understanding of them" (p. 65). That observation leaves us with this haunting question: if so, to what extent is a prophet like Blake dependent upon the book of Revelation; how important is an understanding of that prophecy to an understanding of his prophecies?

Fox has answered that question in one way--"not very important at all"; but I think that students of Blake will eventually answer differently: "it is very important, indeed." The context of prophetic literature, missing from Fox's book, would have saved her from exaggerated claims for Blake's uniqueness. "The structure of *Milton* is unique" (p. 3), we are told; and its "uniqueness . . . is that in its controlling as well as in its underlying structures it seeks to tell the same story 'in several ways at the same time and at several times in the same way.'" (p. 24). When we have come to know more about the tradition of Revelation commentary, we will come to realize that this is precisely the claim made for that book's uniqueness of structure, which by Mede first, then by More, and finally by Newton is discussed under the rubric of *synchronism*.

These commentators, indeed, turn one of Fox's offhand remarks into a question that future students of both Blake and romanticism will have to confront: Which supposition is nearer the truth--that biblical prophecy and romantic poetry arise from very different cultures, predications, needs, and aspirations; or, that biblical prophecy generates the poetic on which romantic poetry is founded and represents, finally, the ur-form of all romantic literature? That question cannot be answered satisfactorily until, like the poets they are studying, students go back to the Bible, to its commentators, to the very tradition of prophecy of which Blake's *Milton* is a mighty emanation.



sheep) with some wildly disparate ones (World War I and II planes and tanks, top hats and a jack-o-lantern). As a result, the combined images in these drawings create a simultaneous sensation of déjà vu and culture shock in the viewer. This kind of liberal play within the hallowed territory of Blake's own illustrations may well be frowned upon by the Blake purist. However, seen as an extension of--rather than an intrusion upon--Blake's designs, these drawings present a fresh interpretation of the artist-poet's well-thumbed iconographical system.

In style, Stewart's drawings are of a gorgeously detailed, linear character not unlike the graphic works of Dürer. They display the variety of texture, depth of space, crinkled drapery patterns and tightly packed compositions that characterize works of the Northern Renaissance. Although Blake often borrowed from such engravings, he inevitably simplified the figures and flattened the spatial representations in his own work. Thus, with their Northern Renaissance flavor, Stewart's illustrations resemble Blakean sources more closely than Blake designs. Both Blake and Dürer were skilled at combining many different symbolic elements into a cohesive whole. Unfortunately, Stewart's compositions lack this quality and too often appear overworked, disjointed or contrived (e.g., pls. 7, 11, 13). The unifying device of a frame is only successful in some of the designs

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.
William Blake. Drawings by Clark
Stewart: Knoxville, TN: Darkpool Press,
1972. 35 pp., 13 pls. \$55. Order from
F. Clark Stewart, Art Department,
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
37916. Edition of 100 copies, numbered
and signed by the author.

Reviewed by Judith Ott

Clark Stewart's drawings for *The Marriage* will cause mixed reactions in many a Blake enthusiast. Intended as a personal response to Blake's visionary cosmology, Stewart's designs incorporate familiar Blakean motifs (mundane shell, batwinged spectre, and flocks of



The University of
California, Los Angeles
Library
3000 University Drive
Los Angeles, California 90095
This book is loaned to you
by the University of California
Library
and is not to be
reproduced or
distributed in any
manner without the
written permission of the
University of California
Library



(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.

Raw Material [Matière Première] by Denis Roche, and For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise [Pour les Sexes: Les Grilles de Paradise] by William Blake. Paris: L'Energumène (31, Rue Victor-Duruy, 75015).

L'Energumène, a collection linked to the journal of the same name, presents a combined volume, unless it be only one book of mirrors and reflections. Denis Roche provides the reader with his translation of *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* by William Blake. These are short poems which either frame a series of prints (run off by the poet on 17 May 1793), or provide them with a title.

Denis Roche does not utilize the traditional preface or introduction. Instead, he makes use of an ensemble of poetry, narrative, and criticism which might be characterized as poetic fiction or creative reading. It should be noted that there is often little more than a slight phonetic slippage separating poetics from politics. This is made apparent to the reader by the appearance of Fourier, Herbart, Restif and Sade in the black romantic and red revolutionary landscape of William Blake's time, or of Denis Roche's inner realm.

Denis Roche rereads Blake, follows him in his garden (where he and his wife played Adam and Eve), or into his studio in front of his plates, where he engraves his illuminations in the form of words and drawings. Denis Roche seeks out, brings to light, makes audible and visible that which constitutes for Blake (but also for himself, as author of *Louve Basse*) the raw material of writing--the bursting forth of words, images, and phantasms.

Reprinted by permission from *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 26 May 1976, no. 2534, p. 32. Contributed by Katharyn R. Gabriella and translated by Claude-Marie Senninger of the University of New Mexico.