

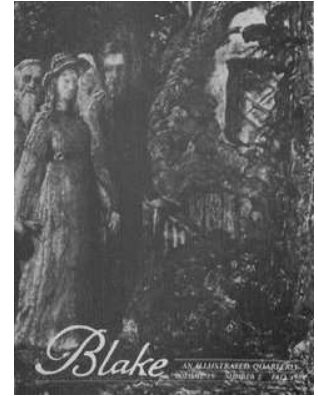
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY  
**BLAKE**

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

An Unpublished Poem by S. Foster Damon

Josephine McQuail

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endon census codes copies according to the color of Death's gown on the title page to Night I, the most common color being white (Type I), the next green (Type II), with a single copy, in the Houghton Library at Harvard, being grey (Type III). Grey is the key color for the entire Dimsdale copy. Not only is Death charmingly portrayed in a grey gown, but many other figures are also robed in grey. The angels, for example, from pages 40–42, are depicted with grey wings, whereas in several other copies these are multi-colored with an iridescent effect. And on page 80, the red-faced Thunder God with gold rays emanating from his head is dressed by dramatic contrast in grey clothes while the sea beneath is grey and green.

In III-2 special attention has also been paid to skin, hair and eyes. Death's skin is quite tanned and many figures show very careful highlighting and pale blue veining. Hair is often cap- or wig-like, and the eyes are usually brightly demarcated.

Pages 53–54, 60 and 62 of the Clarendon census discuss the "non-standard" details of Type III, "the colouring of the beard of Time in 11E (NT36)<sup>5</sup> being brown, rather than white or grey as in all other copies." In the Dimsdale copy, however, Time's beard is white, although his topknot by contrast is black. The Clarendon editors conjecture that the Harvard copy was "quite likely to have been done by some possessor of an uncoloured copy for his own enjoyment, or as a forgery" (p. 60). They conclude that III-1 "Stands apart from all others. In such specific details as the colour of Death's garments and the colours of the garments and hair of other figures as well as in its general character, this copy is peculiar. Of all copies it seems most likely to have been done without close reference to any copy that might have had Blake's authorization" (p. 62).

The discovery of the Dimsdale copy necessitates a re-examination of the Clarendon speculations about Type III, and the similarity of III-2 to Type I copies reconfirms the need to be sceptical about fixity of coloring patterns and their dating.

<sup>1</sup>William Blake's *Designs for Edward Young's "Night Thoughts,"* edited by John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose, Michael J. Tolley, coordinating editor David V. Erdman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 62–72.

<sup>2</sup>Clarendon *Night Thoughts*, p. 61 and n. 81, p. 92; G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 636–46.

<sup>3</sup>James McCord, "An Unrecorded Colored Copy of Young's *Night Thoughts*," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 18 (Fall 1984), 116–18. McCord's tally of copies includes Bentley copy T, the Cook copy, which he argues is not included in the Clarendon census. He is incorrect, as this is Clarendon copy I-15.

<sup>4</sup>The Dimsdale copies of the illuminated works are described

in *Blake Books*, pp. 170, 180, 384, and 410. The Sotheby's catalogue states that the *Night Thoughts* was "probably acquired . . . together with copies of *The Book of Urizen* and *Songs of Innocence*." No evidence is given for this assertion, although Michael Heseltine of Sotheby's confirmed the copy's provenance and wrote the catalogue entry. However, *Blake Books* notes that it was the first Baron Dimsdale (1712–1800) who acquired copies of the illuminated books, whereas the Sotheby's catalogue states that it was the fifth Baron Dimsdale who acquired all three.

<sup>5</sup>11E is in the masculine state.

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On a particularly gloomy winter day in 1984 I attempted to cheer myself up by a visit to my friend John Guillot's bookstore in Charlottesville, Virginia. John, now the proprietor of Magnum Opus in Charlottesville, usually had some tempting volume in the antiquarian section of Heartwood Books, which he managed then. That day he came up with a first edition of S. Foster Damon's *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, in which, he said, there was an amusing poem inscribed by the author. Sure enough, the flyleaf traced a mysterious exchange involving this book, which fell eventually into its author's hands. The book bears several bookplates, including one of "Richard and Caroline Hogue," and Damon predicated the poem:

From Caroline Hogue  
to S. Foster Damon  
and back again  
April 29, 1941

The poem itself reveals S. Foster Damon's sense of humor, which is quite refreshing! He imagined that

Hamlet once met William Blake  
They chatted, for politeness' sake.  
Said Hamlet: "Do you see that  
cloud?"  
Said William: "Yes! It is a crowd  
Of Seraphim shouting 'Glory!  
Hail!'"  
Said Hamlet: "No. It's like a whale."  
And so they parted, each one glad  
that the other, and not he, was mad.

The readers of *Blake* will understand why I immediately purchased the book. I am happy to share it with the readers of the *Quarterly*, and I would like to thank Morton Paley for suggesting that I submit the poem to *Blake*, and Catherine Brown, S. Foster Damon's literary executor, for giving permission to print it.