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NEWSLETTER

MLA BLAKE 1979

W. J. T. Mitchell of the University of Chicago will be discussion leader for the 1979 Special Session on Blake at the MLA Annual Meeting. The topic will be "Blake on Language and Writing." Those interested in being on a panel should send Mitchell a paper of not more than fifteen pages by 30 March 1979 at the latest, sooner if possible.

MLA

The topic for the 1979 meeting of the English Romantic Group of the MLA will be "Death & Dying in the Romantics." Papers should have a reading time of 20 minutes, and they should be submitted before 15 April to David V. Erdman, Crane Neck Point, Setauket, New York 11733.

At the next meeting of the Modern Language Association of America (San Francisco, 27-30 December 1979), the Division of Literature and the Other Arts will sponsor a meeting on the subject of literary illustration. If you or any of your colleagues would like to submit a paper to be considered for inclusion on the program for this meeting, I would be very grateful for your interest and participation.

By literary illustration, the Executive Committee means visual art designed to be viewed and interpreted in conjunction with literary texts. The texts may be written in any of the languages normally represented at the MLA, and may date from any period. Medieval manuscript illuminations are no less eligible than, say, the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery or the works of Phiz. The Executive Committee does *not* encourage the submission of papers on pictorialist texts which are not actually illustrated.

Three or four papers will be selected for oral presentation by the authors in San Francisco. Papers should be 15-20 minutes in length, and should be submitted in full rather than in abstract. If slides are included in the presentation, please send them with the manuscript or describe them on an accompanying list. (Projection facilities will be provided at the meeting.) Papers should be sent to me at the Department of English, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131, by April 20 (March 20 for non-members of the MLA which has some travel funds for distinguished speakers in fields other than those directly represented by the MLA (such as art history), and for speakers who reside outside the United States and Canada. The Division must request such funds no later than April 15, and is not certain to receive them). Results will be announced by May 20. HUGH WITEMEYER, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, DIVISION OF LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS, MLA.

MLA BLAKE 1978

Each year the MLA awards the William Riley Parker prize to the author of an outstanding article published in *PMLA* during the year. This year the Prize went to Morris Eaves, University of New Mexico, for "Blake & the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum & Technology," which appeared in the October 1977 issue. At the general meeting Eaves accepted the cash prize of \$500 and a citation which reads as follows: "This essay not only illuminates William Blake's esthetic and his stance as an artist and a critic of society but also casts new light on the relationship between art and technology. Morris E. Eaves sets his lucid exposition of Blake's attitudes toward technological change within the broad contexts of conceptual analysis, cultural history from the Renaissance to the present, and the influence of the machine on the human condition."

At the Special Session on "Editing the Romantics" (discussion leader E. B. Murray, University of Missouri, St. Louis), G. E. Bentley, Jr., presented an illustrated lecture on the special editorial problems faced by an editor of Blake.

An overflow audience of more than 100 attended the 1978 MLA Special Session on Blake's Concept of Self. Since abstracts of the first three papers read by John H. Sutherland, Christine Gallant, and Robert N. Essick appeared in the fall 1978 issue of *Blake*, I shall summarize them only briefly here. The discussion focused primarily upon points raised in the last paper on Blake's Spectre by Morton Paley, which I shall therefore report in more detail.

In "Some Blake Self-Images in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*: The Blake-Los Relationship," John Sutherland traced Blake's move from self-division to self-integration (defined as a union with Los) in *Milton* 10 and *Milton* 47. In *Jerusalem*, Los and Blake seem "close to full identification" with each other: both are engaged in the same "great task" and both are visually fused in the frontispiece. In *Jerusalem* 6, Los/Blake has gained control over his Spectre, his own self-defeating "pride and self-righteousness" which had appeared as separate entities in *Milton* 10. And on *Jerusalem* 100, Los/Blake compels his Spectre (his rational powers) and his Emanation (his now acknowledged "unconscious realms of imagination") to work "harmoniously for the integrated individual" and at the same time to create the world of space and time in which that individual can exist. Here, Sutherland concluded, Los "represents Blake's integrated self" and this plate therefore is "Blake's most convincing demonstration of his own hard-won inner harmony."

Christine Gallant then argued, in "Blake's Presence as First-Person Voice in *Jerusalem*," that the first-person voice operates much as does the authoritative dream-voice that Jung said emerged from the center of the total personality or what he called "the supraordinate Self." The message of this dream-voice "is a final summing-up of a long process of unconscious deliberation and weighing of arguments." In *Jerusalem*, Blake acts "as spokesman

for the unconscious as he encouragingly speaks to the reader who has not yet dared to descend into it." Blake also claims to speak the "Testimony of Jesus" and "God's words," thus utilizing the archetypes of Christ and God to preserve his conscious ego in the face of an overwhelming unconsciousness. Blake thereby identifies his first-person voice with that Self that includes both the conscious and the unconscious. Gallant then discussed the nine first-person passages in *Jerusalem*. The first six (1:1-5, 5:16-26, 15:4-35, 36:58-9, 34:27-48, 74:14-75:27) tell of Blake's life in an Ulro that grows closer and closer and in which he is increasingly separated from Jesus; the last three (97:5, 98:40-41, 99:5) define Blake's hard-won conviction that he has guided us through Ulro to the divine vision. By using the first-person voice in the last line of the poem, Gallant concluded, Blake emphasizes that this is a journey that we must *each* undergo, again and again.

Robert N. Essick's "William Blake: The Printmaker as Poet" traced Blake's use of imagery drawn from his etching and engraving techniques. The minute particulars of his discussion are too rich to be crudely summarized; readers should go to his forthcoming book on Blake as a printmaker (Princeton University Press, 1979) for a full exposition of this imagery. But his concluding argument can be described. Blake had a love-hate relationship with his commercial profession. He deliberately identified many of his printmaking activities with Urizen, thus suggesting that "commercial copy engraving could become a trap, a degradation of the artist's vision, and an aesthetic-economic system antithetical to Blake's highest aspirations." On the other hand, print-making can be "a medium for the expression of imagination and the transcendence of this world"; hence Blake *reverses* Urizen's unintelligible forms in the process of printing. As Essick emphasizes, "Urizen does not print his books. The *reversal* inherent in the printing process makes all the difference, just as it does in various forms--turning around, converting a state into its contrary, transforming finite into infinite--at key points in the journey towards apocalypse in Blake's poetry." Through *Milton*, *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, Blake struggled to define the proper relationship of craft to art, of his potentially destructive Spectre to the imagination of Los. As Essick concluded, "the drama of Los and his Spectre in *Jerusalem* is in part a mythic portrayal of the subordination of copy work to original composition presented in the *Public Address* and a vast metaphor for the redemption of traditional techniques underlying the maturation of Blake's graphic style from 1804 to the end of his life." Finally, Essick suggested that the physical labor and disciplined energy required of the engraver acted as a necessary counter-balance to Blake's "speculative and digressive mind," enabling him to combine in his best poems "his mental adventures and his keen sense of physical reality."

Morton Paley's essay on "Blake's Spectre" emphasized the *personal* aspect of the Spectre, i.e., Blake's Spectre as the embodiment of what Blake didn't like about *himself*, namely his fearful anxiety, his hostility (both passive and active), his envy, pride, and black melancholy, and his

extreme sexual jealousy. Paley stressed Blake's use of the Spectre to reveal his "deep ambivalence about sexual feeling" in "My Spectre around me"; Blake characteristically separated sexual desire (which he associated with the Spectre) from a healthy love, and thus, Paley concluded, Blake is far from being "the exemplum of sexual harmony that some readers may wish to make him."

Paley then analyzed the strategies that Blake used to dominate and control his own evil "spectrous" feelings. He first had to recognize them, as Los does when he divides the Spectre from his Emanation (*J* 86:54); he then attempted to dominate and control them. But rather than merely casting them out, which Blake knew well could not be easily or permanently done, Blake offered an alternative solution. In Night VIIa of *The Four Zoas* and on plate 100 of *Jerusalem*, Blake envisioned a triumphant resolution in which his healthy imagination embraced the Spectre, acknowledging that the Spectre too has his place in the story. Only by coming to terms with his own jealousies, pride and vindictiveness could Blake attain his ultimate vision of imaginative unity: "Therefore the Sons of Eden praise Urthonas Spectre in songs / Because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble."

The questioning centered on the degree of success Blake achieved in his acceptance of and control over his Spectre, and especially on whether he liberated himself from a possessive, sexist attitude toward women (let me say, parenthetically, that I happen to think he did not). Even if Blake's self is imaged in his poetry as finally integrated, does that integration lead to productive relationships with other people, and especially with women? It was suggested that these questions could be fruitfully explored in another MLA Special Session on Blake and sexuality. ANNE K. MELLOR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors:

Without wishing to seem ungracious to Mr. Andrew Wilton for his generous review of my *Samuel Palmer a Biography* and *The Letters of Samuel Palmer*, may I make one observation?

In the latter Mr. Wilton takes me to task for my transcription of a phrase from a letter of 1839, viz., "inveighed Hannah into the conspiracy," and he says the word "must be 'inveigled'." Has Mr. Wilton examined the MSS? If not, I can assure him that "inveighed" is what is written in the originals. If Mr. Wilton consults *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* he will see that one meaning of inveigh is "to entice, inveigle."

Raymond Lister
Wolfson College
Cambridge

15 December 1978

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