

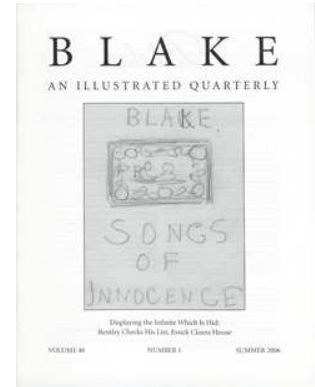
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R E M E M B R A N C E

Janet Adele Warner, 14 February 1931-6 May
2006

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Eternity in Love

BY DAVID BETTERIDGE

"Eternity is in love," the poet wrote, "in love with the productions of time." From his vantage point of filthy Thames and cruel streets, amid the shambles of an empire's hub and capital of greed, he looked, and all around he found his proof: eternity; eternity in love; in love with each and any flower, or grain of sand, or song, or chimney sweep.

We, when we hear the clamor, high in the frosty air, of wild geese flocking to their winter feeding grounds; when we hear the tiny crack of catkin, bud, or pod, ripening, opening, each in its due time; when, in a flood of sunshine, we see the silver flash of salmon curving in a hefty leap and plunge; when, amid the slow, far journeying of constellations, in the staccato of the Dog Star's signaling, we catch the quick red stab of its eye winking; then, and at all such moments when the fire of Nature self-reveals, we stop, must stop, and test the truth of Blake's wise apothegm.

In the cadences of poetry, of memory, of work, and in the silences to which they lead; in or after acts, however small or bold, of empathy or hope; on occasions when the news is heard that good, although as fragile as a snail or creeping tendril of convolvulus, has yet achieved a breakthrough from its crush of opposites; then, and always when some gleam of spirit's gold appears, we again, to test the truth, must stop.

In things contingent and ephemeral, or seeming so, there! eternity!
eternity in love!
in love beyond all waste and count of years!

R E M E M B R A N C E

Janet Adele Warner

14 February 1931-6 May 2006

It must have been predawn in Vancouver the morning of 7 May when Renée Warner, Janet's daughter, called me in Toronto to tell me of Janet's death the evening before. That night I was unable to sleep, thinking of all that Janet had meant to me over the more than forty years in which we had been friends. I decided to try and write down something about this friendship and her impact on my life, but I have found this to be an impossible task, for Janet was an enormous person, not in body, of course, but in spirit. And the world of the spirit is infinite.

I had spoken to Janet earlier in the week, from New York City on Tuesday 2 May, after the great William Blake sale at Sotheby's of the recently discovered watercolor drawings done by Blake two centuries earlier in illustration to Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*. The writings and the images of William Blake were what had brought Janet and myself together in 1964, in what I believe was Northrop Frye's final graduate course in William Blake. Frye was a magisterial thinker and a sweet man, but he was notoriously shy, so the overflowing room—in fact, a lecture theatre in Victoria College in the University of Toronto—in which he conducted his Blake seminar could never be a comfortable forum for his personality.

During our course with Frye, Janet became fascinated with the minute particulars of Blake's images, and she began to count tendrils in the vegetation which abounds in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and went on to study embroideries and other domestic artifacts, like transfer prints on china, as well as images on trade cards, and the most popular, even "humble" sources, in order to search for influences on Blake's art and design. At the time, her passion for this aspect of material culture was out of step with the prevailing approaches to Blake's art, which were highly symbolic, as evident not only in Frye's work, but also in that of Kathleen Raine, and many other critics and scholars. But, as in many aspects of life, Janet was ahead of her time, and the book which she eventually published, *Blake and the Language of Art* (1984), in its investigation of popular culture, was in the vanguard of current critical approaches.

Shortly after I met her, Janet told me she wanted to write a novel about Blake's wife, Catherine Boucher. I thought this was one of those throwaway remarks that people make, since I find that many people imagine themselves writing novels. After graduate school, Janet became a professor at the recently established York University in Toronto, where she remained until her early retirement. She published numerous articles, and was a productive scholar. When she and her husband John retired to the west coast of Canada to pursue their passion for

sailing and gardening, and to be near their respective families and their own children, she decided to write that novel on Blake's wife. She wrote me about it, and again I thought little, until the news came that her book, *Other Sorrows, Other Joys*, had gone to auction in New York, was purchased by Simon & Schuster, and was to be published by St. Martin's Press in December 2003. Janet passed through Toronto on her way to New York to meet with her agent and her publisher in September of that year, and we had a glorious week which included shopping for clothes for her trip and dinners out, the Word on the Street book festival, and lots of late night pajama party conversations. In the store where we bought her several outfits for that auspicious New York trip, they still ask me about my wonderful friend Janet, now nearly three years later.

Immediately after her novel on Blake's wife was published, Janet set to work on a novel on the women in Lord Byron's life, a project she was not able to complete.

Janet and I have traveled the world together, and I expect we will continue to do so. We have gone to conferences and given papers on Blake in Toronto, California, and Vancouver. On one trip, after her ancient and charming Uncle Cal picked us up at Los Angeles airport and took us for hamburgers, we flew up to Santa Barbara and stayed in a rather ramshackle motel on the beach. The Miramar Motel hosted for that event some of the world's greatest Blake scholars, and we walked on the beach together and looked at the Pacific and talked about Blake. In the evening I was exhausted, but Janet was always out into the night with other scholars talking, talking. She had an enormous passion for life, and a sense of fun which was irrepressible. At another Blake conference, we went to Santa Cruz, talked about linguistics and Blake while overlooking a field of horses, and then in the evening we all made our way down to the seafront and visited a kind of tacky midway on the beach.

In fact, Blake and oceanfronts seem to be a motif in our friendship, for we went to New York together one year, and left the city proper to visit David Erdman, whose lovely home overlooked the Atlantic. David and Janet and I walked the beach, gathered shellfish, and retired to lunch to talk Blake talk.

I remember once in England, when I was staying with my adopted family in Surrey, and she had been visiting her mother-in-law Molly on the Isle of Wight, she came down to lunch at the Fogg's grand country house, with its orchard, and rose garden, and wood, and croquet lawn, and lake, and she stayed three days. She taught me on that three-day lunch how to make a delicious suet tart which is stuffed with a whole lemon. Janet knew how to travel light, and she could make an occasion of any gathering.

When she went to the Himalayas on her own, to think about her life and to make life-altering decisions, she inspired me to do the same a few years later, and I borrowed her day pack and her weatherproof jacket which supported me in every way, as I climbed glaciers and crossed the sacred portals of Tibetan lamaseries.

Janet told me she could never get enough of the writings of William Blake, and, like him, she was a deeply spiritual, life-

affirming person. She was always exquisitely dressed, always feminine, always observant of social rituals, and yet able to be informal, generous, and welcoming. She had the talent, and the openness, to enter into the life of other people with grace, and many an orphan I took to her house for dinner, when she and John still lived in Toronto.

I went to Vancouver to say goodbye to Janet, two weeks before she died of pancreatic cancer, and I was privileged to spend a day alone with her. I had feared the worst, as I knew she was down to seventy pounds. Nothing prepared me for the brilliance which greeted me. Her pure white silky hair, those luminous eyes which shifted from grey to green to blue throughout the day, her ineffable sense of humor, her radiant smile.

On her bedside table was an edition of the collected works of William Blake. And her favorite poem from Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, "The Divine Image," was earmarked there:

To Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
All pray in their distress:
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness. ...

For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress. ...

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew.
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too

On that bright Sunday in Vancouver, only last month, Janet gave me, as she always has, recipes for the kitchen and for life, that famous lemon tart, comments on love and the spirit world, many quirky stories of human hopes and foibles, practical remarks about literary archives, trips almost taken, and the one departure. Despite her pain, we laughed about many of the adventures we had shared, including one twenty years earlier in Vancouver, for which she was still gently reprimanding me! She was always a surprise and always a support. The most generous of friends, and the most gracious, and the most life-affirming.

When I walked into her room, straight from the airport, that Sunday morning at St. Paul's Hospital, she looked up and said "You look like an angel." As evening approached, and I kissed her and turned to leave, she looked at me, and smiled and promised, "We will meet again—I believe that." And I do believe her.

Karen Mulhally composed this remembrance of their long friendship the morning after Janet Warner's death, and Janet's daughter Renée read it at the memorial service which took place on 23 May 2006 at 2:00 pm at Shaughnessy Heights United Church, 1550 West 33rd Avenue, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Janet A. Warner

1931-2006