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# BLAKE

N O T E

# Blakes at Buffalo

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namely that the soul generates matter. And poetry is the only verity,--the expression of a sound mind speaking after the ideal, and not after the apparent. As a power it is the perception of the symbolic character of things, and the treating them as representative: as a talent it is a magnetic tenaciousness of an image, and by the treatment demonstrating that this pigment of thought is as palpable and objective to the poet as is the ground on which he stands, or the walls of houses about him. And this power appears in Dante and Shakespeare. In some individuals this insight or second sight has an extraordinary reach which compels our wonder, as in Behmen, Swedenborg and William Blake the painter.

William Blake, whose abnormal genius, Wordsworth said, interested him more than the conversation of Scott and Byron, writes thus: [Emerson then quotes through secondary sources (if the spelling and punctuation are any clue) from Blake's comments on his painting of the Bard in the *Descriptive Catalogue* and the concluding passage from *A Vision of the Last Judgment*.]

Emerson clearly sees Blake in a sound context, especially for a nineteenth century writer with so different a disposition. It was a context, however, with which the younger Unitarian minister, Higginson, Elizabeth Peabody, Emily Dickinson, and much of intellectual New England were familiar. Painter or poet, Blake was a fellow visionary.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It would be nice to believe that Barlow had come full circle, but alas *America* does not seem to come to America until much later. For Barlow, see David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 154 and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup>This edition is no. 134 in the *Bibliography of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Grolier Club, 1921); the second issue is no. 135, from which "The Little Vagabond" song is missing. Although Deborah Dorfman discusses the Wilkinson edition, she never speaks of Emerson's ownership in her random remarks on Emerson and Whitman. She never mentions Higginson. See *Blake in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>Members included Emerson, Alcott, F. H. Hedge, Thoreau, Hawthorne, J. F. Clarke, Margaret Fuller, the younger W. E. Channing, Theodore Parker, George Ripley, Orestes Brownson, Jones Very, W. H. Channing, Elizabeth Peabody, Christopher P. Cranch, and others. Cranch, another Unitarian minister, became a writer and illustrator of children's books. Cranch also did humorous illustrations for Emerson's essays.

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#### Blakes at Buffalo

While teaching a seminar on *Jerusalem* in the Buffalo summer session of 1970, I became aware of five Blake pictures the whereabouts of which are virtually unknown to present-day students of Blake. Four of these are in the Lockwood Memorial Library of the State University of New York; one is in the Rare Book Department of the Buffalo and Erie County Library. As these pictures have been lost track of for at least several decades,



and as at least two of them have never been reproduced, it is appropriate to note their existence here.

I was first informed of the Lockwood Library Blakes by Mr. K. C. Gay, curator of the famous Poetry Collection there. No acquisition record could be found, but the pictures are described in *A Selection of Books and Manuscripts in the Lockwood Memorial Library of the University of Buffalo* (New York, 1935). At some undetermined time, the pictures were placed in the Library vault, where Mr. Gay came across them last year.<sup>1</sup> All four items had been sold at auction in New York by the American Art Association on 2-3 April 1928.<sup>2</sup> They were part of a collection owned by Emma W. Bucknell of Philadelphia, and they are described in the sale catalogue as follows:

[Fig. 1] Original Watercolor Drawing by Blake for "Europe, A Prophecy"

56. Blake (William). Original Watercolor Drawing of "Shot from the Heights of Enitharmon." Height: 6 1/2 inches; width: 6 1/2 inches. Framed between 2 sheets of glass. Circa: 1794.

This is the Final Illustration in Blake's "Europe, A Prophecy," Published in 1794. The drawing depicts a nude figure of a man carrying an inanimate woman on his shoulder and dragging a child by the arm; they are flying from a huge tongue of flame.

[Fig. 2] This drawing is tipped on to a sheet on the back of which is a pencil drawing of a discus thrower, and the name "Mrs. Gilchrist" is written in the right hand margin.

There is a slight variation in this drawing and the illustration in "Europe": the drawing depicts the man entirely nude, and the muscles of his body are clearly depicted, whereas in the illustration as published the muscles of the body are not shown, a cloth is draped across his loins, and the figure of the child is partially obscured by the flames.<sup>3</sup>

### Important Blake Drawing

[Fig. 3] 57. Blake (William). Original Wash Drawing of a giant figure, seated on the ground, in a hunched position, head resting on knees, arms entwining legs and hands clasped at ankles; in the background is the blue sky; rocks to each side of figure; in the right hand margin is depicted a snake wending its way down the side of the rock. Height: 7 1/2 inches; length, 8 inches. Framed.

58. Blake (William) Beggar's Opera, Act III. "When My Hero in Court Appears & c." *Line engraving*. Painted by Will<sup>m</sup> Hogarth. Engraved by Wm. Blake. Publish'd July 1, 1790 by J. & J. Boydell, Cheapside. . London. Height, 24; length 30 inches. In black frame.

The exceedingly rare first state of this engraving, with the following scratched below the plate, -- "Painted by Will<sup>m</sup> Hogarth, 1729. Etch'd by Will<sup>m</sup> Blake, 1788." No. 71 in A. G. B. Russell's *The Engravings of William Blake*.<sup>4</sup>

In the New York Public Library's copy of the auction catalogue, sale prices have been marked next to each item. If these figures are correct, number 56 brought the highest price in the Blake section, going for \$1,100. Number 57, the wash drawing,

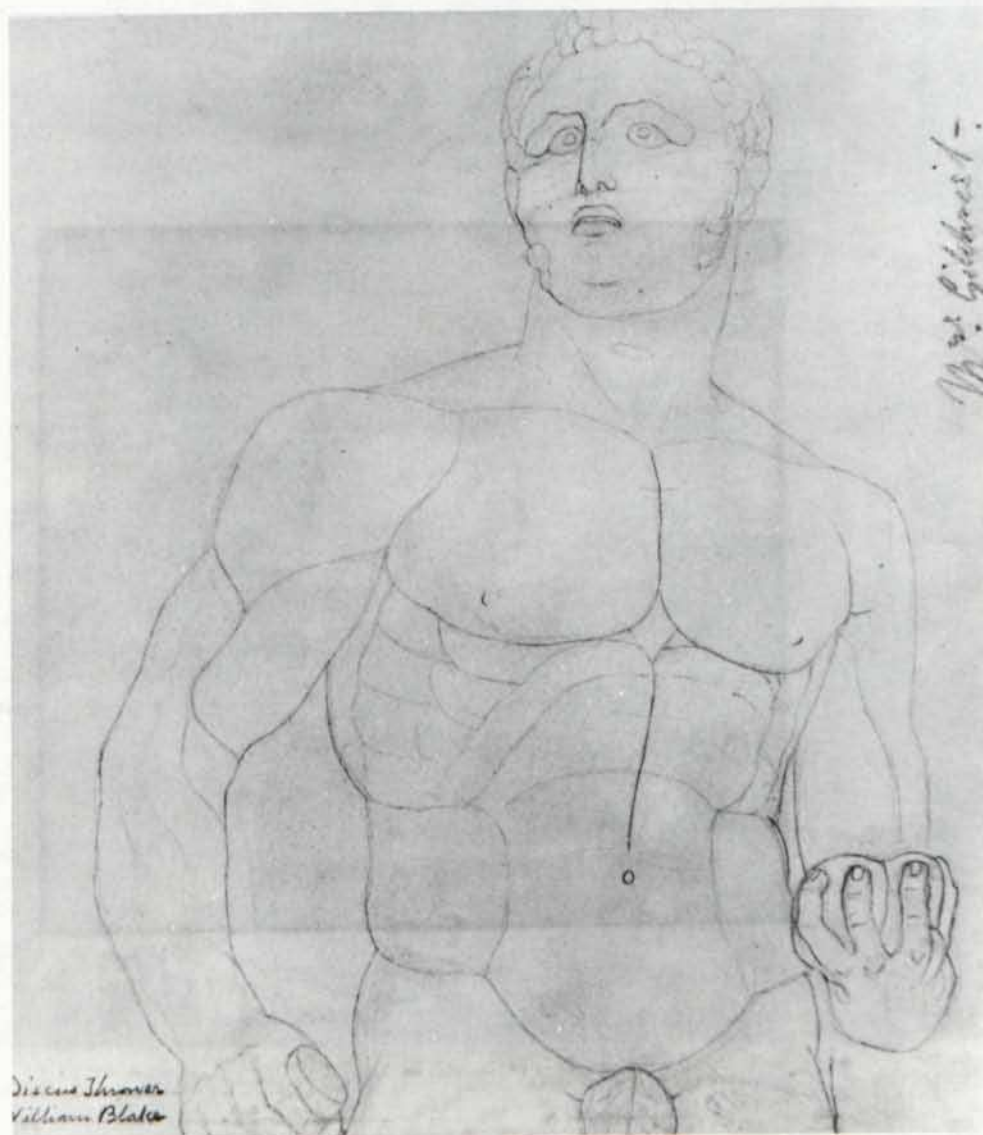




1 Watercolor drawing for *Europe*. Published by permission of Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York at Buffalo.

sold for \$900; the *Beggar's Opera* engraving (in truly beautiful condition) brought \$525. Among the other items in the Bucknell collection, the most important was surely number 76, one of the two known pulls of the *Laocoön* engraving.<sup>5</sup> It went for \$610. There was also one autograph letter, Blake to Linnell, 31 March 1826, "With portrait"; and there was a set of *Illustrations to the Book of Job* (#74, \$280), lacking the last plate. An example of *The Prologue and Characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims* ("London 1812. Not recorded in Keynes bibliog.") went for \$440. The rest of the collection consisted mainly of books illustrated by or otherwise associated with Blake. At least two of these may have been acquired by Thomas B. Lockwood and presented to the Library by him--Blair's *Grave* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life*; the Lockwood Memorial Library has a copy of each of these.

Several minor conundrums attach to numbers 56 and 57. Why did Blake tip the *Europe* drawing on to the back of an unrelated pencil drawing? For what purpose was the picture of the giant figure, too crude to be considered a finished work, intended?



2 Pencil drawing. Published by permission of Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York at Buffalo.



Solutions to these questions must await study of the pictures by a scholar expert in Blake's pictorial techniques, but a tentative hypothesis may be offered here. The pencil drawing is so crude as to be almost certainly one of Blake's early productions, as the Flaxmanesque linear quality also suggests. Perhaps it is a study from a plaster cast. In any event, the figure (as Mr. Ruthven Todd points out to me in correspondence) is less likely to be a discus thrower than a boxer holding a cestus, and the catalogue appears to be mistaken on this point, as was whoever wrote the pencilled inscription on the drawing. If this was a relatively valueless piece of early work, Blake may well have regarded it as expendable, and he may simply have used it as a mount to protect his later, highly finished *Europe* picture. As for the giant figure, he is recognizably a version of a very small figure in *America*, plate 1, lower left. Blake may have used cheap paper for this picture because he never intended it as a finished work: it could have been a study for the *America* figure or, alternatively, an experimental blowup preliminary to a possible finished design.

The Blake picture belonging to the Buffalo and Erie County Library is the illustration to the "Preludium" plate of *Europe* (plate 1). It was given to the Library by James Fraser Gluck, the benefactor who presented the manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* to the same library. The picture is described in the *Descriptive Catalogue of the Gluck Collection of Manuscripts and Autographs in the Buffalo Public Library* (Buffalo, July 1899):

Original water-color, one of the designs made by the gifted, but eccentric, artist-poet to illustrate *Europe*, one of his so-called "prophetic" books published in Lambeth in 1794. The drawing represents a distorted, Caliban-like figure hiding behind a rock with a dagger in his uplifted hand ready to strike a young man who is approaching.

Miss Jane Van Arsdale, librarian of the rare book collection, tells me that for many years this picture was kept in the vault of the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, after having been loaned to the Gallery for an exhibition; it was only recently rediscovered and returned to the Library. Compared against the Trianon Press facsimile of *Europe*, the picture appears to be the same size as the corresponding portion of the top of plate 1. The coloration is different: foliage is colored yellow-brown rather than green, and some details of the foliage behind the Pilgrim figure do not appear in the Buffalo picture. However, the latter is in other respects very similar to the facsimile illustration, even in the configuration of shadows on the rocks. As in the case of the Lockwood picture from *Europe*, it is to be hoped that someone expert in Blake's pictorial techniques will study this picture in order to give us a more precise account of it.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>They now hang in the office of the Associate Librarian. In addition to Mr. Gay, I would like to thank Dr. Oscar Silverman and Professor Thomas Connolly for information about Thomas B. Lockwood and his collection.

<sup>2</sup>For which information I am grateful to Mr. Martin Butlin, Keeper of the British Collection at the Tate Gallery.

<sup>3</sup>This statement is puzzling. In the Trianon Press facsimile of *Europe*, the male figure is nude (this page is from copy B, the Cunliffe copy); in the Huntington Library copy he is nude; and in the proof plate in the Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, he is also nude (this last is reproduced in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's *William*



Blake 1757-1827/A Descriptive Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Works of William Blake Selected from Collections in the United States, 1939, facing p. 38. In the Keynes-Wolf Census, p. 79, this figure is described as "a nude man . . . ."

<sup>4</sup>The Important Library of / PRESS BOOKS / LIBRARY SETS / FIRST EDITIONS / Formed by the late / Emma W. Bucknell . . . The catalogue cover does not mention Blake, but the title page includes "A Notable Collection of BLAKE ITEMS" and particular note is made of the Blake collection in the foreword. The Blake items take up pp. 10-16 of the catalogue; page 15 is a reproduction of the *Laocoön*. The Blake section is headed "Extremely Important Series of Blake Items Including Original Drawings / Numbers 56 to 85, Inclusive."

<sup>5</sup>Presumably this could be the impression designated #2 by Sir Geoffrey Keynes in *Engravings by William Blake / The Separate Plates* (Dublin, 1956), p. 56. However, this example is described as "much damaged" (p. 57), and no damage is evident in the reproduction in the American Art Association catalogue (p. 15). It should perhaps also be noted that of the four examples of the first state of the *Beggar's Opera* engraving listed by Keynes (p. 73), none could be the Buffalo copy, as all four are accounted for elsewhere at some time between 1935 and the present.



3 Wash drawing. Published by permission of Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York at Buffalo.