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Q U E R Y

Blake and William Freud

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QUERIES

Blake and William Frend

John Adlard's reference to Frend [BNL #8, p. 73] is very interesting; but I wonder if the influence is not the other way round? Blake uses the idea in several places, and it arises in the first place from his belief that in the perfect world perception would be infinite and unlimited:

Earth was not: nor globes of attraction
The will of the Immortal expended
Or contracted his all flexible senses. (Urizen 3: 36-38)

Blake seems slightly ambivalent in his treatment of the idea. Sometimes he contrasts the infinite variability of the vision of eternity with the restricted sight of natural man, who can only see and understand "globes of attraction." Sometimes he uses the vision of different worlds as globes as one of the possible attitudes of infinite vision; and this seems to be the point that Frend has taken. In the passage quoted by John Adlard, Blake says that it is a man's subjective viewpoint that counts, not his generalising rationalisations about the universe. Unexpectedly, Blake vindicates the telescope and microscope against their scientific users. These instruments assist the mortal eye, and open living worlds that had previously been hidden. Newtonic generalisation closes them again, against the evidence of experience.

There are other passages, however, with a rather difficult angle. Also in *Milton*, plate 15, Blake describes the universe, not in terms of Newtonian globes, but of Cartesian vortices:

when once a traveller thro' Eternity
Has pass'd that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind
His path, into a globe itself infolding; like a sun:
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,
While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth
Or like a human form, a friend with whom he liv'd benevolent.
As the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing
Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host;
Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding
His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square.
Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
Thus is the heaven a vortex pass'd already, and the earth
A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity.

The world of a man's present, living experience, is opened out to him like the open world of a flower. When he passes beyond it, and ceases to experience it directly, it rolls up into a globe.

Again, in "The Mental Traveller,"

The Cottage fades before his sight
The Garden & its lovely Charms

The Guests are scattered thro' the land
For the Eye altering alters all.
The Senses roll themselves in fear
And the flat Earth becomes a Ball

The Stars Sun Moon all shrink away
A desert vast without a bound...

Again the emphasis is on the difference between close acceptance of life, and fearful shrinking from it: there is a common image in *Jerusalem* of a sort of "exploding universe" in which not only the stars and plan but even the countries of the earth (notably Israel and Britain), are alienated from each other (e.g. *Jerusalem* 66: 40ff). In *Jerusalem* 83: 33ff this restricted vision becomes acceptable to Los after all, as a duty of the now repentant daughters of Albion (82: 72-80) to give some kind of shadowy understanding of the truth to "the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade:"

An outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface
Which is unchangeable for ever & ever Amen so be it!
(83: 47-48)

In short, Frend's idea seems to be drawn from Blake, rather than vice versa, and this explains the late date. Frend has watered it down, and turned it to a use which Blake would not accept; but that is, unfortunately, a common fate of Blake's particular and more original ideas.

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A CHECKLIST OF BLAKE SCHOLARSHIP (continued from p. 7)

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- Review of A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, Southern Review [Australia], III (1968), 188-191.
- Walling, William. "The Death of God: William Blake's Version," Dalhousie Review, XLVIII (1968), 237-250.
- Whistler, Laurence. "William Blake's Milton," Connoisseur, CLXVII (April 1968), 233. Illus.
- Wittreich, Joseph Anthony, Jr. "Blake's The Little Girl Lost, Stanzas 9-11," Explicator, XXVII (1969), item 61.
- "Dylan Thomas' Conception of Poetry: A Debt to Blake," ELN, VI (1969), 197-199
- "The 'Satanism' of Blake and Shelley Reconsidered," SP, LXV (1968), 816-833.
- "William Blake and Bernard Barton," Blake Studies, I (1968), 91-94.

C. Books

- Blake: The Gates of Paradise. Blake Trust Facsimile, described in BNL #7, p. 38. The Illustrations to The Divine Comedy. Da Capo Press (New York). Described in BNL #8, p. 61.
- Letters of William Blake, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes. 2nd ed. London: Rupert Hart-Davis. 1968
- Dorfman, Deborah. Blake in the Nineteenth Century. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1969.
- Rosenfeld, Alvin H., ed. William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon. Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press. 1969. Contents listed in BNL #5, p. 2.