

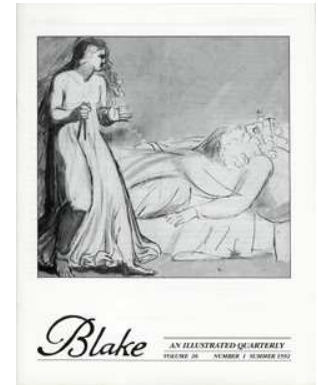
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M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

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

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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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Bentley 357.

¹⁰ Essick 204, no. 4M.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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

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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.¹

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 1913.² 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^o 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



2. Alternative design for Commins's *Elegy* c. 1786. Pen and wash over pencil on paper, cut irregularly, approx 34.0 x 26.5cm. Private collection, U.S.A.

hand, but a relative lack of subtlety, and in particular the way in which the color runs over the edges of the forms in the framing oval, suggests the work of an amateur, not Blake himself.)

The full title of Commins's *Elegy*, at the head of the first of five pages of music (printed on three sheets of paper), is "AN ELEGY/ set to Music by/ THO^s Commins,/ Organist of Penzance, Cornwall./ LONDON./ Printed & sold by J. Fentum, N^o 78, corner Salisbury St., Strand." The verses accompanying the music run (with a long "s" used whenever appropriate):

Sigh not ye winds as passing o'er the
Chambers of the dead ye fly,
Weep not ye dews for these no more
shall ever weep, shall ever sigh.
Why mourn the throbbing heart at rest
How still it lies within the breast
Why mourn since death presents us
peace,
And in the grave our sorrows cease.

[The last two lines are repeated, followed by the first two lines]

The shatter'd Bark from adverse winds
Rest in this peaceful Heaven finds
And when the storms of Life are past
Hope drops her Anchor here at last.

[The last two lines are repeated].



3. Sketch for Commins's *Elegy*, c. 1786 (verso of illus. 2). Pen and wash over pencil on paper, cut irregularly, approx 26.5 x 34.0 cm. Private collection, U.S.A.

It is noticeable that in the song text the "shatter'd Bark" finds rest in a peaceful "Heaven" whereas in the lines below the frontispiece rest is found in a peaceful "Haven"; this last is closer to what Blake illustrates in his engraving.

The recto of the rediscovered sheet of drawings shows a much varied version of the engraved design, in reverse (illus. 2). An older, bearded man gets out of the boat in a considerably less agile fashion, looking apprehensively over his shoulder the while; two angels await him on the shore, and there are trees behind. The composition is again an upright oval, within a roughly drawn outline. The presence of the angels gives a greater feeling of Heaven than in the engraving.

This however is absent from the drawing on the reverse, in which a young man has just finished rowing his boat into a small creek or haven (illus. 3). There are no figures on the shore. Again there are trees behind but of a totally different kind. The composition is an oblong. In the lower right-hand quarter of the drawing there is what may be the beginnings of an oval composition which would have continued to the right over the cut edge of the

existing paper. This drawing presumably preceded the one on the recto, before even the format of the final engraving had been determined.

Another rediscovered drawing in the same American collection, and apparently sharing the same provenance, is similar in style and, like the two drawings here related to Commins's *Elegy*, datable to the early or mid seventeen eighties (illus. 4). It shows three groups of figures in what seems to be Heaven. Three bearded men float in the air just to the left of center, facing the spectator, and another group of three figures, one old, two young, float on the right facing two middle-aged dark-bearded men who soar up from the left. In general character, and in the long flowing robes ending in scroll-like folds, the drawing resembles the group of pen and ink drawings illustrating scenes from the Old Testament, B112-4 in my catalogue.

Various inscriptions together with an attached piece of paper bearing a printed title on the back of the first drawing indicate that it comes from the collection of Henry Cunliffe "of the South Kensington Museum." Two inscriptions in ink are similar in hand-

writing and in the mistakes they embody to inscriptions on other drawings that belonged to Henry Cunliffe, B69, 113, 119^A, 144, 190 and 650. The inscription to the right reads "A Sketch by William Blake. Obit 12 Aug. 1828/For a Biog^y of B. see Cunningham's British Painters." The reference is to Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, first published in 1830 and again, with a more balanced account of Blake, the same year; this is the source for the mistaken date of Blake's death (actually 1827). The inscription to the left reads "Purchased at Sothebys in a Lot/28 Ap. 1862." Again there is a mistake: the anonymous sale, but one long identified as being of works from the collection of Frederick Tatham, took place on the 29th of April.

A further inscription, in pencil and running along the left-hand side of the drawing, reads "From the Collection of Henry Cunliffe/of the South Kensington Museum." To the left of this is a printed title, "A Man getting out of a Boat, two angels standing by him,/trees in the background, *in water-colours*, with a Sketch/in pencil of a man rowing a boat on the back." This can be identified as coming from the catalogue of the sale at Sotheby's on 11 May 1895 of, *inter alia*, "... A Series of Drawings by W. Blake, The Property of the Late Henry Cunliffe, Esq..."; the title is that of lot 105, bought by Keppel for sixteen shillings.

The works from the Cunliffe collection in the 1895 sale comprise, as well as four lots by other artists, 10 lots containing works attributed to Blake, numbers 96 to 105 (plus an india proof impression of the portrait by Linnell of Blake), but none of the more important illuminated books that passed to Henry Cunliffe's nephew Walter, grandfather of the present Lord Cunliffe. With the reappearance of these two sheets of drawings it seems that one can now identify all the drawings in the 1895 sale and, in turn, those purchased by Henry Cunliffe in 1862.



4. "An Encounter in Heaven," c. 1780-85. Pen and wash over pencil on paper, approx 30.5 x 40.5 cm. Private collection, U.S.A.

The 10 lots containing Blakes consist of 13 works in all, 12 drawings and one print, although not every individual work is described and even those that are described are often described in fairly vague terms. Certain lots can be identified straightaway: 96, "A Group of Five Figures (one on Horseback), a town in the background with mountains in the distance, the man and woman in the centre are supposed to represent Blake and his Wife, *a highly finished drawing in indian ink, apparently intended to illustrate some story*" is the finished drawing finally identified in 1978 as an illustration to Robert Bage's *Hermesprong* (B682); 97, "PESTILENCE. An allegorical design in water colours of five figures and corpses" is B190, the version of the much repeated composition later, like the *Hermesprong* illustration, in the collections of William and George Bateson; 100, "The Canterbury Pilgrims, the original drawing by Blake from the picture to reduce the subject to the size of his plate, *in pencil*" is B654, which was bought in at the 1895 sale, eventually passed to the Hon. Merlin Cunliffe and now belongs to the British Museum; 101, "Jane Shore doing Pen-

ance, *highly finished in watercolours, varnished*" is B69, now in the Tate Gallery; 102, "Queen Emma walking over the red hot plough-shares," similarly described, is B59, in a private collection; 103, "The Witch of Endor raising Samuel, *spirited drawing in water-colours*" is B144, now in the New York Public Library; 104, "Good and Evil Spirits contending for the possession of a Child, *an allegorical subject in water-colours*" is, despite the medium given in the catalogue, the version of the large color print of "1795" formerly in the collection of Mr. & Mrs. John Hay Whitney, B324.

This leaves lots 98 and 99, which together with lots 103 and the rediscovered lot 105 were bought by Keppel, apparently the New York dealer Frederick Keppel, whose son David gave B119A, a drawing of *Goliath cursing David*, to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1914; Frederick himself had bequeathed an impression of *The Accusers* to the same museum in October 1913.³ The only other recorded purchase of a Blake by Keppel apart from those at this sale was at Sotheby's on 8 July 1895 when he bought lot 125, *Death on a Pale Horse*,

now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (B517). In addition, in about 1919-20 his firm owned the separate color-printed design from plate 12 of *Urizen* now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (B261 10), and also a copy of the title-page to *Europe*.⁴

Lot 98 is described as "A Sketch in sepia of Angels with spirits of women approaching them; and two other Sketches." Lot 99 was "A Group of Six Greek Warriors, *in pen and ink*, and a fine impression of the Child of Nature, after C. Borckhardt, by W. Blake, *fastened together at the corners*." It is tempting to identify the drawing of eight airborne figures, which seems to have the same provenance as lot 105, definitely bought by Keppel, as the main work in lot 98, the "Sketch in sepia of Angels with the spirits of women approaching them." This allows for the habitual inaccuracy of descriptions in sale catalogues, particularly from as long ago as 1895: at a very quick look two of the figures on the right just could be women!

Two further drawings with typical Cunliffe inscriptions on the back are otherwise unaccounted for in the 1895 sale: B113, *The Elders of Israel receiving the Ten Commandments* (?), and B119A, *Goliath cursing David*, already mentioned as having belonged to David Keppel. This last, again allowing for a fair laxity in description, could, given the round shields carried by three of its six figures, be the "Group of Six Greek Warriors" of lot 99. Assuming one of the undescribed drawings in lot 98 to be B113, *The Elders of Israel* . . . , one further work remains to be discovered and, conveniently, one of the drawings reported in my last article on rediscovered Blakes seems to fit the gap.⁵ This is the sketch for *Joseph's Brethren bowing before him* discovered by David Bindman in Berlin which also, David Bindman tells me, bears the typical Cunliffe inscription "Purchased in a Lot at Sothebys 28 April 1862 HC" together with "A Sketch by William Blake Obit 12 August 1828./In Cunninghams Lives of British Painters Ch.1 Blake"; there is

also an inscription matching the pencil inscription on the drawing for Commins's *Elegy*, "From the collection of Henry Cunliffe of the South Kensington Museum."

It is of course tempting to equate any known drawing one can find with those that one knows to be missing, but at least the total number of works now matches up and, although I have been caught out making similar identifications in the past that have subsequently proved to be inaccurate, it is at least for the present a working hypothesis that we now have all the drawings sold by Henry Cunliffe in 1895. One can also venture further and see how these 12 drawings fit with the only 12 works to have been bought by Toovey in the Frederick Tatham sale held at Sotheby's on 29 April 1862, some of which can quite definitely be shown to have been in Henry Cunliffe's collection. The lots bought by Toovey were as follows: 161, "The Original reduced Drawing of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, from which he [Blake] engraved his plate," lot 100 in 1895, B654; 170, "A Pestilence, and other designs, *in indian ink*," six works in all, of which the named work was lot 97 in 1895, B190; 171, "Queen Emma walking over the red hot Ploughshares, and Jane Shore doing Penance, *both highly finished in colours*," lots 102 and 101 respectively in 1895, B59 and 69; 175, "The Witch of Endor raising the Spirit of Samuel, *in colours*," lot 103 in 1895, B144; 182, "An Allegorical Subject - A Man holding a Child, with a chained demon issuing from a fiery abyss, *highly finished in colours*," lot 104 in 1895, B324; and 184, "A Design, apparently intended in illustration of a tale, *highly finished in indian ink*," lot 96 in 1895, B682. Lot 195 was also bought by Toovey, "Another set" of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* "wanting three plates," the posthumous Copy i still in the Cunliffe collection. The five unidentified works in lot 170, all described as being "*in indian ink*," can therefore be equated with the following five works sold in 1895: 98, "A

Sketch in sepia of Angels . . . and two other Sketches," three works in all; 99, "A Group of Six Greek Warriors, *in pen and ink*," sold with the print of the "Child of Nature"; and 105, "A Man getting out of a Boat . . . *in water-colours*, with a Sketch in pencil of a man rowing a boat on the back." Q.E.D.!

After all this supposition it should be easy enough to say something about "Henry Cunliffe of the South Kensington Museum." But, despite the helpfulness of the present Lord Cunliffe and of Ronald Parkinson and his colleagues at the Victoria and Albert Museum, as the South Kensington Museum is now known, there seems to be very little information. The present Lord Cunliffe's great-great-uncle Henry Cunliffe was born in 1827 and died in 1883, apparently in Germany; he is buried in the family plot at Headly in Surrey. He was, typically for a number of mid nineteenth-century Blake collectors, primarily a bibliophile and left his collection of books to his favorite nephew Walter Cunliffe. Unfortunately, there is no record of a Henry Cunliffe at the V & A either in the diaries of Sir Henry Cole, the famous director from its beginnings until 1873 (but there is mention of an Edward Cunliffe), nor is he mentioned in the *Precis and Board Minutes* between 1863 and 1877. (Just to confuse matters, Sir Francis Philip Cunliffe-Owen, who lived from 1828 until 1894, did work at the Victoria & Albert Museum, having owed his first post in the Science & Art Department to the recommendation of his elder brother Lieutenant Colonel Henry Charles Cunliffe-Owen [1821-67] who, in the course of a mainly military career had been connected with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and was also inspector of Art Schools under the Board of Trade; in 1857 Francis Cunliffe-Owen became deputy general-superintendent at the South Kensington Museum under Sir Henry Cole, in 1860 assistant director, and in 1873, in succession to Cole, full director. In the 1850s and 1860s the Cunliffe-Owens

called themselves Owen, which further distinguishes them from our Henry Cunliffe.⁶)

Two further pen and wash drawings of the 1780s, listed in my catalogue as untraced and not reproduced there, have turned up recently. B139, called *The Bed of Death* and cataloged as untraced since the sale at Christie's on 15 July 1957, has re-emerged and been reproduced in the catalogue for the Christie's sale of 9 July 1991, Lot 86. This has been reproduced and discussed by Robert N. Essick in the last issue of *Blake* 25 (1992) 148, fig. 4. Whether the drawing really shows a death bed seems unlikely, and it is certainly not related, *pace* my catalogue entry, to my numbers B137 verso and 138. (The 1991 Christie's catalogue also reproduces, at lot 85, the Visionary Head of *Jonathan* in its present state; it was previously reproduced, unrestored, in *Blake* following its sale at Christie's on 9 July 1985.⁷)

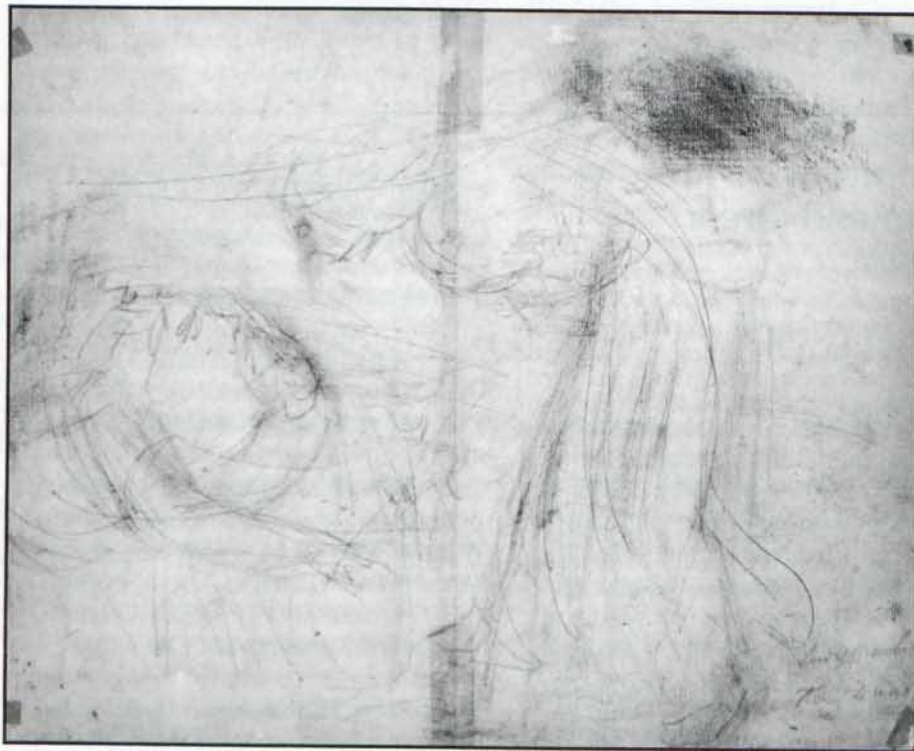
The other rediscovered drawing, *Lady Macbeth approaching the Sleeping Duncan* (illus. 5) is much more exciting.⁸ Its position in my catalogue, as B249, is too late; rather, as hinted at in my entry, it should be placed earlier as one of the pen and wash drawings of about 1785. The full medium is pen and wash over pencil on laid paper watermarked "JWHATMAN." As well as the usual grey wash there is some brown along the draperies down the back of Lady Macbeth and below her left hand. The paper seems to have been trimmed all round, cutting the inscription "Blake," perhaps a signature, in the lower right-hand corner. The drawing illustrates the passage from act II, scene ii of *Macbeth*, where Lady Macbeth describes how

I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miss 'em. Had he not
resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't

This is in fulfillment of Macbeth's suggestion, in act I, scene vii, that he should use the daggers belonging to Duncan's two chamberlains, made drunk by Lady Macbeth, so that it would look as if they had committed



5. "Lady Macbeth and the Sleeping Duncan," c.1785. Pen and grey and brown washes over pencil, on paper, trimmed, 32.7 x 42.6 cm. Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd, London.



6. Verso of "Lady Macbeth and the Sleeping Duncan," c. 1785. Pencil with some brown wash on paper, trimmed, 32.7 x 42.6 cm. Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd, London.

the deed. Blake shows Lady Macbeth with the daggers standing over the sleeping Duncan, who has gone to bed with his crown on.

On the reverse there is a variant in pencil alone of the same composition, inscribed, again in the lower right-hand corner, "Lady Macbeth/King Duncan" (illus. 6). Also on the reverse, with the paper to be seen as an upright with the left-hand edge at the bottom, is a slightly inclined profile facing right, just possibly a study for the profile of Lady Macbeth. On the reverse she stands on the right, leaning over Duncan in a much more threatening manner than on the recto; he lies as before except that his left arm seems to lie across his chest. Pentimenti on the recto show that Lady Macbeth was originally in the same stooping position as on the verso; Blake also drew her in an intermediary position before finally adopting the present upright stance. The drawings therefore are a particularly interesting example of how Blake improvised his compositions. Some of the forms of the recto have

come out on the verso, perhaps because it was drawn with the paper laid on a dirty surface, and some of the brownish wash also appears on the reverse, presumably as the result of an accident.

The drawing, which is listed by William Rossetti as indicated in my entry, seems to be one of the items in lot 165 in the Tatham sale at Sotheby's on 29 April 1862, "Lady Macbeth and Duncan, Angels conducting the Souls of the Just to Paradise, &c. *in indian ink*," four items in all, bought by Palser for thirteen shillings; the lot comes among other drawings that can be identified as pen and wash drawings of the 1780s. The recent history of the drawing is no clearer than was indicated in my entry; all that can be said is that it has recently turned up in the trade. Rossetti's dismissive description, "Not carried far beyond the outline. Ordinary" seems far from the mark. In fact the drawing is one of the most dramatic and boldly drawn of this whole group.

¹ I am indebted to Henry Wemyss of Sotheby's, London, for letting me know of the existence of the drawings in the United States and for letting me have photographs.

² Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1981) 38 no. 98, the engraving repr. pl. 103. In the rest of this article references to my catalogue are given in the form "B98."

³ Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983) 33 no. 3D.

⁴ G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1977) 162.

⁵ Martin Butlin, "Six New Early Drawings by William Blake and a Reattribution," *Blake* 23 (1989) 110-11, repr. fig. 6.

⁶ For the Cunliffe-Owens see the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷ Robert N. Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace 1985," *Blake* 20 (1986) repr. p. 16, fig. 3.

⁸ Andrew Wyld of Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd, told me about the drawing in London, let me examine it and, again, supplied photographs. I am most grateful to my friends among art dealers and auctioneers in keeping me informed about works by Blake as they turn up.

"Empire is no More": Odin and Orc in *America*

Julia M. Wright

Orc appears in a number of Blake's poems, but his character in *America* (1793) is uniquely drawn. A howling, flaming figure in *Europe* (1794) and a chained infant in *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794), the Orc of *America* is described in a wealth of detail that is matched only by *The Four Zoas* (1797).¹ The details that are provided, however, differ. In both *The Four Zoas* and *America*, for instance, Orc claims that his spirit can leave his chained body, but the Orc of *The Four Zoas* represents his spirit as "A Worm compell'd" (80.31), while that of *America* chooses figures of power:

on high my spirit soars;
Sometimes an eagle screaming in the
sky, sometimes a lion,
Stalking upon the mountains, &
sometimes a whale I lash
The raging fathomless abyss, anon a
serpent . . .
On the Canadian wilds I fold. (1.12-17)

These figures have been associated with various sets of symbols of power, as Rodney M. Baine suggests that the shapes are all images of regal power over nature (130), while David V. Erdman identifies some of the animals as revolutionary emblems (259). Although the female later claims that Orc courts her in these shapes, they are quite violent in Orc's speech: the shapes are "screaming," "stalking," "lashing," and, by "folding," encircle and bind, like the serpent of Blake's *Laocoön*. The Orc of *America* thus chooses a diversity of shapes that are not only unbound but associated with aggressive power. This characterization of Orc is reinforced and elaborated through

allusions to Norse mythology that can be used to explore the complexity of this revolutionary figure as he is constructed in *America*.

In his discussion of the first quarter of the Preludium, Harold Bloom writes that "The mythic world suggested is the Northern one of Odin and Thor, the Eddic literature known to Blake through Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* . . . and the poems and translations of Thomas Gray" (118). Bloom emphasizes the references to iron, and his identification of the female as the daughter of a Thor-like smith (118-19), while Erdman finds in the action of the poem an allusion to Paul Henri Mallet's explanation of human sacrifice "as a harvest rite" (251). Both *America* and Blake's notes for his designs for the 1790 edition of Gray's *Poems* indicate a knowledge of Gray's free translation of an Icelandic lay, *The Descent of Odin*, and a familiarity with Norse mythology that extends beyond