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Stanley Kunitz, ed., The Essential Blake; Michael Mason, ed., William Blake; David Punter, ed., William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose

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REVIEWS

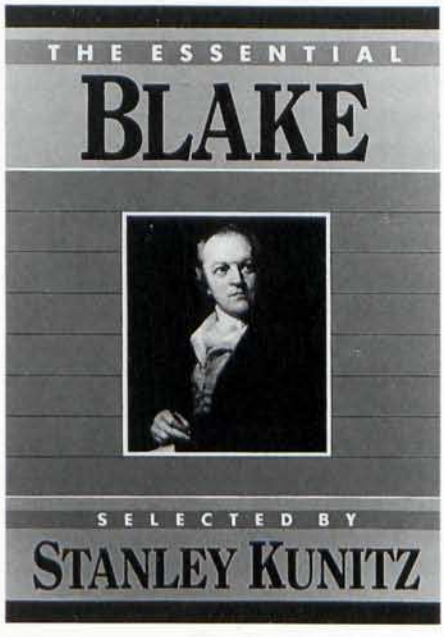
Stanley Kunitz, ed. *The Essential Blake.* New York: The Ecco Press, 1987. 92 pp. $5.00 paper; Michael Mason, ed. *William Blake.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. xxvi + 601 pp. $45.00 cloth/$15.95 paper; David Punter, ed. *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose.* London/New York: Routledge, 1988. ix + 283 pp. $9.95 paper.

Reviewed by E. B. Murray

Volume 4 of Ecco Press's *The Essential Poets* series, *The Essential Blake*, may be conveniently slipped into your hip-pocket, brought to the pub, read on the subway, or on the toilet and may as well be flushed down the drain afterwards if a trace of scholarly substance is what you demand in the Blake texts you keep around. Its unannotated contents, so far as they go, are something less than those you'd find in a survey course anthology—*The Songs of Innocence, The Songs of Experience, Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* "Auguries of Innocence,"—but no *Thel, Visions of the Daughters of Albion,* or *Urizen,*—whose space is perhaps taken up by a "Miscellany" of gnomic verses, epigrams, and letter excerpts. A most unpretentious booklet, meant for the literate among *hoi polloi,* with a poet to provide an essential biographical sketch and a few uninspired generalities by way of essential evaluation. All in all, a harmless little pot-boiler.

Not so the Oxford Authors and Routledge Blakes. They do have some pretensions and they may not be altogether harmless. Michael Mason is initially concerned with telling us what he does not do in his edition. He does not include *An Island in the Moon, The Book of Ahania,* or *The Four Zoas.* He does not follow a chronological order in presenting Blake's texts; he does not provide deleted or alternative readings; he does not provide the illuminations or describe them; he does not summarize the content of Blake's works nor does he explicate Blake's mythology. Most of the rest of this part of his introduction is concerned with justifying what he has not done. For example, he does not provide the illuminations because "the enhancement of our reading of Blake which was expected to flow from attention to his illustrations has simply not occurred." So much for the majority of the present generation of Blake scholars and teachers who have in fact spent much time and trouble trying to enhance their readings of Blake by attending to his illuminations and who have subsequently beguiled themselves into believing they've had some solid success in their attempts. But Mason knows how to put these bemused and errant souls in their place. They are implicitly aligned with the "[e]ditors [who] have fallen into the habit of transcribing what Blake crossed out," who are either "protective Blake experts" insisting, as Blake did not, that the illuminations are an integral part of the text they accompany or "[s]tudents of Blake . . . too ready to assume that his mythology is a well-formed system," and who therefore work up "drab paraphrases" to fit Blake into the Procrustean limitations of their own inferably drab understandings. Mason, a veritable Daniel come to judgment or an editorial David defiant against these overspecialized "giant forms," will let Blake speak for himself—sans illuminations and alternative readings of course.

As we know, and contrary to Mason's implications, Blake felt his illuminations an integral part of his composite art, going so far as to applaud himself (in the third person) for having invented "a method of Printing which combines the Painter and Poet" and, in an earlier self-evaluation, he bluntly asserts, through a persona, that those (*pace* Mason) who will not accept and pay highly for the illuminated writings he projected "will be ignorant fools and will not deserve to live." *Ipse dixit.* The poet/artist is typically seconded by his twentieth-century editors, who, even when obliged to omit the illuminations, argue for their necessary relevance. Max Plowman, in his 1927 *Everyman's Library* edition, has the humilty and good sense to note the "insuperable difficulty in the way of a transcript version" when "there is alternation between words that expand the meaning of a design, and designs that give to the words their complete significance" (xxv). Vivian de Sola Pinto (*William Blake,* 1965) states that the "text and illustrations form a single integrated whole," that part of the effect of the lyrics in *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* "is lost when they are read in ordinary print without the designs," and that in *Jerusalem* "the



pictures are not 'illustrations' but essential and organic parts of the structure" (17, 52). As Thomas Frosch noted in reviewing the most discriminating work on the subject, W. J. T Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, the author not only contends that "each illuminated poem is an organic unit and develops its own particular relationship of text and design" but in specific instances "indisputably shows that text and design together create signification that can't be gained from either by itself" (*Blake* 13 [1979]: 40, 41). But readers tempted to accept Mason's assertion at face value need only riffle through the pages of this quarterly and check out its annual bibliography to infer a consensus refutation *passim*.

While Mason is justified in singling out for our special praise his most helpful "Index of Names and Motifs" (not so original as he seems to think, though, since a roughly comparable and more detailed precedent appeared in the 1926 OUP Sloss/Wallis edition), the most striking feature of his edition will surely be his mixed chronological/generic/thematic division of Blake's works under headings such as "Blake on Religion and Knowledge," "Blake on Art and Literature," "Septenary Verse of the French Revolutionary Period," "The Lyrics," and "The Los Poems." He thus reorganizes the canon for the benefit of readers who will be less "intimidated" by Blake's mythological writings if they find them mixed and matched with the lyrics according to arrangements which, Mason feels, will remind them "that the Prophetic Books are by no means all of a piece." Assuming the epics and the Lambeth poems are together defined as Prophetic Books, we can see how this piecemeal arrangement is effected. "The Los Poems" contains *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Los*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. However, lyrics from these latter poems are taken out of their epic context to form a subgenre of their own called, not surprisingly, "Lyrics from the Epic Poems." For reasons both chronological and nominal, *The Song of Los* does not appear under that title at all but is rather divided into "Africa" and "Asia" to so flank *America* and *Europe* under the "Septentary Verse" heading (which also subsumes *Tiriel*, *Thel*, *Visions*, and of course *The French Revolution*). Both genre and chronology are disrupted for thematic considerations which, for example, place under the head of "Blake on Religion and Knowledge" many of Blake's annotations, the *Natural Religion* propositions, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Auguries of Innocence," *The Everlasting Gospel*, and the prefaces to chapters 2, 3, and 4 of *Jerusalem*. The preface to chapter 1 appears with the preface to *Milton* under the "Blake on Art and Literature" rubric, along with a few other annotations, eight letters, some of *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* and the comments on Homer and Virgil. *The Poetical Sketches* also lose their integral identity and title when they move into the margins of nonentity variously defined by "Early Visionary and Narrative Writings," which contains most of them, and "The Lyrics," which contains nearly all of the poems with "Song" in their titles. Even given Mason's general disregard for chronology, there seems no reason why these two divisions should be separated as they are by the "Septenary" inclusions, all of which are dated later than any of "The Lyrics" which follow them.

One may infer that Mason's decision to refashion the canon so led him to omit *The Book of Ahania* partly because it obviously follows on *The Book of Urizen* but could not be put into the "Los" poems because Los barely appears in it, and partly because Mason prefers to suppose that the real sequel to *Urizen* is *Milton*. Conversely, it's reasonable to suppose that *The Song of Los* could not be allowed its Blakean title, lest it seem to lay at least a nominal claim for inclusion among the Los poems. A lesser but still bothersome effect of Mason's categorizing nomenclature is that the running heads, instead of advising the reader that he's confronting a page of *Milton* or *Jerusalem* or *Urizen*, keeps him guessing what work it is he's opened to at some indefinite point among "The Los Poems." For the student who reads as he runs, Blake's titles are likely to be replaced in his memory by Mason's categorical name for them. Besides the prose already noted, the edition includes excerpts from *Public Address*, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, and the prose from *Poetical Sketches*. Given what Mason provides, his claim to have provided the prose with fuller annotation than other editors seems fairly made, since others have tended to slight it.

David Punter's text follows the traditional chronological orderings. Its selections and annotations are presumably geared to the Routledge English Texts' stated purpose—"to meet the needs of readers for whom the study of literature involves the study of its historical and critical contexts." The usual anthology pieces, along with *Tiriel*, *America*, and *The Song of Los*, are presented complete; but *The French Revolution*, *Urizen*, and "Auguries of Innocence," as well as the longer poems, appear only in extracts. *Europe* is omitted, as are *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*; prose selections include the *Natural Religion* propositions, excerpts from *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, "On Homer's Poetry," and "On Virgil"; there are no letters.

Assuming the historical bias of the edition, it might have seemed appropriate for *The French Revolution*, probably the most history-laden of Blake's works, to have appeared complete; and for the potential it might have provided for historical commentary, perhaps *Europe* is likewise a desideratum. The text is bookended by an introductory essay which seems relatively forced into a style and content expressive of innocence for the innocent reader yet to

engage the text, as it fulfills in a generalized and superficial fashion the editorial policy of providing historical and literary contexts; and by a freeflowing epilogue essay on a higher and more organized plane which apparently assumes that a world of experience has been gained by a reader who has gone through the preceding text. Unfortunately, the essay assumes a knowledge of Blake which simply cannot be gained by the selections as presented and abstracted from in this text. There is a refreshing honesty and due humility (particularly refreshing to a reader who has just been through the first few pages of Mason's introduction) in Punter's admission that the abstracting task which he is constricted to is a "near-impossible" one because "nothing can give the flavor of [*The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*] but a full reading of at least one of them" and because they are "interwoven" and because we must "build up some familiarity with the 'characters' before we can properly understand what is happening." Unlike Mason, Punter also notes that the relevant works should be consulted in their illuminated form because "there are many cases where our notions of a specific poem's meaning can be radically altered by looking at the visual materials which not only accompany but frequently twine around and thread through the written text."

While the two texts seem meant for different audiences, the practical fact is that they will probably be in competion, along with other editions, for a good part of the same audience, particularly since most, perhaps the great majority, of Blake readers will be in college classrooms. To find out which of the two may be better as a teaching and reading text is therefore well worth doing, though to do only that is to do less than enough. The best presently available text for teaching and reading is, with a qualification or two, undoubtedly the Norton Critical Edition (*Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 1979) edited by Mary Lynn Johnson and John Grant. For those who require a complete text of *Jerusalem* (or miss *Tiriel*), then David Erdman's generally diplomatic edition or Geoffrey Keynes' perennially reprinted Oxford Standard Authors editon will be best.

Having asserted my preferences, I'd like to back them by comparing the Mason (M) and Punter (P) editions with each other and with Johnson/Grant (J/G), both in their respective treatments of the accidental features of Blake's illuminated works and in the quantity and quality of their annotations. As a kind of "control" in accidental matters I'll use Erdman's latest edition of *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake* (E), which, along with G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s *William Blake's Writings*, does about as good a job as can reasonably be done of reproducing in print the pointing of the illuminated works. As the traditional reading text since its first appearance, Keynes's *Complete Writings* (K) may also serve as a standard of modernization in a reading text, since, along with J/G, it comes closest to observing what should probably be an editor's golden rule of thumb: if it works, don't fix it.

A few collations from and comment on variant pointing in *Thel* and *Visions* may serve as an expedient if not sufficient index to differing policies of modernizations, insofar as a policy can be inferred from practice. The "shriek mark" is of all points the one which should be shunned if there is no clear authority for it, either in the original or in the texts and apparatuses of those like Erdman and Bentley who have devoted their eyesight to Blake's ambiguous pointing. M's decision to provide an exclamation after "joys" in *Visions* 3:6[1] is therefore dubious, given E's colon, Bentley's semicolon, and the relatively neutral modernization into a period preferred by K and P. Since M states that on occasion he returned to facsimiles (not originals) to confirm or qualify what he felt was "problematical," his unique reading here and elsewhere has no preferential claim to authority and must be presumed a product of his modernizing prerogative. (One may parenthetically wonder why he didn't go down the road from London University, where he teaches, to the British Museum Print Room and check the originals—though discrepant readings of the same points by Erdman and Bentley abundantly illustrate that even that reiterated appeal may be in many instances "problematical.") But after "maid" in *Visions* line 19 it's M who more chastely converts the original's ambiguous colon/semicolon to a period, while K and P supply the emphatic but unauthorized exclamation. At this point the vacillating subjectivity involved in this kind of nitpicking, which makes the aforementioned rule of thumb always subject to a reader's or editor's clinamen towards formal or rhetorical pointing, surfaces, as I find myself wishing that M, like K and P, had added rather than subtracted an exclamation in *Visions* 5:3 (which in E reads "Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven:"), though recognizing as well the plausibility of M's editorial decision.

The fact that only M removes the interruptive but rhetorically effective exclamation after "spring" in *Thel* 1:6 may suggest a preference for a formal syntax (see also the comma used by K, P, and M for the original question mark after "spring" in the next line), though it is not clear that M consistently abides by that preference. In *Thel*'s "Motto," only M among modernizers chooses to change line 3's "rod?" to "rod," a change which seems particularly anomalous if one infers that the only justification for his (and K's and P's) changing line 4's "Mole:" to "mole?" is that the four clauses of the "Motto" are best formalized into a modern syntax when each of them is followed by a question mark. If one is going to change the question mark to a comma in the first instance, then why not keep the colon (along with the semicolon, a rhetorically prevalent surrogate for the interrogative in a series of clausal questions in Blake's

time which may still be appropriately used); or else replace the question mark after line 1's "pit" with a comma? The assumption is that modernization helps the modern reader better understand the sense of the words by a late twentieth-century pointing which joins them together in a formally consistent syntax. If the modernizer is simply going to groom Blake's inferably inconsistent pointing into his own, the would-be step forward is really a step backward, on the grounds that in such cases Blake's version is preferable. It is nonetheless and also the case that no one is likely to argue against normalizing to suit modern sensitivities such patently whimsical punctuation as that represented by the half dozen pointing variations which Blake worked into the several repetitions of "Mark well my words, they are of your eternal salvation" in *Milton*. At the level of pure theorizing, one may care to applaud the ideal surmise of Max Plowman, who felt that even the "vagaries" of Blake's pointing "would eventually prove explicable" (*Blake's Poems and Prophecies*, xi). But in eagle-eyed confrontations with the originals one very soon discovers the futility of attempting to provide the context for that eventuality by trying to reproduce the poet's intended punctuation when it is impossible to be sure whether a given point is a comma or a period, a semicolon or a colon.

At times modernization means disrupting Blake's emphatic caesura ("light," *Thel*, 1:23 in E becomes "light" in M; "cow," 2:10 in E, becomes "cow" in M) or his enjambment ("springs" 1:24 in E becomes "springs," in M). Only M provides an emphatic caesura Blake did not provide by adding a comma after "not," (3:2 in E). But only M among modernizers follows Blake in *not* providing the comma caesura in 3:9 after "thou"—perhaps indicating that random chance rather than organizing intelligence rules the modernizer's syntactical universe. Accepting that indication, a reader sensitive to rhetorical pointing may further infer that even though all modernizers agree to drop a given point, a Blakean effect worth preserving—typically an emphasis on a word before the point—could thereby be lost (e. g., "Har," 2:1 in E, "Har" in K, M, P). Extrapolating from that inference, and all of the above, the reader's ultimate (and charitable) conclusion may be that the modernizer's lot, in theory and in practice, is not a happy one.

There's some implicit disagreement between M and P on the "metrical consequences" of the terminal "-ed." While Mason states that he retains Blake's elliptical "'d" only when he feels it might have such consequences, P insists that any poem which contains both the "-ed" and the "'d" participles should have them discriminated. *Thel* is among these poems (we have "o'ertired"— or is it "o'erfired"?—in 2:4, "naked" in 4:5). But for M, *Thel* 2:2 "ceasd & smild" in E becomes "ceased" and "smiled" (P, following K, merely provides an apostrophe). In fact, M seems seldom if ever to find the foreshortened participle of any consequence: my own random sampling of his text has failed to turn up any example of his retaining it. While P perhaps protests his point too much—he spends half his "Note on the Texts" minutely arguing this particular—it's probably best to observe Blake's distinction, so that in those poems where it may seem to matter the reader will discriminate appropriately. Certain words seem to prescribe a pronounced "-ed," at least in poetry—e.g., *Thel* 3:31, where M's "sailed" (for "saild") will tend to become a disyllable in the pronunciations of some readers.

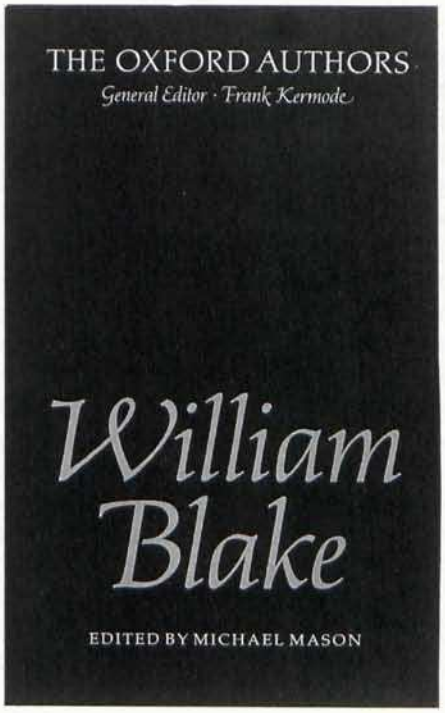
The great majority of Blake's rhetorical (or idiosyncractic) capitalizations are modernized away in both M and P, though both K and J/G retain most if not all of them. Hyphenations are added *passim* in M, with mixed warrant and effect: *Visions* 2:33, "hot-burning" seems to me an unnecessary coalescence of Blake's words, though "charnel-house," 3:36 is unobjectionable. M's "new-washed" (3:18) perhaps rightly avoids a possible ambiguity in the original, since Blake could hardly have intended "new" to imply, as unmodified it might, "new born." M's "fat-fed" seems to aid in understanding the rather obscure allusion of 5:14. Both M and P change such obsolete or variant spellings as "subtil," *Visions* 6:7. While a few of M's modernizations, such as "tyger" to "tiger," will bother the Blakean, others, such as "may'st" for "maist," *Visions* 2:1, should seem well-warranted, since they avoid a momentary ambiguity some readers would otherwise hesitate over. J/G continue to represent their relatively strict adherence to Blake's text by retaining spellings such as "hipocrisy" ("Africa" 3:13). Where this kind of retention stops being a virtue in a reading text is a nice question. While "eccho," *Visions* 2:20, 5:11, presents no problem, is retained in as popular an edition as *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and patently "works," there seems no objection to "echo" it in a reading text (like M's) very much given to modernizing; likewise with "perswading," 2:22—K and J/G prefer Blake's spelling; M and P do not. P, apparently following Bentley, prints "towards" rather than "toward" in *Visions* 1:2; he also prints "is this" for "this is" in *Thel* 5:5 (his line 91—he does not use plate numbers in *Thel*). Only J/G among reading texts consulted preserve and try to justify the perhaps misread or more probably misetched "o'erfired" in *Thel* 2:4. (E accepts, most dubiously to my eyes, that Blake really did etch "o'ertired," which nonetheless seems to be what he meant to etch.) Since I came across it, I should perhaps record for someone's future purposes that M's reference to Proverbs 9:17 in his note to *Europe*, line 6 (iii: 6), is right, J/G's 8:17 wrong.

While the Oxford jacket-cover claims the text is "fully annotated," compared to J/G, M provides us with a mere thimbleful, a good portion of which

contains bare references to the Bible and to *Milton* or provides dictionary definitions. Since the Routledge series more modestly emphasizes the historical contexts of its authors, the fact that Punter's notes are comparably sparse and a bit disproportionate in coverage may be accepted as a built-in limitation of general editorial policy. It will once again be most illuminating to let the two editions face off against each other, refereed again by the generally preferable J/G.[2]

Since M does not treat the *Poetical Sketches* as a unit, he fails to provide it with even the perfunctory headnote which he generally supplies elsewhere. J/G have an excellently informative headnote on composition, publication, and content, including as well a reference to the standard work on the poems, Margaret Lowery's *Windows of the Morning*. P provides only two of the poems, with comparably minimal annotation. M's deficiencies as annotator relative to J/G begin early and stay late. Of "To Spring" he tells us that its metre anticipates that of the "septenaries" and prophetic writings and that lines 2-3 could be glossed by Dan. 11:18—an utterly irrelevant reference. J/G point out that the seasonal cycle instituted with this poem parallels comparable sets of poems by Pope and Thompson, noting as well that general anticipations of the Biblical and Miltonic allusions of the later works appear in these early poems, with "To Spring" echoing the "Song of Solomon," "Lycidas," 163 (which lines 2-3 *do* echo and which perhaps M meant to note), *Comus*, 744 [752?], *Samson Agonistes*, 119, and Horace, *Odes*, 1, v, 3-5 [iv might seem a more appropriate analogue]. In the "Love and Harmony" lyric, M simply reprints without comment the obviously incorrect "her" of line 17. Even if he had not cared to accept the handwritten "his"—the diplomatic rigors of the Bentley and Erdman editions keep them from accepting it—he should have at least noted it, since other less modernized texts (K, P, and J/G) accept it as Blake's intention, which is also the common sense of the context—Blake is hardly a feminist deconstructionist trying to rattle our pronominal preconceptions in the interests of gender ideology.[3] Likewise, while M provides extraneous 1910 commentary from Saintsbury for "Mad Song," he fails to note, as E does, that in several copies line 4's "unfold" was changed by hand to "infold" and that line 7's "birds" was so changed from "beds." Both changes should have been accepted (as they are by K, P, and J/G) in a reading text.

Both M and P follow an editorial tradition, perhaps enforced by the texts, of minimal annotation for the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, though on balance M seems more helpful, at least in the *Innocence* notes. P occasionally illustrates his historical concerns—by, for example, noting that the introduction to *Experience* implies Blake's view of the poet as one "in whom the threads of human history are drawn together," which leads him to further infer that prophecy in Blake meant "focusing" not futurizing. When he says that in "London" "mind-forged manacles" means that "we contribute to our plight by accepting and internalizing various constraints on our freedom" he will allow the teacher to point out to the student that what Blake more probably means and what the context better supports is the reading providing by J/G, who note that they refer "primarily [to] the authorities of church and state," though allowing the subordinate possibility that P exclusively advances. The differing annotative policies of the editors under review and J/G are obvious in such contrasts, with both P and M generally providing only one (perhaps unduly subjective) reading, thereby avoiding alternative, or even consensus, readings in order to impose their restrictive glosses. J/G will generally indicate their preference but allow for alternatives. One kind of editor goes through the text objectively asking himself "How may this be most helpfully annotated?"; the other kind subjectively asks "Do I have in mind an annotation I'd care to provide?"



There may be nothing particularly objectionable in M's telling us that, in the Cynic's first song in *An Island in the Moon*, "vest" is used as in modern American and probably signifies a dandy but not when so telling us that bit of relative inconsequence may eliminate a reading of "Old Corruption" as a radical term for the political establishment, a much more substantive piece of information which a majority of M's readers will not know—unless they read J/G. In general, it's really not so much a matter of what M does tell us but what he does not which will make his claim to "full annotation" a subliminal self-mockery in the mind of the reader as he recurrently ponders the relative value of the notes, what they contain and what they do not. It is correspondingly the case that M's implicit claim to have provided a host of recent secondary commentary is unwarranted. J/G, in one note to "The Mental Traveller," a poem to which M does provide a helpfully suggestive general commentary, provide more such references than M does through the course of his annotations for all the Blake he prints.

Both P and M typically provide brief headnotes to each work. For example, for *America* P has about 60 words, M about 160, both therein providing the barest sense of the poem and its historical and symbolic relations (half of M's note is concerned with defining "prophecy" as M construes it). J/G have over 1100 words, which enlarge on the historical context (beyond P), relate it in some detail to other works, and devote some time to the designs. P generally uses his fewer words to better purposes than M. M's *Visions* headnote is mainly taken up with what the reader could infer from the poem without M's help: That it is dramatic, that its speakers are engaged in moral (sexual), philosophical, and political dialogue. Even after allowing editorial prerogative its exegetal due, a reader may balk at M's feeling that Blake himself does not arbitrate among the ideologies he presents and that, Oothoon to the contrary, there is nothing to choose between Bromion and Theotormon. M's penchant for irrelevant tidbits surfaces in his longest note, a disproportionate attempt at relating the "jealous dolphins" with the story of the sea-nymph Galatea and a jealous suitor. He later tells us, to no helpful or cogent purpose, that "wake her womb" refers to a contemporary sexual physiology. A quick read through the fully annotated J/G *Visions* redundantly demonstrates how much better M might have used his time and space. M continues to illustrate his penchant for the arbitrary: *Urizen* "must have been a formation from 'horizon,' and perhaps Greek *horizein* to limit. The name is stressed on the first syllable." J/G allow for the problematic and alternative by noting that while "probably" deriving from the Greek word, it may also be a Blakean pun on "Your Reason"; they further note that, while metrically Urizen accented on the first syllable seems best, pronunciation, as well as the etymology, of such words must remain speculative. P here avoids dealing with the name but does define in a traditional way what Urizen stands for. Both J/G and P note "God tormented" as a justifiable meaning for "Theotormon"; M simply notes the word as Blake's coinage.

In his de facto headnote to *The Book of Urizen* M expends most of his space pointing out how Blake followed the Bible in using the word "Book" to describe this and a few other of his works. He then points out to no one's surprise who had looked at the Table of Contents that Blake "does not achieve anything remotely like a Bible-sized text, or even a Pentateuch-sized one"—and he then flies off on an associative tangent to tell us such would be the case "even if the imitations of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and Revelation in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are counted into the project." Is this what the reader needs to know? Instead of straightforward expository prose, we too often get this kind of magisterial gobbledegook, usually, as here, following from and further developing a relatively private thesis the editor believes in to the exclusion of all others: "[Urizen] modulates from a complex reworking of *Paradise Lost* into a strange psychomachia that is combined with an imitation of Genesis." Irrelevance, disproportion, and tortured prose work in concert to produce the following note to the *Preludium* to *Urizen*: "The traditional word-order of the opening to an epic (starting with the subject of the poem, which is also the object of the first main verb) is preserved, as is the Miltonic genitive grammatical aspect, even though there is no main verb in Blake's opening, let alone one that takes a genitive." Compare J/G commenting on the same context: "The text of the *Preludium*, in one formulation, summarizes the theme of the work and then invokes the 'Eternals' to dictate stories 'of torment.' This mood is somewhat alleviated by the design . . . of a flying woman guiding a child, which B once printed separately with the caption, 'Teach these souls to fly.'" Since M does not believe in the relevance of the designs, he of course can't help his readers to these latter associations and qualifications, though he could have emulated the clarity and relevance of the preceding reading and application of the *Preludium*.

Having dismembered and variously distributed the "Song of Los," M is free to make his annotations fit his crime—the "four harps" are taken to represent the "sequence of four texts which commences with 'Africa.'" While the inference is plausible, it's still the case that if Blake intended to sell what he'd written as written, two of the four would not make up the sequence as M prints it. Only J/G point out that "Africa" has little to do with Africa. They also note that Blake's tendency to repeat lines in different poems is illustrated by the first line of plate 3 of *America* and the last line of "Africa" but they do not further take advantage of that kind of repetition, as M does, to separate what Blake has integrated so that they can integrate what he has separated. The fact that *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions*, and *America* contain the line "For every thing that lives is holy" is an argument for a seminal thought connecting these poems but nothing more than that. M reads the problematical "loose Bible" as a reference to the "considerable overlap in events and persons between the Koran and the Bible" which makes the former an approximation of the latter. J/G simply supply the etymological suggestion derived by S. Foster Damon from George Sale that Koran means "a collection of loose leaves." (Since Antamon and Leutha, sexual sorts, give the Bible to Mahomet, Damon's further suggestion that moral or sexual looseness is implied may seem a more contextually helpful interpretation.) Perhaps envisaging a more popular audience than either M or J/G, P tends towards strictly informative notes that will seem redundant to scholars and most students—he glosses Ararat in "Africa," provides dates for Newton and Locke, and, it may be with his historical charge

in mind, tells us the needful about Rousseau and Voltaire, noting as well their urizenic parallels. His historical bent is more obviously at work when he relates Blake's critique of the Kings of Asia to the European *ancien regime.* Occasionally P indicates that he is not as much up on his American history as he should be—or he would have singled out, as J/G do, "Light-horse Harry Lee" instead of letting the reader do what he can with Blake's *America* allusion by sorting out the "many possible Lees" in the *Dictionary of American Biography.* Nor does P seem to have the background to suggest, as J/G do, that the scribe of Pennsylvania is probably Franklin and the builder of Virginia probably Thomas Jefferson.

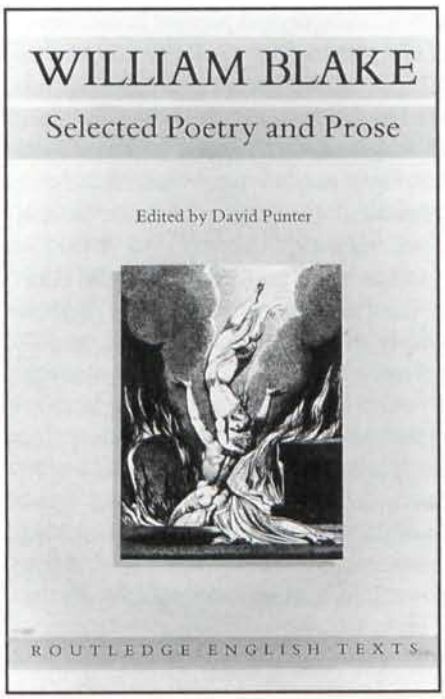
Blake's tendency to foist names at his reader with an implicit challenge to make what he/she will of them can lead to a superfoetation of predication as one moves from commentator to commentator. Both P and M note that a historical Ariston stole his best friend's wife. But P discounts the reference, supposing that Blake is "using the image for his own purposes, because of the double connotation of grandeur and hiddenness," while M feels that the contextual association of Ariston with Atlantis may indicate that Blake was "thinking of Plato's story that Poseidon lord of Atlantis captured a mortal bride." J/G, following Damon, note both references, historical and platonic, though Damon himself feels the historical reference (from Herodotus) "is probably a coincidence." Readers may legitimately infer that the real significance of this and other inextricable allusions is that they remind us of the infera' le holographs that based the plates we have, as well as of lost drafts never transcribed into copper, that might have helped solve the referential puzzles the extant canon sometimes presents both editors and readers.

Examples of differences in annotative style may be as serendipitously picked up as Indian arrow heads were for Thoreau at Walden. For M, Orc "clearly derives from the Latin word Orcus for the underworld and his god." P does not try to derive the name, merely identifying the character with revolution, desire, etc. J/G let the reader take his choice from among the vagaries of an indefinite consensus which derives the word from "Orc" (sea monster), or "Orcus" (hell, also a giant in Spenser), or "cor" (heart), or "orchis" (testicle), concluding that whatever you choose from the above, the word represented for Blake a figure who struggles against political oppression, sexual repression, and restrictions on energy. M's "clear" if tunnel-visioned identification is in keeping with his general assurance that whatever he happens to know is both right and exclusively so. Actually, Orc's later association with Luvah makes it fairly clear that among other meanings "heart" has a good deal of Blakean potential in it, with "testicle" perhaps warranted because at last Luvah is relegated to the place of seed in one version of the Blakean millennium. The hellish reference M is so certain of has no comparable justification in Blake or, for that matter, in classical associations.

P says of the "Atlantean hills" that Blake "was interested in myths of Atlantis; and they become useful here as he sets up a symbolic site for debate and battle between America and Britain." This last would perhaps lead into a helpful association if P would further tell us what those myths were and how he thinks Blake is usefully using them. Since he feels he should remind us that George Washington was the President of the United States, why not more on these myths? M is even less helpful—he tells us "Atlantean" means "as mighty as Atlas." J/G suggest a relevance for the association when they note that the mythical Atlantis, referred to by Plato, "is the land of the Golden Age (cf. 10:7) which is now sunk beneath the Atlantic, breaking the continental link between England and America." To further strengthen this reading, they also point out a consequential parallel in the "Song of Liberty" to "those infinite mountains of light, now barr'd out by the atlantic sea." In this instance, the best note after all might have been a reference to Damon's rundown of variants under "Atlantic" or merely to "Atlantic" in the *Concordance.*

In his notes to *Europe* the reference to the "secret child" (line 59, 3:2) is simply the birth of Christ in M; in J/G it is not only a reminder of the "Nativity Hymn" (M's Miltonic associations seem to have failed him here) but also and consequently contains the implication that His birth should have brought about an overthrow of Old Testament values it did not bring about: Orc's birth, correlated with the French Revolution, is thereby substantively kindred.

Because excerpts make up most of the rest of P's text, annotation is comparably selective, though the editor often provides a brief gloss, mainly concerned with their symbolic purposes, of the works he selects from. M's annotation of the remaining works, when compared to J/G, continues minimal, disproportionate, arbitrary, and relatively irrelevant. He correspondingly continues to suffer from a misguided tendency to originality, perhaps traceable to an insufficient knowledge of secondary materials, while failing to provide what's really needed and helpful. The truly full annotation of J/G's *Book of Urizen* indexes what we need and miss in M. No objective reader could accept M's reductive assessment of the integral relation between illumination and text after reading through J/G's commentary on the title page or, for that matter, after following up the references to the designs which they make *passim.* As usual, M's commentary suggests that all his reader needs are bare references to the Bible and *Paradise Lost.* M characteristically fails to demonstrate the validity of his parallels to either work, with most of the notes simplistically tangential analogues (e. g., "*Dictate.* Milton's well-known



word for the activity of his muse"; "*cities*: The appearance of cities at this point reflects their similar prominance in Gen. 11-14 and 18-19"). Here as elsewhere M pretends to a knowing superiority to his predecessors which he fails to demonstrate: "[Urizen] is a much more ambiguous figure than many critics recognize," a portentous utterance which delivers the usual Miltonic mouse as its ambiguously superficial inconsequence. At about this juncture, one may strongly suspect that given a half-day's research for the project, a competent graduate student would have made up a more helpful set of notes for *The Book of Urizen*, and, in a proportional period of time, for at least a majority of the other works M so "fully" annotates. P has ten notes to his selections from *Urizen*, proportionally more than M provides, and they are more helpful. M's annotations for *The Book of Los* are comparably sparse, unhelpful, mere deadwood—he tells us what a polybus is, how "pliant" and "redounding" should be defined, and of course that chapter 2 is "full of memories of *Paradise Lost*." Again, the continuing point is not so much what M does give us, but rather what he doesn't. Dictionary definitions and references to "Gen. 2:2" would be unobjectionable in an edition that was in fact fully annotated. M simply does not make discriminating use of the space he has.

At times, M's annotative tendency to let what he happens to know loom disproportionately large relative to need or merit verges on the speciously inconsequential—for example, his reminding us that "lovely woman" (*Europe*, line 92, 5:3) is an echo of Goldsmith; or on the inconsequentially ludicrous—for example, the "doors of marriage are open" (*America*, line 233, 14:19) is somehow supposed to be glossed by the fact that "Blake married Catherine Boucher in 1782," a biographical fact there is no reason to believe Blake would have felt important enough to intrude into this 1793 prophecy. As J/G indicate, the context could better suggest Blake's and the general liberal hope that the Marriage Act of 1753 would by then have been repealed or modified—it was being agitated in Parliament around this time. Blake would have regarded it as a triumph for Orc, as well as for "the females naked and glowing with the lusts of youth." The fact that P does not note this may encourage an occasional impression that his historical bent is often as perfunctory as it is sometimes superficial, even when compared to J/G, who have no special historical pretensions to live up to. Their respective notes on "caverned" man suggest the relative awareness M and J/G have of their author's associations. M's reference to Plato's allegory of the cave is generic, shop-worn, nothing much to any *ad hoc* point. J/G's reference to Locke's epistemology reminds the reader of the *Natural Religion* propositions, of *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, of a particular *bête noire* in the Blakean pandemonium.

It's more their quality and character than their number and length that make J/G's *Milton* annotations vastly superior to M's, though J/G have about twenty percent more notes than M, including nearly three times as many to Milton and his works, though one would have expected that M's persistent use of that poet elsewhere would have been appropriately compounded in a work specifically concerned with him. As usual, M's annotations are typically the briefest of one liners—"Cf. Ps. 120: 3"—while J/G's typically tell the student who needs annotation what will actually help him rather than uselessly cf. him into what may as well be a deadend. Both M and J/G refer us to the *Paradise Lost* source of "To Justify the Ways of God to Man," Blake's first Miltonic allusion, but J/G goes beyond the obvious to proleptically point up to the reader its irony ("Blake makes Milton's purpose . . . his own, but he rejects Milton's theology"). M's notes fail to alert the reader to the fact that he has placed the preface to *Milton* elsewhere in his edition, though even if he had so advised him, a trip to its place in "Blake on Art and Literature" would have provided nothing of annotative value, though it would have required yet another excursion into "Lyrics from the Epic Poems" in order for the reader to discover the rest of what Blake had meant to preface his poem with. And even then all he would get for his troubles is misinformation (of the preface's "stolen and perverted writings" M vaguely supposes Blake believed they derived "from more ancient sources," whereas J/G, arrogating to themselves some of M's usual thunder, most helpfully and relevantly note that "the idea that the classics were plagiarized from the Bible . . . had been articulated by Milton's Christ" in *Paradise Regained*) or non-information (that "delight is in destroying" is "not a specific allusion"). In fully annotating "atonement" (*Milton* 2:13) J/G suggest a way M might have gone, had he really got below the surface with his Miltonic (and biblical) references: "Although much of Milton's theology was radical . . . his view of the atonement was the orthodox one that God demands man's death

as punishment for sin, but accepts Jesus' sacrificial death as a substitute payment of man's debt (*Paradise Lost* 3, 203-12, 236-41). To Blake, this view of the crucifixion was no different from 'Druidical' sacrifice." The note is then supplemented by references to confirming and explicatory commentary on the subject of Blake and atonement.

As noted, P realizes that excerpting from *Jerusalem*, as well as from *Milton*, is a "near[ly] impossible task," though one he must attempt. M in his annotation of his complete text of *Jeruslem* continues as above, though he abrogates his introductory policy and qualifies his general criticism of interpretive summaries by providing an intelligent and perceptive account of the poem (as he had of *Milton*). He is of course certain that his rendering of *Jerusalem* is the "best," but we've come by now to smile indulgently at M's naive assurance of his overall superiority to whatever in the world of Blake has had the blinkered misfortune to predate his original inferences about it.

Mason's bibliography is perfunctory at best, merely an outdated list of books containing nothing later than 1978 (only three listings later than 1970) and would not be acceptable appended to a graduate seminar paper on Blake. Punter's coverage is even sparser than Mason's, perhaps justifiable because of the narrower focus of his editorial policy, but he does provide a brief critical note for each entry, a few of which update the bibliography through 1985. J/G provide an ideal example of what a scholarly bibliography can and should be, particularly in an edition which is meant primarily for the student: A compendious headnote referring the reader to major Blake collections, bibliographies, journals etc., is followed by a listing of over one hundred titles divided into major editions, art collections and commentaries, reference tools, biographies, books of criticism, collected and selected essays. Not only is the bibliography up-to-date in itself but it was later supplemented by the editors in *Blake* 16 (1982): 107-110.

Finally, a format matter which will matter to some prospective buyers: Mason and Punter save the typesetter a bit of time by numbering every tenth line; the Norton edition provides the more traditional and helpful five-line numerations.

As noted at the outset, the fact that the Oxford and Routledge texts may be primarily geared to somewhat different audiences does not eliminate the probability that they will both vie for their major readership in the university classroom. Which of the two is then preferable for that readership? For most thorough-going purposes, and in spite of deficiencies in format and annotation, the Mason text is preferable to Punter's simply because it includes *Jerusalem* and *Milton* whole. The given instructor can set his students right about the illuminations, further apologize as needed for Mason's introductory remarks, caution them about the notes, and/or perhaps simply follow the implications of Mason's negating introduction and the paucity or irrelevance of his notes by telling them to indeed let Blake speak altogether for himself. The Oxford text is a handsome and invitingly legible one, with generous margins and interlinear spacings, a credit in this respect to the publishers. On the other hand, if a given instructor or set of students is satisfied with selections from Blake's major works, then Punter should be their choice because his notes, if skimpy, are typically more helpful and to the point both in their facts and in their interpretations than Mason's.[4]

But, as indicated, the choice is not so limited. The Oxford Standard Authors (Keynes) Blake is still the preferred choice for those who need all of Blake in a relatively modernized form; only Erdman's text will suit the scholars in a form most of them can readily afford. Even as it stands the Norton text, which reproduces many of the illuminations in color and most of them in monochrome, is much superior to any other selected edition. If it were re-edited with a *Jerusalem* complete (and *Tiriel* added), and with the first edition's errors and oversights corrected, it would on balance be not only the best reading text available but also the most helpful for nearly all scholarly purposes that could still do without most of *The Four Zoas* and did not require attempts at reproducing Blake's accidentals such as Erdman and Bentley variously make.

[1] I use the traditional plate/line number references, as in E. M prefers consecutive line numbers to plate divisions throughout his edition—thereby seriously detracting from its usefulness to students and scholars who will therefore be unable to use it with the *Blake Concordance* or with secondary materials using plate/number references.

[2] The recently revised and reissued W. H. Stevenson/David Erdman edition of *The Complete Poems of Blake* (Longman/Norton) is also full of annotation and could serve nearly as well as J/G (who seem to have critically appreciated Stevenson's notes) in relevant contrast to the editions reviewed here.

[3] While Blake did later put the case for a female cupid (in the *Notebook* poem "Why was Cupid a Boy"), his grammatical context here obviates a possible argument-from-prolepsis.

[4] P. H. Butter's Everyman paperback (*William Blake: Selected Poems*, 1982) is preferable to Punter's both for inclusiveness and annotation. In fact, Butter's occasionally arbitrary annotation is nonetheless, where comparable, superior both in quantity and quality to Mason's. (He is besides trenchantly helpful in explaining the problems of pointing in Blake which modernizers tend to assume without so explaining.) The complete Stevenson poetry text noted earlier will be overpriced (at $74.95) for most college classrooms unless or until a paperback significantly reduces its cost.