

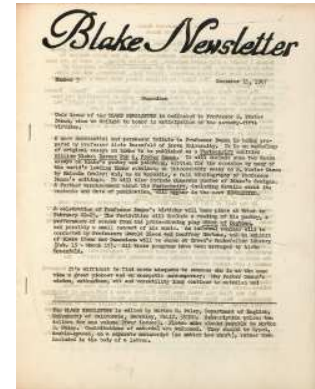
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

Recognizing Mother

Thomas E. Connolly, George R. Levine

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 1, Issue 3, December 15, 1967, pp. 17-18



DISCUSSION

"With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought."

Recognizing Mother

When one gets past the bad temper in John E. Grant's "Recognizing Fathers", one finds that he has three basic objections to our PMLA article, "Pictorial and Poetic Design in Two Songs of Innocence".

1. We used original copies of Blake's songs rather than questionable facsimiles,

2. we used the original Keynes bibliography rather than the Keynes-Wolf census, and

3. we failed "to penetrate" the "clean-shaven disguise" of a masquerading busty female Christ.

Since these charges form the basis for Grant's cavalier dismissal of us as unqualified Blakeists and "would-be scholars", we shall try to treat them seriously. We began the study by examining an excellent set of Kodachrome slides made by the British Museum from the Keynes "N" copy (Keynes, Wolf "T" copy). These slides were used to make the pictures that were reproduced in PMLA. Later we were able to examine all three original copies of Songs of Innocence and Experience in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum (MacGeorge copy, Keynes "A", Keynes, Wolf "A"; Carey copy, Keynes "X", Keynes, Wolf "B"; and Evans copy Keynes "N", Keynes, Wolf "T") and the posthumous (1831-1832) uncolored copy in the British Museum Reading Room (Keynes Posthumous copy a, Keynes, Wolf posthumous copy "a"). We leave it to others to judge whether we acted reasonably to verify findings made from a study of excellent color transparencies by seizing the opportunity to check them against the originals instead of relying on admittedly poor facsimiles. (We refer to Grant's own admission of the dubious reliability of the facsimiles and the microfilm-see especially his note 2). Our reference to Keynes "Z" was based on one of those poor facsimiles in Keynes' A Study of the Illuminated Books of William Blake, Poet, Printer, Prophet.

The original Keynes bibliography is everywhere available. The Keynes, Wolf census was printed in an edition of four hundred copies and has long been unavailable to the general reader.

The real nub of Grant's paper, however, is the last charge; namely, that we did not penetrate Christ's disguise. In our original article we gave full consideration to those critics who interpreted the figure in Lbf to be God or Christ. The figure is "clearly a female figure". We can not seem to get by that fact. We conceded that her face had a resemblance to the face of Christ. The illustration shows the child and a haloed mother after the restoration by God. Our suggestion of the interpenetration of the divine in the human seems to us the only plausible explanation, stemming from our discussion of the integral relationship of poems to illustrations. Yet Grant's objections are based solely on what he considers to be reliable iconographic evidence. By ignoring the total context of our argument, he distorts the point of our essay.

Grant's iconographic evidence at no point seriously challenges our interpretation. As evidence of Blake's conception of Christ as "busty", he offers Schiavonetti's engraving of Blake's first illustration of The Grave, and even admits that "Schiavonetti's engraving stands between Blake's conception and the reader." Grant further questions our identification of the figure at the right of the text in Lbf as an angel by pointing to the apparent absence of wings on the same figure in the facsimile of Keynes "Z" and the microfilm of "copy AA".

In the four British Museum copies, the figure in question is clearly an angel with wings. In fact, in the posthumous, uncolored volume it is obvious that the wings were etched on the plate before the color was added. If Grant is willing to generalize from the facsimiles of copies Z and AA and conclude that the figure must be the mother (although it is in no sense clear how he can justify identifying that figure as earthly female as distinct from angelic being) about to take over, is he not falling into the very error that he attributes to us; namely, generalizing from too limited evidence?

Where then does such criticism as Grant offers lead us? Are we to be reduced to countering four winged angels to two figures whose backs are hidden, or a vaudeville Christ who sometimes appears without a beard to a conventional Christ who sometimes appears with a beard, or Blake's conception of busts to Schiavonetti's? Surely the aim of scholarship tends to get lost amidst such carping considerations. We all too readily admit that we have much to learn about Blake's complex art--both from Blake and even from John E. Grant--but we doubt if knowledge is greatly advanced by such arguments as those that have been presented in these pages.

Thomas E. Connolly

George R. Levine

State University of New York
Buffalo, New York

Notes Continued...

How "when" came to be printed for "where" in editions of Blake is not clear. Perhaps Ellis and Yeats started the tradition. Sampson (1905) printed "when," but Sloss and Wallis (1926) reverted to "where." Keynes printed "when" in 1925, but afterwards substituted "where"; the Erdman-Bloom edition has "where." There appears to be no textual authority for any reading but "when."

MDP

QUERY

Martin Butlin (The Tate Gallery, London, SW1) asks for "information about the present whereabouts of 'The Lute Player', with a drawing of a profile of a man on the back, sold 15th July, 1959 at Sotheby's (lot 52), bought by Jacob Schwartz and almost certainly now in the United States. It may have been given by Mr. T. E. Hanley to some educational body."

The fourth issue of the NEWSLETTER is scheduled for publication on March 15. Copy should be received by March 7 in order to be considered.

The contents of the BLAKE NEWSLETTER are copyright 1968 by Morton D. Paley and may not be reproduced without permission, except for brief excerpts quoted in reviews or articles.