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R E V I E W

Kathleen Raine, *From Blake to A Vision*

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to her in the fading daylight while the ghastly figure of descending night is about to smother her with his bell-shaped pall; and the contrary situation is portrayed in the *Grave* design where a beautiful nude man, an angelic messenger, dives downward, blowing his bell-shaped trumpet, to waken the shrouded, ghoulish skeleton below and rouse him from the sleep of corporeal death in the grave. The pictures thus comment upon each other like type and antitype. Thanks to the inventiveness of Gene Conner and Murray Schwartz, layout and production editors, this kind of interplay is a general feature of *William Blake: The Seer and his Visions*, a feature the thoughtful reader cannot help but learn from and enjoy.

Because of such felicities, this handsomely produced book is a valuable volume indeed. It will be accessible to many because of its reasonable price, and so long as its owner or borrower reads the pictures and skims the text, rather than vice versa, it will make an excellent introduction to Blake's art.

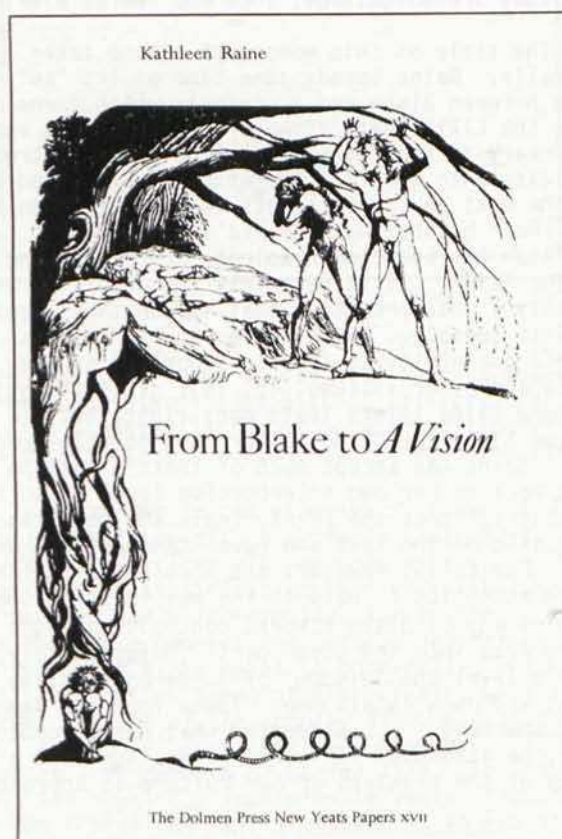
¹ "A Vision of the Last Judgment," *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York, 1970), p. 550.

² Cf. John Hollander, "Talkies," *The New York Review of Books*, Dec. 8, 1977, 50-54, p. 51. This is a review of Klonsky's *Speaking Pictures* and D. J. Gordon's *The Renaissance Imagination*.

³ *Blake Studies*, 1 (Spring 1969), 193-205.

Kathleen Raine. **From Blake to A Vision**. Dublin: The Dolmen Press. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979 (New Yeats Papers XVII). 64 pp. £4.50, \$11.75 paper.

Reviewed by Hazard Adams



Kathleen Raine's line on Blake is familiar to us: He was an adept of the "Perennial Philosophy," which holds that consciousness is the ground of reality. In this monograph she asserts that Yeats is Blake's "greatest disciple" and "the claims he made, the beliefs he held on the reversal of premises which would characterize the New Age, are the same as Blake's." When I hear this sort of remark I must confess that I am inclined to stop reading; I want immediately to make a list

of all the important differences that I am convinced are going to be glossed over in the discourse that follows. But the writer is Kathleen Raine, and like many earlier quirky scholars of Blake, she is usually informative even when she mounts into her particular pulpit and tells us (in the tone I imagine a True Pythoness would use) that we must all now hear occult Truth. This is a Truth that links the speaker in a chain of adepts back to Plato, who of course was himself a neoplatonist.

Raine declares Swedenborg to be a major influence on both Blake and Yeats. This is not news. It would be if Raine were to declare that Blake does not attack Swedenborg. She doesn't, but she also fails to mention that he does and that he tends to use Swedenborg very eccentrically indeed. Raine declares Blake to be a diagrammatist like Yeats and all the diagrams of both to be Jungian mandalas. S. Foster Damon's diagram of Blake's city of Jerusalem is presented, along with Blake's *Vision of the Last Judgment* and the famous plate 36 of *Milton*. But it is *not* said that Damon might better *not* have diagrammed Jerusalem, which as far as I can see is constructed to be a trap for diagrammatists, as is just about all of *A Vision*. Plate 36 stands out as the *only* diagram Blake included in all of his illuminated works and surviving manuscripts. Of course, if one equates every mandala discovered in Blake with a diagram, one finds diagrams everywhere, as does Raine when she declares *A Vision of the Last Judgment* a mandala and claims Blake to have described many mandalas. The nice thing about mandalas is that they are ubiquitous, once one learns alertness.

The title of this monograph can be taken literally. Raine spends some time on its "to" (the space between Blake and *A Vision*), which turns out to be the Ellis-Yeats *Blake* of 1893. In the vast commentary in that work Yeats (and Ellis) introduced occultism into the interpretation of Blake and made for the most part a tasteless mess of it to go along with their butchering of Blake's text. This occultism has been inconvenient for most of us, but not for Raine. It is certainly the occultist aspect of Yeats's interpretation that is constantly getting him into trouble. For example, Yeats "relates Blake's quaternity to the four 'worlds' of the Cabala and other systems" (p. 16). This is typical of where Raine thinks Yeats goes right, but I believe him to be going rather consistently wrong here. Raine can accept much of Yeats's reading of Blake because her own interpretive level is so lofty and abstract that she rarely feels she must stoop to details of the text and never to questions of tone. Basically, however, the problem is that not enough attention is paid to the way in which the whole of any of Blake's works controls how much we should read into any given part. Unfortunately, at Raine's level the "wisdom" of Swedenborg, Blake, Yeats, and Jung is all one. These four are "among those who have . . . attempted what must, sooner or later, be attempted if indeed a 'New Age' and a change of the premises of our culture is approaching."

There are too many unsupported dogmatisms in this monograph. Many years ago I wrote what I think was the first serious American essay on Raine's poetry. It was a quite favorable account (I do not regret it), and I treated her poetic voices as those of enchantress and medium. But neither of these voices is the proper one for criticism. Luckily one can take my complaint, put it to the side, and profit

from parts of this text, for there are some good things here though they are presented in a rather disorganized way. Raine sees certain important shifts of emphasis from Blake to Yeats and notices certain of Yeats's misreadings. But must Blake's twenty-seven churches (correctly traced back to Swedenborg) be so simply related to Yeats's twenty-eight lunar phases, without so much as a word that twenty-seven is not twenty-eight? Is Yeats's little dialogue in *Vacillation* really a dialogue with his master Blake? Isn't there, though not a "rotation" of Urizen and Luvah, at least a cyclicity? Yeats got this all wrong because of his astrologizing of Blake. Is Yeats's mask really to be identified with Tharmas quite so easily, as Raine does? Is there no time in Blake's eternity, or is eternity in Blake's time? Or is it better to look rather more closely and consider that there may be more than one time in Blake? The most interesting part of the monograph is toward the end where Raine discusses the influence of "The Mental Traveller" on *A Vision* and various poems. Here, however, not as much as she implies is new. She calls Blake's poem a detailed examination of his symbol of Canaan. That seems promising, but she goes on to utter over several pages the following equation: Canaan = Mundane Shell or Egg = the world of biblical history = space and time = the twenty-seven churches = the covering cherub = the womb = the serpent = the center = the mills = the wheels = dens = Newton's universe = Milton's chaos and ancient night = Dante's Purgatory = "under the hill." This is, of course, roughly so in the way Joyce later also made everybody everybody else. But since all of these things are roughly the fallen world, the revelation that the poem is about Canaan tells us nothing that hasn't been well known to readers of the poem for a long time under some other term in the equation.

Incidentally, in the process of observing Blake's metaphorical chain, Raine calls Satan the "lost traveller" of one of Blake's late short poems. But if we look at the syntax we discover that Satan is not the traveller but "the lost traveller's dream under the hill." Of course, where everybody is everybody else, this ultimately makes no difference. Or does it? The whole basis of Blake's thought turns on the principle of identity and the paradox in that word. Fully read, it indicates that everything has an identity of its own, but is identical to other things as well. Raine's occultism negates the first meaning and presses for the second. This is the point at issue here. Was Blake an occultist who would suppress individual identity or the "minute particular," which Raine seems to confuse with the conscious ego, or is he a visionary poet who insists on both sides of the paradox at once? For that matter, in the end which was Yeats?

The monograph has numerous illustrations from occult texts, Blake, and *A Vision*. Some are not discussed. That's all right. Most of them are mandalas.