Blake in the Marketplace, 1972-73

Robert N. Essick

"Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy."

The 1971 auction season, surveyed in *Blake Newsletter* 19 (Winter, 1971-72), pp. 183-84, was remarkable for the high quality of works sold and the number of fine illuminated books which changed hands. The last two years have seen some decrease in quality, but a considerable increase in quantity, both at auction and in book and print dealers catalogues. Most notable is the growing interest in Blake's commercial book illustrations, partly out of necessity as the more important materials gravitate ceaselessly towards public collections. Almost all dealers now seem to own Bentley & Nurmi, and once a title is recognized as one containing an "ORIGINAL PLATE ENGRAVED BY THE VISIONARY ARTIST WILLIAM BLAKE," the asking price is at least quadrupled. Even individual plates pulled from the books they illustrate have appeared at London auctions, those engraved after Blake's own designs or after Fuseli fetching the best prices. The Job illustrations are no longer considered a book, but rather a series of plates subject to dismemberment and sale print by print. In some respects this is unfortunate, but it is a boon for the small collector who could never afford all twenty-two plates but can obtain one or two.

Prices have, of course, increased at a steady pace. Listed below are the most important New York and London auctions of Blake drawings and watercolors, prints, and books and letters, including a few works by artists associated with Blake.

**DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS**

*Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, 16 May 1972*

Lot 70. A pencil and ink drawing attributed to Blake, "apparently an illustration for Dante's *Inferno*" from the W. A. White Collection. The drawing is reproduced as the frontispiece to the sale catalogue. It might be by Fuseli or von Holst, but looks very little like anything Blake ever did, much less a Dante illustration. Apparently someone informed the auction house of the dubious attribution, for the sketch was withdrawn.

*Christie's, London, 5 June 1973*

Lot 42. "Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre," one of the black ink and watercolor drawings.

Robert N. Essick is an Associate Professor of English at California State University, Northridge, and Associate Editor of *Blake Studies*. His work on Blake's art includes *William Blake: Book Illustrator* (with Roger Easson) and *A Finding List of Reproductions of Blake's Art*. 
To the left "The Mourners," an ink and gray wash drawing by Blake. Sold at Christie's, London, 5 June 1973, lot 113, for 2,400 guineas.

Robert N. Essick

Blake in the Marketplace, 1972-73

executed by Blake for Thomas Butts circa 1805. This magnificent work is reproduced in the catalogue and in Blake Newsletter 23 (Winter 1972-73), cover and p. [59] with a note on the sale. £23,100, Agnew. Formerly owned by Thomas Butts, Thomas Butts, Jr., F. T. Palgrave, and Lady Beatrice Maud Cecil, the drawing is now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

Lot 113. "The Mourners," an ink and grey wash drawing by Blake of four figures huddled together before some steps [illus. 1], once in the collection of Mrs. Alexander Gilchrist. Reproduced in the catalogue. 2,400 guineas, Cooper.

Christie's, London, 12 June 1973
Twenty-nine drawings by George Richmond were sold by one of his descendants, including a fine Blake-like sketch of "Samson Slaying the Philistines with the Jaw-Bone of an Ass," reproduced in the catalogue; and a sketch of "A Sleeping Shepherd and his Dog" with the energetic spirit typical of The Ancients.

Prints

Sotheby Belgravia, London, 4 April 1973
Lot 302. "Tornado," engraved by Blake after Fuseli for Erasmus Darwin's Botanic Garden, third edition. A proof lacking a good deal of finish work in the design and before title inscription and imprint. Worn in spots, a few pieces missing, laid down and repaired. £110, Maggs. Now in the author's collection. There are four other proofs of this plate, three in the British Museum and one in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lister. All lack the same work in the design, but some have the title inscription.

Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, 10 May 1973
Lot 16. Blake's engraved illustration to Dante's Inferno, plate 3, "Two of the Malebranche Quarrelling." Except for a tiny abrasion on the raised hand of one of the combatants, this is one of the finest impressions I have ever seen, with particularly rich Burr. Reproduced in the catalogue. $1,600.00, Robert Light, Inc.

Sotheby, London, 12 July 1973
Lot 110. A book of portraits of and after Thomas Phillips, from the Dawson Turner collection. Over one hundred items, including Phillips' portrait of Blake engraved by Schiavonetti for Blair's G ras e and a proof of Blake's engraved portrait of Earl Spencer. £1,100, Edmunds. The portrait of Spencer, like the only other known copy in the British
Museum, is inscribed in pencil "never published."

Sotheby, London, 11 December 1973

Lot 19. Blake, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, proof set on laid India paper complete, but the title plate is probably a later impression. Some foxing and damp stains in the margins. Sold with an unpasted example of the printed label. This and the next lot are from the collection of Sir Thomas Phillips and the Robinson Trust. £3,200, D. Tunick.


Lot 25. Blake, "The Man Sweeping the Interpreter's Parlour," engraving on pewter, from the collections of Dr. Greville Macdonald and Ruthven Todd. Reproduced in the catalogue. £2,100, D. Tunick. The estimate was only £500.

Lot 26 and 27. Blake, *The Book of Thel*, title-page and "Thel and the Worm," uncolored, very likely posthumous impressions. Both of these lots were withdrawn because of a disagreement between the owner and the auction house concerning the reserve price.


**BOOKS**

Sotheby, London, 22-23 May 1972


Lot 132. A Memoir of Edward Calvert, by his third son, 1893. This book, published in only 350 copies, is particularly valuable because it contains original impressions of Calvert's six wood engravings and two copperplate engravings. Over the last few years several copies have been disbound and the prints sold individually. £480, A. K. Henderson. Another copy, lot 277, £550, G. Raffy.


Lot 199. Muir facsimiles of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *The Book of Thel*, *Songs of Innocence*, *Songs of Experience*, *Milton*, and *There is no Natural Religion*, handsomely bound in three volumes. £375, Maggs.


Lot 201. Blake, *Writings*, ed. Keynes, one of 75 copies on India paper, three vols. bound in one, Nonesuch Press, 1925. £95, Quaritch.


Lot 269. Pearson facsimile of *Jerusalem*, 1877. £60, Maggs.

Lot 370. A collection of over 700 engravings and woodcuts after designs by Thomas Stothard, a few executed by Blake. Some of the prints are proof impressions, but none engraved by
Sotheby, London, 6 November 1972

Thirty-seven lots of Blake related materials were sold, mostly books with reproductions of Blake's paintings and drawings. The most important item was lot 56, the 1926 portfolio containing restrikes of the *Craye* illustrations, which sold for $275. Lot 78, a first ed., first issue of *Swinburne's Blake: A Critical Essay*, sold for only $20.

Sotheby, London, 13 November 1972
Lot 484. C. G. Salzmann, *Gymnastics for Youth*, with ten plates attributed to Blake. £48, Maggs.

Sotheby, London, 5-6 February 1973

Sotheby, London, 22 March 1973

Christie's, London, 18 April 1973
Lot 54. *Novelist's Magazine*, the plates only, bound in 4 vols., presumably including the engravings by Blake. 70 guineas, Walford.

Sotheby, London, 30 April-1 May 1973

Lot 356. Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, second ed. of Part I, 1791. This copy was in poor condition, but the second ed. is much rarer than the first. £80, Maggs.

Sotheby, London, 18-19 June 1973


Lot 265. C. G. Salzmann, *Elements of Morality*, with the plates attributed to Blake, 3 vols., 1791. £80, Maggs.

Lot 266. John Gay, *Fables*, with the plates by Blake, a large paper copy, 2 vols., 1793. £130, Blackwell. Another copy, regular size, some plates discolored, lot 275, £24, E. Morris.

Lot 267. Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, with the plates by Blake, third ed. of Part I (with the extra plate after Fuseli, "Tornado"), 1795. £190, F. Edwards.

Lot 269. Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, with Blake's engraved illustrations (some discolored, some cropped), and the leaf of explanation, 1797. The title-page to Night the Third is reproduced in the catalogue. £480, A. Solomon.


Lot 273. B. H. Malkin, *A Father's Memoir of His Child*, lacking half-title, 1806. £28, A. K. Henderson. This rare and important work continues to be one of the few Blake books still undervalued.


Lot 279. Blake, Poetical Sketches, Pickering, 1868. £6, E. Morris.


Lot 281. Blake, a portfolio of the illustrations to Blair's Grave with 1813 imprints, issued in the late nineteenth century. £70, Maggs.


Lot 291. Blake, Drawings and Engravings of Blake, 1922. £35, Hendy.

Lot 292. Hollyer facsimile of The Book of Thel, 1924. £32, B. Rota.

Lot 293. L. Binyon, Hollyer facsimile of For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, 1925. £12, Maggs.


Lot 295. Blake, The Followers of William Blake, 1925. £55, McNaughton, up from £35 in the 22-23 May 1972 Sotheby sale.

Lot 296. L. Binyon, The Followers of William Blake, 1925. £55, McNaughton, up from £35 in the 22-23 May 1972 Sotheby sale.


Lot 298. Blake, Illustrations to Young's Night Thoughts, 30 reproductions of the watercolors in portfolio, intro. by Keynes, 1927. £65, Quaritch.

Lot 299. Blake, Illustrations to Thornton's Virgil, intro. by Keynes, Nonesuch Press, 1937. With a set of prints from the electrotype in a folder. £45, Quaritch, up from £32 in the 22-23 May 1972 Sotheby sale.

Lot 300. Blake, Jerusalem, Blake Trust color facsimile, with the companion volume by Wicksteed, 1951. £300, Quaritch.


Lot 305. Blake, The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, with one original etching by Palmer, 1892. £120, Quaritch, up from £80 in the 22-23 May 1972 Sotheby sale.

Also in this sale were 23 lots of reprints and critical works on Blake. These 63 volumes in all brought a total of £64.

Christie's, London, 25 July 1973
Lot 134. Muir facsimile of Europe, 1887. £10, Maggs. This copy was very badly damp-stained and mildewed (hence the low price), but has since been restored to near perfect condition.

Sotheby, London, 15-16 October 1973
At the time of writing I have not been able to obtain a price list.


Lot 30. Blake, Songs of Innocence, Pickering, 1868; The Poems, Pickering, 1874; Illustrations to Thornton's Virgil, intro. by Keynes, with impressions from the electrotypes in a folder, Nonesuch Press, 1937.


Lot 258. William Hayley, Ballada, with Blake's five plates, 1805.

Lot 413. J. Ritson, A Select Collection of English Songs, presumably with the plates by Blake, 3 vols., 1783.

Lot 470. C. G. Salzmann, Elements of Morality, with the plates by Blake, 3 vols., 1792-91.

Lot 586. Edward Young, Night Thoughts, with Blake's engraved illustrations (some soiled and cropped), title repaired, lacking the explanation, 1797. £420.

Sotheby, London, 12-13 November 1973
Lot 499. C. G. Salzmann, Elements of Morality, with 42 engraved plates (50 in other eds.), some attributed to Blake, 2 vols., n.d. (inscription dated 1815). £60, Maggs. This edition is not recorded in Bentley & Numi.

1972-73 were also active years for dealers participating in the far from desolate Blake market. Several noteworthy catalogues were pub-
lished, as listed below.

**DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS: DEALERS**

**Martin Breslauer, London, List XLI and Catalogue 102 (June 1972)**

As item 148 in his List XLI Breslauer offered page 12 from the Blake-Varley Sketchbook, containing eight caricature heads by Blake, for £285. The sketch, now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lister, is reproduced in the catalogue. Breslauer had purchased the leaf at Christie's on 15 June 1971 for £160 guineas. Catalogue 102 offered "The Ghost of a Flea" from the Blake-Varley Sketchbook (item 95, reproduced) for £3,800. Breslauer purchased the drawing at the Christie's sale for 2,000 guineas.

**Paul Grinke, London, Catalogue 5, Summer 1972**

Item 32. Thomas Stothard, "The Battle of Ai," pen and grey wash drawing engraved by Blake for Kimpton's *Universal History of the Bible*, 1781. The drawing is reproduced, along with the published engraving as it appeared in Maynard's edition of Josephus and the reversed proof in the Rosenwald collection. No price is given since the drawing was sold to the Rosenwald Collection of the Library of Congress before the catalogue appeared. Included is a brief article by Ruthven Todd with comments on the drawing and its relationship to Blake's engravings.

**Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, Los Angeles, Catalogue 234, Fall 1973**

Item 3. Blake, sketch of a standing archer from the Blake-Varley Sketchbook (reproduced). $4,550. The sketch was purchased by Zeitlin at Christie's, 15 June 1971, for $3,044 (and previously offered in his catalogue 228 for $4,550). Apparently this is one of the few Blake items for which there is some market resistance.

**PRINTS AND BOOKS: DEALERS**

**P. & D. Colnaghi, London. Original Printmaking in Britain 1600-1800, Fall 1972.** This splendid exhibition and catalogue included a number of important works by Blake and artists of his circle.

Item 108. Blake, Job Illustrations, plate 9, published state on Whatman paper, £140.


Item 111. Blake, "The Fly," from *Songs of Experience*, relief etching, beautifully color printed and heightened with watercolors (reproduced). £1,200. Now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lister.

Item 112. Blake, "Enoch," lithograph on brown paper (reproduced). £5,000. Now in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lister.

Item 127. Blake, "The Canterbury Pilgrims," final state printed between 1880 and 1941 by Colnaghi. £120.


Item 138. Palmer, "The Vine" or "Plumpy Bacchus," etching, first state signed "S. Palmer" below each design by the artist or his son. £130. The early state and inscriptions make the print much more valuable than later impressions.

Item 139. Calvert, "The Brook," wood engraving, from the Carfax portfolio. £90.

Item 140. Palmer, "The Rising Moon" or "An English Pastoral," etching, undescribed state between fourth and fifth of nine. £140.

Item 141. Palmer, "Opening the Fold" or "Early Morning," etching, fourth state of eight, inscribed by A. H. Palmer "Remarque Trial proof--Private Press" (reproduced). £140.


Item 181. Palmer, "Christmas or Folding the Last Sheep," etching, third state of five. £130.

**Christopher Mendez, London, Catalogue 23: English Prints, Fall 1972**


**Christopher Mendez, London, Catalogue 26: Old Master Prints, October 1973**

Item 7. Blake, Job Illustrations, plate 1, proof state "c," the third of three working proof states, from the collection of Linnell and Palmer (reproduced). £875.


Item 5. Calvert, "The Flood," lithograph not from the Carfax portfolio. £275 ($668.00).

Item 6. Calvert, "Ideal Pastoral Life," lithograph probably from the Carfax portfolio. £275 ($668.00).


Items 11-22. Blake, Job Illustrations, plates 1, 4-8, 10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21. All published proof states on India paper laid on Whatman paper. Each £250 ($607.50).


Item 24. Palmer, "The Skylark," etching, seventh state of eight. £175 ($425.00).


Item 26. Palmer, "Christmas--Folding the Last Sheep," etching, final state. £225 ($547.00).

Item 27. Palmer, "The Vine" or "Plumpy Bacchus," etching, final state, large paper issue. £75 ($182.25).

Item 28. Palmer, "The Rising Moon" or "An English Pastoral," etching, seventh state of nine. £230 ($559.00). In July 1971 Weston offered this same print for £90 ($216.00).

Item 29. Palmer, "The Weary Ploughman," etching, final state of ten. £140 ($340.20). In July 1971 Weston offered the much more valuable fourth state of this print for £90 ($216.00).


Covent Garden Bookshop, London, Catalogue 52, Spring 1973
A total of 76 Blake items are listed in the catalogue, one of the largest collections offered for sale in recent years. Most volumes are reprints and critical works of only minor interest to collectors, but the following important books are included.

Item 173. Blake, All Religions Are One, Blake Trust facsimile, special issue with added materials, 1970. £120.


Item 180. Erasmus Darwin, The Botanic Garden, with the engravings by Blake, third ed. of part I, 1795. £125.


Item 184. Blake, The Gates of Paradise, Blake Trust facsimile, special issue, 1969. £120.

Item 185. John Gay, Fables, with the plates by Blake, 2 vols., 1793. £110.

Item 186. Blake, Illustrations to Young's Night Thoughts, thirty reproductions of the watercolors in portfolio, intro. by Keynes, 1927. £45.
Bertram Rota, London, Spring 1973 catalogue. Among a collection of books from the library of W. M. Rossetti were the following Blake items.

**Item 142.** Remember Me! Wanting some plates, but with Blake's "The Hiding of Moses." £20—an amazingly low price for this rare and beautiful engraving. Rota was immediately deluged with orders.

**Item 145.** Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Pickering, 1839, the issue omitting "The Little Vagabond." D. G. Rossetti's copy, with his signature. £350.

Philip C. Duschnes, New York, Catalogue 204, Fall 1973. Twenty-seven Blake items offered for sale, including the following.

**Item 42.** Blake, Illustrations of the Book of Job, reproductions of the engravings, 1902. $125.00

**Item 48.** Blake, Designs for Gray’s Poems, intro. by Grierson, 1922. $200.00.

**Item 49.** Blake, Writings, ed. Keynes, Nonesuch Press, 3 vols., 1925. $200.00. Another copy, including Mona Wilson’s Life of Blake, 1927, item 50, $325.00.

**Item 52.** Blake, Illustrations to Young's Night Thoughts, thirty reproductions of the watercolors in portfolio, intro. by Keynes, 1927. $150.00.

**Item 59.** Blake, Jerusalem, Blake Trust facsimile, 1951. $1,200.00.

**Item 61.** Blake, America, Blake Trust facsimile, 1963. $175.00.


**Item 63.** Blake, The Gates of Paradise, Blake Trust facsimile, 1968. $70.00.

**Item 64.** Blake, All Religions Are One, Blake Trust facsimile, 1970. $55.00

**Item 65.** Blake, There is no Natural Religion, Blake Trust Facsimile, 1971. $95.00


The latest Blake Trust-Trianon Press prospectus includes the following volumes still in print and available from Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., London.


**Jerusalem, monochrome facsimile of the Rinder copy, 1953.** £10.

**Songs of Innocence, 1954.** £40.

**Europe, 1969.** £75.

**All Religions Are One, 1970.** £18.

**There is no Natural Religion, 1971. Regular issue, £35; special issue, £88.**

**Blake’s Designs to the Poems of Gray, 1972.** £960, £640, or £590, depending on the binding.

**Keynes, Bibliotheca Bibliographica, A Catalogue of the Library Formed by Sir Geoffrey Keynes, 1964.** £16.

**Keynes, Blake, Poet, Printer, Prophet, 1964. Limited ed., £30; paperbound, £1.62.**

**Forthcoming Blake Trust facsimiles:**

**The Book of Ahania, 6 plates, 3 in color.**

**Regular issue, £32; special issue, £85.**

**Jerusalem, 25 color plates from Lord Cunliffe’s collection, 4 color proofs from the Preston collection. Regular issue, about £120; special issue, about £240.**

**Blake’s Illustrations for the Book of Job, the engravings, including proof states, pencil sketches, and monochrome reproductions of all watercolors. With a new catalogue raisonné by Keynes. Prices not yet set.**

**The Song of Los.** 8 color plates. Prices not yet set.