

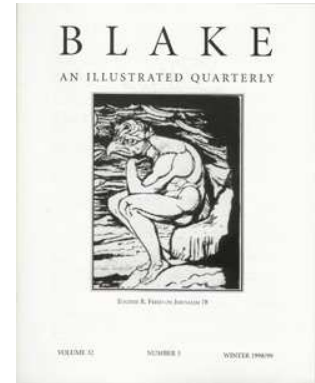
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R E V I E W

Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*

Alexander S. Gourlay

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We also have evidence that Douce's interest in illustrations of Chaucer extended beyond Blake's print. Facing Blake's prospectus in Douce's Chaucer (i.e., pasted on the inside of the back cover) is the prospectus for a rival project: Robert Hartley Cromek's print after Stothard's "The Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims to Canterbury." This prospectus is dated "London, Feb. 10th, 1807." Douce praised Stothard's painting in his book *Illustrations of Shakspeare, and of Ancient Manners*, claiming that the "attention to accuracy of costume which it displays has never been exceeded, and but very seldom so well directed."⁹ In a notebook listing books received, he also records in 1809 that "Cromek" gave him a copy of "Carey's description of Stodart's picture of the pilgrimage to Canterbury,"¹⁰ but Douce apparently never purchased the print. Should he have desired a copy, Douce certainly had the means, especially after his receipt in 1827 of an estimated £50,000 as residuary legatee of the estate of his friend Joseph Nollekens. He was clearly aware of Cromek and Blake's projects, even placing their prospectuses facing one another in a volume of Chaucer. But perhaps he concluded, on the basis of his antiquarian expertise, that Blake's print was the more historically accurate representation and (like Charles Lamb) "preferred it greatly to Stodart's."¹¹ There is a small engraving (approximately 5.1 x 17.6 cm.)¹² by W. H. Worthington after Stothard's painting pasted onto the titlepage of the same copy of Chaucer, but it is obviously not the print "3 Feet 1 Inch long, and 10 1/2 Inches high" that Cromek undertook to deliver to his subscribers. Although no definitive catalogue of the prints bequeathed by Douce to the Bodleian has been compiled, there appears to be no copy of Cromek's print after Stothard's painting in the present collection. Most of Douce's print collection (as well as some of the manuscripts and drawings he owned) was transferred to the Ashmolean Museum in 1863, and more prints and drawings were added from the Bodleian holdings in 1915.¹³

⁹ Francis Douce, *Illustrations of Shakspeare, and of Ancient Manners: with Dissertations on the Clowns and Fools of Shakspeare; on the Collection of Popular Tales Entitled Gesta Romanorum; and on the English Morris Dance* (London, 1808) ii, 285 fn.

¹⁰ MS. Douce e. 69, fol. 9^v. William [Paulet] Carey, *Critical Description of the Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims to Canterbury, Painted by Thomas Stothard, Esq. R.A.* (London, 1808) 11, reprints Douce's commendatory remarks on Stothard's painting. Cromek circulated Carey's essay to promote the sale of the print. See *Blake Books*, 777 and G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books Supplement* (Oxford, 1995) 431-32.

¹¹ G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford, 1969) 538.

¹² This engraving was published by "W. Pickering & R. & S. Prowett London 1822."

¹³ See Arthur Cornwallis Madan and George Rodney Scott's rough handlist *A Catalogue of the Collection of Engravings, &c. in Portfolios bequeathed by Francis Douce in 1835*, 2 vols. (1913-15, 1916). Douce's copies of *Theil*, *The Marriage*, and *A Descriptive Catalogue* remain in the Bodleian collection. I would like to thank Ursula Mayr-Harting of the Ashmolean Museum for her kind assistance.

R E V I E W S

Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*. New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1996. viii + 248 pp. \$65/cloth; \$30/paper [Yale University Press, 1998].

Reviewed by ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY

Upon seeing it, most scholars of Blake and Romanticism will immediately want to read and even to own this book, which promises to cover a lot of material, little of it easily available elsewhere, that is essential background for any literary or art-historical study of the period. The book includes 210 high-quality reproductions of satirical prints, many in color and most in a large enough scale to permit study, and the text is extensive. Once one starts reading it, it becomes clear that Donald knows a great deal about these prints and that she thinks about them in sophisticated and original ways. But many readers are likely to be somewhat frustrated, not so much by shortcomings of the book as by the fact that the topic is simply too large and too complex to be susceptible to summary on this scale, however astute the summarizer. Each of the chapters could have been a lavishly illustrated book in itself, and while it is obvious that Donald has enough good ideas to fill a dozen volumes, this book provides only tantalizing and sometimes exasperating glimpses of the main topics. Donald knows well that works in popular culture embody and convey meaning in extremely complicated ways, and she tries gamely to indicate how various audiences would have responded to these works, but the result is barely adequate even as an overview. Other recent books that investigate the role of popular culture in Georgian political and literary discourse, such as those by Vincent Carretta, Iain McCalman and David Worrall, have been more satisfying and more coherent, mostly because they address similar material from well defined if comparatively limited perspectives. Donald's broader approach permits only cursory examination of the way a given constituency might read a few aspects of a given piece. As a result, we rarely get much feeling for the work as a whole, much less its place in the vast web of relevant contexts that inform it. It is captious to criticize a book for not being what it is not meant to be, but a narrower or a longer book would have been a better one.

A related problem is that the work of Gillray so thoroughly dominates the illustrations and the discussion of them. This is understandable—Gillray was the most powerful caricaturist of the period (perhaps of any period), and his works remain much more interesting than those of his

contemporaries. His fierce approach to caricature went to molecular depth: each form—animal, vegetable, and even mineral—appears to have a completely imagined grotesque anatomy, with hideous bones below the skin and nasty little corpuscles coursing through the veins. Further, Gillray's extraordinary command of the languages of high and low art, combined with his intellectual depth, broad learning (and that of his collaborators), profound political cynicism, and well documented susceptibility to influence and bribery from all quarters, permit (even require) every etching to be read in at least a half-dozen ways. His work is so powerful, so rich, and so influential that he inevitably dominated the scene, just as he continues to dominate modern studies of it. But as Donald tries to show, he was only one of many influential caricaturists: to understand the Age of Caricature, one must also be steeped in the work of James Sayers, Isaac Cruikshank, Richard Newton, William Dent, Thomas Rowlandson, and many others. And to understand even one work by Gillray or these secondary artists one must usually place it in the whole bubble of prints (and other ephemera) that arose about each public issue; most prints, even those by one-hit wonders and amateurs, respond elaborately to both immediate and broader contexts. A similar claim could be made about almost any work of art, and especially of such elaborately cross-referential works as Renaissance sonnets, but I am persuaded that caricature prints of this period are uniquely interdependent: they respond so intricately to each other and to the cultural currents around them that the essential context for a given print often seems limitless. Donald offers a pretty good selection of non-Gillray material—the work of all the artists listed above are represented by several good examples—and she even ventures beyond the world of satirical prints to show how they respond to other media and cultural forms. But one can't get a proportionate sense of Gillray's contribution to the caricature tradition unless one is willing to read this book while juggling M. Dorothy George's fat volumes of the British Museum's *Catalogue of Personal and Political Satires* and simultaneously rolling through the thousands of images in the Chadwyck-Healey microfilms of the British Museum collection.

Because most readers of this journal are likely to approach this book as an adjunct to studying Blake and his circle, it makes sense to consider it in those terms. David Erdman and others have demonstrated that Blake borrowed widely from contemporary caricatures, especially in his illuminated books, and although Blake famously claimed that excessive exposure to Rowlandson's caricature prints had "perverted" the eye of Dr. Trusler, there is plenty of evidence that Blake himself studied and responded to the work of both major and minor caricaturists. Donald is aware of all this, and at various times she reads the prints as a sophisticated artist of the 1790s might have done, but few will come away from reading this book with a substantially

different sense of the context of Blake's work. That is not to say there is nothing of interest to Blake scholars. Although the ideas are not developed very thoroughly, Donald comments suggestively about Gillray's debt to Lavater and current physiognomical literature, which were of great interest to Blake. Further, she outlines several ways in which modes of caricature that are not obviously political or personal—such as the low comic "drolls" by "Tim Bobbin" [John Collier]—could have varying political implications. Her insights on this point are also important for Blake scholars because they can help us in thinking about the significance of Blake's only foray into the caricature print trade, the work he did in engraving after Stothard (who couldn't quite get the hang of it) and Collings for *The Wit's Magazine* in 1784, when it was edited by the radical Thomas Holcroft. Blake's mixed-method etching/engravings after Collings's loopy drawings are firmly within the shaggy tradition of "Bobbin," Isaac Cruikshank and others, even if they seem very odd when we come upon them among his other commercial works.

Donald is particularly successful when she brings to bear her training as an art historian, which is probably why she is so good at spotting the many ways in which Gillray and to a lesser extent the others responded to higher art. She is deeply learned about Hogarth, and often notes that a particular device or theme in a caricature print is a crib or an homage—and that the later artists are often aware of the sources to which Hogarth himself was responding. Especially because the Tory wing of Hogarth criticism still howls whenever Ronald Paulson argues for a political and subversive Hogarth, it is instructive to see that the subtle mechanisms of conveying meaning that Paulson has elucidated were also recognized by artists only a generation away from Hogarth, and that they repeated them, often without his subtlety.

This is a well made book. The reproductions are usually large enough to reveal the features to which Donald's text refers, and while a few are too small to study even with a magnifying glass, most are very good. The paper is a little too glossy for comfortable reading, but it is fairly opaque, the typeface is small but readable, and the quality of the printed images is very good indeed. If the format, the illustrations, or the typeface had been larger, the book would have cost much more, and if the illustrations had been massed at the back and the text printed on less glossy paper it would have been much more difficult to follow Donald's exposition.

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Reviewed by ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY

David Worrall's contribution to the new series of Blake Trust editions of the illuminated books is a thoroughly creditable performance—like the other volumes, this well-constructed book offers a set of thoughtful introductions, carefully edited texts with informative but not exhaustive pictorial, critical, and textual notes, and colorful and minutely detailed images of the illuminated pages themselves. *The Urizen Books* includes *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*, but not *The Song of Los*, which was (appropriately) included in Detlef W. Dörrbecker's edition of *The Continental Prophecies*. Worrall has successfully negotiated the difficult path that one enters when editing a book in which the usefulness of the pictures will outlast that of most of the critical apparatus. Any editor might be tempted to retreat into the mode usually adopted by Sir Geoffrey Keynes in his slight commentaries in the even more glorious Trianon Press facsimiles. Worrall has done better than that. His introductions to the difficult Urizen books offer coherent and sensible interpretive suggestions that reflect a broad grasp of recent scholarship, and his critical, technical and bibliographical information is up to date. Inevitably, readers will find that he has neglected things they wish he had explained or at least mentioned, but most, now and for years to come, will find his apparatus to be a helpful, readable and reliable accompaniment to the illustrations.

In his acknowledgments Worrall cites the influence of the great learned lefties David V. Erdman and E. P. Thompson; he shares their interest in the ways that Blake responded to his times, especially contemporary politics, and his introductions reiterate and expand upon their work. Like them, he is especially good at showing how politics and religion were intertwined in the period, and adduces a score

of political, philosophical, and religious writers and artists whose works are variously analogous or at least relevant to Blake's, some of them well known to Blakeans, like Spence, Paine, Mallet and (more recently) Geddes, and some less familiar ones that Jon Mee, Iain McCalman, and Worrall himself have recently uncovered. Worrall is judicious in selecting these analogues and in his assessment of their relevance. As usually happens when studying Blake in context, even identifying materials or phenomena that the author was undoubtedly thinking of as he wrote (and expected his audience to know) helps the struggling modern reader only so much. As the analogues and potential allusions proliferate, it often becomes harder rather than easier to imagine how Blake could have expected his readers to negotiate these intertextual jungles. None of the contemporary analogues seems satisfactory to me as a rhetorical model for Blake's procedure in these books—something that Worrall, like most of us, usually calls a parody, even though we all know that the term is insufficient to describe the wide range of ways in which Blake's work is related to his most likely targets. When Spence or Paine (or Cruikshank or Gillray) did things like Blake's it is clear that they were operating as parodists of a complex but not particularly mysterious kind, but I still cannot clearly envision a reader for whom these books of Blake's would have been anything but opaque, however richly evocative, wittily suggestive, and potentially subversive we can show them to be.

Worrall is only a little less assured in treating the textual and related technical aspects of these books than in clarifying their political and social contexts. He is familiar with the latest developments in understanding Blake's means of production in general and the history of producing the Urizen books in particular, and throughout his apparatus Worrall shows that he understands the implications of the work of Joseph Viscomi and others for those trying to make sense of multiple versions of an illuminated Blake text. The assorted editorial notes are helpful and fairly efficient. The pictorial notes are much more carefully chosen than, for instance, the luxuriant tangle of implications and possibilities catalogued in David Erdman's *Illuminated Blake*, but Worrall nevertheless includes some ephemeral remarks by others on minute particulars that mean little outside the context of the discussion in which they originally appeared.

The facing-page letterpress texts presumably record the text as it appears in the page that is reproduced (as in the earlier volumes), and they are therefore somewhat different from the more familiar editorial texts (such as Bentley's or Keynes's) and also from the collated "largest printed mark" texts invented by Erdman. I couldn't find any explicit claim here about the editorial principle used, but Paley's rationale in the *Jerusalem* volume of this series is persuasive (126-27). A judicious and uncluttered record of the text of the copy reproduced is a useful thing to have and is not available elsewhere, even if it is not the best imag-