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Further Observations on William Rossetti's
Annotations to Gilchrist's Life of Blake

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The pages concerned are 9-10, 19-20, 35-6, 63-6, 71-98, 107-10, and 131-2.

-Martin Butlin

- NOTES -

I. Further Observations on William Rossetti's Annotations to Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*

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Martin Butlin has recently drawn attention to William Michael Rossetti's copy of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), now in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, Catalogue No. *EC75 / B5815 / W863g (B);¹ and he has suggested, on the basis of annotations to the "Descriptive Catalogue" in Volume II, that these notes -- perhaps written over a period of years² -- were begun before 1872 and completed by 1876. Rossetti's annotations to the biography and poems provide evidence in support of different time-limits for these marginalia. A note on "The Crystal Cabinet," referring to Swinburne's explanation of the poem, indicates that these jottings were begun after the appearance of *William Blake: A Critical Study* in 1868. The fact that the annotation to Volume II, p. 106, is printed almost verbatim in Rossetti's *The Poetical Works of William Blake* and that the annotation to the same volume, p. 77, is greatly expanded in this edition suggests that the marginalia to the biography and poems, at least, were completed by the Autumn of 1873 when Rossetti's edition with "Prefatory Memoir" was being put together.³

A librarian's note, inserted into the Houghton copy, indicates that "some annotations & revisions" from the first volume are "included in ed. 2; many more not" (the marginalia referring to Tatham's manuscript are uniformly ignored); also ignored are the many emendations to the second volume, although "revisions in the Descriptive Catalogue of Blake's pictures" are "generally included; and these marginalia are very numerous." Moreover, Rossetti's annotation to Volume II, p. 243, provides a clue as to what occasioned him to reread and heavily annotate this copy. He says, "It would be as well in a second edition, to put these heads into something a little more like order." The librarian's inference that these marginalia "arise from someone's request for advice concerning a possible 2nd edition" seems correct.⁴ The annotations are clearly suggestions, and indeed very few were carried into execution. For the most part, Rossetti is concerned with textual emendation and correction of printing errors and some biographical facts; however, a very few of his marginalia have a critical orientation, and those are printed below.⁵

Gilchrist, 1, 335.

While, in 1825, the designs from Dante were progressing, I find Mr. Linnell a purchaser also of twelve drawings from Milton's Paradise Regained, a sequel to those from Paradise Lost, executed for Mr. Butts, which are now scattered in various hands. ["a sequel" and "which . . . hands" are underscored by Rossetti]

I don't know how far this may be correct. Strange (alone to my knowledge) has a set which may or may not be complete -- much larger than the *Paradise Regained* designs -- some subjects noted p. 255 vol. 2, may belong to the Strange ed. -- I don't know.⁶

Gilchrist, 1, 343.

[In response to Henry Crabb Robinson's report of Blake saying,] "He [Milton] wished me to expose the falsehood of his doctrine taught in the Paradise Lost that sexual intercourse arose out of the Fall."

He did not

Gilchrist, 11, 77.

This enigmatic-looking poem ["The Crystal Cabinet"] probably does no more than symbolize in a new way the world-old phenomena of a lover's transfiguration of his mistress and of all things through her, and the reaction when the dream is broken by a too ardent effort to embody it.

I differ here, being pretty confident that the poem describes figuratively the physical phenomena of birth: this explanation would probably be repulsive to most readers.

Gilchrist, 11, 88.

*THE CRYSTAL CABINET.**

*This poem seems to me to represent under a very ideal form the phenomena of gestation and birth. Mr. Swinburne has suggested a different explanation; and another again is offered in the 2nd vol. of Gilchrist's book.

Gilchrist, 11, 106.

THE AGONY OF FAITH. [*"AGONY OF FAITH" deleted; "Grey Monk"¹ written above it.*]

¹ See the verses *To the Deists*, with which the present poem corresponds to some extent.

Gilchrist, 11, 199.

[*At the bottom of the page on which the headnote to "Descriptive Catalogue" begins, Rossetti writes:*]

I sh^d be disposed to add a sentence somewhat to the following effect: --

A Catalogue [*"such" deleted*] on the plan of the ensuing is peculiarly necessary in the case of Blake. His life consisted in imaginative insight & in the embodiment of that insight in the form of art. The list of his paintings & designs is therefore a most important part of his life. I am in hopes that the extraordinary amount of original thought & invention which belongs to these works will be to some extent sensible even thro' so imperfect a medium as that of an annotated Catalogue, & will render the looking thro' this somewhat less tedious than would be the case with almost any other artist.

¹ Rossetti's marginalia are printed here for the first time by permission of the Harvard College Library. For Mr. Butlin's description of Rossetti's copy of Gilchrist, see "William Rossetti's Annotations to Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*," *Blake Newsletter*, 11 (1968), 39-40.

² Mr. Butlin's conjecture is borne out by the fact that when Rossetti annotates Volume I, p. 335, he is aware of only the Butts-Strange set of illustrations to *Paradise Lost*, now in the Boston Museum of Art; when he annotates Volume II, p. 210, however, he is conversant with the Aspland set now in the possession of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

³ It seems likely that the corrections and emendations to the biography and text were done over a very short period of time with Tatham's MS in hand; those to "Descriptive Catalogue" occur over a much longer span of time.

⁴ When one considers the use made of these annotations in Rossetti's edition of Blake, it seems likely that the immediate occasion for reading and correcting Gilchrist was the preparation of Rossetti's "Prefatory Memoir" and edition.

⁵ Rossetti's remarks are printed in ordinary type; the passages in Gilchrist to which they refer in italics. Editorial comments are bracketed.

⁶Rossetti's comment explains his reservations regarding the second passage but not the first. A letter to Mrs. Gilchrist, dated 13 Decr. [1862] is suggestive, however; Rossetti writes, "I will consider about the Paradise Regained. The designs were shown to me by John Linnell as being more than usually beautiful, & I do not directly dissent from the terms used in the slip you send me; only my feeling is that Blake has here been less inspired than usual, and the result comparatively tame" (*Letters of William Michael Rossetti Concerning Whitman, Blake, and Shelley* [Durham, N.C., 1934], p. 11).

2. The Auckland Fuselis

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The editor has asked me to comment on the Fuseli drawings that were purchased in January 1965 from a private source in Dunedin, New Zealand, by the Auckland City Art Gallery. The illustrated catalogue, *A Collection of Drawings by Henry Fuseli*, Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery (1967), 100 pp., reproduces the 37 main drawings and also several of the verso sketches. The work for the catalogue seems to have been almost entirely the responsibility of P.A. Tomory, who contributes a brief introduction. The drawings are carefully annotated. The collection itself is, I suppose, still on tour: I saw it on exhibition in Cork Street, London, March 1968 (it was mentioned in several newspapers). Unfortunately, the catalogue seems to be little known by Blake scholars. A case in point is Albert S. Roe's article, "'The Thunder of Egypt'", in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Providence (1969), pp. 158-195. On p. 160, Professor Roe argues that the illustration to Darwin's *Botanic Garden* entitled "Fertilization of Egypt", which is stated to be designed by Fuseli and engraved by Blake, may have been Blake's inspiration. Against Roe's argument is other written evidence, as well as two other Fuseli designs that have figures unmistakably similar to that of Anubis in the Darwin illustration, acknowledged by Roe on p. 444. In the Auckland collection, however, there is a third sketch with (basically) this figure, incidentally on a subject that would have appealed to Blake, "Hephaestus, Bia and Crato securing Prometheus on Mount Caucasus" (c 1810) from Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*. In the catalogue is a note explaining that the figure we are concerned with "is initially taken from the executioner in Andrea del Sarto's *Decapitation of St. John* (Courtyard of the Scalzo, Florence)" (p. 68). (The del Sarto painting is conveniently illustrated in Heinrich Wölfflin's *Classic Art*, now a Phaidon paperback.) P.A. Tomory concludes his introduction with some remarks on Fuseli's connection with Blake:

The connection is illustrated here in nos 4, 18, 24, 30, 36. The evidence of nos 4, 30 and 36 seems to support Mason's opinion that Blake used the older artist as a figurative source, even though his final conceptions were entirely individual. Todd . . .