

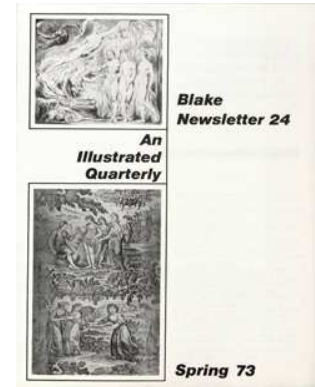
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

N O T E

A Significant Early Review of Blake

Donald H. Reiman

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And St Basil ascribes the darkness that covered the earth, before the appearance of light, to the interposition of an opaque body between it and the heavens. This he illustrates by an example that excludes all ambiguity. "Place around you", says he, "at high mid-day, a tent, composed of dense and opaque materials: the temporary darkness which, by shutting yourself up in it, you will procure, may give you an idea of that darkness, which covered the deep, and which did not antecedently subsist, but was the consequence of other things."

(Preface, p. V)

The closeness in imagery is striking: Blake's "strong curtains" and "curtains of darkness" remind us of the "dense and opaque materials" in Geddes; both tents are interposed between the fallen earth and the heavens. Finally, the Geddes description states that the darkness "was the consequence of other things," which readily invokes the reason for the Eternals' action:

Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads;
At the first female form now separate
(*Urizen*, pl. 18, ll.13-15)

Of course, Blake's fiery imagination has

transmuted and refined this source. The labor of the Eternals is "infinite," the adjective "golden" in "golden hooks" promises brightness and light to come, and the word "woof" will become an integral image in Blake's developing mythology.

However, it is not unlikely that Blake had read this description in the Geddes Bible, sold as it was by the bookseller with whom Blake had the closest contact in this period, Joseph Johnson.¹ Blake had engraved plates for Johnson as early as 1780, visited his shop frequently and would hardly have failed to notice an important new edition of his beloved Bible among the immense volume of scriptural criticism, writings on prophecy, and sermons that stocked Johnson's premises in St. Paul's Churchyard.²

1 An article on Blake's relationship to the London booksellers, "Blake and the Booksellers," has been accepted for a forthcoming issue of *Blake Studies*, and contains detailed remarks on the Blake-Johnson relationship.

2 There were over eighty works on Prophecy and Revelation alone (excluding sermons and editions of the Bible) published in the period 1792-1818, and Joseph Johnson published nearly half--thirty-nine--of them. See article in note 1, above.

A SIGNIFICANT EARLY REVIEW OF BLAKE Donald H. Reiman

In *A Blake Bibliography* by G. E. Bentley, Jr., and Martin K. Nurmi, there are recorded only 102 type-printed references to William Blake or his works through 1827, the year of his death.¹ Suzanne R. Hoover has added one allusion (for 1796) in her "Fifty Additions to Blake Bibliography."² Of these items, only a handful comment substantively on Blake's poetry or his designs, fewer name him, and even fewer comment favorably.

The addition of even a brief notice favorable to Blake as an artist is, therefore, of some value. The following short notice of one of Blake's least significant publications is the second earliest published notice, I believe, to comment favorably on Blake's art³ and is certainly the first to name him in doing so. It appeared in the *European Magazine and London Review* for August 1802 (42:125-26).

Designs to a Series of Ballads written by William Hayley, Esq. and founded on Anecdotes relating to Animals, dram, engraved,

and published, by William Blake. With the

Donald H. Reiman of The Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, New York, is editor of Volumes V and VI of Shelley and His Circle (Harvard, 1973), as well as the nine volumes of The Romantics Reviewed (1972). He has previously published books on Shelley and articles on subjects ranging from Beowulf, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, to Hopkins, James, and Salinger.

1 This figure, derived from the "Table of Type-Printed References to Blake before 1863" (p. xvii), may be slightly askew; that list's entry for the year 1789 is, for instance, a mistake.

2 *Blake Newsletter* 19, 5 (Winter, 1971-72), 167-72.

3 The single earlier favorable mention listed by Bentley and Nurmi occurred in passing in the *Analytical Review's* notice of Mary Wollstonecraft's translation of C. G. Salzmann's *Elements of Morality, for the Use of Children* (1791). But the question of Blake's participation in that work is still open. See Bentley and Nurmi, item 402A (pp. 149-50).

Discussion

"With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought"

THE ACCURACY OF THE BLAKE TRUST GRAY CATALOGUE G. E. Bentley, Jr.

The Blake Trust Gray catalogue, reviewed in *Blake Newsletter* 21, was a very remarkable bargain when sold in London in paperback at £1.75 (\$4.20) with its 116 small monochrome designs and its nineteen large color plates, particularly compared with the North American hardback price of about \$25. The large plates in particular give an excellent idea of the originals. Comparison of the one color plate in Mrs. Tayler's *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton, 1971) with the similar one in the Blake Trust catalogue makes it clear that the latter is very markedly superior in faithfulness to the original; for example, the foxing is plain in the Blake Trust reproduction but is quite invisible in Mrs. Tayler's plate.

There are, however, some serious minor defects in the Blake Trust catalogue reproductions. A number of the reproductions have been significantly cropped at one or more margins--among the color plates, Gray pp. 58-59, 70, 85, 126, 150, 158, and,

among the monochrome plates, Gray pp. 50-51, 53, 151. More importantly, two reproductions seem to have been simply falsified. The Blake Trust cover reproduction of Blake's design for Gray's titlepage bears at the bottom right in an eighteenth-century hand the words "Drawings by William Blake", but these words do not appear in the original design or in the two other reproductions of the design to be seen in the Blake Trust catalogue and in Mrs. Tayler's book. They have been added by a modern

G. E. Bentley, Jr., is Professor of English, University College, University of Toronto. He is editor, compiler, and author of several works on Blake, particularly Blake Records (1969) and, for the Newsletter, A Handlist of Works by William Blake in the Department of Prints & Drawings of the British Museum (1972).

Ballads annexed by the Author's Permission. Two Numbers. 4to. Printed at Chichester.

It appears by the Preface to this work, that Mr. Hayley is now busily employed in rendering an affectionate tribute of justice to the memory of Cowper the Poet, and that Mr. Blake has devoted himself with indefatigable spirit to engrave the plates intended to decorate the work. To amuse the artist in his patient labour, and to furnish his fancy with a few slight subjects for an inventive pencil that might afford some variety to his incessant application, without too far interrupting his most serious business, Mr. Hayley proposed to furnish him with a series of ballads for a few vacant moments' employment, to be published periodically, and to be completed in fifteen numbers. Two of these are now before us. The subjects, the gratitude of an elephant, and the heroism of a mother in rescuing her child from the fangs of an eagle. The artist has executed his share of the undertaking much to his credit; and from Mr. Hayley's pen, though carelessly employed, the Public will not be disappointed in their expectation of elegant, chaste, and pathetic

compositions. To the inhabitants of Chichester, where it is printed, this work is inscribed.

I came across this notice while preparing my nine-volume edition of facsimile reprints of reviews of the Romantic poets and their circles, *The Romantics Reviewed* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1972). Though tempted to include it, together with the few other substantive early comments on Blake, I concluded that the notices of Blake did not belong with those of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats both because the reviews of Blake deal primarily with his work as an artist and because--had I followed uniform criteria for inclusion--most of the critical comments on Blake would have been excluded as passing references in reviews of books by others. Moreover, inasmuch as I came across the *European Magazine* notice while looking for something else, I concluded that a systematic search of periodicals might turn up a few more items to add to the items reprinted by G. E. Bentley, Jr., in *Blake Records* (Oxford, 1969). Blake's name does appear, for example, in the lists of painters and engravers in Leigh Hunt's *Literary Pocket Book* for some though not all of the annual issues of that pocket diary.