

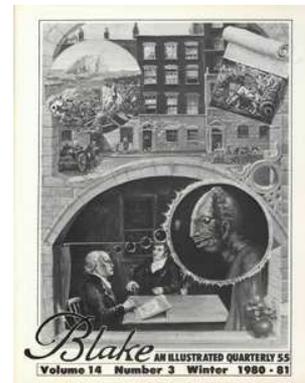
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Janet M. Todd, ed., *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*

Alicia Ostriker

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 14, Issue 3, Winter 1980/1981, pp.
129-131



significant turning point in his style, from the restrained naturalism of his early works to the personal expressionism of his late ones. The shift, of course, is only the most conspicuous version of a tension running throughout all Constable's work between objective representation and subjective expression. Even the rhetorically restrained work of his early period makes covert allusions to private reminiscences (of his boyhood, his father's business, his courtship). In the bolder, reverse strategy taken in *English Landscape Scenery*, Constable identifies the overt personal expressionism of the prints with an utterly empirical study of nature. As the change of title indicates, together with the changes of design asked from Lucas, the key to this identification is Constable's conception of chiaroscuro. As he asserts in his 1833 introduction, chiaroscuro is both a natural and an artistic means for giving landscape its expression. As a result, "the Chiar'oscuro of Nature" permits Constable to

equate nature's moods with his own. At the same time as the inky shadows and glittering highlights evoke the dramatic effects of natural light, they also imply an equally dramatic emotional response to them. (Both dramas, unfortunately, are lost in the British Museum's muzzy reproductions.)

Chiaroscuro is thus Constable's anxious way to seduce the uncomprehending public into collaborating in the meaning and purpose of his art. We participate at once in nature and in the emotional life of an artist deeply moved by nature. If art historians have neglected *English Landscape Scenery*, the reason may be that the prints were not executed by Constable himself. Yet insofar as they carry forward the dramatic revelation of the uses of chiaroscuro, they are directly pertinent to works that he did execute: those intensely tonal late masterpieces like "The Valley Farm" (1835) that seem to aspire to no less than the state of mezzotint.

A Wollstonecraft Anthology



Edited with an Introduction by Janet M. Todd

Janet M. Todd, ed. **A Wollstonecraft Anthology**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. \$16.50.
Reviewed by Alicia Ostriker.

Two years Blake's junior, an ambitious Mary Wollstonecraft arrived in London in 1787 at the age of twenty-eight, seeking a living by her pen and declaring in a letter to her sister, "I am going to be the first of a new genus." Like Blake, Wollstonecraft was essentially self-educated. She had survived a penurious childhood and the conventional and humiliating employments of widow's companion and governess. She had abducted a sister from a bad marriage, organized a school for girls, participated in Newington Green's community of

intellectual Dissenters which included Richard Price, and attended the deathbeds of her mother and of a best friend in Portugal. Having written *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *Mary, a Fiction*, both published by Joseph Johnson, she meant to support herself--and a number of kin. She was, she told Johnson, "not fond of grovelling."

Working for Johnson first as translator and reader, later as reviewer and editorial assistant for *The Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft continued

to produce tracts: at first moral, then--under the influence of the Johnson circle--profoundly political. Her *Original Stories from Real Life*, in which two girls are taught virtue and benevolence by a stern but compassionate mother-figure, was illustrated by Blake in 1788, and contained no revolutionary notions. In 1789 the Bastille fell, and all was changed utterly. Price preached his sermon welcoming the revolution and urging reform in England. Edmund Burke replied with the eloquently conservative *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. And Wollstonecraft excitedly wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, defending reason and liberty, attacking "the demon of property," inherited privilege, and the hypocrisy of Burkean sentiment--which could pity queens but not the hungry poor. In one important digression, Wollstonecraft assails Burke's opinion of women. Another passage criticizes the "narrow circle" of the wealthy family which loves only itself instead of all mankind (cf. Blake on "soft family love" and "storgous appetite") and sells its children into "legal prostitution." Johnson published the book immediately in 1790, and it was widely reviewed. The argument extended in 1792 to the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* brought fame and notoriety; for Horace Walpole the author was "a hyena in petticoats."

Though ardent, impulsive, and thirsty for love, Wollstonecraft seems to have had no affairs of the heart before 1791. In this year she became infatuated with Fuseli, pursued him desperately in person and by letter, and proposed to live with him and his wife. Rejected, she sailed for France. There ensued the self-deluding, initially ecstatic and finally disastrous affair with Gilbert Imlay, which resulted in a daughter, two suicide attempts, and an offer--again rejected--to live with Imlay and his new mistress. A tract on the French Revolution, and a book of travel letters, come from this period. Wollstonecraft's ultimate liaison and secret marriage with Godwin ended in her death in 1797 after the birth of Mary Godwin, and the shattering of her reputation when her widower fondly published her *Posthumous Works* including her love-letters to Imlay, which he praised for their "sentiment and passion," and his *Memoir*, which told the tale of Fuseli as well as Imlay. A torrent of abuse hailed down. A 1798 poem entitled *The Unsex'd Females* depicts a licentious and voluptuous Wollstonecraft. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* ridicules both Godwins and calls *The Rights of Woman* "a scripture, archly fram'd, for propagating whores." Its author had met, by common consent, the death she deserved. If the Pickering "Mary" is a tribute to Mary Wollstonecraft, born like Blake with "a different face," it may owe as much to Blake's horror at her critics as to her actual character.

The largest debt, if debt there be, of Blake to Wollstonecraft, is in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, whose heroine is unique in romantic literature--and unique for Blake, since his later heroines do not feel and think at the same time. Like Wollstonecraft, Oothoon is heart and head. She is both assertively erotic and brilliantly intellectual, generous of spirit yet smart enough to attack patriarchy root and branch. Though the "story" of *Visions* is not Wollstonecraft's, her

proposition to the Fuselis (assuming these matters were gossiped about) might have made Oothoon's offer to fetch silver and gold girls for Theotormon seem plausible. Moreover, the *Vindication of the Rights of Man* may be linked to *Visions* by imagery and rhetoric as well as ideology and the fact that we have a distinctly unladylike female addressing a man who loves chivalry. "Why cannot estates be divided into small farms?" Wollstonecraft asks Burke:

Why does the brown waste meet the traveller's view, when men want to work? . . . Why might not the industrious peasant be allowed to steal a farm from the heath? . . . how much misery lurks in pestilential corners . . . how many mechanics, by a flux of trade or fashion, lose their employment . . . Where is the eye that marks these evils, more gigantic than any of the infragencies of property, which you piously deprecate? Let these sorrows hide their diminished head before the tremendous mountain of woe that thus defaces our globe! Man preys on man, and you mourn for the idle tapestry that decorated a gothic pile, and the dronish bell that summoned the fat priest to prayer.

From *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Blake might, while ignoring its central argument in favor of female independence, have been impressed by a woman who could declare, "I . . . deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty" and "the modesty of women . . . will often be only the artful veil of wantonness." The Blake of "London," "To the Accuser who is the God of This World" and *Jerusalem* would have approved Wollstonecraft's sympathetic treatment of prostitutes, and the fact that one of the two heroines in her second novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*, is an ex-thief and prostitute, while the other lives with the man she loves though married to a brute, and assails the marriage laws in court. Blake would, I think (this is my understanding of the major prophecies) have agreed with Wollstonecraft that "from the tyranny of men . . . the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow makes at present a part of their character . . . is produced by oppression." And if he read Wollstonecraft on the French Revolution, he would surely have been struck--as Janet Todd points out that John Adams and Percy Bysshe Shelley were--by its idea of mental evolution ("the image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding"), her dialectical view of history and politics, and her ability both to deplore and to analyze the causes of revolutionary violence.

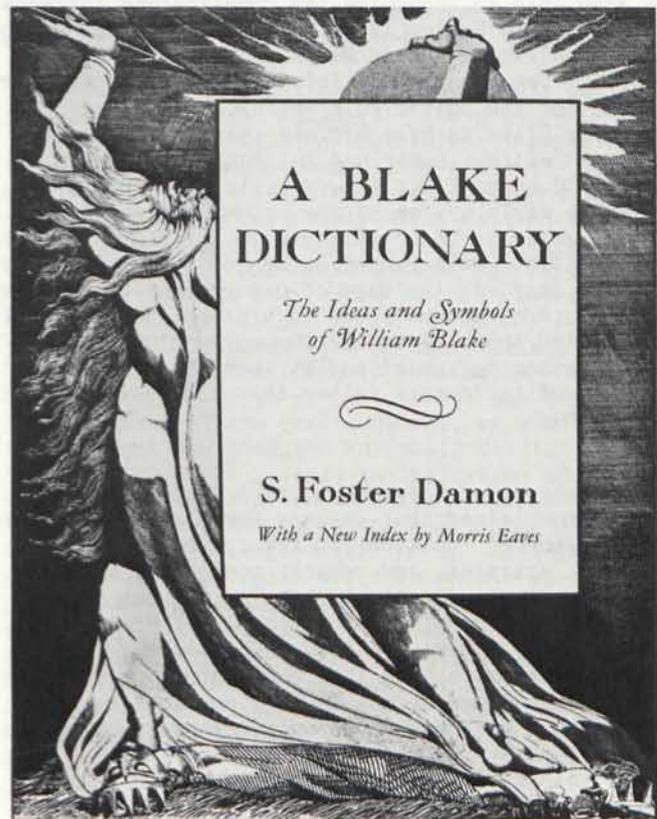
Todd's *Wollstonecraft Anthology* performs the valuable service of making selections available from all the author's works, some of which exist in print only in expensive facsimile editions. The general introduction gives a good synopsis of Wollstonecraft's life, writing, and reputation, stressing the development of her thought from rationalism to radicalism, and seeing her life essentially as a "struggle" against her own social conditioning. Blakeans may be interested in this point, though Blake's personal struggle with Reason is archetypically male, while Wollstonecraft's with Passion is archetypically female.

The headnotes to individual selections in this volume place them in the context of their genres, and the selections themselves are ample, illustrating the variety of the writer's styles and concerns. I personally would have enjoyed seeing fewer of the not-immensely-original "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters" and the uniformly disdainful reviews of novels by women Wollstonecraft thought were

idiots. I would have liked more of *The Wrongs of Woman* and some of the early letters to friends and family as well as the letters to Imlay and Godwin, and perhaps one of the *Vindications* in full. On the other hand, the decision to give a large sampling of hard-to-find material makes sense. All in all, this will be a highly useful book.

S. Foster Damon. *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, with a new index by Morris Eaves.
Boulder: Shambhala, 1979. xii + 532 pp.
\$9.95.

Reviewed by John E. Grant.



When Damon's *Dictionary* was published in 1965 almost all scholars recognized it as an indispensable companion to Blake studies. It was handsomely printed in large clear type and thus quite expensive. Not many who acquired the first printing also got the slightly revised and amplified second printing in 1967, which Brown University Press has commendably kept in print. In 1971 Dutton brought out a small paperback edition of the 1965 printing with severely reduced print and narrowed margins--presumably because Brown University Press wished to reserve the small improvements of the 1967 printing (chiefly articles on EVERLASTING GOSPEL, INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE, and LAVATER). The Dutton edition went out of print some years ago. Now Shambhala has reissued the 1965 version in the same small print as the Dutton reprint but with more generous margins and also an excellent index (pp. 463-532) by Morris Eaves. May Damon's great work of scholarship, thus helpfully embellished, long remain available at a moderate price.

It may not be obvious why a "dictionary" should need an index, especially since the interconnected

entries are usually cross-referenced. But Damon's *Dictionary* is practically an encyclopedia of the subjects indicated in the subtitle, and anyone who consults the *Dictionary* needs to be able to skim over its entries without turning every page, for one symbol leads into another beyond the cross-references given under any one entry. Only after running through Eaves's index can one answer the elementary pre-publication question: "Have you checked Damon's *Dictionary*?" (I did notice an important unindexed mention of Joseph of Arimathea on p. 136; this is fair warning that one must also consult Erdman's *Concordance*.)

Damon was a great scholar because he had read deeply in all the authors Blake himself read and also in more recent authors like Melville and Joyce that Blake would have cared for had he lived long enough. Gossip used to represent Damon as a mystagogue, but nobody who conversed with him thought of him as a crank, even though some of his students admitted they couldn't work up an interest in subjects he knew deeply. During the meetings I had with him late in his life, Damon was a wonderful