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

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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 The period seems to have been initiated by the failed Jew Bill of 1753, which was passed on 22 May, only to be repealed on 20 December.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 Reform: 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."

Works Cited


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
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, Dörrebecker (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 Dörrebecker 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
terrible style (e.g., "rambling," "severe") or con-
siderations about it. In the light of the
"Superbibliography" with its careful interpel-
ations, it is now of significance that Bentley records as
"Newly Recorded Copies" no less than seven indi-
plates and one "Newly Traced" copy of plates from Jerus-
lem copy I. Similarly, if less dramatically, Bentley meth-
ically records new editions of books containing Blake's com-
cal engravings and gives, for example, new locations of
ections to the archaic and undemocratic world of print. Perhaps en-
lightened opportunism at Oxford University Press might
convince the economic potential of selling, either
in CD-ROM format or over the internet, not just Blake
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) 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 (tablases, cembalo, Hardanger-fiddle, bagla- bouzouki) 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-