

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

BLAKE

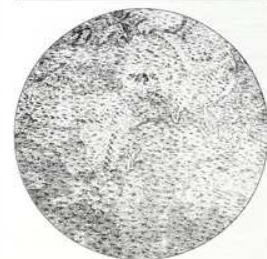
R E V I E W

Martin Butlin et al., William Blake and His Circle;
G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records Supplement;
David Wells, A Study of William Blake's Letters

David V. Erdman

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Blake AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY



over which was more essential in art, drawing or painting. Blake, of course, insisted on the precedence of drawing. It seems clear that Blake courted comparison with West through his *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* (c. 1805-09) and *Death on a Pale Horse* (1817), paintings which share subject matter with West's. But in fact the two artists shared very little, and Staley's suggestion that "there does seem to have been some common

ground between the two artists at a time when it would have been most useful to them" (108) strikes me as fanciful. The common ground was that shared by all English artists of the day, and Blake's interest in West was chiefly adversarial, while West's in Blake was, at best, mild.

As with any catalogue, corrections and additions begin to accumulate before the ink is dry. This inexorable process is evident in a footnote on

page 383 which introduces three West paintings noticed by the authors only in September 1985. No doubt other paintings have appeared and other new information has come to light since then. But in its vast outlines the catalogue will remain the definitive work on West; it is undeniably a monument of scholarship.

William Blake and His Circle: Papers delivered at a Huntington Symposium. San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1989. vi + 144 pp. illus. \$12.95 paper. (Reprinted from *HLQ* 52 [1989]); G. E. Bentley, Jr. *Blake Records Supplement: Being New Materials Relating to the Life of William Blake Discovered Since the Publication of Blake Records* (1969). Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988. xlvii + 152 pp. \$59.00; David Wells, *A Study of William Blake's Letters*. Tübingen, Stauffenburg Verlag, 1987. 132 pp.

Reviewed by
David V. Erdman

A valuable and elegantly illustrated collection of six essays (the first five from a symposium on 29 and 30 January, 1988 at the Huntington): Martin Butlin on "The Physicality of William Blake: The Large Color Prints of '1795'; David W. Lindsay on "The Order of Blake's Large Color Prints"; D. W. Dörrbecker on "The Song of Los:

The Munich Copy and a New Attempt to Understand Blake's Images"; Aileen Ward on "'S' Joshua and His Gang': William Blake and the Royal Academy"; Morton D. Paley on "The Art of 'The Ancients'"; Morris Eaves with an "Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England: The Comedy of the English School of Painting"; and a book review by Robert N. Essick of the 1987 facsimile of *An Island in the Moon*, published by Cambridge University Press in association with the Institute of Traditional Science, 1987.

Butlin examines the growth of Blake's books, first in size, "to accommodate the ever increasing weight of his content," and in the end, with the dramatic change in the proportion of illustration to text, a literal breaking free, in the "Small and Large Books of Designs" described by Blake as "a selection from the different Books of such as could be Printed without the writing, tho' to the loss of some of the best things."

Butlin scrutinizes such physical matters as the evolution of "the idea of multiple color printing," the second of two pulls from a single application of color to the plate, for example, having received a much lighter application of coloring. At the other extreme are certain pulls that were disfigured by later varnish. "David Bindman's somewhat wicked suggestion that any print bearing the date 1795 must have been executed ten years later" is found attractive.

Butlin sees this "reassessment" as only just beginning, the solution being found "in front of the object, not in the study."

WILLIAM BLAKE AND HIS CIRCLE



Papers delivered at a Huntington Symposium by
MARTIN BUTLIN • D. W. DÖRRBECKER
MORRIS EAVES • DAVID W. LINDSAY
MORTON D. PALEY • AILEEN WARD

Lindsay's essay on "The Order of Blake's Large Color Prints" (19-41) is of considerable interest but cannot be easily be summarized.

Dörrbecker's extensive discussion of a little known copy of "The Song of Los" is particularly valuable in its details but difficult to summarize. (He also reports, in a note, that his M.A. thesis, "Blakes Illuminationen zu Europe: a Prophecy," will soon be available [he hopes] from the Insel Verlag, Frankfort.

Aileen Ward's discussion of "S' Joshua and His Gang" is—as is her custom—studded with significant particulars and corrective interpretations. Alas, she notes, "most scholars follow Blake's lead in decrying the Academy's influence while at the same time minimizing its importance in shaping his

career." She demonstrates, with a survey of his relationship to the Royal Academy, that "Blake's achievement would [hardly] have been greater if the Academy had recognized him sooner, and perhaps . . . would have been less."

Morton Paley's discussion of "The Art of 'The Ancients'" is a valuably detailed and critical survey. "Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, and George Richmond were, to be sure, followers of William Blake. But how far did they follow?"

Morris Eaves winds up the symposium with a commentary on the historians of English art as having shown "little inclination to come to a broad and sophisticated understanding of that discourse"—hence leaving "a lot of groundwork [that] still needs to be done," including the demonstration of how "profoundly indebted to this discourse" are Blake's ideas about art and about literature as well.

G. E. Bentley's *Blake Records Supplement* includes: Fuseli on Blake's engraving of Anubis; Richter on his delight on receiving a copy of Blake's edition of Young's *Night Thoughts*; Marsh writing to Hayley about Blake as a musician [a tantalizing reference]; Charlotte Smith to Samuel Rose—and some new details of Blake's trial at Felpham (24-28); several documents with information about Cromeck (42-71, 125); evidence that Blake "regularly dined with the Linnells on Sundays" and of their at-

tending a performance at the West London Theatre of Dryden's *Oedipus* (76-81); an appendix of "Linnell Manuscripts Rediscovered" (101-23); and a list of 51 books which "we may be confident" were in Blake's library (124-29); a bit of further evidence that Cunningham applied to friends of Blake for information for his biography (130-31); and two pages of "Addenda" (132-33). And much more.

In Wells's *Study of William Blake's Letters*, we find that "overall, Blake's letters attest to his remarkable consistency of thought. They also show that Blake was his own first critic." "More than half of Blake's surviving letters, and most of the ones important to art and literary critics, were written between 1799 and 1808 Despite unfortunate gaps . . . students pursuing any one of the following subjects will inevitably encounter in Blake's letters: allegory, empiricism, execution, the Greeks, imagination, imitation, invention, levels of vision, mental states . . . and spiritual sensation" (122).

David Wells will not be the first reader of Blake's letters to notice these topics; this small booklet will have almost nothing to tell old-timers—but it can be a useful introduction of biographical information about Blake to students newly entering these precincts. Bentley's *Blake Records*, however, supplies very much more.

Vincent Carretta. *George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990. xviii + 389 pp. 161 illus. \$40.00.

Reviewed by
Stephen C. Behrendt

This book addresses a very real need. Recent scholarship has increasingly revealed how fully attuned Blake was to all aspects of the culture of his times. An active radical in the tumultuous social, political, and intellectual milieu of Europe's largest city, Blake could scarcely have escaped the influence of the satiric tradition that found graphic expression in the flood of political caricatures that swelled as the eighteenth century progressed. Particularly during the reign of George III, this rich tradition of vigorous political and cultural commentary subjected both to investigation and to ridicule not only the royal and governmental institutions whose locus was the king but also the person of the king himself.

Partly because study of this vast storehouse of visual imagery was for a long time limited by physical access to repositories like the British Museum, and partly because that study was often the province of rather narrowly-defined specialists, and partly too because literary criticism has historically been slow to appreciate that literary artists lived in a world rich in *non-verbal* art and other public phenomena, Blake's relation to this vein of popular art has remained only minimally explored. David Erdman and others have pointed out some of Blake's debts to leading graphic artists like Gillray, but no one has to date undertaken the sort of definitive survey the subject requires. As the visual riches of the

