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Unlisted Articles on Blake Published in China

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The following works¹ of 1957–1982 supplement those in *Blake Books* (1977) and in the article by N.G.P. Malmqvist, "Blake in China," in *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 13 (1979), 24–28.

1. Wang, Ke-wu.² "Wei-lian Bu-lai-ke Ying-guo Ge-ming Shi-ren" ["William Blake, The English Revolutionary Poet"]. In *Jiao-shi-bao* [*Teacher's Newspaper*], 30 April 1959, in Russian.

2. Sun, Xi-zhen. "Zao-qi Lang-man-zu-yi Dai-biao Zuo-jia Bu-lai-ke" ["Blake, The Representative Writer of Early Romanticism"]. In *Hangzhou Re-bao* [*Hangzhou Daily*], 5 May 1957, in Chinese.

3. Cheng, Xiao-nan. "Wei-lian Bu-lai-ke di Yi-shu Ji-qi Sheng-ping" ["The Life and Art of William Blake"]. In *Mei-shu* [*The Art*], 11 (November, 1957), 52–54, in Chinese. There are two plates attached to the article: one is the portrait of Blake by John Linnell, the other is Blake's "Glad Day."

4. Fan, Cheng-zhong. "Ying-guo Lang-man-zu-yi Shi-ge di Xian-qu, Wei-lian Bu-lai-ke" ["William Blake, The Precursor of English Progressive Romanticism"]. In *Jiang-hai Xue-kan* [*Jiang-hai Journal*], 1 (January, 1960), 43–52, in Chinese.

5. Wang, Zuo-liang. "Ying-guo Lang-man-zu-yi Shi-ge di Xing-qi" ["The Rise of English Romantic Poetry"]. In *Ying-guo Weng-xue Leng-weng-ji* [*Essays on English Literature*]. Beijing: Foreign Literature Press, 1980, pp. 57–129, in Chinese. One fourth of the essay, pp. 67–76 is about Blake, and the rest is about Robert Burns, Wordsworth and Coleridge.

6. Liu, Bing-shan. "William Blake." In *A Short History of English Literature*. Kaifeng, China: Foreign Language Department, Henan Teacher's University, 1980, pp. 168–73, in English.

7. Chen, Jia. "William Blake." In *A History of English Literature*, Vol. II. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1981, pp. 237–66, in English.

In China William Blake is not a popular poet, as compared with poets like Byron and Shelley. According to *A Bibliographical List of Articles on Foreign Literature* (overlapping those in *Blake Books* and "Blake in China") from 1920 to 1978, there are only nineteen essays on Blake, while there are sixty-four on Byron and thirty-four on Shelley. But 1957 saw a sudden spurt of interest in Blake. The publication of most of the Blake essays clustered round the bicentennial year 1957, in which Blake was elected "one of the famous cultural figures of the year by the World Peace Congress."³ So most of the

articles are introductions to Blake, and their chief concern is with the revolutionary elements in Blake's poetry.

1. Cheng, Xiao-nan. "The Life and Art of William Blake" (1957). According to this bicentennial appreciation, Blake is a progressive artist, fighting, by means of his artistic works, for truth, democracy, and freedom of mankind. Citing Erdman's *Blake, Prophet against Empire* (1954), Cheng holds that Blake is a poet with a clear political motif, "taking part in some demonstrations and revolts of London citizens, for instance, the demonstration against colonialism and English interference in the United States on 6 June 1780."⁴ Permeated with humanistic spirit, Blake's artistic works have their base in real life and, at the same time, they are treated with romantic methods. His art breaks away from the limited boundary of lifeless academic art and expresses the people's desires and expectations. His method is symbolic. It is only as a means of disguise that Blake takes his subjects from the Bible, Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and Milton's poetry. His purpose is to attack and fight against the strong and wicked. His art is not decadent or mystical. Cheng then explains Blake's artistic sources and his achievements in engraving, etching, and design. The style of Blake's pictures is decorative, stereoscopic, with striking contrasts of colors, and much concerned about revealing his figure's inner mind. To illustrate his point, Cheng, at the end, analyzes two of Blake's pictures: "Europe Supported by Africa and America"⁵ and "Glad Day."

2. Fan, Cheng-zhong. "William Blake, The Precursor of English Progressive Romanticism" (1960).

Blake's poetry was the progressive forerunner of English Romanticism, which, Fan says, was the offspring of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. When man's world outlook underwent a change, his feelings underwent a corresponding change, or, rather, liberation. This is the central idea of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*. The theme of *The French Revolution, America and Europe* is the reformation of the world. Like Thomas Paine and William Godwin, Blake held that organized and tyrannical oppression was the cause of sufferings and griefs in the world, and that this oppression was represented by kings, aristocrats, and priests. Revolution was the only way to realize the ideal world. In *The Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania, The Book of Los, The Song of Los*, the cause of man's fall, Fan explains, is the tyrannical Urizen, who is a reactionary figure in several respects: a representative of the past, the old tradition, belief and ethics, and a tyrant in the primitive age; "His wisdom is confined to senses and rationality." He invents religion and science merely for the convenience of his rule. Man can create a new world only by overthrowing the ruling class, the oppressors and exploiters. But it is a defect in Blake to give in to a doctrine of universal love at the end of *The Four Zoas*, which marks the summit of Blake's writing career. In order to

oppose rationalism, Blake accents imagination, inspiration, and vision. But when he strays too far from reality, he slips into idealistic aesthetics, as is seen in his later Prophetic Works. Such tendencies should be objected to. At the end of his essay, Fan proposes to call the English Romantic period the period of Blake, Byron, and Shelley, clearly for their political sympathies.

Since the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976), China's intellectual life has awakened slowly from that long and destructive chaos. People long to have a clearer and better understanding of Western culture. This situation makes possible some attempt at unbiased, honest judgment of Blake, as seen in the following articles.

3. Wang, Zuo-liang. "The Rise of English Romantic Poetry" (1980).

At the end of the eighteenth century, Wang says, great changes and innovations occurred in the poetic field, and English romantic poetry took form under the strong influence of the French and American revolutions. In his essay, Wang regards Robert Burns, William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as the major figures in the formation of the new poetry and talks especially about the four poet's respective contributions to that formation.

As for Blake, Wang dwells on his dialectical way of thinking and his ambivalent attitude towards the French Revolution. Wang calls Blake an idiosyncratic thinker, who had a profound understanding of both the bright and the dark sides of the French Revolution. Blake must be studied with dialectic methods, because he adopted dialectics in his poems, for instance, his "Lamb" and "Tyger." He described such contraries as intuition and rationality, innocence and sophistication, vision and reality. To these contraries Blake had an unmistakable inclination. He was not a modern intellectual who is all the time hesitating and self-torturing, but a nineteenth-century artisan with a strong sense of good and evil. Blake's poetry, especially his lyrical poetry, is melodious and in simple language but with profound meaning, like his famous poem "London." In his late magnificent long poems, such as *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, the poet writes about human experience, or wisdom, and about the grievous cost of obtaining and calculating that wisdom. There is the poet's vision of the future and his solution to social problems. His peculiar mystical system is only his mask to escape censorship.

The underlying theme of Wang's essay is Blake's ambivalent reaction to the French Revolution eulogizing the violent force manifested by the Revolution in its destruction of the old system on one hand, and, on the other hand, expressing his disgust at the highly rational and philosophical ideas, such as those of Voltaire, which had made way for the French Revolution. Therefore, Blake particularly stressed the significance of feelings and imagination. In this respect, he is consistent. So, in his later

poems, his thought is more profound, his words are more penetrating and precise, and his versification is as free as the later "free verse," inaugurating a magnificent new style.

4. Liu, Bing-Shan. "William Blake" (1980).

Liu's book is a brief survey of all English literature, and it serves in many of China's universities as a textbook for the introductory course in English literature. The slight information about each writer is arranged in the order of the writer's biography, a list of his literary works and evaluation. The very brief Blake section mentions only Blake's *Poetical Sketches*, *Songs of Innocence*, *Songs of Experience*, and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. He says of the theme of *Songs of Experience* that human desire for freedom has to endure the limitation of worldly experience at least for a time, and that the ultimate freedom is still to come through passionate revolt, through revolution. Blake's statement that "without contraries is no progression" is actually his outlook on life. Liu says that Blake, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, expresses his spirit of revolt against social oppression and his desire to maintain liberty against the law of bourgeois society. At the end, Liu mentions Blake's Prophetic Books generally, but only makes some vague remarks on them as long and obscure. So this Blake section is almost as brief as the Blake entry in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*,⁶ but without the latter's accuracy.

5. Chen, Jia. "William Blake" (1981).

Of Blake's poetry, Chen holds that *Songs of Experience* is the best, because it is a more mature work than his previous poems and it does not have the great handicap of obscurity of the later Prophetic Books. The dominant theme of *Songs of Experience* is social criticism. Of Blake's Prophetic Books, *Tiriel* and *The Book of Thel* are less mystical and more lyrical. *The French Revolution* and *America* are among the most significant for their direct reference to historical events. Other works which also have reference to historical and political events of the modern world are *Europe* and *The Song of Los*. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is obscure, but its general drift is a spirit of rebellion against conventional religion, morality, and art. Other Prophetic Books, like *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*, have much less value as poetry, because they are purely allegorical and have no direct reference to historical events. *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are complicated and extremely obscure. But at the end, Chen admits that after much laborious deciphering we can find spiritual freedom and Blake's emphasis on poetry and imagination as against the extreme rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Obviously, the greatest part of the above articles is dedicated to the discussion of Blake's political attitude. And his political works, especially *The French Revolution*, are highly valued in China. Consequently, very little is said of Blake's intellectual and artistic achievement. But a reasonable change in the attitude toward Blake's

major works, his Prophetic Books, can be perceived in Wang Zu-liang and Chen Jia's essays of 1980 and 1981. Wang praises the works particularly highly in terms of intellectual and artistic value.

Even so, the analysis and scholarship of Blake are still elementary and superficial in China. Such critical positions indicate ignorance of Blake criticism and scholarship for at least twenty years.⁷ This situation is largely due to the fact that China's intellectual life was virtually shut off from the West for about twenty years. With a new animation in China's intellectual life, and with an enlargement of cultural exchanges with Western countries, there may be a hope of advance in the study of William Blake in China.

Notes

¹I have examined all the works in the list except the first two. About these two bicentenary notices, "William Blake, The English Revolutionary Poet," and "Blake, The Representative Writer of Early Romanticism," the information comes from *Wai-guo Wen-xue Lun-wen Mu-lu Sue-ying* [A Bibliographical List of Articles on Foreign Literature, 1920-1978], ed. Lu Yong-mao, et al. (Kaifeng, China: Chinese Department, Henan Teachers' University, 1979), pp. 262-63, in Chinese. This is prepared as a preliminary list and distributed to many universities in China inviting opinions and advice to be incorporated in a later edition. This is a common Chinese academic practice for some important works. The previous edition was in 1957.

²The rendering of Chinese names in my writing is in this order: the first name given is the family name, and the name after the following comma is the personal name.

³This is quoted from Cheng's essay, "Wei-lian Bu-lai-ke di yi-su ji-qi Sheng-ping" [The Life and Art of William Blake]. This Congress was sponsored by the World Peace Council, which in 1957 was called the International Institute of Peace—see the *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs*, ed. Richard F. Staar, et al. (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1979), p. 446.

⁴This refers to the Lord Gordon No-Popery Riots, whose purposes were quite different, and Blake's part in it was involuntary, according to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), II, 643.

⁵The title of this plate is transliterated from Chinese as it appears in Cheng's essay. The plate under the same title is indicated in G.E. Bentley, Jr.'s *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 499, as only engraved, not designed, by Blake (it was designed by J.G. Stedman for his *Surinam* [1796]). Since I now have no access to any reproduction of that plate, I cannot verify my suspicion that Cheng used an engraving after Stedman for his analysis of Blake's power of design.

⁶*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, compiled and edited by Sir Paul Harvey, fourth edition, revised by Dorothy Eagle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 94.

⁷This statement was confirmed by G.E. Bentley, Jr., bibliographer and Blake scholar, who was a visiting professor in Fudan University, Shanghai, China. I must take this opportunity to express my gratitude for his detailed assistance on my present essay.

Paintings and Drawings of William Blake (1981): Some Minor Additions

Martin Butlin

The presence in the *Blake e Dante* exhibition (see Reviews) of some of the watercolors from Melbourne that had not been exhibited in Europe either at the Hamburg and Frankfurt Blake exhibition in 1975 or that held at the Tate Gallery in 1978 gave me the opportunity to examine these for the first time. This and other information has led to some minor additions to information given in my *Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 1981.

In my no. 812 31 the "17" in the inscription b.r. has been written over another figure, apparently "16". No. 812 99 has been disfigured by a stamp, "Felton Bequest", b.r.

Two updatings of my catalogue continue the saga of the "1795" color prints. "Nebuchadnezzar," my no. 301, is watermarked "JWhatman/1804". This is not surprising, as it was the companion "Newton" that was first found to have a similar 1804 watermark. On the other hand no. 320, "The House of Death," is watermarked "1794 ITAYLOR". Unfortunately, this color print also having been dated "1795" by Blake, this discovery upsets what one was hoping to establish as "Bindman's Law," that Blake only dated his prints 1795 if they were on paper watermarked 1804! This is in part based on the fact that the Tate Gallery's examples of "Pity" and "Hecate," which are not dated, do not seem to bear dated watermarks. The rest of the examples in the Tate are in the process of being examined, and any new discoveries will be reported in due course.

There are minor corrections concerning a drawing newly back from Australia, my no. 654, the sketch for the engraving "The Canterbury Pilgrims," which is to be sold at Christie's shortly. My own new measurements come out very slightly different from those given in my catalogue: 13 15/16 x 37 11/16 (35.4 x 85.7). In addition there is a roughly drawn framing line which reduces the height of the composition to approximately 13 in. (33 cm.). The paper has been folded a little to the right of center. A few corrections should be made to the transcript of Henry Cunliffe's inscription. In his copy of Frederick Tatham's original inscription "Canterbury" is split by a line break after "Canter-". The word "engraved" is followed by ". —". In the next part of his inscription he does in fact give Blake's address correctly as "3 Fountain Court," though as usual he gives his date of death as 1828. In his reference to Cunningham he spells "extraordinary" "extradordinary". At the end of that sentence, after "Blake", there is a full stop, and in the note on Sotheby's the apostrophe appears to follow the final "s". On actual viewing the drawing on the back, which is upside down in relation to the inscriptions, seems less directly related to the "Canterbury Pilgrims" composition than I tentatively suggested, though there are elements that can be read as figures on horseback. The paper of the drawing is considerably discolored but could almost certainly be bleached, in which case the drawing itself should stand out with much greater clarity.