Christine Gallant, Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 13, Issue 4, Spring 1980, pp. 200-202

Christine Gallant's *Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos* offers a Jungian interpretation of Blake's major prophecies. Accordingly, this study equates chaos with the Jungian unconscious and reads *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem* as expressions of the mythmaking process whereby Blake, through the use of what we can now identify as Jungian archetypes, was able to move from the "static" mythology of the Lambeth books to a more dynamic mythology--a mythology of "ongoing process"--by assimilating chaos or the unconscious. Blake achieves this assimilation by recognizing that chaos and creation, non-myth and myth, are necessary polarities that must co-exist in the reintegrated psyche. Gallant sees Blake's mythic system in the Lambeth books as being static because, she contends, it contains a dualism still closely allied to traditional Judeo-Christian millenarian thinking, which, according to Gallant, posited a linear vision of time and projected an eschatological vision that would totally exclude the darker aspects of the human psyche. In *The Four Zoas*, on the other hand, Blake begins to reject this dualistic view, as he enters into chaos and fully explores its psychological implications. Blake's first major prophecy, then, is a record of "consciousness...trying to comprehend the unconscious without being overwhelmed by it." depicting (1) a descent into the unconscious (the fall of the Zoas, who are agents of the conscious mind); (2) the revelation of the darker aspects of the unconscious (such as the manifestation of Vasa as the "Devouring Mother" archetype), which the conscious mind either succumbs to or rejects; and (3) the acceptance of the unconscious through the imaginatively use of its energies to create a mandala, a holistic vision that integrates consciousness with the unconscious (represented most prominently by the building of Golgonooza). In the last two Nights of *The Four Zoas* Antichrist is recognized as the "dark aspects of the [Jungian] Self," a complement of Christ that must be accepted and "incorporated into the process of Regeneration rather than being cast out." The apocalyptic ninth Night, with its invocation of agrarian imagery, becomes, for Gallant, the ritualized re-enactment of the "myth of the eternal return" (as defined by Mircea Eliade), playing out the necessarily cyclic interaction and interdependence of Christ and Antichrist, cosmos and chaos, as a universal, repetitive "cycle of generation, death and regeneration."

Having traced this Jungian pattern in *The Four Zoas*, Gallant sees similar patterns working on the biographical level in *Milton* and on the public level in *Jerusalem*. *Milton* is described as Blake's autobiographical journey through the Jungian process of individuation, as Blake recognizes and penetrates his persona (his socially correct self, represented by Satan-Hayley), incorporates his Shadow (the darker side of his psyche) and avoids being overwhelmed by the archetypes of the unconscious through the invocation of Milton as the archetype of the Wise Old Man, an archetype that helps Blake's
conscious ego avoid the temptation to appropriate to itself the mana (or power) of the unconscious and thus helps him escape schizophrenia (either seeing his visions as objective reality, or perceiving himself as a literal incarnation of Milton). Like Milton and The Four Zoas, Jerusalem is treated as an exploration of the unconscious, but, Gallant says, in his last major prophecy Blake, from the very beginning, more confidently affirms his hard-won acceptance of the unconscious and uses this new consciousness to diagnose and attempt to cure the psychological/sociological ills of nineteenth-century England, the cause of which is Albion's failure to acknowledge and come to terms with the unconscious. As in The Four Zoas, the apocalypse is initiated by the recognition and acceptance of the unconscious, in the form of the Antichrist, as the source of energy for the reintegration of man's fallen psyche.

If this necessarily simplified summary of Gallant's argument makes Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos appear to be reductive in its application of Jungian psychology to Blake's poetry, a more detailed examination of the argument would only serve to confirm this conclusion. Although Gallant clearly shows the attractiveness of Jungian psychology as a potential tool for analyzing Blake's works and begins her study with a caveat against the pitfalls of carelessly imposing Jung's system upon Blake's, her performance undermines her own good intentions and becomes an unintentional example of the dangers of imposing another system upon Blake's. While scholars such as Northrop Frye, Mary Lynn Johnson and Brian Wilkie have been more wisely cautious in their application of modern psychological systems, valuing these systems mainly as analogues that may aid in our understanding of Blake, Gallant asserts that "it is only through attention to the changing pattern of Jungian archetypes" (the italics are hers) that we can understand the changes that occurred in Blake's myth during the composition of The Four Zoas. Her determination to demonstrate the value of Jung's system of existence to the reintegration of Blake's poetic process leads to the kind of oversimplification of Blake that she warns against, as well as to some serious misreadings of the texts and some distortions of Blake's thought.

The biggest problem underlying Blake and the Assimilation of Chaos is its use of the term "chaos." A great deal of Gallant's argument begs the question because of her unproven and unqualified equation of the Jungian concept of the unconscious with Blake's idea of chaos. As most readers of Blake are aware, Blake names many different things "chaos" and represents many things as being chaotic: the void created by Urizen's fall and the equally chaotic laws inscribed in his book of brass in The Book of Urizen, the social disorder described in America and Europe, the states of "Non-entity" and "Eternal Death" mentioned in numerous prophecies, the Mundane Shell, the "unorganized Blots & Blurs" of bad art--to name just a few examples. In short, Blake applies the word "chaos" and its analogues to everything that is not imaginatively organized (including rational constructs such as Deism) and not exclusively to what we can recognize as Jung's idea of the unconscious. To be sure, some of the voids described or mentioned by Blake, such as the one created by Urizen's fall in The Book of Urizen and Urthona's dens in The Four Zoas resemble the unconscious; but more often than not Blake uses chaos as a means of identifying modes of false consciousness or false vision. Therefore, not every mention or depiction of chaos represents Blake's confrontation with the unconscious, nor do symbols of error, which Blake desires to cast out, represent the unconscious that must be acknowledged and assimilated.

This loose application of terminology undermines Gallant's argument, leading either to confusion or to conclusions anathetical to Blake's basic tenets. For instance, it is absurd to assert that Blake accepts chaos and creation as necessary polarities of existence when Blake himself asserts in The Vision of the Last Judgment that the idea of a creation ex nihilo "is the most pernicious idea that can enter the Mind, as it takes away all sublimity from the Bible & Limits All Existence to Creation & to Chaos." For Blake, the necessary polarity to creation is Eternity. Of course, it can be argued that in the passage I have quoted Blake is using chaos in a different sense than he usually does in his prophecies, but that is just the point: one needs to discriminate among these different ideas of chaos if the term is to have any value. Similarly, while Blake's Antichrist may represent chaos, he does not represent the unconscious or even symbolize unconscious forces that must be accepted as a necessary polarity of existence. Here Gallant completely disregards Blake's distinction between contraries and negations, and she also overlooks Blake's statements about the apocalypse as the casting out of error. When she says that Blake's advocacy of the wiry bounding line in opposition to chaos "no longer holds" in Jerusalem, since she sees chaos as an essential part of Blake's final vision, Gallant seeks to reconcile that which Blake desires to separate: the imaginative vision that triumphs over chaos.

This tendency to impose Jungian categories indiscriminately upon Blake's poetry persists throughout the book. In her analysis of The Four Zoas, Gallant tactfully resists the temptation simply to identify the emanations with the Jungian anima, but by the time we reach Milton we are told that Leutha and Ololon are both anima figures. Without explanation or qualification, Ulro becomes the personal unconscious. The nameless shadowy female in the Preludium to Europe, because of her snake-like hair, is likened to and thus identified with Medusa, who is an archetype of the threatening unconscious; and to support this interpretation Gallant accordingly describes the female's speech as being "savage," despite the fact that the form of her speech (a lament), Blake's allusions to Spenser and the Wisdom Books of the Bible, and the tone and rhetoric of the passage itself make the female an object of pathos rather than terror. In the analysis of Milton, Blake's poetic forebear is identified as the archetype of the Wise Old Man, even though in every illustration and most of the poetry Milton appears as a man in his prime.
In pursuing this kind of analysis, all too often Gallant uses the following rhetorical pattern: (1) Blake says x; (2) x resembles Jung's (or Eliade's) concept of y; (3) therefore y is identical to and explains x. This confusion of resemblance with identity, caused by a failure to notice important distinctions, produces, among other problems, a total misapprehension of Blake's concept of time. Drawing upon the agricultural imagery in Night Nine of The Four Zoas, Gallant equates Blake's apocalypse with the agrarian rituals that Mircea Eliade interprets as the re-enactment of the cyclical "myth of the eternal return," the repeated process of generation, death and regeneration. Through this ritual re-enactment, "sacred time" abolishes profane time, as the participants in the ritual return to the primordial moment when creation emerges out of chaos. Gallant distinguishes this concept of time from "the linear-Judaic" concept of time, perceiving the latter as dominant in Blake's earlier poetry and the former as a new concept of time that Blake unconsciously reached in the process of writing The Four Zoas. This argument not only misconstrues Blake's concept of time in his earlier and later prophecies, but oversimplifies the biblical concept of time as well. Like the "consciously inspired" writers of the Bible, Blake was aware of the implications of the agrarian myths and rituals of the pagans; and, as we see in Europe, Blake represents and rejects the idea of mythic-cyclical time through the symbol of Enitharmon's sleep. In this work and in his other prophecies as well, Blake sees time as being both cyclical and progressive--a view of time that is perfectly in accord with the Bible and with eschatological tradition, as M. H. Abrams and Ronald L. Grimes have pointed out. While the narrative of the Bible is essentially linear, it progresses by repetition, as can be seen most obviously in the allusions to the Old Testament in the New and in the repetition of key motifs even within the Old Testament. Through this repetition of types, a dialectic of constancy and change, repetition and progress, cyclical and linear time, is at work in the Bible; and it is at work in Blake's poetry as well. Against the essentially conservative duplication of the processes of nature through the use of myth, both Blake and the Bible posit the continual radical re-creation of divine events through the use of types, which are rooted in man's historical experience. This distinction between mythology and typology--and the concept of time that each implies--lies at the very heart of Blake's aesthetic and explains, in part, Blake's preference for the Bible over the classics. To say that Blake abandons historical time in favor of mythical time is to ignore the function of history in his prophecies and to forget that, however radical his Christianity may be, Blake is still a Christian poet whose very radicalism is derived from and sustained by Judeo-Christian tradition.