

William Blake, George Romney, and *The Life of George Romney, Esq.*

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luminated page and into the luminous world of the everyday: the woods, fields, and shores of her Cape Cod home. In other words, she offers one example of how a person might “live” Blake’s vision in this world. As a poet who happens to be a woman, she also inherits a legacy from Blake that differs from the prophetic and apocalyptic emphasis of Ginsberg. Oliver’s imagination is no less prophetic, no less radical, but it is radical in the sense of “root”: rooted in the life she sees around her and her effort to see what she calls “the untrimmable light // of the world” (*WIWE* 59) with visionary eyes. Her dialogue with Blake helps us not only to reevaluate the politics of nature and gender in Blake’s work, but also to see that work as a living thing, subject to revision by both readers and writers in the eternal conversation he calls Jerusalem.

As fascinating as such dialogue is to a literary scholar, the stakes are far higher in the conversation about (and between) humanity and nature. As Sylvia Bowerbank puts it, “in our age of ecological crisis, an ideal of transcendence of nature ... is no less problematic than the ideal of ‘harmony with nature.’”⁴⁴ In other words, both the spiritual estrangement from nature and the false ideal of absorption into it become obstacles to surmounting ecological challenges. Bowerbank cites the writings of Martin W. Lewis and others in promoting a “Promethean environmentalism,”⁴⁵ humanity’s active management of the planet, in order to slow or reverse the damages already done. Without such management, in Blake’s terms, nature will be barren. Hence, the conversation between Blake and Oliver has ramifications far beyond the scholar’s study or the poet’s morning walk.

Oliver gracefully declines the suggestion that she is an environmentalist: “My work doesn’t document any of the sane and learned arguments for saving, healing, and protecting the earth for our existence. What I write begins and ends with the act of noticing and cherishing, and it neither begins nor ends with the human world.” In the same passage, she resists the common distinctions between human and inhuman, animate and inanimate. If she speaks of “rescu[ing] the world,” it is because, like Blake, she sees nature not as an object of rescue, a damsel in distress, but as part of ourselves: “The man who does not know nature, who does not walk under the leaves as under his own roof, is partial and wounded.”⁴⁶ Blake would have to agree: “All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore.’ / ... / ‘But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion” (E 171). For both Blake and Oliver, in their different modes, the poet’s task is to make the reader aware both of our fallen estrangement from nature and of our integral connection to it. Both present a world in which the choice between humanity and nature can only be a false one.

44. Sylvia Bowerbank, *Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) 3.

45. Bowerbank 10.

46. Oliver, *Winter Hours* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) 99, 101.

WILLIAM and Catherine Blake returned to London in September 1803, after spending three years in the seaside village of Felpham in Sussex. During the two years that followed, one of William’s most important and time-consuming occupations was assisting William Hayley with the illustrations to be engraved for Hayley’s *Life of George Romney*. Blake had commissions for two of these and hoped for more. These activities were no mere task for Blake, who praised the gifts of “our admired Sublime Romney”¹ and thought, unfairly, that Romney’s talent had been diverted from history to portrait painting by Hayley, asserting in a frank letter to his brother James that Hayley “thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did Poor Romney” (30 January 1803, E 725). In the extraordinary letter that Blake wrote to Hayley about his renewal of vision “on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures,” he stated: “I can, with confidence, promise you ocular demonstration of my altered state on the plates I am now engraving after Romney, whose spiritual aid has not a little conducted to my restoration to the light of Art.”²

Blake’s esteem for Romney was no doubt intensified by the facts that he had known the older artist in the 1790s and that there had been strong bonds between both their political beliefs and their art at that time. True, Romney was not an easy man to know. His friend Richard Cumberland characterized him as “shy, private, studious and contemplative; conscious of all the disadvantages and privations of a very stunted education; of a habit naturally hypochondriac, with aspen nerves, that every breath could ruffle.”³ He had some very close friends, but it is significant that, as his old friend Thomas Greene observed, “he seemed always to avoid associating with Gentlemen of his Profession.”⁴ The exceptions were three artists in fields far from his own: the sculptor John Flaxman and the miniaturists Jeremiah Meyer and (for a time) Ozias Humphry.⁵ After 1772, when Romney showed a portrait of

1. Letter to Hayley, 22 June 1804. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly rev. ed. (New York: Anchor-Random House, 1988) [hereafter E] 753.

2. 23 Oct. 1804, E 756. On this crucial experience of Blake’s, see my “The Truchsessian Gallery Revisited,” *Studies in Romanticism* 16.2 (1977): 165-77.

3. [Richard Cumberland], *Memoirs of Richard Cumberland*, vol. 2 (London: Lackington, Allen, & Co., 1807) 211.

4. Letter dated 9 Dec. 1802 to William Long, another close friend of Romney’s (quoted by David Cross, “George Romney: The Earliest Biography of 1802,” *Transactions of the Romney Society* 9 [2004]: 13-17).

5. Romney and Humphry were in Italy together in 1773-75, but they were not close in later years. Meyer was a highly accomplished miniature

Humphry at the Society of Artists, he did not participate in any further annual exhibitions, and he never showed his work at the Royal Academy. None of these factors, however, would have precluded friendship with Blake, who, like Romney, was not a university man, was self-educated, and came from a middle-class family.

That Romney admired Blake's work as early as 1784 is shown by his telling Flaxman that Blake's historical drawings "rank with those of M^r. Angelo."⁶ Romney did not confine his regard to words, but paid Blake an artist's ultimate compliment: as Joseph Viscomi has shown in a seminal article, in the 1790s Romney was the original purchaser of four of Blake's illuminated books: *America* copy A, *The [First] Book of Urizen* copy B, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* copy F, and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy A.⁷ It is unlikely that Romney could have admired Blake's drawings and purchased his illuminated books without ever seeing Blake himself, but further proof that they conversed is Blake's later statement that "In this ["Canterbury Pilgrims"] Plate M^r B has resumed the style with which he set out in life of which Heath & Stothard were the awkward imitators at that time it is the style of Alb Durers Histries & the old Engravers which cannot be imitated by any one who does not understand Drawing & which according to Heath & Stothard Flaxman & even Romney. Spoils an Engraver for Each of these Men have repeatedly asserted this Absurdity to me [emphasis mine] in condemnation of my Work" ("Public Address," E 572). In this context Blake, at a difficult point in his life, angrily condemns his fellow artists in a verbal shotgun blast that confounds friend and foe alike. "Even Romney," however, suggests that of all people Romney should have known better. (Romney may perhaps with the best intentions have urged an artist whose drawings ranked with Michelangelo's to pursue painting rather than engraving.)

These facts give some credibility to an interesting but otherwise undocumented account concerning the two artists. Richard C. Jackson, who claimed that his father had known Blake, asserted that Romney had presented Blake with a vine and a fig tree from his own garden. "My father," Jackson wrote, "told me that the dear Blake, while resident at Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, that he should say the one joyaunce of Blake's life was when he had a garden of his own and could bask in the sunshine 'neath his own vine—a vine which had been presented to him by the artist Romney (he died on the 15th November, 1802 even as his other friend, Ozias Humphries [*sic*], R.A., died eight years later). This vine, I was given to understand, was grafted from the great vine at Versailles or

painter and a friend of Hayley's. Both Humphry and Flaxman were, of course, friends of Blake's.

6. Letter from Flaxman to Hayley, 26 Apr. 1784. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) [hereafter *BR*(2)] 31.

7. 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): 48-74.

Fontainebleau."⁸ Jackson is a frequently unreliable narrator,⁹ and his account can be only supplementary to the hard evidence about Romney's relationship with Blake. However, a few aspects of his statement lend it support, some by omission. Romney had indeed visited Versailles, in 1764, in the company of the great painter of seascapes Claude-Joseph Vernet,¹⁰ although there is no mention of his taking a cutting from a grapevine there. Jackson introduces Humphry, whose name he misspells, because he was "his [Blake's] other friend." Blake had considerably more than two friends, but Humphry is no doubt linked with him here because he too purchased works by Blake in the mid-1790s.¹¹ Whatever its ultimate origin, Jackson supposes that the vine came from "some place in the country which Romney had, and had given up at or about the time of Blake becoming resident at Lambeth." His guess is half right. The "place in the country" would have been Pine Apple Place in Kilburn, "in a new garden ground," as Romney wrote to Hayley in June 1793, "where I work two hours in advancing my designs (for my series of large pictures)."¹² Romney had not vacated it but had, rather, just rented it, and a vine, as Jackson says, "might have come from Romney's country home." Jackson is hard put to account for how a vine under which Blake could sit could have grown to that size in so short a time, but that is because he assumes there could be only one vine in Blake's garden. Alexander Gilchrist had written of the "fine vine" that "Blake would on no account prune";¹³ Jackson pictures Blake as "rejoicing ... not only to sit beneath its shade, but beneath his own fig tree also—both vine and fig tree coming from Romney's garden." Again, it is less likely that this fig tree had an abnormal growth rate than that Romney gave Blake a cutting. (Gilchrist, however, says nothing about a fig tree.) Furthermore, the fact that Jackson seems unaware of the political symbolism of Romney's gift may again suggest that there is some truth behind the story.¹⁴

8. "William Blake: An Unlooked For Discovery," *South London Observer* 22, 29 June 1912. For helping me obtain a photocopy of this article I am grateful to G. E. Bentley, Jr., and to Chris Sheppard and Kasia Drozdziak of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

9. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., "Richard C. Jackson, Collector of Treasures and Wishes: Walter Pater, Charles Lamb, William Blake," *Blake* 36.3 (winter 2002-03): 92-105.

10. See Arthur B. Chamberlain, *George Romney* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910) 50, and Cross, "George Romney" 16. Versailles may also have been one of the "variety of scenes" outside Paris to which Mme. de Genlis took Romney and Hayley in 1790 (William Hayley, *The Life of George Romney, Esq.* [Chichester: Printed for T. Payne, 1809] 147).

11. Humphry purchased from Blake copy H of *America*, copy D of *Europe*, copy H of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy A of the Small Book of Designs, and copy A of the Large Book of Designs. See G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 91, 158, 170, 356, and 384.

12. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 199.

13. Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, "Pictor Ignotus," vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1863) 100.

14. Alfred G. Hopkins, who came to see the condemned Hercules Buildings in 1916, shortly before it was pulled down, found "a tangled garden, all overgrown with vine and fig tree." See Michael Phillips, "No.

The fruits of the earth furnished abundant imagery to advocates of revolution in the late eighteenth century, not least to Blake, as near the end of *America*, where, after the victory of fiery Orc, the females “feel the nerves of youth renew, and desires of ancient times, / Over their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grape appears” (15.25-26, E 57). The yoking of vine and fig tree is especially important, signifying the peace and freedom of a millennial society. Its source is of course the Old Testament, as in Micah 4.4: “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make [them] afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken [it].”¹⁵ Such biblical texts became part of millennialist and pro-revolutionary discourse even before the American and French Revolutions. As early as 1769, the novelist Henry Brooke speculated how, under the reign of Liberty, “would industry be encouraged to plant and multiply the vine and the fig-tree! how would benignity rejoice to call neighbours and strangers to come and fearlessly partake of the fruits thereof!”¹⁶ George Washington wrote to the congregation of the Newport, Rhode Island, synagogue that in the new republic, “every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”¹⁷ Appropriating the figure for his own purposes, Napoleon told his army of Italy in 1796: “When France gives peace to the world ... each of you at his own hearthstone, under his own vine and fig tree, will be enjoying the prosperity won by your valor”¹⁸ Conversely, in the fallen world that Blake describes in *Jerusalem*, members of the community can no longer meet “beneath the Vine and Fig-tree” (18.19, E 163).

Romney and Hayley visited France as admirers of the revolution in 1790, and Hayley wrote of that time in language that may remind us of the famous passage beginning “O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!” in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*: “It was a time when that scene of astonishing vicissitudes presented to the friends of peace, of freedom, and of the arts, a spectacle of cheerful curiosity, and of hope so magnificent in promises of good to mankind, that philanthropy could not fail to

exult in the recent prospect, unconscious that the splendid vision was destined to sink in the most execrable horrors of barbarity and blood.”¹⁹ Romney too felt great enthusiasm for the early republic but was appalled by the September Massacres, writing to Hayley on 8 September 1792: “The accounts to day from France are dreadful: all the priests that were confined are murdered, perhaps the city of Paris is at this time in flames. I am so agitated with the tremendous situation of that poor Country, I am not able to do any thing.”²⁰ Nevertheless, Romney retained his radical sympathies at home, as was well known to his friends, and to some extent to the public as well.²¹ He was a friend of Thomas Paine, who sometimes lay low at Romney’s house, and who was indicted for sedition on 21 May 1792.²² A few weeks after that the *Morning Chronicle* reported that Romney was painting Paine’s portrait, “but whether for an individual likeness or as the hero of Paradise Lost is not stated. Those, however, who have seen the sketch say it’s ‘devilish like.’”²³ (It appears that the *Chronicle*, like Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, regarded Satan as the hero of *Paradise Lost*, although for different reasons.) In 1793 this painting (now untraced) was reproduced in a fine engraving by William Sharp (illus. 1), showing a smiling Paine beside the manuscript of *Rights of Man*.²⁴ For his part, Blake names Paine four times among the defenders of freedom in *America*, published in the same year as Sharp’s engraving, and was to defend him vehemently in marginalia written some five years later.²⁵ Whether or not Blake walked the streets of London wearing the red cap of Liberty,²⁶ he gave expression to his revolutionary sympathies in the figure of Orc, who defeats the British army in *America*, and then appears “in the vineyards of red France” in *Europe* (1794; 15.2, E 66). Both Romney and Blake would have been conscious that

13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth: William Blake’s Printmaking Workshop and Etching-Painting Studio Recovered,” *British Art Journal* 5 (2004): 14, citing Hopkins’s letter in the *Spectator* no. 4584 (6 May 1916): 571-72. Hopkins can now be identified as a master pottery maker who was in charge of the pottery workshop at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (see W. T. Whitley, “London Schools,” *Arts and Crafts: A Review of the Work Executed by Students in the Leading Art Schools of Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Charles Holme [London: “The Studio” Ltd., 1916] 6). Hopkins’s wish to save Blake’s one-time home, which was the motive for his letter, is an indication of the interest in Blake among some participants in the arts and crafts movement.

15. The biblical text cited is from the Authorized Version as published in the *Blue Letter Bible* <<http://www.blueletterbible.org>>.

16. Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality; or, the History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, vol. 4 (London: W. Johnston, 1769) 109.

17. 17 Aug. 1790. See *The Papers of George Washington*, <<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/hebrew/reply.html>>, accessed 20 Feb. 2010.

18. See Charles F. Warwick, *Napoleon and the End of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs, 1910) 103.

19. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 143; see William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979) 396.

20. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 184.

21. On 29 Oct. 1797 Joseph Farington was told that “Romney ... is a convert from Democracy, and now says He believes Monarchy is best after all,” which suggests that he was known for his radical views at least until then. See *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick, Angus Macintyre, and Kathryn Cave (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978-84) 3: 910. Farington’s informant was the gem-engraver Nathaniel Marchant, whom Romney had known since his time in Rome (1773-75).

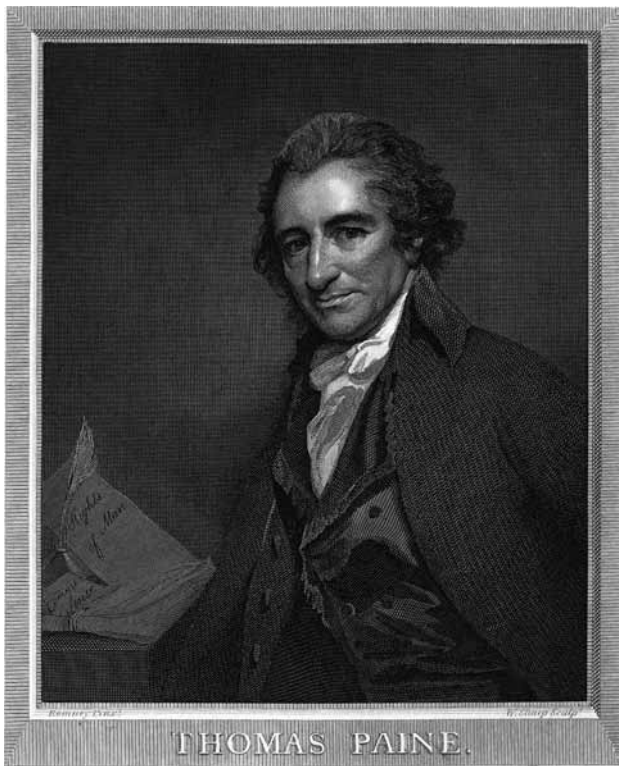
22. See Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) 54.

23. *Morning Chronicle* 28 June 1792. See Suzanne E. May, “Tuching the Times too nearly’: George Romney in 1793,” *Transactions of the Romney Society* 10 (2005): 14.

24. A smaller version of the engraving, issued by Sharp, is dated 1 Feb. 1794. See David Alexander, “Chronological List of Singly Issued Plates after George Romney to 1806,” *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination: Essays on George Romney*, ed. Alex Kidson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 284.

25. Annotations to *An Apology for the Bible* by R. Watson, E 611-20.

26. Gilchrist 1: 94.



1. William Sharp, engraving after George Romney, *A Portrait of the Author of Rights of Man*, 1793. 10.3 x 8.4 in. © Trustees of the British Museum.

the gift of vine and fig tree was a symbolic act, affirming their common adherence to a great popular cause.

Aside from their politics, it may at first surprise us that Blake had such respect for Romney's art. Romney was of course one of the leading portrait artists of his time. Many of his paintings have true elegance and grace, and sometimes, as Alex Kidson says of *The Leigh Family* (1768, National Gallery of Victoria), "an almost disturbing intensity of vision."²⁷ His success, both artistic and financial, was enormous. Nevertheless, Romney was strongly attracted to another kind of art. In February 1787 he wrote to Hayley: "This cursed portrait-painting! How I am shackled with it! I am determined to live frugally, that I may enable myself to cut it short, as soon as I am tolerably independent, and then give my mind up to those delightful regions of imagination."²⁸ By that closing phrase, which has become famous in Romney studies, he meant what was in his time called "history painting"—a term that could include, in addition to strictly historical subjects, scenes from Milton, the Bible, Shakespeare, and mythology. Indeed, he had visited those regions from the beginning of his career, as in *Lear in the Tempest Tearing Off His Robes* (c. 1761, Abbot

27. Alex Kidson, *George Romney: 1734-1802* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 66.

28. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 123.

Hall Art Gallery, Kendal). Although Romney was a dedicated and highly successful portrait artist, having received 593 sittings in 1783 alone,²⁹ he was nevertheless conflicted about his artistic vocation. Money alone was not the reason, although it certainly was a factor. In 1795 the diarist Joseph Farington wrote that Romney was reportedly worth the very considerable sum of £50,000.³⁰ He would have earned this almost entirely through portraiture, for it was notoriously difficult to sell history paintings. Romney knew himself to be a great portrait artist, and he was a perfectionist, said seldom to allow any other hand to touch his work at a time when it was common for artists to employ specialists in landscape backgrounds or draperies. He would rather lose an important commission, as he did Mrs. Siddons's, than finish a picture in haste.³¹ When Blake accused Hayley of turning Romney into a portrait painter, he was simplifying a complex situation.

What would have been most important to Blake about Romney's art? Flaxman, who contributed a "Sketch of Romney's Professional Character" to Hayley's *Life*, points the direction. "His cartoons," Flaxman wrote, "some of which have unfortunately perished, were examples of the sublime and terrible, at that time perfectly new in English art. The dream of Atossa, from the Persians of Æschylus, contrasted the death-like sleep of the Queen, with the Bacchanalian Fury of the Genius of Greece. The composition was conducted with the fire and severity of a Greek bas-relief: the ghost of Darius, with the Persians prostrated before him, awed the spectator by grandeur and mystery" (cover illus.; illus. 2 online).³² The picture Flaxman mentions is one of a group of large, finished drawings in black chalk or graphite, begun by Romney not long after his return from Italy in 1775 and continued over a period of perhaps a decade.³³ "His compositions," Flaxman continued, "like those of the ancient pictures, and basso relievos, told their story by a single group of figures in the front, whilst the back ground is made the simplest possible, rejecting all unnecessary episode, and trivial ornament, either of secondary groups or architectural subdivision." These were also Blake's artistic concerns early in his career (and at times afterwards), and Blake also shared with Romney, Flaxman, and others both a strongly neoclassical style and techniques of pen and wash draftsmanship. As Jean H. Hagstrum, one

29. See Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 36.

30. *Diary of Joseph Farington* 2: 432 (8 Dec. 1795). Farington's informant was "Mr. Sharpe," presumably Romney's friend the West India merchant Richard ("Conversation") Sharp. In the same conversation Farington was told that "Romney did, for many years, wish for independence; that He might be able to exercise the powers of his mind in his profession. He still looks forward to a time when He shall have that indulgence"

31. Kidson, *George Romney 177-78*. In his search for Romney's paintings, Blake saw an unfinished half-length of Mrs. Siddons; see below.

32. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 309-10.

33. See Kidson, *George Romney* 118-39. Eighteen of these drawings (now in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) were given by John Romney to the Liverpool Royal Institution in 1823.

of the few to have taken up this subject, argues, “a linear and thematic stamp from Romney is visible on Blake’s works from the early *Tiriel* to the very late Dante illustrations.”³⁴

At the time that Blake began looking for Romney pictures to be engraved, the state of Romney’s oeuvre was almost chaotic. Even while the artist was alive, some of it had been subjected to terrible treatment in Romney’s move to Hampstead on Christmas 1798. In the words of one biographer, “for want of adequate room, the pictures were crammed into all vacant places, or arranged along the arcade, where, being exposed in the open air to the alternate action of moisture and frost, they were almost entirely destroyed in the course of the winter; several, also, were stolen.”³⁵ The chaos of Romney’s studio was no doubt related to, and in a sense mirrored, the bipolar disorder that increasingly afflicted him. We can only imagine what happened after he left Hampstead not long afterward and then died in Kendal in November 1802. Benjamin West was so horrified by the state of Romney’s paintings that he began cleaning and arranging his own, he told Farington, so that “in case He *should drop*, His House may not be found like those of Romney & Opie full of rubbish that it was disgraceful to them to have brought forward to a sale.”³⁶ In undertaking to search for Romney’s originals, Blake took on what would be a difficult and time-consuming task.

He began with William Saunders, who had physical custody of most of Romney’s unsold paintings. (Saunders was Romney’s framemaker from 1782 on, and the two had enjoyed a close business relationship.)³⁷ Blake mentions calling on Saunders on Hayley’s behalf in letters to Hayley of 26 October and 13 December 1803, 21 March 1804, and 11 December 1805. After his first visit, Blake reported:

I have been with Mr. Saunders who has now in his possession all Mr. Romney’s pictures that remained after the sale at Hampstead; I saw *Milton and his Daughters*, and *’Twas where the Seas were Roaring*, and a beautiful *Female head*. He has promised to write a list of all that he has in his possession, and of all that he remembers of Mr. Romney’s paintings, with notices where they now are, as far as his recollection will serve. The picture of *Christ in the Desert* he supposes to be

one of those which he has rolled on large rollers. He will take them down and unroll them, but cannot do it easily, as they are so large as to occupy the whole length of his workshop, and are laid across beams at the top. (E 737)

Three of these paintings can be identified (as Romney executed numerous beautiful female heads, it is impossible to say which Blake saw). *Milton and His Daughters* (private collection), depicting the blind Milton being read to, would have made for an excellent engraving because of its dramatic lights and darks, but it was not chosen, perhaps because it had already been engraved by Benjamin Smith in 1795. *’Twas Where [sic] the Seas Were Roaring* was no. 117 in the 1807 sale of Romney’s paintings, described as “a despondent Female, seated upon a Rock, overpowered with Grief; a gleam of Light is thrown upon the Breast and Arms of the Female with Richest effect.”³⁸ A detail of the large, rolled-up picture of Christ in the desert, known under the title of *The Temptation in the Wilderness*, was later engraved, though not by Blake, for Hayley’s biography; it will be discussed below with the other illustrations for the book.

Saunders was as good as his word, though not until 5 January 1804, when he wrote to Hayley that at Blake’s request he had made a list of Romney’s “most Capital paintings” with their owners.³⁹ The first whom Blake had called on was the astronomer and lecturer Adam Walker, a member of the Unincreasable Club, an informal group including Romney who dined and went to the theater together from time to time.⁴⁰ One of Romney’s oldest friends, Walker had been with the artist in Lancaster and had posed for some of his pictures there. The closeness of their relationship is epitomized by two paintings and the span of time between them. Walker was the subject of what may have been Romney’s earliest portrait,⁴¹ while *The Walker Family* (National Portrait Gallery, London), showing Walker and his wife and daughter poring over an astronomical chart while Walker’s sons discuss what they have seen through a telescope pointed toward the night sky, is among Romney’s very last works. On 27 January 1804 Blake reported to Hayley that he had called on Walker, but that

34. Jean H. Hagstrum, “Romney and Blake: Gifts of Grace and Terror,” *Blake in His Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) 208. William Pressly suggests that “when seen as a whole,” the Liverpool drawings “may have influenced Blake when composing his series of large colour prints executed in 1795 which similarly cover a wide range of textual sources including ones of the artist’s own creation” (“Romney’s Peculiar Powers for Historical and Ideal Painting,” *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination*, ed. Kidson, 107).

35. John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1830) 251.

36. *Diary of Joseph Farington* 9: 3208 (26 Jan. 1808).

37. On the close business association of Romney and Saunders, see Jacob Simon, “A Note on George Romney and Picture Framing,” <<http://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/the-art-of-the-picture-frame/artist-romney.php>>, accessed 27 Feb. 2010. Saunders’s premises were on Great Castle Street, a few hundred yards from Cavendish Square, the site of Romney’s studio from 1775 to 1796.

38. *Select and Reserved Collection of Paintings of That Eminent and Very Celebrated Artist, George Romney, Esq. R.A.*, London, 27 Apr. 1807. The title is that of a well-known ballad, “’Twas When the Seas Were Roaring.”

39. For Saunders’s letter, see BR(2) 178. The list itself is in the E. J. Pratt Library at Victoria University in the University of Toronto. I thank G. E. Bentley, Jr., for helping me locate it, and Robert C. Brandeis and Roma Kail for providing me with a photocopy. It will be cited as Saunders’s list.

40. See Michael Phillips, “William Blake and the ‘Unincreasable Club’: The Printing of *Poetical Sketches*,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 80 (1976): 6-18.

41. It is said that a portrait of Walker in the collection of Lord Waverley (a well-known breeder of horses in the early twentieth century) may have been cut down from full length. See *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors: Tibbett to M. West*, ed. Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, vol. 15 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993) 212.

Walker was away on an extended trip to Birmingham (E 740). After one more unsuccessful attempt, Blake could at last write to Hayley on 4 May 1804:

I have seen the elder Mr. Walker. . . Mr. Walker showed me Romney's first attempt at oil painting; it is a copy from a Dutch picture—Dutch boor smoking; on the back is written, "This was the first attempt at oil painting by G. Romney." He shew'd me also the last performance of Romney. It is of Mr. Walker and family, the draperies put in by somebody else. It is a very excellent picture, but unfinished. The figures as large as life, half length, Mr. W., three sons, and, I believe, two daughters, with maps, instruments, &c. Mr. Walker also shew'd me a portrait of himself (W.), whole length, on a canvas about two feet by one and a half; it is the first portrait Romney ever painted. But above all, a picture of *Lear and Cordelia*, when he awakes and knows her,—an incomparable production, which Mr. W. bought for five shillings at a broker's shop; it is about five feet by four, and exquisite for expression; indeed, it is most pathetic; the heads of Lear and Cordelia can never be surpassed, and Kent and the other attendant are admirable; the picture is very highly finished. (E 748)

Lear and Cordelia (location unknown) was one of the early pictures that Romney sold by lottery in Kendal in 1762. It had been won by a Mr. Richardson in Cartmel, and by coincidence was bought by Adam Walker's son in a shop in Kensington many years later.⁴² William Pressly remarks that a sketch on a related subject, *The Death of Cordelia* (1775-77, Folger Shakespeare Library), "exhibits a stately, classicizing elegance, whose languid curves and slow rhythms exerted such a strong influence on William Blake."⁴³ One might well think of Blake's early watercolor *Lear and Cordelia in Prison* (c. 1779) in this regard. On 28 May 1804 Blake informed Hayley that Walker "says that I shall have *Lear and Cordelia* to copy if you desire it should be done" (E 750). Despite the availability of the painting and Blake's admiration of it, it was not to be included among the designs engraved for Hayley's *Life*.

Daniel Braithwaite, another Unincreasable and one of Romney's first patrons, was an official in the post office when Romney met him shortly after moving to London in March 1762. Hayley was to dedicate his *Life of Romney* to him. Blake visited him by 23 February 1804, when he informed Hayley: "He gives a very spirited assurance of Mr John Romneys interesting himself in the great object of his Fathers Fame & thinks that he must be proud of such a work & in such hands. The Picture from Sterne which you desired him to procure for you; he has not yet found where it is. Supposes that it may be in the north & that he may learn from M^r Romney who will be in town soon—" (E 741). "M^r Romney" is the painter's son, John, and "in the north" refers to John's residence in Kendal, where he kept some of his father's art. More must be said

42. John Romney, *Memoirs* 25-26.

43. See Pressly, "Romney's 'Peculiar Powers for Historical and Ideal Painting,'" *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination*, ed. Kidson, 105, 106 (fig. 35).

about John Romney shortly. Braithwaite showed Blake "a very fine Portrait of M^{rs} Siddons (by Romney) as the Tragic Muse half length. that is the Head & hands. & in his best Style" (E 741-42).⁴⁴ This beautiful, though unfinished, painting might have been engraved splendidly, but evidently Hayley was not interested. A suggestion from Braithwaite did, however, catch his attention. "He also desires me," wrote Blake, "to express to you his wish that you would give the Public an Engraving of that Medallion by your Sons matchless hand which is plac'd over his chimney piece." Hayley had already decided to include this, writing to Flaxman as early as 7 August 1803 that he had Blake in mind as the engraver of both the medallion and of Romney's self-portrait, but was "astonished" by Blake's asking thirty guineas for the former and forty guineas for the latter.⁴⁵ It appears that Blake continued to hope to engrave the medallion, but he accepted the inevitable by 7 August 1804, writing to Hayley that "Miss. W[atson]. would Engrave your Sons Medallion of Romney most delicately."⁴⁶

How did Hayley go about choosing what pictures should be engraved for his *Life of Romney*? He evidently asked early on for advice from Flaxman, whose reply, had Hayley followed his recommendations, might have resulted in a beautiful book. Flaxman wrote on 2 January 1804 to remind Hayley that Hayley had once considered a group of Romney's cartoons "the noblest of his Studies," and went on to indicate some of their subjects: "A Lapland Witch raising a Storm—Charity & her Children—Pliny & his Mother flying from the eruption of Vesuvius—the following from Æschylus—Raising the Ghost of Darius—Atossa's Dream—The Furies" (BR[2] 177). He then recommended Blake for the engraving job: "they are all well worth etching in a bold manner which I think Blake is likely to do with great success & perhaps at an expence that will not be burthensome—but at any rate give him one to do first for a tryal . . ." Hayley at first tried to follow Flaxman's advice. On 16 January he drafted a letter to John Romney. He assured him that, although the artist had promised Hayley "half a dozen" of these pictures, he did not wish them for himself but merely as a loan for which he would pay carriage, specifying two from Flaxman's list. "I wish you would allow Mr Blake to copy two of them if they are still in London—particularly the Lapland Witch raising a Storm a design that our Friend Meyer used to call equal to any Figure of Michael Angelos—& Pliny the younger with his Mother in the scene of the Earthquake."⁴⁷

44. Sarah Siddons (private collection); see Kidson, *George Romney* 177-78.

45. BR(2) 157. This must have contributed to Hayley's loss of confidence in Blake, especially as, Hayley says, they had agreed on a price of thirty guineas for the self-portrait.

46. From the recently rediscovered letter from Blake to Hayley in the collection of Robert N. Essick, whom I thank for sending me a copy even before he received the original. See Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick, "the fiends of Commerce": Blake's Letter to William Hayley, 7 August 1804," *Blake* 44.2 (fall 2010): 53.

47. BR(2) 188. It was an uncharacteristic diplomatic blunder for Hayley to say that he had a claim on six pictures that were in John Romney's

The “Lapland Witch,” Hayley explains in the *Life of Romney*, could not be found. “I have mentioned this design in the poetical Epistles address to Romney,⁴⁸ and had hoped to decorate this volume with a good engraving from the cartoon, which the son of my departed friend had kindly intended to present to me, but after a diligent search for it in a mass of many large works, that were huddled together in the haste of the retiring painter to clear his London house, we had the mortification to perceive, that some mischance had annihilated this favorite design.”⁴⁹ However, that was not true of most of the other drawings that Flaxman recommended, and that he continued to recommend. On 22 June 1804 Blake wrote to Hayley (E 752-53):

M^r Flaxman named the following Eight as proper subjects for Prints

- 1 The Vision of Atossa from Eschylus
- 2 Apparition of Darius
- 3 Black Eyd Susan—a figure on the Sea shore embracing a Corse
- 4 The Shipwreck with the Man on Horseback &^c which I have
- 5 Hecate. a very fine thing indeed, which I have
- 6 Pliny very fine but very unfinishd. which I have
- 7 Lear & Cordelia. belonging to M^r Walker
- 8 One other which I omitted to write down & have forgot but think that it was a Figure with Children which he calld a Charity

What were these pictures, and how suitable were they for engraved illustrations? Numbers 1 and 2 are illustrations from *The Persae* of Aeschylus, first published in an English translation by Robert Potter in 1777. (Flaxman’s own *Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus*,⁵⁰ which included four illustrations of *The Persae* based on Potter’s translation, was to appear eighteen years later.) Potter sat to Romney for his portrait in 1778, and the two got on so well that Romney made him a present of the finished portrait in August 1779.⁵¹ Their conversations led Romney, who often got his ideas for imaginative subjects from friends, to make two finished drawings on subjects from *The Persae*. Potter wrote in a note in his second edition, “The excellent Mr. Romney gave a strong instance of his good sense and fine taste, when he called Æschylus ‘the painter’s poet:’ the public may expect to see this scene, and

possession, especially as John, we now know from his *Memoirs* (124), thought that Hayley had stolen some of his father’s works.

48. Hayley refers to his *Poetical Epistle to an Eminent Painter* (London: T. Payne et al., 1778), which he reprints in the *Life*. The lines are:

Round fancy’s circle when thy pencil flies,
With what terrific pomp thy spectres rise!
What lust of mischief marks thy witch’s form,
While on the Lapland rock she swells the storm! (*Life* 374)

49. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 84. Sketches for this picture are in the Louvre and in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

50. Engraved by Thomas Piroli (London: J. Matthews, 1795).

51. The portrait was sold at Sotheby’s, 12 July 1995, lot 57, in the sale British Paintings 1500-1850.

some others, designed by him in the genuine spirit of Æschylus; so that the translator will have this merit, if he has no other, to have given rise to some paintings that will do honour to our country.”⁵² Romney must have been buoyed by this encouragement, as he later was by “the fervent praise” of Joseph Warton, who had seen *Atossa’s Dream* in London in 1794.⁵³ At this time, Aeschylus was valued for his “primitive” qualities,⁵⁴ and so Romney here was at the cutting edge of contemporary taste. This picture and its companion also show something of what Romney and Blake had in common: *Atossa’s Dream* is strikingly Blake-like, as is *The Ghost of Darius Appearing to Atossa*. In the latter the crowned head of Darius and his woe-ful expression foreshadow Blake’s renderings of Nebuchadnezzar, and his white beard, outstretched arms, and mantle, seen through the smoke of the altar, anticipate Urizen.⁵⁵ The three elders, bent over on their knees to our left, anticipate Job’s slouched-over comforters in the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*: “Let the Day Perish Wherein I Was Born” (illus. 3) and “Then the Lord Answered Job out of the Whirlwind” (note the visible hands, which are also a detail in Romney’s drawing).

Number 3, a picture at Saunders’s according to his list, appears to refer to John Gay’s popular lyric “Sweet William’s Farewell to Black-Eyed Susan,” published in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1720). There is a puzzle about this title. The poem is about a woman who boards her sailor sweetheart’s warship and takes a tearful farewell before he sails.⁵⁶ It does not feature “a figure on the Sea shore embracing a Corse” or anything like it. According to John Romney, in about 1793 his father “painted . . . the *Death of Ophelia*, and *Susan*, from the ballad of ‘When the Seas were roaring;’ neither of which was in a finished state.”⁵⁷ He also says, confusingly, that among the drawings he presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1817

52. *The Tragedies of Æschylus*, trans. R. Potter, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1779) 354n. Suzanne E. May suggests that this note was added after Potter’s book was in proof (“George Romney, Robert Potter, and ‘the Painter’s Poet,’” *Transactions of the Romney Society* 7 [2002]: 18). Potter seems to have lost confidence in Romney (and, it appears, all other artists) by 1788, when he wrote to the poet Edward Jerningham on 15 June: “I know nothing of Macklin or his Exhibitions, unless you mean the room of vile pictures from the English Poets near Temple Bar. The best picture scene in Aeschylus is the Ghost of Darius rising from his tomb; but the Painter would probably make damnd work of it” (Huntington Library Ms. JE 704: 061588).

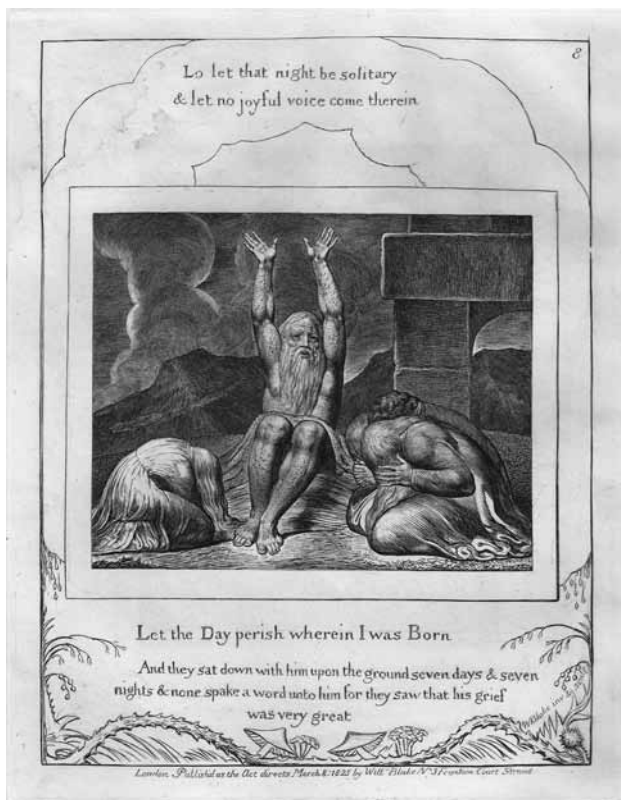
53. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 224-25. This drawing and its companion, *The Ghost of Darius Appearing to Atossa*, are in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

54. “A taste for Aeschylus was in itself symptomatic of the primitivist currents of the late eighteenth century,” according to Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 18n50 and 161.

55. In comparing Romney’s Darius with Blake’s Urizen, I have been anticipated by Hagstrum, “Romney and Blake: Gifts of Grace and Terror” 203.

56. John Gay, *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Vinton A. Dearing with the assistance of Charles E. Beckwith, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 249-51.

57. John Romney, *Memoirs* 234.



3. William Blake, engraving, *Illustrations of the Book of Job* pl. 8, "Let the Day Perish Wherein I Was Born," 1823-26. Leaf size 16.6 x 12.8 in. Image courtesy of Robert N. Essick.

were "V. 3rd. The Damsel; from the ballad, 'Twas when the seas were roaring,' &c. Or perhaps a personification of Sor-row" and "XIII. 3rd. From the ballad, 'Twas when the seas were roaring.'"⁵⁸ Gay does include a well-known ballad beginning "'Twas when the Seas were roaring," sung by a character named Susan,⁵⁹ in his farce *The What D'Ye Call It* (1715). It is about a woman who imagines the death of her lover at sea and then sees his corpse in the water (although the corpse remains there and she does not embrace it). Evidently either Flaxman or Blake made a slip, conflating the titles of two well-known poems.⁶⁰ Romney's *'Twas When the Seas Were Roaring* was not selected for engraving, and its location is unknown.

"The Shipwreck," the only engraving by Blake to appear in the *Life*, will be discussed with the other published illustrations. Blake had mentioned number 5 on the list, *Hecate*, to Hayley earlier: "Mr. Flaxman advises that the drawing of Mr. Romney's which shall be chosen instead of the Witch (if that cannot be recovered) be *Hecate*, the figure with the torch and snake, which he thinks one of the finest drawings" (2 April 1804, E 745). Blake urged Hayley to choose it over the Pliny: "The two Cartoons which I have of *Hecate* & *Pliny* are very unequal in point of finishing the *Pliny* in [is] a Sketch tho

admirably contrived for an Effect equal to Rembrandt. But the *Hecate* is a finishd Production which will call for all the Engravers nicest attention" (28 December 1804, E 760). Blake continued in a way that suggests that, after having been commissioned to engrave *The Shipwreck* as well as the book's frontispiece, he was now lobbying for a chance to do *Hecate*: "indeed it is more finishd than the *Shipwreck* it is every body[s] favourite who have seen it & they regularly prefer it to the *Shipwreck* as a work of Genius As to the [Plates] Price of the Plates Flaxman declares to me that he will not pretend to set a price upon Engraving. I think it can only be done by some Engraver. I consulted M^r Parker on the subject before I decided on the *Shipwreck* & it was his opinion & he says it still is so that a Print of that size cannot be done under 30 Guineas if finishd, & if a Sketch. 15 Guineas as therefore *Hecate* must be a Finishd Plate I consider 30 Guineas as its Price & the *Pliny* 15 Guineas" (E 760). (Note that "can only be done by some Engraver" refers only to getting a price estimate from Blake's one-time partner, James Parker.) These prices are considerably lower than those that had astonished Hayley in August 1803. In any event, *Hecate* was never engraved and its present location is unknown.

Blake's numbers 3, 4, 5, and 7 are additions to Flaxman's original list, and "A Lapland Witch" and "The Furies" have been omitted. As we see, Blake had succeeded in obtaining the Pliny drawing and another that Flaxman had recommended: *Hecate*. Romney's old friend Adam Walker, having offered to let Blake borrow *Lear and Cordelia*, would presumably have permitted him to engrave it. Furthermore, it might have been possible for Hayley to borrow numbers 1 and 2, as these were in the possession of John Romney,⁶¹ who, according to Hayley, had been willing to allow the engraving of the lost *Lapland*

61. John Romney's hostile attitude toward Hayley is frequently expressed in the *Memoirs* of 1830. However, there had been unpleasantness between them as early as 1799, when the painter's son demanded that Hayley redeem £1500 worth of stocks. See Victor Chan, "Pictorial Image and Social Reality: George Romney's Late Drawings of John Howard Visiting Prisoners," diss., Stanford University, 1983, 26. I thank Ted Andersson for providing me with a photocopy of the relevant pages of this dissertation.

On 22 Aug. 1803 John Romney wrote to Thomas Greene about the £15 allowed to Hayley by George Romney's executors. "Mr. Hayley insults my father's memory by saying it is no more than a just return for his signal services. What signal services? for leading him by his bad example and evil counsels into those fatal errors which marked with misfortune and calamity the latter period of his life. Happy would he have been had he never known Mr. Hayley." See Hilda Gamlin, *George Romney and His Art* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1894) 312-14. In 1804 Blake thought that some misunderstanding between the two had been ironed out, as shown in his letter to Hayley of 16 Mar. (E 743-44), and John Romney did help Hayley to the extent of permitting him to reproduce *Newton with the Prism* and *The Shipwreck*, and giving him *The Shipwreck* as a present.

58. John Romney, *Memoirs* 258, 259.

59. John Gay, *The What D'Ye Call It: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce*, 3rd ed. (London, 1716) 32.

60. I am grateful to Alex Kidson (private communication) for this suggestion.

Witch. The only picture from either list to appear in Hayley's *Life* was Blake's fine engraving of *The Shipwreck*, which was among the pictures held by Saunders. Hayley's failure to include any of the others made a considerable difference in the pictorial aspect of his book—an important consideration for a biography of an artist—as did his change in priorities regarding engravers.

All this time Blake had been confident of having a major role in engraving the designs for the *Life of Romney*. His connection with the project had begun while he was still living in Felpham and had executed two miniatures of Romney for Hayley, copied from self-portraits in Hayley's possession.⁶² From one of these he no doubt made a drawing as the basis for a portrait engraving to serve as the book's frontispiece. He showed a proof of this engraving to Romney's friends from time to time, and at every opportunity he let Hayley know how they considered his rendering of Romney exact.⁶³ In the newly rediscovered letter of 7 August 1804 he wrote: "the Plate [of *The Shipwreck*] goes on with Spirit & neatness as does Romneys Head."⁶⁴ After his artistic epiphany connected with visiting the Truchsessian Gallery, Blake declared "I am become suddenly as I was at first," and that he would demonstrate this "by producing the *Head of Romney* and the *Shipwreck* quite another thing from what you or I ever expected them to be" (23 October 1804, E 757). As late as 28 December 1804 he still expected to be the engraver of the frontispiece. "I am very far," he wrote to Hayley on that date, "from shewing the Portrait of Romney as a finishd Proof. be assured that with our Good Flaxmans good help & with your remarks on it in addition I hope to make it a Supernaculum."⁶⁵ However, despite Blake's efforts, when the book was at last published in 1809, the frontispiece was an engraving by Caroline Watson (illus. 4, online only), showing Romney at three different ages, and six other engravings were by Watson as well, with only one, "The Shipwreck" (illus. 5, online only), by Blake.

Watson, who succeeded Blake in several of Hayley's projects during these early years of the nineteenth century, was a highly capable graphic artist, especially of portraits. She had been made engraver to the queen in 1785, the year in which she executed individual portraits of two daughters of Queen Charlotte after John Hoppner. Among her best-known works is her fine engraving of Sir Joshua Reynolds's bespectacled self-portrait, which appeared as the frontispiece to the edition of Reynolds's *Works* that Blake owned and savagely annotated. Arthur M. Hind does justice to Watson's strengths and weaknesses in writing that "Caroline Watson ... is the miniaturist in style among the stipple engravers. Her surface is of the

62. For details, see Crosby and Essick 61-62.

63. See, for example, Blake's letter of 23 Feb. 1804 (E 742). A print that is probably Blake's frontispiece has been acquired by Robert N. Essick and will be the subject of a paper by Mark Crosby, forthcoming in this journal.

64. Crosby and Essick 53.

65. E 760. The *OED* defines "supernaculum" as "A liquor to be drunk to the last drop; a wine of the highest quality; hence, anything excellent of its kind."

closest and finest texture ... and suffers from the excess of its quality, while her design lacks grip and robustness. ... She engraved one plate for the *Shakespeare Gallery*, but subjects on this scale were too large for her delicate talent."⁶⁶ Although of course Watson was merely practicing her trade, in Blake's eyes her supplanting him as Hayley's chief engraver would have been a terrible slight; Robert Essick has suggested that for Blake she became an aspect of the principle of domination that he called the Female Will.⁶⁷ The first indication that Blake had of being superseded by Watson was learning that in the octavo edition of Hayley's *Life of William Cowper* (published 1806) Watson's portrait engraving of Cowper would replace his own. One of Blake's miniatures after Romney's portrait of the poet had disturbed Lady Hesketh, Cowper's cousin and Hayley's friend, because she had seen in the image a suggestion of Cowper's insanity, which she would not allow to be mentioned in the *Life*.⁶⁸ Although she later relented about Blake's portrait engraving of the poet, finding the published engraving "Softened," she was unequivocal in her support of Watson (*BR*[2] 147, 197). Blake tried to put a good face on it, writing to Hayley on 22 March 1805: "The Idea of Seeing an Engraving of Cowper by the hand of Caroline Watson is I assure you a pleasing one to me it will be highly gratifying to see another Copy by another hand & not only gratifying but Improving, which is better" (E 764). These can hardly have been Blake's real feelings in this matter. In addition to feeling professionally injured, he must have resented losing the fee he would have earned for a reduced engraving.⁶⁹ The fact that Flaxman, who in 1804 had urged Hayley not to employ Watson as an engraver (*BR*[2] 194-95), nevertheless advised her on this engraving⁷⁰ may have appeared to Blake another betrayal.

Flaxman had been candid to Hayley about his view of Watson. He had seen two of her engravings after children's heads by William Beechey that were "so miserably executed that similar engraving instead of being a decoration, would be a blemish in your Book" (16 June 1804, *BR*[2] 195). Indeed, Flaxman continued, "if ... you still continue in the same resolution as at first I will deliver Your Commission but there my interference must cease & all further communication must be between the Engraver & Yourself, because I foresee that the

66. A. M. Hind, *A Short History of Engraving and Etching* (London: Constable, 1908) 295.

67. Robert N. Essick, "William Blake's 'Female Will' and Its Biographical Context," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31.4 (autumn 1991): 615-30. This conviction on Blake's part would have been intensified if, as Crosby and Essick suggest (71), he saw a large-paper copy of Hayley's *Life* that had printed on its spine "HAYLEY'S / LIFE / OF / ROMNEY / Illustrated / WITH / TWELVE PLATES / BY / CAROLINE WATSON."

68. See my "Cowper as Blake's Spectre," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (1968): 236-52.

69. Essick ("William Blake's 'Female Will'" 623) points out that Blake might also have expected to be the engraver of "Cowper's Oak" that appeared in Hayley's *Supplementary Pages to the Life of Cowper* (Chichester, 1806). This, too, was engraved by Watson.

70. Letter to Hayley dated 14 Nov. 1805, Morgan Library, record id. 106235.

conclusion of such an engagement must be unsatisfactory to all parties concerned." Hayley was, clearly, determined not to take Flaxman's advice on this matter, and in 1806 he invited Watson to Felpham to copy some of Romney's originals for the purpose of engraving them in London. It is disappointing to find young Edward Garrard Marsh, whom Blake had praised as "my much admired & respected Edward the Bard of Oxford,"⁷¹ later congratulating Hayley on his choice: "Caroline Watson's engravings are beautiful in the extreme; and you never made a happier exchange than when you employed her instead of Blake" (BR[2] 295). (Hayley's friends had a marked tendency to agree with him, unless they were in positions of independent power as were Lady Hesketh and Flaxman.) According to Hayley, he had been drawn to Watson by "a peculiar tenderness of admiration, with which Romney contemplated an exquisite engraving [by Watson] of Sir Joshua's portrait, prefixed to the quarto edition of his works, in 1797."⁷² Hayley may have also had another motive in inviting Watson to stay for "some weeks."⁷³ His estranged wife, Eliza, had died in 1797, and evidently he had no inclination to remain "The Hermit," as he liked to sign himself, literally. In 1801 he was thought to be about to marry Penelope Carleton Chetwynd, an attractive widow (born c. 1762) temporarily resident in Felpham.⁷⁴ This did not happen, but in October 1808 he met and courted Mary Welford, whom he married on 28 March of the following year.⁷⁵ Perhaps, although she may well have been unaware of it, Hayley had earlier entertained the idea of the unmarried Caroline Watson, who was about forty-five at the time, as a candidate. If Blake suspected this, it would further strengthen Essick's argument that Blake identified Watson with the Female Will.

Blake pursued Romney-related errands for Hayley throughout 1804, which he is unlikely to have done had he not anticipated a major role in the engraving of illustrations for the *Life*. He worked on two plates for it during that year. One was after Romney's self-portrait for the frontispiece, the other "The Shipwreck," after Romney's painting of a rescue at the Cape of Good Hope. On 16 July 1804 he sent Hayley a progress proof of the former and a sketch for the latter (illus. 6, online only), along with the newly published *Correspondence* of Samuel Richardson,⁷⁶ which after several attempts he had succeeded in getting from its publisher, Richard Phillips. Evidently Blake

71. Letter to Hayley, 27 Jan. 1804, E 741.

72. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 195.

73. See Gilchrist 1: 182; [William Hayley], *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.*, ed. John Johnson, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, and Simpkin and Marshall, 1823) 59.

74. Angus Whitehead, "'M^s Chetwynd & her Brother' and 'M^f. Chetwynd,'" *Blake* 42.2 (fall 2008): 75-78. Whitehead cites two letters by Charlotte Smith to this effect.

75. See Morchard Bishop, *Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951) 320-21. Hayley's second wife left him in 1812.

76. *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson ... Selected from the Original Manuscripts, Bequeathed by Him to His Family. To Which Are Prefixed, a Biographical Account of That Author, and Observations on His*

had previously disagreed with Hayley about Richardson, for he now declared that "Richardson has won my heart I will again read Clarissa & they [Richardson's novels] must be admirable I was too hasty in my perusal of them to perceive all their beauty" (E 754). It is hard to believe that this profession can be entirely sincere, coming from a man who had written just a few years earlier (of Henry Boyd's moralistic view of the *Odyssey*), "If Homers merit was only in these Historical combinations & Moral sentiments he would be no better than Clarissa" (E 633). Of the book's frontispiece to volume one, engraved after Joseph Highmore by Watson, Blake declared: "I admire Miss Watsons head of Richardson it is truly delicate 'The patient touches of unwearid Art'" (E 754). Delicacy could be Watson's specialty, but this is a very ordinary stipple engraving; in quoting Pope's description of a monument to Virgil in *The Temple of Fame*, Blake, who disliked Pope and abominated Virgil,⁷⁷ was no doubt engaging in a private joke while humoring Hayley, who was still a potential source of engraving commissions.

Hayley's *Life of Romney* contains twelve engraved illustrations, ten of them after Romney. The only Blake engraving to be included was "The Shipwreck," dated 14 April 1809,⁷⁸ though finished no later than 1805. The original oil sketch (location unknown) is called "animated tho' unfinished" by Hayley, who says that the subject was suggested to Romney by the Rev. James Stanier Clarke.⁷⁹ The story comes from a book by the Swedish botanist and travel writer Carl Peter Thunberg, *Travels in Europe, Africa, and Asia, Made between the Years 1770 and 1779*.⁸⁰ Thunberg presents the story of a shipwreck off the Cape of Good Hope as involving "action that does great honour to humanity." Seeing the victims offshore, "an old man, of the name of WOLTEMAD, by birth an European, ... borrowed a horse, and ... resolved to ride ... to the wreck, with a view of saving some of them." Woltemad's heroism ended tragically. "He repeated this dangerous trip six times more, bringing each time two men alive on shore, and thus saved in all fourteen persons. The horse was by this time so much fatigued, that he did not think it prudent to venture out again; but the cries and intreaties of the poor wretches on the

Writings, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1804).

77. See Blake's "Imitation of Pope" (E 506) and *On Virgil* (E 270).

78. This is of course the date of the engraving's publication. Blake's preliminary drawing (Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, vol. 1 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981] #350) is in the British Museum. For information about it I am grateful to Kim Sloan of the Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum.

79. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 84-85.

80. 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London, 1795) 273-74. Hayley owned this book, which is no. 2083 in the sale catalogue of his collection: see *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, vol. 2: Poets and Men of Letters, ed. A. N. L. Munby (London: Mansell, 1971) 153. Sarah Jones informs me that this was preceded by an account by Anders Sparman, who accompanied Captain Cook, in *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, published in London in 1785 in translation from the Swedish edition of 1783. There Woltemad is called Voltmad.

wreck increasing, he ventured to take one trip more, which proved so unfortunate, that he lost his own life . . .”

Romney would have been interested in this story for its humanitarian content—Victor Chan links it to his many drawings connected with the prison reformer John Howard. James Stanier Clarke was certainly aware of the story, for he commissioned the first published illustration of the scene in his capacity as an editor of the *Naval Chronicle*. A copy of Romney’s picture by his student, Isaac Pocock, Jr., was used as the basis for an aquatint, “Shipwreck at the Cape of Good Hope” by Thomas Medland, which appeared in the *Naval Chronicle* in 1800.⁸¹ According to the accompanying text, Pocock’s drawing was taken “from the large Painting by George Romney, Esq. in his Gallery at *Hampstead*.” Thus Blake’s was not the first print after Romney’s *Shipwreck*. It is, however, both clearer and more spirited than Medland’s, showing a swirl of motion among the victims of the wreck and the heroic horseman who has ridden into the waves to help them. A striking difference between Thunberg’s account and Romney’s representation is the age of the hero. Thunberg stresses the advanced age of Woltemad, calling him a “worthy veteran” and a “hoary sire.” However, Blake’s print (like Medland’s) shows a powerful, muscular young man fighting the waves. Romney probably thought this a more dramatic visual concept. It may also be, as Chan interestingly speculates, that Romney thought of Woltemad as a Christ figure rescuing souls.⁸²

“The Shipwreck” was the only engraving Blake contributed to Hayley’s biography. Seven of the remaining eleven were by Watson. Despite his early and prolonged involvement with the Romney project, Blake had been superseded by a highly successful stipple engraver and placed among other contemporaries who were competent at best. This appears to mark a more general cooling of Hayley toward Blake’s work after Blake left Felpham. It may be that Hayley was happy to cut his ties with the *vates irritabilis* and found relief in working with an engraver who had no claims to inspiration. Another instance of Hayley’s withdrawal from Blake may be seen in the thirteenth edition of his perennial best-seller *The Triumphs of Temper*. For the twelfth edition (1803) Blake had executed new engravings after six engaging designs by Maria Flaxman. These replaced the Thomas Stothard illustrations that had been engraved by William Sharp, James Heath, and James Neagle and used in the six previous editions. In 1807 *Triumphs* appeared in a thirteenth edition, one (very rare) printing of which features the Flaxman-Blake images, another the engravings after Stothard previously published.⁸³ It appears that Hayley changed horses in midstream, eliminating Blake’s engravings after Maria Flaxman’s decidedly superior drawings and going back to their banal predecessors for the rest of the

81. *Naval Chronicle* 3 (Jan.-July 1800): pl. 32, facing 296, where Thunberg’s text is reprinted. Medland was best known for his aquatints of topographical scenes.

82. Chan 80.

83. Bentley, *Blake Books* 578-79.

thirteenth edition.⁸⁴ The reason for this unusual procedure appears to be that Blake’s copperplates showed unexpected signs of early wear. Essick remarks that “the plates are quite worn in the 1807 edition” and specifies that in plate 6 “the 4 cm. horizontal scratch, running 2.5 cm. above the lower margin of the design, wore off the plate in the course of the 1803 printing and thus appears as only a faint shadow line in the 1807 edition.”⁸⁵

The problem with Blake’s plates for *The Triumphs of Temper* is likely to have influenced Hayley at a time when he was deciding on the engravers for his *Life of Romney*, especially if he was already disposed to be so influenced. Hayley even stated to Flaxman (through what Bentley calls “a semi-literate amanuensis”) “I should like to employ your Friend Cromak on the Ship wreck you mention,” and was deterred only by the fact that Blake had already taken the picture home from Saunders’s: “I should be sorry to risque wounding the Feelings of our quick-spirited Friend by sending the oil sketch from his possession to the House of any other Engraver.”⁸⁶ Had it not been for Blake’s assiduity in carrying out Hayley’s requests, the book might have appeared with none of his engravings!

When we turn to the book itself, we find the engravings of surprisingly varying quality, considering the time and trouble it had taken to locate some of the originals. Watson’s frontispiece that displaced the portrait engraving on which Blake had been working, and for which he had even been paid,⁸⁷ is an excellent piece of work, showing three heads of Romney, all from self-portraits in Hayley’s possession, at different ages. The largest of the originals (1784, National Portrait Gallery, London), which conveys a fine sense of the artist’s high-strung and vulnerable nature, has justly been called “one of the greatest self-portraits of the eighteenth century.”⁸⁸ The other two are identified by John Ingamells as a watercolor (untraced) drawn at Eartham in 1778 of Romney wearing a bicorne or tricorne hat, and a crayon drawing of a bespectacled Romney (also untraced) of 1799.⁸⁹ All three heads are sensitively rendered as to both contour and expression.

Watson also engraved *The Infant Shakespeare*, a picture that has less to do with Shakespeare than with Thomas Gray’s *Progress of Poesy*, in which “Far from the sun and summer-

84. I have benefited from discussions on this subject with Robert N. Essick and Mark Crosby. For an illuminating discussion of the thirteenth edition, see Mark Crosby, “‘a Ladys Book’: Blake’s Engravings for Hayley’s *The Triumphs of Temper*,” *Blake in Our Time: Essays in Honour of G. E. Bentley Jr.*, ed. Karen Mulhallen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 105-30.

85. Robert N. Essick, *William Blake’s Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) no. XLIII, 84-85.

86. 18 June 1804, *BR*(2) 195-96. “Cromak” is R. H. Cromeck, who in 1805 commissioned Blake to illustrate Robert Blair’s *The Grave*.

87. Letter to Hayley, 28 Sept. 1804: “the Head of Romney for which I am already paid” (E 755).

88. Kidson, *George Romney* 180-81.

89. John Ingamells, “Portraits of George Romney: An Iconography,” <<http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2002/george-romney/iconography.php>>, accessed 21 June 2009.

gale, / In thy [Albion's] green lap was Nature's darling laid."⁹⁰ It shows two females, Comedy (based on Emma Hart) and Tragedy, trying to teach a baby to play a flageolet, supplying, as Richard Altick puts it, "the element of allegory that was, at that time, indispensable to any celebration of Shakespeare."⁹¹ The original (purchased by Lord Egremont and now at Petworth) was exhibited in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and engraved by Benjamin Smith (1803). The version Watson engraved belonged to Francis Newbery, whom Hayley thanks.⁹²

Much admired in its time—Hayley pronounced it his favorite Romney⁹³—*The Infant Shakespeare* is more difficult to appreciate in our own, hovering as it does between charm and silliness. Watson's placing her subject in an oval frame is perhaps an attempt to emphasize the former and ward off the latter by underlining the consciously fictive nature of the scene. Watson also produced a very competent engraving, from Maria Denman's drawing, of Thomas Alphonso Hayley's portrait medallion. Unfortunately, her other engravings for the book are in some ways problematic. The fault was not entirely hers, for Hayley must have had the deciding voice in choosing her subjects.⁹⁴

Among the pictures Watson copied during her visit to Felpham was *Madame de Genlis* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), the subject of which Romney and Hayley had met in Paris in 1790, and whom Romney painted in London in 1792. The author of *Lessons of a Governess to Her Pupils* (London, 1792) is depicted dramatically and somewhat exotically, wearing a large scarf on her head and a shawl over her shoulders. Watson failed to find a graphic equivalent for the delicate, pastel-like coloring of the original, and her portrayal seems vulgar by comparison. Three other engravings are after works owned by Hayley for which Hart alone had served as a model: "Miranda," "Cassandra," and "Sensibility." The head of Miranda⁹⁵ is similar to that in Romney's large *Tempest* painting for the Shakespeare Gallery, now existing only

in fragmentary form.⁹⁶ Watson's engraving suffers especially from having no equivalent to the lushly contrasting reds of Miranda's hair, gown, and lips. *Cassandra* too was modeled by Hart for exhibition in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (though begun earlier),⁹⁷ this time ostensibly illustrating *Troilus and Cressida*. Another version was sold in the 1807 Romney sale; both are untraced, and the full-length picture is known only through Francis Legat's line engraving, dated 1 January 1795. In this instance Romney produced at least three heads of his subject,⁹⁸ one of which was owned by Hayley. Watson no doubt took the opportunity to copy it in 1806.⁹⁹ Cassandra's hair in Watson's engraving is considerably wilder than it is in the Boydell painting (as known through Legat's engraving), as it also is in the surviving small painting (Tate Britain), and the engraving is more melodramatic than dramatic. *Sensibility* (Jay I. Kislak Foundation),¹⁰⁰ painted in 1786, began as a beautiful head; Hayley claims credit for encouraging Romney to transform it to full length: "You have only to enlarge your canvas," he told Romney, "introduce the shrub mimosa, growing in a vase, with a hand of this figure approaching its leaves, and you may call your picture a personification of Sensibility." Hayley says that he then hastened to "an eminent nurseryman at Hammersmith" and returned with the mimosa that the artist painted in the lower right.¹⁰¹ Watson in her engraving brought the picture back to a head alone, but retained its botanical element by moving the mimosa close in (possibly as a wall painting). Hayley afterwards acquired the original as part of a real-estate transaction.¹⁰²

It may seem surprising that of the ten plates after Romney in Hayley's *Life*, three were heads of Emma Hart. It is true that Hayley genuinely admired Romney's famous (by the time he wrote the *Life*) model, writing that "her features, like the language of Shakespeare, could exhibit all the feelings of nature, and all the gradations of every passion, with a most fascinating truth, and felicity of expression,"¹⁰³ but he may also have

90. *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1969) 172.

91. Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985) 143.

92. Kidson, *George Romney* 214n1; Hayley, *Life of Romney* 304. See C. H. Collins Baker, *Catalogue of the Petworth Collection of Pictures in the Possession of Lord Leconfield* (London: Medici Society, 1920) 110-11. The Petworth painting is reproduced facing p. 110. This picture is not listed in subsequent Petworth (National Trust) catalogues because it remains the property of Lord Egremont (information from Alex Kidson, private communication).

93. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 304: "charms of expression not inferior to the finest Greek gems."

94. Crosby and Essick (70n55) point out that Hayley instructed the publisher of the third edition (1793) of his *Essay on Old Maids* to alter its illustrations in specific ways.

95. See [Thomas] Humphry Ward and W. Roberts, *Romney: A Biographical and Critical Essay with a Catalogue Raisonné of His Works*, vol. 2 (London: Thos. Agnew & Sons; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) 184.

96. The fragment, one of four in the Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, is reproduced in *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination*, ed. Kidson, fig. VI. The whole design is known from an oil sketch (National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome) and from Benjamin Smith's somewhat different engraving (1797) for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. These are reproduced in *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination*, figs. 39-40.

97. See Stuart Sillars, *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic 1720-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 136-38. The engraving by Legat is reproduced as fig. 41. According to Saunders's list, the painting was still at the Shakespeare Gallery in Jan. 1804.

98. See Ward and Roberts 2: 181.

99. The picture that Watson copied is not the one in the Tate collection, which has a different provenance. I have been unable to trace Hayley's version beyond 1910, when it was owned by the London collector E. L. Raphael (see Chamberlain 317-18).

100. I am grateful to Arthur Dunkelmann for provenance information. It was engraved by Richard Earlom in 1789.

101. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 121.

102. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 121-22.

103. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 119. For her part, Emma Hamilton regarded Hayley as a trusted friend: "If I had never read your *Triumphs of temper*," she wrote to him on 29 Jan. 1806, "I should never have been

thought that the inclusion of several heads of her in various roles would increase the public's interest in his book. Although Hart was known only to a small circle when Romney painted her,¹⁰⁴ by the time Hayley chose the subjects for his book she was Lady Hamilton, who had become famous for her "attitudes" and for having been the mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson. Her original poses for Romney anticipated the attitudes, and for readers of *The Life of Romney* these prints would look back to them evocatively.

The remaining engravings were by William Haines, Abraham Raimbach, Robert Mitchell Meadows, and Robert Cooper. The earliest Romney painting reproduced in the book was *The Introduction of Dr. Slop into the Parlour of Mr. Shandy* (location unknown). The engraver was Haines, who had been abroad for several years and had returned to England from Philadelphia as late as 1805. Blake evidently knew Haines, who was probably the subject of his epigram

The Sussex Men are Noted Fools
And weak is their brain pan
I wonder if H——the painter
Is not a Sussex Man¹⁰⁵

Haines, who had grown up in Chichester, began as an engraver and also became successful as a portrait artist, often in miniatures, the art to which Hayley had attempted to recruit Blake. He painted Hayley's portrait (engraved by H. R. Cook) and also engraved portraits after numerous other artists. He frequently exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1808 on, and in 1811 his address is given in the exhibition catalogue as 10 South Molton Street.¹⁰⁶ As Blake lived at 17 South Molton Street, his animosity toward Haines may perhaps be linked to a local quarrel rather than to art. *Dr. Slop* could be, as Geoffrey Keynes suggests, "the Picture from Sterne" that Blake told

the wife of Sir William Hamilton not should I have had an opportunity [*sic*] of Cultivating those talents which made the great & immortal Nelson think me worthy of his Confidence" (*English Literature, History, Children's Books and Illustrations*, catalogue of sale at Sotheby's London, 17 Dec. 2009, lot 10).

104. She is mentioned once in Blake's letters to Hayley: "Tho I have call'd on M^r Edwards twice for Lady Hamiltons direction was so unfortunate as to find him Out both times I will repeat my Call on him tomorrow morning" (27 Jan. 1804, E 741). Mr. Edwards was probably Edward Edwards, who in 1808 published *Anecdotes of Painters Who Have Resided or Been Born in England*.

105. E 506. The identification of H—— the painter as William Haines was first suggested by John Sampson, and later agreed to by Keynes and provisionally by Erdman. See *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, ed. John Sampson (London: Oxford University Press, 1913) 214; *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 911n; and E 866. *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 938n, says H—— "may be William Haines."

106. See Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from Its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, vol. 3 (London: Henry Graves and Co. Ltd. and George Bell and Sons, 1905) 349-50.

Hayley he was searching for in his letter of 23 February 1804 (E 741),¹⁰⁷ and Blake may already have been on the track of it when he informed Hayley that "M^r Flaxman is not at all acquainted with S^r Allan Chambré [*sic*]" (27 January 1804, E 741). As it turned out, Chambré did own the picture, having received it from the person who won it in Romney's Kendal lottery in 1762.¹⁰⁸ "The Picture from Sterne" that Blake sought may, alternatively, have been one of two other early paintings of Shandean subjects that Hayley mentions. One represented the death of Lieutenant Le Fever and, as Adam Walker told Hayley, "was much admired." Walker continued:

The figures were about eighteen inches long, and wonderfully expressive. The dying lieutenant was looking at Uncle Toby (who sat mute at the foot of the bed) and by the motion of his hand was recommending his son to his care: The boy was kneeling by the bedside, and with eyes that expressed his anguish of heart was, as it were, turning from a dying to a living father, begging protection, a most pathetic figure. Trim was standing at a distance in his usual attitude, and with a face full of inward grief. What became of this admirable picture I cannot tell.¹⁰⁹

Hayley adds that Romney's friends regarded this work as "a master piece of pathetic expression ... Mr. Braithwaite ... thought it the most affecting picture he ever beheld." But despite all efforts, the picture could not be found. Neither could what Hayley declared was Romney's own favorite comic picture showing "Obadiah making his bow to Dr. Slop as the Doctor is falling in the dirty lane."¹¹⁰ However, Hayley declared Chambré's painting "a work of great comic power." Romney, who, while apprenticed to Christopher Steele, had probably heard Sterne read passages from his novel in Steele's studio,¹¹¹ accurately depicts Dr. Slop as described in chapters nine and ten of volume two: "a little, squat, uncourtly figure ... of about four feet and a half perpendicular height, with a breadth of back, and a sesquipedality of belly, which might have done honour to a serjeant in the horse-guards. ... His hinder parts, upon which he had received his fall, totally besmear'd,—and in every other part of him, blotched over"¹¹² Working in this comic vein was to become unusual for Romney. Haines's engraving is one of the few records of it.

107. Keynes, *Complete Writings* 835n.

108. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 31; Chamberlain 30.

109. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 33.

110. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 31.

111. See T. C. Duncan Eaves, "George Romney: His *Tristram Shandy* Paintings and Trip to Lancaster," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 7 (1944): 321-26. Steele had studied for a year with Carl van Loo in Paris, and dressed so fashionably after returning that he was known as "Count" Steele. Romney was apprenticed to him in 1755, but the indentures were canceled after little more than two years when Steele decided to relocate. See *Four Kendal Portrait Painters* (Kendal: Abbot Hall Art Gallery, 1973) 4-7.

112. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James Aiken Work (New York: Odyssey Press, 1940) 104, 107.

Raimbach engraved a detail from a painting that Blake had looked for at Saunders's: Romney's large, unfinished *Paradise Regained* picture, *The Temptation in the Wilderness*. Hayley does not shrink from giving himself credit for the original concept. "In the year 1794, a passage in the *Paradise Regained* of Milton, so forcibly struck me as full of sentiment and picture, that I desired my son to transcribe it for Romney. It was the sublime description of our Saviour in the wilderness."¹¹³ He then quotes four lines (4.422-25) of the poem:

*Infernal ghosts, and hellish furies, round
Environ'd thee; some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,
Some bent at thee their fiery darts, while thou
Satst unappall'd in calm and sinless peace.*

Hayley had suggested to Flaxman that "if the Figure of Christ in the wilderness ... begun upon an immense Canvas is sufficiently advanced to form a good engraving I should wish your Friend [Cromek] to shew his powers in that"¹¹⁴ Either the painting was not sufficiently advanced or Raimbach lacked the skill to render it adequately, for he shows only Christ's head and shoulders in what Gilchrist justly called "a poor *Head of Christ*."¹¹⁵ (Raimbach generously credited Blake as the better engraver of outlines, but received the commission nevertheless.)¹¹⁶ We do not know what the rest of the picture looked like, which is especially unfortunate because Romney painted so few religious subjects. "The picture of *Christ in the Desert* he [Saunders] supposes to be one of those which he has rolled on large rollers," wrote Blake, and according to John Romney, it was taken to Christie's auction rooms with his father's other pictures, but was never unrolled and not located afterwards.¹¹⁷

Newton with the Prism (private collection) was strikingly engraved by Meadows, who had previously executed engravings after Henry William Bunbury for Macklin's Poet's Gallery (another venture from which Blake felt excluded).¹¹⁸ John Romney gives a concise description of the painting:

It represented that contemplative philosopher seated on the right of the picture, attentively observing a Prism, which he holds with his right hand in a sun-beam, and two female attendants placed opposite; one of whom with a silly kind of laugh is expressing her astonishment at the phenomenon of the prismatic colours projected on the wall; while the other is in the act of carefully bringing in a caraff of water. The com-

position is simple, according with the sobriety of the subject; and the effect beautiful: the countenance of one female is in shadow, and that of the other (the laughing girl) in a reflected light, or demi-shade. This latter gives a fascinating charm to the picture.¹¹⁹

Meadows's engraving (illus. 7) is striking for its contrast of light and dark, which gives something of the effect of a mezzotint, but of course the main point of Newton's demonstration, the diffraction of white light into spectral colors—Hayley refers to the painting as "Newton, displaying the prismatic colours"—cannot be conveyed in black and white.¹²⁰ Obviously, Meadows cannot be blamed for not having done the impossible; the question is why Hayley did not choose the picture that Romney regarded as a companion to *Newton, Milton and His Daughters*, then (according to Saunders's list) in the collection of the brewer and radical Samuel Whitbread, which would have been more appropriate for monochrome.¹²¹ Perhaps, as suggested above, Hayley avoided the *Milton* painting because it had already been engraved (by Benjamin Smith) for Hayley's life of Milton.¹²²

The last picture in the book is neither of nor after Romney, but an entirely conventional portrait of the budding poet¹²³ and future astronomer Romney Robinson. It was painted by the subject's father, Romney's friend and former pupil Thomas Robinson of Windermere, and engraved by Cooper, a copious engraver of portraits (114 in the National Portrait Gallery alone). Why Hayley wanted to include this rather than another print after Romney is one of the puzzling aspects of his book.

The Life of George Romney was long in the making. Hayley advertised for materials for it as early as 28 August 1803.¹²⁴ He says he began it "about the middle of December, 1803" and finished it, after several interruptions, in October 1807.¹²⁵ However, he had to wait for engravings to be completed and so, self-consciously using an artist's term, he continued to "retouch" it. He was still "retouching the Life of Romney" early in 1808. He and the printer, Joseph Seagrave, "revised" the first proof sheet on 27 March 1808, and this process continued for several months. Seagrave died on 9 July 1808, and his suc-

119. John Romney, *Memoirs* 235-36. Romney is said to have painted Newton's head after John Michael Rysbrack's statue in Westminster Abbey; see Elizabeth Johnston, *George Romney* (London: London County Council, 1961) 38.

120. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 186. Hayley acknowledges the permission of John Romney, who then owned the picture.

121. As Blake says that he saw *Milton and His Daughters* at Saunders's in 1803, what he saw was probably an oil sketch (see Kidson, *George Romney* 223n12).

122. *The Poetical Works of John Milton. With a Life of the Author, by William Hayley*, 3 vols. (London: John and Josiah Boydell, and George Nicol, 1794-97).

123. His "Elegy on the Death of George Romney, Esq.," written at the age of ten years and eight months, appears on 335-38 of Hayley's *Life*.

124. *Diary of Joseph Farington* 6: 2117.

125. Hayley, *Memoirs* 2: 45, 62.

113. Hayley, *Life of Romney* 229-30.

114. 18 June 1804; *The Letters of William Blake with Related Documents*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 95.

115. Gilchrist 1: 178.

116. According to Flaxman; see *BR*(2) 251 and n.

117. Letter to Hayley, 26 Oct. 1803, E 737; John Romney, *Memoirs* 245-46.

118. "I was alive & in health & with the same Talents I now have all the time of Boydells Macklins Bowyers & other Great Works. I was known by them & was look'd upon by them as Incapable of Employment in those Works" (letter to Hayley, 11 Dec. 1805, E 766-67).



7. Robert Mitchell Meadows, engraving after George Romney, *Newton with the Prism*, 1809. 8.25 x 11 in. Image courtesy of the Huntington Library, call number RB 135333.

cessor, Mason, printed the book, which was published by T. Payne, London, in the late spring of 1809. Hayley sadly remarks that it met with “surprising ill success.”¹²⁶

The reviews were mixed. The *Quarterly Review* savaged the book in a review by the painter John Hoppner, revised by the editor, William Gifford.¹²⁷ The verdict: “As a literary composition, it is far below mediocrity; and as a critique on art, flimsy and injudicious.” Romney himself was condemned as an artist capable of only minor subjects; his figures had “more the appearance of coloured statues, than representations of animated nature,” and “in his manner of treating the higher walks of history ... extravagance has been mistaken for sublimity, and praised accordingly.” “Romney’s pallet may readily be traced back to the colour-shop.” This sheer overkill suggests

126. Hayley, *Memoirs* 2: 66, 72, 74-75. He says that it appeared a few months after his wedding, which took place on 28 Mar. 1809.

127. *Quarterly Review* 2, no. 4 (1809): 433-44. See *Quarterly Review Archive*, ed. Jonathan Cutmore, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/qr/index.html>>, accessed 4 July 2009.

that Hoppner was jealously taking revenge on his deceased, more successful rival. As for the reactionary Gifford, whom William Hazlitt was to call “the invisible link, that connects literature with the police,”¹²⁸ he was well aware that Hayley was a political liberal and that Romney had been a friend of Paine. Whatever changes Gifford made in revising were not likely to have been in the book’s favor.

The *Critical Review*¹²⁹ attempted to be more evenhanded, saying of Hayley: “His want of compression, and his tedious habit of introducing vapid phrases, are faults so well known, that they need not our emblazoning. On the other hand, his good qualities, his truth, the general correctness of his judgment, his experience of the world, and just feeling, his candour and liberality, have not been duly appretiated [*sic*] by our contemporaries.” (This last point may suggest what the public reception of the book was.) The reviewer devoted more space

128. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, vol. 19 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1933) 210.

129. *Critical Review: or, Annals of Literature* 18, no. 4 (1809): 390-99.

than most to the reproductions of Romney's paintings, finding them "well chosen specimens to exhibit the gradations of his improvement, and the peculiar qualities of his style." "The Miranda," he wrote, "has exquisite expression," but "Sensibility is too pretty, and Cassandra too like a Bacchante of the lowest order." He found "the introduction of Dr. Slop into the parlour of Mr. Shandy ... too just and natural to be sufficiently humorous." Of "The Shipwreck" he says (not mentioning Blake) that "the sentiment, as observed by Mr. Flaxman, is caught at a glance, the light is happily spread upon the gloom, and the confused horrors of the scene represented with great clearness and simplicity."¹³⁰ "The piece entitled Newton with the Prism ... concentrates the excellencies of Romney's manner, namely, character, expression, strength, delicacy, grace, simplicity, and the dexterous management of light and shadow," but "the head of our Saviour in the wilderness" was "not quite equal to Milton's description." "The Infant Shakespeare" was "above our praise."

The *Monthly Review* took a sterner line, condemning Hayley's repetition "almost *ad nauseam*" of expressions like "the tender artist,"—"the tender and *apprehensive* artist," (the latter is a favourite and frequent adjunct,)—"the *sensitive*—the *timorous*,"—"our beloved and *dejected* artist,"—"the *interesting invalid*," &c."¹³¹ This reviewer also made an important point in observing that

The expectations of those young artists should have been considered, who will open the volume with sanguine hopes of discovering the recorded opinions of one of his most distinguished countrymen on the works of foreign art, which he frequently explored; and they will close it with the greater disappointment, from being informed that the professional discussions of Romney, of which no trace is here preserved, were eloquent, original, judicious, and so full of vehemence and enthusiasm that they frequently betrayed him into tears.

Indeed, as Romney gave no lectures and wrote no art criticism, a biographer who had known him for twenty-five years had an unusual opportunity to convey both his views about art and the qualities that made his conversation on that subject so fascinating, but evidently Hayley did not think this part of his responsibility. The reviewer mentioned the book's twelve illustrations in his last paragraph, but his only critical judgment was that Watson's were "charmingly engraved."

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* a favorable notice mostly comprised, as did many reviews of the time, a summary of the book with extracts from it.¹³² It said that the volume was "elegantly printed," and that the engravings were "executed principally by Caroline Watson, in a peculiarly-elegant and highly-finished style," listing all the illustrations but not nam-

ing any other engravers, and concluding with a remark that is unlikely to have pleased any of them: "These Engravings, we cannot help adding, render this book one of the cheapest purchases ever offered to the Publick." The *British Critic*, in a mildly positive review, closed, curiously enough, on the same note: "The engravings by Caroline Watson, are highly spirited and beautiful, and would, if there were a deficiency of interest and merit in the book itself, which there is not, render it a very cheap purchase."¹³³

As we can see, the critical reception was far from entirely negative, although even the favorable critics showed little knowledge of or interest in art. What made the book, in the words of Hayley's sympathetic biographer Morchard Bishop, "a disastrous failure,"¹³⁴ was not the reviewers, but the reading public. Two other works that Hayley said met with "surprising ill success" (*Memoirs* 2: 74-75) were his four-volume edition of Cowper's *Milton* (1810) and his *Three Plays* (1811). Recognizing the likelihood that "I have lost my popularity," Hayley published no new works after 1811, although he lived until 1820.¹³⁵ The literary euphemisms and affectations that had charmed previous generations of readers no longer had such an effect. As late as 1803, Hayley's biography of Cowper had achieved both critical and commercial success, but Cowper's letters had a major role in this, and Romney, as Bishop observes, was an indifferent letter writer. Romney's language was pictorial, and Hayley scarcely did him justice in his selection of both pictures and engravers. As we have seen, some of his choices appear arbitrary and even haphazard with respect to both. As for Blake, he had labored for over two years on behalf of the illustrations to Hayley's book only to find himself represented in it by a single engraving. Ironically, *The Life of George Romney, Esq.* is valued today chiefly for Blake's print of *The Shipwreck*.

130. The reviewer appears to be paraphrasing a sentence Flaxman wrote of Romney's art in general (Hayley, *Life of Romney* 310-11), rather than quoting any specific statement about this picture.

131. *Monthly Review* 60 (1809): 337-46.

132. *Gentleman's Magazine* 79, part 2 (1809): 1140-47.

133. *British Critic* 34 (1809): 341-45.

134. Bishop 323.

135. Other editions of *The Triumphs of Temper*, which seems to have had a life of its own, appeared in 1812 and 1817.