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N O T E

J. Deffett Francis: The Swansea Blakes

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suggests it was Fuseli whom Stothard accused when he '... allowed he [Blake] had been misled to extravagances in his art and he knew by whom'. While Fuseli freely admitted that Blake was '... d--d good to steal from', one must agree with Mason that it is difficult to find any direct reference to Blake in Fuseli's work. It would appear that if Fuseli 'stole' from Blake it was a 'painterly' borrowing. For instance, in general Fuseli's colour and tones are very similar to Blake's (cf: *The Four and Twenty Elders*, c.1800-5: Tate, London). More specifically, Fuseli adapts Blake's yellow aura behind a head (cf: *Glad Day*, c. 1780: British Museum) in such a drawing as no. 25 and Blake's scalloped cloud form (cf: *Elohim Creating Adam*, c. 1795: Tate, London) is found in less precise form in nos. 34 and 36. As he confessed, it was colour that eluded Fuseli; and there was none better to turn to than Blake in this field.

No. 4, "Subject from Milton's L'Allegro" (c1780), has a figure of Laughter "not unlike, in spirit and pose" the figure of Laughter in Blake's "Mirth" (c1815). No. 18, "Chriemhild throwing herself on the body of Siegfried, assassinated by Trony" (1815) has a central group "found also at the foot of Blake's title page to *America*" -- a woman embracing a warrior's body. No. 24 is the Aeschylus illustration already mentioned. No. 30, "Vergil, Dante and Geryon" (1811) is very different from Blake's conception in his later Dante illustration. Not much can be made of Blake's following Fuseli here and Tomory points the difference: Fuseli's Geryon is "a *terribilita* image and yet accurately drawn from the text -- Blake's, a creature of gentle deceit and more arbitrarily conceived". No. 36, "Death and Sin bridging the 'Waste' of Chaos and met by Satan on his return from Earth" (c1819-21) also follows Blake: "The same figure of Satan also appears in Blake's *Argument from The Daughters of Albion* of 1793 [the figure springing from the sunflower], and in the top section of the title page to his *America*". That Fuseli follows Blake in this and no. 18 seems to contradict Tomory's assumption that Fuseli was little indebted to Blake for other than "painterly" qualities.

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3. J. Deffett Francis: THE SWANSEA BLAKES

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"Half-a-dozen of William Blake's finest works, which did belong to his wife, will attract attention by reason of their quaintness and beauty. They bear the date 1793." On 20 September 1878, *The Cambrian* reported these items in its list of 155 prints, drawings and watercolours in the newly opened J. Deffett Francis Art Gallery. Below, in the main reading room of the Swansea Public Library, were 4,000 volumes from the same benefactor.

In 1834, at the age of 19, Francis left Swansea to pursue a successful painting career in London. He immediately befriended Frederick Tatham, from whom he acquired a number of Blake's works. Francis knew Tatham well enough to identify him as "the man with the umbrella", subject of Haydon's painting "Waiting for the *Times*", and to qualify W.M. Rossetti's statement that "Swedenborgians, Irvingites, and other extreme sectaries, beset the then youthful custodian of these precious relics [Blake's manuscripts] and persuaded him to make a holocaust of them."¹ In the margin of his copy of Rossetti's edition of Blake, Francis, a bachelor, sardonically commented: "Fredk. Tatham. Why he was a married man! Old enough to leave Sculpture for Water Col[ou]r portraiture"; but he underlined "Irvingites", affirming that it was this sect in particular which had spurred Tatham to a mass burning of Blake's writings.

When Tatham sold the remains of his Blake collection in 1862, many of the miscellaneous drawings were purchased by Mr. Harvey, who seems to have been a dealer. Some of these drawings, listed as Harvey's by W.M. Rossetti in the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, appear to be among those given by Francis to the British Museum.² As Francis was not mentioned in Rossetti's list of owners, it is probable that prior to 1863 the two collectors did not know one another; however, from presentation autographs in Francis's library, it is apparent that by 1865 he was acquainted with Thomas Woolner, Dante Gabriel and W.M. Rossetti, and that they knew him as a collector.

John Deffett Francis's donations to the British Museum are recorded in detail in the manuscript 'Print Room Register'. On 8 November 1873, he deposited 98 items including 7 pencil drawings by Blake. At 58 Francis was planning his retirement from London, and on his return to Swansea in 1876 he gave the town his library and most of those art works he still possessed. In 1876 he sent W.M. Rossetti the "Woe cried the muse" manuscript, to which Rossetti responded with a copy of *Leaves of Grass* newly autographed by Whitman, and by 1878 he had donated to the British Museum Print Room some 1,500 pieces, including 60 executed by Blake. In that year the Swansea Public Library, incorporating the Francis Gallery, was reopened, *The Cambrian* duly recording the proceedings. Francis was appointed Honorary Curator, and in 1890 he printed a catalogue which listed the Blakes as "61-6 America: a Prophecy", "67 'He descended into Hell'", and "68 Michael Angelo (Buonarroti)".³ Before he died in 1901 Francis had given 8,000 books and 2,500 works of art to the town of Swansea. The library was general enough to be useful, but the prints, drawings, engravings and watercolours, selected by Francis to instruct in method as well as to please the eye, were too sophisticated to have popular appeal, and sunk into storage and oblivion.

In 1913 the Blakes were included in a limited exhibition as numbers 557: "MICHAEL ANGELO", 561-6: "AMERICA: A PROPHECY", and 567: "He Descended into Hell".⁴ The Blakes have not been publicly exhibited since, and are now with the rest of the collection in the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.

Francis's catalogue descriptions of his Blakes are inaccurate and incomplete. "Michael Angelo" is a trimmed and mounted engraving made

for Fuseli's *Lectures on Painting*, 1801. "He descended into Hell" is a misnomer for the top design, trimmed and mounted, of *Jerusalem*, plate 35, printed in reddish-brown ink.⁵ Unfortunately, the lower two-thirds of this plate has not been preserved, and as this fragment is stuck to its mounting its verso cannot be examined. The title given by Francis may be a misconstruction of the last line of text on plate 35: "So spoke the voice from the Furnaces, descending into Non-Entity". The six plates called "America: a Prophecy" are *America*, plates ii, 3, and 13; and *Europe*, plates 3, 4, and 9. These plates exhibit no textual variants from known copies, but *America*, ii and 3 are unique as loose proofs. All are printed in reddish-brown ink, but very lightly, and the versos are uniformly blank. *America*, ii, is the title-page and source of *The Cambrian's* reported date, 1793; *America*, 3, contains the only watermark, "J WHATMAN 1831", indicating posthumous printing. Francis has autographed the verso of *Europe*, 3, and given the date of acquisition: "J Deffett Francis 1834". Five of the plates are the normal 24 x 17 cm., but *America*, 13, is 24 x 17.6 cm. Unlike many of the British Museum holdings, none of the Swansea Blakes has been signed by the familiar "FT", Frederick Tatham, but they are embossed with the recognized collector's seal of their owner, John Deffett Francis.⁶

¹W.M. Rossetti, introd. to *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, ed. W.M. Rossetti (London, 1874), p. lvii.

²I acknowledge my debt to Martin Butlin for this information. For other details I am indebted to Professor G.E. Bentley, Jr., to David V. Erdman, and to Mr. J. Bunt, Curator, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.

³J. Deffett Francis, *The "Deffett Francis" Collection of Fine-Art Works in the Galleries of the Swansea Public Library* (Swansea, 1890), p. 3.

⁴W. Grant Murray, *Catalogue of the Selected Collection of Engravings, Etchings, Lithographs, Woodcuts, Water-Colours and Drawings* [Swansea, 1913], pp. 34-5.

⁵Plate numbers correspond to those of G. Keynes and E. Wolf 2nd, *William Blake's Illuminated Books: A Census* (New York, 1953).

⁶Louis Fagan, *Collectors' Marks* (London, 1883), no. 295.

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