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R E V I E W

Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Drawings of William Blake*

Raymond Lister

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The subjects treated, though generally on the topic of "visionary forms dramatic," range quite widely. Even so, any discussions of visionary forms to be found in music, except for Erdman's discussion of sound imagery in *America*, are almost completely lacking, a rather curious omission since Blake was said to have sung his songs and his epics are full of songs and choruses, with instrumentation specified (one group in Night V of *The Four Zoas*, for instance, includes "the soft pipe the flute the viol organ harp & cymbal / And the sweet sound of silver voices" that calm Enitharmon on her couch). Indeed, the whole of *The Four Zoas*, with its arias, choruses, and set pieces, really resembles an opera more than it does an epic. And in *Jerusalem* 74 (E 227) Blake seems to me to show a remarkable degree of sophistication in music theory in the passage beginning on line 23: "The Sons of Albion are Twelve: the Sons of Jerusalem Sixteen / I tell how Albions Sons by Harmonies of Concords and Discords / Opposed to Melody, and by Lights & Shades, opposed to Outline / And by Abstraction opposed to the Visions of Imagination / By cruel Laws divided Sixteen into Twelve Divisions." The details are too complicated for inclusion here, but I believe that Blake is taking a visionary position on the side of the melodic Pythagorean division of the octave, as opposed to the harmonic tempered division still being vigorously debated in 1806 which would divide the octave into 12 equal or nearly equal but abstract (as opposed to natural) intervals by mathematical manipulations of "harmonies of concords and discords," and that this concept was quite important to him.

This book doesn't quite give us the theory that we need to deal critically with Blake's composite art, but to ask for that is perhaps asking too much. It does give us a vigorous attempt at such a theory, with a great deal of useful matter, and, perhaps most important, it dramatizes the need for a conscious re-direction of Blake scholarship. Its fresh hammer-and-tongs approach to some of the problems as well as the enthusiasm of the enterprise should stir up further activity. Because of all these things, it should be a required book for any serious study of Blake from now on.

Geoffrey Keynes, ed. *Drawings of William Blake 92 pencil studies*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970. Pp. xiv + [185, including 92 plates]. \$3.50.

Reviewed by Raymond Lister, Honorary Senior Member of University College, Cambridge

For a long time most Blake facsimiles and reproductions were available only in expensive limited editions, far beyond the means of the average student. Such cheaper reproductions as were published were inadequate. Recently there has been a welcome tendency to issue adequate reproductions in modestly-priced editions, often in paperback: the Oxford Paperbacks edition of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, edited by Sir Geoffrey Keynes, and issued in 1970, is an example.

The two collections of reproductions of Blake's drawings available up to 1970 were those published by the Nonesuch Press in 1927 and 1956, under the editorship of Geoffrey Keynes. They were expensively produced books and, if printed now, would cost several times as much as they did originally. It is a sobering thought that the 1927 collection was published at £1-75. It is doubtful if it could be published today at less than fifteen times that amount. Now Dover Publications has issued a welcome and cheap paperback edition of Blake's drawings, also edited by Sir Geoffrey. It says much for the editor's vitality that forty years separate the first of the Nonesuch collection from this one.

The Nonesuch collections contained a total of one-hundred and thirty-eight drawings; the Dover edition contains ninety-two, so it is far from complete. In any case, Sir Geoffrey informs us that "there are perhaps more than two hundred drawings now extant." It is therefore to be hoped that the book meets with such success that another collection may be issued to bring the selection nearer completion. But the Dover book is not merely a reprint or rehash of drawings previously published, for a few are here reproduced which did not appear in the earlier selections. Among these are two early drawings, made for Basire, from monuments in Westminster Abbey (plates 1 and 2); and the powerful "Charon, from an Antique" (plate 82).

As in every medium in which he worked, Blake's range in his drawings is enormous, from the poetic, yet homely qualities of "The Virgin Mary hushing the young Baptist" (plate 34), to the almost abstract "Time's triple bow" (plate 53), which, in its tight network of curves might almost be mistaken for a schematic study by the Bauhaus artist, Oskar Schlemmer.¹ This selection also illustrates how Blake could produce excellent "academic" drawings, like "Laocoön: the Antique Group" (plate 58), as well as being able to indicate with a few rough lines the energy and power that would later be translated into a finished design, as in "The Soul exploring the recesses of the grave" (plate 41). On the other hand, when drawing an uncongenial or uninteresting subject, he could be incredibly weak,

as in the poor "Landscape with trees" on plate 36. Indeed, as Sir Geoffrey says, without Frederick Tatham's inscription on it, "it could not be identified as his."

The drawings are adequately reproduced, but the typography has a number of ugly features, especially the plate numbers, which are not only far too heavy for the rest of the type, but tend to distract attention from the drawings themselves. Nevertheless, the book is a bargain and is, moreover, likely to become a standard work.

¹Cf. Oskar Schlemmer, *Man*, ed. Heimo Kuchling (London, 1971).

Adrian Mitchell. *TYGER*. Produced at the New Theatre, London, 1971.

Reviewed by Michael Billington and Morton D. Paley. Mr. Billington's review originally appeared in The Times, London, 22 July 1971, under the title "Blake Revitalised" and is reproduced from The Times by permission. Mr. Paley's review appears here for the first time.

Michael Billington "A celebration of William Blake," is how the programme describes this exuberant and freewheeling extravaganza written by Adrian Mitchell with music by Mike Westbrook, and, although this overlooks the show's undertow of astringency, it accurately sums up its content. It may not win any prizes as the most cohesive entertainment of the year but it has enough theatrical vitality and sheer Dionysiac gaiety to make one overlook its invertebrate structure.

Interweaving past and present with quicksilver fluency, Mr. Mitchell has taken some of the key elements in Blake's life to comment on certain unchanging aspects of the English artistic and political scene. As Northrop Frye pointed out in his brilliant essay on Blake, this great visionary epitomizes the native Protestant-Romantic tradition which takes the individual as the primary field of operations rather than the interests of society; and Mr. Mitchell pursues this line by showing Blake both as the perennial opponent of the Establishment and as a "harmless nut" who believed that God was the divine essence that existed in every man and woman.

Thus we first see Blake as a penurious engraver standing four-square against the ossified traditionalism of the art of his time, against philistine patrons who argue that starvation is essential for the creative artist and against the bureaucratic machine with its wish to classify all human activity. In one of the funniest of all the show's burlesque scenes Blake even applies for a grant to the British Cultural Committee, composed of smooth-faced administrators and female smut-hunters who complain that four-letter words just

leap off the pages of the literary magazines; and, in a characteristic Mitchell phrase, a eunuchoid bureaucrat dismisses the troublesome artist by remarking that "he does tend to bite the hand that has no intention of feeding him."

As long as Mitchell uses Blake as a symbol of the vilified and beleaguered artist, then the show is pungent and alive; and the poet's hatred of all forms of brutality and slavery is movingly evoked in a scene in which Blake leads a group of the permanently oppressed down to the blazing footlights as Mike Westbrook's music reaches a roof-shaking crescendo. Doubts creep in, however, with the attempt to render Blake's vision of a new Jerusalem in concrete theatrical terms. At the end Blake is despatched to the moon in a baroque space capsule that is dismantled by the whole cast and then re-assembled in the form of a chimneyed country house. Blake may have believed in human brotherhood but the building of a Mary Poppins residence seems a weak and inadequate symbol for his vision of a resplendent golden age.

Despite its inability to embody Blake's mysticism and the impression it initially gives that Blake's poetry (as the old lady said of *Hamlet*) is full of quotations, the show still represents an heroic attempt to marry different elements of the English theatrical tradition: musical, panto, satire and cod burlesque. And in one hilarious sequence that is pure Footlights revue the greats of English poetry troop on in grotesque disguises: thus Chaucer becomes an open-air hearty with khaki shorts and a rucksack, Shakespeare a gun-toting cowpuncher and Milton a track-suited disciplinarian advocating a hundred lines before breakfast.

The National Theatre production by Michael Blakemore and John Dexter has the ruthless mechanical efficiency one associates with Broadway musicals and manages the transitions in place and time with astonishing ease; and in a vast company there are suitably broad-scale contributions from Gerald James as the squat, eponymous hero, John Moffat as an insidious cultural middleman and Bill Fraser as a lunatic English sadist. Doubtless Messrs. Mitchell and Westbrook will be said to have gone too far; but, as Blake himself told us, it's the road of excess that leads to the palace of wisdom.

Morton D. Paley (University of California, Berkeley) In Blake's house are many mansions, but does Adrian Mitchell's Blake inhabit any of them? The closest contact the show makes to the poet and artist of that name is in the extraordinary physical resemblance of Gerald James to Linnell's portrait of 1825--that and Isabelle Lucas's moving singing of verses from "London" and *Jerusalem*. Otherwise what we get is an occasionally funny, frequently boring piece of anti-Establishment nose-thumbing in the guise of "a celebration of William Blake." If *Tyger* succeeded in an imaginative transformation of its material, one wouldn't care much about its literal truth or falsehood, any more than, say, one cares about the historicity of Brecht's *Galileo*. But for the most part the spirit of Blake is