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Q U E R Y

Flaxman and Blake on Wordsworth's "Jehovah... I pass... unalarmed"

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symbolism even in the "final" version--as in Jerusalem too, of course.

As a result of our discussion in Denver I am even more confident that Miss Raine has not discovered texts that this picture is primarily designed to illustrate. And I am much attracted to Mrs. Warner's idea that the viewer is expected to work out the meaning of the picture as a result of studying it rather than by looking elsewhere, even at other Blake pictures, for "the key." But other texts and pictures may at least strengthen our willingness to believe that what we are seeing is intelligible. It was evident that the company in Seminar 23 contained few art historians since the mere existence of the many river urns seemed remarkable, whereas Blake would have supposed this symbolism to be completely familiar to his viewer. But Blake almost always repeats his major symbols so that one can pick them up elsewhere in his work without having to ransack all previous periods of painting for a clue. He uses the river urns twice in the Gray designs, as was remarked during the Seminar, and again "The Sunshine Holiday," the fourth design for L'Allegro. And the huge rope distaff is often employed, notably on the titlepage for Night the First of Night Thoughts, no. 6 and, in a more closely related context, in Night Thoughts no. 30, as well as in the Cumberland card. Like the shuttle of Enitharmon in the cave of the weavers, also shown in the Cumberland card, it points to the beginning and the end of things, as in J 100, the MLA topic in 1968. The moral for interpreters is to be found by juxtaposing J 25 with J 77: in the former case the foolish curiosity of the three dispassionate virgins leads them to murder and dismember the father of us all. In the latter, the growing boy will not remain lost because he is able to follow the golden clue wherever it leads out of the forests of the night.

- TO BE CONTINUED -

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QUERIES

1. Can anyone produce a convincing explanation of the following curious coincidence? It is reported in a footnote on page 443 of the revised edition of Erdman's BLAKE: PROPHET AGAINST EMPIRE (paper & cloth):

... a curious pair of entries in Crabb Robinson's diary ... suggest that critical opinion somehow got from Flaxman to Blake at least as late as the latter part of 1814, after the publication of Wordsworth's Excursion. On Dec. 19, 1814, Flaxman heard Robinson read aloud some passages out of the Excursion and "took umbrage at some mystical expressions ... in which Wordsworth talks of seeing Jehovah unalarmed. 'If my brother had written that,' said Flaxman, 'I should say, "Burn it."'" Flaxman and Lamb and Robinson debated the passage. Eleven years later, Dec. 10, 1825, when Robinson first met Blake, the

latter, evidently primed by the earlier debate, asked about Wordsworth's Christianity and "said he had been much pained by reading the Introduction to 'The Excursion.' It brought on a fit of illness. The passage was produced and read ... This 'pass them unalarmed' greatly offended Blake ... Wordsworth was finally set down as a Pagan; but still with high praise, as the greatest poet of the age."

Does this mean that (as Erdman deduces) Flaxman told Blake what he thought of the passage? Or that Blake read the Excursion when it came out and told Flaxman? Or neither? What a brother's keeper Flaxman was!

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2. Nobody knows how Blake spoke and so every Blake student is free to pronounce Blake's invented names as he or she chooses. The following instances are put forward tentatively for discussion:-

URIZEN	pronounced	URĪ'ZEN (near HORIZON)	not UR'ĪZEN
		UR like ERR	not YUR
		URĪ	not UREE
LOS	pronounced	LÖSS	not LÖCE
LUVAM	pronounced	LOVER	not LOOV
VALA	pronounced	VEILER (VĀ'LER)	not VAR
OLOLON	pronounced	OLÖ' LÖN	not OL'ÖLON

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WORKS IN PROGRESS

- ADLARD, John: a book on the folklore sources of William Blake, to be published in the near future by Cecil and Amelia Woolf, London.
- AULT, Donald: book-length study: "Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton;" and a shorter study of perspective ontology in The Four Zoas.