

Whitehead's detailed and insightful monograph encourages the reader to think anew about familiar materials, and she brings neglected works to scholarly attention. Whitehead's approach demonstrates the value of combining literary analysis with attention to historical circumstance to examine the ever-shifting traditions surrounding saints. *The Afterlife of St Cuthbert* will be of interest to those who work on texts, places, and traditions associated with Cuthbert, and the reception of both pre- and post-Conquest saints more generally.

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JASON WHITTAKER. *Divine Images: The Life and Work of William Blake*. London: Reaktion Books, 2021. Pp. 392. \$50.00 (cloth).
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Jason Whittaker's new book, *Divine Images: The Life and Work of William Blake*, is a solid overview of Blake's life and works. Its real merits are Whittaker's utilization of the most recent discoveries and scholarship regarding Blake and his ability to synthesize complex information about Blake's methods of artistic production, his ever-evolving myth and symbolism, and the tumultuous historical and religious times in which he lived. In producing a popular biography, Whittaker does not aspire to break any new ground but seeks, instead, to synthesize what is known about Blake and his works. This modest focus, however, allows Whittaker, at times, to supplant dated sections of G. E. Bentley Jr.'s standard biography, *The Stranger from Paradise* (2001), in terms of reliability.

This accomplishment is especially true in the first chapter, where Whittaker synthesizes the discoveries regarding Blake's mother and her relationship to the Moravian Church, and Whittaker avoids the clichéd association between Blake and religious Dissent. That said, Whittaker moves rather quickly through the first thirty-plus years of Blake's life, beginning with his parents and ending with the creation of illuminated printing and the other works of the late 1780s. Picking up with the *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *The Book of Thel* (1789), the pace of the second and subsequent chapters slows, and although Whittaker offers important details about Blake's life and context, the works themselves are at the forefront of his account.

Whittaker's readings of the *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and the *Songs of Experience* (1794) appear in different chapters, and, implicitly, he follows the idea that the two sets of poems reflect a change not only in society, which was transformed by the French Revolution and the war between France and Britain, but also within Blake himself. Whittaker highlights many of the backward-facing gestures of *Innocence*, such as the use of Elizabethan metrical forms, the motifs of eighteenth-century children's verse, and the echoes of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Importantly, he also emphasizes that innocence was essential to Blake's political thought and insightfully comments that this elevation of innocence is what allowed Blake to escape the cynicism and despair that made his fellow Romantics reject political radicalism (72). Coming after his analysis of *America* (1793) and *Europe* (1794), Whittaker's reading of *Experience* is positioned within the political context of reactionary Britain, and he stresses that Blake's responses to these events were at once political, aesthetic, and spiritual.

In his treatment of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *America a Prophecy* (1793), and the engravings to John Stedman's *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1793), Whittaker brings a welcomed, contemporary sensibility to issues of race, gender, and sexuality to Blake's depictions of rape and slavery. He highlights Blake's ability to expose the cultural forces that at once constitute identity and form the basis of

oppression, and he consistently acknowledges the role that Blake's wife, Catherine, played in helping to create the works at various stages of production.

Whittaker is also very strong in his concise accounts of the literary and religious influences that contributed to Blake's thought. Properly, John Milton is most often referenced, but Whittaker also traces the roles Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante, and Ossian all had in shaping Blake's literary style. Discussing religious influences, Whittaker provides a very accessible introduction to the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg and the founding of both the Theosophic Society (a reading society for those sympathetic to Swedenborg's teaching) and the New Jerusalem Church (a registered Dissenting Church whose orthodox strictures Blake ultimately rejected). This leads to his reading of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), which incorporates Joseph Viscomi's account of how the work evolved from an anti-Swedenborgian pamphlet to what Whittaker terms "a joyful manifesto" (109).

Whittaker's explication of Blake's mythological system in chapter five is admirably lucid, and it lays a firm groundwork for his overview of Blake's epics, *The Four Zoas* (c. 1796–1807), *Milton* (c. 1804–1811), and *Jerusalem* (c. 1804–1820), which succeeds in giving readers a sense of some of the key issues at play in the works without losing them in their profound density. Whittaker is also to be commended for not letting the later illuminated books dominate his account, and he is attuned to the fact that in the nineteenth century, Blake was working predominantly as a visual artist. Works like the Bible illustrations, the illustrations to *Night Thoughts*, the illustrations of Milton, the 1809 exhibition, and the Chaucer project all receive the attention they deserve, and Whittaker's account of Blake's life ends properly with a discussion of the Illustrations of the Book of Job and illustrations of the *Divine Comedy* rather than *Jerusalem*.

Given Whittaker's previous scholarship on Blake's reception, it is little surprise that the concluding chapter on Blake's legacy is perhaps the strongest. He efficiently surveys the Victorian recovery of Blake by the Gilchrist and the Rossettis and traces his impact on different literary and cultural movements through the twenty-first century, emphasizing Blake's continued importance today.

My complaints regarding the book are few. Whittaker's generosity to his fellow scholars can sometimes result in a fragmented tone, and, at times, I wished for more synthesis or simply Whittaker's own insightful perspective. The images in the book are of very high quality, and they are printed on heavy, glossy paper that captures minute details. But the layout of the book itself is unfortunately off-putting. The font is so big that I initially thought I had received a large print edition, and on the pages without illustrations, the interior gutter of each page well exceeds an inch and a half, creating almost four inches of white space between the columns of text that themselves are only slightly over four inches wide themselves. As a consequence, the book reads much quicker than nearly four hundred pages should, but I was disappointed only for wanting more of an admirable accomplishment.

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