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R E V I E W

Tadeusz SÅ,awek, *The Outlined Shadow:  
Phenomenology, Grammatology, Blake*

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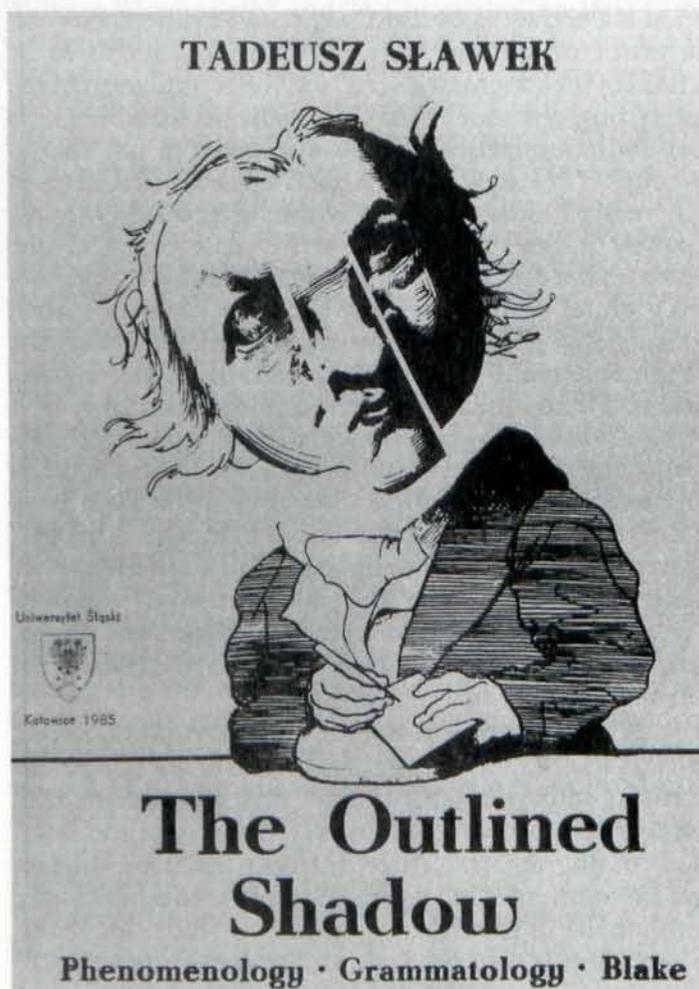


Tadeusz Sławek, *The Outlined Shadow: Phenomenology, Grammatology, Blake*. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1985. 159 pp., 4 illus., summaries in Polish and Russian.

Reviewed by Nelson Hilton

"Who's speaking?" is a question young readers of the new age routinely address to every bit of writing. Which is to ask, "What's the origin?—where does this text come from?" Except for the happy few who still believe in the fiction of intentionality, such questions go unanswered; but they set the quest in motion, and the journey not the arrival matters. In this context, a striking feature of Blake's work is its (apparent) author's apparent deferral of authority, as in the famous claim to be but "the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity" (letter of 6 July 1803). Still more dramatic is *Jerusalem's* opening address "To the Public," where the lyric logic seems to be that "I" will print because "I" "hear" the "voice" of "that God from whom [*all books are given*]", a "voice" that "speaks in thunder and in fire," that is, *speaks* in "Thought" and "desire." As so often in Blake, seemingly firm declarations dissolve into the sliding possibilities set up by the constituent parts. The conclusion of *Jerusalem* offers another telling instance in the opposing readings of "identified": "All Human Forms" . . . what? Became one entity together (id-ens)? Or became each itself a unique thing? The thing, one imagines, is to think these things together—no thing at all but a process ("living going forth & returning"). And if "one" manages that, who's thinking?, who's imagining? Moreover, does this "process," the attempt to gain some vision or imagination of "Jerusalem" have any meaning or end?

Tadeusz Sławek's entertaining meditation on such heady issues situates Blake before Heidegger and Derrida, both of whom are seen to incarnate differing implications of Blake's work. While "Blake nostalgically looks back (or rather listens back) to a traditional situation of the Western metaphysics in which a sign is a reflection, a necessary but inadequate representation of the original plenitude," he nonetheless "seems to see the illusive character of his efforts, and thus is on the verge of breaking away" from that tradition, "painfully aware of non-existence of the origin which can haunt his mind, but which cannot make its appearance" (73). Blake's work is thus at the origin in a mythic history of the late-eighteenth-century advent of the modern/postmodern:



"Blake marks a moment in the Western thinking which still admitting the necessity of origin, the inexorable character of the liaison between the signifier and the signified, intuited already the difficulty which made the search for the origin a mythic, eternal, neverending procedure" (73).

For Sławek, Heidegger is closer to Blake, which makes Derrida the truer heir. "Heidegger and Blake both speak of the thing unconcealed in its Being ('the entity as it is in itself'), and both underscore the independent character of this occurrence" (90), though Blake "betrays the Heideggerian discourse by allowing the treatment of material objects as mere shadows, 'hindrances' of ideas" (101). These shadows Blake can only outline. Derrida, however, shows a Heidegger-like Blake and the rest of us—trapped and inwoven using signs which finally cannot point beyond themselves (neither to "Being," nor "the entity as it is in itself," nor "Eternity," for example) but only to other signs. As Blake seems to suggest in the opening address "To the Public," mentioned above, God is the giver of "all books" and "the wond'rous art of writing": Divine "speech" is writing itself. "It follows, then, that even

God is a preface, a citation, a spacing, a difference characteristic of writing" (69). While Blake "seems to be afraid of such a semiotic void" (cf. the formulation in the preceding sentence) time and again we stumble on "a somewhat undecisive relationship between speech and writing" (72). Discussing Albion's lament that his soul "is melted away, inwoven within the veil" (*J* 23.4), Slawek observes that "if the veil is the element of life, then what it can display when rent is only more veil." So, even while "desperately clinging to the notion of 'Naked Beauty', to the image of a reality different from the 'Vegetable world', Blake sees a possibility of such a world where the signified is separated from its signifier by a *long detour*, by an endless wandering of signifiers" (116). Following the intriguing ontology of his *Nelson* and *Pitt* presented in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake's compositions are "similar to" some ancient designs "still preserved on rude monuments" but which are themselves only "copies from some stupendous originals now lost" (or, adds Blake's wistful epitome of logocentric nostalgia, "perhaps buried till some happier age"). We do not un-veil, whatever we may re-veal.

Slawek nicely details some of the contradictions of Blake's stance, juxtaposing, for instance, the famous assertion "Imitation is Criticism" with the statement of categorical dislike for imitation, "To Imitate I abhor," and finding in Blake three different positions with regard to mimesis. One useful concept for this discussion, announced in the title, is "outline"—which for Blake, Slawek argues, has not only an "aesthetic importance" but also "a marked ontological-existential character" (129). This idea of "outline" leads to a version of the Derridean paradox spelled out in one of Blake's hard and haunting lines: "Truth has bounds. Error none" (*Book of Los* 4.30). Outline entails difference, and the fact of difference cuts through the possibility of transcendental, absolute identifications of value. "Blake in his attempt to retrace the origin of the mark, to move towards the 'wonderful originals', towards the realm of primal unity preceding all differences . . . eventually speaks the language of *outline*, i.e. of difference [sic] . . . . But the language of difference, of the outline, is the language of writing" (140–41). This fearful symmetry, we might note, is also perceived by Edward Larrissy, who writes that Blake's "rejection of the unity of Reason is conceived in terms of the unity of the mystic, but it really belongs to difference" ("A Description of Blake: Ideology, Form, Influence," in Francis Barker et al. eds., *1789: Reading Writing Revolution* [n.p.: University of Essex, 1982] 108). The book leaves us with the thought that "Derrida draws the ultimate conclusion which Blake stops short of," that what Blake would term "Eternal Existence" is "another name for death" (142). From which the reader may draw, extending Slawek's shadowy outline, a rather

more provisional conclusion and then perhaps return to the foolish young man of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "but I said, if you please we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also, if you will not I will?"

Given some curiosities in the nature of Polish university publishing, the book cannot be purchased from abroad. The author has sent 10 copies to the *Blake* office for distribution. This is a first-come, first-serve basis; send your request to Patricia Neill, *Blake*, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627.

Lucy Newlyn. *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. xvii + 214 pp. \$37.00.

Reviewed by John Hodgson

*Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* is above all a study of a poetic dialogue. The dialogue, of course, is a famous one, and has been often studied, even from this perspective; but Lucy Newlyn's sustained and informed attentiveness to the poets' reciprocal literary allusions in their private and public contexts produces fresh insights which justify this retracing of familiar ground.

Newlyn's thesis is that Wordsworth and Coleridge "mythologized their relationship, presenting themselves as joint labourers even while they were moving apart" (vii). "The key to this interpretation," she suggests, "is in the poets' private language, for it is through allusions to each other that their tacit opposition emerges" (viii). This apparently forthright declaration is actually a bit slippery at several points ("private," "allusions," "tacit"): the allusions Newlyn has in mind are most often the poets' literary allusions to each others' (and their own) texts, and the language these constitute is thus a traditional and to a great degree a public one—not a secret dialogue but an undersong.

Since Newlyn's emphasis falls upon reciprocal, dialectic allusion, and since her interest in allusion itself is *ad hoc* rather than theoretical, "the language of allusion" would seem to promise a larger subject than this book actually engages. Newlyn takes no notice of recent meditations on allusion, such as those by Ziva Ben-Porot and James Chandler, and avoids confronting the ideas of Harold Bloom. Nor does she build on or even note the kind of allusion-study recently pursued in Blake's texts,