In their concluding paragraphs, Lee and McGhee note that "increasingly, visions of future electronic editions put more of the editorial process in the hands of the reader." They cite Peter Robinson's conception of "'fluid, co-operative and distributed editions'" as a "model of scholarly edition which opens itself to readerly interrogation and intervention" (par. 43). But the prospect is no sooner offered than replaced with Thomas Tanselle's writing in 1996 to maintain "the necessity of historical expertise and the vital role specialists play in interpreting textual artifacts of the past." After all, they finish with Tanselle, readers "do retain the power of choosing how much of the critical apparatus and scholarly research to incorporate into their reading" (par. 44). (So much for the imposition of "editioning"!)

Attempting to split the difference between Robinson and Tanselle, Lee and McGhee conclude that "regardless of whether readers actually encode and edit electronic editions, the future of scholarly digital projects still rests with its [*sic*] readers" (par. 45). But given that "the *Blake Archive*'s primary purpose is for studying Blake rather than reading him" and that its "primary audience is a scholarly one" (note 8), one senses the predicament concerning audience underlying their disclosure that "uncertainty about the long-term future of the *Blake Archive* … motivates our goals and decisions today …" (par. 46).

Turning to the print editors, less needs to be said. In the collection's shortest piece, "The Ends of Editing," W. H. Stevenson writes that "the first duty of an editor is to present an accurate and useful text" (par. 5). But, as a "modernizing" editor, he argues that "from time to time" and "in pursuit of clarity and ease of understanding," an editor "has to take minor liberties with the minutiae of Blake's text" (par. 19). The "only justification" for such tampering is that "to do so brings us nearer to Blake" (par. 26). Most modern readers, however, will probably agree with the introduction's characterization of Stevenson's (and Fuller's) changing of "The Tyger" to "The Tiger" as "wince-inducing" (introduction, par. 30). Evoking the characterization of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* as "a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," Stevenson offers the memorable observation that "Blake's Autolycus mind snapped up all manner of fascinating wayside material in any kind of order" (par. 34).

David Fuller, in "Modernizing Blake's Text: Syntax, Rhythm, Rhetoric," draws very extensively and apparently without notice from the introduction to his 2000 *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose* (reprinted by Pearson Longman in 2008; see pp. 18-26 in either). The final eight paragraphs turn to a different kind of re-writing ("my re-writings here" [par. 23]) that re-spaces Blake's lines "to reveal features of the rhetorical structure of Blake's poetry that are concealed by the conventions of its formal structure" (par. 23).

Mary Lynn Johnson's entertaining "Contingencies, Exigencies, and Editorial Praxis: The Case of the 2008 Norton Blake" offers an "anecdotal case history" of the "fortuities and mundanities" leading up to the second edition—after twenty-nine years—of the Norton Critical Edition she published with "co-editor John E. Grant (husband Jack)" (pars. 3, 1). In this behind-the-scenes report, we see her "proclaim by e-mail, a little pompously," "wail" to her editor, and "wheedle sympathy" (pars. 4, 12, 13) in the "nitty-gritty trade-offs and editorial histrionics" (par. 23) that make up the long back-story of getting the book to press. In keeping with every other contributor, she does not provide data on actual number of copies printed or sold (or site hits), but she does candidly offer specifics on the permissions budget and other constraints. Anyone who uses the new Norton will find the account rewarding, just as readers of Fuller's and Stevenson's editions, or users of the *Blake Archive*, will gain from the inside stories of these respective versions of Blake, forgiving what they do not approve and loving all for such energetic exertion of talent.

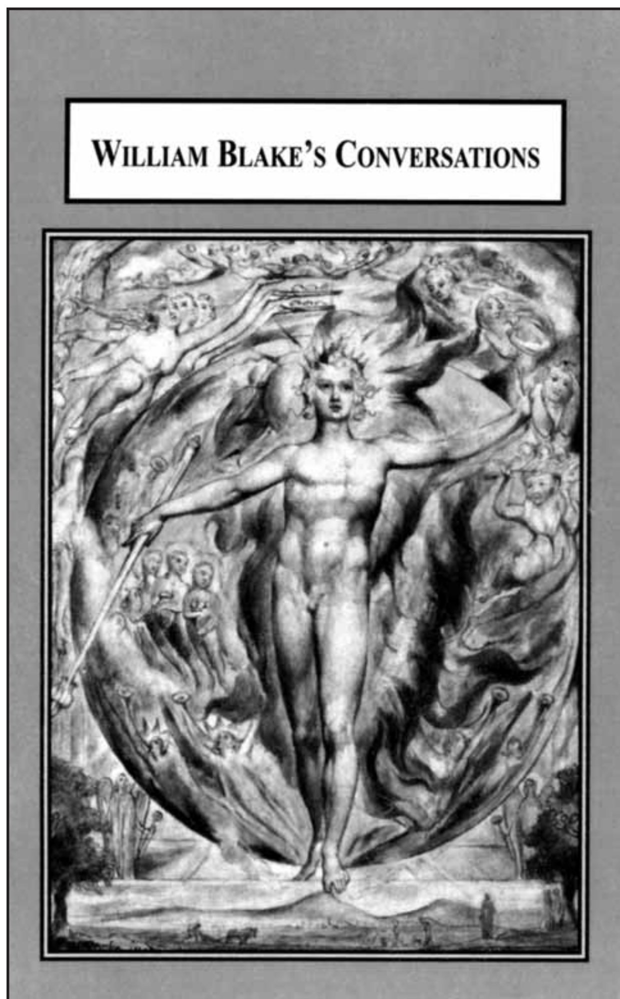
Gerald E. Bentley, Jr., with a foreword by Mary Lynn Johnson. *William Blake's Conversations: A Compilation, Concordance, and Rhetorical Analysis*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008. lii + 300 pp. [+ 8 pp. illustrations, 1 color]. $119.95/£74.95, hardcover.

Reviewed by Alexander S. Gourlay

MOST of the primary material in *William Blake's Conversations* will be familiar to those who have studied Gerald E. Bentley's two editions of *Blake Records*, *Blake Records Supplement*, and his 2001 biography, *The Stranger from Paradise*, but the scholarly alchemy effected by distilling reports of Blake's spoken words into a compact volume and adding an array of related tools has created something rich, strange, and likely to prove enduringly useful. Because many of the reports come to us from within a generation or two after Blake's death, they are strongly colored by the late Georgian/early Victorian conception of him: these Blakeish words often seem to reflect the minds of the reporters as much as they reveal the mind of Blake, and as the intervening years and layers of reportage multiply, the share of credible Blake content diminishes. A snippet of Blake's conversation that was worth retelling or recording is likely to have been one that conformed to, or at least resonated with, the other stories about Blake in circulation at the time. Gathered together in largely unmediated form, these reports constitute a portrait of a fellow we might call Anecdotal Blake, a somewhat different being from the persona we moderns know through his works in ink and paint, Autographic Blake. Ironically, Autographic Blake was not very well known to some of the origi-

nal constructors of Anecdotal Blake—even to ones who knew Flesh and Blood Blake himself. Those modern readers who are thoroughly acquainted with Autographic Blake may find the shimmery Anecdotal Blake who rises in these pages to be an uncanny and alien creature, but it is intriguing to hear his voice, and like any chatty ghost he may have things to tell us beyond the grave.

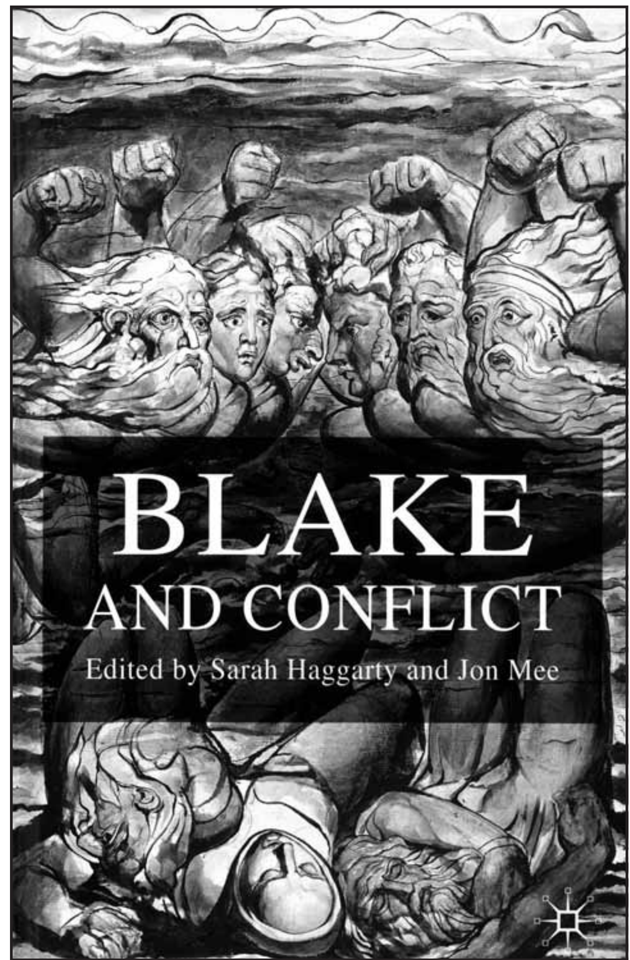
The book begins with an insightful foreword by Mary Lynn Johnson, followed by an engaging set of introductory gestures and prolegomena, most of them a few paragraphs long, by Bentley, then the collected "conversations" themselves. This is a very mixed bag that includes any text that plausibly but indirectly records a Blake statement or something like a Blake statement, even words that he probably did not say, such as the seditious utterings reported in the testimony of the soldier who invaded Blake's garden in Felpham. Presumably the rationale for including this report is that the confrontation definitely did occur and all agree that Blake said something. By contrast, the famous story of naked Blake saying, "Come in, it's only Adam and Eve, you know!" to Thomas Butts in the summer-house is not here (except at least two mentions as an example of what did not make the cut). Though it is only a little less likely on its face than many of the other anecdotes from the same period, the Adam and Eve story is probably apocryphal from top to bottom, and its omission is well deserved. Yet Bentley casts the net for Blakean "conversations" very broadly, including, for instance, at least one unspoken report of a vision reportedly found in a lost letter from Blake to Butts (see below), a fictive conversation between a Blakean persona and Isaiah and Ezekiel from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (10), and an assertion that Blake's wife said she didn't know what Blake meant by *The Book of Urizen* (13). The entries are arranged in rough chronological order, when possible by year of purported utterance, extending from a retrospective account of Blake's telling his mother of angels on Peckham Rye in 1767, to 1831, with the last imagined echoes of Blake's voice, audible at most to Catherine on her deathbed, as she called out "continually to her William, as if he were only in the next room" (81). They are minimally annotated as to source, but most are not otherwise contextualized or qualified. Bentley's commodious criteria make sense: why omit a potentially illuminating bit of second-order information merely because it was not really a conversation, or because it didn't actually involve Blake's saying anything (as in the *Urizen* story above, which usefully indicates that Blake *didn't* talk to Catherine about what some of his works meant), and why clutter the book with inevitably inconclusive assessments of the veracity of the reports?



Bentley's broad definition of "conversation" has payoffs: if he had been more exclusionary he might, for instance, have omitted the anecdote reported at second or third hand by Oswald Crawfurd about a vision Blake supposedly had (and supposedly "afterwards records" somewhere) during his apprenticeship at Basire's, "when he was one day … secluded in … Westminster Abbey." Crawfurd says that Blake reported (apparently in a lost letter to Butts, not in an actual conversation) that he saw "one of his visions": "the aisles and galleries of the old building (or sanctuary) suddenly filled with a great procession of monks and priests, choristers and censer-bearers" (3). This sounds at first like one more of those early accounts that focus on Blake as a man who saw spirits, and the language is utterly unlike Blake's, so one might discount it. But in this case there may be a nonverbal echo of such a vision "afterwards record[ed]" by Blake in later life, though it is unlikely that Crawfurd would have known about it. Among the recently discovered designs to Blair's *Grave* is an unengraved picture that Flaxman called "The Gambols of Ghosts according with their affections previous to the final Judgment," representing the nocturnal activities of phantoms in a churchyard. Blake's scene elaborates upon a passage early in Blair's poem that describes "light-heeled ghosts and visionary shades" that "perform their mystic rounds" around a "trusty yew" beneath "the wan cold moon." The rediscovered watercolor design (which is clearly developed from a sketch that is now in the Yale Cen-

ter for British Art) shows a churchyard occupied by three distinct classes of ghosts performing their "rounds" in their own ways: six "light-heeled" dancers circling the yew, another larger circle of violent quarrelers, victims, and victimizers, and an orderly right-to-left procession of the host composed of pious "visionary shades" bearing tapers, huge tomes, and bread and wine into the church. Blake's decision to expand the population of Blair's churchyard in this particular way may have been inspired in part by a thirty-year-old vision of a ghostly parade in Westminster Abbey.

In addition to the snippets of conversation themselves, Bentley includes several conversation-related scholarly tools. The most useful is probably the concordance of the words used in the reported conversations, but interesting as well are the speculative remarks in the introduction on Blake's pronunciation and the implications of rhymes (xxi-xxxv) and the supporting tables of perfect and imperfect rhymes in the appendices. Throughout the volume Bentley maintains a much lighter scholarly demeanor than one might expect from the author of those magisterial classics, *Blake Books* and *Blake Records*—this assemblage is hosted by Conversational Bentley, a manifestation of the generous and genial Flesh and Blood Bentley that the lucky may meet in person. This Bentley is much too polite and good-natured to acknowledge, say, that a plausible thirdhand anecdote might be unreliable—all tales are treasured here, and accorded pretty much the same respect as an entertaining raconteur at dinner. Similarly, the evidence to be found in Blake's rhymes about the way he probably pronounced words is fascinating but so oblique that it would be difficult to use without extensive qualification. Though there is a danger that some will treat this whole judicious assemblage of somewhat problematic facts as having the same kind of authority as Blake's own words, the lightheartedly learned tone that prevails should inhibit anyone from taking it all too literally.



Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee, eds. *Blake and Conflict*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. xiii + 235 pp. £55.00/$85.00, hardcover.

Reviewed by Christopher Z. Hobson

With *Blake and Conflict* Palgrave Macmillan extends its role as the academic press now most consistently showcasing new Blake scholarship. The volume presents selected revised papers from a conference of the same title held in Oxford in 2006. Although it does not entirely surmount the miscellaneous quality that most conference anthologies have, synergies among several contributions provide a fairly strong thematic coherence.

Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee's introduction outlines two kinds of conflict as salient for the volume, both involving the conversation of "Visionary forms dramatic" that Blake envisions in humanity's future (*Jerusalem* 98, E 257). The first centers on ideological or intellectual conflict as an aspect of pluralistic harmony: Blake, the editors say, imagines "the kind