

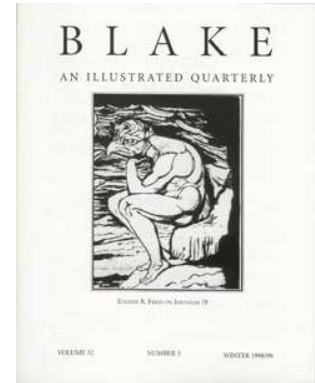
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R E V I E W

David Worrall, ed., William Blake, *The Urizen Books*

Alexander S. Gourlay

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McCalman, Iain. *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

Worrall, David. *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance, and Surveillance, 1790-1820*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992.

William Blake, *The Urizen Books*. Edited with introductions and notes by David Worrall. Princeton: The William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, 1995. Blake's Illuminated Books Volume 6. General Editor David Bindman. 231 pp. \$65. Paper \$29.95 [1998].

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-

inable reconstruction of what Blake meant to write. And as transcriptions of the words and punctuation on the finished pages these texts seem to be very reliable: working from the reproductions in the book I found no apparent errors. In general the compositors did an excellent job of reproducing the format and lineation (and even the word-spacing) of Blake's pages—the only problem I can see is that when Blake inserted the end of a broken line above rather than below the line it completes, the typesetter (or the typesetting program) adjusted the line spacing so that the fragment is placed closer to the line above than to the broken line that it completes.

I can't testify about the color accuracy of the reproductions in this volume, for I have not examined them side by side with the originals. But because so many of the original pages are color-printed in thick smears of ink, the images here cannot be facsimiles of Blake's pages but rather very plausible color-offset reproductions of very sharp and carefully lit photographs. The reproductive processes used cannot even approximate the look of most of Blake's originals, which often feature richly textured impasto effects and other unreproducible elements such as gold leaf, but they do provide a reliable record of most of what is there to be seen. The photographs used were very sharp, and the offset screens so fine that it is impossible to perceive with the naked eye the tiny dots of ink that make up the image. In all seven copies that I have examined the printing plates were perfectly registered, so that the printing colors were applied exactly where they should be. As a result of all these circumstances, the images are exceptionally beautiful and very useful for scholars. The hairline features of the intaglio-etched texts of *Ahania* and *The Book of Los*, for instance, are almost as clearly reproduced as in the photo-collotype Trianon Press facsimiles, and all pages are sharper and more subtly colored than in any other reproductions now available except the best color slides and, perhaps, the digital images that will eventually be available from the electronic Blake Archive. This resource (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/blake>), still under construction, presently offers a dazzling glimpse of the technology that will revolutionize the reproduction of Blake's pictures for scholarly purposes, and will undoubtedly (and unfortunately) forestall any future publishing projects like the one that produced the volume under review. (On the other hand, it seems likely that an electronic archive coupled to advanced printers could eventually be used to produce high-quality paper copies on demand, so all the romance of the printed page may not be lost forever.)

The problem of choosing copies to reproduce and determining the ordering of pages in them is simple for *The Book of Ahania* and *The Book of Los*, since the complete copies are unique, but devilishly difficult for *The Book of Urizen*, which is ordered and constituted differently in almost every copy. Blake made twenty eight printing plates for *Urizen*,

all at roughly the same time, but except for copies A and B he didn't use all the pages that the plates could print, and while some pages may have been extracted (or added) by later owners, Blake's foliation and other evidence suggest that he regarded several different forms of the book as complete and satisfactory. Indeed, the copy reproduced as a whole in this new edition, Copy D, lacks not only plate 16, but also plate 4, which includes about a tenth of all the text. Flawed but plausible cases could be made for several of the more complete copies as the "best" text to reproduce, but as long as one must choose an exemplar—and for paper editions of the illuminated books, I guess one must—Copy D of *Urizen* is an attractive copy and a sound choice. Worrall includes a generous sampling of variant pages (among them the two missing from Copy D) and indicates the variety of alternative orderings.

I am still slowly working my way through these new Blake Trust editions systematically, but I have been using them unsystematically for some time as my primary reference texts for the illuminated books. The whole series seems to me a resounding success—the level of the scholarship is high, the overall editorial approach sound, and the execution of the volumes very good. There is always room for caviling—such a magnificent presentation should be attended by both careful color-checking of the illustrations and perspicuous proofreading (and graceful editing for style), and some volumes didn't receive enough attention in these respects. But no serious Blake scholar can do without these books, and the Blake Trust, the Tate Gallery, Princeton University Press, and the editors should all be proud of all of them. David Worrall's contribution to the series is consistent with the high standard that prevails throughout.

William Richey, *Blake's Altering Aesthetic*.
Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.
xii + 197 pp. \$37.50.

Reviewed by JENNIFER DAVIS MICHAEL

In this radical reassessment of Blake's aesthetic theory, William Richey takes aim at a sacred tenet of Blake scholarship: Blake's espousal of the Gothic and rejection of the classical mode of art. Given Blake's early sketching of medieval tombs in Westminster Abbey and his vehement denunciation of "Greek and Roman models" late in his career, most critics have followed Frye's assumption that his attitude toward the Gothic remained consistent throughout his life.¹ As recent criticism has tended to reject mono-

¹ See *Fearful Symmetry* 148-49.