

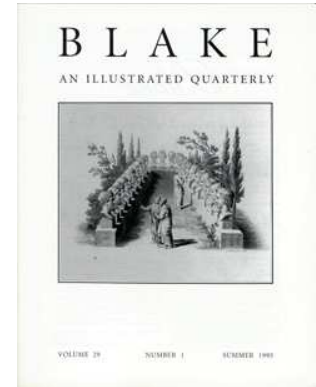
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Gerda S. Norvig, *Dark Figures in the Desired Country: Blake's Illustrations to The Pilgrim's Progress*

Stephen C. Behrendt

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 29, Issue 1, Summer 1995, pp. 25-29



in *Europe: a Prophecy* (13:1-5) may likewise be a conflation of those two (in many ways) seeming opposites. I have always been uneasy with Northrop Frye's explanation of what he refers to as "that curious passage in *Europe*" as representing Blake's doctrine that "the mental attitude represented by [Isaac] Newton moves toward a consolidation of error which could provoke an apocalypse" (*Fearful Symmetry* 254) and have felt that there must be still another way of interpreting the allusion. The passage seems to have a contemporaneous quality, with the preceding plate (which also mentions "the trump of the last doom") referring to Albion's Angel, "Great George street," Enitharmon's triumph, and so on. And of course the impromptu trumpet lesson the "mighty Spirit ... Nam'd Newton" gives the feckless Orc is followed by Enitharmon's awakening and the information that "eighteen hundred years were fled" (12:12-13:10), which sounds fairly specific.

If Blake is referring, at least in part, to the Rev. John Newton here, he would seem to be anticipating the shift of emphasis in his evolving myth from Orc to Los, writ large in *The Book of Los* and *The Song of Los*, of which John Newton's famous conversion, evangelical fervor and anti-slavery work would be suitable, if partial, symbols, all of which find counterparts elsewhere in Blake's poetry.

As for Professor Simpson's reference to Martin Butlin's account of the recent controversy over Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's sculpture adapted from Blake's *Newton* intended for the British Library, no doubt Butlin is right to warn us against imposing "too strictly a Blakean interpretation" on a different work of art; but judging from his description and the accompanying photograph (admittedly a risky business), I would have to say that Paolozzi's *Newton* looks very nearly the antithesis of Blake's, wherein the lightness and delicacy of the medium is artfully contrasted to the heaviness of the design, enhancing the satirical effect. To my bad eye, Paolozzi's *Newton* resembles nothing so much as a defecating armadillo. Cast in bronze twelve feet high, and mounted on a podium of similar height, it could only represent (if taken in the way Butlin warns us against) a perversion of Blake's design into a travesty of unutterable ugliness and monumental stupidity. One can only hope that it isn't as bad as it looks.

Warren Stevenson

R E V I E W S

Gerda S. Norvig, *Dark Figures in the Desired Country: Blake's Illustrations to The Pilgrim's Progress*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 327 pp. \$68.00.

Reviewed by STEPHEN C. BEHRENDT

We have all seen them: those late-night television commercials for knives that cut through lead pipes, pennies, wooden beams, and cement blocks—when all we want to do is slice a tomato. There is something of that quality about Gerda Norvig's impressive study of Blake's much-neglected watercolor designs for Bunyan's most famous allegorical tale. This is a learned and meticulous book, as evidenced in part by the fact that the 213 pages of primary text discussion are followed by 68 pages of notes and 14 of "Works Cited." Moreover, the book is splendidly illustrated. We are treated to all 28 of Blake's designs (about which number, more later), well reproduced in reasonably faithful color in a gathering of plates bound in the middle of the book, plus another 42 related pictures and diagrams in black and white. In addition, the several appendices provide 58 additional reproductions of previous *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations up through the trend-altering designs of Blake's erstwhile friend and colleague Thomas Stothard, whose elliptical designs of 1788 brought to the illustration of Bunyan's tale a wholly different visual sensibility steeped in the visual conventions and mechanical devices of the sentimental in art. This book is, in short, a trove of valuable visual information, and it cannot but help facilitate still further exploration of Blake's remarkable designs. That fact alone makes its publication both timely and important.

Why then the analogy of the knife-cum-everything? It's partly a matter of the actual experience of reading the book. For one thing, in working through the text a reader may become uncomfortably aware of the inherent difficulty an author faces in structuring a book in which the reader is continually reminded of how much preliminary ground ostensibly needs to be surveyed before the discussion can get to "the main event." This is especially so in that the author undertakes several complex tasks, several of which seem always to be going forward at the same moment. By her own account she offers "a thorough case study of Blake's *Progress* illustrations along with an analysis of his changing relationship to Bunyan's persona, Bunyan's ideology, and Bunyan's poetics [sic] over a period of more than thirty years" (4). At the same time, she sets out to codify a way of reading Blake's Bunyan designs (and presumably his designs to other authors like Milton and Dante, though Norvig does not say so) in terms of a process of "visionary hermeneutics," a process based less in simply undermining or reinforcing the

originating text than in a sort of "primary revision" that is neither more nor less derivative from some originary internal (or Eternal) artistic vision than is the initial originating work of art (4-5). In this respect Norvig's discussion is heavily influenced by recent poststructuralist theories about the virtuality of texts, as both the body of the text and the bibliographical citations make clear.

The first half (roughly—117 pages) of *Dark Figures* fills us in on a variety of verbal and visual materials we are given to understand we will need in order to read the Bunyan designs aright. For example, Norvig furnishes an extended psychological reading of Blake's proto-emblem series, *The Gates of Paradise*, in which she discusses what she regards as a significant pairing of designs that reveals "the dialectical principle of alteration" that governs the series, a pairing most obvious in the facing plates of *The Traveller Hasteth in the Evening* and *Death's Door*. Norvig reads in the series as a whole a tale of the contrary operations of expansion and contraction, and she observes about these two plates most particularly that "they attract each other by the energy of their implied movement toward each other, and they repulse by the opposition of their attitudes—psychological and figural—regarding the ultimate goal" (72-73). Her point is that the image of a journey that governs the sequential images in *The Gates* indicates to the perceptive reader a psychological and spiritual journey whose objective is the Jungian goal of individuation, a point she makes in more systematic and detailed fashion about the later designs to Bunyan, in which the image of the journey is again central. Indeed, Norvig's overall interpretation of Blake's Bunyan designs—as of Bunyan's tale and of *The Gates* and much else—is principally Jungian, a perspective particularly compatible with her account of the internal journey she sees Blake tracing in his designs toward the individuation not just of the central character(s) of the narrative but indeed of the central agent and object of the "real" action: the reader/viewer who interacts with both Bunyan's verbal text and Blake's visual one.

As much as anything, Norvig sees in Blake's designs an exercise in reorienting the reader/viewer—particularly in light of the findings of modern depth psychology—into a new way of "seeing," a new way of regarding both the verbal text of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the activity of reading it. This is why the long discussion of *The Gates* is here: it furnishes both an analogy and a paradigmatic precursor for what the author sees taking place in Blake's reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. And yet Norvig frankly admits that the emblems in *The Gates* "are not about *The Pilgrim's Progress* per se, and the unravelling of conflated allusions leads just as insistently to other literary 'sources'" (73). But the manner in which these emblems are treated here, as happens also with other verbal and visual texts (by Blake and by others) which are introduced especially in the first two chapters, inherently imputes to them a disproportionate significance which

no disclaimers to the contrary can entirely mitigate. One cannot have it both ways. Questions of "sources" and "indebtedness" are always intellectual minefields, of course, and it is never any great surprise when explosions occur. Staying with *The Gates* for a moment, let me cite a further example of how such difficulties can unfold. In discussing two familiar plates, *I Want! I Want!* and *Help! Help!*, Norvig revisits the relationship of Blake's images to Gillray's well-known print, *The Slough of Despond; Vide the Patriot's Progress*, for evidence that Blake is rereading both Gillray and Bunyan. Reminding us of David Erdman's original discussion of the particular visual connection suggested by the presence of a ladder in Gillray's print and in *I Want! I Want!*, Norvig adds a new element to the discussion: "Yet when Blake adopts and adapts the ladder imagery, he is not only attacking Gillray; he is also, and perhaps more importantly, defending Bunyan by stressing the value (and problems) of a thematic concern for human aspiration, which is at the root of the *Progress*" (62). This is rather a lot to base upon the evidence of apparently recurrent images, and the manner of the assertion implies that we are meant to accept, with very little question, suggestions and inferences (however attractive or credible) as interpretive certainties.

I am less and less convinced that we ought quite so readily to credit Blake with the sort of conscious and deliberate multilevel, multivalent allusions and revisions that go along with statements of this sort, even though I have occasionally fallen into the trap myself over the years. For this whole business of source-hunting with regard to Blake (indeed, with regard to any creative artist) tends often to place the artist at the mercy of the interpreter, who may see connections that are not in fact there—or perhaps not there in the sense in which the interpreter believes (or wants) them to be. In this case, while Norvig argues convincingly for the connection between the Gillray (where the first two words in the "speech balloon" above Charles James Fox's head are "Help! Help!") and the drowning figure in Blake's *Help! Help!*, she fails to consider the comparably raised hand (raised, too, from amid similar waves) of the central figure in John Singleton Copley's 1778 painting, *Watson and the Shark*, which created a sensation when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in that year. The inability to respond to available help (which is literally "at hand"), which lies at the intellectual and emotional center of Copley's painting, is perhaps as relevant thematically to Blake's emblem, at last, as the details of the Gillray print.

I mention this minute particular because it is precisely the sort of thing that causes trouble at a number of points along the way in *Dark Figures*. A particularly characteristic example involves an image which Norvig introduces in her interesting discussion (58-59) of Blake's print of *The Man Sweeping the Interpreter's Parlor*, a print clearly related both to Bunyan's tale and to Blake's subsequent identity among his young followers as "the Interpreter." Norvig includes a

copy of a print by Anton Wierix called *Jesu Cor Expurgans*, which image she, following Roger Sharrock, claims directly influenced Bunyan's scenes of the Interpreter's rooms. Norvig says that "Bunyan's version of the parable is already a partial caricature of" that print and that, further, "Blake borrowed that pose [of Wierix's Jesus] for his representation of the Interpreter's Mosaic Law." "It might have seemed a specially noteworthy irony to Blake," Norvig continues, that Bunyan replaced Jesus with two menials. "And if he did know the earlier print," she goes on, then the little creatures Blake depicts swirling about in the dust in his plate "could be intended as allusions to the lost religion of Jesus that Wierix's model of the devout heart tried to embody. Thus the design of Blake's engraving becomes an attempt to restore, by ironic revision, a sense of the heart's virile, imaginative integrity" (59; my emphases). Finally, some 10 pages later, the Wierix and the Gillray prints meet up in the same sentence: "One could say Blake has rescued Bunyan from Gillray in these emblems [in *The Gates*] as he rescued the vision of Wierix from Bunyan in the 'Interpreter's Parlor' print" (68).

Rather a lot is made to hinge on several *ifs* here, and it is not at all clear that matters have to proceed in quite so tenuous a fashion in order for the argument to be mounted, especially since Norvig herself reminds us in the midst of all of this of "the frequent reuse and widespread availability of such popular illustrations in Blake's day" (58): My point is simply that by tying one's argument in needlessly restrictive or exclusive fashion to *particular* images, particular artists, and particular prints, one sometimes strains credibility unnecessarily and makes far too much rest upon a shaky foundation of supposition, when it might well be sufficient to acknowledge the common currency of the apparently "borrowed" image and reject the temptation to claim (or to imply) that Blake was working with *that particular image* and that he was performing *this particular significant variation* upon it and it alone. At the same time, it is surely no fault in an author to attempt to give us as much information as possible so that we may make our own decisions about (possible) influence in the most informed fashion. While Norvig occasionally seems to want to have it both ways, she also credits us, generally, with both the innate sense and the critical acumen to make such decisions.

Still, the rigidity (or narrowness) of interpretation that emerges at times here occasionally interferes with the reader's critical freedom—an irony itself in that we are reminded throughout of Blake's intellectual and aesthetic program of liberating the reader from the tyranny of text. But this rigidity almost certainly results in part from the author's efforts to marshal and discipline a great deal of material within a study that seeks at once to introduce, describe, interpret, and contextualize a large series of loosely organized (i. e., neither bound nor attached by explicit textual citation to the verbal text) visual responses to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Indeed, we might most profitably think about Blake's de-

signs as part of a dialogue in which Bunyan's text supplies the other component. Thinking about the designs and the dynamic of the reader/viewer's responses to them is in fact clearly part of Norvig's plan, for she stresses more than once a Hegelian model reflective of the Spirit's drive "to redeem itself by repossessing its own lost and sundered self in an ultimate recognition of its own identity" (117, quoting M. H. Abrams from *Natural Supernaturalism*). Interestingly, Lorraine Clark has only recently claimed (*Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic*, 1991) that in the years following his Felpham sojourn Blake rejected the paradigm of the Hegelian dialectic in favor of an apocalyptic embrace of Truth and an annihilation of Error. That shift from the pattern defined earlier by the Conflict of Contraries suggests a different model of spiritual development than that which Norvig proposes here, and yet the two are not finally incompatible.

As Norvig sees it, Blake seems to have believed that Bunyan's tale "was largely about the visionary aim of the dreamer's unconscious to dream the dream awake, thereby exemplifying a typological process of psychological individuation." Bunyan, she says, saw it differently, virtually ignoring "the narrator's role as shaper of the dream" and unfolding the tale "as a psychobiography not of the dreamer, but of Christian" (129). Put another way, Blake brings the reader into the action by pairing that reader with Bunyan's dreamer-narrator and having both of them explore the dream. In a sense one might argue, then, that the Hegelian dialectic is preserved in the implicit separation (even opposition) Blake posits between the dreamer-narrator-reader and the shared dream, on the one hand, and the narrative content of that dream—the plot through which Christian moves. And yet the apocalyptic resolution toward which Blake moves the reader/viewer gradually eliminates entirely the narrow, time-bound, merely allegorical tale, replacing it with an expanded visionary *consciousness*. Interestingly, Norvig suggests that Bunyan intentionally left latent "the intimations that his fable contained about the curative, self-regulatory structure of the dreamer's imaginal life" (129). Whether Bunyan actually left this salutary substance latent by conscious decision, or whether it is simply not there in Bunyan's tale, is, however, more difficult to determine.

I do not wish, in ventilating these various issues and questions, to slight either the attempt or the execution in *Dark Figures*, for this is going to remain a significant book, not just because of the rich pictorial archive with which it provides us but also because of the important issues it raises about Blake's mature view of the nature of the imaginative life. It is worth thinking, in this respect, about other series of illustrations in which Blake examines the relations that inhere between literary predecessors like Milton or Gray, their works, and the "dreams" that mediate between them. The most immediately obvious parallels lie in the designs to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. The final design for the former,

"The Young Poet's Dream," offers a scenario whose visual conception is not unlike that of *The Dreamer Dreams a Dream* (Progress 1), except that the young Miltonic poet is actually writing in a book. More immediately like the Bunyan is *Il Penseroso* 5, "Milton's Dream," in which the supine Milton is surrounded by the dream borne to him both by Sleep and by his own expansive visionary capacity. What is different about these Milton designs is that in them Milton is a participant in both the dreams and the waking activities the designs depict, whereas Bunyan appears only in the first design, as "the Dreamer," and is never part of the activity represented in subsequent designs. Nor are we told explicitly that the latter dreamer is Bunyan, although the hairstyle and mustache are decidedly Bunyanesque.

The Dreamer Dreams a Dream is at once predictive and synoptic, gathering as it does the chief elements of the entire tale—including the narrative frame—into a single initial design. The "progress" moves from left to right in the "natural" visual reading order that replicates even as it anticipates the narrative order of the verbal text. At the same time, the physical placement of this arch of tableaux over the dreamer signals to us that the whole "sequence" is also simultaneous—or perhaps instantaneous—in the dreamer's visionary consciousness, *within the dream itself*, although it will take the following 27 designs (in which, significantly, the dreamer is seen no more) to "draw out" what is here already present in the *sleeping mind*.

Given my remarks above about interpretive impositions, I hesitate to say anything about the number of designs—28—that Blake's series comprises. But in light of the way in which, beginning in *Milton*, Blake repeatedly treats the number 27 as a figure of relative incompleteness and the number 28 as a "complete" or visionarily fulfilled one, I find it interesting that only by including the initial design of the dreamer is the set raised to the full complement of 28 designs. Was Blake perhaps suggesting here that it is the presence of the *dreamer* (a commanding presence, in that he both appears in and visually dominates the very first design) that furnishes the crucial element in "completing" the vision encapsulated in the dream? And if so, would that fact serve to indicate to a viewer sufficiently informed by and in the Blakean way of seeing that it is likewise the involved activity of the *reader/viewer* that brings both Bunyan's tale and Blake's designs to fruition? While I find the possibility tempting, especially in terms of the process of individuation involved for the reader/viewer in reading the tale and viewing the designs, I offer it as nothing more than a suggestion. Besides, to claim that the series is complete in 28 rather than 29 designs is to exclude a drawing variously titled *Christian Takes Leave of His Companions* (Norvig), *Christian with the Shield of Faith, Taking Leave of His Companions* (Butlin), and *A Warrior with Angels* (its "old" title). While Martin Butlin claims that this design rightfully belongs within the full set of designs, Norvig regards the drawing as "an alternate reading and a trial reso-

lution of the repressive implications of Bunyan's passage" (181). She suggests that the ultimate narrative and thematic resolution suggested by this design is premature, since the incident occurs before Christian's confrontation with Apollyon, and on this basis she proposes that the drawing "was intentionally diverted by Blake from the current set of *Progress* drawings to stand or fall on its own merit" (182), a reasonable and convenient way of resolving the difficulty, but one which seems just a bit too definitive.

Norvig's meticulous discussion of the actual Bunyan designs deftly interweaves Bunyan, Blake, Jung, and the author's own reading of the aim and scope of the separate projects undertaken by Bunyan and Blake. It is hard, finally, not to respect her contention that in the designs Blake subtly shifts the focus of Bunyan's tale away from the history of Christian's own spiritual development and instead onto the process of individuation undergone by the dreamer and represented in the 27 images contained in his dreams. As I mentioned above, Norvig proposes that Blake's designs trace for us a quasi-Hegelian sketch of the dream psyche, presenting us with a visual record of the development and ultimate near-resolution of what she calls a state of "expectant evolution" (207). Interestingly, Norvig reminds us of the profound difference between the conclusion Bunyan wrote and the final design Blake supplied. Where Bunyan ends on a "discordant and disruptive" note, with a strong authorial assertion of the absolute distinction between the book's narrator and the protagonist of the dream, Blake draws the two together, superimposing them finally in the character of the dreamer who is the reader/viewer's representative in the designs. The difference, as Norvig puts it, lies in the fact that Bunyan concludes by stressing the narrator's *exclusion* from the "Desired Country," while Blake formulates a conclusion that is insistently *inclusive*. Bunyan ends not with Christian's triumphal entry into the Celestial City, but rather with "the cautionary tale of Ignorance's defeat"; Blake's dreamer "imagines an apotheosis of the imagination as the fitting signal of an awakening in and from the dream" (209-10).

It is hard, in any event, not to *want* Blake's designs to be a creative, revolutionary reworking of Bunyan's allegories, for we instinctively want Blake's art to take us above and beyond the apparent reductivist simplicities of moral allegory. And so we happily "discover" that Blake rescues precursor artists (and their visions) from various failings of vision or of spirit. And perhaps he does; certainly his designs to the works of other authors always constitute a compelling part of an intellectual and aesthetic dialogue whose minute particulars it behooves us always to labor carefully. The inherent danger in such labors is, of course, an over-particularity that occasionally traps us into absolutist, exclusive claims that are themselves a tyranny of sorts. Like many studies (and not just of Blake) that have labored to extract complicated intellectual agendas from often elusive and always complex visual statements, *Dark Figures in the Desired Country*

occasionally takes rather a harder, more inflexible critical line than one might wish. At the same time, as Blake was fond of reminding us, hard, wiry bounding lines do have their place, if only in serving to delineate figures (or intellectual positions) so that we may encounter them and argue with them. Gerda Norvig's book seems to me an immense achievement, and one that will necessarily provide the foundation for future discussion of the designs to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. She has provided us with a vast treasury of resources, verbal and visual, together with a carefully documented reading of those designs that seeks to account in systematic fashion for the many contexts that inform them, Bunyan's originating narrative, and the century and a half of intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic evolution that separated them. She has given us much to think about, much to talk about, and much to write about. For that, we are in her debt.

David G. Riede, *Oracles and Hierophants: Constructions of Romantic Authority*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1991. 283 + xi pp.

Reviewed by DAVID PUNTER

David Riede in this book seeks to trace the notion of romantic authority, to explore, in other words, why and how it was that romantic poets felt that they could speak with apparent certainty on a range of issues literary, societal, and psychological. He simultaneously, as it were, traces the thanatic fate of this assumption of authority by arguing that in the cases of each of the three writers with whom he deals—Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge—this structure of authority comes to loom so large over their texts that it in effect transmutes them into the sources of a new cultural authoritarianism, which is in each case avidly seized upon by other writers and critics who wish to convert their forebears into a "church," an unquestionable touchstone of knowledge and feeling; and that this "worship" of romantic attitudes persists through literary criticism and pedagogy to the present day.

Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, then, are the main figures here; in his final chapter Riede turns more briefly to the second generation of romantics, principally in order to differentiate their work from their predecessors' and to bring out the readiness with which they questioned *all* authority, in response first to a prevailing sense of political betrayal and second to the perceived "treachery" of some of the earlier poets themselves; the argument here touches on and usefully recontextualises wider issues of romantic irony.

This is a book of extreme meticulousness, full of detail and of close reading, but I have to confess that, although I was gripped from page to page, in the end I found it oddly

unsatisfying. There were two principal reasons for this. The first was the sheer amount of argument from other critics Riede uses to buttress his points, argument which perhaps might be necessary if one were to assume a reader unversed in criticism of the romantics, but to my mind somewhat redundant in view of the likely readership of the book.

But my other problem was more substantial, and has to do with the use Riede makes of his central term, "authority." In part this follows from a passage from Hannah Arendt which he quotes, to the effect that true authority "is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical" (20).

The problem here is that Arendt slides effortlessly between "authority" and the "authoritarian." This is an easy linguistic trope; but it is nonetheless incorrect. The notion of the authoritarian has to do with unjustifiable authority arbitrarily exercised; without some alternative notion of *authority* we have no means even to describe familial or educational process. There can be no development or pedagogy without authority, correctly exercised and subjected to appropriate questioning and testing. Such a notion of "correctness" may well be endlessly challengeable in practice, but that does not mean that it can be removed from political or psychological agenda.

Furthermore, it is not clear to me what poetry—or writing, or text—would look like in the absence of a sense of authority, whether we regard this as in some sense integral or as reader-induced. Riede suggests that the second generation of romantics were "antiauthoritarian" but that "Byron, Shelley, and Keats still struggled in various ways to establish their own poetic authority, and consequently the authority of poetry generally." Well, of course they did: I do not see how you can write anything without founding it upon *some* notion of authority, even if it is a matter of taking on the authority to satirize, to destroy, to rip down. All of these are forms of authority, even if their relations to the dominant formations of culture may be various. To Riede, it seems that this is not so:

The problem with our inherited models of Romantic authority, with the continuing Romantic assumptions of much of our criticism, is that the ideals of an authoritative culture are ultimately authoritarian, and that the practical effects of a self-validating but self-enclosed cultural minority are extremely limited. (278)

I have already said that I do not believe that an authoritative stance necessarily leads to authoritarianism; I would want to add that the issue of the effects of a cultural minority will depend on far greater political complexities than those spelled out here, complexities in the ideological positioning of that minority and in the overall sociopolitical fab-