

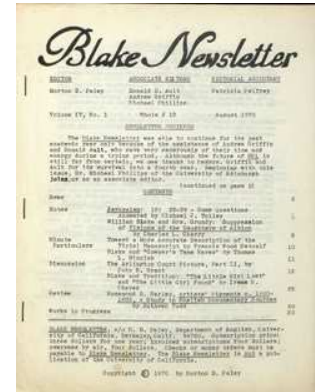
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R E V I E W

Rosamond D. Harley, *Artists' Pigments c. 1600-1835, A Study in English Documentary Sources*

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In the analogy he sets up between initiation into the Mysteries and "experiencing" Blake, Mr. Hughes at first assigns the role of Mystagogue, the sponsor and guide of the initiate, to Blake himself, although his, Mr. Hughes's, own practical choice is Kathleen Raine speaking through her commentary. A better role in the Mysteries ritual for the actual author of the poem would be that of the Hierophant, the high priest of Eleusis, who at the supreme degree of initiation spoke the sacred words and exhibited the sacred objects. Those were the "secrets," neither concealed nor explained but uttered and exhibited--presented for understanding directly to the initiate by their official guardian. Such a ritual exhibition, the epopteia, takes place as part of the narrative in "The Little Girl Found" when the transformed lion-king allows Lyca's parents to see their sleeping daughter. There the formal Hierophant is the "Spirit arm'd in gold," who in the first poem, in his animal shape, has been an epopt himself, "viewing" the same sleeping figure. In both poems, presiding over the enlightenment of the personages in the narrative and of the reader as well, the ultimate Hierophant is Blake, and he too presents his meanings directly, in words and images that are the equivalent (according to the analogy introduced by Mr. Hughes) of the sacred words and objects revealed during the epopteia at Eleusis.

It is such an exhibition, I submit, that is being offered in the last stanza of "The Little Girl Lost," and all the reader-initiate needs to learn for his "salvation" is contained in what Blake the Hierophant puts before him. Mr. Hughes, alas, seems prepared to turn his back and join Kathleen Raine in rearranging the objects in a counter-display.

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REVIEW

Rosamond D. Harley, Artists' Pigments c. 1600-1835, A Study in English Documentary Sources, The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, London: Butterworths, 1970. ix + 230 pp. + 8 plates £3.4s. (new style £3.20 in U.K. only).

Although this book makes no mention of the name of Blake, there being no reason why it should have done so, I would like to draw it to the attention of all of us who are working on the matter of Blake's drawings and paintings.

It will prevent our making fools of ourselves by suggesting that Blake might have used pigments which were not available to him.

Dr. Harley, as technical liaison officer with Winsor & Newton, has, I might mention, been more than generous in her replies to my questions about the pigments which Blake might have used, and I greet the appearance of her book with delight, as it helps to make this information available to everyone. Her bibliography is the only full one, covering the period, which has ever been attempted, and, as a dabbler in the field which she has covered so fully, I cannot fault it in any way. Hitherto, we have had to make do with the admirable Rutherford J. Gettens & G.L. Stout, Painting Materials: A Short Encyclopaedia (latest edition: New York, Dover, 1966), but that covers too wide an area so far as the pigments are concerned (although it remains invaluable for Mediums and Supports), and Dr. Harley's book fills the gap so far as Blake students are involved.

In his long letter to George Richmond, written in September 1828, Samuel Palmer says: "I have been sketching a head from life, and life size on gray board, in colours, and heightened with Mrs. Blake's white, which is brighter, and sticks faster than chalk; & it seems such a quick way of getting a showy, but really good effect,..." (Geoffrey Grigson, Samuel Palmer The Visionary Years, London, 1947, p. 75). This may well have been barium white, as that was well known among watercolor painters from at least 1815 (see p. 165), but it seemed to me strange that Palmer would not have referred to it under its commonly accepted name of permanent white. In her correspondence with me Dr. Harley says that it is possible that, although the pigment Zinc White was not introduced to the watercolor public, commercially, until Winsor & Newton offered it in their 1834 catalogue, Blake, an inveterate experimenter, might very well have been trying it out a good many years earlier, and her book makes it clear that it was available from the London factory of de Massoul from the close of the 18th century, but was not satisfactory as an oil-pigment until a proper vehicle was found some half a century later. This, however, would not have concerned Blake and it seems to me more than possible that, in view of its otherwise admirable qualities (it is non-poisonous for one thing--an important consideration for a man who drank walnut oil instead of trying it out as a medium), he might have used it in his watercolors and temperas.

I merely mention this one point in the hope that others, inspired by Dr. Harley's book, will feel free to speculate

within the limits which she has set. And it seems probable that, in some cases, pigments which are included as acceptable, in watercolor at least, by the latter date of 1835, may well have been a part of the experimental equipment of artists a considerable number of years before. I hope that others will agree with me in finding this book one of those which, while not dealing with Blake directly, are indispensable to those who would know roughly what he could have known in his time.

Ruthven Todd

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Bogen, Nancy, a critical edition of The Book of Thel with a new interpretation; a study of Blake's development as a self-styled prophet in light of 18th century Bible study; directing a thesis on Blake and Whitman as Visionaries.

Duerksen, Roland A., a book-length study dealing with self and society in the poetry of Blake, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley.

Hagstrum, Jean, a collection of essays (some already published) on Meaning in Design and Word; directing a dissertation: Elaine Kavvar, "Blake's 'Vegetable Universe': A Study of Botanical Imagery and its Context."

Helmstadter, Thomas, an article on Blake's ideas and symbolism in selected Night Thoughts illustrations.

Johnson, Mary Lynn, a study of the relationship of the Bard's song to the rest of the poem in Milton.

Singer, June, The Unholy Bible, a psychological study of Blake (item contributed by Mary Lynn Johnson).

Spencer, Jeffry, a study of Blake's illustrations to Milton's poetry.

Todd, Ruthven, a new, annotated edition of Gilchrist's Life; a "Picture-back" on Blake to be published by Studio Vista/Dutton; a study of Blake's illustrative techniques to be called William Blake: The Technical Man.

Tolley, Michael J., Ph.D. thesis: "William Blake's use of the Bible"; a project to edit (for the Clarendon Press) Blake's Night Thoughts illustrations, co-editor with John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose (coordinated by David V. Erdman); articles: one on "The Fly" in the next issue of Blake Studies (an exchange with Hagstrum); one on Europe in the Princeton collection edited by Erdman and Grant.

Woolf, Cecil and Amelia, The Sports of Cruelty, primarily about folklore sources of William Blake (item contributed by John Adlard).