

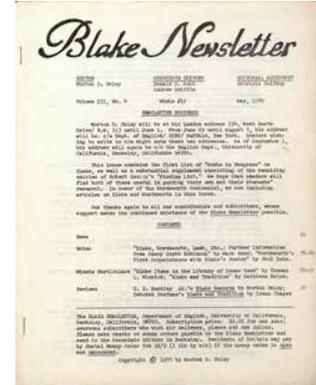
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**BLAKE**

R E V I E W

G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*

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tion of the Arlington Court Tempera as an illustration of Porphyry's de Antro Nympharum, translated by Thomas Taylor. This is not so. Sir Geoffrey Keynes was one of the first Blake scholars to assent to this view, which he holds to be conclusive. I remember his asserting - as a doctor he was well able to judge - to my description of the gesture of the kneeling figure as that of "throwing with averted face," attributed to Odysseus in this work. He has since confirmed in writing his agreement with my interpretation.

I may add that he caught me out badly on another anatomical error - the sex in the figure in the lower panel of Jerusalem Plate 33!

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#### REVIEWS

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr. Blake Records. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969. 678 / xxviii pp. / 60 plates. £8. 10s.

In an earlier age of scholarship, this book would have been called "Materials Toward a Biography" of William Blake, or something of that sort. Our tighter-lipped times must be content with Blake Records. Anyone who works on Blake will be grateful to Professor Bentley for this compendious labor, which comprises not only contemporary references and documents, but also four invaluable appendices: "Early Essays on Blake," "Blake Residences," "Blake Accounts," and "Engravings by and after Blake." There is also a superbly comprehensive index. If one puts down Blake Records at last with a certain feeling of frustration, this is not owing to any dissatisfaction with the book itself; it is, rather, a reflection of the present state of our knowledge about Blake. If even this enormous, rich, plum pudding of a book does not solve any of the major biographical problems about Blake, does this mean they will never be solved at all?

This is not at all to say that no important biographical data emerges from Blake Records. On the contrary, Professor Bentley has substantially increased our knowledge of Blake's life, sometimes by single discoveries, sometimes by the accumulation of detail. The possibility that Blake's father was converted to Baptism in about 1769 (pp. 7-8) is certainly a very interesting one, to say the least. The curious claim of Charles Henry Bellenden Ker that Blake had him arrested for nonpayment for two drawings must give us all pause. (See pp. 227-228). Does this indicate a hitherto unsuspected aspect of Blake's character? But how could a man be arrested for debt as a result of a verbal offer made three years previously, and why should Ker have ended up paying ten guineas more

than he had originally promised? On firmer ground, the detailed exposure of Cromek's dealing with Blake leaves no room for doubt that Blake was swindled; previously we have tended to side with Blake on emotional or intuitive grounds, but Blake Records exposes Cromek's double-dealing very nicely. The Blake-Linnell accounts leave a much different impression: here one can see that Linnell was accused unjustly by Palmer and others. Linnell emerges as a hard-headed man, one who would not scruple to dun a nobleman, for example; more of an entrepreneur than a Maecenas. But he did not pretend to be Blake's benefactor (and would Blake have enjoyed it if he had?), and his dealings with Blake were dignified and straightforward. Frederick Tatham, it must be said, remains about as understandable as Antonio in The Tempest.

At times in reading Blake Records one feels very close to Blake indeed, seeing him through the eyes of his contemporaries. Professor Bentley has wisely not interfered with this feeling of contemporaneity, providing only short, lucid expository links where they are needed. The result is a sort of do-it-yourself Blake biography kit, which at this stage of Blake studies, is more useful than - in the absence of new major discoveries - a new biography.

--MDP

2. Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet from Gilchrist to Yeats, by Deborah Dorfman. Yale Studies in English, Vol. 170. Yale University Press, 1969. Pp. vx + 314. \$8.75.

Exactly how, after Blake's death, the nineteenth century tried to come to terms with what remained of his work and what could be learned about his life: this is a subject on which a major publication has been long overdue. Previously, according to Miss Dorfman, there was only a 1953 dissertation; except for her footnote references, it seems to have sunk without a trace. The present study apparently began as a dissertation also, and the author has been faithful to the genre in approach and organization as well as in the paradigmatic title. Although the immense amount of material she has to draw on might have lent itself to any one of several emphases when the dissertation became a book, intended for a new audience, Miss Dorfman keeps almost exclusively to the main line of chronology, the shortest distance between the earliest date and the latest, and compromises with the other options as she goes. One result, as the footnotes threaten to rise into the text, is that we are aware of how much is being left out, a larger and more complex world of documents, personalities, cultural attitudes, and ideas, which is hinted in the citations at the bottom of the page but which the author is not able to explore in her dutiful march through the decades. Only in the relatively less compressed and more unified chapters on Gilchrist's Life and the Ellis-Yeats edition is there more than a glimpse of the kind of book that may have been one revision away.