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Richard B. Schwartz, Daily Life in Johnson's
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Milton, an "inward and confessional poem," lends itself particularly well to Deen's exploration of the Blakean concept of identity. Milton's journey brings him closer and closer to his most intimate self, until Satan's innermost disguise is unmasked as Milton's own Selfhood, the "anti-identity" that had overwhelmed the hero's true identity. In other words, Milton comes to understand that he had "put himself into *Paradise Lost* unconsciously and that he should have put himself into it consciously (as Blake . . . puts himself into *Milton*)." Milton's projection of his rebellious nature into the Satan of *Paradise Lost* is the source of his confusion of identity; the Bard's Song enables him to recover his projections and to recognize that his Selfhood is the true Satan. In discussing *Milton* Deen comments perceptively on the gap between some of Blake's images and the ideas that they represent: when one strains to visualize what cannot be apprehended, the "effect is of fallen sense experience being intensified to a point at which it is about to overcome its limits and to reveal the world as human."

In contrast to *The Four Zoas*, in which Blake's myth changes as he writes, *Jerusalem* presents the fully developed myth "in fragments or flashes." Deen astutely describes Los's saving action as his descent into error or illusion, through self-annihilation entering progressively deeper states of error and exposing their roots within his own mind. Deen sees the motive force of the poem as a "contest of extremes," one pair of which is "anti-identity and identity." Satan is the confusion of identity; Christ is authentic identity. Blake holds brotherhood above sexual love because the former allows the unique individual to "identify" with the universal community. Deen suggests that Los's hammer prevents the world from solidifying, so that changes leading to redemption may occur. When Albion is bewitched by sexual desire, he confuses sexuality with identity; when he sees the whole world as human, as part of himself, he accepts responsibility for it and regains his identity in community.

A final chapter, "Blake's Los," recapitulates and helps to reinforce the connections among the elements named in the title, with some help from additional mythological parallels. But each element in the mythic complex continues to mean so many different things that a kind of muddle remains the strongest impression. The relationship between identity and community really has been clarified in the course of the book, so that by the end we understand that "identity and community are the same supreme state seen differently, by contracted or expanded senses." But the hyphenated phrase, "identity-as-community" is supposed to mean "the exercise of one's unique Mental Gifts in the creation and exchange of the Mental Forms of a human world," as revealed in Los. And Poetic Genius "is the source and creator of our humanity, the seed that makes us both Homo sapiens

and unique human persons, and at the same time the cultural ground that fosters this development." A further difficulty is that conversing in paradise is "cut short" at the end of Blake's work and "remains mysterious"; it is from our perspective "a vanishing point in which we know what we know through having watched its coming into existence. . . ." Because all these concepts are so slippery, so tenuously related to one another, Los's concretizing role is crucial to Deen's argument. Los is "the generating force in the growth of Blake's systematic myth, the advancing edge of Blake's imagination projected into the poem, the embodiment of the principle of change through imagination as work." Deen is convinced that "wherever we turn in Blake's poetry, we are confronted by Los." Allowing for some exaggeration, this claim may be true. But I am not persuaded that all the ideas that Deen discusses in *Conversing in Paradise* take meaningful shape around the figure of Los.

Richard B. Schwartz, *Daily Life in Johnson's London*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984; 196 pp. + xix; \$25.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Reviewed by Max Byrd

Sooner or later every reader must yearn to grasp one of Richard B. Schwartz's sentences at each end and wring it dry, like a wet towel. For twenty-five of the first thirty verbs in chapter one of *Daily Life in Johnson's London* he chooses either the passive voice or a form of "to be": "Traffic upon the Thames was slow . . . The smell of sewage was apparent . . . The city's streets were covered. . . ." And throughout the book his verbs continue to lie motionless in this way, on their backs and silent, their legs wriggling feebly in the air. Such passivity of style dejects us all the more because Schwartz employs it upon a subject matter that has become almost proverbial for its vitality: the great thrashing, bustling, unceasingly noisy London that Johnson made synonymous with life itself.

Schwartz has intended his book as an introduction "to certain aspects of eighteenth-century social history"

and also as a companion for students struggling to understand the details of daily life that lie behind the major works of eighteenth-century English literature, particularly behind Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Accordingly, he organizes his chapters around topics such as "Work and Money," "Pastimes and Pleasures," "Health and Hygiene"—a familiar and serviceable scheme also used in books like Dorothy Marshall's *Dr. Johnson's London* and Roy Porter's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (neither listed in Schwartz's bibliography). To focus his discussions more sharply, Schwartz takes the figure of Samuel Johnson as a recurrent point of reference, not only because we so closely identify Johnson with the city he loved, but also because, as Schwartz rightly observes, Johnson's moral thought takes so seriously what he called in *Idler* 84 "the general surface of life."

For the second of his goals, the development of a "background" to major texts, this approach works very well. From time to time in the book we do seem to peer over Johnson's shoulder and to register, as he must have done, the presence of "pools of urine and stagnant water" on London streets, the stench of sewage and nightsoil permeating every street and house, the universal coal smoke, from domestic fires and factories, settling like a cloud over the city all year long. Schwartz has an excellent eye for such details, shrinks from no subject (e.g., his account of chamberpots in the sideboards of elegant dining rooms), and clearly revels, like most students of the period, in its vicarious and bracing low-life. Hence, he covers thoroughly such questions as false bosoms made of wirework—and the false buttocks made of cork—that ornamented fashionable Englishwomen for a time. He explains the "growing dominance of the Norwegian, or brown, rat over the English black rat." He lists the prevalent venereal diseases of the period, the locations and specialties of prostitutes (a floating brothel, called the *Folly*, lay anchored opposite Somerset House), and goes enthusiastically into the distinction between ordinary and "deep" gaming. And no one, perhaps, in all the vast literature about eighteenth-century London, has crammed more information on domestic manners and routines into shorter space, from the usual ingredients and dressings used in salads to the fact that dogs were sometimes harnessed to butter churns. "It must be remembered," Schwartz aptly quotes Johnson as saying, "that life consists not of a series of illustrious actions, or elegant enjoyments; the greater part of our time passes in compliance with necessities, in the performance of daily duties, in the removal of small inconveniences, in the procurement of petty pleasures. . . . The true state of every nation is the state of common life."

But as an introduction to aspects of eighteenth-century social history, *Daily Life in Johnson's London* suffers from its remarkable, nearly complete absorption in

such detail: no idea interrupts the unending flow of information. For generalizations Schwartz never rises much above "The period was one of great hoaxes." And for analysis he never reaches past the simple categories of his chapter titles. Thus the information he so generously sets down usually remains shapeless, following no particular order, leading to no particular conclusion. He gives us, for example, nothing comparable to Dorothy George's moving account of the ravages of gin-drinking in the opening chapter of *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, where she controls and justifies her narrative by asserting in the very first sentence that "The key to the social history of London is to be found in its changes in population—its growth, and the ratio between births and deaths." Nor can he sum up and transfer his information to a new context, as George brilliantly does, connecting the "uncertainties of life and trade" to that "sense of instability, of liability to sudden ruin, which runs through so much eighteenth-century literature." Likewise, Schwartz conveys little sense of the dynamics of class that figures prominently in most contemporary social history, as for instance in Roy Porter's discussions of the simultaneous resilience and porousness of the English social hierarchy. In part these failings derive from the brevity of Schwartz's book—he simply gives himself too little space in which to develop ideas—and in part they derive from the essentially static picture he paints of social institutions: he has nothing like George's thesis of gradual humanitarian progress in the Hanoverian years or Porter's continual awareness that Johnson's London stands at the threshold of the Industrial Revolution. Students who come to Schwartz's book expecting to learn what it is that social historians do—and why it is so exciting—will return unenlightened, ill equipped to apply historical techniques to literary issues. Students who expect to see how social history illuminates literature—how, to take one instance, the enormous size and consequent anonymity of life in London lead to new themes of alienation, masquerade, and self-consciousness—will find that the concept of literature at work here rarely goes beyond the anecdotal. His book, in other words, interesting though it is, belongs to the honorable but quite limited genre of antiquarianism.

I should add that the bibliography includes many items having nothing directly to do with London—Johnson's *Poems* in the Yale edition—and omits a great many items (e.g., James Sutherland's *Background for Queen Anne*) that most students of the period would want to know; readers will do better to consult the still useful bibliography at the end of George Rudé's *Hanoverian London*. The University of Wisconsin Press has printed an unusually handsome volume; both they and Schwartz deserve credit for the beautifully reproduced and exceedingly well-selected illustrations.