

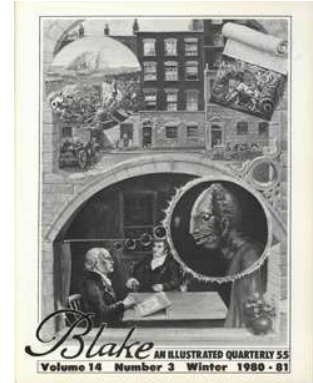
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R E V I E W

David Bindman, ed., assisted by Deirdre Toomey,
The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

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161-163



Exp. 50 is accorded the roman letters which belong to 51.

Many readers who ponder these volumes will be variously afflicted with a certain sense of disappointment, tempered, however, with the recollection that, in terms of the editorial purposes and assumptions set forth in his introductory matter, Professor Bentley has fulfilled his promise, if not, altogether, our hopes for a fully serviceable text and textual commentary on Blake's work. What is certain is that, in a multitude of ways, future editors of reading texts and anthologies are bound to profit from the immense labor which has gone into this edition. And its ultimate review and evaluation

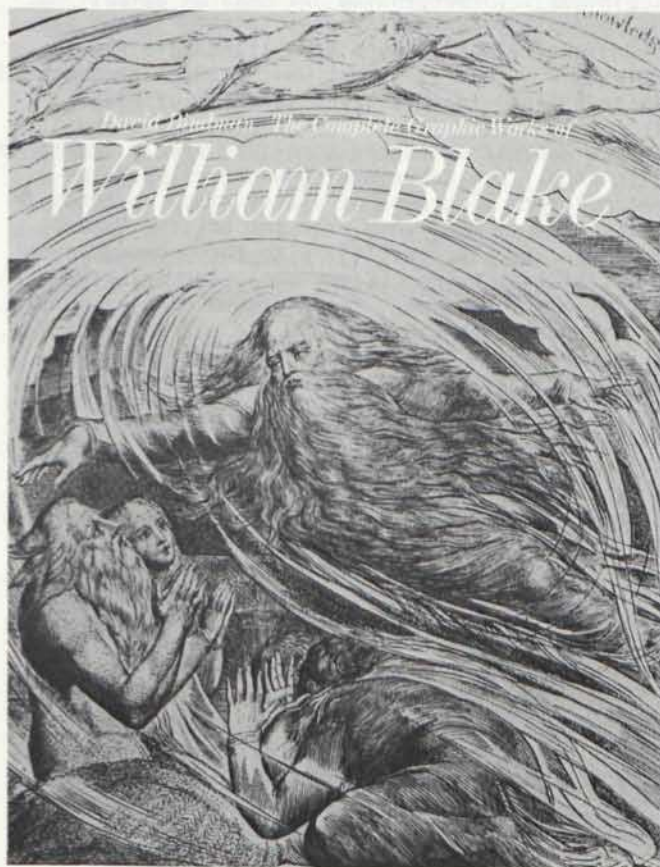
will only be made by the next Blake editor who sets himself the prodigious task of thoroughly retracing, in all its minute particulars, the course of many years of devoted application that has led us this far along the road to the establishment and refinement of the Blakean canon. A vast number of these particulars will only come into view and focus because of this edition--a fact that will continue to inspire the positive assessments which it will continue to receive and which it so richly deserves.

¹ See my "Thel, *The Lyphthora*, and the Daughters of Albion" (forthcoming in *Studies in Romanticism*), wherein I demonstrate the derivation of Blake's title (*θηλυ* means "female") from a book advocating polygamy which was published in 1780-81.

GOD'S PLENTY

David Bindman, ed., assisted by Deirdre Toomey. **The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake.** London: Thames and Hudson, 1978. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978. 494 pp., 765* illus. £20, \$45.00.

Reviewed by G. E. Bentley, Jr.



The *Complete Graphic Works of William Blake* is a remarkable bargain and a great credit to Mr. David Bindman and to Thames & Hudson. It reproduces some 688 prints, mostly in full size, and it includes not only all the subjects reproduced in Erdman's *Illuminated Blake* (1975), in Keynes's *Separate Plates* (1956) (except for the plates Blake engraved but did not design), and in Easson and Essick's *William Blake Book Illustrator Volume I* (1972), but also *The Small Book of Designs* (reproduced nowhere else, as far as I know), *The Large Book of Designs* (ibid.), the large color prints, *Job*, *Dante*, and a number of incidental prints in none of these collected publications. No book reproducing Blake's engraved designs is nearly so extensive.

Further, the standards of production are high. The page size is large, 9 3/8" x 13", so that *America*,

* The titlepage numeration of "765 illustrations" is inaccurate, probably because of the intricate and inconsistent system of plate-numbers. The reproductions are numbered 1-21, 23-311, 314-88, 390-94, 396-655 (in the List of Plates the omitted designs are referred to as "not reproduced" or "missing"), but in addition there are 38 variants (most, but not all, numbered with a suffix of a, b, or c) and 81 enlargements (most, but not all, ignored in the Notes to the Plates and the List of Plates). The correct total is 769, I believe.

Europe, *Jerusalem*, and *Job* can be given full size (some of the smaller prints are reproduced as many as eleven to a page), and every print which is larger than this, such as the large color prints, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Dante, is reproduced whole in reduced size and with a true-size detail. The quality of the photographs and reproductions appears to be fine, and many variants are reproduced. For example, there are three versions of *Urizen* pl. 1 and *Jerusalem* pl. 28 and four of *Job* pl. 16. The plates are arranged straightforwardly in chronological order, with variants gathered after the published version of the work (e.g., *America*, pls. 1-18, a-c), and the text, as is appropriate for a work aimed at a large audience, is matter of fact and unpretentious. The brief "Introduction: Blake as a graphic artist" (pp. 10-22) has the same merits and attitudes as Mr. Bindman's comprehensive *Blake as an artist* (1977), and the succinct "Notes to the Plates" (pp. 465-88) are reliably based upon standard Blake scholarship. This is a work which can be recommended with enthusiasm to lovers and students of Blake.

The copies reproduced come from widely separated collections, from Cambridge to Canberra, but the great majority of groups of plates, such as those for *The Book of Los*, come from the British Museum Print Room and Library (14), with three groups from the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), two each from the Library of Congress, the Pierpont Morgan Library, and the Huntington Library, and one each from Bodley, The University of Glasgow, and Sir Geoffrey Keynes. The originals seem to have been chosen for the convenience of the editor, who teaches at the University of London and who made an admirable catalogue of the Fitzwilliam Blake collection, rather than for the convenience of the scholar. Naturally black-and-white plates on coated, cream-colored paper cannot indicate the red, sepia, blue, green, and orange in which the originals of the works in *Illuminated Printing* are printed, much less their subsequent coloring. However, it would have been desirable to choose uncolored originals instead of the watercolored copies of *Europe* (B), *Songs of Innocence* (B), and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (B), for of course much of Blake's delicate or glorious coloring comes out simply muddy and distracting when reproduced in black-and-white. Further, little effort seems to have been made to reproduce copies of works in *Illuminated Printing* which have not appeared in facsimile before. Some of the copies given here have been reproduced three or four times, and only *Urizen* (B), *Jerusalem* (A), *Marriage* (B), and *Songs* (B) appear to be reproduced here for the first time. Such conventionality of choice represents a missed opportunity, for scholars will of course turn to the color facsimiles of the same copies rather than to these black-and-white photographs.

The generosity of the work is admirable. Far from shunning duplication merely because a design has been reproduced on a previous page, all the *Songs of Innocence* are repeated unchanged in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the *For Children* plates are given again, with mostly minor alterations, in *For the Sexes*, and all the scenes in the Large and Small Books of Designs are of course reproduced elsewhere here. For the Blake student, here is God's plenty.

For the general reader, there are only a few defects of significance. One such defect is the lack of a transcript of Blake's texts, which are here sometimes faint (*Visions*) or obscure (*No Natural Religion*, *Urizen*, *Songs*)--but this of course would have required another volume and a different kind of enterprise. (One might as well ask for color reproductions at the same price.) Most of the texts are plainly legible--ironically the clearest text is that for Young's *Night Thoughts*--and all can be read with magnification and patience. More important is the lack of captions or running-heads for the reproductions themselves. The reader opening at random to the design numbered 519 must first determine whether this is a page number (no) or a plate number (yes) and then look it up in the List of Plates (p. 493) to discover that it is for *Jerusalem* pl. 40. Yet more distracting is the lack of an index, which is inexcusable. If one wants to discover, say, where "Our End is come" is reproduced, one can find it only by trudging all through the List of Plates or the Notes to the Plates; it is given as no. 81, 316, and 402. Plate captions and an index are vital to a compendious work like this, and both editor and publisher should have insisted upon them.

For the general reader, then, *The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake* is of admirable value. What is there in it for the Blake scholar who has ready access to the scholarship on which the book is based? Well, for one thing, there are photographs of several copies of works in *Illuminated Printing* which have apparently not been reproduced before. For another, there are several designs which have not previously been reproduced at all. One of these (no. 8), called "Charity" and distantly related to *Jerusalem* pl. 46 (no. 525), was acquired by the British Museum Print Room in 1958, and Mr. Bindman is cautiously (and rightly, in my view) "inclined to accept it" as Blake's (p. 467). Another (no. 185), "an experiment in colour-printing" called "An estuary with figures in a boat," is described even more cautiously: "the attribution to Blake cannot be regarded as certain" (p. 473), despite the mysterious inscription on it in an unidentified hand: "By William Blake (Mr Stothard)." It is unlike almost anything else Blake is known to have done, and the inscription is the chief reason for associating it with him. Whether or not we accept the work as Blake's, the visual (or at least black-and white) evidence is now before us on which to base a decision.

How complete and comprehensive is the collection of *Graphic Works* presented here? The first problem comes with the word "Graphic," which often means writing or drawing but here means "contemporary engraved or etched or lithographed design or text" (for some of the plates have no design). Mr. Bindman says, "I have set out to reproduce every printed [i.e., contemporary engraved] design by Blake as well as their major variants" (p. 7). Thus, we have Blake's engraving of his own designs and other engravers' copies of Blake's designs, as in Burger's *Leonora*, Malkin's *A Father's Memoir*, and Blair's *Grave*, and Mr. Bindman has generously thrown in one or two of Blake's engravings after the designs of other men such as that for Bonnycastle's *Mensuration*--"there is little to

distinguish it from such work by Heath and others" (p. 467). The book of course omits designs which Blake copied from elsewhere, such as those for the Portland Vase in Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, for Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments, Vetusta Monumenta*, and Stedman's *Narrative*, even though some of them have important Blakean elements. It omits the plates after Blake's designs in Whitaker's *Seraph* (1828) and in Hamilton's *English School* (1831), presumably because they were made by other engravers after Blake died in 1827 and because they were already reproduced in their earlier forms. There are, however, a few plates which appear to belong here on Mr. Bindman's principles but which are missing. Blake's first and third plates for Gay's *Fables* (1793) are significantly his own, for they incorporate characteristic Blakean elements not in the designs he was copying. The very small design of two old men planting trees in Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (1788) is probably designed by Blake, though it is signed only "Blake Sc" (see *Blake Books* [1977], pp. 594, 754), and Varley's *Zodiacal Physiognomy* (1828) has five designs by Blake copied by Varley and engraved by Linnell, including two of the "Ghost of a Flea"--and two more unpublished engravings after Blake for it are in the collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes. (Perhaps the Varley plates were excluded because they were not made by Blake for the purpose of being engraved and may be post-

humous.) Another "Complete" collection of contemporary printed copies of Blake's designs might legitimately omit a few of these designs and include a few others.

Similarly, the variant states of plates are, of course, far from complete. The reproduction of *America* pl. 4 (no. 149) lacks the last four lines of text, but there is no reproduction of the complete plate. The *America* copperplate fragment is reproduced along with a print from it (no. 164a), but the copperplate shows a number of details not visible in the print, such as most of the last line of text. The important proof variants of *Night Thoughts* found in *Vala* are omitted, and there is no reproduction of the important verbal and graphic variants in *Urizen* pl. 1 ("FIRST" omitted), pl. 6 (two figures omitted in copy D), pl. 15 (two figures added in G), pl. 24 (two figures omitted in D), and pl. 25 (a line omitted in A).

The attraction of this volume to the scholar is largely the same as for the general reader: It collects in one place a vast number of fine reproductions after contemporary engravings from Blake's designs and does so remarkably faithfully and inexpensively. With such riches before us, it is ungenerous to complain. This is a work which all students and lovers of Blake will wish to own.