

PHANTASMAGORIA

Art, Madness, and Revolution

by Jack Lindsay

The idea here set out comes in part from my work on Blake but in a wider way from my studies of 18th century life and culture that go back many years. The period was one of deep social change with consequent strain and stress. England was noted for its suicides, its melancholia. Gray and Collins are examples of the latter. Particularly as we come to the period of the French Revolution the strain grows stronger; the sense of profound change often issues in millenary and prophetic attitudes, of which Blake is the supreme example. These attitudes were not merely the property of poets and intellectuals, but affected large numbers of people as we see in the responses to prophets like Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott. The insurrections of 1798 in Ireland had strong millenary and prophetic elements, and so on.

There are many affinities with our own period, also one of deep change and continuous strain, which also has its millenary cults ranging from Jehovah's Witnesses, ^{to} Scientologists, ^{and the Unitarians} followers of Moon, etc. ^{and its escapist irrationality} to the largescale response to science-fiction fantasies, especially those that tell of space-visitors and explain human civilisation as not a human product but the result of such visitors etc. To take one example Von Danikin's Chariot of the Gods has sold some 34 million copies.

My suggestion then is to carry on from the study of Blake to accounts of how others, mainly artists, responded to the same situation. One could easily write two or three books on the subject, carrying on to the work of John Martin with its apocalyptic vision, and 1848. But what I propose here is a book that would cover the following

The poet Christopher Smart	some 15,000 words
The painter Romney	20,000
the caricaturist Gillray	20,000
De Louthembourg, artist	12,500
Joanna Southcott	12,500
	about 80,000 in all

Each character would be treated biographically, as I feel that this is the best way for gaining the general reader's interest, whereas an essay is liable to have a much more limited appeal - though of course the points most relevant to the thesis would be most stressed and elaborated. Also the biographical approach would best enable me to link the particular character of the poet or artist with his world and show how impact of the contemporary situation worked out.

1. Christopher Smart (1722-71), of an old northcountry family. His father had come down to Kent to work as steward of the estates of Viscount Vane. He wrote verse early and gained ~~xxx~~ patronage of the Duchess of Cleveland, was admitted to *embroke Hall, Cambridge, 1739; he had a considerable success, became a fellow 1745, the MA, won Seatonian prize for poetry 1750, 1751, 1752, 1754, 1756 with poems on the attributes of the Supreme Being. Already developing dissolute habits and running into debt. A small pudgy man, who made fun of his looks. Deep need of society, yet extremely shy and uncertain underneath. Very susceptible, at Cambridge fell in love with the Mitre maid and the sister of a friend, Pretty chambermaids common in his verse. Dropped out of the university into Grub Street, editing lightweight periodicals and making prose versions of the classics. Taking on the pantomime character of Mrs Mary Midnight, the Man-Midsife. Got with child Anna!maria Carnan, step-daughter of Newnery the bookseller, who bore him two daughters before his first mental breakdown in 1756. Marriage then broke down. In 1757-8 in Bedlam,

He was a manic-depressive. In his manic states excessively jovial, and given to drink. He started taking Christ's injunction to pray without ceasing. Prayed loudly in places of recreating eg St James Park, called for friends from dinners or beds. (An odd delighting in supping the respectable appears in *Jubilate*, 'For I blessed God in St James's Park till I rounded all the company.'

No need here to detail further his life, which makes an amusing and pathetic tale. The important thing is the way in which he a minor poet on two occasions burst out into something like greatness, at least into works of astonishing originality. Rejoice in the Lab pub for first time in 1754, written during his incarceration as a madman, and the Song to David pub in 1763 after he had again been in a madhouse. The strength

of the latter lies in its rapturous sense of the unity of all living; a passionate emotion that chafes against the regular stanzaic form. In Rejoice he had written a wholly original work, using a structure of Biblical parallelism, but developing the idea of lined contraries in a wild and yet ultimately

complex philological puns and playing on words. background of Berkeley, Masonic ideas and imagery,

The effect is of a mad medley, and yet there is a subtle dialectical vision of the interconnection of all things, of conflict and resolution. In a sense everything in universe is reduced to a

dialectical interplay of words, but in the ^{action} process the words (poetry) ^{become} as expressions of the conflicts and resolutions of process symbols of reality and at the same time precipitations of a new deeper consciousness of process.

These generalisations need to be linked with exemplifications that show that Smart's symbolic system works in detail. But they give some idea of the strange revelation that comes out of his madness, the structure of a higher sanity which has close relations with the system of correspondences that Blake was to develop.

Smart with his conventional forms and modes of expression, his under the stress of anxiety and breakdown, in his manic depressive state, brings out the deeper conflicts of his world and the way in which they can move to higher resolutions.

Take next 1734-1802, seems very different. Born at Beckside, Lancashire son of

a joiner and cabinet-maker, with one elder and 8 younger bros.

175x Apprenticed to an itinerant artist, who set up at Kendal then eloped with a well-off girl. Romner fell ill and was nursed by his landlady, got her daughter with child ^{17 years old} and married her. Marriage soon broke down, though he remained on friendly terms with wife. Using £100 gained from a lottery of 20 pictures, he went to London in March 1762 (was from 1764 with [unclear])

Steadily made his way up the portrait career. First his professional work to 1762, then painting legal and bourgeois characters (;764-7, at Gt New Street Inn); mixed bourgeois and aristocratic (;767, Gt New Street St

then became favourite of high society (Favendish Sq, 1775 on (with bre
in 1788, illness). Fonal collapse of hea h ;799 nack to Westmoreland½

In many ways of a Fainsborough wi ut his robist element and his conti uous
re urn to natural scene. Keeps familar rea;ism nut more nd more adds
elements of grace, using borrowed attituds. Stro element of
sentiment, eg in his capac ty to ddpict generaliwed charms of youth.

One po nt of break through. in 1782 ubder spell of Emma Hart, painting
he in nedless classical or historical figures, from Bacchante or
Cassnadra, Cal pso to Moranda, Jn of arr, s Cecilia, Mary Ma ga h.
here evolves what may call the sket -portrait, where everything based
on the bold achi ement of a single lyrical effe t, simple as yet subtl.

9n later women portraits fuses the ceoclassic line with painte ly
almost monc ome chiaroscuro relived by bright colours. His capacity to
degine simple flowing shapes here to fore (in fahions key as well)
-sees dec poss of the big hats (cf Gainsb urgh richmind walk drawings(
while coured sash contrasts with whit muslin fro ds.

ef Mrs Lee Actón 1791

farway faxe with some obscure anxiety, ne vo clasp of fingers
-in formless landscape menaced by storcmolouds. Much of elements of
G portaits but with less strngth, sense of loss, relation to nature
thinned out.

after exhibit

Yet this artist fashion ble with his capacity to feel and i temsify
or a ing sentiment e c. grace neoclaic controlled to lesser graces.

prodoundly rad l. wanting express moveme t of l fe.
tried death of Wolfe in 753 for ciety of arts premium (Wests work a
RA not till 1771), and started 87 his picture of Tempest, done by april
1790 f Boydell gallery. (Lost, only engraving and some b ts), not
sucess - note takes movemt of sh ipwreck but with Prspeor and Ariel
(controllers, saviours) unseen at side. amid dark clouds.

1784 reaction to Blake. N Records

his verse was capable but wholly conventional, without a spark of originality. Dr Johnson said unkindly but not altogether unfairly when asked if Swift or Dryden were the better poets, "Sir, there is settling the point of precedence between a louse and a flea."

Then he went mad and was admitted to St Luke's hospital in May 1577. Next year discharged uncured, he was provoked madly till 1763. His madness seems to have taken a harmless form. Dr J. "y poor friend..."

Mts Piozzi." MS 1

must have got a certain satisfaction in shaming the respectable and genteel of his world.

That lines from the poem given name of Jubilate Ago or Rejoice in the Lamb he wrote in madhouse.

Throws aside all accepted method, uses Biblical forms of responsive or antiphonal poetry (based on Hebrew ritual), repetitions of synonyms, anaphoras and sycetic forms.

And binds whole with a strange complex set of assonations and interlacements
an ex of simple statements in it MS 28

some of his strange wisdom 31.

Blake's eternity coming to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment

here on flowers

Cat Jeoffroy.

cf. MS (2) (6) cl. 4 (21)

all critics have seen only entangled mss
but in fact underlying a clear argument

summary MS 32-5

After his release he wrote more ordinary verse again. Much of it versions of psalms, hymns and songs for fasts and festivals, parables, hymns for children and so. Only in ~~the~~ A Song to David we see his deep sense of the living interrelationship of universe break out again, struggling against the set forms and the conventional diction of age. A remarkable poem in its way but the great revelation is in Rejoice in the Lamb. One of the strongest and most moving documents in all poetry, both a personal statement, a sustained psalm, a philosophical statement. Here we may say the mad poem reaches its height - unless we are to see Blake's prophecy as a continuation of this tradition. Certainly here a higher sanity, a vision of brotherhood and the unity of all living.

a Blakean power of transforming political and social reality into
imaginative images, but without any central idea or comprehension to
make sense of the pantheism.

Blake in

deeply stirred by idea of Boydell Gallery
in 1787 cursing p rats, was let go imaginatively (48)
tempest, raising of fiend in Henry VI (ii)
Opie in (51)
Macbeth and witches and Baucis ghost,
Emma as Totania (57)

1791 p ted Paine, among his few friends (57)

frenzied haste of stult (56)

brooding on human wretchedness, series on Howard and prisons

1790 in France at Paris with Hayley

(early as 88 oppressed by London (61-8 to Hampstead

1792 massacre of Swiss Guard. cite (66)

light effect (68)

satanic pictures (69)

...

illray

1757-1805

son of man who'd served as trooper, lost an arm, and became an out-
pensioner Chelsea Hospital, then sexton of the Moravian burial-ground
at Chelsea where self buried 1799 (Note likely link of Blake with
Moravians) early apprentice to letter-engraver, but ran off, joined
strolling actors, then student at RA, also studied engraving under
Rylands and Bartolozzi. (got dot-manner from R)

already at age of 12 had made a caricature of Lord North with
owl on head, first in own name Paddy on Horseback (a Bull) 1779

after 1780 mainly political, on till 1811

ready satirize anyone from royal family and ministers. Finally took up
with Miss Humphry with print shop (first in Strand, then New Bond St, Old
St, and St James St

worked rapidly even wounding fingers by burr brought up by needle from
copper

retiring morose, drinking more and more till by end of 1811 sinking into
imbecility, spent rest of life mostly confined upstairs. Once tried throw
himself out of window. on 1 June 1815 escaped, was caught, died
some 1500 pieces.

imaginative force keeps asserting itself, history into a sort of mad
magical nightmare

Cruckshank who knew him near end describes his excitement over his
work as extraordinary and even painful to watch, in its wild hurry
like a premonition of lunacy.

19th

I have done much work on the 18th century. Among published works apart from lives of Hogarth, Blake, The Death of the Hero (David etc) Turner.

novels (Lost Birthright on Wilkite period, Pastoral, 1790s, Light in Italy - Italy of Byron and Shelley), direct works like book on Defoe's London, 1764 (The History of Life... one year), edition of Priestley's Memoirs etc.

Much of the work leads into studies of Blake and Turner, and on consideration I should like to consider a series of studies centered on the impact of the French "revolution, esp on artists

but in general dealing with the social and cultural crisis of the century. Much work done on reaction of the poets, eg Coleridge Wordsworth, Southey and so on to the French Revolution, or but little on wider impact in any coherent way

I first mention a number of headings or individual artists who would come into the survey.

1. The particular struggle around History Painting in England as compared with situation in France. The Kings aim in founding the RA. The direct struggle to take over History by revolutionary artist like David which reflects the struggle for state power in France has no counterpart in England. George wants to use History, esp thru West, but substitution is complex. Mortimer and Hamilton - fusion of of many elements with neoclassic etc. leading on into Blake

Struggle as continued through the radical Barry. Forms taken in attitudes to History by men like Romney, Lawrence, Opie.

Imagery of natural compulsion and disaster (volcanoes, earthquakes etc) and relation to the new industrial landscape. Wright of Derby etc, leading on into Turner

Interest in artificial light effects in this relation. Fireworks and illuminations. Stage and panorama effects and machines. De Loutherbourg Gainsborough et al. Again leading into Turner. Many interesting experiments in his relation not yet examined.

Themes of Stannism linked with History. Gibson. on into History. Lawrence, Fox and others