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## A Rejoinder to John Beer

Irene H. Chayes

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Dante watercolors, and in certain years, in particular the year 1795, the amount of constructive and experimental activity was breathtaking. The author is at pains to show what was actually involved in the *making* of Blake's Prophetic Books and color prints, and he puts into perspective Blake's innovations in relief printing.

The most useful parts of the book for Blake scholars will be the regrettably brief accounts of Blake's stereotype and color-printing processes. Mr. Todd has carried out his own experiments, and has provided a convincing account of Blake's solution to one of the most obvious difficulties involved in combining text and design on a copper plate: getting the lettering the right way round. What slightly worries me is how Blake stopped the nitric acid, which must have covered the plate for some length of time, from eating away *under* the lettering--or was some simple method known at this time of preventing it? The problems of Blake's color-printing processes are harder to fathom, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Todd will devote a much lengthier work to the whole problem of Blake's printing techniques in the near future.

Some mention should also be made of the excellent choice of illustrations. They are hardly ever the most obvious examples, and English readers can be particularly grateful that he has not reproduced works from the Tate when less familiar ones will do. One is grateful, for example, for reproductions of the Minneapolis *Nebuchadnezzar*, the Metropolitan Museum *Pity* and the Edinburgh *Hecate*. With well over 100 illustrations the book seems to me to be an excellent value, and its modest format makes a refreshing change from the bulkiness of many recent books on Blake.

## DISCUSSION "With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought"

IRENE H. CHAYES: SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

A Rejoinder to John Beer

I share the dismay of both editors and readers at the prospect of a serial controversy, but John Beer's reply to my review of *Blake's Visionary Universe* (*Blake Newsletter*, 4 [Winter 1971], 87-90; reply in 4 [Spring 1971], 144-47) does call for a rejoinder. The aesthetic theory Mr. Beer begins to disclose in the last half of his last paragraph (where even Blake's concept of "states" is unrecognizable) seems to leave no common ground for discussion of "the larger points at issue" about either Blake or Coleridge. Therefore I too will limit myself to what can reasonably be debated.

I thought it was clear from the review itself why, writing for a specialized audience and with little space to spare, I decided to consider the section of the book other reviewers would probably pass by. (I am rather sorry Mr. Beer did not choose to defend his selection of illustrations and the special commentary as a miniature prophetic book, for organizing it would have been one kind of response, concrete as well as "visionary," to Blake's example.) I did indicate, too, that I found things to praise in the detailed commentary on the poems in the main text, and on specific points Mr. Beer and I are in accord more often than he grants. We both have noted the relation of "The Little Girl Lost" to Spenser's episode of Una and the lion, he in *Blake's Humanism* and again in *Blake's Visionary Universe* and I in an essay published earlier. (See my "Little Girls Lost: Problems of a Romantic Archetype," *BNYPL*, 67 [1963], 581-82; reprinted in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Northrop Frye [Spectrum Books, 1966], where the observation occurs on pp. 67-68.) More recently, we evidently have been coming on some of the same art sources for Blake, and the mutual corroboration is encouraging. But Mr. Beer is far off the mark in his charge that I think Blake was "more likely to know original paintings than engravings after originals." For one answer to his question about Blake's use of prints, I refer him to the essay cited in the review, my contribution to the new Erdman-Grant collection, *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*. There will be more on the subject of Blake's art sources and how he may have known them in the book I am now working on, which, as it happens, will give my own view of what occurred when Blake's "interpreting imagination" intervened between his sources and his designs.

That an intervention did take place, I agree with Mr. Beer. I differ with him on how it took place, what was involved, and what the result was, and the preliminary explorations in the essay just mentioned will show how profound these differences can be. More immediately, Mr. Beer's recent exploratory remarks only widen the distance between us in the simple matter of looking at Blake's pictures. In a Blake design, even when the total composition is baffling, most of us see a great deal more, and more that is provocative, than a "slant of the eye" or "thrust of the forehead" which under certain conditions may be equated with one or another of Mr. Beer's key terms. When we are reminded of an earlier work by another artist, it is likely to be something far more definite than a generalized "visual likeness" or a similarity of "tone and atmosphere" that arrests the attention, and no points of resemblance can be too obvious for comment. Mr. Beer gives a subordinate place to what he calls "immediate visual memory," and he sets up as Blake's "interpreting imagination" a kind of administrative, allegorizing faculty, which might well have produced the polemical annotations, or some parts of "A Vision of the Last Judgment," but as it is described could not have created a single drawing, painting, or etched design. In comparative groupings such as Mr. Beer reproduces, the evidence is that, on the contrary, memory and imagination acted upon each other with equal force, and "interpretation" did not necessarily move in the direction



Mr. Beer assumes--that is, from another artist's images to Blake's (or Mr. Beer's) "symbolic patterns." At this moment in time, certainly, no one's method of reading Blake's designs can be called wholly adequate to the complexities that are presented, but Mr. Beer's is limited, and limited unnecessarily, by what his own words suggest is a confusion of private, "visionary" aims with the public task of the critic.

On specific designs, Mr. Beer in effect answers, "Read my argument." Since it is not his argument as such that was in dispute, I'll try to clarify my criticism, with apologies for the repetition.

*Urizen 25, Jerusalem 75:* My original objection concerned the presence of women in the first design (since conceded by Mr. Beer in his reply to John Grant) and the difference between the two kinds of entwining creatures: those in *Urizen 25* are winged and wormlike, manifestly not serpents; those in *Jerusalem 75* bear scales, but their horns make them less serpents proper than the "dragon forms" referred to in the text. The contrast Mr. Beer sees is supported only by the apparently different reactions of the two groups of figures to their respective entanglements, which he expresses by his past participles: "Men gripped by spectrous energies" versus "Energies and vision reconciled." If these were two separate and untitled watercolor drawings, say, associated with no literary texts and otherwise unexplained, Mr. Beer might be justified in his interpretations. But both are intimately related to Blake's own texts, and the passages he probably worked from are not hard to find. The design on plate 25 bridges two metamorphoses in *The Book of Urizen*: the generation of Urizen's daughters "From monsters, & worms of the pit," in the text of plate 23, and the shrinking of Urizen's later descendants into "reptile forms" in the text of plate 25 itself. It is true, of course, that the "reptile forms" here are images of the shrunken human perceptions ("their eyes / Grew small like the eyes of a man"), which Mr. Beer might very well say would be included in what he calls "the distortion of energies at the Fall." But in its own context the other design does not (as it should in Mr. Beer's pairing) represent the liberation of the perceptions, or even any kind of "reconciliation" that would be approved in Blake's system of values. The figures fondling the dragons' heads are not "the daughters of Jerusalem, who know nothing of the Law," as Mr. Beer identifies them in his commentary (p. 372), but the members of the third group of Rahab's churches listed in the text of *Jerusalem 75*: "the Male Females: the Dragon Forms / The Female hid within a Male." In this design, too, there is a suggestion of metamorphosis as the "hidden" females emerge from the dragon folds, their thighs covered with scales at the point of juncture. They are emerging because they are being revealed, and through them is revealed Rahab, who is "Mystery Babylon the Great: . . . Religion hid in War: a Dragon red, & hidden Harlot."

The two designs thus are not in contrast with each other at all, for they belong to no common

frame of reference that would make a contrast meaningful; the narrative situations they pertain to are merely different. What they do have in common is Blake's modification of the Laocoön composition, which also contributed to the scene in the Ghisi engraving Mr. Beer uses as a comparative plate. He himself mentions Laocoön, and the "lineaments" of "energy" he is responding to may actually be those of the venerable classical composition; the opposition expressed in his captions has in fact a counterpart in the disparity between attitude and expression which was noted in the marble group long ago by Winckelmann. To this extent, at least, Mr. Beer's critical practice would be consistent with his aesthetic theory. But if the Laocoön provides what he is looking for, what need has he of Blake?

The Death of Adam: Mr. Beer misunderstands my criticism here. Har and Heva in *Tiriel* are obvious figures of Adam and Eve (although not only that), with or without Mr. Beer's special interpretation. Since there is an Expulsion from Paradise on the title page of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, it would be reasonable enough for the title page of *Songs of Experience* to refer in some way to the death of Adam (Genesis 5.5). But why must the white-haired corpses of the *Experience* design be identified as Har and Heva--an Adam and Eve who have not left Paradise and hence have not been doomed to die? In this instance I think it is legitimate to see a contrast in situation, an intended one, as well as a distinction rather than an identity between the two pairs of aged figures actually depicted.

*Europe 4:* Since Orc is exhorted to "arise" in the text (on the same plate, *not* the preceding) and since in response he does rise (line 15), it is hardly perverse to see in the design an act of waking by uncovering. The lines Mr. Beer quotes, "Forbid all joy," etc. (*not* from the same plate, but from plate 6) are about a very different kind of activity: neither covering nor uncovering directly, but spreading in order to snare; in "every secret path," not among clouds or cloud images; by "the little female," not by a full-grown female rather too old for the youth who by this interpretation would be her prey. And "nets" (an image usually precisely rendered in Blake's designs; see the last plate of *The Book of Urizen*) are what is spread, not the cloak or mantle beneath which we see the second figure, who in any event cannot be snared because he is not moving along a path but is lying face downward, in the attitude of one asleep: in other words, a fit subject to be waked by uncovering. In the essay I hope will become available to Mr. Beer some day, I have proposed a source for both the general situation (woman waking sleeping youth) and the specific pose and gesture of Blake's woman, who in terms of the text would be Enitharmon, as the youth is Orc. For the image of the cloak, there are two famous paintings Blake may have been recalling (yes, via engravings), and in both the crucial act is not of covering but of uncovering and revealing. In "Madonna of the Veil," the Child is being unveiled also, as Mr. Beer acknowledges in his caption. (I will concede that under



other circumstances, writing or thinking about it directly, Blake might possibly have interpreted Raphael's scene as Mr. Beer does, perhaps even, for ideological purposes, made Mr. Beer's shift from unveiling to veiling. But I still would relate "Madonna of the Veil" to *Europe* 4 only through the ironic Orc-Jesus analogy, and through the pictorial image of the veil itself.)

Both external and internal evidence (to use those old-fashioned scholarly terms) confirm a reading of this particular design which does not really conflict with anyone else's reading of *Europe: A Prophecy* as a whole. Mr. Beer's own interpretation may be "perfectly self-consistent," as he asserts, but aside from the inapplicable lines of text, he offers no objective evidence to persuade us to accept it, and even no subjective evidence but his feeling about the outstretched arm. When "vision" is silent about so much, it may be time to return to the humbler, vegetative eye.

*Irene Chayes's reply has been shown to John Beer, and he has written a brief riposte on some of the issues involved. Since Blake Newsletter 20 will be devoted to the British Museum Blake Handlist, however, the riposte will not appear until Newsletter 21. (Eds.)*

EDWARD W. TAYLER: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
EVERETT C. FROST: LOS ANGELES

The Source of "Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth"

Edward W. Tayler Louis Middleman asserts (*Blake Newsletter*, 4 [Spring 1971], 147) that Blake's use of the Bible, though "copiously documented," includes an unnoticed allusion to *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*. But the infernal Proverb in question, "Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth," unquestionably relies on the apocryphal book of the Wisdom of Solomon 11.21: *omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti* ("thou hast disposed all in measure and number and weight"). This verse is quoted, varied from, and alluded to frequently in medieval and renaissance literature. Blake, doubtless, knew the original; but he could also have encountered it in any number of neo-platonic treatises, not to mention John Donne and Ben Jonson. In any case Blake would have had to go no farther than his edition of John Milton which would include the commendatory lines of Andrew Marvell:

Thy verse created like thy *Theme* sublime,  
In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not *Rhime*.

There is no need, then, to confuse Blake's Proverb with Daniel's "numbered, numbered, weighed, divided."

Everett C. Frost Louis Middleman argues that the

fourteenth Proverb of Hell ("Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth") "is built on a close translation of the Aramaic writing on the wall (Daniel 5.25-28), 'mene, mene, tekel, upharsin,' or 'numbered, numbered, weighed, divided.'"

But first, Middleman's translation of this perplexing phrase is hardly "close" (literal), though it is viable enough working *backwards* from a knowledge of Blake's Proverb; and, while the apocalyptic concerns of *The Marriage* invite an astute reader to find a *parallel* in the Daniel passage (and in many other Biblical passages as well), they do not, of themselves, justify a derivation.

Second, a much less elliptical possibility lies closer to hand. Much more likely that Blake's Devil is having corrosive fun with one of Milton's angelic interpreters, Andrew Marvell, whose poem, "On Paradise Lost," typically prefaces Milton's poem and concludes with the lines:

Thy verse, created like thy *Theme* sublime,  
In Number, weight, and measure needs not rime.

Blake's Devil may be thought of as mocking Marvell for being cowed by Milton's resonances into accepting Milton's Deistical Trinity of Destiny, ratio of the five senses, and vacuum. He agrees with Marvell that "number, weight, and measure" is a fit description of Milton's poem--though not of the verse only.

## MINUTE PARTICULARS

MARTIN BUTLIN: KEEPER OF THE BRITISH COLLECTION, THE TATE GALLERY, LONDON

An Extra Illustration to *Pilgrim's Progress*

I am sure that the picture referred to as "A Warrior with Angels" in Robert Essick's *Finding List*, *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (Summer-Fall 1971), 141, figure 9, is an extra watercolour from the series of illustrations to Bunyan in the Frick museum. The dimensions and watermark tally, as does the style if one disallows Mrs. Blake's work on the Frick watercolours. The subject of the Rosenwald design, which retains all its original Blake freshness, is "Christian descends the hill from the Pilgrim's House" (Sir Geoffrey Keynes has suggested the title "Christian with the Shield of Faith"). An additional support for this identification is the number "20" inscribed in the upper right-hand corner of the sheet; this corresponds with similar numbers on the Frick drawings and places the subject of the design in its correct sequence. Incidentally, the inscriptions on the Frick drawings raise additional complications in that they do not seem to be by Blake and are not