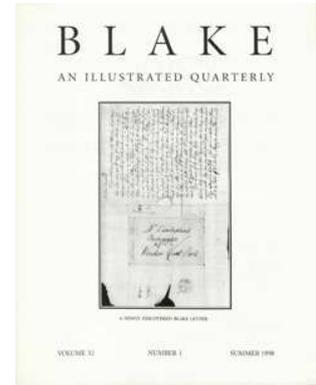


AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

N E W S

Books Being Reviewed for Blake

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 32, Issue 1, Summer 1998, p. 23



the revolutionary "new conquering empire of light and reason" threatens to shine on the essence of womanhood and reveal its bestiality. This may seem to be an overly polemical assessment but the word is not too strong—for though Burke worries that egalitarian levelling will reveal the king to be "but a man," a few more clauses are added to his account of the revelation of Marie Antoinette: "a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order." (166)

She then tracks the way in which, as "the leading character in the eighteenth-century's greatest patriarchal moral fable" (145), the queen came to epitomize "monstrous" female appetites (147) only to be re-revised into a female martyr with her execution in October of 1793. Bruder argues that with these later events Blake begins to see the queen "more as a scapegoat and victim than a tyrant" (163) and so to conceive his later concept of "the female will, that complex of manipulative feminine strategies developed and employed by women to obtain power in an oppressive and resisting patriarchal context" (163). Enitharmon, then, is the figure through which Blake "enters most directly into a discussion of women's roles and fate in the French Revolution" (162), and the crucial aspect of her speech, with the resonant phrase included in the chapter title, is how Blake reveals that it "isn't issued from a position of power but is a response to the position in which patriarchy places women" (170).

Appealing as these suggestions are, their practical application is not without difficulty. Of the illustration on plate 3, for instance, Bruder writes that here "Blake faces up to Marie Antoinette's execution directly: occupying most of *Europe—A Prophecy's* skyline floats an immense female figure, her hair falling down over her face as she vigorously clutches the back of her neck—preparing herself, evidently, for the inevitable blow" (163). Concerning that figure's enormous wings the author is less confident, suggesting parenthetically that with them "Blake perhaps alludes" to the queen's posthumous transformation to aristocratic angel (163)—and concerning the figure's relation to the orb, firey embryo dropped from her hair, she has nothing to say. At the end one agrees with the author that "despite all that [she's] tried to contend and convey in this chapter, *Europe* is still a problematic poem" (176).

As the book concludes, the author appears several times to comment on how her work has lacked the "benefit of genuine critical dialogue" (177) and "sustaining critical dialogue" (181). At the same time she states that her kind of work "most powerfully demonstrates that feminist readings are not simply 'another perspective' that can be neatly lined up amongst a range of alternative options (especially not within Blake studies as I perceive it). This kind of writing disrupts and refutes critical orthodoxies, and so far this iconoclastic enterprise is only in its most embryonic phase"

(181). The effect of such personal references scattered throughout is nicely captured by her own comment on another critic's "lengthy exercise in soul-baring [which] has very little impact upon the body of the text and is more likely to embarrass than illuminate the reader" (11).

N E W S L E T T E R

Books Being Reviewed for *Blake*

The following is a list from Nelson Hilton, our Review Editor, of books currently being reviewed for *Blake*.

Prints and Engraved Illustrations by and After Henry Fuseli: A Catalogue Raisonné

D. H. Weinglass (Scholar Press)

Blake Books Supplement

G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford University Press)

Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake

Nicholas M. Williams (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Blake's Altering Aesthetic

William Richey (University of Missouri Press, 1998)

Locke and Blake: A Conversation across the Eighteenth Century

Wayne Glausser (University of Florida Press, 1998)

Flexible Design: Revisionary Poetics in Blake's Vala or The Four Zoas

John B. Pierce (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998)

The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824

Robert M. Ryan (Cambridge University Press, 1997)

The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III

Diana Donald (Yale University Press, 1997)

The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain 1700-1830

Clifford Siskin (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)

Blake, Politics, and History

Eds. Disalvo, Rosso, et al. (Garland, forthcoming).