

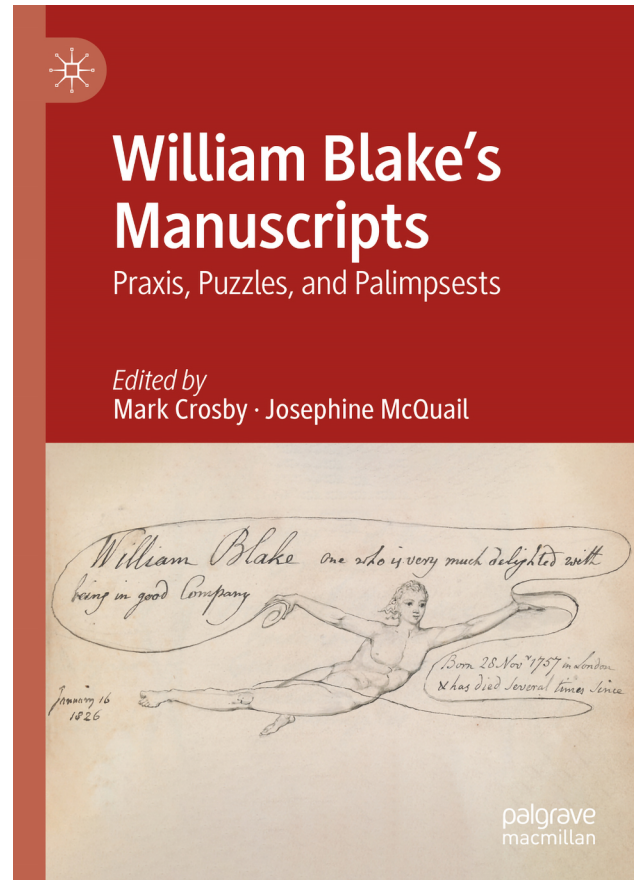
Mark Crosby and Josephine A. McQuail, editors, *William Blake's Manuscripts: Praxis, Puzzles, and Palimpsests*

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Mark Crosby and Josephine A. McQuail, editors. *William Blake's Manuscripts: Praxis, Puzzles, and Palimpsests*. Springer-Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. xxiii + 378 pp. £109.99/\$139.99, hardcover; £109.99/\$139.99, paperback; £104.49/\$109.00, e-book.

IN their introduction, “Writing Is the Divine Revelation,” Crosby and McQuail sketch out the subject matter to come. Their discussion includes the inscription in the lower right-hand corner of a preparatory drawing for plate 14 of the Job engravings (“When the Morning Stars Sang Together”). Blake wrote “done by” followed by five symbols: a straight line, a hand, a capital B, an eye, and a circle with large dotlike marks outside its two o’clock and seven o’clock positions. The authors pose a number of questions arising from this hieroglyphic signature and the possible reasons for Blake’s placing it there. Other manuscripts touched on in this introduction include *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, some of the poems drafted in Blake’s Notebook, selections from his marginalia, and his sole engraving on glass. Some pages of illuminated books are also manuscripts, Crosby and McQuail suggest, if we assume that they were composed directly on the plates. In conclusion, the authors explain the classification principles behind the three-part division of the fourteen papers that follow.

Manuscripts has the distinction of posthumously publishing a paper by G. E. Bentley, Jr., “Blake and ‘the Wondrous Art of Writing’: Letter Faces, Letter Formation, Capitalization.” In his 1963 edition of *Vala*, Bentley distinguished and defined four different scripts in the manuscript, which are summarized here: copperplate hand, modified copperplate hand, usual hand, and “reduced and hurried form of the usual hand.” Among numerous other observations, Bentley remarks that all the *Songs of Experience* are in slanting roman script, save for one in vertical



roman script: “Ah! Sun-Flower” (which is also the one *Experience* poem not drafted in Blake’s Notebook). Bentley advocates that editions in conventional typography represent the words “as faithfully as the words themselves” so that, for example, “The Tyger” would be “*The Tyger*.” An extensive tabulation of Blake’s different font styles and sizes is provided in an appendix.

a. Morton D. Paley recently completed a study of Blake’s Job engravings. His current research is on the history paintings of George Romney.

In his chapter on Blake's letters, Angus Whitehead remarks, "The quotidian and the visionary ... are not merely cheek by jowl in the letters: they constantly combine, cross-pollinating one another," and he goes on to say that "Blake, like [Philip] Larkin, seems to be putting on distinctly different faces, performances drawing on different lexicons for different correspondents." Three of Blake's correspondents can be identified as close personal friends—George Cumberland, John Flaxman, and his brother James—but Blake could equivocate even to those close to him. When he addresses Thomas Butts as "Dear Friend of My Angels" (E 711), he counts on Butts's not knowing what Blake's angels were really like. Blake's discourse was not the same in a letter written for publication in *The Monthly Magazine* as it was when he defended his art to a disappointed would-be client, the Rev. Dr. Trusler. The modulations in his correspondence with William Hayley could in themselves be the subject of a substantial chapter. There are no love letters because throughout his adult life "my sweet Shadow of Delight stood ... by my side" (*Milton*, E 143). While recognizing the enormous accomplishment of Geoffrey Keynes's edition, Whitehead argues that it's time for a "useful and finally definitive edition" of the letters.

As Elizabeth Potter maintains of Blake's marginalia, at least some were meant to be read by others, pointing out that the same was true of Coleridge, as H. J. Jackson has shown. The large, clear handwriting of some of Blake's annotations to the *Works* of Sir Joshua Reynolds shows that these were among them. Potter argues that both in editions and in criticism the quotations from the texts that Blake annotated should be considerably more extensive than they usually are, as context determines meaning. Distinguishing four different modes of Blake's manuscript annotations to volume 1 of Reynolds's *Works*, she concludes that "Blake revisited the volume at different times," that after reviewing his penciled inscriptions in the unbound volume he turned some of them into more permanent form with ink, that he wrote some of them in ink before the volume was bound, and that he incorporated some of their language in writing his *Descriptive Catalogue* and other prose works. By heightening our awareness of the physical interrelations of Blake's marginalia, Potter increases our knowledge of the development of his thought.

Jennifer Davis Michael's paper, "Behn, Bysshe, and the Blakes: Bibliomancy and the Joys of Unbinding," centers on the Blakes' one known experiment in what is defined as "a form of divination by randomly selecting a passage from an authoritative text." In the classical world this often involved consulting Virgil, and in the Christian world the Bible. Today a frequent source is the ancient Chinese *Y Ching*, or *Book of Changes*; for William and Catherine it

was Edward Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry*. It was Catherine who made the cut, and, as Michael points out, in the later eighteenth century bibliomancy was often associated with women. Catherine had this book on hand "by chance," so this may have been a one-off attempt.

Sexual intercourse in Blake's works frequently has symbolic or theoretical associations, so it's refreshing to find this middle-aged couple enjoying a "titillating passage" under the rubric "ENJOYMENT" simply for its licentious content. Bysshe omits the poem's title, prints only the author's last name, and excerpts only twenty-four lines of a poem 107 lines long. Michael rightly ignores the poem's publication history and the author's identity, of which the Blakes may have known nothing. Nor would they necessarily have known the poem's title—"On a Juniper-Tree, Cut Down to Make Busks"—or that the first-person speaker is the tree under which the action takes place. Michael discusses the episode not out of context, but in a context established by the two readers and their marital relationship.

Their presiding sign is fire. The excerpt in Blake's Notebook begins, "I saw 'em kindle with Desire / While with soft sighs they blew the fire," and continues in physical fury:

Her new desire she could not hide
Nor would the shepherd be denied
The blessed minute he pursued
Till she transported in his arms
Yields to the Conqueror all her charms
His panting breast to hers now joind
They feast on raptures unconfind
Vast & luxuriant such as prove
The immortality of Love[.]

After this the lovers pass to a second, harmonious phase of their intercourse, still under the fire sign:

Now like the Phoenix both expire
While from the ashes of their fire
Spring up a new & soft desire
Like charmers thrice they did invoke
The God & thrice new Vigor took[.]

Blake transcribes this text in order to preserve the moments of pleasure that it gave him and Catherine.

Crosby's own paper, "'minutely Appropriate Execution': Variation and *Pentimento* in Blake's Title Pages," is a thorough and convincing discussion of its subject. (*Pentimento*, a term borrowed from art history, is defined as "part of a picture or drawing which has been painted or

drawn over after the artist has changed his mind about a particular motif” [Clarke, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, 2001].) Remarking that “Blake’s production methods for his illuminated books encourage variation,” Crosby considers how “four variations of the title plate [of *Europe*] ... provide four separate visual commentaries on the Urizen and Los narrative.” His examination of the title page of the *Four Zoas* manuscript considers how *pentimenti*, both verbal and visual, affect the meanings conveyed, and he also compares in detail the imagery of the two title pages of the Genesis manuscript.

Silvia Riccardi, in “The Page Embodied in *The Four Zoas*,” suggests that for Blake the manuscript page can be a unit of expression, much as in illuminated books the plate is one. “[M]ost of the pages,” she argues, “appear ... to be treated almost as copperplates.” Yet, Riccardi says, the correspondence is not exact, for the physical natures of the tool (pencil) and of the support (paper) allow greater fluidity of expression, “pushing Blake’s composing process beyond the possibilities afforded by the engraving tools.” For example, referring to page 7 of the manuscript, the author discerningly observes that the initial letter of the last line, the W of “Wandering,” “wanders in a dynamic pattern beyond the line of the script, enacting the movement of wandering,” and that “this line is harmonically arranged with the appendix of the serpent-like figure which intrudes into Enion’s body.” This essay breaks new ground in discussing how Blake’s imaginative processes found expression.

Co-editor Josephine McQuail’s paper is entitled “Blake and the Antiquarians: The Manuscript of *The Four Zoas* and the ‘Monumental Folios’ of the Dilettanti and the Antiquarians.” The Antiquarians here include James Stuart, co-author with Nicholas Revett of *The Antiquities of Athens*; Richard Gough of *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*; the Society of Antiquaries; and the Society of Dilettanti. Some images for their projects were executed by the young Blake’s master James Basire, and some involved William himself as an apprentice engraver. Basire’s emphasis on the line was assimilated by Blake both in practice and (later) in theory. The illustrations of Richard Payne Knight’s *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, although not published in folio, are also discussed as models for some of the drawings in Blake’s manuscript. McQuail’s view of the manuscript is that it “should be considered finished, if not in the final form.”

In “Catastrophe, Sublimity, and Digital Thinking in Blake’s *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*,” Peter Otto joins those scholars who think that in the forty-seven pages of manuscript written on the versos of discarded proofs of Blake’s *Night Thoughts* engravings there are connections between

the engravings and *The Four Zoas*. This, and the fact that both Young’s poem and Blake’s comprise nine Nights, cause Otto to say that “Young’s poem ... haunts *The Four Zoas* with a literary *ancien regime* that the poem is unable finally to exorcise.” Among other issues addressed here are the two Nights VII, “the three primary creation stories,” and “the descent of the sublime into history.”

Otto typically pursues the transformation of images into narrative. In *The Four Zoas* page 32 Urizen’s “golden Building” is created by slaves (generating associations for us of the work going on in Wagner’s *Nibelheim*), followed by its collapse into the material world, which Otto, referring to manuscript page 44, calls the “process of excarnation” of Tharmas. This is paralleled by Enion’s “floating in the air” in the drawing on the left side of page 44. Advancing to page 64, Otto calls the Enitharmon of that page a “material double” of Enion, and Urizen’s following re-animation leads to his journey of exploration in Nights VI, VIIa, and VIIb. Such sequencing is just one example of how Otto interestingly tracks textual/pictorial elements in *The Four Zoas*.

“[G]lobal institutions [Trades & Commerce, Universal Empire, and Religion],” writes Otto, “enable Urizen to shape subjects by reshaping the world in which they exist.”

Then left the Sons of Urizen the plow & harrow
 the loom
 The hammer & the Chisel & the rule & compasses
 They forged the sword the chariot of war the battle ax
 The trumpet fitted to the battle & the flute of summer
 And all the arts of life they changd into the arts of death
 The hour glass contemnd because its simple workmanship
 Was as the workmanship of the plowman & the water wheel
 That raises water into Cisterns broken & burnd in fire
 Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the Shepherd
 And in their stead intricate wheels invented Wheel without wheel
 To perplex youth in their outgoing & to bind to labours
 Of day & night the myriads of Eternity. that they might file
 And polish brass & iron hour after hour laborious workmanship

(*The Four Zoas* page 92, E 364)

Here Blake seems to anticipate Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Ode, Inscribed to William H. Channing":

'T is the day of the chattel
Web to weave, and corn to grind;
Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.

Otto's discussion is richly documented with critical sources. For example, he is one of only two authors (Riccardi is the other) to include a consideration of John E. Grant's seminal article of over sixty pages, "Visions in *Vala*."

Michael Fox, formerly an assistant editor at *The William Blake Archive*, presents "Graphing *VALA*, or *The Four Zoas*: Toward a Dynamic Edition." It's no fault of the author's that the word "dynamic" has become so debased by adspeak that it's lost much of its meaning. After considering what the true title of the manuscript is or ought to be, the author considers the facsimile editions of Bentley and of David V. Erdman and Cettina Magno, as well as the printed *Vala* of H. M. Margoliouth, which goes curiously unmentioned elsewhere in this volume. His tracing of this history culminates in the *Blake Archive*'s online edition of 2017. In the latter part of this paper, Fox explains what a "dynamic edition" of *The Four Zoas* would be, and how it would be achieved. This section is illustrated with graphs and subgraphs that might be helpful if their texts, printed in tiny black type against a dark gray background, were not impossible to read.

As a postscript, a question and a correction. Is it true that *Vala* "in part . . . symbolizes a different faculty of the mind: passion"? Isn't Luvah the faculty of passion and *Vala* the object of his passion? And the version of Robert Blair's *The Grave* that appeared with Blake's illustrations in 1813 is hardly "an early edition," being the second edition of a book published in 1808 of a poem that first appeared in 1743.

"All that we See is Vision": William Blake's *Four Zoas* Manuscript and Multispectral Imaging (MSI)" is the work of six scholars—Oishani Sengupta, Helen Davies, Alexander J. Zawacki, Christina Duffy, Eric Loy, and Samuel Allen. The creation of this paper was assisted by *The William Blake Archive*, the Lazarus Project at the University of Rochester, and the British Museum, a collaboration that reinforces our sense of group participation.

Multispectral imaging has been defined as "a collection of a few image layers of the same scene, each of them acquired at a particular wavelength band." Page 14 of the *Four Zoas* manuscript is discussed as an example of the

authors' application of this imaging technique to try to recover visual or textual data.

The authors confuse engraved proof sheets and watercolors when they say that "the later folios juxtapose the text of the poem with proof-sheets containing watercolors to accompany Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, for an edition Blake was preparing for John Linnell's library." The proof sheets of Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations that he used for his manuscript bear only engraved images.

Fernando Castanedo, the author of highly regarded Spanish editions of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *An Island in the Moon*, here contributes "'O what a scene is here': Visual References in Blake's *An Island in the Moon*." An interesting example concerns Blake's verses on Samuel Johnson. One of these references, John Hall's engraving after Reynolds of Johnson squinting at a newspaper held closely to him, may well have reinforced Blake's conception, although near-sighted Johnson's cognomen of "Blinking Sam" was well known, as was Johnson's dislike of it.

Lo the Bat with Leathern wing
Winking & blinking
Winking & blinking
Winking & blinking
Like Doctor Johnson

There could also have been, as suggested here, a pictorial stimulus for the further lines beginning "O ho Said Doctor Johnson" in two satirical prints of 1786 related to James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785): "Bossy Bounce Preparing for the Scotch Professors to Kiss" and "A Tom Tit Twittering on an Eagle's Back-Side." These images are compared to Blake's

Ah ha To Doctor Johnson
Said Scipio Africanus
Lift up my Roman Petticoat
And kiss my Roman Anus (E 458)

The author wittily remarks that these prints "are the only depictions of him [Johnson] engaging in any sphincteric activities with others." Blake did have a certain interest in sphincteric activities, as evidenced by Bowlahoola in his later works, and images such as these may well have engaged his visual imagination.

Two misused terms should be corrected. A passage in *Island* is referred to as "parodical ekphrasis," but here there is no ekphrasis (defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art"). And Valentine Green's striking mezzotint

of Joseph Wright of Derby's *Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* is not an "etching" but an engraving.

In "'Hang Philosophy': Blake's Metaphysical Forays in *An Island in the Moon*," Joseph Fletcher explores some philosophical issues in Blake's Menippean satire. One of these forays involves books by Emanuel Swedenborg. In addition to the three works by Swedenborg that he annotated, Blake appears to have known at least part of three others. Fletcher says that Swedenborg's *Theosophic Lubrication on the Nature of Influx* could have been known to Blake through being "read in translation at the Swedenborgian meetings Blake attended," but this hypothesis is unnecessary: the Blakes are known to have attended only one such meeting (the General Conference of 1789), while *Influx* had been published in an English translation as early as 1770. Blake also seems to have been familiar with *Earths in the Universe* (1787), to which he refers in a note to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (E 602), and he also read some part of the compendious *True Christian Religion* (1781), as in his *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809 one entry is "The spiritual Preceptor, an experiment Picture ... taken from the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg. Universal Theology [the alternative title of *True Christian Religion*]." In contrast, Blake is not known to have read Descartes, whom he never mentions, and whose works are cited here only in modern editions, but whose philosophy is introduced in several contexts. Of course, Blake may have read something about Descartes—or he may not have. Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage du monde de Descartes*, translated into English in 1692, alluded to several times, is an example of a book with which Blake seems to have been entirely unacquainted. In trying to understand Blake's mental universe we should consider whether or not an author is one whom he read or whom he knew only through a hypothetical secondary source. In general, Fletcher shows that *An Island in the Moon* is fraught with philosophical issues, and that "beneath Blake's satirical clowning lies a deep engagement."

In "'Composite Gender' as the Book of Oothoon," Tommy Mayberry argues for the "transsexual and transgender leanings of Oothoon's body" in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and later. The moment when Oothoon plucks the Marygold signifies not only, as is generally recognized, her initiation into sexual experience (or readiness for it), but, according to Mayberry, the moment "when male-Oothoon stops cross-dressing in the safe privacy of Leutha's vale ... and goes out into the world..." Mayberry continues our walk on the wild side, saying that Theotormon "is not regretful because she [Oothoon] is no longer a virgin; he is regretful because she no longer has her penis." This would presumably have interested the "drag/trans-community" that the author posits as a contemporary audience for the Book of Oothoon.

Jason Whittaker's essay, "'By the Voice of the Servant of the Lord': Blake's New Jerusalem and Swedenborgianism in the Work of Sheila Kaye-Smith," regards a manuscript not by but about Blake. Kaye-Smith (1887–1956) was a fairly popular twentieth-century English novelist, and her reading of Blake had great personal meaning for her. What is impressive about her essay is neither new information nor distinctive insights, but rather her fresh, sometimes breathless, response to Blake. "One can imagine," she writes, "the poet wandering from the streets of the systematised Symbol, lost & baffled, seeking in vain for the truth that does not creep step by step over end, cause & effect, but bounds freely & bridges widely—the infinite truth of the imagination." It would be hard to think of a better encapsulation of Blake's spiritual journey.

William Blake's Manuscripts rightly does not try to establish a unified approach to its subject. It is an admirably multi-pronged exposition, bringing together a variety of scholarly approaches in rich combination.