

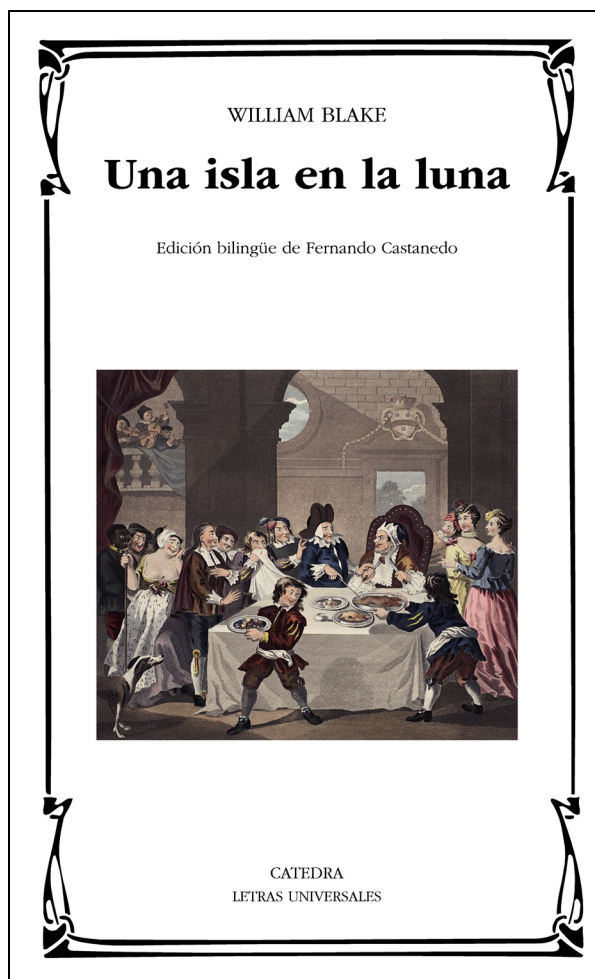
Fernando Castanedo, ed. and trans. *William Blake, Una isla en la luna*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2014. 240 pp. €16.30, paperback.

Reviewed by Cristina Flores

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1 FERNANDO Castanedo's bilingual edition of William Blake's *An Island in the Moon* is an extraordinary and definitive contribution to the reception of the English author in Spain. Thanks to this volume, all of Blake's literary works are now available in Spanish. Moreover, Castanedo's insightful introduction constitutes the only scholarly work on Blake's satire to originate in Spain. Before that, *An Island* had been almost entirely overlooked by Spanish literary scholars and translators. It had never been mentioned or translated previously, with two minor exceptions. It is worth noting that the only critical reference to *An Island* in Spanish was utterly demolishing. It appeared in 1928 in the introduction by Edmundo González-Blanco to *La boda del Cielo y el Infierno: Primeros libros proféticos (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: First Prophetic Books)*, the first volume in Spanish entirely devoted to Blake's poetry:

Blake is not that good when he descends to the role of libeler and satirist, as in *An Island in the Moon*, miscellanea



of prose and songs where, without success, he tries to perform that task of teaching with some humor, which the Greeks considered divine, and in which he quite rudely mocks the respectable and affected group of people that attended the social gatherings organized by his friend and protector Mistress Mathew.¹

Given González-Blanco's opinion of *An Island*, more likely inherited from his French critical sources rather than from direct reading of the original, it is not surprising that his volume does not include it. Previous to Castanedo's work, there existed only a fragmentary rendering of Blake's satire in *William Blake: Poesía completa*, by Pablo Mañé, first published in 1980. Mañé presents the Spanish reader with

1. My translation from the original: "No es tan feliz cuando descende al papel de libelista y satírico, como en *The Island in the Moon*, miscelánea de prosa y canciones, donde, sin lograrlo, pretende realizar aquel arte de enseñar con gracia, que los griegos consideraban divino, y donde, de una manera harto grosera, se mofa de la sociedad tan respetable como afectada, que acudía a la tertulia de su amiga y protectora Misses [sic] Mathew" (40).

a compilation of some of the verse interludes of *An Island* translated from Sampson's text.² In the absence of any contextualizing information, the reader of this volume acquires a highly distorted and limited view of *An Island*.

- 2 Luckily, unlike Mañé, Castanedo offers a significant body of critical apparatus that allows the reader to peruse *An Island* from a well-informed position. The translation is accompanied by useful paratexts: an enlightening, wide-ranging introduction, a complete and up-to-date bibliography, a wealth of pertinent explanatory footnotes, color reproductions of the first seventeen pages and the last page of the manuscript,³ and two appendices. The first appendix includes the poems that would later appear in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, with the variations noted; the second is a table with the names of characters, a translation of the names into Spanish, and the actual persons who may have inspired the dramatis personae.
- 3 In an excellent, comprehensive introduction, the editor and translator draws upon seminal critical works on Blake and *An Island* to articulate further his own interpretation of the prose satire and to defend his hypothesis as regards the manuscript's supposed missing leaf. On the first page, Castanedo underlines the relevance of *An Island* as a decisive text in elucidating some autobiographical aspects of Blake's youth, as well as the later development of his literary production. After a readable account of Blake's biography, in which the most relevant events, personal connections, and influences are explored, Castanedo turns to pay full attention to *An Island*. His general evaluation of this work sharply contrasts with that of González-Blanco: he asserts that "in addition to meeting a serious and mature poet, we observe a satirical mocking poet ... one of the funniest writers in the English literature of his time" (39).⁴ He first offers a chapter-by-chapter summary of the plot, in which the characters appear linked to their supposed referents, those relatives and acquaintances whom Blake met in Mrs. Mathew's circle. He then explores the different theories about the date of its composition, eventually noting that most scholars agree that Blake began writing it after the publication of *Poetical Sketches* in 1783 and completed it in the spring of 1786, before the death of his brother Robert. The next section is devoted to an exhaustive account of the history and characteristics of the Fitzwilliam manuscript. There, Castanedo undertakes a careful analysis of the manuscript, paying special attention to the controversial issue

2. "Canciones de *Una isla en la luna*," *William Blake: Poesía completa* 61-80.

3. From 1r to 9r, and 16v.

4. My translation: "además de encontrarnos con un poeta serio y maduro, observamos a un escritor satírico y burlón ... uno de los escritores más divertidos de la literatura inglesa de su tiempo."

of the two or more pages that could have been first included by the author and later expurgated, something that could explain the discontinuity between the content in pages 8v and 9r (the page designated "x" by Erdman, E 465), and the diagonal penciled note on 9r: "a leaf is evidently missing before this one" (206).⁵ Castanedo proposes that these missing pages may never have existed. To prove his hypothesis, he commissioned a handwriting expert to compare the penciled note with the manuscript in ink, with the purpose of showing that it was Blake himself who wrote that note, thus challenging the opinion of Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, who had suggested the contrary in 2010. The graphological study, which is described in detail, accompanied by numerous images, indicated that the two manuscript passages had a common authorship. Castanedo argues that Blake could have announced that his manuscript was incomplete because he himself had expurgated it, or because he wanted the reader to believe in the existence of a gap for the sake of literary playfulness. The latter is the theory to which Castanedo adheres and upon which he elaborates his interpretation of the work. He follows Kirk in claiming that the deliberate inclusion of a gap is one of the characteristics that permit describing *An Island* as a Menippean satire. Additionally, the author delves into the many echoes of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* he finds in *An Island*, paying special attention to the numerous occasions in which Sterne introduced fake lacunae in his masterpiece, which could well have served, he states, as a direct inspiration for Blake. Finally, the concluding section of the introduction offers an overview of the critical reception of *An Island*, noting that it was not until the rest of Blake's oeuvre was securely canonized that this work was taken into scholarly consideration. Only then, Castanedo affirms, could the eschatological, sarcastic, acid, and much less respectable vein of Blake be accepted (86).

- 4 *Una isla en la luna* is a bilingual volume in which the English text was first rigorously edited. Castanedo meticulously transcribed the Fitzwilliam manuscript, maintaining the duplications, omissions, errors, and deletions in the original. Moreover, in the numerous footnotes he reflects the variations and conjectures in the previous editions by Bentley (1978), Phillips (1987), Erdman (rev. ed., 1988), and Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi (2010), thus providing a comprehensive and authoritative foundational text. As to the translation, Castanedo announces that he tried to be more faithful to the spirit than to the letter, avoiding any literal translation that may sound unnatural to the Spanish reader (89). In addition, the text in Spanish is accompanied by co-

5. [Editors' note: An article by Castanedo, "A Blake Riddle: The Diagonal Pencil Inscription in *An Island in the Moon*," is forthcoming in *Blake*.]

pious footnotes in which the translator clarifies some of the difficulties he found in the translation process and provides the reader with plenty of historical, contextual, and bibliographical references. With this outstanding volume, Castanedo certainly fulfills his ambitious goal of presenting Blake's work from an authoritative perspective to Spanish readers, contributing eventually to recognition in Spain of Blake's wide range. They will see not just the visionary, but also that "indomitable and irreverent poet that we can read in *An Island in the Moon*."⁶

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6. My translation: "poeta indómito e irreverente que podemos leer en *Una isla en la luna*" (86).