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R E V I E W

James King and Charles Ryskamp, eds., *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, vol. 3: Letters, 1787-1791

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as by our passions. (Think of the Houyhnhnms' rational plan to exterminate the Yahoos, which gives us a taste of what was to come, in Hitler's death camps). It may even be said that it is precisely Gulliver's desire to be a purely rational being that leads him into the madness of that stable, in which he enjoys the fumes of his groom—while unable to tolerate the smell of his own family—and from which he writes a book to turn the rest of us into rational creatures. Earlier in the period, Rochester wrote *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind*. And the most famous book of the greatest philosopher of the time, John Locke, might well have been titled *An Essay on the Lack of Human Understanding*. "What is striking about the *Essay*," Richard Ashcraft noted in an important essay in 1969, "is not the claims it advances on behalf of human reason, but rather, its assertion of the meagreness of human knowledge." This statement, in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives* (1969), would not shock those following recent scholarship. Nor would George Rosen's comment, in Harold Pagliaro's *Irrationalism In The Eighteenth Century* (1972), that the period "was as much the critic of reason as its apostle" (p. 255). For a number of major writers in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, reason was held in little repute.

This leads to a last point. At the beginning of the book, Stock tells us that "Basil Willey's opinion of the [eighteenth] century remains the model"—"a period," Willey argued, "in which the dry light of reason was free to penetrate the furthest limits of the universe" (p. 5). For whom, we might ask, does this remain "the model"? Certainly not to informed students of the century. Indeed, ever since Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), one of the central tasks of contemporary scholarship has been to extricate the age from such linsey-woolsey tags, many invented by later periods. (The term "neo-classical," for instance, also employed in Stock's book, has been traced back to William Rushton's *Afternoon Lectures on English Literature* in 1863. No earlier occurrences are known.) The author seems vaguely aware that these old tags have been recently challenged and that "Whig theories of progressivism have come increasingly under attack" (p. 21). From his comments, one would expect this study of religious yearnings and fears to be part of that larger reassessment. It is therefore disconcerting to be asked early on "when in fact does an age of rationalism begin" (p. 6)?—and then to later find a chapter with the words "Rationalism . . . in Pope and Swift" or hear about the "rise of rationalism" (p. 70). The book, in short, assumes the very teleology it attacks. It also shows little awareness of recent work. It is remarkable to discover that it "is now customary" to value Thomson's *Seasons* "for his descriptions of nature, of which his actual ideas are merely the dispensable underpinnings" (p. 178). (Ralph Cohen's *The Unfolding of the Seasons*, cited by the author on the

very same page, buried that view back in 1970). The author likes to speak of the "leading authority" on this or that writer; but these authorities—Havens on Young in 1922 or Tompkins on Monk Lewis in 1927—often turn out to be long dead and usually superseded. Equally surprising are the omissions. Richard Westfall's *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (1958) would have helped the author, particularly in his chapter discussing the debate over miracles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here and elsewhere, however, one searches the notes in vain for a reference to Westfall's book, or to David Morris's major study, *The Religious Sublime* (1972), or to Jacob Viner's *Role of Providence in the Social Order* (1972), or to Martin Battestin's *The Providence of Wit* (1974), or to Horton Davies's superb books on *Worship and Theology in England* (1961-1975), to name a few. Blake scholarship has blossomed in the last twenty years, when most of the important work has been done; yet Stock cites only one book—Altizer's—published since 1963.

There may be a place for an overarching survey of religious yearnings in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature. For the time being, however, other studies will have to suffice. This, I suspect, isn't it.

James King and Charles Ryskamp, eds.
The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper. Vol. III: Letters, 1787-1791. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. xxiv + 630 pp. \$79.00.

Reviewed by Donald H. Reiman

When I received this third volume of William Cowper's *Letters* for review, I hoped to be able to relate the ideals of Cowper to those of the Romantics by centering my essay on how Cowper confronted the French Revolution. I soon discovered, however, that he successfully avoided confronting it. Although the letters contain a handful of remarks on events in France (so few that I shall be able to quote the bulk of them in this review), his persistent concerns were more local and parochial. In

this insularity, he probably mirrors the general attitudes of older liberals ("Whig[s] on the old plan," as he describes himself on pp. 245 and 354-55) toward social and political change within Britain and across the Channel.

In these letters, Cowper strongly supports the Parliamentary battle of 1788 against the slave trade (now almost forgotten) and even contributes his mite by writing some propagandistic poems to be set to music, in an effort to influence public opinion (see pp. 89, 103, 106-07, 172, 177-78). He opposes cruel field sports, describing in disgusting detail the only fox hunt that he ever witnessed (pp. 117-19). On 19 April 1790, he explains "thank heav'n!" that "the Bastile [is] now no more" but he does so in parentheses, while alluding to his own passage in *The Task* (V, 379-445) that describes the plight of a prisoner in the Bastille (p. 369). He supports religious toleration and particularly a bill put forward by his Catholic friends the Throckmortons to ease the Catholic disabilities (pp. 295, 301, 354 f.), and at the end of the volume he even refuses to translate four of Milton's Latin poems on the Gunpowder Plot because he thinks that "they are written with an asperity, which, however it might be warranted in Milton's Day, would be extremely unseasonable now": "I should think . . . that the dying embers of antient animosity had better not be troubled" (p. 583 and fn.). Like all right thinking people of his day, he honored the humanitarian prison reformer John Howard and wrote a (prose) epitaph for a proposed monument to be erected at the site of Howard's death in the Crimea (p. 411).

Though Cowper's actual comments on the French struggles for self-government are not numerous, they are friendly and relatively sanguine at first. Apart from the earlier aside on the fall of the Bastille, Cowper's first such comment comes on 1 December 1789 in a letter to John Newton, in which he also alludes to his central interest throughout this volume—his translation of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*:

In my next, perhaps, I shall find leisure to bestow a few lines on what is doing in France and in the Austrian Netherlands; though to say the truth I am much better qualified to write an essay on the siege of Troy, than to descant on any of these modern revolutions. I question if in either of the countries just mention'd, full of bustle and tumult as they are, there be a single character whom Homer were he living, would deign to make his hero. The populace are the heroes now, and the stuff of which gentlemen heroes are made, seems to be all expended. (p. 321)

In a letter to his cousin Lady Hesketh on 7 July 1790, Cowper shows his system of values to be in direct conflict with the course of events in France:

The French who like all lively folks, are extreme in every thing, are such in their zeal for Freedom, and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lacqueys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Difference of rank and sub-

ordination, are, I believe of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well being of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in [religion] is exactly that which animates their politics, and unless time should sober the[m], they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles, they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings, as they have sometimes treated their idols. (pp. 396-97)

A comparison of these sentiments with such Romantic reflections on the Revolution as "France: An Ode" and the Preface to *The Revolt of Islam* shows that the Romantics shared more of Cowper's prejudices and values than might at first seem likely, while a backward glance confirms that the chief article on which they differed—the divine ordinance of a social hierarchy—was a preconception that Cowper shared with Milton, among many others.

On 26 February 1791, at a time when Lafayette and his allies were still very much in control in France and the most notable events in recent memory were the Festival of the Federation of the previous July and the passage of laws designed to commit the loyalty of the clergy to the civil constitution (nothing to frighten a loyal Anglican), Cowper defended the French against the scorn of his friend Walter Bagot:

I think your Latin quotations very applicable to the present state of France. But France is in a situation new and untried before. When she is a little more accustom'd to it and has time to digest coolly and arrange the chaos of business before her, she will acquit herself better. At least, I think, she will never be enslaved again. (p. 470)

Cowper was now optimistic enough, partly because of the changes he had seen wrought by the French on an entrenched tyranny, to assert "Le bon tems viendra" (p. 260), the exact sentiment that (in Italian, rather than French) would adorn Shelley's ring thirty years later.

Finally, however, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, 11 July 1791, Cowper shows that he pities the plumage more than he remembers the dying bird:

You judge right in supposing that I pitied the King and Queen of France. I can truly say that, except the late melancholy circumstances of our own (when our Sov'reign had lost his sense, and his wife was almost worried out of hers) no Royal distresses have ever moved me so much. And still I pity them, prisoners as they are now for life, and since their late unsuccessful attempt, likely to be treated more scurvily than ever. Heaven help them, for in their case, all other help seems vain! (p. 543)

This passage points us back to Cowper's concern for the madness of King George III (partly because, like the Romantics, he despised and feared the self-seeking politics of the Prince of Wales), and to his affirmation on 25 February 1789, when the King had recovered from his first attack:

The King's recovery is with us a subject of daily conversation and of continual joy. It is so providentially timed, that no man who believes a providence at all, can say less of it than that *This is the finger of God!* Never was a hungry faction so mortally disap-

pointed. . . . It is a wonderful æra in the history of this country; and posterity will envy us the happiness of having lived at such a period (pp. 263-64).

Let me set beside this pæon to the recovery of George III (and to the confusion of the Prince and of Charles James Fox, his crony of that period) Shelley's sentiments at the end of "A Defence of Poetry": "our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty." Whereas Cowper places his faith in the governance of historical process by Providential forces, Shelley celebrates the powers of the human intellect and spirit that are stirred up in times of political crisis. Both set their faith in a causal relationship between times of stress and extraordinary achievements, but whereas for Shelley the activating force is (probably) imminent, for Cowper, He is transcendent. Blake's position, I believe, is more ambiguous than either of these. Certainly his rhetoric and the structures of his works often suggest that he is as much of Cowper's party as Shelley's.

William Cowper represents many of the best features of the world that was about to dissolve in the acid of acrimonious conflicts between ideologies that took form or gained adherents in the wake of the French Revolution. His reactions to the early development of those ideologies and parties, from which he kept totally aloof, enable us to mark the extent of their growth and dissemination throughout the society. They also help to remind us that morality and humanity were not novel concomitants of the modern ideologues, as some superficial partisans of the Romantics occasionally try to imply. Indeed, though Cowper was in every way unfit to provide a model for surviving in the rough and tumble world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he can (as I suggested in an earlier review) remind us of qualities and virtues we have lost and might well seek to foster, as a safety check upon and as a complement to Romantic freedom and individuality.

Cowper's central subject, in these lengthy letters, as in those of the earlier volumes, is himself and his own simple life and desires. But he has changed his orientation. He is no longer a religious enthusiast, as in volume I, or simply the man of rural retirement and quiet observation and commentary, sometimes in occasional poetry, that we encountered in volume II. Now he is the Poet—or even "An Author by profession . . ." (p. 311). In this shift, he would seem to be moving in the direction that the Romantics were to adopt as their central identities. But Cowper does not succumb to the tendency of even the great Romantics sometimes to place their egos at the center of their value-systems. Cowper, indeed, refuses to make his imagination or consciousness either a source or the center of values. He accepts himself as a limited being, neither a paragon in himself nor a

model for most other men and women.

When others called Blake and Shelley mad, they and their admirers retorted that the real madmen were those running the asylum. Cowper, on the other hand, was very much aware that his grasp upon sanity was precarious and that he had to struggle to mediate between his desires and ideals and unpleasant realities that surrounded him. He therefore withdrew to a defensive position that enabled him to control a portion of his environment, without totally withdrawing from society. Even when he was not under any particular emotional stress, Cowper (like the late William Ellery Leonard) had a strong phobia about traveling. When Mrs. King, a correspondent with whom he had developed a strong epistolary friendship but whom he had never seen, asks him to visit her and her husband, he obliquely tells her that such a trip would be impossible for him: "I am a strange creature, who am less able than any man living to project any thing out of the common course with a reasonable prospect of performance. . . . Almost twenty years have I been thus unhappily circumscribed, and the remedy is in the hand of God only" (p. 400). About two weeks later, he is slightly more explicit with his old friend and benefactor Joseph Hill: "you must understand that I have not slept from home these 19 years and that I despair of being ever able to do it more" (p. 403). These remarks help to explicate a more offhand remark to his cousin Lady Hesketh (to whom he had obviously revealed his secret fear) as he prepared to journey by chaise to visit his friend Charles [Bagot] Chester at nearby Chicheley:

when I saw this moment a poor old woman coming up the lane, opposite my window, I could not help sighing and saying to myself—"Poor, but happy old woman! Thou art exempted by thy situation in life from riding in chaises, and making thyself fine in a morning, happier therefore in my account than I, who am under the cruel necessity of doing both." (p. 389)

Feeling as he did his own limitations, Cowper spent much time in these letters advising two young university men who came to him during the years covered by this volume and became his admiring friends to follow practical pursuits and to resist any shyness and fear of novelty or of travel. One of these men, Samuel Rose, wrote to him as an admirer in 1787 and sent him a copy of Burns's *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. This unexpected stimulation helped Cowper to break out of six months of depression. Rose became almost a son to Cowper for a time, to a certain extent comforting him for the loss of William Unwin, whose death on 29 November 1786 may have precipitated that period of depression. (Cowper mentions Unwin only three times in this volume.) By the time that Rose's London legal career—in which Cowper had aided him by judiciously introducing him to influential friends—and his marriage had left Rose less time to visit Cowper and to act as amanuensis for the Homeric translations, Cowper had met and taken a

warm liking to his young maternal cousin John Johnson, then a student at Cambridge. Johnny, Cowper wrote to Johnson's aunt, "I love as if he were my son, and . . . I believe is not unwilling to serve me in that capacity since I am likely never to have any other" (24 November 1790; p. 431).

Samuel Rose, the lawyer whom William Hayley hired to defend Blake against the charge of sedition in January 1804, was not, it seems, a blood relation of John Johnson, as Geoffrey Keynes was led to believe (see Blake, *Letters*, ed. Keynes [3rd edition, 1980], pp. xxi, 75-80, and *passim*). Rather, he was related to John Johnson and Cowper by more significant intellectual, moral, and humane affinities. When Blake imagined Rose's death (late in 1804) and saw "Sweet Rose" entering "into the Celestial City," with bells ringing and trumpets sounding to mark his "arrival among Cowper's Glorified Band of Spirits of Just Men made Perfect" (Blake, *Letters*, p. 106), Blake was also linking himself to the same "great society" of noble men. Significantly, however, Hayley, who formed the strongest link between Cowper's circle and Blake, also saw a negative affinity between the two greater poets. Hayley wrote to Lady Hesketh:

I have also ever wished to befriend Him [Blake] from a motive, that, I know, our dear angelic Cowper *would approve*, because this poor man with an admirable quickness of apprehension & with uncommon powers of mind, has *often appeared to me on the verge of Insanity*. . . . (Blake, *Letters*, p. 118)

Blake, to avoid being relegated to the level of a weak-spirited valetudinarian, whose wife (Hayley thought) was his strongest prop, had to reject the condescending "pity" of this most helpful of his patrons and so distance himself from Cowper's memory.

Even when Cowper identified himself as a "Poet" or "Author," he kept "art" in perspective. He had begun to write poetry—just as he had earlier gardened and made furniture—to occupy his mind and keep it from morbid thoughts. He also enjoyed writing letters to his few friends for the same reason, and in order to make sure that his correspondents did not forget him, he had always answered his mail promptly with letters as entertaining as possible. In this volume, having committed himself to translating *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* for a large group of subscribers and finding that most of his time was occupied in constant revision in order to approach the quality that he demanded of himself (as well as to satisfy the critics to whom he and his publisher sent the early drafts for review), Cowper necessarily modified his habits by writing all his letters before breakfast, apologizing to his growing list of correspondents when he had to delay or curtail his replies. And, though he blamed his occupation of translating for this falling off in his epistolography, he always assumed that he should apologize (e.g., "You must know, my dear Rowley, that a man having two great volumes in the Press, is no

more master of his time than the greatest man in the Kingdom . . .," p. 458). He never pretended that his correspondents were imposing upon his valuable time, thereby impeding literary history. Unlike Joyce or other more recent authors, he did not believe that authorship, of whatever character or quality, licensed a person to use or abuse his friends and acquaintances.

In my review of volume II of Cowper's *Letters* (Blake, 17 [#65, Summer 1983], 26-29), I discussed how poets of Cowper's social class (which included Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley of the later period) began with a gentlemanly ideal of authorship that was opposed to the commercial attitudes of "authors by trade." Eventually the great financial success enjoyed by the poetry of Scott, Byron, Moore, and others forced even Wordsworth and Shelley to deal with the question of commercial success, if only in a negative sense (by saying that the public taste was debased and predicting their own vindication by posterity). Cowper, whose small patrimony was being eaten away by daily expenses, even with the largess of Lady Hesketh, Joseph Hill, and other friends, finally came to count on a monetary reward for his translations from Homer. He worked hard—and encouraged his friends to work—to secure subscribers for the edition. And he engaged in what for him was a difficult negotiation with Joseph Johnson, who bought the rights to the first printing of the edition, leaving Cowper with the copyright (see particularly pp. 537-40, 542-43, 544-45, and 569). But Cowper retained the basic attitudes of the gentleman author, in the sense that he devoted extraordinary time and care to every word he published, abjuring the quick, easy way to make extra money by hurrying through his translations or even through the few reviews he wrote for Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review*, beginning in 1789 (see pp. 239, 259-61, 277, etc.).

One very practical result of Cowper's concern for his reputation was the meticulous care he took, not only in composing and correcting his poems, but even in transcribing them for his personal friends. In two letters of August and September 1788, Cowper transcribes the eleven quatrains of his poem "The Dog and the Water-lily" (pp. 200-02 and 212-13), and a collation shows that, not only did Cowper make no verbal changes in the text when he transcribed it three weeks later, but he made very few variations even in orthography and punctuation. The first text, copied for Lady Hesketh, has no abbreviations, whereas in copying for his young admirer Samuel Rose, he indulges himself by using the ampersand in place of "and" five times and by using the alternative form "tho'" in place of "though" once. The only other changes alter five capital letters to lower-case and one lower-case initial letter to a capital (in the title, "Water-lily" becomes "Water-Lily"), omit one hyphen ("newly-blown" to "newly blown"), and change a period at the end of the tenth stanza to a semicolon. All other

capitalizations and every apostrophe used to indicate that a syllable ought not to be pronounced (e.g., "mark'd" and "consid'rate" in the sixth stanza) are identical in the two versions. Editors of Cowper's poetry, at least, need not change "accidentals" on the theory that he did not care or failed to give time to such minutiae. (I am amused at those textual editors—and copy editors—who seem to believe that their knowledge and concern with the form of a work are automatically greater than those of its author.)

James King and Charles Ryskamp deserve our gratitude for their care and faithfulness in presenting Cowper's letters just as he wrote them. Because the editors have not interfered with the form of presentation, we can make such judgments on Cowper's attitude toward the form of his poetry without having to consult the original manuscripts each time. Only such diplomatic editions begin to fulfill the needs of the serious scholar (and who besides large libraries and serious specialist scholars can afford to purchase editions at these prices?). Naturally, if even Homer sometimes nods, the editors of his translator's letters also do. But though my function as a reviewer requires me to mention a few minor problems, I will say again that the edition has an overall high quality of textual accuracy that is rare even in our age of massive, cooperative editorial enterprises.

In collating the texts of a number of letters with the manuscripts in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, I found a few discrepancies that deserve mention, but I found more frequently that the editors had captured perfectly Cowper's idiosyncrasies of idiom and orthography where I was at first misled by superficial appearances. Among the minor oversights I encountered were these: First, the editors give Cowper the benefit of the doubt occasionally by adding apostrophes where they are appropriate but do not appear in the manuscript (e.g., in "Book's" at p. 145, line 26). Second, they sometimes fill in syllables actually missing from an abbreviated or stylized word (e.g., the "ment" in "Compliments" on p. 497, bottom). Third, they occasionally print without brackets letters and even short words that are actually illegible because marred by seal tears or covered by the seal (e.g., "in" at p. 184, line 22); sometimes they also record without brackets dates and other information from postmarks that are, in fact, totally illegible (e.g., the date on the London morning duty stamp on p. 144, where their inference of "13" may well be an error). Finally, there are a few minor omissions, mistranscriptions, and palpable typographical errors. In one manuscript Cowper interlined very faintly, with an almost dry pen, the clause, "were I to send you verse," (p. 86, line 5, caret between "you" and "which"); those words apparently did not appear on the photocopy and were omitted from the transcription. On page 497 (line 10), "above" has been mistranscribed as "about" (but since the whole issue is whether Cowper has "not about"

or "not above" two ounces of cheese left, no great harm results). I have also noted what seem to be typos—omissions, transpositions, or substitutions of one or two letters of a word—on pages 30, 266, 283, 339, 343, 396, and 573; none of these interferes with Cowper's clear meaning. In the mass of Cowper's words crowded into 600 pages of closely printed text, there must be a few dozen more such minor oversights, but unless they are of greater moment than any I discovered, they would have no effect on any use I can imagine for Cowper's correspondence. More remarkable than these signs of human fallibility is the minute fidelity with which Cowper's characteristic capitalizations, spellings, abbreviations, and idioms have been reproduced throughout the first three volumes.

The quality of the annotation in this volume, however, does not seem to me to be quite as high as in the previous two volumes of *Letters*. In general, the notes become less pertinent and precise as the subject matter widens from Cowper's immediate circle to events in the larger political and social worlds and as the need for biographical reference works yields to the need for comprehension of historical events and Cowper's reaction to them. For example, Cowper comments several times on the Birmingham Riots of 14–17 July 1791 (see pp. 547, 548, 550, and 568), in each case expressing his contempt for the hoodlums who burned and destroyed in the name of King, Church, and Country. Yet the footnotes at pp. 547 and 568 seem to imply that Cowper considered the riots to be as much the fault of the Nonconformist sympathizers with the French Revolution as of the Loyalist mob. The sentiments of Mrs. Carter quoted in the latter note were obviously not what Lady Hesketh had conveyed to Cowper in the letter he was answering, for in the other three comments, he does not hold the liberals at all to blame for the disturbance. Or, to take a subtler problem of annotation, on page 275, when Cowper mentions that his friend Mrs. Throckmorton was to be present "at the Ball at Brooks's," we find a long note giving the location and founding date of the famous London club, but no indication of the real significance of Cowper's gossip to Lady Hesketh: the Throckmortons were in the circle of the Prince of Wales and Charles James Fox, who held forth at Brookes's during this period. As a rule, Cowper's letters do not require extensive historical annotation, but his few political and historical allusions are, therefore, like Jane Austen's, even more significant than in the case of a writer who can be assumed to be vitally interested in such things. I have a short list of other examples of incomplete or erroneous annotations that need not occupy space here, but which I shall send to the editors.

Readers of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* will, however, be interested in a valuable supplement to the story of Cowper's translation of Homer, as it unfolds through-

out this volume. Professor James King has published an essay entitled "An Unlikely Alliance: Fuseli as Revisor of Cowper's Homer" in *Neophilologus*, 67 (1983), 468-79, that adds to Cowper's few comments on Henry Fuseli's involvement some quotations from Fuseli's manuscript letters about his reading and suggestions for improvements in the translation. This article, together with Cowper's remarks to and about Joseph Johnson's way of sending him manuscripts to read for possible publication, casts light on the way Johnson—and presumably other bookseller-publishers—conducted business in the 1780's and 1790's. The attentive reader of Cowper's *Letters* will learn many other things about authorship and publication in the period, but let me leave students of Blake with two in the area of technology: Cowper asked for—and seems to have received—in December 1787 "a new invention, called an everlasting pencil," which seems to have been very similar to mechanical pencils of more recent vintage (see pp. 72 and 76). And unless I am much mistaken, Cowper's remark to John Johnson on 18 December 1790, "I address you with a new pen, a great rarity with me, and for which I am indebted to my Lady Cousin" (p. 443), must mean that he wrote with a steel pen point, rather than a quill—something I would not have thought likely for a person in Cowper's rural retirement at that date. (According to the article on "Pen" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Metallic pens, although known since the days of Pompeii, were little used until the 19th century and did not become common until near the middle of that century." The article goes on to mention that Joseph Priestley had such a pen handmade for him in 1780 and to describe "Steel pens made and sold in London by a man named Wise in 1803. . . .") Neither of these innovations in writing equipment struck me as being as novel, however, as some of Cowper's idiomatic phrases, as when he (addicted to the use of playful pet names, such as the "Frogs" for the Throckmortons and "Cuzzy-Wuzzy" for Lady Hesketh) addressed Lady Hesketh, in a term of endearment, as a "gentle Yahoo" (p. 76).

The copy that Oxford University Press sent for review this time seems to be more sturdily bound and more physically durable than the copies of volumes I and II about which I complained in the earlier reviews. Though a reviewer's single copy remains too small a sample for purposes of valid generalization, I am delighted to testify to my pleasure in finding improvement in an area that posed a serious problem in the copies of the two previous volumes that I saw. A British colleague once suggested to me that the reason that the food in English restaurants remained so abominable, in comparison with the very fine cooking in British homes of my acquaintance, was simply that the British are too polite to complain about the shoddy goods and service. Rather than allow major publishers or other institutions in our area of professional interest and competence to

degenerate into the equivalent of Fawcett Towers, it is our individual and collective responsibility to call their attention to inadequacies that are within their power to correct, assured that they will consider such advice a favor because those in positions of responsibility really strive to gain the respect and gratitude of the profession they serve. To find that a problem I pointed out in reviewing previous volumes (they almost fell apart in one's hand) has, apparently, been remedied gives me renewed hope for the return of the World's Great Age.

John Beer. *William Blake*. Windsor, Berkshire, England: Profile Books, 1982. 52 pp. £1.50.

Reviewed by James Bogan

The concept is admirable: a fifty-page booklet on Blake and his works, something more than a textbook introduction and less than a major study. John Beer's *William Blake* fits the outward description but does not provide the essential information needed by the newcomer to Blake. He does chart Blake's intellectual life well, making clear the links to Swedenborg and Thomas Taylor. His perceptive reading of "London" is enhanced by the contrast to an Isaac Watts poem for children which begins: "Whene'er I take my Walks abroad, / How many Poor I see?" Other comparisons to Watts are interesting but inappropriate for a general reader.

After a generation of warnings that Blake's poems cannot be experienced fully without the illustrations, I have often felt that the *words* are now being overlooked in favor of the pictures, but Beer totally ignores Blake as an artist-engraver. No mention is made of the designs that are fused to the poems. Perhaps the author was restricted by the format of a "Writers and Their Work" series, which shows once again that Blake does not submit to categorization without a severe distortion of his work.

Attempting to describe *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* briefly is a challenge Blake himself never took up—with good reason. In a book such as this, the task should be to intrigue the reader and provide a few land-