

BLAKE'S POETRY AND DESIGNS



SELECTED AND EDITED BY
MARY LYNN JOHNSON AND JOHN E. GRANT

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION
SECOND EDITION

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BLAKE'S POETRY
AND DESIGNS



ILLUMINATED WORKS
OTHER WRITINGS
CRITICISM
Second Edition

Selected and Edited by

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Preface to the Second Edition

True to its title, this new edition of *Blake's Poetry and Designs* follows its predecessor (1979) in emphasizing visual as well as verbal aspects of Blake's self-published body of work in illuminated printing. This expanded selection, designed to be used in tandem with the magnificent William Blake Archive (www.blakearchive.org) and other online resources, presents newly annotated full texts of all the illuminated writings, including the epic-length *Jerusalem*; a rich sampling of images, sixteen in color and eighty-six in black and white; and a generous selection of Blake's most arresting poetry and prose in conventional printing and manuscript. Appearing for the first time in any edition is a letter rediscovered in 1997, now in the collection of Robert N. Essick. The chronology, bibliography, and other editorial materials have been reworked in light of scholarly discoveries of the past quarter century, and the "Criticism" section includes assessments of Blake's work from 1809 to 2003.

As explained in "Textual Technicalities," the thoroughly reedited—and now more lightly punctuated—reading texts are based both on our own study of original sources and on two distinguished editions that have won awards from the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions, one in print, one on the Internet. Texts of the illuminated writings are drawn in part from transcriptions in the William Blake Archive (1996–), edited by Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi; texts of other writings derive from David V. Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1988). Large numbers set in boxes in the right margins of the reading texts refer to Blake's plate or page numbers, following a standardized system discussed in "Textual Technicalities" (p. 600). Rewritten headnotes provide brief thematic and factual introductions; revised footnotes—including those from the first edition that have been cited in subsequent scholarship—have been purged of interpretive material that is not strictly explanatory, in conformity with current practice in the Norton Critical Editions series.

We appreciate the opportunity, in this edition, to correct long-rankling 1979 glitches (which each of us secretly blames on the other) such as scrambled biblical citations (n. 9, p. 100) and anachronistic "internal combustion engines" (n. 9, p. 238). The sharp eyes of editors Carol Bemis and Brian Baker and copyeditor Candace Levy have made this edition factually sounder, better written, and typographically more pleasing than it would otherwise have been. Among others who have noted errors and oversights; recommended online or print resources; critiqued drafts; or provided encouragement, feedback, and advice, we thank Kristin Eager, Peter Schock, Harriet Kramer Linkin, Jennifer Davis Michael, Susan Wolfson, Richard Sha, Bill Van Pelt, Evan Radcliffe, George Donaldson, Justin Van Kleeck, David Christian, Judith Pascoe, Eric Gidal, Nelson Hilton, Morton D. Paley,

G. E. Bentley Jr., and participants in Neil Fraistat's seminar on editing Romantic texts at the 2004 meeting of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism. For textual and pictorial advice and help at every stage, we are deeply indebted to Morris Eaves, Bob Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, editors of the William Blake Archive—especially to Joe, who greatly facilitated our publisher's use of images in the archive. For unfailing moral support and companionable cross-questioning of our annotations and the facts behind them, we thank our friend Sandy, Alexander S. Gourlay. For familial encouragement, we thank Michael E. ("Louie") Grant and his son Steven, Kenneth M. and Martha S. Grant and their daughter Kate, and Will Grant. And we thank each dear friend, sibling, and cousin, unnamed here, whose empathy and good cheer have uplifted us along the way.

Mary Lynn Johnson (Grant)
John E. Grant

Introduction

If you are encountering William Blake (1757–1827) for the first time in this edition, we welcome you to a great adventure. You will read the words of a poet, printmaker, and painter who calls on his contemporaries—and on “Children of the future Age” (p. 44 herein)—to join him in reimagining the world. “If the doors of perception were cleansed,” the explorer-narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* comes to realize, “every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite” (p. 75). With biblical prophecy as his model, Blake excoriates all social structures and belief systems that narrow perception and stifle the human spirit. “The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative,” he writes of his painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (p. 434); “it is an Endeavor to Restore what the Ancients call the Golden Age.” For Blake, visions of a lost paradise or a New Jerusalem are not escapist fantasies but insights into everyday reality as it could be if created anew by an awakened and energized people.

In whatever time Blake could spare from turning out commercial engravings to make a living, he labored mightily in his true vocation “under the dictates of our Angels” (p. 481), with his wife, Catherine, at his side. In all, he produced some fourteen hundred designs or engravings for other writers’ books; more than a thousand prints, watercolors, and tempera pictures on biblical, literary, and historical subjects for patrons; and almost four hundred plates for his own books in a verbal-visual medium he invented himself, which he called “illuminated printing”—and which we might call graphic poetry. For these inventions he prepared templates or stereotypes on copper plates by inscribing his text-design composition in reverse, using an acid-resistant substance as ink; he then used an etching fluid to bite away the rest of the surface so as to leave words and images standing up in relief, as on a woodcut or a rubber stamp, ready to be inked and printed on paper, the right way around.

Blake was well prepared for his life’s mission both by formal training in his craft and by self-education in the liberal arts. He came from a middle-class family of London shopkeepers: his father and oldest brother sold men’s clothing; another brother was a gingerbread baker before joining the army. Luckily, his parents recognized their second son’s gifts and stubborn independence and encouraged his artistic bent. At ten, he entered drawing school; at fourteen, he began a seven-year apprenticeship in engraving; at twenty-one, he was admitted as a student to the Royal Academy. For independent study, his father helped him purchase casts of antique sculptures, sixteenth-century prints, and books of poetry and philosophy. In poems written between the ages of twelve and twenty, published on his behalf by friends as *Poetical Sketches*, he revealed his youthful familiarity with earlier poets, especially Shakespeare, Spenser, and Pope. Steeped in the Bible and Milton, he read widely in philosophy, theology, history, and art theory

and concerned himself deeply with the revolutionary events of his time, their causes and consequences.

Like other great artists, Blake had a profound intuitive grasp of human psychology. More explicitly than any English writer before him, he pointed out the interrelationship of individual and societal problems that link self-righteousness, hyperrationalism, sexual frustration, repression of energy, cruelty, injustice, and revolutionary violence. In his later works, he embodied these and other ills in the nightmare-ridden figure of the cosmic giant Albion, or universal humanity, who has fallen into the deadly sleep of mundane existence. In humanity's coma, the divine is a remote and forbidding sky-god; nature, a sterile heap of atoms; lovers and family members, enemies; and one's own innermost being, an unrecognized alien. To heal Albion and reunite the "Eternal Great Humanity Divine" (*Milton* 44/39:27), Blake created illuminated epics aimed at restoring to the rational mind its estranged faculties of intuition, imagination, and feeling, thus liberating humanity from illusory oppositions between divine/human, spiritual/material, human/natural, self/other, male/female, and masculine/feminine elements within individuals. In everything Blake wrote and etched, he strove to arouse in each of us our full capacity to perceive, think, and act as whole persons belonging to the whole human race.

Selected works. This edition centers on the textual portion of Blake's illuminated works, his core achievement as a literary artist. These are the texts Blake considered important enough to coordinate with designs, etch on copper, print on paper (usually with color added), make into books, and offer for sale. We present this body of self-published writings in full, except for picture captions in the little emblem book *The Gates of Paradise* (1793, c. 1818–20). For a more general view of Blake's writings, we also offer selections from his best unpublished shorter poetry and his most energetic prose. Of works printed without designs in ordinary letterpress, we include selections from *Poetical Sketches* (1783, never sold) and *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809, sold at Blake's one-artist exhibition) but omit *The French Revolution* (1791, partially printed but never published). Of important manuscript works, we omit *Tiriel*, an early work, and represent the mature epic-length illustrated poem *Vala*, retitled *The Four Zoas*, by a brief sampling of self-contained episodes and passages of dialogue. To entice readers to move beyond the text to explore the crucial visual dimension of the illuminated books, we also include a generous selection of reproductions: seventeen in color, in the cover design and the sixteen-plate insert, and eighty-six in monochrome, interspersed throughout the main text, along with one illustration from the manuscript epic *The Four Zoas*.

Annotations and other aids. The reference system for Blake's illuminated books, involving alphabetical designations for copies and standardized numbers for the plates from which pages were printed, is explained in "Textual Technicalities" (p. 600). This section also explains the somewhat unorthodox editorial maneuvers required to produce in conventional typography a reading text that respects the idiosyncratic spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of Blake's handmade books. Since the advent of e-mail and text messaging, Blake's irregularities have perhaps become less of a barrier than they once appeared, as may be seen in the virtually unretouched lines of *All Religions Are One*, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and the Notebook poems. After *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794),

Blake's illuminated books become increasingly longer and more complex, more innovative in myth and form, and more densely allusive. We believe that twenty-first-century readers need some guidance but not so much as to miss the unsettling experience of utter disorientation, of being thrown back on one's own resources. As an aid to confidence building, we annotate earlier texts more heavily than later ones, emphasizing literary, biblical, and historical references that Blake could have expected his contemporaries to recognize; but instead of doubling the length of this book by teasing out the more arcane allusions of later works, we merely point out highlights. For substantial information or ideas attributable to a single scholar, we provide brief references (name, journal or book title, date), but usually we do not specify sources for well-established facts commonly noted in S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary* (1965, 1988) and commentaries in the Longman/Norton/Pearson Annotated English poets series by W. H. Stevenson (1971, 1989, 2007); the Rinehart edition by Hazard Adams (1970); the Penguin edition by Alicia Ostriker (1977); the annotated Princeton/Blake Trust facsimile series under the general editorship of David Bindman (1991–95); Henry Summerfield's *A Guide to the Books of William Blake for Innocent and Experienced Readers* (1998); and the online William Blake Archive (www.blakearchive.org) edited by Morris Eaves, Robert Essick, and Joseph Viscomi (1996–). The "Selected Bibliography" lists major reference books and general studies; more specialized books and articles cited in headnotes and footnotes are searchable by author in "Sources Cited in Editorial Notes," which supplements the bibliography. The chronology and maps provide orientation in time and space. The list of "Key Terms," which directs the reader to our fullest annotations of puzzling proper names in footnotes and headnotes, serves as a brief glossary of Blakean motifs.

Criticism. Although we cannot represent all important critics and schools of thought here, even those that have influenced us most, we provide a fair sampling over time of accessible, engaging interpretations that shed strong light on Blake's major works and encourage further exploration. Critical approaches that use Blake's writings to elucidate more general theories, rather than vice versa, are inherently unsuited to our purposes, but some in this category are listed in the "Selected Bibliography."

A final word. Blake has a way of attracting and repelling his readers at the same time. Nothing is out of bounds; he stops at nothing to shatter "mind-forg'd manacles." He writes soaring lyrics and crude jibes, obscure rants and startling punch lines. He can be inspirational, outrageous, inscrutable, funny, raunchy, offensive, and just plain weird—all in one passage. If you become more and more exasperated as you read, you are in good company. Distinguished scholars and enthusiasts of Blake have acknowledged the impulse to throw heavier books than this one across the room. But if you keep on reading, and especially if you let Blake's ideas and provocations get under your skin, you will experience the exhilaration of making your own discoveries not only about his works but about yourself. We hope that this edition will give you something to hang onto when you need it most, while staying out of Blake's way—and yours—as you explore the "wondrous worlds" that await you.

Abbreviations

Bentley edition	Bentley, G. E., Jr., ed, <i>William Blake's Writings</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
Blake Archive	William Blake Archive, ed. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. www.blakearchive.org .
Blake Trust/ Princeton University Press	Bindman, David, gen. ed., <i>Blake's Illuminated Books</i> . 6 vols. 1: Morton D. Paley, ed., <i>Jerusalem</i> ; 2: Andrew Lincoln, ed., <i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i> ; 3: Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, eds., <i>The Early Illuminated Books</i> ; 4: D. W. Dörrbecker, ed., <i>The Continental Prophecies</i> ; 5: Essick and Viscomi, eds., <i>Milton a Poem and the Final Illuminated Works</i> ; 6: David Worrall, ed., <i>The Urizen Books</i> . Princeton: The William Blake Trust and Princeton University Press, 1991–1995; see “Selected Bibliography.”
Butlin	Butlin, Martin, <i>The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake</i> , 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
Damon	Damon, S. Foster, <i>A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake</i> , rev. ed. with a new foreword by Morris Eaves (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988).
Erdman edition	Erdman, David V., ed., <i>The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake</i> , rev. ed., commentary by Harold Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
Notebook	Erdman, David V., ed., with the assistance of Donald K. Moore, <i>The Notebook of William Blake: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile</i> (1973; rev. Readex, 1977).
Ostriker	Ostriker, Alicia, ed., <i>William Blake: The Complete Poems</i> (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977; corr., 1986).
Stevenson	Stevenson, W. H., ed., <i>Blake: The Complete Poems</i> , 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2007).

Note on Illustrations

Each of Blake's illuminated works, and each page of those works, is meant to be seen as a whole. Although some designs appear without accompanying texts, few pages of text are altogether lacking in ornamentation. Often the interplay between visual and verbal images is elaborately orchestrated: some designs at least partly illustrate the texts they accompany, but—especially in longer works—full-page designs may appear at some distance from the most closely related narrative episodes or lines of verse. The placement of color images in the insert section is indicated by footnotes to the corresponding texts of the illuminated books. Within the size and format constraints of manageable page layout, images in black and white are placed near the texts with which Blake associated them on the pages indicated. Copy designations and plate numbers are explained in "Textual Technicalities," p. 599.

We are grateful to the libraries, museums, and archives acknowledged in the following list for permission to reproduce images from Blake's work in their collections. In the color section, variations from the original size, excluding framing lines, are noted in parentheses. Among black and white images, only the most drastic reductions are noted.

Color

1. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* 1. Title page. Copy U. Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. (Enlarged from 11.2×7 cm.)
2. *Songs* 25. "Infant Joy." Copy Z. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress; Blake Archive.
3. *Songs* 39. "The Sick Rose." Copy Z. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress; Blake Archive.
4. *The Book of Thel* 2/ii. Title page. Copy N. Cincinnati Art Museum. Mr. and Mrs. John Emery, donors. (Reduced from 15.5×10.7 cm.)
5. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 1/i. Frontispiece. Copy P. Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge; Bridgeman Archive. (Reduced from 17.1×11.9 cm.)
6. *Visions* 2/ii. Title page. Copy P. Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge; Bridgeman Archive. (Reduced from 16.3×12.9 cm.)
7. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 1. Title page. Copy G. The Houghton Library, Harvard University. (Reduced from 15.2×10.3 cm.)
8. *America a Prophecy* 2/ii. Title page. Copy O. Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge; Bridgeman Archive. (Reduced from 23.5×16.7 cm.)

9. *Europe a Prophecy* 1/i. Frontispiece ("Ancient of Days"). Copy K. Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge; Bridgeman Archive. (Reduced from 23.4×16.9 cm.)
10. *Europe* 2/ii. Title page. Copy K. Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge; Bridgeman Archive. (Reduced from 23.9×17.3 cm.)
11. *The Book of Urizen* 1. Title page. Copy G. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress; Blake Archive. (Reduced from 14.9×10.3 cm.)
12. *Urizen* 11/22. Copy G. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. (Reduced from 15.6×10.1 cm.)
13. *Milton a Poem* 1. Title page. Copy D. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress; Blake Archive. (Reduced from 16.0×11.2 cm.)
14. *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* 2. Title page. Copy E. Yale Center for British Art; Blake Archive (Reduced from 22.5×16.2 cm.)
15. *Jerusalem* 76. Frontispiece for Chapter III. Copy E. Yale Center for British Art; Blake Archive. (Reduced from 22.4×16.3 cm.)
16. *Jerusalem* 100. Tailpiece. Copy E. Yale Center for British Art; Blake Archive. (Reduced from 14.8×22.4 cm.; vertical format as arranged by Blake.)

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86. *The Four Zoas*, p. 116/112 (infrared photography). Additional MS. 39764. Department of Manuscripts, British Library. 417

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