

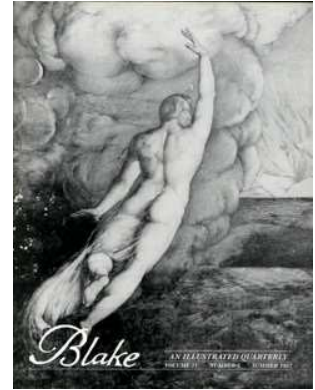
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

Reply to Mary V. Jackson

Charu Sheel Singh

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 21, Issue 1, Summer 1987, pp. 14-15



STOTHARD, THOMAS

Methought I was enamoured of an Ass. Water color, 5 x 5 7/8 in. CL, 18 March, #47, illus. (£378).

Triumph of Britannia. Oil on panel, 29 x 95 cm. SL, 12 March, #69, illus. color (£2860).

"Pilgrimage to Canterbury," etching/engraving by Heath and Schiavonetti, 1817. CL, 13 May, #43 (£291).

"Power of Innocence" and "Innocent Stratagem," stipple engravings by J. Strutt. CL, 11 Nov., #41, some staining, with 2 other prints (£110).

"Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man," engraved title and 7 pls. BBA, 5 June, #498, hand colored, foxed (Fogg, £242).

Bijou, 1828. Book Press, July cat. 25, #53, publisher's binding (\$95). William Allen, winter 1986-87 cat. 276, #80 (\$25).

Bray, *Life of Stothard*, extra-illustrated copies only. Beeleigh Abbey Books, Aug. cat. 41, #40, 2 vols., with 169 added pls. (£395); same copy, George Houlé Books, Sept. cat. 35, #102 (\$1200).

Collins, *Poetical Works*, 1797. Jeffrey Stern, May cat. 4, #430 (£70).

Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 1790. Claude Cox, May cat. 54, #73 (£120).

Hayley, *Triumphs of Temper*, 1799. Deighton Bell, July cat. 236, #431, rebacked (£35).

Rogers, *Italy*, 1830. Swann, 12 June, #302, foxed (\$60). Blackwell, June cat. A83, #384, foxed (£35). SL, 10 June, #994, with Rogers, *Poems*, 1834 (Thorpe, £154).

Rogers, *Pleasures of Memory*. Claude Cox, May cat. 54, #89, 1793 ed., worn (£25); #90, 1802 ed. (£18). Thomas Thorp, June cat. 457, #298, 1810 ed., large paper? (£50).

Rogers, *Poems*. Sterling Books, April cat. 63, #316, 1834 ed. (£55). Claude Cox, April cat. 53, #104, 1814 ed., rebacked (£15). Sanders of Oxford, March cat. 110, #491, 1812 ed. (£38). Blackwell, Dec. cat. A85, #116, 1812 ed. (£50). Claude Cox, Dec. cat. 57, #175, 1834 ed. (£30).



DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

Reply to Mary V. Jackson

by Charu Sheel Singh

Mary V. Jackson's aim in reviewing my book, *The Chariot of Fire: A Study of William Blake in the Light of Hindu Thought*, (*Blake* 18 (1984):721-25), is brought out in the concluding paragraph: "this study is not a search for the truth or a truth or even the facts, but an effort to vindicate one faction and bury its opponents." To this end she begins her review by quoting from the foreword written by P. S. Sastri where he says that British literature cannot be viewed "through the insular binoculars of the British Isles alone," if that literature has any permanent value. While accusing me of always quoting out of context, and being parochial, Jackson shows remarkable talent in the art of rhetoric by not quoting from the foreword: "Without rejecting what Blake inherited from Christianity, he brought out the impact of the Gita on Blake's poetry. Mr. Singh's problem was not Blake's Christian framework, for this has been overworked by able scholars." The language and terminology that Jackson does not understand, she calls "undigested lumps of arcane terminology." But this merely begins a list of blunders.

The quotation from Trevelyan, which seems to Jackson "apropos of nothing" (p. 122), in fact, is the starting point of the discussion that considers British colonialism in India from the earliest times up to roughly Blake's time. Sometimes Jackson says exactly what I have said, but her "peevishness" (the word occurs many times as an accusation upon the author) completely blinds her to the facts. The lines she quotes are these: "no real attempts were made by the Europeans to study Indian culture in its full outgrowth although they were not ignorant of a culture 'fully conscious of its own antiquity'"; she then draws a typically wayward conclusion: "the large number of studies and translations that Singh himself catalogues suggests there was some interest in some aspects of that culture." In fact, the catalogues I have given are in support of my assertion that Western scholars were not ignorant of a culture "fully conscious of its own antiquity."

In the next paragraph the reviewer says that when the accounts by the eighteenth-century indologists were largely reliable, why should I have belabored Europeans' sins of neglect? This observation she makes when a simple survey is being carried out to the point of establish-

ing Blake's context. Jackson shows her total ignorance of influences and counter-influences upon Indian, Greek, and Egyptian religion when she says: "All other matters aside, I hardly think that the idea that the ancient Egyptian and Greek religions were influenced by elements of Hinduism will take the scholarly community by surprise." All credits to Jackson for not allowing me to build a perspective to W. Blake. I would, however, suggest that Jackson read A. L. Basham's *The Wonder that was India* and S. Radhakrishnan's *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*; she might even study P. J. Marshall, ed., *British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*. Then Jackson the moralist tells me: "the only appropriate contest is between fact and error, good judgment and poor, great aesthetic discernment and little . . ." It will do her good if she took such lessons for herself. A person who shows total ignorance of historical facts and the tradition she is offering a review of, how could she be expected to distinguish facts from errors? It is not for giving surprises that I wrote my thesis. The idea was to give an angle and perspective to Blake scholarship that had not been considered in detail. Whether I succeeded in this task is for the reader to judge. I only wish Jackson had the civility to ask the reader to judge the real value of the book instead of offering atrocious "aesthetic" judgments. She even tells me that I should have followed Kathleen Raine's example and method of scholarship. For Jackson's kind information, Raine herself suggested to me the same when I met her in England. I tell Jackson, Raine's method would have destroyed my thesis. Her book presents no *thesis*, develops no single argument, and shows an organizational drawback from beginning to end. If Jackson cares to look up a few reviews of Raine's *Blake and Tradition*, she would find I am not the first person to make such remarks.

There are many examples of semantic confusion. Jackson says that I misquote Erdman and that Erdman is right when he says that in the Gita, desire is the "inveterate foe" while in *The Marriage* it is 'the comforter.' Jackson and Erdman should re-read the Gita. Jackson misquotes me by not quoting the crucial verse number I have given on p. 46 (Gita, chap. 7, verse 11) where Krishna simply says of diverting all desires towards the god within. There is no renouncing all forms of desire and it is really difficult for fuzzy-minded persons (again an accusation against the author) like Jackson to understand the complexities of a text like the Gita. Jackson could further read R. C. Zahener's translation of the Gita, especially the introduction, where he clearly says that in the Gita desires are not to be renounced or killed; they are simply to be directed towards God. Is not attainment of God a form of desire which is the Gita's supreme ideal?

One may go on citing the sheer sense of peevishness

and banality that pervades the entire review. Jackson should at least know what it means to be "impersonal." She has absolutely no right to accuse an author in straight and banal language. There are other ways to show disagreement. At one point she says I misquote Charles Eliot. She accuses me of not having quoted the clause, "but it does not appear that . . ." which should have been prefixed to what I have quoted: "asceticism, celibacy or meditation formed part of its (Egypt's) older religious life, and their appearance in Hellenic times may be due to a wave of Asiatic influence starting originally from India." Jackson's "crucial first part of Eliot's clause" all the more establishes what I am saying, and in no way contradicts my intended point. On the contrary, look at an example of Jackson's scholarship and judiciousness. On p. 123 of *Blake* she says that after some razzledazzle I conclude: "Blake derived his idea of the natural cycle and the sun from the *Vedic* hymns." The concept under discussion is that of the natural cycle, and what in fact I say is this: "Michael Davis thinks that Blake wrote his poems to the seasons after he had composed the rest of the songs in the *Poetical Sketches*. . . . If this is true, then it is very likely that Blake derived his idea of the natural cycle and the sun from the *Vedic* hymns." About the sun image I say: "The idea of the sun riding a chariot drawn by horses is common to both the Hindu and the Greek traditions, and Blake may have derived his image from either." My "crucial first clause" is "If this is true, then it is very likely that" which the reviewer does not quote [but see 124, col. 1 *eds.*]. And this is not manipulation. One could go on citing examples like these to no purpose. Even Dr. James Hogg, the publisher, is not spared. The attack on him is wild and barbarous. I am convinced there are better readers in the Western world (like F. T. Prince whose comments I print on the back of the book) and reviewers like Pamela Dunbar (see the review of my book in *Modern Language Review*, 1985, last issue of the year) who could see what is exactly there in the book.

As for Jackson's complaint on sources and their use, I would like to clarify that William Jones had translated *Vedic* hymns and it is only because of the unavailability of his works that I have quoted from W. J. Wilkins. I could only ask the reviewer to read the book a bit more carefully to find it mentioned therein that Joshua Reynolds had painted a picture of William Jones. Blake was a student of Reynolds for some time and Blake, Jones, and Reynolds were members of the Royal Academy where Blake had also exhibited his paintings several times. In these circles indological works were often discussed as Ozias Humphry tells us.

On the whole, Jackson's is the best example of how not to review a book and make the would-be reader feel it is all whimsical and fuzzy.