William Blake: Visionary & Illustrator

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WILLIAM BLAKE
VISIONARY & ILLUSTRATOR

Mezzanine Gallery
Thomas Cooper Library
July-September 2006
The illuminated books and drawings of the Romantic poet William Blake (1757-1827) form only part of his achievement. Blake also illustrated works by other writers, including Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Gray, as well as several Biblical books. This exhibition draws on the resources of Thomas Cooper Library’s Department of Rare Books & Special Collections to explore Blake’s parallel careers as an independent visionary and as a respected craftsman-engraver and illustrator.

The exhibition charts Blake’s development chronologically through both sides of his activity, from his earliest known work as an apprentice engraver in the 1770’s through the extraordinary originality of his political and prophetic poems in the 1790’s and early 1800’s, and the deep emotion of the later illustrations he prepared for Edward Young’s poem Night Thoughts (1796-97) and Robert Blair’s The Grave (1808). Blake’s political sensitivity and humanity are evidenced in his illustrations for John Stedman’s Narrative (1796), about the suppression of slave revolts in Surinam (Guyana).

The original editions of many of the books for which Blake prepared engravings were acquired by the South Carolina College library soon after publication. The illuminated books of poetry for which he is now best known, including Songs of Innocence (1789), Songs of Experience (1794), Europe (also 1794) and Jerusalem (from 1804), are shown in the Trianon color facsimiles sponsored by the Blake Trust, purchased for Thomas Cooper Library thirty years ago with support from the John Shaw Billings Endowment.

On display in the upright case near the Graniteville Room entrance is the latest Blake acquisition, an original engraving from Blake’s series Illustrations of the Book of Job (1825), purchased with support from the Nancy Pope Rice and Nancy Rice Davis Library Treasures Endowment. Another second recent acquisition, displayed in case 9, is the first edition with Blake engravings of William Hayley’s poem The Triumphs of Temper (1803), purchased with gifts from friends in memory of Mrs. James Willard Oliver.

In addition to the material shown here in the mezzanine gallery, some of Blake’s largest engravings, including those for the Bible, Dante, James Stuart’s Antiquities of Athens (1794), and John Flaxman’s Theogony (1817), are on display in the Graniteville Room.

A: INTRODUCTION & PORTRAITS
Portraits from Complete Portraiture of William and Catherine Blake. Trianon, 1977. Purchased from the

* Louis Schiavonetti, "William Blake," engraving, 1808
* Catherine Blake, "William Blake as a Young Man," pencil, ca. 1828.
* William Blake, "Catherine Blake as a Young Woman," pencil, ca. 1803.

1: BLAKE’S APPRENTICESHIP
* "Eclogue IV," in Poetical works of John Scott. Buckland, 1782.
* "Mad Song" from Poetical Sketches, 1783, in Writings of William Blake, vol. 1. Nonesuch, 1925.

2: BLAKE AND THE NOVELIST’S MAGAZINE
* Pl. IX, vol. 15; Cervantes, History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote. Harrison, 1782.
* Pl. XV, vol. 16; Cervantes, Don Quixote. Harrison, 1782.

3: BLAKE’S FIRST ILLUMINATED BOOKS
* All religions are one. 1788. Trianon, 1970.
* There is no natural religion. 1788. Trianon, 1971.
* "Holy Thurs’ay," in Ann Taylor, City scenes. Harvey
& Darton, 1828.

4: BLAKE AS COMMERCIAL ENGRAVER
* Ariosto, Orlando . . . reduced to XXIV. Dodsley, 1791.

B: BLAKE'S ILLUSTRATIONS TO THOMAS GRAY

5-7: BLAKE AS VISIONARY
* "The Shepherd and the Philosopher," in Fables by John Gay. Stockdale, 1793 [i.e. 1811].
* "The Shepherd and the Philosopher," from Fables by the late Mr. Gay [S.l.: s.n. 1757?]. Gift of Alexander Gilchrist.
* "Pan and Fortune," in Fables by John Gay. Stockdale, 1793 [i.e. 1811].
* Notebook drawing for The gates of paradise. Trianon, 1968.
* The book of Urizen. 1794 [i.e. 1815]. Trianon, 1958.

8: BLAKE, STEDMAN, & SLAVERY
• “Group of Negros, as imported to be sold for Slaves,” in Stedman, Narrative, of a five years’ expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana. Vol. I. Johnson, 1796.
• “March thro’ a swamp,” in Stedman, Vol. II. Copy 2: South Carolina College.

C: NIGHT THOUGHTS
* Title-page for Night the Eighth, pl. 3, and pl. 23, from Illustrations to Young’s Night thoughts, done in water-colour. Oxford University Press, 1927.

CASE 9: NIGHT THOUGHTS & THE GRAVE
* Edward Young, The complaint, and the consolation; or, Night thoughts. Edwards, 1797
• “Michaelangelo Bonarroti,” in Fuseli, Lectures on painting. Johnson, 1801.
• “Death’s Door,” in Blair, The grave, a poem. Cromek, 1808.

10: POETS AND PROPHECY
• Milton, a poem in 12 [i.e. 2] books. 1804 [i.e. 1809-10; 1815?]. Trianon, 1967.
• Jerusalem, the emanation of the giant Albion. 1804 [completed 1820]. Trianon, 1974. No. XX of XXXII.
11: SOME LATE ENGRAVINGS

D: BLAKE’s BOOK OF JOB

IN THE GRANITEVILLE ROOM
(Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.)
* Four additional plates, from *Colour versions of William Blake's Book of Job design*.
* *Vala; or, The four zoas*. A facsimile of the manuscript. Ed. Bentley. Clarendon, 1963.
* *Illustrations to the Bible : a catalogue*. Trianon, 1957.