

Michael Phillips, ed., *William Blake. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2011. Pp. 173. 52 plates. £50 (hb). ISBN 9781851243419. £14.99 (pb). ISBN 9781851243662.

How did Blake compose his works in illuminated printing? When did he complete *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*? And what is the critical relevance of these questions, particularly about the overall coherence of the work, the relation of its narrative voices, and the political contexts to which it is addressed? These are the central issues discussed by Michael Phillips in this new book.

The centrepiece of the book is its facsimile of the Bodleian copy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, so-called copy B. This is plainly printed, with only very occasional water-colour washes, which has the advantage that elements of the engraved plate covered by colour in other copies are here visible. It is beautifully reproduced, with a transcription of the text, an introduction discussing the work's date and contexts and Blake's methods of composition and printing, and a fresh account of the development of his view of Swedenborg. The facsimile includes supplementary illustrations – versions of plate 14 from each of the eight extant copies to show the variety of Blake's printings and colouration of the same image; and plates 12-15 from copy G (c.1818), in which these plates were re-ordered (15, 14, 12, 13), probably (as Phillips argues) to open up new ways of reading. A detailed plate-by-plate commentary summarises and contextualises the argument, reports and discusses readings from a range of scholarly and critical work, reproduces for discussion the most minute details of designs, and records allusions (to the Bible, Swedenborg, Dante, Spenser, Milton) and design analogues elsewhere in Blake's work (in illuminated books, drawings, colour prints). A checklist gives details of the extant copies.

Almost uniquely among Blake's works of this period *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is undated, and Blake did not put his name on the title page. Both facts are open to interpretation. Phillips relates the second to the first: the work appeared in a context of prosecution of radicals – in 1793. This dating has become controversial. The long-accepted dating was indeed 1790-1793 (Keynes, Bentley), with a supposition that the work was not finished until at least late 1792 (Erdman), that is, in the context of British reactionary response to the most bloody phase of the French Revolution. More recently it has been argued (David Bindman, Robert Essick, Joseph Viscomi) that the work was completed quickly in 1790, the dawn of radical exuberance in which it was bliss to be alive. This view of the work's date is often associated with ideas about its composition: that Blake composed directly onto the copper plates, not transcribing from fair copies; that he produced multiple copies of colour-printed works in short printing sessions, with all that implies about his intended readership; and specifically with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that it is not a coherent counterpointing of multiple voices but a work of 'fractured discontinuities'. Phillips argues against all three views.

The main peculiarity of *Marriage* copy B is a 'frontispiece', an intaglio etching, 'Our End is come'. This is dated: 5 June 1793. Whether it was bound with copy B by Blake, or by a later owner, there is no way of telling. It is my own view that Phillips is correct about Blake's compositional methods, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell's* (evidently highly various) fundamental unity, and the completion date of 1793. I find it difficult to agree only that 'Our End is come' helps establish this. Phillips has (for the first time) identified the source of this title phrase in *Lamentations* (4.18). However, his apparent identification of the fear as Blake's ('He must have felt himself a hunted man', 26) seems to me at odds with the image. Blake later (probably after 1805) reworked the plate, and retitled it 'The Accusers of Theft Adultery Murder', adding the inscription 'A Scene in the Last Judgement | Satans holy

Trinity The Accuser The Judge & The Executioner'. Certainly Blake was likely to re-interpret his own images when he returned to them in a new context, but even in the first state of the etching found with *Marriage* copy B, the figure to the right is military (in armour), and the central figure – the figure most obviously signifying terror at his approaching end – is identified by his crown as a king. The end prophesied is not that of radicals but of tyrants and the military and judicial apparatus that supports them. And I am puzzled to know, if Blake did not put his name and the date on *Marriage* in 1793 because he feared prosecution, how he so clearly put his name and the date on this prophecy of doom for the opponents of radicalism. It suggests to me that, if Phillips is right about *Marriage* – as I think broadly he is – the unique association of this plate with copy B came about later. If so, what here appears as a 'frontispiece' is properly a separate plate, and a side issue. The facsimile makes available, in the form in which Blake intended, a new copy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, of which the introduction and commentary make this an important scholarly edition.

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