

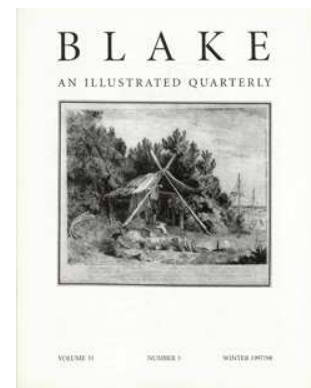
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M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

Blake's Meheux?

Vincent Carretta

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Academy Schools, it would have been natural for the story to be confirmed from the Royal Academy itself. And indeed the military may have wondered why the Royal Academy was sending its students to represent military installations.

Of course the Academy had not done anything of the kind. But the unworldliness of these young men, blithely making careful sketches (like that in Stothard's etching) of military fortifications of the greatest naval base in the world in time of war, almost surpasses comprehension. At least it might appear so to naval intelligence, if that is not an oxymoron.

Blake's Meheux?

BY VINCENT CARRETTA

Among the plates executed by Blake after designs by other artists is Robin Hood & Clorinda, "J. Meheux delint.," published by T. Macklin in London on 30 March 1783. Robert N. Essick, in *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 133, observes that "[n]othing is known of 'J. Meheux, other than his designing 'Robin Hood and Clorinda,'" and notes that "Samuel Redgrave, *A Dictionary of Artists of the English School*, 2nd ed., London, 1878, p. 292, gives the artist's name as 'John Meheux.'" The John Meheux in question was probably the John Meheux (1749?-1839) who corresponded during the 1770s with Ignatius Sancho (1729-80), the black Westminster grocer whose posthumously published *Letters* (London, 1782) I have edited: *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (Penguin Putnam Inc, 1998).

Meheux's obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (December 1839) 662, says, "In his 90th year, John Meheux, esq. of Hans Place, formerly many years Secretary to Board of Control. He has bequeathed 5000£. to Indigent Blind School, 200£. to Deaf and Dumb Institution, and 100£. each to St. George's Hospital, Westminster Lying-in Hospital, and Society of Arts, all duty free." During the 1770s, Meheux was an amateur writer and artist, submitting essays to the newspapers and designs to print sellers through Sancho. Sancho had many contacts in the art world. His portrait had been painted in 1768 by Thomas Gainsborough, and his friends included the artists John James Barralet, William Henry Bunbury, Matthew and Mary Darly, Daniel Gardner, John Hamilton Mortimer, Joseph Nollekens, and William Stevenson. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Darly, who frequently etched and published prints after the designs of amateurs, Sancho also knew the print and booksellers John Ireland and John Wingrave.

In a letter misdated 21 March 1770 but written in 1776, Sancho sends Meheux "a proof print"; in one of 4 January 1776, Sancho asks about Meheux's sketches; and on 3 September 1777, Sancho asks Meheux,

How do you like the print?—Mr. D[arly] says, and his wife says the same, that you are exceedingly clever—and they shall be happy to do any thing which is produced by the same hand which did the original—and if Mr. D[arly] can be of any service to you in the etching, you may command him when you please.

Given the history of Sancho's John Meheux as an amateur artist providing designs for prints executed and published by others during the late 1770s, he is probably Blake's "J. Meheux" of 1783 as well.

R E V I E W S

Marvin D. L. Lansverk, *The Wisdom of Many, The Vision of One: The Proverbs of William Blake*. American University Studies, Series IV, vol. 142. New York: Peter Lang, 1994. 215 pp. \$38.95.

Reviewed by NELSON HILTON

Unknown gnomes mine. pro-verbal proverbs. but, ah! men, Wisdom's awful theopanatives love her. language bombs

Or so one might imagine from recent, stimulating work by Marvin D. L. Lansverk. Beginning with "the puzzle that Blake would use proverbs at all" (2), given the oppressing conformity often found in such "wisdom of the many," Lansverk traces a path to Blake's invention of "a new type of proverb" (3) or prophetic performative in which speech acts. Along the way he revives for us an image with profound implications for Blake's emanations, the figure of the divine female consort in the "Wisdom Books" of Hebrew scripture.

The first part of his book, a literary history of Blake's relations to proverb literature, opens with a comparison of the themes, forms, and functions of the Book of Proverbs and of Blake's "Proverbs of Hell." Timely criticism this, for "the only major English writer himself to have composed a