

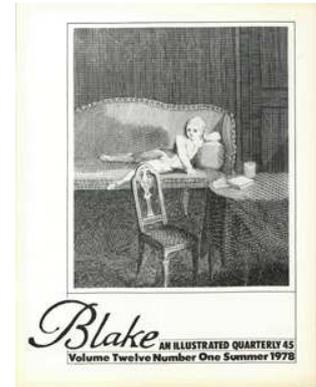
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“Blake, William” in the New American Cyclopeda

Raymond H. Deck, Jr.

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

"BLAKE, WILLIAM" IN THE NEW AMERICAN CYCLOPEDIA (1861)

Raymond H. Deck, Jr.

An article about William Blake which was one of the most widely circulated American accounts of his life and works in the later pre-Gilchrist years and for at least a decade thereafter should be added to the extensive pre-Gilchrist bibliographies of G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s *Critical Heritage* and *Blake Books*.¹ The sketch appears in volume III of the *New American Cyclopaedia*, published in 1861 but copyrighted in 1858; the discrepancy between the dates of publication and copyright is explained by the editorial preface to volume I (publ. 1860, copyright 1857), which notes that the actual publication of the first volume was undertaken only when the entire project was in "an advanced state of preparation for the press."²

The article, about 550 words long, seems to depend almost entirely upon Cunningham's *Lives* for biographical and bibliographical information as well as for a judgment of Blake and his works; in fact, numerous parallels (for example, 1828 as the date of Blake's death) make it plain that Cunningham is quoted silently, repeatedly, and often pretty carelessly. Several of Blake's works are mentioned specifically, and, after Cunningham, the "inventions for the Book of Job" are judged "his best production." Likewise, Blake's visionary qualities are emphasized:

He wrote songs, composed music, and painted at the same time; but in the excitement of his labors, he began to conceive that he was under spiritual influences; and as external prosperity was wanting, he grew more and more abstracted and retired, until the visionary tendencies of his nature dominated his life. Among his friends he gave out that the works on which he was engaged were copied from great works revealed to him, and that his lessons in art were given him by celestial tongues. An original and beautiful method of engraving and tinting his plates he ascribed to the dead brother of his wife, Robert.

The error in the last sentence suggests a careless reading of Cunningham, as do the statements that *Poetical Sketches* contains a "drama" (Cunningham says "a dramatic poem") and that Blake made "12

'Inventions'" for the "Canterbury Pilgrims." Curiously, however, the article states correctly a few details not included in Cunningham's *Lives*: 1789 is given as the date of the *Songs*, and the "Canterbury Pilgrims" (correctly named in contrast to Cunningham's "Canterbury Pilgrimage") is described as a "water-color painting" whereas Cunningham simply mentions that it was painted. Possibly the article-writer was familiar with Robert Balmanno's copy of *Innocence*, which gives "1789" clearly on the title page; that this same copy, *Innocence* (U), had bound with it a print from Blake's engraving of the "Canterbury Pilgrims" may also explain why the article-writer gives a correct version of Blake's title, although the accurate observation that Blake's larger version was a "water-color painting," or at least not an oil, remains of mysterious origin.³

The *New American Cyclopaedia* article probably was written by Charles Dana, the city editor of the *New York Tribune*. Dana and George Ripley, the newspaper's literary critic, were the two editors of the *New American Cyclopaedia* (whose list of contributors does not include anyone else known to have had an early interest in Blake), and in 1857 Dana had edited the *Household Book of Poetry*,⁴ in which he included four of Blake's *Songs* and "My Silks" from *Poetical Sketches*.

Although Dana's contribution to Blake's fame occurred late in the pre-Gilchrist years, his two publications mentioned here are especially important to Blake's American reputation because they were widely read and respected. Dana judged the *Household Book of Poetry* to include "within the bounds of a single volume whatever is truly beautiful and admirable among the minor poems of the English language,"⁵ and the American public seems to have enthusiastically supported his critical judgments, for the anthology (with the addition of yet another of Blake's *Songs* in the 1858 and subsequent editions⁶) went through dozens of printings in the nineteenth century and four more in the twentieth. Dana's biographer seems correct in describing the *New American Cyclopaedia* as "the principle American work of its time"⁷; in sixteen volumes the most extensive nineteenth-century American reference work (the only competition was the even earlier but slightly smaller *Encyclopedia Americana*), the *New American Cyclopaedia* passed through more than a dozen printings in fifteen years and included extensive annual supplements issued from 1876 to 1887.

¹ G. E. Bentley, Jr., *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975); *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

² *New American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*, ed. George Ripley and Charles A. Dana (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1858-63); in the revised edition of 1872 and in later reprintings the name was changed to simply *American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*.

³ See my "An American Original: Mrs. Colman's Illustrated Printings of Blake's Poems, 1843-44," *Blake*, 11, (Summer 1977), 4-18.

⁴ *Household Book of Poetry*, ed. Charles A. Dana (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1857).

⁵ Ibid., p. v.

⁶ Noted by Suzanne R. Hoover in "William Blake in the Wilderness: A Closer Look at his Reputation 1827-63," *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 322.

⁷ James H. Wilson, *Life of Charles A. Dana* (New York: Harper, 1908), p. 159.

ANOTHER EARLY PRINTING OF BLAKE'S "NIGHT"

Raymond H. Deck, Jr.

Blake's "Night" from *Innocence* appeared in the *New Church Advocate* for 16 May 1843 (1, no. 26, 208). I should have noticed this printing in preparing my article, "New Light on C. A. Tulk, Blake's Nineteenth-Century Patron" (*Studies in Romanticism*, 16 [1977], 217-36), which included discussion of Tulk's responsibility for the insertion of Blake's "The Divine Image" in the *New Church Advocate* for 1 December 1844. My arguments about Tulk's role in the publication of "The Divine Image" apply equally about the probability that he was responsible for the insertion of Blake's "Night" more than a year earlier. The text of Blake's "Night" in the *New Church Advocate* is followed by the citation, "Blake's *Songs of Innocence*" and, most notably, differs in more than a half dozen particulars of punctuation and spelling from that given by J. J. Garth Wilkinson in his 1839 edition of the *Songs*, thus suggesting that the text of Blake's "Night" was provided by someone who, like Tulk, had access to one of Blake's original copies.

THE FIRST PRINTED REFERENCE TO THE PUBLICATION OF JOB: DISRAELI (?) IN THE STAR CHAMBER (1826)

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Professor William S. Ward has generously drawn my attention to a previously unrecorded reference to Blake's *Job* in the obscure and short-lived satirical political weekly *The Star Chamber* for Wednesday 3 May 1826:

Mr. William Blake, whose illustrations in outline of Young, Gray, and other poets have long been before the public, has completed his designs for the Book of Job. Some of the etchings are full of that remarkable wildness and singularity of conception, for which Blake is so well known. The embodying of the plagues inflicted on Job by the Almighty; the personification of a Night-mare, and the figures of the creation,¹ are wonderful, although we do not think them equal either in point of originality or skilful execution to some of the earlier productions of this extraordinary artist.²

The account is interesting for a number of reasons. For one thing, it displays a surprising knowledge of Blake's works. The "illustrations in outline of Young" refer of course to Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797) with forty-three plates designed and engraved by Blake. The "Gray" outlines can scarcely refer to the series of watercolors Blake made in 1797-98 for Flaxman in illustration of Gray's poems, for these were not "before the public" in 1826 (they were first published in 1922); "Gray" is probably a mistake for *The Grave* by Robert Blair with twelve designs by Blake etched by Schiavonetti published in 1808 and 1813, for this was Blake's best-known work. The "earlier productions of this extraordinary artist" seems to refer to Blake's works in Illuminated Printing, and since very few copies were printed they were known only to few. The *Star Chamber* author seems to have been surprisingly well informed about Blake's works.

He is also strikingly up-to-date in his information about the publication of *Job*. Subscriptions for it had been taken since 1823 (*Blake Records* [1969], 598), but the label is dated "March 1826," and the first completed copies were distributed at the end of that month (*ibid.*, p. 327). It was not, however, published in the ordinary way, apparently no review-copies were sent to journals, and no review of it is known. Indeed, not only is the *Star Chamber* paragraph the first known published reference to the publication of *Job*, but it seems to be the only such reference during Blake's lifetime. Even the obituaries of Blake failed to mention *Job* except for that in *The Literary Gazette* (1 November 1827), and the only other account before 1830 was in J. T. Smith's life of Blake (1828). The *Star Chamber* account is important, therefore, as the only printed reference during Blake's lifetime to the publication of his greatest finished series of line-engravings.

The Star Chamber is a jocular sixteen-page weekly published by W. Marsh which began on 19 April 1826 and ended with No. 9 on Wednesday 7 June 1826. It includes reviews, attacks on politicians, "The Dunciad of To-day," and news of the arts, particularly exhibitions; it is in the untitled art section that the Blake reference comes. The periodical seems to have been founded by Peter Hall (who gave a copy to Bodley) with various assistants. Benjamin Disraeli was accused of having been the first editor, but he expressly denied this in *The Times* for 3 November 1871 and *Leisure Hours* for 4 November 1871.³ However, his authorized biographer concedes that Disraeli did contribute some fables called "The Modern AEsop," a review, "and perhaps other matter,"³ and it is not unlikely that he was responsible directly or indirectly for the notice of Blake's *Job*. At any rate, he was peculiarly well situated to know of Blake's more "original" and "skilful" "earlier productions," for his father Isaac (d. 1848) owned *The Iliad* (F), *Visions* (F), *Marriage* (D), *Urizen* (B), *Songs* (A), *Europe* (A), and *Song of Los*, and these works of course later came into Benjamin Disraeli's hands. And we know that Benjamin himself was interested in Blake, for he tried to get The British Museum to buy Blake's 537 watercolor designs to Young's *Night Thoughts* in 1875,⁴ over fifty years before they eventually reached the Museum. It is at least a plausible guess that Benjamin Disraeli is the