

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

N E W S

The Limit of Opakeness

Michael Ferber

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 23, Issue 4, Spring 1990, p. 211



NEWSLETTER

THE LIMIT OF OPAKENESS

Blake announces a regular feature to be called "The Limit of Opakeness." It will consist of one or more brief articles that attempt to solve a Blakean crux.

With each issue we shall propose one or two difficult short passages and invite essays of no more than 750 words each. What is a crux for one person, of course, may seem easy to another, and some of our passages will strike some readers as poor choices. For that reason we will welcome suggestions. We may even print a consensus list of opaque passages.

Many of us Blake scholars remember first reading some of the magisterial critics and wondering how they came to know everything so confidently (and why they passed over in silence just those passages that were bothering us); they were as intimidating as they were inspiring. Some of us still hate to admit we can't figure certain passages out. "The Limit of Opakeness" will encourage candor and collaboration, and it ought to be rewarding to diminish Satan's domain bit by bit, issue by issue.

We welcome any and all approaches and will judge them all by the same rough standard: do they seem to clear up the difficulty to any appreciable extent? We recognize that some schools of criticism might find this a retrograde enterprise and offer to deconstruct the opposition between crux and "easy" passage. Let them do so, and if in the process they actually throw light on what we call a crux, we'll publish their essays, too. We ask only that the writing be clear and succinct: there is no Limit of Translucence.

This feature will run on a trial basis, and will last as long as good articles are submitted. We might set design cruxes as well (and welcome suggestions for them), but at first we will confine ourselves to the words.

For the first round, we invite essays on either of two passages from the "Bard's Song" of *Milton* 5:39-41 (on Charles, Milton, Cromwell, and James) and 8:11-12 (Los puts his left sandal on his head).

Please send contributions to Michael Ferber, Department of English, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824. He will give them a first reading and then confer with the editors over which of them will be published.

Michael Ferber

BLAKE'S FATE AT THE TATE

For the last 60 years or so the Tate has always had a selection of works by William Blake from its collection on display. There has never been any doubt during this period that Blake's unique achievement should be represented within the context of British art as a whole and that the Tate, as the National Gallery of British Art, was the place where this was best done. This still remains the Tate's view. It has been done, moreover, in a way not possible for other public collections in the UK which hold Blakes: in the form of a display, on the walls, permanently accessible to the everyday gallery goer. It is the Tate's intention that this should continue to be the case.

Achieving this successfully, particularly with the light-sensitive works on paper which make up the bulk of the artist's output, has been a matter of some pride—to the extent that the Tate has had two rather special "Blake Rooms": the first, the present Gallery 2 which, following the accessioning of 70 works from 1918-1922, was decorated in 1923 with a mosaic floor (still *in situ*) by Boris Anrep illustrating Blake's "Proverbs." The second is a very different room, which was inserted into one of the Tate's conventional top-lit daylit galleries. This gallery, which opened in 1978, for the first time provided the correct controlled levels of temperature, humidity, and light required to ensure that Blake's work, while being on more or less permanent display, did not deteriorate. This

"Blake Room," which was undoubtedly familiar to readers of *Blake*, finally closed in November 1989.

This latest move arises from our present task of redisplaying the entire Tate collection to make the best of our limited gallery space. Our first requirement, and the most pressing, was the need to rehang all the main galleries in the Tate—an idea put forward by the Director and accepted by the Trustees in principle at the end of 1988. Over the last decade a number of exercises were done, on paper, with just this end in view. What usually emerged from these exercises was the conclusion that any attempt at rearranging the chronological sequence of Historic British paintings into galleries would be thwarted by the presence of the Blake Room. No rearrangement ever quite succeeded in demonstrating that the works of Blake could both remain in their specially designed gallery and still be near or adjacent to works by the artist's contemporaries.

The other issue of immediate concern was that the airconditioning plant for the Blake Room had reached its end and was due to be replaced during 1990 (at which time the Blakes would have to be unhung). In the knowledge that no thoroughgoing reshuffle of the British Collection and Modern Collection could work if the Blakes were to remain where they were, it seemed neither sensible nor realistic to renew this plant when the effect of doing so would be to perpetuate a situation which restricted our room for maneuver.

The upshot is that the group of works by Blake and his followers are now housed in the smaller, un-airconditioned Gallery 12, adjacent to the room in which they were displayed during the mid-1970s. In adjacent rooms will be works by, for example, Fuseli, De Louthembourg, Stothard, John Martin, and John Linnell.

The most obvious change brought about by this new arrangement will be—now that they are shown in a smaller room—fewer works by Blake