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**BLAKE**

R E V I E W

Ruthven Todd, *William Blake the Artist*

David Bindman

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scanted here as much as the letter: Mitchell's giving the Blakes a child for his own purposes is one thing, but the spectacle of Blake building Jerusalem on the moon instead of in England's green and pleasant land gives one pause.

As the stance of the show is deliberately "anti-intellectual"--that is to say, anti what Adrian Mitchell mistakes for being intellectual--it should be emphasized that *Tyger's* weakness is not its contemporaneity. In "a celebration" one is prepared to enjoy a Klopstock *cum* cultural master-of-ceremonies, especially as gleefully pranced by David Ryall. The scene in which Sir Joshua Rat lectures on Civilisation on the pub tv while Mr. Blake mutters annotations (though admittedly precious few of them) is genuinely funny; even Scofield's appearance as the bouncer is mildly funny; but when Blake holds Scofield off with the coal scuttle, one gets the feeling that something has been lost. Again, there is an amusing scene before the Arts Council, three Negations who give 10,000 pounds to Evelyn Graze, transvestite mod editor, but who are put to sleep by Mr. Blake's reading from *Jerusalem*. Best of all, perhaps, is the episode in which Scofield tempts Blake to pity by abusing an ingenious mechanical dodo in a super-market shopping cart. This is Mitchell at his best, but there is much more of Mitchell at his worst. When our hero advertizes for lovers, he gets three kinky dames in black leather who seem more an answer to Leopold Bloom's prayers than W. B.'s; and the Blakes' marital crisis is solved by a hunt through an anatomical dictionary, culminating in the discovery of--the clitoris! This, in addition to portraying Blake as a sexual nincompoop, manages to evade what Blake himself tells us about his marital problem and its solution--but to talk about Sacrifice of Self in the West End in the year 1971 would cost a man his life, or at least his reputation for trendiness.

In Act II most pretense to any relation between *Tyger* and Blake is abandoned. Eight of the twelve songs are by Mitchell, but this is merely an indication. A large part of the Act is a variety show in which figures named after poets appear: a nondescript Chaucer, Shakespeare with six-guns, Milton wearing a "Paradise Now" sweat-shirt, to be joined by a bunch of swingers named Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Then come "the late Victorians" wearing white ducks, striped jackets, and straw hats--one of these five is "Walt Whitman"! Allen Ginsberg alone appears at home. The silliness of all this is relieved for a short time by a conversation between Sir Joshua and Mad King George the Fiftieth. Mad King George, as it turns out, loves nothing so much as to see, cause, ruminate on, and enjoy the prospect of children being beaten. The trouble is that as the conversation goes on, one becomes more and more aware of the prototype of Mad King George --not Nobodaddy but Jarry's Père Ubu, a derivation that Bill Fraser's brilliant performance seems to recognize and build on, cocking the head and strutting while delivering sadistic *sententiae*. Perhaps *Tyger* may be followed by a celebration called *Merde*, but meanwhile one can't help reflecting on how much more daring and more talented

Jarry was than Mitchell.

In the last part of Act II, we actually get back to Blake, and here alone (with perhaps the exception of slides occasionally shown) a Blakean prop is used--the winged ark of *Jerusalem* 39. Mad King George having decided to get rid of Blake by sending him to the moon ("A British rocket will never come back"), Blake agrees provided he can substitute his own landing vehicle and name his own flight controllers. The latter are Henry Fuseli (portrayed for some reason as a generation younger than Blake) and Samuel Palmer; the landing vehicle is the moon ark. For a few moments, as the ark is opened and Jerusalem starts a-building, aided by (ostensibly) Lunarians while Isabelle Lucas beautifully sings, one feels close to Blake --but as with everything else in this production, the moments become minutes, many, many minutes, and then even after the curtain calls, the scene goes on and on to Mike Westbrook's unutterably banal music.

The theatre program should be added to the list of Blakean ephemera. It includes a page of selective Blake chronology, two pages of anecdotes and quotations, a reproduction of the 1821 Linnell portrait, a page of "Quotes by Blake," full-page reproductions of the first and twenty-first *Job* engravings, three photographs of one of the life masks, and a page and a half of quotations headed "Blake and Slavery."

Ruthven Todd. *WILLIAM BLAKE THE ARTIST*. Studio Vista/Dutton Pictureback. London: Studio Vista; New York: Dutton, 1971. Pp. 160, illus. £1.80 hardbound, 80p paper. \$2.25 paper, U.S.

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Ruthven Todd has been something of a legend to students of Blake, and this book is his most lengthy contribution to Blake studies for many years. Most people who have been lucky enough to get hold of his long out-of-print *Tracks in the Snow* treasure it as one of the few classics on the subject of English Romantic painting, particularly on the painters of the Sublime, of whose company Blake was proud to regard himself a member.

The present book is an excellent if unconventional introduction to Blake, for it concentrates not on the interpretation of the Prophetic Books, but on Blake as a craftsman working within the limitations of his situation as a penurious engraver. The book follows the career of Blake year by year, and a picture of the man emerges, not just as a visionary, but as a proud and even defiant craftsman, prepared to take on any engraving work to give himself time to work on his visions. Even in his last illness nothing persuaded him to put down the large folio in which he was making the



Dante watercolors, and in certain years, in particular the year 1795, the amount of constructive and experimental activity was breathtaking. The author is at pains to show what was actually involved in the *making* of Blake's Prophetic Books and color prints, and he puts into perspective Blake's innovations in relief printing.

The most useful parts of the book for Blake scholars will be the regrettably brief accounts of Blake's stereotype and color-printing processes. Mr. Todd has carried out his own experiments, and has provided a convincing account of Blake's solution to one of the most obvious difficulties involved in combining text and design on a copper plate: getting the lettering the right way round. What slightly worries me is how Blake stopped the nitric acid, which must have covered the plate for some length of time, from eating away *under* the lettering--or was some simple method known at this time of preventing it? The problems of Blake's color-printing processes are harder to fathom, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Todd will devote a much lengthier work to the whole problem of Blake's printing techniques in the near future.

Some mention should also be made of the excellent choice of illustrations. They are hardly ever the most obvious examples, and English readers can be particularly grateful that he has not reproduced works from the Tate when less familiar ones will do. One is grateful, for example, for reproductions of the Minneapolis *Nebuchadnezzar*, the Metropolitan Museum *Pity* and the Edinburgh *Hecate*. With well over 100 illustrations the book seems to me to be an excellent value, and its modest format makes a refreshing change from the bulkiness of many recent books on Blake.

## DISCUSSION "With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought"

IRENE H. CHAYES: SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

A Rejoinder to John Beer

I share the dismay of both editors and readers at the prospect of a serial controversy, but John Beer's reply to my review of *Blake's Visionary Universe* (*Blake Newsletter*, 4 [Winter 1971], 87-90; reply in 4 [Spring 1971], 144-47) does call for a rejoinder. The aesthetic theory Mr. Beer begins to disclose in the last half of his last paragraph (where even Blake's concept of "states" is unrecognizable) seems to leave no common ground for discussion of "the larger points at issue" about either Blake or Coleridge. Therefore I too will limit myself to what can reasonably be debated.

I thought it was clear from the review itself why, writing for a specialized audience and with little space to spare, I decided to consider the section of the book other reviewers would probably pass by. (I am rather sorry Mr. Beer did not choose to defend his selection of illustrations and the special commentary as a miniature prophetic book, for organizing it would have been one kind of response, concrete as well as "visionary," to Blake's example.) I did indicate, too, that I found things to praise in the detailed commentary on the poems in the main text, and on specific points Mr. Beer and I are in accord more often than he grants. We both have noted the relation of "The Little Girl Lost" to Spenser's episode of Una and the lion, he in *Blake's Humanism* and again in *Blake's Visionary Universe* and I in an essay published earlier. (See my "Little Girls Lost: Problems of a Romantic Archetype," *BNYPL*, 67 [1963], 581-82; reprinted in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Northrop Frye [Spectrum Books, 1966], where the observation occurs on pp. 67-68.) More recently, we evidently have been coming on some of the same art sources for Blake, and the mutual corroboration is encouraging. But Mr. Beer is far off the mark in his charge that I think Blake was "more likely to know original paintings than engravings after originals." For one answer to his question about Blake's use of prints, I refer him to the essay cited in the review, my contribution to the new Erdman-Grant collection, *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*. There will be more on the subject of Blake's art sources and how he may have known them in the book I am now working on, which, as it happens, will give my own view of what occurred when Blake's "interpreting imagination" intervened between his sources and his designs.

That an intervention did take place, I agree with Mr. Beer. I differ with him on how it took place, what was involved, and what the result was, and the preliminary explorations in the essay just mentioned will show how profound these differences can be. More immediately, Mr. Beer's recent exploratory remarks only widen the distance between us in the simple matter of looking at Blake's pictures. In a Blake design, even when the total composition is baffling, most of us see a great deal more, and more that is provocative, than a "slant of the eye" or "thrust of the forehead" which under certain conditions may be equated with one or another of Mr. Beer's key terms. When we are reminded of an earlier work by another artist, it is likely to be something far more definite than a generalized "visual likeness" or a similarity of "tone and atmosphere" that arrests the attention, and no points of resemblance can be too obvious for comment. Mr. Beer gives a subordinate place to what he calls "immediate visual memory," and he sets up as Blake's "interpreting imagination" a kind of administrative, allegorizing faculty, which might well have produced the polemical annotations, or some parts of "A Vision of the Last Judgment," but as it is described could not have created a single drawing, painting, or etched design. In comparative groupings such as Mr. Beer reproduces, the evidence is that, on the contrary, memory and imagination acted upon each other with equal force, and "interpretation" did not necessarily move in the direction