

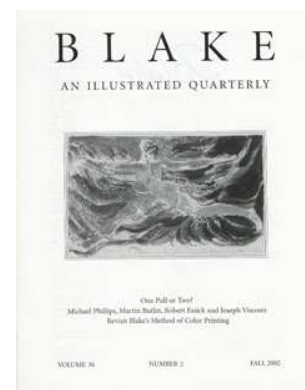
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

The Blake Exhibition at Tate Britain, 9 November 2000-11 February 2001, and at the Metropolitan Museum, 27 March-24 June 2001, and their Catalogues

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 36, Issue 2, Fall 2002, pp. 64-66



pulls made for better images. They merely keep asserting, without solid evidence and without refuting our counter-evidence, that Blake consistently used two-pull printing.

Butlin's concluding paragraph returns to the theme with which he began. We have indulged in too much technical detail, focused over-much on the primary evidence, and this has blinded us to larger issues. Only general knowledge, painted with a broad brush, is allowed. We find this approach unsatisfactory for the study of printing technology. Surveys of Blake's artistic development must neither ignore nor contradict material facts. Indeed, one can speculate on the meaning and aesthetic qualities of an art work, but to ascertain its medium, whether the colors are oil or water based, the support paper or canvas, the plate an engraving or a mezzotint, the print pulled once or twice through a press, it is the material facts, discerned by chemical analysis, x-rays, magnification, hands-on experiments, computer enhancement, and other research aids, that will prove most objective and helpful. Avoiding Minute Particulars will not lead to the Palace of Wisdom.

Works Cited

- Bentley, G. E., Jr. *Blake Books*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977. Plate numbers and copy designations for Blake's illuminated books follow Bentley.
- Black, Peter, and Desiree Moorhead. *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter*. London: Phaidon, 1992.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry and Prose*. Newly Revised Edition, ed. David V. Erdman. New York: Doubleday, 1988. Cited as "E" followed by page number.
- Butlin, Martin. *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*. 2 vols. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981.
- Butlin. "The Physicality of William Blake: The Large Color Prints of '1795.'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 52 (1989): 1-17.
- Butlin. Review of Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*. *Burlington Magazine* 137 no. 1103 (Feb. 1995): 123.
- Butlin. *William Blake 1757-1827*. Tate Gallery Collections vol. 5. London: Tate Gallery, 1990.
- Dörrbecker, D.W. Commentary in William Blake, *The Continental Prophecies*. Blake's Illuminated Books vol. 4, General Editor David Bindman. London: William Blake Trust/Tate Gallery, 1995.
- Eaves, Morris, and Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi. "The William Blake Archive: The Medium when the Millennium is the Message," in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, ed. Tim Fulford. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002. 219-33.
- Essick, Robert N. *William Blake, Printmaker*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. "An Inquiry into William Blake's Method of Color Printing." *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 35 (2002): 74-103. Online version available at <http://www.blakequarterly.org>
- Gilchrist, Alexander. *Life of William Blake*. 2 vols. London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1863.
- Hamlyn, Robin, and Michael Phillips. *William Blake*. Exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain, London. London: Tate Publishing, 2000; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001 (with a supplement on the Metropolitan Museum version of the exhibition).
- Hayter, Stanley William. *About Prints*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962.
- Hayter. *New Ways of Gravure*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1949.
- Mayer, Ralph. *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*. Third edition. New York: Viking, 1977.
- Moser, Joann. *Atelier 17: 50th Anniversary Retrospective Exhibition*. Madison, Wisconsin: Elvehjem Art Center, 1977.
- Phillips, Michael. *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing*. London: British Library, 2000. Distributed in the US by Princeton UP.
- Rossetti, William Michael. *Rossetti Papers*. London: Sands & Co., 1903.
- Viscomi, Joseph. *Blake and the Idea of the Book*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.

R E V I E W S

The Blake Exhibition at Tate Britain, 9 November 2000-11 February 2001, and at the Metropolitan Museum, 27 March-24 June 2001, and their Catalogues.

Reviewed by G.E. BENTLEY, JR.

Blake went with his nineteen-year-old disciple Samuel Palmer to the Royal Academy exhibition of May 1824. Years later Palmer remembered vividly seeing

the image of Blake in his plain black suit and rather broad-rimmed, but not quakerish hat,¹ standing so quietly among all the dressed-up, rustling, swelling people, and myself thinking "How little you know *who* is among you!"²

At the dinner at Tate Britain opening the exhibition in November 2000 and next day at the Tate reception, there were no broad-brimmed black hats—indeed, there were no hats at all. But if Blake had been there, or Gully Jimson either, what would he have made of it all?—the discrete sponsors leading off the quadrille, the cataracts of champagne, and room after deftly-lighted room exhibiting a plethora of his works such as the quiet artist-engraver had never seen assembled in one place. Indeed, some of these works had never been in the same room together, and a number of them

1. Blake was wearing his hat indoors; the watercolor by Richard Newton of an exhibition of c. 1794 shows men wearing and doffing their hats (p. 143 in the catalogue here); see the apparent self-portrait of Blake in a rather broad-rimmed hat in the *Canterbury Pilgrims* design (illus. 1).

2. *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 280.



1. Detail of William Blake, "Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims" (1810), reproduced by permission of Robert N. Essick. "Blake" is fourth from the left.

had not been on the same continent together for a century or more.

Of course he would have been dazzled by the generosity of lenders throughout the English-speaking world—thirty-two in Britain (mostly the British Library [28], the British Museum Print Room [54], the Tate [37], and the Fitzwilliam Museum [25]); eleven in the United States, three in Canada, and one in Australia.

He might have been as curious as we to compare the coloring of early and late copies of, say, his *Songs of Innocence*, to see how the Great Color Prints have withstood the ravages of time (often brilliantly), and how the seasons have assailed his beloved temperas (sometimes lamentably).

But most of all he might have marveled at these bank directors and advertising executives and luminaries of fashion assembled to dine at the table of William Blake. Blake's own private exhibition in 1809 in his brother's hosiery shop may not have attracted more than three or four viewers at a time—indeed, we know of no occasion when there were as many as four there at once. William Blake as a culture or cult hero of the Establishment would have bemused or bewildered the man who wrote of the world of Pitt and Paine in 1798—and could have written of the world of Blair and Bush in 2001—"The Beast & the Whore rule without control."³

Have Blake's arts reduced the power of the Whore and the Beast—or have his arts been perverted, so that the "Jerusalem" hymn becomes in 1917 a war song to Englishmen and the state itself fosters in 2000 the arts of the most eloquent anarchist in England?

3. Marginalium (1798) to Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (1797) (*William Blake's Writings* [1978] 1404).

Most of those who enjoy Blake's works have to make do with not-as-good substitutes, from facsimiles to mere "reproductions" to (even though we know better) editions of his works in Illuminated Printing without pictures. The opportunity to see the real thing is rare, for the originals are scattered from Vienna (Austria) to the National Gallery of Victoria (Australia).

As a consequence, a Blake exhibition such as the enormous one at Tate Britain is a rare treat, though a treat which is becoming less rare. Since Martin Butlin organized the great Blake exhibition at the Tate in 1978, there have been important Blake exhibitions in Toronto and New Haven (1982-83), Tokyo (1990), Barcelona and Madrid (1996), and even Helsinki (2000). Perhaps if you just sit still a major Blake exhibition will come to your own hamlet. Or perhaps not.

The Tate Blake exhibition of 2000-2001 was certainly a major exhibition, mounted with enormous éclat and puffery. It included almost all Blake's works in Illuminated Printing, sometimes in several copies and sometimes with each plate separately exhibited (as in *Jerusalem* [E]). They included *All Religions Are One* (A—the only known copy), *America* (C, F), *Book of Los* (A, unique), *Book of Thel* (A), *Europe* (B), *First Book of Urizen* (D), *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (E), "Laocoön" (B), *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E, L-M), *Jerusalem* (A, E), *Milton* (L), *Song of Los* (B), *Songs of Innocence* (F), *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (B, E-F-G, T¹), *There is No Natural Religion* (L), and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (a, D). Among Blake's major manuscripts there were his Notebook, *Vala or The Four Zoas*, and *Tiriel*, but not the unillustrated Ballads Manuscript.

The drawings included those for *Tiriel* (all the nine known surviving watercolors), Young's *Night Thoughts* (8), Gray's *Poems* (5), Chaucer, Dante (29), *Paradise Lost* (11 of 12 from the Thomas set), *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the Large Blake-Varley Sketchbook and the Large Book of Designs.⁴

It is wonderful to be able to see the real thing—but some of these works are not the real thing. Exhibits 111a-d are copperplates made and printed by Michael Phillips, and #103 is a rolling press with arms about 9' high, much higher than the ceiling of the only surviving room in which Blake printed, in his cottage at Felpham.

The most rewarding of the exhibits were those which cannot be adequately reproduced, either because of their size or because of their medium. Most impressive among the originals of the watercolors are the "Vision of the Last Judgment," 20" x 15½" (#59, Petworth House), "An Allegory of the Spiritual Condition of Man," 59 5/8" x 47 3/4" (#60), and Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims* tempera, 18 3/8" x 53 15/16" (#62). But the most extraordinary effect is made by the complete series of twelve Large Colour Prints (#241-52) which have rarely been seen together—even Butts, his chief

4. The exhibition and catalogue do not, however, include *Poetical Sketches* and *Descriptive Catalogue* (which are not illustrated) or the Bunyan designs, and they have only two of the scores of Visionary Heads.

patron at the time, did not have a complete set. They are enormous, c. 18" x 24", no method of reproducing their three-dimensional effects is at all satisfactory, and their cumulative effect is well-nigh overwhelming.

The exhibition was organized chiefly by Robin Hamlyn, and the catalogue is a worthy memorial of the exhibition. The pro forma essays by Peter Ackroyd⁵ and Marilyn Butler⁶ are remarkable for little more than good will.

The catalogue⁷ is very generously illustrated, though the reproductions vary capriciously in size; for instance, the *Tiriel* designs are reproduced in three radically different sizes, though the originals are all approximately the same size. The reproductions include all those known for *Tiriel* (9), 29 for Dante, 8 for *Milton* (A), *Marriage* (L-M) entire, 9 from *Europe* (B), 16 from *Jerusalem* (E), and 22 from the Bible.

The catalogue is useful and responsible. However, Richard Edwards was scarcely "the leading London bookseller" (p. 52), though his brother James might be so described, and Boydell's Shakspeare Gallery was not "abandoned" (p. 52).

The most original part of the catalogue is Michael Phillips, "The Furnace of Lambeth's Vale" (pp. 98-171). He claims, as he does in his *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs From Manuscript to Illuminated Printing* (London: British Library, 2000), with many of the same reproductions, that the proprietary chapel built in 1793 in Lambeth was "built on the village green" (p. 145), as background for "The Garden of Love," but he offers no evidence that it was indeed on the village green, as is the plain intent of "The Garden of Love" (1794), and there is no village green on the map of Lambeth which he reproduces (p. 145). In the anti-Paine riots in October 1793, "The fires would have been clearly seen from ... Hercules Buildings" where Blake lived (p. 154), but no evidence is offered. "Clearly, any ambitions that Blake had to engage publicly in the debate provoked by the events in France had been suppressed" in the autumn of 1793 (p. 154), but Blake produced *America* (1793), *Songs of Experience* (1794), *Europe* (1794), and *Song of Los* (1795), in each

5. Ackroyd's "William Blake: The Man" (pp. 11-13) is notable for his knighting of "Sir William Hayley" (p. 13), rectifying an omission by George III.

6. Marilyn Butler, "Blake in his Time" (pp. 15-25) speaks of Blake's "death at seventy" (p. 14: he was 69), "his first volume of poems (*Songs of Innocence*, 1789)" (p. 14: his "first volume of poems" was *Poetical Sketches* [1783]), "the busy printing house of the publisher Joseph Johnson" (p. 17: Joseph Johnson had no printing house; he farmed his books to numerous printers), and "Blake's paganism" (p. 19).

7. *William Blake* (London: Tate, 2000) 4", 304 pp., 286 plates, ISBN: 1854373145, £29.99; (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) ISBN: 0810957108, \$75.00, hardcover. The "Catalogue" (pp. 29-293) is by Christine Riding, David Blayney Brown, Elizabeth Barker, Ian Warrell, Lizzie Carey-Thomas, Martin Postle, Martin Myrone, Michael Phillips, Noa Cahaner McManus, and Robin Hamlyn. The Abrams version adds a "Checklist of Works Exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art" (pp. 299-304), with far fewer works than in the Tate exhibition and some additions.

of which an assiduous informer could easily have found generous evidence for his sympathies with revolutionary France. And Dr. Phillips insists (e.g., p. 107), as he does in *William Blake* (2000), that Blake's color prints passed through the press twice, once with the basic design in monochrome and a second time with the colors.⁸ Most Blake scholars doubt his conclusion.

For those who could not see the exhibition at the Tate, a somewhat diminished version of it was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York on 27 March-24 June 2001.

Both exhibition and catalogues are achievements of extraordinary ambition and accomplishment. All who made it possible deserve our thanks.

8. The argument is based in significant part on evidence which does not exist; see Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, "An Inquiry into William Blake's Method of Color Printing," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 35 (winter 2002): 74-103, and www.blakequarterly.org.

Michael Phillips. *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing*. London: The British Library; Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. [xi] + 180 pp. 37 monochrome and 72 color illus. £16.95/\$29.95 paper, £30.00/\$55.00 cloth.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER S. GOURLAY

Michael Phillips' engaging account of the origins, early history, and production of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* bristles with startling insights, fresh perspectives, and new discoveries, but important aspects of its most prominent arguments are simply wrong. The idea behind it is outstanding: to review the publishing, political, and aesthetic contexts in which the *Songs* arose, to reconstruct as far as possible the stages in which they were composed, and to detail the physical processes by which Blake actually produced the books, all accompanied by compelling images of relevant documents, tools, and other visual materials, many in color. In many ways the promise of this concept is admirably fulfilled. The writing is clear, bracing and energetic, the typography and layout are attractive and readable, and the illustrations are fresh, plentiful, well chosen and clear. The book includes more than two dozen large full-color images of pages from particular copies of *Songs*, many of which have not been reproduced elsewhere. Given all these positive characteristics, it is unfortunate that it is marred throughout by major and minor errors in interpreting the complex evidence about how Blake created the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.