

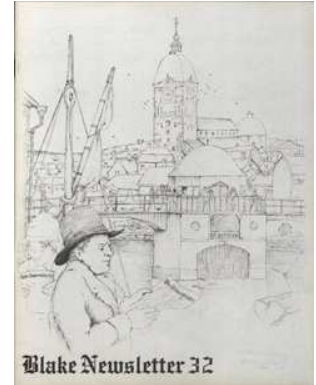
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

David Erdman, ed., with the assistance of Donald
Moore, *The Notebook of William Blake*

Robert N. Essick

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 8, Issue 4, Spring 1975, pp. 132-136



Printed by method described in the text," is actually, like Illustration 8, inked for intaglio with the surfaces wiped.

Of the numerous errors in the text, some are easy to interpret: "insistance" (p. 13), "platten" (p. 40), "resistent" (p. 43), "artificial" (p. 180), "philosophy" (p. 148), "sysmbolism" (p. 210) and many others. More serious are errors in direct quotations from Blake, as "Gallary" (p. 192: see E 568); in titles, as "*Euorpe*" (p. 152), "*Satan exulting over Eve*" (p. 304), and "*Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*" (pp. 241-42) where if "with" were properly italicized, one would not look for two separate works; in proper names, as "grant" (p. 482) for [John E.] Grant, "Tanguay" (p. 40) for Yves Tanguy, "Malfy" (p. 136) for Malfi, "Emery Walker" (p. 225) for Emery Walker, the publisher of Keynes's catalogue of the separate plates, and "Haley" (p. 331) for, I suppose, Hayley, among other errors; and in dates and other numbers, as "pp. 47-47" (p. 225) and "1840-1500" (p. 94). The technical terms used of printing methods may be unfamiliar to some (I would have liked a glossary for "blankets," "bougies" and "stopping out"), and the reader who doesn't recognize "gouche" (p. 40) as "gouache" will be confused. Additionally, Essick has twice substituted "Illustration" for "Plate" in Frye's contribution (p. 156) with resultant awkwardness. The sentence in question should read: "At the bottom of Plate 8 of *Jerusalem* is a female figure harnessed to the moon: the symbol is not mentioned in the text until Plate 63."

In spite of these faults, which make the book a bad example to the graduate and advanced undergraduate students who will otherwise benefit from it most, Essick has provided a useful service to Blakeans by making easily available many essays important for their quality and for the attempt implicit in each to redress the long dearth of attention to Blake's visual art. I would have liked some other things included. Selections from the catalogues to important exhibits--Burlington (1876), Carfax (1906) and Philadelphia (1939), for example--might have plotted the rise of favor toward Blake and suggested something about the development of a taste for his pictorial imagination. And rather than duplicate some illustrations, perhaps works mentioned but not reproduced could have been included--in John Grant's words, "the very great but little known picture of 'The Fall of Man'" (p. 436), for example. I was startled to find virtually no mention of Blake's *Laocoön*, although it has been treated several times at length in the available literature. But here is abundance nonetheless, and I hope this book will enjoy a wide working audience.

At \$7.95 for an unsewn paperback, the book may seem no bargain, although to xerox even just the best essays would run higher, and the photographs would reproduce less well. Libraries at least should be encouraged to get the book, in multiple copies if heavy use is likely. If all students of Blake knew these essays and a half-dozen other works on Blake's art, understanding of this aspect of his genius would increase--perhaps flourish.

The Notebook of William Blake, a Photographic and Typographic Facsimile.

Edited by David V. Erdman, with the assistance of Donald K. Moore. Clarendon Press, 1973. Pp. xiii + 105 + 120 plates + 120 pages of transcription. £16.00 U.K., \$45.00 U.S.A.

Reviewed by Robert N. Essick

All previous editions of Blake's *Notebook*, including Keynes' 1935 printing with a photographic facsimile, have been reading texts with the manuscript analyzed into its constituent works and fragments. As its sub-title indicates, this new edition is a photographic facsimile with a typographic transcription following the original with great fidelity. As such, it commands scrutiny by serious students of Blake. But interest in this book should go beyond the circle of Blakeans, for the labors of Erdman, Moore, and the Clarendon Press have resulted in a great work of textual scholarship and a masterpiece of the typographer's art. In this case, the study of Blake is in the very forefront of literary scholarship.

The most striking characteristic of the book is its typography, exemplified by the page reproduced here [illus. 1]. At first it can be disconcerting, particularly in those pages towards the end of the *Notebook* printed upside-down, but a comparison with the facing-page photographs soon reveals the utility of this new species, the "typographic facsimile." As far as I am aware, all earlier facsimile transcriptions of a difficult manuscript have had to rely on a complex series of signs and symbols to indicate erasures, deletions, palimpsests, and so forth. The results were often clumsy and looked nothing like the original. In this volume the typography bears a direct relationship to the appearance of the manuscript itself. When Blake wrote a note vertically in the margin, it appears in the same place and direction in the transcription. When he erased a line which is still visible under close inspection, it is printed with an overlaying screen to indicate the erasure. Even lines and carets are preserved by the typography, as the reproduction shows. Stages of revision are indicated through reduced type sizes, while italics indicate pencil writing. The system is simple, efficient, and visually pleasing--all of which belies what must have been an enormous amount of work for Donald Moore, whose "professionalism at the composing machine" is acknowledged in the Preface. This facsimile transcription includes some minor corrections of Erdman's earlier text and thus must be considered the standard edition, at least until Erdman can include the new readings in

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a revised edition of *The Poetry and Prose of Blake*.

Thanks to the generosity of David Erdman, I was allowed to compare a selection of his facsimile proofs with the original manuscript in the British Museum. Blake's *Notebook* is no longer generally available to ticket holders because of its fragile condition and the publication of this new edition. The comparison convinced me that the British Museum is justified in believing that the reproductions accompanying Erdman's text can effectively replace the original for almost all scholarly requirements. In the pages checked I could find only one feature in the *Notebook* not visible in the facsimile--the partially erased number "27" below the drawing on page 49. But of course this number is duly recorded in Erdman's transcription, so the problem is negligible. The facsimile was made before new leaf numbers were added by the Department of Manuscripts to the original, but these serve no real purpose and their absence here is not to be regretted. Infra-red photography, used on 75 of the *Notebook's* 120 pages, brings up to the threshold of vision fine lines of text and design not recorded by regular photography, but it does cause some distortion. Infra-red "sees" not only what is on the surface but also the dust imbedded in the paper. Thus on page 64 the chain lines in the paper and the countermark are clearly visible, much more so than in the original or in the fine standard photographic facsimile kept with the original in the British Museum. Infra-red also

distorts the relative darkness of pencil and ink. On page 50 the photograph brings out the erasures in the text, but makes the pencil drawing much darker than it actually is. Smudges and off-setting from facing pages are also magnified by infra-red, as in the design on page 51. On page 59, "Prints" in the penultimate line is clearer in the original, or in a standard photograph, than in the facsimile because infra-red has increased the darkness and opacity of the lines of deletion. On the other hand, infra-red can make very slight sketches more visible than in the original itself; for example, the vague pencil lines in the lower third of page 55 not mentioned by Erdman in his notes. Both standard photography and infra-red record the shadow of the facing page along inner margins (page 55), and shadows from the clips used to hold down the pages (lower left margin of page 52 and lower left corner of page 54). All and all the original is somewhat cleaner than the facsimile would suggest, but this is primarily an aesthetic rather than a textual distortion and should cause no difficulty as long as one remembers the limitations (as well as the virtues) of infra-red photography.

In his introductory essay, Erdman establishes the original order of the *Notebook's* pages based on the first genuinely thorough examination of the manuscript as a physical object. Every detail, including the position of mould and felt sides of the paper, has been recorded in the introduction and



Poem 64
I saw a Monk of Conscience
Arise before my sight
I talked to the Grey Monk where he stood
In beams of infernal light
Gibson arose with a lash of steel
And Voltaire with a winking wheel
The School of Claude of Learning yield
Charlemaigne de his harrow bold
Arise with War in iron & gold
Thus Lay they sang afar
Seditious Monk said Charlemaigne
In every trembling Christian War
The Glory of War thou condemnest in vain
And in thy Crill thou shalt ever dwell
Rise War & kind him in his Crill
The blood red ran from the Grey monk's side
His hands & feet were wounded wide
His body bent his arms & knees
Like to the roots of ancient trees
I die I die the Mother said
My Children will die for lack of bread
What more has the merciless tyrant said
The Monk sat down on her stony bed
His Eye was dry no tear could flow
A hollow groan first spoke his woe
From his dry tongue these accents flow
He trembled & shuddered upon the bed
At length with a feeble cry he said
When God commanded thy hand to write
In the studious hours of deep midnight
He told me that All I wrote should prove
The base of all that on Earth I love
My brother starved between two walls
His children cry my soul appeals
But I mocked at the wrack & grinding chain
My best body mocks at their torturing pain
Thy father drew his sword in the north
With his thousands strong he is marched forth
Thy brother has armed himself in steel
To revenge the wrongs thy Children feel
But vain the sword & vain the bow
They never can work wars overthrow
The Hermit's prayer & the widows tear
Alone can free the world from fear
The hand of vengeance sought the bed
To which the purple tyrant fled
The iron hand crushed the tyrants head
And scourged the tyrants throne & bed
And became a tyrant in his stead
Until the Tyrant himself relent
The Tyrant who first the black bow bent
Slaughter shall beg the bloody plain
Resistance & war is the Tyrant's gain
But the Tear of Love & forgiveness sweet
And submission to death beneath his feet
The Tear shall melt the sword of steel
And every wound it has made shall heal
For the tear is an intellectual thing
And a sign is the Sword of an Angel King
The bitter groan for another woe
Is an arrow from the Almighty bow
To find the western path
Right thro the gates of Wrath
I urge my Way
Sweet Mercy leads me on
With soft repentant moan
I see the break of day
The war of swords & spears
Melted by dewy tears
Ephraim on high
The Sun is freed from fears
And with soft grateful tears
Ascends the Sky
Terror in the house does roar
But Pity stands before the door
When Satan first the black bow bent
And the Moral Law from the Gospel rent
He forg'd the Law into a Sword
And spilled the blood of Mercies Lord
Each Man his
This world is in the Specters power
Until the arrival of that hour
Until the Humanity awake
And Cast the Spectre into the Lake

Blake's *Notebook*, p. 8, an infra-red photograph and facing typographic facsimile transcription from the Clarendon Press book edited by David V. Erdman with the assistance of Donald K. Moore. The lower case letters along the right margin of the photograph identify sketches described in footnotes not included in this reproduction.

used to determine the gatherings. Unfortunately the countermark has not been identified, but a tracing of it (a Beta-radiograph would be better) is given at the end of the volume to stimulate watermark hunters in their searches. Erdman proves that the pages numbered 1 to 14 in this century originally appeared in a different order than the present binding. The new sequence followed in the facsimile places Robert Blake's sketches closer to the front of the *Notebook*, where one would expect to find them since he was the first to use it. Erdman's procedures and conclusions are most impressive, and demonstrate the contribution that descriptive bibliography can make to textual criticism.

The presentation--one might almost say discovery--of a series of 64 emblems in the *Notebook* will be for many readers the most exciting and useful section of introductory material in this edition. Erdman has deduced that the emblems actually comprise four interwoven series, all but the first identified by numbered sequences. Not only are these emblems important in themselves and as the immediate source for *The Gates of Paradise*, but they are also crucial as preliminary sketches for many designs later used in the illuminated books. We can now see Blake's creative processes as a pictorial artist more clearly than ever before. One can further sense here an underlying continuum between Blake's works as a poet, draughtsman, intaglio engraver, and relief etcher; and between his interests in the Bible, English history, Shakespeare, Milton, emblem books, and his own developing mythologies. Below are a few additions and corrections to Erdman's catalogue of the emblems, pages 15-31 of the introduction.

Emblem 3 (*Notebook* p. 16). The cross-reference should be to Appendix II, Fig. 1, not Fig. 3, and thus to a detail rather than a tracing of the sketch.

Notebook p. 20. Erdman does not include this Job sketch among the emblem series because it is on a verso and its "symbolism of gesture seems more highly symmetrical and 'coded' than in the emblems of 1793 and earlier" (p. 17). However, other emblems are on verso pages, and the sketch is about the same size and style as other emblems. I'm not sure what "coded" symbolism is, but the most dramatic gestures are the hand positions, and they are of the same general type as the gestures in emblems 2, 5, and 9. Erdman also associates this Job sketch with the late Job series rather than the early drawing and separate plate, but in *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job*, Bo Lindberg argues convincingly that this *Notebook* sketch is "obviously the first study for the engraving *Job* of August 1793" (p. 11) and includes it in the emblem series.

Emblem 6 (*Notebook* p. 22). The very useful Appendix II includes detail photographs and tracings of the more obscure drawings. Many of these, including both a detail (Fig. 2) and a tracing (Fig. 3) of emblem 6, are not cross-referenced in the catalogue.

Emblem 7 (*Notebook* p. 23). The reference should be

to Appendix II, Fig. 40, not Fig. 38.

Emblem 10 (*Notebook* p. 27). An illuminating comparison can be made between this design and the two versions of "A Breach in a City" (which Erdman compares to emblem 11) and the very similar but later "War" in the Fogg Museum. Certainly the subjects are basically the same, as Erdman's conjectural title ("War") for the emblem allows. The right side of all four compositions are alike--a building or wall of some sort, with two figures standing before it gazing on one or more prone figures. The right side similarities are more obvious, but to my eye no more real, than those on the left--a broken wall, a group of corpses before or within the break (the emblem is particularly similar to "War" in this respect) a small figure seen in the distance through the break and walking to the left, and an eagle at the far left perched on the wall. The eagle's beak and left wing are particularly clear in the emblem, and in the same position as the three watercolors. This arrangement at least seems more likely than Erdman's "lightning strikes the neck of a woman whose slipped leg is extended at left" (caption to *Notebook*, p. 27). A leg of such dimensions would be twice the size of the other figures at an equal distance from the viewer.

Emblem 13 (*Notebook* p. 31). The figure does not appear to be descending towards us as Erdman notes, but rather rising through a celestial doorway to be greeted by two, perhaps three, other figures. Note the bottom of the central figure's left foot, a sure sign that he is moving inward; and his arm position indicating that we are seeing his elbow from behind, as in emblem 2 (*Notebook* p. 17). Emblem 13 can then be seen as a companion, and antithesis, to emblem 2 where the traveller finds Death waiting at an earthly doorway.

Emblem 14 (*Notebook* p. 33). The object lower right is too small for an adult's coffin, and its trapezoidal left side is a very odd shape for any coffin. Perhaps it is a cradle or basket for the babe in the woman's arms.

Emblem 20 (*Notebook* p. 40). A reference should be included in this list of emblems, p. 20, to Gillray's print showing a ladder reaching to the moon, Appendix II, Fig. 38.

Emblem 31 (*Notebook* p. 52). This picture of an old man clipping a youth's wings is a variation on the traditional emblem of Time clipping the wings of Love. See for example Otto van Veen's *Amoran Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1608), p. 236.

Emblem 40 (*Notebook* p. 61). The design, used for *The Gates of Paradise*, plate 13, is very similar to "The Spirit of a Just Man Newly Departed Appearing to his Mourning Family," an early wash drawing now in the Royal Library, Windsor.

Emblem 50 (*Notebook* p. 77). As Erdman points out

in his caption beneath the facsimile page, the sketch below the emblem shows an "insouciant infant, not flat on his back as the ones in *America* 9 or *Europe* 6." A similar child, however, does appear in the *Night Thoughts* engravings, Night II, p. 23, with his legs crossed as in the *Notebook* sketch but with both arms thrown above his head. Curiously, the *Night Thoughts* watercolor is very different, showing only the back of the child. Perhaps the memory of this sketch, or even a chance return to it while using the *Notebook* for other purposes, stimulated Blake to revise his *Night Thoughts* design.

Emblem 59 (*Notebook* p. 93). The footnote, p. 29, should appear with emblem 29, p. 22, where Erdman first refers to the recto-verso group of sketches at Harvard described in the note. In June 1973 Erdman learned that the Harvard sketches were not by Blake, but rather copies of *Night Thoughts* designs made by D. G. Rossetti. Unfortunately the text could not be altered at that late date, but the situation is described in an erratum, p. 105.

Throughout the introductory materials Erdman wears his scholarship lightly. The prose is always direct and lively, never labored or pedantic; some may even find the interpretive sections on the emblem series rather too breezy. Textual scholarship flows gently into criticism. Perhaps at times too gently, for the reader must be careful not to confuse critical speculation, however well-informed and convincing, with the factual record. Certainly some of the narrative structures Erdman finds in the emblem series are open to alternative interpretations. In *The Gates of Paradise* the "elemental" designs, plates 2-5, represent eternally existing states rather than stages in a linear narrative, and very likely other *Notebook* emblems are equally non-sequential in their relationships with other emblems. Is Blake constructing an anthology of designs, as in a typical Renaissance emblem book, or a Hogarthian progress?

The least successful portions of the introductory material are Erdman's excursions into art history. A few paragraphs, pp. 10-11, are devoted to the list of twenty topics, p. 116 of the *Notebook*, for designs on the history of England. Erdman worries over the fact that only a few drawings in the *Notebook* can be identified with these topics; but the presence of the list does not indicate that the drawings must also be there, any more than the text of a poem in the *Notebook* means that its illustrations must be present. Erdman refers to four drawings from the British history series of 1779-80, but does not mention the five other compositions in this group, at least two of which are on topics listed in the *Notebook*. Erdman calls these "paintings," but they are drawings with some water colors added--very likely preliminaries for a series of prints which finally matured into "The History of England, a small book of Engravings" Blake advertised in his Prospectus of 10 October 1793. The *Notebook* list probably represents an intermediate stage between a group of separate drawings (the 1779-80 series plus others)

and the engraved book, a trial table of contents rather than a list of works actually in the *Notebook*. Erdman's comments should be read in conjunction with David Bindman's fine essay, "Blake's 'Gothicised Imagination' and the History of England" in the *festschrift* for Geoffrey Keynes edited by Paley and Phillips.

Erdman's discoveries of supposed sources for Blake's designs are less convincing than his bibliographic scholarship. He compares the sketch of a man and woman in a bedroom in the *Notebook*, p. 14, to Gillray's "The Morning after Marriage," and uses the parallel to date Blake's sketch after 5 April 1788 when the print was published. But the only similarity here is in the general situation and the fact that one of the figures in each work is putting on stockings (the man in Blake, the woman in Gillray). The position and posture of the figures is very different, as are the beds and other objects in the room. In particular, the traditional posture of male sexual fatigue central to the print's humor is not found in Blake's sketch. It is convenient to have a dated source, but one can sense here a spontaneity and concern for three-dimensional realism characteristic of portrayals of actual events that sets this sketch off from the flat, iconic emblems on contiguous pages.

Equally disconcerting are Erdman's association of Blake's traveller in the *Notebook*, pp. 15-17, with Stothard's illustrations to *Pilgrim's Progress* and the suggestion that Blake might have "helped his recent collaborator with some of these designs" (p. 9). The visual parallels between Blake's sketches and the prints after Stothard (one is reproduced in Appendix II) rest solely with the similar hat and staff and with the fact that in the emblem on *Notebook* p. 71 the old man entering the tomb uses a crutch as does Stothard's pilgrim when approaching the grave. That Blake's traveller evolved out of the iconographic traditions of Bunyan illustration is a good point, but the pictorial evidence is not sufficient to specify Stothard as the immediate source. It is even more unlikely that Blake could have influenced Stothard. Indeed, the edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* published by Hogg in 1778¹ has plates with Christian similarly adorned with broad-brimmed hat and walking stick. The crude woodcuts in an edition of 1791² contain these same motifs, and in the illustration of Christian's approach to the lions before Castle Beautiful he has his hand raised and fingers spread out as in the *Notebook* sketch, p. 17. My point here is not to add more specific sources to Erdman's, but rather to indicate that the pilgrim's hat and staff are part of the eighteenth-century artists' stock-in-trade for Bunyan illustrations. The switch from staff to crutch is clear in Stothard, but less distinctive in Blake since the traveller on *Notebook*

1 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Alexander Hogg, 1778), plates facing pp. 4, 16, and 48.

2 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Millar, Law, and Cater, 1791), woodcuts on pp. 13, 25, 36, and 42 (Christian approaching Castle Beautiful).

pp. 15-17 may not be the same character as the old man at the grave many pages later. Further, crutches are a traditional--and rather obvious--emblem for old age (see for example Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* [Leyden, 1586], p. 167), and the fact that two late eighteenth-century artists used this motif is insufficient evidence to indicate that one is borrowing from the other. After looking at Blake's designs for a few years it is easy to see his sources or influences everywhere, viewing all art through Blake-colored glasses. It would be wrong to restrain the fun of discovering such parallels, but source hunting should be guided by a wider sense of the pictorial traditions that shape late eighteenth-century art.

No reviewer of this book should end on a negative note. It is a splendid production for which all should thank Erdman, Moore, and the Clarendon. Its very presence contributes to, in a way silently comments upon, several trends in Blake studies. The recent predominance of scholarship over interpretation is strengthened, for no more than a few of the critical articles and books written in the last ten years will have the permanent value of the Concordance, Bentley's *Blake Records*, the Blake Trust facsimiles, or this edition of the *Notebook*. Erdman's insistence on giving equal attention to the *Notebook* as an artist's sketchbook as well as an author's manuscript once again asserts the interdependence of word and picture in Blake's life and work. I suspect that little of any real importance will be produced on Blake in the future which does not take into account both media. The author of a survey of Blake's reactions to nature published in a recent issue of *PMLA*³ commented upon two approaches to Blake, the chronological and the thematic, and chose the latter. It is a bad selection. We will come to know more about the how and why of Blake's eternal forms only when we see them evolving as productions of time. The grand continuity of Blake's vision is not stasis; rather, it is evolution within a framework of personal development and historical change. The Clarendon edition of the *Notebook* will offer many insights into that process of creation for years to come.

3 Barbara F. Lefcowitz, "Blake and the Natural World," *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 121-31.

D. G. Gillham. *William Blake*. British Authors: Introductory Critical Series. General Ed., Robin Mayhead. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973. Pp. 216. Cloth, \$12.95; paper, \$4.95.

Reviewed by Alicia Ostriker

D. G. Gillham is a horse of instruction. He is quite a good horse. He approaches Blake cautiously, sensibly, step by step, appearing to take nothing for granted. Ruminant, judicial, he works his way through the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, concentrating on the ethical implications of each Song, and of the two sets together. His stated assumptions, that the *Songs* form "an artistic whole," that their speakers "demonstrate a range of human potentialities," and that one can read them without reference to "background," or Blake's other works, or the biography and personality of the poet, run from the obvious to the acceptable. Gillham's readings are essentially those of his earlier work, *Blake's Contrary States* (Cambridge 1966), with most of the critical infighting omitted. A tone of sweet reasonableness prevails, and the method does elicit valuable insights about the characters of Blake's speakers, as well as some good generalizations about the Contraries--for example, a fine appreciation of the erotic elements in *Innocence*. But what of Gillham's nervousness about the social implications of *Experience*? What can one make, for example, of a reading of "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" which transforms William Blake into Edmund Burke, asserting that the poem shows us the folly of revolutionaries and the necessity of building on foundations of past tradition? What of a reading of "A Little Girl Lost" which explains Ona and her father excellently, but insists that the "future age" will be no better off than this one, and that Blake was certainly not advocating free love for persons caught in the state of *Experience*?

By the time Gillham comes to the conclusion that *Innocence* is a "touchstone" and "ideal measure" but that "most of us spend the greater part of our lives meeting our obligations in the deliberate and laboured ways of *Experience*, performing duties and following programmes that purposely exclude the possibility of much spontaneous goodness or imaginative wisdom," he is about three-fourths through the book. A bit later, he adds that the glad grace of innocent virtue is "the sort of thing we can aim at in our more deliberate programmes of conduct." Flashes of it may come as a compensation, or reward, for

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