

The Publication of Ellis and Yeats,
The Works of William Blake (1893)

BY G. E. BENTLEY, JR.

THE first major work about Blake in the nineteenth century was Gilchrist's epoch-making *Life of William Blake*, "Pictor Ignotus" (1863), which introduced Blake to a wide public. The second was *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical, Edited with [296] Lithographs of the Illustrated "Prophetic Books," and a Memoir and Interpretation by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats in Three Vols.* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893). The Ellis and Yeats edition published for the first time both the text and reproductions of the previously unheard-of *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, presented for the first time an analysis of the previously scarcely heard of "Symbolic System" (1:235-420), and provided a previously unattempted "Interpretation and Paraphrased Commentary" on all of Blake's works (2:3-301). These are major accomplishments.

The initiative for the work seems to have been largely that of Ellis. The editing was done for love, not money. Yeats wrote in 1904 that he worked on the edition for "4 years and ... never got anything out of it but a few larger paper copies."¹

As early as 29 April 1891 the antiquarian bookseller and publisher Bernard Quaritch wrote to Ellis about printing three volumes of Blake.² In an undated note, Quaritch wrote about the Blake edition: "500 ordinary issue / 150 large paper / Mr. Griggs to supply paper." A business memorandum in the Quaritch files records:

Ellis' Blake Nov. 1. 1892 Sent Mr Griggs order to deliver
100 sm. Paper
50 larger — to Leighton's
the remaining stock to be delivered at green's Court
Norman, sent order Nov 29

And on 29 November [1892] Quaritch wrote to Ellis:

I have given the order to the printers to deliver small and large copies of your Blake to Mess.^{rs} Leighton, Binders New Street Sq.

The large paper copies will be done up in h[alf] mor. Gilt tops uncut[.] The small paper copies in extra cloth uncut with a gold impression on the front.

1. Inscription in a small-paper set, quoted by Robert N. Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 1982-1983," *Blake* 18.2 (fall 1984): 70.

2. My wife and I went through the files in Quaritch's on 9 August 1990, and Arthur Freeman gave us permission to quote from them.

An agreeably full description of Quaritch's publication arrangements is given in a recently discovered letter from Quaritch to Ellis:

Decbr. 30 1892

Dear Mr. Ellis

I am glad you are tolerably well again and that you have set the binder going to do up your

Blake, 3 vols.

I am in favor of carrying out an agreement to the letter, and therefore refused to Mr. Yeats to exchange small paper copies for the Large Paper ones, due to you, as per agreement. Excuse me, I also refuse this request to you.

To show you however my sense of indebtedness to you, I shall send you beyond your 30 Large Paper copies
10 on Small paper.

The very desire of yours to prefer the small paper to the Large Paper copies has set me reflecting about the relative prices of the book in the two states, I shall alter the price of the

Large Paper copies

(from £6:6.) to £4.14.6

This seems the more correct proportion

Besides the 6 copies for the press you stipulated for, I shall send out a few more.

What Art Journal do you recommend?

Yours, dear Sir,

ever truly

Bernard Quaritch

PS.

Alfred is improving daily; his appetite is fierce.

Due as per Agreement

| <u>Gratis copies</u> | <u>Large Paper.</u> |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Mr. Linnell | 13 copies |
| British Museum | 1 |
| Press Copies | 6 |
| Mr. Ellis | <u>30</u> |
| | <u>50</u> copies |

To which I add 10 copies on small paper

BQ.

Press-copies to be sent to

Times,
Athenaeum,
Academy,
Saturday Review,
Standard
Daily Telegraph (Sir E. Arnold)
The Theosophist
Tribune New York. USA.
Sun — do —

9 Speaker
Chronicle³

In this list, the first six journals are bracketed, suggesting that they are "the 6 copies for the press you stipulated for."

3. The letter was discovered in a copy of Ellis and Yeats which John Windle acquired in Germany in 2006. [Scans of the pages are online at the journal's web site <<http://www.blakequarterly.org>>.]

In 1895 Quaritch offered *The Works of William Blake*, ed. E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893) at £3.3.0 and the large-paper format at £4.14.6. He quoted reviews in *Saturday Review* (4 Feb. 1893), *Times* (19 Jan. 1893), which seems to be based on a flier, and *Methodist Times* (5 Jan. 1893), which says “we have just seen the proof-sheets.”

Of the 650 sets printed (150 of them large paper), Quaritch gave 40 to Ellis (30 on large paper), 13 to Linnell, who had made *Vala* available to Ellis and Yeats, 1 to the British Museum Print Room, at least 11 as review copies (though his agreement with Ellis called for only 6), and an unknown number to Yeats. Not counting the sets for Yeats, which may have been included in the 40 to Ellis, Quaritch gave away ten percent of the press run.

R E V I E W S

Wings of Fire: Exhibition at Muhlenberg College, 19 March–19 April 2008

By James Rovira

MUHLENBERG College’s Wings of Fire, an exhibition curated by Grant Scott and his senior seminar students, offered a range of Blake originals and historically significant facsimiles and other editions that collectively rep-

resent the complex history of Blake’s relationship with his audiences. The core of the exhibition comprised two originals on permanent loan to Muhlenberg’s Martin Art Gallery: a rare third-state impression of the 1810 engraving of *Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims* and a colored copy of the 1797 Edwards edition of Young’s *Night Thoughts* with Blake’s illustrations. Florence Foerderer Tonner collected *Canterbury Pilgrims* and *Night Thoughts* in the early twentieth century, eventually leaving most of her large Blake collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art; these two pieces were first donated to the Lutheran Church of America then passed on to Muhlenberg College. A local Blake scholar also loaned an uncolored copy of *Night Thoughts*, a first edition of *The Grave* with Blake’s illustrations, an 1874 edition of Blake’s engravings of the Book of Job, editions of William Muir’s lithographic reproductions from the 1880s, and high-quality facsimiles produced by the Trianon Press between 1951 and 1979. Wings of Fire also featured such additions as a beautifully bound copy of the Yeats edition of Blake’s works and two replica printing plates based on electrotypes cast from Blake’s original copperplates at the time of Gilchrist’s biography. Joseph Viscomi loaned these plates to the exhibition, opening it on 19 March with the lecture “Blake’s Enlightened Graphics: Illuminated Books and New Technologies.” Muhlenberg alumni and seniors closed the exhibition with a dance adaptation of “The Tyger” and selections of Blake’s *Songs* set to music.

Scott and his Muhlenberg seniors playfully designed the exhibition space with a spiral half-wall set up to display Blake’s *Illustrations of the Book of Job* toward the rear of the room. Students stenciled lines of Blake’s text in large letters on the walls and floor in the form of concrete poems. For example, the lines “How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses

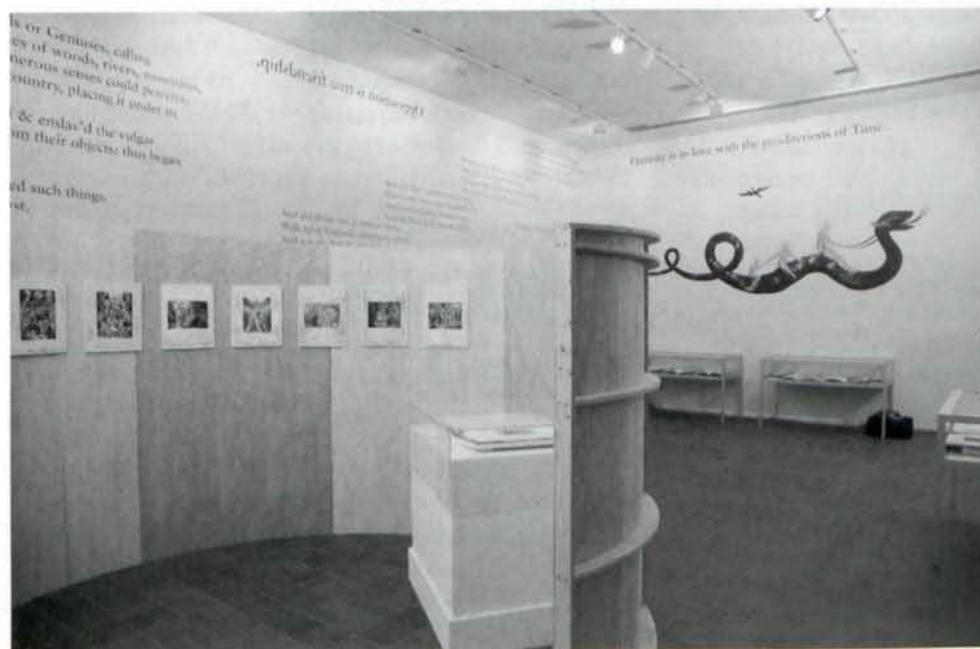


Image courtesy of Grant Scott, the Martin Art Gallery, and Paul Pearson Photography.