

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

# BLAKE

N O T E

## Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc.: Further Information from Henry Crabb Robinson

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 3, Issue 4, May, 1970, pp. 76-84



An article by G. E. Bentley, Jr. on "Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Blake, and The Seaman's Recorder," forthcoming in the next issue of Studies in Romanticism (IX.1, Winter 1970). should be of special interest in that the article includes six hitherto unknown engravings by Blake.

A new newsletter, THE WORDSWORTH CIRCLE, is being edited by Marilyn Gaull and Charles Mauskopf (Dept. of English, Temple University, Philadelphia, Penn.) The subscription price is three dollars for one year (four issues).

M. Cormack informs us that the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, intends to publish a catalogue of their extensive Blake collection, edited by David Bindman, sometime in the autumn, provisionally to be in early October. It is intended to mark the publication of the catalogue (which will have 72 plates) with an exhibition of their Blake collection, and a small subsidiary exhibition of portraits of Blake.

The Royal Ballet (Touring Section) has revived the ballet Job, based on Blake's designs, and will give six performances of it at Covent Garden this Spring.

And the tabloid Express ran a picture article on London graffiti several months ago, with photographs and comments by passers-by. On a wall in Notting Hill Gate - THE ROAD OF EXCESS LEADS TO THE PALACE OF WISDOM. A "Warehouseman, about forty" says: "...I'm sure it's filth. It's best to look the other way in this district. You're not safe anywhere nowadays." While someone identified as "Irishman who declined to give his name" comments: "If it's true, I'm in the palace of wisdom all right."

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#### NOTES

##### 1. Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc.: Further Information from Henry Crabb Robinson

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A significant link in the literary correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with Edward Quillinan, the widowed son-in-law of revered friend Wordsworth, as presented in Edith J. Morley's Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle (London, 1927) is supplied by the following letter at the Dove Cottage Library. These comments from the barrister to Quillinan, who was still an intimate of the poet's household, include revealing remarks on the

medallion of Wordsworth by Leonard Charles Wyon (1826-1891), but rather more excitingly contain Robinson's part of a short but explicit discussion of William Blake hitherto known only on Quillinan's side (Correspondence, pp. 675-77). They thus add a new item to what is properly reckoned "in many ways ... the best contemporary record we have of Blake."<sup>1</sup> More particularly, they add definition to Robinson's and Wordsworth's opinions of Blake and report amusingly if ambiguously on Charles Lamb's opinion of both Blake and Wordsworth.

A few words on the background of Robinson's statements will provide perspective. The event in which the exchange on Blake originated was a visit paid by Quillinan at Wordsworth's home, Rydal Mount, on 27 July 1848. There Quillinan noticed a parcel of books just arrived from the Poet Laureate's publisher Moxon, and later in the day he wrote to Robinson a letter containing these remarks:

I observed C. Lamb's Letters, & Blake's Poems - & as I was glancing over them for an hour or two, it seemed to me that both publications had the fault of too much. In Lamb's too much (for some may be well enough) of childish fun, or rather that strain at fun which is the trivial imitation of child's fun; - And some of Blake's verses, illustrated in the book you possess, want in this publication the poetry of painting to support them. They seemed to sound very like nonsense-verses, as we read them aloud. Some of them, I say; for others have a real charm in their wildness and oddness. Do not suppose I undervalue the man. I have on the contrary a sort of tenderness for him that makes me disposed perhaps to over-estimate the value of many of his verses.<sup>2</sup>

The diarist's answer was delayed by his travels, but he replied as follows from Bury St. Edmunds on 10 August. His letter, comment on which will be basically confined to portions directly relating to Blake and Wordsworth, is here published with the kind permission of the Dove Cottage Trustees. Superscript letters have been brought down to the line and accompanying subscript periods omitted. Misspellings are reproduced without comment. The dash-like periods with which Robinson habitually closes his sentences are transcribed as points.

Bury St. Edmunds

10th Augt 48

My dear Sir.

It was not forgetfulness of your letter so mu<sup>ch</sup> as of my not having replied to it [tha]t I am to be reproached with: There was time for a rejoinder had the time [time del.] occasion been given.

I have now a cluster of letters to be thankful for.

But it suits suits del. and rewritten the scantiness of my materials to jumble together some notice of all. Tho' indeed the greater portion of what you & Mrs. W: have written calls only for & sometimes admits only of an acknowledgment.

As I was driving in an Omnibus to Hampstead on Saturday I fell in with young Wyon. He told me he was on his road to the North. There was a time when he had wished to have another Sitting from Mr. W: in order to complete his exercise on the poets physiognomy. There is no form of plastic work that I like so much as bas-relief Medallion (Italice Medalone) The small medal certainly fails fails del. as a likeness is a - failure But the expression is pure And the sadness will be understood. The next generation will be delighted with it.<sup>3</sup>

You speak more slightly<sup>4</sup> than I should expected of Blake. Recollect they are not to be considered as works of art. but as fragments of a shattered intellect. Lamb used to call him a "mad Wordsworth" Enquire of Mrs. W: whether she has not a copy of his Catalogue. If she has not, enquire of me hereafter. Many years ago Mr. W: read some poems which I had copied and made a remark on them which I would not repeat to every one. "There is no doubt that this man is mad, but there is something in this madness which I enjoy more than the Sense of W: Sc: or Lord B:--I had lent him when he died the 8vo Edit in 2 Vols: of W. W's poems. They were sent me by his widow with the pencil marginalia which I inked over. He admired W:W: "tho' an atheist" And when I protested against this sentence it was thus supported. "Who ever worships nature denies God, for nature is the Devils work." I succumbed, for he always beat me in argument. He almost went into a fit of rapture at the platonic ode.<sup>5</sup>

I enjoyed our Lincoln trip: It was a mere social enjoyment. I shall continue to accompany the learned body, until I am become quite intolerable And considered as a burthen. I cannot now even learn on such an excursion. Teaching was never by by del. my forte. My single contribution consisted in repeatedly reciting

"How profitless the relics that they they del. we cull!"<sup>6</sup>

&c &c &c

We made among others, a wild trip to Tattershall-Castle and Boston Stump Stump repeated. The R:R: Comp: treated us with the journey over an unfinished road in iron sand trucks. And gave us a luncheon to boot. We had bishops deans lords & baronets And I enjoyed the excursion mightily. I shall stay here about a month. And how spend sic the other idle months will depend on accidents. I had meant to go to Germany, but really the uncertain, perhaps perilous state of the country is a sufficient reason for abandoning the scheme: As to France; I have really no inclination whatever to go thither again. I mean in a few days to go to Playford.<sup>7</sup> And that journey will I trust supply materials for a short letter to Mrs. Wordsworth. You will have

seen Mrs. Reid by this time.<sup>8</sup> her great worth lies in her perfect disinterestedness & great benevolence rather than in the judgement which directs that benevolence. When you fall in with her, just say I am here. She may favor me with a line. Indeed I am looking for one. To my dear friends at Rydal Mount The Miss Qus: Miss M: Mrs. D & Mrs. F & Lady R: The Doctor<sup>9</sup> &c &c &c ... my Kind regards

Most truly yours

H. C. Robinson

E. Quillinan Esqr

Quillinan apparently completed the exchange on Blake in his response of 12 August, of which it is sufficient to note that the writer denies having spoken slightly of Blake, one of his "pet spoiled children of genius." Robinson's more valuable comments are of course in large part variants of anecdotes or information recorded in hitherto published writings of the diarist. His remark that Blake "always beat" him in argument, however, although possibly intended to convey no more than "beat down," implies a recollection of Blake as more effective in rational dispute than he elsewhere acknowledges: His usual explanation of his failures to explain himself to, or convince, the poet, such as "I tried to twist this passage into a sense corresponding with Blake's own theories, but failed," or, "Objections were seldom of any use,"<sup>10</sup> is the poet's singularity. Robinson's less ambiguous pronouncement on Blake's sanity, for all its suggestions of cataclysmic historiography, provides a new confirmation of the barrister's basic attitude on this subject as later reported, with concern, by Gilchrist: "Among those who think Blake to have been an 'insane man of genius' or at any rate a victim of monomania, [Robinson] is the only one to think so of all I have met with who actually knew anything of him."<sup>11</sup> Earlier remarks by Robinson on the subject were not uniformly unqualified--he told Dorothy Wordsworth in 1826, for example, that Blake "will interest you ... whatever character you give to his mind"; in 1836 he reassured Samuel Palmer that "in calling Blake insane I was not repeating the commonplace declamation against him."<sup>12</sup> Here he apparently settles conclusively on a description that fixes the pattern for the phrasing of his 1852 Reminiscences, on which Gilchrist's description of Robinson evidently draws in turn, where Blake is again described as an "insane man of genius" and victim of "that form of insanity or lunacy called Monomania."<sup>13</sup>

The immediate sequel of these comments in the 1852 Reminiscences is a repetition, again in phrasing almost identical to that of the 1848 letter, of Wordsworth's pronouncement upon Blake to Robinson after "reading" of a number of the poems: "There is no doubt this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron or Walter Scott!"<sup>14</sup> Wordsworth's alleged comment calls for scrutiny. Possibly it is reported accurately, but it differs radically from other of his comments on Byron's own mental condition. On 18 April 1816 the poet wrote

bluntly to John Scott that Byron was "insane; and will probably end his career in a mad-house."<sup>15</sup> Earlier, on 24 May 1812, he is recorded in Robinson's Diary as remarking that he believed Byron "somewhat cracked." This comment, however, accompanied another of the same day, when, upon hearing Robinson read some of Blake's poems, Wordsworth said that he "considered Blake as having the elements of poetry a thousand times more than either Byron or Scott."<sup>16</sup> In the absence of further evidence, it seems probable that this incident is the actual basis of the 1848-1852 recollection. Robinson's comment to Quillinan may thus represent a casual but, in the event, decisive misformulation of a recollection of an occasion "many years ago"--on 24 May 1812--when Wordsworth in fact expressed appreciation of Blake's powers and doubts of the sanity of Byron.

Wordsworth, whom Blake regarded as "the only poet of the age," and of whose Ode Blake "most enjoyed" the parts that Robinson "least" liked or comprehended, had probably known all of the poems of Blake's printed by Malkin in A Father's Memoir of His Child (1806) by 25 August 1807.<sup>17</sup> and whether Wordsworth read or listened on 24 May 1812, Robinson then possessed transcripts of at least nineteen poems or excerpts from Blake, of which sixteen had not appeared in Malkin.<sup>18</sup> It would thus be inappropriate, in view of the possible extent of Wordsworth's contact with Blake's work by this date, to overlook a last anecdote bearing on Wordsworth's opinions of Blake's mental balance, Gilchrist's rather vague report that he "spake in private of the Songs of Innocence and Experience ... as 'undoubtedly the production of insane genius' ... but as to him more significant than the works of many a famous poet."<sup>19</sup> Gilchrist immediately afterward cites Robinson as the source of his repetition of the late story of Wordsworth on Blake's madness, and thus seems to distinguish the diarist from his source for this previous quotation. But the phrasing of the undocumented quotation is so Robinsonian that it must nonetheless be regarded on present evidence as most likely derivative from Robinson--possibly ultimately from the same events of 24 May 1812. The record in any event is hearsay. The case for Wordsworth's having termed Blake insane would appear to stand unproven.

Lamb's reported comment on Blake, perhaps the earliest direct suggestion, facetious or otherwise, by a critic of resemblances between the minds or purposes of Blake and Wordsworth, might add a minute, speculative measure to the other side of the balance. To characterize Blake as a "mad Wordsworth" is of course to characterize Wordsworth as well, and not necessarily to his praise: The positive qualities of the Wordsworthian sanity remain wickedly undefined. One readily recalls Lamb's irony when, in 1808, he understood remarks of the poet to be a claim of ability to write like Shakespeare if he "had a mind": "It is clear, then, nothing is wanting but the mind."<sup>20</sup> One might also be tempted to imagine Lamb (who died in 1834) responding, long before Robinson's account to Quillinan, to a conversational report that Wordsworth regarded Blake as a madman with a remark like "So he is--a mad Wordsworth!"

Whether a copy of the Descriptive Catalogue, of which Robinson had purchased four copies in 1809 and perhaps received another copy as a gift from Miss Denman in 1842, was either already at Rydal Mount or later sent to Mary Wordsworth, is uncertain. No surviving copy is known, in any case, to have belonged to the Wordsworths. The trail possibly ends in another Catalogue, of the Sale of the Rydal Mount Library in July 1859, in which lot 635, sold on 21 July, is described as containing "Sundry Gallery Guides, etc."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. E. Bentley, Jr., in G. E. Bentley, Jr., and M. K. Nurmi, A Blake Bibliography (Minneapolis, 1964), p. 9. For valuable assistance and advice in the preparation of this note I am grateful to Professor Paul F. Betz, Professor Bentley, and Mr. John Creasey, Deputy Librarian of the Dr. Williams Library.

<sup>2</sup>T. N. Talfourd's Final Memorials of Charles Lamb, dedicated to Wordsworth, was published by Moxon 22 July 1848 (London Times of 17 and 30 July). Robinson's Diary shows that he read the book between 24 July and 5 August. As "Blake's Poems" lacked pictorial embellishment, Quillinan's reference is plainly to the edition of Songs of Innocence and of Experience of J. J. Garth Wilkinson published by Pickering and Newbery in 1839, the only unillustrated collection then extant of verses of Blake's of which an illustrated collection was also extant. Robinson had met Wilkinson on 16 April 1848, and by 27 April had received from him a copy of his edition of Blake and ordered more from Moxon. His Diary records four further meetings in May and June. The "book you possess" was probably Robinson's copy of the Songs, Keynes and Wolf copy Z, apparently purchased from Blake 18 February 1826. Robinson also owned copies of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, pl. 21-24 (K), Visions of the Daughters of Albion (O), and America (D). Probably all were acquired from Blake, and the first two were certainly, the last probably, in Robinson's possession at this time. (Geoffrey Keynes and Edwin Wolf 2nd, William Blake's Illuminated Books, New York, 1953, pp. 32, 39, 65; information from Professor Bentley derived primarily from John Pearson Catalogue no. 62, ?1886, item 70. See also note 18 below.) Robinson possibly received another copy of Songs from Miss Denman on 1 Oct 1842. See E. J. Morley, ed., Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers (London, 1938), p. 625. (The phrasing of his 1848 references to the Garth Wilkinson volume does not suggest earlier familiarity with the book.)

<sup>3</sup>Robinson had written to Wordsworth on 18 April 1847 to arrange a sitting for Wyon, who made a pencil and chalk drawing of the poet on 21 April. Wordsworth sat again on 26 April for the model of his head on which Wyon based the profile medal which he cast in early 1848. Robinson ordered two silver medals. During the second sitting Wordsworth was called from the room to hear bad news about the health of his daughter Mrs. Quillinan, who died on 9 July. Wyon called at Rydal Mount probably on 9 or 10 August. See Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, pp. 664-65, 674; Correspondence, II, pp. 662, 677; Francis Blanchard, Portraits

of Wordsworth (Ithaca, 1959), pp. 18, 99-100, 173-74, plates 30a, 30b.

<sup>4</sup>"Slightingly" underlined and annotated by Quillinan in pencil: "as usual a mistake of friend Crabbe's."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>On the loan of Wordsworth's Poems (1815) see E. J. Morley, ed., Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc. (Manchester and London, 1922), p. 24. This letter confirms Erdman's conjecture (The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, New York, 1965, p. 802) that the inking-over was done by Robinson. Blake's most direct comments (apart from his marginalia) on Wordsworth as a worshipper of Nature and the voice of the Devil appear in Robinson's Diary under the dates of 24 December 1825 and 18 February and 12 May 1826. Robinson wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth about Blake's views of her brother as an atheist in February 1826 (see Blake, Coleridge, etc., pp. 14-16). He read the Ode to Blake on 24 December 1826, probably the occasion upon which Blake responded to the passage "But there's a tree..." with almost "hysterical rapture" (*ibid.*, pp. 15, 23).

<sup>6</sup>Wordsworth, "Roman Antiquities," l. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Residence of Catherine Clarkson.

<sup>8</sup>See Correspondence, II, pp. 674-77.

<sup>9</sup>Jemima and Rotha Quillinan; Miss Martineau; Mrs. John Davy; Mrs. Fletcher; Lady Richardson; probably Doctor Christopher Wordsworth, Jr.

<sup>10</sup>Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, p. 327; Blake, Coleridge, etc., p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Gilchrist, The Life of William Blake (London and Cambridge, 1863), I, 338.

<sup>12</sup>Blake, Coleridge, etc., p. 14; Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, p. 498.

<sup>13</sup>Blake, Coleridge, etc., p. 18. Robinson, commenting on Gilchrist's biography on 11 November 1863, a few days after its publication, adds a remark on "one of Blake's coloured drawings, which was headed America": "When I attempted to read it some years since I thought it Sheer--Madness." (Letter to Mrs. F. W. Fields, Osborn Collection, Yale University Library; quoted with permission of the owner and Professor Bentley, who called my attention to Robinson's comment.) As early as 1810, in his essay on the poet for the Vaterländisches Museum, he had characterized Blake (whom he met on 10 December 1825), as demonstrating "the union of genius and madness." (See K. A. Esdaile, "An Early Appreciation of William Blake," The Library, V, 1914, p. 236: Mrs. Esdaile's re-translation from the German.)

<sup>14</sup> Blake, Coleridge, [etc.], p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest de Selincourt, ed., The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Middle Years (Oxford, 1937), p. 734. A more temperate view of Byron by Wordsworth is recorded in Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, pp. 486-87, but is too late (1836) to bear upon the present discussion.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> Blake, Coleridge, [etc.], p. 15; Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, pp. 330-31; Paul F. Betz, "Wordsworth's First Acquaintance with Blake's Poetry," elsewhere in this issue of Blake Newsletter. Poems of Blake's published in Malkin are "Laughing Song," "Holy Thursday" (Innocence), "The Divine Image," "How sweet I roamed," "I love the jocund dance," "The Tiger."

<sup>18</sup> Transcripts of or from poems not in Malkin included at least: "To the Muses," "Night," "The Little Black Boy," "The Chimney Sweeper" (Innocence), "A Dream," "The Sunflower," "Introduction" (Experience), "Earth's Answer," "The Garden of Love," "A Little Boy Lost," "The Poison Tree," "The Sick Rose," "The Human Abstract," the "Dedication" of the designs for Blair's Grave (1808), America, pl. 10, ll. 5-10, and Europe, pl. 1, ll. 12-15. Robinson's 1810 Vaterländisches Museum article (see note 13 above) had included one poem not among these transcripts, "Introduction" (Innocence); and Robinson also possessed transcripts from the Exhibition Advertisement (1809): See Esdaile, pp. 224-56. Mrs. Esdaile saw the transcripts which she describes at the Dr. Williams Library. An "old letter" upon which Robinson copied the excerpts from America, Europe, and the Advertisement seems to have disappeared since Mrs. Esdaile's examination. The lyric transcripts are in Bundle 1.VI.29 of the Robinson papers. I am indebted to Professor Bentley and Mr. John Creasey for information of these materials. Mr. Creasey has advised me, since the completion of this note, that "Introduction" (Innocence) is also found among a set of transcripts, otherwise containing no poems of Blake's not in Malkin or the copies already cited, in a pocket book of Robinson's also in the Dr. Williams Library.

<sup>19</sup> Gilchrist, I, pp. 17-2.

<sup>20</sup> E. V. Lucas, ed., The Letters of Charles Lamb, to Which Are Added Those of His Sister Mary Lamb (London, 1935), II, p. 51. See also Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, pp. 466-67.

<sup>21</sup> Blake, Coleridge, [etc.], p. 17; Henry Crabb Robinson on Books, p. 625. For the Catalogue see Transactions of the Wordsworth Society, VI [1884], pp. 195-257. The same catalogue offers as one of the twelve items in lot 523 "Songs of Innocence, by W. Blake." The lot was sold for £ 1/18

[?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