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REVIEW

The Letters of William Blake

edited by Geoffrey Keynes

Rupert Hart-Davis (second edition, 1968)

It is always regrettable when a standard text goes out of print, though no doubt it is a sign of the times that publishers do not like to keep books on their shelves unless they are also moving off briskly. The new edition of Blake's letters is therefore welcome. It is also a sign of the times that this edition, which has been entirely reset, is in somewhat reduced print, a smaller format, and an increased price (from 50/- to 75/-), though "in real terms", as they say, this is perhaps no increase at all. These are small criticisms, however; the first edition was so amply spacious that it has been possible to shrink it without producing an unduly cramped page or minute text.

The dust-jacket makes a point of announcing that new material has been incorporated into the second edition. When one comes to look for these new discoveries, they turn out to comprise two receipts given to John Linnell, and the entries from Linnell's personal cash accounts between March 1822 and September 1836, where they refer to Blake or his works; and one real letter, dated 29 December 1826, in which Blake apologises to Mrs. Aders for not responding to an invitation, on account of his serious illness - writing in a blend of respectful anxiety not to give offence, with considerable (and surely justified) fear for his own welfare. It is a pity that Mr. Keynes did not amend his index to refer to this additional letter.

These are, then, interesting but not really major additions to the whole. It is a blessing that the original numbering of the letters has been retained, the additions being numbered 114a, 122a, 136a and 140a, so that any critic henceforth can continue to refer to the old numbering without fear of confusion - a sin (if one may use the word in Blakean circles) - an error of which Mr. Keynes has not always been innocent, as for example in his labelling of the copies in the Census in a completely different way from the *Bibliography*.

It is always a problem, and an unanswerable one, to know how Blake's texts should be punctuated when they are reproduced. Mr. Keynes, as before, has retained Blake's spellings and capitals, but has added punctuation. On the whole one cannot quarrel with the restrained amount of punctuation he has added, though it is a pity that, inevitably, one cannot now be sure when one is faced by a point that Blake meant to stand out. And, since the punctuation is editorial, it is a little strange that Mr. Keynes has retained the clumsy excess of inverted commas in the poem sent to Thomas Butts on 22 November 1802.

These are still minor complaints. The critics of the earlier edition were not slow to remark that, though Mr. Keynes had produced an excellent edition, its usefulness was doubtful since most of the material was available anyway in his own Nonesuch edition of the complete works. This is still true. The O. U. P. successor to the Nonesuch edition does not contain the letters

to Blake, nor the minor items such as receipts; but with a small extension it could easily have been made to do so. The major advantage to researchers of this collection of the letters is the fifty-page *Register* at the end, which gives the bibliographical details, including information about where the letters are to be found. It is an irony of commerce that, to have this information to hand, the researcher must pay his 75/- or \$6.95, more than enough to put the whole of Blake's text in his hands.

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continued from page 68

Marcia Allentuch (CUNY) came across the following amusing passage in the diaries of Lady Cynthia Asquith, concerning the Blake sale at Christie's in March 1918:

We went to Christie's to see a wonderful collection of Blakes which are just coming up for sale. They were just lying about to be handled! It was very difficult to get at them and I found Lady Ottoline Morrell and her long-haired party very distracting--Blake draws a queer crowd.... I longed to see the drawings in peace." (*Diaries, 1915-1918*. London: Hutchinson, 1968, p. 422)

In the census of coloured copies of Young's *Night Thoughts* (BNL II [1968], 44), copy N should be recorded as having been given by Mr. Wilmarth S. Lewis recently to Mr. Paul Mellon. --G.E. Bentley, Jr.

Suggested textual emendation to *Jerusalem*, 43:28, Erdman (29 Keynes): "locks" to read "rocks", on grounds both of consistency and of meaning. The text has established previously that Albion personifies a land, and the physical characteristics with which he is associated are fundamentally architectural and geographical, e.g., "the ancient porches of Albion are/ Darken'd!... Albions mountains run with blood ... every Human perfection/Of mountain & river & city, are small & wither'd & darken'd" (5:1-8). Moreover, 43:2 sets the scene amidst "Albions dark rocks," and a sudden shift to "locks" seems not only improbable but also inappropriate in that context.

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