

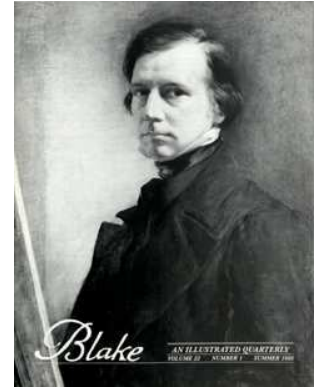
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## Footnotes on the Huntington Blakes

Martin Butlin

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## Footnotes on the Huntington Blakes

## Martin Butlin

I have reviewed Robert N. Essick's exemplary catalogue of *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collections*, 1985, in another place.<sup>1</sup> At that time my knowledge of the works in question was based on memories and detailed notes made as long ago as 1966. An invitation to attend the Blake symposium held at the Huntington to coincide with the exhibition of Robert N. Essick's own collection there last January gave me the opportunity to examine all the works again. The following observations should be seen very largely as minor footnotes on the occasional discrepancies between Essick's information and that given in my own catalogue of *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 1981, with one or two further observations made while looking at the illuminated books that are not included in my catalogue.

First, apropos the newly discovered drawing of *Pestilence* reported by Shelley M. Bennett and fully catalogued for the first time by Essick,<sup>2</sup> I was able to identify the fragment of an inscription in the lower left-hand corner, cut at the beginning where the paper had been torn away, as the name "Locker." The hand is precisely the same as that in which he inscribed his copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* now in the Huntington Library.<sup>3</sup> It cannot be said that this adds anything of substance to what we know about the drawing: its provenance from the collection of Frederick Locker-Lampson

is already known. What is clear about the provenance of this drawing is that Bennett and Essick are absolutely correct in having transferred to this pencil drawing the provenance from Catherine Blake and Frederick Tatham to Harvey, and the reference to William Rossetti's 1863 list 2, no. 18, and 1880 list 2, no. 20, allocated by me to the watercolor of the same subject in the City Art Gallery, Bristol.<sup>4</sup> Only by stressing the near monochrome tonality of the Bristol drawing was I able to justify, somewhat dubiously, the inclusion of the Bristol work among Rossetti's uncolored works and the items in Harvey's catalogue described as "Sketches in Ink and Pencil." The Bristol drawing thus remains without a provenance until the sale of works from the collection of Henry Willet at Christie's on 10 April 1904.

Looseness of wording on my part seems to have led to a misunderstanding in Essick's description of the fourth of Blake's illustrations to Milton's *Comus*, *The Brothers meet the Attendant Spirit in the Wood* (B 527 4). I describe it as having been "made up approx. 1/8 (0.3) along the bottom edge." Essick interprets this as meaning that I note "a three mm. strip of paper added to the bottom edge." In fact no paper was added but Blake extended the area of paper covered by the design by a small strip of extra watercolor along the bottom. Traces of his drawn outline can be seen, though the close trimming that this and the other Milton drawings in the Huntington have suffered tends to disguise Blake's original format. It seems to have been this that led Essick to describe the second illustration to *Comus*, *Comus, disguised as a Rustic, addresses the Lady in the Wood* (B 527 2), as having been "remargined with a narrow sliver of paper along the right margin . . ." Close examination shows that the line down the right-hand margin is not an actual break in the paper but the sharply drawn borderline characteristic of these illustrations. Blake seems frequently to have added to the extent of his designs before giving them their final drawn outline, both in the Milton illustrations and in other cases such as the illustrations to the Bible. His somewhat improvisatory approach is also reflected in the number of pentimenti to be seen in his watercolors (a medium in which it is particularly difficult for such things to be disguised); most are noted by Essick, though I was able to detect further examples.

The only observation that I was able to make which might be said to be of any consequence was in connection with the Huntington Library's copy of *The Song of Los*.<sup>5</sup> As is noted by Essick, the unique ordering of the plates in this copy was probably Blake's original.<sup>6</sup> Instead of culminating in the design of Los and his hammer this full page design is inserted as the fourth plate, so that the book proper ends with plate 7, the conclusion of the text, "The SONG of LOS is ended. Urizen Wept."



However, this somewhat anticlimactic ending does not in fact seem to have been Blake's original conclusion. Bound in at the end of the volume when it was acquired by Henry E. Huntington in December 1915 was the second pull of the independent color printed design *Albion rose*.<sup>7</sup> Essick states that this was "bound with *The Song of Los* between 1903 and 1915," but the evidence is uncertain. When *The Song of Los* was sold from the collection of the Earl of Crewe at Sotheby's on 30 March 1903 it was described as "unbound . . . consisting of 8 leaves in colours . . . 4 of which are full-page figures without text." This has to be wrong: the original book consists of eight leaves, only three of which are full-page illustrations, while if one includes *Albion rose* there are four full-page illustrations but nine leaves in all. As Essick notes, *Albion rose* has offset onto the end flyleaf; this is a partial offset, through the verso of the sheet of paper on which the design has been printed. Far more striking is the much stronger offset onto the verso of the last page of *The Song of Los* proper; this is not the usual print-through from the design on the recto, being larger in extent and coinciding precisely with the size of *Albion rose*. The offsetting is as strong as any of the offsettings to be found in the book, though there is no actual pick up of pigment by the facing page as has occurred in the case of the full-page designs showing Oberon and Titania and Los and his hammer. *Albion rose* is on slightly lighter weight paper than the pages of this copy of *The Song of Los* but it seems clear from the evidence that it was bound in with the book from very early on, almost certainly right from the beginning and by Blake himself. The color print would already have been made, hence no actual transference of color. Nor in fact is there any transference of color from the frontispiece, which seems from close inspection to have been finished off by hand over most of its surface after the color printing, not in pen and water color, as was Blake's usual practice in color printing, but in a medium very similar to that of color printing itself. In fact the effect is very close to that in some of the temperas of 1799–1800, the highlights in particular being almost identical to those to be found, for example, on the small tempera painting of *Lot and his Daughters* also in the Huntington Collection (B 381).

In view of Detlef Dörrbecker's fascinating analysis of the order of the plates in the newly discovered Munich copy of *The Song of Los*<sup>8</sup> it is perhaps justifiable to see this use of *Albion rose* as a concluding plate of the Huntington's copy of *The Song of Los* as a fully deliberate act by Blake himself. Although, as Dörrbecker pointed out, the composition of Los and his hammer does make a concluding design of some considerable optimism in comparison with the frontispiece of *Los bowed down before the lightless sun*, *Albion rose* would seem to have

been added in this particular copy to give an even more positive conclusion. Essick, before the discovery of the Munich copy, had already deduced that the Huntington copy of *The Song of Los* was the last to be printed; I would suggest that it also follows the Munich copy and represents a new and more optimistic solution to the ordering of the full-page plates. Los, shown in the frontispiece at his lowest state, achieves a more positive but still somewhat melancholy role in the scene with his hammer, and is finally resurrected in his full imaginative guise, with rekindled inspiration, as Albion. Once again one has an example of how absolutely vital to Blake's creative processes were his independent pictorial ideas. Here a design which evolved completely independent of text (save for a possible title) is used to transform the conclusion of one of his written works.

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Magazine* 129 (1987): 123–24.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley M. Bennett, "A Newly Discovered Blake in the Huntington," *Huntington Calendar* July–August (1983): 2–4. Reprinted in *Blake* 18 (1984–85): 123–24, illus. 1; Robert N. Essick, *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collections* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1985) 115–18, plate 40.

<sup>3</sup> Huntington Library call no. 54039. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 367, 414 (copy E); Essick 156–62. The related signature "Frederick Locker" appears twice, on plates 1 and 28.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Butlin *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981) 74–75, no. 192; further references to my catalogue will be given in the main text as "B 524 4," etc.

<sup>5</sup> Huntington Library call no. 54043. Bentley, *Blake Books* 358, 362 (copy E); Essick 165–68.

<sup>6</sup> All the other copies of *The Song of Los* seem originally to have been bound in the same order, the standard plates 1–8, though the copy in the Library of Congress (Bentley, copy B) has plates from other works interspersed (is this too of significance?). Copy C, in the Pierpont Morgan Library, seems, contrary to Bentley's analysis (*Blake Books* 358, 362), to have been originally bound in the standard order. The offprints from the heavily colored pages are rather confusing, and the order of plates has been changed at least twice before the present matting of the pages as individual sheets. However, it seems clear that the final plate 8 at one time faced the verso of plate 7, though at another time it faced the verso of the frontispiece, plate 1. Similarly, plate 5 at one time faced the verso of plate 4, though it also at another time faced the recto of the frontispiece. At this time the frontispiece must have formed the right-hand side of a page-opening, with the recto facing forwards. However, there is also an offprint onto the title page, page 2, that suggests the standard order with the frontispiece facing the title page.

<sup>7</sup> Butlin (1981) 153, no. 284, reproduced in color plate 332; Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 24–29, no. 1B, reproduced in color as frontispiece; Essick (1985) 195–98.

<sup>8</sup> Detlef Dörrbecker, "The *Song of Los*: The Munich Copy and a New Attempt to Understand Blake's Images," lecture given at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, 30 January 1988, to be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Huntington Library Quarterly*.