

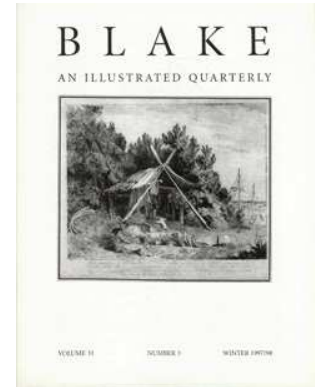
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

Peter Isaac, William Bulmer: The Fine Printer in Context 1757-1830

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 31, Issue 3, Winter 1997/98, pp. 94-97



with a final dark" (157). He goes on to compare this process of troping with the depleting process of time, thus returning to the poetry of the seasons and to Blake's "Mad Song," which "crouds after night" not only in the sense of "murmuring" but also in the sense of crowding or pressing on darkness. "Crouding after Night" (the title of his essay) thus becomes for De Luca the sublime theme of the whole volume, which he ultimately casts as a rivalry between the wintry northern landscape of the Burkean sublime and the (re)generative troping of Hebraic prophecy.

Perhaps the most ambitious essay in the collection is Nelson Hilton's "The Rankest Draught," which analyzes the prose piece "then She bore Pale desire," often grouped with *Poetical Sketches* by editors. The chaotically ambiguous syntax and punctuation of the "sketch" seems an extreme example of the "irregularities" in the typeset poems, so that Hilton is tempted to see "then She bore Pale desire" as a purer version of the same kind of work that Blake's well-meaning friends mutilated with their corrections. Hilton begins his essay by transcribing Blake's prose piece into metrical lines: a questionable move, some would say, in light of current arguments that Blake's lineation should not be tampered with. But this is not an engraved poem; Hilton makes no alterations from Erdman's text; and his transcription simply reveals the metrical form already there in the language. Sometimes it is a trochaic tetrameter familiar from the *Songs* ("She doth bind them to her law"), but more often it is blank verse: "My Cup is fill'd with Envy's Rankest Draught / a miracle No less can set me Right." If nothing else, this lineation makes it easier to read a text that too many readers might dismiss as gibberish. But this transcription is only a prelude to Hilton's consideration of the piece as a poem, one that is intrinsically concerned with the creative process it both embodies and describes.

Hilton explores the "psycho-theogony" of the poem using Melanie Klein's theory about the opposition of envy and creativity as well as his own richly allusive close reading, drawing on Shakespeare, Spenser, Burton, Milton, and a host of lesser figures. The effect is not merely to uncover the sources of Blake's images, which indeed would make "then She bore Pale desire" seem as derivative as any of the lyrics in *Poetical Sketches*, but rather to depict the poet/narrator struggling with his own envy which is itself creative: "it is the Cursed thorn wounding my breast that makes me sing, / however sweet tis Envy that Inspires my Song." The poem depicts the "gods" of the passions generating themselves in a succession of metaphors that aptly represents De Luca's sense of the sublime, but rather than the poet controlling those metaphors, "trying them on" as Vogler has it, they control him. Hilton's article thus pays unusual attention to a "fragment" while also engaging many themes of the collection.

As I mentioned before, all the articles in the collection respond in one way or another to Gleckner's book.

Gleckner then responds to these responses in the closing piece, "Obtuse Angled Afterword." I shall refrain from responding to a response to a series of responses, except to say that the inclusion of Gleckner's piece helps to give the book the informal flavor of a roundtable discussion as well as raising good questions about the specific arguments presented. Giving Gleckner the last word, however, makes it seem as though all things begin and end with Gleckner where *Poetical Sketches* is concerned, whereas the volume has already demonstrated how much more is left to discuss. The questions of originality, evaluation, and formalism raised here have implications for the rest of Blake's work and beyond: implications which I hope will continue to be pursued with the energy already shown in *Speak Silence*.

Work Cited

Gleckner, Robert F. *Blake's Prelude: Poetical Sketches*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982.

Peter Isaac, *William Bulmer: The Fine Printer in Context 1757-1830*: Expanded from the Sandars Lectures Cambridge 1984. London: Bain & Williams, [February 1994]. Pp. 198, 43 plates. £75.50.

Reviewed by G. E. BENTLEY, JR.

The two greatest English printers during William Blake's lifetime were William Bulmer and Thomas Bensley, and each was responsible for a number of works of major importance in Blake's career and in the history of fine printing. These included for Bulmer three major publications by Boydell: Hogarth, *Works* (1795), Shakspeare, *Dramatic Works* (1791-1802), and Boydell's *Graphic Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of William Shakspeare* ([?1803]; 1813). For works printed by Bensley Blake did even more, and more important, work: Lavater, *Aphorisms* (1789), Lavater, *Physiognomy* (1789-98; 1810), two advertisements for Blair's *Grave* (1805) plus Blair, *Grave* (1808; 1813), and Gay, *Fables* (1793 [i.e., 1810]). In the cases of the Boydell Shakspeare and Lavater's *Physiognomy*, the interest of contemporaries and posterity was not infrequently as much in the typography and printing as in the illustrations. Such fine printing is of major importance in Blake's professional context.

William Bulmer established his reputation very rapidly and solidly:

From the moment in March 1790 that he established the Shakspeare Press in Russell Court, Cleveland Row, St James's, William Bulmer was regarded as a fine

printer, and this reputation has survived him by a century and a half.¹

He had the enormous advantage that he was associated ab initio with John Boydell's proposals for an heroic national edition of Shakspeare's *Dramatic Works* (1791-1802), with illustrations by the best designers and engravers (including Blake) in England, one of the most ambitious fine book projects ever undertaken in Britain. He did not so much exemplify the best standards of English printing; he substantially created them. Boydell said in his 1789 Shakspeare Prospectus,

At present, indeed, to our disgrace be it spoken, we are far behind every neighbouring nation, many of whom have lately brought the Art of Printing to great perfection. (121)

As Thomas Bewick said of his old Newcastle friend, "William Bulmer ... was the first that set the example, and soon led the way, to fine printing in England" (16). The printer John Nichols defined "what is technically called *Fine Printing*" as consisting in

new Types, excellent Ink, improved Printing Presses, a sufficient time allowed to the Pressman for extraordinary attention, and last, not least, an inclination in the Employer to pay a considerably advanced price.—Mr Bulmer's example was successfully followed by Mr Bensley; and *Fine Printing* is now performed by every Printer of respectability in the United Empire. (43—see illus. 1)

Bulmer and Bensley were largely responsible for what has been called "this brief Golden Age" of English printing (122). In particular, in Bulmer's editions of Milton and Shakspeare for Boydell, "the letterpress text is a splendid typographical achievement" (142).

Bulmer's success was built upon his use of the types designed by William Martin, and Isaac (35) cites evidence of 1803 that Bulmer had exclusive use of these types, at least at first. The point is made even more clearly in a fascinating entry for 31 March 1796 in the diary of the American papermaker and entrepreneur Joshua Gilpin about his visit to London:

Lawrence Greatrike & his partner George Stafford² who lives in Crane Court Fleet Street came & dined with me—he told me that beside the two foundries

¹ P. 11. According to [J.B. Nichols], "Memoir of William Bulmer, Esq.," *Gentleman's Magazine*, C (Oct 1830), his first publication—Boydell's Shakespeare #1—"at once established Mr. Bulmer's fame as the first practical printer of his day".

² A printer at Crane Court, Fleet Street (1790-96), according to Ian Maxted, *The London Book Trades 1775-1800* (1977).

of Caslons³ & one of Frys,⁴ there is one owned by Stevenson⁵ & another by [space] making 5 in all,⁶ that Martin is confined to cut for Bulmer only—that all are cut on the same body as Fry's, but that the rest are not generally so plain—that the Scots foundry—Willsons[?] furnish the best types—that Fry employs Birmingham cutters, that the difficulty lies in fixing the Matrices so as to make the bottoms of all the Letters even—who also is making the metal.

he further informs me that Fry lately sent out a pearl bible ready cut for some house in Philad.^a or New York, that it is easy to have it; that the price of good printing is very little inferior [*sic*] to the common—gave me Specimens of his Edition of the Encyclopedia—& of Johnson's dictionary—talked with Greatrike ab.¹ paper making, he thinks that the bleaching very much injures the screen[*in*]g[?], shewed me sundry Specimens some made on a new kind of wove mould, gave me also an acct of the Mills in France—⁷

Peter Isaac's book is an admirable biographical and commercial history of Bulmer, with particularly important chapters on "The Shakspeare Printing Office," "Influential Support," his "Publishers," "Bulmer as Employer," and "Fine Printing." These sections are so solid that they may confidently form the foundation for future studies of Bulmer and his contemporaries. My greatest regret is that there is no table of the 43 reproductions which exemplify so much of the beauty and accomplishment of Bulmer's work.

An indication of the intricacy of the printing business—and of Bulmer's generosity in dealing with his creditors—may be seen in a letter in the Huntington (partly quoted on 84-85) which Bulmer wrote to the firm of Cadell & Davies:

Shakspeare Printing Office
July 9th 1812

Gentlemen,
Though I cannot help feeling the very unpleasant situation in which you are placed with regard to the History of Dublin, and know that it is not the usual practice for a Printer to call for settlement of his account for an unfinished single volume, yet under all the cir-

³ Caslon must be Elizabeth Caslon [II] (d. 1809), who, with her son Henry Caslon [II] (1786-1850) and mother-in-law Elizabeth Caslon [I] (c. 1725-95), inherited the type foundry of Henry Caslon [I] (d. 1788), who had inherited it from William Caslon [II] (d. 1778).

⁴ Fry is either Edmund Fry (d. 1835), London typefounder, or his brother Henry Fry, London typefounder, sons of Joseph Fry (d. 1787), type-founder of Bristol.

⁵ Stevenson must be Simon & Charles Stephenson (1791-96), London typefounders.

⁶ According to *Holden's Triennial Directory* for 1802, there were 7 type foundries in London then (Maxted, xxiii-xxiv).

⁷ Quoted from a microfilm of the MS in the Pennsylvania State Archives.

cumstances of the case, I feel myself compelled to apply to you for cash on account, or for a bill at a short date, for the above work. — The History of Dublin was begun nearly 4 years ago; and my charge upon it, up to October last, is nearly 250£. since which period not one single sheet has been printed: and to add to the inconvenience I have had to keep standing 4 whole sheets of the Work, in which are several tables, and 6 separate folding tables besides.—These sheets & tables, though they abound in sorts we are in daily want of in the common course of business, I will still endeavour to keep standing in their present states, provided you have hopes of the Author's shortly proceeding with the work, but I cannot really do so much longer.

The coarse proofs of the standing matter are inclosed, which I will thank you to return, to prevent accident.

I am, Gentlemen,
Your's very truly
W Bulmer

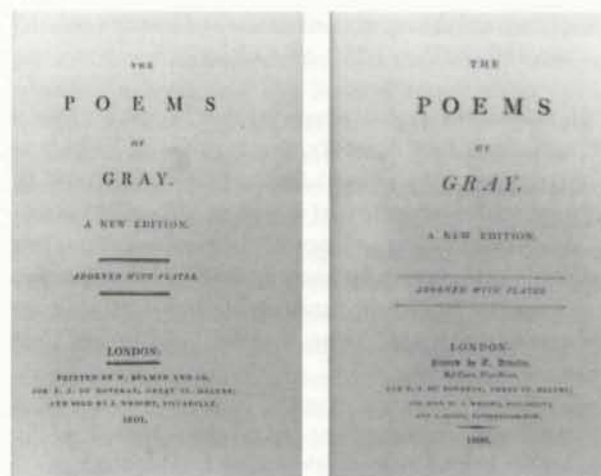
Mess Cadell & Davies

In 1812, Bulmer had been waiting almost four years for any payment for the very substantial amount of work done—and he may have had to wait six more until the work was finally published.⁸ Almost equally awkward, he had had to keep four quarto sheets (32 pages) plus six tables (including small sorts of type which were in short supply) in standing type, presumably because they had not yet been corrected.

The work in question is J. Warburton, J. Whitelaw, Robert Walsh, *History of the City of Dublin*, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand, by W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland-Row, St. James's, 1818), 2 vols., quarto. Whitelaw had taken over materials about Dublin from the late Mr. Warburton, and when Whitelaw died in 1813 there was evidently a pause before Walsh took up the reins. There was some delay in getting on with the work even after Bulmer's letter, for the only typographical folding plates (1: 648) is watermarked "1816" in the Huntington copy. Apparently some sheets of *The History of Dublin* had been printed for almost six years before the work was published, and Bulmer's type and paper were tied up for years at a time producing no benefit to him. Bulmer's forbearance in the circumstances seems very remarkable.

Peter Isaac has been publishing works on William Bulmer for over 30 years, beginning with *Checklist of Books & Periodicals Printed by William Bulmer* (1961), with a First

⁸ Bulmer must have been used to waiting for payment; for instance, according to the promissory note of 9 Jan 1804 (National Book League), he was not paid his £43.18.6 by Cadell & Davies for printing William Marshall's *On Planting* [3rd edition, 1803; Isaac, p. 160] until "Six Months after Date", i.e., 9 July 1804.



1 Titlepages of *The Poems of Gray* Adorned with Plates printed by Bensley for Du Roveray in 1800 <GEB> on the right and by Bulmer ostensibly for Du Roveray but in fact for J. Wright in 1801 <GEB> on the left. Both titlepages are exceedingly simple and handsome, that by Bensley more delicate and feminine, with italic type, longer rules, and better balance, that by Bulmer more bold and masculine, with shorter and more prominent rules and less variety of size and face.

Du Roveray had "sold Wright the Plates," and he was therefore astonished, when he "accidentally saw ... Copies of Gray in a bookseller's Shop," to find his name still on the title page of Wright's edition. He wrote indignantly to Bulmer in September 1801 about the "unwarrantable" "liberty that has been taken with my name in stating on the title-page of the books that they have been printed by my orders, or for me Why not to render the deception complete (for a deception has been clearly intended) state likewise that they were printed by Mr Bensley? One falsehood is as easy to justify as another" (quoted from the MS in Harvard; it is also given on Isaac, 88-89). Bulmer's reply is not known.

Supplement (1962), a Second (1973), and a Third (1986), and culminating in the Sandars Lectures at Cambridge (1984),⁹ which are supplemented in his 1994 book with a checklist (145-79), expanded yet again, of works Bulmer printed.¹⁰ Despite the splendid extent and comprehensiveness of this list, it would be surprising if it could not be enlarged.¹¹ The supplemental works below are merely those

⁹ The lectures were sent to friends as *William, Bulmer, 1757-1830: 'Fine' Printer*: Sandars Lectures, 1984 (1984), 49 pp., organized in a manner quite different from the 1994 book.

¹⁰ In 1994 books are numbered 1-593, serials as 1-141, Publications of the Board of Agriculture as 1-58, and R.H. Evans Auction Catalogues as 1-7, but intercalated numbers make the totals much higher; for instance, 45 Evans catalogues are listed. The 1961 list had 381 entries.

¹¹ Note that it is not always easy to find works in the list. For instance, Thomas Park's *Cupid Turned Volunteer* (1804) is listed under

turned up from a Huntington handlist of Bulmer:
 1 Claude Gelée, dit Le Lorrain. LIBER VERITATIS; | OR | A
 COLLECTION OF PRINTS, | AFTER THE | ORIGINAL
 DESIGNS | OF | CLAUDE LE LORRAIN; | IN THE | COL-
 LECTION OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE
 [EXECUTED BY | RICHARD EARL OM, | IN THE MAN-
 NER AND TASTE OF THE DRAWINGS. | TO WHICH IS
 ADDED | A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE OF EACH
 PRINT; | TOGETHER WITH | THE NAMES OF THOSE
 FOR WHOM, AND THE PLACES FOR WHICH THE
 ORIGINAL | PICTURES WERE FIRST PAINTED, | (Taken
 from the Hand-writing of CLAUDE LE LORRAIN on the Back
 of each Drawing) | AND | OF THE PRESENT POSSESSORS
 OF MANY OF THE ORIGINAL PICTURES. | - | VOLUME
 THE FIRST[-SECOND]. | LONDON: | = | PUBLISHED
 BY MESSRS. BOYDELL AND CO. CHEAPSIDE.
 [PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW.
 [?1791] Folio, 2 vols. with 200 prints, and a supplementary
 volume PRINTED BY JAMES MOYES (1819). N.B. The
 title page exists in at least two different forms; one of them
 specifies "two hundred prints" "Published by the proprietor,
 John Boydell, engraver, London, 1777" (ESTC lists copies
 in the Ashmolean Museum [Oxford], British Library [3],
 Dalhousie, Gottingen, Newberry Library [2], Michigan,
 John Rylands Library [University of Manchester], U.S.
 National Gallery, and Yale—none seen by me), and this can
 have nothing to do with Bulmer, who was not in business
 at the time. The second form, as above, is almost certainly
 in or after 1790 (when Bulmer began paying rates at Cleve-
 land Row [Isaac p. 25]) (4 copies seen in the Huntington
 <129352; 281823; 295025; Art Gallery fn C1135 G3A3>).
 This Bulmer titlepage is not listed in ESTC, NUC, and else-
 where, but I wonder whether some of the sets located there,
 uniformly dated "1777" (the date of Boydell's dedication)
 are not in fact the Bulmer printing.¹²

2 [Incipit:] Cy ensuyt une chanson moult pitoyable des
 grivouses oppressions qe la povre Commune de Engleterre
 souffre ... Pp. i-xliiii in Gothic type, with a colophon on p.
 [xlv]: LONDON; | FROM THE [Gothic:] Shakspeare Press,
 BY | WILLIAM BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW,
 ST. JAMES'S. | 1818. 4°. The work was compiled by Sir
 Francis Palgrave; the front paste-down of the Huntington
 copy is inscribed: "Only 25 copies printed by Sir F. Palgrave,
 all for presents."

"Elizabeth, Princess", the designer of the prints; Thomas Williamson's
Oriental Field Sports, oblong folio (1807), 4° (1808), is oddly listed under
 Edward Orme, who was merely the supervisor of the engravings; and
 Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1819) and other works are listed only under
 the Roxborough Club.

¹² Claude's *Leber Veritatis* Vol. I-II (n.d.) is listed in Isaac's first *Check-
 list* (1961), the Second 1973, p. 8, #143, and the Third (1986, p. 10,
 #143), but it dropped out of the 1994 list because, as Professor Isaac
 tells me, when he checked the British Library copy he found that it did
 not bear Bulmer's name.

Kathryn S. Freeman, *Blake's Nostos: Fragmentation and Nondualism in The Four Zoas*. SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions. David Applebaum, Editor. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997. Pp. 208. \$49.50/16.95.

Reviewed by SHEILA A. SPECTOR

In *Blake's Nostos: Fragmentation and Nondualism in The Four Zoas*, Kathryn S. Freeman explores the possibility of using Eastern nondualism as a useful context in which to place Blake's first epic. Taking a mystical, rather than conventionally literary approach, Freeman suggests that previous studies have all been hampered to varying degrees by their reliance on principles of linear structure, and as a result, all have failed to account for the relationship between the apocalyptic Night the Ninth and the eight nights which precede it. The reasons, she argues, are "that the powerful though tenuously held vision of nonduality in Night the Ninth provides a touchstone for the rest of the poem and that the organized innocence of Night the Ninth is fully cognizant of the fragmented world of the first eight Nights" (21). With the use of subtle and perceptive readings, filtered through a concept she labels "nostos," "the return home of consciousness to its expanded state" (4), Freeman analyzes "the elements of Blake's mythos, including its principles of causality, narrative, figuration and teleology, all having both dual and nondual, or fallen and redeemed, versions" (22).

According to Freeman, Blake's myth has been misunderstood because of our own reliance on Western modes of thought. Given *The Four Zoas's* resistance to the more conventional interpretation of Blake's contraries as dialectical antitheses, Freeman suggests in her first chapter, "Blake's Mythos: Nondual Vision in a Dualistic World," the possibility that Eastern mysticism might help to elucidate the poem. Asserting that in Blake, "The fallen state, a contraction of undifferentiated, expanded consciousness, is therefore subsumed by the redeemed rather than being antithetical to it" (3), Freeman redefines Blake's doctrine of contraries in terms of the fragmentation and reintegration of consciousness, providing revisionist readings of selected poems from the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to support her thesis. Having thus established the plausibility of her approach, she posits the *Bhagavad Gita* as a possible analogue for Blake's treatment of nondual experiences. Regardless of whether or not Blake was directly influenced by the Wilkins translation (or even whatever derivative versions might have been available to him), Freeman believes that they shared similar attitudes towards the problem of consciousness.

In the remainder of her book, Freeman demonstrates the validity of her thesis, constructing a kind of hermeneutical