

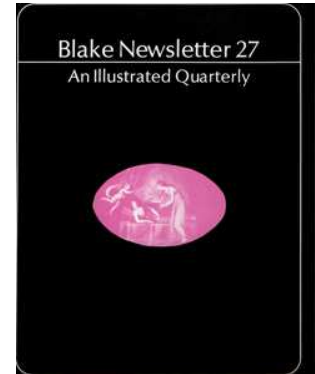
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

D I S C U S S I O N

**The Blake Trust Gray Catalogue and the Blake
Trust Facsimiles**

Geoffrey Keynes

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 7, Issue 3, Winter 1973-1974, pp. 64-
66



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

GEOFFREY KEYNES

The Blake Trust Gray Catalogue and the Blake Trust Facsimiles

In *Blake Newsletter* 24 (Spring 1973) recently issued, Professor G. E. Bentley, Jr., has published an article in which he chooses to question the accuracy of the facsimiles of Blake's Illuminated Books published by Mr. Arnold Fawcus of the Trianon Press on behalf of the Trustees of the William Blake Trust--a non-profit-making educational charity founded with the help of a bequest from the estate of the late Walford Graham Robertson and greatly assisted by generous contributions from Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald and Mr. Paul Mellon. Professor Bentley's object was to rebut a favorable review

(*Newsletter* 21) of the Catalogue of the Tate Gallery Exhibition of Blake's Illustrations of Gray's Poems, issued for the convenience of the visitors to the exhibition. As Chairman of the Trustees I would like to reply.

Professor Bentley writes that he has detected "some serious minor defects" in the Catalogue, the plates of which he regards as having been "simply falsified." This "tampering" with the reproductions he says brings into question the reliability of all the Blake Trust reproductions. It seems that the

ROBERT N. ESSICK

Jerusalem 25: Some Thoughts on Technique

In the Fall 1972 issue of the *Blake Newsletter* Deirdre Toomey presented her interesting discovery of three states of *Jerusalem*, plate 25. As a bibliographic description of a page from five copies of *Jerusalem* her article is perspicacious and thorough, but as a chalcographic description of a copper-plate it seems to me that it leaves several important questions unattended.

The additional lines pointed out by Toomey to distinguish between the three states are of two different types. The white lines in the hair of the central and right females in the third state were very likely added to the plate by removing some of the copper with an engraving tool, as Toomey states. An alternate method for making white lines is "Woodcut on Copper," as Blake called it (Keynes, ed., *Writings*, p. 440), but this would require covering the entire plate with an etching ground--certainly more work than necessary for the limited area reworked. All the other added lines described by Toomey, such as the body contours on the right female in the second state, are far more puzzling. They print black, and thus must be in relief. How were these lines produced? No matter

which etching or engraving process is used, copper can only be subtracted from a plate, and thus it has always been my assumption that adding relief lines to the parts of a plate already bitten in by acid or graver is very difficult, if not impossible. The only way that comes to my mind for adding relief lines is to work the plate up from the back and then engrave away the whites, leaving in relief only those areas to be printed. But the new lines on the second state of *Jerusalem* plate 25 have a delicacy and a spontaneity suggesting etching rather than engraving. If etched, they could have been formed on the worked-up areas by applying a stopping-out material with a small brush or pen, covering all other

Robert N. Essick (California State University, Northridge) has recently co-authored a commentary on the Night Thoughts engravings (forthcoming, Dover) and edited a collection of reprinted articles on Blake's art, The Visionary Hand (Hennessey & Ingalls).

excellence of the color-plates in the Catalogue has led him to assume that it was a typical example of the work of the Trianon Press, which is carried out in most instances by a subtle combination of collotype printing with hand-coloring done through stencils. As a matter of fact the Catalogue was a mass-produced volume hastily put together at the last moment, the color-plates being printed by a four-color offset process at another machine shop in Paris. It had no pretensions to being a *facsimile* of anything, being designed as an inexpensive guide to the exhibition trying to give some idea of the quality of the real thing--as should have been evident from the price at which it was sold.

The most serious "inaccuracy" found by the Professor was an inscription added to the jacket of the book which carried a reproduction of Blake's title-page. Publishers do not commonly provide a careful hand-colored facsimile on so ephemeral an object as a book-jacket, but do often add information on this expendable feature. The other inaccuracy was in another inscription made by Blake in dim pencilling on the same title-page. This would have been invisible when reproduced by the offset process and was consequently rewritten slightly

relief lines with the stopping-out substance, and then immersing the plate in an acid bath to eat away the exposed areas adjacent to the new lines. This is the only way I can account for the addition of the lines to the copper-plate described by Toomey, but the process is clumsy, inefficient, and very time-consuming. It is difficult to believe that Blake would go through such involved procedures just to add a few lines of contour and shading. I would be happy to hear from anyone who knows an easier way for adding new relief lines to an etching.

One simple way out of these technical difficulties remains. Toomey writes that the considerable differences between the Pierpont Morgan copy (*Census* copy F) and the Fitzwilliam copy (H) can be accounted for by differences in printing. It is certainly possible, as well as convenient, to consider all the black line changes in the five impressions reproduced with Toomey's article as the result of inking and printing differences, either accidental or intentional. In the British Museum copy (copy A, first state) the faint and poorly inked outline of some of the contours on the right female can be seen, even though these lines were, according to Toomey, added in the second state. The gray wash shading in copy A which Toomey points to as an indication of reworking to be done for the second state may actually be Blake's attempt to improve on poor printing. The Rosenwald copy of *America* (copy E) shows a good deal of added wash for just this purpose. Printing a copper-plate, either relief or intaglio, is a tricky business, and great differences in impressions can be caused by the way in which the plate is inked, wiped, and imposed on the paper. Even the texture and moisture content of the paper can make significant differences. Copy C of *Jerusalem* (not discussed by Toomey) offers ample

changed by a workman in the offset shop.

On this totally erroneous basis Professor Bentley makes the unjustified suggestion of deliberate tampering by Mr. Fawcus and thereby throwing doubt on the value of all the Blake Trust facsimiles.

I am glad to be able to acknowledge that Professor Bentley has written a letter to Mr. Fawcus expressing regret for any distress he may have caused, but follows this with a series of other complaints which seem designed to undermine still further the status of the Blake Trust facsimiles and I feel that further explanation is needed.

Professor Bentley complains that in the black-and-white reproduction of *Jerusalem* (1953) the plate numbers have been moved in half the plates from the right side to the left. Again, this volume was not designed as a perfect facsimile. It was a mass-produced book (1700 copies) at a low price, in which the plates were printed on both sides of the leaves instead of on one side only. The numbers were moved to aid users by placing them on each leaf where they would expect to find them.

testimony to Blake's problems with, or cavalier attitude towards, clean printing. Many plates in this copy (almost all of which are in Chapter 2, later rearranged and reprinted) have smudges in the white areas that result from sloppy or too heavy inking--or a failure to clean out the hollows properly before imposition. On the other hand, excessive or careless wiping can eliminate fine lines surrounded by relatively large white areas (i.e., just the sort of lines missing from plate 25 in Toomey's first state). In copy C, the text area and major lines on plate 25 indicate that it was very lightly inked, and thus it should be no surprise that this impression shows (at least in the Blake Trust facsimile) even less evidence of the fine contour lines than copy A. The method of inking can also affect impressions in a way that seems like a change in the copper itself. Inking with a dabber or soft roller will cover all raised surfaces, but also get ink into the hollows; inking with a very hard roller or from an unengraved plate (as Ruthven Todd did during his experiments with relief etching in 1948) can miss fine lines slightly below the level of the major relief areas. One or more of these variables can account for the differences in black lines described by Toomey.

My point here is not to dispute the particulars of Toomey's article, but rather to suggest the need to consider the technical potentials and limitations of Blake's processes before making too many assumptions about changes on a copper-plate. Armed with a heady combination of patience, twelve-power magnifying glasses, and a tendency to promote all differences in impressions to the rank of different states, we can end up with a bibliographer's (or botanist's) nightmare--that is, as many species as there are individuals. In "The Suppressed and Altered Passages in Blake's

He complains further that in the eclectic facsimile of *There is No Natural Religion* (1971) the size of the pages is not exactly that of Blake's original leaves. In none of the facsimiles is the leaf guaranteed to be of exactly the same size as that of the original copy. Blake himself varied this relation of print to leaf, and in any case it seems to me to be immaterial to the value of the color print. It is almost the equivalent of complaining that the pulp of which the paper is made is not of the same composition as that used by Blake. In fact the paper was specially made in an attempt to produce an approximation to Blake's paper, though with a distinctive watermark.

Professor Bentley also refers to the slight inaccuracy in the facsimile of *All Religions are One* (1970) in that the various shades of green are not quite true to the unique original. This may well be so, and the reason for it will be obvious to anyone with any knowledge of the difficulties of reproduction. As was stated in my description of the plates, the reproductions had to be made from photographic ektachromes of each plate except one, which were supplied by the H. E. Huntington Library because they were unable to loan the original. The implication was that subtle variations

of this kind could not be caught. The single original print available from my collection had to be used as the standard for color. This partial failure should be attributed to the regulations under which public institutions are administered and not to the craftsman. Private owners can allow themselves to be more co-operative, and the Blake Trust has been fortunate in enjoying this generous co-operation in every other instance.

Professor Bentley concludes with a solemn warning against accepting any reproduction as "perfect." This seems hardly necessary, since the term "facsimile" in its usual acceptation carries with it the assumption that no reproduction is so perfect as to be the equivalent of a forgery. This very small degree of imperfection is wholly desirable and I have no wish to claim that any of our facsimiles have surpassed it. Yet the Trustees are satisfied that during the last twenty-five years they have been able to rely absolutely on the integrity of Mr. Fawcus in his efforts to produce facsimiles which are extraordinarily faithful to Blake's work. This is the more remarkable in view of the volume of work turned out and of the technical difficulties presented by some of the subjects. Brinkley, 6 May 1974

Jerusalem" in *Studies in Bibliography*, 17 (1964), 1-54, David Erdman points out that it is "almost impossible" to add new words in black line to a relief etching. His statement serves as an ample warning to those eager to find textual *additions* (as distinct from easily made deletions) on Blake's copper-plates. The same warning must be extended to include *any* additions of black lines to a relief plate. When confronted with a black line addition in a print made from a relief etching, three possible explanations should be considered in an ascending order of technical difficulty, as listed below.

1. *The additional lines were added in wash or pen and ink. No change in the copper-plate.* Wash or pen and ink work can usually be discovered through close scrutiny of the original print. For example, in the article cited above Erdman writes that the additional lines covering deleted text on plate 3 of *Jerusalem* in copy D were drawn on the print, even though the Pearson facsimile of this copy reproduced these lines in such a way that they look identical to the lines printed from the plate. If however the additional lines are unquestionably printed, as I assume Toomey found the additional lines on plate 25 to be, then the second alternative explanation requires consideration.

2. *Differences in inking and/or printing caused the differences in the impressions. No change in the copper-plate.* Almost every impression from one of Blake's relief etchings shows some variance from all other impressions due to these variables. The changes in the size and darkness of the patch of ink on Albion's right knee on plate 25 of *Jerusalem* in the five copies reproduced with Toomey's article are a good case in point. A list-

ing of all such variations in the illuminated books would serve no purpose that I can foresee. Certainly the vast majority of these differences are not intentional. Even an apparently significant addition to major lines, such as the definition of the central female's pudendum in copy D of *Jerusalem*, plate 25, is probably an accident of inking (assuming it was not added with pen and ink to a single print), particularly when the addition vanishes from later copies.

3. *The additional lines result from a change in the copper-plate itself.* Until some expert in such matters comes forth with a satisfactory method of adding black lines to relief plates, this must be the last and least attractive alternative. And even if Blake could make additions, surely he did so only for some important aesthetic or iconographic purpose. Those who wish to argue for additions to a relief plate should be asked to give good reasons for such changes. There are good reasons for Blake to have filled in the rather messy and visually awkward areas of deleted text on *Jerusalem* plate 3, but he did so only with pen and ink in copy D, and made no additions in most copies. If Blake could add to the copper-plate the small and in most cases unimportant lines that appear in Toomey's second state of plate 25, why didn't he do something about plate 3? Until new evidence is produced, I can only assume that Blake had no simple method for adding black lines to either plate.

I hope that these questions and suggestions will seem not to be argumentative trivia of the sort that stifles research, but rather necessary warnings and guidelines helpful to others interested in Blake's etchings.