

# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

N E W S

## Pierre Boutang's William Blake

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leaves (of 28--without plates 7, 8 and 16), PRINTED IN BRILLIANT COLOURS with thick opaque pigments and finished in places with watercolour washes, the text printed in sepia (first 2 plates) and green, brown morocco gilt, g.e., by Francis Bedford, the Gaisford copy (sale in our rooms 23 April 1890, lot 191)

4to (303 mm by 240 mm) Lambeth, printed by Will. Blake, 1794

\*\*\*Copy C in Keynes & Wolf's census (*William Blake's Illuminated Books*, New York, 1953), where seven copies (and two fragments) are recorded: of these only two are complete, this being the only other copy which contains plate 4 ("Muster around the bleak desarts . . .").

The word "First" appears in the title, Preludium, and in the colophon; the lines "The web is a female in embryo . . ." (plate 25) and "All the seven deadly sins of the soul" (plate 4) are not erased.

Bound in after the title-page is another impression of plate 2 (Preludium), with the words "Preludium to the first book of" painted out, and with a painted border surrounding the figures added by Blake, who has also delicately heightened the figures with pen and brush; this plate is on different paper and is inlaid to size.

[See Colour Plate]

The colour plate referred to is a handsome full-page reproduction of the picture of the crouching Urizen which is plate 4 in the Trianon Press facsimile (of the Rosenwald copy).

Our thanks to Professor James Hart, Director of the Bancroft Library, for bringing this item to our attention.

*PIERRE BOUTANG'S WILLIAM BLAKE*

Professor André Le Vot of the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Paris, sends us two newspaper articles concerning a new French translation and commentary on Blake by Pierre Boutang. We reprint them in full, with thanks to Prof. Lee Johnson of the University of New Mexico for his translations:

[*Le Monde*, 20 November 1970, p. 17]

*Between Holderlin and Nietzsche*

*William Blake, by Pierre Boutang\**

At the same time a commentary, a text, and a translation of the work of William Blake, Pierre Boutang's book will rapidly become an indispensable work with regard to its principal subject, stimulating in its explications, even provoking, because the manner of the author is so incisive and controversial.

Besides his uncommon qualities as a writer, there is the added interest of Boutang's reflection on the diverse philosophical, religious, and literary ideas which



are expounded and discussed in his book--in particular those of Nietzsche and Heidegger. This book, which without a doubt opens up a wider road to future studies, will finally permit the French reader to approach the incandescent core of works that he knows only partially or defectively.

What has kept us separated from Blake until now is of course the habitual obstacle of translation, and as little as one regrets Gide's readings of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and earlier, Denis Saurat's, they remain only approximate. Every difficulty inherent in translation is found aggravated in the case of Blake because the slightest weakness causes irreparable damage. Where one should find only fulgurations, spells, and splendors, there no longer remains the ashes of a poetry that has consumed itself: whereas precisely this consummation is the primary event in the poetry and vision of Blake.

Boutang has surmounted this original difficulty. He has translated a great number of long passages, especially from the "Prophetic Books," and he has then presented himself as the commentator on and the critic of his own translation. He becomes for the reader the "actor" of Blake. His French text is presented before the English text, and the double reading leads us to the heart of the infernal mechanism of the Word by which the work consumes itself.

William Blake is doubtless not only the greatest but the closest to us of those who have exercised the supreme poetic power to the single end of answering the first question, that of our existence in a fallen world, our own. Beyond this well of flames, of which Boutang's book is the scholarly and intrepid discoverer, the frequently-evoked myth of Urizen presents us with the culprit for all the metamorphoses of man.

The demiurge Urizen had for his task the creation of the Universe ("This abominable void, this vacancy before which the soul trembles," writes the poet). This world invented by Urizen, tomorrow the domain of man, is formed by a brutal separation from the Divine, from the "Eternals" who are one and indivisible. The creation of the Universe by Urizen is actually a de-creation: it carries with it the mark of destruction and death. And what follows is the coming of "Time," by which man is forever separated from the "Eternals."

The grand design of Blake, Christian but contemptuous of all natural religion, is to try to imagine the redemption of Time, which holds us in a fallen world, outside the eternal and salvation. "Man," writes P. Boutang, "must be transcended for Blake as for Nietzsche: his reason, and what his reason has accomplished, must be surpassed without abolishing his piety. . . . It is Holderlin the poet and Heidegger the philosopher who in piety come closest to Blake."

Written on Blake, this book finally departs from Blake. By means of Blake's exemplary work the book describes and prefigures the adventure of man in a world of cruelty and violence, the violence that already announces the decomposition of modern society.

I should add that the volume ends with the facsimile (engravings and texts) of *The Gates of Paradise* (1793). Blake, as we know, engraved his own works, which he printed and bound with the help of his wife Kate.

André Dalmas

\*L'Herne, 1970. In the series *Essais et philosophie*, 316 pages, 33 F. In English the most pertinent and suggestive study seems to be that of Max Plowman: *An Introduction to the Study of Blake* (one volume, Dent, London, 1927).



[*Le Monde*, 19 February 1971, p. 15]

About William Blake

Following the article by André Dalmas on the *William Blake* of Pierre Boutang (cf. "The World of Books," for 20 November 1970), we received this letter from M. Pierre Leyris:

The high praise that your newspaper has awarded Pierre Boutang's *William Blake* calls for certain remarks.

M. Boutang has nothing but sarcasms for earlier translators. He laughs out loud at Madeleine Cazamian and at Gide. But while Gide renders superbly the proverb "Damn Braces, Bless relaxes" by "Malédiction tonifie, bénédiction lénifie," Boutang has nothing better to offer us than "Qui te maudit te redresse, qui te bénit te ramollit." If I had several pages instead of several lines at my disposal, I would show that each line of his version of "The Tyger" is faded, awkward, ruined. Under the title (false) of "Eternity" M. Boutang quotes:

Abstinence sows sand all over  
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair  
But desire gratified  
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.

which would be:

L'abstinence sème partout du sable  
Sur les membres vermeils et les cheveux en flammes,  
Mais le désir comblé  
Y implante des fruits de vie et de beauté.

Reading "air" instead of "hair" and not seeing that "over" links the first two lines, M. Boutang (for whom "abstinence" and "chastity" are the same) writes:

Partout la chasteté sème le sable  
Les membres rougis vont enflammer l'air  
Mais le désir quand il peut s'accomplir  
Y plante les arbres de beauté et de vie.

Then he uses this lucubration to accuse Blake of an "unbridled libido, never quite under control." In Boutang's eyes, whoever claims to believe that love should have no restraint but charity is being satirical. Moreover, Boutang comes back to this accusation in speaking completely out of context about "the old erotic obsessions" when Blake makes a sinner (according to the world) of the mother of Jesus in order to identify in her, and in Jesus through her, a plentitude of humanity.

Naturally M. Boutang makes nearly invisible the pro-revolutionary Blake, the friend of Paine, who wears a Phrygian cap in the streets of London. On the contrary he makes him a chauvinist, and calls "warlike" and "nationalistic" a song as purely eschatological as that which ends with:

Je ne ferai pas trêve au Combat spirituel  
Et mon épée ne dormira pas dans ma main  
Tant que nous n'aurons pas construit Jérusalem  
Sur la verte et riante terre d'Angleterre.  
[the last stanza of the song from the Preface to *Milton*]



But for Blake the history of the Jewish people and the history of Albion are one! When he sees on the English meadow the lamb of ancient days and the tower of the future Jerusalem, he is no more "nationalistic" than the Provencaux who wish that the Three Marys had stepped ashore at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer!

Let us console ourselves for a book that so constantly betrays the letter and the spirit of Blake by re-reading the excellent *William Blake* of Francis Léaud (Armand Colin, 1968).

#### WORKS IN PROGRESS

Kremen, Kathryn R.: a book, "The Imagination of the Resurrection: The Poetic Continuity and Conversion of a Religious Motif in Donne, Blake, and Yeats," which will be the revision of a dissertation (Brandeis, May 1970) that "studies how the resurrection motif begins as a religious doctrine--a revelation of God's mercy--and becomes a possession of the romantic poets (especially Blake)--a recreation of the imagination." Article on two of Blake's illustrations to the Bible, "Ezekiel's Vision" and "The Woman Taken in Adultery"--how they "portray Blake's religious vision and how they illuminate Blake's reading of the Biblical text and our reading of Blake."

Paananen, Victor N. (Michigan State Univ.): the *William Blake* volume for the Twayne Series.

#### "A CHECKLIST OF BLAKE SCHOLARSHIP/JUNE 1969-SEPTEMBER 1970": ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS

The following list is divided into the categories used in the most recent Checklist (*Blake Newsletter*, 4 [Fall 1970], 51-59).

#### BOOKS

Blake, William. *Bureiku no tegami [Blake's Letters]*, trans. Narumi Umetsu. Tokyo: Yashio Shuppan-sha, 1970. [Translations of 140 letters by Blake and a chronological history of his life.]

Boutang, Pierre. *William Blake*. L'Herne, 1970. [See the *NEWS* in this issue of the *Newsletter* for some French opinions of Boutang's book.]

Léaud, Francis. *William Blake*. Armand Colin, 1968.

#### ARTICLES

Allentuck, Marcia. [Publishing a letter written in the late nineteenth century by John