

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

The Accuracy of the Blake Trust Gray Catalogue

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 6, Issue 4, Spring 1973, pp. 95-96



Discussion

"With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought"

THE ACCURACY OF THE BLAKE TRUST GRAY CATALOGUE G. E. Bentley, Jr.

The Blake Trust Gray catalogue, reviewed in *Blake Newsletter* 21, was a very remarkable bargain when sold in London in paperback at £1.75 (\$4.20) with its 116 small monochrome designs and its nineteen large color plates, particularly compared with the North American hardback price of about \$25. The large plates in particular give an excellent idea of the originals. Comparison of the one color plate in Mrs. Tayler's *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton, 1971) with the similar one in the Blake Trust catalogue makes it clear that the latter is very markedly superior in faithfulness to the original; for example, the foxing is plain in the Blake Trust reproduction but is quite invisible in Mrs. Tayler's plate.

There are, however, some serious minor defects in the Blake Trust catalogue reproductions. A number of the reproductions have been significantly cropped at one or more margins--among the color plates, Gray pp. 58-59, 70, 85, 126, 150, 158, and,

among the monochrome plates, Gray pp. 50-51, 53, 151. More importantly, two reproductions seem to have been simply falsified. The Blake Trust cover reproduction of Blake's design for Gray's titlepage bears at the bottom right in an eighteenth-century hand the words "Drawings by William Blake", but these words do not appear in the original design or in the two other reproductions of the design to be seen in the Blake Trust catalogue and in Mrs. Tayler's book. They have been added by a modern

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Ballads annexed by the Author's Permission. Two Numbers. 4to. Printed at Chichester.

It appears by the Preface to this work, that Mr. Hayley is now busily employed in rendering an affectionate tribute of justice to the memory of Cowper the Poet, and that Mr. Blake has devoted himself with indefatigable spirit to engrave the plates intended to decorate the work. To amuse the artist in his patient labour, and to furnish his fancy with a few slight subjects for an inventive pencil that might afford some variety to his incessant application, without too far interrupting his most serious business, Mr. Hayley proposed to furnish him with a series of ballads for a few vacant moments' employment, to be published periodically, and to be completed in fifteen numbers. Two of these are now before us. The subjects, the gratitude of an elephant, and the heroism of a mother in rescuing her child from the fangs of an eagle. The artist has executed his share of the undertaking much to his credit; and from Mr. Hayley's pen, though carelessly employed, the Public will not be disappointed in their expectation of elegant, chaste, and pathetic

compositions. To the inhabitants of Chichester, where it is printed, this work is inscribed.

I came across this notice while preparing my nine-volume edition of facsimile reprints of reviews of the Romantic poets and their circles, *The Romantics Reviewed* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1972). Though tempted to include it, together with the few other substantive early comments on Blake, I concluded that the notices of Blake did not belong with those of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats both because the reviews of Blake deal primarily with his work as an artist and because--had I followed uniform criteria for inclusion--most of the critical comments on Blake would have been excluded as passing references in reviews of books by others. Moreover, inasmuch as I came across the *European Magazine* notice while looking for something else, I concluded that a systematic search of periodicals might turn up a few more items to add to the items reprinted by G. E. Bentley, Jr., in *Blake Records* (Oxford, 1969). Blake's name does appear, for example, in the lists of painters and engravers in Leigh Hunt's *Literary Pocket Book* for some though not all of the annual issues of that pocket diary.

hand, presumably at The Trianon Press, to emphasize Blake's part in the work. These words *do* appear in manuscript on the Gray *titlepage* (not on Blake's design), but they appear in markedly different forms in the two color reproductions of it in the Blake Trust catalogue; in particular, the "W", "ll", and "B" are formed quite differently in the two color reproductions of the Gray title page. Such tampering with the reproductions is likely to reduce considerably our implicit faith in the reliability of these plates. A hasty survey has not, however, revealed any further such alterations.

These are, it is true, minor details. They

do, however, bring into question the reliability of the Blake Trust reproductions. Peculiarities such as these should make us cautious in trusting the minute fidelity of Blake Trust (i.e., Trianon Press) reproductions--or, indeed, of any others. Such reproductions can be useful guides to remind us more or less faithfully of the originals, but they must never be trusted in place of the originals for the minute details upon which the most responsible scholarship depends. Blake students have ample cause to be deeply grateful to The Blake Trust and to The Trianon Press, for excellent substitutes for the originals--for facsimiles which are available and beautiful, but not perfect.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE COPY U Mary Ellen Reisner

In *Blake Newsletter* 21 (Summer 1972), p. 22, John E. Grant comments on my note (*Blake Newsletter* 19 [Winter 1971-72], p. 214) concerning the location of two copies of the *Songs*. Unfortunately, his strictures are misdirected. It is well known that Copy U of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which once belonged to the White family, is now at Princeton, but this fact has no bearing on the whereabouts of Copy U of *Songs of Innocence*, the subject of my note. Since Keynes and Wolf list the location of the latter exemplar as Harvard, it is hardly "odd," in Grant's phrase, that I should have sought it there.

My original note does, however, need correction. In a recent letter from Thomas E. Connolly to Morton D. Paley, a copy of which was forwarded

to me, I learned that Connolly, after being told initially (as I was) that Copy U of *Innocence* was not at Harvard, later discovered that it was there after all but had not been catalogued.

Whatever pertinence Grant's reflections may have on the use made of Blake originals, by critics or by graduate students, no serious scholar would willingly forgo the study of originals in favor of reproductions, or consider any of the former expendable.

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SONGS OF INNOCENCE COPY U Thomas E. Connolly

On p. 214 of *Blake Newsletter* 19, Mary Ellen Reisner states that Keynes-Wolf copy U of *Songs of Innocence* is not at the Houghton Library of Harvard University but is owned by Mrs. Harold White. Unfortunately, Mrs. Reisner was given the same misinformation that I was recently given when I wrote to the Houghton Library to purchase a set of 2" x 2" Kodachrome slides of this copy.

Let me try to unscramble this bit of confusion. When Mrs. Reisner and I wrote to Harvard, an unfortunate mixup occurred between K-W copy U of *Songs of Innocence* (described on p. 18 of *Census*) and K-W copy U of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (described on p. 63 of the *Census*). Copy U of *Songs of Innocence* is actually at Harvard in the Houghton Library. I quote from a letter dated 27 November 1972, from Miss Eleanor M. Garvey of the Houghton Library: "We do have the Keynes-Wolf copy U, not fully catalogued but finally located."

Keynes-Wolf copy U of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* did once belong to the White family. It was recently donated by Miss Caroline Newton, of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, to Princeton University where it now rests. For an account of this gift see Charles Ryskamp, "Library Notes: *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and Miss Caroline Newton's Blake Collection," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 29 (Winter 1968).

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