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A "NEW" BLAKE ENGRAVING IN LAVATER'S *PHYSIOGNOMY*

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Increasing interest in William Blake has been accompanied by, perhaps has caused, the discovery of a number of previously unknown engravings signed "Blake". Six were found in *The Seaman's Recorder* (1824-27),<sup>1</sup> two more in James Earle's *Practical Observations on the Operation for the Stone* (1793, 1796, 1803),<sup>2</sup> and yet another is in Henry Emlyn's *Proposition for a New Order in Architecture* (1781, 1784).<sup>3</sup> All these are in recently noticed and obscure books. Doubtless more such backwater-books will be found with plates by the poet in them.

Blake made engravings for some seventy-seven books, and all except those named above are well known and have repeatedly been pored over by schol-

G. E. Bentley, Jr., recently edited and annotated *A Handlist of Works by William Blake in the Department of Prints & Drawings of the British Museum for the Newsletter*. He is the editor of *Blake's Vala or The Four Zoas* (1963) and of *Blake's Tiriel* (1967); compiler of *The Blake Collection of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne* (1971) and, with Martin K. Nurmi, of *A Blake Bibliography* (1964); author of *The Early Engravings of Flaxman's Classical Designs* (1964) and of *Blake Records* (1969).

ars for their Blake significance. However, in one of them, John Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, there has lurked, undetected, a plate not only perfectly characteristic of Blake in form but signed, minutely but legibly, "Blake Se" [illus. 1]. The reason why the design has been so long overlooked is quite simple: the signature is not in the normal place, below the design, but is in a gap in the foliage near the foot of the right-hand old man, and it is so small (c. 0.4 x 0.05 cm.) that it is very difficult to find and almost impos-

1 "Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Blake, and *The Seaman's Recorder*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 9 (1970), 21-36. Sir Geoffrey Keynes "defend[s] his [Blake's] reputation against . . . [this] mistaken attribution" in "Blake's Engravings for Gay's *Fables*," *Book Collector*, 21 (1972), 60. I agree that the "Blake" whose name appears on the *Seaman's Recorder* plates often exhibited lamentable craftsmanship there. The crux of the matter appears to me to be that the poet William Blake is the only engraver known to have been signing "Blake" to plates at this time--the writing-engraver William Staden Blake (fl. 1770-1817) is not known to have worked so late (see "A Collection of Prosaic William Blakes," *Notes and Queries*, n. s. 12 [1965], 172-78).

2 Leslie F. Chard, "Two 'New' Blake Engravings," *Blake Studies* (1973). This and the next essay were generously shown me by their authors in draft.

3 William A. Gibson and Thomas L. Minnick, "William Blake and Henry Emlyn's *Proposition for a New Order in Architecture*: A New Plate," *Blake Newsletter* 21 (Summer 1972), 13-17.

(Toomey, continued)

The other problem to be considered is that of the absence in the Morgan and Fitzwilliam copies of certain details present in the Harvard copy. These are the tears on the right-hand female's cheek and the extra lock of hair in the small of her back, the central female's pudendum and the extra lock of hair to the left of her head, and the line drawn across the square block of stone. Have these details been added to the plate and then removed or are they simply ink additions? This can only be decided by examining the Harvard copy itself. However, I would like to think that one detail, the pudendum, was etched rather than inked, for it shows Blake returning to his prototype, Rosso's *Tre Parche*, in reworking the plate.

Blake's two sets of changes follow much the same pattern and a consistent aim emerges from them. First there is a continual attempt to render the surface of the plate more interesting, hence the grainings on the rocks and the background hatchings. There is also a tendency towards decorative elaboration, hence the increase in the fibers and the reworking and elaboration of the hair. There is also a concern with anatomical detail, evident in the additions to the right-hand female. All these changes make for a more interesting and lively plate. Some of the changes relate to the Rosso design, for example the addition of fine horizontal lines to the background, and, of course, the questionable pudendum. The changes also help to make the plate more solid and intelligible; flesh is distinguished from stone, figures from background. Most of the changes are, as I have pointed out, formal. They do not in any way alter the iconographic content of the plate. Unfortunately, the only change that

does in any way affect the content is one that disappears after the second state, namely the tears on the right-hand figure's cheek. However, even if this is only an ink addition it is worth considering. The addition of the tears gives Plate 25 richer interpretative possibilities. In the Cunliffe copy the absence of the tears and the blood-red coloration of the fibers and entrail-string combine to present a scene of simply unqualified cruelty. In the Mellon copy the softer russet coloration of the fibers and the entrail-string and the clearly delineated tears on the disemboweler's cheek qualify the cruelty with a suggestion of mourning.

The changes in the plate are important because they show Blake's tendency towards elaboration and refinement in progressive copies of a single work, a tendency usually obvious in his illuminations, but here seen in his attitude toward the plate itself. Possibly, however, there would have been far fewer changes to the plate had all or nearly all of the copies of *Jerusalem* been colored. Then Blake's refining tendencies would have expressed themselves in the illumination rather than in re-etching and re-engraving. I have, in the foregoing account, ignored the considerable problem of how these changes were effected on a relief-etched plate. Apart from the one example of white line engraving, none of Blake's changes are technically comprehensible, as they appear in areas of the plate which have been etched away. The existence of the posthumous copies rules out the possibility of reversing the order of the series, so that Blake is wiping his plate of superfluous detail. The only other possibility that offers itself is the existence of a second plate.

sible to read confidently without a magnifying glass. Once it has been located,<sup>4</sup> however, its presence, details, and significance are unmistakable.

There can, I think, be no doubt that this "Blake" plate was engraved by the poet, for not only did he sign other plates in the same volume (Vol. I, pp. 159, 206, 225) which have never been challenged, but the design itself seems to me to be characteristically Blakean. It is a small tail-piece (platemark: 8.5 x 6.1 cm.) of a decorative rather than a demonstrative nature, representing two old men with flowing white beards and long gowns apparently planting a grove of some fourteen young trees; the man on the left seems to be putting a tree in the ground, the man on the right, who is bald, is watering another tree with a large watering can, and in the foreground are a rake and a shovel on the ground. Behind the little grove of trees is an open space which may be water, and in the distance among low hills and trees are buildings, one of which may have a crenellated tower.

In Lavater's *Physiognomy* there are two kinds of plates, generally, one exemplifying Lavater's principles of physiognomy, often copied from famous painters such as Rubens and Raphael, and the other not directly related to the text, ordinarily anonymous as to designer, and decorative. Blake's plate is in the second category,<sup>5</sup> and I think it may have been designed as well as engraved by him. The patriarchal old men are perfectly familiar from other Blake designs such as those for *All Religions are One* titlepage (?1788), *Tiriel* (?1789), "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" from *Songs of In-*

*nocence* (1789), *For Children* (1793) pl. "11," "13," "15," "The Little Vagabond," "London," and "To Tirzah" from *Songs of Experience* (1794), and "Joseph of Arimathea Preaching" (1794). Even the young trees are not unlike those in the background of Blake's *Tiriel* designs and elsewhere. If the form is not all Blake's, he may yet have adapted a design by another artist into one virtually his own, as Sir Geoffrey Keynes has shown us<sup>6</sup> he did with that for "The Shepherd and the Philosopher" in Gay's *Fables* (1793).

Lavater's *Physiognomy* was originally issued in forty-one folio parts at irregular intervals. The "new" plate appeared in Part V, issued in July 1788, and was described on its cover as "Aged Figures, Gardening". The whole work was issued in three-volumes-bound-in-five, and the "new" Blake plate is in Volume I (1789), page 127. The three-volumes-in-five were published again in 1810.

Whether or not the plate was designed by Blake, it is one of the earliest examples known of the patriarchal figure who presides over his work. The design is either one of the first examples of, or a stimulus for, what seems now a characteristically Blakean type.

4 It was in a list of the Blake holdings of the Osler Library, McGill University, generously sent to me by Miss Ellen B. Wells, Acting Osler Librarian.

5 It may be related somehow to the text on the same page, in which Lavater says his Work "contains not a complete Treatise, but merely Fragments of Physiognomy," which perhaps need to be watered and nurtured.

6 "Blake's Engravings for Gay's Fables."

1 The "new" Blake engraving from Lavater's *Physiognomy*, signed, near the right-hand man's foot, "Blake Sc". This is an enlarged reproduction; the true dimensions are 8.5 x 6.1 cm. Reproduced by the permission of the University of California, Berkeley.

