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Berkeley Blake Weekend

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NEWS

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY BLAKE DAYS

The Samuel Paley Library at Temple, in cooperation with the Department of English, College of Music, and School of Communications and Theater held a Blake Celebration from 18 February to 1 March 1974. An exhibit of Blake materials was arranged by the Library's Department of Special Collections. On 20 February Michael Horovitz, editor and publisher of *New Departures*, read from his poetry. On 22 February James G. Smith of the English Department at Temple gave an illustrated talk on "Blake's *Job*--the Art and the System." On 26 February Sheldon Brivic, Annette Levitt, and James G. Smith of the English Department gave readings from Blake's works, and on 27 February the same group joined by Richard Beckman and Jim Blackaby gave papers and led discussions on Blake. On 28 February students from the College of Music and the School of Communications and Theater performed Blake-inspired music and dance. And throughout the days of the Celebration Blake films and videotapes were shown.

BERKELEY BLAKE WEEKEND

"William Blake: A Celebration" was the theme of a weekend conference held 1-2 March 1974 at the Berkeley campus of the University of California under the auspices of the University of California Extension. Morton Paley, program coordinator, introduced the program, which included slides, films, and a series of lectures.

David Erdman, State University of New York at Stony Brook, presented the first lecture of the series, "The Burden of the Present," examining some of the contemporary political events that influenced Blake and other Romantic poets. He supplemented his lecture with a number of slides and offered an interpretation of some of the designs in *Milton*. His lecture was followed by the

presentation of three films, *The Vision of William Blake*, *Tyger, Tyger*, and *Holy Thursday*, which concluded the first day of the Celebration.

The Saturday morning session included lectures by Hazard Adams, University of California, Irvine, Robert Essick, California State University at Northridge, and Morris Eaves, University of New Mexico. With particular attention to a passage from *Europe*, Hazard Adams examined some of the influences on "Blake's Symbolism." Blake as etcher and engraver was the subject of lectures by Robert Essick and Morris Eaves. In "William Blake, Book Illustrator," Essick used slides to survey the development of Blake's commercial engraving style and to explore some of the relationships between Blake's work as a commercial engraver and as poet-painter. In a complementary lecture, "Blake versus the Printing Press," Eaves used microphotographs of engravings to explain Blake's rejection of ordinary means of printing and publishing in favor of "illuminated printing."

Anne K. Mellor, Stanford University, opened the Saturday afternoon session of the series with her lecture "The Major Paintings," using slides to show the iconography of Blake's paintings. Taking a cue from the phrase, "I was only making a fool of you" (*Island in the Moon*), Robert Gleckner, University of California, Riverside, speculated that there may be a good deal more humor in Blake's works than his readers are usually inclined to recognize. In "The Shorter Poems," Gleckner pointed to passages in the lyrics where Blake may be using "non-sense" on his readers. In the concluding lecture, "The Longer Poems," Morton D. Paley, University of California, Berkeley, showed slides of some of the plates of *Milton* and *Jerusalem* to illustrate his interpretation of the major designs in both poems.

In addition to the slides and films supplementing the lectures, there were a number of Blake's prints on display at two exhibitions on the Berkeley campus. Among forty Blake prints shown at the University Art Museum from 13 February through 17 March were some of the illustrations to the Book of Job, to Blair's *Grave*, and Young's

Night Thoughts. This exhibition was organized by Museum Registrar Joy Feinberg and Morton Paley. The prints displayed were from the University Art Museum and other Bay Area collections, including the collection of Robert Essick. Materials for an exhibition of Blake books presented in the Main Library at Berkeley, 23 February-31 March, were from the Bancroft Library, Biology Library, the collection of Mrs. Charles C. Cushing, and the University Art Museum. Leslie Clark, Rare Books Librarian at the Bancroft Library, assisted Morton Paley with the arrangement of and commentary for this exhibition. (*Our thanks to Donna Rix of the University of New Mexico for this item. Eds.*)

BLAKE-MODERNS SEMINAR

Despite its setting amidst the awkward clutter of bare wood tables left over from a previous night's dinner, the MLA Seminar on Blake and the Moderns held the attention of some fifty participants well past its scheduled closing.

Intended to explore the extent and diversity of Blake's influence on twentieth-century writing, the seminar ranged in its papers and discussion from specific textual parallels between Blake and his "descendants" to the more general controversy between the view which sees Blake as a unique force on modern literature and that which contends that he is simply a part of the Romantic or visionary traditions re-emerging in our time. Indeed, the latter issue may become the focus of the 1974 Seminar on Blake and the Moderns.

Annette Levitt's introduction to the Seminar gave a sense of Blake's multifaceted appeal to modern writers, the variety of their responses to him, and, finally, the diversity of approaches adopted by critics in reaction to Blake and his twentieth-century followers. The panelists, speaking from their own critical stances, revealed richly the value of such explorations for an understanding of both Blake and modern literature.

Kay Parkhurst Eason, talking on "Books of Blakeends Jined: Towards a Sense of Structure in Blake and the 20th Century," offered a broad but detailed view of Blake's attacks on the limits of traditional structure in order to change the perceptions of his audience--and the ways in which such novelists as Joyce, Beckett, Woolf, and Nin pursue similar routes to achieve similar effects. The kinship between Blake and the modern novel was then narrowed in focus somewhat, as Barton Friedman, in "Rapes and Robbers: Preludic Myth and Narrative History in *America*, *Europe*, and *Nostramo*," developed Toynbee's view that myths grow out of cultural crises and in crucial respects shadow history; Friedman discussed the preludia to *America* and *Europe* and Conrad's "tale of the gringos" as each orders our reading of the main body of the work--and of history itself. Finally, to narrow and intensify the focus still further, Alicia Ostriker, speaking on "Blake, Ginsberg, and Madness," analyzed the role of the poet-prophet as shaman, by describing Blake's varied uses of "madness," ultimately seen as the poet's absorbing of the ills of society in order to cleanse it; she illustrated her view with close readings of Blake and Ginsberg, primarily from *The Four Zoas* and *Howl*.

The questions and discussion which followed centered on such issues as the role of Whitman and other American writers in continuing the Blake tradition, the need to study such poets as Robert Duncan as heirs of Blake, and the possible subsuming of Blake's influence on modern literature under the more general relationship among modern literature, Romanticism, and the visionary tradition. One felt--after more than two hours of stimulating talk--that still more could be said. Perhaps it will be, in 1974. (*Our thanks to Annette S. Levitt of Temple University for this item. Eds.*)

ERDMAN LECTURES

Several people have written to tell us of visits paid to their campuses in recent months by