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Blake's "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold"

by ROBERT F. GLECKNER

In a recent essay on Blake's manuscript poem, "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold," G. Wilson Knight reestablished his long-held basic principles of "interpretation":

I have followed every curve of the poem, and have tried to remain true to it. Where paradox is involved, I have allowed it to stand, as paradox. I have kept as true to the surface as possible, and only applied to the symbols arbitrary meanings where they are reasonably certain. I have not let my own views interfere; I have not made the poem say what I wanted it to say. . . . Apart from calling on literary analogies to clarify my own statements, I have relied entirely on the poem itself, and as itself.

With such single-mindedness (not to say, with Blake, "single vision") Knight ignores as "nothing to [his] purpose" certain sources and analogs (for example, Ovid, Virgil, Livy, Apuleius) offered by others as well as "Blake as a person, his supposed views, and intentions, or his life.") This is not an unusual approach to poetry, of course, and though it is relatively rare in Blake studies a number of critics have foundered in their interpretation of his poetry because of their espousal of it or similar approaches. The only other substantial effort to elucidate the apparently obstructive ambiguities of "I Saw a Chapel," Hazard Adams's in William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems, is considerably more successful at least partly because he reads Blake's poem in the Blakean context in which it resides—most particularly in light of the relationship in Blake's mythology between Orc and Urizen, and of the importance of point of view in interpreting all of Blake's works. But although Adams mentions in passing that the serpent's tearing down of the door is a "suggestion of Samson" and the vomiting "a suggestion of Spenser's..."


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many-headed vomiting dragon,” he neither pursues the implications of these sources nor takes them into account in his own interpretation. In fact, Blake's sources, as well as Blake’s mythology and general context, are not only “to the purpose” but, as is usual in Blake’s adaptation of borrowed materials, integral to the poem’s total meaning.

It has generally been assumed that Spenser’s influence on Blake’s poetry occurs early—and there is ample evidence in the Poetical Sketches to support that view. Contrariwise, Milton’s influence is seen to rise as Spenser’s wanes, culminating in Milton and Jerusalem (neither of which has been taken to be Spenserian in any sense). I should like to argue here that Spenser’s influence on Blake, at least through the last decade of the eighteenth century, is often just as powerful as Milton’s—and more frequently than not intertwined more or less equally with Milton’s. “I Saw a Chapel All of Gold” is a case in point.

While there is insufficient evidence to argue that Blake’s poem owes its inception to Spenser, a key passage from the latter’s The Ruines of Time informs “I Saw a Chapel” in an important way. After listening to the long lament of the spirit of Verulam, the speaker of Spenser’s poem has a series of visions “Like tragicke Pageants seeming to appeare” (I. 490), the first of which is as follows:

I saw an Image, all of massie gold,
Placed on high upon an Altare faire,
That all, which did the same from farre beholde,
Might worship it, and fall on lowest staire. (ll. 491–494)

If, as Renwick suggests, Spenser’s point of departure was the statue of Zeus at Olympia (as mentioned, for example, in his Ruines of Rome, I. 20) and the ‘great image’ in Daniel 2:31–35,6 Blake also may very well have known the latter at least. But his poem radically alters both the Biblical theme of the ultimate fall of the four empires at the coming of Christ and the Spenserian theme of the frailty and vanity of all sublunary things. Instead, taking his cue from Spenser’s comparison of this “Image” with that ‘great Idol’

To which th’Assyrian tyrant would have made
The holie brethren, falslie to have praid (ll. 495–497)

Blake constructs an image of false, idolatrous religion which, in its forbidding power and above all in its secrecy (vide the closed door that prevents all entrance except apparently by force), deters even mistaken wor-

ship except from afar and without. Spenser's worshippers too, we note, "did . . . from farre beholde" the idol placed on high and could reach only the "lowest staire," certainly sufficient hint, whether or not it was Spenser's intention, of the inaccessibility of Blake's chapel. Moreover, that "worship" is associated not with eternal or spiritual life but with death:

And many weeping stood without
Weeping mourning worshipping

One is reminded of the end of The Book of Urizen after the formation of the self-strangling "Net of Religion":

And their children wept, & built
Tombs in the desolate places,
And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them
The eternal laws of God*

As Adams suggests, Blake has here taken a step beyond his song of experience, "The Garden of Love" (written at about the same time), where

A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

This garden of love in itself is significantly related to another passage in The Ruines of Time:

Then did I see a pleasant Paradize,
Full of sweete flowres and daintiest delights,
Such as on earth man could not more devize,
With pleasures choyce to feed his cheerefull sprights.'

5. Cf. Blake's elaboration of the idea of secret religion and its connection with repressed sexuality in Urizen's "temple" of love in The Four Zoas, VIIb, E392-393:

And he commanded his Sons found a Center in the Deep
And Urizen laid the first Stone & all his myriads
Builted a temple in the image of the human heart
And in the inner part of the Temple wondrous workmanship
They formd the Secret place reversing all the order of delight
That whosoever entered into the temple might not behold
The hidden wonders allegoric of the Generation
Of secret lust. . . .

6. Pl. 28, ll. 4-7. All quotations from Blake are from D. V. Erdman's The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965), by plate and line numbers where appropriate or by page number preceded by E. On the idea of the religion of death see Jerusalem 77:1-21.

7. Ll. 519-522. Cf. the more famous later development of this idea in the Garden of Adonis (Faerie Queene, III, vi, 30ff).
But characteristically Blake transforms Spenser's emphasis on the delights of the flesh, "earthlie blis, and joy in pleasures vaine," which lead to his garden's being "wasted quite" (ll. 528–529), into an expression of the union of human love and divinity in the human form divine by way of "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" and the non-restraint of desire as explored particularly in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. For example, Blake's unSpenserian and unBiblical (except perhaps in the Song of Solomon) collocation of sensual enjoyment with "true" religion can be seen graphically in the Proverb of Hell: "Prayers plow not! Praises reap not!" Complementarily,

Those who refrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire. (*Marriage*, pl. 5)

And, most important, improved sensual enjoyment leads to imaginative perception, by means of which "the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt" (*Marriage*, pl. 14). Thus the "Thou shalt not's" of "The Garden of Love," the self-imposed impossibility of entering into (that is, perceiving) a oneness with God, Spenser's idolatrous image to which the "holie brethren" would be made to falsely pray, and the self-repression of desire Blake conflates in the violence of the serpent's rape of the chapel all of gold.

In this sense Adams is right in seeing the serpent as Orc-like, the spirit of wrathful revolution against all forms of repression—but he is also, of course, the perversion of love in the same sense inherent in Blake's proverb of Hell: "Brothels [are built] with bricks of Religion" (*Marriage*, pl. 8). While the tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction, for Blake such wrath, erupting out of repression and unilluminated by imaginative vision, finally leads to the promulgation of new tyranny to replace the old: the fury of his "wind" does indeed "blight all blossoms fair & true." For, like the chapel all of gold itself, under such tyranny

\[\text{all blossoms grew & grew} \\
\text{Fruitless tho fair to see}\]

in a grotesquely parodic version of the garden of love.

While Blake's frequent uses of the serpent in his works are sometimes confusingly various, in "I Saw a Chapel" it is with deliberate ambiguity both phallic and Orc-like as well as repressively priest-like, an embodiment of natural religion. Thus, after establishing in the first stanza, at least partly by reshaping two of Spenser's "visions," the indissoluble relationship between false religion, repressed desire (and hence frustrated sexuality), death, and the mind-forged manacles of reason which

prevent the union of human with human as well as with divinity (the worshippers do not "enter in" not because they can’t but because "none did dare"), Blake turns in his second stanza from Spenser to Milton. The Samson allusion that Adams mentions could, of course, be the Biblical version of the story in Judges 16; but given the dominant imagery of the passage Samson Agonistes is the more likely source. Not only is Samson’s destruction of the “Theater / Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high” (ll. 1605–1606) the triumph of God’s power over the idolatrous Philistines’ worship of Dagon (who is at least reminiscent of Spenser’s “Idoll”), but Blake clearly read Samson’s resistance of Dalila’s blandishments as his triumph over a prostituted sexuality which, in its inextricable relationship to political and religious purpose, forms a perfect model for Blake’s own identification of these seemingly disparate ideas or principles. Further, the Semichorus later describes Samson, “His fiery virtue rous’d,” as “an ev’ning Dragon” (serpent) come to assail the “tame villatic Fowl” (ll. 1690–1695). Blake’s daring transformation of the positiveness of Samson’s destruction of the Philistines into a graphically melodramatic rape of the established church and its sacraments is made all the more extraordinary by his allusion to Paradise Lost in the last line of the second stanza. In Book V of Milton’s epic, which Blake obviously knew as well as, if not better than, his Bible, Raphael begins his descent from Heaven to earth at God’s behest by flying “through the midst of Heav’n”

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till at the Gate
Of Heav’n arriv’d, the gate self-open’d wide
On golden Hinges turning, as by work
Divine the sovran Architect had fram’d. (ll. 251–256)
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Similarly, in Book VII

Heav’n op’n’d wide
Her ever-during Gates, Harmonious sound
On golden Hinges moving, to let forth
The King of Glory in his powerful Word
And Spirit coming to create new Worlds. (ll. 205–209)

While this last allusion provides an obvious commentary on the unopened (locked?) doors of Blake’s chapel, regardless of the fact that Milton in both passages is speaking of egress from Heaven, Blake clearly set his rape against the Miltonic background of both an open, unsecret religion (Milton was indeed “of the Devils party” after all) and the idea of the freely opening gates of heaven. This motif of the open/closed door Blake used at about the same time as the composition of “I Saw a Chapel” in America, where the door represents not only closed secret religion but the gates of the five senses (here consumed in the “fierce

9. Cf. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, pl. 5.
flames” of Orcian revolution) and Milton’s gates of Heaven: the “ancient Guardians” of the law

slow advance to shut the five gates of their law-built heaven
Filled with blasting fancies and with mildews of despair
With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc;
But the five gates were consum’d, & their bolts and hinges melted
And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men.10

Another gate image strikingly similar to its use in “I Saw a Chapel” is found in The Four Zoas, where the “Gates of Enitharmon’s heart” are

burst ... with direful Crash
Nor could they ever be close again the golden hinges were broken
And the gates broke in sunder & their ornaments defaced
Beneath the tree of Mystery... (VIia, E353)

Finally, and even more startling, is Blake’s pencil sketch executed at about this same time of a spikily crowned female figure (Enitharmon?) whose genitals are represented as a small Gothic chapel containing a figure that is possibly an idol.11

Blake thus characteristically adopts at face value Samson’s heroic annihilation of idolatrous religion only to radically modify it into an un-Miltonic forceful opening of the gates of a closed and secret heaven, a revolt against restrained desire and enforced virginity, the destruction of the gates of the five senses (and hence the reawakening of imaginative vision), the revival of life against a religion of death. Similarly, for Blake Samson’s act, uninformed by vision, without (as Milton puts it) “inward eyes illuminated,” only breeds new forms of tyranny:

And Orc began to Organize a Serpent body
Despising Urizen's light & turning it into flaming fire
Recieving as a poison'd Cup Receives the heavenly wine
And turning affection into fury & thought into abstraction
A Self consuming dark devourer rising into the heavens
(The Four Zoas, VIia, E349)

Accordingly the “pavement sweet / Set with pearls & rubies bright” along which the serpent draws his “slimy length” on his way to “Vomiting his poison” on the bread and wine Blake in The Four Zoas establishes as the rich garb of the transformed Orc (who thus takes on the accouterments of the very religion he ostensibly destroys):

Beneath down to his eyelids scales of pearl then gold & silver
Immingled with the ruby overspread his Visage. ... 

“Emerald Onyx Sapphire jasper beryl amethyst” all strive “in terrific

11. Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition, I, 196. Miss Raine also relates the drawing to “I Saw a Chapel” and then goes on to suggest that “Blake is following the tradition which calls the Blessed Virgin the ‘Domus aurea’ (House of Gold) in the Litany addressed to her.”
emulation” to gain a place “Upon the mighty Fiend,”12 each gem a per­
version of the pavement of love in the Song of Solomon (3.10).
Thus the unregenerate Orc here first follows the advice Blake later has
Los deliver in Jerusalem:

. . . overthrow their cup,
Their bread, their altar-table, their incense & their oath:
Their marriage & their baptism, their burial & consecration. (91:12-14)

And then, by his ambiguously regenerative yet destructive act, the
chalice of wine becomes the “Cup / Of fornication,” the bread the
“food of Orc & Satan, pressd from the fruit of Mystery.” As a result

The Ashes of Mystery began to animate they call'd it Deism
And Natural Religion as of old so now anew began
Babylon again in Infancy call'd Natural Religion.
(The Four Zoas, VIII, E371)

It is at least possible that Blake found some sanction for this ambigu­
ity (though he rarely needed “sanction” for anything) in Spenser’s
Faerie Queene. In Book VI, for example, the Blatant Beast breaks

into the sacred Church. . . ,
And rob'd the Chancell, and the deskes downe threw,
And Altars fouled, and blasphemy spoke,
And th’Images for all their goodyly hew,
Did cast to ground. . . . (xii, 25)

And though Calidore “supprest and tamed” the beast, Blake might
easily have read this attack on the iconoclasm of the Puritan extremists
as a desirable smashing of idolatry and secret religion. In Book I of The
Faerie Queene, presumably the passage Adams alludes to, is in some res­
pects the other side of the coin, though it has its own ambiguity from
Blake’s point of view:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunk so vildly, that it forst him [Red Crosse Knight] slacke
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has. (i, 20)

It obviously little mattered to Blake what Spenser’s allegory here in­
cluded, but the fact that this serpent-like creature was the embodim­
et of error (especially religious error) was a happy discovery. In his own
poem, then, he has Spenser’s Errour defile the sacraments as if she were
the radically iconoclastic Puritan Blatant Beast, and on the other hand

12. The Four Zoas, VIII, E358-359. Adams relates these gems somewhat obscurely to lines 34-36 of
Blake’s The Mental Traveller (Adams, p. 242).
he severely undercuts the validity of that iconoclasm by having the Beast vomit out Errour’s poison and thus equating his “positive” act with visionless destruction.

Blake concludes “I Saw a Chapel” with the speaker laying himself down in a sty among the swine. Interestingly containing the only use of “sty” in all of Blake and one of only two uses of “swine,” this passage is often taken as merely a revulsion from the violence of the rape. Damon, for example, says that the whole poem “is based on the thesis that a forced and unwanted act of sex . . . is a pollution of the sacrament of real love.” While in one sense that is true, such an interpretation is far too narrow (as well as orthodoxly religious) to account for the poem’s intricate ambiguities. After all, Blake could say (via his Devil) that one should “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires”; “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence”; and “Expect poison from the standing water” (Marriage, pls. 10, 7, 9). Part of the difficulty here is at least partly due to non-recognition of the final literary allusion in the poem, this one to Milton’s Comus. Comus, we recall, is the son of Circe, and emulating her employment of a “charmed Cup” (l. 51) he too offers

to every weary Traveller
His orient liquor in a Crystal Glass.

Soon as the Potion works, their human count’nance,
Th’ express resemblance of the gods, is chang’d
Into some brutish form of Wolf, or Bear,
Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,
All other parts remaining as they were.
And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before,
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. (ll. 64–77)

The allusion is many-faceted and, as usual, is an example of Blake’s wrenching of his borrowings out of context (yet retaining some residue of that context) for his own purposes. Obviously no advocate of chastity, he sides here with Comus’s antipathy to restraint:

welcome Joy and Feast,
Midnight shout and revelry,
Tipsy dance and Jollity.

Rigor now is gone to bed,
And Advice with scrupulous head,
Strict Age, and sour Severity,

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With their grave Saws in slumber lie.

Venus now wakes, and wak’ns Love. (ll. 102–110, 124)

In the same vein Blake would also have remembered that the Attendant Spirit in describing Comus and his sport to the two brothers says:

And here to every thirsty wanderer,
By sly enticements gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixt, whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And the inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, unmolding reason’s mintage
Character’d in the face.

The attractiveness of this collocation of ideas and images to Blake should be obvious, especially for the purposes of “I Saw a Chapel.” While seeming to undercut the Homeric and Miltonic emphasis on Circean charms and magic, Blake has his speaker “[turn] into a sty” in what appears to be a nice bit of studied ambiguity. But one need not insist on such cleverness: whether or not that is a legitimate reading, the fact is that the speaker, as Adams suggests, is repelled “not at sexuality itself, but at the hypocrisy of the moral law toward it” (pp. 240–241). Hence he opts “To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty”—or, translating Milton into Blake, to “improve” sensual enjoyment to the point where “the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.” Such sensual enjoyment is pointedly opposed to “Rigor,” the “Advice” of “scrupulous head[s],” “Strict Age,” “sour Severity,” and “Grave Saws,” all of which the Proverbs of Hell are calculated to counteract. Accordingly Comus’s transformations are seen as the “unmolding” of “reason’s mintage / Character’d in the face,” the very Urizenic reason that is identifiable in Blake with the mind-forged manacles of restraint, self-repression, suppression of desire, and above all with the “bound and outward circumference” of divine energy (Marriage, pl. 4).

Comus also announces that in the context of his revels “Venus now wakes, and wak’ns Love,” the kind of love of which both the chapel and the serpent, as well as the Lady’s view of chastity in Comus, are

14. The Marriage, pl. 14. It is worth noting here that the OED defines “sty” as “An abode of bestial lust, or of moral pollution generally; a place inhabited or frequented by the morally degraded.” While Blake may have meant simply that the sty is “cleaner” than the defiled chapel and the serpent, it is more likely that he is here turning the traditional idea of “bestial lust” and “moral pollution” inside out—just as he does, for example, with Christ’s “breaking” of the ten commandments in The Marriage (pls. 23–24) and his championing of harlotry. Cf. Milton’s argument in the Tetrachordon against maintaining at all costs a marriage in which “coupling” is the sole bond: “What is this, besides tyranny, but to turn nature upside down, to make both religion, and the minde of man wait upon the slavish errands of the body, and not the body to follow either the sanctity, or the sovranty of the mind unspeakably wrong’d, and with all equity complaining? what is this but to abuse the sacred and misterious bed of mariage to be the compulsive stie of an ingratefull and malignant lust, stir’d up only from a carnall acrimony, without either love or peace, or regard to any other thing holy or human.” (Complete Prose Works of John Milton [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959], II [ed. Ernest Sirluck], 599–600.)
perversions. In this light it may not be too much to see Comus’s offering of his “baneful cup” accompanied by “many murmurs mixt” as a parodic communion, to be contrasted not only with the rituals of institutionalized Christianity but also with the out-of-control Orc-like destruction of the sacraments. For Comus’s “orient liquor” is also a “pleasing poison” unlike that of the serpent’s vomit.

Despite helpful reference to the Orc cycle, then, Adams’s conclusion (p. 242) seems to me as narrow in its own way as Damon’s comment on the poem as a whole (largely as a result of not taking into account Blake’s shrewd literary allusions): “The speaker’s rejection of the serpent marks his disillusionment at and prophetic criticism of the process of revolt and stultification tied to cyclic nature.” Rather than “disgust” or “dissillusionment,” the speaker experiences a revelation, an enlightenment. One does not merely “reject” the serpent, even in the spirit of “prophetic criticism” of the act of another, for he is in everyman just as the chapel and all that it represents are. The repetition of “I saw” in the first two stanzas is as much of a perception from without as that exemplified by the locked-out mourners and worshippers—a perception with the eye to use Blake’s later locution. But in the course of the poem “I saw” becomes vision, through the eye, by virtue of which chapel, worshippers, serpent, and their various implications are perceived to be what they are, embodiments of error. The self-repression, sense of death, restrained desire, as well as the aimless destructiveness of the serpent are all aspects of the self which, once seen, once given shape, are annihilable. “Error . . . will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it” (A Vision of the Last Judgment, E555). Vision, then, is act: “I saw,” “I saw,” “I turnd,” “And laid me down”; while mere act, as the serpent’s, is not vision (however much it may be preferable to the stultified inaction of the mourner-worshippers). “All Life,” Blake wrote in A Vision of the Last Judgment, “consists of . . . Throwing off Error continually & recieving Truth Continually. he who is out of the Church & opposes it is no less an Agent of Religion than he who is in it. . . . whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual” (E551).

And that brings us back to Spenser’s Du Bellay-like visions, of which the image of “massie gold” and the garden of “daintiest delights” are but two. Clearly for Blake they are not visions in his sense, but rather the sort that might emerge from “a chapel all of gold,” from conventional religion and the orthodox idea of the world’s vanities. While Blake could share Spenser’s view of the latter to the extent that his own

15. Although Blake’s use of the word as a noun argues against it, we might note that “sty,” up through the sixteenth century and occasionally in the seventeenth century, also meant to ascend or rise, “often used,” according to the OED, “of the ascension of Christ or of Elijah.” Spenser, for example, uses the word only in this sense. Milton does not.
view of the "world" as an illusion (or delusion) encompasses vanity, he
could not sympathize with either the inexorable power of time or the im-
mortality inherent in being celebrated in verse. His chapel is built of no
"brickle clay" which decays in the "showers of heaven and tempests"
(Ruines of Time, lines 499, 501)—though it is, of course, as insubstan-
tial as any creation of the unimaginative mind of earthbound man. And
if the immortality Spenser in typically Renaissance fashion feels his
verse may lend to the Dudley family and especially to Sir Philip Sidney
represents in some sense the glory of imaginative creation, of art, Blake
would see that too, I think, to be as false a creation as his chapel. The
artifact to him is but the annihilable portion of the act of creative per-
ception in the same way that the body is but that "portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses" (Marriage, pl. 4). "The Ruins of Time
builds Mansions in Eternity" is Blake's direct answer to Spenser's Ruines of Time. And in "I Saw a Chapel" the sty is, for the speaker,
one of those mansions.

Speculation as to why Blake did not engrave the poem as one of his
Songs of Experience is no doubt an idle occupation, however fascinating
it may be. Too much Orc perhaps—which may also have led him (ill-
advisedly I think) not to engrave the later Pickering manuscript poems?
Or maybe the necessary connections with Spenser and Milton Blake felt
finally uneasy about, as somehow violating the canonical integrity of
Songs of Innocence and of Experience? Other possible reasons aside,
there is in the poem a kind of Swiftian savagery that in general Blake
modulates into a quieter terror and horror in the Songs of Experience—
with perhaps the exception of the last stanza of "London" and the last
half of "A Little Boy Lost"—that sort of bluntness and rage that led
him to excise all but the first two stanzas of his manuscript version of
"Infant Sorrow" and to reject from Experience "A Divine Image." Whatever the reasons, "I Saw a Chapel All of Gold" is an intense and
densely compacted study in ambiguity that encompasses not only a
number of characteristic Blakean themes but also a substantial part of
his reactions to two distinguished literary predecessors whose influence
upon his poetry was both widespread and long-standing. In light of this
alone, it is a poem that deserves better than it has received.

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