

# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

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P A R T I C U L A R

## New Blake Documents: Job, Oedipus, and the Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Mark Abley, G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 21, Issue 3, Winter 1987/1988, pp.  
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denborg's errors are so central to the *Marriage* not because the Johnson circle also attacked Swedenborg but because Blake wanted to rescue a particular kind of religiously based radicalism from Swedenborg's limitations and Jacobinism's rationalism. Moreover, the New Jerusalem Church seems to have been for Blake the one institution which at one time seemed to represent his most passionate commitments. As a way of working through his disillusionment with Swedenborgianism, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* would have to have

Swedenborgian error as a principal point of departure.

<sup>1</sup>*Blake Studies*, 3 (fall, 1970): 51.

<sup>2</sup>"'A New Heaven Is Begun': William Blake and Swedenborgianism," *Blake*, 13 (fall, 1979): 64-90.

<sup>3</sup>Lucy Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England 1792-1793* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), 34.

<sup>4</sup>Howard, 24-32; Paley, 70-74.

<sup>5</sup>Paley, 83. In 1791, Joseph Proud or Robert Hindmarsh would have been viewed as leaders of the Swedenborgians.

## New Blake Documents:

### *Job, Oedipus, and the Songs of Innocence and of Experience*<sup>1</sup>

Mark Abley and G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Contemporary documents of William Blake's life are widely scattered, in record offices, museums, churches, and libraries from London to San Marino and Melbourne. However, one of the richest collections of such materials is in a cottage called Apple Thatch in Hampshire among the voluminous papers of Blake's last great patron, the artist John Linnell. This extraordinarily rich cache of manuscripts has wonderful materials not only for John Linnell and William Blake but for many others as well, such as Samuel Palmer and William Butler Yeats. Scholars with many goals have been welcomed, and often fed, housed, and entertained, by the splendidly generous custodian of these papers, John Linnell's great granddaughter Joan Linnell Ivimy. The pages of *Blake Records* (1969), which attempted to gather all contemporary references to Blake, are thickly strewn with references to the Ivimy Manuscripts, particularly in the parts recording the last ten years of Blake's life.

When I first went through the Ivimy mss. in 1959, it quickly became apparent that I could not possibly read the majority of them without devoting more years to the undertaking than I had weeks to spare. Consequently, I read with care everything I could find which related directly to Blake and to his known acquaintances during his lifetime (1757-1827); I read almost equally scrupulously everything for the period from his death in 1827 to that of his wife in 1831. For the period after 1863, I read much more casually and rarely did more than glance at letters unless they were to or from someone important to Blake, such as Anne Gilchrist or Samuel Palmer. I concluded my search, confident that I had found most of the Blake references there and that more were awaiting searchers with sharper eyes and more patience and time than I could muster.



1. John Linnell's oil portrait (dated "1821") of Edward Denny (then age 25) in the collection of Robyn Denny, and reproduced with permission of Robyn Denny.

But the collection kept growing, with the discovery of here a trunk of Linnell manuscripts which had lain unrecognized for decades in the vaults of a family lawyer and there the return of letters from other members of the family. In the past twenty-seven years, I have returned repeatedly to Apple Thatch and to the loving hospitality of Joan Linnell Ivimy, and I have often found more references to Blake.

In 1982 and 1983, Mark Abley, formerly a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and now a successful Canadian journalist, called by arrangement at Apple Thatch in search of letters of William Butler Yeats and documents relating to Samuel Palmer. He was welcomed with her customary generosity by Joan Linnell Ivimy, and indeed Mark Abley stayed for some time at Apple Thatch. During his stay, he found not only manuscripts relating to William Butler Yeats and Samuel Palmer, which were partly for the Oxford edition of Yeats's letters and partly for Mark Abley's own *Parting Light: Selected Writings of Samuel Palmer* (1985); he also found a number of references to William Blake which were not recorded in *Blake Records* (1969) or *William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (1975). A number of these references to Blake I had myself seen in the years since *Blake Records* went to press, and, by the time I met Mark Abley in September 1986, these were already incorporated in the *Blake Records Supplement*, which is now in press. Some of them, however, were quite new to me, among them some of the most interesting references to Blake. When *The Parting Light* was published, I discovered in it some Blake references (not from the Ivimy mss.) which were new to me, and when I wrote to Mark Abley, and subsequently met him in Toronto, he generously offered me the notes he had made of his discoveries among the Ivimy mss. for the *Blake Records Supplement*. Because of the remarkable interest of these Blake materials not already incorporated in the *Blake Records Supplement*, I thought it desirable to make them into a separate article, to which Mark Abley generously agreed.

## BLAKE AND OEDIPUS

John Linnell had deeply impressed a young man some four years younger than himself named Edward Denny (b. 1796), the son of a baronet and a man of substance, and Linnell had apparently made Denny acquainted with Blake and his works. From August through November 1821 Linnell was busy painting portraits of Edward Denny and five other members of his family; that of Edward Denny<sup>2</sup> shows a dreamy young man with his finger marking his place in a little book—he looks strikingly like a Romantic poet such as Shelley (see illus. 1). On 30 October Linnell sent some of the portraits to Denny at his home at King's End House, Worcester, and on 2 November Denny wrote that the pictures had arrived. In passing he remarked:

when you see Mr. Blake be so kind as to tell him to keep the drawings he is making for me, when they are finished, till he either sees or hears from me— . . .

and Believe me, dear Sir,  
your's truly obliged,  
Edward Denny. —

This is the first known reference to a direct connection between Blake and Denny, but it is plain that already

Denny was an admirer of Blake. Unfortunately, we do not know what drawings Blake was making for Denny in 1821, for Denny is not known to have owned any drawings by Blake.<sup>3</sup> Apparently the drawings pleased Denny, for Denny purchased other Blake works in November 1826.

John Linnell scrawled a long draft reply to Denny on the letter itself, including a fascinating reference to a curious theatrical performance:

Mr Varley, Mr Blake & myself were much entertained Thursday Evening last by witnessing a representation of Oedipus at the West London Theatre—it much exceeded our expectations as to the effect of the Play & the performance of the Actors. I see it sneered at in one of the public[?] papers but you know what [a bad(?) set del] petty motives govern all & most of the Public criticism[.]

Linnell had taken his friends<sup>4</sup> to a box at the West London Theatre in Tottenham Street<sup>5</sup> where they saw *Oedipus* by John Dryden and Nat Lee, first acted in 1678. However, the play was advertised as being the *Oedipus* of Sophocles, and, not surprisingly, at least some in the audience reacted with indignation to the imposture. The anonymous reviewer in *The Times* for Friday 2 November 1821 wrote:

### ROYAL WEST LONDON THEATER.

A numerous audience was attracted yesterday evening to this theatre, by as barefaced an imposition as was ever practised on a public audience since the days of the bottle-conjuror. It was ostentatiously announced in the play-bills, and also in some of the public prints, that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles would be acted last night at this theatre, "being its first appearance these 2440 years". Of course many persons, attracted by the accurate chronological knowledge of the supposed translator, went in the expectation of seeing the ancient tragedy stalking for once on modern boards. . . . In this expectation, which the numerous translations of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* into English prose and verse did not render altogether unfounded, they were most miserably disappointed; for instead of listening to the simple yet majestic strains of Sophocles, they were indulged with a cut-down edition of the bombastic yet powerful tragedy of Lee and Dryden upon the same subject. That piece, which must always affect an audience very strongly, certainly has made its appearance on the stage within the last 2440 years. . . . The tragedy, in spite of "being its first appearance for these last 2440 years", was given out for repetition amidst thunders of applause, which we expect the play-bills of today will inform us proceeded from an audience, distinguished no less for its numbers and its fashion, than for its intelligence and discrimination.

The reviewer's dire prediction was at least partly fulfilled, for in *The Times* for Wednesday 7 November appeared the following advertisement:

### NEW ROYAL WEST LONDON THEATRE,

Tottenham-street, Charlotte-street, Fitzroy-square. *Oedipus Tyrannus*, by Sophocles, revived after a lapse of 2440 years, and received (as at Athens) with shouts of applause. It will be repeated till further notice. THIS and every EVENING, *OEDIPUS*. Oedipus, Mr. Huntley; Jocasta, Mrs. Glover. After which, *THE WAGER LOST*; in which Mrs. Glover will perform. Boxes 4s., pit 2s., gallery 1s. Private boxes for families may be had nightly.



At least the date in this advertisement is two centuries less preposterous than that in the review.

Blake was certainly familiar with Sophocles, for his "Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos" (1812) was made nine years before from Sophocles' *Philoctetes*,<sup>6</sup> and his intimate friends John Flaxman and John Linnell<sup>4</sup> were admirers of Sophocles, and Flaxman had made designs from his plays. It is agreeable to find that Blake was "much entertained" by the performance, even though the play he saw was some two thousand three hundred years younger than it was advertised to be.

## BLAKE AND JOB

On 9 February 1826 Linnell wrote to his father from Cheltenham about a "scrape" relating to his painting of "The Burial of Saul," and as an afterthought he remarked: "I shall be glad to hear from Ed. Chance how the Job goes on & what has occurred." Edward Chance was Linnell's nephew, who was helping to supervise the printing of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* at just this time. For instance, on this same day, 9 February 1826, Linnell's wife Mary wrote to him that "Edward . . . has been every day to Lahees & to [the Linnell's house in] Cirencester Place[;] from all I can learn the printing is going on well by a man of the name of Freeman[.]"

The landscape painter Edward Price wrote to Linnell from Trentham on Monday 3 September 1827, three weeks after Blake's death, about Blake's *Job* engravings:

Lady Stafford will not be here for a month so I have not been able to put before her Ladyship Blake's Etchings, and I fear I shall not be able to get subscribers as many of my friends who have seen them, have only made the remark that they were striking but extravagant and not one has yet expressed a desire to buy, but I will omit no opportunity of shewing it whenever I meet with the One Man in a Thousand who understands Painting.

Elizabeth Lady Stafford, the wealthy Countess of Sutherland in her own right, was married to the even wealthier George Grenville Leveson-Gower, Marquis of Stafford, who was famous as a politician and an improver of their huge estates (including most of the County of Sutherland). Both Lord and Lady Stafford were keenly interested in the arts; he was President of the British Institution, she was a painter in watercolors, and both collected art eagerly. A purchase from the Staffords might have led to important commissions for Linnell and perhaps to purchases of other works by Blake. However, if Lady Stafford was shown the *Job* engravings on her return to their home in Trentham, she apparently showed little interest in them, for her name does not appear in Linnell's *Job* accounts.

There are numerous letters from Edward Price to Linnell among the Ivimy mss., but he is not known

to have had any other connection than this one with Blake. Clearly he was simply one of many acquaintances through whom Linnell tried to sell copies of Blake's *Job*.

## BLAKE AND THE SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE

Blake sold an extraordinarily beautiful copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (copy AA) to Mrs. Charles Aders in July 1826 for £5.5.0,<sup>7</sup> and Linnell apparently had it bound for her—indeed, probably the sale was made through him. Eight years later, when in somewhat narrower circumstances, Mrs. Aders wrote to Linnell:

24 Savage Gardens June 17th [1834]<sup>8</sup>

My dear Sir

I much hoped to have been able to see you before this, but as usual illness has prevented me. — The fact is, I wish to explain to you my feelings & wishes about Blakes songs of Innocence & I cannot resist the desire to have Mr Aders' portrait [painted by you], but am not now so well able to dispose of money as I was, (at any rate for my luxuries or fancies) and wish therefore that you would take that work in part payment, it cost me as you know 6£ that is 5..5..0 to Mr Blake and 16 to you for the Book in which they are [bound?] — I have also another work of Blakes for which I gave to Mr. Tatham 5..5..0[;] perhaps you might like to have that also — What I have said above is in confidence to you, & I feel sure your delicacy will treat it as such — If you agree to my plan you will have the kindness to send for the Songs — and Michael Angelo's [designs engraved by Linnell] whenever you please[;] perhaps some day it may please God that I may be rich enough to purchase the latter[.]

Yours very sincerely  
Eliza Aders

Linnell evidently was not tempted by the Blake work which had come from Frederick Tatham — perhaps the drawings of "Los Walking on the Mountains of Albion" or "Christian with the Shield of Faith, Taking Leave of His Companions" from *Pilgrim's Progress* which Mrs. Aders kept in an album until her death<sup>9</sup> — but he did take the *Songs*. Next year he had an unfortunate misunderstanding with Mrs. Aders about the prices of these works, and on 8 August 1835 she wrote to him that she had understood the price of Linnell's portrait of Mr. Aders was to have been £26.5.0; "when therefore you took Blakes Songs of Innocence &c at 6G<sup>s</sup> I of course concluded I had only 20£ to pay." She declined to pay more but said that a friend might do so, "in which case when you receive the money you will send us the 6 G<sup>s</sup> for Blakes work."<sup>10</sup> Linnell did keep the *Songs*, and twenty-eight years later he inscribed it: "Given to James Tho Linnell by John Linnell sen<sup>r</sup>, April 28 1863."

## BLAKE AND JOB

Linnell had become a profound admirer of "the

dear kind and accomplished Lady Torrens," and in 1820 he painted an admirable portrait of her with her six children.<sup>11</sup> In April 1826 he sold a copy of Blake's *Job* to her,<sup>12</sup> and on 19 December 1832 her son A. W. Torrens, a captain in the Grenadier Guards, asked Linnell to send "by the bearer the '*Book of Job*,' as you kindly promised to do."<sup>13</sup> He apparently admired but did not buy Blake's *Job*, and three years later he wrote again to Linnell:

Windsor.  
17. April 1835.

Dear Mr. Linnell,

I received the book of Job, & return you many thanks for the present, in the name of my wife.<sup>14</sup> —The note you were so good as to send with it, is no mean part of the value of the gift, containing as it does from so eminent an artist such strong approbation of the copy which was inadvertently left in the book . . .

Yr. very truly obliged,  
Arthur W. Torrens.

Clearly the Denny and Torrens families were appreciative patrons of William Blake. If only we had records of the rest of their dealings with and opinions of him.

These are so far the last of the records of Blake's life and works to be discovered among the Ivimy mss., but it seems likely that yet more will be found in that rich repository. Few discoveries, however, are likely to be so intriguing as the view given here of Blake sitting between his friends John Varley and John Linnell in a box in a little theatre in Westminster being "much entertained" by a performance of *Oedipus* advertised as having been written in 619 BC by Sophocles (496–406 BC) but in fact written by Dryden and Lee and first acted in 1678.

<sup>11</sup>The materials exhibited here were discovered and recorded by Mark Abley in 1982 and 1983 and generously shared with G. E. Bentley, Jr., in September 1986; they have been organized and made

into the present essay by GEB.

We should like to dedicate this essay to our friend Joan Linnell Ivimy in thanks for her friendship to each of us over many years. The manuscripts are quoted here by her permission.

<sup>12</sup>Linnell's portrait of Edward Denny (1821) was exhibited in Katharine Crouan, *John Linnell: A Centennial Exhibition* (Fitzwilliam Museum 5 Oct.–12 Dec. 1982; Yale Center for British Art, 26 Jan.–20 March 1983), #76.

<sup>13</sup>According to the index to Martin Butlin's magisterial *Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981). Through Linnell, Denny bought Blake's *Job* engravings and Blair's *Grave* with Blake's designs (*Blake Records* [1969], 335–36, 593).

<sup>14</sup>In his Journal, Linnell recorded that he went on "Th[ursday] November 2 To see *Œdipus*," but he said nothing about his companions, and in his Cash Account Book he noted under 8 November 1821 payment of four shillings "to Dr Thornton for Box Ticket — for *Œdipus* [?]."

Linnell was clearly keenly interested in Greek plays, and the impulse to attend this production may have been his. On 8 May 1819 he paid £1.1.0 "for Greek Theatre 3 vol. 4<sup>to</sup>," and on 24 April 1821 he paid four shillings for "Sophocles — Greek."

<sup>15</sup>For details of the theatre itself, see Raymond Mander & Joe Mitchenson, *The Lost Theatres of London* (1976), 202. It was not a patent theatre and was not therefore entitled to perform legitimate drama, but, "being of too humble pretensions to create jealousy, [it] is permitted to play tragedy, comedy, or farce, in as legitimate a manner as the company is capable of doing" (*The Percy Anecdotes Original and Select* [1822], 168, cited in Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, 4 [1955], 228).

<sup>16</sup>Butlin (1981), #676.

<sup>17</sup>The receipt of 29 July 1826 is given in *Blake Records*, 583, the source of the other Blake references quoted incidentally here.

<sup>18</sup>The letter is postmarked "NIGHT / JU 17 / 1834" and addressed to "J. Linnell Esq'. / Porchester Terrace / Bayswater."

<sup>19</sup>Butlin (1981), #784 and #829 (20).

<sup>20</sup>*Blake Records*, 583, n 1, quoting the Ivimy mss.

<sup>21</sup>It is reproduced in color in Katharine Crouan's catalogue of *John Linnell* (1982), #75.

<sup>22</sup>*Blake Records*, 590, 599.

<sup>23</sup>*William Blake: The Critical Heritage* (1975), 226.

<sup>24</sup>Of course neither Arthur Torrens nor his wife appears in the records of payments for *Job*, since the copy they received was a gift.