

WORK TOWARD KNOWING:
BEGINNING WITH

BLAKE



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JIM WATT



KINCHAFOONEE

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I have included these works to suggest the beauty of the individual voices of the Builders of Jerusalem; evidence of formal training in art are here subsumed by traces of the Four Zoas.

–J.W.

Foreword: The Building of Jerusalem

One sunny day in April I was walking with Jim Watt and Doug von Koss along a path under fragrant Bradford Pear trees toward Jordan Hall where Jim's office was located on the campus of Butler University. Doug was a guest singer from San Francisco, invited to lead the students of Jim's Blake seminar in song. We stopped at the entrance as Doug read the inscription in the limestone above the door: ENTER TO LEARN • DEPART TO FULFILL. Jim was stunned, "Doug, I've been entering through this doorway for 35 years and have never noticed that before!" He was doing just that every day of those 35 years – learning and fulfilling.

* * *

My cubicle was situated just outside Jim's office. I learned more by eavesdropping on his conversations with students than I ever had in graduate or undergraduate studies. I was inspired by the music he would play at a high volume, disregarding his colleagues in neighboring offices, ranging from the blues of Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters to the classical piano of Maurizio Pollini or Hélène Grimaud to fado sung by Mariza. Sometimes he and a couple students who had come by to inquire about their grades would get carried away by impromptu singing, but because this was a highbrow academic institution, they drew no audience except my secretly listening ears.

* * *

Built in 1928, The Arthur Jordan Memorial Hall, designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by Robert Frost Daggett and Thomas Hibben, sits heavily on Butler University's campus with daunting buttresses, recessed entrances framed by pointed arches surrounded by stone moldings and intricate relief sculpture. Unlike the gothic cathedrals, though, Jordan Hall did not have expansive windows. With the exception of the president's office, which was lined with high, broad windows that allowed sunlight to flood the room all hours of the day, Jordan was the dankest building on campus.

* * *

Gothic architecture, the Gothic cathedral especially, represents the universe in microcosm. One of Blake's most well-known stanzas is this one from "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
 And Eternity in an hour

Blake says, "Gothic is Living Form...Living Form is Eternal Existence." Jim also taught courses on the Gothic cathedral.

* * *

With the exception of the occasional guest poet or loudmouthed student, Jim's classroom was the only one that buzzed with vibrant energy and light. He and his students were building Jerusalem. What does that mean? Anyone casually familiar with the Bible would say that Jerusalem is a metaphor for Heaven or a place of universal love and peace. But Blake's idea of the building of Jerusalem is probably more true to what genuine artists such as Jim Watt are doing because it does not discount our life here on earth and in our bodies rather than have us yearn for

someplace beyond. Blake says that Jerusalem is Liberty, the inspiration of all mankind, and the “Divine vision in every individual.” In *The Four Zoas*, Blake’s longest poem, Urizen conspires with Luvah to enslave Liberty. Urizen represents rationality and Luvah represents emotion. And this is what happens to most of us when these two conflicting characteristics are the only attributes by which we experience reality. This is what our parents, teachers, priests, politicians, etc. have taught us. It is what Blake calls “Single Vision.”

* * *

In *The Four Zoas*, the primal man, Albion, represents Man before the Fall, and each of us in a state of sleep or unawakened consciousness. In such a state the four fundamental aspects of man have been thrown off balance. These are represented in Blake’s cosmology by the Four Zoas: Urizen (rationality) and Luvah (emotion), as mentioned above, but also Tharmas (sensation) and Urthona (intuition or imagination). “Though they are present in each of us,” Watt explains, “they are also uniquely and individually unbalanced – and a considerable effort is required to bring them into balance.” He continues, “The Zoas...will assist us in that recovery and recreation of one another and reality which Blake calls the building of Jerusalem.”

* * *

As a poet with a particular fondness for the Romantics – Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Goethe, Hölderlin, Novalis, et al. – I knew a little Blake, but always found him difficult to comprehend. I tried to learn from academics such as Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, but they were not speaking the same language as I. Robert Bly’s *News of the Universe* provided a great introduction, but it wasn’t until I saw in person some of Blake’s prints and drawings from the *Book of Job* at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and in that same gallery attended what was supposed to be a lecture on Blake by Dr. James T. Watt, Allegra Stewart Professor of English at Butler University, that I was inspired to jump in, to begin with Blake. It wasn’t long before Watt had everyone in attendance standing and singing verses of Blake! Watt explains in this

book, "...the words are not the meaning; the text is not the poem... Actual experience...will confirm that the song is more than the notes... and your own life is much more than material cause and effect. You were not reasoned into being," he continues, "ask your parents. You were thought, dreamed, imagined, sung and danced together into being." Later he shares a passage from *Jerusalem*:

A mans worst enemies are those
Of his own house & family;
And he who makes his law a curse,
By his own law shall surely die.

In my Exchanges every Land
Shall walk, & mine in every Land,
Mutual shall build Jerusalem:
Both heart in heart & hand in hand.

Watt asks, "How could we have anything to do with such building? Even if we thought some action might be taken, what would it have to do with art?" He responds, "Blake's art...is obviously and remarkably different from what we have been taught to expect of art. Specifically, it makes powerfully spiritual, mental, emotional, and corporeal, or sensational demands on its audience."

* * *

The book you hold in your hands in more than a text on Blake. And although its subtitle is *Beginning with Blake*, it is not only for beginners. Besides being a guide to the work of William Blake, *Work toward Knowing* is a vade mecum of sorts on teaching and learning and achieving four-fold vision. It is also a memoir of a man who understands Blake and teaching and who is a master craftsman in the building of Jerusalem. Enter this book to learn. Depart to fulfill.

Norman Minnick
Indianapolis, Indiana