

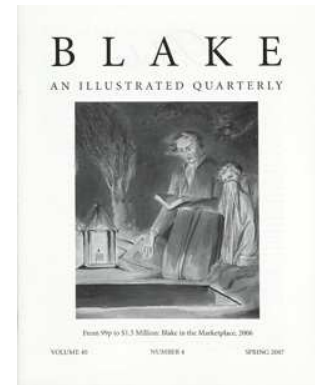
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

A R T I C L E

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 40, Issue 4, Spring 2007, pp. 147-149



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BY J. B. MERTZ

In April 1821, the antiquarian and collector Francis Douce (1757-1834) acquired *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (B), an early and unique copy that includes the monochrome intaglio etching "The Accusers" (B) as its frontispiece.¹ While it is not clear whether Douce acquired these two works gathered together in the present binding, *The Marriage* does not appear in Douce's lists of books sent to be bound between April 1821 and his death.² As I note in "An Unrecorded Copy of Blake's 1809 Chaucer Prospectus," Douce listed his acquisitions in a set of three notebooks entitled "Collecta," which show that he obtained "Blake's marr. of heaven & hell" from "Dyer" (a name that regularly appears in these notebooks).³ The fact that Douce did not write the full name of this source in the "Collecta" has provoked speculation about his identity. In the second edition of *Blake Records*, G. E. Bentley, Jr., suggests that the "former owner was probably Lamb's friend George Dyer."⁴ However, this must be an oversight because Bentley notes elsewhere in *Blake Records* that Douce's friend Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848) wrote to a "M' Dyer" requesting "as soon as possible a copy of Blake's Young" (i.e., *Night Thoughts*),⁵ and suggests that "Dyer" could be Gilbert Dyer, "probably the same Dyer from whom Francis Douce acquired *Marriage* (B) in April 1821."⁶ Essick likewise suggests Gilbert Dyer as a possible source of *The Marriage* (B), though he considers it more likely that Douce's "Dyer" was "the London

In preparing this article, I have benefited from discussions with G. E. Bentley, Jr., Brendan Fleming, Sarah Jones, Jon Mee and Michael Phillips.

1. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977) 76-77, 288, 298 (hereafter "BB"); also note Bentley, *Blake Books Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995) 97 (hereafter "BBS"): "The leaf with 'The Accusers' (B) seems to be tipped into copy B" of *The Marriage*, as suggested by Joseph Viscomi.

2. Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce e. 72, "Libri ligat.," and e. 73 (untitled). Bentley notes that "'The Accusers' (B) ... was separated from *Marriage* (B) in 1977-8" (BBS 97). I am grateful to the keeper of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to cite correspondence and notebooks in the Douce collection.

3. J. B. Mertz, "An Unrecorded Copy of Blake's 1809 Chaucer Prospectus," *Blake* 32.3 (winter 1998-99): 73; Ms. Douce e. 67, "Collecta" (1811-23), fol. 40v.

4. G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004) 378fn (hereafter "BR[2]"), but cf. Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 30n2: "In *Blake Books*, p. 298, Bentley tentatively suggests that the seller may have been the author George Dyer, but he no longer thinks this is the case."

5. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MA 3113 (cited with permission). I am grateful to Leslie Fields, associate curator, for providing a photocopy of this letter.

6. BR(2) 344fn.

printseller Charles George Dyer.⁷ Finally, Joan Stemmler, noting the prior comments of Bentley and Essick, assumes that the identity of "Dyer" is self-evident: "That by 'Dyer' is meant Gilbert Dyer, the bookseller to Dibdin and D'Israeli, seems certain."⁸ While the idea that Gilbert Dyer sold Douce his copy of *The Marriage* has been raised by others, it now stands on more solid ground than earlier commentators may have realized. My review of letters and notebooks from the Douce collection, as well as the fact that Douce's bibliophile friends D'Israeli and Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847) knew of Dyer or dealt with him, provides further evidence supporting the conjectural identification by Bentley and Essick of the bookselling business of Gilbert Dyer of Exeter as the source of *The Marriage* (B).

The name "Dyer" first appears in the "Collecta" for September 1808, when Douce acquired "A batch of prints of Dyer."⁹ On at least twenty-eight separate occasions between 1808 and 1825, Douce obtained various items from a source always identified simply as "Dyer," the last entry appearing in November 1825 ("6 Caricatures Rowlandson—Dyer").¹⁰ The only years during this period in which Douce apparently acquired nothing from Dyer were 1822 and 1824. Douce sometimes provides details of his acquisitions from Dyer, for instance noting the receipt of "Six front[ispieces] by Stodart & Westall &c. Orig. edit. of the Tatler" in May 1812,¹¹ "Six of Fuseli's Shakesp. plates" in March 1817,¹² and "5 capital drawings by Barry" in December 1823.¹³ Often, however, Douce's entries are vague. Representative examples include the receipt from Dyer of "Ten miscell. prints" in January 1810,¹⁴ a "Miscell. parcel" in February 1814,¹⁵ and "Miscell. drawings &c." in October 1818.¹⁶ Excluding *The Marriage*, I can find only three clear instances in the "Collecta" of Douce's having obtained printed books from Dyer between 1808 and 1825: (1) the "Orig. edit. of the Tatler," noted above; (2) Richard Steele's "Guardian & Englishman 1st edit." (bound as a single volume) in May 1813;¹⁷ and (3) Jean Tronçon's illustrated folio, "l'entrée de Louis XIV dans Paris," in August 1814.¹⁸

7. Essick, *Separate Plates* 30. Essick mentions that "[t]hese names were kindly suggested to me by Professor G.E. Bentley, Jr." (30n2). Charles George Dyer was the author and co-publisher of *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Characters of Illustrious and Eminent Men* (1819) and a joint publisher of James Usher's *New Version of the Psalms* (1823).

8. Joan K. Stemmler, "Undisturbed above once in a Lustre": Francis Douce, George Cumberland and William Blake at the Bodleian Library and Ashmolean Museum," *Blake* 26.1 (summer 1992): 13 and n133.

9. Ms. Douce e. 66, "Collecta" (1803-10), fol. 29.

10. Ms. Douce e. 68, "Collecta" (1824-34), fol. 4v.

11. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 5.

12. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 27.

13. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 46.

14. Ms. Douce e. 66, fol. 43v.

15. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 13.

16. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 32.

17. Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 10v.

18. [Jean Tronçon], *L'entrée triomphante de ... Louis XIV ... et Marie-Thérèse ... dans la ville de Paris* (Paris, [1662]); Ms. Douce e. 67, fol. 15v.

The likely purveyor of the majority of these books, drawings and prints, Gilbert Dyer (bap. 1743, d. 1820), worked as a schoolmaster, operated a circulating library, published four books, and established a bookselling business on Exeter's High Street by 1793.¹⁹ After his death, Dyer's son, also called Gilbert (born 1776), succeeded him as bookseller and continued to trade on High Street until selling the business to William Strong of Bristol around the beginning of 1829.²⁰ Consequently, Douce dealt with both father and son, but the bulk of his acquisitions falls before the death of the elder Dyer in October 1820 and *The Marriage* (B) must have been delivered by Gilbert Dyer the younger in April 1821. Douce also owned a copy of the elder Dyer's *Restoration of the Ancient Modes of Bestowing Names*²¹ and corresponded with him concerning this work. In a letter to Douce dated 15 December 1805, Dyer wrote, "For Expressing your Opinion of the Principles of my Book I feel myself particularly obliged—For your Acco^t of M^r Ritson's Enquiries into this Subject I am also thankful."²² With the same letter, Dyer delivered several items to Douce, indicating that payment could be made to "M^r Ostell, Ave Maria Lane," presumably one of Dyer's agents in London.

Douce's longtime friend and correspondent, the novelist and man of letters Isaac D'Israeli, was a Blake collector²³ and apparently dealt with the elder Dyer. As noted above, D'Israeli wrote to "M^r Dyer" on 3 January 1819 requesting "as soon as possible a copy of Blake's Young."²⁴ D'Israeli may also have visited Dyer's bookshop during a period of convalescence in Exeter from 1794 to 1796.²⁵ In his correspondence to Douce from Exeter, D'Israeli mentions Dyer's catalogues three times. The first reference appears in a letter of 2 September 1794: "Dyer's cat. is pretty bulky. it has 300 Pages & consists of 11864 Works."²⁶ Nearly two weeks later, on 14 September 1794, D'Israeli writes to Douce, "Dyer's Catalogue has been

published some time. Write me any book you may want & I'll look into my Catalogue."²⁷ A third and apparently final reference to the Exeter bookseller comes in a letter to Douce dated 25 June 1796, where D'Israeli mentions that "Dyer is preparing a rich and voluminous Catalogue, which you will have in due time."²⁸

A second longstanding friend of Douce (and of D'Israeli), the bibliographer Dibdin, was also a Blake collector²⁹ and refers to Dyer in *Bibliomania* (1811). One of Dibdin's characters, Philemon, says he has been informed of "very choice and copious collections of books about to be sold" and notes that another character, Lorenzo, "is about to visit the book-treasures of Mr. Dyer of Exeter."³⁰ With his characteristic inattention to detail, Dibdin writes in a footnote:

Mr. George Dyer of Exeter is a distinguished *veteran* in the book-trade: his catalogue of 1810, in two parts, containing 19945 articles, has, I think, never been equalled by that of any provincial bookseller, for the value and singularity of the greater number of the volumes described in it.³¹

Regrettably, Dibdin's correspondence to Douce preserved in the Bodleian contains no references to Blake or Gilbert Dyer.³² Also, despite the apparent contemporary popularity of Dyer's catalogues, few copies seem to be extant (or, at least, indexed) in modern libraries; I am aware of only one, his 1811 catalogue.³³ However, the familiarity of both D'Israeli and Dibdin with Gilbert Dyer the elder, their shared enthusiasm for books and prints, and their mutual friendship with Douce together support Bentley and Essick's identification of the Dyer bookshop as the source of *The Marriage* (B). The stature and reach of Dyer's business, its many years as a visible presence in the trade, and the fact that Douce's dealings with "Dyer" extend across a period of more than seventeen years likewise speak in favor of the Exeter bookseller as Douce's source.

Douce's acquisition of *The Marriage* from Gilbert Dyer raises several questions. First, how did an early copy of Blake's illuminated book reach Devon? As provincial booksellers, the Dyers certainly would have dealt with agents in London, such as Thomas Ostell of Ave Maria Lane (noted above), who co-

19. Ian Maxted, *The Devon Book Trades: A Biographical Dictionary*, Exeter Working Papers in British Book Trade History 7 (Exeter: J. Maxted, 1991) 59. Dyer was the author of *The Most General School-Assistant: Containing, a Complete System of Arithmetic* (1770), *The Principles of Atheism Proved to Be Unfounded, from the Nature of Man* (anonymously, 1796), *A Restoration of the Ancient Modes of Bestowing Names on the Rivers, Hills, Vallies, Plains, and Settlements of Britain* (1805), and *Vulgar Errors, Ancient and Modern, Attributed as Imports to the Proper Names of the Globe* (1816).

20. Maxted 59.

21. According to Douce's list of books received, Dyer gave him a copy in 1805 (Ms. Douce e. 69, "Libr. donat." [?1793-1814], fol. 7v).

22. Ms. Douce d. 21, Letters to Douce (1800-09), fol. 60.

23. D'Israeli's collection included *Thel* (F), *The Marriage* (D), "The Accusers" (H), *Visions* (F), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (A), *America* (A), *Europe* (A) and *Urizen* (B); see BB 77, 100, 127, 156-57, 180, 298, 412, 474.

24. See note 5 above.

25. D'Israeli's letters to Douce written in Exeter range from 2 September 1794 through 25 June 1796 (Ms. Douce d. 33, Letters from Isaac D'Israeli [1793-1833], fols. 3-23); see also James Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 31-33, 48.

26. Ms. Douce d. 33, fol. 4. Stemmler misreads this letter, transcribing "1186" instead of "11864" (11).

27. Ms. Douce d. 33, fol. 6.

28. Ms. Douce d. 33, fol. 23.

29. Dibdin's collection included *Thel* (J), *Innocence* (?S), *Visions* (G) and an untraced copy of *Night Thoughts*; see BB 128, 410, 474, 642.

30. Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania; or Book Madness: A Bibliographical Romance, in Six Parts* (London, 1811) 629.

31. Dibdin 629-30n.

32. Ms. Douce d. 32, Letters from Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1806-33).

33. Ian Maxted has kindly directed my attention to a copy of *A Supplement to Dyer's Exeter Catalogue for 1811. Containing the Library of Edward Cotsford, Esq.* (Tiverton, [1811]) in the Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter Central Library (pressmark p018.4/EXE/DYE). The 68-page *Supplement* (running from page 177 through page 244) lists 2619 books for sale (items 6486 through 9104). I am grateful to Tony Rouse, senior assistant librarian at the Westcountry Studies Library, who examined this catalogue for me and found no works by William Blake listed.

published Dyer's *Restoration of the Ancient Modes of Bestowing Names* and received payment in his behalf from Douce in 1805. Conceivably, Dyer continued the relationship with the successors to Ostell, C. Cradock and W. Joy (though I have not been able to confirm this).³⁴ If Dyer acquired *The Marriage* (B) directly from a local or regional owner rather than through a London agent, could Blake's Cornish friend and patron, the antiquarian John Sidney Hawkins (bap. 1758, d. 1842) have had a hand in its appearance in Exeter? In 1783, John Flaxman obtained a commission for Blake to produce "a capital drawing" for Hawkins, who apparently ordered more drawings and planned to raise a subscription to send Blake "to finish [his] studies in Rome."³⁵ In September 1800, Blake informed George Cumberland that "I have shewn your Bonasoni to M^r Hawkins my friend,"³⁶ and in October 1804 he also mentioned to William Hayley "[o]ur good and kind friend Hawkins" and "his former kindness to me" (E 756). Although none of Blake's drawings for Hawkins has been identified or traced,³⁷ it appears that Blake's friendly relationship with his patron continued from 1783 through at least 1804. Since nothing is known of *The Marriage* (B) between the time of its production and April 1821, perhaps Hawkins can provide the missing link.

Second, does the acquisition of *The Marriage* from a dealer who with few exceptions sold Douce drawings and prints suggest that Douce was interested in the graphic rather than the literary component of Blake's works? Bearing in mind that Douce's Blake collection consisted of *Thel* (I), *The Marriage* (B), the first ballad from *Designs to a Series of Ballads* ("The Elephant," dated 1 June 1802),³⁸ *A Descriptive Catalogue* (H), the print of *Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims* (impression 3D), and Blake's 1809 Chaucer Prospectus (B),³⁹ one could argue

34. Ostell may have died around 1808, as suggested by the publishers' imprint in the third edition of Samuel Jackson's *The Contrast; A Poem: "Printed for C. Cradock & W. Joy (successors to T. Ostell)." Ostell was still active in 1807, when he published William Hazlitt's edition of *The Eloquence of the British Senate*.*

35. BR(2) 28-29, 31. G. E. Bentley, Jr., kindly suggested that I consider the possible involvement of Blake's friend Hawkins (personal correspondence).

36. BR(2) 96.

37. BR(2) 29fn.

38. *Designs to a Series of Ballads, Written by William Hayley, Esq. and Founded on Anecdotes Relating to Animals, Drawn, Engraved, and Published, by William Blake* (Chichester, 1802). See BB 572 and [H. O. Coxe, Arthur Brown and Henry Symonds], *Catalogue of the Printed Books and Manuscripts Bequeathed by Francis Douce, Esq. to the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1840) 32. The "Collecta" do not indicate when or from whom Douce obtained *Designs to a Series of Ballads*. The price "2s. 6d." was printed on the cover of the first ballad, but did not appear on subsequent ballads (BB 572). Douce's copy has the price "3/6" written in pencil on the recto of the frontispiece, suggesting that he acquired *Designs* some time after it was first issued. According to Flaxman, Hawkins purchased two copies of the same ballad in June 1802 (BR[2] 133).

39. BB 128, 138, 298; Essick, *Separate Plates* 63; G. E. Bentley, Jr., "William Blake and His Circle: A Checklist of Publications and Discoveries in 1999," *Blake* 33.4 (spring 2000): 141.

that Douce's choices reflect an interest in Blake as artist, art-historical commentator and theorist (with respect to *A Descriptive Catalogue* as well as the Chaucer Prospectus) and historically accurate illustrator of Chaucer.⁴⁰ Of these works, *The Marriage* (B), as an uncolored copy,⁴¹ might be characterized as rather more textual than visual in emphasis.

Finally, should we consider Douce's acquisition of *Thel* and *The Marriage* in terms of his extensive interest in illuminated texts, many of them medieval (his collection included numerous fine specimens of books of hours, illustrated manuscripts, prayer books and psalters)?⁴² Given the rich coloring of D'Israeli's copies of Blake's illuminated books and their impressive dimensions ("they are all large folio copies printed on one side of the leaf"), Joseph Viscomi has speculated that "D'Israeli's interest in the illuminated books appears to have been primarily pictorial rather than literary,"⁴³ and his bias may have influenced Douce's interest in Blake. Similarly, Dibdin's commentary on Blake in *The Library Companion* (1824) focuses on "the bizarre but original and impressive ornaments by BLAKE" for *Night Thoughts* and refers only superficially to his poetry.⁴⁴

In the absence of a Dyer catalogue, c. 1821, offering Blake's book and "The Accusers" for sale, materials in the Douce collection as well as his connections with D'Israeli and Dibdin seem to confirm the idea raised by Bentley and Essick that Douce acquired this unique and early copy of *The Marriage*, possibly in its present binding, from the Dyer bookshop. Although Dibdin's works are marred by inaccuracies and infelicities, my investigation suggests that we can safely agree with his claim in *Bibliomania* concerning the "value and singularity" of many volumes offered for sale by Dyer, especially as *The Marriage* (B) has a place among the most valuable and singular books ever produced.

40. See J. B. Mertz, "Blake v. Cromek: A Contemporary Ruling," *Modern Philology* 99 (2001): 66-77.

41. Bentley notes that *The Marriage* (B) is "uncoloured, except for touches of Blue on pl. 1-4" (BB 289). Joseph Viscomi remarks that "copy B remained uncolored: its illumination is due entirely to various colored inks" (*Blake and the Idea of the Book* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993] 261).

42. See *The Douce Legacy: An Exhibition to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Bequest of Francis Douce (1757-1834)* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984) 39-41, 47-49, 60-62, 83-87, 145-46, 159-61, 165-69, 173-74.

43. Joseph Viscomi, "The Myth of Commissioned Illuminated Books: George Romney, Isaac D'Israeli, and 'ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY designs ... of Blake's,'" *Blake* 23.2 (fall 1989): 48, 56; see also D'Israeli's letter to Dibdin of 24 July 1835, which was published in the latter's *Reminiscences of a Literary Life* (1836) (quoted in BR[2] 328-29).

44. BR(2) 398-99.