

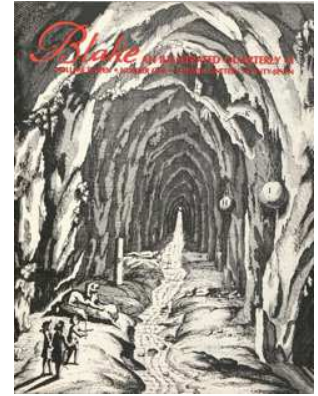
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Geoffrey Keynes, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: A reproduction, with introduction and commentary

John Beer

*Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, Volume 11, Issue 1, Summer 1977, pp. 42-44



explicate the title page to the first Night; also against assuming Blake's "iconographic consistency" (p. xiii). How would the editors explain the cup held by the child about to be cut down by Time, on page 26? Such a cup is often associated in Blake with bacchic figures and with the Scarlet Whore. Hence, it is ordinarily a sinister icon. Odd that it appears in the hands of a child. It is true that the editors express a mild reservation about iconographic consistency (p. viii), but the assumption should be that Blake adapted his images to his context.

The editors' commendable compression of iconographic material has led to small omissions and overstatements. The design, on page 90, of Christ touching an "afflicted" man is said to be "almost identical" to the frontispiece for Blake's *There Is No Natural Religion*, second series, and to those two figures in the lower right corner of "The Divine Image" in *Songs of Innocence*. The "same basic motif" is pointed out in "The Chimney Sweeper" in *Innocence*. Yet, among these designs the editors should have drawn an important distinction. In "The Chimney Sweeper" and the *Night Thoughts* designs the two figures touch; in "The Divine Image" and *There Is No Natural Religion* they do not. Hence, while all four designs share the theme of resurrection, in only two is there a touch which humanizes the action.

The process of iconographic selection is always complex. Very rarely in this edition does that selection appear indelicate. It does seem significant, however, that the "spiritual presences," "Angels," on page 93, are wingless. In the *Night Thoughts* Blake often uses winged creatures for ascension, and wingless beings for visitations.

I think that it is more often in the designs with clear Biblical referents (particularly pages [43], 72, 80, 88) that the editors' interpretations seem to demand the reader's critical attention. On the title page for the third Night, the woman clothed in the sun is pregnant. Through her pregnancy she may escape the endless revolutions of time, turn time to eternity. (Nonetheless, the verso in the water colors shows her even more a prisoner.) On page 88, where Jacob wrestles with an "angel," it is the equality of man and God that Blake seems to stress, an equality quite consistent with the Biblical account and with Blake's emphasis throughout the *Night Thoughts*. (It's an emphasis which also shows Blake's preparedness for the Bible illustrations done for Butts.)

Can we offer an overall interpretation for the *Night Thoughts* engravings? The editors don't suggest one, though many of their comments are interpretative. The repetition of images and of the figures of Death, Time, and Christ do unify the designs and suggest, as Fuseli wrote of Blake's designs for Blair's *Grave*, that they "form of themselves a most interesting Poem." With one exception all of the Christ images appear in the fourth Night. Thus, the grouping of the figures suggests a progression from the world of Time and Death to a world informed by Christ--a progression in keeping with the movement of the poem.

Since the Dover edition is for the general reader, its annotated bibliography is quite properly short. It is short as well because there's been little work done on the *Night Thoughts*. The major studies are listed, though some interesting brief mentions of the *Night Thoughts*, such as John Grant's in *Blake Newsletter* 13, pp. 23-24, are omitted. The first entry in the chronological bibliography is out of order. If the editors wish to consider Thomas Edwards as their first entry, his name should be listed, along with the titles of his catalogues. I must quarrel as well with the fifth entry, which dismisses Adeline Butterworth's *William Blake, Mystic*. Butterworth was, after all, the first to reproduce both the engravings and the full text of the first two Nights. Her reproductions of the engravings are by no means "poor-quality"; the paper stock on which they are printed is superior to that of the Dover edition.

Despite its minor failings, many of them deriving, as I have suggested, from compression and the exigencies of commercial printing, Essick and La Belle have performed a service for students of Blake. Like Robespierre, we can all go to the guillotine with the *Night Thoughts*, now "embellished by the pencil of Blake," in our pockets.

*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake. A reproduction, with introduction and commentary by Geoffrey Keynes. Oxford University Press, London & New York, in association with The Trianon Press, Paris. \$16.95 cloth; \$7.95 paper.



Reviewed by John Beer

This new edition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, issued as it is at a reasonable price, marks an important step in making Blake's work available to the ordinary reader in the form in which he meant it to be seen. For the Blake specialist who already has access to existing facsimiles through a good library it will serve a further important purpose. In recent years it has become clear that a new dimension of Blake's work opens when one looks at the various copies which he executed throughout his life, since almost all of them show interesting variations from one another. It is in some ways a subsidiary enterprise, since there is no evidence that these various executions betray any fundamental change of mind about a book, once constructed, but they can still give evidence of the continuing processes of his mind: the themes which he may now wish to emphasize by rearrangement, by the insertion of an additional plate or plates, or by the different perspectives on a text which can be given through the choice of different colors or the emphasis on particular visual motifs.

The pioneers in this enterprise have been David Erdman and his associates, who have described such variations in detail, but there is a limit to what an individual scholar can do, particularly when, as must often happen, he is forced to carry some differences in his head from one copy to another. It is even more difficult to convey them to other readers



through the printed description. The slide lecture (as David Erdman has found) is often the best way of communicating such discoveries.

The publication of this edition marks an important step in remedying this situation, since the copy it reproduces, copy I (Keynes-Wolf) in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, often thought to be the finest of all, is one that has not so far been available. (It could not be produced as the original Trianon Press facsimile, since the Fitzwilliam, for understandable reasons, has been unwilling to send its copies to Paris for the dismantling which would be inevitable under that process.) As a result of this initiative, a scholar anywhere in the world now has the chance of comparing three versions: this one; copy H (Keynes-Wolf) in the Fitzwilliam (reproduced in Max Plowman's 1927 facsimile); and the Rosenwald copy, reproduced in the Trianon Press facsimile. No printed description can reproduce the experience of comparing say, the slightly sombre effect of copy H, with its cavernous enclosures here and there, and the brighter, rainbow effect of copy I.

The new edition is reproduced with an introduction, a reading text and an arrangement of the reproduction so that two pages of reproduction are regularly interspersed with two of commentary, allowing the plates to appear facing one another as in the original. This is the most satisfactory way of reproducing within the traditional book format, though it might be worthwhile to experiment with an arrangement which would make it possible for pages of interpretation to be pulled out *beyond* the plates and so to be read side by side with the open text.

The commentary, as we have come to expect from Sir Geoffrey Keynes, is uncluttered, clear and very much to the point. He wastes little time over previous interpretations, with the important exception of David Erdman's 1973 essay on the interlinear drawings. He is, indeed, brisk to the point of being almost cavalier with his predecessors: of the two books he does mention, Erdman's *Blake: Prophet against Empire* is given only the second part of its title, together with a date which is that of the second, revised edition, no mention being made of the first, while Sabri-Tabrizi is turned into Fabri-Tabrizi.

The problem with any running commentary on Blake is that it cannot give the reader the initial bearings that he needs before entering the world of the prophetic books. Simple identifications of Blake's personages with human qualities or physical functions will not normally do unless the reader has some grasp of the larger pattern of what is going on. I do not think there is a simple answer to this problem: each reader has to match readings of the larger interpretations against scrutiny of the text itself until he finds a reading that works for him. So far as running commentary is possible, however, this one is good. Some important points are missed out: the reader will not learn anywhere that the Memorable Fancies are satirical versions of Swedenborg's Memorable Relations, for example. Some of the identifications strike one as over-simplistic: to see Rintrah simply as "Wrath," for instance, is to suggest a kind of crude animism which is not characteristic of Blake's work. I am also unhappy with

references to "materialism" and "the spiritual" in commentaries on Blake, for when run together they suggest adherence to a dichotomy between the material and the spiritual which was foreign to his purposes. When, for example, the illustration at the head of plate 11, showing various figures of land and sea, is described as "nature in its spiritual forms," I find it more natural to refer to the text immediately beneath ("The Ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses," etc.) which it seems to be illustrating very closely. Blake's spirits interpenetrate the material to an extraordinary and unaccustomed degree, drastically changing the meaning of the word "spiritual" from conventional usage.

One or two other disagreements may be briefly noted. Keynes interprets "Now is the dominion of Edom and the return of Adam into Paradise" as meaning that Adam has already returned into Paradise; I would read it more in the Biblical form which would suggest "Now is the time for . . .": that is, as an announcement of potentiality and anticipation rather than a statement of achieved fact. On plate 11 he remarks that "a serpent was not infrequently Blake's symbol for the priest of organized religion." Although the Prester Serpent of *The Four Zoas* might support such an identification, I cannot offhand think of other instances where it is explicit. The serpent is always, primarily, Blake's figure for energy (this is one of the few instances where a straightforward identification does work); only a fallen, sneaking serpent would do for the organized priesthood. Similarly I would not agree that the male figure shackled in flames on page 4 "can only be Blake's devil": he can also, for example, be the male shackled under the Law. In such cases, Keynes's own caveat on interpretations of the interlinear decorations--that they are "not always easy and must be regarded as sometimes conjectural"--may profitably be extended to interpretations of the text as well.

The interpretations of the interlinear figures just referred to are, on the other hand, one of the most valuable features of the new edition. The main problem is to know whether in some cases they are straightforward illustrations of the neighboring texts, or counterpointing images of energy (as sometimes seems to be the case in the Song of Liberty). Cautious as one has to be with Blake's left/right symbolism, something of the sort seems to be at work here, since figures on the right are often under the dominion of reason, with a greater emphasis on energy as one looks along to the left.

What of the reproduction? Arnold Fawcus, of the Trianon Press, states in his foreword--"The result, we feel, is as close to the original as can be obtained by a photo-mechanical process"--which is fair. The blurb on the dust-jacket, however, claims that the reproduced plates are "of an accuracy and delicacy which Blake himself would have admired"--which is at the very least questionable--and speaks of their "excellence"--which is certainly too strong a word. The editor, likewise, claims that the reproduction is "in all respects . . . most satisfactory"--which again is somewhat misleading--and is at pains to dispel doubts about the accuracy of register in the lettering which are in fact well founded--at least on the highest standards.



For the plain fact (which will no doubt come as a surprise to many readers) is that the facsimile reproduction which H. John Dent made of the other Fitzwilliam copy of the *Marriage* fifty years ago, though by no means perfect, is a good deal closer to its original than is this one. In Dent's facsimile, colors are sometimes darker than the original, Blake's brown is a little too orange and occasionally a background tint is out; but in other respects the rendering is extremely faithful. This is less so in the present case. The most glaring difference is that Blake used gilt on many of the plates, which both added a touch of subtle brilliance and pointed the imagery of energy. It was no doubt impossible to manage this with a reproduction based on photography (though, again, Dent managed it for his facsimile in 1927), but the omission should at least have been noted somewhere in the edition; I can find no mention of it. I have also noted a number of further differences, primarily in coloring, from the original: this is not intended in any way to be an exhaustive list, simply a note of those differences which have struck me most forcibly in comparing the plates.

- Plate 2 The colors rendered as yellow and orange-brown in the trees and foliage are green and green-brown in the original.
- 3 The "line effect" on the flames is not as defined as, and the colors are more purple than, the original, which is more orange-brown.
- 4-5 In the original, colors are lighter and more delicate, giving better definition to the faces, in particular.
- 8 There is a strong orange effect throughout here, as against the dominant yellow-green effect of the original.
- 9 A light brown appears, similarly--as against the dominant yellows and blues of the original.
- 10 The blues are much stronger, throughout, than in the original.
- 12 The head title is mauve, as against the orange-red of the original.
- 14 & 16 (and elsewhere). The lettering gives a fuzzier and lighter effect than in the original.
- 18-19 The lettering in the blue-green passages is much darker than in the originals, giving a false effect of strong contrast between these and other sections of the text.
- 21 In the head design the purple is very much exaggerated; in the darker sections of the first five lines there is a red effect which is absent from the original.
- 24 The effect is much bolder than in the original.

In many cases of course the effect is surprisingly good, and it is obviously necessary to preserve a sense of proportion in making such criticisms. This copy is on any terms a beautiful book, reasonable value at the price and one which most people, including myself, will be glad to have on their shelves. For many purposes, and especially that of comparison with other reproduced versions, mentioned earlier, it will be invaluable. The point at issue is simply that the imprint of the Trianon

Press, along with the superlatives used in descriptions of the reproductions, may give many readers the impression that this book is of the same quality as that of the limited editions. An extra qualifying word here or there would have been enough to guard against such a false impression. This reservation aside, Arnold Fawcus, Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the Oxford University Press are to be congratulated (-- can hardly, indeed, be sufficiently praised) for bringing this book within the grasp of the ordinary reader.

## Blake Goes German: A Critical Review of

### Exhibitions in Hamburg and Frankfurt 1975 \*

by Detlef W. Dörrbecker



David Bindman, et al., *William Blake 1757-1827* ("Kunst um 1800"), exh. cat. Hamburg and Frankfurt, ed. Werner Hofmann. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1975. 248 pp., 506 illus. (18 in color). DM 28.50 paper. DM 38.00 clothbound.

William Blake, *Die Vermählung von Himmel und Hölle—The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, tr. Lillian Schacherl, ed. Sir Geoffrey L. Keynes. Munich: Prestel Verlag in association with The Trianon Press (Paris), 1975. 72 pp., 27 pp. color facsimile of copy H. Limited edn. of 2,000 copies; DM 38.00 hardbound in slipcase.

William Blake, *Lieder der Unschuld und Erfahrung*, tr. Walter Wilhelm, ed. Werner Hofmann. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag (Insel Taschenbuch, it 116), 1975. 115 pp., 54 pp. color facsimile of copy T of the *Songs*. DM 9.00 paper.

... our object is to draw the attention of Germany to a man in whom all the elements of greatness are unquestionably to be found, even though those elements are disproportionately mingled. . . . but this assuredly cannot lessen the interest which all men, *Germans in a higher degree even than Englishmen*, must take in the contemplation of such a character.<sup>1</sup>

These words, written by Henry Crabb Robinson, passed almost unnoticed when first published in the Hamburg journal *Väterlandisches Museum* in 1811. One hundred sixty-four years later Blake and the Germans were given a second chance, and again it was the city of Hamburg where the action took place. A team of young art historians at the Hamburger Kunsthalle, led by Prof. Werner Hofmann, is concerned with organizing a series of magnificent exhibitions entitled "Kunst um 1800" ("Art around 1800"). Here the works of William Blake were shown from 6 March to 27 April 1975, and then, from 15 May to 27 July 1975, they were to be seen at another important German museum, the Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main. Following the showing of the works of his friend Henry Fuseli<sup>2</sup> in Hamburg the exhibition of a great number of Blake's most important engravings, water-colors, illuminated books and color-prints was placed

\* I am very much indebted to Donna Giromini-Rathkopf who read the manuscript and helped me to improve its diction, and thus its readability.