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Bibliographical Discoveries, mostly Blakean: The Right Way, the Wrong Way, and Beth's Way¹

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Abstract

Article is devoted to the author's experience of editing Blake's works and of researches in bibliography. The paper unites author's biography notes with considerations of Blake's works in what he called Illuminated Printing, that will be interesting for any specialist in study of literature and especially of Blake.

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1 "Bibliographical Discoveries" originated as a paper given on 11 March 2005 to the Toronto Bibliography Group, including Dr. E.B. Bentley on her first week-end pass after 100 days in hospital.

Introduction

I should explain how this subject came about. I asked Beth in her hospital bed, debilitated by three months of medical indignities, whether I should talk to the Toronto Bibliography Group about my book on *The Edwardses of Halifax as Book Finders and Booksellers*, which is now at the press, or about my book on *Thomas Macklin and the Macklin Bible*, which is almost finished. She said, "You should talk about your work as a Blake bibliographer." That is part of what I mean by *The Right Way, The Wrong Way, and Beth's Way*.

My first enterprise in bibliography, or at least in bibliophily, was not auspicious. When I was a post-graduate student at Oxford, I went into Blackwell's bookstore on 19 March 1953 and found a copy of *The Bible* printed by Barker in 1611. Now, even I knew that Barker was the printer of the first edition of the King James translation of the Bible in 1611, so I took it to the counter and asked if this really was the 1611 Bible printed by Barker. When they assured me that it was, I did not enquire why it was priced at only £1.10.0; I hugged my private knowledge to myself and said "Put it on my account, please." I took it home in glory and I boasted of my cleverness to Beth and I crooned over it all afternoon. But of course I discovered next day, on going back to Bodley, that Barker was simultaneously printing and selling both the King James Bible and the previous translation. I have always thought this sharp practice on Barker's part, but it was certainly not very sharp practice on my part. Since then, I have learned more about bibliography, but not enough to make my fortune by buying books.

I didn't discover that I was a bibliographer until I had long passed the age of consent. Averting my eyes from the modish allures of criticism, I was pretty sure I would be a scholar, and I began with Blake. I wrote an undergraduate thesis of 200-some pages on Blake's mythological figures, and then I wrote a B.Litt. Thesis at Oxford on Blake's sources in alchemy and the Kabbala, which I thought was sufficiently *recherché* to qualify me as a scholar.

And my D.Phil. was an edition of Blake's long poem called *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* – the poem has two titles because Blake changed his mind about it. Indeed, he changed his mind about it repeatedly, so that it is replete with notoriously thorny

editorial problems. It is a poem organized in nine numbered nights, but there is no Night One, and there are two Nights called Night VII with no indication as to whether they are alternate versions or sequential. The pages have been numbered and renumbered, and the lines were occasionally and inconsistently numbered, and then more lines were added making the written line-numbers invalid. The leaves are now loose, and there is considerable uncertainty as to the order in which they should be arranged. And the poem is written in four distinct handwritings, all of them indubitably Blake's. I thought these were editorial problems, and I struggled with them as many before me had struggled with them, and in 1963 I published my edition of *Vala* with the Clarendon Press in an imposing folio. As a friend, indeed my D.Phil. examiner, asked me, "If your first book comes out in top hat and tails, how will you surpass that in your second book?" I had no answer, and I have never been able to publish another coffee-table book.

It was this friend who asked me at my D. Phil. defence to define "Folio" for him, since I had described Blake's poem as a folio. I didn't define it very well, but I did persuade him that the definition wasn't really relevant to this poem, as the leaves were all loose, some of them proofs for Blake's own engravings for other works. By "Folio" I then meant little more than "really big".

In 1963 I thought I was an editor, and I blithely embarked on an edition of everything Blake wrote, from songs and epics to marginalia and letters. This required me to see and collate and describe every contemporary copy of Blake's writings in collections from Edinburgh to Auckland. That edition was published in two volumes in 1978, and I have edited eight more editions. And I was associated from its beginning in 1964 with the Conference on Editorial Problems at the University of Toronto. I thought all this qualified me to be considered as an editor.

But bibliography is the chief foundation of editing, and I have often been called a bibliographer, occasionally with pejorative intent, as in "This edition is about as exciting as a bibliography."

I published a bibliography of Blake in 1964, and a better version in 1977, and a supplement to it in 1995, and indeed since 1992 I have compiled an annual bibliography recording that year's Blake discoveries and publications for a journal called *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* which now amounts to almost 800 pages. In the

mast-head of the journal I am described not only as a bibliographer but as the official Bibliographer of the journal, listed right after the two editors and before the mere review-editor. If it says so in print and officially, I must indeed be a bibliographer.

But if A.S.P. Woodhouse, who persuaded me in 1960 to come to the University of Toronto, had known that I was, or would become, a bibliographer, I'm sure he would have been alarmed. He once described a bibliographical incident at the British Museum, which he took to exemplify the breed. As he was working in the great Round Reading Room, he witnessed two bibliographers discussing with increasing acerbity a minute point of Milton bibliography. Eventually one bibliographer rose up in wrath and smote the other bibliographer over the head with a Milton quarto. I've often since admired the pluck and determination of that Milton bibliographer. Bibliographers have all the fun.

Certainly I have had a great deal of fun as a bibliographer. And bibliography has proved wonderfully useful as a cover story for boondoggles right round the world. We lived for an academic year or more in each of Oxford and London and Algeria and India and Australia and China. And I managed to persuade the Canada Council and its successor the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada that it was essential to Blake scholarship for me to do research in Auckland and Wellington (New Zealand), in Melbourne and Canberra (Australia), in Tokyo and Kyoto (Japan), in Taipei (Taiwan) and Hong Kong, in England, Scotland, Wales, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Leningrad, and the United States. And between these entrancing places, we paused from time to time in Bali and Bangkok and Bamiyan and Borabadur, in Persepolis and Periyar, in Srinagar and Surin, in Dubrovnik and Dublin. Often we gave lectures at such places, but frequently we frankly enjoyed ourselves with no academic cover story at all.

The bibliographical problems associated with Blake are notoriously intricate. On the one hand, there are usually no intermediaries between Blake and his printed books – no agents or compositors or editors or publishers or illustrators to corrupt his intentions; what we see on the page is almost invariably and unmistakably and entirely Blake's and no one else's. With mechanical help from his wife Catherine, he did it all, from conceiving the design and composing the poem to etching it on copper, printing it, colouring it, stitching it, advertising it, and selling it – or rather offer-

ing it for sale. The laboriousness of the method, and Blake's lack of interest in actually selling them, means that they are uncommon. Only one of his works survives in more than a score of copies, most are known in no more than a dozen copies, a few are known only in unique copies, and indeed one has not been traced since 1863.

There is one great advantage enjoyed by a Blake bibliographer. Blake's works are very expensive and therefore notorious. In 1999 a book by Blake sold for more than any book had brought at auction before, \$2,500,000 [Bentley E.B., 1999], and in 2004 a Blake print sold for more than any print had brought at auction, \$3,928,000. As a consequence, works by Blake tend to attract attention when they are sold, their owners such as Lessing Rosenwald and Paul Mellon may have their own librarians – and most of Blake's books and pictures and prints by now have migrated to public libraries and art galleries.

Before I forget, I should explain what I mean by The Wrong Way in Bibliography, the Right Way, and Beth's Way. This is the Tao of Bibliography.

The wrong way is to assume that our academic forefathers, the scholarly giants of yesteryear, had noticed and recorded everything worth noticing and recording about the books with which they dealt, and that nothing further is to be added. The wrong way is to assume that you can learn what is necessary about books from bibliographies and from facsimiles rather than from the originals. The wrong way is to assume that such minutiae as the identity of the inaccurate 'prentice hand who helped to set the Shakespeare folio and the variants in the copies of works by Coleridge or Blake are not worth knowing about because, after all, they are merely variants. The wrong way is to assume that bibliographical oddities, upside-down letters, ink-spills, turned down corners, and irregular creases in the paper are insignificant – or that they are all equally significant. The wrong way is to assume that since you're unlikely to get tenure through bibliography, because it takes too long, it's not worth doing.

The right way is to assume that if you look at the originals for yourself in all the appropriate libraries, if you take out a license as a wild-goose chaser, if you think that chasing wild-geese is rewarding in itself because of the entrancing places to which it takes you, you may in time come to the wild goose which lays the golden eggs. And if you can persuade only half a dozen scholars that the wild goose-eggs

you have found are indeed golden, as long as they are the best bibliographical scholars, that will suffice as a reward for your long chase.

Beth's way is to search with a dauntingly dogged persistence for a golden goose not only long after everyone else has lost interest in the goose but in the same places she has looked before.

Almost fifty years ago, I asked Beth to look up for me in Bodley a work with Blake engravings which was so elusive that no copy had ever been seen. We had Blake's prints from the book which had been cut from the parent volume, but the parent volume itself had never been described. Or rather it had been described in oxymoronic terms. It was said in 1863 by Blake's first biographer Alexander Gilchrist to be a periodical entitled *The Lady's Pocket Book* published by Dodsley, but the surviving prints bear the imprint of Joseph Johnson dated 1782. It was not listed in any of the finding-lists of periodicals, it was not in *The Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue*, in *The National Union Catalogue*, in RLIN or OCLC [now WorldCat] or in hundreds of other libraries on five continents. I became persuaded that *The Lady's Pocket Book* was a notebook or memorandum book which would be preserved because of, and probably catalogued under the name of, the person who had filled it with his or her engagements or great thoughts.

Beth undertook to find *The Lady's Pocket Book* herself – she put a curse on anyone else looking for it – and she searched in the British Museum and Bodley and Harvard and the Huntington; she looked in libraries and art galleries and collections of ephemera on five continents and a score of countries. In every library we went to, she first looked up books by my father and me – if they didn't have books by my father and me they couldn't be serious libraries; it's surprising how many libraries in Cairo and Bombay and Darwin *don't* have books by my father and me. She looked under "Lady", singular, and "Ladies", plural. She looked under Pocket Book and under Book, Pocket.

For thirty years she found nothing; and for thirty-one years she went on searching.

Then one year we were working in the Huntington Library, as we have done during Reading Week for perhaps forty years, when she looked up *Lady's Pocket Book* in the Huntington catalogue for perhaps the thirtieth time. And there at 3:15 P.M. on Wednesday January 15th 1992, she found a copy of *The Ladies* [plural, not singular]

New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book for 1780 published by Joseph Johnson [Bentley E.B., 1990].

It is not the volume for 1782 with Blake's prints, but comparison of editions for 1778, 1780, and 1789 demonstrates that the contents were virtually invariable except for the days of the week and the engravings. We now know exactly what *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* for 1783 **will** look like when it is found. And Beth continued looking.

You will notice that she kept looking for it not only in new libraries but in the same libraries in which she had looked repeatedly before. And she only found it because the Huntington had acquired, or at least catalogued, a copy between January 1991, when we had last been there, and January 1992, when she looked yet again in the Huntington catalogue – and found it.

Beth's Way is to keep looking when all hope is gone, to keep looking under the furniture where you repeatedly looked before, to keep looking where you know it *cannot* be because you've looked there repeatedly and in vain. It's an unreasonable method, it's frustrating, it's outrageous – but if you keep at it for long enough you may find thus what you're looking for. As William Blake said in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "If the fool would persist in her folly, she would become wise." Beth persisted in her folly, and perhaps I have become wiser.

A Snapper Up of Unconsidered Trifles²

I have been a Snapper Up of Unconsidered Trifles, making bricks virtually without straw. For instance, on page 48 of the manuscript of Blake's *Four Zoas* is a very faint impression of mirror printing under the writing. The title page of the poem is clearly dated in manuscript "1797", and this page 48 and forty-six other pages of the manuscript are written on proofs of Blake's illustrations to Young's *Night Thoughts* published in 1797. The mirror-printing on p. 48 comes from page 9 of a poem by Blake's patron William Hayley entitled *Designs to a Series of Ballads* which was published in parts in 1802; page 9 is in Part I which was published on the 1st of June 1802.

2 *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV, ii, 26.

How did this impression of mirror-type get on this proof of Young's *Night Thoughts*? Well, the bottom of page 9 of Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* has in its published form an engraving by Blake representing an elephant which is copied from a seal belonging to Hayley. And at the bottom of *Vala* page 48, beneath the mirror-printing, is an indentation of exactly the dimensions of the engraving of the elephant. Blake was using the proof of Young's *Night Thoughts* as a backing-sheet or blanket when printing his engraving of the elephant.

Since the writing on *Vala* page 48 is **on top of** the mirror-printing offset from *Designs to a Series of Ballads* published in June 1802, the handwriting on *Vala* page 48 must be in or after June 1802. And since page 48 of *Vala* is written in a handwriting like that of the rest of the poem but distinctly different from that on the first 42 pages of the manuscript, which are not on *Night Thoughts* proofs, therefore three-quarters of *Vala* must have been written after the first of June 1802.

This is a point of some importance. Not only is the date of most of the poem different from that on its manuscript title page, but the date is of major importance in the understanding of the poem. David V. Erdman in his vastly influential *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* of 1954 had argued that Blake's poem is a response to current events in the developing French Revolution and Napoleonic wars – and many of the events occurred years before most of *Vala* was written. It is possible, of course, that the events were referred to in the poem, though I don't think so, but they were certainly not **current** events. Erdman had never seen the manuscript, and in my edition I said that he had lost his shirt through his ignorance of the physical state of the manuscript. I now wish I'd not said it, though it is true, for it made him grumpy.

Another odd survival of the *Designs to a Series of Ballads* may be seen in the collection of Blake's poems called *The Pickering Manuscript*, which contains some of his most important poems such as "The Mental Traveller" and "Auguries of Innocence". *The Pickering Manuscript* bears no date, and there is little evidence to suggest when it was written.

However, on page 20 of *The Pickering Manuscript*, at the bottom right corner, is an almost completely erased printed word: "With" hanging all by itself with no other printed word near it – or indeed anywhere else in *The Pickering Manuscript*. How could such a loose printed word get there?

It turns out that the word "With" is from page 20 of *Designs to a Series of Ballads*; it is the catchword, hanging free of all the rest of the text. *Designs to a Series of Ballads* was printed for Blake's benefit, and he was given the printed quarto sheets to sell – or to do as he liked with. He could scarcely be bothered to sell them, and when a new edition of Hayley's *Ballads* was published in octavo in 1805 the sheets of the *Designs to a Series of Ballads* became virtually unvendible.

However, paper was expensive, and Blake did not want simply to throw it away.

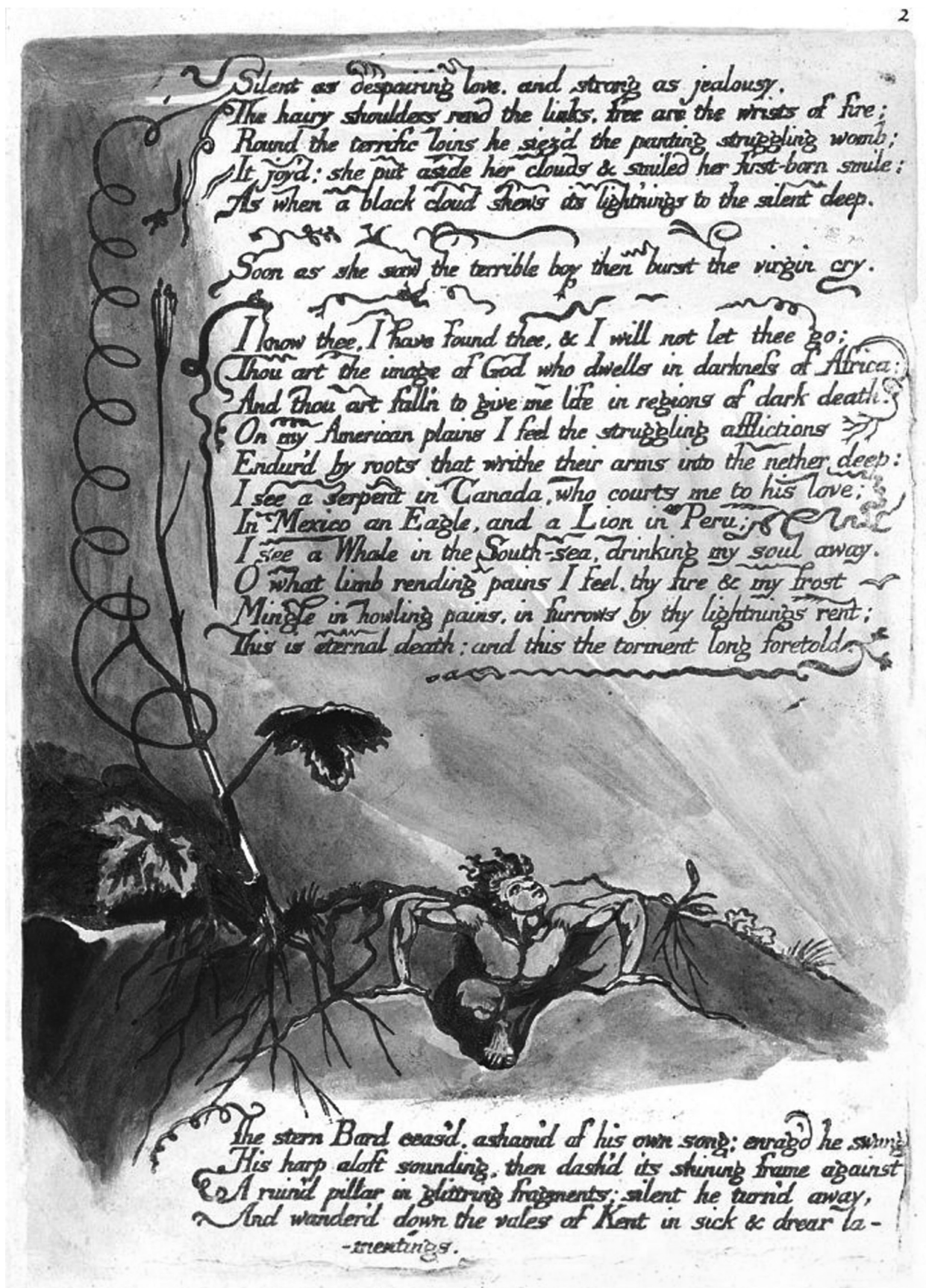
Therefore he cut off the text and used the wide inner margins as blank scrap paper. More than twenty other scraps of paper from the inner margins of the *Designs to a Series of Ballads* have been traced [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1978], and all of them must have been used after June 1802; they are likely to have been used after 1805. The Pickering Manuscript was therefore probably transcribed after 1805 [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1966].

The Dog that Didn't Bark

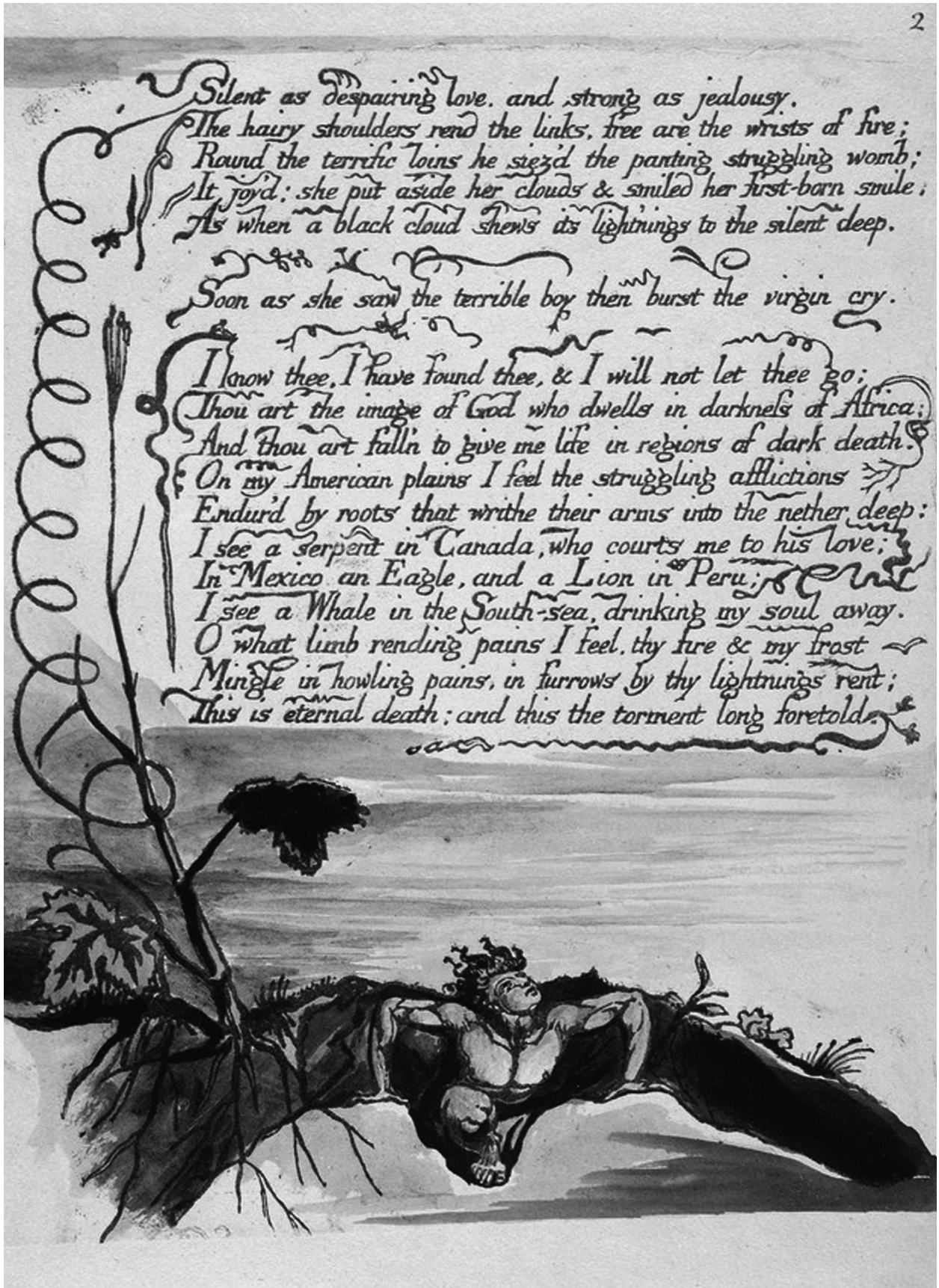
Sometimes what is missing is as interesting as what is present. At the bottom of plate 4 of Blake's *America* are four lines disavowing poetry:

The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song: enrag'd he swung
His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against
A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,
And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings.

We know these lines were on the copperplate <see **Illus. 1**>, for it appears in copies printed from his copperplates after his death. Why does it **not** appear in most copies of *America* which Blake printed and coloured himself <see **Illus. 2**>? Some critics concluded that the copies of the poem which lack these lines are optimistic and that Blake later changed his mind and etched the disillusioned lines at the bottom of page 4 at the end of his life. Indeed, one critic said as much, and in a review of his book [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1965] I said, perhaps with unnecessary force or condescension, that these lines were always there on Blake's copperplate; they were simply masked so that they did not show in most copies he printed. The author of the



Illus. 1. *America*, pl. 4, posthumous copy, showing the lines with the "Stern bard".



Illus. 2. *America*, pl. 4, lacking the "Stern Bard" passage.

book was so indignant at this observation, among others, that he wrote a reply to the review, and the journal editor courteously showed the reply to me for comment.

Now I was morally persuaded of the truth of what I had said in the review, but it was not easy to prove, and indeed I was not certain that I could prove it.

However, I presumed that the last four lines were masked when Blake was printing most copies of *America*, and that as he printed the work over a period of twenty-eight years the masking-leaf might have been put in slightly different places for different printings. I had photographs made of all the copies I could get at, and, sure enough, the line left by the masking-leaf differs in many of them, showing more or less of the design at the foot of the page and sometimes even revealing fragments of the tallest letters in the first masked line <see **Illus. 2**>.

I embodied this bibliographical information in my rejoinder to the attack on my review which the journal editor showed to the reviewee – and my rejoinder was so persuasive that the critic withdrew his attack on my review. I was left with a rejoinder with nothing to rejoin it to. So I purged from my rejoinder all references to the critic and published it separately [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1968].

Somewhat similarly, a proof of the last page of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* lacks the resounding Chorus which concludes the work. <See **Illus. 3**>

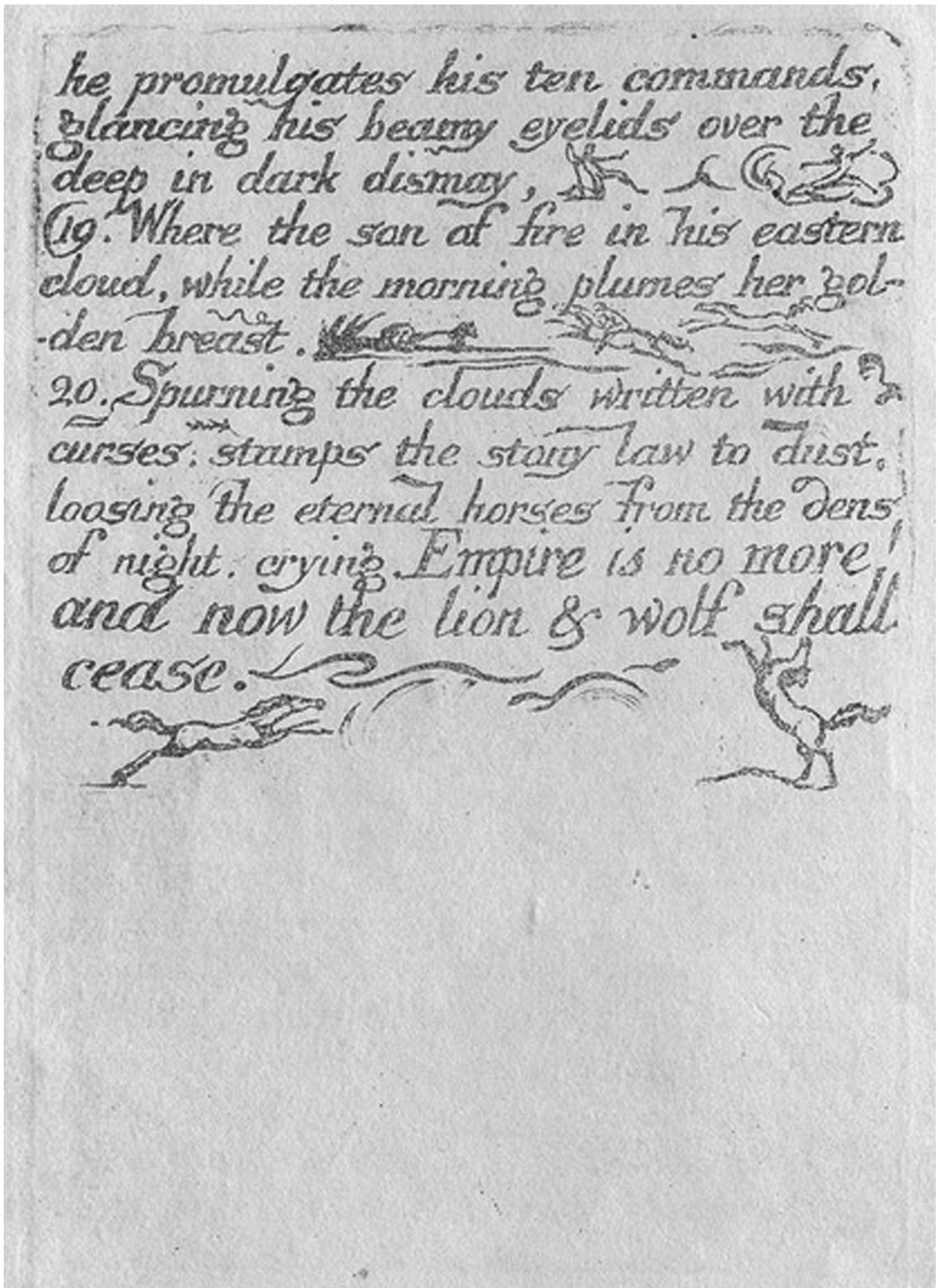
Chorus

Let the Priest of the Raven of dawn, no longer in deadly black, with hoarse note
curse the sons of joy. Nor his accepted brethren whom, tyrant, he calls free: lay the bound
or build the roof. Nor pale religious lechery call that virginity that wishes but acts not!

For every thing that lives is Holy.

This proof lacking the "Chorus" was known in only one copy, and the only evidence of that copy was the description of it when it was sold at Christie's in 1918. Since then it had disappeared, the catalogue merely said that the eight-line Chorus was "missing", and we could not know whether the Chorus had not yet been composed when the proof was pulled or whether the plate was masked in printing so that the Chorus did not show.

Then in 1997 the missing proof leaf was offered at Christie's. Beth and I calculated ways and means and cupidity and took out a line of credit on our house, and Beth flew to London and bought this copy M of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.



Illus. 3. *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (M), pl. 27 with the "Chorus" masked.

What interested me most about the proof was not what was there on the paper but what was **not** there. Certainly the Chorus was missing – but, if you held the leaf in a strongly raking light, the eye of faith could just discern indentations in the paper corresponding to some of the larger letters of the Chorus – and fragments of the flourish above the word "Chorus" were still visible. When this proof was pulled, the Chorus was not masked, for if, it had been masked, these tiny indentations would not have been transferred through the masking paper to the proof. Instead the ink was wiped from the bottom of the plate before it was printed so that the Chorus was almost invisible.

Why did Blake leave out the Chorus? Was it because he feared its heterodoxy was too plain, with its attack on "the Priests of the raven of Dawn" and "pale religious lechery"? Did he fear that such plain speaking would attract unwelcome attention from the thought police? I don't know. But what is now plain is that the Chorus to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was always there; it was not added later as an afterthought. The afterthought was to omit it, and Blake thought better of his afterthought when he printed all the nine complete copies of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, including the Chorus on plate 27.

I like odd knowledge. I like knowing things no one else knows and which no one else cares about. One of the books I most enjoyed writing is entitled: *The Freaks of Learning: Learned Pigs, Musical Hares, and the Romantics* (1980). So far as I know, I am one of only two extant scholars of Learned Pigs; the other is Ricky Jay, the magician.

I like books which are not what they claim to be, such as an edition of Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* dated 1792 bearing engravings by Blake which is printed on paper watermarked as late as 1817 [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1995b]. I was once asked to authenticate a copy of Blake's *Jerusalem* in Victoria College Library in the University of Toronto and had to tell the librarian sadly that it was a facsimile of 1877. In the Doheny Library in Camarillo, California, I had to persuade the very young secretary-librarian that the facsimile of *Songs of Innocence* which she brought me was not good enough and would she keep looking until she found the real thing – which she eventually did. It was sold in 1989 for \$330,000. And at the Cincinnati Art Museum I had to persuade the librarian that what he brought me as a facsimile of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* was in fact the real thing.

Serendipity

The power of serendipity is very wonderful, but you're not likely to find something you weren't looking for unless you're looking for something else pretty vigorously and unless you're looking in odd places.

Two of the most agreeable examples of serendipity in my bibliographical life were the purest accidents. I found a list of subscribers to Eighteenth Century books, and I looked up those books in whose subscription lists appeared people of interest to me, such as Blake's early patroness Harriet Mathew. One of the books to which Mrs Mathew had subscribed was the anonymous work by Elizabeth Blower entitled *Maria: A Novel* (1785). 1785 is just the time Harriet Mathew was patronizing Blake, so I looked at the copy of the book in Bodley with special interest. And to my astonishment, I found that it had a frontispiece engraved by Blake after his friend Thomas Stothard whose existence in the book had never been recorded before among works by Blake or Stothard [see Bentley G.E., Jr., 2001]. Only a few score books are known with Blake's commercial engravings, so the discovery of yet another is very agreeable.

Yet more curious was what happened when I was working at the Library of the University of Texas. I was recording the details of all their contemporary copies of Blake's writings. Some of these were fairly intricate, such as *Songs of Innocence* (copy O) and *Poetical Sketches* (copy O), so I dealt with them first, leaving to the last Blake's letter of 29 December 1826, for which I had merely to verify the transcription and record the watermark, address, and cancellation. As they had only one Blake manuscript letter, I called it up without specifying the date.

They brought up a stack of Blake works for me, and I set aside the letter to deal with last. When I eventually came it, I looked in vain for my transcript of it. I didn't have it! I didn't have it because the letter they had brought me had never been recorded before.

Excited though I was, I didn't shout and wave it about, like the man who found a fly in his soup; I quietly transcribed it, for I knew that the publication rights of unique manuscripts in the University of Texas are reserved under Texas law to citizens of the Republic of Texas. I also knew that their only power to enforce this law was to

make me agree to it before I transcribed the manuscript. Once I had transcribed it, the University of Texas Library had no legal power to restrict my publication of it.

Fortunately when I drew the attention of the library staff to the significance of their Blake letter, they graciously agreed to let me publish it.

One reason for the graciousness of the staff may have been because they were in some embarrassment about the unexpected letter. It seems that the library had bought a collection which cost so much that even the University of Texas had to spread the expense over two years. However, both halves of the collection, the one already paid for and the other yet to be paid for, were mingled in the stacks, and the runner who brought me the Blake letter hadn't known that they didn't technically own it yet. And had he not brought it to me by accident, it might still be lurking unrecognized in the recesses of the Harry Ransome Library.

And later I called up the letter which I had expected to see.

Somewhat similarly, an exhibition of illustrations of Milton's poems held in Wordsworth's Dove Cottage in 2004 included an undated letter by Blake. The catalogue reproduced a photograph of the letter, and when I compared the catalogue photograph with my transcripts of Blake's letters I could not find it. The Dove Cottage letter had never been recorded before, though the cataloguers did not know this – or at any rate they did not say they knew it. The new letter came from the archive of John Murray, but the Murray archive contains no other Blake writings.

The man who commissioned and published Blake's most ambitious series of commercial engravings, his designs to Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797), was Richard Edwards, and, coincidentally, he went out of business within a few months of publishing the book. Probably through Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty and the generous patron of Richard's brother James Edwards, Richard had been given the appointment as Head Registrar of Minorca which the British captured from Spain in November 1798. Richard Edwards sailed for the Mediterranean in June 1799, and there was no evidence as to how long he stayed there.

By coincidence I was in correspondence with Richard Latona, a friend of the distinguished Blake scholar Ruthven Todd who lived in Minorca, and I asked Mr Latona to whom I should write for information about Richard Edwards in Minorca. He found that the island archives were just being transferred and would not be acces-

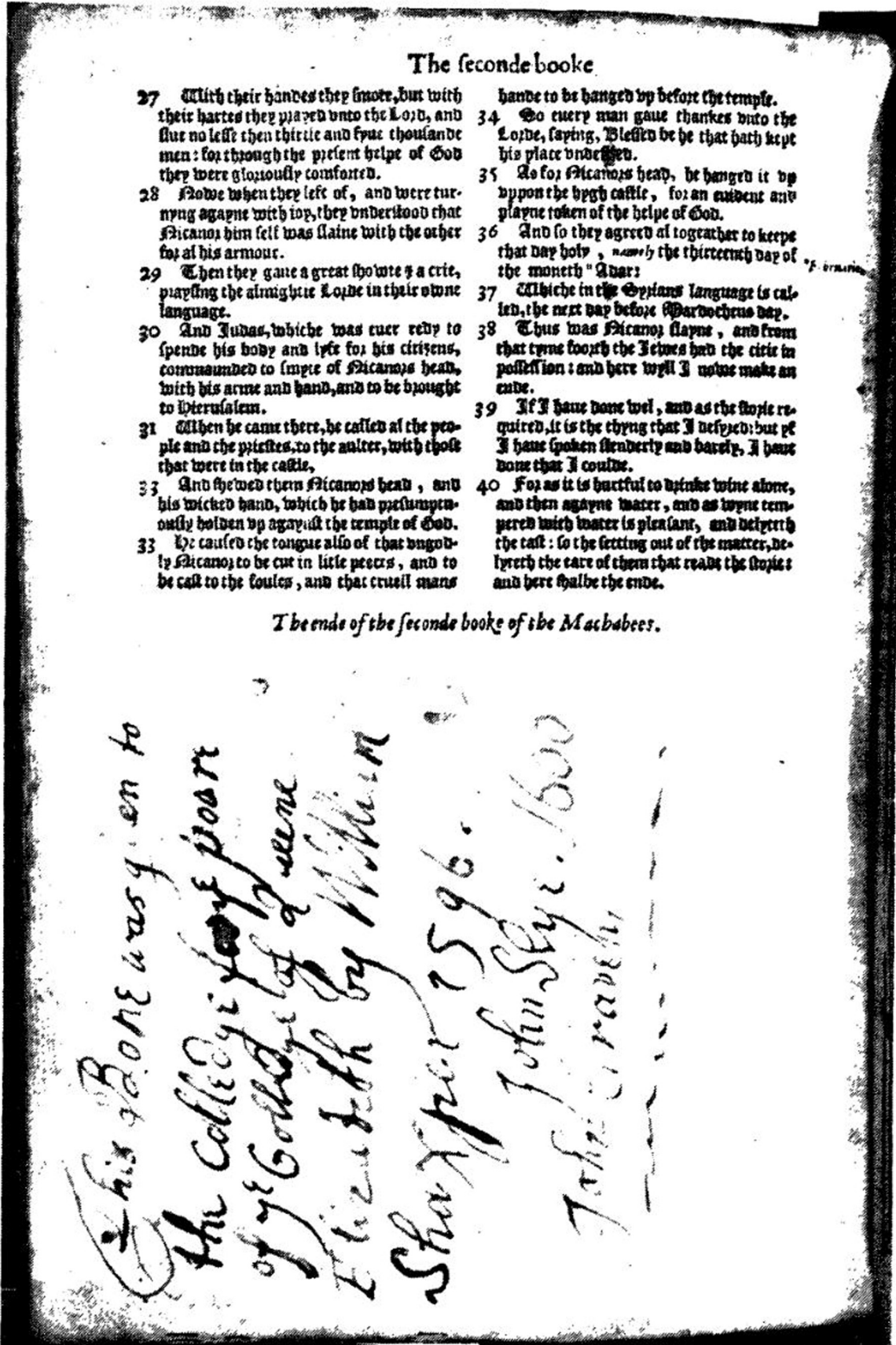
sible again for years. However, at the time we were in correspondence, Mr Latona chanced upon an antiquarian bookshop in Palma de Majorca where the bookseller asked his advice about the vendibility of a manuscript document. In the document, Richard Edwards appoints Dr Peter Ramis to act as his deputy as Registrar and Scribe of the Acts of the Vice Admiralty Court of Malta from 1 August 1799. The price of the document was an alarming 12,000 pesetas, but when this turned out to be only \$148, I bought it. From the document we learned that Richard Edwards stayed in Minorca only long enough to farm out the privilege he had been given. He returned to England almost immediately.

But we still don't know what became of his unsold stocks of Young's *Night Thoughts* with Blake's engravings.

Only very occasionally have I poached on turf outside the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. At one point I was working on English Illustrated Bibles, and I tried to look at as many Bibles as possible to see which ones had illustrations – library catalogues are rarely comprehensive in this respect. I had a fellowship to do research on this in the National Library of Australia in Canberra, and as I was dutifully leafing through their Bibles, more of them than one might expect, I came to one of 1577 with an inscription of "William Shaxper", the patronymic spelled with an x. <See **Illus. 4**> I assumed it was a fraud, but my father, a Shakespeare scholar, asked to see a reproduction of it, and on his advice we canvassed the possibility that it might be genuine. After much heart-searching, we, or rather my father, eventually decided that it was a forgery, perhaps made at the time of the Shakespeare impositions of William Henry Ireland late in the Eighteenth Century [see Bentley G.E., Bentley G.E., Jr., 1994]. But it was an agreeable wild-goose chase while it lasted.

My only other foray into serious, that is, Elizabethan and Jacobean scholarship, was when I identified the 'prentice hand, William Jaggard's apprentice who made such a hash in setting his sections of the Shakespeare folio of 1616. However, I found that the discovery was to be published elsewhere, so I abandoned it.

I like the physical nature of books and pictures, the vehicle, – the texture of the paper, the canvas, the copper, the smell of the binding, the watermark. And while I was preparing this paper I allowed myself to become distracted with the physical nature of part of Blake's work, though it is almost entirely invisible. And I cannot think



Illus. 4. Bible with "Shaxper" inscription.

why it took me so long to become curious about it. Or why all those other Blake students have ignored it as well.

Copper was enormously important to Blake; as he himself wrote, "Mr B ... during a Period of forty Years never suspended his Labours on Copper for a single day" [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1978, 1004]³. His own works in Illuminated Printing were etched on copper, and he might have written of them what Urizen says of his universal creation:

Here alone I in books form'd of metals
Have written the secrets of wisdom
(*First Book of Urizen* pl. 4, ll. 69-70.)

Blake owned very large amounts of copper – among his own writings, his works in Illuminated Printing must have weighed about 136 pounds [60 kg], and his engravings for Young's *Night Thoughts* alone would have come to 156 pounds more [70 kg]. The cost of the copper was by far the largest cash cost of publishing his own writings, and it was so expensive that for all his early works in Illuminated Printing he probably lost money, not counting the value of his own work as designer, poet, engraver, printer, collator, stitcher, and vendor. It was only when it occurred to him in 1793 or 1794 that he could etch other works on the backs of his copperplates that he began to clear more than his expenses in publishing his own works [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1999].

Copper used for engravings is very thin – Blake's copperplates for *Job* are 0.10 to 0.16 cm thick, his Dante 0.146 to 0.204 cm, and *America* pl. a, his only surviving copperplate from his works in Illuminated Printing, is 0.141 cm. Apparently copper was not sold in sheets of uniform size, for it is rare to find copperplate imprints of exactly the same size. In Blake's thirty-seven engravings of Flaxman's full-page designs for Hesiod, the copperplates vary from 18 to 38 centimetres wide and 15 to 25 cm high, though the paper on which they are printed is of course all the same size. One rarely finds two prints of identical dimensions, and when one does one should suspect that they were etched on recto and verso of the same plate.

Papermakers identified their products by embedding a watermark in each sheet, 1794 | J WHATMAN, perhaps, or RUSE & TURNERS| 1815, and generally the

3 The source of all Blake quotations here.

watermark appeared in the middle of one half of the sheet. Similarly, copperplate-makers stamped their name on the back of the sheet of copper, such as JONES AND | PONTIFEX N° 47 | SHOE LANE LONDON or WHITTOW & HARRIS | N° 31 SHOE LANE | LONDON.

We know who made some of the copperplates Blake used, but we do not know from whom he bought them. Nor do we know whether copperplates were sold in standard sizes, and I know of no evidence on the subject. Life is far less predictable for those concerned with copperplates than for those concerned with paper – partly, of course, because very few people have concerned themselves with copper at all. I do not know of directories of copperplate-makers or copperplate- printers, for that matter, and the identities of both are rarely plain.

For most purposes, the copperplate-maker's stamp unfitted that surface for making other engravings. However, when the copperplate was cut up, only one of its segments was likely to have the copperplate-maker's mark; the undefaced segments could be used if you were careful not to etch or engrave the surface so deeply that you came through to the design on the other side. Two of Blake's copperplates for his *Illustrations of the Book of Job* have on their versos engravings for Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau, *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry* [tr. John Mills] (1762) [Bentley G.E., Jr., 1971], a work which has nothing to do with Blake. Presumably Blake's patron John Linnell, who commissioned his *Job* engravings, bought the two Duhamel plates cheaply for re-use. The *Job* sides of the plates show no sign of a copperplate-maker's mark.

However, some of Blake's engravings for his own works do show fragments of the copperplate-maker's mark, and this of course is a clear indication that they are etched on the versos of something else. All but one of the eighteen prints of his poem called *Europe* (1794) exhibit the platemaker's-mark of JONES AND PONTIFEX. And these 17 prints of *Europe* are exactly the same sizes as 17 of the prints in his poem called *America* (1793).

Blake took pains to conceal this defacing copperplate-maker's mark. He arranged his designs so that the copperplate-maker's mark was in the blank spaces, in the recesses of the plate where the ink should not reach it, he carefully wiped the ink from these hollows – and he took pains to colour most copies of *Europe* – eight out

of the eleven he printed are coloured – whereas for *America*, printed from the rectos of the *Europe* copperplates, he coloured only four of the fourteen copies he printed. In none of the copies of *Europe* which he printed is the copperplate-maker's mark visible. It can be identified only in the copies printed after his death by his disciple Frederick Tatham, for Tatham did not bother to wipe the ink from the copperplates as Blake had, and he did not colour the prints.

Most of what we know of Blake's copperplates is by inference, for there is only one surviving fragment from the copperplates from his works in Illuminated Printing. We know their sizes mostly from the indentation in the paper made by the margins of the copper, but measurements of these indentations varies curiously, sometimes with two or three millimetres of difference between copies. One reason for the difference is that Blake dampened his paper before printing it, and some leaves shrank more than others. When his disciple Frederick Tatham printed his copperplates, he did not dampen the paper before printing, and consequently the paper has shrunk less.

Further, the copper indentation is not always clear all along each margin, perhaps because of different arrangements of the blankets when printing. And the copperplates were not necessarily rectangular. Therefore the measurement of the breadth of the bottom of a print, for instance, may differ from the measurement at the top.

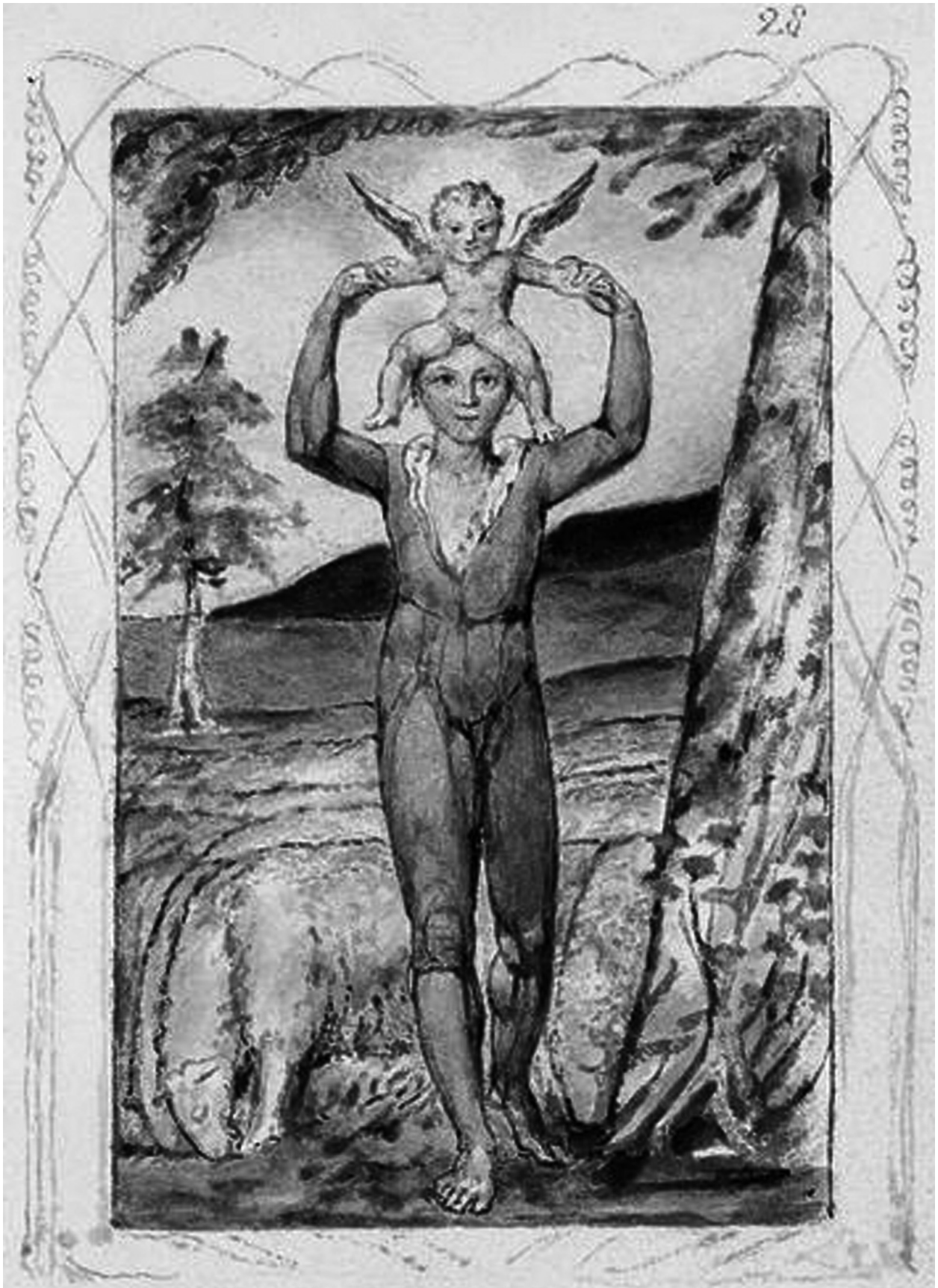
Nor can one be certain that the prints from the recto of a piece of copper will be exactly the same dimensions as those from the verso, for the edges of the rectos were sometimes bevelled to prevent them from piercing the copper under great pressure when printing, and this bevelling of course diminishes the apparent dimensions of the plate. I have allowed a tolerance of a millimetre when determining that two prints are on opposite sides of the same plate.

The fact that *Europe* is etched on the versos of *America* alerts one to the possibility that Blake may have re-used other copperplates for his works in Illuminated printing. He does not seem to have done so before 1793, for there is no duplication in size of his works then. But after 1793 the practice became common. *Songs of Experience* (1794) is etched on the versos of *Songs of Innocence* (1789); *The Book of Urizen* (1794) is etched on the versos of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)

which in turn used four plates cut up from Blake's private print of "The Approach of Doom"; *The Book of Los* (1795) is etched on the versos of *The Book of Ahania* (1795); the hundred plates of *Jerusalem* (1804 ff.) are etched on recto and verso of fifty-one copperplates; and the fifty-one prints of his *Milton* (1804 ff.) are etched on just thirty copperplates.

The evidence of these copperplate-maker's marks is dim and fragmentary but sometimes quite clear. Because the copperplate-maker hammered in his mark, it may be at a somewhat oblique angle, with one side deeper than the other and the dim side scarcely showing. An example of the copperplate-maker's mark on the verso of a copperplate may be seen in the posthumous pull of the frontispiece to *Songs of Experience* <see **Illus. 5**>, which is etched on the verso of the frontispiece to *Songs of Innocence*. In the sky to the left of the shepherd's right hand is a smudge which reads "ON", and the rest of the word "ONDON" is visible in the original in ink plus embossing. When Blake himself was printing the plate, he wiped the ink from the shallows so that the copperplate-maker's mark did not show. Only on prints pulled after Blake's death is it clear. The ordinary appearance of the print before colouring is shown on the other reproduction on the same page.

Yet more unmistakable is the copperplate-maker's mark which appears at the very bottom of the electrotype of "The Human Abstract" from *Songs of Experience* which was etched on the verso of "The Little Girl Found" from *Songs of Experience*. At the bottom of the plate is a dark area of uncertain significance in the design. We know why the dark area was there. Before Blake etched his plate, he built up a dike of wax on the borders of the copperplate so that the acid on the copper would not run off the edges. Ordinarily he wiped the ink from these border-dikes when he printed them, or he coloured them as part of his design, say grass. But in posthumous copies, and in the electrotype of the copperplate itself, the letters of the second "ON" from "LONDON" are quite clearly visible, appearing vertically at the bottom left of the copperplate. The letters do not deface the plate very noticeably, and when Blake printed the plate he either wiped the ink from the area of the copperplate-maker's mark or he coloured over it so that it is invisible. But in the posthumous pulls and in the copperplate it is unmistakable.



Illus. 5. *Songs of Innocence* frontispiece, posthumous copy.

But notice that Blake re-used his own copperplates only for his works in Illuminated Printing which are printed from shallow relief-etchings. He published numbers of commercial intaglio engravings (not relief-etchings) on his own initiative, from "Zephyrus & Flora" after Stothard in 1784 to his great series for *Job* and *Dante* in 1826 and 1827. However, none of these plates which he owned was ever re-used – or at any rate, no coincidence of size would make this possible. Of course he could have cut up a piece of copper to re-use the versos, as we know he did with "The Approach of Doom", and, if he did this, there would be no tell-tale coincidence of size to give away the duplication of the copperplate. But it does seem striking that with his own copperplates he re-used the versos of many of those etched in relief for his works in Illuminated Printing but did not do so with those engraved in intaglio, except for *The Book of Los* (1795) on the versos of *The Book of Ahania* (1795).

Perhaps the works in Illuminated Printing were etched especially shallowly. The only surviving copperplate, a fragment of that for *America* pl. a, is etched to a depth of .012 cm, in two acid-bites of .005 and .007 cm. As the copper is .141 cm thick, an etching to a depth of .012 cm still leaves .129 of copper beneath the etching.

But such re-use of copper limits the resources of the etcher or engraver. It was common to correct mistakes by hammering a section of the plate flat from the back in order to re-engage a mistaken portion. However, this is not possible if the back has another engraving on it which one wishes to preserve.

All this is a far cry from the exalted inspiration and careless freedom from uniformity which is characteristic of Blake. He wrote: "Bring out number, weight, & measure in a year of dearth" and "Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius" – and he never corrected the misspelling of "Improvement". As I hope I have suggested, he was addicted to the crooked roads without improvement. The Tao of Bibliography is not Blake's way, whether The Right Way, the Wrong Way, or Beth's Way.

Blake wanted to show us, not the imaginary backsides of hypothetical copperplates but how

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

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Библиографические открытия, в основном о Блейке: путь верный, путь неверный и путь Бет⁴

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена опыту работы автора по редактированию работ Уильяма Блейка и по библиографическим исследованиям. В документе биография автора перемежается с историей литературоведческих открытий, создавая интересный жанр, который будет интересен для любого специалиста в исследовании литературы и, в особенности, для поклонников наследия Блейка.

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