

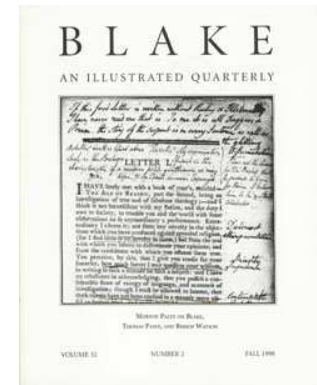
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Books Supplement

David Worrall

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original critical perspective on the values represented by that spirit" (179), it seems hard not to wonder if she was included primarily as a token, especially since she is not a poet but a novelist.

More serious is the limited and ambiguous religious context. Regardless of whether, as Ryan claims, it was "Protestants who fomented most of the domestic agitation during the crucial decade of the 1790s in which British Romanticism first emerged as a cultural force" (19), in fact, all of the works he deals with were written after 1810, and therefore, were affected by more issues than those involved with the Dissenters and Evangelicals. During the nineteenth century, the English were being forced with greater degrees of insistence to confront the inconsistencies of their state church. In addition to the Scots, who had maintained their own national church even after uniting with England in 1707, there were the Irish Catholics, who had become part of the United Kingdom in 1800, and the Jews, who had been legal residents, if not citizens, since the seventeenth century. As the Empire continued to grow, so, too, did the variety of non-Anglican, non-Protestant, even non-Christian peoples to be dealt with.

Actually, the reformation of the national Church coincides more closely with the so-called "long century" of British romanticism. The period seems to have been initiated by the failed Jew Bill of 1753, which was passed on 22 May, only to be repealed on 20 December. Despite the bill's modest intent of permitting just the naturalization of the Jews, public outcry (accompanied by the chant, "No Jews, no Wooden Shoes") was prohibitive. Religious reform was therefore delayed until 1858, when on 23 July, Baron Lionel de Rothschild was permitted to take his seat in the House without having been required to swear an oath "on the true faith of a Christian." In between, Parliament wrestled with the legal complications associated with non-Anglican residents demanding their educational and economic rights, and the religious ramifications of granting equal rights to "heretics."

Ryan is correct to situate the national religion in its larger political and economic contexts. However, by restricting his inquiry to Protestant activities, he sometimes overlooks the religious contradictions inherent in the romantic literature he considers. Certainly, it is possible to define Christian orthodoxy broadly enough to include Blake, but in so doing, Ryan only parodies Blake himself who defines Christianity broadly enough to encompass the Jews, as he says in *Jerusalem*: "If Humility is Christianity; you O Jews are the true Christians; . . . Take up the Cross O Israel & follow Jesus." The same kind of ecumenism seems to dominate Ryan's interpretation of Wordsworth: "Since he himself had found a refuge in the Church he concluded that others could likewise harbor there, even Catholics and Dissenters if they lay aside their specific doctrinal rigidities" (116). Missing, however, is the recognition that both Blake and

Wordsworth are advocating at best only a specious tolerance, both defining, and thereby restricting, the beliefs of others. In another context, Ryan rationalizes Percy Shelley's bigotry against Hindus and Turks as "an alloy of pragmatism" (206). These writers all lived in intellectual milieus whose boundaries far exceeded the narrow range of the state church, and apologizing for their prejudices does them a disservice. Ryan would have done better to consider how these apparently narrow views of religion related to the ever-expanding world in which the romantics lived.

Publishing in the mid-1990s, Ryan had access to the best of two worlds. Situating himself within the Abrams tradition of humanistic scholarship, he foregrounded an important topic which has been marginalized for decades. But by neglecting the many cultural studies that were unavailable to his predecessor, he repeated over again the "same dull round" that itself strongly contributed to the critical reformation we have been experiencing since the publication of *Natural Supernaturalism. The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824* would have been far more useful had Robert M. Ryan taken greater advantage of "the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."

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G.E. Bentley, Jr. *Blake Books Supplement: A Bibliography of Publications and Discoveries about William Blake 1971-1992 being a Continuation of Blake Books* (1977). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. xvii + 789 pp. 13 plates. \$135.

Reviewed by DAVID WORRALL

Bentley's labors, both here and in *Blake Books*, *Blake Records* and *Blake Records Supplement*, have been hugely important to the expansion of Blake studies. It's surely not too fanciful to trace back to Bentley's foundations the original impulses behind the new "Superbibliography" of Essick

G. E. BENTLEY, Jr.

BLAKE BOOKS
SUPPLEMENT

A Bibliography of
Publications and Discoveries
about WILLIAM BLAKE 1971-1992

being a Continuation of
BLAKE BOOKS (1977)

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD
1995

and Viscomi (although their scholarship has always been more than that, of course). Such is the complexity of Blake's work (drawings, watercolors, oils, various processes of engraving, manuscripts, multiple "originals" of illuminated books, etc.), and so rapid has been the expansion of romanticism's centrality within English studies during the 1960s and now the 1990s, that it always had urgent need of being firmly grounded in critical empiricism. If it becomes the case that the six or seven canonical writers diminish to a rump as future critical interest in them dwindles, Blake may endure as the only one whose complex textual materiality will be certain to ensure that he remains unco-opted into any newer, broader and more democratic cultural histories of the period. What might make sense as an argument about Blake's life as a writer may make less sense about his work as an artist, and vice versa. However that develops in the future, Bentley's two *Blake Books* volumes enable us to visualize, at a glance, not only the totality of Blake study but also to glimpse its developmental process. It will be no surprise that the column of index inches (*centimeters* if you must) devoted to Keynes and Erdman are now much reduced, their primacy overtaken ("neck and neck" as horse-racing commentators would have it) by Essick and Bentley

himself. But our colleagues do not *jockey*, for it has long been thanks to the collective labors of Bentley, Essick, Dörrbecker (and many others), that the *Blake Books* themselves have been continually updated by the rapid annual bibliographies and checklists which appear here in *Blake*. As a community of scholars we continue to have much to be grateful for.

As Bentley realized a long time ago, and the rest of us somewhat later, the study of Blake is a uniquely complex activity because the abundance, technical complexity and material diversity of Blake's original artifacts is combined with a dearth of "literary" information about his life. We have all, at one time or another, leapt upon a dated "WB inv" monogram to bolster some favorite—if more or less shaky—hermeneutic about his life or work, but the materiality of the artifact, the principal domain of the bibliographer, has increasingly tended to trounce us. We all now know, for example, that only *some* of the big Tate Gallery color prints dated by Blake "1795" might be dateable to 1795—since some of the paper is watermarked 1803—but now, it seems, in the absence of anything more convincing, we must also learn not to call *Hecate* "Hecate." Such are the things bibliographers (and gallery curators) do to us, and it hurts. Although *Blake Books Supplement* confines itself explicitly to primary and secondary written records, the adjacent domain of art history will frequently converge with the literary bibliographies when the act of interpretation confronts the status of the archive. Ultimately, what we need is a *Supplement* to the *Supplement*, with Butlin and Bentley butted end to end, so to speak, collating the array of materialities connected with Blake. As it is, Bentley's book is our latest (and best) stab at attaining this essential empirical control over Blake. And such control is needed if we are to have some chance of curbing our own excesses, errors and omissions as scholars.

How professional were we that we missed noticing that copies E-H and H-K of *There is No Natural Religion* were Victorian facsimiles (139)? Or, if confirmed, how did we—until 1991—fail to notice a whole set of 1809 silver buttons with Blake's portrait appearing amidst those of Nelson, Pitt and other luminaries in that crucial *Descriptive Catalogue* year (3)? And what of the so-called "Felpham Rummer" inscribed "Blake in Anguish Felpham August 1803" (70-72, pl. 2)? A glass goblet is solid enough, surely? Yet we missed it, and much else. Unless you have at your elbow a complete run of *Blake's* back to 1977 (with past bibliographers Thomas Minnick and Detlef Dörrbecker giving way to Bentley himself), then *Blake Books Supplement* will be essential at your desk keeping you informed about the totality of artifacts involved in modern Blake studies. Its user will even extract oddments of innocent humor such as finding, for example, that (exotically), the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* is indexed next to the *Journal of Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College*. Much like Bentley's photographic dressing, in a recent issue of *Blake*, of Blake's life

mask with his recently discovered spectacles (*speculative spectacles*, strictly), we can never be quite sure of the extent of this impish fun.

One of the most valuable sections of *Blake Books Supplement* is that devoted to newly recorded and newly traced copies of the illuminated books. The former includes, for example, a census of information on the German and Austrian "Lambeth" books discovered by Dörrbecker in the 1980s while the latter includes many new details of Blake's mid nineteenth-century provenance. In the light of the "Superbibliography" with its careful interpellation from artifacts, it is now of significance that Bentley records as "Newly Recorded Copies" no less than seven individual plates and one "Newly Traced" copy of plates from *Jerusalem* copy J. Similarly, if less dramatically, Bentley methodically records new editions of books containing Blake's commercial engravings and gives, for example, new locations of editions of his *Blair's Grave*, including details of contemporary announcements about its publication. On their own these are matters of minor moment but cumulatively, when enriched with other similar notes, they enable us to gauge the extent of Blake's contemporary circulation and help us visualize Blake-the-craftsman as well as Blake-the-visionary. Further help, usually in the form of addenda to the 1977 *Blake Books*, is also provided in the form of tables of new Blake titles and copies, lists of stab holes, collections, details of location and ownership, plate sizes, watermarks and reproductions (including reprints before 1863). Of course, this information is augmented, *inter alia*, by details of dimensions, color, binding orders etc.

As one might expect, over half of *Blake Books Supplement* is given over to a straightforward bibliography of Blake criticism, mostly postdating the first *Blake Books* but also filling in many of that volume's bibliographical escapees. The global coverage is impressive with articles, books and theses recorded in most of the major and minor European languages (viz., Catalan as well as Spanish) in addition to emergent but identifiable Indian and Japanese bodies of scholarship. As one might expect, although the entries include newspaper and other ephemeral publications, the core of the bibliography of criticism consists of the mainstream output of academically oriented books and journal articles with the listings frequently bearing Bentley's own annotations. Many of these are short synoptic quotations from the works themselves but he quite often provides his own analytical comments, sometimes including evaluative judgements about style (e.g., "rambling," "severe") or content ("wonderfully inaccurate," "masterful," "conventional," "highly sophisticated," "rudimentary"). More frequently, however, Bentley's comments (not nearly as starkly reductive as I have presented here) provide a true analytical annotation, by which I mean that they elucidate information from otherwise unrevealing titles. For example, Robert Essick's 1978 *Notes & Queries* piece, economically titled "William Blake and Sir Thomas Lawrence," is annotated

by Bentley to reveal the core of its information (in this case the existence of an 1830 William Etty letter stating that Lawrence sent Blake £100). By also providing analytical entries for Blake chapters in books not otherwise signally, or obviously, concerned with him, as well as cumulative annotated entries for long running journal volumes such as *Blake*, the *Blake Books Supplement* will cut down much speculative searching and retrieval.

Ours is an age of information, the age of IT. My first action on entering a library is not to go to the catalogue but to padlock my laptop within range of an electricity socket. In considering how *Blake Books Supplement* might be used in the future, it seems extraordinarily shortsighted of Oxford University Press not to have presented the academic market with the possibility of having (as antiquarian booksellers are fond of saying) the "very scarce" 1977 *Blake Books* electronically merged with *Blake Books Supplement* and to sell them both on CD-ROM (I am presuming that the latter, if not the former, would have been presented to the Press on disk). While Bentley's index is very good (he indexes watermarks, for example—even if "J Whatman" comes inexplicably under "J") and includes some attempt to index significant title words (e.g., "Enlightenment," "Body," "Self" etc.), what today's scholarly community requires is "Electronic Searchability." The indexing of names and places is exemplary (I've tried faulting the index but haven't yet managed to do so) but, given the increasingly artifact-based nature of Blake studies, what if I wished to search out, for example, all leaf dimensions of 24.3 cm in the illuminated books? Or what if I wished to collect all Blakeana relating to, say, 1890 (e.g., sales, exhibitions, editions, articles, books)? Or, quite simply, to find all references to "woodcut," both in the section on original works and in the titles or annotations of the critical bibliography? While I recognize that the physicality of modern scholarly practices are often curiously asymmetrical (why is it that I always padlock my laptop but never my Bentley?), the types of research *Blake Books Supplement* might potentially support is far greater than the abilities of a paper index to serve. It is also difficult, but necessary, to incorporate information from the old *Blake Books* and merge it with the *Supplement* (I am thinking, in particular, of provenance details and physical descriptions of the illuminated books). The *Supplement* tends to assume ownership or sight of *Blake Books* exactly at those points where other databases (e.g., MLA, ABELL) cannot be of much help. To such wistful electronic mergers we might also add *The Marriage of Blake Records and Supplement*. It seems a pity that such a Herculean set of labors, and such wonderful achievements as *Blake Books/Records/Supplements* should be confined to the archaic and undemocratic world of print. Perhaps enlightened opportunism at Oxford University Press might persuade them of the economic potential of selling, either in CD-ROM format or over the internet, not just *Blake*

Books Supplement but the now dormant *Blake Books*: three OUP incomes for two copyrights. Just as the Blake internet sites have shown so splendidly, we have at our disposal the means to lead our discipline in the digitalization of literary studies: Bentley's four Blake books ought to be there in the vanguard. Blake studies, and romanticism in general, should count itself fortunate to have been so well served, and for so long, by the dedicated (if not precisely devout) scholarship of Jerry and Beth Bentley.

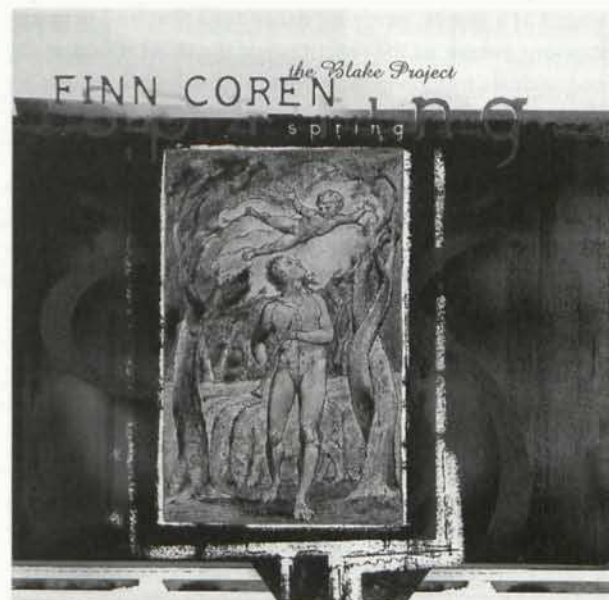
Finn Coren, *The Blake Project: Spring* (Bard Records, BACD-1) (\$15.44) and *The Blake Project: Spring: Appendix* (Bard Records, BACD-2) (\$9.87).

Reviewed by THOMAS DILLINGHAM

Many composers have attempted to fill the wistful quiet left for lovers of William Blake's poems by the anecdotes of his having sung some of them to tunes of his own devising at public gatherings. With no hope, apparently, of recovering Blake's tunes, we must be satisfied with the efforts of admirers. One of the best known is Parry's anthem based on the preface to *Milton*, and Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, among others, have offered their versions of the lyrics, including some texts from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. More recently, Greg Brown has recorded his pleasant country/folk setting of the *Songs* and before him, that indispensable citizen of the world, Allen Ginsberg, tuned the *Songs* in many public appearances and for several recordings, evolving a style of performance that fits nicely with what is called world music.

Now comes the artistically ambitious and powerful recording by a Norwegian rock composer, Finn Coren, *The Blake Project*. Presented in two parts of 10 songs each, "Spring" and "Silent Melancholy," with a separate "Appendix," this work can only be described as a song cycle, a term which might daunt by its implicit comparison with Schubert's *Winterreise*, Schumann's *Liederkreis*, or Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. In each case, the composer has chosen to set a series of poems by a master and has grouped the musical results to provide both meaningful interplay among the songs and an overall sense of unity. The same intention and effect are apparent in *The Blake Project*. Coren has been working on this cycle for nearly 10 years, producing settings of 22 of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (including two versions each of "The Tyger" and "The Fly," along with two lyrics from *Poetical Sketches*, three from the *Notebook*, and "Jerusalem," the preface to *Milton*).

Coren uses a variety of styles and instrumentations for the different songs; "The Sick Rose," for example, is a quiet



lament accompanied by acoustic guitar, while "London," set with electric piano, two violins and a cello, with Coren's vocal (as in some other songs as well) as a kind of *sprechstimme*, with a crooning repetition of the name "London" interpolated between verses. "To Tirzah" introduces a trumpet to particularly dramatic effect, while more exotic instruments (tablas, cembalo, Hardanger-fiddle, baglabouzouki) are featured along with the familiar electric guitars, bass, and percussion of more conventional rock groups. The musical styles range from the quiet, meditative sounds of "The Sick Rose," "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" or "Little Boy Lost" to hard percussion-driven rock (as in the angry sounds of "The Chimney Sweeper" or "Holy Thursday" from *Experience*) to a John Lennon-like lyricism (as in "Spring," "Cradle Song," or "Holy Thursday" from *Innocence*) to songs that might be compared with the best of Lou Reed or Elvis Costello. "Jerusalem" has the feel of an operatic chorale, though firmly grounded in rock idiom.

There is also variety in the production of the music—a few songs are recorded in relatively straightforward manner, while many are given a surreal or angry or even threatening quality by overdubbing, reverberation, echo, and startling sound effects. Coren is especially good at musically punctuating or emphasizing words or phrases with instrumental notes or riffs that function rather like the tendrils, flowers, vine leaves, insects and other intruders into Blake's verbal spaces. While the influences of the Beatles and others mentioned here are apparent, the music remains distinctively Coren's. (Listening with stereo earphones provides a particularly intense experience of the sometimes elaborate sound production on these albums.)

A most impressive feature of Coren's settings is his sense of the dialectical ironies and even wicked humor of many of the songs. "The Little Vagabond," for example, is pre-