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BLAKE

N E W S

MLA Seminar on Blake and the Moderns

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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