

# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

N O T E

## Wordsworth's First Acquaintance with Blake's Poetry

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[?0], a good price by the Sale's standards. The anonymous recorder of the price in the "Queen's Hotel" copy (see Correspondence, II, pp. 873-74) also wrote between "and six others" (the conclusion of the description) and "12" (the total number of items) the word "pamphlets." While the Garth Wilkinson volume was issued cloth-bound, and I know no information suggesting that it was issued otherwise, a casual use of the term pamphlet could have included this small book. The catalogue entry must on present evidence be regarded as a short title for the copy of the Garth Wilkinson edition that prompted Quillinan's uninspired but usefully evocative criticism in 1848. (Information on the annotations kindly provided by Professor Betz from G. G. Wordsworth's transcripts in a copy of the Catalogue at Dove Cottage. Keynes, A Bibliography of William Blake, New York, 1921, p. 264, quotes C. J. Wilkinson, Memoir of J. J. Garth Wilkinson, London, 1911, London, 1911, p. 25: "The edition, a thin cloth-bound octavo, was published jointly by Pickering and Newbery on July 9, 1839." Professor Bentley tells me of his copy of the volume that "even though it is in hard covers, its height and thickness are such that 'pamphlet' might be an appropriate description.")

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## 2. Wordsworth's First Acquaintance With Blake's

### Poetry

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It is relatively well known that William Wordsworth's Commonplace Book (Dove Cottage MS. Prose 31) contains four of Blake's early poems: "Holy Thursday" and "Laughing Song" from the Songs of Innocence, "The Tyger" from the Songs of Experience, and "I love the jocund dance" from Poetical Sketches.<sup>1</sup> One might have hoped to discover that these transcripts had been taken directly from the rare primary sources, or indirectly from these sources through the agency of Southey, Lamb, or Crabb Robinson. But Mary Moorman, in an interesting article on "Wordsworth's Commonplace Book" in the September 1957 issue of Notes and Queries (pp. 400-405), has pointed out that the poems probably have been taken from Benjamin Heath Malkin's A Father's Memoir of his Child (1806), where six of Blake's short poems were printed for the first time.<sup>2</sup> G. E. Bentley, Jr., in Blake Records, has recently confirmed the Malkin source of the entries.<sup>3</sup>

However, the question of when the poems were read and transcribed into the Commonplace Book still remains to be settled. F. W. Bateson, in Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation (second edition, 1956), writes that the entries were made "in or about 1804."<sup>4</sup> He has perhaps been misled by the presence, several pages before the Blake poems, of seven pages of extracts (leaves 38 recto to 41 recto) from Sir John Barrow's Travels in China; at the top of leaf 38 recto, above the title of the



book, the Poet's grandson Gordon Graham Wordsworth has written: "First Published in 1804." But this is not to say that the Wordsworths read the book when it was first published; and as Mrs. Moorman has established Malkin as the source of the verses, a date before 1806 is almost impossible.

Mrs. Moorman does not attempt to specify the date of the Blake entries, although in another context she points out that what appears to be the final entry in the Commonplace Book is a part of Wordsworth's June 5, 1808, letter to Francis Wrangham.<sup>5</sup> This narrows the probable date of the Blake transcripts to a period of approximately two years.

It now appears that the four Blake entries can be placed with some certainty within the period of six and one-half months between February 12, 1807 and August 25, 1807. Within this period, the most likely dates of transcription seem to be from mid-March to mid-April, and from mid-May to June 10.

On February 15, 1807, from the temporary home of the Wordsworths at Coleorton, Dorothy wrote to Lady Beaumont that "We received the Books a week ago" which had been lent by the Beaumonts, and that "I shall next begin with Barrow's Travels."<sup>6</sup> Most and probably all of the literary extracts in the Commonplace Book seem likely to have been made at William's request, so that he might again consult passages or poems from books which he did not then own. As William would have needed to read the book first, Mary Wordsworth's seven extracts from Barrow were probably made after Dorothy's reading, and could not have been made earlier than two or three days before it. The Barrow entries are followed by John Mayne's poem "Logan Braes" (leaves 41 verso-42 recto) in the hand of Sara Hutchinson, a brief passage "From Aristotle's Synopsis of the virtues and vices" (leaf 42 recto) in Dorothy's hand, and excerpts from J. L. Buchanan's Travels in the Western Hebrides (leaves 42 recto-43 verso) in William's hand. Only then come Blake's "Holy Thursday" (leaf 43 verso), "Laughing Song" (leaf 44 recto), and the first quatrain of "The Tyger" (leaf 44 recto) in William's hand, followed by the rest of "The Tyger" (leaf 44 verso) and "I love the jocund dance" (leaf 45 recto) in Mary's hand. If one considers the time necessary for William to have read the works mentioned earlier, as well as other books quite probably read but not represented in the Commonplace Book (see Dorothy's letter to Lady Beaumont for three possibilities), a date earlier than mid-March for the Blake entries seems unlikely.

On August 25, 1807, William and Mary set out for a short stay at Eusemere at the foot of Ullswater. This would have been the Poet's first opportunity to see Thomas Wilkinson the Quaker poet, who lived nearby, since before the Wordsworths had moved to Coleorton during the previous autumn. During November 1806, when already at Coleorton, Wordsworth had written to Wilkinson:

I was prevented by a most severe cold from seeing you  
as I intended ... what shall I say in apology for your



Journal, which is now locked up with my manuscripts at Grasmere ... unluckily, most unluckily, in the hurry of departure I forgot it, together with two of my own manuscripts which were along with it ... it may be procured, for I can write to Grasmere to that effect; it is there in perfect safety .... If you do not want it, it is in a place where it can take no injury, and I may have the pleasure of delivering it to you myself in the spring.<sup>7</sup>

The "Journal" mentioned is the Scottish section of Wilkinson's Tours to the British Mountains, parts of which circulated in manuscript long before actual publication in 1824. Wordsworth had seen this section of the journal before 1806; he had based the final lines of "The Solitary Reaper," composed on November 5, 1805, upon a short passage from it. This very passage ("Pass'd by a Female who was reaping alone, she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle, the sweetest human Voice I ever heard/.<sup>7</sup> Her strains were tenderly melancholy and felt delicious long after they were heard no more") has been entered retrospectively by Wordsworth at the top of leaf 45 verso, directly after the Blake entries. It is followed by a second passage from Wilkinson which Wordsworth draws upon in The Excursion, IV, 489-504.<sup>8</sup> There is no indication that Wilkinson asked for the immediate return of his manuscript, and it would not have been in character; but Wordsworth would surely have taken the first opportunity to return the overdue loan in person. Since the manuscript had been in Grasmere, Wordsworth would have entered these passages in his Commonplace Book between the family's return to Grasmere during July 1807 and the departure for Eusemere on August 25.

How did Wordsworth encounter A Father's Memoir of his Child? It may have been through Dorothy Wordsworth's friend, Catherine Clarkson. On August 26 (or 27), 1809, Dorothy wrote to Mrs. Clarkson:

We saw in the paper the other day that Mr. Malkin is elected to the Mastership of Bury School. I am afraid he will not fill the place so well as the late Master for I am told he is a coxcomb, and indeed it is plain enough from the manner in which that account of his Son is written.<sup>9</sup>

Dorothy seems to assume that Catherine Clarkson also is familiar with the book, and indeed the Clarksons lived in Bury St. Edmonds. If this is the source, then the book might have come ultimately from Henry Crabb Robinson. Crabb Robinson indicates that prior to his attendance at Blake's 1809 exhibition he had encountered Blake's work only through Malkin,<sup>10</sup> and while not yet personally acquainted with the Wordsworths, he had been on terms of close friendship with Catherine Clarkson for some time.

However, a more likely source seems to be the Beaumonts, either through their library at Coleorton or through books sent on personal loan.



While there is no evidence that the Wordsworths were receiving books from the Clarksons during this period, they definitely were receiving books from the Beaumonts.<sup>11</sup> If Malkin's book came to them through the Beaumonts, then in line with the limitations already established, the Blake entries were probably made within either of two short periods: from mid-March to mid-April, when Wordsworth left Coleorton for London; and from mid-May, when Wordsworth returned to Coleorton, to June 10, when the family left Coleorton for an extended journey which was to take them at last back to Grasmere.

Important questions remain to be answered. Why did Wordsworth select these poems while omitting the other two printed by Malkin: "The Divine Image" and "How sweet I roam'd"? Did Wordsworth have in mind the possibility of publishing the poems himself in a collection of poetry he appears to have contemplated making at this time?<sup>12</sup> If he had actually done so, this would quite possibly have introduced Blake's poetry to a wider audience than it ever enjoyed during his lifetime. And what influence, if any, did Wordsworth's awareness of these poems have on his own work?

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<sup>11</sup>I am grateful for encouragement and advice given by Professors Morton D. Paley, Mark L. Reed, and David V. Erdman; and I wish to thank the Trustees of Dove Cottage for permission to examine MS. Prose 31. Wordsworth's Commonplace Book is complicated by the confusion of hands which so often plagues scholars working on Wordsworth manuscripts, and which has led to frequent examples of mis-attribution in the past. While the drafts of Wordsworth's verse notebooks have often not been entered chronologically, with the possible exception of pasted-in entries there seems almost always to be a steady chronological progression in the Commonplace Book entries.

Leaf numbers as given above refer only to the original leaves of the notebook, not to the slips and full leaves which have been pasted to those original leaves. All material cited here has been written directly on original leaves.

Entries in the notebook run from both ends toward the middle. All entries of a primarily literary interest are at one end. The few pages with entries at the other end are entirely taken up with household lists, accounts, medical remedies, and a page of notes by Dorothy about the infant language and activities of John, Wordsworth's first son, born in 1803.

My disagreement with F. W. Bateson's suggestion that Wordsworth may well have encountered some of Blake's poems as early as 1797 will be seen from the title of this note; although, of course, evidence to that effect may someday be discovered. Mr. Bateson's statement (pp. 133-134), that "Susan is one of the country girls in 'Laughing Song' and it may not be simply a coincidence that Wordsworth's poem is 'The Reverie of Poor Susan,'" is surprising. There is no indication that Wordsworth's



lack of invention in choosing names, to which Mr. Bateson alludes, ever extended this far. In addition, the title itself is a translation or Bürger's "Das Arme Süßchens Traum," a poem which Wordsworth praised (see Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1770-1803, p. 428), although it must be added that when first published the poem was called only "Poor Susan."

<sup>2</sup>Moorman, "Wordsworth's Commonplace Book," p. 403.

<sup>3</sup>G. E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records (Oxford, 1969), p. 430n.

<sup>4</sup>Bateson, Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation (London, 1956), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Moorman, "Wordsworth's Commonplace Book," p. 400. The entire letter appears in The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, I, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman (Oxford, 1969), pp. 246-251.

<sup>6</sup>Letters: The Middle Years, I, p. 133. The Wordsworths arrived at Coleorton in Leicestershire at the beginning of November, 1806, and did not depart to return to Grasmere until June 10, 1807. They stayed in the Coleorton farm house as the guests of Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth's patron, while the Beaumonts themselves spent most of this period in London. Sara Hutchinson was at Coleorton from the beginning until mid-April; while Coleridge and his son Hartley arrived on December 21 and also remained until mid-April. It is certainly possible that Coleridge may have seen A Father's Memoir, with its Blake verses, during this stay.

<sup>7</sup>Letters: The Middle Years, I, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup>The first passage appears in Thomas Wilkinson, Tours to the British Mountains, with the Descriptive Poems of Lowther, and Emont Vale (London, 1824), p. 12. The second passage, also clearly from the Scottish tour, never appeared in the published version.

<sup>9</sup>Letters: The Middle Years, I, p. 368.

<sup>10</sup>See Crabb Robinson's account of this in Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc., being Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. Edith J. Morley (Manchester, 1922), pp. 17-19.

<sup>11</sup>See Letters: The Middle Years, I, pp. 129, 133, and 186. Of course, they may have first heard of the book from Catherine Clarkson, and may have asked the Beaumonts for the book or chosen it from the library at Coleorton for that reason.



<sup>12</sup> The only evidence for this proposed collection is Mary Lamb's comment, in a letter written to Mrs. Clarkson on December 25, 1806, that "my brother sometimes threatens to pass his holidays in town hunting over old plays at the Museum to extract passages for a work (a collection of poetry) Mr. Wordsworth intends to publish." The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, II, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935), p. 33.

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#### MINUTE PARTICULARS

##### 1. BLAKE ITEMS IN THE LIBRARY OF ISAAC REED

A glance through Bibliotheca Reediana (London, 1807), the sale catalogue of the library of Isaac Reed, reveals that gentleman as a bookbuyer with interests far outside his own profession of theater history. He was in fact a kind of bookstall omnivore. It is therefore not surprising that, as a friend of William Hayley and George Romney, Reed left two works by William Blake among the possessions to be auctioned after his death.

In their Blake Bibliography, Professors Bentley and Nurmi list one of these, but inaccurately (see item 431). "Blake's Poetical Sketches--1783" appears in the auction catalogue but as lot 6577 and on page 302, not as the bibliographers note. According to the priced catalogue in the Harvard College Library, the Poetical Sketches sold for six shillings sixpence, a respectable price for the sale, on the thirtieth day of the auction, December 5, 1807.

A second Blake item, not listed in Bentley and Nurmi, was sold nine days later among the prints and manuscripts. Lot 8936 (on page 404 of the catalogue) contained an unspecified number of prints including "Designs to a Series of Ballads, by Hayley, engraved by Blake, 2 No. 1802"--clearly Bentley and Nurmi number 375. This reference is the fifth known type-printed allusion to Blake during 1807 (see A Blake Bibliography, p. xvii). The entire lot, with the now very rare "Designs," brought eleven shillings sixpence.

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##### 2. "Blake and Tradition"

I read with great interest the review of Blake and Tradition in your issue of December 15th by Professor Daniel Hughes. In this review Professor Hughes states that Keynes does not agree with my interpreta-