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## A New Color Print from the Small Book of Designs

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## MINUTE PARTICULARS

### A New Color Print from the Small Book of Designs

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A hitherto unrecorded color-printed copy of the design on plate 20 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has turned up in a British private collection.<sup>1</sup> The new discovery can be shown to have come from the second copy of the so-called "Small Book of Designs" and confirms recent discoveries made about the color-printed designs by Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi. It will perhaps be helpful to draw these discoveries together and examine their implications.

In the first place it is clear that the new print is a second pull of the parallel design in the first copy of the Small Book of Designs in the British Museum.<sup>2</sup> The coloring is identical though somewhat thinner, with the tone of the uncovered paper showing through in places. Essick has shown that, in the case of the Large Book of Designs, three of the duplicates are second pulls from the first copy in the British Museum, B262: *Albion Rose*, *The Accusers of Theft, Adultery, Murder and Joseph of Arimathea Preaching to the Inhabitants of Britain*, B284, 285, and 286.<sup>3</sup> To these Viscomi has added *A Dream of Thirialatha*, B267, and the frontispiece to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, B264, and Ted Gott has added *Urizen* plate 21, B281.<sup>4</sup> It is not always easy to

make such assertions; at best most comparisons have to be made between a good color reproduction and an original. However, in the case of the Large Book of Designs it seems that, in fact, every case in which there is a duplicate, in other words every design except for plate 14 from *Urizen*, is a repeated pull from the same coloring.<sup>5</sup>

Viscomi has also demonstrated that the design from plate 5 of *Urizen* in the second copy of the Small Book of Designs was from the same printing as that in the first. To this can be added the new discovery and, almost certainly, the second pull of plate 3 of *Urizen* (c.f., B260 9 and B261 4). As Viscomi (72n38) also points out, even a partial

pendent large color-printed designs of "1795."<sup>6</sup> This theory made some sense in the conceptual and technical development of Blake's use of color printing but is certainly not essential for Blake's development; indeed, the experiments in the books would have been sufficient to produce the independent large prints. Whether one can rely on Blake's dates with regard to his color prints is another question. It has already been shown that a number of the "1795" prints were actually executed in 1804 or 1805.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Viscomi suggests that the 1796 date, created by altering the "1794" on the title page of *Urizen* (B260 1 and B261 1) was done late in Blake's career,

when he added the framing lines and verses characteristic of the second copy of the Small Book of Designs. By this time Blake could well have wished to establish an "ideal" date for the separate designs.

The framing lines and verses characteristic of the second copy of the Small Book of Designs are also a feature of the newly discovered print. The design has been cut out of the original sheet of paper, leaving no margins, but by good fortune

much of the original sheet remains, cut up but stuck to the sheet of cardboard onto which the design is also stuck. From these fragments it can be seen that, like most of the other designs identified as coming from the second copy of the Small Books of Designs, there were two pen-drawn framing lines and a text, similarly inscribed with double inverted commas at the beginning and end of each line as follows:

"O revolving serpent"  
"O the Ocean of Time and Space"

I leave it to other scholars to explain the significance of the second line and its relevance, if appropriate, to the



1. "O Revolving Serpent," Plate 20 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1796. Color-printed relief etching finished in pen and water color, 5.6 x 10.3 cm. Private collection, Great Britain.

duplication in the color printing means that both copies of the Large Book of Designs and of the Small Book of Designs must have been basically prepared at the same time, whenever the final finishing in pen and water color may have been done.

This conclusion, so obvious once made, makes my suggestion that the two Small Books of Designs were printed in 1794 and 1796 respectively invalid. Moreover, if one can accept the date 1796 for the second copy of the Small Book of Designs, this invalidates my suggestion that the books of designs were intermediary between the use of color printing in Blake's illuminated books and the totally inde-



Arlington Court picture, B803. It is generally assumed that Blake himself added these inscriptions when he issued the second copy of the Small Book of Designs. They seem to be in the same ink as the framing lines, which, as Viscomi points out, are very close to those added to *All Religions are One* Copy A, and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* Copy R, presumably at the time that they were sold to John Linnell.<sup>8</sup>

Another characteristic of some of the designs from the second copy of the Small Book of Designs is a small page number in the top right-hand corner. These are found on B261 3, 6, 7, and 9. A similar number, in this case "16," is found on the newly discovered design. The other numbers so far discovered are "9," "13," "20" and "22." This suggests that there may be ten more designs still awaiting rediscovery, a very exciting prospect. There are, of course, 23 designs in the first copy of the Small Book of Designs but the two books cannot have been identical: three designs from the second copy, B261 9, 10, and 11, are of subjects not found in the first copy.

The possibility of missing designs is reinforced by the fact that four of the designs from the second copy show stab holes from a former binding, B261 2, 5, 6 and 8;<sup>9</sup> the absence of such stab holes on other designs can be accounted for by the trimming of the paper. This binding must have been done before the second copy was dispersed. The early history of some of the designs is not known but B261 1 was given by Mrs. Blake (who died in 1831) to Frederick Tatham, B261 5 belonged to Samuel Palmer's cousin John Giles, while B261 3 seems to have belonged to John Varley who, as will be shown, also owned the newly discovered design.

Other inscriptions, not by Blake, give the early provenance of this work. There are two references, apparently in the same hand, reading "Drawing of Blake's given to A White by M<sup>rs</sup> Varley March 31 1856" and "Original Drawing by Blake/See Rossettis "Life and

Works of Blake" (the inscription lacks the closing quotation mark for "Life and Works of Blake"). After the first of these two inscriptions but in a different hand are the words "evidently printed in oil and touched with colour afterwards." There is also the number "8623."

A. White is presumably the Adam White who, according to inscriptions on the back of a counterproof of the Visionary Head of *Wat Tyler* (B740), was given that drawing by J. W. Lowry; the drawing had originally "belonged to Varley the artist whose wife was Miss Lowry." White also owned a number of other Visionary Heads (B711, 712, 718, 736, and 760), one of which, *Pindar and Lais the Courtesan*, now in the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston (B711) is inscribed, in similar fashion to the new color print, "Adam White from M<sup>r</sup> [or more likely "M<sup>rs</sup>"] Varley." In addition one copy of the fourth state of the engraving by Blake and John Linnell after Linnell's portrait drawing of Wilson Lowry is inscribed "To Adam White with J.W. Lowry's regards 1854."<sup>10</sup>

The Miss Lowry who married Varley was his second wife, Delvalle (born c. 1797-1800), the daughter of Varley's friend Wilson Lowry (1762-1824) and his second wife Rebecca Delvalle (1761-1848) whom he married in 1796. Delvalle married Varley in 1825. The Blake connection was strengthened by the fact that Wilson Lowry had engraved a number of the plates for Abraham Rees' *The Cyclopaedia*, 1820, for which Blake also executed seven plates, one page being made up of engravings by both artists.<sup>11</sup>

The mid nineteenth-century owner of this design was Sir Joseph Nöel Paton, RSA (1821-1901); it was probably he who added the inscription about the technique of the print. Through his father he became an admirer of Blake's work, both his poetry and his designs, at an early age, and some of this influence remained with him throughout his life. As he said, his father taught him to "put the *thought before the thing*, and encouraged me

in perpetual scribbles at *subjects*, instead of obliging me to copy *objects*." Even a late work like *Ezekiel* of 1889-91 still reflects the influence of Blake both in the pose, close to that of the *Dance of Albion*, and in the bearded old man type used for *Ezekiel*.<sup>12</sup> In 1845 Paton won a premium for the competition for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament and in 1847 and 1849 came his two large pictures of fairy subjects, the works for which he is probably best known, *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania* and *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania*, both now in the National Gallery of Scotland. He also painted such subjects as *The Spirit of Religion* (for the Houses of Parliament) and the *Pursuit of Pleasure* of 1855. He became an Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1847 and a full member in 1850. He was appointed Her Majesty's Limner for Scotland in 1865 and was knighted in 1867. He also published two volumes of verse. He knew Millais (an associate of the Rossettis in Preraaphaelite days), Ruskin and the brothers David and William Bell Scott, these being further links with the circle of Blake admirers in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is nice to be able to identify at least one work by Blake that he owned.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Wemyss of Sotheby's, London, kindly informed me about this work, allowed me to inspect it, and supplied the photograph.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1981) 134, no. 260 6. References to this catalogue in the rest of this article will be given in the form "B260 6."

<sup>3</sup> Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983) 25 no. 1B, 32 no. 2E, and 44 no. 1B, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Viscomi, "The Myth of Commissioned Illuminated Books: George Romney, Isaac D'Israeli, and 'ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY' designs . . . of Blake's," *Blake* 23 (1989): 72n38; Martin Butlin and Ted Gott, *William Blake in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria* (National Gallery of Victoria, 1989) 110-11, both works reproduced in color.

<sup>5</sup> There is an old color reproduction of 262 4 in Laurence Binyon, *The Engraved*



*Designs of William Blake* (London and New York: Benn Press, 1926) pl. 49, which can be compared with B265 in the Tate Gallery, or the color reproduction of B265 (pl. 338) can be compared with B262 4 in the British Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Butlin, "The Evolution of Blake's Large Color Prints of 1795," in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon* (Providence, RI: Brown UP, 1969) 114-15.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Butlin, "A Newly Discovered Watermark and a Visionary's Way with his Dates," *Blake* 15 (1982): 101-03; Martin Butlin, "Paintings and Drawings of William Blake: Some Minor Additions," *Blake* 17 (1984): 159; Martin Butlin, *Tate Gallery Collections: Volume Five: William Blake 1757-1827* (London: Tate Gallery, 1990) 83, 90 no. 28, and 92 no. 29.

<sup>8</sup> G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977) 85-86 and 420. In addition, Viscomi has kindly let me know of his conclusions concerning these copies, to be set out in his forthcoming book. Incidentally, the two designs from the second copy of the Large Book of Designs in the Tate Gallery, B264 and 265, also have framing lines similar to those that characterize the second copy of the Small Book of Designs.

<sup>9</sup> Bentley 357.

<sup>10</sup> Essick 204, no. 4M.

<sup>11</sup> Essick 207-08. For help in unravelling the family relationships of the Varleys and the Lowrys I am indebted to my former colleague Anne Lyles; see also C. M. Kauffman, *John Varley (1778-1842)* (London: Batsford and Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984) 58 and 132.

<sup>12</sup> For this particular work, and Sir Noël Paton in general, see David and Francina Irwin, *Scottish Painting at Home and Abroad 1700-1900* (London: Faber, 1975) 288-95; see also the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

## Two Newly Identified Sketches for Thomas Commin's *An Elegy* and Further Rediscovered Drawings of the 1780s

Martin Butlin



1. Frontispiece to Thomas Commin's *An Elegy*, 1786. Hand-tinted etching and engraving, 17.3 x 13.8 cm., British Museum, London.

Three typical pen and wash drawings of the 1780's, two on one sheet of paper, have turned up in the United States. Two seem to be related to Thomas Commin's *An Elegy*, while the other appears to be an independent composition.<sup>1</sup>

In my catalogue I listed, as number 98, a "Sketch for Thomas Commin's 'An Elegy,'" the only evidence for which was the fact that it was in possession of Messrs. Robson in 1913.<sup>2</sup> The newly identified sheet of drawings may be this work, but the two drawings are different enough from Blake's finished engraving for the identification to have been easily missed in 1913; if so, there is a further drawing waiting to be discovered.

Blake designed and engraved the frontispiece for Commin's *Elegy*, published in 1786. The engraving itself is inscribed "W. Blake del: & sculp:" (the identification of the final raised letter

is not altogether clear). Below the design are four lines of verse, arranged in two columns:

The shatter'd bark from adverse winds  
Rest in this peaceful haven finds  
And when the storms of life are past  
Hope drops her anchor here at last.

Below is the publisher's imprint: "Published July 1. 1786 by J. Fentum N<sup>o</sup> 78 Corner of Salisbury Street, Strand" (on the British Museum copy the final word is almost lost through the wearing of the paper; it is reconstructed here on the basis of the imprint at the head of the music itself).

The engraved design shows a young man leaping out of an anchored boat towards a young woman and child, presumably his family, awaiting him on the shore; behind are trees and what appears to be a cliff (illus. 1). The design is framed by a border of palm fronds, forming an upright oval. (The British Museum copy is colored by