

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

A Newly Discovered Watermark and a Visionary's Way with His Dates

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artistic reputation was being quietly resurrected shortly before the publication of Gilchrist's biography. But the most remarkable feature of the passage is the symmetry of its errors: Blake was dead, but did not die insane; Dadd was insane, but did not die until 1886.

Gullick and Timbs very probably lifted some of their misinformation from *A Handbook to the Water Colours, Drawings, and Engravings, in the [Manchester] Art Treasures Exhibition, Being a Reprint of Critical Notices Originally Published in "The Manchester Guardian"* (London, 1857).³ In this work, pp. 12-13, the anonymous author compares Blake and Dadd and asserts that "both were mad . . . [but] Blake's fancies were lovely, rather than terrible."⁴

The statement--premature by a mere twenty-seven years--that Dadd was deceased may have resulted from a misreading of other published statements. The *Art-Union* of October 1843 took note of Dadd's insanity, his murder of his father in August 1843, and his subsequent confinement. The journal apostrophizes the unfortunate man as follows: "The late Richard Dadd. Alas! . . . for, although the grave has not actually closed over him, he must be classed among the dead."⁵ Perhaps Gullick and Timbs misconstrued this (or some other) elegy for Dadd's psychological demise, and this prompted them to list him, along with Blake, among the principal, insane, and deceased British masters of watercolor.

¹ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 10. Selections from brief references to Blake, 1831-62, are reprinted in Bentley, ed., *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 220-69.

² P. 304. Blake's name does not appear in the highly selective index. Timbs later wrote a sketch of Blake's life, based mostly on Gilchrist, in his *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), pp. 339-50.

³ First noted in connection with Blake in Suzanne R. Hoover, "Fifty Additions to Blake Bibliography: Further Data for the Study of His Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," *Blake Newsletter*, 5 (Winter, 1971-72), 169. See also Bentley, ed., *Blake: The Critical Heritage*, p. 258; Bentley, *Blake Books*, p. 660 no. A563. The original "Notices" in the *Manchester Guardian* have not been traced. On p. 297 of their book, Gullick and Timbs refer to the *Catalogue* (different from the *Handbook*) of the 1857 Manchester exhibition and on p. 303 they refer to the *Handbook*, the authorship of which they attribute to "Mr. Tom Taylor."

⁴ P. 12; quoted from Bentley, *Blake Books*, p. 660.

⁵ Vol. 5, p. 267; quoted from Patricia Allderidge, *The Late Richard Dadd*, exhibition catalogue (London: The Tate Gallery, 1974), p. 9. Allderidge notes the reference to Dadd in *Painting Popularly Explained*, but does not record its authors or the reference to Blake.

A NEWLY DISCOVERED WATERMARK AND A VISIONARY'S WAY WITH HIS DATES

Martin Butlin

Recent conservation treatment at the Tate Gallery has revealed that the Gallery's large color print of "Newton," signed and dated by Blake in his own hand "1795 WB inv [in monogram]", is watermarked "JWHATMAN/1804".¹ The watermark, in the margin of the actual design, was only found when the fine canvas on which the print had been mounted was removed.² Eight of the other large color prints in the Tate Gallery, also from the collection of Thomas Butts, were similarly mounted on canvas though "Pity" was lifted from its canvas preparatory to being lent to an exhibition in 1980.³ It is expected that others will be similarly treated in due course, when further watermarks may be discovered; "Hecate" is already known to be watermarked "1794/JWHATMAN" but was not dated by Blake.

The first documentary record of any of the twelve designs is the inclusion of eight in an account between Blake and Thomas Butts of 3 March 1806, apparently as having been delivered, four at a time, on 5 July and 7 September 1805; "Newton" was apparently delivered on the latter date. All the works delivered in 1805 are in fact dated "1795", with the possible exception of the copy of "Christ Appearing to the Apostles" now in the Yale University Art Gallery, the only print from these eight not in the Tate Gallery. Nine prints from the Butts collection (seven of those listed in the account, including "Newton," together with two titles not listed in any account) were sold by Butts's grandson, Captain F. J. Butts, to W. Graham Robertson in 1905 or 1906 and were presented by him to the Tate Gallery in 1939.

A number of cases of what may be called conceptual, mythical or even wishful pre-datings by Blake are already known. There are several examples of the later state of an engraving bearing the date of the first state.⁴ It is also highly likely that the version of "The Penance of Jane Shore" that Blake claimed in the catalogue of his exhibition in 1809 had been "done above Thirty Years ago" was not the small, immature example from his series of watercolors of subjects from English history now in a British private collection--that version is easily reconcilable with a date of c. 1779--but the larger, more finished and more accomplished version in the Tate Gallery that seems to date from about 1793.⁵ But what, in the case of this print of "Newton," is the original to which the date "1795" applies? Many people, including myself, have supposed that Blake printed more than one example of each color print at one time, by a sort of monotype process, finishing each print in pen and watercolor on demand at a later date.⁶ This would mean that the two known versions of "Newton," like the (up to three) known versions of the other prints in the series,

would both have been printed in 1795 and that this copy of "Newton" would have been finished in 1805 for delivery to Thomas Butts; this would of course have been reconcilable with a date, for the finishing only, of 1804 or later. But in no way can the first printing have been done in 1795 on paper watermarked 1804. It is known that paper manufacturers occasionally post-dated their watermarks by a year or so; a watercolor by Joshua Cristall in the Tate Gallery, on paper watermarked 1808, is signed and dated "J. Cristall 1807", apparently when the work was executed, in a space carefully left uncolored.⁷ But for a manufacturer to post-date his paper by as much as nine years is inconceivable, and in fact the previous batch of Whatman paper was dated 1794, only a year before the date given by Blake with his signature.⁸

The Butts prints are not only the first series for which there is any evidence; they also seem to have been the first set to have been sold to a patron. Blake offered another set of twelve prints to Dawson Turner in a letter of 9 June 1818 but these, and other examples, seem to have remained unsold at his death. One possibility could be that Blake printed one set in 1795 but that when he came to do the set for Butts he chose not to finish his existing prints but to start again from the beginning with new impressions. Frederick Tatham, who was not born until 1805, stated that Blake re-painted "his outline on the millboard when he wanted to take another print." But to re-do the color printing after a period of nine years, with the original thick, gummy colors all dried up on whatever form of plate Blake used, whether millboard (Tatham stated that Blake used "a common thick millboard") or metal, would seem to be a very perverse way of setting about things. If in fact the prints were color printed from metal plates it is possible that an outline was etched onto the plate in 1795 but that nothing else was done at that date. This is supported by the appearance of "God Judging Adam" in which Blake seems first to have printed a monochrome outline before overprinting it with his usual tacky color-printing medium. Or, in view of the fact that there are certain preliminary drawings, including one for the "Newton," and even a small-scale preliminary color print of "Pity," perhaps it is to these that Blake's 1795 date applies, meaning that at least he had the idea and had made the first experiments in that year. Or, he may have actually begun printing the series of twelve designs in 1795 with the whole scheme in his mind but not completed it until he was able to sell a series to Butts in 1805. It is significant that three of the titles owned by Butts but not included in the 1805 accounts, "Satan Exulting over Eve," "Pity" and "Hecate," were signed in a different way from the others, with the single word "Blake" actually incised into the pigments. The 1794 watermark of "Hecate" allows for this work to have been executed in 1795, while "Pity" does not have a watermark; it is difficult however to be certain about the copy of "Satan Exulting over Eve" now in the collection of John Craxton, though no watermark is visible from the front of the work.⁹ Further explanations are no doubt possible.



"Newton," color print finished in pen and watercolor, 46 x 60 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

Whatever the exact solution, both as to the techniques used by Blake and the stages in which he applied each process, there are far wider implications in this new discovery. It has been generally assumed, at least recently, that Blake's use of color printing was confined largely to the years 1794, 1795 and 1796.¹⁰ This is based partly on the evidence of the large color prints but also on that of the illuminated books and the designs from them that were issued separately in color-printed versions. But it is now clear that Blake was still using color printing in at least one print executed as late as 1804-05. This also has implications for the theory that a revolution in Blake's style took place as a result of his experiences during his stay at Felpham from 1800 to 1803, in which he came to concentrate far more on clear outlines and balanced forms than in his earlier works. It is one thing to postulate a color print basically executed in 1795 and then more closely defined with pen outlines and clear color washes on being sold to Thomas Butts in 1805; it is quite another to see Blake re-using, as late as 1804-05, a technique the most dominant feature of which was its blotting and blurring.

¹ Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 1981, I, 166-67 no. 306, repr. II, pl. 394 in color. All the large color prints, together with related drawings, are catalogued in Butlin, I, 156-77, introd. and nos. 289-329, and repr. in vol. II.

² I am indebted to Kasia Szeleynski of the Tate Gallery's conservation department for informing me of this discovery and discussing it with me. An inscription on the back of the print, previously covered by the canvas, reads "No. 22 Page 203"; this

refers to William Rossetti's listing in the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, which means that the paper must have been mounted on the canvas after that date.

³ Butlin 310; exh. *The Painterly Print*, Metropolitan Museum, New York, and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, October 1980-March 1981 (17, repr.). The exhibition also included the small color-printed try-out in the British Museum (Butlin 313; 16, repr.) and the version in the Metropolitan Museum (Butlin 311; 18, repr. in color); the version in the Yale Center (Butlin 312) was repr. as fig. 50.

⁴ For example, "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion," "Albion Rose," "Job" and "Ezekiel"; see Robert N. Essick, *William Blake, Printmaker*, 1980, pp. 29, 64-67, 70, 178-86, 257.

⁵ See Butlin, I, 23-24 nos. 67 and 69.

⁶ The fullest discussion of the technique of the large color prints is in Essick, pp. 125-35.

⁷ See *The Tate Gallery 1972-4*, 1975, p. 52, repr., where the contrary is argued.

⁸ See the tables of watermarks in Butlin, I, 627, and G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books*, 1977, p. 72; until the discovery of the watermark on the Tate Gallery's "Newton" no "JW-HATMAN/1804" watermarks were known on any of the works included in my catalogue. For Whatman paper see also Essick, p. 105.

⁹ For a discussion of possible implications of the way in which the color prints are signed, though not in fact of the group with

the incised "Blake," see my article "Cataloguing William Blake" in Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce, eds., *Blake in his Time*, 1978, pp. 84-85.

¹⁰ See Essick, pp. 147-51.

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW BLAKE

Nelson Hilton

Robert Hughes seems to have discovered some curious new verses of Blake's, which he quotes without reference on page 235 of his recent study of modern art, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Knopf, 1981). Hughes writes that, "A century before Miró's birth, William Blake had urged his readers to

Seek those images
That constitute the Wild:
The lion and the Virgin,
The Harlot and the Child.

That is the aim of Miró's early paintings."

NEWSLETTER

LECTURE : YALE CENTER

On 16 November, as part of the "Monday Evening Colloquia" series at the Yale Center for British Art, Michael Ferber, Assistant Professor of English at Yale, will lecture on Blake.

EXHIBITIONS : HUNTINGTON LIBRARY

The *Prints of the Blake Followers* will be on exhibition at the Henry E. Huntington Art Gallery from 3 November 1981 to 27 February 1982. This group of artists, who included Edward Calvert, Samuel Palmer, George Richmond, Welby Sherman and John Linnell, were deeply influenced by Blake's personality and art for a brief period, primarily in the late 1820s and early 1830s. The fifty prints by Blake and his followers in this exhibition are drawn from the Huntington collection and the Robert N. Essick collection. The show is accompanied by a catalogue. A scholarly symposium on the followers of Blake will be held in conjunction with the exhibition.

EXHIBITIONS : MORGAN LIBRARY

From 1 September through 4 October the Pierpont Morgan Library exhibited a selection of Blake watercolors and illuminated books, including the Morgan (Butts) set of Job watercolors, watercolor designs to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, "Samson Breaking His Bonds," "Fire," *America*, and the *Songs*. The *Pickering Manuscript* was also on exhibition, along with engravings from books illustrated by Blake. A catalogue is available for \$7.50.

SANTA CRUZ CONFERENCE: BLAKE & CRITICISM

The National Endowment for the Humanities has approved funding for the conference, which the sponsors hope will bring into the open the collision between Blake studies and the concerns, values, and strategies of contemporary critical theory. Ever more perceived as a key document at the origins of post-modern consciousness, Blake's work arguably anticipates and contests many contemporary and often anti-humanistic critical formulations. The conference will focus on the profound role Blake's work has to play in any new organization and interpretation of humanistic studies. The conference will be held 21 and 22 May 1982 at the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Detailed information concerning the program will appear in the next issue of *Blake* and will also be available from The Conference on Blake and Criticism, Literature Board, Kresge College, UCSC, Santa Cruz, CA 95064.