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against *Paradise Lost* XI and "Il Penseroso" according to a program partly derived, regrettably, from Wagenknecht. Gleckner complains of "an Ossianic flaccidness," especially in the most allusive passages in the poems, but they are less Ossianic in effect than one would expect and the allusions are directly imitative of biblical rhetoric (Gleckner correctly recalls Ecclesiastes for "Contemplation"). His reference to Milton's Nativity Ode for the radiance and angelic visitation of the dying youth in "The Couch of Death" seems unjustified, and his comparison of the pair's Calvinistical self-condemnation to the monsters of *Comus* is unwarranted, but his account of Blake's movement towards a definition of sin is noteworthy. His description of the unclosed structure of "Contemplation" is yet more valuable, suggesting a model for the confrontations of Innocence and Experience and particularly for "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* and "Earth's Answer." The poem-by-poem discussion is concluded by a serious engagement with "Samson" and particularly the problems of how far the poet is critical of the hero's character and how the fragment is to be set within or against the narratives in Judges 13–16 and *Samson Agonistes*. As with "King Edward the Third," "Samson" seems to me more like a sample of what the young poet could do, given the right encouragement, than the sketch of a work that might easily be finished; it certainly does not fulfill the promise of its beginning, even (I would submit) ironically. Blake had a curious liking for the foiled deliverer, whose warfare, insofar as it is mental, he rightly locates in the dialogues with Dalila. In his attempt to grapple with the puzzle of his annunciation, Samson seems to be measuring the "truth" of the angel's promise against his own knowledge that, in spite of "matchless might," wisdom and talent, he is merely human. Gleckner is a bit hard on Samson in relating (p. 146) this "matchless might" to that of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* X.404, but whether the hint is to be taken or not this does not mean that the angel's prophecy is necessarily false, only that it remains oracular (and, perhaps, too difficult for the young Blake). Gleckner might be encouraged to take a more positive view of the angel if, in noting that the name "wonderful" derives from Isaiah 9.6, he were to go on to find a reference to angelic mental warfare (which he will not allow Wittreich to claim) in Isaiah 9.5.

There are errors in this book, there are misprints (not all noted here), there are stylistic infelicities; nevertheless this is an invaluable study, containing many fine perceptions and discoveries, which I recommend highly to all scholars and teachers of Blake.

James King and Charles Ryskamp, eds. *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper. Vol. IV: Letters, 1792–1799*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. xxxiv + 498 pp. $91.00

Reviewed by Donald H. Reiman

This volume, in which William Cowper's life draws to its sad close, reveals among its final texts one of the most pathetic tales in the annals of British poetry. The record of Cowper's last years offers few moments of hope or gleams of good spirits from Cowper himself; its shadows are relieved only by the loyalty of his friends, old and new, and by the poet's own courageous fight to maintain before others his civility and decency. He struggled to live as a man, while feeling (as he revealed in private outcries) "like a poor Fly entangled in a thousand webs" or "the hunted hare" (pp. 468–69). By 1795, when he wrote those and even darker words, he believed that God had cast him utterly away because he had failed to commit suicide in his youth, as he retrospectively imagined that God had ordained. In the face of such overwhelming mental anguish and the physical ravages of age, Cowper's attempts to pretend to keep up his spirits in his letters and even to comfort and commiserate with the misfortunes of his friends become a kind of domestic heroism.

Up to a point, Cowper maintained a nearly normal correspondence with most of his friends, not allowing into it the feelings of damnation that poisoned his life. But he could not do so till the very end. Of the 466 pages devoted to the letters of eight years nominally covered in this volume, the letters of 1792 occupy 269 pages, and those for 1793 take 173 pages. No letters at all survive between 14 January 1794 and 27 August 1795, and all of those thereafter repeat the theme voiced in the first words he wrote to his beloved cousin Lady Hesketh on the latter date: "Hopeless as ever . . ." (p. 450). Filling in part of the transitional gap is his brief "spiritual diary" of June-July 1795, which includes the words of despair quoted at the opening of this review. Before 1794, Cowper reserved most of his expressions of spiritual aridity and despair for his letters to the Olney schoolmaster Samuel Teedon, who—as the editors' notes on correspondents make clear—was someone whom Cowper distinctly did not *like* in their early acquaintance, but whom he later found useful as a confessor to hear reports of his strange and usually terrifying dreams. (With characteristic tact and sensitivity, Cowper prepaid at least four out of the five letters he sent to Teedon

from Hayley's house in Sussex, to spare Teedon the high postage costs then current for letters sent the usual way, in which the recipient paid the postage.) Teedon, a chin-up do-gooder, spent much time praying God to reveal His mercies to Cowper and asking the poet whether he was receiving any of the blessings requested. His willingness to listen to Cowper's outcries gave the poet a safe outlet for his feelings, and thereby both enabled Cowper to remain relatively cheerful with Mary Unwin, Hayley, William Rose, Johnny Johnson, and other close friends and provided posterity with a much clearer picture than we could otherwise have of Cowper's long, courageous struggle against the Giant Despair.

Another major aspect of this volume concerns Cowper's proposed work on Milton for Joseph Johnson. Cowper had finished his translations of Milton's Latin and Italian poems and had now to write an introductory "Life" and critique à la Dr. Johnson. From the start of the period covered in these letters, he found himself unable to continue this work, and after Mary Unwin's second stroke, he used her condition and his need to attend to her as a strong reason not to complete the project. That Mrs. Unwin in this case provided an excuse, rather than the chief *cause* of his inability, appears in the alacrity with which he undertook major revisions and annotations of his translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* while under the same external constraints. It is unclear whether Cowper found Milton more difficult to approach than Homer because, reverencing Milton as he did, he paled at the thought that his own poetry would be directly compared with Milton's; or because Milton's theological bias kept bringing his own sense of damnation to the fore; or because he was convinced that his scholarly work would not be up to the high standards he set for himself in all areas. He was aware and thankful for the mitigations of his plight through his possession of a small private income, as appears in remarks about "poor Mrs. [Charlotte] Smith. . . . Chain'd to her desk like a slave to his oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and her numerous children" (p. 280). Nevertheless, he felt his failure to fulfill his commitment to Joseph Johnson more sharply because of the publisher's generosity in voluntarily paying Cowper for later editions of poems to which Johnson already held the copyright. Cowper no longer required busywork to keep his psyche occupied, but, having received a monetary advance for the work on Milton, he found himself with some of the internal pressures of an "author-for-hire."

Readers of *Blake* may be most interested in his important new friendship with William Hayley, his "brother poet" (as Cowper often characterizes him to other correspondents). After reading in a newspaper that he and Cowper were rival biographers of Milton, Hayley, exercising his Boswellian penchant for seeking out and ingratiating himself to great men, wrote to Cowper on 7 February 1792, sending with his letter a complimentary sonnet that contained these lines:

> Poet! to whom I feel my heart incline
> As to a friend endear'd by virtue's ties;
> Ne'er shall my name in pride's contentious line
> With hostile emulation cope with thine.
> No, let us meet with kind fraternal aim,
> Where Milton's shrine invites a votive throng.

(p. 84; the text Cowper quotes here differs in significant details from that in Hayley's *Memoirs* [1823], I, 427–28). Hayley sent this in care of a friend, who gave it to Joseph Johnson, Cowper's publisher, but his letter did not reach Cowper until 17 March. Cowper immediately responded warmly, and Hayley replied with an invitation for Cowper to visit him. Cowper (beginning his second letter to Hayley, 24 March 1792, "My dear friend—") told the stranger about his phobia against traveling and invited Hayley to visit *him*; the next day Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh that Hayley's "candour, liberality, generosity, have won my heart, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me" (p. 39). In his third letter to Hayley, on 6 April, Cowper told him his whole life story, including his mental illness and his association with the Unwins. After Hayley arrived at Weston on 15 May, the friendship was cemented by Hayley's support and helpfulness during and after Mary Unwin's second paralytic stroke (22 May). Hayley helped to care for her, gathered advice from his physician friends, and procured a static electricity machine that, though not restoring all of her functions, at least gave therapeutic activity and hope to both her and Cowper, thereby preventing him from falling into immediate despair about this world as well as the next.

As time passed, Cowper recognized in Hayley the same kind of possessiveness that was to alienate Blake. But though psychologically dependent on his friends, Cowper was able to speak up early and put Hayley in his place before Hayley's demands could permanently damage their relationship. Indeed, it seems to have taken only a single riposte from Cowper to curb Hayley's annoying habit of talking of their friendship as though it were the center of Cowper's life. On 7 June 1792, Cowper wrote to him:

> Love you? Yes to be sure I do. Do you take me for a stock or a stone that you make a question of it? . . . But you must permit me nevertheless to be melancholy now and then, or if you will not, I must be so without your permission . . . . I tell you my man, I was occasionally sad even in the days when I believed that God himself lov'd me, and who are you, that I should not be so now? (p. 101)

Such frankness, when the situation warranted it, Cowper combined with a modicum of tactful flattery of Hayley's little vanities to preserve their friendship as long as Cowper's own sanity remained—and longer, for Hayley

became Cowper's official biographer and, after Hayley's death in 1820, John Johnson, Cowper's younger cousin who had cared for him in his last years, became the editor of Hayley's *Memoirs* for Henry Colburn. The strongest testimonial to Cowper's affection for Hayley is the fact that, in spite of his phobia against traveling that had kept him at home for the past twenty years, on 1 August 1792 he packed up Mrs. Unwin in a hired carriage and made the three-day journey to Hayley's home in Sussex, where they stayed for seven weeks, returning home with only the ordinary wear and tear that long journeys and extended visits would normally inflict on sexagenarians.

Through Hayley, who was a political liberal by the standards of Cowper's circle of friends, he met Charlotte Smith and was induced to read some of her fiction and poetry. Lady Hesketh and her circle were, at the same time, turning more and more reactionary through fear of the growing power of the French Revolution and sympathetic upsurges in British society. Though Cowper himself gave up on the French, he refused to become an English reactionary. In the postscript of a letter to Hayley of 13 October 1792, Cowper first urges Hayley in his life of Milton "to censure and expose the cruelty of that literary cossack's strictures" (perhaps an unindexed allusion to Dr. Johnson?) and then moves on to comment on Dumouriez's capture of Verdun: "I do sincerely rejoice that Prussia and Austria seem baffled. If they ever depart from France, they will return no more" (p. 213). When Louis XVI was executed, however, Cowper wrote (again to Hayley) that the revolutionaries had "made me weep for a King of France, which I never thought to do, and they have made me sick of the very name of liberty, which I never thought to be" (p. 282). Yet, in March 1793, he wrote to Lady Hesketh, "you are a Whig in principle, and a Tory in practise only. . . . You approve all the measures of the Court, or of the Minister, and I am pleased with every struggle that is made against them when they infringe the birth-right of the Commons. . . . We equally rejoice, I dare say, in the repulse of Dumourier from the frontiers of Holland, and in every repulse which that most inhuman race the French have met or shall hereafter meet with" (p. 312). On 7 May he again wrote to her: "There is no *true* Whig who wishes all the power in the hands of his own party. The division of it which lawyers call tripartite is exactly what he desires, and he would have neither King, Lords nor Commons unequally trusted, or in the smallest degree predominant. Such a Whig am I, and such Whigs are the real friends of the Constitution" (p. 332). In these sentiments, Cowper was probably representative of many of the older Whigs, who had grown up during George III's early struggles with the parliament.

If he distrusted the concentration and predominance of political or military power, following the Whig wisdom of Robert Walpole and the framers of the American Constitution that it is best to maintain a balance of power both within and among nations, he also feared the concentration of power in his own psyche. Having pulled back from his temporary religious fanaticism, which lasted from about the time he met the Unwins till after his brother's death, Cowper sought moderation in all things—including his moral judgments and his commitment to his own writing. Whenever one or another activity, idea, or enthusiasm threatened to overbalance his life in one direction or another, he pulled back in a kind of quiet, decorous terror. Whether this need to avoid extremes resulted from conscious or subconscious feelings of guilt about his self-righteous treatment of Morley Unwin and his own brother John on their deathbeds, as I speculated in my review of volume I of his *Letters* (*Blake*, 15 [winter 1981–82], 149–51), or whether he simply felt psychic giddiness whenever he inclined one way or another, Cowper was almost a human gyroscope and—as the behavioral opposite of Burns—provides the literature of the later eighteenth century with a life and an art symbolic of an important aspect of the thought of the century.

In an essay entitled "Byron, Shelley, Keats and Lamb," Lytton Strachey writes:

> The reader who passes suddenly from the letters of Walpole, Gray, and Cowper to those of Byron, Shelley, and Keats experiences a strange and violent shock. His sensations resemble those of a rower who has been meandering for many days down a broad and quiet river, among fields and spacious villas, and who, in a moment, finds himself upon the sea. He has left behind him the elegance, the seclusion, the leisure of the eighteenth century; he has embarked upon the untrammelled ocean of a new age, where he will be refreshed, astonished, and delighted, but where he will find no rest. The contrast is so complete that one is tempted to believe that an intelligent reader from another planet might almost, by the aid of these letters alone, infer the French Revolution. (*Characters and Commentaries* [1933], p. 53)

Some teacher-scholars of eighteenth-century literature do not like this characterization of differences between their period and the Romantic age, objecting to the whole line of thought characterized in George Saintsbury's title *The Peace of the Augustans*. But after Bonnie Prince Charlie's uprising in "the '45" (which did not leave a personal mark on most writers south of the Tweed greater than that evinced in Fielding's use of it as a momentary plot device in *Tom Jones*), there were few foreign or domestic political threats of enough consequence to stir deep fears of impending chaos in leading British authors.

The situation had been different during the reign of Queen Anne. Then the writers not only recalled the bloody civil wars of the seventeenth century, fueled by deeply felt religious, ideological, and social-class conflicts, but also faced—as the late Elizabethans did—the uncertainties of the impending transfer of power from the Stuarts to another house from abroad. (That parallel

enabled both Scott and Thackeray to go back to this period—as Dumas went back to the ages of Richelieu and Henri IV—to find historical analogues for the upheavals of the early nineteenth century.) When, as a graduate student at Illinois, I heard Murray Krieger deliver his powerful paper, "*The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*: The 'Frail China Jar' and the Rude Hand of Chaos," I was quite convinced that he was right to find in Pope's later poetry an almost modern vision of the breakdown of civilization and a return to barbarism. Nor could I quite accept Robert W. Rogers' question to Krieger, "Don't you think that Pope was simply exaggerating the danger for rhetorical effect?" In Swift and Pope, at least, there *is* both the sense of the fragility of human civilization and the qualified faith in the possibility of human enlightenment and progress that leavens the political and social thinking of all the Romantics. But by the Age of Johnson, the demons that threatened the writers came from inside, not from without. That the political world was corrupt and inefficient was, in itself, a protection against any domestic ideological fanaticism. England's Continental rivals were divided and just as corrupt and weak as Great Britain itself, so that even a united onslaught by several of them toward the end of a long and unpopular war against the revolt in her strongest colonies could not wrest Gibraltar or any other significant overseas possession from her, except the United States themselves.

The course of Cowper's letters illustrates clearly how little fear the most timid of men had, even when the London "Gordon" rioters destroyed the home of Chief Justice Mansfield in June 1780, or when in 1783 Scottish Highland troops mutinied against their officers and were discharged to make their way home through England, or when the French and Dutch first overthrew their old regimes in the name of liberty. Even those acts that Cowper disapproved of met with the censure of a calm and superior schoolmaster—not outraged vituperation such as one finds in Southey's and Hazlitt's political prose. What Johnson, Goldsmith, and Cowper had learned to fear (and what Savage, Smart, and Burns never learned to fear in time) was the danger posed by the breakdown of the balance of power between their inner desires and their repressions.

Elsewhere I have differentiated between "Gothic" and "pastoral" imaginations—the first fearfully concerned with outer, the second with inner weather. The Gothic poet—Shelley or Yeats—fears the madness of the wind and snow of the outside world; the pastoral poet—Wordsworth or Frost—fears far more his own desert places. Cowper exhibits the pastoral imagination, but he could not believe that the Good Shepherd cared enough to protect him from his inner demons. And historical events, which can influence the individual either to accentuate or control his natural temperament, conspired to destroy the social nexus that had provided his pastoral guidance and security. The arrival of the French Revolution, with its threats to the unity and stability of English society, set Cowper's friends against one another, while he strove to maintain a decorous *via media*; his growing awareness of this change must have weakened his outward supports just at the time when the infirmities of aging required them most. Johnson and Goldsmith, also pastoral natures, maintained their faith during days that were not quite so trying. But to lack inner assurance during a time when the world outside is also collapsing can overset any mind. Cowper, like Virginia Woolf, was ultimately caught between the storm outside and the whirlwind within. I cannot see him as merely an individual, because the record of the other men and women of talent and genius who in parallel historical circumstances have gone mad, or committed suicide, or withdrawn into circumscribed and virtually useless lives (such as Wordsworth portrayed more than once as a warning to himself) gives us reason to think that the times, as well as the individual temperament, have their contribution to make to human destiny. It is, perhaps, time that we stopped thinking of William Cowper as some kind of sickly aberration, unconnected with other literary figures before and after him. The fine editions of Cowper's *Poems* and *Letters and Prose Writings* now in progress will provide us with the opportunity to carry out this study in depth.

Thomas J. J. Altizer. *History as Apocalypse.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. 263 pp. $34.50.

Reviewed by Steven Goldsmith

Having admired the passion and intensity of *History as Apocalypse*, I find myself brought back to the book's title, a title that points to a central problem of Altizer's exceptionally ambitious study of not merely the Christian epic tradition but the history of consciousness itself. If that scope already suggests the dangers of reification implicit in organizing such a vast array of particular and historical phenomena, the title reflects the principle that imposes unity upon diversity. History and apocalypse are antithetical terms; the apocalypse puts an end to history, substituting a closed and meaningful structure for the merely temporal and often terrifying progression of events that seems without origin and destination. The biblical model of such substitution is the Book of Revelation, where John of Patmos imagines the displacement of history by the transcendental order of the