



R E V I E W

Fernando Castanedo, ed. and trans. *William Blake, Augurios de inocencia*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2020. 178 pp. €13.50, softcover.

Reviewed by Alexander S. Gourlay

ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY (agourlay@risd.edu) teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design.

1 **F**ERNANDO Castanedo's bilingual critical edition of the ten poems from the so-called Pickering Manuscript is impressive, a sensitive translation into Spanish combined with scholarly commentary and apparatus of very high quality. This book will win Blake Spanish-speaking friends

wherever it goes, but there may be some confusion about what's in it. On the back cover Castanedo explains his title by referring to a tradition of naming a manuscript collection after its "most celebrated" poem. "Auguries" is the longest and most important poem in the group, and as a title it is an informative improvement on "The Pickering Manuscript," since Pickering was merely an early owner, but the Spanish equivalent of "Poems from the 'Auguries' Manuscript" might have been better.

- 2 In general this volume gets things just right. Castanedo writes clearly in both English and Spanish, and is a judicious, thorough, and painstaking scholar as well as a gifted translator. His renderings capture many of the subtleties of Blake's verse, ranging from sweetly fluid lyric to pounding incantation, and perhaps because rhymes are plentiful in Spanish, many are preserved without greatly compromising sense or sonority. At the same time, one rarely feels that poetics are determinative for Castanedo in his role as translator; in general, thought appears to have precedence over other considerations, and he seems to have consulted every available scholarly commentary in order to preserve as much as possible of the meaning of these disparate poems, many of them difficult.
- 3 Consider the opening stanzas of "El psiconauta," Castanedo's version of "The Mental Traveller":

Viajé por el país de unos hombres  
de hombres y mujeres también  
y escuché y vi tales horrores  
que nadie pudiera creer

allí al nacer el niño ríe  
aunque se engendra con dolor  
igual que alegres cosechamos  
lo sembrado con aflicción

My line-by-line prose retranslation indicates the extent of his success in capturing the wonderful strangeness of Blake's poem:

The Psychonaut

I traveled through a country of certain men  
Of men and women too  
And I heard and saw such horrors  
As no one could believe

There at birth the boy laughs  
Although engendered with pain  
Just as we reap happily  
What was sowed with sorrow

The retranslation is clumsy, but the Castanedo version is pretty good, especially the second stanza. I think it is better

than Pablo Neruda's version,<sup>1</sup> most of which is more literal and less lyrical, but I have a few quibbles. The laughter of the boy expressed in "ríe" does not include the parallel implication that instead of suffering in labor, the mother shares in the joy, the visionary alternative to bearing children in pain. Also, the translated title is ingenious, but unless Castanedo was trying to avoid Neruda's title, "El viajero mental," I am not sure what motivated it. A *psiconauta* might be either a seafarer whose vessel is the mind (like an Argonaut, who sails in the Argo) or one who sails the mind (as an astronaut sails among the stars); furthermore, the idea of sailing introduces an extraneous spatial element that obscures the idea of purely mental anthropological exploration. And finally, I miss the "cold Earth wanderers" passed by in line 4, but I am more impressed by Blake's suggestive efficiency than critical of Castanedo's translation when I try to imagine a line that could include the wanderers and everything else squeezed into the words "As cold Earth wanderers never knew."

- 4 In addition to the transcription in English and the translation—both annotated—on facing pages, this small volume contains fourteen more discrete editorial components, including a critical biography (with the Blakes as Adam and Eve in the garden), an exhaustive bibliography, the history of the manuscript, three textual appendices, and a full-color reduced reproduction. Castanedo cuts no corners; the work seems to have been conceived as a full scholarly edition that happens to be in Spanish, mostly, rather than a crib for literature students with weak English or a shallow popularization, though some of its features (the biography, for instance) might not appear in an English scholarly edition with such a narrow focus. Together these disparate adjunctive materials make it potentially useful as a pocket-size introduction to one corner of Blake for the general public, as a textbook for undergraduates, or as an aid to scholarship or pedagogy for a graduate student or beginning teacher.

1. Pablo Neruda, *Visiones de las hijas de Albión y El viajero mental* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Botella al Mar, 1947). These translations first appeared in the journal *Cruz y raya* in 1934.