

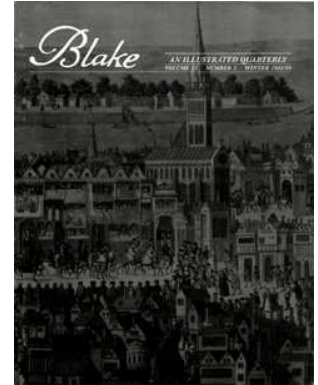
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Michael Phillips, ed., William Blake, *An Island in the Moon*

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 22, Issue 3, Winter 1988/89, pp. 103-105



REVIEWS

William Blake. *An Island in the Moon: A Facsimile of the Manuscript Introduced, Transcribed, and Annotated by Michael Phillips with a Preface by Haven O'More.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press in Association with Institute of Traditional Science, 1987. viii+110 pp., with an extra copy of the 20-page manuscript in a pocket in the back paste-down. \$125.00.

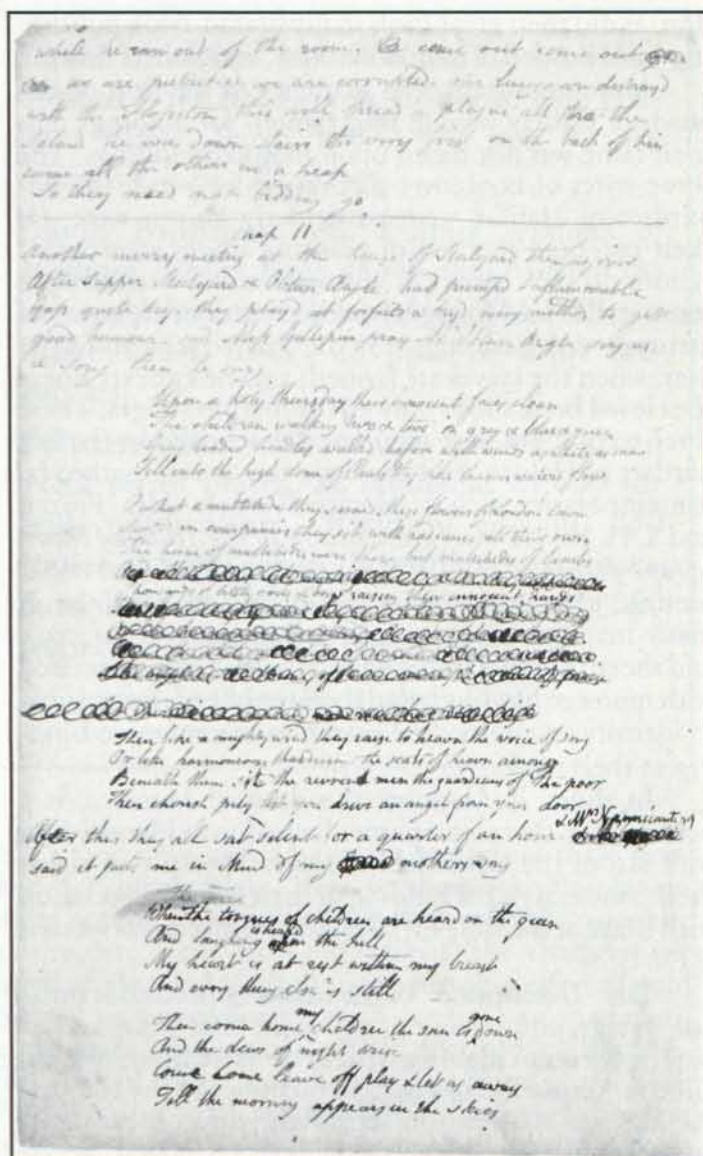
Reviewed by G. E. Bentley, Jr.

This facsimile has been a surprising number of years in gestation, for it was in effect commissioned by Sir Geoffrey Keynes (d. 1982) and Arnold Fawcus (d. 1979) as a continuation of the Blake Trust series of facsimiles. For unexplained reasons, "it fell to the Institute [of *Traditional Science*] to take the work soon after its conception and bring it to completion" (viii). The manuscript in the Fitzwilliam Museum has never been reproduced in its entirety before;¹ it is the longest and most important piece of writing by Blake which has been thus neglected.

The virtues of this edition are all conservative. The reproduction of the manuscript is excellent—true size, on fine wove paper not unlike Blake's, in remarkably faithful color rather than in black and white. The transcription builds carefully upon the accomplishments of its predecessors and extends them a little, and the introduction (3–26) and annotations (67–99) cull the best of what has been written about the *Island in the Moon*. These are great and worthy virtues.

Occasionally the repetitions of the discoveries of the past are somewhat uncritical. Thus the character called "Aradobo, the dean of Morocco" is

conjectured [by Erdman, pp. 507–8] to be one of the sons of William Edwards of Halifax, famous for his Morocco bindings . . . In 1784, James, thirty, and John, twenty-eight, opened their bookshop at 102 Pall Mall, evidently innovating the exhibition sale room, for which 'Descriptive Catalogues' were issued. (72)



James Edwards (1756–1816) was 27 or 28 (not "thirty") when he moved to London in 1784, and his brother John (23 December 1758–1793) was 25 (not "twenty-eight"). From the Edwards's bookshops at 102 Pall Mall (1784–93) and 77 Pall Mall (1793–1800), shop catalogues of antiquarian books were issued in January 1785, May 1787, 1789, 1790, 1794, and 1796, and they were called either merely *A Catalogue* (1787, 1789, 1794, 1796) or *Edwards's Catalogue* (1785, 1790) and never "Descriptive Catalogue" (like Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809). And there seems to be no evidence at all that any of the Edwardses had an "exhibition sale room" in Lon-

don, as did their great rivals in illustrated-book publishing John Boydell, Thomas Macklin, and Robert Bowyer.

More important, the branches of the firm of Edwards of Halifax were indeed famous for bindings, but their fame was not based upon morocco bindings. The three styles of bookcover decoration for which the Edwardses of Halifax were particularly known were: (1) their patented method of painting under transparent vellum on the covers; (2) "Etruscan calf," with designs stained with acid (not gilt) on the boards in imitation of Etruscan vase paintings; (3) the fore-edges painted so that, when the leaves are fanned, a scene appears where the closed book shows only gilt or marbled edges. These three techniques were originated or renewed by the Edwardses of Halifax, and these are the ones remarked by contemporaries such as Horace Walpole, Mrs. Piozzi, and T. H. Horne (*An Introduction to the Study of Bibliography* [1814], I, 309). Of course, as professional bookbinders, they must have commissioned bindings in many materials, such as calf, vellum, goat (morocco), and sheep, but their fame was not particularly associated with morocco bindings, and today it may not be possible to identify any individual examples of a morocco binding as their work.

In short, if Aradobo, the dean of Morocco, is a bookbinder, there is no particular reason to identify him with any of the Edwardses of Halifax because of either their famous styles of binding or their known association with Blake at the time his *Island in the Moon* was written (? 1784).

The "Description" of the manuscript itself is brief, one paragraph on page 3, and somewhat strange. The watermark is not identified (fleur de lis with a shield and GR countermark), and there is no notice of the fact that the last leaf was sewn in separately, thus obscuring its relationship with the rest of the leaves. (Indeed, we are told that "The leaves are no longer conjugate, having at an early stage been mounted on guards for binding" [3], but this is not noted in Keynes's *Bibliography* [1921] or in *Blake Books* [1977], and one wonders what the evidence is for this "early stage.") There is no reference to the five other leaves with which the *Island* was bound or to the proofs of the Virgil woodcuts with them or to A. H. Palmer's statement about the provenance of the proofs. And it concludes "that the extant manuscript is complete, but lacking the missing sheet or sheets" after page 16 with an unknown amount of text. This seems to be an odd use of "complete" when the manuscript lacks an undefined amount of text. The *Island* would have distressed Aristotle because it seems to have a beginning and an end but no middle.

The notes to the transcription scrupulously compare the readings of Erdman (*Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* [1982]) and Bentley (*William Blake's Writings* [1978]) with those given here, and, as an interested party, I have kept score as to who seems to be correct:

Phillips	Erdman	Bentley	None of the Former
34	18	21	6

In general, both Phillips and Erdman read deletions more confidently than I do—and most of these uncertainties are in deleted passages. Then there are half a dozen points at which the truth seems to be slightly different from what any of these worthies has printed, though the extent and significance of the disputed passages is generally not very great. Thus in chapter 5, line 3, we find:

Erdman, Bentley: Is Chatterton a Mathematician
Phillips: Is Chatterton a Mathematicum

The disputed word does indeed look more like "Mathematicum" than "Mathematician"—but it looks more like "Mathematicune" than either. Unfortunately, neither "Mathematicum" nor "Mathematicune" seems to make sense—neither is in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Perhaps it would be best to give "Mathematicum[?]" here. In many small particulars Michael Phillips has improved the readings of the *Island*, and this is useful labor.

The annotations incorporate the best work of his predecessors and occasionally extend it as well. I do not remember seeing the operative passage concluding: "And the Cellar goes down with a Step (Grand Chorus)" (ch. 9, l. 16) compared before to Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso* (1676) and Dryden's poem *Mac Flecknoe* (c. 1678) in which the protagonist-buffoon, instead of being translated to heaven, "drops to the cellar through a trapdoor." I'm not sure the analogy is a necessary one, but it has the virtue of making sense of a very puzzling passage. And the account of Steelyard the Lawgiver sitting at his table taking extracts in chapter 8 is usefully identified as "A burlesque of the opening of Act V, Scene i, of Joseph Addison's tragedy *Cato* (1713, pp. 56–7): 'Cato solus, sitting in a thoughtful Posture: In his Hand Plato's Book on the Immortality of the Soul,'" for Addison's *Cato* is later quoted in Blake's manuscript. The song of innocence beginning "O father father where are you going" is connected intriguingly with the fact that "Blake's father died July 1784" (74, 80), for the *Island* is generally taken to have been written about 1784 or early

1785. Michael Phillips argues that the MS is a fair copy with revisions "composed intermittently between 1782 and 1785, or perhaps even later" (6), but the evidence for a date before 1784 is not very persuasive. Indeed, even the conventional date of 1784 is not very firm. The claims for novel conclusions here are put with appropriate caution, and, while some scholars may not accept all the conclusions which Michael Phillips presents, at least the evidence is laid out plainly.

In sum, this is a satisfactorily faithful reproduction of the manuscript, the transcription, introduction, and notes are just what they should be and what they pretend to be, and the whole is a genuine contribution to Blake scholarship. Anyone concerned to know the appearance and implications of Blake's puzzling manuscript of *An Island in the Moon* can in future turn with confidence to this careful and valuable edition. [See Michael Phillips's comment, below]

¹For that matter, it is not reproduced in its entirety now, for the original consists of a booklet of 32 pages, of which the first 17 bear the text and the last one has a drawing on it. Only the first 17 pages and the last 1 are reproduced; the 12 blank pages are not reproduced, and the work is therefore not, strictly speaking, a facsimile. Much reduced photographs of the text-pages of the *Island* are reproduced in William Blake, *En Ö På Månen*, ed. Göran Malmqvist (Uppsala, 1979) 133-149.

David Bindman, ed. *William Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job*, London: The William Blake Trust, 1987. 172 pp., 53 pp. reproductions, 22 plates.

David Bindman, ed. *Colour versions of William Blake's Book of Job designs from the circle of John Linnell*, London: The William Blake Trust, 1987. 28 pp., 48 color facsimiles.

Deluxe edition with stencils, proofs, and an extra set of plates, 22 copies at £1,600 for both publications. Standard edition, 250 copies at £580 for both publications. Standard edition, 50 copies, £260 and £360 respectively for each publication.

Reviewed by Martin Butlin

It is a long time since I have received one of these wonderful William Blake Trust publications. The excitement of unwrapping a package large enough to enclose a complete set of hi-fi equipment, the characteristic smell of glue and leather, the sumptuous effect of gold tooling on brown leather with carefully attuned cloth and marbled papers, beautifully clear and legible typeface—I had feared that these were a thing of the past. And of course, in many ways this publication is a product of the past. The "onlie begetters," Sir Geoffrey Keynes and Arnold Fawcus, died in 1982 and 1979 respectively, leaving the work unfinished, and a new team, David Bindman, Barbara Bryant, Robert Essick and Bo Lindberg, some already involved in the project, have brought the work to completion. The result is something rather different from, and rather more ambitious than, what was originally envisaged. The long list of color facsimiles produced by the Trianon Press under Arnold Fawcus for the William Blake Trust were above all objects of beauty, recreating as near to perfection as possible Blake's original achievements. The accompanying text, though fully adequate, was deliberately kept as short as possible. Only in a few of the later publications, such as *Blake's Laocoön, a Last Testament*, published in 1976, and *The Complete Portraiture of William and Catherine Blake*, of 1977, was the accompanying matter of necessity fuller and more scholarly. Now, as the preface by David Bind-