

## JAMES JOYCE AND PALE BLAKE

By Elaine Mingus

Critics and scholars often do not agree on the writings of either Joyce or William Blake. This is because of their complexity, also inconsistencies especially in Blake, and it humbles us to try and understand their writings. Nor is there agreement about how and how much Joyce *used* the writings of Blake. I have tried to steer a middle course between two extremes. There are sources common to both, such as The Egyptian Book of the Dead. Some things were merely corroborated for Joyce in Blake. Whatever Joyce did take from anyone was reshaped, expanded, and fused into his own vision.

William Blake was an engraver by trade and had his own technique of illuminated printing. He embellished all of his writing beautifully in color and also with drawing, and was better known for his painting than for his writing.

Blake lived in London from 1757 to 1823, a very different time than Joyce's time. It was an age that was very unsympathetic to any "open vision" or what seemed eccentric or heretical. But Blake was from a dissenting family with the belief that God might speak to one directly. He was self-taught and did not accept anything wholly but was inspired by Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg and others. He greatly benefited by his marriage to Catherine Boucher and she supported his efforts always.

"Imagination leads to wisdom and insight" said Blake, and "The harlot's cry from street to street shall weave Old England's winding sheet". He had his own style and copied no one.

Blake believed in the divinity of man and in identification of body with soul. He was not seen as a mystic but a visionary artist and poet. He was once considered a madman, now revered as a major poet of English Literature, though still considered by many to be a genius who was half-mad. Blake once said, "The prophets Isaiah and Ezekial dined with me", and he claimed that supernatural powers dictated to him. In his "Milton", Milton reincarnates and enters the body of Blake.

William Blake was greatly influenced by the American and the French Revolutions which he and others thought heralded the Apocalypse, expected

at any time. A social rebel with very radical beliefs, Blake was mainly ignored by the general public. He rebelled against prevailing Victorian morals. "Thou Shalt Nots", and followed natural instincts rather than adhere to standards of society, and the same can be said of Joyce. Blake was a symbolist who invented his own symbols, like spectres and emanations. "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's", he said.

But some of Blake's writings are considered chaotic; he stressed love and brotherhood but with stormy doctrine, eccentricity and complexity. Characters play more than one part, and there is merging of some, as in Joyce's Finnegans Wake. What we call animal life, Blake called vegetable life; that is, concerned only with growth and reproduction. He preferred the Bible, or Hebrew History, to the classics. Bacon, Newton and Locke represented rationalism to Blake and he hated that, as well as the "remote sky" of Jehovah God or "Nobodaddy", a word Joyce adopted, and Blake said that churches cast out apostles, creeds root out faith, and that "exile and bitter wrath are a portion of the just man".

The British government was cracking down on radicals, and some of Blake's friends were being jailed, which is partially the reason for some of the obscurity in his writing. As with Joyce, he had financial difficulties all his life in part because of the lack of getting published.

Scholars speak of Blake's goodness of heart. "He sang, as always, when dying." In his writing we can see his spirit taking flight. To him, art alone could restore the Golden Age, when the original state of blessedness will be recovered, he believed. He said, "Soul must look not with but through the eye" and it was his conviction that "the eternal is in love with the products of time."

Some of Blake's early poems show the social problems of the city, as Joyce did. "The Chimney Sweeper" shows his feelings for the downtrodden. "Little Black Boy" is powerful and beautiful. In his poem "London" Blake, as others, paints the modern city with filth, suffering and nets of authority as in Joyce's nets of Stephen Dedalus.

"Songs of Innocence and Experience" has been called the most important commentary of the Romantic Age. It shows two contrary states of the soul.

To Blake, childhood is both itself and also a state of soul that may exist in maturity. What we accept in childhood innocence and simplicity is tested and proved feeble by actual facts. An example is from "Tyger", one of the best known of his poems.

"Tyger tyger burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

.....

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the lamb make thee?"

"Songs of Innocence and Experience" has the message that imagination finds the world not good enough if there is misery and pain and that only vision helps. It is a protest against authority which at that time, ignored the individual, restricted sexuality, and bred poverty, cruelty, and warfare.

In "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", Blake is not marrying the Christian concept of a boring heaven and a tortorous Hell. With his "Human form divine" ordinary morals are turned upside down and "all religions are one". "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" is humanism and Blake wanted to eliminate orthodox corruption. To religion, he said, good is passive. To him the omission and hindrance of action is vice, and all action is virtue. Blake *did* believe in discipline, calling it the "restraint of growth of weeds in the human spirit". In the contrary of "devils" and "angels" here, the angel teaches Theism, the belief in One God as creator and ruler of the universe and the devil represents Pantheism, that all dieties reside in the human breast.

Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" show moral virtue. Examples:

"In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy" and

"The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom".

Blake himself set the most store in his early works; and in the main, they are preferred. Their intensity and simplicity is not matched in his longer poem. His major prophecies, which deal with a new mythology where man's need for

redemption is the main theme, as in the Bible, are seen as a contrast to Blake's earlier "All that lives is holy".

Perhaps one of the primary ideas that Joyce lifted from Blake, is that of expansion, the unlimited, endless possibilities. In his paper on Mangan, Joyce began with Blake and his aesthetics. He enlarges on it, however, embracing also Berkeley. The philosophy of Bishop Berkeley was that particulars alone govern the reality of ideas - not the abstract, as man is able only to imagine the particular. Blake also stressed this.

Joyce as an exile had sympathy for Blake's exile. He did an essay on Blake in which he quotes from him with admiration, adding that Blake was a member of the literary revolution. Blake writes of the lapwing that we find in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man also and says, "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp...and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art". This is the tenet of Stephen Dedalus's aesthetic theory. Stephen calls it "applied Aquinas" and includes his "Claritas (clarity) forged by the mallet of Los". Los, a Blake character, represents creativity.

In the "Proteus" chapter of Ulysses, Stephen transposes himself into Blake and others, tapping with his ashplant. When he touches his forehead and says "It is in here that I must kill the priest and the king", it is probably from Blake. However, Stephen's "shut your eyes and see" and "darkness shining in the brightness" is different from Blake's Biblical references to light; also Joyce did not "preach" as Blake did.

One consideration here is the distinction between the young Joyce and the mature Joyce. He said that as a young man, his idols were Dante and Blake. But in later writing of Joyce, this becomes mixed with other ideas and changed.

A motif common to both Blake and Joyce is that of contraries, that they are very necessary to each other. But the source for Joyce is clearly Bruno, also Nicholas of Cusa and his "coincidence of contraries". For Bruno contraries coincide or merge, each thing within every other. But Blake is not consistent with this and also replaces one dominant force with another, tyranny against tyranny.

Blake took himself and his work very seriously; there is humor in his earlier poems, but in the major prophecies, very little. Joyce on the other hand, made fun of everything and everyone, including himself. He comically refers to Blake more than once and questions the limits of Blake's aesthetic vision with his "thud of Blake's wings of excess".

There are other motifs common to both Joyce and Blake with various origins, like the conflict and jealousy between father and son and between two brothers, the motif of right and left, and lamenting of war. Both have narrator or dreamer characters, but used differently. Threes, fours, sevens, and twelves are used by both but in different ways, and also was in common usage already in mythology and otherwise. Blake's Four Zoas are not the same as the four in Finnegans Wake, who are gossipers; they have no evil intent, no real power. Their attempts to reason always end in verbal chaos. The rainbow is used differently by Blake, and negatively. The rainbow of Finnegans Wake is positive and important, referred to more than 60 times.

Blake was hard on women; he named one "The Whore of Babylon". We see negative and condescending treatment of females, shown as weak, a shadow or emanation of the powerful male. Blake shows the comfort and protection of mothers in earlier poems but the ultimate power is male. This decries his doctrine of necessary equality between contraries. "Female will" was to him a negative, calling it "lust for dominance". Blake's hero Albion was supposedly imprisoned by the power of female will. Blake in one place did refer to Los as time and a female space. Elsewhere both time and space are represented by the male.

Joyce had a much different approach to women; Anna Livia Plurabelle shows the power and the glory of women. In projecting female time, ALP presides as Muse diety over life, birth, marriage, procreation and death, identified with the river Liffey, loosening and flowing. Consider Anna Livia's final monologue, and the cyclical river of time. "Plurabelle's to be", denotes future. But Joyce did show space/time in his Shem and Shaun, as different ways of approaching life.

The myth of Blake's Albion whose fall was the creation of the present universe, is also a story in many mythologies. There are several accounts of the fall in Blake and separation of male and female. With the Blakean

Apocalypse, there is tension, and contraries; we sense possibility of another fall, and cycle. Both Joyce and Blake see their giant as a mountain but for Blake, nature is the scattered and broken body of a human god or giant. Joyce's HCE or Finn is not scattered and not nature. He is Everybody. He is prevented from rising, but no cause for alarm or sadness. "With every fall of every Finnegans he will arise". For Joyce there is no fallen world as in Blake; the fall is a rumor that the four try to constitute as law and HCE tries to discount even as he confuses. There are many falls in Finnegans Wake - fall from a ladder, fall into drunkenness, into bed, fall of his penis. A fall is followed always by a rising and sin is a rumor.

For sure, common to both is the cyclic nature of our world. Vico treated the movement of history from the primitive condition of giants who created the universe. We see an endless cycle of tyranny and merger as engulfing of the other or being engulfed by it. Also for Vico, every effect has a cause. But Joyce says "Of cause, so! And in effect, as?" Nothing new in Vico's four part structure, hence Blake's; the ricorso returns history to its beginning, is retrospective. Blake also uses the Christian end of time, return of the Golden Age with apocalypse and a New Jerusalem. There is no theology in Finnegans Wake as in the later writings of Blake - "Divine" is not used in that sense and it is mostly implied.

Another model for Joyce was Nietzsche, who retains the ability to generate change and chance. Though Joyce used Vico, the emphasis in Finnegans Wake is at times at odds with Vico, seems to be more like Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence", death of God, and resurrection not based on the past but new. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is hard to compare words and phrases as Joyce uses them in a different way. With precursors, nothing can be taken at face value, it is too complicated. Joyce once said to Jacques Mercanton, "I don't know whether Vico's theory is true; it doesn't matter; it's useful to me, that's what counts".

We do think that Joyce's "yea" must be a multiplier of life that gives substance to potential "teems of time and happy returns". Joyce's "fargazer" in FW gazes into the past and future, dizzies us with mixing of tenses, and does not take refuge in God. Also in Joyce's ricorso, it is still the human age. The sleeper rolls over - and it's arise and shine, out of bed

and ready for breakfast - then on page three, back to Howth and environs, with "double ends jined". Joyce, unlike Blake, dealt with it with parody and humor. "The going at gone, the is coming to come". And "no placelike, no timelike".

When we search Joyce's work we may see Blake and others, but I think what we see most of all is the work of Joyce himself. I am very impressed that both Joyce and Blake were both inspired, and this shines through in all of their writings.

In closing, I want to quote Frances Phipps, a Blakean scholar: "Much as we admire and feel reverent toward the works of William Blake...we do not know of any work compared to *Joyce's* which has so lightly accomplished its severe task of instruction. That dance-step is an achievement without parallel, and required in addition to the gifts of an Irish ollave, a oneness between himself and his maker more worshipful than any heretofore realized. The tremendous concentration which drove Joyce onward through all incomprehension of readers, personal physical suffering and family troubles, to sum up the myth of mankind, required every drop of blood he had in him. He shoved us forward in a mighty push of imagination".

Finally, there are *possible* references to William Blake in *Finnegans Wake* which I have not included here. But there are also *probable* references to Blake and they are as follows:

- 57.07 "They answer from their Zoans" (Blake's 4 Zoas)
- 182.31 The "Haunted Inkbottle" & Blakean printing  
(But Glasheen for instances finds other possibles)
- 183.04? "The bouchers" (Blake's wife, Catherine Boucher)
- 219.24 "Bold bad bleak boy of the storybooks" (McHugh says Blake)
- 220.13 "The fine frank fairhaired fellow of the fairtales"
- 293 Diagram and Blake's similar diagram from "Milton"
- 293-304 Numbers & geometry, spatial abstract (Blake's Urizen  
an obsessive engineer whose muse is math.
- 299.05 "Your spictre or my omination" (emanation but perhaps not  
serious)
- 305.n3 "giglamps" etc., on senses; 4 Zoas represent 4 senses.
- 409.20 "MacBlack" MacBlake?

563.11 "Pale" for "Pale Blake"?  
lines 12/13 "Sir Blake tribes bleak"  
line 15 "With pale Blake I write tintingface".  
611.14 "Zoantholitic furniture" as used by Blake?

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2005