

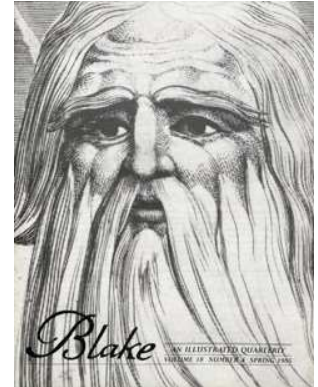
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

David H. Weinglass, ed., *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

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erence to a naive notion of "actuality." Glen achieves this condition all too glibly for my tastes, and having achieved it is not inspired to think further, or even to think at all. If Blake does offer, in poems like "The Lamb," the kind of alternative that Glen finds everywhere in *Innocence*, then he offers it not as an "actualized" experience but as a piece of poetic logic, there to be thought about as well as felt. But I think he also analyzes the refracted perceptions of false consciousness in poems like "The Chimney Sweeper" and "Holy Thursday." There is no unitary notion of "innocence," nor indeed of "experience," in Blake's volume, as we realize if we attend to the poems Glen does not discuss, as well as to alternative readings of those she does. As for Wordsworth, I would argue that there is no poet who does more to explain and analyze the operations of the unconscious within the restrictions of "ideology" and alienation. This is not merely a failure of Wordsworth the poet, it is the precondition and anatomy of his poetic intelligence. The peculiar *problem* of Wordsworth is indeed that he reproduces both these things; by not always suggesting the dramatic differentiation of poet from speaker, he does suggest that the various misreadings of the world which the poems chronicle are his own. Only a criticism which goes at least as far into the deconstructionist or "theoretical" Marxist methodology as to accept the disintegrated model of subjectivity which those approaches (for quite different reasons) offer can hope to make anything of this aspect of Wordsworth's writings. Glen is a very long way from this point, being committed to a moral-poetic faith in "actual experience" and, more to the point, to a faith in poetry's ability to incarnate such a thing. Glen, like all critics of her kind, never has an answer to the challenge that her experience might not tally with someone else's. The danger of this position is that, given these terms, the other is always dismissed as improperly "human." This criticism commits precisely the gesture of which it accuses its opponents, except more covertly and thus more dangerously.

I realize that in much of the above I have gone somewhat beyond the terms of the standard review essay. Nor shall I make any conciliatory mutterings about the friendship of opposition. The *true* friendship that Blake invoked is probably best left vague or undefined, though it is unlikely to be found at odds with the exposition of the maximum number of relevant issues. Some of the issues raised in this book do seem to be as "extrinsic" to the Blake-Wordsworth question as they could possibly be. Because they are important issues, however, and not likely to be familiar to some American readers, I have spent some time exploring them. Before concluding, I might make a few points within the "standard" vocabulary. The book will annoy some readers for other reasons than those I have been declaring. It is deficient in point of "etiquette," in that it does not show a very wide

awareness of the secondary literature; it is not very sensitive to the composite nature of Blake's art (though the author is conscious of this, and apologizes for it); and it continues to cite from the Keynes edition, despite the obvious superiority of Erdman's textual work. The point of "etiquette" is more an American than a British preoccupation. It does not bother me much at those points where it is made up for by the richness of the historical documentation, as in the best parts of the account of Blake. But in the case of Wordsworth, where the history is skimpier and the premises less sympathetic, some awareness of the work of others might have made Glen's case a bit more sophisticated than it is. The historical material is, in its own way, authoritative, even where the reader might dispute the nature of its exact relation to Blake or Wordsworth. But I must end with a strong word of warning to those readers who acknowledge in themselves a tendency to be beguiled by intimations of actuality.

The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli.
Ed. David H. Weinglass. Milwood, N.Y.;
London; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus
International Publications, 1982. Pp. xlviii
+ 685, 4 plates. \$90.

Reviewed by G.E. Bentley, Jr.

[Editor's note: Typesetting limitations have necessitated the following modifications to the author's manuscript: The superscript letter in abbreviations such as "M." and "S." have been moved from directly over the period to the right of it. Also, the symbol "ˆ" replaces a caret below the line which indicates an insertion; two such symbols indicate a second set of insertions. "They are recorded here because they indicate important changes of mind by Fuseli—and to indicate something more which the editor could have indicated in his transcripts," the author writes.]

David Weinglass has produced a major work of scholarship, one which will be invaluable to anyone concerned with Romantic art in general, with Fuseli in particular, or with individuals in whose lives he was of major importance, such as William Cowper, Mary Wollstonecraft, Joseph Johnson—and William Blake.¹ The book is not only a marvelous mine of information; it is in some respects a model of what a work like this should be. But it is also idiosyncratic—with idiosyncracies beyond those of its very curious subject—and the reader should be aware of what it contains and what it omits.

The title—*The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*—is intended to distinguish it from works such as *Heinrich Füßlis Briefe* edited by Walter Muschg (Basel, 1942) and Hugh Macandrew, "Selected Letters from the Correspondence of Henry Fuseli and William Roscoe of Liverpool," *Gazettes des Beaux-Arts*, 62 (1963), 204–28, but it is far more than this. For one thing, the 310 "English" letters by Fuseli of 1759–1825 include a few in Italian, French, Latin, and Greek (p. ix), though none in his native language. ("After he returned from Italy in 1779," "Fuseli appears to have written only a relative handful of letters in German" [p. ix], but these are not identified.) For another, there are 86 letters here to Fuseli, including some in Italian. For another, there are 210 contemporary letters about Fuseli written by his acquaintances, so that Fuseli's "English Letters" include, paradoxically, his "Posthumous Letters" (1825–31; pp. 489–539). In addition, we are given, most valuably, Fuseli's will and that of his wife (pp. 542–44), "Documents relating to John Knowles's Executorship" of Fuseli's estate in 1825–28 (pp. 580–83), and the sale catalogues of Fuseli's Small and very Select Classical Library (1825) and of his Remaining Finished and Unfinished [artistic] Works (1827) (pp. 584–99). Further, the definition of a letter is very elastic, comprehending not only the handwritten messages one would expect but receipts, printed dedicatory epistles, advertisements, and some paragraphs by Fuseli in an edition of Gray which Weinglass "assume[s] . . . were sent . . . in the form of a letter" (p. 208). There is, in short, an enormous mass of valuable information about Fuseli here, probably more than anywhere else except in Gert Schiff's wonderful catalogue raisonné of *Johann Heinrich Füßli 1741–1825* (Zürich & München, 1973). In future, anyone concerned with Fuseli in almost any way will have to depend upon Weinglass's extraordinary volume.

Fuseli's character was strongly marked, and he made a vivid personal impression. William Shepherd wrote to his wife in 1797: "Fuseli . . . is certainly one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met with. His learning is extensive and profound. His remarks are original and he has a strength of expression which makes his observations on man and things to a wonderful degree entertaining and interesting" (p. 173). And after Fuseli's

death, Godwin wrote: "He could not bear to be eclipsed or put in the back-ground for a moment. He scorned to be less than highest. He was an excellent hater; he hated a dull fellow, as men of wit and talents naturally do; and he hated a brilliant man, because he could not bear a brother near the throne" (p. 509). His oral expression was emphatic and profane, a profanity which his good friend John Flaxman found trying. He once said to Blake,

"How do you get on with Fuseli? I can't stand his foul-mouthed swearing. Does he swear at you?"

Blake: "He does."

Flaxman: "And what do you do?"

Blake: "What do I do? Why—I swear again! and he says astonished, 'vy Blake, you are swearing!' but he leaves off himself!"

[Blake Records (1969), p. 53]

But Fuseli's young friend Margaret Patrickson wrote: "There is no giving Fuseli without swearing. Why is it that swearing in him never gave offence? At least, I never heard that it did. In my own opinion, it was accompanied by no profanity of mind. his feelings vented themselves in the most energetic language he could meet with . . ." (p. 519). But in his correspondence there is little of this thunder and lightning—partly, of course, because his letters were kept chiefly by his steady friends whom he did not curse; forty percent of the letters quoted here are from the Roscoe correspondence. His contemporaries regularly remarked on the strong vestiges of German pronunciation which characterized Fuseli's speech even in his last years, but his written English is not only assured and confident, it is strong and elegant; Cowper called him, not unjustly, "a perfect master of our language" (p. 30), and he might have said something similar of Fuseli's German, Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. What his letters lack in the sharpness and volcanic emphasis of his speech, they gain in balance, deftness, and elegance. One must not, of course, pretend that these letters rival those of Cowper and Keats—and Blake—but they are strong and pointed and often graceful—and on occasion they are moving. After the death of Joseph Johnson in 1809, he wrote to an old friend, "If my grief for the loss of my first and best friend were less excessive, I might endeavour to moderate your's" (p. 373). But his generous fund of righteous indignation is more often visible, particularly during the very difficult years when he was trying to accomplish his great Milton project. "Till I had acquired more of that Sublime Philosophy . . . what else Could my Letters Consist of but indignation, Complaint or rage?" (p. 125).

Editorial Method: Weinglass presents a fairly literal transcript of the documents, but he omits deletions or sinks them to footnotes, expands abbreviations such as the ampersand, lowers superscript letters, italicizes titles of books and pictures and quotations in foreign lan-

guages, and silently corrects misprints in texts derived from printed sources. All these alterations are defensible, though they do not represent the most meticulous standards—and some of them are determined not by Weinglass's willing choice but by the defects of his method of printing. More positively Weinglass regularly supplies the address of the letter, its exact postmark (though he does not explain the significance of the postmark), the day of the week, the docket on the letter, where it was printed (he says [p. ix] that only about 130 of these 606 letters have been printed before, even in part), and the collection in which it was found, as well as admirably detailed annotations.

How accurate and reliable is the transcript? I have proofread against reproductions of the manuscripts seven letters (on pp. 163–65, 183, 185, 187–88, 252–53, 365, 409–10) and find that in general Weinglass's transcripts are commendably accurate. Sometimes a letter seems to me to be upper case where he reads lower case, or vice versa; once I read plural ("pictures") where he reads singular (p. 185); the lineation is occasionally and the paragraph indentation once or twice silently simplified; and the amplification of abbreviations is sometimes rather striking—e.g., "Your obedient humble Servant" for "Your obed. 'h: S'" (p. 365). The only serious mistake appears in a letter from Wiliam Roscoe to Fuseli of 24 January 1797 (p. 164) in which the phrase "the Artist [Fuseli] will I am sure furnish me with a treat which I have for some time past longed to enjoy" has unaccountably added to it, after "I am sure," the words "themselves upon the whole with great civility"—a phrase which appears a little later in this letter. Clearly the reiteration of the phrase is due to a defect in the composition of the printed text.

In a work as ambitious as this one, no matter how diligent the editor, there are bound to be omissions. Some which I have noticed are:

TO JOHN BOYDELL [for p. 190]

Sunday 17 December 1787²[?]

Fuseli presents his C[omplimen]. "[?]. to M^r Boydell: as he is now entirely occupied with his Picture, he naturally seizes on every possible advantage, and in consequence, before he orders the Canvas, wishes To know, whether the height of eight by Six be *irrevocably* Settled—the Sketch which M^r Boydell has Seen, is in the proportion of the Size prescribed—an addition of Six inches more, or nine feet, would undoubtedly add much to the Sublime of the Scene. M^r Boydell will judge whether Some future Local Conformity ought To outweigh the Claim of the Subjects.

N.^o 100 S.^t Martins Lane

Sunday morn. 17th of D.^r
1788

TO F.I. DU ROVERAY [for p. 194]

Friday 9 May 1800³

M.^r Fuseli presents his Comp.ⁿ to M^r Du Roveray. and submits it to Him whether the Compound 'Iron-sleep' of page 65 in His edition of Gray be not an exception to His assertion on the Last

page of the book?⁴

May 9. 1800.

FROM F.I. DU ROVERAY [for p. 272]

Thursday 30 June 1803⁵

Sir

When I reflect upon what passed between us at the time of the agreement for the Pictures, I am led to think that you might conclude you was to have the same number to do from the Odyssey as from the Iliad; but I solemnly declare that my own conception of the matter was quite different. I had offered to give you 6 subjects from the Iliad & 6 from the Odyssey: in talking over the matter, I understood that you preferred doing 12 from the Iliad; and, provided you had that number, that you would agree to the terms I proposed—In fact you Soon after Selected the 12 Subjects you wished to undertake, without even mentioning a word of those from the [Iliad *del*] "Odyssey".⁶ It was my intention to have given you a few from the latter poem; but I always considered it optional in me to do it or not; and, when I came to consider the engagements I had made with others, I found it difficult to spare you any, except by way of exchange. This is not the place to examine whether you are alone competent to do them justice; for should my expectation "in that respect" be deceived, I shall be the "principal" Sufferer: methinks however that you have "already" a sufficiently large share in my work to have no reason to complain; [besides I had a right²] to conclude from your manner of expressing yourself respecting our agreement that you regretted having entered into it and would not care to extend it. I shall not dwell upon the suggestion you were pleased to make, *del* "again you have more than once expressed yourself as being dissatisfied with the terms[?] of our agreement (altho' the same were more favourable to you than those proposed by yourself for the Milton pictures) and yet you now regret not having twice the number to do—As to the hint you were pleased to throw out² about my taking advantage of there being no written agreement between us, [further than by observing that I did not expect such an insinuation from you, and *del*] "after the dealings we have had together." I confess that I did not expect so illiberal an insinuation from you. I shall only add² that it is the [more un *del*] "less" justifiable, as in the event of such a proof being wanted I should be in your power, not you in mine—Hoping you will do me more justice for the future

I remain

Sir

Your Ob h^t Ser

F I DuRoveray

30 June 1803

I am still willing to do all in my power to lessen your disappointment; therefore, on your giving up the two subjects already ment.^d from the Iliad, I will endeavour to give you the {four(?) *del*} five follg from the Odyssey; [but I cannot with any degree of propriety allot you more than 12 subjects altogether; therefore I will however, give you, in return for the two from the Iliad two subjects from the Odyssey which I am sure will be to your liking, viz. *del*] Viz.^r Book. 9. Polypheme groping in his cave for Ulysses & his companions

11. Ulysses in the shades, when the shade of Ajax turns indignant from him

12. Ulysses between Charybdis & Scylla or some other subject from the same book

[16. Ulysses revealing himself to Telemachus *del*]

21. Penelope weeping over the bow of Ulysses

23. Penelope's transports on recognizing Ulysses.⁷

FROM JOHN STOCKDALE [for p. 314]⁸

Monday 13 May 1805

[Paraphrase:] Mr Stockdale hopes that he is perfectly recovered from the effects of his accident and that he can send the biographical sketches [for Pilkington's *Dictionary*].

TO HARRIET JANE MOORE [for p. 355]⁹
Saturday 22 November 1806

To Harriet Jane Moore
from her friend Henry Fuseli

Nov. 22nd 1806

TO AN UNNAMED CORRESPONDENT [for p. 368]¹⁰
Friday 7 July 1809

[Paraphrase:] Will you join me and James Moore in going to St Paul's?

TO MRS JAMES MOORE [for p. 472]¹¹
Tuesday 11 December 1821

[Paraphrase:] Mr Fuseli regrets that he cannot accept the invitation to meet her and James Moore.

Technical Methods: The work was produced by extremely sophisticated technology. "This book was formatted and copy-set using the IBM Document Composition Facility (Script/VS) in conjunction with the AMDAHL 470/V7 computer. The master was printed on the IBM 3800 Laser printer" (p. vi). I do not pretend to understand what this means, but the results are often unfortunate; such an important book deserved to be handsomely, or at least tolerably, presented, particularly when the cost is \$90. The typeface is ugly, and each letter is identical in width, not proportionally spaced, with the "i" much narrower than the "m". Apparently the machinery could not cope with superscript letters, and because of the paucity of the characters on the machine "I have been forced to represent the £ sign by L" (p. xii), which is not very satisfactory. The parasite on Fuseli's letter of 24 January 1797, cited above, seems to have been introduced somewhat lightheartedly by the wilful machinery, and "Through a quirk of IBM's 'SCRIPT' a footnote sometimes appears on the page *before* the like-numbered passage in the text" (p. xiii), and Weinglass might have remarked with equal justice that a footnote may appear needlessly on a page *following* the textual reference (e.g., p. 323). The machine apparently cannot break words at the end of the line, so that the spacing is sometimes very distracting—there are seventeen unnecessary spaces in one line on p. 61. Elsewhere there may be a long gap in the line—there is one of about thirty-eight spaces in mid-sentence on p. 56. On the one hand, we should recognize that the only way to get the work into commercial print in these hard times may have been for the editor (and his sponsors) to assume almost all the cost and responsibility for preparing the camera-ready copy. At the same time, a buyer must lament that a work of such importance, initiative, and accomplishment as Weinglass's *Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* should have appeared in a form so far

below the dignity, not to mention the elegance, which its editor, its subject, and the lavish scholarship here presented so richly deserve.

In sum, this is an enormously ambitious work presenting a wonderful range of information about one of the most vigorous and controversial painters of his time. In particular, anyone concerned with the life, the times, and the art of William Blake will need to consult it—and should be grateful to Weinglass for his Herculean labors.

¹ Despite the close biographical connection between Blake and Fuseli—"When Flaxman was taken to Italy [in 1787], Fuseli was giv'n to me for a season" (letter of 12 September 1800)—there is no letter traced between Blake and Fuseli, and there is only one direct reference to Blake in Fuseli's letters (8 May 1792; p. 81), a reference which has been known for a number of years. However, references to Fuseli in Blake's letters are quoted here from time to time.

² MS: McGill University Library. The date, which I read as Sunday 17 December 1788, is puzzling, for in 1788 17 December fell on a Wednesday, though in 1786 it fell on a Sunday. However, in this letter of 17 December Fuseli asks Boydell for permission to extend the size of his commissioned picture by six inches, and on 24 December 1787 James Northcote wrote that "Boydell has allow'd him [Fuseli] six inches more" (p. 39). I presume therefore that the correct date should be 1787.

³ MS: McGill University Library. Address: "F.I. Du Roveray Esqr / 14 / Great S.^t Helens". Inscribed: "To pay". Postmark: "9 MY / 1800 / PENNYPOST [illegible]" and illegible. Docket: "9 May 1800 / Hy Fuseli / R[eplied] 9"; note that Du Roveray's "Reply" of 9 May is "Missing" in this volume.

⁴ The work referred to is *THE / POEMS / OF / Gray. / A NEW EDITION. / = / ADORNED WITH PLATES. / LONDON: / [Gothic:] Printed by T. Bensley, / Bolt Court, Fleet Street, / FOR F.J. DU ROVERAY, GREAT ST. HELENS; / AND / SOLD BY J. WRIGHT, PICCADILLY; / AND T. HURST, PATERNOSTER-ROW. / - / 1800*. The anonymous editor (i.e., Du Roveray) acknowledges in "Some Account of the Life and Writings of Gray" that "For several of the foregoing observations, the editor is indebted to the friendship and learning of H. Fuseli, Esq. Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy" (p. xxv footnote).

⁵ MS: McGill University Library; the manuscript is a draft. Annotation: "[write to Sharpe / Ed^d Smith / Note for Stothard, £32.14—2^d July at 6 p m[onths]/List of Homer subjects for him— / Note to be discounted del]".

⁶ Fuseli's agreement to design twelve named subjects for Du Roveray's edition of *The Iliad* (1805) is given in his letter of 27 December 1802 (p. 260).

⁷ Engravings after all these Fuseli designs were eventually engraved for Du Roveray's edition of *The Odyssey* (1805).

⁸ MS: Art Institute of Chicago; on the verso is a Fuseli drawing.

⁹ Presentation inscription on the first flyleaf of William Blake's *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793), copy E (collection of Paul Mellon). The recipient, the daughter of Fuseli's faithful friend James Carrick Moore, was then five years old. This inscription is cited but not quoted on p. 311, footnote 3.

¹⁰ MS: Jerome Milkman (seen November 1957).

¹¹ Emily Driscoll Catalogue 29 (1972), lot 138.