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R E V I E W

Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

Blake's Illustrations to *Paradise Lost*

May I point out a small error in Joseph Wittreich's article on Blake and Fuseli in your Summer issue 1969 (III, i)? In the note on the differences between Blake's first two sets of illustrations to *Paradise Lost* it is stated that the second, large set of 1808 lacks any illustrations to Milton's first two books. This is incorrect. Although only nine of the series are in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts three more exist, bringing the total up to twelve as in the small Huntington Library set of 1807, though "Satan spying on Adam and Raphael's Descent into Paradise" was replaced by "Adam and Eve sleeping". The large version of "Satan arousing the Rebel Angels", illustrating Book I, lines 300-334, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and both small and large versions of "Satan comes to the Gates of Hell", Book II, lines 645-734, are in the Huntington Library. The third of the dispersed 1808 watercolours, "The Judgment of Adam and Eve: 'So judged the Man'", is in the Houghton Library.

Martin Butlin
Keeper of the British Collection
The Tate Gallery

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REVIEWS

Blake and Tradition The Bollingen Series: XXXV: II Princeton, Vol. I, 460 pp., Vol. II.367 pp., $22.50 the set

What Blake would you have? The "wild pet for the super cultivated" whom Eliot warned us about, the blazing humanitarian in love with mankind's heuristic life, the guru of the body and physician of the ailing intellect, the hero of the counter-culture? None of these? None. But Blake as *mystagogos* can be too easily dismissed by the anxious humanist or the technical critic of language and line. Mylonas in his book on Eleusis defines the *mystagogos* as "the sponsor of a *mystes*, the person who introduced the initiate and even performed some of the rites of preparation and initiation" and, as the Blakean *mystai* continue their search for hidden source and secret ceremony, one begins to understand that, for whatever reasons, there is something in Blake himself of the mystagogue despite his detestation of mystery. His allegory addressed to the intellectual powers demands not only the

resources of literary history and criticism but other rites and ranges of meaning. The long-delayed publication of Kathleen Raine's *Blake and Tradition* sets forth more acutely and problematically than any previous book the problem of who you are and what you are doing when you experience Blake, and what Blake you want him to be. If Miss Raine herself sometimes adopts the mystagogic role, she does so only in imitation of Blake, and her central ritual is, finally, no more remote than the elucidation of poetry itself. This book, with its labor of years, its learning, the battles it fights and the skirmishes it avoids, offers essentially a *poet's* view of Blake, not as the critical technocrats would limit it: to a knowledge of verse and hints from the workshop, but a poet's book in terms of its participation in and sensitivity to a poet's likely motivations and meanings; these are very wide and very mysterious and what we are shown about them will likely do us good.

Like some other Blakeans, then, Miss Raine has more to do than add another explication, vast or little, to the roaring industry of Blake hermeneutics. Her wider motive is probably best approached in her later collection of essays, *Defending Ancient Springs*, 1967, a series of passionate yet graceful studies of English visionary poets in relation to the very Tradition: Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, etc. in which, in her larger work, she seeks to place Blake. Miss Raine's concern with the quality of consciousness as this is maintained in Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Yeats and a few other modern poets is further illuminated by more general essays which, I think, serve as excellent preparation for *Blake and Tradition*: "On the Symbol," "On the Mythological," and "The Use of the Beautiful", endeavors best summed up in her title; she is defending those ancient sources -- the continuing power of symbols -- from modern demythologized naturalism and materialism. Miss Raine has a mission; she would not merely get Blake right or read him in the context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and in the perspective of English literature; she would *use* Blake as he himself saw his prophetic role. His words, her interpretation of those words -- mark them well! -- are of your eternal salvation.

So *Blake and Tradition*, in addition to bearing the normal load of controversial explication and embattled interpretation asks a larger commitment yet: to visionary poetry as Miss Raine understands it and writes it herself. I, for one, am sympathetic to this envelope and find Miss Raine refreshing: profound without hysteria, serious without rancor, and somehow freed from the nervous claustrophobia of the current American academic marketplace; let's say her reading of Blake raises the spiritual level and improves the tone of Blake studies one noticeable notch. But this does not mean that her book, so handsomely produced by Princeton in two impressive volumes, is conclusive or resolving or absolutely new in its position; as a document of belief it is one thing; as a definitive study of Blake, it is another. Grave problems abound. For one thing, the delayed appearance of this book, first finished in 1961, but not published until last year, means that some of the scholarship seems already out of date, and the critical interpretation sometimes lags behind new readings and discoveries. Just what the overwhelmed scholar should attend to will remain a matter of debate and difficult choice, but one sometimes has the sense in reading Miss Raine that what she writes is neither new or startling or particularly hers. This is a familiar problem in scholarship and criticism -- have you seen so-and-so's latest and where can you fit it in? -- but it becomes more complicated when the endeavor is as comprehensive as this one. In studying the lyrics particularly, including

such central works as "The Mental Traveller" or "The Tyger", Miss Raine ignores much valuable explication that would, one feels, enforce or clarify her position; to the reader knowing this other work, her indifference may seem excessively blithe on the one hand or cursorily arrogant on the other, even though one recognizes that she has more to do than to protect tenderly established reputations. A more serious problem in assessing the work -- not as a private and poetic document in the tradition of Swinburne's Blake, but as a contribution to Blake scholarship in its own right -- is an examination of just what is meant by tradition in this book and just what place it is supposed to have in Blake's work.

One knew where Miss Raine stood from the articles she has published over the years: firmly within the camp of which George Mills Harper is the other leading representative: this "tradition" is Greek, it is Platonic and Neo-Platonic; it opts for the mystagogue and his mysteries, and the Perennial Philosophy itself. Knowing this, this reviewer must nonetheless admit to purprise at the importance given to Thomas Taylor in *Blake and Tradition*. Although Miss Raine locates Blake's greatest interest in Taylor's translations and adaptations from the Greek in his work of the 1780's and 1790's, the influence of Taylor on Blake is certainly regarded as pervasive and significant throughout his career. She is definite: "Without the aids of Plotinus and Porphyry, the *Pymander* of Hermes, and, above all, Taylor, Blake's Christianity itself would have been a more limited and lesser matter." One might assent to that more readily if one knew more or believed more about Taylor himself, but the concurrent publication of the Raine-Harper *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, which fills an undoubted gap in our knowledge of this obscure figure, still will not convince many students that he is a crucial missing piece in the intricate puzzle of the backgrounds of English Romanticism. One senses readily the identification that is made between the beleaguered Platonist of the late eighteenth century and the oppressed poet-critic of our own time, but, in reading Taylor's crabbed and deliberately obscurantist writings (including his less than awesome translation of the Orphic hymns), one balks at finding him an important source for Blake. Admittedly, many artists have found fructifying materials in strange places, but did Blake find motivations in Taylor? Miss Raine's emphatic claims for the Taylor-Blake relationship, does prevent one from fully accepting *Blake and Tradition* as the clarifying and central work it is intended to be. I am less concerned with the actual "facts," although we must note that Blake nowhere refers to Taylor in his work, including his letters; Gilchrist is silent on Taylor in any edition; probably Taylor is Sipsop the Pythagorean in *An Island in the Moon*, but it is hard to see how that satiric portrait demonstrates a personal and intellectual bond between the men. It is unlikely, perhaps, that Blake did not attend Taylor's lectures on Platonism in Flaxman's house but he may not have. Finally, however, such nigglings will only mystify some and anger others; he who would deny any connection between Taylor and Blake for lack of concrete historical evidence would lose Miss Raine's important poetic and philosophical understanding of Blake; he who would insist too much on Blake the Platonist (as a welcome relief from Blake the Hebraist) has a difficult case to prove. The issue becomes not scholarly but critical. What does the juxtaposition of Thomas Taylor and William Blake do for our understanding of Blake's difficult work? If that is enhanced and we come to a more precise appreciation of what kind of poet and artist Blake was, then the rescue of Taylor's work and reputation will have been worth while.

According to Miss Raine, "Taylor's greatest service to the romantic poets was in teaching the use of symbolic discourse as the language of metaphysical thought." This indeed is an important contribution -- even if Thomas Taylor did not make it. In recent years critical interest in the Romantics has moved away from the political and the historical to the study of those methods of composition and structuring of symbologies that lead to such extraordinary and still imperfectly described works as *Jerusalem* and *Prometheus Unbound*. The poem as "an essay in mythological composition", argues Miss Raine, required the structural levels of myth which Taylor, in his *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, set forth from Sallust. The levels of fable suggested by Sallust and adopted by Taylor in his exposition of the Mysteries: the fable itself, the physical interpretation of the fable (Proserpina as blossoming earth), the animastic level (Prosperina as the descent of the soul), and the theological-metaphysical level ("who knows if to live is not to die, and to die to live?") -- these give the "fullest possible content" to the poet's material. The raising of curtains here is swift and subtle: one has to assume, for example, that the Neo-Platonic allegorizing of Homer gives us the richest view of the Homeric poems, that Thomas Taylor's resuscitation of Homeric commentaries by Proclus and Porphyry is valuable in itself and of even greater value in showing Blake how to write symbolic verse. Finally, Miss Raine seems to aver, in recognizing the abstracting and Platonizing impulse of Blake's mind we come closer to his basic poetic Method than we have before. Yes and no. Miss Raine's marked ability to write uncluttered exposition of uncertain visibilities makes nearly all her material attractive in itself, but whether it is all relevant to Blake is a different and often controversial matter. She is at her best, I think, in offering possible but undogmatic resonances to Blake's work when that work itself seems particularly to require extension and comparison as in her interpretation of the late painting at Arlington Court, "The Sea of Time and Space" or in her reading of "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found." The painting is examined as an illustration of Porphyry's treatise on Homer's *Cave of the Nymphs*, translated by Taylor in 1788-1789, although neither Geoffrey Keynes nor George Digby agrees that Blake is illustrating Porphyry's view of Homer in this beautiful and complicated work, nor does a careful reading of Taylor's translation of *De Antro Nympharum* in its new appearance resolve the issue. What Miss Raine establishes by these speculations is, I think, the appropriate spiritual and symbolic level on which Blake was operating most of the time. Once again, the range of "abstraction" must be appreciated. The episode in Book Thirteen of *The Odyssey* in which Odysseus returns to Ithaca through the Cave of the Nymphs must assume a symbolic meaning; Porphyry in a typical Neo-Platonic allegorizing must see Odysseus as the soul crossing and freeing itself from the stormy sea of generation; Taylor's translation must convey the full arching weight of an arguable interpretation and Blake, of course, must read Taylor in a sympathetic spirit. If any one these steps is a misadventure, does Miss Raine's further Platonizing fail? I think not.

Paradoxically, the linking of Blake to the Tradition as Miss Raine understands it helps in rescuing Blake's complex poems and pictures from the charges of the private and the arbitrary that have been lodged against them. The poet who may seem self-indulgent, the reader who may appear anxious and cultish both gain from Miss Raine's reading. What has sometimes seemed overdetermined, too casually allusive, and certainly hard to discover in Blake's course is revealed, at the least, to be part of, indeed, clarified and ennobled

by a tradition of speculative thought that shaped itself in the second and third centuries of our era, found new life in the fifteenth century and continues to run in a significant if underground current through the present time of troubles. Miss Raine's reading of the Lyca poems can serve, I think, as a good example of the enriching range she brings to Blake studies even as we hem and haw. Once again the route is perilous, for we have to believe that Blake was drawing on his knowledge of the Portland Vase whose figures he engraved for Darwin's *Botanic Garden* in 1791, that the vase does depict the Mysteries of Eleusis, and that Blake is drawing on Taylor's exposition of the Mysteries. It is true, as Irene Chayes has pointed out,* that Kathleen Raine, in her reading of these poems, fails to distinguish between the primordial image of the Lost Maiden, the Kore Prosperpina, and the Neo-Platonic allegory of what the Kore means, but that "fullest possible content" Miss Raine is anxious to discover for Blake depends heavily on a tradition in which Neo-Platonic extrapolations play an important part. I know of no other discussion of these crabbed and teasing stanzas that better accounts for the poetic process in these poems. What, at first, may seem confused or even careless in Blake's "allegorical waver", as Edwin Honig would call it, takes on body and meaningful connection with other poems by Blake; "Introduction" to *Experience*, "Earth's Answer", and the fallen Ahania of *The Book of Ahania* assume new meaning in Blake's various and elaborate presentation of the archetype. This graceful density continues to operate through Miss Raine's presentation of motifs, sources, and analogues in the Prophetic Books, where we can even see Thomas Taylor start to fade into his significant and interesting but not conclusive role.

Blake and Tradition is a far more personal work than it might look at first -- the quality and commitment of Kathleen Raine's mind and imagination must be engaged at every point. But the subtle boundary between the personal: the alert and steady pressure of a particular outreaching mind and the eccentric: the half-glimpsed display of hidden sources and events -- this line is not always as well defined as it should be in a work of undoubtedly major intentions. Yet the comprehensive works on Blake, starting with Ellis-Yeats, have inevitably swung between the personal and the eccentric and away from the strictly literary-academic because Blake's position in literary and cultural history, a wholly ambiguous matter in his own time, has been only slightly better defined in this century. The "big" books like Foster Damon's and Northrop Frye's did not and could not seek neatly sanctioned solutions to be passed on to the Oxford Histories. Damon, in his time, performed the essential first task of showing that Blake might, after all, be intelligible; Frye, in what is still the best study, demonstrates how consistent in itself and how challenging to our whole view of literature that intelligibility might be; yet both authors, while never losing sight of their larger purposes are often "personal" in the sense in which I have defined the term. Kathleen Raine belongs here but to what degree and to what end is likely to stir the

* "Little Girls Lost: Problems of a Romantic Archetype", *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LXVII, 9 (November 1963) 579-92. Reprinted in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Northrop Frye (Spectrum Books 1966), 65-78.

passions for some time to come. I want to come back to the poet, *sui generis*, not as handbooks and workshops understand him, but as Shelley did, "the hierophant of an unapprehended inspiration." Miss Raine's Blake is no dogmatic geometer-humanist whose wheels, within or without, were set in motion for the critic and propagandist of a terrible time; he is a poet, obsessed with line and verb, requiring and making symbols to which his interpreter must be true. After the elucidation of the Mysteries, we yet remain in the presence of secrets honored, secrets kept.

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William Blake's "Heads of the Poets" (by William Wells). Manchester: City Art Gallery (1969) 43 pp. . . No price listed.

William Blake: Illustrations to The Divine Comedy *of Dante.* New York: Da Capo Press, pp. iii + 109 plates. $100.00.

These two publications, one a large portfolio, the other a booklet, both reproduce series of pictures by Blake not otherwise available at present, although in neither case is the series reproduced for the first time. The Dante series is a "second edition" of the facsimile produced for the National Art-Collections Fund in 1922,[1] (see announcement in *BNL* II, no. 4 [whole #8], p. 61). The Manchester booklet includes photographic reproductions of a series to be found complete only in a long out-of-print Blake Society pamphlet of 1925.

The name of William Wells, Keeper of the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, does not appear on the cover of the Manchester pamphlet, and there is no title page; the author is identified only in the foreward to the booklet. This is regrettable, for Mr. Wells deserves credit for giving us a valuable little study of Blake's least-known series of pictures . This booklet, prepared in conjunction with a Blake-Hayley exhibition[2] at the City Art Gallery, includes reproductions of all eighteen heads, thirty subsidiary reproductions, and a handsome cover drawing of Hayley's Turret. In almost all respects, this *Heads of the Poets* is superior to the Blake Society's 1925 production. The latter had only a cursory introduction by Thomas Wright, while in this one Mr. Wells presents twenty-five pages of concise information. Five Heads given incorrect titles in 1925 are retitled now, following the corrections made by the late Kenneth Povey. Much detail appears only in the new reproductions: for example, the figure of Ugolino in "Dante" is virtually invisible in the Blake Society's reproduction but well defined in Mr. Wells's; in the earlier "Spenser" the delightful figures on the left side of the picture cannot be seen at all. In one respect, however, the earlier reproductions have an advantage -- in being printed one to a page. They have considerably more effect this way than they do in the present booklet, where they are crowded two to a page.