DISCUSSION

Response to Anne K. Mellor

Helen P. Bruder

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Carleton, amateur Cork artist, visited the Blakes provides an intriguing context for Blake's observation to Hayley that both Penelope Chetwynd and her brother "were much pleased with Romneys Designs" that Blake had borrowed from various sources to engrave for Hayley's Life of George Romney.

The "M. Chetwynd" who, according to John Carr, was taught painting by Blake and Hayley at Felpham in September 1801, can now be identified. Catharine Kearsley, in her Kearslay's Complete Peerage, of England, Scotland and Ireland (1794), writes of "William [Chetwynd] who married Penelope Carleton, by whom he has issue, a son and 3 daughters ...." According to Hayley (cited above), Penelope Chetwynd's eldest child Penelope was aged fifteen in 1800. She must therefore have been born about 1785, a year or two after her parents married. Penelope Chetwynd's only son, John, can therefore have been no younger than eight and no older than fifteen in 1801. John Chetwynd was therefore old enough to be "M. Chetwynd," the "noble Youth" referred to by Carr. Hayley and Blake taught painting not to Penelope Chetwynd's brother, but to her orphaned son, young John Chetwynd.

In the light of the new information concerning Penelope Carleton Chetwynd discussed in this note, it is clear that Mrs. Chetwynd is of significance to Blake studies. As a female member of the gentry she, like Rebekah Bliss, challenges the commonplace view of Blake's audience as male, radical, and dissenting. Her nationality is also important. Previously, the only identified Irish customers for Blake's work were Martin Archer Shee (of Dublin) and Sir Richard Newcomen Gore-Booth (of Sligo), subscribers to Robert Hartley Cromeck's edition of Blair's Grave in 1808. Even more significantly, we now know that Blake was in touch with someone personally affected by the "horror & distress" caused by the recent troubles in Ireland. Blake's relationship with Mrs. Chetwynd therefore provides a new perspective for his numerous references to Ireland in his later illuminated books, including his writing of "the majestic form of Erin in eternal tears." Mrs. Chetwynd's social position is also telling. In The Everlasting Gospel, A. L. Morton suggests that "because Blake was a working man he never lost his class passion or his faith in a revolutionary solution." More recently, E. P. Thompson has suggested that a politically radical and dissenting Blake maintained a "conscious posture of hostility to ... polite culture." However, Blake's brief account of his meeting with Mrs. Chetwynd and Mr. Carleton in 1804 suggests that the poet-artist was at ease with members of the gentry. The class distinctions Morton and Thompson look for seem curiously absent in Blake's encounter. Finally, Blake's finding a buyer for his work in William Hayley's intimate friend Mrs. Chetwynd continues the revision of Blake scholarship's perception of Hayley. Even when making love to "M C.," Hayley appears to have been looking out for Blake.
More curious are Mellor's sharp personal criticisms, directed especially at my "unskilled editing." I am, self-confessedly, a novice, happy to learn as I go, but with that acknowledged, I still find myself baffled that she concludes her assessment—which praises all the collection's academic work, some of it very highly (McClenahan "fascinating," Sturrock "brilliant," Wolfson "thoughtful,", "subtle," even Bruder "substantive")—with the damming judgment that my book is "deeply disappointing." Earlier, despite appreciative synopses, she finds "multiple problems" which "lie primarily with the editor." Given that I elicited and compiled all this valuable work, why such censure? The concluding paragraph is tougher and more perplexing still, as Mellor outlines her most serious criticism, namely that the book's contents suffer from their "lack of placement within an overall coherent argument concerning the state of feminist Blake studies at the present moment, the argument that the editor should have provided in her woefully inadequate introduction." As intended, this sting, but it also seems to be another instance of Mellor lambasting me for failing to hit a target I never aimed at. As I'm sure she knows, I've done more than most to chart and assess trends in feminist Blake studies. I clearly reference that scholarship in my introduction, and briefly locate the collection critically but, as my title, "Introductory Note: look over the events of your own life . . .," makes patently clear, on this occasion I chose to open my book with some brief personal reflections. These chime very well, in fact, with the collection's many other "autobiographical memoirs" which, when springing from other sources, Mellor actually finds "charming." I guess, ultimately, that must be it: my origins and enthusiasms mean I lack the power to charm the reviewer! Certainly my lack of either the editorial or personal panache required to keep Mellor within the fold is deeply regrettable, for the article she withdrew partway through the project would doubtless have added something pungent and peerlessly distinctive.

3. I'm sure Queer Blake (forthcoming from Palgrave), which I am coediting with Tristanne J. Connolly, will show many signs of increased proficiency.

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BY ANNE K. MELLOR

I HAVE my opinion of the value of Bruder's collection, already expressed, and she has hers. I don't disagree with anything she says; I just didn't find her method of organization—or goals for the volume—helpful. Readers of course should consult the volume itself and make up their own minds.