

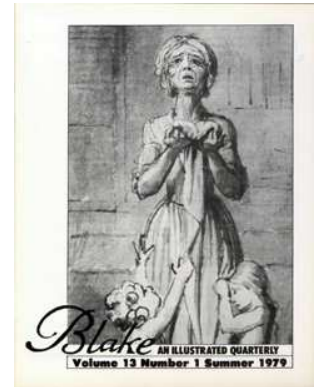
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

An Engraving of Wollstonecraft After Opie

Thomas V. Lange

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 13, Issue 1, Summer 1979, pp. 36-37



MINUTE PARTICULARS

BLAKE'S ENGRAVING OF WOLLSTONECRAFT AFTER OPIE

Thomas V. Lange

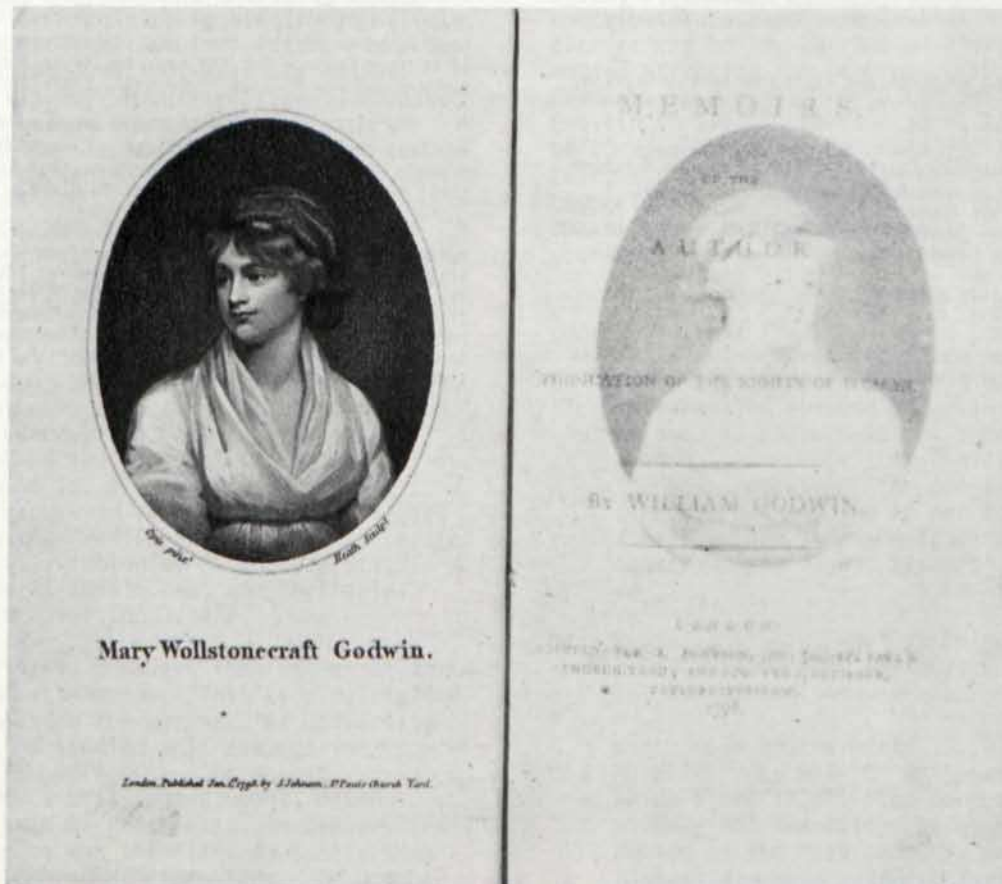
Readers of *Blake* may be interested to learn that the original copper plate for the engraved frontispiece portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (illus. 2) is in the Department of Drawings and Prints of The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. It was given to the library in 1976 by Miss Louise Crane in memory of her mother, Mrs. W. Murray Crane.

The copper plate (measuring 7-5/16 x 4-3/8 inches) has been considerably re-worked since its first appearance in William Godwin's *Memoirs of the*

1 Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, engraved for William Godwin's *Memoirs of the author of 'A Vindication of the rights of women,'* (1798).

2 The copper plate of the same portrait, re-worked in a rectangular format, published by D. Eaton.

author of 'A vindication of the rights of women,' London, for J. Johnson, 1798. The most startling of these changes is the enlargement of the portrait from its original oval shape to that of a rectangle. Under correct lighting it is possible to see the original oval shape, the different handling of the additional stipple work, and the added background shading lines. On the copper plate it is also possible to discern the artist's and engraver's names in their original positions, now on Mary Godwin's forearms. The J. Johnson imprint has been erased and replaced by one reading "London: Sold by D. Eaton, N^o 187. High Holborn." Despite these seemingly major differences, it is clear under microscopic examination that this same copper plate was used in the 1798 J. Johnson edition. Eaton, the later publisher of the portrait, had been found guilty of publishing Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1793, and was a frequent prisoner in the pillory for other publishing offences--see Timperley's *Encyclopaedia of Literary and Typographical Anecdote*, 1839 (rpt. New York: Garland, 1977).



Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin.

London, Published for J. Johnson, St. Pauls Church Yard.



I have been able to locate only one impression of the frontispiece in its rectangular form as published by Eaton, in a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark . . . second edition*, London: Printed for J. Johnson, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1802 (PML 46004). Traces of glue on the frontispiece suggest it was inserted in this copy, rather than being an integral part of the book; I have been unable to locate another copy in the New York area. I would therefore appreciate hearing from any reader able to locate the appearance of the portrait in its rectangular form.

PRIESTLEY AND THE CHAMELEON ANGEL IN THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

Robert F. Gleckner

In the final "Memorable Fancy" of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake created a mini-seriocomic dramatic scene between an Angel and a Devil, in which he himself acts as both narrator and participant. The essentials of the scene are well known and offer little difficulty of interpretation. The Devil begins, without apparent provocation or occasion, by identifying man and God--"for there is no other

God" (Plate 23). The Angel, apoplectically changing color, responds that God is "One," unique and separate from men who are "fools, sinners & nothings." Then follows the oft-quoted Devil's diatribe on how Jesus Christ, who is the "greatest man," systematically broke the ten commandments rather than, as the Angel insisted, giving "his sanction" to them: "I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments." Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules," he concludes (Plates 23-24). The Angel, evidently convinced, embraces the flame of fire in which the Devil stands and is "consumed" to arise "as Elijah"--that is, like Elijah in the fiery chariot. The "Memorable Fancy" concludes with the transfigured Angel ("now become a Devil") reading "the Bible . . . in its infernal or diabolical sense" along with the speaker (presumably Blake) whose "particular friend" the Angel has now become. This "sense" of the Bible the speaker will deliver to the world, "if they behave well" and, whether the world "will or no," "The Bible of Hell" itself, which the speaker says he has ready (Plate 24).

The Angel's embracing the flame of fire, of course, is his embrace of the Devil "in" the flame of fire with which the Memorable Fancy begins--and hence the corrosive melting away of apparent surface (Angel) to display the infinite (imaginative man-prophet Elijah) "which was hid." The embrace may be seen, then, as paradigmatically or symbolically a marriage of heaven and hell as well,¹ though such an interpretation of the entire Memorable Fancy ignores the fact that Blake does not conclude the passage with this metamorphosis: the Angel-become-Elijah becomes in turn a Devil and the speaker's "Particular friend." Some sense, I think, may be made out of this apparent confusion--or even self-contradiction--by turning our attention to the extraordinary, and to my knowledge as yet unexplained, chameleon-like mutations of the Angel in response to the Devil's opening words: "The Angel hearing this became almost blue but mastering himself he grew yellow, & at last white pink & smiling . . ." The standard readings of this passage are notably unhelpful. Nurmi supposes, not without justification, that the Angel "almost allows himself to indulge in infernal wrath" but masters himself to regain "the vapid sweetness of his piety."² Erdman sees the Angel as "frightened" and "violently upset";³ and others merely describe the change as chameleon-like. In a passing reference Hazard Adams, to some extent echoing Bloom's essay on *The Marriage*, comes closest to the essence of the passage, attributing to Blake's "comic disdain" the Angel's "turning the colors of the spectrum."⁴ While this is spectroscopically incorrect (and there is little doubt that Blake knew the spectrum), it is the right idea here.

A passage in Joseph Priestley's *The History and Present State of Discoveries Relating to Vision, Light, and Colours*, published in two volumes by Joseph Johnson in 1772 and very possibly known to Blake, seems curiously apropos.⁵ Boyle, Priestley writes, noted that change of color "is the chief, and sometimes the only thing by which the artist regulates his process" in the preparation of