

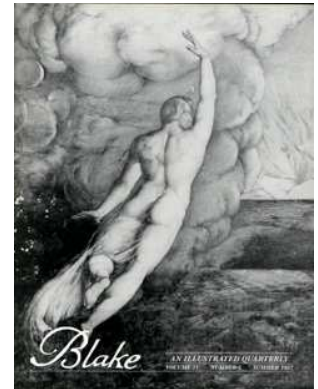
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Robert Gleckner, Blake and Spenser

George Anthony Rosso, Jr.

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The catalogue entries are in standard Library of Congress style (repeated in their entirety for two or more copies of the same work), without italics or reference to Blake scholarship (though the "classification [is] based on *A Blake Bibliography*" of 1964 [pp. xi-xii]) or cross-references within the text, and they are serviceable and unambitious. They serve chiefly as a handlist of the collection.

What then is in the collection? The vast majority consists of secondary works about Blake, reprints of his writings and pictures, some of it is strikingly ephemeral, such as section 7 on "Prospectuses, Book Jackets, Postcards," and some of it has nothing to do with Blake at all (see, e.g., pp. 47, 50-51, 60-61). It is organized as reprints of Blake's writings (pp. 3-35), book illustrations (pp. 39-68), editions of books Blake read or owned (pp. 71-74), catalogues, biographies, criticism, and scholarship (pp. 77-126), separate drawings and engravings (pp. 129-47), manuscripts [none by Blake] (pp. 151-53), miscellanea (pp. 157-59), slides and microfilms (pp. 163-66), and an appendix of books with Blake illustrations elsewhere in the McGill University Libraries (pp. 169-72).

There is, of course, a great deal of Blake scholarship and ephemera here, a testimony to much patient effort and devotion. But the books of scholarship are not very difficult to locate elsewhere, and the ephemera will interest few besides myself.³ For the Blake student, it is of course convenient to have so much gathered in one place.

One of the chief values of the collection to the scholar is probably in the section of books with Blake's illustrations to the works of others, though even here some fifty of the works are modern reprints. Some of the originals are in duplicate copies, such as Blair's *Grave of 1808* (3 copies), Ritson's *Select Collection of English Songs of 1783* (3 sets), Young's *Night Thoughts of 1797* (2 copies), *Job of 1874* (2 copies), and some are genuinely uncommon, such as Mora's *Meditaciones Poeticas of 1826*, one of three copies traced in *Blake Books* (1977), and a unique set of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, originally published in *The Novelist's Magazine* in 1783.⁴ The section of original drawings lists four minor but interesting Blake drawings, and the section called "Blake 6 Manuscripts" has no manuscript by Blake at all but does have interesting contemporary manuscripts (unrelated to him) by Fuseli, Joseph Johnson, and others, as well as some by modern scholars such as Sir Geoffrey Keynes, Foster Damon, and Martin Butlin — it must make one feel monumental to have one's correspondence recorded in public institutions during one's lifetime. The most interesting such manuscripts are those of Anne Gilchrist, the biographer's widow. Among the loose prints are rare and important ones of Lavater, Edmund Pitts, proofs of *Job* pls. 17 and 19 — but the cop-

perplates for an unidentified facsimile of *Job*⁵ are only referred to glancingly through the proofs pulled from them in 1969.

In sum, this is an extensive reference collection with a few quite unusual items in it. It is useful to have a catalogue of the collection, but the items it records and the manner in which it records them will rarely much concern scholars who are not actually working with the McGill Collections.

But I must conclude by saying that the work of Christopher Heppner here seems to be solid and valuable and that I have repeatedly worked in the Lande Collection with profit and gratitude. The staff is extremely eager to help, and the environment is warm and agreeable. There are great profits to be found at McGill if one is not led to expect too much.

¹Well, yes, I know, all books are oblong. I mean this one is wider than it is high.

²On the other hand, there is a curious variation in the length of the columns on a page, differing by as much as six inches (e.g., p. 170).

³See Christopher Heppner, "Notes on Some Items in the Blake Collection at McGill," *Blake Newsletter*, 10 (1977), 100-108.

⁴Vol. 1 was published for T. Kelly in 1818, vol. 2 for C. Cooke probably about 1811. I have a set of the 1811 edition but have not seen a complete set of that of 1818.

⁵See "Blake's *Job* Copperplates," *Library*, 5S., 26 (1976), 234-41.

Robert Gleckner. *Blake and Spenser*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. pp. 384. \$29.50

Reviewed by George Anthony Rosso, Jr.

A larger human brain will be developed by Man when the whole of human life is seen and understood as a single mental form. This single mental form is a drama of creation, struggle, redemption and restoration. . . . the archetype of all prophecy and art, the universal form which art reveals in pieces, and it is also the Word of God. (Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*)

Northrop Frye, the unacknowledged legislator of *Blake and Spenser*, built archetypal literary theory on the idea that a single universal mental form, derived from the Bible, establishes the "ultimate context for all works of literature whatever" ("The Road of Excess," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom [New York, 1970], 129). Frye elaborated the theory following his book on Blake, when a study of *The Faerie Queene* even-

tually was absorbed into the more ambitious *Anatomy of Criticism*. Blake's work led Frye into literature at large because it became coherent when seen in the context of the "line of vision" formed by Milton, Spenser, and Dante among others. Blake's poetry thus holds the keys to poetic thought, for individual works attain meaning only in relation to literature, "or what we may call its archetypal framework," a framework revealed by the contextual strategy of allusion. And since in Blake "nineteenths of the allusions are to the Bible," the Bible is the total order of words or the Word within which all works inhere, providing the poet with both a mythic structure and a prophetic purpose. That purpose is identifying the non-human and human worlds, linking creative activity with an awareness of its social function: "It is this unity of energy and consciousness that Blake attempts to express by the word 'vision'" ("The Road of Excess," 132).

Robert Gleckner seeks to determine just how much vision Blake found in Spenser. And since he adheres to the basic Frye postulate of using Blake's entire canon in his analysis, the synoptic prose description of *A Vision of the Last Judgment* is one of his primary texts. "Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably" and is distinguished from "allegory," although Blake concedes that "Allgory [sic] is Seldom without some Vision" (E [1982] 554). The phrase "some Vision" occupies Gleckner throughout the book. It refers to temporal fragmentation of what really and unchangeably exists in Blake's Eternity or Eden, the highest mode of consciousness that Albion ("Man") can enter and that identifies or marries the contrary subjective and objective poles of reality. In effect, Gleckner's focus is epistemological. On the one hand, he attributes to the passive Lockean subject the mental division that produces external reality. The passive subject, rather than identifying reality with mental form, classifies it according to similitudes and analogies, veering from the concrete or sensuous poetic image to the reified idea, from minute particularity to generality. When an idea is abstracted from its sensory ground it loses its identity, its fundamental metaphoricity, and becomes a substitute image or metonymy, what Gleckner calls "allegory." In Blake's epistemology, on the other hand, reality and vision are one: and this unity appears when the subject perceives as part of the "single eternal and infinite God-Man" that Frye finds in Blake's Albion, who in his unfallen or undivided form is guided by Los-Jesus: "All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour . . . the Human Imagination" (VLJ, E 555). Spenser's fundamental error is relying on the allegorical trappings of Arthurian romance; for in fragmenting Albion into the temporal acts of Arthur, he reduces the eternal into an historical personage and thereby achieves only "some Vision."

Gleckner's other primary text is plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (MHH), which illustrates the process of allegorization at the center of Blake's critique of Spenser. "In addition to Blake's fundamental purpose of exposing the self-serving power play that is the origin of priesthood," Gleckner writes, "the passage is also a thumbnail sketch of how poetic vision is narrowed to allegorical constructs" (324). Although the plate informs the commentary on Blake's tempera painting of *The Characters in Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'*, the central section of Gleckner's book, it also anchors Blake's "mini-commentary" on Spenser in works from 1780 up to the Spenser painting in 1825 (Gleckner refers to plate 11 ten times before page 130). Plate 11 underlies Blake's use of the rhetorical strategy called *abusio* or catechresis, terms that describe the borrowing of contexts from precursors in order to invert, subvert, or comment on them. *Abusio* underlies the "de-allegorizing" project that Gleckner locates not only in MHH but in Los's "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (*Jerusalem* 11:5) and in Los's printing press: "and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain / As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel" (*Milton* 27 [29]:9-10). Blake's critique of such contexts as Arthurian and Petrarchan "systems" amounts to a "reversed rethinking" that produces a "new figuration." Gleckner examines Blake's use of *abusio*, particularly in regard to Petrarchism, in four texts: *The Book of Thel*, two Pickering manuscript poems—"The Golden Net" and "The Crystal Cabinet"—selected passages from the epic prophecies that subsume Petrarchism, and MHH.

Since MHH is so crucial to *Blake and Spenser*, and since Gleckner's insights into the poem are cogent and suggestive, let us turn to chapter 3, "Roads of Excess." Gleckner finds all previous interpretations hindered by the lack of a "guiding principle of interpretation . . . that will account for the apparent shifts in the authoritativeness of the several speakers" (71). Because no one speaker is privileged, when is Blake speaking in his own voice? Gleckner's answer hinges on the epistemological issues discussed in the first two chapters: imagination sees life whole, which means that neither demonic voices of excess nor angelic voices of restraint speak the whole truth. The truth lies in experiencing a marriage of contraries: the reader must redeem the diabolic excesses of angelic correction by experiencing the "errors" of reason and energy divided. The point is to not evade experience, as Thel does, for "You never know what is enough until you know what is more than enough." That proverb, Gleckner argues, demonstrates Blake's use of *abusio*, his inversion of the Legend of Temperance in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. In particular, Blake exposes the error of the "golden mean" morality underlying the Legend, for in reality temperance is an *excess* of restraint. At the end of Book II Guyon destroys the

Bower of Bliss in a rage of excessive zeal that prompts Gleckner to identify Spenser's personification of Excesse as "the presiding allegorical power of the entire book" (79). This ambiguous figure, says Gleckner, should restrain us from embracing "Blakean excess" as desideratum. Hence the "allusionary context" of Book II indicates the proper interpretive stance toward the speakers in *MHH*.

Chapter 4, "Calling and Naming," further substantiates Blake's "de-allegorical" project, relates it to the archetypal Word, and prepares for the central portion of the book on Blake's Spenser painting. Gleckner shows that part of Spenser's redeemability lies in his insight into human character and mental process. The "some Vision" that Blake discerns inheres in Spenser's minute articulation of character and "in the sort of shifting identities of those characters," Gleckner writes, "which I explore as functioning in Blake's painting" (120). The guide here, as acknowledged in the last chapter, is Kathleen Williams ("a Blake critic aborning if I ever saw one"), who in *Spenser's World of Glass* (1966) contends that the personified virtues and vices issue from the poem's action, not vice versa, and who champions Spenser as an acute psychologist, a master of mental space in which characters merge identities and functions not unlike the activity of Blake's zoas and emanations. Unfortunately, Spenser's "naming" the mental energies amounts to the reification deplored on plate 11 of *MHH*. Personification abstracts the energies from the "Divine body" into a system of analogies: character is thus reduced from identity to mere resemblance subject to the ravages of time and mutability in a way that the "eternal attributes" of the human form divine are not (132). In other words—and we are at the cutting edge of recent debates on romantic allegory—Blake presents the "naked passions themselves" rather than allegorical substitutes. Urizen, for example, is not "named" reason nor does he represent reason, argues Gleckner; he is one of "the vinous eternal realities of intellect" pressed from Los's printing press "out of the husk of words" (154). Spenserian virtues and vices, despite Spenser's subtle insights into human character, become "surrogates" that never integrate into the single mental form in which "All Human Forms [are] identified" (*Jerusalem* 99:1).

Armed with his "verbal and conceptual imitation-criticism" culled from years of rethinking Spenser, Blake embarks on a pictorial critique of *The Faerie Queene's* moral-allegorical system. Gleckner arranges this most informative section of the book into three chapters: the first, chapter 5, concentrates on critical methodology and the upper half of the painting, the "supernal realm." The two critical principles Gleckner adduces are interwoven: that the painting is structured by a "double horizontal focus" between the upper "supernal" and

lower "mundane" worlds, and that Blake critiques Spenser by using but disrupting *The Faerie Queene's* book-by-book narration, primarily by placing the lower half of the painting within a "tripartite scheme" that exposes the movement toward allegory in Spenser's sequential conception. The supernal realm, moving from the city of Babylon on the right to the New Jerusalem on the left, counteracts the processional movement below, which follows Spenser's narrative "progression" from Holiness (the New Jerusalem of Book I) to Courtesy (the pastoral allegory of Book VI). Thus Blake's double horizontal perspective visualizes the strategy of significant allusion or *abusio*, which enables him to reverse the mundane procession and collapse the rhetoric of temporality into a visionary "tableau" that "forces us to perceive the entire 'procession' coinstantaneously" (169). Gleckner sees in this reversal of the narrative movement of *The Faerie Queene* Blake's recuperation of Spenser, or Spenser's apotheosis into the visionary company, the select "Chaucer & Shakespeare & Milton" pantheon, for Spenser is "the only poet aside from Chaucer to be granted a non-sequential 'illustration'" (283).

But Spenser cannot be redeemed without Blake, as chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate in detail. Because it is "paradigmatic" of Blake's critical method, the front or Dwarf-Una-Redcrosse panel gets a chapter of its own. Blake not only places the neglected Spenserian Dwarf at the head of the procession (Gleckner sees him as a version of the Christ child), but he ignores the warrior Redcrosse and moves Duessa and Archimago to the rear or "Calidore" panel, where they are identified with the Blatant Beast and so serve as "iconographic signals" of Blake's critical reading of the poem. Chapter 7 treats the "middle" and "Calidore" panels of the tripartite frame as allegorical "traps" that the reader-viewer must dismantle. To summarize crudely, Blake disrupts Spenser's book-by-book narrative sequence by placing Arthur between the middle and rear panels, omitting Book IV on Friendship (the only positive Spenserian "virtue" to Blake) and identifying Arthur with Britomart (Book III) and Artegall (Book V), whom Arthur introduces center stage, and with Calidore (Book VI): that is, with chastity, justice, and courtesy, the linchpins of the moral system supporting Spenser's allegory. Because Arthur subsumes but does not integrate the separate virtues, Blake depicts him as the consolidation of Moral Virtue he so abhors and figures in his Rahab-Satan, religion hid in war, which is what Britomart and Artegall (or Britomartegall) represent. In effect, the reader-viewer must see Spenser "not with, but through" Blake's eyes, see that the Britomartegall hermaphroditic union parodies the androgynous union of Albion-Jerusalem, the single mental form in which virtues and vices are supplanted by "Vision." But as Gleckner contends, Blake can only go so far: "The ultimate deliverers, of course, are Blake's

readers, for it is we who must recognize Blake's imaginative deallegorizing" (111), his abuse of contexts to deliver us from the encrusted orthodoxies embedded in those contexts and clogging the visionary line.

Blake and Spenser is a subtle and highly unified example of contextual criticism at its best. But of course the contexts have not been exhausted. As with Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, whose presuppositions guide Gleckner throughout, the book's thoroughgoing unity hides certain fissures. What, for example, keeps Blake's use of allegory from becoming allegory? Gleckner would respond that Los's "system" self-destructs into a "systematic antisystemizing" that questions its own need of language: "Los's 'system,' I submit, is the allegorical antiallegory" (111). But what do we make of the names Urizen, Luvah, Los and the rest? Are they not "named"? Again, Gleckner would come back with the Romantic distinction between allegory and symbol ("Vision"), but this unresolved point brings us to another quibble. Despite his denial of "system"—which would distance him from Frye—Gleckner relies on the founding assumption of archetypal theory: that of a "total order of words" or of the word within the Word (see 157). Yet this "transcendental signified" situates Gleckner's critical method firmly within the tradition (system) of philosophical idealism. Whether this tradition best illuminates Blake's work—it certainly offers one important context—is not the point. Rather, Gleckner's privileging of method over theory, his rejection of system, reveals his affiliation with the older New Criticism and its built-in suspicion of history and temporality. Ultimately Gleckner's methodology contains Blake within the categories of formalism, even if it is the cosmic formalism of Frye's verbal universe.

True to the value of the New Critical enterprise, however, Gleckner's anti-system rhetoric does not negate the often brilliant readings in the book. And he certainly breaks new ground in his treatment of the Spenser painting, combining a thorough understanding of Blake's poetry with a sure grasp of the mechanics of his art. As an application of the best that has been thought and said about Blake, *Blake and Spenser* is without blame. If Gleckner had acknowledged the philosophical underpinnings of his work, and the essential but partial understanding it affords, *Blake and Spenser* would be so tightly woven of insight and self-critical awareness that neither praise nor blame could mar it.

Abby Robinson. *The Dick and Jane*. New York: Dell, 1985. 237 pp. Hard cover, \$14.95/Paper, \$3.50.

Reviewed by Morris Eaves

Standard histories of the subject maintain that detective fiction begins in 1841—before the word "detective" is in use—with Poe's adventures of C. Auguste Dupin as narrated by his sidekick. Later in the century, Doyle successfully imitated Poe's formula, replacing Dupin and the narrator with Holmes and Watson. In the early 1920s, even before Doyle had quite finished with Holmes, a virtual school of British "mystery" writing, of which Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers are central instances, engendered the Poirot-at-the-manor, Sellers-at-the-vicarage kind of story sometimes known as classical or golden-age detective fiction. At nearly the same moment, out of American pulp magazines like the legendary *Black Mask* came Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, central writers of the so-called hardboiled school, which used violence, sex, and tough talk to charge up the old elements. The development of the form, or forms, from Poe to the present has been cumulative. All the main branches are still alive and well, though the Holmes line has for the most part become a branch of children's literature—appropriately enough, since it began as a refinement of the Victorian boy's adventure story.

As critics like George Grella have shown ("Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel," *Novel* 4 [1970]: 30–48, and "Murder and the Mean Streets: The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel," *Contemporaries* 1 [1970], 6–15), the plot structure of detective fiction has always roamed up and down a spectrum between quest romance, for the adventure, and comedy, for the love interest. The Poe-Doyle formula is usually romance, with comic elements, if present, present merely to ratify a successful quest, as when Holmes's successful battle against man and serpent at Stoke Moran liberates the stepdaughter from the bestial stepfather so she can marry the wimp who had suspected that her fears were all hysterical. In the classical English-style mystery associated with Agatha Christie, structural priorities are more often reversed to favor comedy. Christie's stories frequently leave one with the feeling that her detectives and sidekicks are knights and squires trapped in comedies of manners, while the process of eliminating suspects one by one almost replaces the episodic confrontations one expects in a romance—and gets, in the running battle between Holmes and Moriarty, for instance. The pro-