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G. E. BENTLEY, Jr.'s, *Blake Records* (2004) includes four references to William Blake in the letters of the poet, novelist, and former associate of William Hayley, Charlotte Smith.¹ The earliest allusion appears in a letter from Smith to the attorney Samuel Rose, dated 9 February 1803. She writes:

My present purpose is, to enquire, whether there is not an ingenious Engraver, who executed certain plates for a small work of M^r Hayley's relating to Animals—I know not what it is as I have never seen it.²

Smith is referring to *Designs to a Series of Ballads, Written by William Hayley*. The work comprises four ballads by Hayley ("The Elephant," "The Eagle," "The Lion," "The Dog") and fourteen plates engraved by Blake (twelve of which were designed by him), published in monthly installments between June and September 1802. According to Hayley, the ballads were "vehicles contrived to exhibit the diversified talents of my Friend [Blake] for original design, and delicate engraving."³ Commenting on the 1803 letter, Bentley observes that Smith "clearly knew little of Blake or of his *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802), but she had doubtless heard of the book at least from some of her old Sussex friends."⁴ As we shall see, she may have learned of the publication from a more intimate source.

Eighteen months later, on 10 September 1804, Smith refers to Blake and *Designs to a Series of Ballads* in a letter to Rose's wife, Sarah, part of which is quoted in *Blake Records*.⁵ She continues:

I wishd to have seen that number of his fables—or whatever they are calld which told some extraordinary feats perform'd by a certain Eagle who carried away a child & then served as Monture [mount] to the Mamma—because a remark of M^r Sargents amused me extremely; when having read this fable, she said, "Dear M^r Hayley, how could you think of telling such a thing—really you do love to put Women in the most extraordinary situations!"⁶

1. See BR(2) 149, 196, 224-25.

2. BR(2) 149.

3. Hayley, "Preface" ii, quoted in Robert N. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 82.

4. BR(2) 150.

5. BR(2) 196.

6. Judith Phillips Stanton, ed., *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 662.

Smith's anecdote indicates that by September 1804 she had not seen the second issue featuring Blake's frontispiece and two illustrations to "The Eagle."

Judith Phillips Stanton's recent edition of the collected letters of Smith contains a fifth, earlier, reference to Blake. At the end of a letter to her publishers, Thomas Cadell, Jr., and William Davies, dated 16 December 1802, almost two months before her letter to Samuel Rose, Smith wrote from Frant, Tunbridge Wells:

M^r Hayley informd my daughter some time since that he would order his last publication about animals (the title I forget) to be left at Y^r Shop for her perusal to be returnd for the profit of the person who made the drawings. If it is there, be so good as to let me know.⁷

The reference indicates that through communication with one of her three surviving daughters, Charlotte Mary Smith, Lucy Eleanor Newhouse, or Harriet Amelia Smith, sometime between June and mid-December 1802, Charlotte Smith had learned something of Blake as the engraver who illustrated Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* and as the intended recipient of royalties for that work.⁸ However, the four later references to Blake in Smith's letters of 1803-06 suggest that if her daughter did borrow a copy from Cadell and Davies about the end of 1802, Smith did not see it.⁹

7. Stanton 503. Smith's reference to "[Hayley's] last publication about animals" suggests that she is referring to all four ballads published by September 1802.

8. Smith's reference to Hayley's request that her daughter return the work to Cadell and Davies "for the profit of the person who made the drawings" appears to confirm Hayley's recollection included in the manuscript of his *Memoirs* that the ballads were "printed for the emolument of the interesting artist, who had settled in a Cottage, as the Poets Neighbour" (BR(2) 116).

9. If Smith ever did examine a copy of *Designs to a Series of Ballads*, she did not do so before September 1804. However, she may have seen copies of *Designs to a Series of Ballads* or *Ballads* (1805) sometime before March 1806, although Bentley thinks it unlikely. See BR(2) 224-25.