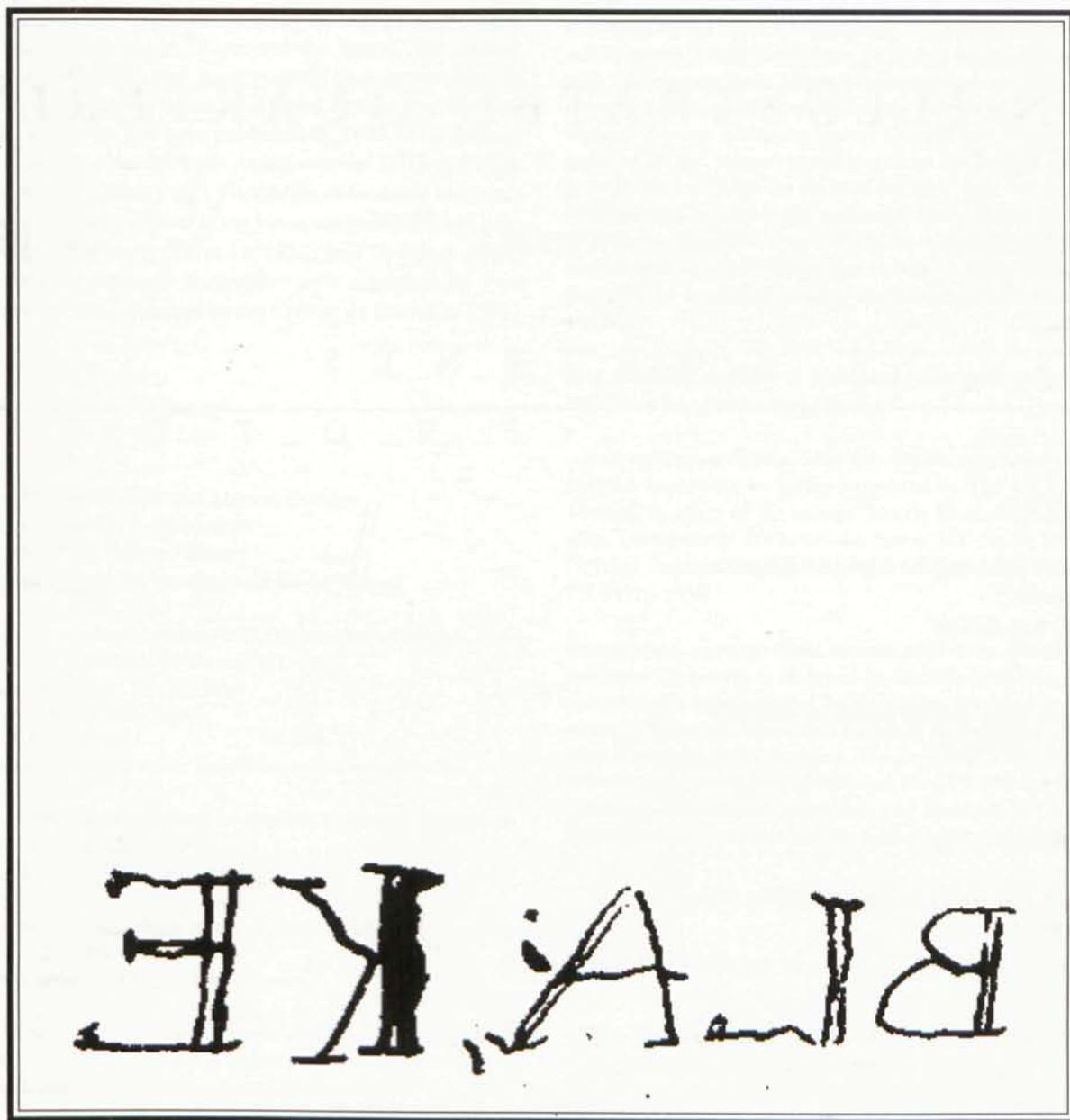


B L A K E

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY



VOLUME 31

NUMBER 2

FALL 1997

Blake

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

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C O N T R I B U T O R S

G. E. Bentley, Jr. is the editor of *Vala* (1963), *Tiriel* (1967), and *William Blake's Writings* (1978).

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MICHAEL PHILLIPS, formerly British Academy Research Reader in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, is completing a biography of Blake during the early 1790s, in part anticipated in "Blake and the Terror," *The Library* (December 1994) and more recently in lectures given in France, the United States, and Great Britain. Another related paper has just been published in *XVII-XVIII Bulletin de la Société d'études Anglo-Américaines des XVIIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, no. 44 (June 1997). His edition in facsimile of Blake's manuscript of *An Island in the Moon* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1987, and *William Blake Recherches pour une Biographie* with a preface by Yves Bonnefoy was published by the Collège de France in 1995.

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I N F O R M A T I O N

BLAKE / AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY is published under the sponsorship of the Department of English, University of Rochester.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are \$50 for institutions, \$25 for individuals. All subscriptions are by the volume (1 year, 4 issues) and begin with the summer issue. Subscription payments received after the summer issue will be applied to the 4 issues of the current volume. Foreign addresses (except Canada and Mexico) require an \$8 per volume postal surcharge for surface, an \$18 per volume surcharge for air mail delivery. U.S. currency or international money order necessary. Make checks payable to *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*. Address all subscription orders and related communications to Patricia Neill, *Blake*, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627.

BACK ISSUES are available at a reduced price. Address Patricia Neill for a list of issues and prices.

MANUSCRIPTS are welcome. Send two copies, typed and documented according to forms suggested in *The MLA Style Manual*, to either of the editors: Morris Eaves, Dept. of English, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627; Morton D. Paley, Dept. of English, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-1030.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER: 0160-628x. *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* is indexed in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography, the Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, *The Romantic Movement: A Selective and Critical Bibliography* (ed. David V. Erdman et al.), American Humanities Index, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents and the *Bibliography of the History of Art*.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Sophocles MS f. 116'. "BLAKE" in mirror-writing. Courtesy of Bertram Rota, Ltd.

[Editors' Note: Each of the following essays on the Sophocles Manuscript was designed to stand alone. Hence there will necessarily be some duplication in the information presented.]

William Blake and the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook

BY MICHAEL PHILLIPS

In January 1993 the London antiquarian booksellers Bertram Rota Ltd. invited me to inspect a manuscript notebook which contained a number of signatures by a William Blake. Following my inspection I concluded that the manuscript should be considered as once associated with William Blake, the poet, painter and printmaker.

My conviction was based primarily upon the signatures. They were clearly very early and the most convincing examples indicated that they had been made by someone learning basic techniques of printmaking; in particular, those formed of pen and ink dots in the manner of stipple engraving technique (folios 43^v and 45^v) (illus. 1 and 2) and the experimental example of Blake's surname printed in reverse or mirror writing (folio 116^v) (illus. 3). If they were authentic, these examples suggested that Blake had probably come into possession of the manuscript during the first part of his seven year apprenticeship as an engraver (1772-79).

The substance of the manuscript supported an association with Blake. The extant manuscript originally formed the blank leaves used to interleave an octavo letterpress text of four plays by Sophocles. These larger blank leaves had then been used intermittently to write translations of and annotations to the plays in several distinguishable hands, with some examples clearly resembling the hand of William Blake. At a later date, probably in the 1920s, the leaves of printed text had been torn out without breaking the binding. Of particular relevance to Blake was the inclusion of *Philoctetes* amongst the four plays, the subject of an etching by James Barry first produced in 1777 and of a major painting by Blake of 1812. In a letter to his brother of 1803 Blake had also referred to how accomplished he was becoming in his studies of Greek. Shortly before, William Hayley in correspondence had also made reference to Blake's study.

I suggested to John Byrne, then an associate, and to Anthony Rota, head of Bertram Rota Ltd., that the next step should be to take the manuscript to the British Library so that the examples of Greek letter formations in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook (as it will be referred to) could be compared with the examples in Blake's holograph present in the manuscript of *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*. This

would also provide an opportunity to make general comparisons of the holograph with those of Blake written in English in the manuscript of *Vala*, examples that vary widely in character from copperplate to less formal styles. I later met with John Byrne at the British Library to compare the manuscripts.

The description that follows is the outcome of these inspections and comparisons, together with study and comparisons made on my own with examples of Blake's holograph from manuscripts as varied as those of "Then She Bore Pale Desire" and "Woe Cried the Muse," *An Island in the Moon*, Blake's letters and receipts to Thomas Butts (*Letters from William Blake to Thomas Butts 1800-1803*. Printed in Facsimile with an introductory note by Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford, 1926) a range of Blake autograph signatures in particular from books he acquired early in life now in the Cambridge University Library and in my own collection, as well as the manuscript of *Vala* in the British Library. It is hoped that the illustrations from the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook will be found helpful in providing an opportunity for others to make their own comparisons. They accompany the description through the generosity of the owner, Mrs. Blunden, and Anthony Rota of Bertram Rota Ltd. For just such comparison the description was made available to G. E. Bentley, Jr., in December 1995.

With regard to the translation and annotation of Sophocles plays, the observations and distinctions that are made have been contributed by Alan Griffiths of the Department of Greek and Latin at University College London, without whose expertise the levels of scholarly and linguistic competence present in the manuscript, and the questions of authorship these raise, would not have been made clear. John Byrne, formerly of Bertram Rota Ltd., and Scot McKindrick, of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Library, have also contributed, especially in identifying similar idiosyncratic Greek letter forms present in the manuscripts of *Vala* and the Sophocles Notebook.

Included in the description are also my own speculations regarding similarities of handwriting which deserve to be assessed allowing for the wide variation of Blake's holograph over the course of his lifetime, as well as an indication of the circumstantial evidence that needs to be taken into account. It is the early signatures combined with the circumstantial evidence that persuade me that the manuscript deserves to be taken seriously. If an association is accepted, its significance for our further understanding only begins with the few suggestions that have been made here.

Description

The Sophocles Manuscript Notebook is made up of 189 leaves, approximately 20.5 x 16.5 cm. The binding is unsophisticated, of eighteenth century marble paper covered boards and vellum spine, the latter partially defective and

in a fragile state, and lettered in pen and ink "BLUNDEN" directly onto the spine.

The paper bears an undated watermark of Britannia within an oval frame surmounted with a crown and with the initials "G R" below. An example is found on folio 12 recto. It can be dated confidently before 1794, when this design went out of use. The earliest examples are from the mid to late 1760s. The present example is extremely simple: there is no writing around the outside of the oval and the drapery is plain. According to Edward Heawood, *Watermarks Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (1950), the simplest forms are the earliest, indicating that the paper used in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook was produced near the beginning of this period.

It is apparent from offsetting of varying strength throughout the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook that it was originally interleaved with a printed text of four plays by Sophocles: *Ajax*, *Electra*, *Trachiniai* and *Philoctetes*. At a later date the leaves of printed text were pulled free or torn away from the binding leaving some stubble still stitched in place. The text of Sophocles used for interleaving has not yet been determined, but the offset is clear and special photography and comparison will eventually make it possible to establish the edition used. Traces of pen marks or ticks against line endings and other forms of marginalia may be seen on some folios where these marks have continued beyond the edges of former interleaved text pages, as on folio 96 recto.

The handwriting is in various shades of sepia ink. Some sketches have been made using pencil.

The Sophocles Manuscript Notebook may be divided into four sections:

1. Verso front free end-paper to folio 22 recto. These folios contain an incomplete translation into English of *Ajax*, with some comparative notes found on folios 5 verso and 7 verso (illus. 4). The handwriting in this section of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook is mature and often fine (apart from the unsophisticated Greek on the front free end-paper and folios 4 recto and 7 verso). If the handwriting in English in this section is that of William Blake, a date later in Blake's life for this translation is likely. Examples of the handwriting in this part of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook may be compared with that in the manuscript of *VALA Night the First*, especially folios 4 through 9 verso (paginated in the *Vala* manuscript 7-18).

The Greek letter formations present in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook on folio 7 verso (see illus. 4) are immature and indicate a beginning student. They are compared with those present in the manuscript of *VALA Night the First*, folio 2 recto (page 3) (illus. 5, detail; illus. 6, another detail). There are no examples of William Blake's signature or other signs that would have drawn attention to the significance of the volume in this section.

2. Folios 23 recto to 37 recto. These folios contain Edmund Blunden's autograph manuscript reminiscences entitled *Some Notes on Friends & Acquaintances*, describing a meeting with Siegfried Sassoon and others in 1921, and his first visit to Thomas Hardy at Max Gate in 1923. From Blunden's hand it is believed that this was written within a few years of the events which it describes. This also indicates the period by which the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook had come into Blunden's possession, possibly together with two other volumes. A bookseller's note on the front paste-down reads "3 Vol £1-0-0." A search of the remains of Blunden's library in February 1993 did not discover the other two volumes, if they had been purchased as a lot by him. Blunden habitually bought fine blank paper cheaply whenever he could and he may well have acquired the present volume (alone) for this purpose.

Although Blunden considered himself "an old reader of Blake," as he remarked in the brief foreword to Bunsho Jugaku's *Bibliographical Study of William Blake's Note-Book* (Tokyo, 1953), he appears to have paid little regard to the possible significance of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook. During the course of writing his description of his visit to Hardy on folio 35 recto he deleted an early Blake signature isolated among the sequence of blank leaves he was using. There is also no record of his having shown the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook to his friend Geoffrey Keynes, although on at least one occasion he had invited Keynes's opinion on what he hoped to be a Blake discovery. This was a watercolor wash drawing contained in a manila envelope upon which Blunden recorded Keynes's response: "Not remotely possible." Blunden may also have been responsible for removing the printed text of Sophocles, of which only offset and occasional stubble remain.

3. Folios 37 verso to 140 recto. These folios contain a number of blank leaves but they also form a distinct section as they contain a series of what appear to be William Blake's early autograph signatures: on folios 43 verso, 45 verso, 48 recto, 60 recto, 71 recto, 79 recto, 81 recto, 83 recto, 91 recto, 103 recto, 113 recto, 114 recto and 116 verso; in addition to the signature on folio 35 recto deleted by Blunden. Two examples, on folios 43 verso and 45 verso, are formed of pin prick dots in the manner of stipple engraving (see illus. 1 and 2). Another example, on folio 116 verso, in roman capitals may be an early if not first attempt at reverse writing (see illus. 3). The only other example of Blake practicing reverse writing is later, where he has written the first three letters of his surname on the verso of the last leaf of the manuscript of *An Island in the Moon*. These examples on folios 43, 45 and 113 verso are indicative of an apprentice engraver learning his craft.

The early signatures present in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook may be most usefully compared with those found

in the earliest examples present in Blake's manuscript of *An Island in the Moon* (folio 16 verso) and in the books he owned and signed in his youth.

The name "Sunderland" appears frequently throughout these leaves. In almost every instance it has been overwritten with the signature "Blake"; for example, on folios 43 verso, 50 recto, 71 recto, 79 recto, 91 recto (illus. 7) and 114 recto, in addition to the example on folio 24 recto (illus. 8). This sign of previous ownership and of the effort to obscure it may explain why these pages were otherwise largely left blank, though blank leaves are also found in the manuscript of *An Island in the Moon*. There is no known association between a "Sunderland" and Blake nor between Blake and a "Taffy Williams" whose name is found on folio 103 recto. There is also one example of doggerel verse on folio 48 verso (cf. Macbeth, IV.i.10f):

In trouble to be troubled,
Is to have your trouble doubled

The handwriting in this section of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook appears to be of the early 1770s (with the exception of the doggerel verse), the beginning of Blake's seven year apprenticeship to the engraver James Basire (1772-79). This is suggested by the graphic experiments that have been noted as characteristic of a beginning apprentice engraver and the obvious immaturity and variation of the signatures.

There are also several casual sketches in this section. They show little promise of the William Blake, but the interlinking circles on folio 71 recto (illus. 9) could anticipate the links of chain decorating the inside margin of plate 65 of *Jerusalem* and the sketch on folio 79 recto (illus. 10), of a moth emerging from a chrysalis, could possibly anticipate similar devices used on the frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise* (1793) and the separate plate known as *Albion Rose*.

4. Folios 140 recto to 189 verso. These folios contain detailed notes made in the course of studying *Philoctetes*. These include remarks on the Sophoclean tragic form, numerous citations of other classical writers both Greek and Roman, reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost* on folio 172 verso, and comparative notes on linguistics and related themes. All authors and editions cited are earlier than c. 1785.

If the notes in this section of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook are to be attributed to William Blake they probably belong to the period c. 1800-12. These dates are suggested by comparisons with Blake's holograph in contemporary letters and receipts to Thomas Butts and in the manuscript of *Vala*. Specifically, examples in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook on folios 159 verso, 169 recto, 171 recto and 172 recto and verso may be compared with the

copperplate capital letters in *VALA Night the First*, folios 7 and 9 recto.

Attributing this section of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook to the period c. 1800-12 may also be predicated on the assumption that Blake's detailed scholarly interest in *Philoctetes* was prior to production of his pen and watercolor painting *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos*, now in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. The painting is signed "W Blake. 1812." A description of the painting is given in Martin Butlin's catalogue, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981), No. 676 (see illus. 17).

This section of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook also contains several sketches in pen and ink or pencil on folios 116 recto, 147 recto and verso, 149 verso, 150 recto, 181 recto, 182 verso, 183 recto, 186 recto, and rear paste-down. They were probably made by some one other than Blake, perhaps by "Blandford" whose ownership signature is found at the beginning of the manuscript (see below under Provenance).

This period is also suggested by Blake's study of Greek and Latin referred to in a letter to his brother James written from Felpham on 30 January 1803, as follows:

I go on Merrily with my Greek & Latin; am very sorry that I did not begin to learn languages early in life as I find it very Easy; am now learning my Hebrew [Hebrew letters for ABC]. I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar & the Testament is my chief master: astonishing indeed is the English Translation, it is Almost word for word, & if the Hebrew Bible is as well translated, which I do not doubt it is, we need not doubt of its having been translated as well as written by the Holy Ghost.

Blake's remark that "the Testament is my chief master: astonishing indeed is the English Translation, it is Almost word for word" suggests that he is still at an early stage, New Testament Greek being far less demanding than classical Greek. He is also relying upon an English translation that he probably knows by heart.

During his stay at Felpham Blake's study of Greek and Latin was undertaken with the help of William Hayley. Writing in February 1802 to the Rev. John Johnson, Hayley enclosed a titlepage for his new edition of William Cowper's translation of Homer together with a motto, commenting: "which I and Blake, who is just become a Grecian, and literally learning the language, consider a happy hit!" Referring to Blake, Hayley concludes the letter: "The new Grecian greets you affectionately." This assessment of Blake's proficiency as a beginning student of Greek in February 1802 set alongside Blake's own remarks of January 1803 further suggests that great progress in the writing of Greek was not made at this time, in spite of both Hayley's and Blake's enthusiasm.

The immaturity of some of the examples of Greek in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook, especially idiosyncrasies of letter formation, can be compared with an epigraph from *Ephesians* vi 12 written at the top of folio 2 recto of the manuscript of *VALA Night the First* (see illus. 5). John Byrne made the following comparisons. Following John Byrne's examples of erroneous letter-forms found in the Sophocles manuscript I have inserted in brackets similar examples of the erroneous letter-forms as written by Blake in the quotation from *Ephesians* taken from the *VALA* manuscript:

While the quotation from *Ephesians* used as the epigraph to *Vala* is brief, a few observations may be made. It is carefully, even stiltedly, written (and without accents). Certain quite distinctive letter-forms appear nonetheless, all of which may be found in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook:

The epsilon ϵ (one stroke) rather than ϵ (two strokes): see Sophocles Notebook f.4 recto and f.140 recto and verso (illus. 11 and 12-13) [*VALA* ϵ]

The sigma σ used at the beginnings of, and within, words rather than σ : see f.7 verso (see illus. 4); f.153 verso, line 18 (illus. 14); f.154 verso, line 1 (illus. 15) [*VALA* σ].

The omicron/upsilon diphthong written with the second letter on top of the first υ rather than beside it ou : see f.155 verso, line 4 (illus. 16). [*VALA* υ]

The phi written in a single stroke ϕ rather than the more conventional two strokes ϕ : see f.7 verso (illus. 4). [*VALA* ϕ]

General observations on the Greek in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook:

Verso of front free end-paper: the word is incomplete and ineptly written.

f.4 recto: not confidently written; still employing the single-stroke epsilon

f.7 verso: almost certainly written later: more fluent and with more character.

f.84 recto: these capitals are very poor, being of different heights and badly slanted.

ff.140 recto and 144 recto: again not very confident; employing the single-stroke epsilon and, unusually, the sigma. Perhaps predating *Vala*.

f.151 verso: hazarded as later than *Vala*; one ζ is employed, but the two-stroke epsilon appears, also accents.

f.153 et seq.: the Greek is now written with skill, individual character (and beauty), demonstrating considerable mastery. This must surely be later than *Vala*.

Scot McKindrick, Greek handwriting expert in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Library, also compared the epigraph from *Ephesians* on the titlepage of *Vala, Night the First* (see illus. 5) and the passage on folio 4 recto of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook (see illus. 11):

The character of the writing style of each passage as a whole, its accent, is different, indicating that they are not by the same hand. However, both share the characteristics of being untutored and demonstrate the same mistakes in letter formation. Also, the respective context of writing is entirely different. In the *Vala* manuscript Blake is copying onto his titlepage the passage from *Ephesians* from a text of the New Testament and writing it like one would write a passage in English. The passage on folio 4 recto in the Sophocles manuscript is written as part of a learning exercise in classical Greek, which comparatively is very difficult.

Apart from the few letters of Greek engraved on the separate plate of Blake's *Laocoön* (c. 1820), which show an improvement in letter formation, the only other example that may indicate how much he improved after writing in the manuscript of *Vala* is present in his annotations in a copy of Robert John Thornton, *The Lord's Prayer, Newly Translated from the Original Greek* (1827, p. 2) in the Huntington Library, which I have not been able to compare.

If Blake is responsible for these two sections or parts of them, Section I of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook (the translation of *Ajax*) should probably be thought of as belonging to the period of nearly a year indicated by Hayley's letter of February 1802 and Blake's letter to his brother of January 1803. The study of *Philoctetes* presumably came later and nearer the time of his painting of 1812. A comparison of Blake's painting (illus. 17) and Barry's engraving (1777 reworked in 1790) (illus. 18) makes clear that Blake made a thorough study of the play that led to his own distinctive interpretation.

Provenance

1. Blandford. On the front paste-down is the signature "Blandford," apparently a signature of ownership but with no date associated with it. It seems likely that Blandford was the original owner, but none of the handwriting in the volume compares with that of the signature. There is no known association between a "Blandford" and Blake.

The name "Blandford" is written in the style of a nobleman, and on a number of occasions elsewhere in the manuscript, but in a quite different hand, is written the name "Sunderland." As Alan Griffiths first pointed out to me, the combination of the two names "Blandford" and

"Sunderland" suggests the possibility that the manuscript may have once been associated with the Spencer family; in particular, perhaps, George (Spencer), fourth Duke of Marlborough (1739-1817), Earl of Sunderland, and until 1758 styled Marquess of Blandford, or possibly his son George (b. 1766), Earl of Sunderland and Marquess of Blandford.

The manuscript originally interleaved the printed texts of four plays by Sophocles, and the surviving leaves were then used to make translations and notes. Some of the notes are impressive and call upon a wide range of scholarship up to the latter part of the eighteenth century, possibly those of a professional tutor working in the middle or later eighteenth century. However, some of the translation and other notes are also very elementary, suggesting a beginning student.

I also wrote the Secretary, Historical Archives, Blenheim Palace, Blenheim, Woodstock, Oxfordshire on 6 September 1993 for assistance with this attribution and supplied with photocopies of the signature. No reply has been received.

2. William Blake. On the evidence of the early signatures in Section III, the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook may have been in possession of William Blake from near the beginning of his apprenticeship to the engraver James Basire 1772-79 and remained so until c. 1803, when he wrote to his brother James of his current study of Latin and Greek, and probably through 1812 when he completed his painting of *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos*.

3. Edmund Blunden. On the evidence of Section II, the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook was in the possession of Edmund Blunden by the early 1920s. The identity of the bookseller from whom Blunden purchased it, and its previous ownership apart from Blandford and Blake, remains unknown. As noted, in early 1993 Mrs. Blunden helped in searching for the other two volumes of the "3 vol. £1.0.0" noted by an unknown bookseller on the front paste-down, without success.

Significance

If the signatures of William Blake are accepted as authentic, the early sections of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook present new insight into the beginnings of Blake's apprenticeship, not least in providing evidence of his attempting reverse writing, a point of contention for many years by those attempting to understand his invention and processes of Illuminated Printing with which he produced his own composite works of poetry and design. For the biographer, there is the intriguing possibility of a connection between the name "Sunderland," compulsively overwritten with Blake's own surname, and also the name "Taffy Williams."

The Sophocles Manuscript Notebook reveals a background of interest and scholarship hitherto unsuspected,

especially for the period during which Blake was writing *Milton* and *Jerusalem* and painting various biblical subjects including the great series of interpretations of the Book of Job.

Blake's knowledge of native traditions of poetry and painting as well as those of other cultures has always been acknowledged. We know he studied Italian in order to read Dante in the original. From the letter written by William Hayley and Blake's own to his brother James, we know that he also studied Latin and Greek as well as ancient Hebrew. But until the discovery of the present manuscript just how deeply and wide-ranging these studies were, especially in terms of the secondary scholarship that Blake may have sought and mastered, has largely been a matter of conjecture and internal reference.

His painting of *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos* at Harvard can be understood in a new light. Until now we have known little of the period following the failure of Blake's Exhibition of 1809 and completion of his painting in 1812: the period Gilchrist calls "Years of Deepening Neglect," *Life*, ch. 27. Apart from its biographical implications, and importance in relation to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake's detailed study of Sophocles's play should now be set alongside the revival of his interest in the Book of Job, also at this time, and recognized as the classical counterpart to Job's trial, isolation and redemption through suffering. In short, Blake's study of *Philoctetes* forms an integral part of his preparations for his greatest work of interpretation as a graphic artist.

Problems of Attribution

As indicated, there is intermittent evidence in the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook of a favorable comparison of the handwriting with examples from Blake's manuscripts. But the extent of the handwriting that can be attributed to William Blake can only be properly assessed when the levels of sophistication of translation and scholarship are appreciated. In this regard, Alan Griffiths pointed out that there are three distinctive personalities who are present in the manuscript.

There is a beginning *student*, as on folio 4 recto (see illus. 11). There is a competent *translator*, as on folio 167 recto (illus. 19). And there is an expert *scholar*, as on folios 156 and 157 (illus. 20-21 and 22-23), in particular who has added comments opposite the text of *Philoctetes* which demonstrate an extensive and at times impressive use of the scholarship available up to mid-century, but who significantly does not refer to Brunck's excellent edition of Sophocles published in 1786. As the personalities of the *student*, *translator* and *scholar* emerge, and they are only based upon brief, sample translations and observations, they may or may not be, in part or on the whole, associated with William Blake.

It is possible that Blake may have contributed to some extent at all three of these stages. This may be explained if the manuscript came into his possession at the beginning of his apprenticeship in the early 1770s. In the first instance Blake introduced his series of signatures, including overwriting the (earlier) name Sunderland. In addition, he may have been responsible for making some of the elementary notes, in particular to the *Philoctetes*. During the 1770s it would be surprising if Blake had not become interested in *Philoctetes*, especially in relation to Job, as a result of the discussions by Winckelmann, Lessing and Burke and especially upon seeing the distinctive rendering of *Philoctetes* by James Barry (whom Blake greatly admired) in his etching first produced in 1777 (see illus.18). William L. Pressly discusses this background in his *Life of Barry* (1981, pp. 20-26).

Later, during the 1780s, perhaps encouraged by John Flaxman, who was an accomplished student of Greek and Latin, Blake may have developed his knowledge of the classics and spent more time with the manuscript. Flaxman left London for Rome in 1787. This could explain why there is no apparent reference to Brunck's edition of 1786, or to subsequent scholarship.

Beginning in the late 1790s while working on the manuscript of *Vala*, and later while living in the cottage at Felpham, Blake evidently renewed his interest in "Greek & Latin." This interest led to his painting of *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos* of 1812, an interpretation different from earlier renderings, including Barry's, and demonstrating the correlations he recognized between the subject of Sophocles's play and that of the figure of Job.

Alternatively, it would appear more likely that the sketches, translations and notes were in large part present at the time the manuscript came into Blake's possession. This would explain the apparent absence of reference to scholarship much later than mid century. If Blake did contribute to the translations and notes, and after the turn of the century became the accomplished Greek scholar present in the manuscript, then the apparent absence of reference to Brunck's and to later scholarship requires explanation. If William Hayley was responsible, and he is an obvious candidate, such scholarship may not have been immediately available and Hayley's knowledge may not have been up to date.

The specific edition of Sophocles that the manuscript originally interleaved has still to be identified from the off-sets. When it becomes known, some of the problems of dating and provenance may be resolved and an explanation found as to why reference to scholarship after 1786 does not appear to be present.

Conclusion

If accepted as authentic, the early signatures make clear that the volume was in Blake's possession from an early age. The

circumstantial evidence which includes Hayley's letter of 1802, Blake's of 1803 and his painting of 1812 demonstrate his later interest in learning Greek in general and study of *Philoctetes* in particular. These help explain why the manuscript was in his possession and at least some of the uses it was put to, whether he contributed largely or not to its contents.

However extensive Blake's contribution, if the early signatures present in Section III are accepted as authentic, the importance of the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook for our further understanding of Blake is considerable in helping to establish the extent and detail of his intellectual curiosity and its application to his art.

1 Sophocles MS f. 43^v [Bentley: "W.^m Blake" in stipple, and "Sunderland" over-written by "BlakeBlake"]

2 Sophocles MS f. 45^v [Bentley: "W.^m Blake"]

3 Sophocles MS f. 116^v [Bentley: "BLAKE" in mirror-writing. Each example of "Blake" is on an otherwise blank leaf except that f. 35^v bears a much later text by Edmund Blunden, f. 79^v has an obscure design, and f. 91^v has "Elektra," all apparently unrelated to the "Blake" on the same pages.]

he slew the ^{Foe} Atreus, and now some
other chiefs, while I urge him on in
his Phrenzy, strutting to catch him in
snarers I laid, Tied with his Houghs.
He binds in chains the living victims
drives home the herds, suspecting they
are Men; there with many a galling stroke
he beats the Doe. So shall well I wear
this glaring Phrenzy, that having seen it
God to the Greeks mayst soon record it.

+ In allusion to this circumstance, the title of the
Play in the original is *Asias Maschopos*
or *Asias the Whelp Bearer* so called either by
Sophocles himself or some of y^e Ancient Comment:
to distinguish it from *Asias of Lorician*, another
Tragedy written by him but now lost. As y^e
Appellation of *whelp Bearer* how ever happily
adapted to an Attilch might not so well suit y^e
delicacy of an English Ear I have taken the
Liberty to sink it upon my readers who

ΟΤΙ ΟΥΚ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΗΜΙΝ Η ΠΑΛΗ ΠΡΟΣ ΑΙΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΑΡΚΑ, ΑΛΛΑ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΑΣ ΑΡΧΑΣ,
 ΠΡΟΣ ΤΑΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΑΣ, ΠΡΟΣ ΤΩΣ ΚΟΣΜΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΑΣ ΤΩ ΣΚΟΤΩΣ ΤΩ ΔΙΩΝΟΣ ΤΩ ΤΩ, ΠΡΟΣ
 ΤΑ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΑ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΝΗΡΙΑΣ ΕΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΕΠΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΙΣ.

ΕΦΕΣ. V
 ΚΕΦ. 12

5 Detail of *Vála*, *Night the First*, William Blake, 1797-1803. Courtesy of the British Library.

Four Mighty Ones are in every Man: a Perfect Unity
 Cannot exist, but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden
 The Universal Man. To whom be glory Evermore Amen

Los was the fourth immortal slarry one, & in the Earth
 Of a bright Universe, Empery attended day & night
 Days & nights of revolving joy; Urthona was his name

John XVII c. 21. 22. 23
 John Ic. 14 v
 CAL. ESSEX
 EV. 171V

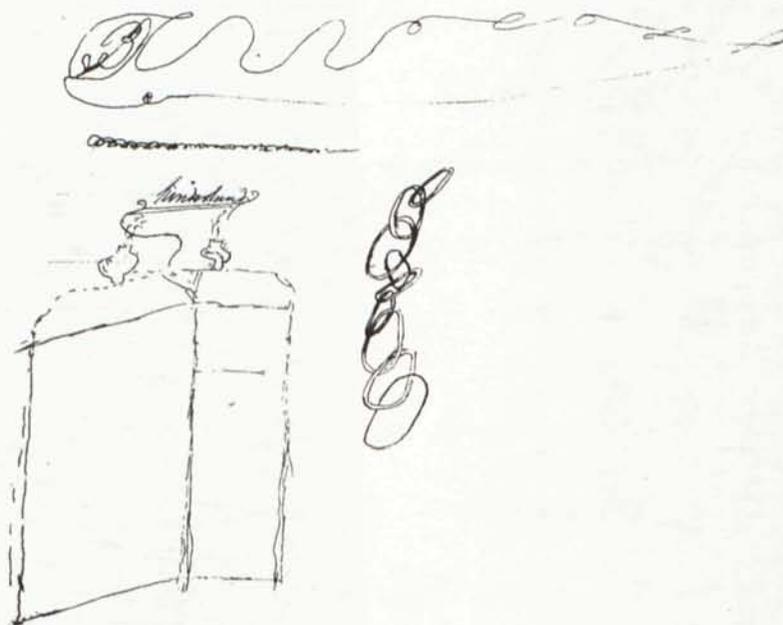
6 Detail of *Vála*, *Night the First*, William Blake, 1797-1803. Courtesy of the British Library.



Sunderland

7 Sophocles MS f. 91' [Bentley: "Sunderland" overwritten by "Blake"]

8 Sophocles MS f. 24'



9 Sophocles MS f. 71' [Bentley: "Bl" followed by a flourish]



10 Sophocles MS f. 79' (bottom) [Bentley: "Sunderland | Blake"]

measuring out his steps but late /
 sagacious - that's how /
 nor in vain, the man /
 sweating brow and hands deep /
 Blood within his /
 Thy pursuit and tell me /
 that so my wisdom may assist /

+ *κρυψτερον* hunting
υποπαχθ - lately impressed -
ευπινος sagacious
 εθω. 2 ημ. Συγ. 1 α. mid. α τ 1 θ η μ 1.

11 Sophocles MS f. 4' [Bentley: Exhibiting two styles of handwriting, HAND A at top and HAND B at bottom, with perhaps a third hand in the last line]

εδτ α φερνεετ suffer me to depart
 α η ω θ ε υ α γ α ρ α λ λ
 ε π ρ ο υ ο ς departing
 ο γ γ ο ν ~~small~~ protuberance.

But may she depart joyful and partake of
 the same pleasure she gave my father.

12 Sophocles MS f. 140'

τελερομητρος having a perfect number of months +
 α ποτος season
 ε υ τ ο κ α ι δ ε α ο ς σ μ ο ς γ ο υ ε

13 Sophocles MS f. 140'

Sophocles generally conducts his plays without a prologue
prologue.

Prologue extended till the first chorus began.

Conclusion of the chorus ἐξοδος, κατὰ δὲ τὸ αἴθριον.

First object — Fable.

Next — Chorus.

μελοποιία — music.

Ὀψίς — ^{the} Sundry.

Δήμω - - Non te Paantia proles

Expositum Lemnos nostro cum crimine habent.

Or. l. 19.

The Attic dialect is preserved throughout; the Ionic
sometimes however is made use of being so like the
old Attic.

- - - - - tu illa lucis Melibaei

Parva Philocteta subrica Petilia Inuro.

Virg. Aen. 3. l. 401.

"Ἐνθεν ᾗ προέειπε καρξέθεον Μελίβοιαν

Apoll. Argon. l. 592.

νόστον. So Euripides. νόστον ἤλθον. Eur. Trach. I. v. 1112.

— — — — — ἰων νόστον. Eur. Trach. II. v. 1187.

Vid. Markland in loc. & Suid in V.
περινοστήντας.

νώδονον. — Virg. de Dictamno —

... sulatoq omnis decore fugit
διήρημε δολο. An. 12. v. 421.

λαβεῖν. Some καὶ μολεῖν; but λαβεῖν is preferred.

Instatur Patrici Pyrrhus. An. 2. 491.

15 Sophocles MS f. 154'

τεχνιστραί. So Apollonius Rhodius.

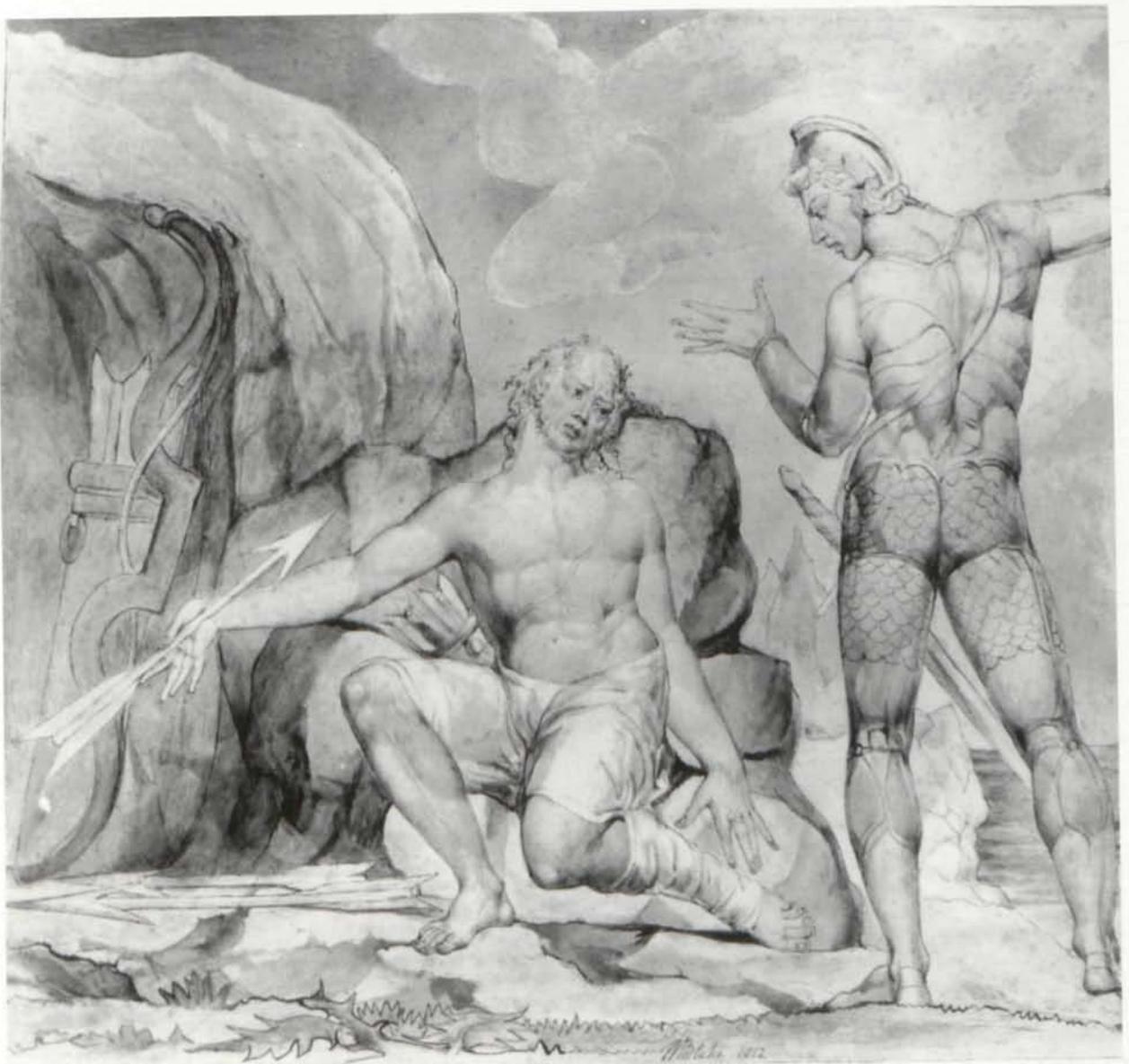
Εἶκε δόλον φείνοισιν ἔκ' ἀνδρῶν τεχνήσαστο. L. 4. v. 463.

Λαερτιά και. Sic in MS.

αειμεν ὦ και Λαερτιά. contra. Λαερτιά

Συδ' ἠνιχ' ἄν' αὖ Λαερτιά χεῖρον τόχος. Troad. Eur.

16 Sophocles MS f. 155'



17 William Blake, *Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos*, 1812, watercolor, black ink and graphite on off-white paper.
Courtesy of Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.

18 James Barry, *Philoctetes*, 1777, etching and aquatint. Courtesy of the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.



μετατιθεμενος. Alii volunt μετατιθεμενος.

Ὁρα σὺ. Οἱ μετα τῆρα τῆς τρεπῆς στιχοὶ ἰαμβικοί τε μετροῦν.
The third act begins here.

Ἀλλ' αἰσχρὰ μεροῖς. Ἄτ' ἄρ' ἐστ' οὐκ ἰσχυροῦς
 negligentiorum quam tu quidem te prodivi
 hospitii inderi. Prudye.

19 Sophocles MS f. 167^r

Τὸς ἀκούκτας.

*Regnaq; viuras iterum Trojana sagitta,
Tene jubet Paunte satum. Ov. Met. L. 9. v. 233.*

ἐς κέρδος. *Ad Trojam capendam.*

*Quum vitæ prosumat, peccat qui recte facit. Unde hic
verus est illi geminus, τὸ κέρδος ἢ δὲ πᾶν ἀπο ψεύδων ἐστίν,
quem Sophocles ipse testatur Plutarchus de Aud. Poet.
Sententia improbo Ulyssæ non Neoptolemo digna.
melius citante Plutarcho idem Sophocles, Οὐκ ἔσται*

*κοίησιν πᾶσαν αἰσχύνην ἀρεῖς. In Mecha. Ἐξέστω αἰδώς
Ἐξέστω αἰδώς. Apoll. Rhod. L. 3. v. 784.*

20 Sophocles MS f. 156'

Εἴης-Callidum quicquid placuit juro

Condere furta. Hor. L. 1. Od. 10.

Mercurius here introduced as being the God of Craft.

----- an magis esse

Præjura prædâ, quam præsens Mercurius fert.

Hor. Sat. L. 2. P. 3.

Regum timendum in propriis greges

Regis in ipso imperium est Jovis, Hor. L. 3. Od. 1.

21 Sophocles MS f. 156'

Ωδυσταραεθε. Afallacum hominum spera fragilium fortunam,
et inanes motus contentionis. Sic.
βρητων. προτις βρατων. Δοι.

ακαρτων καλων αμροος. Πυδαρ.

λασιων μετα. Stanley in Koch. S. T. v. 783. πορ
στικτας βρεας uno dicitur; per λασιος ναο feras
ingeniis monet. R.

Οιμωγας. εν Αρ. Β. — εκτυπε δ' αιδη
Οιμωγη. L. a. u. 261.

22 Sophocles MS f. 157^r

ωμοαερος. hae Epitheta ostendit hie Chryson
nympham esse, non urbem vel insulam est
quidam volunt.

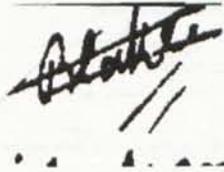
εκεβη. Legimus ακεβη, nisi εκεβη signatissimum
est verbum, & proprium de morbo graffante.

In ceteris editionibus interpretatur post
κη δε μορων, qua interpretatio non probatur.

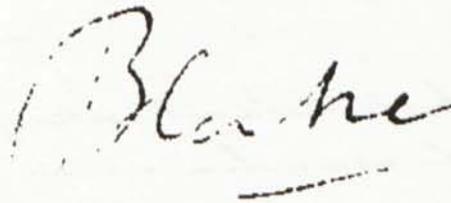
Τροια. Ald. et. Vet. Ed. d. Τροια.

στιβος. Sic Ald. et Vet. Ed. d. et Schol. sub. ἐπι, quam lectionem ego
magis probavi, inquit Stanley, in Koch. S. T. v. 162.
nam τὸ ἔχειν transitivum exemplum facile non occurrit.
al. στιβον, quod magis aridet Vleathio, qui tamen
propositionem ἐπι ante accusationem vult subintellectum.
Sibi iudicet lector.

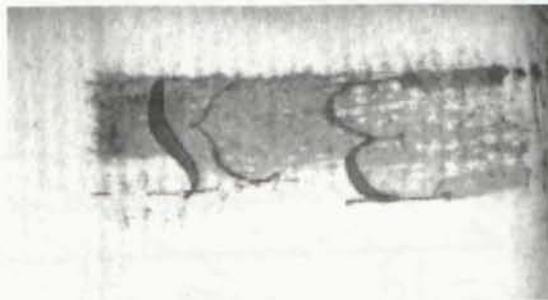
23 Sophocles MS f. 157^r [Bentley: Learned annotations in Greek and Latin with two different pen-points]



24 Sophocles MS f. 35' "Blake" deleted by Blunden



25 Sophocles MS f. 48' "Blake"



26 Sophocles MS f. 51' "KE," perhaps the end of "BLAKE" with the first three letters written on the missing leaf of printed Sophocles text



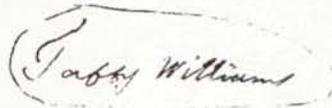
27 Sophocles MS f. 60' "Blake" (greatly enlarged)



28 Sophocles MS f. 81' "Blake," the "B" in stipple



29 Sophocles MS f. 83' "Blake" smudged (enlarged)



30 Sophocles MS f. 103' "Blake | Taffy Williams | Blake"

Blake
~~KKKK~~

31 Sophocles MS f. 113^r "Blake [KKKK|*del*]" (greatly enlarged)

Sun =

Blake:
land

32 Sophocles MS f. 114^r "Sun= der= land" overwritten by "Blake"



33 Sophocles MS f. 147^r Portrait of a man looking faintly like William Blake

1204. Le Violon Erdeni prop. en. "Italian venit." An. v. b.



34 Sophocles MS f. 183^r Sketch of Violin man

My Dear Sir

I beg you will have the goodness to
accept my warmest Thanks, for the distinguished honor
you have done me, in presenting me with your Volume
of Poems, as well as for the pleasure, which I am
persuaded I shall enjoy in the perusal, With every
sentiment of esteem and regard, I am

My Dear Sir

Your much obliged and faithful
humble servant

Wm Blake

Bedford Row
May 12th. 1806

35 Letter from William Blake of Bedford Row, 12 May 1806. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Compare the handwriting with that of the Sophocles MS.

William Blake and the Sophocles Enigma

BY G. E. BENTLEY, JR.¹

Anthony Rota and John Byrne have discovered among the papers of the poet Edmund Blunden (1896-1974) a very puzzling manuscript bearing in eighteenth century hands translations of plays by Sophocles accompanied by learned annotations in Latin and Greek and, at curious intervals and often on otherwise blank leaves, the words "William Blake" (see illus. 1-3, 7, 9-10, 24, 26-32). Nothing at all like this has previously been associated with the poet-artist William Blake,² and it is a matter of very considerable interest to discover what his connection with the work may have been.

Blake's Greek and His Knowledge of Sophocles

On the face of it, the association seems unlikely. William Blake is not known to have written the word "Sophocles,"³ he did not learn Greek until he was about 45, and his attitude towards classical authors, at least at the end of his life, was strongly hostile—in 1827 he wrote: "The Greek & Roman Classics is the Antichrist."⁴

Further, Blake used paper very frugally. In his *Notebook*, which had been used by his beloved brother Robert, Blake wrote backwards and forwards, until parts of it became a palimpsest; the proofs for his engravings for Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797) were used as scrap paper on which to write *Vala* (?1796-?1807); and copies of Hayley's *Designs to a Se-*

ries of Ballads (1802), which Blake published, were taken apart by him after 1807 and used for scrap paper.⁵ Such a prodigal use, or neglect, of good paper in the Sophocles Manuscript, in which so many pages are still blank, would have been very uncharacteristic of the frugal poet.

On the other hand, Blake did illustrate Sophocles's *Philoctetes*,⁶ and on 2 November 1821 he went with John Linnell and John Varley to the performance of a play advertised as Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* (said to be "revived after a lapse of 2240 years"), though it was in fact John Dryden & Nat Lee's *Oedipus* (1678).⁷ Further, the influence of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* has been traced in Blake's *Tiriel* (?1789)⁸ and even in *Jerusalem* (1804-?20),⁹ and his learned friends James Barry, John Flaxman, and Henry Fuseli made illustrations for Sophocles.¹⁰ It would be surprising if Blake had not known the plays of Sophocles, though the likelihood that he made translations from them seems slim.

Blake apparently had a natural gift for languages,¹¹ and his credulous disciple Frederick Tatham claimed that he "had a most consummate knowledge of all the great writers in all languages. . . . I have possessed books well thumbed and dirtied by his graving hands, in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Italian. . . ."¹² According to Alexander Gilchrist, "He would declare that he learnt French, suffi-

⁵ See *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 321-34; 453-64; and 572-75, plus, for Hayley, *Blake Books Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 223-24.

⁶ "Philoctetes and Neoptolemus at Lemnos" (1812), #476 in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁷ *Blake Records Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 77-79; there is no reference to Sophocles in *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁸ Kathleen Raine, "Some Sources of *Tiriel*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 21 (1957): 1-36.

⁹ Margaret Josephine Downes, "Benediction of Metaphor at Colonus: William Blake and the Vision of the Ancients," *Colby Library Quarterly* 27 (1991): 175-83.

¹⁰ Barry's "Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos" oil painting (1770), etching (1777), and engraving (c. 1790) is illus. 18 here; Fuseli's "The Death of Oedipus" (1785) and "Oedipus Cursing His Son Polynices" (1826) are listed in D. H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations By and After Henry Fuseli: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1994) 80; and three Flaxman drawings in illustration of Sophocles are listed by Laurence Binyon, *Catalogue of Drawings by British Artists . . . in the British Museum* (London, 1898) III. On 22 July 1879, Samuel Palmer wrote: "Blake told me about 1825 that we were one century behind the civilization which would enable us to appreciate Fuseli's *Oedipus* with his daughters painted [in 1787] the year before Fuseli became an A R A" (i.e., Associate of the Royal Academy—see *Letters of Samuel Palmer*, ed. Raymond Lister [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974] 2: 968).

¹¹ Samuel Palmer wrote in September 1862: "W.B. was mad about languages" (*Letters of Samuel Palmer*, ed. Lister, 2: 669).

¹² *Blake Records* (1969) 41n4. Elsewhere Tatham wrote that among the books from Blake's library which he acquired at the death of Mrs. Blake, "the most thumbed from use are his Bible & those works in other languages. He was very fond of Ovid, especially the *Fasti*" (*Blake Records*,

¹ The connection of the Sophocles Manuscript with the poet William Blake was first noticed by John Byrne (then of the firm of Bertram Rota), who gathered much of the information used here, particularly concerning the Greek context and the Greek hand-writing. This information was incorporated in an essay by Michael Phillips (which I have been privileged to see in typescript) concluding that at least some of the Sophocles Manuscript is in the hand of the poet William Blake. I have carefully examined the manuscript, recorded its physical details, and written the present essay drawing different conclusions from the same materials. In particular, my own Greek being a good deal less than Shakespeare's, I have depended upon Byrne's conclusions in this area.

I am deeply grateful to Anthony Rota for extraordinary generosity and kindness concerning the Sophocles MS, as well as, of course, to John Byrne and Michael Phillips.

² The only previous notice of the work was given by Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1995) 227, 378, who was "indebted for this information to Mr. George Lawson of Bertram Rota Books": "A notebook has recently been discovered in which Blake has translated parts of *Ajax* by Sophocles and then on some subsequent pages, has made notes of the same dramatist's *Philoctetes*."

³ *A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman et al (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

⁴ *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 1514, the text used in further Blake quotations.

cient to read it, in a few weeks,¹³ and at the very end of his life he taught himself Italian in order to illustrate Dante. As a young artisan, Blake would scarcely have been trained in the classical languages, but, when living in 1800–03 under the patronage of William Hayley, who was a notable linguist, he began studying Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Hayley wrote on 3 February 1802 that “Blake . . . is just become a Grecian & literally learning the Language,”¹⁴ and on 30 January 1803 Blake wrote to his uneducated brother,

I go on Merrily with my Greek & Latin; am very sorry that I did not begin to learn languages early in life as I find it very Easy. . . . I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar¹⁵ & the Testament is my chief master. . . .¹⁶

It is, therefore, exceedingly unlikely that Blake had studied the classics before 1802 enough to translate Sophocles from the Greek or write learned annotations in Latin, but he might have been able to do so thereafter.

Characteristics of the Sophocles Manuscript

The small quarto volume with the Sophocles translation originally had more than 300 leaves. An octavo¹⁷ edition of the plays of Sophocles¹⁸ printed in Greek on thin paper with strong horizontal wire lines (as in an octavo) was interleaved with blank leaves, with one or two blank leaves between each printed leaf. On the pages facing the printed Greek text was written on surviving leaves a translation of

527). No copy of a work owned by Blake in “Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, . . . Italian” or any language other than English is known today.

¹³ Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, “Pictor Ignotus”* (London: Macmillan, 1863) 1: 167.

¹⁴ *Blake Records* 89; Hayley speaks of Blake’s Greek lessons as early as 8 Nov 1801 (86).

¹⁵ Though later ages may be cynical about how well an Oxford scholar of 1803 could be expected to know Greek, it is very likely that Blake’s shop-keeping brother James would have been impressed by Blake’s claim—and that the poet intended him to be.

¹⁶ Hayley was presumably teaching Blake to read Greek using the same principles by which he had taught his son Tom; for instance, when Tom (then 14) was living with Flaxman, he wrote to his father on 17 March 1795 that he “read Greek testament” (West Sussex Record Office Add MSS 2817).

¹⁷ The size is indicated by the fact that in the outer margins of ff. 96^v, 101^r, 102^r, 104^r, 106^r, 107^r, 115^v, and 116^r there are regular rows of horizontal parallel lines, ending on the inner side in a sharply-defined vertical hiatus, suggesting that lines begun on an inlaid leaf of octavo size continued from the inlaid pages onto the host-leaves. The size defined by the hiatus is c. 14 cm wide.

¹⁸ The plays are identifiable from surprisingly clear (but still virtually illegible) offsets on the facing leaves which are still integral; for instance, “Elektra” is legible on f. 115^v, according to John Byrne, and “Philoctetes” on f. 188^r. The Greek edition, which has not yet been identified, has at the bottom of the page double-columns of notes separated by a vertical rule; on f. 171^r seems to be the page-number “443,”

the beginning of *Ajax* (ff. 3–22),¹⁹ with extensive annotations on *Philoctetes* in English, Latin, and Greek, especially on ff. 153^v–60^r, 161^v–65^r, 166^v–69^r, 170^r–75^r, 177^v–78^r, 179^v–80^r, and occasional small designs (see illus. 10, 33–34).

Later all the leaves of printed Greek text and perhaps some of the MS leaves were torn out,²⁰ leaving irregular stubs to testify to their former presence. The stubs are very narrow, and occasionally a leaf has been removed leaving no stub; for instance, f. 121, which is now loose, has no corresponding stub. With the wider stubs, it is possible to be confident that they are on thin paper with horizontal wire lines, but most of them are so narrow as to be effectively unidentifiable. The leaves cut out disappeared long ago.²¹

There were still many blank pages in the volume, including a great block from f. 22^v to f. 139^v,²² and these could be used for other purposes. For instance, Edmund Blunden, who liked to write upon good laid paper made from cloth rather than on cheap wove paper made from trees, apparently bought the volume for the blank leaves it still contained, wrote an essay on ff. 24–37, and deleted the *Ajax* translation in easily-distinguishable black ink. Most of the other integral pages are still substantially blank.

Inscriptions &c in the Sophocles Manuscripts

However, a number of these otherwise blank leaves have brief enigmatic inscriptions in old brown ink in eighteenth-century hands:

First paste-down leaf: “Blandford”

First flyleaf: “ΣΟΠΙΟΚ” (= Sophocles)

f. 1^v “The Life . . .” only the title

f. 24^r “Sunderland”²³

and on f. 188^r is a passage from *Philoctetes* with a line number “1495” and footnotes for ll. 1494 and 1496.

I have seen Greek editions of Sophocles, mostly in octavo, published in 1502 (4^o), 1567 (12^o), 1579 (12^o), 1586 (4^o, *Philoctetes* only), 1668, 1705, 1722 (12^o), 1746, 1758, 1777, 1780 (12^o, *Philoctetes* only), 1781 (4^o), 1785 (*Philoctetes* only), 1786 (4^o, 2 editions), 1786–89, 1787 (12^o), 1788 (2 editions), 1788 (12^o, *Philoctetes* only), 1797 (*Philoctetes* only), 1799, 1800, 1803 (*Philoctetes* only), and 1808. None corresponds to what I read of the offset on Sophocles MS f. 188^r. The fact that the offsetting is so extensive may suggest that the printed text was interleaved with the blank leaves soon after it was printed.

¹⁹ The translation is prefaced by a list on f. 3^r of Persons of the Drama.

²⁰ Illegible offsets of handwriting from missing leaves on at least ff. 49^v, 75^v, 76^r, 81^v, 82^r, 91^r, 92, 141^r, 154^r demonstrate that the leaves removed had writing on them. There is no stub among the leaves for the translation of *Ajax* (ff. 3–22) except after ff. 3 and 12, and the missing leaves probably bore manuscript rather than printed text, for the next pages, ff. 4^r and 13^r, begin in mid-sentence.

²¹ None of the other Blunden MSS removed by Rota from Mrs. Blunden’s house was on the same paper.

²² Ff. 1^r, 2, 4^v, 5^r, 9^v–10^r, 17^v–18^r, 141–143^r, 144^r, 145^v–151^r, 152^v–153^r, 160^v–161^r, 165^v–166^r, 175^v–177^r, 179^v, 180^r, 181^v–182^r, 188^v–189^r are also blank.

²³ The word also looks like “hinterland”—there is a dot for an “i” (see illus. 8)—but elsewhere the word is clearer.

- f. 35^r "Blake" (deleted in Blunden's black ink when he wrote his essay on the page) (see illus. 24)
 f. 43^v "W.^m Blake" in stipple (i.e., a series of dots) with, above it, "Sunderland" deleted by "BlakeBlake" (run together) (see illus. 1)
 f. 45^r "W.^m Blake" in larger stipple (all but the "e" which is cursive) (see illus. 2)
 f. 48^r "Blake" (see illus. 25)
 f. 48^v "Sunderland | Sunderland | Sunderland," and below it in another ink:

*In trouble to be troubled,
 Is to have your trouble doubled

which is apparently derived from *Ajax* l. 248 (as I am informed by Ron Shepherd of the University of Toronto), a discussion between Tecmessa and the Chorus about the murderous madness of Ajax:

When his disease raged highest, in the ills,
 Which round encompass'd him, he felt a joy,
 To us, whose sense was perfect, causing grief.
 Now he is calm, and from his wild disease
 Breathes free, with anguish all his soul is rack'd,
 Nor less is our affliction than before.

From single is not this a double ill?
 (*The Tragedies of Sophocles*, tr. [R. Potter] (London: G.G.J. & J. Robinson, 1788), ll. 266-72)

- f. 50^r "Sunderland"
 f. 51^r "KE" (blotted), perhaps the last letters of a word begun on a printed leaf now removed (see illus. 26)
 f. 60^r "Blake" written very small in the right margin (see illus. 27)
 f. 71^r "Bl" followed by a scroll as if setting up an ornamental signature (see illus. 9); "Sunderland" and two drawings
 f. 71^v Many ink(?) dots in an apparently random pattern
 f. 79^r "Sunderland Blake Sunderland" in the right margin (see illus. 10) with an obscure design²⁴
 f. 81^r Various letters plus "Blake Blake," the "B" of the first "Blake" in stipple (see illus. 28)
 f. 83^r "Blake," smudged (see illus. 29)
 f. 84^r "HAEKTPA" (= Electra)
 f. 88^r A doodle
 f. 91^r "Electra" and above it "[Sunderland (written over by)] Blake" (see illus. 7)
 f. 96^r Something in the margin

²⁴ "Sunderland" is associated with "Blake" on ff. 71^r, 79^r, 91^r ("Blake" deletes "Sunderland"), 114^r (ibid) (see illus. 9-10, 7, 32). I cannot explain this association.

²⁴ Michael Phillips makes out a moth emerging from a chrysalis.

- f. 103^r "Blake," "Taffy Williams," "Blake," widely spaced on different lines (see illus. 30)
 f. 113^r "Blake [KKKK| (del)]" (see illus. 31)
 f. 114^r "[Sun= der= land (each syllable over-written by the word)] Blake," in the inner margin (see illus. 32)
 f. 116^v "BLAKE" written carefully in mirror-writing (see illus. 3)
 f. 141^r A doodle
 f. 147^r A simplistic profile with a snub nose, in pencil (see illus. 33), somewhat like that of Blake in middle age
 f. 147^v A crude pencil sketch of a naked man
 f. 149^v An obscure design in pencil
 f. 150^r An even odder profile, perhaps related to that on f. 147^r but bearded, in pencil
 f. 150^v A pencil hand(?)
 f. 152^r A pencil doodle
 f. 175^v A pencil tracing of the outside of the watermark
 f. 181^r A crude pencil sketch of a horse(?) seen head on
 f. 182^v A crude pencil design of a man ?dancing
 f. 183^r A crude pencil caricature of a man playing a round viola whose body is his torso (see illus. 34)
 f. 186^r A small landscape in pencil at the top

Last paste-down: A crude ink design of a man with a sword threatening another man

The drawings are the merest caricatures and have nothing to do with the creator of the *Job* designs (1810) and engravings (1826).

The surviving annotations to the translation are often impressively learned. For instance, on f. 181^r is "1162 Philoctetes de Ulysse non de Neoptoleme loquitur. H." They frequently refer to Greek scholars, such as "Heathio," and, on tracing the dates at which these scholars published their findings, John Byrne discovered that all had been printed by 1785, suggesting that the writer's information, and perhaps his annotation, stopped about 1785.²⁵ In 1785 William Blake the poet was 28 years old, just making his way in the world as an engraver and artist, and certainly not classically learned in the style manifested in the Sophocles annotations, whatever he may have become later.

²⁵ Dates of works referred to in the MS:

1504 "Hesych[ius]," Greek dictionary (f. 158)

1715-20 Homer, *Iliad*, tr. Pope (f. 5^v)

1729 Samuel "Clarke on Homer," *Iliad* in Greek and Latin (f. 162)

1745 Richard "Dawes, Mis[cellanea]. Critic[a]." (f. 162^v)

1750 "Vid. [Jeremiah] Markland," published classical scholarship 1730-50 (f. 154^r)

1759 Thomas "Francklin trans" of Sophocles (f. 8 and elsewhere)

1773 Pierre "Brumoy," publishing classical scholarship to 1773 (f. 8)

There seems to be no reference to the translation of Robert Potter of 1788.

The question, therefore, is primarily whether all or any of the handwriting of the manuscript, and particularly of the "William Blake" signatures, is by the author of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.²⁶

Let us begin by admitting that it would be very odd to find the poet writing his name thus apparently at random in the Sophocles manuscript. But it would be equally odd to find anyone else doing so. Blake certainly did some very strange things on occasion, and this is no stranger than some others, but the difficulty in finding a motive applies equally to whoever wrote the "William Blake" signatures. And a clue to the motive *might* have been apparent in the leaves which were removed from the manuscript.

Handwriting in the Sophocles Manuscript

I take all the handwriting in the Sophocles manuscript save that of Edmund Blunden to have been added by two or more persons who were taught to write in the late eighteenth century; the color of ink, style of pen-point, formation of the letters, the use of long "s" (which was old-fashioned by about 1800), capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and lay-out all seem to me to be very characteristic of the eighteenth century. Further, though this is a good deal more hypothetical, both the paper and the Greek printed text visible in offsets seem to me to be of the late eighteenth century, perhaps 1770-1800. It would be very surprising but not impossible to conclude that the poet wrote the

²⁶ John Byrne has usefully compared the formation of the Greek letters in the Sophocles Manuscript with those in the quotation from Ephesians on *Vala* p. 3:

The *Vala* Greek is carefully, even stiltedly, written (and without accents). Certain quite distinctive letter-forms appear, all of which may be found in the Sophocles Manuscript:

The epsilon ε (one stroke) rather than € (two strokes)—see Sophocles ff. 4, 140.

The sigma σ used at the beginnings of, and within, words, rather than σ—see ff. 7^v, 153^v, l. 18; f. 154^v, l. 1, etc.

The omicron/upsilon diphthong written with the second letter on top of the first υ rather than beside it $\omicron\upsilon$ —see f. 155^v, l. 4, etc.

The phi written in a single stroke φ rather than the more conventional two strokes Φ—see ff. 7^v, 156, l. 1, etc.

In the Sophocles MS, on the verso of the front free end-paper, the Greek word is incomplete and ineptly written; f. 4, the Greek is not confidently written, still employing the single-stroke epsilon; on f. 84 the capitals are very poor, being of different heights and badly slanted; on ff. 140, 144 the Greek is not very confident, employing the single-stroke epsilon ε and, unusually, the ζ sigma; f. 151 one φ is employed but the two-stroke epsilon € appears, also accents; f. 153 ff., the Greek is now written with skill, individual character and beauty, demonstrating considerable mastery.

Greek translation or learned annotations in the Sophocles Manuscript in 1770-1800, or perhaps about 1803 as a language-learning device under the learned tutelage of William Hayley. The experiments with the writing of "William Blake," in stipple (ff. 43^v, 45^v) or in mirror-writing (f. 116^v) or in ornamental writing (f. 71^r) (see illus. 1-3, 9) are what one might expect of an apprentice engraver (1772-79) learning his craft, though they would be quite surprising as the work of the mature master about 1800.

There appear to be two main hands in the Sophocles Manuscript, written in very similar old brown ink. The first, HAND A, the hand of the translator of *Ajax* and found at the tops of the early pages, is characterized by letters with subscripts, such as "g" and "y," which flourish below several preceding letters and by a "d" which often loops sharply left over preceding letters; the "t" is usually not crossed, and the capital "C" is conventionally formed. The second, HAND B, the hand of the annotator which often appears at the bottoms of pages begun with HAND A, the previous hand, has tightly-curved tails on the "g" and "y," the "d" is usually almost vertical, the "t" is crossed regularly, and the capital "C" swoops to the right. Both hands appear on f. 4^r (see illus. 11), HAND A at the top and HAND B at the bottom; compare "late impressed" there (HAND A, at the top) with "lately impressed" (HAND B at the bottom). The writer of HAND A was a more conventional orthographer than the writer of HAND B, as may be suggested by "Shield" in the translation in HAND A and "sheild" and "feild" of the commentary in HAND B (f. 5^v).

HAND A may be seen in the translation of *Ajax* (ff. 3-22).

HAND B is on ff. 5^v (bottom), 8^r, 48^v ("Sunderland" written with a sharper pen), 50^r (ibid), 71^r, 79^r, 83, 91^r, 103^r ("Taffy" may be in yet another hand, HAND D), 114^r, 140^r and^v, 144^r, 145^r, 151^r, 153^v-160^r (perhaps there are two hands on f. 157^v,²⁷ the second written far more carefully). "Sunderland" seems to be consistently written in HAND B with a sharp pen.

Note that the "Blake" writing is associated with HAND B (on ff. 79^r, 83^r, 91^r, 103^r, and 114^r). Unfortunately the word "Blake" contains none of the letters which most clearly distinguish the two hands.

A third hand, HAND C, far less distinct than the first two and most similar to HAND B, may be hesitantly distinguished on ff. 4^r (see illus. 11) and 19^v, and perhaps elsewhere.

Handwriting in the Sophocles Manuscript and in the Poet's Manuscripts

But what is the resemblance of these hands to those of the poet William Blake?

²⁷ The same unusual two-stroke acute-angle "t" is visible in "Taffy Williams" on f. 103^r (see illus. 30) and in "S.T." on f. 157^r (see illus. 22).

One should begin with the premises that most writers have more than one handwriting, that in *The Four Zoas* Blake used at least four quite distinct hands, and that a professional calligrapher does not have a uniformly characteristic and idiosyncratic handwriting the way most of us do. However, even a professional calligrapher will manifest certain identifying mannerisms, and the writing in the Sophocles Manuscript does not appear to me to be that of a professional calligrapher. It has all the inconsistencies and eccentricities visible even in handwriting by those more carefully trained to form letters than is characteristic of education in the twentieth century.

Both the poet and the writers of the Sophocles manuscript used a fairly conventional eighteenth century hand in which the approximate formation of the letters is very similar. The similarity is most disconcertingly apparent in the words "William" and "Blake." However, there are some distinctions which are both clear and fairly consistent.

A The capital "A" (f. 157^v, "Ald"—see illus. 23) is a printing "A," with a pointed top, whereas in Blake's letters the capital "A" is usually a very large rounded lower case MS "a," though occasionally he does use the pointed printed "A."²⁸

B The capital "B" (e.g., f. 103^r, see illus. 30) begins with a strong vertical downward stroke and continues from the left with a new stroke forming the curving part of the "B." In Blake's letters, the "B" is uniformly formed of one continuous stroke, beginning at the top, going downward, and then rising over the first stroke to form the curvilinear portion of the letter.²⁹ Further, on f. 103^r (see illus. 30) "Blake" at the right has the "B" and the "l" linked, whereas in Blake's letters the two characters are normally, I believe always, formed of two strokes with no join.

C The capital "C" (f. 188^r, "Chrysen," f. 157^v—see illus. 23) curves dramatically deep under the line, whereas in Blake's letters of 23 September and 2 October 1800 it usually does not descend below the line at all or, when it does, but very slightly.

E The capital "E" (f. 157^v, "Epitheta" and "Edd." (see illus. 23)) is curved over on itself, but it is not so reflexively curved in Blake's letters of 23 September, 2 October 1800.

s Perhaps most distinctively, Blake's lower-case "s" is rarely connected to the following letter; see, for instance, his letter of 10 May 1801: "necessary," "accustomed," "shall," "Ease," "wish," "especially," "precursor," "present" (? somewhat ambiguous), "send," "present," "soon shall send," "several," "present," "Sussex say," "pursuit," "furnish," "Ease," "sufficiently," "service," "sense," "most," "should," "pleasant" (?), "business," "utmost" (?), "best," "Sussex," "sweetest

²⁸ Blake's practice in forming "A" is variable; in formal contexts, such as *Vala*, p. 3 (see illus. 6), and *The Ballads* MS (occasionally) it is pointed, but with the usual hand (e.g., *Vala*, p. 80) it is regularly rounded.

²⁹ However, in the more ornamental addresses, the "B" of "Butts" is composed of a straight vertical stroke and a separate curvilinear stroke in some missives (10 Jan 1802, 25 April 1803) though not in others (23 Sept, 2 Oct 1800, 11 Sept 1801, 16 Aug 1803).

spot," "least," "so," "desires," "kindest," "yourself," "also." In f. 157^v (see illus. 23), on the other hand, each "s" is joined to the next letter (14 examples).

S The Sophocles MS usually joins a capital "S" to the next letter (e.g., f. 157^v—see illus. 23), whereas in his correspondence Blake does not.

ss Both the Sophocles MS (e.g., f. 157^v—see illus. 23) and Blake's letters use the long and short double "s."

V The capital "V" (e.g., f. 157^v—see illus. 23) has a very sharp point ("Vet," twice), while in his letters, Blake's "V" is normally much more rounded (e.g., 2 October 1800: "Vision," "Virtuous," "Vegetation").

"Williams" (f. 103^r—see illus. 30) is disconcertingly similar to the "William" of Blake's signature.

The punctuation in the Sophocles is very regular and conventional, whereas in Blake's letters and MSS it is very irregular and sparse.

To confirm that these letter-forms in Blake's correspondence especially of c. 1800 were also characteristic of his handwriting both earlier and later in his life, I examined reproductions of *An Island in the Moon* (?1783), *Tiriel* (?1789), *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* (?1796-?1807), *The Ballads* (Pickering) Manuscript (after 1807), and "The Vision of the Last Judgment" (?1810) in Blake's Notebook, pp. 67-68,³⁰ using as a test the formation of

Sophocles MS	Blake
"A" print-style ("A")	rounded ("a")
"B" two strokes	one stroke
"C" below line	on line
"E" reflexive	not curved on itself
"s" linked to next letter	not linked to next letter
"T" two strokes	one stroke
"V" very sharp	rounded

The result shows a comforting uniformity in Blake's usual writing style:

	A	B	C	E	s	T	V
<i>Island</i> , pp. 1, 10	WB						
<i>Tiriel</i> , pp. 1, 10	WB						
<i>Vala</i> , p. 3, 80	WB						
<i>Ballads</i> MS, pp. 1, 18, 20	WB						
<i>Notebook</i> pp. 67-68	WB						

And this uniformity may be found on other pages of these manuscripts.

³⁰ The reproductions—chosen because they contain examples of all the crucial letter-forms—may be found in *An Island in the Moon*, ed. Michael Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *Tiriel*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); *The Pickering Manuscript*, ed. Charles Ryskamp (N.Y.: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1972); *The Note-Book of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Nonesuch, 1935); samples are gathered in *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), after p. 874—*An Island*, p. 1; *Tiriel*, p. 1; *Notebook* p. 68; *Vala*, p. 1; *The Ballads* MS, p. 1.

I conclude, therefore, that the handwriting in the Sophocles Manuscript is not that of William Blake, the creator of *Songs of Innocence* and *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.

At any rate, I do not suspect forgery. I think it likely that a genuine William Blake, one of the host of the poet's contemporaries bearing his names,³¹ wrote his names on the Sophocles Manuscript, perhaps somewhat idly as he dreamed over a school task. In some respects, the handwriting of William Blake of Bedford Row (see illus. 35) is more like that of the poet than is that of the Sophocles Manuscript. More than one of the poet's contemporary name-sakes was classically educated³² and might well have made such a learned translation of Sophocles, though no other evidence of this has survived.

The Sophocles Manuscript remains an enigma, even if one concludes, as I do, that it has nothing to do with the poet-artist William Blake. Who wrote it, why was it written, why was it taken apart, who is the William Blake cited there and what part did he have in its composition, who is Taffy Williams and what is he doing here, how are Sunderland and Blandford connected to it. . . ? It is a fascinating puzzle whether or not it is related to the author of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

For those who wish to consider the matter further, I append a

Description of the Sophocles Manuscript

Binding: Bound in pale reddish marbled boards over a parchment spine; by December 1995 the parchment spine had mostly perished, but the leaves were still secure. John Byrne, who first examined the manuscript, tells me that it was inscribed on the spine with the name of "BLUNDEN," but this has now disappeared. Many leaves were torn out close to the gutter, generally one at a time but at least once (between ff. 51-52) in a group of up to half a dozen, leaving very narrow stubs.³³

History: (1) Apparently acquired by "Blandford" (perhaps the son of the Duke of Marlborough, known by the courtesy title of the Marquis of Blandford³⁴), whose name is written by itself in a hand unlike those in the rest of the manuscript on the first paste-down in old brown ink; (2)

³¹ See "A Collection of Prosaic William Blakes," *Notes and Queries* 210 (1965): 172-78. I have since found a number of further Wrong William Blakes to add to these 20.

³² William Blake (age 14), son of William Blake of London, was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, on 21 July 1788, and William Jos Blake was at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1826 ("A Collection of Prosaic William Blakes" 177, 178).

³³ F. 121 is now free, leaving no stub, raising the possibility that other now untraceable leaves may also have been removed without leaving a stub or other trace.

³⁴ The son of the Marquis of Blandford bears the courtesy title of the Earl of Sunderland, "Sunderland" is written on ff. 24', 43', 48', 50', 71',

Offered for sale as "3 Vol £1-0-0" (according to the note on the first paste-down); (3) Acquired (?without the two accompanying volumes³⁵) during the 1920s probably for its blank paper by Edmund Blunden (1896-1974), who later wrote brief autobiographical essays in it; (4) Inherited by his wife *Clare Blunden*, who in 1993 offered it for sale through Anthony Rota of Bertram Rota.³⁶

Description: It is a small quarto volume (16.0 x 21.0 cm) presently consisting of 191 leaves (all but the first and last fly-leaves—on laid paper with vertical chain lines—foliated 1-189 in 1993 by John Byrne then of Bertram Rota) of laid paper with horizontal chain-lines (as in a quarto) bearing at the center of the inner margins a watermark of Britannia and a crown of a type common before 1794 and a countermark of GR above a tiny cross.³⁷

These quarto leaves were bound with a printed octavo³⁸

79', 91', and 114', and "Blake" deletes "Sunderland" on f. 43', f. 91', and f. 114' (see illus. 1, 7, and 32).

³⁵ In February 1993, Mrs. Blunden helped Anthony Rota to search the library for the other two volumes which apparently were once with the Sophocles Manuscript, but with no success.

³⁶ Neither Blunden nor his wife seem to have thought the Blake names significant, for Blunden scratched one out at the head of one page of his essay (f. 35'—see illus. 24), and the volume was considered as little more than an example of Blunden's writing until it was examined by John Byrne and Anthony Rota.

³⁷ W. A. Churchill, *Watermarks in Paper in Holland, England, France etc., in the XVII and XVIII Centuries and their Interconnection* (Amsterdam: Menno Herzberger & Co., 1935), #219-238, show Britannia with a staff in her hand and a shield behind her, within an oval beneath a crown, some of them (e.g., #221) with GR, but all are pretty distinct from that in the Sophocles MS (a reproduction of which was generously provided to GEB by Anthony Rota). Edward Heawood, *Watermarks in Paper Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Hilversum, Holland: The Paper Publications Society, 1950: Monumenta Chartae Papyraceae Historiam Illustrantia, I), #201-220, show a similar Britannia, and of these #207-10, 214-21 have a GR attached, # 208 (n.d.), 217 (1794), and 218 (1790) being most like the Sophocles MS. The GR watermark is more common, with 24 examples in Heawood, none just like those in the Sophocles Manuscript.

The Britannia watermark (only half visible at a time) is on ff. 1-39; 106-39, 141-44, 146-49, 170-71, 174-75; and GR (half at a time) is on the rest. Normally a watermark appears on only half the leaves of a divided sheet of paper, not on each leaf, as in the Sophocles MS, but according to Heawood such double marks (two on the same sheet) were not uncommon.

A similar but distinct Britannia watermark with a crowned G R countermark is reproduced in *Tiriel*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 53, and a fleur de lis watermark above a rectangular shield with a G R countermark is in *An Island in the Moon* (*Blake Books* [1977] 221).

³⁸ The size is indicated by the fact that in the outer margins of some leaves (ff. 96', 101', 102', 104', 106', 107', 115', and 116') there are regular rows of horizontal parallel lines as if of deletions, ending on the inner side in a sharply-defined vertical hiatus, suggesting that lines begun on now-missing octavo leaves continued from the now-missing leaves onto the host-leaves. The size defined by the hiatus is c. 14 cm wide.

volume bearing the Greek text of Sophocles,³⁹ which have offset very faintly onto facing pages showing two columns of footnotes separated by a vertical rule. On many leaves one or more eighteenth-century hands wrote in old brown ink a translation (into very colloquial eighteenth century English) of *Ajax* (ff. 3-22) by Sophocles, and another hand made learned annotations in English, Latin, Greek.

At apparently random intervals (including ff. 35^r, 43^v, 45^v, 48^v, 51^r [?], 60^r, 71^r [?], 79^v, 81^r, 83^r, 91^r, 103^r, 113^r, 114^r, 116^v), generally on pages with little or no other writing,⁴⁰ "Blake," "W^m Blake," or "William Blake" is written in old brown ink, once in mirror-writing ("BLAKE" on f. 116^v), and twice in stipple ("W^m Blake" on ff. 43^v, 45^v). On f. 71^r is an ornamental B followed by a flourish, with two drawings beneath it.

There are very small, simple, amateurish sketches in pencil or black ink on ff. 71^r (illus. 9), 79^r (illus. 10), 147^r (see illus. 33), 148^v, 149^v, 150^r, 181^r, 182^v, and 183^r (see illus. 34).

There are two or more hands in the Sophocles Manuscript, and these are similar to but distinct from that of the poet.

Probably before Blunden acquired the book, 126 or more leaves were torn out, including all the printed Greek text.⁴¹

Edmund Blunden wrote an autobiographical essay entitled "Notes on Friends, Acquaintances &c" (one about "An occasion April 14, 1921," and another about a visit to Thomas Hardy at his Max Gate residence in 1923) on 12 blank rectos (ff. 24-37).

³⁹ John Byrne has read the offset running-heads of *Ajax*, *Electra*, *Trachiniai*, and *Philoctetes*.

⁴⁰ "Blake" is written at the top of f. 35^r which now bears Edmund Blunden's essay, and "Taffy Williams" is written between two "Blake"s on f. 103^r. The adjacent leaves are blank. "Sunderland" is associated with the "Blake" on ff. 43^r, 71^r, 79^r, 91^r, and 114^r.

⁴¹ There are surviving stubs before f. 1 and after ff. 1 (2), 3, 5, 7, 9, 11-12, 15-16, 18 (2?), 20, 24, 38-41, 43-46, 48-49, 50 (6?), 53-56, 58-61, 64-65, 68-69, 75-81, 83-84, 86-90, 94-100, 104-05, 109-10, 114-16, 125, 127-34, 140 (3?), 141, 143-45, 146 (2), 149 (2), 150-51, 153, 154 (2), 155 (2), 157-59, 161-64, 166-71, 173-78, 182, 184-87, 189—numbers joined by hyphens indicate a leaf removed after each leaf.

R E V I E W S

English File: Poetry Backpack: William Blake. BBC2 daytime educational program for television. Broadcast Friday, 23 May 1997.

Reviewed by A. A. GILL

Poetry Backpack is another daytime educational strand, made for older schoolchildren. Television rarely makes me very angry: this managed it. It was supposed to be a bright, punchy, accessible, undemanding yet invigorating romp around William Blake. He was, we were told a difficult poet, but worth it. We were told this by Nigel Planer, the actor who was the hippie in *The Young Ones*—an inspired choice of interlocuter for a metaphysical poet. Blake is rather a good poet for young teenagers. He also could be good television. This was frightful. Beyond parody or invective.

Where Blake is mystical and imaginative, this treatment was remedially literal and as unimaginative as bathroom scales. Imagine making the illustrations for *Songs of Innocence and Experience* come alive for young minds by explaining the technical process of etching. They did. It's like trying to explain *Newsnight* by taking the back off your television. And then there was some woman who was called a poet but who could easily have been the understudy for the naughty yellow cow lady. She helpfully pointed out that Blake's special magic was all in the words, and in particular, how the words were arranged. And some people thought the rose that wasn't feeling too well might be suffering from wormy sex, but it didn't have to be: it could be anything you liked. And then Nigel got on a Tube train and looked at the stripy seat, gave us a knowing look and made the vast metaphorical leap to a Tyger. Geddit? Give me strength. What an immortal eye.

It wasn't just that it was bad television, failing all three Es—there's tons of lousy television. What is maddening is when lazy, dumb, patronizing programs go and stamp all over another medium of culture. Poetry is the greatest prize for bothering to learn English, and Blake is one of English poetry's supreme pleasures. God, I pitied the poor English teachers who will have to resurrect some interest in him after this travesty. The box is continually accused of being moronic. It isn't. But when education programs actively de-educate, it's difficult to defend. I ardently hope an invisible worm finds the heart of everyone guilty of this terrible pile.

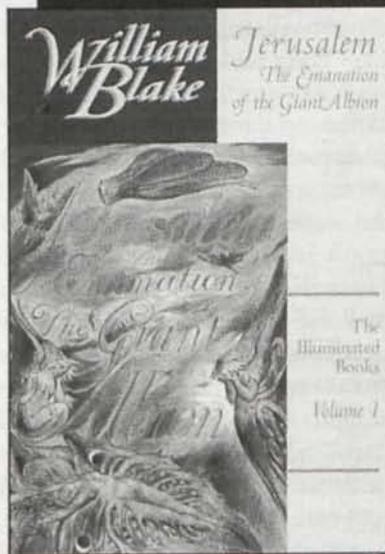
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