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R E V I E W

# Stanley Gardner, Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraced

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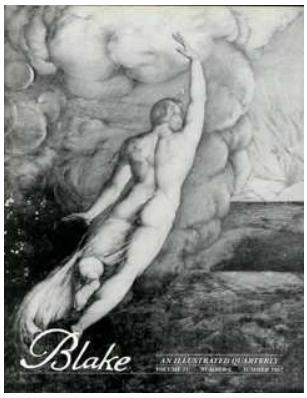


[2]G.E. Bentley, Jr., ed., *William Blake's Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 1:95. Bentley's conjectured dates of *The Marriage* are "(?1790–3)."

[3]G. E. Bentley, Jr., and Martin K. Nurmi, *A Blake Bibliography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 199. According to Bentley and Nurmi, the Law edition was offered by Rivington in 1824 for £1.16.0. That, I suppose, was expensive for Blake.

[4]Thomas Sadler, ed., *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 2:305.

[5]John P. Frayne, ed., *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1:402. From a review in the *Bookman* (April 1896) of Richard Garnett's *William Blake*. Yeats's library included six volumes of Boehme's works by various translators. Five were published by John M. Watkins, Madame Blavatsky's publisher and bookseller, and one by Joseph Richardson which contains four items from the Law edition (see Edward O'Shea, *A Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats's Library* [New York and London: Garland, 1985], pp. 37–39).

[6]I quote from a xerox copy of a typescript in the library of Michael B. Yeats.

[7]*Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study* (Kent: Kent State University, 1957), p. 28. Nurmi refers to Bentley's unpublished dissertation (Oxford, 1954) as "the only study of Blake's connections with Boehme that approaches thoroughness." I agree, having read it many years ago; but much has been done since, as Aubrey points out.

[8]"Negative Sources in Blake," *Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), p. 303.

[9]The opposing viewpoints are most strongly supported by Kathleen Raine in *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) and Helen C. White in *The Mysticism of William Blake* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature 23, 1927).

[10]Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*; Percival, *William Blake's Circle of Destiny*; Bentley, "William Blake and the Alchemical Philosophers"; Raine, *Blake and Tradition*; and Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*. Aubrey's review of the scholarship is generally sound but not comprehensive.

[11]Occasional reference is made to other poems, especially *The Book of Ahania* and *The Song of Los* in chapter 2.

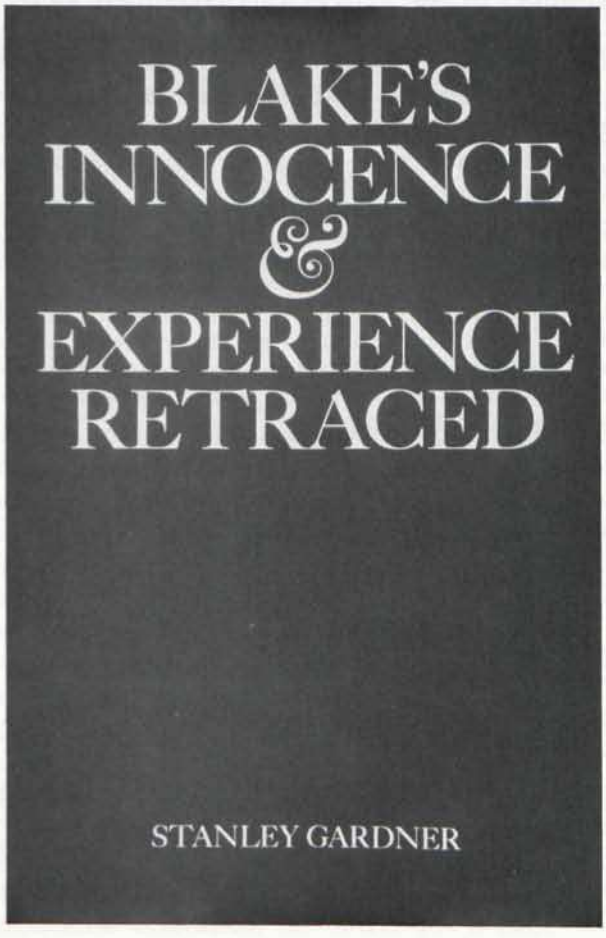
[12]Like Raine, Paley explores many possible sources. See especially his chapter on "The Lambeth Books" in *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 61–88.

[13]Law, 2: 24–31.

[14]See especially George Mills Harper, "The Divine Tetrad in Blake's *Jerusalem*," *Essays for S. Foster Damon*, pp. 235–55; see also Harper and Jane McClellan, "Blake's Demonic Triad," *The Wordsworth Circle* 8 (spring 1977), 172–82.

[15]Vol. 1 of the Law edition contains *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*; Vol. 2 *The Threefold Life of Man* and *The Answers to Forty Questions Concerning the Soul*. For Aubrey's discussion of numbers, especially 7, see pp. 20–23, and 125. Although he comments briefly on the "fourfold nature" of Freher's designs, Aubrey concludes that "the similar fourfold nature of Blake's universe needs little elaboration" (102). Students of the later Blake should keep in mind that "The Sexual is Threefold: the Human is Fourfold" (*Milton*, Bentley, p. 322).

[16]*Blake and Tradition*, I, 1. Besides Boehme, Raine has read widely in and quotes from such esoteric sources as the Cabala, Agrippa, Hermes Trismegistus, Fludd, Paracelsus, Swedenborg, Jacob Bryant, and Thomas Taylor the Platonist. More modest in their claims, Damon and Paley have considered most of these.




**Stanley Gardner. *Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraced.* London and New York: Athlone Press and St. Martin's Press, 1986. xviii + 211 pp. illus. $27.50.**

**Reviewed by Nelson Hilton**

Attempting to trace the *Songs* back to some origin or source, this book offers a Blake who first acclaims "the work of enlightened charity" undertaken by his parish in the 1780s but who subsequently, owing to the failure of that experiment in welfare, turns with "cold fury" to epitomize "the desolation" in *Songs of Experience*. Along the way we have a provocative revisionist account of "Holy Thursday" (*SI*) and become well acquainted with how things sound "to [Gardner's] ear" and look "to [Gardner's] eye." Working our way back to "the groundwork of a vision" (14), "the visionary groundbase" (47),

we can even find ourselves "As we read, sitting beneath the chimney newly swept in Golden Square" (65).

For Gardner, the "geographical and social matrix" for most of *Songs of Innocence* is to be located in two new forms of charity established by the parish of St. James. The first was the practice of transferring pauper children and infants out of the city to be nursed by cottagers at then rural Wimbledon:

> The effect of the policy . . . was dramatic. *The Annual Registers of the Parish Poor for 1783* tell us that twenty-four of the fifty infants nursed by their mothers in St James's workhouse died before the year was out; and that in the same year the nurses at Wimbledon took care of seventy-seven children from the workhouse, with such 'skill and attention' that only two died. A year or two later, Blake had written the first draft of 'Nurses Song,' and then slipped it into *An Island in the Moon*. (7)

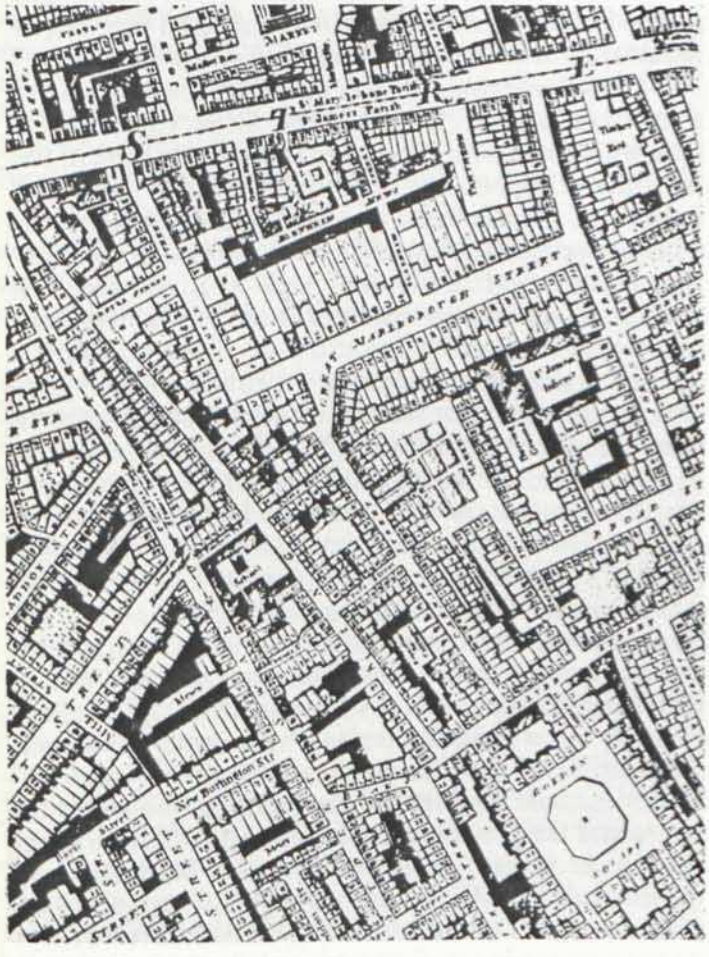
Still more important for Gardner's account is the school for pauper children which "the Governors of the Poor" for St. James established on King Street in 1782. Blake can be strikingly associated with the school through surviving records of payment to "Mr. Blake Haberdasher" —first the poet's father, James, and then his elder brother, also James, who evidently took over the business on the father's death in 1784. In the last weeks of 1784, Gardner reminds us, Blake and James Parker opened their printshop at 27 Broad St., next door to the Blake family home and haberdashery. Gardner reports that "no other London parish even remotely approached St. James's in the vigour and consistency with which it took practical care of its pauper children" (14) and finds in this communal expression of "brief and untarnished charity" the genesis of *Songs of Innocence*. In these poems Blake gives "a conclusively social rather than matrimonial emphasis" to the nurture of children, and "It seems to be an insistence we must respect" (24).

The consequences of Gardner's reading surface most dramatically in the account of "Holy Thursday" in *Innocence*. While "our persistent misreading of the nature of charity schools" (30) has made us uncomfortable with the poem's place in *Innocence*, it is clear to Gardner that Blake "added the illustration to insist that we take 'Holy Thursday' . . . straight, without benefit of our own brand of retrospective enlightenment . . ." (35). One piece of evidence in this view is the poem's reference to "wise guardians of the poor," which Gardner can associate with an actual parish office (re-)instituted in 1782: "Blake's reference to this renewed and repeatedly recorded office of Guardian of the Poor seems to me too topical and too immediately recollective of an enlightened reform to be ironic or accidental" (41). Gardner corrects a common misapprehension in pointing out that the anniversary meeting of the charity-school children ("clearly an occasion Blake had shared") took place "neither on Ascension Day or on Maundy Thursday, the two possible holy Thursdays of the church calendar" (35) but on some other late-Spring Thursday—or, once, Wednesday. This leads Gardner to suggest that the name "Holy Thursday" had been "used ironically as a gibe by some of the circle of friends Blake caricatured in *An Island in the Moon*" (where the first draft of the poem appears), but that Blake took over the term for his own purposes. (Perhaps the formula that "Thursday's child has far to go" may be lurking around?)

The poem is at the center of Gardner's conception of *Innocence*, and the book's penultimate page argues again that "the lamb first entered Blake's creative imagination when he heard the expectant murmur of the charity-school children in St. Paul's. He went on to give the destitute child angelic status, and his neighbours the admonition, 'cherish pity' " (157). But the complete admonition reads, "Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door" (contra Keynes, Erdman, and Bentley, Gardner reads "Then cherish pity; . . ."), and the fact that these messengers ("angels," etymologically) are being walked away from our individual doors reflects eerily on the nature of that "human abstract" pity the speaker would have us "cherish." Such various voices and possibilities are not for Gardner, and, asserting themselves, they leave "an odd sense of contradiction and unease": " 'The Little Black Boy' is a profoundly ambiguous poem, and the ambiguity is deepened, not resolved, by the illustrations. Its relation to the rest of *Songs of Innocence* is uneasy, and yet it provides Blake with the only means to hand by which a necessary dimension is added to the book" (63). While that "necessary dimension" is never clarified, the accompanying argument suggests that if "contemporary circumstances behind the poem" (62) could be identified, ambiguity might be lessened, if not resolved. The difficulty ("profound ambivalence," 64) is that, instead, here Blake writes of "the imagined state, which both generates the poem and is expressed in the poetry itself" (62). That "the imagined state" should prove so problematic will seem to some an apt comment on the entire enterprise of "retracing" Innocence and Experience.

Gardner's research in the Westminster archives adds some useful information about Blake's milieu; but one can regret that such an ambitious project did not extend further into the wide range of secondary material. Particularly striking for a book which argues that "the primary motivation" of the *Songs* lies "in the assumptions which hung in the air [Blake] breathed" (144) is the lack of any reference to Heather Glen's quite different version of those assumptions in *Vision and Disenchantment* (1983). One may have reservations as well about an argument which inserts "universally" before quoting the *OED*'s comment that "willow" is "taken as a symbol of grief" (100), or baldly states "The essence of Innocence" (107), or hears Blake speaking *in propria persona* "for the only time" —in two separate poems ("London,"

118; "On Another's Sorrow," 76)—or characterizes "deep" as "that most sinister of all words" (98). But in its relentless contextualization Gardner offers a salutory antidote to any who would seal Blake up in mere "textuality": "A year before Blake issued *Songs of Experience* a chapel was built 'on the green' in South Lambeth" (139). It cost £3000, "financed by the issue of sixty shares of £50 each, every shareholder being entitled to four seats," and Gardner even reproduces a 1793 watercolor of it, complete with cattle fenced off in the foreground pasture.



Section of *Survey of London* (1786) by J. Cary, showing area of Golden Square, King Street, Oxford Street and Poland Street (Oxford Street is the main road running east-west at the north of the map and Swallow Street is now Regent Street).

**Harold Bloom, ed. *William Blake: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, 1985. 209 pp. $24.50.**
**Nelson Hilton, ed. *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake, 1970–1984*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1986. 333 pp. $35.00.**

**Reviewed by Peter Otto**

One need only measure the articles which open Bloom's *William Blake* with the work of their immediate predecessors to marvel once again at the quantum leap in Blake studies that was effected by the work of critics such as Erdman, Gleckner, Frye and, more recently, Mitchell. Articles such as "Blake: The Historical Approach," "Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs," "The Keys to the Gates," and "Blake's Composite Art" clearly deserve their place at the beginning of a collection of "modern critical views" on Blake.

Yet it would be wrong to view these articles solely in their original context. The temporal gap between production in one generation and transmission to the next, and the resulting change of context, significantly changes any article's meaning. In their original context these articles announced that they were engaged in the task of hollowing out "the cave" of Blake criticism. As a collection of "modern critical views," however, what is foregrounded is the contrary task of keeping open the space of a particular kind of Blake criticism. In the new context—that of "transmitting knowledge from generation to generation"—they now present the smooth surface of "books . . . arranged in libraries" (*MHH* 15, E40), which must be "opened" once again. It is perhaps emblematic of this change of stature that these articles have been reprinted without footnotes. Apparently a "modern critical view" is self-standing and requires no temporal referents. Needless to say, this omission severely qualifies the usefulness of these articles for students, who are presumably the target audience for this book.

Just how dramatic an alteration this change of context can have on meaning can be seen in Bloom's introduction (excerpted from *Poetry and Repression*) which, we are told in the editor's note, is "intended to provoke all settled readings of Blake." This is apparently to be done by pointing out how Blake "in mocking a canonical kind of poem, nevertheless is subsumed by the canonical traditions of misreading" (17). As an introduction to a book which proposes a canon of modern Blake criticism and which assures us that the opening essays "do set forth approaches to Blake that are not altogether unset-