

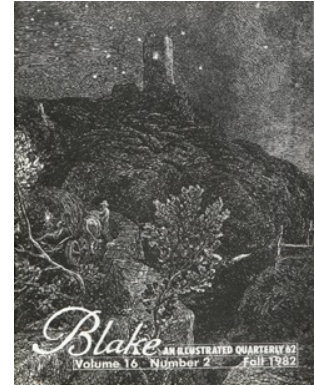
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

R E V I E W

Joëlle Abitbol, trans., William Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel/L'évangile éternel*

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written in pencil. Nor does he identify other annotations in pencil or in a light brown ink quite distinct from the black ink of the majority of the annotations. Blake's editors have attributed some of these annotations to a hand other than Blake's, and surely this is a matter Shroyer should have taken up in his introduction. He cannot be held responsible for his publisher's failures in reproducing the original, but even if he had expected high quality photographic work he should have realized the necessity for identifying different inks and different hands.

Another difficulty not overcome by the publisher is the presence of annotations very close to the spine of the book. Apparently the volume could not be opened wide enough to expose such annotations completely to the camera. As a result, it seems as though Blake wrote "ellent" next to aphorism no. 40; in the original, "Excellent" is clear and fully present. The lengthy annotations in the inner margins of aphorisms nos. 248, 342, 532, 533, and 605 are converted to odd bits and pieces. Once again, the reader must return to typographic texts in order to make sense of the facsimile.

Professor Shroyer has indicated in correspondence<sup>4</sup> that the *Aphorisms on Man* is the first volume

in a proposed series of facsimiles of Blake's annotated books. Future volumes will have full transcriptions of the annotations. These transcriptions, if accompanied by appropriate notes on such matters as differences in ink, should go a long way toward solving some of the problems burdening the *Aphorisms* facsimile. One can only hope that a solid scholar like Shroyer will be better served by his publisher in prospective volumes, and that we can use them with full confidence in their accuracy and completeness. As Blake wrote, "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars."

<sup>1</sup> *Blake Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 65-88; *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 572-90; *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), II, 1350-87. A new edition of Erdman's text is forthcoming, one which has been carefully collated in galley proof against the original volume in the Huntington Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Erdman, p. 590; *Blake's Writings*, ed. Bentley, II, 1386.

<sup>3</sup> All comments on the accuracy of the facsimile are based on a comparison between it and the original volume in the Huntington Library.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from R. J. Shroyer to Nelson Hilton, 6 May 1981.

William Blake. **The Everlasting Gospel/  
L'évangile éternel**, trans. by Joëlle  
Abitbol [text and French translation].  
Paris: Editions Vrac, 1981. 45 pp., illus.  
**Reviewed by Krzysztof Z. Cieszkowski**

**B**lake's *The Everlasting Gospel* exists in manuscript form scattered through the pages of the *Notebook* in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, and in part in the Rosenbach MS; it is usually dated c. 1818. A full treatment of the work and the bibliographical and interpretational problems it raises can be found in Randel Helms's essay *The Genesis of "The Everlasting Gospel"* in *Blake Studies*, 9 (1980), 122-60.

Joëlle Abitbol and Samuel Tastet's edition prints the text and Mme. Abitbol's French translation in parallel; it constitutes "Volume I" of a series entitled *Double Same/Double Même*. Despite the inscription of the verso of the title-page, "c Editions G. Keynes--1957," the text used adheres to the conjecturally chronological arrangement printed by Bentley; but its adherence is limited: Abitbol and Tastet eschew Blake's capitalization and a fair

proportion of his punctuation, and the passages used are selected according to no obvious procedure (there is no mention of the fact that the text is selective). The text takes seven of the eleven or twelve sections and rearranges them according to no immediately apparent plan, labeling them I-VII; in Keynes's nomenclature, the order of the edition is: Supplementary passage 2, Supplementary passage 1, i, a, d, e, b, f; in Bentley's nomenclature (following the Rosenbach MS and attempting a chronological realignment), the order is b, c, d, e, j, f, i, l. In any case, there are three sections missing, including the short prose passage at the beginning, and one of the two "Was Jesus Humble?" passages (p. 52 in the *Notebook*).

The text and illustrations are printed in an unattractive ochre-colored ink, and italics are used for quotations; the French text is aligned to the right-hand margin, which makes reading difficult. The translation does not attempt to reproduce Blake's irregular four-foot iambic line, and so loses the headlong momentum of the invective of the poem; it also does not attempt the paired rhymes of the original, although rhyming couplets seem to occasionally slip into the French translation as if by chance (e.g., lines 3-4, 5-6 of the first section). The final two-line section is particularly inadequately translated: "Je suis certain que Jésus ne ferait pas cela, / A un Anglais ou à un Juif" distorts the meaning of "I am sure this Jesus will not do, / Either for Englishman or Jew"--the addition of "cela" loses the idiomatic sense of the line and introduces all sorts of new (and unwanted) meanings.

The editors of this text include a quotation from Revelation 14:6, "and I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth . . .";

this may be the source of Blake's title for what is admittedly a very fragmentary and obscure work, but it need not necessarily be so, and has no further referential connection with the poem. Its inclusion adds nothing more than an additional disruptive perspective.

Blake's pen and watercolor drawing *The Blasphemer* (Tate Gallery 5195; Butlin 446, dated c. 1800) is reproduced on the cover of the publication; on the back it is reproduced in reverse (probably to highlight the title of the series), an unattractive proceeding under any circumstances; coarse-grained ochre reproductions of details from the watercolor appear inside the text, again with a laterally-reversed copy of the image on the facing page. *The Blasphemer* is usually taken to represent the stoning to death of the Israelite woman's son who blasphemed the name of the Lord, Leviticus 24:23 (Butlin 446), although William Rossetti retitled it *The Stoning of Achan*, after Joshua 7:1, 18-25; the relationship of this subject (or these subjects) to the text in question is problematical if not dubious--Blake's poem is a headlong invective against a particularly milk-and-water conception of Christ, and the stoning of a tied, tensed figure by fierce-eyed elders bears little relation to this. Among the bibliographical data of the edition, "Gravure de couverture de William Blake" is translated as "Design cover of William Blake"--as if attempting to establish a connection.

This is a most unattractive edition of a Blake work, and also a wasted opportunity; such publication of a single work draws the attention to a fragment of Blake's oeuvre which it inevitably loses when buried amid the bulk of a complete edition, and it is a pity that the work could not have been done with greater care and greater accuracy and attention to detail.