

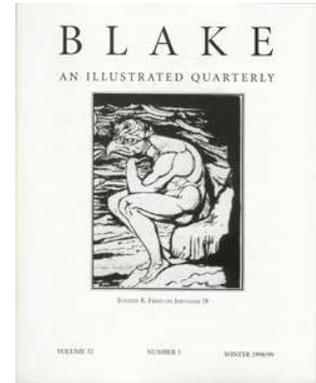
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R E V I E W

**Wayne Glausser, Locke and Blake: A Conversation  
across the Eighteenth Century**

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Wayne Glauesser, *Locke and Blake: A Conversation Across the Eighteenth Century*.  
Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.  
1998. xi + 201pp. \$49.95.

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Despite its title, this is not a philosophical book;<sup>1</sup> instead, it is "a composite critical biography . . . neither continuous nor complete" (ix), narrating and discussing episodes for comparison. The incompleteness of the biographical accounts results in part from a shortage of evidence ("records are scarce from [Locke's] years in political exile" [3], and "neither man said much of anything about his mother" [13], but to a greater degree it results from a selectivity in favor of coincidence.

An introductory chapter states the book's aim to suggest a conversation between Locke and Blake, in imitative or

<sup>1</sup> For accounts of the philosophical issues that are important for a comparison of Locke with Blake, see Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton UP, 1947), which Glauesser mentions briefly, and also two books which Glauesser does not mention: Morton Paley, *Energy and Imagination* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1970); and Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind* (Tuscaloosa, U of Alabama P, 1985).

rhetorical accordance with Locke's remark that "'Difference of Opinions in conversation' brings about 'the greatest Advantage of Society'" (3, quoting Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*). The second chapter affirms that "both [Locke and Blake] participated in conventional representations of gendered desire, yet both of them resisted traditional romantic plots and looked for alternatives to ordinary marriage" (12); this chapter narrates some of Locke's "amorous relationships" (15) and "Blake's feelings about conjugal love" (43) that involved challenging Locke's representation of the body. Chapter 4 shows that Locke condemned slavery and also "participated in the slave trade" (62), whereas Blake's opposition to slavery was not similarly contradictory. In chapter 5, the book explains that "both were accused of sedition" but "neither was convicted" (92). A chapter on the topic of possessions and theory of property proceeds by comparing the anger that each man expressed when he thought that someone had stolen a picture from him. Another chapter explains "Locke's immersion in print consciousness and Blake's reaction against it" (145). The concluding chapter compares Locke's epitaph (" . . . A scholar by training, he devoted his studies wholly to the pursuit of truth") with Blake's inscription in an autograph album (" . . . what is done without meaning is very different from that which a Man Does with his Thought & Mind"), and Glauesser paraphrases: "artists try to create meaningful structures against the reign of 'Nature' and 'Chance,' full of hogs and humans, signifying nothing" (165).

Some of the research is primary, referring to Locke's papers that are now in the Bodleian Library, but most draws on familiar sources—e.g., Maurice Cranston's biography of Locke, E. S. DeBeer's edition of Locke's letters, and Bentley's *Blake Records*.<sup>2</sup> Some of the research and argumentation is both interesting and important—on, for example, the contradictions in Locke's responses (in writing and in his own financial investments) to slavery, and on Locke's involvement in the print trade, literally and in his development of print metaphors. Sometimes, however, the reliance on secondary research leads to problems, as it almost inevitably will: Glauesser attributes to a personal letter written by Damaris Cudworth a passage about "an Active Sagacitie in the Soul whereby something being Hinted to Her she runs out into a More Cleare and large Conception," whereas that passage was written by Henry More, her father's fellow Cambridge Platonist; Damaris Cudworth is merely quoting.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957); E. S. DeBeer, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976-83); G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969); Bentley, *Blake Records Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> The sentence, from Henry More's *Antidote Against Atheism*, is both quoted and attributed to More in Hoagwood's *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind* 14.

Given the readership of *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, I should point out that the discussions of Blake's writings are thematic in what was once a conventional manner, as in the important books by S. Foster Damon,<sup>4</sup> translating Blake's signifiers into abstract ideas: for example, in *Jerusalem*, "Blake used 'female space' to mean an illusory infinity that makes someone feel small and impotent" (5). Clearly, some of the topics discussed in *Locke and Blake*—slavery, gender, sedition—are shared among studies much more recent than Damon's,<sup>5</sup> but the interpretive method and project in this book are often apparently innocent of theoretical sophistication: "The speaker is Leutha, Satan/Hayley's emanation, who tells of his feminization and consequent attraction to Palambron/Blake." A note discredits the biographical equivalence ("no Blakean character should ever be reduced to its biographical referent" [171n90]), but there the discredited interpretation sits.

Sometimes the interpretive reductions involve an apparent exploitation of a coincidence, or an apparent attempt rhetorically to invent a connection between Locke and Blake: for example, in comparing Blake's putatively therapeutic mission with Locke's actual work as a physician, Glausser writes that Blake "liked to represent England as a single body (Albion), whose health . . . would be restored" (53). Observing that "Locke's philosophy had turned the body from 'the human form divine' into an atomized material object" and that "Blake's renovated imagination would undo the damage," Glausser produces this passage (*Milton* 26: 31-33) as an illustration of the supposedly shared interest in healing a physical body: "And every Generated Body in its inward form, / Built by the Sons of Los in Bowlahoola and Allamanda." I would suggest, however, that, rather than resembling Locke's work as a physician, that passage might be susceptible of a figurative interpretation. Sometimes the interpretive reductions in *Locke and Blake* express what might appear to be naive intentionalism, saying, for example, that "Blake wanted to reenchant the body by finding primary spiritual causes" (53); after a few decades of rigorously antifoundational theorizing, many of us would be shy of saying, on the basis of a literary text, what the author "wanted" thereby. To think of the author as a function, for instance, as Foucault suggests, dissolves the terms of the question; any variety of deconstruction (e.g., Kenneth Burke's, or Derrida's, or DeMan's) would see that the terms of the question *are terms* and not per-

sons; Marxists have been loudly critical of the bourgeois construction of the individual on which that interpretive remark about what Blake "wanted" is based; and I (or you) could go on: it is very late in the theoretical day to affirm, as if with confidence, and merely on the basis of a poem's text, what "Blake wanted." Even the desire to write in that way is starting to look obsolete.

What is best about the book, then, is not its scholarship or its interpretations, and not (to my mind) the sometimes far-fetched or merely rhetorical constructions of analogy, but rather its easy-going anecdotalism, which is most enjoyable when one no longer has to worry about whether the research is original, derived, or mixed, or whether the interpretations are rigorous. The chapter on seditious plots, for example, narrates Locke's possible involvement in conspiracies and comments interestingly on the legally seditious character of some passages in the manuscript of *Two Treatises of Government* as well as radical texts that may or may not have been written by Locke; and, noticing that Locke destroyed his letters that pertained to conspiracies against the king, Glausser infers sensibly that "Locke, like other radicals, may have encrypted his references to plots with metaphors of gardening, medicine, business, and so forth" (95). (I will add that the practice of encryption that Glausser describes was in fact so commonplace that Swift was able to satirize it hilariously in part 3 of *Gulliver's Travels*, where decryption experts in political employment decode the remark, "Our brother Tom has got the piles.")

Literary studies have been showing a great deal of interest in several of the topics mentioned in this clearly written book, including slavery, gender, and sedition; and further, the "conversation" model has been gathering interest as well, though *Locke and Blake* is innocent of the sort of theoretical complications associated with Jerome McGann's dialogues or the work of Bakhtin on which McGann's dialogism is largely based.<sup>6</sup> Further still, the book is free of the sort of sentences that one's undergraduate students will profess an inability to understand. For Blakeans unfamiliar with Locke or for Lockeans unfamiliar with Blake, there is probably interesting biographical material here with some likewise interesting discussion of its implications in intellectual history. While one cannot foresee the book's having an effect in the scholarly fields, it is, for all those reasons, likely to interest those with sufficient leisure to read it.

<sup>4</sup> S. Foster Damon, *William Blake* (New York: P. Smith, 1924); and Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence: Brown UP, 1965).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., John Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: New Press, 1993); Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Politics, Philosophy, and the Production of Romantic Texts* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> For one example, see George Mannejc, Ann Mack, J. J. Rome, and Joann McGrem, "A Dialogue on Dialogue," *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 2 (1991). On McGann's interest in Bakhtin, see Anne Mack and Jay Rome, "Marxism, Romanticism, and Postmodernism: An American Case History," in *Dialogue and Critical Discourse: Language, Culture, Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Macovski (New York: Oxford UP, 1997).