Christopher Rowland, “Wheels within Wheels”: William Blake and the Ezekiel’s Merkabah in Text and Image

Robert M. Ryan

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five?” (E 35) were stenciled the length of an entire wall in the
shape of a bird’s wings, while other lines ran along the base-
board and around display cases, swirling and diving across
other walls. The students working with Scott clearly loved
their subject, their playfulness a sure indicator of how much
Blake’s work became their own. It’s not hard to see why. If
online images or print reproductions inspire, Blake originals
inspire even more. What is now called book history has long
occupied Blake scholars; seeing the Muhlenberg exhibit re-
minded me how much of this history was a labor of love, both
for Blake and his readers.

Scott, Grant. *Wings of Fire: The Illuminated Books of William
pp. + 17 illus., mostly color]

Christopher Rowland. “Wheels within Wheels”: *William Blake and the
Ezekiel’s Merkabah in Text and Image*. Père Marquette Lectures in
Theology, 38. Milwaukee: Marquette University
Press, 2007. 43 pp. $15.00, hardcover.

By Robert M. Ryan

IN this installment in a series of annual lectures sponsored
by Marquette University, Christopher Rowland, Dean Ire-
land’s Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at Queen’s
College, Oxford, examines Blake’s response to the introduc-
tory chapter of the Book of Ezekiel: the prophet’s vision of
a God in human form enthroned on a chariot (*merkabah* in
Hebrew) that moves on intricate wheels and is borne or ac-
companied by four living creatures that are simultaneously
man and animal. The influence on Blake’s conception of the
four Zoas has long been recognized, but Rowland finds in
Ezekiel a broader inspiration for Blake’s confidence in the truth
of visionary experience, his conception of the prophet’s role
in society, his insistence on the divine humanity, and his repu-
diation of any image of God as a distant monarchical lawgiver.
In addition to discussion of *The Four Zoas*, Rowland offers
thoughtful commentaries on Blake’s reading of Job and the
Apocalypse of Enoch and on the similarities between his re-
sponse to Ezekiel and that of the mystic Joachim of Fiore.
The lecture serves as a preview of a forthcoming book on Blake as
an interpreter of scripture, a topic to which Rowland brings
his impressive knowledge of the history of biblical exegesis.

**NEWSLETTER**

**Blake in Paris**

The first exhibition in France devoted to William Blake
since 1947 will open at the Petit Palais on 1 April 2009 and
run to 28 June. Curated by Michael Phillips, it will be com-
posed of more than 150 works and represent Blake as a poet,
painter, and artist-printmaker. The accompanying catalogue,
in addition to listing the works, will also include over twenty
essays by John Barrell, Martin Butlin, Elizabeth Denlinger,
Anthony Dyson, Peter France, David Fuller, Suzanne Hoover,
Andrew Lincoln, Saree Makdisi, Jon Mee, Martin Myrone,
Morton Paley, Martin Postle, and Jon Stallworthy, amongst
others. A program of lectures in both English and French is
being organized by UFR d’Etudes Anglophones, Université
Paris-Diderot (Paris 7), together with a conference on 30 May.
A conference will also take place at the Collège de France on
3 June.

**CORRIGENDA**

The Huntington Library recently published a color repro-
duction of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy E.
I served as the volume’s editor and provided a commentary
on the poems and designs. In the “Acknowledgments” (177),
I state that “we show the images on a background based on
the original paper.” In spite of the production team’s best ef-
forts, the paper color in the reproduction does not accurately
represent Blake’s paper. The reproduction is too brown, with
a slight rosy hue, whereas the original is much whiter, with a
slight yellow-gray tint. The one exception is “The Tyger,” plate
40 in copy E. Because of overexposure to sunlight while on
exhibition for many years, the paper has turned brown. The
reproduction is accurate in this regard. The representation
of Blake’s inks and watercolors on all plates is also true to the
original.

The following sentence appears on page 12 of the com-
mentary: “We can see outward evidence of such unities in play, a
central activity in several *Songs of Innocence*, because of the
way the state of innocence promotes a spontaneous marriage
of thought and deed, mind and body.” The sentence should
read as follows: “We can see outward evidence of such uni-
ties in childhood play, a central activity in several *Songs of
Innocence*, because of the way play promotes a spontaneous
marriage of thought and deed, mind and body.” — Robert
N. Essick