

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

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

The Inscription on Evening Amusement

Martin Butlin

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 6, Issue 3, Winter 1972-73, p. 74



THE INSCRIPTION ON *EVENING AMUSEMENT* Martin Butlin

Geoffrey Keynes, in his book on *Engravings by William Blake: The Separate Plates* (Dublin, 1956), (p. 64), reconstructs the last line on Blake's engraving after Watteau's *Evening Amusement* on the basis of that on the companion print of *Morning Amusement*. However, the discovery of a third, untrimmed impression in red shows that in fact the wording is slightly different. As Keynes' transcription is not entirely accurate even in the first line, I give the full inscription:

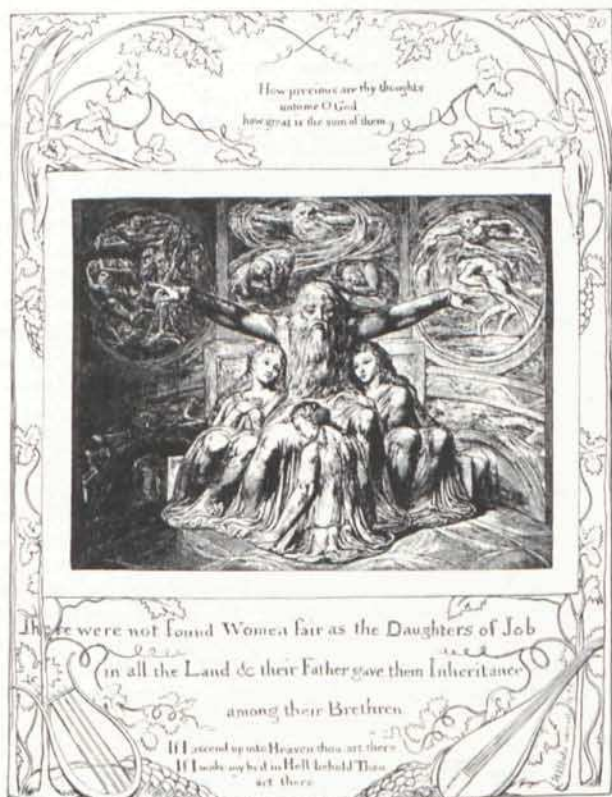
Watteau pinx^t W.. Blake fecit / EVENING AMUSEMENT / From an Original Picture in the Collection of M.^r. A.. Maskin. / Pub.^d. as the Act directs August 21.. 1782 by T.. Macklin. N.^o. 39 Fleet Street.

The punctuation after certain initials and in abbreviations such as "M.^r", which is represented here by two full-stops, is in fact more in the form of two little dashes. It is also found in the inscription under *Morning Amusement* as can be seen from Keynes' reproduction though not from his transcription (*Separate Plates*, p. 63). In this connection it should be pointed out that the "s" of "sculpt^t" is lower case, not a capital. In addition, at least on the copy of the print belonging to me, there is no full-stop at the end of the last line but there are two little dashes

above the stop following "Tho" suggesting a slightly fuller form of the abbreviation for Thomas, though they do not appear to take the form of an "s": "Tho::"

It should be noted that the inscription on *Evening Amusement* gives the name of the owner of the original painting as "Maskin" without a concluding "s". This is in fact correct. However, even allowing for the fact that the oval format of the engravings does not necessarily represent the shape of the original paintings, it appears that Maskin's paintings are not those now in the Wallace Collection. The provenances of *Les Champs Elysees* and *Le Rendezvous de Chasse* (as the paintings related to Blake's *Evening Amusement* and *Morning Amusement* are now known) seem to exclude Maskin's ownership, neither having left France till 1787 at the earliest (see *Wallace Collection Catalogues: Pictures and Drawings*, 1968 edition, pp. 360, 364-65).

Martin Butlin is Keeper of the British Collection at the Tate Gallery, London, and a specialist on the work of Blake and J. M. W. Turner. He is the author of *William Blake: A Complete Catalogue of the Works in the Tate Gallery*, and he is compiling a complete catalogue of Blake's paintings, watercolors, and drawings.



XX Job and his Daughters

In another depiction of the narrative of the Book of Job itself, Job tells his three daughters' the story of his life. The flanking scenes seem to show the destruction of his children² directly behind is the voice from the whirlwind. The identity of figures, God's and Job's, is patent. These three panels represent the matter of Illustrations III and XIII: art, so to speak, within art; and the spectrous elderly figures in the lower panels may represent two of the friends, the third being concealed from view by the bench on which Job and his daughters sit.³ That the story of Job has been made into art is cardinal important in view of Blake's often iterated view of the primacy of art as a theological fact. "Art", he writes in *The Lances*,

'is the Tree of Life' And, in the same place, 'Christianity is Art'. Fig trees grow up both vertical borders and many leaves and much fruit entwine themselves within all the borders. A pair of angels embrace on the upper left margin, and another pair seems ready to embrace in the upper right margin.

The theme of this illustration is gracefully and accurately carried out in the circularity of the wall panels, the curve of the room, and the design of the floor.⁴ The circle of Blake's Job narrative is now complete, and the regeneration has taken place. There remains only the necessity of depicting the renewal itself. This is to be the matter of the subsequent and ultimate illustration.⁵

² Damon says that the daughters represent Poetry, Painting, and Music because in the Blatts water-colour version of this scene they are holding instruments of their art; (Damon, p. 303). But Blake's dissociation of such patron symbols in the final version marks, in my view, an advance. Now am I disposed to accept Wakstein's ingenious speculation that the daughters may represent sun, moon, and earth because Job's attitude is similar to that of the Creator of Illustration XIV. Cf. Wicksteed, p. 203.

³ Hagstrum interprets the panel to Job's left differently. He thinks it depicts 'a scene recalling Blake's famous representation of himself being inspired by Milton, a poet receiving the inspiration of Los. . . Like Los deferring exit by giving it form Job the artist has transcended his experience by shaping them, and Vision is now impressed in a wall design near the floor' (Hagstrum, p. 113). This is ingenious but further away from the Job scene than necessary, and yet Hagstrum argues it again with much force in an important essay called 'Blake's Blake', in Heinz Rubin, ed., *Essays in History and Esthetic Processes* in Stanley Pargell (Chicago, 1963), pp. 174-5. Northrop Frye offers the following explanation, not of the individual panels of this illustration, but of their status: "These pictures are on the walls of Job's mind, for the room he is in is identical with his own body. That does not make them subjective, for Job is no longer

subject: he is one with God.' (*Useful Symbols* (Princeton, N.J., 1942), p. 424.) I like this interpretation.

⁴ Conclusive identification of these figures may be impossible, but I cannot agree with Damon's assertion that they are Job and his wife in disguise (Damon, p. 303).

⁵ Cf. 423, 8, 777.

⁶ Damon says that the circular shape of the floor represents 'the communion of the heaven of art; the smaller circles represent individuals entering each other's houses' (Damon, p. 303).

⁷ A pencil sketch of Job and his Daughters is reproduced as Pl. 43 in *Prints Drawings by William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1925). And the temper painting, now at the Rosenwald Collection of the National Gallery in Washington, is reproduced as Pl. 74 of William Blake's *Illustrations to the Bible*. In the Blatts water-colour Job and his daughters are out of doors and his recital to them is depicted in a cloudlike mass above his head. God in the whirlwind and the striking Satan are also depicted. The Linnell set represents a half-way house: the depiction—very faint—on panels on a wall, but there is grass beneath the feet of Job and his daughters, and a number of cherub heads nearby. The New Zealand artist puts this scene altogether indoors.