

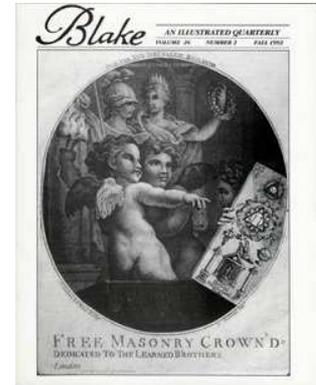
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Andrew Lincoln, ed., William Blake, Songs of
Innocence and of Experience

Irene Tayler

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 26, Issue 2, Fall 1992, p. 57



⁵ Dan Miller, "Blake and the Deconstructive Interlude," in *Critical Paths: Blake and the Argument of Method*, ed. Donald Ault et al. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987) 156.

⁶ Robert N. Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 97-103, 150, 195-96, 208-10.

⁷ Blake, letter to George Cumberland, 12 April 1827, E 783.

⁸ See, for example, Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); and Frederick Crews, *Skeptical Engagements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

William Blake. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Andrew Lincoln. Princeton: The William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, 1991. 209 pp. \$59.50.

Reviewed by Irene Tayler

This is the second volume (after *Jerusalem*) of a projected collected edition of Blake's illuminated books, under the aegis of the Blake Trust and the general editorship of David Bindman. Both for itself and as part of this larger project, it is a welcome work.

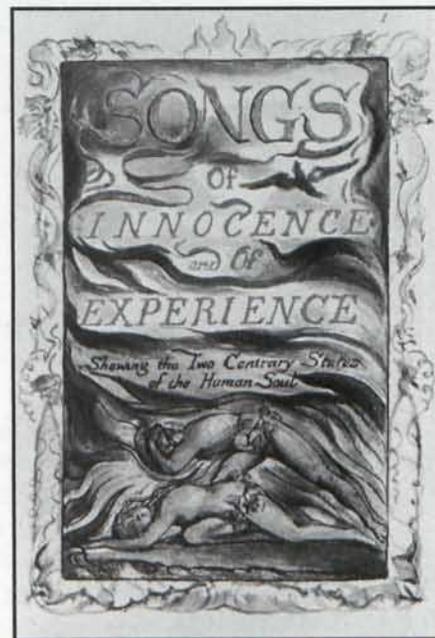
Part of the pleasure of this lovely volume results from Andrew Lincoln's intelligent introduction and commentary. The Introduction conveys a lot of technical and contextual information in readable English; and the fact that the footnotes are on the page (rather than being gathered at the back) is an advantage, especially in a volume that readers will wish to handle carefully and conserve for long life. And the commentaries at the back—which describe and discuss both the text and the plates—are helpful without pretending to be definitive.

But the greatest pleasure by far is the color reproduction itself. This volume reproduces the King's College, Cambridge, copy, which has been called "Blake's own" copy, and is certainly one of the most beautiful and finely

finished copies we have. Each of the 54 plates not only has all the usual attractions of Blake's hand-colored *Songs*, but here he also surrounded each plate with a delicate water color border that in each case bears thematically on the content of the plate itself. Several of these borders are extremely complex in design and richly colored, as in the case of the combined title-page, which is wreathed in thorns and flames and half-animate leaf-life. Others (like those for "The Blossom" of *Innocence* and "London" of *Experience*) are restrained and monochromatic, as if to suggest that in such strong encounters with the life and death of the spirit, further "decoration" could only detract.

It is pleasant to know that this copy was for 55 years owned by the novelist E. M. Forster; literary history does not often offer such appropriate convergences. The book was given to Forster in 1903 by his aunt Laura May Forster, who inherited it from her father, who received it in turn from John Jebb, Bishop of Limerick, who bought it from Catherine Blake in 1830, three years after William Blake's death. It was Forster who willed it to King's College, Cambridge, where it has remained one of their great treasures, much talked of among Blake scholars but never before available to a wide audience.

At \$59.50 it will be hard to require students to purchase this edition of the *Songs*, even for an advanced Blake seminar; but every college library should own at least two copies, as any student at all interested in Blake's composite art will want to study it carefully, and every teacher of romantic poetry will want to keep it on reserve. It will be especially useful as a tool for teaching how Blake varied his copies, both



because it affords a nice comparison with the Oxford paperback color reproduction (likewise based on a late copy of the *Songs*), and because it includes 12 other color plates for comparison—offering for example three starkly divergent images of "The Divine Image," all on a single page. On the other hand it is not clear to me why the texts of the *Songs* needed to be transcribed twice—once facing each page of color reproduction, and once again at the head of each entry of the commentary at the back. To my mind, the space saved by offering a single transcription might have been put to good use in an annotated bibliography of the most important scholarly work that has been done on the *Songs*, replacing the rather brief list of "Works Cited" that we have here. But let such small caveats not cloud my overall point: this is a volume that every Blakean may joy to own.