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Brief Ripostes

John Beer, Irene Chayes

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Discussion.

ON MARY ELLEN REISNER'S
"LOCATIONS OF COPY U OF *SONGS OF INNOCENCE*
AND COPY d OF *SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE*"
FROM *BLAKE NEWSLETTER* 19

John E. Grant

It seems odd that Mary Ellen Reisner should have had so much difficulty as she reported in locating *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* Copy U or that she should have thought it could be found at Harvard. As was reported in *Blake Newsletter* 3 (15 December 1967), pp. 6-7, *Songs* Copy U was acquired by the Princeton University Library. Further particulars are to be found in Charles Ryskamp, *William Blake: Engraver: A Descriptive Catalogue*, (Princeton, 1969), p. 38, and there is also a reproduction of the remarkable general title page in this volume. Reisner's additional note that posthumous Copy d is not at Yale, as was reported in the *Census*, is of more interest.

Some further considerations: Reisner speaks of the "new *Bibliography* by Bentley and Nurmi" as being helpful in finding the locations of illuminated books; but the 1964 *Bibliography* is not "new" and does not attempt to duplicate the work of the *Census*. One gathers, however, that the real "new" Bentley *Bibliography*, which has been in the press for some time, will, when published, at last make up-to-date information as to locations generally available. It is certainly unfortunate that when the *Census* was reissued no effort was made to give current locations.

The problem of how information about locations should be used, however, is frequently mentioned in private but ought also to be frankly considered at least in the semi-public columns of *Blake Newsletter*. The question is, who wants to see a Blake work and why does he wish to do so? At present accessibility varies greatly in the several major public and private collections. There seems to be little relationship between the present condition of the works and their accessibility. Some copies of the illuminated books that are in poor condition and in which the pages have not been properly mounted are nevertheless quite easily available. In other cases one could argue that the security regulations are unreasonably restrictive.

But everyone who gets an urge to see a Blake book ought to ask himself why he needs to do it. Certainly no teacher should be party to the kind of make-work assignment that is too common of requiring his class in Introduction to Graduate Study to go, one by one, to look at a genuine

John E. Grant (University of Iowa) co-edited Blake's *Visionary Forms Dramatic*. By means of a grant from the American Philosophical Society he was recently able to visit the Princeton University Library and six other Eastern Blake collections in the spring of 1972.

Blake book. A Blake seminar is, of course, another matter. But even in this case one should expect that interested students will first carefully study Blake Trust facsimiles (or better, get to know photographic reproductions, such as will soon be available in the Erdman edited Doubleday edition) before seeking out the originals. It might seem as though such a stricture is of the Urizenic sort designed to postpone the day when at least a few more of the Lord's people become prophets. But it is not so. Until one has trained his eye up to seeing a Blake Trust facsimile he isn't going to be able to get very much from an original. Indeed, as I have pointed out elsewhere, he may never get as much from some putative "originals," since by no means all of them are as good works of art as the Blake Trust facsimiles. The great Princeton copy of *Songs*, of course, is much finer than the Blake Trust facsimile of the beautiful *Songs* Copy Z. But it is to be hoped that having Copy U now more clearly located will not much lengthen the lines at the Princeton Rare Book Room. The best Blake works are worth waiting for. Meanwhile everyone should take advantage of the abundance of materials that are generally available.

BRIEF RIPOSTES

John Beer and Irene Chayes

Mrs. Chayes and I have now each had a chance to defend our respective views of Blake's art, and Mrs. Chayes in fact states the difference between us with some precision when she declares roundly that while a work of art may be created through memory and imagination acting upon each other with equal force, an imagination which was *interpreting* the images presented to it "could not have created a single drawing, painting or etched design." What is for me the essence of "prophetic" art, as practiced by Blake, is for her a simple impossibility, and perhaps we ought to leave it at that.

While it might be tedious and repetitious to go over the same ground again, however, I should like to discuss briefly one or two of the new points that she makes. She is kind enough to re-

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Irene H. Chayes has taught at the University of Maryland, SUNY Binghamton, and elsewhere. She has published many critical essays, most of them on Blake and the Romantics. Her most recent publication is "Blake and the Seasons of the Poet," which appeared in *Studies in Romanticism*, Summer, 1972. She is writing a book on the interrelations of Blake's art and his poetry.

gret that I did not defend the organization of my illustrations and special commentary as a private miniature prophetic book of my own; but she does not explain why she thinks I should want to defend a conception which is entirely of her own devising. And she still shows little sign of recognizing that my main discussions of particular designs are usually *in the text of the book itself* and not in the more summarizing and thematic commentary. Thus, in discussing *Jerusalem* 75, she states that the entwining creatures are "less serpents proper than the 'dragon forms' referred to in [Blake's] text"--as if I had been maintaining that they were serpents. I can only refer her despairingly to page 192 of my book, and to the statement, "Benevolent dragons of energy are depicted"

It is worth continuing the discussion of this plate for the sake of the light that may be thrown on a very crucial question--that of the relationship between text and illustration in Blake's prophetic books. This question, which is topical in view of the welcome news of David Erdman's forthcoming Doubleday edition, would seem to lie near the center of the controversy. If one could take it for granted that Blake is always concerned to illustrate, directly and in detail, a line or more of the text on his plate, there would be a firm basis for interpretation. But although it is a good point of scholarly discipline to look hard for such possibilities, the search often breaks down. Sometimes, for example, the relationship is better described as one of counterpoint, as in *America* 7, where the peaceful pastoral images can hardly be making anything but a satirical comment on the speech of Albion's Angel. And this diversification of practice is not surprising when we recall that Blake called his designs not "illustrations" but "illuminations."

So with *Jerusalem* 75. Certainly, the vegetative eye sees a possible connection between the women and dragons of the design and those in the lines above, ending

Thus Rahab is revealed--
Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Abomination of
Desolation,
Religion hid in war, a dragon red & hidden
harlot . . .

The eye of direct emotional response, on the other hand, if it is anything like mine, sees an immediacy of beauty in the design which is distinctly at variance with the sinister tone of the lines about Rahab and the Churches. When the connections made by the vegetative eye and the response of the human being behind that eye conflict so sharply it seems natural to call on the eye of interpreting imagination and to try to resolve the difficulty by arguing that Blake is here not illustrating but illuminating--penetrating further into the conflict described on the plate to suggest a state in which what is, in the text, a destructive interaction between fallen vision and tyrannical energy might yet become a productive alliance between vision and energy, once restored to their proper functions. If so, this is another of Blake's counterpointing designs. While the early part of the text contin-

ues the conflicts recorded in the poem, the illumination, catching a moment of reconciliation--though still a reconciliation held in tension--looks forward to the restored alliance of vision and energy that will be more firmly prophesied in the last chapter of *Jerusalem*. While the motifs are taken from the harlot and dragon forms, in other words, the interpretation is dominated (or the illumination illuminated) by the next lines of the plate:

But Jesus, breaking through the central zones
of death & hell
Opens Eternity in time & space, triumphant in
mercy.

(These points may be found, amplified, on pages 190-91 of my book.)

It may be that modes of interpretation such as this offend the "public critic," but the public critic will always have some difficulty in dealing with writers who, like Blake, regard the public language of their time (whether in art or poetry) as inadequate to express the vision by which they are possessed. In such circumstances it seems more profitable to look for the modes of interpretation which make the best total sense of what is there on the plates (both individually and as a sequence) and then leave theoretical criticism to account for any successes which are achieved. In Blake's case (to put it another way) the purposes of scholarship would seem to be best served by the commentators who are willing to go along with him and look "through" as well as "with" the vegetable eye. It might be easier to apply more traditional methods if the two modes of seeing could be separated, but in many instances, I would maintain, such a separation makes nonsense of what he is attempting. So we return to the basic disagreement which I mentioned at the beginning. I believe that the imagination of an artist like Blake is capable of working towards the expression of new significances as well as of new forms, whereas Mrs. Chayes does not. No doubt the issue will continue to divide Blake scholars.

MRS. CHAYES WRITES:

I am sorry that by misrepresenting my position Mr. Beer makes it necessary for me to reply again, I hope for the last time.

"Impossible" was neither my word nor my meaning for the suggestion--with which I generally agree, as I pointed out--that Blake was likely to interpret in his own way the art themes and motifs he borrowed. What I did mean and believed I was saying clearly enough was that the allegorizing represented by Mr. Beer's captions and descriptions would be *inadequate* to account for the complexity of the designs in question and *inappropriate* to a non-verbal art medium. I do not separate "significances" new or old from "forms" (again, we are talking about pictures), and I would not exempt Blake's own intentions and predispositions from the process of mutual modification out of which, as I see it, the new significances stressed by Mr. Beer

(but not necessarily those found by Mr. Beer) would have arisen.

To me, the design on *Jerusalem* 75 is the product of such a process, involving the Laocoön motifs and resulting in a new significance which is bound up with the revelation of Rahab, the dragon-harlot. There is a great deal more that could be said about this plate, both text and design, and about Mr. Beer's new comments, in which he will not allow Rahab to be both sinister and beautiful or error to wear an appearance of reconciliation. Much could be said, too, about Mr. Beer's theory of "visionary" criticism, which disappointingly turns out to be affective criticism, long familiar. In the hope of putting an end to this debate, which actually began between Mr. Beer and John Grant, I will say only that it has been a reminder that by no means do Blakeists nearly always agree with each other, or differ only on matters that can be resolved in dialogue. A consideration of critical methodology as such has been too long neglected in Blake studies; perhaps space can be found in the *Blake Newsletter* someday for an exploratory discussion.

Minute Particulars.

A RECOLLECTION OF GEORGE RICHMOND
BY HIS GRANDSON

Ruthven Todd

At Christmas 1971, David Bindman sent me the most generous gift of a page, c. 1850, from a sketchbook by George Richmond, of some semi-aquatic plants and a tiny woodland scene in the lower left corner. This sent me hunting through some unsorted papers in search of a note which I remembered making, although, as I had not then moved into the cottage which I now occupy, I feared that it might have been lost with so many other unfiled items. However, I was fortunate and it turned up. This reads:

Sir Arthur Richmond told me that he remembered his grandfather, George, very clearly and that, toward the end of his life, his memories of his early youth became particularly bright. It was a pity that Arthur was up here for such a short time as I wanted to know so much. He suggested that probably these recollections of extreme old age were more vivid than anything he had produced for Alexander Gilchrist in the 1850s. (I had introduced the name of Gilchrist.) One thing he told me was that, when Blake died, George closed his eyes: "to keep the vision in," George explained. Galilea.

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I had stupidly forgotten to date the note, but an application to John Yeoman, who with his wife had accompanied Sir Arthur and his wife Greta on this and previous visits to Galilea, has supplied the information that it was in June 1966. I met Sir Arthur again, for the last time, at lunch in the Chelsea Arts Club at the end of August in 1967. George Richmond was born in 1809 and lived until 1896. Sir Arthur was born in 1879 and died in November 1968, three months short of his 90th birthday. This was the only occasion of our meetings upon which I remember having managed to bring up the subject of Blake. I think that, in explanation of his saying that George's memories of his youth were sharper as an old man than when trying to help Gilchrist, Sir Arthur made the point that, in the 1850s, George was extremely busy making a living and so had more things upon his mind. When Sir Arthur mentioned the detail of George Richmond's having closed Blake's eyes, I did not at once remember having seen it mentioned before, but then recollected that it was mentioned by H. H. Gilchrist, *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings*, 1887, pp. 258-59, and quoted by Mona Wilson in a note. The remark, "to keep the vision in," however, has not been previously recorded. There is no reason to doubt that it is a genuine recollection by a very old man trying to recapture the feelings of the teen-ager who was present at the deathbed, and who wrote the heartfelt and agitated note to Samuel Palmer, for his own young grandson. As such I feel that it deserves this explanation of how I came to be the recipient of the added detail from the only person I have known, so far as I can recall, who was able to give me anything new which he had actually received from the person who was present. The stretch from August 1827 to August 1967, 140 years, is long enough in all truth, but the fact that David Bindman's present now hangs in a cottage in the same village where I heard the remark helps strengthen the cord which pulls me back to examine the nearly seventy years preceding the first of these dates.